

Cultural plan backs up “creative capital” branding: A creative city initiative case study on Providence, RI

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Case Study Summary

Within the last five years Providence has adopted as explicit a creative city agenda as can be found in the U.S. This is evidenced in two ways—a creative city branding effort and a robust cultural plan. A minimal orange “P” logo and the slogan, “Providence: The Creative Capital,” now brand all city staff’s business cards, city websites, and official documents. *Creative Providence: A Cultural Plan for the Creative Sector* lent gravitas to the otherwise limited branding effort. These efforts build on Providence’s near 30-year legacy of political leaders that have strategically used arts and culture to build pride of place, attract residents and visitors downtown and foster economic development.

The politically astute initiators of the cultural plan recognized that they had a limited window of opportunity to leverage the branding effort into more material support for the city’s creative sector and its overall cultural vitality. By harnessing a unique combination of skill sets (experienced cultural planners, talents for grassroots community engagement, event management, and public policy expertise), they executed a planning process with widespread and deep public participation.

On a daily basis, the resulting plan informs all major decisions and investments related to arts and culture. The plan has received prominent political support, even surviving a mayoral transition, and has secured and elevated the fledgling Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism’s standing within city government. Although much work remains to fully implement the long-term vision outlined in *Creative Providence*,

organizers point with pride to the ways in which it has allowed them to harness new opportunities and resources. These successes stem from its origins as an authentic reflection of broadly shared community priorities.

Background: A profile of Providence, RI

Providence’s origin story—a haven founded by Roger Williams on the principle of universal religious tolerance—still resonates today. “That sense of tolerance for differing views and respectful involvement for dealing with each other still has great power in Providence,” explains artist Barnaby Evans, founder of WaterFire Providence.¹ Through a network characterized as active, informal, and open and welcoming, its people and institutions actively collaborate to help it address challenges and realize opportunities.² “The energy of people, it’s incredibly collaborative... There’s a collective feeling of trying to move the city forward,” commented Lynne McCormack, the director of the City of Providence’s Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism.³ And the challenges the city’s faced have been severe; “20-30 years ago, there was such a level of desperation, I can’t even tell you. It was horrific. Nobody was downtown. All the buildings were empty,” noted Bert Crenca founder of the community artist space AS220.⁴ What is the city of Providence like today and what shaped its evolution?

As the capital of the state of Rhode Island, Providence anchors a metropolitan statistical area with an estimated population of over 1.6 million people, which reaches

¹ Barnaby Evans, personal communication, September 30, 2012.

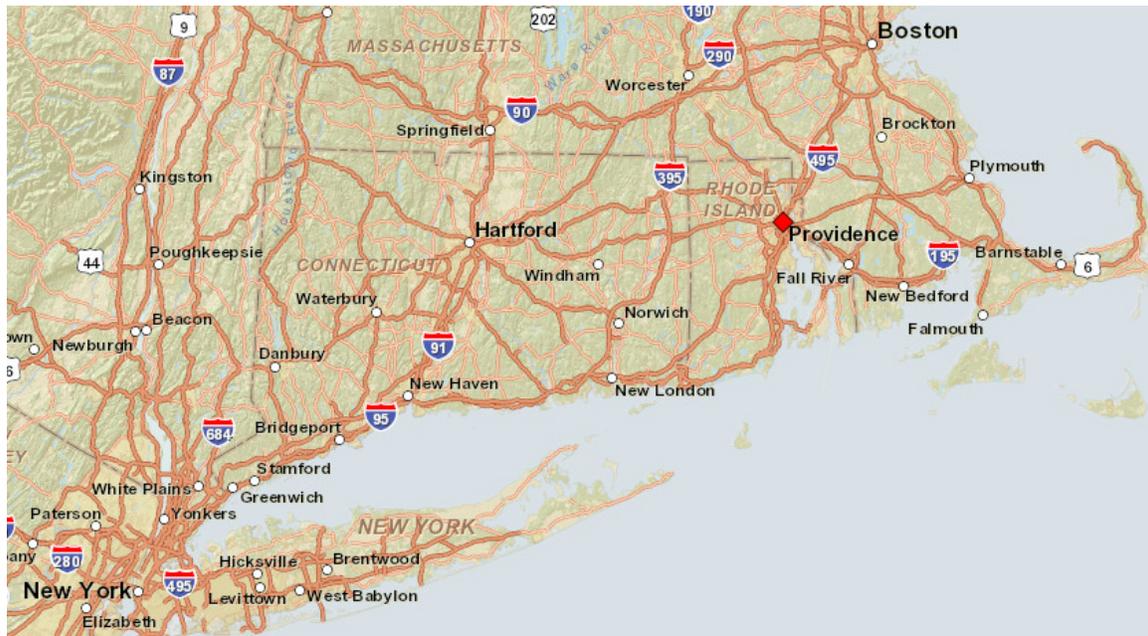
² Dan Baudouin, personal communication, October 1, 2012.

³ Lynne McCormack, personal communication. September 30, 2012.

⁴ Bert Crenca, personal communication. September 30, 2012.

into southern Massachusetts.⁵ Located in New England on the U.S.'s eastern seaboard, Providence is in close proximity to other major cities. Boston, MA and New York City are only an hour's drive and a three and a half hour drive, respectively (see Figure 1). The city falls at the mouth of the Providence River at the head of Narragansett Bay.

Figure 1: Regional Map of Providence



Source: City of Providence Department of Planning and Development's Web GIS Parcel and Zoning Map, http://gis.providenceplanning.org/PVD_Parcel_ZoningMap/

Both the City of Providence's population size and its built environment reflect its history as an early American city and first-mover in industrialization. A compact

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, "Population and Housing Occupancy Status: 2010 - United States -- Metropolitan Statistical Area; and for Puerto Rico. 2010 Census National Summary File of Redistricting Data," *American FactFinder*, 2010, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_10_NSRD_GCTPL2.US24PR&prodType=table.

footprint hosts a rich stock of 19th century mercantile buildings and an irregular street layout. Providence's most recent population estimates are just over 178,000 diverse residents in a land area of 18.4 square miles (47.7 square kilometers). Over 9,600 people per square mile live in Providence compared to an average of 87.4 for the United States.⁶ Providence's current population, however, is far less than its mid-twentieth century high of over 250,000 people.⁷ As one of the first American cities to industrialize, manufacturing in machinery, tools, silverware, jewelry, and textiles once attracted an influx of immigrant labor. However, following World War II, industry moved to the southern states and suburbs. Between 1940 and 1980, Providence lost about 100,000 residents.⁸

Providence's present-day economy reflects its post-industrial restructuring. Manufacturing remains significant, in particular jewelry and silverware design and manufacturing. But, service industry sectors, such as education and health care, now produce more jobs than manufacturing (Figure 2). Providence hosts eight hospitals and seven institutions of higher learning. Providence's arts, entertainment, recreation,

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, "USA QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau," *State & County Quick Facts*, 2010, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>; U.S. Census Bureau, "Providence (city) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau," *State & County Quick Facts*, 2010, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/44/4459000.html>.

⁷ Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places In The United States: 1790 to 1990" (Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 1998), <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html#notes>.

⁸ Francis J. Leaze Jr. and Mark T. Motte, *Providence: The Renaissance City* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 36.

accommodation, and food service industry sectors also generate higher shares of employment than for the state or country overall (Table 1).

Figure 2: Providence Percentage Employment by Industry



Source: Current estimates for Providence Zip Codes: 02903-02909 from Zip Atlas; <http://zipatlas.com/us/ri/providence.htm>

Table 1
Providence Employment by Industry

Industry	Number	Percent	Rhode Island Average (%)	National Average (%)
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	185	0.22	0.48	1.87
Construction	2,718	3.23	5.44	6.8
Manufacturing	14,766	17.56	16.43	14.09
Wholesale trade	2,430	2.89	3.39	3.6
Retail trade	8,135	9.67	12.07	11.73
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	2,400	2.85	3.89	5.19
Information	2,202	2.62	2.27	3.08
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	5,262	6.26	6.93	6.87
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	7,648	9.09	8.3	9.28
Educational, health and social services	23,186	27.57	23.01	19.92
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	7,895	9.39	8.63	7.86
Other services (except public administration)	3,982	4.73	4.65	4.88
Public administration	3,296	3.92	4.52	4.83

Source: Current estimates for Providence Zip Codes: 02903-02909 from Zip Atlas; <http://zipatlas.com/us/ri/providence.htm>

Though Providence remains strong compared to its metropolitan counterparts, it continues to struggle with high unemployment and poverty. The metropolitan statistical area anchored by Providence ranked in the top 12% for the nation, with a 2011 estimated gross metropolitan product of \$68.2 billion, (or \$42,600/person). However, employment shrank in the metropolitan area from 2000 to 2010.⁹ Within the city proper, the unemployment rate topped 13% in 2011, outpacing the national average of 8.9%.¹⁰ An estimated average of 26.3% of people live below the poverty line in Providence (2006-2010) vs. 12.2% for the state and 13.8% for the country.

Characteristics of the creative sector

In its 2009 cultural plan, *Creative Providence*, the City of Providence defines its creative sector as: “all commercial and nonprofit occupations and industries that focus on the production and distribution of cultural goods and services, as well as intellectual property with a cultural component.” It describes three main domains:

⁹ IHS Global Insight, *U.S. Metro Economies: Outlook- Gross Metropolitan Product, and Critical Role of Transportation Infrastructure*, U.S. Metro Economies (The United States Conference of Mayors and The Council on Metro Economies and the New American City, July 2012), 2, 110, 105 (appendix tables), <http://usmayors.org/metroeconomies/0712/FullReport.pdf>.

¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Local Area Unemployment Statistics: Providence City, RI,” *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 2011, <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/dsrv>; Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey,” *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 2011, <http://www.bls.gov/cps/>.

- (1) The arts, humanities, and cultural heritage
- (2) The media, tourism, and entertainment industries
- (3) Creative business-to-business services and design-based business¹¹

Whether approached as industries (in which the product or service that firms make involves a creative element), occupations (jobs that require creative or artistic skills as their primary purpose, regardless of industry), or a set of organizations (producing firms, non-profit, public agencies and community groups), the ways in which scholars and advocates conceive of and tally up the creative and/or cultural sector vary considerably.¹² Providence has not commissioned any analyses of its creative sector specific to the occupations and industries encompassed in its own definition. Instead the city participates in and uses two reports generated by the nonprofit Americans for the Arts, a national advocacy group. Americans for the Arts' *Creative Industries* tallies the number of businesses and employees in both for-profit and nonprofit "creative" businesses, but only those that are registered with the commercial database Dun and Bradstreet.¹³ These businesses range from nonprofit museums, symphonies, and theaters to for-profit film, architecture, and advertising companies. Americans for the Arts' *Arts and Economic Prosperity* studies analyzes the economic impact of nonprofit arts and

¹¹ Dreeszen & Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, *Creative Providence: A Cultural Plan for the Creative Sector* (Providence, RI: City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, June 2009), 5, 8, <http://www.providenceri.gov/efile/47>.

¹² Ann Markusen et al., "Defining the Creative Economy: Industry and Occupational Approaches," *Economic Development Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2008): 24–45.

¹³ Americans for the Arts, "The Creative Industries in Providence, RI" (Americans for the Arts, January 2012), www.AmericansForTheArts.org/sc/CreativeIndustries.

culture organizations and event-related spending by their audiences, with a methodology that includes financial expenditure and event attendance surveys, audience intercept surveys, and input-output analysis.¹⁴ Neither report considers creative workers, regardless of industry, or encompasses the full set of domains outlined in the *Creative Providence* plan, such as tourism (though *Arts and Economic Prosperity* does estimate audience spending). They, therefore, may be considered conservative measures of Providence’s self-defined creative sector.

The 2012 *Creative Industries in Providence Rhode Island* tallies 627 arts-related businesses that employ 3,771 people. By this measure, these creative businesses alone constitute 4.45% of Providence’s employment, outpacing the agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining; construction; wholesale trade; transportation, warehousing, and utilities; information; and public administration industry groupings (Table 1). Visual arts and photography is a particularly robust area with 204 businesses and 1,308 employees (Table 2).

Table 2
Arts-related Businesses and Employment in Providence, RI (2012)

Category	Businesses	Employees
Museums and Collections	19	116
Performing Arts	105	795
Visual Arts/Photography	204	1,308
Film, Radio and TV	87	722
Design and Publishing	199	777
Arts Schools and Services	13	53
Total	627	3,771

Source: Dun and Bradstreet data as compiled by Americans for the

¹⁴ *Arts & Economic Prosperity IV: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences in the City of Providence*, Arts & Economic Prosperity (Washington, D.C.: Americans for the Arts, 2012), http://www.buyartprovidence.com/images/RI_CityOfProvidence_AEP4_FinalReport.pdf.

The 2012 *Arts & Economic Prosperity IV* measures \$84 million of spending by nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and an additional \$106.1 million in event-related spending by their audiences. Using an input-output analysis tailored to the locale, the report estimates that this combined spending reverberates in the local economy such that it supports 4,669 full-time equivalent jobs, generates \$107 million in household income to local residents, and delivers \$19.0 million in local and state government revenue (Table 3). These numbers are even more impressive when viewed in comparison to comparable regions and the national overall, with expenditures and total economic impact being orders of magnitude higher for Providence’s nonprofit arts and cultural organizations. For example \$190 million of direct expenditures by organizations and their audiences vs. \$23.9 million for similarly sized study regions and \$49 million on average for the nation (Table 3).

Table 3
Total Economic Impact of the Nonprofit Arts and Culture Industry in the City of Providence
(Spending by Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences)

	City of Providence	Median of Similar Study Regions*	National Median
Direct Expenditures	\$190,054,892	\$23,879,203	\$49,081,279
Arts and cultural organizations	\$83,987,042	\$12,013,659	\$23,141,643
Audiences	\$106,067,850	\$13,601,859	\$21,573,435
Full-Time Equivalent Jobs	4,669	836	1,533
Resident Household Income	\$106,974,000	\$18,682,000	\$35,124,500
Local Government Revenue	\$9,268,000	\$1,227,000	\$1,946,500
State Government Revenue	\$9,732,000	\$1,223,000	\$2,498,000

Notes: *Similar study regions are those with populations from 100,000 to 249,999

Source: Americans for the Arts' *Arts and Economic Prosperity IV: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences in the City of Providence* (2012).

Creative city history and agenda

Within the last five years, Providence has adopted as explicit a creative city agenda as may be found in the United States, however this frame is neither narrowly defined, nor a new, top-down innovation.

Evidence of Providence's recent creative city branding and policy approach abounds. In 2009 under Mayor David N. Cicilline's administration, the city adopted, "Providence: The Creative Capital" as its new slogan, with a branded, minimal orange "P" logo. That year it also finalized a new arts and cultural plan: *Creative Providence*, the key elements and strategies of which were directly incorporated into the City's comprehensive plan, adopted in 2012.

These actions, however, do not constitute a rigid, official creative city agenda, nor are they exhaustive of Providence's placemaking strategies. For example, the *Creative Providence* plan is a *cultural* plan for the creative sector, and as such it is primarily oriented towards nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and individual artists and designers. City officials under the Cicilline administration and the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation have also advanced "knowledge-based economy" initiatives, which overlap with Providence's vaguely specified creative city frame.¹⁵ They have called for the creation of a "knowledge district" within a 19-acre (.078 sq. km) parcel

¹⁵ Philip Marcelo, "Creative Capital Providence Found Inspiration Elsewhere," *Providence Journal* (Providence, RI, March 30, 2009), sec. Local News; Paul E. Kandarian, "Creativity Becomes Key Selling Point for City," online magazine, *Providence Business News*, September 21, 2009, http://www.pbn.com/detail.html?sub_id=cf78133ea3e5.

available for redevelopment due to the relocation of an interstate highway, I-195.¹⁶ Press coverage and websites describe a vision of knowledge-based industries taking root in this district that include life sciences, health care and research and development and capitalize on proximities to universities and hospitals.¹⁷ Officials have indicated that arts/cultural enterprises may be compatible with the knowledge district, but biotechnology receives far greater emphasis.¹⁸

The malleability of Providence's creative city orientation may be politically expedient, but is also grounded in nuanced theory. Lynne McCormack, Director of Providence's Office of Art, Culture, and Tourism, explains that Charles Landry's creative city frame resonates with Providence's civic leaders and citizens.¹⁹ In *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, Landry conceives of a creative city as a place that successfully harnesses the thinking of a range of diverse actors to address varied challenges.²⁰ The flexibility of this orientation means that other placemaking strategies at work in Providence—including green/sustainable development and knowledge-based

¹⁶ City of Providence, "Growing the Knowledge Economy: The Power of Partnership" (City of Providence, November 13, 2009), <http://www.gcpvd.org/images/reports/2009-11-growing-the-knowledge-economy-the-power-of-partnership.pdf>.

¹⁷ Kate Bramson, "Room to Grow Now Key to Biotechnology Economy," *Providence Journal* (Providence, RI, June 12, 2011), sec. Local News; Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, "Providence Knowledge District," *RIEDC*, 2012, <http://www.riedc.com/providence-knowledge-district>.

¹⁸ Sophia Y. Li, "Whose Creative Capital?: Providence Charts a Direction for the Future of Its Economy. Who Stands to Gain, Nd Who Will Be Left Out?" (BA with Honors in Science and Society, Brown University, 2012), http://www.brown.edu/Faculty/COSTS/documents/SophiaLi_WhoseCreativeCapital1.pdf.

¹⁹ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, September 30, 2012

²⁰ Charles Landry, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (London: Earthscan, 2003).

economic development—are successfully accommodated under Providence’s creative city umbrella.²¹ Widespread public participation in planning efforts and coordination with non-governmental partners, such as the Providence Foundation, became standard operating practice in Providence starting with the Cicilline administration.

Providence’s recent creative city initiatives also build on a near 30-year legacy of elected officials, philanthropic developers, and leaders from the arts and cultural sectors using arts and culture to build pride of place, revitalize neighborhoods, attract residents and visitors downtown, and spur economic development. Beginning in 1996, WaterFire Providence provided the artistic intervention necessary to animate a reclaimed public space. This artistic ritual involving the universal imagery of fire and water attracts millions annually to Providence’s urban rivers—covered in concrete through the late 1980s (see photos).

²¹ City of Providence and Matthew Soursourian, “Greenprint Providence” (Garry Bliss, City of Providence, 2008), <http://www.providenceri.com/greenprint/greenprint.pdf>.



Crowd at WaterFire Providence by Barnaby Evans. Photo by James Turner. Image courtesy of WaterFire Providence.



Daylighting of the Providence River. Images courtesy of WaterFire Providence.

Work, live, and exhibition space for artists and arts organizations (such as AS220, Monhasset Mill, and the Steel Yard) have also anchored neighborhoods and contributed to their revitalization. City officials supported these creative space developments through tax stabilizations and technical assistance with permits and financing.

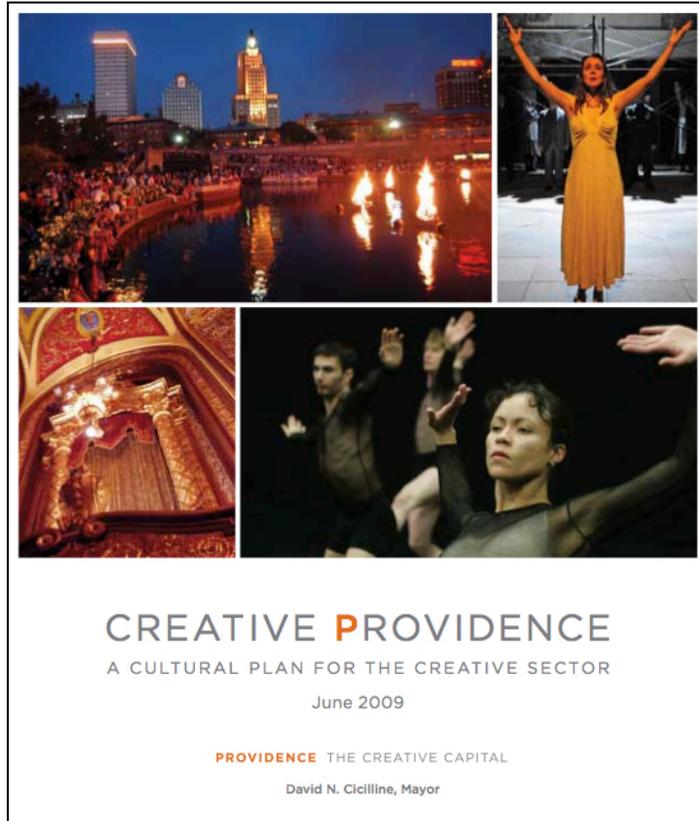
In the mid 1990s, Providence also led the nation with its creation of arts districts with tax incentives for individual artists. Though widely replicated, the program's most

important local impact was to entice a new generation of artists to lay down roots in Providence. As Bert Crenca explained, “Perception is huge. The tax breaks created the perception that Providence is an arts friendly place, independent of whether anyone was actually using them.”²² Artists matriculating from Brown University and RISDI stayed in Providence and created new organizations and arts venues. This history provided the foundation from which the current creative city initiatives were built.

Case study details: Cultural planning in the “creative capital”



²² Bert Crenca, personal communication, September 30, 2012



Images: “Creative Capital Branding” and cultural plan cover image

Origins and objectives

Although both Providence’s creative city branding and the *Creative Providence* plan were rolled out in 2009, these efforts were related but distinct. Mayor Cicilline decided that the city’s previous moniker, “the renaissance city,” had outlived its usefulness, especially in light of the fact that Providence still struggled with high poverty and unemployment. The new slogan was intended to evoke entrepreneurship and tout Providence’s artist population.²³

²³ Philip Shishkin and Jennifer Levitz, “In Hard Times, Rhode Island’s Capital Hopes New Slogan Proves Providential,” Online newspaper, *The Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124164771281893315.html>.

The cultural plan's origins are more nuanced. During his first term, Mayor Cicilline increased the prominence of arts and culture within city government by creating the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism. Until 2003, arts and culture had been a component of Parks and Recreation, with only modest responsibilities for programming. When Lynne McCormack assumed the directorship in 2006, she made undertaking a cultural plan one of her goals. A combination of factors, however, propelled her to buckle down and get to work.²⁴

First, Cicilline was planning to run for higher office and could be vacating the mayor's office as soon as 2009. The Department of Art, Culture and Tourism had been created only by executive order and could easily be restructured or eliminated by Cicilline's successor. McCormack recognized that a cultural plan with widespread public participation could help ensure her fledgling department's future and arm them with policy "marching orders."²⁵

Secondly, McCormack saw the opportunity to link the cultural plan to the branding effort. The process would add substance and heft. It increased the odds that the slogan did not just pay lip service to creativity, but actually supported the arts and cultural sector. *Creative Providence* could help city government be nimble and responsive to the creative sector's needs through a severe economic recession.²⁶

Concurrently, Providence's Department of Planning and Development was hard at work on a new comprehensive master plan for the city, *Providence Tomorrow*. Planning

²⁴ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, October 26, 2012

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

staff originally sought to incorporate arts, culture, and the needs of the creative sector within the overarching participation process of neighborhood wide design charrettes. However, as the process unfolded, McCormack and her counterparts in the planning department acknowledged that subsuming arts and culture within the ambitious and unwieldy comprehensive planning process was inadequate. They struck upon the solution to mount a stand-alone cultural planning process, the key points of which would be directly incorporated into the city's comprehensive plan.²⁷

Key components

Both the branding and cultural planning effort resulted in tangible deliverables that influence public perception and policy. Providence's new slogan, "The creative capital," and its minimal orange "P" logo have been adopted across all city agencies in websites, business cards, reports, and publications (see image). The icon is visible on street banners and posters, and non-city agencies including the Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Providence Foundation have used the branding in their own ads and website.²⁸

The *Creative Providence* cultural plan has resulted in a dynamic roadmap, because of political savvy, a thoughtfully designed process, and widespread participation. It informs all large policy decisions related to Providence's creative sector. The plan articulates six main goals:

²⁷ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, September 30, 2012

²⁸ Kandarian, "Creativity Becomes Key Selling Point for City."

- (1) Mobilize the creative sector by positioning the Department of Art, Culture and Tourism as a leader in creative economic development
- (2) Build community and foster neighborhood vitality through increased access and diversified cultural participation
- (3) Educate and inspire the next generation of creative thinkers
- (4) Foster sustainable cultural organizations
- (5) Create conditions for creative workers to thrive in Providence
- (6) Raise public awareness of the creative sector

Each goal contains numerous specific strategies, several of which have been executed. For instance, to “build community and foster neighborhood vitality through increased access and diversified cultural participation,” one strategy the plan specified was, “the city collaborates to identify, develop, and establish neighborhood cultural centers utilizing existing civic structures...” Because of this directive, the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism is partnering with the Rhode Island’s public transit authority on a major federal grant, the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Sustainable Communities. By mapping housing, work opportunities and cultural assets along transit corridors, they are identifying hubs for investment. In another example, to advance the goal, “create conditions for creative workers to thrive in Providence,” the plan names the strategy “individual artists have access to a robust infrastructure for technical assistance and support, allowing them to generate adequate revenues and working capital, and to reduce costs.” These priorities allowed the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism to make the case to the mayor, chief of staff, and finance director that small arts-based and creative businesses should be included in a grant application to

a separate federal grant program—HUD 108. One million dollars of an \$8 million grant has now been set aside for micro-loans to the creative sector.

Participants, major activities, and costs

The branding effort and cultural plan differed markedly in their process, degree of public participation, and cost. The effort to generate Providence’s new “creative capital” slogan and logo was a relatively closed process, unveiled without much fanfare. The Providence Tourism Council, a little known city board financed with hotel tax proceeds, solicited proposals. A Tennessee-based firm coined the catch phrase with a low bid of about \$75,000.²⁹ A team of local design firms created the logo. In total, Providence’s re-branding effort cost \$100,000, an amount that some citizens deemed exorbitant in light of high unemployment and growing foreclosures.³⁰ Some city branding efforts, however, have had astronomically higher budgets, most notoriously Toronto at \$4 million.³¹ City agencies also phased in the branding incrementally and without a formal press release, although the change did catch the attention of the local and national media. In contrast, the cultural planning process featured widespread public participation and was achieved on a more modest budget.

Working through the Providence Economic Development Partnership, a non-profit quasi-government agency, McCormack assembled her cultural planning team with finesse. An RFP process identified two consultant teams as top contenders, Dreeszen &

²⁹ Marcelo, “Creative Capital Providence Found Inspiration Elsewhere.”

³⁰ Shishkin and Levitz, “In Hard Times, Rhode Island’s Capital Hopes New Slogan Proves Providential.”

³¹ City of Toronto, “Background: Toronto Unlimited,” *Toronto*, n.d., <http://www.toronto.ca/unlimited/background.htm>.

Associates and New Commons, each with distinct strengths. They agreed to work in collaboration, so *Creative Providence* benefited from both an experienced, conventional cultural planner (Craig Dreeszen) and New Common's grass roots, organic orientation. The entire cultural planning process' budget was capped at \$60,000, with each of the consultant teams having a budget of \$30,000, though in reality they worked above and beyond the time for which they were compensated. The Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism dedicated extensive staff time and led the overall process. McCormack's unusual background as a politically well-versed, individual artist allowed her to stay attuned to politics and issues of inclusion and representation within Providence's diverse arts community. Her deputy, Stephanie Fortunato, brought hard-nosed policy based thinking informed by her advanced degree in planning. Graduate student interns in public humanities from Brown University researched and wrote policy-briefs to underpin each of themed planning studios.³²

Two public committees stewarded the process—a 21-person steering committee provided high-level stewardship, and a 29-person working group played a hands-on advisory role, actively helping design the process. McCormack and consultant Craig Dreeszen avoided the temptation to populate the steering committee with high-status members who were amenable to the vision. They sought those with contentious views that would not rubber stamp the plan, but instead provide candid constructive criticism. These individuals ranged from city council members, to artists, to top leaders in nonprofit arts and culture, to business leaders (in aviation, real estate, information technology, and media), to leaders in the education, philanthropic, and community development fields.

³² Lynne McCormack, personal communication, September 30 and October 28, 2012

Arts managers, or as McCormack described, “leaders working in the trenches,” formed the core of the working group. This group crafted the planning process—what themes to hone in on, what meetings to hold and why.³³

In addition to these advisory committees, hundreds of community activists, individual artists, arts administrators, and business leaders attended community forums and planning studios, and participated in interviews and focus groups. Focus groups happened in people’s living rooms and as part of organizations’ board meetings. Planning studios were held at venues that ranged from a nonprofit arts youth center, to a social service organization for immigrants and refugees, to a feminist art collective in a legally unsanctioned space, to the Providence Performing Arts Center. All told, almost every neighborhood across Providence hosted a *Creative Providence* event. In addition, over two thousand citizens shared their opinions via survey.³⁴ Below, we outline the cultural planning process timeline and its public participation.

September 2007-September 2008

Preliminary planning: early related discussions about art, culture, and creativity in Providence

- Creative Conversation with Emerging Arts Leaders
- *Providence Tomorrow* charrettes
- Arts Investment Taskforce

³³ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, September 30, 2012

³⁴ Dreeszen & Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, *Creative Providence: A Cultural Plan for the Creative Sector*, 2.

- Relationship-building

September 2008-December 2008

Cultural Assessment: Identify cultural resources, critical needs, and opportunities for the creative sector in Providence

- Cultural plan launch event: 117 participants
- 2 community forums (The Creative Ecosystem I, II): 150 participants
- Interviews with 20 community leaders
- Online survey: 2,000+ respondents
- 25 focus group discussions: 275 participants
- Evaluation and feedback from steering committee and working group: 50 participants

January 2009-June 2009

Cultural Planning: Plan community-wide actions and secure necessary resources to respond

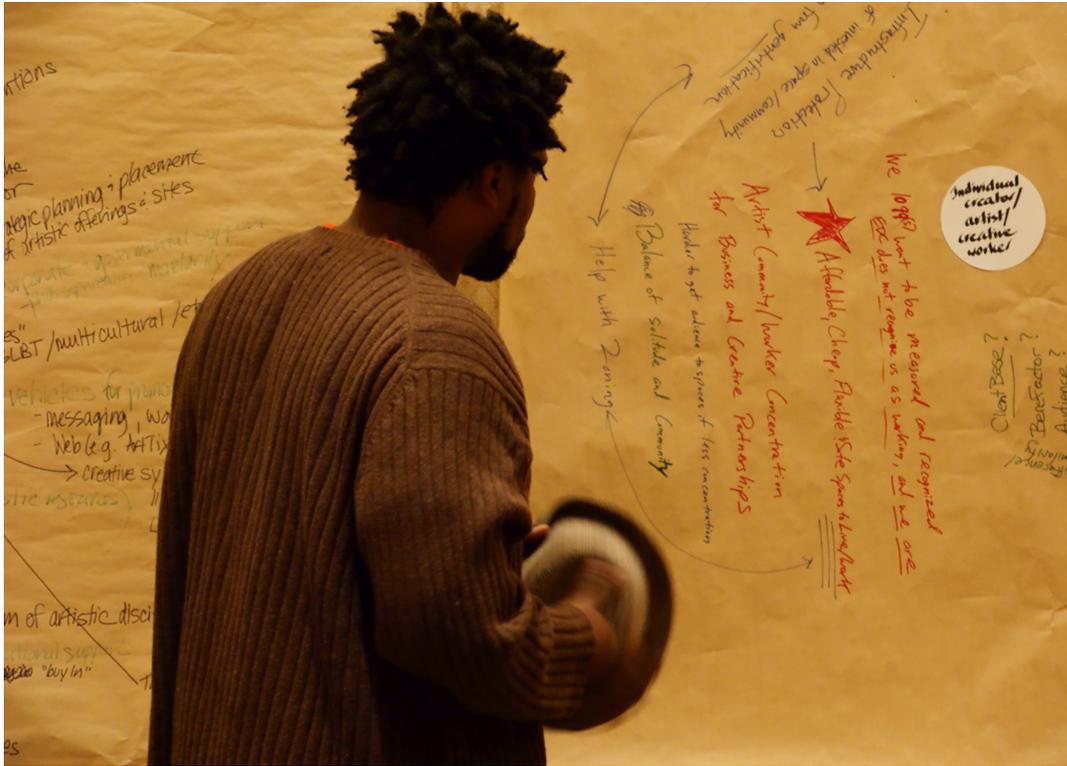
- Senator Claiborne Pell Lecture on Arts & Humanities: 200+ attendees
 - Jeremy Nowak, President and CEO, The Reinvestment Fund
- 6 planning studios: 200 participants
 - Foster Resilient Cultural Organizations
 - Infuse the Economy with Creativity
 - Create Conditions for Creative Individuals to Thrive in Providence
 - Increase Community Access and Cultural Participation
 - Raise Public Awareness of Arts and Humanities

- Inspire Lifelong Creative Learning
- Evaluation and feedback: Steering Committee

June 2009 & Beyond

Implementation: Act on prioritized strategies





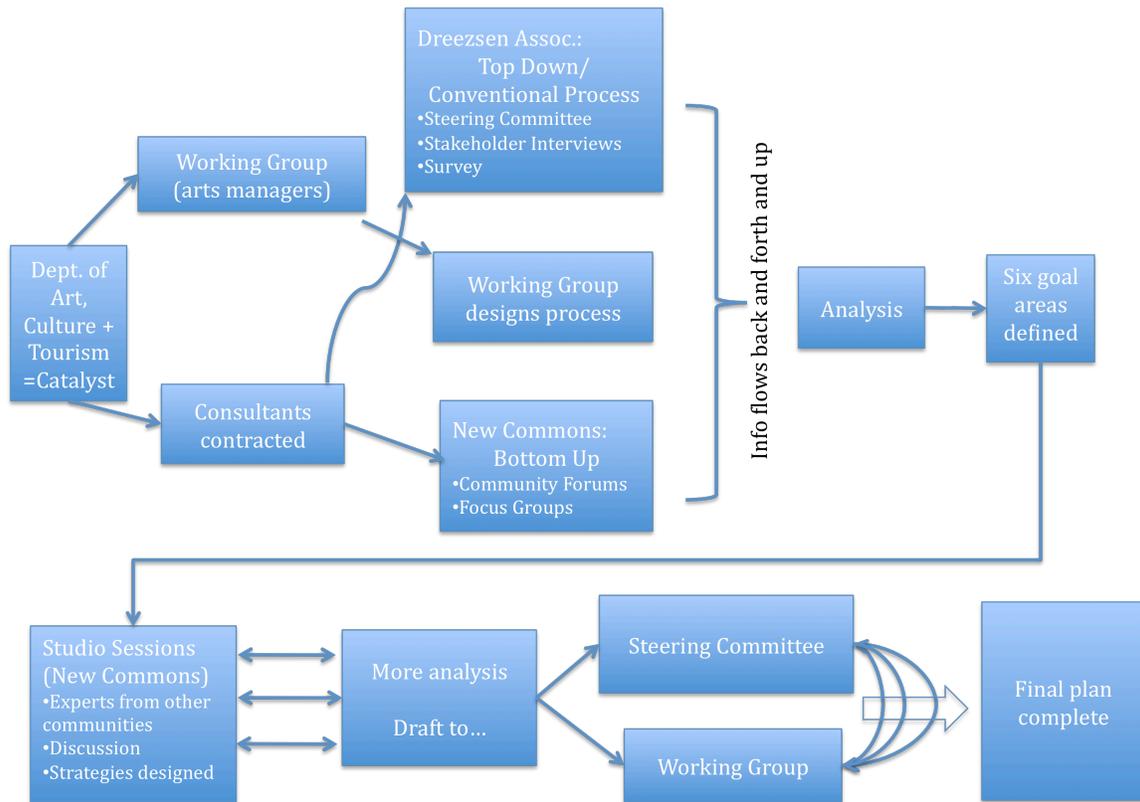
Photos: *Creative Providence* public participation. Photos by Michael Christofaro

Critical Analysis

Authors of all ten creative city case studies commissioned for the Chinese Creative Industries Forum 2012 have applied a consistent analytical research framework to facilitate cross-city comparisons. In this section, I first present a diagram of *Creative Providence*'s structure and process adapted from the initiator's own renderings. Next, I apply the standardized framework that models a case from concept formulation to execution and evaluation, to provide more details from this analytical lens. I then explore challenges and successes in the areas of institutional practice and public participation. Lastly, I discuss how Providence's creative city branding and cultural planning experiences can strengthen and inform efforts in other locales.

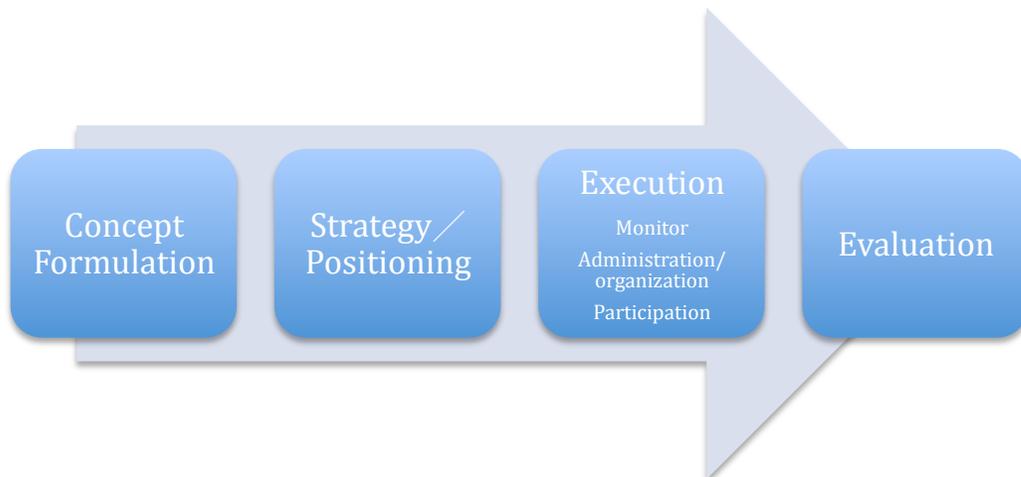
When asked to graphically depict the *Creative Providence's* planning process, McCormack produced a sketch that I adapted to create Figure 3, below. This graphical depiction clearly conveys the iterative nature of the process, its unusual shared operational structure, and numerous opportunities for public participation. It illustrates the working group's active role in designing the process and suggesting revisions to the final plan. The division of labor between the two consultant teams alludes to how the process maximized their strengths. Dreeszen & Associates (the more experienced, conventional cultural planning firm) took responsibility for the steering committee, one-on-one interviews with stakeholders, and the survey. New Commons took charge of the events that afforded opportunities for widespread public participation—the community forums, studio sessions, and focus groups. Impressively, these collaborators and the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism and the working group also successfully shared information between each other to inform the plan. The detailed graphic representation, however, provides few details on the process' inception, implementation, or evaluation—phases that the emphasized in the standardized framework model developed by the case study research sponsors (see Figure 4). It also does not illuminate the branding effort's development or the links between the branding and cultural plan.

Figure 3: *Creative Providence's* process and structure



Source: Adapted from sketch by Lynne McCormack, October 29, 2012

Figure 4: Standardized creative city project process framework/model



Source: Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture

In reality, the stages outlined in the very linear, standardized framework (Figure 4) blurred together for both the *Creative Providence* cultural planning process and the “creative capital” city branding. A desire to re-position the city *was* the catalyst for the branding effort. The impetus for the cultural plan (“concept formulation”) was also partially motivated by a need to secure the standing of arts and culture within future political administrations (“positioning”). With public guidance and committee oversight, the consultant teams developed and refined goals (“strategy”) within the cultural plan itself. Public participation occurred primarily during this phase and not “execution.” City government is now in the midst of the execution phase, as it actively refers to the plan to inform large decisions and shape investments related to the cultural sector. Evaluation has not yet occurred in a systematic fashion. Even though the lines blur across phases, looking at the *Creative Providence* cultural plan and the creative capital branding through this specific analytical framework provides new insights.

Most critically, the *Creative Providence* cultural plan provided substantive strategy to the otherwise limited branding effort. To use the terms in the model, the cultural plan allowed Providence to advance from the positioning phase to strategy and execution. “Having branding that said we were the creative capital without a plan did not add up in my mind,” McCormack noted as she reflected on the process.³⁵ Arts stakeholders capitalized on the creative capital branding initiative to advance their interests. The cultural plan contains numerous references to the branding and uses it to strengthen its stated goals. For example:

³⁵ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, October 26, 2012

- The City will fully realize *Providence the Creative Capital* with adequate recognition for, and investment in, the creative sector.
- Integrate the City’s branding as the Creative Capital into messaging and overall marketing of Providence and assure that support to the creative sector matches the message.
- The City allocates emergency funding of \$1 million over two years to help stabilize cultural organizations critical to Providence’s recovery as the region’s *Creative Capital*.
- The City builds and implements the Creative Capital campaign to help promote Providence’s arts, culture, and creativity.³⁶

The fact that the new slogan and logo were tied to a plan of action for Providence’s creative sector also mitigated the public and press’s mixed reception. Coverage of the branding rollout in the *Providence Business News*, for instance, links the two.³⁷ McCormack, who often served as a spokesperson for the branding despite her limited involvement, noted: “Having the plan in development while the ‘Creative Capital’ branding was released was critical, as it strengthened the message and made it ‘real’ for the arts community, in particular.”³⁸

Looking critically at the cultural planning process through the frames of “execution” and “evaluation,” allows us to explore progress in these areas. At only three

³⁶ Dreeszen & Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, *Creative Providence: A Cultural Plan for the Creative Sector*, 9, 12, 27, 35.

³⁷ Kandarian, “Creativity Becomes Key Selling Point for City.”

³⁸ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, October 26, 2012

years since the plan's adoption, the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism has not yet undertaken a formal evaluation. Instead, they point with pride to evidence of implementation and political and public support.

Many stated strategies have yet to be advanced. As the comprehensive plan cautions, *Creative Providence* outlines, “ long range goals and some bold outcomes that may take decades to realize or that will require new resources and improved economic conditions.”³⁹ However, Providence can celebrate numerous accomplishments. First, the city's comprehensive plan, which guides major policy and land-use decisions for the next ten years, directly incorporated the cultural plan's key components.⁴⁰ Tight municipal budgets constrain the city's ability to directly advance the many goals outlined in *Creative Providence*. However, the well-articulated and widely supported vision has enabled the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism to successfully advocate for the inclusion of arts and culture in city and statewide applications for federal support. Such instances include the micro-loans for creative/arts-based businesses and the cultural asset mapping along transit corridors, both funded from HUD grants and detailed earlier in this paper. In addition, the cultural plan helped leverage a one-time summer workforce development program for youth. The Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism secured \$300,000 from the 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (the federal economic stimulus package), which supported 300 youth placements in arts, culture, and environmental organizations. In a more current example, the Department of Art, Culture,

³⁹ Mayor Angel Taveras and Robert Azar, *Providence Tomorrow: The Comprehensive Plan* (Providence, RI: City of Providence Department of Planning and Development, May 5, 2012), 74, <http://www.providenceri.com/efile/2816>.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 73–85.

and Tourism, has relied on the cultural plan in efforts to secure federal Community Development Block Grants, and funding from the Environmental Protection Agency to support the establishment of neighborhood cultural centers.⁴¹

The *Creative Providence* cultural plan and the Department of Arts, Culture, and Tourism continue to receive political support, one indication of the plan's success. In the last mayoral election, every candidate held up the plan and publically pledged to keep arts and culture in the forefront of their administrations. When elected, Mayor Angel Taveras created a transition team on arts and culture. All of the committee's recommendations stemmed from the plan.⁴²

Continued political support from the Taveras administration allowed the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism to prioritize issues of financial sustainability for the nonprofit arts sector, overall. Previously, Cicilline had made the creation of an independent city arts council a top goal, out of concern that his successor would not support the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism or the cultural plan. Because of continued support, the city shifted those dedicated resources to an independent analysis of sustainability facing the entire nonprofit arts and cultural sector, which is currently underway.⁴³

Internal changes have also enabled arts and culture to inform economic development work (zoning, licensing, and inspections) on a daily basis. The Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism now falls under Taveras' economic development cabinet,

⁴¹ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, October 28, 2012

⁴² Lynne McCormack, personal communication, October 24, 2012

⁴³ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, September 30, 2012

and it co-locates its office with planning, economic development, and workforce development. In one example of how this work plays out, the Department's close working relationship with planning and economic development recently helped it successfully lobby the economic development board to support WaterFire Providence's new building purchase with \$250,000 of assistance.⁴⁴

Only three year's into implementation, it's understandable that *Creative Providence* has not yet been formally evaluated. McCormack notes with pride that it is a living, breathing document that informs all major decisions and investments. She credits its success to the robust public participation, political savvy, and the skillful design of the process.⁴⁵ This case study presents an opportunity for stakeholders to take a fresh critical look at their successes to date and prioritize next steps.

Institutional practice and public participation

Providence's experiences in creative city branding and cultural planning provide insights into how institutional practice and public participation help and hinder creative city initiatives. Governments typical follow prescribed guidelines for procurement of services (or tendering), to ensure transparent processes, prevent sweetheart deals, and to safeguard the public purse. Public meeting laws, which dictate that proceedings are recorded and made publically available, also govern most official government committees in the United States. In both the branding and cultural planning efforts, project initiators took advantage of loopholes to have increased flexibility regarding procurement of services and/or public meeting laws. This approach drew some criticism

⁴⁴ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, September 30, 2012

⁴⁵ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, October 28, 2012

for the branding, but, if anything, it may have strengthened the cultural planning effort. In contrast, robust public participation was a lauded hallmark of the *Creative Providence* cultural planning process. Below, I explore the ways in which the cultural planning process effectively engaged a diverse creative sector and citizenry and the ways in which both efforts addressed the limitations of standard institutional practice.

In terms of procurement, city officials faced public criticism the over the selection process and choice of firms for the branding effort. The Providence Tourism Council, a little known city board financed with hotel tax proceeds, solicited Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to develop the new slogan. The award was made to a Tennessee-based firm, with a low bid of about \$75,000.⁴⁶ In the press, the previous mayor, Vincent “Buddy” Cianci complained, “They had to go to Nashville to let them tell us that we are creative.”⁴⁷ Local designer Alec Beckett pointed out, “If we’re saying that we are a city with creative resources, it’s sad that we had to find someone outside the city to come up with that. It seems hypocritical.” The board did target local firms to develop the logo, but rather than an RFP process, it developed a short-list of five firms. Though apparently legal, the lack of openness drew further ire from the local design community.⁴⁸

Creative Providence also issued a request for proposals for consultants to conduct the planning process. The plan, however, was run through the Providence Economic Development Partnership, a nonprofit, quasi government agency. This fact meant that the contract award bypassed the city’s standard board of contracts and supplies. This resulted

⁴⁶ Marcelo, “Creative Capital Providence Found Inspiration Elsewhere.”

⁴⁷ Shishkin and Levitz, “In Hard Times, Rhode Island’s Capital Hopes New Slogan Proves Providential.”

⁴⁸ Marcelo, “Creative Capital Providence Found Inspiration Elsewhere.”

in increased flexibility. Whereas cost typically is the primary selection criterion, by avoiding the board of contract and supplies the plan's sponsors could implement innovative options, such hiring two consultant teams to collaborate on the project.⁴⁹

Creative Providence's formal structure also permitted it to circumvent stringent public meeting law requirements and successfully navigate political tensions. At the plan's inception the initiators grappled with the questions of whether an official arts and cultural commission should be created to steward the plan. Ultimately, they opted to create the steering committee as an alternative. Since the steering committee served in only an advisory capacity, it was not subject to public meeting law requirements. All steering committee meetings were open to the public, but not having the proceedings recorded fostered more candid and critical discourse, which strengthened the plan. By not forming an official arts and cultural commission, the cultural planning process also drew less scrutiny from city council members during a period of heightened tension between the city council and planning department. Instead, City Council member Cliff Wood (the former director of the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism) served on the steering committee, which ensured a city council liaison and representation.⁵⁰

Robust citizen engagement in planning efforts was another form of institutional practice in Providence, starting with the Cicilline administration. Cicilline's predecessor had been federally indicted and presided over roughly a 30-year period during which many people perceived city government to be not open to public involvement. *Creative Providence* was one of several plans initiated during Cicilline's term. All the plans—

⁴⁹ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, October 28, 2012

⁵⁰ Ibid

from transit, to sustainability, to youth and family, to the comprehensive plan—featured an advisory board and processes for public participation. *Creative Providence*, however, took the level of citizen engagement to another level.⁵¹

Because of novel methods and an unrelenting commitment to include all voices, diverse stakeholders shaped the design of the *Creative Providence* planning process and the plan's content. First, inspired by McCormack's background in orchestrating cultural events, the planning team decided to approach the process as an event. They kicked off the effort with a breakfast with an expansive invitation list to introduce the project and its objectives and drum up excitement. The process itself had numerous opportunities to participate, and a celebration marked its conclusion. Secondly, citizens not only gave input through meetings, they actually crafted the process itself. The working group, comprised primarily of arts managers, decided what meetings to hold, why, and what themes to hone in on as the process advanced. A survey to the general public solicited broad feedback on the community's priorities vis-à-vis arts and culture. Because the survey was promoted through the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism's popular weekly event newsletter and coordinated with an independent survey administered by the state arts council, it benefited from high response rates (over 2,000 returns). In the second and third months of the process, New Commons facilitated two large community forums to frame overarching issues and solicit discussion.⁵²

As a continual practice, the planning team and advisory committees asked whose voice is missing and crafted unique solutions to get deeper, richer input from diverse

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Lynne McCormack, personal communication, September 30 and October 28, 2012

stakeholders. The community forums missed certain groups at both ends of the socio-economic spectrum. In particular, many working class people actively engaged in art making, but their employment situation did not always allow them to attend daytime meetings. McCormack recounted an example of a performer in a Mariachi band that worked inflexible shifts at a factory. In addition, high-ranking leaders, regardless of sector, are typically too busy or uninterested in participating in larger meetings. To include these groups, the planning team struck upon a number of solutions. First, they taught delegates how to conduct focus groups and asked them to go out into their communities and engage their friends, neighbors, and boards of their organizations. Twenty-five focus groups happened in living rooms, kitchen tables, and other diverse venues. Secondly, the planning team responded to issues of time conflicts and geographic access. For instance, they held the planning studio dedicated to increasing community access and cultural participation during the evening in a neighborhood social service center in Providence's north end. Lastly, consultant Craig Dreeszen also held one-on-one interviews with 16 high-ranking stakeholders to involve influential persons that would not normally attend meetings for the general public.⁵³

One public participation challenge that *Creative Providence* sustained involved the steering committee. At the outset, McCormack and Dreeszen had opted to recruit local thought-leaders with contentious views, not those who would uncritically rubberstamp the plan. However, two thirds of the way through the planning process, a couple of steering committee members attempted to curtail their involvement. McCormack worked doggedly to retain them, making the case that they, as prominent

⁵³ Ibid

community leaders, had to be a part of the process for it to be successful. Candidly, McCormack also recognized that if these opinionated individuals publically criticized the plan, it could seriously undermine its standing.⁵⁴

Six goal areas emerged as the planning team and working group analyzed findings from the extensive community engagement. To design specific strategies, New Commons facilitated planning studios, each organized around one of the six goal areas. Policy briefs and panels with experts from other communities expanded participants' thinking and deepened discourse. The consultants populated the draft plan with directives from the community, and the steering committee and working group's feedback sparked rounds of refinements.⁵⁵

Creative Providence's strengths stem from this robust and inclusive public participation. As McCormack sums up:

The cultural plan has been so successful because of the way we engaged entire citizenry of city. We made it an event from the very beginning with a series of opportunities to participate and a celebration at the end... We saw that there were people not at table that needed to be there, and we made that effort to get them there. Sometimes government doesn't do that. We were trying to be as democratic as possible. That intentionality led to the plan being embraced by the community.⁵⁶

Lessons for other creative city initiatives

Communities contemplating creative city branding or cultural planning initiatives can draw inspiration from Providence's experiences and strengthen their approach. An

⁵⁴ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, October 28, 2012

⁵⁵ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, September 30 and October 28, 2012

⁵⁶ Lynne McCormack, personal communication, October 28, 2012

overarching takeaway is the way in which a robust cultural planning process gave substance to an otherwise limited creative city branding effort. The detailed cultural plan ensures that Providence not only touts through branding, but also actively supports its creative sector.

Politically astute leadership deserves much of the credit. McCormack recognized that she had a unique window of opportunity (being in the midst of the creative city branding and before a mayoral leadership transition) to secure the longevity of her fledgling department and develop broadly supported strategies to pursue. Initiators who have the ability to grasp the larger picture of the political realities in which they operate and navigate within them can advance their constituents' agendas more successfully.

The talents and skill sets of the planning team personnel also helped ensure an effective and inclusive planning process. Different collaborators each contributed unique strengths—deep experience with cultural planning, expertise in grassroots engagement, event management, political acumen, and public policy know-how. Two different consulting teams, the Department of Arts, Culture, and Tourism, and the citizens' working group harnessed these varied skill sets and shared information.

However, *Creative Providence's* realization of deep, substantive public participation most distinguishes it from other planning efforts. Other communities can emulate both this commitment to critically asking whose voices are not at the table and the solutions the *Creative Providence* planning team arrived upon to increase engagement. In particular, the do-it-yourself focus groups represent a cost effective innovation that can dramatically expand public participation. These unique combinations

of skills and dedication to a democratic process resulted in a compelling cultural planning document with widespread community buy-in.

Reflections on the larger significance

This paper has provided a window into the Providence's recent cultural planning and creative city branding—how these efforts unfolded, the challenges they faced and their merits. The cultural plan's successes stemmed from: robust and inclusive public participation, politically astute leaders, and a unique combination of skills and talents in the planning team. But of equal, if not greater importance, is the question of “so what?” What impacts have *Creative Providence* and the “creative capital” branding had on Providence's larger city-making agenda? Is there evidence that the efforts yielded social impacts, or benefits to creative workers, businesses, or organizations? If so, what and how were they realized? Have the initiatives boosted Providence's image or enhanced its creative aura? We conclude by examining these questions, although at only three years out, much of the potential impacts are still largely unrealized, and no quantifiable performance measures have been advanced to track progress.

The ability for a cultural plan to give gravitas to a creative-city branding effort stands out as the main impact of these initiatives vis-à-vis Providence's overarching city-making agenda. Even beyond its specific strategies, *Creative Providence's* very existence signifies that Providence values and pledges to nurture its creative assets. Its broad-based public support has garnered it staying power across a change of mayoral administrations. The fact that the cultural plan's main goals were directly incorporated into the comprehensive plan provides an additional measure of assurance that progress will be made towards realizing its vision.

In terms of the branding and cultural plan's social impacts, the story is largely one of still unrealized potential. The cultural plan claims to "work to break down barriers to participation, make the local arts and humanities communities more representative of the city's population, and pave the way for fuller access to the arts for all."⁵⁷ Current efforts, such as the cultural asset mapping in conjunction the HUD Sustainable Communities grant, do advance the goals of expanded arts and cultural access and creation of neighborhood cultural centers. But it's too early to claim or begin to assess far reaching social impacts as a result of the cultural plan. In the realm of arts education, the cultural plan may have fallen short of its own timing benchmarks. A three-year time horizon was specified for a number of accomplishments related to a consortium dedicated to advancing arts learning for K-12 youth,⁵⁸ but that work is just now beginning in earnest. Unfortunately, the ambitious youth workforce development program was also not sustained when the initial funding from federal stimulus dollars ran out.

Creative workers, businesses, and organizations have perhaps benefited most as a result of the cultural plan. Though progress remains unmet on many specific strategies, the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism continually turns to the plan as a means of directing and channeling support within broader community and economic development decisions and opportunities. The \$1 million allocation for loans to small arts-based and creative businesses from HUD 108 funds serves as a prime example. The current research that investigates issues of financial sustainability for arts and cultural nonprofit

⁵⁷ Dreeszen & Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, *Creative Providence: A Cultural Plan for the Creative Sector*, 15.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

organizations represents an effort to directly advance one of the plan's overarching goals that would benefit a large segment of the creative sector. Other areas of impact represent a continuation of effort, such as helping developers of arts and cultural spaces navigate buildings, zoning, fire codes, and permitting. Perhaps the cultural plan's greatest creative sector benefit is the way in which it secured and elevated the Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism's standing within city government. Not only did Mayor Angel Taveras affirm his predecessor's commitment, but city council members now also have newfound appreciation for the department's work. Having robust advocates closely embedded with economic development and planning ensures that the creative sector's interests remain at the forefront of policy decisions.

What impacts have *Creative Providence* and the "creative capital" branding had in terms of Providence's image and overall creative aura? The creative capital moniker—evocative of arts, culture, and innovation—rings true for outsiders familiar with some of Providence's most visible and renowned assets, for instance prestigious Rhode Island School of Design, and WaterFire Providence, which draws over one million people annually with an estimated two-thirds from outside the region. However, by pairing the slogan with the cultural plan, Providence's creative city initiatives not only celebrate but also deepen its commitment to its creative sector and broad cultural participation. Many of the strategies outlined in this ambitious and far-reaching plan have yet to be implemented, but it's enabled leadership to seize opportunities armed with detailed direction and assurances that their actions have widespread community backing.

Conclusion

This case study provides a detailed window into a prominent example of a U.S. creative

city initiative—Providence, Rhode Island’s recent “creative capital” branding effort and its contemporaneous cultural plan. The branding helps shift how residents and outsiders perceive the city, which may result in reality evolving to match the message. The cultural plan has given a precarious, young arts and cultural department staying power and standing within city government. It has provided an ambitious roadmap to shape future support for the creative sector and expand public access. By doing so, “The Creative Capital,” became not just a slogan, but also a commitment of support and an articulated vision.

This paper also explores the political back-story, missteps along the way, and insights into how and why these efforts realized their accomplishments. Politically savvy leadership, diverse talents and skill sets, thoughtfully crafted planning processes, and above all robust and inclusive public participation proved of critical importance to Providence’s cultural planning effort. While not transferrable to every place, Providence’s story of how a cultural plan lent gravitas to “creative capital” branding can inform and strengthen other creative city initiatives.

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