

# IMAGINING A NEW FUTURE

HISTORY ART COMMUNITY EAST LIBERTY



A summary of INF; A series  
of community reflections hosted  
by the Kelly Strayhorn Theater.

When I imagine  
the future of East Liberty,  
I want to see...

VIBRANT, VITAL  
INCLUSIVE PLACE

When I imagine  
the future of East Liberty,  
I want to see...

- MAINTAIN DIVERSITY  
- WALKABLE / ACCESS

Justin Lopez

When I imagine  
the future of East Liberty,  
I want to see...

Culture  
in the  
Streets

## IMAGINING A NEW FUTURE

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CREATIVE DIRECTOR

When I imagine  
the future of Pittsburgh,  
I want to see...

equality, innovation  
& production

When I imagine  
the future of Pittsburgh,  
I want to see...

open minds & hearts

When I imagine  
the future of Pittsburgh,  
I want to see...

LESS SEGREGATED NEIGHBORHOODS  
MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN + PEOPLE OF COLOR  
VALUE OF ALL PEOPLE  
GREEN SPACE  
MORE BIKEWAYS  
BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

When I imagine  
the future,  
I don't want to lose...

Humanity

When I imagine  
the future,  
I don't want to lose...

- sense of community

When I imagine  
the future,  
I don't want to lose...

the past, our  
history.

When I imagine  
the future,  
I want to know...

Who's in the  
room?

When I imagine  
the future,  
I want to know...

HOW I CAN SERVE  
HOW I CAN GROW  
HOW I CAN CELEBRATE MYSELF + OTHERS

When I imagine  
the future,  
I want to know...

What will be the  
big disrupting  
forces?

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## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Art is a catalyst for feeling alive.  
Art allows us to ask:

Who are you?  
Why do you matter?  
What do you care about?  
What do you value?

At the Kelly Strayhorn Theater, we view ourselves as a catalyst for creative expression and active audience engagement. Over 10 years, KST has evolved from a community theater to a nationally and internationally recognized cultural center, all by setting a clear set of ideals for our vision.

Vanguard programs, driven by diverse and visionary artists, have helped make this vision a reality, and have made KST a valued community asset and gathering place. Given KST's history and critical presence in East Liberty, the organization has the potential to set the tone and drive what's happening relative to further East End development as KST positions itself for its next 100 years.

Before we enter our next phase, we must ask some broader strategic planning questions, such as:

**How do we define "KST" now and for the future?**  
**Who are we?**  
**What is our identity (which is tied inextricably to the community)?**

We asked our KST friends, family, and artists to simply brainstorm new possibilities, hopes, dreams, positive visions, and scenarios for the continued strengthening of our community amidst rapid change.

**We called this process "Imagining a New Future,"** and it is just the beginning. We look forward to sharing the start of our collective efforts with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a long horizontal line.

janera solomon,  
Executive Director  
Kelly Strayhorn Theater



## INTRODUCTION

East Liberty is a neighborhood undergoing rapid change. The neighborhood has seen swift shifts in ownership, housing, property value, and been the site of contested, high profile development deals.

Throughout this time, Kelly Strayhorn Theater has remained an anchor for East Liberty arts and culture. As both a cultural institution and a gathering place and community resource, the Kelly Strayhorn Theater is uniquely positioned to become a catalyst for community revitalization that advocates for social justice and equity.

Art and culture is not just about aesthetics. Rather, art presents a platform for people to share

their values, experiences, and visions for a happier, healthier, world. Art and artistic expression are uniquely powerful in their ability to communicate our wishes and perspectives in a tangible and emotionally impactful way. Art is an especially profound tool for both inspiring and synthesizing qualities that contribute to a sound and just quality of life.

Arts organizations are specially equipped to facilitate this kind of engagement. By providing support and space to artists and other cultural practitioners, arts organizations have the capacity to preserve place and push for equitable change.



# WHAT IS IMAGINING A NEW FUTURE?

## THE ARTS HELP US MAKE SENSE OF AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD

Inspired by Maria Rosario Jackson's work on cultural kitchens, we began to ask ourselves what capacity and opportunities arts based organizations have to fully engage in greater conversations regarding community development and revitalization:

What specific role do arts organizations, like KST, play in transitioning neighborhoods?

What role do artists play in their communities?

How can we harness creativity and innovative processes to work towards inclusive, equitable, neighborhood progress?

While transition periods reveal vulnerabilities and sensitivities, they also enlighten us to successes, strengths, and opportunities. Times of transition force us to take a close look at what is most important and how to foster and grow these qualities.

In response to these internal questions, we created **Imagining a New Future (INF)**, an ongoing, participatory initiative in which the Kelly Strayhorn Theater engages directly with friends of the organization, residents and businessowners of East Liberty, artists we serve, and various other stakeholders for an inclusive visioning process. This "process to a plan" will guide future community engagement within the organization, and serve as a foundation for further investment in arts-based community development work.

The Kelly Strayhorn Theater launched **Imagining a New Future** in the fall 2015.

### IMAGINING A NEW FUTURE HAS THREE DISTINCT GOALS

#### 1 RESIDENT-LED INPUT IN EAST LIBERTY

Imagining a New Future is a participatory process that asks East Liberty residents four guiding questions, and centers an arts organizations potential to realize these visions and values and turn them into sincere strategies.

Over the course of three community visioning sessions, Imagining a New Future participants shared insights that shaped and defined the social and cultural landscape of East Liberty.

The four questions guiding Imagining a New Future help us get a better sense of the values of East Liberty residents. The findings in Imagining a New Future identify: what residents prioritize and hold as important and essential, what needs to be preserved and retained, and what elements can be improved upon.

The goal of these findings is to guide stronger, more informed decisions and investments best aligned with the wants and needs of the neighborhood for healthy, inclusive growth.

#### 2 A PROCESS TO A (STRATEGIC) PLAN

Imagining a New Future seeks to bridge previous strategic planning work by providing a basis for future efforts. It can be seen as a “pre-planning” stage, in which observations, recommendations, and concerns generated in this phase of development will directly guide future initiatives. The feedback collected during the Imagining a New Future process will provide a framework to guide resulting goals in subsequent strategic plans and priorities for the organization.

#### 3 ARTS BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Imagining a New Future is the result of various internal conversations at the Kelly Strayhorn Theater in which we brainstormed our role as an arts organization in East Liberty’s rapidly changing cultural landscape, as reflected in the questions to the right. It is our hope that Imagining a New Future can provide a foundation for future efforts in East Liberty, as well as offering a model that can be replicated across other neighborhoods.

What is the role of a community-based arts organization in 2016?

What does it mean to be a community-based arts organization in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood?

What is the role of the arts in a changing world; how does art address intersectionality, politics, and current events?

How do you engage the community on the



# THE PROCESS

## CULTURAL IDENTITY IS A FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

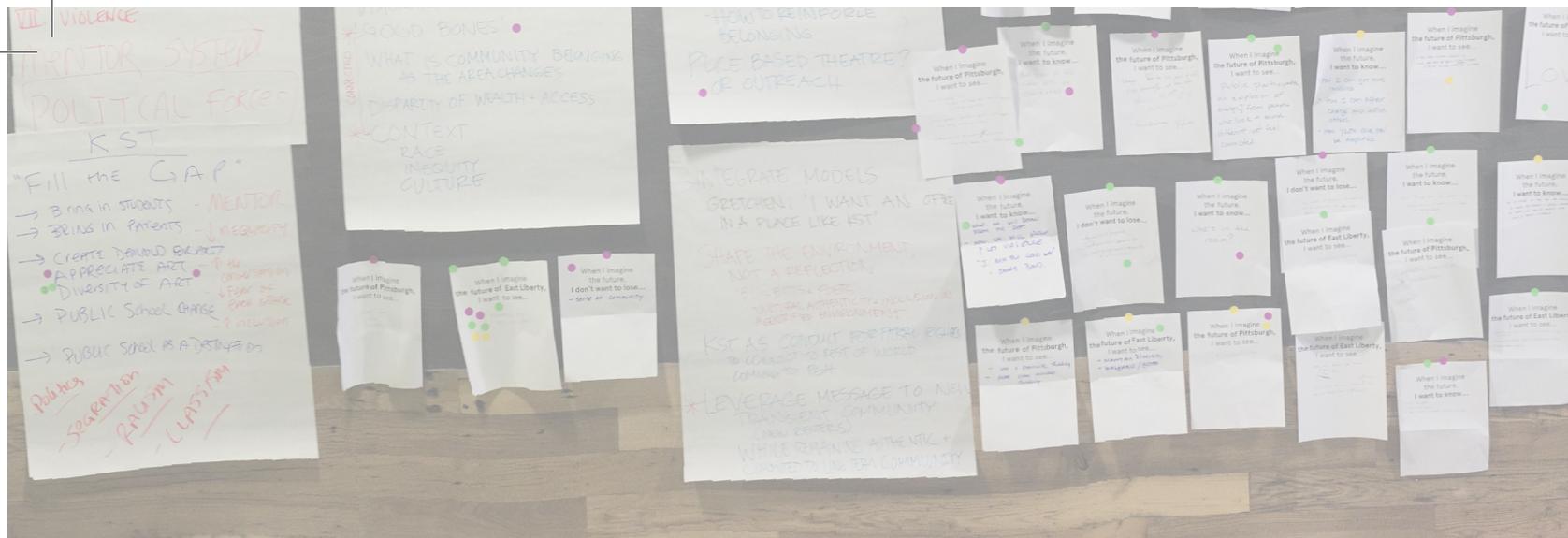
Over two years in community conversations, we asked participants to share their ideal visions of Pittsburgh and East Liberty, and how they put the Kelly Strayhorn Theater into context with how the organization serves its neighborhood and the city at large.

The following pages detail the Imagining a New Future community engagement process and resulting input from residents. Imagining a New Future is both a constant process of reexamination and exploration, as well as an actionable dream that is ready and waiting to be realized. Imagining a New Future is a celebration of what makes East Liberty fascinating, enriching, individual, and dear to the people who call it home.

When I imagine the future,  
I want to know...

*That my children will feel that they belong, not because their community is cohesive and homogenous, but because they and their (our) community places value on diversity and differences.*

-Imagining a New Future Participant



## IMAGINING A NEW FUTURE SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

### SESSION ONE:

December 5th, 2015  
 Repair the World Pittsburgh  
 Facilitated by Ken Foster

Breakout sessions focused on discussing issues that are “happening now—in our neighborhood, in Pittsburgh, and beyond... [including] issues outside of the art world and across sectors.”

Participants then formed eight different groups in order to discuss broad social issues on various subjects, including, but not limited to, racial and class disparities, identity constructs and intersectionality, cultural and ecological resilience, social and cultural movements, politics, infrastructural issues, gentrification, the role of technology, and intergenerational relationships.

### SESSION TWO:

April 28th, 2016  
 KST’s Alloy Studios

A small group of business people, artists, and board members discussed the four prompts. Major points included changing the narrative of negative perceptions of East Liberty, creating a cohesive identity based on preservation and cultural vibrancy amidst gentrification.

### SESSION THREE:

May 3rd, 2016  
 KST’s Alloy Studios

A group of artists gathered and discussed the four prompts, emphasizing creating new traditions, and access for innovative stakeholders and businesses reflective of East Liberty. Surveys were also collected throughout the season

## GUIDING QUESTIONS AND PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

The visioning process was centered around four guiding questions:

- When I imagine the future of East Liberty, I want to see...
- When I imagine the future of Pittsburgh, I want to see...
- When I imagine the future, I don't want to lose...
- When I imagine the future, I want to know...

All responses listed are direct quotes from INF participants. Strategies are selected responses that build off of visions and are proactive and directive in their approach.

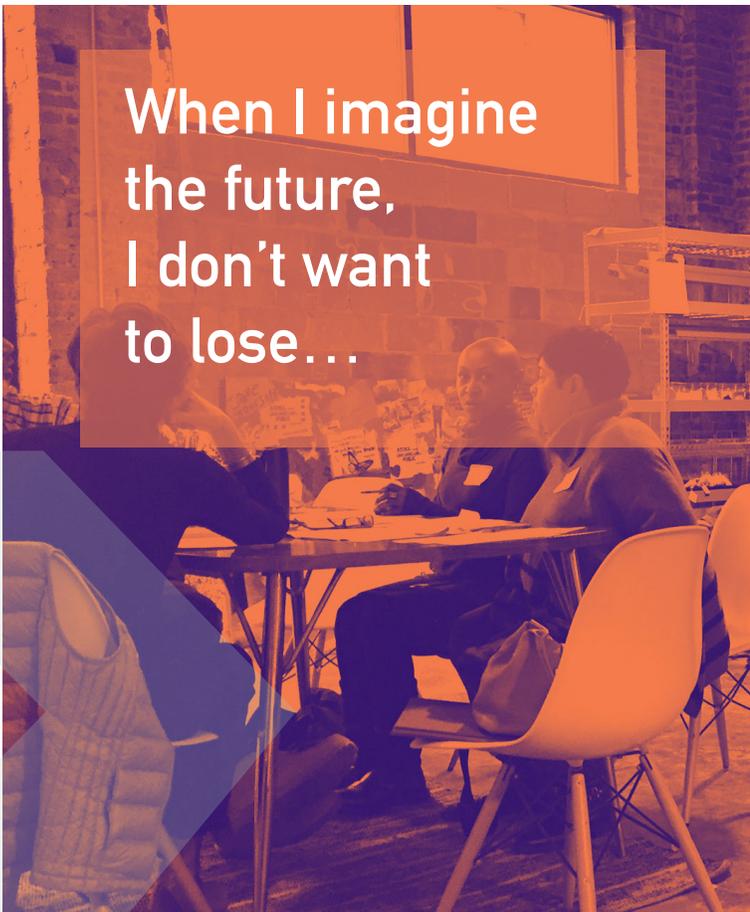
When I imagine  
the future of  
East Liberty,  
I want to see...



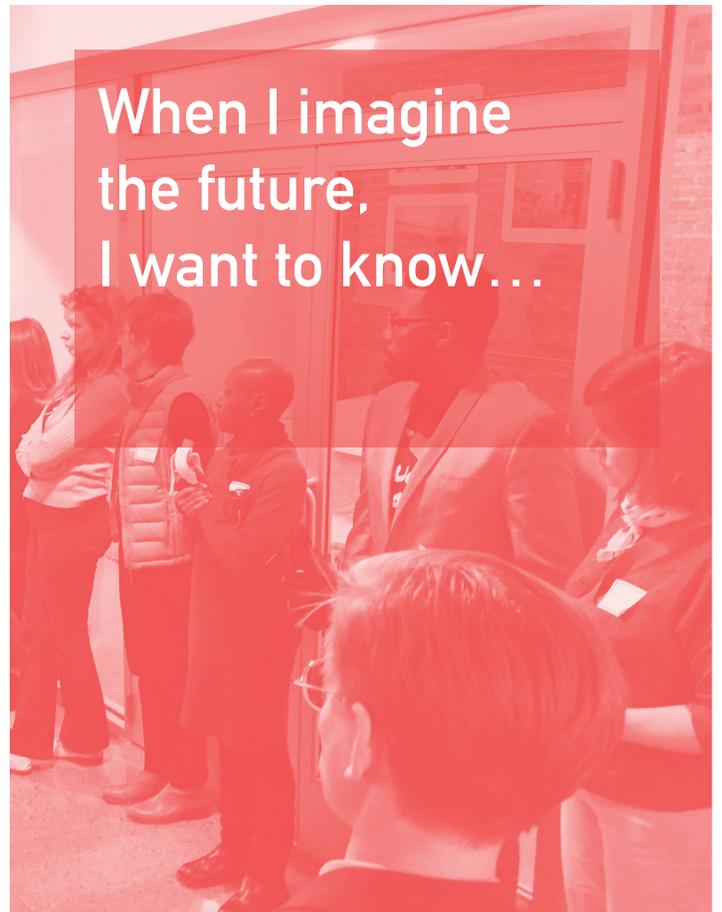
When I imagine  
the future of  
Pittsburgh,  
I want to see...



When I imagine  
the future,  
I don't want  
to lose...



When I imagine  
the future,  
I want to know...



# WHEN I IMAGINE THE FUTURE OF EAST LIBERTY, I WANT TO SEE...

1

Local shops coexisting with new development

Minority-owned businesses

Continuous change and growth that benefit many

Information accessible about future

Locally owned stores/restaurants

Residents owning businesses

2

KST/East Liberty as an arts destination

A destination for arts education

National/International artist performances and residencies

Opportunities for artists to sustain

Places for people to go before and after shows

3

A premier African-American neighborhood

Familiar faces

People with roots staying

Black cultural shops, third places, cultural organizations

Culturally diverse neighborhood racially, economically

4

A model for a desegregated Pittsburgh

Vibrant, vital, inclusive place

Culture in the streets (music, art, food)

Citizen diversity  
Maintain diversity

Racial integration  
Prioritize people of color

5

Urban planning that centers residents' wants and needs

Public art/public squares

A leader in neighborhood planned spaces

Connectivity between neighborhoods, businesses, arts (whole corridor)

Green, nature, parks  
Bike lanes  
Seating at bus stops  
Walkable, access

6

Community members shape their own neighborhood

Neighborhood knowledge sharing

Community members included in dialogues

Arts organizations working in the community directly

Local artists, admin, and residents included in larger conversations



## STRATEGIES to achieve our vision...

### 1 Equitable community and economic development

Neighborhood affordability and accessibility

Protections for local businesses and business owners

Financing tools for property ownership

Equity and access and diversity in schools, housing, addressing poverty, art, transportation, innovation

### 2 Arts-based community development

Business, entrepreneurship, and ownership training for local artists of color

Opportunities for arts-based education

Arts and cultural organizations working in the community directly

### 3 Increased accountability

Forum: organize and demand accountability

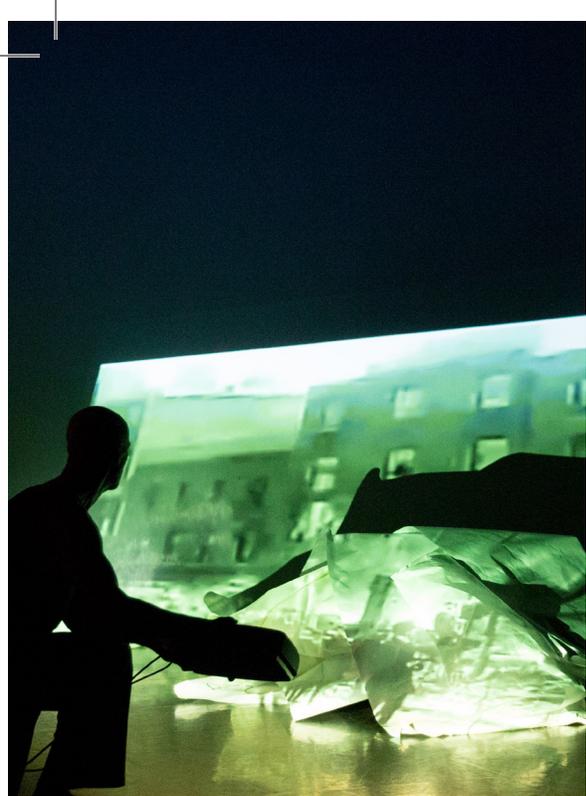
Admission of irresponsibility in community planning and racist practices

Mayor's office keeping momentum

Education civic organizing

Leaders build up constituents

Identify decision makers



## WHEN I IMAGINE THE FUTURE OF PITTSBURGH, I WANT TO SEE...

### 1 A creative, inclusive city

Minority-owned businesses

A more diverse, welcoming, and inclusive city

### 2 A welcoming, global community

Equality, innovation, and production

Global leader in thinking

More open-minded thinking

### 3 Empowering leaders from diverse backgrounds

Public Participation

Representative democracy/leadership

### 4 A responsive and culturally aware city

Valuing community and long-time residents

A community whose narrative is built around resiliency

*A place where people don't have to struggle to find their community.*

*A place where people are open to and willing to engage in difficult discussions without resorting to hate or violence.*

*A welcoming city.*

-Community Responses



## STRATEGIES to achieve our vision...

**1** More opportunities for women and people of color

More job opportunities for black students

Better public schools

Building wealth through ownership

Access- schools, housing, art, transportation

**2** Ownership and fair payment to artists, creatives, people of color

Sharing a model (KST's model) of cultivating, creating, sustaining community with developers and new businesses

Increase or maintain visibility for POC-owned businesses, arts organizations, community centers

Artists paid and respected as culture-makers and revenue drivers

Business training/skills training for underresourced

**3** Required anti-racist training and accountability

Trained police with comprehensive history of anti-racism lens

Required anti-racist training and accountability

Less police violence

# WHEN I IMAGINE THE FUTURE, I DON'T WANT TO LOSE...

1

Knowledge of the past and lessons learned

The past

Our history

Our history of struggle

How communities have been torn

2

A strong presence of black residents and their families

Black people and families

African American presence/identity

My blackness/  
cultural identity/  
cultural connection

3

Pittsburgh character traits that are unique to the city

Affordability

We are resilient

We are bootstrappers

Our character-  
"Pittsburghness"

Yinzer spirit

Friendliness

4

Culture that celebrates the intersection of arts and politics

The arts and diversity in the artful expression

Authentic engagement

Resident voice

Local art scene

Mix of art and community

5

Community that celebrates diversity, solidarity, humanity

Solidarity

Humanity

The KST and East Liberty being a model for integration

Diversity (racial-economic-gender-identity diversity)

6

Community resources and amenities

Nature

Grocery store  
Library  
Food bank

Walkability

Pedestrian Friendliness

Accessibility



## STRATEGIES to achieve our vision...

### 1 Retain people/ Anti-displacement measures

Invest in community resources that anchor indigenous residents, such as public schools, libraries, grocery stores.

Affordability and accessibility initiatives, such as Pay What Makes You Happy

### 2 Increased ownership

Focus on ownership, as opposed to rental: new developments are heavily rental focused, which disconnects people from ownership.

Preserve locally-owned businesses

### 3 Public engagement, outreach, and opportunities

The character of our community that comes from authentic engagement

Resident voice

Knowledge sharing

# WHEN I IMAGINE THE FUTURE, I WANT TO KNOW...

1

How can residents get more involved?

Where/how I will fit in

How I can get more involved

How can the youth voice be amplified?

How I can effect change and involve others

How are the actual stakeholders engaged?  
(residents, artists, individual business owners)

2

How can residents be included in the changes happening?

How to access power and change-makers

How to work with developers to have is say in what happens in the community

Where is the artist's place

Where does the artist interact with the non-artist

[How] To be included in the planning, development, and changes as an artist and resident

3

How will we foster a sense of belonging and inclusion?

That the fear of the other will be eliminated

How I can celebrate myself and others

How to create some new traditons

That we will learn how to accept new change/people

4

What is the vision and driving forces behind future plans?

Who are the stakeholders being heard?

What techinques used to get information out

How the developers view the KST in East Liberty's future (liability or asset)

Who are the decision makers?

Are they [the decision makers] taking in the public's opinion?

5

What will be the big disrupting forces?

What is next?

What's next... short/long goals, visions

What exactly is the plan?

What we will retain from the past



## STRATEGIES to achieve our vision...

**1** Planning that is inclusive and accessible

Residents, business owners, artists being a part of the conversations about development/changes in community

Access to power and changemakers

Work with developers to have a say in what happens in the community

**2** Planning processes that are transparent and holistic

Joint meetings between community-based organizations (KST, ELDI, East Liberty Chamber of Commerce, etc) and developers (Massaro and Walnut, etc)

Understanding of whose vision is guiding investment

**3** Economic investment that retains a distinct cultural identity

Improve transportation to not preclude East End from becoming an arts/cultural destination

KST as an anchor for change

Invest in the sustainability of the KST

# A NEW FUTURE : SUMMARY

## Visions:

What we want to see in the future

- Increased inclusion and desegregation
- Arts-based destination
- Community amenities
- Increased ownership, access to economic opportunity, and stability for residents and artists
- Diverse leadership
- A welcoming, culturally aware, global city

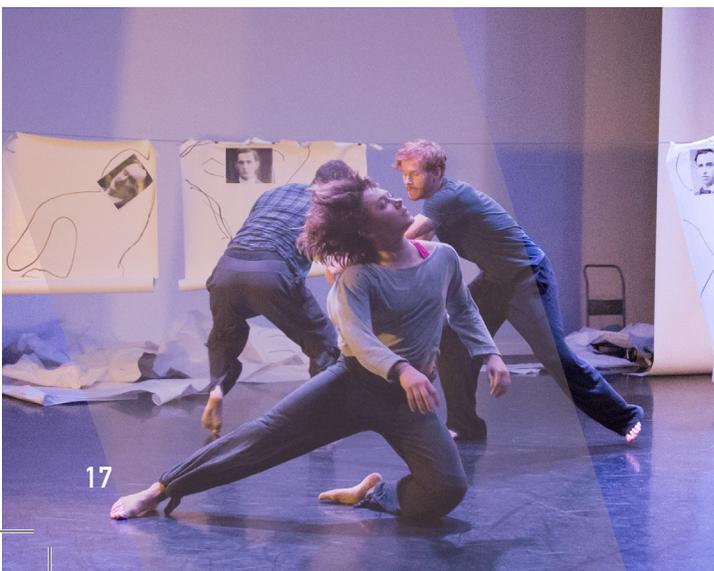
## Priorities for Preservation:

What we want to maintain now

- Arts and culture as an anchor for community life
- Community resources
- Diversity and integration
- Community history
- Pittsburgh character traits
- Black culture that anchors neighborhood identity

## Priorities

- Entrepreneurship opportunities, tools, education, and protections for residents and artists
- Increased opportunities, tools and training, and influence in the community for artists
- Increased access to opportunity for women and people of color
- Increased accountability from those in power
- Required anti-racist training and accountability for law enforcement
- Retain people/ anti-displacement measures
- Increased resident inclusion and influence in planning process
- Planning processes that are transparent and accessible





## NEXT STEPS

### CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

Just as the Imagining a New Future initiative is a KST led process to a plan, the campaign will serve as a public face to expanding the theater's arts-based community development platform. A Bridge to the future- INF inspired the KST 2018 - 2020 Strategic Plan.



### TELL US WHAT YOU THINK:

Your input and responses to this interim report are vital to guiding the growth and path of the Kelly-Strayhorn Theater, our next strategic planning process, and the future we imagine with the community we build together.

Please share questions, comments, issues and concerns with us at:  
<https://kelly-strayhorn.org/imagining-a-new-future/>





## THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING PARTICIPANTS,

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 All KST Staff

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### Directors Emerti

Francine Abraham  
 Stephanie Flom  
 Deborah Powell  
 Jamee Todd

### AN INITIATIVE OF THE KELLY STRAYHORN THEATER

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