



Not Just Murals

Insights into Artists' Leadership
in Community Development

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With residents and partners, LISC forges resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America—great places to live, work, visit, do business and raise families. Since 1980, LISC has invested \$17.3 billion to build or rehab 366,000 affordable homes and apartments and develop 61 million square feet of retail, community and educational space.

Launched in 2009, Metris Arts Consulting believes in the power of culture to enrich people’s lives and help communities thrive. We believe those benefits should be broadly shared and inclusively developed. Metris seeks to provide high caliber planning, research, and evaluation services to reveal arts’ impacts and help communities equitably improve cultural vitality. To accelerate change, we seek to share knowledge and amplify the voices of those closest to the work.

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INTRODUCTION

Why should artists play a leading role in community development?



Many community developers see the role of artists in fairly limited ways: they paint murals, or they work in youth development. But artists can contribute much more profoundly, especially if they are given the authority to act in leadership roles.

Across the country, artists are running programs that are designed to build relationships and a sense of community among neighbors, reshape key locations in a neighborhood, or bring jobs and investment to a community. At the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, staff have seen an uneven understanding across our network of local offices, among community partners, and in the larger field of community development of how artists can exercise leadership in community development and how that leadership might be cultivated and nurtured. Understanding and acting upon this opportunity can help community developers do their jobs better.

Aiming to support arts-and-cultural approaches to community revitalization in the low-income neighborhoods and rural areas where we work, LISC adopted creative placemaking as a national initiative in the fall of 2015. LISC chose to pursue this approach because it believes that creative placemaking, understood as “people coming together to make positive physical, economic, and social impacts in their neighborhood through art, culture, and creativity,”¹ can help local partners better achieve their community development goals. This initiative embraces certain core principles, such as social, economic, and cultural equity, that can and should be advanced through a creative placemaking approach,² as well as the principle to put individual artists at the center of the work.³

¹ “LISC Creative Placemaking: Overview and Guiding Principles,” June 2015, <http://www.lisc.org/our-initiatives/economic-development/creative-placemaking/principles/>.

² Ibid.

³ LISC broadly defines an artist as anyone who professes and practices their creative expression, and defines art and culture very broadly and inclusively.

THIS PAPER INCLUDES:

- an overview of the impact artists can have as leaders in community development efforts,
- how to cultivate artist leadership,
- challenges to and ingredients for their success, and
- nine short profiles of artists who are leading programs that are improving their local community.

We draw on a literature review, interviews with 15 artists leading in different facets of community development, and conversations with experts who have unique insights into regional and national context and trends. Our interviews and examples draw heavily from two locales in the LISC network that are exceptionally fertile ground for artists taking up the mantle of leadership in community development, Minnesota’s Twin Cities and Philadelphia, as well as several projects and artists in the South that have received support from Alternate ROOTS, a regional arts service organization that provides artist leaders with training and resources at the intersection of arts and social justice.

SECTION 1

Examples of Artists as Leaders



Art Blocks: Artist and Organizer Witt Siasoco; Minneapolis, MN. Photo by Bruce Siscox

To LISC, because creative placemaking is a tool to accelerate social, physical, and economic outcomes in traditional community development, the organization has a focus on three types of often-interconnected creative placemaking: **community cultural development, culturally-relevant physical transformation, and the creation or strengthening of arts-and-cultural economic clusters.**⁴

Community Cultural Development

Community developers have long practiced a form of social change known as community building, which aims to forge relationships within communities to enable them to act effectively on their own behalf. Such relationships, sometimes known as social capital, are the essence of collective efficacy, which is social cohesion combined with shared expectations for social behavior.⁵ Traditional community organizing is one way to strengthen collective efficacy. Another is community cultural development—arts-and-cultural activities that enable people to participate in cultural expression as a means of asserting individual agency, community identity and pride, cultural and political equality, and community aspirations. It is arguably community organizing at a much deeper level than traditionally practiced.⁶

On pages 9-11, we offer three examples of artists committed to community cultural development:

— **Mike Hoyt and Molly Van Avery**

Art Blocks

In a version of traditional block captains, South Minneapolis artists supported by Hoyt and Van Avery engage their immediate neighbors in making and experiencing art.

— **Faith Bartley, Courtney Bowles, Aviva Kapust, and Mark Strandquist**

People's Paper Co-op

Ex-offenders expunge their criminal records by using them to make paper in a North Philadelphia storefront managed by Bartley (an ex-offender herself).

— **Nick Slie, *Cry You One***

In an immersive arts experience that includes site-specific theater, a concert, and stories featured online, Slie aims to educate audiences on Louisiana's disappearing environment and inspire them to act.

⁴ "LISC's Conceptual Framework for Creative Placemaking," n.d., http://www.lisc.org/media/filer_public/7d/6c/7d6c8c25-5d85-4987-b51e-bdfcb978eac0/081617_lisc_creative_placemaking_conceptual_framework_april_2014.pdf.

⁵ Robert Sampson, *Great American City*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). As discussed in the relevant literature, *cohesion* is associated with inter-personal trust, predictability of others' actions, mutual recognition of shared membership, shared values, and pro-sociality. *Efficacy* implies personal agency, effectiveness of means, community capacity, and absence of fear.

⁶ "LISC's Conceptual Framework for Creative Placemaking."

Culturally Relevant Physical Transformation

Traditional community developers understand the power of physical surroundings to shape the beliefs, perceptions, social relationships, and expectations of residents and outsiders alike. Culturally relevant physical transformation embraces the signs and symbols of a community's cultural identity as integral elements for new and revitalized structures and public spaces.⁷

At its best, this kind of physical change signals to all that revitalization is *about, for, and with* the people in the community, rather than real estate transactions or central planning without regard for current residents.

On pages 12-14, we highlight three artists working to transform their physical environments in culturally relevant ways:

— **Roger Cummings**, *Environmental Design Program*

Cummings teaches youth design and fabrication skills to create dynamic physical spaces in a North Minneapolis neighborhood, filling in the gaps where government fails to act.

— **Alex Gilliam**, *The Building Hero Project*

Responding to community needs, Philadelphians of all ages learn how to build objects aimed to animate environments with Gilliam and may even generate income through Tiny WPA's Esty store.

— **Dan Brawley**, *Jengo's Playhouse*

Visual artist-turned-developer Brawley works to empower others to play a role in equitable development in his quickly changing Wilmington, North Carolina, neighborhood.

Jengo's Playhouse; Wilmington, NC



⁷ Ibid.



Mountain Tech Media; Whitesburg, KY

Arts-and-Cultural Economic Clusters

Community development can be difficult under the best of circumstances, and community economic development is no exception. Neighborhood commercial corridors are a part of a broader regional economy that steers the allocation of capital, business, and consumer patronage to some places and not to others, exposing the pace and pattern of corridor change to incredibly powerful forces from outside the neighborhood. As a way of understanding these forces and how they influence business location, economists have refined theories about *economic clusters*,⁸ which consist of interrelated businesses in similar industries, as well as their suppliers, customers, and labor force. Businesses form clusters because they enable efficient flows of information, shared public infrastructure, and deeper pools of consumer spending. These advantages and the many ways that arts-and-cultural economic activity fits the cluster framework are strong benefits of creative placemaking for a community's economic development efforts.⁹

On pages 15-17, we explore how three artists nurture arts-and-cultural economic clusters:

— **Ada Smith, *Appalshop***

Smith looks to leverage local assets in Whitesburg, Kentucky, to help the community prosper, with for-profit Mountain Tech Media as the most recent of Appalshop's myriad economic development ventures.

— **Shira Walinsky, *Southeast by Southeast***

Southeast by Southeast occupies a Philadelphia storefront where community members, many of them immigrants, practice and teach arts and cultural practices from their native counties, sell their wares, and receive important social services, like ESL classes.

— **Jun-Li Wang and Oskar Ly, *Artist Organizers***

Ly is one of the artists who have been embedded in community development organizations by St. Paul's Springboard for the Arts under its Artist Organizer program, which helps the artists create projects like the Little Mekong Night Market.

⁸ Harold Wolman and Diana Hincapie, "Clusters and Cluster-Based Development Policy," *Economic Development Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2015): 135–49, doi:10.1177/0891242413517136.

⁹ "LISC's Conceptual Framework for Creative Placemaking."

SECTION 2

Artist Profiles

ARTIST PROFILE

Art Blocks (Minneapolis, MN) *Mike Hoyt and Molly Van Avery*



Art Blocks; Minneapolis, MN. Photo by Bruce Silcox

Even when Michael Hoyt’s neighbors aren’t outside jumping rope or sitting on the stoop, you can still see their faces in the community, because Hoyt has painted them on his fence. A few blocks away, Molly Van Avery tapes personal odes to her neighbors’ doors, like one that was inspired by a neighbor’s laundry hanging out to dry, and hosted Poetry Picnics in a neighborhood park where her neighbors could write and read poems. Lacey Prpić Hedtke researched the history of each house on her block, visually depicted the houses on telephone poles, and led her neighbors on a ritualistic walk to honor past residents.¹⁰ These projects are part of Art Blocks, a program of Pillsbury House + Theatre (PH+T) in South Minneapolis, which engages artists to creatively connect with other residents on the block where they live. Art Blocks strives to be “a bridge reaching deeper into neighborhoods,” Hoyt explains, with artists acting to help community members explore their “own creativity where they live.”

Van Avery says the Art Blocks projects are transformative for the artists *and* their neighbors: working at a micro-scale allows neighbors to more easily forge connections and results in a “network of resources and care.” Art Blocks, as well as PH+T’s other creative placemaking programs, have helped community members gain pride and commit to greater civic engagement in

their neighborhoods; gain skills and confidence to generate opportunities, and feel they had a greater voice in decision-making, especially among underrepresented individuals.¹¹

Hoyt and Van Avery have grown into leadership roles as paid staff for PH+T and continually mentoring other artists. The City of Minneapolis also recently hired them to create a Mobile Engagement Tool for its comprehensive plan, affording them an opportunity to apply principles from their block-by-block work citywide as they collect residents’ visions for an equitable Minneapolis. As artist and community coordinator at PH+T, Van Avery passionately advocates for artists who want to engage more deeply with their neighbors through art, and she says she cherishes working one-on-one with the Art Blocks artists to tease out “what would challenge you, inspire you, feed your hungry artist soul?” When artists reflect on these questions, she says, their “projects are so much more provocative and emotional.”

¹⁰ Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, Rachel Engh, and Christopher Mascaro, “Adding It Up: 52 Projects by 30+ Artists in 4 Neighborhoods” (Minneapolis, MN: Pillsbury House + Theatre, January 2016), <http://metrisarts.com/evaluations/#AddingItUp>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*



People's Paper Co-op; Philadelphia, PA

ARTIST PROFILE

People's Paper Co-op (Philadelphia, PA)

Faith Bartley, Courtney Bowles, Aviva Kapust, and Mark Strandquist

People passing by the storefront of People's Paper Co-op on a busy North Philadelphia street might stop to browse a table with free books, and they might even notice Faith Bartley, an artist and ex-offender, hanging paper to dry in the back room. What they would probably never guess, though, is that this isn't just any paper. In clinics co-designed by lawyers and formally incarcerated folks, participants work to expunge their criminal records and then tear up these records (a food blender is involved) to make handmade paper. The clinics transform typically "dehumanizing, disempowering, boring" social service experiences into an environment where an individual struggle turns into "shared power," explains artist and program co-director Mark Strandquist.

The success of People's Paper Co-op hinges on artist leadership, which permeates almost every layer of the project, including its genesis. Aviva Kapust, a designer and executive director of the Village of Arts and Humanities, spearheaded SPACES, an artist residency program that matches visiting artists with neighborhood residents to create art projects that lift up community

assets, such as family recipes, passion for cooking, and musicianship skills.¹² Through SPACES, artists Courtney Bowles and Strandquist arrived from Richmond, Virginia, with lots of questions and open ears. People's Paper Co-op emerged from the question: "How would reentry services, policies, and stereotypes be transformed if they were being crafted by those with direct experience?" explains Strandquist.

Bowles and Strandquist don't just lead a program: they seek to build capacity of community members, and particularly other artists. The charismatic Bartley, who now strives to "give back to the neighborhood I helped destroy," has emerged as a natural artist-leader. "Courtney and Mark molded me into a social advocate," she says. "I love what I'm doing... I want to help people, I finally found my niche." As a full-time lead fellow at the helm of People's Paper Co-op, she is helping Bowles and Strandquist realize one of their personal marks of success ("working ourselves out of the job") as neighborhood residents increasingly assume ownership and direction of the project.

¹² "Projects," *SPACES Artist in Residence Program at the Village of Arts and Humanities*, accessed June 15, 2017, <http://spaces.villagearts.org/projects/>.

ARTIST PROFILE

Cry You One (New Orleans, LA) *Nick Slie*

If you participate in Cry You One, be prepared to walk, dance, sing, and commune with dirt. Pioneered jointly by multi-disciplinary ensembles Mondo Bizarro and ArtSpot Productions¹³, Cry You One addresses “cultural ... and physical land loss,” part of an immersive arts experience that explores relationship between land and culture in Louisiana. Cry You One is a 2.5-mile “outdoor, processional performance,” one-hour music concert, and online platform with “stories of the people most deeply impacted by coastal land loss.” Through these multiple modes of creative participation, artists strive to help people understand and express their own experiences and figure out ways to “fight to save Louisiana” from land loss.

Nick Slie of Mondo Bizarro conceived, produces, and performs in Cry You One, which is in its sixth year. (Mondo Bizzaro’s Race Peace, a multi-generational project that addresses race, is in its tenth year.) As a young

resident of New Orleans, a place Slie characterizes as communal but under-resourced, where people “are constantly reliant upon one another to achieve what they want to achieve,” he discovered theater artists whose work was artistically “vibrant [and] could stand alone, but it wasn’t separate from the community in which it existed.” After Hurricane Katrina hit, Alternate ROOTS convened Slie and other New Orleans artists, and framed Katrina not as a natural disaster but as the result of “systemic neglect over a long period of time.” Slie says they discussed their responsibility, not only to this moment but to all the movements and moments that came before it. “[It was a] defining moment in [Mondo Bizarro’s] trajectory,” he says, “catapulting our work into this place where ... we just listened, and learned, and continued to be students of the work.” Slie relies on mentors who remind him of Mondo Bizarro’s place in the “continuum” and to focus on what his projects can contribute to the conversation. “I think our work has been the work of our lives,” he says.

¹³ “Mondo Bizarro,” accessed June 15, 2017, <http://www.mondobizarro.org/>; “ArtSpot Productions,” accessed June 15, 2017, <http://www.artspotproductions.org/>.

Cry You One; New Orleans, LA





ARTIST PROFILE

Environmental Design Program (Minneapolis, MN)

Roger Cummings

Cars and trucks zoom down West Broadway Avenue in North Minneapolis, a place with the largest concentration of youth in a three-state area. When Roger Cummings, artistic director of Juxtaposition Arts (JXTA) located just off West Broadway, asked the city and county how they planned to calm traffic, he was met with an unhelpful, “We have to keep it moving fast.” So Cummings and his team in the Environmental Design Program painted the crosswalks with vibrant colors—and drivers slowed down.

The Environmental Design Program, a collaboration among JXTA, the University of Minnesota College of Architecture/Landscape Architecture, landscape architect Satoko Muratake, and architect James Garrett, teaches urban planning, architecture, and engineering skills to youth. Students build temporary structures, like parklets, and more permanent ones, such as bike racks. They learn technical design and fabrication skills, but as important, they learn how to ask for community input. Together, artists and community members can create dynamic physical spaces—such as outfitting a bus stop with art, lights, and benches—that both respond to community needs and are created by people who spend time in the neighborhood.

Since its inception in 1995, JXTA has weathered ebbs and flows, with Roger and Deanna Cummings (who serves as chief executive officer) at the helm to right the ship. In 2009, JXTA had an

annual budget of \$270,000, its staff was struggling with burnout, and the board discussed closing its doors. But re-energized after a year’s absence (Roger, a Loeb Fellow, attended Harvard’s Graduate School of Design and Deanna received a Master of Public Administration at Harvard), the Cummingses changed course, and now, with a budget of \$1.7 million, JXTA is a powerful presence in North Minneapolis. It owns and manages multiple buildings on the block, and developers wanting to build in the neighborhood seek out JXTA for advice on a project’s overall design or on specific elements, such as seating for an affordable housing complex. Roger Cummings says “yes” to such partnering if it benefits people who live, work, and play there.

Accumulation of JXTA-activated spaces, such as the colorful crosswalk, eye-catching design of JXTA buildings, and larger developer-driven projects, signals to outsiders interested in the neighborhood that the community expects the built environment to respond to and convey benefits to the people who live there. Moreover, Cummings stresses the importance of creating the conditions where “residents are experts at [identifying and] solving their problems” instead of developers or consultants sweeping in with answers of how to fix an environment or problem. “Misery is very fundable,” he explains. JXTA aims to change the narrative, creating a place where the students “empower themselves” to help shape their communities.

ARTIST PROFILE

The Building Hero Project (Philadelphia, PA) *Alex Gilliam*

It's easy to find Tiny WPA. It's the only storefront on this major West Philadelphia commercial corridor with chairs outside—and bright blue and yellow ones at that. Tiny WPA's core program, The Building Hero Project, provides youth and adults from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds with innovative training in design, collaboration, leadership, fabrication, and entrepreneurship. Participants in The Building Hero Project complete a free 8-week training—"a shop class on steroids"—where Building Heroes gain hands-on experience with digital, wood, and soft goods fabrication while learning valuable design, prototyping, problem-solving, and creative thinking skills.

Designer Alex Gilliam leads Tiny WPA by empowering participants to emerge as leaders in their own right. In 2012, Gilliam piloted The Building Hero Project in response to the growing interest and excitement around Tiny WPA's community-led projects, such as the design-build for a community message board with People's Emergency Center in West Philadelphia, transformation of a vacant lot into a pop-up playground in Camden, N.J., and creation of a tree-inspired shade canopy for a farmer's market in North Philadelphia. After every one of these projects, a handful of participants—16-year-old girls, college students, unhandy handymen, electricians, nurse practitioners,

union carpenters, struggling 20-somethings—deeply wanted to continue to design, build, and have a positive impact in their community.

"It became apparent that in order to strengthen communities, revitalize our neighborhoods, and further the impact of our design-build projects, as well as creative placemaking in general happening in and around Philadelphia, greater investment needed to be placed on the people," Gilliam notes. The Building Hero Project provides the tools, materials, instruction, and support system so emergent Building Heroes, no matter their age, socioeconomic background, or professional experience, can come together and collaboratively put their ideas into action.

Once they've completed the training, Building Heroes have the opportunity to participate in Tiny WPA in other ways, continuing to build skills and even generate their own income. Building Heroes take on leadership roles in Tiny WPA projects and fabricate items that Tiny WPA sells on its Building Hero Project Etsy page, such as shelves, tables, and iPhone holders. Recently, several Building Heroes enrolled in design schools, inspired by their experience learning from Gilliam and eager to continue learning how to shape and improve their environments.

Building Heroes Project, Philadelphia, PA.





Jengo's Playhouse; Wilmington, NC

ARTIST PROFILE

Jengo's Playhouse (Wilmington, NC) *Dan Brawley*

Driven by a quest for studio space 12 years ago, visual artist-turned-developer Dan Brawley bought and renovated Jengo's Playhouse, a spot that now anchors Wilmington's Soda Pop District—a cluster of six buildings interspersed amidst an old Coca-Cola bottling facility—where creative entrepreneurs live and work. The Playhouse is home to artist studios, a cinema, and arts organizations, including the Cucalorus Film Festival headquarters.

Brawley has played a leadership role in the Soda Pop District not only by directly developing Jengo's Playhouse, but also through commitment to empowering others so future development reflects equity values and a collectively determined identity rooted in history. Brawley spends time on his front porch thinking about the bottling facility's legacy—how it “really devastated the neighborhood in a lot of ways,” including displacing lower-income and African-American families. His current project to marshal start-up capital for emerging leaders in the African-American business community reflects his desire to “craft a new model of community development that goes against the typical gentrification.”

As developers buy up property around Jengo's Playhouse, Brawley seeks ways for the community to “encourage more thoughtful development.” One developer plans to redevelop about three blocks' worth of property and Brawley is wary of how this significant redevelopment will unfold. Community meetings that Brawley helped instigate have jumpstarted a move to start a neighborhood organization “to give the neighborhood a collective voice” and the birth of a history project to help residents “reach consensus on an identity for ourselves.”



Jengo's Playhouse; Wilmington, NC

ARTIST PROFILE

Mountain Tech Media (Whitesburg, KY) *Ada Smith*

Appalshop originated from an economic need—unemployment due to the declining coal industry in Whitesburg, Kentucky—and a cultural one, the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of Appalachian people and culture. In 1969, a grant from the first federal anti-poverty agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity, enabled Appalshop to teach film production skills to local youth. Long after that grant, the organization continues to create media that provides “first voice narrative” and provide opportunities for people to stay in the region and make a living. Over the years, Appalshop has gone on to do media productions, public presentations, and educational projects, including film, video, radio, new media, music, theater, and community exchanges, designed to amplify the voices of Appalachian people.¹⁴ It now boasts film and video production and training facilities, as well as a community radio station, theater, art gallery, and regional archive of film, audio recording, and still images.

In 2015, the Appalachian regional economy was reeling from a years-long precipitous drop in coal production, while Appalshop had created the market for local media and developed a comprehensive training program. To start something new in the local economy the next step, explains Ada Smith, Appalshop’s institutional development director, was to “help organize the talent.” Because artists are at the core of the arts-and-cultural economy, they are uniquely suited to play leadership roles in community economic development. So Appalshop launched Mountain Tech Media, a for-profit marketing business that provides web design, video production, graphic design, social media marketing, and tech consulting¹⁵ for Appalshop and other Kentucky-based organizations such as schools, food and drink establishments, and community, economic, and environmental entities.¹⁶

Rather than the deficit-based model from which Appalshop originated, the move came from internal conversations around “What do we have? What can we create?” says Smith. Artists, naturally predisposed to seek out and highlight community assets, offer an important counterweight to failed deficit-based approaches. Structured as a worker co-op, Mountain Tech Media has two full-time employees. Appalshop and an investor serve as part owners, and employees have the option of developing equity in the company.

Appalshop’s values of shared ownership, horizontal leadership, and asset-based development not only informed Mountain Tech’s design, it also inspired Smith to stay in Whitesburg and apply her skills to community development. A self-identified “cultural worker,” Smith grew up in Whitesburg, and as a young person, she recalls, people told her to escape for places with more opportunities. “Appalshop was one of the few institutions that had a different idea; they didn’t say you had to stay, but they helped showcase to me why this place mattered,” she says. The most important skill Smith uses in her work? “It’s part of my job to understand this culture,” Smith explains, “and to continue to use it ... to create other opportunities and agency for the place that gave me what I got.”

Mountain Tech Media; Whitesburg, KY



¹⁴ “Our Story,” *Appalshop*, accessed June 19, 2017, <https://www.appalshop.org/about-us/our-story/>.

¹⁵ “Services,” *Mountain Tech Media*, n.d., <http://www.mttechmedia.com/services.html>.

¹⁶ “Projects,” *Mountain Tech Media*, accessed June 15, 2017, <http://www.mttechmedia.com/projects.html>.

ARTIST PROFILE

Southeast by Southeast (Philadelphia, PA) *Shira Walinsky*

Southeast by Southeast was originally conceived as a six-month temporary storefront to investigate the needs and desires of new refugee communities from Burma and Bhutan, and artist Shira Walinsky began working there thinking she'd lead a mural project. Today Southeast by Southeast cultivates a market for refugees' artwork and provides space to build skills, both art- and life-related, and community. On any given day community members are learning how to sew, demonstrating traditional Burmese weaving, or taking ESL classes. At craft shows, refugees sell their wares, made using skills honed in their home countries.

The change happened in part because from the start Walinsky asked questions, such as "How can [refugees] have a role as teachers and leaders?" And she listened. She learned about the tatting (a type of embroidery), sewing, and weaving skills already present in the community, as well as about the tough jobs in meat packing and factories that were the primary positions open to refugees. A Burmese immigrant's tale of learning to weave from her mother moved Walinsky to ask, "How can we support this artist?"

Southeast by Southeast, led by Walinsky, herself an artist, takes on the role of economic leadership, affording resident artists a visible pathway to earning income while sustaining their community and cultural attachments. Participants translate their creative skills that many thought they might have to abandon after emigration into economic opportunities. Walinsky also taps deeply into institutional partners, including the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, Lutheran Children and Family Services, and the Philadelphia Refugee Mental Health Collaborative. Southeast by Southeast is an arena for earning income, but it is also a contributor to social capital formation at both the individual and organizational levels, a critical ingredient to sustained economic activity.

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Artist Organizers; St. Paul, MN.
Photo by Sam Carlsen

ARTIST PROFILE

Artist Organizers (St. Paul, MN) *Jun-Li Wang and Oskar Ly*

When the Little Mekong Night Market was in full swing: stilt walkers glowed brightly in the dark, break dancers slid and spun, Lao food steamed on paper plates. The market was fun for community residents and an opportunity to bring more income into the neighborhood while generating opportunities for local artists. It started in large part due to artist organizers (AOs) like Oskar Ly, an AO at Asian Economic Development Association, a nonprofit working in the Twin Cities.

The artist organizer program was created by Springboard for the Arts, an offshoot of Irrigate, a three-year program that trained local artists in collaboration and creative placemaking and offered modest stipends to artists to work with businesses and organizations to execute projects along University Avenue, a major commercial corridor being upended by light rail construction. The AO program trained artists in organizing, team building, evaluation, documentation, and more, to “dig deeper” in a sustained, long-term position within organizations doing community development work, explains Jun-Li Wang, Springboard’s artist community organizer. Besides their salaries, AOs also received funding to hire other artists and initiate their own creative projects. Although not all host organizations decided to fund an AO position after Springboard support ended, the groups forged multiple relationships with local artists from a variety of disciplines who could be tapped for future needs.

Although Springboard’s program has ended, its influences remain. Community development organizations with embedded AOs continue to engage with artists on staff or through project-based work. For example, Lula Saleh works to highlight cultural richness within the emerging Little Africa commercial district, and Brittany Lynch seeks to bolster the “economic power” of black artists in a historically African-American neighborhood torn in two by a 1960s highway construction project.¹⁷ Wang still convenes monthly gatherings for AOs to share their experiences, insights, and connections with each other.

Taking what it learned through Irrigate and the AO program, Springboard for the Arts has published *Irrigate: A Toolkit for Mobilizing Local Artists to Solve Challenges in Your Community*, and later with the International Downtown Association, the *Guide for Business Districts to Work with Local Artists*, a creative placemaking toolkit for business districts to learn how to better engage with local artists to help create vital places and experiences. And Wang and her colleagues at Springboard have other plans in the works to share lessons learned and build capacity for artists in community development in St. Paul and beyond.

¹⁷ “Artist Organizers,” n.d.

SECTION 3

Why Involve Artists as Leaders?



Why should community developers tap artists to lead social, physical, and economic change in low-income communities? At their best, artists bring a questioning spirit, creativity, sensitivity to community, and tolerance for risk. Community developers bring commitment, expertise, and determination. This is a potentially powerful combination.

Leadership can be an amorphous concept, with different meanings for different people. To clarify our thinking, we use Merriam-Webster's definitions, which list a number of actions that are linked but distinct: a) to guide on a way especially by going in advance, b) to direct on a course or in a direction, c) to serve as a channel for.¹⁸

The artist leaders we profile in this paper do guide, direct, and channel as organizers and advocates, social services providers, workforce developers, and/or real estate developers. Some have done pathbreaking work in places or at times when they alone were doing arts-based development in their community. Some have created wholly new programs that have been proven to work well and then been taken to scale. Others have carefully organized and communicated knowledge that enables others to follow in their footsteps. Some artist-leaders mentor others, working with youth or artists and non-artists who are interested in gaining the skills and knowledge needed to flourish. Sometimes artist-leaders have standing in their communities, which look to them for guidance or expertise. Many serve as a channel for community aspirations or help fledgling artists and communities work together to realize their own aspirations, to take control of some aspect of their private and public lives.

Artists adept at and trained in community work bring a number of specific, critical skills as leaders in community development:

- Surfacing community knowledge by asking questions and listening deeply
- Using imagination and vision to bring fresh eyes to community work
- Preparing for the uncertainty and risk inherent in community change
- Collaborating in cross-sectoral teams
- Helping community members advance into leadership roles

¹⁸ "Definition of Lead," Merriam-Webster, accessed June 16, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lead>.

These are skills that are valued and practiced by community developers, and artists who embody these traits can exercise effective leadership that engenders more imaginative and sustained community engagement.

Artist leaders forge creative openings for local residents to step in and contribute their knowledge and experience to place-based change efforts. They work with communities to transform their surrounding physical spaces into expressions of community aspirations. And they contribute directly through their artistry to the creation of local income-earning opportunities.

To be clear, every artist does not embody or practice the skills and traits needed for good community work, nor is it reasonable or healthy to expect artists to “come in and save the day,” warns Melissa Kim with Philadelphia LISC, whose career in arts and development includes serving as a former manager with the Pearl Street Project at Asian Arts Initiative. Academics Karen Chapple and Shannon Jackson point out the paradox of “asking artists to attend to the social ills of our contemporary cities, effectively asking one vulnerable sector of society to fix another vulnerable sector of society.”¹⁹ “(It’s) about how arts and culture, community, and community development work together better and complement each other. How they create new ways of thinking, seeing problems and shifting relational dynamics,” Kim says. We hope that examples of how these two worlds have come together will accelerate continued collaboration and expanded opportunities for artists to assume leadership roles.

¹⁹ Karen Chapple and Shannon Jackson, “Commentary: Arts, Neighborhoods, and Social Practices: Towards an Integrated Epistemology of Community Arts,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 29, no. 4 (2010): 478–90.

²⁰ Maria-Rosario Jackson, “Developing Artist-Driven Spaces in Marginalized Communities: Reflections and Implications for the Field” (The Urban Institute; LINC, October 2012); Debra Webb, “Placemaking and Social Equity: Expanding the Framework of Creative Placemaking,” *Artivate: A Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts* 3, no. 1 (2013): 35–48; Chapple and Jackson, “Commentary: Arts, Neighborhoods, and Social Practices: Towards an Integrated Epistemology of Community Arts”; Leonie Sandercock, “Towards a Planning Imagination for the 21st Century,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 70, no. 1 (2004): 133–41.

²¹ Arlene Goldbard, *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development* (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2006), 63.

Artists surface community knowledge by asking questions and listening deeply

Artists pose questions in their work as a matter of course. “We tend to take a long time looking and listening, looking and listening ... for a density of experience,” says Nick Slie of Mondo Bizarro in New Orleans. He calls this “protracted observation.” Researchers²⁰ and interviewees cite the importance of this kind of looking and listening when working in communities. Deep listening allows artists to grasp the history of a place and a community’s needs and desires, which can set the stage for meaningful work, as deep listening builds the necessary trust.²¹ One of Slie’s goals is to create spaces where people can better listen to each other: “to create a condition to be heard...[is] a radical act,” he explains.

Not all artists are good at this. And even when they are, they must be accountable to the communities in which they work, just as any other community developer should be expected to be. Michael Rohd, the executive director of the Center for Performance and Civic Practice, a national resource for artists and communities working together to build civic health, equity, and capacity, asks artists working in community development, “When in your practice do you listen, and to whom?” By listening to people affected by a proposed project, he explains, an artist gets beyond her own “presumed” needs or desires. Juxtaposition’s Roger Cummings says that listening, especially to his young students, allows his work to stay fresh.

Many of the artists and other experts we interviewed warned against shallow listening and, as the Paper Co-Op’s Courtney Bowles puts it, “making false promises.” Artists must pose questions to communities and listen carefully to their responses instead of, as her colleague Mark Strandquist puts it, “helicoptering in” with answers. “People can read bullshit a mile away,” explains

Alex Gilliam of the Building Hero Project in Philadelphia. “They know when they’re being asked for [information] that’s ultimately not going to be used.”

The imagination and vision of artists can bring fresh eyes to community work

Artists in community development propose imaginative solutions for community change: “Making the familiar strange, and the strange familiar,” as researcher Charles Landry puts it.²² Scholar Patsy Healey advocates for planning processes that “shift the systems of meaning about a set of problems which [participants] have used in the past,” an “‘opening out’ of issues, a mental ‘unhooking’ from previous assumptions and practices, to try to see issues in new ways.”²³

Artists typically pride themselves on the active and practical imagination needed to turn what others may view as unpromising material into work (including community work) of considerable value. “Where many people see only blight and deficiency, artists can see assets, opportunity, possibility, and potential for transformation,” writes Maria-Rosario Jackson.²⁴ Jun-Li Wang of Springboard credits artists’ outside perspective as an asset when working in community development because

they can make something totally new or different from what’s at hand, whether reusing scrap wood in a vacant lot or turning a process on its head.

The timing of engaging an artist in community development may be key—the earlier the better in many cases. “Planner-artist collaborations can create unique possibilities within planning processes,” writes researcher Jonathan Metzger, “but only in very specific parts of these processes, where new openings are in dire need.” The key is imagining an artist as part of the process. The outside world may only see the role of artist in community development as painting a mural on a completed building, but artists are best engaged at the beginning to bring a fresh perspective and different community connections and even “rethink the whole project,” Wang says.

“When you use art as not a product but a process, people can imagine, investigate, reflect, and build,” explains urban planner James Rojas.²⁵

“When you use art as not a product but a process, people can imagine, investigate, reflect, and build.”

²² Charles Landry, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (London: Earthscan, 2000), 179; Jonathan Metzger, “Strange Spaces: A Rationale for Bringing Art and Artists into the Planning Process,” *Planning Theory* 10, no. 3 (2010): 213–38.

²³ As noted by Jonathan Metzger, “Strange Spaces: A Rationale for Bringing Art and Artists into the Planning Process,” *Planning Theory* 10, no. 3 (2010): 216; See also Patsy Healey, *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

²⁴ “Developing Artist-Driven Spaces in Marginalized Communities: Reflections and Implications for the Field.”

²⁵ ArtPlace America, “A Closer Look at the ArtPlace Summit: Artists at the Table,” Text, *ArtPlace*, (April 28, 2016), <http://www.artplaceamerica.org/blog/closer-look-artplace-summit-artists-table>.

Artists are prepared for the uncertainty and risk inherent in community change

An artist enters a community with an idea or vision. “But all of that is up for grabs if you’re creating an accessible and equitable framework for the community to engage with you,” Carlton Turner of Alternate ROOTS explains, adding that this process, which is “not fully realized until it’s informed by community,” runs counter to traditional community development practices.

The ability to face uncertainty, take risks, and even fail are assets in community work, according to both our interviewees and researchers.²⁶ Artists adept at community practice have considerable tolerance for the fact that community change efforts are almost never strictly linear. “Ambiguity has always been part of the process,” says Oskar Ly of Asian Economic Development Association, herself a former artist organizer. She credits time to explore as essential to her work in this role. Wang says that artists who are the most effective at community development work are “comfortable not knowing” and acknowledge that “it’s okay to be in discovery phase,” a mindset crucial to all artists’ practices. Dan Brawley of Jengo’s Playhouse in North Carolina says he “love[s] being in a space on the brink of failure or deep in failure” when trying to create something new. “Those are the moments that mean the most to me.”

Artists can be well-suited to collaborate in cross-sector teams

Because of their varied backgrounds and adaptive ability, artists can be good partners in multi-disciplinary teams, where a kind of multilingualism adds great value. Interviewees spoke to their ability to move between worlds as an asset. Some of the most effective artists in community development, Turner says, also have training in economics, urban or rural planning, or organizational and institutional development, and can “unpack how institutions are built ... [and] bring structural analysis to the table.”

Essential to Mike Hoyt’s work at Art Blocks, he says, is “knowing what you know, recognizing what you don’t know, and aligning with smarter people who know what you don’t know.” Strandquist says that when he recognizes that he’s not the best person for a task, the right person in the community is “within arm’s reach.” In his work, Cummings assembles diverse teams: economists, engineers, writers, people with much formal education, and some with none. “Just a bunch of artists” doesn’t make a “winning squad,” he notes.

A winning squad can share information efficiently across sectors. In her work with “unlikely partners,” Ada Smith of Appalshop has found that community developers, not artists, most effectively communicate with other community developers, and she relies on Appalshop’s partners to communicate with their development peers. Researcher Danya Sherman suggests that partnerships between community-based development and organizing groups and artists “are often effective because they allow the creative workers to maintain a level of artistic freedom while also moving forward tangible urban development work.”²⁷

²⁶ Rosario Jackson, “Developing Artist-Driven Spaces in Marginalized Communities: Reflections and Implications for the Field”; Goldbard, *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*.

²⁷ Danya Sherman, “Exploring the Ways Arts and Culture Intersects with Housing: Emerging Practices and Implications for Further Action” (ArtPlace, April 2016).

Artists help community members advance into leadership

Artists who are good at community work validate the knowledge, skills, and experience of community members. “One of the key lessons of the community arts field is that empowerment and dignity can come out of the creative process,” write Chapple and Jackson.²⁸ Artists who successfully advance community goals strive to create a setting where “arts are not operating on communities, or at communities, or to communities, but rather with and for [communities],” explains Rohd. “If the best work is by community,” notes Erik Takeshita of the Bush Foundation, “[then a key role of the artist is to] help mobilize and actualize hopes, dreams, and desires of community members.” He describes a tension between “walk[ing] with confidence and great humility.”

To do this, artists aim to create conditions in which community members feel enabled to engage in civic action: it’s about creating spaces for community members to practice skills and listen to one another. Organizing in a housing and community development context “can be difficult and hard work,” writes Sherman, but “arts and design-oriented strategies and interventions help to educate, empower, and create space for shared decision-making” and make the work “enjoyable, joyous, and enriching.”²⁹

When Gilliam works with communities in and around Philadelphia, he aims to create an environment where people not otherwise active in their neighborhoods or schools can grow into leadership roles. He cherishes the moment when community residents work together to physically improve their surroundings, which ultimately leads them to “transition to being real advocates for what matters to them.” If community developers aren’t “building up community members to be able to support themselves at the end of the day, to be able to do that work [in the absence of community developers], they’re not fixing anything, but are part of the problem,” explains the Twin Cities’ Ly.

Artist Organizers; St. Paul, MN. Photo by Bruce Silcox



²⁸ Chapple and Jackson, “Commentary: Arts, Neighborhoods, and Social Practices: Towards an Integrated Epistemology of Community Arts,” 487.

²⁹ Sherman, “Exploring the Ways Arts and Culture Intersects with Housing: Emerging Practices and Implications for Further Action.”

SECTION 4: NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Environments that Cultivate Artist Leadership in Community Development



The core concepts of what artists offer to community development in this paper are deeply informed by insights from the artists we interviewed and profile in this report.

Clearly their efforts have engendered seasoned experience and an opportunity to think carefully about how to best approach their work. But what’s “in the water” in Twin Cities and Philadelphia that supports these exemplary efforts? What does ROOTS provide that enables artists and their partners throughout the South to do good work?

Twin Cities

In Minneapolis and St. Paul, we found that foundations, institutions, and individuals constitute a layered ecology of support for artists who assume leadership roles within communities. Notable individuals and organizations lead in highly visible ways, and formal and informal sources of support seem plentiful. Artists, arts organizations, and non-arts entities value partnership and collaboration.

Interviewees in the Twin Cities can rattle off names of established artists and founders of organizations that have led by example. “We have a breadth of talent and practice here that has been leading for a long time, that’s been rooted and connected to community in powerful [and] accountable ways,” observes Hoyt. It makes a difference that the Twin Cities have a rich history of organizing, such as labor, settlement house, and American Indian movements. Van Avery describes Twin Cities’ history as “unsettled” and “vibrant,” which sets the stage for a real urgency for racial and social justice. “A lot of artists I love have their eyes wide open,” she says.

Takeshita suggests that Twin Cities artists “have a density of people to bump up against,” in part because creative jobs are plentiful, including those in Fortune

500 companies like Target and Medtronic. Jun-Li Wang notes that growth in jobs that blend art and community development allows artists to see other ways to be successful beyond getting grants or selling their work.

The Twin Cities also boasts many formal opportunities to learn how to do arts-based community work. Intermedia Arts, LISC, Pillsbury House + Theatre, and Springboard for the Arts all offer programs, workshops, and other resources for artists and community developers. Artists take part in leadership programs open to artists and non-artists alike, including the Shannon Leadership Institute and the Bush Fellowship program, which offers \$100,000 over two years to pursue continuing education. The Bush, McKnight, and Jerome foundations and government agencies provide important support, and the Legacy Amendment, a statewide hotel tax, has allocated more than \$440 million to arts and culture since 2010.³⁰ And with new and younger leadership in philanthropy, Cummings notes, neighborhood organizations and people of color stand to gain a more equitable share of this support.

Finally, the Twin Cities offers plentiful informal networking opportunities. For example, even though Springboard for the Arts financial support for artist organizers has tapered off, they continue to nurture the network of practitioners through online groups for alumni of trainings, and AOs embedded in partner organizations usually convene monthly as a cohort to help navigate this unique role.

³⁰ “Keeping You Informed,” *Minnesota’s Legacy*, accessed January 26, 2017, <http://www.legacy.leg.mn/>.

Philadelphia

With its abundance of art schools, arts organizations, and artists, Philadelphia is a “great Petri dish,” says Kim. Despite deep social and economic distress in the city, residents’ familiarity with and openness to arts interventions—as well as the city’s ethnic and cultural diversity—lend momentum to arts-based community development.

Just as in the Twin Cities, multiple interviewees noted the importance of certain artists and the organizations they founded when asked about why Philadelphia proves to be fertile ground. For example, Walinsky cites Jane Golden, founder of the celebrated Mural Arts Program, as someone who was at the start of the intersection between art and community in the city, and Kim says Mural Arts “created an economy for artists to come and work,” important because “artists attract more artists.” Kim also notes that the Village of Arts and Humanities, with Lily Yeh and Arthur Hall as its first artists in residence, served as a critical piece of the puzzle: “They were trailblazers in creative placemaking.”

Philadelphia boasts a concentration of educational institutions for residents of all ages to learn artistic skills, as well as how to make a living as an artist and work within communities. Fleisher Art Memorial provides affordable classes; Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation offers workshops for teaching artists and community organizations; University of the Arts and Hussian College provide entrepreneurial courses for artists; and programs at Temple University and Moore College of Art & Design offer curricula with a community arts focus.

The concentration of art means having artists “every two feet,” Kim jokes. And as in Twin Cities, a critical mass of

creative people live and work in Philadelphia. Strandquist marvels at the “diversity of brilliant, passionate people in the city,” and Gilliam says the city is small enough that he can feel connected to others when he needs support: “I like bumping into people.” Kim describes a culture of collaboration in Philadelphia, where artists self-organize to share knowledge about how to get financial support, for example.

Artists in Philadelphia also collaborate with non-arts community organizations to achieve community development goals. Gilliam developed Tiny WPA in Philadelphia in part because partners like People’s Emergency Center (PEC), Science Leadership Academy, and Design Philly “got what we were trying to do and were doing nationally important work that we could plug into and complement.” Kim recalled a PEC planning process that included artists because the organization identified them as neighborhood assets, and multiple interviewees noted that the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Programs gave its Blue Ribbon Award for Excellence in Community Development to PEC’s Neighborhood Time Exchange and the Village of Arts and Humanities initiative People’s Paper Co-op.

But the community development world’s recognition of the value artists bring to their work does not necessarily mean plentiful funding for projects. Interviewees expressed mixed opinions on Philadelphia’s funding scene. Kim points to a “strong network” of philanthropists and smaller foundations that support community arts work. But Aviva Kapust at the People’s Paper Co-op said she finds ways to make a lot out of little and also relies on national support to launch new efforts and sustain existing ones.

Alternate ROOTS

Committed to social and economic justice and generally recognized as a standout training and resource provider for artists working throughout the South, member-driven Alternate ROOTS is an arts service organization and a national resource. ROOTS's Partners in Action program helps foster partnerships between artists and community organizations, offering technical assistance, resources, mapping, staff support, financial aid, and connection to the ROOTS network.³¹ In its Artistic Assistance program, ROOTS supports individual artists and cultural workers to build skills, develop projects, and build community.³² ROOTS annual gatherings for its members are an opportunity for peer exchange, networking, and mentorship, and it also curates a collection of Arts & Activism Tools and partners with other organizations to run the Intercultural Leadership Institute, which aims to amplify voices of artists underrepresented in the dominant narrative in the U.S.³³

ROOTS's strong focus on partnerships, peer learning, and tailored financial support and leadership opportunities allow artists to grow throughout their careers. And its local leadership provides a "home-field advantage" in the South, which Slie says is overlooked, misunderstood, and complex. "To have an organization that understands the American South, and is made of leaders, staff, a board of directors who are all from the American South [is] like having a conversation with your family. You can get to harder topics faster," he explains.

This focus on partnerships as a strategy for long-term sustainability and transformation allows artists to deepen their work in communities. For example, a Partners in Action grant enabled Appalshop to formalize its relationship with a local community college and get accreditation for off-site programming. And the financial support and leadership structures that ROOTS offers give artists opportunities at different stages of their work. This important "ecosystem of support" allows ROOTS "to be responsive and build around the artists' needs," Turner says. Slie, a past ROOTS executive committee member, appreciates that ROOTS invests in individuals to build leadership skills along a trajectory, so they're prepared to take on future work.

ROOTS creates spaces for members to connect with one another and see their work in a larger context. Slie says he values the ability to "feel held in a larger community," and Brawley describes his experience with ROOTS as "very emotional." After serving on the executive committee, he says he came away with "a deep understanding of myself, of how I needed to grow and become more aware of the baggage that I bring into the room as a white male, [and]... what it really means to be an ally in fighting oppression."

³¹ "Programs," *AlternateROOTS*, n.d., <http://alternateroots.org/programs/>.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ "Intercultural Leadership Institute (ILI)," *AlternateROOTS*, n.d., <https://alternateroots.org/intercultural-leadership-institute-ili/>.

SECTION 5

Common Challenges and Ingredients for Success



The Twin Cities, Philadelphia, and Alternate ROOTS offer artists supportive environments for artists to play leadership roles in community development that leverages the creativity and existing knowledge of community members to make place-based social, physical, and economic change.

Not every city or community can easily re-create all of these elements, particularly factors such as a density of educational institutions dedicated to the arts or a long history of trailblazers in the field. However, there are key ingredients for success that can be adapted or emulated in nearly any system:

— **Groundwork for artist leadership**

In supportive systems, flagship leaders and institutions are a wellspring of good practice for artists and community developers active in arts-based community work. This support includes an experimental civic and organizational culture that *invites* artists to play leadership roles embedded in broader community development work.

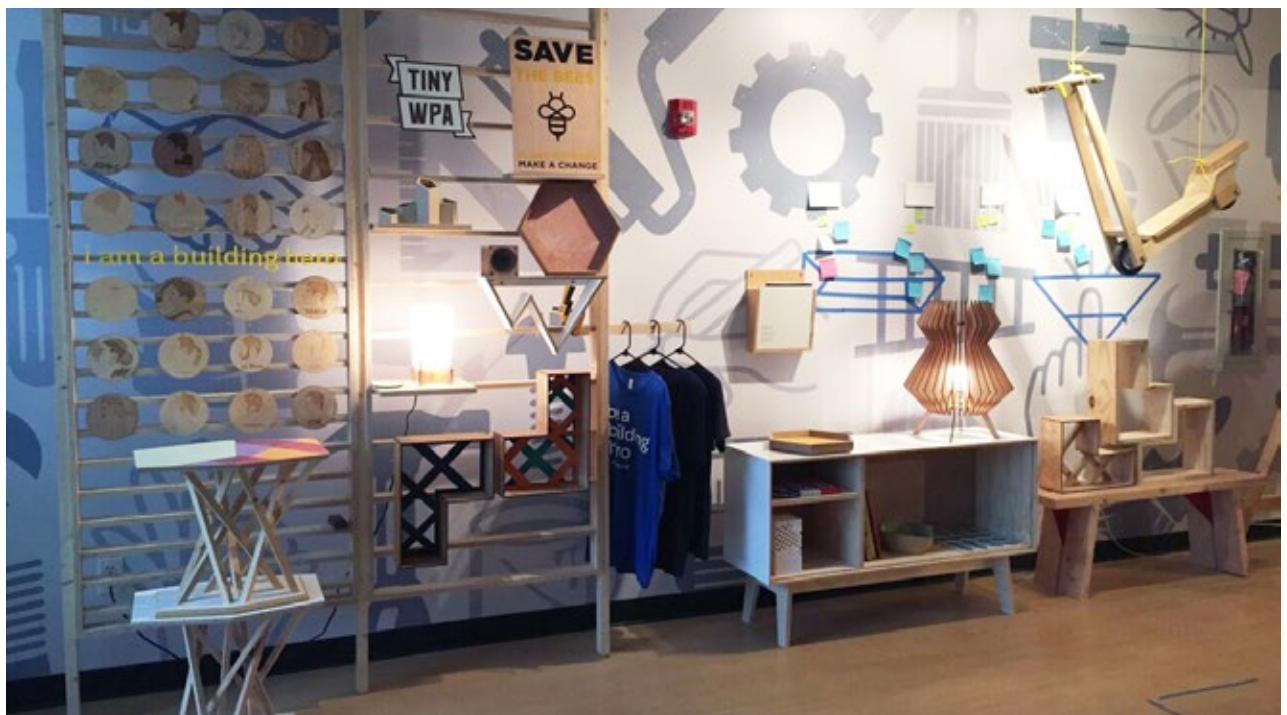
— **Financial resources to ascend into leadership roles**

Artists can more easily become leaders in the field when they have a variety of financial supports, including paid work, throughout their careers in community development. Sources that fund partnerships between artists and community development organizations are also important.

— **Time, space, and resources to reflect on the work**

Whether taking a class, traveling with a fellowship cohort, or convening with local leaders, artists value the time and space to reflect with others about their work. Through this reflection, artists experience new perspectives, learn standards of practice, receive support and recharge, and develop language to describe their work.

Building Heroes Project, Philadelphia, PA.



Laying the groundwork for artist leadership

ROOTS and organizations in Philadelphia and the Twin Cities understand and create the conditions that enable artists to do good work, including permission to invent, an explicit charge to lead, opportunities to learn and develop leadership skills, and a willingness to embed artists in the core tasks of community change.

KEY LEADERS AND INSTITUTIONS

Influential leaders who work at the intersection of art and community seem to act as touchstones for the rest of the creative community. Sometimes over decades, these individuals and organizations build trust with communities and cultivate environments where artists can learn how to authentically work with residents. Artist residency programs, such as SPACES at People's Paper Co-op in Philadelphia, which matches visiting artists with people who live in the neighborhood to create projects together, allow artists to "learn a lot about what it takes to do community development," explains David Ferris, an assistant program officer with Philadelphia LISC. In the Twin Cities, multiple people pointed to the importance of Roger and Deanna Cummings's leadership at Juxtaposition Arts. Aviva Kapust at Philadelphia's Village of Arts and Humanities is another embodiment of good practice, and Carlton Turner of Alternate ROOTs occupies that same role throughout the South, and nationally.

A CULTURE OF SAYING "YES"

Arts organizations that embody a culture of saying "yes" cultivate increased trust, artists' agency, and space for growth. When Faith Bartley brings concerns and ideas she hears from neighborhood residents to her colleagues, she says they respond with open minds: "It's not 'no,' [it's] 'let's brainstorm,'" she explains. In the Twin Cities, PH+T leadership "will say 'yes' until they have to say 'no,'" which cultivates a "beautiful" environment that nurtures trust and generative and complex work, Hoyt says.

What about instances where the culture is not so open? To "move the bar in our own backyard around the things that we think are important," Gilliam operates a "fine balance" between acting "without permission" and participating within a Philadelphia system that he says is neither clear nor efficient. In Twin Cities, Cummings noticed that a highly used bus stop near JXTA didn't have heat, lights, or benches. After Metro Transit gave him "any number of excuses" why not, Cummings placed temporary amenities, including art, at the stop, as well as at other highly trafficked areas. Sometimes the property owners threw away Cummings's creations, but pedestrians used them. Artists find ways to navigate within systems and incrementally move the needle in places not especially open to change or innovation.

Artists find ways to navigate within systems and incrementally move the needle in places not especially open to change or innovation.

Community partners that collaborate with artists to achieve local goals may wind up with a sustained practice of embedding artists in their work. “Partnerships will last [beyond a grant or a project] when done equitably and with patience and care.”

INVITATION TO LEAD

ROOTS and organizations in the Twin Cities and Philadelphia invite artists into leadership roles within community development work. Takeshita, paraphrasing Springboard for the Arts Executive Director Laura Zabel, notes the importance of *asking* artist to be leaders: it’s about an “invitation and a charge,” he says, that is a gateway to artists feeling legitimized, gaining skills, and assuming mentorship roles to help others grow.

Art Blocks embraces this approach. Van Avery asks artists to participate in the work with their neighbors, entrusting them to assume leadership on a project scale. Even if Van Avery doesn’t invite them to participate in the program again, “at least they’ve engaged deeper with their neighbors on their block,” causing “ripple effects,” such as more effective and collective responses to crime.

When artists assume leadership roles, they build skills to advance their practice. ROOTS offers what Brawley says is a rare opportunity for active learning, where artists take on responsibilities “maybe just a little bit beyond their means.” He describes his seven years on the executive committee as his “graduate school,” which taught him horizontal leadership and how to try to cultivate spaces with “shared equity among all the people who are present.”

EMBEDDED IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community partners that collaborate with artists to achieve local goals may wind up with a sustained practice of embedding artists in their work. “Partnerships will last [beyond a grant or a project] when done equitably and with patience and care,” says Turner. The longer and deeper the partnership, he adds, the more “intertwined and seamless” the work of the artist and community organization becomes. All Twin Cities community organizations with embedded artist organizers continue to engage artists in their programming, Wang says, either through a staff position or project-based partnerships. She points to Frogtown Neighborhood Association as an example of an organization that, after experiencing increased participation and better conversations through partnership with Irrigate artists and Artist Organizer Vong Lee, now incorporates artists in everything it does. “It makes sense to them,” Wang says.

Takeshita sees room for growth, however. Often artists adjust their practice to function within the community development world but “the missing link is how to help community development people start to move into the arts world.” Philadelphia’s Mellissa Kim points to how successful projects can help move that dial: “If Philadelphia artists and creative place makers keep turning out really great projects, people will notice no matter what industry they’re in.”

Providing financial resources for artists to ascend into leadership roles

Formal financial supports—from philanthropy, educational institutions, and others—are essential to enable artists to learn how to do arts-based community development work, sustain networks, and earn a living from art throughout a full career trajectory.

ARTISTS NEED TO GET PAID. PERIOD.

Artists need to be fairly compensated for their work, something that doesn't always happen in community development. Wang describes how one artist organizer working with a private developer "wasn't paid nearly anything close to what other employees were paid" (although later, when the organization created a permanent AO position, it increased salary and benefits to match the standards of the sector). When Ly worked at a community development organization, she says it was "embarrassing" when she couldn't pay artists: "It is unethical to ask artists to contribute their skills and expect them to do it without any resources while you get paid to do your job. Pay your artists." Van Avery explains that artists working within community require a "unique skill set" that can be deepened and refined "by doing." This is why she seeks to "constantly ... do everything in [her] power to find financial resources to create paid opportunities for artists to make art... [because when artists are paid they are able to prioritize those projects, giving them the time to] produce more powerful work."

RANGE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

One common ingredient for success in cultivating artist leaders is an available spectrum of financial support for artists at different stages of their practice. Communities interested in incorporating arts-based approaches, Phillips suggests, must "adopt a flexible approach" as artists have different needs: "successful arts-based programmes will respond to artists on an individual basis."³⁴ Slie appreciates ROOTS's tiered system of financial resources that range from getting "your ideas in order" to executing a large project. The arts ecosystem in the Twin Cities supports artists all along the trajectory of their careers, Takeshita explains, whether it's a \$1,000 stipend for an Irrigate project or a Bush Fellowship. He notes that "giant dollars" aren't always necessary to cultivate artist leadership but what's needed is "money to actually try it out and see what sticks."

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Financial support for partnerships between artists and community organizations reflects a recognition that creative community-based work is best done together. In the Twin Cities, for example, Springboard provided artists with small stipends to work with organizations along the Green Line corridor through its Irrigate program and then financially supported artist organizers within community organizations. And as participants in the ROOTS Partners in Action program, artists and community members have the opportunity and resources to intensely probe and reflect on community and project needs, coming away with agreed upon goals, expectations, and roles.

³⁴ "Artful Business: Using the Arts for Community Economic Development," *Community Development Journal* 39, no. 2 (2004): 120.

Ensure there is sufficient time, space, and resources to reflect on the work

Organizations that support artists working in social and civic practice understand that these artists are able to offer their best when they can connect to one another within the context of a broader community. This can happen through different kinds of meetings to exchange perspectives and promising practices, as well as providing mutual support.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

Takeshita emphasizes the need for opportunities for participants in arts-and-culture development to pause. One option is convenings sponsored by programs like the Intermedia Arts' organization's Creative Community Leadership Institute, Irrigate, and Creative CityMaking. These events create moments when, removed from their usual environments, artists and community developers can share and learn from one another. According to Appalshop's Smith, who has sent artists to the annual ROOTS convening, artists value the opportunity to connect with people of similar and different backgrounds and "hear a different narrative of the South." In fact, Slie considers the ROOTS annual gathering as the most critical resource the organization provides. "I can't emphasize enough how important it is to connect on a person-to-person level with people doing this work," he says.

These sharing opportunities need not be highly formalized. Indeed, a range of opportunities to connect and learn from others working in communities appears to be important. Brawley convenes meetings between staff and community at barbecues and bowling alleys, as well as in conference rooms, because "different people are comfortable in different settings," leading to better, more complete engagement.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

Sharing and learning together can build accountability. "You can't experience ... the depth of work that's happening at ROOTS, and then go off and say, 'Well, I am just going to do it my own way,'" Slie explains. "It introduces you to a way of being and thinking that makes you responsible to the work that you are doing, and to the community that you are in." Takeshita says that opportunities for artists and community members to be together can help people grow together and build on each other's learning and can encourage artists to be "explicit" about their work and have greater accountability to the community. Juxtaposition's Cummings values travel to learn what others are doing—how high is the bar—so they can "step up their game" to be "just as dope or doper."

MUTUAL SUPPORT AND TIME TO RECHARGE

Learning and sharing from one another affords artists support and validation. “It’s really hard to think of yourself as valuable when all that you are told, both on a financial and on an emotional level, that what you do is not valuable to the world,” Slie says. Kathy Mouacheupao, the creative placemaking program officer at Twin Cities LISC, coordinates a peer network of neighborhood-based development organizations doing creative placemaking work along the Green Line light rail corridor in St. Paul. Ly mentions that members of this network have built trust in one another over time, generating relationships rich in sharing knowledge and resources. This nurtures a local culture of mutual support. Twin Cities artists even pass along opportunities for jobs, projects, and grants to each other, a rare element in a local ecosystem, notes Van Avery.

Because community development does not happen overnight, artists need the energy gained through reflection. “This is long-haul work,” notes Smith, “nothing happening in the South or rural America is going to change quickly.” Cummings credits a Bush Fellowship with providing a crucial break from his work at Juxtaposition Arts. With the skills he gained through the fellowship, he was able to come back, “hit the ground... and make it happen.” “Working in community is a life practice,” says Ly. “It takes commitment.”

SHARED LANGUAGE ABOUT THE WORK

Rohd says a watershed moment for Center for Performance and Civic Practice was when the organization found and refined the language that helps community development practitioners realize the value of partnering with artists. This framing has helped advocate for “the process and practice of artists being engaged in lots of different spaces of problem solving, coalition building, and visioning.” Both Kim and Ferris at Philadelphia LISC pointed to the value of incorporating documentation and storytelling throughout a project—through photography and video, for example—not just to tell the story about the work and its impacts, but also to help artists iterate towards a more refined understanding of the work itself.

SECTION 6

Concluding Recommendations



From the ideas and suggestions incorporated throughout this paper, we offer some key strategies and tactics to foster conditions to cultivate artist leadership in community development in any city or town. These common themes summarize just a portion of the ideas from practitioners, academics, and experts contained above, but they are a good starting point to begin.

Key Strategies

- **Identify and lift up good practice that can become touchstones for others.**
Not every community has a Juxtaposition Arts or a Village of Arts and Humanities that has demonstrated excellent practice over time, but nearly every community has an organization or artist that shows the same promise.
- **Funding for experimental work, especially in community development where risk is inherent, can slowly contribute to an innovative culture that many artists thrive in.**
Community cultures are not easily changed—and there can be more than one culture within a community—but the opportunity for more flexibility is worth pursuing.
- **Encourage community organizations to extend an invitation to artists and charge them with specific tasks for community-building, physical transformation, and economic development.**
If this encouragement comes from the arts funding stream, fine. If it comes from the housing and community development funding stream, even better.
- **Bring artists-organizers to the community.**
Some of the most powerful work done by artists in service to community has come from those acting in this role. Although this practice is not well-known, there are multiple national sources of technical support for anyone wishing to emulate the Twin Cities experience.
- **Ensure that individual artists are provided sufficient financial support to respect their contributions, even if it only means that project-based stipends are extended initially.**
Over time, a more complete range can be added—salaried positions, fellowships, community residencies, and other ways to financially support artists' changing needs over the course of a career.
- **Create opportunities for peer exchanges for artists who have become experts in community work and between artists and community developers who have pursued projects together.**
Over time, these exchanges can be broadened to include professionals in the arts and in development who have the desire, but not the training and experience, to become experts.

Interviews

Faith Bartley | *People's Paper Co-op*
Courtney Bowles | *People's Paper Co-op*
Dan Brawley | *Jengo's Playhouse*
Roger Cummings | *Juxtaposition Arts*
David Ferris | *Philadelphia LISC*
Alex Gilliam | *Tiny WPA*
Mike Hoyt | *Pillsbury House + Theatre*
Aviva Kapust | *Village of Arts and Humanities*
Melissa Kim | *Philadelphia LISC*
Oskar Ly | *Independent Artist*
Michael Rohd | *Center for Performance and Civic Practice*
Renee Schadt | *Tiny WPA*
Mark Strandquist | *People's Paper Co-op*
Nick Slie | *Mondo Bizarro*
Ada Smith | *Appalshop*
Erik Takeshita | *Bush Foundation*
Carlton Turner | *Alternate ROOTS*
Molly Van Avery | *Pillsbury House + Theatre*
Shira Walinsky | *Southeast by Southeast/Mural Arts Program*
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