

# Creative City



ADVANCING  
EQUITY.

TRANSFORMING  
PUBLIC SPACES.

ENGAGING  
COMMUNITY.

APRIL 2019

## Acknowledgments

The New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) wishes to extend sincere thanks to all those who made the Creative City pilot program a success, particularly the artists, community partners, and audiences who made the artistic projects of Creative City so vibrant, unique, and inspiring. Thank you to the Barr Foundation, particularly San San Wong, whose leadership and support for Creative City made it possible. Thanks also to the Boston Foundation for providing additional support.

A look back at the Creative City pilot through this report and in other forms would not be possible were it not for the tireless effort of those who made Creative City a reality, especially Kim Szeto who leads the program, and Deidra Montgomery, Kamaria Carrington, Ann Wicks, Jeffrey Filiault, Jane Preston, and Dee Schneidman. Sincere thanks also to Barbara Schaffer Bacon and Pam Korza of Animating Democracy for their meticulous learning assessment, and their research colleagues at Americans for the Arts - Graciela Kahn and Liz Deichmann. Last but not least, thank you Hairpin/HHD for producing this report and accompanying video profiles of Creative City projects, including Kristen Hughes, Erin Bloom, and Shaun Adamec.



PROJECT: Teens WRITE: Ten-Minute Play Festival

ARTIST: Fabiola Decius

PICTURED: Carolyn Parker-Fairban (foreground)

COMMUNITY PARTNER: Hyde Park Branch Library

NEIGHBORHOOD: Hyde Park

# Dear reader,

Thank you for sharing in this exciting account of Creative City, a pilot program developed and administered by NEFA and supported by the Barr Foundation through funding and thought partnership. This impressive collection of artists and community partners came together at a time of increased attention in Boston to the important roles that artists play to enhance civic engagement, social wellbeing, and the public good.

This report, combined with a series of video profiles, highlights a sample of these inspiring stories and illustrates the transformative power art can play in civic life and the importance of investing in artists as civic leaders.

The inaugural three years of Creative City explored an impressive array of artistic media, including film, music, performance, visual art, dance, audio, textiles, sculpture, and the written word. Artists and collaborators ranged in age, gender, cultural identity, and years of experience. Importantly, the projects included in the Creative City pilot program made a statement about social issues that are significant to the people and communities of Boston, such as housing, aging, gentrification, inclusion, abilities and disabilities, language differences, and cultural traditions.

Art can expose essential truths about life, giving voice or visual representation to people's hopes, fears, and ambitions. Art can build bridges and connect people across neighborhoods and experiences. It can expose a community to creative solutions to complex problems. Art can push conversations forward and bring people together who may not otherwise meet. These are the stories of Creative City.

We invite you to learn more about Creative City and view the video profiles of Creative City projects at [www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning](http://www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning).

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Edwards".

**Cathy Edwards**  
Executive Director  
New England Foundation for the Arts

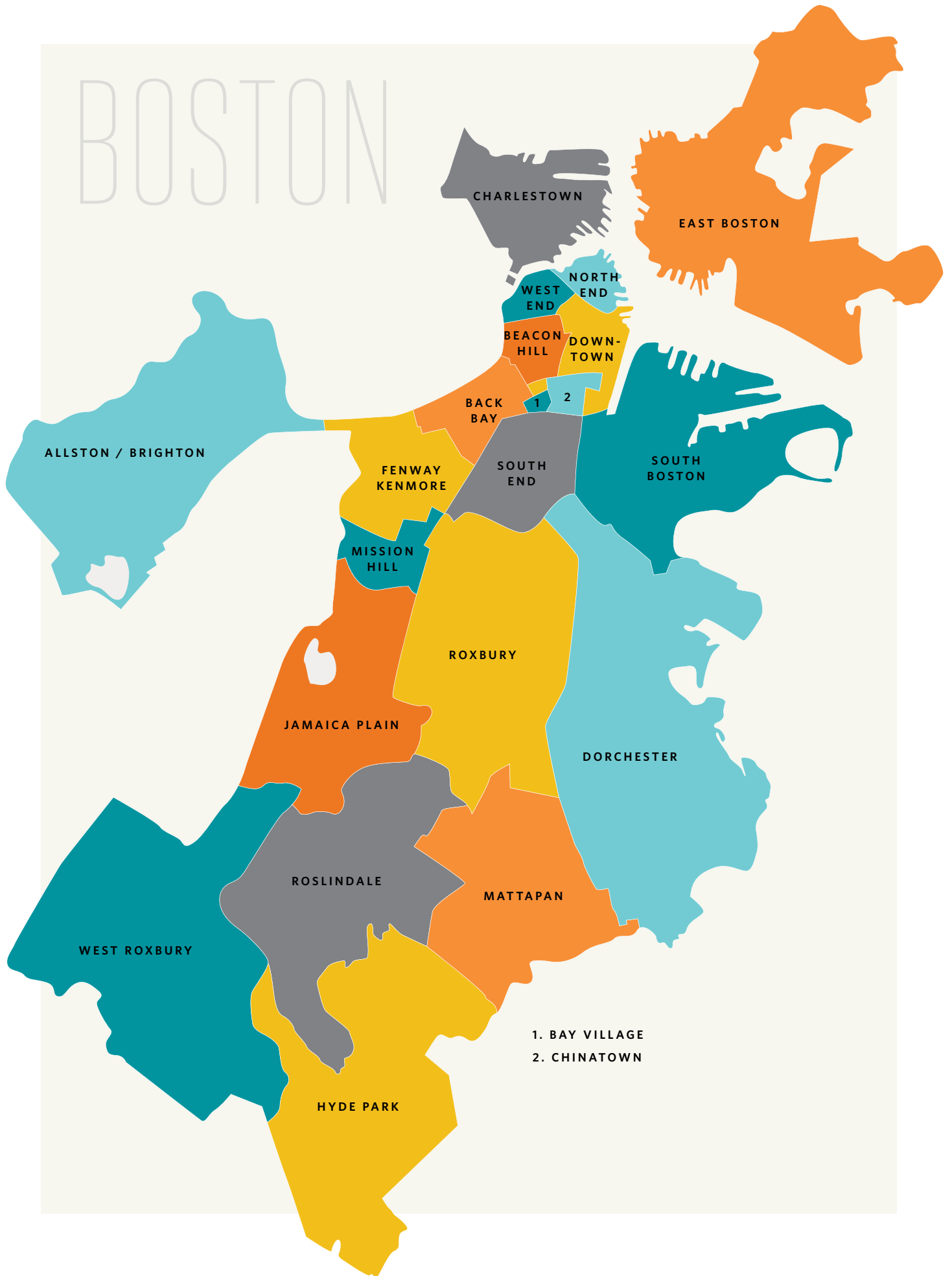


A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "San San Wong".

**San San Wong**  
Director of Arts & Creativity  
Barr Foundation

*P.S. To inform future iterations of Creative City, the Barr Foundation commissioned Animating Democracy to conduct a national scan of public art and community-based arts and cultural initiatives, as well as professional development programs. The scan is available at [www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning](http://www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning) and [www.barrfoundation.org](http://www.barrfoundation.org).*

# BOSTON



## Origin & Intentions

The Creative City pilot program was created by NEFA in partnership with the Barr Foundation in 2015 with the intention of offering direct support for artists to exercise their creative power and elevate the diversity of communities and artistic practices that exist in the city of Boston. Investing in artists and the creative process is a core value at NEFA that is fueled by a belief that artists are, and have the ability to be, civic leaders within their communities. NEFA believes that if we want Boston to be a place where artists are transforming, inspiring, disrupting, and reimagining the public sphere, then we must support artists and the development of their artistic practices.

Art supported by Creative City is intended to reflect and engage Boston's diverse neighborhoods and communities. NEFA values equitable direct investment in artists, especially artists of color, who may not have had access to such funds previously. Many Creative City projects were designed explicitly to elevate the voices and artistic expressions of those who have been historically excluded and to bring the power of art to those who traditionally have had less access. NEFA seeks the increased proliferation of diverse artistic expressions, from visual installations celebrating street art, and African textile traditions, to music, dance, theater and storytelling in parks, storefronts, trains and historic buildings. Creative City is designed to inspire public imagination for all Bostonians.

Finally, Creative City is meant to be more than art for art's sake. The program's pilot phase also prioritized authentic elements of community engagement. In addition to direct support to the artists, each project included a community partner organization, who contributed valuable information, time, volunteers, and other resources to artistic projects designed to benefit their own neighborhoods. In doing so, both artist and community organization increased their own internal capacity, expanded their network, and gained unique perspective on their work and their community.

Through modest-sized grants to artists and community partners, paired with professional development, mentorship, and network-building opportunities for artists, Creative City stakeholders have reaped many rewards. The program and supported artists made inroads in advancing cultural equity and increasing access and opportunity in Boston neighborhoods. These were projects that brought people and neighborhoods together while challenging them to examine the inequities that have historically kept them apart. Where members of the public typically go about the mundane activities of city life, instead they were challenged to reconsider the possibilities of civic space and in the process engage with their neighbors in new ways. Creative City pilot projects influenced change in ways that go beyond the immediate impacts of a mural, a neighborhood performance, or an installation.

# Creative City Impact

## Artists expanded their practice by taking risks.

Artists imagined and tested creative strategies stimulated by public spaces, social goals, collaborations with other artists, and a re-envisioning of their work in a public context. Their understanding and skills in community engagement became sharpened, creating more relevant and meaningful work while improving their own partnership skills. By partnering with community organizations, artists built ownership and communal meaning for their projects. Community input and participation lent authenticity and integrity to the art. Creative City funds allowed for the hiring of professional crews and services, resulting in higher quality work.

## Artists pursued and created career opportunities.

Art projects became valuable parts of portfolios used to promote the artists' work while the artists built their own marketable and transferable skills in the process. Artists received repeated requests to extend their projects and to bring them to more communities, including outside of Boston. Local colleges and universities, major cultural institutions, festivals, funders, and local organizations all took note and sought to spread the reach of a Creative City project.

## Art served as building blocks for community change.

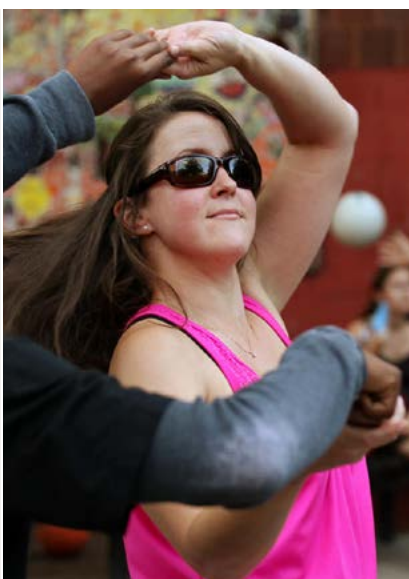
Creative City projects served as vehicles for a shared civic experience, boosting community pride and cohesion. This included the creation of safe, welcoming spaces for community dialogue about difficult issues such as immigration, gentrification, and identity. The ways in which community members were engaged helped to enhance their own leadership capacity. By inviting authentic community engagement, people felt inspired to step up as community leaders in other ways.



"Public art is crucial because public art keeps you honest. It makes you think about issues of generosity and reciprocity, because you're not only creating this to fill some need for your own ego, but to think about what are your needs in the context of community."

**Stephen Hamilton**  
Stitched Into Memory

 Watch a short film on this project at [www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning](http://www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning)



"My vision for full inclusion is not simply that people will go out dancing together, or to a class, or to Salsa in the Park. Full inclusion means that people who were not aware about disability are so much more aware. I am trying to use the arts as a way to bring inclusion beyond the arts."

**Kerry Thompson**  
Movement to Move the Marginalized from the Margins

 Watch a short film on this project at [www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning](http://www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning)

## Projects influenced public spaces, conversations, and perceptions.

Beyond traditional venues, Creative City projects enlivened neighborhoods, parks, low-income housing developments, business storefronts, a mall, buses, farmers markets, a bridge, and other locations, creating positive and celebratory new spaces for art and engagement. These projects brought arts to communities that traditionally did not have access, exercising cultural agency, lifting up human dignity, and focusing conversations on issues faced by neighborhoods and communities of people. Among those engaged were young people who learned new skills in working with artists and engaging with issues of importance in their communities. Intergenerational projects brought families and communities together through artmaking.

## Community partners gained greater understanding of art and artists.

Creative City projects increased the readiness and the capacity of community organizations, participants, and the artists to develop further community action. By serving as key connectors, advisors, and collaborators for many of the artists, community partners enhanced their own engagement capacity and effectiveness, leading in some cases to ongoing and deeper partnerships with the artists. These projects created opportunity for community organizations to raise their visibility, serve residents, and step out in new ways, supporting the creation of new programming, new perceptions among constituencies, and refined public positioning by the organization.

## Artists and communities advanced cultural equity.

The explicit promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the program design resulted in increased access and opportunity in Boston neighborhoods led by artists of color and differing abilities. Cultural traditions were preserved, practiced, and promoted to a wider audience while people became connected to their own heritage, or that of a Boston neighborhood. Many projects in the Latinx community increased access to Latinx arts and culture, promoting Latinx artists by increasing their visibility. Collaborations between culturally specific artists and community organizations mutually advanced their work and interests. This focus on cultural equity also introduced NEFA to a wider range of artists, including artists of color, multi-generational artists, and artists with disabilities.



"I wanted the project to be something that the community could be proud of and I wanted to have their input, and what better way than literally for them to be a part of the process. Local projects that socially engage like this become so important because they are stories from the people by the people it showcases."

**Ngoc-Tran Vu**

Community in Action: A Mural for Vietnamese Folks in Fields Corner



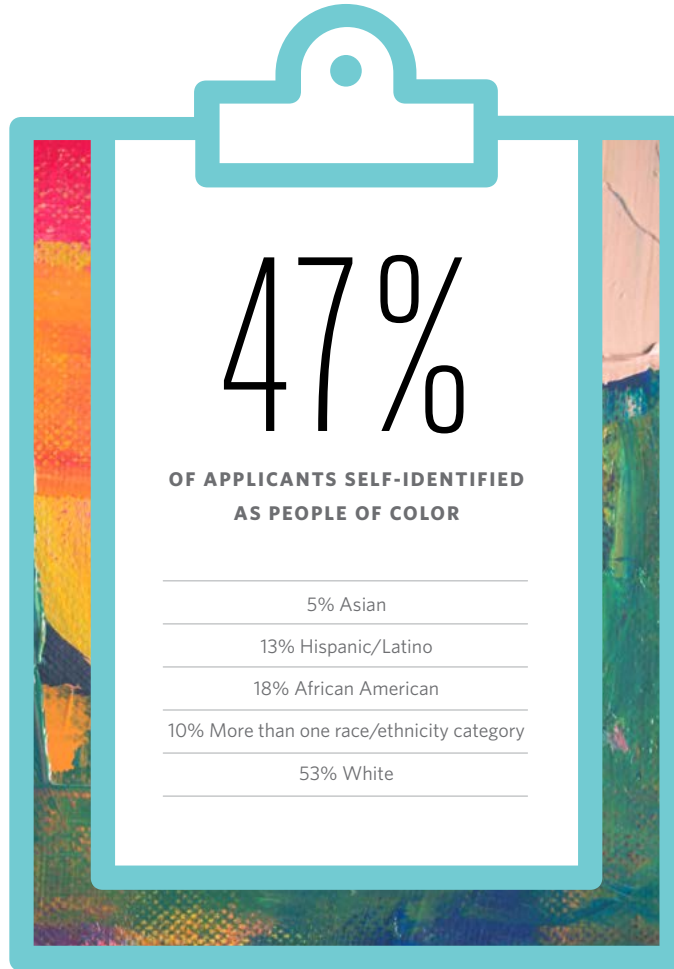
Watch a short film on this project at [www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning](http://www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning)



"The terror attacks by ISIS during recent years have prompted fear and paranoia toward all Muslims. I have grown more and more uncomfortable with all that has been happening around us in recent years. DEVRAN is my artistic response to it - combining my own varied musical influences from diverse cultures."

**Mehmet Ali Sanlikol**  
DEVTRAN

# CREATIVE CITY BY THE NUMBERS



## 2015

ARTIST  
COMMUNITY  
PARTNER

COHORT  
**1**

JORGE ARCE  
COMMUNITY ARTS  
ADVOCATES

DENISE DELGADO  
EGLESTON SQUARE  
MAIN STREET

CEDRIC DOUGLAS  
NORTHEASTERN  
UNIVERSITY,  
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

LINA MARIA  
GIRALDO  
URBANO PROJECT

ASHLEIGH GORDON :  
CASTLE OF OUR SKINS  
ROXBURY  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE,  
MEDIA ARTS CENTER

JOHN KORDALEWSKI :  
MAKANDA PROJECT  
SPARC! THE ARTMOBILE,  
MASSART

LISA LINK  
URBAN SCHOLARS  
PROGRAM, UMASS  
BOSTON



OVERALL



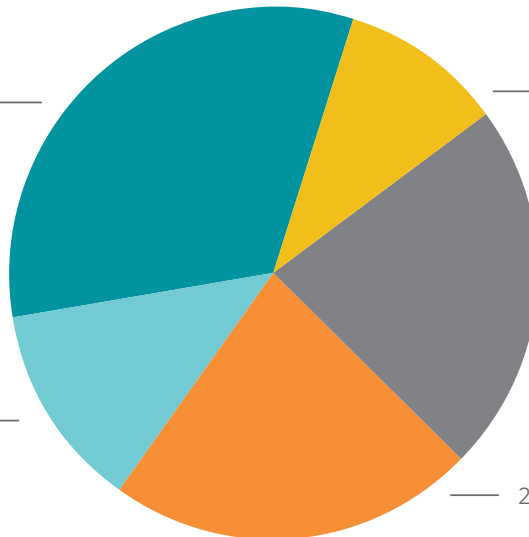
OVER 60 LEAD ARTISTS SUPPORTED THROUGH 46 FUNDED PROJECTS

67%

OF CREATIVE CITY GRANTEES SELF IDENTIFIED AS PEOPLE OF COLOR

32.5% White

12.5% more than one race/ethnicity category



10% Asian

22.5% Hispanic/Latinx

22.5% African American



ANNA MYER AND DANCERS  
WASHINGTON GATEWAY MAIN STREET



WEN-TI TSEN  
CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ENGLAND



COHORT 2



JEAN APPOLON  
IRISH INTERNATIONAL IMMIGRANT CENTER



RYAN EDWARDS  
360 ENSEMBLE



CHRISTIE GIBSON:  
OPERA HUB  
MADISON PARK DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, HIBERNIAN HALL



ELISA H. HAMILTON & SILVIA LOPEZ CHAVEZ  
ELIOT SCHOOL OF FINE & APPLIED ARTS

# 2,171

TOTAL ACTIVITIES + EVENTS  
IN 16 BOSTON NEIGHBORHOODS

# 625

REHEARSALS

# 589

ARTWORK INSTALLATIONS

# 501

WORKSHOPS  
& TRAININGS

# 105

PERFORMANCES

FROM THE FIELD: SELF-REPORTED DATA



JUAN PANIAGUA:  
ESCENA LATINA TEATRO  
HYDE JACKSON SQUARE  
MAIN STREET



MARSHA PARRILLA:  
DANZA ORGÁNICA  
SISTERS UNCHAINED



VERONICA ROBLES &  
CAROLYN LEWENBERG  
EAST BOSTON  
ECUMENICAL  
COMMUNITY COUNCIL



ROSALIND  
THOMAS-CLARK  
LENA PARK COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT  
CORPORATION



PALOMA  
VALENZUELA  
HYDE SQUARE  
TASK FORCE

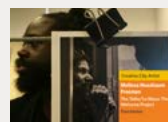


JILLIAN WIEDENMAYER  
ALLSTON VILLAGE  
MAIN STREET



- 8 ARTS + HUMANITIES
- 4 COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY
- 10 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT/  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS
- 5 CULTURALLY SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS
- 5 MAIN STREET PROGRAMS
- 7 SOCIAL SERVICES (FAITH BASED,  
HEALTH SERVICES, ETC.)
- 7 YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

TYPES OF ART: 13 VISUAL ARTS PROJECTS  
20 PERFORMING ARTS / 2 LITERARY  
2 MEDIA ARTS / 9 INTERDISCIPLINARY



COHORT  
3

DANIEL CALLAHAN  
CASTLE OF OUR  
SKINS

IFÉ FRANKLIN  
UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST  
URBAN MINISTRY

MOLLY GILBERT &  
ZAHRA BELYEA  
ON WITH LIVING  
AND LEARNING  
(OWLL)

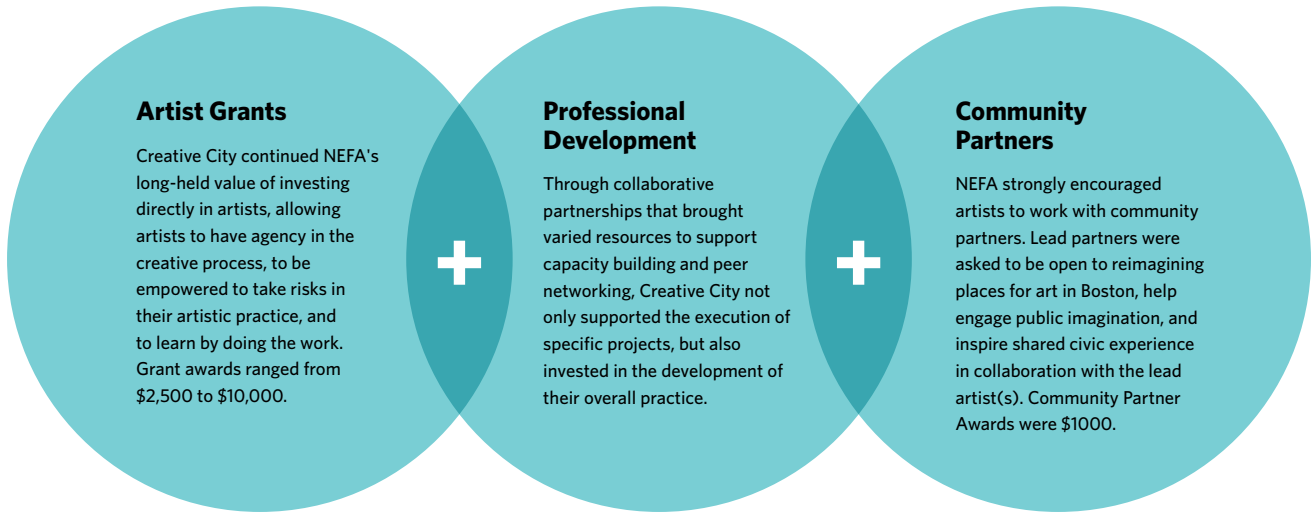
STEPHEN  
HAMILTON  
FRIENDS OF FORT  
POINT CHANNEL

MELISSA  
NUSSBAUM  
FREEMAN  
DUDLEY STREET  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
INITIATIVE

NORA VALDEZ  
URBANO PROJECT

RICHARD  
YOUNGSTROM,  
FIONA O'CONNOR,  
AND ANDREA TAMKIN  
HYDE SQUARE  
TASK FORCE

# Program Concept



# Program Priorities

*Creative City prioritized projects that:*

- Increased access to the arts and cultural equity by valuing the diversity of the city of Boston
- Supported Boston area artists demonstrating deep connections in communities within the city of Boston
- Demonstrated diverse and strong artistic expression
- Supported art in areas of the city of Boston that are historically under-served and under-resourced
- Supported art in sites, spaces, and contexts that may not typically be viewed as places for artistic activity and/or recast conventional arts spaces to be seen in new ways
- Engaged public imagination and inspired community members to share in civic experience
- Seized an opportunity to creatively engage important conversations taking place in Boston's communities



COHORT  
4

EVE BOLTAX & MARY JOY PATCHETT: PATCHTAX  
THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PAUL, MANNA COMMUNITY

MARIA FINKELMEIER  
VERONICA ROBLES CULTURAL CENTER (VROCC)

WENDY JEHLLEN: ANIKAYA  
SHOW OF HANDS THEATER COMPANY

SALVADOR JIMÉNEZ-FLORES  
URBANO PROJECT

MEHMET ALI SANLIKOL  
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST URBAN MINISTRY

VALERIE STEPHENS  
THE SALVATION ARMY KROC CENTER

NGOC-TRAN VU  
ASIAN AMERICAN RESOURCE WORKSHOP

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## PROGRAM DESIGN

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### RECRUITMENT

- Creative City looked for fresh strategies to reach and encourage artists, particularly artist of color, and artists new to working in the public realm to apply.

### APPLICATION DEADLINE

- During this pilot phase, Creative City offered two application deadlines per calendar year.

### PANEL REVIEW

- Panelists looked for depth in both artistic vision and community engagement.

### COHORT GATHERING

- Creative City aimed to build a community of practice through peer learning, networking, and professional development.

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

- Direct investment in artists allowed for artist agency in the creative process. In addition, Creative City provided communications/PR and photography support for artists' projects.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Learning Cohort Model offered:*

- Access to program advisors as a mentor or sounding board
- One-on-one consultations with the Arts and Business Council
- Peer networking and learning opportunities
- Professional development in areas such as business processes, tax planning, etc.

### COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

- Continued access to some professional development opportunities and resources, one-on-one consultations with the Arts and Business Council, peer networking, and learning opportunities.
- Invitations to artist and community partner alumni to serve on review panels and as mentors to current artists.



COHORT  
5

CHAVI BANSAL  
ROXBURY TENANTS  
OF HARVARD

LAURA  
BARING-GOULD  
THE FOOD PROJECT

AZIA CARLE  
GREATER FOUR  
CORNERS ACTION  
COALITION

JENNIFER DE LEON  
GRUB STREET

FABIOLA R. DECIUS  
HYDE PARK  
BRANCH OF THE  
BOSTON PUBLIC  
LIBRARY

PETER DIMURO  
INQUILINOS  
BORICUAS EN  
ACCIÓN (IBA)



## NEFA: In their own words



**Kim Szeto**, Program Director of Public Art at NEFA, answered questions about what inspired NEFA to launch Creative City and lessons were learned through the Creative City pilot.

### What inspired Creative City?

At the time, Boston was undergoing a cultural planning process that revived energy and a public will for more arts in our city. The Barr Foundation and NEFA came together and thought ‘Why not put money in the hands of artists to spark projects that would inspire public imagination?’ We wanted to present opportunities to artists to reimagine places for art and inspire shared civic experience throughout Boston. To do that, we designed Creative City to invest directly in artists, providing professional development opportunities, and lifting up collaborative learning and partnerships.

### How did you envision Creative City impacting Boston?

We started with the idea that if we equip artists with project-specific grants along with some technical assistance and professional development opportunities, then we would see more artists activating public spaces across the city and sparking important public

conversations. We envisioned artists being lifted up as civic leaders within their communities and that community members would see the arts as a more integral part of shaping both public culture and public spaces. And what we are seeing is that the outcome of the Creative City pilot is more than the sum of these parts. A culture of collaboration and mutual learning shaped a community of practice among the artists, advisors, community organizations and other funding programs that continues to produce a ripple of positive impact here in Boston.

### What did you learn about providing support directly to artists?

Early on, we accepted applications from artists residing all the way out to I-495 while giving preference to artists residing in Boston. After a few rounds of grants and many conversations with artists, I was reminded that “residing in Boston” may be a barrier for some artists due to affordability. I remember meeting with one artist who was the fourth generation in her family



MAIA DOLPHIN-KRUTE & JESSE ERIN POSNER  
BOSTON CHINATOWN NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER, PAO ARTS CENTER



L'MERCHIE FRAZIER  
FAIRMOUNT INNOVATION LAB (A PROGRAM OF ARTMORPHEUS)



HEATHER KAPLOW, CAITLIN FOLEY, & MISHA RABINOVICH  
FORT POINT ARTS COMMUNITY



BEAU KENYON  
826 BOSTON



YARA I. LICEAGA-ROJAS  
EGLESTON SQUARE MAIN STREET



SHAW PONG LIU  
MATTAPAN TEEN CENTER, BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF BOSTON



KERRY THOMPSON  
DEAF INC.

to grow up in Dorchester, but the first generation to have to move out to the suburbs as an adult because she couldn't afford to stay in the neighborhood as a working artist. Throughout the pilot we made an effort to apply these learnings and adapted the program priorities to support Boston-area artists demonstrating deep connections in communities within the city.

Another artist brought to our attention her concerns about how a \$10,000 project grant made out to her as an individual might be seen as income by the IRS and could negatively impact her child's financial aid. That moment made us realize that we needed partners with expertise in a variety of areas to support artists as they navigated everything from project management and community partnerships to how to manage receiving a significant project-specific grant. We partnered with art service organizations such as Arts and Business Council of Greater Boston to provide workshops and counseling in these areas.

Looking ahead, we hope to continue to take both the learnings and the strengths of the pilot and turn them into intentions in the program design moving forward.

We designed Creative City to offer direct support for artists to exercise their creative power to excite the public imagination and engage Boston's diverse communities. We wanted to address barriers that would help artists more fully realize their roles and build their capacities to work effectively in the public realm. It was important to us at NEFA and our partners at the Barr Foundation, whose investment made Creative City possible, that the program support art projects that would address some persistent conditions of concern, such as limited access to the arts in historically underserved Boston neighborhoods, few opportunities for artists to experiment and create new work, lack of imagination and community engagement informing Boston planning initiatives, and limited examples in the city of compelling public art that foregrounds public engagement.

## These projects tell a story of...

### ... artists and communities working in partnership

We were intrigued to see the many forms community engagement took among the projects, including planning and research with community members, storytelling and facilitated dialogues, and artmaking - from prints to performance to poetry - connecting local issues with the celebration of place and culture. We saw artists partner with community organizations, and in doing so, enhance their own community engagement capacity and effectiveness.

### ... the rich and diverse cultures of Boston

A key tenet of Creative City from the beginning was its pursuit of cultural equity. We designed the artist recruitment, panel review processes, and direct support to grantees to advance this. We valued racial, cultural, age, ability, and gender diversity as contributing to rich vibrant, and strong communities and in the artists who engage with those communities. We prioritized Boston's diverse and historically underserved and under-resourced public spaces and neighborhoods for opportunities with artistic and cultural expressions relevant to their communities. Our commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility strengthened all aspects of program design and implementation and advanced progress towards greater cultural equity.

### ... transforming public spaces in imaginative ways

We tried to emphasize the value and importance of public art and activation of public spaces as catalysts for engaging public imagination. Artists' own creative strategies were stimulated by public spaces that challenged them to go beyond previous practice. We believe that when public spaces are activated by art, communities come alive, neighbors show up, and places previously marred by monotony are transformed into showcases of dynamic art.

# The Indigo Project

ARTIST: Ifé Franklin

COMMUNITY PARTNER:  
Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry

NEIGHBORHOOD: Roxbury



→ **As a professional artist** for more than 25 years, Ifé Franklin can claim experience in virtually every arts medium there is. She is an author, a photographer, a visual artist, a sculptor, a choreographer, and a designer, among others. But it is the title community activist that Franklin claims first. Her art – and her activism – are rooted in her culture, based on her life as an African American and the lives of her ancestors.

It was from her ancestors that the idea of the Indigo Project was born. Coming to Franklin quite literally in a dream, she awoke with the concept fully formed: Build the dwellings of your ancestors, slave cabins, cover them in traditional West African fabric, and honor their stories by remembering their struggles.

The Indigo Project is a community installation. Franklin teaches participants how to make the fabric using a technique known as Adire, a traditional West African resist and dyeing method, used here as a celebration of the resilience of those who inhabited slave cabins. Each board used to construct the tiny cabin is wrapped with the textile, blending the beauty of the material and the tragedy of our American past. When complete, participants have learned both the tedious Adire technique as well as some of the difficult history that the project is designed to amplify.

“This is not just black history. This is the hard, American history that belongs to all of us,” Franklin notes.

While small, the cabins represented something much larger to those who inhabited them. They may have represented a



brief but critical respite from the master, a small space where cultural traditions were held onto – cooking, dancing, speaking. People were born in these cabins, and others died there. They frequently were the last place family members saw each other.

“When I stepped into those cabins,” Franklin describes, “I could feel my ancestors. They are a monument. By building them, we can no longer deny their existence.”

She calls her Creative City experience life-changing. Despite her deep and varied experience as a professional artist, this was the first grant Franklin received to create her own art. In addition to developing the Indigo Project, Franklin worked alongside other Creative City artists, including younger, emerging artists, who seek in their own way to share the stories of our past.



“Many funders cannot deal with these issues,” she says. “NEFA’s mind is in a different place. No one else has given me a chance. I know now what I am capable of and what I can create.”

It is our painful past that Franklin hopes the Indigo Project symbolizes most. Through the construction of the cabins, the wrapping of the boards, and the cultural traditions and ceremonies of the Ring Shout, participants become a community. The spirit of community can be a healing element for the deep wounds of our history, according to Franklin, and represents an unexpected, emotional layer of this project for her.

“I thought I was doing this for others to grow and learn, and they have,” she said. “But I have learned so much about myself and the spirit of people. There is work we can do together to explore the layers to this hard history.”



## Night Songs

The call went out to composers worldwide to take a piece of writing by a black author and set it to song. The songs would become part of a collaboration, shown on stage in 2016 at a family-friendly event in Roxbury to educate, inspire, and celebrate excellence within black culture. This idea, designed to celebrate the rich tradition of African American composers writing in the classical style, was born from Castle of our Skins, a Jamaica-Plain-based arts organization co-founded by classical musicians Ashleigh Gordon and Anthony Green. As the creators of Night Songs, they had dreamed since its inception that the event be free and therefore open to diverse audiences. With Creative City support, that was finally possible. “At the heart of what we do is education, and you can only teach what you can reach,” said Gordon. “It allows us to fulfill our mission to inspire people to be culturally curious.”

# Lemonade Stand

ARTISTS: Elisa H. Hamilton and Silvia Lopez Chavez

COMMUNITY PARTNER: Eliot School of Fine & Applied Arts

NEIGHBORHOOD: Jamaica Plain, Dorchester, Mission Hill



→ After about an hour of working with students outside the Franklin Hill Boys and Girls Club, it was time for the students to return inside to their regular programming for the day. Artists Elisa Hamilton and Silvia Lopez Chavez began cleaning up the space - art supplies and materials strewn about, the sign of a successful workshop of art making, creativity, and delight. As the artists set about their task, the spectacle of a giant neon yellow kiosk caught the attention of a neighborhood family. They were curious.

What appeared to be a lemonade stand was in fact an arts installation; an invitation for people to reflect on stories of turning lemons into lemonade, using art as the vehicle to share those stories.

Lemonade Stand is the creative brainchild of multimedia artists Hamilton and Chavez. The two combined their interests, strengths, and belief in the convening power of art to create the mobile project that landed in neighborhoods

throughout Boston. To go beyond traditional arts venues, Hamilton and Chavez brought the kiosk into communities and engaged with people in storytelling. The artists partnered with the Eliot School in Jamaica Plain, capitalizing on their extensive network of institutions and community leaders eager for creative programming.

“This project really brought life to public spaces,” said Hamilton, whose previous work includes pop-up dance floors on public sidewalks where passersby were invited to join in on the dancing. “Art has tremendous power to support and build communities. In that moment, we are bringing some joy and hopefully creating a positively memorable experience.”

Together with the Eliot School, the creative team aimed to engage a diverse cross section of communities across Boston neighborhoods - from housing complexes in Dorchester and Mission Hill, to the main commercial street

in Jamaica Plain. The artists found themselves reframing the concept of the project to fit the community they were in. The common English idiom “lemons into lemonade” is not as common among other cultures, for example. “Think of a time you overcame something,” the artists would ask, or “When you are feeling sad, what makes you feel better?”

The engagement would begin with participants reflecting on the question, thinking about their story, and then sharing that story in words or pictures through an artistic piece they would leave with the project, and one they would take home with them. Then the critical piece - sharing with others.

“Storytelling builds empathy,” noted Hamilton. “Story sharing is a foundational way to create social change one person at a time. It allows us to understand a bit more about the diversity of experiences that exist in our communities. We have shared experiences even if we don’t know it.”

Outside the Franklin Hill Boys and Girls Club, the artists were struck by the local family whose curiosity compelled them to wander over and eventually join in on the storytelling and artmaking: “Why are you here?” one of the adults asked curiously. “We don’t get stuff like this in our neighborhood.



Creative City was designed to impact public spaces, conversations, and perceptions by enabling artists to engage their artistic practice in diverse communities, lifting up human dignity, and focusing conversations on issues faced by neighborhoods and communities of people. In that moment

in Franklin Hill, the artists knew Lemonade Stand meant something more than self-reflection, more than community engagement, and even more than creative expression.

That day, to that family, Lemonade Stand meant their neighborhood, their family, and their story mattered.



## Sharing the Gift of Music

Elizabeth Gatti, a lay pastor at St. Paul’s Episcopal Cathedral, had musician friends who could help her. She was organizing an event for homeless individuals in Boston and thought some background music could provide a nice atmosphere. This was emblematic of how St. Paul’s engaged with music as part of their programming then. But two years, several weeks of rehearsals, and two major performances later, things have changed.

Patchtax, a viola and saxophone duo of Mary Joy Patchett and Eve Boltax, combined their background in classical music with the musical contributions of MANNA (Many Angels Needed Now and Always), a ministry of and with the homeless community based at St. Paul’s. With the vision of developing a choir among whoever had the courage to show up, they began with consistent engagement. For a population whose lives too frequently include trauma and crisis, a safe and predictable space is a hallmark of MANNA. With those principles in mind, the MANNA Singers were born.

“It changed my approach to music making,” said Patchett, comparing this experience with the traditional, academic approach she is a student of. “This was accepting everyone’s voice as it is. It brought a lot of beauty into my life.”

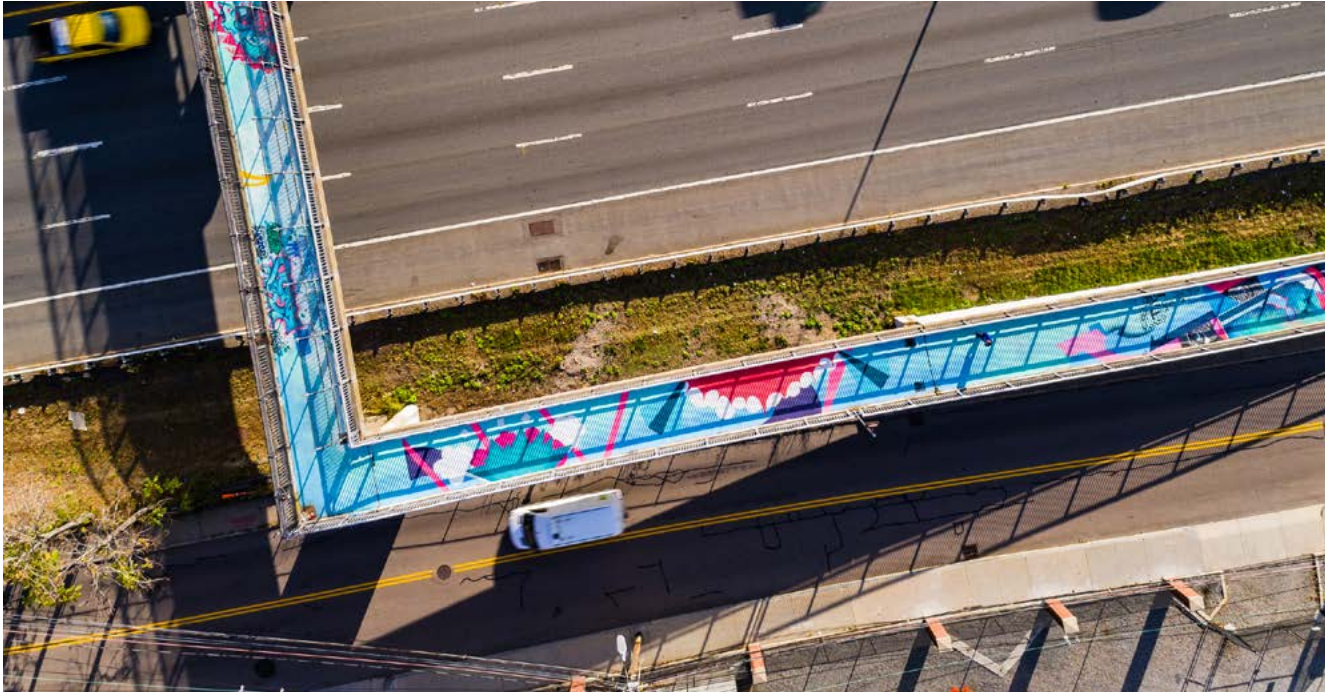
Transformation is contagious. Most of the singers have no musical history or expertise. Over time, they built confidence and presented themselves to audiences who witnessed the performers in a new light - not as just as people who are homeless but as humans with talent, fears, ambition, and joy. St. Paul’s now credits the program with inspiring change to their social service ministry, moving beyond music as background ambiance and fully embracing engagement with the arts.

# The Chroma Line

ARTIST: Jillian Wiedenmayer

COMMUNITY PARTNER: Allston Village Main Street

NEIGHBORHOOD: Allston/Brighton



→ **The pedestrian bridge** connecting Lincoln and Cambridge Streets in Allston is well-known to area residents, but not in a good way. People in the neighborhood know it as an eyesore, complete with orange lighting and suicide fencing. Many neighborhood residents know it as the spot to avoid when night falls. It had become a popular spot for graffiti artists – one the community came to appreciate, actually – until the state Department of Transportation painted over it. Its dull and even threatening features reflected an uninviting tone to the neighborhood – a characteristic that those who live there know is not fitting of their community.

Transforming the pedestrian bridge was a top priority for Allston Village Main Streets, a community and economic development organization whose relationship with Jillian Wiedenmayer, a visual artist and trained architect, helped develop initial ideas for the bridge’s revitalization. Emma

Walter, the organization’s Executive Director, organized local community meetings where the idea to do something with the bridge invited local input and engagement.

Residents wanted the 450-foot bridge to tell a story, perhaps a story of the neighborhood. That story would also need to reflect the diversity of those who live there. And whatever would be done to change the bridge would need to be sustainable.

It fell on Walters and Wiedenmayer to manage the red tape that often comes with public art – particularly art that would alter a public bridge owned and operated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Every permit application would be split among various agencies, and six weeks later a response. Residents had their own ideas – even their own hesitations – about what this project would mean for their community.

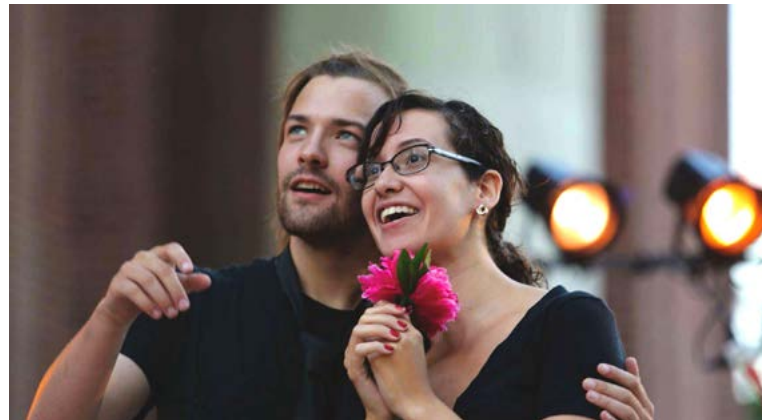
A naturally introverted person, Weidenmayer relied heavily on her community partner to lead the community engagement efforts. Through the process, she came to see the invaluable contributions of local residents as the only way the project could have succeeded, crediting it with changing her career.

“Community engagement is important because I am designing for other people,” said Weidenmayer. “I am always thinking about the viewer’s experience. If we were to work with the community only in the end stages, it would feel artificial. This feels very honest.”

Allston Village Main Streets helped navigate the at-times vexing process of state permitting, and in doing so has succeeded in the official designation of the Franklin Bridge as a permanent mural bridge. The local organization will maintain it as a “living” work of public art, having paved the way for future artist/community partnerships to envision and create more public art on Department of Transportation property.



“A thriving business district has to have some identity to it,” said Walters of the value her organization now puts on advocating for public art and her role as a community partner. “For the community, any beautification of the bridge was good enough. To arrive at a shared vision, we could help translate the artist to the community, to business, and to government.”



## From Public Park to Public Theater

Food vendors, promotions, entertainment, crowd control, city permitting, weather contingencies. It is not easy to pull together a theatrical performance, let alone do so in a public park in Boston. Escena Latina Teatro, a small, community-based theater organization, knew they needed support if they were to pull off Teatro en el Parque, but they never imagined how much the partnership with Hyde Jackson Square Main Street would help both the performance and their organization improve. Creative City offered Escena Latina Teatro its first-ever grant, which meant not only did it allow for a bigger team to support the performance but it also meant they needed to navigate the complexities that come with accounting for and reporting on a grant. “We assisted Escena Latina Teatro to think through the grant, track finances, and administer portions of it,” said Gerald Robins, Director of Hyde Jackson Square Main Street. The grant allowed for the inclusion of English supertitles alongside the Spanish-spoken play, helping to attract an ever-more diverse crowd, and it supported an expansion of the one-day occurrence into an annual, multi-day event, which helped the teams test different formats for future productions. “Because of this grant we are more confident to have multiple-day art events in the neighborhood,” said Robins.



Watch a short film on this project at [www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning](http://www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning)

# Pineapple Diaries

ARTIST: Paloma Valenzuela

COMMUNITY PARTNER: Hyde Square Task Force

NEIGHBORHOOD: Jamaica Plain



→ **Paloma Valenzuela is well aware** of her complexities. She is a Dominican-American and a Bostonian. She is Jewish and bilingual. She enjoys telenovelas like “Betty La Fea” and listens to NPR. She is proud of her culture and her city and she is persistently disappointed with how modern American entertainment portrays both.

“When we watch shows with Caucasian protagonists and majority Caucasian casts, we often see them as complex three-dimensional people,” Valenzuela says. “Often when you watch shows where Latinx characters appear, they are sometimes subject to being accessories. We are simply portrayed as criminals, gang members, maids, janitors, or sex-symbols. We are minimized to stereotypes.”

Paloma sees a problem with typical American entertainment, so she created a show that is anything but typical.

*The Pineapple Diaries* is a comedic web series that Valenzuela created in 2014 to be a reflection of her reality. The show centers around the lives of three best friends: Maite, Feliz, and Catalina, dynamic women in their late twenties, and their electric next-door neighbor, Montserrat. They live in the predominantly Latinx neighborhood of Jamaica Plain in Boston. *The Pineapple Diaries* follows these characters as they discover themselves, each other and the absurdities of everyday life; think *Seinfeld* with Dominican women.

*The Pineapple Diaries* proves that with Latina protagonists and a diverse cast of characters, you can create a show that is funny, endearing, universal, and undoubtedly relatable to many.

“A show about Latinxs doesn’t always have to be about rice and beans,” joked Valenzuela. “It can be about forgetting where you parked or going to brunch with friends - those universal, quirky everyday things - and it can be funny!”

Similarly, Valenzuela hopes the show projects an image of her beloved Boston that she sees as missing in entertainment.

“People outside of this city only see the Seaport, or Southie, the Irish, or the Mafia,” she says.

“People have watched the show and said ‘I didn’t realize you had a Washington Heights, or that Boston has bodegas.’”

With one season of the series completed on a bare-bones budget, Valenzuela applied for a Creative City grant to professionalize her operation in time for Season 2. With a small crew, new production equipment, and the resources to film in multiple locations - including at the Hyde Square Task Force facility, her community partner on the project - the young writer/director slowly developed a portfolio of work she could use to leverage new projects.

By working to shift the perception of her culture and her city, Valenzuela came to see herself and her city differently, too.



“I have a whole new appreciation of art in Boston that I never considered before,” she says. “Too many artists wonder if they can thrive here. I wonder that all the time. Through Creative City, we are connecting with other artists in the community, and I feel a part of that community in a way I never felt before.”



## Home Town: Re-Presenting Chinatown as a Place of People

The ornate gate that stands just outside Boston’s financial district serves as a gateway to Boston’s shops, restaurants, and attractions for visitors to the nation’s third largest Chinatown neighborhood. The gateway is designed to celebrate the rich cultural history of the community, but what often go unappreciated are the complex stories that shape that history - stories of a vibrant, close-knit community of families where children played and neighbors congregated and, at the same time, stories of Chinese immigrants arriving in the 1920s disallowed from owning land or businesses. These stories paint a starkly different picture than the gentrified, newly developed neighborhoods in and around today’s Chinatown. Boston artist Wen-ti Tsen sought to draw attention to that history by visually representing the men, women, and children who make up these stories of the past, eliciting the empathy and curiosity of passersby and the residents of Chinatown today. Partnering with the Chinese Historical Society of New England enabled access to a collection of historical photographs. He transformed these images - some just inches in diameter - into life-sized characters, mounted on boards and painstakingly restored in full color, using glazing to bring them to life and placing them throughout Chinatown. The Historical Society’s connection with the local Chinese community also gave the artist access to the stories behind many of the photographs. “The majority of new Asian immigrants no longer live in Chinatown,” noted Tsen. “They can no longer afford to live in the high-rise luxury buildings. Like the early immigrants demonstrated, this project shows that home is just a mental state, this home should be kept and preserved to honor their stories.”



Watch a short film on this project at [www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning](http://www.nefa.org/CreativeCityLearning)



PROJECT: Bodega Signs & Wonders

ARTIST: Denise Delgado

COMMUNITY PARTNER: Egleston Square Main Street

NEIGHBORHOOD: Roxbury and Jamaica Plain



## From the Desk of

**Kara Elliott-Ortega**

**Chief of Arts and Culture**

**City of Boston**

The mission of Boston's Office of Arts and Culture is to foster the growth of the cultural community in our city and promote participation in the arts. It can be a challenge to represent a government entity for the purposes of promoting the arts; municipal bureaucracy is not exactly synonymous with arts and culture. But we are working to change that perception, and programs like NEFA's Creative City go a long way in helping residents appreciate the value of public art and helping artists see the city as a welcoming environment for their creative work.

Public art, including temporary art, can activate spaces that are underutilized by introducing something that is unexpected and exciting. Creative City showed the communities of Boston that art can be transformative. More importantly, however, it gave residents the power of creating and shaping those spaces. By having community partners serve as collaborators and advisors to each of its artistic projects, Creative City helped build community capacity through a shared experience of public art - art that represents the culture of the community itself.



By supporting individual artists, Creative City also built capacity within the artist community. Navigating the permitting process alone can be intimidating enough to dissuade some artists from even attempting public art projects. Creative City supported artists and community partners through that process, provided professional development opportunities that not only served these specific projects but also invested in artists' long-term careers, and ensured that the pipeline of artists in Boston who can create public art and work with the city to implement it remains stronger than ever.

Lastly, by introducing new, creative ideas to enliven parts of Boston, Creative City helped build our own capacity as city government. The city needs to be responsive to creative ideas that do not fit the classic mold of government contracts. All of the departments that touch these projects - such as Parks, Fire, or Inspectional Services - are growing an awareness of the value of public art, and that can only happen if the steady stream of creative projects and ideas introduced by Creative City continues. In short, the only way to soften the ground of public permitting and advocacy is to expose more permitting offices and officials to the ideas and impact of Boston artists.

Creative City supported artists to take risks, improve their practice, and build their own capacity. In the process, it helped us at City Hall do the same. For that, Creative City is an invaluable resource to Boston.

# Creative City Grantee & Community Partners

**Jean Appolon**

Irish International Immigrant Center

**Jorge Arce**

Community Arts Advocates

**Chavi Bansal**

Roxbury Tenants of Harvard

**Laura Baring-Gould**

The Food Project

**Eve Boltax & Mary Joy Patchett | Patchtax**

The Cathedral Church of St. Paul,  
MANNA Community

**Daniel Callahan**

Castle of our Skins

**Azia Carle**

Greater Four Corners Action Coalition

**Jennifer De Leon**

Grub Street

**Fabiola R. Decius**

Hyde Park Branch of the Boston  
Public Library

**Denise Delgado**

Egleston Square Main Street

**Peter DiMuro**

Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA)

**Maia Dolphin-Krute and Jesse Erin Posner**

Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center,  
Pao Arts Center

**Cedric Douglas**

Northeastern University, Center for  
the Arts

**Ryan Edwards**

360 Ensemble

**Maria Finkelmeier**

Veronica Robles Cultural Center (VROCC)

**Ifé Franklin**

Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry

**L'Merchie Frazier**

Fairmount Innovation Lab (a program  
of Artmorphus)

**Christie Gibson | Opera Hub**

Madison Park Development Corporation,  
Hibernian Hall

**Molly Gilbert & Zahra Belyea**

On with Living and Learning (OWLL)

**Lina Maria Giraldo**

Urbano Project

**Ashleigh Gordon | Castle of our Skins**

Roxbury Community College,  
Media Arts Center

**Elisa H. Hamilton and Silvia Lopez Chavez**

Eliot School of Fine & Applied Arts

**Stephen Hamilton**

Friends of Fort Point Channel

**Wendy Jehlen | ANIKAYA**

Show of Hands Theater Company

**Salvador Jiménez-Flores**

Urbano Project

**Heather Kapplow, Caitlin Foley,  
and Misha Rabinovich**

Fort Point Arts Community

**Beau Kenyon**

826 Boston

**John Kordalewski | Makanda Project**

sparc! The Artmobile, MassArt

**Yara I. Liceaga-Rojas**

Egleston Square Main Street

**Lisa Link**

Urban Scholars Program, UMass Boston

**Shaw Pong Liu**

Mattapan Teen Center, Boys and Girls Club  
of Boston

**Anna Myer | Anna Myer and Dancers**

Washington Gateway Main Street

**Melissa Nussbaum Freeman**

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

**Juan Paniagua | Escena Latina Teatro**

Hyde Jackson Square Main Street

**Marsha Parrilla | Danza Orgánica**

Sisters Unchained

**Veronica Robles and Carolyn Lewenberg**

East Boston Ecumenical Community  
Council

**Mehmet Ali Sanlikol**

Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry

**Valerie Stephens**

The Salvation Army Kroc Center

**Rosalind Thomas-Clark**

Lena Park Community Development  
Corporation

**Kerry Thompson**

DEAF, Inc.

**Wen-ti Tsen**

Chinese Historical Society of New England

**Nora Valdez**

Urbano Project

**Paloma Valenzuela**

Hyde Square Task Force

**Ngoc-Tran Vu**

Asian American Resource Workshop  
(AARW)

**Jillian Wiedenmayer**

Allston Village Main Street

**Richard Youngstrom, Fiona O'Connor,  
and Andrea Tamkin**

Hyde Square Task Force



In addition to this report, which provides an account of the themes, benefits, and learnings of the Creative City pilot program, readers can enjoy video profiles of selected artists supported by Creative City. Those videos are available at [www.nefa.org](http://www.nefa.org).

Finally, readers may also glean unique insights from the National Field Scan produced by Animating Democracy, which profiles 18 public art and community-based arts and cultural initiatives, commissioned to inform future iterations of the Creative City program. In addition, the field scan looked at 10 professional development programs, which offer models for consideration as well.

[www.nefa.org](http://www.nefa.org)

PROJECT: The Table/La Mesa: The Welcome Project

ARTIST: Melissa Nussbaum Freeman

PICTURED: Melissa Nussbaum Freeman (left) and a community member

COMMUNITY PARTNER: Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

NEIGHBORHOOD: Dorchester



NEW ENGLAND FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

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Boston, MA 02111 U.S.A.

*Traditional lands of the Massachuset  
and the Wampanoag Peoples*