### StreamBox

CDN Creative Placemaking Convocation

Workshop with Lowenstein and Jen Hughes

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English Transcript

>> Welcome, everybody. I hope you all can hear me. My name is Dave Lowenstein, I'm one of the 2 presenters here today along with Jen Hughes who you'll hear from in just a second. Thanks for joining the session today recognizng engage am Doing the HOMEwork. We hope that it's interesting and we really look forward to a conversation hearing your questions and your thoughts on this subject. We're not going to spend time having everyone sort of tell their story so we can get down to the meat of the topic but please share in the chat box your name, maybe where you're from and feel free to share other comments, questions or links in the chat box and we'll try and pick them up as the conversation goes along. Can everybody hear me okay? I hope. Like I said my name is Dave Lowenstein I'm coming to you from Lawrence Kansas right in the middle of the United States where today it is 90 degrees. My son is home from preschool because he got an ouchie on the playground and he's having a nap but maybe not for the whole session so we shall see. You may get to meet him. The real life, huh. So in Lawrence Kansas I've lived here about 30 years. I guess I'd identify myself as an artist. I do a lot of community-based murals and other projects I'm a writer, a community organizer.

I've ban part of place making projects on the inside and outside for many years. And today I'll be sharing a couple of stories one about my own neighborhood here in Kansas and then one if we get to it about a project in South Dakota. I'll get it over to Jen so she can introduce herself.

>> Hello everyone. I am calling in from home office in Washington DC. I've been workworking for the NEA for almost a decade now joined at a time when we were starting the art town place making program and been in various roles throughout my time in the agency and so much admiration for the work that you all do. Really he can site one to hear from Dave in this really on the ground story that I think will help to illuminate a lot of what we're hoping to discuss today how we sort of thing about adjudicatng grants and the grant making process vis-a-vis with that lens on community engagement. And then I hope to learn from all of you and conversation reflection, what sort of happening in your state, what you're thinking about experimented in. So I'm just really excited and honored to be with you all and honored to co-present with Dave to kick the session off. So thank you.

>> All right. Thanks, Jen. So we're going to start it off with sort of a story. This is about my own neighborhood here in Kansas. You know I've been doing this work for 3 decades I guess now. And then all of a sudden a project, a placemaking project, a big one landed in my own neighborhood. I wasn't part of it but it was proposed for my neighborhood and I was involved in it in many different ways.

So if you let me I'm going to share a little presentation about that project and then we can talk about it and Jen can chime in about sort of her perspective from the NEA. So let me try and share my screen here.

I know I can do this.

Let me know somebody if you can see this, okay. Jen, is that working?

>> Not yet.

>> Okay. Let's see.

>> If you'd like me to share from my screen your slides I'm happy -- oh there it is.

>> It is working now?

>> Yep.

>> All right just took a second. All right thanks folks.

So I'm titling this Recognizing Engagement building East 9thth street together and you'll understand why in a minute. My neighborhood in east Lawrence is one of the oldest in the city.

It has been and continues to be a working class neighborhood full of radical history and a commitment to social justice.

But it didn't start that way.

Many would like to forget that the land that the city now occupes was taken from the --

and Delaware people as part of an early, early placemaking project, I think we can call it that. It concluded with the Kansas Nebraska act of 1854.

It's still full of small single family homes and backyard gardens. It's where Langston Hughes went to church as a young boy and this is a mural that I made of folks in the neighborhood about that and you see one of his poems, it's where civil rights Marches began and ended.

And these days that same street is home to my art studio. So if you look back in this photograph from the 1960s you see the garage on the right side with the protest March and then you see present day East 9thth street. But it's also where massive creative placemaking project was fund by the art place to propose to revitalize us that project known as free state boulevard is sort of the subject I'm talking about. As a first hand witness to it I was a participant and actually -- in actually fighting it and in the end one of the people who Recognizing Engagement imagined it as a more just and equitable endeavor. It was a big deal for me at least to be invited to present on a panel with the chairman of the National Endowment for the arts -- in 2011 the Pam hosted by the Spencer museum of art included professors from -- university, the University of Kansas note architects and folks from the Nebraska arts council and the auditorium was full.

It was early 2012, and there had yet been an official placemaking project in town. So I think most folks didn't fully understand the term. And I still wonder if I do. And because of that, most of the panelists talked around the idea. Instead commenting on the disconnect between nature and culture. As a community muralI-st I was familiar with and often part of placemaking projects but this was new.

Never had we seen the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts come to our city about a project like this and the new attention made me a little nervous. I felt that not to uncomfortable feeling of something scary approaching like when the pressure drops before a storm and it came out in my comments where I ended up by asking quote I wonder --

creative place sustaining or place keeping or place enhancng because in some cases the places don't need to be made they just need to be recognized and cared for. When I think back this had been signs that something was brewing. There was no real estate speculation happening all along East 9thth street like you see in this slide. de. de. And then it hit news broke that the Lawrence arts center was proposing a $4.5 million project fund by the art place that would revitalize a 7 block stretch of East 9th street comprised of single family homes and local businesses and wanted to turn it into as you can see in the head line from artsy to art place.

In the early diagrams of how the project would work from the folks who were hired to direct it, the neighborhood was not invite to be a partner. And it became clear -- that the organizers saw our neighborhood as a blank slate open to the woes and wishes of developers.

And this slide here is actually from a presentation that project organizers gave of our neighborhood where they were talking about how to Recognizing Engagement image it, but as you can see there's no life there, no trees, no people, there are no color. It just open to whatever anybody would want to change. The blind love of creative placemaking that is tied to the allure of speculation, culture and its economic thinking of build it and they will come from field of dreams, right is suffocatng and unethical and supports the politics of of disbelonging employed to manufacture a place one of my heroes Roberto Bedoya wrote an essay. If you're not familiar with Roberto check him out he's in Oakland, he's amazing doing great work there.

A group of neighborhood friends and supporters began meeting at my studio to talk about the I am Mr. Indications of the project.

What we were feeling and what we wanted to do. We got to know each other. We used a story circle format. To tell stories without interruption. One of us took notes we shared the back, we discussed action items and we commit to tasks. And we agreed to try to limit speculation and personal attacks. Some of our first action items and you see us here in my studio with the U.S. department of arts and culture which is a real imagined thing you can look up too we'll put it in the chat box inspect we wanted to write letters to the newspaper. We wanted to share public documents with the neighborhood association. So people knew what was going on.

We demanded representation on all committees, and we requested access to the full art place proposal including the budget that we had not yet seen from the Lawrence arts center.

How could we tell our stories in a way that would make people stop and listen? I thought they needed to be larger in life --

larger than life and in a form that would be inviting. I had seen these video found tans in Chicago in front of the art institute depicting regular people who because of their scale and presentation were captivatng doing simple things like smiling or blanking and thought that's it. I shared these with a friend of mind, a film maker and we came up with the idea of a little short film called facng east and you see a still from it here. We did short interviews shot in my studio and gave my subjects prompts and you only hear their answers. Nicholas edited down to create a beautiful and funny 12-minute video that celebrates and worries for our neighborhood. We showed it outside on the front of the studio during the monthly art walk to an audience of neighbors and passers by. And this was the beginning of our trying to take back power in the neighborhood away from the frame that this massive multimillion dollar project was sort of wrapping around us. We also made artistic statements for the street that posed questions about the intentions of the project, the trojan horse and here in front of the church that we saw earlier that was the landing point for civil rights protests, a detour sign but a detour because displacemaking is in progress.

What happened next was unexpected completely. And you tend to forget this when you're in the middle of an organizng campaign but politics can get in the way and we had a little local neighborhood election coming up and one of the biggest advocates for this placemaking project he made his campaign all about following through on it.

Going so far as to create this post card that you see here that portrays our working class neighborhood as the famous painting by George -- well that didn't land so well with a lot of neighbors because they didn't see themselves in this image and it began to turn the tide and then this happened, the mayor the second biggest proponent of this project, boom he's charged with embezzlement and he has to resign. And I tell you this stuff because if you're in the midst of a project like this you need to think about all of the dynamics that affect a potential outcome not just the support of artists or the chamber or even community members but how elected representatives will support or not support what you intend to do.

The outcome of that election was that the city commission flipped and city leaders became as it says here in the head line undecided on the arts corridor which effectively killed the project in the form that it had been imagined.

So two years later after much hemming and hawing and bruised egos and anxiety and anger a group of folks got together and started to think about what could possibly happen. What we knew was a lot of the funds were still there, much of the funds were still there. And much of the actual visionary interest in doing something in the neighborhood was there, the question was what. There were a few attempts to revive the project but none of them got anywhere. An then I personally got to thinking. If we accepted circumstances as they are, what would a good art place project for east Lawrence actually look like? In 2016, the arts center CEO the organization that had spearheaded the original project she stepped down but the funds were still there and so we began with a couple of people in the neighborhood an exercise that turned into a plan. Now, paradigm shifts are hard on the brain and the heart to see what was once the ground as the figure, what was once the disaster as the opportunity, takes simultaneously concentration and letting go. I spent years fighting alongside my neighbors to contain or stop this project called free state boulevard. But to image now switching roles and trying to see how our own vision of this project it was -- it was disorienting. And it also felt really risky. But that vision and I'm speeding through this you got to understand after a couple of years

being quiet became what you see here Recognizing Engagement building east Ninth street together with the help and support of folks on all sides of this conflict. So folks who were original proponents, folks who fought against it we came together and Recognizing Engagement fashioned the project to be centered on the neighborhood and local artists.

You can see here the new partners artplace the funder, the arts center, the organization that was funded, and lo and behold east Lawrence the local neighborhood that should have been included from the beginning. We also included what we called a youth core, so there were projects that were proposed and initiated by young people. They were all paid for their work with grants. And we had something else that I really loved that were called neighborhood specialists. And these were folks in the neighborhood who might not show up to meetings might not call themselves artists but they had special knowledge or experience that they wanted to share and would share if someone reached out to them. And they all got funding as well as to work alongside the 15 artists projects that ended up being completed. What I can tell you in conclusion is -- and the timing is so perfect here I don't know who thought of this, but Saturday, last Saturday just a couple days ago October 3rd, we did it. We celebrated the east Lawrence neighborhood association that had originally resisted this whole business alongside the east Ninth project and went throughout the whole neighborhood and had projects on the street obviously socially distanced, people wearing masks, outside wet it right. But we brought it altogether in one event and it was really miraculous. The weather was good. There were lots of people out. The last thing that I want to say before I turn it over to Jen is that my story has a nice ending. But I don't want to imply that there aren't lingering problems within the neighborhood that re involve around issues of gent a fabrication, what we're really talking about when we talking about this project is how its initiation made clear to all of us those underlying issues that we're struggling with every day.

And I think we came out the better for it. And so in the long run this placemaking project I think was a success, but what a -- and Jen, I'll hand it over to you.

>> That's really great, Dave.

I thought, since we have a small group maybe we just kind of take a moment. I imagine folks might have questions about this project. And I'll just dive in with the first one that I acknowledge is you know, at times a struggle as a grant maker just the long time line you know, you're talking about a project that was awarded back in 2011, and sort of recognizng that journey and where you are all today. Maybe we can just expound a little bit on that time line and everybody -- since it's a really small group I think we can unmute, ask questions before we move into the second half of the presentation.

>> Yeah, so there's a lot more to the story, thank you, Jen.

You know, it was sort of initiate by this visit from the NEA chair, at least that's how we became aware of it. And we're really talking about a time when creative placemaking came to the forefront when the first big white paper came out through the NEA and when folks nationally sort of got the idea and saw a potential for funding all across the country. The arts center actually made multiple proposals for this project. They started with an art town grant through the NEA to do some programming and then moved onto art place where initially rejected and didn't get their go ahead, I think it was until 2013. So it was 2013, through 20 15 that all of the conflict and sort of turmoil happened. An then it was 2017, when the project was Recognizing Engagement imagined and sort of re born and now it's just concluded. So that's quite a long time line. And Jen, I throw this to you that's way outside the sort of strictures were allowed to working with granted funding like this.

>> That's true. I'll share a little bit, just a bit about ways that we structure in our thinking about time line et cetera. But I saw Jason unmute himself, so I want to open up the floor to be all yours.

>> So I'm just curious about the fact that you had our town and art place funding. My memory of those and as far as back as I can think is that they always required kind of engagement of community. So how is it that those things kind of went through but missed engaing the neighborhood?

>> Wow, that is such a great question. And it's complicated.

One of the things that I mentioned we requested as a neighborhood once we realized this project was to see the documents. How could we have been left out? And this is hard to talk about. But the narrative that this non-profit had written characterized us in a way that made it sound like we were fully behind this effort.

Now, I shouldn't -- I need to say there were people in the neighborhood who were very supportive of this. And our neighborhood association had many, many questions about it.

So this is one of those areas that I think we all need to consider and work on and this is the doing the homework, I think part of this session, that you need to ask yourself are they really engaged with the neighborhood, are they really engaged with those folks who would be most impacted by the project that's proposed.

>> Sorry don't mean to dominate but it makes me think about the fact that there's so oftentimes I'm reading grant applications without actually being in the community. And how often do we miss that?

And I'm not trying to -- all I'm saying is that it really brings that idea to home to me.

>> Yeah, Jen, that's something that I think you know, you folks in the way that you setup your process might be able to address.

>> Yeah. I mean, I think what I'll share in the presentation I'll give is just how one, the art town program has e involved significantly from a decade ago.

And that's really been because it's you know the field of creative placemaking has evolved, the sort of language the ways that we're sort of thinking about those ripple impacts what we're actually trying to drive towards and fund you know has changed and we've learned a lot. Some of these top down initiatives where it is kind of a mayoral project that they're putting forth that can be highly -- far more robust than that. I'm going to pin that question and maybe we can Recognizing Engagement visit it if I don't quite address some of the think from the NEA side in my presentation. It's important one.

We don't always know we don't know what's going on in local communities. So the best we can really do is try to setup guidelines and programs and ways that we can really dig into some of those questions. So that's what I'm going to share and focus on. So I'll just bring mind presentation. And then I'd also love to hear from all of you how you all are thinking about this. In your community.

Okay. So I just wanted to start -- I don't want to make assumptions that everyone's really familiar with the art town program so I wanted to ground you in that and speak specifically to the community engagement question. So when we talk about creative placemaking I think even the definition at the agency has really evolved significantly. And it's a really big -- at the NEA. So when we're talking about creative placemaking we're simply talking about projects that integrate -- into efforts that strengthen communities. As some of you that might be familiar with sort of of the white paper back in 2010, there was these terms of liveability and a really focus on driving economic development. The programs expanded into bigger tents into thinking -- that are intended to really strengthen a place strengthen the local residents who are there and have that be the central focus of really the project activities.

And ultimately you know, we're trying to -- projects that advance local economic, physical and/or social outcomes with the ultimate goal to really be about shifting systems. Recognizeg that arts, culture and design has something to offer to the development involving of a place and really should be thinking about setting the table with artists, designist and cultureculture -- folks who education specialists affordable housing developers et cetera. And to be completely frank, you know, the art town program is funding one to two year projects. Although we've seen some projects that stretch beyond that time frame and I'll talk a little bit about that the idea is we want to really be planting incremental seeds of change. So that communities have some Recognizing Engagement sources to pilot new partnerships or new ways of working with arts and culture really being sort of a critical focus and center. So we still have funding partnerships between a local government entity or a federally recognized tribe balance government in partnership with at least one non-profit -- I share that because that's really the structure for -- or granted making programs at the agency that we're really trying to provide a carrot to seed some of those relationships and shift some of the power dynamics locally by funding these projects. And oftentimes there are many, many more partners on a local project. That are really brought to bear. And I would say that increasingly in the application review process those -- those projects that really show multiple dimensions of a community coming together to support an activity, do better in the panel review. And we have maintained this requirement that these projects have to be championed or at least on the radar of the highest elected official in that community whether that is the tribe balance leader of government or the mayor of a city or the town manager of a town and the reason and rational in why we continue to feel that's important and we've heard from grantees that that's important is because we want there to be awareness in the highest levels of local government. So that if something really takes off and has promisng innovation there is potentially that political will to continue to support this new innovative way of working in the future. So I always like to put up this map just because it shows the immense diversity of projects we've funded across the country. I will caveat that we don't have the last 57 projects that we recently funded, but this really encompasses over the 630 projects we've funded since the program's beginning and nearly $50 million. And what's remarkable is no creative placemaking project is like, no community in this country is alike. You know, from Indian country to urban centers we've learned a lot as the program staff and continue to learn every day as the field of creative placemaking evolves.

So in 2019, we released a theory of change and logic model for the program. It resulted in an update to how we really articulated our grant guidelines and provided a more articulate description of the program and what we were hoping to achieve.

And I think what's really interesting to note it was based on information collected from our grantees. We conduct a survey so that it was built from the ground up. It wasn't us just speculatng what's really taking place under these projects that we were funding in art town. So first and foremost of the theory change Recognizing Engagement enforcement -- unique skill sets. So we talk about the role in I will eliminatng bring you new attention or elevatng queue community assets, issues, voices, or cultural infrastructure. They also have a unique ability to he beer -- that could be into a place it could be into a community issue or potentially even the local economy. And uniquely positioned to offer skills in imaginng and envisioning new possibilities for a community or place, any future, a new wave overcoming a challenge or approaching problem solving. All of these things I think we all know as funders in arts and culture, but I think it's really critically important to be able to lift up for those audiences that are also partnering with arts and culture for the first time.

And lastly,

artists culture bearers designers, connect communities, they connect people they connect places and some places physically, they can connect and build new relationships in a place.

So I'm not going to spend too much time on this I did share out the sort of theory change document that we first released back in April of 2019. But we thought a lot about this and this really has informed how we've honed in on some of our questions lines of inquiry in the application process. As a federal government agency we can only update our questions for intakng grants every 3 years, but it created a really unique opportunity for us to do so and do a little bit more thinking in breaking down the application vis-a-vis what we were hoping to drive and change and support activity in a place. So I wanted to just draw your attention to two things, first just looking at the project inputs I know this is a little bit small but these are really elements tied to a glint application. We're asking applicants to articulate leadership for a project identify cross sector partnerships perhaps -- or a non-profit arts and cultural organization or local theater group partnering with the department of public health for example, sort of working across the arts and cultural sector with another community development sector. They have to sort of bring to bear how they're going to meet our one to one match what other financial Recognizing Engagement sources are being brought to the project and most importantly this community buy-in piece. Also it helps us to really articulate some of the project activities under this big tent of creative placemaking these arts tact particulars that really have to be tied to local community change outcomes.

And they're paired with one of those local changed goals whether it be economic physical or social resulting from the project activities. So I put this slide up because I think this is really where the sort of community driven approach to these projects is critical in articulatng what is the change that the community would like to see in place. You know, in some of our hot market cities I think Dave really illuminated the pressures of gentrification, you know the desire might be for residents to prevent displacement. We see -- talking about how they want to attract, retain youth, and actually drive in my graduation to a place. So it really varies. The is really intended to be a menu of options for folks to really image what they would like to see in their place. What I think is most interesting in what we've sort of learned from the program over the years is this social change outcome has actually been a significantly part, if not more important and lifted up more as an outcome or goal than any other change outcomes. I think when people here the terminology creative placemaking they think of something physical like an artifact of public art but as you all know oftentimes the actual process of sort of social change that could be facilitated by an artist like in the case of Lawrence Kansas, I'd argue that Dave was really are one of those cultural organizers that brought community together in a really creative way. We're increasingly seeing projects that really are trying to drive at this social change outcome.

So that's an interesting shift over the years of the program.

And the north star of what we're hoping to fund and support over the language term you know, it could result in public changes in a place but really is the system's change. So again just driving back to the Kansas Lawrence, Kansas story, the idea that the resident association and this group of folks that live in the community are permanently part of the future determination of what happens in that place is what we're trying to really drive in these projects. So they could manifest themselves in new positions for an artist or cultural organizer to be part of future initiatives. It could help to see partnerships that breed all sort of new ways of working together permanent staff, training programs, or the replication of projects in other places.

But I'll be honest the our town program isn't a dramatic overthroe the institutions it's really working in partnership with the institutions and in some ways over the course of the one to two year project period it's really planting the seeds of ways to slightly shift how they've worked in the past. So I'm not going to overpromise and say our our town projects are reaching the systems change outcome but this is really the north star and how we talk about the work. So given that today's question is focused on community engagement and the question I'm going to just try to take on and share with you all I don't think I have really perfect answers to this, but these are just some of the ways that we've been thinking about how to success community engagement in our application process. We very explicitly have an application question that drives towards community engagement. Being a federal agency we have some sort of limitations in how we can really speak about a target community and embed equity very, very clearly. In the project --

in the question. But we try to allude to that that if you're beginning to think about how to be really inclusive of the populations in the community neighborhood place where you're articulatng a project. So that's one way, right, really simple, easy, again you know, you must be fed what you want --

you know what we all want to hear versus really that authentic piece. But I'd argue there are lots of other places in an application where you can really out the evidented of true community engagement. I thought one was really great, Dave, to hear you talk about neighborhood specialists. So in the budget we're looking for artists who might be those facilitators, to dedicate their time and share their insights into the community in place. So I think that's a great marker.

In the our town application we ask folks to articulate project participants so are there people on the project that have expertise, experience in the community engagement space or have been engaged in the community in the past or organiing in some way. Are there organizational partners?

We inquire about that, who again really are able to be representative of various stakeholders in a community or neighborhood. And then lastly this letters of support. And again all of these things I think are just multiple ways to come at trying to understand what's really happening at a place which is really hard when you're sort of reading a written application.

And in some cases the letters of support I think actually tell a lot and our panelists are really savvy. As you all know we have grant panels that represent the American public and particularly for our town I am very explicit in making sure that we have one -- at least one panelist on every grant panel for our town whos has unique expertise and community engagement. That could be an artist that works at the intersection of civic practice or it could be someone who is really well steeped in student organizng and engagement and really help shape and influence their fellow panelists in understanding and assessment of a project. I think that is something that is really critically important in ways that I've tried to think through adjudicatng our projects. But let's be honest, just kind of going to conclude with this our political environments change. I think that the Lawrence story is really evident. So even in the case of the our town program or we have applications that come in in August. We don't actually respond to that applicant until April to let them know whether or not they've been funded and project activities start in July. So we're talking about almost an entire year from the time of submitting an application to when people are able to implement their project activities. Which is why I would just really emphasize that it's key for funders to offer flexibility and really emphasize the process in the way that we're funding and supporting the work.

Also these partnership projects that are centered on community needs aren't simple and just often take longer than you might expect. We have that one to two year project period, but we can very easily extend project activities up to four years.

And we often do in the our town program. So that's one flexibility that we've been able to afford our grantees. And also project activities can change dramatically throughout the project period. Sometimes requiring a scope change or other substantial changes to the actual project activities that we as staff try to really be flexible onto the extent that we're able to. And work with the -- the grantee to make sure that they can execute project activities that are in the best interest of their community.

And up front we're really just trying to emphasize the importance of community engagement table setting at the outset of the project.

So I just want to conclude with this one sort of seed of thought: One of the things over the past couple years that we have been really toying with in partnership with local support corporation known as -- is offering technical assistance to our grantees and I would say that crafting inclusive community engagement is one of the biggest challenges that a lot of our grantees grapple with and additional assistance is often inquired for support. And I think that's a really important role that we can really help to play. We're supporting this technical systems offering through a cooperative agreement then working with our existing grantees who want to opt in to receive some additional support on executng their projects.

Over the coming months we'll be sharing more about that publically but I want to put that on your radar that that's something we've been thinking a lot about, diving really deeply into. And then lastly, I just love to end on a picture of a grantee. This is from the city of Indianapolis pre enactment theater and I think projects like this and the Lawrence story really embody that oftentimes the arts cultural intervention in creative placemaking is really the process. You know, this was a project that culminated in a festival and series of activities that happened in the community but there was planning that went into it over the course of 2 years. So these projects areare -- and the manifestation of sort of cultural piece becomes really evident in a one or two day temporary vented but has really lasting exact in the way that it's helped organize and connect communities to really influence the direction of what happens in their place. And I'm just also inspired to think about how creative placemaking it's really unique offering is thinking about new ways to really empower artists and cultural facilitatrs and organizers to work in tandem with community to shift the way things have happened in community that aren't always to the best interest of those who have historically been underserved. So with that I just want to stop sharing my screen and maybe we can just dive into some conversation.

But Dave, maybe I'll throw out to you really quickly just if you have any reflections and then we can open it up.

>> Well, I have multiple perspectives on this because I've been project artist for an our town project. You heard my story about my neighborhood where I was initially sort of fighting against the placemaking project. I've also read for our town, you know, so I've gone through those applications and I appreciate the difficulty and the really and one of our participants here today I can't remember who said you know, how do you really know what's in between the lines in an application? So multiple perspectives.

Yeah. I guess I mean you mentioned a few things that I really -- I guess I felt over the years. One of them was --

is a term and we don't have to go down the rabbit hole of terms but it's one that I've interrogated in the past and it's buy-in. This idea of buy-in I think for residents in east Lawrence during the project I mentioned, was considered to be like they wanted us to give consent in a way. Not participate but give consent.

And there's a big difference there. And you got to remember that in many neighborhoods in places if somebody flashes a five million dollars or even five hundred thousand dollars project in front of you, and you've never seen anything like that in your neighborhood, the chances are you're going to go yeah without looking or reading too closely or without maybe having the knowledge base you need to evaluated it. So buy-in is one that I think about a lot and how we portray that and the other is the irony you mentioned about we want to make sure that the highest elected official is onboard and in Lawrence the guy was corrupt. He was the biggest proponent of the project and he was corrupt.

>> And I think that's like an honest reflection, right, whereas like there have been other cases where having the mayor beyond a project meant that they were sort of kept apprised of the activities and then actually funded out of the local city budget. Artists and residents in multiple departments throughout the city.

So they replicated it and the mayor had he not been sort of aware but in connected understood what was taking place. So, yeah, I think it's kind of that cash 22. It could really go either way.

>> Yeah, then the last thing that I would add really has to do with project partners. And the red flag in our project --

and let's remember because I don't want Jen to be implicated in this whole thing I was talking about an our place funded project so the private cousins -- but the red flag for us was that the neighborhood association was not a partner.

So that should have said something right up front.

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>> Great what what are you all thinking reflecting, what would you challenge, what resonates?

>> And I'm also happy to share one more little project if folks would like.

Well Jen, I have a question and this is about the moment you know, we haven't talked about that yet.

Things I'm sure you can't answer. But I was on a call yesterday

a group of folks in the U.S. and in Britain and France talking about the potential of a new WPA, a new -- type program, a new program that wouldn't be specifically oriented towards art but would contain culture and art within it. And so that's the bigger sort of thought and then the more immediate one is do you folks have imaginings about the next few years? I mean, are there things clicking? I have no idea.

>> So I could say we imagine all the time. I mean, I think that we're so lucky and privileged to be in a place where we just see like innovations that are happening all across the country. I feel so lucky every day to just be learning about sort of the creative life blood of what's happening. You know, just how it manifests itself is to be determined. I mean I think it just depends on you know, if leadership were to change either a continuation of administration and if sort of the responses from an idea whether it be in congress or the vision of the leadership, I mean in the case of -- the chairman in creative placemaking you know he was an incredibly connected to all of the different cabinet secretaries who were really called upon by the then President Obama to think about what is this intersection of ways that we can help people in communities in place and really look through that lens of a ZIP code, a city block. So you know the our town program was really built from that lens of how do we think about what does arts and culture need in the same ways that we look at community schools through the lens of place and the multiple aspect that affects that individual.

So I think we're always all dreaming and I'm just excited to hear those conversations that are happening about sort of a new deal WPA. So we'll just have to see what's to come.

But I think this field is so uniquely positioned to be really responsive to that. Like there's so much work to happen in communities from sort of economic recovery to also just mental health and so many different challenges that I think the creative life blood of our country can really respond to in exciing ways.

>> I had something to ask if I may. Thank you both for sharing it's been very insightful.

Dave, your story definitely resonates with something that happened in my community with our mayor being investigated for corruption and eventually arrested as well. And so the buy-in from the community moving forward with our elected officials has been challenging.

And I was just kind of curious for your community has it kind of galvanized more community agency in actually taking place with civic engagement entrusting the process now that they've been able to successfully create the space is?

>> That's a great question. So one of the things I didn't mention about the East Lawrence neighborhood -- well I sort of did. I mean, it's been a place of community engagement activism for as long as it's been a city.

And this wasn't the first time folks tried to roll over us.

This have been 4 lane highways they wanted to build through this old working class neighborhood and so on and localities of folks know this story. And so the memory in the place and in the people was there and was called upon in the moment that this new project came up. We in effect were prepared and ready that in a way that others might not have been.

They might have been caught back on their heels. And so today I think and it's hard for me to speak broadly about the neighborhood, but folks that I know see what happened in this project as one of a series of challenges we've faced over the years. And I think it's embolden -- we showed up, we've always showed up and folks knew that which was ironic thinking you know, didn't they know we were going to look into this I mean come on. Yeah. So I think our circumstances might be different than a lot of other places maybe where you're at it's similar where folks are engaged but your comment about having corruption and politics is really problematic because you know, in the case of the art place and the our town grants we're really relying on the wisdom and the thoughtfulness of those elected leaders to make decisions and when they do worse than even that but are corrupt then the opportunity or the possibility of doing something good becomes more difficult, I think. And that's the thing that I worry about. Is like how do you get to the good side if everyone's like hey I just don't want to. So great question.

>> It affects not just the situation but the idea of engaging in kind of programming at all. It has a deep seeded --

it creates deep seeded resistance. I don't know if I have anything else to say about that other than that's the kind of large effect it can have.

>> I think that's true. And let's have some other thoughts but when we're ready maybe, Jen, if you feel like it it could share a positive story where of an our town grant.

>> Yeah, I think that's a nice way to kind of end Dave.

>> Should I do a little of the other one?

>> That sounds great.

>> Okay. And then folks jump in. This will be shorter for sure. Okay. Let's see.

This is around the same time as the project in east Lawrence but here my role was completely different. I was asked to join an our town place making project in Sioux Falls. They wrote me into the proposal I had not meet these folks before hand but the way this works especially in community-based work because there are not a huge number of us that do a lot of the deep community engagement, I guess.

So I was asked to be a part of this project and it was funded it was through their local --

agency in Sioux Falls initially they were imagng a series of public art pieces that would be implemented in a neighborhood adjacent to downtown. That was sort of light industrial.

You're going to be like oh yeah I've heard this one, light industrial, low income, was where the homeless shelter was.

And they were seeing it as a potential up and coming cultural district. And when I finally got a chance to see the application I was like oh this is not what I want to do this is not for me. Me being the outsider -- but I thought the least I could do was talk to the folks who had put the project together. So I made a trip to Sioux Falls and had a conversation like we're having here and I talked about what was happening in Lawrence and I asked really openly because I didn't have a lot to lose I said well, tell me more about this community. I mean what makes it interesting what is -- what are the biggest challenges, where are the places that you haven't shown, you know, those kinds of leading questions. And it's very difficult because I was naive, ignorant I didn't have connections there and a lot of things could have gone wrong. .

But they drove me around and took me furthest down 6th street to a neighborhood called --

neighborhood is a low income neighborhood that's adjacent to the big meat processing and slaughterhouse in Sioux Falls which you may have heard about in April because it was the epicenter for COVID. It had the highest rate for a short time.

And this is where many of the workers lived who worked in that plant. And that was related to the fact that the UNHCR, the United Nations high commission on refugees was placng refugees from around the world in this neighborhood and they were placing them there because a lot of them could get jobs at the meat processing plant and this is common also across the country. What was really amazing about it was this neighborhood was filled with people from around the world.

There were dozens and dozens of languages spoken, all sort of amazing little shops, the parks were filled with people doing all sort of cultural practices and playing all sort of different sports at least this is what I could gather initially. So without a lot to lose I said well, what about the -- neighborhood, why didn't you folks think about that?

They said well we just didn't know where we could do it or how that would work and I said well, let's drive around. So we drove around and we came to what you see on your screen. This is Meldron park and this is a city water facility that backs up against a big soccer field. As a muralist I was like are you kidding me, this is where everybody is hanging out and it's the soccer field and it's got this beautiful rolling hills that go up to this enormous wall let's do it. So long story short, I made sort of a counter proposal to theirs and I said if you were to frame this project around the -- neighborhood and the questions and the challenges and opportunities around the UMHCR placement of refugees here I could do my best to try to help you in that project. And it ended up that they said, okay.

So I co-led a project there in the neighborhood with residents to imagine a mural that had to do with their initial sort of feelings and experience of coming to the United States.

And what you see here is typical of many projects probably that you've been involved with.

These are people young and old.

We, you know, in the projects I lead it's always multi generational, there's no kids table and folks present to each other. I'm not the leader of that. So they're showing each other ideas for this mural project. And there are folks from 2 foreign countries and the young woman in the middle was born and raised in Sioux Falls and I'm not going to remember where everybody was from this is about ten years ago. And then a group of the young people who were co-leading the projects were the ones who had to go before the elected leaders and this is another one of my perspectives on doing this work.

They answered questions to the city council and they presented their design. And it was approved.

And then we went to work in the park and as Jen said and I believe it was -- that process of claiming power understanding what our vision was. And then working together that was at least as important as what we created physically.

So, so crucial, I think. So crucial. The bonds that were created, the trust that was developed. And so here we are in the summer of I guess 2013, working together.

Folks, these police officers were actually they would not paint on the mural for days and days. They would walk by. I engaged with them. I got nothing out them. And finally these 2 young women on the left said you all need to paint. And handed them paint brushes and they painted.

And we didn't solve any problems there, but this did happen on this project.

And this is the mural that was the result of that, at least this is the central section.

It's called the world comes to Whittier. Jen can probably point you at it but our town ended up doing a really nice piece that captures a lot of what I'm sharing with you and a short documentary film made about it as well that you might want to check out. Here we are there's the only time you get to see me in the hat with some of my friends who I met.

And I guess that's it. So I just wanted to share one example of a project that had a really positive outcome. Because of the willingness of the non-profit, of our town, of the folks who we engaged with and to some degree with my ability to think about what was possible too.

>> That was awesome, Dave.

>> Very cool, Dave.

>> I think one thing that I have noticed in just trend and projects that we've like funded or supported is that you know, in a lot of cases these 2-year projects the first year is really activities connect to really deep engagement and planning that enables those types of shifts -- oh. Good times. He got a good nap.

Really enabled those types of shifts that an artist can help influence in that sort of facilitation process. So that's another way to think about projects like that and how you might be able to support multiple phases of the work enablng some flex ability in that year too for some of the implementation activities to be responsive to what takes place in that community engagement.

Do you all have programs kind of in place or do you mind sharing?

I'd love to learn about the work you all are doing or thinking about connected to this topic?

>> We actually don't have a like a -- a community program like that. Like many states I know have got cultural districts and a lot of this works happens within the cultural districts.

We don't exactly have that kind of a program, you know different things we do but I am really curious with my peers and their state art agencys if they have something that they run like this through their cultural districts.

So I'm in Nebraska and we just got legislation passion the for cultural districts. So we are in the planning phase of how do we put that together.

[Laughter]. How do you create a cultural district program. So this was really good to sit in on and hear what can go wrong.

[Laughter]. And how to kind of be on top of that from the beginning. So, yeah. This has been really, really helpful.

>> Rachel I need to talk with you because we're in the same position we had legislation take place in January. And we're starting to work on it and then COVID hit and now you know, we're trying to figure out what that means in terms of

you know so many arts groups being closed and NASAA has so much great research on creative districts artist districts so it's very helpful to see what others are doing. I know some are on pause right now because of the crisis.

Because we don't have a program like this setup either just I had mentioned a large group a project with the New Jersey department of environmental protection, and they had received a grant from -- to do some community work and they wanted some artists they reached out to us they wanted artists to do public art projects related to sea level rise. And so we were able to talk with them and say you don't just want an artist to come in and do a nice piece of art, you -- if you're trying to do community engagement, this is your opportunity to work with an artist to do the community engagement and come up with something that's meaningful for that community. So that should be an excitng project coming up.

>> I just wanted to quickly pop in and in the video frame I've been here the whole time but to say for the CDN folks out there, Rachel, Mary, Eileen we are going to have a post phone call those who are thinking about creatng them we're just going to get together and share experiences.

So I'll send that out onto the list serve again shortly so you can just dial in and learn from each other and see what people are doing this particular interesting time period as well as have done in the past.

>> Does this end in five minutes?

Okay.

Does anyone else have a question because I have one for Jen? And I don't -- I feel like I've talked a lot.

All right. Jen, here it comes:

I was curious what you were talking about and you were saying that there's a new thing you're adding to our town the local and I can't quite remember.

>> Yeah.

>> I was curious if you could talk just a little bit more about that.

>> Sure. So yeah, I'm really excited and I wish that we kind of like launched more publically our programs so I had stuff to point to but happy to follow-up and share details. A couple years back we sort of acknowledged that to really support our grantees who might be partnering in ways that they haven't in the past or really doing community engagement for the first time that they needed some more support, you know, they had really great framework proposed. They were grantees they kind of made it through that vetting process.

But you know, trying to navigate associate political landscapes and things that shift that they might not have been able to expect or anticipate helped us to identify like some competency areas that consistently were challenges that folks encountered in execuing projects. So you know, other federal agencies of that technical assistance programs in ways that you know, a municipality might have a grant to do something and they actually provide you know everything from peer exchange to other wrap around support and consultations so that the federal dollars are sort of well implemented. So our premises of the technical assistance program was really based off of that.

That is there a way that obviously these are far smaller grants than you know, the department of housing and urban development, but is this a way to help sort of build relationship among the grantees to learn from each other, to actually learn from just mentoring or coaching from our communities of that done this work before. And so we're getting ready to really roll that out this year as an offering for 201-fiscal year 2019 and 2020 grantees. So some folks are partway through their project and we know that the world has so dramatically changed so we'll learn a lot as a funder and also hopefully be able to help folks really utilize the federal funding that's been awarded to them in a way that sort of helps to advance those goals in place.

So I'm happy to share more with this group as we sort of publically launch that and the mechanism that we have as a federal agency is this cooperative agreement where we're working -- it's essentially a grant but we're working in deeper partnership with -- who was select competitively to execute the programming and we're lucky enough that the head of their --

the director of national creative placemaking there she was actually a the head of a local arts agency and N Rhode Island for about 30 years so unique lens and experience in sort of the arts and cultural Speer but also you know within the body of local government.

So I'm excited and hopeful to share more.

>> I think it's a great idea.

Thank you.

>> Sure.

And I think it goes two ways we learn a lot as grant makers because you know, our deepest touch point with our grantees from the program staff is really in the application review process and so unless something goes wrong or sort of we hear about it in the news or hear from the grantee themselves, you know, we're not really intervening or part until the close out of a project. So this is I think, a way for us to learn and how we can sort of evolve the program but also hopefully provide a little bit more connection and support wrap around support for the grantees themselves.

>> Well, I think we've done it.

There's so much more to do. And everyone thank you for joining us today. Please feel free to follow-up. With Jen or ion anything. I hope you get to have attended and get to attend more parts of the convocation.

Unless there's any last comments I'm going to kick it back to Stephanie for a few housekeeping things.

>> Great job thank you both.

>> Thank you all.

>> Thank you all for coming.

Just want to say a few things as we close out. Our next session will take place on Tuesday October the 13thth at 2:00 p.m.

eastern time. The way to get into the Zoom rooms is the same as you've used today you'll get an email about that if you have any confusion. And on behalf of NASAA we're so glad that you could be here this week. And we hope you have a lovely safe and thoughtful weekend. And we'll see you on Tuesday. Have a good one everybody.

>> Thanks so much.

>> Thanks everyone.