

**Creative Placemaking for Multicultural Communities**

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Hilary Stellner Smith

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## Introduction

Everyone has a history and that history impacts current and future generations. Neighborhoods evolve over time, with changing demographics that bring new residents, cultures, and traditions. Many urban areas have pockets of culturally diverse people who, despite living in the same densely populated geographic footprint, remain insular. As a result, people may not see the things they have in common with others and be hesitant to engage with their neighbors. The neighborhood feels fragmented, without a connectedness or an identity. To remedy this situation, neighbors need to find ways to connect with each other and build relationships that improve the quality of life for everyone.

Neighborhood engagement can take many forms and art is an effective tool for connecting community members with each other. As noted in *Gifts of the Muse* published by RAND Corporation in 2004, “works of art provide two critical public benefits: they create bonds among people and they sometimes provide a voice for entire communities.” (50) RAND cites attending arts events or participating in a book club as examples of creating bonds through communal participation in the same activity. (50) Jazz music is an example of art providing voice for an entire community. Jazz came out of African-American culture and “emerged as a powerful voice of a marginalized community and evolved into a quintessentially American style of musical expression.” (51)

I am interested in going beyond the examples in *Gifts of the Muse* to use art to bring multicultural neighborhoods together to create art together. The art making process is the reason people connect and form social bonds. The work of art created is an expression of the multicultural neighborhood’s voices, providing the first representation of a more connected community.

## Concepts Researched

Five concepts support my framework for art as a connector for multicultural neighborhoods: creative placemaking, collective impact, pillar organizations, historical trauma, and aspiring allies for social justice. Each of these concepts builds upon the others to support the goal of social connectedness among diverse peoples.

### Creative Placemaking

Creative placemaking has been explored by the National Endowment for the Arts which published a 2010 white paper on the topic as part of The Mayors' Institute on City Design.

Authors Ann Markusen and Ann Gadwa Nicodemus define creative placemaking as:

In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, tribe, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired. (3)

Creative placemaking may be implemented in a variety of ways and frequently includes an economic revitalization component connected to city planning and development. I have chosen creative placemaking because it includes art, focuses on a defined area or neighborhood, and it emphasizes cross-sector partnerships.

- Using art to engage people in a creative process is more personal than a series of meetings with featured speakers talking about community-building. Rather than a gathering of attendees, each session will engage neighbors in the process of creating art. This will be a tool to demonstrate that the community has more in common than a zip code.

- Focusing on a defined area or neighborhood informs the scope of the work to be undertaken. Creative placemaking activities may be developed for the particular neighborhood with community-specific goals.
- Cross-sector partnerships capitalize on each program partner's skills, providing access to a greater array of resources than is available in a single organization. In addition, each partner may have relationships of differing breadth and depth with the community which allows resources to be used more effectively.

Creative placemaking is a concept for bringing together communities which reside in a specific geographic footprint; however creative placemaking requires a roadmap to define the activities to be undertaken. Collective impact provides a series of five conditions that make program success more likely.

### **Collective Impact**

Like creative placemaking, collective impact is built on cross-sector partnerships.

Collective impact is “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.” (Kania) Collective impact is recognized as being most successful when these five conditions are present. As defined by the Stanford Social Innovation Review, the five conditions are, in summary:

**Common Agenda:** All participants have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

**Shared Measurement Systems:** Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enable the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.

**Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring that all participants do the same thing, but encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others. The power of collective action comes not from the sheer number of participants or the uniformity of their efforts, but from the coordination of their differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.

**Continuous Communication:** The process of creating a common vocabulary takes time, and it is an essential prerequisite to development shared measurement systems.

**Backbone Support Organizations:** Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations that can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly.

Aligning creative placemaking programs with the structure provided by collective impact provides all partners with a clearly defined roadmap, which is particularly important in cross-sector partnerships. Each organization has a different expertise to bring to the partnership as well as a different lens through which it will view the program's vision, goals, and outcomes.

Each of these five conditions feeds into the others. The common agenda allows partner organizations to define their shared goals within a neighborhood and to use mutually-agreed upon terms across all partner organizations. Once the common agenda is clearly defined, shared measurement systems are crafted to understand the intended impact and evaluate impact across multiple partners. A shared measurement system ensures that each partner tracks the same information and presents it in a common format.

Collaboration by partners to develop a common agenda and shared measurement systems informs the mutually reinforcing activities that each member of the cross-sector partnership will undertake. The mutually reinforcing activities developed allow each partner to contribute their expertise and resources which will complement those of others.

Continuous communication underpins all of the activity generated by collaborating on a common agenda, shared measurement systems, and mutually reinforcing activities that support the program. Without clear, regular communication, it is possible for partners to move away from the common agenda. All partners need to remain focused on their respective roles and responsibilities with regard to the program being pursued.

The final condition of collective impact is a backbone support organization which exclusively provides administrative and project support. While I see the value of a separate support organization, organizations with deep roots in the community may be better suited to managing neighborhood initiatives without the added layer of an administrative support organization.

### **Pillar Organizations**

Collective impact, as described above, includes backbone support organizations that have “a dedicated staff separate from participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative” by providing a variety of administrative and project support functions. (Kania) Rather than relying on backbone support organizations, my conceptual model for creative placemaking incorporates “pillar organizations” for additional support. Pillar organizations are described in *Cultural Vitality in Communities: Interpretation and Indicators*, published by The Urban Institute as:

In our field research in communities around the country, we found that organizations that are key catalysts for both amateur and professional arts practice and collaborate with a range of arts and non-arts organizations as part of their programming are especially important for a community’s cultural vitality as we define it. We found that such organizations usually have been in operation for more than 10 years and typically have involvement in the development of community-based or community-oriented cultural events, such as recurrent festivals. They also have relationships with local artists as well as with some of the larger arts venues primarily concerned with the presentation of professional artwork. Additionally, these organizations tend to have standing

relationships with local parks, schools, churches, social organizations, and local businesses in their communities.

To call special attention to these types of organizations, we term them “pillar organizations” because they are a mainstay for the diverse cultural participation and network of community stakeholders inherent in our concept of cultural vitality. (15)

Pillar organizations provide advantages that backbone support organizations do not. Pillar organizations are already known in the community and have established relationships that can support creative placemaking. For example, a theater can be a pillar organization due to its long-standing neighborhood presence and its connections through outreach to local schools and community centers. The theater, as a pillar organization, can then weave creative placemaking into programs it already provides. This removes the need for an additional backbone support organization that would only provide administrative support.

Creative placemaking aligned with the five conditions of collective impact provides a solid foundation on which to build programming. Creative placemaking programming is not limited to one art form or topic and the needs of each community should be used to develop appropriate activities.

I am interested in creative placemaking as a strategy to bring social connectedness to multicultural communities. I have identified two theories which may influence the activities devised: The Theory of Historical Trauma may be relevant to residents of multicultural neighborhoods and The Theory of Aspiring Allies for Social Justice may set goals for improved engagement and understanding between neighbors.

### **The Theory of Historical Trauma**

Multicultural neighborhoods have residents with many different arrival narratives. Some people have multigenerational history of living in the neighborhood, some have chosen to live in the neighborhood, and others have moved out of necessity due to forced migration or unsafe

conditions. The Theory of Historical Trauma has emerged as a way to discuss the myriad, varied, and multigenerational experiences that non-white populations experienced during the establishment of Eurocentric, Colonial traditions in the United States and the displacement of indigenous people. Maria Yellow-horse Brave-heart is a noted scholar on this subject, with her research focusing on the Native American experience in post-Colonial America. Additional scholars posit that her scholarship may be applied to many non-white cultures that were required to submit to the conquering or capturing European culture. Historical trauma is defined as:

Historical trauma is cumulative and collective: The impact of this type of trauma manifests itself, emotionally and psychologically, in members of different cultural groups (Brave Heart, 2011).

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the United States Department of Health and Human Services, further elaborates by declaring “As a collective phenomenon, those who never even experienced the traumatic stressor, such as children and descendants, can still exhibit signs and symptoms of trauma.” (SAMHSA’s GAINS Center | Policy Research Associates, Inc. - Historical Trauma Fact Sheet)

Reflecting on these two definitions, historical trauma results from actions by one culture on other cultures such as forced removal from one’s homeland and servitude elsewhere (i.e. enslavement of Africans and others in the United States by slave traders) or the displacement of people from their homeland as a result of forces beyond their control (i.e. immigration of Hmong due to covert operations in Laos by the United States). Traumatized cultures may be aware of their history, but may not have acknowledged its impact on its current iteration. Behaviors may be passed down from generation to generation without an understanding of the root of the behaviors.

Creative placemaking is a way for people experiencing historical trauma to engage and share experiences with neighbors who are their cultural peers and eventually with those of other cultures. Understanding what it means to be neighbors begins with understanding oneself and one's perceptions of those living next door, down the street, and across from the bus stop. Many urban neighborhoods evolve over time, with changing demographics that bring new residents, cultures, and traditions. Creative placemaking conceived and implemented at the neighborhood level will help connect long-term residents with new people as these demographic changes continue to occur.

### **Aspiring Social Justice Allies**

Connections made between multicultural neighbors through creative placemaking can help create aspiring allies for social justice. Keith E. Edwards has developed a conceptual model for *Identity Development of Aspiring Social Justice Allies*, which defines three different identities: Aspiring Ally for Self-Interest, Aspiring Ally for Altruism, and Ally for Social Justice and their developmental components. (46) Edwards (46-50) names the three developmental steps along the continuum as:

**Ally for Self-Interest:** Aspiring Allies for Self-Interest are primarily motivated to protect those they care about from being hurt. They often seek to be an ally to an individual with whom they have a personal connection rather than to a group or an issue, and see themselves as protectors who intervene on behalf of a specific individual from an oppressed social group, and frequently do so without consulting him/her.

**Aspiring Ally for Altruism:** As an awareness of privilege begins to develop, seeking to engage in ally behavior as a means of dealing with the guilt becomes a primary underlying, often unconscious, motivator for Aspiring Allies for Altruism. For members of dominant groups, recognition of the systemic nature of their privilege and oppression "often generates powerful emotional responses in students that range from guilt and shame to anger and despair" (Tatum, 1992, pp. 1–2).

**Ally for Social Justice:** Individuals acting as Allies for Social Justice work with those from the oppressed group in collaboration and partnership to end the system of oppression. Individuals acting as Allies for Social Justice work *with* those from the

oppressed group in collaboration and partnership to end the system of oppression. The collaborative and systemic aspects of how aspiring allies view their role is congruent with definitions of social justice allies (Bell, 1997; Broido, 2000).

The Edwards model has been developed with a focus on systems of oppression enacted by the white culture upon those of other cultures. However I am interested in fostering allies between multiple cultures of people of color, using the conceptual model developed by Edwards to understand the commonalities among multiple cultures.

*The Identity Development of Aspiring Social Justice Allies* can be adjusted to support multicultural relationships among people of color as follows:

The Ally for Self-Interest, which focuses on one-to-one connections, is the minimum growth expectation that a creative placemaking program should strive to achieve in a multicultural neighborhood. If each person forms a personal connection with one person of a different culture, that provides a building block for the future. I see this as the most achievable ally relationship through creative placemaking activities.

The Aspiring Ally for Altruism is not directly applicable to interactions between multiple communities of color since the focus is on the dominant (white) culture and its privileges. However, I believe that people of color are not treated equitably or equally by the white culture. I would like to explore how multicultural communities perceive the advantages that other people of color experience in the United States.

The Ally for Social Justice is a long-term goal that I would establish for creative placemaking at the neighborhood level. I have not explored or discovered any research about people of color becoming social justice allies for other people of color. I am interested in the longitudinal impact of creative placemaking in multicultural neighborhoods but that falls outside the scope of my current work.

## Conceptual Framework: Creative Placemaking for Multicultural Communities

Creative placemaking, collective impact, pillar organizations, Theory of Historical Trauma, and Aspiring Allies for Social Justice are the five concepts that inform my conceptual framework:



1. Pillar organizations support the entire framework, with creative placemaking being the catalyst that drives the collective impact.
2. Creative placemaking comprises community (the place) and art (the creative) to provide people the reason to engage and build social bonds.
3. Collective impact and the five conditions (common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations) that make it successful provide the roadmap for partners engaged in creative placemaking.
4. Creative placemaking activities are built around the theories of historical trauma and aspiring allies for social justice.

The conceptual framework has been designed for creative placemaking implementation in multicultural communities that have pockets of insularity living side by side in a densely

populated urban area. Despite the inspiration to craft something for the implementation in urban area, the framework is flexible and implementable anywhere different cultures live together. The conceptual framework supports creative placemaking program development and implementation at the community level.

### **Program Development: *Neighborhood Stories***

I approached Sarah Bellamy of Penumbra Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota, as a prospective organization with which to develop a project during my final year of study in the Master of Professional Studies in Arts and Cultural Leadership at the University of Minnesota. Following an initial meeting, Bellamy suggested including Randy Reyes of Mu Performing Arts, also in St. Paul, Minnesota, as part of the process. Through a series of visioning conversations, a concept for *Neighborhood Stories* emerged.

*Neighborhood Stories* is creative placemaking for multicultural communities, using theater as a tool to connect neighbors to each other by sharing stories of their respective cultures, histories, and lives. The program's mission is to understand what it means to be neighbors. The program goal is to foster social connectedness among diverse peoples.

### **Pillar Organizations: *Neighborhood Stories***

Returning to the conceptual framework I designed, pillar organizations support the creative placemaking activities as well as meet the criteria listed by Mario Rosario Jackson of the Urban Institute. Penumbra Theatre and Mu Performing Arts are ideal pillar organizations. Both have been in existence for longer than ten years and have deep roots in the respective communities that they serve. In addition, both organizations produce art that can be the foundation creative placemaking in *Neighborhood Stories*.

Penumbra Theatre is “Minnesota's only professional African American theatre, and is one of only three professional African American theaters in the nation to offer a full season of performances.” Lou Bellamy founded the company in 1976 and it is a community anchor in the Historic Rondo neighborhood. (Penumbra Theatre) The company partnerships with numerous organizations and its administrative and theater spaces are both located in a community center that provides additional services to the people of Rondo, which is a smaller geographic footprint of the previously larger neighborhood called Historic Rondo.

Mu Performing Arts was founded in 1972 by Rick Shiomi “to bring Asian American voices to the stage” and continues to focus on the pan-Asian experience. Since its founding, Mu Performing Arts has grown into one of the largest performing arts companies in the United States. (Mu Performing Arts) The company is based in St. Paul, Minnesota.

While Penumbra Theatre and Mu Performing Arts are the pillar organizations referenced in this paper, implementation of *Neighborhood Stories* has not been finalized as of the date on this paper. Both organizations are discussing next steps.

### **Creative Placemaking: *Neighborhood Stories***

I have chosen creative placemaking because it includes art, focuses on a defined area or neighborhood, and it emphasizes cross-sector partnerships. Penumbra Theatre and Mu Performing Arts are arts organizations that represent the respective journeys of two cultural communities. These two organizations have been in conversations about the multicultural populations in St. Paul. Through these conversations, Historic Rondo has emerged as the community and theater as the art form that can support creative placemaking for multicultural communities in St. Paul.

## Community

Historic Rondo is a neighborhood that has evolved with each wave of new residents to settle. (Taylor, 32; Vang, 16)The multicultural neighborhood has African-American, African-immigrant, Asia-American, or Asian-immigrant populations that reside side by side. The boundaries of Historic Rondo are represented by the blue border on the map below.



(<http://www.frogstownmn.blogspot.com/2011/07/what-can-we-do-about-fair-lending-in.html>)

## Art

*Neighborhood Stories* uses theater arts as a tool to connect neighbors with each other by sharing stories of their cultures, histories, and lives. Each cultural group will share their various journeys to Historic Rondo amongst themselves. After sharing within their respective cultural community, multiple cultural communities will come together and share with each other. The story sharing process will be guided by artists and community ambassadors.

Mu Performing Arts and Penumbra Theatre are ideal for implementation of *Neighborhood Stories*. Both have been recognized for producing sensitive, artistically-sound, culturally-sensitive productions. Each has a history of community engagement that is inclusive of other arts and non-arts organizations. Each represents a separate community through the artistic approach to performing arts. Mu Performing Arts and Penumbra Theatre have the credibility to guide current residents of Historic Rondo through the process to understand what it means to be neighbors by acknowledging their respective similarities as well as their differences.

### **Collective Impact: *Neighborhood Stories***

The five conditions of collective impact are: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations. These five conditions, when aligned with creative placemaking, provide a foundation on which to build programming. Existing community engagement tools can help Penumbra Theatre and Mu Performing Arts define the common agenda and shared measurement systems.

### **Common Agenda and Shared Measurement Systems**

Developing a common agenda and shared measurement systems is supported by worksheets 1-4 from *The Creative Community Builder's Handbook* by Tom Borrup. The worksheets are titled:

1. Strengths Inventory
2. Community Asset Inventory
3. Partner Checklist
4. Set and Measure Outcomes

These four worksheets provide a starting place for partnership conversations and are included in Appendix A. Once completed, the worksheets provide a common language and a template for partners to discuss goals and evaluate resources. Organizations are often challenged when defining roles and responsibilities as well as program evaluation. These worksheets provide a clear and concise starting point.

### **Mutually Reinforcing Activities**

*Neighborhood Stories* program begins with Penumbra Theatre and Mu Performing Arts writing a common agenda and shared measurement systems. Developing those two conditions will inform the mutually reinforcing activities. The *Creative Community Builder's* worksheets are the resource to document what is needed to create these three conditions and are critical to defining the goals, the partners, and the content of mutually reinforcing activities. Time must be dedicated to planning to ensure that *Neighborhood Stories* is implemented in a culturally-appropriate, community-relevant fashion that pillar organizations are able to oversee.

### **Continuous Communication and Backbone Support Organizations**

*Neighborhood Stories* has two pillar organizations and myriad potential community partners. Regular, transparent communication is needed to move the program forward without drifting from the mission and goals. *Neighborhood Stories'* mission is to understand what it means to be neighbors. The program goal is to foster social connectedness among residents in multicultural communities.

As previously discussed, the conceptual framework features pillar organizations rather than backbone support organizations. Penumbra Theatre and Mu Performing Arts have valuable community relationships as well as expertise in producing art that represents the experience of the African American and pan-Asian communities. This rootedness in their respective

communities makes them pillar organizations. *Neighborhood Stories* can begin in each cultural community and build toward bringing all cultural communities together. Laying the groundwork for each community to share stories will allow each to acknowledge and vocalize the journeys that have brought them to Historic Rondo. Their journeys and histories are likely very different and traumatic.

### **The Theory of Historical Trauma: *Neighborhood Stories***

As described in the conceptual framework for *Neighborhood Stories*, historical trauma results from actions by one culture forced on other cultures. Examples include the forced removal from one's homeland and servitude elsewhere (i.e. enslavement of Africans and others in the United States by slave traders) or the displacement of people from their homeland as a result of forces beyond their control (i.e. immigration of Hmong due to covert operations in Laos by the United States). Traumatized cultures may be aware of their history, but may not have acknowledged its impact on its current generation. Behaviors may be passed down from generation to generation without an understanding of the root of the behaviors. Historic Rondo comprises people that have stories spanning multiple generations or are newly arrived. In order to illustrate The Theory of Historical Trauma as it applies to Historic Rondo, I have focused on two cultural groups: African-American and Asian-American. This choice is to keep the example simple and is not reflective of the many cultures within Historic Rondo's geographic footprint.

#### **African-American Residents**

African-Americans have lived in Minnesota since the early 1800s, some arriving with Southern officers stationed at Fort Snelling, some migrating in the 1850s as newly emancipated or fugitive slaves. The increase in the African-American population caused concern among whites for the additional competition for jobs. (Taylor 4-5) Despite Minnesota being a Northern

state where slavery was illegal, the trauma of the minority existence continued. The issue was addressed in 1868 when Minnesota “amended the state constitution by granting the franchise to males of African descent, ‘civilized’ Indians, and mixed bloods over 21.” (Taylor 6)

### **Asian-American Residents**

The population of traditionally defined Asian-Americans has exploded due to the emigration of refugees. Asian-immigrants and subsequent generations of Asian-Americans have lived in Minnesota for decades with the most notable increase in population when Hmong emigrated from Laos to the United States in the mid-1970s. As the result of covert American government operations in Laos, many Hmong were suddenly in peril and provided safe passage to the United States when possible. The first waves of Hmong were settled in a number of cities across the nation. (Vang, 9, 10, 16)

The Hmong culture depends upon family and community; the trauma of suddenly being displaced from one’s homeland and cultural support system disrupted the framework of day-to-day life. Following the relocation from Laos to the United States, a network emerged as Hmong immigrants began reconnecting with each other and eventually settled in St. Paul to establish a diaspora. (Vang 16) St. Paul’s Historic Rondo neighborhood became home to new Hmong arrivals. Historic Rondo had become fragmented by this time, divided by the construction of Interstate Highway 94 which traumatized the African-American residents that had long called the area home.

### **Multicultural Historic Rondo**

African-Americans and Asian-Americans are among the residents of Historic Rondo; each has different histories that underlie their arrival in the neighborhood. Each of these communities has its respective trauma to address. Before Historic Rondo became identified as a

thriving African-American community, many others lived in the neighborhood. The original stewards of the land were indigenous people and generations of new settlers typically inhabited the neighborhood upon arrival in St. Paul. Eventually new immigrants replaced them as more established residents moved to away from the neighborhood. Following numerous iterations the neighborhood became known as Rondo and was home to primarily African-Americans, and was a cultural destination equivalent to New York City's Harlem prior to the construction of Interstate 94. The construction of the highway fragmented this community which now has become an amalgam of immigrant and long-time residents. Acknowledging the past, sharing common individual experiences, and working toward a culturally inclusive mindset will allow the community to capitalize on its diversity and define a multicultural identity for the most recent iteration of Rondo.

The neighborhood formerly known as Rondo is now called Historic Rondo and has evolved into a multicultural neighborhood with people of different histories, perspectives, and needs as demonstrated by census data in the table on the following page. In addition to being separated by Interstate-94, Historic Rondo has been split between two planning districts. The new Green Line light rail transit corridor has brought attention to other cultures identifying Historic Rondo as their home through cultural districts established along the Green Line.

2008-2012	Frogtown/Thomas-Dale Planning District 7		Summit-University Planning District 8		St. Paul	
<b>Total population</b>	15,475		16,823		286,171	
<b>Race and ethnicity</b>						
<b>White</b>	21.00%		45.40%		56.00%	
<b>Of Color</b>	79.00%		54.60%		44.00%	
<b>Black or African American</b>	32.80%		34.10%		14.90%	
<b>Asian or Pacific Islander</b>	32.60%		12.20%		15.10%	
<b>Foreign born</b>	29.80%		19.20%		17.50%	
<b>Language</b>						
<b>English only</b>	53.30%		74.50%		73.80%	
<b>Language other than English</b>	46.70%		25.50%		26.20%	

(minnesotacompass.org)

The communities of color described above are typically residents of Minnesota due to the actions of others, usually members of the white majority American culture. Regardless of how people have arrived in Minnesota, adapting to fit within the majority culture may take priority over understanding how to acclimate to being part of an amalgam of non-white cultures. Social connectedness is as important among peoples of color as it is between the white culture and any community of color. Forming allies for social justice helps multicultural communities work together to identify and pursue common goals.

### **Aspiring Allies for Social Justice: *Neighborhood Stories***

Aspiring Allies for Social Justice has a continuum of three stages: Ally for Self-Interest, Aspiring Ally for Altruism, and Ally for Social Justice. (Edwards 46-50) As I previously discussed in the research informing the creative placemaking conceptual framework, *Neighborhood Stories* is compatible with the first stage of Ally for Self-Interest, which focuses

on one-to-one connections between people. Forming individual relationships is the first step toward increasing social connectedness.

Each cultural community currently residing in Historic Rondo shares stories and strengthens bonds within their respective communities through creative placemaking which uses art as the tool to connect people and is undertaken by Penumbra Theater and Mu Performing Arts as pillar organizations. This is followed by multicultural gatherings in Historic Rondo which encourage communication among multiple communities, again using art as the tool as implemented by pillar organizations within the neighborhood.

**Community Impact: *Neighborhood Stories***

The primary goal of *Neighborhood Stories* is to increase understanding and social connectedness among multicultural neighbors throughout Historic Rondo. Theater is the community engagement tool which will be used to foster this connectedness. Participants may identify the artistic product as the goal of *Neighborhood Stories*; however the artistic product, whether it is a play or series of artistic events, is actually the outcome from the process of building relationships. The community impact results from the creative placemaking process.

**Program Framework: *Neighborhood Stories***

The creative placemaking conceptual framework informs the program development which leads to the program framework. Each of these elements influences the next, which in turn has a greater potential impact because of the research and planning previously conducted. The three components of the program framework for *Neighborhood Stories* are:

- I. Resource Assessment
- II. Community Engagement
- III. Partner Engagement
  - a. Neighborhood Engagement
  - b. Community Collaboration

**Resource Assessment**

Resource assessment is critical to understanding each organization's baseline resources available for *Neighborhood Stories*. Penumbra Theatre and Mu Performing Arts are the pillar organizations and will assess available resources prior to engaging other prospective *Neighborhood Stories* partners. Each lead partner can independently work through the completion of worksheets 1-4 with their staff, board leadership, or both. This process will include robust discussions, so that the final worksheets provide the most accurate representation of each organization. Resources may include staff time, access to skilled volunteers or contract employees, existing programs, and the capacity to provide a revenue stream to support the program.

Following the independent completion of resource assessments, pillar organizations should present their findings to each other in order to understand the collective strengths on which *Neighborhood Stories* can build and to identify areas of need. After this knowledge is

shared, designated representatives from each pillar organization will collaboratively complete the four worksheets to create a master document: *Neighborhood Stories: Collaborative Program Assessment*. The *Collaborative Program Assessment* is the combination of both Penumbra Theatre and Mu Performing Arts resource assessment documents.

The importance of this process cannot be overstated. Collaborations can be fraught with assumptions which lead to misunderstandings. Pragmatically, allowing for adequate time for alignment of resources, strategy, and transparency of roles and responsibilities minimizes the number of unanticipated situations during program implementation. Philosophically, diverse pillar organizations need to participate in the process of becoming connected with each other just as the program fosters greater social connectedness among neighbors.

*Neighborhood Stories* will weave into current programs rather than be created out of whole cloth; resource assessment will help identify and maximize current capacities. For example, existing pre- and post-performance discussions, education programs, and open-to-the-public outreach programs can be used to gather perspectives from Mu Performing Arts and Penumbra Theatre constituents. Incorporating *Neighborhood Stories* into existing programs will help it to be sustainable in future years.

### **Community Engagement**

Community engagement should be pursued on parallel tracks within each cultural community first, bringing everyone together for a multicultural convening after laying the groundwork. During the resource assessment process, each lead partner will identify additional prospective partners for *Neighborhood Stories*. Using the *Collaborative Program Assessment* as a guide, Mu Performing Arts and Penumbra Theatre should reach out to their respective contacts to begin planning activities that will eventually serve the people in Historic Rondo. The two

tracks of community engagement are: supporting partner engagement and neighborhood engagement.

### **Supporting Partner Engagement**

A project of this scale requires a collaborative comprised of multiple strengths from lead and supporting partners. Using *Neighborhood Stories: Collaborative Project Assessment* completed by Mu Performing Arts and Penumbra Theatre together, Worksheet 2: Community Asset Inventory identifies prospective supporting partners. Worksheet 3: The Partner Checklist is a resource to help define the composition of the partner collaborative to ensure a balance of skills, resources, and relationships. Mu Performing Arts and Penumbra Theatre will remain lead partners throughout the program, providing the resources needed to manage and evaluate the higher-level vision. Staff and skilled volunteers may also participate in the grassroots engagement as *Neighborhood Stories* unfolds.

### **Neighborhood Engagement**

Neighborhood residents of Historic Rondo are the primary participants and beneficiaries of *Neighborhood Stories*. Neighborhood engagement must begin with the words and impressions of its current residents serving as a baseline for *Neighborhood Stories*.

Worksheet 2: Community Asset Inventory is a guide for neighborhood conversations. It does not need to be used verbatim or in its entirety, but using it as a guide allows Mu Performing Arts and Penumbra Theatre to map community perspectives back to the *Collaborative Project Assessment* and make adjustments to the project framework as appropriate. In order to gather feedback from the widest cross-section of people, it is suggested that Worksheet 2 be completed anew at each of the first few community meetings, with each meeting hosted at a different location by a different partner. Partners with trusted, community-driven relationships will be

important during this phase to encourage traditionally unengaged residents to participate and contribute. The information gathered will be summarized to determine next steps for engagement.

### **Community Collaboration**

Community collaboration is the final and most complex component of the program framework. A performance has been envisioned as a final outcome of community engagement. Possible artistic outcomes are listed below.

- A playwright(s) could be commissioned to craft a work based on the residents' stories.
- Artist/organizers from Springboard for the Arts Ready Go Project program could be deployed at neighborhood engagement events, using arts activities to promote conversation while gathering stories and perspectives from participants.
- The community, with guidance from staff and contract artists, could create a site-based series of scenes that travels from one stop on the Green Line light rail transit to another. Each site could feature the stories of people that live and work nearby.

Revisiting the *Collaborative Project Assessment*, previously mentioned as the combination of both Penumbra Theatre and Mu Performing Arts resource assessment documents, is beneficial at this point in implementation. The creative direction has the potential to be refined with the addition of any creative personnel or artist(s). *Neighborhood Stories* includes artistic as well as community goals; the artist(s) should be invited to review and provide input on the initially defined outcomes.

**Program Evaluation: *Neighborhood Stories***

Shared measurement systems are developed through the completion of *The Creative Community Builder's* worksheets and allow *Neighborhood Stories* to be evaluated periodically during implementation. Mutually agreed upon measurements will include institutional, partnership, and community evaluations. Quantitative and qualitative measures are both included. Longitudinal measurements are challenging, but soliciting several residents of Historic Rondo to provide pre-, mid-, and post-anecdotal commentary is beneficial to tracking the personal impact. Follow up at six and twelve months following the conclusion of *Neighborhood Stories* will provide valuable insight into the long-term community impact.

**Conclusion**

Nearly 85% of people in the United States live in cities, arriving with many different histories and through a variety of journeys. In order to live compatibly, we need to learn what it means to be neighbors. Forming relationships with people outside of one's cultural community is not intuitive for everyone. Art is a tool that helps connect and engage communities, providing an opportunity to share experiences with one another. Building personal, one-to-one relationships through shared experiences increases social connectedness, making communities happier, healthier, and more livable for everyone.

*Neighborhood Stories* allows each cultural community to define and acknowledge its own journey to its current place of residence through the process of sharing stories. This process allows community members to understand what it means to be neighbors to others with different histories and journeys to the current place. The ability to understand and embrace multicultural communities is particularly important as people inhabit closer and closer spaces across the United States.

Appendix A. Worksheets 1-4 from *The Creative Community Builder's Handbook* by Tom Borrup

**Electronic Worksheets**

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**The Creative Community Builder's Handbook:  
How to Transform a Community Using Local Assets, Arts, and Culture**

By Tom Borrup

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**WORKSHEET 1: Strengths Inventory**

*Give an honest assessment of yourself (if starting alone) or your organization with regard to each of the categories below. Rate the category as +1 for strong, 0 for neutral, and -1 if weak. You may total the strengths, if you wish, but this is not a formal process wherein a score of 16 earns an A+ and -16 is an F. It's just an honest assessment of strengths.*

Name of organization:

Organization's leaders:

<b>Strength</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Rating</b>
<b>1. Capacity to invest time</b>		
<b>2. Experience with collaboration</b>		
<b>3. Positive profile in the community</b>		
<b>4. Staff/board stability</b>		
<b>5. Demonstrated depth of constituency</b>		
<b>6. Demonstrated breadth of constituency</b>		

<b>7. Demonstrated broad concern for community</b>		
<b>8. Bring key perspective to the work (name it)</b>		
<b>9. Bring key skills to the work (name the skills)</b>		
<b>10. Share information openly</b>		
<b>11. Represent group or position strategic to cause</b>		
<b>12. Holds a special leadership position</b>		
<b>13. Holds a symbolic position</b>		
<b>14. Positive reputation among key civic and business leaders</b>		
<b>15. Ability to participate in or lead groups through planning</b>		
<b>16. "Gut" assessment of "fit" (Do I want to do this? Is it right at this time?)</b>		

## **WORKSHEET 2: Community Asset Inventory**

*For each item below, describe your community in terms of its strengths, characteristics, and/or unique features.*

- 1. Geographic parameters and demographics**
  
- 2. History and industries**
  - 2a. Native American/pre-colonial**
  
  - 2b. Significant events and people**
  
  - 2c. Products manufactured and grown**
  
  - 2d. Cultural and technological innovations**
  
  - 2e. Economic base and employment**
  
  - 2f. Other**
  
- 3. Geography**
  - 3a. Natural or geological features**
  
  - 3b. Climate**
  
  - 3c. Recreational amenities**
  
  - 3d. Other**
  
- 4. People (Give special thought to historic or recent uncelebrated heroes, especially women and people of color whose contributions mirror the spirit of community building)**
  - 4a. Openness**
  
  - 4b. Age range and balance**
  
  - 4c. Ethnic mix**
  
  - 4d. Economic status**
  
  - 4e. Education levels**

**4f. Outstanding individuals**

**4g. Other**

**5. Public sector**

**5a. Effective leadership**

**5b. Communications and accountability**

**5c. Service quality and capacity**

**5d. Versatility and innovation**

**5e. Other**

**6. Reputation**

**6a. Identity to outside world**

**6b. Receptivity to visitors**

**6c. Location and accessibility**

**6d. Navigability**

**6e. Safety**

**6f. Aesthetic experience**

**6g. Other**

**7. Nearby features and attributes**

**7a. Natural amenities**

**7b. Widely known attraction(s) or features**

**7c. Urban center or district (includes or is how far?)**

**7d. Major or unique service(s)**

**7e. Well-known institution(s)**

**7f. Special places**

**7g. Other**

**8. Infrastructure**

**8a. Transportation**

**8b. Education and culture**

**8c. Housing stock—quality, mix of owner and rental**

**8d. Architecture or built environment**

**8e. Power, water, and sewer adequacy and capacity**

**8f. Underutilized structures and real estate**

**8g. Healthcare**

**8h. Other**





## Worksheet 4: Set and Measure Outcomes

*An outcome is a specific, observable, and achievable result that is consistent with your vision. Answer the following questions for each of your project's proposed outcomes.*

- 1. Describe the specific community condition you want to see when the project has succeeded.**
- 2. Describe indications that this success has occurred and how you will measure this success.**
- 3. How long do you think it will take to achieve this outcome?**
- 4. What current condition will you measure change against?**
- 5. Estimate the incremental change that will get you there.**
- 6. What comparison to a larger field or region can you make that would distinguish this effort?**
- 7. Restate in summary form the outcome, how you'll measure it, and what it will require in incremental change to get there.**

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