



YOUR TOWN: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

A National Endowment for the Arts Leadership Initiative

Update

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From the Editor

In mid-January of this year, the National Endowment for the Arts issued an RFP for proposals to produce this year's Your Town workshops. Proposals were due February 25th. We were very pleased to receive 22 proposals from all regions of the U.S.

The 2011 workshop locations and organizers are:

Coos Bay, Oregon – South Coast Development Council

Mart, Texas – City of Mart

Pendleton, South Carolina – a.LINE.ments Studio, Clemson University

Harrodsburg, Kentucky – Center for Community and Regional Studies, St. Catharine College



Figure 1: Downtown North Bend has Highway 101 running through the middle, and a number of retail businesses are struggling.

Coos Bay, Oregon

The workshop in Coos Bay, to take place October 12-14, will focus primarily on the revitalization of the

downtowns of several communities, including Coos Bay, North Bend, Myrtle, Coquille, Powers, and Bandon. Although this area along the south Oregon coast is beautiful – with pristine beaches, rolling hills, sand dunes, and woodland – it is remote, and the local economy has been struggling since the decline of the timber industry. Each of the downtowns is working on enhancements and business development strategies.

Mart, Texas

The Mart, Texas, workshop, taking place October 13-15, will emphasize the role of art in downtown revitalization. Mart is challenged with a deteriorating main street, lack of community gathering places, poverty, and racial divisions. Working with the University of Texas and Baylor University, the



Figure 2: The southeastern coast of Oregon has beautiful pristine beaches that stretch for miles.



Figure 3: Pendleton's town green is a community asset with opportunities for enhancement.

City hopes the Your Town workshop will bring Mart's citizens together across class and race lines to build on shared community culture to rebuild the downtown.

Pendleton, South Carolina

Pendleton, South Carolina, is a classic Southern town near Clemson University. As a historic summer retreat for Charlestonians, Pendleton is blessed with a large and lovely historic district, but it faces design issues related to transportation: a public square that has been partially cut by a through highway and a bypass around the community that has weakened the downtown's economic life and identity. Ed McMahon, Senior Fellow at the Urban Land Institute, will be the keynote speaker in Pendleton workshop (November 3-5), and landscape architecture students from Clemson will help coordinate the workshop.

Harrodsburg, Kentucky

Harrodsburg is Kentucky's oldest city, located about 30 miles from Lexington. Like many rural communities, Harrodsburg is

dealing with issues of economic revitalization, historic preservation, gateway enhancement, and building a pedestrian network. The Harrodsburg workshop will bring together St. Catharine College, the University of Kentucky, the Kentucky League of Cities, and the Harrodsburg Community Advancement Partnership to work with citizens to tackle these design problems.

Follow up Workshops

In addition to these four workshops, we are anticipating two follow-up workshops. Elkhorn City, Kentucky, and the Bitter Root Valley of Montana, will each be holding a mini-workshop to revisit accomplishments and reinforce the role of design and the arts. The workshop organized by the Elkhorn City Area Heritage Council will focus on the development of a riverfront park and the economic impact of the Artists Collaborative Theater, a new initiative in the town that features the work of local talent. The Bitter Root Cultural Heritage Trust will bring Kennedy Smith of the CLUE Group to conduct an intensive workshop and gather data on

the economic opportunities of the community's heritage and cultural assets. In the case of both Elkhorn City and the Bitter Root Valley, the emphasis is on economic development based on heritage and the arts.

Evaluation

Finally, the Endowment is funding a formal evaluation of the Your Town: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design program. We are in the process of soliciting bids from evaluation teams to conduct a series of focus groups, interviews, and review of documents to assess the achievements of the Your Town program. We hope the results of this evaluation will be available by the end of 2011.

Editor
Shelley S. Mastran

Our Town Grants

In early July, the Endowment announced the first round of funding from its new Our Town program (not to be confused with ‘Your Town’). This grant program provides funding to strengthen the arts as a way to shape social, economic, and physical neighborhood character. Our Town requires a partnership between a local arts organization and local government, so that both entities are enhanced.

The Our Town program builds on NEA’s 25-year history in creative placemaking, which includes the Your Town: Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design and the Mayors’ Institute on City Design. As Jason Schupbach, Director of Design, says, “Creative placemaking is a strategy for making places vibrant. Arts and design are essential parts of the complex work of building a livable, sustainable community.”

For the first round of Our Town, \$6.575 million was awarded to 51 communities in 34 states. Grants ranged from \$25,000 to \$250,000 and were awarded to rural, suburban, and urban places, ranging from a population of 2,000 to more than 8.2 million.

Selected examples of rural communities that received Our Town grant funding include:

Ajo, Arizona – The International Sonoran Desert Alliance will receive \$100,000 to support the development of a master plan to reuse buildings and outdoor spaces in Ajo’s plaza and town center. The plan will specifically address use of public space, wayfinding, streetscape design, and public art.

Marfa, Texas – The Ballroom Cultural Arts Foundation will receive \$250,000 to support a park improvement plan for the Vizcaino County Park. This scenic desert park will feature

a new outdoor venue for music, film, and performing arts.

Montgomery, New York – The Wallkill River School will receive \$50,000 to develop economic strategies for sustainable partnerships between arts and agriculture in Orange County, NY. Activities will include an economic impact study on the arts and ways that arts can be integrated into the county’s rural communities.

Reedsburg, Wisconsin – The Wormfarm Institute will receive \$50,000 to support the planting, piloting, and evaluation of its “Farm/Art D-Tour.” Tours will take place along rural roads and feature farm-based ephemeral art, performances, mobile farm stands, and interpretive signage.

The next application for the Our Town grants will be sometime in late fall or early winter. For more information, see: <http://www.nea.gov/grants/apply/OurTown/index.html>

New Design Staff At The Endowment

As we announced in our last newsletter, in 2010 Jason Schupbach became the new Director of Design at the National Endowment for the Arts. Jason came to NEA from Massachusetts, where he was the Creative Economy Industry Director for the state Office of



Figure 4: Jason Schupbach

Business Development. Prior to that position, Jason was director of ArtistLink, in which he managed a statewide artist space development initiative. He has a B.S. in Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Master’s degree in City Planning from MIT. Jason is particularly interested in “Creative Placemaking,” as he oversees the Our Town and Design Art Works grants, Your Town: Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design, the Mayors’ Institute on City Design, and the Governors’ Institute.



Figure 5: Jamie Hand

Last fall Jamie Hand was hired as Design Specialist at NEA. Jamie brings to the Endowment ten years of experience as a project manager, editor, and consultant on projects related to landscape architecture, urban design, and public space. Most recently she was Program Director at the Van Alen Institute in New York, where she led several regional scale design competition initiatives and worked in close partnership with public agencies at both the local and federal level. Jamie holds an undergraduate degree in architecture from Princeton University and a Master of Design Studies from Harvard’s Graduate School of Design.



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