



THE IMAGINING

SATURDAY, JULY 12TH, 2014

ST. LOUIS BRANCH OF THE USDAC

On Saturday, July 12th, the St. Louis Field Office of the United States Department of Arts and Culture held an Imagining at the Community Arts and Movement Project (CAMP) on Cherokee street. 65 people signed in at the door and, additionally, many community members attended the event. The event proceeded with performances, discussions, and creation, culminating in an opportunity to network and continue the imagining process.



Agenda for the
Imagining:

Performance by
CHIPS

Open Space
Discussions

Spoken Word
Reflection

Group Creation

Networking and
Reception

**ST. LOUIS BRANCH
OF THE USDAC**

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WHAT IS THE USDAC?

NOT a governmental agency.

Definitely is a democracy in action—citizens standing up for something they want to see happening!

Many individuals have been involved in shaping this initiative and you're included!

WHAT DOES THE USDAC DO?

Local Initiatives: Cultural agents—ours is Roseann!—have been charged with inviting Citizen Artists to tackle local issues through creative means.

“Imagings” are the first step.

Translocal Infrastructure: USDAC website will connect communities across the country to build solidarity and collective power

National Imagination: the USDAC will offer policy suggestions and visions for the world to see.

The day began and CAMP was full of individuals from all walks of life — community members, businessmen, artists—who were present and ready to imagine a brighter future. Guests enjoyed the opportunity to make “future self-portraits”, take silly photos with their imaginations in our photo booth, enjoy refreshments, and get ready to being the process of



imagining: “what would our world look like in 2034 if the arts were central to our civic, personal, and professional lives?” A call to action from our Cultural Agent, Roseann Weiss, brought us to attention. Following, a performance from CHIPS, led by their fearless leader Kathy Bentley, inspired everyone, young and old, to recognize the importance of culture and the arts in all that we do.



CHIPS Performing the USDAC's Manifesto



Stephen introducing Open Space

After CHIPS performed, Con Christeson and Stephen Houldsworth used Open Space Technology to facilitate discussion. The participants began with a few minutes of silence in which they could think about and write down their ideas for discussion topics. Then, individuals presented topics that they would like to lead discussions on, and four spaces emerged. Each of these categories became a “space” in which individuals could discuss that topic, and if they’d like, individuals were free at any time to depart their space and enter a new discussion. This allowed for “cross-pollination” of ideas, and allowed individuals to get whatever they wanted out of the discussions. Though each space had a unique topic, all were centered on our question of the day: “what would our world look like in 2034 if the arts were central to our civic, personal, and professional lives?”

One space discussed the importance of incorporating arts into in schools. The participants felt that the arts aren’t emphasize in education because they aren’t seen as important. We seem to value individuals that can “think out of the box” but fail to see the connection between that characteristic and arts practice. They brainstormed ideas about how to go about changing this perception, and believe that arts in schools should be a curriculum item opposed to an after school club. Students need to demand this, opposed to relying on parents or teachers to do it. However, the students need support. It needs to become a curriculum requirement opposed to an after school activity

or a club. It likely needs to be a grassroots movement that makes it happen, but it needs to get teachers and administrators on board. The group expressed the belief that there is research being done and more could be done to concretely represent these ideas. Once that has been done and those studies are believed, then it can become a tradition to have arts in schools.

Another space focused on the topic “closing the separation between opposing ideas” and “turning ideas into realities.” This seemingly abstract topic brought about discussion on the importance of building relationships and finding common investments among community members. The group found that this could create a more cohesive community and break down stereotyping enforced by today’s media. They also discussed the importance of arts education and believe the USDAC could help make art more accessible, both in this way and helping to change the standards of “high art”. They believe that this will open communication, teach empathy among people who share multiple perspectives, and promote a healthy amount of civic discourse and civic disobedience where people listen to opposing ideas, diversity among these people and their ideas is celebrated, and change is a welcomed as a natural part of a community's growth process.



Imaginors considering the spaces

A third space began their conversation around the dynamics that exist between artists and art therapists. Some within the group made note that there is a noticeable lack of resources, both in terms of space and funding, for programs and projects that may exist somewhere between community or collaborative art and art therapy. One particular fact mentioned was about funding streams, like The Regional Arts Commission, that do not fund art therapy projects. This also relates to clinical and medical foundations that fail to offer funding for art based programs and projects. Members imagined and discussed ways they and their networks might overcome these obstacles. The group also touched



Open Space Discussion

on how networks can interact in positive and negative ways. For example, experiences of members feeling ‘un-welcomed’ in certain art programming spaces were mentioned. This relates to the discussion of the previous group, and how working to increase empathy is key. The group found that multi-disciplinary arts programs to be used in a holistic approach to art therapy, finding ways to build the right narratives about why it is important to fund art therapy programs to funders of both arts and mental health, and opening up more dialogues between artists, clinicians, therapists, and community members on how to build art therapy programs in the city of Saint Louis.

The fourth and final space discussed how we can create a space and place for new and upcoming artists to present themselves as working. This also included a discussion of network building for artists and employers. The

group discussed how art is generally not seen as a “profession” and therefore often doesn’t gain the kind of monetary value that would make an artist a living salary. Brainstorming ideas towards this end, the group discussed a potential website that could function as both a “Craigslist” and an “Angie’s List” for both individuals hiring artists and artists themselves. This led to a discussion about how these things are already happening in St. Louis but more collaboration needs to be done to make these resources accessible. The discussion led to a discussion of marketing and business skills that artists sometimes lack that would allow them to be more successful.

The group also discussed the necessity of artists increasing their social capital, or becoming more visible and powerful in society. This linked nicely, as both related to the undervalued position of arts and artists in society. The group felt that if arts were covered on the news for even half the amount of time that sports were, that people would think it was more interesting. Additionally, the suggestion arose that artists need to be pointed in making their art part of a marketable “story” that the news networks could use.

The final and most important point brought up in this group was the idea of “what do we do now?” One group member felt that often these events occur without enough consideration of the next steps and, though imagining is nice, that in and of itself will not get the job done. He encouraged the group to exchange cards and phone numbers in order to maintain contact and continue meeting to discuss the future of the ideas they came up with.

When Open Space concluded, Fannie Leiby, Vynetta Morrow, and Cheeraz Gormon then presented their creative report from the imaginations gathered upon participants' entries, as well as information they had gathered from observing the open space discussions. The day concluded with a collective call-to-action, led by Dyneisha Bonner, and a group-created song and dance. Finally, the group enjoyed refreshments and each other's company.



Cheeraz Gormon, Vynetta Morrow, and Fannie Leiby



Liza Butts presenting her Open Space notes



Community members posing with intern Julia Belsky

PHOTO BOOTH!





