

NAS

NATIONAL ARTS STRATEGIES



CREATIVE COMMUNITY FELLOWS

History and Lessons Learned (and Learning)



The Creative Community Fellows (CCF) program began in 2014 as a way of supporting entrepreneurs working at the intersection of arts and community. Fellows from across the US spend nine months working on a project to drive a physical or social change in their communities and nurturing their management and leadership capabilities. They build powerful and supportive connections among each other, with mentors and the broader NAS alumni.

Along the way, we've been checking our own biases and program logic, evaluating what works and what doesn't and making changes to the program and our approach that further benefit the Fellows and, in turn, their communities.

We engaged FSG in 2016 to take a deeper dive into the data we had, talk directly with alumni and give us their clear-eyed view of program impact. Specifically, we wanted to learn more about the effect the program has had on:



The Fellows



Their network development



Their communities since completing CCF

The evaluation shows that our alumni have advanced their projects and brought about positive change in their communities, both of which they have attributed to the gains they made through the CCF program.

At the same time, we cast a broad eye across the fields of social and cultural entrepreneurship and creative placemaking to review the landscape in which the Creative Community Fellows program exists. We found that CCF continues to fulfill a need in the current range of social and cultural entrepreneurship programs as one that does not just produce successful entrepreneurs or projects, but supports individuals over time and across distances as they build their capabilities to lead and co-create more long-term impact on their communities. CCF connects fellows with the tools, resources, and prompts to help them better understand and work with their communities to create change that is positive, equitable, and needed.

NOTABLE BENEFITS OF CREATIVE COMMUNITY FELLOWS PROGRAM



We are cultivating a **NETWORK OF STRONG RELATIONSHIPS** that the Fellows draw support from and use post-project and post-program throughout their careers.



Other programs invest in entrepreneurs, requesting years of experience and successful project portfolios as prerequisites for entry, missing out on individuals who may not yet see themselves as leaders, entrepreneurs, or advocates. **CCF ACCEPTS A WIDE RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS.** We find people with potential who may not see themselves as changemakers or advocates or leaders, or know the field and their role within it yet.



Many programs have a fee - **CCF IS FREE** thereby providing a greater socio-economic range of possible program participants.



CCF, as a program of NAS, has a **BROADER PERSPECTIVE** than other organizations. This in-depth view of the cultural landscape with all its structures, networks, needs, and challenges helps inform the program – from the structure of the application process to the choice of tools that we teach and how we help Fellows grow their abilities to positively impact their communities.



Many programs are locally focused. **CCF IS NATIONAL;** adding a needed perspective to community change – the varying circumstances and paths, and dynamic network of changemakers.

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING



Fellows from across the nation come together at the beginning and end of CCF for two events: **CREATIVE COMMUNITY HOUSE** and the **CREATIVE COMMUNITY LAUNCHPAD**. Monthly online modules provide additional opportunities for learning and connection during the interim months.

As of March 2017, three cohorts of Fellows have completed the program, resulting in:

121
FELLOWS

53
MENTORS

45
FACULTY &
PANELISTS

AND WE ARE LEARNING A LOT.

We designed and launched the program with funding from the Kresge Foundation and in partnership with the Center for Social Impact Strategy at University of Pennsylvania. In subsequent years, Bush Foundation and Knight Foundation joined as partners.

In addition to watching, testing and learning as cohorts progress through the program, we stay in touch with our alumni. We follow their stories as they push and pull their projects forward, develop their leadership and create meaningful change in their communities. We celebrate alongside them and help to amplify their success as they launch pilot programs and reach funding goals.

We know about the ways in which Fellows learn from the curriculum, mentors, faculty and each other during the program, but we wanted to gain an even greater understanding of the changes Fellows experienced and influenced since completing the program. Specifically, we sought to learn the impact of the program on:



The Fellows



Their network development



Their communities since completing CCF

The short answer is that the FSG evaluation confirmed that the program is helping Fellows develop the skills and networks needed to lead change in their communities. The following are some of the elements of the impact.

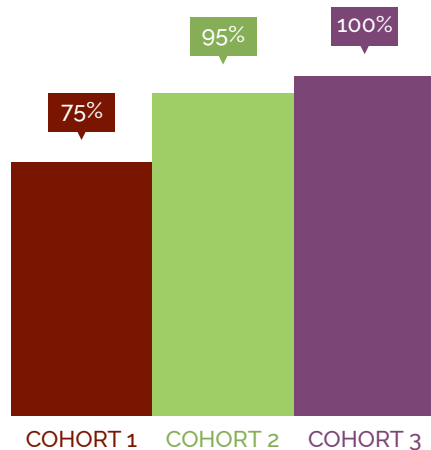
For the full FSG evaluation, please [click here](#).



CHANGES IN FELLOWS

The CCF curriculum covers topics that are crucial in developing good projects and stronger leaders, such as design thinking, strategy, evaluation, community engagement and project budgeting and financing. Our faculty work with Fellows in group sessions and one on one to ensure that Fellows can apply the knowledge and tools to their own work. Our goal in building these skills is that Fellows develop a greater capability to be changemakers in their own communities.

Percentage of respondents that felt the Creative Community House helped develop their capacity to lead change:



The data shows:

- ↑ INCREASED LEADERSHIP
- ↑ INCREASED CONFIDENCE
- ↑ IMPROVED COMMUNICATION SKILLS
- ↑ INCREASED MOTIVATION AND READINESS TO DO THE WORK.

We want learning to be rigorous, actionable and useful. We offer a range of frameworks that Fellows can take home and work through with their community collaborators, and use to advance their work. Fellows reported that they took actions to advance their work such as drafting logic models, conducting interviews in the community and producing marketing materials. Over half of the Fellows interviewed had secured funding for their projects. They attributed their successes to the skills, resources, and/or networks gained through CCF.



▶ “The leadership tools I have gained give me the ability to create a more structured approach to influencing the changes needed.”



CHANGES IN FELLOWS' NETWORKS

Most of our Fellows work independently, outside of a formal organization. We often hear from them that this feels isolating, and that their networks are limited by geography and/or discipline. Many work at the intersection of different fields, such as arts and community development, and don't have adequate access to training, peer-support, funding opportunities and networks in either field.

We create space and tools for Fellows to build their networks and develop relationships that will last well beyond the length of their nine-month program. **AND, IT'S WORKING.**

The FSG evaluation shows that CCF expanded Fellows' networks to include peers from across the country, as well as introduced them to more multi-dimensional mentors and grantmakers. Specifically, **Fellows stated that they felt connected to a diverse group of peers.**

The data shows:

- ↑ INCREASED SENSE OF BELONGING
- ↑ INCREASED CONNECTION TO A DIVERSE GROUP OF PEOPLE
- ↑ INCREASED AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS TO PEOPLE

“The biggest thing I took away was not feeling alone in the work; finding a group of people dedicated to this, building connections to the other Fellows, the NAS team, mentors – it was really powerful. Without this program, I wouldn't have developed [these connections] on my own.”





CHANGES IN COMMUNITIES

Strengthening communities through arts-based approaches is what NAS and our Fellows ultimately want to achieve. We're working towards a future where a more reflective, engaged, creative and diverse group of people are leading the change efforts. Fellows working alongside their neighbors and others in their communities define what "strengthening" means and determine the changes that are most needed.

We know that change comes along slowly. Though only one to two years have passed (depending on cohort) since Fellows completed CCF, those interviewed spoke of positive changes in their community, and the ways in which the CCF program helped them to catalyze change.

Interviewees shared:

- ↑ INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS AMONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS OF KEY ISSUES
- ↑ MORE INTEGRATION OF ARTS INTO COMMUNITY PLANNING
- ↔ TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNITY SPACES

“When I came back from CCF, my acute awareness changed about the work that needed to get done. I needed to do work that would become part of the DNA of the community. I wanted to give the community tools to own it.”



CREATIVE COMMUNITY FELLOWS

CASE STORY ►

Nic de la Fuente

► When **Nic de la Fuente** applied to the Creative Community Fellows program, he was at a critical point in the development of the Spaces of Opportunity project, the community gardening and gathering project he works on in South Phoenix. Nic needed more resources, including an “interdisciplinary team” with which he could seek ideas for solving system-level problems.

Spaces of Opportunity is a coalition of social service and cultural nonprofits that addresses the lack of affordable, healthy food available to neighborhood residents. As Nic explains it, urban farming happens in South Phoenix, but a majority of that healthy produce is sold in wealthier areas of the city. Through Spaces of Opportunity, “those who farm the land will be able to eat off of it.” Nic and his partners reclaimed an 18-acre dry, overgrown, vacant lot and have begun the process of turning

it into a thriving food oasis. The space will feature an outdoor amphitheater, outdoor kitchen, South Phoenix’s first farmers market and STEAM education for the local schools and community.

During CCF, Nic built critical skills in managing partnerships and gained a clearer understanding of the creative placemaking field. He has collaborated with other Fellows and mentors on graphic design, facilitation and strategic planning for Spaces of Opportunity. “Because of CCF I’m now engaging in dialog and directly collaborating with colleagues across the nation and across disciplines.”

Since the conclusion of the Fellowship, Nic has secured over \$500,000 in grant funding from ArtPlace America and the National Endowment for the Arts. Non-profit organizations, schools, and local farmers are already growing fresh produce on this

land for a variety of purposes: family and neighborhood consumption, distribution to schools, community health centers, local restaurants, and markets. All of these distribution points allow healthy food to reach a population with disproportionately high rates of chronic diseases.

Nic attributes much of his success with Spaces of Opportunity to the Creative Community Fellows program. Of his experience, he says, “The Creative Community Fellows Program was the most influential professional development I have ever received. The attention to detail by the NAS team and the strategic pairing of mentors with fellows creates an unprecedented opportunity for direct action and implementation of ideas garnered during the fellowship. Never before have I experienced something so focused on building networks and getting community projects off the ground.”

► “If Spaces is going to be as successful as I think it will, the NAS program will go down as the catalyst that propelled us to a whole new level.”



CREATIVE COMMUNITY FELLOWS

CASE STORY ►

Katarzyna Balug

► **Katarzyna (Kate) Balug** applied to Creative Community Fellows in order to take Department of Play from a side project into a program that is woven into civic conversation and action in Boston. She knew she needed the space and time away from daily obligations to regain focus and chart a path forward and she sought a diverse network of collaborators with whom she could trade ideas and expertise.

Kate is co-founder of **Department of Play**, a Boston-based collective that creates temporary play zones in public spaces for people to step out of the everyday and play out imagined worlds. In play, participants envision alternative futures, share life experiences and knowledge.

During CCF, Kate broadened her network of ideas and collaborators and craft-

ed her funding strategy. Regarding one aspect of the program, Launchpad, Kate says, "It reminded me to connect with my heart and soul, and how to communicate from those places in public speaking. Also, I made incredible contacts among the panelists and the Fellows alike."

Towards the end of the Fellowship, Department of Play got involved with *Boston Creates*, the city's cultural planning process. The city wanted the process to engage the community at an unprecedented level. Department of Play's role was to make community conversation about culture a cultural experience in itself – one that was inclusive, relevant and imaginative for all. For example, one intervention Department of Play staged involved bringing to life the ideas for the

future of the arts that residents posted online. Kate and her co-founder Maria Vidart Delgado dressed in costumes, curated framed images of the online submissions, and provided an opportunity for passersby to engage in critical dialogue around their differing visions for the city's future. They also brought on three additional artist-ethnographers to both expand and document the public participation process.

Kate's hard work resulted in a \$125,000 grant from ArtPlace America in 2015, to create temporary play zones in strategic public spaces along a transit corridor to address a lack of social cohesion among ethnic minorities in Boston, and engage their imagination in the civic unfolding of their rapidly developing neighborhoods.



► "It's as if the clouds have parted in my thinking about my project and now I see the way forward."

WHAT WE ARE CHANGING

We are committed to serving the field and to do so, we must remain aware of needs and the best ways to meet those needs. Collecting and analyzing data and gaining knowledge from our evaluations have helped us continue to shape the Creative Community Fellows program. Some of those changes include:



Eliminated the CCF "online track". The first two cycles of CCF included both an online and a residential track. The online track supported individuals for whom travel was a barrier to participation. We learned that online connections were not conducive to building the kind of community needed to establish deep bonds that increase collaboration and support the group of Fellows over time.



Revised the curriculum to put a stronger focus on building leadership skills in a way that feels authentic and approachable for Fellows.



Altered our in-person events to devote more time to individual coaching and mentoring. Our evaluations show that these efforts have supported Fellows applying their learning more deeply into their own practice.

Life is dynamic, ever changing. We will continue to listen and learn as we go, and make necessary and timely changes to the program.

