



Indianapolis Community Innovation Lab:

Call for local artists to contribute to systems change around economic inclusion!

Apply by: Friday, July 14, 2017

Selected artists will be invited to attend an orientation workshop on: July 20, 2017

Engagement period: August, 2017 – April, 2018

What are the Labs?

Community Innovation Labs, a program of EmcArts, are a new and exciting vehicle for supporting communities to unpack complex systemic challenges, build capacity around adaptive change, and integrate the arts not only as a means of personal engagement but as a way for original strategies to be developed. The Labs exist to support the discovery and prototyping of approaches to complex social challenges that have resisted traditional planning or where existing local services are seen as inequitable. Each Lab repeatedly convenes community stakeholders from multiple sectors, including those whose voices have historically been absent or ignored. Cross-sector innovation groups that emerge are supported to test new strategies for change. The Labs take a deliberately experimental and creative approach to making progress in complex systems.

What's new about this – and why incorporate the arts?

In traditional civic planning and community change efforts we tend to make use of logic, analytical thinking, deductive reasoning, and linear rational models of strategy. In the conditions of social complexity that now characterize our cities and communities, these tools are insufficient, and can lead us in the wrong direction. They rarely achieve the sustained adoption of new practices because they fail to engage the whole person, neglect the power of learning from experience, and ignore the motivating quality of people's emotional response to new ideas.

Artistic practices can add these elements to the equation. Artmaking releases the imagination by removing constraints on feeling and action in order to allow original connections to be made, which are then shaped through repeated rehearsal, critique and improvement. Experienced in the body not just the mind, artistic practices can result in remarkably innovative ideas for change, and also high levels of ownership and commitment to the strategies that emerge from the development process.

Part of the creative approach of each Lab is therefore to work with one or more selected local artists in each community who have an interest in civic practice (i.e., they are not only dedicated to being studio-based artists) and who are interested in further developing their practice as “artists for systems change.” Our interest is not only in developing artistic projects as part of the strategies that emerge, but in experimenting with artistic experiences as *a central means of doing the change work itself*. This means employing artistic practices to strengthen some specific key capacities that we see as essential to progress in each Lab.

What capacities are we seeking to strengthen?

We've identified five different capacities that are critical to each Lab, and at the same time are central to the underlying methodology of many artistic development processes

- The capacity to understand the complex dynamics of social systems
- The capacity to initiate and strengthen networks

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- The capacity to make generative use of sustained uncertainty
- The capacity to design and explore innovative experiments
- The capacity to make artistic practices central to how we address complex challenges

What do we mean by artistic experiences?

We don't mean simulations, games and other activities that aim primarily to enrich learning about a topic by offering an experience of it, rather than commentary on it. We don't mean creative icebreakers – short exercises that are ways for people to get to know each other, and build trust and openness. (Although these are all great things to do.) Rather, we mean activities that meet three basic threshold criteria of artistry: they offer a shift in perspective; they make an unexpected connection; and they demand that we suspend our judgment.

We are particularly interested in artistic entry points of this kind that are designed as the beginning of a longer arc of work – re-applying the approach repeatedly to different circumstances, going deeper as a result; or building directly on the opening insights, combining imagination and craft in order to develop and amplify the engagement into potentially substantial creative outputs. Such activities can contribute to the development of an artistic sensibility in Lab members. By repetition and variation, they can support the group in getting used to sparks of apprehension, to seeing the world afresh metaphorically. We see processes of artistic development as constituting unique and complex ways of knowing that lead to embodied knowledge that cannot be gained by other means.

What will the artists actually do?

We are seeking one “Anchor” Artist Facilitator who will lead and coordinate the work. Alongside this Anchor Artist, we will be considering a pool of artists to contribute to specific sessions of the workshops. The artists will work alongside EmcArts facilitators to co-design and lead substantial artistic engagements in each of four 2-day Workshops that create the space and conditions for new thinking and that strengthen the five key capacities among the 40 or so Lab participants. The artists will engage groups of people in these journeys together, not just as individuals on their own personal journey.

The results of these artistic engagements will not necessarily be art works. The artistic processes will have given the participants the capacities, skills, confidence and space within which to rehearse artistically, so they themselves are able to maintain an imaginative stance even as they implement their strategy. The art-making process will constitute the catalytic enabling work. This is not to say that artists, cultural organizations and artistic projects will not potentially be part of the ultimate set of strategies; rather, all the strategies will be fully *arts-infused* in this sense, and the artistic sensibility in moving forward in complexity will remain active, to be applied again in future.

What orientation will artists receive?

EmcArts will offer a set of underlying principles, criteria, intentions and techniques in building meaning artistically as a contribution to systems work (with examples), to engage with the selected artists. We are not suggesting a set of techniques or steps that we ask artists to replicate. Rather, these approaches will inform an exchange between EmcArts and the artists in order to understand and develop their practice by integrating these elements into the work they do in the Lab.



RELEVANT DATES

- The Anchor Artist Facilitator will attend training and all major lab events, which include:

August–September 2017

- Approximately 1 to 2 days of training (in-person and via phone/video conference)
- Attend up to three full-day meetings with local lab leadership

October 2017–April 2017:

- Attend up to four Intensive Workshops (workshops are two full days and occur approximately every six weeks from October 2017 – April 2018)
- May include additional activities as needed and appropriate

- Workshop Dates:

Workshop 1: Slowing Down to See the System – October 24 & 25, 2017

Workshop 2: Rehearsing Strategies for Change - January 17 & 18, 2018

Workshop 3: Forming our Ensembles – March 7 & 8, 2018

Workshop 4: Growing our Audience – April 11 & 12, 2018

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Resume and 1-2 page letter of interest should be sent – by July 14, 2017 -via email to innovationlab@kheprw.org.
2. Candidates selected will then be invited – by July 10, 2017 - to attend a full day, local workshop/audition on **Friday, July 20th** (time & venue TBA). The morning will be spent discussing - with a group of interested artists - the linkage of art and complexity, capacities and framework of the Lab and the collaborative design. Artists will show work and share ideas. Following lunch (which will be provided), candidates will be invited to continue through the afternoon, during which they will lead the whole group through a longer, scaffolded experience. Therefore, **please come prepared to lead the group in a 10-15 minute experiential process** aimed at embodying the principles and capacities the Lab is seeking to address.



EmcArts Community Innovation Labs: Core Capacities

#1: SLOWING DOWN TO SEE THE SYSTEM AND DISCOVER LEVERAGE

We try to design experiments and prototypes that respond in new ways to the deeper levels of the local system and how it currently operates. We try not to just react to recent behaviors, or to be trapped by established patterns. We try to shift some norms and design new structures – we even aim at transforming the prevailing underlying mindsets that have driven the system as a whole.

What skills do we need? To have enough of a shared vocabulary to understand complex systems and communicate effectively about them; to have a way to distinguish between different decision-making contexts in our system; to recognize patterns in our system and have ways to influence them; and to acknowledge and understand how we are (each and collectively) part of the system, implicated as co-creators.

#2: WEAVING NETWORKS ACROSS BOUNDARIES

We set out to increase the density of connections within and between different networks, and across the different sectors and silos within which all the Lab members generally work. We then try to design actions that will be likely to escalate in impact after a while, even though they start small. By thinking and acting in a networked way, by bringing people together from different backgrounds and reinforcing their work, we hope to gradually gain momentum and experience to create accelerated progress later.

What skills? To discover shared interests between our work and someone else's, and a shared sense of what we don't want; to foster cooperative relationships with people who work in other ways and sectors; to have ways to actively help networks evolve; and to analyze power dynamics and navigate their distribution and decentralization.

#3: EMBRACING THE UNKNOWN – MAKING USE OF SUSTAINED UNCERTAINTY

Moving from a traditional planning approach to a “Lab” approach of repeated experimenting and rapid learning means entering the unknown, dealing with a lot of questioning, ambiguity and uncertainty – and, if we can, living with that uncertainty and making it useful and generative, rather than unhelpful.

What skills? To move forward in ongoing uncertainty, letting go of our assumed constraints on action; to make connections between apparently disparate perspectives/experiences; to manage the paradox of simultaneous irreconcilable truths; and to let the discoveries shape us, not the other way around.

#4: LETTING GO OF LINEAR PLANNING in favor of EXPERIMENTATION & DISCOVERY

It's hard to shift away from the dominant planning approach based on step-by-step progress toward definite goals. Instead, we try to get to grips with complexity – where the future is unpredictable – by embracing “learning by doing,” using repeated experiments to discover new insights and possibilities.

What skills? To work with community input to generate useful experiments in system change; to work with multiple and contradictory “hunches” to respond to systemic challenges we face; to collect evidence from



initial experiments and use it to guide, learn, deepen the value and enroll others; and to evolve, mutate and amplify what works and run with it, letting go of what's not working.

#5: INTEGRATING ARTISTIC PRACTICES

Partnering with local artists, each Lab seeks to bring forth the creativity in the group and to offer **unique ways of seeing and knowing** that free the imagination and help us to revisit deeply held assumptions and beliefs. The aim is to open up space that enables shifts in perspective, requires that we suspend our judgment, and supports us making unexpected connections. Making artistic practices central to the change process – not just its product – will ensure the infusion of creativity into the crafting of the small experiments and bigger social change projects that emerge from the Lab.

What skills? To see and understand complex challenges through artistic methods; to use our own creativity and culture to support our change efforts; and to have ways and language to collaborate with artists in our networks to support our change efforts.