The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking

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An annotated history of creative placemaking at the federal level

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Introduction

This chapter offers a history of creative placemaking from the perspective of and the programming led by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a federal government agency that funds arts, culture, and design in the United States. In 2010, the NEA released a White Paper called Creative Placemaking (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). It documented two decades of American creative placemaking, drawing on case studies and research that demonstrated the ways that ‘creative initiatives were animating places and sparking economic development’ (ibid., p. 3). The White Paper laid the groundwork for the establishment of a creative placemaking grant program at the NEA in 2011, called Our Town: a collaboration of philanthropic foundations to fund creative placemaking, ArtPlace America, and federal interagency collaborations that integrated arts and culture as a key strategy for advancing economic and community development. Various creative placemaking initiatives led by the NEA supported the evolution of the field over the past decade, with an emphasis and focus on partnership across sectors. Some initiatives and programming focused on making creative placemaking legible to non-arts sectors, while others such as the Our Town grant program explicitly piloted investments in local creative placemaking partnerships and projects. As a federal agency, the NEA has played a unique role in advancing creative placemaking practice in communities as diverse as the country itself, supporting the context-specific work of rural, tribal, suburban, and urban places.

Responding to the Great Recession

Creative placemaking was born out of a response to the Great Recession, and a recognition that communities faced a myriad of challenges that were inextricably linked to one another and could not be solved or addressed in isolation. The Great Recession presented significant new challenges to American cities, beginning in 2007 and lasting well into 2009. Homeowners lost a significant percentage of their net worth during the recession, resulting from the bursting of a ‘housing bubble’ and the global financial crisis. The Great Recession bankrupted government coffers and left residents unable to afford their mortgages, while housing prices simultaneously declined. Offering an innovative approach to economic development, arts and culture were perceived to hold great promise for helping communities recover from the economic hardship
of the Great Recession. With artists and cultural assets present in every corner of the United States, creative placemaking offered a fresh approach for elected officials and local leaders to drive economic development by capitalizing on the unique assets of their place.

The NEA’s support of creative placemaking was seeded through a research endeavour that demonstrated the ways that creative initiatives were animating places and sparking economic development. Authored by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, the 2010 NEA White Paper ‘Creative Placemaking’ served as a foundation for informing the programmatic elements of the NEA’s creative placemaking grant program, offering communities tangible arts and cultural case studies to mimic or learn from. The White Paper also defined creative placemaking:

> In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.  

*(Markusen and Gadwa, 2010)*

The compelling case made by the White Paper was that ‘creative placemaking generates economic returns in multiple ways’ (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). The connection between the role of the arts and economic development was a key driver in the early adoption of creative placemaking by a range of local mayors and other community leaders who were looking for new, and arguably low-cost ways, to revitalize their communities. Many of the projects profiled in the White Paper resulted in transformative physical impacts, such as the design of a new public space, artist live–work space, and public art initiatives. Economic impacts, such as increased business revenue, new local jobs, a growing tax base, were lauded as indicators of progress in community revitalization. Creative placemaking promised to ultimately demonstrate tangible economic impact and a visible, physical transformation. In the urgency of the post–Great Recession, communities were desperate to identify swift recovery and new ways to invest in their local ecosystems. However, as the field evolved, the US moved beyond the Great Recession, and as inequity rose in many urban areas; the arts and cultural response shifted towards a more comprehensive approach to community development; one that was also rooted in social equity and systemic impact.

**Seeding creative placemaking with federal and philanthropic funding**

While artists, cultural organizations, and designers have worked to improve their communities for centuries, federal funding, resources and attention to explicitly supporting creative placemaking began in 2010. Under the leadership of the NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman, the terminology of creative placemaking was born and translated into a national federal funding program called *Our Town*.

While a new federal grant program at the NEA was one way to incentivize local communities to integrate arts and culture into their economic development strategies, Chairman Landesman recognized the limitation of NEA dollars and sought out collaborative federal partnerships that could advance the integration of arts, culture, and design into a holistic approach to supporting quality of life in American communities. In an effort to respond to the Great Recession, the Obama Administration sought to advance place-based strategies that were more comprehensive and less siloed, creating an opportunity for the NEA to set the community development
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Table with arts and culture as a key contributor to driving local, positive impact. With federal agency collaborations such as the Partnership for Sustainable Communities underway, the NEA began to introduce creative placemaking not as a panacea, but as a complementary approach to driving holistic community development via arts and culture. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities was an unprecedented federal collaboration among the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the US Department of Transportation (DOT), and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The main objective of this collaboration was to empower federal agencies to break out of their silos and to jointly solve interrelated challenges in communities recognizing that jobs, transportation options, housing, education, and environment are inextricably interconnected, and impact the quality of life of individuals (The White House, 2010). Federal agencies moved towards addressing community challenges through the lens of place and moved away from a technocratic one-size-fits-all approach. NEA’s creative placemaking program, Our Town, was intended to complement this holistic and place-based approach by acknowledging the potential for arts and culture to play a role in responding to local conditions and in helping to solve complex community challenges. Our Town aligned with other place-based federal funding programs that were focused on improving the quality of life and livability in American communities.

Another approach to seeding creative placemaking was to corral additional funding commitments from the philanthropic community. NEA leadership convened the heads of several large philanthropic organizations to birth ArtPlace America. As a foundation collaborative, ArtPlace was envisioned as an entity to advance the creative placemaking field through investment in local projects and research. Uninhibited by federal funding regulations and processes, ArtPlace could serve to advance the field in complementary ways to federal investment programs and often fund projects and initiatives in a way that was not hamstrung by federal regulations that governed the work of the NEA. Unlike the NEA, ArtPlace could make investments in the construction of cultural facilities and public space, and even make direct grants to artists and organizations other than non-profit 501c3 organizations. Over the past decade, the collaborative partnership between the NEA and ArtPlace proved to be critical in advancing and establishing a solid field of creative placemaking practitioners and practice. Via a thoughtful approach to comprehensive community development, ArtPlace has led comprehensive community development sector research, funded over 285 local projects, piloted a community development investment program, and convened practitioners, demonstrating the value of arts and culture in driving ‘equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities’ (ArtPlace America, 2020). ArtPlace presented a unique opportunity for the NEA to collaborate with philanthropy to ultimately enhance creative placemaking practice in communities all across the country. This collaboration enabled creative placemaking to have staying power beyond the federal government, advancing research, field building, and experimentation that responded to an ever-evolving field of practice.

**Our Town: NEA funding for local pilot projects**

While artists, designers, and cultural organizations had been improving places for centuries, looking to them as equal partners driving positive community and economic development was in fact a radical shift in government policy. This shift was incentivized through NEA funding for one- to two-year creative placemaking projects. In 2010, the NEA first issued grant guidelines for creative placemaking under a pilot initiative (and the precursor to Our Town) via a program called the ‘Mayors’ Institute on City Design 25th Anniversary Initiative.’ This pilot program received applications from cities, as a prerequisite for applying required that the mayor had participated in the NEA’s ‘Mayors’ Institute on City Design Program’ (www.micd.org). Ultimately,
21 grants were awarded, including projects such as the public space design of the Main Terrain park in Chattanooga that focused on public health outcomes, a collaborative public art installation by Mary Miss in Indianapolis to illuminate knowledge about a local waterway, and the architectural design of Culture Shed in Hudson Yards, New York. Ultimately, this pilot round of grants set the stage for a more robust creative placemaking grant program. In 2011, the Our Town program was officially launched as the agency’s signature creative placemaking grant program with funding that was specifically allocated via the federal congressional budgeting process.

The Our Town program, named after the famous American play by Thornton Wilder, had some unique requirements that delineated it from other existing NEA grant programs. First, all applications required a partnership between a local government or federally recognized tribal government and a non-profit 501c3 organization. One of the two primary partners had to demonstrate an arts, culture, or design mission. Second, the application required a letter of support from the highest-ranking official in the community, such as a mayor, county judge, tribal leader, or town manager. The idea was to elevate the role of arts and culture within communities by incentivizing partnerships between the local government and cultural organizations, with a political leader to help champion the initiative locally. As a result of the grant application opportunity, unexpected local partners began to unite around a vision for the community’s future with arts and culture taking center stage.

Another first was the introduction of livability, a new outcome area for the agency via the Our Town program. Livability in the Our Town grant guidelines was articulated in the following way:

Livability: American communities are strengthened through the arts. The anticipated long-term results for livability projects are measurable community benefits, such as growth in overall levels of social and civic engagement; arts- or design-focused changes in policies, laws, and/or regulations; job and/or revenue growth for the community; and changes in in-and-out migration patterns.

(National Endowment for the Arts, 2011)

The grant guidelines specified that funding amounts were available, ranging from $25,000 to $250,000, for creative placemaking projects that contribute toward the livability of communities and help transform them into lively, beautiful, and sustainable places with the arts at their core. While other grant programs at the NEA were capped at $100,000, Our Town offered a larger grant award amount; and in turn also awarded some requests for funding in full.

The NEA’s process for selecting grantees occurs via a peer review process. Grant review panelists representing diverse perspectives, geographies, and artistic disciplines are invited to review, score, and comment on applications to the NEA; and ultimately provide recommendations to the agency on those worthy of receiving American tax-payer funding. For Our Town, applications are reviewed in panels divided by similar community size, tapping the expertise of artistic practitioners that understand the unique geographic contexts of the places applying to the program. Grant review panelists also represent the diversity of the creative placemaking field, tapping the expertise of community development practitioners, urban planners, social practice artists, local government agencies, designers, and more. The result is an incredibly diverse body of projects that are funded via the Our Town portfolio each year, representing a wide range of creative placemaking project approaches, unique partnerships, and artistic disciplines. By spring 2020 NEA has supported over 636 creative placemaking projects and invested over $49.3 million in rural, tribal, suburban, and urban communities throughout the nation.

From Ajo, Arizona, to the Cheyenne Rivers Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, the Our Town program extended the reach of the agency by inviting new applicants, partners, and project activi-
ties into NEA’s funding portfolio. The Our Town program dramatically expanded the number of new and first-time applicants to the NEA. With a grant program that explicitly required local government or tribal government partnership, new entities sought to obtain NEA grant funding to support their local arts initiatives. While the program has remained competitive, only funding about 20–25 per cent of applicants each year, the program’s application call has helped to catalyze new relationships in places between the arts and non-arts sectors, as unexpected local partners pull together an Our Town application. Those leading creative placemaking projects are often driven by a coalition of diverse local actors; including artists, economic developers, housing advocates, public safety officials, community activists, farmers, religious and business leaders. Oftentimes, 10–15 local organizations came together and committed to partnering on an Our Town project proposal. The groundbreaking nature of these new local partnerships cannot be overemphasized. Many communities reported to the NEA that multiple stakeholders gathered around tables for the first time to talk about the future of their place and expressed that they should have been working together for years. The unique projects that emerged from these conversations are a true testament to the ingenuity of artists partnering with community entities to bring about positive change to a place. Under the banner of creative placemaking, new applicants to the agency shifted their view of arts and culture as not just a nice-to-have or an add-on, but rather as a central component of their community’s future vision and success. For example, in Austin, Texas, Forklift Danceworks collaborated with the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department Aquatics Division and several East Austin neighborhoods in an effort to organize the community around saving their local pools. Via a two-year-long artistic engagement, choreographers worked with recreation department staff and local residents to produce a series of performances that sought to strengthen the citizens’ sense of ownership over public pools and reenergize the community to save the valued assets of public pools. This innovative partnership and pilot project demonstrated the value of artists and cultural events to unite community and inform local government budgets and planning processes. As a result, other city departments have attempted to partner with Forklift and other artists to establish a new approach to community engagement around city issues.

Making creative placemaking projects legible

While a new federal grant program was an important contribution to incentivizing local creative placemaking projects, the emerging field was in need of concrete case studies that could relate to the diverse rural, suburban, tribal, and urban contexts that exist across the country. Under the leadership of NEA Design and Creative Placemaking Director, Jason Schupbach, the Our Town program made two critical investments that helped to grow creative placemaking practice and make the work accessible and legible to local communities. The first was an investment in developing a microsite called ‘Exploring Our Town’ on the NEA website. GO Collaborative, led by Lynn Osgood, was the selected contractor to develop the microsite and engaged a team of professionals from the fields of art, design, planning, programming, and writing. Released in the fall of 2014, ‘Exploring Our Town’ profiled case studies from NEA grant investments, and offered a suite of additional project insights that enabled communities to learn ways that they might approach a creative placemaking project. The in-depth case studies were a first attempt to make the work happening in this burgeoning field legible and relevant to various community contexts. For many, ‘Exploring Our Town’ revealed that creative placemaking was not a field limited to urban cities, but rather was thriving in tribal, rural, and suburban contexts. ‘Exploring Our Town’ was an early robust tool for effectively communicating creative placemaking and enabled new connections with other sectors and federal agencies that were investing in place-based programming and grant support.
In December 2016, the NEA published a book, How to Do Creative Placemaking, to round out case studies produced in the online resource of ‘Exploring Our Town.’ The book reflects on where the field has been and where it has the potential to head. The book features a diverse set of chapter authors, and encapsulates perspectives from creative placemaking practitioners, a housing authority leader, a mayor, an economic developer, and various artists. It was a piece intended to capture the important moment of creative placemaking as a compendium of key thinkers and thought leaders that embodied a range of sectors. The publication release culminated in a one-day convening, ‘Creative Placemaking: The Role of Arts in Community Development,’ in December 2016 hosted by the Wilson Center, in partnership with the NEA, the Kresge Foundation, ArtPlace America, and Partners for Livability Communities (Wilson Center, 2016). The convening, the ‘Exploring Our Town’ web resource, and How to Do Creative Placemaking publication helped to build momentum and make the work more legible to non-arts sectors.

Investing in knowledge-building and network organizations

Another key strategy for building knowledge to advance the creative placemaking field was to establish a new program category of funding within Our Town, called ‘Knowledge Building.’ This new program category was first funded in fiscal year 2015 and had an explicit call to ‘build and disseminate creative placemaking knowledge more broadly’ (National Endowment for the Arts, 2015). One- to two-year projects led by either arts service or design organizations or economic and community development organizations were incentivized to partner on advancing the field of creative placemaking through a range of activities such as ‘mentorships, training opportunities and convenings, technical assistance, research linked back to practice, technology projects, and other projects appropriate to the organizations’ internal system of learning’ (National Endowment for the Art, 2015). In short, this new program category helped to seed and further cement new ways of embedding creative placemaking practice and approaches in non-arts networks; including a diverse assortment of community development organizations from Smart Growth America’s Transportation for America (T4A) to National Alliance of Community and Economic Development Associations (NACEDA). A requirement for closing out a grant award included the delivery of a final publication, conference agendas, reflections of learning, media, or other material that documented the activities that took place. The intention was to also ensure that the final deliverables were disseminated widely throughout the organization’s network.

The pilot round of knowledge-building grantees seeded several resources that helped to make legible creative placemaking for local leaders in the non-arts sectors. For example, The Trust for Public Land, in partnership with City Parks Alliance, hosted a colloquium for park administrators and arts and cultural organizations to facilitate peer learning, culminating in The Field Guide for Parks and Creative Placemaking (Clarke, 2017). Similarly, Springboard for the Arts partnered with the International Downtown Association to develop a toolkit for downtown managers, helping to guide the integration of arts, culture, and design into the development of downtowns (Springboard for the Arts, 2017). The toolkit included thoughtful approaches on how to hire and contract with artists, with nuts-and-bolts tools including sample artist contracts, how to issue a request for proposals, and how artists can help address the mission and goals of downtown managers. Even arts network organizations, such as OPERA America, embarked on an interesting pivot as they sought to pilot civic-practice learning workshops for opera companies, ultimately piloting a new grant program that helped the art form of opera’s ‘authentic creative assets address public priorities and community needs’ (Barto, 2018).

The NEA ‘Our Town Knowledge Building’ program funded a total of 44 projects over the course of the program’s five-year run which concluded in the last round of awards made in
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2019. From an American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) accredited creative placemaking curriculum for the American Planning Association members, to a peer exchange program called the ‘Creative Counties Placemaking Challenge’ for the National Association of Counties members, the knowledge-building program helped to seed a multitude of new publications, programs, and learning tools. A key component of the program was to ensure that new resources were created to assist local leaders and communities to advance creative placemaking work, and that these resources were disseminated widely to ultimately influence and inform local practice. This program enabled experimentation in forging new partnerships for network organizations between arts and community development sectors and helped to seed new streams of creative placemaking work including research, publications, conferences, training institutes, mentorship programs, and more. Network organizations were empowered to translate creative placemaking into language that resonated best with their member base and continued to make this work more legible to local practitioners that were undertaking local projects. The NEA’s investment in ‘Knowledge Building’ grantees was often accelerated and enabled by strategic and significant investment made by The Kresge Foundation Arts and Culture Program’s National Networks grants. Unlike the one- to two-year project-based grants made by the NEA, The Kresge Foundation made significant, longer-term commitments to national network organizations that built out creative placemaking programs through staff positions and other transformational organization investments. In the fall of 2019, NEA and The Kresge Foundation brought together the cohort of ‘Knowledge Building’ grantees and National Network grantees to further connect those working to advance and strengthen the field of creative placemaking.

Accelerating community capacity to support local work

While the NEA ‘Our Town Knowledge Building’ grant program resulted in new tools and resources for the field, the NEA recognized a need to also directly support its local project grantees through non-financial technical assistance in the form of mentors, coaches, peer exchanges, and creative placemaking consultancies. In an emerging and evolving field requiring complex partnership, and goals of community change, Our Town grantees were unique among the NEA’s portfolio and often necessitated additional support beyond grant funding. Other federal agencies have long supported technical assistance as a complement to their grant awards to ensure that grantees were well-equipped to put federal dollars to good use, harnessing best-practice approaches and broader national learning.

In its first iteration of technical assistance, the NEA issued a program solicitation and scope of work to ultimately select a cooperator to launch and run a ‘Pilot Creative Placemaking Technical Assistance Program.’ Conceptually, the program was designed to serve select Our Town grantees in the execution of their grant award and project activities, providing an opportunity to harness rich learning from a select group of grantees for the agency to consider scaling wraparound support that goes beyond grant awards. The cooperator, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in partnership with PolicyLink, was selected via a competitive process and, in February 2016, formally launching the program. The Kresge Foundation brought additional funding to the table to enable LISC and PolicyLink to make the program more robust by serving nine Kresge grantees with the same programmatic approach, in addition to the Our Town grantees. Grantees were invited to apply to receive technical assistance and were ultimately selected via a competitive process, ensuring that the cohort represented the range of communities and organizations that interface with the Our Town program. For example, it was critical to have the grantees represent rural, urban, suburban, and tribal communities. Similarly, the pilot program
sought to serve a range of lead grantee organizations that spanned municipal, non-profit, arts, non-arts organization typologies. This type of grantee cohort enabled a rich body of learning and was intended to be more broadly representative of the diverse grantees and applicants served by the NEA Our Town program.

Over a two-year period, LISC and PolicyLink delivered intensive technical assistance to a cohort of 16 grantees, including both NEA Our Town and Kresge grantees, to help advance their project work. Via mentorships, deployment of consultants to work directly with grantees, webinars, and peer learning opportunities, technical assistance ultimately benefitted the grantees, but also the funders in identifying gaps and needs in the field that went beyond project funding. For the NEA, this was a groundbreaking venture and seemingly the first time that the agency engaged in providing technical assistance directly to grantees to help them succeed in the implementation of grant funding. The pilot program enabled deeper learning for NEA program staff and an opportunity to think more explicitly about wraparound support that can ensure the effective use of grant funding, with the goal of ultimately seeding long-term outcomes that positively benefit local residents in communities.

LISC also delivered a public webinar series that ran from Fall 2018 through Spring 2019 and was open to the broader public on key topical areas that resonated consistently with the grantees that received deep hands-on technical assistance (Local Initiatives Support Corporation, 2019). The webinars had a far reach, capturing the attention of over 1,300 unique viewers. Nuts-and-bolts learning on how to commission an artist, run a call for entry, or issue a request for proposals was paired with creative community engagement strategies to introduce viewers to a wide range of topics, ultimately expanding the imagination on what creative placemaking can do for communities. Webinars featured a mix of experts on particular subjects such as partnership, as well as artists or practitioners on the ground who have executed projects. Grounding each webinar in specific case studies was critical to spark inspiration and share both successes and pitfalls. An accompanying workbook was launched in spring 2020 as a compendium to the webinars, with various templates, prompting questions, and curriculum to guide the development and execution of creative placemaking projects in local communities.

Experimentation in approaches to technical assistance continued in the summer of 2019 when the NEA and LISC hosted the first-ever ‘Local Leaders’ Institute on Creative Placemaking.’ While the technical assistance delivery to date primarily focused on supporting grantees and their partners, the NEA was interested to establish an approach to serve the roughly 80 per cent of Our Town applicants who are unsuccessful at obtaining a grant award. A significant percentage of Our Town applicants are first-time applicants to the agency, and likely embarking on creative placemaking endeavors for the first time. In the spring of 2019, rejected Our Town applicants were invited to apply to attend the inaugural ‘Local Leaders’ Institute on Creative Placemaking.’ The Institute was conceived by iterating on successful programs such as the ‘Mayors’ Institute on City Design,’ with the same notion of bringing together teams of local leaders with resource team members that had expertise in creative placemaking to share. Ultimately, six local teams were selected, representing mid-size and rural communities, and they met in Washington, DC for two-days in July 2019. The community teams each consisted of a local government representative and arts/cultural representative, which is the partnership required to establish eligibility to apply to the Our Town program. Over the course of two days, Institute participants presented case study projects rooted in their community, and exchanged ideas, challenges, and opportunities with peers and the resource team. Ultimately, the investment in technical assistance over the course of the pilot program and ‘Local Leaders’ Institute’ enabled an expanded strategic direction for the Our Town program and served as a new approach for the NEA as a federal agency.
Reflecting on a decade of federal investment in creative placemaking

The first decade of federal investment in creative placemaking was both exciting and experimental, seeding new relationships, approaches, pilot programs, local projects, and resources to support an evolving field. While the early years of Our Town focused on livability and economic development outcomes, there was a noticeable evolution among the Our Town grantees that were less interested in driving economic development, but rather sought to advance social change and civic engagement on the local level. Similarly, there was a shift in the grantee portfolio that moved from a focus on the artistic output of a project (such as a piece of public art, a newly designed public space, a cultural plan) to valuing and elevating the artistic process (such as artist-led community engagement). The artistic process demonstrated a compelling way to drive long-term change in a place and seed new local partnerships that proved transformational.

In Spring 2019, approaching the 10-year anniversary of the Our Town program, the NEA attempted to codify a more expanded theory of change for Our Town, and the way in which it supports the ecosystem of creative placemaking. Via a collaborative contract with 2M and Metris Consulting, the NEA commissioned the development of a theory of change, logic models, research case studies, and a program evaluation framework that thoroughly examined the Our Town grant portfolio (National Endowment for the Arts, 2019). This collaborative research work resulted in a substantial rewrite of the Our Town grant guidelines in 2019 which articulated that successful creative placemaking projects ‘ultimately lay the groundwork for systemic changes that sustain the integration of arts, culture, and design into local strategies for strengthening communities’ (National Endowment for the Arts, 2019). The theory of change acknowledged that artists, culture bearers, and designers are uniquely positioned to collaborate with cross-sector partners in the following ways: by envisioning, imagining new possibilities for a community or place – a new future, a new way of overcoming a challenge or a new approach to problem-solving; connecting, bringing together communities, people, places, and economic opportunity via physical spaces or new relationships; illuminating, bringing new attention to, or elevating key community assets and issues, voices of residents, local history, or cultural infrastructure; energizing, injecting new or additional energy, resources, activity, people, or enthusiasm into a place, community issue, or local economy (National Endowment for the Arts, 2019).

The Our Town program also shifted its outcome of livability to ‘strengthening communities: providing opportunities for the arts to be integrated into the fabric of community life.’ Project outcomes were defined in an expanded way in 2019, enabling communities to select outcomes most relevant to their place: economic change – economic improvements of individuals, institutions, or the community including local business growth, job creation/labor force participation, professional development/training, prevention of displacement, in-migration, and tourism; physical change – physical improvements that occur to the built and natural environment including beautification and/or enhancement of physical environment, new construction, and redevelopment (including arts, culture, and public space); social change – improvements to social relationships, civic engagement and community empowerment, and/or amplifying community identity including civic engagement, collective efficacy, social capital, social cohesion, and community attachment; systems change – improvements to community capacity to sustain the integration of arts, culture, and design into strategies for advancing local economic, physical, and/or social outcomes including, for example, establishment of new and lasting cross-sector partnerships, shifts in institutional structure, practices, or policies, replication or scaling of innovative project models, and the establishment of training programs or dissemination of informational resources to support the creative placemaking field (National Endowment for the Arts, 2019). The expanded outcomes and theory of change for the Our Town program offers a broader...
reflection of the big tent of creative placemaking and can offer guideposts for states, regions, or local funders that seek to establish programs that center arts in community development. Via the NEA’s creative placemaking investments, communities have been empowered to chart the course of their projects and identify the outcomes most desirable to them. The evolution of the Our Town grant portfolio illuminates the ways in which local leaders have sought to engage arts, culture, and design in achieving goals that stretch beyond economic development, such as social change to drive equity.

Collaborations between the arts and non-arts sectors have prototyped new ways of seeding systems change within our society. It is for this reason that creative placemaking holds particular promise in the face of an unknown future. A global pandemic, historic rates of unemployment, social unrest, and climate change are upending our previous ways of life. As we seek to heal and reimagine a way forward, the vision of artists will be more necessary than ever. The old ways of doing and being will require new creative approaches and cross-sector partnerships to tackle systemic issues. The field of creative placemaking has been exercising its muscles for this moment to rise to the challenges that lie ahead: to ultimately strengthen communities.

References


Further reading in this volume

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

Chapter 20: Displacemaking 2015 and 2020
Catherine Fennell and Daniel Tucker

Chapter 24: Artists, creativity, and the heart of city planning
Tom Borrup
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Chapter 26: Sculpturing sound in space: on *The Circle and the Square* (2016) by Suzanne Lacy
*Trude Schjelderup Iversen*

Chapter 41: Rituals of regard: on festivals, folks, and findings of social impact
*Maribel Alvarez*

Chapter 44: Creative Placemaking and comprehensive community development: rethinking neighborhood change and evaluation
*Maria Rosario Jackson*

Chapter 42: Creative Placemaking and Placekeeping evaluation challenges from the practitioner perspective: an interview with Roy Chan
*Maria Rosario Jackson*

Chapter 43: A theory of change for creative placemaking: the experience of the National Endowment for the Arts’ *Our Town* program: an interview with Patricia Moore Shaffer, PhD
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