

National Endowment for the Arts: Our Town
Funding Opportunity Number: 2012NEAOT
Town of Brattleboro, Vermont

Attachment 2. Details of the Project Narrative

a. **Budget.** The Town of Brattleboro requests a grant of \$50,000, to be matched 1:1, to support The Brattleboro Project. Administered by the Town's Planning Department, the grant will fund activities along three tracks: 1) 20% for community cultural assets mapping, 2) 40% for civic engagement in the planning and potential development of a cultural district, 3) 40% for a public process to create a work of art or arts event that will celebrate the strength of public discourse and planning. The Project match would be funded through a combination of contributions from public, nonprofit, and funding agency sources (40/30/30 est.). The Project, described below, responds to community tragedy as well as to recent Town planning schedules and would allow the Town to implement meaningful projects in the context of larger community visioning.

b. **Major Project Activities.** Consistent with recent Town planning efforts, The Brattleboro Project will allow investigations for creating a more livable community, as envisioned by the NEA. The Project furthers the Town's past three years of cultural planning by focusing on local arts and culture capacity building, involving the arts and culture community in conversations about Brattleboro's natural and cultural heritage and future visions of community.

Because of recent 'wake up calls' in Brattleboro (a major downtown fire, a prominent murder, and significant flooding during Hurricane Irene), The Brattleboro Project has potential to effectively change the way planning and collaboration are conceived in Brattleboro, across multiple spectra. The Project will proceed on three tracks, each demonstrating how the arts, at the core, can play a deciding role in the intentional creation of place and community.

Track 1. Cultural Assets Mapping. Numerous assets, numerous economic layers, numerous geographies jostle for Brattleboro's varied resources. A series of cultural assets mapping exercises will produce both resource maps (tangible cultural resources), and community identity maps (stories and traditions that illustrate "place"). The exercises will investigate historical, current, and future visions. These data will support cultural promotion, economic development, maximizing use of town facilities, and planning and policy work (land use and place making). Sketches, renderings, and professionally produced maps will be presented to the public at an open meeting to close Track 1.

Track 2. Cultural District Planning. Drawing from the work completed in Track 1 and presuming that best practice models already exist, The Brattleboro Project will embark on a learning quest, a series of six panel (and/or roundtable) discussions designed to explore the notions of Cultural District Development and Planning, with the arts and culture sector gaining real entrance into community decision making. Consultant supported convenings will focus on capacity building of local arts enterprises (for and not-for-profit) positioned within a growing creative sector. (Assuming that other area communities might gain from this open forum, we will invite leaders from surrounding communities and towns to learn along with us.) Expert panelists (three per panel) will share experience and advice on a range of topics, and will respond to questions from the community. Current proposed topics include: 1) Cluster v. District v. Hub?, 2) Who's in, Who's out?, Concepts of Boundaries and Gates, 3) Does a Cultural District serve as nexus for sustainable economic development?, 4) Collaboration and Cooperation, Exploring Matrices, 5) 'Culture', Exploring Brattleboro's Cultural Landscape (past, present, and future), 6) What's the Code?: Infrastructure, Statutes, Etc. Ongoing reports will be available via a project website, and through local media. A final findings meeting will coalesce community response and will describe next stages of implementation.

Track 3. Public Art. A very natural, potential district corridor snakes through Brattleboro: the Whetstone Brook, site of severe flooding during Hurricane Irene in August 2011. (The conversation Irene began seeks to be continued.) In response to the ravages of Irene, in response to a budding Cultural District, in response to other downtown tragedies in 2011, The Brattleboro Project will include a public expression of resilience and determination—either as a work of public art or an arts-based performance. The precise nature of the piece will reflect the work of The Brattleboro Project. A call will earn proposals, which will be evaluated through a peer-review process. The selected art piece will be dedicated and celebrated in a public setting.

c. Outcome(s) and Measurements.

Primary livability outcomes for The Brattleboro Project are:

- Increased sense of ownership: public art work, public space, usable private space
- Increased sense of function: safety, walkability, diversity (age, ethnicity, networks, socio-economics)
- Increased interweaving of cultural and community assets: arts, transit, commerce, education, parks and recreation
- Increased opportunities for expression: design in place making, cultural venue, social gathering, jobs
- Increased appreciation of natural landscape and built form: proximity to and use of the Connecticut River, the Whetstone Brook, streets, bridges
- Increased acceptance of the arts and culture sector into Town planning processes

Primary performance measures will include:

- Measuring compliance with proposed Town Plan (adoption expected June 2012)
- Resident surveys
- Tracking numbers, inter-disciplinary convenings, meetings
- Tracking walkability and transportation choices
- Measurement of public venues and available green spaces and their use
- Local economic impact studies
- Tourism statistics

d. Schedule.

Quarter IV 2012. Beginning. Finalize assemblage of players, consultants, project scope, details, and responsibility outlines.

Quarter I 2013. Track 1: Cultural Assets Mapping. Multiple community exercises. Final consultant report. Public exhibition of findings.

Quarter II-IV 2013. Track 2: Cultural District Planning. Final consultant report. Public meeting to discuss findings.

Quarter I-III, 2014. Track 3. Public Art project. Call to creators. Jury appointment. Projects received, evaluated. Award announced. Artwork/event pre-production ensues. Public dedication/event.

e. Partners, key organizations, individuals, and works of art. Key partners for this project will be the Town of Brattleboro and the Arts Council of Windham County (please see Attachment 1 for organizational background statements). The Town has authorized its Planning Department to administer Town responsibilities and to work with community project participants. The Town has also authorized the Town Arts Committee (TAC) to coordinate relations with the grant partner, Arts Council of Windham County (ACWC). The Arts Council of Windham County will receive the grant from the Town to coordinate planning, contracting, day-to-day management of project components. In exploring the notion of Cultural District development, a number of (non-Town) property owners, organizations, businesses come into focus as potential stakeholders. These stakeholders have each been part of previous planning exercises and, so long as the Town's livability is the topic, each could be characterized as a ready player

for the future. Other regional stakeholders include the Windham Regional Commission, the Brattleboro Library, Building a Better Brattleboro (local Downtown Association), and the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation.

f. **Target community.** Brattleboro is a community of 12,000 residents established in 1753 along the Connecticut River. Serving a radius of 30 miles, the catchment population is 45,000. Brattleboro is at the northern tip of the so-called “knowledge corridor” stretching from New Haven, CT in the south and taking in the Five Colleges communities of the Pioneer Valley in Western Massachusetts. Specific strategies are being developed to foster development along the Amtrak railroad, linking communities of the Connecticut River and facilitating connections to larger markets (such as New York City).

g. **Plans for promoting and publicizing.** The two partners will use all print and online media to engage the community, participants, and art specialists. Local television, two newspapers, and multiple websites currently serve the Brattleboro area. Statewide and regional media outlets tend to keep a steady eye on Brattleboro, so all these resources will be fostered. The Brattleboro Project will contribute to the growing library of creative place making by constructing a website. From the onset of the project, a virtual cultural district will be open and accessible to the Brattleboro community, engaging integration around the concept of ‘creative’ planning. The website will provide blogging opportunity and will initiate dialogue with like-minded communities.

h. **Plans for documenting and evaluating.** The Town will document the three Project Tracks reporting to the Planning Commission and other bodies as necessary. The Town Arts Committee (TAC) will monitor the project for the Town (monthly meetings, acceptance of reports from ACWC and planning consultants). Consultants will provide full reports. ACWC will track outreach and publicity efforts, community participation numbers, and will monitor physical and online participation and response.

i. **Goals and impact.** Truth: The Brattleboro Project grows directly (at long last!) from planning in two sectors: 1) town government and 2) area nonprofit cultural agencies. Goal: The Town or Brattleboro and many cultural agencies in the area wish to increase the effectiveness and friendliness of forward planning. Impact: Successful planning exercises, led by the arts and culture community in partnership with the Town, will set the stage for continued policy creation and stronger economic conditions for development.

Truth: In recognition of its vibrant, outsized arts community, the Town, in 2009, appointed an eight-person Town Arts Committee (TAC) to strengthen the bonds among the Town of Brattleboro, the community of Brattleboro, and the arts community, to enable mutual understanding and appreciation for the aesthetic and economic contributions made by the arts. Since its inception, TAC has led bi-weekly public meetings and has led charrettes, the most recent of which culminated in a single-voiced call to use the proposed Town Plan to explore the development of a cultural district. Goal: The Brattleboro Project seeks to move along the natural path created by these nascent efforts by demonstrating how the arts can effectively and creatively map, explore, and create. Impact: Increased livability in this small, yet vibrant community. A successful Project will result in deeper relationships that engender meaningful participation from a full range of community sectors.

Truth: The Town’s geography is changing. The Brattleboro downtown faces away from the Connecticut River, once a source of poison and danger. Goal: The Project will provide a stepping stone vision for discovering and creating a map that will incorporate livability as central to decision making. Impact: The Town’s grittier, more industrial funkiness will ultimately be rearranged, as in any living room, to create a more usable, safe community.

j. **Plans for making the project accessible.** The Town of Brattleboro, in accordance with the American Disabilities Act, makes provision for accessibility. The Town operates an ADA committee. Normal provisions include public meetings scheduled in buildings that conform to ADA requirements. All participants are encouraged to notify meeting organizers of any special accommodations required.

k. **Mayor’s Institute.** N/A