

Working With Artists to Deepen Impact

Alexis Stephens



Introduction

Community-based organizations typically do not have the luxury to step back from their daily routines and examine their work from a different point of view. Six organizations did have the chance to do just that—put into practice a theory that working with artists and arts groups could help them create bold, inventive solutions to existing challenges, and breathe new life into how they do their work. In order to test their assumptions, the organizations that were selected to participate in a groundbreaking program broke out of their silos, developed new languages and messaging, and restructured their professional practices. They left their comfort zones to learn new styles of engaging with residents, co-creating with artists, and embedding creativity into the daily life of nonprofit management.

Launched in 2015 by ArtPlace America, the Community Development Investments program supported community-based organizations to incorporate arts and culture into their core work. This one-time program provided \$3 million to each of six community planning and development organizations, over three years, to develop creative placemaking projects that could help them more effectively achieve their missions, resulting in positive outcomes for their communities. ArtPlace America provided technical support through coaching, site visits, monthly webinars, connecting sites with national creative placemaking experts, ongoing advice and workshops with the national artist team of the Center for Performance and Civic Practice, and convening in-person peer exchanges where the sites learned from each other's achievements, setbacks, strategies, and recommendations.

Three years later, these investments have yielded valuable insights and lessons for a wide range of fields of practice, from affordable housing development to parks stewardship, from the social practice of art to youth development, from community organizing to public health. The grantees and their partners have struggled with some of the most pressing and complex issues of our time, including gentrification and displacement, racial health inequities, the isolation of new immigrant residents, and the historical trauma resulting from racism and oppression. With new tools and ways of thinking and imagining, they have helped residents to define and express the identity of

their communities, build cultural resilience, and change the ways in which neighborhood planning and creative placemaking are carried out.

This is the first in a series of briefs that describe the changes, insights, and lessons that these six organizations, the residents of their communities, and their many partners in the arts experienced. This brief examines how these community-based organizations designed collaborative practices between their organizations and artists, and how they have significantly changed the approaches through which community preservation and revitalization can take place. Additional briefs in this series will examine topics such as using the arts as a tool for community engagement, the kind of organizational change that is needed to sustain these partnerships, and how this work strengthens the social fabric of community.

Experiential learning has been a primary goal of the Community Development Investments program (at times referred to as the CDI program) and, as the research and documentation partner of ArtPlace America, PolicyLink has worked with the participants to harvest knowledge and document lessons learned since the program began. Each brief addresses a different facet of the research framework, and collectively they provide an introduction to the changes that have taken place during the program. The overall research and documentation project will include publications, videos, and other presentations, available at www.communitydevelopment.art.

CDI Participants and Activities

Cook Inlet Housing Authority

Anchorage, Alaska

Guided by Alaska Native village values, this regional tribally designated housing authority creates housing opportunities as a way to empower people and build community.

Focus: Solving problems in new ways and elevating resident voices.

Key projects: “Living Big, Living Small,” exploring small space living with set designer Sheila Wyne; “#MIMESPENARD,” mitigating business disruption during a road construction project with performance artists Enzina Marrari and Becky Kendall; the Church of Love, transforming a former church slated for demolition into a community center/art space/performance venue; and embedding story gathering and listening as an organizational practice with Ping Chong + Company.

Fairmount Park Conservancy

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

This is an urban parks conservancy that leads and supports efforts to improve Fairmount Park’s 2,000 acres and 200 other neighborhood parks citywide.

Focus: Working with artists to make city parks relevant for a more diverse population of Philadelphians, and celebrate the history, culture, and identity of its neighborhoods.

Key projects: : A community catalyst residency with the Amber Art & Design collective at the Hatfield House in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood, including cultural asset mapping, social engagement, and community building; leading a master plan process for the Mander Recreation Center; co-hosting the West Park Arts Fest in East Parkside; and expanding the scope and reach of The Oval, a seasonal pop-up park in downtown Philadelphia.

Jackson Medical Mall Foundation

Jackson, Mississippi

This organization manages a 900,000-square-foot medical and retail facility in central Mississippi with a mission to eliminate health-care disparities holistically through the promotion of creativity and innovation.

Focus: Enhancing their role as a neighborhood anchor by fusing arts and culture with health and economic development goals.

Key projects: Intergenerational programming and festivals linking artistic production and economic development with the delivery of health services; “Reimagining the Jackson Medical Mall” with Carlton Turner to introduce history and storytelling into the design of the space; a new community garden and kitchen; and internal and external creative engagement practices with Significant Developments, LLC.

Little Tokyo Service Center

Los Angeles, California

This organization provides family services, affordable housing and tenant services, and community organizing and planning for the nation’s largest Japantown in downtown Los Angeles.

Focus: Facing increasing pressures of displacement, homelessness, and high costs of living, they launched the +LAB (“Plus Lab”) Arts Integration project to test new ways to promote the equitable development of ethnic communities.

Key projects: “Takachizu” with Rosten Woo and Sustainable Little Tokyo, inviting residents to share treasures from the neighborhood; #MyFSN, which seeks to assert “moral site control” over the future of the contested First Street North site; 341 FSN, an experimental storefront space designed to explore community control and self-determination; and the +LAB artist residency program.

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership

Southwest Region of Minnesota

This organization provides housing development, preservation, rehabilitation, and supportive housing services for a rural 30-county region.

Focus: Partnership Art, which uses arts and cultural strategies to incorporate new voices, including Minnesota's growing immigrant communities, into local planning processes.

Key projects: Milan Listening House, exploring immigration stories and the concept of home to inform the revitalization of public spaces; Healthy Housing Initiative, an outreach and education toolkit reaching new Latinx communities; "Creative Community Design Build," where artists engage communities to reimagine underutilized downtown buildings; and hiring Ashley Hanson as an internal artist-in-residence to help sustain their arts and cultural approaches.

Zuni Youth Enrichment Project

Zuni, New Mexico

This effort is devoted to enhancing the health and resiliency of youth on the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico.

Focus: Integrating Zuni arts and culture into planning, design, and construction of a new youth center and park.

Key project: Supporting an ongoing artists' committee and other local artists to co-design and contribute to long-term stewardship, activation, and programming of H'on A:wan ("of the people") Community Park.

Cultivating Arts Partnerships

Community development practitioners who are new to working with artists can learn a lot from the three-year journeys of these six organizations—from identifying partners and formalizing relationships, through contracts and memorandums of understanding, to uncovering the hidden assets and talents of staff. By embracing the fact that “artists have a unique way of problem-solving and seeing the world,” community development corporations, nonprofit housing developers, park associations, health services providers, economic development agencies, and others can leverage small-scale arts and culture work into larger, more ambitious projects.¹

Specifically, this brief provides insights on:

- how the community development organizations matched community development priorities with the expertise and artistic practice of potential collaborators;
- identifying arts partners and building relationships through cultural asset mapping, calls for artists, collaborating with intermediaries, the compilation of artist rosters and directories, and the formation of arts advisory committees;
- lessons learned from the process of creating guidelines for this new work, structuring relationships, and establishing roles and responsibilities;
- overcoming challenges and learning to be more transparent, nimble, and reflective; and
- continuing the work after the CDI program ended.

“““

I fell in love with the space and was so inspired by the work [Cook Inlet Housing Authority] was doing and the potential of creating a community center and changing the way a community is built by including artistic methods and artists in the process. They acknowledged that artists have a unique way of problem-solving and seeing the world that’s just as valid as a developer’s.

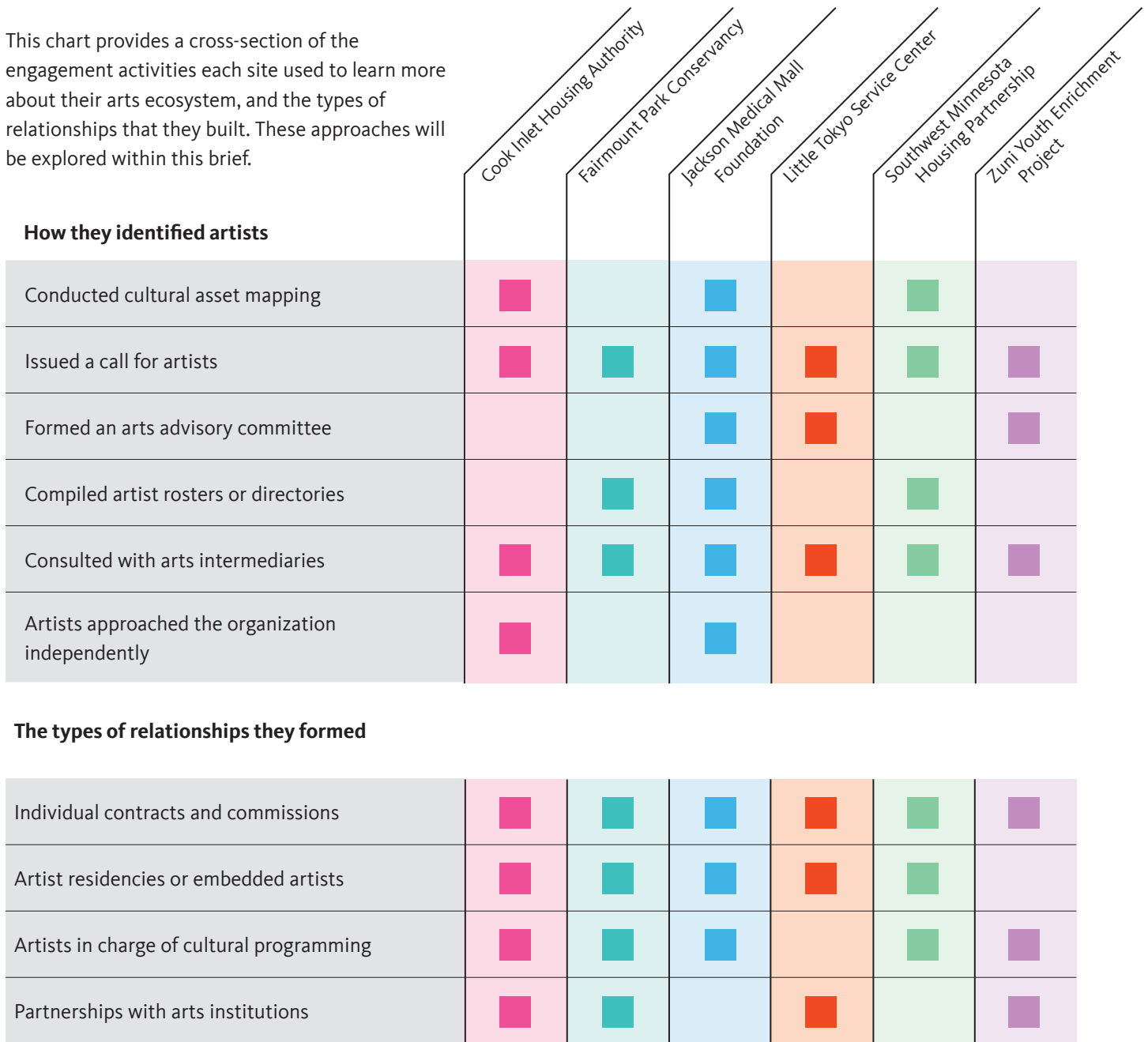
Candace Blas, Manager, Church of Love

Momentum Dance Collective at the Church of Love in Anchorage. (Cook Inlet Housing Authority)



Summary of Approaches to Working with Artists

This chart provides a cross-section of the engagement activities each site used to learn more about their arts ecosystem, and the types of relationships that they built. These approaches will be explored within this brief.



Expanding Knowledge about Artistic Practice

These organizations had a broad range of experiences working with artists when the program was launched in fall 2015. Even though they were inexperienced in using an arts and cultural approach to their community development work, Little Tokyo Service Center had long-standing partnerships with arts and culture institutions in downtown Los Angeles. The Jackson Medical Mall Foundation regarded the investment as an opportunity to view art as more than what lined the Mall's corridors. All six organizations embarked on learning more about the wide typology of artistic practice and increasing their understanding about how different methods and approaches might match each organization's community development goals.

Ellen Ryan, senior director of strategy and planning, commented that Fairmount Park Conservancy had worked with artists before, but they viewed the arts as something to deploy for entertainment or decoration. "What we hadn't done," she said, "was to ask an artist to partner with us as a thought partner. And, we certainly hadn't worked with any kind of social or civic practice artist."²

"We had zero knowledge that there were different forms of artistic practice," said Sezy Gerow-Hanson, public and resident relations director of Cook Inlet Housing Authority. "We were only familiar with public art as community developers, so this was quite a journey."

The Center for Performance and Civic Practice—a team of theater artists who regularly consult on cross-sector collaborations with artists—engaged in coaching and training, and guided processes at the six sites throughout the course of the program. Their role as a key technical assistance provider

was to help the organizations consider their own partnership practices, identifying opportunities where an artist might be of service, and engaging in productive co-design processes with artists interested in pursuing community development goals. With this framework in mind, many of the projects that the six organizations undertook were developed with artists who had social and civic practices where their artistic work functioned in service of an aspiration, challenge, or vision defined by the organizations and their community partners.

Social and civic practice artists played a more limited role for the Zuni Youth Enrichment Project which prioritized working with culture-bearing artists, or artists who pass down Zuni traditions, forms, and knowledge through generations and play an active role in the preservation of the culture. The Zuni Pueblo is an artisan community; the Tribal Council estimates

that 80 percent of families earn at least part of their income through the arts, crafting of baskets, jewelry, pottery, and more.⁴ Initially, they engaged with Daryl Shack, a fetish carver (fetishes are small carvings of animals believed to possess the animal's powers and spirit), who supported their aspiration to collaborate with artists representative of a variety of traditional forms. Joe Claunch, co-director of the Zuni Youth Enrichment Project, remarked that in addition to having a specific type of artistic practice, the artists' personal values had to match the organization's mission, a devotion to youth development—"They had to care for kids, and had to care about how they grew up for them to help us."⁵

Matching organizational priorities to practice led the sites of the CDI program to collaborate with teaching artists, studio artists, performance artists, chefs, dancers, theater groups, singers, and more. As Ellen Ryan mentioned above, when they expanded their knowledge of, and capacity to work with, artists representing different types of artistic practice, they shifted from approaching artists with fully baked ideas, to treating artists as thought partners at the onset of their projects.

Studio practice: Artists create their own work and engage with neighbors/residents as audience.

Social practice: Artists work with neighbors/residents on an artist-led vision that involves some level of community participation and an intention of social impact outside traditional audience experience.

Civic practice: Artists co-design a project with neighbors and residents; the spoken intention is to serve a community's/public partner's self-defined needs.³

Seeking Out Arts Partners

The initial phases of becoming familiar with the range of artistic practice, learning about common pay scales, identifying local partners, and embarking upon relationship building was resource-intensive and protracted. Up to one-third of the Community Development Investments program was dedicated to laying this groundwork before many of the groups could launch their projects. Gerow-Hanson once referred to Cook Inlet Housing Authority's approach as, "going slow, in order to go fast," something that peer organizations should take note of—it helps to test and calibrate arts and culture tactics to ensure that new partnerships are healthy before immediately tackling complex initiatives. The six organizations pursued several approaches to cultivating relationships.

Cultural Asset Mapping

Cultural asset mapping is a process of identifying the cultural and artistic skills, talents, networks, and histories—including people, spaces, and businesses—to acknowledge and integrate them into planning and development efforts. It provides documentation for visioning and planning that focuses on community-identified strengths, and also provides a new lens through which to understand their communities.⁶ All six organizations performed cultural asset mapping during the program, but they utilized different approaches and goals, and the work led to different outcomes.⁷

The Jackson Medical Mall Foundation used traditional asset mapping techniques to better understand the local arts landscape, and clarify their potential role to further serve targeted communities near the Mall. In the first year, they contracted with Mississippi Urban Research Center, which conducted surveys and focus groups with local residents and performed geographic information system mapping of cultural activities within 15 miles of the Mall. Key findings from the study informed the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation that local residents desired more events that promote health and wellness and out-of-school opportunities for youth.⁸ This insight helped to shape their major programming and festivals, like teaching artist-led summer camps and health and wellness fairs, which interconnected arts and culture to the provision of health services.

Sustainable Little Tokyo, an initiative focused on strengthening the cultural, environmental, and economic development of the Los Angeles neighborhood, conducted traditional asset mapping as a part of a community visioning project with the Little Tokyo Service Center prior to the Community Development Investments program. Consequently, the partners (including artists Maya Santos and Rosten Woo) decided to scaffold a more expansive and participatory project over that existing mapping. "Takachizu," a combination of the Japanese translation for the English words "treasure" and "map," invited residents and community partners to participate in "show and tell" gatherings in Little Tokyo over a period of six months in 2016-17, to share what people cherish about the neighborhood through storytelling.⁹ The Takachizu archiving effort compiled 149 treasures that will give conceptual guidance to the ongoing preservation and development agenda of Sustainable Little Tokyo and the Little Tokyo Service Center.

Fairmount Park Conservancy did not complete their cultural asset mapping project until the final year of the program. Their two collaborators, Amber Art & Design and Beth Uzwiak, encouraged them to focus on the process of listening over predetermining what the ultimate product of asset mapping would be. The partners conducted life history interviews in people's homes, on street corners, and via public events, including a barbershop on the porch of a historic house in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood where cross-generational conversations were documented during and in-between free haircuts.¹⁰ They then compiled residents' stories and memories of the neighborhood into a deck of playing cards featuring current and historic figures and landmarks, such as jazz saxophonist John Coltrane and boxer Eugene "Cyclone" Hart. The cards have been distributed to residents as an educational and culturally evocative way to continue a dialogue about how these people, places, and memories might fit into future planning and development projects for the Philadelphia neighborhood.

Issuing a Call for Artists

A call for artists is an “opportunity notice that provides artists the information they need to apply and be considered for [a] project.”¹¹ The organizations used this mechanism to invite artists for specific projects and to cultivate their arts advisory committees and rosters (more on this follows in the next section).

In fall 2016, Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership issued a call for artists to collaborate on community engagement projects in the region, “with an emphasis on areas such as affordable housing, downtown redevelopment, public safety, health and wellness, and arts and cultural development.”¹² Ten of the 11 applicants were invited to join their artist roster. Despite explicitly encouraging people from “diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds” to apply, there was a low response rate from people of color and new immigrant communities. They learned that by offering artists more than three weeks to apply and conducting outreach with more intentionality in more languages, they could have secured a more diverse applicant pool. Feedback on the process helped to inform subsequent artist outreach. They issued a second call and created an ongoing process to keep the door open to prospective arts collaborators while building their artist roster.

The following spring, Cook Inlet Housing Authority issued a call for artists to “advance the design of a small plaza as a permanent enhancement” in front of one of their mixed-use development projects in the Spenard neighborhood of Anchorage.¹³ Their call included: guidelines for working with artists; the project’s details, including the building architect’s plans; and very detailed guidance with respect to how artists were to approach the purpose, functionality, and design of the plaza. As in the case of the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership, it was a learning experience for the organization—one artist responded that they were invited too late in the process, after the planning and permitting were already underway. If the artist had been engaged at an earlier stage, they would have suggested reorienting the plaza in relationship to the surrounding landscape; the architect had oriented it toward being able to look at the building rather than the surrounding Alaskan mountains. Ultimately, the organization did not work with any of the respondents to this particular call. Instead, they learned to be more intentional about seeking ways to collaborate with artists in earlier stages of their construction projects and they are more thoughtful about drafting the language for their calls for artists.

Forming Artist Rosters, Directories, and Advisory Committees

While individual artists and arts groups were being identified as potential collaborators via cultural asset mapping, calls for artists, or through direct contact by interested artists, the organizations created new structures for communicating with them, sharing opportunities, and consulting with them as a group. There are subtle differences between an artist roster, an artist directory, and an arts advisory committee, but they all demonstrate an organization’s commitment to incorporating an arts and cultural approach to community development in the long term, rather than deploying it on a project-by-project basis.

An artist directory can be as simple as a record of information about artists and arts groups. Fairmount Park Conservancy’s directory lists the 49 artists they have worked with over three years, their contact information, the project they worked on, and the role they played. An artist roster is more formal; they are people who are engaged regularly and might be paid a stipend for their collaboration. Artist Carlton Turner advised the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation that these are artists that “you don’t just call when you need them, they show up when you need them.” An arts advisory committee is a group that is convened early and often for their input on the range of arts and culture work of an organization. Jackson Medical Mall Foundation, Little Tokyo Service Center, and the Zuni Youth Enrichment Project all formed arts advisory committees and paid members from \$30 per session to between \$40 and \$60 an hour for their participation.

Zuni Youth Enrichment Project’s seven-member advisory committee helped to culturally ground and foster community ownership over the design, construction, and placement of public art within H’on A:w’an (“of the people”) Community Park. They included Daryl Shack, Jeff Shetima (carver), Carlton Jamon (silversmith), Edward Lewis (painter), Noreen Simplicio (potter), Eldrick Seoutewa (silversmith), and April Unkestine (silversmith).¹⁴ Initially, artists were skeptical about the park because of historical experiences where development projects proposed by outsiders equipped with significant financial resources failed to deliver on their promised outcomes.

Over a series of monthly meetings, the Zuni Youth Enrichment Project was first asked to share how their project would be different from previous planning projects, their understanding of the role of artists in the project, and to provide contracts and clarify their expectations of artists in writing. The organization successfully countered skepticism from artists and built trust through frequent communication with the committee, especially when the construction progress was periodically stalled. Members of the committee have reflected that this is the first project where they have felt “heard” and that their input was acted upon.¹⁵ The organization learned how to work with artists to develop concepts for park design and materials, as well as individual commissions, from concept to completion.

“““

It [the committee] forced us to create space and to have conversations with folks we had worked with in the past. Before, it was definitely that whole silo thing where we'd get the resources, we'd write the grants, we'd let [artists] do what they do really well, but over there... Internally we were not really changing or learning anything.

– Joe Claunch, Co-Director, Zuni Youth Enrichment Project

Deejay set by Atomic Nancy at the 341 FSN storefront in Little Tokyo. (Scott Oshima)



Consulting with Intermediaries

Some of the groups enlisted experts to support them in identifying artists and incubating relationships. Those professionals were available for brainstorming, confidence building, and connecting the groups to other regional and national creative placemaking leaders. The Center for Performance and Civic Practice played this role for many of the groups, with ArtPlace America providing supplementary technical assistance and matchmaking.

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership sought out Intermedia Arts, a Minneapolis-based multidisciplinary, multicultural arts organization, to hold their first rural Creative Community Leadership Institute in Minnesota in early 2017. The institute engaged cross-sector leadership (community developers and artists) to address community issues with arts-based strategies. This series assembled groups in each of the three target communities (Milan, St. James, and Worthington). They also added a fourth group to focus on the organization itself as they worked for three weekends on a series of trainings to ideate, research, and develop a logic model for a project addressing a community issue. This process generated the initial projects for the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership, creating momentum for at least 15 projects by the end of 2018. Artists, community leaders, and city planners collaborated on these projects ranging from “Milan Listening House,” a community-generated art installation centered around the question, “What does home mean to you?” to an “artmobile,” engaging and educating residents of Worthington through mobile art workshops about a forthcoming public transit route system. Even after Intermedia Arts closed its doors at the end of 2017, former staffers Bill Cleveland and Sandy Agustin continued to serve as creative advisers to the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership.

Cook Inlet Housing Authority partnered with Asia Freeman, executive director of Bunnell Street Art Center in Homer, Alaska, to guide them in their early experiments with creative placemaking. Affectionately referred to as their “arts midwife,” Freeman worked with the organization’s leadership through the learning curve of incorporating arts and culture as an internal practice, and she was an intermediary with several artist collaborators.

Defining Relationships

The community development organizations pursued projects that can be roughly divided into three categories: narrow in scope and duration with a specific outcome in mind (e.g., a one-day youth talent competition, panel discussion, or a festival); open in scope, iterative in design, and responsive to evolving external conditions (e.g., a community engagement campaign or artist residency); and major capital or planning projects that required design (e.g., construction of a park space or commercial corridor visioning plan).

With these project types in mind, the groups had to make decisions about when and where to deploy artists. More often than not, earlier was better. Nonetheless, the organizations still had to create the structural openings for any processes that engaged artists. For example, Little Tokyo Service Center established an arts action committee to educate artists about civic processes (such as displacement, city land disposition, and zoning), learn what types of supports they needed, and incorporate their unique perspectives as collaborators before planning activities for the Art @ 341FSN storefront activation. Phasing the work this way helped artists connect to their heritage, see themselves as advocates for the Sustainable Little Tokyo Community Vision, and generate ideas for the two-month arts and culture hub which hosted 23 events, engaged with 70+ artists, was attended by more than 2,000 participants, and generated over 3,000 petition signatures.

The different types of projects and initiatives deployed by the six organizations all required distinct relationship structures: shorter-term collaborations were often categorized as commissions; open/responsive collaborations could be considered partnerships as formalized through memorandums of understanding; and major design and planning undertakings, like artist residencies and capital projects required contracts. The sites also formed, or strengthened more informal but critical, partnerships with major arts institutions and cultural organizations.

To collaborate successfully, the organizations had to demonstrate their respect for the artists' and arts groups' skills and expertise, educate themselves about integrating these structures into their programming, institute fair-wage pay scales, and assign—and more critically, have a dialogue with artists about—shared language and expectations. Building or strengthening these muscles required that organizations avoid succumbing to mission drift and become arts organizations themselves (a forthcoming brief will discuss organizational change and growth). Above all, they had to lead with their values, vision for the work, and with open ears. Below, see how Cook Inlet Housing Authority¹⁶ and Little Tokyo Service Center¹⁷ created guidelines for collaborating with artists to help create boundaries, accountability, and serve as lodestars for their projects and relationships.

Cook Inlet Housing Authority's ArtPlace CDI Framework

“...Any artist we work with must demonstrate their capacity for listening to community residents/stakeholders and the Cook Inlet Housing Authority. They must be committed to outcomes which address the needs, values, and priorities expressed by other stakeholders and a process that is mutually iterative, amidst whatever artistic process and output they devise and execute.”

Guiding Principles of Little Tokyo Service Center's +LAB Strategies

1. Socially engaging with meaningful resident and community participation.
2. Strengthen and amplify existing assets.
3. Create connections and establish common values and visions.
4. Collaborate with existing groups, artists, events, and resources.
5. Educate and increase awareness.

Short-Term Commissions

Prior to the program, the participating organizations were most familiar with commissioning artists as a means to animate spaces, provide entertainment or activities, or decorate walls. They continued to find this work to be a useful and functional approach to capturing public attention and beautifying neighborhoods. The investments from the program helped them to add more nuance to these collaborations—iterating smaller, shorter-term work allowed their projects to become increasingly experimental—which provided space for testing more agile and flexible agreements and methods of payment, and identifying artists who were better partners for more complex initiatives. “It’s almost like dating,” said Primus Wheeler, executive director of the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation. “It takes three years before you get engaged, then another three years before you get married.”¹⁸

Many issued their first request for proposals, memorandums of understanding, and contracts with artists during the program. A request for proposals invites artists to create and submit plans for the production of artwork. Those plans are then evaluated by the commissioning organization, which makes their selection based upon the proposals.¹⁹ A memorandum of understanding is a statement of the intentions of a relationship. It is generally not legally binding, while a contract is.²⁰

Fairmount Park Conservancy’s first program year was characterized by short-term commissions undertaken strategically to build their muscle for working with artists. The organization had experience with issuing requests for proposals, but they were encouraged by their arts partners to create additional opportunities for neighborhood-based artists of color to earn money through short-term work. By the end of 2018, they had employed local deejays, photographers, videographers, graphic designers, musicians, and caterers in their events and produced publications at an unprecedented scale.

Artist Residencies

Through artist-in-residence programs, host organizations can provide artists with time, space, and other supports to engage in community-based work.²¹ Five of the six organizations established formal residency programs, or embedded artists in their neighborhoods and towns to play a curatorial role in public programming and community engagement (another brief in the series will delve further into community engagement and community organizing).

Fairmount Park Conservancy pursued a residency at the Hatfield House, a historic house on the boundary between Fairmount Park and the residential Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. They partnered with Amber Art & Design, a local socially engaged collective led by artist-facilitators of color, to solicit the perspectives of community residents to inform future planning and decision-making processes for new park investments.

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership hired Ashley Hanson as an in-house artist-in-residence to integrate arts and culture into the DNA of the organization, promoting collaborative practice across teams and departments. In her six-month tenure, Hanson produced one-on-one podcasts (often in staff’s homes), conducted story circles, increased organizational understanding of creative placemaking by engaging women artists of color as guest speakers, and paired inter-departmental teams with artists to resolve organizational challenges through creative solutions. A staff retreat held in September 2018 attributed significant internal buy-in to Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership’s external arts and culture work as a direct outcome of Hanson’s contributions.

Partnerships with Arts Institutions

Aligning with local museums and cultural centers can lend community developers credibility and expertise, boost their visibility, connect them to new artists, and generate new audiences for creative placemaking work. Fairmount Park Conservancy partnered with West Park Cultural Center to bring the annual West Park Arts Fest outdoors, attracting neighbors into the park, and establishing connections between the natural and cultural ecosystem of East Parkside. The Zuni Youth Enrichment Project worked with Jim Enote from the A:shiwi A:wam Museum & Heritage Center to advise them on transferring the knowledge and heritage of Zuni people into the park.

Little Tokyo Service Center had prior experience working with local institutions dating back to the late 1990s when they renovated a former church building, transforming it into the Union Center for the Arts. In 2018, they ran a residency program in Little Tokyo on the theme of “community control and self-determination” with four of their long-standing partners. Each served as primary hosts for the four selected artists. Through their partnership with the Japanese American National Museum, the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, Visual Communications (a media arts company), and Sustainable Little Tokyo, they amplified the impact and reach of the residencies. Leaning into their role as a convener, Little Tokyo Service Center helped to increase cohesiveness among these LA arts institutions by circumventing competitive barriers, deepening present and future collaborations, and normalizing the practice of sharing expertise, contacts, and resources.²²

A Strawberry Mansion Reimagines Mander community event in Philadelphia. (*Snapshot Anderson*)



Overcoming Challenges

The multiyear interventions pursued by the selected community development organizations were not without friction and periodic roadblocks. Participants in the arts and community development sectors brought their own styles of working, priorities with respect to project outcomes, and approaches to conflict resolution. Throughout the program, all six organizations had to accept critique, learn from missteps and blind spots, and identify best practices for adapting to the approaches of their new partners. Early failures were often stepping stones toward meeting more ambitious community development objectives.

Lessons that participants in the CDI program seek to share

- Identify a common language and shared goals with artists
- Increase transparency and consistency in communication (“provide a steady stream of information”)
- Demonstrate more patience during the initial pilot phase of a program (a precursor to deeper and longer-term partnerships)
- Trust the process and be flexible with respect to deadlines and deliverables
- View partnership as mutually beneficial with both sides sharing their creativity and resources

When collaborating with a team of socially engaged artists (Jack Forinash, Mary Rothlisberger, and Kelly Gregory) on a community engagement process that sought to work with new Latinx communities on housing issues in the town of St. James, Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership’s project managers became frustrated with the way the artists veered away from the organization’s game plan and ideal benchmarks. Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership considered ending the collaboration but decided to enlist Bill Cleveland and Sandy Agustin from Intermedia Arts to advise them on how to proceed. They were encouraged to ask the artists more questions about why they wanted to rethink the agreed-upon approach. The artists argued that it was necessary to change the direction of the project based on feedback they received from residents. “[That shift] really changed the dynamics,” said Lisa Graphenteen, former chief operating officer of the Southwest Minnesota

Housing Partnership. “We would have missed out on the ripple effect of their work—creating some of the most successful community-based outcomes of all our projects. [It’s really about] being flexible, putting trust in the artist you’re working with, and being open to how it might shift what you’re doing.”²³

Negotiating the terms of the residency program at the Hatfield House presented challenges for Fairmount Park Conservancy and Amber Art & Design. The arts collective had several points of contention with the Conservancy’s initial proposal: they wanted more funding to be dedicated to renovating the property for community use, the option to extend the residency beyond one year, make installment payments instead of upon completion, and to change references to their role. Amber Art & Design preferred to be considered as a “community catalyst” rather than an “artist” residency, hoping to emphasize their roles in engagement and facilitation in the production of art. Michael Rohd and Soneela Nankani of the Center for Civic Practice and Performance mediated conversations between the two parties. They encouraged Fairmount Park Conservancy staff to clarify and more clearly articulate the benefits that they were offering to both Amber Art & Design and community residents. The contract expanded to 17 pages, and negotiations lasted months longer than anticipated, but ultimately the collaboration was fruitful, and Fairmount Park Conservancy secured additional funding to continue the program beyond the initial year.²⁴

““”

[The residency] was such a big leap for us... Amber was focusing on the future of the Hatfield House, and we were saying that the house is a vehicle or tool by which we are exploring the relationship between Strawberry Mansion and East Fairmount Park. And it turns out it was both. I recognize that now.

– Ellen Ryan, Senior Director of Strategy and Planning,
Fairmount Park Conservancy

Like the other organizations, perception of a gap between staff and arts partners was a challenge for the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation to overcome. “I think it was hard for them to not treat relationships transactionally,” said Daniel Johnson, a socially engaged artist who joined their artist advisory committee in the early phase of the program.²⁵ When participation began to dwindle in the spring of 2017, Mahalia Wright—recently promoted from a staff position in human resources to lead the new arts and culture department—invited Johnson to share her feedback about the program’s strengths and weaknesses. As a result of ongoing conversations, the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation contracted with Johnson’s company, Significant Developments, to develop a strategic plan for their cultural work. The arts group encouraged the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation staff to recognize themselves as artists and creative collaborators, narrowing a perceived divide between the institution and their new partners.²⁶

Carlton Turner, who is bringing history and storytelling into the Mall’s public spaces through “Reimagining the Jackson Medical Mall,” supported the organization in resolving attrition in their advisory committee by suggesting that they change their meetings from a town hall format to a social mixer, with food and drinks. Now promoted as Artist Thursdays, attendance has increased and members of the advisory committee can interact with elected officials and heads of local agencies and commissions.

The groups learned that the more skills and expertise they contributed in addition to payment for services rendered—offering professional development services or leveraging their connections with local businesses and political leaders—the more trust and goodwill they were able to generate within the arts community.

Maintaining and Sustaining a Collaborative Practice

The Community Development Investments program was a rare opportunity for participating organizations to access financial resources, coaching, and professional networks, and to gain experience as a cohort. When the program drew to a close in the fall of 2018, the organizations could execute their dual roles as community developers and creative placemaking leaders with confidence. They began to leverage their new arts endeavors into other opportunities, explore new ways to generate additional sources of funding, nurture or renegotiate their nascent relationships with artists, and document and communicate the journeys they had recently completed.

A forthcoming brief in the series will explore the internal changes these organizations made to ensure future sustainability. Below is a chart with examples of their approaches to maintaining their collaborative practice with artists as they relate to the frameworks described.

All participants report that sustaining this work is a different type of challenge from the ones they faced as implementers, but their best practices have been transferrable to new arts partners, projects, and communities. In particular, they have come away with a more sophisticated, strategic, and reflective understanding of the potential of arts and culture to amplify their mission-driven community development work.

How organizations are sustaining...

...partnerships with artists	All of the sites continue to consult with artists they collaborated with during the CDI initiative.
...particular projects or programs	Zuni Youth Enrichment Project is transferring what they learned about working with artists on a planning and capital project, to managing and providing cultural programming for H'on A:wan Community Park.
...relationship structures	Fairmount Park Conservancy is adapting the lessons learned from the community catalyst residency on the east side of Fairmount Park and incorporating them into their community engagement efforts on the west side of the park.
...funding for the integration of arts and culture	Cook Inlet Housing Authority staff produced a five-minute play to enliven a pitch to funders for the ongoing renovation of the Church of Love. Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership is considering establishing an arts-focused revolving loan fund. They also produced a creative placemaking funding resource guide for their staff.
...organizational practice involving arts and culture	Partially inspired by the success of Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership's in-house artist-in-residence, Little Tokyo Service Center is hiring an embedded artist to problem-solve challenges faced by their teams.
... community development impact	Jackson Medical Mall is embarking on a new mini-grant program for artists to conduct projects in the neighborhood surrounding the Mall's campus.

Conclusion and Lessons Learned

The organizations that participated in the Community Development Investments program learned several effective strategies to forming lasting and impactful relationships with artists:

- Becoming familiar with, and engaging in, a range of artistic practices maximized their success in matching goals with the strengths, expertise, and cultural knowledge of potential arts collaborators. Learning more about common relationship structures and pay scales also enhanced their capacity.
- There are many proven avenues to seeking out local artists and arts organizations including cultural asset mapping, issuing calls, and forming rosters, directories, and committees.
- Leading with shared values (established by early conversations with artists and the development of guidelines for arts work), engaging with artists as thought partners, and adopting compatible partnership structures can amplify mutual benefits for both sides of a collaboration.
- Calibrating tactics, failing early, and establishing trust in the beginning of the process made the work more powerful down the line.
- Friction should be expected. Being transparent, flexible, and patient helps to mitigate conflict; mediation from an outside arts intermediary can also bridge perceived gaps. Additional strategies: recognize and acknowledge the existing creativity within community organizations while being explicit about the benefits of the work to artists and communities.
- Sustaining arts and culture work over the long term is a different challenge from embarking upon it, but the community development organizations continue to cultivate their programming via relationships, projects, and organizational practices.

Youth singers perform at Jumpstart: The Back-to-School Jam in Jackson. (*Jackson Medical Mall Foundation*)



Notes

- 1 Candace Blas, interview by Chris Johnson, PolicyLink consultant, September 28, 2017.
- 2 Sezy Gerow-Hanson and Ellen Ryan, interview by PolicyLink, February 21, 2019.
- 3 All three definitions are from Center for Performance and Civic Practice, *Effective Partnering: Starting with Values, Goals and Vision*, May 17, 2017, https://www.artplaceamerica.org/view/pdf?f=/sites/default/files/public/pictures/cpcp_low.pdf.
- 4 Virginia Morell. "The Zuni Way," *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 2007, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-zuni-way-150866547/>.
- 5 Joe Claunch, interview by PolicyLink, February 21, 2019.
- 6 Kofi Boone, "Disembodied Voices, Embodied Places: Mobile Technology, Enabling Discourse, and Interpreting Place," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 142 (2015): 217-226, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282487456_Disembodied_voices_embodied_places_Mobile_technology_enabling_discourse_and_interpreting_place.
- 7 ArtPlace America provided the six sites with a resource called, "Mapping Out Cultural Asset Mapping: A Practical Guide to the Practice," accessed on April 7, 2019, https://www.dropbox.com/s/3642fq60d4gzd9d/AssetMappingCompilation_FINAL.pdf?dl=0.
- 8 Mississippi Urban Research Center, Jackson Medical Mall Foundation's Arts & Cultural Asset Mapping Project, 2016.
- 9 Scott Oshima, "Documenting the Process & Communicating Success," February 13, 2019, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Webinar, 12:50. <http://www.lisc.org/our-resources/resource/how-do-creative-placemaking-webinar>.
- 10 Amber Art & Design, Strawberry Mansion Community Engagement: Cultural Asset Mapping and Gateway Conceptual Planning 2017-2018, October 15, 2018.
- 11 Americans for the Arts, *Abridged Call for Artists Guidelines*, 2009, https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2013/by_program/networks_and_councils/public_art_network/CallforArtistsGuide_Abridged.pdf.
- 12 Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership, *Call for Artists*, September 12, 2016.
- 13 Cook Inlet Housing Authority, *3600 Spenard Plaza Design*, February 10, 2017.
- 14 Karen Olsen, "A Cultural Park for the Health of the Kids," *Public Art Review* 58 (2019): 13.
- 15 Susan Carter, memorandum to PolicyLink, December 2018.
- 16 Cook Inlet Housing Authority, *ArtPlace CDI FRAMEWORK/ VISION*, January 2017.
- 17 Little Tokyo Service Center, *What is +LAB?*, 2016.
- 18 Primus Wheeler, interview by PolicyLink, June 27, 2018.
- 19 Americans for the Arts website, "Frequently Asked Questions," accessed on March 19, 2019, <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/public-art-network/faq/in-what-cases-would-a-request-for-proposals-rfp-process-be-used-0>.
- 20 ChangeLab Solutions, "Contracts and MOUs: Understanding Key Terms," accessed on March 19, 2019, https://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/MOU-vs-Contracts_FINAL_20120117.pdf.
- 21 Maria Rosario Jackson, "Brief Reflections on Artist Residencies in Community Contexts," CONSUMPTION (project), Asian Arts Initiative, accessed March 19, 2019, <http://asianartsinitiative.org/consumption/essay-by-maria-rosario-jackson-ph-d>.
- 22 Jilly Canizares, memorandum to PolicyLink, December 10, 2018.
- 23 Lisa Graphenteen, interview by PolicyLink, July 11, 2018.
- 24 Ellen Ryan, interview by PolicyLink, June 21, 2018.
- 25 Johnson's name is intentionally not capitalized.
- 26 Significant Developments, Jackson Medical Mall Foundation – cultural production final report, December 2017.

Acknowledgments

This research was made possible through the generous support of ArtPlace America. We want to especially thank Lyz Crane, Deputy Director, and Jamie Hand, Director of Research Strategies, for their invaluable guidance throughout this process.

Our deep gratitude goes to the staff of the six participating organizations of the Community Development Investments program, their artist collaborators, and community partners who contributed their experiences and reflections to this research. We would also like to thank Samuel Hoi, President of the Maryland Institute College of Art and Margy Waller, Senior Fellow at Topos Partnership who shared their thorough review and insightful feedback on this document.

The PolicyLink team for this project included Victor Rubin, Milly Hawk Daniel, Jeremy Liu, Alexis Stephens, Lorrie Chang, Adam Dyer, Kasandra Kachakji, and Nisha Balaram. Heather Tamir, Kakuna Kerina, and Jacob Goolkasian supported the production and design of this report. We would also like to express our appreciation to the local correspondents who contributed so much information and insight throughout our research process: Michele Lee Anderson, Karen Black, Jilly Canizares, Susan Carter, Meghan Holtan, and Charles Husband. Every effort has been made to accurately record and reflect the perspectives and experiences of the participants. The analysis and conclusions are the responsibility of PolicyLink.

Main cover photo: Cook Inlet Housing Authority.

Small cover photos top to bottom: Lyz Crane, Jackson Medical Mall Foundation; Zuni Youth Enrichment Project; Ashley Hanson, Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership; Rudy Espinoza, Little Tokyo Service Center; Albert Yee, Fairmount Park Conservancy.

©2019 PolicyLink. All rights reserved.

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing racial and economic equity by **Lifting Up What Works®**.
www.policylink.org

Author Biography

Alexis Stephens is a senior communications associate at PolicyLink. She develops and lifts up messages on racial equity and inclusion and implements communications strategies for the All-In Cities initiative and the National Equity Atlas. She has played an integral role researching and documenting efforts to explore arts and culture as an equitable development strategy. Prior to joining PolicyLink, Alexis was Next City's 2014-2015 equitable cities journalism fellow and has a master's in historic preservation from the University of Pennsylvania.



Lifting Up What Works®

Headquarters

1438 Webster Street
Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94612
t 510 663-2333
f 510 663-9684

Communications

75 Broad Street
Suite 701
New York, NY 10004
t 212 629-9570

Washington, DC

1301 K Street, NW
Suite 300 W-414
Washington, DC 20005

policylink.org

Facebook: /PolicyLink

Twitter: @policylink