

Pittsburgh Artists Working in Community:

A Case Study of Aesthetic Perspectives in Action



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in collaboration with the Office of Public Art,
Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council

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Table of Contents

Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change	4
Introduction: Aesthetic Perspectives in Action	5
Collaboratively Assessing and Formalizing an Innovative Program	
Arts Excursions Unlimited, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh–Hazelwood	8
Supporting a Cohort of Artists Developing Creative Projects	
Residencies with Immigrant and Refugee Communities	12
Articulating Values for a New Program and Setting the Tone for a Selection Panel Discussion	
Environment, Health, and Public Art Initiative	18
Themes and Takeaways	22
Author	24

Acknowledgments

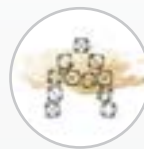
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Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change



Commitment - Creative processes and products embody conviction to the cause espoused through the work.



Risk-taking - Creative work assumes risk by subverting dominant norms, values, narratives, standards, or aesthetics.



Communal Meaning - The creative work facilitates collective meaning that transcends individual perspective and experience.



Openness - The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction.



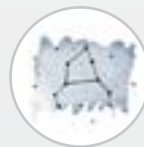
Disruption - Art challenges what is by exposing what has been hidden, posing new ways of being, and modeling new forms of action.



Resourcefulness - Imaginative use of available resources drives artistic innovation and demonstrates responsible social and environmental practice.



Cultural Integrity - The creative work demonstrates integrity and ethical use of material with specific cultural origins and context.



Coherence - Strong ideas expressed with clarity advance both artistic and social purposes.



Emotional Experience - Arts for Change facilitates a productive movement between *heart* space—the emotional experience that art evokes—and the *head* space of civic or social issues.



Stickiness - The creative work achieves sustained resonance, impact, or value.



Sensory Experience - Vivid sensations deepen the experience of the creative work and heighten the power of its messages and the potential for change.

These attributes are further described online and are available for free download from the [Aesthetic Perspectives](#) webpage.

- **Pointed descriptions** relating each attribute to Arts for Change
- **Reflective questions** to guide consideration of the attribute in Arts for Change work
- **Illuminating examples** of creative works and projects that exhibit the attributes

Introduction: Aesthetic Perspectives in Action



Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change aims to enhance understanding and evaluation of arts for change through 11 attributes developed in an artist-driven process.

Aesthetic Perspectives was developed by artists, allied funders, and evaluators who participated in the 2014–2015 Evaluation Learning Lab led by Animating Democracy at Americans for the Arts, in partnership with the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Arts x Culture x Social Justice Network. Activation of the framework is supported by Hemera Foundation.

The [Office of Public Art](#) (OPA)—based in the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council (GPAC) in Pittsburgh, PA—exercises a broad vision of public art by supporting artists working in a variety of community settings. Reflecting a movement in the public art field that is expanding beyond conventional commissioning of physical artworks to include socially engaged art, these residencies and temporary art commissions support artists engaged in creative practices to partner with libraries and immigrant service and environmental advocacy organizations. Together they are addressing issues that matter to the people these agencies serve. OPA has shown foresight by examining how to describe and assess the aesthetic dimensions of work that is often more about process than product and that embraces a wide range of aesthetics in order to be reflective of and meaningful to the diversity of Pittsburgh's artists and residents. This case study dives into how OPA used the [Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change](#) framework in three recent programs.

Aesthetic Perspectives aims to enhance understanding and evaluation of arts for change through 11 attributes developed in an artist-driven process. The attributes can be observed in socially engaged work in all artistic disciplines and are equally relevant to artistic processes and outcomes. They encompass both the external qualities and underlying values of such work. The attributes address the potency of creative expression to embody and motivate change in the context of community development, civic engagement, and justice goals. They are designed to inspire reflection, dialogue, and rich description through a variety of applications by artists, funding organizations, evaluators, students, educators, critics, presenters, programmers, curators, and audiences.

OPA's programs expand the range of possibilities for artists to engage communities through technical assistance, educational programs, commissions, and residencies in the public realm. Its approach to these programs is emblematic of trends in community-based art practice in the fields of public art, creative placemaking, and community development.



The artists, program managers, host organizations, and an evaluator who engaged the framework reflected on its value in their work. Many said that they only really understood the framework through applying it to their work and would have been helped by hearing about how others were using it.

Artists who work in the public realm within residencies and other community-engaged practices, evaluators who are engaged to assess these practices, and the commissioning agencies and funders who support this work will find resonances within this case study for how they might use the Aesthetic Perspectives framework.

This case study describes how OPA used the Aesthetic Perspectives framework and highlights some of the successes and lessons learned for other people looking to use it. This document provides some examples of the Aesthetic Perspectives framework in action. Of the three programs examined here, two used the framework within artist residencies. OPA's approach to artist residencies fosters collaboration between artists, hosts, and organizers without preconceived notions of the outcome and seeks to have entities work together to implement a creative project that engages communities. In each residency, the first phase is observation and learning. During this phase, artists familiarize themselves with their respective organizations by attending community events and staff meetings, observing classes, and finding other ways to learn about their new communities. The second phase is community engagement. Based on what the artists learned in the first phase, community needs are identified and artists begin to develop community engagement activities to address those needs. After gathering information, artists test additional ideas before moving on to the development and implementation phase of the creative project.

Above, left: Director Sallyann Kluz and Associate Director Divya Rao Heffley of the Office of Public Art. Photo: OPA

Above, right: Artists, organizational hosts, and OPA staff from the residencies with immigrant and refugee communities. Photo: OPA

As OPA has experimented with the Aesthetic Perspectives framework, it progressively has deepened its application of the framework and has found valuable dimensions of the attributes for its work.

Arts Excursions Unlimited

In its assessment of this artist residency program, OPA used the framework to

- formalize artistic goals for the purpose of ongoing evaluation and development.
- provide appropriate benchmarks for accountability and objectivity.
- serve as an adaptable and flexible evaluative tool.
- communicate about the impact of the program with the funder and a journalist.

Residencies with Immigrant and Refugee Communities

A cohort of four artists-in-residence used the framework to

- stimulate meaningful exchange and build common language in a learning community of artists working on different projects.
- develop creative projects with partner organizations.
- offer characteristics and language to describe creative projects and to build an ethos for work that deeply engages community.
- build capacity for crafting a narrative around the process of forming creative projects.

Environment, Health, and Public Art Initiative

In developing and launching this program, OPA used the framework to

- reflect on the organizational values expressed in this new program.
- develop guiding questions to establish shared values in a selection panel discussion.

Collaboratively Assessing and Formalizing an Innovative Program

Arts Excursions Unlimited, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh–Hazelwood



OPA staff meets with residency artists Edith Abeyta, Christine Bethea, and Molly Rice at the AEU Satellite Studio. Photo: OPA

The Office of Public Art (OPA) supports Edith Abeyta in an artist residency at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh–Hazelwood, where she developed the creative project [Arts Excursions Unlimited](#) (AEU). This residency is largely funded by The Heinz Endowments, with growing support from other area foundations and organizations.

AEU is a free monthly arts and cultural experience for residents in the Greater Hazelwood neighborhoods. This includes Hazelwood, Glen Hazel, and Glenwood. The program occasionally stretches these boundaries to Hays and Lincoln Place. Excursion locations are community determined and vary greatly from museums and galleries to steel mills in the Greater Pittsburgh region and beyond.

How was Aesthetic Perspectives used?

After the residency had been underway for some time and the AEU program already had taken shape, OPA commissioned an assessment of the program to inform its direction. OPA asked consultant Mary Navarro to conduct the assessment, to be shared with The Heinz Endowments and others. Janet Sarbaugh, vice president of creativity for The Heinz Endowments, suggested the Aesthetic Perspectives framework as a possible resource. She reflected that “arts funders need guideposts such as the Aesthetic Perspectives attributes, and at The Heinz Endowments we were immediately drawn to them. We move in a world increasingly ruled by quantitative measures, when we know in our hearts that quantitative and traditional measures favored by philanthropy don’t begin to touch the human and qualitative effects of arts experiences. And as arts funding has expanded to support socially engaged art, it’s so important to have language for and validation of the great benefits that community-based and civically engaged arts programs provide.” OPA had been seeking a suitable methodology to evaluate the outcomes for the program, which required a qualitative approach able to capture its nontraditional artistic process and products. Navarro and OPA agreed that the Aesthetic Perspectives framework was appropriate.

Navarro observed some activities and conducted a few stakeholder interviews before she and Abeyta read the framework and jointly selected several attributes that they felt fit the project. From then on, Navarro used the attributes to identify the themes that were showing up in her interviews and observations. She then used the attributes to organize the quotations and information from her interviews and observations in the evaluation report.

Abeyta experienced the assessment as an opportunity to reflect on the program with an objective outsider acting as a coach. As a result, she intentionally has emphasized the selected attributes in her planning and administration of the program. She continues to think about and use the attributes to guide her work and describe it to others.

“We move in a world increasingly ruled by quantitative measures, when we know in our hearts that quantitative and traditional measures favored by philanthropy don’t begin to touch the human and qualitative effects of arts experiences. . . . It’s so important to have language for and validation of the great benefits that community-based and civically engaged arts programs provide.”

Janet Sarbaugh,
Vice President of Creativity,
The Heinz Endowments



Left: AEU participants tour an exhibit at the August Wilson African American Cultural Center with curator Kilolo Luckett. Photo: Heather Mull

Selecting the relevant attributes helped to formalize Abeyta's goals and helped her observe and monitor changes in the program.

Highlighted Attributes



Disruption The idea of *disruption* provided a way to derive meaning from some of the friction that AEU participants experienced visiting local institutions. Abeyta knew it was happening but didn't think of it as *disruption* before reading the framework. Some institutions were not prepared to adequately and graciously host such a large and diverse group, and the participants felt rudely treated. The idea of *disruption* being an attribute of artistic excellence allowed Abeyta to frame this as a program feature that reveals inequities within the Pittsburgh arts ecosystem. Abeyta commented that "institutional *disruption*... happens everywhere we go. With the framework, I could identify it conceptually. How can we then take this idea of *disruption* and emphasize it more?" Since the assessment was completed, AEU participants have taken trips further afield to Washington, DC, where they noticed the inclusive practices of institutions that are prepared for large groups of multigenerational and multiracial visitors. The conceptual frame of *disruption* allowed them to compare their experiences in Pittsburgh to their experiences elsewhere and bring knowledge of more inclusive practices back to their community.



Cultural Integrity and Resourcefulness Navarro and Abeyta used these terms to describe the rootedness of participants in their neighborhoods and how the program respects their sense of cultural history in that place. In her interviews with participants, Navarro noted that *cultural integrity* kept coming up: "Everyone's cultural origins were from the neighborhood.... Everyone had a huge sense of the history of the neighborhood." Abeyta also interpreted *resourcefulness* as referencing her value of people as community assets. She noted that "there are a lot of resources in the neighborhood, but what those resources are isn't really recognized: connecting people, ideas, love, hustling." She felt that all of the attributes could be described as resources and could emphasize not just the economic and physical resources but the emotional resources of a group. AEU has created a cohesive group because of the engagement and support networks, which already existed in the community, that the participants have brought to the program. The community has pride and attachment to AEU and feels a sense of ownership that makes people want to be part of the decision-making and ensure that the project succeeds.

Successes and Lessons Learned

The attributes provided language for what Abeyta and the library were doing and what already was happening with AEU. Selecting the relevant attributes helped to formalize Abeyta's goals and helped her observe and monitor changes in the program. The program's start had been experimental and exploratory. The collaborative assessment process provided a moment to reflect and conceptualize the work as it had taken shape. Abeyta said, "It was the first time I got to think about it formally. The evaluation was a way to formalize what had been happening at an intense speed." Abeyta valued the evaluator/curator lens of the framework that enabled her to contextualize the intellectual component of her artmaking and keeps the attributes in mind as her residency continues.

The framework was an appropriate touchstone of accountability for an emerging and innovative program. Abeyta and Mary Ann McHarg, library branch manager of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh-Hazelwood, noted that having an outsider (not a funder or an artist) evaluate and reflect on AEU validated it and the work Abeyta was doing. Using the framework, noted McHarg, "makes the program accountable to something that is already there. It provides objective criteria for assessment." McHarg saw the framework as something to measure against when she talks with colleagues who are used to working with more formalized standards.

The framework provided a ready tool for an assessment with a short timeframe. With less than four months available, Navarro and Abeyta did not have to spend time inventing a conceptual framework. The Aesthetic Perspectives framework was adaptable and jargon-free (with the exception perhaps of the word *aesthetics*). Navarro felt that anyone could use it in a formal or informal evaluation: "you don't have to be a trained professional, just...have observational and listening skills."

Navarro also felt that the looseness of the definitions was good because it enabled Abeyta to see herself and AEU in the attributes, but she knows others may find the looseness a challenge. Initially, Navarro and Abeyta understood *resourcefulness* differently, but Navarro honored Abeyta's understanding in her assessment. The initial differences in their understandings are a reminder that evaluators must take time to come to an agreement about how the attributes are understood and should be applied to a given project.

The Aesthetic Perspectives document itself has been useful to help people understand AEU. Abeyta gave the document to journalist Tereneh Idia to use as background material when writing about AEU. Her article highlights aspects of the AEU program that exhibit attributes like *cultural integrity*, *resourcefulness*, and *openness*.¹ Navarro felt that the framework "makes it easier to explain the importance of [this work] and change in a human being" as being program impacts. McHarg has used the framework in talking to peers working in public libraries and in asking for funding internally. While The Heinz Endowments already was familiar with Aesthetic Perspectives, the use of the attributes in communicating the results of the assessment achieved renewed funding.

1. Tereneh Idia. "How residents can build an inclusive, justice-centered community in the Pittsburgh area." Public Source (Pittsburgh), March 12, 2019. www.publicsource.org/how-residents-can-build-an-inclusive-justice-centered-community-in-the-pittsburgh-area

Supporting a Cohort of Artists Developing Creative Projects

Residencies with Immigrant and Refugee Communities



Artist Lindsey Scherloun and community members from USB meet with Tereneh Idia, designer and creative director of Idia'Dega. Photo: OPA

In an effort to help a new wave of immigrants and refugees connect with Pittsburgh and its residents, the Office of Public Art (OPA), in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh's [Welcoming Pittsburgh](#) initiative, organized a cohort of four artists to work in residency with four host organizations that serve Pittsburgh newcomers.

- [Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh](#) with artist [Christine Bethea](#)
- [Literacy Pittsburgh](#) (formerly Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council) with artist [Mary Tremonte](#)
- [Northern Area Multi Service Center](#) with artist [Molly Rice](#)
- [United Somali Bantu of Greater Pittsburgh](#) with artist [Lindsey Peck Scherloun](#)

The residencies occur over a two-year period, 2017–2019. The first year allows artists to engage and identify community needs. During the second year, the artist and the selected community will develop a creative, collaborative project based on the first year of learning and engagement. Residency goals are to identify community needs, bring awareness to immigrant and refugee causes, and teach organizations how to pursue various artistic projects.

How was Aesthetic Perspectives used?

After the success of using the framework to formalize the goals of Arts Excursions Unlimited (AEU) and evaluate its work, OPA decided to introduce the framework earlier in the process of creative project development. Before the midpoint of these residencies, as the artists were testing out ideas for their creative projects, OPA shared with them the Aesthetic Perspectives framework. OPA asked the artists to discuss the framework at one of their quarterly meetings—attended by representatives from the host organizations, as well as staff from OPA and their partners—and then had the artists select attributes that were relevant to their evolving creative projects and refer to them in their project proposals.

Highlighted Attributes



Cultural integrity This attribute was of heightened importance for these artists because they all are working with communities whose culture is different from their own. “Working with the Bhutanese community,” said artist Christine Bethea, “that was one of the first things that came up. Keeping their culture and yet assimilating into the community.” The artists particularly wanted to avoid cultural appropriation when making creative work in collaboration with recently arrived communities. For example, Molly Rice’s creative project involves a series of public events featuring Afghan food, history, and culture, especially as it pertains to Afghan women’s experience and culinary skill. Rice has been

“Working with the Bhutanese community, [cultural integrity] was one of the first things that came up. Keeping their culture and yet assimilating into the community.”

Christine Bethea, Artist

very deliberate in setting up a process to check in regularly with the women whose stories will be presented to be sure that everything she researches and writes reflects their experience. Lindsey Scherloun described one of her project intentions as “collecting stories, cultural traditions, and contemporary cultural expressions together to enrich a sense of solidarity and cultural integrity among Somali Bantu in Pittsburgh and enrich connection of youth to stories of their own culture and history.” The end result will be a website and book that will serve as a resource for the Somali Bantu community and for organizations hoping to engage it.



Stickiness The artists referred to this attribute when thinking about what will live on after their projects were completed and how to plan for that during their residencies. Rice noted that “*stickiness* was another one besides *cultural integrity* that jumped out... because in doing this kind of work there have been a couple of times when I felt like I did not have the best exit strategy to allow things to continue when I was gone, and that’s not helpful for communities.” Part of Mary Tremonte’s project with Literacy Pittsburgh is to create lesson plans that integrate creative activities into language learning. Tremonte is collaboratively creating these lessons with the teachers so that they have the tools and relationships with arts resources in Pittsburgh to continue providing creative learning opportunities after the residency is over.

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Molly Rice, Artist

In designing the lessons, Tremonte is “working with all the logistics of time and space and transportation, and making that part as easy as possible for the teachers that are already doing this hard work of teaching and curriculum building, and for the students who have all the other challenges in their lives, making the time to come and be in the classroom and learn English.” Tremonte recognizes that she must be sensitive to the cultures of the school and their pressures in order to create lessons that will be repeated after she leaves.



Risk-taking The artists used this attribute to provide language for what the host organizations were doing—putting resources and time and energy into what was for most of them very uncharted territory. For some of these groups, the idea of an artist as a professional was new, and the idea of art itself as something that happens in public as opposed to in private was challenging. For instance, Bethea is creating a Youth Arts Team that is planning artistic workshops for peers and younger children, as well as learning TV production in order to create a pilot television show about the Bhutanese community. Bethea spoke about the risk the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh was taking by giving leadership to young people and entrusting them to communicate about Bhutanese culture to a larger audience. “It’s going to be on real TV, and they are letting these kids write it and produce it and direct it and interview for it,” said Bethea. “I really applaud their willingness to put this in the hands of kids.”



Top and middle: Women from the Pittsburgh Afghan refugee community prepare food for Khuraki. Photo: Jen Saffron

Bottom: Members of the BCAP Youth Arts Team train with PCTV to develop their own television program. Photo: BCAP

Successes and Lessons Learned

The Aesthetic Perspectives framework contributed to fostering a learning community among cohort members by creating a common language and supporting comparisons between projects. Each quarterly meeting for the cohort includes a report from the artists about what is happening and what challenges they face. The artists—together with OPA staff, partners, and host organization representatives—discuss those challenges and strategize how to meet them.

“We are all doing very different things, but when we are talking and we get stuck we can say well, what was your *disruption*. It gave us another level of conversation.”

Christine Bethea, Artist

The framework “was a way to bridge and translate how we talk about the work we are doing and how it works together.”

Mary Tremonte, Artist

The artists have seen how the attributes relate to each other’s projects and have found that helpful in understanding how to use them in their own work. Bethea shared, “We are all doing very different things, but when we are talking and we get stuck we can say well, what was your *disruption*. It gave us another level of conversation.” Before reading the framework, Rice had assumed they all had the same understandings; afterwards, she appreciated the need to talk about and make these values explicit among the cohort.

The attributes helped the artists articulate and discuss their goals. The artists appreciated being asked to use the attributes in writing their proposals because it helped them understand the framework. Rice noted that she had to apply the framework to find it useful: “To be asked to use it in your proposal, you have to really read it and understand it and apply it to the work that you’re doing.” The attributes helped the artists to anchor and articulate why they are doing what they are doing as shown in their proposals.

The attributes were helpful in discussions with host educational and social service organizations. Tremonte noted that “because I’m working with this educational organization and they are used to formatting things in a similar way even though the content is different..., [the framework] was a way to bridge and translate how we talk about the work we are doing and how it works together.” One host organization representative said that the attributes helped them understand the idea that art could be a profession and not a private activity.

Most of the artists felt that the attributes are geared more towards artists and commissioning agencies and funders and less for their host organizations. The artists found talking to the host organization different than to the larger community; the cultural gap between the language of the art world and the attributes and the language of these communities was too broad. The artists mused that the attributes could be used at the beginning of a project to surface what the community values in a collaboration with an artist and acknowledged that this process would involve more translation work.



Left: A Haft Sin table assembled by the women of Khuraki displaying seven items starting with the Dari letter 'sin' for Nauruz. Photo: Jennifer Saffron. Right: Students of Literacy Pittsburgh and their families learn silkscreening. Photo: Mary Tremonte

Some artists felt that the attributes resonated with their work immediately. They felt that attributes like *commitment* and *cultural integrity* speak to an ethic for the deep process of engagement. Upon first reading the framework, Tremonte felt that the framework was “about the process of doing public engagement in a really deep and real way, and not... without actually fully engaging with the community, but a way to think about the ethos of community engagement. A lot of this really hit the

nail on the head for me.” Tremonte and Scherloun found language for the work they already were doing. Scherloun highlighted *resourcefulness* as an example of an attribute that resonated in her work, “because I knew that I wanted to redistribute resources into the community.” She also particularly valued *risk-taking* as an attribute that gave her permission to push on the limits of the easy route and possibly fail.

Scherloun highlighted *resourcefulness* as an example of an attribute that resonated in her work, “because I knew that I wanted to redistribute resources into the community.”

Other artists initially were ambivalent about the framework. Despite the language in the framework that notes that it is neither a checklist nor standards to live up to, Rice initially felt that it was telling her how to make her work. This response is a reminder that those who want to use the framework need to be very careful about how they present the attributes, especially if they are being used by a commissioning agency or a funder. Scherloun noted, and Tremonte agreed, “how very hard some of [the attributes] are to accomplish.” The artists liked the idea of it as a buffet from which they could mix and match. Rice encouraged commissioning agencies to do “as much as you can do to communicate that the artists are to be trusted with our own work and this is to help you.” The artists also valued the way that OPA introduced the framework halfway through the residency, because it validated what they were already doing and thinking, instead of telling them what to do.



Artist Mary Tremonte (bottom center) with staff and students from Literacy Pittsburgh. Photo: Mary Tremonte

For artists whose work is less oriented towards process and more towards a product, the framework helps them build capacity to assess and build narrative around the process element of their work.

Most artists agreed that the attributes presented an ethos and a language for the work they were doing, even as they struggled to explain how they actually used the attributes or how the attributes shaped their work. Scherloun described the attributes she selected as “things to keep in mind. It never really seemed like there was a clear path from them or that I could look at this and say this is how I will do this project, but more that reading them put my mind in a different space.” As her project developed, she noticed how specific attributes were relevant to specific actions she was taking. The attributes ultimately provided language for the artists to describe their work and that they can use to communicate with funders and others in the future. Rice uses the term *stickiness* all the time now with her own theater students and with collaborators.

For artists whose work is less oriented towards process and more towards a product, the framework helps them build capacity to assess and build narrative around the process element of their work. The framework also can help project managers be better coaches as projects are developing. OPA Director Sallyann Kluz said that OPA staff mostly used the framework in the cohort gatherings, but she also plans to use it more in her one-on-one meetings with artists to check in on how they are progressing towards their artistic goals. Kluz noted that some artists might need different support to use the attributes in proposals, since some integrated it more into their proposals than others. The framework can help set realistic expectations about what can be accomplished and set guidelines for authentic community engagement.

Articulating Values for a New Program and Setting the Tone for a Selection Panel Discussion

Environment, Health, and Public Art Initiative



Community organizations, OPA, and the advisory group for the Environment, Health, and Public Art Initiative meet to review program goals. Photo: OPA

In 2019, the Office of Public Art (OPA) is launching the Environment, Health, and Public Art Initiative, a new program to partner artists with organizations that have identified environmental health issues as topics of concern and advocacy. The one-year pilot program will partner three organizations with artists in collaborations that will explore how artists can help to build support and advocacy for environmental health issues in the Pittsburgh region and catalyze change through temporary public artworks that are expected to be present in the community for one to two years. OPA will provide funding for the artwork and to the partner organizations to support outreach and engagement efforts. Artists and partner organizations will participate in bimonthly meetings with a project advisory committee from local environmental health programs. OPA also will provide project management support for the execution of the temporary artworks. At the time of writing this document, OPA has developed this program and selected the three partner organizations.

How was Aesthetic Perspectives used?

As OPA has found success in using the Aesthetic Perspectives framework to assess and guide creative projects in development, it thought about how the framework could assist staff to reflect on and develop guidelines for new programs and initiatives. OPA has used the framework to formulate a series of prompts to help it consider what it values and articulate the initiative's guiding principles. OPA also has referred to the attributes in its funding requests.

OPA Associate Director Divya Rao Heffley used the framework and the attributes to draft questions for the panel that would select the three partner organizations for the pilot year (see page 20). OPA shared the Aesthetic Perspectives framework and the guiding questions with the panel to get everyone in the same headspace and as a primer for the discussion about applications. It also used the guiding questions in its interviews with shortlisted organizations and will use them to give feedback to organizations that were not selected for this round of the initiative. Eventually, OPA will share the Aesthetic Perspectives framework with artists who will collaborate with the three partner organizations.

Establishing shared values can move the discussion beyond any individual's worldview or lived experience and put the responsibility for considering equity in everyone's hands, as opposed to the onus being on the people of color in the conversation.

Highlighted Attributes



Cultural integrity The guiding questions developed by OPA point to the organizations' connection to their communities through their physical locations and their commitment to community self-determination. OPA also looks for organizations that use multiple ways to engage the community, engage in power-sharing, and include leadership from the community of focus. These all define *cultural integrity* for organizations' community engagement processes.



Openness and Communal meaning OPA looks for organizations that are committed to plurality as evidenced by an emphasis on collaborative practices and a commitment to collective solutions and participation. These features of how an organization does its work highlight how to be open to influence and create programs that have shared communal meaning.



Disruption and Risk-taking The guiding questions ask whether an organization has a stated commitment to equity, access, and inclusion, but they also go further to look for evidence of that commitment in action. OPA is looking for partner organizations that are willing to embrace *disruption* and take risks to challenge and change the status quo.

Questions to Guide the Selection Process for Partner Organizations

Environment, Health, and Public Art Initiative

The Office of Public Art developed these questions for the selection panel to consider in their discussions about prospective local partner organizations' applications. See page 19 for further description of how these questions relate to the attributes.

Organization should be strongly connected to its community(ies) of focus.

- Does the organization have proximal strength? Is it located within its community of focus?
- Is the organization committed to community self-determination, i.e., finding multiple ways of engaging the community in conversations on the topic of concern?
- Does the organization embody power-sharing? Do staff, including upper management, and board include members from the community of focus?

Organization should be fully committed to plurality.

- Does the organization have past evidence of commitment to engaging in process?
- Does the organization reflect the use of collaborative practices that encourage collective solutions and participation?
- Does the organization employ practices that actively seek to encourage equity, access, and inclusion?

Organization should be willing to embrace disruption.

- Does the organization practice active and dynamic engagement through strategies that create change?
- Is the organization willing to take risks and challenge the status quo?

These following questions also helped the panel assess what was important in the overall composition of the partner organization cohort.

Cohort should represent diversity in focus area.

- Does the cohort exhibit a range of environmental and health issues? Does the cohort cover issues that impact both humans and environments or ecosystems?
- Does the cohort address multiple areas of focus, including water quality, air quality, and lead toxicity?

Cohort should represent diversity in service area.

- Does the cohort engage in activism and advocacy in diverse and disparate locations across the county?
- Does the cohort reflect multiple methods and types of engagement with different communities across the county?

[In using the framework as a backdrop,] “you feel the dynamic in the room shift and people are pausing, maybe checking their privilege, not always being the first person to speak.”

Divya Rao Heffley,
Associate Director,
Office of Public Art

Early Successes and Lessons Learned

Prior to reviewing applications, the guiding questions informed by the Aesthetic Perspectives framework stimulated thoughtful conversation between the selection panel and OPA by establishing shared values and language. The conversation turned to the responsibility of established legacy organizations to step aside and make space for those that have had less access to resources. The framing discussion rooted in the guiding questions gave everyone permission to talk about these core issues. Establishing shared values can move the discussion beyond any individual's worldview or lived experience and put the responsibility for considering equity in everyone's hands, as opposed to the onus being on the people of color in the conversation. Heffley noted that she would like to see more successes like they had in using the framework as a backdrop for this discussion, “where you feel the dynamic in the room shift and people are pausing, maybe checking their privilege, not always being the first person to speak.” The guiding questions were not a rubric or checklist in the subsequent discussion of the applications, but a shared point of reference.

Use of the attribute *disruption* in the guiding questions helped the panel to value this aspect of the applications and to identify organizations that are the right fit for this program. In the applications, OPA observed that organizations articulated the potential for *disruption* in working with an artist in their own words without being prompted to do so in the application guidelines.

Reflecting on the attributes has prompted OPA to consider how its organizational values are expressed beyond the new program guidelines. In the Environment, Health, and Public Art Initiative's development phase, OPA began thinking about how it is modeling power-sharing as an organization. Since OPA has decided to value *risk-taking* among organizations and artists, it has reflected on how it should communicate that value when asking funders to support this work.

Themes and Takeaways

It takes time and consideration to get inside the framework and work through its relevance for a particular situation. The Aesthetic Perspectives framework really comes alive when it is applied to a particular artistic project. Again and again, the artists and OPA staff talked about how the attributes are not a checklist. OPA deepened its relationship with the framework over

three different applications and is continuing to explore situations for its use. Artists and program managers alike described the attributes as creating a headspace that helped to guide their work and to foster shared values among groups of people working together.

The framework is particularly useful for describing the process of engaging with a community and the qualities of excellent community practice.

The attributes and their definitions are broad enough to be meaningful in a range of creative projects. OPA's experience with the

Aesthetic Perspectives documents highlights the flexible nature of the framework and of the attributes themselves. Many of the same attributes rose to the top in the discussions about each of the three programs. While these are all programs supporting artists working with communities to catalyze positive social or civic change, the settings and shape of the creative projects are significantly different. *Cultural integrity*, for instance, was defined in terms of how environmental organizations engage their communities, how artists can collaborate to make creative projects with recently arrived communities, and how a residency in a public library can recognize and value the cultural and personal resources within the surrounding community.

The framework is particularly useful for describing the process of engaging with a community and the qualities of excellent community practice. Edith Abeyta's residency did not produce a traditional artistic product, and although some of the artists working with immigrant and refugee-serving organizations will produce stand-alone artistic works, the framework was applied in the development phase of their projects. This means that some of the attributes, like *sensory experience*, were less relevant. Those looking for an example of how the framework can help to describe completed public artworks and engagement programs might look at *Art as Infrastructure: An Evaluation of Civic Art and Public Engagement in Four Communities in South Los Angeles County*, an evaluation report about a public art initiative involving four Los Angeles County neighborhood parks and libraries.²

2. Susannah Laramée Kidd. *Art as Infrastructure: An Evaluation of Civic Art and Public Engagement in Four Communities in South Los Angeles County*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Arts Commission, May 2018. www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/lacac_artasinfrastructure_report_2018_-_web_1.pdf

The framework is a promising tool for organizations looking to deepen diversity, equity, inclusion, and access practices.

None of the attributes explicitly use these terms, but they are foundational values underpinning the framework. The attributes describe approaches to reaching these goals and offer opportunities to place those values at the center in practical ways. OPA felt the framework would benefit all organizations, especially white legacy organizations that have a mandate to connect with communities but haven't figured out what authentic and excellent practice looks like. Organizations that want to go beyond lip service to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access goals and want to make significant change, but don't know how, could start with these attributes to follow through on these goals.

The framework is most apt for use among artists and commissioning agencies, but also has promise for use with community members directly. While none of the artists or program managers brought the framework or its language to engage with community members directly, they were intrigued by the possibility of using it in conversations at the beginning of a project. Discussion of the attributes might surface what a community values in engaging with an artist. The attributes could be presented individually or in another form to spark conversations about how artists can collaborate most effectively with communities to bring about change. However, the attributes would probably need some reframing or translation, since the language of the Aesthetic Perspectives document itself resonates more deeply with artists and commissioning agencies.

Stakeholders in Arts for Change will benefit from these [Companion guides](#) for Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change, published by Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts.

Curator Companion

by Sara Reisman

Educator Companion

by Bob Leonard

Evaluator/Researcher Companion

by Susannah Laramée Kidd

Funder Companion

by M. Christine Dwyer

Performing Artist Companion

by Mark Valdez

Teaching Artist Companion

by Dennie Palmer Wolf and Jeannette Rodríguez Pineda



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Laramée Kidd holds a PhD in Anthropology of Religion and Literature and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Emory University. Her academic research focused on how religious communities and individuals make meaning through everyday imaginative and aesthetic practice—like reading in discussion groups—and she continues to be interested in the interplay between the social and aesthetic dimensions of meaning-making.



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