

PRELIMINARY FEASIBILITY STUDY

Las Cruces, New Mexico | December 2022



Cover Photos: Artspace Las Cruces Core Group; Mural "Color me Cruces" by Anahy Nuñez, Aaron Valenzuela, and Christina Ballew; Downtown Las Cruces



*Prepared at the request of the Community Foundation of
Southern New Mexico and Doña Ana Arts Council*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Artspace thanks the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico (CFSNM) and the Doña Ana Arts Council for inviting us into your community, especially Terra V. Winter and Greg Smith for leading this effort. This visit would not have been possible without the leadership, wrangling, and support of the Core Group members, especially Lea Wise-Surguy, Marisa Sage, and Jennifer Charity, our expert-behind-the-scenes coordinators. The Core Group and focus group participants they assembled offered invaluable insight, hospitality, and feedback throughout the process. It was a pleasure to work with such a committed group. We would also like to thank the 200+ focus group and open house participants who made their voices heard over the course of this study. See Appendix B for the list of open house participants. This study was funded through a USBank matching grant with the CFSNM and through various individuals and entities contributing major gifts to kick start this work. We also acknowledge Nusunda Credit Union Foundation for their generous support providing entertainment, food, and libations for our public meeting.



LAS CRUCES CORE GROUP

- Abby Nayra** // Cruces Creatives
- Chris Faivre** // City of Las Cruces
- Greg Smith** // Doña Ana Arts Council
- Jennifer Charity** // U.S. Bank
- Lea Wise-Surguy** // Cruces Creatives
- Marisa Sage** // New Mexico State University Art Museum
- Robert Cruise** // Downtown Las Cruces Partnership
- Susan Cabello** // Downtown Las Cruces Partnership
- Terra Winter** // Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico



AMERICA'S LEADER IN ARTIST-LED COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Artspace is a nonprofit organization that uses the tools of real estate development to create affordable, appropriate places where artists can live and work. Because Artspace owns each of the projects it develops, we are able to ensure that they remain affordable and accessible to artists in perpetuity. Over the last three decades, Artspace has led an accelerating national movement of artist-led community transformation. While embracing the value the arts bring to individual lives, Artspace has championed the once-radical idea that artists living on the edge of poverty and chronically underfunded arts organizations can leverage fundamental social change. With headquarters in Minneapolis and offices in New York and Washington, D.C., Artspace is America's leading developer of arts facilities with 57 completed projects to date, and has provided consulting services to more than 300 communities and arts organizations nationwide.

WWW.ARTSPACE.ORG

FOCUS GROUP ATTENDEES*

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS AND ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

- | | |
|---|--|
| Adrian & Zoe Aguirre // Local Artists | Katrina Chandler // NMCO Media |
| Alex Nipper // Low Clearance Lab | Laurie Churchill // Watercolor and Quilt Artist |
| Betty Krebs // Local Artist | Matt Byrnes // Media and Architecture at Community College |
| Bob Diven // Local Artist | Meg Goehring // NMSU Department of Art |
| Celina Corral // Mural Artist and Instructor | Micah Pearson // Digital Artist |
| Chris Bardey // Artist and Art Instructor | Motoko Furuhashi // NMSU Jewelry Art Professor |
| Gabby Flynn // Friend of the Organ Mountain Visiting Artist, NMSU Art Alumni | Nan Rubin // Radio Host |
| Henry Hartig // Experimental Artist | Nicole Martinez // Musician |
| Hillary Dutcher // Visit Las Cruces | Penny Peace // Gallery Manager for Arts Council |
| Irene Oliver-Lewis // Las Cruces Arts and Cultural District Plan Author | Rochelle Hernandez // Visit Las Cruces |
| Joshua Peugh // Dark Circles Contemporary Dance | Sephra Reyes // Jewelry Artist and Local Gallery Professional |
| Karen Conley // Local Artist | Sonya Fe // Local Artist |
| Kathleen Deasy // Local Artist | Tim Staley // Grandma Moses Press |

EQUITY IN SPACE - DIVERSE LEADERS

- | | |
|--|---|
| Abeer Al-Ghawi // Ngage New Mexico | Emma Ladd // Local Artist |
| Adrian Aguirre // Local Artist | Gus Ramirez // Local Artist |
| Alfred Gyasi // Graduate Student | Hamad Aziziam // Graduate Student |
| Brittany Ontiveros // Cruces Creatives | Lori Martinez // Ngage New Mexico |
| Candace Cichuniec // Ngage New Mexico | Marcus Chormicle // CAV Gallery Owner, Local Artist |
| Diego Medina // Piro-Manso-Tiwa Tribe, Arts Educator, Curator, Local Artist | Micahel Heiner // Cruces Creatives |
| Elham Sabri // Graduate Student | Robert Palacios // New Mexico Advocates for the Arts |
| | Yashoda Lafkar // NMSU Graduate Student |

CIVIC AND FINANCE LEADERS

- | | |
|---|--|
| Brian Kavanaugh // FYI+ | Erica Saunder // SVP - Century Bank |
| Celeste McGuire // Citizens Bank of Las Cruces | Heather Pollard // Amador Hotel Foundation and The Emporium |
| Celina Morales // Economic Development - City of Las Cruces | Jed Fanning // Citizens Bank of Las Cruces |
| Chris Schaljo Hernandez // Salud! de Mesilla, Doña Ana County Commission | Jonathan Raffert // U.S. Bancorp |
| Cruz A. Ramos // Economic Development - City of Las Cruces | Natalie Green // City of Las Cruces |
| Daisy Barek // NMSU Graduate Student | Robert Cruise // Downtown Las Cruces - Partnership |
| Debbi Moore // Greater Las Cruces Chamber | Scott Mohrhauser // SVP - Pioneer Bank |

*Due to the virtual nature of some of these meetings, this list is to the best of the Core Group's ability and may not include all attendees. We apologize in advance for any omissions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background

Las Cruces is the second largest city in New Mexico, after Albuquerque, with a unique character of its own. While it is home to New Mexico State University, its long history as an arts and culture hub in the Borderlands region keeps it distinct and outside the mold of a classic “college town.” It has a vibrant downtown, plenty of arts and cultural activities, incredible food, and attracts recreation enthusiasts with its location in the foothills of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument hiking area and nearby White Sands National Park.

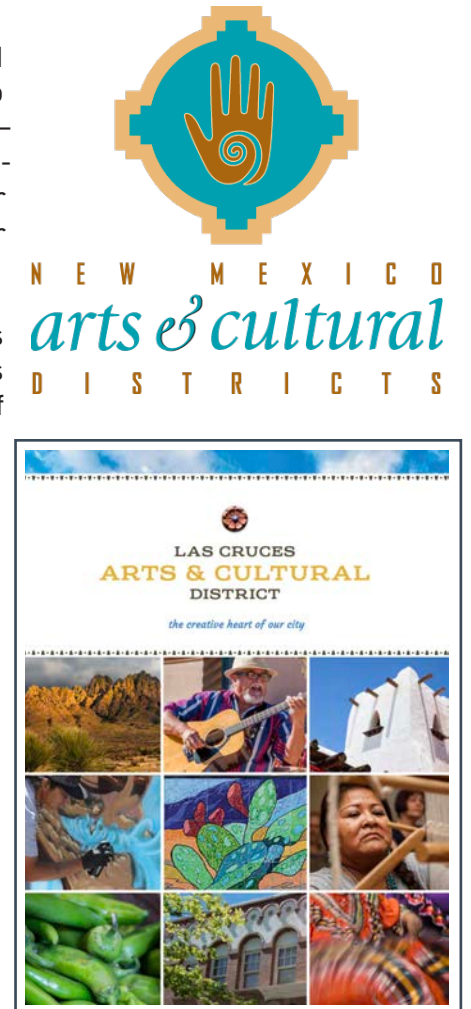
Given its arts assets and culturally distinct community, Las Cruces was designated a state-certified Arts and Cultural District in 2018. According to New Mexico MainStreet who oversees the program, the district contains “21 arts assets—museums, galleries, theaters; 1 library; 14 restaurants, 1 coffee house; 27 arts-complementary businesses; 8 historic buildings/sites and at least 100 homes or buildings built from 1870 to the 1950’s, which are listed in the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register of Cultural Properties.”

Years of planning work predated the 2018 designation and subsequently Artspace’s 2022 study and visit. In 2014, a Task Force was formed to explore opportunities to create a cultural district in Las Cruces. The Task Force included members of the Doña Ana Arts Council, Downtown Las Cruces Partnership, and the City. In 2015, the Task Force re-formed into a cross-sector, 11-member Coordinating Council and began developing the first “municipally-designated” Arts and Cultural District in New Mexico. The Council researched the designated New Mexico districts, national trends, and outcomes of other districts and determined that the establishment of a unique cultural identity was paramount. The 2018 Arts and Cultural District Plan (ACD) and guiding document engaged over 700 community members. Its vision statement was that **“The Las Cruces Arts and Cultural District is a vibrant, inspirational, diverse, and asset-rich cultural environment with collective economic and quality of life benefits.”**

Artspace had the chance to meet with one of the authors of the 2018 plan, Irene Oliver-Lewis, who added immense insight from her local arts leadership. Based on the action steps in this ACD Plan and the guiding principles from the 2020 Elevate Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan, the community has been working to advance this work for over eight years.

The ACD Plan proposed to:

- Make the ACD the new, exciting, and ever-changing center of the public’s participation in arts and cultural activity in the Mesilla Valley.
- Grow the creative economy and tourism for the benefit of the entire community.
- Create a unique identity by showcasing the unique confluence of Border Art and Culture that arises from Las Cruces’ place and history in New Mexico and the international border region.
- Create sustainability for Las Cruces’ downtown core and the Mesquite Street Historic District as a place to live, work, shop, and spend leisure time.



Source: 2018 ACD Plan

The four goals of the ACD Plan are to:

1. Foster Economic Growth
2. Improve the Community's Quality of Life (See Action 2.2 Sidebar)
3. Honor and Promote Las Cruces History and Culture
4. Community Engagement and Implementation

Having clear action plans and comprehensive plans that state the need for housing and for more people to live and work in downtown provides us with a roadmap when we visit a new community. The amount of legwork and outreach the community has already conducted is not in vain. It demonstrates the engagement and commitment to seeing an affordable creative space development happen. This process also brought new voices to the table.



Past Study Response from Public Meeting Presentation

Artspace's first conversation was with the CFSNM in February 2020; in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we paused the conversation until late 2021. We held a number of zoom conversations with the Doña Ana Arts Council and CFSNM stakeholders for the past year to discuss our work and approach to feasibility, all culminating in our September visit. Even despite the pandemic, our study is advancing the ACD action plan goal 2.2 (See sidebar above) within the suggested timeframe. [Read the press release here for more information.](#)

Artspace was represented by Wendy Holmes, Senior Vice President, and Aneasha Marwah, Director, both from the Artspace Consulting Department. The Las Cruces Core Group was also lucky enough to be joined in downtown El Paso for a tour of Roderick Artspace Lofts by Jennifer Marmol, Asset Manager in the Artspace Properties Department.

ACTION 2.2

ATTRACT CREATIVE PEOPLE TO LIVE IN THE DISTRICT

2.2.1 Enter into an agreement with Artspace to pursue an affordable live/work rentals project in the district, make the common spaces and the leased spaces in the building(s) a center of creative activity, and deploy the residents to create activity throughout the district.

SUGGESTED LEAD: Artspace Project Steering Committee

POTENTIAL PARTNERS: CLC / El Paso Community Foundation / Southern New Mexico Community Foundation

WHEN: 2018-2023

Source: ACD Plan

PAST PLANNING THAT LED TO THIS STUDY

2014 Arts & Culture District (ACD) Task Force Formed

Las Cruces Arts and Cultural District Plan

- Foster economic growth
- Improve the community's quality of life ("enliven the district by attracting artists with affordable live/work housing.")
- Honor and promote Las Cruces' history and culture
- Community engagement and implementation

2018

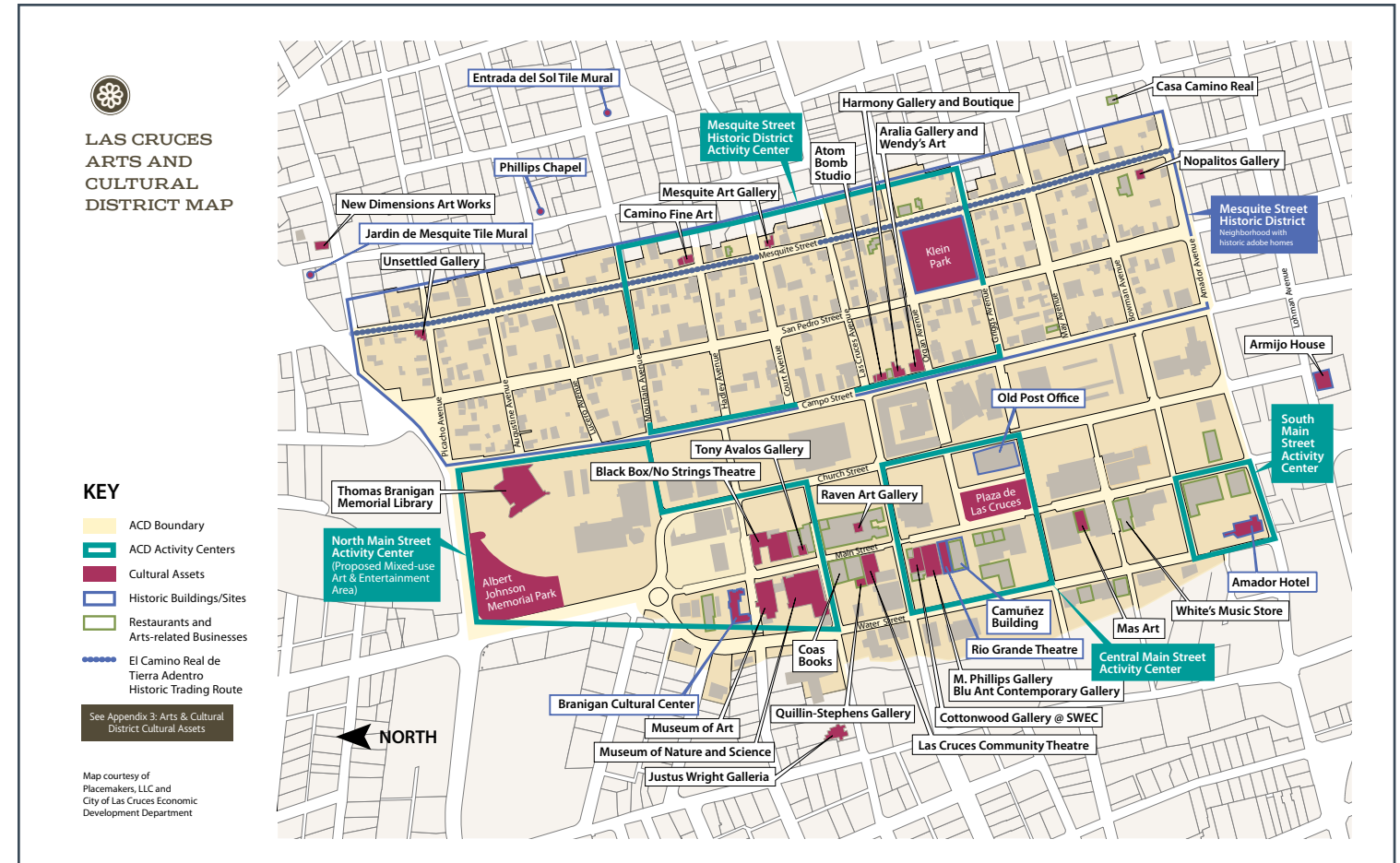
2020



CFSNM reached out to Artspace to explore a feasibility study to advance Action 2.2 "Connect with Artspace to pursue an affordable live/work rentals project in the district."

Artspace Study Kicks Off

FALL 2022



Source: ACD Plan

LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO AT A GLANCE	
Population (2022 est.)	113,029
Households (2022 est.)	46,644
Population % Change 2010-2022	+11%
Est. Population Growth 2022-2027	+1.7%
Vacant Housing Units (2021)	4.3%
Median Age (2022 est.)	35
Median Household Income (2022 est.)	\$50,453
Median Gross Rent (Monthly) (2021)	\$787
Renter-Occupied Households (2022 est.)	44%
Race/Ethnicity (Top 5, 2022 est.)	Hispanic/Latino (of any race): 61.2% White: 50.3% Two or More Races: 25.9% Black/African American: 2.7% Asian: 1.8%

Source: Esri Business Analyst, US Census, 2021

II. PRELIMINARY FEASIBILITY STUDY

A Preliminary Feasibility Study (PFS) is the first step that Artspace takes to determine whether an affordable arts development project can move forward within the context of a community's unique needs, assets, sites, leaders, and resources.

Since the pandemic, Artspace approaches the PFS study in a hybrid form. We begin with a virtual artists and arts organizations focus group to get to know the community before we arrived and meet with our lead stakeholders: the arts sector. We kicked off with this virtual focus group on August 30, 2022. The Artspace Consulting team then visited the community in-person from September 13-15, 2022 to gather information, tour potential sites, connect with local stakeholders, and share information about how these projects come together. With this hybrid approach, we were able to gather community feedback in many different formats and build general support for the creation of affordable space for the arts sector.

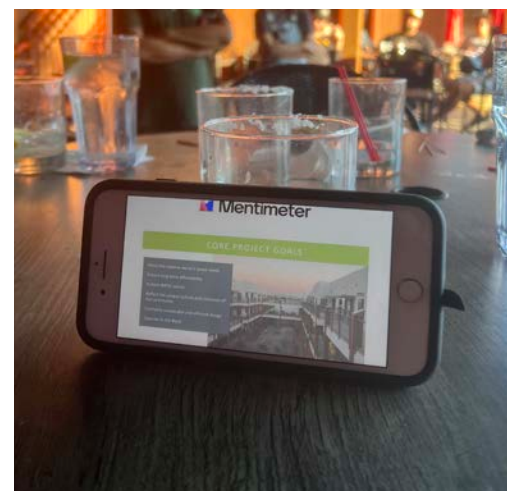
A strong indication of the desire and need for this kind of project in Las Cruces was the number of attendees who participated in multiple meetings facilitated by Artspace Consulting throughout the course of our study. The excitement was palpable, especially at the in-person public meeting at the Amador Patio Bar & Grill. There was a wide array of attendees at our meetings in terms of ages, art forms, demographics, and longevity in the city - with many new faces for locals to meet.

The local Core Group was instrumental in planning the tours and inviting the community and public to the various meetings. At every meeting we had thoughtful conversations with community members about their excitement for a project like this and how it has the potential to bring the community together. The turnout at each meeting was outstanding. Several members of the Core Group commented on how Artspace was invited into the community at the right time - when there is a strong sense of forward momentum and optimism. That was apparent in all our conversations and certainly a notable characteristic of this place and time.

PRELIMINARY FEASIBILITY ENGAGEMENT

During the Las Cruces study, the Artspace team:

- Met with residents and toured Roderick Artspace Lofts in El Paso, TX with the Las Cruces Core Group
- Facilitated four focus group meetings:
 - Artists & Arts Organizations (Virtual)
 - Core Group Dinner (In-person at Little Toad Creek)
 - Equity in Space Diverse Leaders (In-person at New Mexico State University Department of Art Devasthali Hall)
 - Funders/Civic Leaders (In-person at Las Cruces City Hall)
- Community Tour of Mesilla, Mesilla Park, Downtown, and the Mesquite District
- Toured NMSU Devasthali Hall and NMSU Art Museum
- Visited Cruces Creatives
- Toured potential sites in and near the Arts and Cultural District
- Hosted a Public Meeting and Happy Hour Social at Amador Live (In-person)
- Visited existing art spaces and creative businesses.
- Concluded with a wrap-up meeting at CFSNM's new offices.
- Recorded an interview with Nan Rubin for Las Cruces Community Radio
- Visited Las Cruces Museum of Art with Irene Oliver-Lewis
- Zoom conversations with community stakeholders and local developers
- Met artists and community members at the Wright Museum



Public Meeting at the Amador & Interactive Presentation Tool: Menti // Photo Credit: Artspace

Community Tour

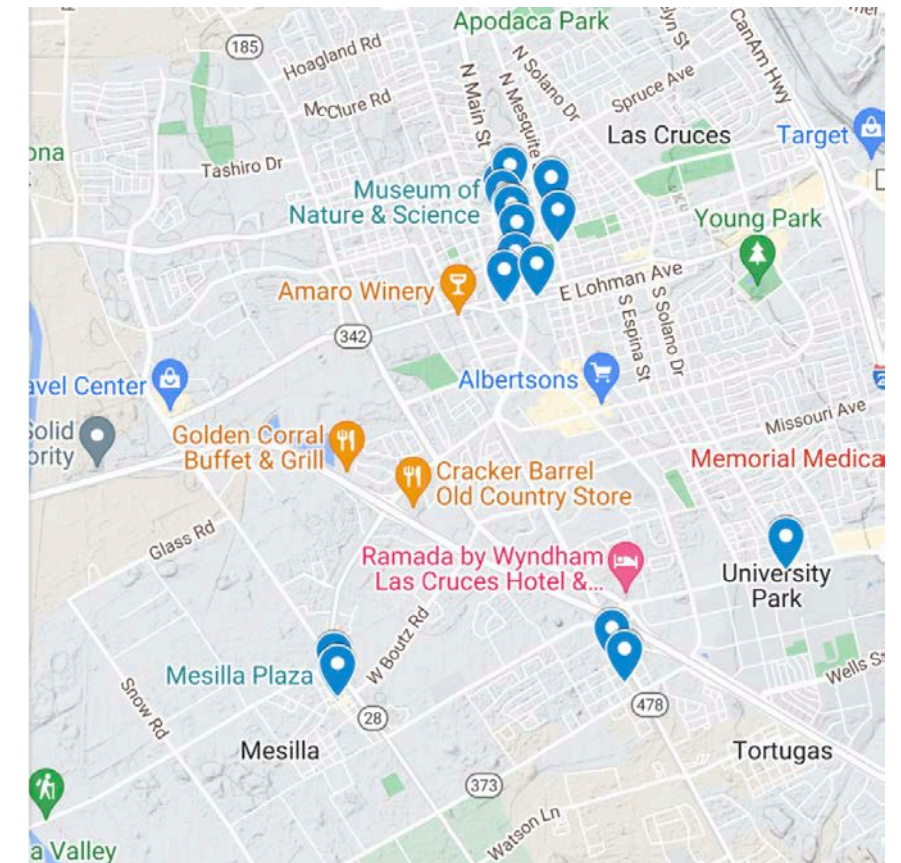
As part of our orientation, the Core Group planned a fun tour of the creative community in Las Cruces. We kicked off with a visit to Cristian Anthony Vallejo (CAV) Memorial Gallery downtown and met local artist and all around creative brand superstar Marcus Xavier Chormicle. He thoughtfully explained the roots and history of his family in the area, providing a great deal of context for our next few days. We walked and toured businesses in the Arts and Cultural District along Main Street and Mesquite Street.

We visited Las Cruces City Hall, Organ Mountain Outfitters, Mew and Company, Grounded, the Borderlands Exhibit at Las Cruces Art Museum, Plaza de Las Cruces, Cruces Creatives, Amador Patio Bar & Grill, Doña Ana Arts Council, Beck's Roasting House, and The Mandrake Fine Art + Botanica near downtown. Had a full behind-the-scenes tour of Devasthali Hall's student artist studios, the NMSU Art Museum and the upcoming Ex-Votos exhibit and retablos collection with Core Group member Marisa Sage.

In Mesilla Park, we visited Art Obscura, The Hood, and Picacho Coffee Roasters. This area is organically an industrial arts district in Las Cruces and has a unique funky vibe right along the train tracks with spaces for neon arts, coffee roasting, galleries, and events. While not located near downtown, we see this area as continuing to grow as space is made available.

Core Group member Lea Wise-Surguy brought us to see the neighboring town Mesilla and its Historic Downtown. With its quaint charm, stunning architecture, and art studios we appreciated the additional context on this neighboring community that we had heard so much about. We happened to catch a mariachi and folklorico show in conjunction with Diez y Seis de Septiembre while we were in town. The opportunity to experience a show added to the unique art experience of this special region.

- Art Obscura
- Picacho Coffee Roasters
- The Hood
- The Bean at Josefina's
- Heart of the Desert Pistachios & Wine
- Mesilla Plaza
- Organ Mountain Outfitters
- Las Cruces City Hall
- Las Cruces Museum of Art
- Mew and Company
- Grounded
- Plaza De Las Cruces
- Amador Patio Bar Grill
- Old Doña Ana County Courthouse
- NMSU Art Museum
- Cruces Creatives
- The Mandrake Fine Art & Botanica
- Beck's Roasting House & Creamery



Source: Artspace via Google Maps

Initial Reflections From the Visit

Artspace Consulting learned a great deal of **history and context** from our Core Group. There is a distinct divide between northern and southern New Mexico, and Las Cruces is uniquely southern New Mexico. It is not Santa Fe, and that's a source of pride. There are new industries moving into town with tech, video, and film, but it has been a quiet hotspot for artists for years. It is still a "homey" city, and described as very friendly, where you can easily get to know your neighbor. We heard anecdotally that since COVID, the community has grown with many newcomers and retirees finding a new home in Las Cruces. These new perspectives and energy moving to the city hopefully can overcome the segregated/siloed way things have operated in the past, especially for the creative sector.

While the rich local history is an asset, this may be an opportune time for some attitudes about "the way things have always been done" to benefit from a push forward. There is also a **creative sector leadership shift happening** with some leaders retiring and others gaining prominence, which provides a new opportunity to gel the creative sector and advocacy efforts.

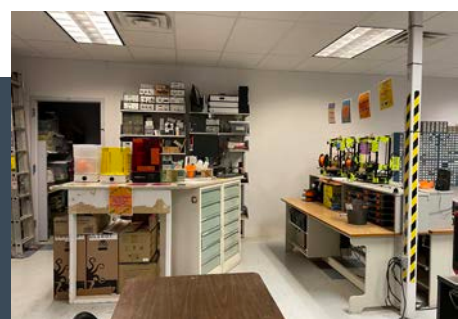
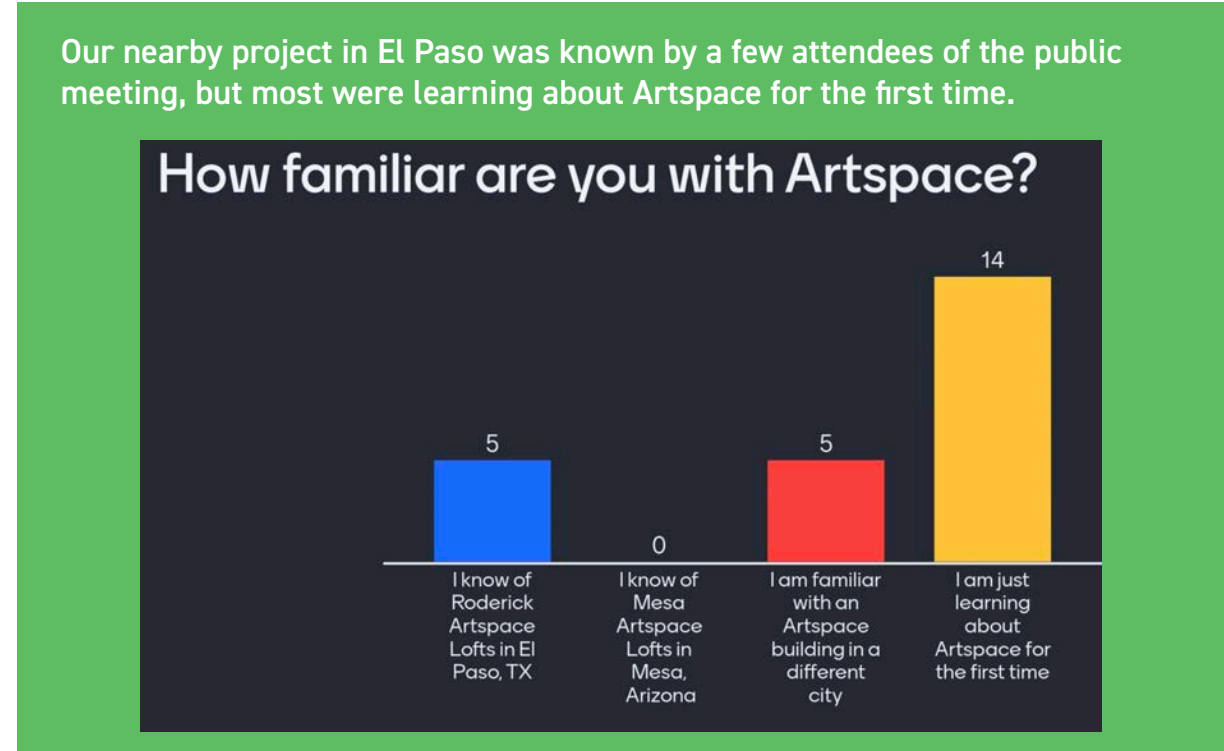
We asked our Core Group on the first night what **excited them** going into this study. Responses included: raising visibility of artists not part of the Doña Ana Arts Council or the University, connecting available housing funds to this process, having creative space is about visibility and can launch an arts practice - underscoring the importance of space, connecting the music community, having more opportunities for recent grads and bridging the divide between art grads and workforce opportunities. Economic development impacts of the arts. They also mentioned that art is happening all over Doña Ana County, it is just not known about.

Core Group Reflections

On our final day, we asked Core Group members to state **one new thing they learned or a new opportunity** they saw for their community that came from interactions with their peers through the course of the visit. Some of their responses were:

- More people are moving here and the time feels right to focus on artists' needs.
- Many unfamiliar faces and many new connections were made over the visit. A lot of people who do not usually come out, joined for these events and meetings. Even the "grunge artists" came out.
- There have been many shifts and changes in the community since COVID.
- Noticed pockets where the usual funders are not reaching.
- More community engagement focused on the arts is needed as a follow-through.
- Very little awareness of the 2018 Arts and Cultural District before this study and all the great action steps. Make this study more widely available through the Downtown Las Cruces Partnership (DLCP).
- A lot of great real estate is being held by absentee landlords and nothing is happening. Time to think about strategies to fix this.
- Businesses need space to incubate.

- This process helped redefine for locals hopefully who we define as an artist. Never thought about woodworkers and restoration as art, but it is.
- Musicians are usually thought of as separate, great to see them part of this conversation.
- Made new connections with NMSU university art students, great to have them more ingrained in the Las Cruces arts community.
- Leaders collectively should be doing more to excite the local arts community.
- More cross-sector collaboration for each other's events seems manageable for now.
- Feeling fired up, people love to come together and this study showed that.
- Cruces Creatives needs more space and tools to reach all the artists in Las Cruces.
- Parking spaces are a hurdle that the community needs to overcome, especially to revitalize downtown.
- We heard the City of Las Cruces is planning a large housing project that incorporates the arts and are excited to learn more.
- There isn't one centralized entity to stay connected and collaborate for the whole arts sector. There are arts organizations that support select groups and there is not overall collaboration.



Artspace Community Tour // Photo Credit: Artspace

The Artspace Approach

Based on three decades of experience, Artspace has identified six key components of community-led development that every community needs to have in place to make a grassroots arts project feasible. For the Preliminary Feasibility Study, Artspace organizes information through the lens of these **six components**, defined below:



ALIGNMENT WITH BROADER COMMUNITY GOALS. A potential project can help achieve other civic goals, such as economic development or historic preservation. Artspace considers strategies and partnerships that can leverage impact, so that the operating project can be greater than the sum of its parts. Focus group attendees were asked to circle or rank their top priorities during the meetings with Artspace.

PROJECT CONCEPT. What type(s) of space would the community like to see created? Although many communities have a well-developed project concept in mind before embarking on this study, Artspace's first step is to ask different stakeholders, "What type of creative spaces are needed and wanted in your community?" While these are not the only factors Artspace considers in making a recommendation to move a project forward, they help frame the discussion – especially in the preliminary feasibility stage.

While these are not the only factors Artspace considers in making a recommendation to move a project forward, they help frame the discussion – especially in the preliminary feasibility stage.

CREATIVE SECTOR. Is there a sufficiently strong creative sector to support an arts facility? To answer that question, qualitative data is collected through focus group meetings. Specifically, Artspace seeks to better understand the existing arts community, its assets, challenges, and opportunities. It also lays the groundwork for an Arts Market Study, the second step on the path to an Artspace project, which provides quantitative data about the creative community's space needs.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP. Are there leaders on the ground in Las Cruces who are willing and able to advocate for the project, open doors, and keep lines of communication flowing between a developer and the community? These leaders come to the project from all industries - from elected officials who control agencies and program dollars to citizens who are passionate about making their community a better place to live, work, and create.

FUNDING AND FINANCING. Arts facilities typically represent significant investments of civic resources. Although a variety of state and federal programs can be used to generate revenue for construction, Artspace relies on local funding and financing programs to support pre-development expenses and gap funding. The Preliminary Feasibility Study considers the community's interest and capacity to commit resources to an arts facility. Basic information is gathered about local funding options from both private and public institutions as well as philanthropic donations.

SITE ANALYSIS. At this stage, the primary goal is not to select the final site, but rather to identify candidates for further study. The factors under consideration include: location, size, ease of acquisition, and potential for sustained positive impact. As a project moves into predevelopment, these (and perhaps other) candidate sites will be evaluated in the context of a refined Project Concept, Arts Market Study data, and a deeper understanding of local development priorities and funding sources.

Commitment to Equity in Creative Space

At Artspace, we are committed to using our platform as consultants and nonprofit developers to elevate the voices of those who all too often are not included in real estate decisions. Every community has room to improve in addressing diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) issues, and Las Cruces is no exception. In each of the findings of this report, we identify areas where DEIA opportunities exist for the community. Creative space is not developed in a vacuum, and communities like Las Cruces have historic imbalances of power that need to be further evaluated for all parties to truly feel welcome in any future community driven space.

One method we use to identify DEIA challenges is inviting artists and cultural leaders who identify as BIPOC – black, indigenous, or a person of color – to share their challenges and issues around creative space to a *Diversity in Space* discussion to offer their perspectives. Reflections from those conversations are included throughout the report, most notably in the section devoted to alignment with broader community goals section, especially since supporting a diverse cultural community is an important goal for Las Cruces artists.

Bringing Artspace's National Experience to Las Cruces

In addition to the information gathered about Las Cruces, this report is informed by Artspace's experience working in other cities that have invested in affordable facilities for artists and arts organizations. The following thoughts provide context for evaluating the feasibility and demonstrating the importance of creative spaces:

Mixed-use arts facilities with long-term affordability have been shown to:

GENERATE ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT. Each development provides indirect, direct, and induced economic impact, as well as job opportunities before, during, and after construction.

PRESERVE OLD BUILDINGS, STABILIZE NEIGHBORHOODS, AND REVITALIZE VACANT AND UNDERUTILIZED PROPERTIES. They help create activity and foot traffic in areas devoid of creativity.

CATALYZE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INVESTMENT, such as façade improvements and general beautification in the surrounding area.

CREATE COMMUNITY SPACES that give the public opportunities to interact with the artist tenants through gallery events, demonstrations, performances, and installations. They also provide opportunities for other local artists to showcase their work.

SUPPORT INDEPENDENT ARTISTS who are each, in effect, cottage industry business owners, generating economic activity by selling products or services, purchasing equipment and supplies, and paying taxes.

BUILD COMMUNITY. Artists and creatives are active neighbors and community members. Many collaborate with the educational, cultural, and business communities as teachers, community conveners, and volunteers. The spaces provide a place where cultural art forms can be passed from one generation to the next.

CORE GOALS

At the heart of every Artspace development are these goals:

- Meet the creative sector's space needs
- Ensure long-term affordability
- Reflect the unique culture and character of the community
- Include diverse BIPOC voices at the table
- Exemplify sustainable and efficient design
- Operate in the black
- Hire a local property management firm trained in affordable housing management to maintain, support, and manage the rental facility



Work by Yashoda Latkar, Graduate Student of NMSU Art Department // Photo Credit: Artspace

III. KEY FINDINGS

Alignment with Broader Community Goals

Successful arts buildings serve not only their residents and other tenants but also the surrounding community. They accomplish this by aligning with as many complementary goals as possible, effectively becoming more than the sum of their parts. When multiple goals, such as walkability, downtown revitalization, or historic preservation, can be addressed by an Artspace initiative, it has all the more potential to foster long-term, sustainable impact. It also helps to bring more stakeholders to the table who are eager to see the project succeed.

To help us determine the goals that matter most in a community, Artspace uses the Preliminary Feasibility Study to obtain input from a broad cross-section of stakeholders. Once we understand their priorities, we look for ways to bring these goals into alignment. During the Las Cruces focus groups and Public Meeting Open House, Artspace outlined the mission-driven goals that we know could be met through creative space development. Participants were then asked to choose their top three goals from the list in the table below. The top five choices are shaded in the table below.

FOCUS GROUP AND OPEN HOUSE ALIGNMENT WITH BROADER GOALS RESULTS					
Community Goal	Artists (Virtual)	Civic/ Finance Leaders (In-Person)	Equity in Space Leaders (In-Person)	Open House (In-Person)	Total
Supporting a Diverse Cultural Community	18	2	7	25	52
Sustaining Creative Businesses and Nonprofits	10	11	2	27	50
Preserving Affordability	10	2	4	22	38
Retaining Recent Graduates	5	12	2	17	36
Anchoring a Creative District	12	0	3	18	33
Activating Historic Buildings/Historic Preservation	4	2	1	18	25
Activating Vacant Lots	N/A	7	4	12	23
Strengthening Community Ties/Youth + Elderly Communities	5	2	2	6	15
Promoting Tourism	2	1	1	10	14
Downtown Revitalization	N/A	0	1	12	13
Developing a City/County Identity	N/A	0	1	8	9
Increasing Residential Density	1	0	1	0	2

*N/A refers to categories that were not asked at said focus group

In Las Cruces, the top five goals were:

1. **Supporting a Diverse Cultural Community.** Las Cruces is clearly proud of its arts and creative sector; the hard work that led to the Cultural District designation is testament to that. Its unique location as a Borderlands community with many Mexican, Mexican-American and Indigenous artists adds to its cultural and historic significance. Highlighting the history, stories, food, population, unique perspective in this region, and its architecture adds to Las Cruces' identity. It was great to see the diverse events hosted in Plaza de Las Cruces and how Mexican heritage is proudly showcased - given that diversity is a clear goal for the community.

At our *Equity in Space* conversation with international artists and people of Iranian, Indian, Latinx and Indigenous backgrounds, we did hear how ethnicities and populations that are non-white or Mexican with smaller representation felt overlooked. We learned that there has been an influx of Afghani refugees to the region who have not been integrated. It was mentioned to keep ancestral, tribal voices at the table. We heard from Piro-Manso-Tiwa Tribal Historic Preservation Officer and educator, Diego Medina, that native artists who live in the region have stories and contributions that are not as well known. We heard from multigenerational Cruceños about how older generations were asked to assimilate and that younger generations are pushing back against that, wanting to express themselves freely and also their unique cultures. It was repeated that any new space initiative should be for locals foremost. In Santa Fe at Siler Yards, artists we met mentioned that people from other communities ended up living in those spaces.

Participants in the *Equity* conversation also mentioned the importance of finding artists who are not a part of the "system" and who may fall below the radar and the importance of connecting with Tribal leaders. Social media was mentioned as the best way to reach younger and diverse audiences.

The arts and cultural sector's events and pop-ups are all great ways to bridge cultural divides, as well as "Town and Gown" and to break down barriers and silos. Inviting other cultures or making a clear path to host events and cultural pop-ups in the Plaza or at performing/event venues could be handled through the Downtown Las Cruces Partnership. We were impressed to see Southern New Mexico's Pride Festival and Hanukkah celebrations are all being hosted this fall/winter on the Plaza. In Salida, Colorado, a rural community with 5,000 people, a few East Asian artists have started a Lunar New Year celebration that begins with a community gathering at a local nonprofit is space to make paper lanterns. This is just one case study on how integrated underrepresented cultures can lead to greater understanding and community building.

Through the development process of an Artspace project, we encourage local leaders and the Core Group to make a concerted effort to keep this goal at the top of mind, as it is apparent the community hopes that a creative space project can help address it.

Expanding the leadership group to include some of the younger diverse artists we met would help address this goal. It should be noted that this goal ranked much lower for the Civic and Finance Leaders, which is surprising considering the cultural diversity of Las Cruces.



Art Obscura and Downtown Las Cruces // Photo Credit: Artspace 18

2. **Sustaining Creative Businesses and Nonprofits.** An affordable, self-sustaining mixed-use art facility helps to ensure a long-term home for creative businesses and nonprofits, as well as individual artists. A critical mass of creatives also offers increased visibility to the buying public and an opportunity for artists to share networks, materials, and ideas. Arts leaders mentioned that there are many unincorporated arts businesses. Having an organization/foundation that can act as a fiscal sponsor for organizations can be one solution to growing capacity with small arts and cultural nonprofits for them to eventually take on leases. We also heard there is not one central gathering space for artists and creative businesses.

In our experience, having this sort of space can help organizations partner, network, and strengthen their capacity. Make sure services are offered bilingually or with an attention to diverse creative businesses and nonprofits who make Las Cruces unique.

3. **Preserving Affordability.** Long-term affordability was identified as a goal and is a core value of every Artspace project. We heard repeatedly from Las Cruces artists that there is not affordable space for nonprofit organizations/individual artists, nor are there creative career opportunities. Emerging artists and recent graduates therefore tend to leave. With its growing popularity and newcomers/retirees moving in, space is at risk of becoming more expensive very quickly. It was mentioned to us anecdotally that home prices near Mesquite Street have tripled in the last ten years. An influx of new Airbnbs and rentals downtown have added vibrancy to the City's core where lodging options are limited, but it is a delicate balance many tourist locations have to play to preserve home prices before short-term rentals become too prevalent. Affordable housing and creative space is needed to continue to have the creative sector flourish.

In Artspace's opinion, affordability should continue to be top of mind in Las Cruces as it is in a precarious economic situation compared to other arts-centric cities where we've worked. While Las Cruces is considered "more affordable" than other American cities, the poverty rate is also very high at 24% and wages are low - median household income is around \$50,000, well below the national average. The housing vacancy rate is also very tight at 4.3%, and the housing market is getting more expensive. Artspace reflected that, while the community is still affordable now, it has all the makings of a place on the cusp of an affordability crisis. The low median income, very little housing turnover or housing stock, coupled with a growing reputation and people moving to Las Cruces can change a community quickly if affordable housing solutions are not put in place - especially for artists who've made Las Cruces the place that it is.

4. **Retaining Recent Graduates.** Retaining recent graduates - or "stopping the brain drain" - is an age-old challenge for college towns like Las Cruces. Communities across the U.S. use different strategies to keep college students from leaving after graduation. Access to well-paying jobs, opportunities for growth, a cool place to live, and affordable housing are a few of the most sought-after needs of recent graduates. NMSU attracts artists from all over the world who feel they are not well integrated into community activities nor are there opportunities for them - this was mentioned by our Equity in Space focus group participants at NMSU.

For the thousands of graduates coming out of fine arts and other creative industry programs every year at NMSU, a mixed-use project in the Artspace style could be transformative. Affordable space to live and work, a community in which they can make an impact, studio space, entrepreneurial spirit, and creative partnerships could go a long way toward persuading recent college graduates to stay in Las Cruces after graduation. Having strong partnerships with the NMSU Art Museum and graduate program are a great connection. Continuing conversations with art grads about what they need to stay specifically in Las Cruces will be important to this goal. Collaborative galleries such as Marcus Xavier Cormicle's and jobs at Cruces Creatives are great examples of local graduates contributing to the downtown economy.

5. **Anchoring an Arts District.** An affordable live/work housing project in the Las Cruces Arts and Cultural District could be the demonstration project for the state's Creative District program. Nearby in Colorado, we've worked with the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) and the Colorado Creative Industries (CCI) program to develop the Space to Create program. This same program doesn't exist in New Mexico, it could be a model.

The Main Street and Mesquite Street areas have lots of creativity and the Plaza is a natural gathering space, but we still heard that having a hub for creatives would help anchor this area. In comparison, Mesilla central downtown plaza is more condensed and feels like an arts district in a more distinct way. An Artspace-style project could be an anchor to create more of a sense of place.

Residential artist tenants are also their own cottage industries. Artists support creative businesses through the purchase of materials and services and by offering classes, workshops, arts retail and coordinating art crawls and exhibitions/performances.

ARAB-AMERICAN MUSEUM AND BLACK LIVES MATTER 360 EXHIBITION PARTNERSHIP IN DEARBORN, MICHIGAN

CITY HALL ARTSPACE LOFTS // DEARBORN, MI

City Hall Artspace Lofts in Dearborn, Michigan is a great example of how an Artspace project can foster relationships between artists in and out of the building. During the development process as early as 2010, the Arab-American Museum, which is located directly across the street from the property, was an early partner. City Hall Artspace Lofts now houses an artist in residency unit for visiting artists who are exhibiting at the museum, and have welcomed artists from Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and beyond. Artspace Consulting also coached the Arab American Museum through our Immersion program on their expansion and incubator space.

The artists in the building, led by original resident Julia Denguhlanga, also have transformed the ground floor into a community gallery space. The Black Lives Matter 360 Exhibition that went up in response to the death of George Floyd showcases work from artists within the building, and from other mission-driven community organizations.



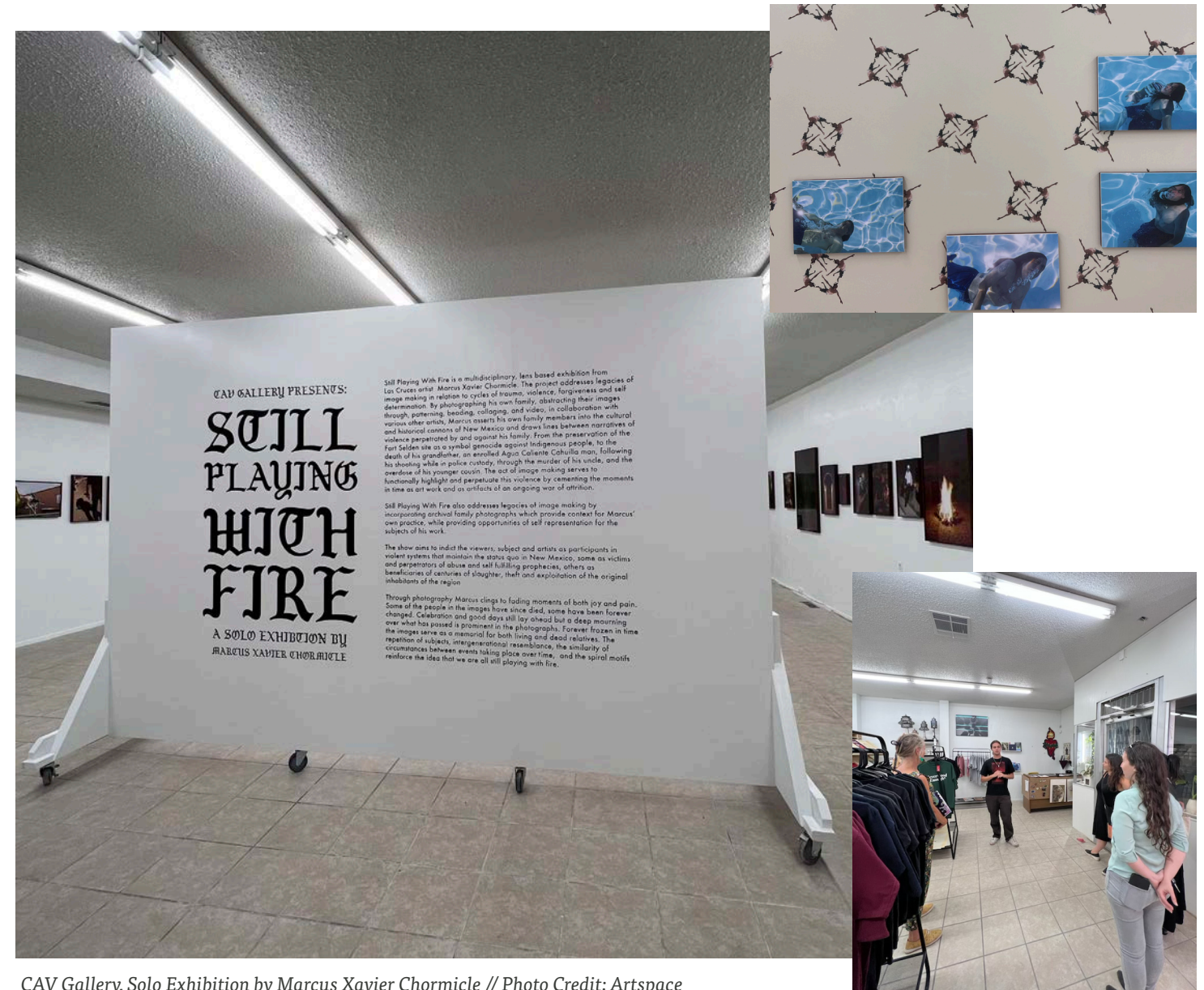
Photo Credit: Artspace

INVESTING IN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Taking a measure of creative placemaking

The Artspace live/work model has been proven to benefit communities by:

- Animating deteriorated historic structures and/or underutilized spaces.
- Bringing vacant and/or underutilized spaces back on the tax rolls and boosting area property values.
- Fostering the safety and livability of neighborhoods without evidence of gentrification-led displacement.
- Anchoring arts districts and expanding public access to the art.
- Attracting additional artists, arts businesses, organizations, and supporting non-arts businesses to the area.
- <https://www.artspace.org/taking-measure-creative-placemaking>



CAV Gallery, Solo Exhibition by Marcus Xavier Chormicle // Photo Credit: Artspace

Project Concept

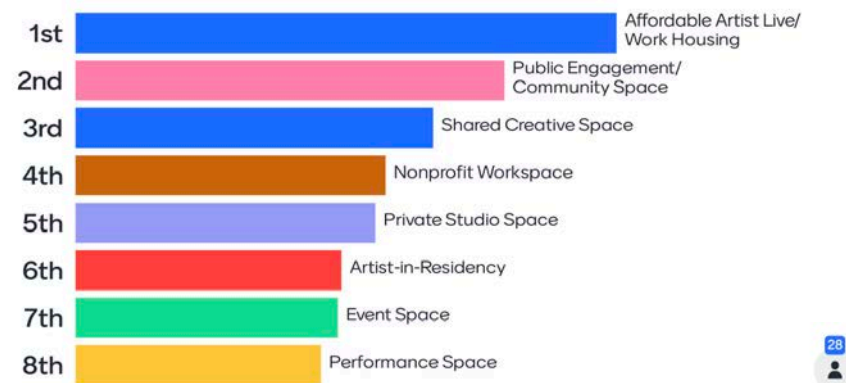
Some communities are clear about what they hope to achieve; others are starting from scratch. They look to Artspace to guide them through the process of determining whether a new facility makes sense for them – and, if so, what kind of space. While the space needs of creatives in each community are different, Artspace has learned from more than 30 years of conversations with artists, arts organizations, and creative businesses and entrepreneurs that there are commonalities across the types of spaces that are needed to live, create, and present creative work. Although affordable live/work space for artists is central to most Artspace projects, residential projects are not necessarily the right fit for every community. From our very first conversation with Las Cruces artists in August, it was evident that space was central to the vision.

Priority Concepts

The first questions Artspace asked the Artist and Arts Organization Focus Group participants back in August before we reached Las Cruces were, “What kind of creative spaces are in your community?” and “What additional spaces are needed and/or wanted?” Artspace also asked the Equity in Space focus group how they would like to be included in the conversation around any new creative space that is developed in Las Cruces.

What the Las Cruces artist and arts organizations said...

What types of creative spaces are needed for artists and arts organizations in Las Cruces? Rank in order of importance.

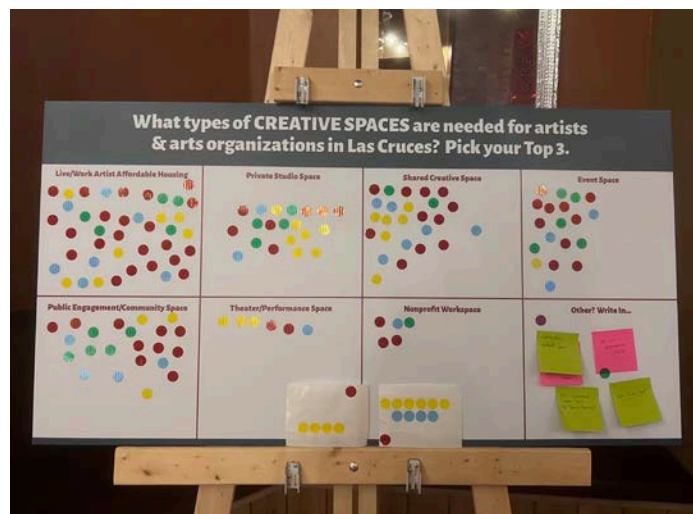


Menti Participant Responses

The Artists/Arts Organization Focus Group and Open House attendees were asked to prioritize the type of artist/creative space they would like to see in Las Cruces. There was strong interest in affordable artist live/work housing; other desired spaces included public engagement/community space, shared creative space, nonprofit workspace, and private studio space. Many of these uses can be accommodated in the ground floor of a mixed-use project.

At the Open House, attendees prioritized needs as follows:

- **Live/work Artist Housing: 41**
- **Shared Creative Space: 25**
- **Public Engagement/Community Space: 22**
- Private Studio Space: 20
- Event space: 19
- Theater/performance space: 6
- Nonprofit workspace: 5



Open House Exercise 22

Here's a more detailed look at the top five space categories:



AFFORDABLE LIVE/WORK ARTIST HOUSING is residential space where artists can work as well as live. Artspace live/work units meet standard residential codes. They are rental units financed in part by federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and subject, therefore, to certain restrictions. A common restriction limits units to households whose annual incomes are between 30% and 60% of the Area Median Income. Artspace live/work units include such artist-friendly design features as durable surfaces, large windows, high ceilings, and wide doorways. It was great to know that both audiences prioritized housing as the most important space needed. We know if artists can't afford to live in their community they won't create there either.



SHARED CREATIVE SPACE offers shared equipment, education, and community for working creatively and/or making things. These spaces usually are run by nonprofits or businesses and can be accessed through a membership basis. They include co-working and makerspaces and can be designed for specific purposes such as ceramics, 3D printing, community kitchens, and woodworking. These types of spaces provide access to space and/or equipment that is expensive, impractical, or in some cases hazardous. Interest in these types of spaces has increased nationally in the last few years. Shared creative space is a growing trend that is rooted in many traditional and contemporary art forms. Cruces Creatives is an exemplary local shared creative space, and this data is important as they expand and grow.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT/MEETING SPACE was identified in more than one discussion as a kind of space that Las Cruces lacks. Artspace residential projects invariably have community rooms that serve this function not only for residents but for the surrounding neighborhoods as well. Plaza de Las Cruces opened in 2016 and is an outdoor example of this. The new Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico space also has rentable meeting/event space available for a modest deposit, and the local library has this space as well.

In our projects around the country, Artspace has also welcomed many coffee shops that serve as informal meeting spaces. These and many of the kinds of spaces mentioned above can also be created beyond an Artspace development by local entrepreneurs and developers.



PERFORMANCE SPACE serves organizations and individuals looking to rent space for private events, performances, rehearsals, or community gatherings, usually for a fee or hourly rate. A typical space could take the form of a proscenium theater, black box, concert hall, or flexible event space.

Artspace has a number of smaller flexible performance and meeting spaces in many of our buildings. If such a space were included in an Artspace project in Las Cruces, finding an organization interested in running/renting/programming would be key. In Las Cruces we visited Cruces Creatives' small performing space, and others we learned about were the Las Cruces Community Theater, New Mexico State University (NMSU) Center for the Arts, No Strings Theatre Company (Black Box Theatre). It was mentioned that music spaces were lacking and the only performance spaces for music were restaurants and bars or churches. Performance artists mentioned they are asked to perform for free at local restaurants or for minimal funds, which does not allow for economic viability. Recently, Cruces Creatives has restarted its all-original monthly open mic, and Blues Coffee does a mixed listening theater weekly that has been growing in popularity.



PRIVATE STUDIO SPACE is commercial space specifically designed for the creation or practice of art. Studio space can be rented under an annual lease agreement or on an occasional or short-term basis by individual artists or small businesses. Uses can include fine arts studios, industrial work space, teaching, offices, recording studios, soundproof rooms, etc. Keeping the sizes and price points flexible ensures greater market applicability. The spaces along Mesquite Street, Marcus Xavier Cormicle's space, and the University studios are all local examples. The artists we met at our first focus group mentioned they had their space at home, in backyards, on 17th street in a new facility, at the Corbett Center, and at a media center.

Other Spaces of Interest

At both the virtual meeting and the in-person open house, participants were asked what other spaces are needed in Las Cruces.

- Art educational space
- Black box space/non traditional theater space
- Central meeting space for all artists
- Community spaces where meetings and performances can occur
- Craft center, including ceramics, jewelry, glass, textile. Nationally, there is Penland, Arrowmont or Haystack... something like these would be also a great addition to Cruces Creatives!
- Creative economy business incubator
- Creative educational spaces
- Culinary/kitchen creative spaces
- Dance and performance spaces
- Digital manufacturing and fabrication spaces
- Ecology educational space
- Few spaces are really designed for spoken word pieces with heavy visual components
- Gallery space
- Maker and class space for adults and elderly
- Makerspaces as Cruces Creative is excellent and can serve as lead to grow this type of space
- Micro galleries
- Music rehearsal space
- Multifunctional creative space for teens-twenties
- Pop up gallery type spaces
- Presentation spaces (projectors/mics/laptops)
- Printmaking space
- Public art
- Retail space
- Shareable social platform (studio, blog, web, open studio/exhibition/events)
- Visual and performing arts combo that offers education and events to the community
- Welding studio
- Workshop space

Defining a Project Concept in Las Cruces

We came away with a strong sense that there is a desire locally for a facility that provides sustainable affordable space for the creative sector, acts as a destination for the creative community, and is an anchor for the Arts and Cultural District.

Based on the information gathered during this study, **Artspace recommends the exploration of a downtown mixed-use, live/work artist housing development as the priority project concept for Las Cruces.** A development with affordable live/work housing for artists on its upper floors and private studio/collaborative space/commercial space on the ground floor would be appropriate to pursue in the Arts and Cultural District or within walking distance of it. Arts and community advocates should also use these findings as an advocacy tool to prioritize other spaces in the community for the creative sector and continue the dialogue with civic leaders.

ARTSPACE & TENANT PARTNERSHIPS

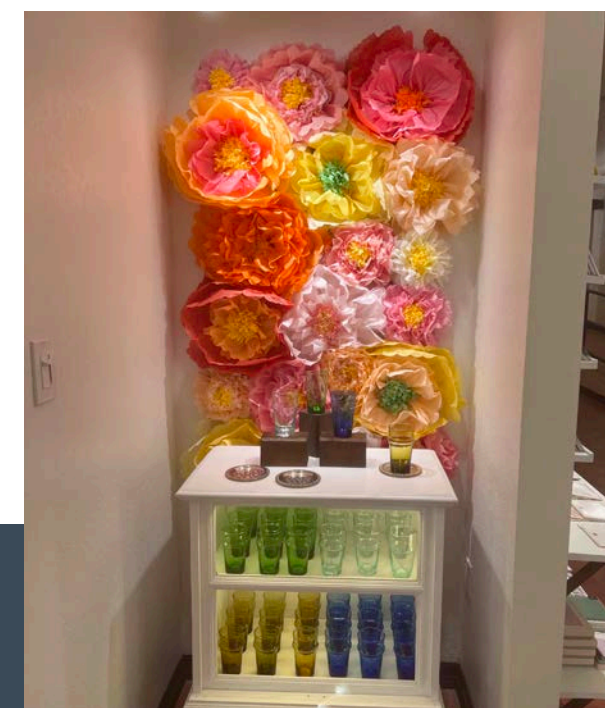
BUFFALO, NY - The Buffalo Arts and Technology Center (BATC) is an anchor tenant in our mixed-use affordable artist housing project in Buffalo. The BATC occupies 15,000 sq. ft. of space on the first and lower level of the historic electric car factory that houses 36 units of artist housing on floors 2-5. The focus of the BATC is two-fold: 1. To provide high quality art instruction to low-income children in the neighborhood, with an eye toward potential art careers and 2. To provide medical technology training to low-income adults in the neighborhood and assist with job placement at the nearby medical campus. There is a synergistic relationship with both the nearby hospital and the artist residents, some of whom act as faculty in the BATC program.



SEATTLE, WA - The Hoa Mai Vietnamese Bilingual Preschool located on the ground floor of Mt. Baker Station Artist Lofts, is the first bilingual Vietnamese-English daycare in Seattle. The Transit-Oriented Development is ideally located and offers a sliding scale for tuition based on family income. It serves the multicultural needs of the neighborhood.



Photo Sources: www.buffaloartstechcenter.org and Artspace



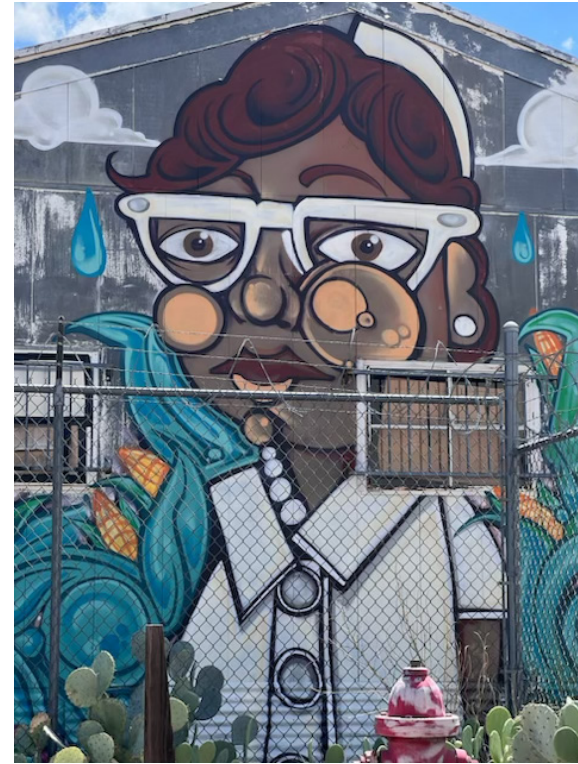
Art by Yvette Mayorga at the NMSU Museum of Art (left) and Mew and Co. (right) // Photo Credit: Artspace

Creative Sector

One goal of the Preliminary Feasibility Study is to obtain information from the local community on their arts and creative sector and offer guidance on how to strengthen it ahead of pursuing an Artspace-style development and Arts Market Study. Our conversations help frame Artspace's understanding of the arts scene and whether or not there is grassroots support and the local need for the proposed project concept.

Artspace intentionally keeps its definitions of artist and creative broad to be as inclusive as possible. Residents of Artspace buildings range from veterans, formerly homeless, retirees, service workers, teachers, parents – and they also happen to be creative. They are likely to earn a portion of their income from something other than their art. In fact, a look across the Arts Market Surveys that Artspace has completed in the past 15 years shows that only about 10% of artist respondents make between 75%-100% of their income through their art.

Mural in Las Cruces



WHO IS AN ARTIST?

Artspace's definition of a creative is very broad. An "artist" is a person who has a demonstrable commitment to the arts or a creative pursuit? While the term is broad and varies from community to community, if affordable housing is utilized in a project, all "artists" must still qualify for that housing by income. An artist is:

- A person who works in or is skilled in any of the fine arts, including but not limited to **painting, drawing, sculpture, book art, mixed-media and print-making.**
- A person who creates imaginative works of aesthetic value, including but not limited to **film, video, digital media works, literature, costume design, photography, architecture and music composition.**
- A person who creates functional art, including but not limited to **jewelry, rugs, decorative screens and grates, furniture, pottery, toys and quilts.**
- A performer, including but not limited to **singers, musicians, dancers, actors and performance artists.**
- In all culturally significant practices, including a **designer, technician, tattoo artist, hairdresser, chef/culinary artist, craftsman, teacher or administrator** who is dedicated to using their expertise within the community to support, promote, present, and/or teach and propagate their art form through events, activities, performances and classes.

Arts Community Profile

During the virtual Artists and Arts Organizations Focus Group and Open House participants discussed their creative space needs, current creative assets, cultural barriers faced by artists who identify as black, indigenous, or people of color, and other challenges and opportunities for Las Cruces artists. These conversations lay the groundwork for the quantitative Arts Market Study, the next step on the path to an Artspace project (for the complete path, see Appendix A).

CREATIVE IDENTITY

We asked participants to tell us their favorite existing arts assets, and we were pleasantly surprised by the number and range of assets they could name: 96 in total with many repeated including Alma d'arte Charter High School, Arts and Cultural District, Art Obscura, Borderlands Ballet, CAV Gallery, Cruces Creatives, Dark Circles, Doña Ana Arts Council, Downtown Blues Cafe, Downtown Main Street, Farmers Markets, Film Las Cruces, Fine Art Flea Market, First Fridays, Las Cruces Museum of Art, Mesquite Historic District, Murals, Music, NMSU Art Museum, Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, Plaza de Las Cruces, The Hood NM, and other soft assets like the people, food and good weather were all mentioned.



Public Meeting Menti Responses

Many participants didn't know that all of these are in their own community. Mapping them for a visual representation through a Cultural Asset Map would be a powerful tool to demonstrate the strength of the creative community. For a list of all the assets named, see Appendix C.

DESCRIBING THE CREATIVE SECTOR

What words and phrases best describe the arts scene in Las Cruces? We put that question to the Artists and Arts Organization Focus Group, and this is what they said. The more times a word is said, the larger the size of the type in which it appears. "Diverse" was the most frequently stated word, followed by "unorganized," "eclectic," and like "herding cats."



Artists and Arts Organizations Focus Group Menti Responses

Challenges and Opportunities

We asked artists to share their thoughts about the greatest challenges and barriers the creative sector faces in Las Cruces. This feedback helps Artspace plan for subsequent steps if project planning moves forward, and it helps civic leaders and advocates understand challenges to progress and the opportunities that can address them. This also helps frame the recommendations that begin on page 50.

The **top challenges** that were repeated include:

- Anti-Donation Clause in the State Constitution
- Art isn't recognized for its value
- Bad internet costs/speeds/availability
- City Zoning Codes
- Lack of affordable spaces
- Lack of centralized space
- Lack of community education on resources
- Lack of Technical Support
- Little City of Las Cruces support of the arts
- Limited public transportation
- Money/financing for the arts/artists
- No incentive for commercial spaces or even privately held spaces to rent, even perpetually empty space
- Monopolization
- Stuck in their ways
- Supportive arts community, but low engagement within the larger Las Cruces community
- Silo of information
- Rising cost of living

Similarly, we asked artists to share their thoughts about opportunities that exist for artists/creatives in the community. Space-related needs are discussed in the Project Concept section. **Opportunities** mentioned include:

- 828 Production Studios and local collaborations that can happen
- Artists are eager to collaborate
- Creative collectives - full of different artists
- Cruces Creatives is looking to grow to include hot work, more materials, and expand to all creative areas in the community.
- Cruces Creatives workshops/adult education courses/stem-steam programming
- Draw attention to the arts in Las Cruces - become an arts destination.
- Do-it yourself community, less regulation
- Las Cruces is a center for fostering the unique Arts & Cultural aspects of what is truly "Southern New Mexico"
- Las Cruces is growing and changing; it is the perfect place to be a destination for artists
- Lots of artists and creativity (just needs more support)
- Low cost of living compared to large art hubs
- Make Harrelson a walking district
- More plaza opening for events - for licensed businesses, bring more events for the businesses (even once a week for the arts)
- Need a hub/venue for emerging artists
- New Mexico's overall reputation for the arts
- New voices and residents moving here with new perspectives
- NMCO Media
- NMSU art graduates - local/national/international artists - need to keep them around
- Spaces like Cruces Creatives and potentially more spaces like it
- The artists themselves primarily, the University, Cruces Creatives
- Resources: City Art Board, DAAC resources - education, recognition, creative opportunities

ECONOMIC INVESTMENT IN THE CREATIVE SECTOR: 828 PRODUCTIONS

828 Productions, a California film and production company, has chosen Las Cruces for its new headquarters and will invest \$75M into a 300,000 square-foot studio and 20-acre back-lot downtown where the old Santa Fe Mining company silos were located. They will also acquire an additional 35 acres in downtown Las Cruces for a sound stage and set construction space. The studio is expected to create at least 100 jobs and hopes to start their first production by the end of 2022. The state will also pledge \$3M to the project from the Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) fund.



Source: screendaily.com

Key Takeaways

There are clearly many artists and creatives in Las Cruces creating and involved in varied art forms. There has been a history of disorganization that hasn't led to a very unified arts and culture sector, especially one that advocates for diverse voices at the table. After COVID, communities have had to rethink the role of arts and culture in community development and it has provided a unique opportunity to determine new ways to strengthen that sector. Artists mentioned they would like to make new connections and collaborate more - we know artists are natural conveners and opportunities to connect can make all the difference.

There is also state legislation in the works to bring more funding for Creative Districts and a demonstration project in Las Cruces with housing would be a big boost to the creative identity. **A mixed-use concept with housing for artists could make a big difference in retaining arts graduates and creating a hub for the Southern New Mexico creative community.** An Arts Market Study or pre-development scope of work should include facilitated conversations with potential "commercial" tenants interested in new space and in helping to bring creative vitality to the ground floor of a project and activate downtown. This could be anything from a retail space for Cruces Creatives, space for DAAC, or any other organization who needs space.



Artspace Community Tour // Photo Credit: Artspace

Arts Market Study

The next step in Artspace's feasibility process is to quantify the market for an affordable mixed-use project. We conduct an Arts Market Study, an online survey of the area's artists and creatives to determine if there is sufficient demand for such a project, how many residential units should be planned, what other kinds of creative spaces the project should contain, and start a list of interested people and businesses who need space.

Quantifying the market need for these spaces helps attract funders and operators, and related data can be used to plan spaces and programs that are both affordable and self-sustaining, whether in an Artspace project or developed independently in the area.

STEP 2: Arts Market Study

The Arts Market Study will enable Artspace to test the priority project concept, a mixed-use affordable arts facility. The data collected helps refine the project concept, influence site selection, and guide future creative space development. The AMS Study gathers information about:

- Amount artists can pay for studio/work space
- Amount artists can pay for housing
- Types of shared or community spaces that are most important
- Types of private studio workspaces that are most important
- Location preference
- Types of amenities that are important

In addition to providing key information about the need for space within the possible context of a future Artspace project, this survey also provides valuable information for other developers and organizations who might consider carving out space for artists in their buildings and planned projects. **Not every type of needed space can be accommodated in a single project.** Having arts market information available to multiple interested parties is important to supporting new creative space opportunities.

ARTIST PREFERENCE IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Artspace live/work projects are unlike most affordable housing in that we use an "artist preference" policy to fill vacancies.

For each project, we appoint a committee that includes diverse artists who are not applying to live in that project. The committee interviews income-qualified applicants to determine their commitment to their chosen art form or creative pursuit. It does not pass judgment on the quality of an applicant's work, nor is it permitted to define what is or is not art. Artists do not need to earn any of their income from their art form.

Although the IRS challenged the "artist preference" policy in 2007, it dropped the challenge after the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 became law. That law states: "A project does not fail to meet the general public use requirement solely because of occupancy restrictions or preferences that favor tenants...who are involved in artistic or literary activities." This clause was threatened again in December 2017, but through broad reaching advocacy efforts, the new Tax Cuts and Jobs Act retains the artist preference language in the final signed version of the law.

Local Leadership

Strong local leadership is essential to the success of any community-led development. Cross-sector stakeholders, all must act in partnership to advocate effectively for the project and host community conversations. Without voices on the ground locally to keep communication flowing between Artspace and the community, there is little chance of success. It is also important to make sure there is a groundswell of local leader support to make a project possible.

Artspace invests time and effort at the very beginning of a proposed project to work with the community to identify local leaders well-equipped by position, experience, and influence to serve as members of the Core Group.

Core Group

The local leaders who make creative projects possible can come from many sectors but must share a willingness to work toward a common vision. The Core Group that led the Preliminary Feasibility Study in Las Cruces exemplified this quality. The group had members of both public and private sector interests, a key factor in building support for an Artspace project.

The Core Group met for months prior to Artspace's first virtual focus group on August 30th and in-person visit on September 13. The group had representatives from Doña Ana Arts Council, CFSNM, Cruces Creatives, New Mexico State University, USBank, Downtown Las Cruces Partnership, and the City of Las Cruces. Several members of the group toured the Roderick Artspace Lofts in El Paso with us to get acquainted with the Artspace model for live/work housing. It was mentioned that living space with working space is a very powerful combination that doesn't really exist in Las Cruces. The artists we met at Roderick Artspace Lofts in El Paso included an adjunct professor and a recent graduate of El Paso State University demonstrating the town and gown connection.



Core Group Members at Roderick Artspace Lofts in El Paso

It was great to see Las Cruces community members who had not worked together before be part of this initiative. Cruces Creatives also took the lead on planning the public meeting and we were impressed with the turnout and range of community members who participated (see graphic below for participant breakdown).



Part of the Core Group (upper) and Public Meeting Menti Responses (lower) // Photo Credit: Artspace

Civic Leaders

Artspace held an in-depth conversation with Finance and Civic Leaders at City Hall while we were in town. This great group of leaders brought up potential partnerships and civic priorities. The prevalence of vacant lots and a local initiative to address that with the Downtown Parking Committee. The El Paseo Corridor and Solano Corridor were also mentioned as areas of development. The city is working on new affordable housing developments as well. Participants included Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce, County Commissioner, City's Business and Economic Development Department, City's Affordable Housing Department, Century Bank, Pioneer Bank, Wells Fargo, and FYI+.

Our overall impression is that there is the space downtown and near downtown to accommodate a project, but conversations with the city need to progress. We didn't feel they were totally on board with the concept and idea yet. During the meeting many weren't aware of projects that were being developed within the City of Las Cruces or the nontraditional financing to assist these types of projects, such as the new multi family housing with an arts component.

Artspace would also like to connect with Sylvia Ulloa, the field representative with Senator Heinrich's office to discuss how an initiative like this aligns with other federal priorities. Downtown Las Cruces Partnership and the MainStreet authority also have a unique role in emphasizing the Arts and Culture District and enhancing the visibility of the arts and cultural sectors.

Potential Partnerships

Both formal and informal partnerships can help Artspace-like projects address multiple community goals. We rely on local leaders to bring important opportunities for such partnerships to our attention and to make meaningful introductions.

Participants were asked to identify potential partners that could enrich an arts facility project or be complementary. These could be organizations who need space or advocates during the Arts Market Study phase. Responses included:

- 828 Studios
- Alamogordo and Carlsbad NMSU campuses
- Alma d'arte Charter High School
- Art Obscura / Studio Langan / Victor Whitmill
- Big Picture Print Studio
- Borderlands Ballet
- Branigan Library & Cultural Center
- CAV Gallery
- City Hall
- CMI Department of NMSU
- Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico
- Cruces Creatives,
- Doña Ana Community College East Mesa Campus
- Dark Circles Contemporary Dance
- DePress Press Print Shop
- Doña Ana Arts Council
- Downtown Blues Café
- Downtown Las Cruces Partnership and Arts & Cultural District
- Electronic Caregivers
- Farm and Ranch Museum
- Film Las Cruces
- Fine arts flea market
- Former First Baptist Church in Amador neighborhood
- FYI+
- Ganymede Games
- KTAL
- Las Cruces Public Transport
- Low Clearance Lab – collective group of artists looking for expansive art opportunities
- Mas Art
- Malu
- Mesilla Valley Community of Hope (MVCH)
- Mesilla Valley Public Housing Authority (MVPHA)
- MVDA
- New Mexico MainStreet
- NMCO Media
- NMSU, Peluca
- Piro-Manso-Tiwa Tribal leaders
- Project in Motion
- Raices Del Saber
- Sandra Mom's coffee shop monthly jazz
- The Lighthouse
- The Range - performance and recording space

Emerging Art Leaders

There is a new generation of arts leaders emerging (Cruces Creatives, NMSU Art Museum, Dark Circles, Art Obscura, Marcus Xavier Cormicle, NMCO Media, Sonya a local muralist, Diego Medina, the Grounded Coffee Shop owners, among many others) that we met and were very impressed by. In conversations with Irene Oliver-Lewis she also mentioned how a younger facet of the community needs to take the lead now and the time is right for this to happen as other arts leaders retire. This natural shift that is taking place will be interesting to follow and support. Working together on an initiative like an Artspace project and an Arts Market Study can be the type of project that gets this new leadership group.

In Colorado, Colorado Creative Industries under the Office of Economic Development and International Trade has the [Colorado Change Leader Program](#). It teaches cultural and community leaders how to handle change in organizations, communities, and their daily lives. A program like this has been transformative for the leaders in communities around Colorado. As part of the Creative District bill and proposed changes in New Mexico, an addition like this could be very worthwhile.



Mesquite Street District, Grounded Coffee Shop (left) and Plaza de Las Cruces Sundial by Tony Pennock // Photo Credit: Artspace

Funding and Financing

An Artspace project represents a substantial financial investment for the community where it is located. Strong city and state leaders can often identify and prioritize funding for projects they feel strongly align with their community goals. A typical project of 50 to 70 units of affordable housing for artists plus community and commercial space costs \$15 to \$20 million. Predevelopment expenses, the “soft” costs, such as architects’ fees, that must be met before construction can begin, are usually about \$750,000, regardless of the size of the project.

In most cases, however, only a small portion of the capital investment comes directly from the community itself. This is because Artspace relies on its track record and 40+ years of experience in 23 states to tap into federal programs, such as Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), Historic Tax Credits (HTC), and HOME funds, to provide long-term equity for development projects. These programs, and others like them, exist to encourage the development of affordable housing, the rehabilitation of historic buildings, economic revitalization of neighborhoods, and other public purposes.

2022 Figures for Dona Ana County, Las Cruces, NM Metro Area			
Area Median Income (AMI) and Rent (Only for Live/Work Space) - 4-Person AMI: \$56,800			
HOUSEHOLD SIZE	INCOME (30-60% AMI)	# OF BEDROOMS	MAX. RENT (60% AMI)
1	\$12,810-\$25,620	Efficiency	\$320-\$640
2	\$14,640-\$29,280	1	\$343-\$686
3	\$16,470-\$32,940	2	\$411-\$823
4	\$18,300-\$36,600	3	\$475-\$951

Source: novoco.com

The local community plays a significant role in the broader funding and fundraising effort, especially during the early steps of the process. We look to the community for the donation of land or buildings as well as private and public pre-development funds and commitments of affordable housing allocations in a combination of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME funds, and private philanthropic support.

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich had a representative attend the Public Meeting and is a strong advocate for affordable housing. Southern New Mexico doesn't always “get the love” from the State where the focus has traditionally been on the more affluent and tourist-focused cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

Philanthropy

In addition to the public funding sources identified on the following pages, philanthropy is an important tool for funding Artspace developments. This comes in the form of gifts from foundations, corporations, and in some cases individuals. For example, this study was funded partly through the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico as well as through a grant from the US Bank Foundation and a private individual grant. Many of the key people we met during the course of this study are important connectors to the private funding community. Major funders and individual donors to the arts should be considered as well as the private and foundation funders listed on the following pages.

BRAINSTORMING POTENTIAL FUNDERS

At the Civic and Finance Leaders Focus Group we asked the attendees to identify who they thought potential public, private, and philanthropic resources for a potential Las Cruces project would be. Downtown sites were all discussed as the priority location with the goals of adding vibrancy, energy and diversity to the downtown area. The group expressed confidence in identifying resources for projects that are a priority for the community. Ones they identified with potential to support a mixed-use capital project include:

- El Paso Community Foundation who helped fund both predevelopment and capital costs of the 51-unit [Roderick Artspace Lofts](#) project in downtown El Paso.
- The Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico helped fund this Preliminary Feasibility Study and whose leadership has been instrumental in beginning these conversations many years ago.
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- McCune Foundation
- Paso del Norte Health Foundation
- Thoma Foundation
- Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce – though not a philanthropic entity, the Chamber has invested in projects in Las Cruces, most specifically their office in the historic Nestor Armijo home.

The local bank representatives who we met discussed how they are unusual in how often they work together both on the philanthropic side and on the loan side of their businesses. Banks have often partnered with the City and other public entities on major economic development initiatives and play a stronger role than we've seen in other communities. We are not certain how this would play out for a potential future Artspace project but it is good to note as we get further down the path of this initiative.

Potential Public Sources

LOW INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDITS

The largest source of funding for most Artspace residential projects is the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and state housing agencies in accordance with Section 42 of the IRS Code.

LIHTCs come in two varieties, known as 9% credits and 4% credits after the variable in the formula used to calculate them. Of these, 9% credits are much more popular with developers because they can pay for up to two-thirds of a project's construction budget, more than twice as much as 4% credits. They are therefore extremely competitive, and it is not uncommon for a developer to have to apply two or more times before receiving an award; 4% credits, which take the form of tax-exempt bonds, are at will and easier to obtain.

In New Mexico, LIHTCs are administered by the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority (MFA), an agency Artspace has had conversations with through consulting work it has done in Santa Fe and Taos.

Recent LIHTC awards in Las Cruces bode well for a potential future Artspace initiative. While an Artspace project would probably be a mixed-use facility, with non-residential uses (which cannot be paid for with LIHTC-generated funds) on the ground floor and housing above, we encountered no resistance to this concept in any of our meetings and believe it is a viable model for Las Cruces. Applications for 9% LIHTCs in New Mexico are typically due in February.

The Mesilla Valley Public Housing Authority (MVPHA) has been the local leader in the development and management of affordable housing in Las Cruces. MVPHA often partners with other developers and has several projects currently in the pipeline, most of which received a 9% LIHTC allocation.

In Las Cruces, the most recent allocation of 9% LIHTC was awarded to The Three Sisters 70- unit project at 130 North Walnut Street. The project developers, Chelsea Investment Corporation out of California received a \$1.3M LIHTC award in May of 2022. Chelsea Investment is a large for-profit developer of affordable housing. The project scored 76 points for the LIHTC awards. Typically, 78 is the lowest score for a 9% allocation of LIHTC unless too few projects score above this level and the Mortgage Finance Authority (MFA), in its reasonable judgment, decides to reduce the minimum score; 58 is typically the lowest score for the less competitive 4% LIHTC.

The Mortgage Finance Authority (MFA) is the State agency that issues the LIHTC in New Mexico. One advantage of doing affordable developments in New Mexico is the ability to apply for both federal and state LIHTC as described below:

FEDERAL LIHTC

As in all states, the 9% LIHTC awards are highly competitive. The State looks for a 10% match from the local government in the form of a local housing trust fund, CDBG or HOME award to be eligible.

STATE LIHTC

Affordable housing developers may apply to MFA for state tax credit allocations, which they then award to individuals and businesses who donate to their affordable housing projects. Eligible applicants include nonprofit or for-profit developers as well as governmental and tribal instrumentalities that plan to solicit donations for the development of an affordable housing project.

Tax credit applicants must demonstrate that their housing development includes one or more of the following activities: land acquisition, building acquisition, construction, remodeling, improvement, rehabilitation, conversion or weatherization. Both single-family and multifamily projects are eligible for a state tax credit allocation, but the projects must be approved by MFA. When completed, developments must remain affordable for a minimum of five years for single-family projects or 10 years for multifamily.

State tax credits are also available to individuals and businesses that provide donations to help build affordable housing in New Mexico. The credit is equal to up to 50 percent of the value of the donation. Donations may include land, buildings, money or services.

Donations may be made directly to an affordable housing development that has been approved by MFA or to the New Mexico Affordable Housing Charitable Trust which is a 501(c)3 administered by MFA. The minimum accepted donation is \$200 and the maximum accepted donation is \$2 million. Tax credits may be applied to state income tax, gross receipts tax and compensating tax burdens.

At our focus group it was mentioned there is a precedent of receiving USDA rural development funding and EDA funding in Las Cruces for creative projects. Cruces Creatives received a Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) for over \$200,000 in 2022.



Mesilla Downtown, and Public Art at City Hall // Photo Credit: Artspace

UNDERSTANDING LOW-INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDITS (LIHTC)



Source: NPR, Illustrations by Chelsea Beck/NPR. Explainer by Meg Anderson, Alicia Cypress, Alyson Hurt, Laura Sullivan and Ariel Zambelich/NPR and Emma Schwartz/Frontline

OTHER PUBLIC FUNDING SOURCES

This is a preliminary list of other potential public sources discussed during the study as well as other New Mexico funding sources that could support a development project.

- **Federal Home Loan Bank.** The Dallas office serves the state of New Mexico and is one of twelve government-sponsored Federal Home Loan Banks that provide equity to support housing financing and community investments.
- **State and Federal Historic Tax Credits (HTCs).** To qualify for the federal program, a property must be listed on the National Register of Historic Places either individually or as a contributing member of a designated historic district. Although the state has a state historic tax credit, only one of the properties within we visited would qualify for HTCs.
- **HOME Program.** A federal program that provides funding to state and local governments to fund affordable housing developments. Las Cruces is a participating jurisdiction and does have a dedicated allocation of HOME funds.
- **Tax Increment for Development (TID).** A tool available to local communities for assisting economic development, redevelopment, and housing. Las Cruces has one TID district, and every site we visited was within this district.
- **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)** are tools that cities can use for a range of activities that benefit low- and moderate-income individuals or prevent or eliminate slums and blight. Las Cruces is one of five entitlement communities in New Mexico and, as such, has its own allocation of CDBG funding. The funds vary from year to year but average about \$1 million annually; 20% are typically used for infrastructure improvements. It does not typically allocate CDBG funding for affordable housing.
- **New Mexico Arts** is the state agency that regrants to individual artists and arts organizations through a competitive process. The agency also partnered with other state departments and the McCune Foundation to create an Arts and Cultural District program, modeled after the Colorado Creative Industries program that has been in existence for about 15 years. It is significant that Las Cruces has been awarded a Cultural District designation that could also lead to additional funding for projects that happen within the district.
- **Local Economic Development Act (LEDA)** funding is a state program that recently provided \$3 million for the new 828 Productions development. The New Mexico Economic Development Department (NMEDD) is granted authority to administer grants to Local Governments (Municipality and/or County); to assist expanding or relocating businesses that are Qualified Entities that will stimulate economic development and produce public benefits.
- **Sustainable Building Tax Credits** are new and a first of its kind in the U.S. The State of New Mexico adopted this new legislation which now applies to multi-family zero energy buildings. These tax credits can be sold to others in exchange for equity into a development, in a similar manner as historic tax credits and low income housing tax credits.

Roderick Artspace Lofts // El Paso, Texas Example

This 51-unit development opened in 2016 for a total project cost of \$12.7 million. It includes 8,000 square feet of commercial and community space. The gallery and workshop space provide artists and community groups space for meetings, events, gallery shows, exhibitions, and performances. The development partners were the City of El Paso, El Paso Community Foundation and Ford Foundation. On Artspace's recent visit to the building with the Las Cruces Core Group, we heard about the impact this space has had on the artist's lives, but also on how this building and its residents have added vibrancy to the area. Residents serve on the downtown councils and boards now too, bringing new voices to these sorts of institutions.

“These types of projects not only generate a place for artists to live and to showcase their work. They tend to attract other types of businesses drawn to the location by the concentration of people. It’s a tried and proven model.”

Sean McGlynn, Former Deputy City Manager, City of El Paso



Photo Source: Artspace.org

Mesa Artspace Lofts // Mesa, Arizona Example

This 50-unit development opened in 2018. It is a good example of the architecture suitability to Arizona with the courtyard-style development. There is 12,000 square feet of courtyard space that is used for events and arts activities and 3,500 square feet of community space. The total development cost was \$16.3 million. It is a transit-oriented development located one block from the new light rail corridor and downtown amenities. The development partner was the Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation (NEDCO).



Photo Source: Artspace.org

SOURCES OF FUNDING AND FINANCING RODERICK ARTSPACE LOFTS // EL PASO, TEXAS		
PUBLIC SOURCES		
Low Income Housing Tax Credits (9%)	\$9,096,329	72%
City of El Paso - HOME First Mortgage	\$500,000	4%
PRIVATE SOURCES		
Affordable Housing Program Load (Wells Fargo and FHL Dallas)	\$500,000	5%
Sponsor Loan: Predevelopment Funding	\$350,000	3%
Sponsor Loan: Green Building Grant Program	\$200,000	2%
Sponsor Loan: El Paso Community Foundation	\$1,700,000	13%
Deferred Developer Fee	\$353,899	3%
TOTAL	\$12,700,000	100%

SOURCES OF FUNDING AND FINANCING MESA ARTSPACE LOFTS // MESA, ARIZONA		
PUBLIC SOURCES		
Low Income Housing Tax Credits (9%)	\$12,503,134	77%
State HOME Funds	\$1,000,000	6%
PRIVATE SOURCES		
First Mortgage	\$1,171,000	7%
Philanthropic Gifts	\$600,000	4%
Artspace (Federal Home Loan Bank)	\$500,000	3%
Deferred Developer Fee	\$463,352	3%
TOTAL	\$16,300,000	100%

Development Support

The financial information Artspace gathered and subsequent research suggests that there may be sufficient capacity in Las Cruces and in the State of New Mexico to underwrite an arts market study, predevelopment, and capital funding of an affordable mixed-use, artist live/work project in downtown Las Cruces. Although no funding process is ever easy, **it is clear that the resources and tools exist here to support an affordable housing project aligned with local goals.** However, because a project in Las Cruces would be a first in the state for Artspace, additional fact finding will need to take place in order to have more confidence. Artspace has consulted with Interfaith Housing in Santa Fe on their recently opened \$19 million Siler Yard: Arts + Creativity Center. Connecting with them on financing and lessons learned would also be a potential step in predevelopment.



Exvotos exhibit at NMSU Art Museum

Left: The Hood in Mesilla Park



Work by Student of NMSU Art Department



Mesquite neighborhood home



Deret Roberts, Owner of Art Obscura in Mesilla Park, with self-made custom film prop
// All Photos Credit of Artspace

Potential Sites

While site selection is a critical component of any project, it should not drive the project. During a Preliminary Feasibility Visit, therefore, Artspace's primary goal is not to choose a site but to identify candidates for further study should the project move forward. Our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the project concept and to assess each site for its ability to serve that concept, its alignment with broader community goals, and issues that affect its cost of acquisition and development. Factors we consider include location, size, physical conditions, adaptability to project concept(s), construction type, zoning and land use restrictions, ease of acquisition, and potential for sustained impact on the broader community.

Given our mission to keep our projects affordable in perpetuity, Artspace gives high priority to sites that can be conveyed below market rate. Sites owned by government agencies, which can often donate them as part of their contribution to the project, are especially valuable. A minimum of ½ acre and possibly more, depending on parking, would need to be assembled to develop a 40-50 unit mixed-use artist housing project. The 40-50 unit number is based on Artspace's work in other like-size communities across the country, as well as information received during the August virtual focus group and the September in-person visit. We would explore the project concept sizes with City and housing partners during predevelopment phases.

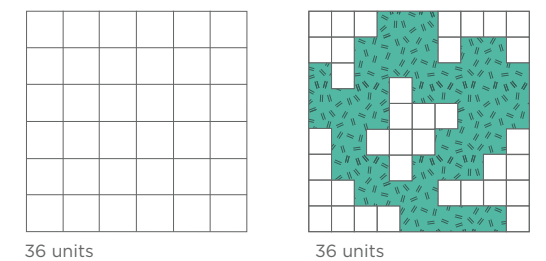
Downtown Site Context

To many, downtown Las Cruces is not yet widely viewed as a neighborhood in terms of having a healthy mixture of uses, including multi-family residential living. Though increasing in popularity, downtown Las Cruces still has very few residential units of living outside of the small, adobe style single family homes in the blocks around downtown. The Elevate Las Cruces Master Plan for the City was adopted in 2020 and includes higher allowable density for downtown mixed use residential projects. That said, the density is still relatively modest for a City of Las Cruces size.

DEVELOPMENT SCALE

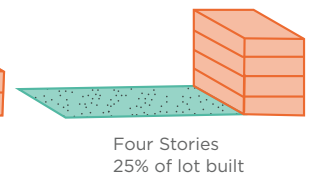
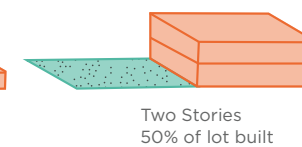
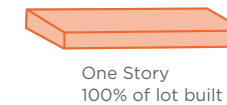
Measures of development scale presented in this Plan are provided for reference only. Alternative measures may be utilized by the City to implement the vision of Elevate Las Cruces through amendments to the Las Cruces Land Development Code.

GROSS DENSITY. Gross density (right) refers to the number of dwelling units on a tract of land divided by the total acreage. Gross density may be identical for developments incorporating different lot sizes where individual parcels are clustered and a percentage of the land is set aside for other uses.



FLOOR AREA RATIO (FAR). FAR (below right) is the ratio between a building's total floor area and its site coverage. FAR is calculated by dividing the gross square footage of a building by lot area. FAR is a useful tool in measuring nonresidential and mixed-use development bulk, mass, and scale.

$$FAR = 1$$



Development Scale from Elevate Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan Document, Page 31

A project that would add permanently affordable housing for Las Cruces' growing creative sector, space for creative businesses and nonprofit organizations, and perhaps other kinds of space, would certainly strengthen the downtown neighborhood and address other Master Plan goals as well.

WHERE ARTISTS WANT TO BE

At the Open House at Amador Patio Bar & Grill, we asked the audience where an Artspace-style project should go. We've left this list in the artists' own words, because it is important to note how many times downtown was mentioned as the area of interest.

- Amador hotel
- Art Obscura/ Harrelson Ave/ Mesilla Park
- Centralized location owned by local altruists
- **Down flipping town**
- Downtown
- Downtown
- Downtown
- Downtown
- Downtown
- Downtown
- Downtown and in a walkable and homey feel
- Downtown. Definitely
- **DOWNTOWN. Where else would you go????**
- Downtown. Open spaces. Mixed zoning area.
- Downtown - Vacant building with framing that exists
- Downtown - Old courthouse
- East Mesa
- Loreto Town Center
- Mesilla
- Mesilla Park
- Mesquite district, green historic lots of character
- Mesquite Neighbors
- Near downtown
- New Mexico State University
- NMSU
- NMSU vicinity,
- North Main
- North main street
- Open spaces are needed for outdoor industrial arts.
- Picacho Hills
- The industrial area by the train tracks near Art Obscura and Picacho Roasters Coffee. Along main near university and union
- The old Harley Davidson showroom

Site Tour Observations

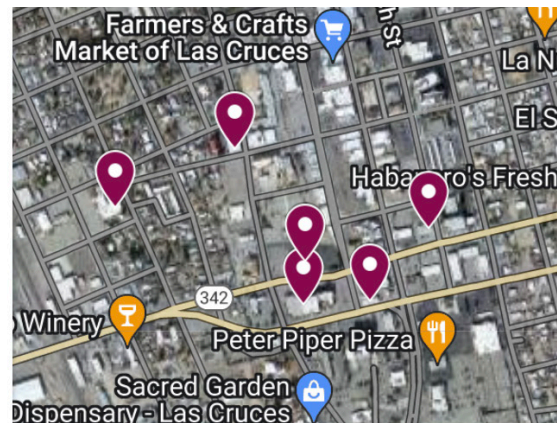
Artspace toured six potential sites in downtown Las Cruces to evaluate their potential for an Artspace-style development. Our core group leaders focused their attention on identifying downtown and/or Arts and Cultural District sites.

We also drove by and/or discussed other potential sites (included in site matrix addendum). There was a general sense from attendees at the September 14th public meeting as well as the participants in the August 30th artists and creative focus group that a preferred site would be downtown in or adjacent to the Arts and Cultural District.

All of the sites we visited had potential for reuse as creative spaces of some nature, but all had significant drawbacks related primarily to size and cost of acquisition. Here are our impressions.

POTENTIAL SITES VISITED DURING TOUR

- Las Cruces Sites
- Individual styles
- 130 W Lohman Ave
- 106 S Miranda St
- 127 E Amador Ave
- 251 W Amador Ave
- 250 W Amador Ave
- 304 W Griggs Ave



1. Old County Annex (Locally Known as Skeletor) & 911 Call Center 130 W. Lohman Ave., 440 & 482 S. Main Street

The Old County Annex building is a 15,400 SF facility in the middle of a one-acre site bound by Main, Lohman, Water and Amador. Next to it is another vacant building that was previously used as a 911 Call Center. The entire site is divided into five separate parcels with three separate owners, one of which is the City. While its proximity to the heart of downtown and other creative and cultural entities makes it a very attractive site, its complex ownership does not bode well for a mixed-use artist housing development at this time. One parcel is a former gas station that could have environmental conditions associated with it.

One parcel is the building locally called the "Skeletor" and a blight and eyesore for the community. The unfinished building project is on the market for \$5 million, a nonstarter given its condition. This site is in a prime location. If public entities are able to combine this site it would be prime for affordable artist housing and creative space development. Putting conditions in place on blight and vacant prime parcels could help see this site be redeveloped for a community purpose.

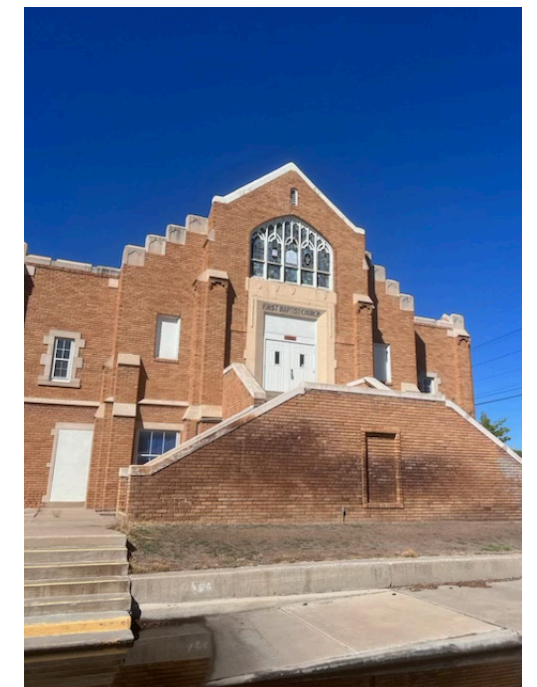


Exterior of the "Skeletor" (left) and 911 Call Center ((right) // Photo Credit: Artspace

2. Old First Baptist Church 106 Miranda

On the edge of the Alameda Historic District and next to the proposed Amador Próximo area, this 4.45 acre site is owned by the First Baptist Church and includes two facilities – the main church building (which is currently empty) at 24,863 SF and a smaller youth education building at 4,104 SF. The Church has the property listed at \$3.5 million, a purchase price unattainable for most creative or nonprofit or workforce housing opportunities. The property's size makes it a potential site for multiple projects.

Cruces Creatives has built an initial group of nonprofit and for-profit organizations interested in securing this site for a creative campus, whose participants would share facility expenses, cooperatively launch community programming and gain access to Cruces Creatives' tools and spaces in the campus. While this site is not technically downtown, it is on a bus route, with a bus stop directly outside. The central Las Cruces bus station is approximately a quarter mile from the site. It is both walkable and bikeable to downtown, the established Arts & Cultural District, and is within ~1.5 miles from a grocery store, library, and multiple other amenities.



Exterior of the church // Photo Credit: Artspace

It was mentioned that the Arts and Cultural District could grow to include this site. This property has been available for several years and the current owner does need the sale to support other building projects the church is implementing (that said – the site is unlikely to be donated).

The site is adjacent to an historic area and city council members and neighbors have been in favor of the site becoming an arts and cultural community space. Discussions have not included artist live/work space yet, but if it reduced the number of parking lots in the area, increased family-friendly housing, and used the space in an aesthetically pleasing way, some members of the core group believe the neighbors would be in favor as long as their input was gathered through the process. Additionally, this site is located between both a friendly neighborhood and an industrial space in town, allowing for more intense art practices in empty warehouses that could be converted for work in materials such as metals, plastics, resins, etc., as well as for film production. The 828 Studios site under development is also only a few blocks away.

The site may benefit from being designated a Tax Increment Development District (TIDD), a Qualified Census Tract (QCT) which would make it eligible for New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC) if used for commercial purposes such as a collaboration of creative businesses and may qualify for both state and federal historic tax credits. A redevelopment that included Cruces Creatives and a coalition of our nonprofits and creative businesses could also qualify for the State’s LEDA program that is focused on job creation and relocation (see funding section for more information).

The size of the church and youth education buildings make them too small for a mixed-use artist housing project though the 4.45 acre site makes it large enough for multiple kinds of facilities including an artist live/work new construction project. If the sale price could be lowered or if a market rate developer also had interest in the larger site, the sale price could be spread over multiple projects, including the coalition of creative businesses already formed to express interest in this site.

**3. The Old Welcome Inn
127 E. Amador**

This property is small at just under ½ acre, including the Old Welcome Inn at 6,056 SF. It is owned by the Community Enterprise Center LLC which operates an incubator program for new businesses.

The parcel is adjacent to a city parking lot and has some parking of its own. The single-story building does not appear to have much historic significance. The location is in the Arts and Cultural District and with high visibility.



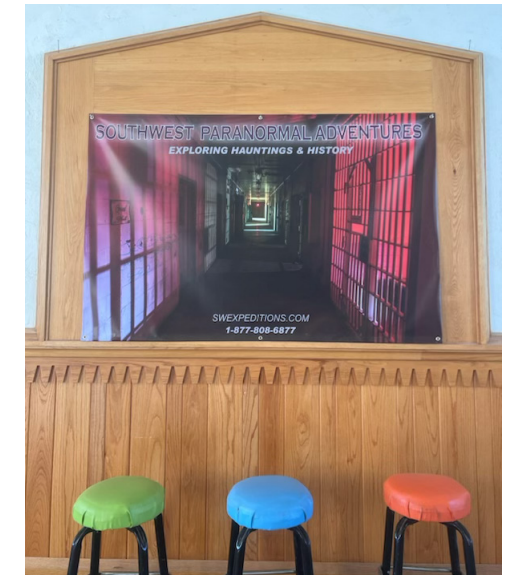
Old County Courthouse // Photo Credit: Artspace

**4. The Old County Courthouse
251 W. Amador Ave. (The whole block bounded by Lohman, Alameda, Amador, and Water)**

The Old County Courthouse is a gem of a historic building, constructed in 1938, WPA-era, in the Pueblo Revival style adjoined by a jail structure from the 1960s. The building is 61,000 SF on a 2.88 acre site. It is in a prime downtown location and screams for a new use. It is privately owned and mostly vacant at this time. One of its features is a large auditorium space that would make great reuse for film, dance, theater and other performing arts.

The current renter gave us a tour of the facility and cares about figuring out a redevelopment plan. It was purchased 13 years ago for \$1M and the owner has stabilized the property but a lot of work remains. If redeveloped, the property could qualify for both state and federal historic tax credits and may be in a Qualified Census Tract (QCT) for the use of New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC).

The Courthouse building is not in an ideal configuration for housing units. Some units could definitely be carved out – perhaps 20-25 units in total – but it is too small for a mixed-use artist housing project of any scale. The space is currently vacant and used for ghost tours. There have been development plans for this to become a hotel in the past.



Ghost tours at the Old County Courthouse // Photo Credit: Artspace

**5. West Parking Lot
250 W. Amador Ave. and 311 S. Alameda Blvd.**

Originally the site of the Amador Family home (after they moved out of the Amador Hotel) was where the east parking lot for 250 W. Amador is located. The west parking lot may have been where family gardens were located. The businesses currently in the 250 W. Amador buildings rarely need all of the parking available on this privately-owned, 1-acre site. The west parking lot is farther from the noise at the adjacent Amador Patio and Grill outdoor venue.

The lot is ideal size for a new construction mixed-use project with well landscaped surface parking but again is in private ownership which may make it challenging in terms of additional costs for an affordable, workforce housing project.

**6. The Richardson Building
304 W. Griggs Ave.**

This privately owned site is 0.69 acres and includes an 11,189 SF former car showroom, bounded by W. Organ, N. Alameda, & W. Griggs.

This site is large enough to accommodate a 40-50 unit mixed-use artist housing project depending on the parking requirements. The 1950s showroom building would most likely come down to make way for a larger development.

Again, the private ownership may make the site challenging to acquire in the context of an affordable, workforce housing project.

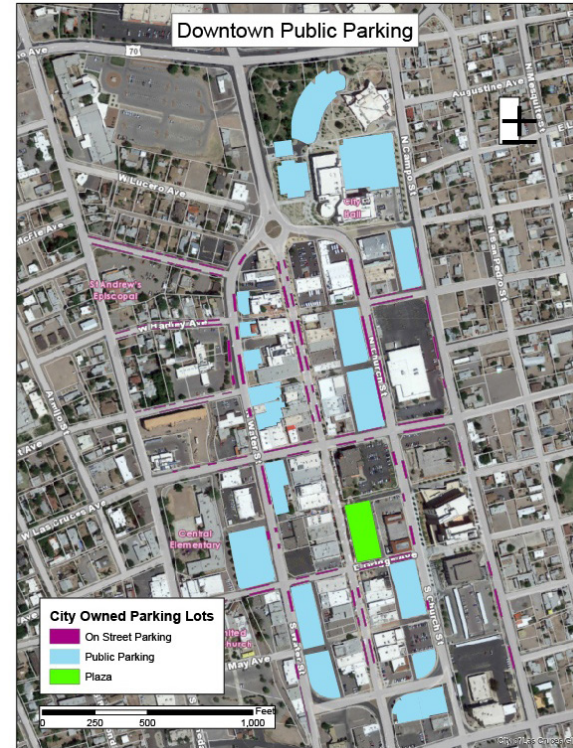
Site Feedback

Typically, Artspace further evaluates the top three sites but given our current thoughts on these sites, we believe further site identification is needed, including the possibility of identifying a City-owned surface parking lot for a future mixed-use, affordable development.

Since our mid-September visit, a downtown city-owned surface parking lot has come up for discussion at a City Council meeting, in terms of reuse for a potential development that would help meet some of the City's goals for additional density and affordable, workforce housing.

We heard mixed perceptions of the downtown parking lots, on one hand "activating vacant lots" was a priority at the Civic and Finance Leaders meeting, but on the other hand we also heard that any talk of losing parking downtown becomes very contentious. We recommend the city conduct a downtown parking study and implement an overlay district if they truly are interested in making downtown a vibrant corridor. The immense amount of parking was starkly in contrast to the ACD Plan goals and what we heard from the creative community. These lots provide a great deal of infill opportunities for smaller developments as well.

Redevelopment of almost any downtown site would further "anchor" the Arts and Culture District and create a critical mass of working artists and their families which would further catalyze future developments of all kinds and support the Downtown Master Plan, Elevate Las Cruces as well as the Las Cruces Arts and Cultural District Plan. There were lots along Alameda Boulevard and S. Water Street that we suggest digging into further and the unfinished stalled development at W. Amador Avenue and S. Main Street.



Source: DLCP

The **El Paseo-South Solano Corridor** has been a subject of several studies in the past three years and has suffered from disinvestment for decades. Although none of the sites Artspace visited were directly in the corridor, we know this area is another priority area for the City and could yield future site opportunities, depending on the timing of this initiative.

We also spoke with Brian Kavanaugh at FYI (Family Youth and Innovations Plus) about their development projects underway. As a well-respected local nonprofit who supports many arts organizations, their model is very interesting to Artspace. The lots they've acquired on El Paseo could provide an interesting opportunity for partnership on a mixed-use development. The Boys and Girls Club is in the midst of purchasing in the same area - the old Video 4 Movie Theater to build a new club. While not in the Arts and Culture District, it is a short walk to downtown, near Cruces Creatives and is in a priority area for the City.

SITE SELECTION DISCLAIMER

Finally, it must be stated that these findings are preliminary and based on currently available information. Much can and often does change between the writing of a Preliminary Feasibility Study report and actual site selection, which usually takes place during predevelopment (see Appendix A, "Path of an Artspace Project"). The sites mentioned in this section will be prioritized as conversations progress and the project concept is refined, but no one should rule out the possibility that a site not yet on the radar will be the one chosen for the project.



Mural at Cruces Creative (North Wall) // Photo Credit: Artspace

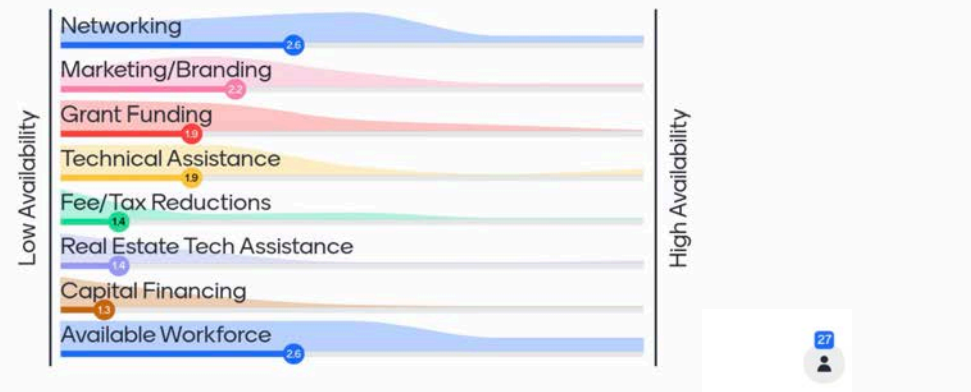
IV. SUMMARY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Las Cruces is well-positioned to pursue an affordable live/work mixed-use facility for artists and creatives. Locally, there are nearly 100 arts assets and strong arts leadership committed to this industry as seen by the local Arts and Cultural District Plan and state designation and more recently the new 828 Studios development. We are very impressed by the arts leaders we met in the community and the community's enthusiasm to make this sector thrive. The arts and cultural sector has been overlooked though more widely by civic leaders and a project like this may be the impetus to weave the arts, affordable housing, and the city's economic and business development goals together.

While Las Cruces is considered "more affordable" from many other American cities, the poverty rate is also very high and wages are low. There is very little housing vacancy and the housing market is getting more expensive. Artspace reflected that while the community is still affordable now, it has all the makings of a place on the cusp of an affordability crisis. The low median income, very little housing turnover or housing stock, coupled with a growing reputation and people moving to Las Cruces can change a community quickly, if affordable housing solutions are not put in place - especially for artists who've made Las Cruces the place that it is and given it its distinct Southern New Mexico identity.

Our recommendations are based on listening to the community and the feedback we heard. Overall, Las Cruces artists ranked the following creative sector services very low. In this section, Artspace Consulting offers some best practices and case studies from communities where we've worked to provide ideas on how to strengthen the creative sector in each of the 6 criteria that were a part of this study.

How would you rate the availability of these services for the creative sector in Las Cruces on a scale of 1 (low)-5 (high).



Mesquite Historic District Signage // Photo Credit; Artspace



The Bean at Josefina's // Photo Credit; Artspace

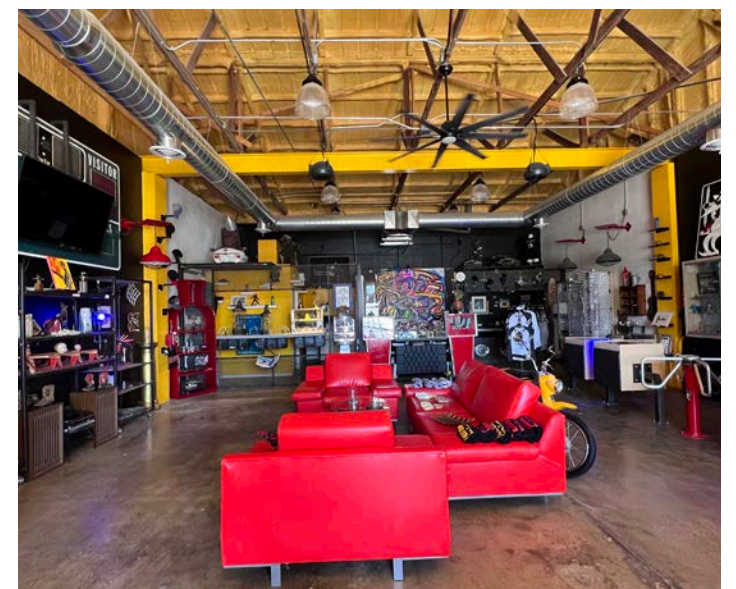
CRITERIA	FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	CASE STUDY
Alignment with Broader Community Goals	Geographically, Las Cruces is a unique part of the country and Borderlands where TX, NM, Native Nations and Mexico come together. It is a hub of cultural exchange seen by the exhibits at the local museums and ingrained in its culture.	Continue intentional outreach and engagement, as a future development could have diverse businesses on the ground floor which very much aligns with the top community goal.	In Missoula, MT there are Syrian, Afghani, Iraqi, and Hmong refugees who are all active vendors in the weekly farmers market showcasing food from around the world and the multiculturalism in Missoula. NYTimes Reading "Missoula's Most In-Demand Kitchen Is Run by Refugees"
	New cultures and communities outside of Mexican and White can feel overlooked and disconnected.	Invite other cultures to host events and cultural pop-ups in the Plaza or at performing/ event venues. The DLCP can take the lead on this and make an accessible resource on how to make this possible. We heard there is a growing Afghan population in the region: See case study from Missoula, MT.	Fiscal Sponsorship example to support creative businesses and nonprofits: -Springboard for the Arts, St. Paul, MN (fiscal sponsorship example)
	Supporting a diverse cultural community was the top goal identified by the 100+ respondents that were asked, followed by Sustaining Creative Businesses and Nonprofits , Preserving Affordability, Retaining Recent Grads, and Anchoring an Arts District.	Establish an organization/ foundation that can act as a fiscal sponsor for organizations who are small for fundraising - this can be the DAAC, CFSNM, Ngage New Mexico, or Cruces Creatives. This is one solution to growing capacity for small arts and cultural nonprofits for them to eventually take on leases.	Easily accessible grants and funding resources: -CultureSource - Detroit, MI
		Have a resource where grants are listed and easily accessible for artists. Connecting with a statewide entity or adding something like the CultureSource page to the DAAC webpage and social media is recommended.	
		Raise the profile and visibility of the ACD plan through the DLCP. Host a networking event to discuss the next goals of the plan and prioritize action steps coming out of the pandemic.	

CRITERIA	FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	CASE STUDY
Project Concept	<p>Live/work housing was the highest prioritized type of space needed by the creative community in Las Cruces. A mixed-use concept would provide much needed housing downtown and add vibrancy and continue the goals of the Arts and Culture District Plan.</p> <p>As affordability pressures increase and Las Cruces popularity grows, this also creates intentional affordable space for the creative sector.</p> <p>There is no current hub/venue for emerging artists.</p>	<p>Look at matchmaking the type of spaces the community wants and what exists. Take an inventory of existing spaces and needs and where there may be space available to share.</p> <p>Other local space initiatives can incorporate some of the spaces artists mentioned on page 24 or may already have them in the case of Cruces Creatives. Connecting artists with existing spaces feels crucial at this time.</p> <p>Maintaining a database of available spaces ties in with the asset mapping exercise suggested below.</p> <p>Explore models of a flex community-run arts + culture space in the Creative District - or Mesquite Historic District. DLCP/Creative District to think about operating this sort of space.</p> <p>Cruces Creatives and its many natural subsidiaries could operate a retail space downtown and expand into empty storefronts.</p>	<p>Artspace Consulting conducted a space optimization workshop in Grand Junction to address this same issue. This style of workshop can be added on to the AMS scope of work or conducted by a local partner.</p> <p>Peerspace, an airbnb-style concept for unique venues for meetings, events, pop-ups etc. is a website nationwide. Las Cruces currently has no listings on it, and this could be a new resource, if built out.</p> <p>The People's Building in Aurora, CO - a former ski shop turned community hub. The city invested over two million to convert the space into a gallery, flexible event space for cultural events, workshops, meetings, independent artists, musicians, dancers, and event planners. It is a city of Aurora owned, non-profit space, curated and managed by a dedicated employee.</p> <p>Spaceworks Tacoma launched in 2010 as a joint initiative of the City of Tacoma and the Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber to approach community transformation and small business development in a new way. The City and Chamber envisioned creative business, events, and art installations creating visitor destinations and driving new consumers into underutilized areas.</p>

CRITERIA	FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	CASE STUDY
Project Concept Continued			<p>This has evolved into a decentralized business incubator and anchor for the creative class in downtown and beyond. Since launching in June 2010, Spaceworks has worked with over 400 artists and creative individuals and organizations in at least 50 sites around Tacoma.</p>
Creative Sector	<p>There were nearly 100 cultural assets mentioned through our informal data collection methods.</p> <p>The sector is seen as diverse, unorganized, eclectic, and unique, but facing funding and support challenges. New Mexico's reputation for the arts and culture helps this region.</p> <p>It is clear that Cruces Creatives is a big player in the local arts scene even as a relative newcomer, providing new momentum, leadership opportunities, and strategic growth for this sector.</p> <p>828 Studios new development provides cross-collaboration opportunities and big investment in film.</p> <p>Music as an industry has been left out of the "arts" conversation by the existing arts organizations.</p> <p>Many people mentioned they loved the public art in Las Cruces, there are new and creative ways to grow that sector.</p>	<p>The Mesilla Park (Harrelson Street) is an organic arts area and should be further cultivated as such. The city can loosen red tape, allow for live/work style spaces, warehouse conversions, create a pedestrian overlay, etc.</p> <p>Create a map of the City's cultural/creative assets. This may have happened in 2016 for the ACD designation, but an update would be needed. Even in 2016, the abundance of parking was noted in the MainStreet NM document that had Las Cruces as an example. The asset list on the DAAC website also feels like it needs updating. Mapping creative businesses and nonprofits arts organizations creates a visual representation that would be a powerful tool to demonstrate the strength of the creative community. For a list of all the assets named, see Appendix C. DAAC would be a natural partner on this update.</p> <p>This work helps create the identity for the arts in Southern New Mexico that we heard repeatedly and bridge the different silos and build community. The artists we met seemed hungry for more opportunities to connect.</p>	<p>The City of Tacoma developed a tip sheet and streamlined the approval process to create work/live developments. They wanted to support their growing creative sector and adaptively reuse historic buildings while creating innovative, creativity-centered projects. Taking it a step further, they connected their small creative businesses and artists with local developers and building owners to help break down barriers between these sectors.</p> <p>Cultural Asset Map Example: Northwest Arkansas, Asset Maps, 2019</p> <p>In Salida, Colorado, The Creative District had very little visibility. Through our work, they added the Community Engagement and Special Events Coordinator Position within the City's Arts and Culture Department. Since starting in August 2022, the Salida Creative District has added monthly MeetUp's with the last one having 60 attendees to network and connect.</p>

CRITERIA	FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	CASE STUDY
Creative Sector Continued		Establish a position (or expand the role of the Arts Coordinator at the City) to include outreach and arts coordination. Either at the City, Visit Las Cruces, or through DLCP. This position would be the bridge and network builder. There were new faces at our meetings and continuing to build that network and making a shared calendar of resources for the sector would be useful.	Build on the recent approval of the Percent for Art Fund, and if appropriate and there is the community will, expand the public art fund to include private developments over a certain amount, as many cities are doing.
Local Leadership	<p>It was great to see Las Cruces community members who had not worked together before be part of this initiative.</p> <p>There is an energy building with people who are willing to embrace new things to come in a way that hasn't happened for generations, and there are new arts leaders emerging as others retire.</p> <p>NMSU art grads who stay in Las Cruces are contributing greatly - but many leave.</p> <p>The banking industry is very collaborative making it a unique opportunity to support community projects, including in the arts.</p> <p>We didn't feel the City leadership fully embraced the concept and their important role in making a space like this possible.</p>	<p>Expand the leadership group to include younger and diverse voices and have a social media presence that's reflective of that. Figuring out the roles and responsibilities of how this moves forward will take new ideas - especially for the Arts Market Study.</p> <p>Cultivate a new generation of arts leaders. (Cruces Creatives, NMSU Art Museum, Dark Circles, Art Obscura, Marcus Xavier Cormicle, Sonya a local muralist, Diego Medina, the Grounded Coffee Shop owners, NMCO Media, among many others) that we met and were very impressed by and clearly have the capacity to run complex spaces. Any of these artists/orgs could be great partners when it comes to ground floor commercial spaces.</p> <p>Make a concerted connection to NMSU art grads and find new ways to connect them with the existing art scene and local opportunities.</p> <p>More Civic Participation, present this document to the City Manager and other staff. Discuss how a project/ initiative like this aligns with specific comp plan goals, ACD goals, including Makers Space and Creative Placemaking and the Site sections of Elevate Las Cruces Plan.</p>	<p>In Colorado, Colorado Creative Industries under the Office of Economic Development and International Trade has the Colorado Change Leader Program. It teaches cultural and community leaders how to build support for community-led initiatives. This could be part of the Creative District funding bill that emerges.</p> <p>Pittsburgh Emerging Arts Leaders exists to provide networking, resources, and professional development opportunities to emerging arts managers and artists in the Pittsburgh area. This peer group is an entirely volunteer-run organization, spearheaded by a steering committee.</p>

CRITERIA	FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	CASE STUDY
Funding and Financing	<p>The local community plays a significant role in the broader funding and fundraising effort, especially during the early steps of the process.</p> <p>There may be sufficient capacity in Las Cruces and in the State of New Mexico to underwrite an arts market study, predevelopment, and capital funding of an affordable mixed-use, artist live/work project in downtown Las Cruces.</p> <p>The resources and tools exist here to support an affordable housing project aligned with local goals that could be a demonstration project in a Creative District, but additional fact finding will need to take place in order to have more confidence.</p> <p>The usual funders are not reaching all the emerging artists and art forms.</p>	<p>Connect with Sylvia Ulloa, the field representative with Senator Heinrich's office to discuss how an initiative like this aligns with other federal priorities.</p> <p>Connect with the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs to understand state financing and grant programs.</p> <p>Follow the Creative District State conversations on additional funding and roles of the Creative District and the Creative District Consortium This is part of the upcoming 2023 Legislative Session with a bill authored by Senator Jeff Steinborn.</p> <p>CFSNM, our community partner, also noticed pockets where the usual funders are not reaching that should be addressed.</p>	<p>Colorado Creative Industries and the Space to Create Program are the best national examples of investment in the creative industries and affordable space. The estimated impact of the arts in Colorado is \$13.7 Billion, compared to \$5.6 Billion in New Mexico.</p> <p>Recently opened in Santa Fe, NM - Siler Yard: Arts + Creativity Center contains sixty-five units of affordable live-work housing designed for artists and creatives. New Mexico Interfaith Housing was the developer of this \$19 million project that took over 10 years to complete. We recommend connecting with Interfaith Housing on financing ideas and lessons learned.</p>



Picacho Coffee Roasters (left) and The Hood, Owned by Richard Parra, Located in Mesilla Park (right) // Photo Credit: Artspace

CRITERIA

FINDING

RECOMMENDATION

CASE STUDY

Potential Sites

The city's rule that 25% of multi-family housing units must be of a "diversified" type makes an Artspace project more desirable, since 100% of the live/work units in an Artspace project would meet that description.

Parking spaces are a hurdle that the community needs to overcome, especially to revitalize downtown and fulfill the top goal of the civic leaders we met to "activate vacant lots." Likely a new construction project is most viable.

A lot of great real estate is being held by landlords and nothing is happening. Time to think about strategies to fix this.

FYI+ locally is creating a new affordable housing development that could be an intriguing partner.



Artspace looked at sites in and near downtown

Conduct a Downtown Parking Study, the last one was in 2012, to analyze the vacant lots and get clarity around ownership. A more walkable and vibrant downtown is difficult to achieve when the priority is put on providing parking. Future development in downtown should aim for a better utilization of parking to encourage infill and activation of the downtown. Many parking requirements were created arbitrarily and cities are rethinking this across the country.

Implement an overlay district for downtown, if the city is truly interested in making downtown a vibrant corridor and including housing. Connect with New Mexico MainStreet for ideas and resources, this could be structured similar to a Business Improvement District (BID). See the Grand Junction example.

The immense amount of parking was in stark contrast to the ACD Plan goals and what we heard from the creative community. These lots provide a great deal of infill opportunities for smaller developments as well as larger, mixed-use office/housing projects.

Pursue a downtown plan, to identify where residential density should go on adjacent streets (perhaps along Water or Alameda) and where are the appropriate sites for infill development.

No specific site that works from those we visited, so this process may evolve.

Continue FYI+ conversations as their development plans become more established. Could be an opportunity for a collaboration.

[Grand Junction's Downtown Plan](#) includes ideas on Shared Parking Agreements, better signage for available parking, parking apps that show available parking, parking management, utilizing parking technology, and considering creating a Downtown Parking District. A parking district defines an area to be managed holistically from a parking and transportation perspective. Consider zoning code changes to review requirements - may include reducing parking requirements downtown, flexibility in providing parking off-site, and incentives for shared parking. Parking reductions for affordable/workforce housing or transit-oriented developments could be considered. See page 61 of the Grand Junction report.

[Chicago's Small Business Storefront Activation Program](#) is an example of how arts and culture organizations are creating pop-ups in vacant spaces as part of an economic development grant. On a smaller scale this is replicable.

In St. Paul, MN [Grow Downtown](#) is bringing new life to empty storefronts by hosting local businesses and boosting community engagement in public spaces through events, art installations, and activations, all while continuing to promote downtown Saint Paul. Grow Downtown hosts businesses in currently empty retail spaces across downtown Saint Paul for six-month stretches of time with an open application on their website.



Mew + Co Boutique // Photo Credit: Artspace

V. NEXT STEPS TOWARDS AN ARTSPACE-STYLE PROJECT

Artspace recommends proceeding to an Arts Market Study the next step on the Path to an Artspace Project (Appendix A.) It is an in depth survey and analysis to quantify the creative space needs of the creative sector in and around Las Cruces.

Based on the preliminary findings in this report, we believe that there is a market for 40+ live/work units in Las Cruces in a mixed-use Artspace-style project in or near downtown. But our hunch alone is not enough to build confidence in this type of niche development. The market study quantifies the need for affordable live/work housing, private studios, shared creative spaces, and other types of spaces and provides Artspace data that informs site selection, project amenities, and other design factors. It also is an advocacy tool for the arts sector that can be used to secure financing, and inform civic priorities. Not least, it helps generate community-wide interest in a future project, creates an interest list, and allows Artspace to be visible to the area's artists and creatives that the project will eventually serve.

The survey can be customized to address specific questions of interest to the community even aside from an Artspace project. In Las Cruces, for example, the survey could include questions that guide Cruces Creatives future phases, or policy questions. The data and reports are owned by the study funder and can be used by the broader community. To advance this forward we recommend:

- **Identify a source of funding** for the study.
- **Assemble a diverse group of community leaders** to serve as an advisory committee as the project moves forward. In many cases this is a version of the Core Group; if so, this is the time to increase its diversity by bringing in additional members and younger leaders. Working on an initiative like this, can be a project that gels a new leadership group.
- **Brainstorm ideas** for outreach and engagement. Stay in touch with the folks who participated in this study through an email list and ask for volunteers.
- **Connect with potential private sector funders.** The cultivation process can be lengthy, and it is never too early to start.
- **Connect with the civic leaders** to better understand the funding and financing and sites and affordable housing funds.
- **Begin conversations with potential anchor and commercial tenant partners** in any future mixed-use facility. This should include meeting with BIPOC leaders who participated in the study. An Artspace mixed-use project could create a strong opportunity to provide below-market rate rents for BIPOC-led organizations and businesses.

After completing the Arts Market Study, the next step toward an Artspace project would involve entering into a predevelopment agreement. Given the potential availability of funds through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and other newer programs through the federal government as well as the State of New Mexico, getting started quickly would help move a project forward.

Artspace greatly appreciates this opportunity to work in Las Cruces and learn from its residents and leaders. Artspace came away with a strong sense of the potential for an artist live/work mixed-use facility to be a successful venture and an asset to the community. Insights and recommendations in this report are solely intended to guide a project to the next phase of development and set Las Cruces on the path to becoming home to a new arts facility.



Icons and Symbols of the Borderlands Exhibit and artwork by Diana Molina 58

ARTS MARKET STUDY: USING THE DATA TO INFLUENCE LOCAL POLICY ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Artspace Consulting worked closely with the Center for Craft, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, City of Asheville, NC, and the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina to assess the feasibility of creating new affordable artist workforce housing and creative working spaces, and to quantify the need and preferences for those new artist spaces. A Preliminary Feasibility Study was conducted in 2016 and was followed by an Arts Market Study in 2018. The landmark survey, taken by 1,265 individuals and 170 organizations, documents the immediate need for affordable spaces for makers, designers, and performers in Asheville. The results have been instrumental in helping the community successfully advocate for and address the issue of rapidly rising rents and displacement through local real estate development efforts.

In response to the study findings the City of Asheville prioritized affordable space solutions for artists on a City-owned site in the gentrifying River Arts District. Following broad promotion of the AMS results to the local development community, several other plans for affordable, artist-centric mixed-use developments have been submitted to the City for development by private developers. The result will be the creation of more high-density, mixed-use space specifically geared towards the creative population.

You can read more about how the work Artspace Consulting conducted in partnership with community stakeholders continues to influence the discussion around space and the Center for Craft's work in Asheville in the article [here](#): "Artspace Survey Findings Ripple out into Asheville's Development Sector."



Covid Memorial at The Bean at Josefina's (left) and The Hood (right) // Photo Credit: Artspace

APPENDIX A

PATH TO A SPACE TO CREATE/ARTSPACE PROJECT



Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither is an Artspace project. In fact, a typical Artspace live/work project takes from four to seven years to complete. Although no two projects are precisely alike, they all travel a similar path through the development process.

Here is a brief look at a typical Artspace live/work project as it proceeds from first inquiries through preliminary feasibility studies, an arts market survey, predevelopment, and development to completion and occupancy. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of every activity that goes into an Artspace project, and that some actions may occur in a different order.

STEP 1: PRELIMINARY FEASIBILITY VISIT	
OVERVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information Gathering and Outreach
PRIMARY ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with artists, local funders, businesses, civic leaders, and other stakeholders Conduct a public meeting to introduce Artspace and solicit community feedback Tour candidate buildings and/or sites Extend outreach as needed to ensure that people from underrepresented communities are included in the process
DELIVERABLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written report with recommendations for next steps
PREREQUISITES FOR MOVING FORWARD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrated support from local leadership Critical mass of artists and arts organizations with space needs Established base of financial support
TIME FRAME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-5 months, kicked off by a 2-day visit
STATUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed

STEP 2: ARTS MARKET STUDY	
OVERVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessing the Market
PRIMARY ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three phases to the study: survey preparation, data collection, and analysis/reporting Quantify the overall demand for arts and creative spaces Identify the types of spaces, amenities and features that artists want/need Inform site selection, design, and programmatic decisions Maintain community involvement throughout the project Help build support and secure funding
DELIVERABLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written recommendations and technical report of survey findings
PREREQUISITES FOR MOVING FORWARD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient number of responses from eligible, interested artists to support an Artspace live/work project
TIME FRAME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 months
STATUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under Consideration

STEP 3: PREDEVELOPMENT I	
OVERVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining Project Location and Size
PRIMARY ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with City and other stakeholders to establish (a) preliminary project scope and (b) space development program for evaluating building and site capacity • Analyze candidate buildings/sites with respect to cost, availability, and other factors impacting their ability to address development program goals • Review existing information about potential site(s) to identify key legal, environmental, physical, and financial issues affecting their suitability • Negotiate with property owners with goal of obtaining site control agreement • Continue outreach to artists and arts organizations • Connect with potential creative community partners and commercial tenants
DELIVERABLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation of development space program and goals • Assessment of site suitability and identification of any contingent conditions to be resolved through continued due diligence • Site control agreement or update regarding status of site control negotiations • Summary of project status
PREREQUISITES FOR MOVING FORWARD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site control agreement with property owner • Growing stakeholder/leadership group • Both parties' agreement on project scope and feasibility
TIME FRAME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-6 months
FEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$350,000

STEP 4: PREDEVELOPMENT II	
OVERVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Design and Financial Modeling
PRIMARY ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish process for selecting architectural team • Confirm development goals and space program with architectural team • Engage architect to create conceptual plans and schematic designs • Engage contractor or cost consultant to provide pre-construction services • Resolve any contingent conditions relating to site control • Create capital and operating budgets • Obtain proposals and/or letters of interest from lender and equity investor financing partners • Prepare and submit Low Income Housing Tax Credit application • Submit other financing applications as applicable • Maintain excitement for the project within the creative community • Encourage and guide local artists to activate the site with arts activities
DELIVERABLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schematic designs • Financial pro-forma detailing capital and operating budgets • Preliminary proposals and letters of interest for project mortgage and equity financing • Summary of project status
PREREQUISITES FOR MOVING FORWARD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Award of Low Income Housing Tax Credits (first or second application) or commitment of alternative funding
TIME FRAME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 months+
FEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$350,000

STEP 5: PREDEVELOPMENT III

OVERVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From Tax Credits to Financial Closing
PRIMARY ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure final gap funding commitments • Raise funds for equity, including private sector philanthropic dollars • Complete construction documents and submit permit applications • Negotiate construction and permanent loan commitments • Negotiate limited partner equity investment commitments • Advance project to construction closing • Communicate the progress of the project to the creative community to keep up the involvement and excitement
DELIVERABLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful closing and commencement of construction
TIME FRAME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-6 months
FEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$300,000+

STEP 6: CONSTRUCTION

OVERVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction and Lease-up
PRIMARY ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee project construction • Engage property management company • Identify commercial tenants and sign lease agreements • Reach out to potential artist tenants, providing education on the application process • Conduct residential tenant selection process
DELIVERABLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed project ready for occupancy
TIME FRAME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-10 months

APPENDIX B

OPEN HOUSE PARTICIPANTS

We would like to thank the many community members who came out to hear about the potential for affordable artist spaces during our visit.

PUBLIC MEETING

Alex Nipper	Emma	Kelley Hestir	Mike Pinch
Alfred Gyasi	Emmajean Smith	Kevin Self	Mike Psorik
Amy Cahill	Emmanuel Sarmrento	Kim Skaggs	Mire S.
Analinda Gonzales	Erik Winter	Larissa Lury	Motoko Furuhashi
Armando Arellano	Feaelen Pengelly	Laurie Churchill	Pashoda L.
Ashley Saldana	Federico Almarez	Lee Sullivan	Pat DeSimio
Bill Moree	Henry Hartig	Lester Frank	Penny Peace
Brian G.	Irene Oliver-Lewis	Leticia Roybal	Raquel Madrigal
C Sephra Reyes	Isaac Montellano	Linda Sandis	Raul Dorn
Celina Corral	Jacob Morin	Luis Rios	Renee Frank
Charleah Harris	Jamie Roberts	Lynn Sally	Rishelle Peush Safford
Chong Fee	Jason Valencia	M. White	Robert Cruise
Chris Duillory	Jeff Erwin	Manny Franco	Robert Hull
Citlali Delgado	Jeremy Gilbert	Marc Moffett	Rosa Chavez
Craig Sears	Jerry Crenshaw	Marcus Chormicle	Saul Castillo
Danny Medin	Jim Henning	Marisa Sage	Stephanie Preciado-Shelton
David G Chavez	Joe Salisbury	Mark Steffen	Sylvia Ulloa
Debbie McCurdy	Johanna Typaldos	Meg Goehring	Taunna Cole Dorn
Demick Pacheco	Joshua Peugh	Melanie Brown	Thelonious Moree
Deret Roberts	Julio Valencia	Mia Kalish	Trisha McCarl
Donna Tate	Kamella Tate	Michael Mandel	Victor Whitmill
Elizabeth Allen	Karly Jean Kainz	Michael Ponce	
Elva Osterreich	Katrina Chandler	Michele Fawcone	
Emilee Rush	Kayla Martinez	Midrom Peteren	

APPENDIX C

CREATIVE ASSETS IN LAS CRUCES

As identified by participants in the Arts and Arts Organization Virtual Focus Group and Open House:

CREATIVE ASSETS

- 10 O'Clock artists
- 10X25 Creative Conference at Rio Grande Theatre
- Alma d'arte Charter High School x 3**
- Arts & Cultural District x 3**
- Art history exhibit from LC Museum
- Art Obscura x3**
- Art organizations
- Artist-in-residence program
- Borderlands Bullet
- Branigan Cultural Center
- Cactus Pickin Jammers**
- CAV Gallery x2**
- City Art Board & Public Art
- Cleves Salon
- CMI & CMT
- Coas Bookstore
- Community Share education program
- Creative Campus X 2**
- Cruces Creatives x 10**
- Dia De Los Muertos
- Dona Ana Arts Council x 10**
- Dance x2**
- Downtown Blues Cafe x2**
- Downtown Las Cruces Partnership
- Downtown Main Street x2**
- Downtown plaza for covid-safe outdoor public performance
- El Paso museums and events
- Farm & Ranch Museum
- Farmers and Crafts Market
- Farmers market x4**
- Fiestas Art Theater
- Film Las Cruces x3**
- Fine art flea market x 5**
- First Fridays x 3**
- Friends of OMDP
- Galleries
- Game Jams
- Ganymede games, CMI
- Hazlo mentoring program
- Indigenous/cultural artists
- Jazz Jam
- KTAL Radio
- La Vida
- Landscape
- Language (bilingual community)
- Las Cruces Convention Center
- Las Cruces International Film Festival
- Las Cruces Museum of Art x 4
- Las Cruces Symphony
- Las Esperanzas
- LCCT
- Marcos Space
- Mariachi Conference
- Mesilla Park
- Mesilla Valley Chorale
- Mesilla Valley Concert Band
- Mesquite Historic District x5**

- Mexican music and dance
- Mom's Coffee
- Mural artists
- Murals x7**
- Music x2**
- Natural environment - White Sands and Organ Mountain
- New Mexico's reputation for the arts
- Next gen media academy
- NMCO Media
- NMSU Art Museum x 7**
- NMSU Community Garden
- NMSU Music
- NMSU student population
- NMSU Theatre
- Old Mesilla
- Organ Mountain National Monument x3**
- Our indigenous artists
- Picacho Arts District
- Piro- Manso-Tewa tribe
- Plaza de Las Cruces x 5**
- Public art x2**
- Public/outdoor events
- Raw talent in LC
- Renaissance Fair
- Rich in Culture
- Rio Grande
- Rio Grande Theatre
- Singing out Las Cruces
- Small local galleries willing to show up and coming artists.
- Southern Pride of NM
- STEAM Team (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math, & Making) with Cruces Creatives
- Studio 603
- The architecture in the Historic District
- The food
- The Hood NM x2**
- The people x4**
- The Wrap - Film Las Cruces film maker screening and hangout for locals
- UHM
- UKE Club!
- Woodmills NMSU
- Working spaces

