Innovative Cultural Uses of Urban Space

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

by Lynn Stern August 8, 2013

a **NOCD-NY profile series**

NOCD NY.org

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

Innovative Cultural Uses of Urban Space
a NOCD-NY profile series

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cover photos, clockwise from left: Trinity Project event at Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Brooklyn, New York; Carlos Montana at Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, Brooklyn, New York; Public art on East 4th Street, Manhattan, New York.
photo: c. bay milin, Sam Lewis

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

**Philadanco dancers
at Philadelphia's City Hall.**
Photo credit: Amanda Brandt for the City of Philadelphia

INTRODUCTION

Innovative Cultural Uses of Urban Space: A Profile Series is a collection of seven profiles commissioned by the Naturally Occurring Cultural District Working Group New York (NOCD-NY), a citywide alliance of artists, activists, creative manufacturers, and policy makers committed to revitalizing New York City "from the neighborhood up." NOCD-NY coalesced around the idea of naturally occurring cultural districts, recognizing the vital cultural, social, and economic contributions that distinguish these community-initiated cultural clusters. Formalized in 2011, this growing coalition of networks represents a wide swath of communities and sectors across all five boroughs. Organizational members include Arts & Democracy Project, Bronx Council on the Arts, Fourth Arts Block, Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC), Laundromat Project, New York Chinatown History Project, El Museo del Barrio, THE POINT Community Development Corporation, El Puente, Queens Museum of Art, Urban

NOCD-NY launch event at GMDC in August 2011

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Bush Women, Staten Island Arts, and individual members Michael Hickey and Betsy Imershein.

NOCD-NY's unified set of strategies drive toward a vision of New York as "a city composed of equitable, sustainable, and culturally rich communities for all residents, which are both distinct and connected." Leveraging members' networks and local knowledge, NOCD-NY advocates for policies that support asset-based cultural work in neighborhoods and promotes the value of local practices by identifying connections between artists, cultural workers, and local communities. NOCD-NY also collaborates on programs that scale up ways of understanding and promoting NOCD-NY values while building local capacity for members. Finally, NOCD-NY profiles and raises the visibility of neighborhood work in NOCD-NY cultural clusters.

NOCD-NY members convene monthly at sites throught the city.
photo: Tom Oesau

Series Background and Goals

The idea for this collection emerged out of initial working group discussions in 2012 about inventive cultural uses of urban space—an area of activity that engaged nearly all NOCD-NY communities. Members shared stories about the complex process of transforming vacant lots and underused public spaces into vibrant cultural centers that revealed a reservoir of local know-how and creative approaches, both of which contrib-

uted to the success of these projects. NOCD-NY determined that this was an area of practice where members had much to share and learn and that the commissioning of profiles to document the projects would promote the sharing of innovative practices and lessons learned within the NOCD-NY network in and the broader field. Further, NOCD-NY was deliberate in orienting this series as a "go-to" resource for practitioners. Although there is a growing body of literature by academics and researchers about the value and impact of cultural uses of space, there was still a need for resources that provide artists, cultural workers, and community groups with practical approaches and neighborhood-based solutions. At the same time, NOCD-NY intended the collection to illustrate for policy makers the needs and opportunities in the field and make recommendations for policies and practices that would support this work.

While cultural uses of urban space provided a unifying focus for collective learning across NOCD-NY communities, subsequent working group discussions revealed that this practice takes many forms, depending on artistic intent, community priorities, and local conditions. Through an analysis of temporal and spatial characteristics, NOCD-NY members surfaced a spectrum of cultural uses of vacant and underused spaces, from temporary exhibits and performances to long-term artistic production (for example, artist/artisan studios and rehearsal spaces) and adaptive reuse developments. The working group identified seven realms of space (see sidebar, Realms of Space: Definitions), which provided a foundation for a collective understanding and common language about this practice. Realms of space also served as a useful organizing principle for the series.

With these intentions in mind, NOCD-NY assembled a team of writers to research and prepare profiles. To tap current expertise and a broader knowledge base on cultural uses of space, NOCD-NY selected writers who were already broadly engaged in this topic, as practitioners, researchers, or both, and who were involved in larger, space-related initiatives undertaken by Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), ▶

Realms of Space: Definitions

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

Construction Zones and VacantProperty. In an effort to clean up construction sites and turn a blight into an asset, individuals, communities, and organizations are creatively reusing and repurposing containers, construction sites, scaffolding, and vacant lots into opportunties for public art and, sometimes, public engagement.

Public Outdoor Space: Short-Term. New York has a long history of using public open space for a variety of temporary arts uses, from dance and musical performances to large-scale festivals to murals and the display of public banners. Accessible open spaces provide opportunities for individuals and groups to express themselves and their cultures. But the use of such spaces is restricted by an array of bureaucratic hurdles that require navigating a labyrinthine permit and approvals process involving Parks, Transportation, and other public agencies. A collaborative approach and inclusive spirit, along with persistence in overcoming setbacks, are key to success.

Public Outdoor Space: Long-Term. From misused former dump sites or brownfields to underused lots or plazas, what starts with an artistic vision ultimately requires getting your hands dirty: digging in to the extensive and complex work of clearing out space and renovating or reconfiguring, securing funding, transferring ownership, and formalizing relationships with a range of public and private funders and other stakeholders. The best of these efforts encourage strong interaction between artists, artworks, and the public.

Publicly Owned Facilities. Every neighborhood can point to spaces such as libraries, schools, recreation centers, and senior centers as hubs of civic life. Even so, many of these spaces are underused and present unique opportunities for arts programming and use. Unfortunately, they can also present unique challenges for the process of navigating the complicated relationships of city agencies and regulations.

Religious Spaces. Religious spaces across the country are increasingly used for arts and cultural purposes that extend beyond the beliefs, mission, and focus of the congregations that own and manage them. With most religious facilities across the country experiencing a decline in active membership, arts and other secular cultural uses of sacred spaces and places will continue to increase.

Shared Space. A multitenant arts facility is a creative space inhabited by more than one artist or arts group, often housing a combination of individual artists and creative entrepreneurs, arts organizations, and other creative businesses. The most familiar examples might be a building of artist studios or an art center that houses several nonprofit arts organizations.

Municipal Arts Society, and Partners for Sacred Spaces, among others. NOCD-NY also chose writers who brought perspectives from other sectors, such as architecture, sustainability, community development, and local government. The collection's profiles and writers are "Public Outdoor Space: Short- and Long-Term," by Joan T. Hocky; "Publicly Owned Facilities," by Lyz Crane; "Shared Space," by Risë Wilson; "Religious Spaces," by Michael Kreigh; "Construction Zones and Vacant Property," by Betsy Imershein; and "Adaptive Reuse," by Michael Hickey.

In selecting examples to illustrate profiles, the working group and writers chose projects led by NOCD-NY members as well as exemplars throughout the United States, with a preference for lesser-known projects about which little has been written. NOCD-NY's values-based approach to this work also informed the selection of projects, which emphasized cross-sector approaches, sustained partnerships, and innovative practices born out of the grassroots ingenuity and creative problem solving that often characterizes neighborhood-based work. In researching profiles, writers were asked to consider the following questions:

- *What were the key community relationships (formal and informal) necessary for making the project successful?*

- *What are the conditions for success and what are the restrictions and barriers to success?*

- *Who were the partners, how did they collaborate, and who carried what responsibilities?*

- *How was the local community engaged?*

- *How were artists brought into the process? What were the details of the relationship between the artist and other partners in the project?*

- *What changes would make things easier?*

- *What was the project's impact on the community and organization?*

- *Can this experience be applied to other neighborhoods?*

Profiles were developed through an iterative, collaborative research process that involved the writers, NOCD-NY members, and a wider circle of community voices. Public events presented by NOCD-NY contributed to and were informed by this generative process. The first, "Spacing Out: A Forum on Innovative Cultural Approaches to Urban Space" was held in August 2012 in Fort Greene, Brooklyn's South Oxford Space. This half-day, citywide forum brought together over seventy artists, community leaders, researchers, and policy makers to share best practices and explore common challenges in the reuse of urban space for cultural purposes. Six short case study presentations by Fourth Arts Block, Chocolate Factory, Trinity Project, Queens Museum of Art, THE POINT, and Staten Island Arts (formerly known as Council on Arts and Humanities of Staten Island) were followed by two small-group discussions. One-page summaries of profiles provided background and helped guide conversations at this event; in turn, discussion notes and policy recommendations, as well as comments from social media, fed into profile research.

Profile research surfaced an area of inquiry explored in NOCD-NY's second event, "Spacing Out 2: A Conversation with the City's Cultural

Spacing Out: A Forum on Innovative Cultural Approaches to Urban Space August 2012 photo: Eva Ting

Liaisons About Accessing City Spaces," which was held in April 2013 at Under St. Marks in Manhattan's East Village. This interagency roundtable session featured artists, arts administrators, community leaders, and representatives from several New York City agencies in conversation about the capacity of city policies to be more arts friendly toward urban spaces.

SUMMARY

Cross-Cutting Themes and Learning

Taken as a whole, Innovative Cultural Uses of Urban Space illuminates a richly textured and dynamic landscape of practice. As underscored by all seven profiles, the impulses that catalyze and drive the reuse of a vacant lot or underused urban space are as varied as the communities in which these projects take root. Three main drivers characterize the wide array of cultural reuse efforts in this series: the economics of urban space, which often gives rise to opportunities for project partners to tap program or mission synergies; creative expression that often springs from what are felt as the empowering and egalitarian aspects of underused outdoor space; and the captivating nature of the physical site itself—be it a decaying industrial facility or unsightly scaffolding in a construction zone—that transforms the site into a canvas for creativity.

Economics as a driver of cultural reuse efforts. Economics is frequently the spark that fuels cultural reuse efforts in New York and other densely populated cities across the country where real estate is at a premium. As evidenced in three of the profiles—"Shared Space," "Religious Spaces," and "Publicly Owned Facilities"—the economic necessity behind cultural reuse of space often leads to mutual benefits for project partners. In "Shared Space," affordability is revealed as a primary driver for arts groups in developing and selecting space in a multitenant arts facility. In the example of Philadelphia-based Asian Arts Initia-

tive (AAI), the attendant benefits of space sharing can fulfill a component of an arts group's mission and generate benefits for the community in which the building is located. By serving as nonprofit developer for its own building, AAI secured affordable space for its operations. AAI also met its mission-driven goals as a community-based arts organization by providing space to artists and artist groups that share AAI's core values, and AAI exercised a preference for tenants that use art to deeply engage the facility's surrounding neighborhood of Chinatown North. One of the lessons drawn from AAI's experience is the importance of determining a strong cultural fit within the community of tenants sharing the space in order to maximize space-sharing benefits for both tenants and the surrounding community.

In "Religious Spaces," economics is revealed as a driving force in the growth of shared-space relationships between performing arts groups in need of affordable space and religious organizations. With most mainstream religious dominations in the United States experiencing a decline in active membership, many congregations are welcoming arts groups as tenants in their underused religious facilities to generate revenue and offset facility maintenance costs. These shared-space relationships often extend beyond the exchange of space for rent, as illustrated by Gallim Dance's artist residency at the St. Luke and St. Matthew Episcopal Church in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. In exchange for low-cost rehearsal space in the church's secondary chapel, used also as a social hall, Gallim has committed to a substantial cosmetic upgrade of the leased space. As their relationship has grown, Gallim and the church increasingly collaborate on arts programming, block parties, youth and community dance programs, and other community-building activities from which they both benefit.

Like religious facilities, publicly owned municipal buildings—libraries, schools, and senior centers, among others—often have an abundance of underused space for arts groups in need of low-cost venues in which to present their work. As noted in "Publicly Owned Facilities," city agencies and institutions that manage these facilities are

Performers of Gallim Dance practice in the church's upper parish hall.
Photo credit: Kyle Thomas McGovern

increasingly receptive to shared-space relation-ships with arts groups as a means to fulfill their mandate to promote community use of publicly owned space. In the case of the Jacksonville Public Library, space sharing has extended the library's mission beyond its traditional role as a center for information and learning. The library's program-ming of local popular bands throughout its space during regular library hours provides Jacksonville musicians with validation and a new performance venue while enhancing the library's role as a cen-tral hub for a wide range of community activities.

Creative expression as a transformative force in reuses of public outdoor space. "Public Outdoor Space: Short-Term" brings into focus the empow-

Yip-Yip performs at the Jacksonville Public Library Photo credit: Max Michaels

ering, egalitarian nature of accessible open spaces, such as parks, plazas, and streets. These physical settings invite diverse individuals and groups to employ art making and performance for personal expression and the sharing of their cultures. As illustrated by the Heart of Corona Initiative of the Queens Museum of Art, cultural uses of public outdoor space can not only help build bridges across diverse communities but also galvanize residents to address community issues and concerns. One of the initiative's components, Corona Plaza: The Center of Everywhere, com-missioned artists to make interactive site-specific work in Corona Plaza that would draw attention to disinvestment in the plaza and its underdevel-oped infrastructure. A key factor in this compo-nent's success was the attention paid by artists and project organizers to creating artwork that was cul-turally relevant to the largely South and East Asian and Latino immigrant neighborhood of Corona.

As shown in "Public Outdoor Space: Long-Term" a strong artistic vision can spur the revitalization of former dump sites, underused lots, and plazas, transforming these neglected open spaces into neighborhood assets. In the case of Socrates Sculp-ture Park, a coalition of artists and community members, under the leadership of sculptor Mark di Suvero, transformed an abandoned riverside landfill and illegal dump site in Long Island City into an open studio and exhibition space for art-ists and a neighborhood park for local residents. One factor contributing to Socrates's success as a vibrant public space is its diverse art and public programs aimed at attracting a broad cross-section of users and visitors, including cultural tourists and younger visitors from the greater metropolitan area and local residents and their children.

Underused space as a canvas for creativity.
"Adaptive Reuse" portrays a variety of projects in which the physical site itself is the key driver behind cultural reuse efforts. As this profile notes, many adaptive reuse projects often have a "love at first site" element, where the nature of the ven-ue—its "good bones with deteriorated but compel-

ling design"—makes it a captivating prospect for conversion. In the example of the Queens-based Chocolate Factory, this performing arts collective saw in an abandoned paint factory an inspiring space well suited to the collective's brand of experimental performance. Other sites have historical significance and architectural relevance for the neighborhoods in which they are located; often these structures have a history of public use or recognized identity that the community wants maintained. In the case of Indianapolis-based Big Car, an abandoned Firestone tire dealership inspired this "social practice" artists' collective to repurpose the privately owned facility for public benefit. Big Car rehabbed the 11,500-square-foot space into Big Car Service Center for Contemporary Culture and Community, which houses an event space, art gallery, classroom, library, performance venue, and urban farming outpost.

"Construction Zones and Vacant Property" explores how a physical site presents opportunities for public art that revitalizes and beautifies neighborhoods. As this profile points out, these projects are often the inspiration of one individual or small group intent on turning blight into "urban art making, using the city itself as a canvas for creativity." A case in point is the Centre-fuge Public Art Project, an ongoing initiative started in 2011 by two downtown Manhattan residents who saw a construction container on their East First Street block and transformed this eyesore into a rotating outdoor gallery for murals by local street artists. A valuable lesson from the Centre-fuge example is that actively engaging with the community throughout the project is important. By sharing

artist guidelines and initial designs for the container, project organizers cemented transparency and trust with their community.

Ingredients for Success

Regardless of drivers for cultural reuse efforts, these profiles share elements that are fundamental to the overall success of such efforts. Three factors for success—sustained, crosscutting partnerships, a broad network of allies, and community engagement—stand out in the projects featured in these profiles. Partnerships and alliances with nonprofits, government, small business, and neighborhood associations contribute to a project's success by creating synergies, leveraging resources, and extending the capacity of project organizers. An expansive network of allies plays a critical role in linking project organizers to contacts and resources as issues and concerns (securing permits, approvals, liability insurance, and so on) arise. Community engagement that emphasizes sustained, two-way dialogue and relationship building with residents and other community stakeholders constructs the kind of trust and grassroots support necessary for cultural reuse projects to reach their full potential.

Sustained, crosscutting partnerships and collaborations. While these cross-sector partnerships and collaborations are essential, they add complexity and require organizational capacity, skill, and time to initiate and sustain. In "Outdoor Public Space: Long Term" the Riverside Campus for Arts and the Environment of THE POINT

Big Car Indianapolis, Indiana

Community Development Corporation offers an instructive example of the critical role that sustained, crosscutting partnerships and collaborations play in each stage of a space conversion project, from site acquisition and repurposing to programming and site sustainability. In coalition with local activist and advocacy groups, THE POINT worked closely with public stakeholders to acquire the site that is now home to the Campus. That effort was ultimately made possible thanks to leadership from Congressman José Serrano, who purchased the property with funds allocated through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and secured district funds for site remediation. Critical to the Campus's long-term success is THE POINT's ongoing involvement in coalitions with shared common goals. THE POINT, with its campus programming and partner tenants, is part of several local advocacy initiatives—Hunts Point Re-Envisioning Project, South Bronx Greenway Plan, Bronx River Alliance, and South Bronx Waterfront Brownfield Opportunity—that work to revitalize the South Bronx and its waterfront through environmentally sound means. These alliances provide a support system for the Campus as well as a unified structure for advocacy, information sharing, and problem solving.

Productive partnerships between arts groups and the staffs of city agencies and institutions are critical for space sharing in publicly owned facilities. Forging these partnerships requires arts stakeholders to invest significant time and resources. They also require an understanding of and ability to navigate complex city bureaucracies. "Publicly Owned Facilities" identifies three factors that can make or break these partnerships: reciprocity, partnering experience, and mission alignment. With regard to mission alignment, Staten Island Arts illustrates how complex it can be for an arts group to align its goals with those of city partners. In working with the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) on designs for the Culture Lounge at St. George Ferry Terminal, Staten Island Arts needed to balance one of the DOT's primary objectives—to move people as efficiently as possible through the terminal's main corridor—with its goal of developing a space in which people would stop and view a performance or exhibit.

Broad go-to network of allies. Successful cultural reuse projects often rely on a go-to network of allies with know-how and contacts to help problem-solve around a host of technical and regulatory issues, such as permits, approvals, liability, and public safety. As cited in "Construction Zones and Vacant Property" the start-up and success of Fourth Arts Block's (FABnyc's) public art program, ArtUp, is attributable in large part to FABnyc's ongoing relationships with city agencies and community partners, particularly the New York City Department of Design and Construc-

Riverside Campus for the Arts and the Environment photo: Joan Hocky

Renderings of the Culture Lounge under construction at St. George Ferry Terminal, Staten Island image: Vincent Appel

tion (DDC), which connected FABnyc to the scaffolding company to secure permission for ArtUp's first scaffolding bridge exhibition. As ArtUp expands to new public art projects on scaffolding bridges, construction containers, and vacant walls both on the block and throughout the surrounding Lower East Side community, FABnyc relies on its network of allies, including member art groups, DDC, Community Board 3, the New York Police Department, and the New York City Department of Transportation, to facilitate connections with property owners and contractors and to navigate regulatory issues for new sites.

Engagement with the local community. Inclusion of the local community is another key ingredient for success that reverberates throughout these profiles. The Queens Museum of Art's (QMA's) Heart of Corona Initiative offers insights into how a major cultural institution developed, through trial and error, an effective arts-based community engagement initiative that served the twin goals of positioning QMA as more relevant and responsive to its surrounding neighborhood while building community support for Corona Plaza infrastructure improvements. From a community engagement standpoint, several factors contribute to the effectiveness of QMA's cultural programming of the plaza. First, QMA's on-staff community organizer, a position not usually found in a major museum, plays a key role in orienting artists to the neighborhood, brokering partnerships and project locations, and facilitating public interaction. Second, QMA strives to commission site-specific art in the plaza that is culturally relevant to Corona residents.

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

The inherent complexities of cultural reuse projects are attested to in these profiles, which cite myriad barriers and restrictions hindering the success of such projects. Regardless of the varying size, scale, and scope of the projects featured in this collection, they have common challenges. Chief among them are the difficulty of navigating

city agencies and regulations governing the use of public space and the scarcity of public and private resources to finance cultural reuse projects. A striking theme that permeates these profiles is the resourcefulness and ingenuity applied by arts groups to surmount these challenges. In profile after profile, practitioners demonstrate that turning challenges into opportunities is a necessary aim, if not working method, for cultural reuse projects to succeed.

Navigating relationships with city agencies and regulations. The challenge most frequently cited in the profiles is lack of transparency and of easily accessible information from public agencies about space use. Further, few city agencies have an overarching policy on how and by whom space can be used. As pointed out in the two profiles on public outdoor space, what policies do exist tend to be universalized for large-scale projects rather than tailored to a community-based model that would support small grassroots groups. As highlighted in "Publicly Owned Facilities," while many city agencies are increasingly receptive to cultural uses of public space, they too face challenges. Public agencies that oversee programs using public space or that manage access to public space often have limited staff to respond to inquiries and requests for use of such space, as well as little experience partnering with outside groups. The collection's profiles offer a wide range of recommendations to streamline public processes, centralize information about public space use, and suggest ways that arts group can develop more effective partnerships with public entities.

Creativity spurred by limitation. In "Public Outdoor Space: Short Term," Downtown Art offers a compelling example of "creativity spurred by limitation," whereby arts groups employ inventive, out-of-the box approaches to barriers and restrictions that they may face in using public space for cultural purposes. This small arts group, which works with teens to create and perform original music and theater works, has been homeless since 2009, when its Lower East Side building underwent publicly funded renovations. To keep its teen troupe creating and performing work, Downtown

Art chose to bring the company's theater productions to outdoor public spaces. Given the time and effort required to obtain city permits and get permission for outdoor space use, Downtown Art decided to create work based on a "neighborhood tour" model, which would require as few approvals as possible. The company creatively adapted performance events to fit within the city's parameters for neighbor tours: audience size was limited to fewer than fifty per performance, thus avoiding adherence to rules for parades and other public assemblies, and each audience member was provided with an MP3 player to avoid sound permits and noise issues.

Transforming scarcity into abundance. Resourcing cultural reuse projects is another challenge frequently cited in these profiles. Yet a number of

Downtown Art performs on the streets of the Lower East Side, Manhattan
photo: Ryan Gilliam

profiles highlight examples in which artists and community groups have employed creative and resourceful ways to make these projects happen. As profiled in "Religious Spaces," the Trinity Project was initiated as a barter arrangement for space between a group of artists and Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church in southeast Williamsburg. Artists trade labor, including art instruction in the church's parochial school and maintenance work in the church buildings, for studio and rehearsal space. In "Publicly Owned Facilities," the example of Brooklyn's Kensington Library Resources and

Community Space demonstrates how participatory budgeting offered an opportunity for the community to secure funding for enhancements to the new library's community room so it could function as "'a site for rehearsals, story times, and small performances'" as well as a meeting room. As pointed out in "Construction Zones and Vacant Properties," the ad hoc nature of street art projects, coupled with the current fund-raising environment, makes it challenging to raise funds specifically for these projects. This is especially true for community-based organizations, whose budgets are by and large very small. In the case of Centre-fuge, local businesses have donated materials and space for a fund-raiser. Other groups, like FABnyc, have used Kickstarter and other crowd-funding platforms via the Internet to raise funds earmarked for these projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the process of researching and preparing profiles, an expansive list of recommendations was generated for improving practice and developing a more favorable policy environment in which this work can thrive. The following recommendations are culled from all seven profiles and are grouped in two categories. The first set of recommendations is directed to practitioners and relates to strengthening practice and field learning. The second set is directed to policy makers and city agencies considering ways to enhance the capacity of city policies to create more opportunities and access for arts in public spaces.

Recommendations for Practitioners in the Field

Improving Practice

- **Find experienced partners from other sectors.** Tap the experience and connections of groups, such as civic groups, community development corporations, and neighborhood associations, which frequently partner with the

city on events and activities in public spaces and have contacts and infrastructure in place to help facilitate partnerships with city agencies.

- **Develop and share resource guides to inform public partners.** Using and outfitting public space often involves working with public construction and facilities personnel who may not have detailed knowledge about theater construction, acoustics, or dance floor specifications. Develop and share guides with public partners that outline arts-specific requirements for use of public space.

- **Be low impact and low maintenance.** Simplify or use models that minimize the oversight of public agencies. If you are a small organization or group of artists with limited resources, consider creating something that requires as few approvals as possible to avoid unknown variables that can strain limited resources.

- **Communicate well and sustain engagement with the population that will be affected by your work**. Regular communication with community stakeholders throughout the project is essential for maintaining and sustaining successful initiatives. Communicate and provide information in a way that enables the broadest level of support. Acknowledge and address different issues and cultures that exist in different areas, and consider the needs, interests, and concerns of the community.

- **Be politically engaged and actively seek local support and cooperation.** Positive personal relationships with local civic leaders, elected officials, and city agency representatives can build mutual trust and streamline the project implementation process. Political or active community participation can include maintaining communication with local elected officials and agency representatives about the project's development and milestones; extending engagement beyond the project in support of other neighborhood needs; and serving in public office, on community boards, or as cultural liaisons.

Information Sharing for Field-Building

- **Document strategies.** Document how you have made partnerships work. Making lists of what you needed, whom you needed to talk to, and what works and what doesn't work are valuable internally and for the wider field.

- **Initiate more opportunities to share and learn from others through online, print, and in-person learning communities.** Artists and practitioners with experience in the successful design and implementation of programs or artworks in public spaces have a deep reserve of information and experience that could benefit others. Connecting seasoned and emerging artists and organizations would be useful for those seeking guidance and support and offer a chance to brainstorm and problem solve on projects.

Recommendations for Policy Makers and City Agencies

Creating a More Favorable Policy Environment

- **Open a forum to discuss potential changes to city policies that would create more opportunities and access for arts in public spaces.** Create a multiagency task force or working group composed of representatives from agencies involved in overseeing use of outdoor space or funding art in public spaces and elected officials who support the arts, along with artists or art organizations, to discuss current policies and possible changes to make the policies more arts friendly.

- **Review and develop arts-friendly public policies.** Review mechanisms for transferring property, such as land banks; reuse of space, such as former brownfields; or creating space-sharing agreements between private and public sector parties. Minimize or streamline processes that apply unwieldy event guidelines

and restrictions to small community gatherings or that prohibit or limit gatherings in public parks or other spaces. Make capital funding more accessible to small arts and cultural organizations for projects in their communities.

Increasing Accessibility of Public Space

- **Make information on public space more accessible.** Provide more user-friendly, transparent, and easily accessible information about public agency roles, rules, and processes for using or gaining access to outdoor public space.

- **Create centralized, online resources.** Develop an online portal that provides basic guidelines, permits, and other stipulations for all agencies that oversee public outdoor space (Department of Transportation, Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Cultural Affairs, Metropolitan Transit Authority, and so on). Include attachments of registration forms or applications and provide useful links, and provide space in which practitioners or artists can post comments and suggestions.

- **Designate point people.** Assign point persons in city departments that oversee public spaces who are responsible for the facilitation of outside partnerships and events in public spaces.

- **Provide training to the public and relevant agency staff.** Hold free trainings for individuals and groups to help them learn how to navigate the system of permits and regulations for using public space. Provide internal training for staff of city agencies and publicly owned buildings in effective partnering with the public to use their spaces.

Advancing Practice and Policy: Next Steps

As the profile series brings forward, the cultural use of space is an evolving and expanding practice. The summary of recommendations suggests a road map for advancing practice and policy in support of this work. Next steps under consideration by NOCD-NY include the development of a tool kit for practitioners and a technical assistance program to enhance the capacity of nonprofit groups to do this work and building and strengthening alliances at the city and state level to support this work.

With regard to policy making in support of this work, New York City's leadership transition in 2014 offers a ripe moment for NOCD-NY to step up its advocacy efforts for a more favorable policy environment in which this work can flourish. To that end, NOCD-NY is developing a set of values-based policy recommendations about how the city can strengthen naturally occurring cultural districts and local cultural economies, including ways the city can create more opportunities for cultural reuse of urban space. NOCD-NY's policy recommendations were initially developed by the working group and incorporate policy priorities identified through this collection's research process, presentations at 2012 city council hearings, and the "Spacing Out 2" interagency roundtable held in April 2013. A forum led by NOCD-NY, "From the Neighborhood Up: A Citywide Forum on Culture and Community," held in May 2013 at El Museo del Barrio, provided an opportunity for artists and arts and cultural groups to generate policy priorities that shaped and refined NOCD-NY's policy recommendations. In the coming months, NOCD-NY will broadly share this policy platform at relevant public hearings, mayoral candidate forums, and new city leadership overseeing policy making related to use of public space.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

LYNN STERN is writer and consultant with a passion for strengthening the role of arts and culture for social change. In her consulting practice, Lynn works with foundations and nonprofit arts and culture organizations on grantmaking, program development and evaluation. Clients include: Ford Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Trust for Mutual Understanding, Creative Capital Foundation, Media Impact Funders (formerly Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media), and Brooklyn Academy of Music. She has written case studies and monographs for the Americans for the Arts' Animating Democracy Initiative and The Business of the Arts monograph series published by Nonprofit Finance Fund. Prior to consulting, Lynn was senior program officer at the Surdna Foundation, where she managed its $8.25M culture portfolio with national grantmaking in arts-based economic development, arts and social change, community-engaged design, and teens' artistic and cultural advancement. Fluent in Russian, Lynn is a specialist in international cultural exchange with regional expertise in East and Central Europe and Russia.

NOCD NY.org

look for:
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