

Innovative Cultural Uses of Urban Space

ADAPTIVE REUSE



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look for:

- adaptive reuse
- construction zones and vacant lots
- public outdoor space: short- and long-term
- publicly owned facilities
- religious spaces
- shared space

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WHAT IS ADAPTIVE REUSE?

Adaptive reuse concerns the acquisition and rehabilitation of spaces for development into cultural venues and particularly concerns those spaces that were not initially built for creative sector purposes (former industrial buildings, firehouses, schools, churches) or that were built for a previous cultural use and repurposed for a new one (former vaudeville houses, movie theaters).

In many of the case studies noted below, the decision to acquire and develop an adaptive reuse facility was as much an inspired, creative decision as a practical one connected to plans for organizational growth. Indeed, in almost every instance the process of taking on an adaptive reuse project inspired change for the nonprofit cultural organization in turn: affecting programs and funding priorities, developing alliances and stakeholder relationships, and even altering its relationship to creative sector peers. The transformative nature of making a home through adaptive reuse can be profound.

While references and images are noted throughout this report, additional videos, links, and other content on the organizations and projects discussed can be found on the NOCD Adaptive Reuse Tumblr site (<http://www.nocd-adaptive-reuse.tumblr.com>).

BACKGROUND

Nonprofit cultural leaders, like most of us, are involved in very few real estate transactions throughout our lifetimes. Whether seeking to rent or to own, we usually have limited experience in the various stages of the process: finding something we can afford in a decent location, dealing with the complications of signing a contract, figuring out how to go about fixing up the space to suit our needs and aesthetics, and maintaining it over the lifetime of our residency.

But nonprofit culturals face a number of additional challenges that can make the process far more difficult, requiring longer development time lines, greater expertise, and substantial pools of both labor and capital. And while adaptive reuse is generally a less expensive approach to developing a cultural facility in comparison with new construction, it can pose unique problems of its own. For instance:

- **Locating development sites.** There are no brokers, listing services, or exchanges that track available spaces suitable for adaptive reuse. Every acquisition is therefore the result of a specialized search, usually conducted by the cultural practitioners themselves.
- **Acquisition.** The vast majority of cultural organizations are relatively small (with less than \$250,000 in annual revenues), but many have substantial space needs for accommodating their creative practice—making the cost disproportionately high. In addition, very few nonprofit culturals have the capital needed to acquire space outright and so must engage in substantial fundraising from public and private sources. This is usually a lengthy and laborious process.
- **Closing.** Whether negotiating for a lease or the purchase of property, both the relative rarity and “custom made” nature of these transactions means there are few examples of legal templates or contracts to guide decision making. In addition, access to proper legal guidance may be difficult to obtain, given cost constraints.
- **Construction and improvement.** Spaces in adaptive reuse projects are usually “fixer-uppers,” to

say the least. Many require substantial renovation to make them safe and habitable, in addition to specialized alterations to meet the needs of the designated creative use.

- **Ongoing management.** In general cultural facilities tend to have a larger physical footprint, meaning that there is just more upkeep to do. In addition, to cover the larger operating costs associated with their size, many facilities provide rentals or the option to share spaces with several creative sector partners. This requires stronger administration, negotiation of boundaries and responsibilities, and higher levels of operational care than does a single-tenant property.
- **Public sector bureaucracy.** Projects funded through public sources or engaging with public sector construction partners can face a bewildering array of bureaucratic procedures, experience substantial planning and funding delays, and even face political pressures affecting the development of the facility. Many profile examples noted the importance of maintaining strong relationships with local elected leaders and governmental partners and of seeking the mentorship of others who have gone through the experience before.

In spite of these challenges, adaptive reuse is happening all the time. There are many examples from a wide variety of real estate environments, including both “hot” markets, where increased competition tends to drive up real estate values, and “cold” markets, where population decline and surplus real estate has resulted in vacancies and (often) blight. The successful projects tend to share a number of characteristics, such as the following:

- A “love at first site” component, where the nature of the venue itself seems to invite the possibility of conversion. Many projects have “good bones,” with deteriorated but compelling design or structural elements.
- A process of public engagement around the planning, development, and ongoing programming of the site. This is especially true for buildings with a history of public use that the community wants maintained in any future use.

- Access to substantial sources of public funding and the presence of strong connections to elected and appointed public leaders.
- Clear lines of leadership and decision making, especially when multiple creative sector partners are involved.
- The engagement of outside professionals in real estate finance and construction management as advisors or, if funds allow, as hired supports.
- The ability to develop a business model that supports operations while meeting creative objectives.

While no two projects are the same, deeper analysis of these common characteristics can provide useful insights and support to those seeking to conduct their own adaptive reuse engagements.

KEY COMPONENTS

Site-Specific Development

For many nonprofit cultural organizations, their work and their workspace are inseparable parts of a whole. The reasons for this can vary substantially: some cultural organizations need a space suitable for rehearsal, performance, or production; some use their space to create a sense of artistic inspiration; some select their space because its location or disposition helps fulfill a component of their mission. Many spaces satisfy several of these criteria or address still other considerations.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that for many adaptive reuse developments the site itself is a key driver behind the effort.

Flux Factory, Queens, New York www.fluxfactory.org

Flux Factory is an artists' collaborative that has actually had three locations over the course of its existence—each one a leasehold secured for several years. Initially, its goal was to create shared live/work space for its resident members, but over time Flux Factory's model has evolved such that residents not only develop work together but also build and share spaces within the facility for woodworking, printmaking, research, cooking, and gardening. Access to much of the resources and equipment is obtained through Build It Green and Materials for the Arts. Decisions about adapting and managing the shared spaces are handled collectively by artists in residence. There are currently twelve artist residencies.

Flux Factory currently occupies a former greeting card factory in Long Island City. The lease on the group's prior space was terminated by the owner, who decided to take back the property. Fortunately, a local real estate agent who had attended several shows got involved with Flux Factory's board and assisted the collaborative in locating the new building. Flux Factory currently has a three-year lease. It has made substantial improvements to the space to accommodate artists in residence, ▼



Flux Factory Queens, New York. photo: Autumn Workshop

and it holds shows and studio tours throughout the year. Approximately 60 percent of its support comes from public and private philanthropic sources, with the remainder being earned through rentals and events hosted at the space. Given the relatively short-term nature of the lease, the group is currently negotiating with the present owner to acquire the property. It is actively seeking to raise substantial capital to make this possible. If it can't secure an outright purchase, it will seek to extend its current lease.

Curley School, Ajo, Arizona www.curleyschool.com

Located in rural Arizona approximately forty miles from the national border, and surrounded by the public lands of the Sonoran Desert, the Curley School is a former public school campus of approximately seven acres and eight buildings. The main building was constructed in 1919 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. When the town of Ajo experienced substantial population decline after the local mining industry closed down, the school was shuttered and sat vacant for many years.

Local artists and community development activists with a knowledge of affordable housing finance contacted Artspace about collaborating to acquire the Curley School properties.¹ They also developed a partnership with a strong local nonprofit, the International Sonoran Desert Alliance, which provided administrative support. While Artspace did not ultimately stay involved with the project, its early support in planning was an important part of getting the project moving.

When a plan had been formulated, the partners approached the county and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, receiving \$250,000 in combined support for capacity building and planning. With these funds in hand, they were able to mount a capital campaign to raise eight hundred thousand dollars for the initial acquisition of the main building and then pull together ten million dollars in philanthropic supports and financing to build thirty units of affordable live/work space for artists, as well as a large auditorium for community events. Curley School received a one-million-dollar developer's fee for this work, which it immediately used to purchase the remaining properties. These are being developed as workshops for woodworking, printing, and ceramics and also as training and residential facilities for visitors studying the Sonoran Desert ecosystem. With sound management in place, the live/work units have rarely experienced significant delinquencies and have never generated losses. The Curley School developers have now been approached by the Ajo Chamber of Commerce to redevelop the historic town square and currently plan a combination of cultural and traditional commercial activities.



Curley School Ajo, Arizona photo: TrailerGypsies.com

1. Artspace (www.artspace.org) is a national nonprofit intermediary that seeks to create and preserve affordable space for artists and arts organizations. Activities include project development, asset management, consulting services, and community building.

While Flux Factory and Curley School vary substantially in scale, both are rooted in and deeply shaped by their connection to the physical assets themselves. Indeed, both organizations came into being as a direct result of the work they did while adapting these spaces to cultural uses.

Public Engagement

Many projects that are developed through adaptive reuse either come into being because

their former use served a direct social benefit or because their new nonprofit stewards wish to achieve a social benefit through the new use. In either case, maintaining strong public partnerships throughout the planning and programming stages is critical to achieving the right tenor of public support. This is particularly true when considering the needs and ambitions of the local arts community that hopes to engage directly with the new use.

Big Car, Indianapolis, Indiana www.bigcar.org

Big Car is an artist collective with a history of taking advantage of underused spaces in urban Indianapolis to create cultural events. Launched in 2004, the organization has been building capacity and currently runs with just two full-time staff. Early projects included pop-up events, a clothing resale shop and gallery, and mural creation. Over time it has been remarkably successful in attracting volunteer and community engagement to develop facilities and programs. Big Car members consider themselves to be “social practice artists,” and civic engagement figures heavily into their programming.

While programming a community-based pop-up food event just over a year ago, Big Car staff members identified a nearby abandoned tire sales outlet and service center as a potential site for adaptive reuse. The site is a detached structure at a currently empty mall. They approached the owner of the mall about gaining access to the site, and the owner agreed to provide them with an eighteen-month lease. Big Car is charged only the cost of utilities. The collective created its project, called Service Center, through volunteer labor and a small pool of local funding. The facility now houses cultural events, community workshops, and public gardening.

For various reasons, the owner of the mall does not wish to sell the property and is instead holding the vacant mall until an opportunity to redevelop it occurs in the future. This is an ideal situation for Big Car, as its lease—although short term—is unlikely to be terminated anytime soon.

Through its network of artists and volunteers, Big Car has been programming the Service Center with performing arts, community meetings, greening activities, and one-day events (such as food festivals and skateboarding) ▶



Big Car Indianapolis, Indiana

competitions). Big Car is supported through local foundations, public funds from the city of Indianapolis and the state of Indiana, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

Northside Town Hall, Brooklyn, New York www.nthccc.org

In 2003, New York City closed Engine Company 212, a Williamsburg, Brooklyn firehouse, in an effort that had been a point of contention between the city and the community for many years. The community felt strongly that the closed firehouse had both historic importance and architectural relevance and advocated strongly for the conversion of the facility to another social purpose use. When the city issued a request for proposals on the development of the site, the People's Firehouse Inc. and Neighbors Allied for Good Growth submitted a joint response suggesting that the building become a community center, providing performance space, community meeting space, and offices for the two nonprofit partners. Before they could acquire the building, the proposed project had to pass through the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), a long and demanding public review procedure requiring input from the community and approval from multiple city agencies and departments. The two nonprofit partners sought the support of the Pratt Center for Community Development (www.prattcenter.net) in developing a community outreach plan that included presentations to the community board and less formal local gatherings to brainstorm potential programs and design elements. Eventually the building was acquired for one dollar from the city, but it now needs a substantial investment of capital funds so that necessary repairs can be conducted. The Pratt Center has also provided substantial guidance on the design and renovation of the new facility.

Through close relationships with its city council representatives, its state elected officials, and the Brooklyn Arts Council, Northside Town Hall, a community-driven cultural facility, has been building the capital it needs to conduct planning and renovation on the property. Northside Town Hall has been very active with neighboring businesses, residents, artists, and other stakeholders to gain support, plan the development of the facility, and anticipate uses and programming.



Northside Town Hall Brooklyn, New York image: Pratt Center for Community Development

In the case of Big Car and Northside Town Hall, adaptive reuse plans require community input to both validate their objectives and meet an important component of the mission. Active engage-

ment with community members, the ability to organize volunteers, and finding external partners with knowledge of local stakeholders are all essential elements.

Establishing Clear Project Leadership

Many adaptive reuse projects involve multiple nonprofit and even for-profit partners. Because cultural facilities in general can be costly and challenging to develop, maintain, and program,

sharing these efforts makes good sense. There can be substantial challenges, however, in deciding leadership, handling critical decisions, assigning important tasks, and negotiating boundaries. In addition, attempting to change the structure of leadership after the fact is much harder than taking the time to establish it from the beginning.

El Barrio's Artspace PS 109, East Harlem, New York

www.artspace.org/properties/nyc

PS 109 is a landmarked former public school located in East Harlem, New York City. El Barrio Operation Fight-back (EBOF), a local nonprofit community development corporation, had a vision for converting the facility into affordable live/work spaces for artists, including substantial space for additional public uses, performance, and commercial uses. While EBOF is well grounded in its community, it felt it would not have the capacity it needed to take on a complex development without assistance.

EBOF reached out to Artspace, which agreed to take a substantial role in the development. Artspace has evolved a model for creating and preserving affordable space for artists and artisans, and it has the capacity to bring together a process for community engagement, real estate finance expertise, and a knowledge of the philanthropic community dedicated to nonprofit cultural capital initiatives. By adopting Artspace's approach, EBOF was able to bring its strengths as the liaison to important local stakeholders (including residents, small businesses, and elected officials) and focus on the critical work of raising capital commitments from public sector partners. It was able to rely on Artspace to provide the deeper technical support and do the heavy lifting in locating appropriate financing—particularly for the affordable housing portion of the project. When completed, PS 109 will provide ninety units of affordable housing and ten thousand square feet of additional space for community and cultural uses. EBOF has just closed on the financing for the project and will now move into construction.



PS109 East Harlem, New York photo: ArtPlace America

Curley School, Ajo, Arizona www.curleyschool.com

In addition to being an important model for site-specific development, the Curley School was very effective at defining leadership and decision-making roles. Because their effort was born out of a grassroots effort to adapt the school to a new use, Curley School advocates moved quickly to identify leaders within their own group who had the capacity to manage the complex planning and development process. These included local residents with substantial experience in using public housing subsidies (most notably the low-income housing tax credit) to deliver affordable housing, but to also generate a substantial developers fee, which could then be used to support further development of the site.

In addition, Curley School leaders developed a unique model for addressing public concerns in their small community. They created a “truth squad” of local gossips: people whom they identified as being at the crossroads of multiple constituencies and who often were engaged in informal conversations. They then developed an information session specifically for these residents and made sure they were provided with accurate content about the project’s development and program goals. By proactively seeding correct and clear information, Curley School leaders were able to engage their community stakeholders early and consistently, dramatically reducing the resistance that could be caused by hearsay and rumor.

There were a number of examples discovered in the course of this profile where partnerships were not so successful. The reasons for these challenges were quite consistent:

- No clear project leader was identified and assigned the primary job of ensuring that key decisions were inclusive, timely, and complete.
- Partners brought different strengths and challenges, but they were assigned leadership as equals. This usually burdened one group unfairly and caused resentment on all sides.
- Once the project was completed, disagreements arose about how shared spaces and operations were to be managed within the team, again causing resentment and frustration.

Having a process that works early to determine leadership, decision-making procedures, and how information is shared greatly decreases the likelihood of tensions as the project moves forward.

Public Supports

Very few cultural capital projects, whether adaptive reuse, substantial renovation, or new construction, proceed without public sector support. Money for building derives most often from a combination of community support provided by local elected leaders and direct funding through public dollar capital allocations (which is very much a function of community support). Additionally, a number of the more substantial capital projects referenced, particularly those involving affordable live/work space, also used access to federal funds to support the housing component. Engaging public support means having a strategy of communicating with local elected and appointed officials, including city council representatives and officials in cultural affairs, budget, finance, economic development, and similar municipal agencies. This can sound daunting, but in point of fact many groups reach their public officials through their local city council member, who (assuming he or she supports the project) is normally eager to provide guidance.

Harlem Stage, Harlem, New York www.harlemstage.org

This twenty-million-dollar development project was built in the former operations center for the Croton Aqueduct, a landmarked municipal building. Ultimately converted into a three-thousand-square-foot flexible performance art space (the Gatehouse), the facility hosts dance, theater, film, and music.

Harlem Stage board members had agreed several years earlier that, in order to thrive, the organization would need to find a new home. Given this reality, staff and board members organized to build relationships in the community and with local elected and appointed officials. Securing permission to develop the closed operations center alone took a significant amount of work.

Knowing that the development would have to be approved through ULURP, Harlem Stage held a planning charrette for the community board and residents. This full-day event involved one hundred representatives from the community, among them artists; elected leaders; and members of nonprofits, schools, parent groups, and the community board. It was critical to securing the public support necessary for the ULURP approval. When the project was awarded, capital allocations from elected officials were essential to enabling the development of the facility and were secured through representatives being systematically approached throughout city budget negotiations. Furthermore, these funds were administered by the New York City Department of Design and Construction, requiring ongoing communication and coordination with this agency and the Department of Cultural Affairs throughout design and build-out.



Harlem Stage Harlem, New York

Tannery Arts Center, Santa Cruz, California www.tanneryartscenter.org

The Tannery Arts Center is somewhat unusual, as its development was driven by the city itself. On the basis of previous research conducted by the city to evaluate the viability of the arts as a tool for economic development, the director of the economic development and redevelopment agency approached the owners of this eight-acre site, proposing to acquire and adapt the campus for multiple cultural uses. Because the site was contaminated, the development agency required substantial support from state and federal sources to remove ground toxins before any work could begin. The city decided to engage Artspace to conduct a feasibility study for the phased development, beginning with an assessment of creating affordable live/work spaces for artists. Artspace ▼

conducted a two-day session, with attendees organized by discipline; these included elected leaders, cultural venue operators, visual artists, philanthropic partners, dance groups, and so forth. All these elements proved critical to demonstrating strong public support for this complex project.

Shortly thereafter, the Tannery Arts Center nonprofit was created to provide a fundraising vehicle and to lead the development of programming and cultural partner engagement. In the first phase, one hundred units of artists' housing were built. During the second phase, twenty-seven work studios were built, hosting sixty artists and creative practitioners (working in digital media, dance, sculpture, and other fields). The third phase, currently under construction, will provide a new theater.



Tannery Arts Center Santa Cruz, California photo: Art Gray Photography

Business Model

Acquiring and developing facilities for nonprofit cultural use is demanding financially, technically, and programmatically. Operating a cultural facility once you have it built is equally complex. There are many variables (such as creating programs to adequately use the space or handling ongoing maintenance and utility costs) that are difficult to fully anticipate. Many nonprofit culturals see their

overall capacity to develop creative engagements diminished in the short term as they allow for and adapt to the administrative and operational needs of the facility. The good news is that once administration and operations are more stable, the venue actually allows for taking greater risks and dedicating richer resources to creative productions. Having an operational model in mind when moving into a residence significantly increases the likelihood of a successful transition.

The Chocolate Factory, Queens, New York

www.chocolatefactorytheater.org

Originally, the resident artists of the Chocolate Factory were located in an actual chocolate factory. Taking their name from this first location, this artists group has actually relocated several times—all through leaseholds or rentals of limited term. Its current location is a former paint factory, which it has leased and renovated ►

substantially to meet its program needs in dance, theater, music, and visual art. The group's commitment has secured it a five-year lease on the property.

The resident artists of the Chocolate Factory produce their own work, and the Chocolate Factory also has a robust visiting artists program. Many nonprofit culturals provide rentals to artists, using the revenues generated to support operations and maintenance. The Chocolate Factory, however, has developed a model whereby visiting artists are carefully vetted and selected, then awarded free access to the space and technical equipment, as well as commissioning funds, administrative support, and a guaranteed artist fee. This model has been developed over many years of producing high-quality, innovative art recognized by philanthropic supporters and public sector partners. While unusual, the Chocolate Factory's model works: the group has been successful in securing funding based on the reputation of its programming and the high-quality work produced by both resident and visiting artists.



The Chocolate Factory Long Island City, New York photo: Steven Schreiber

Moving into a newly adapted space usually entails a leap in operations—not a slow, steady climb. Many nonprofit culturals recognize that they themselves will not be able to fully program all the facility's available hours. Building partnerships with other nonprofit culturals whose work is complementary can both better activate the space and bring in needed financial resources.

KEY LESSONS

There are a number of important takeaways from this survey:

- **Adaptive reuse and building renovation vary significantly from new construction.**

It is axiomatic in the construction industry that any time you are dealing with an older building, you won't really know the full scope of the construction project itself until you are well under way. Structural issues, compromised electrical or plumbing systems, sewage and drainage issues—any number of these may not be in the initial expected scope of work but may be identified as walls are opened up or new systems are being upgraded. Even the most experienced contractors can't necessarily tell you if a wall is load bearing until they pull off the old plaster and see. Proceed with caution when attempting to rehabilitate an older building, and

consult engineering, code, and building systems experts before fully committing to the project. For additional reference, consult online tools such as “Square Feet Seattle” (www.seattle.gov/arts/space/sqft_seattle.asp).

- **As form affects function, so all capital projects interact with an organization’s mission.** Moving into long-term control of a facility can provide new stability and opportunities for growth. It can also distract attention or even demand time and effort that cultural leaders would prefer to give to their creative work. Many of the members of the groups in this profile discussed the tremendous effort they put into understanding the intersection of their creative practice and the facility they were building. Many were also clear that the development of the facility would require them to build new expertise, new capacities, new partnerships, and new resources. These had to be carefully managed so that they did not detract from the organization’s mission, but deepened it.
- **Developers of adaptive reuse projects must be open to change.** Capital projects are complex, have long time lines, and require multiple layers of resources. It is almost certain that even the best-laid plans will have to be amended as new information comes to light. This can entail adding new partners or dropping old ones or reevaluating deep assumptions about what’s possible in the new facility. While it is intuitive that these changes will occur, developing a decision-making structure capable of digesting and dealing efficiently with such changes is essential to maintaining an efficient process. Again, clear lines of leadership and delegation of responsibilities up front, with an understanding that these may be altered, are critical.
- **There is no substitute for local expertise in project development and management.** Artspace (www.artspace.org) is a frequent development partner, and additional national community development intermediaries like the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (www.lisc.org), Enterprise Community Partners (www.enterprisecommunity.com), the Nonprofit Finance Fund (www.nonprofitfinancefund.org), Fractured Atlas (www.fracturedatlas.org), and others can provide much needed expertise and resource. It

is clear, however, that there always needs to be on-the-ground leadership with access to key stakeholders, as well as a deep understanding of local relationships and community priorities. As noted above, plans will change. Furthermore, the more complex the project, the greater the need for anticipating community needs. Those surveyed were absolutely clear: national intermediaries were critically important, but final decision making needed to rest with local leadership who understood the community impacts of their efforts. In New York City, nonprofit culturals have been able to gain support with planning through local entities such as the Pratt Center (www.prattcenter.net), the Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York (www.art-newyork.org), borough-based arts councils, and many others.

- **Capital projects require a careful earned-revenue strategy, and many times this includes cultivating relationships with cultural partners who do not have access to a space of their own.** For most groups, the process of developing and adapting space is a leap, not a stretch. A number of the profile participants built both earned-revenue and operational objectives with other cultural partners in mind. In fact, many said that they viewed their developments as not just meeting the immediate developmental needs of the organization but also increasing infrastructure for other cultural partners in the community. Several spoke of their development specifically as public service or even a utility. While funding sources (both public and private) do not frequently include this in their consideration of support, it is nonetheless clearly an established reality.
- **Capital projects require significant financial support, and having a clear strategy about how the acquisition and rehabilitation will be financed or funded is key.** Many projects surveyed were directly supported by a combination of public funds (usually from the city or state), private funds (from foundations and individual donors), and even borrowed funds (from a lender or nonprofit intermediary with lending capacity). Understanding how much capital the project will require, what the likely sources are for obtaining that capital, and timing the many complex pieces to come together is very demanding. Many nonprofits made use of a wide array

of friends, stakeholders, contractors, and experts to accomplish the fund-raising and financing alone—even before engaging in design or construction. In addition, a number of cities blessed with a relatively large pool of capital funds nonetheless face extremely high demand and competition for support. Funds awarded can be channeled through bureaucratic processes that substantially attenuate project development. Getting clear on the nature of the entire process and establishing strong working relationships with funding partners and other stakeholders (particularly elected representatives if the project is publicly funded) will significantly improve success.

- **Leaseholds can provide a helpful foothold, but be wary of the landlord.** A number of profile examples in this report leased their current facilities (and some had leased several properties in their evolution). All reported being justifiably wary of the landlord's intentions for the ultimate disposition of the property, and several reported that the landlord was clearly bringing in artists to both improve the condition of the property and increase the overall desirability

of the location. Most profile examples secured leases of between one and three years. Leases of five years or more were very rare and were reported only in those cases in which a landlord truly valued the cultural partner or, conversely, saw little value in the property. Most cultural organizations also had some form of negotiation under way to acquire the leased property but were fairly realistic about the possibility that the landlord would not sell the building and simply replace them with a higher-paying tenant at the end of their lease. It's important to note that while leased spaces pose the risk of displacement, they can also provide an opportunity to obtain a space at a relatively low cost. Several cultural organizations were careful negotiators and secured inexpensive leases or more favorable terms in exchange for their investment of "sweat equity" in cleaning up and preparing a dilapidated space for occupancy. Finally, a number of nonprofit culturals also planned carefully, doing only as much work as necessary to make the space usable and planning investments in equipment and furnishings so that they could be removed at a later date if they relocated.

CONCLUSION

"Adaptive Reuse," like all the case studies concerning capital investment and access to space for creative engagements, addresses a big topic. Still, there are consistencies. Potential developments tend to find us as much as we find them. The ability to develop and manage partnerships with a multiplicity of local stakeholders is both a necessary strength and a critical buffer. Partnerships are essential, but they add complexity that requires clear leadership and decision making. Having a plan that extends beyond the development through operations, including engaging other cultural partners, strengthens the chances for success.

Important Issues Remain:

- **How can small culturals be supported in accessing temporary spaces more consistently?** Most nonprofit culturals are small nonprofit culturals. For many, engaging in facilities development on their own can feel far beyond their reach. There is a need for funders, particularly public sector funders, to maximize the utility of existing cultural venues both for their primary occupants and for those there on a temporary basis. Funds to increase the operational and maintenance capacity needed for greater use would be a powerful tool to make more spaces available.
- **How can opportunities for adaptive reuse, which are rare, be identified and targeted early?** Ideally, public sector partners would provide more access to lists of publicly held vacant lots, blighted properties, and other underused spaces suitable for adaptive reuse. They would also create incentives in the forms of technical assistance, funding for planning, and tools for financing on terms that small culturals could work with.

- **How do you select cultural partners who are reliable, flexible, and community oriented?**

Like choosing a roommate, finding cultural partners who will help build out programming and perhaps even share some of the operational burden of a new facility can be challenging. Very little attention has been paid to this issue, and a sectoral dialogue about the difficulties and importance of making sound decisions is needed. Furthermore, standard legal agreements that can help structure and govern these relationships would go a long way toward preserving clear lines of responsibility.

Adaptive reuse, the recycling of older venues for new purposes, has long been linked with the work of nonprofit cultural practitioners. Fixer-uppers are more difficult than is new construction, but they are also less expensive and working on them frequently overlaps with other mission-oriented goals. This is likely to remain true, and with some process improvements, they could yield even greater benefits to cultural groups and communities alike.



Big Car Indianapolis, Indiana

a NOCD-NY profile series



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