

Big Car community engagement/public art series: Made for Each Other

1) Describe your proposed project and why it is important to your neighborhood. How will it meet at least one of GINI's 11 Principles of a Healthy Neighborhood?

Big Car Collective, a non-profit community arts organization based in Fountain Square, is proposing community and social practice public art projects in all six GINI Demonstration Neighborhoods. Working with these neighborhoods is a natural fit as each has a track record of resident engagement and systems in place — including a GINI coordinator — to help facilitate our connection with the communities. And each neighborhood has specific quality-of-life goals that we can help meet.

In this six-part public art initiative, we will engage neighbors in the planning, creating and celebration of each project — bridging gaps between art, artists and art institutions and our neighbors in the community. These projects will also bring neighbors together; building more cohesive communities as all involved work to improve the quality of life through this cultural avenue. All of the artwork will be inclusive, interactive, thought provoking and dynamic. Most will be temporary, but some — depending on ideas that arise when neighbors and artists collaborate — could be longer lasting. The end result of one of these pieces may be something that becomes a regional or national attraction that brings the community together — like the Fremont Troll in Seattle, a large interactive sculpture located in what was once a crime-ridden spot under a bridge.

Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* explains why public art is so important (from a 2008 interview with *Public Art Review*):

“Public art plays two roles in a community: It helps to create an authentic sense of place and serves as a tool for revitalization.”

Florida has this to say about public art efforts that reach multiple communities:

“Stakeholders and leaders in various geographic and demographic regions must work together to make each community within that region the best it can be. Perhaps the use of public art throughout an entire region can help create a unified feel and sense of cohesiveness.”

Indianapolis has a long history with public art — from the looming war memorials to the flashing lights of Julian Opie’s “Ann Dancing” to the latest installation of George Rickey’s kinetic sculptures throughout downtown. But, with major funding cuts, more major public art projects — like those create by the Arts Council of Indianapolis through the city’s Cultural Development Initiative — may be unlikely.

The six-part public art project we are proposing would continue to the momentum created by the Arts Council’s public art projects of the last several years and take public art in some new and important directions. First, this project moves public art from the realm of

cultural tourism in downtown locations to community locations in city neighborhoods. So the target audience is no longer visitors. It is the people who live nearby. Second, the social nature of these projects will more directly connect members of the community with the final product. The work located in each community will be about these communities in authentic ways. The work will be made based on ideas and input from neighbors engaged in the communities. And the community will be part of the creation and celebration of the projects.

“I go around the world, really, in various sorts of ways, I’m pointing to things, identifying them, and saying there’s something good about this.” – Portland, Oregon artist Harrell Fletcher.

This philosophy is exactly why we are bringing in Fletcher (www.harrellfletcher.com) to lead our efforts with the project. His internationally known social practice and public art projects are about bringing people and communities together and celebrating the stories of who we are and where we live. For example, in one of his projects, he visited garage sales in a neighborhood, asking the owners of the items for sale for the stories behind certain things he purchased. He then created an art show displaying the items and the stories in a location within that same neighborhood. The resulting show brought together the neighbors who were selling things at their garage sales with members of the arts community and artists in the area who came to see the show.

In another project, Fletcher walked through a Portland neighborhood and discovered some interesting cement lawn statues in the front lawn of the house. After getting to know the people there, the idea came up to create similar small lawn statues of dozens of people who lived in the neighborhood. A local artist was commissioned to make these. And, after they were shown in a gallery (where all of the neighbors came together for the show), the statues were placed in the yard of the people who first prompted the idea. They remain there today.

In another project, Fletcher talked with people in a California community passed through by thousands of highway commuters every day and decided that those commuters should get to know the people who live in the town. So a local artist was commissioned to paint giant plywood portraits of these neighbors that were placed as billboards near the highway. Millions of people saw this project titled “Some People Who Live Here.”

Fletcher, who has worked as a farmer, has a strong interest in future projects that involve urban gardening, exploring environmental issues and dance/performance.

“I form collaborations with people to produce exhibitions about aspects of their lives, or the world, that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.” – Fletcher.

At this point in our planning, we have ideas for public art projects in each of the six GINI neighborhoods. But we want to start each project by gathering input from neighbors (adults and children), stakeholders and people who best know each neighborhood:

Southeast: We would like to keep this project open for input from residents and for thoughts from Fletcher. We have plenty of options available here for facilities with Big Car being located in the neighborhood. We will link the public input aspect or public presentation to an existing art event in Fountain Square, Masterpiece in a Day, and/or to the Art of July art parade event in the neighborhood. We will also consider linking the project with the Cultural Trail that will come through the neighborhood in the near future.

West Indianapolis: This may be a neighborhood garden project that integrates art — most likely sculpture — with gardening and the new farmer's market in the neighborhood. We are also interested in working on an environmental art project connected to the White River or Eagle Creek, possibly blending the elements of urban gardening and environmental art with attention to the beauty of the river as it passes through the city. In West Indianapolis, we are very interested in working with students from George Washington Community Schools.

Near East: As with Fountain Square, we would like to keep this project open for Harrell Fletcher and for community input. We may want to connect our project with the strong history of “outsider art” on the east side and its ongoing mural project. Also, we'll want to involve students from area schools in the project. As we plan to do in Fountain Square, we would like to link the public input or public presentation of the project somehow with the Feast of Lanterns.

Near Westside: Using the Central State grounds, we would like to partner with a local dance group, Susurrus, to create and host an outdoor performance connected to Halloween and Day of the Dead. This project, which will also include input from the community, will explore the cultural diversity of the neighborhood. We'll gather stories from adults and children, maybe favorite legends, dreams and nightmares, etc. and incorporate these into this performance. We'll use local artists to build sets and lighting.

Binford Area: This idea is one we're fairly set on and will be our first project in the fall of 2009. At Skiles Test Nature Park we will create an environmental art festival in the fall featuring installations in the park made with found and natural materials. For this festival, the artwork will be temporary in nature, fading back into the natural setting in time. The project will involve students from Skiles Test Elementary School, who will learn about environmental art before helping plan the projects and then collaborating to create and document the work in pictures and writing.

Crooked Creek: We will host an art show about the neighborhood in an available retail location in the area. This show may be similar to Fletcher's garage sale idea detailed above. But we will seek input from the neighbors before deciding on the show. The Indianapolis Museum of Art, which is located in the boundaries of Crooked Creek, is interested in connecting with the project — possibly hosting a discussion/reception at the museum.

Our six-part project meets eight of the 11 GINI Principles of a Healthy Neighborhood:

1. Leadership: We'll ask members of the community to come forward with their ideas, skills and excitement and participate in the planning and execution of these projects. While Big Car and our internationally known lead consulting artist, Harrell Fletcher, will coordinate and facilitate these projects, we will seek residents from each neighborhood — children and adults, previous leaders and new leaders — to help guide us. They know their neighborhoods. They know what they'd like there. They know the best stories, the most interesting people and the important things about where they live that should be honored in our projects.

2. Vision: At its core, this project is about ways creative expression and culture can bring people together instead of creating distance. When people are connected to art and culture by being a participant in its planning, making and celebration, they will likely continue to better appreciate the power of creative expression and the power of the community working together to make exciting and important things happen.

3. Collaboration: This is central to all of the projects — from engaging the community in the formation of the specifics of each project idea, to including neighbors and organizations for each community in the creation of each project. These will not be top down efforts. Instead, these will be grassroots projects made possible by many people and organizations working together with one goal — to celebrate and honor each neighborhood and its people, places and stories.

5. Education: These projects offer a great opportunity for connecting our neighbors across the city with art and culture. The projects will help demystify art making and help people understand that they can participate in creative expression. We will work, with each project, to involve children — allowing them input in the idea stage, hands-on experience in the execution of the projects when applicable and inclusion in the celebrations. We will also ask children to help us document the projects in photos and in writing.

6. Culture: These projects will foster creativity within the communities by involving neighbors directly in all aspects. We will include artists who live in each neighborhood directly in the projects taking place where they live. The end results will leave behind a positive cultural experience for the participants, a community-building celebration and projects that will beautify the neighborhoods and make them more interesting, genuine and unique places to live.

7. Safety: Neighborhoods where people know each other are safer neighborhoods. These projects will bring people out and bring people together. Some of these projects are designed that get people walking in their neighborhoods, get them talking with each other. Some projects will help beautify parts of the neighborhoods that are now ugly and encourage vandalism and petty crimes.

8. Environment: Much of what we are proposing will bring art into the physical environment of the neighborhoods, encouraging people to get outdoors into nature parks full of environmental art installations or into community gardens that double as sculpture

parks. We want our projects to be both about appreciating and improving the physical environments of the communities and about appreciating the importance of preserving and caring for our outdoor environment in general.

11. Economy/Jobs: One of the key components to our six projects will be commissioning local artists and artisans to make our projects possible. Times are tough for members of the creative community in Indianapolis. While much of the work will be from volunteers, we're pleased that we will be able to provide supplies and stipends to the professional artists making these projects happen in the six neighborhoods.

(2) Describe your project work plan and timeframe.

We will meet with neighbors and stakeholders from each neighborhood starting this summer, with input gathered by all six by the end of 2009. The project will have a presence at the 2009 Feast of Lanterns and Masterpiece in a Day events this fall.

Our first priority will be Binford Area, which will be the project we'll complete in 2009. While he'll be consulted before this, Harrell Fletcher will come to Indianapolis in November of 2009 (returning two more times in 2010) and we'll move forward on the process to complete the other four projects in 2010.

Fall 2009

Binford Area (October)

Lafayette Square (October)

Spring 2010

Crooked Creek

West Indy (prep in fall of 2009, planting in April, harvest event in fall of 2010)

Summer 2010

Near East (July)

Fall 2010

Southeast (September)

Near West (late October)

Winter 2010

Overall project celebration event connected with Spirit & Place (November)

Martinala-Brightwood (TBD)

(3) What collaborative partners will play what roles on your project?

Staff members from each neighborhood CDC or community center in the six neighborhoods will help us by facilitating ways we can connect with the community to receive input and ideas, helping us find volunteer participants from each neighborhood and by helping spread the word about the projects and celebration events.

The Arts Council of Indianapolis, the producer of the downtown public art exhibition series as well as the public art on the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, is supportive of this proposal. The Arts Council will collaborate by providing advisement and access to existing resources that will help us connect with artists based in the Indianapolis-area, appropriate city contacts for permitting and compliance and other potential funders.

Herron School of Art will collaborate with us by offering advise and expertise, by bringing Harrell Fletcher to Indianapolis for a lecture in November of 2009 that allows us to begin our project efforts with him here and by providing a link to art students and artists on the school's faculty who can participate in the project.

Spirit & Place Festival will collaborate with the project by including it in its programming for 2009 and possibly for 2010. This will help spread the word about the project with a launch event and then link the six neighborhoods together at a public celebration at the end of 2010.

The Indianapolis Museum of Art will focus specifically on the Crooked Creek project. But may be involved with the project in an overall way too. The IMA's collaborative input will include offering: curatorial input and expertise, support connecting the community at the IMA with the neighborhood, facilities for a community event, marketing support and web-based technological support for documentation and ongoing community input.

Sussurus, a nonprofit dance group based in Indianapolis, will collaborate with us on the Near West project at Central State. Sussurus will be contracted to work with the public to create a site-specific performance linked with Halloween and Day of the Dead. Sussurus will provide performers and/or training for neighborhood residents (possibly adults and children) to be involved.

The Second Story, a nonprofit creative writing project, will work with young people and families to document the projects in their neighborhoods in creative ways. Writing from the kids and adults in the neighborhood may be incorporated in the performance at Central State as well as other projects. This writing – as well as photographs by children – will also appear in the final printed catalogue documenting the project. And The Second Story, which has experience with publishing, will help with the editing and production of the catalogue.

Hoosier Environmental Council, an organization that addresses Indiana's environmental challenges through education and advocacy, will collaborate with us by supporting the environmental art and urban garden projects at Binford Area and West Indy. Their

support will be through input on the educational elements of the projects for kids and families, spreading the word through their channels about these projects and events and helping recruit volunteers.

(4) IMAGINE BIG is focused on supporting efforts that increase and strengthen neighborhood engagement. How will your project engage neighborhood residents, organizations, and institutions, especially those that haven't previously been involved?

Neighborhood engagement is crucial to all elements of this project. We will start by asking each community for its input and its stories. We'll ask the communities questions: What makes each neighborhood unique? What makes it beautiful? What could we do to add to this? How can we help? Who are the interesting and important everyday people in the neighborhood? Who are the unsung heroes?

Then we'll engage the community as volunteers in the process of creating the projects and planning the events. These projects won't be things we push on the neighborhood or things that just appear one day and nobody knows why. We'll make sure we keep organizations and institutions — as well as the neighbors themselves — up to date on what's happening through person-to-person communication (by walking in neighborhoods and meeting people), email communication, web updates and flyers available in neighborhood gathering areas.

People feel engaged and connected when they have input, when their stories are part of the big story, when they can participate and when they are informed about what's going on. These are the things we'll do to make sure neighborhood engagement is central to our effort. And, in the end, we'll celebrate together — engaging neighborhoods with each other and with the city as a whole.

(5) What results do you hope to achieve with your project, and how will you measure them?

As a result of our efforts with these six public art projects, Big Car is anticipating and measuring the following goals:

Engagement:

2 unique outcome goals for this project created and met by each neighborhood. These goals will be specific to the particular aspects of each project, neighborhood, and/or neighborhood's quality-of-life plan. An example: *The Southeast will see a 200 percent increase in positive attitude about art as measured by resident surveys.*

180 people (30 per neighborhood average) participate in project planning/focus group meetings as indicated on sign-in sheets and survey forms.

300 people (50 people per neighborhood average) participate in helping create content or execution of projects as measured with head counts.

50 percent of project creative participants should be first-time arts volunteers as measured by surveys.

500-plus people attend Spirit & Place project preview event and gallery show.

12 neighborhood residents create and make presentations in Spirit & Place celebration event.

500-plus people attend Spirit & Place celebration event and gallery show.

5000 people participate as audience members in events and celebrations as measured by head counts.

50 percent of event audience members should be new to arts events or rarely attend arts events as measured by surveys.

20,000 people visit and/or participate in assignments on the website as measured by unique hits and entries on the site.

3 new neighborhood arts leaders identified in each of the 6 neighborhoods as measured by Big Car staff observation.

1 new art association (i.e. committee, porch group, working group, etc.) created in each of the 6 neighborhoods as measured by Big Car staff observation.

Awareness:

50,000-plus people from Indianapolis and across the country will learn about the project, the neighborhoods, GINI and its supporting organizations, and IMAGINE BIG as estimated by flyer distribution and other marketing efforts, project participation, event attendance, media coverage, and web traffic.

25 articles, calendar blurbs or blog stories about projects and events in national, regional, local and neighborhood publications and websites.

3 stories highlighting projects on local television.

(6) How will you sustain the project's impact and the resident engagement you've created?

The logical next step is to encourage community members to take action both as art makers and art supporters. First, we'll seek leaders in each community who would like to

continue these kinds of projects in their neighborhoods in future years. We'll assist with the development of committees and with forming plans for making this happen. And we'll volunteer to advise these leaders and groups on an ongoing basis. Big Car will also seek ongoing grant funding for facilitating further social practice public art projects once this project ends.

Our efforts will continue as people from the six neighborhoods become more comfortable as fans of art in the city. Arts events abound in Indianapolis throughout each year. But many people don't know about them or don't feel comfortable attending. One important element to what we'll do with these projects is link people from all six communities with information about other arts events they can attend and help them feel more comfortable with the idea of art. As part of the project, we'll bring the art to them, and encourage them to come to the IMA, to the arts community buildings in Fountain Square and other arts locations. Once they visit these places, maybe for the first time, they'll be better prepared to continue enjoying these cultural offerings in their neighborhoods.

We'll also use an interactive website designed for the project that will serve as the project's convening piece — documenting all six projects. The site will also feature community and social practice oriented “assignments” that will engage neighbors in the creative process and keep them connected with each other and with the broader online community. Modeled after Harrell Fletcher's www.learningtoloveyoumore.com, the site will ask people to email, mail or drop off writing, photos and documentation of things they make. Big Car Collective staff will keep the site updated with the submissions for at least two years after the project ends in 2010. Examples from Fletcher's current site include: Make an encouraging banner, write a phone call you wish you could have, take a picture of strangers holding hands, recreate an object from someone's past, write your life story in less than a day, make an educational public plaque.