

# breaking down CREATIVE PLACEMAKING



Across the country, community leaders are talking more and more about the field of creative placemaking. But what exactly does it mean? What kind of impact could it have on your community, and how can you play a role in deciding what happens?

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# so what exactly is CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

The simple answer is that **creative placemaking is any artistic or creative effort to make a particular community stronger**. Of course, that can mean a lot of different things. It's one reason creative placemaking can be hard to explain – it can look very different depending on where it takes place, what it's trying to address and how exactly it tries to accomplish that.

## where



Creative placemaking is happening around the globe - in small villages, huge cities and everything between. Projects could involve ten people living on one particular street or thousands of people living over a large region.

## what



Every community has a set of unique challenges and opportunities, and good creative placemaking responds to what is particular to a place. Sometimes projects try to stop something bad - like vacancy - from happening. Other times, projects try to make something good - like people getting higher-paying jobs - happen more often or faster. Other projects might be less interested in what's good or bad ... And more focused on just increasing conversation among people who visit or live or work in a place.

There are literally hundreds of communities carrying out creative placemaking projects across the U.S. - and countless more around the world. Here are two particularly strong examples, both generously supported by The Kresge Foundation.

### North Collinwood

Cleveland, Ohio  
Northeast Shores  
[welcometocollinwood.com](http://welcometocollinwood.com)



Over the past decade, North Collinwood's Waterloo Arts District has grown into a huge center for indie music and art. Northeast Shores is building off of that energy to redevelop dozens of vacant lots, houses and storefronts into new creative spaces and opportunities for low-cost homeownership (as low as \$8,500!). The organization is also providing artists with small grants to creatively address a range of different resident priorities, from health to safety to education.

## SOME KEY EXAMPLES



### The Westside

Covington, Kentucky  
Center for Great  
Neighborhoods  
[greatneighborhoods.org](http://greatneighborhoods.org)

The Westside has historically been a neighborhood that has produced and exported things like decorative woodwork and metalwork. The Center for Great Neighborhoods is working to strengthen that culture of making. That work starts with the redevelopment of the Hellmann Lumber Mill into a community gathering space and creative center. It also involves providing residents with support to creatively address blight and to launch projects that improve quality of life.

## CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

### what's creative?



When you hear “creative” or “art”, you might think of a very narrow definition ... probably involving painting or some other form of visual art. But creative placemakers usually have something else in mind - yes, visual art ... but also theater, writing, dance, music, video, graphic design, product design and even culinary art. At the end of the day, creativity can be anything that leads us to think about our world or community or lives in a different way. Creative placemaking is really all about how we take issues that seem huge and hard to address - poverty or crime or walkability or small business support - and test out new approaches for building community.



Establishing a fashion co-op where low-income residents can learn tailoring and sewing ... and how to create and market their own work.



Asking students to describe why safety is important to their community ... And then using their words in a large mural.



Inviting visitors to take photos of things they like in a community ... And then designing signs that point to those locations.



Making a short documentary about the history of businesses on a particular “main street” and hosting a viewing at a street party.

# CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

## what's place?



One of the biggest misunderstandings about creative placemaking is the idea that it's only focused on the physical world - the development of murals and small parks and sculptures. These are all definitely things that could be part of a creative placemaking project, but physical improvements are just one type of creative work. In a lot of creative placemaking, people are considered as important as physical space. Projects are often as focused on the process of creating community dialogue as on a final product. That's because the focus is usually on how we make *spaces* into *places*.

## the difference between space & place



It might sound like a silly distinction, but space and place mean two very different things. A space is a location and nothing more. It might not be particularly inviting, and it's probably not explored a lot. It's something we're more likely to travel *through*. A place, on the other hand, is a space with meaning. People are attracted to it. They have memories of it. It's somewhere they're likely to want to travel *to*. Creative placemaking works to strengthen this sense that spaces have meaning, sometimes through physical improvements ... But also often by focusing on improving human experiences.

# CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

## what's making?



When people talk about "making places", they're usually referring to the process we've already described: increasing how much people value a place; celebrating what's already great about it; and giving people the reason and resources to make it even better.

## doesn't that assume the process of making isn't already happening?



Absolutely not, although this is another common misunderstanding about creative placemaking.

The word "making" can either mean bringing something into existence that wasn't around before ... Or it can mean forming or advancing something by bringing different parts together that already exist. Creative placemaking is based around the second definition - the idea that great things already exist in a community, and with a little extra effort, we can advance things even further.

In fact, creative placemaking doesn't work very well unless community building *is* already happening. Projects typically focus on how we can creatively increase the value and visibility of community assets, find new ways to address long-term challenges and get resources into the hands of people and organizations committed to making that kind of positive change. Creative placemaking is all about bringing those good things happening together in an even more significant way.