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YOUTH & COMMUNITY
development

**CENTERING CREATIVE YOUTH IN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:**
A Creative Placemaking Field Scan

Authored by Creative Generation
Commissioned by ArtPlace America
December 2020

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The [Creative Youth & Community Development](#) research initiative is a project of Creative Generation commissioned by ArtPlace America, which seeks to explore the intersections of arts & culture, community development, and youth development through community based, youth- and practitioner-led research. The initiative produced a series of web-based tools and resources created by and for practitioners operating in this intersecting space.

ARTPLACE

[ArtPlace America](#) (ArtPlace) is a ten-year collaboration among a number of foundations, federal agencies, and financial institutions that supports and strengthens the field of creative placemaking – the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development. ArtPlace works to enlist artists as allies in creating equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities in which everyone has a voice and agency. To this end, ArtPlace has invested over \$150 million to grow the field of creative placemaking through demonstration projects, in-depth investments in organizational change, research, and convenings – embedding knowledge and resources within existing networks and supporting local ecosystems to own and evolve the practice.

CREATIVE GENERATION

Contributing to the development of thriving communities and a more just world, [Creative Generation](#) works to inspire, connect, and amplify the work of young creatives who catalyze social change and those who are committed to cultivating their creativity. Founded in 2019, Creative Generation operates four signature programs: The Campaign for a Creative Generation, the Institute for Creative Social Transformation, The Academy for Creative Leadership, and the Incubator for Creative Impact.

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Publication & graphic design: Bridget Woodbury

Suggested Citation:

Poulin, J. M. (2020). *Pathways for Centering Creative Youth in Community Development: A Creative Placemaking Field Scan*. Creative Generation and ArtPlace America. <https://doi.org/10.51163/CREATIVE-GEN002>

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Table of Contents

Foreword 4

Executive Summary 5

Introduction 7

Research Design 9

Guiding Principles 10

Methodology 10

Case Stories 12

Definitions 13

Context 14

Positive and Creative Youth Development 14

Community Development & Creative Placemaking 15

The Role of Social Justice 16

Outcomes 16

Findings 17

Community Benefits Defined by Creative Youth 18

Youth Increase Creativity and Cultivate Greater Agency in Themselves and Others 19

Communities (People and Places) Are More Sustainable and Responsive 20

Youth-Serving Organizations Honor Personal Identity and Build Collective Belonging 22

Places and Their Populations Are Healthier, Safer, and Better Able to Foster Wellbeing 23

Youth and Adults Catalyze Intergenerational Cultural Continuity 24

Partnering to Expand the Reach of Creative Youth & Community Development Projects 25

Working "In Community" With Others 26

Connecting Across Sectors 27

Mapping the Full Range of Stakeholder Impacts 29

Defining Success in New Ways 30

New Dimensions for Describing Intended Impacts of CY&CD projects 31

New Measures of Success for CY&CD Projects 32

Conclusion 33

Bibliography 34

Acknowledgments 35

FOREWORD

ArtPlace America (ArtPlace) is a ten-year collaboration among a number of foundations, federal agencies, and financial institutions that supports and strengthens the field of creative placemaking — the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development. We work to enlist artists as allies in creating equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities in which everyone has a voice and agency.

In looking systemically at who does community planning and development work in America's communities, we have found that our colleagues may generally be organized into ten sectors: Agriculture & Food, Economic Development, Environment & Energy, Health, Housing, Immigration, Public Safety, Transportation, Workforce Development, and Youth Development. As a core part of ArtPlace's research agenda, we are exploring how arts and cultural practitioners have long been — and may increasingly be — partners in helping to achieve each of these sector's goals.

In each of the ten sectors we produced a 'field scan' to illuminate key priorities in that sector, and to offer a framework for understanding the ways that arts and culture contribute to local, place-based outcomes in that sector. Each field scan is not an end in itself, but an initial inquiry that informs ArtPlace's knowledge and network building work as well as those working at the intersection of art and community development more broadly.

The tenth and final sector to be explored in this process is Youth Development — an intentional sequencing that recognizes the intersectional role of young people in all ten of the other sectors, and in all aspects of community life. We acknowledge, too, the depth and breadth of research that already exists in the fields of arts education and creative youth development; each demonstrates the critical value of the arts for young people in its own right. And yet the prospect of layering in a place-based lens, and thereby building an even broader understanding of the way the next generation can transform our communities, inspired further inquiry.

As we near the end of ArtPlace's tenure, partners such as Creative Generation — as well as the Advisory Group assembled for this project — are critical allies not only in conducting the research itself, but in leading the next chapter of this work.



Jamie Hand
Director of Research Strategies
ArtPlace America

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people are envisioning the future of their communities. The future is theirs. Youth see the challenges our communities are facing today and understand the need to use their creativity to dismantle our problematic systems. As adults, we must support the creative work of youth, cede power where possible, and uplift their visions for the future.

To do this, we must understand the immense and expansive impact of creative youth on communities. Through this research initiative, young creative people, their adult allies, and a team of researchers have reviewed literature, data sets, and case studies – comprised of interviews, narratives, and artistic works – to examine the challenges and opportunities that exist at the intersection of arts & culture, community development, and youth development.

This field scan seeks to answer the question:

What impact do creative youth have on communities?

Following an introduction that includes the research design and methods, we provide an outline of the context of this work that emphasizes where the field is now, as addressed by the current literature and the combined crises and insights of 2020. We then present the key findings that seek to expand on our simple answer to the question posed above presented through the perspectives of young creatives. Throughout this document, we have amplified the words of young creatives which provoke bold ideas for change; these words and ideas are underscored throughout in pink.

Unabashedly, young creatives believe their projects benefit both people and places and promote more just and thriving communities.

In the following two sections, we provide emerging lessons that include both additional learnings from the research and a set of researcher-generated provocations articulating the ideas that young creatives shared about the future of their projects in communities.

Upon deep analysis, we conclude that through creative youth & community development projects, creative young people impact their communities in significant ways which too often go unacknowledged.

Young creatives believe that in communities where creative youth & community development projects are present, there is a future where:

- **Youth increase creativity and cultivate greater agency in themselves and others**
- **Communities (people and places) are more sustainable and responsive**
- **Youth-serving organizations honor personal identity and build collective belonging**
- **Places and their populations are healthier, safer, and better able to foster wellbeing**
- **Youth and adults catalyze intergenerational cultural continuity**

Further, **we found an increased importance of partnering across sectors and among stakeholders to increase the impacts of creative youth in communities.** Creative youth believe their projects benefit from working “in community” with others, meaning strategically investing time, resources, and relationships with other youth, adults, projects, and organizations. By doing so, they believe their projects have a greater impact on people and places. Through our analysis of the full sample of programs, we discovered a significant portion of the field uses youth development and creative placemaking approaches alongside deep engagement with an allied social sector. Creative youth also believe the impact of their projects was enhanced by an intentional mapping of the full range of stakeholders they sought to impact.

Finally, we conclude that **creative youth believe their projects need new language and measures of success.** In order to achieve this, the fields of creative youth development, creative placemaking, and their allied sectors need to evolve their approaches to defining, researching, and measuring success. We believe that young people and adults must work together to define and build these.

The intended audiences for this field scan include practitioners and supporters of creative youth & community development projects who work in the arts & culture, youth development, community development, creative youth development, creative placemaking, or allied sectors. Throughout the publication, we have provided tangible models in order to guide practitioners towards application of the ideas within their own work and context.

We researched and wrote this scan from June through November 2020, in the midst of several crises impacting communities throughout the United States: the global COVID-19 pandemic, the resulting economic recession, the political uncertainty of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, and the community uprisings and racial reckoning resulting from the violence against Black civilians at the hands of police. Our findings reflect these circumstances and are presented with the urgency these events demand.

These circumstances – and the resulting actions of young creatives around the United States – are the precise reason why we do this work. The creative contributions of young people to their communities, particularly in times of crisis, exemplifies the urgency and responsibility of their adult allies to support their creative social change pursuits. Now is the time we need this work most.

For more resources produced during this research, be sure to [visit the Creative Youth & Community Development research initiative's website](#). Additional publications include:

- A Creative Youth & Community Development Literature Review
- The Guide: “What is a Creative Youth & Community Development Project?”
- A Set of Case Stories of Creative Youth & Community Development Projects
- Additional Suggested Readings

INTRODUCTION

Youth have clear visions for the future of their communities. In the last decade, myriad young people - young creatives in particular - have applied their capabilities toward justice-oriented creative projects in communities around the globe¹.

Notably, young people like Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai, the arts students who founded A March for Our Lives, the youth leaders of the Sunrise Movement for climate justice and those leading #BlackLivesMatter protests have taken innovative and alerting approaches to calling for social change. While these have gained national if not international acclaim, there are many similar efforts around the globe happening at a hyper-local level, grounded in specific histories and cultures, and supported by artists, educators, and adult allies. Particularly in this moment – a time in which we are more connected than we have ever been via popular digital platforms, yet facing deeper community divides due to from economic disparities, health crises, and racial violence – young creatives have overwhelmingly decided not to tune out, but to tune in.

In our foundational research at Creative Generation, we concluded it was time to up-end the antiquated narratives about arts and cultural education and about the impact of creative youth in their communities and the world. To do that, we have taken a justice-oriented approach, elevated local solutions to complex global challenges, focused on projects led by young creatives, and documented that work through the perspectives of creative youth. We hope this research initiative will contribute to an expanded discourse about the roles young people can play in community change.

In order to do so, we must begin by understanding the underpinning foundational, philosophical, and practical frameworks of this work. In the last decade, the nascent fields of Creative Placemaking (CP) and Creative Youth Development (CYD) have both formed from long-standing practices in their non-arts counterparts: community development and youth development, respectively. Through widely-scoped work initiated by large, national funders and associations, bodies of scholarship have begun to emerge which provide the definitions, core practices, and outcomes utilized within both CP and CYD. However, until now, the intersection between these fields has not been examined.

1 Poulin, 2019

Treble NLS leads a musical protest in Pittsburgh, PA.



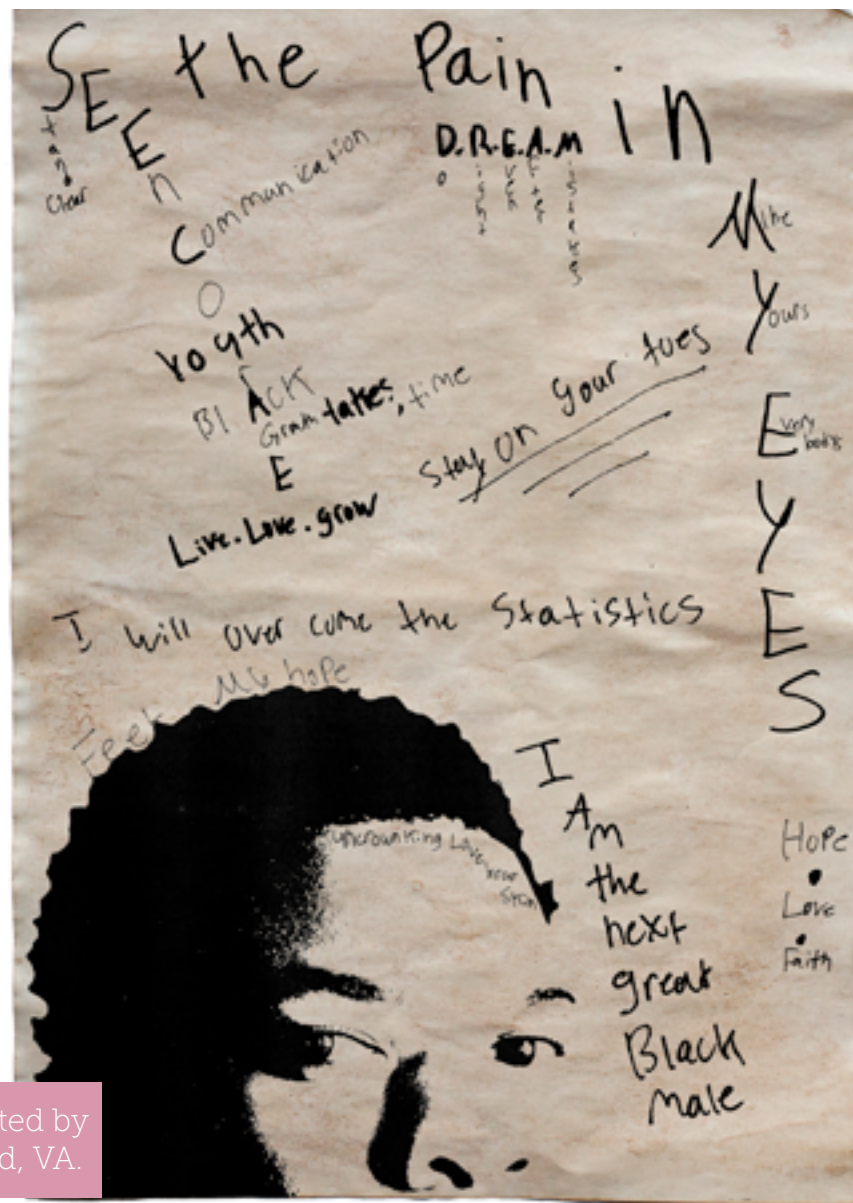
But now, more than ever, a study of the impact of creative youth in communities is relevant and needed as young people and communities face unprecedented challenges. During the research period, the ever-changing circumstances of 2020 highlighted how essential community-based creative youth development programs are to the health and well-being of young people, the civil and social justice of our societies, and the re-imagination of community systems to eradicate racism and all forms of oppression.

We know that young people are essential members of communities. We know community-based programs support the creative and cultural development of young people. We know young people use creativity to drive community change. We know that how we describe our work, evaluate our impact, and measure success changes how we implement the work.

Yet, we continue to celebrate, but not understand, examine, and improve, the types of support adults can offer to support youth in their creative work. We hope this study can contribute to the further development and increased investments in creative youth & community development projects into the future, while simultaneously acting as a call to action for the field to more deeply examine the intricate and expansive provocations posed by young people about how current practices operate.

We recognize the barriers to this work – some due to the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, and others more entrenched in intergenerational and community-specific work. Throughout our process, we worked to maintain values grounded in power-sharing, authentic communication, and the like. However, we note the limitations to representative sampling, collaborative work in a virtual space, and intangible feedback loops during an unpredictable period.

The following document presents an overview, key findings, and provocations for the fields of arts & culture, community development, and youth development. It is a call to continue to evolve practices, to center young creatives, and to document their efforts to catalyze social change.



Arts and message created by Sid Evans in Richmond, VA.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The following section describes the principles and methodologies that guided the project, and the cohort case stories selected for inclusion. Additionally, it includes selected definitions of terms used throughout the research and a synopsis of the relevant literature and underpinning histories of the work.

- Guiding Principles
- Methodology
- Case Stories
- Definitions
- Context

guiding principles

Recognizing the unique circumstances of this study – both in that it is centered on young people and took place during an unprecedented set of challenges for communities – the research team at Creative Generation deliberately applied a set of core principles.

- **Pursuing Justice through Creative Social Transformation:** We adopt a justice-orientation for our work – grounded in anti-racist, Indigenous, feminist, and restorative justice approaches – that fosters internal and external environments to compel social transformation through creative processes.
- **Fostering Intergenerational Collaborations:** We approach every project through an intergenerational lens, evolving meaningful youth/adult partnerships to drive the work.
- **Empowering Youth Voice & Action:** We believe that young people are the world's greatest asset and we develop narratives and infrastructure that prioritize their agency, voice, and work.
- **Honoring Diversity and Radically Inclusive Practice:** We commit to recognizing the past and taking radical action, both internally and externally, to deconstruct systems of oppression and exclusion.

methodology

The goal of this study is to understand, through the perspectives of young creatives, the impact that creative youth & community development projects have on communities in an effort to ask more from the adults and institutions with the resources to support them. Ultimately, we seek to answer the question:

What impact do creative youth have on communities?

To answer this, we devised a three-stage research process:

- First, we explored the extant literature, both academic and non-academic, in the fields of arts education, youth development, community development, creative youth development, creative placemaking, and critical race theory to inform our approach and research design;
- Second, we fielded a national call that identified 134 youth-led, place-based creative projects – or creative youth & community development projects – which we examined, analyzed, and categorized to allied sectors within which they work; and
- Third, we identified a representative cohort of nine projects and worked with youth and adult pairs to deeply understand their projects. This work consisted of in-depth interviews and the creation of original written and artistic documentation articulating the impact of their projects. Youth authored written narratives about their project and its impact within their community. In several cases, the young people created artistic pieces to articulate their creative process and community impact

To gather insights, we used a community-based participatory approach in dialogue with youth and their adult allies to better understand the origins, practices, outcomes, and impacts of their projects. We also employed arts-based analytical approaches to derive meaning and insights from artistic creations. These projects are listed on page 12.

We asked the following questions of each of the nine project teams:

- In what sectors are creative youth & community development projects working?
- How do youth and their adult allies approach and accomplish their work?
- What are the common outputs and measurable outcomes of creative youth & community development projects?
- Who is affected by creative youth & community development projects? And how?
- How can the impacts of creative youth & community development projects be described?
- How can creative youth & community development projects increase their impact?

Throughout this initiative, we convened a 15-person advisory committee, comprised of youth and adults who work in the cultural, community development, youth development, and research sectors to review and refine our process, analysis, and communication of findings. A list of these advisors is included in the acknowledgments on page 38.

The data collected includes: 1) a sample (n=134) of self-reported creative youth & community development projects, and 2) nine in-depth interviews with youth/adult pairs representing a diversity of youth-led, place-based creative projects, and 3) written and artistic works by young creatives and their adult allies articulating their original research and documentation of the origins, practices, outcomes, and impacts of their work.

We intentionally left out PK-12 arts education. The philosophies, pedagogies, strategies, and outcomes of formal in-school arts education are well documented and understood. Those existing during out of-school time, in community-based settings – particularly those focused on applying creativity for community development aims – are less studied. Thus, for purposes of this research initiative, we focused on the latter.

To learn more about the elements of a creative youth & community development project, check out the [“What is a Creative Youth & Community Development Project?”](#) guide on the Creative Youth & Community Development research initiative’s website.



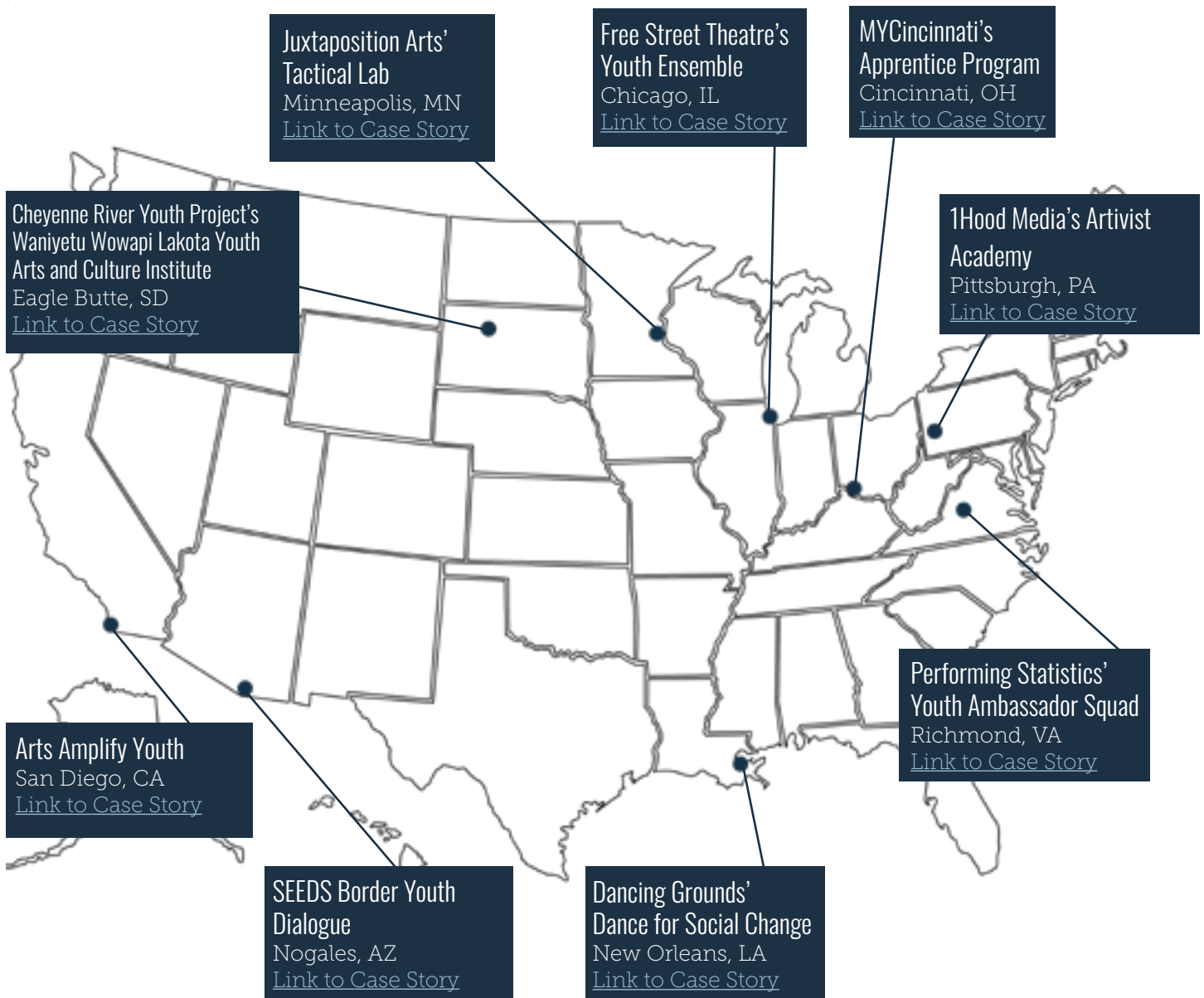
Young artists create large-scale displays with social messages.

case stories

In the summer of 2020, we selected nine projects as case stories. Our intention was to identify youth-led, place-based, creative projects focused on addressing issues within a specific community. Combined with learnings from the literature review and data from the field-wide survey, we began to understand three criteria that define this type of work:

1. Youth leadership, agency, and autonomy;
2. Creative and cultural learning through creative youth development; and
3. Place- and community-based engagement

Utilizing the case research method, we first conducted in-depth interviews and then worked with youth and adult pairs associated with each project to research and document the origins, practices, outcomes, and impacts of their work. Youth created written narratives describing impact and artistic works to articulate their perspectives. We also collaborated with The Loop Lab, a youth media organization, to produce a series of short explainer videos about each project utilizing the voices, data, and stories of the youth/adult pairs.



definitions

Throughout this field scan, you will read about several key concepts. To ensure a baseline knowledge for all readers, regardless of the sector in which they work, we have provided working definitions below.

Youth – As there is no universally agreed definition, we observe the definition offered by the United Nations which classifies ‘youth’ as those persons between the ages of 15 to 24 years.²

Creative Youth/Young Creatives – We use these terms to describe young people who are actively engaged in processes of creative development (including artistic, cultural, and critical problem solving). They may or may not be involved within CYD programs.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) – PYD is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.³ There are meaningful critiques about PYD regarding racial equity.⁴

Creative Youth Development (CYD) – CYD is a recent term for a longstanding theory of practice that integrates creative skill-building, inquiry, and expression with positive youth development principles, fueling young people’s imaginations and building critical learning and life skills.⁵ The core values of CYD are racial justice, youth voice, and collective action.⁶

Community Development – Community development is a process (and an associated field of practice) where people concerned with human rights, economic, social, and environmental justice act collectively to change societal circumstances.⁷ Meaningful critiques of this process focus on who holds decision making power and how to ensure equitable access to resources.

Creative Placemaking (CP) – CP is the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development.⁸

Creative Youth & Community Development Projects

– The phrase we use to describe youth-led, place-based, creative projects focused on addressing issues within a specific community. These projects exist at the intersection of arts & culture, community development, and youth development utilizing creative youth development and creative placemaking practices.



Treble NLS leads a protest in Pittsburgh, PA.

2 United Nations, 2020.

3 Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, 2020

4 Zelden, Christens, and Powers, 2012

5 Massachusetts Cultural Council, National Guild for Community Arts Education, Americans for the Arts, 2018

6 Ibid.

7 International Association for Community Development, 2018

8 ArtPlace America, 2020

context

The following section provides a synopsis of the extensive literature – both academic and non-academic – in the related fields of this study: positive youth development and community development, along with their arts & culture associated sub-fields, creative youth development (CYD) and creative placemaking (CP).

Readers will note the shared history of both fields originating in the late 19th century during the Settlement House movement and the Progressive Era in the United States. As both CYD and CP evolved, the fields responded to the negative perceptions of youth, and eventually found new names centered in community and practice. With a clarity of name, theory of practice, and coalescing networks of practitioners, both fields made more explicit the role of social justice in the work and, thus, aim to contribute to social and community change in societies today.

Please visit the [Creative Generation Youth & Community Development research initiative's website](#) for a full literature review and other resources related to these histories.

positive and creative youth development

The field of Positive Youth Development (PYD) has evolved in scope and mission over time. As early as 1916, American education theorist John Dewey outlined the importance of the social environment of community in the development of young people.⁹ These ideals were further developed throughout the 20th century by scholars like Paulo Freire¹⁰ and begun being utilized in community-focused youth programs. Such examples include formal organizations like 4H and Boys & Girls Clubs, and informal instances like youth service projects in Black churches, the Children's March, and more. Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, a pioneer of the Settlement House movement, is an early example of the integration of youth development with arts and cultural education, marking the beginning of the field of creative youth development we know today.

Critics of PYD acknowledge the White, urban, and patriarchal nature of the study of the field. It should be noted, however, that core principles of PYD are exemplified – yet, often not documented – in the vast majority of American social change efforts, like the Civil Rights Movement.

In the 1990's the arts and culture sector began to examine these practices and created a body of knowledge supporting "youth arts" programs which intentionally integrated arts education with positive youth development principles. These formative investments underpin contemporary notions of Creative Youth Development (CYD), which embraces an asset-based approach to youth development through arts and cultural education. The "naming" of the CYD field occurred in 2013 with a national summit of 250+ members of this community of practice convened by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the National Guild for Community Arts Education, and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

9 Dewey, 1916, pp. 1612

10 Freire, 1973, pp.15

From 2013-2019, the CYD field collectively developed new research, networks, and guiding principles for their work culminating in the release of the National Action Blueprint in 2018. Supported by interviews with over 650 stakeholders, the Blueprint outlines CYD's six key characteristics as follows:

1. Youth are engaged in safe and healthy spaces.
2. Programs focus on positive relationship-building.
3. Programs are artistically rigorous and set high expectations of youth participants.
4. Programs are asset-based and help youth build upon their inherent strengths and talents.
5. Programs are youth-driven and honor student voice.
6. Program approaches and outcomes are holistic, recognizing a range of youth needs and often integrating with other service providers to create a coordinated community response to those needs.¹¹

community development & creative placemaking

The conception of community development originated in the late 1800's during the Settlement House movement as an intentional set of reforms for parts of the United States which were struggling due to the economic and racial inequities of the time.¹² In parallel, racially-specific communities developed their own principles for community planning during Segregation. Over time, however, community development would flourish when substantial money – usually from government or community investments in a comprehensive strategy – were made. The 1980's and 1990's brought the expansion of community development corporations (CDCs) with further social investment through community development financial institutions (CDFIs) and other government levers of expanded aid for community-driven change.

Creative Placemaking (CP) intentionally centralizes the role of arts, culture, and creativity in community planning and development. More specifically, CP is “about artists, culture-bearers, and designers acting as allies to creatively address challenges and opportunities...[contributing] to community-defined social, physical, and economic outcomes [while] honoring a sense of place.”¹³ It actively builds on the traditions of asset-based community development to encourage grassroots, locally driven development – in the tradition of urbanist Jane Jacobs – rather than large-scale, top-down planning that, more often than not, disrupts lives and communities.

While pioneering communities across the country have been using arts and culture as a driving force for equitable development for decades, CP became a formalized field in the early 2000s through the support of governmental and philanthropic funding bodies including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kresge Foundation, and ArtPlace America. The field-building efforts of such organizations and associated scholars have allowed the field to evolve since its “naming.” For example, a notable and central change for CP was the move away from traditional economic indicators and strategies when outlining the key components (and outcomes) of a CP program, and the reconciling with an aptitude to “re-make” places which already exist. Conversely, over time, certain elements – like the employment of an asset-based approach – have been cemented in the CP practices.

11 Massachusetts Cultural Council, 2018

12 Von Hoffman, 2012

13 ArtPlace America, 2020

14 Markusen and Gadwa, 2010, pp. 26

In their early white paper, Markusen and Gadwa identify six components of successful CP strategies. Each effort:

1. Starts with an entrepreneurial initiator - often an artist.
2. Demonstrates a commitment to place and its distinctive character.
3. Mobilizes public will, both in local government and the citizenry.
4. Attracts private sector support, from cultural industries or developers.
5. Wins the active participation of arts and cultural leaders.
6. Succeeds in building partnerships across sectors, missions and levels of government.¹⁵

the role of social justice

Inherent in both current discourses of CYD and CP is social justice. However, throughout the histories of both theories of practice the role of social justice has not been explicit.

Years after the “naming” of Creative Youth Development, a large gathering of practitioners met to produce a blueprint for the field. In doing so, they named the three core values of the CYD movement: racial equity and social justice; youth voice; and collective action. In this light, social justice education and Hip Hop pedagogue, Dr. Bettina Love integrated the early ideas of social justice youth development (pioneered by Dr. Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammorata¹⁶) with the concepts of CYD to expand the boundaries of the intended outcomes:

“Frameworks like Creative Youth Development that are grounded in social justice not only benefit youth, but all of us, because [this] work is the work of civics. Civics is more than just voting, working on an election campaign, or food drives; civics is built on a radical imagination and the creativity of people fighting for social change. Social movements move young people because they ignite the spirit of freedom, justice, love, and joy.”¹⁷

In a similar fashion, the creative placemaking field came to recognize that components of social justice, like racial equity, social capital, and belonging, had been overlooked; this is evident in the intentional critique and awareness of “White Saviorism” within both fields. Scholars like Roberto Bedoya offered criticisms of the CP field for being predominantly White and Western, especially because concepts of place were initially focused on the beautification of a community’s physical capital and creation of amenities for inhabitants with leisure time.¹⁸ These critiques have drawn attention to the need for the explicit inclusion of racial and social justice within the contemporary frameworks of creative placemaking today.

outcomes

In both CYD and CP, scholars and practitioners alike have discussed the intended outcomes for each type of work. However, in both fields, there is little to no consensus on which outcomes should guide the work.

As part of our analysis, we compared the extant literature on these topics and found several trends, which provided guidance to both our research design and analysis of our findings. Both CYD and CP claim to contribute to:

- The growth and development of people
- The resilience of people and places
- Safety and wellbeing: physical, cultural, and emotional
- The development of identity and belonging
- The relevance of culture in communities and societies

¹⁵ Markusen and Gadwa, 2010, pp. 2612 Von Hoffman, 2012

¹⁶ Ginwright & Cammorta, 2002:14

¹⁷ Love, 2019

¹⁸ Bedoya, 2013

FINDINGS

Throughout our research process, we wanted to answer the question: What impacts do creative youth have on communities? We uncovered a combination of findings, some straightforward and others that represent more complex paradigm shifts for the fields of practice involved.

The findings can be divided into three sections:

1. The benefits of creative youth & community development projects, as defined by young creatives
2. The importance of partnering with allied sectors and other community stakeholders to expand the reach of creative youth & community development projects
3. New ways of defining and measuring success that emerged from the research

community benefits defined by creative youth

Working with youth and adult documentarians and researchers, we were able to better understand the youth-described intended and observed impacts of creative youth & community development projects. Since there are significant bodies of knowledge about the youth-focused academic, social, and place-based benefits of such projects, we sought to look closely at the outcomes for communities. In this process we have examined the perspective of young people using both their spoken word, written word, and (in some cases) artistic works. Our core finding is that:

Unabashedly, young creatives believe their projects benefit both people and places and promote more just and thriving communities.

Using the work of the youth respondents from nine projects, we compiled the numerous ways in which young creatives believe their projects affect their communities:

- Youth increase creativity and cultivate greater agency in themselves and others
- Communities (people and places) are more sustainable and responsive
- Youth-serving organizations honor personal identity and build collective belonging
- Places and their populations are healthier, safer, and are better able to foster wellbeing
- Youth and adults catalyze intergenerational cultural continuity



A community youth music ensemble practices at the helm of an apprentice.

youth increase creativity and cultivate greater agency in themselves and others

"If I get loud, it is because my voice isn't being heard!"

– Sid Evans, Youth Ambassador Squad, Performing Statistics .

Young creatives believe their projects increase creativity and cultivate greater agency in themselves and others.

By the very nature of this study, the projects studied aimed at and delivered programs which increased creativity in participants. Virtually all of the participants surveyed in this study (96%) state that peer-to-peer youth development through arts and cultural education is a goal. In all nine cases we observed, young creatives were working alongside adults to cultivate both creativity and agency in other youth. Their aim was to increase creativity beyond art-making and enable greater agency for its application in adulthood, like in the job-market, self-advocacy in the justice system, or using arts-based strategies for self-care.

In some cases, youth also say they transferred these skills to other aspects of their lives. The team at MYCincinnati describes their philosophy that every student is a main character. Free Street Theatre focuses on teaching the "practice of arguing" to lead to productive, discursive dialogues. In both cases, the young creatives describe their changed perception of themselves as agents, directing their own lives and influencing the lives of others at school, in the workforce, or in peer social gatherings.

In other cases, youth describe how they cultivate other youth to be able to take over from them in their projects. Farooq Al Said, from 1Hood Media, shared the concept that the programming of his project should cultivate independence in young creatives so that they outgrow the project. A similar sentiment was shared by the team at Dance for Social Change, specifically noting the importance of youth voice in the arts sector and the specific need to have current youth regularly at the decision-making table. In both of these cases, youth leaders seek to cultivate other youth to be prepared to take their space when they leave, often through -peer-to-peer mentoring, apprenticeships with growing sequential responsibilities, or formal youth-led leadership training programs.

For examples of increasing creativity and cultivating greater agency, please see the following case stories to hear from youth and practitioners:

- [1Hood Media's Artist Academy](#)
- [Cheyenne River Youth Project's Waniyetu Wowapi Lakota Youth Arts and Culture Institute](#)
- [Dancing Grounds' Dance for Social Change](#)
- [Free Street Theatre's Youth Ensemble](#)
- [MYCincinnati's Apprentice Program](#)
- [Performing Statistics' Youth Ambassador Squad](#)

communities (people and places) are more sustainable and responsive

The concept of resilience is often used to describe the outcomes of community development and youth development in dominant literature. However, young creatives with whom we worked challenged the term for its harmful assumption that people and places should be able to “bounce back” rather than having the root causes of harm be eradicated. For example, at Dance for Social Change, the youth used dance to expose White Supremacist systems in the lives of young people by understanding their personal histories, dissecting intersections with Euro-centric developments in dance, and reconciling both through movement.

These youth realized that systems of oppression – like school-based education systems, city-wide housing policies, and policing strategies aimed at young people – are what forces them to be resilient:

“I’d only be called ‘resilient’ by adults because of the oppression put on me by the systems of White Supremacy governing my body and my development since birth.”

Thus, instead of celebrating youth’s “resilience” in the face of oppressive systems, creative youth and their adult allies work together to dismantle harmful systems and celebrate the growth of people and communities. The two words they used to replace ‘resilience’ were ‘sustainability’ and ‘responsiveness.’

Young creatives believe their projects contribute to the sustainability of places and the responsiveness of people.

Across the board, young creatives described the impact of their projects as helping their communities become and remain sustainable: in some cases this was tied to climate and the environment, and in others it was about fiscal responsibility and longevity. For purposes of this analysis, we view sustainability as the ability to evaluate challenges and respond accordingly. Additionally, young creatives described the impact of their projects as helping individuals within a community be responsive to the changing needs of their community. The two, however, we believe are connected. In the words of Pittsburgh musician Treble NLS, “If my city is going to withstand the challenges being hurled at it right now, then our people – my people – need to learn to respond. My music helps them learn about the challenges and what to do about them.”

Many projects employ a diversity of tactics to cultivate the sustainability of their communities, but also to encourage responsiveness of the individuals engaged in their projects. Juxtaposition Arts uses the arts to create scenarios which challenge people’s perspectives on complex topics. Free Street Theatre’s Youth Ensemble encourages “critical generosity,” meaning that everyone has different experiences but a shared responsibility to act to sustain their places, spaces, and fellow community members. In both cases, the creative work is aimed at broader community discourse focused on the sustainability of their place coupled with tangible actions of people to respond to those needs.

In a similar fashion, SEEDS Border Youth Dialogue, which operates on the American southern border, seeks to “cross the border and bridge it – almost smash it” in the process. In this process, project leaders encourage responsiveness to their community by introspection (“learning from ourselves, ourselves”) and external dialogue (“let me hear you, hear me out”). This duality in internal reflection and external exploration allows for young creatives to form relationships with other community members to evaluate the challenge of the border, and form tangible actions to respond.

For examples of communities (both people and places) becoming more sustainable and responsive, please see the following case stories:

- [Free Street Theatre’s Youth Ensemble](#)
- [Juxtaposition Arts’ Tactical Lab](#)
- [SEEDS Border Youth Dialogue](#)



Youth in Free Street Theater’s Youth Ensemble perform “PARCHED: Stories of Water, Pollution, and Theft”

youth-serving organizations honor personal identity and build collective belonging

We are dope, and we are powerful in our own voice"

– Sam Marciel, youth director, Arts Amplify Youth

In much of the literature about creative youth development and creative placemaking, a stated goal is "community belonging" or "collective identity." Throughout our study, these ideals were challenged, parsed, and nuanced.

Young creatives believe their projects honor personal identity and build spaces for collective belonging, noting the role of diversity and strength in difference.

They believe that all projects should be welcoming and radically inclusive, honoring the diversity of personal identities brought into the space. Very specifically, they dismissed the concept of "collective identity," arguing that not every young person should conform to a shared singular identity: "Collective diversity is more powerful than unified conformity," said one respondent. Almost all young people explained that the beauty of diversity is found in the individual identities youth brought to the projects and the shared, collective actions they took together.

Those collective actions built collective belonging, in the perspective of interviewees. Young creatives had a home in their projects, a community among their creative peers, and a shared objective through their work together. This collective notion, however, only applied to the idea of belonging, and not to their individual identities.

When asked about the demographics of the people involved in one youth-led project, Akilah Toney stated, "The demographic conversation...picks at the very problem that these programs are built to solve," explaining that projects honor the diversity of individuals while simultaneously enabling collective belonging of those individuals. Encouraging collective identity – though often a goal of community engaged artistic practice – is the antithesis of what is desired by these young creatives.

In one example, musician and activist Treble NLS stated, "Every collective is only as strong as the individuals in it," thus we have to do the work within ourselves in order to empower the collective. In this case, working together to benefit each other in personal growth was key. Programmatic activities (both creative and interpersonal in nature) are customized to meet the individual needs of the young person. While all grow through different aspects of programming, they together become stronger in their collective work.

For examples of youth-serving organizations honoring personal identity and building collective belonging, please see the following case stories to hear from youth and practitioners:

- [1Hood Media's Artist Academy](#)
- [Arts Amplify Youth](#)
- [SEEDS Border Youth Dialogue](#)

places and their populations are healthier, safer, and better able to foster wellbeing

The terms health, safety, and wellbeing are among the most frequently mentioned in the literature about outcomes of creative placemaking and creative youth development. However, the meanings of each of these terms varies widely. In the cases we examined, the shared attributes of people and places became synonymous for the young creatives we interviewed. Divorcing the health, safety, or wellbeing of a place from the individuals in that place is simply not possible.

Young creatives believe their projects increase the health, safety, and wellbeing of both people and places.

In many cases, projects foster safe and healthy spaces while simultaneously addressing the physical and mental health, safety, and overall wellbeing of people. At My Cincinnati, which is a program embedded within a community development corporation, Aleesia is an apprentice educator who focused on creating spaces that were physically and mentally safe for other young people, while providing nourishment for their wellbeing. Similarly, Performing Statistics seeks to create a safe haven where young people will be heard; the adult and youth leaders of the project ask everyone “What can you teach me?” in an effort to build safe and healthy intergenerational connections.

At Arts Amplify Youth, a group of young artists supported by an adult ally produce an annual youth summit and arts exchange. In 2018 the theme was *Safety: Reclaim, Reframe, Reimagine*, using youth-to-youth artistic creation, performance, and learning to explore the complexities of safety, mental health, and wellbeing. “The role of the artist is to announce there is a safety issue,” said Dairrick Khalil Hodges, director of Arts Amplify Youth. By creatively expressing the challenges of safety – whether it be physical or mental health, individual or community wellbeing, etc. – young creatives are equipped to address the challenge and envision potential solutions or pathways for their actions.

For examples of places and their populations being healthy, safe, and fostering wellbeing, please see the following case stories to hear from youth and practitioners:

- [Arts Amplify Youth](#)
- [MYCincinnati's Apprentice Program](#)
- [Performing Statistics' Youth Ambassador Squad](#)

Akilah Toney dancing during her project with Dance for Social Change.



youth and adults catalyze intergenerational cultural continuity

Cultural continuity describes the transmission of culture from one generation to the next. Though using different language, young creatives endorsed the tenets of intergenerational collaboration to create art, engage with community change, and impact places.

Young creatives believe their projects catalyze intergenerational cultural continuity.

When describing the role of young people in their project, the team at the Cheyenne River Youth Project (CRYP) grounded their practices in the Lakota tradition of “walking in two worlds,” explaining the power-sharing in creative practice and project leadership to counteract the harm against Indigenous people and cultures. At CRYP’s Waniyetu Wowapi Lakota Youth Arts and Culture Institute, youth and adults work together to map their futures in the workforce and cultural sector using both Lakota traditional and contemporary methods. Youth determine their pathways in the art they create and life pathways they take through intergenerational cultural dialogue.

In another case story, the team at 1Hood Media described the intergenerational nature of their work in determining the media they create, causes they choose, and strategies for community engagement. Though in different places – rural South Dakota and urban Pittsburgh – the traditions of cultural continuity were similar.

Most notably, the concept of “Time is 360” emerged in the case of the Dance for Social Change Project within Dancing Grounds in New Orleans, LA. Akilah Toney described how the “past is in the present” and connecting the cultures and experiences of ancestors in African American communities to the current cultural creations and community change efforts was essential. “Our art impacts people in deep ways,” Toney told us when describing the impact of their dance performance.

“It is essential to give the power to create that art to young people who hold the vision for the future of their community.”

– Akilah Toney

For examples of this, please see the following case stories to hear from youth and practitioners:

- [1Hood Media’s Artist Academy](#)
- [Cheyenne River Youth Project’s Waniyetu Wowapi Lakota Youth Arts and Culture Institute](#)
- [Dancing Grounds’ Dance for Social Change](#)



Lakota Youth showcase traditional craft.

Partnering to expand the reach of creative youth & community development projects

Throughout this body of research, we examined our data to uncover the “how” of creative youth & community development projects. We sought to analyze the structural elements which enabled youth to observe the impacts discussed in the previous section.

Creative youth believe their projects benefit from working together with other stakeholders in new ways.

While this echoes earlier research on community development, youth defined three strategies which are particularly important to the success of their projects:

- Working “In Community” With Others
- Connecting Across Sectors
- Mapping Stakeholder Impact

Within these findings, we conclude each section by posing provoking questions to help guide future research in this field.



Youth perform a theatrical production in Chicago, IL.

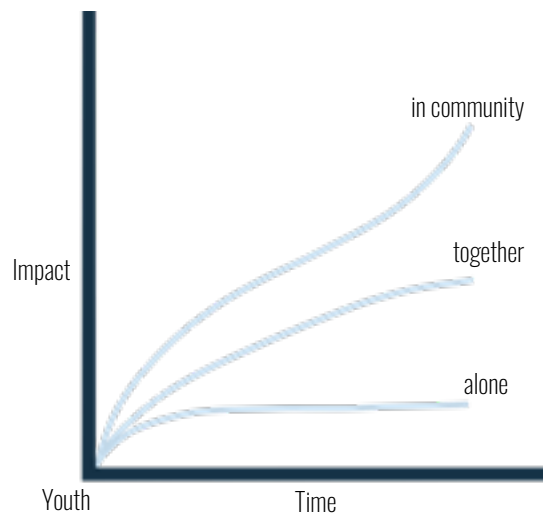
Working “In Community” With Others

Creative youth believe the impact of their projects can be achieved along three pathways: alone, together, and “in community.” They believe that by working “in community” – strategically investing time, resources, and relationships with other youth, adults, projects, and organizations – their projects have a greater impact on people and places.

When reviewing the origin stories of the nine case stories we examined, each one could identify a time in the history of the project where a change occurred that allowed for their project’s impact to increase: in all cases, this was the intentional decision to work “in community” with others in their context.

One respondent stated it clearly:

“I could have gone it alone, or together with [my adult ally], or we could have done it in community with others who share the same purpose. We went in community and began to see the change we envisioned.”



One youth contributor created a diagram to describe these relationships, as shown (slightly modified for clarity) above.

In this diagram, there are three lines which are mapped on the axes of time and impact. The bottom-most line displays the youth’s perceived impact over time if doing their project alone. The middle line displays the youth’s perceived impact over time if doing their project together with an adult ally. The top-most line, which ends with an exponential increase over time, displays the youth’s perceived impact over time if doing their project “in community” with others. Similar work has been published by The Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI).

In the mind of this respondent – and shared across all case stories – is the notion that working together beyond oneself and one’s adult allies will exponentially increase a project’s impact. However, in this example, how one works “in community” is not defined and merits further exploration.

QUESTION: How can youth and adults broaden the scope of their project or program to include other partners or community members?”

Connecting Across Sectors

In order to better understand the concept of working “in community,” the range of engagements in each project were mapped to determine trends among the sectors in which they worked. In some cases, projects operated entirely independent of other projects; in other cases, projects collaborated with other projects to address systems change; meanwhile, a final set of projects collaborated across systems to unify sectors in community-wide change. Similar work has been published by Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett in their book, *the Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History*.¹⁹

Through our analysis of the full sample of programs (n=134), we discovered a significant portion of the field uses youth development and creative placemaking approaches alongside deep engagement with an allied social sector. The vast majority (89%) explicitly state in their project or program description that their work is grounded in an allied sector. The below graphic represents the sectors, as described by creative youth, and their interconnectedness. It stresses the role of Creative Youth & Community Development projects as one piece of the tapestry of community life.



19 Belfiore and Bennett, 2008

Our analysis of these allied sectors indicated nine other sectors with which creative youth & community development projects frequently partnered:

- Safety & Belonging: Almost one-fifth (19%) of projects focused on issues of community safety, justice reform, diversion, re-entry, or community healing from justice system trauma.
- Racial Justice: Over one half (52%) of projects expressed an explicit commitment to racial justice or focused on community advocacy related to issues of race.
- Immigration: Numerous projects (12%) stated immigration and associated policy reforms, or service to undocumented immigrants was within their mission.
- Food/agriculture: 40% of projects named food or agriculture as part of their work; this was fairly evenly divided between providing food and nutritional services (in an urban setting) or connecting youth and agriculture and/or food security (in a rural setting).
- Environment: Almost half (44%) of projects focused on the environment, most notably on issues related to the current climate crisis.
- Leadership: Almost all (96%) projects explicitly stated their goals to empower youth, increase agency, and build leadership.
- Education Reform: Approximately one-third (32%) of projects focused on issues of educational attainment, equity, and reform.
- Mental & Physical Wellbeing: Almost all (98%) projects stated their focus on the mental and physical wellbeing of participants; about one-third (34%) focused on the issue on behalf of others in their community through advocacy for increased support, and systems reform.
- Justice Reforms: Over half (59%) of projects focused on broader types of reform aimed at social justice. In some cases, this focused on criminal or juvenile justice (seen above), but many others focus on justice systems across the broad social fabric of their community (like pay equity, spacial justice, and the like).

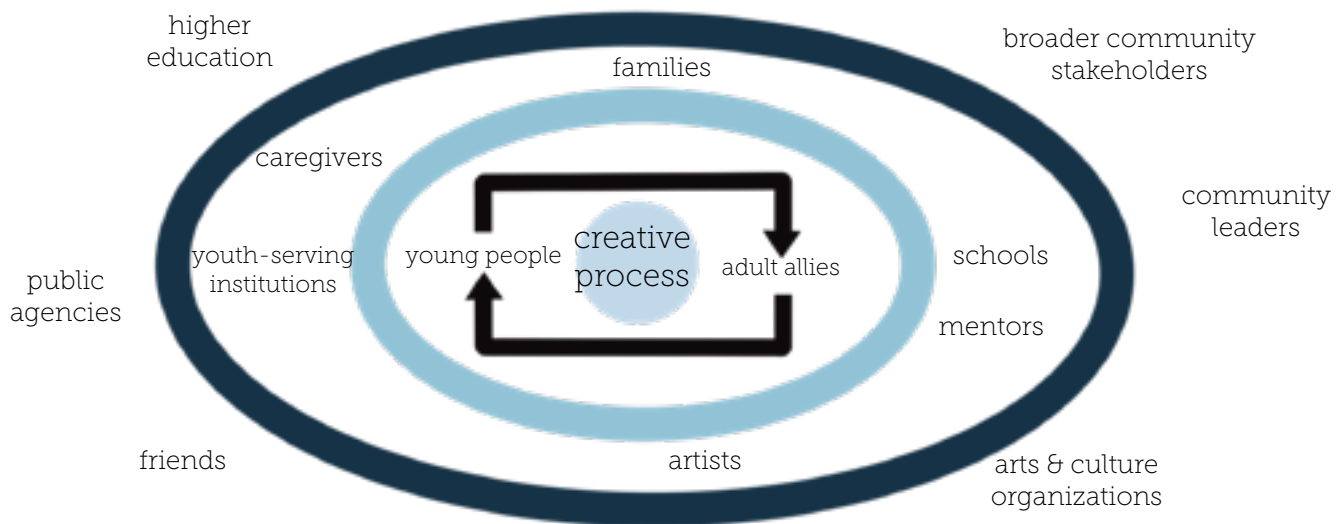
On the ground, the work is often cross-sectoral. For example, one project focused on ending the school-to-prison pipeline: young creatives worked with other artists, and occasionally other organizations, to tackle the issues within the juvenile justice system. In another case, the project created arts-based mentorship aimed at disrupting barriers in the pipeline to the workforce working with other business sector partners and community leaders.

QUESTION: How can youth and adults together strategically approach allied sectors to encourage greater programmatic cooperation aimed at shared objectives?

Mapping the Full Range of Stakeholder Impact

Creative youth also believed the impact of their projects was enhanced by an intentional mapping of the full range of stakeholders they sought to impact. Based on youth documentation, we were able to map a broad ecosystem of stakeholders who were involved with the projects. To start, we mapped the specific scenario of the youth-led, place-based creative projects.

- The first, or most immediate, realm of impact includes the creative process and the reciprocal relationship of learning, growth, and connection between youth and adult.
- Next, the intermediate realm of impact results from the relationships within the project itself and the stakeholders engaged in bringing the vision to fruition. This includes families and caregivers, program staff and artists, the youth-serving institutions, other strategic cross-sector partners, and more.
- Finally, the outermost realm includes the broad set of community stakeholders who are potentially affected as a result of the project, like community-decision-makers, audiences, the general public, and more.



The mapping includes those not directly tied to the project alongside those intimately involved. We recognize these relationships may be intentionally cross-sector in their nature, or they may be happenstance. In almost all cases we examined, the former was true: intentional involvement of stakeholders led to success.

For example, one case study focused on the housing sector. In the first year, the participants were greatly affected alongside their adult allies by collaborating to make art together and jointly learning about the social impacts of the topic of gentrification and displacement. As the project grew and began working across sectors, the partner organizations, other artists, and families were impacted through the performances and youth-facilitated dialogues. Finally, at the full maturity of their creative project, youth invited community stakeholders, government officials, funders, and more to experience their creative work. As a result, their impact was amplified in the changed opinions of those to whom they presented, ranging from the public to civic decision-makers.

This modeling shows that when projects are able to work in community, work across sectors, and include more stakeholders, the reach and impact within a community increases.

QUESTION: How can youth and adults together better understand the myriad stakeholders impacted by their projects, map connections, and determine barriers to involvement?.

defining success in new ways

Creative youth and their adult allies were clear: the consequences of their work are not sufficiently articulated within the extant scholarship in the relevant fields of study. This section describes two different pathways for articulating the intended and measurements of outcomes from creative youth & community development projects.

Creative youth believe their projects need new language and measures of success.

Two trends surfaced repeatedly within our data collection and analyses concluding that youth believe there is a need for:

- New Dimensions for Describing Intended Impacts of Creative Youth & Community Development projects
- New Measures of Success for Creative Youth & Community Development projects

Within these findings, we conclude each section by posing provoking questions to help guide future research in this field.

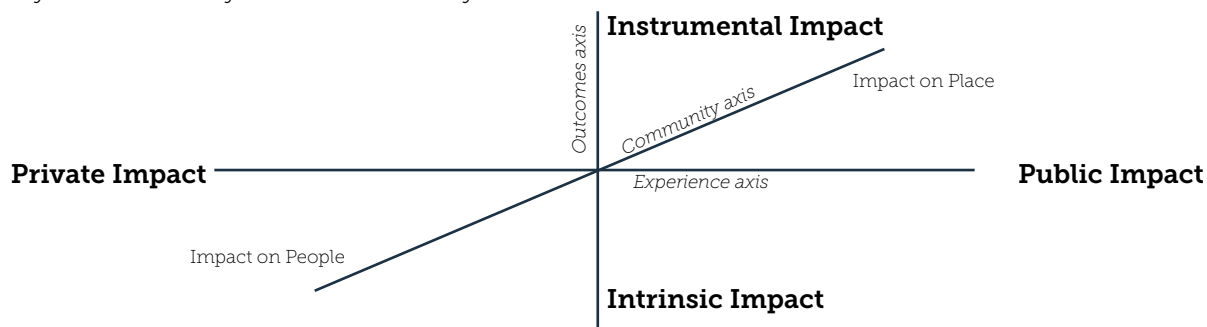


Dancers in New Orleans, LA investigate place and dance together on railroad tracks.

New Dimensions for Describing Intended Impacts

Creative youth believe their projects would benefit from new language to describe the intended impacts. Adults use the language of youth development, community development, or other allied sectors to describe their goals and intended outcomes, often relying on a deficit framing and notions such as repair and resilience. In sharp contrast, youth used their own asset-based language that highlighted new opportunities for growth.

The vast majority of both youth and adult respondents (88%) lacked the language to accurately describe the intended impacts from their project design. Upon review of the research that they conducted in their communities, we were able to locate, code, and categorize the impacts they sought through their work. The data set (n=73) provided six categories, which aligned to three metrics: experiences, community, and outcome type. Upon review of additional literature, we found great synergy with the existing model from the RAND Corporation's *Gifts of the Muse*.²⁰ The language proposed by our case studies aligns with a body of work offered by Alan Brown in his piece, "An Architecture of Value."²¹ Combining all three bodies of knowledge, we modified the Gifts of the Muse Model with Brown's concepts, plus the language offered by the creative youth in our study:



In this diagram there are three axes: x, y, and z. The x-axis represents the experience of impacts, which can be either private or public. The y-axis represents the outcomes, which can be either instrumental or intrinsic. The z-axis represents the community, which can be either the impact on people or the impact on place.

It is important to note that there is neither positive nor negative connotation within this modeling. An intrinsic, private, person-focused impact (such as enjoyment of doodling) is just as worthy as an instrumental, public, place-focused impact (such as increasing the economic value of a neighborhood block by installing a community mural).

In one case study, we heard about the joy and interpersonal connections that occurred from a community music program which operated within a Community Development Corporation. In another, we heard about the change in attitudes of a community around pollution after collectively experiencing a devised theatrical performance. In both cases, however, the project teams did not have the desired vocabulary from the existing research models employed by their (or similar programs) and expressed a desire for new ways of describing the intended impacts of their projects.

The above model provides for greater flexibility to align impacts with the youth development or community development sectors, but also with the allied sectors in which projects are working in community.

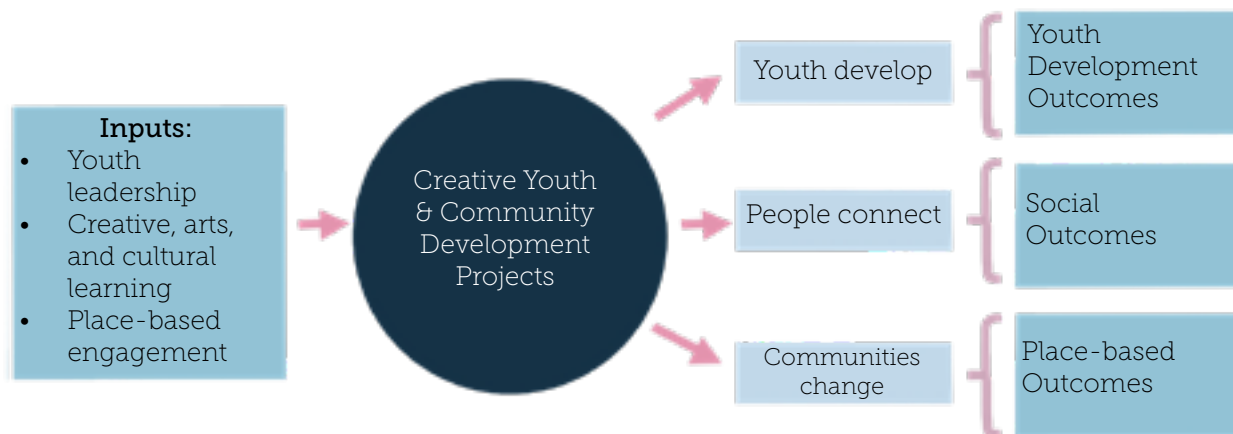
QUESTION: How can youth and adults together more accurately articulate their intended and observed outcomes?

²⁰ McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2005

²¹ Brown, 2006

Measuring Outcomes

Throughout our research, we also sought to unify the many threads illuminated by the data sets, interviews, and research conducted by young people. One overarching concept observed was the logic within each case story. So, we analyzed the data collected to create a logic model in order to understand how their activities, intended impacts, and connections created measurable outcomes. When cross-examining all nine projects, we found a common framework, which can act as a guide for future projects.



Across the entire population of projects examined, we found consistencies in the ways in which outcomes were named and measured. The light blue boxes in the diagram above, indicate the three common outputs of these projects: youth develop, people connect (intergenerationally), and communities change. For each output, there are existing measurable outcomes in the sector, many of which were explored in our literature review about CYD and CP.

In one case, the project used the county-wide model for measuring youth development across similar projects. In another case, they ascribed to measuring community development outcomes due to their funding structure. Regardless, though, there was consensus in recognizing the current outcomes and systems of measurement were lacking. One respondent said:

“It barely paints the picture – it’s like only painting with blues and greens – what if we are killin’ it with red? That just gets missed.”

We would argue, however, that even though there can be reliance on existing models, if projects operate by centering young people, then those very young people should be contributors to the design of the measurement models.

QUESTION: How can youth and adults together define the metrics of success against which their projects are measured?

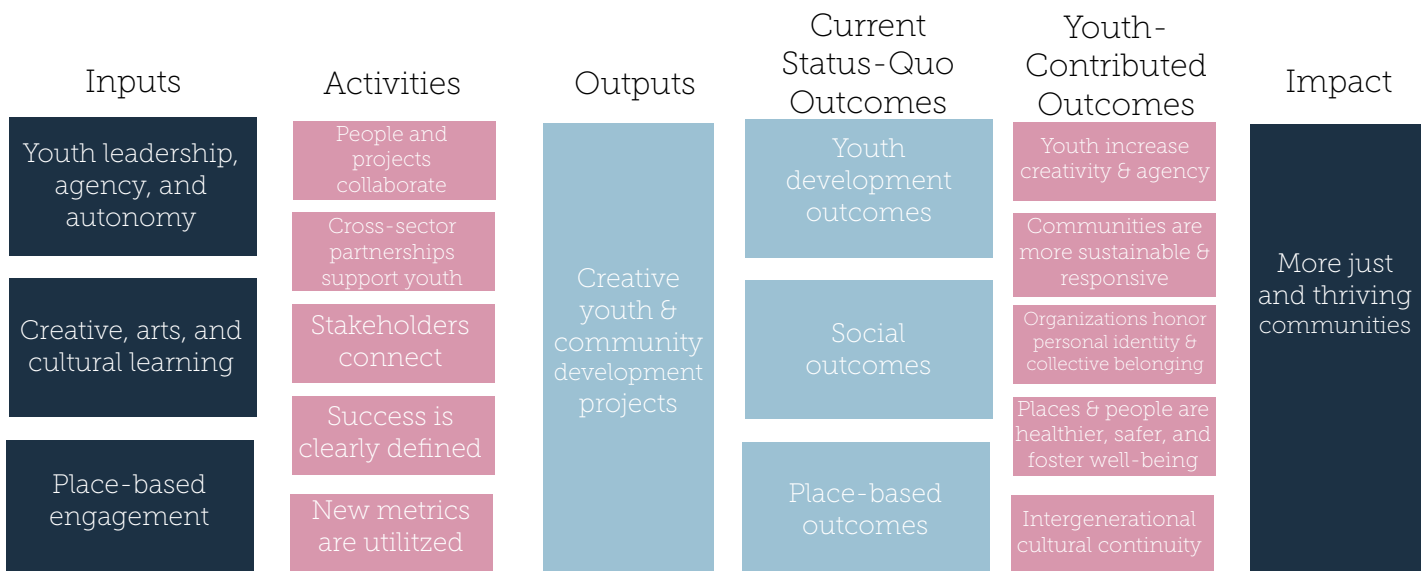
CONCLUSION

Recognizing a lot can be learned from the youth-centered, democratized process of this research, we wish to elevate the following internal findings based on the reflections of the research teams – both Creative Generation staff and the youth/adult teams who served as researchers and documentarians throughout the process. This research initiative has elevated:

- The power of young people in catalyzing social change through youth-led, place-based, creative, community development projects;
- The responsibility of their adult allies in ceding power, co-creating, and bridging the work beyond existing silos; and
- The potential – modeled in this very research initiative – of empowering and uplifting young people to lead the generation, documentation, and dissemination of knowledge about this work.

Throughout this process, and encapsulated in this field scan, we have identified three sets of findings – community benefits defined by young creatives, partnering to expand the reach of projects, and defining success in new ways – to help drive change within the intersectional field of creative youth & community development. Our hope is that together, this body of research provokes necessary dialogues among practitioners, youth and their adult allies, and other field-wide decision-makers to envision a new future for the role of creative youth in community development.

To conclude, we have combined the broad and inclusive findings to act as a road map for the future – compiled by inputs through the lens of creative youth – to guide our communities of practice. In pink below, we have integrated the significant changes to the intersectional field of creative youth & community development from the perspectives of creative youth outlined throughout this field scan. As adults, it is our responsibility to center creative youth in the development of the communities – and the future – that they envision.



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acknowledgments

We wish to express our thanks to the many contributors who made this research and publication possible, including: the team at ArtPlace America for their guidance and editorial oversight, in particular Jamie Hand and Sarah Calderon; the team at Creative Generation for their relentless perseverance in conducting the research and communication of findings; the Advisory Committee, listed below, for their time, guidance, and insights throughout the research process; and the youth and adult practitioners who lead local initiatives profiled within this field scan, listed below, for the significant and inspiring work they do daily.

A special thanks to the team at The Loop Lab, Magdiela Matta, Matt Malikowski, and Katie Medrano-Escobar for their curiosity, creativity, and can-do attitude.

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