



"Productive Fictions": Using Pop-Up Exhibits to Engage Residents in Imagining New Possibilities

To Do List:

Before:

- **Commission artists** to co-lead the project with you, including making sure to spread the word about the commission in many “nontraditional” art spaces, and seeking out local artists, artists of color and other undervalued artists. Ideally, we’ve learned that art commissions should go out at least 4 months prior to the exhibit.. It is important for artists to understand the nature of your work and the collaboration—it is less like a stand-alone commission and more like a partnership.
- **Hire a project manager (or 2).** We’ve learned that having a part-time project manager is key, ideally someone who is already very familiar with the community, local nonprofits doing work in the same area, city or town officials, etc. The project manager is responsible for managing the artists, doing logistics for the exhibit and related events, working with press and community partners to do publicity, coordinating volunteers and running the exhibit. If funding allows, the project manager should be on board at least 4 months before the exhibit and 1 month afterwards to support folks interested in on-going work and to share information back to the community from the exhibit.
- **Work with community based nonprofit organizations** to host the project and related events and help spread the word amongst residents, artists, merchants, youth, elders, etc. Choose community based nonprofits which already have strong relationships in the community and can lend you credibility, critical knowledge, exhibit space, and local resources and relationships. Not only does this make your exhibit more relevant and better-received, but it helps to ensure on-going impact after the exhibit is done.
- **Make sure your space is easy to get to:** having our exhibits in places with heavy foot traffic and in the heart of the neighborhood has been critical to really involving the public, not just those who are already involved or concerned with an issue.
- **Connect with related city/town/region officials, offices, and plans:** for example, we connected Public Kitchen to National Food Day and Making Planning Processes Public to the Boston Redevelopment Authority’s community-based planning meetings.



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During:

- **Create a welcoming space** with food, spaces to relax, and chances to interact with the exhibit and/or a volunteer out on the street.
- **Debrief everyday:** By debriefing with our team everyday, we were able to make critical adjustments, like pulling parts of the exhibit out into the neighborhood on a nice day
- **Use events to create buzz:** Even as foot traffic is critical, having a reason to come to the exhibit (or get in the paper) helps drive traffic too, and having events co-led by community partners, youth groups, city officials, etc, can bring in different people.
- **Don't forget documentation!** We get so caught up in the exhibit that we have learned that it's critical to have someone else responsible for taking photos and video. You want to share what happened afterwards for folks who couldn't come, folks in other cities interested in the same work, funders, etc.

After:

- **Debrief with your artists, production manager(s), and community partners:** What did you learn? What worked or didn't work? These different constituencies bring knowledge that can be critical to moving forward and to planning another pop-up exhibit in the future.
- **Capture your data and give it back:** If you used your exhibit to collect ideas and/or information from the public, make sure you have a plan to share it back with them.
- **Work with local nonprofits or other bodies** to continue the work of the exhibit. For example, we needed to figure out how to support folks who wanted to impact on-going planning processes or host a component of a Public Kitchen after our exhibits were over.

For more information, contact us at ds4si@ds4si.org. Many thanks to our funders, ArtPlace and The Boston Foundation, and core partners: Upham's Corner Main Street and Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative.