Creative Capacity



Takachizu, from the Japanese words takara (treasure) + chizu (map), is Little Tokyo's community archive that identifies and reflects on that which is most valuable, celebrated, and in need of protection in the neighborhood.

Credit: Rudy Espinoza

Creative capacity is an organization's ability to embed arts, culture, and creativity into its programs, operations, and strategies to drive community connection, economic opportunity, and systems change. It might be letting those culture bearers with the longest relationship to the land lead the way in how to think, behave, and create, in harmony. It is recognizing that art and body, mind, and spirit practice carry real healing power. A gathering of visual art, dance, music, and storytelling can explore how memory and experiences can be transformed into expression, connection, and meaning. It is recognizing the powerful ways food, traditions, and memory keep people connected to home. When people can assert their own identities, they can create, nurture life, and claim space on their own terms. Creative practice rooted in identity, memory, and freedom can be transformed into embodied expressions through movement or spoken word.

Creative capacity may include:

- Using creative expression to engage communities and support healing, organizing, and storytelling (arts integration);
- Investing in artists and cultural workers as key contributors to local economies (creative economic development); and
- Aligning organizational strategies with the cultural values and lived experiences of the communities served (cultural strategy alignment).

Building creative capacity means viewing art and culture as critical infrastructure—not just tools for beautification, but forces for social cohesion, narrative power, economic equity, and systems change. Community audience insights—harnessed by artists, culture bearers, and organizations—can help ensure these efforts are centered on residents' lived experience and honors local cultural knowledge and practices.



Artist Audrey Chan depicts Little Tokyo, the Arts District, Skid Row, and the former Bronzeville area residents in her public art commission "Will Power Allegory" displayed at the Little Tokyo/Arts District Station.

Credit: Audrey Chan

How Little Tokyo Service Center Builds Creative Capacity

Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC) provides a comprehensive array of social welfare and community development services to assist low-income individuals and other persons in need, also providing resources to neighboring Asian Pacific Islander and other low-income communities. Based in Los Angeles Little Tokyo, LTSC contributes to community revitalization and cultural preservation in the historic neighborhood and among the broader Japanese American community in Southern California. LTSC joins with Little Tokyo residents, businesses, activists, and other nonprofits that have been fighting to ensure the neighborhood's unique cultural and artistic strengths are preserved under community control. They view this effort as critical not only to honor the community's physical qualities, but to highlight its character, people, and multicultural history as a way of combating displacement and shifting neighborhood dynamics.

Designed to help local residents and small businesses leverage the arts to address displacement pressures, LTSC's +LAB Artists in Residence (+LAB AIR) program was one approach to preserve community assets under community control. In 2013, Little Tokyo advocates learned of several publicly owned plots of land slated for redevelopment that could threaten the neighborhood's character. The city's Metro also unveiled plans to remake the adjacent Little Tokyo stop into Los Angeles' second-busiest transit hub. This, along with changes to the historic First Street North block, raised major concerns about the disruption of local small businesses and the destruction of historic neighborhood assets, prompting advocates to organize for community control over the block.

NATIONAL CAPACD

About National CAPACD: The National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development's (National CAPACD's) Community Arts Framework is six interrelated dimensions of capacity-building—knowledge, creative, relational, political, affective, and economic. National CAPACD advances equity and creates vibrant, healthy neighborhoods by mobilizing and strengthening a powerful coalition of community-based organizations working in low-income Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.