

CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON THE ARTS

URBAN

artists

INITIATIVE

in partnership with the
INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY RESEARCH

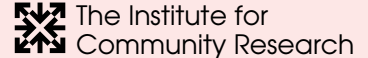


The Urban Artists Initiative is a program of the Connecticut Commission on the Arts in partnership with the Institute for Community Research.

The Connecticut Commission on the Arts is a state government agency whose mission is to support artistic excellence, foster cultural development through the arts, and increase public understanding of, participation in, and support for the arts.



The Institute for Community Research is a private nonprofit research and educational organization partnering with communities in the fields of culture, education and health. In addition to collaborating with the Connecticut Commission on the Arts in the Urban Artists Initiative, the Institute operates the Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program and the ICR Gallery.



The partnership between these organizations is strengthened by the access to arts networks and resources provided by the Connecticut Commission on the Arts and the cultural field-work, outreach, documentation and support to communities and artists available through the Institute for Community Research.

When we originally designed the Urban Artists Initiative, we knew that we could provide resources and support to help nurture the talent of urban artists. We knew that they could make a substantial contribution to the economic and cultural health of our urban communities. Watching this program exceed our high expectations has been an invigorating experience. Funding support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the State of Connecticut has increased substantially in recognition of the exceptional achievements of the program participants and the powerful effect of the initiative in our communities.

John E. Ostrout, Executive Director
Connecticut Commission on the Arts

It's been a privilege to be able to develop this program in Connecticut as an illustration to the country of how artists and communities can work in partnership with the Connecticut Commission on the Arts and the Institute for Community Research to create new visions for the role of the arts in the cities. We've seen program participants become recognized in Connecticut, in New England and nationally for their work. The Urban Artists Initiative has stimulated, deepened, and enriched cultural expression in the state. The program has changed the cultural landscape of Connecticut.

Jean J. Schensul, Ph.D., Executive Director
Institute for Community Research

urban artists initiative

Nurturing the Artists Among Us

The Urban Artists Initiative provides culturally and ethnically diverse artists and organizations with the tools to thrive and to enrich the cultural life of their communities. With professional training, financial assistance and network-building, we help people develop and refine skills that will enhance their careers or facilitate the growth of their organizations.

Many artists struggle to express their visions while meeting daily needs in a society that often does not value their work. Frequently isolated, urban artists and arts organizations are further challenged by their lack of access to training, resources and networks more readily available to those from other communities.

Background

The Urban Artists Initiative, which began as the Inner City Cultural Development (ICCD) Program, was designed to address the unique needs of emerging urban artists and organizations that produce art or present cultural events. The Urban Artists Initiative was developed by the Connecticut Commission on the Arts and the Institute for Community Research.

Launched in Bridgeport in 1992, the program expanded to Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury by 1996. In 1998 the program began in Bristol, New Britain, Norwalk and Stamford. In addition, working with the Commission and the Institute, the Arts Council of Greater New Haven has implemented the Initiative's approach as part of a regional cultural development plan.

In each location the program operates for three years, during which six community-based organizations and fifteen individual artists are selected from a pool of local applicants. The Initiative provides training, grants, mentors, technical assistance, and staff support. In this way, local arts leadership is developed within the communities.

Give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day. Teach him to fish, and he will eat for a lifetime.

Chinese Proverb



Phillip Fortune



Building Community Arts Partnerships

From its inception as the ICCD Program, the Urban Artists Initiative has reflected the rich and diverse ethnic and cultural tapestry of our state, nurturing artists and organizations from African-American, Argentinian, Asian, Peruvian, Puerto Rican, Lebanese, Armenian, Russian, and other backgrounds. The program design stimulates the formation of new cross-cultural networks within and among Connecticut's major cities to address common concerns and to share resources.

The Urban Artists Initiative also facilitates partnerships with schools, social clubs and social service organizations that, while not arts-dedicated institutions, include community-based arts programs among their core activities. Such programs are embedded in pressing community issues, reflect the culture of the community, and exemplify the arts as an intrinsic part of community life, meaning and identity. Helping create connections among local artists, different types of community organizations, and the larger Connecticut arts network is a fundamental component of the mission of the Urban Artists Initiative.

T*his program is about getting organized. It's about knowing where to find the things I need. For me, it put in place different building blocks that let me know what is possible. A lot of it is seeing how artists who are making a living at their art do it. Knowing I wasn't alone helped me make that jump off the cliff to become a full time artist.*

Scott Kessel
New Haven UAI artist



Kathleen DeMeo



Program Goals and Strategies

- To create a vibrant network of artists and presenters within and among target cities
- To enhance the ability of artists to effectively produce, present and market their work to varied local, state, and regional audiences
- To expand the ability of community-based, non-arts organizations and developing arts organizations to effectively present to their audiences the work of artists in a wide variety of disciplines.

The Urban Artists Initiative applies a number of strategies to address our goals:

- Fieldwork
- Professional training for organizations and artists
- Mentors matched to participating artists and arts organizations
- Training to conduct classroom residencies
- Grants for developing creative projects
- Opportunities to initiate collaborative projects within and among cities
- Continuing education opportunities
- Quarterly meetings to discuss progress and issues
- The Initiative's annual conference featuring nationally recognized arts leaders.

Artists and organizations collaborate on projects and events that bring together communities that have not traditionally worked together. This program has the capability of impacting these local communities and the state in ways that count—economically, socially and culturally.

Maryland M. Grier
Urban Artists Initiative
Program Co-Director
Institute for Community Research

MENTORS

projects

fieldwork

mentors

training

collaboration

community

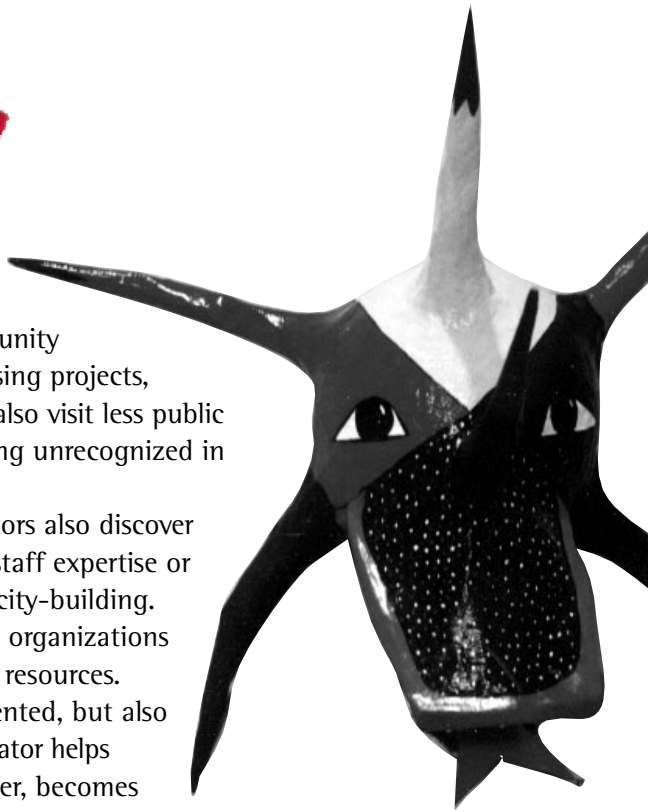
fieldwork

A site coordinator from each city in the Urban Artists Initiative seeks out local emerging artists and organizations. Site coordinators talk to community members and visit churches, service agencies, housing projects, social clubs, schools and local organizations. They also visit less public locations to learn about artists who may be working unrecognized in their homes.

Through these informal networks, site coordinators also discover organizations that include arts activities but lack staff expertise or resources to tap into sources of funding and capacity-building.

The search for candidates focuses on artists and organizations that don't traditionally have access to mainstream resources. The program looks for those who are not only talented, but also are involved in their communities. Each site coordinator helps interested candidates apply to the program, and later, becomes a resource person for the artists and organizations selected. A panel of artists, administrators and social scientists screens applications and chooses participants.

Participants and other organizations become part of an information base on community artists and organizations throughout the state. Staff and participants work together to assess the program using ethnographic techniques like focus groups, in-depth interviews, and audiovisual documentation.



The Urban Artists Initiative in Waterbury has brought back a sense of community in the city. There were a lot of artists who were struggling on their own. It is certainly better when you have people who have the same passion as you do, and to see the energy that passion creates within the group and for each individual. That energy is what really helped the artists develop professionally and get a real sense of themselves as artists.

Vanessa Bennett
Waterbury Site Coordinator



training

Core Training

Participants first receive a 16-week intensive, college-level course that emphasizes the business side of being a professional artist. They learn marketing, budgeting, fundraising, contract negotiation, grantsmanship, and time management, among other skills. Participants from organizations are trained in arts administration. Sessions involve arts leaders from throughout the state, providing participants with crucial exposure and access to the mainstream Connecticut arts network.

Continuing Education Opportunities

Upon completing the training program, artists and organizations attend quarterly meetings on topics of special interest. These gatherings provide a chance for participants to share their progress. Many have used the meetings to initiate collaborative projects.

Urban Artists Initiative participants also have the opportunity to attend regional and national conferences where they hear widely-recognized arts leaders, meet other artists doing similar work, and expand their network of contacts.



W

hen we first started Urban Artists

Initiative, we thought of it as a career development program. We were more concerned with establishing access to resources than focusing on developing artistic quality. But what I've seen is amazing growth in artistic development on the part of the artists who've been in the program.

David Marshall

Urban Artists Initiative Program Director
Connecticut Commission on the Arts



Nick Lacy

Participating in this program brought tremendous changes to our school. Having artists come to our school changed the way our kids think because they began integrating arts into every subject. Through their exposure to art, the students learned to see how everything is connected.

Becky Squire, teacher
Edgewood School (New Haven)

Classroom Residency Training

Collaboration with local schools and other institutions is an important aspect of training. Returning something to the community by sharing talent and skills forms an integral part of the Urban Artists Initiative. For example, by arranging artist residencies in local elementary schools, the program helps to integrate arts into the school curriculum in a way that contributes to improving the cultural and educational structures of the school. The artists gain valuable teaching experience and exposure in the community. Some have become participants in the Connecticut Commission on the Arts' Master Teaching Artists Program.



mentors

When participants have completed the education component, the Urban Artists Initiative matches them with mentors who are professional working artists or arts administrators. Mentors are also provided to organizations to develop their presenting capacity. Mentors encourage and advise Urban Artists Initiative participants by sharing knowledge gained

through years of experience, providing critiques of work in progress, helping participants develop new skills or assisting in the preparation of promotional materials. As models of success in arts careers, mentors inspire their proteges to learn from their mistakes and persist in the face of challenges.

Mentors benefit from the relationship as well. Beyond having his or her theories and perspectives validated, as one mentor commented, mentoring can also stimulate one's own creative process.



My experience as mentor was a two-way street. I loved helping artists. But I also gained a broadening and deepening of myself artistically. I got a lot of satisfaction from seeing people grow.

Janet Luongo
Discovery Museum of Bridgeport
New Haven program mentor

financial assistance

The Urban Artists Initiative provides modest grants for participating individuals and organizations to help support their creative projects. Artists have used funds to purchase equipment and supplies, develop portfolios and promotional materials, or create costumes for performing. Some pool funds to finance large productions. Organizations use grants to test project ideas developed during course work. Such seed money can help participants make the leap from “struggling artist” to “professional artist.”

resources and information

We encourage educators, cultural event planners, community programmers, exhibit curators and others to use our resources to access urban artists, community organizations, and emerging arts organizations representing many cultures and artistic disciplines.

Resources

Urban Artists Initiative Directory

Showcases the artists and organizations, including addresses and phone numbers. Free of charge. (Available August, 1999)

Documentary video: Artists Among Us

Portrays how artists, whether through active involvement in schools or through increased involvement in neighborhoods, help strengthen neighborhoods and contribute to revitalizing cities. To order, send a check for \$12.50 payable to the Connecticut Commission on the Arts to: Artists Among Us Video, Connecticut Commission on the Arts, One Financial Plaza-Lobby, Hartford, CT 06103.

Artwork is available for sale or exhibition.

Information

For more information on the Urban Artists Initiative, contact: Connecticut Commission on the Arts, Tel: (860) 566-4770 Fax: (860) 566-6462 or Institute for Community Research, Tel: (860) 278-2044 Fax: (860) 278-2141.

Visit our websites: Connecticut Commission on the Arts: www.ctarts.org

Institute for Community Research: www.hartnet.org/~icr

Urban Artists Initiative: www.hartnet.org/~iccd

The Urban Artists Initiative produces a quarterly newsletter. To join our mailing list, please mail the form below to: Urban Artists Initiative, Institute for Community Research, 2 Hartford Square West, Suite 100, Hartford, CT 06106-5128.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

I am an ___artist ___arts administrator ___arts leader ___other (specify) _____

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