



PLACES, PERCEPTIONS, AND PUBLIC VALUE:  
BUILDING RURAL ARTS PARTICIPATION THROUGH  
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Brittany N. Andrew

Major paper submitted to the faculty of Goucher College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts in Arts Administration  
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## Abstract

<b>Title of Thesis:</b>	PLACES, PERCEPTIONS, AND PUBLIC VALUE: BUILDING RURAL ARTS PARTICIPATION THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
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Arts organizations looking to serve rural communities must address challenges unique to rural audiences. Through collaboration with organically congregational centers, arts organizations can capitalize on the particular resources that are available in rural communities and mitigate barriers to art participation in rural areas. Arts organizations that create partnerships with these community gathering spaces are able to provide more arts programming to rural residents while insuring institutional longevity through the building of public value.

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This paper is dedicated to Laurie and Jeffery Smith, who taught me that I could accomplish anything with hard work, and to Ronald Andrew Jr., whose unfailing love and patience made this entire venture possible.

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## Introduction

There is no universal method for successfully delivering arts opportunities to a community. All communities have different needs, histories, and resources. Each community exhibits its own character and challenges that arts administrators must consider when developing arts opportunities.

Rural areas offer a unique set of challenges for arts organizations seeking to serve those communities. Due to the geographic isolation and expanse of rural settings, access to transportation, jobs, healthcare, and general public services are a challenge for residents of rural communities. A study on geography and healthcare utilization found that proximity and poor transportation had a direct negative effect on participation in routine healthcare services (Arcury et al. 135). The same is likely true for arts participation. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) *2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* found that residents of non-metro areas attend arts performances at a lower rate than their metropolitan counterparts. The study attributed much of the difference in participation to variations in access and opportunity, as metropolitan residents have “greater access,” with 88% of traditional arts venues being located in urban areas (Silber et al. 90; *Come As You Are* 3). Other limiting factors for arts organizations seeking to serve rural communities include a lack of arts education and a lack of higher education among

rural residents, both of which have been found to have a direct negative correlation with arts attendance (*Come As You Are* 11). These factors contribute to the challenges arts administrators seeking to serve rural communities face in designing relevant arts programming.

Despite limited access to formal arts venues, rural residents are interested in participating in the arts. Rural residents participate in informal arts activities, or “creative activities [that] fall outside of traditional nonprofit and commercial arts experiences” (Wali et al. viii), at similar rates to their urban counterparts (*Come As You Are* 8). Informal arts encompass a wide range of cultural and utilitarian crafts that include but are not limited to knitting, sewing, weaving, jewelry making, and metal work. Often those who practice informal arts do not self-identify as artists. These art forms are often characterized by the casual location they are produced in and the spontaneity with which they occur. Examples of informal arts and the spaces they occur include singing in a church choir, writing poetry at the local library, painting at home, or quilting at the park (Wali et al. 3). Rural areas may not always have a formal arts venue such as a concert hall or a museum, but often have places of social assembly such as libraries, schools, fire halls, and fraternal clubs. These organically congregational centers are epicenters of social interaction and are often used in multiple ways within a rural community. Such places, already established in the community, present a unique opportunity for arts organizations looking to serve rural communities to harness existing resources and reach their audiences. By partnering with organically congregational centers, nonprofit arts

organizations in rural communities can reduce barriers to participation and provide more opportunities to create and experience community-relevant art.

In a collaborative effort with organically congregational centers, arts organizations in rural communities can more effectively meet the specific needs of the communities they serve. By integrating arts programming into the existing infrastructure of the rural community, as opposed to developing a single-purpose arts institution, arts organizations serving rural areas can foster relationships with a greater number of people, in places that are not intimidating to individuals who may otherwise never visit an art center or gallery. In the long run, arts programming through these partnerships may also be more cost effective, possibly allowing organizations to share overhead costs and financial resources. Partnerships between arts organizations serving rural communities and organically congregational centers will ideally lead to more meaningful community engagement and result in an increase of arts participation within rural communities.

Chapter I will define the broad range of rural characteristics and analyze the assets and resources available to rural arts organizations. Chapter II will discuss the barriers to arts participation as well as the unique challenges arts organizations looking to serve rural communities face. Chapter III will examine how successful partnerships can occur by exploring the importance of place within rural communities, creative placemaking, and public support, as well as how these elements can provide the best means for arts organizations to better use resources and expand arts participation in rural communities.

## Chapter I RURAL DESCRIBED

### Population Density

The term *rural* is difficult to define. Often researchers and policy makers will “define rural as a particular kind of socio-geographic place” and focus on a particular attribute, such as population size or dependence on agriculture (Brown and Schafft 4). Different branches of the United States government employ different definitions to maximize the relevance of their research. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), for example, adopts the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) definition that relies on counties or county-equivalent units to track economic and population trends (“What is Rural?”). The fact that multiple rural definitions exist demonstrates that *rural* and *urban* are complex concepts that encompass a variety of social, demographic, economic, and cultural attributes (“What is Rural?”; Brown and Schafft 4). Just as the United States geographic landscape varies, so do its rural communities. A Montana town with a one-room school house is very different from a small Maryland municipality of farmers and watermen, but they are both decidedly rural. Because of the difficulty of creating a standard definition, small changes in definition can have a large impact when it comes to research and policy making (“What is Rural?”).

Much of the research involving arts participation in and access to the arts uses a population density definition of *rural* established by the United States Census Bureau. This paper will also use this definition for purposes of consistency. This definition of rural is contingent on the definition of urban. The ever-changing settlement pattern of Americans has led the US Census Bureau to define an urbanized area as 50,000 or more people, and urban clusters as having at least 2,500 but less than 50,000 (Ratcliffe et al.). The Bureau examines the total population threshold, population density, land use, and distance as the criteria for urban identification. Rural encompasses everything else that does not fit into the categories of urbanized area or urban clusters (Ratcliffe et al.). This means that rural communities can range from “densely settled small towns”, to “sparsely populated and remote areas”, to “housing subdivisions on the fringe of urban areas” (Ratcliffe et al.). Compared to urban areas, rural places have a smaller and less dense population, are not built up, and cover greater landmass (Brown and Schafft 5).

Some researchers use the terms “metro” and “non-metro” to delineate urban and rural respectively (“What is Rural?”). The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) utilizes these terms in their reports. Though “non-metro” and “rural” are not identical according to the OMB, there is significant overlap in the definitions of the two terms. The overlap is significant enough that it may be possible to draw conservative speculations for rural communities from non-metro data.

## Socio-Economic Status and Diversity

Differences between rural and urban communities “often mask important diversity within the rural and urban categories themselves” (Brown and Schafft 8). Though not as diverse as metropolitan areas, today’s rural communities are often home to more racial and ethnic diversity than popular culture would lead one to believe (Brown and Schafft 122). Rural communities “more closely resemble a patchwork” and significant variations in economic structure, race, and culture exist within rural communities (Davis and Marema), which adds to the complexity of defining them. The dynamics of rural communities are changing. Such changes may include an in-migration of retirees and vacation homeowners, families who move to rural areas to raise children, or an increase of people whose first language is not English (Ewell and Warlum 22). As rural communities change, arts organizations that serve rural communities should be cognizant of how these changes may affect the arts organization and its programming. Partnering with organically congregational centers can provide a means to help arts organizations remain relevant in light of community changes. By infusing art into the community via established social centers, arts organizations may be able reach newly emerging age and cultural demographics within the rural community. A credible congregational center plays a significant role for new residents, and may provide a viable outlet for arts organizations to connect with new demographics.

Educational attainment tends to be lower in rural communities compared to their urban counterparts. High school graduation rates among rural students are comparable to urban graduation rates, however only 56% of rural students go on to

attend college compared to 65% of urban students. Of that 56%, only 70% of rural students return to live in rural areas (Brown and Schafft 107). Much of the education gap is attributed to employment opportunities on two levels. Historically, rural residents were able to find jobs in “resource extraction and manufacturing industries that offered competitive wages” without the need for a college education (Brown and Schafft 64). This is not necessarily the case anymore, as rural economies have shifted away from these industries, and two thirds of the job growth in the US between 1984 and 2000 required a bachelor’s degree or higher (Brown and Schafft 64, 108). On the other hand, there is a dearth of employment opportunities for highly educated individuals in rural areas, resulting in an out-migration of educated youth (Brown and Schafft 12; Stevens 9). The remaining rural adults “on average have lower levels of educational attainment than their urban counterparts” (Brown and Schafft 107).

This is critical information for arts organizations serving rural communities, as higher educational attainment is a major positive predictor of arts attendance among adults (Blume-Kohout et al. 18). Individuals of lower educational attainment who were inclined to participate in the arts, but chose not to, are more likely to cite that the venue location was too difficult to get to as their reason for not attending than those who have a bachelor’s degree or higher (Blume-Kohout et al. 19). Arts organizations seeking to serve rural communities who partner with organically congregational centers may be able to maximize their reach to potential arts audiences in rural communities by eliminating barriers related to venue location.



Poverty rates in rural areas are consistently greater than those in urban areas. In 2014, the *American Community Survey* found that an estimated 18.1% of the rural population was living in poverty, compared to the urban rate of 15.1% and the national average of 15.5% (Kusmin 3). Historically, this data is relatively unchanged as chronic poverty has plagued rural regions for generations (Davis and Marema), though data compiled from the *2011-2015 American Community Surveys* may show a change in this trend (“New Census Data”). Poverty rates in non-metropolitan areas has ranged between 13% and 18% since the 1970s, which has been consistently higher than metropolitan areas by three and five percentage points (Brown and Schafft 193). Like educational attainment, higher income is a predictor of arts attendance (Blume-Kohout et al. 19). Similar to individuals with lower educational attainment, individuals with lower income are more likely to cite difficulty of access to be the primary barrier to participation (Blume-Kohout et al. 20). Arts organizations that serve rural communities can mitigate the access barrier by partnering with the places where residents naturally gather.

### Character and Attitudes

Rural communities are often characterized by the land. Rural areas cover 93% of the U.S. landmass, but only 19.3% of the population resides there (“New Census Data”). The economic, social, and cultural identity of rural communities are “bound up in their land and landscapes” as agriculture and natural resource extraction have historically had a significant impact on the livelihood of rural

communities (Brown and Schafft 81). As a result, rural communities tend to be “deeply linked to place” (Stevens 7).

People in rural communities are accustomed to working with less. Major funders tend to give more to urban areas than rural areas because of the population density, rationalizing that the funds will reach more people (Love). However, this rationale ignores the level of impact the funds could potentially have on a small community, as expenses incurred in rural areas can often be relatively higher than urban settings. The expenditures of the average rural household account for a larger percentage of their income than their urban counterparts (“Urban and rural”). Rural households spend a greater percentage of their income on common needs such as food, utilities, healthcare, fuel, and transportation than urban households (“Urban and rural”), as there is often the added cost to ship goods and services to the area. Consequently, arts organizations looking to serve rural communities must also function with limited resources.

Rural residents tend to be socially conservative in nature and risk averse (Brown and Schafft 7; Stevens 8). The byproduct of geographic separation, rural residents tend to be content with what they have and do not feel the need to look for more (Love). This sentiment permeates rural communities and can take time for newer organizations to overcome, providing another reason why arts organizations in rural areas should integrate arts programming into places that rural residents already know and use. Due to the differences in resources and demographics, arts organizations serving rural communities must often behave differently from those in urban settings. Arts organizations in rural communities can be fiscally prudent,

conservative, and practical (Stevens 8), values which are often found in rural settings.

### Arts Participation

Attendance at art activities and art creation are two different methods of experiencing the arts. Art is a process and a product, both of which are equally important (Gard et al. 86). For this reason, the definition of art participation will encompass both attendance at art-related events and active art making.

The *2008 and 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* conducted by the NEA found that attendance at art museums and performing arts events was greater among urban residents than their rural counterparts (*Come As You Are 2*; Silber et al. 90). The exceptions to this were craft fairs and visual arts festivals, which were noted to often occur in non-metro areas (Silber et al. 90). Much of the disparity in arts attendance between urban and rural areas can be attributed to relative access and opportunity. Eighty-eight percent of traditional arts venues, such as nonprofit performing arts centers and art museums, are located in urban areas (*Come As You Are 3*). As a result, urban residents have greater local access to arts experiences, whereas rural residents likely must travel greater distances to visit their nearest arts venue, or travel outside of their community to experience a traditional arts venue.

However, when looking at informal arts engagement, the participation gap between urban and rural residents virtually disappears (*Come As You Are 3*). Non-metro residents are more likely to participate in traditional crafts such as

leatherwork, metalwork, woodwork, knitting, and sewing, which are often considered informal arts (Silber et al. 90). This would imply that rural communities are not void of art activities, nor do they lack interest in art; instead, rural communities use resources and experience art differently from urban communities. These informal art activities may be difficult to quantify, as many who participate in informal arts do not self-identify as artists, nor do they identify their craft as art (Novak-Leonard 7-8). Informal arts are also less likely to be measured because, unlike corporate or nonprofit arts organizations that are enumerated by the Census Bureau's Economic Census and by IRS Form 990 filings respectively, informal arts are unaffiliated and as a result have historically been unaccounted for in research data. However, recent studies such as the NEA's *Come As You Are* and *2012 SPPA*, The Chicago Center for Arts Policy's *The Informal Arts: Finding Cohesion, Capacity and Other Cultural Benefits in Unexpected Places*, and The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and Irvine Foundation's *The Cultural Lives of Californians* have made strides to measure the participation and impact of informal arts, recognizing that arts engagement is evolving and measuring attendance at formal arts events does not capture the full picture of arts participation.

Where rural residents participate in art is important for arts organizations looking to serve rural communities to understand. Often places that are not designated art spaces such as churches, schools, and libraries are providing arts opportunities for rural residents. For example, 21% of adults in rural areas attend performing arts activities at churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions

(*Come As You Are* 9). Arts organizations can expand arts opportunities by capitalizing on the existing venues that are supplying arts activities in the rural community.

### Resources

Rural communities have a “bounty of assets” that are largely overlooked (Davis and Marema). A common misconception is that outside help is needed for arts participation, funding, and support (Schupbach). However, “the resources that an organization needs...are not limited to dollars and staff time and abilities” but also include intangible resources “such as leadership, knowledge of target populations, and visibility and reputation in the community” (McCarthy and Jinnett 49). Though arts organizations in rural communities may have fewer financial resources available, they tend to have a strong volunteer base, access to natural resources, and open space (Stevens 23; Davis and Marema).

The physical infrastructure existent in rural communities is a viable asset to arts organizations. The SPPA found that non-metro residents attend arts events outside of traditional arts venues at a similar rate to urban dwellers (Silber et al. 90). Non-traditional arts venues included schools, churches, and community centers (Silber et al. 90). This would indicate a creative use of existing resources within a rural community, which may not have a theatre but does have a school gymnasium, to provide an accessible art space.

The multifunctionality of places and spaces in rural communities serves both the economic and the social wellbeing of a rural community. Rural communities

have utilized integrated spaces to improve the quality of rural life for over a century. Grange halls, for instance, became centers for social and economic activity in rural communities in the late 1800s. The Grange was founded as a fraternal group for farmers to protect the interests of the farming community, much like a workers' union ("What is the Grange?"). However, "social and agricultural interests grew side by side" (Patten 9) and Grange halls became gathering places for a variety of community events including educational activities, dances, town meetings, and other entertainment ("What is the Grange?"). Similarly, the Social Center or Community Center movement became prevalent in the early 1900s in both rural and urban areas. Dramatist Alfred Arvold stated "the fundamental principle back of the community center is the democratization of all art so the common people can appreciate it, science so they can use it, government so they can take part in it, and recreation so they can enjoy it" (Arvold, "The Community" 4). The overarching goal of the community center was a holistic approach to "make the common interests the great interests" (4), giving the people an opportunity to come together and share. Arvold advocated for the creation of community centers as a solution to the social starvation of country existence. In this respect, Arvold created The Little Country Theater to function as a neighborhood laboratory "to reveal the inner life of the country community in all its color and romance, especially in its relation to the solution of the problems in country life" (Arvold, *The Little* 64-65). He designed The Little Country Theatre so that it could be replicated in any rural community space (Arvold, *The Little* 56). Meanwhile, under the Smith-Lever law of 1914, the Agricultural Extension Service was created for the purpose of helping "to develop

better economic, cultural, social, recreational, and community life among people living in farming areas in the United States” (Patten 8). The Extension Service recognized the need for integration in rural life, noting the unique blending of art with handicraft and discussion of farm problems that made rural arts programs unique and beneficial (Patten 16, 14).

By housing multiple activities or organizations, a rural space can minimize financial expenditures through cost sharing, which is often necessary as resources are scarce. The spaces also provide social interactions that are vital to rural life (Arvold, *The Little* 20), as activity consolidation means more foot traffic for the space. Collaborations between arts organizations and existing places in rural communities can have both cost sharing and resource sharing benefits, while also providing means for social interaction. The characteristics of these spaces can mitigate barriers to arts participation, discussed in more detail in Chapter II.

People are one of the most valuable resources of a small community (Lambe 5). Human resources such as skills and expertise of individuals can often be overlooked. Much like rural spaces, rural residents will often play multiple roles within the community, generally out of necessity. In-migration of older populations, such as retirees, poses a potential resource opportunity for arts organizations serving rural communities. New residents need to establish new relationships, and older in-migrants often will do so through volunteering and joining a variety of local and cultural organizations (Brown and Schafft 115). Retirees often bring skills and expertise that may otherwise be difficult for a rural organization to obtain (115). Arts organizations that collaborate with other prominent community organizations

can build a positive institutional reputation and public value, the public's collective favor regarding an organization. A positive local reputation through partnerships may attract these skilled individuals to the arts organization. Partnerships can bring together the different physical and human resources of the arts organization and the congregational center, assembling a wealth of knowledge and greater capacity than working independently (Walker 4; Markusen and Gadwa 21).

Local Arts Agencies provide a valuable resource for arts organizations serving rural communities. These private or local government agencies promote, support, and develop the arts at the local level. The purpose of the Local Arts Agency (LAA) in the rural setting is "to foster an active concern for the community in enterprises dedicated to art, and seek to add art dimensions to presently operating private and public agencies" (Gard et al. 8). LAAs recognize that placement and integration of arts programming in the community are essential for the wellbeing of the small community (Gard et al. 24, 28). As of 2015, Americans for the Arts estimates there are about 4,500 LAAs nationwide. LAAs have grown in number exponentially since 1969, this growth speaks volumes for the effectiveness and importance of an arts presence in local communities (Ewell and Warlum 21).

No two LAAs are alike. They take many shapes and fit the needs and opportunities of their distinct communities (Ewell and Warlum 27). The Talbot County Arts Council in Talbot County, Maryland, for example, provides only fiduciary support for the existing arts organizations and artists of Talbot County. The Talbot County Arts Council recognizes that they do not need to use resources to provide arts programming, since the existing arts organizations are well-established



and filling the programming needs of the community it serves. Thus, the Council provides the financial and leadership needs of the arts organizations so that each organization can do what they do best. The Council does not have a physical location, but instead borrows space from the county once a month to meet and vote, another cost-saving and community-building measure. In contrast, the neighboring LAA in Dorchester County, Maryland, plays multiple roles as the primary arts presence and provider of arts programming in the county. The Dorchester County Arts Council allocates fund for arts activities in the community and runs the county arts center, which was the only nonprofit arts organization in the county until 2015. In many cases, such as Dorchester County, the LAA is the only source of art support in a rural community.

## Chapter II

### CHALLENGES FACING ARTS ORGANIZATIONS IN RURAL SETTINGS

The decision to participate in the arts is multidimensional. Individuals weigh out their options and base their decisions whether to participate on a variety of barriers and motivations, which will depend on the individual. Individuals residing in rural communities have their own unique set of challenges that affect their decision to participate in the arts.

#### Perceptual Barriers

Tastes and values vary among individuals. When deciding to participate in an arts activity, individuals first determine if the benefit of participating outweighs the cost. Each individual will value the activity differently based on their personal beliefs and influences of their peers. These beliefs and influences can lead to perceptual barriers, defined as “influences that include both their own attitudes towards the arts...and their understanding of the social norms of their reference groups with respect to participation” (McCarthy and Jinnett 25). Perceptual barriers must first be addressed to determine whether an individual is inclined to participate (25).

One factor preventing individuals from participating in the arts is the perception that the arts are not inclusive. People who feel that they do not belong are not likely to participate (McCarthy and Jinnett 33). The appearance of exclusion

is often unintentional by arts organization and varies based on the community. A reputation for creative insight and innovation in one part of a community may be viewed as insularity in another part of the community (Walker 6). Examples of this may include an organization that brands itself as prestigious only to be viewed as elitist by the blue-collar residents of the local community; a venue located on the historically segregated rich side of town leads the economically depressed population to feel unwelcomed; or the local gallery consistently presents art that is not relevant to the interests of the community residents who then find no meaning in the art or the gallery.

Language can often create an unintentional barrier to arts participation. An example in a Chicago study on informal arts describes a Polish/Irish actor who worked as a stage manager for what he called a “professional” theatre. He was too intimidated by the professional atmosphere that he never acted, afraid that he was not skilled enough to participate. Ultimately, he ended up quitting to perform at a self-described “community” theatre (Wali et al. 68). The theater’s use of the more inclusive term *community* made it more inviting to the actor. Though both theaters provided high quality art, it was the actor’s perception of the place, influenced by the language, that determined arts participation (Wali et al. 69). Additionally, a staff member of the Colorado Creative Industries’ (CCI) Creative Districts program recalls a conversation with a rural city manager, who told her he felt the Creative Districts program was particularly viable in rural areas because of the CCI’s use of the word *creative* instead of *arts* (Ewell and Leonard). He is quoted as saying “*Creative* is a word that invited you in. *Art* is a word that shuts you out” (Ewell and Leonard). This

conversation illustrates anecdotal evidence of the importance of language, its profound effect on people's perception of a place, and how that perception may affect arts participation.

Often the preconceived notion of what an art space is can be a barrier to arts participation. The symbolic importance that people attribute to particular places can be a driving factor in arts participation (Brown and Novak-Leonard 9). People may feel uncomfortable entering a designated art space, due to their unfamiliarity with art or, in the case of the Polish/Irish actor, fear of embarrassment by appearing unskilled in art. In fact, more people attend arts events in non-art designated community spaces than traditional arts venues (Walker and Sherwood 2), as people are more willing to participate in the arts when they are in spaces where they feel comfortable (Wali et al. 72). People's expectations and associations differ based on the setting. Places like parks, libraries, church basements, building lobbies, and restaurants were found to be neutral, "unpretentious, familiar, or intimate in nature," which allowed art participants to feel a "sense of belonging and ease" (Wali et al. 72). Arts activities in non-art designated spaces challenge the preconceived notions of an art space in people's minds, creating a safe space for people to engage in the arts.

Rural communities have a wealth of informal spaces where residents are already engaging in activities. By utilizing spaces outside of a traditional arts venue through partnerships with organically congregational centers, arts organizations in rural communities can free themselves "of the accumulated performance behaviors that can feel inhibitive and stifling to some patrons" (Reidy 11). Altering the location

of arts activities can alter the public perception of the organization. Designing arts programs in these natural gathering spaces can allow the arts organization to create art experiences that speak to the community's values in places where the community wants to be involved (Reidy 5).

Much of the inclusion problem sometimes associated with arts organizations and arts activities falls away when considering informal arts. The nature of informal arts practice and the spaces where they occur eliminates many of the barriers to arts participation (Wali et al. xvi, 77). The authors of a study on informal arts termed it "the metaphorical space for informality," noting that spaces in which informal arts occur are found to be approachable and engaging (Wali et al. 63). The inclusive nature of the socially acceptable locales that characterize informal arts participation foster a high degree of diversity among participants in not just skill level, but age, ethnicity, and socio-occupational status (Wali et al. 77-78, 84). Arts organizations in rural areas can use some of the engaging aspects of informal art participation by partnering with organically congregational centers to reach a broader and more diverse audience within the community.

### Practical Barriers

Once perceptual barriers are addressed, an individual is disposed to participate in the arts. However, for those inclined to participate in the arts, several obstacles, often called practical barriers, may still hinder them from participating (McCarthy and Jinnett 28). Naturally, the arts and the artistic process are the primary focus of arts organizations, but individuals have an array of motivations

and barriers that drive their decisions whether or not to participate (Blume-Kohout et al. 4). Some practical barriers may include cost of admission, timing of the event, distance traveled, parking difficulty, or simply not having someone to go with. It is vital that arts administrators are aware of these practical barriers when designing arts programs for their community.

A lack of time was the most commonly reported barrier to arts attendance (Blume-Kohout et al. 2). However, the *American Time Use Survey* found that 95% of Americans age fifteen and older engage in leisure activities an average of five hours daily. These activities include, but are not limited to, watching television, exercising, and socializing (Blume-Kohout et al. 4). More often than not, people spend their free time in places other than the arts. Arts organizations are challenged with designing programs that tap into people's personal values and preferences to compete with these other activities (Blume-Kohout et al. 4). Rather than competing with other activities, integrating arts programming into the places that individuals are spending their free time can be an opportunity for arts organizations in rural communities to better reach their constituents.

A study published by the NEA recognized that rural residents also face a series of socioeconomic barriers, including fewer educational opportunities and less exposure to arts education, both of which have a direct correlation to arts attendance (*Come As You Are* 11). The *2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* found that individuals of low socioeconomic status, defined as those with at most a high school education and in the bottom half of the income distribution in the United States, consume the arts at a much lower rate. Interestingly, though

attendance is lower, the percentage of interested non-attendees - individuals who express interest in attending art activities yet did not attend - is higher among less educated individuals than those with bachelor's degrees or higher (Blume-Kohout et al. 18). This is significant in that art interest is likely present in rural communities, but a practical barrier is preventing them from engaging.

Though many practical barriers are experienced across demographic groups, some are more relevant to a specific group, such as lower income adults and lesser educated adults. A National Endowment for the Arts report on barriers and motivations affecting arts attendance found that the apparent education- and income-related gap in arts attendance is not due to lack of interest, but rather a distinct set of barriers that lower income adults and lesser educated adults experience, such as greater difficulty of access to arts venues and cost (Blume-Kohout et al. 4, 19). As rural communities are often described as having a greater poverty rate and less educational attainment than their urban counterparts (Brown and Schafft 193; 107), it would be reasonable to assume that some of these low income and less educated individuals would reside in rural areas. This could be an important distinction for arts organizations in rural communities who are challenged with increasing their attendance. The implications of the study are that low income and less educated individuals want to participate, but for some reason choose not to. Additionally, the motivations of low income and less educated individuals who participate in the arts vary. They are more often motivated to attend art activities as "a wish to support their communities, to celebrate their cultural heritage, or to gain knowledge and learn new things" (Blume-Kohout et al.

4, 19-20). To reach lower income and less educated adults, arts organizations need to be seen as an integral part of the community. By partnering with organically congregational centers, arts organizations can foster closer community ties and potentially reach the lower income and less educated demographics within the rural community.

A 2005 healthcare study analyzed the utilization of healthcare in rural communities. It found that geographic distance, access to a driver's license, and a lack of transportation options played a significant role in routine healthcare use (Arcury et al. 135). The study concluded that such geographic components significantly contribute to the health care access inequity in rural communities and argued for better policies to address these components to bridge the gap (Arcury et al. 152). A similar, if not more strident, argument could be made for the arts. Health care is perceived as a basic need of survival. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that basic needs must be satisfied before an individual is motivated to satisfy psychological and self-fulfillment needs such as creative endeavors (Maslow). People first need to be well and healthy to be inclined to participate in the arts. If distance is hindering access to a basic need such as health care, then it may be reasonable to assume that distance is affecting the less-urgent need of art. Mickey Love, Executive Director of the Dorchester Center for the Arts, observed that distance played a large role in the rural community. A twenty-minute commute to town was too much to entice many residents in the county to participate in arts and other events (Love).



Related to distance, difficulty of travel was also found to be a barrier to arts participation. The NEA's arts participation study *When Going Gets Tough* found that 37% of interested non-attendees chose not to attend a performance or exhibition in which they were interested because "the venue would prove too difficult to get to" (Blume-Kohout et al. 14). In addition to distance, rural residents face problems such as not owning a vehicle, poor road quality and lack of public transportation options (Arcury et al. 136; Davis) that may contribute to this. Partnerships with organically congregational centers will mitigate much of the distance related barriers by integrating art programming into the places people are already accessing. Partnerships can minimize and potentially eliminate the geographic gap between the individual and the art venue.

A study published by the NEA posed the question of whether barriers to the arts encountered by rural residents could be largely mitigated through touring and outreach programs, thus removing the geographic distance and other related hindrances (*Come As You Are* 11). If touring and outreach are the possible solution, then this implies that arts organizations serving rural communities are not located in places that rural residents find accessible. If arts organizations serving rural communities developed arts programming within the community's established infrastructure through partnering with organically congregation centers, those arts organizations would not need to do outreach or touring, as they would already have closed the distance between the arts organization and the rural residents they serve. Integrating arts programming into the existing community infrastructure removes

the sense of invasion and importation that can be inferred with touring and outreach programs, which can be met with resistance by rural residents.

For many, arts participation is a social activity. The most common motivation for arts attendance is being able to socialize with friends and family (Blume-Kohout et al. 9). For many adults, not having someone to go with was a significant barrier, “more important than the price of admission” (Blume-Kohout et al. 4). An NEA study found that, of adults who were interested in arts events but chose not to attend, one out of five stated they chose not to go because they did not have someone to go with (Blume-Kohout et al. 9). A study on arts participation in rural Montana discovered that having a shared experience with family and friends was one of the top reasons for arts attendance (Stevens 15). Grange halls and community centers were places not just to solve agricultural problems or create art, but were places for social engagement that were severely lacking in rural communities at the time. Organically congregational centers are social centers. They are places where individuals are currently interacting and socializing, making them prime locations for arts programming in rural communities. Performance arts events that take place in non-traditional arts spaces often incur more socialization (Reidy 11). Arts organizations that partner with organically congregational centers may be able to capitalize on the motivation of socialization by developing programs in places that are rich with social activity.

Though lack of time is a barrier to attendance, the leisure time that could be spent on the arts is challenged by ever expanding forms of entertainment and interests that compete for people’s time. Part of this is due to “the growth of digital

media and other forms of entertainment that rival the spectacle and power on which the arts once held a near-monopoly” (Reidy 10). Technology has made it easier for people to find entertainment on their own terms, as television and internet are widespread and accessible to nearly everyone (Stevens 9). The instant gratification and ease granted by entertainment technologies has decreased individuals’ attention spans and willingness to expend energy on activities such as attending an arts events (Reidy 10). Technology has made it so people do not have to travel to find arts and entertainment, and thus people make fewer trips to town to participate in the arts (Stevens 9). However, though technology has led to virtual online communities and mass telecommunication, place-based social relationships that are geographically bound still play a key role in meeting the everyday social needs of individuals (Brown and Schafft 36). Place-based relationships that form communities are vital to personal identity and a sense of belonging (36). Organic congregational centers in rural communities are epicenters of place-based social relationships. By integrating arts programming through partnership with organic congregational centers, arts organizations can play a role in meeting the daily needs of the people.

### Chapter III

## HOW TO PARTNER WITH ORGANICALLY CONGREGATIONAL CENTERS

Merriam-Webster defines a partner as “one associated with another, especially in an action”, or more simply “one that shares”. Essentially, a partnership is a collaboration between two or more parties, such as an arts organization and an organically congregational center, to accomplish a goal. Collaboration requires reciprocity, “necessitating a sharing” of ideas and exchanges (Goldbard 150). There must be some level of give and take between the arts organization and the organically congregational center, or else it becomes less of a partnership and more of a rental agreement. A collaboration should not be confused with a cooperation, though these terms may have similar dictionary definitions, the connotation varies. Often *cooperation* implies a more passive engagement or a sense of enabling, with minimal reciprocity. *Collaboration*, on the other hand, implies greater involvement and denotes a stronger share of responsibility and ownership.

#### Finding A Good Fit

Partnerships can mean different things to different organizations depending on their needs and resources (Cohen 15). Art organizations in rural communities need to find a partner within the community that has overlapping interests, missions, and resources (Markusen and Gadwa 22). A congregational center partner can come from a variety of sectors including educational, religious, human services, and community development (Walker 4).

It has been well established that rural communities are linked to place (Stevens 7) and that geographic barriers exist that hinder rural residents from participating in the arts as well as other activities. Thus, the location of a congregational center is important in allowing arts organizations to reach their intended audience. In addition, “missions of the collaborating organizations must be complementary, and expectations and assets must be made explicit for the union to work” (McCarthy 50). A common ground needs to exist between the partnering organizations.

Many small towns revolve around their schools (Stevens 34). Often the school building is a multifunctional center and a staple in the community. The Montana Rural Arts Project found that the “right place” in Montana rural communities is “most often the schools, followed by parks” (Stevens 44). Though this may be a good starting point for arts organizations in rural communities looking to build a partnership, it is important that arts organizations find a partner that will fit their needs. Just as no two rural communities are the same, not every partnership between an arts organization and school will work.

Arts organizations serving rural communities may find partnership with organizations that are already involved with the arts in some capacity (Walker 4). Many non-arts organizations in rural areas already provide arts opportunities to their community. Twenty-one percent of adults in rural areas attend performing arts activities at churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions (*Come As You Are* 9).

### Creative Placemaking as a Model for Partnership

Arts organizations serving rural communities who want to partner with organically congregational centers can glean knowledge from the principles of creative placemaking to build effective partnerships geared towards community engagement. Creative placemaking is when “public, private, not-for-profit, and community sectors partner to strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, tribe, city, or region around arts and cultural activities” (Schupbach). This practice employs creative initiatives and is often used in small communities to revitalize economic development to promote greater livability, diversity, and job opportunities (Markusen and Gadwa 3).

Creative placemaking has goals that are similar to what an arts organization wishes to accomplish through partnership with an organically congregational center in a rural community. Creative placemaking partnerships work to get arts organizations out of their silos and into the neighborhoods around them (Schupbach; Markusen and Gadwa 16). The use of creative placemaking allows arts organizations to raise the visibility of the arts in a community (Schupbach). Creative placemaking uses skills, resources, knowledge, and leadership from multiple sectors of the community to solve place-based problems (Markusen and Gadwa 21).

Successful cases of creative placemaking share several characteristics. These characteristics include dovetailing goals with other organizations to tap into resources and funding, utilizing creative and local resources, garnering public sector support, and mobilizing the public around a goal (Markusen and Gadwa 19-22). Arts

organizations serving rural communities looking to partner with organically congregational centers in rural areas could incorporate these components in their partnership to successfully reach their goals.

Perhaps more pertinent to rural neighborhoods, the term “creative placekeeping” has emerged in response to creative placemaking. Whereas creative placemaking has purposes linked to economic development and tourism development, creative placekeeping is “the active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there” (“Creative Placekeeping”). Creative placekeeping recognizes that places already have a history and a people, and thus there is no need to create something new or artificial (Ewell and Leonard). More than preserving historic buildings, creative placekeeping aims to keep local culture, histories, and landscapes alive, all of which are valuable and relevant to rural communities. This would suggest another group of potential partners for arts organizations that serve rural areas.

#### Building Value and Sustainability

Geographic accessibility is important but it is not enough. Partnerships are vital in reaching rural communities as they can address both the practical and perceptual barriers to arts participation. Location is important, but it is not the only hindrance to art participation. Public value goes hand in hand with location.

The Oakland Museum of California discovered that providing arts opportunities in a central location was not enough. The Museum, whose building is “embedded in a diverse community” found that geographic proximity was moot

because the community it resides in perceived the museum as meant for “other types of people” (Reidy 37). Though Oakland Museum is in an urban setting, this problem is encountered by arts organizations in both urban and rural communities.

In *New Creative Community*, Arlene Goldbard argues that arts organizations need to engage the people, actively involving them to figure out “what works best for them.” Residents who are engaged become invested in the arts organization, which builds the public value and perceptions of the organization. Partnerships with other organizations in the community is a great launch point for arts organizations looking to serve rural communities to engage with the people. Goldbard explained that, in order for a partnership to work, “we can’t impose, nor will it work if we disappear into the background”; all parties involved need to be stakeholders. A partnership is not simply renting a conveniently located venue space. Arts organizations that simply use the congregation center as a space allocation fail to address the barriers of exclusion. As Oakland Museum found, existence within a geographically accessible space does not develop public value. Arts organizations that fail to create true partnerships with organically congregational centers run the risk of exacerbating their problem. Residents who use these spaces may perceive the arts organizations as an imposing force, leading to further distrust and continued lack of arts participation. By collaborating with the organically congregational center in a true partnership, arts organizations can engage people in meaningful and sincere ways that build public value.



To reach its local audience, Oakland Museum worked in close partnership with many local organizations to learn from the community and develop programming that was relevant to both the museum and its community. These partnerships allowed the Museum to alter its public perception among locals. Oakland Museum met with some resistance, as many community members had been disappointed in the past by big institutions making big promises. The partnerships created a neutral space that helped the Museum and the community work through issues and build trust. Trust between the arts organization and the community is a vital resource (McCarthy and Jinnett 49). By working together with “sincere and thoughtful engagement”, the Museum was able to develop projects that not only satisfied its institutional goals but met the needs of its community (Reidy 38).

Partnerships are vital in that they establish relationships. An arts organization cannot “just go to a new place to ‘give’ art to the people there” (Reidy 6). This approach can often alienate individuals and puts local culture under a microscope (Goldbard 87). In general, people respond indifferently or negatively to outsiders imposing in such a way. An arts organization that is perceived as imposing is not going to successfully engage its community. It is better to integrate the arts within the community (Reidy 36). Relationship building through community partnerships with organically congregational centers can actively involve people and help arts organizations avoid negative perceptions. To be successful and sustainable, placemaking partnerships generally need strong public sector support (Markusen and Gadwa 19). This is why building partnerships with organically

congregational centers is vital for arts organizations serving rural communities to build trust and value in the community that will aid in garnering that support.

Locations such as public parks, local libraries, places of worship, coffee houses, school classrooms, office settings, and bookstores were “observed as valued and desired” places for informal arts activities (Wali xxiv). Additionally, organizations that provided the spaces for the arts activities built their reputations, benefitting from the increased use of their space and the positive attitude of participants (Wali xxiv). Reputational benefits as a result of partnerships are shared between the arts organization and the congregational center. Not only do people enjoy participating in the arts in these informal spaces, but they become frustrated and angry when the spaces are no longer accessible for the arts activity due to financial reasons or policy changes (Wali xxiv). People become angry because they find value in art participation within informal community spaces. By providing arts opportunities in places where people want to be, arts organizations can truly become a part of the community, building long-term sustainability through public value.

### Challenges for Partnerships

Like any partnership, there are risks involved. Arts organizations and organically congregational centers risk reputation, time, money, and other resources when they develop a partnership (Walker 9). Identifying potential liabilities, while establishing expectations, costs, and resources ahead of time can help mitigate challenges for all partners involved. Good communication ahead of

time and throughout the partnership enables both the arts organization and the congregational center to deal effectively with problems that arise (Walker 11).

Successful partnerships take time and resources to build. They are “often the result of many months of planning and engagement” to build connections (Reidy 6). Relationships do not occur overnight. Long term commitments with multiple interactions between partners and community were found to be more successful than one-off engagements (Reidy 34). Arts organizations need to be prepared to dedicate time, understanding, and accommodation (Markusen and Gadwa 22).

Each organization operates differently, which can be beneficial to the partnership as it contributes skills and resources. However, these differences can cause tension, so flexibility in programming, business models, and funding may be required (Reidy 6). Arts organizations need to be cognizant and respectful of the strengths and needs of the congregational center. Many community organizations “have processes developed specifically to promote community engagement and client participation” (Walker 9). Sometimes arts organizations can be at odds with the process, claiming that it compromises artistic integrity. However, if the congregational center is unable to engage in these processes, the benefits that the arts organization are seeking are unlikely to occur, rendering the partnership moot (Walker 9).

Establishing strategic alliances with other institutions and individuals within a community can be a way to expand available resources (McCarthy 49). Ideally partnerships between arts organizations in rural communities and organically congregational centers will capitalize on resources that are limited in rural

communities. However, in the short term, partnerships can have more costs than benefits (McCarthy 50). Initial costs such as staff time and money can be substantial while partners learn to work together. This should not deter a partnership, as the long-term benefits make the venture worthwhile, but, instead, should work as a guide to help establish reasonable expectations between both partners.

## Conclusion

Rural communities exhibit unique characteristics and challenges regarding arts participation. Arts organizations serving rural communities must be cognizant of these characteristics to overcome the obstacles that exist for rural arts participation. Partnerships between arts organizations serving rural communities and organically congregational centers within the community address the obstacles to arts participation that rural residents face. By integrating arts into the rural setting in places the community already uses, arts organizations can significantly mitigate barriers to arts participation.

Arts organizations can capitalize on the inherent value of the organically congregational center, and organically congregational centers can provide the right invitation for rural residents to participate in the arts. By being associated with a place rural residents value, the arts organization can become more approachable, reducing perceptions of elitism and exclusion. Art that is integrated into spaces that are not designated arts spaces can “demand attention in a way that art in conventional space cannot” (Reidy 12), as people can more easily be immersed in art when they encounter it in the places that they frequent and are comfortable with. Exposure to art, evident by the correlation between arts education and arts participation, can reduce perceptual barriers of fear and elitism, making art participation more appealing to individuals.

With barriers to arts participation addressed, arts organizations that integrate the arts and themselves into the rural community through partnership with organically congregational centers have the advantage of building their audience base and expanding arts access in the community. This method keeps the dynamics of rural communities in mind and allows the arts organization to address problems at a local level. Arts organizations can then better meet the needs of their communities, create more inclusive programming, and satisfy their institutional mission.

Not only do partnerships mitigate barriers to arts participation, but partnerships can foster growth and sustainability for the arts organization within the community. Arts organizations could build their volunteer and membership base as well as capitalize on resources. Research indicates that the arts have the ability to make a small community thrive, as “the ways the community understands itself, celebrates itself, and expresses itself are major contributing factors to its ability to withstand economic, political, and cultural winds of change and transition” (Duxbury and Campbell 112). Once integrated, and harnessing public support, arts organizations may be less susceptible to local budget cuts, as they are part of the community lifeblood. Relationships built through the partnerships with organically congregational centers may give arts organizations more clout by having support from a valued partner.

Though undervalued as an economic engine, a robust arts presence is a significant economic component for small communities, the benefits of which

extend to more than the partners (Duxbury and Campbell 113; Markusen and Gadwa 8). By building arts participation in locations people are comfortable with, residents tend to participate locally instead of traveling elsewhere for entertainment and cultural activities (Markusen and Gadwa 7). As a result, residents invest locally, spending their money on local art, at local events, in local venues. The money then recirculates into the local economy at a greater rate (7). This boost in the local economy benefits the entire community in addition to the partnering arts organization and congregational center. A thriving arts presence enabled by partnership may not only address some of the barriers, but may be able to fix some. The quality of activities and appearance of a place are attractive to potential new residents and businesses (Strauss 57), which may slow the flow of out-migration that is prevalent in rural areas.

Partnerships are not the only way to integrate arts in a community, however, in rural communities it may be the preferred method. Partnerships between arts organizations and organically congregational centers can provide public value to both institutions that can prove beneficial to long-term sustainability. Partnerships offer a great deal of customization; thus, they may work for a greater number of rural communities than other methods of building arts participation. Participating organizations in the Montana Building Arts Participation program experimented with many methods. Some worked better than others. The common thread was building value within the community. Often participants found that locations within the community, namely schools, were of the utmost importance to the success of their projects. Partnerships between arts organizations of rural communities and

organically congregational centers capitalize on both public value and location to meet institutional needs.

It is important to recognize that “No matter how much arts spaces transform...it will likely be impossible to change audiences so that they regularly attend performances there, so reaching out to people in places where they already are or want to be is critically important” (Reidy 39). Arts organizations can build upon the value that already exists in an organically congregational space. Art organizations can harness that value to satisfy their institutional mission, but they should not expect people to leave those spaces to attend programs at the arts organization’s main hub. That is not to say that some people will not make the journey, but getting people to come to the arts organization should not be the main reason for creating these partnerships.

Instead, arts organizations in rural communities may question the need for a central hub. Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa wrote in their NEA white paper *Creative Placemaking* that “instead of a single arts center or a cluster of large arts and culture institutions, contemporary creative placemaking envisions a more decentralized portfolio of spaces acting as creative crucibles.” Perhaps the future of rural arts organization development will be less about physically building an arts center through brick and mortar endeavors, but instead play a more systemic role within the community.



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