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New project linking Saint Paul arts-based community development to Central Corridor receives \$750,000 grant

A New National consortium of arts funders called ArtPlace selected project for potential to be replicated across the U.S.

Soon, hundreds of projects led by local artists will bring new life and vibrancy to the Central Corridor Light Rail Line in Saint Paul, thanks to a new partnership announced today between the City of Saint Paul, Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation and Springboard for the Arts.

The partnership's project, called Irrigate, has received \$750,000 in support from ArtPlace, a new private-public collaboration. Each project supported by ArtPlace has been selected for developing a new model of helping towns and cities thrive by strategically integrating artists and arts organizations into key local efforts in transportation, housing, community development, job creation and more. ArtPlace has now announced its first round of grants, investing \$11.5 million in 34 locally initiated projects, including Saint Paul's Irrigate.

Over the next three years, Irrigate will mobilize and train artists in community development and creative placemaking, and activate hundreds of artist-led projects along the Corridor to benefit businesses and neighborhoods. These projects will change the

landscape of the Central Corridor with art, creativity and a population of artists who are engaged in their community.

“In Saint Paul, we’ve known for a long time that our artists aren’t just the soul of our city, but the arts industry is a huge economic engine. You need look no further than Lowertown to see clear evidence of this. It only makes sense that we turn to these same strategies to achieve our goals for the Central Corridor,” said Mayor Chris Coleman, whose office is a key driver in the effort.

The effort plans to bring together a period of significant infrastructure development, a high concentration of resident artists on both ends of the Corridor, a wide ethnic and cultural mix across the Corridor and a city with a strong track record of artist community engagement.

Saint Paul’s Irrigate project will emphasize cross-sector participation with public and private sector partners. It will be a model of artist-led community development during major infrastructure improvement, and will also create a lasting cultural identity for the Corridor.

“We’re excited to demonstrate that artists are a powerful, creative force to be mobilized during major infrastructure projects like this. We know that these creative people who live and work along the Corridor can engage communities and build lasting cross-sector relationships through projects that are practical, fun and surprising. Ultimately, we think this can be a model for cities across the country,” said Laura Zabel, the executive director of Springboard for the Arts, a Saint Paul based economic and community development organization for artists.

ArtPlace, an initiative of 11 of America’s top foundations working in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts and seven federal agencies, was also announced today. It aims to drive revitalization across the country by putting the arts at the center of economic development.

“The Central Corridor Light Rail Transit line is a billion dollar infrastructure investment in this city, and the hope and expectation for that investment is that it will increase the vibrancy and livability of the community around it. Irrigate is a unique and exciting project that will help us get to that vibrancy faster and more effectively by engaging artists as assets in their own communities,” said Polly Talen, Saint Paul program director for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which is funding ArtPlace’s efforts in Saint Paul and is also deeply engaged in Central Corridor development..

As longtime supporter of Minnesota’s artists, The McKnight Foundation in Minneapolis is also among the collaborating private funders behind ArtPlace. “Irrigate is a terrific example of exactly the type and quality of work McKnight seeks to support through ArtPlace,” said Kate Wolford, McKnight’s president. “At the intersection of regional development and the arts, this public-private collaboration is beautifully positioned to forge creative, comprehensive approaches to transit-oriented development in the Twin

Cities, with a strategic focus on how artists will contribute to its success.”

The approach ArtPlace is taking, known as “creative placemaking,” has emerged over the past twenty years as a promising way to increase the vitality of communities and help them grow. In 2011, the National Endowment for the Arts built on its two decades of work in creative placemaking by announcing the first grants in its new Our Town program, designed to support public-private partnerships to strengthen the arts while energizing the overall community. ArtPlace takes this movement a step further, as the first major public-private partnership to encourage creative placemaking across America.

“ArtPlace is accelerating creative placemaking, where cities and towns are using the arts and other creative assets to shape their social, physical and economic futures,” said Rocco Landesman, Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts. “This approach brings new partners to the table to support the arts and recognizes the arts as vital drivers of community revitalization and development.”

“Economic development historically has been about bagging the buffalo—competing for the big employer to move operations to your city,” said Carol Coletta, President of ArtPlace. “But now we know the economic development game is all about how you deploy local assets to develop, attract and keep talent. So why would you not deploy every asset you have—including artists and the arts—to do that? That’s what ArtPlace is all about.”

“ArtPlace represents a new paradigm,” said Luis A. Ubiñas, President of The Ford Foundation and Chairman of the ArtPlace Presidents’ Council. “It brings to the arts the kind of economic development thinking that has long been pursued for attracting and developing businesses, big and small, across the country. ArtPlace’s integrated, interwoven approach has the potential to kick-start local economies and transform communities. The arts can play a central role spurring local economic activity.”

ArtPlace grants are given through the combined support of Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Ford Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, Rasmuson Foundation, The Robina Foundation and an anonymous donor. In addition to the NEA, federal partners include the departments of Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Education and Transportation, along with leadership from the White House Office of Management and Budget and the Domestic Policy Council. Federal partners do not provide funding to ArtPlace, but participate in the ArtPlace Presidents’ Council and Operating Committee meetings, ensuring alignment between high-priority federal investments and policy development and ArtPlace grants.

Concurrent with announcing its first round of grants, ArtPlace has initiated its second funding cycle. A Letter of Inquiry has been posted on www.artplaceamerica.org as of September 15, 2011. Submissions may be made through November 15.

For more information about Saint Paul's Irrigate project, visit www.irrigatearts.org