



## **Up From the Roots: Economic and Cultural Equity in Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts**

**Findings from a Series of Roundtable Discussions  
2009–2011**

by Tom Borrup  
with Caron Atlas

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## Executive Summary

In the spring of 2009, the Arts + Community Change<sup>1</sup> Initiative began working with various partners to explore the power of neighborhood-based arts and culture as an integral part of equitable, democratic and culturally vital communities. The Initiative was responding to the vision, sustained needs and creative resilience of low-income communities. It was also responding to a moment in time when the economic crisis and heightened civic engagement encouraged people to rethink how creativity can be part of a transformative vision for the future.

Roundtable discussions were convened in several cities across the United States between 2009 and 2011 to better understand the growth of “naturally occurring cultural districts”—grassroots, culturally based efforts that are bringing about significant changes within a variety of communities—and to learn from their successes and challenges. These discussions brought together cultural district leaders, artists, neighborhood activists, planners, elected officials, community and industrial developers, foundation program officers and trustees, public agency directors and staff, researchers and others from around the country. The spirited dialogues aimed to develop more informed public policy around naturally occurring cultural districts and more strategic investments by public and private funders. They also served to advance networking and learning among practitioners, local government, neighborhoods and nonprofit organizations.

Sponsors of these discussions included the Arts + Community Change Initiative, Arts & Democracy Project, Center for Rural Strategies, Ford Foundation, Fourth Arts Block, InCommons, LA Commons, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, LA Department of Cultural Affairs, Surdna Foundation and the Thai Community Development Center. They took place at the Archibald Bush Foundation, St. Paul; Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, New York; Neighborhood Funders Group annual meeting, New Orleans; J. M. Kaplan Fund, New York; Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Los Angeles; and Surdna Foundation, New York.

This report presents key findings and offers recommendations distilled from these roundtables. It also contextualizes the phenomenon of cultural district formation in the United States within the fields of community planning, municipal policy, economic development and the arts. We distinguish between “naturally occurring cultural districts” and those that result from large-scale, planned investments—developments in which large-scale private and/or public “flagship” projects are focused on major cultural institutions or entertainment facilities. The context for both kinds of cultural districts or clusters is truly global and research has examined the nature and impact of such districts in many parts of the world.

While most of the attention to naturally occurring cultural districts has been in cities, they have also emerged in small towns and rural areas and these efforts were also addressed in the roundtable discussions. It is our hope that this report will contribute to the ongoing dialogue and lead to better understanding of the role of culture and grassroots organizing in community development. The collective experience of practitioners, supporters and partners within naturally occurring cultural districts has pro-

<sup>1</sup>The Arts + Community Change Initiative was incubated at the Pratt Center for Community Development. In 2011 it became part of the Arts & Democracy Project.

duced a depth of experience relative to the more recently branded practice of creative placemaking. This growing field of practice has only begun to emerge and to reflect on and assess assumptions, strategies and needs of the field. This report also hopes to contribute to that process.

## **Emerging values and practices**

Through case study presentations, the naturally occurring cultural districts represented in the roundtables expressed and exemplified a series of underlying values important in their organizing strategies. They fuse culture and community building with placemaking and economic development. Shared characteristics show that they:

- are rooted in community-based cultures and identity
- build on asset-based strategies
- bridge diverse cultures, ages and economic means
- include and recognize cultures equitably
- are led by empowered local leadership
- increase civic capacity through cross-sector partnerships

## **Key strengths and contributions to communities**

Throughout the roundtable discussions, participants cited a number of benefits. In general, naturally occurring cultural districts play a critical role in revitalizing the sense of community spirit and connections among diverse stakeholders. They improve blighted and abandoned neighborhoods or town centers, repurpose historic buildings and bring economic activity into neglected areas.

Participants cited ways naturally occurring cultural districts improve the quality of life, generate new tax revenues, reduce crime and contribute to creative and cultural growth. Often they contribute to education, develop new leaders and bridge racial and generational divides. They utilize and improve existing building stock and help guide new development that better fits a community's needs, aspirations and identity. Because they are locally led and emerge through community-based efforts, they contribute to social cohesion while improving neighborhood conditions. These results stand in contrast to externally driven or flagship-style approaches in which real estate development and replacement of older properties are designed to cater to new residents and produce profits that typically leave the immediate community. This often weakens community bonds or polarizes older and newer residents. According to discussion participants, naturally occurring cultural districts typically:

- create collective efficacy
- provide sites of opportunity for community visioning and planning
- sustain and build on community diversity
- sustain and build on cultural and community heritage
- foster creativity and innovation
- build collaborations and partnerships
- improve physical conditions of local neighborhoods
- attract visitors as contributors to the local economy
- contribute to community stability

- create new economic opportunity
- build the capacity of local cultural and civic organizations
- engage young people in community life

## **Key issues facing naturally occurring cultural districts**

The roundtables sparked rich and varied discussions about both the challenges and opportunities of this emergent field. Practitioners, policy makers, philanthropists and others identified a range of issues and questions facing naturally occurring cultural districts:

- honoring and preserving organic growth
- increasing the capacity for sustained organizing
- determining the value of formal designation and place identity
- finding a role within formal planning, governance and economic development
- assessing outcomes
- maintaining community stability
- sustaining local services and amenities
- allowing for varying degrees of municipal capacity and cooperation
- recognizing local assets
- improving access to financing tools and strategies for small-scale activities

## **Recommendations**

From each of the roundtables a variety of recommendations emerged. Some were explicit and detailed, others broad. Some participants raised questions that remain unanswered. All drew on experiences of the planners, policy makers, nonprofit leaders, artists, researchers, funders and others who participated. Many recommendations are directed to policy makers, some to funders or researchers and some to practitioners who are implementing, managing, or acting as partners within cultural districts. Recommendations have been grouped into three areas:

### *Policy*

- apply context-sensitive approaches
- respect and work with local networks
- support artists, self-employed workers and entrepreneurs
- recognize diversity as an underlying strength
- connect policies across silos
- provide for mixed-use affordable spaces
- combine regulatory and incentive-based tools
- designate a municipal liaison
- foster community-driven planning
- factor in cultural impacts
- allocate and sustain accessible space for creative activities
- incorporate preservation of historic assets and other community treasures

### *Practice*

- employ strategies that leverage local assets
- organize around affordable housing and space for creative work and business
- build cross-sector coalitions

- share best practices and offer peer support
- stress diversity and inclusion
- integrate lifelong learning opportunities
- develop strategic communication plans

### *Investments*

- strengthen networks internally with support and technical assistance
- provide support for planning and placemaking in the context of community visions
- invest in mentorships, peer networks and support for entrepreneurs
- support immigrant entrepreneurship
- support local leadership development
- promote cultural district demonstration projects
- validate successful districts through casemaking
- provide funding and investment equitably
- leverage resources from within and from outside each community
- remove bureaucratic impediments and structural barriers

## **Research and questions for further discussion**

Qualitative and quantitative analyses are needed to assess cultural practices, community engines of change and policy/planning needs in naturally occurring cultural districts. Two promising examples of such assessments include the work of the Social Impact of the Arts Project at the University of Pennsylvania and the Urban Institute's Cultural Vitality Indicators.

Many questions were raised during the roundtable discussions related to success indicators, community-based cultural work and local economic development efforts in the context of the creative economy and social equity. Some may be the subject of formal research; others may provide topics for similar roundtable discussions in the future or be addressed in other venues.

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Arnaudville Experiment, Louisiana Dept. of Cultural Recreation and Tourism, LA  
Ashé Cultural Arts Center, New Orleans, LA  
Asian Arts Initiative, Chinatown, Philadelphia, PA  
Boston Chinatown and Asian Community Development Corporation, Boston, MA  
Broadway Arts Center and City of Los Angeles Dept. of Cultural Affairs, LA, CA  
Central Baltimore Partnership, Baltimore, MD  
Corona Plaza and Queens Museum of Art, Queens, NY  
Double Edge Theatre, Ashfield, MA  
East Village Arts District, City of Long Beach, CA  
El Puente/Green Light District, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, NY  
First Peoples Fund, Sioux Falls, SD  
Fourth Arts Block, New York, NY  
Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, Brooklyn, NY  
International District and Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, Seattle, WA  
Leimert Park Village and Crenshaw Corridor Business Improvement District, LA, CA  
Llano Grande Center, Edcouch, TX  
Made in Midtown and Design Trust for Public Space, New York, NY  
Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, Old Town, ME  
Midtown Area and University Cultural Center Association, Detroit, MI  
Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard Merchants and Business Association, New Orleans, LA  
Penn Center, St. Helena Island, SC  
San Pedro Arts, Culture and Entertainment District, Los Angeles County, CA  
South Bronx Cultural Corridor, South Bronx, NY  
STAY Project, Appalshop, Whitesburg, KY  
St. Croix Festival Theatre and St. Croix Valley Heritage Area, St. Croix Falls, WI  
Thai Town and Thai Community Development Center, Los Angeles, CA



## Preface

In the spring of 2009, the Arts + Community Change Initiative<sup>2</sup> began working with various partners to explore the power of neighborhood-based arts and culture as integral parts of equitable, democratic and culturally vital communities. The Initiative was responding to the vision, sustained needs and creative resilience of low-income communities. It was also responding to a moment in time when the economic crisis and heightened civic engagement encouraged people to rethink how creativity can be part of a transformative vision for the future.

We chose the roundtable format for our discussions to encourage the sharing of perspectives from a wide mix of practitioners, policy makers and researchers from multiple sectors and communities. Recognizing the value of dialogue to explore, develop and model emergent ideas, we encouraged participants to bring their expertise and a willingness to reconsider assumptions and think creatively.

We drew on the concept of “naturally occurring cultural districts” as a window into a broader understanding of the dynamic interrelationship between a community’s cultural assets, social networks and economic well-being. At the same time we recognized that this concept does not always work for everyone—besides being a mouthful, the idea needs to be adapted to rural contexts and raises the question of what is truly “natural.” We were mindful that the designation could be misused to exclude instead of include. However, most people at the roundtables found the concept a useful catalyst for considering the role of arts, culture and creative industries in revitalizing our cities and towns from the neighborhood up. And the districts themselves provided strong examples of the innovative and collaborative processes and infrastructures needed to build our communities.

We purposefully grounded the roundtable discussions in values of equity, inclusion and recognition of the integral role of arts and culture in communities. We framed them as follows:

There is much talk about the creative economy, but rarely in the framework of equitable development or sustainable communities. Many efforts to support sustainable communities or comprehensive community development overlook the deep reserve of arts, culture and creativity that is essential to the vibrancy and resilience of a community. And many articulations of the arts and creative economy lack an explicit analysis of who has access to cultural resources and opportunities, what forms of arts and culture are validated and who benefits from the creative economy.

Throughout our conversations people asked for a broader definition of arts, culture and economy, as well as a sensitivity about how they come together in diverse contexts. Theresa Secord of Maine, for example, said, “Be wary of bringing western entrepreneurial notions to the work...this is about our culture, it’s not about an enterprise.” Our rural roundtable recognized the differences between rural and urban experiences and the dangers of imposing urban policies and practices outside the city. It also revealed some interesting shared themes, such as displacement, which happens in small towns and

<sup>2</sup>The Arts + Community Change Initiative was incubated at the Pratt Center for Community Development. In 2011 it became part of the Arts & Democracy Project.



urban neighborhoods alike. While outside development may play out differently in each context, the stories, history and ownership of cultures and communities are similarly at stake. Overall, roundtable participants were struck by the proactive quality of the work: people using their imaginations to create communities that lived up to their values. And we learned how narrow assumptions and mistaken perceptions could prevent large cities and small towns from valuing, supporting and ultimately benefiting from their local cultural assets.

Of course we were not the only ones having this kind of conversation. We held it in the context of growing interest in cultural districts, placemaking, culturally based community revitalization and integrated strategies for sustainable development. Mark Stern and Susan Seifert's Social Impact of the Arts Project, including their report *Cultivating "Natural" Cultural Districts*; Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa's white paper, *Creative Placemaking*; Maria Rosario Jackson's work on cultural vitality at the Urban Institute and the field information gathered by Judilee Reed and her colleagues at Leveraging Investments in Creativity informed our conversations (and they all participated in at least one roundtable). We were also inspired throughout by the holistic practices of the case studies we highlighted, including the Fourth Arts Block, which cosponsored the two New York City-focused roundtables. The Ford Foundation, Surdna Foundation, LA Commons with the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the Arts & Democracy Project and the Center for Rural Strategies all convened additional discussions.

Each conversation built on the learnings of the conversations that preceded it. Participants moved from defining characteristics and benefits to grappling with critical issues and challenges and making recommendations and considering how best to implement them. The roundtables also began to develop the cross-sector alliances needed to move the recommendations into action. In New York City, for example, the new Naturally Occurring Cultural District Working Group (NOCD-NY) is carrying forward a plan to strengthen practice, shape policy, coordinate research and build a citywide alliance. The Rural Cultural Roundtable also recommended forming a Rural Cultural Working Group.

Karen Mack of LA Commons, a key organizer of the Los Angeles Roundtable, said, "Cultural districts are in essence a storytelling process." This report takes this story a layer deeper to tell about the grassroots ingenuity that makes for strong and culturally vital communities.

—Caron Atlas, *Arts & Democracy Project*, August 2011

## Introduction and Framework

### Up from the Roots: Economic and cultural equity in community regeneration

Urban neighborhoods and small towns in the United States have evolved in a variety of ways since the middle of the last century. Demographic and lifestyle shifts have brought about significant degrees of social, economic, cultural and physical changes—and in many cases deterioration. Efforts to reverse deterioration, or to bring about entirely new kinds of places, range from large-scale, top-down projects driven by governments and/or private developers to small-scale, bottom-up work driven by community groups and/or individual entrepreneurs. Some consider larger-scale or externally driven redevelopment exploitative or disruptive of existing, long-standing communities. In contrast, the smaller-scale or grassroots efforts often led by coalitions of community stakeholders, including artists and cultural organizations, have served as key catalysts in community rejuvenation in many places. They have brought a revitalized sense of identity, new social connections and economic drivers and other benefits to existing populations as well as to newcomers.

Change of any kind, however, does not come without challenges and can raise a variety of difficult questions.

A series of roundtable discussions were convened between 2009 and 2011 to better understand the growth of what have been called “naturally occurring cultural districts”—grassroots culturally based efforts that are bringing about significant changes to a variety of communities—and to learn from their successes and challenges. These discussions brought together cultural district leaders, artists, neighborhood activists, planners, elected officials, community and industrial developers, foundation program officers and trustees, public agency directors and staff, researchers and others from around the United States. Their spirited dialogues sought to develop more informed public policy concerning naturally occurring cultural districts and more strategic investments by public and private funders. The gatherings themselves also served to advance networking and learning among practitioners, local government, neighborhoods and

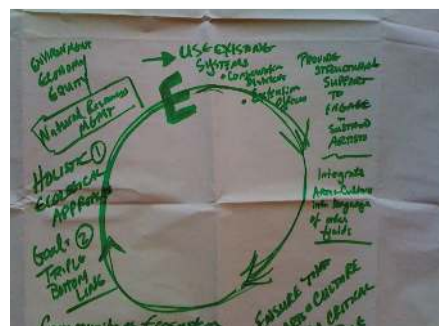
nonprofit organizations. Specific focus was placed on the impacts of these districts with regards to cultural and economic equity.

This report summarizes key findings and offers recommendations distilled from these sessions. It also contextualizes the phenomenon of cultural district formation within the fields of community planning and policy, economic development and the arts. We draw a distinction between “naturally occurring cultural



New York's roundtable discussion at JM Kaplan Fund in 2010.

districts” and those that result from large-scale, planned investments with “flagship” amenities—developments in which large-scale private and/or public projects are focused on major cultural institutions or entertainment facilities. The context for both of these kinds of cultural districts is truly global and there has been research examining the nature and impact of cultural districts in many parts of the world (see accompanying bibliography).



A flow chart generated at 2010's \*\* roundtable.

This series of discussions and this report address the phenomenon as it has emerged in the United States. While most of the attention to this work has been in cities, the clustering of cultural assets as in naturally occurring cultural districts have also emerged in small towns and rural areas and these were also discussed.<sup>3</sup> It is hoped that this report will contribute to continuing dialogue and will result in better understanding of the role of culture and grassroots organizing in the process of community development.

*“These clusters of cultural agents generate social networks that build community and reinforce diversity within neighborhoods as well as help connect communities across the city.”*

—Susan Seifert, *Social Impact of the Arts Project, University of Pennsylvania*<sup>4</sup>

The six different roundtable discussions that inform this report explored conditions that make naturally occurring cultural districts successful as well as the policy frameworks and investments needed to further the contributions they are making to their communities. Sponsors for these discussions included the Arts + Community Change Initiative, Arts & Democracy Project, Center for Rural Strategies, Ford Foundation, Fourth Arts Block, InCommons, LA Commons, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, LA Department of Cultural Affairs, Surdna Foundation and the Thai Community Development Center. They took place at the Archibald Bush Foundation, St. Paul; Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, New York; Neighborhood Funders Group annual meeting, New Orleans; J. M. Kaplan Fund, New York; Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Los Angeles; and Surdna Foundation, New York.

*Naturally occurring cultural districts are not created by public policy—but rather by the intentional action of actors on the ground...How do you foster this creativity, especially in low-income communities and communities of color where equity and inclusion are challenged? How can we enact public policy to support naturally occurring cultural districts, recognizing that this is by definition challenging?*

—Brad Lander, *NY City Council member*

Taking no one form, naturally occurring cultural districts have emerged as the result of a variety of efforts in a variety of contexts. They have contributed to the rebuilding of community life in many places. Case studies discussed at the roundtables explored their contributions and challenges. Presenters and other participants addressed municipal policy, funding, community and cross-sector organizing, networking, leadership development and other issues of concern to their cultural districts and communities.

<sup>3</sup> Cultural districts in an urban context generally refer to a geographic neighborhood bound by a common identity. In rural settings, districts may include entire towns and even multicounty regions bound by specific cultural practices or products or by historical identity.

<sup>4</sup> Quotations cited throughout this document are taken from verbal comments made by participants during the roundtable discussions.

Conversations about cultural districts have gained currency around the United States the past few years as planners, economic development professionals, policy makers and others look for multisectoral approaches to building and rebuilding vital and sustainable communities. In addition to the importance of this work to artists, community organizations, local businesses and the neighborhoods they serve, naturally occurring cultural districts are seen as a vehicle or strategy for community revitalization, which, at the same time, supports artists and local cultural activity. They can simultaneously build social capital, economic capital and cultural or creative capital.

## Community revitalization and cultural districts in the United States

Over the past half century the evolving nature of the industrial economy, transportation patterns, residential development and lifestyle choices—among other factors—altered life and the physical environment in city neighborhoods, small towns and rural areas alike. Most lost considerable population and declined economically; some have recently stabilized or begun to grow again. During this period of change, some communities retained social cohesion, while others disintegrated; many experienced vast demographic shifts and some have successfully reconstituted themselves as vibrant centers of community life. Strategies employed by cities and towns in efforts to refashion themselves during the past several decades have recently begun to embrace culture and the arts as significant factors and tools in community regeneration.

*Redevelopment can also be a very bad thing. And we went through a period when we did a lot of bad things and did a lot of harm. I think we've learned from those mistakes. "Urban Renewal" doesn't exist anymore.*

*—Laura Zucker, Los Angeles County Arts Commission*

A variety of programs of national, state and local governments attempted to renew, revitalize, regenerate and regentrify cities, towns and rural landscapes. Some arguably made matters worse or benefited only those with economic privilege. These transitions have produced winners and losers. In both large cities and small towns, where centers have decayed through abandonment and disinvestment, remaining residents have largely been poor, often people of color and more recently arrived immigrants.

During the past couple of decades, many upwardly mobile people have returned to center cities attracted by cultural amenities, the convenience of walkable areas and active commercial and entertainment districts. Where culture-led regeneration has occurred as a capital-intensive strategy of public and private developers, results have been mixed. Many of these efforts have been considered successful on the level of attracting investment, residents with higher incomes, retail business and rebuilding property tax bases. However, their benefits have primarily accrued to property owners, developers, investors and more well-heeled incoming residents, while rising costs of housing and other factors have forced existing lower-income residents to leave, even if their employment remained in the immediate area.

Many rural communities have experienced abandonment. Farming, resource extraction

and other rural-based industries—even when expanding—require fewer workers. External development forces have brought resorts, vacation homes, entertainment attractions, casinos and other non-producing development requiring service workers. Ownership is rarely vested locally and profits rarely stay in rural communities.

*We are hoping that we can salvage a culture out of chaos—chaos being all of this madness that is coming to the coast. There are a number of rural communities in that madness that we hope we can preserve as well as sustain.*

*—Emory Shaw Campbell, Penn Center, St. Helena Island, SC*

An expanding body of international research has begun to uncover relationships between the growth of the creative economy and the growth of economic inequity. Meanwhile, enthusiasm among policy makers for the emerging creative economy has rarely included discussion of equitable development or the sustainability of communities. Gentrification and dislocation of the poor have often followed creative economy initiatives, particularly those centered on large-scale and flagship-style cultural district development projects.

In areas with depressed property values, where investors took no interest and municipalities could not summon the resources to make change, community regeneration efforts were often initiated by residents, entrepreneurs and nonprofit organizations that had a stake in community life. Grassroots efforts, such as naturally occurring cultural districts, have had great impact in rebuilding some communities and in providing the capacity and social capital to propel economic growth and to shape subsequent municipal or developer-driven efforts.

*With respect to social justice and equity, are we replicating conventional models or welcoming new equity to tap incredible cultural assets?*

*—Roberta Uno, Ford Foundation*

## **“Flagship” versus “naturally occurring” cultural districts**

Cities and towns in virtually every corner of the United States have seen the emergence of cultural districts during the past few decades. They are sometimes called cultural clusters, arts districts, artist districts, entertainment districts, cultural corridors, or creative clusters and sometimes they’re known by ethnic community designations. They vary widely in their identities and are diverse in their origins.

*Cities are always looking for the “Next Big Thing”—we’re trying to get them to look more closely at [the assets] they already have.*

*—Beth Siegel, Mt. Auburn Associates*

Some cultural districts came about through major public and/or private investment strategies with high-profile cultural facilities designed to stimulate residential and commercial real estate development. Known as flagship cultural districts, they generally focus on consumption of high-end culture and retail goods and are focused on the identity of major arts and/or entertainment venues such as a performing arts center, museum,



sports facility, or aquarium. These institutionally based districts rarely engage existing residents and, in fact, often precipitate economic and social displacement or heighten divisions between haves and have-nots. While numerous policy tools and financial incentives have been available for flagship cultural districts, few support mechanisms exist or have been applied to grassroots efforts or naturally occurring cultural districts.

*Another important reason to make the distinction is that institutional arts districts are often more visible, whereas naturally occurring ones are more rooted in the neighborhood fabric and might therefore be invisible to those outside the neighborhood*  
—Caron Atlas, Arts + Community Change Initiative

Naturally occurring cultural districts<sup>5</sup>, on the other hand, have grown up “organically” or through small-scale, community-driven investments. Nurtured slowly, they are coordinated once they reach a threshold where a sense of collective identity is achieved. Local coalitions form and leadership emerges. They evolve from the convergence or clustering of cultural organizations and/or artists, or as ethnically specific commercial activity centers such as an urban Chinatown or other culturally defined business district. Still others include older industrial buildings serving as workspace for artists, creative-sector entrepreneurs, craft workshops and small artisanal manufacturing. They generally include nonprofits and small presentation venues as well as creative clusters that combine art production and cultural participation along with small service and retail businesses.

Naturally occurring cultural districts can be described as social networks of creators, consumers, participants and collaborators that exist within geographically defined neighborhoods. They are self-organized, emerge through community-generated action and are cultivated and reinforced by a diverse range of participants and residents over time. Some are market-oriented where arts assert a direct economic impact on their communities. They can serve as anchors for neighborhood-based economies and also function as networks across areas, leveraging arts and culture within a regional economy. Others function in a civic manner, tapping community resources and working toward equity and social justice objectives.<sup>6</sup>

*We have to be careful of the idea of holding artists apart from everyone else versus the idea that everyone can be an artist...and use caution with the term naturally occurring cultural districts, implying some places are cultural districts and others aren't.*  
—Ann Markusen, University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs

In rural areas naturally occurring cultural districts may be dispersed over a wider region where furniture makers or specialty food producers, for example, have established a known style or quality, or where a musical genre and set of venues draw attention from far and wide. The community or region's identity remains rooted in distinctive cultural practices or products.

*[Rural communities] speak from your assets . . . you are about solution finding.*  
—Patrice Walker Powell, National Endowment for the Arts

Naturally occurring cultural districts grow up organically outside the active intervention of large public investments and/or major private development. As geographically

<sup>5</sup> The term “naturally occurring cultural districts” was adapted from “naturally occurring retirement communities,” a construct used in urban planning to distinguish such areas from planned communities.

<sup>6</sup> Drawn from roundtable discussion and from Stern and Seifert, *Social Impact of the Arts Project*, University of Pennsylvania.

defined networks they are created by the presence of a cluster of cultural assets. Some are planned as part of initiatives from community-based organizations involved in economic and community development, education and/or the arts. Naturally occurring cultural districts evolve more organically in the context of their neighborhoods, tapping into and strengthening clusters of creative assets. They stimulate a combination of social, civic and economic benefits within communities and across them.

*I think there's that inherent responsibility that comes with growing up in a cultural community . . . really a sense that you will be involved in the art.*  
—Theresa Secord, Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance

For the roundtable discussions a naturally occurring cultural district was defined as a neighborhood or place with a set of sociocultural qualities that can generate community and economic benefits. In urban areas, such a district is generally characterized as follows:

- **dense:** high-cluster area that connects cultural groups, artists and other small businesses and community groups
- **inclusive:** broad definition of arts and culture in both creation and participation and a recognition of the vitality of endogenous cultural producers
- **dynamic:** clusters are fluid, organic and constantly changing creative ecologies
- **diverse:** value inclusion and people advocating on their own behalfs
- **grassroots:** growing naturally out of the community's cultural assets
- **self-organized:** not imposed from outside or through economic initiatives
- **networked:** density, diversity and participation generate social capital, social networks and community capacity

*We grew up in a system with a private property model, yet we had commons that we shared. . . . [We're] refuting that we don't know how to share or work together and the first thing we need to say is that we are not divided—rural and urban.*  
—Julie Ristau, *On the Commons*

While some attributes in the preceding list, such as density, don't fit as neatly in a rural context, rural cultural districts may also be characterized by:

- historic associations with, or identities based on, unique cultural practices or products
- the broadest definition of culture that includes outdoor practices, such as fishing, hunting and seasonal recreation, as well as agricultural or food specialties
- geographic regions defined by natural features, indigenous flora and fauna or historic patterns of settlement.



## Profiles of the Roundtables

### **Roundtable at Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, New York, NY, May 8, 2009**

*Sponsors:*

Pratt Center for Community Development, Arts + Community Change Initiative and Fourth Arts Block.

*Case Studies:*

Bronx Cultural Corridor, Bronx, NY; Fourth Arts Block, New York, NY; Asian Community Development Corporation, Boston, MA.

*Focus:*

Identifying characteristics of naturally occurring cultural districts and exploring which policies support them and which hinder them.

### **Neighborhood Funders Group Annual Conference Panel Presentation Creating a Social Compact by Nurturing Organic Cultural Districts, New Orleans, LA, October 14, 2009**

*Sponsor:*

Ford Foundation.

*Case Studies:*

Ashé Cultural Center, New Orleans, LA; East Bay Community Foundation, Oakland, CA; Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, Seattle, WA.

*Focus:*

How funders can best support naturally occurring cultural districts as part of strengthening neighborhoods and furthering cultural equity and community change.

### **Surdna Foundation Roundtable, New York, NY, June 15–16, 2010**

*Sponsor:*

Surdna Foundation

*Case Studies:*

Asian Arts Initiative, Philadelphia, PA; Central Baltimore Partnership, Baltimore, MD; El Puente, Brooklyn, NY; Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, Brooklyn, NY; O. C. Haley Boulevard Merchants and Business Association, New Orleans, LA; University Cultural Center Association, Detroit, MI; Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, Seattle, WA.

*Focus:*

How arts and cultural districts, particularly those defined as “naturally occurring” cultural districts, can function as an equitable cultural and economic development strategy for communities; and how philanthropic investment could help more fully realize this emergent field’s potential.

## **Roundtable at the J. M. Kaplan Fund, New York, NY, August 12, 2010**

### *Sponsors:*

Arts + Community Change Initiative and Fourth Arts Block;  
Resulted in New York City NOCD Working Group.

### *Case Studies:*

Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, Brooklyn, NY; Fourth Arts Block, New York; El Puente Green Light District, Brooklyn, NY; Made in Midtown/Design Trust for Public Spaces; Queens Museum of Art / Corona Plaza, Queens, NY.

### *Focus:*

Identifying public policy recommendations and, with several elected officials in attendance, planning how they could be put into action.

## **Leveraging Culture to Build Communities and Economies Los Angeles, April 4, 2011**

### *Sponsors:*

LA Commons, Los Angeles Country Arts Commission, Department of Cultural Affairs, Thai Community Development Center.

### *Hosts:*

Los Angeles Country Arts Commission, Department of Cultural Affairs.

*Case Studies:* Broadway Arts Center and Department of Cultural Affairs; East Village Arts District, City of Long Beach, CA; Leimert Park Village/Crenshaw Corridor Business Improvement District; San Pedro Arts, Culture and Entertainment District; Thai Community Development Center.

### *Focus:*

Urban planning and economic development strategies that might best support the growth of naturally occurring cultural districts to the benefit of residents, local businesses, artists and arts organizations.

## **Rural Roundtable in conjunction with Rural Assembly, June 28, 2011**

### *Sponsors:*

Arts + Community Change Initiative, Arts & Democracy Project, Center for Rural Strategies, InCommons.

### *Host:*

Archibald Bush Foundation.

### *Case Studies:*

Appalshop and the STAY Project, Whitesburg, KY; the Arnaudville Experiment, Arnaudville, LA; Llano Grande Center, Edcouch, TX; Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, New Town, ME; Penn Center, St. Helena Island, SC; Festival Theatre, St. Croix, WI.

### *Focus:*

To consider the role of culture in the revitalization of rural communities and how naturally occurring cultural districts function in rural contexts.

Participants considered a variety of questions during the roundtables, such as:

- How does one organize and support naturally occurring cultural districts in a manner that honors their natural growth and development?
- In what ways can community members have a voice in local decisions?
- How do we generate and equitably distribute investment while preserving neighborhoods and avoiding displacement?
- What kinds of relationships do these initiatives have to community planning, placemaking, housing, tourism, neighborhood revitalization and cultural policy?
- What kinds of relationships do these initiatives have to a viable and robust economic strategy, including economic development, education and workforce development?
- How are these districts economic drivers? Who is benefiting from this economy? How do we make sure that the economy created is open and inclusive?
- How can arts and culture be supported as an ecology rather than a hierarchy?
- What outcomes are we looking for? Social capital? Social change? Economic development? How would we measure them?
- How do rural geography, density, networks and pace of change vary from urban areas and how do these differences affect the practice of and support for this work?

## Emerging Values and Practices

Naturally occurring cultural districts represented in the roundtable discussions expressed and exemplified a series of underlying values important in their organizing strategies. They fuse culture and community building with placemaking and economic development. Shared characteristics show that they are:

**Rooted in community-based cultures and identity.** Artists, small businesses and non-profit organizations shape formal and informal networks and serve as effective anchors or hubs. They are well connected to and serve their communities and the cultural practices emerging from the people in those places. These actors represent a diverse and interdependent cultural ecology rather than a hierarchy. They coalesce around an identity that may be cultural or place based. The identity may evolve over time or come as a result of grassroots planning and sometimes designation by a local municipality.

*We can't forget who we're talking about when we talk about creative entrepreneurs—where they come from, what their culture is.*

*—Amalia Mesa-Baines, California State University Monterey Bay*

**Built on asset-based strategies.** Naturally occurring cultural districts are by definition asset based. They build on their human, physical, locational, historic and other assets. They identify and incorporate endogenous strengths, resources, identity, talents, partnerships, organizations and relationships engaging people in the process of discovery and problem solving rather than adopting or imposing external models. The arts often serve as a form of community process to facilitate change as much as a practice or product to consume.

*It's the discordant note that makes music more interesting. That's what artists do—make the discordant notes evident.*

*—Gaye Hamilton, Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism*

**Bridging diverse cultures, ages and economic means.** When crossing sector boundaries and activating relationships within geographic areas—whether urban neighborhoods or rural regions—naturally occurring cultural districts build bridges rarely encountered yet essential for the successful growth of both local social and economic capital. They primarily involve locally owned businesses, nonprofits, public agencies and individual entrepreneurs, including artists. Cultural activities often involve schools and youth (which helps to connect parents) and local arts organizations can effectively connect with youth culture and get young people involved as future citizens and leaders.

*We need to be real about who is in the region: How do we get people to stay? How do we include LGBTQ youth?*

*—Ada Smith, Appalachian Media Institute / STAY Project*

**Including and recognizing cultures equitably.** Through inclusive practices, naturally occurring cultural districts work to generate a more equitable distribution of economic, civic, social and cultural opportunities and benefits for existing community stakeholders. They recognize a broad definition of culture, include traditional practices as well

as creative expression and incorporate artists and creative manufacturing. They engage immigrants, newcomers and long-term residents alike. They provide a network or vehicle for community members to have a voice in major decisions affecting them, including planning and development.

*I think that, by making those connections to who we are as a people and identity tied to place, we can begin to change the ways that institutions function.*

*—Delia Pérez, Llano Grande Center for Research and Development*

**Led by empowered local leadership.** Local leaders are effective in connecting sectors and disciplines and they bridge cultural and economic barriers such as race, language, tenure in the community, age and economic class. Leadership rises up from the community, engaging broad community interests and representing less-heard voices. Local leaders think and plan with a long-term perspective and value inclusion as much as immediate results. Grassroots or bottom-up efforts, when supported and matched by municipal leadership from the top down, are particularly effective.

*Our partners are the drivers and carry out the work. Our organization is the network, the facilitator.*

*—Garland Thomas, Central Baltimore Partnership*

**Increasing civic capacity through cross-sector partnerships.** Naturally occurring cultural districts provide an effective vehicle for stakeholders to work together to build strong social capital and civic capacity—key ingredients for creating sustainable and prosperous local economies. Local partnerships between arts, business, community development and other institutions build a more sustainable base of power because they can mobilize local assets and balance more perspectives and interests in planning and policy making.

## Key Strengths and Contributions to Communities

Throughout the course of the roundtable discussions, a number of benefits were cited from the work of naturally occurring cultural districts and the multiple partners engaged in their realization. Generally they play a critical role in revitalizing the sense of community spirit and connections among diverse stakeholders. They improve blighted and abandoned neighborhoods or town centers, repurpose historic buildings and bring economic activity into neglected areas.

*It's important for funders to take the time to discover what is occurring in the arts beyond the circle of organizations that they fund. Often there are rich artistic and cultural practices that do not engage with foundations. Sometimes you can discover these groups through other arenas, such as social justice, immigrant and refugee projects, faith-based community organizing, community centers and by just poking around in neighborhoods.*

*—Diane Sanchez, East Bay Community Foundation*

Ultimately, naturally occurring cultural districts improve the quality of life, generate new tax revenues, reduce crime and contribute to creative and cultural growth. Often they contribute to education, develop new leaders and bridge racial and generational divides. They utilize and improve existing building stock and help guide new development that better fits community needs, aspirations and identity. Because they are locally led and emerge through community-based efforts, they contribute to social cohesion while improving neighborhood conditions. This stands in contrast to externally driven or flagship-style approaches in which real estate development and replacement of older properties are designed to cater to new residents while producing profits that leave the community or region. This approach often weakens community bonds or polarizes older and newer residents.

Naturally occurring cultural districts have demonstrated a variety of benefits that typically:

**Create collective efficacy.** The capacity of residents to self-organize in response to crisis and/or in response to opportunity is strengthened. Crises can include mounting deterioration or crime, or more sudden issues stemming from natural disasters or pending demolition of housing or iconic community treasures. Opportunities might include access to space or services, leveraging market opportunities and economies of scale. Naturally occurring cultural districts frequently grow social and civic networks that represent the needs and goals of a community within a geographic area or who share an ethnic identity. These networks often organize stakeholders to advocate on behalf of shared needs or challenges, aggregate best practices, or provide mutual assistance and support.

*By example:*

**El Puente\*\***, translated as *The Bridge*, takes a leadership role in its community in the southside of **Brooklyn's Williamsburg**. Where crime and deterioration had threatened residents, now rapid development and economic dislocation are the greater challenge. El Puente organizes neighbors and takes on issues related to health, youth development, environmental justice and the rebuilding of public spaces. Combining culture, the arts and community-organizing strategies, El Puente, like the **Asian Arts Initiative\*\*** in **Philadelphia's Chinatown District**, serves as



El Puente. Williamsburg, Brooklyn.





a focal point or hub for community networking and collective action. While both organizations are rooted in ethnic communities, they remain committed to their geographic areas and to bridging diverse populations through the arts and through their response to issues, including gentrification, jobs and environmental quality that threaten the fabric, identity and health of their neighborhoods.

Asian Arts Initiative in Philadelphia's Chinatown District.

*Should we be equitably distributing resources, or concentrating in key areas?*  
—Karly Katona, LA County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas

**Provide sites of community visioning and planning.** Within naturally occurring cultural districts, relationships are built across sectors and social groups and around aspirations for an improved quality of life. Bringing people together to clarify and articulate these aspirations is one thing some cultural district partners contribute. Community organizing strategies are often used to help bring about change regarding issues of local concern. Social entrepreneurs or local leaders see when their district is ripe for stakeholders to come together for visioning and planning. They sometimes solicit support from philanthropies or higher education institutions. These efforts both address immediate concerns and serve to build the capacity of communities to organize to better address future challenges. Local arts organization partners often bring skills and practices based on exercising the imagination and translating ideas into visual or performative forms.

*By example:*

Like many nonprofit arts organizations, [Ashé Cultural Arts Center](#)\*\* in New Orleans's [Central City Neighborhood](#) promotes local African, Caribbean and African American art and artists and has been a community gathering place for many years. When Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, Ashé's building was spared major damage and reopened quickly to serve as an emergency meeting space for the discussion of all kinds of issues affecting area residents—as well as citywide gatherings. Ashé quickly emerged as both an important civic space and an active player in community planning, visioning and organizing. Artists working with Ashé not only provide residents a reason to gather and a reminder of their connections to their culture and communities, they also apply their creative imaginations and skills to help the community envision a new



Ashé Cultural Arts Center. Central City, New Orleans.  
photo credit: Kerry Maloney, The Times-Picayune



future. While no sudden calamity struck [Boston's Chinatown](#), the slow march of real estate pressures threatens the 150-year-old cultural enclave. As a local hub, the [Asian Community Development Corporation \(ACDC\)\\*\\*](#) serves as a developer of low- and mixed-income housing and as a forum to actively engage residents, local businesses and nonprofits in planning. ACDC uses highly innovative strategies, commissioning artists who help long-term residents tell their stories, highlight community cultural histories and connect across language and other cultural barriers.



[Boston's Chinatown](#)

*When planners go into communities they traditionally try to divide things into categories, but communities don't make these divisions. The challenge of planning is not separating out the relationships between community, culture and the environment, but weaving them together.*

*—Ronald Shiffman, Pratt Institute*

**Sustain and build on community diversity.** Strengthening place-based relationships serves to build mutual respect and to preserve cultural and economic diversity in rapidly changing neighborhoods. Arts and culture organization partners, who define culture broadly, have been shown to be an integral part of holistic approaches to community development, bridging and reaffirming diverse cultures. This approach is hallmarked by values of community self-determination, intergenerational bridge building and activating the overlap between civic participation and cultural expression. Community-based cultural organizations often play a key role as district hubs, prioritizing engagement of local residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the process of building and sustaining community. A sustainable community is one in which each resident has equal access to the resources and knowledge that enable him or her to live a safe, healthy and culturally expressive life.

*By example:*

The [Queens Museum of Art\\*\\*](#) takes a lead role in its New York City borough, building on the diversity and energies of stakeholders surrounding [Corona Plaza](#), its neighborhood commercial node. The museum hired a community organizer to build on relationships among highly diverse neighbors who then worked together to produce events focused on health, food, cultural expression and aesthetic improvements (such as cleaning up decades of pigeon waste). These ef-



[A 2007 cleanup event at Corona Plaza in Queens.](#)

forts brought neighbors together to address common issues and promoted an inclusive identity.

*These [naturally occurring cultural districts] already exist, but people there don't always have the awareness and tools to leverage what they have.*

*—Judilee Reed, Leveraging Investments in Creativity*

**Sustain and build on cultural and community heritage.** Historic and heritage preservation is frequently a component or partner with most naturally occurring cultural districts in urban and rural areas. Historic urban core areas, warehouse, or industrial districts often transition to house artists, small nonprofits and creative enterprises. Rural communities with deep-seated cultural traditions find their history to be their greatest asset for future sustainability. Fostering diversity and innovation is not contradictory and does not have to be in opposition to maintaining identity and traditional practices. Successful naturally occurring cultural districts find the synergy between preservation and innovation and between maintaining cultural identity and embracing diversity.

*By example:*

**Thai Community Development Center\*\*** provides an umbrella for a diverse group of low-income residents. Municipal designation of an **East Hollywood** area as **Thai Town** was part of a locally devised economic development strategy that includes and is planned to benefit, residents of all ethnic backgrounds. Activities are designed to include and to measure the benefits for all residents so as to capitalize on a specific ethnic identity while building on relationships across ethnic groups. The success of the district prompted other Los Angeles neighborhoods to seek advice and assistance from Thai CDC, which, along with LA Commons, has mentored several other ethnically identified districts. Resort and vacation development in **St. Helena Island, South Carolina**, threatened to erase the area's rich history of the Gullah culture of freed slaves that blossomed here beginning in the mid-1860s. Having established a heritage conservation district, the **Penn Center\*\*** and other activists are



Thai Town. East Hollywood, Los Angeles.



Penn Center's School Collection conserves a photographic heritage of freed slave life on St. Helena Island, SC..

working to preserve foodways, visual art, spirituality, performance and other compelling cultural forms. Heritage Days Celebrations and stories housed within the Penn Center, the York W. Bailey Museum, aging residents and alumni of the Penn School represent some of the vehicles used by the conservation district.

*We were born of the need for contemporary arts and to be an engine of change.*

*—Luis Croquer Museum of Contemporary Art  
Detroit*

**Foster creativity and innovation.** Innovation is sparked by the diverse and multiple interactions naturally occurring cultural districts can supply. An area that includes artists, cultural workers, creative entrepreneurs, small businesses and community activists, along with a diverse population, provides this kind of environment. Such a concentration of creative people within a geographic community in tandem with low-cost space and stimulating cultural and creative events spawns new connections between people and ideas. Social gathering places for those residing and working in the community, or “third places,” serve to build formal and informal social networks and a marketplace where both ideas and basic needs are found and exchanged.

*By example:*

New York’s **Made in Midtown**\*\* employs a research-based strategy to uncover the depth and range of creative work within the city’s **garment district**. While not an industry in the traditional sense, it is composed of a remarkable array of creative, production and sales workers employed (and many self-employed) through a flexible network. A creative district emerged from this web of entrepreneurs not only to grow jobs but also to stimulate innovation in product design as well as in the manufacturing, marketing and supply chain. Similarly, **Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance**\*\* is a decentralized cottage industry network rooted in tradition yet innovating in every aspect of the survival and growth of their craft. As practitioners gather, share and highlight their aesthetic achievements, new ideas emerge as old ways are carried on.

*I’m deeply skeptical of the rural-urban binary and, with respect to those who note the artistry/culture tension, I’m skeptical of this binary as well...I feel that some of the most innovative and challenging contemporary rural art cocates that artistry/culture binary.*  
—Matt Fluharty, *The Art of the Rural*



Made in Midtown investigates the viability of small businesses networks in Manhattan’s garment district.



Intergenerational exchange leads to commerce through the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance.

**Building collaborations and partnerships.** Roundtable participants cited naturally occurring cultural districts for their unusual ability to cross artistic, community building and economic development activity. The success of districts is based in effective cross-cutting partnerships that bridge small business, nonprofits, government, diverse residents, neighborhood associations and others. Small arts groups and other community-based nonprofits, sometimes take on leadership in these efforts. They are often uniquely positioned to foster connections and working relationships across racial, economic and institutional divides.



*By example:*

The [Central Baltimore Partnership](#)\*\* brings together multiple players within a defined geographic area to leverage expertise and resources toward development of successful cultural districts. This consortium-based organization marshals enormous collective resources of a variety of partners large and small—from Johns Hopkins University to neighborhood theater groups—while operating on a shoestring budget. The partnership contributes community-organizing and community development expertise, leaving the actual lifting to their members or the municipal, institutional, or corporate resources they leverage.



[Central Baltimore Partnership.](#)

*Our interest is in long-term sustainability of artists as residents, making sure they are at the table as well—not just window dressing*  
—Lynn Stern, *Surdna Foundation*

**Improve physical conditions of local neighborhoods.** Through the organic growth of local retail and the magnetism of aesthetically interesting districts, neglected commercial corridors come back to life. This placemaking activity gradually builds on the reuse of historic or abandoned properties often by small arts groups, artists and small-business entrepreneurs through sweat equity and small-scale investments. In the aggregate this activity creates a rejuvenated sense of identity and attracts new business and new investment.

*By example:*

[Leimert Park Village](#)\*\*, a small-scale, walkable commercial and residential district in south-central Los Angeles, was built in the 1920s for low- and moderate-income resi-



[Leimert Park Village, Los Angeles.](#)

dents. After serious decline that started in the 1960s, artists moved in and began long-term investment through sweat equity and organizing to oust drug addicts and prostitutes and to re-create an attractive village environment. The neighborhood began to re-emerge in the late 1980s as more artists, some successful in Hollywood, set up shop. [The Greater Leimert Park Village/Crenshaw Corridor Business Improvement District](#) was formed and city designation as a cultural district achieved.

New private and public investment continues to foster a destination and a working artist community. As a nonprofit planning and development agency in [Midtown Detroit](#), [University Cultural Center Association](#)\*\* (UCCA) serves as a formal network, coordinating efforts in real estate management, marketing, public space maintenance, beautification, security services, housing, retail develop-



University Cultural Center Association. Detroit, MI.

ment and arts programming. UCCA focuses on revitalizing the Midtown neighborhood, an area that experienced significant abandonment and disinvestment. Its initiatives include historic property renovation, mixed-income housing development, a system of community gardens and walkways and more recently an array of small business development services for artists and local entrepreneurs. Among the area's anchors is the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, which serves as a creative gathering space

and engine of change in a community trying to reweave fragmented urban spaces.

*[These are] community economic development strategies that place people and fundamental needs of residents at the center.*

*—Chanchanit Martorell, Thai Community Development Center*

**Attract visitors as contributors to the local economy.** As clusters of nonprofit and for-profit cultural assets, naturally occurring cultural districts attract people to events, retail services, or simply neighborhood experiences. The areas coalesce and build a strong identity, formally and informally. Through this bond, local actors often begin to work together to increase marketing and enhance the visitor experience, thereby benefiting local businesses and neighborhoods by bringing in new economic, social and knowledge resources.

*By example:*

The **South Bronx Cultural Corridor**\*\* was designated in 2001 and dubbed “Gateway to the New Bronx.” Led by the **Bronx Council on the Arts**, the four-mile corridor highlights artists and diverse immigrant populations, as well as a variety of cultural and sports facilities. A variety of marketing efforts, events and the operation of the Bronx Culture Trolley bring new attention and new visitors. An area of mixed-income housing and otherwise hidden cultural assets is similarly highlighted by the **East Village Arts District**\*\* in **Long Beach, California**. Special events, a festival and the monthly Artwalk bring visitors to galleries, shops, restaurants and artist studios while strengthening the network of participating organizations.



Residents tour their neighborhood during a Bronx Council on the Arts' Culture Trolley event.

*We're carrying on stewardship of a place that has been going on for about 100 years; it came long before us.*

*—Danette Olsen, St. Croix Festival Theatre*



East Village Arts District. Long Beach, CA.

**Contribute to community stability.** Through their work in community organizing and bridge-building, naturally occurring cultural districts help build social capital, maintain connections among residents and contribute to retaining active community members. They can also steer or mitigate development driven from outside their neighborhood or community and coordinate efforts to fight displacement. Rather than placing blame for gentrification or exploitation of natural resources, local coalitions can focus efforts on solutions. Some work to generate and equitably distribute investment so as to preserve neighborhood assets and bring together nonprofits, artists, small business and others as partners in neighborhood stability.

*By example:*

In many rural communities, stability is related to the retention, or attraction of young people. The community of [Whitesburg](#), deep in eastern [Kentucky's](#) Appalachian Mountains, is home to the [STAY Project](#)<sup>\*\*</sup>, a regional network of young people ages 14 to 25 working to create, advocate for and participate in safe, engaging and inclusive communities throughout Appalachia. It is based at the Appalachian Media Institute, a program of [Appalshop](#), a 40-year-old nonprofit center that connects the region through traditional cultural expression via filmmaking, music production, arts education and other programs. The Stay Project promotes leadership development to grow and retain emerging Appalachian leaders. College-educated youth from the region have returned to the area to work in Appalshop's programs and start other local enterprises. Within the urban context of [Seattle](#) and its [International District](#), multiple generations of immigrants, mostly from Pacific Rim countries, remain con-



[STAY Project](#), a program of [Appalshop](#). Whitesburg, KY.



[Wing Luke Museum](#) is a stabilizing entity in [Seattle's](#) [International District](#). Seattle, WA.  
Photo: [Lara Swimmer](#)

connected through business and culture. Founded in 1967 to preserve and share the stories of multiple ethnic immigrant groups, [Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience](#)<sup>\*\*</sup> uses highly participatory techniques as it develops and presents exhibits and other programs. An economically challenged area for decades, the International District first struggled to remain alive and more recently struggles with encroaching redevelopment incompatible with its ethnic and mixed-use identity. A 2008 expansion into a historically significant building solidified Wing Luke's presence and helps to coalesce the identity and significance of the district for its constituent populations.

*There is a need for an expanded definition of economic activity, including the small business role that arts groups play to sustain the local economy. We also need to consider the obstacles facing small businesses, including government.*  
—[Diana Reyna](#), [New York City Council](#), [Small Business Committee](#)

**Create new economic opportunity.** Economic activity can come through unique culturally based products, development of local retail and creative services and highly skilled and niche-oriented custom manufacturing. This creative-sector mix has emerged in many places as an important component of a community's economic base. Although traditional large-scale manufacturing has declined as a source of employment and no longer exists within most urban centers or neighborhoods, creative entrepreneurs and artisanal manufacturers—often based in the arts or traditional cultural forms—are making significant contributions to their communities. In turn, these hubs help to restore older commercial nodes, revive their retail position and attract new investment and new markets for local products.

*By example:*

Occupying a number of industrial spaces considered obsolete a couple of decades ago, the [Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center\\*\\*](#) (GMDC) in [North Brooklyn's Greenpoint](#) neighborhood brings new life and new employment to the area. GMDC considers the reemergence of light manufacturing and retention of artisans in cities to be of paramount importance to the preservation and rejuvenation of mixed-use communities. Over 500,000 square feet of space redeveloped by GMDC now houses more than 100 small businesses employing over 500 people in once-abandoned buildings. Workers in traditional handmade products, in tandem with innovative creative entrepreneurs, produce goods marketed locally, regionally and internationally. These “clean” industries are compatible with residential, retail and office-based environments, forming new communities within older industrial infrastructure. Similarly, the [Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard Merchants and Business Association\\*\\*](#) leads the way in transforming a historic retail area in [Central City New Orleans](#). Designated as a Main Street program and with a State of Louisiana Cultural District designation, the neighborhood works to bring abandoned retail infrastructure back to life, filling the needs of local residents as well as attracting customers from a greater area. A commercially focused land trust is one of the vehicles the group is pursuing to stabilize local business. Partnerships with Ashé Cultural Arts Center and other groups provide regular events and a meeting place for those working to restore the city's vibrancy.



GMDC. Greenpoint, Brooklyn.



Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard. Central City, New Orleans.

*My great-grandfather started this business and dealt with all of these intense divisions and animosities. Serving on the Chamber of Commerce, I see old timers still holding on to some of the divisions.*

*—Amy Frischmon, Wild Mountain Taylors Falls Recreation*



**Build the capacity of local cultural and civic organizations.** Cross-sector partnerships help build the identity of a district and strengthen the collective efficacy of its stakeholders. This collaboration in turn helps individual organizational members grow their capacity. A hub organization, whether a community-based cultural center, a CDC, or a business association, often takes on an expanded role, learns a new set of skills and attracts a broader base of support. Through the process local social and civic infrastructure is fostered.

*By example:*

The **Fourth Arts Block\*\***, representing **East 4th Street in Manhattan**, serves as a formal advocate and service provider for a diverse constituency of nearly three dozen arts and



Fourth Arts Block's annual FAB! Festival exhibits the work of many arts and culture organizations on East 4th Street



St. Croix Festival Theatre. St. Croix Falls, WI.

culture organizations and other area stakeholders such as small businesses and civic groups. Together they have secured designation as a city cultural district and ownership of eight properties for their members. They assisted in the renovation of 100,000 square feet of arts space and marketed the area as an important destination. An hour northeast from Minneapolis–St. Paul, the **Saint Croix River** demarcates Minnesota and Wisconsin. This National Scenic Riverway is rich in natural assets, including multiple local and state parks (in both states), as well as privately owned recreation areas, wineries, community-supported farms and pick-your-own orchards and berry farms, among other features. As the center of community culture, recognized by locals old and new, those who manage these assets join forces with networks of ceramic artists, crafters, musicians and others to enhance the tourism and experience economy. The 22-year-old **St. Croix Festival Theatre\*\***, in downtown St. Croix Falls, at the demographic

hub of the valley, occupies a historic municipally built auditorium. The organization connects the natural, cultural, commercial and historic assets strengthening local and regional capacity to both attract visitors and address needs of local residents.

*Young people want to step forward and tell their stories across diverse places; tell their stories and take them back to their communities.*

*—Dee Davis, Center for Rural Strategies*

**Engage young people in community life.** Many community-based cultural organizations offer programs and activities that draw on contemporary youth culture and engage

youth across lines of race and class. Those organizations that are part of naturally occurring cultural districts generally engage youth beyond simple involvement in arts activities, expanding that engagement to build a variety of relationships centered on social and civic interests and including opportunities to develop and take leadership. The future of both urban and rural communities depends on constructive engagement of young people. The unique mix of cross-sector networks and contemporary cultural connections within naturally occurring cultural districts forms an especially appealing and constructive environment for youth.

*By example:*

As a school-based program in [southern Texas](#), the [Llano Grande Center for Research and Development](#)\*\* engages students in community development and leadership programs to achieve multiple goals. Classroom and extracurricular arts and media projects better prepare students for college entry, engage youth in current civic affairs and bring college graduates back to their hometown. The group boasts competitive college placements and the majority of former students have returned to the local workforce as professionals and contributors to civic life. Social networking technology helps Llano Grande maintain contact with native-born residents who have moved away and keeps them connected and involved.



[Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, Texas.](#)

## Key Issues Facing Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts

The roundtables included rich and varied discussions about the challenges and the opportunities of this emergent field. Participants identified a range of issues and questions facing naturally occurring cultural districts. As these topics were articulated by practitioners, policy makers, philanthropists and others, they represent various perspectives:

**Honoring and preserving “organic” growth.** Given the unique mix of local actors coming together in the formation of naturally occurring cultural districts, such districts need to be organized and supported in ways that honor their organic growth and development. Major interventions driven by outside interests are generally not in their best interests. If municipalities or philanthropies create and impose highly formal processes, structures, or expectations, local organizers may be presented with obstacles they’re not prepared to address. These can disrupt their sometimes-fragile cross-sector relationships.

*The conundrum is, how does one organize these districts in a manner that honors their natural growth and development, without creating a process or structure that is so formal that natural growth is no longer possible?*  
—Claudine Brown, Nathan Cummings Foundation

**Capacity for sustained organizing.** Small organizations that need leadership in naturally occurring cultural districts are challenged by lack of time, resources and capacity to sustain their organizing. Sometimes they lack the experience required to get support from local government or philanthropies. While some small cultural organizations demonstrate an instinctive capacity to bring people together across a variety of boundaries, including business groups, cultural and educational institutions, city agencies and resident groups, they are generally not prepared to serve as leaders across sectors or outside their own silos. Other local leaders are often unprepared to employ and lack access to, the planning and organizing strategies needed to carry out placemaking and creative industry development—activities that require multiple partners.

**Identity and formal designation.** If a geographically or ethnically defined area projects a formal identity through branding or designation by a local civic or business association, local government agency, or other group, how does the identity emerge and does it represent the community’s diversity, history and best interests? The Los Angeles roundtable in particular discussed the pros and cons of formal designation. Thai Town in Los Angeles was cited as a positive example wherein the Thai CDC led the designation and gained consensus of the community, including residents and businesses not of Thai culture or origin. Community leaders from San Pedro, on the other hand, expressed concern over the heightened prominence that followed from the designation. A



San Pedro, CA.

California beach community with a historically large population of artists, the district's leadership felt the lack of artist property ownership made the creative community vulnerable to unintended consequences. This includes a potential escalation in the cost of real estate that results from greater attention to their arts district.

*There is little understanding of the value of diverse levels of creative and cultural activity to the cohesion and economy of a specific neighborhood.*  
—Tamara Greenfield, Fourth Arts Block

**Finding a role within planning, governance and economic development.** Within the rubric of municipal planning and policy, grassroots cultural districts face the challenge of not fitting the mold. They are cross-sector, mixed-use and multi-purposed. They may define themselves within a culture or arts rubric and are not fully appreciated for other change they foster. Their grassroots or decentralized leadership rarely has a singular relationship with municipal government. They may connect with agencies such as planning, economic development, cultural affairs and the mayor or local council member's office. Roundtable participants named challenges that hindered naturally occurring cultural districts from developing formal relationships with their municipalities, beginning with lack of time to navigate labyrinthine bureaucracies. They also recognized opportunities where they can model holistic approaches and become catalysts for agency collaboration. While place-based development can create a sense of progress and momentum within a community, it was pointed out that it doesn't always translate to real economic growth or other opportunities for residents.

**Assessing outcomes.** Identifying measurable outcomes produced by naturally occurring cultural districts has not been easy. While they seek to improve the livability of neighborhoods, build social capital and revitalize neglected real estate, naturally occurring cultural districts have few tools or metrics to assess their progress. Established and commonly used measures and data sources do not adequately capture the cultural, civic and social impacts of naturally occurring cultural districts. Formal economic measures are rarely nuanced enough to analyze the impacts of artists, creative industries and cultural districts at a local or neighborhood level. While there is growing interest in cultural districts and creative economy initiatives among economists, planners and policy makers around the world, limited research has been conducted.

*We often work with very narrow definitions of economy. How do we broaden that to include households, sustainability, the environment?*  
—David O'Fallon, Minnesota Humanities Center

**Community stability.** The phenomenon or mythology of artist-led gentrification was on the minds of roundtable participants. If artists, cultural groups and local businesses do not own the land or buildings from which they are operating, development driven from outside and/or increasing real estate prices can force them out. Many neighborhoods and many artists have had this experience. The potential role of artists in gentrification—both as catalysts and as displaced parties—was a concern throughout discussions of urban communities. Artists and small groups take up residence in undervalued, often deteriorated real estate, bringing aesthetic improvement and interest to an area that developers capitalize. Values rise and artists, along with other longtime or poor residents



and small shopkeepers, get pushed out. Participants wrestled with how to generate and equitably distribute investment while preserving neighborhoods and making artists partners in neighborhood stability.

**Sustaining services and amenities.** Fully functioning neighborhoods offer residents, local workers and visitors a complement of services, retail outlets, jobs, cultural activities, access to transit and other amenities. Many emerging cultural districts are not able to provide such a range of amenities. At another point on the continuum, existing, affordable locally owned restaurants, coffee shops, retail food, repair and other community services can be pushed out when real estate prices escalate. Can these amenities strengthen the area, serve local residents, attract visitors and remain viable? Is there affordable real estate that allows them to thrive and contribute to local economies and community life?

*We have to talk about sustainability in our arts districts. How can artists continue to live in the district after it becomes economically viable?*  
—James Allen Preston, San Pedro SPACE District

**Municipal capacity and cooperation.** Municipalities across the United States vary widely in their abilities to understand and address the needs and benefits of naturally occurring cultural districts. Some lack will or capacity to plan and lead efforts to engage stakeholders or to steer investment in ways that provide equitable benefits. Major civic investments in culture and cultural districts are often directed to flagship institutions or iconic edifices designed to attract expansive real estate development. These generally do not benefit or include emerging majorities of people of color, immigrants, or low-income populations. Participants at the Surdna roundtable in particular pointed out that communities spend inordinate amounts of time looking for outside solutions rather than looking more closely at building on what they already have. A challenge for naturally occurring cultural districts is to find planners and policy makers willing to marry local creative, cultural and entrepreneurial assets with municipal resources and to support inclusive planning.

**Recognition of local assets.** Local leadership can find it difficult to acknowledge and utilize the ingenuity and creativity of local residents or to recognize and build upon their existing resources. Their challenge is to identify their assets and find common points of interest among local stakeholders around which to organize. Appreciating the roles of endogenous cultural producers as opposed to importing talent and cultural products requires a big shift in thinking for those who assume outside models or answers are better. This requires local actors to redefine and reframe their assets and to work together in new ways.

*In LA, we tend to be segregated in our conversations—geographically, ethnically, linguistically, by discipline—which can be a challenge.*  
—Karen Mack, LA Commons

**Access to financing tools and strategies.** Changes in real estate values and capital financing have made it increasingly difficult to create affordable space for artists and creative entrepreneurs. Many artists and naturally occurring cultural districts have

benefited from spaces developed before the recent credit crunch. Local nonprofits and businesses face capacity issues in accessing financial tools. How do we build local infrastructures so that both community development corporations and arts groups can gain access to these financing tools? And how can intermediaries with financial capacities offer technical assistance to community-based groups? Complex legal work and partnerships, along with risk taking, become necessary to leverage philanthropic, public- and private-sector resources. These are beyond the reach of most grassroots groups.

## Recommendations

From each of the roundtables a variety of recommendations emerged. Some were explicit and detailed, others broad. Others raised questions that remain unanswered. All drew on experiences of the planners, policy makers, nonprofit leaders, artists, researchers, funders and other leaders who participated. Many comments were directed to policy makers, some to funders, some to practitioners who are implementing, managing, or acting as partners within cultural districts and some to researchers.

The recommendations are organized here within four broad and sometimes interrelated areas: *planning and policy, practice, investment and future research.*

### Planning and policy

**Apply context-sensitive approaches.** Many roundtable participants were in agreement that planning practices, policy making and investing in the context of naturally occurring cultural districts must begin with the commitment to “do no harm.” These districts are generally self-organized and have developed their own ecologies or organizational cultures—ones that can be easily upset when institutional or municipal cultures, or large infusions of capital, enter the picture. Naturally occurring cultural districts require planning practices, policies and support responsive to conditions on the ground and flexible enough to accommodate the unique qualities of particular types of clusters. Understanding the focus of a district—ethnic or geographic, consumption or creation-based, often a mix thereof—is an important first step. Engaging key players and stakeholder groups is essential to understand the local culture and to provide assistance that does not destabilize or reinforce historic divisions.

*Part of the challenge [for city planners] is language—understanding and changing the language when it comes to art centers.*

*—James Burks, Special Projects, LA Department of Cultural Affairs*

**Respect and work with local networks.** In many naturally occurring cultural districts, social networks are more important than individual leaders or hierarchies and those networks can be complex. Neighborhoods need bottom-up strengthening, not trickle-down policy. Their networks are usually horizontal—formed around personal, business or cultural connections across sectors, professions and ethnicities. On the other hand, municipal entities and institutions function in vertical silos and have a difficult time engaging with horizontal thinking and relationships.

**Support artists, self-employed workers and entrepreneurs.** As independent contractors and small-business entrepreneurs comprise a growing part of the general workforce—and the creative workforce in particular—new ways of thinking about the needs of independent workers are emerging. These workers often make up a large part of the creative and social energy within naturally occurring cultural districts. A social safety net embedded in tax policies, as well as support systems related to health care, education, affordable work space, employment transition and retirement needs to be addressed. The



contributions of entrepreneurs and independent contractors to local economies have increasingly been recognized. Advocates and trade associations have begun to identify and quantify their economic impacts and to advocate for their role in local economies.

**Recognize diversity as an underlying strength.** Cultural diversity serves as an underlying strength in local economies. Roundtable discussants at the J. M. Kaplan Fund, in particular, emphasized that creativity historically emerges from the cross-cultural intermingling of diverse ideas and diverse peoples. Immigrants with entrepreneurial drive have reinvigorated many communities through naturally occurring cultural districts. Accommodating mixed-use, mixed architectural styles and other creative activity in planning, zoning and regulatory policy can help recharge dormant neighborhoods. Diverse economies that include culturally based small businesses, nonprofits and creative manufacturing and that also incorporate retail and service enterprises, provide more stability in both hot and cool markets.

*Historically in New York City, improvisation and creativity depends on the cross-cultural intermingling of mixtures of diverse people—monocultures do not inspire the same quality of arts and culture making as intermingled cross-cultures. New Orleans is the classic example.*

*— Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen, New York University Asian/Pacific/American Institute*

**Connect policies across silos.** Local government agencies, in particular, as well as philanthropic and educational institutions, can provide better support to naturally occurring cultural districts when they work horizontally across silos to create more integrated strategies and policies. Discussants, particularly at the roundtable at the J. M. Kaplan Fund, recommended that cities convene interagency stakeholders with a focused agenda and clear milestones to create blueprints for support. They advocated for initiatives at the local council or mayoral level to convene agencies—from public health, planning, cultural affairs and transportation—to think about neighborhoods holistically and to always include the arts and cultural affairs at the table. Examples were cited of the recent federal government approach to connecting transit, housing, environment and arts. Cities and philanthropies can create cross-sector opportunities through funding initiatives but may do harm if they force cross-sector activity in a heavy-handed way.

**Provide for mixed-use affordable spaces.** Local zoning and land use policies and other regulatory provisions typically segregate industrial production from retail, residential, service and other functions. This is generally not conducive to artist workspaces or mixed-use “24/7” communities where artists, arts activities, creative-sector workers and creative industry production might thrive. With material goods being produced more cleanly and with a growth in custom manufacturing, cities can consider mixed-use districts with manufacturing taking place within residential zones. Municipalities may need to reevaluate land use policies and processes so as to allow co-location of manufacturing and creative workspace within residential areas. This can benefit working people and low-income communities as well as reduce the need for travel between residence and employment. To protect affordable space, as noted by roundtable participants in New York, agencies might use both regulatory and stewardship models that embed financing mechanisms into the zoning process to capture value that can be used to create funding for creative spaces. Formalized districts designed to grow creative-sector enterprises

and jobs could be established to support this expanding sector. “Creative Enterprise Zones” could focus local policy and investment tools on stimulating and supporting small-scale creative entrepreneurial activity and are a good fit with urban job creation within mixed-use areas.

*We have to capture value as the zoning shifts occur...buying space to lock in protection and the value to be created by that zoning. The city needs to embed financing mechanisms into the land use process so that it's permanent and can generate a revenue stream.*

—Adam Friedman, Pratt Center for Community Development

**Combine regulatory and incentive-based tools.** Public and private financing tools or incentives—historic, industrial, or retail districts—and other designations are commonly used to stimulate economic development. These can be applied to cultural districts. Tax credits for low-income housing, new markets and renovations to historic buildings have also been employed in many places to provide affordable spaces to restore or build community amenities. These are a good complement to the mixed-use character of cultural districts. Specific tools might include industrial zones, business districts, historic districts, tax increment financing, tax abatements and commercial and residential rent control. Roundtable case studies illustrated ways local government and nonprofit agencies and universities have provided targeted and informed investments and technical assistance to overcome regulatory obstacles.

**Designate a municipal liaison.** Neighborhood-based efforts that cross silos have a difficult time finding champions within municipal government. If they connect with cultural affairs, they're pigeonholed in the arts. They can fit awkwardly within an economic development framework. Rarely do neighborhood leaders have the wherewithal to maintain multiple relationships at city hall. A liaison within local government who can navigate across the relevant agencies and manage political relationships is needed to support the breadth of neighborhood issues addressed.

*Artistry and citizenry should be coalesced, not separate. When faced with resistance, your artistry is forced to evolve. Methodology and aesthetics come to play a role in community process.*

—Matthew Glassman, Double Edge Theatre

**Foster community-driven planning.** Inclusive planning efforts engage stakeholders from all segments of a community and can launch effective community organizing efforts. Such planning practices can inform and empower communities while offering the greatest likelihood of success and equitable benefit. It is important in planning to integrate local plans within a larger ecosystem of local and regional planning and to clarify the unique role and potentials that each district can bring to its wider region. Involving a broad mix of community stakeholders and diverse voices through the planning process can further empower individuals and the community as a whole and build community capacity. This can include the design of research and collection of data, as in action research methods. To strengthen multi-stakeholder, integrated and empowered community planning might require changes in how some municipal planning processes are structured. Culture and the arts can contribute when at the table in community plan-

ning and can even bring some creative methodologies for participation. Roundtable participants urged the engagement of local hub or connector organizations, community leadership groups and/or coalitions to take a lead in creative and culturally appropriate participatory planning during the formation of, or major transitions in, naturally occurring cultural districts. It is also helpful to make data (such as the new census data) easily accessible to community organizations with technical assistance in applying and analyzing it.

**Factor in cultural impacts.** Roundtable participants advocated for cultural impacts to be considered in ways similar to how environmental impacts are factored into planning and decisionmaking. Community planning should intentionally integrate artists and diverse cultural communities through multi-stakeholder public processes. Representatives from diverse cultural communities should be at planning and policy tables who can help interpret and articulate the benefits or potentially detrimental impacts on a community's cultural life, including the displacement or dividing of neighborhoods, for example and to reinforce the value of local cultural assets.

*If we are going to make deep shifts we must reveal an alternative compelling vision—something that reflects our own voices, our own histories, our own place.*

*—jessika maria ross, Art of Regional Change, University of California Davis*

**Allocate and sustain accessible space for creative activities.\*\*** Successful naturally occurring cultural districts include a network of affordable, appropriate spaces for social and cultural activities as well as for creative entrepreneurs. Partnerships can make public and private space available for such uses, from empty storefronts and churches, to schools, parks and piers. Opportunities for artists and cultural workers to live and practice in their community depend on a plentiful supply of affordable spaces. Creative policy and targeted funding can ensure that existing cultural assets benefit from and are not displaced by, increases in real estate and commercial value—value they have helped to generate. Developers can be required to work with the local community to integrate community benefits into their designs from the outset to help secure the long-term presence of a local cultural economy.

*Part of artists being seen as oppositional is just us being artists. Institutions listen, but then quantify what we say in a way that cuts the art out of it. We've been a part of processes where artists were engaged, but then the end product cut the artist out and the artist was there, watching from the shadows.*

*—Reuben Caldwell, artist*

**Incorporate preservation of historic assets and other community treasures.** Iconic or symbolic buildings, places and important events can add greater meaning to places and have a profound impact on community cohesion and vitality. When there is such meaning, these assets should be incorporated as central elements in planning and development strategies. Such treasures are often brought to attention or revitalized through public art or capital projects, such as transforming a historic building or public space. Public policy action, as well as strategic investments, can overcome hurdles, or leverage greater value from community treasures. When recognized and included in local strategies and approached through grassroots participatory efforts, these assets can become

a fulcrum to retain diversity, strengthen connection to place, build collaborative capacity and leverage change. They can send a signal of progress and/or rejuvenate the identity of place and the investment stakeholders are willing to make.

## Practice

**Employ strategies that leverage local assets.** Roundtable participants emphasized the importance of identifying and lifting up local cultural assets and neighborhoods' distinctive characteristics. Communities in which numerous grassroots cultural entities come together, share a history and find and organize around points of common interest have greater success at building cohesion and attracting investment. Conditions that bring about successful efforts include districts where cultural and community partners join forces and point to real or potential collective impact.

*When it comes to artists' work spaces and housing, there's a fine line. If you don't fortify work-spaces, along with affordable housing, naturally occurring cultural districts wither on the vine.*

*—José Serrano, NY State Senator, Committee for Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks & Recreation*

**Organize around affordable housing and space for creative work and retail.** Creative or cultural economy initiatives and cultural district development can result in economic displacement in many communities as a result of escalating housing and property values or through a change in identity of place that leaves some residents feeling excluded. Community organizing strategies help protect affordable real estate and build the cohesion and stability that keep people connected to their neighborhoods. Community organizing skills, however, are not always the “first language” for cultural or economic development organizations, but they need to be. Developing knowledge of policy, financing tools, land trusts and other vehicles can also help address displacement and assist with other issues related to cultural and economic equity. In some cities rent reform laws (rent regulations, rent stabilization laws) can be used to stabilize communities and provide space to nurture artists and creative work. Identifying opportunities for rent-to-own partnerships and live-work spaces may be useful options.

**Build cross-sector coalitions.** Cross-sector coalitions have served as key catalysts in the growth of many cultural districts. They create synergy, leverage resources and maintain a balance of interests among stakeholders. In some cases formal coalitions have become hubs for local development or served to create and nurture creative industry clusters. They've helped to ensure consideration of broader interests and a more equitable distribution of benefits. Cross-sector coalitions can also advance more integrated approaches between cultural and community development efforts, promote innovation and enhance outcomes. Engaging in cross-sector dialogues (i.e., cultural, small business, land use, transportation) and forming partnerships to sustain community-based networks are long-term efforts and require investments of time. Building skills and finding time for staff to coordinate coalition efforts will contribute greatly to the success of a

district. Participants at the Surdna and Kaplan roundtables also suggested that cultural organizations that are invested in their districts tap both nonprofit and for-profit developers to help build their cultural assets. Private developers, for example, can provide technical assistance to measure nonprofits' risks and help evaluate whether they should pursue ownership models.

*[Local leaders] must be willing to look beyond formulaic solutions to nontraditional approaches to community building. Maximizing a naturally occurring cultural district requires creative responses to current conditions and recognition of a dynamic environment with ever-changing conditions.*

*—Maurine Knighton, Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone*

**Share best practices and offer peer support.** Cultural districts, creative entrepreneurs, regional planners, small businesses and community-based cultural organizations can benefit from development of best practices, face-to-face meetings with peers and broader transfers of learning. Roundtable participants shared case studies and experiences while explicitly advocating the value of such exchanges. Peer networks among leaders of naturally occurring cultural districts help local leaders harvest learning from economic and policy trends, new research, emerging strategies and evolving challenges and opportunities. They allow practitioners to share innovative practices and new perspectives and they become the basis for field organizing and advocacy. Best practices related to creative industries and clusters, placemaking, the new workforce, coalition building and naturally occurring cultural districts in general are nascent and need to be identified and documented. Learning-based conversations between practitioners, academics, policy makers, philanthropists and others are rare, but they can help form networks. Taking time to visit other neighborhoods and cities, as well as seeking out supportive planners and academics, can be an energizing experience for local leaders. A network can often more effectively find support from philanthropic or educational institutions for convenings, documentation, case studies, structured learning and publications to build and share knowledge.

**Stress diversity and inclusion.** Broader definitions of arts and culture engage a wider base of support. In rural areas more emphasis may be placed on history and traditional crafts and cultural practices as well as interaction with the natural environment and recreational activities. Embracing diverse cultural forms and ethnic groups, as well as age and gender diversity, is critical to long-term social cohesion. Local cultural economies include individual artists and other independent workers, nonprofits, cultural and educational institutions, community-based organizations, artist ensembles and collaboratives, for-profit studios and small businesses, social communities and public spaces. When not viewed as mutually exclusive groups, they can build more social cohesion and social capital. Contributions to the economy by longtime residents, artists, people of color and entrepreneurs become more visible, recognized and honored.

*Our vision is of communities that are sustainable, where people are not displaced, but there is improvement for everyone. How do we create a physical environment for this?*

*—Kim Burnett, Economic Development Consultant*

**Integrate lifelong learning opportunities.** Communities that offer access to affordable



and lifelong learning opportunities find more support for local regeneration efforts and enjoy greater social cohesion. Communities benefit when opportunities for training and peer mentoring are present. Educational offerings should incorporate topics immediately beneficial to communities, including arts, culture, human rights, community-based research, economic development, personal and human development and other skills relevant to the respective place. Parents, children and other family members gain greater social capital as the stewards of local schools and when participating together in educational programs. Young people gain validation as artists, organizers and community leaders. Their acknowledgment and achievement help ensure that the values of diverse cultures are sustained over time.

**Develop strategic communication plans.** Cultural districts that reframe definitions and roles of artists and their relationships to communities can build a stronger identity. The conventional artist/audience duality diminishes the multiplicity of relationships artists actually have in their community. A more robust image of a district is fostered by incorporating a broad and full definition of arts, culture and creative industry, including both the process and the product of artistic and cultural practices. Branding, or a niche identity campaign, may help districts gain traction. Strategic identity building also comes through framing issues as opportunities, not as problems or conflicts. Communities with a strong creative presence, contribute to neighborhood identity and pride. Visual art can enhance every street corner and music and performing arts can take place openly in public and private spaces, enabling the full preservation and celebration of inclusive and indigenous cultural histories. The power of images, stories and creative processes can be leveraged to tell the community's story. Events such as the Naturally Occurring Cultural District tour organized in partnership with OpenHouse New York in spring 2011 and the Bronx Council on the Arts' Culture Trolley raise visibility and support networking.

## Investments

Roundtable participants from all six sessions addressed different ways investments have been or could be helpful to naturally occurring cultural districts. The Neighborhood Funders Group (New Orleans) and Surdna Foundation (New York City) sessions were most focused on investment—both public and philanthropic—with several private philanthropies and two federal funding agencies participating. Other sessions looked at ways states, cities and towns, along with private philanthropy, might best support efforts of naturally occurring cultural districts without disrupting their sometimes delicate ecologies.

**Strengthen networks internally with support and technical assistance.** Coalitions need capable leadership and resources to maintain active contact within their communities and to initiate joint projects among stakeholders. A lot of time for relationship building is required to bring together the mix of individual artists, cultural organizations, community groups, small businesses and residents that makes these communities vibrant. Networks are led by a diverse range of people—motivated individuals with skills and time dedicated to the coordinating function. They often work through an arts organization, small business, or institution. It is important to identify and support these anchors and to understand how their network functions so as to provide resources and technical assistance in ways that nurture, but do not destabilize, their relationships.

*[We support] budding entrepreneurs connected to the community [who] believe in providing local jobs and are committed to diversity.*  
—Susan Mosey, University Cultural Center Association

**Provide support for planning and placemaking in the context of community visions.**

Roundtable participants observed that arts funding often focuses on products while community development funding often seeks to facilitate process. Both require planning of different types and to varying degrees. Bringing these funding approaches together would better meet the needs for community building, advocacy, inclusion and network development. Funders might provide flexible support for leaders to formulate creative responses to current conditions and respond to dynamic environments with ever-changing conditions. This can include support for planning and neighborhood partnership development. Formal planning that includes broad stakeholder groups helps coalesce partnerships and draw out strong community visions. Technical planning, as in financial modeling, architectural or other design and feasibility work, may then be needed to advance the community vision. Strategic funding to realize placemaking activities—such as special events, distinctive streetscapes and new signage—can also help build public awareness, engage the community and reinforce partnerships.

**Invest in entrepreneur support, mentorships and peer networks.** Artists, creative entrepreneurs and social innovators often need support different from that provided through small-business development organizations. Enterprise development, mentorship programs and peer networks designed for the creative sector that are sensitive to cultural diversity enable more people to activate their unique skills and ideas. Supporting non-profit developers and community arts organizations to serve as incubator and network-

ing sites can assist artists and small-business entrepreneurs in career and creative enterprise development. Support can include capacity building for incubator organizations and coalition and network building. Mentorship and peer support programs simultaneously build social capital, contribute to leadership development and help start-up enterprises leverage results through the use of existing assets and skill bases.

**Support immigrant entrepreneurship.** It is important to pay particular attention to rapidly growing immigrant communities by providing culturally appropriate support. This can be accomplished through community-based cultural organizations, at times in partnership with local CDCs or other culturally specific small-business development groups. Support can also be provided through low-cost space and micro-loan or regranting projects and peer mentoring.

*Leadership development is a sustained process that's about empowerment.*  
—Frances Lucerna, *El Puente*

Support local leadership development. Community leadership development builds local capacity and helps communities more effectively achieve sustained outcomes. Neighborhood-based groups, local governments and nonprofits operating in community settings—especially diverse cultural settings—require knowledge and sensitivity about context, history and cultures. Indigenous leadership rising up from communities brings passion and commitment as well as knowledge and representation of community stakeholders. Targeting support to nurture cross-sector and cross-cultural bridge-building skills would be particularly helpful to naturally occurring cultural districts. Including local public officials in leadership development programs provides important value-added benefits by building connections between cultural and neighborhood leaders and municipal agencies and policy makers and helping public officials to better understand this grassroots phenomenon. Cross-sector partnership development efforts require creative and versatile leaders. Roundtable participants cited characteristics they felt were important, including an ability to formulate creative responses to changing conditions, an inclination to recognize and leverage existing assets and an ability to look beyond formulaic solutions. Instinctive, nontraditional leaders exist in most naturally occurring cultural districts but are often overtaxed and underresourced.

*What prevents us from doing this work? We need to be mindful of the challenges and of historical patterns and realities—and how to deal with them and move forward, to be more active players in creating our own destinies.*  
—Erik Takeshita, *Local Initiatives Support Corporation*

**Promote cultural district demonstration projects.** Exemplary cultural districts, led by hub organizations or coalitions, have established themselves in many parts of the United States. Funding for core operations and capacity building can leverage their partnership-building strengths and enhance their resource development capacities. Technical assistance programs or services can also assist community-based groups to mobilize their assets more efficiently and to gain access to resource streams from multiple sectors. Larger funders with a regional or national scope could provide multiyear support for a cohort of hub organizations or coalitions leading naturally occurring cultural districts. A mix of types of groups that effectively blend community identity, neighborhood

revitalization and creative industry development would make a dynamic cohort. Technical assistance delivery in planning, partnership building and other areas can bring a complement of expertise and offers an economy of scale to multiple districts.

*Economic development is not only about real estate; it also involves schools, jobs and community exchange.*

*—Milly Hawk Daniel, PolicyLink*

**Validate successful districts through casemaking.** Lifting up successful projects and practices helps leverage funding and can motivate local leadership. Commissioning, interpreting and packaging relevant research, along with the identification and promotion of successful case studies, can affect policy and investment on the local, state and federal levels. Highlighting successful projects can also add to learning among practitioners. Support and acknowledgment from prominent foundations can positively influence community-based work in its efforts toward local policy change and leveraging local funds. Investments may also involve sponsoring awards, funding local projects to produce presentations for national or international conferences, underwriting electronic or print publications, or awarding grants in ways that leverage local media and political attention

**Provide funding and support equitably.** To maintain district equilibrium, it is important to invest in grassroots efforts that bridge and welcome all cultures and creative forces. Small cultural institutions can have large-sized influence in their districts and can serve as hubs connecting many parts of diverse communities. Support for small, locally based organizations and businesses can help them gain access to more tools and resources, building their capacity and sustainability. It is also important to support groups at various stages of development. Such funding strategies can help to preserve communities under stress from market and displacement pressures. Artists, artisans and cultural workers (just as other members of their communities) will benefit from policies and investments that support the development of jobs and affordable work and retail spaces. Affordable space for artists, cultural activity and creative manufacturing can be included in sustainability, stimulus, jobs programs, zoning, land use and other investment and policy strategies.

**Leverage resources.** Private funders can leverage public funding, for example, by supporting partnership building and development of strong community planning. Convening funders and public agency heads across silos to discuss public/private strategies can produce new understanding of the benefits of naturally occurring cultural districts and help to coordinate municipal efforts. Long-term investments and risk capital for stable nonprofits can leverage funding and provide opportunities for other community partners.

*This is a new way of thinking for us. . . . I'm interested in learning more about what level of intervention is the right amount, from a land use and zoning perspective.*

*—Susan Gray, Community Redevelopment Agency, Los Angeles*

**Remove bureaucratic impediments and structural barriers.** Typically geared to aiding large arts and cultural institutions, municipal agencies and foundations need to adjust

their scope to meet the variable needs of small organizations and businesses within naturally occurring cultural districts. Reevaluating funding mechanisms can facilitate the emergence of leadership from small cultural and community-building organizations, especially in low-income communities. Policies and requirements that may inadvertently impede organic growth of cultural districts should be closely examined. For example, in New York it was noted that the model for funding plaza projects was based on revenue that is not accessible to low-income communities. Agencies and funders need to consider the time that is needed for communities to plan and carry out collaborative work, allowing sufficient time and flexibility in issuing RFPs.



## Research and questions for further discussion

Naturally occurring cultural districts are quite varied in their social and cultural ecologies as well as their origins and objectives. However, there is little information available that documents these varied approaches and their impacts. Only a small amount of research-based work is available globally. This work is primarily in the form of case studies with little in-depth analysis or research that looks at the breadth of the field or major factors impacting its evolution. Roundtable participants stressed that existing data needs to be more widely available and new data collection and research need to be conducted to supplement existing knowledge.

*How we measure success begins with how cities and city regions define success.*

*—Dan Lurie, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*

Qualitative and quantitative analyses are needed to assess cultural practices, community engines of change and policy/planning needs in naturally occurring cultural districts. Some promising examples include the work of the Social Impact on the Arts Project at University of Pennsylvania the Urban Institute's Cultural Vitality indicators.

Many questions were raised during the course of the roundtable discussions related to success indicators of naturally occurring cultural districts, community-based cultural work and local economic development efforts in the context of the creative economy. At the same time it was stressed that when measuring benefits, it is important to assess all the impacts of these districts, not just economic impacts. Some questions raised may be the subject of formal research; some may be topics for similar roundtable discussions in the future, or addressed in other venues.

## Arts, Culture and Community

In what ways are naturally occurring cultural districts and hub organizations improving the quality of life in their communities? Can we measure it?

Are there patterns or tools for cultural district development that can be replicated?

Why have arts and culture groups not been invited to and/or not been showing up to planning and policy-setting tables to discuss community and economic development? What are the barriers to their participation and how can these barriers be most effectively overcome?

If cultural anchors or other district assets are expected to be more than iconic symbols or centers of cultural activities, what can they reasonably be expected to do?

How do we best identify and measure the range of impacts of the creative sector and independent workforce on the quality of community life?

## Economy

Do naturally occurring cultural districts need to include production and marketing of goods to wider markets to contribute economically to their communities?

How can creative industry job creation on the local level be effectively and meaning-

fully measured?

What is the economic impact of independent workers and what policies affect self-employed and small-business entrepreneurs?

What is the quality of jobs developed in the creative sector?

How can the mainstream economic development sector better see what's going on in naturally occurring cultural districts and immigrant communities?

Can outcomes be clearly articulated that balance or blend quality of life with social, cultural and economic development? Can links be made between economic prosperity and social and civic capacity?

If enabling mobility of people and business is considered good for regional or national economies, what are the impacts on neighborhoods and local economies?

Can we assess the impacts of naturally occurring cultural districts not only on neighborhood communities but also on the town or citywide and regional economies?

## Equity

Are there links between ownership of place and ownership of culture?

Must trade-offs be made to achieve both equity and economic growth? Is economic development inherently inequitable?

What are the best ways to bring issues of equity more explicitly into arts and creative economy discussions?

Do heightened visibility and attention to districts hasten a process of gentrification and displacement?

How do these initiatives relate to the use of public space, community gardens and parks, as well as general cultural connections within neighborhoods?

How can we best understand the impact of demographic change and the influx of new immigrants to specific neighborhoods or rural communities?

Better mapping tools were also called for to identify the less visible assets in communities, including open source tools for communities to map their own cultural assets and related businesses. Additionally, there was a call for participatory research methods, enabling community groups to engage in research in their own districts.

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### Roundtable Discussion Participants

(affiliations listed are those that were current when the roundtable took place.)

#### **New York Roundtable at Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation**

##### **New York, NY, May 8, 2009**

*Bill Aguado, Bronx Council on the Arts/South Bronx Cultural Corridor, Bronx, NY*  
*Caron Atlas, Arts + Community Change Initiative, Brooklyn, NY*  
*Jay Beckner, Mertz Gilmore Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Claudine Brown, Nathan Cummings Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Adam Friedman, New York Industrial Retention Network, New York, NY*  
*Ryan Gilliam, Downtown Art, New York, NY*  
*Tamara Greenfield, Fourth Arts Block/E. 4th Street Cultural District, New York, NY*  
*Gary Hattem, Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Michael Hickey, The Center for New York City Neighborhoods, New York, NY*  
*Heather Hitchens, New York State Council on the Arts, New York, NY*  
*Betsy Imershein, Arts + Community Change Initiative, Brooklyn, NY*  
*Lisa Kaplan, New York City Council, Rosie Mendez's office, New York, NY*  
*Maurine Knighton, Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, New York, NY*  
*Brad Lander, Pratt Center for Community Development, Brooklyn, NY*  
*Brian Levinson, New York State Senate, José Serrano's office, New York, NY*  
*Jeremy Liu, Asian Community Development Corporation*  
*Boston Chinatown, Boston MA*  
*Sam Marks, Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Nello McDaniel, ARTS Action Research, New York, NY*  
*Rosie Mendez, New York City Council, New York, NY*  
*Jim O'Grady, Scribe, New York, NY*  
*Judilee Reed, Leveraging Investments in Creativity, New York, NY*  
*Susan Seifert, Social Impact of the Arts Project*  
*University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA*  
*José Serrano, New York State Senate, New York, NY*  
*Sasha Soreff, New York State Council on the Arts, New York, NY*  
*Mark Stern, Social Impact of the Arts Project*  
*University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia PA*  
*Anusha Venkataraman, Arts + Community Change Initiative, Brooklyn, NY*

#### **Neighborhood Funders Group Conference Panel Presentation**

##### **New Orleans, LA, October 14, 2009**

Presenters and cofacilitators:

*Caron Atlas, Arts + Community Change Initiative, Brooklyn, NY*

*Carol Bebelles, Ashé Cultural Arts Center, New Orleans, LA*  
*Ken Grossinger, Crosscurrents Fund, New York, NY*  
*Diane Sanchez, East Bay Community Foundation, Oakland, CA*

**Attendees:**

*Beth Takekawa, Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience  
Seattle, WA*  
*Roberta Uno, Ford Foundation, New York, NY*  
*and other session participants*

**Surdna Foundation Roundtable  
New York, NY, June 15–16, 2010**

*Libby Andrus, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Caron Atlas, Consultant, Brooklyn, NY*  
*Tom Borup, Creative Community Builders, Minneapolis, MN*  
*Kim Burnett, Economic Development Consultant, Denver, CO*  
*Helen Chin, Sustainable Environments, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Brian Coleman, Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, Brooklyn, NY*  
*Lynnette White Colin, O. C. Haley Boulevard Merchants and Business Association  
New Orleans, LA*  
*Luis Croquer, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI*  
*John Hawkins, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Phillip Henderson, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Gayle Isa, Asian Arts Initiative, Philadelphia, PA*  
*Jee Kim, Foundation Initiatives, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Frances Lucerna, El Puente, New York, NY*  
*Daniel Lurie, Department of Housing & Urban Development, Washington, DC*  
*Amalia Mesa-Baines, California State University, Monterey Bay, CA*  
*Amy Morris, Foundation Initiatives, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Susan Mosey, University Cultural Center Association  
Wayne State University, Detroit, MI*  
*Kim Musler, Strong Local Economies, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Judilee Reed, Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), New York, NY*  
*Gibrán Rivera, Interaction Institute for Social Change, Boston, MA*  
*Ellen B. Rudolph, Thriving Cultures, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Nick Salter, Intern, Strong Local Economies, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Jason Schubach, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, DC*  
*Beth Siegel, Mt. Auburn Associates, Somerville, MA*  
*Lynn Stern, Thriving Cultures, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Mark J. Stern, Social Impact of the Arts Project  
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA*  
*Diane M. Sugimura, Department of Planning and Development, City of Seattle*  
*Beth Takekawa, Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience  
Seattle, WA*  
*Garland Thomas, Central Baltimore Partnership, Baltimore, MD*  
*Jasmine Thomas, Strong Local Economies, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Edie Thorpe, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*  
*Rebecca Volinsky, Thriving Cultures, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY*

**New York Roundtable at the J. M. Kaplan Fund  
New York, NY, August 12, 2010**

*Luis Garden Acosta, El Puente, New York, NY*  
*Caron Atlas, Arts + Community Change Initiative, Brooklyn, NY*  
*Bennet Baruch, Office of City Councilmember Diana Reyna, New York, NY*  
*Tom Borup, Creative Community Builders, Minneapolis, MN*  
*Jerome Chou, Design Trust for Public Space, New York, NY*  
*Brian T. Coleman, Greenpoint (NY) Manufacturing and Design Center*  
*Milly Hawk Daniel, PolicyLink, New York, NY*

Adam Friedman, Pratt Center for Community Development, Brooklyn, NY  
Alexandra García, Queens Museum of Art, Queens, NY  
Ryan Gilliam, Downtown Art, New York, NY  
Tamara Greenfield, Fourth Arts Block, New York, NY  
Laura Hansen, J. M. Kaplan Fund, New York, NY  
Joseph Heathcott, The New School, New York, NY  
Michael Hickey, Center for NYC Neighborhoods, New York, NY  
Maria Rosario Jackson, Urban Institute, Washington, DC  
Lisa Kaplan, Office of City Councilmember Rosie Mendez, New York, NY  
Leah Krauss, Mertz-Gilmore Foundation, New York, NY  
Brad Lander, New York City Council, New York, NY  
Karen Mack, LA Commons, Los Angeles, CA  
Sam Marks, Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, New York, NY  
Tom Oesau, Arts + Community Change Initiative, Brooklyn, NY  
Judilee Reed, Leveraging Investments in Creativity, New York, NY  
Antonio Reynoso, Office of City Council member Diana Reyna, New York, NY  
Diana Reyna, New York City Council, New York, NY  
José M. Serrano, New York State Senate, New York, NY  
Susan C. Seifert, Social Impact of the Arts Project  
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia  
Ronald Shiffman, Pratt Institute Graduate Center for Planning  
and the Environment Brooklyn, NY  
Lynn E. Stern, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY  
Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen, New York University Asian/Pacific/American Institute  
New York, NY  
Edwin Torres, Rockefeller Foundation, New York, NY  
Roberta Uno, Ford Foundation, New York, NY  
Jimmy Van Bramer, New York City Council, New York, NY  
Anusha Venkataraman, Arts + Community Change Initiative, Brooklyn, NY

**Roundtable at Los Angeles County Arts Commission  
Los Angeles, CA, April 4, 2011**

Fred Allen, Grand Vision Foundation, San Pedro, CA  
James Allen, Random Lengths News, Los Angeles County, CA  
Caron Atlas, Art + Community Change Initiative, Brooklyn, NY  
Walter Beaumont, Community Redevelopment Agency, Los Angeles, CA  
Tom Borrup, Creative Community Builders, Minneapolis, MN  
Russell Brown, Historic Downtown Business Improvement District, Los Angeles, CA James Burks, Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles, CA  
Reuben Caldwell, City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning, Los Angeles, CA  
Angie Castro, Office of Supervisor Gloria Molina, Los Angeles County, CA  
Ernest Dillihay, City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles, CA  
Linda Dishman, Los Angeles Conservancy, Los Angeles, CA  
Greg Esser, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Los Angeles, CA  
Sherri Franklin, Urban Design Center, Los Angeles, CA  
Olga Garay, City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles, CA  
Susan Gray, Community Redevelopment Agency, Los Angeles, CA  
Linda Grimes, Golden State Pops Orchestra, Los Angeles CA  
Erin Harkey, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Los Angeles, CA  
Alex Holsheimer, Thai Community Development Center, Los Angeles, CA  
Carolyn Hull, CRA/LA, Los Angeles, CA  
Leslie Ito, California Community Foundation, Los Angeles, CA  
Maria Rosario Jackson, Urban Institute, Washington, DC  
Karly Katona, Office of Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas  
Los Angeles, CA  
Rosalyn Kawahira, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Los Angeles, CA  
Maria Lam, Thai Community Development Center, Los Angeles, CA



Meg Linton, Otis College of Art & Design, Los Angeles, CA  
Karen Mack, LA Commons, Los Angeles, CA  
Chanchanit Martorell, Thai Community Development Center, Los Angeles, CA  
Simon Pastucha, Urban Design Studio, Los Angeles Department of City Planning  
Clint Rosemond, Leimert Park Village/Crenshaw Corridor Business Improvement District, Community Build, Inc., Los Angeles, CA  
Anusha Venkataraman, El Puente, New York, NY  
Will Wright, American Institute of Architects, Los Angeles Chapter, Los Angeles, CA  
Laura Zucker, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Los Angeles, CA

**Roundtable at the Bush Foundation  
St. Paul, MN, June 28, 2011**

Caron Atlas, Arts + Community Change Initiative, Arts & Democracy Project  
Brooklyn, NY  
Vickie Benson, McKnight Foundation, Minneapolis, MN  
Tom Borup, Creative Community Builders, Minneapolis, MN  
Isabel Broyld, Neighborhood Development Center, St. Paul, MN  
Helen Brunner, Media Democracy Fund, Washington, DC  
Emory Shaw Campbell, Penn Center, St. Helena Island, SC  
Dee Davis, Center for Rural Strategies, Whitesburg, KY  
Amalia Deloney, Center for Media Justice, Chicago, IL  
Timothy Dorsey, Strategic Opportunities Fund  
Open Society Foundations, New York, NY  
Matthew Fluharty, The Art of the Rural, St. Louis, MO  
Amy Frischmon, Wild Mountain Taylors Falls Recreation, Taylors Falls, MN  
Anne Gadwa, Metris Arts Consulting, Minneapolis, MN  
Matthew Glassman, Double Edge Theatre, Ashfield, MA  
Gaye Hamilton, Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism  
Catherine Jordan, InCommons, Bush Foundation, St. Paul, MN  
Gulgun Kayim, Leadership & Community Engagement  
Bush Foundation, St. Paul, MN  
Ellen Kimball, Athens Area Council for the Arts, Athens, TN  
Whitney Kimball Coe, National Rural Assembly for the Center for Rural Strategies Whitesburg, KY  
Ann Markusen, Arts Economy Initiative and Project on Regional and Industrial Economics, University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs and Markusen Economic Research Services, Minneapolis, MN  
Maureen Mullinax, Xavier University, Cincinnati, OH  
David O'Fallon, Minnesota Humanities Center, St. Paul, MN  
Danette Olsen, Festival Theatre, St. Croix Falls, WI  
Katharine Pearson Criss, Center for Rural Strategies, Whitesburg, KY  
Peter Pennekamp, Humboldt Area Foundation, Bayside, CA  
Delia Pérez, Llano Grande Center for Research & Development, Edcouch, TX  
Mimi Pickering, Community Media Initiative, Appalshop, Whitesburg, KY  
Lori Pourier, First Peoples Fund, Sioux Falls, SD  
Julie Ristau, On The Commons, Minneapolis, MN  
jesikah maria ross, Art of Regional Change  
University of California Davis, Davis, CA  
Theresa Secord, Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, Old Town, ME  
Ada Smith, Appalachian Media Institute, Appalshop, Whitesburg, KY  
Erik Takeshita, Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Minneapolis, MN  
Patrice Walker Powell, Programs and Partnerships, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, DC

## Selected Bibliography

Literature related to economic and cultural equity in community regeneration spans the globe. Below is a sampling of articles and books that address equity within the context of creative clusters and their more specific form, described in this report as naturally occurring cultural districts. While the term “naturally occurring cultural districts” is not widely used, there is no commonly accepted term for the phenomenon. Informal, organic, vernacular, bottom-up, everyday, among other terms, are used to describe these districts, which are also known as clusters, quarters, or zones. Common threads in the scholarship represented here are the analysis of the distribution of benefits and the organizing principles around which they form. Generally the literature considers “bottom-up” districts to provide more equitable benefits to their communities than “top-down” districts. Similarly, the active engagement of stakeholders in the events, organization and management of such districts is found to stimulate greater civic engagement or cultural citizenship that translates into more robust participation in community and civic life.

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# **Up From the Roots: Economic and Cultural Equity in Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts**

**Findings from a Series of Roundtable Discussions**

**2009–2011**

## **Appendix**

## Case Studies (as provided by the organizations)

### **Arnaudville Experiment, Louisiana Dept. of Cultural Recreation and Tourism, LA**

Located at the confluence of Bayous Teche and Fuselier, the bi-parish community of Arnaudville is built on the site of a native Attakapas village and is one of the oldest remaining towns in St. Landry and St. Martin Parishes, where both French and English are spoken. In the last 6 years, this tiny town with a population of about 1,480 has recast itself from a small, declining community into a rural arts and cultural destination. It was one of only 14 pioneering case studies featured by the Mayors' Institute of City Design in their recent Creative Placemaking report.

The NUNU–Arnaudville Experiment is essentially a vortex of volunteers: a law professor, a gourd craft artist, a retired marketing specialist, a musician, a filmmaker, a homemaker, a French activist, a retired banker, and—at the center of the vortex—contemporary fine artist George Marks. Capitalizing on local resources and talent programs attract an equally diverse audience and a growing rank of volunteers. NUNU events provide multiple platforms for artists to earn a living wage and gain access to professional administrative services. The Experiment focuses on four main areas—education, visual arts, music, culinary—and has developed key organizations representative of each.

Frederick l'Ecole des Arts is a volunteer-driven nonprofit organization that promotes opportunities for artists. It utilizes grants and local resources to create a variety of classes and workshops including Blues Guitar with virtuoso Selwyn Cooper, Creating the Spirit Pole with widely exhibited sculptor John Geldersma, Improvisation with accomplished local actor Bruce Coen, Poetry Workshop with NEA Fellow Cornelius Eady, and Story Telling with editor Jessica Powers and the Compagnie Coatimundi, puppeteers from Chateaubrenard, France.

The Deux Bayous Gallery Collective—a cooperative artist-run space through partnership exhibitions, outreach, and educational programming—presents distinctive, one of a kind works of art in a variety of mediums. The gallery is a valuable market outlet for regional artists. It encourages experimentation through presentation of new works by craft artists and emerging fine artists.

The Louisiana Musicians Collective produces many music presentations including Grammy-winning BeauSoleil and little known musicians. The live entertainment at NUNU's is the envy of much bigger towns. Performances with an educational component are encouraged through heritage sessions, Q&A, and workshops including Music of Acadiana, Celtic Circuit, and Bayou Blues Revival.

The culinary program has been primarily event-driven. Under the newly developed umbrella of the Louisiana Culinary Collective, local chefs and cooks interested in carrying on Louisiana food traditions will soon have access to a commercial kitchen that will serve as an experimentation and teaching facility to cultivate local culinary traditions and expose residents to culinary contributions from other cultures.



The most recent project in development is the Jacques Arnaud French Studies Collective and an international French immersion center patterned after a renowned program at St Anne University in Nova Scotia. Students will earn college credit while participating in a variety of activities on campus and in the French-speaking communities around Arnaudville. The consortium of partners includes LSU, CODIFIL, the French Consulate, and indigenous French-speaking residents. The goal is to immerse students in a unique cultural ecosystem to create a living and working campus where French is part of the daily fiber. Regionalism, Inclusion and Diversity are the cornerstones of the NUNU–Arnaudville Experiment.

Programming is coordinated in a dozen or more satellite locations. In nearby Grand Coteau, Project Director Patrice Melnick facilitates Open Mic on the Literary Stage almost weekly and at Festival of Words annually. In addition to offering programming in neighboring communities, artists George Marks—at Atelier–Magasin Artists’ Collective in New Orleans—and Jill Hackney—at Atelier–Reflectioné in Baton Rouge—are exporting the programs created within the community of Arnaudville to large urban areas.

Like a rich gumbo, the collaborations facilitated by the NUNU–Arnaudville Experiment have created an enviable, diverse and artistic mix of people, media and genres—a poetic sensibility to creative living that addresses the arts, culture, community, education and the environment while leveraging the role of the artist in society.

### **Ashé Cultural Arts Center, New Orleans, LA**

Ashé Cultural Arts Center is an effort to combine the intentions of neighborhood and economic development with the awesome creative forces of community, culture and art to revive and reclaim a historically significant corridor in Central City New Orleans—Ortha Castle Haley Boulevard, formerly known as Dryades Street. Ashé is a gathering place for emerging and established artists to present, create and collaborate in giving life to their art. For those who felt compelled to choose a more mainstream existence at earlier points in their lives, Ashé is a reclaiming harbor that welcomes them with open arms. The Center works to involve the entire community from children to elders, in cultural community and creative efforts. The celebration of life and cultural traditions of the community, are immortalized in Ashé’s art, storytelling, poetry, music, dance photography, and visual art, all a part of the work done to revive the possibility and vision of a true “Renaissance on the Boulevard.” The name Ashé—a Yoruban word that translates closely to AMEN—So let it be done—The ability to make things happen, bears testimony to the organization’s commitment and intention to accomplish its goals.

The cultural center became a beacon for community development and rebuilding after the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Ashé reopened just a couple of months after the storm. The Center went into action, hosting many of the city’s public and private meetings, discussions, planning workshops and charettes on rebuilding efforts. Carol Bebel, the center’s director, became one of the most prominent voices for the preservation of New Orleans’s culture and for the right to return and community rebuilding efforts on behalf of the city’s culture bearers. Efforts of Grace, Ashé’s sponsor, has purchased the facility it was previously leasing and the ground floor commercial space next door for an over-

due expansion that will more than double the size of the center and will include more performance spaces, additional bathrooms, a recording studio and technical updates including soundproofing. Recently, the organization acquired 30 units of rental residences above the cultural facility. Local artists and culture bearers have been targeted to occupy the units, lending to the further integration of New Orleans' indigenous culture and art.

## **Asian Arts Initiative, Chinatown, Philadelphia, PA**

### *At the Intersection of Multiple Cultural Districts*

Asian Arts Initiative is a multidisciplinary community-based arts center in Philadelphia, currently developing a multi-tenant arts facility in our new location in the expanding northern edge of the Chinatown neighborhood. Each year, at our site we serve thousands of participants including a range of Asian American artists, local community members and youth through workshops, performances, films, and gallery programming; and even greater numbers through experiences such as our Chinatown In/flux exhibition series, impacting tourists, residents, workers and passersby at multiple neighborhood locations.

Our multi-tenant arts facility originated after Asian Arts Initiative was notified in 2005 that we and additional artists and organizations would be forced to relocate by the expansion of the Pennsylvania Convention Center. In 2008, Asian Arts Initiative was able to complete initial renovations and relocate to the new facility in progress. Here we see ourselves as an anchor and a hub among several naturally occurring and planned cultural districts:

### *Chinatown/Chinatown North*

Throughout its history, Philadelphia's Chinatown—like many Chinatowns throughout the country—has struggled with challenges to its existence. With projects like the Vine Street Expressway, Independence Park to the east, the Gallery shopping mall on the south, and the Convention Center to the west, Chinatown has in effect been boxed in. More recently, gentrification threatens to displace low- and moderate-income residents. Our multi-tenant arts facility supports existing plans to revitalize the Vine Street corridor and promote positive community-driven neighborhood development.

### *Callowhill/Loft District*

Bordering Chinatown North, the Callowhill neighborhood is a developing residential neighborhood and business district in a once predominately industrial area. Sometimes called The Loft District, in reference to luxury condominiums being developed in the area, the Callowhill neighborhood also supports a variety of businesses and a growing network of galleries and artist studios.

### *Avenue of the Arts North*

Avenue of the Arts North is an arts district along North Broad Street, supported by formal plans developed by the City of Philadelphia to leverage the success of the Avenue of the Arts on South Broad Street to revitalize the corridor between Center City and Temple University to the North.

Our Space In addition to our core artistic programming, through space rental and co-op programs, Asian Arts Initiative is able to offer our gallery, theater, and media lab as a venue for artists and community members from these districts and across the city—for developing and showcasing new work, and hosting workshops and other community gatherings. Recent events have included a panel discussion on queer immigrants’ rights, a forum for district attorney candidates to address the Asian American community, and a documentary film screening highlighting community organizing.

## **Boston Chinatown and Asian Community Development Corporation, Boston, MA**

Built on a landfill created from tidal flats in the early 1800s to provide additional housing for Boston’s expanding middle class population, Chinatown is home to Boston’s largest Chinese community, in a unique mix of residences and family owned and operated businesses. As the area’s original residents moved out of the area in the 1840s, an influx of immigrants moved in, including Chinese, Irish, Italian, Jewish and Syrian, who converted the area’s single family homes to multiple unit tenements. Commercial uses, including textiles and leather works, began at the turn of the Century with the construction of South Station and the Washington Street Trolley line. To this day, Chinese restaurants and specialty shops fill the ground floor levels of residential buildings.

### *Mission*

The Asian Community Development Corporation, a community-based organization, is committed to high standards of performance and integrity in serving the Asian American community of Greater Boston, with an emphasis on preserving and revitalizing Boston’s Chinatown. The Corporation develops physical community assets, including affordable housing for rental and ownership; promotes economic development; fosters leadership development; builds capacity within the community and advocates on behalf of the community.

### *Programs*

The key to preserving and revitalizing communities in Greater Boston is to ensure there is adequate high-quality, and affordable housing to meet the needs of current and future neighbors. ACDC makes a commitment to building high-impact, sustainable communities that are affordable and welcoming for residents and neighbors.

### *Community-Based Affordable Housing and Real Estate Development*

ACDC’s real estate developments are large-scale, transit-oriented, mixed-use and mixed income. We work strategically with private partners to maximize the number and quality of affordable units we are able to develop while simultaneously fostering diversity that brings strength and additional resources to the neighborhood. We ground our developments in the principles of Smart Growth and sustainable design, creating transit-oriented developments that maximize affordability while offer a variety of housing, services, employment, and transportation options to our residents.

### *Community Organizing and Planning*

Community outreach and organizing is an integral part of our development process for real estate and affordable housing projects, especially during the critical planning and

permitting phases. For example, our Parcel 24 program responds to the Community Vision document developed by the Hudson Street for Chinatown, a coalition of community organizations and residents in which ACDC was a founding member. This Community Vision was referenced in the Boston Redevelopment Authority's Design Guidelines that was subsequently included in the Request for Proposal issued the site. ACDC and its development partner successfully responded to this RFP and gained development rights directly because of its extensive organizing work.

#### *Asian Voices of Organized Youth for Community Empowerment (A-VOYCE)*

A-Voyce supports young people in projects that provide leadership development and skill building, while raising awareness of critical community issues and Asian American culture. The A-VOYCE Radio Project and the A-VOYCE Chinatown Walking Tours highlight the current issues faced by the communities we serve, especially the need for affordable housing. The A-VOYCE Radio Show is a weekly, live public affairs and music radio show written and run entirely by the youth, while the youth-led Chinatown Walking Tours give visitors new historical, cultural, and personal interpretations of the neighborhood.

#### *Comprehensive Home Ownership Program (CHOP)*

To prepare potential homeowners in the local community, ACDC continues to provide homebuyers with assistance and education through the Comprehensive Home Ownership Program (CHOP) in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. ACDC's workshops, bi-lingual information mailings, and one-on-one counseling have helped families in the process of purchasing their first home. CHOP has served over 450 clients since its inception. CHOP will serve an estimated additional 360 households in the next two years, and recent graduates have indicated in exit surveys their desire to live in Chinatown.

#### *Speakeasy*

Non-English-speaking individuals, particularly new immigrants, face tremendous barriers that limit their ability to access day-to-day needs. Communication barriers also compromise immigrant status in society, contributing to social isolation and community disenfranchisement. Speakeasy leverages the widespread use of cell phones and connects non-English speakers to guides promptly, reducing the undue burdens placed on callers' families and friends. In practice, Speakeasy is not a new concept as many multi-lingual individuals are already serving as informal interpreters for their family members and friends, but often with uneven results and compromising privacy.

The MacArthur Foundation recently selected ACDC and our project partners, Emerson College and Metropolitan Area Planning Council, as one of 19 winners in their 2009 Digital Media and Learning Competition. Participatory Chinatown seeks to transform the planning practices shaping Boston's Chinatown from disjointed transactions between developers and the community to an ongoing conversation guided by the process of participatory learning. By encouraging Chinatown residents to actively experience, transform, and interact in proposed urban developments, Participatory Chinatown enables residents of all ages and abilities to understand and articulate their own vision of a better neighborhood. No prior urban planning experience is necessary. To lower cultural and language barriers to participation, neighborhood youth will play a vital role as informal staff and interpreters who mediate between the virtual environment and other

community members. Participants sit side-by-side in physical space and simultaneously co-inhabit a 3D virtual space where they engage in rapid prototyping and testing of urban design proposals.

ACDC and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) are developing HD-OD in Boston's Chinatown, one of four national pilot sites. The objective is to help residents at risk of displacement due to heavy development to better plan for their future and preserve the character of the neighborhood. This project will provide a new model for community development that could be applied around the country. HD-OD uses information technologies to link together social service and physical infrastructures in order to help families coordinate social services, small-business resources and housing assistance in a focused "human development district." This work is made possible through support from the Environmental Simulation Center, a New York-based nonprofit linking cutting-edge technology with community planning, in partnership with the Ford Foundation.

#### *Chinatown Heritage Project*

The Chinatown Heritage Project celebrates and promotes the multifaceted history, culture, and community that make Boston's Chinatown so unique and vibrant. Through a series of innovative programs, the CHP aims to increase cross-cultural understanding, contribute to Chinatown's economic prosperity, and offer current residents new mediums for self-expression. The Project includes efforts such as A Chinatown Banquet, a series of 45 short video documentaries about the neighborhood; The Chinatown Heritage Trail, a self-guided podcast tour focusing on history and contemporary issues facing the community; and Chinatown Walking Tours, a community-centered outing offering of educational guided walking tours for large groups. ACDC is a lead partner in the Chinatown Heritage Project, working in collaboration with the Chinese Historical Society of New England, and Chinatown Main Streets.

#### **Broadway Arts Center and City of Los Angeles Dept. of Cultural Affairs, LA, CA**

The Broadway Arts Center is designed to provide affordable artists' housing and creative support services within the Broadway Historic Theatre District. The City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) and project partners were awarded \$100,000 by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for the Mayors Institute on City Design 25th Anniversary Initiative (MICD 25). The project team, led by the Department of Cultural Affairs, includes The Actors Fund, Artspace, L.A., Councilmember José Huizar's Bringing Back Broadway Initiative, CalArts, the City of Los Angeles Planning Department, the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

The partners will use the MICD25 grant to develop planning studies for creating a creative mixed-use facility, the "Broadway Arts Center," along the historic Broadway corridor. The conceptual project would offer multi-disciplinary support for artists and arts service providers in Downtown Los Angeles, including affordable artists' housing, incubator performance/exhibition space, ground floor retail spaces, creative office space, an educational facility, and support for existing historic theaters. The goal is to serve approximately 5,000 artists and 200 CalArts students per year.



The historic Broadway corridor, in the center of downtown Los Angeles, features one of the largest concentrations of historic theaters on one street in the nation. Twelve beautiful theaters are located within nine blocks, set between several architectural gems; these structures stand in tribute to the architectural and engineering achievements of the early 20th century. The Broadway corridor is part of an important National Register Historic District.

The project's future potential, however, is tremendous. The area has abundant regional transit, with numerous inter-modal transit centers within walking distance, and Broadway will be the spine of the alignment for a modern streetcar system intended to be constructed within the next several years. The Downtown L.A. Streetcar will connect Downtown's major cultural, commercial, and entertainment destinations, including: Bunker Hill, Grand Avenue, and the Music Center; Historic Broadway and the Historic Core; and South Park, L.A. LIVE, and the Los Angeles Convention Center.

The Actors Fund and Artspace are key private partners. They each have the track record to bring this mixed-used project to fruition. They will take the leadership in locating financing, from planning to construction, through the Actors Fund Housing Development Corporation. The two private nonprofits will also direct planning studies with CRA-LA, and administer the affordable housing component. The Fund has built four housing communities that include over 550 affordable housing units in various cities, and has one additional housing project in development. Artspace, America's leading nonprofit real estate developer for the arts, has built 24 housing communities for artists that include over 900 affordable live-work units, and has six additional projects in development.

The Department of Cultural Affairs generates and supports high quality arts and cultural experiences for Los Angeles's 4 million residents and 25 million annual visitors. DCA advances the social and economic impact of the arts and assures access to arts and cultural experiences through grant making, marketing, public art, community arts programming, arts education, and partnerships with artists and arts and cultural organizations in neighborhoods throughout the City of Los Angeles.

### **Central Baltimore Partnership, Baltimore, MD**

The Central Baltimore Partnership (CBP) is a coalition of neighborhood, private, public and institutional interests that are implementing a comprehensive community development strategy in the Central Baltimore area—an area that is roughly bordered by the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Campus to the north, Greenmount Avenue to the east, Mt. Royal Avenue to the south and Fallsway to the west. The Central Baltimore Partnership organizations have coalesced behind a five point agenda:

#### *The Five Point Plan for the Central Baltimore Partnership*

*Goal 1:* Foster a critical mass of large-scale, progressive commercial development

*Goal 2:* Measurably reduce crime and increase security for residents, businesses and business patrons

Goal 3: Improve the appearance, quality-of-life and adequate economic and employment

opportunities for residents in the area between Mount Royal and 24th Street

Goal 4: Preserve and secure for the future a sustainable number and distribution of affordable

and workforce housing units, including artists' housing

Goal 5: Promote successful and sustainable market rate housing

Many neighborhoods in Central Baltimore have groups and individuals already working on their behalf, and the goal of the CBP is not to replace any of these existing efforts. Rather, the CBP will work across neighborhoods as a macro organization, bringing greater attention and resources to the area as a whole. To do this, we are engaging, either directly or indirectly, virtually every neighborhood organization, major property owner, university, nonprofit agency, CDC and foundation in the target area and many from the stronger communities immediately surrounding it. In addition, Mayor Sheila Dixon has committed her Administration and key agencies to the Partnership and assigned Deputy Mayor Andy Frank to lead the city's participation. The Central Baltimore Partnership operates through Task Forces, each one led and facilitated by one of the member organizations:

Commercial Development—MICA

Public Safety—UB

Code Enforcement—Greater Homewood Community Corporation

Sanitation—Charles Village and Midtown Benefits Districts

Housing—JHU

Workforce—Greenmount West CDC

*Participants in the Central Baltimore Partnership Baltimore City Representatives*

Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative Deputy Mayor for Neighborhood and

Baltimore Museum of Art Economic Revitalization

Barclay Midway Old Goucher Coalition Baltimore City Department of Planning

Baltimore City Public Schools Headquarters Baltimore Development Corporation

Charles North Community Association Baltimore Housing

Charles Village Civic Association Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods

Charles North Community Business Committee

Charles Street Development Corporation

Charles Village Community Benefits District Management Authority Participating in Task Forces

Charles Village Community Benefits Social Service Providers Baltimore Police Dept: Central,

Downtown Partnership of Baltimore Eastern and Northern Districts

Goldseker Foundation Mayor's Sanitation Coordinator and

Greater Homewood Community Corporation Department of Public Works

Greenmount West CDC Baltimore Housing Division of Code

The Johns Hopkins University Enforcement

Jubilee Baltimore, Inc.

Maryland Institute College of Art

Midtown Community Benefits District

New Greenmount West Community Association

Old Goucher Community Association

Old Goucher Business Association

People's Homesteading Group

Station North Arts and Entertainment, Inc.

Seventh Baptist Church

## Corona Plaza and Queens Museum of Art, Queens, NY

Corona, Queens, the neighborhood immediately surrounding the Queens Museum of Art (QMA), is a nexus of ethnic diversity. In the past, it has been home to legends such as Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Malcolm X, and Ella Fitzgerald. Ever since F. Scott Fitzgerald first immortalized Flushing Meadows in *The Great Gatsby*, the park that houses QMA and the surrounding community have been inextricably linked. The 1939 and 1964 World's Fairs were held in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, helping to cement the area's status as a thriving artistic and cultural community.

In the last three decades, however, Corona has experienced a major demographic shift, with a tremendous outflow of long-time residents and an influx of recent immigrants to the United States. The population of Corona has increased by 31.2% since 1980, and QMA has discovered that its programs serve only about one-third of the diversity found just outside its doors. Furthermore, despite the announcement by New York City Mayor Bloomberg of citywide decreases in crime and unemployment, Corona remains an anomaly, with a large demographic of underserved communities, many of whom have limited English language proficiency.

Given the need to address some of these challenges as well as making the most of its rich and varied cultural assets, the Queens Museum of Art (QMA) has spearheaded the *Corazón de Corona/Heart of Corona* initiative which aims to improve the health of residents and to activate and beautify Corona's public space, thereby creating a better climate for residents and businesses alike. The initiative includes several projects, including *Beautification and Clean-Up*, a *Healthy Taste of Corona Cookbook*, and a series of street celebrations and public art projects spearheaded by working groups that are collaborations among community-based organizations, health institutions, elected officials, and local businesses. Through the *Heart of Corona* initiative, the Museum is a stakeholder in the revitalization of its surrounding community. Our sustained programming aims to beautify the space and populate it through a series of art projects attracting both local residents and cultural tourists. We feel that focusing efforts in this neighborhood over a period of time will be a major contributing factor in creating a center for community engagement and positive community change. We hope to provide better services for the residents and create a cultural hub for the community, which will lead to increased cultural tourism, pride of place, and a safe space for cross-cultural interaction and problem-solving.

### *Beautification and Cleanup*

A neighborhood committee and QMA's community organizer put together a group of volunteers from local community organizations and the NYC Department of Parks, for ongoing cleanup and greening activities in and around Corona Plaza. In 2010, in collaboration with the Louis Armstrong House Museum, we organized "My block, My home," a block party and beautification day that highlighted this

historical landmark of Corona and announced the opening of a new visitors center that the LAHM will inaugurate in 2012. Participant homeowners benefited from free home repairs and received valuable information about loan scam prevention and financial advice to prevent foreclosures.

#### *Corona Plaza: Center of Everywhere*

In both 2007 and 2009, the Queens Museum of Art commissioned four temporary, site-specific artworks in Corona Plaza (103rd Street and Roosevelt Avenue), just a few blocks from the Museum's home in Flushing Meadows Corona Park. These artworks are part of a larger Heart of Corona initiative in which the Museum and community members work together to improve the health of residents, beautify the neighborhood, and activate the public spaces in the area.

#### *Corona Cares Day Street Celebrations*

QMA and its partners organize three street celebrations per year in Corona Plaza that combine art, entertainment, health, and social services into one package. They offer free health evaluations, opportunities to sign up for free and low cost health plans and food stamps and information about immigration, financial education and legal services. Live music and dance performances are interspersed with local Mexican, Colombian, Peruvian, and Ecuadorian folkloric dance troupes, spoken word artists, and singers, many of whom use QMA space for classes and rehearsals. The popular events, attracting several thousand attendees, celebrate the richness and diversity of Corona residents and foster a sense of ownership over the oft-neglected area.

### **Double Edge Theatre, Ashfield, MA**

Double Edge is more than a theatre—it is a center for discovery: of the possibility to express profound ideas and emotions; of the potential of the individual to seamlessly integrate art and life; and of the power inherent in a community that has embraced its creativity and used it to define its identity.

The relationship between Double Edge and Massachusetts' most rural (and poorest) county, Franklin County, embodies the concept that good art makes thriving communities, expanding the local residents' perceptions of what is possible. Productions are immersive, lush and dreamlike, highly physical performances that are also nuanced and emotional. They create outdoor, site-specific Summer Spectacles performed in their beautifully renovated barn as well as in the fields, ponds, and hills of their center. People say, "We're not going to the theatre, we're going to Double Edge."

The work is founded in an openness to the unexpected and a desire to attempt the impossible. The training methodology attracts students from all over the US and the world to the farm to expand what they are capable of achieving. Students are challenged to achieve more than they thought possible.

In the company's notion of creative economy, it is believed that the key to the endeavor is artistic achievement: the theatre has an economic impact because its performances and trainings have an emotional impact. Artistic ambition is not the sole property of

artists—it translates to students, audiences, and all who see new possibilities when their imaginations are engaged by an extraordinary cultural experience.

Double Edge Theatre's mission is to create a "living culture" by developing the highest quality of original theatre performance, and by cultivating at its home in Ashfield, MA—the Farm—a permanent center of performance, training, research, and cultural exchange. The goal is to elevate the creation and understanding of artistic expression and cultural mutuality between artists and communities. The Farm, a 105-acre former dairy farm, today hosts artists, students, and community exchange through the practice of living culture. Facilities include permanent housing for company members, two performance spaces, archives, and a historic boarding house for students and guests.

Double Edge has had a significant overall economic impact on its region. The influx of audience members and student residents increases the business of local restaurants and bed and breakfasts, and the theatre is constantly adding jobs to the region. In response, DE developed its Rural Initiative, which cross-promotes art and culture audiences with farms and small businesses to expand demand for the region's products and services. Through collaborations, this project increases awareness of local businesses and culture.

For its model in cultural sustainability, Double Edge was given special recognition by the UNESCO and included in their "Year of Rapprochement 2010." Double Edge is one of the only US arts organizations listed in their prestigious and important global initiative whose purpose is to demonstrate the benefits of cultural diversity and exchange.

### **East Village Arts District, City of Long Beach, CA**

East Village Arts District is the name of the eastern half of Downtown Long Beach, California. The borders are Ocean Blvd. to the south, Long Beach Blvd. to the west, 7th Street to the north, and Alamitos Avenue to the east. In 2007, the border of the East Village was expanded north to 10th Street.

The East Village is a mix of many different housing types, including high-rise condos, artist lofts and small craftsman cottages, as well as people of many different cultures, income levels, and professions. The neighborhood has many independent stores selling everything from designer denim and specialty sneakers to used books and mid-century furniture. There are coffee shops which serve food, and restaurants featuring everything from crepes and sushi to chicken n' waffles. The East Village is also the city's arts district, with most of the independent shops, restaurants and galleries exhibiting work by Long Beach and Southern Californian artists.

Besides the regular bus services going to other parts of Long Beach, Long Beach Transit has a free Village Tour D'art going through the East Village that stops at the Long Beach Performing Arts Center and the Long Beach Sports Arena (which has one of Wyland's Whaling Walls), the 1926 Art Deco Breakers Hotel, the Museum of Latin American Art, the Oceanic Art Museum and gallery, several local historical churches, the City



Place and Long Beach Promenade shopping centers, and the restaurants and shops on Pine Avenue in the West Village.

The East Village Arts District is home to the Second Saturday Art Walk every month, featuring art receptions and special events in the shop and galleries of the District. The East Village Arts District is also home to Soundwalk, a unique sound art festival, which began in 2004. Soundwalk is a series of site-specific sound installations and sound art performances and attracts renowned sound artists from around the world.

## **El Puente/Green Light District, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, NY**

### *Inspiring and Nurturing Leadership for Peace and Justice*

*El Puente*—Spanish for “The Bridge”—is a community-based human rights organization that promotes leadership and social action by engaging youth and adult members in arts, education, public health, environmental justice and neighborhood improvement projects. Founded in 1982, in the Southside of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, El Puente has since become one of the nation’s premier youth and community development institutions, and continues to develop programs and initiatives that inspire and impact social policy both locally, nationally and internationally. El Puente engages more than 2,500 individuals annually throughout North Brooklyn through its Center for Arts and Culture, a Community Health and Environment Institute (CHE), four Youth Leadership Centers, and an “A” rated New York City public high school, the El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice.

El Puente has received numerous awards for its vision and leadership in the field of community and youth development, including the NYS Governor’s Decade of the Child award, the Children’s Defense Fund award (1996), the Heinz Award for the Human Condition (1999), the President’s Committee on Arts and Humanities Coming Up Taller Award as an “outstanding arts program nurturing the creative promise of young people” (1999), the Hispanic Federation Community Organization of the Year award (2001), Arts Advocate Award from the Brooklyn Council on the Arts; 2009 Public Health Community Organization Award, from the Public Health Association of New York City; and the 2010 New York Environmental Quality Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

### *The Green Light District Initiative*

El Puente’s emphasis on individual, community and environmental health dates back to its origins in early 1980s as the Southside Health Promotion Center. In the last three decades, the organization has emerged as an unwavering and creative advocate for improving the health and well-being of its neighborhood, successfully preventing the development of a 55-story trash incinerator that was legislatively mandated by the New York City Council, leading a diverse community coalition to curb the activities of a radioactive and hazardous chemical waste storage facility, and reaching out to 5,000 residents in a three-year asthma study that resulted in the first ever scientific, peer-reviewed article written by a community organization and published in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

Building on this legacy, El Puente is preparing to launch *The Green Light District Initiative*,

a 10-year campaign that will transform the Southside of Williamsburg from one of the most challenged neighborhoods in New York City to a more equitable, healthy and green community. Working collectively, block by block, apartment house by apartment house, and family by family, the members of El Puente will demonstrate to the entire nation that urban communities can reduce health disparities, achieve education equity, and increase indigenous artistic expression, while shrinking their carbon footprint. In order to accomplish this ambitious transformation, our work will concentrate in four mutually reinforcing areas:

- *Healthy Community:* Promoting individual and community wellness, especially through standard and traditional health practices; increasing access to healthy food; exercise and reducing stress, addressing household toxicity and outdoor air pollution.
- *Education, Arts and Culture:* Supporting academic and intellectual attainment as well as creative expression objectives for every Green Light District, and addressing the race and class divide in our gentrifying community by creating equitable access to funding, infrastructure and community venues for artistic expression and cultural participation.
- *Reducing Our Carbon Footprint:* Expanding local control of how energy is produced and used in both new and old buildings, reducing carbon emissions, and creating green jobs.
- *Greening Spaces:* Reimagining the built environment and integrating streets, infrastructure, open spaces and the waterfront to create healthy, safe and vibrant public spaces.

## **First Peoples Fund, Sioux Falls, SD**

Founded in 1995, First Peoples Fund's mission is to honor and support the creative community-centered First Peoples artists; and nurture the collective spirit® that allows them to sustain their peoples.

### *Our Vision*

Our vision is to communicate to the world the roots and philosophy of Indigenous artistic expression and its relationship to the collective spirit of First Peoples. We will strive to provide support and voice to the creative Indigenous artists who share their inspiration, wisdom, knowledge and gifts with their communities.

### *Our Purpose*

Our purpose is to inspire the collective spirit by honoring tradition bearers, supporting Native artist entrepreneurs and fostering vital relationships within tribal nations and national networks.

### *Our Programs*

Community Spirit Awards (CSA) are national fellowship awards for established artists who have demonstrated substantial contributions to their community through their careers as artists. In the spirit of giving, First Peoples Fund honors American Indian artists who exemplify their traditional cultural values and way of life through the sharing of

their creative talents and skills with others in the community.

The Cultural Capital (CC) program provides artists the opportunity to further their important cultural work in their respective communities. Cultural Capital invests grants in our network of community artists to conduct specific cultural projects. These grants fund public works as diverse as commemorating histories of tribal events, collective building of tradition-based art, protection and preservation of ancestral knowledge and practices that support younger generations.

The Artist in Business Leadership (ABL) recognizes tribal artists for the critical role they play in strengthening the economies in their communities. In some reservation communities, arts contribute significantly to the tribal economy.

Another 66% of American Indians currently reside off the reservations and those that pursue art as a career depend upon the arts business as their primary source of income. This self-directed, independent business arts fellowship provides professional development training and working capital funds to support their marketing strategies.

Art Marketing and Professional Development Training, Success Coach Training and Technical Assistance Services. FPF training and technical assistance services include community-based partnerships with Native Community Development Financial Institutions (NCDFIs) where up to one-third of their client base are artists. FPF's artist alumni serve as Success Coaches and trainers to the NCDFI partners. FPF offers fee-for-service workshops to state arts councils, nonprofits arts service organizations, NCDFIs and tribal governments.

Grant Awards: CSA, CC and ABL awards are \$5,000 each. Since 2000, one hundred sixty-six (166) Native artists/fellows have benefited from one of three FPF programs, totaling \$830,000.

Community Spirit Arts Initiative (2011) will foster community spirit arts networks to strengthen cultural continuity, engage a broader community in transformative social change and deepen the practice of community institutions in strengthening change makers within tribal communities/nations.

Fourth Arts Block, New York, NY

### **Fourth Arts Block (FAB)**

Fourth Arts Block (FAB) was founded in 2001 by a coalition of arts and community groups to improve and promote the East 4th Street Cultural District as a center for diverse, experimental art for our community. FAB serves as an advocate for the arts district and our members, overseeing the renovation of more than 100,000 square feet of arts space, marketing the neighborhood as a cultural destination, supporting artists' growth and capacity and developing a new model of collaborative artistic leadership.

East 4th Street occupies a unique position in the City's history, representing a century of focused artistic activity and social activism. The block has long been home to poor

and immigrant interests, housing the first Yiddish theater, the Labor Lyceum and ethnic social clubs. In the late 1960s, plans to raze the area were halted by neighborhood protest. Buildings cleared through eminent domain sat unused until La MaMa secured a 30-day lease from the City and the new Off Off Broadway movement took off. Gradually other small groups moved in and the block developed into a nationally recognized incubator for new work and diverse artistic voices.

Today, East 4th Street between 2nd Ave and Bowery is home to more than a dozen arts groups, 12 theaters, 8 dance and rehearsal studios and a film screening room. Due to FAB's activism and the support of our elected officials, in October 2005, the City sold 8 properties to the block's arts tenants for \$8 and designated it a Cultural District.

FAB is working to ensure the long-term survival of artistic voices that are quickly being pushed out of our rapidly changing neighborhood. FAB's members range in size from volunteer-run art collectives to nationally renowned theaters and have outstanding records for outreach, racial and ethnic diversity, low cost programs and training for emerging artists and youth. Each year, FAB's member arts groups serve more than 1,250 artists and attract an audience of more than 250,000.

Over the past three years, FAB has emerged from a small part-time coalition to a thriving organization and a powerful advocate for the preservation and growth of the East 4th Street Cultural District and artistic community. We have unified and engaged our diverse constituency through neighborhood planning initiatives and technical assistance and provided a community forum for local residents, nonprofits and merchants. FAB has initiated and led many successful community projects including a façade and streetscape improvement program, annual festivals, community-wide partnerships, discount ticket programs, centralized website and calendar, historic tours and public art program, all of which have heightened the District's visibility and increased the economic opportunity and stability of our growing network of artists and small businesses.

With the current threats to the financial stability of arts groups, the demand for FAB services and programs has increased exponentially over the past few years. In response, FAB has instituted an affiliate membership program, extending services to arts groups throughout the East Village/Lower East Side. By providing direct services and support FAB is helping reduce costs for artists and increasing opportunities for resource sharing and community sustainability.

Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, Brooklyn, NY

### **Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC)**

Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC) is the premier nonprofit industrial developer in New York City. Since its inception in 1992, GMDC has rehabilitated six North Brooklyn manufacturing buildings for occupancy by small manufacturing enterprises, artisans and artists.

GMDC is a nonprofit industrial developer and provides flexible below market-rate spaces for minimum terms of 5 years, conditions not otherwise available to artists and small

creative entrepreneurs in New York. Currently GMDC owns and manages five properties, which together represent more than half a million square feet of space. GMDC has transformed the image of modern day urban manufacturing, with artists and artisans among industries providing high quality jobs. Over 100 tenants employ more than 500 people and pay an average annual wage of \$40,000. Jobs housed in GMDC spaces are not traditional manufacturing jobs but provide creative work options for a key segment of New York's population. Most workers and owners live nearby and walk to work. They have a stake in community, in supporting local jobs and providing products for local, regional, national and international markets. They have contributed to a new vision for urban industrial sites as a home of light manufacturing integrated into neighborhoods with retail and residential character.

The Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center creates and sustains viable manufacturing and offering other related services. Here's how we do it:

- We acquire, rehab and manage derelict industrial properties.
- We serve as a financial intermediary.
- We act as advocates by building coalitions and fostering collaboration among stakeholders.
- We create and influence policy and the allocation of resources related to manufacturing and/or industrial development.
- We build the field and promote our model by publishing, presenting at conferences and providing technical assistance to other communities.

New York City needs industrial real estate that provides small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises with affordable, flexible production space.

The Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC) started in the late 1980s as an innovative intersection of two interests: reclaiming derelict factories in North Brooklyn's Greenpoint neighborhood and sustaining industry and manufacturing in New York City. The organization formally incorporated in 1992.

From its initial purchase and redevelopment of a large facility at 1155 Manhattan Avenue for use by light manufacturers and artisans, GMDC has since expanded and today is the only nonprofit industrial developer in New York City. The organization acquires, develops and manages industrial real estate that provides small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises with affordable, flexible production space.

GMDC, in addition to managing, maintaining and improving its properties, actively looks for still more opportunities to uncover underutilized buildings. Crafting public/private financing, engaging staff in building design and reconstruction and marketing newly renovated spaces to small businesses, manufacturers and craftspeople are all ways GMDC can influence how unused properties will be reinvented and push its mixed-use agenda. GMDC seeks to position itself as a national model that could be replicated. Keeping light manufacturing and artisans in American cities is paramount to the preservation of buoyant mixed-use communities such as Greenpoint. As long as visionary designers, committed manufacturers and active small businesses look to grow and thrive in New



York City, GMDC will strive to help them realize their ambitions.

## **International District and Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, Seattle, WA**

Seattle's International District, earlier known as Chinatown, represents the city's lowest income area with the highest rate of building vacancy, yet it is a community rich in history and living stories. In 2008, the Wing Luke Museum expanded into the historic Kong Yick building catalyzing a revival of the district's visibility, spirit, visitorship and business activity. The Museum was founded in 1967 in Seattle's Chinatown to tell the stories of the multiple ethnic groups from Asia and the Pacific Islands who had come to Seattle since the 1800s. With a local Community Development Corporation as its project manager and partner, Wing Luke has made a palpable impact. The iconic Kong Yick building and expanded museum operation brought tens of thousands of visitors and focused widespread attention on the district. [www.wingluke.org](http://www.wingluke.org)

### *Our Mission*

to connect everyone to the rich history, dynamic cultures and art of Asian Pacific Americans through vivid storytelling and inspiring experiences

### *Our Place*

§ Located in Seattle, Washington's Center City

§ Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) 15% of Seattle's population, 30+ different ethnic groups, 50+ languages

§ Sited for 43 years in Chinatown–International District, historic center of this community

§ Culturally vibrant neighborhood on National Register, homegrown small businesses, economic challenges

§ 1910 East Kong Yick Building constructed by early Chinese Americans; Transformed into community museum with historic spaces, opened June 2008

### *Our Programs*

- Guided tour of historic hotel rooms
- Guided neighborhood walking tours
- Thirteen exhibits/galleries [permanent and rotating] featuring culture, history, art, contemporary issues, youth
- Marketplace, SPACE at the Wing (community/public gatherings)
- Youth programs with youth-directed exhibits: middle school and high school programs
- Library and Museum collections with Asian Pacific American resources
- Membership, Donor circles
- Family Fun Day (3rd Saturday) with artist workshops; JamFest (1st Thursday music acts in neighborhood venues)
- Performances, lectures, cultural demonstrations

### *Exhibits (partial list)*

- A Refugee's Journey of Survival and Hope. Explores the refugee experience (including

Americans of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Burmese, Bhutanese, Tibetan, Mien, Hmong descent) through first-hand testimonies, personal photographs and mementos, artistic works and primary source documents.

- Cultural Transcendence, George Tsutakawa Art Gallery. New media works created by five artists. Contemporary photography, film, video and digital media
- Paj Ntaub: Stories of Hmong in Washington. Hmong Americans tell their own stories, share their cultural traditions, historic journeys through artifacts, artwork and oral histories.
- Beyond Identity: APA Adoptees. A generation has come of age. Their first exhibit presented through their eyes, rather than the lens of adoptive parents and agencies.
- Invent This!, KidPLACE An interactive exhibition on the many inventions by APAs now part of American culture ranging from the fortune cookie to the toy Wacky Wall Walker.
- Journeys of Faith: Spiritual Communities of APAs. Share diverse faith traditions, from over 100-year-old churches established by pioneer immigrants to new churches built by refugees that are helping to revitalize our urban cores.

#### *Our Organization*

- First Smithsonian Institution affiliate in Pacific Northwest
- 1995 recipient of Institute of Museum Services national award presented at White House
- \$2 million annual operating budget: 25% earned income, 30% donations/fundraising event, 45% corporate, foundation, government grants
- 40,000–50,000 visitors annually. 10,000 students on school tours (15% tours underwritten for low income)

The Wing uses the power of culture to bring people together—businesses, residents and the public—and engage them in telling their stories, building community and pursuing their dreams. Our signature community development process is taught around the nation as a way to instill a sense of ownership and responsibility for a community's shared future.

#### **Leimert Park Village and Crenshaw Corridor Business Improvement District, LA, CA**

Leimert Park was designed in the 1920s by the firm of Olmsted and Olmsted, sons of famed landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted, who in their own right shaped many well-known parks and public gathering spaces. The area was developed by Walter H. Leimert as a self-contained community for low- to moderate-income families. When it was completed, it was considered a model of urban development consisting of tree-lined residential streets around a central commercial core with no visible power lines and minimal traffic near churches and schools. Through the 1950s the area remained largely a white enclave. But, following a 1948 Supreme Court Case which ruled illegal restrictive covenants that didn't allow Blacks to buy property west of Western Avenue, the African American population grew until it became one of the largest black neighborhoods in the country. This was the beginning of the end for Central Avenue, which from the 1920s to the 1950s was the center of black culture in Los Angeles.

The 1960s saw Leimert Park Village, the area's commercial center, in decline. But, in typical fashion an artist moved in and began cleaning up the place. Artist Alonzo Davis co-founded the Brockman gallery in 1967 and this is when the African American history of Leimert Park Village began. For the next 20 years, the pioneer artists had the neighborhood to themselves along with drug addicts and prostitutes, but eventually the rest of the community caught on and the vision took hold.

By the late 1980s, the renaissance was in full swing. A multifaceted array of artists created space for creative production: filmmaker Ben Caldwell established Kaos Network as a community-based art space for young hip hop artists; acclaimed jazz drummer Billy Higgins joined poet Kamau Daood to found the World Stage Performance Gallery; Marla Gibbs, the actress famed for her role as "Florence," the maid on the hugely successful TV sitcom *The Jeffersons*, bought into the area. She became the major stakeholder in what became known as the Vision Theater Complex which included a former movie theater and the Crossroads Arts Academy.

The next decade brought the Greater Leimert Park Village/Crenshaw Corridor Business Improvement District (BID) to provide resources to support ongoing maintenance and revitalization in the area. Since its inception in 2006, the BID has worked closely with CRAL/LA South Los Angeles regional staff to implement its primary goals of improving the appearance and safety of the area as well as marketing and promoting the area to businesses and the community. The current business improvement district is bounded by Vernon Avenue to the south, Leimert Boulevard from the triangle to 43rd Street, 43rd Street to Crenshaw north on the east and west sides of the street to Stocker. To the west the BID includes all of the Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza (BCHP) up to 39th Street and the commercial property along King Boulevard to McClung Avenue.

Most recently, the Leimert Park Art Walk started in February of this year, has been a dynamic addition to the artistic and cultural programming in the neighborhood. Created as a way to provide small business owners and artists with an outlet to showcase their artistic production, the monthly gathering brings hundreds of people from all walks of life to Leimert Park to experience the unique and compelling atmosphere. Prior to the artwalk, street vendors did not have a publicly sanctioned way to participate in the economy of the village and their presence created tension from several quarters. In response to this situation, Ben Caldwell stepped in to rally the community to come up with a creative solution and the artwalk was born. It has been so successful since its beginning that the LA Times took notice with a cover story in the arts and entertainment section. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-leimert-park-artwalk-20110322,0,4348504.story>

### **Llano Grande Center, Edcouch, TX**

The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, a school-based nonprofit organization in Edcouch, Texas, is the home of an exciting, long-term experiment in educational innovation and community development. The Center's mission is to revitalize local communities by expanding educational horizons and developing leadership. Our goals

include creating access to higher education, engaging students in community development and building leadership that respects local history and culture. Llano Grande was incorporated in 1997, though initial work began in the early 1990s.

Our approach to community development brought hope and higher expectations to our border community, where a historical dynamic between a laboring class of Mexicans and a ruling class of Anglos resulted in poor educational attainment and a poor local economy.

Through a series of classroom and extracurricular innovations, we proved to Edcouch-Elsa High School students that college was not only possible for them, but that it was necessary and that many of them were talented enough to compete for admission at the most prestigious universities. Over the years, scores of our students have graduated from some of the most elite schools in the country, many of them pursuing post-graduate degrees. The majority of our former students have returned home to enter the local workforce as professionals and contribute to civic life and community development efforts.

Llano Grande Center has been nationally recognized for its unique college preparation program. While test-taking skills, rigorous classes and good grades are important, our program uniquely emphasizes students' intellectual and social development through an exploration of self and community. In partnership with alumni and other adults, our students use media as one means to build identity and shape the community.

We engage in media development for the purpose of sharing stories that add to the collective sense of history, empathy and activism. These stories lead to public dialogues that are open, vigilant and mindful of the continuing need for change. For example, our students designed a media campaign about the costs and benefits associated with a \$21 million bond to construct new school facilities in Edcouch-Elsa. Taxpayers received adequate information from unbiased sources, our youth were able to cast informed votes. The bond issue passed with a slight margin and now local students enjoy new school facilities.

### **Made in Midtown and Design Trust for Public Space, New York, NY**

The Design Trust for Public Space is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving public space in New York City. From parks, plazas and streets to public buildings, creative districts and modes of transportation, Design Trust projects affect how public space is created, managed and made accessible to all New Yorkers.

In 2009, the Design Trust for Public Space partnered with the Council of Fashion Designers of America to produce Made in Midtown, a study of the role of the Garment District in the fashion industry. Working with an interdisciplinary team, the Design Trust documented how designers depend on the skills and expertise found in hundreds of small factories and suppliers throughout the Garment District and why this neighborhood is an integral part of the city's economy, identity and sense of place. The launch of [madeinmidtown.org](http://madeinmidtown.org), which published the study's findings, made visible the extraor-

dinary creative activity that takes place in Midtown and helped shift New Yorkers' understanding of the District from a declining manufacturing relic to a vibrant fashion research and development hub that enables innovative fashion design and entrepreneurial activity.

Building on this success, Made in Midtown Phase 2 will develop a vision for a working, creative district in Midtown that could become a new economic development model for urban light industry. Phase 2 will include a detailed analysis of the District's physical infrastructure—buildings, sidewalks, streets, open spaces—and how people in the area occupy the public realm; and an examination of the present and potential real estate value of the District, including the costs and benefits to New York City of redeveloping the Garment District. Using these analyses, the Design Trust will convene a series of workshops that will examine the broad spectrum of tools available to city officials—from zoning to branding, physical improvements to training programs—in order to balance the needs and interests of Midtown's many stakeholders. Ultimately, Made in Midtown will provide flexible strategies to preserve the District's diverse uses—including fashion production and supply—while exploring the potential for physical improvements to the public realm that could benefit the fashion industry, property owners and the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who pass through the District every day.

Made in Midtown is about more than just fashion. It's about one of the last neighborhoods in Manhattan that has not yet been transformed by recent waves of redevelopment. It's about jobs and immigrant workers. And it's about the decisions we make as a city to support certain kinds of businesses and land-use developments, whether it's baseball stadiums, high-rise condominiums, factories, or creative districts.

### **Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, Old Town, ME**

The Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA) is an intertribal arts service organization in Maine serving 200 tribal basket makers in the Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Tribes. The mission is to preserve the ancient art of ash and sweetgrass basketry, Maine's oldest art form. In 1993, when tribal basket makers founded the organization, there were only 5 dozen Elders still practicing ash and sweetgrass basketry, once a mainstay of cultural artistic practice and economic development among the tribes. Through a series of annual programs—inter-tribal basketry workshops, a traditional arts apprenticeship program and 4 annual markets—the MIBA has successfully lowered the average age of basket makers from 63 to 40 and increased the numbers of artisans from 55 to 200.

In 2010, a 32-year-old Passamaquoddy basket maker from Maine (Jeremy Frey) won the prestigious United States Artists Fellowship ([www.unitedstatesartists.org](http://www.unitedstatesartists.org)). Acknowledging the rise of a successful artist from poverty and drug addiction as a youth on his rural reservation, this award was celebrated by the entire basket making and arts community in Maine. It was a direct result of MIBA programs and its community of artisans practicing in this ancient, naturally occurring cultural district. The market for baskets in Maine has virtually disappeared since the recession began. For 7 years, the MIBA operated its own retail gallery in Old Town, ME, where approximately 125 basket



makers sold their work together. Since the gallery closed in 2009, MIBA has established new collaborations and partnerships to keep artists employed. Collaborators include the Maine Crafts Association, Four Directions Development Corporation, the Abbe Museum, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners, the Hudson Museum and the University of Maine for marketing, exhibitions, artist workshops and demonstrations. MIBA has committed 18 years to improving the quality of life through traditional art for dozens of tribal artisans, many of whom live at or near the poverty level.

### **Midtown Area and University Cultural Center Association, Detroit, MI**

*Encouraging Arts and Entrepreneurial Activity in Midtown Detroit*

The University Cultural Center Association (UCCA) is a non-profit planning and development agency in Detroit that has been working to revitalize the Midtown neighborhood for the last two decades. UCCA serves as the primary connector between the large and diverse stakeholder base operating in the neighborhood which includes traditional educational and cultural institutions, social agencies, community based non-profits, entrepreneurs, developers, artists, churches, among others. Our work has evolved over time from creating an environment that supports and attracts organically growing arts and entrepreneurial activity to more direct involvement through the provision of incentive funds, technical assistance and informal networking opportunities across sectors and stakeholder groups.

Due to the level of disinvestment in the neighborhood in the early 1990s, UCCA concentrated efforts on building a base for stabilizing the existing residential and commercial market while attracting new investment. Early efforts included the creation of a predevelopment loan fund for small-scale mixed-income housing and the establishment of numerous federal and local historic districts. These critical early strategies ensured that the income diversity, scale, character and integrity of the district would be preserved. Work then began to restore and build sustainable infrastructure within the neighborhood including renovation of key historic properties; restoration of the tree canopy; construction of streetscapes, community gardens, parks and green alleys; and most recently a 3.5-mile greenway that is currently under construction. This dedicated non-motorized trail will create a physical connection between the major educational and cultural assets to a number of organically growing arts and retail clusters within Midtown.

Most recently, our focus has shifted substantially to providing assistance to the many local artists and entrepreneurs pursuing their passion to open street level businesses; green business, arts and restaurant incubators; studios and live work space. This is due in large part to more competitive pricing and a variety of loan and grant funds that have been created to incentivize this type of activity. In addition, we are building small-scale flexible mixed-use facilities adjacent to organically developing clusters to create enough density to sustain them.

While UCCA has been working at the macro level across the neighborhood for years <— Also used earlier in the sentence] to connect arts and economic development activity, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) has been working at the micro level building community and helping UCCA to foster a smaller, more focused arts and eco

district around the museum. This involves building a walkable dense cluster of activity with flexible performance spaces, outdoor galleries, community garden, affordable artist studio space and supportive commercial space. Although the real estate is being developed to support arts development, the district will self-organize in terms of the organizations, artists and entrepreneurs who will choose to make this place their home. Already a wide variety of artists are leasing affordable studio space in the first renovated building. The district is utilizing green technologies such as geothermal, solar, storm water retention, LED and induction lighting, recycling, composting and many other sustainable practices that both reduce operating costs and benefit the environment.

MOCAD has been open for three years and has become an important community gathering space for public discourse sparking new thinking about how to re-imagine Detroit. Attracting large numbers of both city and metro residents eager to participate, its exhibitions and educational programs are highly acclaimed yet accessible to everyone in an environment that fosters inclusion and dialogue. Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard Merchants and Business Association, New Orleans, LA

Born out of the works of Ashé Cultural Arts Center, The Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard Merchants and Business Association was formed in 2001. It is currently the lead organization working toward a cultural transformation of this historic retail district. Once a mecca for African American life, O. C. Haley Blvd. Has the potential to once again be a highlight of New Orleans's African American Community and so much more. The O. C. Haley Blvd. area, which is an extension of downtown New Orleans, just north of historic mansion-lined St. Charles Avenue and in the back yard of the affluent Garden District, went into blight and disinvestment after integration legislation.

The Corridor now has the designation of a certified state Urban Main Street and was awarded one of the state's first "Cultural District" designations. Both distinctions have created diverse incentives, including historic and low-income housing tax credits, as well as other financial assistance and business-related and design technical assistance is available to merchants and real estate proprietors. The Association's work has attracted major investment to the area. Several major redevelopment projects have been completed and/or are underway or upcoming in the near future, including a state-funded Civil Rights Museum. The Merchants' Association has established working relationships with private developer partners and public entities to ensure the community's vision for a cultural tourism district with sustainable resources and economic development goals for this marginalized, but culturally vibrant and resilient African American community. The real challenge to our efforts is preserving the culture and the built capital and retaining ownership of community assets that ultimately protects the community's vision for the neighborhood. The Merchants Association is in the process of developing a "commercially focused" land trust that we feel will facilitate efforts to preserve one of New Orleans' cultural treasures, Central City.

## **Penn Center, St. Helena Island, SC**

When Laura Towne and her friend Ellen Murray established Penn School on St. Helena Island, SC, in 1862, they experienced the strange, melodic language of the freed slaves that—only part English—was tempered with expressions and idioms and spoken in a melodious, euphonic manner. Towne had come from Philadelphia and Murray from Rhode Island. Their goal was to furnish teachings to the former enslaved people on St. Helena Island, allowing them to move into mainstream American society. They soon came face to face with remnants of African cultures that would eventually come to be known as Gullah.

Soon after her arrival, Towne wrote in her diary, “Tonight I have been to a ‘shout’ . . . the Negroes sing a kind of chorus—three standing apart to lead and clap and others go shuffling around in circle . . . I never saw anything so savage.” Obviously, Towne did not know at the time that she was witnessing an African dance movement.

Despite the cultural differences between these two Caucasian teachers and their students, the two ladies—over a forty year period—developed a model community-based school incorporating traditional African arts and crafts (i.e. music, dance, blacksmithing, basketry and net knitting). The school closed in 1948— eighty-six years later—after educating many students of the SC Sea Islands. Its programs were transferred to the public school sector.

In 1950, Penn School was reorganized as Penn Center, focusing on community development issues imbedded in the Civil Rights Movement. The campus that once boarded students became one of the few sites in the South that was allowed to accommodate multiracial groups. Martin Luther King and staff regularly retreated at the Center. The arts of music and dance were often incorporated into organizing strategies. The Center also has a long-standing tradition in monthly community Sings, which can be traced back to 1918. The culmination of these activities led to the opening of the York W. Bailey Museum, which initially began by displaying the arts and history of Gullah culture in an old classroom in 1971.

In 1981, a group of Alumni and friends of the Center recognized a need to revive the once-vibrant community programs at Penn Center into the Penn Center Heritage Days Celebrations. Their goal was to preserve the Gullah cultural heritage primarily through demonstration of Gullah art forms and cuisine.

The arts of Sam Doyle and Jonathan Green are among its popular attractions. The annual celebration has grown in popularity from a local audience of 200 to an international audience of more than 25,000 participants.

The Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration Parade has evolved into one of the most popular Gullah cultural art forms. It embodies the Gullah culture in a compelling art form. Elder and youth depictions of family, food ways (rice, sweet potatoes, etc), spirituality (Gospel choirs), visual art (baskets) and performance art (bands and music) are all presented in an artful session with diverse and appreciative audience.

Penn Center is seen by many as the main purveyor and preserver of Gullah cultural heritage today. And the expanded York W. Bailey Museum is considered to be the center of this community preservation effort. Penn Center's website has the name as York W. Bailey.

### **San Pedro Arts, Culture and Entertainment District, Los Angeles County, CA**

San Pedro's Arts, Culture and Entertainment District has the goal of institutionalizing an emerging arts scene to make San Pedro an arts destination. SPACE and its immediate surroundings are home to over 90 visual artists as well as a lively and varied collection of restaurants, performing arts venues and art galleries. The district is anchored by the Warner Grand Theatre, a 1,500 seat historic art deco movie palace; Little Fish Theatre, which presents repertory theater in a converted garage; and the Loft Studios, a three-story warehouse where a concentration of fine artists do their work. The District's streets are lined with artists' live-work spaces. The studios come alive on the 1st Thursday of every month, with gallery receptions, artist open houses and live music. Throughout the month, there are many performances to take advantage of from contemporary plays to acoustic music, to foreign films and more. A website, [www.spacedistrict.org](http://www.spacedistrict.org), provides visitors with a comprehensive guide to what's happening in the area.

In 2007, the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency led an effort to designate a section of downtown San Pedro as a City of Los Angeles arts district. With initial funding of \$75,000, local civic leaders, community members and artists, led by James Preston Allen, worked together to form the district. The first step was to complete a study of the needs and conditions of the local arts environment. This study was completed in June 2008 and on February 13, 2009, the L.A. City Council adopted a resolution to form the arts district, by unanimous vote.

The district currently has a diverse board overseeing it with the guidance of Walter Beaumont, a CRA Assistant Project Manager. The goal is to create a balance that allows for the commercial success of business and property owners without extinguishing one of the main things that makes San Pedro a destination. The goal within the relatively small district is to provide as much to as many people as possible: to meet the aspirations of artists and cultural institutions; provide for the enjoyment of the public; and address the economic needs of property owners. The boundaries are Harbor Boulevard on the East, Pacific Avenue on the West, 4th Street on the North and 8th Street on the South.

### **South Bronx Cultural Corridor, South Bronx, NY**

In 2001, Bronx Council on the Arts designated a mile-long strip along the Grand Concourse as the South Bronx Cultural Corridor. Serving as a demonstration of arts-based community development for the borough, this corridor was dubbed the "Gateway to the

New Bronx.” While the Grand Concourse corridor is at the center of the neighborhood’s public space, the BCA’s initiatives, within the Corridor rubric, cover 4 miles of the South Bronx. This area includes neighborhoods:

- where immigrants are settling
- where concentrations of poverty and unemployment exist
- where there are large not for profit institutions: e.g. hospitals
- where there are major for profits: e.g. NY Yankees and Gateway Mall
- where there is a preponderance of Bronx artists and arts organizations

Bronx artists and arts organizations face two basic economic development problems. On the demand side, potential consumers often lack information about the quantity and quality of products; and on the supply side, artists and arts organizations may not have the resources to take advantage of the market opportunities. BCA helps to generate income and investment through staging creative connections between arts/artists, the community at large and the marketplace. BCA’s pivotal role in the area is to:

- expose the social networks
- provide opportunities for cross pollination of ideas and innovation
- encourage cross promotion and healthy competition for market share

BCA enlists the involvement of key cultural and arts organizations, to serve as attractions to the area and as catalysts for retail business sales. These arts anchors include Bronx Museum of the Arts, Longwood Art Gallery @ Hostos, Pregones Theater, Bronx Blue Bedroom Project, Synthetic Zero Event Space, among others. Each organization shares a common mission of focusing on the arts and culture of their community. By emphasizing the rich and diverse cultural identity of the South Bronx, a synergy is created with residents to participate in and create their own outlets of expression.

The following key components of the Corridor strategy are the facilitators for this change. The Bronx Culture Trolley promotes civic engagement and impacts quality of life. The Art Handlers Training is an ongoing workforce development program. The Artisans Initiative develops micro businesses. The Creative Bronx! Black Book identifies and promotes a network of existing creative industries. The connectors are there—BCA collaborates with a large number of stakeholders as we incrementally create a shared vision and embark on a comprehensive culturally dynamic approach to maximize the Bronx creative assets/resources and achieve broader objectives.

BCA is identifying and encouraging the building of networks among the entrepreneurial and artistic community already working and/or living in the South Bronx with other active community members. By creating an indigenous creative resource within the boundaries of the community, BCA is leading the efforts to create an economically vibrant area.



## **STAY Project, Appalshop, Whitesburg, KY**

The STAY Project (Stay Together Appalachian Youth) is a diverse regional network of young people throughout Central Appalachia who are working together to advocate for and actively participate in their home mountain communities. It is a consortium supported by Appalshop's Appalachian Media Institute in Whitesburg, KY, High Rocks in Hillsboro, WV and the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, TN. The STAY Project is poised to make a much-needed contribution to leadership development in Central Appalachia.

Central Appalachia faces an exodus of young people due in large part to the lack of economic and educational opportunities. Youth from this region grow up in communities with an average high school completion rate of 68% and a 7% college completion rate. Roughly 17% of residents in these counties live in poverty, with young people disproportionately affected.

Because of this, many organizations provide direct services to youth and struggle to consistently offer basic personal and leadership development opportunities. Youth have few avenues to participate in community decision-making or provide leadership on the region's critical issues. We are interested in working with young people as decision makers that design their own projects, build diverse coalitions and contribute solutions to community needs.

The youth-led STAY Project is doing what few other organizations have done:

1. Having youth ask each other what they want and need in order to stay and work in their home communities.
2. Connecting them with the resources and skills they need to make their visions for Central Appalachia come true.
3. Recognizing that there are young leaders in the region who already creating change.

The STAY Project is about the need for communities now and in the future to have the basic human rights that everyone deserves no matter where they live, their economic background, their race, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or cultural background.

In Central Appalachia there are few regional networks, meeting places, spaces for intergenerational conversation, or united youth visions; thus it is crucial to provide more spaces for people to gather formally and informally. The STAY Project's network of members and regional gatherings create avenues for our communities to educate themselves, find a voice and nurture political power.

Appalshop is a multi-media arts and cultural organization located in Whitesburg, Kentucky, that strives to develop effective ways to use media to address the complex issues facing central Appalachia—a declining coal economy, a legacy of environmental damage, high unemployment rates and poor educational opportunities and attainment. In 1988 Appalshop staff members founded the Appalachian Media Institute (AMI), a me-

dia training program for central Appalachian youth. Using the technological and artistic resources of Appalshop, AMI helps young people explore how media production skills can be used to ask and begin to answer, critical questions of themselves and their communities. With opportunities to have input into community dialogues and frame those dialogues themselves, young people develop the skills and critical thinking abilities necessary to become leaders in creating sustainable futures for their communities. Since its inception AMI has directly engaged over 700 young people in media production.

### **St. Croix Festival Theatre and St. Croix Valley Heritage Area, St. Croix Falls, WI**

The central area of the St. Croix River Valley is emerging as a cultural and heritage region of considerable impact, one that crosses the sectors of history, the arts, economic development, the environment and recreation. In 1968, the upper St. Croix River was one of the first eight rivers in the nation to be protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, legislation co-authored by U.S. Senators Walter Mondale (MN) and Gaylord Nelson (WI). This was followed in 1972 by the lower St. Croix being protected under the same legislation. In 1970, the region's ecological profile was further distinguished by U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson's establishment of the first Earth Day. Nelson grew up in Polk County, WI, just 25 miles from the St. Croix. At the line of demarcation between the upper and lower St. Croix are the communities of St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin and Taylors Falls, Minnesota (just 50 miles northeast of downtown St. Paul, MN). Working together in the 1890's, these communities advanced legislation in each of their states to create Interstate Park, establishing state parks on both sides of the river and setting the tone of a land stewardship ethic for decades to come.

During the early years of the 20th century, St. Croix Falls and Taylors Falls were known for tourism and post-lumber era manufacturing. A hydroelectric dam was built in 1907 and shortly afterward the City of St. Croix Falls built the civic Auditorium directly across the street from the dam. The structure featured a community room on the street level and a performance hall upstairs which was meant to host touring vaudeville acts and opera companies. Also during this time, excursion paddle boats provided economic impact through tourism. The Auditorium opened to the public in January 1917, unfortunate timing due to the Spanish flu epidemic and the impact of World War I and was quickly pressed into service as a Red Cross hospital. Just a short time later, the dream of a live performing arts venue quite quickly gave way to a more practical and very exciting new entertainment era: silent film. From 1918 to 1985, the performance hall of the Auditorium was used as a single screen movie house and it was not until the summer of 1990 that professional theatre was produced for the stage by Festival Theatre, now in its 22nd season of providing arts programming in the central St. Croix Valley.

The Auditorium has been a unique witness to history in these two little river towns and as such has also been a gathering place to a great cross-section of people over the course of time. The current tenant, Festival Theatre, is a 501(c)(3) arts organization with a mission to "make the arts welcoming to all people as an essential part of their well-being and for the vitality of the community." To this end, the non-profit has a long history of both traditional arts partnerships and non-traditional cross-sector partnerships. Over the past six years in particular, the organization has participated in and

supported partnerships and programs such as: three consecutive NEA Big Read grants in partnership with libraries in the region; a strategic marketing alliance with a focus on destination cooperative advertising; participation in the development and implementation of Earth Day celebrations with the National Park Service; membership and strategic support of ArtReach St. Croix which is a regional arts agency located 25 miles south of St. Croix Falls/Taylors Falls; the merging of two Chambers of Commerce organizations into one; planning within the National Heritage Area task force (led by the St. Croix Valley Foundation and the National Park Service); and the Living Landmark partnership initiative of the City of St. Croix Falls and Festival Theatre to study sustainable reuse plans for the civic Auditorium which was named to the National Register of Historic Places in January 2007.

By sustaining a vibrant arts presence in this rural place and reaching across sectors to build community through the arts, Festival Theatre is now part of a cultural heritage ecosystem that is beginning to add fuel to an Experience Economy that has been valued for over a century.

### **Thai Town and Thai Community Development Center, Los Angeles, CA**

Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC), a community development non-profit organization since 1994, facilitated the designation of the one and only Thai Town in the world located in Hollywood, Los Angeles and founded the Thai New Year's Day Songkran Festival. Thai Town is the first designated enclave of its kind internationally. This designation was the first step of a multi-faceted, economic development strategy to revitalize a depressed section of Hollywood while enriching the City's cultural and social fabric. Thai Town was envisioned as a way of generating local business and economic development in East Hollywood through cultural tourism.

Thai CDC began its feasibility study of a city designation of Thai Town in 1992 by conducting the landmark Thai community needs assessment survey. Results from surveys reflected an overwhelming support for a Thai Town in East Hollywood, the historic port of entry for newly arrived Thai immigrants spanning 45 years and for Thai Town to be more than just a commercial center. Rather, a Thai Town would preserve the Thai community's cultural integrity while embracing the ethnic diversity of the area. We also owe the successful designation of Thai Town to our establishment of a Thai Town Formation Committee, comprised of representatives from various segments of the Thai community and training them in the civics process to garner broad-based support for the Thai Town concept through petitions, support letters, a post card campaign and canvassing of diverse local merchants and residents.

Thai Town became more than just a designation as it is a community economic development strategy, placing the well-being of people and quality of life within the area as paramount. In our role as an advocate for the Thai community and other economically disadvantaged minority communities, Thai CDC believes that the development of Thai Town or any other neighborhoods should address the fundamental needs of its residents for decent jobs, economic security, decent and affordable housing and neighborhood beautification. We try to measure the success of Thai Town on how well it contributes

to the overall development process and how well it gives local access to the above basic rights.