

Definition

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 underutilized and present unique opportunities for arts programming and use. Unfortunately, they can also present unique challenges in navigating the complicated relationships of city agencies and regulations.

Key components

- Publicly-owned spaces for arts use may include vacant buildings, dormant spaces, under programmed spaces, spaces serving a single purpose that could be serving multiple purposes and public buildings not yet built that could include an arts function.
- These spaces may be managed by one or a combination of the following: Department of Building Services, contracted property managers, building's primary user (library, school, senior center, etc) and other City Departments as relevant (Aging, Education, Transportation, etc).
- Examples of single use partnerships:
 - A library with a room designed for use by community arts groups
 - An arts organization that shares space with a New York City public school
 - A museum that began with exhibits in senior centers, libraries and a school building
 - A city arts agency programming performing arts in spaces inside and outside of City Hall
 - A local arts council creating a cultural space and gallery in a ferry terminal
- Examples of larger initiatives:
 - A city arts agency placing artists in residencies in senior centers
 - A nonprofit started by the city to identify underutilized city owned spaces to turn into artist work spaces
 - A local activist working with city agencies and their staff to produce and display art in city office buildings and City Hall
 - A dance company that has produced performances in empty pools across the city

Key Learnings

- Relationships with City staff members: A large investment of time and resources into developing relationships with city staff is critical. While political buy-in at the top can help smooth the process, city staffers are the ones who actually carry out the work and can make sure you are connecting with the right people and fulfilling all requirements.
- Clarity of Expectations for Artists: Because they may not be designed for arts uses, many of these spaces require creative thinking and adaptation. Before encouraging artists to use

the space, all requirements and limitations should be laid out to ensure everyone is clear about what is possible.

- Demonstration Projects: It may be difficult for some stakeholders to imagine how a space may be used in a nontraditional manner. Before investing in a large project, it helps to do a small project in the space that can show its potential and help get leaders, agencies, and the community on board.

Open Questions

- How can cities improve their capacity to respond to unusual space use requests?
- How can cities improve the ability of outsiders (and insiders!) to determine who they need to speak with to get their project completed?

Case Study Example

Seniors Partnering with Artists Citywide. In 2009, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), in concert with local arts councils, piloted a program that placed artists in residencies in senior centers. As the program has evolved over the years, DCA has learned a number of lessons about managing expectations. In the beginning, artists had trouble with the short hours available for using the space, the lack of storage or private space, language barriers and the difficulty of programming against popular activities such as lunch and bingo. This led to frustration by artists that they were not able to get work done. However, by clarifying the parameters of each available space, recommending that artists' projects incorporate the seniors, and providing a stipend and materials budget, DCA has helped to create a viable program that can provide affordable space to artists while increasing the vitality of local senior centers.

Additional Examples and Reference Points

- **Kensington Library**, Brooklyn, NYC (<http://bradlander.com/sites/default/files/images/Culture%20-%20Kensington%20Library%20final%20online.pdf>), with a room designed for use by community arts groups
- **Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education**, Bronx, NYC (<http://www.casita.us>), an arts organization that shares space with a New York City Public School
- **City of Philadelphia Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy "City Hall Presents,"** Philadelphia, PA (<http://cityhallpresents.creativephl.org>), a city agency programming performing arts in spaces inside and outside of City Hall
- **Staten Island Arts "Culture Lounge,"** Staten Island, NYC (<http://statenilandarts.org/culture-lounge.html>), a local arts council creating a cultural space and gallery in a ferry terminal