Community Innovation Labs

A national initiative managed by EmcArts

Information Packet
As of March 5, 2015

Summary

In up to three US communities in 2015, EmcArts will pilot a new approach to solving tough social challenges by deeply integrating artists and artistic experiences into rigorously designed and facilitated change processes. Over the next nine months, the pilot Labs will bring together a diverse, cross-sector group of stakeholders in each location, including city agencies, community organizers, business leaders, artists, cultural organizations and nonprofit service providers, to begin to address a specific and urgent local challenge in civic and cultural life. Lead support for the work is being provided by the Kresge Foundation.

This packet contains information about the *Community Innovation Labs*, including the background, rationale, principles, and framework. It also describes what EmcArts will be testing during the pilot Labs and how the pilot locations will be identified. *Pilot Labs will begin in two or three neighborhoods or cities in May and continue through December of 2015.*

While the schedule for implementation of the full *Community Innovation Labs* is dependent on what we learn from the pilots, we expect to announce the official launch in early 2016. *We encourage interested community leaders to keep in contact with us between now and the end of 2015.*

Introduction & Context

For the last 10 years, EmcArts has been designing and facilitating *Innovation Labs* for arts and cultural organizations. Our Labs create the space and conditions for organizations to test innovative new ways to take on their most complex, intractable challenges. We do this by helping them bring together teams of "unusual suspects," unfreeze the status quo, and test their most promising ideas by putting them into action.

Our first Labs were for performing arts organizations. Then the program grew to include museums and arts development agencies. At the same time, EmcArts began expanding its work to other areas of the not-for-profit sector, including organizations serving youth and families. We found that the rigorous process frameworks and arts-based methodologies we'd developed for the cultural sector had great resonance with other sectors as well.

We began to explore what it would look like to craft an *Innovation Lab* process to work alongside multiple stakeholders from different sectors in one local community as they came together to uncover new approaches to a shared civic challenge. Our hunch was that our deep experience as process designers and facilitators, and our work with over 250 cultural organizations, would be of value. With the support of the Kresge Foundation, we began developing the *Community Innovation Labs.*

To ensure that we integrated multiple perspectives in the research work, we brought together an Innovation Team of leading practitioners from many related fields. The Team included:

- o Savannah Barrett, Program Director, Art of the Rural
- o Ellen Baxter, Founder, Broadway Housing Communities
- o Lyz Crane, Deputy Director, ArtPlace America
- o Dayna Cunningham, Executive Director, MIT Co-Lab
- o Kemi Ilesanmi, Executive Director, The Laundromat Project
- o Michael Rohd, Director, Center for Performance and Civic Practice
- o Erik Takashita, Director of Creative Placemaking, National LISC
- o Marlon Williams, Director, Cross-Agency Partnerships, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
- o Laura Zabel, Executive Director, Springboard for the Arts

This group work alongside EmcArts staff Richard Evans, Melissa Dibble, Karina Mangu-Ward and Liz Dreyer to design the full *Lab* framework and determined the focus of the 2015 pilot *Labs*.

Learning from Creative Placemaking and Social Innovation Labs

The *Community Innovation Labs* build on and contribute to two emerging fields of practice: creative placemaking and social innovation labs.

With creative placemaking, we share a belief that artists and cultural organizations can play a critical role in civic life and community development. With social innovation labs, we share a belief in the power of large-scale, cross-sector collaborations over extended periods of time to attempt system-level change.

Yet, we sensed that there was potentially great power in bringing together and remixing the most effective aspects of these two emerging disciplines.

Our hypothesis is that community efforts to address problematic situations will be deeper and more sustainable if artists, artistic practice, and cultural organizations are fully integrated, and combined with a rigorous process framework that balances control and emergence over an extended period of time. We'll be testing this hypothesis through the pilot phase of the *Community Innovation Labs*.

Rationale for a Lab approach

The *Community Innovation Labs* are a response to what we see in our nation today. Inequity is increasing across the board in our communities, in terms of economics, education, race, gender, age and more. Traditional strategies for civic planning are failing us, while often reinforcing existing power dynamics. Views are increasingly polarized, progress is slow, and ingrained ways of working exclude most citizens from decision-making.

That said, we do believe systems can change for the better if people come together around shared purpose and explore mutual interests. In order to make progress in complex, problematic situations, and move beyond fixed positions, we need unconventional approaches that bring multiple viewpoints together, drawing those who have historically been empowered and those who have been disempowered into new relationships in order to imagine and develop new ways forward. While we don't have the hubris to believe that these Labs can tackle inequality and injustice as a whole, we do recognize these dynamics as the context for the more specific and local challenges that we see these Labs taking on.

The Labs are also grounded in the belief that artists and cultural organizations have untapped potential in our communities and that artistic practice is an invaluable tool for unfreezing the status quo and discovering new ways forward. The Labs offer the opportunity for artists and cultural organizations to play a vital role in community change, using artistic practices to build a shared vision, explore new possibilities, and advance adaptive solutions. Locally-based artists will play an important role in designing and leading Lab activities that grow authentically from their individual aesthetic practices, as well as contributing more broadly to creative facilitation of the Labs. Overall, the creative sector will be engaged at three levels:

- o **Champions**: Local artists and cultural leaders as part of the champions group
- o **Process Leaders**: Local artists as facilitators, designing and leading activities
- o **Participants**: Artists and cultural leaders as community members, bringing their perspectives to the discovery process and development of innovative strategies

Values and intentions of the program

At EmcArts, we believe that innovation is primarily a process, not a product, fueled by discipline, focus, and a strong will for change. It requires letting go of what is no longer useful and experimenting your way forward. This is difficult and vulnerable work. We also believe that artistic experiences help us learn to productively navigate the tension between thinking and feeling, both of which are required to respond to complex challenges.

In our experience, highly effective teams bring together people with many points of view and value their differences. Moreover, we find that lasting change occurs when you do real work in tandem with rigorous reflection, and support it with strategic financial investment. In situations of complexity, we believe that communities that learn together have more power to shape the future than any one person or organization working alone.

Building on these core beliefs, our intentions in designing and piloting these Labs are to:

- o work with communities only upon invitation
- o ground our approach in the local cultural context
- o build on existing assets, including existing networks (both formal and informal)
- o engage local artists and facilitators
- o work alongside communities to support greater equity and justice
- o be transparent, patient, and responsive in the work
- o create capacity that can't be taken away once EmcArts is no longer working with the community
- o link efforts in different communities so as to enrich learning and strengthen the field

What we expect the Labs to achieve, and how

Too often, large-scale attempts to align many different stakeholders around a single strategy result in fine words but little action. While, on the other hand, heroic efforts of single organizations typically lack the capacity to ignite wider community change. Neither approach produces lasting social impact.

The *Labs* are designed to mediate between these two extremes – being too big to get down to work and too small to affect the system. Instead, the Labs are designed to help communities navigate the transition from doing deep exploratory work with a diverse stakeholder group to taking action via a limited number of consortium-based initiatives, each one a different innovative response to the community challenge.

Through the Labs, participants from different sectors will be empowered to work together in pursuit of specific shared interests within the umbrella of the challenge, without all having to align around a single proposed overarching response. Effective responses will be financially supported to go to scale and become sustainable new contributions to the health of the community.

We also anticipate the Labs enabling new and stronger networks across the community, developing a set of leaders with greater capacity to work together for the long haul, and ultimately helping to create more just communities across the country.

Community Innovation Labs - Full Framework

Although still in development, below is our current understanding of the 2 Stages of the full *Community Innovation Labs*:

Stage 1: Discovery (approximately 8 months)

    Phases

- o CO-DESIGN the Lab with local stakeholders
- o ENGAGE local networks
- o UNFREEZE the status quo

    Outcomes

- o A shared understanding of why the problematic situation is so difficult
- o Stronger cross-sector relationships and networks
- o Shared vision of a transformed future
- o Radical new responses to the situation
- o Greater capacity to take on similar challenges

Stage 2: Taking Action (approximately 16 months)

    Phases

- o TEST the most promising ideas
- o ANCHOR the new way of working

    Outcomes
- o Multiple, coalition-based innovative strategies to address the problematic situation
- o Strategies tested in action via repeated prototyping
- o Shared learning from prototypes with Lab participants, the wider local community, and other Lab communities nationally
- o Sustainable local capacity to continue working in this way

Where might a Community Innovation Lab be useful?

A Lab is most useful in places where:

- o There is **problematic situation that is complex** - it requires a systemic approach and the involvement of multiple stakeholders, perspectives, and sectors

- o The problem has **resisted traditional planning** approaches

- o There is **no clear accountability** for solving the problem

- o **Many stakeholders are needed** to develop solutions and carry out new strategies

About the Pilot Labs

For the pilot Labs, EmcArts is looking for two to three local communities who are interested in exploring a Lab approach, with the understanding that the pilot Labs have two related goals: 1) to leave the community with new relationships, stronger networks, ideas for moving forward, and the capacity to continue working in this way, and 2) to maximize learning for EmcArts about the *Community Innovation Labs* approach so that we can continue to improve it before a full launch of the program in 2016.

Funding from the Kresge Foundation for the pilot Labs will support the first Stage in two to three communities. EmcArts does not currently have funding to support Stage 2, which is a longer and higher-cost engagement. However, it's important to note that we believe that Stage 2 is absolutely critical to the long-term impact and success of this type of program.

We are looking to identify pilot sites that are interested in partnering with EmcArts to explore a Lab approach, build and strengthen their local networks, begin to unfreeze the status quo, and consider new ways forward, while acknowledging that this is not the full arc of the intended work.

Timeline for pilot Labs

March 31st, 2015: Deadline for initial partnership inquiries

April 1st – May 31st, 2015:

- o Exploratory phone calls with local stakeholders in communities with strong interest in participating in the pilot
- o Site visits in up to five communities to clarify the local problematic situation, identify a preliminary vision of the future, determine a diverse group of initial champions, and mutually determine whether the pilot Lab is a good fit
- o EmcArts identifies 2 to 3 sites to pilot Stage 1 of the Labs

June 1- December 31, 2015: Stage 1

- o Up to three one-day meetings of an initial champions group to map local networks, identify important influencers, understand local assets and obstacles, co-design the features of the pilot Lab, develop a clearer description of the problematic situation and recruit a committed group of up to 30 local stakeholders that "bring the system into the room" to participate in the pilot Lab.
- o Up to two two-day workshops for 30 to 40 local stakeholders to increase shared understanding of the problematic situation, begin to unfreeze the status quo, develop trust, and begin to develop a transformative shared vision of the future.

Pilot Community Identification Process

Through March 31st, 2015, EmcArts will be accepting Lab inquiries from groups of local stakeholders.

We believe the pilot Labs will work best in communities where there is already some momentum toward addressing tough problems collectively, existing networks that draw people together, and an openness to process and to extended experimentation.

Therefore, inquiries should include written reflection on the following questions:

- o What problematic situation(s) in your community would be a good fit to explore in a pilot Lab – one that has resisted traditional planning approaches and requires many stakeholders to carry out new strategies?

- o In what ways might a pilot Lab build on existing momentum, networks, and efforts?

- o What community stakeholders from a range of sectors and backgrounds might be champions of this effort? Who is already committed?

We'll be looking for a coordinated inquiry from multiple stakeholders in your community that represent different aspects of your local system, and multiple perspectives on a specific complex challenge. This group would likely include representatives from institutions and organizations historically empowered by the system as well as representatives from informal networks and groups who have been traditionally disempowered.

Inquiries can be summited online, at http://bit.ly/1MfGgQb.

Pilot Resources

Funding from the Kresge Foundation for the Pilot Labs:

- o Covers all expenses for program design and facilitation from EmcArts, including travel and accommodations

- o Includes an investment of $50,000 to $70,000 in the local community to cover fees to local facilitators and artists, convening costs, coordination, and research needs. *The use of these funds will be co-determined by EmcArts and the local leadership team.*

Timeline for the full Labs

While the schedule for implementation of the full *Community Innovation Labs* is dependent on what we learn from the pilots, we expect to announce the official launch in early 2016. *We encourage interested community leaders to keep in contact with us between now and the end of 2015.*

Contact Information

Inquiries can be summited online, at http://bit.ly/1MfGgQb.

If you have any questions about the Community Innovation Labs and/or about participating in the pilot Labs, please contact:

Karina Mangu-Ward - KMangu-Ward@EmcArts.org
212-362-8541, ext. 29