

## BEYOND THE BUILDING: PERFORMING ARTS AND TRANSFORMING PLACE

**Question 2: Place & Mission:** How does the work of your organization relate to the place and community within which it is situated? In what ways have you engaged in creative placemaking strategies? How might you see creative placemaking as part of your organization's operational or artistic missions or philosophy?

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Reporter: MK Wegmann

Responses from place-based performing groups and presenters included several whose missions are shifting to reflect the view of their civic role. Performing arts leaders are active community leaders. Program examples (too many to include in this summary) illuminated myriad ways the performing arts provide ongoing rather than episodic contributions to creative placemaking in their communities including projects and programs that investigate history and issues, tell local stories, introduce new ideas, create new social platforms, engage marginalized people, model democracy and inclusivity and drive local economies. Some have become centers for health and well being while others are activating places and spaces beyond their own halls and walls. They have challenges in supporting development while being cautious of gentrification that may affect them or the communities they intend to serve.

SANDIE ARNOLD: YBCA has just undertaken a refresh of its strategic priorities, with one of those priorities being centered on creative placemaking, making this a priority for our organization. The new priority is as follows: *CIVIC LEADER, PLATFORM, PLACEMAKER* - Assert YBCA's role as a civic asset, practitioner, platform and placemaker. YBCA is working across sectors to provide a 'continuum of service' and opportunity within our city. Within this continuum the arts become part of a larger network of human services, with YBCA working in partnership with other organizations that specialize in housing, health, immigration, education, legal services, city planning and more, in order to provide a comprehensive, collaborative, and integrated approach.

SANDRA BERNHARD: We are a cultural resource to the city in which we reside. We are a community member because we sit at many tables in many communities in Houston. What we bring to this table is the craft and resource to tell stories with universal themes and personal messages that resonate in our city.

SARAH WILKE: Through artistic programming and accompanying engagement activities we are trying to evolve our community by broadening access, relationships and perspectives. A culture of artistic experimentation and production is part of what gives a city its soul. From Ancient Greece to Renaissance Europe to New York City in the '70s and '80s, great places and eras are defined by what is made there and then. This is because new things inspire people. It's research that sometimes leads to innovation. It's how we evolve."

HOWARD HERRING: New World fills a leadership role as an institution that is reimagining the educational, artistic, and economic role of culture in the community.

COOKIE RUIZ: Our mission has grown to encompass our expansion into the area of life-long health and well-being. Our work now includes extensive recuperative work, balance and falls-prevention work with seniors, and work with families to address childhood obesity.... Our building is home to over 50 nonprofit organizations that use our facilities to hold board meetings and other convenings. We chaired *CreateAustin*, the city-wide cultural planning process, helped to lead *ImagineAustin* two-year effort to develop the city's new 30-year strategic plan, and currently serve on Austin's Affordable Housing Board, and the Austin's Hate Crimes Task Force.

NOAH SPIEGEL: Our view is that the opera company is a community/social service organization, whose mission is to improve the community through the creation, education and performance of opera. We are intimately involved with our city's planning process, Nashville Next, to track the evolution of the city and subsequent planning processes.

MICHAEL ROHD: Both Sojourn and CPCP have histories in this work separate from Creative Placemaking as a term/field. And that work is central to the missions, strategies and collaborators in both organizations. Creative Placemaking has expanded the conversation, and brought more parties to the table both in and outside the arts. So we engage in the term and field as allies, as critical thinkers/participants, as leaders (we think) and as learners.

MK WEGMANN: While NPN/VAN members are engaged in presenting and commissioning touring artists, they are also supporting local artists and providing a locus for communities and artists to intersect. ... They are creative places themselves. Many pioneered their work in neighborhoods in the 1970s and 80s, and now are anchors in thriving neighborhoods (some, unfortunately, are being priced out of those same neighborhoods).

**National service organizations broadly connect their missions with creative placemaking objectives. Theresa Ewing's observation could be generalized: *"through all of our programs, whether convenings, research, publications, grantmaking or advocacy, we are working to strengthen and promote the theatre field--with the hope that theatres and theatre artists will in turn be or become integral to the health and vitality of their communities."* All cited both general and specific programs and services that, in the past or currently, encourage, inform and in some cases incentivize responsible community engagement. Several initiatives such as the APAP's Wallace funded *Arts Partners* program and Dance USA's *Engaging Dance Audiences* supported by Duke were cited as having "profound" impact on field practice. National conferences were mentioned for distinct creative placemaking contributions to host cities throughout the country –when they are planned with local engagement and use, highlight and boost local artists and venues citywide. They bring a national eye to the host cities that can reinforce creative placemaking strategies. Several noted their own local creative placemaking activities - others highlighted the innate placemaking value of certain practices.**

MITCH MENCHACA: Choruses are highly accessible to people in a place and community. The majority of choruses in the country are community choruses - people who come together to sing and be part of a "community" outside of their day-to-day work/life.

ASHLEY SPARKS: Most ensembles are place-based entities. We believe that ensemble practice is present in all creative placemaking and we want to make that known/visible: group of people collaborating over time with a shared vision/ developing shared vocabulary/ working toward similar goals / shared values, such as mutual respect, inclusion, and transparency.

CARLTON TURNER: What is being labeled in this space as "creative placemaking" is built into the very fabric of Alternate ROOTS mission. We exist to support the creation and presentation of original art that is rooted in community, place, tradition or spirit. ... We strive to eliminate all forms of oppression. It is also in the fabric of the south, where the product is important, but the process of relationship building is essential.

MK WEGMANN: NPN/VAN's expanded definition of creative placemaking is not just about the physical or built community of a neighborhood, but about relationships to communities of spirit and/or tradition, which is not about geography but about ideas and commonality. When the National Performance Network moved its national office to New Orleans in 2000, it was with the commitment and understanding that we would be a national organization that manifests, in the national office, the kind of community engagement we expect from our members around the country. In 2011 our local relationships in New Orleans were formalized into our Local Network through which we provide fiscal sponsorship, intermediary services and capacity building for 16 entities...