

Questions for the Mayoral Candidates (due July 26)

Addressing Citywide Issues

Just as any other major city, Boston faces many economic and social issues. Can you provide examples on how you would integrate the arts, culture, and creative community in solving social problems? How would you use our community to drive economic development in the city?

As the first candidate in this race to vow to elevate the sector to a cabinet-level office in my administration (as it was under Mayor Flynn), I think my commitment is clear. Arts and culture impacts or can impact most if not all other policy areas in a municipal administration. This includes but is not limited to economic development, education, public safety, public health, human services, parks, transportation, city services and more.

In my administration there will be a strategic reframing and naming of this sector to the Arts, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Industries (ACTCI), which is essential to the expansion of Boston's creative ecosystem. ACTCI encompass all the key pillars that support and fuel the City's creative economy and help to grow our arts and culture. The addition of Creative Industries better reflects the artists of all disciplines, individuals, nonprofits, and for profit businesses who are the innovators and the contributors that are helping to make Boston one of the best cities in country. This repositioning and redefining of this sector better enables the City of Boston to be included at the policy table for this sector on statewide, national, and international levels.

Your Personal Connection

We've all had defining moments in our lives. What personal experience with arts, culture, or creativity has had an impact on your life and your view of the community?

I won't impress this group in particular with my personal expertise or lifelong experience in art. My upbringing included many good things, but BSO concerts or a legacy membership to the Boston Athenaeum were not among them. But as I have grown, especially in my 16 years as a state legislator, I have seen the impact the arts can have across a wide range of issues, and their deep meaning to individuals and communities I care about, and I have fought tirelessly for your sector. I certainly won't stop as Mayor.

I spent some time in Belfast a few years ago, and saw the way arts and culture make the city come alive. I've seen the transformation of the Combat Zone into the Theatre District, and worked in favor of all the legislation that made that possible. Because of my own personal background, I have a particular fondness for Medicine Wheel in South Boston, which works with young people, many of them court-involved and dealing with addiction problems. I've seen the power of that program.

I have a close advisor whose exploration of music led him to a career as an author, which has been instrumental in helping him cope with trauma. After losing four siblings and seeing his neighborhood hurt by poverty, crime, and addiction, he became a leading Boston activist, helping launch many antiviolence initiatives, including gun-buyback programs. One of my campaign staff told me she realized recently, while reflecting on the death of Mayor White, that her successful career as a small business owner in the creative industries was largely because of his Summerthing program, which opened her eyes to the arts and the world beyond her neighborhood. I want that. When someone is thinking about my legacy as mayor, I want to be the person who helped put into place the program that inspired a working class kid from my city to do well and do good.

Arts Education and Programs for our Youth

While the Boston Arts Academy and the BPS Arts Expansion Initiative are providing access to quality arts education, many of our youth are still being left out of the creative community. What will you do as Mayor to

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champion arts education with our youth both in our schools and in our communities? How will you balance the importance of arts education with the constant pull to “teach to the test”?

Arts education is vital to the growth and success of our children, to the City of Boston and to the sector as a whole. As Mayor, I will be supportive of four key areas: 1) arts education as an important part of the comprehensive education experience 2) full support of the Boston Public Schools Arts Expansion Initiative 3) continue to build partnerships with Boston artists and non-profits to bring arts to schools throughout the city, including as part of after school programs, 4) explore opportunities to establish STEAM pathways. The implementation of the Common Core State Standards over the next two years, which emphasize critical thinking and problem solving, provides BPS with the opportunity to promote the contributions made by art education to student’s intellectual development.

Boston’s individual artists of all disciplines can clearly play a much bigger role in arts education for Boston’s young people in the BPS system and in Boston’s neighborhoods and communities. One recent example of this is the positive transformation that took place in BPS’ Orchard Gardens K-8 school based in Roxbury. The principal decided instead of having security guards on the payroll, to use that money instead to hire teaching artists of all disciplines. The school has become a model on how to turn around an underperforming school. My administration will explore ways to better support artist residencies, visiting artists programs and teaching artists in our schools and in our communities.

Creating pathways for BPS students in key industries in the sector is also an important part of any arts education platform, and dovetails nicely with my personal interest in vocational training. The Mass Production Coalition has expressed an interest in partnering with the City on creating a youth mentorship program specifically geared towards high school students. My administration will pursue ways to better leverage and grow the programs our colleges and universities offer for Boston high school students such as Berklee College of Music’s City Music Program, and the Boston Architectural College’s Summer Academy. My administration will continue to support the Boston Youth Fund that offers teens summer employment. One of the key sectors that participates in this program as employers are in the cultural industries sector.

The New Administration’s Role in the Creative Community

According to research conducted by Americans for the Arts, Boston consistently ranks among the bottom five of the 30 largest U.S. cities in what it annually invests in the creative community. Some in the creative community are concerned about the city’s administrative capacity to program, support, and promote activities. Describe how you will address these concerns in the following areas:

- What three revenue sources will you create or use to increase the city’s financial investment in the creative community?
- How will you modify or expand the city’s current administrative structure to support the creative community?
- What are your program priorities and where will the funds be allocated?

As Mayor, I will work to increase funding to your historically underfunded sector. There is a need for a chief grant/development officer for the City of Boston. This person will be charged to better coordinate the City’s current efforts in grant seeking and sponsorship opportunities and would work in securing new grants and sponsorship that could be shared across several sectors. This key staff person would work collaboratively with all city departments and would provide support and expertise on specific grant/sponsorship opportunities being pursued by individual departments. Both the approaches of better leveraging of existing funds and of the creating of new funding streams will be under consideration as tools for increasing funding to this sector. For example, all housing, neighborhood, small business, and economic development specific grants/funding opportunities on local, state, regional and federal levels should also be leveraged, when possible, to also help grow resources for the sector.

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The Creative Economy

One of Mayor Menino's signature accomplishments was the promotion of the Innovation District that supports and promotes the creative economy. As mayor, how would you leverage that success and broaden your administration's commitment to the creative economy to include arts and culture as well as the innovation district? How will you foster an ecosystem which is reflective of the up and coming independent creative community in Boston?

First of all, I do want to foster the Innovation Economy in Boston, but I think it can expand from there. Every neighborhood in Boston should be an innovation district. But, more specifically, in order to cultivate this and other creative industries-related sectors, we have to work on talent recruitment, talent retention and amenities. I've spoken extensively about workforce housing. I will be a champion for the development of workforce housing, so that artists and other working people, the heart and soul and backbone of the City, can afford stay here. We're making strides in affordable housing, and we're really good at building luxury units, but in order to strengthen the character of the City, we have to keep our working people here. I will also work to support the kind of amenities we need to attract the independent creative community – nightlife, transportation, etc.

A World Class Arts Destination

While Boston is known for its hospitals, professional sports, and universities, the city has yet to fully leverage the strength of our arts, culture, and creative community as a means for tourism and branding. How would you utilize our community to market Boston as a world-class cultural destination?

At a recent arts town hall I held, an artist took me to task for talking so much about the arts as a driver for tourism, saying that it's not central to the arts and culture policy arena. I thought about it on my way home that night, and came to the conclusion that he is mistaken. While it's certainly not the ONLY reason to support the arts, it's one of the ways in which the arts supports the City, and it's important to cultivate. For years, we've the historical tourism sector, which is certainly part of arts and culture, has pumped millions of dollars into our economy. We need to expand on that. We need to promote the treasures we already have, supplementing the efforts of the GBCVB. We need to strengthen and protect our signature events and festivals, and have more of them. Boston should have the equivalent of Seattle's Bumbershoot, Toronto's Film Festival, Newport's Folk Festival, Montreal's Jazz Festival, MuralFest and Comedy Festival. (Actually, we should just have one of every festival Montreal has!) Boston's institutions and artists should be involved in all of this.

Also, I know it seems like a long way off, but it really isn't. As we approach 2030, I will call for the formation of a "Boston 400" committee, to begin the planning celebration for Boston's 400th birthday celebration. The bicentennial in 1976 was an expansive event that drove millions of dollars in tourism revenue to Boston. It also gave birth to Boston's First Night celebration. Boston 400 should be even bigger – a huge showcase of the arts and culture and history and all of the great things Boston has to offer to its residents, plus the national and international tourism market.

Your Priorities

The start of a Mayor's tenure often sets the Administration's tone and priorities. When elected, what actions will you take in your first 100 days to provide support and resources to the creative community?

"First hundred days" questions are a terrible trap, and don't give much of an indication of values and priorities, which is I think what the sector is interested in. As I said in an earlier answer, there will be an Arts Commissioner. That person will have a seat in my cabinet, right alongside Police, Fire, BPS, BRA, Chief of Staff and so on. The top three priorities of my administration are Economic Development, Education and Public Safety. The arts can and will inform much in these priority areas. The power of the sector comes with its integration into the overall framework of the administration, and I pledge that the sector will be an integral piece of the plan.