City of SACRAMENTO

City of Sacramento

Arts and Entertainment Regulatory Review

PHASE 2: Sacramento Regulatory Review: Entertainment Related Sound

APRIL 2025/ PREPARED BY SOUND MUSIC CITIES

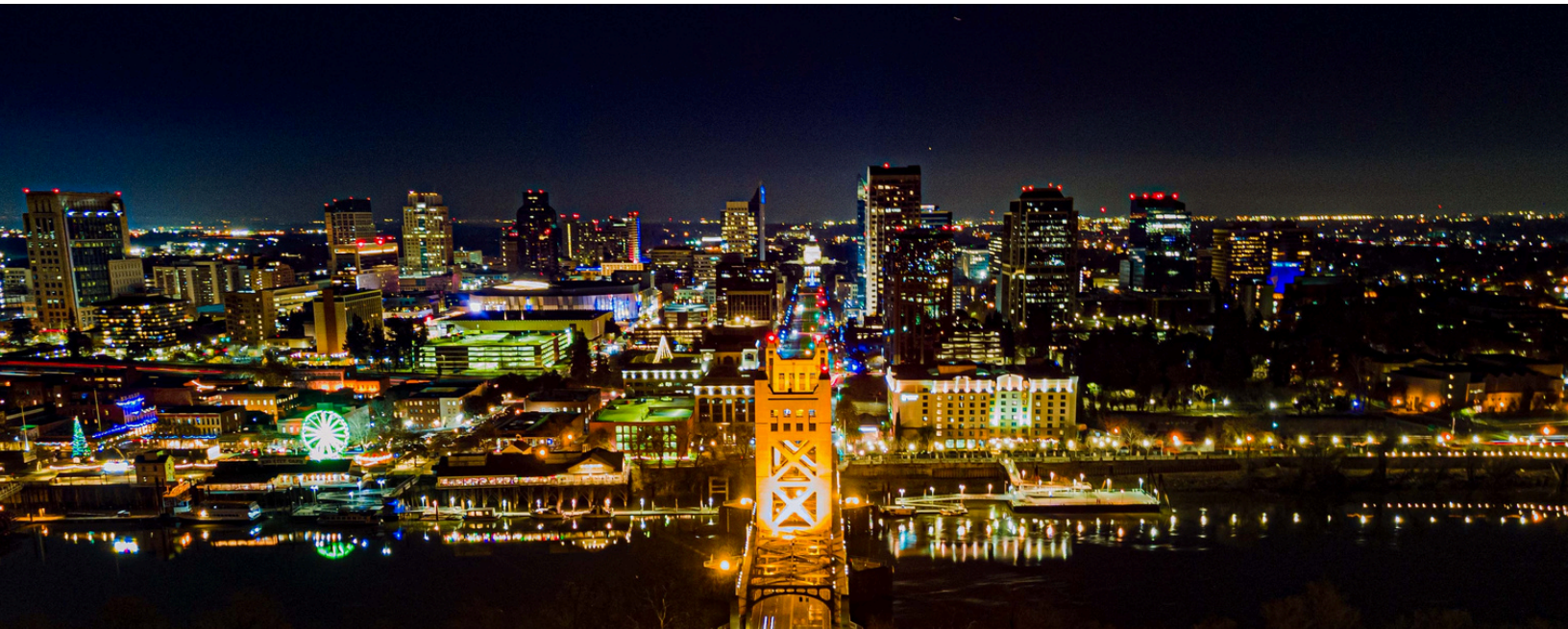
SOUND MUSIC CITIES

INTRODUCTION

Phase Two of the City of Sacramento's entertainment sound policy project focused on diagnostics, community engagement, and technical exploration to better understand how amplified sound impacts both residents and the local entertainment sector. Building on the foundational goals of Phase One, this phase combined field observations, Source-Path-Receiver (SPR) reviews, and stakeholder input to identify practical gaps in the City's current sound management approach and explore pathways for improvement.

This report reflects a policy philosophy grounded in practicality, flexibility, and shared responsibility. It is not a prescriptive ordinance draft, but a set of policy directions and illustrative language designed to help bridge the gap between community concerns, city operations, and enforceable standards. Some of the language offered in this report may ultimately be refined and codified into ordinance, but much of it is intended to inform departmental policies, permit conditions, and internal workflows, areas that are just as critical to effective sound management.

While the breadth of recommendations and terminology may initially feel overwhelming, it's important to view this report not as a rulebook, but as a framework for mindset change. The goal is to normalize sound management as a routine part of Sacramento's entertainment and permitting culture, supported by tools, expectations, and processes that are adaptable, transparent, and community-informed.



WHAT WE HEARD AND OBSERVED

Listening sessions and stakeholder interviews revealed a clear and consistent set of challenges with Sacramento's current approach to amplified sound management at venues and special events. Community members, residents, and industry professionals identified the following concerns:

- Inconsistent and last-minute permit approvals, with unclear criteria and lack of transparency
- Proximity to residential areas not being clearly factored into permit decisions or allowable sound levels
- Lack of consistent guidelines for outreach, notification, and real-time complaint resolution
- Difficulty managing low-end (bass) frequencies, and limited understanding of how these impact nearby homes
- A desire for a sliding scale of requirements based on location, zoning, and past performance
- Concerns over inadequate tools for enforcement or presenter responsiveness during events
- Strong support for post-event reviews and the introduction of an Accountable Official to coordinate citywide response
- Support for a more consistent outreach and education process—particularly for venues and events near residences—that includes a clear role for the City in verifying efforts and ensuring expectations are communicated to all parties.
- Suggestions to encourage higher-impact events to take place in areas with fewer residential sensitivities
- Recognition that the City should better leverage existing tools and resources rather than relying solely on new staffing

FIELD OBSERVATIONS & SOURCE-PATH-RECEIVER (SPR) INSIGHTS

As part of Phase Two, Sound Music Cities conducted three Source-Path-Receiver (SPR) evaluations—two at venues and one at a special event site. These assessments were designed to better understand how amplified sound travels through specific environments and interacts with surrounding land uses, particularly residential properties located within 100 to 600 feet of event or venue sites.

While several locations were not actively experiencing sound issues at the time of observation, two of the sites had recently faced sound-related complaints from nearby residents. In both cases, field evaluations revealed operational patterns worth noting. Most notably, open doors and windows during programming allowed amplified sound to travel well beyond the venue—particularly in tight urban corridors where sound reflects and carries. Even when the entertainment itself was appropriate for the space, these small but impactful oversights contributed directly to community concerns and frustration.

A shared issue across both cases was the lack of consistent communication with those most affected by sound. While venue operators had relationships with some neighbors, there appeared to be limited outreach to those most impacted. This selective communication tended to exacerbate tensions and reduce the potential for collaborative problem-solving. These examples also revealed inconsistent use of standard sound management practices, such as speaker orientation, internal containment, and a real-time plan for addressing concerns, all of which are essential for building trust and minimizing complaints in sound-sensitive environments.

CASE STUDY: SPECIAL EVENT MONITORING USING A SOUND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

On April 5th, Sound Music Cities observed an outdoor EDM event held on a vacant commercial lot that had recently received a two-year entertainment license, located in a mixed-use area of the city where surrounding residential properties were primarily multifamily. Despite the genre's heavy use of low-end frequencies, often a trigger for complaints, the event stood out as a strong example of how proactive outreach and real-time sound management can reduce conflict, even in challenging environments.

In this case, the event producer independently led sound mitigation efforts and demonstrated what effective sound management looks like. Their team:

- Conducted direct outreach to nearby property owners
- Provided a real-time contact for resident concerns
- Carried out interior sound measurements in adjacent residential buildings to understand how sound was being received—not just how it was being produced
- Made targeted adjustments focused on low-end frequencies, rather than volume alone

While a small number of complaints were received, it was clear that the event's intentional planning, transparency, and responsiveness minimized negative impacts and built trust with nearby residents. This stands in contrast to more reactive, enforcement-driven approaches that tend to intervene only after issues arise.

This case reinforces the idea that proactive outreach, monitoring, and real-time responsiveness should be standard expectations for events using outdoor amplified sound, especially in areas with low-frequency sensitivity. It also supports the call for clearer criteria within the City's event permitting and oversight framework.

RETHINKING MEASUREMENT LOCATION: TOWARD A SOURCE-PATH-RECEIVER APPROACH

Current enforcement of Sacramento's sound ordinance involves multiple measurement strategies, including:

- 98 dBA at 150 feet from the sound source
- 80 dBA at the nearest residential property line
- 24 dBA above ambient levels

Additionally, Section D introduces a 96 dBA Leq standard measured at the sound booth or within 150 feet of the sound source, stating this is "generally equivalent" to existing limits. However, this assertion lacks concrete acoustic analysis or field verification. In all locations we measured and observed, these levels were not generally equivalent; these numbers never aligned in the field. This further illustrates the need for a clearer, standardized measurement approach.

We recommend reevaluating this approach by introducing a standard measurement location at the property line of the sound source, rather than relying solely on measurements taken offsite. This aligns with the Source-Path-Receiver model widely used in modern sound management and reflects practices in many U.S. cities. Measuring at the source property line provides a clear, enforceable reference point that reflects both event output and proximity to sensitive receivers.

It is important to note that while a Sound Management Plan may include multiple measurement locations, capturing sound behavior at the source, along its path, and at the receiver end, *enforcement should rely on a single, consistent location.* Multiple measurement points can introduce ambiguity. For enforcement, clarity and consistency are paramount, and a practical, replicable location is essential.

By contrast, the current 80 dBA limit at the nearest residential property line presents several practical challenges:

- **Unbalanced Impacts**: A fixed level of 80 dBA may not be appropriate if the nearest residential property line is **600 to 800 feet** from the source. In such cases, the allowable output at the source may be overly restricted or overly lenient depending on context. A one-size-fits-all limit does not account for variable distances, topography, or land use patterns.
- **Enforcement Difficulties**: Measuring sound at the receiving property introduces complications due to reflections, elevation changes, and legal ambiguity around "who caused" the sound, especially in urban areas with multiple sound sources.
- **Equity and Fairness**: Relying on receiver-side enforcement can unintentionally penalize or favor certain venues and events depending on how far away the nearest receptor happens to be, rather than based on their actual sound emission.

Shifting the enforcement standard toward a property-line measurement at the source offers clarity for venue operators, simplifies compliance checks, and supports more transparent engagement between event producers, residents, and enforcement staff. While we are not recommending a specific decibel threshold at this stage, the critical first step is establishing where sound should be measured.

CITY EXAMPLES: SOURCE-BASED SOUND MEASUREMENT

A growing number of cities across the U.S. are shifting away from measuring sound at the receiving property and instead focusing on measurements taken at or near the property line of the sound source. This approach provides clearer accountability, simplifies enforcement, and aligns with modern sound management practices.
The list below offers a snapshot of cities that have adopted this framework. It is not exhaustive, but helps illustrate the emerging standard in how communities are managing and enforcing amplified sound:

- **Austin, TX** – Enforces sound limits at the source property line. Outdoor music permits are tied to clear SPL thresholds at the venue perimeter.
- **Portland, OR** – Applies zoning-based decibel limits measured at the source lot line.
- Cedar Park, TX – Measurements are taken at the real property line of the sound source.
- **Round Rock, TX** – Recent ordinance amendments require sound measurements at the business property line.
- **Nashville, TN** – In the Downtown Code and Core Frame districts, amplified sound is limited to 85 dBA as measured 50 feet from the exterior wall of the sound source, serving as a proxy for source-based enforcement.
- **San Diego, CA** – Measures noise levels from the property line of the source or within designated event permit zones. The municipal code states that enforcement can occur “on or beyond the boundaries of the property on which the noise is produced,” making the source property line a clear and enforceable reference point for many use cases, especially in outdoor and event contexts.
- **Houston, TX** – Implemented a noise ordinance requiring bars and venues that play amplified sound within 300 feet of a residence to obtain a special permit. While the ordinance focuses on proximity to residences, it emphasizes measuring sound levels at the property line of the source to ensure compliance and minimize disturbances to nearby residents.
- **San Antonio, TX** – Measures amplified sound levels at the property line of the source.
- **Phoenix, AZ** – Specifies that noise levels should be measured at the property line of the noise source. For example, in Commercial C-3 districts, the average noise level, measured at the property line, shall not exceed 55 dB.

MOVING TOWARD SOLUTIONS

This report introduces ten key policy directions to guide the development of a modern, balanced entertainment sound ordinance. Each direction is supported by findings from Phase Two and accompanied by illustrative policy language where appropriate. These early examples are intended to:

- Clarify how proposed changes could take shape in legislation
- Encourage early alignment across City departments and community stakeholders
- Reduce the distance between Phase Two diagnostics and Phase Three ordinance drafting

Rather than waiting until the next phase to introduce solutions, this report begins the transition to code-ready thinking, helping to shorten the path to adoption while still allowing room for collaboration and refinement.

WORKING DEFINITIONS

ACCOUNTABLE OFFICIAL means the City officer or employee designated by the city manager with a particular administrative or enforcement responsibility under this chapter.

C-WEIGHTING means a frequency response adjustment of a sound level meter with a "C-weighting" filter, as defined by the American National Standards Institute, that analyzes the sound source signal with approximately equal weight to all frequencies. Measurements made with this weighting are designated "dBC."

DECIBEL means sound pressure level as measured by a sound level meter using the "A" weighting network and either the slow or fast meter response as specified by the American National Standards Institute.

RESPONSIBLE PARTY means a sound engineer, audio professional, or other person authorized to make decisions regarding the use of sound equipment permitted under this chapter.

ENTERTAINMENT SERVICES DIVISION means the division or working group of a city department designated by the city manager with advisory and administrative functions related to permitting of entertainment and special event permits.

SOUND EQUIPMENT means a loudspeaker, public address system, amplification system, or other sound producing device.

SOUND MANAGEMENT PLAN means a plan required in connection with approval of an Entertainment License and Special Event permit.

1. Require Sound Management Plans for All Entertainment-Related Permits

What it addresses: Inconsistent planning, lack of site-specific mitigation, and absence of real-time accountability mechanisms.

Policy Direction: All Entertainment Licenses, Limited Entertainment Permits, and Special Event Permits should require a Sound Management Plan (SMP) as a condition of approval. The SMP functions as a site-specific agreement outlining how sound will be managed before, during, and after an event or ongoing programming.

Illustrative Policy Language: "A sound management plan is required to use sound equipment for a special event or entertainment license that involves the amplification of sound from instruments, vocal and instrument microphones, turntables, and digital or analog devices used as part of a performance requiring human operation from song to song."

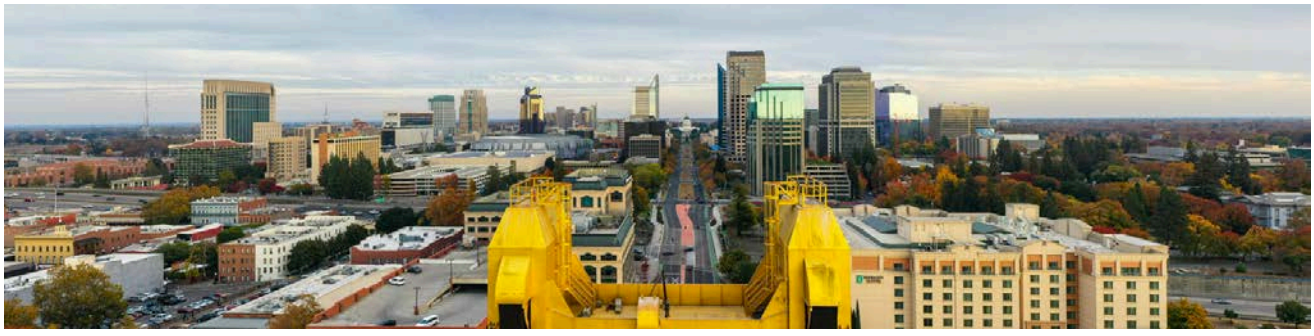
(A) The elements of a sound management plan are:

(1) sound-mitigating design features;
(2) prescribed decibel levels and hours of operating;
(3) availability and use of decibel meters on site;
(4) contact information and hours of availability for an individual responsible for sound;
(5) location for display of permit; and
(6) any other elements required by the accountable official.

(B) After a permit has been issued, the accountable official may modify a sound management plan. A sound management plan may not be modified until a notice of intent to modify the sound management plan has been provided to the permit holder.

(C) A sound management plan does not require annual renewal.
Instead, the City may establish a process to periodically review the plan based on factors such as site changes, complaint history, or permit compliance. This approach maintains the integrity of the original plan while allowing for responsive updates through a standardized modification process.

The following two pages provide an example of what the ordinance language could look like.



1. Require Sound Management Plans for All Entertainment-Related Permits continued

ENTERTAINMENT SERVICES DIVISION REVIEW

(A) Upon receipt of the application, the Entertainment Services Division shall begin the appropriate level of review within 10 business days. The depth of the review will be based on the nature of the event, the type of permit sought, and the potential impacts to surrounding areas. The review may include:

- On-site inspections and sound level measurements;
- Discussions with nearby residents and businesses;
- Coordination with other relevant departments;
- Any other due diligence necessary to assess the impact of amplified sound in the proposed setting.

(B) Following the review, the Entertainment Services Division shall prepare a statement recommending approval, conditional approval, or denial of the Sound Management Plan associated with the application. The Division may also recommend specific conditions to protect public health, safety, and quality of life. These may include restrictions that exceed general citywide standards, including but not limited to:

1. Attendance and capacity limits;
2. Adjusted decibel limits, which may include a requirement to use C-weighting in addition to standard A-weighted decibel measurements;
3. Specific hours of operation for amplified sound;
4. Frequency-specific conditions, including limitations on low-frequency output where events or businesses employ amplified sound systems with a concentration of low-end bass frequencies capable of generating vibration or traveling significant distances through structures or the ground.

(C) The Division's decision and recommendations shall be based on the following factors:

1. Suitability of the site for amplified outdoor sound, including topography and proximity to existing and future residential, commercial, or civic uses;
2. Size and layout of the venue or event site;
3. Proposed sound mitigation measures, including building or stage design, speaker placement and orientation, and natural or built buffers;
4. Any voluntary restrictions proposed by the applicant regarding decibel limits or hours of operation;
5. Ownership or operation of decibel meters by the applicant or responsible party;
6. Availability of an on-site responsible party, as defined in city code, to monitor compliance with sound regulations during the event or during operating hours of an entertainment business;
7. Potential for additional sound mitigation or real-time sound monitoring;
8. History of sound-related complaints or violations at the site, as verified by code enforcement, law enforcement, or other relevant city officials.

1. Require Sound Management Plans for All Entertainment-Related Permits continued

SOUND MANAGEMENT PLAN.

(A) A sound management plan is required to use sound equipment for a special event or entertainment license that involves the amplification of sound from instruments, vocal and instrument microphones, turntables, and digital or analog devices used as part of a performance requiring human operation from song to song.

(B) The elements of a sound management plan are:

1. Sound-mitigating design features;
2. Prescribed decibel levels and hours of operation;
3. Availability and use of decibel meters on site;
4. Contact information and hours of availability for an individual responsible for sound;
5. Location for display of the permit; and
6. Any other elements required by the accountable official.

(C) After a permit has been issued, the accountable official may modify a sound management plan. A sound management plan may not be modified until a notice of intent to modify the plan has been provided to the permit holder.

SUSPENSION OF A PERMIT.

(A) The accountable official may suspend a permit if the official determines that:

1. The permit was issued in error; or
2. At least four documented violations of the sound management plan have occurred within a 45-day period.

(B) A suspension is effective for up to two weeks.

REVOCATION OF A PERMIT.

(A) The accountable official may immediately revoke a permit that has been suspended if the official determines that the sound management plan has been violated:

1. During the suspension; or
2. Within six months after the end of the suspension.

DENIAL OF A PERMIT FOR REPEAT OFFENSES.

(A) The accountable official may refuse to issue a permit to an applicant or renew an existing permit if:

1. The permit holder has two violations of a permit issued under this chapter; or
2. The property where the sound equipment will be used is the location of more than two violations of a permit.

2. Appoint an Accountable Official

What it addresses: Disconnected internal communication, unclear decision-making authority, and inconsistent policy enforcement.

Policy Direction: The Accountable Official shall coordinate with the Entertainment Services Division, which is responsible for reviewing Entertainment Licenses and Special Event Permits through a sound management lens and facilitating cross-departmental input. Designate a City staff member to serve as an Accountable Official responsible for coordinating all entertainment-related sound permitting and policy interpretation. This role ensures that sound-related processes are consistent, transparent, and aligned across City departments.

Illustrative Policy Language: "The City Manager shall designate an Accountable Official to oversee the administration of all entertainment-related sound policy and permitting. The Accountable Official shall coordinate across departments, maintain records of permit decisions, and serve as the final authority in interpreting the sound ordinance and related policies. This position may rotate depending on departmental responsibilities but must be clearly identified in all Entertainment Licenses, Limited Entertainment Permits, and Special Event Permits that require a Sound Management Plan (SMP) ."

3. Implement a Transparent, Tiered Permitting System

What it addresses: Unclear permitting processes, lack of predictability for applicants, and inconsistency in how permits are granted or reviewed.

Policy Direction: Create a tiered permitting framework based on venue location, programming intensity, proximity to residential and civic uses, and history of sound-related issues. The intent is to bring greater clarity and consistency to permit decisions while ensuring that higher-impact uses receive a more thorough and context-sensitive review.

Illustrative Policy Language: "The City shall implement a tiered entertainment permitting system that distinguishes between applicant types based on location, history of compliance, proximity to residential or civic uses, and programming scale. Permit tiers may include: (a) Basic Permit, for small venues or limited programming, (b) Intermediate Permit, for recurring or amplified events near mixed-use or sensitive areas, and (c) Enhanced Permit, for venues with a history of noncompliance or events with elevated sound sensitivity.

Permit applications will undergo a level of review appropriate to the tier and potential neighborhood impacts. This review may include assessments of site suitability, distance from nearby residences or civic facilities, coordination with other departments, and other due diligence necessary to evaluate the context of the proposed activity.

Based on this review, City staff may recommend permit approval, conditional approval, or denial, and may propose site-specific sound-related conditions."

3. Implement a Transparent, Tiered Permitting System, continued

Sample Framework: Proximity-Based Sound Management Zones

These examples are illustrative only and are not intended as fixed recommendations or exhaustive categories. In some cases, particularly where events are held near sensitive residential areas or involve nighttime programming, an approved Sound Management Plan may include earlier end times or reduced decibel thresholds.

Tier	Typical Context	Examples of Uses	Permit Requirements	Sound Management Expectations	Max dBA/dBC
Tier 1	Low-sensitivity use, small-scale, distant from residences or civic uses	Acoustic music in cafés or patios, small community events in parks	Basic SMP, minimal outreach, no post-event review	A-weighted only, minimal mitigation needed	70 dBA / n/a
Tier 2	Medium-scale or mid-range proximity to residences/civic uses	Outdoor markets with live music, DJ sets in mid-size bars, amplified performances in community centers	Standard SMP, outreach logs required, potential post-event review	A- and C-weighted limits, directional audio setup, stage orientation	80 dBA / 90 dBC
Tier 3	Large-scale, high-volume, or close to sensitive uses	Festivals with low-frequency programming, block parties near residential buildings, events with past complaint history	Detailed SMP, Event Attendant required, real-time monitoring, post-event review required	A/C weighting, bass mitigation, detailed outreach records	Up to 85 dBA / 95 dBC (subject to SMP review and minimum 600’ distance from residences or civic uses)

3. Implement a Transparent, Tiered Permitting System, continued

Implementation Guidance

- **Establishing Limits**: To fully implement this framework, a maximum allowable decibel limit at the source property line must be established. This baseline level will serve as the enforcement standard, with potential adjustments based on proximity.
- **Sound Management Plans (SMPs)**: A lower decibel limit may be recommended in sensitive areas based on location-specific factors such as topography, reflective surfaces, and land use patterns. The SMP should detail any such adjustments.
- **Special Events**: Use this proximity framework to inform Sound Management Plans (SMPs). Final terms should be reviewed and adjusted based on event type, scale, and context.
- **Entertainment Licenses**: Use this as a baseline for evaluating venue permit conditions. Final conditions should be shaped through on-site review, zoning compatibility, and compliance history.

Illustrative Policy Language: Outdoor amplified sound shall be regulated based on the proximity of the sound source to the nearest residential property line. Permitted use, required mitigation, and enforcement thresholds shall be informed by the following distance-based tiers:

- **Tier 1: Within 100 feet of residential property**
  - Outdoor amplified sound may only be permitted under limited conditions and shall be subject to elevated review standards. Additional mitigation measures may be required through an approved Sound Management Plan.
- **Tier 2: 100 to 500 feet from residential property**
  - Outdoor amplified sound may be conditionally permitted with appropriate controls. Conditions may vary based on surrounding land use, event type, and prior compliance history.
- **Tier 3: Beyond 500 feet from residential property**
  - Outdoor amplified sound is generally permitted, subject to compliance with an established maximum decibel limit measured at the source property line.

Final enforcement requires the establishment of a baseline decibel limit at the source property line. Lower thresholds may be applied through a Sound Management Plan based on site-specific characteristics or community context.

4. Establish Consistent Notification & Outreach Standards

What it addresses: Uneven communication with residents, unclear outreach expectations, lack of designated event contacts, and resident frustration over last-minute or undisclosed events.

Policy Direction: Require applicants for all entertainment-related permits to complete notification and outreach activities appropriate to the size, sensitivity, and location of their event or venue. Special Event outreach requirements should be consistent regardless of whether the event is held on public or private property.

To reduce the City's burden as an intermediary and improve transparency, a clearly designated Responsible Party, with direct contact information, must be provided for all permitted events and venues.

Communication About Low-End Expectations

For events or venues with known low-end emphasis (e.g., electronic music, large-scale amplified sound), applicants should:

- Provide advance notice to nearby residents and property managers.
- Share programming type, dates/times, and contact information for the designated Responsible Party who will manage real-time sound response (e.g., text or call-in number).
- Set expectations with nearby neighbors and remain available to respond to concerns during the event.
- Clarify when sound adjustments will be possible and under what circumstances.
- Encourage open communication to reduce frustration and foster good neighbor relationships.

Illustrative Policy Language:

“All applicants for Entertainment Licenses, Limited Entertainment Permits, and Special Event Permits shall provide documentation of outreach to nearby residents and property managers. At a minimum, notification must include:

(a) the date, time, and nature of the programming;
(b) the type of sound equipment to be used and expected sound levels;
(c) the name and contact information of the designated Responsible Party available during the event for real-time response;
(d) how and when the outreach was conducted (flyer, digital, in-person, etc.).

Where appropriate, outreach must also include a call-in number or other form of real-time feedback channel to allow nearby residents to report concerns directly to the Responsible Party or Event Attendant, reducing reliance on City staff for non-emergency conflict resolution. Notification and outreach strategies may vary based on the permit type and tier, but Special Event outreach requirements shall remain consistent regardless of whether the event occurs on public or private property.”

5. Event Attendants and Real-Time Monitoring

What it addresses: Lack of field-level accountability, inconsistent response to community concerns, and limited communication during events.

Policy Direction: Require Event Attendants, either trained City staff or qualified subcontractors—to be present for events flagged as high sensitivity. Attendants act as real-time contacts for both presenters and residents and ensure that Sound Management Plans and any other conditions placed on the event are followed. This approach builds trust, improves compliance, and offers an immediate point of contact during live events.

Illustrative Policy Language: "For events determined by the City to require enhanced oversight due to scale, location, complexity, or complaint history, a designated Event Attendant shall be assigned. This role may be fulfilled by trained subcontractors contracted by the City or staff designated by the Accountable Official. Event Attendants shall have access to real-time monitoring tools and the authority to verify compliance with the event's approved Sound Management Plan and any other applicable conditions or restrictions placed on the event permit. The current Event Attendant provision within the special event process may be adapted to fulfill this function, with a standard rate of $20 per hour, pending further codification."

6. Low-End Frequency Management

What it addresses: Unmanaged sub-bass energy, structure-borne vibration issues, and lack of technical know-how among presenters.

Policy Direction: Create technical standards and guidance to reduce the impact of low-frequency energy, including recommendations on speaker placement, subwoofer directionality, and measurement tools that detect low-end frequencies.

Illustrative Policy Language: "All permitted venues and events utilizing heavy bass programming shall implement best practices for low-end control, including consideration of cardioid subwoofer configurations, speaker orientation away from residences, and use of baffles or isolation materials. Sound Management Plans must demonstrate how low-frequency content will be addressed, particularly in proximity to residential areas."

Best Practices for Low-End Frequency Management

To reduce the impact of low-end sound and improve coexistence between venues, events, and nearby residents, the following strategies are recommended:

Speaker Direction and Elevation

- Aim speakers away from residential structures and reflective surfaces.
- Elevate speakers where possible to reduce direct low-end bounce into buildings or courtyards.

Subwoofer Management

- Reposition subwoofers to minimize coupling with ground surfaces or structural walls.
- Use partial enclosures, baffles, or isolation pads to help reduce vibration transfer.
- When feasible, deploy cardioid subwoofer arrays, which are designed to project bass energy forward while canceling rear projection. This technique significantly reduces off-site bass impact, particularly effective in urban or sound-sensitive locations.

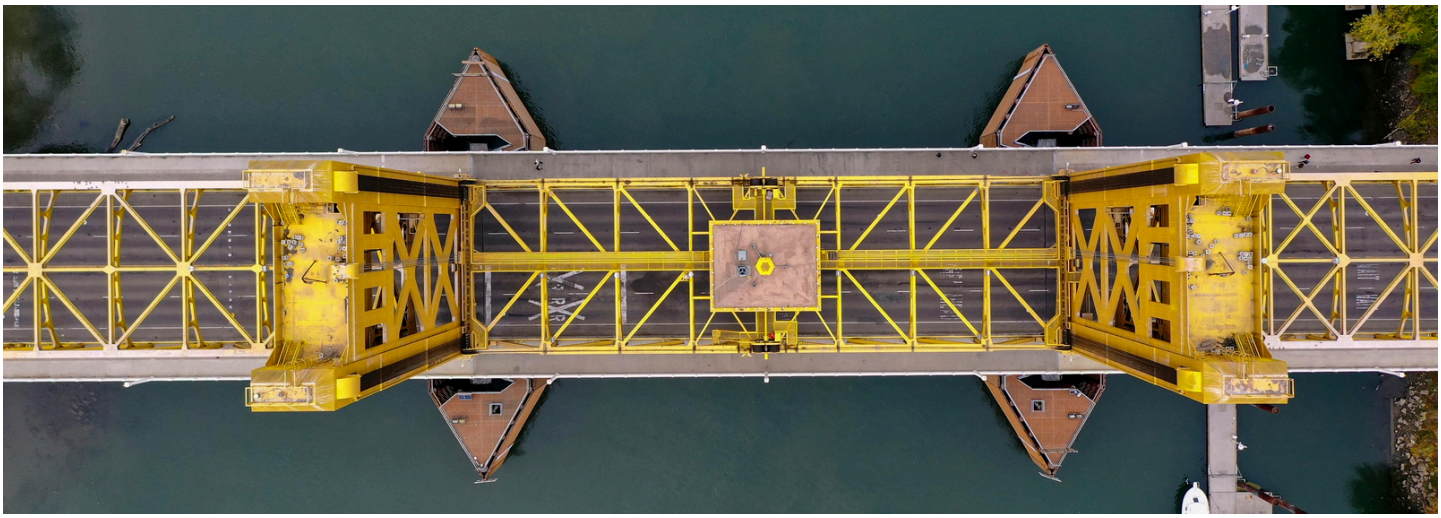
Use of C-Weighted Measurement Tool

- Utilize sound meters capable of capturing both C-weighted and Z-weighted (also known as flat or zero weighting) data, in addition to the standard A-weighting.
- C-weighting offers a more accurate view of low-end energy, making it better suited for managing bass-heavy content.

7. Establish Post-Event Review Criteria

What it addresses: Lack of follow-up procedures, inconsistent evaluation of sound impacts, and limited opportunity for learning.

Policy Direction: Create clear thresholds and conditions under which post-event reviews are required. Reviews should assess performance against the Sound Management Plan and determine whether changes or penalties are warranted.



8. Designate Appropriate Areas for High-Impact Programming

What it addresses: Mismatches between entertainment uses and neighborhood expectations, and a lack of proactive planning.

Policy Direction: Designate specific parts of the city—whether downtown corridors, arts districts, or commercial zones—as preferred locations for louder or more frequent entertainment. These zones may have relaxed limits or extended hours to support nightlife.

Illustrative Policy Language: "The City shall maintain a map of Entertainment Priority Areas where higher decibel limits, later operational hours, and expanded use of amplified sound may be permitted. Permit applicants located within these areas may qualify for modified Sound Management Plan requirements or fast-tracked approvals, provided compliance history supports it."

9. Leverage Existing Technology and Shared Resources

What it addresses: Budget constraints, underuse of available tools, and duplication of effort across departments.

Policy Direction: Rather than creating new systems or hiring additional enforcement staff, the City of Sacramento can strengthen its sound management strategy by fully utilizing the tools it already has. A key opportunity lies in maximizing use of the City's mobile sound meter, a flexible, deployable resource that can be integrated into both planning, managing, and enforcement workflows.

Used effectively, real-time sound monitoring becomes more than a compliance mechanism. It creates a shared accountability platform between residents, venues, and City departments—reducing the need for reactive, complaint-driven enforcement and shifting the emphasis toward transparency, responsiveness, and collaboration.

Key Features of Sacramento's Sound Monitoring System

- Mobile and Deployable: Can be placed near venues, festivals, or residences based on complaint history, event planning, or Sound Management Plan (SMP) conditions
- Real-Time A- and C-Weighted Measurements: Captures both standard and low-end bass frequencies, which are often the source of complaints
- Frequency Band Data: Identifies when low-frequency content (like sub-bass) is the issue, not just volume
- Public-Facing Dashboard: Allows residents, venues, and City staff to access the same real-time data—reducing disputes and supporting direct, data-informed resolution

Why It Matters

- Empowers Venues and Residents: With shared data access, venues can make immediate adjustments and residents feel heard and informed
- De-Escalates Conflict: Objective data reduces finger-pointing and shifts conversations from blame to solutions
- Supports Data-Driven Enforcement: Enforcement decisions are grounded in concrete evidence—not just perception or anecdotal complaints

9. Leverage Existing Technology and Shared Resources continued

Event Attendants as a Field-Based Tool
In addition to technology, Sacramento already has an underutilized asset in the form of **City-designated Event Attendants**. These individuals can serve as on-the-ground support during high-sensitivity events, acting as:

- Real-time contacts for residents and presenters
- Field verifiers of sound levels and other permit conditions
- Neutral observers able to document and facilitate immediate adjustments

While this function may require future codification to expand beyond Special Events, it does not necessarily require hiring new City staff. The City could contract with trained subcontractors or third-party sound professionals to fulfill this role—ensuring flexibility while maintaining high standards for professionalism and neutrality.

Illustrative Policy Language: "The City shall integrate the use of real-time monitoring tools —including mobile sound meters with A- and C-weighted capabilities, into regulation and planning workflows. These tools shall be managed by the Accountable Official and accessible by key departments. Data shall be used to inform both policy and post-event decisions, minimizing reliance on anecdotal complaints."

10. Strengthen Outreach and Education for Sound Management

What it addresses: Gaps in knowledge, distrust between stakeholders, and missed opportunities for proactive problem-solving.

Policy Direction: Develop and implement outreach and education strategies to support sound management, including training for permittees, online guides, and neighborhood communication templates.

Illustrative Policy Language: "The City shall provide educational resources and engagement opportunities focused on sound management practices. These may include permit application guides, training sessions for Responsible Parties, sample outreach letters for venues, and online dashboards for residents to view monitoring data.
A useful example can be found in New Orleans' Business Resource page, created by the Mayor's Office of Nighttime Economy.

Next Steps

The next phase of this project will focus on turning insights into action. We will develop a set of clear and practical legislative and policy recommendations for the City of Sacramento, addressing key areas such as noise thresholds, enforcement hours, low-frequency vibrations, and sound governance processes. This phase will also include targeted conversations with enforcement officials, regulatory staff, elected leaders, and community members to ensure that the final framework is grounded in local experience and supported across stakeholder groups. Additionally, we will explore how Sacramento's 311 system can better capture noise-related data to support proactive sound management. All findings and recommendations will be delivered in a Final Report to guide long-term implementation.

ABOUT SOUND MUSIC CITIES

Based in Austin, Texas, Sound Music Cities is a consulting firm with deep experience in music policy, sound management, and cultural planning. Led by Don Pitts, the team brings a unique blend of political insight, street smarts, and listening skills to help cities design and implement sustainable music and sound strategies.

Sound Music Cities partners closely with communities to develop actionable policies that balance live music growth with neighborhood compatibility. Their experience includes designing Austin's single point of entry permitting model for music and event coordination and leading the most comprehensive rewrite of music permitting and enforcement policy in decades.

They also host an annual Music Cities Think Tank, a convening of leading music policy experts from across the globe.