

Creative Placemaking in Central Appalachia

Understanding the role of arts
and culture in Appalachia's
economic transition

A research report for:



Prepared by:



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A Family Foundation est. 1959

Introduction

The members of the Central Appalachian Network (CAN) believe that creative placemaking has an important role to play in the region's transition towards more equitable and resilient local economies. Creative placemaking has gained steady momentum across the country and region as an approach that can drive cross-sector engagement and transformation in communities of all types. CAN commissioned this scan of creative placemaking in Central Appalachia in order to understand what creative placemaking looks like on the ground, assess the state of the field regionally, offer ideas to strengthen and accelerate current momentum, and ultimately bring more attention and resources to advance the approach of creative placemaking in the region.

CAN's 25-year history has been focused on strengthening communities, diversifying economies, and guiding an economic transition to make the region more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable. CAN's member organizations have been active within this space for many years, using sectors like local food, agriculture, tourism, and arts entrepreneurship to foster sustainable economic development and animate rural communities. Given the focus of CAN members and partners on community-based economic development, the primary lens for this scan is the application of arts as a tool for community and economic development. This is what we mean when we refer to creative placemaking in this paper. We note this focus not to diminish other sectors where the arts are used as tools to address challenges, but to acknowledge that this paper does not equally represent all the versions of creative placemaking that appear in the national discussion.

To complete this scan, we undertook a participatory research process that gathered data, information and insights using a series of qualitative, quantitative, and secondary research. First, we distributed a survey to over 200 people in CAN's network; 49 people responded. While the survey results should not be considered scientifically rigorous, they provided an important baseline of data that could be adapted and deepened through ongoing participatory investigation and exploratory conversation with regional actors. To contextualize the findings from the survey, we conducted nine qualitative interviews with people who are using creative placemaking in a variety of ways around the region. Participants who attended the Creative Placemaking track at the November 2018 CAN Peer-to-Peer Convening also contributed important nuance and consensus around several leverage points for the field moving forward. The most important findings and themes from the research activities are synthesized and presented in this paper. For more detail on the methods used to conduct the research portion of this project, see Appendix C.

This paper first provides, on the next page, a quick summary of high-level takeaways from the research. It then reviews the relevant literature and discusses the history, definitions, and Appalachian context of creative placemaking. The following section presents the findings, including a proposed framework for creative placemaking in Central Appalachia and an inventory of actors in the region. The paper concludes with an assessment of the strength of creative placemaking in the region and specific recommendations intended to advance the field regionally. Lastly, the Appendices includes an Inventory of Appalachian Creative Placemaking Actors that categorizes all the organizations that surfaced during our scan, a set of Appalachian Creative Placemaking Profiles that capture the variety and innovation of the work on the ground in our region, and a detailed explanation of our Research Methods.

Key Themes and Takeaways

Defining Creative Placemaking

Arising out of academia and the National Endowment for the Arts, creative placemaking, as a field, is a cross-sector and inclusive approach to community and economic development. Many definitions have been proposed, which emphasize themes like solving problems, working together, centering equity, advancing community ownership, and celebrating identities. For the purposes of this report, **creative placemaking is when residents use arts and culture to tell the story of what's unique about a place, drive economic development, improve quality of life, and inspire hope for their community or region.**

What Does Creative Placemaking in Central Appalachia Look Like?

Several grounding principles are true of creative placemaking efforts in the region. Creative Placemaking:

- **Engages artists and creative strategies:** recognizes and uses the perspectives, tools, problem-solving capabilities of the arts to bring people together, communicate ideas, and contribute solutions.
- **Employs community organizing approaches:** meets people where they are, centers equitable decision-making, and empowers residents to influence and make decisions that affect their own lives.
- **Honors culture, identity, and place:** celebrates the diversity of cultures and livelihoods that have defined the character of a place in the past and present.
- **Creates economic development opportunities:** leads to growth in businesses and jobs that result from or spur additional creative endeavors.

These principles inform a wide range of activities used by creative placemaking actors, which are often applied to promising economic sectors in order to achieve the desired impacts above (See figure 1).

Why Creative Placemaking in Central Appalachia? Intentions and Impacts

- **Economic diversification:** as the major economic drivers (coal, tobacco, manufacturing) decline, communities are looking to creative placemaking to foster more diverse, resilient economies.
- **Equity & Inclusivity:** creative placemaking can help address inequitable power dynamics.
- **Placehealing:** To heal the wounds of Appalachia's history, communities use creative placemaking to build a sense of hope, pride, and trust in the region, all of which feed a more cohesive regional identity and a more positive narrative of Central Appalachia.

Who Does Creative Placemaking in Central Appalachia?

The enabling ecosystem of creative placemaking actors is diverse, from grassroots and community economic development organizations to creatives, small business support providers, facilitators, and field builders. [This inventory](#) contains a database of actors identified in this research process so far.

Recommendations to Strengthen the Field

The region's creative placemaking practitioners have a robust foundation of aligned goals and shared principles guiding their work. The following are recommendations to build the field in Central Appalachia.

- Increase investments in community-designed solutions via flexible grants and seed funding.
- Train communities in artistic strategies that break down traditional power dynamics.
- Change the narrative around the relevance of the arts.
- Promote peer learning and field building coordinated through a regional creative placemaking network.
- Support artists as small business owners.
- Show the potential economic and social impact of taking the creative placemaking approach.
- Meet communities where they are to help them define where they want to be.

Understanding Context: An Overview of the Creative Placemaking Field

This section presents a general overview of creative placemaking, while also reviewing elements most relevant to the Appalachian and rural context. The section will not present a comprehensive review of creative placemaking literature, as the field is far broader than the scope of this project. The core interest of this report is centered around how creative placemaking is used as a tool for economic development and community empowerment. First, this literature review summarizes where the field originated and defines creative placemaking; next creative placemaking is discussed as a way to catalyze community economic development goals. Finally, creative placemaking is situated in the rural and Appalachian context.

Origins of the Creative Placemaking Field

Arts and culture have long been used to bring people together under a common agenda, whether to celebrate and keep traditions, reach people in new ways, or motivate action for change. Only over the last decade or more has the term “creative placemaking” gained currency, emerging out academia and urban planning and popularized by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

The NEA began promoting the term creative placemaking in 2010, partly in an effort to leverage the NEA’s relatively small budget with other federal and private funding across the many community development disciplines (Frenette 2017). The former chair of the NEA from 2009-2012, Rocco Landesman, envisioned an entity that could greatly increase funding specifically for creative placemaking. In 2010, the NEA partnered with private funders, financial institutions, and federal agencies to create ArtPlace America, a 10-year initiative meant to elevate the approach of creative placemaking within the broader field of community development. In the same year, the NEA published what has become a core field building white paper for creative placemaking, written by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa. Their paper paved the way for additional research and identified areas for policy reform to enable the arts to collaborate across sectors. They saw a way to accelerate arts and culture’s potential “to animate downtowns and neighborhoods, to stoke their creative industries, to stabilize population and jobs, and to attract new residents and businesses” (23).

Defining Creative Placemaking

Creative placemaking, as a term, has taken on many definitions over its decade-long evolution. It is, necessarily, a cross-sector and inclusive approach to community and economic development. It is not simply adding artistic elements to a downtown project or activity; it is the process of their incorporation into planning and action so that a place is representative of and intended for the people living there (Salzman and Yerace 2018). By design, creative placemaking includes and considers perspectives from low-income communities, people of color, and artists (Markusen 2014). Thus, the aim of creative placemaking is for “arts and culture [to] make substantial contributions to local economic development, livability, and cultural industry competitiveness” (Markusen 2010). Several themes are highlighted to different degrees in the most prominent definitions, all of which center arts intentionally and demonstrate creative placemaking as a values-based approach to community development. Themes include:

- **Solve problems:** Intentionally integrates the arts throughout the process and end result to inspire communities and contribute to creative solutions. (Frenette 2017; ArtPlace America 2018)
- **Work together:** Fosters cross-sector participation to connect across silos. (Kresge 2018; Markusen and Gadwa 2010)

- **Center equity:** Works toward positive social and economic change. (Markusen and Gadwa 2014; LISC 2018; NEA 2018)
- **Communities take lead:** Is place-based and locally-informed. (ArtPlace America 2018)
- **Celebrate identities:** Celebrates the uniqueness, sense of place and the identities held within a place. (Project for Public Spaces 2017)

In regional conversations, we most commonly encounter ArtPlace America’s definition, which encompasses many of the tenets underlying CAN’s approach to community economic development: *When arts and culture plays an intentional and integrated role in place-based planning and development that is human-centric, comprehensive, and locally informed.*

For the purpose of this report, creative placemaking is ***when residents use arts and culture to tell the story of what’s unique about a place, drive economic development, improve quality of life, and inspire hope for their community.***

The Intersection of Arts, Culture, and Community Development

Creative placemaking is a process to catalyze community economic development, and is applied to a variety of sectors – from public health to housing, transportation, the environment, and others. Arts and culture’s interaction with other sectors makes clear the potential benefit that using the creative placemaking approach can have on the sticky challenges within complex community development work. ArtPlace America is in the process of commissioning 10 field scans, five of which are complete at the time of this writing. Their 2016 environmental field scan, carried out by the Helicon Collaborative, identifies ways that arts and culture contribute to the sustainability of energy, water, land, waste, pollution, and climate change issues:

1. **Spark Public Demand.** *Art and culture can help by making environmental issues personal, emotional and salient, and by showing people what sustainability can actually look and feel like.*
2. **Build Community Capacity and Agency.** *Art and culture can help by building community cohesion, identity, power and leadership, and by creating inclusive processes for dialogue and co-creation.*
3. **Bridge Scales.** *Art and culture can help by connecting local experiences with larger contexts, and by helping people find common ground across political, geographical, and ideological boundaries.*
4. **Enrich and Activate the Built Environment.** *Art and culture can help by creating infrastructure that meets people’s social, aesthetic, and spiritual needs, and by designing physical spaces that cue and reinforce new and more sustainable thinking and behavior.*
5. **Nurture Sustainable Economies.** *Art and culture can help by generating, revealing, or redefining value, and by helping drive more sustainable local economies.*

Overall, the field scans describe how arts and culture help us address challenging issues that arise in specific sectors: **Art makes the problem accessible, felt, and understandable by more people; Art unifies a community or communities toward solutions; Communities use art as part of the solution.** The other field scans can be found published on the ArtPlace [website](#).

Creative Placemaking in Rural Areas

Rural areas use arts and culture to bring people together and solve problems. While fewer rural cases have been lifted up, there are some good examples that have appeared in the national literature, including: Clear Creek Creative (Helicon Collaborative 2018); the Letcher County Culture Hub and Thomas, WV (Langston and Chang 2019, HAC and [bc] 2017) in Appalachia; and Arnaudville, LA and Paducah, KY (Markusen and Gadwa 2010), among others. What those initiatives have in common are similar to what Markusen and Gadwa characterize as key ingredients for creative placemaking to be successful (2010):

- *Prompted by an initiator with innovative vision and drive*
- *Tailors strategy to distinctive features of place*
- *Mobilizes public will*

- *Attracts private sector buy-in*
- *Enjoys support of local arts and cultural leaders*
- *Builds partnerships across sectors, missions, and levels of government*

All too often, creative placemaking in rural areas lacks access to the financial resources generally available in urban areas. Despite this, the examples demonstrate how rural efforts lean on other strengths, particularly social cohesion. In a study to understand creative placemaking in the Greater Cincinnati area, Salzman and Yerace found that “the greatest potential for [creative] placemaking may actually exist in rural areas where there are few enabling organizations and there is a strong will to revitalize communities that maintain many of the social connections lost in more transient and diverse urban settings” (2017). Existing relationships and social networks in rural areas make the creative placemaking process even more promising.

Central Appalachia’s History of Creative Placemaking

For Central Appalachia, the act of using arts and culture to shape how communities grow and heal has been the norm for decades, if not centuries. Historically, creative placemaking has most prominently been used in social movements and labor activism – an approach that continues today. More recently, communities in the region have begun to use creative placemaking as a tool for economic development, though not necessarily calling it by that name.

For decades, outside ownership has dominated much of the economic and political power in Appalachia. In reaction, arts and culture have been used to organize against political, economic, and social injustices that punctuate Central Appalachian history (Atlas 2013). For instance, the Highlander Research & Education Center, founded as the Highlander Folk School in 1932, worked to organize labor and the civil rights movement in the South and environmental and workers’ rights in Appalachia. In 1976, Highlander hosted the “Appalachian and Southern Theater Workshop,” which planted the seed for Alternate Regional Organization of Theaters South, or [Alternate Roots](#), to flourish with six theater companies operating in Appalachia and the South. Their founding used theater as a way to organize people politically, preserve oral histories, and spur public debate on local issues (Cocke 2018). Likewise, organizations like Appalshop, Carpetbag Theatre, Clear Creek Creative, Higher Ground, and Roadside Theater have used theater and media to rebut the negative national perception of Central Appalachia and to reflect on the challenging realities of substance use, natural gas drilling, and strip mining (Spangler 2015).

Especially in Appalachia where the major economic drivers – coal, tobacco, and manufacturing – have either disappeared or are in a precipitous decline, communities are using the arts and culture to build new economies and honor the uniqueness of their places. Particularly important to the participants interviewed for this paper is that the people who are most affected are involved in the decisions that affect their lives and communities. In Appendix B are brief profiles of communities and organizations employing the creative placemaking approach around Appalachia. Overall, these profiles illustrate inclusive community-led efforts that identify potential assets and employ them towards community objectives as a way to build places and activities that represent the will and creativity of the people living there.

Findings in Central Appalachia: Who, What, and Why?

This section presents the thematic findings from a set of research activities that included an inventory of creative placemaking organizations in Central Appalachia, a quantitative survey of 49 regional placemaking actors, nine qualitative interviews with a range of in-region creative placemaking practitioners, and insights from a variety of participants in the creative placemaking track of the November 2018 CAN Convening. These findings are intended as a benchmarking scan of what creative placemaking looks like in the region, who is out there doing this work, what creative placemaking is accomplishing, and what supports are needed to reach creative placemaking's full potential in the region. We fully expect this understanding to deepen and evolve through continued stakeholder engagement and conversation.

What Does Creative Placemaking in Appalachia Look Like?

Upon synthesizing the data and themes from interviews and survey responses, we identified several principles working in concert across examples of successful creative placemaking efforts in Central Appalachia. Those principles entail work that:

- **Engages artists and creative strategies:** recognizes and uses the perspectives, tools, problem-solving capabilities of the arts and creativity to bring people together, communicate complex ideas, and contribute to solutions.
- **Employs community organizing:** centers equitable decision-making and empowers community members to influence and drive decision-making processes that directly affect their lives.
- **Honors culture, identity, and place:** celebrates the diversity of cultures and livelihoods that have defined the character of a place.
- **Creates economic development opportunities:** leads to growth in businesses and jobs that result from or spur additional creative endeavors.

Grounded in these principles, creative placemakers in Central Appalachia use a variety of strategies and tactics, often simultaneously, in order to advance their community development goals. The following is a non-exhaustive list of several prominent activities, but there are many more.

- Narratives & storytelling
- Communal meals
- Events & festivals
- Building rehab & redevelopment
- Public art
- Transforming public spaces
- Musical activities
- Artist training
- Regional identities and branding
- Education & training
- Etc.

The above principles and activities are used in Figure 1, on the next page, to present a beginning framework for creative placemaking in Central Appalachia. We find that being grounded in the four principles and applying them to activities within relevant sectors of the economy begins to generate, over the long-term, the impacts listed in the diagram and described in the next section. In practice, the creative placemaking process shown in the framework is adapted to the character of each community and thus best understood through on-the-ground examples like the profiles found in Appendix B.

Framework for Creative Placemaking in Central Appalachia



Figure 1

Why Creative Placemaking in Appalachia? Intentions and Impacts

Interviewees spoke broadly about the possibilities that using a creative placemaking approach affords; they fell into three categories: economic diversification, equity & inclusion, and “*placehealing*.”

Economic Diversification and Opportunity

The quantitative survey showed that economic development and diversification was the most sought-after impact: 73% of survey respondents indicated it as a desired result of their work.

The creative placemaking-related economic opportunities cited in the survey and interviews include artisan entrepreneurship, training and education in specific artistic trades, local food value chains, and tourism. In addition, there is broad consensus around the ripple effects that creative placemaking efforts have for Appalachia’s towns, cities, and rural communities. These ripples include local businesses that move in to support the ecosystem and economic activity created by artists, new career opportunities available to students and young people, and expanded cultural amenities that make a place more attractive to both existing and prospective residents. Looking forward, one interviewee sees creative placemaking as a bigger economic opportunity than originally thought because businesses are beginning to seek expertise from people with a creative background thanks to their proclivity for design thinking, empathy, and communication. Creative placemaking, because of its inherent ties to a specific community’s identity and assets, is also useful as a lens for other place-based economic strategies and industries such as cultural or nature-based tourism, downtown redevelopment, public infrastructure, and workforce development.

“IT’S PARADIGM-SHIFTING WHEN A COMMUNITY TAKES STEPS TO LIFT UP THE ARTS AND USE IT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.”

Lori McKinney, Create Your State

Equity and Inclusivity

In both the interviews and the survey, equity and inclusivity featured prominently. In the survey, 53% of respondents said they are looking to creative placemaking to support more equity and inclusion in the community development process. In the interviews, respondents spoke about the creative placemaking process as one that inherently and intentionally centers equity. Specific examples of an equity-focused process include participatory planning, open community meetings, seeking engagement and input from historically marginalized groups, utilizing transparent and democratic decision-making processes, and holding space for difficult conversations about power and inclusion. A benefit of using arts or creative activities in the process is that it serves as an equalizer for power dynamics, helping shift people out of roles associated with their historical levels of influence.

“FOR ANY CHANGES TO BE MEANINGFUL, THE PROCESS NEEDS TO START FROM THE GRASSROOTS UP.”

Renee Margocee, Tamarack Foundation for the Arts

Placehealing

Other desired impacts and actual benefits interviewees described fall under what we are referring to as “placehealing.” Ben Fink of Appalshop and the Letcher County Culture Hub articulates the idea as “unbounding imaginations.” Most interviewees and those creative placemaking practitioners that attended the CAN Convening noted that there is work needed in Central Appalachia to inspire hope and undo what a century of reliance on outside ownership and extractive industries has done to the region’s collective psyche. Specifically, the reliance on forces far beyond community control has led to a pattern of dependency that the region has been fighting mightily to reject. One method for changing this pattern involves creative placemaking, which explicitly puts the power to dream and do back in the hands of the community.

“PEOPLE ARE NEVER GOING TO MAKE A TOMORROW THAT IS BETTER THAN YESTERDAY IF THEY THINK IT’S HOPELESS – COMMUNITIES ARE SEEING HOPE”

Ben Fink, Appalshop¹

According to interviewees, creative placemaking processes can produce the following “placehealing” impacts:

- **Hope:** People feel a renewed sense of hope and optimism for starting something positive and meaningful in their communities.
- **Pride:** There is a growing sense of pride for oneself, one’s talents, and one’s community.
- **Individual wellbeing:** People experience improvements in overall quality of life.
- **Trust:** Communities weave a stronger social fabric when people come together to work towards shared objectives. Notably, 50% of survey respondents said they sought social cohesion outcomes as a result of using creative placemaking.
- **Regional identity:** Communities are connecting to a larger regional identity that acknowledges and celebrates the region’s heritage.
- **More positive narrative of Appalachia:** When people from Appalachia travel to other places, many carry with them a coherent narrative and story that helps dispel negative stereotypes and lifts up positive work happening here.

¹ Paraphrasing Fluney Hutchinson of the Economic Empowerment and Global Learning Project at Lafayette College

Who Does Creative Placemaking in Central Appalachia?

People and organizations in Central Appalachia who are using a creative placemaking approach are doing so from a variety of perspectives, roles, and disciplines – from grassroots community organizing and facilitating collaboration, to small business support services, to providing space for artists to create, show, and sell their work. [This spreadsheet](#) contains a database of actors identified by the dozens of creative placemaking actors who've engaged in this research process so far. These organizations are categorized according to the type of support or role they play in the creative placemaking ecosystem. The inventory of actors is meant to grow as CAN develops more relationships with others using the approach, and hopefully can serve as a useful reference moving forward.²

At the time of this writing, the inventory identifies 176 organizations that play one or more roles in creative placemaking. There was fairly even representation across these categories, with the exception of a relative shortage of actors playing the “field-building” role. The most common roles or category of supports include:

- **Physical Supports:** Organizations that provide artists and creatives space to create, display, or perform their work.
- **Education or Training for Artists:** Organizations that provide artistic training or education to youth or professional artists. May include small business support services or entrepreneurship training for artists.
- **Supports Collaboration:** Organizations that facilitate connection among organizations from economic/community development and the arts and culture.
- **Artist Organization:** Organizations that are made up of artists or cultural practitioners. It includes organizations whose activities advocate for, celebrate, or highlight the visibility of arts and culture.
- **Community Development:** Organizations whose objectives support community-driven processes to solve community issues, oftentimes using the arts as part of the solution.
- **Food & Ag Heritage:** Organizations that specifically use local food, foodways traditions, or agricultural heritage to celebrate cultures or guide development efforts.
- **Funder in Arts:** Organizations that provide funding (grants, loans, or other investment types) to nonprofits, social enterprises, or small businesses, where at least some of the funds are directed towards arts.
- **Field Building:** Organizations that publish tools, research, case studies, best practices, and other resources informing people about the practice of creative placemaking.

Most of the organizations in the inventory provide the supports at a scale that is smaller than the entire region of Central Appalachia. When the service area is broken down by state or parts of a state, as in the graph on the next page, the support landscape is more varied across the types of support.

² If you wish to add an organization to the inventory, you may do so via the [CAN website](#).

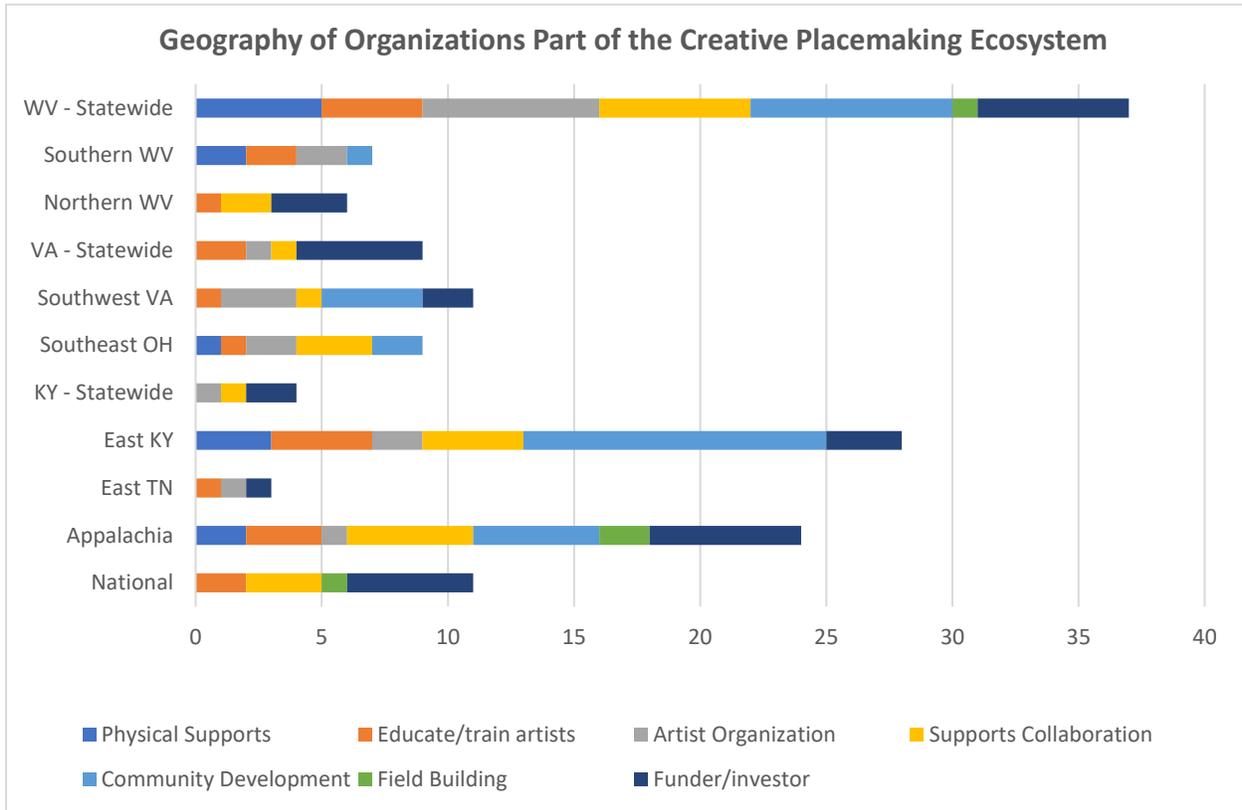


Figure 2

Figure 2 represents the geographic distribution of the given creative placemaking organizations, from geographies served nationally down to parts of a state.³ Notably, community development organizations are fairly well represented in most parts of a state or in whole states. For example, statewide, West Virginia shows an even spread of support organizations, including community development organizations. Likewise, Eastern Kentucky shows many types of organizations working in ways that provide creative placemaking support. As CAN grows its inventory and knowledge of creative placemaking actors, these numbers and proportions will change; the need to share lessons learned and foster connections among them will remain.

Appalachian Creative Placemaking Profiles in Appendix B

Organizations in Central Appalachia are using a diversity of tactics as they employ creative placemaking to revitalize their communities. Nine organizations are profiled in Appendix B to bring to life some of the ways communities are shaping their own futures through the will and creativity of the people living there.

³ Figure 2 excludes from the inventory 87 organizations that serve only one community or county since there is no way to visually display the individual counties served by those organizations. 12 | Page

Strengths and Challenges of Creative Placemaking in Central Appalachia

Assessing the Strength of the Regional Placemaking Field

One of the objectives of this scan is to understand how strong the field of arts and economic development is in Central Appalachia. A field, here, refers to “a community of organizations and individuals who are working together towards a common goal and using common approaches to achieving that goal” (Bridgespan Group 2009). We used the [Strong Field framework](#) to assess the strengths and needs within arts and economic development efforts in the region. As described by the Bridgespan Group, the Strong Field Framework is made up of five components that inform an overall assessment of the field:

- **Shared Identity:** the foundation of the field – it identifies whether people and organizations in a field have a shared purpose and shared values which bring them together for collaboration.
- **Standards of Practice:** the practices that people learn through shared learning and training.
- **Knowledge Base:** the proof that the standards of practice result in the desired impacts.
- **Leadership and Grassroots Support:** the “influential leaders and exemplary organizations across key segments of the field” that spread important ideas widely.
- **Funding and Supporting Policy:** the policies that support or enable the standards of practice, as well as organized funding streams from diverse sources.

The table below presents a short assessment for each of the Strong Field components in Central Appalachia:

Shared Identity			
Placemaking practitioners are aligned in their emphasis on economic development, equity, & placehealing impacts. Collaboration across the region is a stated intention across members of the creative placemaking community. Creative placemaking stakeholders are generally aligned in their principles (see figure 1).			
Standards of Practice	Knowledge Base	Leadership and Grassroots Support	Funding and Supporting Policy
Exemplary models exist but need to be highlighted in case studies and shared across the community. Standards of practice are still emerging and being uncovered. An understanding of the trends is needed. Training and technical assistance have emerged in programs through organizations like AIR Institute, Appalshop, WV Hub, and Create Your State (to name a few).	Dissemination of existing research on creative placemaking in Central Appalachia is needed. Further research that investigates best practices, trends, and success stories will support stakeholders’ learning, connections, and collaboration.	There are many organizations leading and gathering grassroots support of local efforts (several are lifted up in this scan). Connections among these groups, through CAN and elsewhere, must be fostered in order to advance the field of creative placemaking in the region.	A number of national & local funders are aligned in recognizing the promise of creative placemaking, yet many communities still lack access to funding. More philanthropic and corporate giving and low-interest lending is needed to reach underinvested places. A better understanding of what a conducive policy environment looks like for Central Appalachia can help stakeholders employ specific policy strategies.

We find that, overall, creative placemaking as a field is strong and growing in the region. It is clear that creative placemaking has secured a healthy foundation in the variety of actors working toward aligned goals and operating under a set of shared principles. As the field grows, existing actors will be critical, expanding their support roles in the creative placemaking ecosystem. That will require more connections, collaboration, and learning among the diverse range of actors like those identified in the inventory in Appendix A.

Strengthening the Field: Challenges and Recommendations

The barriers that surfaced among survey respondents and interviewees often play off one another, compounding their entrenched nature. At the same time, people using creative placemaking have clear ideas about the remedies that are needed for creative placemaking to foster thriving and resilient communities. This section presents the most significant challenges and directly related recommendations that surfaced during the research. Notably, many of these themes are relevant to rural areas beyond Central Appalachia.

Questions for Further Research:

What are the current partnerships and specific projects that use creative placemaking as part of their process?

What does a network analysis of the creative placemaking support system tell us about the needs, successes, and/or trends in creative placemaking?

Challenge: Funding is both sparse and too often targets strategies that are unrealistic in rural areas.

Funding doesn't reach the hills and hollers of Appalachia for several reasons: Many national creative placemaking funders find the rural Appalachian context unfamiliar, and thus, are less likely to invest here; some parts of the region aren't in the footprint of any of the place-based local and regional funders; and many state departments of tourism invest heavily in big-ticket attractions and leave community-level arts and cultural activities unsupported. Compounding the issue of limited funds is that large grant opportunities are too often aimed at infrastructure development, where projects often do not incorporate community input on what's actually needed nor a plan for how to sustain their usefulness.

What's needed: Increase investments in community-designed solutions via large, flexible grants as well as more experimental seed funding. Some projects start small and need early-stage grants to come up with and test solutions of their own, while others in the region are ready for larger investments that leave outcomes flexible, since so much of the work and results arise organically from the community-based process. In the survey, respondents rated the need for more grant funding for creative placemaking a 2.87 out of three, meaning "this support is very needed." This was the highest rated need among survey respondents.

Challenge: A century of reliance on extractive industries has led to a lack of creative self-determination among some Central Appalachian residents. While it is clear that the true spirit of Central Appalachian people is hearty, creative, and entrepreneurial, entrenched power structures and outside ownership has strongly influenced the socio-economic realities on the ground. For residents who do bring determination and creative energy, overcoming voices of pessimism is an added challenge that limits the number of ideas that get tried.

What's needed: Train communities in creative strategies that break down traditional power dynamics. The arts have a unique ability to disrupt entrenched ways of working and thinking. Communities need training and support that help them promote that sort of artistic or creative disruption, which would help break down traditional power structures from the inside out. When communities feel the power of the arts, especially when they do the creating, they experience an "unbounding of the imagination" (the term used by Ben Fink, developed by the Letcher County Culture Hub to describe this effect).

Challenge: The creative talent that exists in Central Appalachia is under-utilized and under-appreciated. All communities, even those that struggle to improve economic, social, and health outcomes, have assets that can be built on to create change. The arts are one of the assets available to communities to use on their unique community development paths. The challenge is often in bridging arts and culture with other sectors. Barriers to getting these groups working together include money to pay artists for their work, insufficient time to build relationships, and lack of broadly shared understanding of the benefits that the arts could bring to the community development process.

What's needed: Change the narrative around the relevance of the Arts. Show that art is for everyone and demonstrate how it improves quality of life for all people – through hope, inspiration, and community cohesion. Demonstrating art's value opens up possibilities for what the arts can offer other sectors.

Challenge: Geographic isolation makes it more difficult for ideas to catch on, evolve, and spread. Without a dedicated system or structure for the sharing of ideas to happen, projects don't go through the iterations or adaptations necessary to scale up or spread from community to community.

What's needed: Promote peer learning and field building, coordinated through a regional creative placemaking network. Interviewees had a strong appetite for opportunities to learn how other communities have overcome challenges or approached opportunities. The [creative placemaking inventory](#) also showed that few creative placemaking field-building actors exist in the region, despite the high number of organizations doing this work on the ground. A learning network would enable a collaborative ecosystem to form and codify standards of practice that ensure inclusive, collaborative, and impactful processes.

Challenge: The lack of connections between rural creative talent and larger markets limits the business potential of rural artists and craftspeople. Access to larger markets would increase the ability for artists to turn their talent into a business opportunity, given the growing demand for hand-crafted items, original artwork, and other creative products.

What's needed: Support artists as small business owners. If artists were provided better access to low-interest loans, low-cost studio space, and other tools and resources meant to scale their work, it would remove many barriers artists face as entrepreneurs. They also need peer support, training, value chain coordination, marketing skills, and brokers to help them reach larger markets.

Challenge: Economic development policies aren't oriented to support unconventional strategies like placemaking. Traditional economic development policies often seek silver bullet answers like offering incentives to attract companies to relocate, yet those policies don't promote the growth of locally-rooted businesses. For example, "makerspaces" provide new opportunities for product ideation, shared production and value chain coordination, but don't fit the traditional economic development model. Economic development professionals in general lack an appreciation of what the arts offer local economies.

What's needed: Show the potential economic and social impact of taking the creative placemaking approach. Advocate for the economic development policies that incorporate creative ideas approaches by showing the impact that creative placemaking has on a community's quality of life, civic engagement, and business opportunities.

Challenge: Assumptions about the term “creative placemaking” can turn people off from considering the approach. For some, the term may be associated with gentrification and displacement of low-income people or artists from places they’ve lived for years or generations. For others, it may sound like another “solution” from elsewhere that is based in urban planning principles which don’t necessarily transfer easily to the rural context.

What’s needed: Meet communities where they are to help them define where they want to be. A number of people interviewed said that they use the term “creative placemaking” and find that it resonates with the people with whom they work. For those that find it problematic, they simply don’t use the term and instead use language that the community is already using in their work together. After all, a core principle of creative placemaking is that the people who will be affected by decisions that are made need to be involved in those decision-making processes.

Addressing these needs and challenges is sure to be a long and expensive process, especially if creative placemaking resources and practices are to reach the most underinvested places. Further collective learning and analysis is needed to understand the most effective leverage points to address each of these needs, but this list provides a starting point for that exploration.

The Central Appalachian Network (CAN) believes it is well-positioned to play a coordination, learning, sharing, and convening function to build the field of creative placemaking in Central Appalachia. As an established network of seven anchor organizations that work across various sectors, a central component of CAN’s approach is to strengthen social infrastructure across the region through connectivity and collaboration. CAN’s network of partners includes over 50 place-based organizations working on community economic development, including non-profits, local governments, lenders, social enterprises, and academic institutions. Given the role that the arts and culture can play to address challenges and unify communities around solutions, CAN looks forward to the opportunity to strengthen the field of creative placemaking as a tool for community economic development.

Conclusion

Drawing on participatory research methods that prioritize the input of the people doing the work, this paper presents a baseline understanding of the current state of creative placemaking in Central Appalachia. We fully expect that the definitions, categories, analysis, and recommendations shared here will be refined and advanced by the region’s creative placemaking actors. While the paper focused on creative placemaking in Central Appalachia, the themes and findings that have surfaced are relevant for the broader field and certainly have implications and lessons for other rural areas.

Creative placemaking in Central Appalachia is a ripe and growing opportunity to strengthen community and economic development practice. Demand is mounting for more intentional support to discover and share the promising practices and lessons learned from around the region. Stakeholders are eager for better coordination of services and resources to strengthen the “enabling ecosystem” for creative placemaking in the region. And a growing number of local, regional, and national funders have recognized the region’s momentum around creative placemaking and its potential to drive economic development, improve quality of life, and inspire hope in Appalachian communities. Yet, more investment and long-term approaches are needed to do the complex, slow work of community development. Connecting and supporting this work within a regional creative placemaking ecosystem will accelerate the pace of meaningful change. We hope this paper offers some shared foundation and direction for the exciting work to come, as we explore the true value and potential of creative placemaking in Central Appalachia’s economic transition.

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Appendix A – Inventory of Appalachian Creative Placemaking Actors

The [Creative Placemaking inventory](#) is a spreadsheet containing a list of categorized organizations doing creative placemaking work in Central Appalachia. These organizations are categorized according to the type of support or role they play in the creative placemaking ecosystem. The inventory of actors is meant to grow as CAN develops more relationships with organizations using the approach so that CAN may serve as a hub of information that helps build the field. Should anyone wish to add an organization to the inventory, he or she will have the opportunity via the Creative Placemaking page on the [CAN website](#).

Appendix B – Appalachian Creative Placemaking Profiles

Profile: Appalshop

Background: Established in 1969, [Appalshop](#) “documents the life, celebrates the culture, and voices the concerns of people living in Appalachia and rural America.” Located in Whitesburg, KY, Appalshop uses its art gallery, theater, community radio station, regional histories archive, and media training and production facilities to support telling the real and felt stories of Appalachia. To that end, Appalshop makes an intentional point to bring voice and empowerment to Appalachian people, whom it believes have largely been excluded from the national public conversation.

Sample Creative Placemaking Activities: Appalshop partnered with Imagining America, and Lafayette College’s Economic Empowerment & Global Learning Project to use creative placemaking principles for the purpose of supporting revitalization efforts. Starting with the Letcher County [Culture Hub](#), community members representing arts, business, civic groups, public figures, education, and nonprofits come together to tell new stories about themselves, unbound their imaginations, and build community wealth. Their cultural events attract visitors from around the country to experience the community’s new stories.

Another effort of Appalshop’s partnership with Imagining America and Lafayette College is a program called [Performing Our Future](#), which documents community organizing principles and how to implement economic development strategies in a practical multimedia toolkit. The toolkit “combines the expertise of economists, humanities scholars, and artists to advance economic development driven by cultural assets.”

Profile: Create Your State

Background: “[Create Your State](#) is an entertaining multimedia musical performance and workshop that inspires and empowers creative community revitalization and development. It provides a full program of immersive experiential learning and strategic planning for leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, students and other involved citizens.” It is modeled to share successful strategies from the [RifRaff Arts Collective](#) in Princeton, WV, which has led a remarkable renaissance into the formerly depressed downtown.

Sample Creative Placemaking Activities: Unlike most concerts, people who attend a Create Your State performance will get introduced to new skills, tools, and other community members to catalyze vision and momentum toward positive change. Participants can also receive ongoing support as they continue to use arts-based community development strategies. Over 20 towns in West Virginia have hosted a Create Your State performance to explore the possibilities and plan creative projects that catalyze social and economic change for their town.

Profile: Appalachian Artisan Center

Background: The [Appalachian Artisan Center's](#) (AAC) mission is “to develop the economy of eastern Kentucky through our arts, culture, and heritage.” It supports artists with technical assistance that helps them create and maintain successful businesses. Support includes business plan development, training and workshops, continuing education, studio space, access to a network of artists, and sales space to exhibit their work. The Center offers apprenticeship programs in blacksmithing, clay and pottery, and luthiery, or instrument building.

Sample Creative Placemaking Activities: AAC uses the arts as a tool to help in the healing process for people with drug addiction and substance use disorders in its [Culture of Recovery Program](#). In addition to offering workshops in the trades mentioned above, the Culture of Recovery includes workshops in painting, journal-making, song-writing, and cooking.

Profile: Coalfield Development Corporation

Background: The [Coalfield Development Corporation](#) operates social enterprises that “transform perceived liabilities into assets, and cultivate the community needed for real opportunity in Appalachia through mentorship, education, and employment.” It developed a 33-6-3 model, as a holistic approach to addressing West Virginia’s challenges using on-the-job training (33 hours), higher education class time (six hours), and life-skills mentorship (three hours) for under-employed and unemployed people entering the program. Included in its education and personal development components are elements that celebrate West Virginia history and heritage. Trainees work in construction, wood-working, agriculture and artisan trades.

Sample Creative Placemaking Activities: Coalfield works with communities in Southern WV to purchase and rehabilitate abandoned or deteriorating buildings. Throughout the rehabilitation process, Coalfield ensures that the local community informs the decisions made about how a building is repurposed and for what community purpose. One project, the [West Edge Factory](#) in Huntington, WV, undergoing transformation into offices, community event space, a food hub, wood shop, solar training center and work area for local artists. West Edge has also demonstrated a positive ripple effect on the surrounding community.

Profile: AIR Institute

Background: The [AIR Institute of Berea College](#) serves communities with creativity-focused community and economic development programs designed to raise the value of creativity in every community. The AIR programs connect creatives, business-minded folks, and their community and helps them collaborate and use design thinking and business planning to make their communities more vibrant.

Sample Creative Placemaking Activities: AIR programs include a three-day Shift Workshop and six-month Evolve programs. Shift Workshop participants work together quickly to design and plan implementable projects for their community that focus on raising the value of arts and creativity. Examples of projects include: streetscape designs, youth farmers market, Pop-up STEAM shop, hiking trail wayfinding, youth-run coffee shop, barn quilt trail festival, suicide prevention campaign, and business creativity training.

In January 2018, AIR convened over 40 people across seven Appalachian states to discuss the development of a regional creative economy network. The emerging network includes leadership from seven states that are all using the AIR programs and [Artists Thrive](#) tools and hope to share stories, convene regularly, and help grow the creative assets of Appalachia.

Profile: Step by Step Big Ugly Community Center

Background: Beginning as a writing group for children in foster care, [Step by Step](#) has supported children and their families throughout the southern coalfields of WV for over 25 years. Their programs are centered around education, health & wellness, child safety, and community development and include activities like tutoring, oral histories, and community/family gardening. Step by Step's Big Ugly Community Center has served as a training center for other West Virginia communities hoping to model their own community center off of Big Ugly's using community organizing, storytelling, and other creative placemaking activities.

Sample Creative Placemaking Activities: After improving the BUCC infrastructure for sound recording and performance spaces, Step by Step will develop a series of cross-sector and intergenerational trainings in oral history, nonfiction portraiture, and videography. This is an effort to build the capacity of leaders in Southern WV and empower them to share their stories.

Profile: Grayson Gallery & Art Center

Background: The [Grayson Gallery & Art Center](#) (GGAC) opened 2011 with a mission to “encourage, foster and sponsor the fine and practical arts and to establish a community art gallery focused on visual and performing arts and to make available a venue for showcasing regional artistic talent.” Their vision for “a vibrant community, engaged in the fine and practical arts” has led the GGAC to partner with community organizations on arts-related projects focused mainly in northeastern Kentucky. Through its art and music shows, the GGAC brings together a diverse range of community members and offers training in the arts and brings attention to important community issues.

Sample Creative Placemaking Activities: The GGAC is building out a network of community organizations that would model its activities after the Letcher County Culture Hub, supported by Appalshop, profiled above. After a series of trainings with the Culture Hub to build relationships among the GGAC networks, members will attend an AIR Institute Shift Workshop to assist the group in identifying a community project with seed funding to cultivate its growth.

Profile: Friends of Southwest Virginia

Background: In partnership and support of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, [Friends of Southwest Virginia](#) “helps artists, crafts people, localities, nonprofits, and entrepreneurs mobilize and succeed.” Together, they support a southwest Virginia (SWVA) marketing strategy for asset-based tourism, promote artisanship and support artists to display and market their work, and revitalize downtowns with residents and nonprofit partners in SWVA communities. Their efforts directly promote and enable the development of creative economies in SWVA through programs and organizations including Heartwood, Round the Mountain, and the Crooked Road.

Sample Creative Placemaking Activities: Friends of Southwest Virginia supports the [Crooked Road](#), Virginia's 330-mile heritage music driving trail that connects nine major venues where SWVA's unique music can be heard nearly every night. Itself a nonprofit, the Crooked Road celebrates 19 counties, four cities, over 50 towns, and numerous music venues. Festivals, concerts and competitions also gather musicians and spectators each spring, summer and fall weekend.

Profile: Lost Creek Farm

Background: [Lost Creek Farm](#) was once a vegetable and livestock farm in the early 20th century. In the latter part of that century, the farm was abandoned until its current owners began revitalizing it in hopes to turn it into a working farm and a culinary destination in Harrison County, West Virginia.

Sample Creative Placemaking Activities: The owners of Lost Creek Farm operate a travelling kitchen inspired by the depth and complexity of Appalachia's rich culinary heritage. Using produce from other local farms, the owners and the meals weave stories of the land, food, and people that bring the public together at their traveling meals.

Appendix C – Research Methods

CAN set out to conduct a scan of creative placemaking in Central Appalachia, to form an initial assessment of who is doing this work, what the challenges and opportunities are, and how strong the ecosystem is that supports creative placemaking. With direction and advice from the CAN Steering Committee members, creative placemaking practitioner partners, Appalachia Funders Network Arts & Culture Working Group members, and ArtPlace America staff, the research team at Rural Support Partners conducted a series of qualitative, quantitative, and secondary research to complete the scan. This work includes:

- Initial literature review to understand and summarize creative placemaking concepts and pull out elements relevant to rural areas
- Public survey to gather input on examples, needs, and strengths of creative placemaking from practitioners and supporters around the region
- Organizational research to develop an inventory of creative placemaking actors
- Qualitative interviews with regional placemaking actors to deepen and provide nuance to survey data
- Participatory feedback during the Creative Placemaking Track at the 2018 CAN Convening

The survey was distributed to over 200 people across the Central Appalachian region through CAN's network of networks. The purpose of the survey was to identify a variety of actors using creative placemaking in Central Appalachia, what some common approaches and strategies are, and what the core needs, challenges, and opportunities are in the field. The distribution of the survey included a range of community and economic development actors across sectors as well as artists and arts organizations. As CAN steps into the creative placemaking space and begins to connect with creative placemaking actors, its network is somewhat limited, which does affect how representative the survey results are. Thus, the survey results should not be considered scientifically rigorous. Rather, they provided an initial understanding meant to be deepened and adapted by ongoing participatory investigation and exploration with regional actors participating in the emerging Creative Placemaking Network supported by CAN.

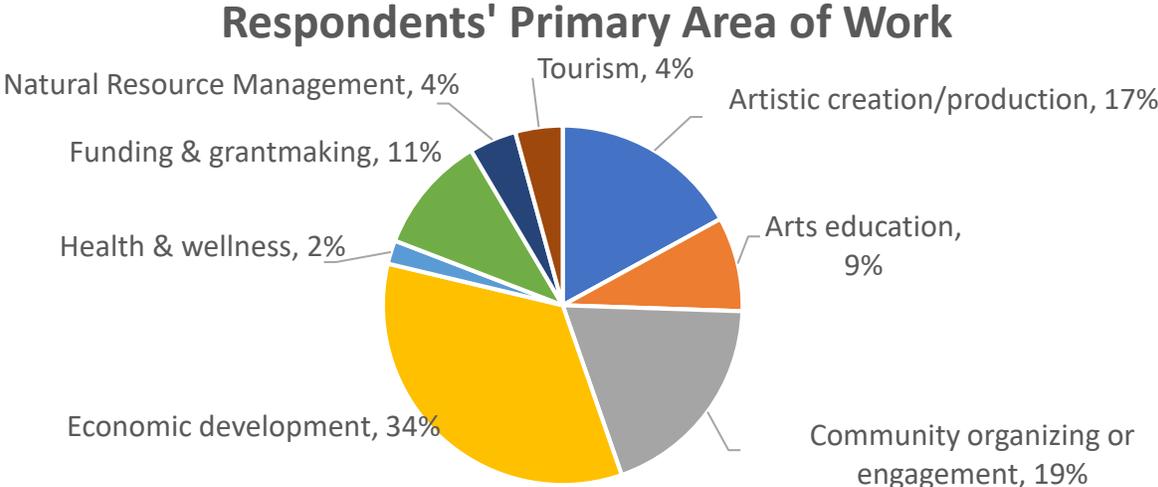
To deepen the insights from the survey, the research team conducted nine qualitative interviews with people who are using creative placemaking in a variety of ways in the region. Participants who attended the Creative Placemaking Track at the 2018 CAN Convening also contributed important insights and consensus around several needs for the field moving forward.

Respondents

Since CAN's network of networks are people and organizations doing a range of economic development activities, the survey's respondents represent people who are more likely to be economic development

focused and/or be familiar with and already use a creative placemaking process. The result is data with a predominant economic development focus, which uncovers some hotspots of creative placemaking activity and knowledge sources in the region but certainly does not capture all activity or actors.

Forty-nine (49) people completed the survey, including 16 who identified as artists or arts organization representatives and 33 who were neither artists nor arts organization representatives. The majority of respondents come from nonprofits (48%), while 21% represented funders and 17% were from the for-profit or private sector. The graph below breaks down the primary areas of respondents' work: 34% said they work in economic development, 19% in community organizing, and 17% in artistic creation or production.



The nine interviewees selected to complement and deepen the insights from the survey represented the fields of community organizing, the arts, economic development, agricultural heritage, capacity building, entrepreneurship training, and funding. Participants in the 2018 CAN Convening's Creative Placemaking Track included people from arts organizations, community organizing, financial institutions, food systems, entrepreneurship development, funding, and community development, among others. These respondents served as practice-based experts for this scan, sharing their knowledge from years of employing the creative placemaking process to their work. They provided nuance, texture, and valuable perspectives on the state of creative placemaking in the region.