

How Investing in Small-Scale Projects Can Foster Big Change

BY FREDERICK ZINDELL

JULY 2020



What is a collaborative action?



Collaborative actions are small scale projects that build community agency, engage local voices, and connect to long-term community goals. They include community collaboration at their core, cultivate a seed of possibility, incentivize moving an idea into reality, and fill a gap that there may not otherwise be time or money to invest in. By deploying creative placemaking and participatory strategies, collaborative actions help amplify community engagement efforts while advancing community goals or meeting community needs.

In 2013, Enterprise Community Partners in collaboration with the Fetzer Institute, set out to investigate how creativity and design could be a force for building love, compassion, and forgiveness in the world. From this, the collaborative action grant program was born. Officially launched in 2016, these small but effective grants provided funding for communities across the country that brought a range of impacts to people in urban centers, rural neighborhoods, and Native American communities.

The collaborative action grants were designed to provide flexible funding in the amount of \$5,000. What we found was that this small infusion of funding sparked many positive

outcomes in communities throughout the country. With over 50 grants awarded, each community faced a different set of challenges, but almost all emphasized that collaboration was the pathway to changing both long-standing and current narratives of trauma in their community.

Cover photo by Rebecca Ward

What did we learn?



Photo Credit: Matt Reiter

While there are innumerable groups with inspiring visions and strong coalitions across the country, community development practitioners constantly face challenges when advancing their community engagement efforts. Whether because a project is in the early exploratory phase, or the funding needs are too small to write a grant for, or the project needs may not align with grant restrictions, traditional funding mechanisms for community development projects create barriers to creative collaborative efforts. Small, flexible funding focused on creativity and collaboration can help reduce some of these barriers. The following three examples illustrate a range of ways the collaborative action process influenced local approaches.

Glass House Collective in Chattanooga, TN was faced with bureaucratic challenges when their original idea to bring resident influence into a new development in their community was derailed. With the Glass Street neighborhood federally designated as an opportunity zone, the city decided to change the local zoning regulations for the area. Glass House Collective quickly adapted by partnering with Chattanooga Organized for Action to lead a discussion on Opportunity Zones at the annual Glass Street Live event. After the event, resident engagement drastically increased, and residents are now leading the conversation on the influx of capital that comes

with being designated an Opportunity Zone. The flexibility of the collaborative action funding provided freedom to Glass House Collective to pivot their strategy when faced with bureaucratic barriers. Because of this, they were able to forge new partnerships while achieving their goal of leading from behind and supporting residents to direct the conversation on plans for their neighborhood.

Extra Terrestrial Projects in Raleigh, NC set out to bring attention to the redevelopment of the Durham Beltline Trail to ensure the city was taking an equitable and sustainable approach. Extra Terrestrial Projects was able

to tell the story of Durham's African heritage by holding workshops on the current belt line that used Ankara cloth as visual markers to represent Durham's cultural heritage. This work attracted attention from a local journalist, who attended the first workshop and helped amplify the message to city leaders. Extra Terrestrial Projects leveraged the collaborative action grant funding to bring in new funding streams, including \$10,000 more raised from the Ford Foundation. This helped bring Nathaniel Smith from the Partnership for Southern Equity to Raleigh to give a workshop on the lessons learned from the Atlanta BeltLine. Over 250 people showed up to this event which put pressure on the city to adopt a "Durham Equitable Community Engagement Blueprint" to guide all future projects while using the belt line as a pilot.

Popp's Packing in Detroit, MI used the collaborative action funding to expand their Camp Carpenter program, increasing paid opportunities for teaching artists, providing

common spaces for kids, and creating opportunities for local youth to build community and learn new skills. The East Davison Village neighborhood in Detroit houses many vacant structures and has struggled to maintain community identity and pride in the context of population loss and disinvestment. Since there were few playgrounds in the neighborhood, local youth would play in blighted vacant lots. Popp's Packing activates these spaces with local artists and youth who "learn together" to design, build, and enhance performance skills through hands-on activities. To expand their reach, they decided to offer two weeks of programming, and the collaborative action funding supported that expansion by providing the artists who teach the youth with a reasonable rate of pay. It also helped purchase tools and supplies for the campers to use. Having the ability to increase capacity due to this funding helped them overcome logistical issues of expanding their program.



Providing small, flexible funding to community development practitioners working on creative ways to advance a community vision can go a long way to helping groups overcome challenges and barriers to effective community engagement practices. It allows them to fill funding gaps, remain adaptable to their local political context, overcome logistical challenges, and dream bigger.

What do we recommend?



When supporting community development practitioners, it is important to be thoughtful about the design of the program to ensure professionals are set up for success by having the necessary resources in place to advance community priorities. We can do this by understanding challenges for the field while providing flexible funding and programming to community development practitioners.

Design for flexibility in how funding can be used.

Flexibility is a key ingredient when it comes to designing programs that support creative approaches to community engagement. Funding sources like Section 4 or programmatic grants with a set agenda have detailed requirements as to where funding can be spent and are often specify the expected deliverables in advance of implementation. However, the process of community development activities is much less predictable. By providing seed funding that can be used in myriad ways, the collaborative action grants gave community engagement practitioners more freedom to advance community priorities in creative ways. Based on feedback from exit interviews, groups across the country appreciated that this flexibility allowed organizations to meet expenses that can be difficult to fundraise for, or to pivot their plans when faced with unanticipated challenges. Groups noted a range of ways they used these funds, including to purchase permanent fixtures that could be used again and again in a space activation project, pay artists to design a mural that reflected the cultural history of the community, and provide honorariums for residents' time to represent the community.

Office42 architecture in Los Angeles, California created the Refresh Spot for the Skid Row community. The Refresh Spot is a personal hygiene station right in the heart of the neighborhood.



With the collaborative action funding, office42 architecture was able to purchase permanent fixtures for the space, such as plants and furniture. Additionally, they were able to purchase supplies for the “build day” events hosted by office42 architecture. These events brought the community together to help build the space. Funding these small but important features of a project is crucial to supporting creative engagement practices.

By design, the collaborative action grant program was built to be flexible and give much needed seed funding for practitioners to try something new and creative in their community engagement practice.

Make reporting methods simple and worthwhile.

While flexibility is integral to achieving successful outcomes, there are effective ways to track these outcomes and make it a simple process for grantees. This could mean giving grantees the opportunity to define their own goals and success markers at the beginning of the project, constructing the final report template to prompt honest reflection, using alternative reporting methods (such as exit interviews, video logs, or submitting a blog post), and asking questions that help you better understand the needs of grantees in order to design future programs for increased impact. Reporting on a project can also perform double duty as a reflective practice within the program or serve as a communications piece. These adjustments to the final reporting process can help grantees reflect on their project while providing valuable feedback to help the program adapt for greater impact.

Support connections and peer-learning between grantees.

The latest cohorts maxed out at 20 organizations; several people expressed how they enjoyed hearing about each other’s projects at the beginning of the grant period. Supporting and enhancing collaboration amongst grantees not only creates a support network but helps other organizations brainstorm ideas and get started. While creating community how-to guides was part of the final reporting requirements, additional connection amongst grantees is critical to building a network of creative community engagement practitioners.

What do we recommend?

While the recommendations outline the most common suggestions amongst grantees, there are further points to consider in designing future programming.

First, consider structures of the program that can make the group of grantees feel more like a cohort. At the beginning of the grant period, we brought every grantee together on a call to share their projects with each other. In the exit interviews, several grantees spoke about the inspiration they felt when hearing about other groups and projects in the cohort. Supporting and enhancing collaboration amongst grantees not only creates a peer network but helps other organizations brainstorm and implement their ideas. While the community how-to guides provide one source of peer sharing, additional connection and interaction amongst grantees is critical to building a network of creative community engagement practitioners.

Second, consider what happens beyond the grant period. The period of performance for these grants ranged from 6-12 months, with many groups committing to a shorter window of implementation than with typical grants. To expand the reach of the program, there was a rule that if a group received funding previously, they were not selected to receive funding again. This creates a program that provides much needed seed funding once but doesn't allow community development organizations to come back for future projects or help them adapt to increased capacity needs. There are several examples like Popp's Packing that have a hard time growing from an infancy stage to a full-blown program. Design of future programs should take into consideration an exit strategy that supports organizations in building the capacity to establish themselves as a trusted partner in the community.

Lastly, as an intermediary organization, Enterprise could provide more support in telling the community's stories and help to amplify their presence locally, expand the reach of the program, and potentially help them attract more funding. The community how-to guides were part of the final reporting requirements to ensure there was a product available to others that might need guidance in getting their community engagement efforts started. However, many groups faced challenges in completing this task and utilizing it to its full potential because creating and managing technology platforms requires a level of capacity, consistency, and quality control on the part of the Enterprise staff. Using technology as a platform in supporting community development organizations to tell their stories should be taken into careful consideration when designing future programs.



The success of the collaborative action grants and publications would not be possible without our funders, grantees, and collaborators over the years.

COLLABORATORS

We partnered with these individuals on cohort support, publications, and evaluation: Linda Grdina, Ceara O’Leary, Amber Christoffersen, Mia Scharphie, Emily Roush-Elliott, Drew Stanley, Jennifer Minner, Wylie Goodman, Ella Acerman, Mehwish Bandyal, David Cabuenas, Talia Greenberg, Alfie Raynor, and Gretchen Worth.

FUNDERS

Over the years, the Collaborative Action Grants received funding from the Fetzer Institute, the Kendeda Fund, the Kresge Foundation, and the Surdna Foundation.

PARTNERS

The grantees who implemented these projects were the source of great learning and inspiration and we appreciate the spirit of openness, learning, and collaboration with which they approached this grant program. We are grateful to the individuals directly involved, who number in the hundreds, and those they partnered with in turn, who are many more. The organizations and projects are listed below.

2016 Grantees

Grantees	Project Name	Description
Kounkuey Design Initiative Los Angeles, CA	Carnival for Design	Created a community "carnival" that launched the participatory design process for a 5-acre park
A Community of Friends Los Angeles, CA	Saturday @ the Square	A celebration of community, envisioning their future at a soon-to-be-developed vacant lot
Urban Juncture Foundation Chicago, IL	Expanding Safe Space at Bronzeville Community Garden	Address critical gun violence by working w/ key stakeholders to define & develop programs for peace
Lawrence Community Works Lawrence, MA	Duck Mill Art Installation	Engaging local artists and our design team to create art installations for a new housing development
Envision da Berry New Iberia, LA	Envision da Berry Community Billboard	A series of community interviews and video that result in a digitally projected community billboard
A Better City Boston, MA	Plates for Placemaking	Pop-up dinners facilitate a conversation about disempowerment within the placemaking field
One Square World Boston, MA	One Egleston Square	A place-based community education and action program for a diverse, sustainable and just Egleston
The Bridge Progressive Arts Initiative Charlottesville, VA	Neighborhood Future	Local youth with created a 35'x35' foot sculpture envisioning the future of their neighborhood
Saint Louis University St. Louis, MO	Journey to Justice Mobile Museum	Journey to Justice is a pop-up museum and art studio that bridges social justice and forgiveness
Sun Valley Youth Center Atlanta, GA	Sun Valley Youth Hub	Engaged Sun Valley youth in the design of a Youth Hub and a community bike rack program
East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation Portland, OR	Oaktown Family Tree Mural	A history of place collage co-created at a painting party with youth and graffiti artists
Claretian Associates Chicago, IL	South Chicago Community Cafe	A community cafe that engages residents around coping with trauma to promote housing stability
Thunder Valley CDC Porcupine, SD	Collaborative Growth: Food, Art, Community	The celebration of art, community and local food through the collaboration of Lakota youth and artists
Slavic Village Development Cleveland, OH	Hyacinth Community Based Collaborative Action	A collaborative action to engage residents in placemaking will take place at Hyacinth Park
Brooklyn Movement Center Brooklyn, NY	District 16 Storytelling Project	Dinners and story circles for podcast series about the future of public schools in District 16

2017 Grantees

Grantees	Project Name	Description
Neighborhood Development Associates, DBA Beyond Walls Lynn, MA	Beyond Walls	A placemaking project using lighting & art to improve safety, walkability, & commerce in Lynn
Athens Land Trust Athens, GA	Athens Heritage and Urban Agriculture Festival	A festival to honor the social and cultural legacy of the Hancock Corridor
The Urban Collaborative Project San Diego, CA	Lincoln Park Community Gathering Space	Increase Community Resilience by community placemaking efforts
APANO Communities United Fund Portland, OR	East Portland Arts & Literary Festival	Lead a creative community visioning festival on the site of a future mixed-use development
West Colfax BID Denver, CO	Over the Colfax Clover	Community-led design solutions to make Colfax & Federal intersection safer for pedestrians
The Youth Resiliency Institute (Fusion Partnerships, Inc) Baltimore, MD	The Cherry Hill Heritage Project	PThe Cherry Hill Heritage Project will engage youth in an intergenerational community history project
Territory NFP Chicago, IL	Bridging the Distance	Young designers using the culture and craft of weaving to represent and sustain a diverse community
People's Emergency Center Philadelphia, PA	Lancaster Avenue Parklet	West Philly neighbors created a parklet on an underutilized parking lot along Lancaster Avenue
Denver Indian Family Resource Center Denver, CO	Phyllis Bigpond Community Day	This event brought the community together to celebrate family preservation or reunification
Lawrenceville United Pittsburgh, PA	Duncan Park Community Orchard	Revitalized a decommissioned city park with a community orchard, playscape, and kids programming
Brightside St. Louis St. Louis, MO	CARE Picnic (Community Art & Recycling Engagement)	Hosted a community specialty recycling event and created an art exhibit for America Recycles Day
First Peoples' Conservation Council Montegut, LA	Collaboration for Youth Capacity Building	The six member Tribes of the First Peoples' Conservation Council will bring their youth together
Unity Properties/Bon Secours Baltimore, MD	Bon Secours Unity Properties Vacant Lot Working Block Party and Competition	Held an event + competition to creatively transform vacant lots into resources that address diverse need
Native American Connections Phoenix, AZ	IndigeFoods Demonstration/Tasting at Phoenix Indian School Visitors Center	Brought local food demonstrations to the grand opening of Phoenix Indian School Visitors Center featuring healthy indigenous meal

2017 Grantees

Grantees	Project Name	Description
L/A Arts Lewiston, ME	Activate LA	Activating empty indoor/outdoor arts space, expanding outreach to a connect with a wider community
New River Valley Home Blacksburg, VA	The Tools of Time Community Art Project	This project incorporated shared community history into a rural development initiative.
Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization Cleveland, OH	Art and Heart on Colgate Court	This project built community through mural painting along a neglected alley
Self Help Graphics & Art Los Angeles, CA	Know Your Rights	This project was built in response to the urgency to educate vulnerable populations and activate public space
U SNAP BAC Non-Profit Housing Corporation Detroit, MI	Seeds of Change Concert	Music event on blighted land as incentive to increase community hope for a permanent public space
A. Larovere Consulting Brooklyn, NY	Crown Heights Connect	Crown Heights brainstorm around what effective community development means to residents

2018 Grantees

Grantees	Project Name	Description
Attitudinal Healing Connection Oakland, CA	St. Andrew's Superheroes Mural	AHC engaged low-income West Oakland elders to create a mural at St. Andrew's Plaza
Slavic Village Development Cleveland, OH	Rooms to Let: CLE	Beautification and art projects leading up to weekend event of art in homes slated for demolition
Arizona State University Foundation for A New American University Phoenix, AZ	Gila River Indian Community Sustainable Housing Charette	Two-day sustainable housing design charette with GRIC community, ASU faculty and ASU students
Quality Life Center of Southwest Florida, Inc. Fort Myers, FL	Our Youth, Our Future	Youth lead community members to create a visual representation of their hopes for the community
Higher Purpose Co. Clarksdale, MS	Delta Creative Business Challenge	Community education program & pop-up shop to improve the economy by supporting creative businesses
EcoWorks Detroit, MI	Eco-D: Connecting and Empowering Sustainable, Creative Neighborhoods	A sustainability-focused, network-building effort to enhance connections at the neighborhood-level
Latinos Progresando Chicago, IL	ACTivate Marshall Square	ACTivate Marshall Square is a collaborative strategy to activate public space and celebrate culture
The Boston Project Ministries Boston, MA	"My Story-Our Story" oral history video quilt and mural	A youth-led community history gathering project transformed into a creative placemaking mural
Mary Mitchell Family and Youth Center Crotona, NY	20 Year Neighborhood Plan Research Project	Unite community stakeholders to create 20-year neighborhood plan around Housing and Good Development
Extra Terrestrial Projects Durham, NC	Green Placekeeping: creating an equitable and sustainable Durham Belt Line	An equity-centered, vision-making temporary activation of the future Durham Belt Line park
office42 architecture Los Angeles, CA	Skid Row Community ReFresh Spot	The ReFresh Spot: A community-created personal hygiene station in the heart of Skid Row
Peoples' Self-Help Housing Corporation Guadalupe, CA	Guadalupe Makers Market	The Guadalupe Makers Market is the first public platform for a fledgling group of entrepreneurs
Rebuilding Together San Francisco San Francisco, CA	Rebuild My Block	Through Rebuild My Block, neighbors help plan and execute a day of repairs in their area

2018 Grantees

Grantees	Project Name	Description
United Way of Greater St. Louis St. Louis City and County, MO	Ready by 21: Engaging Youth in Collective Impact	Community Cafe's with youth to ensure input into and ownership of a violence prevention plan
Glass House Collective Chattanooga, TN	Glass Street LIVE Community Engagement Project	GHC will empower neighborhood engagement in the redevelopment of their 35-acre public housing site
Black Girls Cook Baltimore, MD	BGC Healthy Cooking and Gardening Program	Participants will learn how to cook healthy meals and grow an edible garden in an urban environment
popps packing Detroit, MI	Camp Carpenter: Adventure Playground Building Workshop	Camp Carpenter is a week-long, outdoor design/build/play workshop for youth in Detroit
The Greater Ridgewood Youth Council Ridgewood, NY	Youth + Artists Storefront Collaborative	A youth-led project to address vacant storefronts by connecting artists, local civics, and owners
Pigtown Main Street Inc Baltimore, MD	Tot Lot Collaborative Action	Brought together local caregivers, parents and kids to reclaim the Tot Lot playground

References

[Made with Love: Recipes for Community Change](#)

A book of stories of creative and community-focused collaborative actions that Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellows led in communities across the country. It is a book of inspiration, as well as an informative guide for engaging in your own collaborative action. *Produced in partnership with Mia Scharphie, Creative Agency*

[Made in Place: An Atlas of Community-Led Change](#)

This collection of case studies highlights lessons learned from collaborative action grantees from 2016-2017 and points toward upcoming hurdles and goals that communities face in doing this important work. *Produced in Partnership with Emily Roush-Elliott, Delta Design Build*

[Made to Last: A Field Guide to Community Resilience Vol. 1](#)

A publication that articulates the role of cultural and creativity in building resilience and shares experiences from five diverse community development organizations leveraging culture and creativity to strengthen their resilience to climate change and other forces. *Produced in partnership with Drew Stanley, Very Smart & Beautiful*

[Community How-To guides](#)

An online library of resources developed by collaborative action grantees to provide guidance on how to successfully implement various community engagement efforts. *Produced in partnership with Ceara O'Leary, Detroit Collaborative Design Center*

[Creative Placemaking for Community Developers](#)

This report frames eight reasons why to do creative placemaking and strategies for getting started. It also features case studies of how these strategies are being used by three community development organizations that are leading this practice in the field. *Produced in partnership with Mia Scharphie, Creative Agency*

[Changing Places: Evaluation Methods to Strengthen Enterprise Collaborative Action Grant Program](#)

This report presents a series of considerations and recommendations to assist Enterprise Community Partners' collaborative action grant program in evaluating its impacts. This report was completed by: Ella Acerman, Mehwish Bhandeal, David Cabuenas, Talia Greenberg, Alfie Raynor, Gretchen Worth, as a course project for "Just Places? Community Preservation, Art, and Equity in the City" (CRP3850/5850) Cornell University's City and Regional Planning department. *Produced in partnership with Wylie Goodman and Jennifer Minner, Cornell University School of Architecture, Art and Planning*

[Durham Beltline Trail](#)

The Durham Belt Line is a 1.7-mile inactive railroad right-of-way that runs from the area around Avondale Drive to northeast of the Durham Amtrak Station at West Chapel Hill Street, forming a crescent around downtown Durham. It ends two blocks from the American Tobacco Campus and the Durham Bulls Athletic Park, the northern terminus of the American Tobacco Trail (ATT).

[Durham Equitable Blueprint](#)

The Community Engagement Team of NIS, to match the goal of encouraging active participation in neighborhood redevelopment and public policy and decision-making dialogue, has created an Equitable Community Engagement Blueprint through conversation with other departments and community leaders.



www.EnterpriseCommunity.org

1 Whitehall St.
11th Floor
New York, NY 10004
212.262.9575

© 2020 Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. All rights reserved.