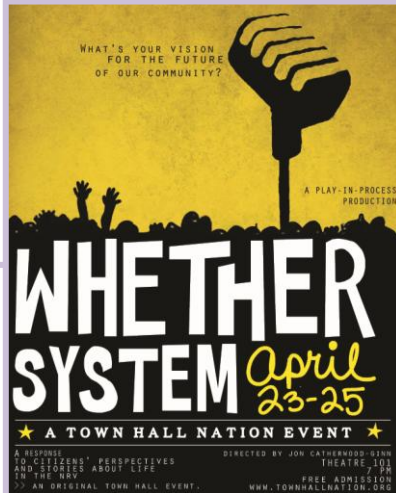


A Working Guide to the Landscape of Arts for Change

A collection of writings depicting the wide range of ways the arts make community, civic, and social change.



Whether System: A Town Hall Nation Event (2012). Photo © Jon Catherwood-Ginn



Playing for the Public Good: The Arts in Planning and Government

By Jon Catherwood-Ginn and Bob Leonard

When governmental and civic entities employ the arts to engage people in public processes, they often find new and effective ways to motivate participation, make decisions, and solve problems. In communities of all sizes, coast-to-coast, the arts are enhancing grassroots community planning activities and initiatives in participatory democracy. Artists and their creative practices are enlivening the workings of civic committees, town hall meetings, and action plans, at the same time they are engaging community members in education, advocacy, and policy efforts related to local and regional issues vital to the public well-being. This paper highlights a wide range of arts and culture-based projects or programs that broaden participation and deepen meaning beyond typical planning processes and/or governmental systems and structures. It offers a brief history of and context for the roles of arts and culture in public planning and governmental processes and characterizes the various drivers, intents and outcomes, and orientations in arts infused planning and civic processes in these projects.

While investing in the arts has proven effective in producing jobs and capital, economic prosperity is but one benefit of activating the arts in community. Arts and culture also play a crucial role in increasing, diversifying, and sustaining public participation; navigating contentious issues; and fostering productive public dialogue and decision making.

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Building Home and Beginning a Partnership

The term was “woo-woo.”

“I’m sorry... what was that...?”

“Woo-woo,” she blurted, matter-of-factly. “Y’know, that touchy-feely arts stuff.” She was polite, but matched the sing-songy word with a cringing smile. “We won’t have to do that, will we?”

It was the first day of our partnership with regional planners. As a couple of theatre artists, my graduate advisor Bob Leonard and I were discussing our vision for Building Home, a joint project between the Virginia Tech Department of Theatre & Cinema and the New River Valley Planning District Commission that aimed to use participatory theatre and music techniques to engage local citizens in the planning process. With a dozen actors and “old time” Appalachian musicians in tow, the project would invite people to express their views on life in our corner of Southwest Virginia as they currently experience it and as they hope it could be in the future. We would use Roadside Theater’s Story Circle techniques, Augusto Boal’s Image and Forum Theatre methodologies, “old time” group sings...Bob and I were thrilled by the prospect of this transdisciplinary endeavor. Our enthusiasm had—at least, temporarily—eclipsed any consideration of potential obstacles in our path.

And then came “woo-woo.”

INTRODUCTION

As a young artist co-directing Building Home, I am currently exploring how the arts can be infused into public planning processes and governmental systems and structures. Art making in this project takes the form of storytelling, group sings, and Augusto Boal-based games and exercises. In this way, art serves as a tool for opening up community dialogue about points of community pride, distress, uncertainties, and hope. My fledgling awareness of the field has swiftly grown through my leading of this project and, in particular, Building Home’s evolution into a [Town Hall Nation](#) event. [Arts & Democracy](#)’s recent convening of national briefing conference calls that have explored art’s value in community visioning and deliberation have further informed me and compelled me to question: **How do we define the arts in planning and governmental processes?**

7 *his piece focuses on projects or programs that directly contribute to, influence, or transform planning processes and/or governmental systems and structures.*

Governments have long funded the arts. I would argue that artistic creation itself is an essential element of healthy, strong communities—a manifestation of aesthetic philosopher Herbert Marcuse’s “longing for utopia.” For the purposes of this paper, however, I

define the arts in planning and governmental processes in more specific terms. This piece focuses on projects or programs that directly contribute to, influence, or transform planning processes and/or governmental systems and structures.

I will offer a brief history of and context for art’s functions in public planning and governmental processes (though certainly not an exhaustive survey) and will highlight key examples of recent projects that have emerged from research and interviews with a variety of community-based artists, scholar-artists, and innovative planners from across the country. The projects included here take many forms. The drivers, intents, timelines, outcomes, and orientations to planning and civic processes in these projects are as varied and unique as the communities they serve.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

In what ways have artists related to or worked within planning processes or governmental systems in the past? For one, governments have hired artists to apply their art to the expression of national events, experience, character, and identity. Artists possess the capacity to perceive, reconceive in aesthetic form, and share unspoken or even unrecognized truths. These truths—embodied in image, verse, song—serve a vital purpose for citizens striving to make sense of what it means to be part of a nation, its history, and its culture. A classic example of this was the hallmark of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “New Deal,” the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Under the WPA, the Federal Writers Project commissioned such renowned authors as Zora Neale Hurston, Studs Terkel, and Richard Wright to pen state guidebooks to educate citizens, entice tourists to visit specific states, and illustrate the unique spirit of each state. The Federal Theatre Project had a similar educational focus (though its “Living Newspaper” and other performances drew heat and ultimately led to the program’s termination by act of Congress for being too left-leaning). In addition to putting thousands of unemployed artists back to work during the Great Depression, WPA arts programs advanced the field

through their production, instruction, and artistic research; built on Americans' capacity to produce and interpret art; and legitimized the public value of art as a product and as a process.

The United States government launched an extension of the WPA, the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), in 1973 to situate artists in communities for the purposes of artistic production and training for citizens. CETA artists' work—sculpture, photography, murals, and the like—still stands in government buildings, public parks, and schools to this day.

Through the research efforts of organizations like Americans for the Arts and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), government personnel and planners have come to recognize the arts as a vehicle for economic development.¹ This view has inspired the implementation of arts initiatives intended to strengthen communities' economic stability. For example, numerous planning organizations that were recently awarded federal grants from the inter-agency [Partnership for Sustainable Communities](#) have initiated efforts to plan for the arts as a development strategy (i.e., the New River Valley Planning District Commission's "[Livability Initiative](#)," [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning \(CMAP\)](#); Broward County, Florida's [CreativeBROWARD2020](#)). The successes of programs like the [East Georgia Arts Trail](#) and Southwest Virginia's '[Round the Mountain](#) and [Crooked Road](#) exemplify the arts' efficacy in helping create a vibrant economy.²

While investing in the arts has proven effective in producing jobs and capital, economic prosperity is but one outcome, albeit an important one. What else can the arts provide? Herbert Marcuse argued that transcendent artists, through detachment, forge new worlds in their work and, in turn, radically alter viewers' conception of daily life, politics, and so on.³ In this way, good art, at its core, is revolutionary; it is a subversive and vital outlet for restless and inquisitive civic imaginations. Considering this, positioning the arts as primarily a tool for economic development stifles the transformative power of the arts. The strength of Marcuse's argument is evinced by the arts' universal role in community-building, civic participation, political activism, and other dimensions of the public good. As Cheryal Hills, Executive Director of the Region Five Development Commission in Staples, Minnesota, said, "[I]f we truly want to be sustainable, arts and culture are vital outside of economic development."⁴

Considering the powers they possess, **what can the arts provide when they are used as a tool *within*—rather than viewed as strictly the outcome of—a planning process?** When artists have worked within government systems and planning processes in the past, they have provided a unique approach to decision-making and problem-solving for the public good different from, yet compatible with, those contributed by bureaucrats, elected officials, planners, technocrats, and so on. In this capacity, artists have enjoyed greater

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influence over planning and governmental decisions and, more importantly, aided public entities in serving their citizens' needs. In contemporary terms, one could call

this art "social entrepreneurship." The [Artists Placement Group \(APG\)](#) in London during the 1960-70s exemplified this type of partnership among art-makers, planners, and government. APG stationed artists in government agencies and businesses. Once situated, APG artists worked on common duties as employees at their host organizations, received payment commensurate with their non-artist colleagues, and generated artistic "reports" on the organizations' challenges, ideas, and initiatives. While the primary goal of this artist-led project was to shift the position of the artist's role in society, the greatest impact was the cross-pollination of artists and their processes with government and business. As William Cleveland—musician, author, and director of the [Center for the Study of Art & Community](#)—put it, "It's not about what artists make, it's about how and what they think."⁵ The success of APG attracted the attention of government bodies in Germany, France, and the Netherlands.

Unfortunately, APG's progressive and laudable approach to repositioning the artist's role in society did not help *sustain* engagement among artists, government personnel, and industry workers. While APG still exists to this day in the form of Organization + Imagination, an artist-led international consultancy and research entity, its activity has diminished significantly since its heyday.

THE WORK

Where and how are the arts being employed in planning processes and government systems and structures? Who, and what, is driving these civically engaged art projects? What are their impacts? These questions guided my research and led me to develop the following projects and artist profiles. Despite the fact that many of these projects overlap in purpose, focus, methodology, and impact, I have organized them into four categories in hopes that we might frame the field and draw conclusions about best practices. I classified projects and artists largely by their intentions and partnerships. Who are the artists working with, and toward what ends? The resulting categories include:

1. Art as a tool for grassroots community planning,
2. Art as a vehicle for participatory democracy,
3. Art and artists as change agents within government, and
4. Art as an educator, advocate, and policy-driver.

1. Art as a Tool for Grassroots Community Planning

What can the arts contribute to planning processes to enhance them and make them more effective? The arts, through story and image, serve a vital role in expressing and defining who we are, what we experience, and what we imagine for a better future. The act of storytelling releases the spirit of community identity and values, the foundation of any democratic plan of public service. Similarly, image-making offers community identifiers for public scrutiny, acceptance, and appreciation. These are essential for recognizing the bond of common values.

While many initiatives that plan for, and/or with, the arts are top-down processes, there exists a rich field of grassroots planning efforts that are also arts-based. While planners, politicians, and developers commonly hold the most power and influence in planning processes, community-led planning practices bring ideas to the table that often reflect the interests, needs, and creativity of a broader, more diverse population. Caron Atlas, director of the Arts & Democracy project, underscores the fact that, with no aid from professional planners, “communities have been doing planning forever, [though] this isn’t acknowledged.”⁶ Organizations like the [Planners Network](#)—an “Organization of Progressive Planning”—increasingly recognize the value of arts-based, grassroots planning and actively promote its implementation.⁷ What follows are some examples of grassroots arts-based planning projects.

Dream City Vision 2020: Civic journalism drives community dialogue

Based in the Pikes Peak region of Colorado, [Dream City Vision 2020](#) (2008-9) launched a website, multidisciplinary art contest, and art summit as tri-fold avenues through which citizens could share their ideal vision for the region in 2020. The genesis of Dream City emerged from an interest in the value of community-based journalism among employees at *The Gazette*. The associates at the newspaper reached out to the Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region (COPPeR), Leadership Pikes Peak, and the Pikes Peak Library District to launch the project. The leaders behind Dream City prioritized the arts as a major element from the inception of the project; COPPeR hosted the project’s first large-scale event, an Art Summit, in 2009. At the Summit, community members were invited to help design a cultural plan for the region. Subsequent initiatives and artistic outputs included discussion groups, art exhibits, public talks, and published pieces about community history in *The Gazette*.

Image-making offers community identifiers for public scrutiny, acceptance, and appreciation. These are essential for recognizing the bond of common values.

From Dream City’s mission and history, it is clear the organizers believed that, to plan for the future, one must first look to the past. Consequently, citizens gained not only ownership over the

creation and communication of a regional vision, but an awakened understanding of their community's rich history. Dream City's deep commitment to opening space for citizen dialogue resulted in partnerships with and participation among 100 local organizations and 3,000 citizens of the Pikes Peak region. Sam Gappmayer— president of the Fine Arts Center in Pikes Peak that showcased community members' work from the Dream City art contest—described the project as “one of those 30,000-foot kind of things that brings people together ...People coalesce around the dream or vision and we all go separate ways, [which] propels the community forward.”⁸

Most recently, Dream City has been translating identified visions into action. *The Gazette* has been instrumental in inviting community members to share their response to the project's vision statements and ultimate manifestation in the community. In this way, the public conversation and community-led planning process continue well past the discoveries made in brainstorming sessions, art exhibitions, and discussion groups. The visions created serve as both artifacts of a period of focused community deliberation and points of reference as Pikes Peak citizens continue to articulate their community's values and work for their region's improvement. Also, based on data collected from citizens during Dream City's forums, COPPeR has recently drafted a [10-year Cultural Plan](#) for the region.

Image Theater Unlocks Experience

A local nonprofit leader had warned me that the group we were to be working with included people who were staunchly opposed to the regional planning initiative. They resented and feared what they perceived to be a “big government” project hell-bent on dispossessing citizens of their land. This perception bore little resemblance to the reality of the initiative. “But expect to meet suspicion and friction,” she said.

Despite this forewarning, the session had been going fairly well. The elderly participants were quick to name their support for or cynicism about the planning project. The room was split, but all were respectful and open to contribute.

Community members had been sharing stories about their experience with affordable housing and my partner had been taking notes feverishly with brightly colored markers on flipchart paper...

...Three out of the ten group members had been or were currently mobile home park landlords; since they were particularly vocal, the majority of the conversation had focused on the challenges of managing a park for low-income tenants. “Tenants get behind on rent.” “They incur damage to the property.” “When I need to evict someone for breaking their lease, it leads to all kinds of legal complications and hassle.”

We had filled up several flipchart sheets, but the story exercise had plateaued. How to go deeper? I proposed we explore Augusto Boal's Image Theatre. My partner and I moved to another part of the room, and demonstrated how molding each other's bodies "like clay" could generate "sculptures" of complex feelings and ideas. Members of the group were curious. From the back of the room, one attendee chimed in, "This looks fun!"

I served as the "sculptor," my partner the "sculpture" in the demonstration. Responding to the low-income housing topic, I molded the other Building Home team member into a hunched figure, peering out the window of the Community Room door. The figure's left hand pulled her left-side pocket out of her pants, and her forehead and right hand were firmly planted on the window's glass to shield the glare. "What do you see?" I asked. Group members shared that they saw a poor, cold woman, unable to get inside a home she desires.

"She's on the outside, looking in," one said.

"How do we know she isn't on the inside, looking out?" another replied.

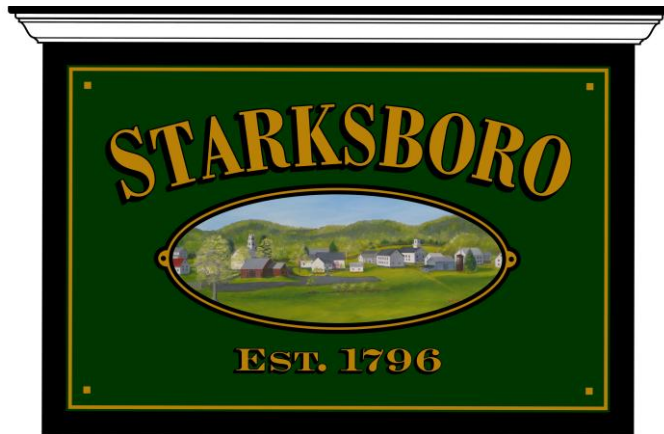
This binary scenario opened up a conversation about who the figure might be; is this a low-income citizen seeking housing or a near-broke landlord, scanning the outside world for new tenants? How are the circumstances low-income tenants and landlords face similar and different? What divides and unifies them?

Reflecting on the activity, a participant expressed amazement at the fact that—prior to the creation of the "sculpture"—the group had focused almost exclusively on the experience of landlords in the area, not those who are struggling to find and maintain low-income housing. How had Image Theatre unlocked an investigation of poor citizens' experience? How might the technique be used further to explore multiple perspectives on other issues the group faced?

Art & Soul: Illustrating community character as a basis for planning

This and other community-led arts-based planning initiatives encourage communities to identify what is collectively shared as a first step in the planning process. The most successful planning efforts not only strengthen local infrastructure, they sustain the most human of elements in a community: its values. Opportunities for community-wide creative expression, in tandem with open public dialogue, create a space for the free articulation and discovery of what unifies a population across difference. This practice is evident in the [Art & Soul project](#) (2008-2009) in Starksboro, Vermont, which invited community members to share their values, dreams, and anxieties about the town's future through storytelling and visual art.

Four Starksboro residents initiated the project, responding to a joint call for community proposals from the Orton Family Foundation and the Vermont Land Trust. The Orton Family



Starksboro, Vermont Town Sign. Created by Cynthia King.

Foundation was instrumental in not only funding the effort, it helped to design the project's process. The Foundation's mission of helping a community explore and articulate its unique "heart and soul" as a guide in land use planning, for instance, rooted Art & Soul in a three-step model: gathering stories, creating art, and putting the stories and art into action. As the founder of the Family Foundation Lyman Orton said during an Art & Soul phase one community meeting, "[T]he dream

that I've had in starting the Foundation ...is to simply get citizens involved in shaping and defining the future of their community. If you don't do it, somebody else will do it for you."⁹

Following the initial story-gathering phase of the project, an advisory committee of Starksboro residents interviewed and selected an artist-in-residence, Matthew Perry, to lead the project's subsequent art-making initiatives during his nine-month tenure. Among the art projects Art & Soul included were: the *Town Portrait Project*, in which teens and older residents paired up, interviewed one another, and created portraits; a maple syrup can painting project titled *Tap It!*; and a *Community Clothesline*, in which residents were invited to share their thoughts about the town's strengths, challenges, and questions on the tags of hanging clothes. The stories gathered, the art pieces created, and the discoveries made about the community's collective values during public conversations directly fed into the town's planning process. Specifically, residents who participated in Art & Soul proposed action steps and policies to the Town as the latter redrafted the town plan and zoning ordinances. The benefits of Art & Soul went way beyond these municipal achievements, however. Starksboro's town auditor Robert Turner said, "When you recognize that there's a lot of good in this community, and you're proud of the people, your neighbors, the volunteers, the people in the fire department, your elected officials, when you feel pride, I think that goes a long way toward increasing your social capital. And when the inevitable challenges come up that divide communities, I'm a great believer that this sort of capital banking will go a long way toward making those difficult challenges a lot easier."¹⁰

The spirit of Art & Soul is light-hearted, eclectic, and inclusive. The leaders of the project demonstrate a strong commitment to youth and the value of the latter group's input in community visioning.

2. Art as a Vehicle for Participatory Democracy

How do the arts impact our capacity to understand and exercise democratic dialogue and deliberation? In a recent report, NASAA said, “The arts foster civic participation and a strong democracy. The arts enhance our ability to illustrate viewpoints, to dramatize issues, to inspire action and to see things through the eyes of others—all necessary components of a thriving democracy. Americans who engage in the arts are more likely to engage in other aspects of community life, such as voting and volunteering. The arts also enhance civic dialogue, capturing the American experience and giving voice to our joys and aspirations and the conscience of our communities.”¹¹

At their most basic level, democracy and art-making derive their strength, purpose, and poetic beauty from the individual’s voice. The following projects foster space for an exploration of this intersection of civic life and art-making at both the individual and public levels. Some artists use their work to highlight the inadequacies of our current models for democratic engagement. The acuteness of their criticism is matched only by the earnest optimism they embody. In their art pieces, these makers ask, “What *else* is possible to realize more fully the essential components of any democracy: transparency, inclusion, equity, and popular control?”

Whether System, an Experiment in Public Dialogue

We were an hour-and-a-half into “Whether System,” our [Town Hall Nation](#) event, and several participants’ patience with one another was clearly eroding. Our “guides” had taken the audience on a walking tour of original participatory scenes, all based on stories we had heard in the New River Valley over the past year. Having engaged with this *mélange* of scenes that explored such topics as cultural memory, meth addiction, racial prejudice, and child care, audience members were invited to take part in a culminating group dialogue about what they had experienced and how our community might address its most pressing issues. We planned to use storytelling and idea mapping as the bases for this dialogue. In this experiment in democratic self-governance, however, our first task was to determine the rules for our conversation.

“How about a waiting list? Y’know, for who talks when?”

We’ll need a ‘runner’ to add names to the list...Anyone up for that?”

“Wait a second, I don’t know everyone’s name. Should we all get numbers?”

“No, no, no...WAY too confusing. Can’t we all just agree to take turns? How hard is that, guys?”

“On another topic, I gotta say: I hate sitting in circles. If someone’s presenting, I can’t see them and I feel left out. Can’t we change this?”

“Did anyone offer the idea of a Native American ‘talking stick’ (Do we have a stick?) Scratch that—make it a ‘talking Thermos.’”

(a) Building citizens' capacity for civic engagement

Works Progress: Creating space for citizen-led research and dialogue

A team of collaborating designers, architects, photographers, videographers, and visual artists make up [Works Progress](#), a Minneapolis-based studio that creates performance events and installations for community interaction and art making. Works Progress projects consistently invite, provoke, and inspire participation from community members. This positions the participant as “curator, audience member, investigator, instigator, and co-creator.”¹²

To build citizens' capacity for healthy public dialogue and social entrepreneurship, a Works Progress project titled *Solutions Twin Cities* invites local innovators in technology, activism, design, and related fields to share their stories at public talks. The speaker series is cross-disciplinary and brims with engaging media. While similar to the [TED talks](#), *Solutions Twin Cities* focuses primarily on the local; it explores regional issues and highlights the creativity and achievements of local leaders. In practice, this project recognizes, validates, and fosters the power of everyday citizens to investigate problems and devise solutions through the arts.



Solutions Twin Cities (2007). Photo © George Byron Griffiths.

As the facilitator of this 50-person dialogue, I was scrambling to rein in the group's focus and recalibrate its forward momentum. I was keeping my cool, but many in the circle—slumped in their chairs, arms tightly crossed—were visibly irritated by their opinionated peers. As the cacophony of voices reached its peak, a single, measured voice emerged from the din.

“It strikes me,” he began, “that, so far, people have only proposed rules for how to talk.”

The lighting dimmers buzzed above the silent crowd.

The speaker continued, “In our 30-minute conversation, I've heard no proposals for how we might listen.”

The investigative impulse permeates much of Works Progress' work. More specifically, the studio commonly invites audience members to don the “hat” of a self-guided researcher in artistic inquiries into the role and potential of art in community. *We Work Here* took the form of an art installation, a “storefront for ideas, a temporary employment agency for creative workers and a reading room filled with crowd-sourced material.”¹³ Works Progress complemented this ongoing exhibit with public programs and dialogues to brainstorm about the function and value of the arts—economic

and otherwise—in the Twin Cities. *Commons Census* served a similar purpose. In this project, Works Progress co-directors Shanai Matteson and Colin Kloecker facilitated a “man-on-the-street” census of cultural activity in Minneapolis-St. Paul with and among visitors to the Walker Art Center. The art and design studio delivered the data drawn from this census to the education staff at the Walker and plan to distribute the information publicly, as well.

Works Progress balances this objective data gathering impulse with an organic understanding of that which most sustains democracy, person-to-person connections. “Neighbor Makers”—tables composed of chalkboard paint and plywood, set up in public spaces—revitalize citizens’ ability to engage with strangers. Works Progress supplies these tables with informative cards that teach participants neighbor-making practices: group brainstorming, story sharing, and healthy give-and-take. At a time in which research argues that [social media like Facebook](#) are [making us lonelier](#) and, in turn, more susceptible to narcissism and physical and mental sickness, simple models like “Neighbor Makers” are vital innovations for breaking down barriers and building social capital.

The Participatory Budgeting Project: Citizens’ voices direct public expenditures

The Participatory Budgeting (PB) movement, which had its genesis in Brazil in the late 1980s, exemplifies grassroots community planning around a particularly potent aspect of government. [The Participatory Budgeting Project](#) defines PB as a “democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget.”¹⁴ It focuses on identifying community priorities, designing corresponding projects, and arriving at innovative spending ideas. A nascent strategy in PB is to incorporate the arts as a way to attract people to participate, open up new thinking, and support messaging by asking people to create artful presentations to illustrate spending ideas for their fellow citizens. A PB initiative in New York City recently partnered with the Arts & Democracy Project to integrate art into their process. Arts & Democracy organized a workshop and Expo to help delegates prepare and unveil creative presentations of their ideas for how to spend dedicated public funds in the 39th District in Brooklyn.¹⁵ Further, the Project enlisted filmmakers from the Peoples Production House to document with [video of the delegations’ presentations](#).

The role of arts and culture in PB is nascent but this example suggests that artistic practice can fuel the PB process. Participatory budgeting can illustrate citizens’ ideas for community projects, promote popular control, document participants’ deliberations, and spur creative problem-solving in public fiscal decision-making. To hear more about the Participatory Budgeting Project, listen to Arts & Democracy’s briefing titled [“Creative Engagement: From Civic Dialogue to Direct Democracy.”](#)

(b) Inspiring civic responsibility at all levels of community**Crossroads Charlotte: Making story a reality to foster inclusion**

Responding to the results of Robert Putnam’s Social Capital Benchmark Survey, which revealed that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina region possessed high levels of interracial and social distrust, leaders behind the ongoing initiative [Crossroads Charlotte](#) began with a question: “[W]hat course will Charlotte-Mecklenburg chart for all its residents over the next ten years as [it] deal[s] with issues of access, equity, inclusion and trust in the social, political, economic and cultural life of the community?”¹⁶ The Foundation for the Carolinas pursued this question by bringing together nearly two dozen community leaders on a steering committee. The committee concluded that mistrust in Charlotte-Mecklenburg among diverse groups was a direct consequence of feelings about access, inclusion, and equity; these three words became the banner for scenario planning and, ultimately, story-creation. A consulting team of community people wrote four stories that illustrated Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s potential future, good and ill, with regard to building community across racial and social differences. The stories centered on the influence and consequence of decision-making associated with leadership and civic participation, allocation of community resources, land use, growth, the economy, education, and demographic shifts.¹⁷

These four stories—“Class Act,” “Eye to Eye,” “Fortress Charlotte,” and “The Beat Goes On”—became the core of the project and were used to prompt expansive and deep dialogue about what kind of city Charlotte should be in the year 2015. However, it wasn’t until poets—including Quentin Talley—were engaged to offer live poetic responses to the four scenarios that Crossroads Charlotte caught on. Since its launch in 2003, Crossroads Charlotte’s associated projects in spoken word poetry, [film](#), visual art, and theatre have catalyzed and continue to spark a variety of efforts that inspire civic participation at all levels. Through their highly engaging website, Crossroads Charlotte prompts citizens to perform positive “acts” in their community, everything from teaching a neighbor English as a second language or tutoring them for a GED exam to joining a neighborhood association committee. The nonprofit further links individuals’ motivation to community change by hosting and posting germane arts events, Crossroads Charlotte groups, and citizen-organized “Let’s Talk” forums. By design, the Crossroads website, www.crossroadscharlotte.org, is an open-source conduit for positive public dialogue. Through these many options, anyone committed to the organization’s mission is invited to participate in this community-wide effort.

Crossroads Charlotte is an example of sustained achievement in fostering civic participation through art. Funding through the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Foundation for the Carolinas and management by the Community Building Initiative have proven to be vital to its continued success. In terms of methodology, Crossroads Charlotte smartly targeted institutionalized impediments to positive social change, first. From there, they successfully

brokered and continue to maintain partnerships with businesses, government agencies, universities, and nonprofits. The organization spurred these institutions to use the scenario plans and stories as a focal point for advancing their own equity, inclusion, and access. The capacity built in this first phase of the project set a foundation for engaging grassroots organizations and everyday citizens, so the whole community could “choose and pursue a future for Charlotte, not just arrive in one.”¹⁸ Recent community convenings on such issues as Amendment One, which would recognize marriage between one woman and man as the only legal form of domestic union in North Carolina, and the 2012 murder of 17-year old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida demonstrate the culture of civic responsibility that Crossroads Charlotte is fostering.

(c) Reimagining democracy and civic participation

County Judge: Filmmaking as an act and reflection of participatory democracy

The documentary film *County Judge* is an excellent example of the way in which art both in process and product can reawaken citizens’ understanding and practice of democracy. The film—a joint effort among East Kentucky University (EKU), [Appalshop](#), and filmmaker Robert Salyer—followed the 2006 campaign for County Judge-Executive in Letcher County, Kentucky. As the film evolved through production and post-production, however, it came to explore and ask questions about political trends in the region; relationships among government, citizens, and corporate interests in Letcher County; and the enduring challenges therein. To create the piece, Salyer filmed public meetings among county officials for more than a year. He invited locals to attend those public meetings and trained them to help shoot the documentary.¹⁹ This practice drew citizens into deeper engagement with local government processes. Further, the continual presence of cameras in public meetings influenced local officials’ decision-making as elected representatives felt greater accountability for their voting choices. Finally, students from EKU advanced the conversation by organizing and facilitating community dialogue sessions to explore the topic of participation in local government among Letcher County’s citizenry.

The incumbent subject of the *County Judge* lost the 2006 election. Throughout and following the race for public office, the film built awareness and galvanized community organizing and action. Concerned citizens assembled a group termed County Watch and endeavored to attend every



Filming Magistrate Wayne Fleming for *County Judge* (2006). Photo © Appalshop.

public meeting among county officials and share the details from those meetings with one another. *County Judge* exemplifies how the creation of a film as a community project can reveal how democracy does or doesn't function within a region. Further, this film project—which focused on bringing individuals' stories forward—stimulated Letcher's citizens to understand their own role in a democracy: What role did and *could* they play in the community's betterment?

Town Hall Nation: Creating an “ideal” public meeting

While *County Judge* examines democratic models as they currently function, other projects illustrate or call for a complete reimagining of such models: How could public meetings, for example, more fully realize democratic ideals if they were reconceived from the ground up? [Town Hall Nation](#) does this very thing. [Sojourn Theatre](#), [Theatre of the Emerging America Moment \(TEAM\)](#), and [Imagining America](#) in 2012 partnered to develop [Town Hall Nation](#), a national initiative that invites community groups, artists, universities, arts organizations, and high schools to create 30-minute events that illustrate or exemplify an ideal town hall meeting. These events will take place all over the United States and serve as the engagement initiative of an original theatre piece jointly created by Sojourn and TEAM titled *Waiting for You...* (which will premiere at Kansas City Repertory Theatre in 2013). *Town Hall Nation* events will be recorded and serve as source material for Sojourn and TEAM and/or live-streamed as the ensembles develop their production.²⁰

Town Hall Nation is a notable example for several reasons. For one, the project's national reach is ambitious, responding to the breadth of unique public dialogue challenges that exist in different regions of the country. Also, *Town Hall Nation's* approach to exploring alternative structures and processes for successful public dialogue is decentralized. With such a variety of artists, as well as the diversity of local realities, this orientation could stimulate uncommon innovation among artists and community leaders across the country. Such innovation is sorely needed, since [public policy often suffers from governments' limited experimentation](#).

3. Art and Artists as Change Agents within Government

How do artists who are working within government systems and structures influence those public entities' organization, culture, and ways of working? What is possible in terms of civic impact, institutional change and paradigmatic change when artists secure more permanent roles in planning processes and governmental units?

Government systems, structures, and processes are often criticized for their bureaucracy, limited creativity, and infighting among elected leaders. Iconic images of frustration with government function abound: tightly-bound strips of “red-tape;” verbose Members of Congress, rattling off lines from phonebooks in protracted filibusters; endlessly long lines at the DMV. These images evoke feelings of being bound, hindered from forward motion, silenced, and denied one's individuality.

In contrast, art making—with its focus on the experience and perspective of the individual—has the potential to counterbalance the negatives of such systems. When the arts are infused into government, they can offer new ways of conceiving, structuring, and improving institutionalized processes. Some of the following projects introduce art making into government workers' routines, enhancing the culture, morale, and productivity of those working in first sector²¹ units. Elsewhere, we see artists don the hats of public officials, as in the case of theatre artist [Kathie deNobriga](#) and musician [Melanie Hammet](#), Mayor and Mayor ProTem, respectively, of Pine Lake, Georgia. Finally, arts in government can provide a much-needed dose of engagement and fun to structures and processes that might otherwise be considered rigid, old, or just plain boring.

Marty Pottenger, Art at Work: Art making as a bridge between city employees and citizens

Theatre artist [Marty Pottenger](#) founded the Arts & Equity Initiative, now [Art At Work](#), in 2007. The mission of the national initiative is “to improve municipal government and the communities they serve through strategic arts projects with municipal employees, elected officials, residents, and local artists.”²² Art At Work has executed most of its projects in its home city of Portland, Maine, but the groundwork has been laid for projects in Providence, Rhode Island; Pine Lake, Georgia; and Holyoke and Northampton, Massachusetts.

Art At Work's projects have raised the visibility of public employees' contribution to Portland's function and health. *Public Works* (2009) trained Public Works Department employees in block printing and invited them to identify key images associated with their work and personal history. The printed images were exhibited in public buildings, art installations throughout Portland, and emblazoned on cups distributed by local coffee shops, with quotes from city employees. Such a project gives recognition to, and raises awareness about, city employees' vital role in Portland's day-to-day prosperity.

One of the greatest outcomes of Art at Work's efforts has been heightened morale among city employees. The hallmark project *Thin Blue Lines* (2009-10) convened Portland poets, photographers, and police officers for poetry workshops. The project yielded a calendar of police poetry and photographs, which was sold to raise money for the family of a fallen fellow officer. Poetry readings by police officers became opportunities for public dialogue about what was revealed through the poems and related issues. Reflecting on the project, Joe Loughlin, Acting Police Chief of the Portland Police Department, concluded,

*We had no idea the outcome would be this outstanding. The photographs in the hallways, reading poems at roll calls—it's brought us a different sense of who we are and what we do. It's changed a lot of minds about the police and about poetry.*²³

In terms of quantitative outcomes, a follow-up evaluation of the project showed that 83 percent of the officers who participated in *Thin Blue Lines* felt that the project had a direct positive impact on morale among members of the police department. Further, the number of officers participating in the project more than doubled in the second year.²⁴ By enriching the emotional and creative lives of city employees, this type of work not only clarifies city employees' roles as public servants, it improves government function and dramatically shifts how public entities view art's value and use.



"March," *Thin Blue Lines*. Police Poetry Calendar (2010).

Art At Work projects have been particularly successful in engaging diverse populations to build an inclusive Portland community. The success of *Thin Blue Lines* prompted Portland's police chief to ask Pottenger to initiate a project that would engage immigrant youth and police in the city. The project, *Forest City Times* (2010), brought Portland police officers and high school students from the Rwandan, Sudanese, Guatemalan, Haitian, and Ethiopian communities together to create and perform a two-part original play.²⁵ The play, coupled with post-show talkback sessions, explored citizens' sense of safety in the community and law enforcement's relationship to youth. At a time in which many felt that conflict was increasing between youth and police officers in Portland, the act of creating and performing the plays strengthened understanding and connection between these two communities. Relationships built during a similar project titled *Portland Works* (2011), an ongoing art workshop among city employees, community, and elected leaders, set the stage for recent community conflict resolution. At the height of the Occupy Wall Street protests, Occupy Leader Jake Lowry, Police Chief Mike Sauschuck, and City Manager Mark Rees met to "discuss the protest and lay out terms for withdrawing from their encampment."²⁶ These projects demonstrate how art making with everyday citizens is at the root of all of Art At Work's community-building initiatives.

Phillip Bimstein: Composer as civic leader

[Phillip Bimstein](#) is a composer based in Springdale, Utah, a town of approximately 450 residents adjacent to Zion National Park. Bimstein earned an undergraduate degree in music theory and composition at the Chicago Conservatory of Music. In the 1980s, his new wave band Phil 'n' the Blanks gained exposure on MTV and radio stations across the country before Bimstein pursued graduate study in conducting, orchestration, and composition at UCLA.²⁷ The composer moved to southern Utah in the early 1990s after becoming enamored of the region following a hiking trip there. As a new resident, he joined the board of the local arts council and later ascended to the Mayor's office, where he served for two terms in the mid to late nineties.

From a musical perspective, our community is engaged in a collaborative improvisation.

Bimstein led his campaign under the banner of a key word: civility. He was running for office during a time of strident community conflict over development issues. Bimstein explained that, "I didn't see the mayor's job as pushing through an agenda but rather as

moderating and facilitating [...] We all have to listen to each other and respect what the other person thinks."²⁸ This practice in listening as a musician was a major asset as an elected public official. Creating music out of "found" samples (i.e. cracking eggs, jail cell doors, desert animals), Bimstein gave expression to the unique character of Springdale. This can be heard in such pieces as his duet for farmer and livestock, [Garland Hirschi's Cows](#). Composing music also laid the groundwork for building open, healthy relationships with his town's citizenry. Bimstein says, "The vehicle that introduced me to my new neighbors, and which allowed me to get to know them, was my music."²⁹ Finally, by placing the sounds of Springdale's natural world and immediate challenges at the core of his compositions, this composer/politician was able to serve as an effective policy advocate and a catalyst for public dialogue. During his mayoral tenure, Bimstein was invited to testify before Congress twice regarding the state of Utah's natural resources. Further, he created [Lockdown!](#) (2005), a "techno poem" composed of interviews with incarcerated youth and sounds from Utah detention centers to prompt public dialogue devoted to juvenile justice issues.

Bimstein's unique approach to mayoral governing grew from discoveries made about the value of arts-based approaches while previously serving on Springdale's arts council. Bimstein explains how the arts council effectively addressed the town citizens' deepening distrust of one another and their frustration with local government. "Our arts council presented a series of roundtable discussions entitled 'Embracing Opposites, In Search of the Public Good,' which helped us to develop a language of cooperation. Poetry readings, creativity workshops, and concerts became our positive meeting places, where we strengthened our social bonds, sustained our spirit, and nurtured the health back into our community. The arts provided the breeding ground for the cooperation and communication which brought us back together."³⁰

At the root of these non-conventional forums for civic dialogue was Bimstein's creative character. His passion and skills as a musician drove his innovative approach to public governance: "quelling civic dissonance by integrating diverse voices into a harmonious dialogue."³¹ He says, "As a composer, I know that dissonant notes have value, and that even opposites can be orchestrated together. From a musical perspective, our community is engaged in a collaborative improvisation. If we play it well, a good work emerges, a constantly evolving composition."³²

4. Art as an Educator, Advocate, and Policy-driver

What is it about the arts that make them particularly powerful for raising awareness, engaging communities, and pushing for policy decisions? Few things are more engaging than really moving art. Conversely, many view government and planning processes as infamously tedious. A *Time Out New York* interview with Aaron Landsman, the creator of the “performed participatory democracy” piece [City Council Meeting](#), illustrates this sentiment:

TIME OUT NEW YORK: I’m guessing there wasn’t a lot of drama [when you attended public meetings]. Did you keep yourself awake by digging a pencil into your thigh?

LANDSMAN: In fact, I got so thoroughly bored doing research that I can use my thigh as a giant pencil!³³

Considering this, many planning groups, governments, and nonprofits use the arts to educate communities about proposed municipal plans, new laws, and relevant issues. The [Center for Urban Pedagogy](#), for example, employs graphic design to elucidate complex public policy in ways that teach, engage, and entertain; their Making Policy Public series connects designers and policy advocates to produce posters and comic books that have explored such issues as street vendor regulations, voter redistricting, and the juvenile justice system. Likewise, artists and community members often employ the arts to express their views and pressure governments for policy change. These goals are evident in the following examples, which variously aim to raise public awareness and affect decision-making about community health issues, sustainability, poverty, proposed planning “scenarios,” and complex policy details.

Resources like Arts & Democracy’s [Art of Policy Change](#) provide profiles, media, and links to additional exemplary projects and ensembles that use art to influence citizens’ understanding of current policy and elected officials’ decision-making regarding the same.

Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) and John Malpede: Skid Row homeless build strength from within

At its inception in 1985, the [Los Angeles Poverty Department](#) was the first performance group in the country to be composed largely of homeless people. Founded by theatre artist and activist [John Malpede](#), the pioneering ensemble articulates its mission as “creat[ing] performances and multidisciplinary artworks that connect the experience of people living in poverty to the social forces that shape their lives and communities. LAPD’s works express the realities, hopes, dreams and rights of people who live and work in L.A.’s Skid Row.”³⁴ Skid Row is the poorest community in Los Angeles, and LAPD notes that this situation is at least in part a consequence of a city planning “containment



UTOPIA/dystopia (2007). Photo © Los Angeles Poverty Department.

policy” regarding where to locate low-income services and citizens.³⁵

One of LAPD’s most significant projects was [*UTOPIA/dystopia*](#) (2007), a combination of original theatre performance, guerrilla dance, documentary film screenings, and public dialogue sessions. LAPD generated the multi-faceted art and dialogue series in response to the notion that, in city planning, “one person’s utopia is another’s dystopia.”³⁶ The development of Bunker Hill, an affluent financial center of skyscrapers, and Skid Row symbolize this dilemma in civic policy. *UTOPIA/dystopia* invited audience members to share their vision for the future of downtown L.A. How might the city serve all its residents justly as it evolves? Among many art and discussion events, *UTOPIA/dystopia* included *220 Glimpses of Utopia*, an “outdoor utopian movement chain” that linked participants dancing their vision for an ideal Los Angeles from the streets of Skid Row to the steps of City Hall. It also included *Is it a Crime to be Poor?* This film screening and panel

discussion focused on police harassment of the homeless following the “safer cities” initiative of August 2006.

LAPD and John Malpede are notable for many reasons. LAPD’s longevity since 1985 sets a high bar for sustained work in the field of community-based art for policy change. Ensemble members work closely with neighborhood groups, service providers, and social benefit organizations to cultivate community strength, all the while combating stereotypes and marginalization. Current and formerly homeless citizens play a central role in art-making and advocacy for LAPD; this positioning not only fosters opportunities for creative expression among Skid Row’s poor, it ensures that the voices of those in poverty are present and accurately reflected in city-wide debates about development policies. The availability of LAPD’s original scripts on the company’s website makes resource sharing among artists working in this field much easier.

Planning commissions: Messaging and testing public response

Planning commissions’ purpose and community engagement efforts make them an ideal platform for “workshopping” ideas for the future—like play development—with interested citizens. In several examples we see such organizations using the arts to animate and humanize complex planning issues and proposals for the public they serve. In their

Sustainable Communities regional planning project, the [Southeast Michigan Council of Governments \(SEMCOG\)](#) has partnered with the [Cultural Alliance of Southeastern Michigan](#), an association of 117 nonprofit arts and culture organizations, to develop and perform a mobile theatre production. The play, in tandem with art and science exhibits, aims to educate and unify the public around sustainability, which is the keystone of SEMCOG's regional plan. The planning group believes that this arts-based approach will "enliven community meetings and communicate key information in entertaining, engaging, and thought-provoking ways."³⁷ The [Region Five Development Commission](#) in Staples, Minnesota embarked on a similar project in their recent development of "scenario planning" plays: scripts that dramatized a series of proposed planning options for consortium partners. Cheryal Hills, Executive Director of the Commission, spoke very favorably about their extensive experience working with artists and arts agencies in the planning process. Hills admits, however, that, at first, integrating the arts into their process "wasn't done without a lot of fear [that they would] lose their credibility, [... that] serious people would not see this as relevant, [or that they would] be seen as way too far to the left."

In addition to funding the Building Home project and its associated original play, *Whether System: A Town Hall Nation Event*, the [New River Valley Planning District Commission](#) (NRVPDC) (whose activities are highlighted in the sidebars of this paper) has employed the arts in its [Livability Initiative](#) through digital storytelling with youth and the creation of an original board game. Funded by the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#), HealthyNRV is a collaboration involving the NRVPDC, [Virginia Tech's Institute for Policy & Governance](#), and Thenmozhi Soundararajan, a singer, filmmaker, and grassroots media organizer. In the project, Soundararajan trained high school students to create short films to illustrate community health issues that were important to them and suggest how those challenges might be addressed in the region's future.

To create a planning board game, the NRVPDC connected with [Sojourn Theatre](#), an ensemble of theatre artists who commonly work at the intersection of art and planning, to develop BUILT NRV. Sojourn developed an earlier version of the planning board game as a component of their original production BUILT (2008) for its performance in Portland, Oregon. The theatre company and NRVPDC have since then collaborated to redesign the game for a rural setting to stoke community conversation and collect qualitative data around citizens' planning values and priorities in Southwest Virginia.

El Puente's Green Light District: Harnessing cultural spirit to drive environmental improvement

A community-building initiative founded in 1982, [El Puente](#) has a rich history and several strong institutional anchors to sustain positive change in Brooklyn, New York. The El Puente Academy for Peace, four Leadership Centers, El Puente Arts (ELA), and the Community Health and Environment Institute (CHE Institute) complement one another in holistic educational and capacity-building efforts for community residents of all ages. El Puente views the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of Brooklyn as one of the borough's greatest assets in driving

community change; they believe the “coming together of many brings forward [their] power for self-determination.”³⁸

El Puente’s [Green Light District](#) initiative, launched in September 2011, aims to “‘green’ every inch” of the Southside of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, a largely Latino community of around 40,000 residents.³⁹ Southside suffers from some of the highest levels of pollution in New York City and its toxicity has a continued negative impact on residents’ health and the community’s carbon footprint. At the heart of this 10-year initiative are two questions: “What is well-being?” and “What does it mean to feel good and whole about the place where you live?”⁴⁰ These questions guide El Puente and its CHE Institute as it engages in canvassing efforts to assess residents’ sense of Southside’s educational, environmental, and cultural health. The executive director of El Puente, Frances Lucerna, describes this first phase of the project as “door-to-door...holistic planning and visioning.”⁴¹ With an eye on the long-term potential impact of Green Light District, Lucerna continues:

*If we could create...a real way, a process, for community to really come together and drive the way in which development happens in an equitable and just way, then I think we will have really accomplished something that will benefit people across the country and certainly internationally.*⁴²

In this very early stage of Green Light District, El Puente has already achieved notable success in gaining support from major foundations and political leaders.⁴³

Though websites and press coverage devoted to the Green Light District do not characterize what role the arts will play in the initiative, ELA as a respected community cultural organization is helping to galvanize the community’s creativity in this environmental effort. The initiative’s fiscal support, advocacy among elected leaders, and shared community heritage have also set a firm foundation for Green Light District’s potential success. As NYC Council Member Reyna predicts:

*The GLD will bring all parties together focusing on the essential building blocks for a more complete and undivided Southside, fulfilling Williamsburg’s true promise. We envision a healthier Williamsburg—preserving identity and historical past, improving our livability of the present, and transforming our future.*⁴⁴

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

How does an artist’s orientation to problem solving differ from a planner’s or government leader’s? What can healthy partnerships among these different agents of change and their approaches yield in planning processes and government-led initiatives

in the future? In his analysis of international development, William Easterly describes two common types of people in foreign aid practice, “planners” and “searchers.”⁴⁵ The author explains that planners “set out a predetermined goal, ...determine a big plan to reach the big goal and throw an endless supply of resources and a large administrative apparatus at that big goal; ...a planner thinks he already knows the answer; he thinks of poverty as a technical engineering problem that his answers will solve” (Easterly 6). Conversely, a searcher is “more humble about how little she knows about other people’s problems. Searchers do not set predetermined problems and do not have big plans; they are just on the lookout for favorable opportunities to solve problems. ...A searcher only hopes to find answers to individual problems ...by trial-and-error experimentation” (Easterly 6-7).

Admittedly, this binary characterization simplifies the complex dynamics that continuously influence problem solving in international development. At the same time, however, I believe the model of planners and searchers illuminates an important distinction among artists, planners, and government personnel. While centralization, top-down organization, and backward design are characteristics of government bodies and formal planning processes, spontaneity and responsiveness to one’s surroundings—qualities of “searching”—drive artistic creation. There is surely an optimal time and place for both planning and searching in government functions and planning efforts. But how might increasing the presence of artists in planning and government balance the planning impulse in public systems and structures? What could this change mean for institutional transformation and the public good?

In considering this potential, it is worth asking: to what extent do citizens know about and value the role of the arts in government and planning processes? At a time in which the arts are commonly novelized, commoditized, and consequently neutered of their efficacy in public service and social change efforts, what can we do to lay the path for the continued growth of this work?

Grassroots organizations are not alone in advocating for art in government and planning. Major arts organizations like the [National Endowment for the Arts](#), [Americans for the Arts](#) and its [Animating Democracy](#) program, and the National Association of State Arts Agencies have been instrumental in supporting and enhancing the visibility of this field. Likewise, national organizations in other sectors like the [American Planning Association](#), [Local Initiatives Support Corporation](#), and the [United States Conference of Mayors](#) have played a crucial role in this endeavor.

Continuing to monitor arts-based planning and government projects, evaluating their impact, and sharing discoveries more broadly could go a long way in boosting citizens’, planners’, and government officials’ recognition of the arts’ value as both product and process in public service. As Liz Lerman, founding artistic director of [Dance Exchange](#), recently said, the “artistic process makes everything better.”⁴⁶

Block by Block, Side by Side

After two hours of intense focus, frenzied game play, fevered debate, and cheering compromise, the electricity in the room was lasting. A collective sigh. Members of the group started pushing in chairs, repositioning tables, continuing conversations as they gathered scattered bags from corners of the sunlit room.

Our first “in-the-field” run with the newly designed BUILT NRV board game had drawn to a close. Earlier in the week, our team of theatre artists and planners had trained with members of Sojourn Theatre. Two packed days of instruction on the ins and outs of game organization and facilitation. Soon, we would be working together, the planners and theatre artists conducting the game side by side in a constellation of regional gatherings. This training had begun with a slow reveal; eyes widening, we gingerly slid the freshly fabricated game boards from their boxes. From there, however, our orientation to BUILT 2.0 took on a breakneck speed. The test drive of the new game pieces sparked creative conflict, eruptions of laughter, and fleeting glimpses into the nature of our distinct working styles.

“We have to play the game to discover its kinks,” an artist insisted.

“...but before we go any deeper,” a planner replied, “we have to answer a few questions about what we’re trying to do, where we’re trying to go...”

This push-and-pull persisted, but faded with time. Each misstep, playful tease, and triumph brought us closer together, revealing how our approaches dovetailed.

Back in the meeting room of the municipal building, the furniture was nearly reset. An elderly participant surveyed the game board: fully gridded with blocks that read PLACE OF WORSHIP, BAR, POST OFFICE, FARMERS MARKET. With a look of simple wonder at a personal discovery, he announced to the group, “In my 30 years living here, I’ve never shared my thoughts on development like I did with you all today...Thanks for this.” Sneaking a glance at my teammates, there were grins, all around.



BUILT NRV board game (2012). Designed by Sojourn Theatre, New River Valley Planning District Commission.
Photo by Jon Catherwood-Ginn.

Jon Catherwood-Ginn is a graduate student in Directing & Public Dialogue at Virginia Tech, where he serves on the Graduate Steering Committee in the Department of Theatre & Cinema and Community Voices Leadership Team in the Institute for Policy & Governance. Since 2011, Jon has partnered with the New River Valley Planning District Commission as co-director of Building Home, a participatory theatre and music engagement project that invites a diversity of citizens in the region to contribute their perspectives on pressing regional issues, planning for sustainable communities, and healthy civic discourse. Since moving to Virginia in 2008, Jon has directed *When Worlds Collide*, *Having Our Say*, and *Whether System*, an original play and Town Hall Nation event. Following his graduation from Bucknell University, Jon worked as a public school teacher at high-needs schools in Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Manhattan. Beyond his stage work, Jon has conducted classes in interactive theatre—inspired by the work of Augusto Boal and Jonathan Fox—at the Danville Center for Adolescent Males, a drug and alcohol treatment facility for juvenile offenders. Jon has worked with the Lost Nation Theatre in Montpelier, Vermont, Hamilton-Gibson Productions in Pennsylvania, as well as Extant Arts Company and the Off-Broadway Aquila Theatre in New York City. In spring 2013, he will be working with Sojourn Theatre and the Theatre of the Emerging American Moment (TEAM) on *Waiting for You...* at Kansas-City Repertory Theatre.

Bob Leonard, Professor of Theatre Arts, is director of the MFA in Theatre Arts graduate program and is the primary advisor for the MFA program in Directing and Public Dialogue at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA. His teaching has a specific focus on ensemble processes, collaborative creation of new work, and creative community partnerships. Bob is the founding artistic director of The Road Company, a theater ensemble based in Johnson City, Tennessee, where he served from 1975 to 1998. The Road Company ensemble created more than two dozen original plays reflecting the history and issues of the Upper Tennessee Valley and Central Appalachia. At Virginia Tech he has directed numerous established scripts and collaborated in the development of new works. He has career-long experience as a director/facilitator of improvisation in theatre and community dialogue through theatre. Bob is co-director, with Jon Catherwood-Ginn, of the Building Home Project. He is the lead author of *PERFORMING COMMUNITIES, An Inquiry Into Ensemble Theater Deeply Rooted In Eight U.S. Communities*, published by New Village Press (2006). He is a founding member and former board member of the Network of Ensemble Theaters (NET), the national coalition of ensemble theaters. He is a founding board member of Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theaters - South) and a trainer/consultant with the Resources for Social Change Institute, organized and implemented by Alternate ROOTS.

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For more information, visit: www.animatingdemocracy.org

End Notes

¹ As the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) writes in its “Tool for Arts Decision-Making,” in addition to providing educational, civic, and cultural benefits, “[T]he arts create jobs and produce tax revenue. A strong arts sector is an economic asset that stimulates business activity, attracts tourism revenue, retains a high-quality work force and stabilizes property values. The arts have been shown to be a successful and sustainable strategy for revitalizing rural areas, inner cities and populations struggling with poverty. [...] The arts are part of a state’s creative capacity, spurring innovation and creating distinctive products and locales that attract tourists, businesses and residents alike.” “Why Should Government Support the Arts?.” *State Policy Briefs: Tools for Arts Decision Making*. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2010. Web. 29 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.nasaa-arts.org/Advocacy/Advocacy-Tools/Why-Government-Support/WhyGovSupport.pdf>>.

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