



NeighborWorks® America

CREATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



FINAL REPORT

April 2018

Working Together for Strong Communities





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“Sewing the Fabric of our Community” by Kate Deciccio and Rose Jaffe. Chosen through the 2015 call for proposal process, traditional fabrics inspired the artists, and each person featured in the mural lives in the community.

Photo credit: Edgar Alvarado

COVER PHOTOS

Celebrating the opening of 41 Ross.

Photo credit: Chinatown Community Development Center

Epic Art Studio

Photo credit: Diosselyn Tot-Velasquez

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**Samantha Lo and her mother
at the “Eat Chinatown” opening.**

Photo credit: Chinatown Community
Development Center

INTRODUCTION

NeighborWorks America is a national nonprofit organization that creates opportunities for people to live in affordable homes, improve their lives and strengthen their communities. We do so by providing support—in the form of grants, technical assistance, training and organizational assessment—to our network of nearly 250 high-performing nonprofit organizations across the country. Many of these NeighborWorks network organizations are pursuing comprehensive approaches to affordable housing and community development and we support them with multifaceted programs and initiatives. The “North Star” guiding all of our work is our mission to ensure that every community in America is a place of opportunity.

Over the course of a year in 2016-17, NeighborWorks America sought to capture what art, culture and creativity can contribute to creation of equitable and engaged communities that offer opportunity to all. This report describes our exploration process and what we found.

WHY CREATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

NeighborWorks organizations use the arts to engage residents, build community, create awareness, forge partnerships, beautify public spaces, honor history and culture, revitalize neighborhoods, promote economic growth and lift up voices that often are not heard.

Alleyway murals in Kansas City, Kansas; art classes for developmentally disabled adults in Huntington, Indiana; and an interactive exhibit highlighting the memories of elders in San Francisco’s Chinatown may sound quite distinct, but they all represent ways to use arts, culture and creative expression to build and strengthen communities. NeighborWorks refers to these types of efforts as creative community development¹. The organizations that comprise the NeighborWorks network have rich and varied experience incorporating arts, culture and creative expression into their comprehensive community development efforts. We have seen the value of these creative approaches for many years, as NeighborWorks organizations use the arts to engage residents, build community, create awareness, forge partnerships, beautify public spaces, honor history and culture, revitalize neighborhoods, promote economic growth and lift up voices that often are not heard.

¹ During the exploratory process, we referred to these activities collectively as “arts, culture, creativity and placemaking.” We examined different terms in the course of our explorations and arrived at “creative community development” as the term that resonated best with our network and stakeholders.

NeighborWorks' Approach to Comprehensive Community Development

Comprehensive community development uses interrelated strategies to achieve progress on multiple fronts in a given community. Strategies may focus on housing, economic development, safety, youth, financial security, equity and inclusion and community engagement. Many of these approaches leverage partnerships to focus on both the place and the people who live there.



We sought to determine whether NeighborWorks—as a funder, capacity builder and vital voice for communities—could use creative community development to advance core goals and strategies.

Recognizing the richness both of the work already underway and the potential for more, NeighborWorks America began a yearlong planning process to better understand where (and at what scope) creative community development is happening in the network, its impact and how we could potentially broaden and deepen our support for this work. In particular, we sought to determine whether NeighborWorks—as a funder, capacity builder and vital voice for communities—could use creative community development to advance core goals and strategies. We had a particular interest in its application to the promotion of inclusiveness and equity, community engagement, resident leadership and cross-sector collaboration.





This planning process was made possible by generous support from the Kresge Foundation and included input from a broad range of stakeholders, including NeighborWorks staff, network organizations, and other partners in community development and the arts.

THE EXPLORATION PROCESS

We spent a year gathering input from network organizations, NeighborWorks staff, and existing and potential partners.

Beginning in 2017, we spent a year gathering input from network organizations, NeighborWorks staff, and existing and potential partners. We surveyed the network to discern the extent to which organizations already use the arts to pursue their goals, their requirements for this type of work and the assistance they want from NeighborWorks. We also conducted interviews with experts in the field to determine where gaps in capacity-building exist and convened NeighborWorks staff representing multiple divisions to weigh in on what support we could and should offer. Finally, we assessed the availability of training for creative community development, both through our own curriculum and other organizations' offerings, and analyzed trends in the evaluation of arts- and culture-based work. (See Appendix B: Exploratory Activities for a description of the full range of our information-gathering efforts.)

NeighborWorks America Creative Community Development Exploratory Process

	Phases	Products/Milestones
	DISCOVERY: Gather and synthesize information on the intersection of arts, culture and creativity in community development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network Scan Survey • Literature Review • Partner Identification
	DIALOGUE: Conduct informational interviews, focus groups and discussions designed to raise key issues and opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Informant Interviews • Focus Group Discussions • Network Advisory Committee Input • Peer Learning Site Visit • External Advisors' Input
	ANALYSIS: Perform deep-dive review of evaluation tools, curriculum and community development practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network Case Studies • Training Curriculum Review • Evaluation Tool Review
	SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Develop and vet recommendations for deeper NeighborWorks support of arts as a vital component of community development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Statement • Recommendations • Final Convening



Creative Abilities Art Studio participant.

Photo credit: Evan Mower

Insufficient understanding of the value of creativity, cultural expression and artistic practice to community development²

- ▶ **Cultivate imagination and value process as much as output:** Preconceptions about this work can limit the ability to fully realize its potential. For example, a number of interviewees voiced concern about a tendency of arts/community development partnerships to prioritize a particular output to the detriment of the artistic process. While artists are indeed skilled at painting murals, for example, they also can help organizations think differently and foster new approaches to community challenges.
- ▶ **Identify champions:** We heard that leadership support and staff champions are vital to keeping creative community development at the forefront of an organization’s strategies. It can be challenging to gain traction and sustain these efforts when internal buy-in and support is lacking.
- ▶ **Embrace and mitigate risk:** Creative community development may require testing new approaches. While this means embracing uncertainty (especially for organizations newer to this work), several participants noted that starting with small demonstration projects and extrapolating from existing models helps mitigate risks.



Hula Hoop Hoopla.

Photo credit: Shannon Kennelly

Difficulty demonstrating and articulating the impact of creative community development

- ▶ **Demonstrate that art tells organizations’ stories in a compelling way:** Sometimes, creative community development is seen as a competing priority instead of as a support of existing objectives. We heard that it can be a challenge to articulate the value of arts, culture and creativity in relation to broader goals. When framed successfully, however, creative community development actually promotes and markets the organization and community; in other words, it’s not just “art for art’s sake.”

² During a stakeholder convening in December 2017, participants ranked this as the most critical issue they are facing.

- ▶ **Build capacity for evaluation:** Many organizations struggle to develop relevant metrics to evaluate the results of their creative development work. This is a critical challenge because organizations often are asked to demonstrate return on investment.

Thus, many participants expressed a desire for more holistic evaluation tools and assistance in developing theories of change, implementing evaluations, and interpreting and communicating the results.



SPACE.

Photo credit: Shannon Kennelly

Struggle to identify arts partners and develop shared expectations and frameworks

- ▶ **Seek coaching on how to identify the right partners:** The vast majority of community development professionals we spoke to rely on partnerships to engage in creative community development. Although the types of partners vary, the most common are either individual artists, designers or other “culture-bearers”³ or arts, culture and design-related nonprofits. Organizations newer to this work, or whose primary focus is affordable housing development, often struggle to identify and recruit such partners. Identifying individual artists who are suitable and interested is a particular challenge.
- ▶ **Learn to work effectively in partnerships:** We heard from the network that artists and community development organizations often have different priorities, approaches, terminologies and strengths; working together is not always easy or intuitive. Differing expectations can prevent collaboration. For example, many interviewees reported that artists often feel they are not compensated fairly for their time and effort when partnering with community developers. Likewise, some community development professionals see a need to train artists and cultural leaders on resident engagement and other fundamentals of community development.
- ▶ **Develop a shared language:** We heard about the importance of articulating the intersection of art and community development in terms so audiences understand. Participants in these conversations also noted a need to translate sector-specific terminology so that partners are on the same page.

³ Defined as any individual, especially a migrant, who possesses, and thus diffuses, cultural values and traits between societies.



Community Clothesline Project.
Photo credit: Shannon Kennelly



The buildings that Pathfinder Services and its partners hope to transform into a community arts center.
Photo credit: Evan Mower

Need to avoid gentrification-led displacement and promote inclusion

- ▶ **Assure equitable outcomes:** A number of interviewees reported a perceived shift in the field toward creative placemaking projects that advance equity for marginalized communities, and away from work that is more focused on physical change or traditional economic development. Many network organizations cited challenges related to segregation and a lack of connection between diverse resident groups. Community building and engagement was cited as the most common motivation for undertaking creative community development. There is a desire for new models and tools to help residents bridge their difference. In addition, there is a desire to use these tools to give residents a say in the development of their own communities.
- ▶ **Avoid gentrification and displacement:** We heard about network organizations' efforts to use creative community development to promote and preserve cultures while avoiding gentrification and displacement. Many participants in the planning process were concerned that by drawing attention to a neighborhood, creative community development could accelerate market appreciation and alter the character of the neighborhood. They find it difficult to foster inclusive growth and are looking for creative ways to spur more equitable development.
- ▶ **Bridge differences in terminology:** “[The term] placemaking is immediately linked to gentrification and displacement,” warned one interviewee. A number of people we spoke to referred instead to “placekeeping” and “community cultural development” (thus maintaining the voice and culture of a neighborhood).

Difficulty in securing sufficient financial resources

- ▶ **Obtain adequate financial resources to sustain and scale up:** In several feedback sessions, community development professionals named securing adequate financing as the top challenge they face when attempting to integrate arts, culture, creativity and placemaking into their work.
- ▶ **Articulate the value proposition:** Network organization representatives repeatedly emphasized the importance of helping funders make the connection between creative community development and the outcomes they want to see. We heard that although funding will always be a challenge, other streams will open up if network organizations can explicitly connect this work to their goals and objectives.

There is clear enthusiasm in the network and the broader field for NeighborWorks to deepen support for this work.

Network organizations also let us know what support they need from NeighborWorks America. The most common requests were for peer-learning exchanges, training, funding, and exposure of these needs to funders and other decision makers.

Based on these findings, and the clear enthusiasm in the network and the broader field for a deepening of support by NeighborWorks, we created the following statement to formally express our position on creative community development and lay out a plan for robust support in the near future.

NEIGHBORWORKS CREATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

NeighborWorks America believes art, culture and creative expression are key components of comprehensive community development. Art, culture and creativity can connect people across differences, amplify residents' voices, generate imaginative problem solving, animate public and private spaces, rejuvenate structures and streetscapes, honor history, improve business viability, and boost jobs and income. When they are fully integrated, community development and arts- and culture-based strategies enhance one another. They create opportunities for people to improve their lives and strengthen their communities. For these reasons, NeighborWorks America embraces creative community development as a key strategy for advancing our vision of ensuring that every community in America is a place of opportunity.

What is creative community development? We define it as when residents, community development organizations, artists, culture-bearers and other partners harness the power of culture, art and creativity to collectively catalyze social, physical and economic transformation in their neighborhoods, towns, tribal lands, cities or regions. Many people refer to this work as “creative placemaking.” However, NeighborWorks America’s approach encompasses placemaking and placekeeping, with a goal of creating and preserving communities that offer equitable opportunities for all residents.

Kids play day.

Photo credit: Artist Solidarity Fund





The Role of Arts and Culture in Advancing Comprehensive Community Development



Connect People
Across Difference



Improve Business
Viability



Boost Jobs
and Income



Amplify
Residents' Voices



Animate Public and
Private Spaces



Rejuvenate Structures
and Streetscapes



Generate Imaginative
Problem Solving



Honor History

We celebrate the value of professional artists, as well as the contribution of people of all backgrounds who engage in creative and cultural expression as part of resident engagement.

What constitutes culture, art and creativity and who is an artist?

NeighborWorks America takes a broad and inclusive view. We celebrate the value of professional artists, as well as the contribution of people of all backgrounds who engage in creative and cultural expression as part of resident engagement. We honor the role culture-bearers play in preserving and sharing often-marginalized cultural values and practices. Culture and art include not just the fine and performing arts, but also the traditions, rituals and languages found in specific neighborhoods, tribal lands, towns, cities or regions.

Our approach to creative community development is shaped by NeighborWorks America's core values and extensive guidance from network organizations. Through this work, we strive to:

- Advance multi-sector, creative and culturally appropriate efforts to improve lives and strengthen communities.
- Encourage expression of identity and priorities by diverse residents and communities.

**NeighborWorks
America’s commitment
to creative community
development also
aligns with the strategic
priorities that guide our
organization.**



“Liminal Space/Crossings.”

Photo credit: Chinese Culture Center

- Promote equity, inclusion and engagement.
- Support the strategies that best fit unique local conditions.
- Leverage the assets of NeighborWorks America, the NeighborWorks network, our partners and the broader field to address critical needs.

NeighborWorks America’s commitment to creative community development also aligns with the strategic priorities that guide our organization:

- An emphasis on people-centered and place-conscious strategies.
- A holistic understanding of network organizations’ businesses and activities.
- A commitment to strengthen the housing and community development field.

NeighborWorks America’s investment in lifting up culture, art and creativity as part of community development builds on our prior support of arts- and culture-based strategies and responds to strong interest and deep experience across our network. To strengthen the field, we will respond to the most critical needs and issues that community development organizations face in this arena, as identified in our research:

- Insufficient understanding of the value of creativity, cultural expression and artistic practice to community development.
- Difficulty demonstrating and articulating the impact of creative community development.
- Struggle to identify arts partners and develop shared expectations and frameworks.
- The need to avoid gentrification-led displacement and promote inclusion.
- Failure to secure adequate financial resources.

To advance culture, art and creativity in community development, NeighborWorks America will:

- Build network organizations’ capacity.
- Raise visibility of arts- and culture-based strategies and creative expression to increase understanding of their value and aid network organizations’ efforts to secure financial resources.
- Provide the network and broader field with tools for and training in creative community development and impact assessment.
- Embed creative practices and collaboration within NeighborWorks America.



Waterway Park.

Photo credit: Steve Curtis

GROWING CREATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT – AT NEIGHBORWORKS AND BEYOND

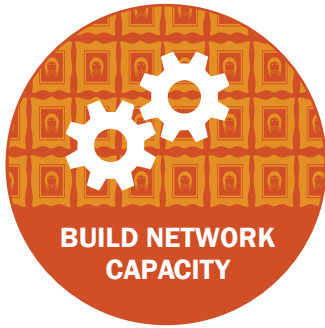
As a result of this planning process, NeighborWorks America has recognized creative community development as one of several components of comprehensive community development strategies. We have drafted a work plan that includes objectives and corresponding strategies that provide a roadmap for our creative community development work over the next several years. The plan calls for us to:

- Grow the capacity of NeighborWorks’ network organizations to plan and execute creative community development strategies.
- Support the advancement of this work in the larger community development field.
- Demonstrate the value of creative community development to funders and decision makers and encourage them to offer support.
- Integrate creativity into our own way of doing business.

This plan responds to the needs we heard from network organizations and includes a full complement of possible activities to support creative community development in the network and the field. As a next step, NeighborWorks will prioritize a few strategies to tackle first and allocate resources to accomplish them.

NeighborWorks’ approach to supporting creative community development efforts in the network and field.





Potential Strategies & Activities

- ▶ Pilot
- ▶ Knowledge exchange
- ▶ Collaborations

OBJECTIVE 1: Build network capacity and connections for creative community development

We will focus on building the capacity of the organizations in our network to plan and execute creative community development strategies, as well as connect to others doing this work. We will explore creation of a demonstration program through which we can test and refine a variety of tactics to address critical challenges that network organizations face when using creative community development to further their goals. We will use the results of the pilot to inform the work of a small cohort of network organizations and their partners to further develop the knowledge base and the field as a whole. These knowledge- and field-building efforts may include creation of learning communities, integration into existing convenings and development of a catalogue of organizations that are addressing specific opportunities or challenges. NeighborWorks will also seek cross-sector partnerships with funders and other organizations active in this arena.



Potential Strategies & Activities

- ▶ External communications
- ▶ Speaking engagement
- ▶ Grantseeking and grantmaking

OBJECTIVE 2: Raise the visibility of creative community development in order to increase understanding of its value and aid network organizations' efforts to secure financial resources

We heard from network organizations that NeighborWorks could play a significant role by helping funders, leaders and decision makers understand the value of creative community development. We hope this insight will increase support for both the work and the organizations undertaking it. It is particularly important to demonstrate how creative work supports the goals of comprehensive community development, rather than diverting needed attention and resources.

NeighborWorks will work to promote best practices for creative community development in our external communications, including speaking engagements, to raise visibility among key audiences. As a vital part of this objective, we also will explore funding and re-granting opportunities to directly support network organizations' creative community development work.



OBJECTIVE 3: Provide the NeighborWorks network and broader field with tools and training in creative community development and impact assessment

We will support the growth of creative community development not only in our network but also in the broader community development field. Potential strategies include creating new and augmenting existing training offerings to develop the core competencies required for creative community development. We will investigate opportunities to work with other training providers to fill gaps, as well as consider development of new training courses. We may also assist network organizations and others in evaluating the impact of their efforts by identifying, developing or adapting data collection tools, piloting them and providing technical assistance to integrate them into their existing work.

Potential Strategies & Activities

- ▶ Training
- ▶ External communications
- ▶ Evaluation



OBJECTIVE 4: Embed creative practices and collaboration at NeighborWorks

We strongly believe in the power of arts and culture to inspire and strengthen the work of our partners as well as NeighborWorks itself. Our exploratory process has included participation across NeighborWorks divisions, which has helped ensure our findings and our plans are appropriate for and relevant to our entire organization, as well as our partners. Our working group is enthusiastic about supporting art- and culture-based work within our network, as well as by adopting creative practices within our organization. We also heard from network members that the inclusion of artistic practices in NeighborWorks training and events would enhance the experience offered and enrich the subject matter.

We will work to identify and allocate financial resources for creative community development and continue to involve cross-divisional participants in our work. We will seek to create intentional opportunities to include creative practices in our planning processes, meetings, training sessions and the evaluation tools offered by Success Measures. We also will seek to bring more arts and culture into our physical space and our day-to-day ways of doing business.

Potential Strategies & Activities

- ▶ Grantseeking and grantmaking
- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Planning/operations adaptations
- ▶ Convenings and meetings
- ▶ Physical space
- ▶ Training
- ▶ Success Measures
- ▶ Corporate reporting and data analysis

For more on our work going forward, see Appendix A: Creative Community Development Objectives and Strategies Detail.



“The American” by Maxx Moses.
Selected through the 2015 call for proposals, the artist engaged community youth to help paint the mural.
Photo credit: Edgar Alvarado

Deepening our support for creative community development makes sense for NeighborWorks.

CONCLUSION

NeighborWorks America undertook an investigation of arts, culture, creativity and placemaking to understand their significance for our network organizations, define the challenges, and identify how we can help overcome those obstacles and deepen their engagement with this work. We found that creative community development strategies are important for our network organizations and that they face common challenges that NeighborWorks can help them overcome.

Deepening our support for creative community development makes sense for NeighborWorks and complements our strategic plan in multiple ways. It helps further comprehensive community development strategies. It can improve the quality of housing development and strengthen ties among those who live there. It presents opportunities to revitalize communities by engaging residents, strengthening the business community, encouraging cultural expression, and improving physical surroundings and safety. Finally, it helps strengthen both our network as a whole as well as each individual organization.

NeighborWorks America will work over the next few years to develop an internal structure to support creative community development, including building capacity and allocating resources. We will concentrate first on a few key strategies, such as launching a pilot, fostering knowledge exchange and sharing the value of creative community development with larger audiences. We are excited about the potential of creative approaches for making comprehensive community development strategies more successful, and we look forward to deepening our support for these initiatives in the years ahead.

APPENDIX A: CREATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES DETAIL

1. Build network capacity and connections for creative community development.

- a. Demonstration project:
 - i. Test and refine a variety of tactics (including grant funding, direct technical assistance, peer-to-peer learning, training and evaluation tools) to address critical challenges with small cohorts of network organizations and their partners.
 - ii. Use results from the demonstration project to facilitate peer exchange, develop the knowledge base and build the field.
- b. Knowledge exchange:
 - i. Leverage network and field expertise by fostering knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer learning in creative community development.
 - ii. Cataloging: Build on the network scan by identifying a diverse range of organizations from the network and beyond that are working to address specific opportunities or challenges.
 - iii. Best-practice dissemination: Promote stories, promising practices and lessons learned through external communications.
 - iv. Matchmaking: Broker one-on-one connections between network members, as well as with non-network organizations.
 - v. Learning communities: Establish groups of network organization peers and external partners to facilitate dialogue.
 - vi. Peer convenings: Integrate creative community development into existing peer-learning events.
- c. Collaborations: Seek cross-sector partnership opportunities between NeighborWorks America, funders and artists.

2. Raise visibility of arts- and culture-based strategies and creative expression to increase understanding of their value and aid network organizations' efforts to secure financial resources.

- a. Promote stories, promising practices and lessons learned through external communications.
- b. Seek speaking engagements to raise visibility among key audiences.
- c. Seek funding and re-granting opportunities to support network organizations' creative community development work.

3. Provide the network and broader field with critical training and tools for creative community development and impact assessment.

- a. Training:
 - i. Partner to create new training offerings.
 - ii. Adapt existing training coursework to build core competencies and infuse curricula with more relevant examples and tailored content.
 - iii. Evaluate whether gaps still exist and develop new courses, if needed—perhaps in partnership with external training providers.
- b. Promotion of stories, promising practices and lessons learned through external communications.
- c. Evaluation: Through Success Measures, connect community development organizations with evaluation tools appropriate to their needs and grounded in the tenets of community-based research.
 - i. Identify, adapt and develop evaluation/data collection tools that integrate arts and cultural components.
 - ii. Partner with organizations experienced in creative community development evaluation to enhance existing offerings and explore new approaches.
 - iii. Provide technical assistance to help organizations integrate creative community development into existing work (through evaluation plans, theory of change, etc.).
 - iv. Pilot innovative/creative methods for data collection and evaluation across content areas related to community development.

Embed creative practices and collaboration within NeighborWorks America.

- a. Financial resources: Secure adequate funds for creative community development work
- b. Collaboration:
 - i. Maintain cross-divisional leadership of creative community development efforts and sustain staff participation.
 - ii. Explore ways this creative community development planning process can serve as a model for other cross-divisional initiatives.
- c. Planning and operations adaptations: Intentionally apply the artistic/creative process as a tool when planning new initiatives or programs, and when adapting existing operations.
- d. Convenings and meetings: Increase commitment to artist co-facilitators, creative engagement techniques and graphic highlights to facilitate creative thinking and enliven meetings.
- e. Physical space: Activate NeighborWorks' office spaces with art that provides a connection to the mission.
- f. Training: Increase use of artistic pedagogical tools in course offerings to enhance teaching and learning.
- g. Success Measures: Pilot innovative/creative methods for data collection and evaluation across content areas related to community development.
- h. Organizational reporting and data analysis: Develop corporate understanding and learning related to data collection or creative initiatives.

APPENDIX B: EXPLORATORY ACTIVITIES

Network Scan Survey

The Network scan survey included questions about network organizations' past, current and planned work in creative community development; their primary challenges in doing the work; and the resources they would find helpful. We distributed the survey online and via email and received responses from 75 NeighborWorks organizations, encompassing about a third of our network and providing a sample that reflects the full range of communities in which we work. The majority of respondents reported they use creative community development approaches, and do so strategically, as a way to support their larger revitalization goals. We were able to gather information about top challenges (discussed on page 5) and desired support, including peer-to-peer learning and financial resources.

Arts Week at NeighborWorks Training Institute

We planned multiple arts- and culture-themed events at the NeighborWorks Training Institute in Minneapolis in May 2017. These included a two-day training course on arts- and culture-based community development in the Twin Cities, arts-focused neighborhood tours, and workshops in which attendees discussed their organizations' use of arts and culture to achieve community engagement and development goals. All of the arts-related events attracted high levels of participation and we learned about the breadth and depth of network organizations' experience with art, culture, creativity and placemaking.

Key Informant Interviews

From August to September 2017, NeighborWorks America conducted a series of informant interviews and a round table with experts in the community development, arts and cultural fields. The goal was to identify NeighborWorks America's possible role in arts, culture, creativity and placemaking. Participants reported an increased interest in projects that advance social outcomes and equity and the need to bridge the gap between the community development and arts sectors. They saw opportunity for NeighborWorks America in leveraging our already-robust training infrastructure to build field capacity and enhance our track record in supporting equity.

External-Advisor Conversations

During the same time period, NeighborWorks America conducted a series of exploratory conversations with organizations working at the intersection of community development and arts, culture, creativity and placemaking. Through the conversations, we sought to:

- Better understand the universe of stakeholders that support this work.
- Form ongoing relationships with knowledge leaders and institutions that would be important for NeighborWorks America to know and stay connected with moving forward.
- Identify needs and gaps in the marketplace and gain insights into what NeighborWorks America's role or strengths could be.
- Identify potential partnerships or joint venture opportunities for NeighborWorks America.

Through the conversations, NeighborWorks America developed insight into how our core competencies align with opportunities and needs, as well as identified possible opportunities for collaboration. Advisors also shared advice and lessons learned that will inform NeighborWorks America's strategic direction.

NeighborWorks Advisory Committee Consultations

As part of the exploratory process, NeighborWorks America engaged in dialogue with several of its network advisory committees. These committees are composed of representatives—typically, but not always, executive directors—from organizations throughout the network of approximately 250 community-based nonprofits that NeighborWorks America supports through formal partnerships. The network advisory committees are carefully composed to include representatives from all geographic regions and with a variety of organizational capacities, and each is focused on a specific line of business or aspect of community development work. These consultations enabled us to gain insights directly from organizations that are actually doing creative community development and may benefit from NeighborWorks America's support.

NeighborWorks Staff Focus Groups

NeighborWorks America convened three, 90-minute focus groups with 13 participants in August 2017. We invited staff from across the organization; participants represented the following departments: Corporate Planning, Performance and Strategy, Finance Planning and Contracts, Green Strategies, Information Technology & Services, Leadership & Development, Office of the General Counsel, Organizational Assessment, Procurement, regional Public Affairs and Communications, Public Relations, and Public Policy and Legislative Affairs.

Through the focus groups, we informed participants of key findings from the exploratory process to date, gathered ideas on how NeighborWorks America could help network organizations advance creative community development and heard how participants experience creativity within NeighborWorks America and where they see opportunities for more. We encountered a broad sense of enthusiasm for creative community development and creative practices at NeighborWorks America.

Ad Hoc Advisory Team

We pulled together a team of advisors composed of representatives from network organizations that are engaged in creative community development. The team included organizations large and small, from urban and rural communities, and those with a great deal of creative community development experience and those newer to the work. These advisors came together for several conversations to help us interpret our findings, vet the position statement and objectives in their early and later stages, and participate in a convening of stakeholders at which we unveiled the case statement and objectives publicly.

Curriculum Review

Given its training track record and reputation, NeighborWorks America explored how its existing offerings matches with training needs at the intersection of community development and arts, culture, creativity and placemaking. We also wished to learn more about other training providers in this arena to consider for possible collaborations and to be able to direct constituents needing additional resources. The curriculum scan supported these objectives. By looking at core competencies needed for creative community development and identifying training gaps and related partnership opportunities, this analysis helped ground our deliberations as we considered possible strategies.

Evaluation Literature Review

Leaders from NeighborWorks' Success Measures team performed a review of literature and programs, and conducted interviews with eight leaders in the field about efforts to create evaluation schemes for creative community development. The resulting report focuses on approaches, frameworks, trends and challenges in the evaluation of creative community development, noting that one area of interest is the development of innovative ways to evaluate the work.

“Bright Spots” Case Studies

NeighborWorks America identified and profiled five network organizations engaged in creative community development. The organizations—Community Housing of Wyandotte County (Kansas City, Kansas), NeighborWorks of Western Vermont, Montgomery Housing Partnership (Silver Spring, Maryland), Chinatown Community Development Center (San Francisco) and Pathfinder Services (Huntington, Indiana)—are using creative community development to achieve a variety of objectives, including economic revitalization, cultural preservation, community engagement and public safety. The case studies explore how these organizations became involved in the work, how it serves their larger community development goals, and their successes, challenges and lessons learned.

Stakeholder Convening

As the culmination of our exploration into creative community development, we held a convening in December 2017 to introduce our findings to NeighborWorks America staff, network organizations and partners. The daylong session highlighted creative community development efforts taking place throughout the NeighborWorks network, introduced the NeighborWorks Creative Community Development position statement and objectives, and shared creative activities designed to energize and inspire. We designed the session to emphasize the value of creative community development as one of the tools in the comprehensive community development toolbox and demonstrate how practitioners can use it to promote equity and elevate resident voices.

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NeighborWorks America Internal Work Group

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- Randy Gordon, Senior Director, Curriculum, NeighborWorks Services Group
- Maggie Grieve, Vice President, Success Measures
- Nancy Kopf, Director, Success Measures Evaluation Services
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- Judith Rose, Sr. Relationship Manager., Northeast Region
- Alex Sasayama, Relationship Manager, Western Region
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