

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES EXCHANGE (CCX):
**LEARNING FROM NEW ENGLAND
CREATIVE ECONOMY INITIATIVES**

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NEW ENGLAND FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

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ABOUT NEFA

The New England Foundation for the Arts invests in the arts to enrich communities in New England and beyond.

NEFA accomplishes this by granting funds to artists and cultural organizations; connecting them to each other and their audiences; and analyzing their economic contributions.

NEFA serves as a regional partner for the National Endowment for the Arts, New England's state arts agencies, and private foundations. For more information, visit www.nefa.org.

Dear Reader,

The New England Foundation for the Arts is dedicated to advancing the creative landscape of the New England region. We grant funds to artists and arts organizations, connect them to each other and their audiences, and study their economic contributions to New England. We recognize the importance of raising awareness of the role that the arts and creative sectors play in community development on a local level in New England.

NEFA developed the Creative Communities Exchange (CCX) event in 2011, a biennial convening designed as a practicum for those in the creative sector and their civic partners to learn about best practices and methodologies when developing creative economy strategies to enhance community life. We envisioned a peer-led networking event that draws from the work happening here in New England.

For NEFA, the CCX is a critical element of our portfolio of programs. It gathers approximately 250 attendees from all over our region to network, learn, and provide mentorship, connects them with resources, and enables our sector to set a powerful agenda about the place of the arts in community revitalization. At this interim point in our CCX planning cycle, as we begin to plan for the upcoming CCX in June 2017, we appreciate the opportunity to reflect and learn.

This document, written by Dee Schneidman, NEFA's research manager, with key elements contributed by Chris Dwyer of RMC Research, is intended to serve as a report on the CCX 2015, which took place in June, 2015 in Keene, NH, with help from Arts Alive!, the local host. The report highlights the scope of the CCX, as well as learnings and impact of creative economy strategies in New England, as seen through the lens of the CCX and the New England Creative Economy Network that has grown around it.

NEFA is grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts and the six state arts agencies in New England, the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, the Maine Arts Commission, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, and the Vermont Arts Council, for their support of NEFA's work in the creative economy.

Upcoming projects in our New England Creative Economy area of work include a study of creative sector employment in New England, a region-wide artist survey, and the growth of our CreativeGround website, which is a database and networking tool for over 30,000 artists, creative businesses and nonprofit cultural organizations in the New England region. Together with state-by-state initiatives, these enable us to study the data and tell the stories of the critical work happening at the intersection of arts and community development.

Please join us by signing up for our [email list](#) and volunteering to help circulate our artist survey, building or maintaining a profile on [CreativeGround](#), and planning to attend our next Creative Communities Exchange in June 2017!

Sincerely,



Cathy Edwards
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

The New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) is a leader in providing frameworks and tools that inform the intersection of culture and community vitality. A key element to our portfolio of activities are convenings of creative economy practitioners, initiated with the Connecting Creative Communities event in 2010 in Providence, RI. The event was subsequently established with Berkshire Creative as the Creative Communities Exchange (CCX) format in North Adams, MA (2011). It moved to Portland, ME (2013) and most recently was held in Keene, NH (2015). This paper outlines the structure and goals of the CCX concept; provides a summary and learnings from the 2015 event; and shares responses from CCX attendees when asked about what they need in order to advance arts-based community development work in the New England region. Our hope is that input we have gathered from creative economy leaders can help NEFA and other service providers advance the role that the creative sector plays in building healthy New England communities.

NEFA has commissioned studies on how arts and culture impacts New England communities since the late 1970s, and helped develop a research definition of the occupations and industries of the creative economy in [The Creative Economy: A New Definition](#) (2007). NEFA developed and manages an online directory of the region's artists, arts and culture nonprofits, and creative businesses called [CreativeGround](#). These activities have resulted in a network of relationships with researchers, policy makers, and practitioners on the local, state, and national levels. Our creative economy products shine a light on the rich creative activity of our region, and allow us to get direct feedback from constituents as we see creative economy strategies being applied to local main streets. This extends NEFA's regional service beyond grantmaking, and broadens the notion of how the arts impact communities.

WHAT IS THE CREATIVE COMMUNITIES EXCHANGE (CCX)?

The CCX is a two-day convening that gathers individuals who are catalysts in building creative communities throughout New England to share resources, ideas, practical information, and actionable tools that can be executed in one another's communities. This fast-paced biennial event is focused on networking and practical creative economy workshops that follow a peer-led case-study model. The Exchange, which rotates to different New England communities, highlights a wide range of successful initiatives from around New England that leverage the local creative sector for revitalization and growth of the local community.

Topics of broad interest in creative community building are discussed at panel sessions and lunch roundtables, but the core of the CCX consists of timed workshops that use a [consistent format and focus on "how" creative economy strategies are implemented](#). Workshop leaders are advised to include specifics regarding project challenges, partners, and impact in their presentations, and participants receive a checklist of tasks to replicate the project as a session handout. Everyone in the room is considered an expert; each workshop follows a 20/20/20 timeline: 20 minutes of presentation, 20 minutes of Q&A, and 20 minutes of networking. See the "What is the event content?" section below for more detail.

NEFA's creative economy work and the CCX are built on the premise that knowledge sharing and networking advance the whole region's leadership when it comes to applying creative economy strategies in communities. **The CCX provides an opportunity for creative economy R&D and professional development that is not available anywhere else in New England.** CCX is a place to learn how the arts and creative institutions intersect with other sectors to enhance communities in an intentional way, and not as an accidental byproduct of great art institutions sitting on Main Street. These creative projects share a goal of community development instead of arts learning or art-making in a studio or performance space, and as a result they require collaboration with civic organizations and others who share community development goals. Creative economy projects inherently require partnerships between arts and non-arts sectors, which means they require different languages to be learned – those of planning, transportation, economic development, community development, zoning, and real estate development.

WHAT ARE THE INTENDED OUTCOMES OF THE CCX?

Intended outcomes of the CCX:

- » Collect qualitative data on creative economy projects that complement the numbers in commissioned research reports on the creative sector and the people and entities listed in CreativeGroundreports on the creative sector and the people and entities listed in CreativeGround
- » Build a network of New England leaders and communities for ongoing support by peers, experts, and potential collaborators and fundersShare models being used by the regional “hot spots” for adaptation in other communities
- » Share models of successful creative economy strategies for adaptation in other communities, learning from trends, challenges and successes, and regional “hot spots” for the creative economy.
- » Build momentum for arts-based community development within the region, and encourage collaboration and learning across state lines, strengthening the bridge between the creative sector and community development

PARTICIPANTS REPORTED THAT THE VALUE OF THE CCX IS:

“Shared learning accelerates success.” - **Jennifer Olsen, Waterville Main Streets, Waterville, ME**

“The value of convening, particularly at NEFA’s CCX cannot be overstated. Meeting others engaged in this same type of work is not only energizing, it provides useful perspectives, tools, and resources to apply within one’s own community work, and helps establish lasting contacts for questions, ideas, and initiatives that may come up down the road.” - **Anonymous**

“Most valuable event in New England. Want to share this experience with the hopes of others to come in the future.” - **Joanne Wise, Upper Valley Arts Alliance, Grantham, NH**

“It’s important to maintain a regional identity AND to demonstrate how NEFA ties us all together and supports/fosters the creative economy. We need to convene from time-to-time to know that we’re not in this effort alone.” - **Byron Champlin, Lincoln Financial, Concord, NH**

WHO PARTICIPATES AND WHAT ARE THEY INTERESTED IN?

CCX 2015 attendees said they come to the event primarily to:

- » Learn models of what to do and not do (63%)
- » Network/connect with peers (52%)

"I attended to get great ideas, meet awesome people, share about our organization (Vermont Festival of the Arts) and get recharged. All of this was accomplished, including solving a problem that has been puzzling me and my board for about a year!" - **Karen Nevin, Valley Arts Foundation, Waitsfield, VT**

Seventy-six participants at CCX 2015 (35%) were first time participants at a NEFA creative economy event, and there was more variety of sector representation in 2015 than in 2013. Participants identified themselves as 39% from arts/culture nonprofits, 22% creative businesses, including artists, and 39% from government, education, or social service organizations. There were planners and economic developers among the government employees in attendance, but participants expressed a strong desire to see more of them. Discounted registration was offered to those who brought along a non-arts municipal employee or leader from their community, and NEFA will continue to offer that as an incentive to broaden participation.

Participants represented an equal distribution of ages from 21-70. Participants came from each New England state and from Washington, DC, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Of those who gave their race/ethnicity, 11% identified as non-White/Caucasian, fairly proximate to the non-white racial makeup of New England at 14% (U.S. Census). We will continue to strive to be representative of the demographics of the region.

WHAT IS THE EVENT CONTENT?

There are four content tracks at the CCX:

- 1. LEADERSHIP & PARTNERSHIPS:** Organizational leaders building capacity within their organizations and communities through strong partnerships with local stakeholders.
- 2. HEADING DOWNTOWN:** Innovative events and projects that catalyze the creative community and draw visitors and life to the economic centers.
- 3. POLICY & PLANNING:** Programs that use information and cultural plans to implement policy and zoning decisions that affect all citizens of their local community.
- 4. SECTOR CONNECTOR:** Model projects that use technology, networking, and training to enhance the capacity of the creative sector's connections to other sectors.

To facilitate learning among and between professionals from various sectors, CCX workshops have a specific format and cross-sector review process for inclusion in the event.

- » Workshop leaders submit information about their creative economy project in the [Community Initiative](#) section on NEFA's website, and once selected, create their slides well in advance to review with a mentor and have time to incorporate suggestions.

- » The format for both the application and presentation section of the workshop is:
 - » **Brief History:** When and why was the project idea conceived? What were the motivating factors in your community and its economic development strategy?
 - » **Project Goals:** What were the project goals? How have they changed over time? Who are the stakeholders?
 - » **Project Specifics:** How was the project executed? (include details) How has it been refined over time?
 - » **Obstacles:** What were your major obstacles? Who or what was instrumental in overcoming those obstacles? What do you suggest for other colleagues that might undertake this work?
 - » **Project Impact:** How did this project contribute to creative placemaking and/or community and economic development? What is different in your community as a result of this project? What do you consider particularly successful about the project? How did you measure this success? Who could and should replicate this project?
- » Recipients receive a “How To” checklist from each workshop, a handout describing tips and the action steps required to replicate the creative economy strategies discussed in their own communities
- » Workshops follow a consistent 20/20/20 structure: 20 minutes of project presentation, 20 minutes of Q&A discussion, and 20 minutes of networking

CCX 2015 workshops included sessions on the Data of the Creative Economy (Somerville, MA), Partnerships in Cultural Tourism (Monadnock Valley, NH), Town Arts Assessments (Peterborough, NH), Community Planning through the Arts (Burlington, VT), Arts Festivals and City-Wide Open Studios (Waitsfield, VT, and New Haven, CT), Culinary Entrepreneurs in Immigrant Communities (Somerville, MA), Engagement of Immigrants and New Americans in the Creative Economy (Concord, NH, and Portland, ME) among many others. See [NEFA's website for a full list of workshops](#).

The strongest models of creative economy strategies are not accidental – they tend to include time for planning and reflection, leadership or strong participation from within the arts sector, true collaboration with civic leaders, creative use of neighborhood assets, breaking down of language barriers, and course corrections as needs arise throughout the project.

The content of the CCX emerges from the Community Initiatives that are submitted and the creative economy work being done by New England community leaders. The content themes that emerged in 2015 were:

- » Planning concepts including and translated for arts assets
- » Inclusion in creative economy efforts, especially of new Americans
- » Space development that is relevant and making use of local/existing assets instead of bringing in a model or business from outside
- » Collaborative leadership – with main streets, local schools, arts leaders
- » Data for policy and planning recommendations

Some particularly resonant project outcomes/lessons learned:

- » Do a feasibility study before you decide that renovating an old building into an arts center is a good idea [[Town of Peterborough, NH](#)]
- » Include a lot of arts events when incorporating artists into city planning [[Burlington City Arts, VT](#)]

- » Offer varied options for audiences to create their own event experience (draw return visitors to an unused park by...) [[Norwalk 2.0, CT](#)]
- » Don't rely on local or federal data on the artist business practices of your community - ask them. But only what you really need to know for policy recommendations [[Somerville Arts Council, MA](#)]
- » Start small and include local artists, businesses, teens, and residents to change internal and external perceptions of a neighborhood [[One Neighborhood Builders \(formerly Olneyville Housing Corporation\), RI](#)]
- » Say yes to unusual collaborations and expansion, but with discernment [[Waterfall Arts, ME](#)]

“[The CCX] gave a long term picture of planning, funding, engagement, staffing, pacing, and implementation of complex multi year projects with similar jobs, self actualization and community capacity building to the projects we are working on.” - **Pat Loheed, Earthos-Institute, Somerville, MA**

The 2015 workshops were judged by 87% of CCX participants to be very useful, and 100% of participants agreed that they were useful or somewhat useful. **Participants said that CCX workshops and presenters are:**

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| » candid | » grassroots | » relevant |
| » clear | » hands-on | » successes and failures |
| » coherent | » informative | » tangible |
| » collaborative | » inspiring | » useful |
| » concrete | » powerful | » well organized |
| » engaging | » practical | |

Participants were asked about their creative economy topics of interest and for ideas about future CCX workshops, not only to inform future NEFA creative economy events, but also to check in about the level of general understanding of creative economy topics and strategies that are appropriate for the CCX. Here is how we differentiate between the creative economy sector and creative economy initiatives:

Creative Economy Sector = three interdependent pieces

- » Cultural nonprofits
- » Creative businesses
- » Creative professionals that produce or distribute cultural goods and services

Creative Economy Initiatives = activities that leverage the creative sector for community development

- » Place-based
- » Cross-sector partnerships

Respondents' creative economy topics and future CCX workshops of interest are grouped below.

Not all are appropriate to be addressed at the CCX because they are not related to arts-based economic and community development, but they are important to note nonetheless:

- » Partnerships (Arts and...)
 - » business
 - » non-arts entities
 - » municipal and state government
 - » healthcare
 - » local stakeholders
 - » science
 - » housing, public health, and public safety
 - » other arts organizations
- » Urban Planning and Design
 - » Differences between urban and rural downtown development
 - » Public art in trail or landscapes
- » Space Development
 - » Multi-purpose arts and culture hubs (studio/educational/gallery)
 - » Co-working and maker spaces; creative enterprise incubators
 - » Ownership of buildings through cooperatives and community land/arts trusts
- » Economic Development
 - » Small business and job development in underserved areas
 - » Micro lending
 - » Policies to mitigate gentrification/displacement
- » Data Collection/Evaluation (Outcomes and Impacts)
- » Marketing/Telling the Story/Making the Case
- » Sector Capacity
 - » Funding and sustainability
 - » Skills/staff training
 - » Leveraging existing arts assets
- » Arts Administration (programming, audience development)
- » Social Issues
 - » Youth and elder empowerment
 - » Inclusion of immigrant communities, low-income populations
 - » Racial diversity and tolerance

At each CCX, NEFA recognizes one creative economy initiative and one organization with [creative economy awards](#) for their successful strategies, their impact on their local creative economy, and the potential for their leadership to be instructive to other communities. [The winners](#) in 2015 were the **Square One Initiative** in Rhode Island and **Creative Portland** in Maine. They are examples of one emergent measure of creative economy initiative success - longevity and adaptability.

LEARNING AND EVALUATION IN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

Are the local creative economy strategies discussed at the CCX working? Because **success is different for each project and for each community**, this is a difficult question to answer. The most popular sessions taught peers the most because they detailed what didn't work, why, and what course corrections were taken to steer toward the outcomes that were desired. The desired outcomes might even have changed throughout the project, but there was enough reflective practice built into the activities that leaders were able to recognize when the goals – and therefore the project – needed to shift. There were measurable outcomes determined by the project that could signal to the participants whether they were on or off course.

Assessing the impact of creative economy strategies continues to be a challenge. For that reason, we devoted time for a panel at the CCX to a discussion with **Jamie Hand**, director of research strategies at Artplace America, and **Meri Jenkins**, manager of the Adams Arts Program at the Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC), who have been collecting metrics from the creative economy projects they fund. A big topic like this one is important to everyone and warranted time for the whole group of 240 attendees to participate. It was a lively discussion, and one that continued at the next New England Creative Economy Network (NECEN) meeting. The two researchers who have helped the MCC evaluate 10 years of Adams grantees, **Dr. Pacey Foster** (UMass Boston) and **Dr. Richard Maloney** (Boston University), facilitated the NECEN meeting on program evaluation at NEFA on 9/29/15, ([read the notes on NEFA's blog](#)) and Artplace has started developing their [matrix](#) of how sectors intersect to do creative placemaking, as well as their metrics library. Keep an eye out for that!

While some CCX participants requested that funders “just tell us what to measure,” it doesn't seem possible that a one-size-fits-all approach would work. We have to use the right tool for the job, and measure what is appropriate for the specific type of creative economy initiative. That's where peer examples like the ones discussed at the CCX come in – you might get ideas of what to measure and how from a similar project, but only you know what your project is trying to do and how to measure whether it succeeded or not.

Some suggested additional questions related to success are featured on the CCX workshop application: What are you aiming for? What does quality of life look like in your community? What change are you trying to create? Are you helping your civic and government leaders make your community better? For whom?

Artplace asks their applicants: How will you know when your project is complete? For example, there are visible, measurable indicators that tell you whether your project is inclusive of who you're trying to serve, but it takes some work to figure out what is feasible for you to measure. Working backwards from your project goals in determining what you need to measure along the way can be helpful. If you want to attract x number of new businesses or artists to your service area with your project, then you need to measure the related outcomes that are different from if you're trying to serve the artists already in your community. You would of course need to ask how many of x are in your community already? What percentage do you want to be serving? How? How will you know that you've served them? Are you trying to attract people? What kind? Are you instead focused on the citizens already in your community? Who are they? What do they care about?

Additionally, a strong suggestion is to work with experts in your community and adapt their metrics instead of creating some in an area in which you are not the expert. For example, **community development goals need community development metrics (adapted to the arts)**. Starting with those that your local economic development, planning, or community development office are using might be a good first step. For example, Creative Portland worked with their economic development and planning colleagues at the city to add creative profession metrics to their annual [economic scorecard](#).

And of course an essential step in evaluation is sharing what you've accomplished and/or learned. Peers, funders and supporters need to know about the work you are doing. As a sector, or a subset of the arts/creative sector that is focused on community development, we need to improve how we describe our goals, strategies, specific assets, and outcomes.

NETWORKING

For cross-sector arts and community development work to get and/or continue to have traction, you have to be willing to work with everyone: those you already know, and those you don't. And, you have to learn the language of other sectors. One way is to start networking within your community; for example, by attending city council meetings and listening. Ask questions and find someone who will explain the economic development terms you don't understand.

For constituents doing this work on the ground in their own communities, it's clear that creative economy projects can be lonely work because it is necessarily very local, and outside the norm of "arts administration" networks and training.

Of CCX respondents, 96% said they were very satisfied or satisfied with the connections they made at the CCX and that the networking helps:

- » support the local work with ideas and inspiration
- » understand the universal struggles and reinforces how/why/when it goes right
- » make new business connections
- » learn from others mistakes and successes
- » find partners for future projects
- » get our name and mission out there among our peers
- » get feedback and fresh brains
- » feel more connected and able to express ideas
- » meet the needs of the field, not just working in a vacuum

Recommended networking strategies from 2015 participants:

- » Have lunch at a table with a topic - health, mobile apps discussions, etc.
- » Sit with new people at lunches and raise an issue like diversity
- » Go to optional evening events
- » Use the attendance list provided on arrival
- » Find others experiencing similar issues even though their programs may be different from yours

Increasing access to the CCX for those who have not previously attended or are from small organizations is necessary to deepen the connections made at the event. Thirty-one participants received complementary registration and/or a travel stipend to attend CCX 2015, 70% of whom said they would not have attended otherwise.

"I really appreciated the support with the stipend, particularly because I wasn't sure what to expect or if I would fit in to such a conference. I got a lot out of it, and plan to go next time. Thank you!" - **Anonymous**

CCX 2015 OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

CCX 2015 met or exceeded expectations for 96% of the survey respondents. This means that they understood what to expect, the experience was what was promised, and it aligned with what they wanted. Participants were promised a fast-paced event where they would learn practical strategies about arts-based community development and meet others invested in such projects. Most stayed for both days, including the final session with National Endowment for the Arts chair Jane Chu and NEFA's creative economy awards.

Respondents reported that the CCX 2015 provided:

- » good ideas and insights that people can use
- » opportunities to network easily
- » handouts and workshops formatted well for learning
- » good Q&A time
- » candid workshop leaders
- » well organized logistics
- » exposure to a vibrant community
- » opportunities to socialize and see various venues

The Keene, NH, location of the CCX was set up with Day One at Keene State College, and Day Two at downtown Keene locations. Most participants understood why we were in different spaces and appreciated the incorporation of the city venues vs. the college. Everyone liked or loved all of the event elements, and there were some great suggestions that we'll try to increase or incorporate as much as possible next time around:

- » Have a home base to connect and get messages
- » Facilitated networking time at workshops
- » Staff members prepared to ask questions in Q&A if needed
- » Keep lunch topic discussions
- » More local optional evening events
- » Include inspiring "arts moment"
- » Keep 20:20:20 format, but with more consistency across workshops
- » Mix of workshops from various points of view (arts, economic development, artists, nonprofit, government)

"I loved the creative use of space for the conference itself. I felt like Keene was really highlighted and the conference planning really reflected the overall idea behind the conference. This could have been a real conference logistical headache for participants, but with the tremendous organization that went into the conference, it felt seamless and easy from the participant viewpoint." - **Margo Ghia, Main Street Arts, Saxtons River, VT**

LEARNING FROM THE CCX MODEL AND NEW ENGLAND CREATIVE ECONOMY NETWORK

NEFA commissioned Chris Dwyer from RMC Research to summarize findings related to feedback from CCX and New England Creative Economy Network participants as part of program planning for NEFA's New England programs and services. At the Keene, NH, event, attendees were asked **what they need for their local creative economy to thrive**. After the event, participants were sent a detailed online survey. The responses were articulate, specific, and very useful to any funder or support organization that wants to target their service to constituents. The following findings come from Dwyer's report:

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT NEEDS AND CONCERNS RELATED TO CREATIVE ECONOMY RESEARCH, EVENTS, AND NETWORKS

Chris Dwyer, RMC Research

In broad terms, the ideas for future support are in three categories:

1. The creation of tools and processes to facilitate cross-sector community collaborations that include a robust role for the arts
2. Building capacity of the arts community to support work in community revitalization
3. Continuing to quantify and highlight the creative sector in New England in new ways.

The needs and interests were very wide ranging, reflecting both the relative "new-ness" of integrating arts with other sectors to achieve community outcomes and the broad spectrum of individuals and organizations interested in these goals.

- » As any CCX agenda illustrates, there are many possibilities for community revitalization initiatives that involve the arts, ranging from integration of new immigrants and engaging public housing residents in community activities to addressing tensions among neighborhoods. In fact, the **options can seem almost overwhelming** to community leaders interested in exploring what might work in their own contexts. Leaders are typically looking for "quick wins" and they want to learn from others how to maximize efficiency and achieve success: How to get started? Who to involve? What's a reasonable expectation? What are the communities to learn from? Are there sources of funding?
- » NEFA's network and conference gatherings have demonstrated that people from all over New England are energized by examples of cross-sector collaborations that include the arts. They have also learned that **cross-sector collaborations can be challenging** for a variety of reasons, including overcoming the communication barriers that arise when people with different professional perspectives begin to work together toward common goals. Each sector has its own terminology, priorities, standards, methodologies, opportunities, and incentive structures. Obviously, people of good will in many communities have overcome those barriers and carried out admirable initiatives that have contributed to community development—and they have lessons to share with others about getting through the "rough patches."
- » Leaders who are embarking on revitalization initiatives that involve the arts will face skeptics who are **not convinced of the value of applying the arts** in different sectors. They want to be able to articulate expected outcomes with confidence, drawing upon examples of successes in other communities. Arts leaders especially want to be able to articulate the value of the arts in

reaching a variety of outcomes associated with community revitalization, e.g., safer communities, economic vitality, creation of more viable public space, and so forth.

- » Arts strategies can play a special role in the **processes associated with cross-sector collaboration**, i.e. strategic planning, engaging reluctant participants, dealing with difficulty issues, relationship-building. Communities have used visual arts participation, storytelling, theater, and performance in many ways to further community outcomes. Participants wanted more ideas for using arts strategies in their community work.
- » In some cases, individuals need external **support to figure out the best way to engage other sectors**. For example, members of the arts community may not have had experience in working with particular sectors, e.g., transportation providers, health care, or subgroups within the community. In some cases, external facilitation may be helpful to bring together leaders from different sectors into productive dialogue.

SUGGESTIONS FROM CCX CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

CCX participants raised some suggestions for NEFA and others to consider in response to the needs and interests they expressed. The ideas and topics identified below offer a menu of options that could be incorporated and disseminated over time within familiar NEFA mechanisms such as NECEN networking meetings, webinars, blogs/monographs, and future CCX gatherings.

Toolkit Resources to Support Communication and Initiative Development

Organizing structure. Community development/revitalization through the arts represents a blend of ideas emanating from a variety of sources and different sectors of the economy. There isn't a single well-known or widely shared framework to guide planning discussions. To further this field, NEFA could work with other leaders in the field of community revitalization to develop a taxonomy of cross-sector initiatives that incorporate or are led by the arts sector. Such a tool would help members of the field expand their ideas about what is possible and serve as a structure for organizing other resources such as community profiles and provide a structure for strands within conferences.

Compilation of existing resources. There are many possibilities for documents, tip sheets, and other reference documents to fill in information gaps. For example, arts organizations might benefit from information about working with other sectors, perhaps in the form of a short introduction to the functions of planning departments and economic development agencies/corporations. Of special interest would be information about funding mechanisms that members of the arts community might not be familiar with (e.g., tax increment financing, tax credits, special assessment districts). Another type of support would be a resource pool or speaker's bureau of experienced individuals who can assist other communities.

Models of effective strategies. Members of the arts community are eager for definitive research that illustrates the value of incorporating the arts in community revitalization strategies. They're looking for a small number of "sure fire" credible examples that can be used in local advocacy. In other fields it is sometimes the practice to convene panels of experts to create authoritative syntheses of outcomes from varied studies. Such meta-analyses produce generalizations about the types of strategies that are most likely to produce desired outcomes.

Outcomes and measures. Local community practitioners are eager to document and assess the results of their initiatives but rarely have the resources to engage professional evaluation support. Any community profiles (see below) that are developed should clearly describe intended and attained outcomes (e.g., increased retail activity, improved sense of belonging to community, positive views of neighborhood), and methods used for assessment. Another option is a menu of types of outcomes that are common to cross-

sector collaborations in communities along with suggestions for approaches to measurement and examples of documentation formats, survey examples, and secondary data sources (e.g., property valuation records).

Municipalities, counties, regions, and states (as well as the federal agencies) collect data on a regular basis that could be of value in both understanding opportunities and gaps and also in tracking the results of initiatives. Examples include county employment data by industry, commercial property valuations by neighborhood, building permits, retail sales, accommodation and food service sales, homeownership by population group, and so forth. A useful reference would be a catalog of types of extant data sources and potential ways to use the information in conjunction with community revitalization projects that integrate the arts.

New England Examples

Practical profiles. Community members want to learn from other communities; of course, in-person exchanges are always best but not an efficient way to reach many communities. The most useful profiles will provide details about start-up, implementation, and results along with practical tips and tools that others can use (e.g., how to do asset mapping, methods of gathering input, sources of funding). Most useful would be a variety of examples that illustrate the instrumental value of the arts within different sectors and in varied community contexts. It is always helpful to learn about the strategies that others have used to overcome obstacles and make course corrections. The raw material for a number of community profiles already exists from past CCX gatherings; tagging and organizing information into profiles would make them more useful.

Creative clusters. It's clear that New England has many geographic areas of creative economic activity—clusters of interconnected creative businesses, suppliers, and associated organizations in a particular field. Some clusters are well-known (e.g., the jewelry design and manufacturing industries in Rhode Island) but other clusters may not be obvious components of the creative economy. Identifying and making visible cluster information is one way to transform the uses of information collected through creative economy reports. Ideas include: mapping creative clusters throughout New England; creating profiles of particular clusters and the creative industries within them, including linkages among artists, industries, and nonprofit organizations. Trends showing cluster growth and decline over time would provide information about opportunities for investment.

Training and exchanges. Participants in the CCX gathering expressed interest in additional learning opportunities which could take many forms—webinar series, peer-to-peer structured exchanges, informal virtual or in-person discussions. Areas for potential professional development: cross-sector leadership development seminars; peer-to-peer structured visitations to learn directly about initiatives in context; introductory sessions built around any of the resources discussed in above, e.g. a webinar that presents financing options that have been used to develop initiatives or a series of sessions that are built around profiles of operational initiatives with the opportunity to engage with local leaders; and relevant practical skills-based training aimed especially at arts professionals (e.g., methods for gathering input from community members through surveys and interviews; use of social media for engagement).

CCX NEXT STEPS

As far as which of these suggestions NEFA will implement, most will require additional staff capacity and funding, and some may best be accomplished by external partners. But in order to continue to provide the unique professional development for those implementing creative economy strategies, NEFA will continue to produce large-scale CCX events every other year and incorporate as many relevant project discussions as possible. Smaller New England Creative Economy Network (NECEN) meetings will happen more consistently to discuss emergent topics from the list above, with the big event happening periodically to focus on strategies and case studies.

NECEN meetings might include a site visit to a community or organization discussed at the CCX, a webinar to hear about a non-New England leader or model project, or a hands-on workshop for training from a local expert.

NEFA will also continue to participate in the National Creative Economy Coalition, especially regarding updates to the definition and coding of creative sector occupations and industries for research purposes. Beginning in June 2016, NEFA will [launch a research project](#) that includes a New England creative economy employment report that updates the 2007 research definition for New England, and continues to promote a consistent “cultural core” in creative sector research nation-wide. This is especially important because the national conversation is engaging creative industries and entrepreneurship. A lingering question for creative economy strategies – and supporting the creative sector – is how to represent its importance separate from connections to and impact on community development? The research project will also include a region-wide artist survey and updates to CreativeGround, both designed to enhance the inclusion of artists and self-employed creative freelancers in the analysis of the region’s creative sector employment.

The CCX events give NEFA the opportunity to collect information about creative economy projects happening around the region, and sharing those findings is important for community leaders. In the future, we would like to organize that information into a taxonomy to see what we can learn from the combination of projects discussed across the years and across geographies. With more data from future CCX events, we can envision sharing patterns of learning that have emerged, and following up with some of the CCX workshop leaders who are still implementing their projects to see what new lessons could be added about long term success and challenges, to the benefit of all New England communities.



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