

# Arts & Civic Engagement



A TOOL KIT *from* ANIMATING DEMOCRACY



Animating  
**Democracy**

A Program of **Americans for the Arts**



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE ARTS

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# Introduction

Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, is pleased to offer you this tool kit. It serves as a companion to Arts & Civic Engagement professional development programs that are being offered across the country with local arts agency (LAA) partners and with support from the National Endowment for the Arts. The kit provides practical tools designed to help you plan and implement arts-based civic engagement projects—whether you are an artist, a cultural organization programmer, or a community agency wanting to create opportunities for civic engagement or advance social change through arts and culture.

There are many ways in which people engage in civic and community life—staying informed and educated about issues, voicing concerns, volunteering, community organizing, and voting. The arts shape a new paradigm of civic engagement that:

- *offer a welcoming entry point* to civic participation;
- *bring forward voices* of those often silenced or left out of public discourse;
- *create open and receptive spaces* for expressing and hearing differing views;
- *provide alternative forms of dialogue* through dance, poetry, theater, and other art forms; and
- *offer new ways of looking at issues* that can shift contentious public debate and move people to deeper understanding.

Arts organizations and artists are both motivated and challenged by the responsibility of working on civic concerns that affect people in real ways. Similarly, community agencies and civic organizations may recognize the valuable contribution the arts can make toward achieving their goals, but not know quite how to begin. Local arts agencies can play a strategic role in advancing opportunities at the fertile intersection of arts and civic engagement.

Animating Democracy's workshops and forums, along with this tool kit, respond to the educational needs of these various players. We would like to thank and acknowledge four forward thinking local arts agencies—Broward Cultural Division, (FL); Greater Columbus Arts Council, (OH); Los Angeles County Arts Commission; and 40 North/88 West, (Champaign-Urbana, IL)—for piloting the Arts & Civic Engagement Workshops for constituents in their communities. We also thank the National Endowment for the Arts and acknowledge Patrice Walker Powell's leadership of the Access to Artistic Excellence category for supporting this endeavor which we hope will seed many more opportunities for professional exchange and learning to strengthen the role of the arts in civic engagement.

# ☐☐☐ What You'll Find in the Tool Kit

The Tool Kit includes practical outlines, worksheets, and resources listings, as well as articles, diagrams, and other resources that offer context for creating arts-based civic engagement experiences. Some items support and others supplement material covered in the Arts & Civic Engagement workshop. The tool kit is organized into four parts; each containing multiple documents. The table of contents offers a complete listing of all of the elements.

As you make use of the tool kit, Animating Democracy welcomes feedback so that we may continually refine and improve the kit and learn about your work!

## **Part 1 — Understanding Arts-Based Civic Engagement**

Part 1 provides context and background for understanding the possibilities at the intersection of art and civic life. Based on Animating Democracy's work with cultural organizations and artists across the country, we introduce the potent roles the arts can play as *spark, invitation, space, and form* for civic engagement. Definitions clarify **common terms** and diagrams help distinguish and situate **arts-based civic engagement** work in a broader context of **arts** and **community engagement**.

## **Part 2 — Planning & Designing Arts-Based Civic Engagement Projects**

Part 2 includes the tool kit's central tool—*Imagine, Define, Design: Planning Arts-based Civic Engagement Projects*. A series of worksheets containing thoughtful questions, clarifying sidebars, and examples help you define a project's core artistic elements and civic or social concern. Worksheets also help you consider factors such as setting, facilitation, and ways to link art and engagement activities in order to effectively create meaningful experiences for participants and publics. In addition to the main tool, other items point out

where to identify artistic, facilitation, and other resources for projects; considerations for strong partnerships; and tools for assessing the impact of your efforts.

## **Part 3 — Basics of Arts-Based Civic Dialogue**

If your engagement activities focus on creating opportunities for civic dialogue, Part 3 helps you to create meaningful dialogue at arts events and design dialogue sessions with questions and facilitation that can generate deeper dialogue. A resource from the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation describes four streams of practice—exploration, conflict transformation, decision-making, and collaborative action—as well as some of the most well-known methods that have proven effective in each stream.

## **Part 4 — Resources**

In Part 4, you will find an array of resources. Among them, a compilation of organizations, websites, and publications offers many vital arts, dialogue, and civic engagement resources. An Americans for the Arts *Monograph, Making a Difference: Lessons*

*Learned from Animating Democracy*, explores the roles that local arts agencies can play to foster arts-based civic engagement in their communities and tells the story of the *Common Threads Theater Project* of the Arts Council of Greater Lima, OH with Sojourn Theater. You will also find descriptions of Animating Democracy's publications. These seven books offer numerous in-depth case studies and synthesize principles and best practices of arts-based civic engagement from Animating Democracy's initial phase.

### **How to Use the Tool Kit**

On the disc, files are grouped by topic in folders. Clicking on a folder will show you the titles of individual documents contained within it. Alternately, you can use the Table of Contents to link to folders and the individual documents within them.

All files have been saved as Adobe Acrobat (pdf) files. To open Acrobat files, a free copy of the software can be downloaded from Adobe's website: [www.Adobe.com](http://www.Adobe.com) (click "Get Adobe Reader").

Documents that are intended to function as worksheets may be edited and customized to serve the needs of your projects and programs. To ease strain on your computer, first copy the file from the disc directly to your hard drive, then edit documents as necessary. Instructions on editing pdfs can be found in the Adobe Acrobat Help file.

### **Acknowledgements**

Animating Democracy would like to acknowledge the excellent editing and content management skills of Communications and Marketing Associate Elizabeth Van Fleet and Managing Editor Kirsten Hilgeford at Americans for the Arts. Their many hours of organization, editing, and creativity were essential in helping to move this project from concept to reality. Further, Animating Democracy would like to thank Bennett DeOlazo from Studio B Creative—our skilled graphic designer who designed and executed the tool kit with quick-turnaround and masterful results.

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