Evaluating Creative Community Development:

A Learning Brief

Credits & Acknowledgments

Success Measures Project Team:

Nancy Kopf - Director, Success Measures Evaluation Services, NeighborWorks America

Jessica Mulcahy - Director, Success Measures Philanthropic Evaluation Strategies, NeighborWorks America

Helen Moore - Senior Specialist, Equitable Evaluation, Success Measures, NeighborWorks America

Calece Johnson - Manager, Evaluation & Special Projects, NeighborWorks America

Tobi Lippin - Tobi Lippin Consulting

Beckah Terlouw - Invisible Strategy Consulting

Publication Production:

Linda Kahn - Editor, Success Measures, NeighborWorks America

Elissa Schloesser - Graphic Design, Visual Voice

We appreciate the participation in the pilot project by the following organizations:

Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids
Grand Rapids, MI

Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation
Houston, TX

NeighborGood Partners (formerly NCALL)
Dover, DE

NeighborWorks Alaska
Anchorage, AK

NeighborWorks New Horizons
New Haven, CT

NewVue Communities
Fitchburg, MA

Ponce Neighborhood Housing Services
Ponce, Puerto Rico

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership
Slayton, MN

The evaluation tools discussed in this report are available for download and use in your community:
 Success Measures Creative Community Development Evaluation Tools

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Creative community development is the use of arts, culture, and creative expression to enhance community development and engagement.[1] Creative community development is a key placemaking and placekeeping strategy in the field of community building.[2] While the terminology of creative community development is more recent, the work itself is not—many communities and community organizations have a deep and rich history of embedding arts and culture into their community building strategies. Creative community development work can take on many forms, from culturally relevant murals that beautify and demonstrate community history to musical or poetry performances that highlight local artists. In the context of community development, arts and culture strategies are used to support an array of community change efforts related to deepening connections among people in a community, revitalizing a particular area or district, increasing economic opportunities for artists and improving overall quality of life for people in a place. Organizations doing creative community development work seek to understand the impact of the effort, as well as the difference made by approaching community development through the arts and culture lens. As the understanding and use of creative community development continues to grow and evolve, new ways of capturing change and progress through evaluation are needed.

---

1   https://www.neighborworks.org/Documents/Community_Docs/Revitalization_Docs/CreativeCommunityDevelopment_FinalReport2018.aspx

2   https://www.frbsf.org/community-development/publications/community-development-investment-review/2019/ november/building-capacity-for-creative-community-development/#:~:text=Creative%20community%20development%20 occurs%20when,tribal%20lands%2C%20cities%2C%20or%20regions

Much of the evaluation of this work has occurred over the past decade, most of it necessarily specific to the project or effort, and conducted by outside evaluators. The pilot undertaken in this project explored what it would take for organizations to carry out an outcome evaluation of an ongoing creative community development program with evaluation and resource support.

Creative Community Development and Evaluation

Evaluation allows organizations to analyze program activities, identify the intended outcomes, understand what did and did not work and provide the opportunity to improve and build upon the evaluation outcome. While evaluation of arts and culture work has been ongoing over the past ten years, community-based organizations that incorporated arts and culture programming and methodologies into their work called for additional frameworks and tools to understand this work within the broader context of community development. Between 2019 and 2021, Success Measures, an evaluation social enterprise at NeighborWorks America—a national intermediary in community development and affordable housing—worked with Americans for the Arts in an effort supported by The Kresge Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts to update and develop tools to evaluate the outcomes of creative community development work. The resulting Success Measures Creative Community Development Evaluation Tools include more traditional surveys and observations, as well as two new tools that use creative methods—weaving and mapmaking—to understand community change.

The Evaluation Opportunity

This opportunity was developed to support organizations in evaluating their creative community development work more holistically and to experiment embedding creative methods into their evaluative practice. Success Measures designed, planned, and implemented the eleven-month evaluation with eight organizations selected through an application process. All of these organizations (see list in the sidebar) are members of the NeighborWorks network, a group of nearly 250 nonprofits across the country working in every facet of community development. As organizations with a history of creative community development and previous training on evaluation, they were well positioned to not only implement an evaluation of an existing creative community development project, but also benefit from its outcome.

Many resources were offered to the organizations to support this effort. They were each paired with an evaluator who provided direct assistance throughout the entirety of the project, including helping to develop an evaluation plan, select and tailor the evaluation tools and analyze the data. This effort incorporated training on basic evaluation of arts and culture work through the NeighborWorks Training Institute, as well as access to the set Success Measures evaluation tools for creative community development and the Success Measures Data System to store and report on their findings. NeighborWorks America provided each organization a $15,000 grant to support staff and community engagement in the evaluation. This support enabled organizations to build their capacity to conceptualize and carry out an evaluation of an existing project

within their creative community development work. Additionally, organizations worked with a professional communications consultant to help translate their evaluation findings into products that were relevant and useful for organizations to share their work.

Participating Organizations

Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids
Grand Rapids, MI

Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation
Houston, TX

NeighborGood Partners (formerly NCALL)
Dover, DE

NeighborWorks Alaska
Anchorage, AK

NeighborWorks New Horizons
New Haven, CT

NewVue Communities
Fitchburg, MA

Ponce Neighborhood Housing Services
Ponce, Puerto Rico

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership
Slayton, MN

The Evaluation Focus and Creative Process

Participating organizations evaluated a wide range of arts and culture programs and events. Many organizations chose to evaluate a collection of activities that were part of a larger project focused on arts and culture programming. Some of these projects were concentrated on engaging and revitalizing a specific place, such as an historic downtown area or community center, while others were part of national special events weeks or programming by Artists-in-Residence. Other organizations chose to evaluate a single activity or event, which included mural projects, embedded art at a local nature trail and a community garden at an affordable housing community.

The evaluation was organized into three main phases: planning, implementation and learning. Supplementing the evaluation work itself, organizations participated in a reflection process at the end of each phase. This process included both an interview conversation to discuss the experience and a creative activity to capture participants' feelings about their journey. These reflection points were an intentional way to embed equitable evaluation practices and hear firsthand from both participating organizations and the evaluation practitioners how the opportunity and experience could be improved upon. Additionally, the reflection process provided an identified moment for organizations to pause and think through their experiences and learning—a rare opportunity for staff who are usually occupied planning and implementing programming. Following the first phase of work, organizations created an outcome map and evaluation plan and submitted photos of their arts and culture work as the reflection activity. Following implementation, organizations created a poem to describe their

experience. For the final reflection activity, organizations created digital illustrations of their journey's story, including graphic icons of obstacles and progress along the way. Additionally, organizations had an opportunity to work with their assigned evaluator and a communications professional to help articulate the outcomes of their evaluation work.

Navigating this Publication

This report focuses on the experiences of participating organizations, their outcomes and what is needed to support this kind of work in the field. The experiences, challenges and insights of participant organizations are documented in order to help others who are exploring creative community development work and evaluation.

The three core sections of this report follow the phases of the evaluation:

1	2	3
Planning	Implementation	Learning

Each section includes both narrative description and products from the reflection activities, including quotes, photos, poems and illustrations. The publication ends with a final conclusion section that describes important next steps identified by the organizations and what it takes to do and support this kind of work. As the field of arts and culture work continues to grow, so should evaluation and its tools. Organizations throughout the process surfaced valuable insights about their experiences, including the importance of centering equity, which gives the field more clarity on what the path forward might look like.

The Impact of COVID-19

This evaluation began in early March 2022 as a virtual opportunity for organizations to evaluate their creative community development work. During the initial planning phase, conversations with organizations provided important insights into the realities of their circumstances trying to launch this initiative, many having been completely virtual for the previous year. Many organizations were in the early stages of restarting in-person events and programming, including their creative community development work—much of it having been put on hold to meet the immediate needs of their residents during the height of the pandemic.

While many of the organizations are still reeling from the impacts of the multi-year pandemic, they considered this evaluation an opportunity to reset and re-strategize their work. Some described the evaluation as a way to understand at a deeper level the new needs of residents and how their programming could help meet them. Others considered the evaluation as a chance to embed evaluative processes into their community engagement work moving forward. Organizations saw their creative community development work as an opportunity to help residents reconnect, and this evaluation specifically as a tool to further support how that happens now and in the future.

EVALUATION PLANNING

Participants were selected for this evaluation opportunity through an application process. As part of this process, organizations were asked to describe why they were interested in evaluating their creative community development efforts. Once the cohort was set, the eight organizations participated in a kick-off meeting which outlined the initial planning steps of the evaluation. For this first phase, organizations were asked to select the arts program they wanted to evaluate and then create an outcome map and evaluation plan to help guide efforts for this pilot project. Organizations created their outcome maps and evaluation plans with an assigned evaluation support provider and participated in a reflection process to discuss their hopes and goals for the evaluation.

This section of the report highlights each participating organization, presenting their organization's mission and overall work, with photos and descriptions of their arts programming, evaluation focus and what they hoped to learn.

Evaluation Support and Resources

Evaluators helped organizations understand how they would conduct their evaluation by using a template to create an outcome map and evaluation plan. In this context, an outcome map is a tool used to articulate a particular program strategy, in this case the creative community development project being evaluated, and then map that strategy to short-, mid- and long-term outcomes. The evaluation plan operationalized the specific outcomes organizations wanted to measure into clear next steps, outlining the data collection tools to be used as well as an implementation plan and timeline. Evaluation support providers met with organizations in 1-1 meetings to create their outcome map, discuss the creative community development tools offered by Success Measures, and choose and map the appropriate tools onto their evaluation plan.

Reflection Activities by Organizations

After completing their outcome maps and evaluation plans, organizations participated in a reflection conversation to discuss their organization's work, their experience with evaluation and creative community development, what they chose to evaluate and their overall hopes for the process. In addition to the reflection conversation, organizations were asked to submit photos of their arts and culture programming; these are included throughout this section.

Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids, MI

dwellingplacegr.org

> **Dwelling Place evaluated two of their creative community development initiatives—the Heartside Historic Murals and an Artist-in-Residence program—hoping to measure the mural's impact on resident belonging and identity and to practice new ways of collecting robust data.**

Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids believes that all residents deserve a healthy place to live and thrive, which includes a community that embraces diversity and provides equitable access to quality affordable housing, regardless of income. The organization owns and manages over 1,500 affordable homes and apartments in addition to providing essential support services and programs to catalyze neighborhood revitalization in Michigan. Community partnership and resident leadership is at the core of Dwelling Place's neighborhood investments and projects. Dwelling Place has fully integrated arts and culture into its work which includes community safety initiatives, increasing the quality and accessibility to greenspaces, and creating training and employment opportunities for residents.

Dwelling Place serves the Grand Rapids area which sits along the Grand River in West Michigan. The Heartside Historic District, where the organization's arts efforts are currently focused, was

One of Dwelling Place's Artist-in Residence members leading a panel discussion on access through music at the "IDK What You Know" community listening experience event.

historically home to low-income and working class families until the 1900s when manufacturing moved into the neighborhood. As manufacturing left the city, buildings were abandoned and forgotten. Since the 1990s, Heartside has undergone significant revitalization and development efforts. Through Dwelling Place's neighborhood revitalization efforts, the organization works with residents to bring life to vacated buildings, increase accessibility, and make neighborhoods a comfortable place to live where residents feel connection and belonging.

Residents listening to panel discussion at the "IDK What You Know" event.

Dwelling Place currently has two creative community development initiatives: the Heartside Historic Murals and an Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program. The Heartside Historic Murals is a project born out of resident feedback. Done in collaboration with six local artists, it centers the untold stories of Indigenous, Native, Black, Brown and Queer communities through mural installations. Heartside is one of the areas of Grand Rapids that became home to many low-income immigrants, and the Heartside Historic District houses many historically significant buildings. Through this project, Dwelling Place hoped to connect residents to the creative culture of their community and increase awareness of the neighborhood's history.

In addition to the Heartside Historic Murals, the organization has been working on place-based artwork opportunities for local artists to dive creatively and intentionally into themes such as social justice, urban design and history. As a result, the organization launched the AIR program in 2021 for local Grand Rapids Artists to create place-based artwork and events. The AIR program was intended as an opportunity for local artists to expand the existing culture of creative community development throughout the Grand Rapids area and connect with the community their work was centering. Since the AIR program's onset, the organization has collaborated with three artists to host events and programs related to the arts. AIR programming included work in community gardens, a photography exhibit showcasing residents in community greenspaces, and an "I Don't Know What You Know" event, where residents came together to have deep and meaningful conversations about community-identified topics. The collection and diversity of the organization's arts and culture work was intended to increase the community's sense of belonging and strengthen neighborhood connectedness and identity.

This evaluation presented a unique opportunity for Dwelling Place and their long-standing history of creative community development. By evaluating both the Heartside Historic Murals and AIR-led programming, performances and exhibits, the organization hoped the process would allow them to collect more robust data to identify trends and understand how best to move work forward. Additionally, the organization hoped to learn how to use new evaluation methods and measures related to the built environment to demonstrate the impact of place and measure community change. Overall, this evaluation served as a steppingstone for the organization to deepen their understanding of what is needed to fully capture how art catalyzes community change.

Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation

Houston, TX

fifthwardcrc.org

> **Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation evaluated a collection of creative community development programming throughout the Historic Fifth Ward District to better understand resident needs and guide their future arts and culture programming.**

Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation (Fifth Ward CRC) seeks to enhance the quality of life for all residents in Houston's Historic Fifth Ward. The corporation's vision for its historic district is to establish a beautiful place for residents to live, work, and play by creating a community of choice. Fifth Ward CRC started their journey in 1989 building homes and commercial development and has since expanded to other activities in service of their mission to stimulate opportunity and economic growth to ultimately foster a vibrant environment. Current services include home buying education programs, housing and financial counseling, foreclosure and default prevention counseling, affordable housing development and management, and small business technical assistance. Additionally, their community building and engagement work has more recently expanded to include investments into the district's arts and culture scene, such as the revitalization of the DeLuxe Theater, the establishment of the JAM performance space, and the annual Lyons Avenue Renaissance Festival which showcases the community's progress.

Musical performance at the 2018 Lyons Avenue Renaissance Festival.

The Fifth Ward community sits northeast of downtown Houston and has historically been home to working-class African American families. In 2020, the Fifth Ward neighborhood was designated as a State Cultural Arts District by the Texas Commission on the Arts. Since then, Fifth Ward CRC has partnered with the city and local organizations to plan and implement arts and culture programming that makes Fifth Ward a center for African American culture by acknowledging the community's rich and diverse history. The organization's work in Fifth Ward celebrates the neighborhood's historic heritage by providing inclusive arts

and culture activities to build community pride. Guided by a comprehensive arts plan developed in collaboration with local artists, community members, organizations and leaders, Fifth Ward CRC implements arts-based developments and programs to strengthen community well-being.

For this effort, the organization evaluated a collection of creative community development programming at their restored DeLUXE Theater and throughout the historic Fifth Ward Cultural Arts District such as the Lyons Avenue Renaissance Festival. The DeLUXE Theater is a historic cornerstone on Lyons Avenue in the arts district. Historically known as the neighborhood's premier Black theater, the building sat vacant for over 40 years, until Fifth Ward CRC purchased it in 2015 to restore and create a performing and visual arts facility. Since then, Fifth Ward CRC, local organizations and community members have used the space to provide creative experiences for all residents. The

Face painting and performance by Batala Houston, a community-based percussion band, at the 2018 Lyons Avenue Renaissance Festival.

Lyons Avenue Renaissance Festival is an event that celebrates history, art and culture through live-music stages filled with blues, hip hop, rock, gospel and other acts. In the organization's arts and culture work, Fifth Ward CRC partners with the Houston Arts Alliance, the City of Houston, and national and local artists to provide opportunities for community engagement, improve resident quality of life and nurture new artists and community groups. Through events and programming that center the arts and culture history of Fifth Ward, the organization aims to connect resident relationships across different racial and ethnic backgrounds while also increasing community awareness around the history of Fifth Ward and strengthening community engagement and identity.

Given the organization's pause on arts and culture programming due to COVID-19, Fifth Ward CRC's creative community development work is still in its early stages, making this evaluation an opportunity to guide their future direction and programming. The organization's hope for this evaluation was to have it inform the direction of their creative programmatic work and understand how to use quantitative data to support broader community change. Through this evaluation the organization also hoped to gain a better understanding of how their arts and culture programming in the Fifth Ward district was being accessed by residents, since many of those who attend Fifth Ward events come from outside the neighborhood. These evaluation findings will give Fifth Ward CRC an opportunity to be more proactive and intentional about its engagement work. The organization's goal is to provide opportunities for families to be part of community change—with this evaluation as an important step toward that goal.

NeighborGood Partners (formerly NCALL)

Dover, DE

neighborgoodpartners.org

> NeighborGood Partners focused its evaluation on its programmatic work occurring during two special events weeks—NeighborWorks Week and Art Heals Week—to understand how to increase resident engagement.

NeighborGood Partners, a nonprofit organization based in the state capital, serves communities in the Delmarva Peninsula with affordable housing development, education, community development lending and technical assistance services for self-help housing. Formerly known as NCALL, the organization has helped more than 10,000 families become homeowners over the past 40 years. In addition to serving low-income families, the organization offers homebuyer counseling, financial education and default and foreclosure prevention programs, and collaborates with local nonprofits to develop equitable housing opportunities. Restoring Central Dover is one of the partnerships led by NeighborGood Partners in collaboration with other nonprofits, churches, government agencies, businesses and residents. With these community partners, NeighborGood Partners has implemented several strategies to revitalize Central Dover, including integrating arts and culture events and programs as part of their ongoing work.

With electric boxes often serving as unofficial social hubs and community meeting spaces, NeighborGood Partners worked with several community residents to paint the boxes with neighborhood themes.

NeighborGood Partners began their Restoring Central Dover (RCD) initiative in 2014 as a neighborhood revitalization effort focused on developing a strong community and improving quality of life among residents in the 75 blocks around the historic Loockerman Street commercial corridor. In partnership with community members, the RCD initiative's vision centers on three goals: strong communities (strengthening community cohesion across the Dover area), positive development (preserving existing affordable housing and ensuring equitable economic development), and integrated public realm and infrastructure (improving public and green infrastructure like transportation and open community spaces). The organization has incorporated creative community development as part of their work in the RCD initiative, engaging residents in a wide variety of creative arts and cultural programming. This work invites both adults and youths to participate in different ways to increase community engagement, strengthen social connection across communities and increase community care and resilience.

For this evaluation, NeighborGood Partners focused on its programmatic work during two special events weeks—NeighborWorks Week and Art Heals Week—which both included arts programming. For NeighborWorks Week, an annual week of service sponsored by NeighborWorks America, the organization offered in-person and virtual events such as paint night, classes for Zumba and making raised garden beds. During the Arts Heals Week, NeighborGood Partners hosted a variety of events including spoken word poetry performances, cook-off competitions, musical shows, dance programming and a memorial to honor those who have passed. These events were part of the broader RCD effort, using arts and culture as

an avenue for residents to connect with one another and work toward the RCD goal areas.

NeighborGood Partners hoped that this evaluation would help the organization understand how to increase resident engagement with the arts, and whether arts can serve as an entry point for residents to engage with NeighborGood Partners' other programmatic work. As the organization begins to reemerge from the pandemic pause and continue programmatic work, it hopes that this evaluation brings the organization a step closer to understanding what residents want to see and to increase community involvement. This evaluation presented NeighborGood Partners the opportunity to apply and incorporate its learning into future community engagement strategies, helping to guide and redirect arts and engagement toward resident-identified desires and needs.

A newly painted electric box in the Central Dover Area.

NeighborWorks Alaska
Anchorage, AK
nwalaska.org

> **NeighborWorks Alaska evaluated their Stories of Fish Creek interpretive sign project in the Spenard neighborhood to understand the impact on residents' sense of community and belonging.**

"Stories of Fish Creek" panels created by local artists to highlight the history, culture and people in the Spenard neighborhood.

NeighborWorks Alaska envisions a place where all residents can enjoy stable housing, thriving families and strong communities. To achieve this, NWAK believes that housing can serve as a catalyst for transformational community change. Along with providing affordable rental housing opportunities throughout Anchorage, the organization is dedicated to offering homeownership services and community engagement through avenues such as civic engagement, leadership development and resident services for all Alaskan residents. NeighborWorks Alaska works with community leaders and partner organizations to support resident-led projects that foster safe, healthy and strong neighborhoods.

NeighborWorks Alaska formally launched its creative community development work as part of its ongoing community engagement and resident services in 2021. Staff were able to take advantage of a professional training opportunity that introduced them to creative community development. They saw a direct link between the culture-oriented programming at the organization and arts and culture work overall. Since then, the organization has organized and implemented multiple creative community development initiatives, such as Mountain View Mural Walk and Stories of Fish Creek, an interpretive sign project along a neighborhood trail which the organization selected as the focus for this evaluation.

The Fish Creek Trail runs throughout Anchorage's Spenard neighborhood and has recently undergone rehabilitation to restore the local greenbelt trail which runs alongside the creek, making it more passable and accessible. The two-mile trail connects the Spenard neighborhood to six parks, two schools, a recreation center and more. Since the restoration, resident use of the trail has more than doubled. As part of the Stories

NeighborWorks Alaska partnered on a community initiative to replace a deteriorated and graffitied mural along this pocket park with a new welcoming Mountain View Mural Walk.

of Fish Creek project, residents installed six culturally relevant interpretive signs along the trail with the intention of increasing residents' sense of belonging and pride. These signs combined arts, nature and storytelling to bring new life to the greenspace that connects the rich history of the river and community to the residents of Spenard. The project was initiated by community members hoping to increase walkability, engagement and connections among residents and visitors alike to the rich culture and history of the town. These goals aligned with NeighborWorks Alaska's broader organizational goals on

multiple levels. Increased walkability could help residents feel safer and more connected to the community, increasing community pride and civic engagement. Additionally, this project was an opportunity for leadership development among the residents who volunteered.

The trail is the first creative community development project that NeighborWorks Alaska has helped to both plan and implement. They conducted the evaluation to better understand the impact of implementing the interpretive trail among volunteers, and to understand how it influenced resident engagement, community pride and overall trail use. NeighborWorks Alaska entered the evaluation effort intending to embed evaluation within their ongoing engagement work and to begin gathering data that would communicate the importance and impact of their efforts.

Residents in front of the Welcome to Mountain View mural.

NeighborWorks New Horizons
New Haven, CT

neighborworksnewhorizons.com

> **NeighborWorks New Horizons evaluated "Paint Me!", a preschool building's community mural project which was intended to engage residents, increase cohesion and bring attention to affordable childhood education programs.**

NeighborWorks New Horizons (NWNH) developed, owns and manages over 650 affordable housing and commercial units across New Haven, New London, and Fairfield County. With a mission to strengthen neighborhoods by developing quality, affordable homes and supporting community building initiatives, NWNH has been serving its community for over 25 years. As a respected housing organization and community engagement leader, NWNH provides homeownership counseling, budget coaching and renter readiness programming in addition to resident services such as leadership programs, community events and other workshops open to the public. The organization has worked in deep partnership with local organizations and funders to provide affordable and equitable housing opportunities to residents across New Haven, New London, and Fairfield County.

The organization has a history of creative community development, with a comprehensive revitalization program in

A "Paint Me!" participant and New Haven resident in front of the finished preschool mural.

Waterbury that involves a variety of stakeholders, including the Mattatuck Museum, a center of art and history that focuses on the Naugatuck Valley and Connecticut artists. Through public art installations, the revitalization program aimed to connect the neighborhood to the museum and other local stakeholders.

NeighborWorks New Horizons is located in the Fair Haven neighborhood, in the easternmost part of New Haven's city limits. While the city is known for its population of students and downtown shopping centers, many communities that surround the city center have been historically divested from the core through discriminatory policies and practices such as redlining and urban renewal. More recently the city has partnered with nonprofits and community organizations, including NWNH, to change the negative narrative about the city and create a community where people feel connected and have a sense of ownership and pride.

For this evaluation NWNH focused on creative engagement with residents in New Haven neighborhoods, including Fair Haven and Westville, and organized "Paint Me!", a community mural project on a daycare and preschool building which was once an operating mill along the West River. Beyond beautifying otherwise untouched walls, the project aimed to engage residents and create a sense of ownership and cohesion among residents. The art is also meant to be a conduit for community voice and reflect the backgrounds, nationalities and cultures of residents. For the preschool specifically, the organization wanted to increase awareness of affordable opportunities for early childhood education. By having the mural, NeighborWorks New Horizons hoped to increase visibility of the affordable education opportunities for families in the area. The organization engaged residents, small business owners and local artists to plan and implement a mural that reflected the identities within Westville and expand use of creative arts throughout the community.

NWNH wanted the evaluation to reflect its organizational mission to strengthen neighborhoods and to better understand how to implement an evaluation and interpret data to be meaningful to the community. Additionally, the organization used the evaluation process as an opportunity to step back, understand and reflect on their creative work—an important pause often missed by most community engagement practitioners due to the fast-paced and demanding nature of their work. The organization hopes to use this experience moving forward to launch its other creative work and share it beyond the specific communities currently served to expand impact.

New Haven residents working together to paint the mural and bring awareness to affordable early childhood education opportunities throughout the city.

NewVue Communities

Fitchburg, MA

newvuecommunities.org

NewVue evaluated their Activate Mill Street effort to understand how events and activities could be more representative of the community and preserve its culture.

The formal ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Activate Mill Street project showcasing resident murals in the newly renovated space.

Based in historic downtown Fitchburg and led by a community of diverse and dedicated residents, NewVue Communities serves 22 municipalities with a combined population of 240,000 residents throughout North Central Massachusetts. NewVue has a four-part approach for supporting the communities in its service area: homeownership services, supporting small business through technical assistance, developing and supporting community leaders through community organizing, and building safe, affordable housing. NewVue has embedded arts and culture work across its program areas, particularly within its leadership development efforts which are focused on stewarding resident projects and coalitions to drive community change.

Established along the Nashua River, Fitchburg was a mill town with factories for tools, clothes and paper. When industry left the city, many residents moved or were left unemployed. NewVue's creative community engagement work, ongoing now for more than a decade, began when community residents, coming together to clean the river polluted by industry, created murals along the water to honor local activists. NewVue formed the ReImagine North of Main coalition with its local partners, such as the City of Fitchburg, Fitchburg State University and the Fitchburg Art Museum, to make Fitchburg a gateway to arts and culture.

Residents participating in summertime "Salsa on the Riverfront."

NewVue brings arts and culture into much of their work, including Activate Mill Street, part of a broader revitalization effort with the ReImagine North of Main coalition to change the negative narrative and improve local perceptions of downtown Fitchburg. Now, downtown Fitchburg is undergoing a new wave of development and construction creating the potential for gentrification. NewVue is working to ensure that the benefits of rebuilding reach low-income residents as new higher income residents move in. The organization is focusing its efforts on preserving the community's cultural history through its Activate Mill Street project, focusing on one section of Main Street in downtown Fitchburg. Through this initiative, New Vue has planned and implemented a variety of arts and culture activities such as an open air gallery and community salsa events. The goal is to improve how residents of Fitchburg and surrounding areas view downtown, increase foot traffic and bring positive attention to the rich history of the city.

Through evaluation of its arts and culture focused work, NewVue hoped to understand how the Activate Mill Street effort was seen by Fitchburg residents, visitors and people who work downtown. NewVue saw the evaluation as an opportunity to better understand both the project's impact on the community and the value residents place on the arts and culture work overall. This includes monitoring for unintended negative possibilities such as gentrification. Additionally, this evaluation allowed the organization to better understand the impact of NewVue's work in the North of Main neighborhood to improve arts and culture programming, as well as increasing foot traffic and small-business patronage. In this diverse community with a longstanding history of engagement and activism, NewVue wants to make sure that creative events are accessible to all residents and that they feel represented in the work. The evaluation allowed NewVue to understand more about its arts and culture work downtown while gathering feedback and data about what changes they could make in their approaches to creative community development.

Community yoga and musical performances at the Activate Mill Street ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Ponce Neighborhood Housing Services
Ponce, Puerto Rico

www.poncenhs.org

> **Ponce Neighborhood Housing Services evaluated programming at the Villa del Mar Community Library and neighborhood clean-up and painting projects throughout the community to better understand resident needs and guide their future programming.**

Ponce Neighborhood Housing Services (Ponce NHS) serves low- to middle- income communities in Puerto Rico through housing, community development and financial education programs. Its mission is to work toward a reality where each person or family can enjoy a decent and safe community and socioeconomic environment. Ponce NHS offers first-time homebuyer counseling, financial literacy programming and foreclosure prevention services in addition to its socioeconomic development work, which includes disaster relief, case management and leadership development. The organization serves primarily moderate to low-income households and fosters equitable opportunities for families to live socially and financially fulfilling lives. The organization's passion and dedication to support communities in Puerto Rico is exemplified by the establishment of La Moca Socio-Educational Development Center which provides individuals and families low-cost community space with computer access, educational opportunities and community resources.

Residents painting trees and benches to beautify the common areas and recreational facilities of the Villa del Mar community in Santa Isabel.

Ponce NHS's community engagement team has focused its efforts on community education efforts such as technology and computer skills, youth study programs and mental health care. Its creative community development work was initiated through participation in NeighborWorks Week, an annual week of volunteer service sponsored by NeighborWorks America, in which Ponce NHS volunteers and staff worked together to clean up and paint shared community spaces such as the beach and local recreational facilities. The organization has continued and formalized its creative community development programming through art workshops and other creative programming. Ponce NHS's work has focused primarily on the Villa del Mar community in Santa Isabel, which has experienced a significant decrease in services available to residents. The organization has responded by planning and implementing a needs assessment and focusing on meeting the immediate needs of residents to improve community well-being. Initial programs and events are centered on developing technology skill sets; however, the organization hopes to include more artistic endeavors in the future such as photography, drawing and painting.

This evaluation focused on Ponce NHS's current programming at the Villa del Mar Community Library and its neighborhood clean-up and painting projects throughout the Villa del Mar community. At the library, the organization established La Moca Socio-Educational Development Center as a community resource for residents who need access to computers and other resources to overcome academic challenges. The center, an office trailer equipped with computers, printers and internet access, offers training aimed at promoting social and community education, as well as workshops and homework assistance. Through the community clean-up and arts work and the new

community resource center, the organization aimed to increase hope and strengthen residents' perceptions of their own potential for success. Additionally, Ponce NHS hoped to improve the reputation and status of the Villa del Mar community and increase community pride and ownership, while also equipping community members with the skills and resources to be successful.

Ponce NHS hopes to further understand the needs of their community and develop a plan to intentionally integrate arts into its work in sustainable and effective ways. Based on learning from the evaluation, the organization plans to develop multiple workgroups for education and skill development. Educational groups would offer specialized teaching of a particular topic through participatory group discussions. Through this evaluation the organization is further operationalizing their goals, developing a deeper understanding of resident needs and measuring the impact of their current work to inform their future programming.

Ponce NHS staff, volunteers and residents working together to clean and paint community recreational facilities as part of a volunteer service week.

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership

Slayton, MN

swmhp.org

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership evaluated a creative community garden initiative at their Solace supportive housing property to better understand residents' experiences and connections made through a creative activity.

Local kids helping to water the Solace community garden fruit trees which provide produce for community meals.

The Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership's (SWMHP) mission is to create a community where all residents have access to a welcoming home and the opportunity to thrive in an equitable community. The organization operationalizes this mission by promoting and delivering high quality and comprehensive housing services and products, including renter and homeownership workshops, foreclosure supports and asset management programs, resulting in over 4,800 newly educated community members. As an experienced affordable housing developer, SWMHP has prepared over 600 lots for new housing development and over 5000 rehabilitated affordable homes and rentals. The organization also provides land development and redevelopment services. Community-oriented services include community planning, technical assistance, community building and community engagement programming. The organization serves 27 counties throughout Southwest and South Central Minnesota and operates in deep partnership with many organizations including Southwest Regional Development Commission and Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council. Additionally, the organization is a member of several housing and community development associations and collaborations, both regionally and nationally. For example, it participated in the national ArtPlace America Community Development Investments (CDI) program from 2015 - 2019.

As one of six organizations selected to participate in the Artplace CDI program, SWMHP explored how to embed arts and culture into its core work. This included focusing on how art and culture strategies could be woven into community planning processes to engage a greater cross section of residents who are not typically involved in local decision-making processes. Through this effort, the organization identified three distinct communities—unique in size, demographics, assets and opportunities—that went through dramatic demographic shifts. Working with these communities through initiatives such as the Worthington Artmobile, This Land is Milan, and the Listening House, SWMHP used art and culture strategies to identify community assets and opportunities, connect with people in new ways and create solutions to community challenges. SWMHP continues to partner with artists to deepen their community engagement, project development and program delivery.

In this evaluation, SWMHP focused on a creative community garden initiative at their Solace Apartments in St. Peter, MN. This supportive housing[3] development opened its door to residents in 2018 because of a community identified need for stable housing opportunities for women and families involved in treatment court[4]. At this time, SWMHP was starting its Artist-in-Residence program and, in alignment with their approach providing wraparound services for residents, decided to bridge the two projects. Together, residents and the Artist-in-Residence identified food access as a focus which led to the creation of the Solace Community Garden. A community garden was designed to serve the community by addressing food insecurity as well as improving mental health through outdoor participation. With a horticulturist, Artist-in-Residence, SWMHP staff and Solace residents planned and launched the garden in 2018, completing its first growing season in 2022.

Families planting fruit trees and making raised beds, a tunnel and teepee for beans and peas, seating areas, and stepping stones.

This evaluation is providing SWMHP an opportunity to learn about the impact of engagement work in the Solace Apartment community. SWMHP wanted an avenue to understand resident connections, stories, and experiences more deeply through creative work. Additionally, the evaluation process is helping the team to learn more about evaluation processes and using data to capture a more holistic understanding of engagement work and impact. Moving forward, the organization hopes to be able to replicate this project, or a similar community garden initiative, on other properties they serve.

---

3 "Supportive housing combines non-time-limited affordable housing assistance with wrap-around supportive services for people experiencing homelessness, as well as other people with disabilities." Supportive Housing | United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)

4 "Treatment Court is a common term for drug courts. Treatment Courts represent a shift in the way courts are handling certain offenders and working with key stakeholders in the justice system. In this approach, the court works closely with prosecutors, public defenders, probation officers, social workers, and other justice system partners to develop a strategy that will pressure an offender into completing a treatment program and abstaining from repeating the behaviors that brought them to court." Minnesota Treatment Courts

EVALUATION IMPLEMENTATION

Moving from planning to implementation steps, organizations put their evaluation plan into action by selecting their specific data collection tools, developing a data collection plan and carrying out the data collection activity. All of the data collected in this effort was primary, gathered directly from people or places.

This section of the report discusses the learning from the implementation phase, organized thematically, and presents the quotes and creative poems that came out of the reflection activities.

Data Collection Tools

To evaluate the change resulting from creative community development work, organizations used the Success Measures Creative Community Development Evaluation Tools, a set of tools developed through a partnership with Americans for the Arts funded by The Kresge Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts and Success Measures. The 15 tools, available to the field at no cost, include more traditional surveys and observations, as well as two art-making activities, in this case weaving and mapmaking.

The two creative tools include instructions, facilitation guides and methods for interpreting the gathered information. The "Community Connection and Social Cohesion" tool presents a hands-on weaving activity where each participant completes a woven visual representation of their social cohesion overall, which has likely been further strengthened in real time during the group activity. The "Community Voice" tool examines how arts and culture have contributed to building community voice through a layered mapping exercise.

Evaluation Support and Resources

Evaluators provided direct assistance to the organizations with calls, templates for the data collection planning, navigation through the creative community development tools, as well as new survey questions specific to the groups' evaluations. In almost every case, the organizations, with assistance from the evaluators, maximized the flexibility of the original toolset and tailored them to ensure that they focused on their specific prioritized outcomes and fit the context of each community. The ability to tailor the surveys meant that, across all the evaluations,

the Success Measures tools were used to address outcomes from a broad array of arts and culture projects and programs. With this assistance, organizations were also able to adjust and refine surveys and interview guides which they were already using—allowing those with ongoing feedback and evaluation work to integrate this new effort more easily.

NeighborWorks America provided $15,000 grants to each organization to support the evaluation. They all indicated that these funds were essential to carrying out many different aspects of the project, including supporting staff, arts and culture programming, supplies for the creative evaluation activities, outreach materials for data collection and food, stipends and honoraria for participants.

Reflection Activities by Organizations

Staff members at the organizations were asked to reflect on this phase of the project in real time through two activities. The first, an interview, focused on the breadth of their experiences including practical lessons learned, "aha" moments, changes they will make going forward and new questions emerging as they deepen their practice of evaluating arts and culture work. For the second activity, they were invited to create a poem—in this case a cinquain, a five-line form with specific syllable counts. This activity was designed to help the staff members identify and express their feelings and insights about this phase of the work. The poems, presented throughout this section, provide a glimpse into their individual experiences, from reconnecting with community to the challenges of data collection. They also reflect the feedback and focus heard throughout the project including moving from pandemic isolation back into shared spaces, placekeeping, reconnecting residents to the history of the community and the importance of incorporating arts into community building work.

Learning from Implementation

During the interviews, organizations shared their insights about the tools they used, the process and experience of collecting data and the challenges faced when engaging key staff and stakeholders in the evaluation process. Out of these conversations, several themes emerged. Some relate to the specific category of tools used while some relate to data collection more broadly. Some relate specifically to evaluating arts and culture work, although, in general, the learning can be applied to evaluation practices for any effort. Throughout these conversations, organizations highlighted the value of this evaluation opportunity for real learning about what worked well and what was less successful. Participants appreciated the room to experiment with data collection and expand their experience incorporating evaluation into their arts and culture work.

The themes listed below emerged from the interviews with the organizations and are discussed more fully on the pages that follow.

- ***Data collection requires intentional design and poses unexpected challenges.***

- ***Evaluation needs to serve the community and honor community voice.***

- ***Creative tools require special advance preparation.***

- ***Uses for data need to be identified before implementing creative tools.***

- ***Creative tools can lead to rich learning and community building benefits.***

- ***Flexibility and openness support the artistic process and unexpected ideas.***

- ***Qualitative data increases understanding for community organizations and residents.***

Survey Tools

All organizations implemented surveys as part of their evaluation effort. While all were familiar with surveys in their community development and engagement work, some had not previously evaluated their arts and culture programming specifically.

> **Data collection requires intentional design and poses unexpected challenges.**

Survey tools appealed to the organizations for a variety of reasons. Based on familiarity from prior experience, organizations generally felt surveys were the most accessible. Surveys can easily be implemented during both small- and large-scale events, with many organizations already using survey tools to regularly assess their events. Adding to these existing efforts was efficient use of staff and respondent time. The Success Measures survey tools enhanced existing tools already in use by the organizations. During this phase, a key component was for organizations to work with a Success Measures evaluator, tailoring surveys to meet unique community needs either by combining questions from different surveys into a single tool or by selecting a tool that most aligned and then adjusting it to reflect the particular evaluation focus.

While these factors initially made surveys feel easier, organizations faced several challenges such as: burn out from both staff and residents, concerns about data quality related to low response rates or incomplete responses and concerns about increasing the length of existing surveys to incorporate new questions. Organizations weighed these factors carefully as they selected and created final survey tools and shared several key insights related to learning from the experience.

Organizations highlighted that it is important to be intentional about the context surrounding data collection in order to collect quality data. While surveys are easy to distribute, organizations found that the setting and context for the activity is just as important as the data itself. They put a great deal of planning into the aspects of survey administration that they expected to be challenging. Some focused on response rates, others on communicating the purpose and use of the survey and others found ways to articulate the connection between the survey experience and the broader community benefit. Across all of these, organizations sought to make the surveys a relational, rather than transactional, experience.

For example, focusing on increasing accessibility and responses to the survey, Fifth Ward CRC intentionally distributed their surveys to make it easy for people to respond. The organization provided both electronic links and QR codes that were sent to individuals connected to its arts festivals and DeLuxe Theater programming. In addition, they made sure to have paper surveys available at in-person events such as Juneteenth and yoga classes. When they began to look at the data, they found that less than a quarter of responses were from the Fifth Ward community. This helped the organization understand the important role their events played in bringing other people into the community, the impact of their events and that their multimodal method for collecting data was successful. However, they also now understood that the data did not capture the thoughts and feedback of the residents who were their intended audience. This spurred them to find ways to reach Fifth Ward residents, which includes developing relationships with

other organizations working with specific communities within Fifth Ward and filling a community engagement position. This new staff person has already begun doing additional outreach in the community.

Similarly, NewVue was deeply intentional about centering diversity, equity and inclusion in their survey implementation. The organization referred to Maslow's hierarchy[5] of needs as a way to understand how to engage the community meaningfully, recognizing that there are basic needs that must be met before residents can meaningfully engage with arts and culture. While implementing the survey, the organization was challenged to think more deeply about how to include communities that might not see arts as an immediate priority and how to distribute to individuals who were not as active in the community.

Dwelling Place reflected on how gathering feedback after an event often becomes an afterthought without communicating to participants the data's important role, intended use or relevance to other programming. With this in mind, the organization set aside time to talk about the survey with residents and explain how it connected to programmatic and community goals. They also created the "Snacks for Surveys" hour, when the organization held office times for individuals to come take the survey, share a snack and ask questions about the survey or its use. This thoughtful approach to survey deployment helped the organization to collect data and build rapport with residents.

> *Communities of color and vulnerable communities tend to focus on survival, and arts and culture is seen as a luxury of sorts. It is not that there are no artists in communities of color, because I know them by name, but they don't perceive themselves as artists. When you convene them and invite them to partake in training, meetings, events and activities they are shy about showing up.*
>
> **NEWVUE COMMUNITIES**

> *One of the things that I learned and have been thinking about in terms of good data collection is giving incentives and making sure that people know why we're collecting the data and what it's gonna be used for.*
>
> **DWELLING PLACE**

---

5   Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory on individual motivation that comprises needs which must be met in order to achieve the next, and ultimately achieve self-actualization. Those needs are physiological , safety, love and belonging, and esteem.

Evaluation needs to serve the community and honor community voice.

From guiding future programming and events to understanding how arts and culture can improve neighborhood narratives, participating organizations sought to learn about the effect of their work from the communities they serve. These eight organizations are focused on building relationships with community members and in carrying out creative community development work as embedded and invested participants who are aware of the unique history of people and place in their communities. Organizations articulated a sense of responsibility to be transparent and clear to those they serve about the intent of the evaluation and use of the survey results. This was of critical importance, given the history of systemic injustice which has too often extracted information and resources from communities. Responsive use of data included having a plan to share it with those surveyed and making sure any resulting changes based on the data would be community informed and, when possible, community driven. Especially in communities that have been historically underserved, organizations considered responsively sharing survey results as a critical component to building trust with residents, as well as overall community building and engagement work. This evaluation enabled organizations to think more deeply about how to plan and implement effective ways to share data with their communities.

Healing
Relationships
Art of recovery
Connecting us to each other
Solace

SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

I was strategic when I did this survey. We were going back and forth with the words 'neighborhood' and 'community'. I am totally against the word 'neighborhood' for this survey. It further separates us. The people living in affordable housing already feel so separated. It's affordable housing and the rest of the neighborhood. I was intentional about using the word 'community'. New Haven is a community. If I can address it and change that verbiage we are collecting information as a whole, not just people living in affordable housing.

NEIGHBORWORKS NEW HORIZONS

Other organizations, such as NeighborWorks New Horizons, reflected on the importance of changing the wording of the survey to be inclusive of everyone in the community. They subsequently changed the word 'neighborhood' to 'community' to help ensure that people living in multifamily affordable housing properties could begin to feel that they were truly part of the broader community and not defined as people who lived in "affordable housing" within the neighborhood.

For their Activate Mill Street initiative, NewVue Communities noticed the significant lack of diversity for both event attendees and artists. With so many activities organized under the Activate Mill Street project, NewVue wanted to understand what kinds of events and programming would not only attract a more representative portion of the population, but also make residents feel culturally represented. This evaluation prompted the organization to think more deeply about these questions as they designed the survey. They appreciated the flexibility the opportunity offered including designing the survey and integrating questions related to their interest and having the capacity to translate the survey into Spanish to serve their community to the best of their abilities. Additionally, NewVue shared the survey with several partners such as the city's Director of Community Development and the Director of the ReImagine North of Main collaborative. The organization's survey process aimed to center voices outside the organization to capture data that was representative and useful for the broader community, not just the organization's internal use.

Act
Community-based projects and outcomes
Neighbors truly make the difference
Impact
NEIGHBORWORKS ALASKA

" *We have a significant population to whom this survey was sent. And having the capacity to translate the survey into Spanish and present it in the native language was meaningful.*
NEIGHBORWORKS NEW HORIZONS

" *How do I get the pieces of the evaluation together and then give it back to the community so that the next time I ask them to do a weaving project, the community has found value in the previous experience?*
NEIGHBORWORKS ALASKA

Creative Methods Tools

Across the eight organizations, five chose to use one of the creative methods tools—weaving or mapmaking—to gather information from the residents in their community. Through this experience, organizations captured important insights about using creative methods to evaluate arts and culture work.

Creative tools require special advance preparation.

Organizations new to using creative methods to collect data needed time to acquaint themselves with this approach. With the exception of Dwelling Place, which participated in the earlier pilot cohort for the creative methods tools, none of the organizations had previously used arts and culture methods for evaluation and faced a variety of challenges.

Some organizations were concerned about how residents would experience the tools. For example, out of respect for residents, Fifth Ward CRC wanted to be certain that participating in the weaving tool would feel worthwhile, meaningful and engaging—and not feel like "work". Others, such as NeighborWorks New Horizons and Southwest Minnesota, looked for ways to understand the core elements of facilitating the tools, beyond the comprehensive instructions provided in the tool publication. NeighborWorks Alaska, the first to implement the weaving tool in this effort, led a webinar for the other participating organizations to share how they used the tool, how it went and what they learned. They also shared their slide deck which illustrated the steps of using the tools with residents. This example and peer-to-peer exchange were highly valued by the organizations using the weaving tool.

Arte
Nos ayuda
E interactúa
Una mejor convivencia
Feliz

PONCE NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING SERVICES

"

When the residents were doing the weaver tools – I wasn't expecting the weavings to be so different and so individual. In a survey – you answer these questions and do these things. Recognizing that people are able to do their own thing and be creative within the arts tools – that they interpret in their own way what they want to reflect in this process. One participant started to draw and then talked about what these things meant to him. It's still a community activity, it's still giving us data, it's still a creative way for people to share their stories with us.

SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Dwelling Place highlighted the importance of allotting the appropriate time and space for implementing the creative tool to get the most out of the collected data. This insight was especially relevant when they used the "Community Voice" mapping tool at an event. They laid out a community map and asked participants to map out their access to various community resources. While the data collected from the mapping was useful to understand the organization's impact on community development on a broader scale, there wasn't enough time to dive deeper and understand the specific impact of their arts-based work. The organization recognized how these creative tools specifically have to be implemented both fully and thoughtfully, which in this case means setting aside the appropriate amount of time to get the most useful and relevant data.

> ### Uses for data need to be identified before implementing creative tools.

Organizations implemented the weaving tool in a variety of ways. Those who were the most successful at collecting useful data worked hard to understand how the data that emerged from the creative process could be most effectively used. For example, NeighborWorks Alaska sought to understand how the finished weavings could be turned into learning that would move the work forward and help the community understand their progress.

Others focused on the ability to customize the tool to their needs and how that might increase the complexity of facilitating the weaving or mapping activities. Dwelling Place took advantage of the supported evaluation opportunity to push the limits of customizing the weaving tool. While some of the

**Community
Loving, cultural
ethnic inclusiveness
a social unit with commonality
Together**

NEIGHBORWORKS NEW HORIZONS

" *One of the hardest parts of this line of work is getting the community to engage. Within something as simple as using the yarn to say how do you feel your voice is heard. That 60 seconds with that one color…it will tell you what people are really feeling. They live here, but they don't feel like it's their home. That means they won't engage in their neighborhood. That one little project can open up our eyes to see what is really needed.*

NEIGHBORWORKS NEW HORIZONS

changes worked, others did not. Although they did not get uniformly useful data from their experiments, they did add to their evaluation capacity with the understanding that even a creative methods tool has boundaries on how far customization can go and still maintain its viability as an evaluation tool. Their reflection was that "there are best practices around arts and culture methods" and that identifying those is an important next step for the field. Overall, organizations who initiated the weaving tool with a clearer idea of how that data might be used found the most utility in using a creative tool.

Creative tools can lead to rich learning and community building benefits.

Organizations had some initial concerns and hesitancy about using the creative methods tools. Some organizations felt nervous about implementing and facilitating an unfamiliar activity. Others expressed uncertainty about the types of data that would be collected from the process and unsure how it would feed into their work moving forward. However, in their reflections after using these tools, organizations reported they were surprised by the richness of the data collected and how well the process was received by community members. Southwest Minnesota was surprised to find that despite the many differences in the weavings produced by the Solace property residents, the finished pieces could still be bridged together thematically. NeighborWorks New Horizons reflected on how informative it was to visualize data in real time through the weaving activity, as well as how powerful an activity this was for relationship building—often one of the most challenging aspects in this line of work.

> " The outcome is profoundly tied to the arts and a community development outcome. How can we be in service to the vision of the community? And the artist is helping to carry that vision into the world. The tools I get most excited about are the ones with creative methods. It's where the most growth could come from the cohort. What does it look like to utilize a question but capture it in a picture, photo or collage form? How can we do that with community members in a way that we are collectively making something and that can become the center of the conversation?

DWELLING PLACE

> " The way that this tool allowed people to open up to someone who was a complete stranger to them was remarkable. People were very vulnerable in that space with someone they didn't know.

SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

While the primary purpose of the creative tools is to collect qualitative data specific to arts and culture work, organizations found that the implementation of the creative methods also fostered community building among participants. For NeighborWorks New Horizons, this meant community members connected by sharing their personal experiences which surfaced during the weaving activity and prompts. Other organizations felt that the participants were able to connect more deeply with one another through the activity, although that had not been an explicit expected outcome of the process. Organizations felt that this was partly because the creative tools have space for personal connections rather than preset responses associated with more traditional surveys.

Flexibility and openness support the artistic process and unexpected ideas.

Each creative method tool comes with detailed instructions on implementation, as well as a set of facilitation questions. These guidelines are helpful to get organizations started using creative methods in evaluation; however, this evaluation effort highlighted the importance of leaving room for participants to engage in the artistic process and of being open to unexpected findings. Southwest Minnesota used the "Community Connection and Social Cohesion" tool with their Solace residents to understand the impact of their engagement work and the community garden space on residents. For many residents, this was one of the first times they were able to participate in an in-person event held at the property since the beginning of the pandemic. An unexpected idea emerged during the process:

Weaving
yarn and charms and
meaning beyond what one
glance can give. Community can
bloom, grow.
SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

"The number of residents who included something on their weaving that represented a resident they lost during COVID was striking. It was moving to see how much that affected people around the table. They were able to mourn together.
SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

"How do we measure [arts and culture work] in a way that makes the artist's vision valued but the community outcome is centered? This is where I am sitting. This process has helped me get clear on that.
DWELLING PLACE

residents were interested in honoring Solace residents who had died due to COVID. The facilitator was able to flexibly give residents the space to fully express these creative ideas even though this had not been the original activity focus.

▌ *Qualitative data increases understanding for community organizations and residents.*

All organizations acknowledged that surveys helped them understand the impact of their work on the community and advocate for future support from internal and external stakeholders. Organizations also noted that this evaluation showed how qualitative information added dimension and nuance to traditional survey findings. For example, Ponce Neighborhood Housing Services shared that the creative tools helped make it possible for the organization to find common ground among their residents to inform future arts and culture work. Additionally, Dwelling Place found that survey data might miss the more nuanced findings that arts and culture work might enable. Collecting and understanding good qualitative data can also contribute to stronger partnerships between organizations and the artists they work with. For example, Dwelling Place talked about another activity they conducted: a three-word data collection exercise resulting in a word cluster. The organization was initially surprised at the words that came to the top such as "cool, calm and inspired". When discussing these results with their Artist-in-Residence, the organization learned that the artist had, in fact, intended that exact atmosphere and outcome. Without the data, the organization would not have known that this event achieved an important aspect of its planning.

Fifth Ward CRC experienced a similar learning. The organization partners with residents to lead community events and programming, and recognizes the necessity of sharing data with resident leaders to collectively understand the importance and intention of their work. By implementing the creative tools and participating in a reflection process that also embraces the arts, organizations are now in a position to think more deeply and intentionally about what other methods and best practices might exist to capture qualitative data specifically related to the arts.

> **5th Ward**
> **beautiful**
> **Historic, life-changing**
> **A place to advocate for change**
> **My Home**
> **FIFTH WARD COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

> ❝ *We have programming that is supposed to be resident-led. But if I can't get them connected to the sense of why their work is important or how they feel about the community it's hard to get their support. These tools are great ways to get them to talk about what they mean to the community and what they contribute to the community will help with that.*
>
> **FIFTH WARD COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

Summary and Looking Ahead

Organizations stated that this evaluation process provided a space for experimentation and learning with the assurance of a safety net: the peer cohort and evaluation support providers. The implementation phase was an opportunity for all of the organizations to apply the learning and conceptual development from the planning phase. For some, this was about developing fundamental evaluation practices, while others focused on using the creative tools and thinking through the opportunities of using arts and culture methods and making meaning from them. The organizations also used this process to think through how their data collection efforts could help them return to in-person community engagement after the pandemic restrictions, an adjustment for both community members and staff. For others it led to a deeper conversation about how to incorporate artists into the data conversation and reconnect the intention of the work with the experience and outcome of it. For example, programs which worked regularly with artists through Artist-in-Residence programs are now better equipped to draw the throughlines between their arts and culture work and their intentions, as well as to discuss the importance of data collection to inform future programming.
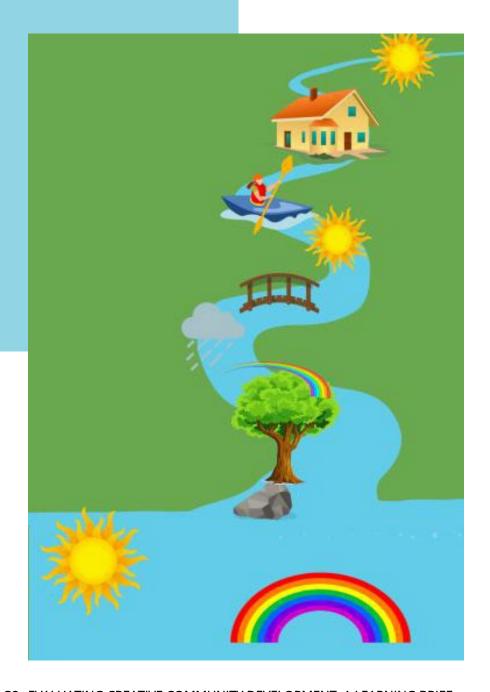
Across use of both traditional and creative data collection tools, all organizations gleaned important insights. Most organizations had previously established data collection methods and protocols for their community building and engagement work but had not necessarily had the opportunity to have direct evaluation support over a prolonged period. Organizations used this experience to more deeply embed evaluation practice across their staff,

experiment with understanding outcomes from arts and culture work, try out collecting data in new creative ways and practice sharing interim learning instead of waiting for a final summary at the end of a data collection period.

The reflective practice at the end of each project phase, and for the implementation phase in particular, served as a refresher about the importance of evaluation, including the value of pre- and post- data that can be used both to advocate for this type of work and to guide future arts and culture investments. Several organizations emphasized the importance of data and learning being iterative, not just summative. Specifically for arts and culture programming, having data that is comparable over time and specific to artistic mode—for example performance-based art or murals—is critical to expanding and sustaining this work.

For organization staff newer to evaluation, in addition to strengthening their understanding about the importance of evaluation and quality data collection, this opportunity gave them the space and time to think more deeply about how to embed evaluative practices into their work in meaningful ways. Evaluation and data collection cannot be an afterthought, but should be intentional and continually guide and contribute to the hard work being done by organizations.

All organizations were energized about how they could build on this experience to refine future evaluation efforts. In addition to the learnings and the nuances of implementing evaluations related to arts and culture, organizations worked next to make sense of their data and create a plan to communicate their findings to community members and stakeholders in a meaningful way. The next section of this learning brief will focus on this final component of the evaluation.

PHASE 3

EVALUATION LEARNING

In this phase of the evaluation, participating organizations began to analyze and make sense of the information and consider what elements they wanted to share with key audiences.

This report section shares specific lessons from the organizations' findings that help illuminate the overall experience and explores cross-cutting learning about what it took to carry out the final steps of the evaluation effort. Samples of the organizations' creative reflections—in this phase digital and annotated river illustrations—are highlighted in this section as well.

Evaluation Support and Resources

In this phase of the project, the evaluators helped the organizations to understand the results, identify themes (for qualitative data), and find the stories in the data. In some cases, this included identifying additional questions that emerged from analyzing the data collected in this initial round. In addition to this assistance, each organization received support from a professional communications firm to fully develop a narrative story related to the data and learning they wanted to share with an identified audience.

Reflection Activities by Organizations

Staff members from the organizations had interviews with the evaluation team to talk through the process and resources needed to make sense of the data they collected. Additionally, they participated in a call with the entire cohort to share stories and reflect on what they were learning from the evaluation overall. These conversations were supplemented with a creative reflection activity. Participants made a digital drawing depicting their organization's journey through this evaluation experience. With a digital illustration of a river as the base, they added different icons such as trees, waves and bridges representing details across the entirety of the evaluation and wrote brief descriptions of their overall experience to further explain the meaning of their illustrations. Samples of these creative reflections are shared in this section.

Learning from Data

Organizations worked with their evaluation partner to analyze results from their surveys and, for those who implemented a creative method, the visual and qualitative data collected from the weaving or mapping exercises. Across the eight organizations, findings emerged that support what organizations and people engaged in arts and culture work have known through experience and research—and can now demonstrate using the Success Measures data collection tools. The four key outcomes, listed below and discussed on the following pages, reflect arts and culture work's contributions to community change.

- **Increased neighborhood pride.**
- **Strengthened connection to identity, history and place.**
- **Increased connection among individuals.**
- **Promoted healing among individuals and communities.**

Increased neighborhood pride.

Through the evaluation process, many organizations gained valuable insights about increased community connection and pride. For example, NeighborWorks Alaska's survey documented perceptions of Spenard neighborhood residents about their most recent arts installation, Stories of Fish Creek, at the local Fish Creek Trail[6]. The organization has been working on the Fish Creek Trail, in Dena'ina known as Ch'atanaltsegh Trail, with community partners to make it more accessible to residents by adding lights and fixing trailways—especially valuable features in a community that does not have sidewalks. The arts installation was intended to integrate local culture and storytelling into the trail experience. Through the collected data, the organization learned that not only do more than 70% of residents now feel proud to tell others they are part of the Spenard community, but more than 80% of those surveyed feel like they belong to the community and more than half feel that they can make a positive difference in their community. These findings demonstrate achievement of the intended outcomes and help the organization understand how it is moving the needle by using arts and culture in community building and engagement work. The findings are also useful to the organization's advocacy efforts for a trail extension, which would connect the Ch'atanaltsegh Trail to another well-used trail, providing another opportunity to increase resident engagement within the corridor.

Stories of Fish Creek Evaluation Journey

I started the journey excited and nervous about what we were getting into. I knew it was a months-long commitment, but it has continued to extend over many more months. I was proud of our Stories of Fish Creek project and knew we would gain some[thing] positive. I was glad to have [technical assistance] support to design the evaluation process and select the tools, even as we moved forward before the Stories of Fish Creek signs were installed! Then, our project moved ahead of the consultant's process to review and report out the data. Now, we are moving forward faster than the consultant support can provide. The challenges now lie in providing timely information and engagement to community members so we can plan how to move forward with more creative projects.

NEIGHBORWORKS ALASKA

---

6   https://nwalaska.org/programs-events/community-engagement/spenard

Fifth Ward CRC evaluated a series of events and programming which focused on local history and culture, including their annual Juneteenth and Cinco de Mayo events. Through the evaluation, one resident reported "I attended Cinco de Mayo because it instills a sense of pride and civic duty to connect the community." Another resident remarked "This place tugs at my heartstrings because I grew up here. I know and love this community very strongly and am still very connected." The qualitative data that Fifth Ward CRC collected is an example of how the participating organizations found that their creative community development work has been successful at increasing community connection and neighborhood pride.

In addition to surveying events led by the Artist-in-Residence, Dwelling Place surveyed the artists directly to understand how they perceived the arts and culture work they were implementing, as both artists and residents of the community. The Artist-in-Residence program was created to engage local artists and increase community engagement through the arts, and also improve artists' connection to the community they are serving. The artists reported feeling closer to and more comfortable in the community, while also learning new skills. Dwelling Place plans to follow up with a focus group to further understand and improve the Artist-in-Residence community experience and use the river illustration activity as part of their final reflection (see more in Conclusion, p.51). All of this data is useful for the organization as they continue to expand and improve the program.

Strengthened connection to identity, history and place.

Arts and culture work has been an avenue for community organizations to be creative in connecting residents to one another, their communities and the resources available to them. Many organizations aimed to connect residents to the community's history and culture through arts programming. For example, Fifth Ward CRC is a designated historic district with its rich history often highlighted in events and programming. The organization found that most residents surveyed felt that the organization was "very good" or "good" at providing opportunities to express cultural history and traditions.

NeighborWorks New Horizons' mural on a local daycare center was intended to vibrantly reflect the community and bring attention to affordable housing and education opportunities available to community members. Their survey findings, similar to NeighborWorks Alaska, revealed that of those surveyed, all reported feeling either "very connected" or "somewhat connected" to the community. Additionally, the majority of those surveyed responded that art events and activities made them feel more connected to others in the neighborhood and that they valued meeting new people and connecting with people different from themselves. Uniquely, the survey also highlighted NeighborWorks New Horizon's success in connecting residents to their local resources. Of those surveyed, the majority of all respondents said they learned about affordable early childhood education seats at the daycare center. This connection to services can serve as a gateway for residents to connect to other resources and opportunities.

Increased connection among individuals.

Organizations discussed the importance of this evaluation related to their advocacy efforts for arts and culture work. Because staffing for creative community development is often led by only one or a few individuals within an organization and can be difficult to fund, organizations are eager to "make a case" for this work. This evaluation helped organizations connect the arts with the ability to meet broader community building and engagement goals. For example, NeighborWorks Alaska learned that residents valued arts and culture work specifically because it helped them feel that they belonged to the community. The organization plans to share this finding with other groups in their community, such as the local housing authority and a new local arts collective, to inform community development work and enhance arts and culture work throughout the neighborhood.

Southwest Minnesota used the weaving tool with their Solace Apartment residents and found that the majority deeply appreciated and enjoyed opportunities to engage in arts. Residents shared that they wanted more opportunities like the weaving exercise and other arts activities to be a larger and more integrated part of the Solace community. As a result, the organization was able to implement the weaving exercise into an engagement event it conducted in Worthington, a very diverse rural community where multiple languages are spoken. At this event, the organization incorporated questions about the importance of affordable housing and community connectedness. Through this evaluation opportunity, Southwest Minnesota gained important insights about how residents value arts opportunities and plans to use their findings to expand their arts engagement both within and beyond the Solace community.

We started our journey feeling comfortable about the work we were doing in the community. At first we were excited to evaluate our creative community development projects, including a collaborative mural exercise our organization had been hosting weekly. In the beginning, although we anticipated challenges, it was difficult to see the path ahead and move the evaluation forward. During the implementation phase, it was easy to choose the survey tools we wanted to use. But, when we ran the survey it was difficult to get participants and make time to do the evaluation work. As we progressed, we became more organized and established processes to build in the time to dedicate to the evaluation. After getting our results, we worked with our [technical assistance] provider to navigate what the next steps looked like which made the future of our mural project move forward.

FIFTH WARD COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Promoted healing among individuals and communities.

This evaluation expanded many organizations' perceptions about who arts and culture events serve and for what purpose. As described on p.36, during the weaving exercise, Southwest Minnesota discovered that individuals needed a space to grieve loved ones lost from COVID-19. This surprising and important finding came about because of the creative tools' flexibility, skillful facilitation by the Southwest Minnesota team and the safe space which arts-based programs can create. The organization also reflected more generally on the value of artistic events to create comfortable spaces that surface important perspectives and needs. Similarly, Dwelling Place had an opportunity during this evaluation to reflect with participants who were specifically looking for events to attend with other community members who were also focused on staying sober. This reflection came during a social arts-based event, which highlighted the importance of arts as a vehicle to creating safe community connection points.

Cross-Cutting Learnings

Across the evaluation, and during this final reflection and learning process, significant insights (discussed on the next pages) emerged about what it takes for community-based organizations to evaluate arts and culture work, the type of support they need and key challenges for organizations and funders to consider as they implement and support evaluation of creative community development efforts.

- **Organizations need evaluation support to define long-term outcomes and collect data.**

- **Sharing findings can take many forms.**

- **Inclusive and representative data collection requires significant effort and intentionality.**

Organizations need evaluation support to define long-term outcomes and collect data.

Organizations relied on the evaluation support they received throughout the process. In particular, they cited the value of this support to help identify long-term outcomes and plan data collection strategies—two activities that are not necessarily part of an organization's regular work.

Long-term outcomes

Although organizations are well-versed in the vision and strategy to achieve their community engagement goals, articulating long-term goals proved challenging. Organizations found it easier to describe their short-term and more immediate outcomes. Typical short-term outcomes included increased engagement by community members in their programming and in the community more generally. For example, NewVue and NeighborWorks Alaska both identified increased foot traffic as an immediate outcome of their community mural walks.

Organizations had a more difficult time defining long-term changes they wanted to see in their community at the systems level. For example, NeighborWorks New Horizons noted that the fast-paced nature of community engagement work makes it difficult to reflect on the big picture, including long-term outcomes. With support from the evaluation team, organizations were able to consider more deeply how their work could contribute to systems-level changes, including how community connectedness might contribute to civic engagement and a sense of autonomy among residents. Even those organizations with a history of arts and culture work, with regular programming such as annual events, needed support to articulate longer term outcomes. The support helped organizations to bridge their visions with long-term outcomes, which helps focus evaluation efforts and arts and culture work moving forward.

Data collection

Some organizations needed considerable help conducting data collection. This included understanding where and how surveys should be collected and when it is appropriate to provide thank-you gifts for survey respondents, as well as needing more data collection training to feel prepared and confident. Although there were specific print resources available on using these data collection tools, organizations valued the direct evaluation support, particularly those newer to evaluation efforts.

We started with the garden evaluation concept thinking we would be able to get a lot of data about the Solace garden, wanting to understand if/how residents are enjoying it, and what they need to continue successfully operating it. We were also looking to duplicate the garden at other developments, so we wanted to examine what it takes to start the garden and keep it going. The next stage was realizing that the tools did not leave a lot of space to evaluate the garden exclusively. We had to adjust our expectations, tools for interacting with the residents, and ultimately adjust the purpose for the project. This took some of our time to conceptualize a new vision for the project, but eventually we adapted the tools enough to get some data about the gardens and significant data about how residents feel about Solace, all of which will help improve our services and hopefully future projects.

SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Sharing findings can take many forms.

Organizations received additional assistance from a communications consultant to help them translate their findings into a usable and shareable format of their choice. Organizations primarily chose one-page summaries and social media content as their preferred communication products and planned many ways to share their findings with stakeholders and community members.

Stakeholders

Organizations discussed the importance of evaluation and data collection for "making the case" for their arts and culture work to both internal and external stakeholders. While many organizations have a long-standing history of creative community engagement and building, this work still needs data to show stakeholders how they are advancing their community engagement and building goals.

At the Solace residential community managed by Southwest Minnesota, it was important to share findings with partners focused on the treatment court component of the property's work (see p. 25 for more detail). While the partners were supportive of the vision to incorporate arts into their engagement work, connecting it to the residential property's broader vision of reducing recidivism[7] felt more challenging. Through this evaluation, Southwest Minnesota was able to demonstrate how the arts contribute to overall community

connectedness and, therefore, the community's overarching vision for their residents.

Dwelling Place hopes to share its findings with board members, specifically to expand understanding about what good data is. The organization has relied on quantitative data that is repeatable and measurable over time and is eager to show that qualitative data and new visual representations are equally as valuable. This evaluation opportunity helped the organization begin to explore new and innovative ways of sharing information.

NeighborWorks Alaska reflected on the particular importance of sharing their findings with internal stakeholders. As a smaller organization with one staff person responsible for the arts and culture work, communicating about the results contributes to the organization's broader community engagement goals and can build buy-in within the organization to further the work.

Community Members

Organizations are very clear about the importance of sharing information with community members, moving beyond transactional interactions of just collecting information. Most organizations plan to share findings with residents via social media and newsletters, but many are also planning to share how community members' feedback would directly feed into the organization's actions related to enhanced programming.

NeighborWorks New Horizons highlighted how the evaluation prompted the organization to be more intentional about programs and events. Their findings underscored the need to meet community members where they are—which might look like bridging community building and social service work in the future. By communicating these findings to residents,

---

7   Recidivism is defined as the proportion of released people who return to prison within 2 years of their release. (Recidivism, health and social functioning following release to the community of NSW prisoners with problematic drug use: study protocol of the population-based retrospective cohort study on the evaluation of the Connections Program - PMC.)

the organizations let the community know that not only are their voices being heard, but they are also driving how the organization plans to move in the future.

Dwelling Place also plans to communicate with community members about how the organization plans to integrate data collection and action to improve future feedback opportunities. The organization believes that if community members can clearly see how their contributions have directly led to actions by the organization, they might feel more encouraged to respond to surveys at the end of an event. This kind of approach has also had an impact on the organization and staff who work on these efforts, pushing the organization to be more intentional about gathering outcome feedback from the onset of their program planning.

> **Inclusive and representative data collection requires significant effort and intentionality.**

Organizations felt that the key audiences for the evaluation evolved over time. In some cases, this resulted from collecting different data than originally intended and led to valuable lessons.

While NeighborWorks Alaska's experience collecting survey data was successful in terms of response rates, they were less successful in reaching all intended participants across demographic groups. Because they administered the survey online, in English only, the primary sample surveyed were white, English-speaking, older and homeowners. While the information collected was valuable for understanding the impact of the mural walk, it was not representative of the population. Moving forward, the organization plans to take a more expansive and equitable approach to how they collect data by making the survey more accessible.

The sun and rainbow reflect how exciting the project was and the high hopes and expectations. The rock and the tree reflect some of the obstacles that came up, schedule conflicts. etc. The rain cloud and bridge reflect the event having to be rescheduled because of the rain and the bridge reflects us over the rain date, and not having all the vendors that were set for the actual date. The sun and rowboat reflect how after the rain date we still had an amazing day/event. The rowboat reflects a bit of paddling to get the community to complete the weaving tool. The house and sun reflect the end of the project. The weaving tool was an amazing experience - we all learned a lot about how we show up and are represented in our community.

NEIGHBORWORKS NEW HORIZONS

Fifth Ward CRC had a similar experience to NeighborWorks Alaska: After collecting data, they realized it was not as representative of the community as they had hoped. The organization found that most people taking the survey were not residents of Fifth Ward. While this impacted how they could interpret and learn from their survey data, it also helped the organization see that many people who were participating in and benefiting from the organization's programming in the district were not Fifth Ward residents. This insight was unexpected, but valuable nonetheless.

Southwest Minnesota found that, because of how they had chosen to collect data, they had data with broader implications than originally envisioned. Staff intentionally opened the creative evaluation activity to all residents, not just those who participated specifically in the garden project; this allowed the organization to capture data more relevant to the Solace community as a whole. The organization appreciated the ability to collect a new kind of data that was deeper and qualitative. This data provided valuable insight into residents' perceptions and what kinds of programming they would like to see in the future.

NeighborWorks New Horizons surveyed individuals in the Fairhaven neighborhood, which they had perceived as a community that has been historically Hispanic. However, the evaluation showed that a large percentage of the survey respondents were Black and that these residents felt less represented in the community. As a result, the organization plans to create more events and initiatives that represent all of the cultural groups in the neighborhood.

Summary and Looking Ahead

Organizations completed the evaluation with findings and valuable lessons that will contribute to their future work and other evaluation efforts. With the evaluation assistance provided, organizations were able to make sense of their data and draw the throughlines to how their arts and culture work contributes to their organization's overall mission. Organizations learned about how their creative community development work improves community connection and pride with one another and the unique history of each place, as well as how the arts enable valuable and unique findings. Additionally, organizations emphasized the key point that collecting good data is equally as important as having a plan to share and communicate those findings with stakeholders and community members alike. Communicating findings looks different depending on the audience: For internal and external stakeholders there is an emphasis on connecting arts and culture to broader goals, while for community members the emphasis may be more action-oriented.

Moving forward, organizations hope to be more intentional and equitable in their evaluative approaches. This includes being more accessible in their data collection efforts so that the data is representative. The evaluation helped organizations to re-center their work and to gain valuable insights into what their arts and culture work should look like in the future, driven by community input. Participating organizations took a leap to help move the field of community building and engagement forward in a new and valuable way.

CONCLUSION

Evaluation Overview

Over the course of eleven months, the eight organizations which participated in this pilot were able to increase and embed capacity for evaluation into their organizations, collect data that provided learning and engagement opportunities with residents in the communities they serve, experiment with using arts and culture methods to collect data and practice communicating their learning with key audiences for their work.

These organizations evaluated ongoing work that ranged from arts and culture programming led by local artists and mural projects open to the general public, to community garden initiatives specific to a residential property. Evaluators helped organizations to plan, implement and make sense of their findings. Following each evaluation phase, organizations participated in a reflection process, which consisted of an interview to discuss their overall experiences and takeaways, as well as a creative reflection activity.

Even for experienced organizations, evaluation often means additional time and effort for staff who are already working at capacity. All of the organizations worked through a variety of local challenges to complete the evaluation. Ultimately, organizations gained valuable insights about the outcomes of their work, such as how arts and culture programs directly contribute to community connection and pride in neighborhoods which the organizations have worked to revitalize—particularly where there have been inequitable practices such as divestment. Additionally, this evaluation provided an explicit opportunity for organizations to recenter their work and be more intentional as they returned to post-pandemic, in-person events and programs. During this generative experience, organizations also articulated important next steps for this work and the field of practice.

Important Next Steps

Creative community development has emerged as a key placemaking and placekeeping strategy across community building and engagement organizations. Using arts and culture as an avenue to build community connections and feed into broader systems-level changes that benefit all residents— especially those who have been most impacted by systemic injustices—has allowed organizations to be creative in their approaches. This report offers a series of observations about how to support evaluating that important arts and culture work. While this pilot included only a small cohort of organizations, it provides a sample of experiences about what these organizations did, what it took for them to do it and what they learned from the evaluation and the overall experience.

The organizations in this evaluation effort can now add their key insights, listed and discussed below, as important contributions to field-level conversations about the breadth of approaches and ongoing innovation in creative community development.

- **■ *Identify wise practices for evaluation.***
- **■ *Explore the importance of embedding reflection processes.***
- **■ *Support building evaluation capacity for arts and culture work.***
- **■ *Recognize and continue evaluative practices that are equitable.***

■ *Identify wise practices for evaluation.*

Only one of the participating organizations had previously used the new creative tools offered for the evaluation; for the rest, this was a new experience. Organizations reflected that the type and quality of data collected from using these tools was unexpectedly rich and expanded perceptions of how data could be collected. Using arts and culture methods produced credible and useful data and equipped organizations with new tools and ways to think about evaluation. In addition to the evaluative benefits of the creative tools, there were valuable insights about how people were able to be engaged and about evaluation as an opportunity to build community connections. The implementation of the creative tools transformed traditional evaluation into an evaluative experience that had multiple

levels of value and utility. Organizations noted that the creative tools prompted and surfaced unexpected, but much needed, conversations and connection points. In addition to specific findings, organizations and community members found it useful and important to have an artifact that served as a visual representation and reminder of their evaluation experience, which can be referenced and compared over time.

During this pilot, important questions arose about how to best use these tools, how far they could be tailored while still maintaining rigor and how to manage the artifacts so that subsequent rounds of data collection could be carried out. These questions and the reflections from organizations help clarify what needs to be explored next, particularly related to wise practices for using creative methods for data collection. Some organizations already began to explore these questions during this pilot, further emphasizing this as an important next step for the field.

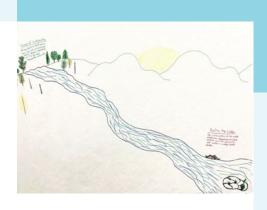### ■ *Explore the importance of embedding reflection processes.*

As discussed in previous sections, organizations appreciated the time set aside during the reflection process to explicitly explore their work and insights with one another. The design and integration of reflection points and activities was an intentional component of the evaluation pilot, meant to facilitate and create specific space and time for both organizations and evaluators to learn. One organization discussed the rarity of slowing down in environments where individuals are generally expected to continually plan and implement programming without pausing to ask themselves why they are hosting an event and how it fits into their long-term organizational goals.

Organizations enjoyed the multimodal engagement, as well as the opportunity to be heard and reflect on their journey creatively. The interviews were a way to share what was working and what wasn't—the latter an important reality to acknowledge. And, pairing the formal interview with a creative reflection (photos, poems and illustration) allowed the organizations to explore their experience in a variety of ways. For example, Dwelling Place discovered that the reflection activity gave them a new way to gather insights from their Artists-in-Residence that brought creativity into the fold. With this new creative reflection activity in their toolkit, Dwelling Place invited their artists to create a river illustration of their experience in the Artist-in-Residence program, centering on their learning from the data collected in the evaluation (see example in the sidebar). The organization hopes to continue to explore creative reflection processes, together with arts-based evaluation methods. This is something for the evaluation field to consider as a wise practice, while also exploring how to embed the activity without making it burdensome for organizations. Having an explicit opportunity to reflect and be more intentional about the work, coupled with multiple ways of thinking about reflection, was valuable to participants and an area for further exploration.

Support building evaluation capacity for arts and culture work.

For all the organizations, this opportunity helped to reaffirm the importance and use of evaluation, internally and externally. Within organizations, evaluations and data help to make the impact visible and clarify the path forward. For external stakeholders, such as funders and partners, evaluations build the evidence base for why this work is important and how their

My river shows the beginning of my AIR [Artist-in-Residence] experience - the rush of knowledge, expectations, and needs that shaped what I anticipated creating, [which] was very different from what I ended up creating. Compared to the experience I've had in the past with some typical drum circle, this was a music-making experience where people are learning and creating.

My obstacles were the expectations and a lack of understanding of resident needs. To go deeper - there was an expectation of Dwelling Place (creating a drum circle) vs. needs of residents. The most connected and meaningful experiences have centered around music, and in conversation about their daily needs and what is happening in their lives. It's hard to be creative when you are in survival mode. [The data] showed that they are in survival mode [and] can't be creative in the survival space. There is a strong juxtaposition, emotional expressiveness people want to have and needing a venue for emotional content. It's been a learning time for me as an artist. I've leaned into emotional connection and the expression aspect - creating moments of joy by pouring into music connection. Some of that is captured in survey results but a lot of it isn't. The most important moments were the connections between residents, the musical conversation.

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE, DWELLING PLACE

support helps make the difference. It is especially important for arts and culture work to be seen as more than a fun and aesthetic activity, but as one that builds deep community connections and begins to address the harm caused by inequitable policies and systemic inequities.

This pilot evaluation echoes what many in the field of creative community development know: Continued support is needed to build evaluation capacity among organizations to demonstrate the importance of the work. As discussed in the report, many organizations have a limited capacity for creative community development generally, often having one person or a small team carry out all the work for a large service area. As a result, evaluation is often sidelined for other priorities. It is a testament to these organizations that they took a leap to participate in this pilot, devoting significant time and effort in addition to their ongoing work.

Recognize and continue evaluative practices that are equitable.

Implicitly embedded throughout this report and the evaluation experience of the eight organizations is the importance of creative tools for expanding access to evaluation. The use of creative tools enabled not only many different kinds of learning for organizations, but also expanded evaluative thinking across languages, abilities and cultures. Practicing and embedding creative tools that are flexible and broaden ideas of what valid data look like creates a field with more equitable data practices. Additionally, this pilot project was planned with a distinct intention to be equitable for participating organizations by using a reflection process that

included a creative activity. This focus facilitates a respectful practice that can adapt to the needs of technical assistance providers and participating cohorts as feedback is received. As the field of community building and engagement continues to expand and grow arts and culture work, so should evaluative practices and tools with equity at the forefront.

Closing

The efforts of the eight participating organizations resulted in thematic findings, not only about what it takes to support and evaluate this work, but where the field needs to move to integrate and center arts and culture. This report offers valuable insights for organizations that are evaluating or considering evaluation for their creative community development work, as well as funders who are looking to understand what it takes to support these efforts across the field. Organizations have been practicing creative community development for decades and working hard for their communities to demonstrate the value of arts and culture. The in-depth insights about how this work can be supported and built upon moving forward, grounded in the voices and experiences of those in communities, are offered for their value to the broader field. For organizations and funders looking to deepen their support of creative approaches to community development and engagement, this report offers the initial steps to do so using evaluation as a valuable pathway.

1255 Union St. NE, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002