



Community Innovation Labs

A national initiative managed by EmcArts

Round 2 – Open Call for Communities

Information Packet
As of March 1, 2016

Summary

Building off of pilot work begun last year in Winston-Salem, NC and Providence, RI, EmcArts will launch *Community Innovation Labs* in two additional US communities in 2016.

The *Labs* represent an unconventional approach that brings multiple viewpoints together to address complex social challenges in new ways. The *Labs* use artistic processes to build trust, explore new possibilities, and advance arts-based strategies for systemic change. As interventions in local systems, the *Labs* are designed to help community stakeholders from different sectors work together in innovative ways in response to a specific challenge they are committed to tackling.

The *Labs* will bring together diverse, cross-sector groups of stakeholders in each location, including city agencies, community organizers, business leaders, artists, cultural organizations and nonprofit service providers. The *Lab* will foster a deeply connected local network and take a systemic, arts-integrated approach to change.

Lead support for the *Labs* provided by the Kresge Foundation covers the costs for EmcArts' program design, facilitation, and logistics. Local Conveners will need to raise a community matching grant of \$100,000 to cover local costs.

This packet contains information about the *Community Innovation Labs*, including the rationale, principles, and framework. It also describes how the two new locations will be identified. *Labs* will begin in two neighborhoods or cities in July 2016 and continue through December 2017.

Rationale for a Lab approach

The *Community Innovation Labs* are a response to what we see in our nation today. The problems facing our communities are challenging and complex. Traditional top-down strategies for civic planning are failing us, while often reinforcing existing power dynamics. Views are increasingly polarized, progress is slow, and ingrained ways of working exclude most citizens from decision-making. Inequity is increasing across the board, in terms of economics, education, race, gender, age and more.

Our communities need unconventional approaches that bring multiple viewpoints together, drawing those who have historically been empowered and those who have been disempowered into new relationships in order to imagine and develop new ways forward.

The *Labs* are grounded in the belief that artists, artistic processes, and cultural organizations have untapped potential to play a vital role in unfreezing the status quo and discovering new ways forward. We believe systems can change for the better if people come together around shared purpose and explore mutual interests, and that the arts can play a critical role in fostering silo-busting relationships and developing innovative responses to specific local challenges that have resisted traditional planning efforts.

The *Labs* use artistic processes to build trust, explore new possibilities, and advance arts-based strategies for systemic change. Artists will play an important role in creative facilitation of the *Lab* activities, as well as in the development of arts-based interventions. Overall, the creative sector will be engaged at four levels:

- **Champions:** Local artists and cultural leaders as part of the champions group
- **Process Leaders:** Artists as facilitators, designing and leading activities

- **Participants:** Local artists and cultural leaders as community members, bringing their perspectives to the discovery process and development of innovative strategies
- **Strategy:** The strategies fostered by the *Lab* will be arts-based, with artists and artistic practices at the core

Where might a Community Innovation Lab be useful?

A *Community Innovation Lab* is most useful in places where:

- There is a **social challenge that is complex** – it has resisted traditional planning, needs a systemic approach, and requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders, perspectives, and sectors to develop and carry out new strategies
- The **arts have the potential to play a vital role** in bringing stakeholders together across boundaries and contribute to strategies for change in response to the challenge
- The community has a **track record of cross-sector collaboration** to make progress on tough local problems, and momentum around a specific challenge.

What we expect the Labs to achieve, and how

The *Labs* are an intervention designed to help communities use the arts so that participants from different sectors can work together in innovative new ways in response to a specific challenge.

The design of the *Labs* is deeply influenced by systems thinking, from which we know that the way to make systemic change over the long-term is to: 1) help the system see how it's operating, 2) shift mindsets, 3) change the norms, rules, and structures of the system, and 4) enable participants in the system to self-organize in new ways. The *Lab* is carefully designed to intervene in each of these four ways.

We anticipate the *Labs* will help participants build new relationships that challenge their old ways of thinking and doing, identify highly leveraged arts-based strategies for long-term structural change, and support the organic movement of participants into cross-sector working groups. We also anticipate the *Labs* will enable new and stronger networks across the community and advance a set of leaders with greater capacity to integrate artists into change efforts for the long haul, and ultimately help to create more just communities across the country.

In systems change, one key principle is not to try and change everything all at once, but to search for *leverage* – designing a small number of focused new cross-sector interventions that disrupt ingrained mindsets and system structures, so as to accelerate and amplify impact over time. Through the *Labs*, participants from different sectors will be empowered to work together in pursuit of specific shared interests under the umbrella of the challenge, without all having to align around a single proposed overarching response.

Values and intentions of the program

At EmcArts, we believe that innovation is primarily a process, not a product, fueled by discipline, focus, and a strong will for change. It requires letting go of what is no longer useful and experimenting your way forward. This is difficult and vulnerable work. We also believe that artistic experiences help us learn to productively navigate the tension between thinking and feeling, both of which are required to respond to complex challenges.

Building on EmcArts' core beliefs, our intentions in designing these *Labs* are to:

- Work with communities only upon invitation, grounding our approach in the local cultural context and building on existing assets (including existing networks and local talent)
- Create capacity that exists once EmcArts is no longer working with the community
- Be transparent, patient, and responsive in the work

Learning from Creative Placemaking and Social Innovation Labs

The *Community Innovation Labs* build on and contribute to two emerging fields of practice: creative placemaking and social innovation labs.

With creative placemaking, we share a belief that artists and cultural organizations can play a critical role in civic life and community development. With social innovation labs, we share a belief in the power of large-scale, cross-sector collaborations over extended periods of time to attempt system-level change.

We feel that there is great power in bringing together and remixing the most effective aspects of these two emerging disciplines. We believe that community efforts to address complex challenges will be deeper and more sustainable if artists, artistic practices, and cultural organizations are fully integrated, and combined with a process that balances control and emergence over time.

Learning from pilot Community Innovation Labs

We have been chronicling the journey of our *Community Innovation Labs* from conception to design through piloting on our blog series on ArtsFwd.org. We hope you will read more about the *Labs* and share your comments: <http://artsfwd.org/tag/community-innovation-labs/>

Community Innovation Labs – Framework

Phase 1: Initiating a Lab (approximately 6 months, July – December 2016)

EmcArts works with local Conveners to customize key elements of the *Lab* design to the local context, clarify the focus of the *Lab*, engage local artists, engage a small group of local Champions, and recruit larger groups of *Lab* Members, who represent the social diversity of the system relative to the stated challenge.

Research is conducted to gather stories and perspectives from local stakeholders, who each bring a different insight on the challenge. Outputs produced from research are used in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Unfreezing the Status Quo (approximately 6 months, January – June 2017)

EmcArts facilitates a series of carefully crafted Intensive Workshops for a core group of 30-40 *Lab* participants, as well as a series of additional community gatherings to engage a larger cross-section of local stakeholders and influencers.

Activities in this Phase are designed to increase shared understanding of the challenge, begin to unfreeze the status quo in the system, develop trust, and organically catalyze participants into cross-sector working groups for new systemic initiatives.

Workshops are richly interwoven with artistic facilitation techniques and move participants towards transformative, arts-based strategies for change. Each builds on the previous, drawn from a deep well of experience and theory.

- Workshop 1: Seeing the System Drawing on the work of REOS Partners and Theory-U, we create conditions for the group to build trust, develop new relationships, and see the complex, interdependent dynamics of the local system related to the challenge.
- Workshop 2: Looking for Leverage Applying the work of Donella Meadows and Cognitive Edge, the group rehearses interventions that get at the underlying structures, forces, and root causes that drive the challenge, beyond short-term fixes.
- Workshop 3: Moving Toward Action As shared interests emerge, *Lab* participants coalesce around innovative responses. Cross-sector working groups design small experiments with radical intent to test emerging strategies, generating early wins.
- Workshop 4: Weaving a Network Core participants invite new community members into the process to further develop their thinking and build momentum around emerging strategies.

Alongside the workshops in this Phase, core *Lab* participants will engage repeatedly with local residents and end-users, as well as community influencers.

Phase 3: Accelerating Innovation (approximately 4 months, July-October 2017)

Up to three cross-sector working groups that emerge from Phase 2 can opt in to further facilitation support from an EmcArts team to foster their emerging arts-based strategies, maintaining momentum and pivoting towards testing strategies in action.

Lab Outcomes

- A deeply connected network of participants who have come together across silos and boundaries, built trust, and challenged their own assumptions, values, and mindsets about each other, the challenge, and their community.
- An embodied appreciation among participants of the role that arts, artists, and artistic practices can play in systemic community change efforts, which has been modeled throughout the *Lab* process.
- Multiple, organically formed, cross-sector working groups dedicated to developing arts-based strategies for change related to the challenge, as well as numerous other projects, experiments, and initiatives catalyzed by the *Lab* that continue beyond formal *Lab* support.
- Greater capacity to integrate the arts into taking on similar challenges in the future.

Timeline for Labs

April 11, 2016: Deadline for initial letters of inquiry

Site Selection

April 11 – June 15, 2016

- Exploratory phone calls with local stakeholders in communities with strong interest in beginning a *Lab*
- Site visits in up to five communities to clarify the local challenge and mutually determine whether the *Lab* is a good fit
- EmcArts identifies two sites to begin *Community Innovation Labs*

Phase 1: Initiating a Lab

June 15, 2016 – December 31, 2016

- Hold up to three one-day meetings of an initial Champions group to map local networks, identify important influencers, understand local assets and obstacles, co-design the features of the *Lab*, develop a clearer description of the problematic situation and recruit a committed groups of local stakeholders to participate in the *Lab*.
- Conduct research to establish context and gather perspectives on the challenge

Phase 2: Unfreezing the Status Quo

January 1, 2017 – June 30, 2017

- Hold a series of four intensive workshops, plus additional community meetings for local stakeholders, to increase shared understanding of the challenge, begin to unfreeze the status quo in the system, develop trust, and organically gather into cross-sector working groups.

Phase 3: Accelerating Innovation

July 1, 2017- October 30, 2017

- Up to three cross-sector working groups continue to meet with facilitation support from an EmcArts team for up to three meetings to foster their emerging arts-based strategy, maintain momentum and pivot towards testing the strategy in action.

Community Identification Process

Through April 11, 2016, EmcArts will be accepting letters of inquiry from groups of local stakeholders interested in beginning a *Community Innovation Lab*.

The *Labs* will have the greatest value in communities where there is already some momentum toward addressing tough problems collectively, existing networks that draw people together, and an openness to process and to extended experimentation.

Therefore, letters of inquiry should include written reflection on the following questions:

- What complex social challenge in your community would be a good fit to explore in a *Community Innovation Lab* – one that has resisted traditional planning approaches and requires many stakeholders to carry out new strategies, and where the arts could play a vital role?
- What community efforts, initiatives, and networks are already underway related to this challenge that the *Lab* might build on? What momentum exists for this work?
- What community stakeholders from a range of sectors and backgrounds might convene and champion this effort? Who is already committed?
- The *Community Innovation Lab* program requires a community matching grant of \$100,000 plus part-time project support to coordinate the *Lab* locally. Where might these matching funds come from? Do you have any financial commitments already in place to support this work?

The *Labs* are designed to bring together a broad, cross-sector swath of community members, so letters of inquiry would ideally be jointly submitted from a coordinated group of two to three local stakeholders or organizations. Community stakeholders may include local arts organizations, city agencies, community foundations, academic institutions, and community-based organizations. Inquiries can be submitted online, at <http://bit.ly/IRryQw6>.

Lab Resources

The *Community Innovation Labs* are supported by funding from the Kresge Foundation:

- A grant of \$250,000 from the Kresge Foundation to EmcArts covers program design and facilitation, including travel and accommodations.
- Local Conveners will need to raise a community matching grant of \$100,000 to cover the fees to local facilitators and artists, participant stipends, convening costs, and research. Local Conveners will also need to provide part-time project support to coordinate the *Lab* locally. The matching grant would need to be pledged in advance of starting the work, no later than July 2016, and available to be applied to lab expenses no later than Sept 2016.

Contact Information

Inquiries can be submitted online, at <http://bit.ly/IRryQw6>.

If you have any questions about the *Community Innovation Labs*, please contact:

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