

Creative Placemaking

Grounding Vacant Property Revitalization in Arts and Culture

What would you think if you saw a railroad underpass flooded with neon lights? Or stumbled upon an abandoned liquor store turned into a community art gallery? Or encountered performance art, led by young people, on a vacant lot? Incorporating the arts into place-based community development can spark fresh interest in vacant property.

Creative placemaking is the practice of enhancing a neighborhood's quality of life through arts, culture, and intentional community development. This practice can take varying forms including, but not limited to, temporary visual art installations, performance events, and developing permanent, brick-and-mortar spaces.

Creative placemaking is about more than just creating artistic attractions. Creative placemaking connects to the community's identity through its arts and culture resources, and in doing so can help communities understand their past, examine their history, and together look ahead toward a most just and inclusive future.

For many communities, an examination of shared history is not easy. Community development in the United States is interwoven with racist and unjust policies that benefited some communities at the expense of others.

When done equitably, creative placemaking can be one way for communities to leverage creative expression to reshape a community, reverse the systemic silencing of residents, and spur investment.



Why consider creative placemaking?

Creative placemaking effects change for both people and places.

PEOPLE IMPACTS

Creative placemaking helps amplify existing community culture, refine the narrative, and improve the perception of disinvested neighborhoods. The process of engaging community through arts and culture can provide healing, hope, and inspiration that can lead to racial change, new investments, and neighborhood pride.

PLACE IMPACTS

Creative placemaking efforts redefine purpose for vacant and abandoned properties and disinvested neighborhoods. By converting spaces from barriers to fuel for community efficacy and cohesion, these community transformations help stimulate neighborhood pride, build wealth, and create better health outcomes and economic opportunities for neighbors.

Learn More and gain inspiration from other transformative creative placemaking projects at communityprogress.org/creative-placemaking

What are the Elements of Creative Placemaking?

The three essential elements to equitable, effective, and efficient creative placemaking efforts include:

PLACE-BASED

Creative placemaking projects always root their work in a specific place and in service to the people who give it purpose. This includes making sure projects reflect the physical, social, and economic priorities of the community.

CONNECTED TO LOCAL STRATEGIES

Creative placemaking always works alongside and in concert with local strategies for housing preservation and development, economic development, and resident-serving programs.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED

Creative placemaking must engage residents, business owners, leaders, and other people who want a say in shaping a community's future. These projects prioritize the people who experience the place in question.



PHOTO CREDIT: Creative Collective for Beyond Walls

Most common goals for using creative placemaking on problem properties

- Activate underutilized space
- Build resident community
- Reduce blight
- Empower residents to share their neighborhood
- Engage artists
- Support a larger neighborhood revitalization vision

Creative Placemaking in Action

Communities across the United States engage in a spectrum of creative placemaking efforts, from one-off events to long-term plans that incorporate arts and culture more systemically.

When community members in Lynn, Massachusetts were tired of the unfair reputation that their city was unsafe, they brought their community together in colorful, vibrant ways by thinking outside the box. With the purpose of taking back the narrative, residents focused on making downtown a more enjoyable place. In just two years the Beyond Walls Mural Festival has installed 46 murals in the small seaside town and brought together hundreds of festival participants. Beyond Walls is one example of creative placemaking in action.

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