

Artists as Change Agents within Complexity – Workshop Series

Orienting practicing artists as agents of complex community change

Overview

Why is this work important now?

These days, our neighborhoods and communities are “*complex systems*” – where 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 learn to 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 “*artistic capabilities*” to the work of complexity to lead groups to discover their own creative solutions. Bringing these artistic skills to community issues, such as addressing food insecurity, housing needs, etc. is starting to be known as “*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 work studying and developing approaches to navigating complex systems suggests that extraordinary parallels exist between approaching problems from the “*system-level*” and the essential processes that artists use in their making of creative work. The roots of the theories known as “*artistic process intelligence*” and of the “*dynamics of complexity*” are similar, but have not until now been connected, nor intentionally deployed in the process of managing *complex system dynamics*, limiting the success of creative placemaking work.

What is the Workshop Series about?

Our new workshop series for *Artists as Change Agents within Complexity* focuses on how efforts to make change 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***. This 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.

What are the five artistic capabilities?

Our research, and its application to practice in our *Community Innovation Labs*, 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 (co-designed by master teaching artist Eric Booth) 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 complex 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 workshops 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 Workshop 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.

Workshop Structure

Each program 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 capabilities 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 will sketch the design of an original workshop series they could imagine leading that addresses complex local issue.

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

THINKING ABOUT APPLYING?

WORKSHOP DATES – Charlotte

- August 30th: Application guidelines released for artists to participate
- September 30th: Participant applications due
- October 9th: Notifications of acceptance for participating artists
- November 9th – 11th: Workshop weekend #1
- December 14th – 16th: Workshop weekend #2

Is this the right program for me?

Below are a series of questions that might help you in thinking about whether to apply for the Artist Workshops in your community. These can help you determine if this program could be a good fit with your practice and your aspirations. Ask yourself if exploring these topics might help you move your artistic leadership challenges forward.

Five artistic and system-changing capabilities

Our research, and its application to practice in our *Community Innovation Labs*, identified a core set of five capabilities that are vital to the work of changing complex systems, which are also inherent in many artistic processes. The Workshops will delve into these capabilities and explore ways to develop them and activate them in the service of complex social change:

- 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 connections across difference**
(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)

Applying the Capabilities to your own practice

1. Being able to work with the surprises of inter-dependence and unpredictability

(recognizing and responding to the dynamics of complex systems)

- Do you have an external orientation, paying attention to trends and circumstances outside your professional domain? Do you find yourself making connections between these circumstances and the dynamics inside your community or with participants you work with?
- Are you interested in gaining a deeper understanding of complex social systems (such as gentrification, economic mobility, or access to nutritious food), as well as how they function and how they can be influenced toward positive change?

2. Being able to weave new networks and make imaginative connections across difference

(connecting like-minded people across difference)

- Do you enjoy creating atmospheres in which you let go of your own expertise to foster collaborative learning?
- Do you have a feel for creating fair and inclusive engagements that bring different, even opposing, worldviews together?
- Are you good at stopping voices (including your own) from dominating?

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)

- Are you good at motivating and inspiring people to undertake difficult journeys?
- Are you interested in learning how to create a safe and energized “practice space” for non-artists to undertake creative work as a methodology for systemic change?
- Are you interested to set aside your usual ways of working in order to devise and try new approaches?

4. Being able to make generative use of sustained uncertainty

(making active use of multiple simultaneous approaches to plumb unexpected strategic potential)

- Are you curious about leaning into working around challenges that don't respond to linear planning? Have you tried to move community folks forward and been frustrated about the difficulty in making change happen?
- Do you have a sense of how to guide people to adopt an experimental mindset?

5. Being able to rehearse new pathways and dispassionately let go of our favorite ideas

(amplifying and elaborating promising experiments, while closing others down)

- Are you curious about articulating your creative approach for others?
- Do you facilitate others to make their own art—for a variety of different learning purposes?
- Do you want to take the work out of the studio/performance practice and into interaction with others?

How Can I Apply?

What Is the Deadline for Applying?

The application deadline is 6:00pm on September 30th.

All applications must be received electronically by this date. If you need to mail all or part of your application, please send an e-mail to LDreyer@emcarts.org to make arrangements. All applications will be acknowledged by e-mail upon receipt.

You will receive notification by October 9th of the status of your application. We ask that you officially accept your admittance by October 19th.

What should the application include?

It is natural for ambiguity and a degree of messiness to characterize adaptive change work—indeed, these qualities are often part of developing new ways of thinking, acting and leading. In selecting our cohort in your community, we are looking for understanding of what needs to be learned and a high level of critical self-awareness and openness to change. Your application should provide a window into the conflicting ideas, creative tensions, areas of growth and hard choices that this work generates for you, **as well as identifying particular experiences of yours that seem pertinent to the kinds of challenges in this work.** Please submit all materials as one PDF document.

The application should include two elements:

1. An Application Narrative of no more than 2-3 pages (minimum 11-point type)
2. Your résumé (two-page maximum)

The Application Narrative should include:

- A Personal Vision Statement (1 page): What do you hope to gain by participating in this program? Why is this kind of work important for you at this stage of your career? How will this program benefit your career goals?
- Community Realities and Future Possibilities (up to 1 page): What do you see as some of the major opportunities and challenges ahead for this work in your community? What barriers do you see to seizing these opportunities/ meeting these challenges? How could you imagine this program supporting your efforts in leading your community's responses to these opportunities and challenges?

Where should applications be sent?

Applications should be sent as PDF e-mail attachments to Liz Dreyer, Senior Program Manager at EmcArts, at LDreyer@EmcArts.org. Please submit all materials in one PDF file. Please number the pages of your application.

Where can I get additional information?

For clarification about the workshop goals and objectives, program design and elements, and more, visit our [program webpage](#). If you have a specific question that's unanswered by our program page or this call for applications, or if you'd like to explore in more detail whether your application would be

appropriate and timely, please contact Liz Dreyer directly: Liz Dreyer, Senior Program Manager, tel: (212) 362-8541, ext. 27; Email: LDreyer@EmcArts.org.

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.

About Kirya Traber (Artist Facilitator)

Kirya Traber is a nationally awarded playwright, actress, and cultural worker. She is a co-host of the PBS series *First Person*, the lead Community Artist in Residence with Lincoln Center Education, and co-host with Isake Smith of *Cheers & Queers*, a podcast in the Gifted Sounds Network.

From 2014-2017, Kirya was faculty, and Social Justice Coordinator at the New School College for Performing Arts, School of Drama. Kirya received her MFA in Acting from the School of Drama at the New School, and is the recipient of the California Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts, Robert Redford's Sundance foundation award for Activism in the Arts, Congresswoman Barbara Lee's Certificate of Recognition, an Astrea Lesbian Writers Fund award for Poetry, and is a former judge for the LAMDA Literary awards in LGBT Drama. She has worked as a teaching artist with youth and adults, in school and community based settings, and within the juvenile justice system.

More at kiryatraber.com