

New Community Visions Initiative
St. Paul, Minnesota, Regional Meeting #1
The Arts and....
September 30

Things happen or don't because of conversations. ~ Edgar Smith, welcoming everyone to a day of conversation about the role of arts in community building and development for healthy, equitable, and vibrant communities.

The New Community Visions Initiative of Americans for the Arts hosted the first of eight regional meetings on September 30 in St. Paul, Minnesota. Seventy-six people from thirteen states met for a full day of conversation about the future of places, community development, and the arts. About two-thirds of the people in the room were artists or represented arts organizations, the rest were from other sectors of the community. About half of the people were from the Twin Cities area and the rest from other parts of the state, as well as from California, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Washington, DC.

Building Community

Michael Rohd asks AFTA's Clay Lord three questions to start the day.

What is it?

National Community Visions Initiative sits at the intersection of arts and community. We want to understand how the arts can be part of creating healthy, equitable, vibrant, places. We are having eight of these cross-sector, one-day think tanks across the country. We're seeing new knowledge about how people interact to create stronger communities.

What do you want to learn?

We want to know how the arts work in communities. We have a theory of change: arts can sit at intersection of arts and community life, but we want to know more about how it happens and how it could happen better.

Our goal is for AFTA to take lessons from these meetings to develop tools, systems, and services, which can make it easier for arts to be at the table for these community initiatives.

What do you hope this convening offers today, for those who are here?

A day of really interesting conversation and deep thinking about things you don't always have the chance to delve into in your day to day work. Some new connections and conversations you can

carry forward into the future and that will stick with you as you think about developing ways to address community issues in your own work.

Michael asks the audience: Is anyone thinking they need to know more about to help you engage?

Audience Q: What's going to happen with all this when we're done?

*A: We're doing a series of convenings over the course of a year, culminating in meetings at our annual convention in Boston next year. Margy Waller is documenting the process, and she, Michael and Clay will be translating these events into occasional reports and blog posts. She, Michael, and I along with AFTA staff will be working on releasing a book **Community Visions: A Blueprint for 21st Century Community Development for the Arts** at the end of 2016. It will be a guidepost for AFTA's work over the next 10 years, and a tool for facilitating this work in local communities, for local intermediaries, local and state level arts agencies, public and private partners and others who are interested in the role of arts and culture.*

NCVI: A national two-year effort; research, cross-sector think tanks, publications, & creating action-oriented tools and resources; exploring "Arts And" opportunities;

Goals: new relationships, make & surface new knowledge about how healthy, vibrant, equitable communities are achieved, and what role the arts can play in getting there.

After a series of introductory prompts, the participants responded to Michael's request for responses: *What do you know? What do you wonder?*

- Heard that we were all practicing artists, past present future
- We are all many things
- The arts are in everyone
- Intergenerational thing in how art has been transposed across generations
- We're no different than the people we serve, the people in our neighborhood
- How important and transformative early experiences in the arts are
- I feel goosebumps
- Hearing a lot of art and service for community
- Meeting people where they are-difference/similarities of one another, identity and connection
- Heard a lot about how the arts breed a restless and smart activism
- Deep and important role parents play in getting us to arts
- Where is the next generation of leaders coming from?
- We need a pipeline for amazing people
- Role of local government in arts is important
- Place is important to the work we do and how we approach the world in doing the work
- Struck by how small the world is despite how broad our geography

What should be added, what's surprising?

- Not every child is getting those early arts experiences, reminded by the conversation how important our collective activism is to change this
- In our system, failure is important learning tool for artists and that's a powerful asset to bring to community problem solving
- Diverse ways of thinking and practices toward a common goal of equity in our society
- Background relatedness
- We're shaped by the places we're from, and we also get to claim which part to take with us
- Important to pay attention to the art and people around you when you walk or run
- Arts appreciation did not come the lessons in the classroom

Defining Healthy, Equitable, Vibrant Community

Americans for the Arts provided a starting point for the definition of community: *A collection of people sharing place, affinity or interests*

Participants discussed their definition: What does **community** mean to us?

- Belonging
- These are my people
- The word that is missing is relationships, and we have to work to create them
- Disbelonging, these are not my people
- Coded language for people of color
- Inclusion, identity, virtual communities
- We are going in out of communities all the time
- Communities are identified by the privileged class
- We don't ever say "this is my community," we use it to address "other"
- Community shares a root with communion
- Trust, relationship, history, culture
- Echo system, social capital, character of place
- Communities of choice, and those externally defined
- Shared values and acceptance
- Community defined by who is not in the room

What are the questions that we want to be in a conversation about the meaning of the word community? What questions make it more likely that the work is meaningful?

Are we ascribing inherently positive meaning to community?
Who gets to define community?
Who has the agency?
Do our definitions of community keep up with the rate of change?
Do members of community have responsibility to community in the community or to others?
Who is orchestrating the beginning and ending of community?
Would the people in the community define themselves the same way as people outside the community do?
When people belong to many communities, what is the most important community?
How does one (member of both) manage conflict between communities?
Is community defined by place optional?
What are the different ways communities interact with each other?
Who decides how often a community redefines itself?
Who determines membership for a community?

Americans for the Arts provided a starting point for the definition of healthy: Vigor of mind, body, and spirit. A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.

What are the questions that we want to be in a conversation about the meaning of the word healthy? What questions make it more likely that the work is meaningful?

If you are sick are there places you can go to get healthy?
Are there ways to have an active lifestyle?
Is healthy too loaded a word?
Should it be well instead of healthy?
Is healthy the end point of process?
How do we talk about healthy community, not just individuals?
What are drivers of healthy community so that individuals can share the health?
What does healthy mean when the community is virtual?
Where is the love?
Can we exchange the notion of complete with movement toward?
What's difference between healthy and successful?
Who defines healthy and what are metrics?
What assets are necessary?
How do you incorporate social determinates of health into the definition of health?
In defining health for your community, how are we including the most vulnerable?
Is death and decay and failure a part of how we think about health?
Does health inspire hope?
If healthy is an aspiration, how do we measure it and who decides whether it is enough?
How do you balance healthy unification against conformity?

Does everyone get to be healthy?
Is healthy a loaded word and should we talk about well-being instead?
To what extent is healing embedded in health?
Is a healthy community one where everyone has the resources they need?

Americans for the Arts provided a starting point for the definition of vibrant: *Pulsating with life and activity. Responsive, sensitive, bright, strong, powerful.*

What are the questions that we want to be in a conversation about the meaning of the word vibrant? What questions make it more likely that the work is meaningful?

Can vibrancy be channeled for outcomes?
Do people have to be involved for a place to be vibrant?
Does vibrant have to be economically thriving and if so should we use authentic or genuine instead?
Can quiet sparsely populated places be as vibrant as a place with lots of people?
Where's the joy?
Can vibrancy be engineered or does it have to be organic?
Do people self-identify with vibrancy in their own community?
Why are we using such a jargon-laden term?
Do all places want to be vibrant?
Vibrancy is a white Eurocentric notion, how do we refocus?
Are we loading up the word with too many feelings?
Who defines vibrancy?
Is vibrant often used to describe an entertainment district?
Can vibrancy be responsive to contemporary issues without contemplating history?
Is vibrancy best defined by children?
Can vibrancy be separate from healthy?
Why should we use a concept that is so totally fuzzy?

Americans for the Arts provided a starting point for the definition of equitable: *Fair, accessible, guaranteed opportunity and advancement for all, lacking in barriers that have prevented full participation.*

What are the questions that we want to be in a conversation about the meaning of the word equitable? What questions make it more likely that the work is meaningful?

Is equity addressing symptom or root cause for the symptom?
What do you do when some communities no longer believe this is possible?
Is equity not just about access but also about quality?
Can you achieve a healthy, vibrant place without equity?

Does equity also mean distribution?
What in life is guaranteed?
Why can't the word power be in the definition?
Where is the ownership?
Is there a choice? Can you choose to get access to or is it imposed?
Where is the notion of justice in the organization of our democratic institutions?
Can equity align with the American narrative of self-definition?
Are we talking about equity between communities or within communities?
Is equity by definition at odds with community?
Who defines and recognizes the barriers?
Can equity be achieved in a democratic society?
Is the end game about breaking down barriers or changing outcomes?
Will fair, accessible, and guaranteed lead to more equity?

In the next session, participants were invited to join a circle and share an experience they'd had or observed, or would like to see in the future. Each circle focused on a different Arts and... topic.

Arts and...

Health & Wellness

"The social epidemiologists have found that the health outcomes of families individuals and communities is about 5% predetermined by genetics, about 30% determined by healthcare access, and the rest is driven by the social determinant factors. Not to say that the medical system isn't important, but if you can move the 65% you can move a lot, and that's a space where arts and culture in particular has some real potential to overlap. In place, in care."

"I'm an artist who works in therapeutic environments. One woman learned that negative behavior and would get her a medical response, and she was overdoing it. So they asked me to see if she would make some art instead. Now, she asks for art box instead of asking for medication and her room was filled with art projects."

K-12 Education

"Following up on the cross-capacity, we were talking here about integrating the arts into school settings, so it's not just the specialists, it's the entire school talking, integrating arts. How can AFTA get involved in this—working up a curriculum or a PD model that brings artists and arts organizations in real useable ways to interact with teachers and arts specialists, because it doesn't happen by going up and talking up a program, it's got to work with the administration of a school, the culture of a school."

"In our group, there was a lot of discussion about the crisis of arts education within public education today – and in our group we had multiple examples of entire school systems/districts that has 0-1 arts instructors. Regardless of whether there's a rural area or a major urban area, there's a throughline that this crisis exists. One of the biggest challenges that I've perceived in the last handful of years – there's been an inability to create the correct value proposition for the arts in our public schools. There's been a poor job of doing that.'

Political Activation & Immigration

"Here in St. Paul, there's a group called Dangerous Productions that does parkour based physical comedy. They're working with a lot of a group of refugees that are mostly very young and don't speak English, and they did a whole production about this group's origin story done entirely in parkour – the power of art to bring everyone together and to understand this story of this group of young people was so powerful, you can see that with this idea that they had control of their narrative, and had been invited and tasked with sharing it, was so powerful. The neighborhood came and people were just blown away."

"The arts bring people together, create a common language. Yet we are coming up against a system where a political candidate can demonize millions of people and be the frontrunner in the political process. We need more work on figuring out how those stories can transform the narrative. I mean no disrespect in any sort of way to artists at all, but if we keep talking about creating a space where artists can do their work as though it is outside the political and civic process, then it will be outside the political and civic process."

Comments about a future vision - how do we support arts and artists in working in other sectors?

"How about embedding artist in health care? It could work if we tell artists: you belong here—let me show you how to navigate."

"We should have an arts group embed in a community group. We would tell them: you're there to be a creative problem solver, not just or primarily as an artist. But we'd need to note: artists need more training to be problem solvers."

"We have to deal with this: it's hard to get the other sector folks to see your value as an artist."

"Public health field is interested in quality of place and that creates an opportunity for the arts field."

“Too many people think of the arts as something that is added on, not something integral.”

“Studies fall on deaf ears. We proved it with research, so why aren’t decisionmakers making the decisions we want them to make? We have done a not so great job of getting the decisionmakers to hear us and need new language for our audience.”

“Too often the arts are something that is added on, instead of integrated. If the arts come as an addition, it will be rejected. If it’s part of the program, it’s appreciated as something that is part of our life and therefore more palatable.”

Arts, Health & Wellness

Read a full essay on this topic at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/CommunityVisions

How will the American healthcare system change, and what is the role that the arts may play in positively impacting those changes, over the next 10–15 years? Some ideas/examples drawn from the essay include:

- Future healthcare will focus on the healing of the whole person and will specifically focus more fully on preventative care. In addition, a growing shortage of healthcare professionals will lead to a shift in tasks to adjacent professionals and are structuring generally of the healthcare team. Art and artists have a high potential to become more fully integrated into the healthcare team, entrusted with the care of our citizens, through design, arts-based therapies, and preventative exercise regimens.
- The Affordable Care Act and other new legislation will provide support for mental healthcare for the many people who have lacked access to those services in the past. Artists and creative arts therapists will continue to be among the first responders to trauma and crisis. The arts will also be utilized more fully as therapeutic alternatives to medication and as a way of easing and providing comfort to the families of those suffering.
- As the population of persons 85 and older grows exponentially, so will the need for interventions that can prolong cognitive function, increase quality of life and socialization, and allow for alternatives for a pending shortage of family caregivers. The arts, already known as a good mechanism for dealing with some of these issues, will come into wider use as a way of bettering the lives of our oldest Americans.

Arts & K-12 Education

Read a full essay on this topic at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/CommunityVisions

How will the K–12 American formal education system change over the next 10-15 years, and what role might the arts play in positively impacting those changes? Some ideas/examples drawn from the essay include:

- What is expected of students will shift from simple fact recitation and rote memorization toward deeper and more nuanced learning via systems and concepts. This shift opens up opportunities for the arts to be engaged to create more well-rounded learning environments, as well as a need for the arts to step in to achieve equity in access to quality education.
- The blurring of boundaries between the digital and physical learning environment and the increased acceptance of non-place-based learning environments as legitimate alternatives to in-school learning will increase, possibly increasing access to education, but also posing a very real possibility of niche learning experiences that may narrow the worldview of students. The arts will play a role in providing a commons for place-based engagement and learning, as well as an outlet for combating such insulated views.

Arts, Political Activation, and Immigration

at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/CommunityVisions

What changes will occur in the meaning of citizenship and political activation of individuals, particularly through the lens of immigration issues, over the next 10–15 years? What role might the arts play in positively impacting those changes? Some ideas/examples drawn from the essay include:

- A melding of technology and cultural awareness will catalyze a growing immigration movement through easier activation of cultural memory, the crossing of media for amplified effect, and a stronger connection among intersectional identities. The arts will provide a solid platform from which to tell their stories, build allies, and link issues across diverse identities as they creatively connect their assets for collective thinking and action.
- A generation of immigrants brought to the United States as children and living under an unauthorized status—as well as other youth immigrants that enjoy authorized status—will find themselves navigating an increasingly complex identity formation process. Arts and culture can be utilized as a mechanism for crystallizing self-definition of the individual and the group and activation of political will.

- As the demography of America continues to dramatically shift, a redefinition of the American Dream, the dominant culture, and what it means to be a citizen will occur. Much of that shift will be driven by the crossing and melding of disparate artistic and cultural traditions, which will also allow for a resistance to outright assimilation over time.

Intercommunity Dialogue

The participants turned to a focused discussion on the Arts and....Intercommunity Dialogue.

This essay by Laura Zabel looks at America's changing communities and how they have and will interact with each other, as well as the role that the arts may play in positively impacting those changes over the next 10–15 years. In particular, this paper proposes the following trends and associated arts interventions:

- As debunked theories and practices—such as the Broken Windows theory, which pit different communities against each other and allow prejudice and privilege to override common goals—become untenable, an opportunity will open up for a new, more equitable way of ensuring safe and healthy communities. Creative deployment of the arts and artists will increase connections and understandings across disparate and historically unequal groups; provide opportunities for a more even-footed conversation; and build agency for marginalized communities to create, maintain, and share their own narratives.
- With a stronger and more sustained lens being trained on issues of gentrification and economic and cultural displacement, a movement to find ways of encouraging neighborhood investment and population growth without displacing indigenous residents or dismantling long-held cultural beliefs will arise.
- The arts and artists will need to recognize their historic role in displacement, deliberate or not, and to deploy their skills as stewards of cultural traditions and points of intersection among new and existing residents.

Three experienced leaders shared thoughts from their own experience.

Jun-Li Wang, Springboard for the Arts.

We did some work in Kirkwood a decommissioned mental health institution. Some people wanted to save it, some to take it down. To learn more about what the community wanted to see happen there, we asked an artist to help. She created a chalkboard in the shape of the building. On the chalkboard, she asked: What is possible here? And people answered on the art with chalk. This opened an invitation for dialogue allowing people who don't often speak in public to have a say about this decision. The movement evolved into a community play about Kirkwood pride. The play took place throughout the grounds and artists created place based installations. One of those actors ran for city council and is now city council president.

Erik Takeshita, Bush Foundation.

In Hawaii, I was the gentrifier, as the operator of an arts center. So we hired an organizer to hire artists to build a relationship with people in Chinatown. The artists created a sense of identity for the community, through the arts center. The question we should be asking is: How do we frame our conversation in ways that are going to resonate with other sectors. How do artists do that? Artists can help create a new onramp for these conversations.

Ariadne Albright, Sanford Vermillion Medical Center.

I'm an artist now working in the healthcare field. I got the job by asking for meetings to see if there was a way I could be of service, as part of new funding for ways to keep costs down and reduce medication. And the health care provider did see a reduction in restless behavior and there was a reduction from 30 percent to 4 percent of those using drugs to deal with behavior. That happened over a year and half. Having artists in service is something new. If you throw an artist at an issue, we can do a lot!

Participant comments:

What happens when art and artists make it to the community building table?

"There is a tension that is running thru the day. On the one hand, there is a notion to be inclusive about who an artist is - and we can stretch that definition. And on the other hand there is a desire to point out what artists do differently and specially. How do we balance those things? How do we move out of this room to other sectors without the conversation feeling arrogant?"

"Our discussion revealed a common thread of spaces where dialogue is open; a door is opened where people who haven't talked to each other can talk to each other over art-making. For example, the Kirkbride chalkboard offered that opportunity to the community. Americans for the Arts can provide a service to the field by sharing examples of times and ways that artmaking opens the door for dialogue across sectors. We also discussed that this needs to be a long-term effort, not a one-time thing."

"We aren't successfully stating the value proposition for the arts. I'd like to challenge AFTA to put aside the economic impact case. It was helpful, but isn't helpful anymore and that's because it's not very convincing to many people, since you can spend on anything. Other sectors sell what they do, not the dollars returned for spending on their sector. If we could do that, our argument for reinstating arts in schools would be much more powerful."

"We need a shift in the paradigm from getting the arts to the table, to being seen as one of those who creates the table."

"We often create our own spaces because we aren't at the community table. We should be the creative change agent and create a space for others to talk across the table. We have to find the language, expand definitions of creative and culture, and discuss not just the specifics of what we need in the arts community, but instead we must focus on the whole community."

"It's time for an evolution to a value proposition beyond economic impact. Message and media are so important. We need a larger public relations campaign for *Arts And* messages."

"Language is so important. The word arts is currently a barrier because people default to thinking about fine arts. If we're going to be successful we need new words so that people can hear the message."

"Artists are sometimes apologetic about their own work when suggesting taking time and resources in another sector. But when talking to another sector, as in talking to non-artists in a health care settings, it's important to keep it in simple, non-jargony, terms. Understanding the words others are using and the needs of the other sector is a most important thing."

"Being embedded in another sector is good for relationships. We have to find the artists who are interested in this approach and the institutions that are ready for it. Instead of the arts being a white horse savior, we approach the work as a collaborative that will succeed together. It's not helping people, it's being part of a community."

"When we work across sectors, other sectors need to know the value proposition and we have to be prepared to share it with them. It's our job to prepare for that conversation with other systems for this conversation (in addition to the artists). We also have to be prepared to admit that some work is not as good as it needs to be."

"Art is not just about making art - but the process of making art for common goals. Americans for the arts can help by making the space for that process."

"Listening carefully, it's hard to tell the arts people from the non-arts people in this room. One of the lessons is to let the imagination be free at the cross-sector table to see what might come from a conversation where everyone let's go of what they think can work and develop a plan together. Listening and language is key to making that work."

Michael Rohd: "We've talked about giving voice to the voiceless. But if we are a community, we don't give voice to others, we make space for voices instead. We make space for them to be in a place with different layers of power and privilege. We are giving space for voices, instead of being the voice."

Conclusions and Offers

Clay: In our time remaining together, we'd like your closing thoughts and suggestions.

We know that difficult times also create possibilities. Maybe there is a unique role for the arts to turn straits into possibilities. Does that feel like a genuine impulse? Or is that hubris and arts primacy that we've identified? Is it true that creatives see the possibilities and others see the boundaries? Once those connections have happened - so what? What do you need to make it work? Is it a steward, a translator, and takes what the artist can do and puts it into the system.

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Participant comments:

"We have to be really intentional about what we want to accomplish. We have to think about scale. A community garden is a nice idea, but how do we take that to scale so that it leads to real change. We heard stories, but we need to move that to a much bolder idea."

"An intense challenge we've identified is the difficulty of talking to other sectors in ways that help them see the arts as an added value to the community table. And this is the part that Americans for the Arts can really help us do."

"Funding mechanisms have to change if we want the arts orgs to change. It's the boards - they are the people who aren't in this room. The mission statement and vision comes from the board. If we want to focus on this work, the board members will have to see this as a priority, along with filling the seats and selling memberships."

"Some corporate social responsibility funders have recently shifted investment away from the arts to community development. This suggests that there is a blind spot in the funder community about role of arts in community development. We need to find ways to talk with them about this."

"Getting in front of corporate leadership to share our ability to collaborate on health outcomes is hard. Art is not seen as valuable to addressing community needs. People respond by saying things like: "You mean to tell me that you make a picture with crayons and that helps people?" We don't have the language to help them understand it. The values proposition part is part of the language problem. It doesn't matter what you say, it matters what people hear."

Michael: What assumptions does AFTA need to know about?

Participant comments:

"We need help thinking about how we are framing the conversation. And we need to design these conversations in ways that ensure everyone can be in the conversations—in the arts sector and in other sectors. The conversations have to happen in places and in ways that others are comfortable, not where the people of privilege are comfortable."

"When we create a long-term version, we must have the courage to explicitly define problems we want to address through the arts and the difference we want to see as a result."

"The arts are an essential vehicle for creating the leaders that we need for this challenging work."

"The pressure here is for validating the arts and the danger that feels implicit in this cross-sector work is that we are constantly defining the value/role of the arts in others people's terms and outcomes. The likelihood is that we aren't going to be better at it than people who have been at it for many years. We have got to be willing to look hard at what we are doing and say so if the work isn't great, but is just feel good. If we are still willing to define the arts in these terms and others' outcomes, then maybe we can add special value in a few places."

"This work is not for every artist or arts organization or every entity that one makes an overture to. This is a theme that is getting a lot of attention right now, but it's not new. It's getting some resource and energy right now. But there are other worthy practices that it should be synergistic with."

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Closing and thank you notes wrapped up the day. Next steps include blog posts and rough summaries, blog salons, pre-conference and plenary about this work at the annual conference in June. Followed by a synthesis of the findings and a plan for action.