#ARTPLACESUMMIT: EFFECTIVE PARTNERING, STARTING WITH VALUES, GOALS, AND VISION

NOVEMBER 8, 2017
By: Lyz Crane, Deputy Director

Fieldbuilding, Community Dev Investments, Partnerships, ArtPlace Summit, Elected Officials, Arts organizations
Collaborative community practice between artists and community development organizations is a foundational aspect of creative placemaking. But how many of us are actually very good at it? With this question in mind, ArtPlace invited the Center for Performance and Civic Practice (https://www.thecpcp.org/) to host a breakout session at our 2017 Summit focused on “Effective Partnering: Starting with Values, Goals, and Vision.”

The truth is, when most of us think about the art of partnerships, we often think of them as external processes, with the challenges and stumbling blocks arising from poor communications, difficult power dynamics, or capacity gaps. And yet, many organizations fail to realize that partnership challenges often begin internally: with a lack of shared understanding within an organization of values, goals, and vision BEFORE beginning a new relationship.
The Center for Performance and Civic Practice (CPCP) (https://www.thecpcp.org/) has been testing out this theory through its work with ArtPlace's Community Development Investments (https://www.artplaceamerica.org/our-work/community-development-investments/introduction) participants. Many of these community development organizations have gone through a CPCP-led workshop that helps them to gain greater staff-wide clarity on their values and intentions, so that they can more effectively communicate and structure opportunities with new arts partners and artists. During the collaborative discovery process as their staff generates a shared understanding of their values and goals, they are often able to explore potential tensions – for example, how might the values of humility and vision occasionally work at odds, and how might that create new challenges when bringing a partner to the table and setting expectations around external communications about success.

Additionally, in the full workshop, the participants get to experience a real-time demonstration of artists and staff going through a guided inquiry process around exploring and generating ideas around key tactical goals for an organization. This process allows non-arts staff to learn more about artistic practice (for example, non-arts folks may not know that many artists go through a deep research and discovery period in their process – how might this skill set or creative inquiry process help identify new angles on an issue for a community organization?) and also to see how artistic practice can directly benefit something they wake up every day thinking about (how can an arts-based strategy help me get the attention of the local city government to gain site control of a key community asset?).

Moreover, in addition to building capacity around providing clear values and goals-based starting points for partnerships, these workshops are also valuable tools to generate the internal buy-in that is often needed when taking on new work - in this case that of working with new arts-based partners.

At the ArtPlace Summit, the staff of CPCP – Michael Rohd, Soneela Nankani, and Shannon Scrofano (https://www.artplaceamerica.org/summit-2017-presenters); all working artists in addition to their role with the Center – led
attendees through a sped-up demonstration of how these workshops unfold, and explained throughout why they have been so powerful as a foundation in what CPCP refers to as “arts-based community-led transformation.”

While not everyone in the room was coming from a similar kind of community development organization, many participants from arts organizations, individual artists, and other organizations felt a resonance with the idea of getting your house in order before inviting guests. For example, one concept that CPCP has developed and championed that can help artists communicate more effectively about their work is to understand their own process along a spectrum of engaged artistic practice:

- **Studio practice:** Artists make their own work and engage with neighbors/residents as audience
- **Social practice:** Artists work with neighbors/residents on an artist-led vision that involves some level of community participation and an intention of social impact outside traditional audience experience
- **Civic practice:** Artists co-design project with neighbors and residents; the spoken intention is to serve a community's/public partner's self-defined needs

ArtPlace often finds this framework useful to share with practitioners interested in creative placemaking as it can help identify important questions around ‘Who Decides, Who Benefits, and What are the Stakes’ in any arts-based project. Artists, arts partners, and even non-arts partners who go into a project with a clear sense of where on the spectrum the included artistic practice lies can immediately help all partners make more informed decisions about who should be involved, how should decisions be made, and how to ensure everyone is in alignment around the intended impacts – questions that are often at the heart of successful collaborative practice.

Overall, we're grateful to CPCP for putting together such an engaging session to provide ideas and tools that can improve collaborative practice from its very foundations. And, the session was a great reminder that the next time you seek to embark on a new partnership, take a few moments and ask yourself – does my organization (or do I) have a clear sense of our own values,
goals, and vision? If the answer is no, you may be saving your collaborative relationships a lot of headaches by spending some time working internally first!

To read more about CPCP’s work on core capacities in arts-based community-led transformation, check out their recent blog (http://www.thecpcp.org/field-notes/2017/9/6/the-questions-we-ask) on this subject.