

## **The Importance of Arts to Sustainability**

We all know of places that are inspiring to visit, or are great places to live, because of some quality linked to creative vitality. There is an increasing body of knowledge that firmly establishes the link between the arts, creativity and positive outcomes for communities. This body of knowledge has inspired a movement in what is becoming known as “creative placemaking.” Research suggests that both the image and the social fabric of a town can be improved with well-thought-out investments in arts and culture.

The arts create robust and vital communities and contribute to overall quality of life. They are one of the few activities that bridge all the components of sustainability (economy, environment, social).

- The arts increase prosperity and economic development, such as increasing property values, increasing cultural tourism, and supporting a flow of commerce to other sectors via the creative economy.
- The arts celebrate nature and build awareness of and an appreciation for our physical environment: its beauty, fragility and its need for stewardship.
- The arts provide an opportunity to gather and engage ALL community members in shared experience. They foster creativity and innovation to transform individual lives and communities.

In other words, we are talking about the concept of “sustainability” in its broadest sense. That is why a series of new actions, “arts-related” actions, is being added to the Sustainable Jersey framework. They present a series of new and exciting opportunities for your community. Moreover, they can provide fun and inspiring experiences for the people who get involved. Are you one of those people? If so, read on.

### **Establishing a Creative Team is a pre-requisite for other arts-related sustainability actions.**

The action, “Establish a Creative Team” should be viewed as a pre-requisite in connecting the arts with economic development, the environment and social justice issues for the sustainability of your community. This is because the Creative Team has the mandate to assess, initiate and implement the cluster of “arts-related” actions that are being incorporated into the Sustainable Jersey framework. The Creative Team can provide the strategic overview, thereby insuring that cultural plans and projects are inclusive, well-integrated and impactful.

The establishment of Green Teams is a key feature of Sustainable Jersey. There are similarities between the way that your Green Team and your Creative Team will function. Certainly, there must be a strong relationship and ongoing communication between the Green Team and the Creative Team to ensure that arts-related initiatives are integrated within the broad notion of sustainability for local communities, championed by Sustainable Jersey.

A notable difference is that there are more options for the structure and format for Creative Teams than is the case for Green Teams. Green Teams generally have a similar format from municipality to municipality and are always officially established through municipal resolution, or by an ordinance adopted by the municipality. In the case of Creative Teams, it is recognized that a diversity of effective approaches already exist, or are able to be implemented that can deliver the desired outcomes. The establishment of 566 stand-alone Creative Teams for each municipality in New Jersey is not the way forward.

*(See Establish a Creative Team Action for details of composition and organization for your Creative Team).*

While there are choices for Creative Teams in terms of size of membership and organizational structure, the need for leadership that is open and inclusive is a constant. A smaller Creative Team will need to insure that it has mechanisms to consult and bring in a diversity of views. A larger Creative Team will need to insure that it has governance arrangements in place, such as an executive group, to move with sufficient pace in response to opportunities and challenges as they arise.

While leadership for the Creative Team can, and will be found in different domains in different communities, it is critical that the final membership of the Creative Team is broadly based and able to reflect different elements and aspirations within each community or region. To state the obvious, a local team that consists solely of artists and arts experts - with no links to broader social, economic and environmental expertise and connections in the community will not function effectively. Conversely, a local team that consists solely of business and civic representatives, for example within a business improvement district, with no participation by artists and arts experts will also be deficient. It is important for every Creative Team to encourage a broad base of participation.

In diverse communities, especially ones that wish to improve the degree to which various demographics (race, income, age, etc.) are involved in civic life, the formation of the Creative Team is a prime opportunity to expand inclusion. Aspiring to establish a Creative Team that reflects the overall demographics of the region is the optimal goal.

The creation of a Creative Team has the potential to become a sensitive issue within a community, if not approached thoughtfully. A key consideration is to respect and include existing arts and creative capabilities and resources within your community and not to assume that the Creative Team becomes the owner or originator of all creative activities within your community. Across New Jersey, there are many places where creativity is already central to the fabric of the community and its sustainability (socially, economically, environmentally). These communities may already have a clear definition of the geographic area that works most effectively for them and an existing organizational structure that can encompass the overall responsibilities of a Creative Team. In communities such as these, it would be counter-productive to reinvent the wheel.

At the other end of the continuum, some places in New Jersey may have little in place that approximates the work of a Creative Team, nor have perceived strengths in arts and cultural capacity. The formation of a Creative Team provides the gateway for the new and interesting “arts-related” actions that are being added to the Sustainable Jersey framework.

### *Some further considerations in establishing a Creative Team*

The thrust of this guidance is to provide a clear rationale, combined with a flexible approach, to encourage the establishment of Creative Teams. At the same time, it is acknowledged that some municipalities may be reluctant to make this commitment, or have local voices that are skeptical of its value. However, the community that does not have an existing reputation as an arts destination could be the community that finds the greatest opportunities for new initiatives. Every community in New Jersey will include creative people and a host of different capacities, for example:

- Is your community the host of particular cultural organizations or artists? – i.e. folk art, music, ceramics
- Does your community have business development activities where the arts and cultural initiatives can make a difference? – commercial or residential, new developments or potential for urban regeneration
- How can arts and cultural initiatives link with the social aspirations of your community? – education, health and well-being, disadvantaged populations, changes in demographics
- How can arts and cultural initiatives link to environmental aspirations of your community? – rural or urban, water, landform, flora and fauna
- If not the arts, does your community have other cultural strengths? - history and heritage, ethnic diversity, cultural tourism, food, recreation, sporting, entertainment
- What are the lateral and ‘organic’ possibilities? – unused commercial property and buildings; walls for murals; pathways and travel routes; relationship to other centers of activity; myths and preconceptions about where you live
- How can the arts and culture help exploit the unique competitive of a community or region with positive and inclusive results? – New Jersey’s artisanal food specialists of the farm-to-table movement collaborating creatively with artists and fine craftspeople; Main Street NJ vintage car shows inviting representatives from Latino communities to exhibit artistic low-rider classic vehicles.
- Who are the passionate people in your community? – ‘top down’ leaders or grass roots movers and shakers, or both

All of these are important considerations as you begin to form your Creative Team which is a pre-requisite to all of the other sustainability related arts actions in Sustainable Jersey.