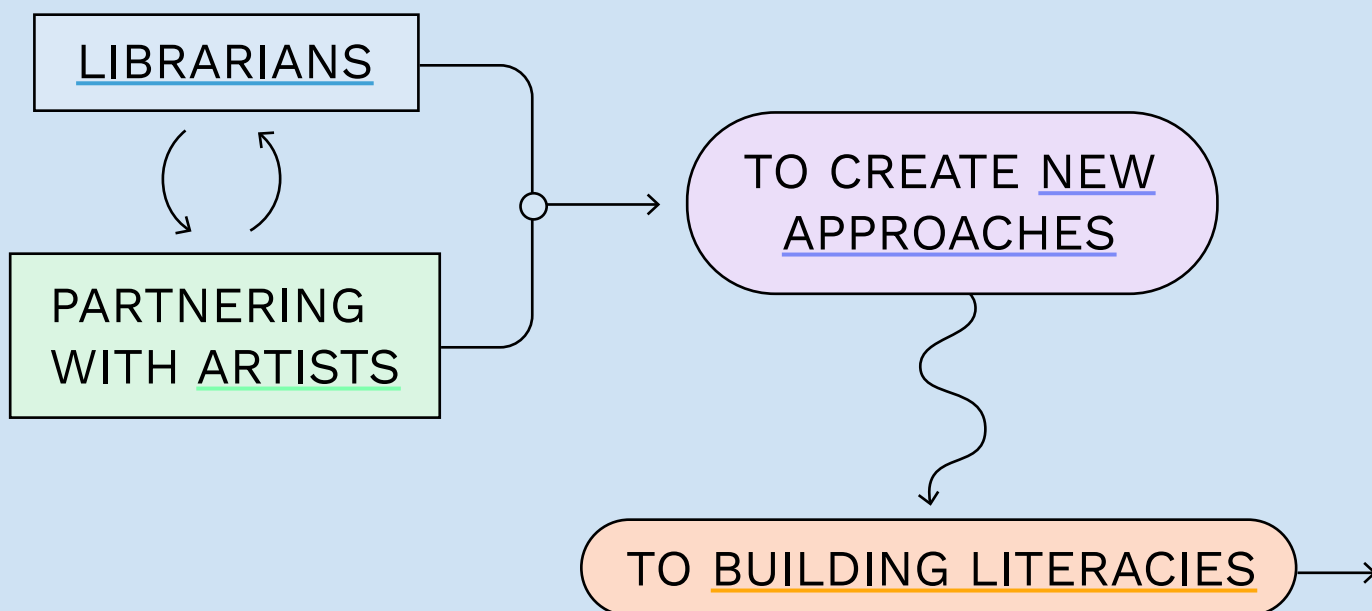


# Civic Imagination Stations:

A PROCESS MAP



The American Library Association's Civic Imagination Stations was generously funded by the Estée Lauder Companies WRITING CHANGE Initiative. WRITING CHANGE is a three-year global, literacy initiative in partnership with Amanda Gorman, the youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history, award-winning writer, and Estée Lauder Global Changemaker.

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This document was written by Michael Rohd, Sara Sawicki, and Willa Taylor in collaboration with Tracie Hall and Anne Manly and the Civic Imagination Stations pilot cohort.


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# Introductions and Grounding

## Table of Contents

<u>INTRODUCTIONS and GROUNDING.....</u>	<u>3</u>
→ Table of Contents.....	3
→ Overview.....	4
→ Program Description.....	4
→ Who “we” are .....	6
→ Toolkit Guide .....	9
→ Questions as Wayfinding .....	9
→ How to Use this Process Map.....	10
→ Definitions and Ideas .....	12
→ Key Terms.....	15
<u>PROCESS POINTS .....</u>	<u>16</u>
→ Getting Started/ Find Your Partner.....	16
→ Assets .....	19
→ Moving Towards Action Together.....	21
→ Voyager’s Agreement: When are we done traveling together?.....	24
→ Engaging with Community .....	25
→ Defining Success .....	28
→ Co-Design and Project Iteration .....	32
→ Stuckness: When you hit a bump in your collaboration .....	36
→ Documenting the Process .....	37
→ Moving Forward/Moving On.....	40
<u>APPENDIXES .....</u>	<u>42</u>
→ Appendix A: Cohort Spotlights .....	42
→ Appendix B: Printable Worksheets.....	55
→ Appendix C: Public Engagement Tools .....	65
→ Appendix D: Further Reading .....	71

## Overview

This document outlines the key terminology, values, and central questions of the process designed by Lead Artists Willa Taylor and Michael Rohd, and Program Manager Sara Sawicki for the American Library Association's pilot program of Civic Imagination Stations, supported by the Estée Lauder Companies WRITING CHANGE Initiative. An initial goal of the program was to activate the community outreach strategies that artists and arts organizations often use in building audiences, not only to engage existing library users, but to reach those who rarely use or have never used the library. Within this document you will find a guide for learning, exploring, and creating your own locally-specific civic imagination project.

## Program Description

The American Library Association's Civic Imagination Station Pilot Program was generously funded by the Estée Lauder Companies WRITING CHANGE initiative. The Civic Imagination Station Pilot Program sought to create a national model for bridging access and opportunity divides through creative practice. It sought to expand libraries' reach into their communities by using arts and culture activity as an entry point, and increase libraries' visibility as a path to educational persistence, economic mobility, and civic participation.

**Twelve teams at libraries across the nation consisting of artists and library staff comprised the pilot cohort of the program. The cohort represented a diversity of artistic disciplines, locations, library types, and communities served.**

The cohort began their journey together in August 2022, with workshops led by Lead Artists Willa Taylor and Michael Rohd that focused on partnership, collaboration, process-design, and public engagement. Program curriculum focused on supporting the cohort teams in successful cross-sector partnership practice as well as process-driven collaboration (as opposed to product-driven) that supports emergence, surprise, and community input. Over the course of Fall 2022-Spring 2023, each team developed and implemented a short-term project focused on building access and engagement for a specific community in their area. Along the way, the Civic Imagination leadership team, Michael Rohd, Willa Taylor, and Program Manager, Sara Sawicki, hosted additional coaching and cohort collaboration.



Photo by Amanda Raiche

Details on the cohort teams and their projects are included in Appendix A of this document. Key insights from the cohort are also woven into the process map itself. Such as,

**“The support and guidance from the whole Civic Imagination Stations Cohort team has made a huge difference in my comfort with planning programming and collaborating with our artist partners. I also have a super supportive group of coworkers who are excited for more programming. This opportunity has already been exciting and invigorating for our little library and our town.”**

-Brandon Free Public Library (VT), Library Staff Co-lead C.T.

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**Some of the projects the cohort explored are:**

- Professional skill development creating and producing original music through a suite of industry standard digital music production tools available at the library
  - Supporting families in collective joy alongside explorations of meaningful conversations through a series of guided activities and prompts available both in-person within the library as well as online
  - Community curated “art boxes” that populate local public spaces and digitally link community members to library resources as well as into dialogue with one another
- 

**“What delights me about the project is both working with Joan [the Artist Co-Lead] and working on a project that is so beautifully aligned with my nerdy interests and what I’m already doing at the library. And it is an opportunity to highlight stuff about that library that people go, ‘What? You can make posters at the library for free with your library card?’ All of that is amazing.”**

-St. Louis Public Library (MO), Library Staff Co-Lead Lisa Thorp

The pilot program culminated in this document, developed by Civic Imagination Station leadership. It is being made widely available to the ALA network, aimed at supporting libraries across the nation in developing their own librarian/artist partnership processes.

## Process Map Design

[Cori Lewis](#)

Cori Lewis is a graphic designer and creative consultant who transforms business visions into dynamic brand experiences that demand attention and drive engagement. She has over 10 years of experience as a freelance graphic designer and has supported many businesses in creating their brand identities and visual communications. Cori also works as senior graphic designer at internationally-renowned Goodman Theatre, where she develops design solutions for theatrical productions and marketing campaigns. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design from University of Michigan's Stamps School of Art & Design. When Cori is not crafting visual experiences, she can be found exploring Chicago's vibrant arts, music and food scenes, or knitting her latest sweater.

### Who "we" are

Whenever we refer to "we" throughout this document, we are referring to the writers of this Process Map: Civic Imagination Stations, Lead Artists Michael Rohd and Willa Taylor, and Program Manager Sara Sawicki.

Collectively, we have worked in and across artistic and civic spaces in a number of capacities. We bring with us the practitioners and movement makers from whom we have learned, and the artistic and social change histories that have informed who we are today.



Our work together has been influenced, challenged, and deepened by:

**ROBERT ALEXANDER, AUGUSTO BOAL, PING CHONG, DWIGHT CONQUERGOOD, CORNERSTONE THEATER, MICHELLE HENSLEY, LIZ LERMAN, JOHN O'NEAL, BOB LEONARD, WANDA DALLA COSTA, MARIA ROSARIO JACKSON, CARLTON TURNER, LAURA ZABEL, ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN, JAN COHEN CRUZ, JOHN P. KRETZMANN, BELL HOOKS, FOR YOUTH INQUIRY, FRANK GALATI, BARBARA CARLISLE, GRACE LEE BOGGS, CHRISTINA SMITH, WILLA LEE JACKSON, ELLA BAKER, FANNIE LOU HAMER, AND JAWOLE WILLA JO ZOLLAR**

For a reading list connected to this work, and penned by many of the above influences, visit APPENDIX D.

## Individually we are:

### Michael Rohd

(Lead Artist, Civic Imagination Stations)

Michael is a theatre-maker, educator, process designer, writer and facilitator. His research and creative practice is focused on civic imagination. He has a 30+ year history of projects across sectors bringing cultural activity to the work of public engagement, community planning and cross-sector coalition building. In 1992 in Washington DC, Michael co-founded Hope Is Vital, an arts & public health program that, over 8 years, helped start up theatre-based public engagement/HIV prevention coalitions in over 80 communities around the US. In 1999, Michael co-founded Sojourn Theatre and served as artistic director for 20 years. In 2012, he co-founded the Center for Performance and Civic Practice, a collective of nine artist/facilitators who work with organizations and agencies around the country on community research, transformational process and system change. He is currently Civic Collaborations Director for One Nation One Project, a national arts/municipality/public health project & research cohort in partnership with National League of Cities; Michael is co-designer/co-facilitator for Art-Train, a virtual national technical assistance program in partnership with Springboard for the Arts; and he is co-creator/co-director on Sojourn Theatre's touring show *Don't Go*. He recently founded the Co-Lab for Civic Imagination at the University of Montana, and he is author of the book *Theatre for Community, Conflict and Dialogue* (Heinemann Press).

### Sara Sawicki (Program Manager, Civic Imagination Stations)

Sara is the National Program Manager at Springboard for the Arts in St. Paul, MN. As a program manager, she has supported artists and their partners in creating original, community-engaged projects across the country, with organizations such as Center for Center for Performance and Civic Practice (CPCP). Sara is also a theatre artist with a focus on devised and participatory work. She is a company member with 20-year-old ensemble theatre company, Sojourn Theatre, and tours internationally with Emmy Award-winning cinematic puppetry company, Manual Cinema.

### Willa Taylor

(Lead Artist, Civic Imagination Stations)

Willa J. Taylor is the Walter Director of Education and Community Engagement at Goodman Theatre where she collaborates with educators and community partners to transform learning and support equitable systemic change using arts-based strategies. She has created education and community programs for Lincoln Center, New Victory Theater, and Arena Stage. Ms. Taylor is an adjunct at DePaul University, and has guest lectured on theater and social change at Yale, NYU, Spelman, Columbia College, Arizona State University, and Northern Illinois University.

She has served on the boards of Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed Inc., the Association of Theatre in Higher Education, the National LGBTQ Taskforce, and Season of Concern. She is the inaugural recipient of the Exemplar Award from the August Wilson Society, and the 2021 recipient of Association of Theatre in Higher Education's Leadership in Community-Based Theater and Civic Engagement Award. Taylor is a practitioner of Theatre of the Oppressed, having studied with both Augusto and Julian Boal, and has written extensively on the use of TO for Youth. Her work has been published in Amazon all-stars: *Thirteen Lesbian Plays*, published by Applause Books; in *Arts Integration in Education: Teachers and Teaching Artists as Agents of Change*, published by Intellect Ltd; and *Applied Theater With Youth: Education, Engagement, Activism*, published by Routledge.

The lessons and wisdom contained within this document would be far less insightful without the wisdom and partnership of ALA's Executive Director, Tracie Hall and Associate Director of Foundation and Corporate Relations, Anne Manly, as well as the Pilot cohort team members listed below. You can read more about their specific projects and processes as part of the Civic Imagination Stations pilot, by jumping to Appendix A.

**Bowdoinham Public Library**

Bowdoinham, ME  
Dana Legawiec (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Kate Cutko (Library Staff Co-Lead)

**Brandon Free Public Library**

Brandon, VT  
John Brodowski and Ethan Nelson  
(Artist Co-Leads)  
Carey Bunker and C.T.  
(Library Staff Co-Leads)

**Burnsville Public Library**

Burnsville, WV  
Quincy Potasnik (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Elizabeth "Beth" Anderson  
(Library Staff Co-Lead)

**Chicago Public Library**

Thurgood Marshall Branch  
Chicago, IL  
Mo Phillips-Spotts (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Lina Armstrong (Library Staff Co-Lead)

**Edith B. Siegrist Vermillion Public Library**

Vermillion, SD  
Sandra Kern Mollman (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Amanda Raiche (Library Staff Co-Lead)

**Fayetteville Public Library**

Fayetteville, AR  
Jasper Logan (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Melissa Taylor (Library Staff Co-Lead)

**IU Libraries: Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center Library and Herman B Wells Library**

Bloomington, IN  
Dr. Maria E. Hamilton Abegunde  
(Artist Co-Lead) with  
DeLoice Holliday and Willa Tavernier  
(Library Staff Co-Leads)

**Memphis Public Libraries Cossitt Branch**

Memphis, TN  
Lex Phillips (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Emily Marks (Library Staff Co-Lead)

**Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Library and Learning Commons, Mount Mary University**

Milwaukee, WI  
Kelly Saunders (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Daniel Vinson (Library Staff Co-Lead)

**The People's Library**

Fox, AR  
Olivia Trimble (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Rachel Reynolds (Library Staff Co-Lead)

**St. Louis Public Library**

St. Louis, MO  
Joan Lipkin (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Lisa Thorp (Library Staff Co-Lead)

**Thomas Memorial Library**

Cape Elizabeth, ME  
Marie Ahearn (Artist Co-Lead) with  
Rachel Davis (Library Staff Co-Lead)



## Toolkit Guide

When we began conversations with Tracie Hall about what would become ALA's Civic Imagination Stations pilot program, one thing in particular animated our passion: the program's focus on **process**. When new collaborators begin to imagine how to work together, the values they center in that collaborative work are inevitably the values that will exist across everything they do- each relationship built, each program designed, each project created.

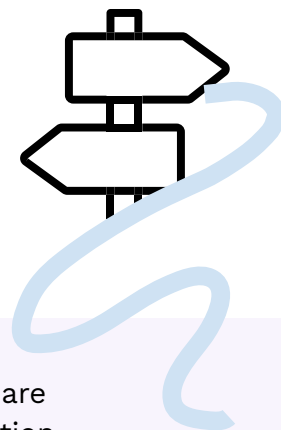
Good process accomplishes two main things- it holds space for building relationships, and it makes space for setting shared goals and co-creating ways to accomplish them. Process design helped these 12 teams ensure that the values they centered were intentional, and the way they worked together was aligned with those values.

**This toolkit functions as a record, and as a map.** It is a record of the process we built for and with the 12 pilot sites as they began to co-create what they wanted to accomplish through their artist/library partnership; more importantly, it's a map you can use as a guide to help you build a partnership and a project that makes sense where you are, with and for your community.

SO THIS TOOLKIT ACTUALLY ISN'T A TOOLKIT.

IT'S A **PROCESS MAP.**

A MAP THAT OFFERS NOT JUST A VIEW OF THE TERRAIN THAT IS PARTNERSHIP AND CIVIC IMAGINATION, BUT A ROUTE, AND WAYFINDING.



### Questions as Wayfinding

Wayfinding is a term used in the field of urban planning to describe the thoughtful use of signage and signals to help people know how to move from one place to another. This document is a map, and therefore requires ways to determine how to chart your own journey across it.

Our version of signage and signals are questions. We believe a good question starts a useful conversation, and a useful conversation points towards the next step that's right for you and your collaborators. Sometimes the questions we offer are meant to be a reflective, solo activity; sometimes, they're meant to catalyze dialogue between you and your collaborators and partners.




Your journey of co-design and community engagement will likely not be linear- the destination may not be where you expect. But these journeys, even if the partnership continues, will arrive somewhere and will end. We offer the questions within this Process Map, to help you stay focused on what you and your collaborators define as your end goals, no matter how circuitous the journey may be.

**“The meetings that we had as a cohort, the questions y’all would ask, pushing us further, deeper, making us rethink and reshape the program...That space helped me. It forced me to think about things more...and either land on things further and know we are on the right track, or be like, alright, maybe we need to pivot.”** -Fayetteville Public Library (AR), Artist Co-Lead Jasper Logan

**“I’ve been thinking through this process and would love a workbook for the artist and the librarian so we can both sit down to understand how we are going to work together. We did talk about many things through this process but still had many surprising roadblocks. Having a workbook would be so helpful with not only this kind of work, but just with any creative project our institution takes on and even artist to artist. People need to communicate to one another how they work. When an artist and librarian come to the table, it’s two different languages. How do we create a tool that we can translate languages for each partner?”** -Memphis Public Libraries (TN), Library Staff Co-Lead Emily Marks

We start by offering some context, definitions of key terms/ideas and a description of the Civic Imagination Stations pilot program itself. From there, we offer steps you can move through to build partnerships and your own civic imagination project. Each step has corresponding questions to help you shape and conduct conversations, as well as sample lists of actions to help you move towards concrete activity and outcomes.

## How To Use this Process Map

Throughout this document, when you see , you’ll find a corresponding worksheet you can print and complete in Appendix B.

**Just as processes like these are not linear, we encourage you to use this document non-linearly as well. Whether you are mid-process or just getting started, we encourage you to finish this introductory section, and then find your own way through the major sections of the Process Map. Jump to the Process Point that is calling to you.**

We’ve written this document with librarians and library staff in mind, but believe it may also be beneficial to artists and culture-bearers working or seeking to work within library contexts. Occasionally in this document we use “librarian” and “library staff member” interchangeably, though we are aware that those positions are distinct and carry many nuances between them.

We have created this process map to offer a structured approach to thoughtful, focused program development that can benefit from discovery without getting stuck in a never-ending planning phase.

Bringing cultural activity and creative practice to the needs of your branch and the community in which it sits can provide measurable outcomes and legible results.

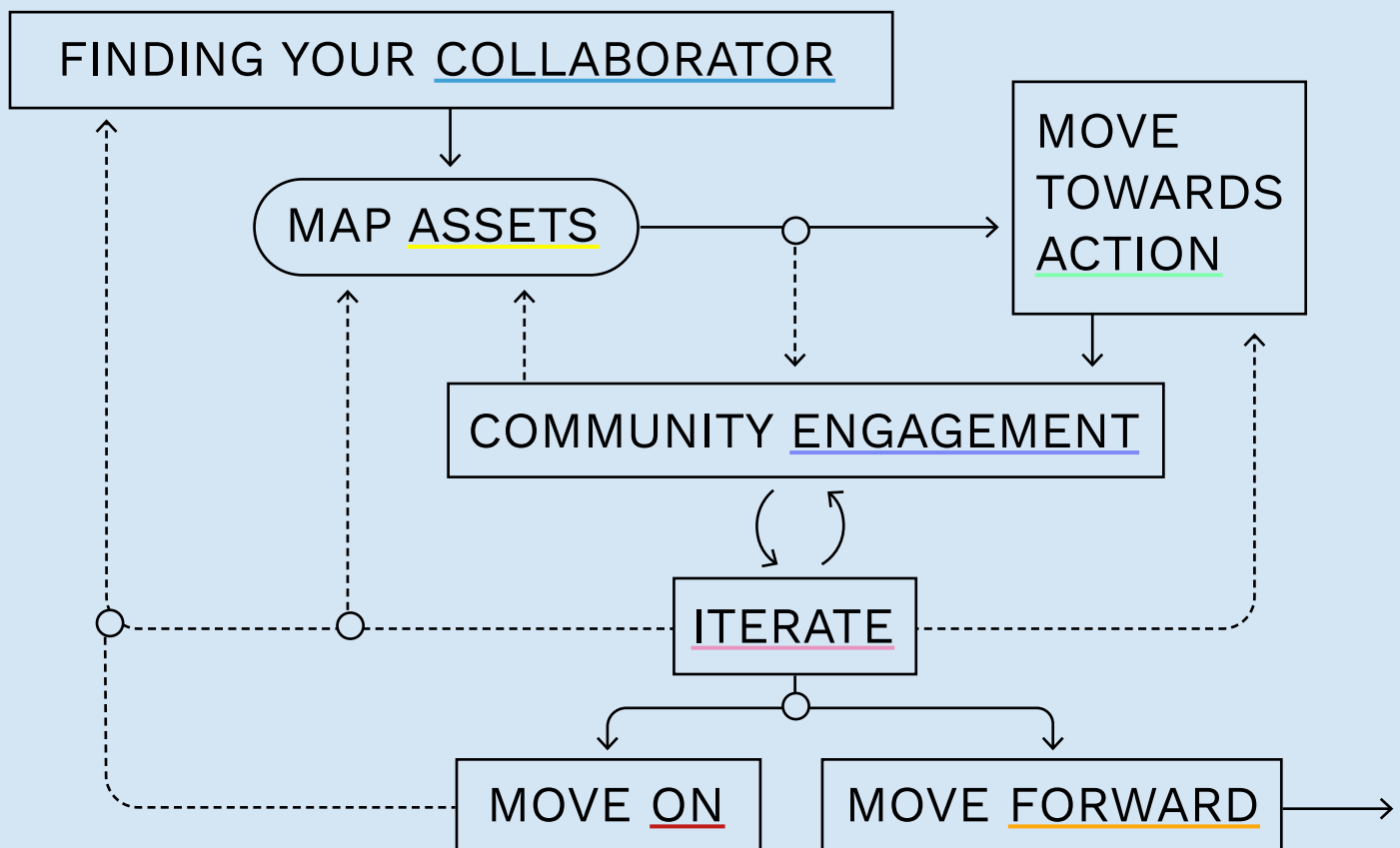
This process map supports work that relies on discovery and iteration.

Discovery and iteration rely on periods of not knowing- of uncertainty.

In some contexts, committing time and resources to uncertainty may feel uncomfortable- even irresponsible. We hear that.

- We know that you have deadlines, and expected outcomes, and at times, result-oriented supervisors.
- We know how stretched thin you are. We know how you go above and beyond, pretty much every day, in service to your users, your community, and your unending belief in the power of knowledge.
- We know you frequently have to make pragmatic choices for the sake of branch functionality, and you sometimes have big ideas that can't fit within the parameters of daily activity and obligation.
- **We are grateful for the time and energy you are taking to read this and to consider civic imagination work for your branch.**

## Process Points Along the Journey



## Definitions and Ideas

### A note about the word “civic”:

Whether you're at a library, or you're an artist working in community, some of you might already do work that you would describe as “civic.” Some of you may not. The work of these civic imagination partnerships at the intersection of library, artist, and resident aims to lean into the civic with intentionality. But the word can mean different things to different people. You and your collaborators have the opportunity to figure out what it will mean for you.

### **Some questions to consider in your civic wayfinding include:**

- What does the word civic mean to me?
- What associations might it have for the residents with whom we hope to work?
- How might we think about the word civic in relation to democracy, and is that connection important to us?
- In a time when community can seem fractured in so many ways, how should we think about the idea of civic?
- Do we believe technology access and digital literacy are civic rights? If so, how does that impact our goals?
- Do we believe economic literacy and mobility are civic rights? If so, how does that impact our goals?

### Civic Imagination

We define Civic Imagination as the capacity for residents of a place to collectively envision just, healthy, and equitable futures. We believe libraries are sites of learning, connectivity, and potential. We believe that when complemented by the methodologies of publicly engaged artistic practice, libraries are uniquely positioned to support communities in the development of a full spectrum of literacies, from digital to social, from economic to civic.

*There is a reason this program and the projects it encourages are called “civic imagination projects,” and not “arts-based library projects.” When people think about working with artists in non-arts settings such as housing or transit or education or community development- or libraries- the first thing that often comes to mind is output- the art product that is the result of the collaboration. The mural. The play. The concert. The magazine.*

*These outputs can be powerful. They can be wonderful examples of artists contributing to community and public good. But they are not the entirety of what artists can offer in these non-arts contexts.*

“I think it’s genius to put artists and librarians together. I see the type of skill set that Rachel [my Library Staff Co-Lead] has, that I don’t have. Her skills make good use of what I bring to offer. It creates a structure, a context. It’s hard to say what these skills are but it’s something like organizing within a larger context, putting things into categories in a way that has a life to it. The library helps me see where to apply what I have to offer.”

-Thomas Memorial Library (ME),  
Artist Co-Lead Marie Ahearn

“All of a sudden...[we have] excitement about ....telling stories across campus... [using] storytelling, you know, as a way to build to community across the silos of these different communities...I think post pandemic, to use storytelling as a way to really build community in terms of listening to each other, and engaging in who each other is, using art to do that, but then also seeing the library as that space to build back together, I think, is pretty exciting.”

-Mount Mary University, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Library and Learning Commons (WI),  
Artist Co-Lead Kelly Saunders

There is a body of practice that involves artists (and designers and culture makers and heritage holders) bringing their tools to the process of community building, and to the outcomes that individuals in these non-arts sectors spend their time working to achieve. We call that work civic imagination, and it begins not with asking “What can we make?” Rather, “What do we want to address together in our community, and how might the unique assets of this library and this artist come together, center equity, and do something creative and impactful we could not accomplish on our own?”

## Literacy

According to the US Department of Education, literacy is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.

The American Library Association recognizes a range of literacies including reading literacy but also extending to civic literacy, digital literacy, financial literacy, food and nutritional literacy, health literacy, information literacy, media literacy, and even emergent areas of concern like recreational literacy.

Literacy is a key concept in this program, and questions you can consider throughout your process include:

- How might these literacies help organize your thinking around what your team can explore together?
- How might you work to co-design a program in partnership with the community that will expand access to one or more of the literacies when need has been identified?

“We get so excited to do projects, or the project we’ve had in our mind for forever, and I think sometimes it’s even what’s hard to describe to the artists, what really comes to life...[if you can be] authentically curious about what you’re doing. As long as you’re really willing to be present, and let everything be authentic, and really experience the experience, some of the heights that you reach are beyond what you could have expected...But really, that’s the hardest thing...to kind of really relinquish that control, including the creative control.”

–Edith B. Siegrist Vermillion Public Library (SD), Artist Co-Lead Sandra Kern Mollman

“At a university level...people sometimes don’t see the value of doing this kind of work, how I teach, or how you work this way. Then you put librarians and artists together? It’s a challenge to imagine the art by itself. And then you add all of the components. And then you add the community to it. It challenges all of the notions of how one does research and what outcomes are possible.”

–Indiana University Libraries (IN), Artist Co-Lead Dr. Maria E. Hamilton Abegunde

“This kind of work is messy, which makes it so special and is also why not many people do it. It’s like any time you do an EDI session, they’ll say, you need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable...Through our process, I knew this is completely normal because the nature of work is messy. I just wish there was a way also to communicate to the institutions and the people who don’t know. You’re gonna do this work that’s really hard and this is why it’s hard. There’s relationships. A huge part of the art is the relationship, and that’s the crux that carries the journey through this process.”

–Memphis Public Libraries (TN), Library Staff Co-Lead Emily Marks

This process map contains quotes and examples from the 27 individuals who comprised the pilot cohort of ALA’s Civic Imagination Stations program. Throughout this document, library staff and artists will share insights into moments when they realized they needed to slow down. They will note instances when they were tempted to begin, by habit, with the declaration of a desired result and the immediate crafting of a legible creative output, and their realization that they actually needed to make space for shared discovery, authentic public engagement, and iteration. They will provide insight into how they surprised themselves and developed unique, creative responses to community challenges and aspirations.

## KEY TERMS

### Artist:

We use this term broadly to include anyone who self-identifies as an artist *as well as* those who use other names to identify their work and contributions, due to context and/or historical legacy, such as culture-bearer or culture-maker, designer, storyteller, and heritage holder. If you are seeking to connect with creatives in your community, we encourage doing so equipped with a broadened definition and understanding of artistic and creative practice.

### Collaboration:

In this process map, when we refer to collaboration, or collaborators, we are referring to shared activity that people take on, together, for any amount of time. It may or not involve relationship-building; it may or may not involve duration. It does involve committing to a task and usually, a goal.

### Co-Design:

In this process map, when we refer to co-design, we are referring to a way partners can choose to work together on the design and implementation of a project or program. We use the term to distinguish the work of civic imagination stations from artist commissions. An artist commission asks an artist to create a specific creative product (output) based on a library's predetermined notion of how an artist can contribute to a specific desired outcome. Co-design invites an artist into conversation with a library about how the artist's assets can best be deployed to address a community need or aspiration. Co-design requires ongoing communication and iteration. The benefit is a focus on process, and the gift of shared discovery.

### Community:

We use this term broadly throughout this Process Map given the expansive audience for this document. In practice, we encourage partners and collaborators to be as specific as possible about their definitions of "community," and provide tools in Appendix C to support this.

### Partnership:

In this process map, when we refer to partnership or partners, we are referring to the library and the artist who are building a civic imagination project or program together. We consider partnership to be a shared commitment that involves duration, co-design and relationship-building.

# PROCESS POINTS

## Getting Started/ Find Your Partner

“So... how do we start?”

As we do with much of the process, we start with questions.



### You might begin by asking:

- *What is an issue in my community that needs to be addressed, and do I believe we, as a library, have something to offer?*
- *Who is a prospective partner I can bring to the table to address this issue?*
- *Will there be community support for the project?*
- *Who are other collaborators who might be willing to support the project?*

Your idea of a focus to address doesn't have to be fully formed. Your approach does not have to present itself immediately. In fact, it shouldn't. You may know that the walk sign light at the corner turns too quickly, so parents of kids in strollers and seniors can't safely cross the street.<sup>1</sup> You don't need to know how you'll fix it. You just need to note the challenge, feel it connects to your central mission, and commit to partnering to find a creative solution that will increase library access!

Identifying the focus will also help you better choose an artist partner. Is there someone already working around access issues? Is there someone directly impacted by the issue who you know has a local cultural practice?

Like a good marriage or any good partnership, finding the right person is essential. It can be an artist you've worked with in the past; someone you've wanted to reach out to; or someone who has similar interests in the community.

**“The library already had certain things in place around certain values, our goal is to amplify those. And that's actually better, because we aren't starting from scratch.”**

– St. Louis Public Library (MO), Artist Co-Lead Joan Lipkin

**“I think we worked really well to balance each other out. We'd worked before on smaller, shorter projects together and so we knew each other, and we knew each others' styles. But I think we got to know each other a lot more in this. I think we have very different styles and sometimes that can totally push against someone. But I feel like we really appreciated the other person's strengths and learned to let that person take their strength and run with it when the need was there. We learned to rely on each other in those certain situations. And so it wasn't something that really caused issue. It was something that we appreciated about each other...I think because we could recognize that. And allow each other to highlight our strengths. It also made it easier to respect the other person, because we knew we were being respected. So it was a really nice balance.”**

– Edith B. Siegrist Vermillion Public Library (SD), Library Staff Co-Lead Amanda Raiche

<sup>1</sup> Basting, Anne. “The Crossings.” YouTube, uploaded by Anne Basting, 2014. <https://youtu.be/IFaDatWrcU8>



“What is a reasonable period of time that we can expect to hear back when we contact each other and what are our individual preferred modes of communication and agreed upon mutual methods? Are we about e-mails? Phone? Texting? What is our process if we don't agree about something, how will we then move forward?

People don't come into most projects with enough conversation about their individual styles and their different expectations. They think, 'Oh, we both want to do this thing. Let's just forge ahead.' And then you get down the road and realize that you don't know how to talk safely or productively about having different ideas or expectations.”

-St. Louis Public Library (SD), Artist Co-Lead Joan Lipkin

When approaching a possible partner, think not only about what you will need- but what you can offer in the partnership.

### **If you do not know someone you want to work with already, how do you find a creative partner?**

1. Get to know your community. Who performs at festivals or special community events? Who directs music at houses of worship? Are there artists giving private lessons in your community? Can you speak to arts classes about your ideas?
2. Do you feature local writers in the library? Who is on your shelves or doing readings in the library?
3. Are there arts projects being created by other organizations or your local municipality? Can you get recommendations from someone?
4. Do not forget teachers! Many schools have drama, speech, visual arts, music classes, and many of the teachers have their own artistic practices. Is a partnership with the library an opportunity for them to stretch their creative wings - to involve students - and perhaps parents - in a project?

Because you are not just looking for an artist to create a product, be sure to emphasize the civic capacity of the arts when finding a partner. These projects will incorporate elements of both product and process, making them most effective when they are attuned both to the community's needs, the library's interests, and the artist's capacity.

**“I was given a very small platform at these other outreach events, in which I could talk about what the library had to offer, and [the people and artists who stood out as good collaborators], these are people who approached me afterward. They wanted to know more about what we were doing. They wanted to know more about how they could use our spaces and use our resources and access those things. You know, not everyone is a natural teacher, but these people were just excited about what the library was doing and how we were trying to connect to this community.”**

**-Fayetteville Public Library (AR), Library Staff Co-Lead Melissa Taylor**

While building real collaborative partnerships takes time because they are built on trust, leading with honesty and creating the project together from the beginning will help to establish solid footing.

**“Come with an open mind, toss in ideas to be mixed around, and to some extent, surround yourself with the people who are passionate about [the process or project].”**

**-Mount Mary University, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Library and Learning Commons (WI),  
Library Staff Co-Lead Daniel Vinson**

**“I think part of librarianship, at least for me, is suspending your biases. Unless you have hard data to show that something doesn’t work, assume it’s gonna work, right? Foster a culture of ‘yes.’**

**Can you help me find it?**

**Yes.**

**Have you seen the-?**

**No, but let’s find it.**

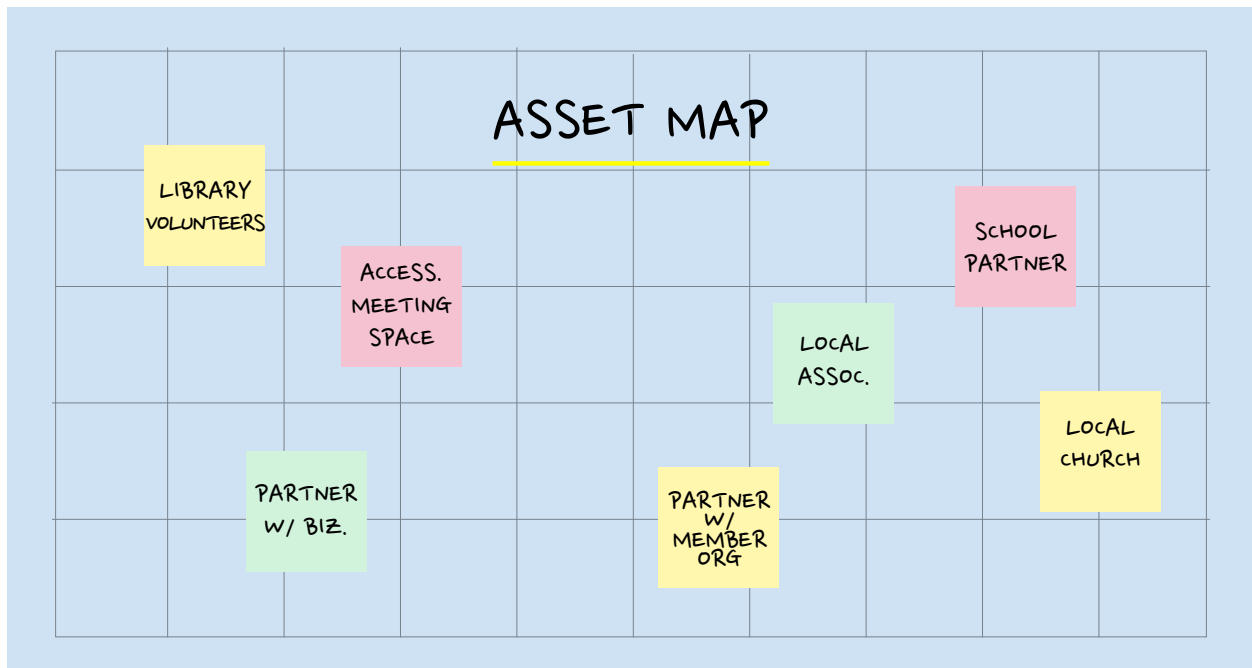
**So I think for librarians working with artists...be open. Be flexible.”**

**-Chicago Public Library (IL), Library Staff Co-Lead Evelina “Lina” Armstrong**

## Assets

Now that you have identified what issue you want to focus on, and found a partner, what assets do each of you bring to the project? We so often work from a deficit mindset – what we don't have – but for building a civic imagination project, it is important to start with asset-based thinking or what you do have.

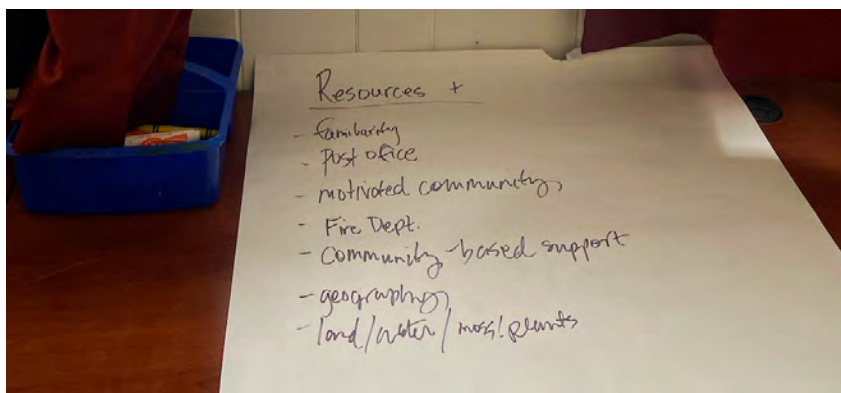
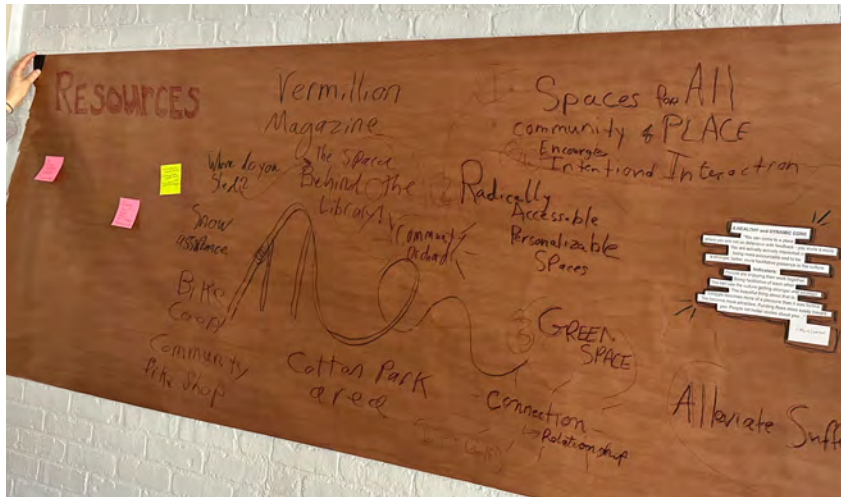
When we think of assets, we often think of money. While money is great, it is not the only (and sometimes not even the most important) resource when doing community projects. Community assets are anything that can improve the quality of life in the community. They can include library volunteers, an accessible meeting space, a partnership with a business, affiliation with a local association or membership organizations, or ties with churches and schools.



Asset mapping<sup>2</sup> can help clarify not only the skills and capacities that can support the project, but can uncover strengths, resources, and talents in your community. It can help define what geographic area you will work in, and sharpen your focus on the population you intend to serve. It can help you recognize allies and involve others in your community, exponentially expanding the reach and resources for the project.

<sup>2</sup> For many resources related to Asset-Based Community Development, visit: DePaul University. "Asset-Based Community Development Institute." DePaul University, 2023. [www.abcdinstitute.org](http://www.abcdinstitute.org).

**Begin with the library and your artist partner.** You have space for meetings, places to advertise events and display posters. You have a built-in audience of people who engage with the library both physically and perhaps online. Artists have relationships in communities, in neighborhoods- in place. They might connect you to people who are not library users. They have creative skills and assets. They have a network of other artists.



Project brainstorm on available resources. (Top) Photo by Amanda Raiche. (Bottom) Photo by Rachel Reynolds

→ There are many ways to do an asset map but creating a physical one with your partner – and perhaps some other invested stakeholders – will have you visualize your community in new ways and help with program/project planning. It can be used as an exercise to develop new relationships, introduce your constituents to what you are attempting to create, and get people together to start working collaboratively.

“I really like the way that we blended [my Library Co-Lead’s] Lina’s knowledge of kids books with the improv games. [She] was just like, ‘Here’s this and here’s this.’ And I’m like, ‘I didn’t even know these existed!’ I love the way that her brain connected the games we were playing to things we could bring out with the books.”

–Chicago Public Library (IL), Artist Co-Lead Mo Phillips-Spotts

“We’re kind of a unique situation because [our programming is] county wide, just because we’re so small...When the new census numbers came out, we’re just over 12,000 people, and that’s the entire county. So, my service area is just over 3,000. I guess in hindsight I would have tried to reach out to the two other libraries [in the county] and tried to get programs inside their libraries, and not just ours.”

–Burnsville Public Library (WV), Library Staff Co-Lead Elizabeth “Beth” Anderson

“We have a partnership with the Historical Society, which unbeknownst to me, they have this little cadre of older folks who love to share stories... [We’re thinking about] plugging that right into this program to collect those on an ongoing basis. Plus those events are super fun and there’s great food. They are attended by a small dedicated group, but I think to have the wider community know about these events [through the library]...I think that has enormous potential.”


–Bowdoinham Public Library (ME), Artist Co-Lead Dana Legawiec

## Moving Towards Action Together


- ✓ You have a partnership.
- ✓ You've done some asset mapping.
- ✓ You've chosen an issue or aspiration to address.

It's time to begin to figure out how you'll collaborate with each other.

Some questions you can start with. You can reflect on these individually to start, but we encourage you to share and discuss together with your collaborators:

 On Collaboration:

- What does a great collaboration feel like?
- What do you need to be the best collaborator you can be?
- What do you bring to collaboration that makes it joyful and productive?
- What has been challenging in the past?

 Now, in addition to being collaborators, you're partners. These questions can be useful as well:

- What conversations might we have, and what commitments could we put in place, to ensure that we have an equitable partnership?
- What questions might we ask each other about our values, our practices and our working culture(s)?
- How might we make decisions together?
- How might we think together about the impact we want to make through this partnership that we could not/ would not achieve on our own?

**“I respected [my Artist Co-Lead] Jasper’s expertise in this, and I let him kind of run with that side of things. I knew that I wasn’t an expert in local artists or local musicians. I gave him the autonomy to make decisions for us.”**

–Fayetteville Public Library (AR), Library Staff Co-Lead  
Melissa Taylor

**“We are able to easily lean on the expertise of others to keep moving. One member noted that there is “perfection in the messiness” of it all. People who need more rigid organization have been easily able to move around ideas because of the artist’s focus on stories rather than completion.”**

–Mount Mary University, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Library and Learning Commons (WI), Library Staff Co-Lead Daniel Vinson

**“We have had to work to find middle ground between a fairly structured schedule at the Library and a more free-flowing one for Joan as an artist, but I think we’ve generally been pleasantly surprised at how well it has gone and have great hopes for future collaborations.”**

–St. Louis Public Library (MO), Library Staff Co-Lead Lisa Thorp

A reminder, as we articulated in the Key Terms section on page 13, not all collaborations are partnerships. Before moving forward, make sure you've clearly articulated the commitments and expectations you are setting with one another if you choose to move towards partnership.

And, equally important, are you hearing any reasons to put on the brakes? Through these early explorations with a new collaborator, you may learn that moving towards partnership may not be suitable, given your values, personalities, and/or visions and goals. That is okay and expected. It is the reason to ask these questions now, before you really get going into a process. If you find yourself in this moment, build off of the learnings you've uncovered about yourself and what you are trying to accomplish as you pursue new collaborators and partners.

**Sometimes, it seems like we should just get to work.  
Do we have time to talk this much about process?**

**Here are two thoughts on that:**

1. Different people have different power and authority and access to resources within project teams. Talking about that, or at least being aware of it, can help us stay honest and transparent about the decisions being made around resources, timelines, outcomes, and workflow.
2. Upstream (early) conversations about how we are going to work and make decisions together, make downstream (later) moments of collaboration more effective, productive, and equitable. Talking about how to make decisions together upfront avoids miscommunication and sets the stage for the power and beauty of a diverse team to pay off. Coming from different work and disciplinary backgrounds means that disagreement can be profoundly, powerfully useful IF your partnership has the process in place to allow those disagreements to be safe and even exciting, not dangerous or hurtful.

*a conversation about  
defining success*

*a conversation about  
conflict resolution*

*a conversation about  
communication*

## UPSTREAM CONVERSATIONS

*a conversation about expectations*

## DOWNSTREAM MOMENTS

*realizing that we believed workload allocation  
would be different than how its playing out*

*relying on emails when in-person  
dialogue is strongly preferred by one  
of the collaborating parties*

*prioritizing different criteria to determine  
effectiveness mid-way through the process.*

*struggling to make a decision because  
there is disagreement*


## Voyager's Agreement: When are we done traveling together?

In addition to the process work described so far, at this point early in your partnership, you need to ask:

### How will we know when we have reached the end of this particular journey together?

An ending doesn't mean the journey can't continue, or that there won't be other journeys- but a map partly exists so you know when you arrive at your destination and can mark that arrival. Take time here to lay the groundwork for an ongoing conversation about not just the beginning, but also the closing. Keep in mind that usually a librarian is on staff, and an artist is free-lance, being compensated for this work specifically. You need to set up a way of noting when the artist's responsibility, contractually and ethically, is complete within the expectations of this partnership

## Creative "Process" vs. Creative "Product"

 Once you've gone through this sort of process set-up, take some time to work with your team's artist on these questions:

- How might we (library staff and team artists) think more expansively about the full range of tools that artists possess, and not assume an artist's contribution is limited to the creative product they traditionally create?
- What assets does our team's artist have under their belt that they deploy to make their "creative product," but usually do not think about as creative work in itself?

For example:

*The musician you're working with listens for patterns and shapes meaning through sound;*

*The theatre artist you're working with gets stakeholders with different agendas to come together around a shared vision and express that publicly;*

*The visual artist you're working with puts together images in ways that make stories clearer and understanding more possible.*

Exploring process tools can help you avoid jumping straight to product, and might be the key to a surprising direction your work together could take.

*"I think for me this project was so different than typical library programs because it was about the process, and we didn't go in with a plan...In some situations it wouldn't be as acceptable to go in without a plan, and that is too bad, because I've learned it really is such a positive experience, and there's such importance in it. But I know in some situations, the person in charge would be like, 'You have to show me.' Luckily that wasn't the case for us."*

*-Vermillion Public Library (SD), Library Staff Co-Lead Amanda Raiche*



“The library has not provided programming in the library that offers the spaces as the place for creative expression. For example, library counters may have provided poems to take during April’s poetry month but did not provide poetry workshops. This initiative shifted the focus so that the library became the hub for people to come together, first and foremost, to create, share and take risks. The campus has a long history but the demographics have shifted dramatically. Sharing the stories of who we are today and where we have been together is important.”

–Mount Mary University, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Library and Learning Commons (WI), Library Staff Co-Lead Daniel Vinson

“For me, it’s the little fishing line down the well and then you discover this whole huge underground cavern, how the students are sort of interacting with the stories, or actually more accurately, how they’re taking a germ of a story and then totally taking it in a whole other direction...The work that I do is iterative. We can come back to this year after year. Having that archive as source materials, as stories, as voices, to go back to and let it land and to facilitate those experiences, I, and I’m sure others, will have a lot of ideas around that [as this project continues]...And that’s just taking the digital archives, that’s not even talking about what happens in the room with those in-person experiences.”

–Bowdoinham Public Library (ME), Artist Co-Lead Dana Legawiec

## Engaging with Community

A core belief of the Civic Imagination Stations program is articulated by the Center for Performance and Civic Practice in this way:

“If you are working for change,  
the people you hope will  
benefit from that change  
must be the authors of  
the vision for change.  
And,  
they must be co-designers  
and co-leaders of  
any strategies to accomplish that change.”

In other words, the process should center the audience or community, not just in the creative activity you design, but in the design/needs assessment phase that precedes the work.

There is a history in this country of people with academic and government positions deciding on community development goals for communities of which they are not members. Those same “experts” then make “the plan” for how to achieve those goals, sometimes without ever engaging the residents that stand to be impacted by those goals until something is delivered or placed on that community. This dropping in from outside or “helicopter” version of design misses

the opportunity for the wisdom of those most impacted by these decisions to be present in the decision-making and creation process.

**Rather than making conclusions about what goals should be achieved or what form outcomes should take, ask the question: How can we start to engage the community members, both those that are currently library users and those who are not?**

“Outreach was key in doing this. Getting out there and sharing with those communities what resources that you have as a library to elevate their voices was really important. That drew people in to ask, ‘What are you doing? What can we partner together on?’ They became advocates for the library themselves. [So I’d say to other librarians,] immerse yourselves in your communities...I’ve been saying to other co-workers and colleagues, ‘Get out there.’ If you’re trying to [connect with] certain people...immerse yourselves in their world. That’s a great starting point.”

–Fayetteville Public Library (AR), Library Staff Co-Lead Melissa Taylor

“We had so many experiences of people joining into the process with great ideas and strong opinions. It feels like magic when community members take ‘ownership’ of the project or an aspect of the project and add some sort of important clarity or an enhancement that far exceeds what we had hoped they would bring to it. For example, we changed the name from ‘Gallery Art Boxes’ to ‘Community Art Boxes’ after a community meeting in which people expressed that ‘Gallery’ made it sound like the art boxes were for ‘artists’ and not everyone, not for themselves...Each person we engage in the project sends ripples out to more people. It feels like the community involved in the project is expanding with numbers and depth.”

–Thomas Memorial Library (ME), Artist Co-Lead Marie Ahearn



Before engaging, get clear with your partner on your expectations, commitments, and expectations for engaging with community. Ask one another:

- What has public engagement meant to you in the past?
- What role has it played in your work?
- What values do you bring to and place on community engagement and the collaborative design and goal setting it necessitates?
- How have you done it before?
- What role does public listening have in the direction this work will take?
- How are you and your project co-leaders accountable to community members whose voices you hear as you seek community input?

→ How will you make your rationale legible and actions visible to community residents as you make decisions about project goals and plans? In other words, how will they know their voices impacted what you are doing?

Once you feel like you've wrestled with these questions, and are ready to invite a larger community into process with you, make sure to articulate expectations and commitments to residents who share their time and energy with you.

## COMMUNITY QUESTIONS EXAMPLE

*Shared by Sandra Kern Mollman and Amanda Raiche from their project with the Edith B. Siegrist Vermillion Public Library in Vermillion, SD*

*This is a list of the questions asked on our questionnaire during community events, online, and at the library. Community events include the Welcome Table meals, United Way picnic event, the Main Street Senior Center, the Social Justice Choir, and at the Vermillion Area Farmer's Market (Sept/Oct 2022). Community members were invited to submit their answers by filling out the form in person or by email, text, or verbally through voice mail.*

### *First set of questions*

- *What is your favorite thing to see or do in your community? Why?*
- *What are the sounds of your community? How do they make you feel?*
- *Imagine a day in the future where you feel peace and joy. Looking around in that day, what do you see and/or hear?*

### *Second set of questions*

- *If you ever write a book, what will it be about?*

- *What would look different to you if all of your needs were met?*
- *What needs must be met in order for you and your community to thrive?*

### *Third set of questions*

- *What is something unique you can give the community for free?*
- *Where is your social gathering place? Where do you meet your people?*
- *Do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in the Vermillion community? Welcomed or unwelcomed?*

**"When we have our meetings with our [young adult leadership]... I've been wanting them to hold that space, not feel like we're guiding them. They're really guiding us."**

**-Memphis Public Libraries (TN), Artist Co-Lead Lex Phillips**

You might say, we want to impact “everyone in our community.” If we were with you in conversation, we might push on that a little bit. Is the impact you hope to have as relevant for the parent of a family of three as a single senior citizen? How specific can you get in your intentions? And then, once you’ve gotten more specific, how are you going to engage those individuals in conversation with you as part of this process, *prior* to all decisions being made on that project or process.

In Appendix C, you’ll find a couple of our favorite activities for building spaces for exchange and listening in community, for you to adapt and use in your own process, if supportive.

**“Working with young people often helps me remember to be fluid through the process!”**

–The People’s Library (AR), Artist Co-Lead  
Olivia Trimble

**“The most beautiful thing that we have discovered is how excited, curious, and aware people become when invited to engage in this conversation. In every age group, the conversations have been rich, grounding, and empowering. For our process, a major key was to learn and listen first, before rushing in to build A Project. This kept us nimble, flexible to make changes according to what we previously did not know about our community and to take advantage of our new discoveries and opportunities. We did not have to build in any ‘buy in’ from our communities to participate, rather our project(s) continue to build according to the community’s input.”**

–Vermillion Public Library (SD), Artist Co-Lead  
Sandra Kern Mollman

## Defining Success

Talking about what success means for an individual is different than how a group wants to define success for a process. Both are important.

Within the context of the Civic Imagination Stations pilot, we encouraged the cohort to include the following question in their considerations and visions of success:

How do you build your own and your library’s capacity for civic work?

Yes, success is about defining “the what” of the project or creative process. But also:

How might success be defined through the lens of a growing capacity to engage, imagine, and build with your community?

And then, to deepen your visions of success, you might ask one another:

- How do we define what success means for our work?
- Who gets to define what success means for our work?
- How do we measure success?
- Are the answers to those questions aligned with our core values?
- Who are the folks we hope will benefit from this work?
- How might we engage them, and listen to them, in the design of our work and in ways we design and measure success?

An example: your library might have a successful artist workshop program, where a local visual artist comes in on a weekly basis to teach a series of art lessons for elementary school students. You've measured the success of this program up until now based on workshop attendance and levels of satisfaction reported on evaluation surveys. You know this artist fairly well at this point, and know that they are also someone who grew up in this neighborhood, who holds an interest in supporting this community. Up until this point, your relationship with them has been largely transactional.

They provide an outlined service on a set schedule, and in return you issue them a paycheck for that service.

If you, as a library staff member or librarian, were to engage in a civic imagination project with this artist:

- How might you need to adjust your vision of success or grow your own civic capacity?
- What priorities will need to shift? Who will need to be engaged in the co-imagining and co-creation of the process?
- How might you need to approach collaborators differently to achieve this?

What is the practice that you, an artist, and the library can come together around that:

- serves the library's goals
- functions well in your community
- centers values of equity and community development and justice and literacy, all the different kinds of literacy, in your place



**To help you and your collaborators deepen this inquiring around defining success, turn to Appendix B and find the “Defining Success List Poem” exercise.**

**“We love this work but we don’t want it to feel like a parachute drop that will go away if the artist can no longer bring the storytelling techniques and workshops and author experiences to the project. We don’t want to end up with a pretty but rarely used storytelling booth.”**

**–Mount Mary University, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Library and Learning Commons (WI), Library Staff Co-Lead Daniel Vinson**

Here are some examples of visions of success from the Civic Imagination Stations pilot cohort teams:

Success for us could look like:

*“Collaborating students will understand the power and agency they have to re/create/imagine the future, and that they have the ability to create and use new technologies to make them sustainable.”*

**“AT LEAST 1 TEEN GETTING A SENSE OF WHAT’S POSSIBLE WITH THEIR LIBRARY.”**

*“People learning about our project through word of mouth so that the project has a life of its own beyond what we’ve created.”*

**“Boundless Black Joy.”**

*“Individuals utilizing [the library’s] resources long after our program.”*

“A broadened understanding of what public art is and why it is important for rural spaces.”

*“Putting tools in the hands of students to name for themselves what the success has been.”*

**“There’s a certain amount of interconnectedness...that is so precisely a part of the whole thing....I’ve been proud of and grateful for the fact that we’ve really really taken the time to like be in that before we say, okay, we’re gonna do a thing. Just holding as much, just honoring the fabric [of the community]. Because that’s deeply woven....That spaciousness to honor that, I’ve been really appreciative of.”**

**-Memphis Public Libraries (TN), Artist Co-Lead Lex Phillips**

**“Our workshops are focused on adults. Kids can attend with a caregiver. That’s part of the description. I think that’s a really cool thing. To have the kids see adults making art and know they are equal in the room to all of the adults as participants. They needed art in this way, just the way the adults did...just to be creative. It’s not for the purpose of the class, or the curriculum... Their creativity is treated seriously.”**

**-Thomas Memorial Library (ME), Artist Co-Lead Marie Ahearn**

**“Yeah, that’s it. As much as we’re saying, ‘Come have fun with us,’ we’re treating art seriously, a serious endeavor, that’s-”**

**-Thomas Memorial Library (ME), Library Staff Co-Lead Rachel Davis**

**“-a worthwhile part of life.” - Marie**

**“So worthwhile that adults do it too...So many things having to do with kids get dismissed. Play gets dismissed, even though that’s a fundamental aspect of literacy development. But I think as you grow up, it becomes less acceptable for adults to play in that way.” -Rachel**

**“I also think that it’s cool that the woman in the town [Rachel], who’s known for leading storytime and kids’ arts activity is holding this line: ‘No, this isn’t just kids’ space.’ No one’s thinking Rachel doesn’t care about the kids in this town and their creativity. The focus on adults comes from the right perspective. It’s credible.” - Marie**

## Co-Design and Project Iteration

You have a partnership. You've done some asset mapping. You've chosen an issue or aspiration to address. You've prepared for a healthy collaboration, and have wrestled with ideas around values and goals, public engagement and success. You may by now have some specific ideas. You may have begun planning.

### Now to begin the planning:

What will you do?

What will the work together be?

### Process Notes from Indiana University Libraries, Artist Co-Lead Dr. Maria E. Hamilton Abegunde

**Steps:** Communication with partners; have a common plan from which to work; be open to re-visioning the project based on real-time needs; be open to emergent practices as students are un/learning old/new concepts; engage with and meet students where they are (what historical, cultural, political knowledge they have/don't); provide access to as many creative options; work with staff outside the project (other librarians, digital staff, graduate student fellows).

**Detours:** Scaling down some of the intended work based on student energy and ability to integrate information in order to co-create final project; being okay with and comfortable with the unfinished; helping students see archival fragments and dearth as an opportunity to investigate the topic.

**Surprises:** How much fun we had and the commitment to co-creating a totally new and original work; consideration of copyright and citation methods; the strength of the group work.

In Appendix A, you'll see snapshots of what our 12 pilot sites did. Take a moment and look those over. When the collaborative work began at those sites, the projects and programs you see in that Appendix were, for the most part, not yet imagined. They were undiscovered ideas waiting to be found.

**“Our end result changed three or four times, as we were thinking and creating. We're really proud of the end result.”**

**– Burnsville Public Library (WV), Library Staff Co-Lead Elizabeth “Beth” Anderson**



Leading from a place of curiosity, of not knowing where the project might land, can feel unfamiliar, but ultimately, can lead to unexpected outcomes and impact as well as increased opportunity for community-informed decision-making.



At this point, you might use these questions to begin your exploration:

- What goals and themes keep returning in our conversations?
- What aspect of the artist's practice excites us, even if we're not yet sure why?
- What about the community challenge or aspiration we hope to address has gained some clarity through our discussions?
- When we revisit an expanded concept of literacy, and we think about all the different literacies necessary to make up a healthy and equitable community, which modes of literacy (see page 13) stand out for us?
- Which ones connect with the most urgent needs we have observed in our community?

Co-design means, at this phase, partners are in conversation about these questions, are checking their assumptions, asking deeper questions, and make space to listen to those their work seeks to impact. At this point, it may feel difficult, but taking time to refine an idea or create an approach together, leaves opportunity for plans to emerge and transform that you likely would not have come up with on your own.

**“It has been an interesting process of thinking big, then remembering all the other stuff we have going on, then refining our scope with the reminder that...there will be ...more opportunities to grow and evolve.”**


–St. Louis Public Library (MO), Library Staff  
Co-Lead Lisa Thorp

**“We had no specific project in mind when we submitted our application, we simply knew we wanted to create some kind of participatory visual art installation. We came up with the idea for our project through participating in the cohort Zoom sessions, and we refined it by brainstorming with each other, other library staff, and other artists in Town. The result was a project with multiple facets, all supporting the creation of our Community Art Boxes around Town.”**

–Thomas Memorial Library (ME),  
Library Staff Co-Lead Rachel Davis

The moment will come when the ‘what’ starts to gain some clarity.

You will start to move from a “what” will we do, to a “how” will we do it.

 As you start to plan your “how,” we encourage you to ask yourselves:

- What does a process timeline/plan that prioritizes discovery and community input look like?
- How does our pace or sense of urgency need to exist in relation to making space for curiosity and emergence in our process?
- What process decisions can be made with internal stakeholders (our lead partner team), and what decisions must involve community participation?

Know that your “what” may change as you keep figuring out your “how.”

Projects and programs iterate. They evolve. They shift. Sometimes in small ways that are barely visible, and sometimes the changes seem massive.

As you learn, you change.

### **Process Notes from Bowdoinham Public Library (WV), Artist Co-Lead Dana Legawiec**

**Step 1:** Reach out to potential partner(s)

**Step 2:** Together, decide on a project(s)

**Step 3:** Map out your project. Discover that it might be multiple projects. Pick one at a time.

**Step 4:** Realize that you need to make another map before you can map your project. That foundational map involves people, expertise, infrastructure you don’t currently have.

**Step 5:** Take one of your 3-4 projects that are embedded in your big project and pare it down to its simplest form that is not dependent on completion of your discovery from Step 4.

**Step 6:** Start over

So if you are learning about the work you are doing, and you are learning through it, that work changes.

Keep an eye on your “why,”  
and on your values.

**“We tried to get people to come in to paint during set event hours; however, since we are open during the day anyway, it was offered for people to come in and paint whenever they could. No pressure. If they couldn’t finish one day, they could come in another... and finish or could have help in finishing. Flexibility is key to getting people to respond so we changed it up to meet that need.”**

–Burnsville Public Library, Artist Co-Lead  
Quincy Potasnik

**“When we started, we were thinking our target audience was all ages. But we realized that adults don’t get the opportunity to just make art the way that kids do. They feel like they are not artists, and they don’t have the qualifications, you know? Whereas kids can freely be creative and play with stuff. Adults don’t give themselves that permission...or they think they need talent or something in order to do it. And so we’ve really refined our focus to adults. The way we’ve worded all of our workshop promotional material has been, ‘Children and teens who are motivated and able to focus on the project are welcome to attend.’ And we’ve had remarkable success with that. We’ve had children as young as seven attend with a parent, and they produced some remarkable artwork alongside teenagers and adults. It’s been a wide spectrum of ages all in the same room with one another. It’s been great!”**

**-Thomas Memorial Library (ME), Library Staff  
Co-Lead Rachel Davis**

So long as change serves the core of what you set out to address, and doesn’t drift to the shiny or the convenient, iteration is natural and positive.

**“Originally, we envisioned that we would have a cohort of participants who would attend each workshop. We realize[d] that we may get increased participation over time, and some people may only want to come to workshops with specific subjects. This [made] the ‘office hours’ or one-on-one engagement arm of our programming more important.”**

**-Brandon Free Public Library (VT), Library Staff  
Co-lead C.T.**


**“The project has morphed from a bunch of ideas into something that we can see and can share with others.”**

**-Indiana University Libraries (IN), Library Staff  
Co-Lead DeLoice Holliday**

## Stuckness: When you hit a bump in your collaboration



Your work together as partners may be smooth, transparent, and without tension or conflict.

 But just in case, it's useful to ask some questions early before activities are set in motion, so you're prepared:

- What are some reasons why we might get stuck in our work/process together?
- How would we, as our best versions of ourselves, handle those stuck moments?
- How might our everyday, non-best self, respond and why?
- What commitments might we make to each other to invite our best selves into moments of group stuckness?
- How might we hold ourselves accountable to those commitments?

And then make space together to return to these commitments when you need to enact a “pause-point,” if/when things start feeling challenging in your partnership.

**“I would say that one thing that I wish I did a little earlier in the process is creating the library guide that we used for the course that summed up all the different technologies that were available to the students through IU. But that is a lesson learned I will put for other librarians. If you're going to pursue something like this, have that Lib Guide up front, I think it would have made some things easier in terms of skill-building for the students.”**

**–Indiana University Libraries (IN), Library Staff Co-Lead Willa Tavernier**

**“We have had many detours. I have been grateful that my library partner understands how important it is to plant many seeds even if they don't all produce fruit. We have let many wonderful ideas fall to the side as we continue to listen to what this specific moment, and the people in this moment, are guiding us toward.”**

**–Vermillion Public Library (SD), Artist Co-Lead Sandra Kern Mollman**



Artist Co-Lead Joan Lipkin speaks to the press in front of the Voters of St. Louis photo backdrop. Photo by Lisa Thorp.

## Documenting the Process

“Due to the nature of the process some of the greatest results (finished and distributed local books [written, edited, and formatted by local authors]!) may not come to harvest until later- but I can see not only sown seeds but sprouts!”

-Brandon Free Public Library (VT), Artist Co-Lead Ethan Nelson

As you work, it can be hard to prioritize documenting what you're doing.

Documenting your process is a way to prepare to tell the story of your work at its culmination and beyond. Just as impact is important, documentation is critical. Often when we tell the story of a process we talk about impact, but sometimes when we tell our stories, the telling is impact.

The ways you work as partners, the ways you work with library users, the ways you work with residents who may never have engaged before with the library: every moment of designed interaction and accidental creative encounter is a proposal of what's possible to every person who discovers what you've done. A proposal that they can accept and then make discoveries of their own.



Captured in “full play” at a Family Improv Night event.  
Photo by Elias Rios.

**“We had the photographer [at one of our workshops]...And one of our “this will be a success” was ‘because we deserve boundless joy.’ And we were caught in full play. One of the pictures is my daughter. And every year, right, I pay for school pictures. And I know who my child is. But to capture her joy, or her play, on camera, is like lightning in a bottle. I can’t even catch that... So I would say out of this, I’m proud of ...the kids that came and played [with us].”**

**–Chicago Public Library (IL), Library Staff Co-Lead  
Evelina “Lina” Armstrong**

So, what structures and systems can you put in place at the beginning of your process, to build in regular and consistent moments of reflection and documentation?

How can you challenge yourself to capture with intent to share, before things feel “polished” or “ready.”

What systems and structures need to be in place so that you are transparently and ethically capturing public engagement?

Prepare photo releases ahead of time.

Consider what might be recorded and how.

Ask what moments in process are better gathered via notes and immediate recollection from your team, without images and without sourcing of individuals.

Creative Documentation examples:

- Engage a community member to write about an activity or event in a local paper or blog, or coauthor it with them.
- Invite a social media savvy participant to document the creative process or output on their social media platform of choice for an agreed upon amount of time.
- Take photos of your notes and brainstorming sessions, both close-ups and wide shots.

Be in conversation and capture your conversations about process with questions like these:

- How might you talk about the benefit of discovery?
- How can you articulate what things emerged that wouldn’t have if you hadn’t made space for emergence?
- How does that play into the way you think about the story of your work?
- When you think about telling the story of the work to other people, how do you talk about the work separate from describing the thing you’re going to do? How do you tell the story outside of the product?

Pay attention to the story you and your partner are co-designing along the way—there is value to be shared.

**“We brought together high school students and first year college students for some community building (and pizza!) as we read and discussed Erika Sanchez’ memoir, *Crying in the Bathroom*. That launched a series of storytelling workshops, one with local publishing house, *Genre: Urban Arts*, on campus. We shared our microstories, had lunch together in the quad, and toured other parts of the library. The high school students, who engage in weekly storytelling discussions at their schools, were able to talk with campus admissions and explore the areas of the library where students work, learn, and convene for conversations.**

**Students asked, ‘Wait, are we allowed to go in here?’ ‘Can I actually look at this? Can I pick up this book?’**

**Seeing a high school student, who is thinking about whether or not they can even go to a school like this, see that this space is not only a space they haven’t envisioned, but also is a space that can be for them... And we just found out recently that two of those students involved in the program have enrolled in Mount Mary for next fall. We are ecstatic that they will be continuing this journey!”**

**-Mount Mary University, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Library and Learning Commons (WI), Artist Co-Lead Kelly Saunders**

## Moving Forward/ Moving On

What does culmination look and feel like? How do you know when you have reached the end of this particular journey together?

We wrote about this early in this process map- did you decide, up front, how much time/how many hours of artist time your resources would support?

Have you been able to check in across your process, not just about the work but about your partnership?

Have you been able to brainstorm infrastructure possibilities that could support this sort of work long-term?

What goals around continuation and sustainability do you have?

What can you imagine now that you couldn't imagine when you started?

What acts of imagination have library users and residents undertaken through this process and are you able to understand why they were able to do so? Are you able to witness what those acts created?

"These young people are excited to use the library space. I think that they're very excited to see their message in, 'Downtown Fox.' There's our library, a post office, and a little country store. But right there, at the nexus of all those things everybody's gonna drive by every day: "Acceptance is expected here. Kindness is required." And they know that's theirs. That they came up with that, that they created, that they learned how to paint, that they did that. That's their message. So I do think that even though they were incredibly empowered already, I think that they just love the idea of having that message out in the community, too."

-The People's Library (AR), Library Staff Co-Lead Rachel Reynolds

"We hired...a PODS [Public Open Digital Scholarship] Fellow on this project. He's also a Black Studies PhD. He's now applied to library school, gotten into library school and gotten a full scholarship as well as a library job to continue working with our department. He is continuing to build skills in digital humanities. I think that is a really fantastic outcome."

-Indiana University Libraries (IN), Library Staff Co-Lead Willa Tavernier

**"I do feel a lot of pride in, not only people who participated directly: the Teen Zine Club full up and then some; the adult [Self-Publishing Club] bigger than we could have calculated. We were talking about measures of six before it started. But the way it ended up going down, even afterward, the impact kept expanding by word of mouth to people who didn't participate directly...As we walk around our town, people will be like, 'Hey, thanks for that club!' 'Hey, I've got more questions for you, I didn't know about that resource!'"**

-Brandon Free Public Library (VT), Artist Co-lead Ethan Nelson



“We’ve had a demographic come into these programs that we don’t usually have, which is 20-30 somethings. That is not usually our audience, but we’ve had a fair number at every workshop, there’s a handful of younger adults.... And it’s just been really cool. And that’s not usually an audience that we see at library events. It usually skews way older on the adult side. There’s been such a range of ages at each of these things, it’s amazing.”

-Thomas Memorial Library (ME), Library Staff  
Co-Lead Rachel Davis

**“I think that Dana [my Co-Lead] and I launched a brand. We launched a really cool brand. And I think that will live beyond the two of us, at least I hope it will. You know, from the early days and creating our logo, to using the language on all our posters, and saying it at events, and training our audiences on where to find more. I feel so proud of the part.”**

**-Bowdoinham Public Library (ME),  
Library Staff Co-Lead Kate Cutko**

If you imagine this work in 5 years, resourced and sustained, what does it look like? Are you both still doing it, together? Have you moved on and have others taken it up?

If you imagine a beautiful ending to the work done together- if you imagine a celebration, a meal, stories and laughter- what do you say when it’s your turn to stand and acknowledge with words what’s been accomplished? Acknowledge what you have accomplished, what you didn’t quite achieve, and what might be if you could continue the project.

Stay in conversation throughout your process, and the closing can be as much a discovery as every other moment of co-design.

Move forward, move on.

Move together, move gently, or swiftly.

But, move.

# APPENDIXES

## Appendix A: Cohort Spotlights

All projects took place Fall 2022-Spring 2023 and were supported by the American Library Association’s Civic Imagination Stations program, generously funded by the Estée Lauder Companies WRITING CHANGE initiative.

### TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Bowdoinham Public Library: Bowdoinham, ME .....	43
Brandon Free Public Library: Brandon, VT .....	44
Burnsville Public Library: Burnsville, WV.....	45
Chicago Public Library, Thurgood Marshall Branch: Chicago, IL.....	46
Edith B. Siegrist Vermillion Public Library: Vermillion, SD .....	47
Fayetteville Public Library, Center for Innovation: Fayetteville, AR .....	48
IU Libraries: Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center Library and Herman B Wells Library: Bloomington, IN .....	49
Memphis Public Libraries, Cossitt Branch: Memphis, TN .....	50
Mount Mary University, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Library and Learning Commons: Milwaukee, WI .....	51
The People’s Library: Fox, AR.....	52
St. Louis Public Library: St. Louis, MO .....	53
Thomas Memorial Library: Cape Elizabeth, ME .....	54

# Bowdoinham Public Library: Bowdoinham, ME

[Bowdoinham Story Bridges: Digitizing, archiving, and connecting the stories of Bowdoinham's past, present, and future.](#)

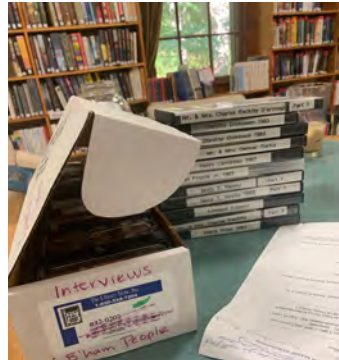
Beginning with a long-forgotten box of cassette tapes, co-leads Dana and Kate have begun an ongoing story listening and story sharing project centered on local history in Bowdoinham, Maine. They've hosted gatherings, captured stories from gatherings hosted by local partners, like the Historical Society, and developed a local elementary school production, which engaged with and iterated on stories from Bowdoinham's past.

## Process Guiding Question from the Co-Leads:

- How can we use the voices of storytellers, both past and present, to build bridges in our community?
- How can we protect the voices of the past and make them more accessible?
- How can we use our community's voices to create theater art?
- How can we inspire the voices of the future?

**“Our town has cultural assets. And I think some people would say, ‘Well, yeah, of course it does.’ But now more people can have that appreciation of: This has value. I’m part of this. I could contribute a story. I have my experiences living here with my neighbors, and all of that is something that has worth and value.”**

–Artist Co-Lead, Dana Legawiec



**Setting:** Rural

**Learn more at:** <https://bowdoinhamlibrary.org/story-bridges/>

**Instagram:** @storybridgesbhm

**Artist Co-Lead:** Dana Legawiec

**Primary Artistic Discipline:**  
Performance & Storytelling

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Kate Cutko

**Literacies Explored:** [Civic](#); [Creation/Creative/Design](#); [Cultural](#); [Dialogue/Discourse](#); [Digital](#); [Emotional](#); [Historical](#); [Process](#); [Recreational](#); [Reading](#); [Social/Community](#); [Technological](#)

**Ongoing Impact:** “We have never had the technology and knowledge to preserve, collect and share our local stories. We can now do that and can teach others how to do it for themselves, their families, and their community.”

–Library Staff Co-Lead, Kate Cutko

## Brandon Free Public Library: Brandon, VT

### Brandon Publishing Club & Teen Zine Club

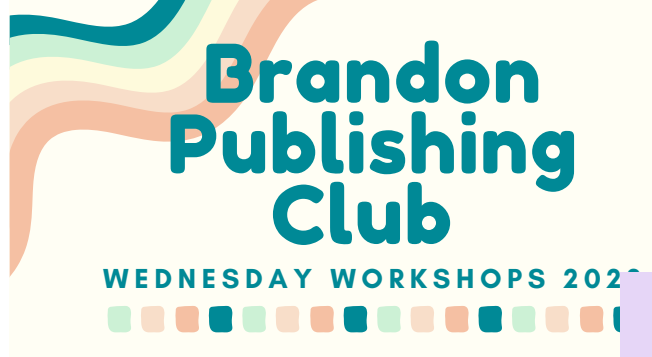
Through presentations, workshops, co-working opportunities, and drop-in office hours, the Brandon Publishing Club and Teen Zine Club, supported community members in developing skills in writing, editing, self-publishing, design, and zine creation. Participants were met at varying levels of skill. Presentations from the self-publishing club were also recorded and made available online for ongoing access.

#### **Process Guiding Question from the Co-Leads:**

- What kind of space would invite writers and artists at varying degrees of experience and at different places in process into a multi-generational learning space hosted by the library?
- How can we make visible self-publishing resources that are already at the library?
- How can we expand library resources so that local residents see the library as a place where they can connect with others and grow their work and skill sets?

**“People were calling the library going, ‘Well, I love the idea of a self publishing club, but my manuscript isn’t finished.’ We were like, ‘Yeah, of course! That’s the whole point.’ But it would be questions like that, that the library team was receiving [at the beginning]....So John [and another collaborator, Abby] talked through, eventually calling it a club, instead of a seminar or program or training.”**

**-Artist Co-Lead, Ethan Nelson**



**Setting:** Rural

**Learn more at:** <https://brandonpubliclibrary.org/brandon-publishing-club-presentations/>

#### **Artist Co-Leads:**

John Brodowski and Ethan Nelson with assistance from Abby Brodowski

**Primary Artistic Practice:** Writing

#### **Library Staff Co-Leads:**

Carey Bunker and C.T.

**Literacies Explored:** [Civic](#); [Creation/Creative/Design](#); [Dialogue/Discourse](#); [Process](#); [Social/Community](#); [Technological](#)

**“John [one of our Artist Co-Leads] is an art teacher, so he’s seen hundreds and hundreds of kids over the years. So he knew parents, too. And Ethan [our other Artist Co-Lead] works in speech pathology, so he knows people in the community, too. I think, because John and Ethan are so public facing and they’re used to helping people, that really contributed to our success in wanting to help people and engage people in different ways, ways we would not have been able to do on our own as a library. I don’t even know if I would have thought to do it. I would have thought there wouldn’t have been any interest, honestly. So, seeing the number of people come in that we did, obviously I was quite wrong. But you know, that’s a happy thing to be wrong about.” -Library Staff Co-Lead, Carey Bunker**

# Burnsville Public Library: Burnsville, WV

## Braxton County Positivity Project

A series of facilitated conversations coupled with a local painting project that culminated in public art pieces featuring local artwork centered around the positive aspects of being a part of the Braxton County community.

### Process Guiding Question from the Co-Leads:

- How do we create, hold, and make visible positive connections and experiences in Braxton County?



**Setting:** Rural

**Artist Co-Lead:** Quincy Potasnik

**Primary Artistic Discipline:** Visual Arts

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Elizabeth “Beth” Anderson

**Literacies Explored:** Civic; Creation/Creative/Design; Dialogue/Discourse; Recreational; Social Community

**Ongoing Impact:** “I had other areas call me that had seen it in the newspaper, and they were like, ‘Is this a state-wide program? Because this needs to be done state-wide.’ And I said right now it is just a Braxton program, but we could do it if people wanted to sign on and make it a statewide program.”

–Library Staff Co-Lead Elizabeth “Beth” Anderson

# Chicago Public Library, Thurgood Marshall Branch: Chicago, IL

## Family Improv Night Program Series

An in-person series of improvisation-based exercises and activities hosted for families focused on opportunities for joint play and Black family joy, with complementing book recommendations for participants.

### **Process Guiding Question from the Co-Leads:**

- How can we use appropriate thematic children's literature to foster familial Black Joy?
- How can we facilitate multi-generational play in families?
- How can improvisation encourage critical thinking and playful conflict management?
- Is it effective to use play to learn about emotional intelligence?
- What are ways that familial play can create safe emotional environments when one may be living through harsh and oppressive physical environments and neighborhoods?

**"I really like the way that we blended Lina's knowledge of kids books with the improv games. [She] was just like, 'Here's this and here's this.' And I'm like, 'I didn't even know these existed!' I love the way that her brain connected the games we were playing to things we could bring out with the books."**

**-Artist Co-Lead, Mo Phillips-Spotts**



**Setting:** Urban

**Artist Co-Lead:** Mo Phillips-Spotts

**Primary Artistic Discipline:**  
Improvisation

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Lina Armstrong

**Literacies Explored:** Creation/Creative/Design; Culture; Dialogue/Discourse; Emotional; Recreational; Reading; Social/Community

**Ongoing Impact:** As part of their collaboration, Co-Leads Lina and Mo recorded the improv exercises to be packaged with library resources and made available for families to engage with together on the go or at home.

# Edith B. Siegrist Vermillion Public Library: Vermillion, SD

## Vermillion Public Library's Civic Imagination Station

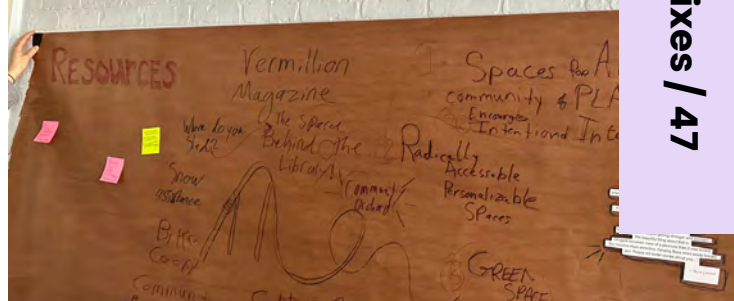
With a focus on community dialogue, Co-Leads Sandra & Amanda engaged youth and adults in opportunities for civic imagining and visioning for their community. Their work together culminated in a public gathering sharing projects from the educational workshops, learnings from the facilitated gatherings, as well as additional opportunities for community engagement and participation.

### Process Guiding Question from the Co-Leads:

- How do we invite a wider range of people into a process of identifying needs and imagining actions toward creating a community that thrives?

### From the Co-Leads:

**“The programming offered through the Civic Imaginations Stations grant project was different because the process rather than the product was highlighted. The focus of this project was on starting conversations with a wide variety of community members from diverse age groups, locations, organizations, and academic and economic standings to determine the shape the product(s) would take based on community members’ needs, thoughts, and values arising in this moment. The Civic Imagination Station programming shaped and shifted according to input from the community. The process allowed us to be nimble in responding to the community’s concerns and desires, and flexible for incorporating their input into opportunities for community building and co-creation.”**



**Setting:** Rural

**Learn More at:** <https://vermillionpubliclibrary.org/civic-imagination-station-resource-hub/>

**Artist Co-Lead:** Sandra Kern Mollman

**Primary Artistic Discipline:** Performance & Gathering Design

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Amanda Raiche

**Literacies Explored:** Civic; Creation/Creative/Design; Cultural; Dialogue/Discourse; Digital; Emotional; Historical; Process; Recreational; Reading; Social/Community; Technological

**Ongoing Impact:** A Civic Imagination Resource Hub, hosted by the Vermillion Public Library

**“Part of what I love about the Resource Hub is that it’s the bulk of what we used to even come up with the ideas [for gatherings and conversation], and then some. There’s so much information in there...our university doesn’t have most of the books that we’ve put in our Resource Hub. I just see that the possibility of utilizing those resources will only grow, intentionally, with it being accessible to people.”** -Artist Co-Lead, Sandra Kern Mollman

And

**“The seventh grade teacher whose class did the workshop with the project, said she wants to incorporate it into her curriculum. She’s working with Sandra [to develop the curriculum]...And that is huge, that will affect 100 to 125 kids per year.”** -Library Staff Co-Lead, Amanda Raiche

# Fayetteville Public Library, Center for Innovation: Fayetteville, AR

## All Together Now: A music production series

Over the course of six-weeks, Fayetteville Public Library hosted this drop-in music production series at their Center for Innovation. Artist Co-Lead, Jasper Logan, along with invited guests led participants in practical workshops from song-writing to track mastering. The project focused on making accessible current library resources to a new group of patrons; developing relationships with a community that was new to the library; supporting early career artists and music production technicians in developing practical industry skills; as well as building out library resources to better support the local Fayetteville rap and hip hop communities.

### Process Guiding Questions:

“When we applied for this program, we were grappling with:

How do we make authentic connections to our community and encourage collaborations?

How do we share our new technologies and resources with them?

The Center for Innovation and the recording studio are new spaces and we wanted to make sure that we were reaching all our potential users and audiences and offering equipment and technology that works for as many people as possible. Through outreach efforts I was introduced to a community of local hip-hop artists; producers, MCs, writers, beat makers, DJs, poets, etc. and realized that this was the community we needed to reach and connect to these free resources. As the program came to life, we learned from our artist partner and his colleagues that there were some things lacking in our new recording studio that would make the space more friendly to these artists.

The question then became:

What can we add to our recording spaces to make hip hop artists and digital music makers feel like this space was made for them?”

-Melisa Taylor, Library Staff Co-Lead



**Setting:** Small or mid-sized city

**Artist Co-Lead:** Jasper Logan

**Primary Artistic Discipline:** Music

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Melissa Taylor

**Literacies Explored:** Creation/Creative/Design;  
Digital; Process; Recreational; Social/Community;  
Technological

“It was really nice that we were able to pay the artists and the presenters. I know sometimes with artists, it’s like, ‘Should we pay?’ But paying artists goes a long way, and it meant a lot to them.” -Artist Co-Lead, Jasper Logan

“...And it gets paid back. I’ve had at least two of these presenters, that Jasper connected us with, essentially continue a version of this series to make sure that we’re still connecting with patrons who didn’t have a chance to join us for the first part. That’s been huge.” -Library Staff Co-Lead, Melissa Taylor



# IU Libraries: Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center Library and Herman B Wells Library: Bloomington, IN

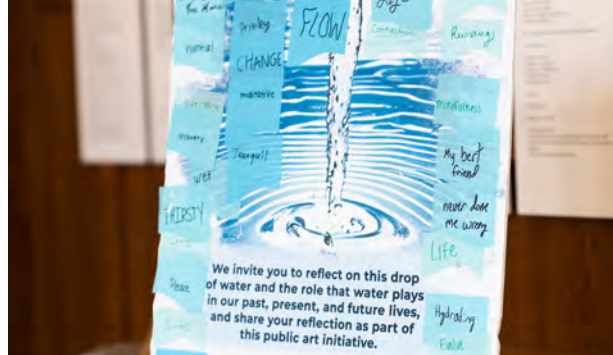
## Letters to Ourselves: A2632022 Water Epistles

A collaboration between the Contemporary Social Issues in the African American Community course and the Land, Wealth, Liberation digital resource. In addition to coursework on the historical contexts that impact access to affordable, clean, and safe water in Black communities worldwide and a conversation with a community activist, Water Epistles included workshops on new technologies with campus librarians and community gatherings that featured student work. The student work, and community engagement artifacts, and course syllabus were preserved and will be publicly shared as learning objects within the Land, Wealth, Liberation digital resource (see link).

**From the Co-Leads:** This was our first Open Pedagogy project together on campus. We situated our collaboration at the intersections of Black histories, Black expressive traditions, digital literacies, and imagined futures to provide a transformative experience for students and community partners, positioning them as co-creators of knowledge - a practice known as open pedagogy. To support this approach, Dr. Abegunde utilized contemplative practices - quiet, journaling, deep dialogue, deep listening - to help students reflect on the histories they were learning (some for the first time), to situate themselves within these histories, and to recognize their agency to create change.

### **Process Guiding Questions from the Co-Leads:**

- How can we share information about the global water crisis in Black communities with our peers and home communities?
- How can combining Black Studies and digital humanities strengthen art-based research practices and lead to relevant, resonant, and accessible outcomes for participants and target audiences?
- How can libraries be a site for collaboration with different communities inside/outside the university?
- How can we use our new digital knowledge to research this topic further and impact change?



**Setting:** College campus

**Learn more at:** <https://collections.libraries.indiana.edu/iulibraries/s/land-wealth-liberation/page/water-epistles>

**Artist Co-Lead:** Dr. Maria E. Hamilton Abegunde

**Artistic Discipline:** Poetry

**Library Staff Co-Leads:**  
DeLoice Holliday and Willa Tavernier

**Literacies Explored:** [Civic](#); [Creation/Creative/Design](#); [Contemplative](#); [Cultural](#); [Dialogue/Discourse](#); [Digital](#); [Emotional](#); [Historical](#); [Process](#); [Recreational](#); [Reading](#); [Social/Community](#); [Technological](#)

“If at the end everybody who walks into my classroom can step into the circle... For me, that’s it. There’s a syllabus, but we are creating as we learn. Students come to understand that they have the agency to create change, and then take it to their parents, their communities. I often say to students, if you want to bring your sister, your mother, your father, your baby brother, just bring them to the class, in one way or another. This is Black Studies: inviting the community to teach and learn; to imagine change and to create it; together. This is also the role of libraries - and the histories of Black communities and public libraries are linked - to be havens for the possibilities that can change our lives when we collaborate.”

-Dr. Maria E. Hamilton Abegunde, Artist Co-Lead

# Memphis Public Libraries, Cossitt Library: Memphis, TN

## You Are Special: A Celebration of Black Queer Artists and Community

Co-leads Emily Marks & Lex Phillips designed a series of public events along with Ariel Cobbert and Nadifah Abdur- Rasheed for and featuring Black Queer artists and creatives in the Memphis community. The process and ultimate public celebration worked to prioritize flexibility, deep listening to community voices, and thoughtful event design focused on safety and care. Events were tied to the re-opening of the historic Cossitt Library branch in downtown Memphis, TN and included an open mic, self portrait workshop, a Black Queer History 101 workshop led by Black Queer artists who had not previously worked within Memphis Public libraries.

### Process Guiding Question from the Co-Leads:

- How do we build a platform to amplify the creative voices in the Black Queer community and use the library as a welcoming space to convene and build community?

**“Our most successful night was an open mic night led by queer artists on our patio. Allies showed up, and it was our most well-attended community-building event since we [re-]opened [the branch]...Everyone was engaged, and having it outside attracted more people from the street to see what was happening. The most powerful moment was when a young artist got up to share a new piece she was working on and commented on another artist not much older than her, saying from the stage, ‘I see who exactly I want to be when I grow up.’”**

-Library Staff Co-Lead, Emily Marks



**Setting:** Urban

**Artist Co-Lead:** Lex Phillips

**Primary Artistic Discipline:**  
Writing & Facilitation

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Emily Marks

**Literacies Explored:** Civic; Creation/ Creative/Design; Cultural; Dialogue/ Discourse; Digital; Emotional; Historical; Process; Recreational; Social/ Community

“There’s a certain amount of interconnectedness... that is so precisely a part of the whole thing...I’ve been proud of and grateful for the fact that we’ve really really taken the time to like be in that before we say, okay, we’re gonna do a thing. Just holding as much, just honoring the fabric [of the community]. Because that’s deeply woven.... That spaciousness to honor that, I’ve been really appreciative of.” -Memphis Public Libraries, Artist Co-Lead Lex Phillips

# Mount Mary University, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Library and Learning Commons: Milwaukee, WI

## In the Words of Women: A Campus Storytelling Collaboration with Mount Mary University's Haggerty Library

Storytelling collaborations with high school students, first-year college students and a variety of campus partners, that focused on curating stories from across campus and its intergenerational community via digital recordings in a student-led, highly accessible library storytelling booth. These stories create a digital archive "In the Words of Women" to amplify the voices of courageous, unique, and resonant personal stories for others to learn from as they model how to share their own story.

### Process Guiding Question from the Co-Leads:

- How do we engage the varied intergenerational communities in the library through Storytelling?
- How do we engage our communities in the library space in ways that we have not thought of before, particularly after the pandemic, to be together and connect across the campus and share our stories, after being apart for so long?
- How do we extend this connect by sharing the resources the library has to offer- the collection, the digital tools, and the Human Resources- that are the campus assets that we can continue to build on?

**"The library has not provided programming in the library that offers the spaces as the place for creative expression. For example, library counters may have provided poems to take during April's Poetry Month, but did not provide poetry workshops. This initiative shifted focus so that the library became the hub for people to come together, first and foremost, to create, share, and take risks. The campus has a long history but the demographics have shifted dramatically. Sharing the stories of who we are today and where we have been together is important."**

-Library Staff Co-Lead, Daniel Vinson



**Setting:** College Campus

**Learn More at:** <https://digitalcollections.mtmary.edu/exhibits/show/inthewords>

**Artist Co-Lead:** Kelly Saunders

**Primary Artistic Discipline:** Storytelling

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Daniel Vinson

**Literacies Explored:** [Creation/Creative/Design](#); [Dialogue/Discourse](#); [Digital](#); [Emotional](#); [Process](#); [Reading](#); [Social/Community](#); [Technological](#)

**Ongoing Impact:** "We brought together high school students and first year college students for some community building (and pizza!) as we read and discussed Erika Sanchez' memoir, *Crying in the Bathroom*. That launched a series of storytelling workshops, one with local publishing house, Genre: Urban Arts, on campus. We shared our microstories, had lunch together in the quad, and toured other parts of the library. The high school students, who engage in weekly storytelling discussions at their schools, were able to talk with campus admissions and explore the areas of the library where students work, learn, and convene for conversations.

Students asked, "Wait, are we allowed to go in here?" "Can I actually look at this? Can I pick up this book?"

Seeing a high school student, who is thinking about whether or not they can even go to a school like this, see that this space is not only a space they haven't envisioned, but also is a space that can be for them... And we just found out recently that two of those students involved in the program have enrolled in Mount Mary for next fall. We are ecstatic that they will be continuing this journey!" -Artist Co-Lead, Kelly Saunders

# The People's Library: Fox, AR

## Civic Imagination Station at The People's Library

Co-Leads Rachel and Olivia led workshops focused on providing skill-building and empowerment activities for young people, the core patrons of a new, one-room, community-resourced library in Fox, AR. Their process together and with participants culminated in a group-designed mural featured on the exterior of the library building.



### Process Guiding Question from the Co-Leads:

- How do you feel seen, heard, and appreciated in your community?
- And if you do not, what do you need to feel that?

**"These young people are excited to use the library space. I think that they're very excited to see their message in, 'Downtown Fox.' There's our library, a post office, and a little country store. But right there, at the nexus of all those things everybody's gonna drive by every day: "Acceptance is expected here. Kindness is required." And they know that's theirs. That they came up with that, that they created, that they learned how to paint, that they did that. That's their message. So I do think that even though they were incredibly empowered already, I think that they just love the idea of having that message out in the community, too."**

**-Library Staff Co-Lead, Rachel Reynolds**



**Setting:** Rural

**Artist Co-Lead:** Olivia Trimble

**Primary Artistic Discipline:** Visual Arts

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Rachel Reynolds

**Literacies Explored:** Civic; Creation/Creative/Design; Cultural; Dialogue/Discourse; Digital; Emotional; Process; Social/Community; Technological

### A Key Insight from the Process:

**"I told them why we were working with that particular group, because they had been the largest group of patrons who had used the library, and I wanted them to make it their space, and to let them know that we were there to help them make that their space. And so they started jamming on what they would not only want in the community, but what they would want in that space. So it helped me learn how they would be using it in the future, the kinds of things that they needed."** -Library Staff Co-Lead, Rachel Reynolds

**Ongoing Impact:** **"I'm feeling confident that the folks who participated in our hands-on days can move forward and do their own murals. I feel like they've got the technical skills to do it themselves. They were already pretty talented artists because we were working with the Art Club. But I felt like that piece was really important to me, to equip other people with the skills that I have."** -Artist Co-Lead Olivia Trimble

# St. Louis Public Library: St. Louis, MO

## Voters of St. Louis

Loosely modeled on Humans of New York and Humans of St. Louis, Voters of St. Louis is a series of activities focused around multi-generational engagement with the democratic voting process. The starting point was taking portraits and collecting narratives, paired with upcoming electoral deadlines, which were shared through social media. Activating and expanding upon already present library resources, Co-Leads Lisa and Joan hosted and collaborated on voter awareness and registration efforts across St. Louis and are avid to expand their work.

### Process Guiding Question from the Co-Leads:

- How to increase (a) voter registration, (b) voter engagement, (c) voter turnout, and (d) intergenerational pride in voting.

**From the Co-Leads:** We came up with the concept “Voters of St. Louis” as a way to highlight current voters, bring attention to upcoming elections and voter registration opportunities, and hopefully attract the attention of and generate excitement among future voters, including youth.

“**[This work] is complicated. There is no easy narrative. There is no clean, ‘If we do this, all will be well.’ We want democracy to be joyful and something people show up for and not some duty or something that doesn’t work. But often it is a duty, often it is something that doesn’t work, and historically it has been messy, with roadblock after roadblock, including where we are based. So we’ve been trying to create a narrative that counters, but also acknowledges that. My initial vision was just going to be to show people how voting is fun. But we quickly backed off of that, and worked to include both sides. It is complicated. And we have a way [now] to hopefully chip away at some of that.**”

–Library Staff Co-Lead, Lisa Thorp



**Setting:** Urban

**Learn more at:** <https://www.spl.org/votersst/>

**Artist Co-Lead:** Joan Lipkin

**Primary Artistic Discipline:** Multi-disciplinary and Civic Engagement

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Lisa Thorp

**Literacies Explored:** [Civic](#); [Creation/Creative/Design](#); [Cultural](#); [Dialogue/Discourse](#); [Digital](#); [Social/Community](#)

“When I was planning our Midterms Matter nonpartisan cultural voting festival through my existing organization, Dance the Vote, it seemed like an ideal place to do a soft test drive for The Voters of St. Louis. Lightbulbs went off when one of my friends said, ‘Well, I want to come to this event, but I think I’m gonna have my grandchildren that day, so I don’t know if I can.’ And I said, ‘Well, how old are your grandkids? What if we have activities that they would enjoy, like coloring and making signs and dancing? What if you didn’t have to choose between engaging around voting and being with your grandkids?’

This is why it is essential to listen to the community and to the event itself. It starts to tell you what is needed.

A family should never be asked to choose between being involved citizens and their parenting duties, if they’re really willing to do both. It’s our responsibility to figure out how to answer that question.” –Artist Co-Lead, Joan Lipkin

# Thomas Memorial Library: Cape Elizabeth, ME

## Community Art Boxes

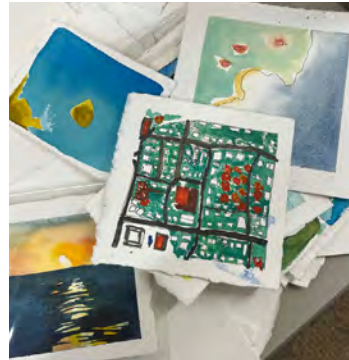
A series of physical community art boxes, or mini galleries, located in five spots around the Town center, featuring a rotating series of artwork by non-professional local artists and crafts-people around a common theme, coupled with facilitated community discussion and engagement.

“In the beginning, we had a lot of work to do spreading the word that this project and the display boxes are for everybody, not just for people who think of themselves as artists. The workshops and display boxes are for anybody who wants to be creative. And the thing that’s amazing to me is that it took so little for people to go from not feeling included, to eager to participate. It was just like flipping a switch. People just needed to feel invited. We continue to make adjustments to reinforce that openness. We listen and notice what words and conditions help people feel invited and included...and grateful. That’s the other amazing thing. I’ve been taken aback by how grateful people are for the opportunity to be creative. Participants thank us throughout the workshops and we thank them because we are all making something happen together.”  
-Artist Co-Lead, Marie Ahearn

### Process Guiding Questions from the Co-Leads:

- Could we create a project that would connect people through art-making, as opposed to the general disconnection people have with one another over politics, current events, and town issues?
- Could we create a space where people could recognize and celebrate each other’s different perspectives?
- Could we encourage the healing power of unleashing an individual’s creativity as a means toward collective healing of our community?

“At each of these workshops, people are amazed that, given the same materials, the same opportunity, and the same instruction, everybody comes up with something completely different, and people talk about that with one another...And that’s exactly what we were hoping for: that people could see different perspectives and appreciate them and celebrate them.”  
-Library Staff Co-Lead, Rachel Davis



**Setting:** Rural

**Learn More at:** <https://www.thomasmemoriallibrary.org/cab/>

**Artist Co-Lead:** Marie Ahearn

**Primary Artistic Discipline:** Visual Arts

**Library Staff Co-Lead:** Rachel Davis

**Literacies Explored:** [Civic](#); [Creation/Creative/Design](#); [Dialogue/Discourse](#); [Digital](#); [Emotional](#); [Process](#); [Recreational](#); [Social/Community](#); [Technological](#)

“When we started, we were thinking our target audience was all ages. But we really focused more on adults because we realized that adults don’t get the opportunity to just make art the way that kids do. They feel like they are not artists, and they don’t have the qualifications, you know? Whereas kids can freely be creative and play with stuff. Adults don’t give themselves that permission...or they think they need talent or something in order to do it. And so we’ve really refined our focus to adults. The way we’ve worded all of our workshop promotional material has been, ‘Children and teens who are motivated and able to focus on the project are welcome to attend.’ And we’ve had remarkable success with that. We’ve had children as young as seven attend with a parent, and they produced some remarkable artwork alongside teenagers and adults of all ages. It’s been a wide spectrum of ages all in the same room with one another. It’s been great!” -Library Staff Co-Lead, Rachel Davis

## Appendix B: Printable Worksheets

Reflection Questions & Activities Shared in the Process Map.

Getting Started / Finding Your Partner Worksheet.....	56
Collaboration & Partnership Questions .....	57
Exploring Creative Process Worksheet.....	58
Engaging with Community Worksheet.....	59
Defining Success: List Poem Worksheet.....	60
Project Iteration Worksheet.....	63

## Getting Started / Finding Your Partner Worksheet

*Reflection questions for library staff and librarians to specify who and why they might seek out as a possible partner. These questions may also be supportive if you have a partner who you've worked with previously, but are looking to deepen that relationship or work in a different way together.*

**What is an issue in my community that needs to be addressed, and do I believe we, as a library, have something to offer?**

**Who is a prospective partner I can bring to the table to address this issue?**

**Will there be community support for the project?**

**Who are other collaborators who might be willing to support the project?**

**What can you and your library bring to this partnership? What might you be able to offer a potential collaborator?**



## Collaboration & Partnership Questions

*Questions to support you and a (potential) partner as you begin your process together. You can reflect on these individually to start, but we encourage you to share and discuss together with your collaborators:*

### **On Collaboration:**

- What does a great collaboration feel like?
  
- What do you need to be the best collaborator you can be?
  
- What do you bring to collaboration that makes it joyful and productive?
  
- What has been challenging in the past?

### **Now, in addition to being collaborators, you're partners. These questions can be useful as well:**

- What conversations might we have, and what commitments could we put in place, to ensure that we have an equitable partnership?
  
- What questions might we ask each other about our values, our practices and our working culture(s)?
  
- How might we make decisions together?
  
- How might we think together about the impact we want to make through this partnership that we could not/would not achieve on our own?

## Exploring Creative Process Worksheet

*After you've made some agreements on the way you will work together, take some time with your team's artist(s) to explore all of the tools and possibilities available to your creative process together. Some questions to get you started:*

**How might we (library staff and artist(s)) think more expansively about the full range of tools that artists possess, and not assume an artist's contribution is limited to the creative product they traditionally create?**

**What assets does our team's artist have under their belt that they deploy to make their "creative product," but usually do not think about as creative work in itself?**

## Engaging with Community Worksheet

*Before engaging, get clear with your partner on your expectations, commitments, and expectations for engaging with community. Reflect on the following questions, then share and discuss with one another:*

**What has public engagement meant to you in the past?**

**What role has it played in your work?**

**What values do you bring to and place on community engagement and the collaborative design and goal setting it necessitates?**

**How have you done it before?**

**What role does public listening have in the direction this work will take?**

**How are you and your project co-leaders accountable to community members whose voices you hear as you seek community input?**

**How will you make your rationale legible and actions visible to community residents as you make decisions about project goals and plans? In other words, how will they know their voices impacted what you are doing?**

## Defining Success: List Poem Worksheet

*This list poem exercise comes to us through Willa Taylor who learned it while studying “HOWL” by Allen Ginsberg at University of Texas at Austin.*

*You can use this structure as a solo writing exercise or in collaboration with others, on any topic or focus of your choosing. For this purpose, we share it here as a way to explore, deepen, and iterate your definitions of success within partnership. Although, you might use this as a solo exercise first, before even beginning a partnership, to guide you in your exploration around who should be involved in a possible collaboration.*

### Part One: Defining Success List Poem, Solo Exercise:

This exercise begins as a solo writing reflection, that can then be combined with collaborators and partners. You’ll need something to write on and about 10 minutes for this first solo writing time.

**(ONE) On a blank sheet of paper, begin by completing the statement, “Success for this project might look like...”**

- No need to self censor, you aren’t going to share all of these, and you aren’t making any commitments.
- Write down both personal visions of success as well as project outputs and outcomes.
- If it is helpful, set a timer for two minutes.
- Write down at least five completed statements.

Success for this project might look like \_\_\_\_\_

Success for this project might look like \_\_\_\_\_

Success for this project might look like \_\_\_\_\_

Success for this project might look like \_\_\_\_\_

Success for this project might look like \_\_\_\_\_

**(TWO) Look over your list and circle one statement that is resonating with you.**

**(THREE) Focusing just on the statement you selected, complete this statement, “This is success because....”**

- Create a new list of at least five statements.
- Give yourself no more than 2 minutes.

This is success because \_\_\_\_\_

This is success because \_\_\_\_\_

This is success because \_\_\_\_\_

This is success because \_\_\_\_\_

This is success because \_\_\_\_\_

**(FOUR) Still focusing on the statement you selected in step TWO, now complete this statement, “Because of this success, I will...”**

- Create a list of at least five statements.
- Give yourself no more than 2 minutes.

Because of this success, I will \_\_\_\_\_

Because of this success, I will \_\_\_\_\_

Because of this success, I will \_\_\_\_\_

Because of this success, I will \_\_\_\_\_

Because of this success, I will \_\_\_\_\_

**(FIVE) Read over the statements you’ve created in steps THREE and FOUR.**

- Note what feels most important.
- Edit and revise as you see fit.
- Select and then write out one or two full sequences that feel more resonant and that you feel comfortable sharing with your partner(s).

Success for this project might look like...

This is success because...

Because of this success, I will...

**(SIX) Go back to step TWO and select a new statement to focus on for steps THREE - FIVE. OR if you've explored to your satisfaction, move on to the next section, sharing this with your partner(s).**

**(SEVEN) Read over all of your lists. Select the full statement sequences from step FIVE that feel most resonant and important to share with your partner(s).**

### Part Two: Defining Success List Poem, Team Exercise:

This portion of the exercise jumps off from the prior solo writing exercise. You may wish to have a new sheet of paper for this next section.

**(ONE) Give each partner space to read aloud the full statements that they selected in step SEVEN of the solo portion of this exercise.**

→ It may be helpful to share in a way that the text can also be referenced and shared, via shared google doc, or written out on butcher paper, for example.

**(TWO) Discuss what feels resonant, aligned, or at odds between what was shared.**

**(THREE) Together, create a new list of three statements, that completes the phrase, "Success for us could look like..."**

Success for us could look like \_\_\_\_\_

Success for us could look like \_\_\_\_\_

Success for us could look like \_\_\_\_\_

To read some examples from the Civic Imagination Stations pilot cohort, jump back to page 40.

## Project Iteration Worksheet

*Questions to support you and your partner(s) in exploring the what, the how, & the commitments you are making to one another. You might explore all three sections in one session together, or break these up over time.*

*Depending on your process and the collaborators you've engaged, it may be beneficial to explore some questions with only internal stakeholders, while others might be useful to engage in a conversation with external stakeholders and collaborators as well.*

**THE WHAT: Questions to explore with your partner(s) to expand, revise, and deepen what you might create together. You might use these questions to facilitate a team discussion, or answer them separately and share your answers.**

- What goals or themes keep returning in our conversations?
  
- What aspect of the artist's practice are most suited to the community we seek to support? What facets of the artist's practice most intrigue or excite us, even if we're not yet sure why?
  
- What about the community challenge or aspiration we hope to address has gained some clarity through out discussions?
  
- When we revisit an expanded concept of literacy, and we think about all the different literacies necessary to make up a healthy and equitable community, which modes of literacy (see page 11) stand out for us?
  
- Which ones connect with the most urgent needs we have observed in our community?

**THE HOW: After your “what” begins to gain some clarity, use these questions to explore how you might accomplish your vision together:**

- What does a process timeline/plan that prioritizes discovery and community input look like?
  
- How does our pace or sense of urgency need to exist in relation to making space for curiosity and emergence in our process?
  
- What process decisions can be made with internal stakeholders (our lead partner team), and what decisions must involve community participation?

**COMMITMENTS: Questions to explore together, prior to the start of your work, so you have them to refer back to if/when things get bumpy.**

- What are some reasons why we might get stuck in our work/process together?
  
- How would we, as our best versions of ourselves, handle those stuck moments?
  
- How might our everyday, non-best self, respond and why?
  
- What commitments might we make to each other to invite our best selves into moments of group stuckness?
  
- How might we hold ourselves accountable to those commitments?



## Appendix C: Public Engagement Tools

*A small pool of our favorite tools/exercises for hosting community conversations.*

*We offer a basic way to structure the exercise for each, and also heartily encourage you to adapt and evolve these exercises to suit your purposes and the identities of those you will be engaging with. Deepening on purpose, all of these exercises can be adapted and structured thoughtfully to open a meeting, close a meeting, or fit anywhere in between.*

Exercise One: Find Someone Who.....	66
Exercise Two: Sociometrics .....	67
Exercise Three: Where I'm From .....	69

## EXERCISE ONE: Find Someone Who.... (fill in the name)

**This version of “Find Someone Who...” comes from Willa Taylor through Khanisha Foster, a fabulous California-based director and teaching artist.**

This is a great way for participants to see their similarities and discover what they have in common. It is also a low-stakes way to get people talking and learning everyone’s names.

Before the session, create a list of statements that will apply to some members of your group and are aligned with the objectives of your meeting/workshop/event.

Print the statements on a sheet of paper, enough for each participant.

Group instructions for the exercise:

- I’m going to give you a few minutes to mingle within this group.
- Introduce yourselves to one another, and share the statements on your sheets.
- If a statement applies to you, sign the sheet at that statement.
- Your goal is to introduce yourself and get as many signatures next to those statements as you can.

Facilitation notes:

- Set a time limit to encourage people to mingle with intention.
- To avoid having people try to fill out their sheets by talking to only a couple of people, limit the number of signatures they collect to one or two per person
- The game ends with the first person to collect all the signatures they need.

Some statements to help get you started:

Find Someone Who....

1. Has a birthmark \_\_\_\_\_
2. Has more than one sibling \_\_\_\_\_
3. Loves chocolate cake \_\_\_\_\_
4. Has a pet \_\_\_\_\_
5. Lives with a grandparent \_\_\_\_\_
6. Has lived in another state/country \_\_\_\_\_
7. Plays a musical instrument \_\_\_\_\_
8. Loves to fish/hunt \_\_\_\_\_
9. Has a pet \_\_\_\_\_
10. Cooks/bakes when stressed \_\_\_\_\_
11. Has at least one tattoo \_\_\_\_\_
12. Uses the library more than once a week \_\_\_\_\_
13. Is a second generation resident of our town \_\_\_\_\_
14. Has never tried sushi \_\_\_\_\_

## EXERCISE TWO: Sociometrics

These activities come from Willa Taylor through Jennifer Nelson, Rebecca Rice, and the talented artistic ensemble of Living Stage Theatre Company at Arena Stage.

Sociometry is a way a group of people can visibly take measure of themselves. These activities can be used as icebreakers, as a way to explore decisions, or as scaffolding into more challenging conversations.

Here are three exercises we've used with people as young as 8 and as old as 98.

They are simple and easily adaptable, in fact, we heartily encourage it.

### **Sociometrics Option One: Line-up / Continuum**

A continuum – or a line-up – is a great way to start. Have people line up between two points in a room. These points at either end represent extremes and in between are a range of views that are possible.

Basic Prompt Examples:

Line up according to height from shortest to tallest

Line up according to birthdays. (January here, December down there)

Line up according to your love of desserts (a lot at this end, no love for desserts at this end)

Prompts can be created to gather information you are interested in or can be crafted strictly as conversation starters:

- (At one end) I use the library a lot//I never use the library (at the other end)
- (At one end) I believe in love at first sight//I don't believe in love at first sight (at the other end)
- (At one end) I believe public education is crucially important and should always be a funding priority//I believe schools should have to prove their worth and should be funded in relation to that worth (at the other end)

Once people have placed themselves on the continuum, ask them to share, if they are comfortable, why they chose to be where they are.

### **Sociometrics Option Two: Four Corners**

To give participants more structured options, four corners is a good activity.

Identify four corners/spaces in a room and instruct people they can only choose one space during the game.

Then assign each "corner" a value.

Basic example:

(Prompt) If I could choose, my superpower would be...

(Corners) Invisibility; teleportation; telepathy; flight

Similar to the Line-Up, once people have selected their corner, ask them to share why they chose what they did.

Deepened prompt examples:

(Prompt) When it comes to conflict, I-

(Corners) run away from it, go rushing towards it, am deeply uncomfortable and simply shut down, deal with it in a mostly healthy way.

(Prompt) The biggest challenge our community faces is-

(Corners) failing education system, mental health crisis, gun violence, voter apathy

### **Sociometrics Option Three: Human Mapping**

At the beginning of your event or meeting, you can have participants create and use a “human map”.

Use signage to designate the north, south, east and west compass points of your location, then invite the participants to spread out around the room and stand relative to where they came from to get to your location.

This is a great way of getting people talking and introducing themselves, and it gives the facilitator a good idea of the geographic diversity in the room.

Prompts for the map, as they are for Four Corners and the Line-up, can be scaffolded up so that the prompts elicit even more information.

For example, you could suggest that the map, instead of being of your local area, is a map of the world.

Then ask people to go to where their great ancestors lived/came from.

Or ask them to go to where they most want to live or vacation.

Or ask where they fell in love.

Or had a sad day.

Or learned a great lesson...

### EXERCISE THREE: Where I'm From

This version of the “Where I’m From” exercise was iterated and shared by Michael Rohd, inspired by earlier versions he learned from folks including Rives Collins, Alison Carey, Viola Spolin and Reverend Chris Von Lobedan.

This exercise is a great way to start to get to know a group of people and/or explore individual’s and a group’s connection to a topic or theme, outside of an open conversation. It can be structured as a warm-up or brainstorm to lead into large or small group conversations or further activity. You can play with 10-100 people, though the optimal size is 20-40.

This exercise can be explored in person or online, adaptation for your setting is encouraged.

It can be played with raised hands, or standing and moving. We offer the version with standing and moving here:

- **Imagine we are a group of anywhere from 10-100 people (optimal size is 20-40). Sitting in a circle of chairs. But there are fewer chairs than there are people. There is one person in the middle.**
- **Usually the facilitator would start in the middle, explaining the rules of the game, and then begins to play.**
- **The playing is simple.**
  - The person in the middle completes the statement “Where I’m From...”
  - If this is true for anyone in the circle, they stand and find a new place in the circle. The person left “in the middle” offers a new “Where I’m From” statement.
  - Prompt the group: If you don’t want to respond to a particular statement, don’t.
- **Each round, the quality or the focus of the “Where I’m from...” statement deepens.**
  - Starting with easier/less vulnerable offerings, scaffolding up to more complex offerings, if it feels possible to do so with your group.
- **Round One: Place**
  - Prompt: Complete the statement, “Where I’m from ...” in regards to place. Choose for yourself how you’d like to answer, maybe from your childhood home, maybe from the place you live now. Whatever you choose. And, you can choose differently with each statement.
  - Example, “Where I’m from, there is a body of water.”
  - If this is true for anyone they stand, and find a new spot in the circle. The person who gets stuck in the middle, offers the next “Where I’m from...”

- **Round Two: Adding in what makes you the individual human being you are**
  - Where I'm from, (what makes you YOU in relation to where you are from)
  - Example, "Where I'm from we go to a place of worship every week"
  - Might be about faith, culture, family of origin. Anything that contributes to making you the person that you are, however you see that.
- **Round Three: Add "I believe" or "We believe"**
  - "Where I'm from I believe..."
  - "Where I'm from we believe..."
  - Example, Where I'm from, I believe being true to my values is important.
  - Example, Where we're from, we believe that food is really important.

#### **Additional coaching/ ways of playing that are often helpful:**

- If you don't want to play, you don't have to move/raise your hand.
- If you get stuck in the middle, you can call a "sub" and ask the group to help you swap out.
- While playing, resist the urge to ask for clarification. Just interpret the statement as it lands for you.
- You choose where you are from, how you play. It can even change from statement to statement. And if you don't like this game, just stay seated. No one will know. You choose how you want to play.

#### **Virtual Meeting Adaptation**

- Folks simply raise their actual hands if the statement is true for them, rather than standing and finding a new chair.
- Current speaker can pick someone to go next from those who have raised their hands. If someone didn't raise their hand, you can't pick them to take the next "Where I'm from..." offering.

## Appendix D: Further Reading

*(A non-exhaustive list, but additional threads to follow...)*

*Belonging: A Culture of Place*

By bell hooks

Published by Routledge

*The City We Make Together: City Council Meeting's Primer for Participation*

By Aaron Landsman, Mallory Catlett

Published by University of Iowa Press

[Handbook for Artists Working in Community](#)

By Springboard for the Arts

Published by Springboard for the Arts

*Holding Change: the way of emergent strategy facilitation and mediation*

By adrienne maree brown

Published by AK Press

[Literacy For All: Adult Literacy through Libraries](#)

By American Library Association

Published digitally by American Library Association

*Remapping Performance: Common Ground, Uncommon Partners*

By Jan Cohen-Cruz

Published by Palgrave Macmillan

*Teaching To Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*

By bell hooks

Published by Routledge

*Theatre for Community, Conflict and Dialogue*

By Michael Rohd

Published by Heinemann Drama

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