RESEARCH NETWORKS 16
Qualitative Methods

Leveraging Assets: How Small Budget Arts Activities Benefit Neighborhoods

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This paper is excerpted from the full report, which can be found at www.macfound.org. The direct link is:

http://www.macfound.org/documents/docs/small_budget_arts_activities.doc
I. Introduction

This study demonstrates how small budget arts activities play a role in leveraging both local and non-local assets for neighborhood improvement. Throughout this report we shift the focal point from the “art product” to the activity around it. We show how such activity connected people to resources and to each other, and enabled local problem solving. We draw attention to the social networks that exist within local communities.

We surveyed 10 Chicago neighborhoods: Logan Square, Kenwood, Oakland, Woodlawn, Grand Boulevard, North Lawndale, Rogers Park, Uptown, Little Village and Humboldt Park (see Figure 1). None of these communities is considered an “arts center.” Rather, each is primarily an urban residential area. Each has a median household income below the median for Chicago, Illinois and the United States. Each has relatively large populations of racial or ethnic minorities (from 30%-98%). Each is a place where people live, work, go to school, socialize and worship, and each has arts activities produced within their locality. We focused on arts activities that are regularly organized activities and open to the public, including visual art exhibitions, theater, dance, poetry and literary presentations, arts education, art therapy and community festivals. We pay special attention to small budget arts activities. We gathered qualitative data on arts activities through review of public records, observation of local arts activities and interviews with 126 people identified through a snowball sampling process. Among our interviewees were artists, directors of small arts organizations, staff at community development organizations, community leaders and residents.

Figure 1: Map of Chicago with locations of 10 Communities in this study.
Need for This Research

The need for this research was three-fold:

1) To identify if there was any connection between arts activities and neighborhood capacity building.
2) To identify what regularly organized arts activities actually existed within these 10 residential neighborhoods on Chicago’s south, southwest, west and north side.

3) To summarize characteristics of organizations with budgets under $100,000 located within these neighborhoods.

In this short paper, I discuss only the connections between arts activities and neighborhood capacity building. The full study, available at www.macfound.org, contains addresses the other needs.

**Relevant Social Science Literature**

The literature we draw upon includes research in the production of culture (see Peterson 1979; Radway 1984, Crane 1992) art production (Becker 1982, Gilmore 1990), innovation (Burnes and Stalker 1961), social capital (Putman 1982) and community development (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993, Chaskin 1999). Following Becker, we focus on the networks involved in art production. In his often cited study of the organization of work in *Art Worlds* (1992), he argues that art is not produced by a sole creator or by an individual genius, but rather by networks of people “whose cooperative activity organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art work that art world is noted for” (Becker 1982:x). Rather than explore how a network constitutes the field of art production or a substantive area of work and occupations as Becker did, we look at the how these network activities constituted a local urban community. Like Becker and his colleagues (see Peterson 1979, Fine 1983, Gilmore 1990 and 1993) our emphasis on small budget activities locates the
level of analysis between a social world and a formal organization. In a social world, a number of people interact to produce a relatively stable aggregate of relations (Gilmore 1990). This is what we refer to as a network. Whereas formal organizations rely on boundaries, centralized authority and monopoly control of resources (DiMaggio [1982] 1991) or management of coalitions of support sufficient for continued existence (Pfeffer and Stalancik 1993), networks provide an open flow of information through which producers can access needed resources or information necessary for decision-making (Gilmore 1990) and innovation (Burns and Stalker 1961, Granovetter [1973] 1982). We focus on the social and community-based outcomes of coordinated activities that occur in art production networks. Based on data gathered primarily from interviews we show how art production constructs local identity, provides access to new resources and solves local problems. Similar to Gilmore who studied how a concert world’s location (in Midtown, Uptown, or Downtown, Manhattan) guided the stylistic decision-making, access to resources and types of exchanges within an art world (1990:157), we studied the interaction between local context – i.e. specific urban locations having distinct racial/ethnic composition, local history and local economy — and the art activity.

As arts activities in urban landscapes are increasingly community-oriented, our research is timely because it links these localized arts activities to social research of the community networks that support them. Local benefits are possible because of the way social networks in neighborhoods and in small budget arts activities operate. The networks are structured around reciprocity exchanges (Putman 2000). Through these exchanges, social capital is embedded in the network and can be accessed as needs arise. The social networks that enable small budget arts activities are either part of the local
fabric or become directly or indirectly accessible to local areas through the arts activities. The emphasis of arts activities leveraging assets draws attention to how arts activities create new networks, supplement and improve upon existing networks and assist in problem-solving efforts within urban residential neighborhoods.

The majority of the data was collected June-October 2001. Additional data was gathered March-June 2002 as we checked facts for the preparation of our final report. Our data from interviews exist as transcribed field notes. These data are presented throughout the report.

II. Comparison of the 10 Neighborhoods

An overview of statistical data on the 10 neighborhoods provide a macro level view of the context of these neighborhoods. The populations in these neighborhoods range from 6110 people in Oakland to 91,000 people in South Lawndale/Little Village. Together, these neighborhoods have 17% of Chicago’s population of 2,896,016 people. Chicago’s demographic breakout is split in thirds between African American (36%), Caucasian (31%) and Latino/a (26%). The remaining races – Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, “Some Other Race” and Mixed Race – comprise 6% of the population. Only two of our neighborhoods have similar proportionate diversity as Chicago—Rogers Park and Uptown. Racial composition in Rogers Park is 30% African American, 32% Caucasian, 28% Latino, less than 6% Asian/Pacific Islander and 4% of remaining races which includes less than 1% Native American and 4% multiple races. In Uptown, the breakout is 21% African American, 42% Caucasian, 20% Latino, 13% Asian/Pacific Islander and 4% remaining races. The proportional racial distribution of the remaining
eight communities does not mirror that of the city as a whole. The neighborhoods we studied which are predominantly African American are: Grand Boulevard – 98%, Woodlawn – 94%, North Lawndale – 94%, Oakland – 98%, Kenwood – 76% African American. There is a concentration of Chicago’s Hispanic population in South Lawndale/Little Village, which is 83% Hispanic. The remaining two neighborhoods are each made up of predominately of two races: Logan Square is 65% Hispanic and 26% Caucasian; Humboldt Park is 47% African American and 48% Hispanic.

We also examined Median Household Income of these 10 neighborhoods range from $10,739 in Oakland, which has the lowest median household income to $36,612 in Kenwood, which has the highest median household income of the neighborhoods we studied. Ironically, these two neighborhoods border each other and are often referred to together as Kenwood/Oakland. All of the neighborhoods we studied are below the average median household income for Chicago ($38,625), Illinois ($46,435) and the national median household income ($42,148). Oakland, Grand Boulevard, Woodlawn and North Lawndale are among the poorest communities we studied and the poorest neighborhoods in Chicago.

The number of arts activities we found range from 35 in Rogers Park, 25 in Uptown and 23 in Logan Square. These three communities have substantially more publicly available arts activities compared to the other seven areas, which have from 3-6 activities. These figures give some idea of the local capacity to produce publicly accessible arts activities. The population density shows that these same neighborhoods with more arts activities also have higher density. Whereas, the numbers of activities do
not increase as population size or median household income, the neighborhoods with the greater diversity and density also have the greater number of public arts activities.

These data do not tell the entire story. These data provide a macro view of the demographics of these communities. They begin to show the complexity of neighborhood context. This fact led us to consider that multiple strategies might be necessary to address the issues in each of these communities. For a more detailed analysis, we pursued our research question through interviews and participant observation. The qualitative nature of the data captures a sense of what small budget arts activities contribute to their neighborhoods and how neighborhood needs vary.

III. Arts Activities Leverage Assets for Local Benefits

In this section we outlined a list of ways arts activities leveraged local and non-local assets to benefit the local community. We organized this section under the broad headings of “Provide Access to Resources,” “Enable Problem Solving” and “Build Social Relationships. These outcomes are listed on the chart on the next page and illustrated through qualitative evidence throughout this section.
PROVIDE ACCESS TO RESOURCES

1) Arts activities attract local and non-local customers to neighborhood businesses.
2) Arts activities create new productive uses for neighborhood facilities and underutilized or abandoned spaces.
3) Arts activities create new links to non-local resources.
4) Arts activities provide new resources to be shared by residents.
5) Arts activities supplement local educational resources and provide mentorship to local youth.
6) Arts activities provide training and access to equipment and facilities.
7) Arts activities provide youth with access to technological and entrepreneurial skills.

Arts Activities Leverage Assets for Neighborhood Benefits

8) Arts activities help address local problems by providing space for cross-cultural dialogue.
9) Arts activities provide a safe haven and opportunities to learn new skills.
10) Arts activities engage neighborhood residents in creative problem solving.
11) Arts activities help to foster collaboration.
12) Arts activities engage youth as neighborhood citizens.
13) Arts activities develop leadership and decision-making skills.
14) Arts activities build cultural identities for immigrants, refugees, and people of color.
15) Arts activities build knowledge, understanding, and engagement in democratic processes.
16) Arts activities provide a focus to build positive social relationships among neighborhood groups.
17) Arts activities build knowledge across cultural boundaries.
18) Arts activities help build an understanding of immigrant experiences.
19) Arts activities create a bridge between American culture, immigrant cultures, and homeland cultures.
20) Arts activities enable a sense of belonging to a neighborhood.
21) Arts activities connect individuals to each other and to a network of opportunities.
22) Arts activities build bridges between different socio-economic sectors of a community.

ENABLE PROBLEM SOLVING

8) Arts activities help address local problems by providing space for cross-cultural dialogue.
9) Arts activities provide a safe haven and opportunities to learn new skills.
10) Arts activities engage neighborhood residents in creative problem solving.
11) Arts activities help to foster collaboration.
12) Arts activities engage youth as neighborhood citizens.

BUILD SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

8) Arts activities help address local problems by providing space for cross-cultural dialogue.
9) Arts activities provide a safe haven and opportunities to learn new skills.
10) Arts activities engage neighborhood residents in creative problem solving.
11) Arts activities help to foster collaboration.
12) Arts activities engage youth as neighborhood citizens.
Provide Access To Resources

Each of the following examples offers a different picture local outcomes when arts activities to provide a community with access to resources.

*Arts activities attract local and non-local customers to neighborhood businesses.*

In Rogers Park, several neighborhood businesses allow regular use of their facilities by a range of autonomous groups to stage arts activities. Among them is the Heartland Café, owned by Michael James and Katie Hogan. The Heartland, located in Rogers Park at 7000 N. Glenwood, is a restaurant, bar and a general store that sells a range of literary, artistic and political journals, books, clothing and gift items. The owners build community and their customer base with small budget arts activities as a central component of their business. Arts activities at the Heartland are organized largely by outside groups and individuals. Some groups, like the Uptown Multi-cultural Art Center are registered as non-profits. Others, like the Labor and Arts Festival, do not have a 501c3, but have an organizing committee and a point person with some decision-making authority. Other activities are organized by individuals or loosely assembled groups. These activities take place within the restaurant eating area and include exhibitions, readings and concerts. In 2001, exhibitions featured local children’s work from Field School; *Down at Theresa’s ... Blues Chicago*, photo exhibit by Mark Pokempner of noted Blues musicians such as Junior Wells, Billy Branch and Muddy Water; a t-shirt competition organized by Uptown Multi-Cultural Art Center; and a national exhibition of painting, prints and photos sponsored by the Rogers Park-based *Labor and Arts Festival*. Openings for these events bring in friends of the artists, i.e. customers from throughout Chicago. Heartland also features music and literary programming, three to four nights a week. Bands come from throughout the region and
therefore attract audiences from throughout the region. Open mic poetry readings each Wednesday at 10 p.m. draw a predominantly local crowd. Hosted by Peter Wolf, who describes himself as a “third generation Rogers Park resident,” the open mic involves 30-40 people presenting poetry or stories in three-minute slots. Presented at these sessions are traditional poetry as well as commentary and critiques of local, national and international politics. In addition there are also on-stage announcements such as “looking for roommates” and “cars for sale.” As such the weekly live open mics function like a traditional handbill distributed in 19th century Paris.

Through the range of artistic activities organized by neighborhood residents and organizations at its venue, the Heartland has built its customer-base. Local residents describe the restaurant as “a stabilizing feature in the neighborhood.” This stability is in part attributed to the arts activities that take place there. According to Katie:

At first it was hard for me to believe that people saw us as a stabilizing feature in the neighborhood. But, landlords bring future tenants here to sign leases to show them what kind of ‘community’ exists in Rogers Park. To many people we are an immense safe haven. People hear the music and see the art and the people in the place and it represents life to them. We are a haven for the sense of community that exists in Rogers Park.

The Heartland’s 25 years of success has inspired others. There are numerous nonprofit and for-profit arts activities that exist within blocks of the Heartland. Staff at the local alderman’s office point to Al Goldberg, a musician, real-estate agent working in Rogers Park and owner of ArtSpace RP, as someone “who is well connected in the arts community.” Goldberg is a relentless proponent of the idea that the arts are an engine for economic activity. He recently rehabbed a deteriorating building on the corner of Morse and Glenwood to accommodate artist studios and gallery space. The structure, built in 1916 as doctor’s offices, no longer served that purpose. According to Goldberg, artists
and arts organizations bring a host of beneficial activity to an area, which help to build both commercial and real estate markets:

Artists bring people and money into a neighborhood. Artists often are pioneers. They will go into areas before the general market is ready for it. Artists will assume a greater risk than the general market. [As renters] they create stability and income in a building which otherwise would be vacant or rented to undesirable tenants… Artists create demand and business for other businesses. They attract people to the neighborhood who are coming to their events.

Goldberg is applauded by some Rogers Park residents for rehabbing a building that in his words “was like a scene in NYPD Blue. There were squatters, crack addicts, hookers and a guy’s pit bull staying here. The windows were covered with plywood. People would not walk down Glenwood. Now, there is lots of foot traffic by the building.” One of the street-level spaces is occupied by Inclusion Arts Gallery, which is subsidized by Goldberg. The gallery provides emerging and established artists with a place to present works and explore cross-disciplinary projects. It provides a neutral space for neighborhood residents to gather. It attracts non-neighborhood residents to the neighborhood for exhibitions. It is a safe and non-threatening business on a corner that has been the site of several attacks and two murders between 2000 and 2001. According to Goldberg, residents and community leaders in Rogers Park recognize and value the arts activities because of the resources they directly and indirectly attract to the neighborhood. The story of ArtSpace RP is similar to countless stories of urban industrial loft conversions that were first valued by artists who used them as live work/space. The new twist is the location of such space in the heart of an urban residential neighborhood rather than an abandoned industrial zone.
Arts activities create new productive uses for neighborhood facilities and underutilized or abandoned spaces.

Local churches are facing declining use in several neighborhoods we studied. As a sponsor of visual and performing arts events and children’s art education in Logan Square, AuroraArts sought to provide connections between adults and children, residents and artists, through arts activities. To fulfill these goals, the organization forged an alliance with Nazareth United Church, which had the space AuroraArts needed to host its programs. According to Executive Director, Dawn Marie Galtieri the partnership served the needs of both the organization and the church, which had seen a declining congregation as the neighborhood population changed and congregation members relocated. The arts programming brought new people into the church facility while providing AuroraArts with the space it needed to fulfill its mission. According to Galtieri:

Nazareth is an aging church and the membership that used to live in the community has shifted. While some members returned for services on the weekends, the connection to the local community has waned and the church is in crisis. We are embraced by the church because of our goals, which include opening up existing facilities in Logan Square to the visual and performance arts.

By bringing art to Nazareth United Church, AuroraArts has attracted families that are not congregation members. It has created what Galtieri calls a “trans-generational connection that would not normally happen. We are building bridges everywhere. We bring in artists and encourage them to get involved with the community and with each other.” In the process AuroraArts has also created a new use for an existing space.

Arts activities create new links to non-local resources.

When Marti Foster began the West Humboldt Park Center for the Performing Arts she could not find artists from her neighborhood to provide the skills she needed to implement her program. In many neighborhoods there are limited opportunities for
artists to gain visibility; there are no gathering places for artists, no cafes, no galleries, no public places where flyers are posted with events. Often, the lack of public space and venues for artists, as well as the disconnection between most arts activity and other community activity makes it especially difficult to find artists. Foster, however, who is the Center’s Executive Director, didn’t think the problem was with finding artists in West Humboldt Park. She was convinced that they simply did not live in the neighborhood:

There are a lot of churches in the area so I know someone is going to church. There are a lot of liquor stores so I know someone is drinking. There are a lot of beauty shops so I know someone is getting their hair done. Usually what people do is evident. In terms of cultural development I have seen nothing in the six years I have been working here. I tried to find some brothers that drum and there was no one with even a conga drum. There is no Afrocentricity over here. After a while you get a feel of what is here and what is not here. We have been doing programming since 1996 and you would think that if there were other performing artists in the neighborhood someone would have asked if they could use our space for rehearsals.

By bringing Black artists from throughout Chicago to the West Humboldt Park Center for the Performing Arts, Foster is also bringing insights, knowledge and experience from Black cultural movements that were homegrown in South Shore, Englewood, Hyde Park, Uptown and Rogers Park. Foster illustrates how poorer communities, particularly poor communities of color, are able to remain separate from neighboring communities.

This community is isolated…the community is stuck… They go to church and that is real important, but it stops there. They don’t move outside of the community. The schools are here, the grocery store is here, the church is here…. It amazes me that women in this neighborhood typically marry the guy that lives around the corner. I have so many cousins in my program because people seldom venture outside the neighborhood. They live here, marry here and die here.

As Foster is an African American woman from Chicago’s South Side, she was viewed as an outsider in this predominantly Black, west-side community. She had to gain the trust and respect of this tight-knit community if she was going to be successful building an arts center and providing arts education to area youth.

I’m able to do what I do here because the community allows me to do it. For a long time people did not realize I did not live here. They saw me out in the streets working and they felt comfortable. If someone else wants to create artist venues, if they want the community to participate, they have to get to know the people first… That is what Redmoon did. What they do is so strange that curious kids started coming out to see
what they are doing, since they were creating outside. People still kind of peep at them and wonder what those White kids are doing.

Foster points out that she, like others looking for arts expertise, had to turn to organizations located outside of the neighborhood. Redmoon Theater, which uses masks, physical performance and puppetry in outdoor performance. Redmoon is most known for their Logan Square performances, but maintain their props build shop in West Humboldt Park near the Center. In addition, Foster has collaborated with Chocolate Chips Theater, an African American, South Side, theater company, and MPAACT, an African American theater company based in Rogers Park, to create an arts-centered safe haven. The artists teach classes in sound and light engineering, writing, speech and diction, set design, step dancing, acting, and stage makeup. The West Humboldt Park Center for the Performing Arts maintains five full-time teachers and five contractual artists. Foster started the Center to get kids off the street and as a consequence has also created jobs, revitalized an unused property, brought new resources into the neighborhood, and introduced new skills to residents.

*Arts activities supplement local educational resources and provide mentorship to local youth.*

Much of the Sutherland Cultural Arts Initiative’s activity in North Kenwood focuses on performing and educating about jazz music. They target schools with band programs. Through his work as a visiting artist, Malachi Thompson, SCAI’s Artistic Director, seeks to support school band instructors plagued by limited resources:

We fill the gap with our Visiting Artists Program. When jazz recording artists are in town we bring them to schools that have a band program. Not only do these artists help them with technique on their instruments, but they also serve as role models, showing that there is an alternative to the rap music they hear all the time. By meeting these artists they can see that it is possible to have a career as a musician, not just as a singer or pop star. These visits are critical because a lot of kids in our neighborhood cannot afford private music lessons.
These visiting artists in addition to providing backup to teachers in the schools also act as mentors. Thompson recalls a time when there were plenty of male role models in his neighborhood. He remembers when it was common to take shop and drafting classes at school and when there were plenty of males teaching math and science. Observing what he terms a crisis in his community and the schools, Thompson says “We thought one way we could influence the situation was using the arts to mentor children, especially the boys, since there are not many men in schools.”

*Arts activities provide training and access to equipment and facilities.*

Electronic Sound Studio in Uptown provides public access to its recording studio as well as workshops for artists to build knowledge about recording technology and to meet each other. The studio is a gathering place for networking among artists who produce sound pieces as part of their work. The studio also provides the public with access to out-of-town visiting artists through workshops and its Annual Festival of Sonic Arts. The studio regularly distributes experimental audio through its programming on WLUW. As a production/workshop facility, the organization brings 700-900 people into the area each year to work and learn. The indirect impact is these people patronize area businesses, particularly eating establishments.

*Arts activities provide youth with access to technological and entrepreneurial skills.*

While there are many citywide programs that engage inner city youth in arts activities, The Urban Photographers Forum is among the few art programs within the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA). It is a nonprofit organization started by a CHA resident Annie R. Smith and based in the Ida B. Wells housing just off Pershing Road in Oakland. It is just six blocks north of Little Black Pearl Workshop, which runs similarly entrepreneurial programs in ceramics and other art media. Smith started the Forum to
engage youth-at-risk who live in CHA housing in productive and creative activities that build entrepreneurial skills. The Forum provides a gallery space at 3820 S. Langley, summer photography program for youth and a year-round after school program. According to Smith:

The program engages CHA youth, [yet] it is not just for CHA, but all people interested in urban photography. We are subcultural. Urban youth don’t get a chance to show their work. [The Urban Photographer’s Forum] provides them with space to show their work and it is a place for community residents to come together and see the work of urban youth.

Smith gives new meaning to the word subcultural through her work with youth who are shut out or demonized by mainstream culture. By becoming engaged in photography, poor, inner city youth in the Forum’s program learn a technological medium for expression. They learn computer graphics and magazine layout along with skills to produce an exhibit that attracts a range of people from throughout the area. Smith says:

Everyone from the community comes together. Mothers want to see their kid's artwork. Can’t wait to get our newsletter, which features youth art, photography and poetry. Our community has never had access to a gallery in the past. People can come into gallery and see art on the walls. We circulate magazines throughout the community at places such as Northeastern University’s Center for Inner City Studies [located on block away]. We provide an outlet for people to see and read about art and urban life. We teach kids who live in CHA and surrounding areas new skills related to photography, desktop publishing, web design and entrepreneurship.

Smith has been lauded for her efforts. She was selected to represent the positive and constructive efforts taking place in CHA in Washington, D.C. during the Clinton administration.

**Enable Problem Solving**

This section shows how arts activities enable problem solving through engaging people directly in civic involvement or in dialogues that enhance the civic involvement necessary for problem solving.
Arts activities help address local problems by providing space for cross-cultural dialogue.

As many local areas in Chicago are sites where people from diverse cultures co-exist, information in the form of how diverse cultures see, think, and understand is invaluable for consensus building and problem solving. Some arts organizations present and involve artists from diverse cultural backgrounds. Such organizations gather audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds to experience and become engaged in cross-cultural dialogue. Such activities help to build tolerance among diverse peoples. Several arts organizations in Uptown and Rogers Park enable cross-cultural dialogue, particularly because they operate within diverse neighborhoods. Among these is Insight Arts in Rogers Park. It provides art education activities for youth and adults, it organizes cross-cultural events and it provides administrative support to emerging arts groups. According to their Executive Director, Craig Harshaw, they support both cultural and political work that seeks “meaningful social change through the creation of cooperative social and political structures.”

Working in such a multi-cultural neighborhood, one of the unique positions we have is actually being a PLACE. We are a place where people from all the diverse cultural and linguistic groups come. We provide a site for real dialogue to happen. It happens through planned events like the Nights of Insights. By programming diverse groups together diverse [audiences] are brought together. Being in the same room, people come together and have a dialogue. We have also hosted community forums, which are successful because people are used to coming here for children’s arts classes, or other kinds of events. Some of the issues these community forums have focused on are youth issues, policing and community development. In our arts education programs, especially, this is a built-in component—initiating dialogue about issues of concern in the community and the world... [The arts help] to give people voice who have been shut out of the discourse, particularly youth and youth of color.

Insight Arts carries out arts education programs year-round. Their summer programs take place at their organizational home, United Church of Rogers Park. They also carry out programs in local schools. Their events, which feature performance and literary groups, take place at the church and at Preston Bradley Hall, operated by Women in the Director’s Chair in Uptown. Among the performance groups they have featured is *I Was Born With Two Tongues*, a collective of both Pan-Asian young women and men who use poetry and music to address language and cultural issues important to Pan-Asian immigrants.

Insight Arts uses the broad networks it has created to produce arts events, to provide arts education, to enable civic action and to address community problems.
Through its work, it links a citywide network of cultural and political workers who use their creative energy to address local issues. An example of this was a recent partnership to organize a rally against racial and ethnic harassment following the September 11 bombing.

We invest creative energy to deal with what’s been happening within the neighborhood. Since the September 11th bombing, there has been harassment against community areas, which are seen as being Southeast Asian, West Asian, North African and other Muslim communities. There has been violence and property damage, but also a general sense of harassment. [We helped to stage] a rally and march through the neighborhood, in partnership with the Indo-American Center and the Southeast Asian Progressive Action Coalition. It is a bit difficult because networks within these communities have not been developed to do such work. In the past, they have been rather passive. We are engaged with peace coalitions from other parts of the city. Those coalitions are predominantly white, so, we wanted to provide a space where people of color, specifically Muslim, Arab and Pakistani can be in leadership positions. We [also provided access to] a wide range of cultural workers ranging from musicians, performance artists and poets from the communities most effected to perform and speak to these issues at the rally.

As illustrated in this account, Insight Arts uses the artist networks they have built for art production for the improvement of the neighborhood environment. In addition to racial and ethnic harassment they have organized around issues related to community policing, affordable housing and youth rights.

*Arts activities engage neighborhood residents in creative problem solving.*

The *Artists of the Wall* neighborhood festival, held over Father’s Day Weekend began as a way to address the problem of graffiti on the Loyola Beach retaining wall between Pratt and Lunt Streets in Rogers Park. It was originally an activity of the Loyola Beach Neighbors Association, a nonprofit group of neighborhood residents east of Sheridan Road. In 2001, the 8th annual festival was organized by the Loyola Park Advisory Council and included a range of food vendors, music and 120plus neighborhood residents, both artists and non-artists, who pay $15 for the opportunity to paint five feet of the 600 foot retaining wall. As a member of the Park Advisory Council,
Heartland co-owner, Katie Hogan chairs the committee that now sponsors the event. She said, “[we hope they paint] according to the theme, which in 2001 was *2001: A Neighborhood Odyssey Hulabaloo*. This theme sought to link Homer, the Iliad, and the Lake with Stanley Kubrick’s 2001 Space Odyssey.” The two-day festival gave cash prizes for 1st and 2nd place in both the adult and junior artist category. The volunteer work of the organizing committee, donations from neighborhood businesses of supplies such as paint, food vendor rental fees, contestant fees and funds from the City of Chicago’s Office of Special Events Neighborhood Festival Grants support the festival. In 1999 they received $2000, in 2000 they received $1500 and in 2001 they received $750 from the City of Chicago to supplement the nearly $3000 raised through local donations. The festival is an example of how an arts activity addresses a problem of vandalism while building a sense of ownership of a place and a sense of community connection around an annual event.

*Arts activities engage youth as neighborhood citizens.*

Through its neighborhood-based programs, BeyondMedia education assists under-served and under-represented women and girls to appreciate and become involved in their neighborhoods. They do this through an innovative partnership involving at-risk girls using video to explore their own neighborhood history. By collaborating with the Rogers Park Historical Society and Family Matters, BeyondMedia, rebuilds relationships within their community through art, and develops critical media and production skills. They help women and girls become agents in their own educational process and create a space where they use their own assets, find and build skills for their own betterment.
Among its programs are the Girls Action Media Project, a one-year project in Uptown with Girlworld, an after-school program of Alternatives, Inc. and the Young Women’s Empowerment Project; a Rogers Park multi-media literacy and neighborhood history project working with young women and men involved with Family Matters, and an in-school media project working with the Young Women’s Leadership Charter School. In addition, in 1999, it completed a video project with formerly incarcerated mothers who used the media to re-frame the “welfare mother” images of poor women and formerly incarcerated women who are often forced to exist on the margins of society because of their past criminal records.

**Build Social Relationships**

This section shows how arts producers provide localities with structured activities through which to build social relationships. It also summarizes our findings of the ways arts activities build social relationships. These findings link to what Putnam (2000) refers to as “bridging and bonding relationships,” which includes developing community leadership as a social relationship rather than personal skill. In addition, we include cultural identities, political consciousness and the sense of belonging in a community.

*Arts activities develop leadership and decision-making skills.*

Sapphire and Crystals was inspired and founded by Marva Jolly, a self-taught artist and feminist, who recognized that she and other Black women artists needed a support system to continue producing their work. She suggested the name to include “sapphire,” which, in her words, refers to “women with attitude.” She wanted the group to support the kind of thinking she saw in such spirited women. The group was formed
because there were rarely exhibitions of African American women artists. According to Jolly:

Sapphire and Crystals provides a support network for their members, they provide connections between their members and other organizations. We build careers for Black women artists through mentoring young women who are just beginning to talk about being an artist as well as mentoring each other to improve their work. I am dogmatic about the quality of work. I have helped people to understand that if they are going to exhibit, they are going to have to do better work. It’s not just this ‘Black women thing.’ They have to produce art. We hold lectures and workshops to help to educate South Side residents, and members of the arts community throughout Chicago, about the work of African American women artists.

To carry out this kind of work, this group had to develop leadership among its members. As Jolly points out, people used to wait for her to inspire or suggest something, then follow her initiative. Through the relationships that have been built and the successful events the group has hosted, now members are beginning to take initiative because they have seen a model of how it is done and they have new ideas on how to take the ideas a step further.

Part of our mission is the goal of building leadership among African American Women artists. These efforts have taken hold with recent activities spearheaded by Arlene Crawford who organized Black Arts Week events and Juarez Hawkins who narrated a public access “video salon” highlighting artists featured in the Oct 2001 Sapphire and Crystals exhibition at ARC Gallery [in River West].

The Black Arts Week events drew together Black arts leaders from throughout Chicago to the South Shore Cultural Center to celebrate the work of Black artists. Sapphire and Crystals is based in Bronzeville between Crawford’s office at the Center for Inner City Studies in Oakland, and Jolly’s home studio in Hyde Park and her office at Chicago State University. In this respect the form of the Sapphire and Crystals network is similar to other networks of Black artists, such as those involved with the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians and the West Humboldt Park Center for the Performing Arts. These networks are broad, are not concentrated in one area, rather they span nearly the entire city. Their exhibitions have taken place at the South Side
Community Art Center, South Shore Cultural Center, ARC gallery and Union Street Gallery in Chicago Heights.

*Arts activities reinforce cultural identities for immigrants, refugees and people of color.*

Several of the people we interviewed emphasized that participation in arts activities helped build bonding relationships to others with similar cultural histories. Participation in arts activities construct and reinforce shared cultural identities among immigrants, refugees, and people of color. The reality of being an immigrant, refugee or living in Diaspora often requires one to maintain organizational or network connections with people of similar cultural history in order to feel a sense of belonging while living in the United States.

The Pintig Cultural Group, in Uptown, hosts auditions and recruitment workshops to engage people in cultural work, cultural organizing and theater production. Because Uptown is home to the largest concentration of Filipinos in Chicago, according to Luis Pascasio, Pintig’s Artistic Director, it gave rise to Pintig in this community. Nonetheless, Pintig’s work involves Filipino actors and audiences from the suburbs. According to Pascasio:

> We believe that art is an empowering tool for people to be able to express themselves, to mobilize self-expression and to create a collective expression of issues affecting the Filipino community. Through art we are able to create a more dynamic community. A community where people can hear each other and share insights of issues that affect the community. We see our performances as a process not an end. After each performance we have a Q & A. We want people to be critical about what they see or hear in society. We help to motivate that kind of thinking.

Pintig emphasizes art as an empowering tool. Art empowers through transmitting cultural, historical, and timely information that is then shared among a group of participants. This information can then be acted upon. Pintig seeks to build the capacity
of Filipino immigrants to critically assess their situation and their social location as minorities in American society. Pintig seeks to raise consciousness about issues that effect Filipinos living in Chicago. Through their work they build a democratically engaged Filipino-American citizenry.

**Arts activities build knowledge, understanding and engagement in democratic processes.**

Pintig’s emphasis on empowerment and mobilizing self-expression is designed to build engagement of Filipino people in democratic processes. According to Pascacio, cultural workshops and theatrical productions help to motivate critical thinking about the social location and role of Filipinos living in Chicago.

[Through art] we are able to create a critical community of people who can take an active stance on issues that affect them. By creating an opportunity for people to create a voice, they can have a role in charting their own future. We are interested in people relating to issues such as immigration, preventing racism or preventing hate crimes. Within the Filipino community, there is a level of passivity. People are conditioned to not say anything. We hope to encourage people to be part of the process, to have their voice heard, and to be part of a bigger arena. Art and theater are a good way to be part of social change in the community. The other thing, which is most prominent, Filipino Americans --born and raised here -- are searching for a cultural identity. The arts help them figure out who they are. The arts figure prominently in their cultural life in America.

As this account shows, Pintig uses lessons from history and theater to build an understanding and to motivate involvement in both cultural and political life. This involvement strengthens the capacity of democracy to be equitable, proactive and pluralistic.

Pintig’s first production, “America is in the Heart” written by Carlos Bulosan opened in 1992. According to Pascasio the play became a galvanizing opportunity to attract more Filipino immigrants to come together to do cultural work and become a voice for the community. The Group’s 2001 production, “Nanay Isog and her children” is an adaptation of “Bertold Brecht’s “Mother Courage.”
Arts activities create a bridge between American culture, immigrant cultures, and homeland cultures.

Arts activities help youth address problems that are not necessarily shared by their parents. As Ruphina Pettis, founder and director of Sunlight African Community Center points out, African immigrant parents often commute long distances to work low-paying jobs in the Chicago suburbs. This creates a situation in which their children do not have access to the kind of support necessary to negotiate between the three cultures in which they co-exist – American youth culture, African culture and immigrant culture.

As I did home visits I saw a lot of African immigrants. After school, I saw kids on the streets, misbehavior in the house. It is not African culture for kids to disrespect parents. Parents can’t handle pressure with low-income jobs [combined with long distance travel required for] work in the suburbs. Parents come home and don’t know what to do. They send kids back to Africa with extended families. Kids never have been to Africa. Often, it was not the proper solution. I believe the solution is here where the problem started. I created this little safe haven for African immigrant youth and their parents. Children get tutored and mentored. [They] learn about cultural heritage, cultural activities, story telling, and field trips... We expose kids to the arts. The kids are very happy. They are excited. They feel they are lost in three cultures – American, African, African-immigrant youth culture. It is confusing. They don’t know which ones to follow. Families can come for information – which [is lacking] because of cultural barriers to information. [At Sunlight African Community] they know 3-6 from Monday – Friday, their kids are in a safe haven.... So far, the parents of the kids that come here are really satisfied with their relationships and their interaction. These kids are able to interact with other ethnic groups and learn what their culture is.

At Sunlight youth are engaged in arts activities led by African and American artists and learn to negotiate living within multiple cultures.

Arts activities enable a sense of belonging to a neighborhood by providing a structure for meaningful social interaction.

Arts activities provide structured activities in spaces where people can get together and share a dialogue. They further create structures that enable the development of social skills, such as trust and cooperation. One organization that has successfully created a structure for cooperation across class and life style is Scrap Mettle Soul, which is located in Uptown. Both theater professionals and non-professionals work together in the organization. Scrap Mettle Soul gathers community stories from diverse people,
employs professionals to build scripts, builds sets in partnership with neighborhood residents and then produces an annual production featuring residents. The actors are everyday citizens of different races and classes. The events take place at Margate Park.

According to Managing Director, Barbara Michelotti:

Our productions bring diverse people together who might not otherwise get along. Our plays are intergenerational involving people from 4 years old to 91. There is something about seeing this diversity of people together on stage. It is profoundly moving. As art production goes, the snobbery is gone. We provide a forum where [community people] can work together to put on a play. [The economic diversity of our population, and the existence of low income, Single Resident Occupancy Units (SROs)] has raised issues in our community. The activity of putting on a play is a way for [diverse members of the community] to get together to get to know each other in a relatively neutral context. People start out as strangers, very wary of each other. People who were polarized, were able to work together to put on the play.

The stories of Scrap Mettle Soul’s success at building communication amongst strangers abound in Uptown. One story is of the conflict between wealthy homeowners and the poor who live in SRO’s. The property owners wanted to get rid of the SROs in the neighborhood because of their negative effect on property values. It happened that one man, who was very vocal at community meetings expressing his opposition to SROs was also on the park advisory board. He became involved in the play and worked with people who live in the SROs. His opposition to the SROs waned as he got to know the residents. On both sides of the polarizing issue, people learned that the others were just people. Now, there are stories of wealthy residents giving fellow actors rides back to the SROs and sharing rides to get groceries. Michelotti recalls that:

People got to know each other. They became part of something. People find they need respect and they give respect. This has allowed neighborhood residents to build friendships and trust. They know—when you go to Margate Park, people know your name; there’s a place for you here. Through the networking and involvement in our play, two people got married. One guy who had an addiction problem was able to get a handle on it. Now he is living in an apartment. There were two unemployed people who got jobs. In our work, the expertise and wisdom of the artist meets the expertise and wisdom of the community. Artists who have worked on these plays say they have been refreshed in their craft – it is a whole new ladle of fish.
The impact of participating in a Scrap Mettle Soul production moved beyond building communication. According to Michelotti, the “reality” of working with everyday people reinvigorated actors and other theatrical professionals who were burnt out on the cutthroat and artificial environments that sometimes dominate the process of theatrical production.

Participating in a Scrap Mettle Soul production has created a sense of belonging as well as her real connections to other people living in the neighborhood, Michelotti described her own transformation:

I came to Chicago when my mother was dying. I had trouble finding a place to live. I was embarrassed to live here but the rents were affordable. I’ve come to care about this little park and care about kids I see on the street. I understand how come people have become homeless. I’ve been involved in the play for three years. I feel very invested. I guess I feel like I’ve made some small contribution. I feel at home, more than anywhere I’ve been. If I saw a child in trouble, I would go out of my way to help them. Teens—I used to be afraid of them. Now, they see me on the street and say ‘Hey Barbara!’

Such experiences exemplify the kind of social connections and civic engagement that is built through participation in the arts.

*Arts activities connect individuals to each other and to a network of opportunities.*

According to Pat Murphy, artist and Director of the Beacon Street Gallery and Performance Company, in Uptown, her organization helps to connect people to a network of cultural and social opportunities.

We live in cultures not just a neighborhood. Uptown is known for its cultural diversity. Uptown is home to a range of immigrant and low-income American people including Vietnamese, Cambodians, Appalachians and Native Americans. Artists and exhibitions at Beacon Street represent this diversity. It is a gathering place and art is a catalyst for people to come together. Art provides food for our souls and connectedness to our cultures. Youth involved in our arts activities have access to means for self-expression. It makes them connected to culture. They are making things with their hands and this gives them a physical sense of connection to the earth’s resources. But, more so, we as an organization connect them—physically—with a network of opportunities both cultural and social. Through participation in our programs youth get to know artists. They have an artist in their own life. They can see that there is support for creative expression in their life. This leads to spiritual payoffs of being connected, rather than alienated.
While Murphy emphasizes the spiritual payoffs of arts activities, she demonstrates how this arts organization connects people to networks of social service and civic cultures.

[Beacon Street Gallery is] a member of [Mayor Daley's] Youthnet. We are part of a consortium of 17 groups working together in our [police] district. We help kids become connected to the neighborhood through “youth mapping.” This is a process in which youth survey [and identify] ‘safe’ places and ‘not safe’ places in the community. Youth involved in our programs are connected to the entire network of social service agencies. We keep an eye out for these youth. But with each young person comes an entire family. This means that youth often bring with them their family problems. If we notice a problem, we know of dozens of other agencies to refer them to for help. This is what I mean by being connected to a community and a culture. Such connectivity is an invaluable resource that they just don’t get anywhere else.

This excerpt highlights a series of ways Beacon Street Gallery builds leadership among local youth and creates connections for residents of Uptown not only within her neighborhood but also to larger city services. Such connections replace the sense of alienation that often accompanies urban life for immigrants and other low-income Americans.

*Arts activities build bridges between different socio-economic sectors of a community.*

Through its arts programming Little Black Pearl Workshop in Oakland plays multiple roles in the community. According to Executive Director Monica Haslip, Little Black Pearl is a bridge builder between different sectors of the community. She sees this role as being critical as North Kenwood/Oakland undergoes profound socio-economic transformation.

As an arts organization it is going to be vitally important that we play a role in bridging the gap between the people who have been here and those who are arriving. We need to ensure that there is a place for economic diversity so that people in different economic positions feel comfortable coming here and bringing their kids. People who live here feel that they are being pushed out and those who are moving in are not responsive to the people who are living here already. You have $350,000 homes going up next to Section 8 housing. And because of the economic differences a lot of times the children and adults never have any interaction although they live next door to each other.
One way the organization is “bridging the gap” is through the annual Little Black Pearl Festival, which was co-sponsored by Black Entertainment Television (BET) in 2000. The festival is designed to thank the community for its support but it also brings residents together and creates interaction between artists, local businesses, churches, schools and other institutions. In the process the organization nurtures existing relationships but also opens avenues for new community relationships for Little Black Pearl and other businesses, which gain exposure through the festival.

Little Black Pearl’s mission is dedicated to enabling program participants to “contribute to the health and well-being of their families and community by exercising a sense of pride and collective teamwork through economic self-sufficiency in the arts.” Little Black Pearl has been in contact with area arts, social service agencies, and churches. It has worked directly with the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization and the Center for Inner City Studies to participate in redevelopment and maintain a role for the arts in that process. According to Haslip:

We [strive to always] present art and a quality organization that will attract diverse families into an environment where they can see that there are no differences between them. And then hopefully we will be able to establish a relationship in the community where neighbors interact and communicate. Our role is to bridge the gap in our community and to facilitate a space where people can come and feel comfortable, and bring their children to create beautiful art.

As the director of this vital community resource, Haslip is also a model for how an individual working in the arts can serve as a bridge in the community. She came to her vision for Little Black Pearl when she saw the absence of Black artists being represented in the mainstream arts world:

As a young artist, I went to art school and I did not see people who looked like me represented in the larger arts world. I wanted other young artists to know that there is actually a place for them in this profession…. A lot of this came to me because I have lived here through the various phases and see the needs in the community. My job is to
deal with the vision of the organization. I try to interact with and talk to the people in the community. I pay attention to them. My friends range from winos to very successful people. I have the luxury of having real conversations across the spectrum of the community.

In addition to creating avenues for exposure to art and culture, Little Black Pearl’s mission is also about teaching the profitable connection between art, education, and business. One result is that local homeowners and developers have hired workshop participants to do mosaic tile work in private spaces. LBPs programming provides an avenue for the families to see the artwork of their children and for these youth to also sell that work. The kids keep a portion of the money and they contribute a portion of it back. “We not only want to teach children about the creation of art and the business of making money as an artists, but also help them to understand and develop consciousness about their community. They are taught that it is important to make contributions back to the community, so that they provide an avenue for another child to come into the program just like they did.”

IV. Summary and Conclusions
These examples expand our scope of understanding about the role of art in local communities. They push knowledge beyond the enjoyment of the “art product” as is emphasized in most art historical and critical assessments of individual artworks. These examples expand the scope of our understanding beyond psychological and aesthetic analyses that emphasize the joy and personal satisfaction the arts provide. By focusing on the social and economic activity that goes on around the art we have identified a range of benefits that the arts provide to their local communities.

Our review of the 2000 U.S Census on these neighborhoods indicate that other factors – beyond population size and median household income – may be significant to the existence of visible arts activities within a neighborhood context. Our analysis shows that the neighborhoods in this study that have diversity and density have more arts activities and have different needs than neighborhoods with a single predominant ethnic or racial group and less arts activities. A foundation interested in building local capacity and supporting arts might focus on funding activities that solidify understanding a particular cultural or ethnic identity (bonding relationships) as well as those which build access to the outside resources of other groups (bridging relationships that provide access to diversity).

Our focus on the activity that goes on around the arts programming shows how small budget arts activities leverage assets to benefit local communities. Our qualitative data show how arts activities create, develop and facilitate the growth of neighborhood capacity. Among these, arts activities provide local communities with access to resources, they help build social relationships and help to solve problems. The resources found within social relationships, referred to as social capital by current researchers, can also be understood by looking at the cultural identities created through the arts (Pintig Cultural Group), by looking at the space that is created for cross-cultural dialogue (Scrap Mettle Soul), by looking at the new ways of meaningful social interaction (Artists of the Wall), by looking at the new ways youth are
engaged in civic concerns (*BeyondMedia*), by looking at the new links to resources outside the neighborhood (*West Humboldt Park Center for the Performing Arts*), by looking at the knowledge across socio-economic and cultural boundaries (*Little Black Pearl* and *Sunlight African Community Center*), by looking at the new connections between individuals and to a network of opportunities (*Beacon Street Gallery*), by looking at the stability and ownership of neighborhood assets (*Heartland Café* and *Near Northwest Arts Council*), by looking at the new links created between arts producers and other organizations (*Center for Inner City Studies*), by looking at the new uses for neighborhood facilities (*AuroraArts* and *Insight Arts*), by looking at the collective access to professional facilities (*Experimental Sound Studio*), by looking at the new economic activity generated by the arts (*ArtsSpace RP*).

The findings of this research can inform how Requests for Proposals (RFPs) can focus on the way in which small budget activities engage and manage networks of support in the production of their arts activities. This paper outlines a range of outcomes of such activity. They show how the arts are one means of developing neighborhood capacity. As this research was designed in part to inform small grants programs to small, locally-based arts organizations, the categories we identify could be used to structure a funding program. The RFP could seek to assess the level of involvement between the arts producers and local communities targeting “community-based art networks or groups” for funding. Requests for proposals could solicit information on networks of support engaged in the activity as well as provide the categories we have identified as “local outcomes” and solicit more information as to where the activity is located in this series of outcomes. Among the types of questions that could be posed are:

- What resources do you provide access to in your local community?
- How does your activity build social relationships within your local community?
- How does your activity bridge your local community to other localities?
• How does your activity engage people in dialogues that enhance civic involvement necessary for problem-solving?

• What types of problem-solving does your activity address?

When we undertook this project in 2001, evidence was plentiful of the economic impact of large budget activities. Studies showed how such activities help to create jobs, and attract tourist dollars and corporate investment, but little had been done to look at the local impact of small budget activities. In fact, because of the way such activities are organized, with limited staff and funding, they are often overlooked as part of the fabric of the art world and community life. This study provided some insight into what activities exist and how they benefit their local area. Our approach emphasized qualitative methods to provide insight into the neighborhood context and to provide a glimpse into the worldview of the participants that create and sustain these arts activities. Through these methods we were able to provide a rich and multi-dimensional view of locally-based arts activities.

References
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