

The ICMA logo is a white, bold, sans-serif font set against a dark blue rectangular background. The background of the entire page is a vibrant, stylized illustration. It features a city skyline with yellow and orange buildings under a blue sky. In the foreground, there are green, winding vines and various flowers, including large circular ones with intricate geometric patterns in red, blue, and white, and smaller white flowers with red centers. Three stylized human figures are integrated into the scene: one in a black shirt and red pants, one in a red shirt and black pants, and one in a blue dress with red polka dots. The overall style is modern and artistic.

# PROBLEM SOLVING THROUGH ARTS AND CULTURAL STRATEGIES

A CREATIVE PLACEMAKING  
WAYFINDING GUIDE FOR  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGERS

DECEMBER 2020



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>5</b>	<b>FOREWORD</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
9	HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE
10	CLARIFICATIONS ON TERMINOLOGY
<b>11</b>	<b>10 KEY PRINCIPLES OF CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AT ITS BEST</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>THE PROBLEM-SOLVING POTENTIAL OF CREATIVE PLACEMAKING</b>
13	OFFERS NEW PERSPECTIVES ON WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS SEEN (OR NOT SEEN!)
15	CULTIVATES THE COMMUNITY'S IDENTITY AND SOCIAL FABRIC
17	EXPANDS AND DEEPENS YOUR NETWORK OF COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS
19	ENHANCES COMMUNICATION AND INPUT ACROSS DIFFERENCES IN CIVIC PROCESSES
21	HELPS MATCH THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS TO THE REAL ISSUES
<b>22</b>	<b>DISCOVERING OPPORTUNITIES</b>
28	CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IN SAMPLE CONTEXTS
35	10 THINGS YOU (OR YOUR STAFF) CAN DO TO TAKE THIS GUIDE'S IDEAS FORWARD IN YOUR COMMUNITY
<b>36</b>	<b>NAVIGATING PROCESSES</b>
37	DEFINING YOUR OPPORTUNITY
41	PREPARING TO PARTNER
46	ASSEMBLING YOUR TEAM
50	STRUCTURING AND SUSTAINING CREATIVE PLACEMAKING PARTNERSHIPS
<b>62</b>	<b>POTENTIAL REALIZED: CASE STUDIES</b>
63	AMPLIFYING DATA TO MOBILIZE CHANGE
70	BUILDING LOCAL IDENTITY IN UNEXPECTED PLACES
78	IMPROVING GOVERNMENT-COMMUNITY RELATIONS THROUGH ARTISTIC EXPRESSION
84	RECREATING PERMITTING POLICY WITH THE COMMUNITY
91	UNEXPECTED APPROACHES FOR IMPROVED OUTCOMES
<b>97</b>	<b>APPENDIX 1: PROJECT ADVISORS</b>
<b>98</b>	<b>APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS</b>
<b>99</b>	<b>PHOTO CREDITS</b>



## ABOUT ICMA

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government management worldwide through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics. Through expansive partnerships with local governments, federal agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropic funders, the organization gathers information on topics such as sustainability, health care, aging communities, economic development, cybersecurity, and performance measurement and management data on a variety of local government services—all of which support related training, education, and technical assistance. ICMA provides support, publications, data and information, peer and results-oriented assistance, and training and professional development to more than 13,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world.



## ABOUT ARTPLACE

ARTPLACE AMERICA (ArtPlace) is a ten-year collaboration (2011-2020) among a number of foundations, federal agencies, and financial institutions that supports and strengthens the field of creative placemaking—the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development.



## ABOUT CIVIC ARTS

CIVIC ARTS is a non-profit organization whose mission is to support and foster the integration of arts and culture strategies into the ways we envision, plan, and develop just and healthy communities. Civic Arts helps to bring together artists, culture-bearers, and their organizations to work alongside municipal and community development organizations in order to co-create responses to complex local issues.

## AUTHORS

Laura Goddeeris, AICP, MUPP | Director of Survey Research | [lgoddeeris@icma.org](mailto:lgoddeeris@icma.org)

Lindsay Jacques, MPA | Senior Research Associate | [ljacques@icma.org](mailto:ljacques@icma.org)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ICMA is grateful to ArtPlace America for recognizing the role of local government leaders in this work and for funding the development of this guide. The authors extend our deepest appreciation to ArtPlace America Deputy Director Lyz Crane, and to Civic Arts Executive Director Lynn Osgood, for their extensive support throughout an adaptive process, and to our team of [project advisors](#) that shaped the guide's content with their varied perspectives and expertise, even in the face of compounding urgent challenges. We also celebrate the public servants and socially engaged artists whose efforts are featured throughout this guide and informed our research.

Additional thanks are due to [Noah MacMillan](#) for his original illustrations, and to our ICMA colleagues Delia Jones, Kathleen Karas, Kerry Hansen, and Tad McGalliard for their contributions to this project.

Cited Internet sources were valid as of November 2020. Because URLs and websites are constantly changing, we cannot vouch for their current validity.

# FOREWORD

As my life has become more public—in high-profile city manager roles and now leading an international organization—I realize that art is central to the way that I see things.

As a boy I spent countless hours sketching the people and objects in my world. My art became both an escape from the harsh realities of my environment and a portal of sorts. It was a way to overcome my introversion and connect with others when words failed.

I continue to practice my avocation today. I look deeply at the faces of my subjects and see first the minute lines and shadows present, but then I look beyond and imagine their lives. When I step back, I begin to see how these intricacies connect to the larger form.

I approach my work in much the same way: listening and collecting opinions and experiences to find opportunities for connection that weren't initially obvious, using storytelling and illustrations along with facts and data.

It's a multi-dimensional process that lends itself to the complexities of our work as public managers; using varied techniques to discover different perspectives on an issue and guiding communities toward creative solutions aiming to improve the big picture—quality of life.

In local government, art and creativity occur in places most people don't see. The lights turn on and the water flows through the pipes, but often crews are confronted with problems and limited resources that force them to ideate and craft a solution in the moment. Art is work, and they do it in the field every day.

Or consider the opportunities to reimagine places through art and culture. In the course of my time as city manager of Austin, Texas, the Waller Creek urban waterway transformed into a vibrant public space, freely accessed by people across all backgrounds and demographics. Surrounded by the beauty of the restored natural environment, people can experience sculptures and music, exercise, contemplate, and interact.

In current events where managers and their communities are grappling with the pandemic, structural racism, and political unrest, art brings us together in powerful ways. From residents singing on their balconies in solidarity for health care workers, to murals on the street memorializing the loss of black lives, these examples may only exist for a moment, but they too leave a lasting impact on the community.

Art enables us to come together from a place of empathy, compassion, and connection to create spaces for new opportunities. In spite of all the obstacles we face, there's good and powerful energy in communities to be part of positive change.

We've discovered much over the course of 2020, including new insights on what we're capable of. And this implies the need to be open-minded—open to new connections, to new ways of working, to creative pathways through the many challenges ahead.

There is no playbook to address the problems we are confronting in our communities today. As local government managers we reach into our toolbox and find that the standard approaches just don't work for the myriad complex problems and the issues surrounding equity and inclusion that we are experiencing today.

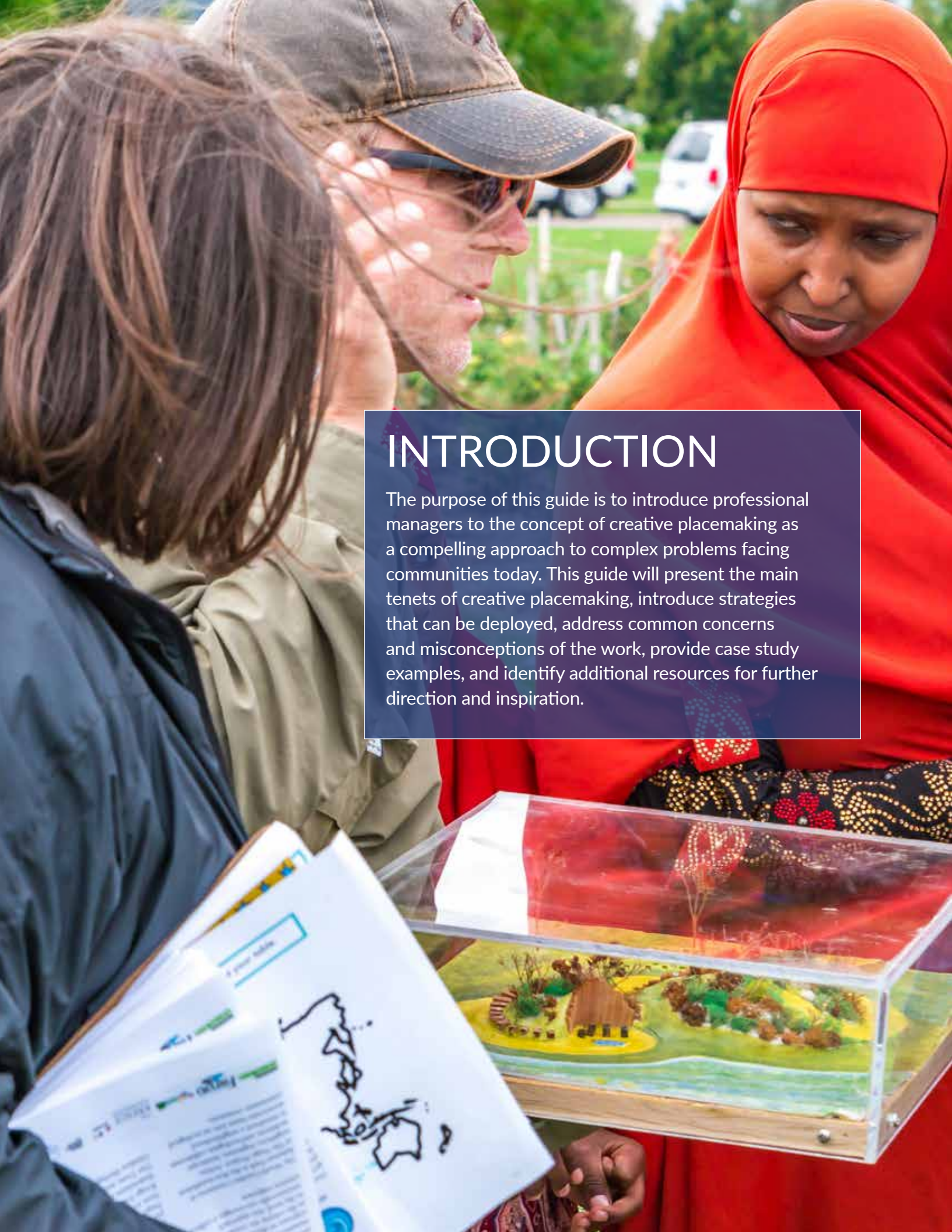
The elements of creative placemaking outlined in this guide offer you not a playbook but a shift in mindset, to co-creating new plans, and new possibilities with new voices from your communities. In tapping into the artists in your community and on your staff, you will find that all kinds of things become possible and you will find your way to discoveries that you might not have otherwise.

As we all face an uncertain future, consider the power of creative processes in both embracing where we've been and propelling us forward. How our approach to work—our authentic, humble, courageous leadership—is itself an art.



Marc Ott  
Executive Director, ICMA

November 2020



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to introduce professional managers to the concept of creative placemaking as a compelling approach to complex problems facing communities today. This guide will present the main tenets of creative placemaking, introduce strategies that can be deployed, address common concerns and misconceptions of the work, provide case study examples, and identify additional resources for further direction and inspiration.

**M**any turn to the arts as an escape from everyday challenges. And local arts and cultural institutions are often celebrated as community treasures. But how often do local governments think to involve artists or culture-bearers as members of teams working to address local problems, big or small?

The arts can do more than just beautify a place. Artists and culture-bearers can facilitate processes that amplify residents' voices and experiences, build trust and enable collaboration across disciplines and sectors, reveal fresh perspectives on persistent challenges, activate community assets, and foster a stronger social fabric and sense of identity.

Americans are living in a time of heightened awareness of critical functions for which local governments are responsible; the consequences of racial, income, and power inequities; the fragility of local economies; the risks and rewards of built and natural public spaces; the power of community and relationships. A time that invites the use of community-informed, creative processes to foster more equitable and resilient outcomes.

Creative placemaking strategies—problem-solving approaches rooted in arts and culture—have helped communities throughout the nation tackle complex challenges like repairing police and community relations, addressing environmental injustices, confronting the threat of gentrification, and improving service delivery to those who may have been left behind. Today, these types of outcomes are even more essential for communities.





Creative placemaking is the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development.

This is about more than public murals, festivals, or bistro chairs and string lights. Working in collaboration with local governments, artists and culture-bearers use their talents to engage the community in everything from identifying issues and setting priorities to facilitating processes and developing solutions. The creative perspective manifests in many forms—through artistic mediums such as paint, dance, theater, sculpture, or design, but also through storytelling and language, food, and other types of cultural expression and identity. When intentionally integrated as part of a process—not just an end product—their strategies can facilitate deeper, authentic, and unexpected dialogue, and constructively challenge the way local governments have historically viewed an issue.

So much of government happens in meetings. But imagine if instead of a typical staff meeting or public meeting, employees and the community came together to share a different, interactive experience—a performance, a meal, a game, a demonstration, an art project—and still learned about each other's perspectives on an issue and what might need to be done in response. This guide will help you consider how artists make such an approach possible.

By allowing artists to impact the planning and development of new programs or projects early on, innovative engagement strategies central to creative problem-solving harness community knowledge to create more equitable outcomes. Not only can they offer a safe space for historically underrepresented communities to participate, they can amplify and honor their heritage and perspectives. Outcomes can then reflect a holistic understanding of the community's past, present, and future identity.



## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We developed this resource oriented to a generalist manager's perspective, aiming to provide guideposts for considering, launching, or continuing a creative placemaking journey with your staff and partners. Throughout the guide, you will find pointers to other types of resources that may be helpful to you and your staff. Some provide finer detail on research, process, or specific sectors; some allow you to experience multimedia highlights of projects referenced; some provide tools and templates you can adapt for your own use. In addition, we suggest actions or questions to help you apply ideas to your own community. Look for the following tags throughout the guide:



### DIVE DEEPER

Highlights further action-oriented reading.



### TAKE ACTION

Highlights tools or concrete steps you can take to advance a concept.



### TAKE A TOUR

Links to project websites or existing case studies.



### ASK YOURSELF

Questions to stimulate your thinking.

To directly access resources linked throughout this guide (indicated by [this formatting](#)), download the pdf available at [icma.org/creative-placemaking](https://icma.org/creative-placemaking).

Footnotes credit other existing literature that informed this guidance.

One more note of preamble: we recognize that—as you'll soon discover—there are a lot of nuances to the creative problem-solving approach covered within. If this is new to you, we encourage you to read for inspiration and guidance, not for a list of requirements. It is not only fine, but often advised, to start with small ideas to test out new ways of working with artists as partners. As with any process grounded in innovation, it is a journey and there will be bumps in the road, but the destination and what you learn on the way might just be worth it.



“We tend to focus on the technical aspects of our work and lose sight of why we got into public service in the first place. Conducting this work in my community was a great opportunity to take a painful part of our past and turn that into a positive future that the whole town could get behind. But that process was a very difficult one personally, and there were many nights that I had to dig deep and remind myself that the whole reason I wanted to do this job was to help develop a genuine spirit of community throughout the town. Engaging in this work is the difference between ‘administration’ and leadership.”

Michael Herbert  
Town Manager  
Ashland, Massachusetts

## CLARIFICATIONS ON TERMINOLOGY

As this guide underscores with its links to additional resources, much has been written over the past decade about the concept of placemaking, and specifically creative placemaking. A 2010 white paper commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts' Mayors Institute on City Design offered an inflection point in the conversation, emphasizing the value arts and cultural activities add to community livability and economic development.<sup>1</sup> Since then, leading practitioners and supporters have called for a more explicit focus on equity in both process and outcomes. In a 2017 essay, Carlton Turner, then executive director of regional arts service organization Alternate ROOTS, writes:

Too often the case for creative placemaking is made through economic indicators such as jobs created, property values, and new businesses. These indicators drive investment and serve as benchmarks and measurements of a certain type of success. This focus on economic-driven measurement is problematic, especially in light of the fact that the income and wealth gaps in our country historically divide across racial and ethnic lines, and only continue to widen. But the community is always there, they are always present—their constant presence, energy, labor, and relationships are part of the dark matter that holds the community together. It is up to individuals and institutions with financial and material resources to make the choice whether to see or not see them. Choosing not to see the community in its wholeness, including the dark matter that holds it together, leads to inequitable and unsustainable development.<sup>2</sup>

As the concept has grown in notoriety, so have its many permutations—including plenty of examples that focus heavily on replicating activities, but do not always introduce the level of intentionality that many of the best creative placemaking projects embody. Jim Walker, executive director of Big Car Collaborative, an arts and design organization based in Indiana, describes the distinction in his essay on placemaking and vibrancy:

If somebody completes what they say are placemaking or creative placemaking projects and they don't have pictures with people in them, what they've likely done is beautification, or creative decoration projects. Placemaking is about setting the table for making things happen for humans; it is about making places to do things. It isn't about making the physical location passively artsy or pretty. It isn't about involving artists to put a little icing on the cake. Adding some decorative elements to a vacant lot or old building and then walking away will make things nicer for those who pass by. But this does not create true vibrancy.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, *Creative Placemaking*. National Endowment for the Arts, 2010, [arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf](https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf).

2 Carlton Turner, "Equity in Practice: Strategies from Alternate ROOTS' History of Creative Placemaking," *How to Do Creative Placemaking*, National Endowment for the Arts, 2017.

3 "What is Creative Placemaking?" Reconnecting to our Waterways, [americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/ROW-Creative-Placemaking-handout.doc.pdf](https://americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/ROW-Creative-Placemaking-handout.doc.pdf).

Recognizing the vast network of existing resources referencing this term, and that it has become a rallying cry for practitioners from many different sectors to come together in a new way of working, its use continues here. But it is important to understand that “creative placemaking”; is more than just “placemaking plus art;” it’s not about creating a place and then adding a mural, it’s about involving artists from the beginning in decision-making processes. And not all “creative placemaking” efforts have centered their focus on equitable outcomes; some initiatives labeled as such actually ring hollow or at worst, exacerbate inequities. The examples and tips included in this guide are meant to help clarify and illustrate the potential of creative placemaking with the best of intentions, as it is understood today by leading practitioners.

Finally, embedded in the “creative” aspect of placemaking are not just artists of all forms, but culture-bearers—those that hold and can transmit experiences, values, and characteristics of a community of identity or place. Where this broad concept of artists and culture-bearers is shortened to “artists” for the sake of readability, assume it to be all-encompassing.

## 10 KEY PRINCIPLES OF CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AT ITS BEST

The principles below, inspired by extensive research and outreach commissioned by leading advocates and support institutions of the field—Arizona State University’s Herberger Center for the Arts, ArtPlace America, the Kresge Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts—summarize current ideals of creative placemaking practices centered in equity.<sup>4</sup>

1. The community desires the change envisioned and community experience drives the process.
2. The partnership aims to expand opportunities and address barriers so that members of the community can express ideas and experience benefits.
3. The process considers and aims to address imbalances of power and influence between partners and stakeholders.
4. Community assets—people, institutions, history, culture, and solutions—are represented and valued in a community-driven process.
5. The process and partnership build reciprocal relationships of trust and respect, listening carefully, and working together with flexibility, agility, and patience.
6. Artists are valued, respected, and compensated for their unique abilities and creative problem-solving skills.
7. The partnership intentionally considers the selection of local vs. non-local partners.
8. The work includes partnerships across disciplines and sectors.
9. The work recognizes, highlights, and contributes to the narrative of a place.
10. Evaluation of the work considers both process and outcomes, qualitative and quantitative indicators of success, and public and artist perspectives.

<sup>4</sup> Margy Waller, “How Do We Know It’s Creative Placemaking? Let’s Talk About Our Shared Values,” ArtPlace America, 2019, [artplaceamerica.org/blog/lets-talk-about-our-shared-values](https://artplaceamerica.org/blog/lets-talk-about-our-shared-values).



## THE PROBLEM-SOLVING POTENTIAL OF CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

Local government managers, working with elected councils and professional staff, are at the core of building equitable, resilient, and livable communities. In the wake of compounding national and global crises, these obligations have never been more complex and urgent.

But finding new approaches to persistent challenges need not feel out of reach. A creative approach to placemaking and problem-solving adds new tools to the manager and staff's toolbox, and offers multiple returns on the investment of time, energy, and resources.

Five ways creative placemaking promotes more inclusive, equitable approaches to persistent problems are briefly described in this section. More detail on the examples provided, as well as other projects with similar themes, can be found in the "**Potential Realized**" case studies section of this guide.

## OFFERS NEW PERSPECTIVES ON WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS SEEN (OR NOT SEEN!)

**THE SCENARIO** Needing a fresh pair of eyes.

**THE OPPORTUNITY** Artists often provide new ways of looking at your community—both its assets and its challenges.



The impacts of environmental pollution, gentrification, and systemic bias are unevenly distributed within our communities, and such routine governmental services as public safety and water go largely unnoticed when they are running smoothly. The full consequences of negative externalities and community trauma are often obscured from the general public enough to make them easy to ignore, no matter how detrimental they may be. Managers may strive to reconcile these issues but can struggle to find support when residents do not understand their full magnitude—and the converse can be true as well, with residents calling for change. It can be difficult to gain the political will to fund tackling these issues, so they persist and continue to hold the community back. Using creative processes to make the invisible visible can justify reallocation of resources and inspire the community to rally around a resolution.



## CONSIDER THIS

Years of corporate dumping in the 1970s left Ashland, Massachusetts, with an EPA-designated Superfund site that they are still recovering from over 40 years later with no end in sight. Much of the community was seemingly resigned to living with this reality, despite the acknowledgment of a known public health hazard. A local artist who witnessed firsthand the devastating impacts of this contamination used EPA data to shed a light on the hidden pollutants that still impacted Ashland's water supply by incorporating colored street lights throughout the town that highlighted where and how the contaminants were concentrated. He also created an art installation at the old factory site, a stained-glass structure that served as a place of healing for the community to address their long-standing trauma. With support from the town government to realize these installations, his work reignited a culture of resident activism that is pushing the EPA to expedite cleanup.

Recent crises have prompted serious reflection on opportunities to do things differently. Managers and their teams learned to innovate quickly. Assumptions that things “have to be this way” have been challenged and often dismissed. Though it felt like the world went virtual overnight, we know not everyone was equally able to adapt, and concepts like connection and community took on new dimensions and importance. Daily headlines, backed up by unprecedented availability of data, remind us that many in our communities are deeply—even fatally—impacted by racial, income, power, and too many other forms of inequities. It is, perhaps, never a better time to consider ways to engage new partners and those who need the most help in co-creating a more equitable future.

While approaches and priorities of artists and culture-bearers may conflict with long-standing government practices in ways that can feel uncomfortable, partnering with them can yield results unattainable through traditional methods. The next section will help guide managers on successfully incorporating creative placemaking and problem-solving approaches throughout their organizations.

To read more on this example, go to page [63](#).

## CULTIVATES THE COMMUNITY'S IDENTITY AND SOCIAL FABRIC

**THE SCENARIO** In a world of choices, why would we choose here? What makes us want to be an active part of the community?

**THE OPPORTUNITY** Artists and culture-bearers can create meaningful experiences and expressions that connect the community through authentic place-keeping and placemaking.



Managers intuitively know what researchers have worked to describe and quantify for decades: that a strong sense of place has value. When residents feel a sense of attachment and belonging to each other and to where they live, they are invested in caring for it and shaping its future. The intangible qualities associated with a strong sense of place like neighborliness, a welcoming feeling, and a distinct and authentic atmosphere that reflects local values and identities, cannot always be scientifically measured, but they can be felt.



“Oftentimes when you try to think about how we can work together better, we hit stumbling blocks. But when the arts are the vehicle through which you can do that, we have found that those stumbling blocks have moved away.”

Kathy Sheehan  
Mayor  
Albany, New York

And yet, in a three-year “Soul of the Community” study conducted by Gallup for the Knight Foundation, researchers found social offerings, aesthetics, and openness were most correlated with community attachment.<sup>5</sup> A follow-up study, “Community Ties,” affirmed the value of these quality of life indicators and recommended attention be paid to ensure equitable accessibility.<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, while identity is a living, evolving concept, efforts to understand and strengthen it should take into account the history of a place and honor the entire community’s right to belong.

## CONSIDER THIS

In flood-prone Fargo, North Dakota, the local government took a different approach to stormwater management issues emerging from 2009’s state of emergency. Instead of limiting their response to simply calculating and planning the needed infrastructure improvements, without concern for unintended consequences such as community division, the city partnered with an artist to help engage the historically underserved residents directly impacted by the floods. Through a series of neighborhood charrettes and community events, the design of which she led, the artist was able to facilitate communication between technical engineers, Native and New Americans, and other community institutions to gather input, generate buy-in, and build trust. The process not only yielded functional, sustainable, community-centered stormwater and land management approaches that bridged the divide between the surrounding neighborhoods and created a strong sense of ownership and pride, it fundamentally shifted thinking about how to approach community development and planning in Fargo.

To read more on this example, go to page [70](#).



<sup>5</sup> “Soul of the Community,” Knight Foundation, [knightfoundation.org/sotc](https://knightfoundation.org/sotc)

<sup>6</sup> Molly Scott, Robert Santos, Olivia Arena, Chris Hayes, and Alphonse Simon, *Community Ties: Understanding What Attaches People to the Place Where They Live*, Knight Foundation, 2020, [knightfoundation.org/reports/community-ties-understanding-what-attaches-people-to-the-place-where-they-live/](https://knightfoundation.org/reports/community-ties-understanding-what-attaches-people-to-the-place-where-they-live/)



## EXPANDS AND DEEPENS YOUR NETWORK OF COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

**THE SCENARIO** Us versus them.

**THE OPPORTUNITY** Through processes that inspire empathy and communication, artists can foster shared understanding and human connection between the community and local government.



Much of a manager's implicit responsibility and day-to-day activities surround building relationships with individuals and institutions. Fostering government's relationship with the community can be difficult in a political environment. Individuals get frustrated when decisions made in the best interests of the greater community don't align with their personal opinions; staff and elected officials may feel misunderstood or unfairly blamed. Tenuous relationships where everyone is focused on defense can lead to inequitable outcomes.

But relationships can also be the primary driver for getting things done in times of relatively normalcy—and your insurance policy in times of heightened stress or crisis. Artists, culture-bearers, and designers can develop new mechanisms for city staff and leadership to deepen their community



**“Our role as public administrators needs to evolve. Public administrators need to reacquaint themselves with our origin as reformers. We came from that, but we’ve moved past corruption to social issues. We must become leaders that inspire change or risk becoming irrelevant.”**

Noel Bernal  
City Manager  
Brownsville, Texas

relationships, trust, and communication over time to transcend transactional encounters, to see how respective knowledge and capabilities complement each other. In particular, communities of color, immigrants, lower-income households, and other historically marginalized residents are often those most in need of dedicated attention to repair or establish communication and responsive action.

## CONSIDER THIS

Relationships between public safety staff and the communities they serve have been in the spotlight for several years. In Portland, Maine, the Art At Work initiative has implemented several programs to reverse “historically low” morale within the department and humanize its officers to the broader community. The city embedded a local theater artist within the manager’s office, who spent time working with leadership and staff to understand root issues and desired outcomes. She then designed arts-based strategies to address these challenges. As one example, the Thin Blue Lines project partnered writers with law enforcement officers and developed a calendar of their poetry and photographs reflecting the complex realities of a difficult job. Art At Work helped to empower employees, foster a culture shift across the local government, and prevent burnout and turnover. It also enabled community members to see local government staff as three-dimensional people with good intentions, stopped incidences of youth violence against police and public employees, and substantially decreased incidences of discrimination-based lawsuits against the city.

To read more on this example, go to page [78](#).



## ENHANCES COMMUNICATION AND INPUT ACROSS DIFFERENCES IN CIVIC PROCESSES

**THE SCENARIO** You don't know what you don't know.

**THE OPPORTUNITY** Artists can facilitate processes and experiences that respect and translate for different perspectives within and between government and the community, bridging disconnects in understanding.



Managers serve communities made up of a variety of individuals that may only have one thing in common: they call it their home. They lead teams of staff with wide ranges of skills, functions, and experiences. Language barriers, or the ways we communicate, are a major disincentive to participation in traditional government processes or collaboration across disciplines. These are not limited to non-native English speakers, though they are perhaps at most risk; the technical jargon used by specialized areas of practice can also result in confusion or shut down communication altogether.

To effectively engage the community, government needs to communicate and translate across diverse cultures, perspectives, races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, socioeconomic statuses, ages, physical abilities, and religious and political beliefs. Local governments can provide a space to engage where differences can be acknowledged and respected to lead to better outcomes for the entire community, not just those already plugged into routine public participation efforts or those steeped in specialized knowledge.



**“The kinds of things this work tackles are the kinds of things that have no other solutions.”**

Marty Pottenger  
Founder/Director  
Art At Work



**“As a local government manager, I am convinced that the creative placemaking process can be used effectively to develop a strong sense of community and provide common purpose to disparate parts of the community. And the use of the arts helps to provide an emotional response that draws one in.”**

Richard Brown  
Town Administrator  
Somerset, Massachusetts

## CONSIDER THIS

In the U.S./Mexican border town of Brownsville, Texas, entrepreneurial residents of the lower-income Buena Vida neighborhood had long operated an informal economy of micro-businesses based around traditional foods. Confusion or simple lack of understanding about requirements, coupled with concerns about family members' immigration status, disincited residents from engaging with the local government and its formal permitting process. Operators dreamed of growing their businesses and the overall community economy, but their needs were unique and the system wasn't working. The city was able to bridge communication challenges with residents by partnering with a local art collective. Its activist-artists designed an engagement process that allowed residents to feel safe and invited in sharing both their challenges and future visions. Through this process and open-mindedness, city officials experienced new means of listening to their residents' needs and were able to tailor processes that promoted economic opportunities for a community segment that deserved special attention.

To read more on this example, go to page [84](#).



## HELPS MATCH THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS TO THE REAL ISSUES

**THE SCENARIO** Everything looks like a nail.

**THE OPPORTUNITY** Artists can use their unique talents to facilitate processes that identify inclusive, culturally rooted, equitable solutions to community-validated challenges.



Abraham Kaplan and Abraham Maslow are credited with popularizing the “law of the instrument,” the tendency for scientists to over-rely on familiar methods regardless of the situation. The same could be said for the bureaucratic inertia of governments. This is not news to local government managers, but awareness alone won’t overcome the behavior. It’s too easy for government to fall back on a standard model for community development decisions, where technical “experts” draft a plan that follows a routine, formal process of review through implementation. This approach is familiar, compliant, and efficient. But it also defaults to those technical experts in defining the goal and the solution, and often relies on public input meetings attended by a narrow sliver of the population. This runs the risk of missing the point, of a solution in search of a problem. Artists can bring a wide range of facilitation tactics that help surface under-the-radar sentiment, identify root issues, and value different types of knowledge. Engaging artists’ expertise can therefore improve your ability to design solutions embraced and supported by the community.

### CONSIDER THIS

Engineers with the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, like many of their peers in agencies large and small, had been trained to focus on objective, data-driven decision-making. But de-emphasizing the human side of numbers stymied the department’s Vision Zero efforts. Looking to stimulate the work and improve community engagement with some creative, outside-the-box thinking, the city embedded an artist within the department. Tapping both his artistic and teaching skills, the artist fostered a culture shift where civil engineers learned the power of personal storytelling around dangerous roads and pedestrian fatalities as a complement to their technical expertise. This approach also helped to connect the community to the effort. To read more on this example, go to page [91](#).



# DISCOVERING OPPORTUNITIES

## REIMAGINING ROLES FOR ARTISTS ON YOUR TEAM

As a local government leader, employing a creative placemaking or problem-solving approach means inviting an artist or culture-bearer to join your team. Your existing team includes experts on data, policies, and programming across an array of service areas and functions, as well as a network of relationships with community members and institutions. But despite best efforts and intentions, entrenched or “wicked” issues persist—whether they manifest as “everyday” issues like lack of participation, or as some of the largest systemic challenges, such as racial inequity.

**A**rtists and culture-bearers can complement your team's capacity to deal with these challenges by taking on one or more roles or functions, which could include, but are not limited to:

**Activation of public or vacant space through temporary or permanent art installations, programming, or events reflective of authentic community identity.** These opportunities may be among the first that come to mind when considering where creative placemaking might apply to your community. Thoughtfully structured partnerships can yield “win-win” experiences led by artists that improve both physical infrastructure (property value and conditions) and social fabric (community empowerment and engagement).

- Local land banks in areas such as Newburgh, New York, and Kalamazoo, Michigan, have facilitated temporary pop-up installations that encouraged redevelopment of neglected districts and properties while boosting visibility of artists and community assets.
- Communities like Greensboro, North Carolina; San Diego, California; and Nashville, Tennessee; have reclaimed highway infrastructure and surrounding areas with creative design processes to reconnect historically marginalized neighborhoods with safe, vibrant, culturally reflective public spaces.
- In Casper, Wyoming, an interactive sculpture was constructed from remnants of a condemned public housing facility and integrated within a new sustainable, affordable housing development. And in communities across the country, artists are leading conversations around reimagining public monuments during this time of heightened public consciousness.

**Facilitation of an event or ongoing process.** The diverse, historic Upham's Corner neighborhood of Dorchester, Boston, found itself squarely in the path of the city's transit-oriented development plans in the 2010s. While an exciting prospect to some (i.e., those familiar with planning processes or located at other points along the corridor), plenty of residents were worried about gentrification or unaware of the plans altogether.

- As part of a series of activities organized to foster a stronger sense of belonging and participation among residents, artists with the Design Studio for Social Intervention put on a pop-up exhibit called Make Planning Processes Public. In contrast to standard public meeting processes that typically engage a limited slice of a population, this installation engaged hundreds of residents in learning about and offering feedback on the plans, including on a proposed fence along the middle of the corridor. Though intended to improve traffic and pedestrian safety, the plans hadn't accounted for the symbolism of dividing the neighborhood—and were ultimately changed based on the clear feedback received.



## TAKE A TOUR

[“Do You See Yourself in Upham's Corner?”](#) case study.

**Performance for or with community members and local leaders.** This can be a playful but purposeful means for bringing attention to under-the-radar issues and perspectives. Community pools are important recreation and gathering spaces, particularly in hot climates, but Austin's rapidly aging aquatics facilities were in danger of closing due to a lack of funding for

## IN THIS SECTION YOU'LL FIND:

- Roles that artists can contribute to your team.
- More on how creative placemaking approaches can add value to specific local government areas of work.

maintenance and repairs. This stood to disproportionately impact residents without access to private alternatives.

- To draw attention to their deteriorating status, the city's Parks and Recreation Department and Austin-based Forklift Danceworks created My Park, My Pool, My City. Through a series of meetings, parties, and performances organized by the Forklift artists, this initiative brought attention to the vital roles community pools filled in Austin's historically marginalized neighborhoods. In addition to celebrating and maintaining the vibrant histories of these community facilities, the initiative facilitated understanding of the policy issue. Voters later supported a city bond package that included a significant earmark for the aquatics system.



## TAKE A TOUR

[My Park, My Pool, My City](#) website.

**Organizing/engagement, including marginalized groups, using nontraditional approaches.** It is no secret that traditional methods of engagement often exclude a majority of the population, particularly those from minority and low-income communities. The barriers to entry are high: show up to a meeting in a public facility removed from public transportation, at the designated time (usually evening) with no childcare provided, and speak English if you would like to participate. Artists and cultural organizers find new ways to engage the community that can transcend these barriers through creating a safe, comfortable space that meets the community where they are.





- The city of Milan, Minnesota, has a population of 400 and has recently seen a large increase in Micronesian immigrants (now over half of the population of the town) to what had historically been a largely Norwegian-descended community. Placebase Productions, a local theater company, led an engagement process through the creation of a community musical that explored past stories, addressed present conditions, and envisioned future possibilities together. By establishing common ground and celebrating differences, the voices of local residents were elevated to reflect the traditions, heritage, and vision for their community with 50 percent of participants indicating after the performance they would connect more with community members they didn't know.



**Instigation, or disruption of “business as usual,” encouraging reflection or a fresh perspective.** Similar to how some local governments have brought on innovation or diversity officers to review standard practices through a new cross-cutting lens, artist residencies may be an effective opportunity to breathe new life into routine operations. As Joanna Woronkovicz and John Michael Schert wrote in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*:

“(A)rtists possess general factors of creativity that enable them to work across domains. Some of these factors: adaptiveness to foreign environments, autonomous decision-making and idea generation, capacity to deal with uncertainty and discomfort, and willingness to depart from norms and create new frameworks. ... The other and perhaps more important part is the collaborative potential of artists working with public sector workers to find creative solutions to public sector problems.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Joanna Woronkovicz and John Michael Schert, “Artists in Local Government: Local Government Artist-in-Residence Programs Must Include Opportunities for Public Sector Innovation,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2020, [ssir.org/articles/entry/local\\_government\\_artist\\_in\\_residence\\_programs\\_must\\_include\\_opportunities\\_or\\_public\\_sector\\_innovation](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/local_government_artist_in_residence_programs_must_include_opportunities_or_public_sector_innovation)

See the “Unexpected Approaches for Improved Outcomes” case study for more on examples and links to additional resources.<sup>8</sup>

**Conduits/translation of complex or sensitive information.** Artists are often more adept at broaching conversations in and with the community about difficult issues. They can use various forms of creative expression to help others understand and empathize with pain or trauma outside of their own experiences.

- In Alameda County, California, sheriff’s deputy Jinho Ferreira developed his own one-person show, “Cops and Robbers,” in response to the rash of police violence targeting African Americans. The play depicts his own journey from adolescence amid the Oakland crack epidemic to a career in law enforcement, and helped to catalyze new crime prevention programming and improve police-community relations.
- Creative minds can also work to make scientific, technical, or seemingly invisible information relatable across sectors. Leveraging her identity as an artist and her role directing Health Equity in All Policies for New York City’s Department of Health and Hygiene, Elizabeth Hamby and a cross-sector team involving epidemiologists, housing specialists, and planners developed a Dungeons and Dragons–style game to drive home the impacts of structural racism on public health over three significant time periods. The game helped to facilitate conversations across municipal departments about inequitable impacts of housing and other public policies.<sup>9</sup>

8 Victoria Hutter, “Playing Cops and Robbers,” *American Artscape*, 2016, [arts.gov/NEARTS/2016v3-pursuit-creative-life/playing-cops-and-robbers](https://arts.gov/NEARTS/2016v3-pursuit-creative-life/playing-cops-and-robbers).

9 Elizabeth Hamby, “Equity and Urban Planning,” *ArtPlace America*, 2018, [artplaceamerica.org/blog/equity-and-urban-planning](https://artplaceamerica.org/blog/equity-and-urban-planning)



Some of these—facilitation, engagement, information-sharing—are likely familiar responsibilities. Artistic performance or creation may seem further afield from core government functions. And the notion of disruption may be completely counterintuitive or risky to a management-oriented mindset. But chances are, there is room for improvement of existing practices and trying new approaches altogether in an effort to better serve the entire community.





“As I started working with artists on housing projects and transportation projects, I realized that the arts were involved in the process and not the final project ... which resulted in a better, more collaborative, locally focused, and relevant result in the end, that often didn’t even look like a work of art—it didn’t have something traditional like a mural or a sculpture. Really, the art took place in the process, often behind the scenes.”

Ben Stone  
Director of Arts and Culture  
Smart Growth America

## CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IN SAMPLE CONTEXTS

Much of the early literature and resources on creative placemaking focused on its applications to community planning and economic development. While these are still fertile ground for creative placemaking partnerships to take root, as the field has grown, practitioners have found opportunities across a wide range of government functions and responsibilities. The following cover just a sampling of additional examples and links to further discovery for managers or relevant staff.

### HOUSING

Ensuring equitable access to quality, affordable housing is a perpetual challenge facing local leaders in communities across the density spectrum, from rural to urban. While not all local governments are in the housing development business, they can support creative placemaking efforts to raise awareness of local market conditions and the needs of vulnerable community segments.

- In the cities of Albany, Schenectady, and Troy, New York, local governments were vital partners in an artist-driven regional public art initiative called Breathing Lights that illuminated hundreds of vacant homes each night for several months. The initiative drew attention to the challenges facing neighborhoods with high vacancies and opportunities for rehabilitation, generated additional public and private support for combating blight, and provided new ways for community members and partners to build civic connection and pride. Mayors championed the long-term transformational impacts of the project, even as an alternative to direct investment in blight cleanup.

“People are looking at opportunities in some of the neighborhoods that before, they never would have even considered. And, so, the effect of this is happening today, and I believe it’ll carry on five years and ten years into the future. It is really a transformational engagement that gets people to rethink about how we deal with some of the problem properties.”  
Gary McCarthy, Mayor, Schenectady, New York<sup>10</sup>

- Local governments can also facilitate or provide vital support to cross-sector partnerships that plan for community-driven, culturally appropriate housing development. A group of Black artists led the charge in Houston’s Third Ward to develop what started as an historic preservation public art project in the early 1990s. With support from a tapestry of private, philanthropic, and nonprofit partners along with the city, Project Row Houses grew into a thriving complex of affordable housing, art galleries, and community programming.

<sup>10</sup> Nicole Van Slyke (Producer), Brian Flynne, Ron Bigge, Zeke Kubisch, Jill Malouf (Videography), “Behind the Lights,” WMHT Educational Telecommunications, 2017, [breathinglights.com/documentary](https://breathinglights.com/documentary).



## TAKE A TOUR

[Breathing Lights](#) website; [Project Row Houses](#) website.



## DIVE DEEPER

Find more examples and a rich exploration of the context for these opportunities in [Exploring the Ways Arts and Culture Intersects with Housing: Emerging Practices and Implications for Further Action](#).

## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation decision-making is a heavily numbers-based game, with decisions driven largely by precedent, engineering standards and analyses, funding formulas, and political support. “Rather than sparking new, innovative ideas, these cumbersome constraints often lead to rehashed ideas that follow conventional standards, adhere to the status quo, and are designed to win approvals rather than to inspire community members and find new ways to solve old problems.”<sup>11</sup> The possible consequences? At best, missing potentially low-hanging fruit opportunities to increase public support for projects, improve user experiences, and validate assumptions. At worst, highways that divide more than they connect. Street design that favors the automobile over pedestrians or non-motorized uses, leading to safety hazards and access issues. Construction that disrupts community life and fosters ill will toward the government. Failure to appreciate the connectivity needs of the entire community and the potential social and economic impacts left unrealized. Engaging the perspective of artists and culture-bearers, ideally early on in these decision-making processes, can help to humanize the numbers in your calculations and dive deeper into the implications of investments (or lack thereof) in your community.

- Artists trained in theater and dance helped Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, and Takoma Park, Maryland, facilitate processes through which government officials and staff were able to learn from residents about their lived experiences navigating key transportation corridors. Milwaukee’s performances, facilitated by Anne Basting and the Sojourn Theater, prompted crosswalk signal changes to improve pedestrian safety. Takoma Park’s work with Dance Exchange, founded by Liz Lerman and led by Cassie Meador, helped city staff understand the need to consider cultural feedback in planning decisions.

Local governments have partnered with artists to mitigate challenges posed by transportation projects.

- When a commuter rail system proposed to connect rural Kewa Pueblo, New Mexico, with its larger region, early plans overlooked safe local access to the station itself. Tribal community members worked with artists and the local planning department to blaze a connective trail that not only improved pedestrian safety and opened up local economic opportunities, but honored cultural heritage and fostered a sense of ownership and pride.



“What excites us about introducing creative placemaking strategies in rural communities is that the change can be simultaneously so much more immediate and long-term. The role of the artist is to help city governments be more engaging and equitable, something many small cities are challenged by at the moment.

Ashley Hansen  
Founder and Director  
Department of Public Transformation

<sup>11</sup> Smart Growth America / ArtPlace America, *Arts, Culture, and Transportation: A Creative Placemaking Field Scan*, [t4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Arts-Culture-Field-Scan.pdf](https://t4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Arts-Culture-Field-Scan.pdf).

- In the Twin Cities region of Minnesota, the city of Saint Paul worked with the community and economic development corporation Springboard for the Arts, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative, and other partners in a proactive initiative to use arts and culture in countering disruption of the Green Line light rail construction. Their Irrigate initiative trained hundreds of local artists, who completed 150 creative placemaking performances, installations, and infrastructure improvements over 36 months that fostered social capital and support for local businesses along the corridor.



## DIVE DEEPER

For more on solving transportation planning problems through creative placemaking, see the essential resource, [Arts, Culture and Transportation: A Creative Placemaking Field Scan](#).

## PUBLIC WORKS

Public works departments are known for providing some of the most important services to the community, including wastewater collection and sanitation, stormwater management, and clean drinking water, but often focus more on tried and true methods and what to build rather than new ways to approach a problem. Resistance to change can be strong, and often for good reason. These essential systems are costly to maintain, and errors can have devastating impacts on community health. But much of the infrastructure built to provide these services is on average over 100 years old, long outliving their intended lifespans. Postponement of capital projects as a result of fiscal stress, coupled with additional system pressure from the impacts of climate change, has led to an alarming decline in public

infrastructure. Marshalling the significant investments needed to address these issues will require public and political will. “Today, water utilities increasingly realize that the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ nature of their operations hinders their ability to deliver on their core mandate of providing reliable water service. They need deeper and more sustained interactions with the public, especially in light of the fact that revenue generated from water bills is the primary source of support for water infrastructure.”<sup>12</sup>

Artists have become important partners in addressing these complicated issues by promoting public awareness and identifying innovative infrastructure improvements.



12 U.S. Water Alliance, *Advancing One Water Through Arts and Culture: A Blueprint for Action*, US Water Alliance, 2018, [uswateralliance.org/sites/uswateralliance.org/files/publications/uswa\\_artsculture\\_FINAL\\_PAGES\\_RGB\\_0.PDF](https://uswateralliance.org/sites/uswateralliance.org/files/publications/uswa_artsculture_FINAL_PAGES_RGB_0.PDF).

- Water is Life was a series of projects that focused on strengthening water systems in Native American communities. Through their work with rural Russian Mission, Alaska, they addressed poor water quality and community perception by visually displaying the change in management of the water system through community events, such as murals and youth-led art projects. Their efforts raised the public's perception of the water utilities and resulted in a collection rate growth from 32 to 89 percent after one year.
- In West Palm Beach County, Florida, the Solid Waste Authority invited artist Michael Singer onto the design team for its new waste-to-energy facility. With a seat at the table throughout the entire project, Singer's team was able to influence design by suggesting the inclusion of an onsite rainwater harvesting system that can capture and store over 2 million gallons of rainwater, significantly reducing the amount of water needed to be purchased to run the facility. Additionally, artists developed the environmental and educational components of the building, creating a space where programming could connect the community with the often invisible yet essential services being provided.



## DIVE DEEPER

For more on solving storm, drinking, and wastewater problems through creative placemaking, see the essential resource, [Advancing One Water Through Arts and Culture: A Blueprint for Action](#).

## EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Emergency management has become a robust field in local government over the past 50 years with public managers playing a vital role in leading the response in their communities. As Amelia Brown notes in "Art: Creating Possibilities in Emergencies" in the October 2020 issue of *Public Management*, disasters come in many different forms, including natural, technological, and structural, and often intersect. For example, Hurricane Katrina (a natural disaster) caused the levees to break (a technological disaster), exacerbating disparities in housing and transportation (a systemic disaster). But opportunities can arise even within these compounding crises to develop new, innovative, and creative ways to address long-standing issues. "One of the most overlooked yet vital roles in emergency management is the role of artists," says Brown, founder and CEO of Emergency Arts, who regularly works with local governments on emergency planning and response. "Integrating artists into every phase of emergency management is key to addressing various types of emergencies and to implementing an integrated approach."<sup>13</sup>

- Brown provides an example from Hurricane Katrina, in which many marginalized communities without personal transportation were left stranded in the midst of a disaster. This led to the development of pick-up points throughout the city to safely evacuate via public transportation, but years after their creation it was found that people



**"It's so important that we preserve a historical record of our city's experience. This project was a chance to give our employees an opportunity to share their own experiences, and out of it, have a way to share those stories with our community and with other communities and agencies so that we may learn from each other."**

Sean McGlynn  
City Manager  
Santa Rosa, California  
([The Press Democrat, September 3, 2019](#))



**"One of the most overlooked yet vital roles in emergency management is the role of artists."**

Amelia Brown  
Founder & Consultant  
Emergency Arts

<sup>13</sup> Amelia Brown, "Art: Creating Possibilities in Emergencies," *Public Management*, 2020, [icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/art-creating-possibilities-emergencies](https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/art-creating-possibilities-emergencies).

were unaware of the program. Evacuteer, a volunteer management organization partnered with FEMA, the Arts Council of New Orleans, and the city to increase visibility of the pick-up points by installing 17 public arts pieces. Named Evacuspots, the art serves as identifiable markers to designate gathering locations. Listening to the most underserved and underrepresented communities provided a pathway to improved emergency management and community recovery.<sup>14</sup>

Public employees are often residents of the community they serve, so responding to and being a victim of an emergency can coincide. This was the case for many employees in Santa Rosa, California, following the Sonoma Complex Fires in 2017. City staff served in their roles with heroic dedication as some of their own homes burned to the ground. City Manager Sean McGlynn turned to artists to develop a documentary that could help staff and the broader community process what had happened, and to begin to heal the trauma experienced in the organization. “Last October” captured both the professional and personal recollections of municipal staff from various departments and was initially developed for internal use, but was released to the public and resonated strongly with the community.

These examples show how art is a way to build solidarity, heal communally, and help build more resilient communities.



## TAKE A TOUR

[Emergency Arts](#) website; [Last October](#) documentary

## CIVIC PROCESSES

Managers sometimes struggle with the general public’s apathy toward, limited understanding of, or politicization of basic civic processes. Creative placemaking strategies can help reimagine a stale process and provide opportunities for increased, meaningful public participation.

- When Austin restructured its city council to an entirely ward-based format by popular referendum in 2012, it required the creation of 10 new voter districts. Redistricting can be a contentious endeavor, but with this obligation came an opportunity. Through a public-private partnership called Drawing Lines, artists were embedded in each of the 10 districts for a year prior to developing place-specific pieces of public art, culminating in a collective exhibition. In addition to the varied forms of art that endure as symbols of each community, the processes used in developing these projects allowed new district members to interact in unexpected ways, through sharing of recipes, soundscapes, poetry, or images.
- Denver, Colorado, is home to the world’s first known “Civic Health Club,” founded in 2012 by theater artist and activist Evan Weissman. Called the Warm Cookies of the Revolution, it has since created over 150 unique programs that provide unexpected, approachable, and fun opportunities for a diverse array of local residents to make connections with each other, learn more about civic processes, and build capacity for taking action on issues important to them. The city of Denver has supported Warm Cookies activities by access to space through its cultural partners program. Through a recent effort called “This Machine Has a Soul,”

<sup>14</sup> Amelia Brown, “Art: Creating Possibilities in Emergencies,” *Public Management*, 2020, [icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/art-creating-possibilities-emergencies](https://www.icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/art-creating-possibilities-emergencies).



Warm Cookies partnered local students and artists in developing a Rube Goldberg–inspired installation to educate and engage community members, including youth, in participatory budgeting processes. These pilot projects have helped advance broader adoption of participatory budgeting in Denver.



## TAKE A TOUR

[Drawing Lines](#) website; [Warm Cookies of the Revolution](#) website; [This Machine Has a Soul](#) website



## DIVE DEEPER

### OTHER CONTEXTS AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Didn't see the context you were looking for? Here are a few additional recommended jumping-off points for further reading:

#### ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

This field scan encompasses several domains: energy, water, land, waste, toxic pollution, and climate resilience and adaptation; and how arts and cultural strategies can facilitate transitions to more sustainable and equitable systems.

[Farther, Faster, Together: How Arts and Culture Can Accelerate Environmental Progress](#)

#### EQUITY INITIATIVES

An increasing number of local governments are having internal and public-facing conversations about the need to assess and modify practices to better address issues of inequity. If you aren't yet sure where arts and culture could best help you in this process, this resource introduces potential policy targets and creative placemaking strategies across a wide range of issues.

[Creating Change Through Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development](#)

#### FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Drawing from examples across the rural to urban continuum, this field scan explores food and agriculture activities as both expressions of arts and culture and opportunities for community economic development.

[Cultivating Creativity: Exploring Arts & Culture in Community Food Systems Transformation](#)

#### IMMIGRATION AND INCLUSION

As population demographics of America continue to change, this field scan explores how arts and cultural strategies can help build more welcoming and inclusive communities that serve and support both new and longer-term residents.

[Bridging Divides, Creating Community: Arts, Culture, and Immigration](#)

Civic Arts, a partner in the development of this guide, maintains [a living library of creative placemaking resources](#) organized for easy navigating according to your unique interests.

## PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Similar in scope to this guide but applied to the specific context of parks, the Field Guide's collection of case studies demonstrates how arts can build a sense of place in a wide range of open spaces. The toolkit expands on health impacts of these interventions.

[Field Guide for Creative Placemaking in Parks; Toolkit for Health, Art, Parks & Equity](#)

## PLANNING

Perhaps the most common government sector to engage in creative placemaking activities, the American Planning Association maintains an extensive collection of resources on the topic for planners and other local government leaders, including sample policies, local and regional plans, trainings, and more.

[Creative Placemaking Knowledgebase](#)

## PUBLIC SAFETY

Published in 2016, both following and preceding a series of high-profile incidences of police violence and ensuing civic unrest, this field scan explores linkages between creative practices and public safety indicators.

[Exploring the Ways Arts and Culture Intersect with Public Safety](#)

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Creative placemaking strategies have been effective at preserving rural character while advancing social and economic opportunities. This resource describes successful initiatives and lessons learned.

[Rural Placemaking: Making the Most of Creativity in Your Community](#)

## TRIBAL NATIONS

Long before creative placemaking was a term, indigenous tribes have embodied its principles, as exemplified by this collection of case studies and links to additional resources.

[Native American Creative Placemaking](#)

## VACANT PROPERTIES

Many communities struggle with what do with vacant properties and often artists and creative practices are exciting places to start to reactivate, animate, and develop these spaces into community assets.

[Creative Placemaking on Vacant Properties](#) and [Creative Community Development: A Resource Guide for Artist-led Development of Vacant Spaces in Southwest Minnesota](#)

## 10 THINGS YOU (OR YOUR STAFF) CAN DO TO TAKE THIS GUIDE'S IDEAS FORWARD IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- 1 Meet artists where they are and begin to build informal relationships.** Attend a meeting of your local or regional arts agency, commission, or other cultural institution leadership. Listen with an open mind.
- 2 Invite artists to help you set the table.** What are some of the most difficult conversations you're facing now within your staff or with the community? Could an artist help structure those experiences differently?
- 3 Make new friends.** Connect with your peers that have experience in these types of partnerships or share interest in learning more about these ideas. Join a listserv such as the [Civic Artist-in-Residence Project](#) or online affinity group such as [Emerging Local Government Leaders' Creative Community Cohort](#). ICMA members can continue the discussion on ICMA Connect. Reach out to ICMA staff for assistance in identifying contacts.
- 4 Introduce new concepts.** Share some of the guidance found within this guide with your governing body and staff. Identify those who are more receptive to the ideas and help connect them to the work.
- 5 Dare to take small risks and don't overthink.** As you start to build relationships and provide space for ideas to spark, seize on opportunities that instinctively feel doable. Stage a pop-up, one-off activity and see what you learn. Use those experiments to develop comfort in working with new types of partners and ambiguous expectations.
- 6 Go one step further.** Challenge yourself or your team to take a single policy or program and imagine how it could better serve or reflect the community. Maybe it is refining how you make public art decisions. Maybe it is finding new ways to hear from users of a public service outside of city hall. Now think about who can help you do this.
- 7 Look to activate and animate dormant spaces** and processes with meaningful activities that help unearth underlying challenges or opportunities in a community or highlight existing assets and undervalued resources.
- 8 Cast a talent show or create opportunities for staff to share hidden creative abilities** of all forms and help honor the existing creativity that's in your departments already. Can these talents be brought to bear in their existing or new responsibilities?
- 9 Support your arts and culture sector, even indirectly.** Even without dollars to invest, get out of the way by eliminating unnecessary red tape, or use the power of regulation to reward creativity and support for what arts and cultural institutions add to your community.
- 10 Watch a movie.** There are many examples of videos that document a creative placemaking process or its final product, adding dimension to the experience and its impacts. A couple are referenced earlier in this guide ([Breathing Lights](#); [Last October](#)) and another collection is [here](#). Find one that inspires you and share it with your team.

# GRANDES

VISIONES  
10-15-20-30-40-50-60-70-80-90-100



Small/medium  
vision

¿MI ME GUSTA MI PUEBLO  
MI TOLL MU-FELIS BONA  
LOS MALOS NO NOS GUSTA

LA DE LA TIEN  
SI A LA TIEN  
Y LA MALA TIEN SUS ROS

Futuro

# ADULTOS

VISIONES



Small/medium  
vision

¿MI ME GUSTA MI PUEBLO  
MI TOLL MU-FELIS BONA  
LOS MALOS NO NOS GUSTA

LA DE LA TIEN  
SI A LA TIEN  
Y LA MALA TIEN SUS ROS

Futuro

# JÓVENES



Small/medium  
vision

¿MI ME GUSTA MI PUEBLO  
MI TOLL MU-FELIS BONA  
LOS MALOS NO NOS GUSTA

LA DE LA TIEN  
SI A LA TIEN  
Y LA MALA TIEN SUS ROS

Futuro

# NIN



Small/medium  
vision

¿MI ME GUSTA MI PUEBLO  
MI TOLL MU-FELIS BONA  
LOS MALOS NO NOS GUSTA

LA DE LA TIEN  
SI A LA TIEN  
Y LA MALA TIEN SUS ROS

Futuro

## NAVIGATING PROCESSES

In this section you'll find guidance on implementation and navigating challenges organized into four major areas, which can also be found in the guide's five featured case studies:

- Defining your opportunity.
- Preparing to partner.
- Assembling your team.
- Structuring and sustaining partnerships.

You'll also find links to additional tools and resources, prompts for reflection, and suggested next steps.

## DEFINING YOUR OPPORTUNITY

As it is practiced today, creative placemaking is as much about the process as it is about the end result. In that sense, it is less about the object at the end and more about the relationships, conversations, and actions that arts and culture bring into community change processes. It is about using arts and culture strategies to facilitate outcomes desired by the community stakeholders impacted, which could include those internal and/or external to the local government.

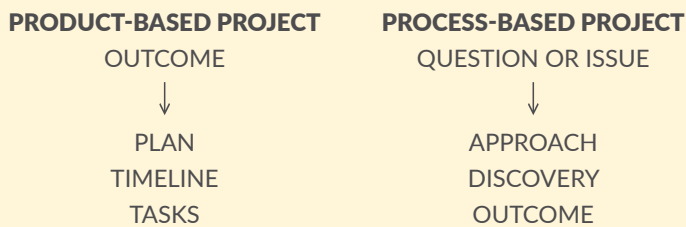
### COMMUNITY-DEFINED PROBLEM

In thinking about how one might apply this approach to their community, it's important to acknowledge that a creative problem-solving approach can be different than "business as usual." Focusing first on the process instead of the end results, start by collaboratively identifying the challenge you and your community would like to address or opportunities you wish to explore. The figure below, adapted from creative placemaking practitioners at Forecast, a nonprofit organization based in Saint Paul, Minnesota, that provides consulting and technical services on public art and placemaking projects across the country, illustrates how this might look different from a product-based approach where the outcome is pre-supposed (as also described on page 55).



- Hint: It can be anything!** Because creative placemaking is process-oriented (as opposed to product-oriented), it can be applied to a wide range of topics, challenges, and aspirations. While it often starts with a desire to improve civic infrastructure, build social cohesion, and advance community cultural life, the creative practice can also be applied to solving transportation challenges, housing needs, and food security, among other things. Think expansively!
- Community stakeholders need to define or validate the opportunity.** The best project ideas often start in early dialogues between community members, artists, and government and community stakeholders around a shared vision or identification of needs. While the idea may have started within your local government (or even your own mind), it is always important to consider how you are listening to the community, either in advance of or as a part of the project you are embarking on. Projects that

### CONNECTING WITH ARTISTS PRODUCT + PROCESS



Artists can contribute to different types of projects. Unlike typical problem-solving approaches oriented around a desired outcome, creative placemaking tends to focus on working with the community through a process to collaboratively define the issue, explore potential responses, and achieve a more equitable solution. (Adapted from [Forecast Public Art](#))

advance without community input and guidance often run the risk of doing harm or having negative impacts on parts of the community, even while benefiting others.

- **Consider when community engagement happens.** Very often municipal projects begin to involve the community after many larger project decisions have already been made. But pause to consider, what is the central focus of the project? Who is leading the design or management of it? How will the project come together? Community input is often sought after many parts of the project are already in place, leaving a narrow range of “community choices.” Working with artists to help establish on-going, long-term community conversations can help ensure that when project opportunities arise, a foundation of dialogue and trust are already established.
- **Build on local context, assets, and aspirations.** [Springboard for the Arts’ Irrigate Toolkit](#) offers a set of overarching questions to help local governments consider the potential scope of a new creative placemaking partnership;



## ASK YOURSELF

The following questions from the [Springboard for the Arts’ Irrigate Toolkit](#):

**1. What is the community challenge or opportunity?** It will likely be a combination of place and the people who live, work, and are invested in that place.

**Place – What is it?** A construction project, a commercial node, a road improvement, a set of lots or buildings, a lakeshore? What are the boundaries and the physical features? A historic preservation effort? Is it a contentious community issue or a negative narrative about a place?



**People** — Are there relationships between groups of people or interests that you'd like to build? Are there attitudes or habits that you'd like to change? Do you want to build artist leadership? Are there types of people you want to engage through the artist projects? You might be interested in intergenerational or intercultural exchange, or connecting business owners to the neighborhood they are in.

**2. What are you hoping artist projects will achieve?** Referring to the challenges/opportunities above, what are you hoping these artist projects will achieve? This could be specific or general, such as revitalizing storefronts on a main street to bringing activity and sense of identity to a neighborhood node. It might also include engaging community in new ways, and empowering residents to affect change where they live.



## TAKE ACTION

The Animating Democracy program also offers a toolkit for [Planning & Designing Arts-Based Civic Engagement Projects](#). Its Phase I (IMAGINE) worksheets may be useful in helping to capture and organize initial ideas as you prepare to discuss with arts, culture, and community stakeholders. The DEFINE and DESIGN aspects are better thought through together with community input.

The case studies included in this guide also provide questions to help you consider how these examples might inform scoping of a project in your community.

While every creative placemaking initiative should ultimately reflect a unique combination of local challenges and assets, honing in on your initial internal and/or external goals can help to identify sources of inspiration from past efforts with overlapping themes (and provide some indication to would-be partners about your readiness). Pointing to those examples of successful partnerships elsewhere can help generate buy-in from necessary decision-makers. In general, though, local governments should resist the temptation to pre-suppose how an artist will achieve these outcomes for their own communities.



## TAKE A TOUR

Browse the [Our Town Project Showcase](#) for illustrated case studies of projects funded by this signature NEA program. Examples span a range of locations (i.e., urban, rural, tribal) and project types and may help you find inspiration aligned with your own ideas.



## DIVE DEEPER

[How to Do Creative Placemaking](#) is a comprehensive primer compiled by the NEA of short reads on many dimensions and examples of the practice. Essays could be excerpted and shared to spark conversations with your council or staff.

## NAVIGATING HAZARDS

**Consider whose visions are leading.** Because creative placemaking involves public and civic life, it means making choices about whose culture, whose values, whose aesthetics, whose identities, and whose ideas are shaping the community you serve. This means it can easily replicate inequity- or privilege-dominant cultures or suppress the complexity of local cultural identities.

[Creative Placemaking Values: A Guide for Practitioners, Funders, and Evaluators](#) provides a series of questions to help partners align their process and outcomes to shared values in line with the full list of principles. To start,



### ASK YOURSELF

- Does the community desire the change envisioned in the project goals? Is community experience leading?
- Will this work include practices that expand opportunities and address barriers so that members of the community experience benefits?
- Do we understand how power and influence imbalance may impact this process and the goals? Who benefits? Who leads? Who is missing? Who pays? What's at stake? Who decides?
- What are your community strengths and assets—people (including artists), institutions, history, culture, and solutions—that exist and are they represented and included in a community-led process?





## PREPARING TO PARTNER

As local governments begin to scope out opportunities for creative placemaking, they should take stock of readiness to support an authentic partnership that embodies the principles listed on page [11](#). Governments and artists will inevitably find differences in their ways of thinking, working, and communicating, and both need to take steps to understand each other's strengths, language, preferences, and where tensions have potential to emerge.

## UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES

A Blade of Grass' Municipal-Artist Partnership Guide's [Understanding Differences to Find Common Ground](#) reference tool summarizes key characteristics typical of artists and government agencies that each should understand about the other going into conversations about a potential partnership. Major elements include:

**Vocabulary.** Government leans heavily on technical jargon and acronyms, as well as straightforward language oriented toward solving problems, whereas artists are more apt to talk about exploring ambiguity and emotions. It's especially important to be aware of common terms used by both stakeholders that may mean different things, sometimes to the point of polarizing the other side. A few examples:

- As noted elsewhere in this guide, the term “creative placemaking” itself can be loaded and troublesome to artists and culture-bearers skeptical of government intentions (whether based on past experience or just perception).
- Artists and local government likely also have different expectations and experiences with the notion of “community engagement.”
- The “design” skills of architects and planners/urban designers are distinct from those of other professional artists.

Creating a team understanding of the key terms that will be used to describe the work early on can help in clarifying how different interpretations and roles complement each other as part of the larger project.

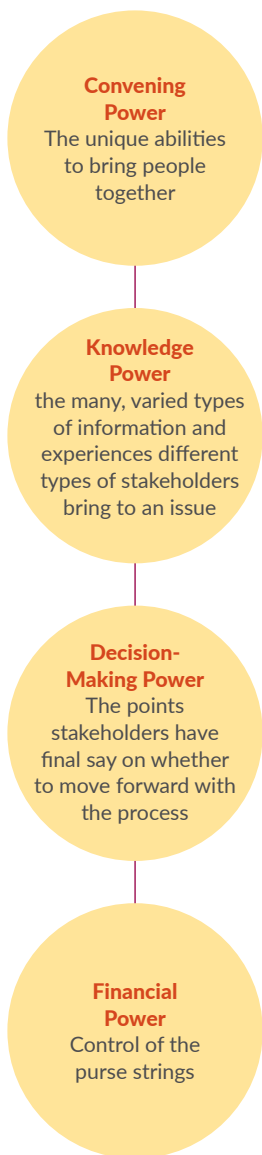
**Different ways of working.** Artists and government may have different (even opposite) expectations about what decisions and processes should move quickly versus which require more time for vetting or iteration. That's not necessarily a bad thing, as friction can reveal blind spots, prompt reevaluation, inspire process improvements, and create opportunities to slow down and build trust. Be open to questions such as, Why does an approval process take so long? What's the worst that could happen if you open up for more feedback?

**Risk.** Explaining the realities of public accountability and legal liability can help prospective partners understand government's aversion to risk and why red tape is sometimes necessary. Appreciate that there is risk on the artist side to consider as well: will working with a government hamstringing their creative energy, process, and individual agency? Will they be able to support themselves if project timelines, payments, and processes shift?

**Power dynamics.** Different dimensions of power will exist in a creative placemaking partnership. Understanding them is the first step; taking measures to manage and rebalance them is a more complicated, longer-term effort.



The Municipal-Artist Partnership Guide classifies major types of power as:



The Municipal-Artist Partnership Guide classifies major types as:

- **Convening power:** the unique abilities to bring people together.
- **Knowledge power:** the many, varied types of information and experiences different types of stakeholders bring to an issue.
- **Decision-making power:** the points at which specific stakeholders have final say on whether to move forward with the process.
- **Financial power:** control of the purse strings.



## DIVE DEEPER

**Power Dynamics** in the Municipal-Artist Partnership Guide.

In *Community Development Information Review*, a publication of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, the team behind the Center for Performance and Civic Practice (CPCP) share a candid sentiment heard during their consulting with community development and municipal agencies:

The thing that makes me most uncomfortable about setting up moments to listen to community members about projects and plans is: What if they tell me what they want and I can't deliver? Isn't that a betrayal? Doesn't that prove I wasn't listening? I mean, we make the decisions. Sure, we base them on feedback, on research, on our own expertise in areas like construction and zoning and budgeting. But if we open the conversation up and people have an unrealistic wish list, or a batch of complaints, I know we can't address all those things within the parameters we have to make a project happen. Why set up false expectations? Why disappoint people? Why piss them off?<sup>15</sup>

## NAVIGATING HAZARDS

**Find power in new processes and in honoring new experiences.** Is the scenario above familiar? In it, there are several implicit assumptions about power worth reconsidering.

1. Community members are being asked to critique a solution, not define the problem.
2. The process for gathering feedback (listening session) may perpetuate a traditional power imbalance (picture a physical division between the expert and the community).
3. Institutions make the decisions and won't be able to meet expectations (but what if the institutions misunderstood the root issue?)
4. Research and technical expertise are more important than lived experience.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Rohd, Rebecca Martínez, Soneela Nankani, Sara Sawicki, and Shannon Scrofano, "Creating Process for Change," *Transforming Community Development through Arts and Culture*, Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco Community Development Innovation Review 2019-2, 2019, [frbsf.org/community-development/publications/community-development-investment-review/2019/november/transforming-community-development-through-arts-and-culture/](https://frbsf.org/community-development/publications/community-development-investment-review/2019/november/transforming-community-development-through-arts-and-culture/).

What if instead of a listening session, the community and the local leaders shared in an experience of co-creation or discovery about the possible issue. A process facilitated by someone external who helped rebalance the power dynamics, where they were able to interact as neighbors. What new information and relationships might that yield, and how might it help future interactions?



## DIVE DEEPER

Read what the CPCP suggests is possible through reimagined processes, based on their experiences working in communities from Alaska to Minnesota to Philadelphia, in their full commentary: [Creating Process for Change](#).

**Find common language, or at least an understanding of how you'll describe the work.** Recognizing some of the vocabulary challenges previously noted, think about how you may want or need to frame the idea so that it is easier for your staff and council to understand and embrace. Focus first on the problem you're trying to solve, then on how to frame what a new type of partnership may offer.

Seasoned creative placemaking practitioners with experience working within government have found success in describing the overall approach using terms like “strategic doing” or “creative problem-solving,” which might mitigate some of the anxiety about an unfamiliar approach. Reflecting on her own experiences as an initially “undercover” artist embedded in local government, Elizabeth Hamby cites an example of a fellow artist hitting a dead end pitching art to a police department—but returning with the same proposal framed as a public relations strategy.<sup>16</sup>

**Appreciate and honor why an artist wants to work with local government.** Despite differences and reservations about working with government, know that artists do see good reasons to collaborate. Examples include a real desire to understand how systems work; an ability to influence decision-making; and more visible or impactful opportunities to demonstrate and share their artistic abilities.



“The first time I really understood the power of creative placemaking was when I witnessed firsthand the relationships built between community members that may not have met each other if it were not for that particular creative placemaking project.”

Sarina Otaibi  
Rural Programs Manager  
Rethos: Places Reimagined  
Former Council Member  
Granite Falls, Minnesota

## ASSESSING READINESS

[A Blade of Grass' Municipal-Artist Partnership Guide](#) encourages local governments to assess their capacity for this type of partnership by asking the following questions early in the process:

- What core strengths, knowledge, sensibilities, and resources can we (as people and professionals) bring to the partnership?
- What are the gaps? What more do we need to learn to help us imagine and define opportunities to work with artists in our community and/or agency?
- To what degree are we able to allow aspects of the creative work to evolve through collaboration with the artist?

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Hamby, “Who are the Naturally Occurring Artists in Your Municipal Agency?,” Americans for the Arts: Artists-Municipal Partnerships Blog Salon, 2018, [intranet.americansforthearts.org/2019/05/15/who-are-the-naturally-occurring-artists-in-your-municipal-agency](https://intranet.americansforthearts.org/2019/05/15/who-are-the-naturally-occurring-artists-in-your-municipal-agency).

- How open are we to new ways of working that may disrupt our usual practices? What is our risk threshold? Where can we bend and what are our risk limits? Can we be critically reflective of our work in order to pave the way for new ways of working?
- Is the timing right to embark on this? What internal and external factors might propel or impede this work?
- Do we have buy-in? Who are the champions in the city and in relevant departments? Who are the skeptics? Where are the barriers in the system that will require preliminary work to ensure buy-in and assistance?
- Can and will we commit time and resources to pay artists fair compensation and provide space, access to staff, and other resources as needed?
- How will we think about incorporating this work within staff roles and responsibilities, and compensation requirements?



## TAKE ACTION

[Access the above list, paired with questions artists may ask of local government partners, as a downloadable tool.](#)



“Instead of creating projects internally from scratch, we’ve identified opportunities for ‘rapid experimentation’ by investing in organizations and individuals already doing the work. We help them expand their efforts and take note of their results.”

Carlos Contreras  
Former Director of Marketing and Innovation  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

## NAVIGATING HAZARDS

**Acknowledge where you are starting. It is not just identifying the right artist partners that is important; the prospective artist partners will assess you as well.** They will be looking for indicators of readiness, that the local government has thought through what an artist will need to feel comfortable and empowered in a partnership. If a local government doesn’t have much of a history in creative placemaking work, starting with a small-scale project or working with an intermediary organization more experienced in liaising with artists can provide a degree of assurance.

**Addressing the financial requirements is a necessary piece of assessing readiness from both the local government and artist’s perspectives, and is described in greater detail on page 50.**

**Consider the cost of inaction.** There are plenty of good reasons to be cautious about entering into a partnership or process that feels risky or ambiguous. But in some instances, the gravity or urgency of the situation may be enough justification to take the leap. Cindy Steinhauer, director of community development in Rochester, Minnesota, explained this from multiple angles. She described the decisions her team made to move quickly in finding ways to engage artists in their management of the protests and demonstrations during June 2020 and to create community healing opportunities. With activity heating up quickly, there wasn’t a lot of time for handwringing or to go through complex approval processes. The entire process took two days total to conceive, secure materials and support from parks and public safety staff, and implement.

Worried that tough financial times put funding for arts and culture at even greater risk, Steinhauser noted, “arts are the ultimate equalizer.” She said, “When you have greater equity, you have greater return on investment in your community. It pays back in so many ways,” citing costs related to policing or rebounding from a crisis.

**Start small and build from there.** This recommendation was echoed by artists and experienced creative placemaking public practitioners across the board. Not only is it acceptable, it is often highly recommended to begin with smaller, short-term, pilot, and/or temporary projects to test the waters and “start developing those muscles” for working together, as Ashley Hanson, director of the Small-Town City Artist in Residence program, described it. Alternatively, consider investing in existing opportunities within your community through donating funds or through small grants.

Sarina Otaibi, a former councilmember in the same region, agreed: “My advice to city managers in exploring creative placemaking is to make it about engaging and connecting with your city residents. Take on small, visible projects to get started, so that you can begin to normalize the process for city staff, or councilmembers that may not be familiar with creative placemaking. This will provide a low-risk start to integrate creative placemaking and provide credibility to the process before moving on to large projects.”

## MAKING THE CASE

You will likely need to convince your staff or governing body to support creative placemaking initiatives. Several strategies described throughout the guide and summarized here can help you build the case:

- **Articulate priority outcomes through existing community goals.** Many communities list public safety, economic development, and livability as priorities in their comprehensive plans. Develop projects and link desired outcomes and evaluation tools to advance these goals, especially in areas where you’ve had trouble making progress.
- **Lead with the story.** What’s the dream headline at the end of this process? How will those impacted by the work be better off? Whether you use examples of similar efforts elsewhere and/or present a compelling hypothetical vision, storytelling is central to effectively communicate creative placemaking’s potential.
- **Start with small projects that have a narrow focus.** To minimize risk and introduce staff and residents to new concepts, focus on one or two outcomes and design a small pilot project around achieving those goals.
- **Validate the practice.** Make it clear that local government leadership is supportive of creative placemaking by situating initiatives in the administrator’s office, backing initiatives up with funding, or holding staff accountable via updates on how they are applying these strategies in their department.
- **Share success throughout the process.** Don’t wait until the end of a project to update key stakeholders. Plan frequent updates and celebrate project milestones.

## ASSEMBLING YOUR TEAM

Creative placemaking partnerships can be initiated through many channels, including through the artist themselves and by the local government soliciting for services.

### FINDING YOUR ARTIST

**When they find you.** In some scenarios, such as the Ashland-Nyanza project, an artist may approach the local government with an idea for a project. Given a widely held perception that governments can be challenging to work with, this is an encouraging position from which to start. But a manager's mind may quickly cycle through all the reasons to say no—budget, timing, liability, or an initial sense that the proposed project might not obviously align with your top priorities. In these situations, keeping an open mind is important to see if you can find common ground between your interests. Focus on understanding the underlying problem the idea proposes to solve, and how the community will be better off.

**Initiating a search.** Without anyone knocking at your door, reviewing examples of this work may lead to such questions as “I don’t know any artists, so how am I supposed to engage in these strategies?” or “Can I just hire that artist to do the same thing in my community?” It is hard to know where to begin after looking at retrospective case scenarios, but there are common places you can look to identify potential artistic partners if the “perfect fit” in your community isn’t already clear.



### ASK YOURSELF

- Can I name the cultural or arts-based institutions already existing within my community?
- Do I have an existing relationship with them, and if not, who could reach out to learn more about who is involved and the work they do?
- Do I have an art and/or cultural advisory board or committee? If so, could they provide me with a list of artists we have previously worked with?
- Does the community currently have any public art, and if so, how was that created? Who was involved?
- Are any of my staff artists themselves or engaged in the artistic community? Could they help me connect to that community or serve as a liaison?

These questions can help begin to identify the arts and culture capacity already existing in your community and may help identify work already underway that you could help expand with funding. Engaging with a local artist or arts organization can serve as an easy initial step by leaning on existing staff knowledge and experience.

If you don't know where to start, look for either your local arts agency or state arts agency as many of them are well-equipped to help you start new conversations—read more about them in “Arts Agencies” on page 54.

**Choosing the artist.** Artists and the mediums they employ are as varied as the communities managers serve, so selecting the right artist is imperative. A successful partnership is built on a clear understanding of the unique role you want an artist to play in a project or process as well as buy-in from the community they will be working with. When determining what you are hoping to achieve through the partnership, try to focus on the process over product to avoid pigeon-holing artists into predetermined outcomes.

**A Blade of Grass' Municipal-Artist Partnership Guide** suggests considering the following criteria when searching for an artist partner:

- What level of experience is needed? Does the scale, complexity, and nature of the project require a highly experienced artist or can you help build capacity with a promising artist?
- Does the artist need specialized skills or knowledge to work on a particular issue? For example, if they partner with an agency that works on domestic violence, will they need to have experience in working with people who have dealt with trauma?
- Is it important that the artist share the same cultural identity or be otherwise familiar with the place, culture, or particular population they will be working with?
- What is the artist's role and does that have specific requirements, like facilitating dialogues or training staff in creative techniques for their community engagement work?
- Do they have an affinity for working in a civic context? Municipal partnerships call for artists who like to work with diverse groups of people, are patient in the face of bureaucracy, and value what other sectors bring to a project.

**Tools for solicitation.** As with other consulting arrangements, many public-artist partnerships will start with a request for qualifications, a request for proposals, call for submissions, or some other similar process. These take a little more time and effort to manage, and the templates and processes used here will likely depart from the standard elements of other public procurement processes. But accepting submissions and undertaking some type of documented review process can lend necessary credibility to what could be seen as a subjective process and may even be required depending on the scope.

**Springboard for the Arts' Find an Artist Toolkit** offers many helpful tips in designing a process and template. Basic principles to keep in mind include:

- Artists are professionals, and you want to work with them because of their expertise and experience.
- Pay artists, because you pay professionals.
- Be transparent about what you can pay.
- “Exposure” is rarely a substitute for paying.
- Create clear, understandable calls and processes.
- Artists retain copyright of submissions and accepted artworks.



## DIVE DEEPER

Access the [full toolkit](#) for guidance on when to use various strategies, such as a call for artists versus a request for proposals or a request for applications.

## NAVIGATING HAZARDS

**Think about how you will ensure the artistic approach and its results are reflective of the community.** Does the artist need to come from and/or have deep relationships established with the community? If not, what is the plan for connecting the artist with critical community stakeholders, including those that will be most directly impacted by the potential activity?

**Sharing technical requirements or other non-negotiable elements** of the opportunity is useful, but ensure you are leaving space for the artist to help define the approach and potential outcomes.

**Consider potential underlying power dynamics.** As an example, arts commissions or agencies can be viewed by some artists and culture-bearers with the same skepticism as applied to local government in general—i.e., part of the “establishment.” Be careful of limiting your search for an artist to only their networks or recommendations.

**Be sure to consider “barriers to entry.”** Many artists aren’t used to contracting with municipal governments’ systems for applying to a project or registering as a vendor. In advance of bringing an artist on as a project partner, think about what they will need to do to get set up within the system, and potentially carve out extra time to help them navigate the system for the first time.



## TAKE ACTION

The National Endowment for the Arts and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation developed a series of training webinars on aspects of hiring and contracting artists, such as RFPs; Calls for Entry & Commissions; and Formalizing Partnership through Contracts, MOUs & Agreements; [access free materials here](#).

## FINDING YOUR INTERNAL CHAMPION

Municipal and county organizations are complex, each with their own set of rules, hierarchies, and culture. Bringing an artist in as a partner can provide a fresh perspective on operations, enabling them to observe and question practices to identify areas for growth. While this “outsider” point of view is valuable, it can be overwhelming for the artist and difficult to manage on their own. Identifying a staff member with the capacity to workshop ideas, facilitate decision-making, and help the artist navigate internal processes is an essential aspect of a successful partnership. Without a designated internal champion, an artist can feel adrift in an organization and unable to conduct their work. The artist will have to spend considerable time and energy finding



allies and developing relationships, and while that will remain an important aspect of the partnership, a champion can help bridge that process so the artist has more time to focus on their work.

Obvious choices will be staff in the unit to which the artist's work most closely aligns. But ensure the individual has the time and energy to be an effective liaison and champion for a partnership and process fraught with a higher degree of unpredictability.

Ideally, the staff member should:

- Be open to trying new things, questioning/challenging processes, and not overly risk-averse.
- Be a person who gets things done, finds workarounds, and rarely runs into dead ends.
- Have an appreciation for community engagement and a willingness to work with other staff and the public in new ways.
- Be a proactive, strategic project manager and communicator.
- Be willing to “go to bat” for the artist to promote their work to other staff, leadership, and the community.
- Be the person other staff go to when they have a problem.

## NAVIGATING HAZARDS

**It starts at the top.** While a manager may not be able to dedicate the time needed to be the day-to-day internal champion, support from the top down will give the artist credibility with staff and set expectations that they are an important member of the team.

- Art At Work worked out of the city manager's office, which allowed artist Marty Pottenger to more easily open doors to different departments. After she had worked with a department directly to address persistent issues, it became less important that she came from the manager's office, as departmental leadership and staff had experience with the unique and effective solutions she was able to produce.
- Before Alan Nakagawa began his residency with the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, the department director sent out a message introducing him, explaining his role, and that he had her full support. Nakagawa recalls his first day fondly and with surprise: “My first day, I walked into the building and everyone said, ‘Oh yeah, we read about you.’” A simple message from the right people before I even arrived,” he said, made a significant impact and set the tone.



## STRUCTURING AND SUSTAINING CREATIVE PLACEMAKING PARTNERSHIPS

Developing an appropriate budget and identifying funding must be part of the conversation to initiate and sustain creative placemaking partnerships.

### BUDGETING AND PROCUREMENT

Artists (and potentially other community participants) will need to be compensated for their time and resources dedicated to the partnership's activities.

**Budgets should account for the full range of artist and art expenses.** Beyond the artist salary or fee and materials and equipment, the partnership may require travel, permits, insurance, or other benefits. There may be expenses anticipated related to community engagement, such as meeting or event costs, or direct compensation of participants.

Also consider costs related to local government support for the partnership, including staff time. Determine if it can be absorbed within current workloads or whether additional compensation must be made available.



### TAKE ACTION

The Municipal-Artist Partnerships Guide offers this [budgeting template](#) to help you consider a comprehensive range of expenses. In addition to estimating the costs, clarify up front (including building into contracts and other documentation) where those costs will be borne.

**Professional fees should be commensurate with the type of work to be performed.** If partnering with artists to lead community engagement efforts or other facilitation services, for example, consider what you might have



offered to a “traditional” planning consultant. In absence of benchmarks based on relevant past projects within your local government, use examples described in this guide or other case studies to get a sense of reasonable ranges.

**Consider providing discretionary funding to the artist/project.** This applies especially to artist residencies or similar arrangements. In addition to salary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, one City-Artist was given an additional \$50,000 for two years that they had control to budget (for context, the city’s total budget is \$700 million). As former Saint Paul artist Amanda Lovelee noted, “My annual budget meant I could begin projects as pilots to test them out. Once they were established, it was easier to find funding in other places to keep them going, as their value became clear once outcomes were experienced.” While this amount might be far out of range for a much smaller community, even a small fraction of unrestricted dollars could provide an important signal to an artist that their talents and innovation are trusted and valued.

## NAVIGATING HAZARDS

**Recognize that standard procurement tools will likely need amending.** As also noted in the Finding Your Artist section, standard forms, processes, and other tools may not account for nuances of formally doing business with an artist. Copyright, ownership, payment schedules, and intellectual property are areas of particular concern. You should expect to need to discuss boilerplate terms and be willing to adjust.



### TAKE ACTION

[The Municipal-Artist Partnerships Guide](#) offers more detail and links to examples of contract language across various components.

**Look for ways to front-fund the work.** Unlike government or other institutions, artists generally do not have the luxury of reserves at the onset of a project and thus are not as easily able to work on a reimbursement basis. They cannot as easily go out and purchase materials or commit resources to other direct expenses or even dedicate time with the expectation of eventual reimbursement or payment. This challenge can potentially be mitigated by the local government making purchases for the artist (which could have cost-saving potential, due to favorable purchasing terms), or by funneling project resources through a project intermediary (which though, adding a layer of complexity, could be a net positive if it circumvents some of the local government restrictions).

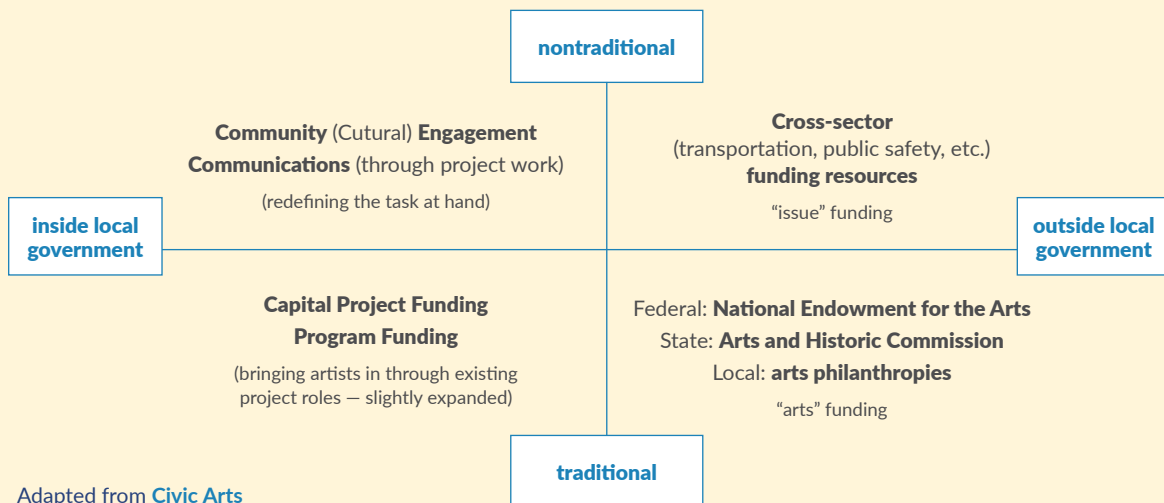
**Be aware that artists may be prone to underestimating their time and rate.** Don’t exploit this! Knowingly or unknowingly lowballing a project will only increase the risk of disappointing outcomes and a bad experience all around. Work together with a prospective artist partner (consulting arts agencies or other resources as necessary) to ensure that estimated effort and costs seem reasonable and, to the extent possible, allow for some unanticipated challenges. Encourage the artist and your staff liaison to communicate regularly and openly about any unforeseen issues, rather than assume one side must quietly bear the burden.

**Acknowledge the rigidity of public budgets.** Anticipate that creative placemaking partnerships will have more inherent messiness or unpredictability than other types of contracts. Project timelines will not always neatly align with fiscal years. Raise possible scenarios with your fiscal staff early, as you are setting up the collaboration to mitigate potential issues down the road. This is particularly important where intended resources have strict guidelines attached, such as federal funds. Identify any non-negotiable items around timing and documentation of expenditures and clearly communicate those back to the artist, including follow-up reminders.

## FUNDING

As illustrated in the figure below, the universe of funding for creative placemaking activities may come from inside or outside the local government, and from what might be distinguished as traditional or nontraditional sources. Traditional sources would include those more directly/obviously related to a specific art-based project (i.e., a capital project) or program. Nontraditional sources align with the evolved conception of creative placemaking as a process, not just projects, and its application to a wider range of local government contexts and functions.

### CREATIVE PLACEMAKING PROJECT FUNDING SOURCES



## EXISTING BUDGET AND REVENUE SOURCES

While some local governments have established budgets for arts and culture programming, it’s not essential to start (or stop) your search there. Even in times of fiscal stress, it is possible nontraditional resources are already hiding in your current budget, waiting to be discovered. Consider resources designated for communications and marketing, facilitation and community engagement activities, planning processes, capital improvements, professional development, or consulting services. These could be reprogrammed and/or pieced together to support hiring an artist to perform similar functions, albeit in a new way.

Additionally, your local government may have the ability to access non-federal revenue sources that could be directed toward creative placemaking activities. These might include special assessments for business districts, taxes on utilities (such as telecommunications infrastructure), or unique taxing powers granted by state legislation. When researching or brainstorming about these nontraditional possibilities, frame your thinking around intended community benefits, such as improved economic opportunities, public health, or public safety.

Percent for Art funds are another option for local governments to consider. An estimated 350+ state and local governments have implemented percent-for-art ordinances over the past several decades, which allocate a designated amount (often one percent) of specified public capital improvement and/or private development costs toward public art programs.<sup>17</sup>

## IN-KIND SUPPORT

Another good place to start (though ideally not end) is to think about the unique resources your local government can provide to an artist partner. What do you own or have access to, and what skills currently exist on your team that could help support the partnership? Common examples include working space, whether an office, studio, or a publicly owned performance or display space; maintenance, marketing, administrative, or other services; equipment and supplies; or other professional staff time. In-kind contributions can be leveraged to attract additional support. Staff experienced in grant writing and monitoring available opportunities may be able to take an active role in fundraising efforts. And since creative placemaking projects are centered on partnerships, perhaps a community partner who is joining in the effort might also have in-kind resources that can be brought in as part of the project as well.

Think also about where you can intentionally align routine spending and operations with a creative placemaking strategy. If you have limited annual resources to invest in improving your bike or pedestrian infrastructure, for example, might you target the same area around which a placemaking activity will be concentrated.

As partnerships mature, both in terms of working relationships and demonstrated impacts, local government should consider options for dedicated funding to formalize their commitments to the work.

## FEDERAL SOURCES

**Arts-based.** The [National Endowment for the Arts \(NEA\)](#), an independent federal agency, has supported creative placemaking partnerships for a decade, primarily through the [Our Town](#) grant program. The program requires partnerships between local governments and nonprofits, at least one of which must be a cultural (i.e., art and design) organization. Grants currently range from \$25,000 to \$150,000 and require a cost share/match equal to the amount of the award. Many examples of in-kind support previously described can be prime resources to meet the match requirement.

---

<sup>17</sup> Metropolitan Area Planning Council, "What is Percent-For-Art?," Arts and Planning Toolkit, [artsandplanning.mapc.org/percent-for-art](https://artsandplanning.mapc.org/percent-for-art).



“I think there’s a mutuality in this work that’s part of the learning adventure. It highlights the connections between people, place, and story and allows us to see our interdependence, how we need one another, and how we matter as part of community.”

Susan DuPlessis  
Community Arts Development Director  
South Carolina Arts Commission

**Non-arts-based.** Depending on the intended outcomes of the partnership, funds from additional federal agencies may be well-suited to support your idea—if not directly to the artist partners, as a piece of the overall puzzle. Examples include:

- Department of Agriculture, specifically rural development programs.
- Department of Health and Human Services.
- Department of Housing and Urban Development, such as Community Development Block Grants, Low Income Housing Tax Credits or the HOME Investment Partnerships Program.
- Department of Transportation, though the Federal Transit Administration has tightened their guidelines to allow only “functional” artistic elements.
- Environmental Protection Agency, such as brownfields programs.
- National Park Service, such as historic tax credits.



## TAKE ACTION

The [Creative Placemaking Public Resources Guide](#) is an interactive website that allows users to browse essential information about public funding opportunities by category of project or keywords, including a wide range of non-arts-based resources.

## ARTS AGENCIES

Each state and territory has a designated “arts agency,” also known as an arts council, commission, alliance, or similar name. While all are designated by the state government and receive/distribute funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, their specific structures, priorities, and processes differ from state to state. Arts agencies also exist at the regional (i.e., multistate and substate) and local levels. In addition to direct funding of artists and cultural organizations, agencies may provide technical assistance, convene events, support cultural planning and policy efforts, and build networks. Virtually all have engaged, directly or indirectly, in creative placemaking work. Many have developed innovative programming in partnership with other public agencies, leveraging resources across multiple sectors to enhance quality of life, create economic opportunities, and promote local identities.<sup>18</sup> As local governments consider potential creative placemaking opportunities, it is worth connecting with arts agencies about where respective interests overlap and complement.



## TAKE ACTION

Find your state arts agency contact from the [National Association of State Arts Agencies directory](#).

## OTHER LOCAL, REGIONAL, OR NATIONAL RESOURCES

If not already identified, additional sources noted in the [Municipal-Artist Partnerships guide](#) to consider for funding or structural support, or other types of capacity building, include:

<sup>18</sup> National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, *State Arts Agency Roles in Creative Placemaking*, 2020, [nasaa-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SAA-CPM-Field-Scan-FINAL-8-2020.pdf](https://nasaa-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SAA-CPM-Field-Scan-FINAL-8-2020.pdf).

- National funders such as the [Kresge Foundation](#), which has dedicated significant resources to art, culture, and creative placemaking.
- Community or regional foundations.
- Intermediary organizations focused on community development, such as national examples like the [Local Initiatives Support Corporation](#), [National Alliance of Community Economic Development Associations](#), [NeighborWorks America](#), or others focused exclusively in your region.
- Other place-based entities such as Main Street programs, cultural or tourism districts or regional planning agencies.

## NAVIGATING HAZARDS

**Leverage the power of the purse intentionally.** Funding is perhaps the dominant lever of power in a partnership. Often, the funds involved will originate from or flow through the local government budget, further contributing to an imbalance of power. Be aware of this and be sure you are taking steps outlined in the budgeting and procurement section of this guide to mitigate that imbalance.

**Diversify your funding sources.** It is common for creative placemaking efforts, particularly those receiving support from the most well-established national funders of creative placemaking activities, to draw from multiple sources. A study of more than 570 projects conducted by Drexel University found that it was typical to have a primary source covering about one-third of the total budget, with support from another 5-7 sources (which could include in-kind or earned income). Local governments contributed a median amount of \$30,500 per project.<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that these trends may not align perfectly to smaller-scale projects and/or those not receiving funding from the NEA, Kresge Foundation, or ArtPlace America. But as noted in the Municipal-Artist Partnerships guide, “When a project gets to ‘we,’ the resources are easier to find...excitement about it grows, and it becomes relevant to stakeholders, it can stimulate new funding prospects.”<sup>20</sup>

## EVALUATING OUTCOMES

Measuring performance and evaluating outcomes are essential in all government services, but creative placemaking strategies require different approaches.

Traffic counts, available affordable housing units, and turnout time for EMS response are standard metrics local governments have used to measure performance for decades. Properly measuring services establishes a baseline to making decisions in professional management, but while the outcomes

<sup>19</sup> Ryan Debold, Andrew Zitcer, Clara Pinsky, and the Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation, *Financing Creative Placemaking: Analyzing Data and Trends for a Field In Transition*, Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation, 2020, [drexel.edu/lindyinstitute/initiatives/creative-placemaking-financing](https://drexel.edu/lindyinstitute/initiatives/creative-placemaking-financing).

<sup>20</sup> Jan Cohen-Cruz and Pam Korza, “Funding,” *Municipal-Artist Partnerships Guide*, A Blade of Grass/Animating Democracy, 2019, [municipal-artist.org/nuts-and-bolts/the-nitty-gritty/funding/](https://municipal-artist.org/nuts-and-bolts/the-nitty-gritty/funding/).



“Don’t just look at the bottom line, the finances. Look at how the project ties to the community and tells their story. Look to this as an opportunity, a leap of faith for bigger and better outcomes.”

Michael Herbert  
Town Manager  
Ashland, Massachusetts



## DIVE DEEPER

ArtPlace America has surveyed a number of different issue areas to look at how arts and culture are driving specific kinds of outcomes. These “typologies” can be a helpful place to start in thinking about what you are specifically trying to achieve with your arts and culture work. Once you’ve established these intended outcomes, the task of identifying indicators and measurement plans becomes much simpler.





## DEFINING OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

[Animating Democracy's Continuum of Impact](#) provides insight on how to measure and translate social and civic outcomes common in creative placemaking projects. Below is a sample of adapted examples from their six categories that help break down these intangible benefits into measurable success:

	Sample Outcome	Sample Indicators
<b>Awareness &amp; Knowledge:</b>		
Changes in how people assess choices, make informed decisions, and take action for the common good.	Stakeholders understand each others' views regarding a civic or social issue.	Changes in quantity or content of public comments Sign-ons, donations, other evidence of support
<b>Dialogue &amp; Discourse:</b>		
Changes in who engages and how they exchange with one another.	Adversaries are able to work toward common understanding and problem solving in an engaging, empathetic format.	Residents who don't typically participate are engaged and heard Common priorities identified Expanded number and types of engagements
<b>Attitudes &amp; Motivation:</b>		
Changes in the thoughts and feelings that underlie people's choices and action.	Residents previously disenfranchised or stigmatized are valued, respected, and included in community life.	More positive interactions between members of those populations and other community residents Support for issues expands beyond those directly impacted
<b>Capacity:</b>		
Changes in abilities and means to engage in civic life or social action.	Marginalized groups increase status and capacity to influence change.	New/increased interactions between government and specific segments of the community Increased funding to neglected populations or areas Public art creations reflecting previously hidden community history
<b>Behavior &amp; Action:</b>		
Changes in how people behave, participate, and take action in their community.	Residents engage in problem solving and make immediate changes in behavior.	Decrease in negative or damaging behavior Votes or other measures of support Community receives assets desired
<b>Conditions:</b>		
Changes in policies, systems, and conditions leading to lasting results.	Departments identify policies and practices that will make the department more accountable to underserved residents.	Policies and practices implemented Positive movement toward intended outcomes Resolution to longstanding challenge or conflict



## TAKE ACTION

Create your own evaluation plan with [Animating Democracy](#) Evaluation Tool or the [Municipal-Artist Partnerships Guide's](#) Documentation Tool.

**Financial impacts of creative placemaking can be substantial but are often indirect.** Earlier research on creative placemaking focused heavily on the promises of economic benefits—the value of the creative sector; multiplier effects of creative infrastructure investments; impacts on property values, taxes, and revenue.

Outcomes and project goals for our expanded concepts of creative placemaking processes may not center on promises of economic indicators and benefits, but they can be powerful motivators for continued investment and support from key stakeholders. Relatively small investments in arts and culture strategies can provide large financial benefits to the community.

Projects highlighted throughout this guide do demonstrate substantial impacts to action and insight into what inaction can cost your community:

- Breathing Lights (page [69](#)) saw \$4 million in additional investment for new initiatives created as a result of the project and 18% of the abandoned building included in their exhibit sold.



- Eden Night Live (page 76) attracted over 18,000 residents and launched 27 new local businesses in a previously underused space, reducing hate crimes reported in the area.
- Art At Work's Public Works project (page 80) ceased discrimination lawsuits in the public works department that were costing the city hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.
- Water is Life's (page 31) efforts improved the water utility collection rate from 32 to 89 percent after one year.



## DIVE DEEPER

For data wonks, the Urban Institute and National Endowment for the Arts published extensive research on a wide range of metrics and indicators in [The Validating Arts & Livability Indicators \(VALI\) Study: Results and Recommendations report](#).



## TAKE ACTION

Watch a free training webinar from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation on [Crafting an Evaluation Plan & Measuring Impact](#).

## NAVIGATING HAZARDS

**Engage stakeholders in defining desired outcomes.** Unintended consequences of not centering the community in projects can lead to a focus on outcomes that exacerbate problems and create a sense of not belonging in the existing community.

**Consider community empowerment and social cohesion outcomes alongside traditional development outcomes.** Creative placemaking work should define success through the benefit to those within the community—think notions such as belonging, civic engagement, and collective efficacy rather than dollars and cents. In many cases, it is the reduction of community wellbeing to financial terms that artists are trying to counteract. Thus, it is important for metrics to reflect the values of the community and artists, even when being augmented with financial data as required.



## ASK YOURSELF

- Are we using measures of success that reflect the way artists, formal and informal arts spaces, and creative interventions have contributed to community outcomes?
- Is equitable evaluation contributing to an understanding of the impact of the work?<sup>21</sup>

**Size evaluation efforts to match the project and explore different methods of measurement.** Evaluation can be time consuming and expensive, so prioritize and right-size efforts based on investment and impact to the community. Creative placemaking strategies outcomes can

21 Margy Waller, *How Do We Know It's Creative Placemaking?*, Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities, 2019, [a2ru.org/creative-placemaking-values-a-guide-for-practitioners-funders-and-evaluators](http://a2ru.org/creative-placemaking-values-a-guide-for-practitioners-funders-and-evaluators).

be measured through a variety of methods that can be tailored to match your budget and prioritized outcomes. [Springboard for the Arts' Irrigate toolkit](#) offers some examples of measurement tools to consider:

- Observation (head count, some demographics).
- Pre- and post-surveys/questionnaires (self-administered or given by surveyor).
- Key stakeholder interviews.
- Conversations with participants.
- Focus groups.
- Media coverage.

**Accept that not all outcomes will be known at the beginning.** Traditional evaluation and assessment practices look to see “how we’ve been successful.” Remember in creative placemaking projects that the patterns of working are often new to many of those involved, so there’s often no way to know in advance what to look for in terms of success. Let some project outcomes emerge as the project goes along. Just naming them is an important step to being able to talk about the project with others and structure a department’s capacity to seek similar types of results in the future.

## DOCUMENTING AND COMMUNICATING

Without clearly communicating the value of creative placemaking initiatives, they are susceptible to being written off as expendable costs. Communicating your efforts and evaluation findings will play a large role in sustaining projects and expanding the use of arts and culture strategies in your organization. Consider these strategies:

**Create comprehensive documentation.** Establish a living record of the work that includes such documentation as the project goals and desired outcomes, evaluation processes, lessons learned, and successes. In addition to facts, include quotes, pictures, and video when possible. This information will be useful in informing peers about your story, as well as seeking additional support for sustaining or expanding the work.

**Share your story:** “Creative problem solving often increases media exposure and professional accolades,” says Alan Nakagawa, former Los Angeles artist-in-residence. Use evaluation efforts to share the story within your community and to the world beyond. These projects often create opportunities to celebrate your community on a regional and national level. Reach a wider audience by sharing the story with local media outlets or through professional presentations, webinars, or articles.



“Celebrate it, how we tell our stories around the creative placemaking field helps folks see themselves in it.”

Sean Starowitz  
Assistant Director for the Arts  
Bloomington, Indiana

## NAVIGATING HAZARDS

**Loudly celebrate small victories along the way.** Once projects are designed and underway, frequently update key stakeholders on developments, especially when milestones are reached, and be intentional in recognizing incremental progress. Projects will inevitably encounter unanticipated delays, hurdles, and other setbacks, but this does not mean they were not worth attempting.



### TAKE ACTION

Watch a free training webinar from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation on [Documenting the Process & Communicating Success](#).



# POTENTIAL REALIZED: CASE STUDIES

This section includes more in-depth case studies illustrating successful creative placemaking partnerships with local governments in communities of all sizes located across the United States.

In each case study, you'll find:

- **A community profile** with key demographic information to help orient you to the location of the featured example.
- The **new approach to familiar problems** where you can find a brief description of what the project was and the creative placemaking strategies they used.
- The **leading characters** who were integral in the success of the project, both internal and external to the local government.
- Evidence of this guide's **processes in action**, highlighting how the featured projects defined their opportunity, prepared to partner, assembled their team, and structured and sustained their work.
- The **outcomes and impacts**, both short and long term, of the project and the benefits celebrated by the local government organization and community at large.
- An opportunity to **ask yourself** how these strategies might apply to your own community, or consider how other communities have approached problem-solving on similar themes.



## CASE STUDY 1

# AMPLIFYING DATA TO MOBILIZE CHANGE

Pollution, emotional trauma, distrust in government. Some issues go unseen or ignored in our communities.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### Ashland, Massachusetts

Population (2019): 17,807

Demographics:

- White alone: 78.1%
- Asian alone: 10.3%
- Hispanic or Latino: 7.1%
- Black or African American: 2.7%
- Other: 1.3%

Median Income: \$121,406

Persons in Poverty: 3.7%

FY 2020 Adopted General Fund: \$58 million

**N**yanza Color & Chemical Company dumped and buried over 45,000 tons of toxic chemicals in the town of Ashland before closing in 1978. The EPA declared 180 acres of Ashland land a Superfund site in 1982 and conducted cleanup efforts over the following decade, but a study in 2006 revealed that the spike in rare cancers in the town were connected to the dye contamination that continued to threaten the population. A portion of the site was privately owned, and a developer was breaking ground to build apartment housing despite continued EPA monitoring.

## NEW APPROACHES TO FAMILIAR PROBLEMS

After reviewing the EPA data, artist and Ashland native Dan Borelli found that residents did not realize they were still at risk from the contaminants and additional cleanup was needed. Equally as hidden as the contaminants was a community need for a space to acknowledge and heal from the lasting emotional impacts of loss due to the site.

In conjunction with the town, community, and sponsors, Borelli approached these issues with a three-part project:

### THE LIBRARY EXHIBITION

Ashland's Public Library has long been home to the quantitative history of the contaminants as the EPA's official public information repository for the site. Borelli worked with the community to preserve the qualitative impact through the creation of a public exhibit archiving firsthand accounts, memorabilia, and an interactive map. The exhibit humanized the data, encouraging people to orient and project their own memories and experiences on the subject.

### THE STREETLIGHTS

Throughout Ashland, the streets were bathed in red, yellow, green, and purple light to reflect the concentrated color contaminants buried underground. Borelli held walking tours with residents where he explained the historical and ongoing impacts of the contaminants, translating the hidden data into a spatial experience.





## THE ASHLAND HEALING GARDEN

The final component of the project was the creation of a memorial garden adjacent to the Superfund site. There, a stained glass pavilion projects colors onto the body to promote healing where it previously had done harm. Community youth helped build the garden through landscaping programs that dually educated them in community history and practical skills.

## LEADING CHARACTERS



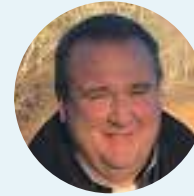
**Dan Borelli**  
Artist

- Ashland native.
- Project origin and design.
- Coordinated funding.
- Project management.



**Michael Herbert**  
Ashland Town Manager

- Internal manager for the project.
- Facilitated community dialogue.
- Connected partners through official channels.
- Negotiated the purchase of the contaminated land.



**Doug Small**  
Ashland Public Works Director

- Advocate and champion within the local government as a lifelong resident of Ashland.
- Managed the city's logistical involvement in the streetlights and healing garden.



**Marie Kane**  
Community Figure

- Led advocacy efforts after her son, Kevin Kane, died in 1988 of cancer linked to Nyanza.
- Community leader who lent her support to the project helping build political will.



**Jamie Merloni**  
New England Laborers  
Training Academy

- Partnered with city and school district to establish skill-building program for youth to build the healing garden and educate future generations.

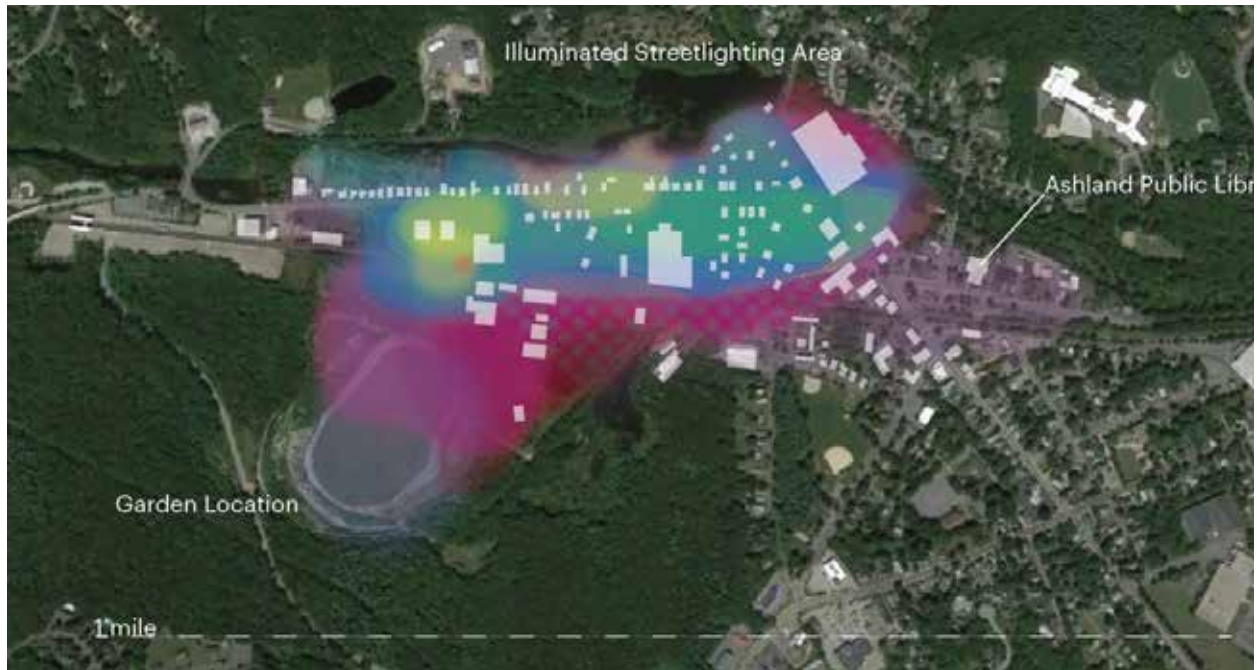
“Remediation is not solely a physical matter, it’s a cultural and social problem, and this project is creating a space of discourse, a permanent legacy of activism.”

Dan Borelli  
Artist

## PROCESSES IN ACTION

### DEFINING OPPORTUNITY

- **Community-Defined Problems:** Even though Borelli was an Ashland native, residents were wary of drawing attention to their difficult past and the stigma associated with the Superfund site. Borelli began by listening to key community leaders and built his project on a foundation of intentionality and respect that validated his work and gained the community’s support.



## PREPARING TO PARTNER



“Dan’s art project, and the concurring development on the Nyanza site, was a great opportunity to take a painful part of our past and turn that into a positive future that the whole town could get behind.”

Michael Herbert  
Town Manager  
Ashland, Massachusetts

- **Openness to Change:** Residents were desperate to stop the apartment development and began to self-organize and turned to the town for help. As the land was privately owned, it was technically outside the town’s control and the town could have used this reasoning to stay out of the dispute. However, seeing how important it was to the community, the town approached the issue with openness and chose to work closely with and support the work.
- **Different Ways to Work:** A project such as this had no precedence in Ashland, and staff at all levels had to creatively find ways to approach the work. From small process accommodations, such as those needed to install the colored street lights, to fundamental changes to the town’s operations, such as arranging the public purchase of contaminated land, the organizations had to redefine their work to address the community’s need.

## ASSEMBLING YOUR TEAM

- **Artistic Approach:** Borelli was a part of the community’s history and this empowered him in their eyes to properly tell their story. Through such unique participatory experiences as the streetlight tours and storytelling, Borelli translated the impact and importance of Nyanza on the community to those who did not experience it themselves. Town Manager Michael Herbert recalled, “The most important thing that happened was we started talking about stories instead of numbers. When Dan said their names and shared the faces of those lost, it changed my perspective and was how I changed the perspective of others in turn.”
- **Internal Validation:** Town staff that were Ashland natives became internal drivers for the project. Herbert leaned on them to help represent the community in decision-making and to build support among other staff.

## STRUCTURING AND SUSTAINING

- **Funding:** It was important to Borelli to use external funds to support the project to help build political will and “sell” the idea to the community. Borelli found funding from such sources as ArtPlace America, Harvard, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. After the initial investment, the project built community support for the town’s purchase of the land.
- **Sustaining:** Once the town owned the site, the community could ensure the land was protected against development until it was officially deemed clean by the EPA, a process planned to take hundreds of years. Planned educational programming and wayfinding elements on the site will serve to inform future generations of their history.

## OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

### SHORT TERM

- **Making invisible contamination visible through emotional experiences.** While the EPA publicly released the data annually, it wasn’t until Borelli’s artistic intervention that the public was able to connect with its meaning. The town was able to use this attention to reignite the conversation and begin to make active steps for change.
- **Connecting different stakeholders for community benefit.** The project generated new partnerships between different people and entities, such as the partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to build the healing garden as their training classroom. They in turn worked with the local high school to develop Skill Builds, a program where schoolkids work over the summer to have an introduction to general construction through working on the garden. This inclusion of the community led to additional partnerships with local businesses.

### LONG TERM

- **Changing public perception and trust in local government.** When Borelli began the project, he found widespread distrust in local government due to Nyanza. Rather than shying away from the difficult topic, the town aided in his work and facilitated discussions, engaging their residents in new and powerful ways. Town citizen satisfaction survey responses increased by 20% regarding the overall direction the town is taking, confidence in town government, and belief the town was honest, and Manager Michael Herbert attributes this to the work done with the Ashland-Nyanza project.
- **Reigniting community activism and public engagement.** In 2016, residents created the Ashland Citizens Action Committee to protect the community and advocate for full cleanup, becoming active participants in their own future. The committee has worked with the EPA to develop an expedited cleanup plan that is currently under review for adoption.
- **Safeguarding the community’s future health.** As a direct result of the project, the town was able to build unprecedented consensus to purchase the contaminated land to proactively prevent future harm to the community. Instead of becoming low-income housing as planned, the space will now include parkland, trails, and educational components to become a space of healing and remembrance for the community, mitigating against future trauma.





## ASK YOURSELF

- Is there data or an issue in your community with significant impacts that you would like to bring to the public consciousness?
- How could an artist help highlight these impacts in a way that connects to the community as seen in this case study?
- How have you addressed past injustices experienced by your community and could art be a bridge to rebuilding trust?



## TAKE A TOUR

Learn more at the [Ashland Nyanza Project website](#).

## SIMILAR CASE STUDIES

### HIGHWATERLINE

#### DELRAY BEACH, FLORIDA

A chalk line represents future community loss due to climate change.



**Problem:** Rising sea levels and extreme weather because of climate change are a particular threat to the city of Delray Beach and surrounding communities. The city needed to promote comprehensive regional planning to implement recommendations made by the Southeast Florida Climate Change Action Compact to increase community resilience.

**Approach:** Artist Eve Mosher guided community members who drew a 4-inch wide chalk line with a sports field marker to demarcate what will be flooded or underwater in three Delray Beach neighborhoods due to a four-foot rise in sea level accelerated by climate change. Residents helped mark the potential loss of their own cultural assets, such as portions of the historically black community “Frog Alley.” Art-centered workshops before and during the public event gathered personal oral histories for use in policy advocacy, partnered with local schools to create permanent murals, and fostered creative brainstorming for community action.

**City Investment:** Portions of the project were funded by the city of Delray Beach Public Art Advisory Board and city staff helped coordinate the event and identify local landmarks that would have the greatest impact to include.

**Outcomes:** The project translated data into a visceral experience that helped the community understand the urgency of engaging and funding resiliency efforts in response to increasing flooding events.



## TAKE A TOUR

Learn more at the [Highwaterline website](#).

## BREATHING LIGHTS

### ALBANY, SCHENECTADY, AND TROY, NEW YORK

Art illuminated the need for regional community revitalization.



**Problem:** Hundreds of vacant properties told the story of industrial decline in the Capital Region of New York. Urban blight had become a regional mainstay after decades of ignoring the exacerbating problem.

**Approach:** Artist Adam Frelin and architect Barbara Nelson animated hundreds of abandoned buildings by illuminating windows with pulsating lights that mimicked the rhythm of human breathing. Breathing Lights was a temporary art installation that took place in three adjacent cities, centered in community engagement that was designed, built, and activated by neighborhood residents and involved over 90 community organizations as partners.

**City Investment:** Over 20 city agencies in the region were involved in creating the project. The lighting equipment was installed in over 200 vacant buildings owned by municipal land banks. Along with hiring neighborhood contractors, funding from the project allowed the city staff time to plan, coordinate, and implement installation.

**Outcome:** Breathing Lights instigated increased governmental collaboration, civic engagement, economic development, and investment in the arts. All three cities collaborated for the first time to comprehensively address blight as a regional issue. Sixty-four percent of residents surveyed said that Breathing Lights stimulated greater community engagement and 67% expressed a greater sense of pride in their neighborhoods. Renewed attention to a long-ignored issue brought \$4 million in local investments for new arts initiatives and future work related to vacancy and blight, including 14 grants awarded to local artists to produce new works. Eighteen percent of the buildings consistently lit during the exhibit have been sold as of 2018.



## TAKE A TOUR

Learn more at the [Breathing Lights website](#).



## CASE STUDY 2

# BUILDING LOCAL IDENTITY IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

One stormwater basin, 18 acres of land,  
and over 20 cultures coming together.

**F**argo, North Dakota, is incredibly prone to severe flooding and utilizes large stormwater basins to mitigate spring rain. Feelings of isolation were exacerbated in the refugee and low- to moderate-income neighborhoods surrounding an 18-acre basin that sat empty and barren a majority of the year.

City Administrator Pat Zavoral recognized the quality of life challenges presented by the basins and a need to think differently to better serve and connect his community. Following the initial suggestion from a community member, the city invited Jackie Brookner, an ecological artist, to help engage residents in re-envisioning the basin that eventually became the Fargo Project.

## NEW APPROACHES TO A FAMILIAR PROBLEM

### PHASE ONE: BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

Brookner spent the first year engaging over 400 different community stakeholders in a series of public meetings co-led by local artists. This engagement went beyond listening and helped translate the importance of stormwater management to the various stakeholders, generating public interest and establishing relationships with future partners. From these meetings, a community advisory team of key stakeholder groups and guiding principles were created to help preserve the community's shared vision throughout the project.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### Fargo, North Dakota

Population (2019): 124,662

Demographics:

- White: 85.6%
- Black or African American: 6.1%
- Hispanic or Latino: 2.8%
- Asian: 3.8%
- Other: 1.7 %

Median Income: \$53,309

Persons in Poverty: 13.0%

FY 2020 Adopted General Fund: \$103,135,000



“I thought that this presented an amazing opportunity to have local citizens experience their own possibilities for creativity. I don’t just mean art creativity: problem-solving in creative ways, making positive changes in their own local situations, working collaboratively.”

Jackie Brookner  
Artist

## PHASE TWO: PROJECT DESIGN

The primary design process for renovating the basin culminated in a one-day event and participatory workshop, WeDesign. Over 200 community members celebrated the dedication of the basin by a Native American drum circle and intertribal dance, followed by a shared meal and design workshop. Participants used different artistic methods, such as rearranging props in a giant sandbox model, to share their ideas and vision for the space. These engagement strategies focused on inclusion, particularly useful for those without strong English skills. Brookner then incorporated the community’s vision into her collective design.

## PHASE THREE: WORLD COMMON GARDENS

The basin has been a work in progress ever since, engaging local artists, neighbors, engineers, landscape architects, ecologists, and nearly 250 local partners in the creation of a unique space that meets the community’s cultural, ecological, and stormwater needs. They reintroduced native plant and animal species to create a natural, self-sustaining aquatic environment. To activate the space, the city gave small grants to local organizations to host events, drawing residents to the new park and helping them establish it as a community asset.

## LEADING CHARACTERS



**The late Jackie Brookner**  
Ecological Artist

- Project lead, community engagement facilitator, and lead investigator.
- Managed hundreds of partners.
- Maintained the shared community vision through guiding principles.



**Nicole Crutchfield**  
Fargo Planning Director

- Internal project lead.
- Internal champion for unproven arts-based methods.
- Helped navigate through municipal processes.



**Cali Ancha**  
Community Leader and Activist

- Consistently encouraged and engaged community members, building support for project.
- Bridged communication between the city and community members.
- Served as a “vision keeper.”
- Provided housing accommodations for Brookner when visiting Fargo.



**Rachel Asleson**  
Communication Manager

- Project coordinator between construction and artists.
- Coordinated communication between 50+ project stakeholders and partners.
- Provided project updates and records to the public.

## PROCESSES IN ACTION

### DEFINING OPPORTUNITY

- **Community-Defined Problems:** Brookner took more than a year to understand the community and what it needed before designing the renovation. She intentionally created opportunities of influence for New



American and Native American residents, as they were heavily impacted by the project but historically underrepresented in decision-making processes.

- **Guiding Principles:** The early development of guiding principles served as a “north star” in decision-making throughout the project and helped new partners understand and honor the community’s shared vision. The guiding principles were developed based on community feedback and refined by key project coordinators through Brookner’s facilitation and included: let the water lead; learn from the natural environment; involve the community by creating a sense of belonging; and experience nature and ecology.

## ASSEMBLING YOUR TEAM

- **Artistic Approach:** Brookner’s genuine and nonjudgmental demeanor coupled with her direct communication style gave her the ability to unite different stakeholders to work collaboratively toward a common goal. She was dedicated to including the public in every phase of the project in a way that had never been done in the city, which contributed to the project’s success.
- **Internal Validation:** Crutchfield worked extensively at the beginning to convince her skeptical colleagues of the value of an arts-based approach to stormwater management. She accomplished this through actively listening to her coworker’s concerns, taking time to uncover the root of the issue, and thoughtfully addressing them collaboratively with Brookner.

## STRUCTURING AND SUSTAINING

- **Funding:** Funding the Fargo Project required creativity to find support from sources such as foundations, academic researchers, the state, and the city itself. Brookner and Crutchfield wrote and coordinated grant applications to continue expanding the scale and reach of the project to the community.
- **Sustaining:** The city thought it would be done with the project in a year, but 10 years later it continues to evolve, finding new points of discovery and partnerships that continue to change the plan. To allow for this flexibility, the city used a “sketch and test” approach by developing small parts of the project at a time so plans can adapt to changing circumstances.

## OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

### SHORT TERM

- **Improvements to stormwater management.** The project included the reintroduction of native plants, wildlife, and natural water flow throughout the basin. Creating pathways for the water to move eliminated standing water and reduced the mosquito population in warmer months and planting native species facilitated the growth of deeper water infiltration and root systems. Testing has proven a significant increase in the understanding of water quality issues.



“Today, I know that when engaging arts and culture strategies, there’s really almost a ‘secret sauce’ element. And you know it when it’s there—it’s there when people are connecting with the issues in deep and real ways, it’s there when partners who never spoke to each other are sitting together around the table, it’s there when suddenly the mayor begins to talk about the importance of creativity within the community, and it’s there when you stumble upon ideas and solutions that were never visible before.”

Nicole Crutchfield  
Planning Director  
Fargo, North Dakota  
([Engaging Local Government Leaders blog](#),  
March 12, 2020)

## LONG TERM

- **Incorporating social engagement skills in other city services and projects.** According to Nicole Crutchfield, “The work we do today to design and plan our city’s infrastructure and open spaces has forever changed because of Jackie’s involvement. What started as a public engagement strategy has now blossomed into a larger adaptive strategy that helps us address our most complex problems in new ways, and to do so hand-in-hand with the community.” When responding to civil unrest relating to city police policies and corresponding social injustice, the city relied on relationship-building strategies that the Planning Department learned on behalf of the work with The Fargo Project; such as active listening, building a community of interest, and asking the community to lead.
- **Cultivating Fargo’s social fabric through essential infrastructure.** Prior to the Fargo Project, the infrastructure was not a destination for social use because it was not designed with people in mind. The space is now programmed as a community commons that transcends cultural barriers and features pathways for walking, designated areas for gardening, an outdoor amphitheater, and more.



### ASK YOURSELF

- What existing assets make your community special? What opportunities might there be to rally people around asset preservation, revitalization, or creation?
- How are you promoting community connection and are there ways to deepen those connections through programming or facilitation?
- How often are decisions made based solely on the bottom line? Where is there room, or need, to compare them to a shared vision for the community?



### TAKE A TOUR

[Visit The Fargo Project’s website.](#)

## SIMILAR CASE STUDIES

### ONE POEM AT A TIME LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Poetry and photography replace ads to accurately represent the identity and value of a community.

**Problem:** Predatory billboards advertising cheap lawyers, drug sniffing dogs, and payday loans peppered Louisville’s oldest African American neighborhood, Smoketown. These concentrated messages create a social toxin that impacts the emotional well-being and health of residents and outsider’s perceived value of Smoketown.

**Approach:** From 2017-2020, nonprofit IDEAS xLab—through the leadership of artists Hannah Drake and Josh Miller—replaced 30 billboards in

Smoketown and Louisville with positive images of people and places from the community paired with one-line poems written with neighborhood residents through four different roads. A launch party event included guided poetry walks, monologues, and conversations between residents and city officials.

**City Investment:** Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness partnered with IDEAS xLab on three of the four sets of billboards. Additional support came from the Louisville Health Advisory Board Cultural/Social Impact Committee and community partners including Youthbuild Louisville, Bates Community Development Corporation, the Smoketown Neighborhood Association, and more.

**Outcomes:** One Poem at a Time was designed to spark community planning focused on policy change, specifically on restricting predatory advertising in communities that are in the process of reviving and rebuilding. The images and words reflected the vibrant 151-year-old community, reiterating a positive neighborhood identity with Smoketown residents. Residents were inspired to directly influence their community through civic engagement that led to city-wide policy change specific to how community members are notified about a business's application to sell liquor.



## TAKE A TOUR

Visit the project website at [IDEAS xLab](#).

## MY PARK, MY POOL, MY CITY AUSTIN, TEXAS

Live performances lead to reinvestment in the city's aging aquatic infrastructure.

**Problem:** Austin's extensive pool system was falling into disrepair after decades of disinvestment. Through a combination of insufficient funding for yearly maintenance and the average age of facilities being over 50 years old, several pools were on the verge of being shut down. The pools at greatest risk were those serving the historically marginalized African American and Latino neighborhoods of East Austin.

**Approach:** Austin-based Forklift Danceworks created performances with staff, lifeguards, and neighborhood residents over three summers to highlight the community importance of the pools and tell the story of failing infrastructure. Community meetings and pool parties were hosted in addition to large-scale community performances that sought to educate the public on facility operations and activate community conversation and advocacy.

**City Investment:** The city paid for employees' time while performing, and provided access to public facilities. Forklift Danceworks fundraised for their artistic costs.

**Outcome:** Following these dances for city pools a great city-wide understanding emerged on the importance of pools as community infrastructure. A budget analyst attending one performance gained a new understanding of the infrastructure funding issues and its impacts on the community use, resulting in an increase of \$1.4 million annually to the aquatics budget. In addition, a \$40 million aquatics bond was also passed for capital improvements.



## TAKE A TOUR

Visit the project website at [My Park, My Pool, My City](#).

## EDEN NIGHT LIVE ALAMEDA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Sheriff's deputies transform a vacant lot into a vibrant community plaza.



**Problem:** Ashland-Cherryland is a predominantly Hispanic, African American, and Asian low-income area of unincorporated Alameda County with little funding for economic development programming and few cultural institutions. Crime in the area has been a persistent issue since the 1970s, with assault and robbery rates nearly triple that of other communities in the area.

**Approach:** The Alameda County Deputy Sheriff's Activity League engaged community partners to develop a more proactive approach to reducing crime rates and activating space. Eden Night Live was a community hub that provided entertainment, engagement, and business development opportunities in a previously underutilized and vacant commercial corridor. Eden Night Live focused on supporting and bringing together small and local businesses through events that included other community-building elements, such as volleyball and basketball courts with scheduled league games, a pop-up civic center, and a stage.

**County Investment:** The sheriff's office had over 15 deputies involved in the development and staffing of events. The board of supervisors' office chairs and convenes ongoing development and planning meetings and builds support from county commissioners and the community.

**Outcome:** Officers involved developed a new understanding of their role by becoming proactive participants in community-building and development. They were able to build positive relationships with community members outside crisis situations, promoting a greater level of trust and understanding that shifted departmental priorities. Other direct results included the creation of 27 new local vendors through accessible economic development opportunities that did not displace or exacerbate gentrification and the fostering of community identity with over 18,000 residents participating. Funding has been secured from the parks district to make a permanent plaza in the space where Eden Night Live was held.



## TAKE A TOUR

[Alameda County Deputy Sheriff's Activities League](#) website.

[Urban Institute's Project Research Report](#)





### CASE STUDY 3

# IMPROVING GOVERNMENT- COMMUNITY RELATIONS THROUGH ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Police shootings, racism, employee morale, community relations: small town, big problems.

In 2005, Portland city leadership attended a theater performance written and directed by Marty Pottenger that shared the stories of Portland's diverse population, including those of the mayor, fire chief, and director of equal opportunity. The impact of the performances created a willingness on the part of the city manager to green light Pottenger's proposal to join his department and launch a national initiative now known as "Art At Work."

From 2007 to 2015, Pottenger implemented 15 distinct arts-based projects designed to tackle non-arts-based challenges within city government and the community it serves. These projects put creativity to work to deliver measurable outcomes that focused on issues ranging from a fatal police shooting, inter-agency racial discrimination, historic low police morale, community disengagement, high turnover, and more.

## LEADING CHARACTERS



**Marty Pottenger**  
**Founder and Director**  
**Art At Work**  
**Theater Artist**  
**Arts-based Civic Dialogue**  
**Facilitator**

- Worked in collaboration with city staff in identifying problems, designing, implementing, and evaluating projects.
- From 2007 to 2015, implemented 15 projects involving 75 local artists, 12 city agencies and unions, and 4 neighborhood associations.



**Michael Sauschuck**  
**Commissioner**  
**Maine Department**  
**of Public Safety**  
**Former Assistant**  
**City Manager and Police Chief**  
**Portland, Maine**

- As a lieutenant, helped lead the police department's poetry/photography project "Thin Blue Lines," a major success and turning point for increased investment in Art At Work.
- Publicly and privately advocated for arts-based strategies, securing support and funding for Art At Work as his career advanced.
- Served as departmental liaison for AAW's "Forest City Times," a performance response with officers and African-born youth to a fatal police shooting.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### Portland, Maine

Population (2019): 66,215

Demographics:

- White: 82%
- Black or African American: 8.3%
- Hispanic or Latino: 3.4%
- Asian: 3.5%
- Other: 2.8%

Median Income: \$56,977

Persons in Poverty: 15.9%

FY 2019 Adopted General Fund: \$194 million



## NEW APPROACHES TO FAMILIAR PROBLEMS

### FOREST CITY TIMES: IMPROVING POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS WITH THEATER

**The Issue:** Police were labeled as "murderers" and "assassins" as rocks and bottles were thrown at them and their vehicles. Intensifying tensions between the police department and (primarily) immigrant/refugee youth following the death of a Sudanese man during a confrontation with Portland police officers led to the creation of Forest City Times.

**The Approach:** Two original plays performed by police officers and African-born high school students addressed youth attacks on police and city workers to over 1,000 Portland high school students and faculty. The first performance was written, staged, and performed by nine students and explored the relationship between young immigrants and the police. Portland Police Chief asked Pottenger to write and direct a second performance that communicated the police officers' willingness to engage in transformational change with youth to understand each other's perspective. Forest City Times concluded with facilitated dialogue among officers, students, and audience members that examined where they were, where they wanted to be, and how they might get there.



"I've had lots of jobs, but this one lets you feel good about what you do. When I finished this picture, I stood back, looked at it, and said 'That's my life.'"

Dave Melendez  
Trainer  
Portland Public Services



We will be following the same footsteps  
and the same road

We will be tracing the same circle  
over and over again

That is until we dare to make a change  
In order to be one we must live as one

From "The Weeping City"

**Critical success factor:** Recognizing the perspective of both sides in a complicated issue and working together to create a space for discussion, healing, and relationship building.

## PUBLIC WORKS: COMBATING RACISM WITH STORYTELLING AND PRINTMAKING

**The Issue:** A culture of unaware and intentional racism and discrimination resulted in poor community relations as well as multiple lawsuits filed against the Public Services Department—and the city.

**The Approach:** Storytelling and printmaking workshops that focused on raising awareness, visibility, and appreciation for heritage and diversity were conducted in the department's 10 divisions. Participants told their stories, carved block prints, and created illustrations representing their families. The stories focused on actual heritage—Greek, Italian, Franco, Irish, English, Russian—thus undermining the idea of a "white" identity. Selected images were printed onto paper coffee cups with the name, job, years of service, and a quote from individual employees and used by local coffee vendors throughout Portland. The increased visibility and awareness of work accomplished by public services employees improved community and internal relations.



In the year following the project, there was a 50% reduction in discrimination suits filed; finished prints were framed and displayed at all department facilities and city hall; and employees invited Art At Work back to partner on a CDBG project.

**Critical success factor:** Addressing notions of “whiteness” and racism head on through creative expression and personal accountability.

### CITY WRITERS GROUP: APPRECIATING PUBLIC SERVANTS THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY AND STORIES

**The Issue:** A treasury clerk jokes at her own expense that “people love her” after describing taking payments for parking tickets and property taxes. She then recites a moving poem about the stories she hears at the desk to city council. Employee morale and connection was low, and poetry became an important vehicle to address these issues.



Hands...different colors, different shades of flesh, soft, rough, leathered, smooth, wrinkled, gnarled, large or small and delicate... Hands extended toward me with cash — crisp and sticky straight or wadded up bills — sweaty, soft and worn.”

Excerpt from "Hands"  
Written by Tina Carlstrom, Portland clerk,  
Treasury Department

**The Approach:** The monthly meetings of the City Writers Group were attended by employees from parking, dispatch, treasury, survey, engineering, housing, fire, police, corporation counsel, general assistance, and the library. Two hours allowed for time to check in, write, read, and share positive feedback. At every other meeting, the group wrote about their work with the city; topics included “first day,” “worst day,” and “mentors.” The year-end anniversary of the City Writers Group was celebrated by creating a chapbook where participants paired a photograph they had taken on their worksite



“What we all need to remember is that community engagement is a constant work in progress. What have we done the past year, past six months, past month? Building public trust with those we serve should always be a priority. Trust provides one of the cornerstones for our work and when times get tough it also gives you something to fall back on. Powerpoint presentations and data are important, but art is one tool that really serves to enhance our relationships.”

Michael Sauschuck  
Commissioner  
Maine Department of Public Safety  
Former Assistant City Manager and Police Chief  
Portland, Maine

and a short section of text they had written. These were also made into large posters and hung at their workplaces. As part of the Impact Design, they were hung where staff and the public could see them—in the 911 Dispatch Center, Portland Public Library’s Archives, an elevator in a municipal parking garage, the waiting line in the Treasury office, and so on. This increased awareness of the work that city employees do, as well as increasing city workers’ pride in having the work they do be so visibly acknowledged.

**Critical success factor:** Encouraging staff to tell their own story and helping them explore new ways to do so together facilitated a stronger sense of interpersonal understanding and deepened relationships across departments while improving employee morale.

## PROCESSES IN ACTION

### DEFINING OPPORTUNITY

- **Community-Defined Problems:** Marty Pottenger embedded herself in city operations until she had a good sense of the work, what was going well, and what could use some resource. She would join public and internal meetings, participate in ride alongs, and attend events primarily as a listener. For example, Thin Blue Lines developed out of a protest officers made at the swearing in of their new chief. Subsequent visits to police headquarters revealed the force was experiencing historic low morale, a costly situation from any perspective. After the first year of a two-year poetry-photography calendar project, 83% of the participating officers reported an increase in morale.

### ASSEMBLING YOUR TEAM

- **Artistic Approach:** Pottenger used her ability to engage with different publics and her commitment to diversity, sense of humor, fun, and warmth to empower individuals to actively participate in artistic work and convince them anyone could be an artist. Whether it was a police officer, elected official, or resident, each project resulted in a newfound ability to connect to the issue at hand through creative expression.
- **Internal Validation:** Inviting Pottenger in was the first step by city leadership, but placing her within the city manager’s office solidified her credibility and sent a clear message that arts-based strategies were an integral part of how the city would conduct business moving forward. Leadership allies, including the assistant city manager, mayor, and chief of police, were important leverage when first working with staff. Once she was inside a department, she found “unofficial” leaders that became allies in promoting the work and building trust essential for the success of a project.

### STRUCTURING AND SUSTAINING

- **Funding:** The city budgeted \$5,000 annually to Art At Work’s projects, as well as \$35,000 in benefits and in-kind administrative support. While Pottenger’s salary and funding for individual projects were secured through external foundations, this baseline provided her important stability and credibility.
- **Evaluating Outcomes:** Pottenger designed her programs to meet departmental and city goals, and conducted thorough evaluations that measured what mattered to city leadership. Pottenger worked with an external consultant early on to link evaluation planning to program planning that helped leadership understand her work’s credibility and impact, and justified continued investment.

## OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

### SHORT TERM

- **Increased community exposure to public servants.** City employees created hundreds of works of art, performances, poetry readings, and civic dialogues that engaged over 25,000 people in the region and reached over a million people through local and major media outlets. The art increased residents' awareness of city employees as three-dimensional people and city workers' self-respect and pride in their work.
- **Substantial return on investment for city finances.** Small investments in Art At Work to proactively address problems saved the community thousands of dollars in legal fees, recruiting costs, and training. As Michael Saushuck explained, "For some people, it's counter intuitive. We're having a tough budget year, so how can we in good faith support the arts? But small investments of money in the arts are worth the benefits you gain interacting with employees and the public. It's tough to quantify, there was no question, but the results are off the charts."

### LONG TERM

- **Shifting the city's approach to problem-solving.** This assets-based approach centered art-making as a valuable, cost-effective, and sustainable tool for reaching concrete, innovative solutions to municipal and community problems, while deepening the public's awareness and appreciation of local government's role in creating healthy, educated, engaged, and economically vibrant communities. The sustained use of these strategies and focus on staff-led projects changed the way employees viewed their work and shifted the organizational culture, empowering employees to take risks when addressing community issues.
- **Deepening internal and external networks.** Externally, structures were developed for ongoing communication and relationships between municipal and community leaders. These projects decreased tensions and increased collaborative activities within and between diverse communities and the city, as seen between the police and youth in Forest City Times. Internally, staff were able to engage, function as a team, envision a positive outcome, remember their connections, and take risks that lead to innovative solutions and sustainable relationships.



"In choosing the three departments to begin working with, Marty chose the most misunderstood and most stressed departments in the municipal system – police, public services, and health and human services. Art At Work has already made real transformations for our employees and the communities. Should we already have had respect for each other? Yes. But is municipal government set up to give that respect a chance to be made visible? Rarely. For city councilors, with increasing pressures regarding services, layoffs, and budget cuts, the challenge is to get the arts to be as central, as core to our community, as a police cruiser or a water fountain."

Patricia Finnigan  
Former Assistant City Manager  
Portland, Maine



### ASK YOURSELF

- If you were to engage your staff in artmaking, what different intelligences could you tap into? How could this byproduct of art change perceptions in your community and create new understanding?
- What are common complaints your staff often field from the public? How might arts or culture-based strategies create a more neutral or friendly platform for addressing those issues?
- Where are the communication pain points within your staff?
- Where could you leverage resources and obligations to engagement or facilitation to support working with an artist?



### TAKE A TOUR

To learn more, visit [Art at Work](#).



#### CASE STUDY 4

## RECREATING PERMITTING POLICY WITH THE COMMUNITY

Antiquated systems often disproportionately impact and leave behind our most vulnerable populations.

**T**he city of Brownsville, Texas, is located along the border of Mexico and the United States. The low-income, tight-knit neighborhood of Buena Vida (“Good Life”) has a rich culture of small businesses operating in an informal economy. Families often make a living through unpermitted small operations, like selling traditional foods or farm produce out of homes and vehicles, many of which were illegal under municipal code.

The city worked with a socially engaged local art collective, Las Imaginistas (“The Imaginists”), to explore how changing the permitting process to allow for microeconomies could better serve the needs of low-income residents. In the project Taller de Permiso (“Permit Workshop” or “Workshop of Permission”), they used art as the tool to collaboratively imagine sustainable economic opportunities in a way that celebrated and exemplified the existing assets within the community, decoded municipal permitting, and incubated emerging small local businesses.

## NEW APPROACHES TO FAMILIAR PROBLEMS

### PHASE 1: PERMISSION TO DREAM

The project began with a “Dream Parade,” where residents of Buena Vida held a march, carrying signs depicting their dreams of an equitable, sustainable economy for their community. The dreams collected inspired others to participate and became a community-building resource. Dreams continued to be collected through re-designed Loteria cards and tricuculos (traditional tricycles typically used for street vending) where they printed “Dreaming Permits” on a re-purposed tortilla press.

### PHASE 2: PERMISSION TO KNOW

This phase focused on building capacity within the community’s youth and entrepreneurs. Youth interviewed community stakeholders, including the city manager and health department, and researched city and media archives on the permitting process. Through this investigative journalism, a vendor guide was created and a video showcasing their findings is in production. Additionally, an entrepreneurship program was created where a cohort of neighborhood residents completed business trainings through the University of Texas Business Incubator and a cooking class through a local food center.

### PHASE 3: PERMISSION TO ACT

This phase launched a co-op fellowship program for vendors in partnership with a local nonprofit, Border Workers United. The program is the region’s first co-op and includes ten women advocating for change to municipal regulations for microbusinesses. A community market was created where microbusinesses could sell their wares. The project coincided with another project titled Hacemos Le Ciudad, which incorporated different strategies to amplify and build civic capacities and networks within the Buena Vida neighborhood. Development of a pilot expansion of permitting for small mobile vendors in Buena Vida, a mobile municipal code library, and a mobile negotiation space are underway.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### Brownsville, Texas

Population (2019): 182,781

Demographics:

1. Hispanic or Latino: 94.0%
2. White alone: 4.7 %
3. Other: 1.3 %

Median Income: \$36,499

Persons in Poverty: 31.0 %

FY 2020 Adopted Budget: \$153,656,244

“This work gave community members permission to dream, act, and know. It gave us permission to innovate, engage, and be more inclusive.”

Noel Bernal  
City Manager  
Brownsville, Texas

## LEADING CHARACTERS

From left to right: Christina Patiño Houle, Nansi Guevara, and Celeste De Luna.

- Artist-activists and founders of Las Imaginistas.
- Secured external funding for project.
- Designed and managed project in collaboration with the community and the city.
- Connected the city to the lived experience and needs of a neglected and misunderstood population.



**Noel Bernal**  
Brownsville City Manager

- Relayed value and garnered project support from city council.
- Dedicated time to interviews.
- Ensured staff support and engagement.



**Ramiro Gonzalez**  
Brownsville Director of  
Government and Community  
Affairs

- Engaged staff in participating in the project.
- Helped secure matching funds for grants.



**Rick Vasquez**  
Brownsville Planning and  
Redevelopment Director

- Coordinated cross-departmental staff involvement in revising permitting processes.
- Led code rewrite and adoption of proposed revisions.

## PROCESSES IN ACTION

### DEFINING OPPORTUNITY

- **Build on local context, assets, and aspirations:** Fears of deportation, language barriers, historic disinvestment, and systems that penalized their way of life had created a significant disconnect between the city and Buena Vida community. The Las Imaginistas artists bridged the divide by integrating the engagement process within existing Buena Vida community spaces and such traditions as street marches and eloteros.

- **Community-Defined Problems:** Instead of creating convenings that reinforce normal power hierarchies (across job, race, income, education, or position), Las Imaginistas worked to disrupt those systems by making worlds in which all participants and the experience, knowledge, and reflections they contributed, had equal value and potential to impact the direction and vision for the project.



## PREPARING TO PARTNER

- **Openness to Change:** The city was unaware of the issues facing this community and took a leap of faith to trust the artist's process without fully realizing how it could lead to worthwhile outcomes for the community. For the city, there was no ideal outcome when they began working with Las Imaginistas, only a desire to explore residents' needs in a different way to increase their understanding. The city continues to actively develop and grow their ability to be open as they work with community partners in new ways.
- **Different Ways of Working:** The city had recently revised its organizational vision and found staff wanted to be innovative, equitable, and inclusive. They recognized that Las Imaginistas' work embodied those values and was an example of who they hoped to become. They continue to partner with Las Imaginistas to internally develop their skills and learn how to accelerate this work by applying these strategies in other areas of municipal management.

## STRUCTURING AND SUSTAINING

- **Sustaining:** To maintain this connection to the community, a mobile "negotiation space" is in development where residents can speak to a city official about changes to the permitting system, how it impacted them, and how they could inform future decisions. The space is planned to expand these conversations to different topics and create an ongoing opportunity for engagement.

## OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

### SHORT TERM

- **Improving the permitting process for the entire community.** The city was already prioritizing the review of its permitting process, but had failed to consider perspectives outside development and business stakeholders. Through this project, they harnessed the community's collective knowledge and have begun to make significant improvements that aligned with the entire community's needs.
- **Co-creating engagement strategies with the community.** By partnering with artists, the city was able to build concrete civic engagement skills, increase its capacity for research, and pilot strategies to increase accessibility and transparency. This began with the translation of government documents to Spanish and next steps plan to expand beyond surface-level access to invite community members to influence policy decisions that impacted them directly.

"Brownsville, being a border city, there are a lot of immigrants in the region, and microeconomies are incredibly important for their economic well-being—but also for sustaining the cultural legacies that they bring with them from all different parts of the world. So, we thought that by looking at permitting and small business development for microeconomies, we would be able to find a really rich intersection: how art can support community development and quality of life in the region."

Christina Patiño Houle  
Co-Founder and Co-Director  
Las Imaginistas



- **Developing the economy in one of their poorest areas.** Buena Vida residents and the Brownsville community saw the value in their artisanal informal economic traditions and utilized them as a pathway to imagine and construct more economic opportunities for the community that aligned with their passion, talent, and ingenuity. The project empowered residents to dream through their own existing talents and the city recognized its responsibility and role in fostering opportunity for all residents.

## LONG TERM

- **Promoting mutual respect between the community and government.** Residents felt that the city historically acted as a roadblock to pursuing their entrepreneurial dreams. After this project the city became more aware of how to consider, respond, and support their needs and better understood their most vulnerable and historically marginalized population. This work deepened relationships and encouraged residents to actively participate with local community partners and in their local government processes.
- **Promoting economic equity for low-income residents.** Through the unique engagement of traditionally disengaged residents, the project resulted in economic development that actively combats involuntary displacement of longtime residents. For example, the creation of the Buena Vida Online Market Place will be a portal for the co-op fellowship participants and provide business owners who previously had no internet presence a low-barrier space to advertise online and draw customers in. By addressing issues in municipal code and practices that disproportionately negatively impacted low-income populations, the city has promoted long-term possibilities for economic equity.



## ASK YOURSELF

- Are there parts of your community you've had trouble engaging or connecting with? What might be contributing factors?
- What does it look like when your "full community" participates? How can you expand your reach through nontraditional engagement strategies?
- How are you checking your assumptions about different segments of your population? Does your staff reflect your community?



## SIMILAR CASE STUDIES

### WARM COOKIES OF THE REVOLUTION DENVER, COLORADO

Making civic processes fun, engaging, and creative.



**Problem:** There are barriers to participating in traditional civic engagement strategies in Denver and they fail to reach a majority of residents, resulting in an uninformed and disengaged community.

**Approach:** Warm Cookies of the Revolution is a “Civic Health Club” that approaches civic engagement in as many ways as possible with one common denominator: fun. They start by identifying events a resident would already be interested in attending and then layer in civic issues. They have created over 200 unique programs, hosting events that encourage residents to become civic decision-makers through the use of crafting projects, trivia, “ask me anything” interviews, and fashion shows.

**City Investment:** The city has supported the initiative by including the club as a cultural partner, which allows the use of city facilities at a subsidized rate and provides funding for their programs.

**Outcome:** The initiative has had over 25,000 participants who would otherwise be uninterested or uninformed of traditional civic engagement opportunities. Participant demographics: 70% women, 67% under the age of 45, and 69% in the low- or middle-income tax brackets. Most importantly, 72% of participants reported increased civic engagement after attending an event.



### TAKE A TOUR

Visit the [Warm Cookies of the Revolution website](#).

## MAKING PLANNING PROCESSES PUBLIC BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Taking planning to the streets to increase participation and improve outcomes.



**Problem:** Public engagement conducted for planning processes in Boston had fallen into a rut. Attendance was minimal and those who came were the “regulars,” already well connected to city business. As the city was planning a variety of transportation improvement projects for its Upham’s Corner neighborhood, local nonprofits decided it was time to try something different to solicit feedback from a wider basis of the community.

**Approach:** The Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI) partnered with local artists to create a planning exhibit with interactive public signage and art structures, as well as forums for people to share their ideas. The exhibit and integrated street signage lowered barriers for the public to engage in planning processes, both those already going on and ones they might want to create.

**City Investment:** The Uphams Corner Main Street organizations hosted the week-long exhibit for free and the city’s working advisory group took findings into account when finalizing plans.

**Outcome:** Over 600 community members engaged in the exhibit, improving the neighborhood’s awareness of planned projects and gathering feedback to improve the plans. A direct result of public input included removing a fence that would have unnecessarily divided two neighborhoods and decreasing the cost while increasing the frequency of public transit to the area.



### TAKE A TOUR

[DS4SI’s Making Planning Processes Public](#) website.



## CASE STUDY 5

# UNEXPECTED APPROACHES FOR IMPROVED OUTCOMES

Innovative government organizations have included artists early in their decision-making process to better align issues, processes, and outcomes. An artist in residency program is the practice of a local government inviting an artist to work within its organization for an extended period, operating similarly to an innovation team or diversity officer.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

Below we highlight three cities ranging from 2,000 to 4,000,000 in population and their unique approach to an artist in residency program.

### LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

- Population 3,980,000
- Placement: Department-based
- Goal: Create community workshops
- Duration: 6 or 12 weeks, part-time
- Funding: 30 artists with up to 15 stipends of \$6,000 and 15 of \$12,000
- Source: The Cultural Affairs, Marketing, and Digital Research Departments

### SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

- Population 308,000
- Placement: City-wide
- Goal: Maintain a portfolio of projects
- Duration: Open-ended, part-time employment
- Funding: \$25 hour, \$40,000 a year. \$50,000 project budget across first two years
- Source: City of Saint Paul, Public Art Saint Paul, and external grants

### GRANITE FALLS, MINNESOTA

- Population 2,600
- Placement: City-wide
- Goal: Maintain a portfolio of projects
- Duration: 6-12 months part-time employment
- Funding: \$3,000 a month, \$25 an hour, and fully furnished living arrangements
- Source: Nonprofit Department of Public Transformation and external grants

## CREATION AND GOALS

Residencies are established through different avenues that influence their design.

### LOS ANGELES

**Innovative strategies to address traffic fatalities.** Vision Zero was an initiative of the mayor to end all traffic deaths and serious injuries. The general managers of LA's Department of Transportation (LADOT) and Department of Cultural Affairs partnered together to find a novel way of approaching the complex issue.

LA's goals for the program include:

- Creatively support underserved communities.
- Provide a platform for local artists.
- Promote innovative ideas to service delivery.

### SAINT PAUL

**Recommendation from public policy review:** The residency was established by the city in 2005 with nonprofit Public Art Saint Paul after a comprehensive review of their public art ordinance.

The city wanted to ensure art was considered as an integral part of nearly every civic discipline by inserting creative influence "upstream" through:

- Planning studies.
- Capital project design.
- Asset management.
- Programming of public places.

### GRANITE FALLS

**Result of nonprofit leadership:** After 10 years building a positive relationship with the city of Granite Falls, local artist Ashley Hansen was able to secure the city council's unanimous approval to launch the smallest artist in residency program in the nation. She raised external funding to support the initiative for its inaugural year.

Key goals include:

- Use art-based strategies to help with current projects and initiatives.
- Enable new approaches for community engaged policy making, planning, and practice.
- Enhance the city's approach to community engagement.



## THE NEW HIRES

These programs have included many artists, but one artist and their partnership with each city is featured here.



### LOS ANGELES

#### Alan Nakagawa

- Discipline: Sound and interdisciplinary artist
- History: Inaugural LA resident artist and lifelong resident with a history of working with LA County's Metro
- Competitive advantage: Great listener



### SAINT PAUL

#### Amanda Lovelee

- Discipline: Visual artist
- History: Local Twin Cities-based artist with a history of storytelling through different visual artistic representations
- Competitive advantage: Community-centered approach



### GRANITE FALLS

#### Dani Prados

- Discipline: Media storyteller
- History: Moved to Granite Falls for residency with international experience in theater, film, and immersive performances
- Competitive advantage: Exceptional documentarian and storyteller

## NEW APPROACHES TO FAMILIAR PROBLEMS

Samples of the projects each artist worked on during their tenure at the city.

### LOS ANGELES

Nakagawa was hired expressly to help the city reach its Vision Zero goal to end all traffic deaths and serious injuries. In a multipronged approach, he began by interviewing over 60 LADOT employees to share their stories in a podcast series. Nakagawa arranged a storytelling training where transportation engineers practiced humanizing the data to more effectively communicate the importance of the initiative. Finally, he placed haikus offering messages of pedestrian empowerment on street signs.



### SAINT PAUL

Lovelee partnered with the planning department to create the Pop Up meeting, a small electric truck that brings public meetings around key issues to neighborhoods across the city. Focusing on reaching historically underrepresented residents, participants receive a locally made ice pop for responding to surveys. Meetings lasted 3 hours or until the last of 300 ice pops were handed out. Project staff and councilmembers joined meetings on such topics as long-range planning, city budget proposals, and capital projects.



### GRANITE FALLS

As of this writing, the Granite Falls residency has recently begun and has thoughtfully planned the development of future projects. The first three months of each residency will focus on research and discovery where the artist will attend internal and public meetings, participate in ride alongs, and interview staff and the community to develop a baseline understanding and foster relationships throughout the municipal government. While undergoing this research, the artist will identify potential projects based on their perception of need and areas of interest. This approach gives the artist the freedom to organically develop projects to encourage outcomes that are beneficial to the community and fulfilling for the artist.

## PROCESSES IN ACTION

### DEFINING OPPORTUNITY

**Community-Defined Problem:** After attending city council meetings, Amanda Lovelee identified the tension between the community and government exacerbated by traditional public meetings and the barriers to access that resulted in the same few people attending to share their input. Lovelee used art-based strategies to create a safe space for open communication that sparked joy in the act of public input.

**Guiding Principles:** Granite Falls explicitly incorporates community-driven and inclusive projects as a major strategy of their program to promote active engagement in civic processes and connection as a community. They have included methods within their evaluation framework to gauge success.

### PREPARING TO PARTNER

**Assessing Readiness:** Granite Falls had engaged with artists in economic and community building projects—such as placemaking festivals and community theater productions—for over 10 years, preparing them for a more integrated approach to arts-based solutions.

**Different Ways of Working:** In both Saint Paul and Granite Falls, having a third party employ the artist and act as a liaison with the city was crucial. The coordinating nonprofit's involvement streamlined procurement processes for materials and services for projects and funding avenues were expanded to include more grant and philanthropic opportunities.

**Different Ways of Working:** Lovelee and Prados attended development meetings for projects so their input was inserted “upstream” in planning processes, creating opportunity to influence project design and implementation. Lovelee said, “The biggest impact I had was being part of the process, getting to ask questions while planning large projects where an artist had a valued *and* required seat at the table. I was able to help the city take into account past history in a proactive way to avoid large fallouts in the future.”



“I need to exhaust every single tool in the toolbox and then a bunch of other tools people don’t even think belong in the toolbox.”

Seleta Reynolds  
General Manager  
Los Angeles Department of Transportation  
([NextCity, August 11, 2016](#))

### ASSEMBLING YOUR TEAM

**Artist Approach:** Each artist chosen had one thing in common: they all emphasized the importance of listening. Nakagawa recalled, “A key ingredient for my success was I always shared or relinquished the authorship of the art. I wanted everyone who participated to feel like it was their idea, whether it was staff or the community. My MO is to ask questions, then assess, then propose, incorporating input.”

**Internal Validation:** Prior to Nakagawa’s first day, the general manager of LADOT sent an email to the entire department introducing him and his role within the department. Upon arrival, Nakagawa felt welcome and validated as a member of the team. Granite Falls has a program coordinator that works within the city to advocate, facilitate relationships, and help the artist navigate governmental processes so they can focus on their work.

## OUTCOMES

In addition to tangible outputs, projects had deeper impacts on city operations and community life.

### LOS ANGELES

**Igniting public interest and support in Vision Zero.** In 2017, LADOT found a 20% increase in community knowledge of Vision Zero and traffic safety precautions after transportation engineers were trained to tell the stories of those lost in traffic accidents. This significantly impacted future civic engagement strategies.

**Paving the way for future AIR:** Nakagawa's success resulted in continued partnerships between the city and artists, resulting in expanded programing in subsequent years.

### SAINT PAUL

**Expanding access for residents excluded from traditional public meetings.**

Seventy percent of survey responses collected from Pop Up meetings had never attended a public meeting before, and respondents more closely reflected the city's demographics.

**Fulfilling exchanges for staff.** The Pop Up meeting format broke down hierarchical barriers between staff and residents, allowing them to better understand one another. A planner with over 30 years with the city told Lovelee after a meeting, "Thank you for helping me learn to love my job again."

### GRANITE FALLS

**Changing mindsets and behaviors.**

An advisory committee consisting of stakeholders such as councilmembers, the city manager, and community members outlined desired outcomes to intentionally focus on community outcomes over "products" to increase Granite Falls residents:

- Value of arts and culture as a way to address community challenges and increase quality of life.
- Feelings of connection with one another across differences.
- Activity in civic processes, community gatherings, and other events.

## EXAMPLE DOCUMENTS

See sample documents and outreach from each organization.

### LOS ANGELES

- [Program Description](#)
- [Application Instructions](#)
- [Panel Review Process](#)
- [Artist Information Meeting](#)

### SAINT PAUL

- [City Webpage](#)
- [Timeline of City Artists](#)

### GRANITE FALLS

- [Program Overview](#)
- [Request for Qualifications](#)
- [Artist Information Meeting](#)





“I wanted to see more civic engagement with residents on issues that impacted them. I was surprised by how many big decisions are made at the leadership level, and then told ‘it is how it is’ when residents finally become aware of that decision. So, my hope is that a city artist in residency will help improve that public engagement process.”

Sarina Otaibi  
Rural Programs Manager  
Rethos: Places Reimagined  
Former Council Member  
Granite Falls, Minnesota



## ASK YOURSELF

- Are there departments or areas of work that your gut tells you could use a fresh perspective or out-of-the-box thinking?
- Where might you have even a small degree of flexibility and risk tolerance to test out partnering with an artist?
- What's a recent project or process you wish you could do over? Could a new type of artistic partner help improve outcomes if faced with a similar scenario?
- What persistent issue is impacting your community and are you sure you understand the root cause?



## DIVE DEEPER

Hear from artists directly by visiting the Artists-Municipal Partnerships collection of [10 artists' perspectives on working with local government](#).



## TAKE A TOUR

Visit more examples of residencies via the [Alliance of Artistic Communities](#).



## TAKE ACTION

[Create your own residency with the this guide](#), developed by the City of Pittsburgh Office of Public Art.



## APPENDIX 1: PROJECT ADVISORS\*

Norton Bonaparte, Jr.	City Manager, Sanford, Florida
Amelia Brown	Founder and Consultant, Emergency Arts
Brytane Brown	Transportation and Mobility Planner, Strategist, and Cultural Producer, Oakland, California
Richard Brown	Town Administrator, Somerset, Massachusetts
Carlos Contreras	Creative Consultant and Sole Proprietor, Immastar Productions
Nicole Crutchfield	Director of Planning, Fargo, North Dakota
Susan DuPlessis	Community Arts Development Director, South Carolina Arts Commission
Betsy Keller	County Administrator, El Paso County, Texas
Sean McGlynn	City Manager, Santa Rosa, California
Mallory Rukhsana Nezam	Civic “Reimaginatrix” and Artist, Justice + Joy
Sarina Otaibi	Rural Programs Manager, Rethos: Places Reimagined, Former Council Member, Granite Falls, Minnesota
Sean Starowitz	Artist and Assistant Director for Arts and Culture, Bloomington, Indiana
Cynthia Steinhauer	Director of Community Development, Rochester, Minnesota
Ben Stone	Director of Arts and Culture, Smart Growth America

\* Titles and affiliations listed above are as of December 2020.

## APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS\*

Hilary Bass	Crime Prevention Senior. Program Specialist, Alameda County Sheriff's Office
Noel Bernal	City Manager, Brownsville, Texas
Dan Borelli	Artist and Director of Exhibitions, Harvard University School of Design
Nicole Crutchfield	Director of Planning, Fargo, North Dakota
Hannah Drake	Poet and Spoken Word Artist, IDEAS xLab
Adam Frelin	Artist and Associate Professor, SUNY University at Albany
Ashley Hanson	Founder and Director, Department of Public Transformation
Michael Herbert	Town Manager, Ashland, Massachusetts
Christina Patiño Houle	Co-Founder and Co-Director, Las Imaginistas
Lori Lobenstine	Program Design Lead, Design Studio for Social Intervention
Amanda Lovelee	Artist and Park Ambassador, Metropolitan Council
Eve Mosher	Artist and Founder, HighWaterLine
Alan Nakagawa	Sound and Disciplinary Artist
Marty Pottenger	Theater Artist and Founding Director, Art At Work
Michael Sauschuck	Commissioner, Maine Department of Public Safety
Evan Weissman	Founding Executive Director, Warm Cookies of the Revolution

\* Titles and affiliations listed above are from the time of interview; several interviewees have taken on new positions within their organizations or elsewhere.

# PHOTO CREDITS

- Page 2: Courtesy of the Indigenous Design and Planning Institute
- Page 6: Amu Production, courtesy of The Fargo Project
- Page 7: Courtesy of the Indigenous Design and Planning Institute
- Page 8: WeDesign, courtesy of The Fargo Project
- Page 9: Courtesy of the Town of Ashland, Massachusetts
- Page 12: Hyers + Mebane, courtesy of Breathing Lights
- Page 14: Justin Knight Photography, courtesy of Dan Borelli
- Page 16: (upper) Courtesy of the City of Albany, New York; (lower) Amu Production, courtesy of The Fargo Project
- Page 18: (upper) Courtesy of the City of Brownsville, Texas; (lower) courtesy of Art at Work
- Page 20: (clockwise from top left) Courtesy of Art at Work; Verónica G. Cárdenas, courtesy of Las Imaginistas; courtesy of Richard Brown
- Page 22: Mike Conti, courtesy of Cook Inlet Housing Authority
- Page 24: John Berg, courtesy of the Design Studio for Social Intervention
- Page 25: Courtesy of PlaceBase Productions
- Page 27: Peter Haakon Thompson, courtesy of Springboard for the Arts/Irrigate
- Page 28: Courtesy of Ben Stone
- Page 29: Courtesy of the Department of Public Transformation
- Page 30: Courtesy of the U.S. Water Alliance
- Page 31: (upper) Courtesy of Sean McGlynn; (lower) courtesy of Amelia Brown
- Page 36: Courtesy of the Indigenous Design and Planning Institute
- Page 38: Rachel Summers, courtesy of Springboard for the Arts/Irrigate
- Page 43: Courtesy of Sarina Otaibi
- Page 44: Courtesy of Carlos Contreras
- Page 54: Courtesy of Susan DuPlessis
- Page 56: (upper) Courtesy of the Town of Ashland, Massachusetts; (lower) courtesy of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office
- Page 58: Hyers + Mebane, courtesy of Breathing Lights
- Page 60: Courtesy of Sean Starowitz
- Page 61: Hyers + Mebane, courtesy of Breathing Lights
- Page 63: Courtesy of Dan Borelli
- Page 64: Justin Knight Photography, courtesy of Dan Borelli
- Page 65: (clockwise from top left) Courtesy of Dan Borelli, (next two) courtesy of the Town of Ashland, Massachusetts; courtesy of the Massachusetts Laborer; Art Illman, courtesy of Daily News and Wicked Local.
- Page 66: (upper) Courtesy of Dan Borelli; (lower) courtesy of the Town of Ashland, Massachusetts
- Page 67: Courtesy of Dan Borelli
- Page 68: Courtesy of Eve Mosher and Janice Booher
- Page 69: Hyers + Mebane, courtesy of Breathing Lights
- Page 70: Amu Production, courtesy of The Fargo Project
- Page 71: (upper) Maegin Elshaug, courtesy of the Fargo Project; (lower) Nicole Crutchfield, courtesy of The Fargo Project
- Page 72: (left to right) Courtesy of The Fargo Project; courtesy of Nicole Crutchfield; courtesy of Cali Ancha; courtesy of Rachel Asleson
- Page 73: Courtesy of Nicole Crutchfield
- Page 74: Josh Miller, courtesy of IDEAS x Lab
- Page 76: Courtesy of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office
- Page 77: Courtesy of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office
- Page 78: Courtesy of Art at Work
- Page 79: (left to right) Courtesy of Art at Work; courtesy of Michael Sauschuck; courtesy of Art at Work
- Page 80: (all) Courtesy of Art at Work
- Page 81: (upper) Courtesy of Michael Sauschuck; (lower) courtesy of Art at Work
- Page 83: Courtesy of the Town of Ogunquit, Maine
- Page 84: Verónica G. Cárdenas, courtesy of Las Imaginistas
- Page 86: (upper) Courtesy of Las Imaginistas; (lower, all) courtesy of the City of Brownsville, Texas
- Page 87: Courtesy of Las Imaginistas
- Page 88: Courtesy of Las Imaginistas
- Page 89: From The Hip Photo, courtesy of Warm Cookies of the Revolution
- Page 90: John Berg, courtesy of the Design Studio for Social Intervention
- Page 91: Amanda Lovelee
- Page 93: (clockwise from top left) Courtesy of Alan Nakagawa; David Bowman, courtesy of Amanda Lovelee; courtesy of the Department of Public Transformation; Tiffany Bolk, courtesy of Amanda Lovelee; courtesy of Alan Nakagawa
- Page 94: Courtesy of the City of Los Angeles, California
- Page 95: Tiffany Bolk, courtesy of Amanda Lovelee
- Page 96: Courtesy of Sarina Otaibi

# ICMA

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

777 N. Capitol St. NE, Ste. 500, Washington, DC 20002

202.962.3680 | [icma.org](http://icma.org)