



## Drexel University

### Arts-centered Community Action: How Public Arts Programming Strengthens Civic Infrastructure and Promotes Civic Innovation

#### What is the background for this study?

This intergenerational community-led participatory action research (CPAR) project examines the potential impact of public arts programming to strengthen civic engagement, civic infrastructure, and to promote community-driven civic innovation in West Philadelphia. Community residents, students, faculty, youth, writers, and artists collectively explore how a community can leverage the arts to solve community-identified issues such as gentrification, displacement, racial injustice, and systemic inequality.

#### What are the research questions?

The purpose of this CPAR study is to examine the effects of community arts participation and to better understand how collaborative creative work functions at the intersection of arts and civic engagement, community development, and justice. The co-constructed research questions are:

1. How does intergenerational arts programming strengthen civic engagement and civic infrastructure for long-term and sustainable impact?
2. How does intergenerational arts programming catalyze community-driven civic innovation towards transformative solutions?

#### Who are your community partners?

The study is co-led by the Drexel University team, which includes the School of Education and Writers Room, along with community partners from the Mantua Civic Association. The multigenerational research team includes university faculty and staff, undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, community residents, older adults and seniors, high school students, writers, and artists.

#### How are community members engaged in the research to action process?

Co-learning and co-knowledge construction are key tenets of the study. The partnership involves shared decision-making and shared power and the participatory approach draws upon an existing CPAR team that has been working closely together for four years prior to this study. The team co-develops every part of the research plan with community researchers and partners. For example, the team is flexible and centers the ideas and wants of community researchers to drive the analysis. The study also includes reflective analysis within the research group on how the act of research itself affects their understanding of their place within the community.

#### Study At-A-Glance

##### Study Title

Arts-centered Community Action: How Public Arts Programming Strengthens Civic Infrastructure and Promotes Civic Innovation

##### Researchers

Ayana Allen-Handy, PhD  
Rachel Wenrick

##### Grant Cohort 2022

##### Timeline 2022-2025

##### Study Location Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

##### Study Topic Area(s)

Arts and Culture  
Community Development  
Senior Development  
Social Equity

## What data and methods are used in this study?

This CPAR study includes ethnographic case studies, multi-modal data collection through interviews and focus groups with up to 50 community stakeholders over two years, analysis inclusive of retrospective and current narrative, document, survey, archival, and multi-media artifacts. The study uses holistic-content analysis and axial coding to excavate key themes. It also analyzes documents and artifacts narratively, through photovoice and thematic analysis.

## How does this research translate to community action?

For the past seven years, those involved in this study have used arts-centered processes, engaged in community-driven research, and built cross-sector partnerships to develop an alternative strategy for affordable housing and aging in community, [Second Story Collective](#). They are working to create a sustainable, transferable model for co-designed equitable development, particularly for historically marginalized Black communities.

## What are potential opportunities to apply study findings and/or build on this research?

This research can lay the groundwork to advance the field's knowledge of how a place-based multi-modal collaborative arts program affects civic action and creates the relationships that bind those of diverse backgrounds, educations, ages, religions, races, and genders together.

### For more information on the study:

<b>Study Website</b>	<a href="#">Anti-Displacement: The Untapped Potential of University-Community Cooperative Living   Drexel University</a>		
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AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation holds grant competitions to foster scholarly research on civic health, address knowledge gaps in civic engagement and volunteerism, and identify new ideas and methodological approaches to service.

- Learn more about [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation Research Grants](#).
- See a [Snapshot of Research Grantee Activities and Insights](#).
- Explore the [AmeriCorps Open Data Research Grantee Dataset](#).

### About the Office of Research and Evaluation

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