

## BEYOND THE BUILDING: PERFORMING ARTS AND TRANSFORMING PLACE

**Question 4: Issues and Impact:** What are the types of community issues or needs are best addressed by placemaking activities? What is the intent of the activity and the impact?

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Performance work can “make issues seen,” as noted by Ashley Sparks. Responses enumerated an expansive list of community issues or needs\* that could be addressed, including equity, racism, hunger, gentrification, immigration, community identity/history, lack of access to (arts) education/ lack of creative outlets and artistic expression, political issues, environmental concerns, public education, public health and nutrition, housing, employment, transportation, immigration, the justice system/incarceration, city/community planning, urban/rural divides, aging, gun violence, economic justice, brown fields, food deserts, abandoned neighborhoods, converted military bases, historic preservation, and more.

There was consensus that any issue could be undertaken. But, that “true and equal partnership between organizations” with an emphasis on listening and making space for uncomfortable ideas was critical. While performing arts can be the spark for activating neighborhood revitalization, Carlton Turner urged respect for local cultural assets and leaders. Recognizing that issues are interconnected rather than individual problems was viewed as necessary to have impact. The importance of understanding the nuance of the issues from the community, rather than assuming what they might be from the outside, was highlighted in several examples.

MARIO GARCIA DURHAM: There are countless types of issues and needs [including] bringing healing and beauty to areas which desperately need both. It’s how you identify them and work together to address them that makes the most impact. As to intent and impact, it depends on the selected project(s) and partners.

TERESA EYRING: Bringing people together from a variety of economic and social backgrounds, to know each other, feel comfortable with each other, and be able to communicate effectively across differences. Helping people learn about social and political issues, health and nutrition, environmental concerns and more. Helping people take ownership of the special place in which they live, in order to make it more vital and ever more livable. Helping people understand their collective responsibility for fighting injustice in their place, as well as what it means to exercise their citizenship.

MICHAEL ROHD: My experience is that the strongest performing arts projects may have a single issue as a portal into community dialogue, but their practice investigates the networks and webs of connectivity amidst multiple areas of need, players, ideas and systemic mechanisms...through story, through encounter, through relationship-building, through presentation, through interrogation.

*“An ecology of ‘issues’ becomes the skeleton upon which ‘place’ lays its flesh and blood. And the art, the practice, the manifestation- that becomes the muscle that moves the body into the public arena for discourse and action”*

SANDIE ARNOLD: All of our placemaking is designed to build community connections, honoring and respecting the diversity within our city while also crossing these boundaries, and gathering people together in a civic commons.

COOKIE RUIZ: Assuming that I’m beginning to fully understand that term “creative placemaking” ... the word “community” is key to the question. Engaging in these types of projects assumes: There is a collective issue, without a simple answer; we’ve realized that it probably does “take a village”; and we agree to be the “village people.”

MARK SCORCA: Opera companies have used new works to inspire community conversation about the death penalty, anti-Semitism, immigration and bullying, among others. There is no limit to the range of possibilities. As in all their work, opera companies seek to examine and elevate the emotional and intellectual dimensions of various issues by expanding the power of words with music. In the opera house or any venue, thousands of people share an emotional/intellectual journey in the same time and space, intensifying the experience for everyone. This convening function alone strengthens the civic fabric in communities

ASHLEY SPARKS: [Performance] is a tool that can be employed to all issues; what does a community need/what does it need of artists / arts and culture / placemaking. The arts illuminate and can make issues seen (e.g. stories could be about education, hunger, health, etc.) Impact – Deeper sense of belonging. The Animating Democracy continuum of impact is a useful tool that looks at intentions and outcomes.

MK WEGMANN: In the neighborhood-based planning that took place in New Orleans following the devastation of the city by floods, every neighborhood expressed the desire for a community cultural center that supported diverse arts and culture activities. Contemporary artists creating new work are responding to and often directly supporting community issues. Live performing arts events bring people together; provide beautiful, challenging, moving, and transformational experiences; remind us of our history; preserve cultural traditions; give insight into the human experience; bridge cultural differences; move bodies and raise voices. What is the intent of the activity? more just and equitable communities.

SARAH WILKE: We see our placemaking/community-making activities as capacity building for the community. We want to create a community that is able to tackle and have dialogue around difficult issues – everything from racial equity to bold forms of expression. Our work is to help create a safe space for unsafe ideas. We do not see the issues addressed as single issues, but as part of the larger approach. This comes, in part, from building new and honest cross-community relationships and modeling how to use art as a means for these conversations.

SANDRA BERNHARD: To create with a community demands trust. Trust is built on a strong foundation of relationships with community leaders and members. Our relationships are in place before we begin partnering, collaborating, and creating. The intent of our activity is to create together. Relationship is first - Period!

AMY FITTERER: The intent of this work is to remove barriers to entry, to awaken the collaborative spirit, unite those with common goals and interests, and unearth the true character and voice of a community.

CARLTON TURNER: Any issue, whether it be housing, education, health and wellness, or transportation can be addressed as long as creativity, sustainability, agency, and transparency are part of the formula.

“We see supporting the local creative assets and leadership as part of a sustained process around self-determined change, as the critical places this work can address.”