

Teaching Creative Districts to Uncover their Past

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The Purpose

Colorado Creative Districts celebrate a community's distinct and unique character. Much of this work is achieved through art and creative industries. However, it is also a guiding principle that certified Creative Districts incorporate their cultural heritage into planning efforts in order to help preserve and promote Colorado's heritage. Districts must be able to capture their unique story, which according to CCI Standards, might include "history, the people(s) who have lived in the place, the unique style of the place as reflected in architecture, historical identification, streetscape, events and/or marketing."

By definition, Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artifacts (cultural property) and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generation. Cultural heritage includes tangible culture (such as building, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art, and artifacts), intangible culture (such as folklore, traditions, language, and knowledge), and natural heritage (including culturally significant landscapes, and biodiversity). The "story" conveys the unique and authentic identity of the community or district. It is a coordinated message conveyed to travelers about the resources and special intrinsic qualities that it promotes.

A Cultural Heritage Workshop, as created by members of the Professional Advisory Network (PAN), can assist Creative District boards in identifying their cultural heritage or "story." The goal of the workshop is to help each Creative District board bring the heritage and cultural community to the table for a discussion of the community's "story." What follows is a description of the process used for the Greeley Creative District (GCD).

The Preparation

An initial meeting with the Greeley Creative District board took place in November 2013. The board provided background information about the district, its boundaries, work plan, and a list of current activities. The GCD took the PAN Advisors on a comprehensive tour of the district prior to the workshop. This helped the advisors get a sense of the area, the history, and potential challenges.

The PAN advisors asked the GCD staff to put together a mailing list of potential workshop participants who would be interested in attending a workshop to discuss the history of Greeley. The GCD staff was given this task as an initial exercise in building a new constituency for district activities. The PAN team believed it was better that the invitation come from the district rather than an out of town consultant. Board members were also asked to help identify people who might be interested participants.

An invitation was e-mailed to everyone on the mailing list and follow up calls and flyers helped reach a wide audience of potential participants. Workshop participants should include at least one representative of as many local historical and cultural groups as there are within the community. This might include staff from the local history or other type museum(s), the local library, Historic Preservation Commission, historical society, local history buffs or storytellers, teachers (public school as well as higher education), anyone who could represent various cultural and/or ethnic groups, and long time residents and families.

The Greeley session had close to 35 participants, but it is not necessary to have such a large group. Anywhere from 10-20 participants will also work. The advisors felt that three hours would be required for the workshop, and suggested that the board determine the best time of day. In Greeley, the session took place in the morning, but late afternoon also works if a majority of people have other jobs. Refreshments are helpful but not required.

Invitees were asked in advance to think about their perception of Greeley's "Sense of Place" and/or "Sense of the Soul." They were told to consider the following:

- Historic Building and sites
- Community groups (ethnic, agricultural, cultural)
- Community traditions
- People and their individual stories
- Meaningful places
- Community Stories
- Festivals and celebrations
- Archeological and paleontology sites
- Geology
- Natural and scenic places
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Recreational
- Heritage food/beverages
- Local stewardship organizations

The Workshop

On the day of the workshop, the room was set up with six tables, with 5-6 chairs at each. Flip charts or large sheets of paper and pens were provided at each table. Board members were asked to serve as facilitators at each table but were also allowed to participate in the discussion. PAN advisors circulated among the tables and asked/answered questions as needed.

The session began with a brief introduction from the GCA board about the Creative District Program, the Greeley district and its activities. After introducing the PAN team, an ice breaker question was circulated as the first activity. The question, to be answered on note cards, asked the following:

“If you could go back in time, what person, place or event in Greeley’s history would you like to visit? “

Each person in the room was asked to introduce themselves, tell a little bit about why they came to the meeting, and then tell the group about their person, place, or event. While somewhat time consuming, this exercise allowed everyone to get to know each other a bit more, and also learn about interesting aspects of Greeley history that they may not have been familiar with prior to the meeting.

Following the introductions, the participants got to work on answering the first of six specific questions, with the discussion taken down on newsprint by note takers at each table.

1. What are the key historic buildings, sites, artifacts and meaningful places in the Greeley Creative District area?

2. List Greeley's present arts, cultural and recreational assets.
3. What are Greeley's main celebrations, events, festivals and community traditions?
4. Who are the individual people and community groups that have influenced Greeley's history & heritage?
5. What natural & scenic places, geology, landscapes, archeology and paleontology sites have shaped the Greeley area?
6. What makes Greeley unique, makes it different and sets it apart from other communities?

Participants were given roughly 10 minutes per question. Notes were collected at the end of each ten minute period and responses tabulated by the advisors. Participants were also asked to move to a different table after each question in order to create new mini-focus groups and to avoid the potential of having one or two people dominate the entire discussion. With a smaller group of participants, it may not be necessary to move around, or to wait for other tables to complete each question.

By the time the groups had completed the six questions, the advisors had assembled a tally sheet of the top three to five items mentioned by each table under each category. With a smaller group, the discussion at each table can include the identification of the three most important places, people, events, etc. for each question. The wrap up discussion included a brief conversation about the tallied results.

The Outcome

Participants become a history focus group and with their input, an inventory of heritage resources is created that the Creative District board can build on as it moves forward with its strategic plan. Another benefit may result in the creation of some new connections within the cultural and heritage community.

In the case of Greeley, the advisors noted the following results:

- A. *The board gained an understanding of the importance of tying history to their efforts within the district – identifying key themes of agriculture, unique people*
- B. *The board gained an understanding of the need to connect the three distinct areas within the district; water is an important theme and the ditch which travels throughout much of the district could be developed as a primary link between the three areas.*
- C. *The board identified new partners to include in planning events – key events include the Jazz series, Chautauqua, Farm to Table*

At a follow up meeting with the GCA board seven months after the workshop, the board reported that they had achieved their certification with CCI as a Creative District, and that plans were underway for "AgriCulture Fest & Feast" in August, celebrating the agricultural heritage and cultural connections in the community. Discussions were also underway with some of the various cultural and heritage groups to create an annual event highlighting the historic ditch that connects the three zones of the creative district.

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