CDN Creative Placemaking Convocation

Plenary

October 8, 2020 at 2pm EDT

English Transcript

[ MUSIC PLAYING ]

>> SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Good to see you. Welcome. Those who don't know me, I am Eric Giles. I know many of you have been using Zoom as one of your primary ways of doing business during this pandemic but it never hurts to get a refresher. Before we begin digging into the content, I would like to go over a few things. I encourage you to interact with each other and us throughout the day via chat.

That is where we will field questions, technical and otherwise. We have a couple of people working today. Thank you. Feel free to send them technical questions you may have. All other questions and comments can be entered into the general chat.

To send a chat, click on the chat icon at the bottom screen to open the chat window and start typing at the bottom of the chat window. To see your fellow participants, click on the participant's icon at the bottom of the screen to open up the participant's window. You will notice that we have quite a crowd today from across the country, agency folks and partner organizations. Speaking of people joining us today, we have a sketch artist who will illustrate our sessions in realtime. Thanks so much for joining us. You can watch her work through the gallery view or you may want to make his work your primary view. To do so just hover over the video and right click, from the menu click pin. To unpin, click remove pin in the upper left corner. Speaking of views, you have a choice of how to view the Convocation on your screen. Click view in the top right corner and select speaker or gallery to toggle between them. At certain moments we will spotlight a speaker, which will force your screen on speaker view. When you want to see the whole crowd again, please press gallery view.

As much as you are able, we encourage everyone to keep your individual video feeds on. It will reinforce our sense of community and it allows our speaker to see who they are talking to.

We are also offering closed captioning today in both English and Spanish. To access English, right click on the CC icon at the bottom of the window. From there, choose to view the captioning as a full transcript or on the screen in realtime. To access the Spanish captioning, click on the link in the chat window. It will open another window where you can follow along.

We will kick off with the Robert Gard award. And then we will shift to a plenary and after a break, we have a selection of workshops to choose from. I think I spoke enough so I will turn things over to the education coordinate Maryo.

>> MARYO: I am a former CDC and now on the board of the Robert E. Gard foundation, he was the development pioneer in the 1960s and his book the arts in the small community, a national plan, created the basis for all our job descriptions.

As we talk about the arts, that is where it began, with this book. Arts in Religion, Arts in Cultural Expression and more topics we take for granted. We give an award to acknowledge a career that has been devoted to these ideals. On your screen today are most of our board members. The leadership award goes to a CDC for the first time. It will be obvious who it is when you look at this video, a tribute from four people who have worked with this person.

>> SPEAKER: Greetings. We first met when we were working for the West Virginia commission on the arts in the 1990s. Karen moved to West Virginia to become the community arts coordinator and I worked in arts education.

What I came to discover about working in any role in State Arts Agencies is that the staff are seed planters by providing funding, technical assistance, advice and just by showing up.

We help communities grow and thrive in the arts. Karen is a master at cultivating relationships, understanding policy and she is able to translate that into action with significant impact.

In West Virginia, Karen was instrumental in founding the peer assistance network. Many communications and organizations she touched, the opera house, and the county arts counsel are still thriving.

Through her efforts Karen helped plant good seed in rich soil that she tended over her 8 years in West Virginia.

Karen's superpower, as most of you know, is her deep friendship. She is a lifelong friend, a gifted and generous person and it is a great pleasure to participate in honoring her work.

Congratulations, Karen.

>> SPEAKER: I have got to finish these lyrics for Karen.

[ singing ]

>> SPEAKER: Karen, seems like she is never getting old. All right.

[ singing ]

>> SPEAKER: That is awful. Not going to work. What am I going to do? Hi. You are already here. I didn't expect you so soon. Let me get into it then.

Karen and I met each other when we were first starting our careers as community development coordinators and we bonded over shared experiences, or I should say shared inexperience. Lots of phone calls back and forth. Forth. I remember lot of commiseration on why our romantic lives were not getting traction.

We kept the friendship going over the annual CDC taste of the states events. Overindulging with too many Tennessee goo goo state’s clusters and sweet Texas wine. That is where we picked up our third musketeer. She is third from the right.

Just like any great friendship, it never matters the distance or the number of years when we get the chance to reconnect, we pick up where we left off. Here is the thing about Karen, she is the embodiment of the phrase good things come in small packages.

And that is a really apt metaphor for her life as well.

Karen has done good small things every day.

And days become weeks, become years, become decades. And now here we are, Karen, and you can look back in your wake and feel the love and affection coming at you from all the people who were touched from just the way you chose to live your life.

There it is.

[ singing ]

Karen, she is the one with a heart of gold.

Congratulations, Karen. Crazy about you. Miss you tons.

>> SPEAKER: I am thrilled to hear the news Karen is receiving this honor and it is so well deserved. She and I first met in 1989 at the convention in Atlanta. She was the CDC in West Virginia and it was at the Missouri arts counsel.

I left my job in 1997 and at that time we were chair and vice chair of the CDCs. We continued to stay in touch over the years. She is an extraordinary person and so much fun.

I know that her generous spirit, her creativity, kindness, and empathy played a huge part in her accomplishments. She is a dear friend and I know she is to many others. I am so glad that she is receiving the leadership award.

[ singing ]

Rambling around your town. Karen rambles for the arts each day, through all of Wisconsin, through all of Wisconsin.

Now, that’s a tune about what you, Karen, just like through your lives and careers have done and I thank you for it. Wisconsin, I am sure thanks you for it and America should thank you for it.

We have known each other for a long, long time. I have always been your fan, as you know. But I was a fan even when you left us in Washington, D.C. Karen came in as a fellow. And did a fabulous job. We all loved her and wanted her to stay but she returned to Wisconsin.

I even wrote a song about that that I am not going to do, called I have got the Wisconsin winds, Karen blues, another time. I want to congratulate Karen for what she deserved her career to, that is using the arts to change community and state and reinforce the words of Robert Gard and the lyrics of another Woody Guthrie song and I would like to end with that.

[ singing ]

>> SPEAKER: Congratulations, Karen.

>> SPEAKER: I am going to turn it over to Ruby, our president.

>> RUBY: Hello. I get the honor to present the award on behalf of the board of the Robert E. Gard foundation. Presenting the 2020 Robert E. Gard award to Karen for a career committed to creative communities, founded on human empathy, respect and love. Congratulations, Karen.

>> SPEAKER: Karen, do you want to say anything? If you do you probably have to unmute yourself.

>> KAREN: I spent 15 minutes writing comments for nothing? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you everyone.

That was a complete success in terms of surprise. That was awesome. I will have a chat with my husband later about the fact he knew about this.

Words cannot convey so I will leave it at that. Thank you so much. It has been a privilege and continues to be.

>> SPEAKER: Great. Congratulations, Karen.

>> SPEAKER: Thank you. And congratulations, Karen. No one deserves it more.

>> ERIC: I am choked up by that. It is now my pleasure to introduce an icon who needs no introduction, Barbara Schaffer Bacon, co-director of Animating Democracy and Americans for the arts. Get us started.

>> BARBARA: I am thrilled that the award is going back to Wisconsin and especially to you and I want to say that the other embodiment ‑‑ on behalf of a terrific panel, I want to thank the CDC community for inviting us in and NASAA and ArtPlace, all of you, thank you so much. We have a wonderful panel and a very tight hour so I am going to get us right into it.

Divergent Thinking: Making New Connections. Does not worry our presenters. They don't work by formula.

They enter communities with openness.

They respect people and local culture.

And they see change possibility.

Use the chat to make comments, to ask questions and you can send questions directly to Eric and we will get to as much as we can.

I am going to turn our thing over to ‑‑ I will introduce each speaker as they present. First, Maria Sykes, an architect by training with a focus on community engaged rural work.

>> MARIA: Hi everyone. So glad to be here. What a wonderful group of kind people. Hope you can see everything okay. Thumbs up? Cool.

As Barbara said I am Maria Sykes, I live in Utah. I am the executive director of Epicenter.

One thing I will say, it is wonderful that my states art agency Utah Division of Arts & Museums embraces Epicenter even though we are quite different. Epicenter stewards creative initiatives that honor the past, strengthen the present and build the future that we envision with our community.

Generally cultural exploration of our region, the high desert of south eastern Utah and we advocate for early communities and contribute to the dialogue on contemporary place work.

Excited to be here. Epicenter started as a creative placemaking project. This was before creative placemaking existed. I think the paper came out the year after we were founded. Oh, there is a name for the thing we are doing. Exciting.

As soon as I heard that term it rubbed me the wrong way, which a lot of things do when you live in a rural place.

The reason it rubs me the wrong way is that this process of Creative Placemaking starts with a problem. Like Barbara said, I like to approach the work with openness and seeing the assets that exist here.

And I think especially for rural communities and probably generally any communities that are marginalized or disenfranchised, there is a common master narrative that rural places need help. Right?

I think when you approach things from that mind set, you are already starting off on the wrong foot.

Our project started off as a year‑long ‑‑ I like to talk about our origins, how do organizations like this start up, it started with Americore and we started within that nonprofit and then became our own nonprofit.

Our first project was the renovation of our building. It is in Green River. About a thousand people and 60 miles of desert from any other community. Far out there.

Yeah. I think we started with this project, right? And we thought we were going to renovate this building, hand it back to the nonprofit and say here you go, solve your problems. Because at the time I was problem solving focused as well.

We realized if we wanted to dismantle any systems or break down barriers, we would have to commit long term.

One year turned into a decade of work in this community in this building right here.

Out of that building, we build and design houses. We created a downtown plan for our community.

We started all kinds of various community groups and projects. We drafted local policies. We helped get a rural arts ‑‑ a recreation arts and parks tax passed in our community. We have overseen so many arts and design projects. Including which some of you may have seen before, our beloved welcome to Green River sign.

This work, you know, it takes a lot of new energy.

Especially when you are here for a decade, as I am sure all of you know. If we want to police keep, you have to make that happen so we started a residency program called the Frontier Fellowship. This is not a traditional arts agency by any means.

It is very much community focused.

Our residency takes creative practitioners from around the world, they come into our community and they generate innovative work that is in cooperation and conversation with the region's history, the people and the environment.

These are artist, designers, writers, musicians, all types of creative people.

We invite them to come and stay a while and discover what makes Green River worth listening to, celebrating. One thing that is important to the work for us is elevating the rural voices within our region rather than speaking for the community.

Residencies are typically a month long. With the possibility to return later.

We actually do not accept proposals from artists. We invite them to come in. We work with them and develop a project together.

This kind of brings in the idea of outsiders being good and bad. Right?

I started as an outsider, despite being invited into the community.

I am very hyperaware of the dynamic between insider and outsider in a rural place.

There is a distrust of outsiders wanting to help and just ‑‑ just feels like anyone who is coming into the community, you need help, let me help you.

We like to subvert that as often as we can.

The reason that exists is because rural places has always been at the mercy of outsider industries and influences. You can't blame them for being that way. I am one of those people now.

Yeah. Our residency program is an exploration how to leverage outside resources without giving up the power, the local power and also, we don't want this work to be extractive in any sort of way.

We also ‑‑ the residency is also Epicenter's main tool for working with and not for the community.

And each of the projects, which I will talk a little bit about the project in a second, each of the projects shapes our ongoing practice and builds local capacity and does so much more. Not just an art project. I am sure you know. Preaching to the choir a little bit.

This project specifically is the Green River newspaper. They are graphic designers as well. And rather than create a new project, they came into our community, saw what was existing in the classrooms and in the local teen center and said how can we add on to what is existing, rather than making this new thing that kids have to come to and yadda yadda. They went into the creative writing class.

They thought interviewing skills, thought art directing, photography, art design and made the teenagers co‑creators and co‑designers in this product.

The timing was great. It was when the recession was getting started.

The community kind of needed a love letter and so this was a wonderful love letter to itself.

This ‑‑ the other thing that is important about the project, it wasn't the artists came in and said we are going to start a newspaper and then y'all deal with it. Right? It is a single publication, an art piece that they created, they made it clear up front, we are making a newspaper.

You can see we printed 20,000 of them, delivered them throughout the town.

Instead of bringing something into the community, starting a project and just, like, leaving it, you know, it was someone within and that is okay.

There is a picture of the newspaper.

My time is almost up. I will end on one thing that is really critical to being able to do the work in Green River.

I believe the State Arts Agencies must empower rural communities to be more self‑sufficient and less susceptible to the booms and busts that exist. When you live in a rural place it could be up and down a lot.

And I think there is a tendency to come in and help but that helicoptering in and helping and then removing yourself is ‑‑ could actually make things worse.

One way in Utah I have seen that this doesn't happen is through the Utah Division of Arts & Museums change leader program. This program ‑‑ many of you heard about the program but I am going to harp on it because I love it.

This program specifically takes the people that are working and living in the communities, rural, urban, suburban, whatever, and brings them together in an institute for a weekend long of training. And Maryo was in my group years ago. It is important. It brings people together. I am sure I have taken up my time and I will end here and we can talk about this later.

>> SPEAKER: Thank you so much for really bringing this perspective to us. Many of our CDCers work in rural communities and I think we will have an opportunity come back to some of the themes you brought up.

Apologizes for my change in scenery and blurriness at the beginning. We had a big wind storm last night and my house is still without power so I am interloping somewhere and trying to get it right.

The same is true for Daniel Ross who is our next speaker who lives south of me. Daniel is the CEO and principle for DAISA Enterprises which works at the intersection of food, health, economic and community development.

If you have been following ArtPlace and the series of arts and publications they have been working to get out to the field, he is responsible for one of them. I will let you tell us about it.

>> DANIEL: Thank you. I am going to start by asking everybody to maybe tip your head back, close your eyes, think for a few seconds about what you cultivate.

Trying to figure out where to put my notes here. Normally on a zoom call I am trying to act like involved in the meeting while I do my e‑mail. It is a different eye placement here. Right? My name is Daniel Ross. I work with DAISA Enterprises. Thank you for taking that moment of reflection.

DAISA cultivates healthy and vibrant communities, working with foundations and leading nonprofit organizations and enterprises.

Our sweet spot is working with projects and initiatives that use food and agricultural for community development that come from a strong sense of community, culture and identity.

I am going to start by sharing one of our big projects that we have been working on throughout the past number of years. The fresh, local, equity initiative in Troy, Michigan.

We have been serving since 2016. It combines resources from the help team of the foundation and the arts and culture team. And support urban communities that are developing food ventures and networks to preserve and protect neighborhood identity and culture.

This integration resonated with how communities are seeking development. There were over 500 applications in response to that.

The biggest response ever. In fact, it overwhelmed their computer systems. Everything got shut down for a while and now there is 23 grantees throughout the country.

One great example is the Montebello organizing community. It was an ad hoc collection of community agencies and residents of this neighborhood near the Denver airport.

It is identified as the most diverse neighborhood in Denver, a thriving community of African‑American and central American families, a tight knit and fun community. Under great pressure from development from expanding Denver central, a transition thruway, it lost its high school and grocery stores. Affordable housing and identity lost. They began to fight back to preserve residents and its culture.

The goal was to attract a new supermarket but founders included artists, and as it organized a series of youth and cultural activities, neighborhood planning sessions, public dinners and art sessions, and even festivals, much more grew out, a walkable loop of greenways, gardens and public art connecting community assets was designed and installed by youth and public artists.

Among many other partners, the Colorado Black Arts Movement and the Denver Commission on Cultural Affairs have been key partners. seeing this weird connection between communities, groceries and the festival.

The center piece of the effort, a $50 million community center, with a black‑owned grocery store, public housing and community gathering and art spaces is being built.

The site and city funding have been committed and a coalition of funders are dedicating further grants and investments.

The organizing community and the other 22 funded projects are far from the only ones recognizing the power of arts and culture with food systems and community development.

Commissioned by ArtPlace, DAISA looked at 1500 projects. You should have a link to the cultivating creativity report in your packets and it will go in the chat as well. Through the research and a national working group that met in Georgia, we found that this fusion between art and culture and food systems were ‑‑ is a powerful way to bridge and heal divides.

As a nation, states, communities, this is a challenge to us right now to bring people together. This is a great strategy to drive economic development in urban and rural communities.

Food and agricultural meets people where they are at. A good way to protect and bever community spaces and identity, make them beautiful and flourish.

It helps secure land for community and economic uses.

It is a strategy for gathering and planning. Think about potlucks as the original organizing strategy.

And how much we break bread together to figure things out.

We need preserve and reclaim traditions. Food, how we produce and prepare and share it. Our practices at the heart of our cultures and rituals. We connect generations this way. I am sure you will right how these efforts are showing up in your states. Community gardens and farms. Celebrations from urban block parties to rural county fairs.

Community and incubator kitchens, allowing small enterprises to flourish, food trucks. We can seek chefs and cooks as culture bearers.

Farmers markets and public markets are flourishing in rural and urban communities.

The power of this integration is growing in recognition. I would like to invite you all to an ArtPlace discussion that is happening October 28 and 29. And DAISA is working with USDA and NEA and ArtPlace as they consider integrated funding and technical assistance programs.

We would like to encourage you to see and recognize farmers and food producers and cooks as culture bearers and development drivers in your communities and states to seek coordination between arts agencies and ag agencies. And keep seeking connections across the urban and rural divides.

And please, let me know if we could help.

>> SPEAKER: Thank you so much. I appreciate your introducing us to the word cultivate. It resonates for this group of folks and captures the work that everyone is trying to do every day. But this particular focus on food and agriculture offers hope and especially with new resources and information.

I am going to shot out to Jamie Hand from ArtPlace for helping to create this series of arts and publications that help us to find the language in the other sectors that we are trying to work with to communicate the work the creative community can do.

With that, we are going to turn to one more story to round out our picture of Divergent Thinking: Making New Connections. To my good friend, Marty Pottenger, Marty is coming from Maine, a theater artist, playwright activist, pioneer of creative placemaking and founder of Art at Work, putting creativity to work and strengthening communities and local government's ability to meet challenges and health and inequities and partnership and climate emergency.

>> MARTY: Thank you. The work of Art at Work began in New York City in 1993.

I moved here where I still am to see if an idea I have been experimenting with, putting creativity to work could achieve measurable cost effective and permanent solutions to community problems to make that ‑‑ making the case and documenting it.

I would like to take you into the artistic side of a real-life drama with one of our projects. Shows the issues this work can engage in. Some of the challenges and the valuable outcomes you would be hard pressed to find and achieve in other ways.

Engaging artists increases the likelihood of outcomes with positive, lasting impacts.

The thrill, the risks, the challenges of bringing creativity and putting it to work is where the fuel resides.

In 2009, David, a 26‑year‑old Sudanese man in our community who came to Portland with his family from Sudan when he was a child, was shot and killed by police officers. Witnesses reported him having a gun and one was recovered at the scene but from my perspective, that is an essential question. After two weeks of escalating rock and bottle throwing, mostly directed at police cruisers by African board. I received a call from the police chief and he asked if I would create a theatrical performance as a way of addressing the situation.

This was a significant opportunity to put creativity to work on a real-life tragedy and traumatic situation that was affecting our community and our region.

But it was not an opportunity to quell protests or divert the energy that was demanding police accountability.

When the police chief and I met to discuss this idea, I explained the objectives of Art at Work were not public relations but transformation.

To do that I would need access and permission and assistance in meeting with and working with the officers in the department that were more "likely" to cross the line. We had a heated conversation back and forth. It was not clear where this was going. This was not the kind of thing that made sense to back down at all.

And he only agreed after this officer, who worked for two years on one of the projects, police and poetry and photography calendar, she was present at the meeting, she volunteered to help identify the officers most likely to cross a line. It resulted in my having ride‑alongs and interviews with five police officers that I had never met in the two years I had been working with the department on art projects.

As well as other city departments.

In life, as well, to keep the work on track, you need to have clear principles and the ability to decide when to walk away. As a way of ensuring the project's integrity without asking permission, I immediately commissioned an organization called Maine inside out to create its own theatrical performance with African born high school students that finds part of the groups they were working with.

The students' production focused on their relationship with the police and they named it the Weeping City. Both productions were created independently. I worked with the officers and Maine Inside Out worked with the students. This ensured the autonomy of voice and content and avoided false or forced performances or fake assumptions of connections or trust of which there was not.

It was clear that lack of trust or connections was made clear when after a month of workshops, we came together for the first of the performances. I ended up agreeing to ask the officers to participate. One of the team suggested in ‑‑ I am sure you have done it in your lives ‑‑ a simple exercise. Passing an imaginary ball around a circle.

Within seconds of that 5-minute exercise ending, each of the officers individually approached me and in fierce, fierce told me they will never ever do that again and don't ever, ever ask them to do that again.

We were just about to perform. I realized that there are threshold of humiliation was cresting at flood tide and the fact that they were participating in this performance at all was very much for them an act of courage.

I am going to show you these series of slides to give you a sense of the performance.

The moments of smiles were rare but here they are.

It was simply staged. There were smiles. The impact of the performance is the performances were seen by over 1200 students, faculty, residents and thousands more through TV news broadcast and media coverage.

Watching the two original performances with 600 students and faculty at Portland high school for 45 minutes, each performance was 20 minutes, you could hear a pin drop.

Afterwards, the students completely committed to the question and answer period.

And the talk back. And filling out the evaluation forms that they helped us pass out.

As this ended, the down stage area was mopped by the students who wanted to personally meet and talk to and connect to the officers.

The power of theater couldn't have been more evidence. In choosing the public library of the place of the one public performance, we intentionally chose a neutral community space that was used by and familiar to the refugee students in particular.

I wanted to use my precious time to talk about the essential value of the evaluation and achieving goals.

I considered designing a unique evaluation process for each project, an essential element, early on in the process, about meeting with the cops about the police poetry calendar.

I facilitated an evaluation exercise imagining the projects that began with their input about what they think needed to change. It was the first time in months of engagement I saw them consider that what I was proposing might increase the officer's historic low morale, which was the point of the whole project.

Sometimes a good question and a genuine listen makes all the difference.

I want to jump to our shared evaluative debriefing, we were all in a circle, I want us to get together and have a debriefing, all together. They haven't done that all together.

They offered the best excuses you could imagine am some officers were working the midnight shift, students had child care responsibilities. I knew enough to schedule it anyway. Every person showed up and stayed the entire two hours and more striking, each person shared a version of I will never think of each other the same way again.

This changed my life. I will never forget what we did.

In this type of work, this is considering we are here with the collective people we are, to give people a chance to think through, if you have an idea, help me out, a great deal of precious information is lost. It is exchanged in private conversations, friendships form, changes in people's lives.

From doing this work for so long, one significant challenge when making the case for the cost effectiveness of spending money on this work is to ‑‑ how do you estimate the financial savings of something that was prevented by the project? Something that didn't happen, a racist incident, a targeting, a shooting, a death that impacts not only individual lives but community trust and in this case with the Police Department, morale.

Some certain to result in expensive lawsuits, damages and much more.

That is true of all the projects I have done in the last 27 years. Here are a few impacts following the performances. Officers reported scores ‑‑ officers not involved in the performance reported secures of youth initiative positive contacts on patrol.

Which surprised them. You can imagine. For me that has powerful potential that raises the expectation for a relationship on both sides of that thin blue line.

The second I will mention is that in the next three months following the last performance, our debriefing, the far left, one of the Somali born students, organized three meetings with Somali leaders in the community. The first with the Portland Police Department, the second with the Maine state police and the third with I.C.E. and the Department of Homeland Security.

This is the only time you will see them standing together and laughing. This is at the end. The curtain call at the end of the last performance.

Here we are. Putting creativity to work with you. I appreciate your good attention. Our website has baskets of projects and perspectives and I am looking forward to the rest of our time together.

>> BARBARA: Thank you. I really thank you for going deep into a project that is timely among other things in so many communities.

We will to talk for a few minutes and then open up for questions. I hope you are sharing those in the chat.

If you want to get a specific question in.

I think as I warned you, I am going to start by asking if any of you want to key off of a comment or something that another pan list shared with a story to reinforce or take it into some direction that you want to go further.

You can unmute for a minute. I think that will be the best way to have conversations.

Thank you.

Anything that struck you? I know as Daniel was speaking and you made the point for me that food cultures and the culture of agriculture are common denominators in our communities. A great and natural place to start and work. We always kid about the fact there always has to be a meal but you took that in a different direction and I appreciated that.

>> MARIA: One thing that jumped out to me when Daniel was talking, I got really hungry, but the word potluck came up.

That reminded me of a project my organization did, we called it potluck. There was no Chamber of Commerce that existed in our community so we brought all these business leaders together and calling the group potluck.

The idea was bringing ideas to the table instead of food.

Which lot of people were disappointed on their first meeting because there wasn't food to share.

Just makes me think there is so many ways you can bring different things to the table.

That feels ‑‑ if I had to distill the work down, it is about getting people around the table together and sharing those ideas. As simple as that is. That jumped out to me.

>> DANIEL: When I saw your presentation, I was wondering about the role of agriculture in your community, what connections are being made there.

>> MARIA: Absolutely. Green River has seen so many booms and busts but the one thing that has been consistent is agriculture.

One of the main products of that is melon. Green River grows 16 types of melons. Over 100-year tradition of that and celebrating that as well. It is something that I am excited to talk to you after this, actually, just hasn't been ‑‑ we haven't dug into it enough.

Part of it is a little bit of resistance too because rural communities are scene as agriculture is the thing and so much of our work has focused on not agriculture but now we are realizing more and more ‑‑ actually there was a documentary by a local film maker, as soon as I was watching that, I can't believe we haven't done a project with the farmers lately.

They are cultural bearers in our community, very, very much.

The reason we haven't dug into it is that being in the west, there is a lot of struggles around water and so that results in a lot of politics, and farmers not willing to come together because they are fighting over water or whatever it might be. But there is a lot of opportunity there.

I am excited to learn more about your work because of that.

>> DANIEL: I was picturing ranching and cowboys.

>> MARIA: I had a rancher as a room so I have done cattle tagging now. But constantly learning about all of that out here.

>> BARBARA: Can you talk about how Epicenter came to be the name of the center.

>> MARIA: I hate the name now but ‑‑ especially because of the pandemic.

We wrote a USDA grant and we had to come up with a name for our project.

It was an acronym. We found a word that had center in it. Epicenter, cool, center, radiating out positive change. Unfortunately, Epicenter is an earthquake or pandemic. Didn't work out.

But here we are.

>> BARBARA: I took it as bold and empowering the community. I went with the most positive renditions around that.

I am wondering if you want to speak, any of you, to the idea of coming into a community of coming in and seeing things that perhaps you could imagine change. But that entry, what are some of the things you would share about entering community gracefully and respectfully?

>> MARTY: Always, always a pertinent thing to think about. Taking your time. Listening.

One thing I do is I ask people who they look to. I try before going forward with any project idea, if it gets that far, asking people what they ‑‑ what is going well, not going well, what they would like to change. And it is rare people get listened to about something that important and just listen to and it is not a conversation and people aren't giving their own ideas.

That proves an entry way. At some point I think it makes sense to find out who are the people that people respect, who are the people people look to when there is an issue and sometimes not always the identified leadership, who do they go to and finding those people and meeting with them and thinking about what is going well and what projects make sense.

As is clear from the police and poetry project, I am a believer you get to keep the bar very, very high for what you think.

You get as ‑‑ you know, you succeed as well as you can.

>> DANIEL: Maybe it is obvious in my line of work but I love to sit down and eat with people.

It is funny how having your face with barbecue sauce all over it can show vulnerability and begin relationships. Talking with people over eating and drinking seems to be a step in the right direction.

>> BARBARA: I was struck about this ‑‑ thinking about ‑‑ in that your impulse was not to put the kids and the cops together right away. I think there is push that we have to create these joint tables but you took the step of honoring and getting to know groups in their groups.

I thought that offered a lot.

>> MARIA: I think Daniel said a keyword that is important, vulnerability.

Even though I lived here for 10 years I am still very much an outsider and this is the primary community I am working in.

I think if you are working with rural places, duration is key.

I know that not every community coordinator can move to the rural place they are working in. Finding the leaders within the community and empowering them is critical.

I have a question, when I think about that, Marty, do you feel when you try to identify those people, a problem we have here, it is the same 10 people that get called upon. The STP.

Someone comes in to do a project and they are like who are the people, it is always the same 10 people. How do you make sure that you are not, like, causing community fatigue?

>> MARTY: Right. One is that some of the people are not known. Some of ‑‑ the way you are asking the question, you are looking and watching to see what happens. Right?

Sometimes the people are not identified at all as leaders.

Then there is leadership development, what a lovely landscape for leadership development. Figuring out, you know, who could be brave enough to take a step and show themselves I think is a part of it as well.

Is that helpful?

>> MARIA: Yeah. There is an interesting question in the chat.

How does the current movement toward recognizing and dealing with racial justice manifest itself in a rural community like Green River that has a 20% Latinix community, .9% African‑American. data on rural communities is trash because they don't ‑‑ there is no system in understanding who lives in a place. There is margins of error of 30%. In a town of a thousand people that could be a lot of people.

It is more, like, a third of our community is Latinix. Those are numbers. Doesn't matter. Matters to me. Anyway.

There is very little dialogue in our community and in a lot of rural communities about the current racial injustice movement. That being said, it does exist. There are Black Lives Matter Movements that are happening in adjacent communities. Not in mine. I live in a conservative community, unfortunately.

That is not something that is talked about. That being said, you know, we are doing a lot of work internally on our organization, thinking how we can decolonize our practice, every single project we are doing. A lot of that has to do with recognizing the lands we are on. And also making ‑‑ you know, I work on the ‑‑ I am on the board for the county ‑‑ the county travel board.

Something that I have been harping on is how do we ‑‑ we get a lot of visitors here. We are like a hospitality-based economy. How do we make our home here in Green River more welcoming to black, indigenous and other people of color.

That is important. The one thing I have been pushing over and over, it is not about getting the people here just to visit, how do we incentivize the people of color to start businesses here, move here, become farmers here, whatever it might be.

It is so much discussion behind the scenes but rarely talked about this Black Lives Matter Movement talked about publicly.

>> BARBARA: Marty?

>> MARTY: I forget.

>> BARBARA: I want to open it up, thank you for the question. We are open to your comments.

Your own stories about this work that relates. Remember, our topic was Divergent Thinking: Making New Connections. We were talking in the introductions for ourselves about the community development coordinator joke I am here from the government and I am here to help you.

And really, almost every one of you are working back from that old adage to create new ways of entering communities, putting people together. Sometimes the outsider does many things that don't happen without the outsider.

They make relationships and put people together that are not connecting themselves all the time.

Just let us know in the participant thing, raise your hand.

We will get to the gallery view and we are happy to have your ideas and additions here.

Marty is going to say something.

>> MARTY: We are here with State Arts Agencies and that is such an Epicenter of connections and relationships and possibilities. I wanted to say as things get harder and harder and as resources get more and more strained and as relationships perhaps continue to become dramatically polarized, I want to encourage everyone who works with State Arts Agencies to consider not just the discreet projects, but to ask yourself where can the states, the infrastructure within the states, where can they become more engaged?

The more we can resource and strengthen those relationships between the community and local government, we will make a profound difference to how our future goes together.

And the work is as vital there as it is with, you know, this particular group and that particular group.

>> BARBARA: Great point. I am scanning the screen to see ‑‑ yeah.

>> SPEAKER: I wanted to mention that ‑‑ before COVID, the New Jersey Environmental Protection Department, reached out to us, and in particular to Danielle who runs our public arts projects, and they have gotten a grant to do work in ‑‑ to start with three communities in New Jersey who are being affected by climate change and flooding.

You know, those issues in their communities.

And they want to work with an artist to work with the community to talk about sea level change and how it is affecting their communities and what it means for their culture and so that was exciting. I think they are just about to do the call for artists.

That was our first connection with this state department.

>> ERIC: There is a question in chat. It would be great if Marty could answer. Do you feel Police Departments across the nation are super defensive at this point and that makes a project more unlikely to happen. I know you answered in the chat but if you could repeat it on the chat.

>> MARTY: Very much more defensive. But they are more desperate for real possibilities that can address what is being revealed by Black Lives Matter. Desperation can drive innovation and it can ‑‑ the kinds of work we are doing offer ‑‑ racial discrimination lawsuit ‑‑ and claims in their department, you know, this is not the kind of thing an employee barbecue is going to fix.

The tools agencies and organizations have to deal with real, you know, issues, that matter, often have to do with relationships and with people's connections and people's perceptions. This work is made for that.

You know? An employee barbecue, drive together, toys for children at Christmas, having a little police ‑‑ little league team, these are the things the police in particular have as their community relations and it is not going to cut it.

There is so much more that could happen and so much more justifiable things that their feet can be held to the real fire. This isn't ‑‑ it is not about PR and I think that is important to be clear with them up front.

>> ERIC: I think you had a question for everyone related to what Marty was talking about. Would you mind asking?

>> SPEAKER: My question is about trust. All three of the really powerful stories here have been about different ways of building and bridging and cultivating trust.

We have heard bits and pieces about what are ‑‑ what are techniques to build rapport and trust.

I am wondering if you have specific insights about good ways to do that in stressed communities, traumatized communities. Or polices where there is a mistrust. Sounds like all three of you have seen that cycle from different perspectives.

>> DANIEL: I gave a flippant answer last time about the barbecue sauce. There is tactics and strategies. But overall, the communities have so many good reasons not to trust people. If I was living there, I wouldn't trust anybody either. That is healthy and smart given the hundreds of years of oppression and violence and attacks on their communities.

There is no easy answer to building trust except showing up and proving you are trustworthy by doing things fairly and equitably and consistently and coming through on things over and over again.

Lord help us, I think that is ‑‑ there is no easy short ‑‑ there is not an exercise that should make it happen. I don't think.

>> MARIA: I think consistency I think is the keyword I would pull out of there.

Not over promising. Do what you say you’re going to do. The change leader program, there were a lot of things I learned in that institute that were super helpful.

Such as working through resistance, understanding my own resistance. How to put yourself in someone else's shoes. An exercise to do that, not just saying it.

Understanding my own relationship to change as well as the kind of ‑‑ how complicated change is for a community. Mindful listening and understanding different leadership styles people have. All of those things are tools to building trust. And just, like, being a person.

Not being the government stooge who comes in. Get barbecue sauce on your face.

>> BARBARA: We are close to out of time. Thanks everyone for participating in the chat. I know good stuff is going on and I believe that will get saved.

I want to offer our speakers an opportunity for a last word. You are welcome to add another point or two.

Since we started out with divergence, we might think about how we cultivate convergence in our work as well. Go there or wherever you like to. A quick last word.

>> MARIA: The challenges ‑‑ I wrote it down. The challenges ‑‑ the critical work ‑‑ role the work has to play. The challenges cities, communities, local governments are facing are of a scale and complexity they rarely face and the likely future is guaranteeing more challenges. Creativity is a toolkit, a powerful addition opening up chances to create solutions, relationships, sharpen everyone's collaborative capacity, encouraging honestly and vulnerability that undermines grandstanding and positionality. It is cost effective, rewarding and fun at times. Thank you for your attention and all you all do to help the arts thrive.

>> DANIEL: I would like to express gratitude for everything everyone is doing. The arts and the intersections are such powerful ways of creating the bonds and crossing the divides that we have right now as a country.

Really important work. Thank you.

>> MARIA: I would agree. I feel it is our most powerful and human tool to do this sort of work. Right?

A lot of the other things don't come as naturally. We appreciate everyone's thoughts today and that I was able to be here.

>> INSTRUCTOR: Thank you so much for bringing the work you are doing, the way you are doing the work, really to the fore. There is so much connection between the CDC community and each of you in the work you are doing. Thank you for having us. Eric. Back to you.

>> ERIC: Thank you. That was a great session. A lot of good information in the chat. We will save that and we recorded this so you can watch it later on as well.

I want to let you know, we will take a 30‑minute break now. We will be back at 3:45 p.m. eastern.

You will need go back to the virtual portal, thank you for putting the link in the chat. There will be three workshop choices there which will run simultaneously choose the one that resonates with you. Click the join session button. Come prepared for a highly interactive time. This is the last time we will be together today. I am not going to see you again until next Tuesday so thank you for a great week.

We have a great afternoon workshop this afternoon. I will be in one of those. I won't tell you which so we don't overload one. I will pop in and enjoy one myself. Have a great afternoon workshop and a great weekend and I will see you all again next Tuesday. Thank you so much.

[ MUSIC PLAYING ]