



Juxtaposition Arts

2013 Bush Prize Winner

We want to change minds about the ability and potential of youth, particularly youth of color, to contribute to solving the tough problems that we are all dealing with – beginning first within the community. When I say change minds, I mean change the minds of young people themselves, of people here in the community, of people outside of the community, and then even broader still.

– DeAnna Cummings, Juxtaposition Arts executive director

What is the Bush Prize?

The Bush Prize is an annual award that honors and supports innovative organizations with a track record of making great ideas happen. Winners receive public recognition for their work and creative capital to use however they choose. The Bush Prize is part of Bush Foundation’s Community Innovation initiative, which inspires and supports communities to create innovative solutions to their challenges. Each year, the Foundation selects Bush Prize winners from Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and the 23 Native nations that share the same geography. Juxtaposition Arts (JXTA) was one of nine winners of the inaugural 2013 Bush Prize.

To learn how JXTA made its community innovation happen, Wilder Research conducted a group interview with Executive Director DeAnna Cummings, Artistic Director Roger Cummings, and Development and Strategy Director Betsy Altheimer. We also interviewed three organizational stakeholders. Additionally, Wilder Research reviewed internal documents provided by JXTA, including demographic information of JXTA artists and youth served in 2013, an evaluation framework from 2013, and multiple articles describing JXTA’s history and work.

What is Juxtaposition Arts?

Based in Minneapolis, Juxtaposition Arts is a youth-focused community development and social enterprise arts organization. DeAnna and Roger Cummings, along with Peyton Russell, started JXTA in 1995. JXTA’s leaders and their stakeholders describe JXTA as an action-oriented organization that continually takes calculated risks.

First of all, we just started doing the work. That is a part of the culture of JXTA. We didn't wait to get a grant to do it. We just started doing the work. –DeAnna Cummings, executive director

JXTA strives to bring racial equity to the Twin Cities through an arts, design, and community development framework, which they accomplish by offering arts skill development and training to K-12 students, including opportunities for some high school students to apprentice on professional-level arts and design contracts; delivering equitable city planning and urban design education to K-12, undergraduate, and graduate students; providing studio spaces to artists of color; place-making in their community; and providing opportunities for civic engagement for their community members regarding decisions that affect their neighborhood. JXTA envisions their students entering the workforce as innovators and problem-solvers, equipped with necessary skills and connections to actively participate in achieving their communities' goals.

What is JXTA's community innovation?

JXTA's innovation is an asset-based and community-informed approach to community development, which includes actively seeking the input of community members traditionally left out of decision-making processes. This asset-based and community-informed approach is exemplified by a partnership with the University of Minnesota Department of Landscape Architecture called "ReMix: Creating Places for People on West Broadway." ReMix has three components. First, JXTA and UMN offer joint city planning and urban design classes to JXTA youth and UMN graduate students to diversify the design and planning professions, as well as train future design, planning, and policy professionals on the equity impacts of their work. One stakeholder mentioned how JXTA's efforts seek to change the field of urban design: "For success in urban design, typically if you design well, rent goes up and people are moved out. But we're interested in how to use urban design to help the people who live there now." Second, by offering arts training and education, JXTA supports youth to make visible, physical changes to their physical surroundings that reflect the diverse history, values, and aspirations of people who live and work there. Third, ReMix connects community members to city officials regarding decisions that affect their community.

JXTA views the perspective of each member of their community as valuable, which results in JXTA routinely reaching out to individuals in their community for their input and ideas. For a project focusing on the redesign of bus stops in their community, JXTA played dominoes with those waiting at the bus stop across the street from their building, asking community members about their desires and concerns regarding the bus stop and public transit in general. Roger Cummings commented, "We were playing dominoes on the corner to figure out how we can make the bus stop and the corridor better. We wanted to know what people thought about how to make it better." JXTA leadership highlighted that this type of community engagement (i.e., community engagement that is convenient for community members and focuses on individuals from all facets of a community) is not usually included as a part of traditional urban design or redesign projects.

Some context for JXTA's community innovation

Understanding the context in which a community innovation happened is important to a holistic and informed understanding of that innovation. A key context for JXTA's work is their geographic location in Minneapolis. JXTA leadership and stakeholders noted a number of ways in which their geographic location affects their work, with stakeholders specifying that racism and racial disparities in Minneapolis hinder, as well as provide an impetus for, JXTA's work.

[JXTA] did a beautiful mural on the front of one of their buildings. They got a call from the City telling them that their building had been tagged and that they will need to paint over it or be fined. I've heard comments of thinly veiled bigotry, such as, 'It makes the neighborhood look bad.' Really what they're saying is, 'It makes it look African American.' Minneapolis is a shitty place to be for a person of color. –Stakeholder interview

Additionally, respondents criticized the culture of “Minnesota Nice” when asked about the geographic context in which JXTA works, noting that it is not conducive to community change. As will be described later in this case study, JXTA's “hard critique” approach to working with youth and their partners is partly a reaction to the “Minnesota Nice” culture.

In Minnesota, we are always trying to have things be nice and easy, that change happens spontaneously because everybody showed up and was part of the goodness that is our Minnesota culture. Real innovation is fraught with conflict. –Roger Cummings

The city planning, urban design, and policy fields are additional contexts in which JXTA is making meaningful change. As mentioned earlier, JXTA is innovating in the field of urban design by shifting the end result of “successful” design away from increased housing and rental costs, and, instead, striving to improve a community for its current residents. Specifically, DeAnna mentioned shifting policy creation by changing communication between policymakers and constituents to include a broader section of city residents.

We are trying to change the paradigm of how policy is created, how you influence policy, ways in which community members can be engaged, and how the voice of community members is reflected in broad civic decision-making processes. –DeAnna Cummings

Regarding the youth arts field, JXTA leadership and stakeholders mentioned the limited lens through which youth arts organizations are often viewed. In particular, JXTA is sometimes mislabeled as a youth arts organization, which is problematic because the label misses the critical social enterprise and community development components of JXTA's work.

People weren't ready for an arts organization to have a strong message about social issues and urban development. –Stakeholder interview

How did JXTA bring about its community innovation?

Bush Foundation awarded the Bush Prize to Juxtaposition Arts in recognition of the organization's demonstrated history of using community problem-solving to bring about innovative solutions. The purpose of this case study is to learn more about how JXTA facilitates this problem-solving in their community. The Bush Prize celebrates organizations that use inclusive, collaborative, and resourceful problem-solving processes to bring about innovation. The Bush Foundation Community Innovation initiative defines these processes as:

- **Inclusive.** Meaningfully engage key stakeholders – thoughtfully identifying those needed to create the intended change and, whenever possible, including those directly affected by the problem
- **Collaborative.** A true joint effort, with partners willing to share ownership and decision-making as they pursue an innovation together
- **Resourceful.** Using existing resources and assets creatively to make the most of what a community already has

Listening to their community

Juxtaposition Arts views the ideas and experiences of their community as key resources for their work. The goal of JXTA's community engagement efforts is to gather community opinions and perceptions in order to make community changes that reflect the experiences and values of their constituents. For example, the process that JXTA uses to gather community input when designing murals positions community members as key stakeholders in how their environment is shaped.

When we do a mural on the side of the building, we want the mural to reflect the values of the neighborhood. And so we go into [neighborhood] businesses – a catering business, a corner store, a dry-cleaning business, a coffee shop, a candy business, a contracting firm – and ask them what good things that they see and feel in the neighborhood and the challenges [of the neighborhood]. ... That creates ownership. –Roger Cummings

Juxtaposition Arts develops participatory ways to engage a wide variety of community members in decision-making processes that have an effect on their community. In one instance, JXTA created mobile, bicycle-based chess boards and asked community members about city planning efforts while playing chess. These types of community engagement activities exemplify JXTA's value of engaging constituents from all facets of their community in decisions that have an effect on their community. As Roger said, "People who aren't traditionally involved in the civic processes, we bring them into the mix." DeAnna offered an example of when a Minneapolis city planner sought JXTA's assistance in engaging youth in a city planning process:

The city planner said they didn't have enough youth voices and they wanted to get more young people involved. And we said, 'But you also don't have enough people of color, working people, unemployed people, or people who are homeless, and so we'd like to help you engage a whole range of constituents.' –DeAnna Cummings

Youth-focused, collaboratively driven

JXTA's approach to interacting with youth involved in their programs results in meaningful relationships between JXTA staff and youth participants. In particular, JXTA leadership and stakeholders noted the tremendous amount of respect with which JXTA staff treat youth participants and their artistic interests. DeAnna framed this respect in the following way: "We support young people to accomplish what they want for themselves and their families."

From day one they believe something about you and what you can do that you may not even believe in yourself. And so that kind of optimism and positivity and almost prophetic-ness is kind of intoxicating. ... They speak into the possibilities of your life and help you to see a better future for your work and for you as a person. –Stakeholder interview

When asked about how youth contributed to decision-making, DeAnna and Roger stated that JXTA is youth-focused, not youth-driven; young artists are involved in JXTA's decision-making processes, but they do not drive the organization. Instead, DeAnna noted that JXTA is "intergenerational-driven," highlighting the benefits of youth and adults offering their distinct strengths and experiences to decision-making processes. JXTA leadership also specified that they are a collaborative organization – considering input from JXTA staff, JXTA youth, community members, artists, and partner organizations alike.

[Youth] often have a lot of good ideas, but they don't have the experience to execute it. It's important for adults and youth to work together because [adults] have the experience, connections, resources, determination, and long-term commitment to this work. –DeAnna Cummings

As a testament to the value that JXTA sees in youth as contributors to JXTA's work, JXTA offers an apprentice program for select youth, in which youth work on professional-level art and design contracts with staff and are compensated for their time and efforts. Additionally, DeAnna, Roger, and all stakeholders mentioned that while JXTA empowers youth to collaborate with staff, they also have high expectations for young people's ideas and creative products – a point of view that is informed by the inequity that JXTA seeks to change, according to one stakeholder.

I remember one of the instructors was like, 'We're going to give you a hard critique. We're not going to go soft on you; not everyone gets a blue ribbon because that's not the real world. We don't live in a world where everybody is first place.' –Stakeholder interview

Intentional partnerships

Open and honest dialogue, as well as careful scrutiny of potential partnerships, frames JXTA's collaboration with organization partners. JXTA looks for specific criteria when partnering with other organizations, such as quick thinking and the willingness to engage in conversations about sensitive subjects. DeAnna described a process of short-term contract-based partnerships which act as trial partnership periods. The caution with which JXTA approaches partnerships is reflected by a stakeholder's comment regarding the benefits of JXTA *not* partnering with some organizations, particularly those with which they do not share similar values. Temporary partnerships offer a clear way out if JXTA or their partners deem the partnership unsatisfactory.

There are huge values for JXTA to be collaborative and inclusive, but I think there's also a huge value in them being exclusive and not letting people in and not partnering with some organizations. –Stakeholder interview

Without honesty, authenticity, and willingness to embrace conflict and tension, you're not going to go further upstream to deal with what actually causes the problems we're trying to solve. I think that [JXTA's] ability to be honest is innovative, and, in Minnesota, it's maybe more innovative than in other parts of the country. You can't talk about racial disparities without talking about race, and Minnesotans suck at talking about race. Their ability to go into those hard conversations confidently and honestly is hugely valuable. So who do they choose to partner with? It's the people they can have those conversations with. –Stakeholder interview

Utilizing assets in their community

JXTA's leadership identified aspects of their physical location, including their presence on a major corridor, as resources for their work. For example, in partnership with the City of Minneapolis Public Works department, JXTA participated in the 2014 Parklet Pilot Program. A parklet is a temporary expansion of an existing sidewalk designed for public recreational use. The parklet acted as a point of interest for community members and is an example of JXTA creatively using their community's physical assets to bring neighbors together in an area where on-street seating is rare.

JXTA's physical campus, our location on the major corridor, and the fact that we own a lot of real estate – those are assets. –DeAnna Cummings

The other day I was at JXTA and they had a parklet. I love it because it totally throws people off. It's this nice table set and these umbrellas and people asked if they could sit there and we said, 'Yes, you can!' –Stakeholder interview

Additionally, JXTA uses its real estate capital to offer spaces for displaying and creating art to their constituents, such as an indoor gallery space for young people's art and cooperative artist studios for community artists. Traditional art spaces like this, one stakeholder noted, did not exist in their community before JXTA created them.

One example is the cooperative artist space. When they acquired this building there were people who really questioned the ability to find artists of color on the North Side. Did they really exist or were they a unicorn? That space has become an incubator for all sorts of creativity and innovation as a result of those that now occupy that space. Putting that kind of space on the North Side is something nobody else would have done. –Stakeholder interview

Leadership that fosters a culture of innovation

We asked interview respondents about how JXTA’s leadership facilitates community innovation. Findings from interviews highlighted that JXTA’s leadership exhibits two seemingly ‘juxtaposed’ values:

1. Valuing collaboration and disagreement in decision-making, a characteristic that one stakeholder noted as indicative of a healthy creative environment
2. Being confident in their own viewpoint and the value that they bring to their work

If you’re in a meeting and your two bosses are having their own disagreement, that can be one of two things. That can look like division within the ranks or it can look like a healthy creative environment. And I think at JXTA it looks like a healthy creative environment. ... It’s like having a kid trying to tell Sam Ero-Phillips, who is an architect and a Fulbright Fellow who works with JXTA, that his design looks funny. That’s a healthy creative environment. –Stakeholder interview

I wish I would have known sooner to stand on what I know to be true. We’ve had tons of funders and consultants over the years giving advice and recommendations. I wish earlier on in my career I would have had the confidence to stand behind what I know about how to be most effective in doing the work of Juxtaposition Arts. –DeAnna Cummings

Summary

In addition to JXTA's case study, Wilder Research produced similar case studies for all 2013 Bush Prize winners and a synthesis report of key findings. These reports can be found on Bush Foundation's website. A primary learning from the synthesis analysis is that community innovation is an iterative process and that repeated risk-taking is necessary to achieve community innovation. Despite the unknowns inherent in community innovation, Juxtaposition Arts forged a new and effective path for solving a problem in its community and has proven itself an innovative leader in the fields of community development, city planning, urban design, and youth arts.

Wilder Research

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451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700

www.wilderresearch.org



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For more information

For more information about this report, contact
Ryan Evans at Wilder Research, 651-280-2677.

Authors: Ryan Evans

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