



# SHIFTING SANDS



Partners for Livable  
Communities

## **ARTS, CULTURE AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE**

ARTS / ARTISTIC EXPRESSION  
AS A TOOL FOR:

**NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY**

**SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

**UPWARD ECONOMIC MOBILITY**

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**


**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**



# **INTRODUCING SHIFTING SANDS**

**TENSIONS** can run high in neighborhoods undergoing dramatic economic swings and demographic shifts. Clashes are common between long-time community residents and newcomers, especially when issues of race, ethnicity and class are involved. The pressures occur in large communities, like the Corona neighborhood of Queens, New York, where more than 120 languages are spoken. And in smaller communities, too, such as Holyoke, Massachusetts, where both older and more recent immigration trends have yet to be harmonized with the traditional New England culture of the area's Anglo descendant population.





Against this backdrop, in 2002, Ford Foundation Program Officer Miguel Garcia thought to use the energy generated by all of that tension to create opportunities to imagine, discover and create common good. To take on that job, the foundation decided to look outside traditional community development circles to the hyper-creative world of neighborhood-based arts and cultural organizations.

Why arts and culture groups? On the one hand, they're already operating on the ground in many transitioning neighborhoods, often culturally fluent and nimble enough for multi-disciplinary learning. And they tend to be viewed as neutral turf by hostile factions –there's a great deal of trust in arts and cultural organizations. Ford became convinced that with encouragement, guidance, and financial support, some arts and culture organizations could play a significant community development role.





The foundation assembled an advisory team of experienced practitioners from both the arts and community development fields. The group identified a handful of museums, arts and cultural organizations, a back-to-its-cultural roots farm venture, and an academic partner looking to aid these groups in translating the story of their foray into uncharted waters for funders, policy makers and civic leaders. Most were already engaged in some community development activities, but the idea here was to provide enough support for the groups to become even more active and concerned neighbors. Ford named the new initiative “Shifting Sands” to symbolize the changes occurring in its target communities. To run the day-to-day contact with neighborhood groups, Ford commissioned Partners for Livable Communities, a 1977-founded national intermediary with historic interest in the nexus of arts and community development.

There were early programmatic fits and starts, as the two distinct fields, each with its own history and support infrastructure, tried to collaborate. Gradually, however, a framework for Shifting Sands evolved. In 2003, nine organizations received Ford funding to expand their work in their respective neighborhoods. By 2008, Ford was providing \$150,000 per year to eight groups. The program is slated to run at least through 2009.

A key goal of Shifting Sands is to accumulate a solid body of best practices highlighting a new role for arts and culture groups in community development. The idea is to spotlight initiatives in assorted settings, with diverse participants and programs, where the hope is not to produce a cookie-cutter model, but instead to support a concept of working for greater social equity. The foundation wants to inspire more arts and culture groups to get involved in neighborhood revitalization; it also wants traditional community development groups to recognize and value the special contribution these new allies can make to their field. On the funding side, Ford is also encouraging other grant-makers to consider initiatives that straddle both the community and arts worlds. Today, most funding is in separate silos, which often only helps to further the gap between the two practices.



***Shifting Sands is testing out five assertions:***



**1** ***Arts and culture organizations can act as curators of neighborhood identity.***

**2** ***Arts and culture organizations can encourage meaningful social integration.***



All neighborhoods have a unique personality, but when buildings are remodeled and new faces arrive, that character changes and past history is often forgotten. Through not only their programming, but their willingness to build multi-lateral relationships, arts and cultural organizations can help to broker and celebrate neighborhood identity and help communities adapt to change.

Cultural organizations routinely assemble people of diverse backgrounds at exhibits and other cultural events, but the interactions are fleeting. Shifting Sands groups intentionally set out to activate dialogue and bring about opportunities for disparate voices to be heard. Through participation in neighborhood associations, traditional community organizing, arts events and good community listening the groups are able to encourage common visions to emerge. Working together on community improvement, lasting relationships also emerge.

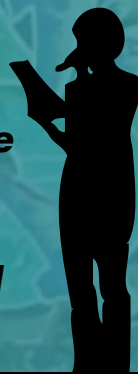


**3** *Arts and culture organizations can help promote upward mobility for all people.*



**4** *The creative methods of the artist can be applied to community development.*

**5** *Arts and culture organizations can help all voices to have a say in the shaping of neighborhood change.*



Some cultural associations already promote their ethnically-rich neighborhoods to tourists. And some arts groups train youth for jobs in arts-based industries or help artisans market their wares. Many more arts and cultural institutions could undertake these and similar economic development initiatives. More than most groups, arts and cultural associations tend to be comfortable approaching people with financial means. Why not capitalize on those connections to create a number of economic opportunities for neighborhood residents? The Shifting Sands organizations go one step further and attempt to spread information and opportunities for dialogue so that economic development is informed and more likely to help 'all boats rise'.

The artist's mandate is to present that which is known in an original form. That same approach can be applied to help Shifting Sands' residents visualize new possibilities for their changing community. Artists also act to translate and share meaning, especially when divergent ideas abut. Competing development agendas provide opportunities for creative minds to generate compromises, and culture clash can inspire the creative energy needed to discover shared community assets.

In rapidly changing communities, civic engagement is difficult. However, a healthy community requires the voice of all of its residents. Local arts and cultural groups have a unique ability to create neutral space for different groups to openly express their concerns. They can become the voice for an underserved community in times of crisis and opportunity.

# ***Making the Arts - Community Connection***

## **CAN THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FIELD**

–bricks and mortar, production-oriented, driving for scale –co-exist peacefully and work productively with organizations rooted in the creative world of arts and culture?

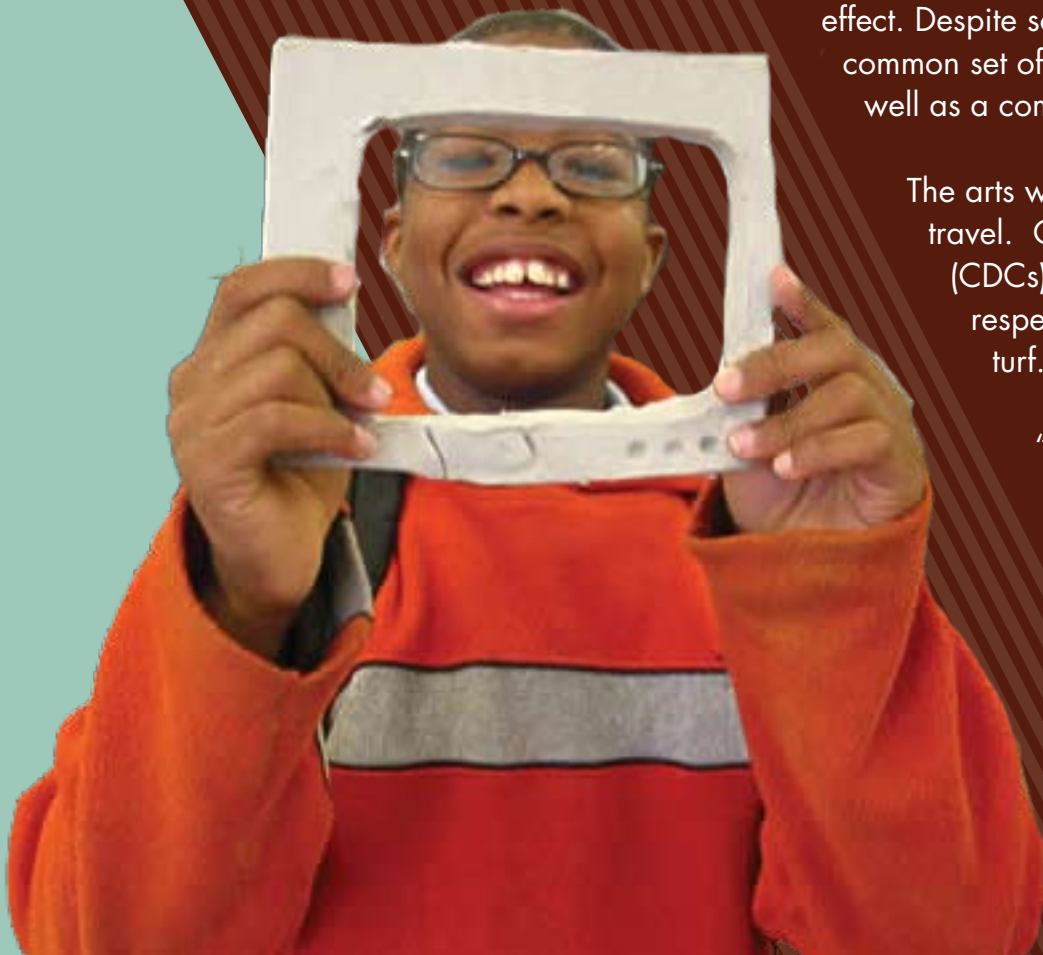
Or put another way: Can arts and culture institutions – dedicated to creative excellence, advocacy for often marginalized art and artists, and getting ever growing audiences through their doors – make community meetings, concern for housing, immigrant issues, and support for small businesses fit within their scope of operation?

Shifting Sands' leaders are convinced the differences between the two worlds can be bridged –to startling effect. Despite some fits, starts and early missteps, a common set of principles and tools is emerging, as well as a common language around hopefulness.

The arts world, it would seem, has farther to travel. Community development corporations (CDCs) need only make room for and respect as equals a new player on their turf.

"Arts institutions are having to learn to navigate the complexity of community development," says Esther Robinson, an artist-advisor to Shifting Sands.

"A huge issue for them has been translation, speaking the same language as





**“The arts and culture groups often view community development people as too staunchly rooted in production and physical development. That they’ve lost track of the spirit of the people. On the community development side, arts and culture people are often seen as too soft, not rigorous, not productive enough. They do nice performances, but what do they do for an encore?”**

**- Miguel Garcia, The Ford Foundation**

community developers, with a shared sense of terms, outcomes, results.”

Shifting Sands advisor Roy Priest, former President of the National Congress for Community Economic Development, sees much room for common ground. “We’re not talking about a different strategy of community development so much as involving new players,” he says.

But for arts groups willing to embrace community development, the stakes are high. Shifting Sands can divert them from their normal reward system and put them at odds with their peers. “These groups are brave,” says Penny Cuff, Senior Program Officer at Partners for Livable Communities. “This initiative asks them to make a far reach.”

But while arts and culture groups may have the biggest leap to make, community development entities, too, are being asked to take a big plunge.

“In the past, arts organizations and CDCs didn’t work much together, and when they did, it wasn’t pretty,” says Juana Guzman, Vice President of the Mexican Museum of Art in Chicago. “CDCs,” she says, “seldom even thought about how artists might enhance their affordable housing.”

But breakthroughs are occurring around multiple issues in many communities. In San José a

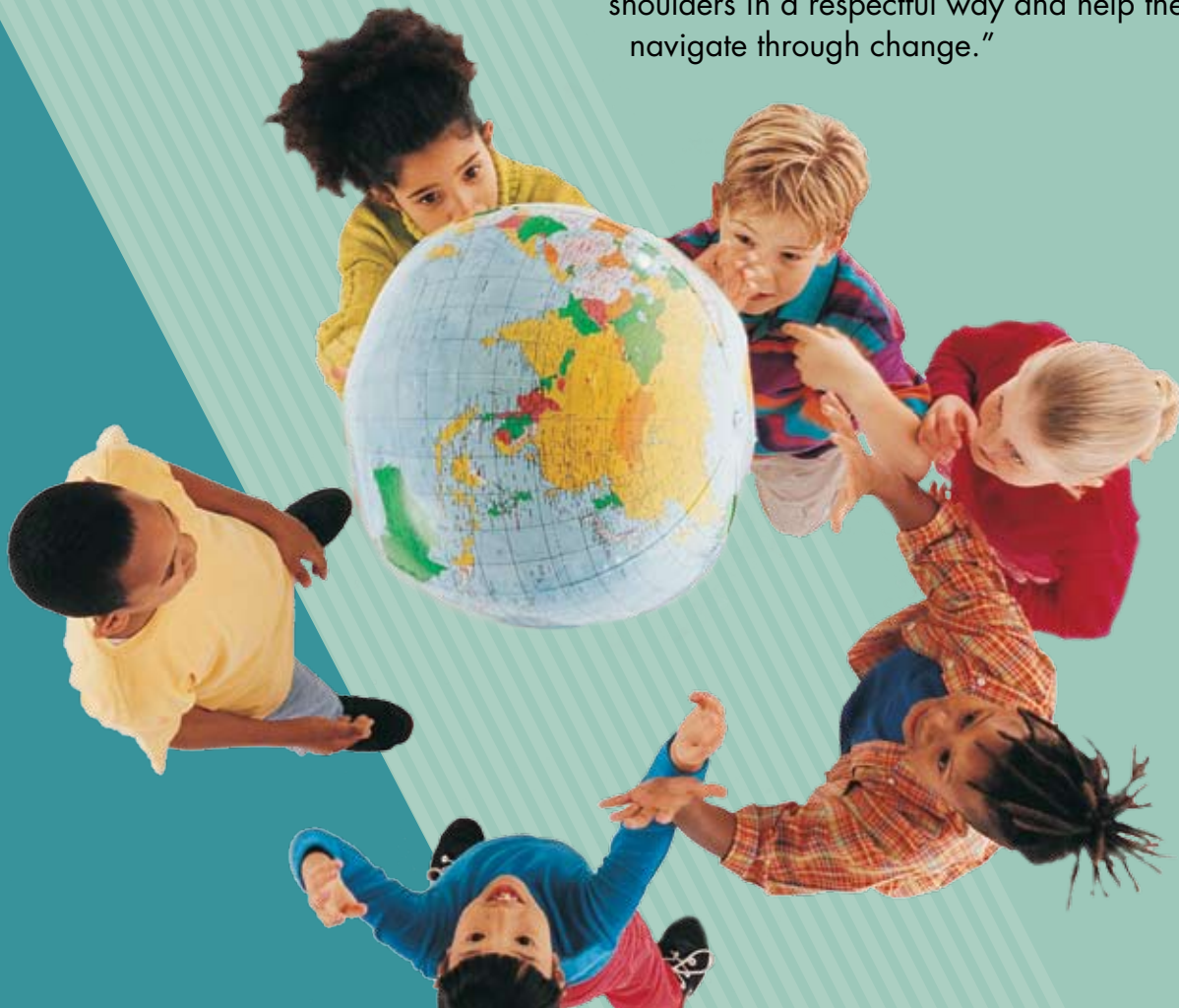
community arts organization created alliances around issues ranging from immigration to property values and relationships brokered with nearby San José State, city government and local small businesses. Houston’s Project Row Houses collaborates closely with Rice University to develop affordable housing in the style of Houston’s culturally significant “shotgun” houses. Their architectural vernacular lends not only a name to the trailblazing non-profit, but helps to ‘curate’ a growing sense of shared identity in Houston’s Third Ward. In New Orleans, Ashé Cultural Arts Center is leading a wide public dialogue on rebuilding Katrina-ravaged neighborhoods and playing a huge role in even-handed economic development projects for its Central City neighborhood.



# Curating Neighborhood Identity

**EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD** has a unique personality. Ask why and you discover ideas ranging from history and culture to family roots, sports teams, religious celebrations, property value, architectural styles, food specialties ad infinitum.

In Shifting Sands neighborhoods, arts and cultural institutions can catalyze the formulation of an inclusive identity. “The idea is not so much to preserve the identity of the past, or fast forward to the future, but to act as steward,” said the Ford Foundation’s Miguel Garcia. “By creating public square dialogue and making sure different voices are heard, these organizations can take the identity of the neighborhood on their shoulders in a respectful way and help the community navigate through change.”



**“Neighborhood identity is powerful. Identity is so important that people will fight and die for their piece of real estate.”**

**- Tom Borrup, Consultant in Creative Community Building**

But it is often a challenge to heal the breaches created by competing identities. The William-Reed corridor neighborhood in San José, for example, had a conflict of cultures between its “old-timers” – dubbed “the Victorians” – and new immigrants. A local arts organization, Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA), worked persistently to engage the Victorians, a local university, an umbrella citizen organization, and a diversity of immigrant ethnic groups, in addition to its own Latino constituency, demonstrating it could “deliver” on local projects. “This neighborhood had lots of history, but not many traditions,” said MACLA Executive Director Tamara Alvarado. MACLA’s strategy was to provide opportunities for an emerging and inclusive community identity by creating new neighborhood traditions, from family murals to an annual Day of the Dead celebration.

Resolving competing neighborhood identities is also a key objective of the ARTS at Marks Garage in Honolulu’s Chinatown district. Since 2001, this arts incubator and collaborative gallery has used community arts to create an aesthetic, social and economic renaissance in the city’s historic downtown. Poverty, crime and tension among diverse ethnic groups have plagued Chinatown for decades. But there’s also a strong sense of identity in Chinatown, reinforced by its residents, architecture, and businesses – everything from noodle shops and lei stands to fish markets, grocers, restaurants and herbalists.

Launched by the Hawaii Arts Alliance, Marks’ sponsoring institutions read like a “who’s who” of local

arts powerhouses. The partners work closely with the community to develop and market the neighborhood’s unique identity, improve social conditions and generate jobs.

Marks sponsors arts education programs in public housing and community arts projects throughout the neighborhood. Special effort is made to convey the community’s historic identity to young people. For example, Marks enlists master artists to give demonstrations of various cultural traditions, followed by field trips to museums, galleries, theaters and arts performances. Engaging elders to work with the students is an important part the strategy.

Marks has also worked hard to hear the community’s voice. In June 2006, it organized the Talk Any Kine festival to solicit feedback from Chinatown area residents, business owners and employees. More than 350 people attended the brainstorming sessions, which examined key local issues from homelessness to public safety. The group suggested solutions to widely-known problems. Among the ideas: provide 24-hour restrooms, address traffic safety for pedestrians, encourage police to enforce anti-loitering laws, provide more time on parking meters, and give landowners incentives to improve their buildings. These results were then shared with the city at the Mayor’s Chinatown Summit, providing space for often underrepresented voices to make direct contact with Honolulu’s political class. Following, Marks assembled a jury to select the best ideas and provide mini-grants of \$3000, bringing the entire process to lasting fruition with the implementation of these community-owned projects.

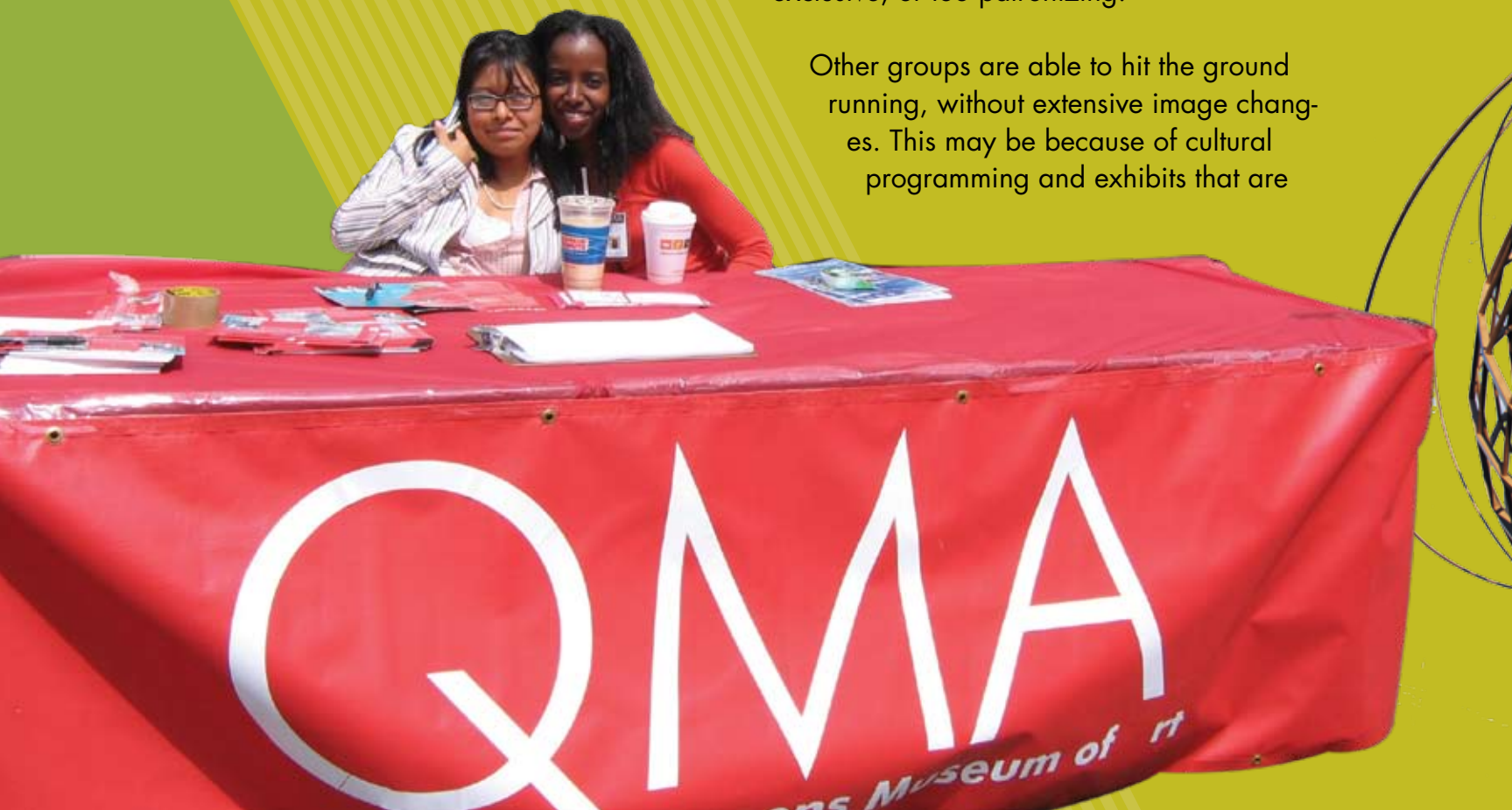


# *"Activating" Public Space: Social Integration and Shared Vision*

ART EXHIBITS and theater performances, street festivals and town fairs – these events attract diverse audiences. Most of the time, however, the interaction ends when the curtain falls. Now, some community-based arts and culture institutions are trying to use public spaces and the idea of town hall-style dialogue to promote lasting relationships among people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and income levels.

The first hurdle is to ensure everyone feels welcome in the space. Shifting Sands grantees are often able to provide a neutral space, or use the expressive nature of their cultural work to help foster trust inside their walls. Whether small or large, some arts organizations may need to overcome the lingering image of being too exclusive, or too patronizing.

Other groups are able to hit the ground running, without extensive image changes. This may be because of cultural programming and exhibits that are



**The issue is not just seeing performances or focusing on shared physical space. It is partnerships, social integration, debate and the possibility of shared vision that engages the community.**

reflective of local diversity, or the result of efforts to go out and engage the community through organizing, public exhibits, or festivals. Many of these organizations have already been slowly building the relationships that build trust and a sense the organization is working to encourage a fair exchange of ideas.

But how can the interactions be made to last?

The Ford Foundation's Miguel Garcia, a key Shifting Sands architect, tells the story of watching visitors attend a Monet exhibit at an El Paso, TX

museum. "The crowd was very diverse, and there was much interaction around the paintings," he says. "But there was no follow up. Not one of the 300 or 400 people came out and said: I'm ready to change my life."

A core Shifting Sands tenet gradually emerged: The issue is not just seeing performances or focusing on shared physical space. It is partnerships, social integration, debate and the possibility of shared vision that engages the community. "Interaction can't stop with the performance or the painting," says Garcia. "That's just the catalyst for a longer process." Garcia gave the concept a name – to "activate" public space.

Says Esther Robinson, an artist-advisor to Shifting Sands: "The first step is bringing people together, then giving them common goals. You can't predict how people will work together, or who will create an affinity and who won't."

For the Queens Museum of Art, activating public space is a major component of its neighborhood outreach. Priority one (as dictated by the community!): to spruce up the nearby poorly maintained Corona Plaza. "The plaza's unclean, unattractive appearance was a source of community shame," says Naila Rosario, hired by the museum in 2006 to be its community organizer. Attempts by others to make the plaza more attractive had failed. There was "too much work and bureaucracy to make significant headway," Rosario says.








Rosario and her team reached out to dozens of community organizations, enlisted volunteers from small businesses, social service non-profits, ethnic associations, immigrant rights groups and forged partnerships with city and state agencies. On April 21, 2007, the museum sponsored the first Clean-Up Day in Corona Plaza, attracting nearly 100 volunteers. "We transformed the space," Rosario says. Home Depot donated soil and shrubs. The local Western Union supplied flowering plants. Walgreen's made sure the volunteers had plenty to eat and drink. The city parks department replaced the plaza's broken fire hydrants so plants could be watered. A second clean up day in May produced equally good results.

And it didn't stop with the clean-up. Every six months the museum puts on a major public art display in the re-activated plaza, and its Corona Cares Day Street Celebrations, a part of its Corazon de Corona initiative, attracted some 4,000 visitors.

"As a result of this outreach, people want to come more to the museum," says Rosario.

"So now our member organizations give passes to their members." The museum's further partnerships with local health service organizations and Elmhurst Hospital meant hundreds of people signed up for free or low-cost health insurance and received health screenings and information on being heart healthy.

Corona community leaders welcome the museum's new community activism. Small businesses



are working with larger, more established firms and small non-profits that formerly served one or two target groups are now participating in a community-wide effort. “The beautification committee has given me a chance to work with businesses and other nonprofits that want to make Corona Plaza a center of our community,” says José Tejada, executive director of the Dominico-American Society. Before the initiative, he says, Corona Plaza was a “hang out place for pigeons and drunks.” Now, says Tejada, “the plaza has beautiful flowers— plus budding new partnerships.”

The initiative is promoting more lasting interaction. For example, when the Dominico-American Society

ran out of space for its citizenship classes, it used a contact it had made at the museum to secure more space at the Queens Library.

Small steps, to be sure. But critically important for Shifting Sands communities.

For Robert McNulty, the approach is reminiscent of the settlement houses of an earlier era, when public spaces were intentionally designed as meeting places and melting pots. “The Carnegie Library once had a swimming pool and a boxing ring,” McNulty says. In the past, if the community had a need, the museum or library met it. “We’re trying to motivate traditional institutions to come back out.”





# Promoting Upward Economic Mobility

THERE IS GROWING RECOGNITION of the role of arts and cultural institutions in supporting and sometimes spurring the economic growth of communities. The Shifting Sands Initiative, funded by the Ford Foundation and managed by Partners for Livable Communities, asks arts and cultural organizations to help broker relationships so that those economic benefits are leveraged for the benefit of all community members. Shifting Sands groups are trying a variety of tactics – some rooted in standard community economic development practice, others more innovative and fresh.

One popular approach is to help ethnically diverse neighborhoods promote themselves as tourist destinations. For example, San José's Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA) helps ethnic enterprises become "tourist-ready." It's also working with the city to create distinctive signage and other "branding" for this rich and diverse community. The work requires an organizer, small business development resources and attention-grabbing design and produces not only better economic prospects, but a growing sense of cohesiveness in this community of Asians, Latinos, African-Americans, and whites.

Another approach is to help artisans capitalize on the market potential of their wares, from beads to vegetables. "It's a traditional economic development concept



**“...the gardens are helping people gain confidence that their skills and their cultural traditions have value and can generate value.”**

**- Tom Borrup, Consultant in Creative Community Building**

with a new player, arts and culture groups, in the middle,” says Roy Priest, an experienced community development practitioner. “Many community-based arts groups aren’t thinking about selling what they’ve created. And those that are interested can get confused in this translation.”

“You redefine artists as people who make interesting stuff,” adds Tom Borrup, who for 22 years ran Intermedia Arts, a Minneapolis-based community arts organization. “The arts community puts in place programs to build up business skills. And artist-entrepreneurs get a support structure that didn’t exist so well previously.” For Borrup, Nuestras Raices Community Gardens in Holyoke, Mass. is a model of this approach. Far beyond the dollars produced, he says, “the gardens are helping people gain confidence that their skills and their cultural traditions have value and can generate value.”

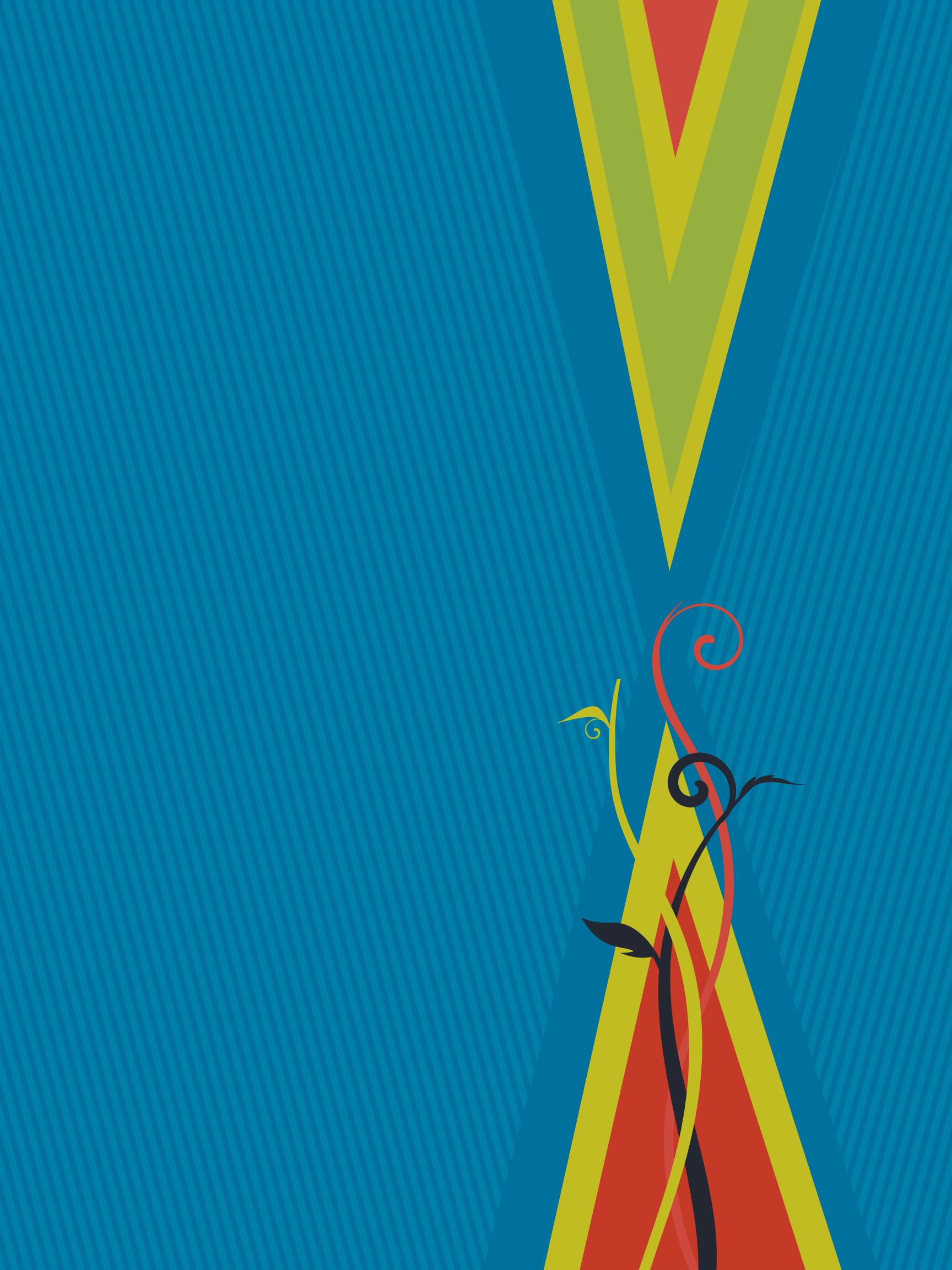
And it’s not just Nuestras’ gardens. The group is also nurturing a variety of small enterprises with micro loans and critical business assistance, creating urgently-needed economic opportunity in Holyoke’s Puerto Rican community. There’s Mi Plaza Restaurant, for example, located in Nuestras’ Centro Agricolo plaza, along with El Jardin Bakery, and Marine Reef Habitat, which installs and maintains saltwater fish tanks and sells tropical corals and fish. New seasonal businesses are also flourishing at La Finca, Nuestras Raices Farms,

where Nuestras Raices has helped to launch more than a dozen small food enterprises and farms, selling everything from produce to hot sauce.

Shifting Sands is also challenging grantees to go beyond the standard economic development playbook. It wants groups to figure out what they do uniquely well in their communities and exploit those core competencies to create opportunities for new connections and upward economic mobility.

Through their programming and other activities, says Borrup, arts groups can help ensure community residents meet the people who can help them move up the economic ladder. And the value, Borrup adds, goes beyond just making the connection. “Before long, low-income people recognize that they, too, can move in those circles,” he says.

The result? “A natural cultural democracy,” notes program manager, Partners for Livable Communities.





# *Shifting Sands Initiative: The Facts*

THE SHIFTING SANDS INITIATIVE seeks to build common vision, create tolerance and respect, and boost economic prospects in rapidly changing underserved neighborhoods. This is accomplished through programs supporting social integration across race and class, upward economic mobility, neighborhood identity, civic engagement and community development.

[www.cultureshapescommunity.org](http://www.cultureshapescommunity.org)

## GRANTEES

Hawai'i Arts Alliance and its Community Project:  
**The ARTS at Marks Garage**  
Honolulu, Hawai'i

**Ashé Cultural Arts Center**  
New Orleans, Louisiana

**Bindlestiff Studios/South of Market  
Community Action Network (SOMCAN)**  
San Francisco, California

**Center for Creative Community  
Development (C3D)**  
North Adams, Massachusetts

**International Sonoran Desert Alliance**  
Ajo, Arizona

**Movimiento de Arte y Cultura  
Latino Americana (MACLA)**  
San José, California

**Nuestras Raices**  
Holyoke, Massachusetts

**Project Row Houses**  
Houston, Texas

**Queens Museum of Art**  
Queens, New York

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Partners for Livable Communities is a non-profit leadership organization working to improve the livability of communities by promoting quality of life, economic development, and social equity. Since its founding in 1977, Partners has helped communities set a common vision for the future, discover and use new resources for community and economic development and build public/private coalitions to further their goals.

Partners promotes livable communities through technical assistance, leadership training, workshops, charrettes, research and publications. More than 1,200 individuals and groups from local, state, national, international, public and private and media organizations make up Partners' resource network and share innovative ideas on livability and community improvement.

Partners has a long and distinguished history in the use of culture, heritage, design, and the humanities to help people reclaim their neighborhoods since its founding. In 1993, Partners began an extensive developmental program called Culture Builds Community, which aims to systematically place cultural assets within the portfolio of community development efforts.

*Shifting Sands Initiative Case Study:*

## **Ashé Cultural Arts Center**



**CAN A COMMUNITY-BASED ARTS GROUP** be the curator of a neighborhood's identity? Can it carry on its back the culture, soul and spirit of a community in crisis?

No place offers a better testing ground than post-Katrina New Orleans. There, the Ashé Cultural Arts Center is helping residents navigate the hard winds of change.

Ashé Cultural Arts Center (from a Yoruban word that translates closely to "the ability to make things happen or "Amen") is operated by Efforts of Grace, Inc. Douglas Redd, an artist, and Carol Bebel, a local writer and program administrator, started the group in 1993 to highlight the positive contributions made by the African people to community arts and culture. The arts center sits in the heart of New Orleans' historic Central City.

Focusing on the historic corridor along Oretha Castle-Haley Boulevard, Ashé fused neighborhood development with the creative forces of community, culture and art. The center quickly became a popular gathering place for emerging and established artists. Storytelling, poetry, music, dance, photography, visual art — all were part of Ashé's "Renaissance on the Boulevard."

"We started with the concept of a welcoming place where folks could meet to create art," says Bebel. Over the years, Ashé added productions, art exhibits and community events while it forged productive alliances with arts organizations, churches, service agencies and schools.



After Katrina, Ashé's role expanded. Since 2005, it's been hosting a bold, thoughtful public dialogue about how to rebuild and repopulate New Orleans' ravished neighborhoods. Throughout the often painful, sometimes contentious process, Ashé remains the self-appointed guardian of the community's rich heritage.

With so much change in New Orleans, "culture can be the way we re-weave intimacy," says Bebelle. She defines culture as a set of common values that people self select to live by. "Those values can be as strict as 'thou shalt not kill' and as loose as 'red beans and rice on Monday,'" she says.

On an average day at Ashé, there are meetings underway about everything from education to housing to small business development. One or more programs may be operating, like Sisters Making a Change, targeted to women working on wellness issues. If a theatrical performance is coming up, the performers are in rehearsal.

On Saturdays, there are dance classes, followed by drum circle for young people. Sunday is a day of rest -- except when there's a theater

matinee, a baby blessing, or a senior citizens gathering. "We're now doing events pretty much all the time because people want to be together," Bebelle says.

Ashé sponsors an annual July 4th tribute to the community's African roots called "Maafa". The program commemorates the tragedy of the New Orleans slave trade. Today, the Maafa seems all too real. "The language of the past starts sounding a lot like today," Bebelle says. "The boats. People taken asunder from their families in inhumane conditions."

For Bebelle, one of Ashé's challenges is to help New Orleans old and new residents deal with the experience of pain and grief resulting from Katrina, but also to see the opportunity to build a new city. Carrying a community's cultural identity through times of crisis is hard, Bebelle admits, "We've carried the responsibility of being an anchoring place, a place folks could connect to," she says. "There's so much disappointment here. We want to let people know it's worth continuing the struggle."



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[www.ashecac.org](http://www.ashecac.org)

*Shifting Sands Initiative Case Study:*

# **International Sonoran Desert Alliance**



**TENSIONS RUN HIGH** in communities undergoing rapid change. In tiny Ajo, Arizona, the International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA) is trying to harness those energies to ensure the town's economic survival and heal old and festering ethnic wounds.

Ajo's tensions begin with its physical contrasts. It lies within the stunningly beautiful Sonoran desert, 10,000 square miles of the hottest and most fragile ecosystem in North America. The town's traditional Spanish plaza and lovely historic buildings reflect a Spanish Colonial Revival style. But amid this charm and natural splendor sits a jarring reminder of the recent past: an abandoned copper mine, one of the biggest open pits in the United States.

That mine is a visual representation of Ajo's legacy of segregation. As a mining town, the Native American, Mexican, and Anglo populations lived apart and social interaction was minimal. "The mining company owned everything and was very paternalistic," says ISDA Executive Director Tracy Taft. When Phelps Dodge closed the pit in 1985, she says, "people

had no self-sufficiency, nothing to fall back on." And today there is still a severe lack of economic opportunity."

After the mine closure, two-thirds of Ajo's 9,000 residents left. The two segregated neighborhoods closest to the copper pit, Indian Village and Mexican Town, were leveled. Then in the 1990's the vacant homes of the mine's management class were sold by Phelps Dodge to outsiders.

Into this fray stepped the ISDA in 1993. Operating in three nations, the U.S. Mexico, and the Tohono O'odham reservation (which spans the U.S.-Mexico border) the Alliance was founded to establish the Sonoran Desert region (including Sonora, Mexico and the Tohono O'odham Indian Nation) as a showcase for environmental excellence. Ten years later, resources for environmental work had become scarce, and ISDA reinvented itself as a community development organization with a commitment to the environment. Then ISDA hit upon an idea. Why not use the arts to build a sustainable local economy and an international center for arts and culture?



Today, Ajo's Native Americans (10 percent), Mexicans (40 percent), and Anglos (50 percent) share the town with 200 U.S. border patrol agents and a few thousand northern U.S. and Canadian "snowbirds" who winter in Ajo. There is plenty of grist for the mill and the ISDA is up to the task of putting together an economic development package centered around culture and art.

To accomplish their goal, ISDA cobbled together \$8 million and bought the abandoned Curley School complex. It began renovating the eight historic buildings into artists' housing and studios, classrooms, a beautiful indoor-outdoor auditorium, an arts business incubator, computer lab, and community workshops. Early funding came from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, The Christensen Fund, the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Arizona Community Foundation. The major renovation was a low income housing tax credit project with 9 sources of funding.

By fall 2007, ISDA had leased all 30 artists' lofts. It began training artisans to grow small businesses. Its Shop Girls program helped women create marketable products using an array of power tools. A micro enterprise center and retail gallery were in the works.

Meanwhile, ISDA was aggressively using arts and culture to build stronger relationships among the groups that had once been strictly segregated.

ISDA hired artists to create large murals reflecting Ajo's Native American culture. It sponsored an inter-ethnic festival meant to harvest memories and begin dialogue around a new and more inclusive vision for Ajo. The ISDA has been producing an annual peace festival in cooperation with artists and schoolchildren from Mexico, the O'odham Nation and the U.S. The artists and young people created all manner of giant puppets representing the bio-diversity of the Sonoran desert. The menagerie was on display at Ajo's annual United Nations' International Day of Peace parade, and included intricate raven headdresses and giant dove kites with 15-foot wingspans, requiring four people to fly them.

ISDA is embarking on a project to capture the history of Indian Village, Mexican Town, and the mining years through public art...to capture what needs to be remembered and spoken to preserve the town's identity and to heal old divisions. In this public art process, Ajo residents will decide what needs to be publicly remembered. "It may be the joy of the celebrations on the old plaza or the pain of having their homes torn down," Taft says.

For Taft, who bought one of the mine homes in 1992, the stakes couldn't be higher. "Big cities often experience population dynamics," she says. "But small towns die if someone doesn't come up with a new development strategy."



International Sonoran Desert Alliance  
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*Shifting Sands Initiative Case Study:*

# **MACLA / Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana**



SAN JOSE'S WILLIAM/REED CORRIDOR is full of surprises. Located downtown, in the heart of California's Silicon Valley, it offers great restaurants, historic architecture, pocket parks and universities such as San Jose State University. It also has thousands of low-income residents sharing neighborhood amenities and space with upper and middle income people, as well as sizeable populations of Mexican and Vietnamese (in addition to other South Asian and Latino) immigrants and Victorian-era homes abutting public housing projects. Soon a 23-story market-rate condominium will become part of this mosaic. This is a neighborhood in flux and boasting incredible diversity. Naturally, this diversity, of income, background, ethnicity, and time spent living in the corridor means plenty of opportunity for points of tension to sprout.

A spirited community arts organization —MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana— is working hard to smooth the tensions and move the corridor forward. MACLA formed in 1989 to support Latino artists, but not just any artists; MACLA sought out painters, sculptors, performers, writers, actors, singers and dancers who were eager to define,

interpret, and transform society through the creation of new work. In 2003, MACLA decided to venture into community development. The group went door-to-door, soliciting information on what people wanted for their neighborhood. "We thought people would say they wanted a supermarket," says Executive Director Tamara Alvarado. "Instead, they wanted to know their neighbors." As a first project, MACLA helped turn a dingy neighborhood Laundromat, owned by a Sikh family, into a community gathering place that showed movies.

Bigger initiatives would require bridges to the local power structure. Initially, MACLA wasn't an easy sell. When Alvarado sought to join the board of the dominant University Neighborhood Coalition (UNC), she was rebuffed by distrustful, mostly white homeowners. MACLA persisted. When one local group needed translators, MACLA found them. When another needed daycare, MACLA had it covered.

MACLA was finally welcomed onto the UNC board in 2005. "We won our neighbors," says Alvarado, "by consistently offering high quality products

— not just art and performances — but also neighborhood festivals and celebrations, including a digital mural project and the Family Giving Tree project, as well as providing gifts for low-income children every Christmas.”

Gradually, MACLA built its identity as a neighborhood change agent. “We’ve used one of our core competencies -- our ability to connect different communities -- to leverage resources into the neighborhood and create alliances among different people,” Alvarado says. “We’re not aiming to lead the charge,” she adds. “We’re the connectors, the bridge builders.”

The better relationships have been a boon to MACLA’s programs. In 2004, 16,000 visitors attended its four-track programs in community development through the arts, youth arts education, visual arts, and performance and literary arts. By 2006, attendance had jumped to 25,000. Non-Latinos make up about 30 percent of its patrons, audiences, and participants.

A symbol of the improved social relations is O’Donnell’s Gardens, a small local park where MACLA hosts many of its events. MACLA assisted neighborhood groups in the creation of the park. Today, the park teems with activity and is a prime example of what Shifting Sands’ architect Miguel Garcia calls “activated” space. “Lots of times, parks get built, ribbons get

cut, and the space is forgotten,” Alvarado says. Not O’Donnell Gardens. Residents oversee maintenance. An elderly man sweeps daily because city services are only sporadically available. A couple in an adjacent Victorian weed the gardens. The couple and the man, who were only acquainted because of the need to watch over the park for the sake of the kids who use it, are now anchored in their identities as neighbors and stewards. The cascading effect has meant that an adjacent corner store no longer sells alcohol in the early daytime, and has since even gotten another grocer down the block to follow suit. Furthermore, the property owners have begun to look into quality of life issues and code enforcement on behalf of their renting neighbors.

MACLA is presently forming a neighborhood business association. The idea, says Alvarado, is to forge a collective identity for the corridor’s small, immigrant businesses. “When we bring business owners, residents, MACLA and the city together, there are lots of resources,” she says. “The fact that we’re not government, which many immigrants distrust, enables us to make these connections.”

For MACLA, it’s all about creating connections, forging new neighborhood traditions that can solidify the William/Reed Corridor’s identity and sustain it through many more changes to come.



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*Shifting Sands Initiative Case Study:*

## ***Nuestras Raices Community Gardens***



**HOLYOKE, MASSACHUSETTS** was once a proud Connecticut River city that produced a high percentage of the world's fine writing paper. Today the town's economy is alarmingly depressed, it is burdened with high joblessness, there are stark class tensions, and it must contend with a legacy of pollution. In Holyoke, even the local newspaper folded.

Holyoke's population changed, too. Over the past two decades, white families have moved out, and many Latino families, largely Puerto Rican, have moved in. Old Holyokers, remembering the city's glory days, blame the current economy and social conditions on the newcomers. Many immigrants too, have absorbed this negative self-image. At one point, Holyoke had become so segregated that almost all space was divvied up as white or Latino, nice or ghetto.

A community organization -- Nuestras Raices (Our Roots) -- is trying to reclaim Holyoke's blighted blocks. It's tapping the rural and farm heritage of many of the Puerto Ricans who first came to the Connecticut

River Valley as migrant workers. With Nuestras Raices' help, inner-city residents are planting garden plots on even the most desolate tenement blocks, then offering their produce in farmers' markets, local restaurants, and cafés.

A day with Daniel Ross, Nuestras Raices' dynamic executive director (and recent awardee of a prestigious Ashoka Fellowship), provides strong evidence the experiment is working. Neighborhood after neighborhood has sprouted community gardens. On modest plots, several square yards each, accented by colorfully painted tool sheds reminiscent of rural farmers' houses in Puerto Rico, residents grow cilantro, peppers and many other crops. Some earn several thousand dollars yearly from their produce. So far, more than 120 families are participating. All the gardens have waiting lists.

The locus of new pride is "Opportunity Farm" -- 4.5-acres of prime Connecticut River bottomland, just outside of town, that Nuestras Raices acquired in 2004. Mt. Holyoke College students, researching the history



of the farm, discovered that the Agawam Indians originally hunted and farmed the site. Next came English, Irish and French-Canadian farmers.

Five Puerto Rican farmers started at Opportunity Farm in 2005; since then, a dramatic expansion has been started on 26 adjacent riverfront acres made available by the Sisters of Providence. With youth leaders taking a leading hand in major environmental restoration work, a network of trails has been created. On festival days, there is horseback riding, canoeing, a dominos tournament, and a petting zoo. The farm plots are raising herbs, vegetables, flowers, and fruits as well as chickens, goats, pigs, sheep, rabbits and guinea pigs. An outdoor stage provides the venue for African dance and drumming, Puerto Rican music and arts, and Latin jazz. A community barn raising is in the works. Nuestras Raíces is even marketing the area for weddings, church retreats, and corporate events. And not just for Puerto Rican families – for all of Holyoke’s residents.

“At every stage,” says Ross, “community-owned businesses and jobs are created. At heart it’s about a healthy community where people know each other and invest in each other.”

Elsewhere across Holyoke, other Nuestras Raíces’ initiatives are apparent. There is the Centro Agricolo renovated plaza, a greenhouse distributing seeds, a farm stand, catering service, a restaurant, an organic bakery, cultural festivals, and a youth basketball league.

One of Nuestras Raíces biggest goals, says Ross, “is addressing the negative stereotypes of Puerto Ricans as lazy and destructive and replacing them with a community identity of Puerto Ricans as productive caretakers of the environment with a proud culture.” The organization has been addressing tense relations as it goes about its work by recruiting a host of non-Latinos from Holyoke, its suburbs and local colleges and rallying them around the shared environmental opportunities sustainable agriculture can afford.

It hasn’t all been rosy. While relationships are improving, racism, and resentment still flair. But for Holyoke’s transitioning society, the Nuestras Raíces Farm (La Finca) and Community Gardens offer much more than a source of nutritious food and extra income. They have heightened pride and turned abandoned urban lots and riparian land into colorful and active spaces where gardens, healthy food and new relationships grow.



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# *Douglas Redd Fellowship*

*Building the Leadership  
Field of Arts, Culture, and  
Community Development*

The mission of the Douglas Redd Fellowship is to build an ever-increasing cadre of leaders that are dedicated to equitable community development and are steeped in a community development model that seeks partners, tools, and lessons from the fields of both community organizing and the arts.

**DOUGLAS REDD**, co-founder and artistic director of Ashé Cultural Arts Center, was a “mentor and teacher to emerging artists and a coach and counselor to community folk who were often inspired by his talent to refine and improve their lives.” As a community-based artist, Douglas used these gifts to bring light to his New Orleans neighborhood and to the people who lived there.

Douglas Redd told Miguel Garcia — the Ford Foundation program officer directly responsible for Shifting Sands — that this work was special to him because it captured his work and translated it through people. This fellowship is an aspiration to the ideal of that expression. We believe he would want there to be some commentary about the ability of Douglas Redd Fellows to change people one at a time.

The Douglas Redd Fellowships are built on the lessons learned during five years of experience with the Shifting Sands initiative and are structured to enlarge the circle of practitioners as well as the understanding of Shifting Sands work. The fellowship will function as an experiential store of knowledge to add to, challenge and pass along.

## **Core Values**

- The creativity, risk-taking and problem solving skills of emerging and established professionals working in economically challenged communities who seek to learn new ways to change their lives and institutions, and show a willingness to cultivate leaders within their staff, organization and community:
- Effective leadership unbound to traditional, linear, top-down models and the empowering of non-traditional models of leadership
- Broad cultural fluency, a high tolerance for complexity and ambiguity and support for professionals to experience multiple career paths and pinnacles
- Challenges to the traditional paradigm by looking for the hidden leadership potential in the people and communities we seek to support
- Unlikely partnerships and the force for positive change that can be brought to bear on community futures when all voices are heard
- The power of the arts and cultural disciplines to catalyze change across ethnic traditions and to make both obvious and unlikely connections in communities
- Self-reflection and thoughtfulness when working in communities
- Diversity of every stripe and an asset-based model of self and environmental assessment

## About the Fellowship

The fellowship opportunity is a year-long exploration into the intersection of arts, culture and community development. Like the Shifting Sands initiative itself, the fellowship is innovative in its structure and content. Seasoned community development and arts practitioners will mentor the fellows by passing along their knowledge and contacts. The mentors will also guide the fellows to plan a learning program and goals that can be applied to their current work environment. This "learning while doing" methodology will be enriched by a series of group meetings, networking opportunities and fellowship projects designed to contribute significantly to the body of arts, culture and community development knowledge.

## Fellowship Goals

- Provide fellows and mentors with an expanded network of colleagues and advisors able to help effect equitable social change in each fellow's community
- Document the work of community development professionals, community-based arts practitioners and social justice organizers over the past forty years, for field-wide enrichment.
- Provide individual fellows with a national spotlight for their local work and invigorate the dialogue on arts and social justice, organizing and community development with fresh innovations

- Help provide resources for catalytic change in the lives and work of individual fellows, their communities, mentors and through networks to the field of arts, culture and community development
- To better understand the rapidly changing communities that make up the world around us.

## About the Fellows

The Douglas Redd Fellows are drawn from community-based arts and cultural organizations and will be selected based upon criteria that include a demonstrated commitment to arts and community development work, adaptability and nimbleness when confronted with changing situations, and above all, a curiosity and excitement to begin a new venture.

## Selection

A broad-based selection committee makes decisions based on written applications and personal interviews. Application announcements and guidelines are disseminated annually in March, applications are submitted in early April, and the selection of fellows are made public in May. Inquiries are invited at any time.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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THE SHIFTING SANDS PROGRAM SEEKS TO BUILD COMMON VISION,  
CREATE TOLERANCE AND RESPECT, AND BOOST ECONOMIC PROSPECTS  
IN RAPIDLY CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS.



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