

Creative Placemaking in Government: Past and Future

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In 2020, the National Endowment for the Arts (Arts Endowment) will celebrate 10 years of investing in creative placemaking via its signature Our Town grant program. Creative placemaking seeks to use the arts to *unite and strengthen communities* socially, physically, and economically, by forging collaborations among entities from the public, private, philanthropic, arts, and cultural sectors.

To date, the Arts Endowment has supported over 585 creative placemaking projects and invested over \$45.7 million in rural, tribal, suburban, and urban communities throughout the nation. Via project-based grants, the agency incentivizes local governments to play a new role in partnering directly with artists in deep and authentic ways. The arts have played a role in improving everything from public safety to health, while also offering innovative solutions to challenges that have too often divided communities. These investments are transforming places, as well as how governments at all levels fundamentally think about how to approach community development and how they cultivate new partnerships in their communities.

Although the creative placemaking field was primarily founded with the goal of driving economic development and rebounding from the Great Recession, it has also proven to be an effective tool for driving social change by increasing civic engagement and bridging community divides. For example, in Granite Falls, MN (population 3,525), the city is establishing an artist residency program within local government, which will place an artist in direct collaboration with city employees to explore how they, as public servants, can better serve local residents. This type of program is unique in a small, rural setting and has the potential to serve as a national example for other small communities that are interested in implementing a similar, locally tailored approach.

Beyond investing in local creative placemaking projects via Our Town, the Arts Endowment has also focused its grantmaking to support key network organizations. One example is a recent grant to the National Association of Counties to elevate creative placemaking strategies among a network of local county leaders. This award is focused on equipping county leaders with best-practice protocols in creative placemaking so that they may better connect with local artists and carry out their own successful projects. Investments in local creative placemaking projects and network organizations are paving the way for long-term, sustained support and recognition of arts and culture as integral to every phase of community development.

Today, the Arts Endowment has expanded the goals of its Our Town program beyond local economic, physical, and social change to also include “systems change”—defined as improved capacity for a community to sustain and advance the integration of the arts, culture, and design into everyday civil society.

The National Endowment for the Arts believes that the future success of creative place-making throughout America is inextricably bound to the continued collaboration with committed partners who share a belief in the power of the arts to unify local communities.

Mary Anne Carter was confirmed as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, the nation’s federal arts agency, in August 2019 after serving as the agency’s acting chairman since June 2018. Carter focuses her efforts on advancing the Arts Endowment’s mission to support artistic excellence and access to the arts for all. Since arriving at the agency, Carter has pushed to make the Arts Endowment more accessible to the American people, which includes bringing the annual Jazz Masters tribute concert to San Francisco in 2020, in collaboration with SFJAZZ.