



# SOUND PLACES

A CREATIVE PLACEMAKING TOOLKIT FOR MUSICIANS

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Cover image: Community members in Opelousas improve a downtown intersection, inspired by the Sound Places residency.

Photos used in this toolkit were contributed by:

Elka Gotfryd

Gaye Hamilton

Julian Hernandez

Kara LaMoure

Melanie Lee Lebouef

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**In 2016, *Chamber Music America (CMA)* received an Our Town grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to pilot the Sound Places program, which would introduce creative placemaking to the chamber music field, and disseminate the knowledge gained and lessons learned through this pilot to ensembles and presenters in order for them to further engage in this work in their own communities.**

## **WHAT IS CREATIVE PLACEMAKING?**

Creative placemaking is a term that is often used, and more often misunderstood. According to the NEA, creative placemaking “integrates arts, culture, and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities.”

Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit organization that has been the central hub of the Placemaking movement since its founding in 1975, defines placemaking is “both an overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving a neighborhood, city, or region,” which “inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community.”

CMA’s goal was to help communities imagine an improved or enhanced public space by integrating small ensemble music into the design and planning of a placemaking project, and to document the steps of the process so that other ensembles would have a guide to engage in this work.

CMA enlisted the help of Project for Public Spaces (PPS) and the Louisiana Division of the Arts (LDOA), a component of Louisiana’s Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, which served as our on-the-ground partner. Through an application process we matched two of Louisiana’s cultural districts, Opelousas and Rivertown Kenner, with two ensembles, the wind quintet WindSync and the brass quartet The Westerlies.

From January to December 2017, each ensemble visited its host community four times to help residents and public officials realize their visions for improved public spaces. Throughout the year there were great successes and unforeseen challenges, which are described in the pages that follow.

Also outlined in this guide are the general principles of creative placemaking and the process that brings an idea to implementation.

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Additionally, CMA is most grateful to Melanie Lee-Lebouef, Director of the City of Opelousas Tourism, and her steadfast volunteers, Troy Kahler and Joseph Cilano; Mike Ince, Main Street Director for the City of Kenner; and the talented and adventurous ensembles, WindSync: Garrett Hudson, flute; Emily Tsai, oboe; Julian Hernandez, clarinet; Kara LaMoure, bassoon; Anni Hochhalter, horn; and The Westerlies: Riley Mulherkar and Zubin Hensler on trumpets; Andy Clausen and Willem de Koch on trombones. (Since Sound Places concluded, Zubin Hensler has been succeeded by Chloe Rowlands on trumpet.)

A heartfelt thanks to the warm and welcoming residents and business owners of Opelousas and Kenner, who contributed their time and efforts, working in tandem with the ensembles.

Chamber Music America extends its most sincere gratitude to the National Endowment for the Arts for its generous support, without which Sound Places would not have been possible.

# INTRODUCTION

**This toolkit is for musicians who are curious about their communities, passionate about civic engagement, and interested in improving public spaces using their music as a catalyst for change.**

This toolkit will provide a framework for initiating projects that integrate music, creative placemaking, and community development by explaining how to:

- identify community spaces that could benefit from your efforts;
- form, cultivate, and solidify relationships that will lead to partnerships in this work;
- gather information and opinions from residents, business owners, community leaders, and elected officials;
- formulate a plan;
- establish metrics and indicators by which to measure success;
- plan events to galvanize community interest and support;
- see your project through to completion;

The Toolkit is separated into “Steps,” each of which is followed by a “Step in Action,” an example from the Sound Places project that illustrates the particular Step.

Placemaking can happen anywhere, but to be most effective, you should live or work in the community where your project is taking place. Not only will you be more aware of the places that are in need of improvement, but other community members will have greater confidence in your intentions as a fellow resident. If you do not live or work regularly in the community where your project is taking place—the situation with our Sound Places ensembles—you will need a strong and well-respected organizing partner on site.

You may already have an idea of what needs to be done in your neighborhood/community, and may even have people to work with (fellow artists, community organizations, and others). This guide may be used to develop new projects or to refine ideas already in process. Either way, what follows are essential principles that apply to any and every placemaking project.

## **A BRIEF GUIDE TO USING THIS TOOLKIT**

Rather than deciding on a project and then figuring out how to make it happen, begin by broadening your knowledge of your community, which will in turn inform a project that is born naturally from the place itself.

Placemaking projects focus both on enhancing community spaces as well as building community networks in your city or neighborhood. The key to a successful placemaking project, then, is first and foremost to observe these spaces, and listen to the people in these networks.

Steps 1, 2, and 3 will outline how to go about observing and listening, and how to access the community-sourced information that will shape your project. As you move through these steps, you will begin to see how you as a musician can contribute to addressing the issues and improving the places that are important to your community.

Steps 4 and 5 will outline how to engage the broader community in order to collect feedback on your initial findings, and then translate those findings into short-term experiments through which you will test ideas, refine your thinking, and begin to formulate your project plan.

Steps 6 and 7 will bring you from short-term experimentation into longer-term planning and project development. If your engagement and experimentation was successful, you will be able to develop a solid plan for ongoing creative placemaking activities in your community.

# STEP 1

IDENTIFY YOUR  
COMMUNITY'S  
PHYSICAL  
ASSETS

You may already have an idea of where you'd like your placemaking project to take place. Nevertheless, it's always helpful to look at the place you're considering within a broader context, and in relation to other key community spaces. Think about the different public spaces in your neighborhood, town, or city where you might direct your efforts, as well as the broader context in which these places are located. To guide this thought process, look at a map of the area and ask yourself:

- ▶ Which are the best and most well-used places in my neighborhood, town, or city?
- ▶ Which places have the most potential and opportunity, but aren't quite there yet?
- ▶ Which places are struggling, underutilized, and need the most attention?

For example, you might think about:

- an unused, vacant lot or storefront in a prime location that could be activated;
- a public institution, such as a school, library, or a hospital that has underutilized and/or unwelcoming outdoor space;
- a dangerous intersection to which attention needs to be drawn;
- a central location that already functions well, but could act as a springboard or testing ground for future events at alternate locations;
- pocket parks, playgrounds, plazas, farmers markets, or public transit stations that are functional, but unwelcoming and aesthetically unappealing to the community.

Examining these kinds of places will help you understand your community's physical public assets, and will help you make better-informed decisions about where to concentrate your efforts. As you gather information, here are a few points to consider:

- Make sure your site is known to the community and accessible to multiple segments of the population in order to ensure project relevance.
- Avoid selecting sites that are too challenging. For example, any site that is in severe disrepair, is unmanageably overgrown, or has any health or safety concerns would likely hinder the effectiveness of your project and should be put farther down on your list.
- Some sites, and certain types of events, will require you to obtain a permit before you can begin. Be sure to clarify this before you invest too much time on a particular place in order to develop a realistic project timeline.

Spend some time at the sites you identify, and observe how they are used on a daily basis. Try to be present on site at different times of day and in the evening, as well as on a weekday and a weekend. As you observe the site, use the following points of reference to better understand how the site is currently functioning, and what kinds of activities could offer improvement:

- ▶ **Comfort and Image:** What makes the area look and feel inviting and safe? What makes it feel uninviting?
- ▶ **Access and Linkages:** What makes it easy or difficult to get to and around this area, in particular on foot or by bicycle?
- ▶ **Uses and Activities:** What kinds of activities happen here? What makes it feel vibrant? What makes it feel lackluster?
- ▶ **Sociability:** What makes it feel like a welcoming, social place? What might make someone feel unwelcome?

Now that you have some ideas of public spaces that could benefit from your efforts and enhance the liveability of your community, and the specific characteristics that need attention, it's time to think about building your placemaking team. The information you gather through discussion and dialogue with additional partners will contribute to your comprehensive understanding of your community and its needs.

# Step 1 in Action: Key Public Spaces in Opelousas and Kenner

Step 1 was carried out primarily by the Cultural District teams in Opelousas and Kenner, as part of their application to the Sound Places program, before the ensembles arrived on site.

In Opelousas, the local team aimed to revitalize its downtown by focusing on neglected public spaces and vacant storefronts in the area. While downtown Opelousas had at one time been bustling with activity, it had lost its vibrancy since businesses left downtown for the suburbs in the latter part of the 20th century. Underutilized outdoor spaces, such as the very central downtown Courthouse Square, were identified as having great potential to become active gathering spaces. The nearby public library, too, was pinpointed as a key community destination that could benefit from attention, and support the community development goal of improving literacy rates among residents. Although Opelousas was historically home to three opera houses, and is known as “The Zydeco Capital of the World,” filled with this intrinsic Louisiana music, the town’s residents were not familiar with classical music. The local team saw this marriage of classical music and public space activation as an opportunity for education and exposure to new cultural experiences. Indeed, the sites identified by the local team became the platform for addressing key community issues, as described in Steps 2 and 3.

In Rivertown Kenner, the predetermined goal was to bring attention to the unrealized potential and value of its public spaces, through musical programming. Kenner has a number of high-quality but underutilized public spaces; it also has a distinct advantage as it is situated along the Mississippi River. LaSalle’s Landing, for example, sits adjacent to the levee, and is highly visible both to pedestrians and to those driving from the suburbs to New Orleans. By activating public spaces, the local team hoped to celebrate Rivertown Kenner’s local identity and its distinctiveness from New Orleans, to develop an ongoing platform to showcase local talent, and to bring attention not only to the outdoor assets but also to cultural venues such as The Kenner Planetarium and Space Science Complex, of which few people beyond school groups were aware.



**Top:** LaSalle's Landing was identified as a key public space at the beginning of the process. Here, it is shown after the relocation of the farmers market, later in 2017.

**Bottom left and right:** WindSync performs at Courthouse Square in Opelousas during its second visit.

# STEP 2

IDENTIFY  
POTENTIAL  
PARTNERS

Strong partnerships are essential to the entire placemaking process, from understanding the dynamics and challenges of your community, to building a robust engagement process, to the implementation and conclusion of your project. Successful placemaking always includes collaboration: relationships you build with others from nonprofit or community organizations, public institutions, local businesses, or government agencies. These partners can also offer insight into local demographics, economic activity, key public spaces, and potential sources of project support.

You may already have relationships in place, or you may need to reach out to new contacts. Begin by making a comprehensive list of organizations and individuals that would make good partners, using the following categories as guides:

#### SITE NEIGHBORS

If you have an idea of a public space you'd like to improve, the easiest place to start is with the neighbors. Anyone who has regular access to the site from adjacent businesses, restaurants, resident homes, civic buildings, or cultural institutions will have valuable insight into how the site functions. They may also be interested in using the site for their own activities; in this case, they could become natural partners for programming, or for physical amenities that could enhance your efforts, such as tables and chairs or special signage.

#### COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Local community organizations are excellent partners, as they can provide further contacts, promote workshops and events, and offer in-kind resources such as meeting spaces, staff/logistical support, and marketing/public relations guidance. Consider reaching out to organizations that focus on issues that may be important to your community, such as tourism, economic development,

social services, youth education and lifelong learning, assisted living, environmental protection, public health, accessibility and mobility, and food justice, to name only a few.

#### PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Public institutions such as K-12 schools, universities, libraries, and cultural institutions are natural candidates for mutually beneficial partnerships. Public institutions themselves are generally indoor

**Consider reaching out to organizations that focus on issues that may be important to your community.**

public spaces, but they often have outdoor public spaces adjacent to their brick-and-mortar facilities. They might be interested in working with you, as a musician, to enhance their own programming, and in exchange can provide venues, promotion, and outreach support. Many public institutions have existing community and inter-institutional networks in place, and strive to support initiatives that have community benefit. Their Boards of Directors, advisory committees, and staff can provide significant insight into critical community issues and additional partnerships that can support your vision and

**Local governments often have processes in place, and dedicated resources, to support grassroots initiatives.**

ideas. Universities, and in particular public policy or urban planning departments, are often good partners for evaluation and data collection.

#### LOCAL BUSINESSES

Local businesses are rooted in the community and are often interested in becoming associated with vital and necessary community projects as a way to serve their customers and promote their own business. They may be interested in providing venue space, catering for community

meetings, or even sponsorships for programming or public space improvements. At the very least, they are generally willing to distribute flyers or other promotional materials to build community awareness of your project.

#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

Representatives of local government are often essential to the success of a placemaking process, especially if the local government is responsible for management of the public spaces in which you are interested. Local governments often have processes in place, and dedicated resources, to support grassroots initiatives. They are also the best source for any existing blueprints or maps of a site, and can provide you with any information you need about acquiring permits for events or physical placemaking interventions you'd like to propose for the site. Always be transparent and forthcoming with government representatives; make them feel welcomed as partners in the process. By informing your community board member, city/town council person, or the Mayor's office about your project, you will be cultivating a vital partner who has a vested interest in improving community life.

## COMMUNITY LEADERS, VISIONARIES, PROFESSIONALS, AND FELLOW CREATIVES

In smaller communities, the most important partnerships are often with high-profile individuals who have taken on leadership roles within the community's social fabric. They are passionate about their communities, and are willing to volunteer their own time, efforts, and expertise to catalyze projects that will have meaningful impact.

Local professionals, such as urban planners, real estate agents, event planners, or others may provide insight into various aspects of your project. Also consider individuals or organizations that have implemented local projects in the past; you may be able to learn from their experiences.

The layering of multiple creative and programmatic perspectives always increases the impact of a placemaking project. Accordingly, think about working with fellow musicians or other artists as well as other creative individuals who can contribute their unique perspectives and talents to your project.

### WHO'S MISSING?

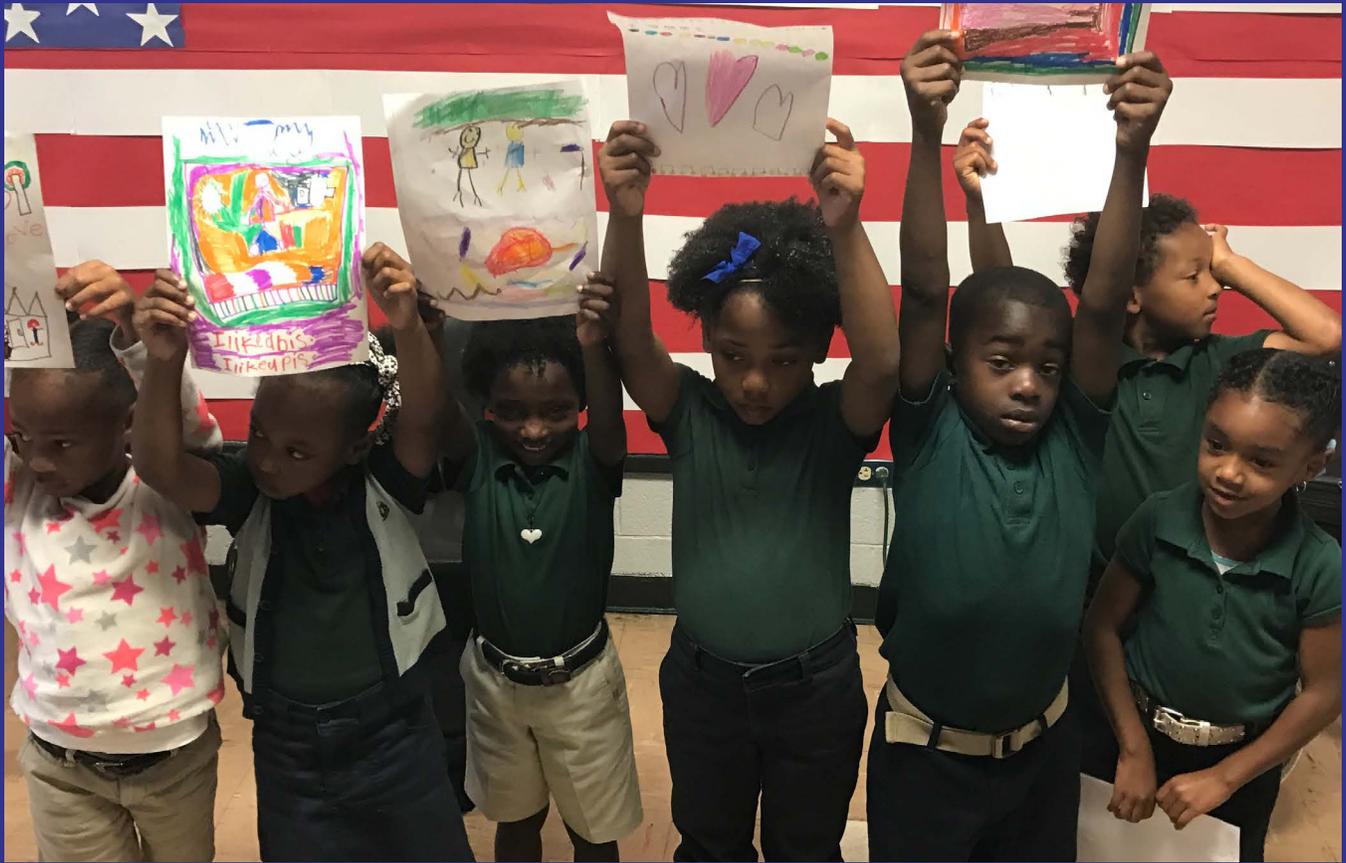
In any placemaking project, it's important to notice not only who's participating, but who isn't. Is there a certain demographic that is absent from your list of potential partners? Does your project cater to an intergenerational population? Is there a predominant group that would benefit from the project? Are you working in a community where racial or socioeconomic divides are prevalent, and if so, are those divisions manifesting themselves early in your planning stage?

With attention to these questions, you will recognize who's missing. Remember to hold a space for them and to gather their input if at all possible before you begin.

# Step 2 in Action: What to Look for in Partnerships

Because Sound Places was a pilot project with predetermined locations and lead organizations, WindSync and The Westerlies had strong partners in Chamber Music America, the Louisiana Division of the Arts, and the cultural districts of Opelousas and Kenner. The ensembles relied heavily on the local teams to establish community partnerships. The Opelousas team had extensive contacts with local businesses, several different public schools, youth groups, and the Mayor's office, to mention a few of the categories listed above. As the team identified partners, they were inclusive of race, gender, age, position in the community, and mindful of the capacity of potential partners to be helpful and involved. Because of Opelousas' struggle with low literacy rates, the local team was eager to work with schools to engage children and their families in reading and writing through music; accordingly, meetings and events took place in collaboration with two of the local schools' principals, teachers, and students.

The local team in Kenner engaged primarily with local business owners and city government representatives, which made sense given that those entities represented the most significant influencers in the cultural district. However, it would have been ideal to have potential partners that had the capacity to contribute to programming and logistics as the project moved forward. Read more about these lessons learned in the stories that come in later sections.



**Top:** In Opelousas, the ensemble worked with the South Street Elementary School to engage students in literacy and art through music.

**Bottom left:** The Westerlies kicked off their residency with an appearance at a City Council meeting where the Mayor welcomed them to town.

# STEP 3

BECOME  
ACQUAINTED  
WITH THE  
POTENTIAL  
PARTNERS ON  
YOUR LIST

Once you've identified a number of potential partners, reach out to them in order to begin conversations. Your list may not have candidates in every category, but aim for three or four categories in order to cast a wide net and invite people from different segments of the community to become involved. There is no magic number of partners that makes a project successful. In general, the more people that will take ownership of the project along with you, the greater will be the potential for positive, ongoing impact. Step 3 outlines some ways to make initial contact with partners, and some tips to remember during the process.

#### INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Formal or informal, conversations are often the easiest and most effective way to gather information about the local community and its important public spaces. Through these conversations, you will learn of any plans that may impact the public spaces you are considering. For example, if a developer has plans to build on the site you have in mind, it might not be the best place for you to devote time and efforts. On the other hand, if a municipality is planning to expand a waterfront area for public use, it might present an opportunity for you to be part of a larger project and demonstrate how that expansion could support cultural programming in the future.

As you think about the assets and challenges in your community, you'll begin to identify the individuals and organizations who are already doing the work with the people you want to reach or in the public spaces where you'd like to work. Rather than sending an inquiry to an "info@..." email address, make a phone call or send an email to an actual person so that you will more likely be put in touch with the appropriate representative. If you aren't sure who would be the best person to contact at an organization, just call and ask.

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When you reach out at this early stage, it will be sufficient to introduce yourself and note that you're in the process of developing your creative placemaking project. You may want to briefly explain that you're seeking valued insight from your community, explain the issue you're trying to address and/or the public space you're looking to activate, and request an in-person introductory meeting.

## ATTEND PUBLIC MEETINGS

All cities and towns hold regular public gatherings, such as borough, town hall, district, governmental, departmental, or neighborhood association meetings. Schedules and agendas for these meetings are usually available online. Consider attending these meetings in order to meet the activists and decision makers in your communities, and to hear community members express opinions on the issues that are important to them.

# **Consider attending town meetings in order to meet the activists and decision makers in your communities.**

## SELECT AT LEAST ONE PRIMARY PARTNER

It is important to have a primary partner or organization that you can count on, who has an interest in improving or enhancing a particular place, is influential among its peers, and has the potential to help bring the project to fruition by supporting the program development, logistics, outreach, and implementation of your project.

In your community, the primary partner might be a city councilperson, a school principal or teacher, a local business owner, or a lead representative at a community nonprofit. Look for someone who is well-known and well-regarded in the community. This primary partnership should be based on mutual respect for what each of you can contribute to the project, and where you, as a musician, will be an equal partner in planning and decision-making.

There may be the opportunity to engage more than one primary partner. In that case, they may be able to share the responsibilities of engendering community support and taking care of administrative tasks. You may decide it works better for you to have a single primary partner supplemented by several tangential partnerships—people and organizations upon whom you can call for specific help with a task or an event.

# Step 3 in Action: Partnerships Aren't Always Easy

As described in previous sections, the local partners for the Sound Places pilot project with whom the ensembles worked were pre-selected, after having submitted applications that provided information about their visions for their communities as well as their capacity to participate throughout the year. Nevertheless, the ensembles and communities had very different experiences.

Opelousas benefitted from a core team of volunteers, and strategic direction from the Director of Tourism, who was the on-the-ground project manager. The volunteers were assertive and persistent in publicizing the arrival of WindSync in their community. This kind of follow-through is important; as you identify your primary partner, keep in mind the partner's capacity to organize meetings, manage follow-up calls and emails, and maintain timelines. The Opelousas team's talents and skills complemented each other as well as those of WindSync.

It was more difficult to garner broad community participation in Kenner. Many of its business owners and government representatives are not local residents, which detracts from the sense of ownership of the public realm that is so crucial to a vibrant and engaged community. The Main Street Director, who was the Sound Places project manager, did not have a staff, and his volunteer force was not immediately visible, although it continued to evolve throughout the project's duration. This situation put more responsibility directly onto The Westerlies, and while they rose to the occasion, it made the planning and execution of events much more arduous. In the absence of a core local group, The Westerlies built relationships with a select few, including the councilmember for the downtown district, and the director of the Kenner Planetarium, the latter of whom contributed to planning events at the Planetarium later on.



**Top:** WindSync visits classrooms in Opelousas to establish relationships with the students and to build creative projects throughout their residency.

**Bottom left:** Local stakeholders meet in Rivertown Kenner to brainstorm key public spaces.

**Bottom right:** WindSync tours the Hope for Opelousas facilities, as they get to know potential partners and community destinations.

## IN SUMMARY:

Steps 1, 2 and 3 are focused on laying the groundwork for a successful project by more deeply understanding your community and its public spaces, forging relationships, and solidifying your primary partnership.

Throughout this process, remember:

- The key is to listen, and to be open to learning new things you may not have known about your community.
- Begin by reaching out to the organizations that are most interesting to you, and that have potential and capacity to be of assistance.
- What you discover will be far beyond what you can address as an ensemble; as you move through this process of research, some ideas will stand out more than others.
- You will quickly begin to see where you and your ensemble can be the most effective, which will lead you to refine your project idea.

# STEP 4

ENGAGE IN  
STRATEGIC  
OUTREACH

In steps 1, 2, and 3, you will have gathered quite a bit of information about the tangible and intangible assets and challenges in your community. In Step 4, you will engage with your community, beyond the initial partners you've identified, in order to infuse your project with broader community significance and impact. Sufficient community engagement will help you to delve deeper into identifying community assets and challenges, and to develop your project accordingly.

## **Strategic outreach involves those who will be closest to the project.**

Your outreach strategy will depend, among other things, on the nature of the issue you are trying to address. For example, if your goal is to activate or bring attention to underperforming but important public spaces, you might develop a performance experimentation

plan to test out ideas in those places. We delve deeper into experimentation in Step 5. Alternatively, if your goal is highly focused on a social issue, you would likely incorporate deliberate engagement with people and groups who are most affected by that issue. No matter the strategy, remember that it is important to gather input and feedback in order to assess the significance of your project to your community and its places.

Strategic outreach involves targeted conversations and activities with those who will be closest to the purpose of your project. Is there a particular group of people who will be most affected by your project? Is there a specific social issue you are trying to address? The partners you identified in Steps 2 and 3 ideally will have the connections and capacity to help you reach out and organize group conversations and activities with broader stakeholder groups, which will in turn help you to refine your project ideas, and through which you may generate volunteer support among participants.

Many placemaking projects begin with a community or stakeholder workshop, which requires planning and promotion. If you have a strong partner who can help with this, a workshop is a good idea. However, organizing a workshop requires a significant investment of time; furthermore, in some communities, workshops are less effective at tapping into community knowledge. This is especially relevant in places where there is distrust in public process, or planning fatigue from too much talking and not enough doing.

Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a workshop, focus groups should be arranged to help you to gain a better understanding of the needs of a particular stakeholder group, and to assess how these groups can contribute to your project. Before you gather stakeholders as a group, have individual conversations with key representatives in order to build stronger relationships. If your project does aim to address a certain issue, or to engage a specific population, these groups could be organized by categories, such as social services, education providers, government representatives, public health or healthcare professionals, local businesses, cultural institutions, and others.

For example, you might:

- ask social service providers to help you speak with social service clients if you are trying to bring awareness to issues of equity regarding housing, transportation, or food justice;
- ask a representative from your City's department of economic development to help you reach out to downtown business owners if your goal is to bring attention to small local businesses;
- work with school teachers or principals to engage with students through music, who can in turn get their families excited about your project; or,
- have a community health organization co-host a focus group with health-care providers, exercise instructors, or bike enthusiasts if public health and active living are a priority for your project.

The purpose of working with these groups is to gather insight and expand on the partnerships you've developed in Step 3. While you may already have an idea of what you'd like to do, it is important to keep an open mind and listen to the different perspectives that arise.

From the information you gather from your interviews and other meetings or workshops you will have scheduled, you and your primary partner(s) will begin to focus on one or two potential issues that many—perhaps even most—community members believe is in critical need of attention. Be sure that the issue you are addressing is one in which you are particularly interested; it's important to maintain enthusiasm for your work throughout this process.

# Step 4 in Action: Engagement and the Power of Serendipity

The Opelousas team was enthusiastic about hosting a community workshop and garnering local support for WindSync's presence in their city. A broad cross-section of the community was invited and reminders were sent to ensure that the date remained in everyone's calendar. As a result, WindSync's first appearance in the city was met with excitement and vast participation by residents, business owners, school principals, and the Mayor himself. The event was covered by a local television station, adding a layer of community significance to the project.

The workshop included a walk-through of the downtown area, where vacant stores, underutilized public areas, and a general sense of lost vibrancy in the downtown were evident. The residents identified the areas that were good candidates to be among the first to receive attention downtown, further focusing the initial goals expressed in the Cultural District's application. The members of WindSync were assigned to different tables of community members to hear firsthand what their concerns and hopes were for the downtown area. Following the workshop, the ensemble met with the Director of Tourism and the local team to develop a plan that would serve the community and accomplish the goals that had been identified and prioritized, such as downtown revitalization and improving engagement in literacy.

During their first visit, the Westerlies were invited to introduce themselves and perform at

a City Council meeting, and were welcomed with sincere cordiality. However, the next morning, only one local resident arrived at the planned community workshop. While this was disheartening, it highlighted an important rule of place-making: if the people don't come to you, go to the people.

With guidance from Project for Public Spaces and the local Main Street Director, the Westerlies relocated to the local Farmers Market, set up, and began performing. The local vendors gathered around to find out what was going on, and in the process, began to voice their concerns about the market, and the lack of attention given to their needs as well as to the needs of its patrons. The downtown City Council member, who was present at the previous night's meeting, was contacted to stop by the impromptu performance, and joined the spontaneous meeting. What could have resulted in a derailment or at least a serious reconsideration of the project turned into a catalyst for action, setting a course for The Westerlies' long-term project, which in part focused on relocation of the market to a more prominent and visible space.

In addition, they found some of their most productive leads in unexpected places: a photographer, who had briefly participated in the community meeting, revealed himself to be an exciting potential collaborator for future projects; the director of the local museum demonstrated his wealth of knowledge about the City of Kenner,



and made the ensemble aware of Kenner's valuable, yet underutilized/underappreciated museum system; a visit to the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts allowed them to connect with talented students, some of whom were from Kenner, and opened the door for future interaction; and the impromptu performance at the Rivertown Farmers Market had given hope to vendors on the verge of quitting the market, and facilitated a thoughtful meeting between the vendors and the local city councilperson. The Westerlies embraced these unexpected experiences, which drove their thinking about subsequent visits.

In both cases, the golden rule of placemaking was reinforced: community input is essential to the implementation and success of any placemaking project. While engagement sometimes goes as planned, it often occurs unexpectedly.



**Top:** Community members in Opelousas gave their input at a workshop organized by the core local team.

**Bottom:** After the Westerlies' impromptu performance at the Rivertown Kenner farmers market (left), the downtown councilman held a spontaneous meeting with the market vendors (right).

# STEP 5

## EXPERIMENT

Shifting into action is done through experimentation, or “testing” activities that are open to the public in the places you’ve identified, and using those activities to further engage with community members. As a musician, your craft is your most valuable engagement tool: with performance, either spontaneous or planned, in an important public space or other key community destination, you will naturally draw people to engage with you. Take advantage of your experimentation activities, infused with your music, to continue to ask people what is important to them, what issues they are facing, and how they think music can contribute to building community and enhancing public spaces.

In many placemaking projects, an event—such as a community picnic, market or fair, a sidewalk sale, or a concert or dance performance—is held in order to demonstrate how a particular space can be activated in a new way. Events are helpful in engaging the community in informal and fun ways, by asking those who attend for their ideas and input and seeing how they interact with your event and the space you’re in.

## **Start with a small-scale event rather than immediately diving in to a long-term plan.**

It is most effective to plan a small-scale event that will bring attention to your efforts and to the goals of the project, rather than to dive in to a long-term, ongoing plan for a series of events or other programming. Once you’ve implemented a pilot that tests out an idea and further engages the community, you’ll begin to gain a better understanding of what works

and what doesn’t. That said, if you have gathered enough information and partnerships to develop a more robust experimentation plan, you might consider organizing a series of events in collaboration with additional programming partners in key community places, and gather feedback from passersby and participants in a few locations.

In developing a pilot event, consider the following:

- ▶ What is the principal community development or public space goal(s) you wish to address through your event? Why is this a priority for you and your community?
  
- ▶ How will your project help you to address these goals?
  
- ▶ What role will your music play in the event? Are there additional programmatic elements, beyond music, that should or could be incorporated?
  
- ▶ What kind of external technical assistance, professional guidance, or other human resources, if any, would help you have a greater impact, make the event more successful, or make your work easier?
  
- ▶ Which community stakeholders and partnerships have you identified and solidified to work with you on the event? How can they help?

- ▶ What materials will you need to implement the event?
- ▶ What approximate costs do you expect to incur (e.g. venue rentals, promotion, permits, etc.) as a result of this event?
- ▶ What is the timeline for planning and implementing the event?
- ▶ Will your event be a “spontaneous” one, or promoted ahead of time? If the latter, how will you market and promote your event?
- ▶ What additional resources, if any, do you need to implement the event? (e.g. tables and chairs, stage, lighting, sound equipment, etc.).

In order to best leverage these events for outreach, it is highly recommended to utilize additional input-gathering techniques on-site, such as voting boards or post-it idea boards, surveys, or simply having informal conversations with passersby or audience members. Even without saying anything, you can observe how people are interacting with the space that may be different from the day-to-day. Compare these interactions with your observations from Step 1, when you began to explore and identify public spaces.

After you’ve implemented your pilot, you’ll use the information gathered to build additional programming and a longer-term project. Your answers to the above questions may evolve once you’ve tested out your idea, as may the project concept in general. As you develop the longer-term plan, return to this list of questions and replace the word “event” with “project.”

# Step 5 in Action: Experiments, Both Planned and Spontaneous

Following their initial visit to Opelousas, participation in the town meeting, and brief visits to a public school, WindSync crafted a performance plan informed by discussions with their Opelousas partners. The ensemble's next visit consisted of more extensive visits to two public schools to work with students on material for a Saturday morning public library concert with the intention of encouraging the children's families to travel downtown to attend the concert with their children and enjoy other downtown destinations. The ensemble's visit also included a spontaneous concert at a historic site in conjunction with an art auction, a Facebook Live interview, a second pop-up concert at the courthouse square during a Friday lunchtime, and a Saturday-morning concert at the public library with children from both participating elementary schools. The group also performed a number of "impromptu" concerts over a period of five days at various locations in the downtown area to call attention to the Sound Places project and to maintain local placemaking momentum, as well as to engage community members in conversation. Each activity addressed a different public space that had been identified by community members at the initial workshop, as well as the community's interest in literacy activities.

However, despite the consistent efforts of the Tourism Office and its volunteers, there were several mishaps: an interview overlapping with scheduled time at a school, important information such as the telephone numbers of various contacts at different locations being omitted from

the ensemble's itinerary, and not enough information about the numerous locations where the ensemble would perform being communicated to them. These types of problems might not have occurred if the ensemble were actually members of the community rather than visitors. As residents, they would have greater direct access to the community partners with whom they would be working. Nevertheless, the community experienced how music added a vibrancy to their public spaces, and how thrilled the students were to be involved in a performance with "celebrities."

As mentioned in Step 4 in Action, The Westerlies' first visit to Kenner did not proceed as expected: attendance at community meetings was low, and the group was not connected with as many schools or educational music programs as it had anticipated. As they encountered these hiccups, they realized that they would need to be creative and optimistic in order to make their second trip to Kenner a productive one.

Following their initial visit, The Westerlies created three plans that would address the issues in the city that had been identified by the Main Street Director, vendors at the Farmers Market, and the few community members with whom they had spoken. They began to work on various aspects of each one to see which elements would resonate most with the community.

One idea they proposed was the "History of Kenner," a project whereby audio recordings of the personal histories of longtime Kenner resi-

dents—interviews conducted by the members of the ensemble—would be presented alongside photo portraits with original music by The Westerlies. During this second visit, they began their interviews, which led to relationships with important members of the community and a deeper understanding of the identity of and pressing issues in Rivertown Kenner.

As they progressed through the interviews, The Westerlies realized that while historical facts provided important context for their project, what was most meaningful to the project was local residents' personal connections to Rivertown, their memories of what it once was, and their vision for what it could become. The History of Kenner project soon revealed its full potential: by providing a platform for the people of Kenner to share their ideas for the future of Rivertown in an artistic, cohesive manner, it could draw the attention of local government officials, allow the people's voices to be heard, and lead to meaningful community-driven change.

The Westerlies' visit culminated in the re-opening of the Kenner Rivertown Farmers Market at LaSalle's Landing, a move partly catalyzed by the

group's impromptu performance at the market during their first visit. It was during that serendipitous event that the downtown councilperson had an unprecedented face-to-face meeting with the vendors and listened to their concerns. One of the results of this spontaneous meeting had been government endorsement of a plan to move the market to a much more visible and hospitable location. At the Re-Opening, the number of vendors nearly doubled from those at the former location, and the market saw significantly higher turnout from community members. The Westerlies shared the stage with students from the Kenner Music Camp, taking turns performing several pieces at a time. They then joined forces for several collaborative numbers that were great crowd-pleasers. By the end of the day, one of the vendors had sold all of his goods, and several other vendors expressed their appreciation for the increase in customer traffic that was a result of the market's new location. Later in the evening, The Westerlies provided music for "Rivertown Art After Dark," a pre-existing monthly art exhibition event produced by the Rivertown Arts Council, where they mingled with the many new friends they had made earlier in the day.



**Top:** High school students enjoy an event at Courthouse Square in Opelousas.

**Bottom:** As part of the relocation to LaSalle's Landing, community members in Kenner planted a Butterfly Garden to test out other uses for the space.

## IN SUMMARY:

Steps 4 and 5 are focused on transitioning from ideas to implementation, assessing the relevance of the information gathered in Steps 1, 2 and 3, and refining your longer-term project through experimentation and broader community outreach.

Throughout this process, remember:

- To generate enthusiasm about the project by demonstrating, through experimentation, what it can become;
- A well-informed, sensitive, community-led plan will make participation more appealing for the community;
- Continue to listen, to be flexible, and to be open to learning new things, which will continue to bring vitality and relevance to your project.

# STEP 6

## EVALUATE

Congratulations! You've completed your first community event, and are ready to evaluate its effectiveness. Based on the results of the event and any community feedback you've gathered, ask yourself:

Is the place(s) you've chosen to focus on the "right" one? Was your event well attended? If not, why? Was your event successful in raising awareness for the community development goals you've identified? Was there sufficient community response? Has the community demonstrated that they are inspired to get involved?

If the event was not as successful as you would have liked, it's up to you and your partners to understand why that was the case. Refer to the next page for a list of questions that can guide you in evaluating your event.

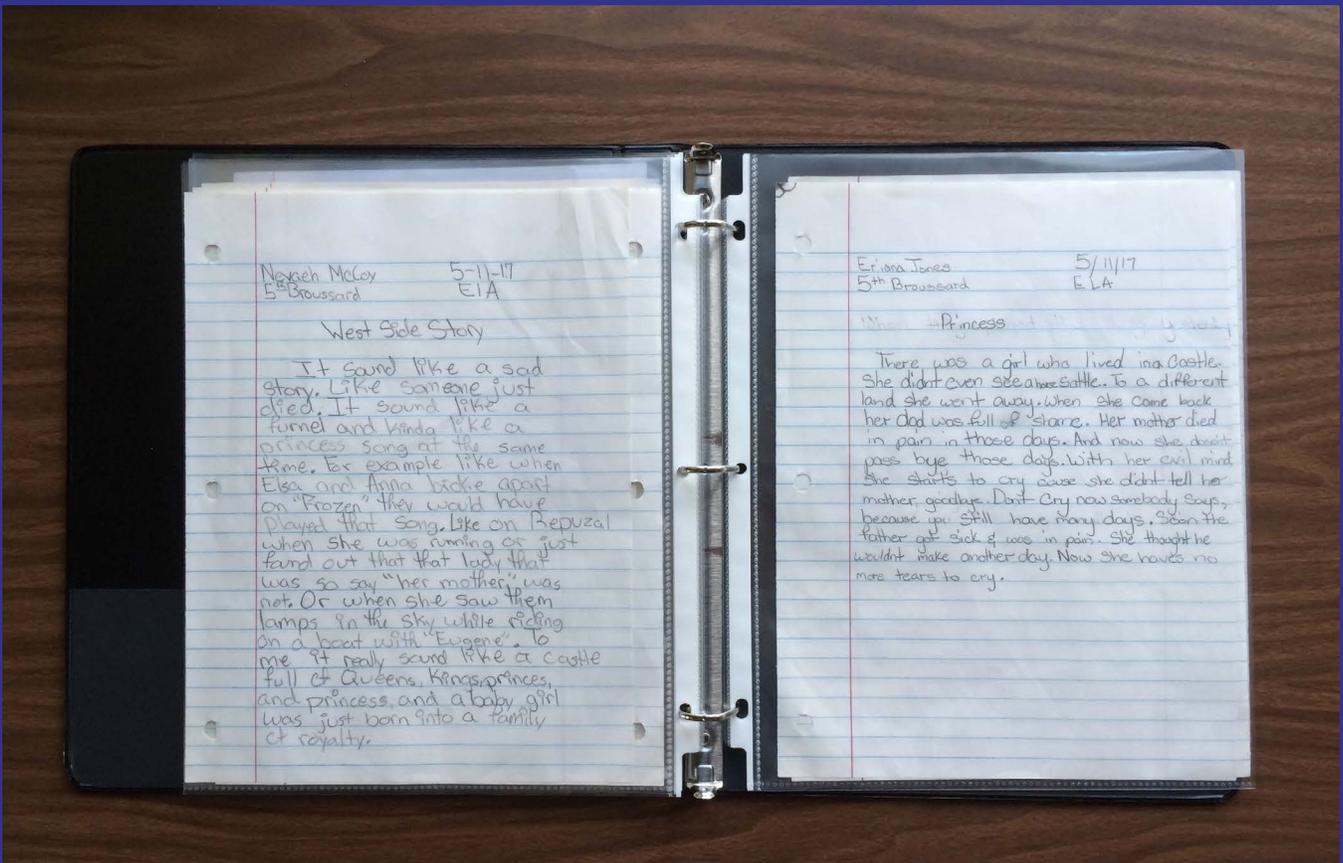
Most of these questions pertain to things that can be easily adjusted: better publicity, a rain date, inviting people from different community groups, etc. However, if you determine that there is not enough community interest, you must return to Steps 2 and 3. Do not proceed with your current idea. Not only will you become frustrated, but your efforts will not have the impact they deserve. Take a moment, step back, and spend a little more time reaching out to the community that stands to benefit from your idea. Then, experiment again with another activity or event.

- ▶ Is there enough interest around the idea of improving this particular public space?
- ▶ Was there enough publicity surrounding the event?
- ▶ Did inclement weather keep people away?
- ▶ Were there conflicting events scheduled at the same time?
- ▶ Was the event itself interesting and fun?
- ▶ Did the event include many segments of the population?
- ▶ Did you interact with community members on site?

# Step 6 in Action: Evaluation Sometimes Means Letting Go

In Step 5 in Action, we mentioned that The Westerlies had created three different plans to address the needs that the Main Street Director and community members had identified. One ambitious idea was called “Art Bike to Kenner,” the goal of which was to encourage people who bike to utilize the beautiful bike path connecting the center of New Orleans to Kenner, with the intention of promoting the art and artists that exist in the city of Kenner. The idea involved creating pop-up performances and installation pieces all along the Mississippi River Trail, which runs from Audubon Park in New Orleans all the way to Main Street in Kenner. At the end of the trail would be the newly-located Farmers Market with The Westerlies and other local musicians performing on a natural stage built into the existing staircase. This was intended to draw attention to the importance of building a stronger connection between the two cities, to highlight the interdependence of big city New Orleans and its suburbs, and to bring new audiences to enjoy the cultural assets that Kenner has to offer.

However, this idea had more traction with The Westerlies than it had with the community. The concept of connecting the cities by emphasizing an existing asset may have been on target, but there was not enough community interest to justify the efforts and resources that an event of this scope would require. In addition, during the summer months, most Louisiana residents do not bicycle beyond the early mornings because of oppressive temperatures. Initial planning revealed that the logistics of executing the event required a strong volunteer force, and other resources such as City support and funding, which were not available to the group. While it was one of the ensemble’s favorite ideas, The History of Kenner project was pursued instead.



**Top:** Elementary school students in Opelousas write journal responses to WindSync's musical storytelling.

**Bottom:** In Opelousas, the Sound Places residency got the community excited to implement additional music-based creative placemaking projects.

# STEP 7

## CREATE YOUR LONG-TERM PLAN

If you've entered Step 7, you have given your "test" event a favorable evaluation, based on the criteria outlined in Step 6. Now that you're ready to develop your long-term plan, you should:

- Indicate what the situation is now (Point A) and what you want it to be when you finish (Point B);
- List the steps that must be taken to get from Point A to Point B;
- Number the steps in the order that is the most realistic for them to happen;
- Add a timeline to those steps;
- Build additional ongoing evaluation into your steps;
- Make a budget for the plan so that the expense and revenue projections will be clear to you, your ensemble, and your other partners;
- Put the plan away for one or two days and return to it with a fresh perspective to assess whether it is realistic, or could use some refining.

Make sure that you are creating your plan in collaboration with your primary partner(s). Not only will they be able to help you achieve your own goals, but they will feel more engaged and take greater ownership in the long run if they have been involved in the planning process. Once you both are in agreement with the timeline, budget, and general principles of the plan, share it with your other partners and invite their feedback.

As you plan public events, remember that people become highly engaged when they are invited to participate in hands-on activities, such as painting a mural or planting flowers, to improve a space. Sometimes, a street or a portion of a street is closed to vehicles for a day or two to demonstrate how it can be transformed into a more pedestrian-friendly environment. You'll want to make sure you have arranged the necessary permits from the relevant city agencies and/or management organizations, which is a task your primary partner can help with.

Keep in mind that public events around a creative placemaking project are less about "showcasing" your ensemble and much more about using your music to bring attention to community issues. Your musical presence may initially draw people into the public space, but you may also find that if you are helping others to paint a mural or plant flowers, you are advancing the project while indicating your commitment to the community itself.

# Step 7 in Action: Magic Happens When the Community is Excited

WindSync's final visit to Opelousas took place after Thanksgiving, and included a holiday caroling event. Designed collaboratively by WindSync, the City of Opelousas Tourism, local artists, and the owner of a local restaurant, the community event drew audiences from a broad spectrum of ages and allowed residents of Opelousas to come together for a memorable and replicable gathering. The event began strategically with refreshments at the familiar and beloved local restaurant located across the street from the historic Courthouse Square, where the ensemble had had its first event several months before. After a sizeable audience had gathered, the quintet led caroling at various locations in the nearby historic section by singing with the community members and using only the French horn as accompaniment. Most of the caroling locations were ones that the community had selected as places they wished to revitalize in the first community meeting almost one year prior to this event. The caroling drew an audience of approximately 200 residents.

The ensemble's final appearance in Opelousas was another collaborative concert with students and members of the community. Five banners, representing the five musicians in WindSync, which had been created by student artists during the group's October visit, were presented at a ceremony for parents, students, teachers, and school staff. At the ceremony, plans were announced to hang the banners in public locations around Opelousas in order to continue to inspire the community through art and place-making.



**Top and bottom left:** Students in Opelousas painted banners inspired by the music WindSync brought to school.  
**Bottom right:** The Westerlies perform at the farmers market, testing out its new location on LaSalle's Landing.

# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The preceding pages document the key steps in planning and implementing a creative placemaking project for music ensembles. While they provide a thorough framework, your project will be unique to your community and its public spaces, and you will likely have additional questions that only you and your community can answer together. In conclusion, the following points may help in your overall approach:

Creative placemaking is easiest when you live and/or work in the community where you are trying to affect change. Both The Westerlies and WindSync traveled to Louisiana for their projects, which added another layer of planning and complexity to the process. You may be able to participate in a creative placemaking project as a touring ensemble, but in such cases you will still need to make a commitment to be in the community at previously determined and regularly scheduled times.

There is more than one way to execute a successful creative placemaking project. As you and your ensemble have unique musical characteristics, so does each community, and therefore each placemaking project. Utilize your strengths and those of the community to get the job done.

Remember to keep listening. No one listens as acutely as chamber musicians! Use this skill to continue to hear the concerns of community members, suggestions from partners, and feedback about your ideas. Don't be discouraged by those who might not be on board with your ideas right away. Change can be threatening to people, even if the changes are positive. Listen to what your partners and others you trust are telling you and make adjustments accordingly.

Projects of a substantive nature take time. Make sure that your timeline is realistic and always build in extra time for unexpected delays.

There is always more to do. Your project may take six months, a year, or two years. One project may lead to another. Every situation is different, but the general principles outlined in this Toolkit remain the same.

How will you know when you're finished? Look around. You may see that your project has sparked additional community events that may not have been taking place before. People may be using the public spaces you've been activating in new ways. Perhaps your project has sparked some political attention regarding a crucial social issue in your community. At some point down the line, the empty lot you've activated may receive attention from your town's Parks & Recreation Department, a program may have been developed and firmly established with a marginalized community that you worked with, or you may even see a change in vacancy rates in businesses nearby your project site. You, your partners, and the community will determine when the project's goals have been achieved. While there is always more work to do, a successful project will spark others to join in and contribute to the wellbeing and cohesion in your community; in this case, your project will have had great impact.

**Good luck on your creative placemaking journey!**

## 8 PRINCIPLES OF SOUND PLACES

(Excerpted from Eleven Principles for Creating Great Community Places developed by Project for Public Spaces)



### THE COMMUNITY IS THE EXPERT

In any community, there are people who can provide an historical perspective, valuable insights into how the area functions, an understanding of critical issues, and insight into what is meaningful to your fellow community members. Tapping this information and listening to the people around you at the beginning of the process will give context to and increase the impact of your project.



### CREATE A PLACE, NOT A DESIGN

To transform an under-performing space into a vital “place,” its physical elements—such as seating or landscaping—should make people welcome and comfortable, encourage interaction, and have meaning to the people who use it. The goal is to create a place that has a strong sense of community, a comfortable image, and various activities and uses.



### LOOK FOR PARTNERS

Partners are critical to the success of a public space improvement project. Whether you have a group of core, active partners involved from the beginning to help plan the project, or you gather a dozen advisory partners who might participate in the future to help brainstorm or develop programs, relationships are invaluable in providing support and getting a project off the ground.



### YOU CAN SEE A LOT JUST BY OBSERVING

By looking at how people are using (or not using) public spaces and finding out what they like and don't like about them, it is possible to assess what makes them work or not work. Through these observations, it will be clear what kinds of activities are missing and what might be incorporated into a project. Continued observations will teach even more about how to evolve and manage them over time.



#### HAVE A VISION

Each project vision needs to emerge from the circumstances in each unique community. Essential to a vision for any public space is an idea of what kinds of activities might be happening in the space, a view that the space should be comfortable and have a good image, and that it should be an important place where people want to be. It should instill a sense of pride in the people who live, work, and play in the vicinity.



#### LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER

The complexity of public spaces is such that you cannot expect to do everything right initially. The best spaces experiment with short-term improvements that can be tested and refined over a period of time. Elements such as seating, outdoor cafes, public art, and community gardens, and programmed events that show how a space can be used are examples of improvements that can be accomplished in a short time.



#### THEY ALWAYS SAY "IT CAN'T BE DONE"

In creating great public spaces, you will inevitably encounter obstacles and nay-saying. Starting with small-scale improvements that nurture your community can demonstrate the importance of "places" and help to overcome obstacles in the long term..



#### FORM SUPPORTS FUNCTION

Input from the community and potential partners, an understanding of how great places function, experimentation, and overcoming obstacles will all contribute to the concept for your project and the place. Although design is important, these other crucial parts of the project tell you how the physical space will support desired and meaningful experiences for your community.