



# OCCASIONAL PAPERS

SUMMER 2007

## CONNECTING CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY TO FOSTER A CREATIVE ECONOMY:

### Strategies and Lessons from Upstate New York

*Susan Christopherson, J. Thomas Clark Professor, Department of City and Regional Planning, Cornell University*

*Suzanne Loker, J. Thomas Clark Professor, Department of Textiles and Apparel, Cornell University*

*Susan Monagan, Manager Audience Development & Special Proj., Department of Theatre Arts, Ithaca College*

**T**he idea that the arts and culture are valuable to local and state economies (not to mention, the national economy) is not new. It has been demonstrated in studies by organizations such as Americans for the Arts for decades.<sup>1</sup> The goal of these organizations has been to garner support for arts and cultural organizations from government, the citizenry, and foundations. What is different about the current policy discussions surrounding the creative economy is their attention to the myriad of ways in which the creative economy approaches can be integrated into economic

development programs.

The distinctiveness of the creative economy approach is that it links the arts and the creative process to a wide range of economic activities including education, technological innovation, and local and regional marketing. It originates in the understanding that people, quality of place, and innovation are central to economic development and has led to a focus on cultural resources as key elements in regional economic development. Small towns and small and medium-size cities, including those in New York, face particular challenges in building a creative economy.

<sup>1</sup>For example, see “Jobs, Arts and the Economy,” published by Americans for the Arts, Washington, DC, 1994

\*\*\*\*\*

*The New York Campus Compact Occasional Papers are publications designed to advance an understanding of and appreciation for collegiate civic engagement in its many forms. Occasional Papers describe promising practices in service learning and civic engagement, and the role of civic engagement programs in fulfilling institutional missions and promoting student learning. Manuscripts are invited that represent the viewpoints and experiences of the variety of individuals who have a stake in civic engagement - presidents, academic administrators, faculty, students, and community partners. Publication guidelines and contact information can be obtained on the New York Campus Compact web site –[www.nycc.cornell.edu](http://www.nycc.cornell.edu).*

www.nycc.cornell.edu

One significant resource they can draw on in building creative economy approaches to economic development is a local college or university. This is particularly true in Upstate New York, which has one of the highest densities of higher educational institutions in the United States. In this report, we examine some of the ways in which upstate New York colleges and universities interact with their local communities to enhance cultural life.

### **What Role Do Colleges and Universities Play in Fostering Creative Economies Outside Big Cities?**

During the summer of 2004, we surveyed administrative officials and faculty from 38 upstate New York colleges and universities regarding their interactions with arts and performance organizations and activities in their adjacent communities. The interviews were conducted by telephone or in person<sup>2</sup>. All 38 higher education institutions were members of the New York State Campus Compact, an organization through which members commit their schools to community engagement through “service learning,” developing relationships, programs and curriculum that serve their surrounding communities meeting both educational and institutional missions. We chose this group to survey because of their stated commitment to work with their local communities on issues of mutual concern, including activities promoting community and economic development.

---

<sup>2</sup> Susan Monagan, a master’s degree student at Cornell’s Community and Rural Development Institute and currently a staff member at Ithaca College’s Department of Theatre Arts, conducted the survey. The instrument is available upon request.

Of the 38 schools in the initial survey, interviews were obtained from 33 – an 87% response rate.

Of the 33 responding schools, 11 were public institutions (four community colleges and seven state universities), and 22 were private institutions. Fourteen of the responding institutions were located in urban settings, as defined by a local population of more than 30,000 inhabitants, and 19 were located in rural areas. One-third of the schools enrolled over 5,000 students while the remainders were small schools that enrolled below 5,000 students. The majority (30) of the responding campuses offered degrees in visual and/or creative arts.

The survey questions probed:

- 1) who initiates collaboration between campus and community,
- 2) the nature of the collaboration,
- 3) the types of events sponsored, and
- 4) the types of facilities provided and under what conditions.

Survey respondents were also asked to identify obstacles to collaboration and to imagine ways of facilitating healthier relationships. The majority of collaborative projects fell into two categories:

- programs for children, either bringing children to campus to attend classes or performances, or sending college representatives (either staff or students) into the local schools to teach and/or facilitate arts-related workshops; and
- community festivals, based on a theme or with fundraising goals. The festivals typically

focused on food and or a performance by a local or visiting performing artist. They were located in the community adjacent to the college with at least some college sponsorship.

Staff and (a far second) faculty were identified as being most likely to initiate collaborative projects. Most respondents felt that these projects were successful if they built relationships between community and college members. They also cited the benefits of broadening the horizons of both the college/university and its local community members.

When asked to identify the resources that their institution provides to encourage collaboration, most colleges cited rehearsal and performance space. These physical facilities were made available to community groups under certain conditions:

- 1) for long-established collaborations with the performing arts organization,
- 2) for programs or events that were planned well in advance, and
- 3) for events that did not conflict with student or faculty use of the space.

Few respondents said that their college or university had funds dedicated to community/campus artistic collaborations. Many indicated that funding was contingent and dependent on the entrepreneurial skills of the group sponsoring the event. They described "creative" ways to get funds for worthy projects --- well-designed collaborations involving resource sharing (money, time, space and staff). A few pointed to discretionary funds available through administrative or academic departments.

Respondents ranked key obstacles to successful collaboration as follows:

- 1) inadequate performance and exhibition space, including space in the community;
- 2) insufficient information about whom to contact on the college campus;
- 3) insurance concerns; and
- 4) absence of staffing dedicated to collaborative projects.

Suggestions for improving campus-community partnerships included:

- 1) a central office for campus coordination of requests for co-sponsorship;
- 2) special funds to encourage joint programming; and
- 3) a physical presence for cultural activities in the community.

In addition, respondents indicated that institutional support for community collaboration was crucial to successful projects. Staff dedicated to cultural planning, outreach and collaboration also was key to successful programs. All responding institutions indicated that campus-based cultural events were open to community members, with the exception of two representatives who were not certain. When asked to identify key leaders in the community with whom the campus collaborates to produce arts events, answers ranged from "no one" to multiple sources including politicians, art patrons, and business people. Most consistently, respondents mentioned their local arts or cultural councils as being central collaborators.

The results from this survey can inform colleges and universities about successful engagement with their

surrounding communities to provide for a lively cultural environment on and off campus. Using these results, we have developed a set of strategies for building campus community connections around creative economy goals and illustrated these strategies with case studies from upstate New York communities<sup>3</sup>.

The strategies can be used to initiate conversation about creative economy initiatives, steer users through the challenging aspects of bridging among participants and provide inspiration in the form of case studies, resources, and reports.

### **Strategies for Building Creative Economies**

#### **Strategy 1: Setting Up an Initial Stakeholder Gathering**

An initial stakeholder gathering can be used as a focus group to gather information, elicit support for ideas, and generate new ideas. These meetings are excellent opportunities to breathe new life into stale local processes and challenge conventional attitudes and assumptions as well as to neutralize dominant players by giving everyone present equal time and equal voice. Traditional leaders need to be involved but the roles they take during the initial gathering should make the most of their expertise while harnessing the energy of new participants.

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.nycreativeeconomy.cornell.edu](http://www.nycreativeeconomy.cornell.edu) features an extensive resources section linking readers to reports, articles, books and websites on topics related to the creative economy as well as a gallery section highlighting examples of public art initiatives across upstate New York.

#### **Putting Strategies into Action**

It is important to get a commitment from several community leaders who have a positive and far-reaching reputation. Rely on these leaders to suggest other contacts and then call them or schedule a personal "interview." Garner their help in developing an agenda for the stakeholder gathering by describing very broad goals for the meeting. Ask them to describe some past successes and obstacles to community cultural programs.

#### **Case Study: Cortland and Penn Yan-Keuka Campus/Community Consultations**

Applying our survey results about how connections between communities and colleges foster a "creative economy" in upstate New York, we provided technical assistance for two campus and community partnerships in Cortland County and Penn Yan-Keuka. Our goal was to develop a plan for a specific, actionable intervention in consultation with community representatives, to be initiated and completed by the end of 2004, and to lead to further collaborative action between the campus and community.

In both communities, the SUNY Cortland and Keuka College campuses have a significant presence and are dominant players in the provision and consumption of cultural products. Over a dozen telephone interviews were conducted to elicit perceptions regarding the local cultural landscape, and existing and proposed cultural partnerships. Key stakeholders identified through this process helped prepare agendas for two meetings, each of which was attended by over 20 people. Reading lists and a

baseline definition of the “creative economy” concept and how it might be shaped locally were provided to the participants. The researcher facilitated the Keuka meeting and the economic development leader was the facilitator for the Cortland meeting. Minutes and participant contact information were circulated to all participants.

At each meeting, representatives of the educational institution, arts-related businesses, artists, art teachers and local arts councils and arts institutions described their current projects and plans and, in the case of Keuka, brainstormed ideas for future collaboration. At Keuka, several representatives from local social services agencies attended and at Cortland, representatives of local politicians attended, reflecting the interests and connections of those key individuals who helped arrange the meetings.

The Cortland meeting resulted in support for a new organization for arts education and presentation that went on to open its doors in June 2005. At Keuka, the researcher-facilitator led a group of social service providers to develop a proposal that would mesh the missions of the college and the agencies by providing an after-school arts program. The group, including the grants writer for Keuka College, continues to discuss the project for future implementation.

### **Challenges**

To gently direct these initial meetings, provide discussion time for all participants, and develop trust with and within the group may be challenging. There may be no positive outcomes and

it may be difficult to find ways to acknowledge individual and group credit if there are positive outcomes. The goals of this strategy are to develop knowledge and leadership skills in the stakeholder group, to spend sufficient time to enable the group to develop a plan, and to include people representing diverse groups and interests.

### **Strategy 2: Bridging Town and Gown with Service Learning Arts Projects**

*Service learning is an educational approach that builds bridges between academic study and practical experiences. It helps students pair the theoretical knowledge learned in academia with participation in the everyday challenges of communities. It enhances and reinforces academic knowledge with practical experience, while strengthening civic values and moral character and responding to community-identified needs. Service learning fosters reflection on, and appropriate responses to, community problems and needs. In service learning, students work in partnership with communities to become active agents of social change.*

(Cornell University Public Service Center)

Developing service learning opportunities is an excellent strategy to promote campus/community relationships. Service learning focuses the energy of students on a specific community problem to generate innovative ideas to address it.

Service learning engages students and the organizations with which they are

involved, and provides opportunities for knowledge building and inquiry. Service learning focused on the creative economy can take many forms. For example, courses can be offered by landscape and architecture departments to define the town entry, by design departments to develop signage and branding symbols to identify the town, by planning departments to design long-term economic development strategies or develop a historic site to encourage tourism, and by business departments to offer marketing advice to small arts-related businesses. It is a major commitment for both professor and community contacts, but the students' enthusiastic engagement and the creative outcomes are worth the effort.

### **Putting Strategies into Action**

Service learning is distinct from “public service” or an office serving as a student volunteer clearinghouse. It is a partnership between the students and an organization offering a real-life learning opportunity. The most important part of initiating a service learning project is finding the right people to be involved in the project, with the vision, leadership skills, and energy to conduct a successful collaboration. The impetus for a project can come from students, organizations, or faculty members but its success depends on all three. Careful collaborative planning, establishing realistic goals and timelines, and clear decisions about course organization and credit are essential.

### **Case Study: The Franklin School Project and Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY**

The Franklin Magnet School focuses on arts education and collaborates with Syracuse University's School of

Education to offer the *Franklin School Project*, a service learning course. Its goal is to examine and apply theories of teaching and learning within a specific cultural and socio-political learning environment. Students in this course collaborate with instructional staff as they tutor children in the Franklin School. They work with the children to foster their oral and written language development.

Several years of partnership between the Franklin School and SU via this service-learning course led a group of SU students to initiate a student club called “Friends of Franklin.” This club extends the collaboration to an annual “Showcase of the Arts” benefit to raise funds for the Franklin School. This year's show featured 120 students from both schools performing in seven groups, including dance, drumming, chorus and band. Syracuse University students helped design costumes for the performances, taught dance techniques and performed for the students at Franklin.

The service learning course first brought Franklin to the attention of the SU students who deepened and extended their relationship and commitment to the school through the club. To close the loop, the annual fundraiser brings attention back to the course. Now there are two distinct campus avenues for SU students' involvement with the Franklin School.

### **Challenges**

Service learning projects require substantial administrative coordination and oversight, record keeping, and a supervision partnership. This takes

extensive planning. Students are the energy of the projects and leaders need tolerance for change and fluctuation in the quality of students and their interests from year to year. Matching student learning and community needs sometimes lead to unexpected, but interesting outcomes. The semester-length courses (roughly 13 weeks) can be incompatible with organizational time lines and agendas.

### **Strategy 3: Capitalizing on Student-led Community Arts Projects**

Entering into partnerships with undergraduate or graduate students as volunteers or for credit has cost, speed and flexibility advantages. Working with students can infuse “traditional operating procedure” with a strong dose of “out of the box” thinking and first-hand information about their demographic cohort that may be used to develop innovative programs. Students are energetic, and some have valuable skills in research methods, writing, specialized computer software, and design. Students seeking or initiating community projects are passionate and motivated and can sometimes provide community partners with access to on-campus resources. Initial relationships with students may develop into regular internships at the collaborating organization or students’ long-term commitment as volunteers or board members.

### **Putting Strategies into Action**

Campus community service and volunteer clearinghouses provide resources to identify informal opportunities for students in potential collaborating organizations. Meaningful projects for students need focus, clear expectations, and autonomy. Formalizing relationships as internships

or temporary employees is one approach. Involve students in organizational meetings, ask them for their opinions, and listen to their ideas. Help students build on their impulses to be involved and creatively engaged and think twice about the impulse to say “no” when they want to pursue a new direction.

### **Case Study: Culture Link, Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY**

**[www.ithaca.culturelink/index/html](http://www.ithaca.culturelink/index/html)**

Culture Link is a student-led organization that promotes the exchange of world music between the Ithaca College community and the surrounding Ithaca community. Building on the worldwide reputation of the Ithaca College School of Music, Culture Link promotes the sharing of ideas, resources, talents, and abilities from a wide variety of cultures and ethnic backgrounds. The Culture Link multicultural festival in 2005 brought over 50 Ithaca College students, faculty, and non-Ithaca College guest artists to the Community School of Music and the Arts (CSMA) as a part of a two-day celebration of multicultural performances. The festival was produced by volunteers, with more than 80 performers and over 400 audience members in attendance throughout the festival. Local media covered the event and admission was free, allowing any community member, regardless of financial status, to attend.

### **Challenges**

Student clubs and organizations often struggle with issues of succession and varying leadership quality and commitment. Students are typically only in leadership positions for an academic year, making longer-term commitment and planning challenging. Supervising

faculty and community partners need to be prepared to provide supervision, mentorship, planning, and focus. Expectations for communication and follow-through during and after the event or program need to be clearly defined. Working with students requires patience with their limited experience, extraordinary enthusiasm, and occasional lack of diplomacy.

#### **Strategy 4: Research Collaborations with Higher Education Partners**

Creative businesses and arts administrators can find value in accessing the research capacity of universities. Students and faculty are often seeking “real-life” experiences to apply their new skills in research, organizational strategies, business planning, marketing, and information systems, including feasibility studies and strategic planning. Communities have the problems and higher education institutions want to help; it is a win/win relationship. Working with students and faculty is a viable alternative to hiring expensive consultants. For example, depending upon department and level of study, students can develop high quality research with which to approach donors or to develop into grant proposals for funding agencies. University faculty possess considerable expertise in helping organizations focus vision and mission in order to pursue grants and other sources of funding. Another advantage is the extended exposure of an organization through partnerships with university faculty and students. Not only will more people learn about the organization, but also partnerships can enhance recruitment for volunteers, new board members, and paid staff.

#### **Putting Strategies into Action**

Websites of local or regional colleges and universities and community organizations can be used to identify ongoing research and programs of interest. The local newspaper and campus publications may identify people who have common interests and specific talents. Land grant universities, such as Cornell, have contractual agreements with their states to provide service to their state and its local communities. For example, the Cornell Cooperative Extension System has offices in almost every county of the state, extending university research results into the community from a variety of fields. Initiate contact rather than waiting for others to come to you. Figure out how research collaboration can benefit the university and your organization and propose an arrangement. Look for distinctive programs such as those in planning schools, business schools or public policy programs that require student fellows to complete a community service project as part of their educational experience.

#### **Case Study: An Economic Impact Study of the Light in Winter Festival Conducted Cooperatively by Cornell and the Light in Winter Organization**

During the summer of 2006, a sponsoring faculty member in the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University was contacted by the artistic director of the Light in Winter Festival to enlist a graduate student to conduct a program evaluation and economic impact analysis of Light in Winter.

The master’s degree student who undertook the evaluation worked with her faculty adviser, the festival artistic



director and the festival organizing committee to design a survey of festival attendees with the goal of providing a better estimate of the festival's impact on the local economy and improving marketing strategies. The 2007 Light in Winter Festival was held from January 26 to 28 at a variety of downtown and Cornell University venues. The survey was conducted at the events produced by LIW by a group of trained volunteers consisting of graduate students and community members. For the nine surveyed events, there were 737 valid surveys collected, which represent approximately 14 percent of those 5,154 event attendees.

The survey results were presented to the festival board and are being used to support funding proposals to expand and market the festival. The master's degree student engaged in the survey-based study gained important skills in survey design, administration, and analysis. She also made a significant contribution to an important organization in her community.

### **Challenges**

In research collaborations, we are up against the challenge of balancing power, objectives and outcomes. Make sure everyone gets something useful from the arrangement. Bridging the worlds of creative pursuits and higher education presents language challenges and barriers. Identify the person in each organization who can express and interpret needs, assets and data for the collaboration. Be clear about the time frame for the project and modify in order to complete the project in the time available. An effective project design will meet specific needs but also

establish or build successful, long-term relationships.

### **Conclusions**

The strategies described in this report are intended to help bridge the gap between interest in creative economy as a concept and the ability to implement workable strategies. They are particularly addressed to non-urban practitioners and college and university personnel to provide resources, connections, and ideas to those who may feel isolated in a sparsely populated area. We plan to build on these strategies to configure a Practitioner's Toolkit adding examples of successes and challenges to the four strategy areas. The ultimate goal is to build local and regional creative economies that reflect the centrality of creative citizens, express the quality of place, and contribute to sustainable economic development.