Progressively, there are more Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), town centres, and urban districts that are seeking cultural placemaking strategies and delivery plans. These dense urban places already have strong footfall, businesses, and tourists, yet they cannot build ‘community’ cohesiveness the same way as a residential or mixed-use development. From 2012–16, I served as the Director of Times Square Arts and Creative Director for Times Square Alliance. The experience has provided a robust framework for cultural placemaking elsewhere. This is my journey.

Times Square context

Every day, 380,000 international visitors, American tourists, and New York City residents pass under the mesmerising electronic billboards of Times Square, cross its asymmetrical collection of five pedestrian plazas, and encounter hawkers, business leaders, and Broadway performers. This area, that is now celebrated for being home to the most vibrant theatre on Broadway and a commercial epicenter of global commercial retail, finance, and creative sectors, was once notorious for its proliferation of porn shops, peep shows, and Kung-Fu movie houses. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Times Square represented a bankrupt and broken New York City. From the late 1990s into the early 2000s, as antidote to Times Square’s rapid change, and in honour of their early intentions for the area, independent arts organisations found ways to infiltrate the commercial mecca. Economic development and city incentives to businesses (such as Disney) soon encouraged investment in the area and the City worked to clear the crime. New business boomed, rents soared, and tourists began to flood the thoroughfares. As a result, the majority of artists and local residents and businesses were eventually relocated in exchange for high-commercial tenants, including internationally branded retailers and restaurants. After its earlier theatre-ticket-booth design competition, the Times Square Alliance latterly came to want a cultural programme as this new Times Square identity was overshadowing its longstanding edgy, creative, and flashy quirkiness. New Yorkers’ favourite sport was to ‘love to hate it’ and there was a constant claim that it had lost the authenticity of place.
Taking back the city centre: experimental cultural capital of public space

My vision of success was to make Times Square New York City’s cultural hub and to geographically and soulfully regain its role as City Centre. We needed visitors seeking spectacle as well as authenticity; we needed a diverse exploration of narrative of place for businesses to attract world-class talent to headquarter there. It was necessary to raise the ambition of cultural delivery in the programming to showcase the city’s cultural infrastructure prowess through institutional partnerships in order to gain loyalty from the jaded New Yorker. As a Business Improvement District (BID), the Times Square Alliance needed to set firsts, take risks, and generously share its learning as Times Square, by default, is an exemplar for cities of all scales. Our precedent would indirectly encourage other cities to be bolder.

Times Square Arts: getting started

In 2010, Times Square Alliance initiated a public art programme to bring the creative community in to counterbalance the commercial visual cacophony. A democratic, non-curated approach was taken that relied upon widely distributed open calls (Requests for Proposals or RFPs), so that the BID was seen to be supporting the presentation of arts, not curating them. An impressive Arts Advisory Committee (including cultural stalwarts as Thelma Golden, Head of Studio Museum of Harlem, Barry Bergdoll, then Chief Curator of Architecture at Museum of Modern Art, Anne Pasternak, then Executive and Artistic Director of Creative Time and later Executive Director of Brooklyn Museum, and Tom Finkelpearl, then Executive Director of Queens Museum and later the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for New York City) alongside Times Square Alliance Board Members and representatives from the Department of Transportation, Public Art Commission, New York City Parks) was established to inform direction, and a subset Selection Committee chose proposals from the open call. The programme was vulnerable however, with uncertainty over how this would deliver against key District objectives, how it might make a difference in local residents’ perception of place, or how it would differ from commercial marketing events. The perception was that these were nice arts efforts when the presentation could be supported. However, The Times Square Alliance wanted to invoke cultural placemaking principles that were visible more regularly and consistently, and courting more ambitious proposals from artists, designers, and architects.

Listening is learning

When I joined the Senior Management Team of Times Square Alliance in 2012, it was a company with 130 employees and an annual operating budget of $15m. My job was to ensure that cultural delivery was valued as much as operations and economic development. I had come to the role with over 20 years of professional experience working in the arts across all forms and it was (and still is) rare to have a dedicated fulltime and senior-level cultural professional within a BID. It was very uncharacteristic to have an arts person sit within the Senior Management, under direct dialogue with the President of the Alliance, and collaborate with the Vice Presidents of Policy, Research & Economic Development; Operations and Security; Events/Marketing; Finance; Human Resources; Communications and Sponsorship Development.

Working outside an arts institution opened perspective and access to wider industries that make a city. I learned that our tourists were visitors and representing well-educated, high to medium income, which helped to redefine the tourist as an adventurer, who sought surprise. Our pedestrian-counting cameras taught me patterns of behaviour according to times of day
Cultural placemaking

at each plaza. I was exposed to exceptional issues in global place that was a gathering spot for important political and social protests, as well as capitalistic activity. I was invited to the Board Meetings (up to 55 board members) representing some of the largest developers and property leasers, financial and legal firms; 25 per cent of the hospitality industry in New York City; and entertainment services and theatres, as well as churches and major transportation authorities. I was present at the Executive Committee of eight of New York City’s most influential Chief Executive Officer’s (CEOs) in the New York Times headquarters. Listening to the challenges of the District became my creative inspiration and direction; I sought general cultural collaborations that would also positively counter the negative perceptions or challenges about the place. Giving artists and curators the problem was actually providing them with the intrigue and dramatic tension that was attractive. In a sophisticated city where the audience is fickle, one needs to surprise the locals to capture their attention. The problem, thus, became the advantage.

I inherited some past programmes from the open call proposals, and I had to begin renegotiation conversations with restrictions and questions, which meant that every question was perceived as criticism and reductive, rather than collaborative. Staff struggled to understand the strategic rationale for the programme without a strong mission. Communications were focused on individual stories and not making an impact. Funding applications didn’t apply to well-financed BIDs. Consultation showed that there was suspicion amongst the serious artists and institutions for fear that working with a business-led entity would only exploit marketing-led activation, but without large budgets to support commissions. It was assumed that the audience needed simple. Quickly, I realised that we needed to frame strategic objectives for non-arts collaborators that also served as curatorial focus for the creatives. At the same time, I needed to start with the impossible. For two years, there had been attempts to create a Video Programme on the electronic billboards across the five blocks of the canyon that makes up the icon of ‘Times Square.’ While public art organisations Creative Time, Public Art Fund, and Performa had run programmes or projects on one screen at a time, there had never been a consistent commitment across multiple screens. Requesting free time on the individually owned and operated billboards that are expensive to run, maintain, and replace required exceptional content, time, and some form of return on investment. There are property owners, screen owners, subcontractors who sell the advertising. There are competitors who need to be collaborators. Curators had presented the information in formats familiar to their field but almost incomprehensible to the billboard owners. In order to make a big shift, one needs to take a big risk, very publicly. I had to expand my knowledge by working with the largest global monitors with the highest visitor numbers. There is no time to wonder if it can work, only time to figure out how it can work. As the billboards are the most unique aspect of Times Square’s authenticity, they are the greatest symbol of the place for over 100 years.

Start with who and what you know

Our official opening May 2012 for the electronic billboards was Robert Wilson’s Video Portraits. I had run Wilson’s The Watermill Centre and knew that he wanted to see these high-definition-shot portraits of celebrities and animals in Times Square. The saturated colours would make the monitors look gorgeous and an avant-garde downtown artist in the commercial space would gain attention. Our Sunday, 11.45pm opening event in Times Square attracted some of the world’s most notorious collectors, arts patrons, funders, artists, and celebrities – who self-confessed that they came because it was ‘so odd to see that work, there.’ Things began to change.

I worked with trusted curators from the cross-disciplinary Crossing the Line Festival presented by French Institute Alliance Français, who brought festival funding and accomplished
international artists who wanted to engage with the city. I combined video programme and live performance to the visual arts offer, so we could leverage more press. We attracted a major funder, ArtPlace America, to enable more ambitious works and share our findings through blogs, talks, convenings, and dedication to online documentation. Rockefeller Brothers Fund funded more substantial visual arts installations with Cuban Artists Fund, due to our active curatorial role in developing the artist work, mentoring artist practice outside Cuba, and because of my past professional portfolio of producing complex, experimental works. Press communications became more aligned and the partners’ cultural standing gave legitimacy to the programme and intrigue to expanded press outlets. I chose to align with the annual arts season(s) and imitate the cultural protocol of New York City. Our ‘first season’ beginning in September 2012 had an announcement of programmes staged across the electronic billboards and plazas, first creating visual posters of artist Bel Borba’s work across the plazas. Our first tipping point was our partnership with Art Production Fund to present Yoko Ono’s Imagine Peace (2012) on the billboards for the month of December 2012 and then creating a Happening where we invited the public to stop the world from ending (predicted to end on 12.12.12) by singing Imagine on the iconic Red Steps. We gained over 600,000 press impressions from 63 countries from a three-minute art event. We began to garner trust from the Board, billboard stakeholders, the staff and the creative community, and so it was time to…

… Structure it!

This vision required a more focused and proactive governance, and strong curatorial leadership that actively solicited the rich cultural organisations, festivals, and artists of New York City and from across the globe to challenge and illuminate the richness of heritage that lives amongst the mysterious, pulsating, chaos. We worked with a consultancy agency and created with them an articulation that informed the mission, vision, and core values, which have led the programme for seven years now. Times Square has always been a place of risk, innovation, and creativity, and thus Times Square Arts needed these qualities to remain central to the district’s unique identity. Our Mission made a commitment to be daring and site-specific: Times Square Arts collaborates with contemporary artists to experiment and engage with one of the world’s most iconic urban places. We established clear and ambitious goals to focus creative proposals as well as provide clarity to stakeholders. We established our Vision to create a more complex place: through Times Square Arts, Times Square aspires to be: an internationally recognized leader in integrating art into the urban fabric, a must-visit destination to experience ground-breaking, site-specific contemporary art that can’t be found anywhere else, a place where boundaries are pushed and the spirit of creative risk-taking is embraced and celebrated – in business, entertainment, and art, and a catalyst for new and unexpected connections and conversations.

We used five Core Values to focus all creative proposals that would ensure keeping the ambition high and focused on our specific place, which doubled as the selection committee evaluation criteria: collaborative – producers, artists, and audience collaborate, not compete; responsive to place – the work is site-specific and could not happen elsewhere; boundary-pushing – Times Square is a place where risks are taken and boundaries are pushed; conversational – questions, not statements, encouraging dialogue, not assault; and transparent – Times Square is never shut, so incorporate the process into presentation. We then determined that all of our experiments had to be easily grouped according to the distinctive platforms we had to showcase art: Midnight Moment, on electronic billboards; At The Crossroads, on public plazas; Hidden Assets, in
district venues off the Broadway plazas. To best understand how the simple structure can deliver extensive variety, I explain each platform to define it and give project examples that demonstrate the strategic curation

**Midnight Moment**

Once the Mission and Core Values were established, it was evident that the strongest place attribute could foster the programme as the world’s largest digital art gallery displaying synchronized, cutting-edge creative content every night at 11.57pm; with each month showcasing a new artist work. We partnered with the non-profit entity Times Square Advertising Coalition (TSAC) to have one body representing independent billboard owners, so that we established a producing partnership whereby TSAC presents and Times Square Arts curates. The presentation form as created, and still adhered to, has been successful; many established artists and artist estates have made exceptions in their own specifications to meet the conditions. The approach needed to consider how the screens were part of the architecture, and therefore a part of the scenography, and that the programme needed to consider the viewing experience very differently from typical screenings, whereby the viewers are also performers at the centre of the scene.

The curation needed to be a combination of aesthetic diversity and partnering curators to link to major moments in the city or exhibitions so that we could draw their networks, audiences, and press contacts. We became the outreach location for museums so that they could reach new audiences and we could draw attention to Times Square as a central place to know about culture in New York City. Rather than commission to reflect holidays, we sourced existing works that indirectly celebrated that time. Alex Prager’s *Applause* (2016), which is a video portrait of people in auditorium audience clapping, corresponded to June, the month of the Tony Awards. For February celebration of Valentine’s Day, we commissioned Tracey Emin’s *I Promise to Love You* (2013), her first animation of her neon sculptures of love messages, and Alex Da Corte’s *Blue Moon* (2017), in conjunction with his upcoming exhibition at Whitney Museum. When we felt that the novelty was wearing off, we developed live actions on the plaza with *Midnight Moment* to draw attention and worked around late-night sound restrictions to deliver innovative sound components. We pinch the concept of ‘Silent Discos’ to create immersive, fine-art moments for general audience through headphones. We held a special concert of Ryoji Ikeda’s *test pattern [times square]* (2014) with a live mix to accompany the intense binary code strobing of his visuals; a ‘silent orchestra’ or orchestral machines electronically plugged with Jhereck Bishoff; and Laurie Anderson performed a solo, live *Concert for Dogs* on the Red Steps, alongside her film *Heart of a Dog* (2016.). We let any restriction be a creative inspiration.

**At the Crossroads: ‘the gallery that can be seen from space’**

We set out to create installations and performances on the five Broadway plazas as stages of urban life, capitalistic trade, theatres, 24/7 culture, and one of the greatest cultural melting pots. Ordinary performance would not work – the sites are loud, distracting, and asymmetrical. We needed actions, participation, oddness and everyday relevance. French artist JR and his INSIDE OUT PROJECT made their first government-sanctioned intervention with INSIDE OUT NEW YORK CITY (2013). For three weeks, people took their self-portraits from a mobile Photo Booth Truck and pasted the resulting photos on Duffy Square, between Broadway and Seventh Avenue. To gain interest and trust, INSIDE OUT began in the outer four boroughs to bring their representation into the centre of the city. We timed this with a Midnight Moment, and another documentary film about JR that was playing in the Tribeca Film Festival, making a city-wide
cultural moment home in Times Square. When the plazas were threatened to be removed and place authenticity was under fire, we invited artist Kimou ‘Grotesk’ Meyer, *Victory Journal*, and *Juxtapoz* magazine to install *T.S.Q. Newsstand* (2015). The artists created an imitation of classic New York newsstand, equipped with wooden pigeons, cigarettes, and other artist objects, and then graffitied by street artists. Each day, artists such as Charlie Ahearn, were on hand to sign their work, sell limited edition prints, books, and rare pieces from their personal archives. Each day, the artist appearances were tweeted, and queues generated, and the publication editors decided to open professional crits onsite while people waited. For 10 days, an artist and design colony populated organically and took back Times Square’s old reputation as place for ‘grit’ and street artists. Each year, there is a competition to encourage emerging architects to create a Valentine Heart that counters the starchitect presence in the city. That experimental commitment inspired architect, H. Juergen Mayer, to propose another project: *XXX: From Times Square with Love* (2016) seating that referenced the signage of old porn theatres that would display ‘XXX’ on marquees to indicate content and the ‘xxx’ people often sign off on letters and texts now. The bright pink seating shaped as ‘X’ are recliners for enjoying the light show of the electronic billboards. People were worried about sleeping on the loungers, so we set a limit of time to allow enough people to enjoy, rather than telling people ‘don’t.’ The temporary installation became permanent and is a symbol of place.

Perhaps the greatest tipping point for the Board of Directors of Times Square Alliance was when we found that German Expressionistic opera could overturn base entertainment. At a time when the district was under siege by costume characters harassing people for paid photos, we were searching for ways to clear the performers indirectly. Performa (Performance Arts Biennial) brought Arnold Schönberg’s *Erwartung – A Performance by Robin Rhode* (2015) as a full, live opera. The one-act monodrama for a solo soprano was originally set in the moonlit, wilderness of the forest, and Rhode’s reproduction interpreted Times Square as the contemporary forest, filled with light emanating from the electronic billboards (moon.) People were fascinated to watch this *gesamtkunstwerk* take place in front of them. They chose to follow a character who was battling her place in a loud and oppressive world through extraordinary artistry, and as a result, the costume characters soliciting money left the area due to lack of business. When the work is true to place and mission, programming can challenge assumptions of audience ‘taste.’

Practically, we learned that people will queue for almost anything if the queue is organized; artists will come anywhere for great content; seeing oneself in a famous, valuable place of real estate has immense impact on positive self-confidence; people engage openly in a populated space; signage and setup will reframe ‘don’t’s’ into ‘do’s.’ Programmatically, we were pleasantly surprised to find that quality wins; opera can be for everyone; and people will surprise you with their level of serious debate in a public space.

**Hidden Assets**

Stakeholders wanted people to discover the unique assets of the full 40-block District, outside of the Broadway plazas, so we developed this strand to explore scale and approach. We focused on themes of ‘discovery’ and ‘intrigue’ by showcasing experimental performance in expensive and quirky commercial venues and creating content through online or app-based projects. With Clocktower Productions & Radio, we created *After Hours* (2013–16), a series of ephemeral installations and performances hidden amongst the Times Square district’s diverse venues, recorded for radio and video dissemination. The ask for the venue was simple: one night (ever) of their weakest sales night plus one cheap cocktail to offer plus their trickiest audience demographic. We would provide the content, as well as video and still documentation to be used
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for their promotion. Clocktower paired musicians and visual artists with each of these unique environments, specifically designed to draw on the neighborhood’s history as a social and artistic melting pot. Exclusive lenticular postcards were created as souvenirs as valuable keepsakes. As the venues had tight capacities, word of mouth turned the events into small legends. We generated imagery and mystery that resurrected a vintage feeling of elicit discovery and people were competitive about getting in. The results were so positively, sold-out, successful, that many venues invested in creating their own programming and attracting new audiences (and artists) and taking over our job. We developed a relationship with the AMC Empire, the USA’s largest grossing cinema, requesting free evenings for experimental performance that would not be able to normally afford the facilities. While Jay Schieb’s experimental Chekhov theatre performance of *Platanov* was live at The Kitchen, the experimental theatre on the lower west side, Schieb filmed the actors onstage to broadcast to AMC Empire audiences as the First Real-time Feature Film called *The Disinherited* (2014). Soundwalk Collective created, JUNGLE-IZED: A Conversation with Nature, a virtual soundscape that superimposed the Amazon Jungle ecosystem upon an eight-square block area that was transmitted via an app. They geo-located the sounds to correlate to the heights within the Amazon to the manmade jungle. As one walked and moved their phone through volumetric space of Times Square, they were entering a phonic 3D jungle.

At the end of my tenure, we created a Residency at the Crossroads (2015–16): a cross-disciplinary and collaborative residency program, in which artists were invited to experiment and engage with Times Square’s unique urban identity and users. Luke DuBois, Joseph Keckler, Okwui Okpokwasili and Joshue Ott, and Kenneth Kirschner all came with different disciplines, needs, and end results. We gained support from the National Endowment for the Arts as policymakers wanted to prove that successful (and expensive) real estate also needs artists creating to keep a creative soul of place alive and that artists genuinely want to make dialogue with their cities.

We learned that despite the concept, sound art installations are challenging to market and deliver; apps require fast and free wi-fi. Artists will always teach venues about creative potential they hadn’t tapped; free access to exclusive events attracts audiences to try anything; and lenticulars are highly valued. We surprised authenticity sceptics by discovering that elicit feeling can be delivered without elicit activity; subtle and informed security allow more risk and encourage better behaviour; and mirage-like transformations create indelible memories.

**Evaluating in real-time**

In the spirit of Times Square 24/7 transparency, we actively, internally analysed and externally exposed our learning lessons about behaviour in public space. Internally, we had several approaches to test our programme development. In addition, The Times Square Alliance Board of Directors indirectly provided guidance of the District’s objectives and the Times Square Arts Advisory Committee (meeting one to three times a year) gave cultural guidance. We had different selection committees for *Midnight Moment* (half curators and half advertisers) and then specialist curators and association leaders across design, art, and performance for *Residency at the Crossroads* and *At the Crossroads*. We developed a curatorial committee to round out the cultural, gender, and artform diversity. We always sought to reflect representation of our ‘contemporary’ world and never get lazy or predictable. For four years, 2013–2016, I was an Assistant Professor teaching The Artist and the Arts in Urban Revitalisation course for graduate policy, planning, and arts administration at the New York University Wagner School and used students’ critique to measure aspects of the programme. Additional dissemination platforms included national and international panels, conferences, writings, and exhibition: as an exemplar for BIDs, public art, art and technology, and cultural partnerships. Academics, city leaders, city servants, International Downtown
Association, and related, global BIDS and town centre managers constantly visited, asked advice, and requested participation. Architecture, Arts, and Design communities requested my presence to explain, advise, and inspire their ambition through talks, review panels, and academic critiques. We used our live programme for others to dissect and keep our self-scrutiny sharp.

**Establishing cultural sustainability**

In 2016, I was invited to create the inaugural exhibition for ‘The New Space,’ of The Theatre of Nations of Moscow that would expose a local Moscow audience to the ‘West’s approach to public art.’ I titled it *Times Squared: Theatre of the Absurd*, because like all great absurdist dramas, Times Square has subjective time and no clear proscenium; everyone is simultaneously audience, participant, and performer. Strelka Institute also invited me to give a keynote, exposing the process of cultural placemaking in Times Square, as an example of how one may redefine major sections of cities. These opportunities provided an opportunity for me to analyse the specifics of the programme and turn the findings into lessons for major cities. I realised the five-year experiment of developing cultural programming and placemaking could be formalised into a framework that could be scaled for any place. The Framework for Vision, Mission, and Core Values across three key platforms is still used, as it is robust enough to focus its role and pliable enough for artists, curators, and cultural leaders to interpret it freshly. While still at Times Square Arts, I was asked to contribute a case study for an international research project between Arts Council England, Mayor of London, and Kings College, which later resulted in the publication, *Improving Places: Culture & Business Improvement Districts: Thriving Partnerships*. We chose to concentrate on the *Hidden Assets* programme of Times Square Arts, to highlight how we used defied stereotypes to attract new audiences and how this contributed across the cultural placemaking themes of Place Branding and Tourism, Public Realm, and Increasing Footfall. UK BIDS first developed in 2005, and by 2018, there were more than 280; 60 of which are based in London and often have leveraged culture to deliver various objectives of economic development, by using this activity to create distinctive places. This publication was designed to provide case studies and key lessons to encourage BIDs to adopt cultural partnerships within their remits.

**From Times Square to London Bridge: transference to other business improvement districts**

Soon after I moved to London, I was appointed to produce a Culture Strategy and Delivery plan for Team London Bridge, the BID for the area between London Bridge and Tower Bridge and nestled between Borough Market and Shad Thames. It includes the area of the Greater London Authority and Mayor of London offices, the new transport interchange of London Bridge Station, medical Kings College campus with the oldest London hospitals, and contemporary corporate offices in More London. Their main objective was to shift ‘the area as a place that one went through’ to ‘to a destination that people came to.’ They simply needed to reframe their opportunity to see their neighbour’s assets within view as their assets, also. My approach for the strategy and delivery framework was based upon the model of Times Square Arts, and they were open about their interest in applying that success of methodology to establish the trust with their stakeholders.

**Using the framework**

Team London Bridge wanted to raise the ambition of their cultural delivery to further the place as a destination. As its location on the river front also faces iconic heritage sites such as...
Tower Bridge, Tower of London, and the new skyline of City of London skyscrapers outside its boundaries but within sightline, we valued the neighbour’s assets as beneficial in visitor experience. We crafted a Vision that establishes London Bridge will be the front stage that creates our favourite memories of the city through innovative and contemporary cultural programming. We determined a Mission of engaging the city’s cultural sector to creatively and continuously reveal the diverse landscape of London Bridge as the epitome of a global capital. This commitment gave purpose to leveraging commercial, cultural, and civic stakeholder partnerships. As much of the public realm is under private ownership and management, the partnerships’ first responsibilities were centred around identifying the cultural programming characters for the Platforms and related permissions and invitations. The authenticity of the place is the diversity of scale and extremes of contemporary and historic. Therefore, we had a more complex space categorisation than Times Square, but maintained the framework, none the less. The Front Stages of London grouped open spaces that have space for spectacle and large statements to reflect the important moments for London. Temporary artistic innovation of static and performing arts positioned for great visibility are located At the River; framing of iconic landmarks took place At Gateways, and large courtyard spaces were grouped as For Gatherings. We recognised the small yards and plazas as places to present unexpected heritage stories as Intrigue; the vital connectors as Corridors; the commitment to cultural institutions as Insiders; and a street-front-dedicated indoor lab space for talk, exhibition, and workshops as The Hive.

**London Bridge core values**

The area is the longest continually inhabited part of London, as well as home to the architectural marvel of The Shard, and thus needs to reflect the extremes. In this case, we formed the values as nouns. *Innovation* is reflected in the ingenuity of government, medicine, transport, and commerce, that can translate to thinking and scale; London as *diversity*; *bridges* literally define the area’s boundary and connect people metaphorically; *heritage*, commitment to be preserved as innovation thrives; contemporary issues, perspectives, and design to be showcased on its *Front Stages*. We aligned a commitment to cultural sustainability through all four priorities of the area’s London Bridge Plan. Rather than having ‘Culture’ as a distinctive deliverable, we chose to have a distinctive role of Cultural Director working against all areas of statutory delivery of Team London Bridge, to ensure the missions cross-referenced one another. To further demonstrate that commitment, we produced a dramatic launch event that invited stakeholders and press to newly opened London Bridge Station. The launch doubled as an action against the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan, enacting the new central concourse as a performance platform with synchronized video and choir. On 1 March 2018, despite a snowstorm, Team London Bridge announced and distributed and toasted first success to a packed audience. Their new Cultural Director was announced, and the next day, they began discussing the new programme with clear focus.

**Concluding principles**

I have brought this framework into my role as the Managing and Cultural Director of Futurecity, a cultural placemaking agency, where it has informed new architectural design in Melbourne to purposefully accommodate public art platforms; an Events Strategy for Exhibition Road Cultural Group (made up of cultural and academic institutions along the site of the 1851 Great Exhibition) in London; the creation of a dedicated cultural programme in Wembley Park, London; as well as arts commissioning in Boston. Each project remains authentic and distinct to
The importance is copying the robust framework, which establishes questions, rather than copying others’ case studies or answers. While many places may not have the same 24/7 intense culture as Times Square or other large city districts, the main rule for curating in any public realm is this: one can never control the entire scene; therefore, the best approach is to collaborate with place. In creating or altering any governance for implementing cultural placemaking programmes, consider the following guiding principles.

**Be authentic and distinctive through ambition**

Authentic means being true to your site and its heritage or character; being distinctive means that you generate a new or celebrate an existing USP (unique selling point). Consider how you will tell the story and be ambitious in accordance with your context and resources. Always use this as a chance to be more daring, surprising, and inspirational.

**Create structure to assist not limit**

First, create your Vision for success of the place and then, identify the Mission (reason) for the cultural placemaking approach. Establish Core Values that serve as criteria or guidance for creative content. The structure should facilitate objective conversations and help foster better creative concepts. Audit your place and identify the platforms for presentation and their related characteristics that inform cultural producers. Vision first ensures you have the right structure to inspire.

**Set up stages, permissions, and systems for collaboration**

Begin partnerships before you need anything. Generate a positive relationship with the owners and managers of spaces to establish key contacts and respect their process or limitations. Develop a way of working that empowers them to take risks, by respecting their fears and finding ways to mitigate unnecessary risks. Set up communications protocol at the beginning of the project, so that everyone is clear on the partnership priorities.

**Use cultural professionals: respect practice, networks, and professional trust**

Hire cultural professional(s) who know how art is made, as well as presented, and want to work with other creators and producers, rather than just create their own work. Develop relationships with cultural institutions and entities to build trust; show up at their events and know about their work. Seek presenting partners who bring diversity of audience and press in order to expand your own.

**Address your blind spots: invite expertise**

Never assume anyone can do this on their own. Set up an advisory council or curatorial committees or selection committees to round out your own knowledge. Seek out what you do not know; ensure you explore work outside your previous knowledge. Ask advice of those you respect; it’s flattering to them and you learn from their experience. Art in public space is not about single authorship; it is about collective representation and idiosyncratic contemporary taste. Surround yourself with those who can help.
Your stakeholders, residents, and staff very often want to feel protected and respected. Once you establish trust through clarity of Mission, process, and details like budget and insurances, they will take risks. We develop strongest bonds with those who have succeeded through shared risk; and those stakeholders will become allies beyond the life of a project. Most importantly, never underestimate your audience or assume that people only want what they know or feels familiar. We bring artists to surprise us, inspire us and make us think or feel more fully. If the choices are guided by the Vision and the place’s Core Values, the projects are grounded in context and therefore allow the artists’ concepts to fly safely.

Further reading in this volume

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Jen Hughes

Chapter 9: From the dust of bad stars: disaster, resilience, and placemaking in Little Tokyo
Jonathan Jae-an Crisman

Chapter 10: From moon village to mural village: the consequences of creative placemaking in Ihwa-dong, Seoul
Jason F. Kovacs and Hayun Park

Chapter 11: Free State Boulevard and the story of the East 9th Street Placekeepers
Dave Lowenstein

Preface: The problem with placemaking
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Chapter 17: ‘I am not a satnav’: Affective placemaking and conflict in ‘the ginnel that roared’
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Chapter 45: How the city speaks to us and how we speak back: rewriting the relationship between people and place
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