Arts & Culture
The Cooper’s Ferry Partnership is developing spaces in Camden, N.J., where people want to live, work and play.
Revitalizing America’s urban communities takes grit, persistence, imagination and a willingness to apply innovative combinations of tools to help unlock the potential of people in disenfranchised neighborhoods.

Throughout the country, Kresge’s Arts & Culture Program is pioneering new models of embedded creative placemaking — integrating arts and culture as an essential component of comprehensive community development — in low-income communities.

The support we provide our partners to carry out this work has aided many places where art, expression and creativity create a synergy with traditional community development tools to help energize neighborhoods.

In 2015, we expanded our toolkit through a unique partnership with Kresge’s Social Investment Practice to help unlock alternate forms of capital for creative placemaking projects in New Jersey. Support for the New Jersey Community Capital’s (NJCC) $12 million revolving loan, Creative Placemaking Fund, will enhance technical assistance services to arts and creative businesses.

The Arts & Culture Program awarded NJCC a $300,000 grant as a complementary investment to a $2.5 million program-related investment (PRI) from Kresge’s Social Investment Practice. It is our program’s first combined grant and PRI. The goal: Stimulate economic investments in the character, diversity, art, culture and livability of low-income communities in New Jersey.

Projects in the NJCC’s Creative Placemaking Fund pipeline will range from large-scale cultural districts — which include mixed-income artist residences, education centers, nonprofit arts organizations and arts-based small businesses — to individual anchor enterprises such as community theaters, outdoor spaces for performances and creative production and learning spaces for music and visual arts.

We are particularly excited because the NJCC’s pipeline has the potential to include a number of existing Kresge grantees, providing tremendous learning opportunities moving forward. With our Social Investment team, we look forward to evaluating and sharing what we learn from the new venture and using it to inform and refine our work and that of our grantees.

We continue to remain on the lookout for opportunities to collaborate in unique partnerships — internally and externally — that will unlock and unleash the creativity that catalyzes community building and a better quality of life in our great American cities.
Located across from Philadelphia on the Delaware River, and surrounded on three sides by water, Camden, N.J., was once a thriving industrial hub. After the factories that dotted the waterfront began to close in the 1950s and in subsequent decades, vacant and contaminated lands remained.

In 1984, the owners of those properties came together to form what would become the Cooper’s Ferry Partnership. The goal? To find new purpose for abandoned and underutilized property.

“We’ve come a long way,” says Meishka Mitchell, vice president of Neighborhood Initiatives at Cooper’s Ferry. “Today we have about 3 million visitors per year on the downtown waterfront, which now has an aquarium, concert venue and other cultural attractions.

“Over the last 10 years, we utilized the same expertise we used on the downtown waterfront to look more into the city’s neighborhoods.”

Cooper’s Ferry is all about making Camden into a place people want to live, work, visit and invest. The Kresge Foundation’s Arts & Culture team is supporting this ambitious work.

Elevating the Narrative
In 2015, the Arts & Culture Program allocated just more than $18.5 million to 69 organizations for projects that illustrate how creative placemaking can help reknit a fractured social fabric.

“Most community development projects don’t include arts and culture,” says Regina Smith, managing director of Kresge’s Arts & Culture Program. “Our belief is that by including arts and culture, there is an opportunity to lift up a distinctive narrative about a place that residents will both own and tell.

“Often, low-income residents don’t have a voice or aren’t given the opportunity to tell or share stories about their community.”

When they are provided meaningful opportunities to engage, the community benefits, she says.

In identifying grant applicants that merit support, the Arts & Culture team looks for projects and organizations that engage in cross-disciplinary and cross-sector approaches, exhibit strong leadership, empower residents, benefit all stakeholders — particularly low-income residents — and have distinctiveness of place.

For example, Kresge awarded the city of Fargo, N.D., a three-year, $900,000 grant to transform large stormwater basins into public common areas. While the basins continue to function for drainage collection, the transformed spaces will help to connect and engage the city’s artists and residents.

The unrelenting efforts of Cooper’s Ferry to build a healthy and strong community through the integration of arts and culture parallel the goals of Kresge’s Arts & Culture team.

“Cooper’s Ferry really serves as a vital partner for the city of Camden,” Smith says. “They not only have an awareness of the integrated approach to stabilize a lot of the neighborhoods in Camden, but they also hear directly from residents what they desire for their communities.”

At just 9 square miles, the city is home to some 77,000 residents who Mitchell describes as resilient, spirited and sharing great love for their community.

“We see that every day in the work that we do,” says Mitchell, who was born and raised there. “It’s a small city with big-city problems.”
it rains, runoff and sewage mix. And when capacity is reached — often after just one inch of rain — sewer backups and overflows occur in homes, parks and streets. When the team at Cooper’s Ferry spoke with residents regarding concerns in their neighborhoods, the sewage backups emerged as a pressing issue.

That resulted in the Stormwater Management and Resource Training Initiative. Through infrastructure improvements, the initiative helps mitigate those problems. Among the projects: capturing rain before it hits the sewer system to help keep water and sewage from overwhelming storm sewers.

Cooper’s Ferry has also invested in parks as a way to engage the community on multiple levels.

“We were doing these enhancements in some of the neighborhoods and investing in parks,” Mitchell says. “For instance, in North Camden there was a park that had just been overrun by drug dealers. We were able to rehabilitate this park and create a nice, well-kept area, safe for people to play.”

Still, residents were staying away.

“Once people stop going to a place, it doesn’t become part of their routine,” Mitchell says. “The park was still seen as a place that was off limits to them to play in.”

From that grew the Connect the Lots program. With a two-year, $1.1 million grant from Kresge awarded in 2013, Cooper’s Ferry revitalized vacant spaces within the community through the lens of creative placemaking. These empty lands became the center of structured activities like free yoga classes, a skateboard park, an afternoon concert series, community dinners — even a musical theater workshop for the city’s youth.

“When we were doing the Connect the Lots initiative and talking to residents about how they wanted their parks programmed and what activities they wanted to see in their vacant spaces, among the things that were mentioned included active living, active lifestyle, healthy initiatives and free fitness classes,” Mitchell says.

Cooper’s Ferry listened.

“All of those activities had the goal of really getting the community out in a way that maybe they hadn’t been engaged in a long time,” Mitchell adds. “There were a lot of residents who would say they couldn’t believe something like this was happening in their neighborhood. They are used to going elsewhere for these kinds of activities.”

That’s what appealed to The Kresge Foundation.

“It’s more than just arts interventions on vacant lots,” Smith says. “It’s a comprehensive and integrated approach to stabilize neighborhoods that have been disinvested for decades.”

**Outside the Box**

Until recently, the city had no gym or other spaces designated for exercise. High childhood obesity rates and sparse access to fresh food were among related challenges.

In response, in 2015 Kresge awarded a new, $900,000 grant over three years to support the new Camden Healthy Places Initiative. With the success of the Connect the Lots program and establishment of a platform for community engagement through arts and culture, Cooper’s Ferry proved its ability to seamlessly blend sectors.

“This is a strategic opportunity for Cooper’s Ferry to bring its experience and expertise to bear in integrating arts and culture into a broader, comprehensive community framework that includes health and the environment,” Smith says.

Healthy Places falls under a larger umbrella of the Camden Collaborative Initiative, a partnership among roughly 50 government, nonprofit, private and community-based agencies that Cooper’s Ferry helped launch in 2013. Its goal is to help create and implement projects that lift and improve the environment and quality of life for Camden residents.

“We are really putting a collective impact spin on how we tackle health in the city of Camden,” Mitchell says.

For Valeria Galarza, vice president of Public Health Initiatives at the YMCA of Burlington and Camden counties, the Camden Healthy Places Initiative is vital.

“The city of Camden has many opportunities to transform unused space to connect the community to activities,” she says. “We need to demonstrate that exercise and physical activity can happen anywhere.

“Outdoor play fulfills basic needs for exploring, exercise, socializing and connecting with nature. Urban cities, like Camden, lack many opportunities for such needs to be met, which is why this initiative is important.”

Galarza and her team at the YMCA worked on the Connect the Lots program, administering outdoor yoga classes at Johnson Park downtown. Not only was that effort a success, it was among the catalysts that led to creation of the Healthy Places Initiative.

“The program was successful in attracting local residents and partners to take our classes in a park not usually used for exercising,” Galarza says. “The park is small, but conveniently located in the downtown area with consistent foot traffic near the school district administration building and Rutgers University’s Camden campus. The classes were visible to passersby, making it a go-to place to get active.

“Outdoor family yoga was not a common activity to see in the city. Now it is an opportunity to connect with others in a green space to be active, which should be the norm.”
Community education is among the top objectives of Healthy Places. Activities in the works include a mini Camden Olympics, a fitness loop, aqua Zumba classes in a revamped pool and assorted bike-related events — each with the dual goal of increasing fitness opportunities while providing a safe environment.

“Kresge has been instrumental in helping us think outside the box, to really consider the interconnectivity of social networks and the natural fabric of the community,” Mitchell says. “A lot of foundations are focused on funding one aspect of the work, but not interested in much overlap or collaboration between different sectors, say, between the arts and environment.

“Kresge has really allowed us to push ourselves and think internally about how we can bring all these pieces together, and has given us the opportunity to work with community residents and really bring them together.”

“As holiday gifts go, moving into the Karcher Artspace Lofts in Waukegan, Ill., on Christmas Day 2012 might have been one of the best yet for artist Evelyn Larsen-Ford.

“It is an artist’s haven for creativity,” says Larsen-Ford, who works in multiple media — from textiles to jewelry and painting to soap making. “I am able to create, network and enjoy my life as an artist. I am just as excited today about living here as I was three years ago.”

Established in 1979 by the City of Minneapolis, Minn., Artspace Projects Inc. began as a result of the gentrification of the city’s warehouse district.

“Artspace’s mission is to create, foster and preserve affordable space for artists and arts organizations,” says Colin Hamilton, senior vice president of national advancement at Artspace. “At the time (in the late 1970s), many low-income artists were being displaced. It took a little while, but ultimately Artspace recognized that to advance our mission in a meaningful way, we needed to control property, so we evolved from an arts advocate to an arts-centric real estate developer.”

Today, Artspace is a leading developer of affordable live-work spaces for artists, with 40 “art spaces” across the United States. These facilities are most often abandoned and historic structures that have been reclaimed and renovated by Artspace. They are
In 2009, Artspace Projects Inc. was faced with a challenge made more difficult by the ongoing financial crisis. The organization was seeking to redevelop two properties in largely abandoned downtown areas in Waukegan, Ill., and Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Their financial partners were comfortable financing the affordable housing portions of the live-work projects, but hesitant when it came to the developments’ ground floor commercial units. These retail spaces often house nonprofit organizations and other cash strapped creative and locally based enterprises.

For that reason, investors were concerned about Artspace’s ability to attract commercial tenants and therefore required Artspace to set aside significant cash reserves as security. Doing so would have forced Artspace to tie down its modest cash flow; investments in new projects would have ceased.

Artspace approached Kresge for help meeting those reserves. Kresge’s Social Investment Practice structured a deal to provide Artspace with a $1 million Kresge guarantee.

Kresge’s guarantee substituted for Artspace’s cash reserve, required by equity investors for two mixed-use affordable housing projects under development at that time: The Harvester Artspace Lofts in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and the Karcher Lofts where Larsen-Ford lives and works.

“This opportunity for us to have a different relationship with Artspace was triggered by the economic downturn,” Smith says. Like many commercial real estate developers at the time, Artspace was having difficulty leasing new apartments and commercial space.

The Kresge guarantee “allowed the organization to continue to progress during the downturn when it was difficult to access traditional forms of capital,” she says.

Trying to close the financing transactions for both projects without the guarantee would have been nearly impossible. Today, the developments in Council Bluffs and Waukegan are fully occupied and flourishing. Smith says it was an important, groundbreaking deal.

“Providing permanent, affordable housing to artists and affordable office or community space for nonprofit organizations helps us meet our goals,” she explains. “And the impact is that artists are a part of the community, an integrated element of the neighborhood and they can contribute to the stabilization of the neighborhood.”
2015
Arts & Culture Grants

Stabilizing Communities Through Creative Placemaking

Creative placemaking is the deliberate integration of arts and culture in community revitalization. The Arts & Culture Program supports and invests in national community development organizations committed to the adoption of creative placemaking practices in low-income communities. By adopting creative placemaking into their networks, we believe community development organizations will see the value of embedding the practice.

<table>
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<th>Grants Awarded</th>
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Blue Grass Community Foundation  
Lexington, Ky.  
$675,000

Building Bridges Across the River  
Washington, D.C.  
$1,200,000

City of Fargo  
Fargo, N.D.  
$900,000

Community Foundation of Greater Memphis  
Memphis, Tenn.  
$1,150,000

Community Loan Fund of New Jersey  
(New Jersey Community Capital)  
New Brunswick, N.J.  
$300,000

Community Partnership for Arts and Culture  
Cleveland, Ohio  
$500,000

Community Science, Inc.  
Gaithersburg, Md.  
$200,000

Cooper’s Ferry Partnership  
Camden, N.J.  
$900,000

EMC Arts, Inc.  
New York, N.Y.  
$1,500,000

Good Work Network  
New Orleans, La.  
$320,000

Grantmakers in the Arts  
Seattle, Wash.  
$120,000

Juxtaposition Arts  
Minneapolis, Minn.  
$700,000

Lincoln Park Coast Cultural District, Inc.  
Newark, N.J.  
$180,000

National Arts Strategies, Inc.  
Alexandria, Va.  
$1,500,000

National Housing Institute/Shelterforce  
Montclair, N.J.  
$75,000

Nonprofit Finance Fund  
New York, N.Y.  
$26,750

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors  
New York, N.Y.  
$5,000,000

Seattle Housing Authority  
Seattle, Wash.  
$678,000

Skid Row Housing Trust  
Los Angeles, Calif.  
$600,000

Smart Growth America  
Washington, D.C.  
$390,000

Tides Foundation*  
San Francisco, Calif.  
$1,000,000

*Denotes cross-team grant