

Artists as Change Agents within Complexity

Orienting practicing artists as agents of complex community change

As of August 2, 2018

Why is this work important now?

These days, our neighborhoods and communities are complex systems in which many individuals and agencies interact, resulting in unexpected behaviors alongside entrenched repeating patterns. In this kind of unpredictable and swirling context, traditional approaches to planning for change simply aren't up to the task.

To work effectively at the community or neighborhood level nowadays we must navigate the complex dynamics at play, and bring an experimental mindset to learning our way into "next practices" for a brighter shared future. Artists can contribute uniquely to these efforts, not only through arts-based community activities but also by offering their embodied knowledge of how to operate in complexity and leading groups to discover their own creative solutions. Bringing these artistic skills to community development work forms part of what is now called "creative placemaking." This new approach is rapidly catching on, but there's still a long way to go in shifting attitudes and building the capacity to think and act differently when the social conditions are complex.

Our immersion in the methodologies of navigating complex systems suggests to us that extraordinary parallels exist between the complex forms of understanding and processing inherent in system-level work and the essential processes that artists use in the gestation and rehearsal of creative work. The roots of *artistic process intelligence* and of *the dynamics of complexity* are similar, but have not until now been connected, nor intentionally deployed in managing complex system dynamics, limiting the scope and depth of creative placemaking work. Few dispute that artistic experiences and creative participation offer unique gateways of entry to deep human engagement, advanced thinking and emotional transformation. Nonetheless, these tracks have not yet converged, and the enormous potential of this reservoir of imaginative energy and capacity for systemic change remains largely untapped.

What is the program about?

Our new workshop series for *Artists as Change Agents within Complexity* focuses on how change efforts in conditions of social complexity can be re-imagined as artistic processes – not how artists could better contribute side-bar activities alongside systems analysis and strategy design, but ***how the creative assets artists can bring to developmental processes could become central to the complex change work itself.*** Such a methodological breakthrough would vastly expand the applicability of artists' practices to change processes at the organizational and community levels. If this could be achieved, the potential for artists to play much larger roles in a wide variety of community change efforts could finally be realized.

The interactive workshops focus on five artistic capabilities which our research suggests are pivotal to effective change in complexity. The program provides unique capacity-building support for local artists committed to work on community change – opportunities to slow down, reflect and learn how to make real progress in changing the dynamics of complex systems through artistic practice. At the same time, the program offers the opportunity to local partner organizations to consider how they might best support the complex change work of artists in the community going forward.

What are the five artistic capabilities?

Our research has identified a core set of five capabilities that are vital to change in conditions of complexity, and which are also inherent in many artistic processes:

1. **Being able to work with the surprises of inter-dependence and unpredictability**
(recognizing and responding to the dynamics of complex systems)
2. **Being able to weave new networks and make imaginative and unexpected connections**
(connecting like-minded people across difference)
3. **Being able to let go of advance planning in favor of experimentation and discovery**
(using repeated small experiments to discover new insights and possibilities)
4. **Being able to make generative use of sustained uncertainty**
(making active use of multiple simultaneous approaches to plumb unexpected strategic potential)
5. **Being able to rehearse new pathways and dispassionately let go of our favorite ideas**
(amplifying and elaborating promising experiments, while closing others down)

We believe that strengthening these capabilities through repeated and extended artistic processes will uniquely empower groups of people pursuing systemic change in conditions of social complexity to generate novel and effective new pathways with momentum for achieving a better world.

Who is this for and what are the expected benefits?

Overall, the program has two aims: To advance local artists in contributing as leaders of system change in their communities, and to foster local support networks for artists in this and related work.

Each program is intended as a developmental exchange between EmcArts faculty and a group of up to 10 locally-based artists, each having at least five years of professional experience, who are interested in further developing their artistic practice as a central methodology for systemic change in their local community. Each participating artist will receive an honorarium of \$250 a day for each of the four sessions. Breakfast and lunch will also be provided.

Artists who will likely benefit the most from this work are those with an established practice, in any discipline, that already extends beyond the studio or rehearsal room. We seek artists who are deeply interested in community-based artmaking, and who have experience of facilitating a wide variety of different groups in creative processes. Those who self-identify as teaching artists will likely be particularly attracted to this work – the passion of a pioneering teaching artist includes a high commitment to the kind of curious exploration and inquiry that the program will demand. It will help if your practice has a performative element to it, and you relish artistic interaction with others, adapting your creative approach to different situations.

The program will also involve a local partner, who will provide or develop the necessary funding match. We see the local partner as an active player in each program. Knowing the local artistic scene better than EmcArts, they will lead in the recruitment of applicants to the program (reaching out to, and hopefully beyond, known local networks). EmcArts will orient local partners to the program, and engage with them in considering how best to support artists to play wider roles in leading adaptive change in complex social systems. Local partners are strongly encouraged to take a full part in the series, with up to two people working alongside the local artists. Participation by hosts deepens the understanding of this pioneering work, enhancing the effectiveness of projects that ensue.

What is the program structure?

Each series consists of four whole-day sessions over 2 to 4 months. The five capabilities central to systems change form the backbone of the Workshop Series. The workshops will orient artists to the five capabilities, and explore the use each artist can make of them in a community context. Our aim is to facilitate an exchange and dialogue with local artists in order to find and develop the meeting points between their existing practices and these complexity-related capabilities.

In the Workshop Series, artists and EmcArts faculty will together explore how the five capabilities can be developed and consolidated among champions of change in local communities, as assets they can carry forward with them in their work. This means artful repetition and rehearsal of each capability across the three primary stages of a complex change process: First, understanding the counter-intuitive dynamics of complex systems, and the roles participants play in sustaining the status quo; second, the design and carrying out of multiple small experiments with radical intent to research potentially divergent and original strategies for change; and thirdly, rapid learning from experimentation in order to discover and execute more substantial prototypes for lasting change in how local systems operate.

The workshops will be paired. Workshops 1 and 2 will take place on consecutive days; Workshops 3 and 4 will be held back-to-back approximately 6 weeks later. These two intensives (each of which will start on a Friday evening, then run all day on Saturday and Sunday) will allow the participating artists to exchange and absorb new ideas in the first two gatherings, and then prepare a response through their artistic practice in which to engage other participants in the second pair of workshops. Here is the anticipated outline of the structure of the work together:

Workshops 1 and 2: Design (provocation)

- Overview of the whole arc of this work, including related histories, clarification of terms, and consideration of the ways this work connects to and reaches beyond most teaching artist/community artist/social practice artist opportunities
- Introduce the five target capacities that teaching artists focus on to foster innovative success in complex social change
- Engage with the key dynamics of social complexity, and explore the teaching artist's opportunities to disrupt entrenched patterns and activate discovery of innovative alternatives

Between the two workshop weekends, participants (working in pairs) will sketch the design of an original workshop series they could imagine leading that addresses complex local issue. Facilitators will also be available for consultation during this time.

Workshops 3 and 4: Testing (response)

- Artists will test out ideas from their emerging workshop series on their feet, with colleagues as participants and detailed feedback for ongoing growth
- Reflection on key challenges, common pitfalls, examples of success, detailed self-assessment and individualized learning plans
- Artists will produce a final culminating body of work – a potential implementation of the new approach to guiding complex social change that they have explored and developed
- Closing reflections on the application of this work to complex local challenges

How is the program funded?

Each series costs \$55,000, to cover EmcArts fees and expenses, local venue and catering, and honoraria to participating artists. The Kresge Foundation is providing \$30,000 per Series (for up to four Series). The balance of \$25,000 for each Series will be provided by one or more local funding partners in each community.

What is the timeline?

Workshop dates for 2019 are approximate, and will be worked out in conversation with host communities.

- October 15th, 2018: **Letters of Interest** due from host communities
- November 8th: Notifications of acceptance for communities
- November 29th: Host/funding partner agreements signed
- November 30th: Application guidelines released for artists to participate
- December: Planning and design work with host communities
- December 17th: Participant applications due
- December 21st: Notifications of acceptance for participating artists
- January 25th – 27th: First & second workshops in Community #1
- February 22nd – 24th: Third & fourth workshops in Community #1
- March 29th – 31st: First & second workshops in Community #2
- April 26th – 28th: Third & fourth workshops in Community #2

About EmcArts

Inspired by the arts, driven by a world in transition, EmcArts works alongside individuals, organizations, and communities as they take on their most complex challenges. By advancing processes and practices of innovation and adaptive change, EmcArts strengthens the resilience of individuals and organizations in the arts and social sectors. Through carefully designed and facilitated workshops, coaching, and labs, we create space and conditions to navigate uncertainty, test innovative strategies, and build adaptive cultures. Our current programs include *Community Innovation Labs*, *New Pathways*, *Arts Leaders as Cultural Innovators (ALACI)*, and our resource-sharing and storytelling web platform, ArtsFwd.org. To learn more, visit www.EmcArts.org.

About Eric Booth (Co-Designer)

In 2015 Eric Booth was given the nation's highest award in arts education (the only artist ever to win it), and was named one of the 25 most important people in the arts in the U.S. He began as a Broadway actor, and became an entrepreneur and author of six books, one of which is the primary textbook for teaching artistry. He has been on the faculty of the Juilliard School (12 years), Tanglewood (5 years), The Kennedy Center (20 years), and Lincoln Center Education (for 34 years, where now he is the leader of their Teaching Artist Development Lab). He has founded many of the nation's pioneering endeavors in teaching artistry, and consults with many arts organizations, cities, states and businesses around the U.S., and in six foreign countries. A frequent keynote speaker, he founded the International Teaching Artist Conferences. Website : ericbooth.net.

Community Application Guidelines

DUE DATE: October 15th, 2018

Letters of Interest should be submitted to Liz Dreyer, EmcArts Senior Program Manager, at LDreyer@EmcArts.org.

If you are interested in bringing an *Artists as Change Agents within Complexity* program to your community, please submit a 2-page Letter of Interest addressing the following questions:

1. Why are you specifically interested in *Artists as Change Agents within Complexity*?
2. In what community will the program take place? Tell us a little about the community and why this program is a good fit.
3. Which local organization(s) will serve as host (raising local funds, recruiting artists, and helping organize the Workshops)?
4. Do you have initial recommendations for suitable artists that might be invited to participate? Please tell us a little about the work they're currently doing in the community – Are they working with community partners and organizations? How are they currently engaging the community? Are there effective collaborations?
5. Do you have access to the necessary local matching funds for the program (\$25,000 for the *Artists as Change Agents within Complexity* program)? What are likely sources for the funds? When will commitment be confirmed?
6. What are your goals for the impact of this program in your community?
7. What would be your ideal schedule for the program? Do you have any difficulties with the dates suggested above?