

EAST VILLAGE ARTS DISTRICT Business/Neighborhood Activation Creative Brief:

What are we here to do:

The East Village Arts District sits at a fascinating (and frustrating *for them*) crossroads. By nearly every measure that matters to a neighborhood with artistic ambitions, it delivers: grassroots-run independent businesses, Art Deco architecture, murals and mosaics that tell a genuine story, and a community of owners and residents who are unusually invested in one another's success. And yet, the neighborhood remains largely undiscovered and underappreciated by the broader Long Beach community and virtually unknown to those arriving from outside the city.

Through our work on the DTLB Alliance Marketing and Communications Committee, our task is to define brand personality opportunities for the East Village Arts District that will be reinforced through a range of communication activities, including social media content and physical assets to be developed by the committee. The goal is not to invent an identity for this neighborhood. The identity exists. Our job is to sharpen it and make it impossible to overlook.

Who are we talking to (Key Audience Segments)

Our research focused on audience stakeholders who are directly connected to the East Village Arts District. While each has their own perspective, collective themes emerged that are essential to understanding and communicating the neighborhood's value.

- **Business Owners:** The operators of the East Village describe what they feel is a truly unique community within Downtown Long Beach. In fact, they see it as a distinct community that happens to sit within Downtown Long Beach. These are grassroots businesses, independently owned and deeply collaborative. Owners step outside their storefronts to activate the community around them, and they root for one another in a way that is rarely seen in a commercial district. They are also home to some genuinely pioneering offerings: a silversmith, refillable goods stores, tattoo studios, and other one-of-a-kind experiences that exist nowhere else in the city in comparable form. The challenge for these business owners is a lack of audience, not identity. People who discover the East Village are consistently surprised it exists, and that surprise is a brand asset that needs to be activated.
- **Residents:** East Village residents share the same deep investment in their neighborhood that is characteristic of Downtown Long Beach as a whole. What distinguishes the East Village resident, however, is the degree to which they have bought into a community-first philosophy. This is not simply a place to live. It is a

pocket of the city that offers something increasingly rare: genuine human connection, intentional slowness in a fast world, and a sense of shared purpose.

- **Visitors:** Visitors to the East Village largely arrive by accident or by appointment. They come for a specific business and leave without any sense of what surrounds them. Those traveling from outside of Long Beach often carry fear-based perceptions of the area that, once dispelled through an actual visit, frequently turn into surprise and shareworthy moments. The opportunity is to move visitors from single-purpose trips toward full neighborhood immersion, and to make the East Village the kind of place people plan to return to, with others in tow.

Biggest Challenges

- **Awareness:** The East Village is a hidden gem, and while there is some pride in that, the reality is that most people in Long Beach and beyond simply do not know this neighborhood exists.
- **Undefined Boundaries:** Stakeholders noted that people do not know where the East Village begins and ends. A neighborhood with no legible edges is difficult to market as a coherent destination. People cannot visit a place they cannot locate.
- **Safety Perception:** Visitors from outside of Long Beach in particular carry fear-based assumptions about the area that do not reflect the actual experience of being there. Overcoming this perception requires an authentic, people-forward communications strategy, not polished marketing language.
- **Lack of Anchors:** Beyond its highly niche and specialized offerings, the East Village currently lacks the kind of broad draw that compels repeat visits or extended stays. Without anchors to hold people in the neighborhood, converting a first-time visitor into a regular patron remains difficult.
- **Lost History:** The East Village carries a rich history rooted in its Art Deco architecture and the independent creative culture that has defined the neighborhood for decades. Stakeholders feel that this story has gone largely untold, and telling it is both an opportunity and a responsibility.

Opportunities and Recommendations

- **Own the “Third Space”:** The most compelling and strategically sound opportunity for the East Village is to own the “third space” positioning. In a city and culture saturated with transaction-based experiences, the East Village offers something categorically different: a place to show up, slow down, make something with your hands, and connect with other people. Stakeholders articulated this unprompted and with real conviction. Positioning the East Village as the antidote to the commerce-focused, screen-addicted pace of modern life is

not only authentic to what the neighborhood actually offers, it is a culturally resonant idea that will travel well beyond Long Beach. "Come get your hands dirty" is not a tagline. It is a worldview that belongs to the East Village.

- **Make the Arts Participatory** The East Village is not an arts district in the passive sense. It is not a gallery row you walk through and observe from a polite distance. The arts here are hands-on, interactive, and community-driven. Murals and mosaics are not decoration; they are declarations of values. The neighborhood actively invites people to learn a craft, make something, and take their time. Communications should reflect this active, participatory quality by featuring the doing rather than just the looking. Creative executions that show people engaged and creating will be far more powerful than aesthetic shots of empty streets and storefronts.
- **Lean into the Grit** Every polished urban neighborhood looks the same on social media. The East Village does not, and it should not try to. The authenticity of the neighborhood, its rough edges, its independent spirit, its Art Deco bones and hand-painted walls, is precisely what makes it worth visiting. Stakeholders explicitly called out the desire to lean into the grit. Creative executions should celebrate the texture, the imperfection, and the handmade quality of the neighborhood rather than softening it for broader appeal. There is a growing and well-documented cultural appetite for the real and the raw, and the East Village can credibly own that space.
- **Define the Territory** A neighborhood no one can locate is a neighborhood no one can visit. The East Village needs to draw its own map, both literally and figuratively. A pocket map distributed at local businesses and at key downtown touchpoints would address one of the most basic and solvable barriers to discovery. This map is also a natural extension of the neighborhood's handcrafted, tactile identity, and could itself become a collectible artifact if designed with the same care and character as the neighborhood it represents. Alongside the physical map, all communications should consistently reinforce the neighborhood's name and its geography so that over time the East Village becomes a place people can find, and come back to.
- **The New York Connection** Stakeholders noted an association with New York City's East Village, one of the most iconic arts and counterculture neighborhoods in the country, known for its independent spirit, creative energy, and refusal to be anything other than itself. This connection carries weight and is worth acknowledging in communications, not as imitation, but as a proud parallel. Long Beach's East Village carries the same grassroots DNA that made the New York version legendary. Leaning into this shared identity gives the neighborhood national context without losing its distinctly local soul, and it provides a useful

shorthand for audiences who may need a frame of reference before they are willing to make the trip.

Overall Takeaway / Strategy Recommendation:

The East Village is a Place to Be, Not Just a Place to Buy.

Stakeholders drew a clear and unprompted distinction between the East Village and the Retro Row corridor on 4th Street: "4th Street is consumer and purchase based. We are community and activity based." The East Village should own the idea that it is a place to be, not just a place to buy. For a generation of consumers who are actively seeking experiences over transactions, this is a powerful and differentiated promise. Every piece of communication should reinforce the idea that when you come to the East Village, you leave with something you made, someone you met, or a memory you didn't expect.