

DEVELOPING ARTIST-DRIVEN SPACES IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Reflections and Implications for the Field



Maria Rosario Jackson
The Urban Institute

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INTRODUCTION



12th commemoration of Maafa—observance of the transatlantic slave trade
Provided by Ashé Cultural Arts Center, New Orleans, LA

Photograph by Peter Nakhid

Spaces in which arts and cultural activity happen are often the pulse points of communities. At their best, they are places in which artists, tradition-bearers and cultural workers are in charge. They are places in which people gather; curiosity is piqued; world views are challenged or affirmed; preservation and innovation are fostered; creativity and imagination are stoked; intellect, critical thinking, and compassion are expanded; and people find inspiration that leads to a more generative society. These places can also help to create a community's identity and promote stewardship among residents and stakeholders. Art spaces can stimulate civic engagement, and affect economic conditions directly and indirectly. While art spaces are important in all communities, they can be especially significant in low- and moderate-income communities that are striving to improve the quality of life of and opportunities for residents.

This essay distills important issues to consider in the creation of artist-driven spaces, primarily those in marginalized communities. It begins with a brief background discussion of the space development process and why artists work in marginalized communities. This is followed by a discussion of considerations related to (a) organizational structures and resources, (b) purpose and leadership, (c) site selection, (d) relationships with residents and other stakeholders, and (e) sustainability and implications for the field.

The entities discussed are artist-driven or artist-initiated spaces that are integrated into residential, mixed-use, commercial, industrial, and some rural areas; and are primarily in communities that have been disinvested in, marginalized, or in some cases even abandoned. These areas are (or are near) moderate and low-income

communities, and often have significant concentrations of people of color and immigrant populations. The spaces are born from the passion of artists, tradition bearers, cultural workers, and in some cases, members of the community who may not identify as artists but are enthusiastic about art, creativity, innovation, and cultural traditions. The spaces are not created solely for the formal presentation of professional art; they are also places in which artists and other community stakeholders engage actively in artistic and creative processes and share their work. In some instances, artists as well as other people live in the spaces; likewise, these spaces are sometimes used for purposes other than art.

This writing builds on a previous essay, commissioned by Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), entitled “Building Community: Making Space for Art.” It is also informed by earlier research on the development of art spaces, the author’s participation in LINC’s Space

for Change grantee meetings, the Rust Belt to Artist Belt conferences, and other meetings at which artist-driven spaces have been discussed. More specifically, it is also informed by 20 recent interviews with artists and developers, including individuals from organizations connected to LINC, the Space for Change program, and other relevant initiatives around the country.¹ Examples include Artspace in Minneapolis, Minnesota; AS220 in Providence, Rhode Island; Ashé Cultural Arts Center in the Central City neighborhood of New Orleans, Louisiana; Dance Place in Washington, D.C.; Project Row Houses in the Third Ward of Houston, Texas; Rebuild Foundation projects in Chicago, Illinois, St. Louis, Missouri, Omaha, Nebraska, and Detroit, Michigan; and Watts House Project in Los Angeles, California. This essay is not intended to be a technical treatment of the issues described herein, but rather a discussion of collective observations and emerging wisdom from the field.²

In addition to affordability of space, other important factors draw artists to marginalized neighborhoods. Where many see blight and deficiency, artists see assets, opportunity, and potential for transformation.

¹ This essay is also informed by other research projects including an initiative to create arts and culture indicators (1996-2010), a study of support systems for artists (2000-2003), recent research on the sustainability of artist residency programs, and current research on the support structure for artists working at the intersection of the arts and other fields such as community development, health, education, and the environment.

² artspace.org; as220.org; ashecac.org; danceplace.org; projectrowhouses.org; rebuild-foundation.org; wattshouseproject.org

BACKGROUND

Space Development Process

For the most part, artist-driven space development stages mirror typical real estate development stages, including pre-development planning, financing, design, permitting, construction, and occupancy. A 2007 Urban Institute and LINC study on artist space development financing reported, “95% of the artist space development process is the same as that for any other real estate development. Buildings must conform to neighborhood standards; be built to local codes governing safety, health and quality; meet lenders’ and insurance companies’ standards for quality and market value; and meet the needs of intended occupants.”³

However, the ways in which teams are assembled for the development of artist-driven spaces varies from case to case. A common scenario is one in which artists motivated to develop a space seek out the assistance of a developer. In low-income neighborhoods, most often, it is a non-profit developer. In some cases, non-profit or commercial developers seek out artists. There is also evidence of artists attempting to go it alone, at least initially.

To end up with optimal space, and in order to achieve the aesthetic and functional vision of the space, artists who are acting in the capacity of developers/owners (and even those who will be solely anchor users or tenants) are involved in all key aspects of the development process including early planning and stakeholder meetings, conceptual development, and programming. They participate actively in the design development stage, when architects are formally engaged and decisions and compromises are made, taking budgets, space design/use optimization, codes and regulations into consideration. Also, artists are involved at critical junctures of decision-making during construction, when decisions need to be made in response to actual site conditions and up to the moment project modifications. Without a doubt, artists must have sufficient information and/or informed collaborators to participate effectively. Fortunately, in recent years, resources to help artists participate in an informed fashion have increased and improved.⁴



Darkroom, AS220, Providence, RI
Photograph by Elliot Clapp

³ Walker, Chris. 2007. “Artist Space Development Financing.” Leveraging Investments in Creativity and the Urban Institute. New York and Washington, D.C. p. 12

In the same way that artists should be equipped with information about the development process, non-artist partners also need to be versed in artists' considerations to arrive at a maximally effective outcome. For example, Artspace, a national non-profit developer, has expanded its portfolio in recent years to develop properties with artists who work with and in ethnic-specific communities. In the process, the organization has become more sensitive to the requirements of organizations that (a) promote active community engagement in art-making in multiple disciplines, (b) require modular spaces to accommodate art and non-arts activities, and (c) wish to create physical spaces that affirm specific cultural identities through design and aesthetic choices.

Why Work in Marginalized Communities

Without question, affordability of space is a feature that attracts many artists to live and/or work in moderate- and low-income communities. But there are other important factors that draw artists to marginalized neighborhoods. Some reasons are pragmatic; others are philosophical. The overriding theme, however, is that where many people see only blight and deficiency, artists can see assets, opportunity, possibility, and potential for transformation. Artists often recognize and are inspired by both the assets and challenges of marginalized communities, and many are eager to participate in problem-solving using arts and creativity. They passionately believe in the power of the creative process.

The question of the appropriate organizational structure typically comes when artists wish to take their work to a larger scale and/or when artists decide to commit to a community long-term and require a designated space they can control and program consistently.

⁴ This includes how-to books, websites and online information portals such as LINC's national art space database, artist space development guidebook www.lincnet.net/artist-space/guidebook/11-how-use-guidebook, the Space For Change Planning and Predevelopment Self-Assessment Workbook and Space for Change workshops; Artspace's Consulting Toolkit www.artspace.org/toolkit/startup; ArtistLink's Space Tool Box which provides resources to artists in the New England Region www.artistlink.org/?q=spacetoolbox/forartists; Chicago Artists Resource's Square Feet Chicago www.chicagoartistsresource.org/visual-arts/node/8849, a comprehensive portal of information for artists seeking to access space to work and live; and numerous courses and webinars devoted to the topic of artist space development.

Some artist-developers believe the non-profit model is still the best vehicle for working in low-income communities when the artist has a concern for community improvement. Others—often younger and more recent practitioners—are much more critical of the non-profit structure and inclined to consider other options.

Artists and developers interviewed for this paper noted that marginalized neighborhoods often offer interesting spaces and buildings that can be rehabilitated. Some noted that although older buildings may present greater challenges (if they require historical/preservation and environmental assessments and mitigation, or significant code upgrades), they are often preferable to new ones because they are more interesting, and the process of transforming them can itself be an artistic undertaking. In some instances, the buildings and the surrounding neighborhood provide the opportunity for artists to work at a large scale transforming the landscape. Some artists noted that these neighborhoods also provide an opportunity to work “off the beaten path” in places that are not intended primarily as “show places.” Rather, they are settings that are concerned primarily with the creative process, not mainly or exclusively with the end product.

Some artists are also inspired by places in which the people, the landscape and the buildings have a distinct cultural identity—one based on traditions, distinct manners of expression, and identity consciousness. One developer said, “Artists draw inspiration from communities that reflect cultural depth. Many communities of color have retained cultural richness.” Carlton Turner, Executive Director of Alternate Roots, an organization that supports artists and cultural workers in often marginalized places in the southern United States, said it is imperative to recognize that people in low-income communities are frequently “culturally rich and economically poor.” Some artists seeking to create art spaces are driven primarily by a concern for social justice and equity for people who have been excluded from the mainstream social and economic opportunity structure. Artists are often especially motivated by this factor when they



Stony Island Arts Bank, provided by Rebuild Foundation, Chicago, IL

come from the communities they seek to improve, or feel otherwise connected to these communities. In these instances, the creation of art spaces and the work that takes place in them is not only about “art.” It is not primarily about the creation of an object, a performance, or something else for an audience. As Carol Bebel of

Ashé Cultural Art Center in New Orleans noted, the space and the work that happens in it are about the culture that makes the art possible—the culture that gives artists roots and inspiration. “Art is the favored daughter, but culture is the big mama,” said Bebel.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES AND RESOURCES



Dance Class, Dance Place, Washington, D.C.

Photograph by Enoch Chan

Arriving at an organizational structure to support an artist-driven space is not always straightforward, especially in a marginalized community. Artists typically talk with other artists and wrestle with the question of what kind of organizational structure to pursue, if any. Efforts often begin in a “do-it-yourself” (DIY) fashion, operating with whatever resources artists may have at their disposal—money of their own, gifts from family and friends, and even in-kind resources acquired through bartering art. Past this point, the question of the appropriate structure typically comes at the juncture at which artists wish to take their work to a larger scale (to take on bigger and/or more projects, or serve more people) and/or when artists decide to commit to a community long-term and require a designated space that they can control and

program consistently. At that stage, an infusion of external resources is generally required, and artists must seek out grants, contracts, loans, or other sources of money. The two avenues generally considered are (a) becoming a nonprofit organization, usually with a 501(c)(3) Internal Revenue Service designation and the charge of charitable or educational work for the public good; or (b) becoming a for-profit business. Increasingly, however, savvy artists and their partners are investigating ways to combine nonprofit and for-profit ventures. Within socially engaged and contextual arts practices, there is a growing interest in allowing structures to evolve around the work.⁵ In these practices, the inclination is for form to follow function and there is sometimes alignment with social entrepreneurship and related ideas.⁶

⁵ Thompson, Nato, ed. 2012. *Living as Form—Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*. The MIT Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts

⁶ www.pbs.org/opb/thenewheroes/whatis/

Key Questions

For artists, it is important to consider the following questions in deciding on the most appropriate organizational structure to pursue:

- Is the structure suitable for the artist's or artists' mission, philosophy, and style of work?
- What is the best structure for attracting contributed resources and generating earned revenue, given the nature of the work and the characteristics and circumstances of the community?
- What structure is most suitable to the temperament(s) of the artist or artists?

For stakeholders in the project who are not artists, the questions might differ somewhat. While there may be interest in and concern for the artist or artists' mission, work style, and temperament, there are likely to be other factors in play. These may include overlapping concerns about community circumstances as well as interests related to monetary profit or other kinds of outcomes, such as economic development and revitalization, and increased public safety and civic engagement, among others.

What Structure to Choose or Create?

Many of the meetings that have informed this essay were supported by foundations and organized by non-profit entities. As such, insights about non-profit structures have been more available to the author than information about for-profit ones. Additionally, previous research makes a strong argument for artists to work with community development corporations and promotes artist space

development as a revitalization strategy.⁷ However, in interviews with artists and developers, there was debate about the extent to which the traditional non-profit model was optimal. While keenly aware of the facets of the non-profit world that can prove frustrating or tedious, some artist-developers (many of whom have been involved in this work for decades) still believe that the non-profit model is the best vehicle for working in low-income communities when the artist has a concern for community improvement. Others—often younger and more recent practitioners—are much more critical of the non-profit structure and inclined to consider other options. These practitioners are often interested in entrepreneurial practices, and some welcome the possibility of becoming a business owner and achieving the autonomy that comes with it. Among artists seeking other alternatives, I found that there is interest in structures such as the fairly new “low-profit limited liability company” (L3C), a designation intended to facilitate both non- and for-profit investing in entities with socially beneficial goals. The flexibility to operate between commercial and non-profit modes is attractive, although the freedom and limits associated with this new structure in the arts field are not yet fully known. Despite the desire of some artists to pursue structures beyond the traditional non-profit model, there was evidence that without readily available alternatives (and having to forego available resources from foundations), artists often adopt the traditional non-profit structure by default.

While some artists are willing to consider a for-profit business structure to pursue their work, we also heard that others do not want to turn their operation into a for-profit business because they consider commercial ventures to be at odds with their practice of art. In other instances, artists do not have philosophical problems with becoming for-profit entities, but without additional training, they often lack the skills to set up a viable business. One respondent familiar with many artist communities said

⁷ See Walker, 2007

If one chooses a non-profit structure, especially in a disadvantaged community, it is important to continually recognize that the organization exists to be “in service.”

that at times he sees tension between artists that have incorporated as businesses and those who have not. Those that have incorporated can be accused of being “sell-outs.” Artists who have not incorporated might be seen by those who have as idealistic and impractical. Interviews suggest that the “sell-out” vs. “not sell-out” dichotomy is much less prevalent among artists working in low-income communities who come from or have personal and historical connections with the communities they seek to improve.

One seasoned developer said that he thought that going the non-profit route requires a great deal more energy than the for-profit route, and that a service mission can exist within a commercial venture. He noted that many cottage industries that artists develop support this belief. Others disagreed, saying the non-profit structure is absolutely essential for arts organizations with a social justice mission, especially if they are concerned primarily with the artistic process, not just the end product. That said, even those respondents who were adamant about the importance and centrality of the non-profit structure to the maintenance of a social justice focus recognized the need to create independent earned revenue streams. Generally, people pursuing the non-profit route are not satisfied with remaining completely dependent on grants and gifts. Moreover, many funders encourage the development of earned revenue streams. Rental property is a frequent resource and can be a good strategy if the numbers make sense and the property management aspect of the business is strong. For example, AS220 in

Providence generates rental revenue and derives some income from providing art-based social services. At Ashé Cultural Arts Center in New Orleans, leaders are contemplating collaborating with a university to offer courses and advance Ashé’s goal to support community members interested in higher education, while at the same time creating a new revenue source.

Carla Perlo, founder and executive director at Dance Place, offered a pragmatic reason for the non-profit structure she operates. She said that when she took an honest look at the art form, the location she selected, and the community she sought to engage, the path was clear for her. She did not believe that there was any other structure that would work for an organization that is focused on dance and serving all people, particularly low-income people. “It had to be a non-profit,” she said. Several other seasoned artist-developers asserted that the non-profit model is essential in mission-driven work in marginalized communities. They stressed that the non-profit structure allows for grant acquisition and other contributed income, and also ensures that the mission is protected.

Considerations in Going Nonprofit

While respondents certainly valued the resources and opportunities made available by a non-profit structure, they were also keenly aware of its constraints and challenges. A non-profit organization structure’s requirements include a mission statement, a board of directors, articles of incorporation, bylaws, a budget,

financial systems, and reporting mechanisms, among others. Setting up the organization can be laborious, although the level of effort necessary varies from state to state. Once the structure is established, challenges that ensue must be met head-on.

Who Is In Charge? Whose Vision is It?

Artists noted that making art as an individual (in “DIY” fashion, without a formal structure) and making art through a non-profit are two very different activities. For some artists working in marginalized neighborhoods with community members, working in a non-profit structure can be complicated because the challenge is not only in achieving consensus between artist and other community members about the work; the considerations of the board of directors—many of whom may not be members of the community—also come into play. Artists noted that board politics can take up a lot of energy; sometimes the negotiated outcome is satisfactory and sometimes not. As a strategy to protect the art-making process from business concerns, an artist will sometimes take on a leadership role primarily focused on art-making and hire another party to run the business. Some people interviewed found this to be a sound strategy, but many believed that even with such an arrangement, the artist is seldom able to fully extricate himself or herself from the business management process. In other cases, the artists saw the creation of the organizational structures and all that follows as part of their artistic practices, and extrication from that process was not a goal.

Accountability and Evaluation

Reflecting upon interactions with artists who have decided to incorporate or have considered incorporating as non-profits because they think they will be shielded from having to behave like a business, one developer said, “People think the non-profit world is not business, but it is. Your time is beholden and you are accountable. It’s just a different system.” Artists sometimes referred to the accountability and reporting requirements of foundations

and other funders with mixed feelings. They understood the need to be accountable for funders’ investments but lamented that reporting and evaluation practices can be cumbersome and ill-suited to the work. This is especially true for work in marginalized communities, where funders’ and others’ expectations about impact and progress can sometimes be misguided and unrealistic given time constraints and levels of investment.

“In Service of...”

Several seasoned artist-developers said that if one chooses a non-profit structure, especially in a disadvantaged community, it is important to recognize continually that the organization exists to be “in service.” With this in mind, Bert Crenca of AS220 in Providence and several others opined that the non-profit structure is not for everybody and that before committing to it, the artist must do some soul-searching about his or her willingness to be of service.

Integrated or Parsed Artistic Practice?

Some artists are able to successfully parse out aspects of their artistic practice and can clearly identify when their work aligns with the non-profit intention—when it is of service and when it is not. For example, an artist may maintain a “studio” practice and also have a community practice. Some artists strive to keep these practices separate. However, others view different dimensions of their practice as more integrated. For example, at a LINC Space for Change meeting, Theaster Gates of Rebuild Foundation eloquently explained the dimensions of his practice, which includes studio work as well as work at street scale in disinvested neighborhoods. His neighborhood work involves the transformation of buildings, urban landscapes, and people’s connection to place, each other, and even to the economic opportunity structure. The aspect of his practice that has generated money from galleries or museums often helps to support his work in neighborhoods. All of the work, thematically, is about “redemption” and creating value in the discarded.⁸

⁸ <http://artsanctuary.org/event/a-public-conversation-with-theaster-gates-and-naomi-beckwith/>

PURPOSE AND LEADERSHIP



Story Circle – Truth Be Told II: America Healing, Ashè Cultural Arts Center, New Orleans, LA

Recent interviews with artists and developers, discussions during meetings focused on artist spaces, and previous research all point to the centrality of artists' leadership and clarity of purpose in bringing meaningful and appropriate spaces to fruition regardless of whether they are "DIY," non-profit, or commercial. Respondents noted that passionate, dedicated leadership is paramount. Artists and developers alike strongly advised against "leadership by committee," noting that artists are sometimes inclined

to buck conventional hierarchies. While this intention may be admirable, many warned that efforts that succeed have one or maybe two clear leaders—focused point people who are responsible for the project and know it inside and out. Additionally, the following optimal characteristics of an artist-leader in the development of spaces, especially in marginalized communities, emerged. While some of these characteristics may seem obvious, respondents were insistent that too often they are not fully considered:

Awareness

Be aware of pre-existing community conditions, plans, aspirations and challenges. Be aware of community perceptions about the project and address those issues.

Engagement

Be present and engaged at all significant decision-making tables in pre-development, design, construction and programming. Several artists noted that absences at various stages of the process can lead to less-than-optimal spaces.

Entrepreneurialism

Be mindful that art has currency. The most entrepreneurial artists involved in development see their identities and their art as resources and sometimes even forms of currency—for bartering with art skills and products. Bartering with art is especially prevalent in DIY efforts. However, all parties must take care to protect themselves and their investments.

Generosity

As much as possible, become a resource for others in the community. Be generous with ideas, skills, and even new financial resources if circumstances permit. Also, create opportunities for community stakeholders (residents, businesses, and leaders) to contribute to the project.

While some artists consider a for-profit business structure to pursue their work, others do not want to turn their operation into a for-profit business because they consider commercial ventures to be at odds with their practice of art.

Honesty

Be clear and candid about what one wants to accomplish with art. Particularly in low-income communities and when choosing to operate as a non-profit entity, answer honestly whether or not—or to what extent—the work is intended to be of service to that community.

Humility

Be humble and attuned to the need to form a team to provide the full complement of skills required for participation in the development process and subsequently in programming. “Check your ego and surround yourself with people who know more than you,” said one artist who has been developing spaces for decades. “The leader does not have to be expert in everything!” said another respondent. Engage with other community leaders and stakeholders, all the while mindful of their roles in the community. “Humility, trust and transparency will allow people to contribute. If you pretend to have all the answers, they are not going to participate,” said one seasoned artist-developer.

Imagination

Be imaginative about what might constitute capital. Consider sweat equity and community assets.

Passion

Be passionate and articulate about the transformative power of art; communicate that art touches people not only intellectually, but also viscerally. Be willing to create opportunities in which people—community members and potential development partners, funders and investors—can actively experience the power of art.

“People think the non-profit world is not business, but it is. Your time is beholden and you are accountable. It’s just a different system.”

Research

Be willing to find out what one needs to know. Take the extra steps to learn new skills and gain information and knowledge. This includes knowledge not only about technical skills related to finance and physical development, but also about the community's history and culture—its customs, traditions and relationship to spaces in the area.

Risk

Temper a willingness to take risks with pragmatic considerations.

Transparency

Strive to be clear and open about the process. Transparency, even with some mistakes, is important in generating and sustaining good will. In low-income communities that feel vulnerable to outsiders (if artists and any partners are not of that community), transparency is especially important.



Round 31 Life Path 5: Action/Restlessness
Provided by Project Row Houses, Houston, TX

SITE SELECTION



Open House, Project Row Houses, Houston, TX

Photograph by Eric Hester

Site selection is a crucial aspect of developing artist-driven spaces. Among artists and developers alike, there was concern that in the face of the urgent need for affordable space and the possible desire to serve a community, artists often do not sufficiently consider important questions when selecting a site. Whether the entity is DIY, non-profit, or commercial, several issues must be carefully weighed.

Appropriate Spaces

Artists and developers interviewed stressed the necessity to be as clear as possible about the purpose and the length

of time that the space will be needed. Given trends towards cross-disciplinary, multimedia, and socially engaged work, they noted that adaptable, flexible space is often desirable. However, it can be difficult to meet the needs of multiple and diverse users.⁹ Artists must ask: Is it the kind of place that the artwork demands? Is it the type of place that will support the kinds of relationships that artists seek to have with the public? For example, if a key element of the work involved is attracting people to it (as audiences or active participants), is it accessible by public transportation? Is parking adequate? Is it reasonably safe?

⁹ This is also discussed in “*Developing Affordable Space for Artists*.” 2004. Prepared by Community Partners Consultants, Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the Urban Institute for Leveraging Investments in Creativity. New York

Another set of questions to consider involves land use ordinances, regulations, and the politics of place. For example, if the art form involves high noise levels that are beyond what is permitted by regulations, is mitigation possible given existing physical conditions and the budget? Or if an artist requires industrial-grade equipment to make art, is it permissible within existing zoning and land use designations? Are there, or have there been, competing interests for the use of the site? Given the history of the site, will people in the surrounding community and other stakeholders in the neighborhood support or oppose the space? For all artists, especially those without pre-existing ties to the community, it is essential to do the required homework and learn the lay of the land, as previously noted, before any commitments are made. This is discussed in more detail later in this essay.

When one is working with a for-profit entity or a non-profit with goals such as economic development, yet another set of questions arises, having to do with the anticipated non-arts effects of the project. In these instances, especially in economically challenged communities, one must ask: Does the location make good business sense? Is it close to other existing entities that will be synergistic with business or economic development goals? If it is intended to be an anchor organization, does its location make it possible for future entities to cluster nearby? Does its location lend itself to business and economic development success, or is it too isolated and set apart from vehicle and pedestrian traffic?

Amenities

In marginalized communities, be mindful that amenities and public services may not be plentiful. For example, grocery stores, hardware stores, and places to buy art supplies or production equipment may be non-existent. Also, public services and infrastructure may be significantly compromised. Will this considerably impede

the work? Will addressing these needs become part of the work, especially for artists committed to the goal of equality? Will artists, mindful of such conditions, readily join or even catalyze efforts to attract amenities and advocate for services?

Bottom Line Cost Effectiveness

There was concern about the bottom-line cost-effectiveness of a project among respondents involved in non-profit and commercial spaces as well as in DIY efforts (although the concerns were less formal in that area). While concern with the bottom line is important, it is crucial that artists in non-profit and for-profit ventures are entrepreneurial in arriving at the bottom line. Too often, in commercial and non-profit efforts, especially in low-income communities, volunteering, in-kind contributions, and sweat-equity are undervalued. Additionally, artists often see assets in marginalized communities that others may not immediately perceive. For money and other resources, a developer advised, “Scour everything for resources. Leave no stone unturned.”

Recovering Real Estate Markets

As a backdrop to new and expanding methods in artist space development, the real estate market in many places in the United States is still recovering. Developers report that while there are more “affordable” and even free properties and buildings that might be used as artist-driven spaces in marginalized communities, it is often still difficult to get financing. Affordability is only part of the equation. “You have to have money to get money, and monitoring is much greater,” said one developer. Kelley Lindquist of Artspace said the organization has done well in this precarious climate because of its long relationships, noting that it would be hard for the organization to sustain its work without its institutional history.

RELATIONSHIP TO RESIDENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS



Providence Industrial, Shepard Fairey, provided by AS220, Providence, RI

Photograph by Miguel Rosario

Discussions about relationships with residents and other stakeholders in communities optimally occur early in the development process. Ideally, they should happen before the development process even begins, especially in the case of a non-profit venture. This is particularly true for non-profit efforts in low-income neighborhoods when there is a desire to include community members in programming. The following are suggestions for developing viable relationships with residents and other stakeholders. Elements of some of these recommendations were foreshadowed in the earlier discussion of desirable leadership traits.

Honestly assess the conditions and circumstances in a community and be realistic about what one can contribute. Next, build on community strengths, including the intrinsic value of local culture.

Without stifling the artist's imagination or motivation to be a change agent, respondents advised that artists, developers, and other stakeholders should be realistic about the kinds of change that can happen (particularly in marginalized communities) as a result solely of art activity—even sustained art activity. Respondents also urged that all stakeholders should appreciate the intrinsic value of authentic cultural expression in communities, in

Stakeholders should appreciate the intrinsic value of authentic cultural expression in communities, in addition to understanding this expression as an element of other community characteristics and processes.

addition to understanding this expression as an element of other community characteristics and processes. Identifying viable community assets, including local culture, and building on those to effect change is highly advisable. Artists and developers warned that entering a community and assuming a posture that presumes residents' deficiencies is bad practice.

Involve community members and stakeholders at various junctures in the development process; even slow the pace, if necessary.

Develop processes by which primary and secondary stakeholders have opportunities to contribute. Involving

community members at various stages in the development process is crucial and sometimes requires slowing down the project. While slowing the pace of development to address community concerns may be frustrating and costly, it's essential to allocate the time and resources to hear, consider and incorporate genuine community input and cultivate goodwill to avoid detrimental situations. Kelley Lindquist said that Artspace's practice is to focus their marketing and community engagement processes strategically, making sure that marketing materials are available in appropriate languages and that community partnerships are in place to reach target populations.

“What’s the value added versus the value taken out? The last thing communities need is more exploitation.”

Balance community values and desires with artist aspirations.

Be prepared to discover that what the community wants and what the artist wants are sometimes two different things. Make a judicious decision about how to deal with competing or incompatible differences. “It’s a delicate balance,” one artist-developer noted. Some also mentioned that particularly when the non-profit structure is pursued, compromise is often part of the process.

Find ways to highlight the importance of art in the community and help people connect with their creative selves.

Acknowledging that in our society many people are distanced from or unaware of art, artists, and creative processes as a part of daily life, start with a spirit of generosity and be willing to help infuse art into different facets of community life on a regular basis. Develop programming that is inclusive and that builds on community members’ own creativity and culture. In Providence, AS220’s early efforts included neighborhood arts programming that was visible to any interested community members. The organization also offered refreshments and sponsored neighborhood clean-ups, soliciting the involvement of all residents, including residents who were visibly compromised. This was an overture, signaling that everyone could contribute.

Be mindful of the community’s context, how a new project might be received, and perceptions of how it might impact a community.

In gauging the reception of new initiatives, especially in low-income communities, it is important to consider previous planning efforts, their statuses, inclusiveness or lack thereof, successes or failures, and the extent to which residents might have “planning fatigue” from involvement in previous efforts. In some marginalized communities, new initiatives can stir fears of gentrification and displacement of low-income residents. Developers noted that a focus on preserving permanent affordability in rising real estate markets is imperative. Given that artists can be seen as catalysts for rising real estate prices, be prepared to help preserve affordability as a pre-emptive measure. Artists cannot do this alone, but they are capable of bolstering existing efforts to preserve affordability, or helping to begin such efforts.

At a minimum, do no harm.

Rick Lowe of Project Row Houses in Houston stressed the importance of artists being honest with themselves about their relationships with marginalized communities and conscious about their responsibilities when they choose to work in such communities. “What’s the value added versus the value taken out? The last thing communities need is more exploitation,” he said. Attention to this ethical issue is especially crucial as interest swells in social practice, socially engaged art and similar arts practices.

SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD



Photograph by Eric Hester

Zerow House, Rice Building Workshop & Project Row Houses, Houston, TX

There are several forces that impact the proliferation and sustained efforts of artist space development, especially in marginalized communities. These forces also have implications for both the arts and community development fields.

Growing recognition among government, foundations, and investors that the arts bring value provides an opening for more sophisticated thinking about the roles of artists and art spaces in communities.

Though inclusion of arts and culture in community development practice is not yet ubiquitous, the degree

to which the government, foundations, and investors are looking to the arts and creative industries as real partners in community development is greater than it was several years ago, according to some developers. National and local interest in “creative placemaking”¹⁰ and interest in “new urbanism”¹¹ is contributing to this awareness. Additionally, the “creative class” theory that explains and catalyzes the competitive economic advantages of cities and communities has been consistently present in policy discussions since the publication of Richard Florida’s book in 2002.¹² In both the arts and community development fields, interest in these topics can lead to more expansive

¹⁰ Markusen, Ann and Anne Gadwa. 2010. *Creative Placemaking*. National Endowment for the Arts. Washington DC.

¹¹ New Urbanism is a planning movement that seeks to return to viable towns and communities. In some ways, a response to suburbanization, principles of New Urbanism include walkability, connectivity, mixed use and diversity, mixed housing, quality architecture and transit-oriented, traditional neighborhood design. www.newurbanism.org/newurbanism.html

¹² Florida, Richard. 2002. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Basic Books. New York. The tenth anniversary of this book has renewed interest in and critical analysis of his concepts.

and nuanced thinking about the roles of artists and art spaces in communities.

More artist/developer experience in marginalized communities, better articulation of artists' space needs, and related resources can benefit communities and strengthen both the arts and community development fields.

There is a growing number of non-profit and for-profit developers who have experience and connections with artists, and there are more artist-developers now as well. As a result of investments from the Ford Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), MetLife Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, and other funders, there are stronger networks of people involved in this work. There are more research and technical resources to help with artist space development, although little of it is focused specifically on artists in marginalized communities. More attention to technical resources for artists' spaces, specifically in marginalized communities, will strengthen both the arts and community development fields.

Adequate evaluation methods to fully capture the impacts of artists' spaces in disinvested communities must be developed.

Amidst increased recognition and participation in artist space development, there are still challenges related to the lack of suitable evaluation methods to adequately assess the impacts and contributions of artists working in marginalized communities. The traditional assessment methods from the arts, community development, workforce development, and social service fields that are most frequently applied to artists working in communities are inadequate. These methods are incapable of considering aesthetic contributions, the creation of meaning, and the new value of a place or an object based on that meaning in community contexts.¹³ Some strides have been made in the arts field to better capture contributions and effects, but this is still a nascent area and more efforts are needed.

Forums and mechanisms to address practices and ethical issues, and to equip the next generation of artists and developers who will work in low-income communities, are crucial.

Discourse about arts practices in marginalized communities and related ethical issues is not robust. Despite a proliferation of training programs focused on social engagement and similar practices, as well as increasing recognition in the arts world of artists taking on social issues, forums in which artists and their partners working in marginalized communities can vet ethical issues and exchange best practices are scant. While there are beginning to be more formal and informal affiliation groups of artists involved in this work, these groups are focused primarily on networking and sharing resources. There are artists who have tremendous experience with developing spaces and working in marginalized communities. Some are concerned with sharing their ideas and methods with others who need that knowledge. However, there are few efforts to harvest this material through curriculum development or other mechanisms. On the community development side, the situation is somewhat similar, although there is even less consciousness that this type of experience and wisdom must be utilized.

Building on the momentum that exists in this field, the bolstering of infrastructure to critically advance and sustain the efforts of artists working in marginalized communities is crucial.

Investments in that infrastructure are important not just for the arts, but for any field concerned with vibrant cities, towns, and communities, and expanding opportunity and improving quality of life, especially for low-income people. This is work that warrants significant attention if the next generation of artists and developers are to build on the accomplishments we can witness today.

¹³ Jackson, Maria Rosario. August 24, 2011. "Artists' Hybrid Work Challenges New Ways of Evaluating Quality and Impact." MetroTrends Blog. The Urban Institute. Washington, D.C.

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Urban Institute
Metropolitan Housing & Communities Policy Center
Culture, Creativity and Communities Program
2100 M Street, NW, Washington, D.C.
www.urban.org

Leveraging Investments in Creativity
237 West 35th Street, Suite 1202, New York, NY
www.LINCnet.net

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Maria Rosario Jackson's research expertise includes neighborhood revitalization and comprehensive community planning, the politics of race, ethnicity and gender in urban settings, and the role of arts and culture in communities. Her projects in cities throughout the United States have explored the role of intermediaries in comprehensive community planning, the characteristics of place that lead to cultural vitality, the measurement of arts and cultural vitality, and the integration of new topics into policies and programs concerned with quality of life.

Dr. Jackson's work has appeared in academic and professional journals as well as edited volumes in the fields of urban planning, sociology, community development and the arts. She has been a speaker at numerous national and international conferences focusing on quality of life, changing demographics, communities and cities of the future, and arts and society. Jackson earned a doctorate in Urban Planning from the University of California, Los Angeles and an MPA from the University of Southern California.

Images, from left to right:

Dakashina, Daniel Phoenix Sing Dance Company
Dance Place, Washington, D.C.
Photograph by Stephen Baranovics

Mercantile Ribbon Cutting
AS220, Providence, RI
Photograph by AS220 Youth Photo Mem

Public School 109, New York, NY
Provided by Artspace Projects, Minneapolis, MN

Cover images, from left to right:

Public School 109, New York, NY
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Social Dress St. Louis
Rebuild Foundation, Chicago, IL

Origin Of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth
Ashé Cultural Arts Center, New Orleans, LA