

Community Advisory Council (CAC)

March 2026 Meeting Notes

The Council received the latest updates on priority projects, including the upcoming feasibility assessment of Durham County Memorial Stadium and a pilot community investment program. The group talked about what it looks like to create local impact through a matching grants program. Council members emphasized prioritizing investments in partner-led activations that:

- Showcase non-traditional uses of public spaces
- Amplify experiences that embody Durham's character
- Incorporate public art and provide opportunities for local artists
- Engage local businesses in meaningful ways
- Involve students and youth across the community

The group also learned more about the framework being developed to address the challenges and opportunities present in growing the footprint of Durham's local festivals and events in order to drive both economic and community-based impact. During that discussion, Council members outlined several indicators of success for event growth, including:

- Expanding single-day events into multi-day experiences
- Increasing activation of public spaces
- Establishing consistent, recurring annual or biannual events
- Growing attendance and regional recognition
- Enhancing economic impact driven by visitor spending

The CAC will meet in-person in June for its next quarterly meeting. The group will also have the opportunity to participate in virtual office hours during the months of April and May to share any additional feedback or ideas they have with the Durham Next staff.

See meeting presentation deck below.



Durham Next Community Advisory Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 11, 2026



Agenda

- Project Updates
- Festival Ecosystem Plan & Cohort Model
- Group Breakout Discussion & Report Out
- Final Announcements



Project Updates

Durham County Memorial Stadium Feasibility Study



- Vendor selection is underway
- Feasibility study will assess opportunities to upgrade stadium infrastructure and present viable options
- CAC will be engaged to provide feedback and help shape community engagement strategies

Pilot Matching Grant Program



- **Name:** [insert here]
- **Goal:** Catalyze bold ideas and innovative experiences that contribute to a stronger, more dynamic Durham for visitors and residents.
- **Program Description:** Providing competitive matching grants to support community-driven projects that strengthen Durham County as a vibrant place to live, work & visit

Matching Grant Eligibility

- **Eligible Projects:** Programs or activations that take place in Durham County that demonstrate clear potential to create economic impact through visitor engagement
- **Eligible recipients:** Durham-based nonprofits, locally owned businesses and government entities
- **Cycle Frequency:** Annual 1:1 matches with applications opening next month



Additional Details on Matching Grants



- Applicants must submit a clear plan for project delivery, marketing and impact measurement.
- Organizational overhead expenses will not be considered for funding
- Regularly recurring events are not eligible without demonstration of compelling expansion of a visitor attraction

Group Discussion: 15 minutes

1. Based on this discussion, what kinds of projects and/or activities should we be engaging with?
2. Based on the vision that we've outlined today, what do you think is the minimum grant amount required for this funding to produce meaningful impact for individual recipients?
3. Are there barriers you can think of that potential recipients might face when it comes to finding matching dollars elsewhere?



Festival Ecosystem Implementation Plan

Key Findings

- **Durham's Strengths:** Entrepreneurial spirit, diversity of types, committed producers.
- **Vibrant but Under-Resourced:** Homegrown, grassroots festivals thrive on community pride yet face ongoing challenges around funding, shared infrastructure and coordination.
- **Funding Gaps:** Despite a recent doubling of City support to \$400K, requests outpace available funds by roughly fourfold; reimbursement-based grants create added strain for smaller producers.



Key Findings (cont.)

- **Structural Challenges:** Fragmented processes, inequitable access to resources, limited venue capacity and a limited corporate sponsorship base constrain the ecosystem's growth.
- **Pathways Forward:** Opportunities include stronger municipal coordination, streamlined permitting, diversified funding (public, private and tourism-based), producer mentorship and a strategic approach that balances economic impact with community inclusion.



What the Research Told Us

Strengths	Gaps	Opportunities
• Entrepreneurial producers • Diverse festival portfolio	• Limited infrastructure • Inequitable and insufficient funding • Overused venues	• Central coordination • Corporate partnerships • Increased funding • Producer incubation



The Implementation Roadmap

Investing in assets and building for the future

Three phases:

1. Address immediate needs
2. Build capacity
3. Launch the new ecosystem

Phase One

Address immediate needs and begin planning for the future

Goal: stabilize and scale existing high-potential festivals

Invest and Support	Advocate and Educate
• Launch cohort program that includes investment and wrap-around services support • Enhance services support • Create advocacy plan and identify priorities to advocate towards • Identify a “quilt” of existing venues to maximize space	• Dedicated festival liaison • Define and collaborate for a one-stop-shop • Educate public-sector leaders on economic impact benefits of investing in streamlined festivals ecosystem

Phase Two

Build out festival capacity

Goal: Build the infrastructure for all festivals

System Launch	Measure What Matters	Grow Funding
• Implement one-stop shop • Train festival owners • Build awareness around the new process in Durham and the Triangle	• Evaluate economic impact of cohort festivals and benchmark • Consider if a signature festival is emerging	• Corporate partner inventory • Corporate festival fund • Target \$1M annual public investment through in-kind, grants, and infrastructure investment

Phase Three

Launch new festival ecosystem

Goal: Activate a mature festival economy

Signature Festival Path	Sustainable Funding Model
• Durham is positioned to support a thriving festival ecosystem • Launch a new festival or a re-imagined, signature homegrown festival	• City, Durham Next, and corporate alignment to provide reliable funding and support for venues • Continue technical assistance and support

Roles (Who Does What)

Discover Durham	Durham Next	City of Durham
• Producer support and services • Economic impact studies • Venue strategy • Advocacy for process navigation • Support a signature festival launch	• Cohort model of investment and wrap-around training and support services • Signature festival strategy • Long-term coordinated financial support	• Grants • Infrastructure • One-stop shop implementation

Durham Festivals Cohort

Program goals:

- Drive measurable economic impact
- Strengthen Durham's tourism appeal
- Invest in existing community assets
- Leverage public, private, and philanthropic funding



Cohort Program Structure

- Approx. 3-5 festivals in the first year
- Multi-year participation, anticipated to span 3-5 yrs.
- Approx. \$75-100k per festival per year; investment amounts will vary
- Funding intended to support sustainable growth, operational capacity and strategic development
- Wrap-around support tailored to eligible festivals



Festival Eligibility

- Durham-based or long-standing and meaningful presence in Durham
- Cultural relevance and strong community engagement
- Potential to increase attendance, revenue or regional visibility
- Possess organizational leadership and operational readiness
- Commitment to collaborative planning, learning and coordination with other cohort members



Cohort Participation

- **Funding Alignment:** Participants agree not to apply for the City's cultural festival grant funding during the period of participation.
- **Participation and Collaboration:** Participants are active in cohort meetings, learning sessions and planning efforts and agree to work collaboratively with cohort members to minimize scheduling conflicts and maximize impact.
- **Planning, Reporting & Evaluation:** Participants will complete an initial assessment and co-create a multi-year development plan with program partners, providing regular updates and participating in data collection practices.



Next Steps

- Finalize cohort plan
- Align with Cultural Roadmap, Parks and Recreation, DDI
- Budget planning
- Outline advocacy plan
- Unanswered questions of the plan
 - What are additional things we should implement?
 - What does a one-stop shop look like in practice?
 - What are other immediate pain points we can relieve?

Breakout Engagement Prompts

1. What does realistic, scalable growth look like for a local festival in 3 - 5 years?
2. As we grow these locally owned festivals, there are a couple of indicators we can look at to determine if our efforts are working. Rank the indicators below from most relevant to least.

Indicator	Description
Audience Growth	Total attendance, percentage of visitors vs. residents, repeat attendance rate & demographic diversity
Economic Impact	Vendor revenue, local business sales & paid artist opportunities
Organizational Capacity	Growth in the festival's ability to sustain itself (budget size, number of sponsors, staff structure, etc.)
Cultural & Community Impact	Number of community partners represented, community-led programming & volunteer participation
Place-based Impact	Foot traffic in business districts, regional recognition and activation of public spaces



Final Announcements

- **New Annual Event Date:** Tuesday, April 7 at 4 p.m.
- **Next CAC Deep Dive:** Thursday, April 16 from 12 - 1 p.m.
- **Next CAC Quarterly Meeting:** Wednesday, June 3 from 4 - 6 p.m.