



# ADDING IT UP

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### AN EVALUATION OF ARTS ON CHICAGO & ART BLOCKS

JANUARY 2016

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# ADDING IT UP:

## 52 PROJECTS BY 30+ ARTISTS IN 4 NEIGHBORHOODS

### An evaluation of Arts on Chicago and Art Blocks

January 2016

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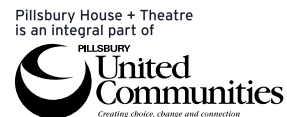
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2013 Arts on Chicago Celebration

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beginning in 2012, Pillsbury House + Theatre (PH+T), a hybrid arts center/ social service organization, began experimenting with arts-based community development in its four surrounding neighborhoods. With ArtPlace and subsequent Minnesota State Arts Board funding, it launched the Arts on Chicago (AOC) and Art Blocks programs. In the span of two years, over 30 neighborhood-based artists engaged their neighbors in 52 projects that ranged from a stiling club to artistic bike racks to puppet shows to photographic portraits of neighbors. PH+T also developed structures to remain responsive to changing community interests and provide artist project leaders with professional development.

What is the change that PH+T sought to make and how and why did it expect this change to occur? Ultimately, they hoped to empower neighborhood residents, which included artist project leaders, to affect positive change. That positive change could be individual, family-level, or community-wide outcomes, with goals and values ideally determined collectively by neighborhood residents. PH+T theorized that this change would come about by catalyzing a critical mass of participatory neighborhood arts activities. Led by neighborhood artists, these activities would be strategically designed to foster residents' access to arts participation, increase residents' levels of community attachment, and promote residents' agency (both individual and collective). PH+T imbued each of these concepts with sub-themes and values, which directly informed the selection of our research questions.

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### ACCESS

"I (we) feel welcome here."

### ATTACHMENT

"I (we) fit here."

### AGENCY

"I (we) want to make good stuff happen here."

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To advance field-wide knowledge, provide accountability to its stakeholders, and deepen the effectiveness of its future work, PH+T engaged Metris Arts Consulting to collaborate on this evaluation. This report assesses the impact of 2012-2014 Art Blocks and Arts on Chicago activities on residents' arts and cultural "access," community "attachment," and individual and collective "agency." It also explores what strategies were most effective and makes recommendations on how to improve data collection efforts moving forward.

Our findings capture the perspectives of artist project leaders, neighborhood residents and other civic stakeholders. We made use of the extensive data collected internally by PH+T, prior to Metris' involvement, and also designed and executed select additional methods to help us address gaps in our ability to answer specific research questions. Core data sources include artists' final reflections (response rates of 70%-83% of artist teams/year); spreadsheets detailing the social connections that Arts on Chicago artists made via their projects, which underpinned our social network analysis (response rate of 60% of artist teams); and a residents' survey designed with a quasi-control group (response rate of 14%). Using a range of data sources, we explored AOC and Art Blocks' impacts related to residents' arts access, community attachment, and individual and collective agency.

## FOSTERING ARTS ACCESS

We found clear evidence that AOC and Art Blocks provided residents with opportunities for creative expression.



Mike Hoyt's Art Blocks project was a growth chart mural on his fence featuring people on his block.

We found clear evidence that AOC and Art Blocks provided residents with opportunities for creative expression. In the two-year period, AOC and Art Blocks artists initiated 52 projects, many of them clearly visible in the public realm, within the four neighborhoods that surround PH+T. The residents' survey, event participants' survey, and focus group data suggest that residents noticed these efforts and that they helped build towards a critical mass of arts activities. Survey respondents living on Art Blocks or blocks where AOC activities took place, for instance, were 1.5 times more likely to rate their neighborhood as good or excellent in terms of opportunities for creative expression. Through their final reflections, artist project leaders provided details about the ways in which neighbors encountered art projects.

We found more modest evidence surrounding the projects' abilities to remove barriers to arts participation and help residents feel welcome at these and other arts events. Through their final reflections, artists illuminated a variety of ways in which they strove to make their projects welcoming and remove barriers; and focus group respondents contrasted arts activity in the neighborhoods surrounding PH+T with another Minneapolis-based neighborhood with arts cachet, and characterized the former as much more accessible. However, high percentages of both quasi-control group respondents and respondents living on Art Blocks or blocks with AOC activities indicated that they felt welcome at PH+T arts events. While PH+T's neighborhood standing as an accessible and welcoming arts center is to be celebrated, we are unable to correlate this trend to recent Art Blocks or AOC activity.

In terms of shifting attitudes regarding arts participation, similarly, the AOC and Art Blocks' influence on increasing residents' awareness of the connections between art and community building was difficult to assess. Through qualitative responses, resident survey respondents demonstrated an awareness of the connections between art and community building, but illustrated with examples other than from AOC/Art Blocks projects. Event participant survey respondents, however, did indicate a strong demand for similar arts experiences and in their final reflections, artists supplied examples of how individual Art Blocks/AOC projects served as springboards for other neighborhood-based arts projects.



## INCREASED ATTACHMENT: PEOPLE AND PLACE

Respondents living on Art Blocks or blocks where AOC activities took place, for instance, were 1.6 times more likely to report that they felt more connected to their neighbors because of arts offerings than quasi-control respondents.



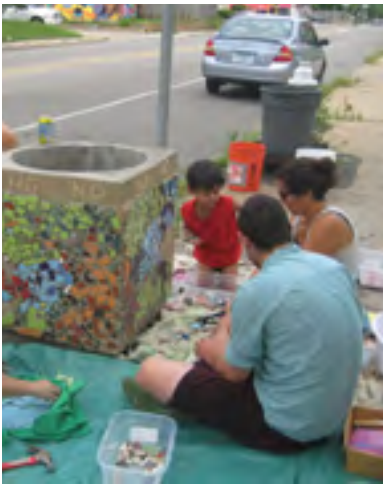
TAWU's Art Stop Garden installation was revealed at the 2013 Arts on Chicago Celebration; photo by Bruce Silcox.

A range of data sources allowed us to probe whether or not residents felt more connected or trusted each other more. Social network analysis, artists' final reflections, and resident survey data provided clear evidence that the Art Blocks and AOC projects fostered social connections. Respondents living on Art Blocks or blocks where AOC activities took place, for instance, were 1.6 times more likely to report that they felt more connected to their neighbors because of arts offerings than quasi-control respondents. For AOC, social network analysis illustrated a cohesive group of artists that bring together many disparate individuals in the community. In addition, particular individuals stood out for their role in the network. Via final reflections, artists conveyed that they truly valued the relationships that they developed through the projects and how this helped foster their attachment to place. This data source also yielded insights into the ways in which their projects facilitated initial interaction between neighbors. We also wished to specifically explore whether increased social connections and trust between neighbors spanned difference (including race/ethnicity, income status, and age, among other dimensions.) Although artist final reflections and the relationship data submitted by AOC artists reveal that the projects involved people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, we found very little qualitative evidence to help us contextualize the depth or relative significance that participants placed on those interactions.

Another desired dimension of the community attachment goal was residents' increased appreciation for difference, such as valuing knowing people of different backgrounds or being invested in neighbors' success, regardless of difference. Two participants shared testimonial via event participant surveys that AOC/Art Blocks activities helped expand their thinking in this regard. The residents' survey also provided only modest evidence. High majorities of both AOC and Art Blocks survey respondents and quasi-control group respondents indicated that it was very important to them to know neighbors of different backgrounds. This suggests that majorities of residents may share these values, but that life experiences beyond and pre-dating the AOC and Art Blocks projects shape these world-views.

PH+T also wished to explore residents' sense of belonging as another component of the community attachment goal. Qualitative data from artist final reflections, artist video interviews, participant event surveys, and focus groups suggested that the AOC and Art Blocks activities may have deepened residents' sense of belonging and/or fostered it for those that did not initially feel that they belonged to their neighborhood. In addition, these dynamics appeared closely linked to residents' sense of safety and increased familiarity with neighbors and neighborhood amenities. The residents' survey, however, revealed that high majorities of residents feel a sense of belonging with no apparent correlation to AOC or Art Blocks activities.

The final dimension of the community attachment goal is fostering pride of place. We found strong qualitative and quantitative evidence that AOC and Art Blocks projects helped increase residents' pride in where they lived, particularly as relates to its arts identity.



Nicky Duxbury's Art Bloks project engaged neighbors in creating a mosaic trash can.



Peter Haakon Thompson's *Mobile Sign Shop* at the 2013 Arts on Chicago celebration

## PROMOTING INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE AGENCY

PH+T wished to explore five facets of individual and collective agency: inspiration, empowerment through skills and confidence, increased voice in community decision making, increased sense of civic responsibility at the neighborhood level, and residents' ability to work collectively and engage in dialogue about tough issues.

We found clear evidence that AOC and Art Blocks activities helped residents gain inspiration, as well as skills and confidence to generate opportunities. Higher percentages of AOC and Art Blocks respondents, for instance, reported that they imagine positive futures for themselves and their neighborhood than for quasi-control group respondents. This pattern also held for skills and confidence, with higher percentages of Art Blocks and AOC respondents agreeing with the statement, "I have the skills and confidence to generate opportunities." Artist final reflections illustrated the ways in which the projects inspired participants and provided them with new skills, particularly for artist project leaders and youth participants.

Our analyses revealed promising signs that Art Blocks and AOC may help previously underrepresented individuals have a greater voice in community decision making. Higher percentages of Art Blocks and AOC respondents agreed with the statement: "I have a voice in community decision making," and this trend was even more pronounced for racial minorities, low-income individuals, and people of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, though extremely small sample sizes limit the validity of these results.

In terms of the projects' abilities to increase residents' commitment to be civically engaged in their neighborhood, our data sources suggest success in this area, particularly for the artist project leaders, themselves. Respondents dwelling on blocks where AOC or Art Blocks activities took place were 1.8 times more likely to state that it was very important to them to be civically engaged in their neighborhood. In their final reflections, artists provided qualitative evidence of this commitment, which seemed particularly pronounced for Art Blocks artist project leaders. Their experiences seemed to whet their appetites for more hyper-local civic engagement.

Lastly, with regards to increasing residents' capacity for dialogue and collective work, we found only modest qualitative evidence. Interestingly, residents held up non-AOC/Art Blocks examples of arts-based strategies that can help people discuss divisive issues, develop shared values, and better appreciate alternate points of view, including the community process surrounding In the Heart of the Beast's MayDay parade and festival and PH+T's own Breaking Ice program. We speculate that with increased artist experience, the potential for Art Blocks and AOC to generate these kinds of impacts will increase.

## IMPLICATIONS: LEARNING FROM PH+T'S EXPERIENCE

To explore how PH+T, project partners, and the broader field can learn from these efforts, this study also explores factors that appear to help or hinder desired access, attachment, and agency-related outcomes and also provides guidance for future measurement efforts.



The “living” fiber art installation created by StevenBe’s Arts on Chicago Fiber Sprawls

Looking across all individual AOC and Art Blocks projects, we identify six factors that seem to help (or hinder) access, attachment, and agency-related outcomes:

1. Active participation and connecting participants to unfamiliar people and places
2. Tradeoffs between geographically diffuse and concentrated approaches
3. Deep artist-to-artist social connections
4. Staying attuned to challenges and value of collaborations with outside partners
5. Successful navigation of tight timelines
6. Balancing artists’ experimentation and building on experience

With regards to future measurement efforts, the data sources and methods that proved most valuable in helping us address access, attachment, and agency impacts were the artist final reflections, the residents’ survey, and the artist relationship data and resulting social network analysis. We provide specific recommendations on ways to boost response rates, increase sample sizes, and improve the quality and specificity of the data collected. In addition to these three core data collection efforts, we recommend that resident/participant focus groups are added to the mix of data collection efforts with protocols strategically designed to illicit qualitative responses from those impact-areas for which we had limited or inconclusive data.

In conclusion, with a relatively small amount of money and a lot of gumption, PH+T sought to help “make good stuff happen” by seeding its four surrounding neighborhoods with a series of neighborhood artist-led art projects that it hoped would foster residents’ access to arts participation, community attachment, and individual and collective agency. It also set out to measure the impact of these efforts so that it could iteratively improve its work and offer insights to others in the field trying their hand at related efforts.

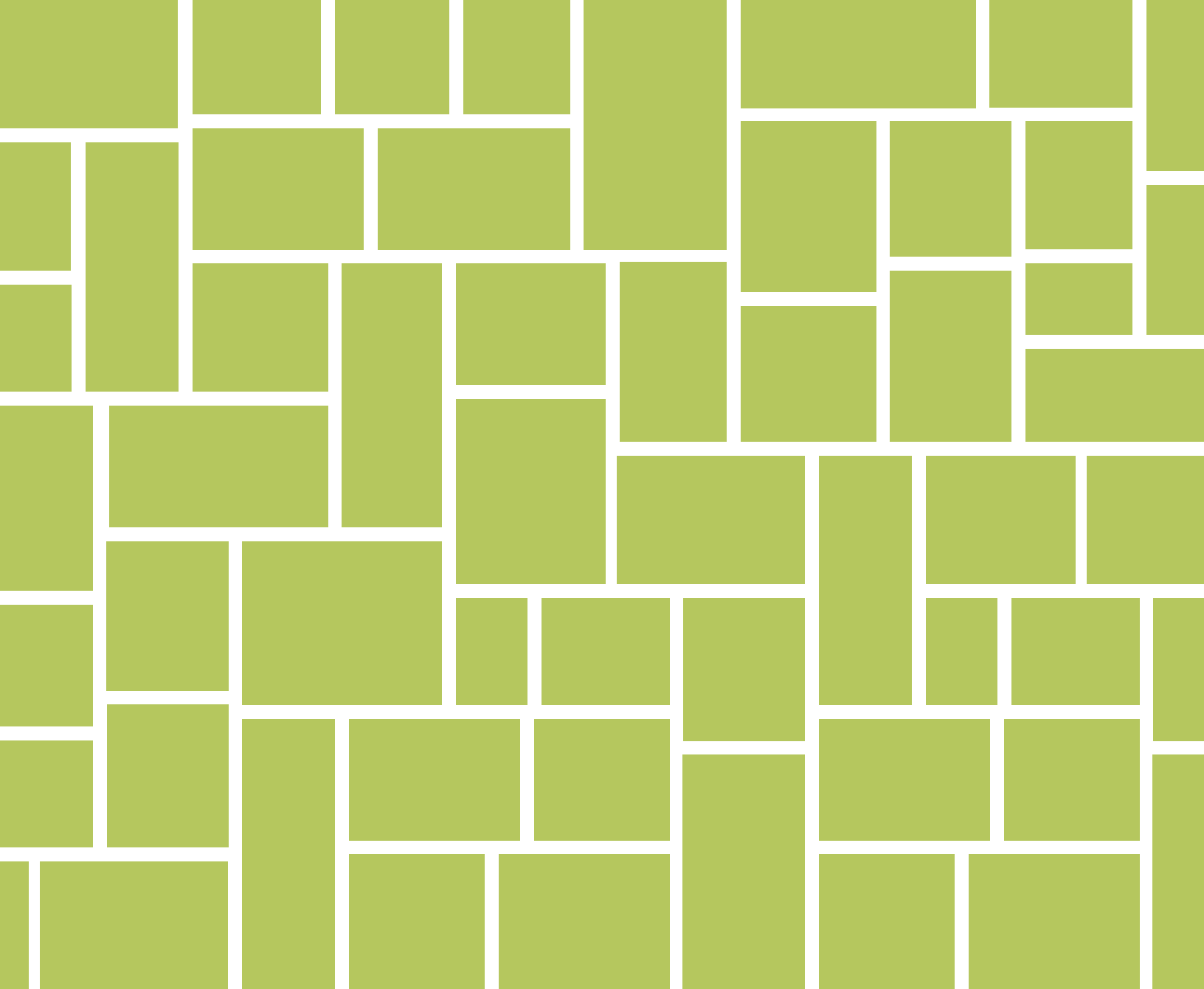
Although some impacts may be modest, this evaluation finds evidence that Art Blocks and AOC did, indeed, help PH+T make inroads towards its agency, attachment, and arts access goals. It also synthesized lessons learned about which strategies and approaches appear to be most effective and how measurement efforts can be improved moving forward. This in-depth evaluation makes a valuable contribution to the emergent creative placemaking field, both in sharing what kinds of “people-stuff” impacts creative community development projects such as Art Blocks and Arts on Chicago can generate, and by helping others improve their own program design and evaluation efforts.





additional photos by Bruce Silcox; Xavier Tavera; and Ethan Turcotte





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