

# Seeding Civic Engagement

Anchoring Sonoran Desert Retreat Center and Residencies—Ajo, AZ

**Tracy Taft**

*Executive Director, International Sonoran Desert Alliance*

Activating Great Chicago Fire Festival—Chicago, IL

**Jim Lasko**

*Executive Artistic Director, Redmoon Theater*

“Fixing” Creative Trails at the ARTery—Milwaukee, WI

**Julia Taylor**

*President, Greater Milwaukee Committee*

Planning Fairmount Cultural Corridor—Boston, MA

**Lori Lobenstine**

*Program Design Lead, Design Studio for Social Intervention*

# Seeding Civic Engagement: Anchoring

Author: Tracy Taft  
Organization: International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA)  
Program: Sonoran Desert Retreat Center and Residencies  
Location: Ajo, AZ

## At a Glance

The International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA) encourages civic engagement in Ajo, Arizona, an economically depressed former mining community. Efforts designed to attract artists from throughout the United States have helped restore and repurpose historic buildings in the town center into the Sonoran Desert Retreat Center and Residencies, a cultural hub that will anchor a vibrant, ongoing community revitalization process. ISDA measures its success by tracking restored building use.

## Overview

For the past 10 years, ISDA has implemented a series of intensive strategies to spark economic and community development in Ajo, a remote rural town in the heart of the Sonoran Desert. ISDA encourages broad-based community participation, bringing people together across cultural divisions. Its mission is to anchor the region's economy by providing a showcase for environmental excellence and an international center for arts and culture that offers opportunities for all the city's residents. ISDA's strategies are a blend of real estate development efforts, which use historic restoration and renovation practices, and cultural programming designed to help people connect among generations, cultures, and national borders.

## Context for Creative Placemaking

Ajo was originally built as three segregated company towns: Indian Village, Mexican Town, and the Ajo Anglo Townsite. After Ajo's copper mine began operating in 1917, the town reached a peak population of more than 7,000 residents in the 1960s and boasted one of the best public schools in Arizona. When the mine closed in 1983, homes in Indian Village and Mexican Town were moved or demolished, which ultimately fully integrated the three communities. Miners lost their livelihoods and homes, and the local economy was devastated. The effects still exist. For older community members in particular, memories of institutional racism persist, and cultural rifts among the long segregated ethnic groups are slow to mend. Ajo's 3,300 year-round residents still experience high rates of poverty (23 percent) and unemployment (12.7 percent).

In the past five years, Ajo has experienced a second economic challenge. Located only 40 miles from the US–Mexico border, Ajo has been swept up in the national press’s depiction of the border region as a “war-zone.” A decade ago, 1.4 million cars passed through Ajo each year en route to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and the beaches along the Sea of Cortez in Mexico. Today, the traffic count is less than 700,000 cars, and the reduced customer base has crippled the local economy on both sides of the border.

Nevertheless, Ajo remains an undiscovered treasure. Built in 1916, Ajo’s town center is one of the finest examples of the City Beautiful architectural reform movement in town planning and implementation. Ajo’s plaza is a stunning set of white, arcaded buildings with red tile roof accents, surrounding a two-acre palm tree-lined center park with a bandstand and flagpole. A visitor looking west in the park sees two historic churches. Between them is a wide avenue leading to the historic Curley School, built in Spanish-revival style, and the entry point for a campus with several more significant historic buildings. The entire 15-acre town center is on the National Register of Historic Places. Restoring these buildings and repurposing them for the arts creates significant opportunities. The plaza and the retreat center generate earned income that can support ISDA’s operations and programming, and in years to come, they will underpin a building reserve fund for long-term maintenance and preservation costs.

## **How Creative Placemaking Helps**

Conventional community and economic development initiatives likely cannot revitalize Ajo on their own. Ajo’s challenges are more socioeconomic and cultural than physical. ISDA believes that an intensive combination of building renovations coupled with arts and cultural programming can be effective. At the intersection of three nations (Indian Village, Mexican Town, and the Ajo Anglo Townsite), the Ajo community is complex, spanning diverse cultural, ethnic, and political boundaries. In this context, ISDA has found that an arts and culture-based approach has enormous potential. Doing creative work together dissolves barriers. It makes communal bonding easier and helps people connect among generations, cultures, and across national borders. Providing the community with dedicated communal spaces that display the arts for all is, therefore, an important step toward cultural integration and encouraging civic engagement.

## **Implementation**

Market opportunities, such as the availability of large, affordable spaces to live and work, have brought artists to urban inner cities in the United States, and in many cases, the artists have created neighborhood economic revitalization. Ten years ago, ISDA wagered that by creating and marketing affordable and attractive rural live-work opportunities for artists, a similar revitalization phenomenon could occur in Ajo. ISDA’s first project was the conversion of the historic Curley School into 30 units of spacious and affordable live-work space

for artists. During the years it took to secure \$9.6 million in financing and redevelop the Curley School, ISDA developed arts programming aimed at raising spirits and bringing the community together across cultures. ISDA invited artists from the local Tohono O'odham Nation to the Curley School to teach painting, basket weaving, and pottery. It also sponsored a Mexican cultural crafts group that has continued to meet weekly, and it brought puppet makers to Ajo to teach residents and visitors how to make giant parade puppets. ISDA then organized parades, festivals, and celebrations in the town center.

Curley School Artisan Housing opened in 2007, and since then, artists from throughout the country have come to Ajo to live and work. ISDA renovated additional historic buildings on the Curley School campus, creating a gallery, microenterprise center, and clay studio. Eventually, ISDA purchased the entire Ajo town plaza and began to raise federal and state grant funds for its renovation. ISDA expanded arts programming to include workshops on business development and asset building designed for artists.

ISDA is currently working on the capstone project at the Curley School campus—the conversion of the elementary school's courtyard into the Sonoran Desert Retreat Center with 21 apartments, multipurpose rooms, a commercial kitchen, art studios, and access to the indoor/outdoor performance and conference venue at the adjacent Curley School. With its short-term residencies, the retreat center will complement the Curley School's long-term artist housing and create a gathering space for arts and cultural groups, environmental organizations, and people concerned about the border. While anchoring the town center with more cultural institutions, the steady influx of visitors will help drive the ongoing revitalization of the local economy.

Key partners in ISDA's creative placemaking initiatives include the Ajo community, which has been involved in large and small building renovations and town center planning; the Ajo District Chamber of Commerce; and the Ajo Regional Food Partnership. Pima County has been one of ISDA's government partners from the beginning. Important funding sources include the Ford Foundation, ArtPlace America, NEA Our Town, NEA ArtWorks, USDA Community Facilities, HUD Rural Innovation Fund, HUD Community Development Block Grant, Arizona Community Foundation, and Community Foundation of Southern Arizona.

## **Progress to Date**

As conflict in the border region continues to intensify, ISDA has realized that its new Sonoran Desert Retreat Center will create an opportunity for Ajo to turn its toughest economic challenge into an asset. ISDA envisions Ajo and the retreat center as places where people come to experience regional arts and culture, as well as to engage in peaceful dialogue on immigration and other border issues. The artist-in-residence program at the retreat center will host artists from Mexico and the Tohono O'odham and Yaqui Nations.

In the long-term, economic measures will be relevant in determining whether the arts, cultural, or business development programming in Ajo has succeeded. In the short-term, ISDA suggests that the best measure is the town center's vibrancy. When ISDA began 10

years ago, Ajo had four annual festivals, only two of which were in the town plaza. Last year, Ajo had seven annual festivals and 32 significant community events in the plaza. Although ISDA assisted with marketing several of these events, it produced only one of them, signaling its dramatic increase in community involvement and cooperation.

*Tracy Taft, PhD, is the executive director of the International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA), based in Ajo, Arizona near the US/Mexico border and the border of the Tohono O'odham Nation. With her leadership, ISDA has been engaged in the redevelopment of Ajo's historic town center as an arts-based community economic development strategy. ISDA's projects have won regional and national awards and recognition. Taft is a tenacious visionary with a background in academic and community education and experience in nonprofit development and management. Prior to working in Ajo, she spent 15 years in Washington, DC, building the NeighborWorks Training Institute. She holds a BA in history from Stanford University and a MA and PhD in philosophy from SUNY/Buffalo.*

# Seeding Civic Engagement: Activating

Author: Jim Lasko

Organization: Redmoon Theater

Program: The Great Chicago Fire Festival

Location: Chicago, IL

## At a Glance

In 2014, the Redmoon Theater produced the inaugural Great Chicago Fire Festival—a new signature event presented in partnership with the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events and the Chicago Park District. The festival celebrated the city’s resurgence following the devastating Great Fire of 1871, and it honored the grit and resilience of Chicagoans who continue to rebuild and strengthen the city. To engage residents, Redmoon partnered with community-based organizations in 15 Chicago neighborhoods to produce a series of free public arts events called “Summer Celebrations.” The festival culminated on October 4, 2014, with a large-scale urban spectacle on the main branch of the Chicago River, with more than 30,000 in attendance. The grand spectacle and summer celebrations were a citywide expansion of Redmoon’s mission to transform residents’ experiences of the city by activating the community through creativity and empowered democracy.

## Overview

Redmoon Theater alters Chicago’s urban landscape through ephemeral events that disrupt everyday life and provide opportunities for public engagement, community building, and recognition of the possibility for change. Founded in 1990, Redmoon transforms streets, stages, and architectural landmarks, bridging international, economic, cultural, and generational boundaries with a unique brand of spectacle: a public art form that draws on pageantry, gadgetry, puppetry, robust physical performance, and visual art. The festival atmosphere generated by such public art turns familiar places into exciting destinations, encouraging social cohesion, attracting tourists, and provoking thought and conversation. The Great Chicago Fire Festival is a natural extension of Redmoon’s mission to engage the public in new and meaningful ways, and it represents the theater’s largest community activation initiative to date.

## Context for Creative Placemaking

Chicago is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the United States. There are 77 officially defined community areas within the city limits, and each is unique regarding its demographics, socioeconomic status, culture, history, and challenges. For the 2014 festival,

Redmoon partnered with 15 neighborhoods, including Albany Park, Austin, Avondale, Bronzeville, Englewood, Humboldt Park, Little Village, North Lawndale, Old Town, Pilsen, Roseland, South Chicago, South Shore, Uptown, and Woodlawn. Of these, 12 have a higher percentage of residents living below the poverty level than the city average, and 11 have higher unemployment rates than the city average. Located predominantly in west and south Chicago, these neighborhoods are among the most racially segregated in the nation.<sup>1</sup>

## How Creative Placemaking Helps

There is a unique opportunity to integrate these neighborhoods with the rest of Chicago by generating citywide interest in site-specific arts and culture interventions. Since it was founded in 1990, Redmoon has hosted performances in 49 Chicago neighborhoods, at more than 180 urban locations. Redmoon's expertise lies in its ability to create larger-than-life machines and interactive installations that amplify the voices of its collaborators and the communities they serve. Redmoon hopes these installations will continue to prompt regional, national, and international tourism; foster new avenues of communication between people, community-based organizations, and neighborhoods; and provide citywide opportunity for creative expression.

Redmoon amplifies existing neighborhood events and public spaces primarily through its massive spectacle machines. One of Redmoon's most recent contraptions, designed especially for the festival's summer celebrations, is the mobile photo factory—a booth housed inside a refurbished horse trailer that captures beautiful portraits of community members. Before entering, participants respond to the prompts, "I overcome..." and "I celebrate..." on chalkboard placards and then they have their pictures taken with the placards in hand to commemorate the event. Participants are encouraged to share their photos with one another and post them on social media.

In its past neighborhood engagements, Redmoon learned how successfully food can bring people together. Theater designers and master builders created the Cyclone Grill, an otherworldly 15-foot-tall, 15-foot-diameter carousel—outfitted with nine Weber grills in three elevated grilling stations—that cooks and serves food. The Cyclone Grill has hosted "Grill Master Contests" in all 15 participating neighborhoods. In these contexts, community members can step up and take turns making meals for one another. The Cyclone Grill further engages the audience by providing a performance platform for local poets, musicians, and speakers. Community members are invited onto the grill's stage, which is equipped with a

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<sup>1</sup> According to a 2011 report in the *Chicago Reader* that aggregated housing data from the 2010 US Census, "The south-side section, between Western Avenue and the lake . . . includes 18 contiguous community areas, each with black populations above 90 percent, most of them well above that. The west-side black section includes another three contiguous 90 percent-plus community areas. Fifty-five percent of Chicago's 964,000 African-Americans live in these 21 community areas, in which the aggregate population is 96 percent black. Two-thirds of the city's blacks live in community areas that are at least 80 percent black." Steve Bogira, "Separate, Unequal, and Ignored," *Chicago Reader*, February 10, 2011, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/chicago-politics-segregation-african-american-black-white-hispanic-latino-population-census-community/Content?oid=3221712>.

DJ station and two microphones, to share the sentiments they wrote on their mobile photo factory placards and voice their concerns to fellow residents.

## Implementation

Redmoon selected its 15 official neighborhoods for the Great Chicago Fire Festival in early 2014 and at the same time began planning its Summer Celebrations with the help of corporate supporters including the Boeing Company; city government offices including the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events and the Chicago Park District; and 36 community organizations including churches, public schools, local theaters and arts troupes, community boards, local businesses and restaurants, and public library branches. Its total budget for the Summer Celebrations and finale on the Chicago River totaled approximately \$2 million. In the spring of 2014, Redmoon expanded its outreach by hiring canvas leaders to manage the Summer Celebration events. It brought on talented undergraduate fellows from the University of Chicago to support the expert builders and makers tasked with constructing the large-scale machines and sculptures for the October 4th finale. Redmoon also became a program provider for After School Matters, a Chicago nonprofit organization offering teens free high-quality, out-of-school apprenticeship and internship opportunities to gain skills in the arts, science, sports, technology, and communications. Ultimately, Redmoon launched three After School Matters programs and worked with nearly 90 teens from throughout the city to help build the festival's infrastructure.

## Progress to Date

After three months of sustained neighborhood activity through its Summer Celebrations, Redmoon turned its attention to the culminating event of the Great Chicago Fire Festival—the grand spectacle on the Chicago River on October 4th. The finale attracted more than 30,000 spectators representing many of the 15 neighborhoods engaged through the Summer Celebrations. It also gave 2,000 artists, makers, and builders an opportunity to showcase their work for an audience of incredible scale. The degree to which these artists can translate such exposure into future creative placemaking activities will ultimately be an important measure of Redmoon's progress. A more immediate indicator of Redmoon's success has been its partners' enthusiasm for supporting the Great Chicago Fire Festival in years to come—despite malfunctions during the finale, which prevented three floating sculptures on the Chicago River from catching fire. In the days following the finale, Michelle Boone, commissioner of the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, remarked that the office “remain[s] committed to helping Redmoon and its team of education and arts organizations build a foundation for this new annual event, which activates our riverfront with dynamic new recreational and cultural uses—and experiences for the entire city to enjoy.”<sup>2</sup>

2 Ted Cox and Lizzie Schiffman Tufano, “Rahm Stands by Fire Fest, but Says ‘Changes, Adaptations’ to Be Made,” *DNAInfo Chicago*, October 8, 2014, <http://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20141008/downtown/rahm-stands-by-fire-fest-but-says-changes-adaptations-be-made>.



*Jim Lasko is an artist creating theatrical events that reveal and celebrate overlooked and hidden cultural assets. As a founding principle to Redmoon Theater in Chicago, Jim's work has activated a wide range of public spaces, from the Great Chicago Fire Festival, to the Museum of Contemporary Art to the Jackson Park Lagoons, to urban interventions in some of the Chicago's most underserved communities. Jim's theater work has received numerous awards and critical notices and played across the country. He was the City of Chicago's first ever Artist in Residence. In 2011 he was honored to design the staging for a public talk by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Jim is a Harvard University Loeb Fellow. He is pleased to serve on the advisory board for such institutions as The Nantucket Project and the Chicago Children's Museum.*

# Seeding Civic Engagement: “Fixing”

Author: Julia Taylor

Organization: Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC)

Program: Creational Trails: The ARTery at the Beerline  
Recreational Trail Extension

Location: Milwaukee, WI

## At a Glance

In 2013, the Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC) partnered with arts initiatives Beintween and the Riverworks Development Corporation (RDC) to transform an unused railroad corridor into the ARTery. This linear park engages residents from Harambee and Riverwest, two neighboring communities whose economic prosperity and racial composition are markedly divergent, by using arts and culture programming as a bridge. The GMC encourages residents to participate in planning initiatives and design-builds that make the space these communities share safer and more hospitable. It does this by adapting the site’s cultural programs and construction projects to reflect input gathered from residents. Early on, the GMC and its collaborators petitioned the city to purchase a closed railroad bridge that crosses Capitol Drive—a major dividing line between the two communities—and recondition it for foot traffic. Now, residents from Harambee, Riverwest, and other nearby neighborhoods come to the ARTery regularly for open mic nights, film screenings, community meals, workshops, and other events.

## Overview

The GMC is a CEO-led civic organization with a 65-year history of fostering support for the arts and economic development in the Milwaukee area. The GMC focuses on strategic social investment compatible with Milwaukee’s neighborhoods. It advocates investment in historic architecture, repurposing buildings as new and inviting public spaces. The GMC works in neighborhoods where a strong community development corporation is present or forming. With partners, the GMC assembled a committee in the fall of 2014 to raise local awareness of creative placemaking and highlight the important role creative placemaking can play in improving underdeveloped neighborhoods.

A flagship project of the GMC is the ARTery—an eight-acre linear art park developed from a disused railroad corridor. The ARTery connects Harambee and Riverwest geographically and culturally. Residents are encouraged to participate in designing the park space and public performances that occur at the site. The GMC has partnered with Beintween; the RDC; and the City of Milwaukee on “Creational Trails: The ARTery at the Beerline Recreational Trail Extension.”

## Context for Creative Placemaking

More than 30 percent of the Harambee population does not have a high school degree, and 33 percent of families live below the federal poverty line. Property values have declined dramatically in recent years, with the median assessed value of single-family homes at \$44,611, compared with \$91,462 in Riverwest in 2010. Harambee has the highest crime rates of any district in Milwaukee. Directly east of Harambee and known as a haven for artists for many years, Riverwest continues to attract many young people, students, and families. In 2008, the average household income in Riverwest was \$32,593 compared with \$23,664 in Harambee. 23 percent of the population in Riverwest has bachelor's degrees versus eight percent in Harambee. As a comparison, Harambee's 25 percent unemployment rate is markedly higher than Milwaukee's 11 percent.

## How Creative Placemaking Helps

The GMC recognizes the severe perceptions of social, cultural, and economic separation among residents of Riverwest and Harambee. These issues have grown for several generations. Today, emerging leaders in both communities are interested in arts- and design-based entrepreneurship as a way to redress past problems. The GMC has an opportunity to inventively address these issues through programming at the ARTery. The ARTery will catalyze redevelopment in the greater Riverworks area, which includes both the Riverwest and Harambee communities, by drawing on existing networks of artists, makers, and other entrepreneurs. The GMC and its partners aim to grow Riverwest and Harambee as cultural hubs by building new access ways to the park and surrounding neighborhoods. These efforts will change the perception that neighborhoods in the Riverworks area are separate while promoting a sense that Harambee and Riverwest have distinct but equal cultures.

## Implementation

Collaborations with multiple departments of the city have enabled the GMC to activate the ARTery and plan for the long-term economic vitality of the surrounding area. The City of Milwaukee has implemented design and structural improvements at the ARTery site, in program infrastructure, and in assistance obtaining permits for on-site programming and installations.

RDC has been responsible for graffiti removal at the ARTery site and public relations support to promote on-site programming among the neighbors. Further, RDC has helped form an advisory board. Earthbound Development, the current private owner of the site and an active member of the RDC, allowed access to its property in 2014 for site cleanup, programming, installation, and landscaping ahead of the city's formal purchase and acquisition of the land.

Another key partner on the ARTery is Beintween, a social and spatial networking initiative that improvises spaces to strengthen communities, making "art do work." Beintween

began working at the ARTery in 2012, focusing their initial efforts on repurposing old rubber tires found along the trail. The organization launched its arts activity in the community with a pop-up tire swing park at the Holton Bridge in Milwaukee's East Side neighborhood. Its work is now an integral part of the linear park and is responsible for the construction of the ICAN2 Laboratory, an alternative learning site built from a recycled shipping container.

Beintween also sponsored a series of community barbeques leading to the initial site construction. These barbeques allowed attendees to discuss sensitive social and political issues between the two neighborhoods and for community members to help plan performances and installations, as well as contribute to the development of the site. One of the major issues raised by the community during the barbecues was Harambee's difficulty accessing Capital Drive—one of the most heavily trafficked streets in the state and the dividing line between the Harambee and Riverwest neighborhoods.

### **Progress to Date**

Previously, the ARTery area was a sort of “nonspace” marked by illegal dumping and abandoned tires. It was used only occasionally by dog walkers or residents taking a short cut. Now, the trail is the destination. The ARTery has become an established, friendly, usable site because of landscaping efforts, lighting additions, and art installations.

Early on, the GMC and its collaborators petitioned the city to purchase a closed railroad bridge that crosses Capitol Drive and recondition it for foot traffic. Now, youth and adults from Harambee, Riverwest, and other nearby neighborhoods come to the ARTery regularly for open mic nights, film screenings, community meals, workshops, and other events. Residents continue to work on the ARTery's design-build projects and often come to the GMC with ideas that the committee encourages them to pursue at the site themselves.

By fall of 2015, the City of Milwaukee will have purchased land along the ARTery to install a new bicycle and pedestrian path, inviting residents from the two communities to grow even closer.

*Julia Taylor was appointed president of the Greater Milwaukee Committee in December 2002. The GMC is a CEO leadership organization creating a Milwaukee region that is the best place to live work, play, learn, and create. Her recent work includes MiKE (Innovation in Milwaukee), which creates new innovation pathways for corporate and social problems, and the Our Creative Placemaking projects, which align creative and art-place-based efforts with authentic community-based economic activities. Ms. Taylor serves on the boards of the United Performing Arts Fund, the Water Council, the Milwaukee Film Festival and the Spirit of Milwaukee.*

# Seeding Civic Engagement: Planning

Author: Lori Lobenstine  
Organization: Fairmount Cultural Corridor (FCC)  
Program: Making Planning Processes Public  
and StreetLab: Upham's  
Location: Boston, MA

## At a Glance

“The Upham’s Corner Pilot is a unique cross-sector partnership of city, philanthropic, community-based, and arts organizations that have come together to elevate the Fairmount/Indigo Line Cultural Corridor (in Boston, MA) as a destination. Today, the Fairmount/Indigo transit line passes through a number of historically-disinvested neighborhoods without stopping, but after years of community advocacy, new transit stations are being constructed to bring critical access to these neighborhoods and their residents. The vision is to build a brand for the neighborhoods along the corridor that is based in and sustained by the cultural assets and ethnic traditions of its residents.”

—*F. Javier Torres, senior program officer, the Boston Foundation (2012)*

## Overview

Fairmount Cultural Corridor (FCC) is a collaboration that engages residents, artists, community organizations, and businesses along the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line in Boston, Massachusetts. Its goals are as follows:

1. Use an artistic approach to increase local awareness, engagement, and leadership regarding plans for neighborhoods along the Fairmount Line.
2. Support and expand the local creative economy.
3. Explore, with these communities, what it would mean to create an “aesthetic of belonging” in some of the most vibrant, hectic, and diverse neighborhoods in Boston.

FCC does this in various ways: equipping each community with its own artist-in-residence; through pop-up creativity labs that bring communities together to reimagine public spaces, planning processes, and food access; and supporting artists active in the local economy.

A 2012 pilot project in the Upham’s Corner neighborhood is currently expanding to other communities along the rail line. The numerous organizational partners involved in the initiative include business-led, community-based, and artist-led organizations. Using creative placemaking to prompt dialogue and action, FCC hopes to create a cultural corridor that is accessible, affordable, and meaningful for both residents and visitors.

## Context for Creative Placemaking

The communities along the Fairmount Line are both culturally diverse and economically vulnerable. The businesses serving these neighborhoods are primarily small, locally-owned shops including restaurants, clothing stores, and hair salons. The two neighborhoods under development by FCC—Upham’s Corner and Four Corners—include a large Cape Verdean population, along with African Americans, Dominicans, West Indians, Caucasians, and Asians (primarily Vietnamese). Upham’s Corner is anchored by the Strand Theatre, an iconic cultural landmark in Boston.

## How Creative Placemaking Helps

FCC’s long-term vision is to foster vibrant, diverse, and livable communities that feel empowered to design their own quality of life and culture. The communities along the Fairmount Line have been disconnected from each other and from Boston.

One successful element of FCC’s efforts has been increasing civic engagement and the communities’ access to the urban planning process. Well-intentioned city planners often rely on town-hall-style meetings to receive residents’ input on significant urban planning projects. However, this format rarely provides a nuanced and holistic picture of the community’s needs and desires. In response, FCC partner Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI) commissioned artists to take urban planning into the streets, designing interactive opportunities that involved hundreds of community members. DS4SI artists used spectacle, play, and the subtle repurposing of everyday objects to invite community members to step into both community planning and implementation. Examples of this include:

**Making Planning Processes Public.** An interactive, weeklong pop-up exhibit that aimed to make planning accessible to residents of Upham’s Corner featured installations and interactive signage designed by two local artists. It engaged more than 600 community members both in the exhibit and on the streets. Community input helped stop plans for the construction of a fence in the middle of the main street.

**StreetLab: Upham’s.** The project put tactical urbanism in the hands of the Upham’s Corner community by creating an outdoor makerspace where community members worked with local artists, designers, and builders to create and test solutions to “micropublic” spaces in Upham’s Corner. Temporary installations included an “alley gallery,” a community-knit railing, and a street-installed Cape Verdean mancala game.

## Implementation

Beginning in 2012 as a pilot project in Upham’s Corner, the FCC initiative was funded by the Boston Foundation, ArtPlace America, and the Kresge Foundation. As the initiative expanded to Four Corners, leadership shifted to the local organization Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI). Participating organizations are staffed primarily with local

residents. The budget includes direct support for local artists such as paid positions for artists-in-residence and new microgrants for cultural entrepreneurs.

Large collaborations require strong coordination and attentive communication. To that end, DSNI has hired a full-time arts and culture manager who will play a critical role in coordinating the ongoing multineighborhood collaboration. Measuring FCC's effect on civic engagement, community belonging, and the degree to which residents feel empowered to lead is particularly challenging because much of the arts programming intentionally engages busy residents, merchants, and passers-by rather than a fixed constituency such as members of an established, well-anchored institution. FCC has addressed this by creating quick, interactive ways for participants to voice their ideas and feelings. For example, StreetLab: Upham's could focus on seating at bus stops and alleyway safety in part because of responses collected on posted notes from residents during a pop-up installation. FCC's current plan to dedicate ongoing artists-in-residence programs to communities was based on community feedback that indicated residents wanted more time to build permanent microsolutions during StreetLab: Upham's.

### **Progress to Date**

During the two-year pilot project in Upham's Corner, FCC succeeded in engaging thousands of community members—artists, merchants, students, families, and senior citizens. Hundreds attended community events such as DSNI's Multicultural Festival and the Upham's Corner Street Fair; DS4SI's creative pop-up installations such as the Public Kitchen, Making Planning Processes Public, StreetLab: Upham's, and the pilot UP Markets. Feedback from more than 50 street interviews showed many residents felt a new sense of energy, connectedness, and hope, and community members' willingness to participate in new events, and lead them, indicated that FCC's creative placemaking was succeeding.

*Lori Lobenstine is a co-founder of the Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI), a creativity lab for the nonprofit social justice sector. She is also an established consultant and experienced youth development and diversity trainer, including over 15 years of experience as a certified trainer in the National BEST Youth Worker Training Initiative. Her recent writings include "Social / Justice / Practice: Exploring the Role of Artists in Creating a More Just and Social Public" (published by AnimatingDemocracy.org), and "Spatial Justice: A Frame for Reclaiming our Rights to Be, Thrive, Express and Connect."*