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New national initiative will fuel arts and cultural investments in low-income communities

Kresge Foundation commits \$3.5MM to help LISC expand 'creative placemaking'

NEW YORK (November 13, 2014)—The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) has launched a national effort to drive millions of dollars into arts-related businesses and cultural activities that will help transform some of America's most distressed neighborhoods into safe, vibrant places of economic opportunity.

The Kresge Foundation is providing \$3.5 million in seed funding for this new "creative placemaking" initiative, which will fund projects that range from live/work spaces for artists to arts and entertainment businesses in struggling commercial corridors. The money will also be used for cultural programming such as music festivals that strengthen a community's sense of identity and pride.

"Kresge is a game-changer when it comes to creative placemaking," said Michael Rubinger, LISC president and CEO. "It has a deep understanding of what it means to integrate arts and culture into broader plans to revitalize communities, and it is acting on that insight in bold and interesting ways."

Kresge's Arts and Culture Program seeks to expand the ways different fields and sectors incorporate arts and culture into efforts to improve the social, cultural, physical, and economic conditions in low-income communities.

"LISC is arguably the nation's leading community development network, combining a foothold in neighborhoods in 30 cities with a national presence and perspective," said Rip Rapson, Kresge's president and CEO. "We're delighted to help LISC integrate and systematize arts and cultural activities into its approach to community development across that broad network. It promises to reinforce compelling on-the-ground examples of where this approach is already occurring. It should also draw together residents, businesses, public sector partners and artists in new efforts to demonstrate to others in the community development field just how effectively this can be done."

LISC's Erik Takeshita has been named to lead the new creative placemaking initiative. Takeshita, deputy director of LISC's Twin Cities office, has long championed the role of arts and cultural investments in low-income areas and has most recently been helping revitalize neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

“This isn’t about art for art’s sake,” he explained. “What we care about are people and places. We care about the health of residents and the quality of the housing that’s available. We care about whether or not neighborhood businesses can flourish and if local streets are safe. We care that kids can get a good education and that their parents can find good jobs. Investing in local culture is another way for us to advance all of that.”

In some places, this work is already in progress, he said. In Philadelphia’s Eastern North neighborhood, for example, LISC has been working with community-based groups to create murals, mosaics, pocket parks and colorful storefronts—all with the intention of making the area a vibrant area for local entrepreneurs and visitors.

And in St. Paul, LISC has partnered with the City of St. Paul and Springboard for the Arts to launch a program called Irrigate, which has supported more than 120 artist-led projects along a new light-rail line. These projects have helped transform the physical environment, support economic growth, create a sense of community identity and attract people to the area’s Central Corridor.

Underlying it all is a unique approach that focuses not just on stimulating growth but on responding to the needs of long-time residents, Takeshita said. “This is about nurturing the fundamental character of these neighborhoods. We are embedding the arts within community development plans, and that’s quite different than just financing a range of new businesses. We are being strategic about how we help residents build community in lasting, creative ways.”

The Kresge grant will initially support creative placemaking in five of LISC’s 30 local program areas—places where arts-related community development work is already underway but needs support to grow. That experience will form the basis for developing best practices that can help direct efforts in other places, and funding will expand to new communities across the country.

For more on creative placemaking, visit [Erik Takeshita’s blog](#) at LISC’s Institute for Comprehensive Community Development.

About LISC

LISC combines corporate, government and philanthropic resources to help nonprofit community development corporations revitalize distressed neighborhoods. Since 1980, LISC has invested \$13.8 billion to build or rehab 310,000 affordable homes and apartments and develop 51 million square feet of retail, community and educational space. For more, visit www.lisc.org.

About The Kresge Foundation

The Kresge Foundation is a \$3 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America’s cities through grantmaking and investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services, and community development efforts in Detroit. In 2013, the Board of Trustees approved 316 awards totaling \$122 million; \$128 million was paid out to grantees over the course of the year. In addition, our Social Investment Practice made commitments totaling \$17.7 million in 2013. For more information, visit www.kresge.org.