



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Dallas and Buffalo Named Next ‘Community Innovation Lab’ Cities by EmcArts

Community-based projects to use creative practice to drive social change

New York, N.Y. – EmcArts is excited to announce Dallas, TX and Buffalo, NY as the next two cities to establish Community Innovation Labs (CIL), a nationwide program that addresses social issues by integrating artists with community-based change efforts. Following pilot Labs in Winston-Salem, NC and Providence, RI, and a national, competitive open call, both Dallas and Buffalo were selected to participate based on the significant work and social infrastructure already in place in each community.

By being deeply embedded in their respective communities and bringing together a diverse cross-section of stakeholders, including city agencies, community organizers, business leaders, artists, cultural organizations, and nonprofit service providers, the Labs are designed to enable community stakeholders to build new connections and address complex challenges at the system level. The goal of the Lab program is to create long-lasting, well-connected networks in each city that empower communities to leverage artistic practices to bring about social change and advance progress on important civic issues.

In late 2016, both Dallas and Buffalo Labs began a 15-month process to address their self-determined community challenges. “In this time of increased uncertainty and deepening inequities, traditional linear planning is not a sufficient response; a coalition of community stakeholders coming together to bring creative experimental approaches to persistent complex challenges is powerful and radical,” said Richard Evans, president of EmcArts. “Community Innovation Labs invite the cultural sector into the change process, priming the environment for creative collaboration. Building on our work in the pilot cities, EmcArts will work alongside the remarkable leaders and organizers in these two vibrant communities to advance a shared understanding of the system and to generate and rehearse new strategies for change that can be effective and long term.”

Buffalo, NY

Convened by Open Buffalo, PUSH Buffalo, and Ujima Theatre Company, Lab members will explore the core question: “**How can we use artistic practices to encourage community participation in a just transition to a new economy that uplifts and supports people, place, and planet?**” With lead local funding by Open Buffalo, the Buffalo Lab will examine the intersection of economic practices, racism, and climate change, and seek to discover a community economy model rooted in values of equity and sustainability.

“Buffalo, New York’s second-largest city, is in the midst of rising economic inequities, where a select few are finding prosperity and most continue to fall behind. Without creative, innovative, and inclusive solutions, the gap between the haves and have-nots in our city will only increase,”

relayed Franchelle Hart, executive director of Open Buffalo. “The Community Innovation Lab offers us creative methodologies to tackle challenging work across sectors and tear down historic silos and segregation.”

Dallas, TX

The Dallas Lab is convened by Southern Methodist University’s (SMU) Meadows School of the Arts through its arts and social justice initiative, Ignite/Arts Dallas, and by Big Thought, the Embrey Family Foundation, Make Art with Purpose (MAP), and SMU’s Hunt Institute. Using nutritional access as the hub to connect educational, economic, and cultural opportunities for the community, Dallas Lab participants will investigate the core question: **“How can we work collectively to ensure equitable access to healthy food and nourishment for and with all the citizens of Dallas, using arts, creativity, and food itself as catalysts?”** The Dallas Lab receives local funding from the Embrey Family Foundation and SMU Meadows School. Representatives from some 30 Dallas organizations and independent artists are participating in the Lab.

“By bringing together stakeholders from all corners of Dallas, the Lab has already started meaningful conversations about how economic justice and economic security affect equitable food access,” said Clyde Valentin, director of SMU Meadows’ Ignite/Arts Dallas. “We are thrilled to be a partner in this initiative, which aligns so well with our own commitment to creating more just and vibrant communities by building connections between our students, the artistic community, and the city of Dallas.”

Lab Principles

Working in ensembles, Lab members from both cities will initiate new arts-based strategies for change over the course of 2017 with the support of \$15,000 in grant funds. Funded in part by the Kresge Foundation, EmcArts’ Community Innovation Labs bring together learning from the fields of social innovation and creative placemaking. The process is undergirded by four key principles:

1. a focus on building dense, cross-sector networks
2. a willingness to slow down in order to see systems as a whole
3. an ability to harvest unique contributions from artists and cultural workers
4. a willingness to let go of linear planning in favor of experimental learning

By design, each Lab fosters a deep commitment to collaboration, learning, and experimentation. In each city, dense local networks of cultural and civic organizations, leaders, and organizers are leveraged to build on existing capacity, reveal connections, and enable sustainable change efforts.

To learn more about EmcArts’ Community Innovation Labs framework and Round One cities (Winston-Salem, NC and Providence, RI), visit the EmcArts program webpage [here](#).

ABOUT EMCARTS

EmcArts is a nationally recognized service organization for innovation and adaptive change. We work alongside people, organizations, and communities as they take on their most complex challenges. Through our rigorously designed and facilitated workshops, coaching, and intensive labs, we create the space and conditions to test innovative strategies and build cultures that embrace change. Our practice is deeply influenced by the artistic process, which we believe has a unique power to unlock entrenched assumptions and open up new ways of seeing.

ABOUT KRESGE FOUNDATION

The Kresge Foundation is a \$3.5 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America's cities through grantmaking and investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services, and community development in Detroit. In 2014, the Board of Trustees approved 408 awards totaling \$242.5 million. That included a \$100-million award to the Foundation for Detroit's Future, a fund created to soften the impact of the city's bankruptcy on pensioners and safeguard cultural assets at the Detroit Institute of Arts. A total \$138.1 million was paid out to grantees over the course of the year. In addition, their Social Investment Practice made commitments totaling \$20.4 million in 2014. For more information, visit kresge.org.

ABOUT SMU MEADOWS SCHOOL

The Meadows School of the Arts, formally established at SMU in 1969 and named in honor of benefactor Algur H. Meadows, is one of the foremost arts education institutions in the United States. The Meadows School offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in advertising, art, art history, arts management and arts entrepreneurship, corporate communication and public affairs, creative computation, dance, film and media arts, journalism, music, and theatre. The goal of the Meadows School of the Arts, as a comprehensive educational institution, is to prepare students to meet the demands of professional careers. The Meadows School is a leader in developing innovative outreach and community engagement programs, challenging its students to make a difference locally and globally by developing connections between art, entrepreneurship, and change. The Meadows School of the Arts is also a convener for the arts in North Texas, serving as a catalyst for new collaborations and providing critical industry research. For more information, visit [here](#).

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