

Understanding Difference to Find Common Ground

Working with and through differences is paramount to being good partners. Here are ways of working in which municipal agencies and artists often (but not always!) differ in their orientation. The intention is not to perpetuate stereotypes, but rather to acknowledge differences that are often in play so that they can be discussed and honored when they serve good purpose, and challenged when they might jeopardize best results.

	What a Municipal Agency Needs to Know About Working with an Artist	What an Artist Needs to Know About Working with a Municipal Agency
Basics	Arts & Civic sector 101 – What artist-municipal partnerships look like and how they function in other civic contexts and settings. What is happening nationally	Civics 101 – How municipal/county government works. How this differs from working with nonprofits.
	Nature of the artist’s work, past projects, intentions, skills.	Nature of the Agency/Dept -- Mission, goals, aspirations, what it does, who it represents/ serves, and how these often are embedded in a hierarchy of larger municipal goals
	History - relevant past or current experience; artist’s knowledge of community and knowledge gaps; agencies, partners artist has worked with; history of relationships, successes, challenges, etc.	History – What has come before that is relevant to the project at hand; agency’s efforts, community context, successes, challenges, relevant partners, relationships, experience working with other artists, etc.
Language & Meaning Making	Vocabulary and language specific to artistic work (jargon, technical, discipline- specific).	Vocabulary and language specific to the municipal agency’s work (jargon, technical, discipline-specific, acronyms).
	Artistic liberty to explore dilemmas. Artistic practices allowing for blurred lines, ambiguity.	Municipalities are charged with analyzing dilemmas and straight forward solving problems. They tend toward clear and sharp definitions.
	What artist means when using certain common terms, e.g., “community engagement.”	What municipality means when using certain common terms, e.g., “community engagement.”
Ways of Working	Socially engaged artists tend to engage laterally across structures or groups, and/or bottom up.	Even the most benevolent government effort carried out by the most compassionate staff is structurally top-down.

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<p>Ways of Working (cont.)</p>	<p><i>Wait, don't hurry!</i> Artists work in iterative ways; often exploratory, organic, reflexive, nonlinear. Managing a project may require greater flexibility, longer timeline, more process and making sense of things, when artists are involved.</p> <p><i>Can we move this along?</i> Artists may be ready and need to act or respond in a timely way to opportunity or crisis, but feel hamstrung by city systems and protocol. Sometimes municipal agents need to figure out ways to avoid unnecessary delays or expedite approvals, processes so as not to lose momentum or timeliness.</p>	<p><i>Hurry up and wait!</i> Municipalities set up formal systems and procedures for reasons of accountability or safety that may dictate steps and approvals, require meetings, protocols, and documentation, and take time. In addition, politics of the work, construction delays, funding issues can hold up projects.</p> <p><i>Also... Just Hurry!</i> Lots of things can happen quite quickly too. Municipalities are often time-bound, set up for efficiency, cost effectiveness, solving timely problems fast, or to meet interrelated deadlines. Partnering with municipal agency means knowing what these realities are, where there is wiggle room, and where there is not.</p>
	<p>How the artist generates ideas, engages publics for input/feedback.</p> <p>Cultural competency regarding engaging marginalized communities and communities of color</p>	<p>How the agency generates ideas, engages publics for input/feedback. There are legal requirements for community engagement and feedback that cities have to adhere to.</p>
	<p>Artist decision-making may place significant emphasis on community, stakeholder, and/or participant involvement. Get to know who the artist wishes to involve in informing or making decisions and when in the course of projects. Also learn at what points deliberation with municipal agents is critical.</p>	<p>Municipal agents are trained in how to make decision-based civic processes happen well; to move from dialogue to decisions.</p> <p>Municipal decision-making may require multiple approvals. Get to know who are the decision-makers and how decisions are made.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchies of decision-making & who makes various decisions • Who influences whom? • Who are the champions for art at all levels? Who needs help understanding how art works, adds value?
	<p>Artists may not want to pre-determine project outcomes but rather allow creative practice to help define what matters to the agency and those who are intended to benefit from the project.</p>	<p>Municipalities are driven by public accountability. Results and evidence to back them up ensure responsible use of public resources. Artists need to know what outcomes matter and what goals need to be set up front.</p>
<p>Risk</p>	<p>Art and artists may push boundaries and take risks in their ways of working internally and externally. How to hold the tension between working within the system and using the artist's creative thinking, strategies, and findings to stretch or transcend it.</p>	<p>Municipal government is generally risk averse. Understand municipal partner's risk limits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject to public scrutiny & accountability • Legal constraints of what a municipality can and cannot do • Liability concerns; the notion of "assumed liability" • Communications protocols, messaging concerns