Art + Policy Impact Report

Committee of the Whole

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

April 15, 2026

Art + Policy Strategic Goal

To use art and creative practices as a catalyst to make policy and public engagement more inclusive, imaginative, and human-centered—while also fostering creative collaborations that enhance public spaces, cultural identity, and community connections throughout the region. We aim to connect communities to decision-making and place-making, inspiring shared ownership of our region's future.

The Role of Art + Policy in Imagine 2050

To truly Imagine 2050, there is an opportunity to bring in the arts and artists to synthesize and amplify the Regional Development Guide's Values, Goals, and Policy Areas.

The Art + Policy project was designed to:

- Raise awareness of the Met Council
- Break down complex issues through arts-based engagement
- Invite community to collectively imagine our future
- Make policy playful and fun with creative practices and artistic expression
- Connect and understand our work in new ways

Imagine 2050 Art + Policy Impact Report Overview

Impact Report Audience

- Planners
- Artists
- Cities we work with
- Government agencies wanting to bring artists and creativity into their work
- Local leaders and policymakers

Impact Report Sections

Section 1 — Introduction

- From the Met Council Chair
- Expanding the Role of Art and Creativity in Policymaking
- Roots of the Art + Policy Program at the Met Council
- Imagine 2050 Regional Development Guide
- What is Art + Policy?

Section 2 — Impact & Overview

- Awareness Impact: Creating a Mobile Gallery
- Artist Engagement Impact: Working with Community Engagement Artists
- Community Impact: Reaching Community Voices
- Policy Impact: Go Policy! Game and Engagement
- Organizational Impact: Creating Internal Joy

Section 3 — Insights & Learnings

- What We Learned About Arts-Based Engagement
- Challenges and Wins, Lessons Learned

Section 4 — Program Structure

- Project Timeline
- Meet the Artists

Section 5 — Future & Resources

- Future Impacts
- Additional Information and Resources

Introduction

Section 1

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Impact and Overview

Section 2

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- Artist Engagement Impact: Working with Community Engagement Artists
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- Policy Impact: Go Policy! Game and Engagement
- Organizational Impact: Creating Internal Joy

Arts-Based Engagement Lessons Learned

- Play & creativity invite participation – reaching beyond formal and technical policymaking.
- Art humanizes government and brings joy and connection when it is deeply needed.
- Art translates complexity and meets people where they are – in unexpected ways & places.
- Playful engagement gives youth a voice adults can hear.
- Arts-based engagement greatly expands partnerships and reach.

Challenges

- Integrate artists early to make creative practices fundamental to engagement strategy.
- Contextualize public comment. Creatively provide participants grounding on issues to generate more focused input.
- Streamline process for collecting, transcribing, and archiving public comments, including those in nontraditional formats.
- Create an evaluation plan to document project's impact more intentionally.

Wins

- Short timelines invited experimentation without perfection.
- Including a wide variety of artistic mediums allowed inventiveness.
- Arts-based engagement significantly increases public comments.
- Art + Policy reached people who had never heard of the Met Council in a playful, inviting, positive way.
- Art was created that lives on and continues to represent the Met Council.
- Quirky cross-division collaborations generated energy and joy internally.

Future & Resources

Art + Policy: Scaling Beyond the Pilot

- With the adoption of Imagine 2050, Art + Policy is transitioning from a pilot to a program with Council-wide service
- Proven ability to expand public participation, including reaching residents not typically engaged in policy processes
- Established as a cross-divisional approach, supporting parks, housing, transportation, land use, and water policy
- Generated new partnerships and public trust through creative, community-centered engagement

What this enables moving forward:

- Earlier integration into planning processes (not just awareness phase)
- Scalable tools for consistent, high-quality engagement across Council work
- Continued innovation in how policy is communicated and shaped

Tools & Resources Available:

- Go Policy! card game
  - Makes complex policy accessible across ages and audiences
- Artist engagement model
  - Replicable framework for integrating artists into planning
- Creative engagement strategies
  - Murals, installations, youth activities, storytelling
- Partnership ecosystem
  - Artists, community orgs, cultural institutions

Learn more:

- metrocouncil.org/planning/imagine-2050/art-policy.aspx

Concept 2
Met Council spread

Introduction

Message from the Met Council Chair

"Policy is powerful and everyone deserves a meaningful voice in shaping it. Through Art + Policy, local artists became essential partners in bringing Imagine 2050 to life, infusing the planning process with creativity, joy, and a deeper sense of possibility. Their contributions didn't just broaden engagement; they transformed it, inviting communities into the conversation in ways that data and policy language alone never could. This pilot project has done more than prove a concept—it has planted the seeds for a permanent program, one rooted in the belief that art and planning are stronger together, and that the future of our region belongs to all of us."

Robin Hutcheson
Chair

Concept 2
Impact Spread

Impact & Overview

Awareness impact: Raising awareness of the Met Council and inviting public input

Creating a mobile gallery

The first element we launched was a mobile gallery – transforming our public transit fleet into an artful invitation to add your dreams to our region's future.

We started by commissioning four Minnesota artists to create visual manifestations of the policy plans for the Met Council's five policy areas: water, parks, transportation, housing, and land use.

We kicked off our work by bringing these artists together with staff policymakers for a day-long retreat. Staff shared key themes emerging in their policy plans and what trends and challenges were most important to explore.

Artists were then given time to explore how these themes might be visualized in their designs, with a halfway point to check in on progress with members of the Art + Policy team and policy area liaisons. Artists were encouraged to infuse emotions of joy and play into their future-forward designs as an opportunity to imagine and dream the collective future and bring feeling into a policy process.

Once finalized, designs were printed and installed to fully wrap buses and light rail trains. Each bus included the prompt "Share Your Dreams for the Future of the Region" with a short link and QR code for the public to contribute their thoughts and make their voices heard. In all, there were 12 buses and two trains rolling throughout the Twin Cities metro region for eight months.

The mobile gallery was our primary public awareness phase of the project, which proved to be instrumental in reaching more participants—with residents expressing that frequent bus sightings in their neighborhoods gave them a better understanding of the work of the Met Council and the policy areas we focus on. This public awareness of policy plans taking shape empowered residents and elevated new ideas.

Discussion Questions

What stands out most from this report in terms of impact?

- What part of this work matters most to you in terms of advancing the Council's mission and priorities?

What outcomes from this work feel most important to continue or build on?

What role should Art + Policy play in the Council's work as we implement Imagine 2050?

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