



THE GO-GO COMMUNITY SUSTIANABILITY REPORT

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The Go-Go Community Sustainability Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Go-Go Community Sustainability Report documents the current challenges of the go-go cultural economy and produces public-private policy and investment recommendations. The impetus for the report is the desired sustainability and growth of this cultural asset. Go-go is a distinct part of the Washingtonian experience, retaining a regional cultural capital since the 1970s. Amid the current changes in the District, go-go's relevance, particularly with younger audiences, is jeopardized.

In 2019 the city released a cultural plan that produced recommendations to aid the growing cultural sector. However, tangible recommendations for D.C.'s now official music were absent. At this moment, D.C. is a city with many exciting developments that unfortunately exacerbate inequity. The city is grappling with cultural remembrance; the treatment of go-go continues to serve as an analogy for the treatment of the Black population, .

For some, the Official Music of D.C. legislation is a positive turning point. It is an implication of the city's support of the genre. As conveyed by many engaged in this research, policy is the next step. The recommendations of this report are informed by primary research conducted by a single researcher. Over the span of three months, six oral histories were collected from go-go musicians and stakeholders. Additionally, field observations occurred in the physical environment, and because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, observations of three digital performances occurred. The conversations and field engagements shaped the research, producing new areas of inquiry, and highlighting central themes. The implementation of the recommendations requires a similar, community-driven model. The recommendations address the central challenges of affordable and go-go friendly venues, educational and business development resources, technical support for digital integration, and the development of tourism infrastructure. The recommendations of this plan support the heritage preservation aims of the D.C. Cultural Plan. Relevant government agencies and community stakeholders are mutually involved in generating solutions. The implementation of these recommendations is a step toward long-term, systemic resources that safeguard and promote the genre.

I. Introduction

“Go-go is more than just music, it’s a complex expression of cultural values masquerading in the guise of party music in our nation’s capital.”

- Kip Lornell and Charles Stephenson Jr., *The Beat: Go-Go Music from Washington, D.C.*

Depending on whom you ask, and where you are in the city, go-go is emblematic of D.C. culture. This distinctly Washingtonian sound has garnered worldwide attention, as demonstrated in Don't Mute D.C.'s (DMDC) 2019 petition that garnered over 80,000 responses from over 94 countries. The survey enlisted support to protect the public presentation of the genre on historic 7th Street and Florida Avenue atop the T-Mobile affiliate, Metro PCS. The shop is a great community asset; for nearly 25 years, the store has been playing go-go on the street corner. Additionally, the store is one of the last places to purchase go-go CDs. The shop maintains the musical remnants of the quickly changing Chuck Brown Way intersection, named after the musical pioneer who popularized go-go. In April 2019, the hallmark sound of Chuck Brown Way was silenced due to noise complaints from new residents. Undoubtedly, the attention around the briefly interrupted music at Metro PCS revitalized attention on go-go. Online activism and public demonstrations mounted under the moniker #DontMuteDC. The hashtag #DontMuteDC provides an archive of public reaction that expresses the importance of go-go in D.C. cultural heritage.

The noise complaints came from residents of The Shay, a new luxury apartment building embedded with suggestive cultural symbols. The incident, which led to public demonstrations, exemplifies the implications of rapid city development and its cultural effects. "She has arrived," is boldly proclaimed on The Shay's poster that sits directly across a block of Black-owned businesses in the historic Howard-Shaw neighborhood. One is left to ask, as "she" arrives, who and what remains?

The Go-Go Community Sustainability Report provides social impact investment and policy recommendations to support the heritage aims of the DC Cultural Plan. This report is informed by pre-existing scholarship and primary research to produce critical remarks on economic vitality, cultural impact, and the sustainability of go-go music and culture. This report looks to support private and public sector partnerships that retain authenticity and enacts fiscal recompense for the city-sanctioned actions that have comprised the growth and sustainability of the genre.

II. Go-Go Cultural Influence and Impact

Washington, D.C. has been known as the Chocolate City since the funk band Parliament-Funkadelic coined the epithet in their 1975 song. The song is an homage to D.C. and similar cities with "Socio-politically-diverse-Afro-centric culture," as stated on the back text of the album's cover. "On the Black music tip, it [D.C.] was way ahead as well. There was a thriving Go-Go band circuit..." Chocolate City not only denotes a particular cultural capital, but also Black political leadership, and a community of entrepreneurship. The nickname slowly loses relevance as the city gentrifies, pushing out much of the Black community. While the residents fight for fair and affordable housing, they also advocate for city measures to support the sustainability of the city's homegrown sound.

Go-go is a polyrhythmic sound with congas, timbales, cowbells, rototoms, and depending on the sub-genre, string, and brass instruments. Go-go was firstly introduced in the 1970s by the revered "Godfather of Go-Go" Chuck Brown. For Washington's Black community, go-go was the de facto official music of Washington, D.C., before it was designated as such by legislation in February 2020. Generations of Black Washingtonians have lived with go-go as the soundtrack to their lives; it plays at graduations, funerals, and in public spaces, like on makeshift drums in Chinatown.

Each generation has contributed to the evolution of go-go sound, dance, and aesthetics. The music not only reflects the hottest radio songs through selected covers; but tells the story of the city through its original lyrics. While go-go is keenly relevant to the Black community, it is a central figure in the city's history broadly. In example, go-go is used in political campaigns, and key figures are memorialized in statues, murals, parks, and streets.

III. DC Cultural Plan Support

In 2019, Mayor Muriel Bowser released the *DC Cultural Plan*. The plan includes twenty-eight policy and six investment recommendations for "leveraged funding to sustain the city's cultural core and create new opportunities for historically under-represented creators and communities."¹ The rapid gentrification of the last decade has resulted in widespread changes to the cultural sector, in particular, the closure of hallmark venues and the migration of the producers and patrons of go-go. *DC Cultural Plan*'s recommendations do not speak to the niche needs of the go-go community. This go-go specific report supports the goals of the *DC Cultural Plan*; it proposes additional recommendations that address the needs of the go-go community as identified from primary research.

¹ DC Cultural Plan, DC Cultural Plan (2019). Washington, DC.

Go-go is mentioned briefly in the D.C. plan, but no tangible recommendations are produced. The mention of the genre is primarily in summaries of community conversations included within the appendix. The community conversations occurred city-wide and invited community stakeholders and the general public to chime in on the state of the city's cultural sector. However, given the often informal arrangement of go-go stakeholders, they may not have been directly targeted. Many go-go stakeholders lie within unanticipated yet related cultural production sectors such as radio, event promotion, or photography. These cultural figures are not always formally constituted in an organization and may be less visible to cultural policymakers. Identifying and tapping into the go-go community may present a challenge without ambassadors to consult on the engagement. *The Go-Go Community Sustainability Report* recommendations are drawn from community members captured by oral histories, surveys, and notes from town hall convenings. The implementation of the recommendations requires stakeholder shared ownership and authority.

The majority of oral history participants interviewed for this research report did not expect the city to follow up on the genre's status as the Official Music of D.C. with new policy. However, the city's aims to support the evolution of go-go require strategic policy informed by the cultural impact, community interests, and tools for economic development. This plan assesses the needs of the cultural ecosystem and presents probable solution generating actions.

“Systematic change, versus one small victory...we need to get the community involved, the people involved, and the public officials. Get them [public officials] to hear the other side of the equation. The next phase of the movement is policy.”

- Ron Moten, Don't Mute D.C.

Longtime activist Ron Moten underscores the need for multiple stakeholders to develop policy. This report is in agreement with Moten's assertion that the next phase is policy. All recommendations prioritize long term benefits and reflect policy, partnerships, and capital investment. Social impact investment informs the approach to identifying challenges and proposed solutions. Social impact investment recommendations are supported by multi-partner decision making that prioritizes social impact.

IV. Social Impact Investment

Social Impact Investments are multi-sector, collaborative, strategic investments made to generate measurable social, and environmental impacts with mutual financial benefits.² Impact investments involve new communities, emergent, or pre-existing communities that require strategic partnerships to accomplish identified goals in response to impact needs. Social impact investment recommendations are included in the *DC Cultural Plan* to support pre-existing cultural assets. For example, the city's cultural plan outlines steps to obtain public resources for graphic designers, visual artists, theatres, and creative start-up enterprises. This report's recommendations outline similar approaches specific to go-go sustainability and economic growth that are supported by public-private social impact investments.

The city's cultural plan and the recommendations of this research report situate the government as a capital deployment intermediary, logistically and fiscally supporting existing business and real estate projects. The intermediary party usually mandates and reviews the social and financial metrics and outcomes. This intermediary role supports the development of new programmatic, business and real estate projects.

As the intermediary, the government can bring community stakeholders and other partners together to respond directly to broader needs related to the go-go community. Addressing the needs of go-go can also support other social challenges such as food deserts, and services for returning citizens, seniors, and job seekers. The native population faces the encroachment of gentrification to its last frontier east of the river. The investments that support go-go have the opportunity to address other community needs, such as affordable housing and commercial real estate in Wards 7 and 8. The recommendations presented in this report prioritize equity for the native population that face pre-existing barriers, including historically low city investment in the cultural landscape.

² What You Need to Know about Impact Investing. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://thegiin.org/impact-investing/need-to-know/#what-is-impact-investing>

V. Go-go Creative Economy

This multi-faceted genre of diverse professions requires a focused research protocol to gather relevant information to produce impactful recommendations. This ecosystem requires specific attention as there are roles that operate independently of go-go but are dependent on the live performance genre for a large percentage of income generation. Understanding this self-sustained resilient ecosystem not only avails nuance to public memory, but helps outline a course forward that widens visibility, and embeds resources for continuity. For our purposes, the Go-Go Creative Economy is comprised of the following:

- Musicians
- Band Management
- Fashion Design
- Videography/Photography
- Sound Engineering/ Audio Services
- Venues
- Marketing/Promotion
- Security
- Media/ Journalism

VI. Methodology

The findings of this paper reflect surveys and oral histories collected from a small sample of the go-go economy. Existing academic, journalistic sources and government documents placed personal narratives specifically within historical, political, regional, and field contexts. A single researcher accomplished this research process in three months. A citywide and regional understanding of this creative economy's size, economic contribution, demographic data, and response to the rapid city changes requires a larger body of research. Resources to support the continued study of go-go are recommended and may require a full year of observation to understand trends, especially as they relate to tourism.

This research process employed the definition of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) from the Community Tool Box produced by the University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development. The Community Tool Box defines CBPR as a research method that “enlists those who are most affected by a community issue – typically in collaboration or partnership with others who have research skills – to conduct research on and analyze that issue, with the goal of devising strategies to resolve it.”³ *More information on the research methodology may be found in the Reflection Paper located within the appendix.*

³ “Tools to Change Our World.” *Community Tool Box*, 1994, ctb.ku.edu/en.

KEY FINDINGS

A. VENUES

I. Key Observations

“Venues ban certain bands because of fights the bands had no business in. After a while you have no place to go. I remember every Saturday I would drive to Saint Mary’s County, would drive back at three in the morning, nodding off...couldn’t play in PG County, D.C....kept getting pushed out.”

- Walter “Walt” Hansborough, Event Promoter

Over the past decade, influential go-go venues like Ibiza, DC Star, and The Neon have closed without new go-go friendly venues opening to an equivalent extent. The closure of these venues is due to a variety of factors, including increased property taxes, and stiff operational license requirements for business owners. Historically, The D.C. Alcohol and Beverage Control Board has pressured venues that support go-go music due to the wide misjudgment that correlated violence to the genre.⁴ The city’s disavowed relationship with go-go and the effects of gentrification have compounded challenges in recent years. Tenants are bound to the interest of owners who seek to attract businesses reflecting the tastes and interests of new residents. Throughout the research, the need for affordable, and lesser policed venues was a recurring theme.

The impetus for the current go-go and resident rights activism is partially due to divergent attitudes regarding public sound and the presence of Black culture in public space. The #DontMuteDC movement was initiated by the temporary closure of music atop Metro PCS on the corner of 7th Street and Florida Avenue NW. The movement started with a primary focus on go-go and has evolved into a multi-committee organization advocating and enacting solutions to many issues that affect native Washingtonians. Ron Moten shares that DMDC uses “the social power of music to address issues of our community.”⁵ The availability of venues is one of those issues. The treatment of go-go is often a micro expression of a macro, city-wide, racially informed inequality issue. In the case of MetroPCS, even while in compliance with the public sound ordinance, the music was overthrown by personal preference assertions from new residents. Venues are vital to the economic sustainability of the genre; within this section are observations that inform the needs and recommendations for city-supported investment support.

"About." Chapter 2. Other Models for Promoting Community Health and Development | Section

⁴ Mock, B., & CityLab. (2019, November 22). How Go-Go Music Became Kryptonite for Gentrification in D.C.

⁵ R. Moten, Oral History, March 17, 2020

City social impact investment is a corrective measure to ongoing challenges presented in venues' ability to present go-go. Additionally, the city's stated commitment should be an indication to new coming residents of the importance of this genre within D.C. history and cultural infrastructure. City support manifested in policy and funding would emphasize go-go's importance to residents and visitors.

In the last decade, the continuation of the genre is supported largely by regional venues in suburban Maryland. A small sample of go-go attendees were engaged during a Black Alley Concert held at Ivy City Smokehouse in Northeast. Half of the sample's go-go attendance is now in Prince George's County, Maryland, or Northern Virginia. The native Washingtonians engaged felt their concert attendance has lessened, reflecting the number of concert venues and the frequency that go-go is played in the city. One audience member notes that their participation five years ago was once a week, and now they may attend once a month. However, the perceived frequency of band performance and audience attendance is subjective, based on audience preference. The subgenres of go-go are not afforded the same opportunities for space and visibility as "traditional" go-go. For example, a more established band like Backyard Band may perform weekly, while a younger, bounce beat band like X.I.B. might perform once a month. The discussion of venues often is coupled with concerns around cultivating younger audiences.

“The culture is boastfully being honored and silently being killed. They cut the umbilical cord. Now it is hard for younger band 16,17,18 to like go-go because where can they perform?”

- Ben Abba, Go-Go Stakeholder

The above quote is from Ben Abba, previous manager of TCB- Bounce Beat Kingz. Bounce beat is a subgenre that reflects the younger millennial audience. Bounce beat was introduced and popularized in the late 2000s and early 2010s when their audience was in high school. Ben recalls that from 2005-2010 many venues would hold two shows on one night. For example, popular venue CFE in Prince George's County would hold an all-ages show from 7p-11p, the second show of the evening from 12a-3a would be for a 21+ audience. Once CFE stopped their all-ages shows, the business began to subdue until it ultimately folded. The availability of venue space not only supports youth engagement but widens the business opportunity for all related to the performance experience.

II. All Ages

The last generation to partake in all age go-go is the "bounce beat generation," those in high school during 2005-2012. Bands known for bounce beat are referred to as "alphabet bands" by older generations because of the use of acronyms. Popular bounce beat bands include XIB (Xtreme Intentionz Band), ABM (All Bout Money), and TOB (TakeOvaBand). The bounce beat generation popularized beat your feet and clapping as signature dance moves that are specific to the cadence of the sound. Without the availability of younger bands and audiences, the genre's ability to produce new audiences and evolve the culture is vulnerable.

Particular attention to spaces for young people to partake in the genre is vital. Currently, there is no commercial venue space that allows audiences under 18 to participate. More specifically, most performance venues have full-service bars, and are restricted to audiences 21 and over. While not strictly enforced, some bands advertise their event as *Grown and Sexy*, exclusive to those aged 25 and older. Since the decades of the genre's inception, young people have been the pioneers continuing the musical, performance, and dance evolution.

All age go-go events are now limited to public community events and intimate private gatherings and are without staple home venues. The dwindling number of all-age venues is related to the previous prevalent perception of go-go in the media. However, the media activity around the #DontMuteDC moment and movement have represented a more positive narrative around go-go. This narrative showcases the attributes that have shaped regional identity, establishing a case for city investment.

III. Misperceptions and Issues

"We're musicians...if the legislatures can't control it, how can we? Instead of pointing fingers at the politicians and politicians pointing fingers at the musicians, we should collaborate. Some individuals in the band are more in touch with youth than the politicians."

- Ali, Suttle Thoughts

A primary reason there is particularly low availability of venues for youth is the historical perception of go-go. The perception of violence is less pervasive now, but this historical trend informs the genre's sustainability today. Propagated media attention focused solely on violence, and not the plethora of community assets embedded within and produced from go-go. Throughout this research, violence only came up in relation to venues. In 2010 the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department's Go-Go Report became publicly known.⁶ The report

⁶ Smith, R. (2010, July 14). Exclusive: A Look at MPD's "Go-Go Report". Retrieved from <https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/blog/13062005/exclusive-a-look-at-mpds-go-go-report>

shared with *The Washington City Paper* from an undisclosed source listed two weeks of go-go performances both in the city and Prince George's County, Maryland. In the research, a few crimes were repeatedly mentioned because of their public visibility, political response, and social impacts. Ben Abba also sheds light on the typical news story that mentions go-go in relation to crimes. In example, a crime may happen miles from the venue and occur hours after a performance, yet if any suspect is traced to a go-go concert, that go-go band and venue would face collateral consequences.

In the 1980s, the D.C. Council enacted curfews for go-go youth attendance. These measures reflected the social climate of the time, during the Crack Epidemic. Go-go was not an accomplice for drug culture but was collateral damage. Go-go tends to be the scapegoat for more substantial social ailments that require systemic solutions. The city has an excellent opportunity to support go-go and embed actions that duly aid social issues affecting the native community.

The city enacted curfew laws in the 1980s and 90s to curtail go-go, specifically for minor audiences.⁷ Additionally, the Alcohol Beverage Control Board targeted venues that played go-go with threatened and issued liquor license violations. The venue targeting came soon after the murder of D.C. police officer Brian Gibson in 1997. Gibson was sitting at a red light near The Ibex, during a Backyard Band concert. While no evidence tied the band to the murder, the band was scapegoated for the crime. This particular example demonstrates a recurring connection that plagued the genre. The possibility of such negative implications created a culture of fear for venues, worried both about their safety and economic viability.

Regardless of its perception, go-go supports non-violence with informal policies that result in the immediate end of performance upon the outbreak of a fight. Go-go, both from the music and voiced in public arenas by the musicians, makes progressive political statements to galvanize citizens around social issues such as voting, homelessness, and recently, PSA announcements to progress social distancing. Black Alley, for example, continues its community engagement and service off the stage with #HoodRockUniversity scholarships and service events. Black Alley and other bands should be engaged as advisors to aid the city in social services that address identified social issues and foster solutions to community wellness.

⁷ Jennings, M. (1997, June 13). Downsizing Go-Go. *Washington City Paper*.

IV. Economic Impact

As a genre predominantly reliant on live performance, the availability of space affects the scale of this economy. Go-go has not yet transmitted performances on the digital landscape as other genres. Digital streaming is a definite possibility; however, the crux of the genre's signature quality is audience interaction. Without venues, the central space of commerce is jeopardized, affecting the sustainability of surrounding industries.

From the small sample engaged at the Black Alley performance, on average, attendees spent \$150.00 to attend a concert. The identified average ticket price is \$25. Based on this data, on average, a go-go patron attending a live show spends \$125 on the experience. The sample noted that spending related to concert attendance includes rideshare, clothing, restaurant patronage, bar drinks, and street photography. The sustainability of go-go fosters the stability of other creative entrepreneurs of this market place. Ayanna Long captured information on street photography through research for the documentary film *The Let Out*. Ayanna, also having a short tenure shooting with backdrops, estimates a profit of \$300 a night. Artist Larry Cook engaged several photographers and painters for his *Eternal Splendor* series. Larry recalls the rental of backgrounds around \$300, and the commission for an original as \$1,500. Street photography, such as the other industries of the go-go community, thrives in and around venue spaces. Both Larry and Ayanna are examples of creative entrepreneurs that work primarily outside of go-go but find inspiration and business within the genre. Ayanna puts it plainly, "more shows means more jobs."

V. Recommendations

- Tax Incentives
 - A Go-Go Heritage Tourism Development Tax Rebate is proposed to attract new businesses and leverage the challenges faced by entrepreneurs recovering from the COVID-19 Pandemic. The rebate program will have specific requirements supporting new businesses that will play and promote go-go music. The proposed Go-Go Heritage Tourism Development Tax Rebate will require a commission to determine eligibility and ensure compliance with participants. The duration of the rebate program will be determined by economic data, guaranteeing the rebate is efficient, effective, and responsive to the compounding challenges of the COVID19 Pandemic.
 - Additionally, a small tax(<1%) may be charged to qualifying music venues that are in the top income percentile for their sector. These contributions will support the tourism infrastructure of go-go. The dollars will not directly aid go-go entrepreneurs. Still, they will help the investment in incentives to elevate go-go regionally, nationally, and internationally. Specific programs may be developed to ensure the funds' stream into a system of outcome-driven policy.

- Social Impact Investment Properties
 - Chinatown is D.C.'s prime entertainment hub with retail, dining, and entertainment experiences. However, areas known for their local, community-produced cultural heritage are increasingly less prominent. As the city identifies areas for tourism and community-based property investment, Ward 7 and 8 residents and businesses should receive a priority occupancy in this designated zone. Within that cultural zone, a city invested mixed-use property may support go-go through the inclusion of private and public resources that service the direct needs of the area.
- DPR
 - The District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) facilities remain a go-go access point for youth. However, these experiences are often limited to the summer months and are infrequent. Fort Dupont Park is a staple venue that hosts both large and small go-go acts. Chuck Brown Day is DPR's largest go-go celebration, held annually in August to celebrate the birthday of "The Godfather of Go-Go." Investment in the increased frequency of go-go events will heighten the cultural relevance of the DPR venues. It may be a tool to attract the community to sites with go-go as the initial entry point. DPR has 67 community centers and spans over all eight wards. City investment can cover all fees related to go-go entertainment and technical needs. It is recommended that the city fund specific entertainment and educational/instruction, one time and ongoing programs for participants of all ages.

EDUCATION

The need for educational resources is a recurring theme in this research and similar studies. On April 10, 2020, Don't Mute D.C. (DMDC) published *HOW TO MAKE GO-GO' OFFICIAL' POST-COVID-19*.⁸ The participating sample audience conveys the priority of go-go education as a crucial need through online surveys and a series of town hall engagements. Go-go education and go-go archival resources were the top recommendations for city funding. As the organizing and advocacy body for the Go-Go Museum and Café slated for construction in Historic Anacostia, DMDC is positioned as a resource with deep community ties. This section outlines recommendations for city investment and collaborative programmatic initiatives to support and further develop educational resources. DMDC is an example of one of the recommended partners and projects.

I. Cultural Exposure in District of Columbia Public Schools

In October 2019, Ward 5 Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie introduced Go-Go Official Music of the District of Columbia Designation Act of 2019 [B23-0317]. In February 2020, Councilmember McDuffie introduced the African American and Cultural Studies Inclusion Amendment Act of 2020 [B23-0642]. Go-go is positioned as a resource in the implementation of both acts. The legislation [B23-0642], which was co-introduced by twelve Councilmembers, requires the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education to develop an African American and Cultural Studies curriculum for high school students enrolled in either a District of Columbia Public School or a District of Columbia Public Charter School. The legislation would allow such courses to be counted as part of the promotion requirements toward graduation. The intended course implementation is the Fall 2022 semester. The outlined development of curricula involves governmental and relevant community stakeholders, who are yet to be defined.⁹ Go-go should be included within the development team.

Councilmember McDuffie's interest in African American history includes "experience and contributions of African Americans, the slave trade, as well as the socio-economic struggle that African-Americans experienced collectively in striving to achieve fair and equal treatment under the laws of the United States." This focus offers the opportunity for go-go to be integrated as a useful tool. Go-go is not only hyperlocal but an art form with international appeal and influence. The investigation of go-go from a cultural lens draws relevance to local African American history and global influences.

⁸ Stephenson, C., Jr., & Goodney Lea, S. (Eds.). (2020). *HOW TO MAKE GO-GO 'OFFICIAL' POST COVID-19* (Rep.). Washington, DC: Don't Mute DC.

⁹ B23-0642 - African American and Cultural Studies Inclusion Amendment Act of 2020, B23-0642 - African American and Cultural Studies Inclusion Amendment Act of 2020 (n.d.). Washington, DC.

Go-go needs to maintain relevance with District youth to remain an evolving cultural practice. Several bands have cited high school as their space of assembly and introduction to music, often through in-classroom instruction. Afterschool, bands would practice go-go in their basements, garages, and wherever there was available space. The former member of New Impressionz and current go-go entrepreneur Walter "Walt" Hansborough joined a go-go band in high school with the aspirations of being "D.C. famous." Walt suggests that for his self identified "golden era" of the late 2000s, many bands started in high school with the aim of regional popularity. A generation earlier, staple bands Junkyard and Rare Essence formed at Frank W. Ballou Senior High School.

The 2019 Go-Go Awards were held at Ballou High School, a highly appropriate venue given its cultural significance. It was on that date that Mayor Muriel Bowser declared November 17-23rd Go-Go Awareness Week. The city's acknowledgement of the public school system, and particularly Ballou High School's role in go-go will be further demonstrated through go-go education requirements in core curricula.

DCPS Recommendations

- Embedded go-go specific curricula with learning outcomes tied to core curriculum requirements.
- Develop and implement go-go within DCPS' *Framework for Arts Learning*¹⁰, allowing go-go artists to support core curriculum with arts integrated residencies. The artist residency program may be administered through the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, experienced government affiliate, or go-go specific non-profit organization.
- Fund afterschool opportunities and resources to support arts education field trips to the proposed museum, classroom and after school learning experiences. A memorandum of understanding may be drawn to commit relevant non-profits to multi-year programming to provide interactive learning experiences. This programmatic partnership would be managed through a select committee or team within arts integration to carry out all matters about increased go-go cultural exposure.
- DCPS supports go-go performance at school related events such as dances, sports games, and large assemblies.

¹⁰ Art: Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://dcps.dc.gov/page/art-dance-drama-music-and-visual-arts>

II. Go-Go Museum

Schools are a catalyst for youth engagement and cultural exposure, but spaces outside of school are necessary to support innovation. While public schools provide access for all youth, there is an embedded, institutionalized school culture that may limit go-go expression. DPR facilities, commercial spaces, and the Go-Go Museum and Café are spaces to engage go-go without the school environment and its associated behaviors. The announcement of the Go-Go Museum and Café in January 2020 received an overwhelmingly positive community response. The museum not only serves as a resource for District residents but also for tourists, widening educational experiences.

Additionally, the museum would support the exposure across barriers of age, race, and learning preferences and abilities. Investment from the city could support conformity with the standards of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. City dollars can support the development of the museum, providing resources and technical support, particularly in the vein of accessibility innovation. The COVID-19 Pandemic has shifted how we engage with museum spaces, and the impacts of social distancing are likely to inform our engagement with the public for the next 24 months.¹¹ The Go-Go Museum and Café would benefit significantly from technical assistance to aid the digital presentation of exhibition materials.

In January, Don't Mute DC began their fundraising for the museum. The grassroots fundraising speaks to the community's desire for this resource; within two months, the GoFundMe page raised over \$17,000. \$10,000 was raised in one day alone as part of a 12-hour fundraiser hosted by radio station WPGC 95.5. In a *Washington City Paper*¹² article, several go-go stakeholders expressed interest in donating objects and ephemera to the museum. The stakeholders additionally expressed their interest in the museum's ability to widen discourse for the local and tourist community. An institution with the sole purpose of archiving and sustaining the history of go-go affords opportunities to research and present a broad range of styles, musicians, and related cultural assets. These materials that share more thorough information on the broader field provide space for lesser-known figures and trends.

¹¹ Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, Univ. of Minnesota. (2020). *Covid-19: The Cidrap Viewpoint*. Minneapolis, MN.

¹² Wartofsky, A. (2020, February 13). The Go-Go Community Opens Up About What They Want to See in a Museum for the Music.

The city's investment in the Go-Go Museum and Café will provide impactful leveraging resources, particularly as the COVID-19 Pandemic has interrupted the fundraising and construction momentum. The museum is slated for Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue in Historic Anacostia. The block is within an unofficial municipal downtown with public services, mixed use commercial properties, retail and dining venues.

III. Recommendations

A. Go-Go Museum and DCPS Partnership

The museum may serve as a resource for DCPS as a grade-level field trip and introduction to museums as research resources for high school students. The Prince George's African American Museum and Cultural Center (PGAAMCC) provides an example of a museum partnership embedded within the public school system core curriculum. Since 2014, a memorandum of understanding exists between PGAAMCC and the Prince George's County Public School System.

PGAAMCC services over 50 schools with their Cultural Education Passport Program. The three programs targeting K-12 students are arts-integrated approaches to the African American history of Prince George's County, and that of the larger African Diaspora. A similar partnership between the Go-Go Museum and DCPS is recommended to support arts access and education for K-12 students. The African American and Cultural Studies Inclusion Amendment Act of 2020 [[B23-0642](#)] and the Go-Go Museum are in early development stages. A formalized partnership can align efforts, achieving the aims of both endeavors by creating specific and measurable goals for ongoing collaboration, supporting access and education to K-12 students. This partnership may manifest in a multi-year contract to provide go-go education enrichment programs for students and professional development experiences for educators

B. Museum as Community Anchor Institution

City investment in the Go-Go Museum is recommended to support the institution as a learning center for adult learners, professional scholars, and tourists. Moreover, with multiple community organizations involved, the museum and the surrounding area have the potential to service other community needs.

For example, The Sugar Hill Development in Harlem, New York, is a multi-use space embedded in a community responsive, cultural context. The Sugar Hill Development opened in 2015 and includes a pre-school, children's museum, and affordable housing, inclusive of units for the homeless population. The Children's Museum is the anchor institution for the other social services, affordable housing and commercial business space. This example of a significant conglomerate building might not be suited for the future site of the Go-Go Museum and Café on

Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE. However, the Sugar Hill Development does provide elements of possibility. The housing vulnerability of Ward 8 necessitates the opportunity of city-funded affordable housing for artists and creative entrepreneurs. The increasing commercial rents jeopardizing over 100 small Black-owned businesses along Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue emphasizes the need for affordable business space to continue both economic stability and cultural identity.

Currently, a cooperative model vendor marketplace is part of the museum plans. The city government could underwrite this marketplace. If a more involved partnership is identified as a valuable enterprise, a community needs assessment would need to be implemented. This potential social impact investment would require resident input to ensure the resources meet community needs.

C. Collections Management and Research Resources

Much of go-go's historical objects are with their producers, not yet preserved in an archival institution. Conversations with community stakeholders convey hesitance to contribute to the District of Columbia Public Library System's Go-Go Archive, the only repository established solely for the genre in the District. The hesitation is due to the perceived lack of security of the archive, as materials have gone missing. The city may identify other collections management repositories better equipped to conserve and present collection materials. The Go-Go Museum and Café is a primary resource for access to scholars and others interested in go-go. It is recommended that the city identify holders of cultural assets to support the proprietorship to archives for maintenance and presentation. Educational institutions such as the Go-Go Museum, Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, and Howard University may support this collection process by duly preserving the items, creating opportunities for study, and presenting materials for a public audience.

D. Public Education Resources

It is recommended that attention and funding be contributed to professional learning opportunities. Folklore and related cultural expressions are an area currently without grantmaking or programmatic focus for the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities and other relevant governmental entities. *Don't Mute D.C.'s Go-Go Report* outlines recommendations for the transmission of community-based arts knowledge, skill, and protocol through a fellowship. DMDC's report includes other local and national examples of folklore specific artist programs such as The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) National Heritage Fellows. NEA Heritage Fellows are selected through a public nomination process and are awarded up to \$25,000.00. A recommended artist fellowship grant for go-go should be offered on artistic merit and experience. Beginner-level engagement should be afforded an apprenticeship program to

support the transmission of knowledge to the next generation. The apprenticeship allows the participants to grow in their respective areas, while the fellowship supports increased visibility of experienced artists. The awards would require public programming and a culminating project to be documented and placed into repositories' collections.

An apprenticeship held within pre-existing workforce development programs such as the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) can support budding cultural entrepreneurs. SYEP affords go-go related industries such as photography, venue management, band management, and graphic design attention and inclusion. Currently, 12% of SYEP employers are in the performing arts sector.¹³ Go-go inclusion will increase this percentile and broaden access to performing arts career opportunities, specifically within the entrepreneurial space, outside of the nonprofit sector.

¹³ Summer Youth Employment Program. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://webapps.does.dc.gov/OYP/OYPHome.html>

Business Development and Digital Expansion

The go-go ecosystem is dependent on the availability of venues to support its economic activity. Amid gentrification, the implications of the COVID-19, and other challenges, the go-go economy requires innovation and adaptability to thrive in new contexts. New ways of conducting business must develop in tandem with social distancing requirements, and with the trends of the cultural sector. Widely, experiences typically for a public audience such as concerts, lectures, and worship ceremonies are moving online. Online exposure is a great solution for social distancing; it affords space for connection, education, and commerce. Online streaming and social media are particularly useful for fields that are otherwise dependent on live interaction for sales appeal. Go-go bands have participated in this online shift with weekly performances since the stay at home order on March 30, 2020.

This section summarizes current challenges and opportunities for go-go musicians, especially younger acts. The section also summarizes the implications of COVID-19 on the go-go ecosystem. The collateral damage of COVID-19 further emphasizes the significant need for digitizing go-go. The development of business goes in tandem with digital expansion, equipping bands to traverse into new realms of visibility and commerce.

I. Barriers to Entry

Go-go entrepreneur and past band manager Ben Abba was mentioned a few times in conversation with go-go musicians because of his success and mentorship. Ben mentored younger bands, imparting tips on business development. Ben's management elevated TCB, a band influential to the bounce beat generation. TCB's ascension to a high demand reputation relied heavily on venue availability, street promotion, and audiences under 21. TCB's rise happened in the late 2000s when all age venues were still viable. The COVID-19 Pandemic has compounded challenges and barriers to the resources and tools that elevated TCB and other go-go bands a decade earlier.

For younger bands, a primary challenge is establishing an audience. Supporting the upfront costs of expenses specific to go-go is a challenge for younger bands, particularly those with members under 21 years old. The primary challenges discussed in previous sections are overlapping; business development requires a holistic approach to solutions.

II. Audience Cultivation

Ben credits the success of TCB to organic, word of mouth promotion. Street promotion is a challenge given the transient nature of the city, with community cultural shifts and the Black population migrating around and outside of the city. Hyperlocal relevance is a challenging terrain; neighborhood dynamics have shifted, cultural edifices and modalities for communication are hard variables. The COVID-19 Pandemic makes street promotion currently null in impact. However, the digital frontier is posed as a resource for younger bands to establish themselves, one that they may be better suited to excel. Word of mouth once fostered through bands talking in public spaces such as barbershops, basketball courts, and cookouts is now facilitated on social media. Bands have an opportunity to provide original content to keep the interest of their audience.

"At some point, you gonna have to end up throwing shows, whether a loss or not. That's the only way to become a headliner. If you keep opening for bands, you'll remain an opener band."

- Ben Abba, Go-Go Stakeholder

Social Media allows for bands of all levels of experience and visibility to hone their audience. Social media democratizes our public consciousness with burgeoning cultural producers bypassing traditional barriers to entry and "rites of passage." The digital realm provides solutions to issues identified from the COVID-19 Pandemic. Digital presence has improved the visibility and economic viability of go-go for years. Cameron Coles, the manager of Black Alley, attributes Black Alley's international success to YouTube, amongst other factors. Black Alley's music videos have garnered the attention of Vh1, and have been aired on national cable channel Vh1 Soul. Ben Abba recommends the use of app Tik Tok to capitalize on the national dance trend. Ben compares the potential of Tik Tok to dances birthed from the bounce beat generation a decade earlier.

III. Impacts of COVID-19 on Go-Go's Economy

"Go-go industry is in dire need of intervention—but this need not only be a bailout. This report urges the city not to waste this crisis and to seize the moment to make critical investments in a previously untapped tourism resource that will rebound after the Pandemic. Go-go music is akin to the Cherry Blossoms that sprout each Spring, or the sounds of the Potomac River. It is a vital, irreplaceable natural resource. As we mark a full year of art and activism, this report describes how to protect Go-Go as an essential voice for future generations of Washingtonians—and share it with the world."

- *DMDC Go-Go How to Make Go-Go Official Post COVID-19*

DMDC, through its report, surveys, and digital programs, continues to advocate for go-go, explicitly targeting the impacts of COVID-19. Attention on go-go should not only concern the integration and accommodation for the digital realm but should strategize solutions for when the economy reopens. As the economy slowly reopens, live entertainment is expected to be one of the last sectors to resume business per usual.¹⁴ As a genre with barriers before COVID-19, keen attention should be drawn to prepare solutions. The recommendations of this section acknowledge the impacts of COVID-19 and suggest development to aid during and post-pandemic.

IV. Present and Potential Revenue Streams

Identified revenue streams for go-go bands include local performance, touring, digital music sales/streams, and merchandise. The lack of accessibility to the audience due to record levels of gentrification is exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Go-go has quickly adapted to the new digital realm. Bands play weekly, garnering thousands of views. As the environment shifted from physical to digital, so did the audience participation. The audience's engagement is not heard but read in the comments. The lead talker retains the call and response activity by responding to comments in real-time. Emojis are used to substitute other elements of the live experience, and there are sidebar conversations. This example of the transition to the digital realm reflects the need for continued adaptability.

The majority of the performances are live streamed through social media accounts and are free to access. However, some streams serve as fundraisers with no fee for entry but promote processes to donate. Backyard Band, Black Alley, and Junkyard Band were amongst those to participate in fundraising concerts. Funds supported band members and technical staff who would otherwise lose performance-related income due to social distancing measures. Bands may consider the development of new streaming platforms and social networks to further monetize in their digital activities.

The response to the COVID-19 Pandemic demonstrates the interest in digitally available go-go, and its potential to garner new audiences. On March 17th, over 2,500 tuned into a Backyard Band performance. Data from the music streaming platform Spotify offers statistics on one digital audience. Black Alley, Backyard Band, Rare Essence, Trouble Funk, and Chuck Brown have a monthly average of over 100,000 listeners combined. While Chuck Brown has the most extensive discography, renowned go-go act E.U. (Experience Unlimited) has the highest streams with over 105,000 plays. E.U.'s success is due in part to the genre-defining song "Da Butt" featured in Spike Lee's 1988 film *School Daze*. Bounce beat music lives mainly on Soundcloud,

¹⁴ Elis, N. (2020, April 11). Arts, struggling to survive pandemic, face a longer road to recovery. Retrieved from <https://thehill.com/homesnews/coronavirus-report/492301-arts-struggling-to-survive-pandemic-face-a-longer-road-to-recovery>

a platform intended for independent artists. New Impressionz, XIB, and New Impressionz have over 5,000 followers, while promotional account XclusiveGoGo only reaches over 6,000.

Many bands do not own their music online and are not able to properly promote and distribute a saleable product. Recorded audio from live events is posted on YouTube by audience members. In an example, New Impressionz's 2010 album *Statement to the Game* was never posted on their official channel. However, the full album and individual tracks are featured on dozens of other channels. The owners of the channels are widely unknown, but mainly feature fan-recorded content and unofficially released studio recordings. The majority of go-go related content online is not posted from the band or a band affiliate. New Impressionz allowed the music to remain up as a promotion. Their hit song "Don't Say You Will" has over 4 million views and is not posted on their channel. The average revenue from YouTube monetization is \$0.18 per view¹⁵; New Impressionz could have potentially earned \$720,000 from "Don't Say You Will".

Craig Ackerson, personality and show host for Go-Go Radio Live mentioned the scarce digital availability of high quality, accessible go-go as a challenge for his radio program. Craig hosts *Crank Huntin'*, a show aimed at introducing new go-go. However, Craig finds the music difficult to source, although some acts do bring music to the station for promotion. Go-go musicians will need to move performances and recording catalogs online to take advantage of the streaming and sales spaces. Online streaming may be a challenge for many bands who cover copyright music without a license. However, even the contemporary original songs have yet to navigate to the lucrative digital space.

"I don't buy any music online. I wouldn't mind every week shelling out money, I would love to be able to do that, but I can't. I never buy music from an online retailer because it's simply not there."

- Craig Ackerson, DJ Personality

Craig sources the majority of his music from YouTube, and there he faces challenges of capturing recordings with quality sound. The majority of bounce beat songs on Youtube are raw, unedited audio. Craig also obtains music from CD stores, which carries him to Baltimore to explore the bins of an old flea market. Bands do submit music, and some groups even pay to have their music heard by Go-Go Radio Live's 65 thousand monthly listeners.

Go-Go Radio Live's primary source of income is from its Go-Go Tix website that serves as a basin of promotional materials for go-go performances and events. Go-Go Radio Live is a pioneer bringing go-go online. However, as an intermediary, they do need more support from the

¹⁵ How Much Do YouTubers Make? - [A YouTuber's Earnings Calculator]. Retrieved from <https://influencermarketinghub.com/how-much-do-youtubers-make/>

musicians to develop their platform further and broaden the music presented to include bounce beat and younger acts.

For bounce beat bands and younger acts to maintain the same level of relevance as the more established acts, touring is required. Go-go bands frequently tour the south, as much of the music is introduced on the campuses of Historical Black Colleges and Universities. Recently, those with an international appeal have traveled abroad. The digital space will support the dissemination of go-go, especially the visibility on streaming platforms. International audiences grant the opportunity for an audience likely to commemorate the experience by purchasing merchandise. Black Alley is an example of a band that has used the internet to their advantage. Black Alley garnered a national audience by touring small festivals, often expecting to break even or make a small loss. However, such minor fiscal setbacks have proven to produce long term results. Band manager Cam Coles recalls one of their first festivals was a small folklife festival in Boston. The band packed a van and drove to the performance; till this day, data traces listeners to the Boston area.

Recommendations

A. Community-Organized Non-Profit

- A non-profit organization for the sole purpose of go-go business development and support is recommended. This organized body should be composed of experienced go-go musicians seeking to mentor younger musicians, offering a space for education and relationship building. The organization's network offers an opportunity for feedback, critique, and dialog to address generational differences. The organizations' programs and activities connect educational resources to members and the larger public. Target programmatic areas may include: performance and cultural documentation, musicianship, business development, and digital marketing.

B. Start-Up Capital for Bands and Go-Go Entrepreneurs

- A funding base and programmatic system may be administered by the go-go non-profit, or a pre-existing D.C. agency such as the Commission on the Arts and Humanities, or the Small Business Resource Center. A grant or microloan program specific to the go-go sector will be developed to assist start-up capital procurement, provide educational resources, and network cultivation to the go-go economy. The program should lead to initial contractual, performance, and sales opportunities. This program will be developed with current members of the community, and with metrics of success determined both by program participation and success in the marketplace upon grant program/loan term completion.

- For this go-go specific start-up funding, a model comparable to the D.C. Dream Grant administered by the Department of Small and Local Business Development is recommended. The grant awards up to \$10,000.00 to businesses located in ward 7 and 8 with less than five members. Similar eligibility may be required for participation in the go-go program. Individual applicants should be accepted to support go-go entrepreneurs in related industries that primarily service bands, venues, and management.

C. Funding for Travel/ Sister City Program

- Washington, D.C. is a culturally diverse city; the Smithsonian Institution, local universities, and over 175 international embassies share cultural experiences and values. Washington D.C. has 15 official sister cities, signed agreements commit the cities to mutually beneficial exchange opportunities.

These partnerships create opportunities for the sister cities to learn from each other in the areas of economic development, education, social, youth, and cultural projects or exchanges and government administration. Four to five specific projects are developed under each relationship.¹⁶

One recommendation is a go-go cultural exchange program for each sister city. Potentially 15 bands may travel internationally sharing D.C. culture, and offering a new area of interest for future D.C. visitors and tourists.

- Washington D.C. has become a home for large festivals, amongst the largest are Broccoli City Festival and The D.C. Jazz Festival. These events bring international artists to Washington, D.C., often introducing acts and their musical styles to new audiences. D.C. should support its homegrown artists to perform in festivals in other cities. It is recommended that a travel fund be established to help support the touring of go-go musicians and artists. The funds not only benefit the bands in promotion and capital but help share the distinct culture of the city.

D. Technical Assistance Programs and Grants

Technical Assistance for the cultural sector may greatly support D.C.'s broad arts arena, aiding sustainability during the COVID-19 Pandemic. For go-go specifically, digital learning experiences may also cover tips for the reopening of the economy and availability to perform for live audiences. These digital trainings may include high-quality audio and video recording, web design, social media marketing, and industry-specific business development. These programs may be administered by an existing

¹⁶ DC Sister Cities. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://os.dc.gov/service/dc-sister-cities>

government affiliate such as DCCA. Additionally, the instruction may be serviced through an existing non-profit or the aforementioned new go-go non-profit.

Tourism Infrastructure

I. Key Findings

New Orleans is home to Jazz, and Nashville is the epicenter of the country music world. Washington's homegrown sound is widely acknowledged locally but has yet to represent the district outside of the beltway. Tourism infrastructure for go-go would support experiences beyond the monuments. Washington, D.C., is a vibrant city with a fun, inter-generational artform. The inclusion of go-go as a promoted tourism opportunity requires attention to spaces that support access for diverse audiences.

The tourism sector may require its own study to capture information relevant to the go-go community.

Recommendations

- Investment into Museum cafe to include performance space
 - The recommendations of the prior sections, Venues, and Business Development, also support the tourism infrastructure. Increased availability to performance space is vital to growing a tourism culture around go-go. Specifically, investment into the Go-Go Museum and Cafe should be a particular funding focus. Supporting an educational resource with an ongoing performance calendar, and nearby dining and retail experiences will produce a compounding impact. As Historic Anacostia further develops, the District is in a position to safeguard, stimulate, and revitalize some of the cultural and economic activity. In an example, a city investment in affordable retail space for businesses, or an incubator for micro-leases will support the over 100 Black-owned businesses facing increasing rents. City investment may promote this area as a cultural center.
- Marketing
 - Washington.Org and CulturalTourismDC.Org are the official sites offering resources to attractions, dining, and other experiences relevant to tourists. It is recommended that go-go be afforded more attention on the site, and have its robust presence on the website given its status as the Official Music of D.C. Currently, four of the 107 arts and entertainment venues listed play go-go regularly. The Go-Go Symphony is the only go-go affiliated band listed under the registry of Theatre and Performing Arts activities. The Go-Go Symphony is an anomaly, as indicated by the hyphenated blend of the band's name. The inclusion of the Go-Go Symphony may be argued as a gentrifying go-go; this racially blended band looks and sounds different than the majority of go-go acts.

Other cities proudly support, embrace, and promote local heritage, and may be looked at for inspiration. New Orleans is known for its lively jazz culture. "New Orleans Music" on VisitNewOrleans.com gives ample space to its beloved culture. The page features an active live music calendar, break down of nightclubs by genre, the inclusion of stores that sell music-related merchandise. A separate page covers the musical history of New Orleans, highlighting nine musical styles and three famous musicians in a descriptive film profile. Destination D.C. may receive support from DCCAH to research and more thoroughly present go-go specific activity.

A committee of go-go stakeholders is recommended to assess the branding of go-go, transmitting information to an external contractor to produce new content for official tourism resources. Websites and promotional materials should be updated to an expanding listing of go-go related resources. The websites and materials should afford attention to the historical and cultural significance of the genre. Marketing should also include signage around the city.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Go-Go Community Sustainability Report* has produced a series of recommendations with public-private partnerships developed by industry stakeholders. The recommendations respond to the key challenges: venue space, educational resources, business development, and tourism infrastructure. Government support is central to the report, as go-go has faced specific challenges supported by governmental actions. These investment opportunities not only benefit the go-go cultural ecosystem but are embedded with recommendations that promote social good.

Go-go is now the Official Music of D.C., and for decades it has maintained a role as a crucial cultural asset embedded with its own history, vernacular, and values. As D.C. shares this cultural asset with new residents and visitors, the current activity, producers, and spaces must be supported. As these recommendations are holistic solutions with multiple benefits, the implementation strategy should be a comprehensive, collaborative process.

This study is a part of increasing the scholarship of go-go intended to produce results that support its sustainability. While the variety of go-go related industries are mentioned, they are not covered in depth. This research looks specifically at the economy of go-go performance; further research would reveal more about the cultural impacts, international influences, and related creative industries.

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Date: _____
4/6/2020

Date

Maleke Glee, Ethnographer

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walter hansborough

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Name: Ben adda _____

Signature:  _____

Email Address: Selfmade1ent@gmail.com _____

Phone Number: _____

Date: 05 / 05 / 2020 _____

05 / 05 / 2020

Date



Maleke Glee, Ethnographer

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Craig Ackerson

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Craig Ackerson

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Phone Number: _____

4/17/2020

Date: _____

Date

Maleke Glee, Ethnographer

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By signing I consent to:

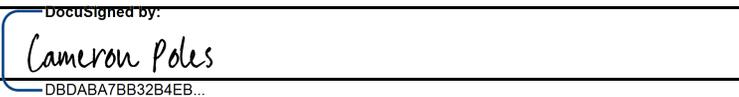
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Name: Cameron Poles

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May 2020
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Background and Introduction

Growing up in Prince George's County, Maryland, go-go was inescapable. Until high school, I experienced go-go through my family. Go-go was distant, something I considered exclusive to older generations. I cultivated my own relationship with go-go at Suitland High School, located on the border of Washington, D.C. and Prince George's County, Maryland. The location of the school is particularly relevant to go-go, a genre that emphasizes neighborhood pride. Suitland is a melting pot, students from all over the county attend the visual and performing arts magnet school. Additionally, many residents of Southeast, D.C. would attend Suitland, finding loopholes to support their attendance. The diverse student body produced a culture of neighborhood pride. Go-go was an integral ingredient of neighborhood identity and expression. The response to the lead talkers' shout outs would instantly identify attendees' home neighborhood. "Aye...41, Benning Road, Trinidad, Palmer Park, Landova " are just a few of the neighborhoods that were popular at Suitland, indicated by loud responses at the go-go.

Attending Howard University, I came into contact with peers from all over the world. My pride established in high school was emphasized in my college experience. It was in my undergraduate years that I realized the dwindling number of go-go performances. The bands I listened to a few years earlier in high school now had a scarce performance roster. Attending go-gos at the Howard Theatre, Takoma Station, Aqua, and Society, I was presumably one of the youngest audience members. The shift experienced in the go-go community was directly related to the changes happening in my Northwest neighborhood. The diminished availability of go-go, particularly for listeners of bounce beat, was a residual effect of the city-wide gentrification.

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I entered the MACS program not exactly sure how my scholarship would manifest, but I desired a space to learn more about go-go, and quite broadly the challenges of globalization and mass migration on local cultural economies. I close my MACS experience with the *Go-Go Community Sustainability Report*, a document with a local focus but embedded research methods that may be applied globally.

The *Go-Go Community Sustainability Report* is a white paper that produces policy recommendations informed by community based participatory research (CBPR). This assignment was selected to strengthen my research ability, and to gain experience in writing for diverse audiences. The report should be relevant for all stakeholders included in the research, the recommended implementation partners, and the broader community.

The go-go community is resilient, and their values reflect the central themes of MACS curricula. Although it may not be described with the same language, the go-go community has identified modalities of documentation and sustainability. The go-go community has its own cultural norms, modes of communication, and commerce. I look to support go-go with documentation projects, and as an intermediary for multi-partner, policy informed engagements.

The capstone has taught me about my strengths and areas of growth that will allow me to achieve my goals. The *Go-Go Community Sustainability Report* applies lessons from the entirety of my MACS experience, the capstone project also reflects all learning outcomes of the MACS program, expounded in the next page. Particular course readings and notes that were relevant to this process were from Cultural Policy, Arts and Social Change, Cultural Partnerships, and a majority of the management credit courses.

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Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability Learning Outcomes

Cultural Sustainability Cultural Practices and Practical Uses

The recommendations of the report address both cultural practice sustainability and its positive effects on the social lives of patrons and producers. The research demonstrates a complicated correlation between the treatment of go-go and that of Washington's native Black population. As such, the produced recommendations support the sustainability of the genre and communal benefits that address city inequities.

Additionally, as mentioned briefly in the report, go-go itself is a genre with practical uses. Go-go community stakeholders are well respected in the community for their progressive social posture, which they avail their go-go platform to support. As I continue in this research area, and further support the go-go community through advocacy and developing educational tools, I will keep this vital element in the forefront of inquiry and activity.

Both the genre, and the report itself have practical applications. The genre is a historicizing asset and a tool of social justice. The report, producing investment and policy recommendations, provide tangible actions for more abstract goals such as heritage preservation. I look forward to maintaining the relationships established through this process, and continuing a democratized process of documentation that is narrated by the community.

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Exhibit professional and ethical responsibility that foster community self-determination and empower community efforts in cultural documentation, preservation, revitalization and social equity.

The go-go community is self-determined and empowered; for that reason, I believe my research was embraced. My research aim supports the current community building activity. The community's embrace and support reflect the benefits of an intermediary party placing authority with the community. My position as a participant-observer is informed by my longtime patronage as an audience member. My familiarity with the codes and behaviors of the genre allowed me to maneuver in spaces with ease. I was familiar with relevant venues, resources, and community stakeholders. Additionally, my relationships supported my introduction with go-go stakeholders. For example, my good friend Alex Vaughn is a local musician who connected me with past New Impressionz member Walt Hansborough.

I am not a producer of the genre; my daily social, professional, and creative life does not involve go-go. However, my experience as a longtime audience member provided a social capital. I was not perceived as someone capitalizing on the genre, which is a trend of the current moment. The social media attention around #DontMuteDC has garnered an impressive response with many millennials. The seemingly new embrace, particularly expressed social media and not related public demonstrations, receives mixed reception from older generations. The millennial reception depends on how their public communication and programs are sourced, cited, and how longtime producers are involved. The generational differences reflect broader stances on social media, activism and cultural continuity that are not specific to go-go but are interrelated.

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Feeling a part of the community, and to some extent having an understanding of community values and temperament, I did not deal with many ethical quarrels or uncertainties. However, ahead of engaging in the research, I intended to ask for financial information. I wanted to gauge how much personal income came from go-go, and how the availability of go-go related income had changed over the years. Such information did not manifest in conversation, given its lessened relevance in this study. Additionally, my hesitance to divulge personal income related questions was informed by a potential skepticism from the interviewees, and from my own capacity. I am not an economist and did not have the time or current skill set to interpret the findings from a small sample. That was a major lesson from this process, to take my personal capacity into consideration. As the time progressed, my captivation expanded the research purview, placing pressure on the timeline.

While information regarding personal income was not asked, in preparation to request more confidential information, I orally emphasized consent. I continuously reminded the participants that their words were voluntary and that any information may be omitted upon request. The consent forms provided a document of mutual agreement, but I also relied on my perception of body language and other non-verbal cues to assess the direction of the dialog.

The implementation of the policies will also emphasize community involvement for continued documentation, preservation, revitalization, and social equity actions. Go-go has adapted to the city's ever-evolving change, and most recently, adapted to the digital landscape. I look forward to serving as an intermediary as the recommended policy is implemented alongside go-go community members.

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**Design undertake and critique cultural documentation field projects.
Devise, implement and evaluate actions that support cultural sustainability.**

As I sought information on the city government's history with go-go, the *DC Cultural Plan* presented itself as an essential document. While the plan addressed the implications of rapid development in the cultural sector, particularly that of community and heritage-based arts, it did not provide tangible solutions. The *Go-Go Community Sustainability Plan* is a de-facto addendum to the *DC Cultural Plan*, outlining go-go specific recommendations as informed by primary research.

It is unclear if the recommendations of the *DC Cultural Plan* have begun implementation. The *DC Cultural Plan's* execution cannot be critiqued yet, but the scope of the research may. The information presented in the plan reflects the areas of inquiry and potential action. I do look forward to this project having relevance outside of the purview of a capstone requirement. As the plan progresses, I will rely on the learnings from the MACS program to evaluate the success of the implementation process and its results.

Identify and demonstrate a range of professional management skills that contribute to organizational sustainability

In this capstone project, I leaned heavily on the readings from Cultural Partnerships to develop a research process that elicited information from community members. As I engaged with various community members, the purview of the interviews adjusted, often expounding the scope, or providing specificity related to the interviewees' field position. The implementation of the report's recommendations enlists the continued participation of go-go stakeholders. Almost all recommendations of the report require additional research or advisement.

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Additionally, with experience in the non-profit sector, and with an understanding of relevant organizations in the district, activity in that sector is recommended. The management of new or existing non-profits may support the goals of the report. The implementation of this report requires a project manager or intermediary to ensure the interrelated activities are occurring in a complimentary manner. I look forward to further implementing and developing my management skills across industries and with diverse partners working toward specific goals.

Identify strategies for cultivating a professional network of practitioners and organizations in support of a community of practice

_____I further developed my professional network through this capstone project. I targeted specific individuals who reflect the broad span of professions that are part of the go-go economy. In the process of this research, I began involvement with Don't Mute D.C., and am a recent addition to their Go-Go Museum and Café Task Force. The research process placed me in conversation with key members of the community. Community-wide network cultivation strategy and organizing practitioners for a community goal are reflected in the recommendations.

I began my observation of the go-go community in the courses Cultural Documentation: Field Lab and Ethnographic Methodologies: Research. In those courses, I began to introduce myself to go-go stakeholders, and it was considerably an easy process. The go-go stakeholders want to talk and tell their stories. I think the excitement around the Go-Go Museum exemplifies this desire to share history, to have it recorded, documented, and presented by its producers.

While the network cultivation did not present any challenges; there were a few outliers who were consistently unavailable. I wanted to incorporate two participants for each

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entrepreneurial area represented in the ecosystem. However, this research only incorporates those who are primarily engaged with band management and performance. For future studies I may focus attention on the related cultural producers such as photographers, fashion designers, and technical support providers.

The Implications of COVID-19

The COVID-19 Pandemic altered my research process and presented a new area of inquiry. Go-go, like the broader cultural sector, faced new challenges. Drafting recommendations, I intend to support to fruition require that I take implications of this pandemic into consideration. I began to watch go-go performances online casually and became quite excited by the interaction occurring in the comments. The audience was recreating the club experience, taking drink orders, celebrating birthdays, and making song requests. The live splendor of go-go had shifted to its new environment. As considerations to sustain and grow the cultural ecosystem came to mind, the internet presented a new frontier.

Working for the Prince George's Arts and Humanities Council (PGAHC) provided insight into the ways local governments and nonprofits could support artists in this unprecedented time. In my role as the Senior Program Manager, I am responsible for our grant programs and for public programming throughout Prince George's County. COVID-19 had shifted my day to day tasks as the response to COVID-19 took an organizational priority. Nearly 50% of our grant budget, reserved for county artists and non-profits, was reallocated to provide need-based grants to relieve small businesses, nonprofits and artists impacted by COVID-19. There is ongoing fundraising to aid the available grant dollars, and support from council members is greatly beneficial. Additionally, our programs shifted online, and while an

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unexpected change, it produced positive network expansion. Online we encountered cultural producers and artists whom we might not have met in our normal work environment and activities. My work with PGAHC mirrors some of the activity of the go-go community and provides an example of governmental support in the arts and cultural sector. While talks of the “new normal” and “back to normal” interchangeably court aspirational conversations, one truth remains constant, that adaptability is required. The recommendations of the report are not fixed to one environment or process of implementation given the uncertain recovery time.

The Go-Go Community Sustainability Report

Methodological Approaches

With limited experience in ethnographic research aimed at policy recommendations, I relied on theories to enact the research with social responsibility and equity. The following methods informed how research was conducted.

Interpretive Research

Interpretive Research Methods were employed to summate the quantitative data pulled from oral histories and simple surveys. Most of go-go’s history, particularly its economic activity, is under-documented. Extracting critical remarks on economic vitality supports the interpretation of qualitative data with quantitative value. One of the principle goals of this Capstone is to produce the base analysis to be further explored by a more extensive body of research. This research approach involves the unique information available through creative entrepreneurs, academics, or city planning, professional partnerships.

The findings of the research were initially to be presented on an interactive website, accessible by the general public. The public accessibility requires that the research and its

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interpretation be comprehensible and useful for diverse audiences. In phase two of the research, digital surveys will be made available for widespread public participation. Analysis of the larger, public pool of information is contingent on funding and the availability of a larger, organized team of researchers.

Convivial Research

Convivial research reorients the traditional modalities of policy-driven social assessments. This democratic and participatory approach asserts lived experience as valuable knowledge. Convivial research relates to the engagement of academics, artists, and participants, not only in the research findings but in the research strategy, in the metrics of success and methodological activities. Togetherness is central in this theoretical approach and may support an understanding of the implications of go-go's migration informed by gentrification pricing out businesses and residents. This is where cultural expressions of performance, aesthetics, and commercial exchange may be reviewed and understood, through field observations codified with insider expertise.

Social Impact Investment

Social impact investment involves ventures interested in social improvement and revenue gain. As it relates to this study and its recommendations, the social impact investment is multi-industry. The areas of research interest and systemic improvement actions are informed by city regulation that has enforced constraints on go-go, new legislation could further the sustainability

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and continuity of go-go. The city government plays an essential role in the successful realization of the plan through participation and systemic funding streams. The successful completion of this plan may present new models for heritage preservation.

Methodology

I view this research as multi-phased, with the first phase being complete with the Capstone project. The second phase, which covers a broader spectrum of go-go production requires more time and a larger research body with diverse, complementary skills.

PHASE ONE

The findings of the report reflect the first phase of a larger project implementation. In phase one, surveys and oral histories were collected from a small sample of the go-go economy. Existing academic, journalistic and city government documents placed personal narratives specifically within historical, political, regional and field context. This research process was accomplished in a three-month period. A citywide and regional understanding of this creative economy's size, economic contribution, demographic data, and response to the rapid city changes requires a larger body of research. Phase two will require a calendar year of observation to understand trends, especially as they relate to tourism. This research also requires the assembly of a diverse steering committee.

Content and Focus Areas

Survey of Field

The Capstone surveyed the economic activity of the field through collected and analyzed data. The specific focus of this content area is the creation of economic activities and essential traits that have provided stability. The survey of the field also defines the ecosystem's current

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challenges, triumphs, and aspirations. This qualitative information demonstrates the community ideas, ideally presented to respective governmental parties.

Cultural Policy

Cultural Policy is a content area that is presented in research and through the application of the research in methodological frameworks. Cultural policy was intended to be cited through the use of case studies, highlighting cities that have applied research to facilitate planning for cultural infrastructure, tourism, and historic preservation. The exploration of tourism and cultural plans by other major cities will be beneficial in the second phase of this research.

Impacts of Gentrification

There is a plethora of scholarship surrounding the impacts of gentrification. Studies even delve into the particulars of Washington, D.C.'s historically rapid change. However, in my current research, I have found little information on the effects of the displacement of underground creative economies. This Capstone, both in primary research and the application from the existing text, expounds on the impact of gentrification on cultural continuity and economic stability. This is an area of opportunity to be further explored.

Cultural Continuity

Through the collected oral histories, this Capstone presents an overview of Go-Go's continuity. The intended outcome of the presented rationale cultural continuity is to establish sustainable models to enact and support this transmission of cultural musical tradition.

Literature Review

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The literary resources below were instrumental in designing the research process and identifying common themes to investigate further. These texts particularly provided case studies of comparable investigations and policy recommendations.

Relevant Methodologies/Case Studies

Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor^[1] displays a variety of techniques to garner community trust, namely through strategic network building, initiated by trusted stakeholders. The study by Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh looks at the low-income community of Maquis Park, a predominantly Black neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois. While the majority of the study surrounds drug and gang activity, through its intersectional approach, it presents an analysis of this insular underground economy. The economy is not solely comprised of drug activity, but also includes service industry work, artisan products, religious institutions, and other self-employed professionals. The study presents the community as thriving. However, its system of monetary exchange is under constant surveillance, threatened to be criminalized. Venkatesh's work brought him into unsafe spaces and handling very confidential information that risks the safety of community members. Venkatesh's transparent telling of successes, challenges, and shortcomings offer methodological processes, especially those regarding self-orientation, fieldnotes, and interpretive processes.

Shifting Neighborhoods, Gentrification, and Cultural Displacement in American Cities^[2] is a National Community Reinvestment Coalition study spanning 2000-2013. The study focuses on four gentrifying cities, including Washington, D.C. Through the use of qualitative research, the study foregrounds the experience of residents and the general public. While presenting information from all strata of the community, it does not present them in a top-down or

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hierarchical mode. This research is supported by specific information about Washington, D.C, presented in the study. The processes and interpretation tools employed are guiding tools in the Capstone process.

Cultural Policy & Cultural Continuity

Bau Graves' *Cultural Democracy: The Arts, Community, and the Public Purpose*^[3] is a hallmark text shaping my understanding of the field. The presented scholarship and the potentiality of its generative use of theoretical frameworks will be applied in this Capstone. The book presents a plethora of theoretical claims that were implicitly gauged through the research. While Graves' offers the 'why' to the work of cultural production, advocacy, and equitable planning, Catherine Grant lends attention to the "how."

Music Endangerment: How Language Maintenance Can Help^[4] is positioned as a text with a practical use similar to the aims of this Capstone. Catherine Grant organizes and presents this research in an applicable method, resonating primarily with the musicians. The book outlines replicable tools to define a music genre and identify its strengths and challenges. Grant, in her connection of music and language preservation, helps to connect another referenced text.

Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms^[5] by Ngugi wa Thiong'o theorizes the necessary tools to recenter African language and its ontological vocations. Thiong'o and Grant both investigate the historical trends which have produced the current climate of endangerment; they explore tools in tandem with the community to center their knowledge and ability to preserve their cultural products.

Grant hypothesizes that the digitization of historical genres will better support their cultural relevance, means of transmission, and economic growth. This shift may be further

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inferred from Go-Go entrepreneur Donald Campbell's aims to digitize his intensive collection of Go-Go CD's. In speaking about the initial #DontMuteDC protests that were sparked by noise complaints of his business, he notes "...that the hundreds of protesters coming to the store could not patronize his music collection because they do not have CD players. So he has decided to use his collection of upward of 30,000 live go-go recordings to set up an online subscription service."⁶

Local Music Collections: Strategies for Digital Access, Presentation, and Preservation—A Case Study^[7] follows the Saskatchewan Music Collection (SMC) held at the University of Saskatchewan. The case study details the process for digitizing tools to garner additional scholarship and public interest in the genre. I am particularly interested in the legal compliances outlined and the tools of ownership and monetization. While the scholarship around Go-Go is increasing, I look forward to adding the economic assessment of the arena.

Go-Go Scholarship

Natalie Hopkinson's *Go-Go Live: The Musical Life and Death of a Chocolate City*^[8] provides information on Go-Go's historical foundation and detailed analysis of its distinctive musicality and performance culture. Hopkinson has authored several articles and essays that further expound on the genre, and contemporaneously track its evolution. Kato Hammond also provides a full text to be referenced. *Take Me Out The Go-Go: The True Story Of A Music Culture And The Impact It Made On The Life Of One Man*^[9] is autoethnography that provides essential cultural assets outlined in venues, moments, and persons of cultural significance. This Capstone aims to engage both authors directly in the research.

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The Capstone's relevance to the field is garnered through the produced scholarship and its processes to garner the information. The referenced material of the Capstone involves the broader field of ethnography and cultural advocacy, and the specifics of the genre. These research areas serve as a starting point for the research; however, it is expected that more source material will surface as the work takes shape.

The *Washington City Paper* and other journalistic sources produced vital information on significant moments of go-go's history. Particularly, the documentation in April 2019, when the #DontMuteDC movement began and was heightened by social media. As I progress in this work, I look to use social media as a research tool. Social Media is a democratized arena that offers real time nuance, authentically developed as posts may reflect personal history and attitudes rather than non partisan or objective reception.

Conclusion

I indeed came into this process with expectations, many of which were satisfied. However, one surprise was the lackluster embrace of the new status of go-go, as the Official Music of D.C. However, that community response was widely telling, and it is contextualized with the history of go-go and the D.C. government. Through this nuance, I learned that every bit of information is valuable, a halt is not an end, but an opportunity to reposition.

I thoroughly enjoyed the learning of this capstone process, not only the increased knowledge of the go-go sector but leaving with a better understanding of my research process. I decided to embark on this capstone because it is uncharted territory for me, and is an area that I will excel in with continued experience. I look to continue work in the go-go community and quite broadly to use culture to address social issues.

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My reader Natalie Hopinkson said it plain "at some point you have to press send." Well, here's that point. With this document, the remaining process of this milestone is my defense. I placed pressure on myself because the work forever felt undone. One comment would open several tabs and books, and a few days later, I would only have more than less on the to-do list. Engaging in this process as if I were completing the implementation of this research, I realized the necessity of a timeline. Of course, there are unexpected occurrences, like a global pandemic. But, regardless of the implications of our social distancing, I allowed my excitement to often get the best of me.

This observation is an exciting one; it not only allows me to adjust moving forward but affirms that there is more for me to do in this sector. I plan on continuing this research at the doctoral level and am grateful to have undergone this process. *The Go-Go Community Sustainability Report* is one of many policy papers to be authored by Maleke Glee. I am thankful for my committee and the continued support of Amy SKillma throughout my MACS journey.

Thank You.

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