

OUTDOOR PUBLIC SPACE: LONG TERM

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Definition

From mis-used former dump sites or brownfields to under-used 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, artwork and the public.

Key components

- Public space is leased, purchased or managed by nonprofit organizations through an agreement formalized with public agencies or landlord. Ownership may be held by a nonprofit, a city or a business entity.
- Nonprofit organizations and artists work in coordination with other community and public sector stakeholders.
- The best of these collaborations encourage mutually respectful and inclusive interaction between artists, artwork and the public
- Arrangements are long term, not permanent. Leases can require re-negotiation; contracts may be altered or severed and stakeholders can change, leave or be added.

Key Learnings

- Unused open space exists throughout the city, but it takes dedicated organizational and/or civic leadership to take the lead on purchasing, leasing or creating management agreements to enable space to be used for arts purposes.
- Local elected officials are overwhelmingly supportive of outdoor public space being reclaimed for arts use (as long as late night use is banned or limited); it is recognized as a stabilizing and unifying force in community development.
- For maximum usage, space coordinators or managers need to develop and execute a multi-pronged approach to respond to the needs of local residents and to welcome visitors and cultural tourists in the form of maps, transportation information and material on other neighborhood resources or activities.
- At their best, public events and classes that are part of public art projects should consider both new and longtime neighborhood residents and be programmed for different constituencies (e.g., evening films for a younger crowd and Saturday morning classes for families.) For neighborhoods that have experienced significant demographic change, programs or exhibits should be developed that speak to all members of the community.
- Positive and regular communication among stakeholders is essential to maintain and sustain successful initiatives.

Open Questions

- How can successful projects be replicated? How can those who have gone through the long and arduous steps required to build broad-based coalitions that revitalize abandoned spaces or produce successful events in unexpected spaces pass along what they have learned to others?
- How can community groups with strong relationships with public agencies share their experience with other groups who are either new to developing these connections or stymied by less positive relationships?
- How can public agencies with collaborative arrangements with nonprofits develop, replicate or formalize aspects of those relationships for other projects?
- How can groups move from capital funds for purchase or renovation to securing the operational support necessary to maintain their space and keep it available and active?
- Given the many years required to transform a space, how can funders be convinced of the importance of multi-year support?

Case Study Example

THE POINT CDC's Riverside Campus is a hub of creativity and environmentally-motivated activity built on the site of a former brownfield—land that was used for industrial purposes, was polluted and was then abandoned. Purchased by THE POINT CDC with federal funding from HUD and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the campus is an early stop on the South Bronx Greenway plan, envisioned to bring the community an array of arts and environmental programming that emphasizes increased access to the Bronx River waterfront. Current tenants include *Rocking the Boat* (which teaches boat building, boating skills and environmental restoration) as well as THE POINT CDC's *Urban Farming Home Garden* and *Brick House Studio*. *The Art Container*, a NEA-sponsored gallery is scheduled to open soon. The Riverside Campus hosted student workshops for a Groundswell Community Mural Project this summer, in collaboration with the Majora Carter Group. The Campus is part of the Hunts Point Reinvisioning Project, a comprehensive planning, organizing and revitalization initiative to improve economic health through environmentally sound development that maximizes open space use. The POINT and its tenants are part of The Bronx River Alliance, which works to improve conditions in the South Bronx.

Additional Examples and Reference Points

- **Socrates Sculpture Park**, Queens, NYC (<http://www.socratessculpturepark.org>)
- **Coney Island USA**, Brooklyn, NYC (<http://www.coneyisland.com>)