



RESEARCH REPORT

# Creative Placemaking and Community Safety

## Synthesizing Cross-Cutting Themes

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# Creative Placemaking and Community Safety

## Introduction

What role can the arts and artistic activities play in strengthening our communities? This question has informed the work of ArtPlace America in its efforts to better understand the ways in which art and artistic practices can be integrated into place-based efforts. The term *creative placemaking* describes efforts to integrate art into a range of community planning and development efforts, from economic development to the environment, housing, transportation, and community and public safety. This report focuses on the last of these issues, community and public safety, by synthesizing cross-cutting themes from case studies of four initiatives in which creative placemaking is informing efforts to improve community safety.

Chosen by ArtPlace America, which worked with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, the four case study sites discussed here were selected because they represent different approaches to creative placemaking and community safety. Urban's role in this project was to better understand how these sites were planned, developed, and aim to advance community safety goals. Project goals include the following:

- detailing the context, history, and structure of these interventions;
- understanding their theories of change and logic modes: how they are supposed to work, and how stakeholders understand their goals;
- understanding existing evaluative efforts and proposing future ones to more accurately assess the impacts of these sites; and
- exploring the overlap between the goals of creative placemaking and the goals of public safety.

The overarching goal of this document is to identify cross-cutting themes that reappear across projects that link creative placemaking to community safety, to discuss some of the challenges this sort of work has, and to explore evaluative techniques that practitioners could potentially use to help better define and do justice to the work that they do. Given the range of efforts examined as a part of this project, and the even-wider range of work in this area, the hope is that people already working in the

intersection of creative placemaking and community safety can use it to more effectively design, implement, maintain, and discuss their work, and that people working on community safety issues can understand the role that creative placemaking can play in supporting their efforts.

Besides creative placemaking, three concepts are important to define. The first, *public or community safety*, can be broadly defined as the idea that communities and their residents can be safe from risk of harm, injury, or loss of property. Most stakeholders involved with these sites viewed safety as a key ingredient for healthy civic life and economic vitality. The second concept is the *arts*. We stress that we use the term broadly to include not only generally recognized forms such as murals, music, sculpture, and dance, but also other creative work, from promoting entrepreneurship to creatively engaging stakeholders and using space in novel ways. Finally, although place-based interventions are based in particular sites, they may have a broader influence than their immediate surroundings; as such, we need to consider the concept of *community* in both its hyperlocal and more expansive senses. To the extent that these interventions attempt to address systems change, we need to think about how neighborhood trends are shaped by broader societal forces.

With these definitions in mind, this project is based on findings from four sites:

- the **Beerline Trail Extension and ARTery project** in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where artists and arts and cultural organizations are working with police, other local law enforcement agencies, and community development organizations to reduce crime and disorder and turn neglected places into community assets;
- **Eden Night Live**, in Alameda County, California, an effort by the Alameda County Sheriff's Office to activate a previously vacant space as a community hub in collaboration with community developers, artists, and arts and cultural organizations and to rethink its mission, priorities, and ways of engaging with the community;
- the **Marcus Garvey Youth Clubhouse** in Brownsville, Brooklyn, New York, a partnership between a developer and nonprofit organizations to provide a community space and programming for local youth, both to enhance perceptions of neighborhood safety and lower the risk of youth violence; and
- the **People's Paper Co-op** in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a set of artist-led programs and initiatives aimed at reducing recidivism and working with formerly incarcerated residents through transformative artmaking to help develop skills and networks so they can more effectively advocate for themselves, their families, and fellow community members.

Although these initiatives are all different, they share some common threads. For more information on any particular site, detailed case studies are available in separate briefs. To illustrate what these four sites are trying to accomplish, Table 1 maps them onto a typology of creative practice types created in a recent survey (Ross 2016) of these sorts of interventions:

- Promote empathy and understanding.
- Influence law and policy.
- Provide career opportunities.
- Support well-being.
- Advance quality of place.

Each of these practice types is mapped onto a public safety indicator category and a target population. As illustrated, these interventions all take multifaceted approaches to linking creative placemaking to community safety, but they do so in different ways.

TABLE 1

Sites Integrating Creative Placemaking and Community Safety

	Promote empathy and understanding	Influence law and policy	Provide career opportunities	Support well-being	Advance quality of place
<b>Public safety indicator</b>	Education, socioemotional development, collective efficacy	Collective efficacy, civic engagement	Education, economic development, self-efficacy	Physical and mental health	Economic development, neighborhood livability
<b>Population</b>	Individual, community	Individual, community, systemic	Individual, community	Individual, community	Community
<b>Beerline Trail Extension</b>	Uniting disparate communities	Crime prevention through environmental design	Entrepreneurialism and skills building	Promoting healthy identity of self, community, and physical well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Changing perceptions of safety</li> <li>■ Repairing blight</li> <li>■ Connecting people to geography</li> </ul>
<b>Eden Night Live</b>	Fostering community cohesion and positive community-police relations	Systems change in police department	Entrepreneurialism and skills building	Promoting healthy identity of self community, and physical well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Changing perceptions</li> <li>■ Repairing blight</li> <li>■ Connecting people to geography</li> </ul>
<b>Marcus Garvey Clubhouse</b>	Reducing interpersonal violence, youth development and empowerment		Entrepreneurialism and skills building	Promoting healthy identity of self and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Changing perceptions</li> <li>■ Repairing blight</li> <li>■ Connecting people to geography</li> </ul>
<b>People's Paper Co-op</b>	Promoting understanding between reentering people and their community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Advocating for change</li> <li>■ Systems reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Connecting justice-involved people with opportunity</li> <li>■ Entrepreneurialism and skills building</li> </ul>	Promoting healthy identity of self and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Changing perceptions</li> </ul>



## Key Cross-Cutting Themes

So how *exactly* do creative placemaking interventions work to enhance public safety? Although place-based interventions are, by their very nature, site-specific, the interventions we focus on all can provide lessons for projects elsewhere. To this end, we have identified a set of creative placemaking activities designed to have an effect on community safety (figure 1). In a sense, the diagram in figure 1 represents eight simplified logic models, each with an activity type, goal, pathway toward meeting that goal, intended impact, and broader intended outcome. Our key activities are as follows:

- activating underused spaces,
- temporary placemaking,
- creating a sense of play,
- turning boundaries into borders,
- building skills,
- building collective efficacy,
- building resilience, and
- rethinking institutions.

The sections below examine these activities in turn by introducing the concept and providing examples of how each activity has been implemented in our case study sites. We do not see this list as a checklist of activities that creative placemaking efforts must engage in to be successful: some activities will be more relevant in some places than others. Instead, we see these activities as a toolkit a stakeholder can select from and dig into (both in this document and in the individual case studies) to better understand how it could be relevant for their own work.

The organization of these activities is roughly site specific. The first ones are more clearly targeted to the site itself: its design, construction, and programming. The last few, which deal with processes and broader community or even societal goals, are more abstract. We do not want to overprescribe this hierarchy. To take one example, “building skills” can involve, say, building a stage or undergoing formal skills training like Occupational Safety and Health Administration certification (both of which were done in the Marcus Garvey Clubhouse). These activities were tied to the site itself but were also intended to assist participants with professional development more broadly.

FIGURE 1

Key Activities in Linking Creative Placemaking to Community Safety



Activating Underused Spaces

- Goal: Get people to visit and to stay
- Pathways:

- » advertise and signal a place as welcoming
  - » create amenities (either activities or resources) to draw people in and keep them there
  - » create gatherings and events
- **Impact:** Creating a new node of activity, use, and community in a given space
  - **Outcome:** Busier places are safer, more cared for

The idea that people make places safer by their presence dates back at least to Jane Jacobs' notion of "eyes on the street." By promoting gathering spaces, installations, and events, creative placemaking can serve as a way to encourage foot traffic and use in a given space. This activity relates directly to community safety as operationalized through the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design model (Cozens and Love 2015; Gehl Institute 2017), which includes a focus on "natural surveillance" to help reduce crime and fear of crime and to improve quality of life. Welcoming design and amenities play a role, but so does programming, especially programming that incorporates arts and culture: gatherings and events draw people in and familiarize them with a place.

Careful design and upkeep play a role in maintaining a sense that a space is open and cared for. Design and maintenance, such as the removal of graffiti, have been major elements in Milwaukee's Beerline Trail and ARTery extension, which has activated an abandoned rail line in an industrial corridor of the city. With art installations, events, and other amenities designed to draw people in, the space serves as a destination in its own right as well as a way for neighborhood residents and visitors to get around the community.

How events are conceptualized and designed affects how many people are drawn to the space and how they experience that space when they get there. To maximize their appeal, spaces need to be welcoming to a range of people,<sup>1</sup> accessible in terms of time and location, and, especially when located in high-crime communities, perceived as safe by potential users. Stakeholders need to ascertain what draws people into a space or to an event and identify who they want to include. Surveys in Milwaukee and Alameda and the close involvement of youth in Brownsville were used to gain community feedback to identify what was and was not a draw and to refocus efforts to make programming more appealing.

Cultural activities in particular, by being able to express and support the cultures and identities of a given community, can be a valuable way to meet these goals. By offering spaces for people from different backgrounds to interact and to showcase their talents, these activities can help develop a broader sense of shared community (Guetzkow 2002).<sup>2</sup>

## Temporary Placemaking

- **Goal:** Piloting and proof of concept by creating smaller or temporary projects that lead to bigger and longer-lasting ones
- **Pathway:** Build spaces using cheaper, temporary components that can be tested for permanent use
- **Impact:** Expanding on what works, recycling what doesn't
- **Outcome:** Build deeper support for a given intervention

Temporary placemaking techniques provide many advantages for creative placemaking and community safety efforts. Also defined as “lighter, quicker, cheaper,”<sup>3</sup> and related to tactical urbanism,<sup>4</sup> relatively inexpensive and easy-to-set up temporary alterations allow stakeholders to experiment with novel approaches and rapidly change the environment of places perceived as high risk or unsafe. They can generate interest and support for a longer-term project, be set up while longer-term interventions work through fundraising and permitting processes, be more adaptive and responsive to community concerns, encourage community buy-in by showing how something works in practice, and inform the direction of subsequent work.

Creative activities fit in naturally with temporary placemaking, whether through appropriating existing site features for a quick intervention or public rehearsals, or using murals and the mural creation process to engage the community.<sup>5</sup> Creative efforts can also help make otherwise utilitarian elements more welcoming and attractive. In Philadelphia, the expungement clinics are set up temporarily throughout the city; by integrating art by Peoples' Paper Co-op members into the locations, not only do the often-utilitarian spaces benefit, but they showcase the creative potential for people involved in reentry.

In Milwaukee temporary placemaking resulted in a “creational trails” focus. The ARTery Beerline Trail extension was in part a pilot for the possibilities of reusing dumped rubber tires as a trail-paving material; initial programming used shipping containers as temporary spaces (figure 2), and the Season One performance series there engaged 20 local performers to design their performance space, with a local business donating materials for the space and bleacher seating.<sup>6</sup> In Alameda, the entire Eden Night Live event series was a showcase for how a more sustained “Polis Station” concept could work as a community space. In Brownsville, shipping containers both provide indoor space and help define the outlines of the lot in which they sit.

FIGURE 2

### ARTery Temporary Shipping Container



Photo by Carla Vásquez-Noriega.

### Creating a Sense of Play

- **Goal:** Get people to interact across differences
- **Pathways:** Spaces for unprogrammed interactions and activities
- **Impact:** Creating a sense of creativity and possibility through play
- **Outcome:** Breaking down social barriers

Play, or free expression more broadly, is an activity engaged in without a specific outcome in mind. As something that can draw people in, alleviate stress, foster a sense of ownership of a space, and break down social barriers through interaction, play is a creative placemaking tool for creating a more open and equitable lived environment (Konkol and Hakanson, n.d.). Play encourages youth to take healthy risks, develop positive relationships, and use problem-solving skills. For residents of high-crime neighborhoods, especially youth, play provides a way to reinvent and rearticulate their self-narratives and find healthy outlets for expression (Wolf and Wolf 2012).

The role of the arts has also been described as having a “ripple effect,” with benefits not just to participants but to the broader community, by drawing people to a place and building connections between people (Topos Partnership 2010). Some evidence suggests that although arts consumption is linked to class status (even when events are free, attendance rates increase as income and education go up), arts *participation* is less tied to income (albeit still tied to education).<sup>7</sup> As such, creative placemaking

efforts that actively engage participants as creators may be more successful than more passive arts-related events at bringing in a wider range of community members.

Play takes many forms, from amenities for active or passive recreation to structured and unstructured events. In Alameda play has meant creating an event space for people to gather, share an experience, and interact during Eden Night Live. In Milwaukee, the bike trail itself serves as a recreational space, with gathering spots throughout intended to get people to think of a space—in this case a former rail corridor—differently, to incorporate it into their daily lives, and to create art to make the space their own (figure 3).

**FIGURE 3**  
**Making Art on Milwaukee’s ARTery**



Photo by Willie Fields.

### Turning Boundaries into Borders

- **Goal:** Create a place for people of different groups to interact safely
- **Pathway:** Have a place’s design or programming signal it as a safe space
- **Impact:** Building community and empathy

- **Outcomes:** Less friction between groups, more understanding, denser interpersonal networks

Successful places have the capacity to draw in people from different communities. In the context of community safety, edges between different communities can be particularly unsafe spots, given issues such as turf and mistrust. Public spaces on the edges of different communities can just as easily become a vacant no-man's land as a space for interaction. This activity provides an opportunity for creative placemaking interventions targeted to crime hot spots to replace negative activities with positive ones. Turning a boundary—an edge where things end—into a border—an edge of interaction<sup>8</sup>—requires careful siting, programming, and buy-in to work. Often, hot spots reflect long-standing social tensions, so turning them into places seen as safe and inclusive is not easy. Creative placemaking efforts can be part of a broader effort to rethink the social geography of a community and encourage productive social interactions.

In Milwaukee, changing boundaries was done very literally by creating a physical connection in the form of a trail between two neighborhoods: Riverwest and Harambee. The union of these communities is symbolized in the murals commissioned for the trail, which visually activate the trail and link the communities. Rozalia Singh's mural "Welcome to Harambee & Riverwest" features the history and present of the trail with a train, cyclists, and neighborhood symbols. In Brownsville, the Clubhouse, although focused on the residents of Marcus Garvey, has the potential, longer-term, to fulfill some of this role.

Eden Night Live and the People's Paper Co-op have used programming to bring disparate communities together: in Alameda by providing an opportunity for law enforcement and the community to interact with one another in a noncharged space (figure 4), and in Philadelphia by promoting the voices of the formerly incarcerated.

FIGURE 4  
Eden Night Live



Photo by Andrea Gill.

## Building Skills

- **Goal:** Use arts as a means of educational and employment development
- **Pathways:** Arts-related skills and employment assistance
- **Impact:** Linking participants to employment options
- **Outcome:** Local community economic development

Lack of access to education and employment opportunities is a critical issue in many underresourced communities that also face community safety issues. Research has shown a relationship between unemployment and at least some crime categories. Some evidence indicates that labor market programs can help deter crime (Aaltonen et al. 2013) and that arts-based ones specifically can be used as a tool to successfully engage youth at risk for incarceration and promote job readiness (Yahner et al. 2015). In Brownsville, the Clubhouse initiative has included a range of skills-building activities, including Occupational Safety and Health Administration safety training, entrepreneurship classes, and designing and building the Clubhouse itself.

In Alameda, Eden Night Live has provided opportunities for local vendors and craftspeople to show and sell their wares, and organizers have hired local residents to set up and run the stage and hold artistic performances. In Milwaukee, where local organizations have hired people for trail upkeep, the



Beerline Trail Neighborhood Development Project has had community economic development as a central goal. Billing Harambee as an “arts district,” efforts have included artist performance showcases, vendors and markets, and youth-focused entrepreneurial activities.

Some creative placemaking projects go a step further by offering skills building for people who face additional employment barriers given a history of incarceration. The creative sector, by being comparatively open to individuals with criminal records or incarceration histories, is a promising space for these sorts of targeted efforts (Ross 2016). Skills building has been central to the work in Philadelphia, where Co-op members build artistic skills through their involvement in papermaking and other activities. In addition, by participating in the expungement clinics and local policy advocacy, they help to lower employment barriers for the formerly incarcerated.

### **Building Collective Efficacy**

- **Goals:** Let people determine their goals and desires for a space or event; create a system in which groups usually excluded have a voice
- **Pathways:** Create inclusive processes; let users define space and program goals and efforts
- **Impacts:** Building agency and creating a more useful, vibrant program or space
- **Outcomes:** Greater community support and buy-in; broader and deeper social connections across parts of the community

Collective efficacy, or social cohesion of neighbors willing to work for the public good, has been shown to be associated with improved neighborhood safety and, in particular, reduced violence (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Creative placemaking efforts, by incorporating multiple voices and encouraging inclusive processes, can help build local support, sense of purpose, and collective efficacy and deepen the level of citizen involvement beyond simply informing or consultation to a more active partnership and control (Arnstein 1969). Although stakeholder organizations may already be in a neighborhood and have an idea in mind, encouraging authentic accountability and decisionmaking power can make creative placemaking efforts more sustainable, both by ensuring broader community involvement and by activating new stakeholders who can take on planning and implementation as existing stakeholders or organizations exit the space.

The case study sites in this project all focus on inclusive practices. Brownsville does this by having youth voice crucial to design, location, and programming. In Milwaukee, project leadership has used community charrettes and surveys to gauge community interest, and their Guiding Lenses Group gives

community residents a seat at the table to discuss design, programming, and safety concerns (figure 5). In Philadelphia, Co-op members decide on activities and approaches to engage and support justice-involved people. These activities, by incorporating local knowledge, both help to identify the particular needs and goals of participants and to foster a deeper level of engagement.

FIGURE 5

### Guiding Lenses Group Meeting



Courtesy of Greater Milwaukee Committee.

## Building Resilience

- **Goals:** Create spaces that can be adapted to changing needs; turn closed systems into open systems
- **Pathways:** Flexible programming, materials, spaces, and layouts
- **Impact:** Responsive to new needs of new users over time
- **Outcome:** More sustainable forms of social capital

If a creative placemaking effort is to sustainably play a role in promoting community safety, it not only needs long-term resources but also needs to maintain community interest, buy-in, and participation over time. Resilience in creative placemaking relates to collective efficacy, but it focuses on maintaining mechanisms to maintain that efficacy over a longer term. As community needs change, how a place is being used needs to change with it: what may work to draw people in at first may not work five years down the road. Placemaking interventions also need to find new ways to encourage buy-in and ownership, because once the period of initial planning, development, and implementation is past, integrating future cohorts can be a challenge (Small 2002, 2004).

Building resilience may mean incorporating tenets of universal design<sup>9</sup> to ensure a given environment is accessible and understood regardless of age or ability. More generally (Glover Blackwell 2017), it means building flexibly so that new needs can be incorporated into existing spaces (in this way, building resilience parallels some of the goals of temporary placemaking). In communities with safety issues, new participants may bring new knowledge about conflicts or safety concerns that can be incorporated into placemaking efforts to ensure the continued vitality and safety of a given space.

Programmatically, one way to build longer-term resilience, then, is to continuously update and think through programming with the input of new cohorts or participants. Long-term resilience is expressly the goal of work in Brownsville, which uses a cohort model in which participants spend the first part of their engagement identifying interests and needs and then move forward by developing and implementing activities relevant to those interests. The Co-op in Philadelphia also uses a cohort model in which new groups bring in new ideas and approaches to the work. Both sites have actively engaged, informal, alumni networks that allow alumni to stay engaged, mentor new participants, observe differences across cohorts, and engage in efforts to improve the program. For the arts, the cohort model sets up a peer-to-peer learning element that allows people to think collaboratively and creatively about how to meet their cohort's goals.

## Rethinking Institutions

- **Goal:** Question existing systems and institutions
- **Pathways:** Arts in the service of policy development and advocacy
- **Impact:** Building broader support for systems change
- **Outcomes:** New and more just, inclusive policies and practices

Creative placemaking efforts have the potential to help participants rethink institutions. The arts invite participants and communities to think differently and creatively about various aspects of their public and private lives, including the institutions that surround them. They also equip them with creative tools and processes to reenvision how institutions might be reformed in ways that may mitigate the collateral consequences of justice system involvement. Through creative placemaking, participants can reimagine the processes, policies, and products of institutions and advocate for new and transformative policies and practices.

In Philadelphia, the work of the Co-op is expressly tied to systems change and policy advocacy as participants work to rethink and reform legal services institutions throughout the Philadelphia region

(figure 6). Program staff and, more notably, formerly incarcerated individuals, work in concert with social service stakeholders to collaboratively rebuild systems in ways that fulfill the emotional and material needs that returning citizens face. The arts play a critical role in this process by providing space for returning citizens to inform policy in an accessible and emotionally moving way. Similarly, in Alameda, Eden Night Live has provided the Alameda County Sheriff's Office not just a space to engage with the community, but also an opportunity to rethink the role of that engagement.

FIGURE 6

### People's Paper Co-op

*Free Our Mothers*



Photo by Mark Strandquist for the People's Paper Co-op.

## Implementation Challenges and Lessons

Almost anybody working in the creative placemaking and community safety spaces will face three sets of challenges: resources, coordination, and sustainability. The first is needed to get a project operational, the second is required for the project to actually work, and the third is crucial if the project is to remain vital over time. The lessons learned in the four creative placemaking sites offer ways to overcome these challenges.

## Key Challenges for Projects at the Intersection of Creative Placemaking and Public Safety

### DEFINING, TRANSLATING, AND OPERATIONALIZING CONCEPTS

Developing a common language is often necessary when placemaking or arts communities work with those in the justice fields. Translating concepts, approaches, and outcome measures can be a challenge. An expanding body of work in the creative placemaking field shows the challenges of operationalizing indicators like vibrancy or livability, and how “fuzzy indicators” can do more harm than good.<sup>10</sup> The justice field similarly has ongoing debates on how to define and understand recidivism and disorder. Stakeholders working to understand how creative placemaking can affect community safety need to have a clear sense of the goals of their intervention. Translating also means that stakeholders need to find ways to effectively engage with their communities so active stakeholders and institutional leaders, as well as residents, understand the terms and goals of an intervention.

Also at stake is understanding the scope of a given intervention. Creative placemaking efforts are, by their very nature, site specific and need to be understood within their broader community and social contexts (Treskon 2015). Because even active sites will engage small parts of the community for limited periods, the dosage of a given creative placemaking intervention will be insufficient on its own to address deeper community issues around safety or educational or employment opportunities. This limitation means that expecting a bike trail to reduce crime on its own, or expecting a clubhouse to overcome long-standing tensions between different sections in a community, is unrealistic. We agree with others in this field (Markusen 2013) that placemaking efforts need to be measured and understood based on their specific context, with indicators targeted toward the goals of the project itself and not based on some universal set of always-applicable measures. We also believe that smaller projects will be more effective when undertaken as part of a broader community development strategy.

### AVOIDING UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The relationship between the arts, placemaking, and gentrification has long been a fraught topic, with a standard narrative being that artists and artistic endeavors can serve as a “chain” leading to gentrification and displacement. Although recent research has shown this pathway to be oversimplified (Chapple and Jackson 2010; Grodach, Foster, and Murdoch 2014, 2018), it still is a concern that efforts designed to make a community more welcoming, vibrant, and safe may not only improve the lived experience of existing residents, but draw the attention of others to the area. This shift is not a bad thing in itself, but to maintain buy-in from the community and create a sustainable intervention,

stakeholders need to work with this potential outcome in mind and build projects and events that benefit everybody (Shaw and Sullivan 2011).

Given the often-contentious relationship between law enforcement and lower-income and minority communities, the issue of community safety itself can be contentious. This issue is well-documented in Milwaukee, where incidents of police violence have had a profound impact on black residents' willingness to report crimes (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk 2016). An intervention about safety runs the risk of being seen about control rather than collaboration. As such, stakeholders need to put in the time and effort to communicate their intent and work. A successful intervention also means expanding metrics beyond crime incident or recidivism rates: although these measures may seem like appropriate impact measures (not least because they are relatively straightforward to compile and analyze), they may miss the point of a given placemaking intervention. We discuss more appropriate measures below.

#### **BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUNDING AND ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

A third challenge for any placemaking effort is that of sustainability. A baseline requirement is some sort of “champion” that can be a catalyst, intermediary, or convener for a project. Sometimes this may be a local elected official or municipal department, sometimes (as has been the case in Alameda) it has been law enforcement, but often it is a community-based organization that has the capacity to connect stakeholders together and engage in the work necessary to get something up and running. Stakeholders, then need to identify responsibilities and roles for various entities involved in a given project.

Often project financial sustainability is framed in terms of building self-sufficiency, but stakeholders need to be realistic about the extent to which certain kinds of interventions can be spun off into independent and self-sufficient entities without outside operating supports. In many cases, stakeholders may need to identify sustainable support streams from government (particularly local government) and private entities with the capacity to take on an ongoing funding role. Arts and culture and safety practitioners will have more power to successfully pursue external operating supports if they coordinate their efforts.

Several of the initiatives used a proof of concept as a way to build interest and support for more permanent interventions, such as Eden Night Live as a proof of concept for a more permanent Polis Station or temporary installations along the ARTery to illustrate how the space could be designed and programmed. Building sustainable funding into projects will allow them to retain enough resources to continue to operate effectively after the proof of concept stage. Innovative, nontraditional efforts

supported by evidence from multiple fields better reflect the complex reality of high-crime locations, and they also may attract more attention from a broader range of sponsors.

Similarly, long-term sustainability benefits from ongoing coordination between key organizations and stakeholders. This practice involves not only coordination between core organizations leading a particular intervention, but planning inclusively by collecting participant feedback and input and building an open process. Building community buy-in also builds a local base of potential stakeholders who can move a project forward in the future. Tangibly, building long-term organizational sustainability means holding meetings at convenient and multiple times to account for different schedules; ensuring quality translation services when appropriate; and thinking about other services like childcare. These considerations are consistent with research on trauma-informed practice, which is crucial for mitigating harm and promoting healing in high-crime areas.

## Evaluation: Looking Forward

As practitioners know, building a sustainable effort requires the ability to communicate about its effectiveness. This is where evaluation comes in. Evaluative capacity, whether internal or with an external partner, not only helps to justify the relevance and utility of a project but also can identify pathways for internal improvement. Thinking systematically can also help identify the exact nature and scope of what the effort is trying to accomplish.

### Creating Capacity for Evaluation and Self-Evaluation

Putting together an evaluation framework concurrently with program implementation is a challenge. Asking the right questions and collecting the right data from the beginning have the potential to make understanding and tracking outputs and outcomes easier down the road. A successful evaluation effort means programs and funders need, at the very least, to dedicate staff time, funding, and resources to data collection, analysis, and more broadly, reflection.

Creating a space for ongoing self-evaluation can also improve programs by helping them to assess the directions they are moving in and to change course as needed. Participatory evaluation approaches (e.g., action research and formative evaluation models) in which stakeholders doing the work of implementing a program actively engage with evaluation development and implementation strategies encourage stakeholder buy-in; take advantage of local knowledge; and provide useful, real-time feedback. This work helps build cohesion and collective efficacy and a sense of opportunity in high-

crime neighborhoods where it is often in short supply. The *improvement science* framework can also play a role: based on a plan-do-study-act cycle, this framework involves multiple iterative cycles of planning, implementation (or testing), analysis, and change. Although similar to evaluation, the goal in improvement science is less about analyzing the effects of a given program and more about building in a continuous mechanism for improvement based around three framing questions (Lemire, Christie, and Inkelas 2017):

1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. How will we know that a change is an improvement?
3. What change can we make that will result in improvement?

This framework and these questions can be specifically targeted to the ways in which creative placemaking efforts encourage community safety components. Finally, this approach is useful for community-based interventions in which core stakeholders may change relatively often and identified needs may shift in response to changing circumstances.

The first step in evaluating the effects of a given intervention needs to be understanding the goals of that intervention. The four sites we studied were all attempting to do different things, with different goals in mind. As noted above, crime incident or recidivism rates may be appropriate metrics, but they tell only part of the story.

To take incident reports as one example: these data, although they are often available for download and analysis (all four sites are located in cities that provide online crime incident report data), only tell what is actually reported. Increased reporting of nuisance complaints, for example, may be the result of a creative placemaking intervention. More activity in a place may lead to more interest in maintaining a space, or more positive interactions with law enforcement may lead to greater trust, either of which may lead to more people calling in reports.

Before we turn to some specific evaluative techniques, it is worth stressing four general ones. First, evaluative efforts and data collection work best when they are integrated in a program during its development stage. This practice allows data collection to start from the beginning: it is easier to track outputs and outcomes if they can be traced as they happen rather than retrospectively. Second, instruments should be simple to administer and take. Given the limited resources and capacity of stakeholders, expecting them to administer, say, a 50-question survey to event participants, is unrealistic; devoting resources to subsequent data coding and analysis would be equally unrealistic. Some organizations have the capacity to do more sophisticated work, but others do not. Third, the tools



used depend on the type of intervention or activity: a 50-question survey *might* be appropriate for an intensive, longer-term relationship; it is probably *not* appropriate for a trail user or event attendee. Fourth, engage participants in the process while respecting their time.

## Specific Tools

There are a wide range of evaluative tools available, although the ease of use and effort involved may vary widely. As such, organizations often need to consider potential partners. Local universities and colleges often have capacity and technical knowledge of specific approaches, law enforcement may be able to provide useful analytics, and other local government entities may collect and organize other data useful to the practitioner.

## DATA WALKS

Data walks are used to engage community residents, program participants, and other stakeholders with research findings (Murray, Falkenburger, and Saxena 2015). For a data walk, the research team prepares “stations” presenting data visually and textually. Participants move around the stations in small groups, interpreting and discussing the findings, and generally reconvene at the end for a facilitated discussion. Data walks are designed with an eye toward four key objectives:

- to share key data and findings with community residents and program participants,
- to ensure a more robust analysis and understanding of the data,
- to help inform better programming and policies to address both the strengths and needs of a community or population, and
- to inspire individual and collective action among community agents.

Because data walks rely on individuals affected by an issue to interpret research findings, they mimic the community engagement work already happening at many creative placemaking sites and could be a useful way to contextualize future quantitative evaluation findings.

## LOCAL DATA

In addition to police incident or 311 reports, other local organizations may already be compiling useful information. In Milwaukee, for example, Safe and Sound’s community organizers and the Community Prosecution Unit (CPU) already field nuisance complaints. Safe and Sound is a nonprofit organization that works in each of Milwaukee’s five police districts to bridge the gap between community members,

law enforcement, and prosecution staff to promote public safety. Through the CPU partnerships, a Safe and Sound coordinator is assigned to work with an assistant district attorney in each police district substation to identify unique trends in quality-of-life issues. Community residents reach out to them first to report signs of blight and persistent nuisance issues. The District 5 coordinator, who works the Beerline Trail Extension project, reports that the CPU team carefully keeps track of these complaints. Reaching out to these sorts of stakeholders to track trends over time and identify changes can be built in to the program plan.

## PHOTOVOICE

Photovoice is a method expressly designed to creatively engage participants in understanding their community. In it, participants compile a creative video of scenes that highlight research themes and then collaboratively interpret the images in group settings to help develop narratives around issues in their community. The technique as originally developed has three main goals: to enable participants to record and reflect on their community, to foster dialogue about important issues, and to reach policymakers (Wang and Burris 1997).<sup>11</sup>

## MAPPING SAFETY- SMARTLY

In measuring community safety over time, hot-spot analyses or other measures of incident rates can play a role, but they can potentially oversimplify a particular case and overstate, or even misread, the intended effects of a given intervention. For example, deputies in Alameda reported having more calls for service because of relationships formed during Eden Night Live, but this increase could be the result of greater trust in law enforcement, not more incidents of crime. Still, data such as crime incident rates can provide valuable information, especially in group mapping exercises in which people produce mental maps of their communities. These maps can be a particularly useful way to gauge changing community perceptions over time.

## SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

A common theme in the four interventions is one of deepening social ties. Social network analysis, which measures connected groups of people to determine how and around what issues they build relationships, can be used to examine how deepening social ties could work in practice. By analyzing a social network's assets and deficiencies, network leaders can better understand what interventions may be needed to increase the network's overall capacity to meet its goals.

## SURVEYS

Technology has made survey administration, coding, and analysis simpler in recent years. Tablet, computers, or cell phones can be used to collect and compile answers, saving people the onerous task of transferring paper-based survey answers to computers. Short and simple pre- and postsurveys with similar questions are a particularly valuable approach to show change over time, but they need to be designed with care. Pretests to ensure questions make sense and get at the intended answers are ideal (even if not always realistic, unfortunately).

Structurally, stakeholders need to balance the richness that open-ended questions can provide with the difficulty in compiling answers systematically. Useful compilation requires a lot of time, resources, and tacit understanding of what survey respondents are talking about. Issues of distrust or fraught power dynamics in high-crime communities also complicate these efforts, making the question of who delivers the survey important.

## What's Next?

There is a tension inherent in identifying cross-cutting themes in efforts linking creative placemaking and community safety and noting the importance of specificity in place-based work. The suggestions here are not intended to be a prescriptive exercise: if you do X, you will get Y. Instead, this project has been designed to identify how creative placemaking can inform efforts to improve community safety, whether through design, programming, or inclusivity.

We also stress that creative placemaking needs to be thought of expansively, and its role in promoting community safety needs to be integrated thoughtfully into interventions to be effective. Painting a mural or hosting a performance won't have much of an effect if it is done without community understanding, support, or input. Without community input and buy-in, creative placemaking efforts are in danger of being seen as an outside intrusion or imposition in a community. The stakeholders involved in the four cases studied for this project all worked to incorporate and learn from their communities.

Another feature of these projects is that they have been implemented as part of a broader range of interventions targeting community safety. The creative placemaking component plays a role by drawing in people and getting them to participate in the creative life of their communities, but it also helps to bridge programs. So in Brownsville, the Marcus Garvey Clubhouse is a space where youth participants can learn and create; in Alameda, Eden Night Live drew people in for shared experience between the

community and law enforcement; in Philadelphia, the Co-op has used art to build a path forward out of incarceration; and in Milwaukee, the ARTery and Beerline Trail Extension bridge communities (figure 7) and are an effort to catalyze inclusive economic development.

Finally, and related to the previous point, stakeholders not only need to understand the role that creative placemaking can play in their efforts to improve community safety, but to understand the limits of a given intervention. Looking for an intervention to lower crime or recidivism may sound plausible (and be measurable), but expecting a small-scale place-based intervention to have a measurable effect on that sort of outcome (and have a measurable effect in a short period of time) may be unrealistic, both because it takes place within a broader social and economic context and because some of the outcomes discussed here require time to develop and be observable. Stakeholders need to understand exactly what they want to do, undertake realistic data collection efforts, and link their efforts to broader community-based developments.

**FIGURE 7**  
**Experiencing the ARTery**



Photo by Adam Carr.

# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ian David Moss, Louise Geraghty, Clara Inés Schuhmacher, and Talia Gibas, “Why Don’t They Come?” Create Equity, May 6, 2015, <http://createequity.com/2015/05/why-dont-they-come/>.
- <sup>2</sup> “Arts Create Cultural Cohesion in Changing Communities,” How Housing Matters, September 17, 2015, <https://howhousingmatters.org/articles/arts-create-cultural-cohesion-in-changing-communities/>;
- <sup>3</sup> “The Lighter Quicker, Cheaper Transformation of Public Spaces,” Project for Public Spaces, accessed September 24, 2018, <https://www.pps.org/article/lighter-quicker-cheaper>.
- <sup>4</sup> Tactical urbanism is often couched as a more disruptive, less formalized way to enact place-based interventions on the urban fabric. For an overview, see, “What is Tactical Urbanism?” Tactical Urbanist’s Guide, accessed September 24, 2018, <http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/about/>.
- <sup>5</sup> Dan Parolek, “The Power of Public Art: How Murals Beautify Cities and Build Communities,” Optics blog, November 19, 2014, <https://opticosdesign.com/blog/the-power-of-public-art-murals/>; “Benefits of Murals,” CRP Bay Area, accessed September 24, 2018, <http://crpbayarea.org/painting/benefits-of-murals/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Keith Hayes, “matireal, a ‘creational trail,” Kickstarter, accessed September 24, 2018, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/keith-hayes/matireal-a-creational-trail>.
- <sup>7</sup> Tom Jacobs, “Participation in the Arts Is Driven by Education, Not Class,” *Pacific Standard*, September 15, 2015, <https://psmag.com/education/participation-in-the-arts-driven-by-education-not-class>; Salem Tsegaye and Daniel Reid, “Taking Art into Their Own Hands,” Create Equity, March 4, 2016, <http://createequity.com/2016/03/taking-art-into-their-own-hands/>.
- <sup>8</sup> Richard Sennett, “The Open City,” accessed September 24, 2018, <https://www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/UploadedResources/The%20Open%20City.pdf>.
- <sup>9</sup> “What is Universal Design,” National Disability Authority, accessed September 24, 2018, <http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Markusen (2013); see also, Sheila Regan, “What Are the Real-World Impacts of Creative Placemaking?” Mn Artists, August 21, 2014, <http://www.mnartists.org/article/what-are-real-world-impacts-creative-placemaking?rid=352414>, and Ian David Moss, “[Createequity Reruns] Fuzzy Concepts, Proxy Data: Why Indicators Won’t Track Creative Placemaking Success,” Create Equity, July 1, 2014, <http://createequity.com/2014/07/createequity-reruns-fuzzy-concepts-proxy-data-why-indicators-wont-track-creative-placemaking-success/>.
- <sup>11</sup> For an overview and examples see, “Chapter 3, Section 20: Implementing Photovoice in Your Community,” Community Tool Box, accessed September 24, 2018, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/photovoice/main>

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