

A GUIDE ON  
CREATIVE  
PLACEMAKING  
FOR WELCOMING  
COMMUNITIES

A BEST PRACTICE  
GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS  
OF IMMIGRANT  
INTEGRATION SEEKING  
TO WORK WITH ARTISTS  
AND CULTURE MAKERS TO  
FOSTER MORE WELCOMING  
COMMUNITIES.



CREATIVE PLACEMAKING & WELCOMING:  
TIPS AND TOOLS FOR INTEGRATING ARTS,  
CULTURE, AND IMMIGRATION

## INTRODUCTION

All of us have the desire to be seen, to be heard, to belong, and to find a sense of home and safety amidst so much uprooting. This simple fact can both drive the “othering” that fuels anti-immigrant backlash, or offer solutions to it.

No matter the national climate, many communities have addressed these deeper needs and are successfully making themselves places that feel like home to everyone who lives there, whether they just arrived or have lived there for generations.

Where these welcoming efforts have been successful, artists, cultural organizations, and creative placemakers have not been at the periphery, but at the center of such efforts. Artists and culture-makers are using their talents and assets to shape both inclusive policies and places that weave newcomers into the civic, social, and economic fabric of communities, helping neighbors to see one another as “we”, rather than “us” or “them”.

In communities where arts institutions also play a role in welcoming, these organizations reap the benefits of inclusion as they attract more diverse audiences, reflect their changing communities, and make communities more vibrant.

Welcoming America invites you to layer on arts and culture strategies into your current immigrant integration efforts when considering contact building, cultural heritage, collective capacity, and co-creation.

## ABOUT THIS TOOL

*Creative Placemaking & Welcoming Tips and Tools for Integrating Arts, Culture, and Immigration* was created as an entry point and companion piece to the field scan *Bridging Divides, Creating Community: Arts, Culture, and Immigration — A Creative Placemaking Field Scan* by John Arroyo, Ph.D., AICP, and published by ArtPlace America and Welcoming America.

In *Bridging Divides, Creating Community: Arts, Culture, and Immigration — A Creative Placemaking Field Scan*, you will find more examples and detailed strategies. The full scan is available at <https://wamerica.us/artplace>.

This resource also includes excerpts from *Making Waves: A Guide to Culture Strategy*, originally published by The Culture Group, a collaboration of organizations including Air Traffic Control, American Values Institute, Citizen Engagement Lab, CultureStr/ke, and TaskForce. The excerpt from *Making Waves* is reprinted with permission from The Center for Cultural Power.

Illustrations by Jing Wei and publication design by Studio MESH, both originally conceived and created for the ArtPlace field scan.

## DEFINING CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

This guide focuses on “creative placemaking,” or projects in which art plays an intentional and integrated role in place-based community planning and development. ArtPlace America defines creative placemaking as “the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development. It’s about artists, culture-bearers, and designers acting as allies to creatively address challenges and opportunities... contributing to community-defined social, physical, and economic outcomes and honoring a sense of place.”

# CONTACT BUILDING

*Arts and culture can help bridge newcomers and longer-term residents by unearthing compelling narratives, increasing opportunities for connection, building empathy and relationships, and diffusing or preventing future tension or “othering.”*



## QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

What are the opportunities for real listening, sharing, and understanding across differences in perspectives and backgrounds?

Where can arts and culture play a role in inspiring these conversations and supporting diverse relationships?

Communities need generative, collaborative ways to explore commonalities and encourage “contact building” between new and existing groups. Contact building is commonly used in welcoming initiatives and is inspired by Gordon Allport, a psychologist who developed “social contact theory” as a way to explain how a focused, common goal reduces prejudice across different people.<sup>1</sup>

Contact building works best when individuals identify each other as peers working towards a common goal—a two-way dynamic. Because those connections do not necessarily happen organically, many community leaders recognize there must be intentional efforts to bring people together and establish bonds that shift perceptions from “us vs. them” to a collective “us.”

Contact building is an important strategy for welcoming efforts, especially when racism and othering create real barriers to good policy and practice. Arts and culture can generate bridges between new Americans and longer-term populations by increasing empathy and building connections.

Place-based arts and cultural activities that embrace the plurality of the human experience, regardless of origin, can bring people together for shared experiences. What might otherwise be a tense encounter can be defused in a creative space, where people share, learn, and celebrate the arts and cultural traditions of their neighbors.<sup>2</sup> This requires time-consuming hands-on work to develop relationships with each individual group before relationships can develop between them.

## CASE STUDY

**FOLDED MAP PROJECT CHICAGO, IL.** Artist Tonika Lewis Johnson's **Folded Map™** Project connects residents at corresponding addresses on opposite sides of Chicago, or "Map Twins" from the North and South sides, to investigate what urban segregation looks like and how it impacts residents. What started as a photographic study quickly evolved into a multimedia exploration with video interviews. She invited audiences to open a dialogue and question how we are all impacted by social, racial, and institutional segregation. These encounters created space for connection and also for conversation on the legacy and impact of segregation in Chicago.



*Credit: Tonika Lewis Johnson*

# CULTURAL HERITAGE

*Arts and culture can help to elevate cultural traditions as assets by promoting appreciation of diverse cultural expression, creating new business opportunities rooted in heritage (ex. foodways, folkways), and sustaining a new population of ethnic entrepreneurs.*



QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

What role has culture played in the local economy?

How can current programs be expanded to better support immigrant entrepreneurs and artisans?

Culture links new and generational Americans to their homelands through food, medicinal remedies, religious expression, athletic traditions, and arts.<sup>3</sup> Traditions such as these form the foundation for a shared cultural experience within immigrant communities, a necessary bond amidst multi-dimensional migration experiences. This tie to people and places is critical to creating a sense of belonging and has been linked to health and community engagement; the preservation of cultural heritage is an important factor in building and sustaining inclusive places.

Culture and creativity can also present new business opportunities to build immigrant wealth and expand access to economic life. Core to immigrant inclusion is developing and executing programs that expand skills and leadership in new immigrant communities.



## CASE STUDY

**NIBBLE SOMERVILLE, MA** is the culinary entrepreneurship arm of the Somerville Arts Council. Through food tourism in the form of cooking classes, international market tours, and pop-up restaurants, the program celebrates the diverse food and cultural landscape of the Union Square neighborhood of Somerville. Its signature element is the Nibble Entrepreneurship Program (NEP), an eight-week program that provides emerging immigrant culinary entrepreneurs training to launch their culinary careers. The program distinguishes itself from other culinary entrepreneurship programs because it provides skills training while allowing members to share their stories and talents with each other and through cooking classes with the public. Culinary entrepreneurs learn about price points, permitting, employee training, business development, restaurant hospitality, and restaurant safety. Nibble has embarked on Nibble Catering as a revenue-generator; in October 2019, a fixed Nibble Kitchen opened in Union Square, complete with cuisines from Brazil, Ethiopia, and Bolivia.



*Scenes from the Nibble Kitchen Grand Opening. Credit: Photos by Maria Merbanda Martinez, courtesy of Somerville Arts Council*

# COLLECTIVE CAPACITY

*Arts and culture can help build individual and collective capacity by providing an accessible forum to advocates that empower immigrants; hone their voice; and guide them on how to be civically engaged.*



QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

What diverse, cross-sector networks or coalitions exist in the community already? Do artists and cultural workers participate in these spaces?

Success in the immigration sector requires cross-sector strategies and support, including diverse financial support. Distinct connections between groups that have traditionally served one ethnic population or type of new American with larger local cultural institutions has proven to be a powerful base for building new coalitions.

Arts and culture practitioners can help build collective capacity by recognizing and convening allied partners and funders in other sectors that intersect with the immigrant community. While service provision and advocacy efforts may differ, core values such as the quest for a more just and inclusive society also resonate with the target affinities of other sectors, including women's rights groups, the labor and workers' rights sector, human rights, and the LGBTQ advocacy movement.

Artists and cultural workers can also engage and inspire new leaders on immigrant inclusion by reframing policy issues in creative and accessible ways, as well as creating physical spaces that inspire greater civic engagement.

Arts and culture is a powerful tool for building trust, raising awareness, and opening up safe spaces. The sheer act of convening in a casual, creative, and culturally familiar setting provides an opportunity for deeper conversation and understanding of the issues faced by many immigrants and refugees that would not be shared through traditional surveys or other community feedback approaches.

## CASE STUDY

**KOUNKUEY DESIGN INITIATIVE (KDI)** NORTH SHORE, CA is a socially-engaged design and community development organization. Their projects increase access to resources and build connections between public and private actors through the social design of “productive public spaces”, or spaces that address the economic and social conditions of an underserved neighborhood. KDI’s projects draw on expertise from different sectors, including architects, engineers, urban planners, and community organizers. In all of their projects, they center the communities from start to finish. Recent projects include partnering with the LA Department of Transportation and residents to explore more flexible uses for city streets, particularly in neighborhoods that lack access to open space and parks. Through this project, KDI designed and deployed a “box of play” that could be used at events in low income neighborhoods lacking park space.



*Top: North Shore community members were co-authors in the park’s design process from start to finish.  
Credit: Kounkuey Design Initiative*

*Bottom: Children playing at the park entrance.  
Credit: Studio Loz Feliz*



# CO-CREATION

*Arts and culture can help co-create physical spaces that reflect identity, signal belonging, and serve as entry points and pathways for immigrant services and action.*



## QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

How can the design of physical spaces better empower immigrant and refugee leaders and build bridges within the community?

As more institutions and communities become involved in the work of serving and engaging immigrants and refugees, arts and culture can strengthen service provision and collaboration.

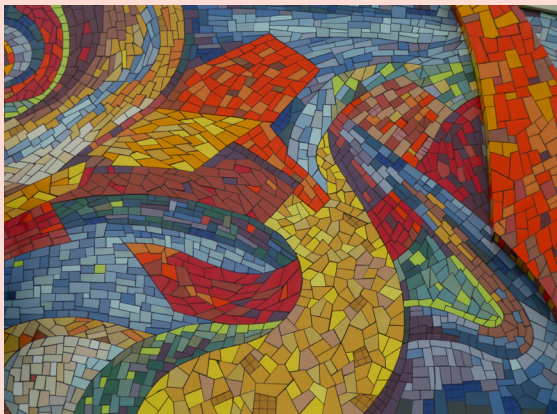
“Co-production” in this context is a dual process where artists of different backgrounds and disciplines work with each other as well as with service providers to develop creative programs, events, or spaces for both new and existing communities. Examples include installing culturally relevant visual arts elements in immigrant-serving social service centers; physically designing spaces to strengthen community and belonging; and building monuments or memorials to local immigrant and refugee leaders.

Many immigrant-serving organizations are constructing centralized facilities that serve many of the needs of the newcomer constituency and allow organizations to more easily collaborate. How these spaces are designed has the potential to empower new immigrant residents, create a sense of belonging, and build bridges across diverse communities.

Co-created spaces also have the ability to become a meeting point for passive socializing or organized strategy.

## CASE STUDY

**CASA AZAFRÁN NASHVILLE, TN** is an immigrant services complex located in downtown Nashville, one of the fastest-growing urban centers of new immigration in the U.S. The complex is a one-stop shop that houses education, legal, healthcare, and arts and culture service providers alongside a community event space. Opened in 2012, the complex was a project of Conexión Américas, one of Nashville’s largest immigrant social service centers. After purchasing the 28,800 square-foot building Conexión Américas worked with artists Jairo Prado and Susan Prado to ensure the physical space embodied the vision for the building. The outcome was “Migration,” a 12-foot mosaic mural that includes more than 7,000 pieces of hand-cut tile “built by Nashville, for Nashville”. During the open sessions in the Prados’ studio, community members shared and illustrated their migration stories. “Migration” ultimately incorporated the work of over 350 volunteers, capturing the migration story of people across the world.



*Top: Hands on Nashville and Workers Dignity staff members arrange tiles in the mosaic. Credit: Prado Studio*

*Left: Detail of “Migration,” the mosaic mural installed at the main entrance of Casa Azafrán. Credit: Prado Studio*

GETTING STARTED:

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND IMMIGRANT INCLUSION ORGANIZATIONS

### 13 KEY PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH ARTISTS

The following principles are designed to help organizations and organizers build an equitable, respectful, and effective partnership with an artist or culture-maker — a relationship that is rewarding and inspiring for all parties involved.

*The following excerpt from [Making Waves: A Guide to Culture Strategy](#), first published by The Culture Group, is reprinted with permission from The Center for Cultural Power. You can read the full report and find additional resources at [culturalpower.org](http://culturalpower.org).*

1.

### INVOLVE ARTISTS FROM THE BEGINNING

Engage artists from the very beginning of your process, not at the last minute or after a campaign or event is fully planned. Give them time to immerse themselves in the issue and create something of real quality. Who knows, by engaging them earlier they may also offer a game-changing idea that dramatically enhances the plan itself—you might end up building your entire campaign around a great song, video game, or work of art. Art amplifies our struggle best when it is not merely used as decoration, but as part of the foundation of any plan or action. (And as with any relationship, clear and open communication is key, from the beginning and throughout the process.)

2.

### FIND THE RIGHT ARTIST

Although this may seem like an obvious point, it is crucially important to partner with artists who have an authentic connection to the issues you are working on. Do your research! Also, think about your target audience. Who are you trying to reach? Is there an artist who is a natural fit for your audience? Think about demographics and identity as you search for the right creative partner.

3.

### SUPPLY INFORMATION

Provide the artist with raw materials to become well versed in the issue, and get inspired: a breakdown of the issue, a few talking points, key facts, and the values and principles that motivate your work. Don't assume the artist will know everything you know about the topic, so put them in close dialogue with people knowledgeable in other areas, like people who are affected by the broken policies or academics who've done extensive research.

Some artists like to immerse themselves in research and become an expert on an issue and others prefer just enough material to develop a basic working knowledge. We have generally found that providing artists with information around strategies and stories helps them be more creative and effective than loading them up on facts and figures.

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COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND IMMIGRANT  
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13 KEY PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH ARTISTS

4.

## MATCH THE MEDIUM

Try not to choose artistic mediums because they are cool or trendy. Concentrate on the art forms that best suit the campaign you're working on. For example, comedy allows for the safe exploration of taboo subjects, while film and TV offer opportunities to tell stories that create empathy and understanding.

5.

## CONSIDER WORKING WITH A CULTURAL PRODUCER

Cultural producers are bilingual in art and advocacy. They are professionals who will understand your needs and goals, match you up with the right types of creators, and help you develop and manage the partnership. They can help you assess what is already happening culturally around your issue. She or he also has the connections and know-how to help you access—and effectively work with—high-profile artists and cultural figures.

6.

## GET ORGANIZATIONAL BUY-IN

Make sure your organization is fully on board with integrating arts and culture into your work, and that everyone understands that the project(s) will require an investment of staff time, budget, and other organizational resources. Also consider hosting a creative fellow, or creating a staff position, to focus on integrating cultural strategies into your organization's work.

7.

## LET THE ARTIST LEAD IN THE CREATIVE

The artist should always be the lead when it comes to creative matters. Trust the artist's intuition, and remember they are the experts in their area: reaching people emotionally and unleashing the public's power and willingness to act. They need the flexibility and authority over the final product to make sure it works as effective art, music, or storytelling first.

Nobody wants to hear political comedy if it's not actually funny, or a political song that's painful to listen to, so be sure not to compromise the art in order to force the message. If it works as art, then the message it carries will travel further.

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COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND IMMIGRANT  
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## 13 KEY PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH ARTISTS

8.

## PAY THE ARTIST

Artists are skilled laborers. They have years of professional training, so pay them appropriately (with actual money, not just “exposure”). Also, be sure to allocate for related costs like supplies, production, and insurance. Artists should not be asked to work for free or reduced rates, unless you and your colleagues are doing the same.

9.

## CREDIT ARTISTS

Make sure to credit artists wherever their work is featured. It’s not just their proper due; it also can imbue the work with greater authenticity. It tells the audience the work was created by an actual human being who genuinely cares about the issue. Also, be judicious in the size and placement of organizational logos as they can distract from the work and undermine its authenticity.

10.

## BE CLEAR ABOUT OWNERSHIP

Artists own their creations by default, so a licensing agreement is the proper business and legal framework to use (as opposed to a work-for-hire contractor’s agreement). As the owner, the artist is free to repurpose his or her work, but if you want exclusive rights to the work you can negotiate with the artist and pay a higher fee.

11.

UNDERSTAND THIS  
WORK TAKES TIME

Be prepared to invest in a long-term process of learning the best way to work with creators. It may take time and experimentation to get it right, but the organizations that take this process seriously will find that they are able to consistently produce great results, and that culture can dramatically amplify and transform the work they do.

12.

## HAVE A ROLLOUT PLAN

Have a plan ready to disseminate the art or cultural product in the public realm. You should have a plan and the budget for distribution and promotion, including a press strategy and a social media strategy—maybe even an advertising budget—and all the personnel and resources you’ll need to implement the plans. And make sure to plan that outreach strategy in partnership with the artist.

13.

## DON’T TRY THIS AT HOME

Creating an effective, powerful work of art is not easy. Artists who do it are able to because they have spent years honing their craft. Trying to do it yourself might not produce the best results. Be willing to invest in real talent.



GETTING STARTED:

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND IMMIGRANT INCLUSION ORGANIZATIONS

### FOR ARTISTS

Smart cultural strategy means you have an equal and early seat at the table when organizations begin planning for a particular project or campaign. If the organizations are doing their part right (and hopefully the “13 Key Principles” in the previous section will help them do just that!), you should be in a situation where you can lead the creative charge, do your best work, and be an effective, fully-engaged advocate for an issue you care about.

You may have had prior experience working with organizations on a political or social issue or campaign. It may or may not have been a happy collaboration. But our hope is that everyone involved can aim for—and achieve—an engaged, empowering, effective, and long-term relationship that produces potent, affecting work.

With that in mind, we’ve put together a couple of notes specifically for artists that we hope will help you in your work with advocacy groups, political campaigns, philanthropic foundations, and the like.

Starting with the 13 Key Principles for Working With Artists in the previous section, here are some things you can do to ensure the organizations are doing their part in treating you like the skilled professionals you are.

1. **PLEASE HELP THEM REMEMBER THAT THEY NEED TO PAY YOU FAIRLY FOR YOUR LABOR**, CREDIT you appropriately, and ensure there is clarity over OWNERSHIP (and not assume your creative work belongs to them).
2. **WE ALSO RECOMMEND YOU TRY NOT TO AGREE TO DO THINGS AT THE LAST MINUTE** or when you haven’t been involved from early on. Try not to allow your process to get rushed or shortchanged. Your work can get compromised, and you can get frustrated fast.
3. **HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THEY ARE YOUR COLLABORATOR**, and must do their part if they want the final work to be effective. This means providing you with any RAW MATERIALS you need to get inspired, like their core arguments, key information, or connections to researchers and people who have been directly affected. They also should have a proper plan for the ROLLOUT of your creative efforts once completed.

A couple of other things to think about:

4. **MOST ADVOCACY GROUPS ARE 501(C)(3) NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, AND AS SUCH THEY HAVE TO LIVE BY CERTAIN LEGAL AND FINANCIAL RULES**—they are accountable to their funders, the IRS, and their board of directors in ways that can limit their willingness to court risk and controversy. Sometimes those limitations

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COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND  
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## FOR ARTISTS

are fine, but for some projects and for some artists, they're not OK. Try and understand what the restrictions might be early on in the process, and if you aren't comfortable with those restraints, then you may not want to work with them.

**5. PEOPLE IN THESE ORGANIZATIONS HAVE DIFFERENT EXPERTISE, HISTORIES, TALENTS, AND STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE THAN YOU**—sometimes worse, sometimes better, mostly just different. Either way, they have a lot of information that can be useful to you. And just like it's important that you lead in the creative process, unless you are an expert on the issues, you might want to take their lead on the policy front.

**6. PEOPLE WHO WORK IN ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS OR IN PUBLIC POLICY USUALLY HAVE NO IDEA HOW AN ARTIST'S CREATIVE PROCESS WORKS.** It can be hard not to get disheartened by that, but try and patiently explain how you do what you do. Sometimes you may need to be very clear about things that seem incredibly obvious to you. If you're really having trouble understanding one another, you may want to get a cultural producer involved, someone who can help with the translation and advocate for your interests.

**7. FINALLY, IT'S IMPORTANT FOR ALL PARTIES INVOLVED TO OPERATE IN GOOD FAITH WITH ONE ANOTHER.** There should be enough clarity from the beginning to ensure that everyone is in agreement about goals, responsibilities, and deadlines. You're a professional. So you do your part—and if they don't do theirs, it's your right to call them on it and ensure that everyone is operating with mutual respect.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ♦ [Bridging Divides, Creating Community: Arts, Culture, and Immigration - A Creative Placemaking Field Scan](#) by John Arroyo, Ph.D., AICP (ArtPlace America)
- ♦ [Welcoming America Social Cohesion Series](#)
- ♦ [Building Meaningful Contact: A How-to Guide \(Welcoming America and Welcoming Michigan\)](#)
- ♦ [Welcoming America Community Planning Process Guide](#)
- ♦ [Welcoming Week](#)

RESOURCES ON CREATIVE PLACEMAKING  
AND ARTS-FOCUSED EFFORTS

- ♦ [Making Waves: A Guide to Cultural Strategy, The Culture Group](#)
- ♦ [The National Consortium for Creative Placemaking](#)
- ♦ [LISC creative placemaking resources](#)

## ABOUT WELCOMING AMERICA

Welcoming America leads a movement of inclusive communities becoming more prosperous by making everyone feel like they belong. We believe that all people, including immigrants, are valued contributors and vital to the success of our communities and shared future. Launched in 2009, Welcoming America has spurred a growing movement across the world, with one in every eight Americans living in a welcoming community.

Learn more at [welcomingamerica.org](http://welcomingamerica.org) or contact [communications@welcomingamerica.org](mailto:communications@welcomingamerica.org).

## CITATIONS

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