

Ear to the Ground: Listening as Resistance

Ear to the Ground is a creative, community-led project that gathers and shares everyday stories, especially those often left out of official histories. It's rooted in the belief that culture is shaped from the ground up and that communities have the power to resist cultural erasure (being ignored or forgotten) through storytelling, creativity and solidarity.

Through local projects, workshops and a growing digital archive, Ear to the Ground makes space for people to reflect, speak and listen deeply. It's a platform for what's called grassroots cultural resistance, that is, people using art and memory to push back against exclusion and to protect what matters to them.

Why It Matters

In many places around the world, policies that once protected diversity, inclusion, and cultural rights are being dismantled. When that happens, community stories risk being erased. Ear to the Ground stands against this trend by:

- Preserving unheard voices – especially from marginalised, indigenous, or working-class communities.
- Building cultural agency – giving communities the tools to share their own stories, not just rely on big institutions.
- Creating alternatives – helping communities develop local archives, art spaces and networks that can last and grow independently.
- Connecting globally – linking people across countries through shared struggles, stories and solidarity.

By supporting counter-archiving (community-led memory projects) and radical listening (listening as a political and creative act), Ear to the Ground helps reclaim cultural space and keeps it in community hands.

How It Works

Ear to the Ground brings people together in practical, creative ways. Its tools include:

- Walkshops & Listening Walks – guided walks through neighbourhoods, where people share memories, stories and reflections.
- Story Circles & Art Activities – workshops for photography, poetry, murals and other forms of co-created expression.

- Digital Archives – living collections of sounds, images and stories that evolve over time and are shaped by those who contribute.
- Responsive Design – the project adapts to what communities need and say. There’s no fixed template — it listens first, then acts.

The process is simple but powerful: gather, share, and protect what might otherwise be lost.

Local Stories, Global Reach

Though rooted in place, Ear to the Ground is part of a larger movement for cultural sustainability making sure communities everywhere can hold onto their histories and shape their futures. It links local action to transnational solidarity: communities learning from each other, collaborating across borders and resisting erasure together.

The project is also part of broader research into alternative cultural infrastructures: ways of doing cultural work that don’t rely on government or corporate approval. It explores how communities can build their own support systems, networks and spaces of meaning.

Examples in Action

● The Hopewell Project (Cleveland, USA)

An open invitation for people to explore and respond to their city’s layers of history from indigenous heritage to present-day experiences. Residents contribute stories, images and memories, building a “living record” of place.

● Opportunity Corridor Workshops

A series of summer 2025 creative sessions along an imagined extension of Opportunity Corridor in Cleveland. These events, mobile art, story circles, soundscapes cultivate connections across neighbourhoods and turn infrastructure into a space for cultural exchange.

● Rustlight Radiance Digital Archive

A growing digital archive of photos, field recordings and reflections from across Cleveland. It captures both decay and resilience documenting overlooked beauty and community strength.

An Invitation to Listen and Contribute

Ear to the Ground is more than a project, it's a movement of memory, resistance and imagination. It invites anyone – neighbours, artists, educators, elders, youth – to add their voice. Whether by joining a walk, sharing a story or just listening, you help build something lasting.

In a time when cultural rights are under threat, Ear to the Ground shows how local voices can shape global futures. It reminds us that listening is a radical act and that stories, once shared, become seeds for change.