

The “How To List” – Vermont Arts Exchange: Art & Soul Starksboro, VT

(Best Practices in Community Arts Work based on experiences – Matthew Perry)

1. **IDENTIFY** (or at least understand) your task, challenge with your Core team.
Your Core team may be the individual or group that you initially made contact with.
2. **CREATE A MISSION. SET GOALS & OBJECTIVES**
3. **BUILD** upon your Core team: Establish committees and sub committees if needed. Consider a project coordinator-planner to assist the artist.
4. **PROJECT STRUCTURE:** Define if it is one big event or a number of smaller projects.
Consider creating “Phases” for the project, which allows you to go step by step and evaluate as you go. *FLEXIBILITY is important. Creating new projects with new people is like making art from a blank canvas. Have more than one canvas ready. Be prepared to try new things, break away from the mold, paint over and start again. Have everyone keep an open mind.*
5. **COMMUNITY MAPPING:** Identify organizations, the stakeholders and key individuals. *The variety of resources you need to bring your project to fruition are most likely right in the community you are working in. Utilizing these local resources will help bond the project. Be inclusive not exclusive. Reach out to every one of all ages that may be integral to your project. Turn over every rock. The local ARTISTS are a key stakeholder (creative thinkers) in this process. Hold a casual potluck gathering inviting all of them. There’s a good chance that some of them will continue the work after the initial project comes to rest (which is also an important thing to consider). Identify the skeptics as well. Look at a physical map of the area and get a good sense of the lay of the land. This map could be a valuable tool in your box. Identify community-gathering spaces, which will also play an important role.*
6. **COMMUNICATION TOOLS:** Define what your tools are for communicating information based on what already exists. What can be improved upon and what new strategies you can implement? Use your Communication Tools to inform the community of your progress. Develop a list of Public Relations (PR) media. Engage the interest of reporters that can follow your progress. Good PR is important for the artist, community, funders and is essential documentation. Proper. Professional documentation is crucial.
7. **COMMUNITY MEETINGS:** Meet with your Stakeholders. This is a good opportunity to introduce you, the project and listen. It is a good time to gather& collect information. **GATHER & COLLECT:** Formulate your plan of collecting information that will help you decide the “Action Steps” that lie ahead. How will you do this? EX: SWOTs, Storytelling sessions, community workshops, neighborhood potluck suppers. *Hold group meetings “on their turf” when possible*

where comfort level is at the highest. Personal invitations by telephone or in person are the most effective ways to engage those unlikely to participate. Build on existing meetings, ex: get on the agenda at a Zoning Meeting, meet with teachers after school and bring cookies. Food & beverage is always an important part of this work. It can work like a magnet and puts everyone in a good mood. Humor is also key in this work and in “breaking new ground”.

8. ACTION:

* “Think with the end in mind”. At the start of the project, have a goal and envision the end.

Is it a parade, exhibition, a reading, concert? Who will celebrate, where?

* Important to consider the timing of project work and “tagging on” to ongoing popular events/gatherings, collaborate rather than duplicate if possible.

* Utilize your Communication Tools to keep the momentum going and informing the community of progress. Be open to “CHANGE” and be flexible. A project may decide to take a turn in the road.

* Embrace the positive surprises that come up! Encourage, support and recognize individuals when they “step up to the plate”.

* Make the most of the situation. Try to push the limits of what you can do to get the most out of it and to help it run smoothly. If there’s an adult gathering, consider if having a childcare activity run by local teens would not only increase adult participation but also a mini related activity with children might also be valuable.

* Use (with caution), the words “Art”& “Artist”. “Getting things done and being creative about it” seemed a more appropriate approach. Art can be seen as intimidating, an accessory, and luxury or even as something we don’t really need.

9. IMPLEMENTATION: *Bringing the work to an end and celebrating is the icing on the cake.*

- Lots of good PR, posters, and marketing are key.
- Volunteers from the community are vital as is food & drink.
- Reach out to area businesses, farms for material & products and money. Consider them sponsors and give them proper credit (hand painted signs, logo on Banners, name in programs, etc.).
- Bring together your stakeholders, have Firemen parking cars, Planning board members selling tickets, children handing out programs. PTA serving food.
- Personally invite sponsors, funders, local legislators, art councils and press.
- Continue documentation and show the project’s progress through past documentation if possible (short video, photos of people making art).