

THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

Creating Healthier Places with Art and Artists

In this moment of focus on the physical, social, and civic infrastructure of our places, many leaders are looking for ways to build on their equitable practice toward improved well-being for residents. In 2021, federal policymakers passed major legislation to address COVID impacts and local infrastructure needs. As a result, state and local governments, in partnership with federal agencies, are using these flexible resources to develop new approaches to equitable programming, focusing on social, health, and economic outcomes, as well as the physical infrastructure of roads, bridges, transit, climate, water, and internet access.



Creative CityMaking/City of Minneapolis, Photo by Justin Sengly

In the past, state and local leaders have faced challenges in reaching all communities for input into priorities and program decisions, as well as designing solutions. With new and flexible funding available to address economic and social relief, **now is the time to build on the proven practice of creative placemaking—community planning and development initiatives with art and artists playing an integral and integrated role that can lead to systems change.** Artists, our sculptors, actors, writers, painters, dancers, storytellers, musicians, and more, have long been the voice of communities. They reimagine ways to resolve problems – reaching out to people in all corners of the neighborhoods, creating compelling and fun ways to get work done, designing beautiful spaces where we feel open and connected, helping us deal with trauma and more. Local artists elevate the history and culture of places, from all perspectives, by bringing community voices into the public square.



 This Is Reading/Lynn Nottage, Photo by © 2017 Max Acra Inc.

How Creative Approaches Work

The national traumas of COVID, with its economic and social impacts and the racial reckoning of 2020, brought new focus to the inequities of our systems. Creative approaches to community issues and opportunities that are uniquely responsive to this time can strengthen our hopes for systemic changes and the future of our places.

Artists can:

- Design engaging and accessible processes for planning, reaching all corners of communities.
- Illuminate a new view of challenges and unexpected ideas for problem-solving.
- Reflect the local culture, history, and values of a place in local infrastructure and program design.
- Connect people, places, and opportunity with activities and spaces, leading to new relationships.
- Facilitate new partnerships across sectors, leading to more engagement of residents.
- Create new ways of promoting desired social, physical, and economic change, eventually leading to systems change.



This Is Reading/Lynn Nottage, Photo by Margy Waller

Creative Placemaking is Working

- National Endowment for the Arts' Our Town local creative placemaking grants over the past decade have made notable local social, economic, and/or physical impacts in places across the nation.
- Transportation officials are working with artists to redesign systems, mitigate economic disruption of transit construction, and make streets safer for all. Atlanta's federally recognized Metropolitan Planning Organization is prioritizing planning applications that incorporate creative placemaking.
- Utility agencies responsible for water systems facing problems caused by aging infrastructure and challenges of climate change are working with artists to design creative solutions for a sustainable future.
- City officials are hiring artists-in-residence to rethink and improve city services. In Minneapolis, artists are located in multiple city agencies to create better engagement and services, with the goal of focusing on economic and racial disparities.
- Housing and community developers are working with artists to remove barriers to equitable development and better housing.
- Artists partnered across multiple sectors to share health information and address isolation during COVID-19, while the CDC and public health providers took creative approaches to increasing vaccine confidence. The National League of Cities captured information about local use of American Rescue Plan Act funds for creative approaches in a comprehensive fact sheet.



Creative CityMaking/City of Minneapolis, Photo by Uche Iroegbu

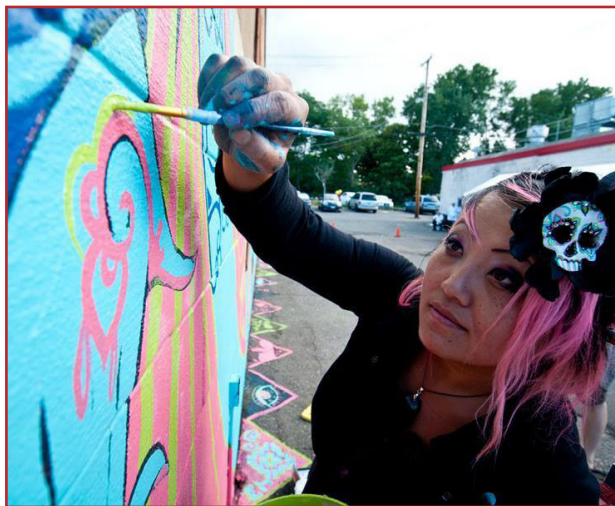
People across the country, in multiple fields – housing, health, business development, transportation, and more – are utilizing the lens of equitable development to ensure that creative placemaking practices and policies benefit current residents while enhancing quality of life for the future.

For a broad set of resources and examples of how the arts and artists are partnering with others to address local priorities, visit the Resource Hub: a2ru.org/hub/.

Equitable Creative Placemaking Spotlight

- [Creative City Making](#)
- [Pre-Enact](#)
- [This Is Reading](#)

IRRIGATE



📷 Springboard for the Arts/Artist Kao Lee Thao,
Photo by Soozin Hirschmugl

Irrigate is a nationally-recognized, artist-led creative placemaking initiative in St. Paul developed along the Green Line light rail corridor during the disruptive construction period. Irrigate mobilized and trained artists to make positive physical, economic, and social impacts along the corridor. Multiple media stories about fun, exciting and curious activities changed the narrative from how difficult or challenged an area is to how much it has to offer – to its own residents and to people and businesses you want to attract. Along the way, Irrigate created new community connections and networks, and brought attention to small businesses in the area.

Action Steps to Enhance Creative Local Solutions

- Publicize and encourage use of American Rescue Plan State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds and federal infrastructure resources for Equitable Creative Placemaking approaches to relief, recovery, and rebuilding.
- Create incentives for engagement strategies that involve artists in outreach and design.
- Bring artists-in-residence into government agencies for new perspectives and approaches.
- Support technical assistance programs for cross-sector partnerships using Equitable Creative Placemaking.