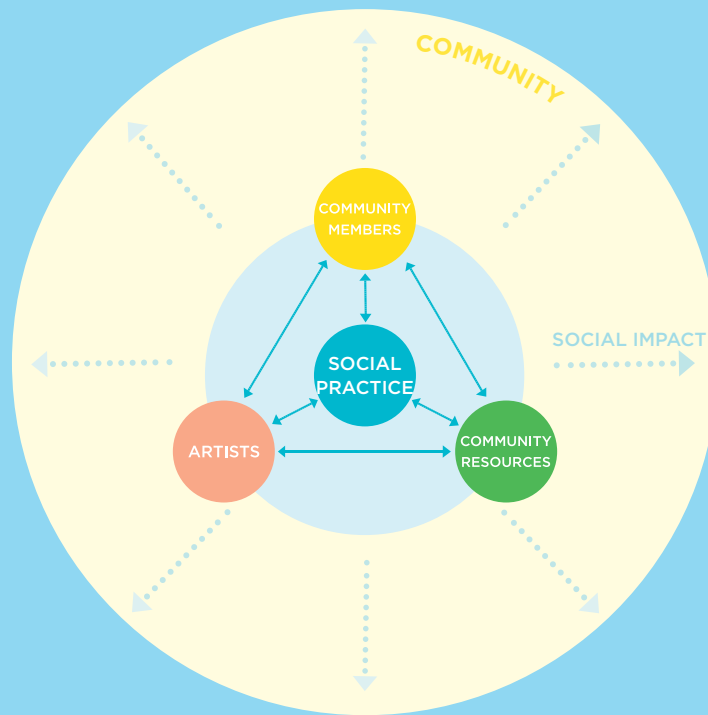


# DESIGNING SOCIAL PRACTICE ENGAGEMENT

An Open Collection of Research and Engagement  
Tools for Social Practice in Local Communities



Tian Cai



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An Open Collection of Research and Engagement  
Tools for Social Practice in Local Communities



320 South Broad Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

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# DESIGNING SOCIAL PRACTICE ENGAGEMENT

An Open Collection of Research and Engagement  
Tools for Social Practice in Local Communities

By Tian Cai

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree Master of Industrial Design in the College of Art,  
Media, and Design.

The University of the Arts  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
May, 2013

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## THESIS STATEMENT

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As Social Practice is attracting more artists, the engagement with local communities can lead to outreach anxiety, especially for those artists who are more familiar with studio artwork;

Using the methodologies of Human Centered Design, this thesis presents a Community Engagement Toolkit for Social Practice programs to support emerging artists who aim to engage with community members and promote social impact.



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Thank you to my thesis lead Dr. [Benjamin Olshin](#), and my thesis advisors Prof. [Jeremy Beaudry](#), Prof. [Sharon Lefevre](#), and Dr. [Neil Kleimen](#) for giving critical comments and advice on this thesis project. Thank you to Prof. [Jonas Milder](#) for guiding me in this thesis research phase. Thank you to [Daeun Song](#) for collaborating with me in the early research phase. Thank you to [Nancy Chen](#) and [Gayle Isa](#) from the Asian Arts Initiative for being genuinely supportive of my thesis studies. Thank you to the current artists-in-residence, [Ben Volta](#), [Dave Kyu](#), [Yowei Shaw](#), National Advisory Committee member, [Sue Bell Yank](#), and Local Resources Team members, [Carol Wong](#) and [Jeffery Harley](#), for sharing community stories and experiences with the 2012 - 2013 Social Practice Lab. Thank you to [Lois Frankel](#) for sharing an inspiring generative toolkit on cross-cultural communication. Thank you to [Ann Northrup](#) for the fascinating mural arts conversation. Thank you to [Meredith Warner](#) for meeting and giving genuine suggestions and insights throughout the thesis work. Thank you to [Allan Wexler](#) for sharing the amazing public commissioned art work experience. Thank you to [Kerry Polite](#) for documentation design advice. Thank you to [Michele Kishita](#) and [Nicole Dupree](#) for keeping an eye on my English conversation and writing. Thank you to [Patrick Dajarnette](#) for always being considerate, as well as positive about this thesis project. Thank you to my parents, [Cai Ju](#) and [Shen Danfang](#), for always having faith in me for pursuing my dreams in life.

Without all of you none of this would have been possible!

由衷感謝我的父母－蔡居和沈旦芳，  
一直支持並鼓勵我堅持自己的夢想。

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## ABSTRACT

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Social Practice is an increasingly prevalent approach for artists to engage with communities in order to create a desired social impact. However, as Social Practice is attracting more artists, the engagement with local communities can lead to outreach anxiety, especially for those who are more familiar with studio artwork.

In addressing this anxiety, my goal as a designer was to develop a Community Engagement Toolkit to support emerging artists in their research and engagement processes. By working with the Social Practice Lab at the Asian Arts Initiative in Philadelphia, I designed several research and engagement tools to investigate both the Chinatown community and the current artists-in-residence.

This thesis presents a design contribution that serves as a creative response to the issues in the practical case study and those faced by the Social Practice Artists. The resulting Toolkit was shared with artists, multi-disciplinary designers, and program organizers to provide options to facilitate the work of these participants. This thesis also highlights similarities between Human Centered Design and Social Practice, two areas which potentially could collaborate creatively, and build on each other's strengths.

# CONTENTS

	THESIS STATEMENT		5	DESIGN PROCESS:	75
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS			Research and Sensemaking	
	ABSTRACT			5.1 Community Life in Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods	77
1	PREFACE:	15		Research Tool: Observation & Identity Map	78
	My Role as a Designer			Research Tool: Contextual Interview	81
				Research Tool: Future Backwards Workshop	86
2	INTRODUCTION:	19		Synthesis Tool: Affinity Diagramming	92
	What Is Social Practice?		5.2 Artists-in-Residence's Engagement Process with the Community		98
2.1	Case Studies:	21		Research Tool: Contextual Interview & Influence Timeline	99
	The Emergence of Social Practice			Synthesis Tool: Character Profile	103
2.2	Synthesis:	31		Synthesis Tool: Affinity Diagramming	107
	What are the Basic Components of Social Practice?				
2.3	Literature Review:	36	6	DESIGN PROCESS:	111
	How Do Others Define Social Practice?			Prototype and Test	
2.4	Synthesis:	39	6.1	Conceptual Prototype:	112
	What Is the Difference between Social Practice, Social Work, and Socially Engaged Art?			Orientation System for Social Practice	
2.5	Recap:	41	6.2	Turning Point:	121
	The Operative Definition of Social Practice			Designing Community Engagement in Social Practice	
3	POINT OF ENTRY:	43	6.3	Further Developed Prototype:	123
	Why Should I introduce Human Centered Design in the Social Practice?			Community Engagement Toolkit	
			6.4	Test:	142
				Feedback on Community Engagement Toolkit	
4	A PRACTICAL CASE STUDY:	47	7	FUTURE DIRECTIONS:	149
	Overview of the Social Practice Lab Program at Asian Arts Initiative.			Final Thoughts and Next Steps	
4.1	Community:	51			
	Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods.			POSTSCRIPT	
4.2	Commissioning Body:	59		GLOSSARY	
	Asian Arts Initiative			BIBLIOGRAPHY	
4.3	Experimental Program:	62		APPENDIX	
	Social Practice Lab			VISUAL BIO	
4.4	Participants:	66			
	Stories of Current Artists-in-Residence				

**PREFACE:**  
My Role as a Designer

1

PREFACE:  
My Role as a Designer

In my design work, I see myself a designer who starts with and focuses on people as the center of work. I am concerned to develop not only my skills of making and of craft, but also skills of thinking and sense-making. As a designer I learn from individuals, discover their underlying needs and relations with other entities, and address the complexity in an informative and inviting way in order to uncover new opportunities. I term this approach Human Centered Design.\* Over the past two years, I have been aiming to bring these design theories and practices together as a way to address pressing social problems, and promote positive social impact.

My design process is a flexible loop that basically consists of four stages: Research, Sense-making, Prototyping and Testing. Each stage contains different methods and techniques that prepare me to have creative responses to different social issues and needs within a group of individuals. While the creative responses can take on any form, it should be established based on the core of design process - research and sense-making. Traditionally, a designer's role has been fairly passive in most contexts. The response has taken the form of physical objects or layouts. This form has evolved over time to meet the needs of globalization. Now design is focused more on direct connection - co-creation between the users and designers.

\*Note: The consulting firm IDEO also calls their process “Human Centered Design”. While I drew some inspiration from their work, I employ the term differently, as can be seen in my design process to the right.  
( Figure 1.1 )

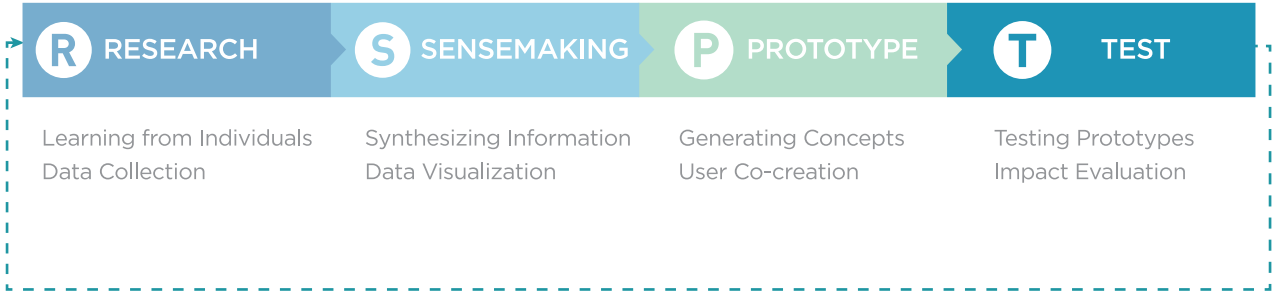


Figure 1.1 : The Design Process.

# INTRODUCTION: What Is Social Practice?



2.1	<b>Case Studies:</b>	The Emergence of Social Practice
2.2	<b>Synthesis:</b>	What are the Basic Components of Social Practice?
2.3	<b>Literature Review:</b>	How Do Others Define Social Practice?
2.4	<b>Synthesis:</b>	What is the Difference between Social Practice, Social Work, and Socially Engaged Art?
2.5	<b>Recap:</b>	The Operative Definition of Social Practice







1) Project Row Houses

When	1993 - Present	Theme	Urban Development, Community Building, Social Justice, Economics and Consumerism
Where	Houston, Texas		
Who	Rick Lowe, Residents in Northern Third Ward district		

Project Row Houses (PRH) began in 1993 in Houston’s Northern Third Ward district, a low-income African-American neighborhood.

Artist Rick Lowe aimed to open up discussions among African-American in order to establish a positive, creative presence in their own community. He galvanized hundreds of volunteers to help preserve the buildings, first by sweeping streets, and renovating the old housing’s interiors.

Then, with external funding, the growing group of activists transformed the community into a vibrant campus that hosts visiting artists, galleries, a park, commercial spaces, and gardens. Now PRH is functioning as a neighborhood-based nonprofit art and cultural organization. Its mission is to create community through the celebration of art, African American history and culture.

In Rick Lowe’s previous work, he not only

generated the installation, but also organized the press conferences around the piece as a form of community activism. The challenge he faced was not only trying to figure out how to create a work both symbolic and poetic, but also how it could have a practical application. In this work, he gradually pulled himself away from studio practice toward a practice that allowed him to be a part of the community.



2) Park Fiction and the Right to the City Networking Hamburg

When	1994	Theme	Urban Development, Community Building, Economics and Consumerism
Where	Hamburg, Germany		
Who	Christoph Schafer, Residents’ association in the St. Pauli Neighborhood		

Park Fiction evolved out of a 1994 civic campaign in the St. Pauli neighborhood of Hamburg, Germany’s harbor area - a red-light district and one of the city’s poorest communities.

The Park Fiction project was initiated by the local residents’ association and artist Christoph Schafer, and emerged as a viable alternative to the city’s plan, which

tended towards commercial interests over the community’s desire for recreational space. The group rallied community residents to put the park to use for festivals, exhibitions, and talks - activities that demonstrated local culture and encouraged citizens to take control of the urban planning process themselves, rather than seek the city’s permission first.

One of the features included in the site was a “planning container” that moved around the neighborhood to collect residents’ wishes.





3) Hotel Fuentes De Erbo

When 1997  
Where Zaragoza, Spain  
Who Lara Almarcegui, Begona Movellan

Theme Urban Development, Economics and Consumerism, Environment

Fuentes de Ebro is a small town in Spain, that rarely receives visitors from outside its community. In order to draw attention to the area, Lara Almarcegui and Begona Movellan renovated the local train station, which had been abandoned for 20 years, into a free hotel for one week. They spent \$400 from a small grant to renew the concrete, two-story building. They painted the interior walls, brought in furniture donated by the residents in town, installed electricity and plumbing, and advertised the repurposed station in the neighboring city of

Zaragoza. Within the week, the hotel was completely booked by tourists online. While creating the project, Lara Almarcegui and Begona Movellan were very careful to not reveal any related information to the railway station officials, because they originally received permission from officials to use the station as an exhibition venue, not a residential facility. Once the project ended, the inhabitants of Fuentes De Ebro wanted to keep the train station as a meeting place for the village.

In the research phase, Almarcegui spent one month in Spain looking into unused spaces that offer potential solutions to housing and urban dilemmas. Her work often explores different methods for forming relationships in communities, usually through long-term research, interviewing residents, and investigating new possibilities for aging infrastructure.

4) Magdalena Oil Spill

When 1999 - 2003  
Where Magdalena, Argentina  
Who Silvina Babich, Alejandro Meitin, Creative Thinkers from Different Disciplines

Theme Urban Development, Community Building, Environment, Economics and Consumerism

In 1999, a Shell-owned oil tanker collided with another cargo ship in the Rio de la Plata, a major river in Argentina along which the city of Magdalena is situated. Collaborating as environmental activists, artists Silvina Babich and Alejandro Meitin began walking along the damaged coast, photographing stained, soaked birds, and pools of indigo liquid collected in buckets and marshes along the riverbank.

They produced photographs, notes, and other documentation - from satellite imagery to maps - to build a case for repairing the ecosystem and paying reparations to the community. Since 1991, Ala Plastica has worked with artists, environmentalists, government agencies, scientists, reed harvesters, naturalists, and journalists to study rivers in

Argentina, as well as to weigh in on the impact, prescribe solutions for aggressive clean-up measures, and present their findings in local and global forums. In 2002, with the proposal “Failing the Challenge, The Other Shell Report,” the country’s Supreme Court ruled in favor of a \$35 million cleanup of the river’s coastline.





5) Haircuts by Children

When 2006  
Where Toronto, Canada  
Who Mammalian Diving Reflex, Children

Haircuts by Children was organized by Mammalian Diving Reflex, a Toronto-based arts and research group that creates very specific interactions between people in public spaces.

The project invited children from the fifth- and sixth-grade to participate in a one-week training session with professional stylists, and then paid them to run a real hair salon, offering the public free haircuts

in hair salons across the city. In the preparation stage, children need to learn how to trim bangs, add color, shave necklines, create long layers, and use a blow dryer. While adults provided supervision during the sessions, most patrons trusted the novice hairdressers, who worked in pairs or groups, to make aesthetic decisions like color choices and hair length, on their own.

Theme Community Building, Social Justice

Haircuts by Children leveraged the image of children performing a highly specialized, and personal form of labor, as well as shifted the traditional power dynamic between children and adults, creating a safe social space where children and adults who live in the same community can meet and share a creative experience together.



6) Fairytale: 1,001 Chinese Visitors

When 2007  
Where Kassel, Germany  
Who Ai Weiwei, 1,001 Chinese residents  
Theme Social Justice, Nationalities and Borders, Economics and Consumerism

Presented as part of the Documenta 124 art fair in Kassel, Ai Weiwei brought to town 1,001 residents of China - between June 12 and July 9, 2007. Advertising through his blog for three days, Ai received 3,000 applications. He selected 1001 participants who had limited resources or travel restrictions. The participants ranged from 2 to 70 and included laid-off workers, farmers, street vendors, students, rock singers, white-collar workers, and women from a minority farm-

ing village without proper identity cards. Ai's documentary crew filmed travelers during the art fair, conducted separate interviews with each individual, and had them fill out a 99-question form - which focused on personal histories, desires, and fantasies. With \$4.14 million from different funding administrations in Germany, Ai Weiwei paid for flight tickets, processed visa applications, converted an old textile mill into a temporary hostel, transported Chinese chefs to cook

meals, designed luggage clothing, and organized tours of Kassel's landmarks. He also installed 1,001 antique chairs throughout the exhibition pavilion to represent the chinese participants' presence in Kassel. His visitors acted as both tourists and subjects of his art - viewers of a foreign culture, as well as signs of another.





## 7) Urban Solid Waste

Basurama is a laboratory for considering waste and its reuse launched in 2001 by a group of students at the Madrid School of Architecture. The group believes that how trash is disposed reveals about the way we consider the world. Since then, the group -

When 2008  
Where Lima, Peru  
Who Basurama, Residents in communities

who now work as professional architects, designers, and other urban planners - has collaborated with communities to explore how to identify what members regard as trash and how that trash is reused. The group's work often exists in the form of

workshops, talks, and other discussion forums. In Lima, Basurama rehabilitated an abandoned railway by inviting local artists and other community members to create an amusement park along the tracks.

## 8) Time / Bank

When 2010  
Where Various Locations in the U.S.  
Who Julieta Aranda, Anton Vidokle, Community members

Theme Community Building, Economics and Consumerism

Time / Bank is an alternative economic model that allows a group of people to exchange skills through the use of a time-based currency, started by artists Julieta Aranda and Anton Vidokle in September 2010, it is an international community of more than 1,500 artists, curators, writers

and others in the field of art, who are interested in developing a parallel economy based on time and skills. Using a free website created by the artists participants requests, offer, and pay for services in "Hour Notes." Earned Hours may be saved and used at a later date, given to

another individual, or pooled with other Hours for larger group projects. The system of this project not only allows people to share resources and skills, it also builds community by building relationships.





2.2 SYNTHESIS:  
What Are the Basic Components in Social Practice?

There is no doubt that in the social practice art field there are many components and features captured in different projects. Based on my synthesis of the case studies on the previous pages and my research throughout this thesis project, this section explains four basic components of social practice in this thesis context: Process, Engagement and Co-creation, Social Impact, and Community Building.

1) Process



Maria Rosario Jackson  
Senior Research Associate  
in the Metropolitan Housing  
and Communities Center at  
the Urban Institute

“All art invites social interaction; yet in the case of Socially Engaged Art, **it is the process itself - the fabrication of the work - that is social.**”

“The ‘**failure**’ in the project would lead the artists and other participants to build better scenarios next time around and that **it is important to just talk about the process of work.**”



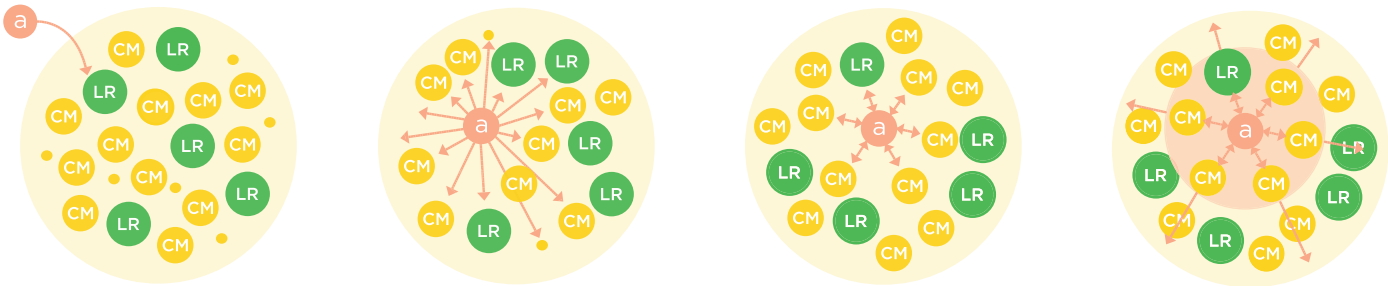
Pablo Helguera  
Curator, Critical Writer, Artist  
Education for Socially  
Engaged Art

The process of Social Practice aims to open up conversations with community members and to be responsive to the input from the community. From Maria Rosario Jackson’s point of view, everything in Social Practice projects is very much goal-oriented,

she argued that the ‘failure’ in the project would lead the artists and other participants to build better scenarios next time around and that it is important to just talk about the process of work.

However, in the interview with an emerging socially engaged artist, Dave Kyu, I sensed that it might be difficult for artists to think about the process in a documentable, communicable way, because he stated that “In [my] art school, art students are never responsible for presenting their process. The whole class was structured based on the day of critique, in critique, the art students wouldn’t check in on each other’s processes. Typically, the final

product is the most important thing in traditional work. However, in Social Practice, the process why and how artists are doing the projects would give others a clearer picture of what to measure in the end.” For Social Practice, the impact of projects mostly depends on the process of the work. Hence, documentable materials for process is vital in Social Practice.



① Learn from the Community      ② Understand the Community      ③ Connect with the Community      ④ Co-create with the Community

Figure 2.1 : Social Practice Process


- a** = Artist
- CM** = Community Member
- LR** = Local Resources in a Community

Figure 2.1 reveals the four stages of Social Practice process, from learning, to understanding, to connecting and co-creating with the community.

- At stage ① , artists act as observers as they first approach a community. They will **learn** from the community with a beginner’s mind in order to have a broad sense of the community’s life.
- At stage ② , artists will reach out to different groups of individuals in the community, in order to gather more useful and inspiring information and better **understand** the community culture.

- At stage ③ , artists probably have drafted their project proposal and considered reaching out to potential partners for possible collaboration in order to closely **connect** with community members and gather ideas and input from the public.
- At stage ④ , artists will have established relationships with a specific group from the community for their social practice projects. They share the responsibility to **co-create** the final pieces and implement it and test it out in the community.


2) Engagement and Co-creation



**Stephen Willats**  
Curator, Conceptual Artist  
<Society through Art>

**“Co-production is a key to Social Practice.**  
The hard part is to be committed to that notion of co-production and of erasing your own vision for something and being completely open to surprise about the direction that things can go.”

“A prerequisite for an art work that manifests a counter-consciousness is that the separation which existed between the artist and the audience is closed, that **they become mutually engaged**, to the point where **the audience becomes the rationale in both the making and reception of the work.**”



**Sue Bell Yank,**  
Critical Writer, Organizer  
Assistant Director of Academic Programs @ Hammer Museum

As we understand, in traditional static art, such as a painting or a sculpture, artists create artwork based on their perception, present it back to the community and share the outcome with the community members in galleries or museums. However, the interaction between artists and community may not happen in the art creating process. ( Figure 2.2 ① )

When it came to public art format, the community resources come into the picture. Artists usually create artwork with community resources’ support and approval of space, generate artwork and install it in communities. Just as in static art, artists may not interact with the community members directly in the creation process. ( Figure 2.2 ② )

“What distinguishes public art is the unique association of its

structure, location, and meaning. Public art can express civic values, enhance the environment, transform a landscape, heighten our awareness, or question our assumptions. Placed in a public site, this art is there for everyone, a form of collective community expression from the once celebrated but now unrecognized general on a horse to the abstract sculpture that may baffle the passerby at first glance.” ( Public Art Strategies in the Urban Landscape: Rethinking Sites in Downtown Syracuse ).

On the other hand, Social Practice is a kind of participatory art form which emerged approximately twenty years ago (as was discussed in the previous chapter ). In this model, art is acknowledged as a co-creation process amongst artists, audience and context, rather than a separate object. While in traditional art, audience is usually considered as viewers, receivers or consumers,

there is little response or input contributed by the audience in the artwork. The ideal social practice model allows the artists-in-residence, community resources and community members to have an open discussion and explore the community life as a whole in order to co-create social changes through artwork.

The move from the traditional artist-centered creation process to a co-creative participatory practice based on collective creativity is transforming the roles of both the artists and the audience into the roles of co-creators. ( Figure 2.2 ③ )

Those formerly regarded as “viewers” or “consumers” in the art making process are now given the positions of “experts of their experience in community life,” and take on significant roles in the development of social practice projects. On the other hand, artists who used to be known as the genius behind the art pieces are now gradually transformed to co-creators, facilitators and even

mediators in this context. In co-creation, there is common occurrence that participants in groups will experience different levels of communication barriers. Hence, it becomes evident that the initiated artists need to understand how to facilitate participants’ broad interests and ideas, and mediate the possible conflicting opinions in the group.

Lastly, most experts in social practice field agree that co-creation is a core aspect of Social Practice. It can involve anyone from community leaders, members, artists, designers, executives or consumers working collaboratively in order to promote social changes in Social Practice projects. For this thesis work, “engagement” is an essential process that leads the participants to the “co-production” portion of their projects. In some way, the engagement process is throughout the whole Social Practice projects.

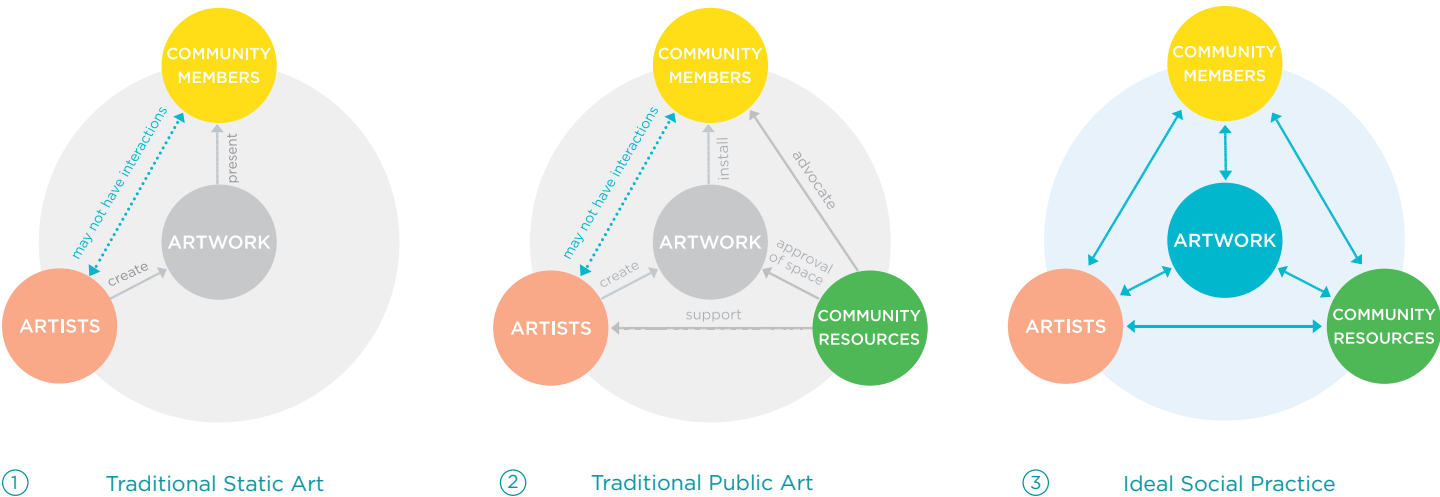


Figure 2.2 : Interaction between Art and its audience.

3) Social Impact

In the traditional concept of art work, the social impact usually depends on the relationship between the exhibited work and the audience. In Social Practice, rather than having the audience simply engage with a piece of art, social practice artists invite their audience to be involved in an ongoing conversation or interaction in the process.

For instance, in the Magdalena Oil Spill Social Practice project (on Page 25), the artists’ group -- Ala Plastica collaborated with the experts and community members from different disciplines to study rivers which were polluted by the oil spill in Argentina, as well as to prescribe solutions for clean-up measures, and present their findings in local and global forums. With the collective efforts from the community and the artists, finally, the community received \$35 million cleanup funding from the country’s Supreme Court. In the process, the impact of the Social Practice on both the artists and the individuals in the community was promoted.

Social Practice not only transformed the artists’ original artistic inspiration of “photographing the contaminated rivers,” but also impacted the community through the collaboration between the artists and the community members.

Figure 2.3 below indicates how the impacts occur during the collaboration between artists and community members (audience). The flow of the transformation on both sides should happen simultaneously and organically throughout the process.

From my research throughout this thesis project, I believe placing artists outside the studio will help transform their artwork as well as transform the communities which they collaborate with. Meanwhile, this transformation is not a form of compromise, but a process of practice that is co-created by the individual participants and the initial organizers(e.g. the artists) through a collaboration.



Figure 2.3 : Impact of Social Practice on the artists and the community

- .....➡ = Impact from Artists to Social Practice
- .....➡ = Impact from Community Members to Social Practice
- .....➡ = Impact from Social Practice to Community

4) Community Building



Sue Bell Yank,  
Critical Writer, Organizer  
Assistant Director of Academic Programs @ Hammer Museum

“Current art practice shows a renewed interest in the **social responsibility of art**. The problem addressed now seems to be, how to retain the autonomy of art (the critical distance of the aesthetic) but at the same time to break the active-passive opposition.”

**Social Practice artwork is not necessarily aiming to create social good.** Sometimes their aim is to be provocative, which is not always comfortable. However, **there was always a desire from socially engaged artists that there is some impact on the community at the end of their practice.**



Henk Slager  
Curator, Critical Writer  
Principles of Hope

The roles of artist and audience are drastically different from that of more traditional forms of art (as I already stated in the previous session). Both of them gradually grow into active co-creators, who share responsibilities of the social practice projects. With time, it will bring up a sense of community building by gathering participants together and performing actual practices.

In Henk Sladger’s statement, not only the significant co-creative relations among the Social Practice participants were addressed, but also another nature of the work, its social responsibility. Since Social Practice work, in general, strives to co-create with local members, and promote actual impact on a (temporary) community, it is hard to put aside its connection to community building. On the other hand, in the interview with Sue Bell Yank, she argued

that, “Social Practice artwork is not necessarily aiming to create social good. Sometimes their aim is to be provocative, which is not always comfortable. The whole reason is that it is not a social service organization.” But, she also clarified that there was always a desire from socially engaged artists that there is some impact on the community at the end of their practice.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize the core of social practice in this thesis context -- the engagement element. As I stated in the previous section, a well-structured engagement process will lead to more meaningful co-created pieces of work.

## 2.3 Literature Review: How Do Others Define Social Practice?

The term “Social Practice” originally extends from art practice. Art practice has a long history of being social and participatory. Over the past twenty years, Social Practice has become a relatively popular form of art practice in the U.S., however it is defined differently by many different artists, curators, critical writers:

“**The definition of Social Practice is still fluid**, it is not set right now. It seems unimportant precisely how participants access the project, as long as they do, **They don’t necessarily need to understand them as Art**. [...] The term “Social Practice” is unintelligible to a general public, [...] People tend to take these projects on their own terms.”



**Sue Bell Yank,**  
Critical Writer, Organizer  
Assistant Director of Academic  
Programs @ Hammer Museum

“Social Practice is **not about starting with an end product already determined**, artists need to talk to the community and figure out what the needs are and what the shape would be after they have those conversations. We wanted to make sure the projects the artists ended up implementing are structured in ways that are **actually being responsive to the community input** [in the Social Practice Lab].”



**Nancy Chen**  
Program Assistant of  
Social Practice Lab  
@ Asian Arts Initiative



**Dave Kyu,**  
2013 Artist-in-residence  
@ Social Practice Lab

### Social Practice = Socially Engaged Art

“All art, inasmuch as it is created to be communicated to or experienced by others, is social. Yet to claim that all art is social does not take us very far in understanding the difference between a static work such as a painting and **a social interaction that proclaims itself as art** - that is, socially engaged art.”



**Pablo Helguera,**  
Curator, Critical Writer, Artist  
*Education for Socially  
Engaged Art*

“What people do in social space, [and] how they interact with objects.”



**Ted Purves**  
Chair of Social Practice program  
at the California College of Art



Social Practice, to some degree, obscures the disciplines amongst artists, urban planners, community organizers, designers, etc. Social Practice is defined by Ted Purves, chair of the first Social Practice graduate program in the U.S. at the California College of Art in San Francisco, as *“What people do in social space, [and] how they interact with objects.”* Social Practice is not necessarily related to a specific art medium or format. Rather, it is about managing relationships amongst “who”, “what” and “where.”

*“In the 1990s, Suzanne Lacy defined these practices as new genre public art, while Grant Kester later labeled them dialogic art in his book Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art, released in 2004. Social practice has become staple shorthand for many for categorizing socially-engaged practice.”* Stated by Chelsea Haines<sup>11</sup>, <SEA Change: Education for Socially Engaged Art>

However, as Helguera’s stated in Education for Socially Engaged Art, *“‘Social Practice’ has emerged most prominently in recent publications, symposia, and exhibitions and is the most generally favored term for socially engaged art.”* From Helguera’s perspective, Social Practice seems more to be a short form for Socially Engaged Art. He also pointed that, *“All art, inasmuch as it is created to be communicated to or experienced by others, is social. Yet to claim that all art is social does not take us very far in understanding the difference between a static work such as a painting and a social interaction that proclaims itself as art - that is, socially engaged art.”*

*“The definition of Social Practice is still fluid, it is not set right now.”* Revealed by Sue Bell Yank, a writer and arts organizer located in Los Angeles, *“It seems unimportant precisely how participants access the project, as long as they do, They don’t necessarily need to understand them as Art. [...] The term “Social Practice” is unintelligible to a general public, [...] People tend to take these projects on their own terms.”*

While there is no complete agreement as to a rigid definition or even a name for this type of work (Social Practice or Socially Engaged Art), the remarkable characteristic that makes it different from other art formats is “its dependence on social intercourse” as well as on an “actual [...] social action.”

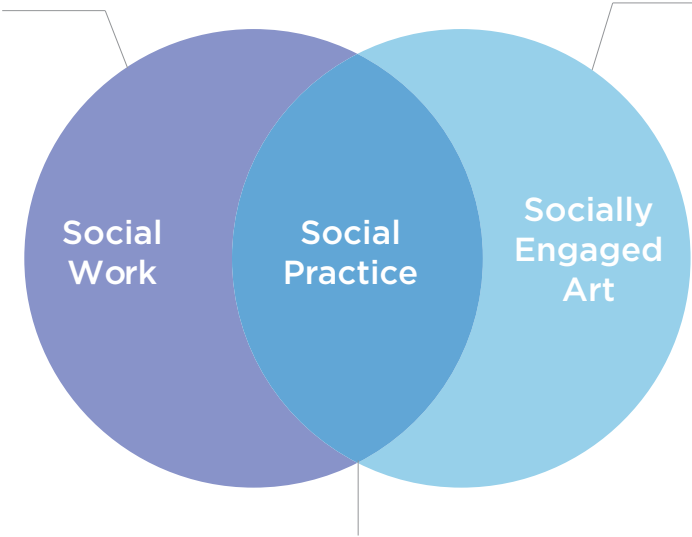
In general, the major difference between Social Practice and other art formats is that it is not just a symbolic representation of social issues, but what Pablo Helguera calls actual practice, which intervenes upon the world in some tangible way for social good or causes social justice.

## 2.4 Synthesis: Difference between Social Practice, Social Work, and Socially Engaged Art

Earlier, I noted that the Social Practice field is a relatively young format in art history, and its definition is still evolving and fluid. Concurrently, there has been a heated debate as to what category some practice projects should be classified into -- social work, socially engaged art or social practice. In the book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, a critique has

been made by Claire Bishop that social practice is beyond evaluation, and it is neither social work nor aesthetic art practice. The Venn diagram below ( [Figure 2.4](#) ) conveys my understanding of the distinction between these terms and their general applications in this thesis context.

Social Work usually offers a **service** to a community in order to **fulfill the needs** of specific groups in a community instantly. Meanwhile, the people who provide these services are usually accredited social workers with a specific education in this field.



Socially Engaged Art **doesn’t necessarily** create **positive social impact** in the community, or meet specific community interests.

It allows **artists** to be **out-of-the-box thinkers** who are likely to bring **new insights** to a large conversation that hopefully would **impact all social services on a large scale**.

Social Practice stands in between Social Work and Socially Engaged Art, but it is **more similar to** the nature of **Socially Engaged Art**.

It requires the participants from different disciplines to be **creative thinkers** in various aspects of community life, and ideally promote some kind of social impact in a community through the **actual practice**.

Figure 2.4 : Differences between Social Work, Social Practice and Socially Engaged Art



2.5 Recap:  
The Operative Definition of Social Practice

In this thesis, the work that socially engaged artists and their community collaborators co-create is called Social Practice. The operative definition of Social Practice requires that artists place themselves in a community, and closely work with community members from various disciplines, and aim to promote certain social impact on the community through actual practices.

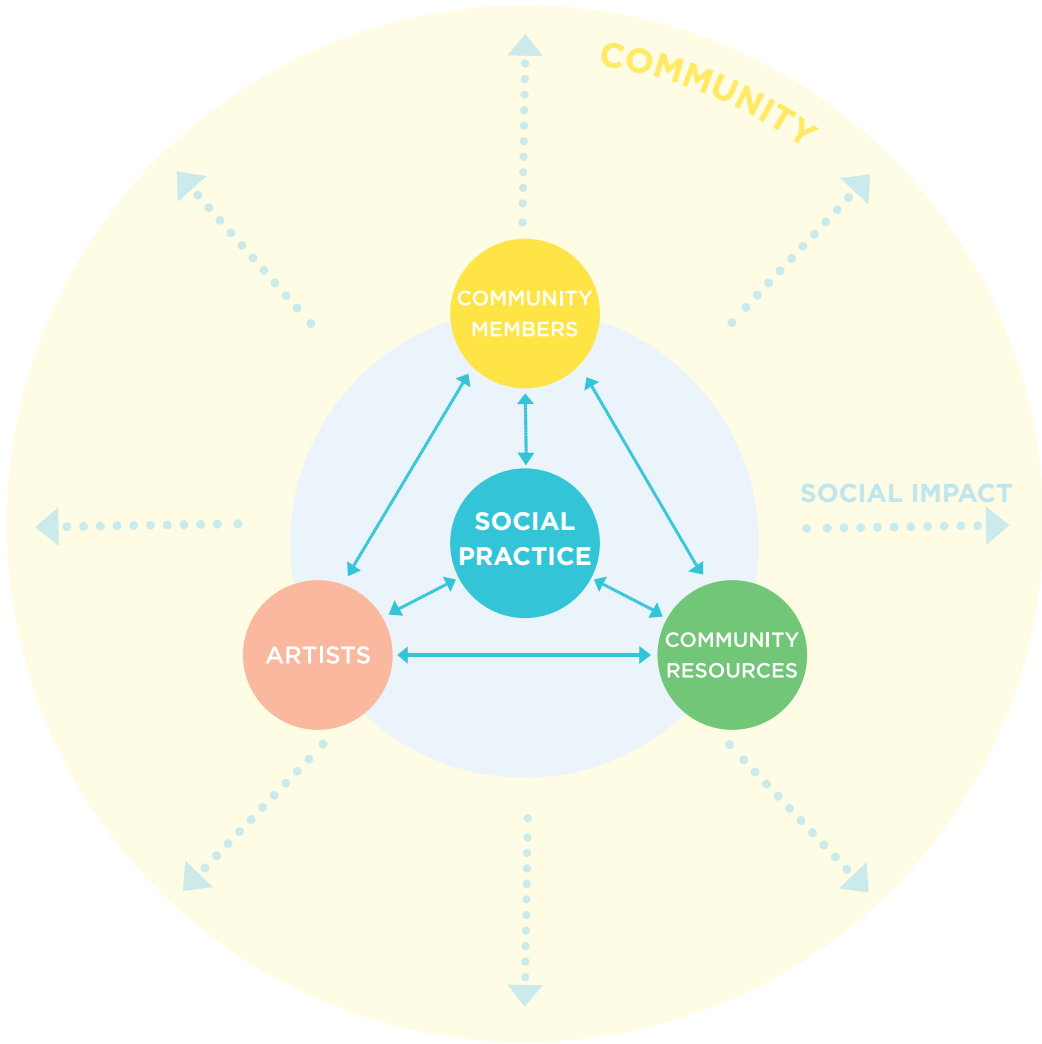


Figure 2.5 : Ideal Social Practice Model in a community

**POINT OF ENTRY:**  
Why Should I Introduce  
Human Centered Design  
into Social Practice?

3

POINT OF ENTRY:  
Why Should I Introduce Human Centered Design into Social Practice?

Based on the case studies of Social Practice in Chapter 2, I identified that Human Centered Design and Social Practice art fields share values and methods to engage with local communities. Figure 3.1 demonstrates these similarities in the engagement process. As every artist and designer may follow their own approach, but being a designer, I found the likeness they share striking.

As Figure 3.1 shows, Human Centered Design and Social Practice are most similar in the Research and Sensemaking (Reflection) processes. For example, Social Practice Artists often engage communities in interviews, which is similar to designers. They then take these interviews and reflect on them, sometimes talking with other Social Practice Artists or organizers to make sense of what they learned. Over years, designers have been working on a number of tools and outreach strategies for meaningful engagement with individuals and communities. I believe this would benefit the Social Practice artists to better engage with local communities in their research process.

However, since there is a large variety of Social Practice Projects, the implementation of Social Practice is very context specific. Hence, I focused on Research and Sensemaking (Reflection) tool-kits to assist Social Practice Artists. (See more details in Chapter 6 - Prototype and Test.)

SOCIAL PRACTICE



HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN

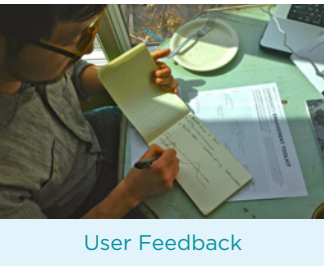


Figure 3.1 : Social Practice and Human Centered Design Share Similar Process with Different Terms.

A PRACTICAL CASE STUDY:  
Overview of the Social Practice  
Lab Program at Asian Arts  
Initiative



4.1	Community:	Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods
4.2	Commissioning Body:	Asian Arts Initiative
4.3	Experimental Program:	Social Practice Lab
4.4	Artists-in-Residence:	Stories of Current Artists-in-Residence





Figure 4.1: Steven Parker, current artist-in-residence at Social Practice Lab, facilitated sound experiment workshop with kids in Chinatown Learning Center.

#### 4. A PRACTICAL CASE STUDY: Social Practice Lab at Asian Arts Initiative in Philadelphia

In Summer 2012, I started working with the Social Practice Lab, a year-round artists-in-residence program hosted by the Asian Arts Initiative. The project invited artists from different states to Philadelphia to focus on the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods and create socially engaged art in order to facilitate positive changes in the community.

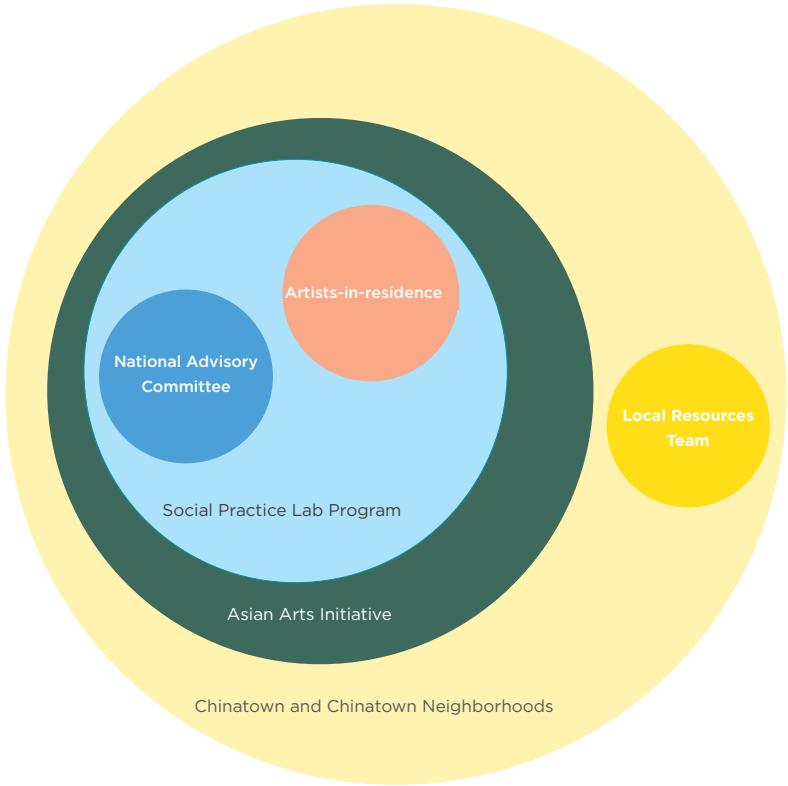


Figure 4.2 : An Introduction of the Practical Case Study





Figure 4.3 : Map of the Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods, which is defined by Asian arts Initiative

- Chinatown North Neighborhood
- Chinatown Proper Neighborhood

## 4.1 COMMUNITY: Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods

Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods are considered as one community by the Asian Arts Initiative, although its organizers also recognize that these two areas have separate characters. This community was the focus of the Social Practice

Lab program, which was hosted by the Asian Arts Initiative. Before we dive into the potential Social Practice Art projects, this session will reveal an overview of the community of Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

### 1) History

Philadelphia’s Chinatown was pioneered by several Cantonese immigrants, who opened laundries and restaurants, back in the mid-19th century. Once the workers saw the economic opportunities in the area, they notified others on the West Coast and in China and this started a mass influx of Chinese people to eastern cities such as Philadelphia.

Throughout its history the area has hosted a majority of merchant and service-oriented businesses to meet the needs of immigrant workers and help them interact with mainstream society such as accounting and law firms, driving schools, insurance services, and providers of herbal medicine and acupuncture.

Today, the Chinatown community is split up by the Vine Street Expressway. ( Figure 4.4 ) However, the expressway was originally proposed to be built on South Street in 1950, but the Italian and the artist community protested and the city restructured the proposal and set it up on Vine street. At that point, maybe because of language issues, national cultures or lack of community construction, Chinatown residents didn’t know how to fight for their rights and didn’t didn’t effectively protest the city plan.

In the late 1950’s proposed construction of the Vine Street Expressway called for the demolition the Holy Redeemer Church and School, a landmark of the community. To protest this redevelopment, the community mobilized its residents and the Philadel-

phia Chinatown Development Corporation was formed in 1969. The community has faced repeated challenges to its geographic boundaries through the years, including the construction of the Gallery Mall, the Philadelphia Convention Center, expansion of Independence Mall, and the latest, expansion of the Convention Center. Other threats to build a baseball stadium and a casino were defeated by the community.



Figure 4.4 : East-On Vine Street-From 15th Street  
Source: PhillyHistory.org. 8/23/1951





Figure 4.5: The Friendship Gate of Chinatown Proper Neighborhood, located on Market and 10th Street, established in 1985.

## 2) Current State - Chinatown Proper

As can be seen in the photos, Chinatown proper has a vibrant business commercial district, consisting of various Asian restaurants and Chinese grocery stores. Most residents in Chinatown who immigrated from China don't have acknowledgement of the concept of community building.







Figure 4.7: The Reading Viaduct in Chinatown North Neighborhood

### 3) Current State - Chinatown North

Meanwhile, from the construction environment as well as the signs on the buildings, there is much less Chinatown identity in the Chinatown North neighborhood. In particular, I was surprised that the only artistic scene with Asian identity present is the public area with several red lanterns.





4) Visual Demographics

For my demographic information, I pulled data from the 2010 U.S. Census. In employing the data, I used the smallest geographic unit available, called census block group, for the following areas:

- Census Tract 2 - Block Group 1
- Census Tract 376 - Block Group 2
- Census Tract 376 - Block Group 1

As you see on the map ( Figure 4.9 ), the pink and orange outlined areas overlap the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods to some extent, but they serve as relatively representative data for this community. The statistics indicate a sense of the neighborhoods, as seen on the next page.



Figure 4.9 : Map of Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods' boundaries, which was defined by Asian Arts Initiative

- = Chinatown North Neighborhood (Defined by the Asian Arts Initiative)
- = Chinatown Proper Neighborhood (Defined by the Asian Arts Initiative)
- = Census Tract 376 - Block Group 1 and 2
- = Census Tract 2 - Block Group 1

Total Population

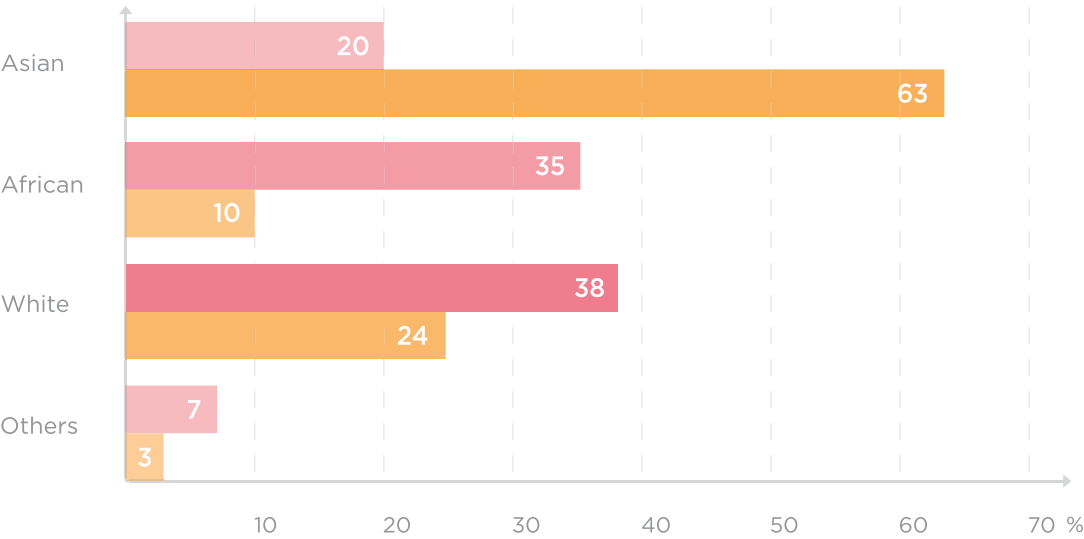
Chinatown North

2 9 8 6

Chinatown Proper

2 9 3 7

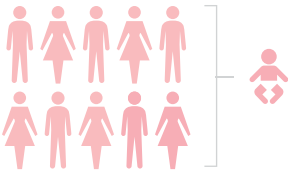
Ethnicity



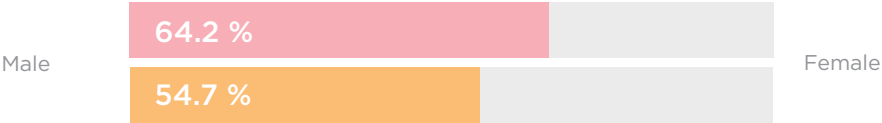
Family

Sex and Age

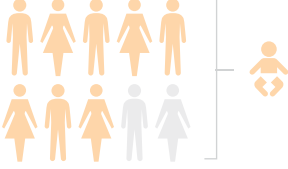
10 Adults for 1 kid



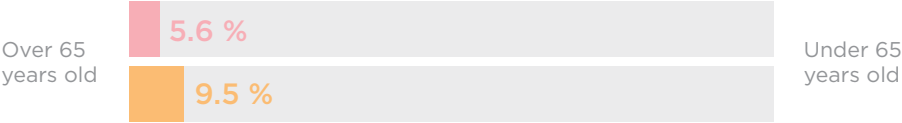
Chinatown North has the second highest proportion of males of any census block group in central Philadelphia.



8 Adults for 1 kid



Chinatown Proper has almost twice as many elderly as Chinatown North, despite having similar sized populations.



5) Existing Public Art

In general, art scenes can reflect the identity of a community and its culture. Because Social Practice was originally extended from art practice, I was curious about the existing or emerging art scenes in the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhood. Typically, those existing public art in Philadelphia have presented themselves in the format of murals and outdoor sculpture. In the case of Philadelphia’s Chinatown North neighborhood, surprisingly, there are limited aesthetic art scenes.

However, there are numerous artist studios and contemporary art galleries located in the Chinatown North neighborhood, which the Asian Arts Initiative is clearly aware of and responding to (e.g., Vox Populi and others in the building on N. 11th Street); yet, these art studios and galleries seem to be hidden from the public.



Cherry St. and 10th St.  
Chinatown Proper Neighborhood



Cherry St. and 10th St.  
Chinatown Proper Neighborhood



Arch St. and 8th St.  
Chinatown Proper Neighborhood



Race St. and 12th St.  
Chinatown Proper Neighborhood



Vine St. and 12th St.  
Chinatown North Neighborhood



Callowhill St. and Ridge St.  
Chinatown North Neighborhood

4.2 COMMISSIONING BODY:  
Asian Arts Initiative

The Asian Arts Initiative, located on 1219 Vine Street in Philadelphia, was established in 1993. It is a multi-disciplinary community-based arts center. Their mission is to engage artists and everyday people to create art that explores the diverse experiences of Asian Americans, addresses the social context, and imagines and effects positive community change.

The Asian Arts Initiative is developing a multi-tenant arts facility that will incorporate individual artist’s studios and office and program space- including room for workshops and meetings, gallery and exhibition areas, and a black box-style theater.

The organization’s current programs include a public performance season, a gallery exhibition series, artist residences, and youth workshops that focus on telling the stories of Asian Americans and the diverse communities of which Asian Americans are a part.

- Organization Mission:
- Engaging artists and people to create art
  - Exploring the diverse experiences of Asian Americans
  - Addressing social context
  - Imagining & effecting positive community change

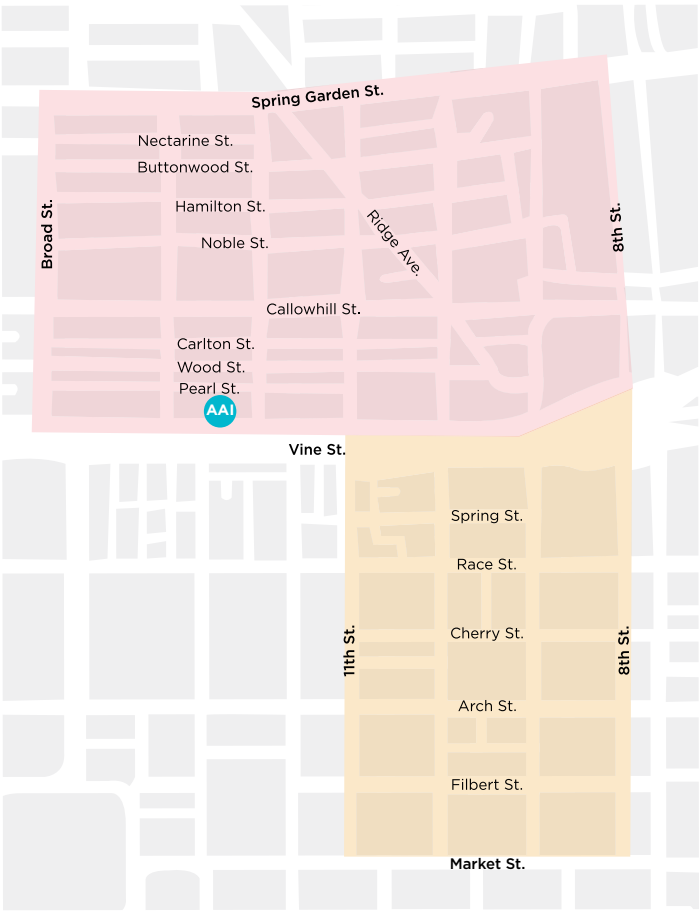


Figure 4.10 : Map of Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods’ boundaries, which is defined by Asian Arts Initiative.

AAI =  Asian Arts Initiative



## Asian Art Initiative Programs



### Youth Program

- Summer program
- Teenagers (Grade 6th -12th, 13-18 )
- July 2 ~ August 17
- Clay, drum, painting, photograph, movement, radio/film/book making



### Public Programs

- Artwork events
- Gallery / on view
- Theater / on stage
- Film / on screen
- **Social Practice Lab**



### Chinatown Project - 2009

- Three themes:  
Food, Community, and Identity
- Utilizing the social performance art intervention methodology
- Combining with the community development strategy to engage residents in Chinatown



### Artists in Communities Training (ACT) - 1997

- Asian American artists who want to teach in school / community
- Training artists to be effective educators (skills in teaching)



### Art - Making

- Asian Americans ( all ages )
- Technical skills
- Exploring culture & identity

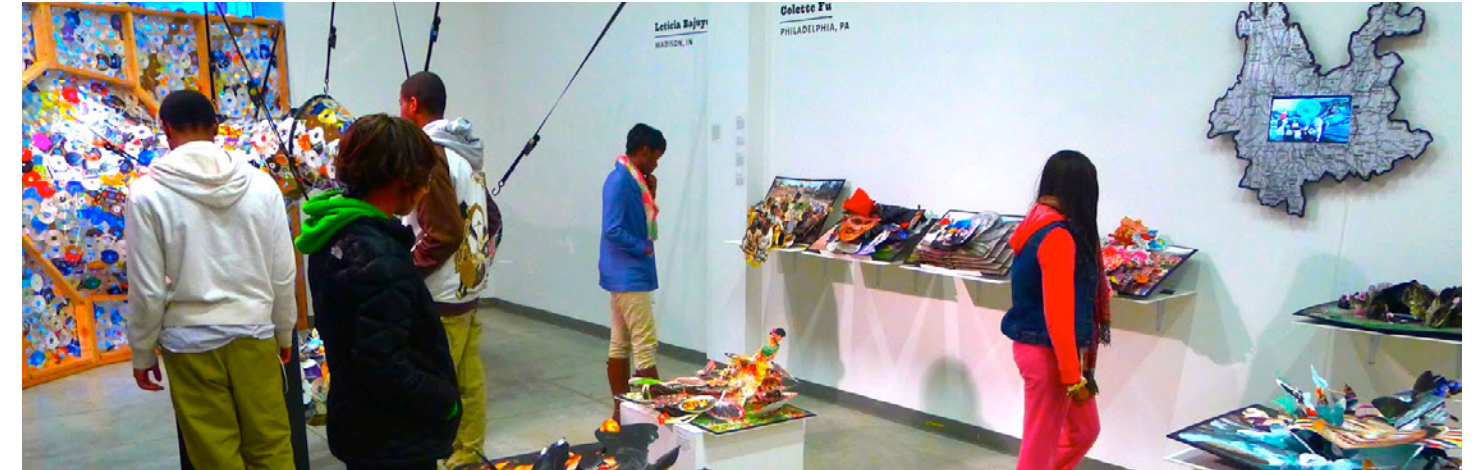


Figure 4.11 : Asian Arts Initiative Programs Structure

4.3 EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM:  
Social Practice Lab

In 2012 summer, Asian Arts Initiative proposed its Social Practice Lab program as an approach to increasing art’s impact in the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods. Initially, Asian Arts Initiative invited artists, urban planners, community organizers, designers, and creative thinkers from all sectors--locally, regionally, and nationally--to propose public art projects and initiatives

that engage with and enliven the community. It commissioned and supported the work of creative individuals and organizations in the neighborhoods of Chinatown and Chinatown North in Philadelphia.

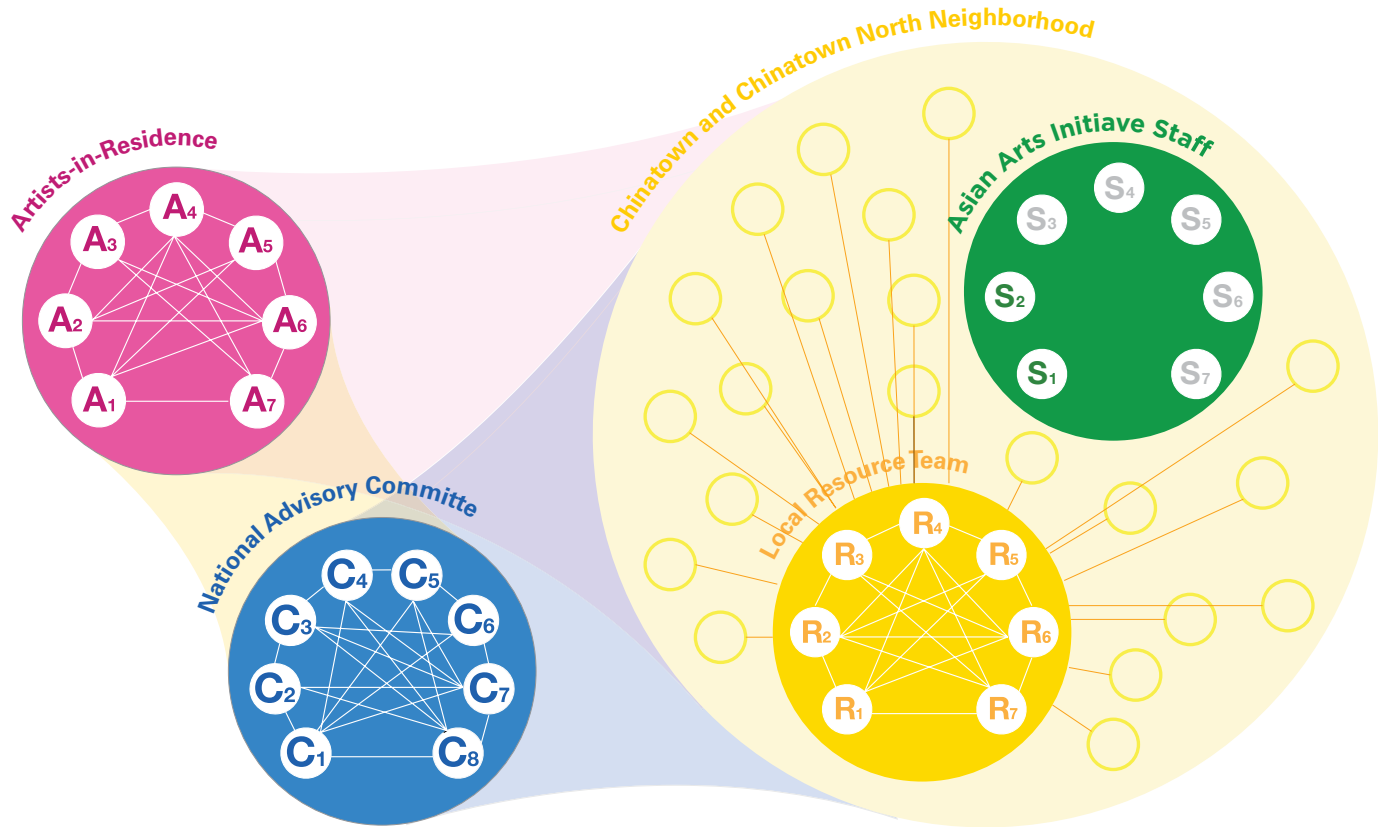


Figure 4.12 : Structure of Social Practice Lab Program



Gayle Isa  
Executive Director of  
Asian Arts Initiative

“The core of social practice lab project is **to better serve the neighborhood through arts, as well as to get to know our neighborhood better**. As a community-based art organization, we want to **respond to the community dynamic that exists**, but also **influence it from the positive by opening up communication and build relationships across different groups** that don’t currently communicate.”

“Since it was the first year of Social Practice Lab program, everything is an experiment to us! We have purposely tried to encourage the seven teams of artists-in-residence with flexibility to change and experiment with different approaches or projects, **emphasizing the notion of a true “lab” where not everything is necessarily expected to be a success, and where risk is inherent.**”



Nancy Chen  
Program Assistant of  
Social Practice Lab  
@ Asian Arts Initiative

The selected projects were a part of a network of ongoing, year-round projects, supported by a National Advisory Committee of experienced social practitioners and local community activists, and by the infrastructure of Asian Arts Initiative.

Figure 4.12 shows the structure of Social Practice Lab program, which includes 4 different entities: Artists-in-residence, Asian Arts Initiative, Local Resources Team and National Advisory Committee.

In 2012, there were 7 groups of artists-in-residence selected to participate in the Social Practice Lab program. The Local Re-

source Team emerged around July of 2012. As for Asian Arts Initiative, the goal of its establishment is to foster meaningful conversations in the community.

In our former meetings, the Executive Director, Gayle Isa expressed her hopes to expand the Local Resource Team to include more diverse community members who care about the future of our neighborhood. For the Social Practice Lab, the representatives from diverse community organizations were also committed to participating in the retreat events and acting in the role of “connector” for the Artists-in-Residence in their community research phase.





Figure 4.13 : Photo from Three-day Retreat Events during September 13 to 15.

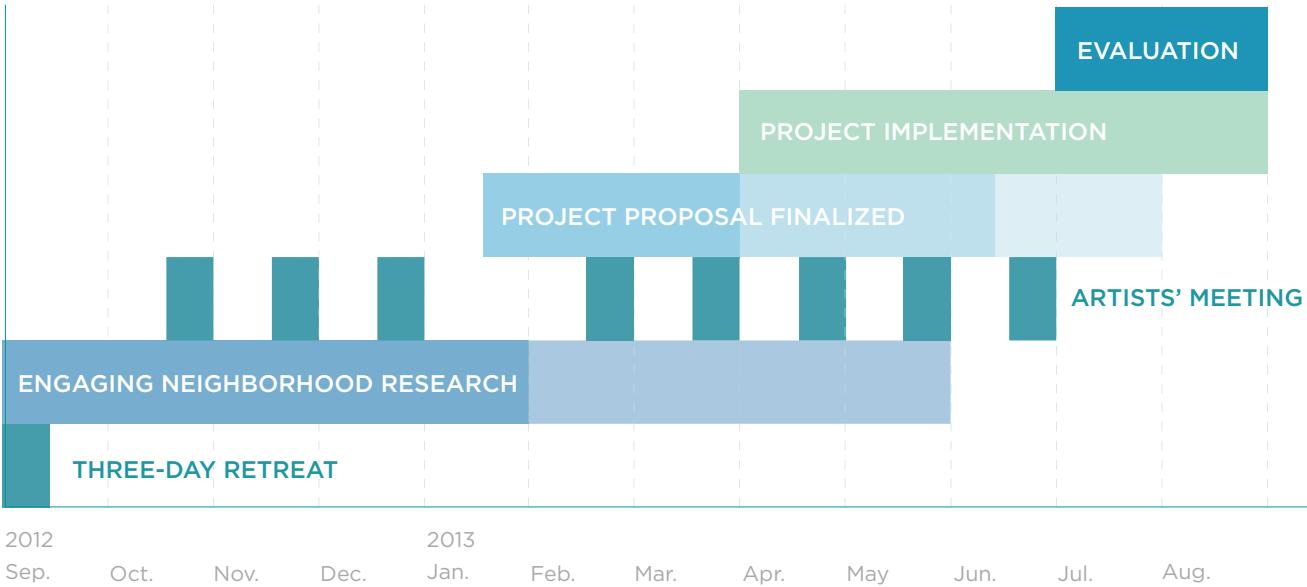


Figure 4.14 : Timeline of 2012 - 2013 Social Practice Lab



### 4.3 Artists-in-Residence: Stories from the Current Artists-in-residence

In this section, I will share the stories of three artists that I interviewed for this thesis project. Most participating artists-in-residence are from various disciplines. They were required to focus on Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods to create artwork in a variety of mediums. To see the details of the Artists’ Community Engagement Process on [page 98](#).



Figure 4.15 : Artists’ Meeting during Three-day Retreat Events of Social Practice Lab

### Ben Volta School . Kids . Fabric

Ben Volta works with public school teachers and kids from the community to develop creative methods that link art to specific areas of learning. In my conversation with Volta, he remarked that initially he just thought working with schools would be a good way to have income and also create artwork with kids. Hence, he started working with schools as an art instructor to teach students how to make beautiful, creative artwork through experiments with various materials.

His previous school-based art projects combined academic learning and life skill development to create art with an unexpected content. He is more pas-

sionate about the process of collaborating with kids, than the final pieces. He wanted to continue working with kids and share the process, to do something big and beautiful that the participants can be proud of, but also learn from because of the process they engaged in.

In 2010, Ben Volta worked with the Mural Arts Program to create Home That Was. This temporary public artwork in Chinatown North raised Volta’s interest in applying for artist-in-residency at the Asian Arts Initiative’s Social Practice Lab program. Although he has been working with the school community and kids for





Figure 4.16 : Contextual Interview through Generative Toolkit with Ben Volta on Nov. 13, 2012 in Chinatown Proper Neighborhood. (More Details on Page 122)

## Yowei Shaw

Audio Producer . Youth Media

Yowei Shaw works as an audio producer and public radio reporter in Philadelphia. In 2011, she founded Philly Youth Radio, a project that provides young people of color with the tools and training to create their own radio stories. Meanwhile, she has also reported for WNYC's Studio 360, NPR's Morning Edition, WHYY, and other outlets. Shaw planned to continue working in public radio while creating innovative community-based audio exhibitions and documentaries. This also informed her intention of participating in the Social Practice Lab program at the Asian Arts Initiative.

In the past, Shaw had worked near the neighborhood of Chinatown North as a producer and journalist, but she saw herself as an outsider to the community. I learned from our conversation that her expectation for the Social Practice Lab was to draw upon the expertise of community members to explore neighborhood stories and secrets. Her previous audiences for daily work were highly-educated people who have already been used to listening to the radio. As a result, Shaw was concerned about how stories can be created to reach different groups of community members with different language backgrounds, which might include the Chinese seniors, the homeless men, and the

several years, he explained that he had never worked on a project that required artists to reach out to different community groups and conduct research for almost six months. Volta thought it really changed his working context that he was no longer working with an isolated community (school) within a community, but with a broad range of organizations.

When I interviewed Ben Volta in Nov. 2012, he was in the middle of the research phase. However, he shared some initial thoughts about collaborating with PECO and kids from the community to beautify the electricity station fence between 11th and 12th streets in China-

town North. He told me the inspiration was from Gayle Isa, executive director of Asian Arts Initiative. She said that, "A lot of residents around the substation have expressed discomfort with the fact that it was built right next their homes." In January 2013, Volta got permission to continue planning and working on the PECO fabrication project with kids. This project will be implemented in August of 2013.





young students. Seeing herself as a producer, reporter and a storyteller, more than an artist, she thought that success was measured by getting people to listen to her stories on radio. She hoped the stories would entertain them, teach them something new and stay with them in some way. But when her work was put into the Social Practice framework, her understanding totally changed. She felt confused by the concept of Social Practice initially, thinking it involved ways to put her work into a large scale. She expressed that she was struggling with the tension between her own personal aesthetics and community needs. She wanted to create something that she could be proud of, however, which might be in conflict with the need to work together with community members and try to create an

impact. With these concerns, Shaw proposed different projects to collect, create and deliver the community sound and stories.

Presently, she is planning to produce a mobile audio installation that will feature sounds and stories of waiting in the neighborhood and be placed in elevators, waiting rooms, and other places where people naturally wait in the neighborhood. Her idea was to partner with four to six organizations to install the mobile audio installation and hold workshops to gather content and encourage participation. The possible impact she imagined was to raise the awareness of the different entities in the neighborhood so as to open up conversations.

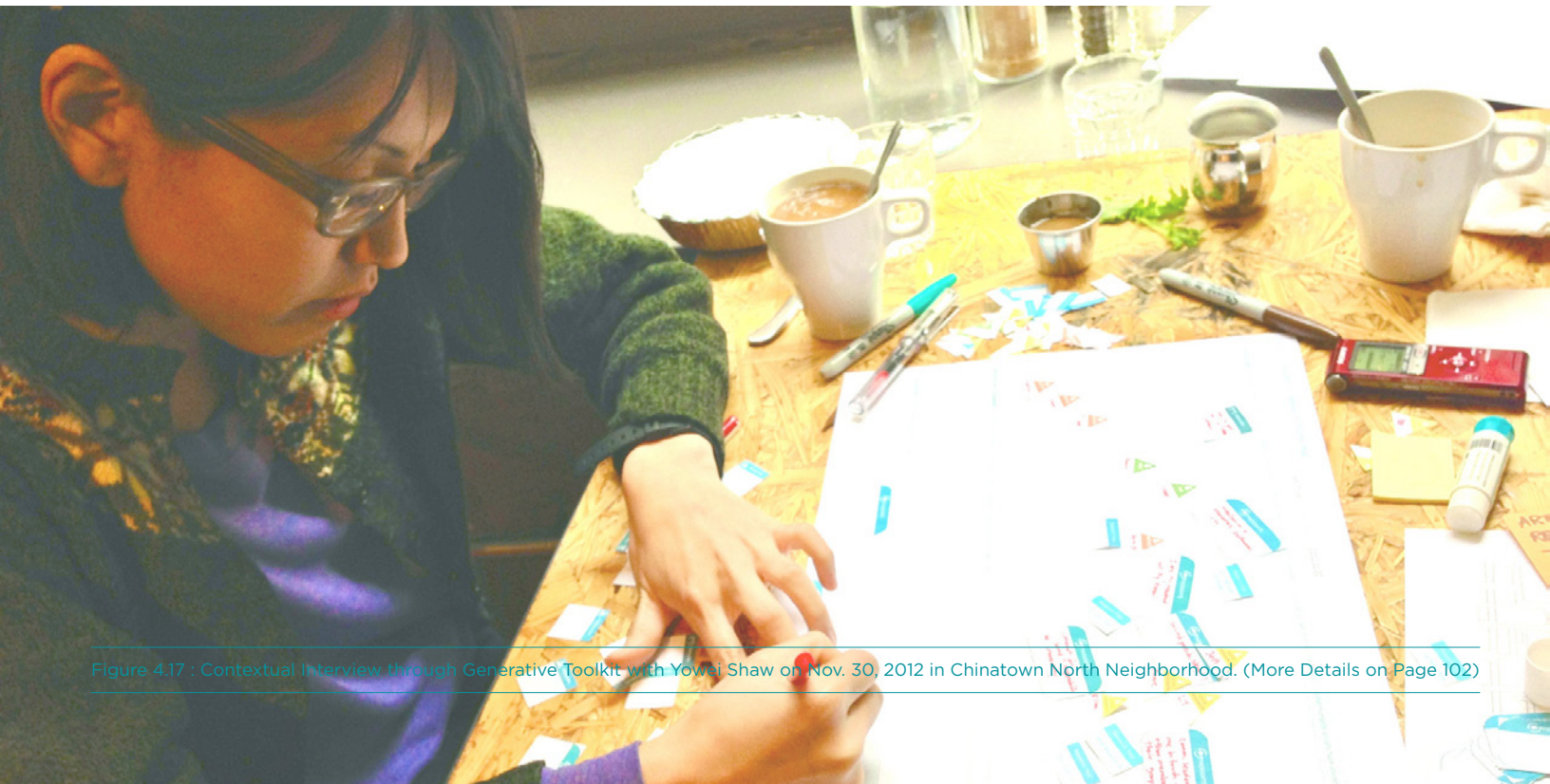


Figure 4.17 : Contextual Interview through Generative Toolkit with Yowei Shaw on Nov. 30, 2012 in Chinatown North Neighborhood. (More Details on Page 102)

### Dave Kyu

Performance Artist

Dave Kyu is a performance artist, and now working in Mayor's Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy as Percent for Art Project Manager. His previous performances seek to pick apart and examine the implicit rules of the social environment. He has been interested in interpersonal relationships and identities. Because for him, these are things typically people don't question, and they are very personally constructed. He created artwork to allow people to reflect on those overlooked issues and be able to improve themselves in the social environment.

During the interview with Kyu, he told me this was the first time for him to participate in Social Practice projects, and it was very different from other artists-in-residency programs he has experienced. Other artist-in-residency programs just invited artists to create artwork in their provided studios with the required equipment needed to make the artists' own work. The Social Practice Lab wanted artists to build relationships with the community and promote certain impact through the work. Hence, the call for Social Practice Lab applications caught his attention, and he thought it would be an opportunity to see if his work could go





Figure 4.18 : Contextual Interview through Generative Toolkit with Dave Kyu on Jan. 28, 2013 at MiD Studio. (More Details on Page 102)

in the direction of Social Practice.

Dave Kyu's current project for Social Practice Lab is to arrange for a plane to fly over the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods and have skywriting above the community. He is now planning to find engaging ways to gather input and ideas from different parts of community for what they want to see in the sky. He was inspired by the idea that distinct communities coexist in Chinatown North but don't necessarily come into contact with each other. The goal of the project was to create art that will facilitate interaction between these communities. This project will be implemented in 2013 summer.

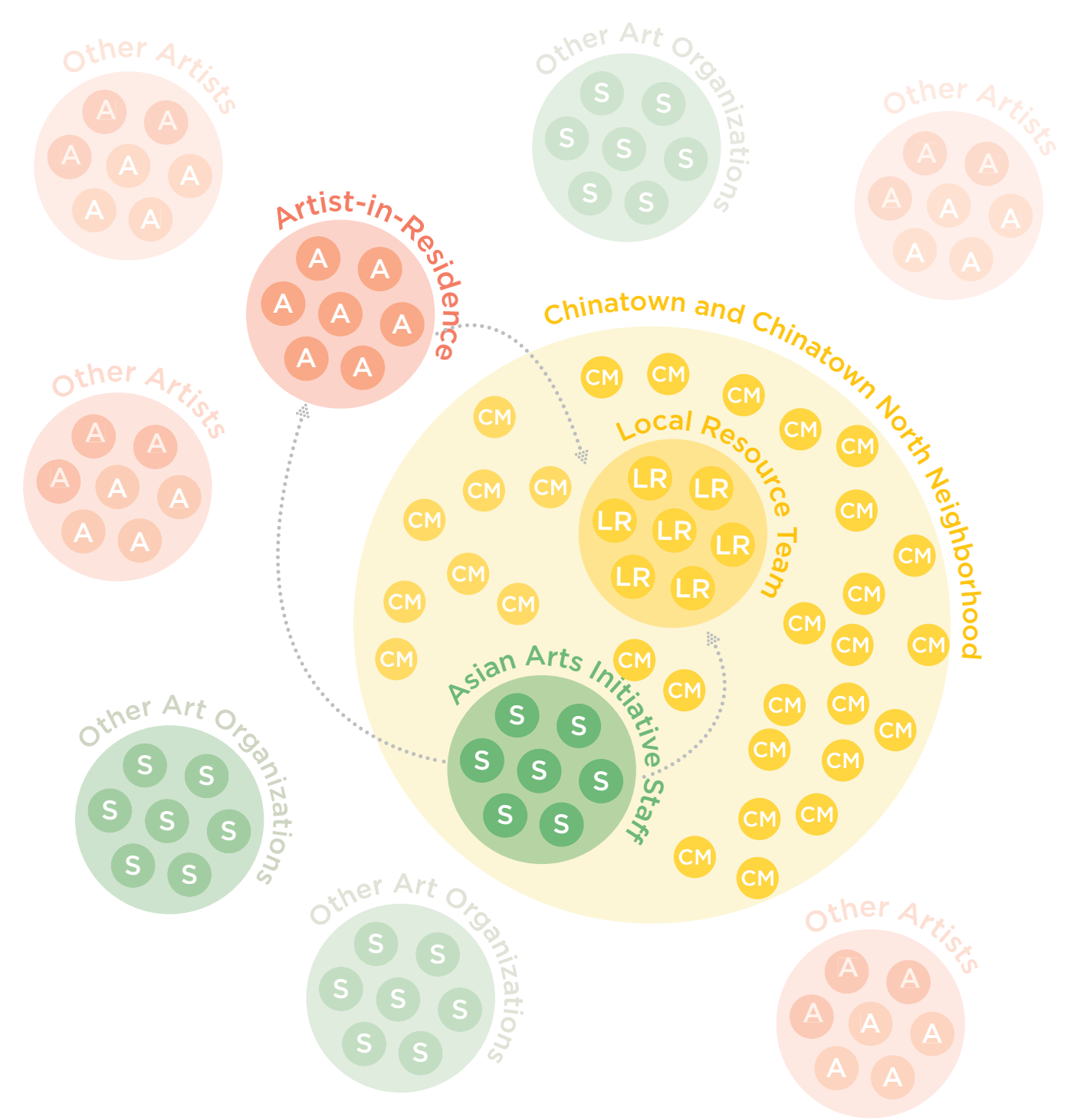


Figure 4.19 : Stakeholders Map for This Thesis Project

# DESIGN PROCESS: Research and Sensemaking



5.1	<b>Community Life in Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods:</b>	Research Tool: Observation and Identity Map
		Research Tool: Contextual Interview
		Research Tool: Future Backwards Workshop
		Synthesis Tool: Affinity Diagramming
5.2	<b>Artists' Engagement Process with the Community:</b>	Research Tool: Contextual Interview
		Generative Research Tool: Influence Timeline
		Synthesis Tool: Affinity Diagramming
		Synthesis Tool: Character Profile





Figure 5.1: Chinatown North Neighborhood

## 5.1 RESEARCH AND SENSEMAKING: Community Life in Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods

To find effective ways of assisting the artists-in-residence who were/would be involved in the Social Practice Lab, I felt I needed to have a deeper understanding about the community first. Hence, before scheduling interviews with the current artists-in-residence, I went through the design process of research and synthesis in the community.

As a part of my research, I worked at the Chinese Music School in Chinatown Proper area two days a week in the summer of 2012, as well as volunteered at the Asian Arts Initiative in Chinatown North to document its Social Practice Lab program. I believed that in order to fully understand the environment and get to know the people in the community, it was important to be a part of the community as much as possible.

The Human Centered Design tools that I applied in my community research are: Observation, Community Identity Map, Contextual Interview, Future Backwards Workshop, and Affinity Diagramming. Below is a brief description of how each tool is connected to the larger context of my thesis work:

### Observation and Community Identity Map:

Just by walking around the neighborhoods and observing the environment, Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods possess different scenes and identities. However, the Asian Arts Initiative sees them as a whole community. Hence, I designed an Identity Map to find out how other people perceived these areas. As a result, I learned there are co-existing identities for Chinatown North neighborhood. This exercise led me to wonder how the artists-in-residence would see this phenomenon, and whether they would take it into consideration in their Social Practice projects.

### Contextual Interview:

In addition to passive research, I conducted contextual interviews with three different types of community residents, from Chinese immigrants in Chinatown Proper area to residents who call Chinatown North Eraserhood neighborhood, to commuters in the neighborhoods. These interviews reveal the Chinatown residents' personal interest, habits and stories, as well as their perspectives on art and community building. Meanwhile, I became more curious about how artists-in-residence investigated in the community and what might have inspired them.

### Future Backwards Workshop and Affinity Diagramming:

This workshop was designed to gather community members and leaders together to reflect on their own perspectives toward the current and past state of the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods. This Future Backwards workshop also visually collected different voices about the community's possible future. From the participants' feedback, I believe it is a useful tool that benefits the artists-in-residence for their Social Practice. Hence, I included it as a part of my thesis prototype - Community Engagement Toolkit. ( [page 135](#) )

To read more details about how I applied those tools and the results in the following pages.



1) Research Tool:  
Observation and  
Community Identity Map

Narrative

As I showed in the previous chapter, the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods convey different community scenes and identities. In order to understand how people perceive the identity of the neighborhood, and its importance in terms of community building, I designed a Community Identity map that helped me conduct a quick survey around Chinatown

When 2012. Oct. 12, 3 hours  
Where Chinatown and North  
Who Residents, commuters in Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods, people outside of the community.

Goal Learning from a community about its identity and overall culture through observation and map survey with its residents, leaders, consumers and commuters.

and Chinatown North.

My research began by walking around and observing the environment, as well as the residents and merchants to find out how aware they were of community life in the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods. Meanwhile, my target audience was divided into four groups: the

residents, the leaders (Local Resources Team members), the commuters, and the people outside of the community.

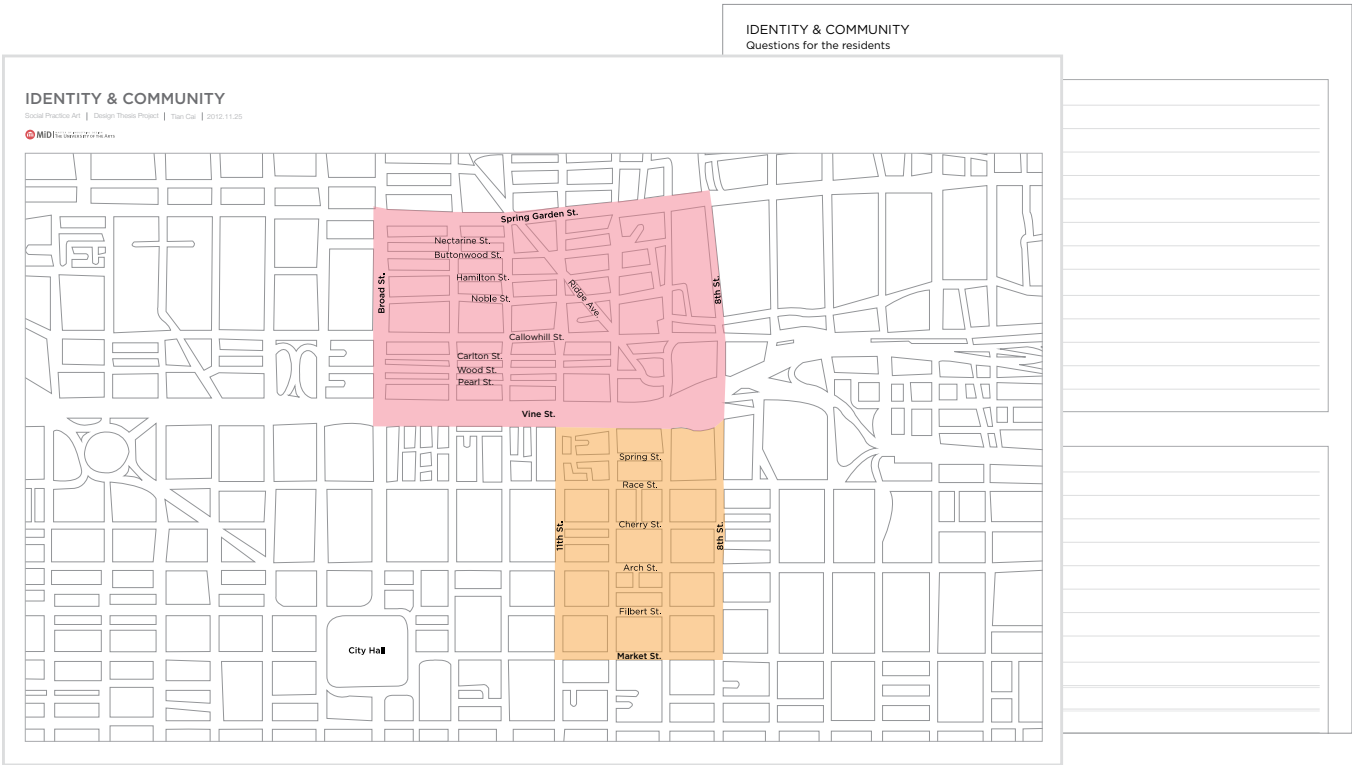


Figure 5.2 : Community Identity Map

What and Why?

Observation of environment and real people in communities is a method often used in the research stage of the Human Centered Design field. It may seem simple to conduct observation by wandering and seeing who and what is in a community.

However, the key element of observation is to develop a beginners' mind, which is critical when entering a familiar environment without carrying assumptions. Usually the lens of personal experience can influence what we focus on and can cause

us to miss important issues.

Observation is an essential research tool to build empathy for people in a community, and understand their natural behaviors and experiences. This tool helps differentiate between the objective environment and the activities in a community. Subjective interpretations of what observers see can reveal their biases and the lenses through which they view the world.

In my research in the Chinatown and Chi-

natown North neighborhoods, I asked people to view the map (Figure 5.2) of these two neighborhoods and then respond to the following questions:

- What are the names of the areas in orange and pink?
- How do the boundaries on the map differ from your understanding?
- Do you feel a sense of community around this area?



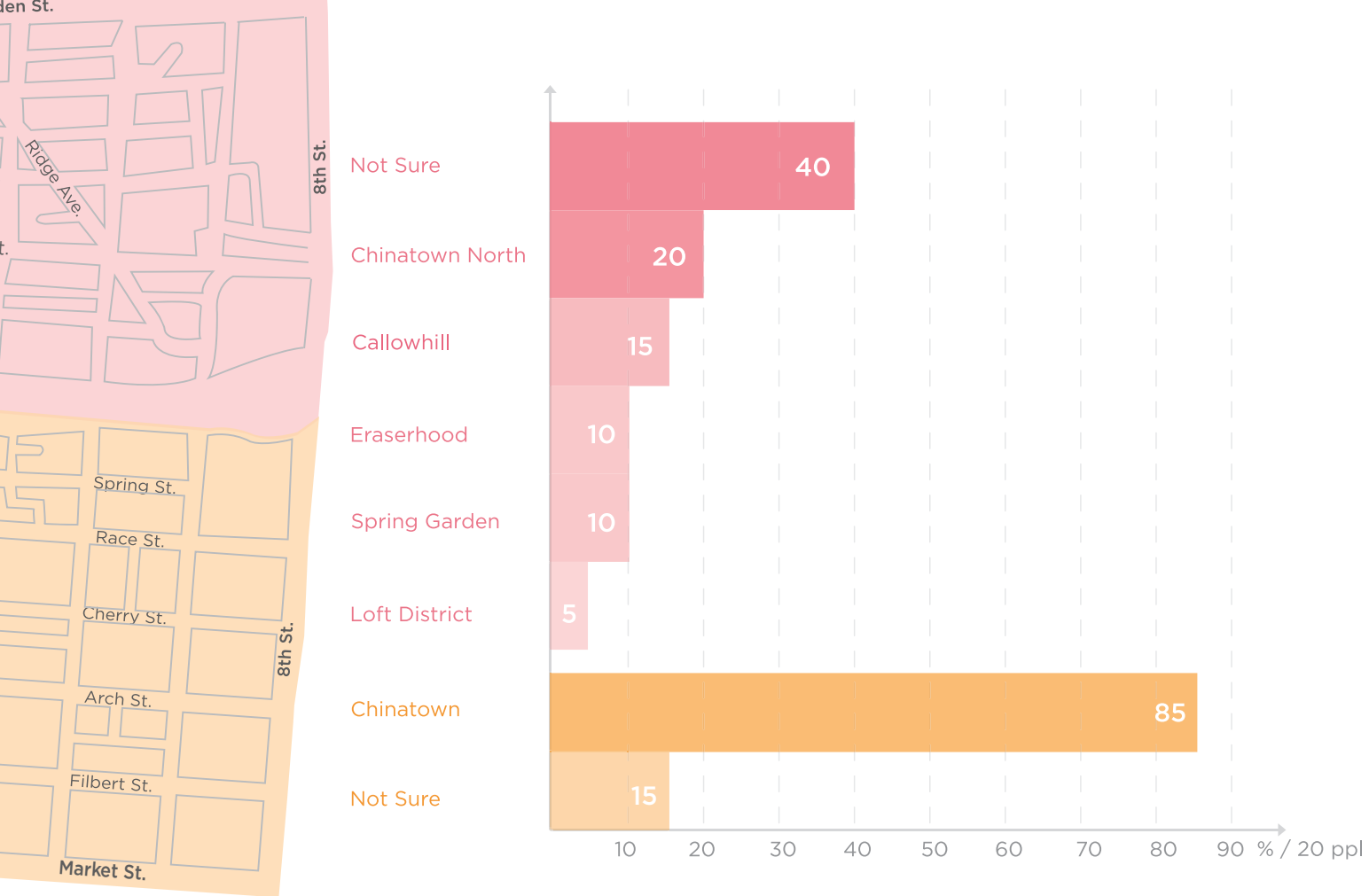


Figure 5.3 : Result of Community Identity Map Exercise

Reflection: Co-existing Identity of Chinatown North Neighborhood.

For my research, I talked with 20 people around the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods. Figure 5.3 shows how the people name the community.

It was evident that the Chinatown Proper neighborhood was easily identified as Chinatown by most residents, commuters

or the people outside. Most of them described the community as a nice place for delicious Asian food and Chinese grocery stores.

As can be seen Figure 5.3, forty percent of the 20 interviewees expressed they were not sure about the name of Chinatown

North area. While other people’s answers indicate that Chinatown North has multiple layers of different people, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. Because of this, there are different names to identify this area: Chinatown North, Callowhill, Eraserhood, Spring Garden, and the Loft District.

2) Research Tool:  
Contextual Interview

When	2012. Aug. - 2012. Dec.
Where	Chinatown and North
Who	Residents, leaders, commuters in Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods, people outside of the community.

Goal	Understanding a community about its community life through contextual interviews with the residents, leaders, consumers and commuters.
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Narrative

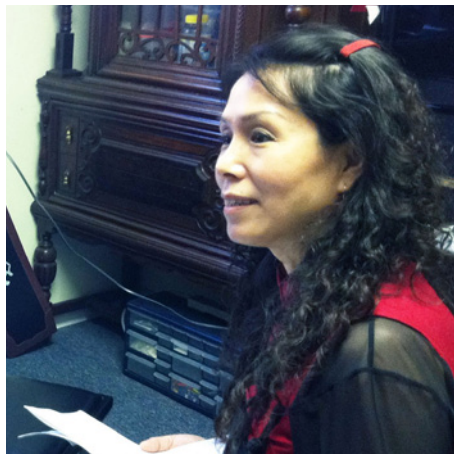
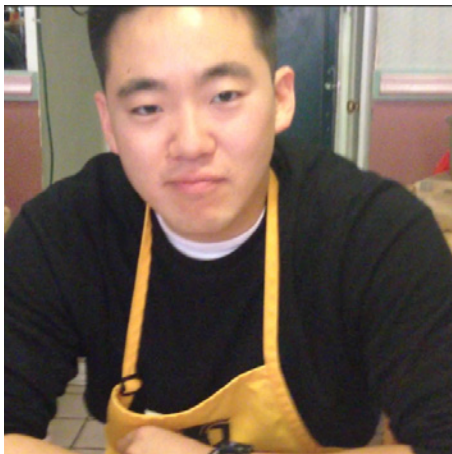
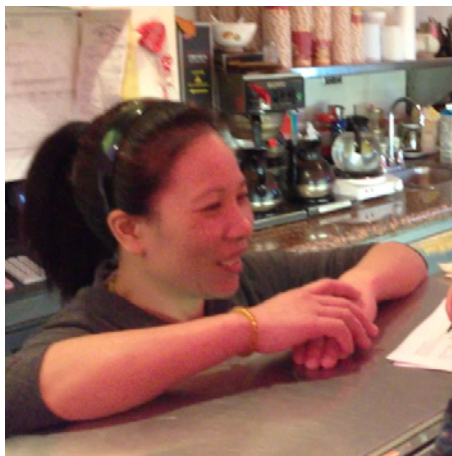
With the Community Identity Map survey, I designed ten questions for the possible contextual interview about Chinatown and Chinatown North. Topics that I was interested in included community members’ perception of art, community building, as well as the Asian Arts Initiative and its Social Practice Lab.

I interviewed 20 individuals in Chinatown and Chinatown North. Among the interviews, I was luckily invited to visit some of their homes, or workplaces in the area. It is valuable for me to contextualize myself in their life, which helped me get to know more about their daily life through the objects, spaces, and people they felt attached to and interacted with.

The photo below is me conducting a group contextual interview with the students in the Chinese Music School in Chinatown Proper neighborhood. All of them were about ten years old and immigrated to the U.S. around two or three years ago. Surprisingly, from the interview, I learned that they identified themselves as Americans at school, but Chinese at home.







## What and Why?

Contextual interviewing requires the researcher to observe, shadow, and talk to the constituents about their life experience in their familiar and comfortable environment. The value of doing this -- meeting with people where they live, work, and socialize -- is that it reveals new insights and unexpected stories of the community culture.

Contextual interviewing also helps conductors put themselves in someone's shoes so as to get beyond what people say to what they think and feel. Because what people say (and think) they do and what they actually do are not always the same thing. However, it is important not to correct or point out the misperception, but rather to understand the difference.

The example questions are below:

- Do you have art experience? What do you see the value of art?
- How do you perceive art's social role in terms of community building?
- What does community building mean to you? What is the key element?
- Are you aware of Social Practice format of art? e.g. community garden, bakery, etc.



Reflection: Residents in the Community Don't Understand Social Practice.

As can be seen in [Figure 5.4](#), when it came to the concept of art, people's first thought was a certain kind of entertainment, such as playing the violin, making a painting, or attending a theatre play. When I introduced the typically community-involved Social Practice Artwork, e.g. community kitchen, garden or bakery, all the individu-

als expressed that they didn't think of that as a form of art, but a kind of social work or community building event. Moreover, community members demonstrated their unfamiliarity around the term of Social Practice. In the diagram below, green quotes were the results from my interviews with two Chinese immigrants who

currently work in a grocery store and a restaurant. They expressed they had been busy making a living and supporting their families, rather than caring about art or the community. They move with their jobs, with their own families. ( See [Figure 5.5](#) )

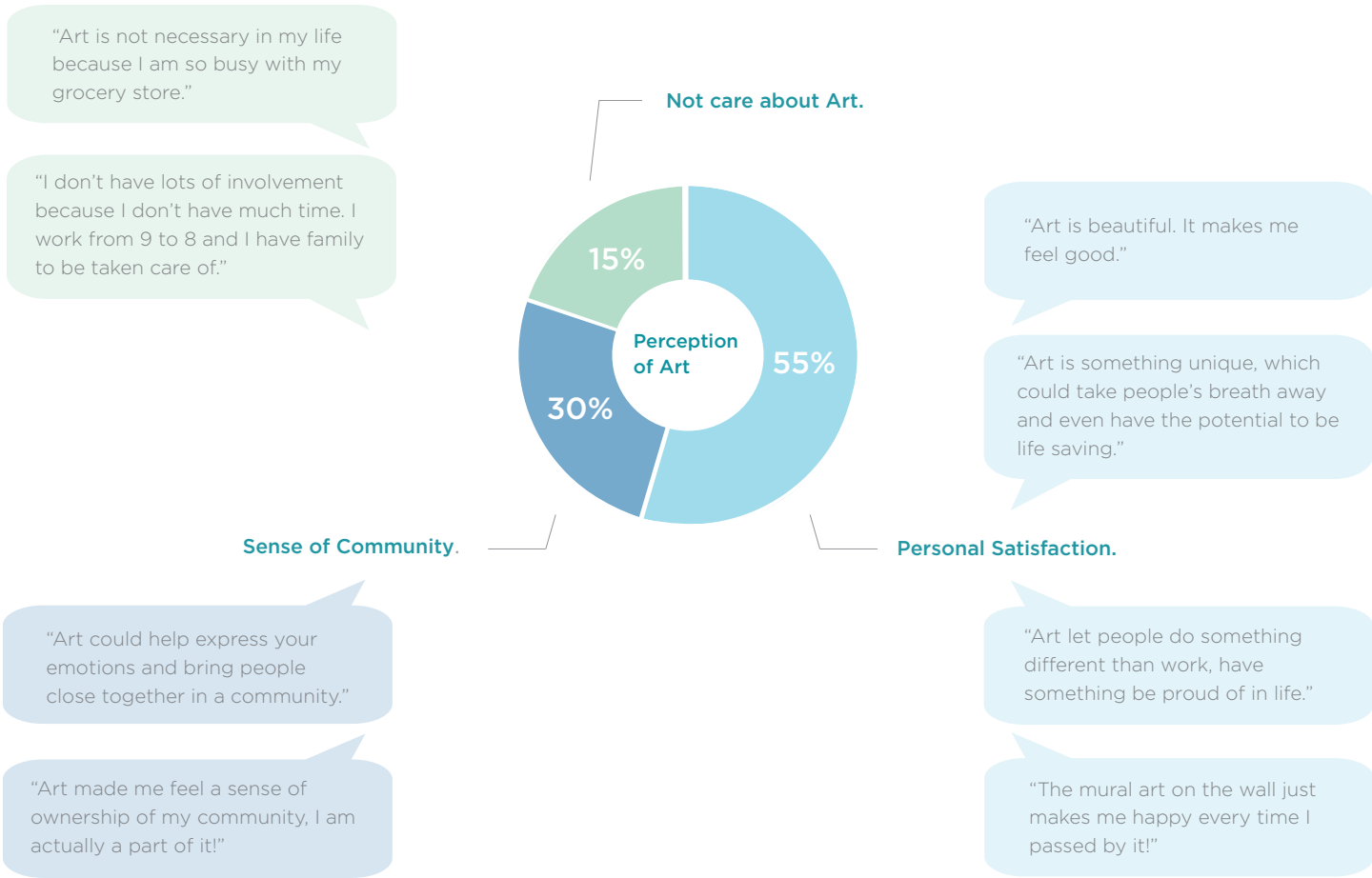


Figure 5.4 : Community Perception of Art

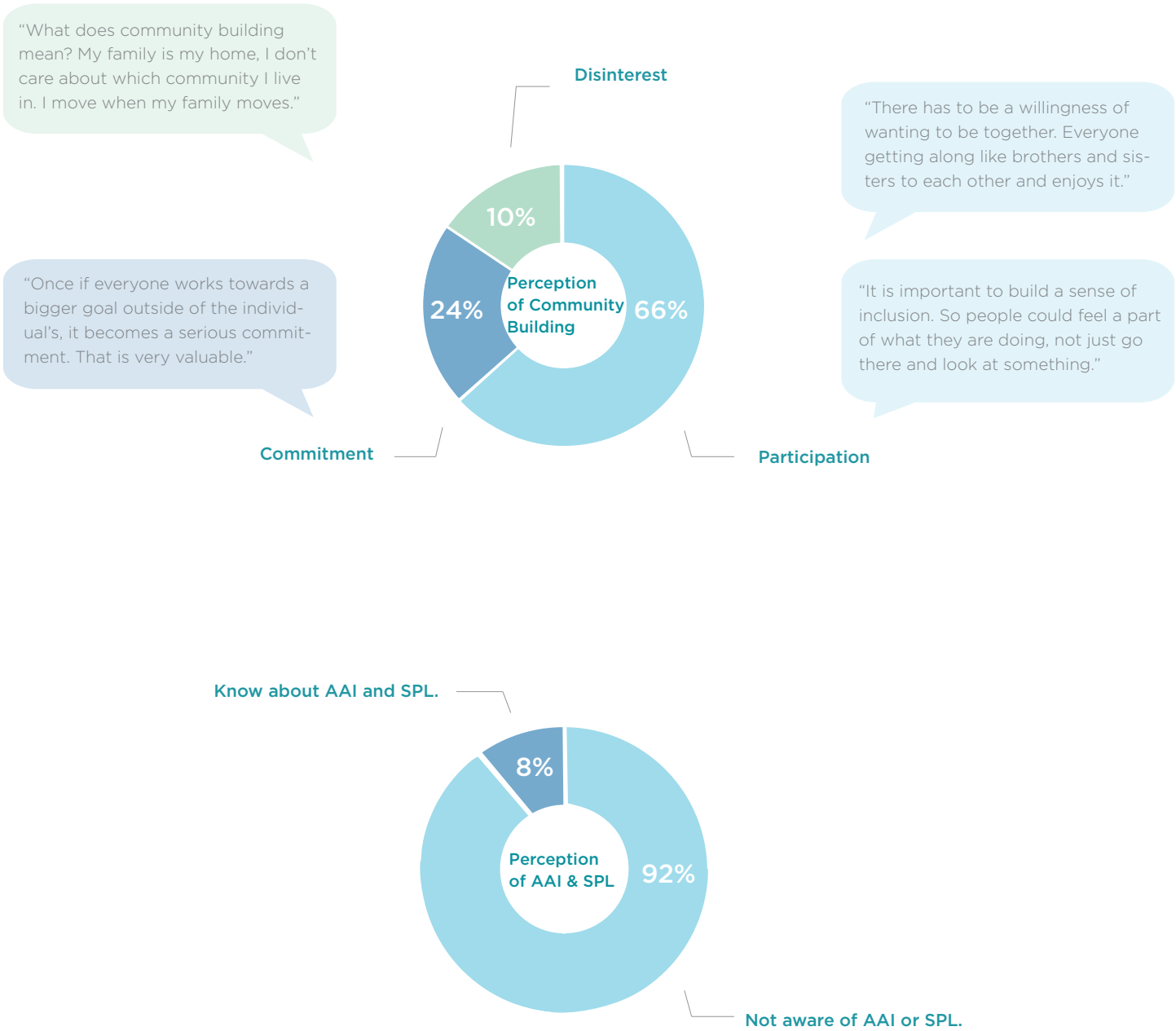


Figure 5.5 : Community Perception of Community Building (top) and the Asian Arts Initiative and its Social Practice Lab (down)

### 3) Research Tool: Future Backwards Workshop

When	2012. Oct. 15, 2 hours
Where	Asian Arts Initiative
Who	Action Mill, Local Resources Team, Asian Arts Initiative Staff, Artists-in-residence

Goal Better understanding a community through discussion about the current, past and possible future of the community among groups of people from different aspects.

## Narrative

Following the launch retreat of the Social Practice Lab, the first meeting of the Local Resource Team was held on October 17, 2012 at the Asian Arts Initiative. As addressed in the previous chapter, the Local Resources Team was established around the time that the Social Practice Lab project was initiated. The goal of the team is to bring different insights and foster open conversations in the community.






“Future, Backwards” workshop helped the participants to understand the past and envision a possible future for the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods. It was facilitated by peers, Meredith Warner and Georgia Guthrie from the design firm, Action Mill.

About 20 participants (including the members from the Local Resources Team, two

current Artists-in-residence, as well as the residents in the community) were divided into four groups and were given instruction to have insightful conversations around the current state and past of the neighborhoods, as well as the best and worst case scenarios for their futures.



Figure 5.6 : Discussion Result of Future Backwards Workshop

-  = Current State
-  = Past State (on the left), Path to the Heaven and Hell (in the middle)
-  = Heaven State - Impossibly Good Future
-  = Hell State - Impossibly Bad Future
-  = Act of God - Unexpected Events

## What and Why?

Future Backwards is a method to aid in widening the range of perspectives a group of people can to understand their past and the possibilities of their future. The established perspectives of people within a community gives them a limited view of the present, and these patterns of past perception usually determine its fu-

ture. It is a group sense-making exercise that is often used at the start of group visioning. It can serve as a warm-up and an opportunity to visualize differences and share anecdotes. (For more details, please see the following page.)

It is a useful tool which assists different

groups of people to open up conversation about one specific community. It also empowers individuals to verbalize and visualize their own voices and perspectives towards their community life.

(The Action Mill facilitates a modified version of this tool that was originally developed by Cognitive Edge.)





## How was it implemented?

Being a documenter of the Future Backwards workshop, I observed and recorded the process of the workshop. From my observation, I noticed that there was no time constraint during the workshop. Also, the facilitators addressed some ground rules to the participants in advance, which included:

- No right or wrong answer.
- No silence in the discussion.
- Be as creative, imaginary and extreme as possible about the future.
- One idea or turning point per post-it.

Below is the process of how this research tool was implemented in the Local Resources team meeting at Asian Arts Initiative:

Step 1. The facilitators divided the twenty participants to four groups and explained the ground rules. Then, they gave the participants the first task to discuss and

write down the current state of the China and Chinatown Neighborhoods on yellow post-its ■.

Step 2. The facilitators guided the participants to think backwards step-by-step from the current state to the past of Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods. The participants need to record them on green post-its ■. The participants were not allowed to remove or rewrite the post-its they put down in the first place.

Step 3 & 4. The participants were given the tasks to imagine about the scenarios of the “heaven state,” along with the “hell state” of the community. They were told to be creative and imaginary about the impossibly good future and the worst condition of the community. The heaven states were captured on the blue post-its ■, while the hell state was documented on the orange post-its ■.

Step 5. The facilitators encouraged the participants to build two paths, which could connect the possible heaven and hell future scenarios to the a point just before the current state. Each event or idea was shared on one green post-it ■ as one step of the paths.

Step 6. The participants were empowered with the pink post-its ■, which represent the act of god - unexpected events. They were allowed to fill in the gap if there was any in the path, which connects the future scenario and the current state.

Step 7. After the over an hour-long discussion, each group accomplished their own post-its map which visually showed their group perspectives on different states of the community. Each group were assigned to present and share their story to the large group based on those visual post-its.

## Reflection: Transience of the Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods

The workshop stimulated rich conversations in the four small groups, and helped people to envision the possible future scenarios of the Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods. From the observation, collectively few participants clearly acknowledged the past of the community. While in this exercise, the value of sharing common understandings of the history of

the neighborhood is that community members started to raise a sense of ownership and belongingness in the community, as well as to have reasons to rally around the community building.

The participants' and facilitator's thoughts about the future, backwards workshop will be shared on the following page.





How did the participants and facilitator reflect on the Future Backwards Workshop?

“One thing that struck me was how, when given a slip of paper to insert as an ‘act of god’ to help us move toward our desired state of bliss in the neighborhood (or an alternate vision of hell in the neighborhood) it didn’t seem that divine intervention was necessarily required. Though **it definitely could help with two important elements that most of us feel are required – providing a huge infusion of capital into the neighborhood; and encouraging passionate leaders with different perspectives to work more harmoniously toward a shared vision!**”

“I thought the ‘Future Backwards’ was wonderful for both sides. In the community, you could talk about anything you want. But when it is written down, and it’s visual in front of you, even these ideas are in community for long time, but **really need to share fresh and new ideas in an evident, visual way.**”



**Gayle Isa**  
Executive Director of Asian Arts Initiative



**Carol Wong**  
Local Resources Team member  
Director and Founder of Chinatown Learning Center

“This neighborhood has been historically transient. It has been the state of fluctuation persistently for probably the last fifty to a hundred years. The **Future, Backwards workshop is useful because it can make statements visible and apparent. Sometimes just putting there in front of others is enough for participants to understand the community better.**”



**Meredith Warner**  
Facilitator of Future, Backwards at Asian Arts Initiative, designer, and artist



4) Sensemaking Tool:  
Affinity Diagramming

Narrative

With Meredith Warner, the facilitator of the Future Backwards workshop and a designer from the design firm, Action Mill, we applied affinity diagramming to group and organize various ranges of information that were collected from the group post-its in Future Backwards workshop. Our goal was to make sense of those statements or events on the post-its, and find the

When 2012. Oct. 19, 2 hours  
Where Action Mill, MiD Studio  
Who Meredith Warner, Daeun Song

Goal Better understanding a community through sensemaking the results from the Future Backward workshop.

possible common themes and patterns or differences among the groups.

The photo below is a process in which we tried to understand how the people from Future Backwards workshop perceive the past of the community. We clustered similar or meaningful statements through silently reading the post-its and physically

moving them around. In the following reflection session, some interesting common themes for each community state will be shared in a visual presentation.

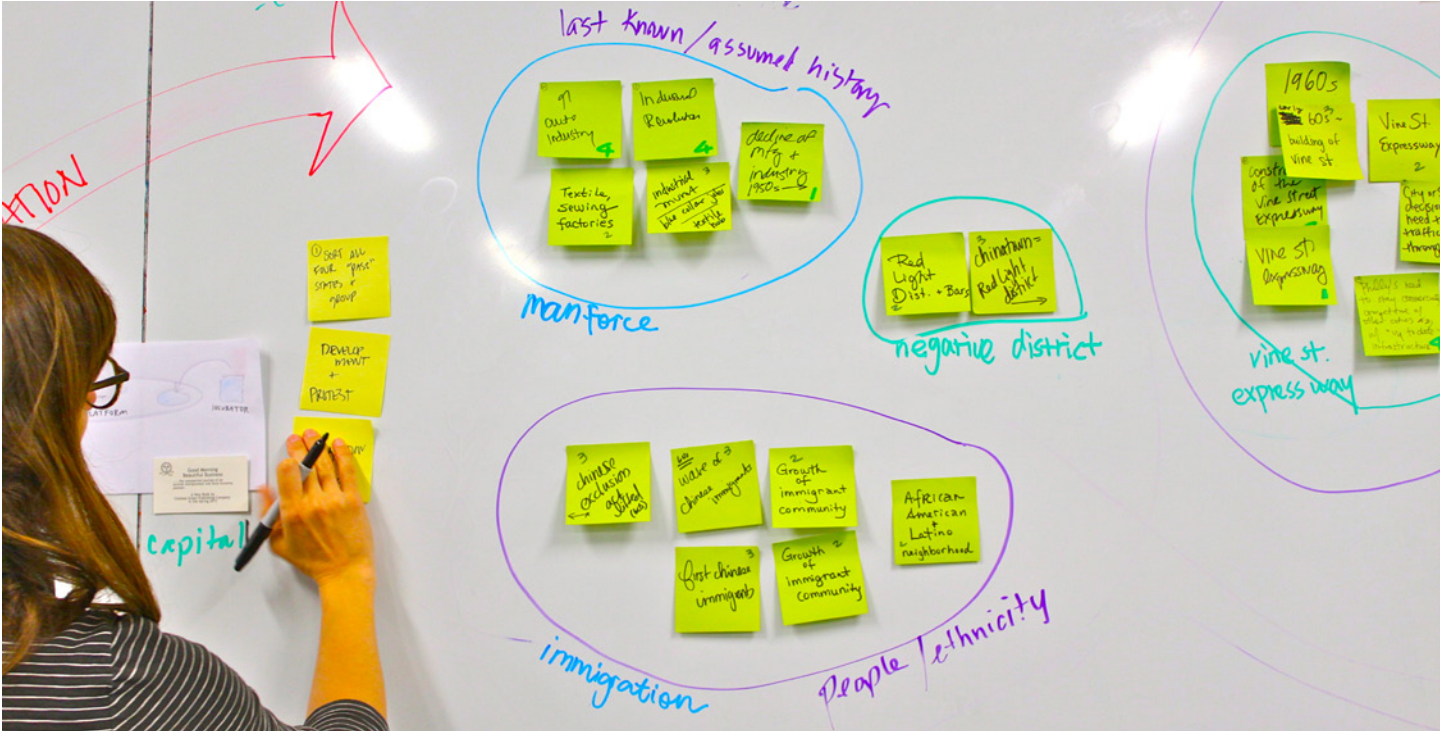
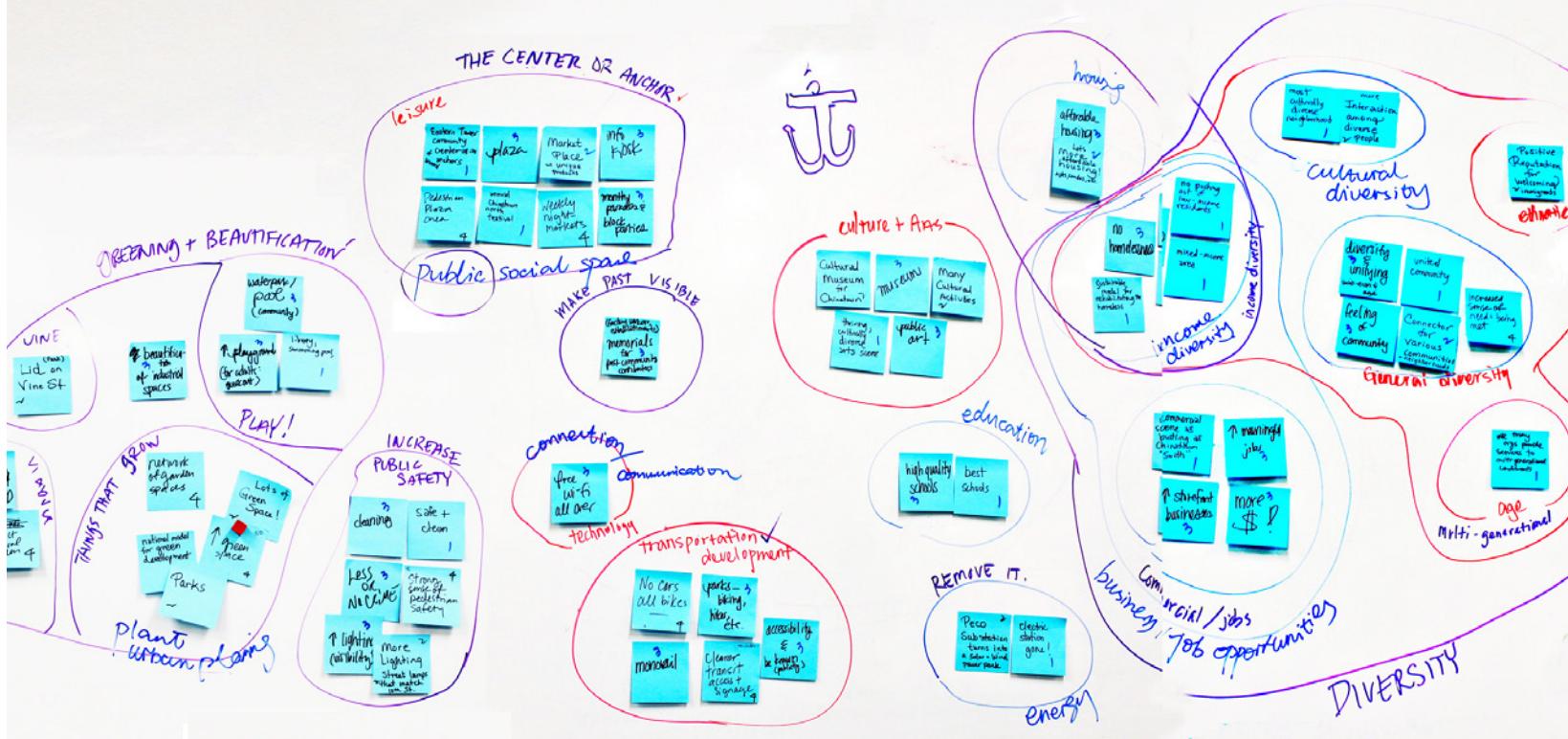


Figure 5.7 : Affinity Diagramming of the Community Heaven State. Below is to Review the Interpretation of Different Colored Post-its:

- Yellow = Current State
- Light Green = Past State
- Blue = Heaven State - Impossibly Good Future
- Orange = Hell State - Impossibly Bad Future
- Pink = Act of God - Unexpected Events

What and Why?

Affinity diagramming is a method of data organization that is intended to define categories based on similarity of information.

This method usually requires the materials and ground rules below:

- Post-its and Markers.
- Whiteboards or spreadsheets (which

allows the post-its to be moved, if necessary).

- One idea or event per post-it.
- Time constraints (in case the participants spent too long time on the clustering process).

Resulting from the exercise, a story will

emerge about community residents, their tasks, or the nature of the community. It is a useful tool showing the process of synthesis to make sense of the information in a visual way.





How was it implemented?

In order to share the detailed steps of affinity diagramming, the paragraph below shows the process of how we understand the “heaven state” -- impossibly good future of the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods, through the affinity diagramming exercise.

**Step 1.** At Action Mill, we started from the heaven state of the community by ran-

domly placing the blue post-its onto the white board.

**Step 2.** Individually, we silently read through the post-its and clustered them to groups based on their similarities within 15 minutes.

**Step 3.** We spent another 15 minutes using colored markers to categorize different

groups by circling and naming them.

**Step 4.** We counted the numbers of the post-its that from one cluster, and recorded the number and name of category on another colored post-it to represent and replace the group.

Reflection: How did the Community Members Envision the Best Scenario of Chinatown Future?

Figure 5.8 is the visual synthesis of the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods’ best scenario that the participants in Future Backwards envisioned. The number on the top of the circle represents how many post-its shared the similar idea (One idea per post-its). It is evident that the main areas of the impossibly good future is to have more diversity, greening and

beautification in the community. Within the two categories, different activities, issues, and events were brought up for the possible future scenario. For instance, lots of community members care about the parking and public safety issues in the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhood. At the same time, the most popular ideas were around the topic of public social cen-

ters and culture arts. For instance, some suggestions like creating more public space for parks, art festivals, block parties were raised several times by the community groups.

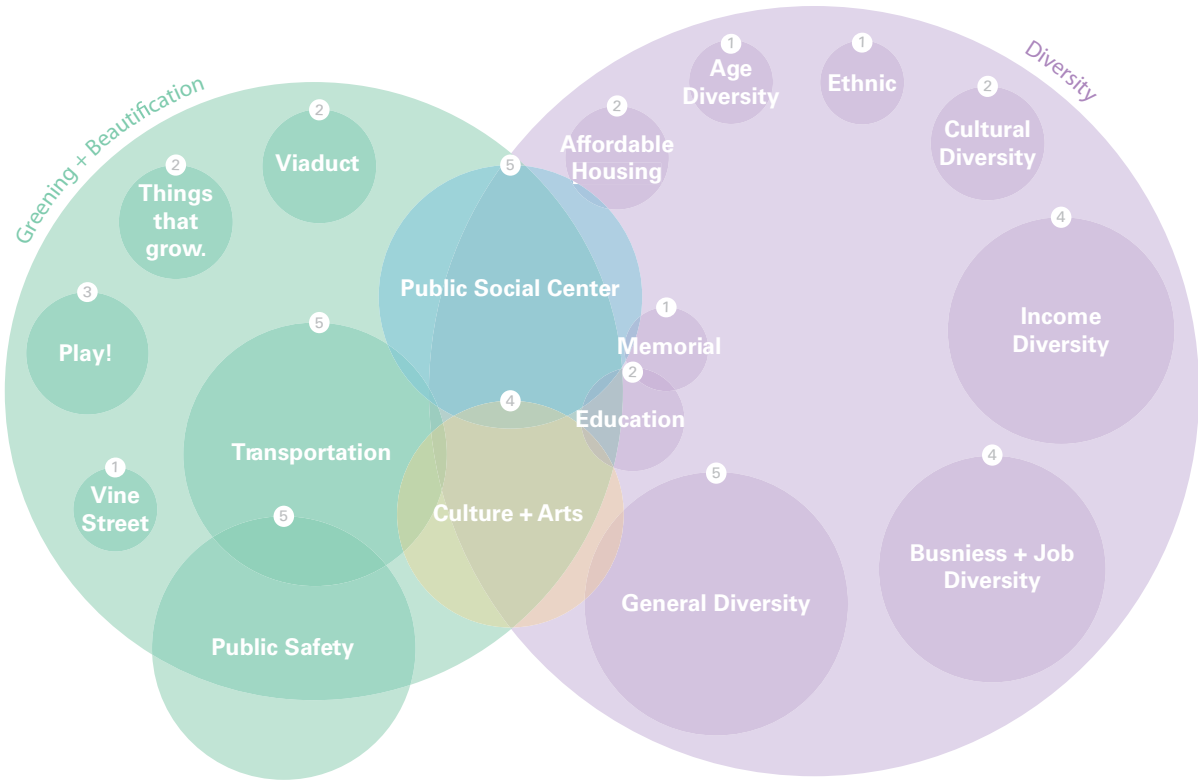


Figure 5.8 : Visual Synthesis of Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods’ Heaven State (Best Scenario) in the Future



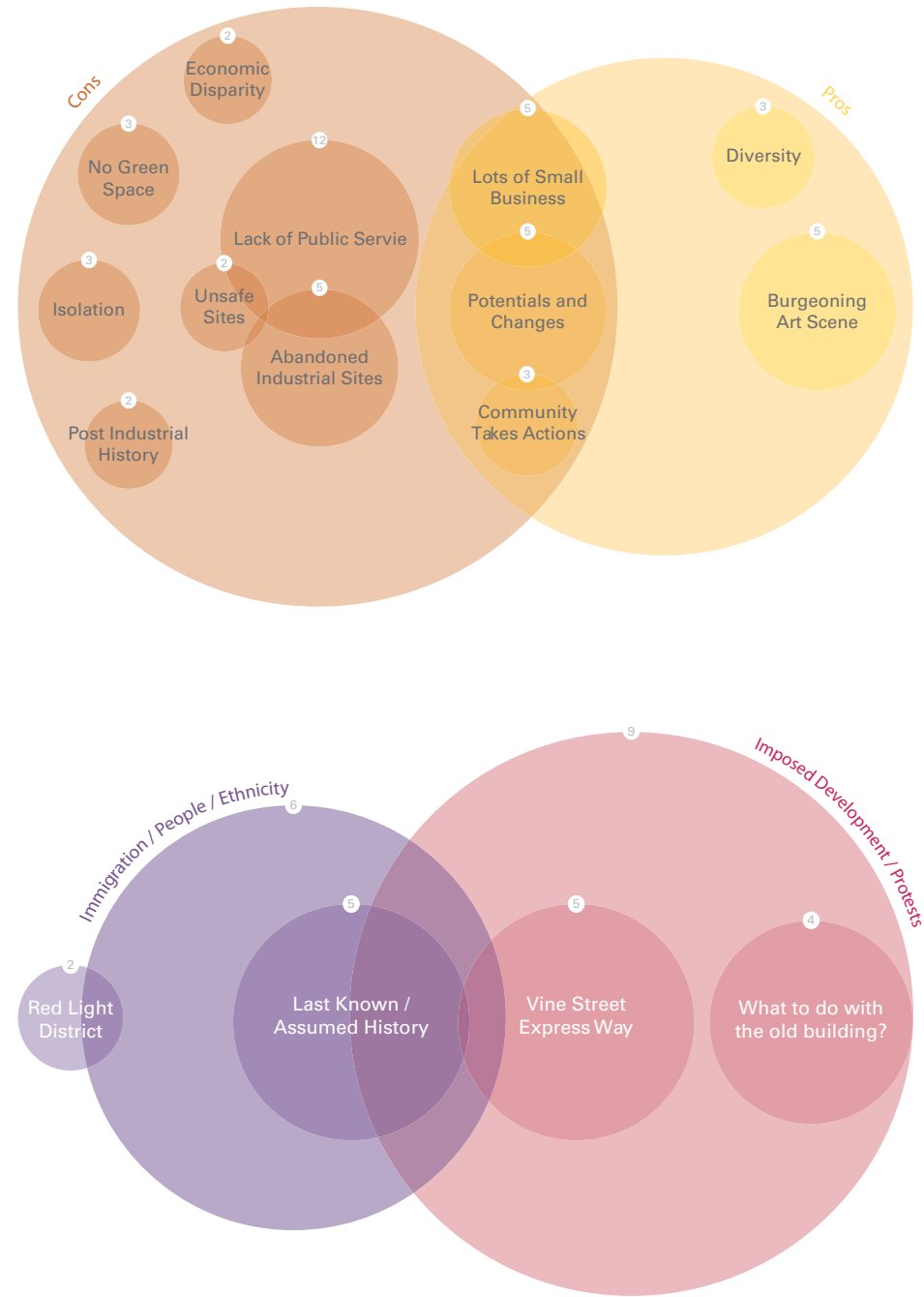


Figure 5.9 : Visual Synthesis of Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods' Current State (top) and Past State (down)

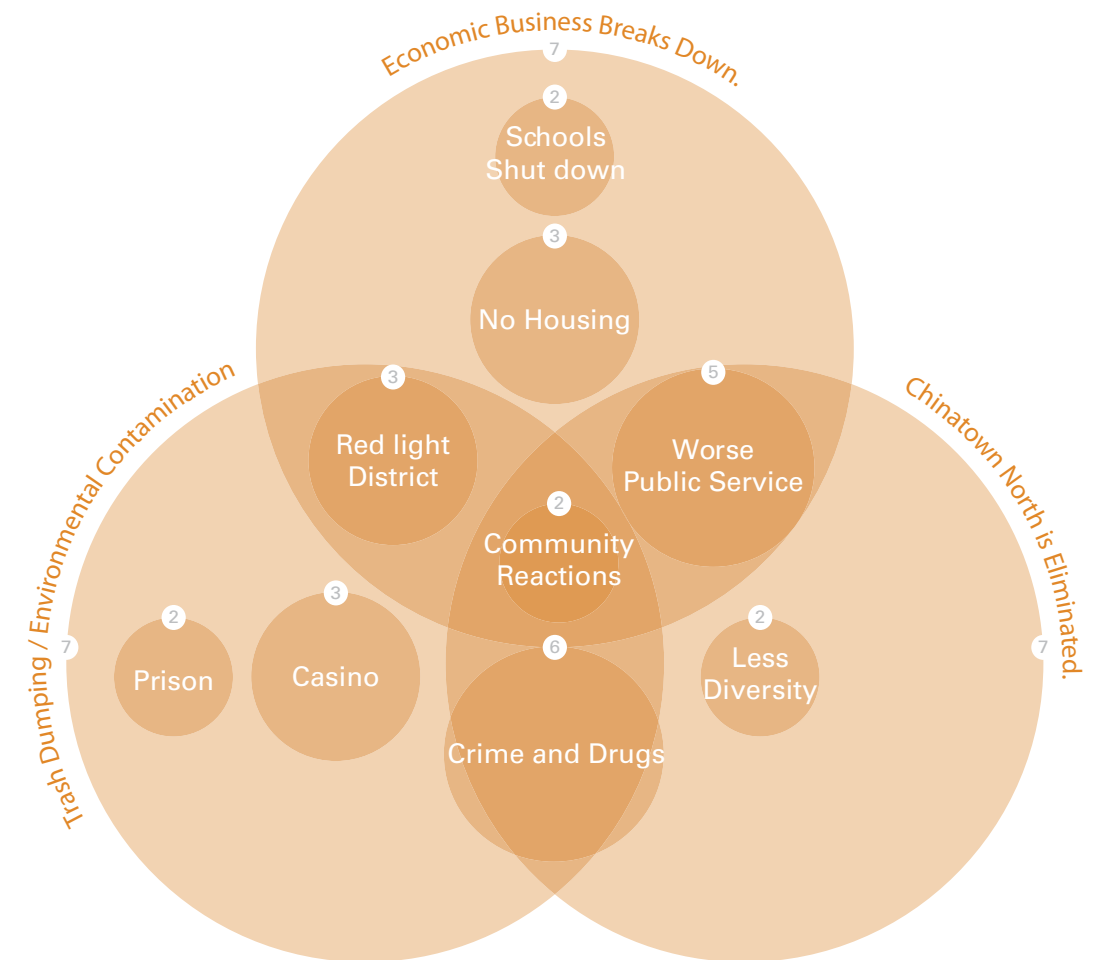


Figure 5.10 : Visual Synthesis of Chinatown and Chinatown North Neighborhoods' Hell State (worst scenario) in the Future

5.2 RESEARCH AND SENSEMAKING: Artists' Engagement Process with the Community

While volunteering at the Asian Arts Initiative to document their Social Practice Lab, I reached out to the current artists-in-residence for possible interviews or interactions.

On one hand I was curious about their community investigation and engagement process. On the other hand, I was also interested in their perception and working definition of the relatively new art format -- Social Practice.

I followed the same design process with three artists-in-residence for my research. The tools that I used included: Contextual Interview, Influence Timeline, Character Profile, and Affinity Diagramming.

Contextual Interviews have already been discussed in Chapter 4.1, and my intent was to understand the artists backgrounds and interests. On the other hand, the Influence Timeline involved the artists envisioning their thought process over time, which reflected what the artists learned from the community. Based on these timelines and the earlier contextual interviews, I created Character Profiles for each artist to synthesize the information. Lastly, I used Affinity Diagramming to find similarities and meaningful statements across the artists. More details can be found in the following pages.

1) Research Tool: Contextual Interview and Influence Timeline

Narrative

With the knowledge I learned from the community, I began to design the contextual interview with the artists-in-residence.

My curiosity was around what their intent was, how they understand social practice, how they perceive the current community,

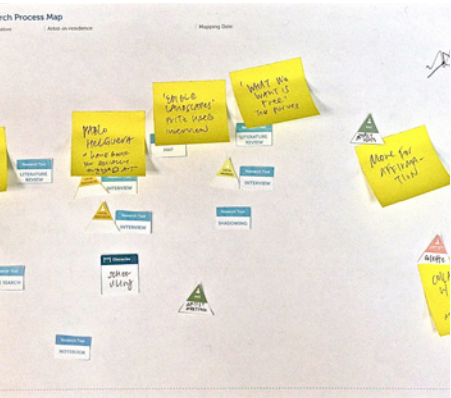
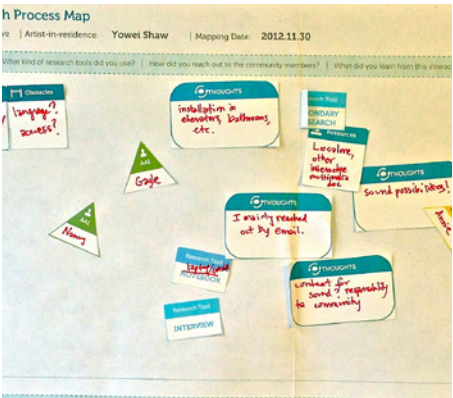
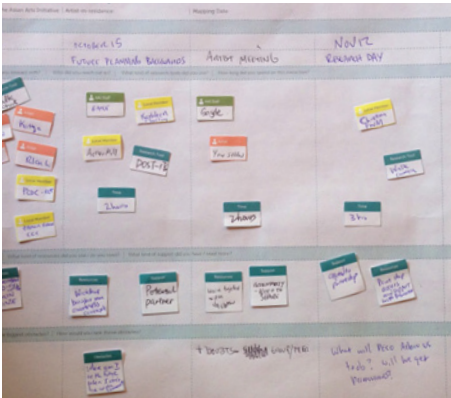
When 2012. Oct. - 2013 Mar. 2 hr/each  
Where Chinatown North, MiD Studio  
Who Ben Volta, Dave Kyu, Yowei Shaw

Goal Learning from the current artists-in-residence about their community engagement experience, outreach strategies and definition of Social Practice.

what their typical research routine was in the community and the possible research tools they applied.

I reached out to all the current artists-in-residence via email. I am glad three of them were willing to work with me and

share their learning process for their Social Practice projects.





I also intended to have potential contextual interviews at their studios, art making environment or research areas. However, it was interesting to learn that most of the current artists-in-residence don't possess a studio.

cultural program manager, school teacher, and radio producer, etc.

Besides preparing the interview questions, I also designed a set of generative tools in order to gather comprehensive information and stories about the artists' research process for Social Practice Lab. ( Figure 5.11 )

My meetings with artists were throughout the past few months. After each interview, I asked them for feedback about the interview questions as well as the generative tool. ( Details on [page 103](#) ) Based on my observation and the feedback, three iterations of Influence Timeline were designed.

## What and Why?

For a description of contextual interview, please see [page 83](#). This section instead focuses on what the influence timeline is and why it is valuable.

Influence Timeline is a generative research tool that I designed to conduct conversations visually. The participants place sticky icons representing people, events,

thoughts, obstacles, etc. onto a graph that relates influence ( vertical ) and time ( horizontal ).

There are two strengths of this tool. First, it helped me understand the artists' research process in the community. Second, it helped the artists reflect on their own process and capture new insights

that they ignored in the past.

Generative tools are usually composed of simple, low-cost materials. They allow participants to easily map out their visions and share their stories. They are used in the Human Centered Design field to co-create users' experiences through hands-on exercises.

How was it implemented?

Step 1. I explained the instruction to the artists about what the paper tools represent and how to use them.

Step 2. I asked the artists to think backwards about their research process for the Social Practice projects. Some prompts were given to the artists:

- Who did you reach out to in the community?

- What were the most memorable experience with the community?
- How did you interact with the community members?
- What did you learn from the interactions?
- Besides those interactions, what other secondary research did you do for your research?

Step 3. I encouraged them to write down key words about their reflection on the interactions or activities they mapped, and asked them about how that might relate to their future directions.

Step 4. After the artists finished placing the little cards onto the influence timeline, I asked them to tell a story based on the map they created.

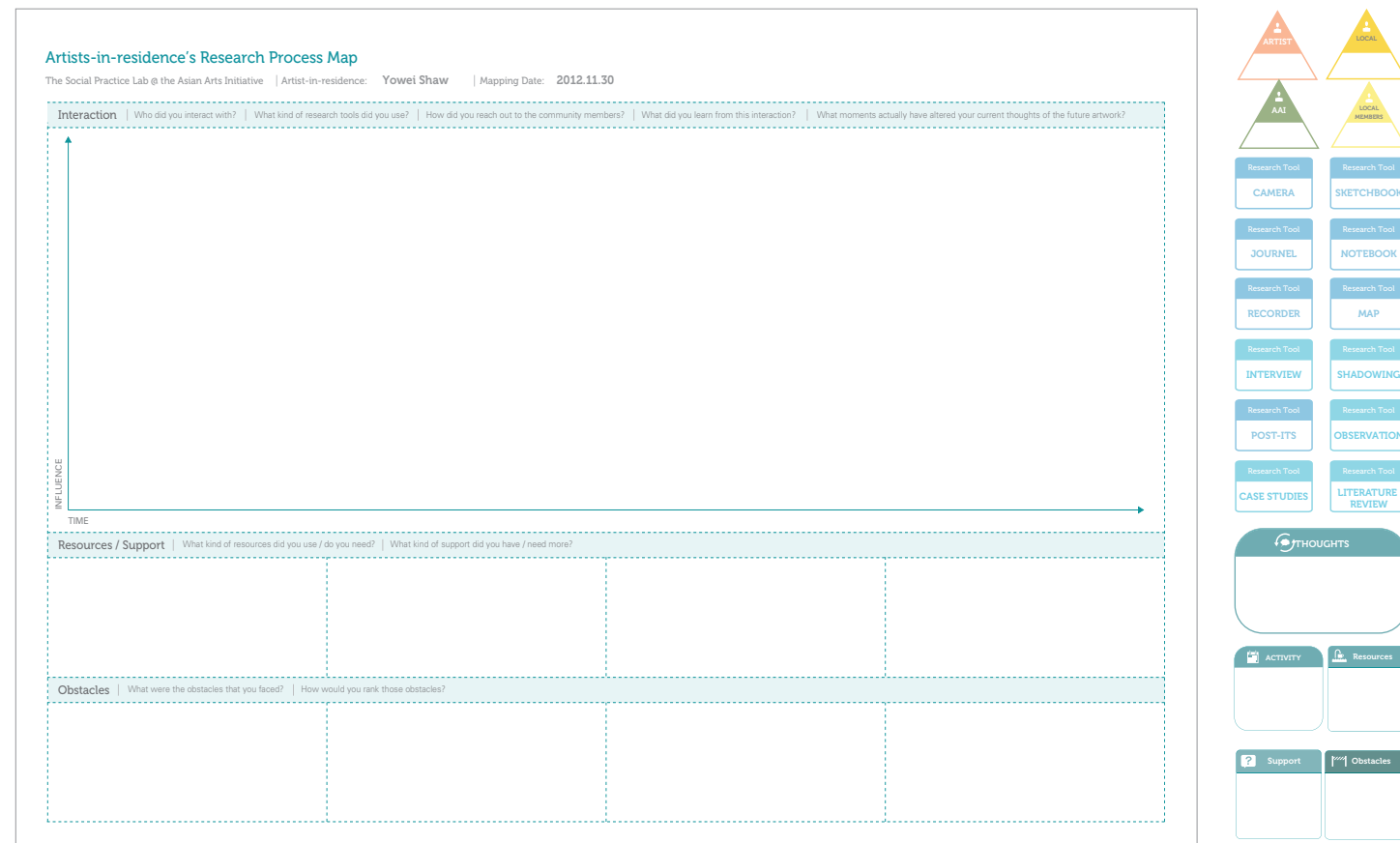
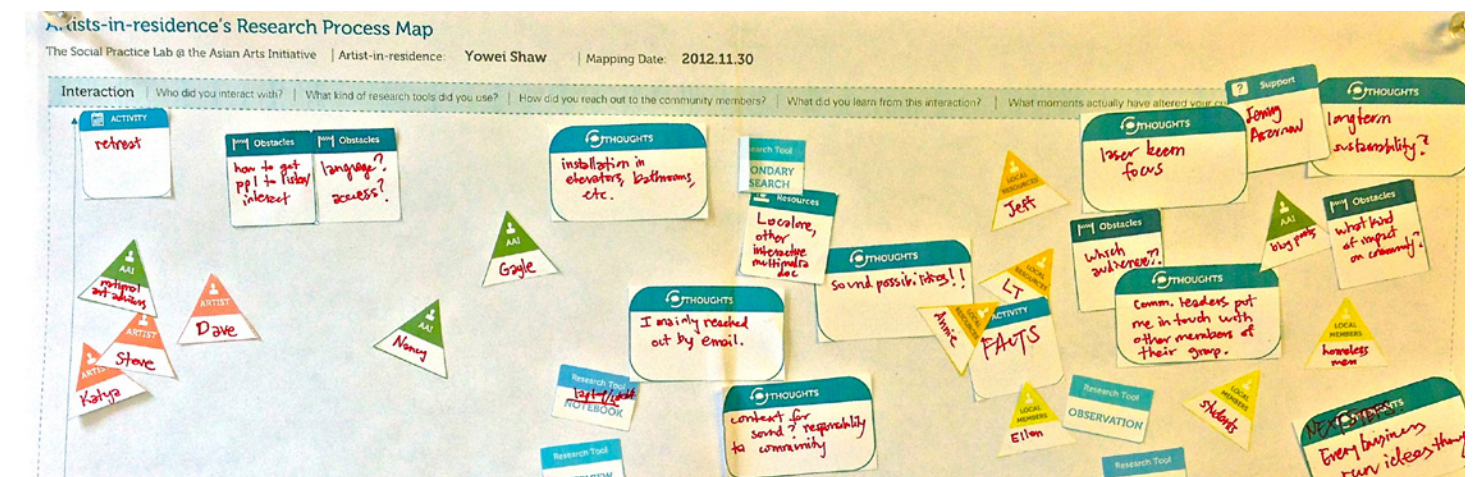


Figure 5.11 : Generative Research Tool - Influence Timeline



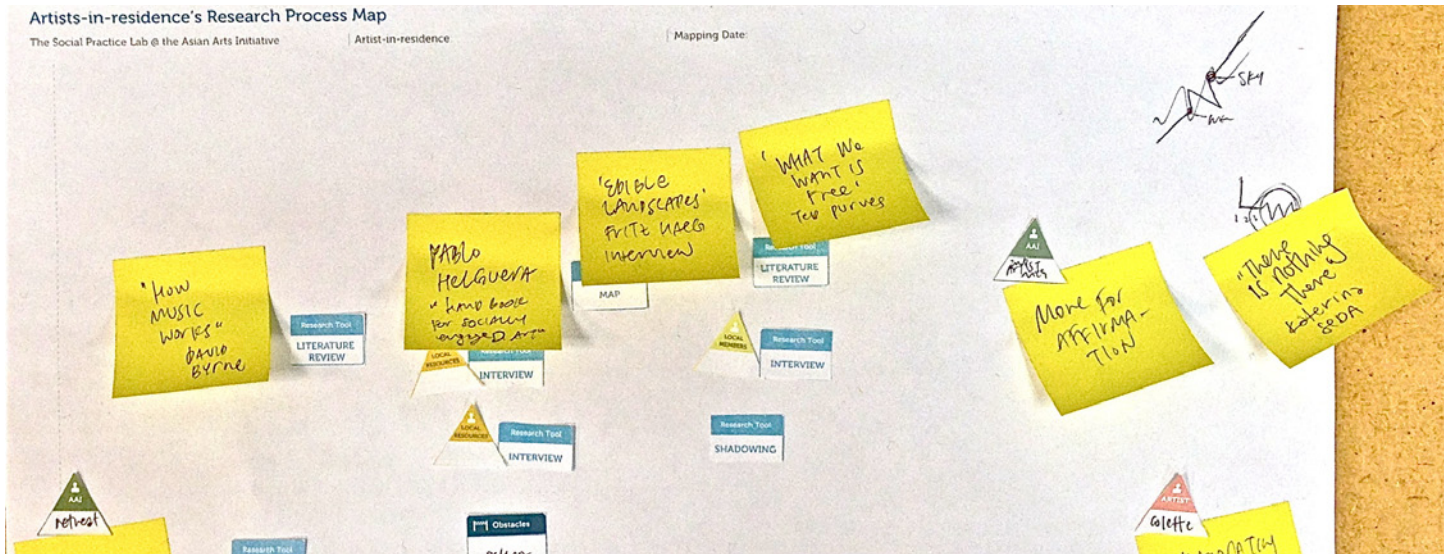


Figure 5.12 : Third iteration of the Generative Research Tool - Influence Timeline

## Reflection: How did the Influence Timeline work?

This influence timeline exercise has been revised several times based on the artists’ feedback and my observations. Overall, the artists thought the influence timeline tool was useful for them to reflect on what they already did in a visual way, which helped organize and document their research process.

They also expressed that it reminded them of some insights and opportunities they had ignored in the past. By the 3rd iteration, artist Dave Kyu expressed that the Influence Timeline led him to think more about future plans for how to engage with the community for his project.

Based on the suggestions from the artists, I deduced four tips to better facilitate this tool:

1. Be sincere and empathetic to the participant. It is hard to let people try new things without making sure the new thing is simple and helpful.

2. Give clear instruction step by step. It is really important to engage with participants by giving them clear instruction while the participants are making progress. For example, Artist Yowei Shaw “felt overwhelmed” when she first heard all my instructions.

3. Provide appropriate amount of options with the interview flow. Every artist thinks differently, some prefer more freedom and optional tools, some may need more structure and guidance in the exercise. For example, Dave Kyu was not “usually comfortable with too many options.”

4. Lead the artists to think more about how the specific inspirations or evidence will relate to their future directions in their projects. For instance, Ben Volta had “hoped it could prepare me for the next steps for my projects.”

## 2) Sensemaking Tool: Character Profile

### Narrative

After the insightful and rich conversations with the artists-in-residence, I started to review and transcribe their meaningful statements about Social Practice Lab, the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods, their concerns in the research process, and their expectations and excitement in projects.

### What and Why?

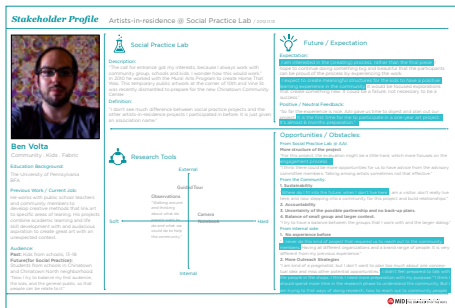
Character Profile is created based on real information and stories, which gives an accurate and thorough picture of who the participant is and what his / her perspectives are. It is a sensemaking tool that Human Centered Designers often use to

When 2012. Oct. - 2013 Mar. 2 hr/each  
Where MiD Studio

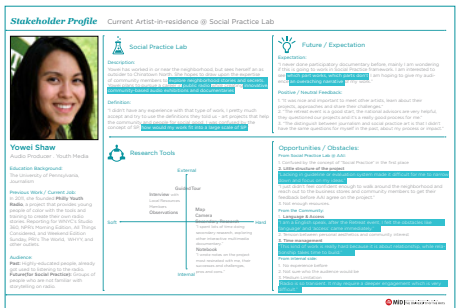
Goal Internal reflection on what I learned from the artists.

Hence, I designed a “Character Profile” for each of them to document and capture their characteristics, stories, and projects. It helped me organize the broad data and narrow down the complex information. I was also able to uncover what tools the artists were using and may be comfortable using in the future. This also led me to the

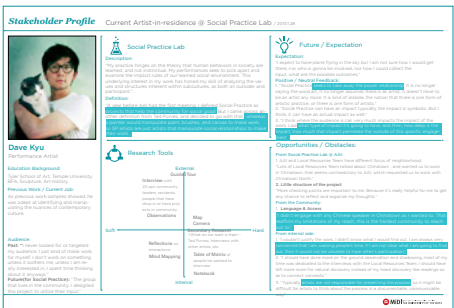
possible opportunities for Human Centered Design to assist artists-in-residence for Social Practice.



Ben Volta  
Current Artist-in-residence  
@ Social Practice Lab



Yowei Shaw  
Current Artist-in-residence  
@ Social Practice Lab



Dave Kyu  
Current Artist-in-residence  
@ Social Practice Lab





**Ben Volta**  
School, Kids, Fabric

Education:  
BFA Painting and Art History

Current Job:  
He works with public school teachers and community members to develop creative methods that link art to specific areas of leaning.

Audience:  
Past: Kids ( 13 -18 )  
Future (For Social Practice):  
Students from schools in Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods.



Social Practice Lab

Definition:

“I don’t see much difference between Social Practice projects and the other artists-in-residence projects I participated in before.”  
Although Ben Volta didn’t give a concrete definition of Social Practice, during the interview, I learned he has worked with school communities and kids for years. But he has never worked on a project that requires 6 months research process in a community.

Current Project:

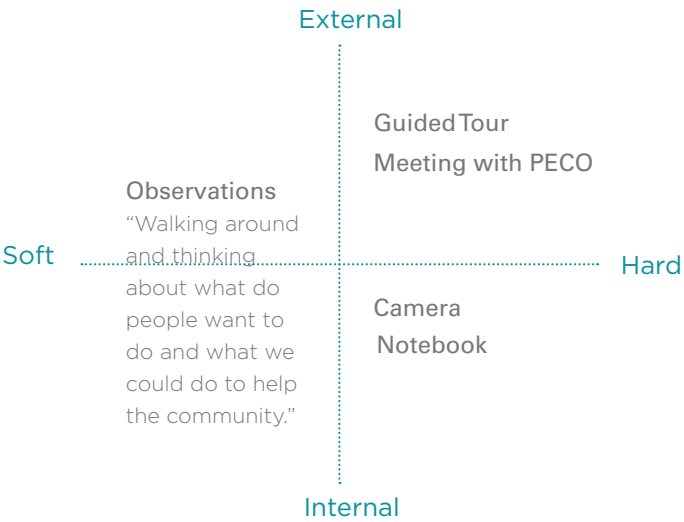
Ben Volta is planning to work with kids from the community to create art fabrication on the fence of PECO station in Chinatown North as his contribution to Social Practice Lab. This project will be implemented in August of 2013.

Possible Impact

Volta expressed his passion about collaborating with the kids to create beautiful, large art fabric work on the fence of electricity station as a process to learn about science, and open up conversation among the kids about their hopes of the future Chinatown.



Research Tools



Future / Expectation

“I hope to continue doing something big and beautiful so that the participants can be proud of the process by experiencing the work. I expect to create meaningful structures for the kids to have a positive learning experience in this community. It would be focused explorations that create something new.”



Obstacles / Opportunities

From internal side:

- No experience before  
“ I have never done this kind of project that required us to reach out to the community members. Having all different organizations and a brand range of people is very different from my previous experience.”
- More Outreach Strategies  
“I think I should have spent more time in the research phase to understand the community. But I am trying to find ways of doing research, how to reach out to community people.”  
“I didn’t feel prepared to talk with the people in the community. I think I need more preparation with my purpose.”  
“I am kind of a pragmatist, but I don’t want to plan too much about one conceptual idea and miss other potential opportunities.”

From Asian Arts Initiative:

- More structure of the project  
“I think there could be more opportunities for us to have advice from the advisory committee members. More structure of the program can help me continue my project. Talking among artists sometimes not that effective.”

From the Community:

- Sustainability
- Uncertainty of the possible partnership and no back-up plans.
- Balance of small group and larger context.  
“I try to have a balance between the groups that I work with and the larger dialog.”









Figure 5.15 : Artsits-in-Residence's Neighborhood Trip during Three-day Retreat.

## Reflection: What led to the artists' anxiety in their research process?

As can be seen in Figure 5.16, most artists expressed an anxiety of reaching out to the community, since they had no experience working in this kind of community-based project. However, they took Social Practice Lab as an experiment and were willing to interact with the community.

Unfortunately, there were few community outreach strategies shared by the program.

At the same time, a lack of program structure was noted many times by the artists. The artists hoped to be given more sup-

port from the organization and the experienced Social Practice artists or advisors. In addition, some other issues were addressed around time management, language barriers, project's sustainability, etc. I will return to these issues in the following Chapter.

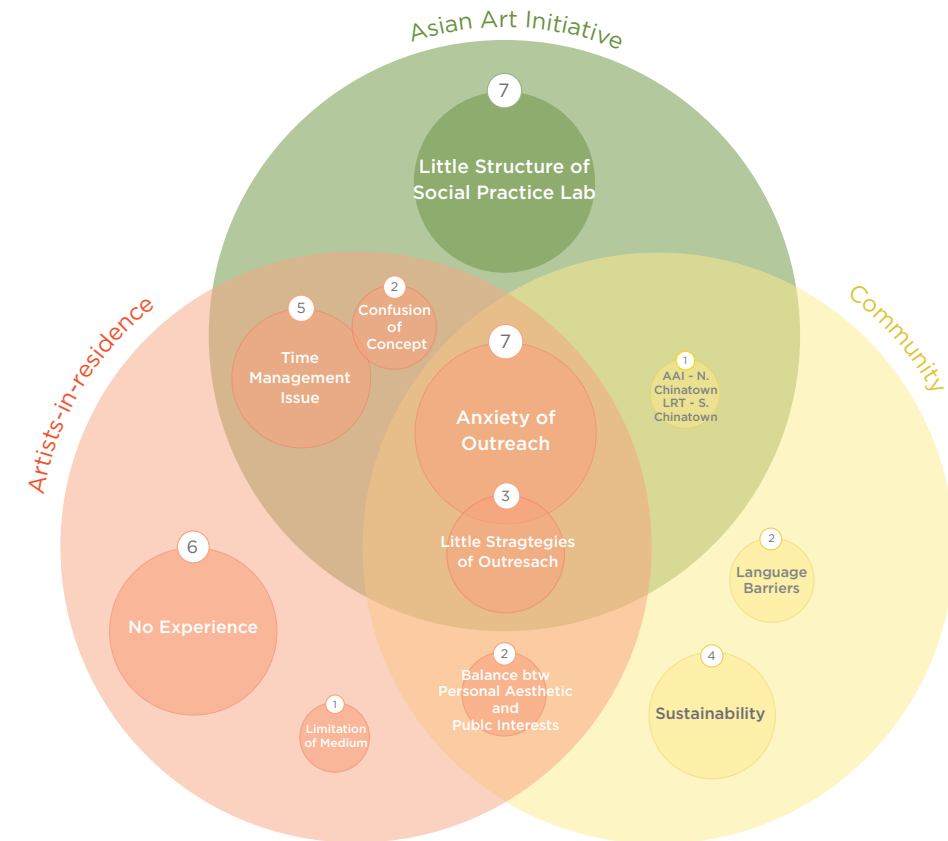


Figure 5.16 : What Led to Artists' Anxiety in Their Research Process?

# DESIGN PROCESS: Prototype and Test

6.1	Conceptual Prototype:	Orientation System for Social Practice Lab
6.2	Turning Point:	Designing Social Practice Engagement
6.3	Further Developed Prototype:	Social Practice Engagement Toolkits
6.4	Test:	Feedback on the Community Engagement Toolkit



6.1 CONCEPTUAL PROTOTYPE  
Orientation System for Social Practice Lab

As concluded in Chapter 5, most current artists-in-residence at the Social Practice Lab were anxious about their outreach process in the Chinatown and Chinatown North neighborhoods. I synthesized my findings (sensemaking diagram on page 109) to deduce that their anxiety came from three aspects, the Asian Arts Initiative, the community and the artists themselves. Figure 6.1 shows my deeper understanding of the fact that a lack of stan-

dardized structure for Social Practice Lab can lead to artists' anxiety of outreach in a community.

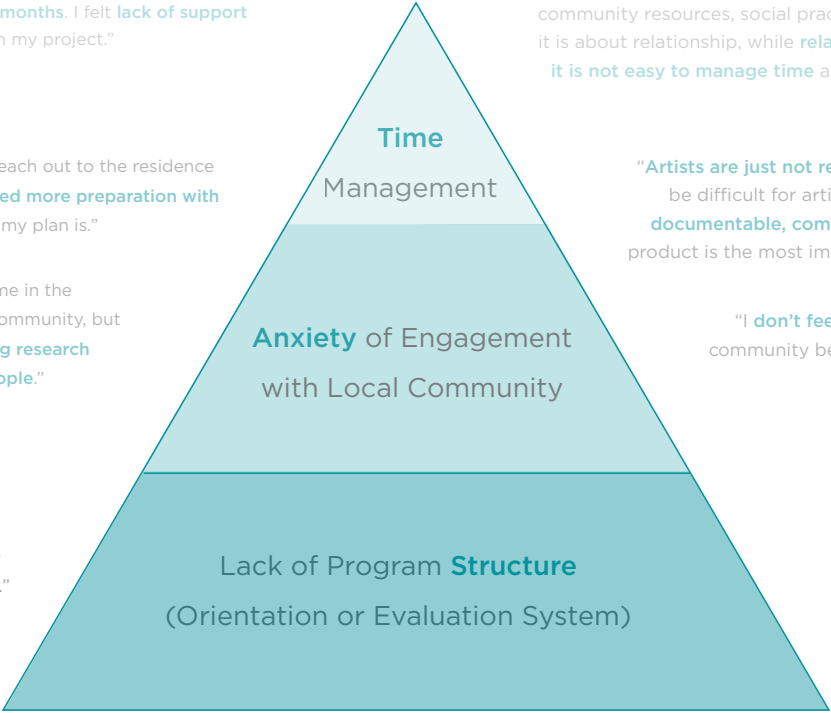
This anxiety was not felt only by the artists, but also had an impact on the Local Resources Team members and organizers. On the right are community perspectives from our interviews:

"It's the first time for me to participate in a one-year art project, and the research phase is almost 6 months. I felt lack of support or advice how to move forward with my project."

"Other than Retreat event, I didn't reach out to the residence or community members. I think I need more preparation with my purpose. But I don't know what my plan is."

"I think I should have spent more time in the research phase to understand the community, but I am still trying to find ways of doing research how to reach out to community people."

"Since it's the first year of AAI to have Social Practice Lab, there is not so much structure that I can hold onto. I wish there could have some guideline that I can refer to."



"Being artists-in-residence in this project, we don't have enough community resources, social practice becomes really hard because it is about relationship, while relationship takes time to build. Also, it is not easy to manage time and plan out strategies of reaching out to the community."

"Artists are just not responsible for process, so it might be difficult for artists to think about the process in a documentable, communicable way. Typically, the final product is the most important thing in traditional work."

"I don't feel comfortable reaching out to the community before the Asian Arts Initiative is on board with my project idea."

"I wish there could be more check-in points. Because it's really helpful for me to get any chance to reflect on and organize my thoughts. More chances to bring me back to the neat line, that helps me to figure out what the next step is in my research."

"When I first met Colette ( one of the current artist-in-residence ), she had a fear of homeless people, a fear of the unknown. Until she started coming here to do work with the homeless people over 9 or 10 times, I watched her fear went away by interacting with people. Not only did the fear disappear, but her excitement and acceptance emerged. It's a great experience to me. In terms of barriers, there might be some obstacles from some of the artists to explain the goals of Social Practice Lab to the people in Sunday Breakfast Mission. "

"Some Social Practice projects, community members might not be as visionary as the artists, to envision what their projects would tell. The artists need to have good presentations to explain why they are doing this, how it would benefit the community, how it would help the community grow, how it would help the public view and understand the community."



Jeffery Harley  
Chaplain of Sunday Breakfast Mission in Chinatown North



Carol Wong  
Local Resources Team member  
Director and Founder of Chinatown Learning Center

"The Asian Arts Initiative's goal for Social Practice Lab program is to form new relationships to expand a network in the neighborhood. The artists seemed to lean too heavily on the same concentrated areas. So I personally think, we need to support the artists but also find ways to motivate the artists to independently expand the circle."



Nancy Chen  
Program Assistant of Social Practice Lab @ Asian Arts Initiative

Figure 6.1 : Lack of Program Structure Resulted in the Artists' Anxiety of Outreach. (Quotes anonymous to protect identity of artists.)

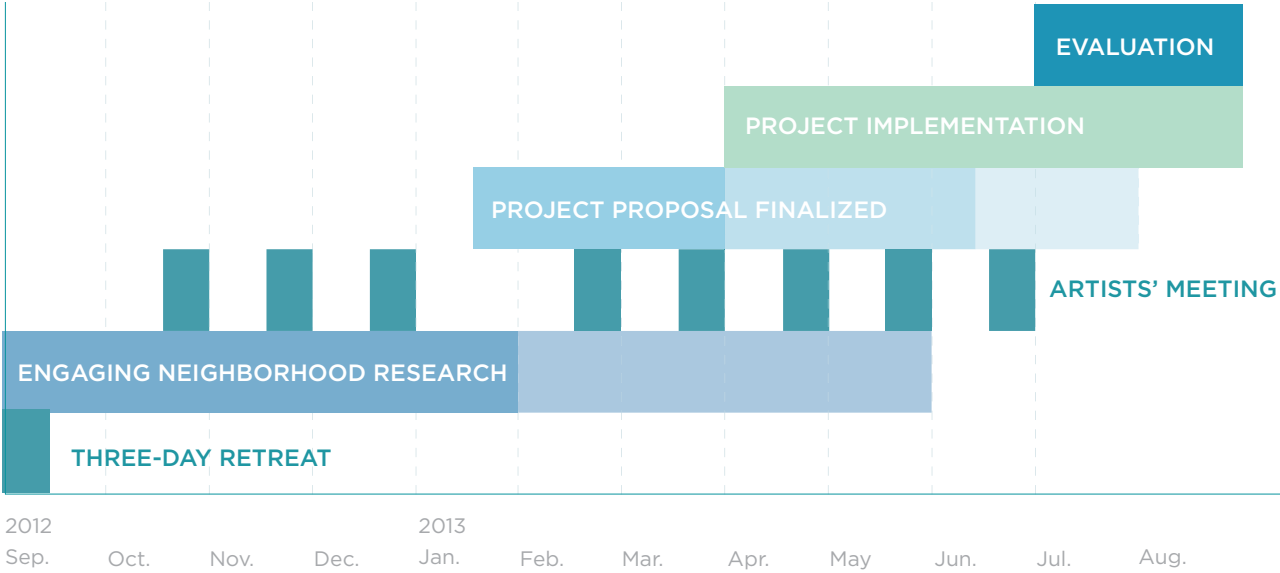


Figure 6.2 : Timeline of 2012 - 2013 Social Practice Lab

1) Existing Orientation System at Social Practice Lab

Just as its name indicates, Social Practice Lab was established to host a laboratory that allows different participants and entities to be out-of-the-box thinkers and contribute to fostering new conversations in the Chinatown and Chinatown North communities.

As a recap, Figure 6.2 reviews the initial Orientation and Evaluation System plan for 2012-2013 Social Practice Lab. However, because of some funding and other resource issues, most of the Social Practice projects will not be implemented until 2013’s summer or fall. Meanwhile, with my thesis schedule, I was not able to conduct follow-up research on the on-going Social Practice Lab for its evaluation stage in my thesis documentation. In addition, there were funding issues which unexpectedly delayed imple-

mentation, limiting my ability to iterate my toolkit.

Reflecting on the experience at the Social Practice Lab, the three-day retreat was fully scheduled with rich presentations from different entities: Organization introductions from Local Resources Team, Social Practice experiences shared by the National Advisory Committees, and initial Social Practice proposals from the current artists-in-residence. Additionally, here are individual and group critiques arranged in-between the different kinds of presentations and meetings.

Most artists expressed that it was very helpful to talk with the experienced Social Practice Artists about their projects ideas. And

it seemed to be a good opening for the Social Practice projects. However, following the retreat, I found that some artists felt lost in their projects, and realized that they were overwhelmed by the concept of Social Practice, which requires close engagement with different community groups. At the same time, they recognized their unfamiliarity with the community and were required by the Asian Arts Initiative to go back to the community for further investigation in order to repurpose their initial proposal. This was outside of the artists’ expectations.


Based on my observation in each artist’s meetings and the individual contextual interviews, I found that since it was the first year of Social Practice Lab, there was no standardized orientation and evaluation system set up for each entity to refer to. This might lead to the artists’ confusion or anxiety in their project development. ( See Figure 6.1 ) Hence, one of the prototypes for my thesis is to propose a conceptual Orientation System for the Asian Arts Initiative’s Social Practice Lab program. I then designed the most extensive part of this Orientation System, the Community Engagement Toolkit, as will be explained in the next section.



Figure 6.3 : Artists’ Usual Check-in Meeting




2) Balance between Freedom and Structure



**Yowei Shaw,**  
Current Artist-in-residence @  
Social Practice Lab program

“The only concern that I have about evaluation is that **once a hard and fast guideline is established, it will start to manipulate how the artwork is made from the get go.** It is really hard to measure the impact of art work, it depends on the connection between the art pieces and the audience.

“I was not trained as an artist, or a community organizer. I was not familiar with the concept of social practice. I wish there could be **some guideline and structure to help shape my project.** I was struggling with the tension between my own personal aesthetics and the community needs and interests.”



**David Kyu**  
Current Artist-in-residence @  
Social Practice Lab program

From my interviews with the artists, I learned that for artists, there is a delicate balance between the freedom of creation and the structure of a program. As the above quotes indicate, artists as creative individuals possess different ways of researching and creating process and modes of thinking. Hence, finding ways to balance the freedom of creation and a program structure is essential to art organizations which are interested in Social Practice projects. Figure 6.4 shows that focusing too intently on either end may lead to some possible drawbacks.

For instance, letting artists have the freedom to facilitate their own Social Practice might cause anxiety in moving forward in the outreach phase, especially for the artists who do not have any working experience in this field. This might also lead artists to focus

too much on their own internal perception, rather than engage and co-create with communities. However, putting too much emphasis on any program guideline, structure, or concrete evaluation system will distort artists' creation processes by manipulating the relations between artists and the community.

As a result, to balance the freedom of creation and structure within the program, I envision co-creating and developing a flexible toolkit as the Orientation and Evaluation system for the Social Practice Lab program. The primary objective of the design is to support the annual Social Practice Lab program in order to help artists-in-residence engage with local community members and promote social impact.

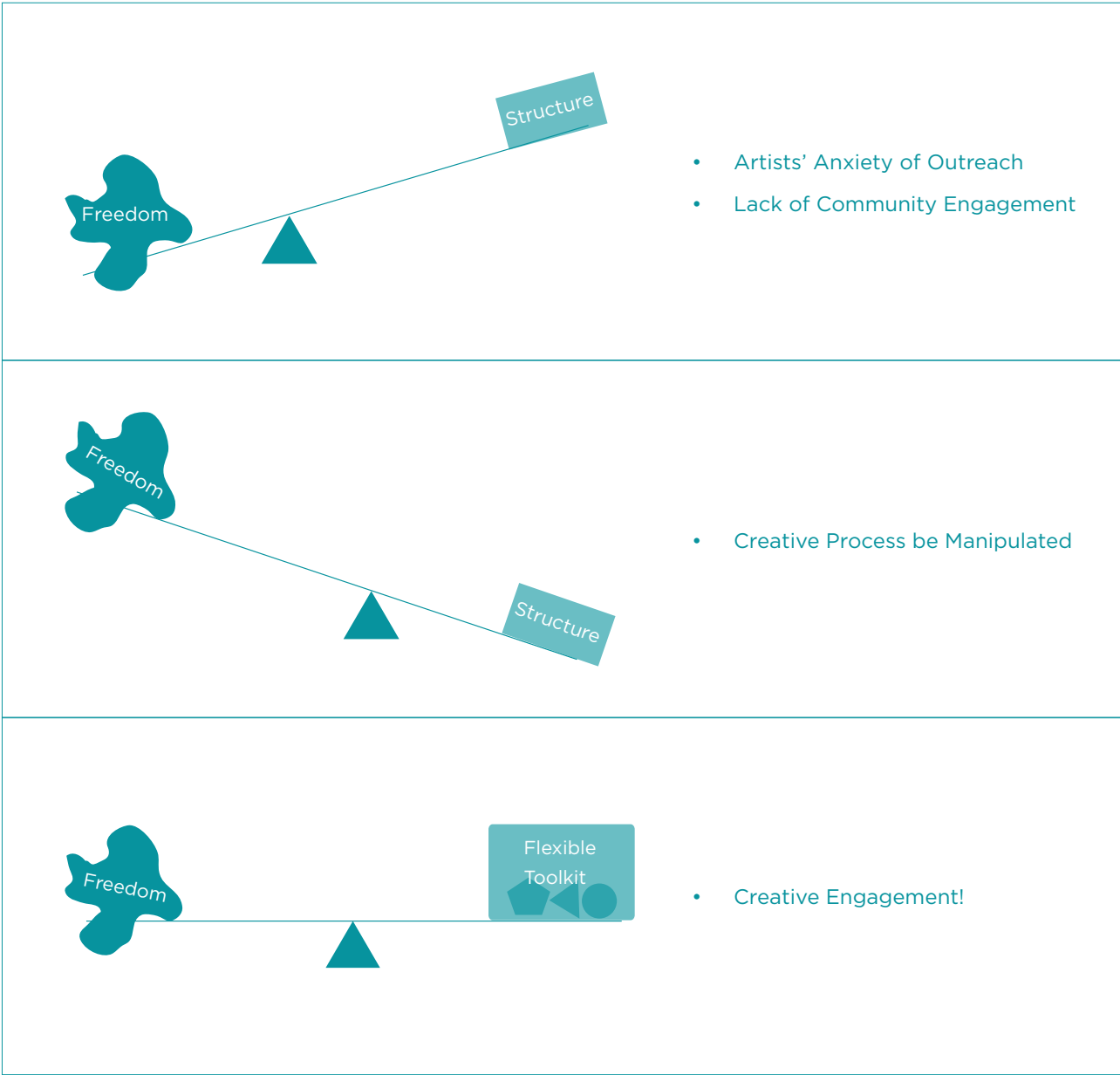


Figure 6.4 : The Importance of the Balance between Freedom and Structure

3) What is the Orientation System I am proposing?

Learning from the current Social Practice Lab and case studies of different Social Practice ( see Chapter 2 ), Figure 6.5 is conceptualized as an overview of the the program structure for Social Practice Lab at the Asian Arts Initiative, which is in line with the official timelines announced by the Asian Arts Initiative:

- Fall 2012: Artists-in-Residence engage in neighborhood research.
- January 2013: Artists-in-Residence project proposals finalized.

- March 2013: Project implementation begins.
- August 2013: Evaluation from the public.

For reference, I researched different art programs and design projects, as well as the Chinatown community in different locations. The details will be revealed in the secondary research in the next section, “Further Developed Prototype - Community Engagement Toolkit,” on page 123.

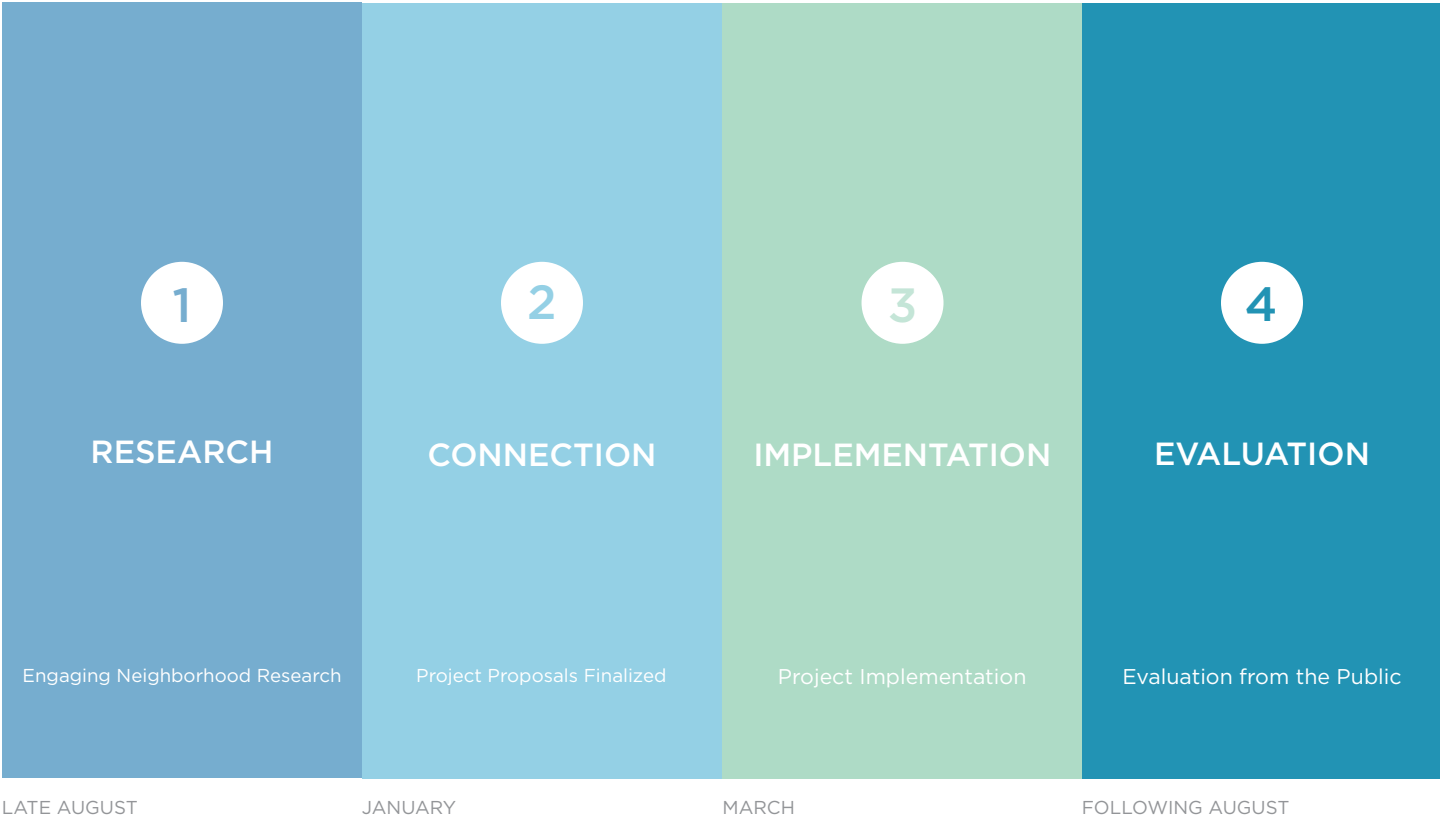


Figure 6.5 : Overview of the Social Practice Lab Structure in the Asian Arts Initiative

The primary objective of establishing a fluid, organic orientation system is to support the annual Social Practice Lab program in order to help artists-in-residence engage with local community members and promote social changes.

Figure 6.6 indicates the overview of the Orientation and Engagement System, which includes:

- Historical background of the community, which visually and accurately provides information to the artists.
- Visual orientated navigation, which introduces the featured key business in the community.

- Potential Focused Topics, which were referred in Temple Fox Design Challenge: education, public health, public transportation, microeconomics, community building.
- Already existing Local Resources Team network, which gathers key association figures from the community.
- Community Engagement Toolkits, which empowers the individual artist to plan their outreach strategies and engage with local communities.

( See details of research on the precedents on page 125. )

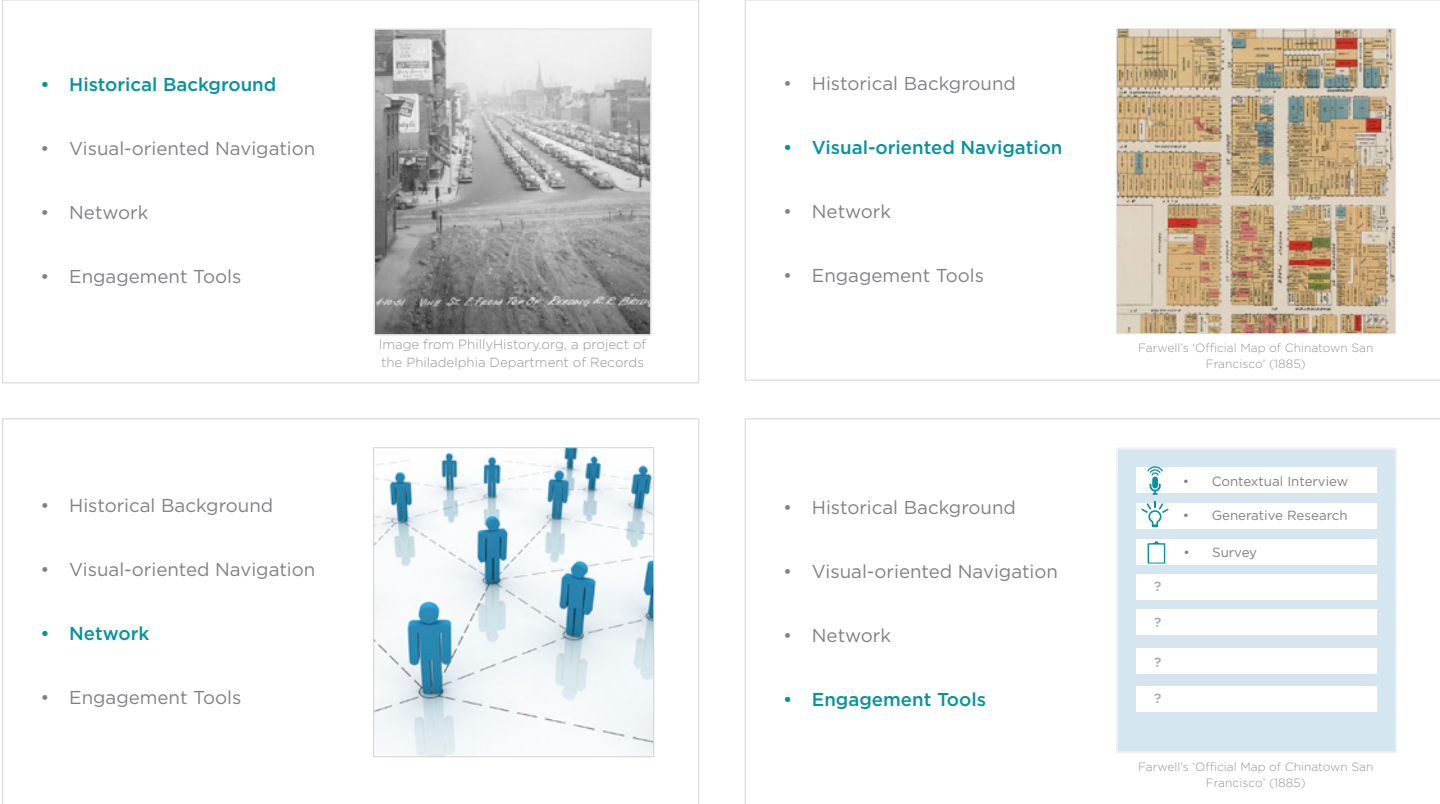


Figure 6.6 : Possible Components in the Orientation System of the Social Practice



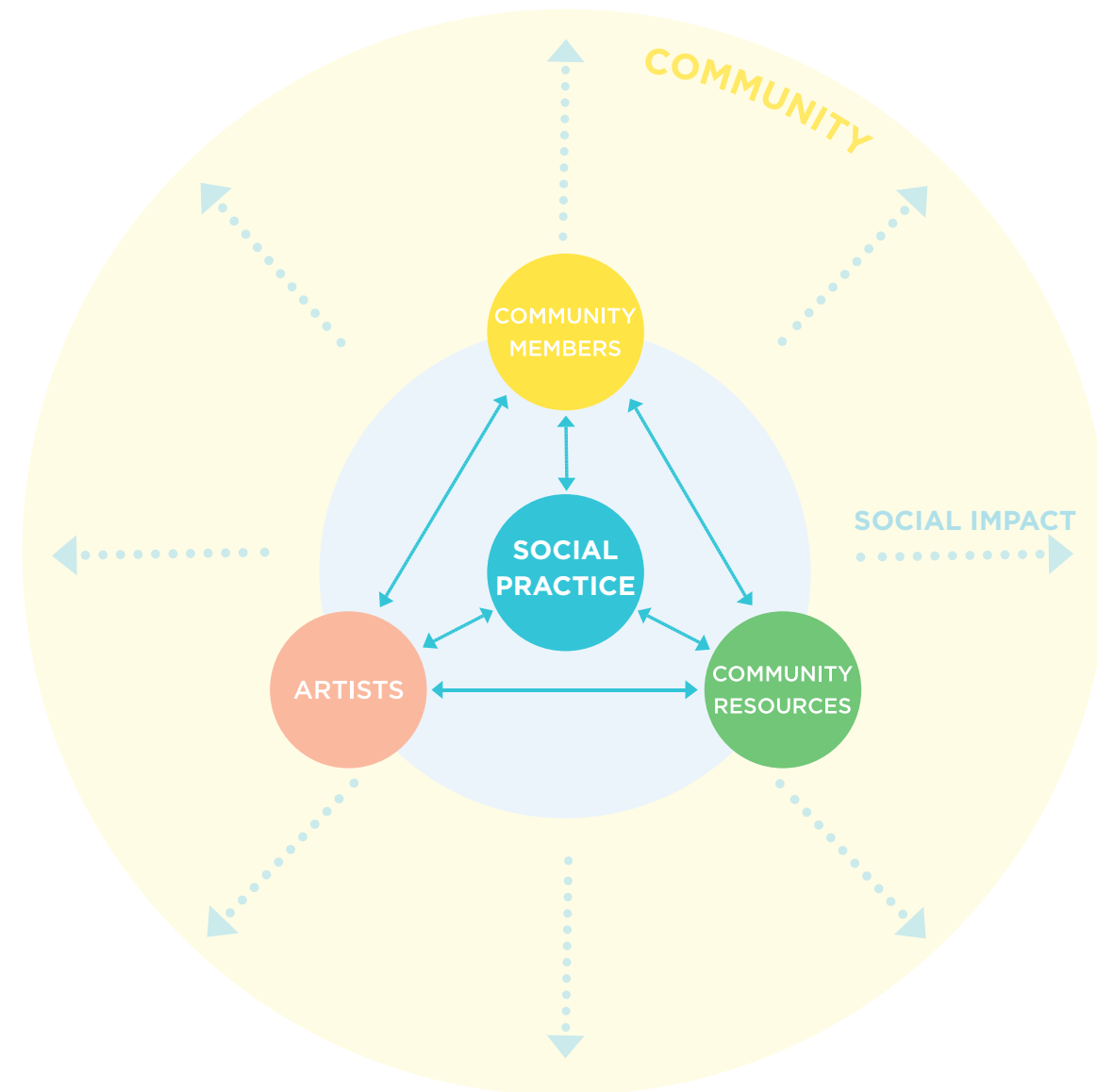


Figure 6.7 : Ideal Social Practice Model in a Community

## 6.2 Turning Point: Designing Community Engagement in Social Practice

During the brainstorming and development of the potential Orientation System, community engagement (the essential component), caught my attention and drove me toward the next stage of my prototype. With my knowledge about the concept of Social Practice and the artists' engagement process, I believe the community engagement piece not only determined how the orientation system would be structured, but also where the artists seem to need the most assistance. This vital piece will impact how the artists can cross barriers to connect with community as they think about and develop their Social Practice projects.

For the Orientation System prototype, most of the content can be handed over to local art organizations in terms of communicating the history of the community. Hence, I narrowed down my focus to the core of community engagement, and started designing the Community Engagement Toolkits as my second prototype for this thesis work.

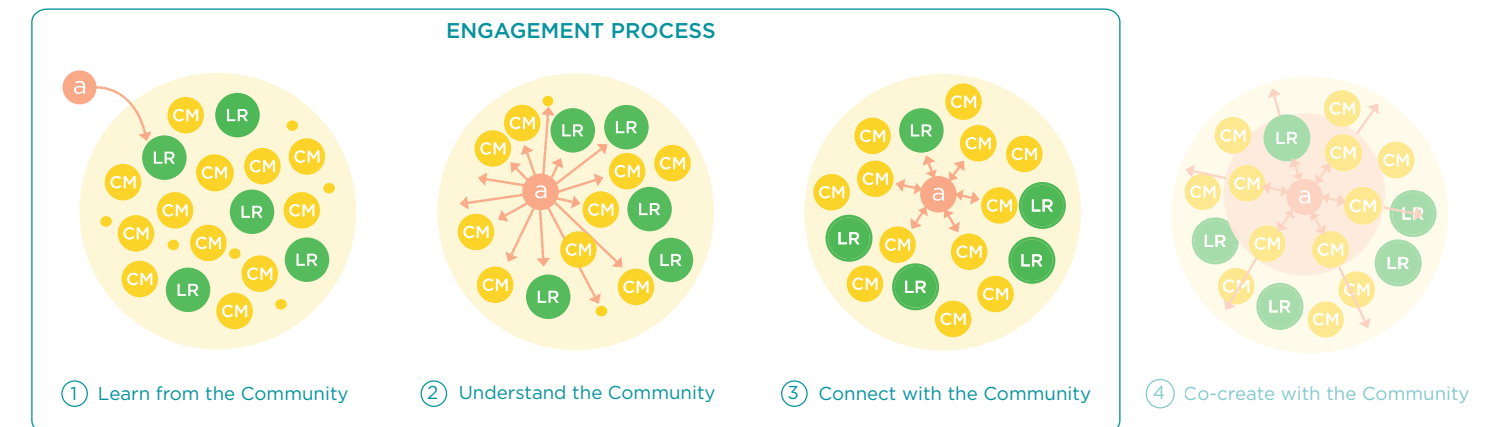


Figure 6.8 : Social Practice Engagement Process

- a = artist
- CM = community member
- LR = local resources in a community

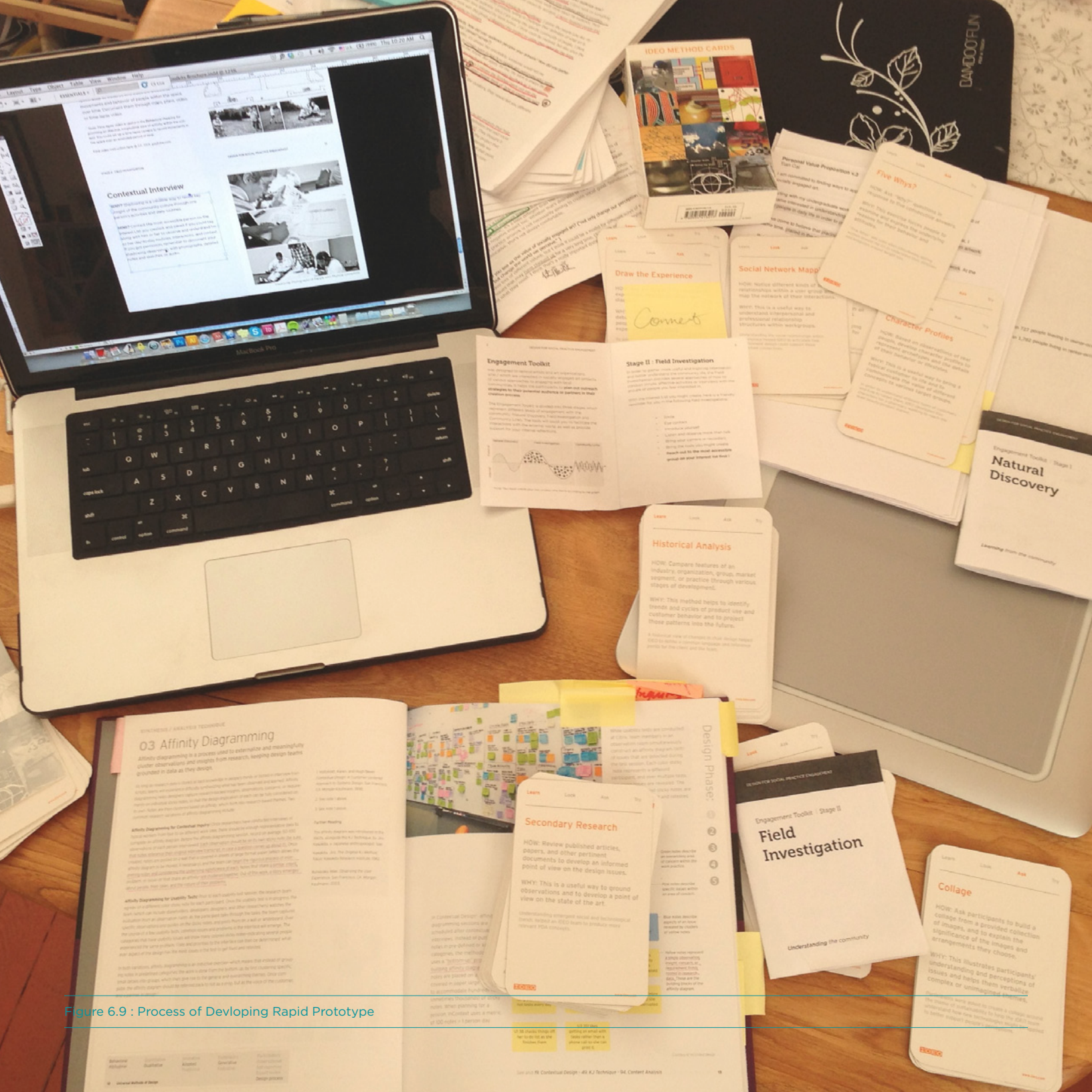


Figure 6.9 : Process of Developing Rapid Prototype

## 6.3 Further Developed Prototype: Community Engagement Toolkit

This prototype focused on the “engagement” piece for artists-in-residence. It is a distinct phase throughout the process of Social Practice ( To see a description of engagement in Chapter 2.2 on [page 32](#) ), which also pertains to the orientation phase. In this section, I will explain why it is a toolkit, how I developed it in terms of its content, as well as its deliverables.

### Why is it a Toolkit?

Because artists are creative.

Artists have always been seen as out-of-the-box thinkers, who have the widest and most creative visions about the world. This kit doesn’t offer visions of the world. Instead, it offers an open collection of research methods and engagement techniques. It empowers artists to reach out to communities with their desires of hearing and communicating with different community voices. This toolkit also allows artists to go through an organic but reflective process that reminds them of new insights and inspirations in communities.

Because artists are hands-on and flexible.

The tool kit is deliberately non-linear -- open to alternative sequencing. Artists not only can select and choose which techniques or methods work best for their context and situation, but also can make and implement new ideas and tools through various materials in their creation process.





Figure 6.10 : 2013 Temple Fox Design Challenge ( Source: MiD program )

### Precedents of the Community Engagement Toolkit Content.

What tools are useful? What tools are appropriate? What tools were already used by artists? In addition to my research experience in the Social Practice Lab, I did secondary research for related precedents both in the Social Practice and Human Centered Design fields. (See Figure 6.11) In the following section, I will share six case studies in both fields in order to give a relative spectrum of the precedents that I collected.

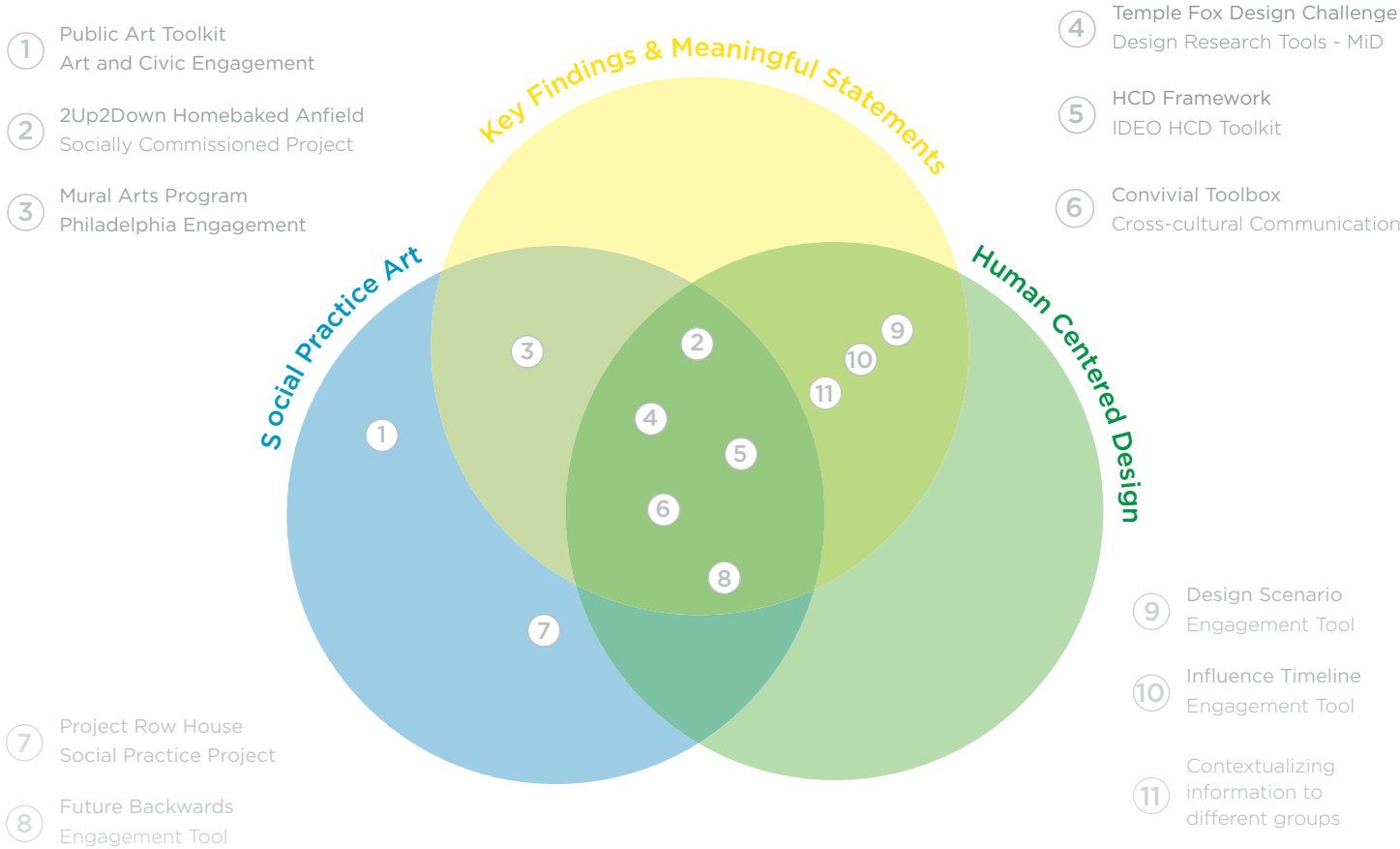


Figure 6.11 : Precedents in Social Practice, and Human Centered Design Fields.



1 **Public Art Toolkit & Art and Civic Engagement: Mapping Connections**

Searching for the key words that are similar to “community engagement toolkits,” several related websites popped out. However, most of the toolkit websites are very theoretical.

For instance, the *Art and Civic Engagement toolkit* explained why and how artists’ roles changed in different stages:

container, convener, connector and catalyst, rather than practical methods or techniques of engaging communities. The same is true for the content of the *Public Art Toolkit*. It covers why artists should consider different stakeholders in a community, and how important it is to have different stages in the community-based project.

Field      Social Practice and Art

Source    [forecastpublicart.org/toolkit](http://forecastpublicart.org/toolkit)  
[media.walkerart.org/pdf/ce-workbook.pdf](http://media.walkerart.org/pdf/ce-workbook.pdf)

I agree these are valuable descriptions in terms of preparing the artists’ mindset before they step out of their studios and work with communities. I believe simplifying these insightful suggestions, and adding more practical instructions for research outreach steps will be more beneficial to artists in their actual practices in communities.



2 **2Up2Down / HomeBaked: Social Practice Project**

Field      Social Practice and Art

Source    [www.2up2down.org.uk](http://www.2up2down.org.uk)

2Up2Down is a recent Social Practice project initiated by artist, Jeanne van Heeswijk in Liverpool, Anfield. When Mitchell’s Bakery was closed down in 2010, which was an Anfield institution for a hundred years, Heeswijk was commissioned by the Liverpool Biennial to make a project with young people to create a new vision for the area.

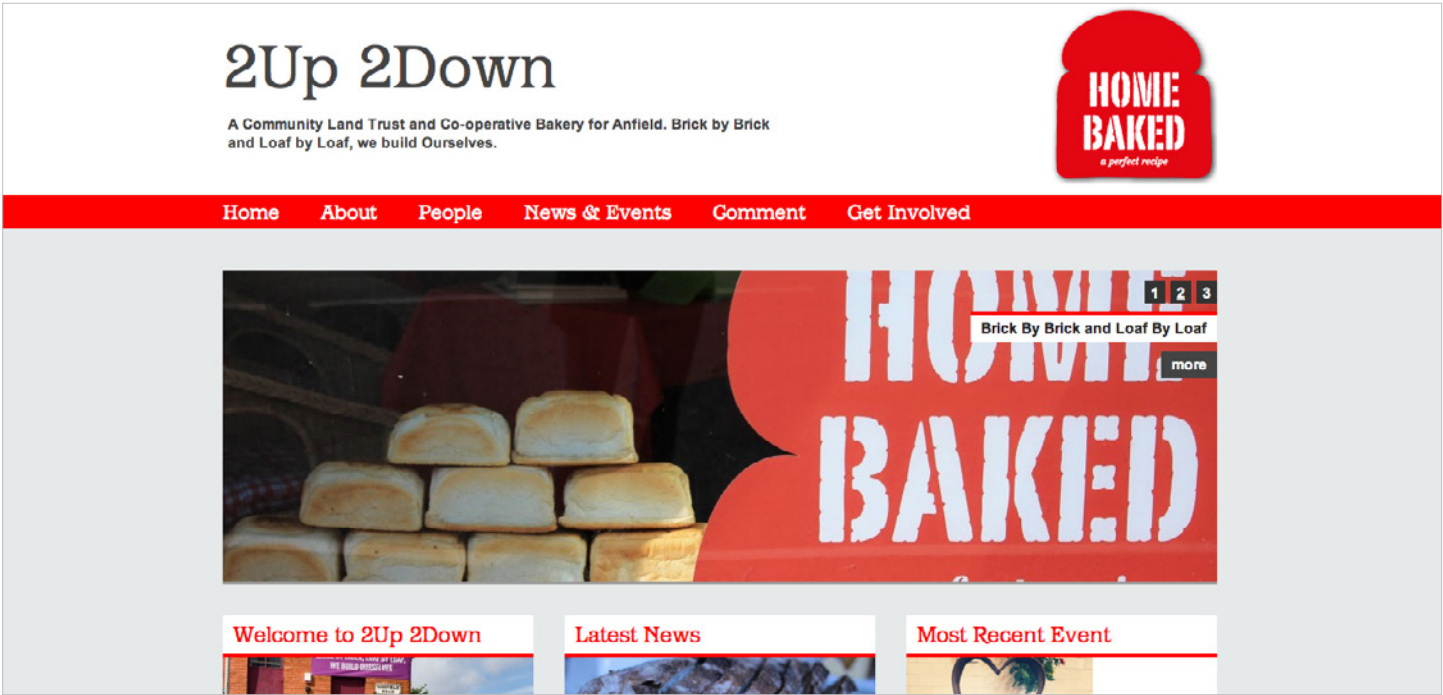
Following a design process (see Figure 6.9 on the back), Jeanne van Heeswijk and her design team set up their goals and facilitation strategies for the youth engagement

activities. The activities motivated the youngsters in Anfield to look at the issues facing the development of their neighborhood and to take matters into their own hands.

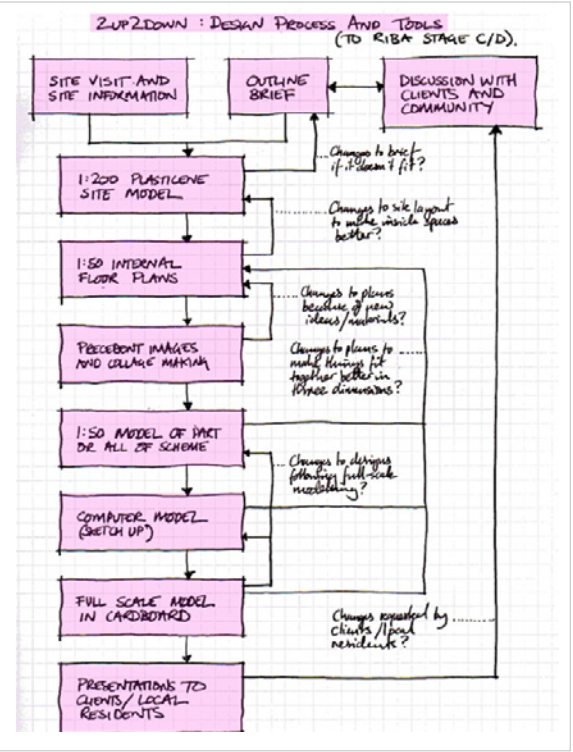
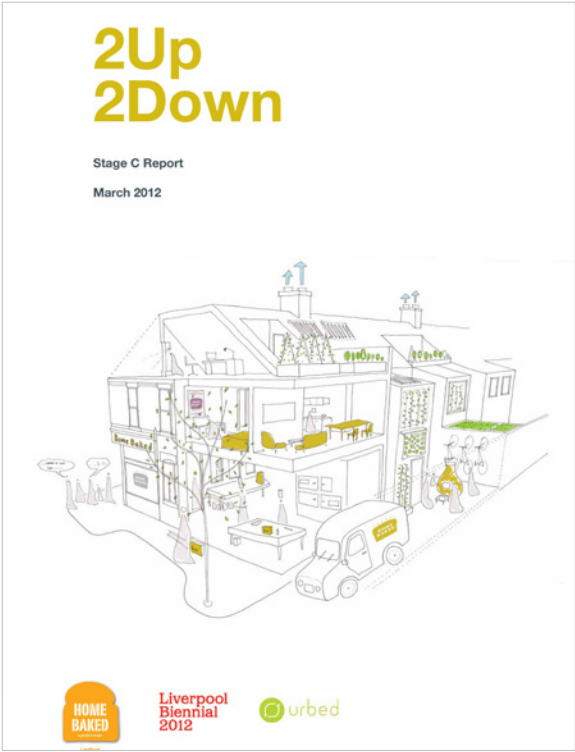
Their engagement process consisted of an imaginative, experimental approach to dealing with empty properties and spaces in Liverpool and beyond. Surprisingly, I realized that most of their tools were also utilized in the Human Centered Design field, which include: interviewing the end

users, designing future scenarios, making rapid prototypes through generative toolkits, as well as creating collages.

This impactful Social Practice project showed strong connections between Social Practice and design methods, which contributed to fleshing out the toolkit collection for my second thesis prototype. (page135)







3 Mural Arts Program:  
Civic Engagement in Philadelphia

Field Social Practice and Art  
Source muralarts.org

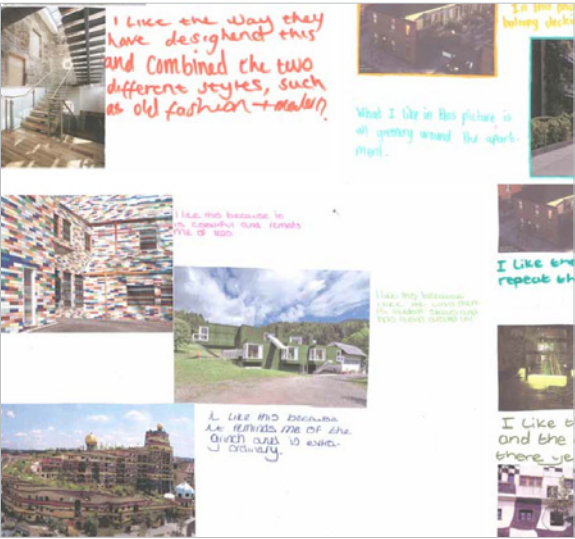
The Mural Arts Program began in 1984 as a component of the Philadelphia AntiGraffiti Network, an effort spearheaded by then Mayor Wilson Goode to eradicate the graffiti crisis plaguing the city. The Anti-Graffiti Network hired muralist Jane Golden to reach out to graffiti writers and to redirect their energies from graffiti writing to constructive mural painting.

I confess that before my research for this thesis, I didn't understand the beauty of mural art work. Moving from Shanghai to

Philadelphia with some college art background, I perceived mural art as a giant landscape painting on a wall with some human figures. I thought creating mural arts was only a way to avoid graffiti in Philadelphia's communities.

However, the more I learned from the Mural Arts, the more I was struck by its powerful impact and close engagement with the community. On March 8th 2013, Shari Hersh from the Mural Arts program visited the MiD studio and presented work

in progress from the *Restored Spaces project*. From the meeting, I learned that the Mural Arts program actually has been working with different communities in Philadelphia on various art and design projects. Also, their content and mediums vary. Most importantly, their community engagement process is very complex, and resident-centered, which indicates the artists' role as a community organizer in the social context.



Community Engagement

Mural Arts' work is unique because of the extensive, interactive process used to engage neighborhood residents and organizations. Mural Arts integrates mural projects with existing community revitalization strategies, often partnering with block captains, grassroots neighborhood associations, public schools, community development corporations, local nonprofits, and other city and community agencies. Designed with input from these stakeholders and nearby residents, each mural addresses a theme of significance to the neighborhood. The selected muralist is deeply involved in this process to hear first-hand the ideas, concerns and values of the community.



Figure 6.12 : Photos of 2Up2Down Engagement Process from 2up2down.org.uk



During the conversation between the peers from MiD and the representatives from Mural Arts, Hersh shared fascinating stories about how artists and mural arts staff facilitated creative workshops and community meetings in order to open up conversations among the local youth and community resource leaders.

In general, Mural Arts’ community engagement process includes interviewing the residents, hosting community leaders’ meeting, as well as planning project strategies with the community resources to gather input for the projects.

The presentation about the *Restored Spaces project* which was given by Hersh contained beautiful murals and installations in the community, whereas, it somehow lacked the visual process of explaining how artists actually interacted and gathered input from local communities in the research phase. I realized that this might be why the mural arts program is not as well understood by the public.

It seems that Mural Arts is experiencing two challenges: One is how to share with the public the value of mural arts behind the visual product; The other challenge

is how to evaluate its impact in the community. In reference to my thesis, I see a close connection between the mural arts work mode and human centered design methods. This confirmed my belief about developing the Community Engagement Toolkits not only as a way to provide outreach methods, but document and share the engagement process in order to motivate the public to appreciate the value of the mural arts.

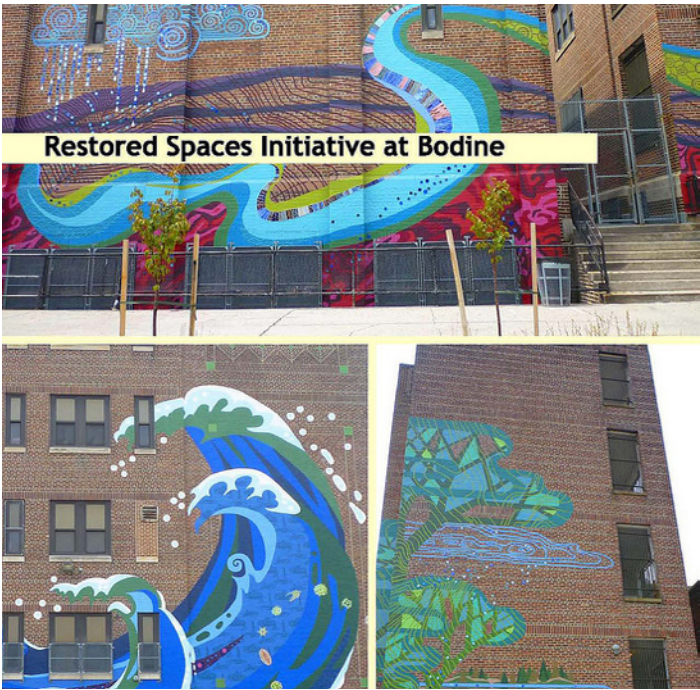
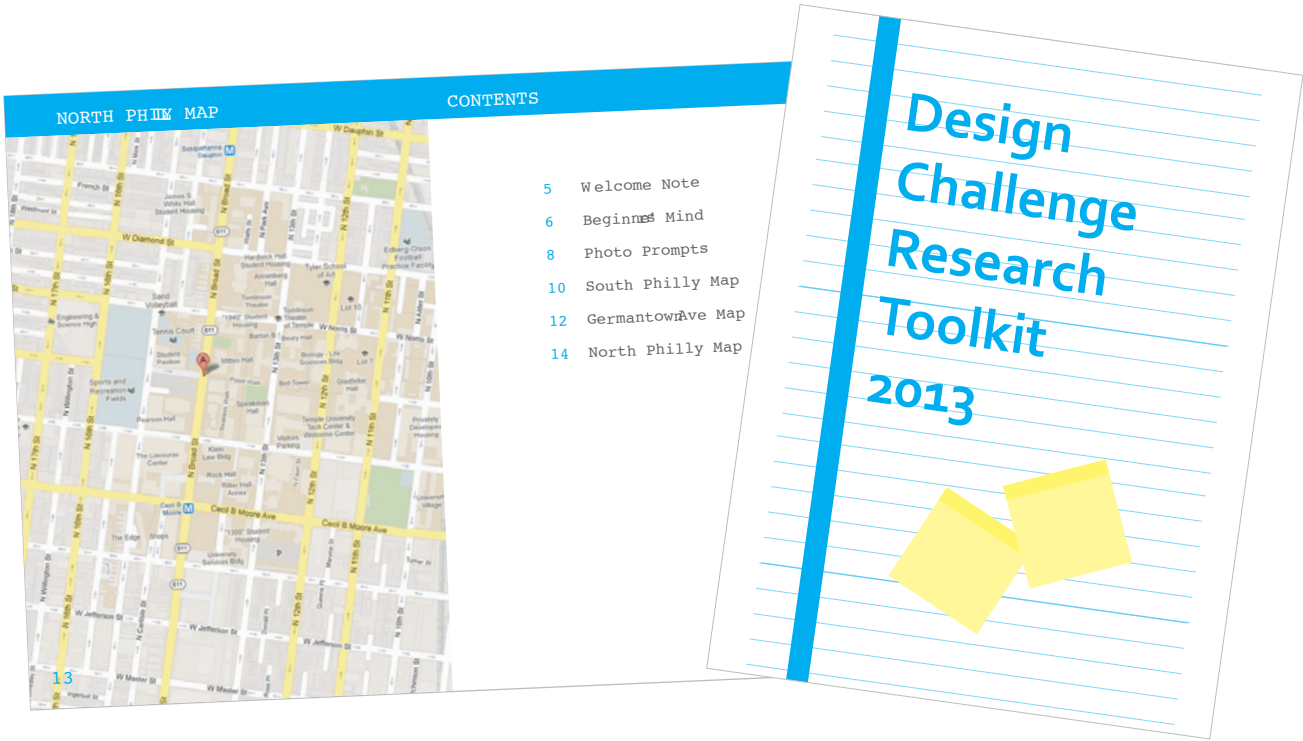


Figure 6.13 : Restored Spaces Project from the Mural Arts Program



#### 4 Fox Design Challenge: Research Toolkit 2013

Field Human Centered Design  
Source [design.temple.edu/events/fox-designweek-challenge/](https://design.temple.edu/events/fox-designweek-challenge/)

During February 15 to 19, the 2013 Fox Design Challenge was hosted by the Center for Design + Innovation of the Fox School of Business in collaboration with the University of the Arts and Philadelphia University. This Challenge was structured with a three-day community research and a one-day co-creation workshop. In the process, 120 participants were challenged to discover design opportunities around Philadelphia’s urban fabric and the Broad Street corridor, and then bring their findings together to create innovative ideas

and future scenarios for the community. This year, my classmates in the MiD program not only participated in the innovative design competition, but also served as a design team in the preparation stage for the event. The design package they designed for the 2013 Fox Design Challenge was composed of two toolkits: 1. Pre-challenge Toolkit - Design Challenge Research Toolkit 2013 2. Challenge Toolkit - which included team building exercise, ways of synthesis, guide

for storytelling, character profile, etc. The goal of the Temple design toolkit was in line with my thesis, which is to assist the non-designers take on understanding of the community culture and identify existing opportunities through observation and community investigation. From my experience with the implementation of the toolkits, I noticed that the research toolkits were effective when they were used by the non-designers. For instance, the participants who used the research



toolkits seemed more active and shared more findings than others who didn't use the toolkits. After the event, MiD designers also emphasized that it was difficult to push non-designers to embrace the toolkits because the participants were not clear about the value of the tools. Hence, the question of how to motivate artists (who are not familiar with design language or skills) to apply the tools in their research occurred. This also reminded me of my interview with a current artist-in-residence,

Dave Kyu. He pointed out that the design toolkits would be worthwhile for Social Practice's research, if there is a clear way to present its value to the artists.

The experience in Fox Design Challenge informed the content and deliverable designs of the Community Engagement Toolkit. ( See [page 137](#) )



Figure 6.14 : 2013 Temple Fox Design Challenge. ( Source: MiD program ).



## 5 Convivial Toolbox: Generative Tools for Cross-cultural Engagement

Field [Human Centered Design](#)  
Source [issuu.com/bis\\_publishers/docs/convivial\\_toolbox](#)

In the sensemaking section, I concluded that some artists felt a language barrier when engaging the Chinatown community for Social Practice projects. For instance, Yowei Shaw was concerned about being an English speaker, how she could gather input from the Chinese community and how she might get her stories across to the community. Meanwhile, Dave Kyu also addressed that the Chinese community was the hardest community to reach out.

In the *Convivial Toolbox* book, collage

was introduced as a generative tool to eliminate the existing language limitation in cross-cultural communication. A typical case was that described a collaborative research trip to Chile. In this research trip, student researchers from Carleton University in Canada travelled to Chile and hosted a collaborative workshop to help local children “Visualize a future” for revitalizing the City of Lota. Fortunately, I was able to interview the planner and facilitator of the cross-cultural workshop, Prof. Lois Frankel. Through our Skype interview, I

learned that the collage toolkit exercise led to a deeper engagement with the local children, although the students couldn't communicate in the same language.

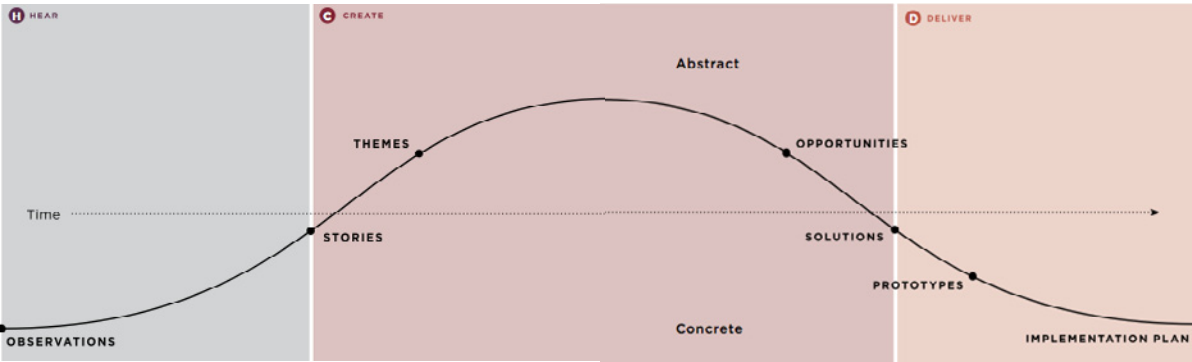
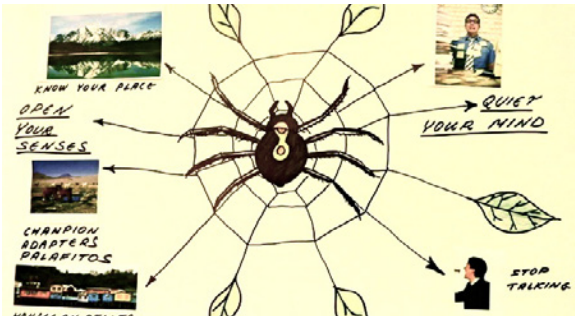
Initially, the two Canadian teams participated in a cognitive mapping activity as preparation for the trip. Using project-specific toolkits, they completed the sentence, “In Lota, Chile I see myself...” as a way to build empathy and map expectations for the project. Prior to traveling to Lota, the Canadian students explored



ways to establish a meaningful dialogue with the people, given cultural and language differences. When they arrived in Chile and met with the children they would collaborate with, they introduced the question “What do you like about Lota?” to the groups of participants. Given the familiar images about family, food, parks, and beaches of Lota, the children started playing with the simple materials and creating their perception of Lota. In the process of the workshop, the Canadian team

hired one translator to help communicate the stories the Chilean children wanted to tell based on their creative collage. This project generated a deep understanding and communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. This is exactly the same situation between the English-speaking artists and the Chinitown community. The opportunity I found was to implement the collage workshop as a visual way to motivate cross-cultural

communication and break the barriers of language. ( See how it was implemented into thesis prototype on [page 139](#) )



## 6 HCD Framework and IDEO Cards

Field [Human Centered Design](#)  
Source [www.ideo.com/work/human-centered-design-toolkit/](http://www.ideo.com/work/human-centered-design-toolkit/)

Based on concrete observations with people and abstract thinking and synthesis, the HCD Framework is divided into three main phases: Hear, Create and Deliver. This research and design process was initiated by a design corporation, IDEO. Compared to other design processes from different regions and fields, HCD framework seems more similar to the organic research process that artists performed in the Social Practice field, which allows both external community research and in-

ternal reflection.

Meanwhile, the IDEO Toolkit Cards are also frequently applied by designers as a boundary object in non-design contexts. Each of the cards was designed based on Why and How as a simple way to communicate the value of human centered design process. The IDEO cards are the various tools which provide designers with a selection of effective research and engagement techniques. Artist-in-residence,

Dave Kyu, also pointed out the similarity of the Social Practice and HCD processes. However, the opportunity I identified was that it would be more accessible to non-designers if the design terminologies can be substituted into common plain language. The HCD framework and IDEO cards very much impacted the structure of the Community Engagement Toolkit prototype.

Figure 6.15 : Pre-trip Contextual Exercise and Preparation in Carleton University ( Source: Prof. Lois Frankel )



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

## DESIGNING SOCIAL PRACTICE ENGAGEMENT

An open collection of research and engagement tools that assist artists and art organizations, who/which are interested in Social Practice projects. The toolkit offers the artists various methods and techniques to engage with external communities, and conduct internal reflection.



### What is Community Engagement Toolkit?

The Community Engagement Toolkit is designed to assist artists and art organizations, who / which are interested in socially engaged art projects. The toolkit helps the artists to better understand their potential audience or community partners through meaningful research and plans for effective outreach strategies. This toolkit can support artists attempting to co-create art projects with local community members in order to promote social impact.

The toolkit is divided into three stages, which represent different methods of engagement with the community:

**Stage I - Natural Discovery**, which allows artists to learn from the community by observing local environments and residents;

**Stage II - Field Investigation**, which provides artists with different techniques of individual and group exercises in order to understand neighborhood culture through deeper engagement;

**Stage III - Community Links**, which offers artists ways to facilitate creative workshops and activities with the locals to gather a broad range of input.





Stage II: Field Investigation

**Future Backwards Workshop**

**Why?**

Inviting a group of individuals from the community and having conversations about the past, present and future of the community helps widening the range of perspectives. It allows both you and the participants to take on understanding the past and possible future of the community.

**How?**

- Step 1. Prepare 5 different colored posts, representing: current state, past state, heaven state, hell state, and accidents.
- Step 2. Prepare your facilitation notes for the workshop.
- Step 3. Invite the community leaders and members you shadowed or interviewed to attend the Future Backwards Workshop in a specific space.

\* Note: Please see details on Chapter 5, [page 86](#).

**Sample: Future Backwards Workshop @ Social Practice Lab**



Stage III: Community Links

**Collage**

**Why?**

Collage is a useful way to facilitate cross-cultural or cross-generational communication. This method helps you to communicate with your participants by verbalizing their ideas in a visual way, and eliminating possible language or generation barriers.

**How?**

- Step 1. Create a theme around your project topic.
- Step 2. Prepare materials, which include pictures of daily objects, interactions, or locations.
- Step 3. Ask the participants to build a collage from the provided collection of images.
- Step 4. Let the participants tell a narrative or explain the significance of the images and arrangements they choose.

\* Note: You might need one translator to assist you in understanding the significance of images selected.

**Sample:**





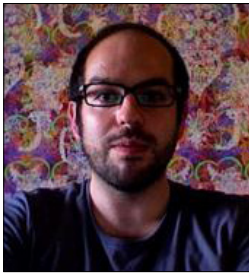
6.4 TEST:  
Feedback on the Community Engagement Toolkit

With the rapid prototypes I designed, I conducted another round of contextual interviews with artists, designers, as well as program organizers to collect feedback and input on the toolkit prototype.



Figure 6.17 : Contextual Interview and Prototype Feedback from artist, Allan Wexler.

“I think this toolkit is very thorough and valuable, and I feel like the first stage (Natural Discovery) **is already a lot to think about for someone who has never been trained in Social Practice**. I think **this process of Social Practice is a good visualization**, because it shows **how artists interact with people and then internalize it**. If the artists were doing studio art, they would have been always doing internal reflection rather than external community communication.”



**Ben Volta**  
Current Artist-in-residence  
@ Social Practice Lab



**Dave Kyu,**  
Current Artist-in-residence  
@ Social Practice Lab

“The toolkit is cool. But I am not sure if I have any direct feedback. **I am happy to test out parts of the toolkits when I work with the kids this summer for Social Practice. It might make more sense in real context to see if they are useful and workable.**”

“The toolkit seems really helpful! I would definitely **give the toolkit a try for future Social Practice projects.**”



**Yowei Shaw**  
Current Artist-in-residence  
@ Social Practice Lab

“The toolkit is graphically beautiful! However, **the way I work is very organic, my projects evolve over time, intuitively.** So I don’t think I have any helpful contributions to your toolkit.”



**Colette Fu**  
Current Artists-in-Residence  
@ Social Practice Lab  
(Feedback via Email.)



“Conceptually I am able to see how an engagement toolkit could be useful, particularly **as a starting point for orientation to a new environment.** Intuitively, however, I’m not convinced that a procedure or formula on paper could really ease any pre-existing anxieties or uncertainties over how to conduct community outreach effectively.”



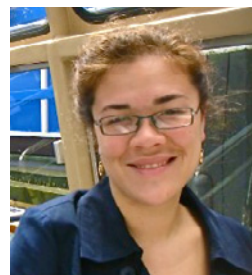
**Nancy Chen**  
Program Assistant of  
Social Practice Lab  
@ Asian Arts Initiative

“The toolkit is an eye opener design for community research and engagement!”

“This is a great! **The toolkits are totally on the right track. These methods actually exist in different Social Practice projects process, but not have been shared.** The toolkit will be very helpful especially in this co-creation art context. **I wonder if there are other formats that might be easier for the artists to understand how to facilitate this useful toolkit.**”



**Ann Nothrup**  
Mural artist



**Sue Bell Yank,**  
Critical Writer, Organizer  
Assistant Director of Academic  
Programs @ Hammer Museum

“**The toolkit design itself becomes a flexible structure which allows artists to sway and move on their own, but not to ‘fall over.’** I also like the way the toolkit break down the research and engagement process in Social Practice. These tools could be **very useful for artists who do not have practice experience and have anxiety about outreach in communities.**”



**Meredith Warner**  
Multi-discipline Artist and  
Designer @ Action Mill,  
National Advisory Committee  
member of Social Practice Lab

“I think **the toolkit is insightful for Social Practice.** Your process from research to prototype was thorough and natural. It will be a potentially **valuable material for MFA programs,** either Social Practice or Studio Art, **to take on as a part of their curriculum,** and have a course about how to do research and understand communities through design methods. **Art students need techniques and some social responsibility to learn from the communities if they want to work in Social Practice and collaborate with people.** Now you need to get hands dirty and work with artists for their projects through your toolkit!”



**Allan Wexler,**  
Artist, Professor at Parsons the  
New School for Design





Figure 6.18 : Contextual Interview and Prototype Feedback from Current Artists-in-Residence, Dave Kyu.

## Reflection: Great Opportunity to Continue the Community Engagement Toolkit!

As I stated in the previous chapter, artists usually do not take on the task of formally documenting their research, thought or creation processes. Likewise, the artists were reluctant to share their past processes as they felt it was too intimate. This made it difficult for me to test the toolkit with the artists through an interview or a workshop. Below shows the opportunities that I seized from the test and feedback:

1. It was hard for the artists to imagine whether the tools were too specific or general without specific context. For instance, some artists expressed that they had several different community-based art projects in the past, but each project was very complex and context-specific. I could see that either in a contextual interview or a group workshop, there was limited time to share individuals' detailed process.

2. Through the prototype process, I found that designing tools can be particularly hard when the required instructions are complex. The Future Backwards tool, for instance, has several intricate steps and even experienced designers can feel some difficulty facilitating the workshop. Hence, I envision a series of video instructions to help explain what the tools are and how to use them. Also, a simple appendix including an extended template of tools will be incorporated, helping to expound on the tools.

3. From conversations with a multi-disciplinary designer and artist who has been involved in Social Practice, Meredith Warner, she suggested that more basic guidelines about what to expect for the artists will be also valuable. For instance, telling emerging Social Practice artists that they do not need to struggle for a compromise with the whole community, because it's not possible that everyone will like the work.

4. The overview of the Community Engagement Toolkit can be a useful digital menu on its own for artists to navigate through the process. However, how much time and effort everyone is going to

spend on this toolkit varies from person to person. The key is to provide them as a resource, and don't keep up the expectation that artists should follow along the steps.

In conclusion, some artists are not so open to try the toolkit for their research because they were concerned that the structure would bind their creativity. But others recognized the potential of the toolkit after I explained how to use the tools. In general, from most of the feedback collection, I found that there is a great opportunity to continue developing the Community Engagement Toolkit.



## FUTURE DIRECTIONS: Final Thoughts and Next Steps

7

FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE THESIS:

Exchange Values between Social Practice and Human Centered Design

This thesis has been an explorative experience for myself and a continuation on the topic that I have been thinking about -- “How to promote meaningful interactions between art and its audience.” In my design process I have been putting efforts on practicing in both Social Practice and Human Centered Design fields.

Although every artist and designer may follow their own approach, I identified that these two fields share values and, in some cases, methodologies to engage with local communities.

SOCIAL PRACTICE



Interview



Artists' Meeting

Research

Research

Reflection

Sensemaking

HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN



Contextual Interview



Affinity Diagramming

Figure 7.1 : Social Practice and Human Centered Design Share Most Similarities at Research and Reflection (Sensemaking) Stages.

How can Social Practice benefit from Human Centered Design?

Human Centered Designers have spent a considerable amount of effort designing tools and outreach strategies for meaningful engagement with individuals and communities. As I mentioned the similarities above, I believe Social Practice may benefit from existing toolkits employed by Human Centered Design.

Based on my synthesis of Social Practice, I also believe Human Centered Design and Social Practice are most similar in the Research and Sensemaking (Reflection) processes. For example, Social Practice Artists often engage in informal contextual interviews, similar to Human Centered Designers. They then take these interviews and reflect on them, sometimes talking with other Social Practice Artists or organizers to make sense of the information.

In addition, given the large variety of Social Practice Projects, Implementation and Impact may be very context specific, which makes it more difficult to develop general tools. For these reasons, I focused on Research and Sensemaking (Reflection) toolkits to assist Social Practice Artists. (Review in Chapter 6)

Why don't Social Practice Artists use existing Design Tools?

One of the reasons is that most artists are not aware of the existence of the design tools. However, I do not believe that is the entire story. Instead, most of the design tools employed a considerable amount of design terminology, which need to be modified to fit the proper art context, because the terminologies that artists and designers employ can differ greatly and evoke different responses.

For example, from my conversations and experience with the artists, several of them mentioned a dislike for the term “evaluation”, feeling it took away from their artistic authority, but were usually open to “feedback” or “impact”. The language of the tool may change how it is received as users interpret the words and the

world differently. Yet for some tools, Designers and Artists may approach engagement too differently, which can make the tools inapplicable.

Are there new tools that could be designed for the context of Social Practice?

As mentioned above, some tools may not be applicable to Social Practice, or may be too far removed from the approach artists take. However, this provides a unique opportunity to create new tools for Social Practice Artists to employ. Specifically, the context of Social Practice led me to design a new sensemaking tool, Influence Timeline (on [page 99](#)), to help artists organize people, events, and thoughts. This tool may not be useful outside of Social Practice, but based on my prototypes and iterations, it helped Social Practice Artists understand their own research and interests. This was discussed during Chapter 6. I believe there may be additional tools that could be designed to help Social Practice, however time limitations made this unfeasible.

Are there methodologies that Artists use that could help Human Centered Design?

While I learned much from the Artists and am thankful for their unique insights, that is not the primary goal of this thesis and is too broad. I do believe this exchange is beneficial and also look forward to exploring this more in the future. As will be discussed in the next section - Next Steps: A Starting Point of Future Career.



NEXT STEPS:  
A Starting Point for Future Career

Being a designer, my goal is to combine the theories and methodologies of Human Centered Design and the practical case studies in Social Practice in order to generate positive social changes through actual practices in some tangible way. I believe by sharing the knowledge of Human Centered Design with Social Prac-

tice artists I can help artists engage with the local community in a larger scope and transform the community itself in a more sustainable way. From the feedback I collected, I learned that the framework of the toolkit is most likely to benefit emerging Social Practice artists rather than established ones.

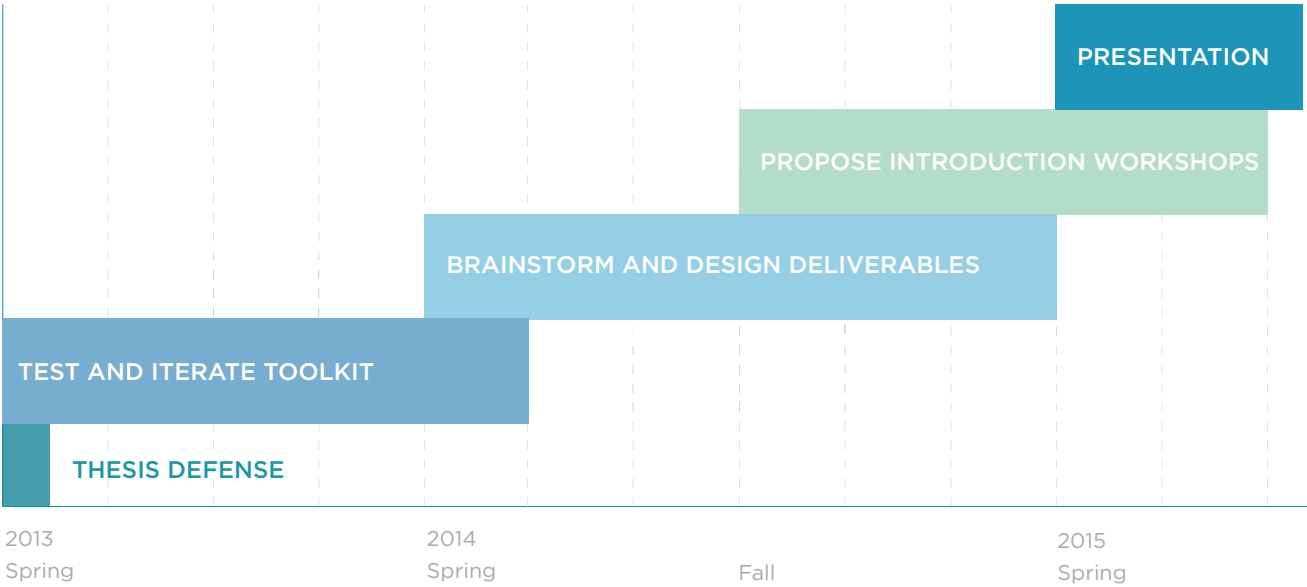


Figure 7.2 : Continuation of the Community Engagement Toolkit

Future Plans for Community Engagement Toolkit:

2013 Fall ~ 2014 Spring

Collaborating with potential partners to evaluate how the toolkit works in real working contexts. The potential partners could be:

- Graduate students from studio arts programs
- Muralists from Mural Arts program
- Artists planning to participate in Social Practice projects

Why?

At this stage, the key of the prototype is to see if the toolkit is really feasible and useful for artists in Social Practice. In order to gather more accurate feedback on the Community Engagement toolkit, the next steps for my thesis is to shadow and collaborate with artists for their actual Social Practice projects. I believe that only by placing the toolkit in real Social Practice context with the artists can the toolkit be improved and shaped into a more accessible and useful form.

2014 Spring

Brainstorming and designing different deliverables for the content. For instance, setting up a digital platform of the toolkit collection which is accessible to the artists and the public.

Why?

Easy access and understandable deliverable are essential to distribute a meaningful design process and content. In this thesis context, the current artists-in-residence that I interviewed expressed that the tools and methods of the toolkit would benefit their Social Practice process, however, finding ways of simplifying and customizing tools is a crucial part for the toolkit be more likely to be adopted.

2014 Fall

Proposing an introduction workshop of the toolkit to art or cultural organizations which have interests in supporting artists in Social Practice process. In the workshop, the organization and I can co-

facilitate and introduce a set of useful tools that can assist artists to step into socially engaged art field and engage local communities for social impact.

Why?

The idea of the introduction workshop is to share the possible scenario which shows how the artists could facilitate the tools for Social Practice projects.

2015 Spring

Preparing a presentation around my design research and prototype - the Community Engagement Toolkit - on a conference level that invites different art and cultural organizations to participate in conversations - how to foster bridge building between artists and communities, and promote social impact through Social Practice.

Why?

By sharing and exchanging the knowledge between Human Centered Design and Social Practice artists and organizations, both the practices of Designers and Artists will benefit.

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# POSTSCRIPT

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In my thesis defense, this project received some praises and concerns. As me and my committee all agreed, the toolkit should provide a resource of research engagement methods for artists to refer to, rather than a fixed guideline. Moreover, several valuable points were also addressed by the committee members. These comments led me to think more about how I could move forward with the thesis in a more sustainable way.

## How did the research inform my toolkit?

My research both in the community of Chinatown and with the artists-in-residence gave me the opportunity to apply Human Centered Design to engaging my audience. In particular, I had relatively little knowledge about the Chinatown community, similar to the artists-in-residence. Hence, the toolkit design was very much impacted by those research tools that I employed. For instance, the Design Scenario tool at Stage II of my toolkit was designed because the local resources team expressed that the community members were not as visionary as the artists, and they had trouble envisioning artists’ Social Practice concept and plans ([page 113](#)).

## How to transfer the toolkit to the artists?

I agree it is crucial to consider ways of transferring the toolkits to the artists. This is far from trivial and to some extent, an open question. I plan to prototype and implement several methods for distribution. For instance, I hope to follow the thesis committee’s suggestion to create a road map outlining how artists can apply the tools. In addition, the ideas of a simple appendix with an extended template of tools, and video tutorials were also discussed in the previous chapter ([page 147](#)).

## What is the support need for artists to sustain and practice the tools?

The answer to this question is open-ended. Several possible scenarios were discussed with the committee. For instance, whether Human Centered Designers will be brought on as a dedicate support consultant to mediate the experience of using these methods and tools, or the toolkit could be built into the Social Practice program with art organizations.

Some other suggestion were also addressed during the thesis defense. For instance:

- Coordinating with experienced Social Practice artists or organizers to co-author the toolkit moving forward. This would allow the experts to bring in their history of work as a way to collectively improve the content.
- Addressing that many Social Practice projects relate to political conflicts and can also lead to outreach anxiety. In this sense, the artists are also traversing the local political landscape. Government resources and funding for the arts is increasingly focused on Social Practice, rather than traditional static art.
- Reaching out to Fine Arts students at UArts or others to connect them with Human Centered Design students for possible collaboration.



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# GLOSSARY

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Affinity Diagramming: A method of data organization intended to define categories based on likeness of information.

Boundary Object: Objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites.

Card Sort: Asking people to organize cards spatially, in ways that make sense to them, revealing expectations and priorities about intended functions.

Co-creation: The process of creating something collaboratively with the belief that the outcome will be richer and better than from a solo endeavor.

Concept Map: Graphical method for organizing and representing knowledge supporting meaningful learning through associative and hierarchical connection forming.

Contextual Interview: Conducted in the environment, or context, in which the service process occurs allowing interviewer to both observe and probe the behavior they are interested in.

Collaboration: To work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor.

Design Tools: Artifacts and frameworks that aid multiple aspects of the design process.

Empowerment: To promote the self-actualization or influence of an individual or group.

Facilitation: To make easier or help bring out.

Framework: A basic conceptional structure (as of ideas).

Participatory Design: An approach to design that attempts to actively involve all stakeholders (e.g. partners, customers, citizens, end users) in the design process to help ensure that the product designed meets their needs and is usable.

Secondary Research: Supportive information including published articles, papers and other pertinent documents to develop an informed point of view on design issues.

Shadowing: Involves researchers immersing themselves in the lives of people in order to observe day-today routines, interactions and context.

Stakeholder: One who is involved in or affected by a course of action.

Storytelling: A method for sharing insights and new concepts through the use of compelling narratives.

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2Up2Down Anfield Project. [www.2up2down.org.uk](http://www.2up2down.org.uk)

Mural Arts Program. [muralarts.org](http://muralarts.org)



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# APPENDIX

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In this section, I will share the first stage of the Community Engagement Toolkit prototype -- Natural Discovery. Hope you enjoy them! Please contact me if you have any comments and advice: [tcai.shanghai@gmail.com](mailto:tcai.shanghai@gmail.com)

DESIGNING SOCIAL PRACTICE ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement Toolkit | Stage I

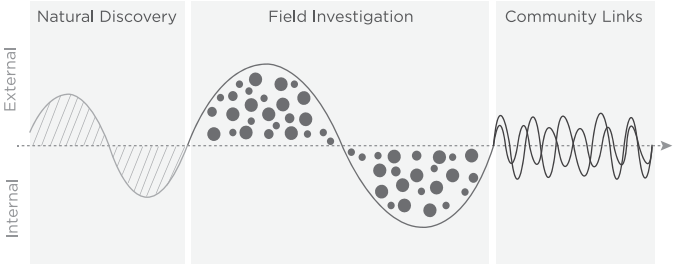
# Natural Discovery

**Learning** from the community

### Community Engagement Toolkit

was designed to remind artists and art organizations, who / which are interested in socially engaged art projects, of various approaches to engaging with local communities. It helps the participants to **plan for outreach strategies to their potential audience or partners in their creation processes.**

The Engagement Toolkit is divided into three stages which represent different methods of engagement with the community: Natural Discovery, Field Investigation and Community Links. The tools will assist you to facilitate the interactions with the external world, as well as provide support for your internal reflections.



\* Note: Time frame is merely suggestive. Please create your own!

### Stage I : Natural Discovery

Where to begin? During the Natural Discovery Stage, you will observe, record and learn from the community in an organic way in order to prepare for the follow-up field investigation.

You could bring these on your first tour in the community:

- ☐ Open Mind !
- ☐ Map
- ☐ Notebook
- ☐ Tools you might create
- ☐ Camera
- ☐ Recorder (Audio / Video)
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

\* Note: Make sure you get permission before you take photos or recordings. Because the community members might get nervous, not clear about your intent for recording as you first time come to a community.

### Observation Map

**WHY?** Recording your pathways and routes on the map and document your observation and interpretation helps to define zones of different behaviors and cultures.

**HOW?** Create your own Observation Map by placing the map of the community on a piece of blank paper. As you found any interesting scenes, or events on your tour in the community, mark them out and ask yourself:

- What do you see? (observe)
- Why do you think is happening? (interpret)

\* Note: Ask questions you think you might already know the answer to. We all interpret the world based on our experience and what we think we know. This lens of personal experience can influence what you focus on and can make it hard to see important issues.

What do you see?  
What do you think it is happening?

What do you see?  
What do you think it is happening?



AEIOU

**WHY?** Preparing for a set of simple questions from your instinct according to activities, environments, interactions, objects and people in the community beforehand will help to trigger your thought processes.

**HOW?** Take photos of any activities, environments, interactions, objects or people that interest you or are different than what you expected. By asking the sample questions on the left, you could create a visual collage connecting the things you learned from your tour in the community.

Activities

- What are people doing?
- Day to day activities?
- Specific one time actions?
- Are people goal oriented or socializing?

Environments

- Where are people interacting?
  - Is the area safe or clean?
- Harmful or dirty?

Interactions

- Who are people interacting with? Neighbors? Friends? Strangers?
- Are they using any interfaces or machines?

Objects

- What are the items people are using?
- Do they relate to the acitivies or interactions?
- Are they digital or analog?

Users

- Who is in the area?
- Can you guess their values or motivations for being in this particular area?

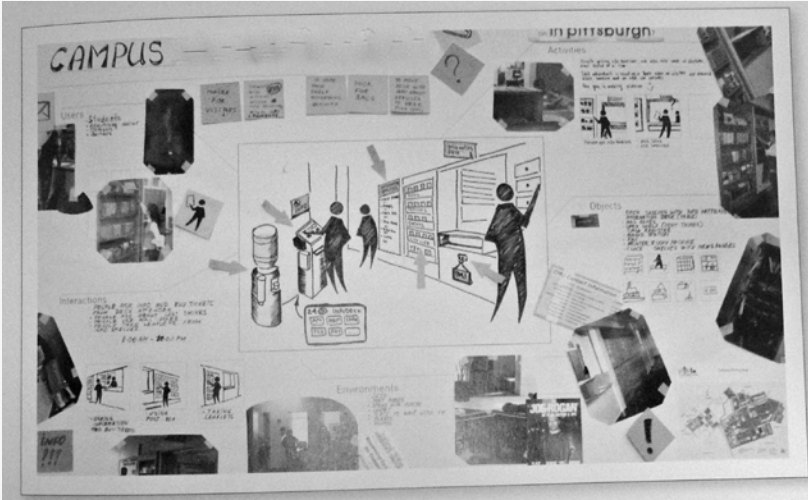
Share Stories

**WHY?** Sharing stories about what you heard in the community with your partners or other artists-in-residence will provide you with concrete details that help you imagine possible entry points for your creation project.

**HOW?** Tell stories according to the collage or any visual formats you might create. Remember to be specific, descriptive, and include: who, what, when, where, why and how. It would be more effective if you have the listener(s) of your stories take notes of key words. You could brainstorm:

- What are the next steps this information leads to?

\* Note: It's best to share stories soon after your research in the community so that details are not lost. When you tell the stories, try to avoid: generalizing, hypothesizing, judging, prescribing or assuming.

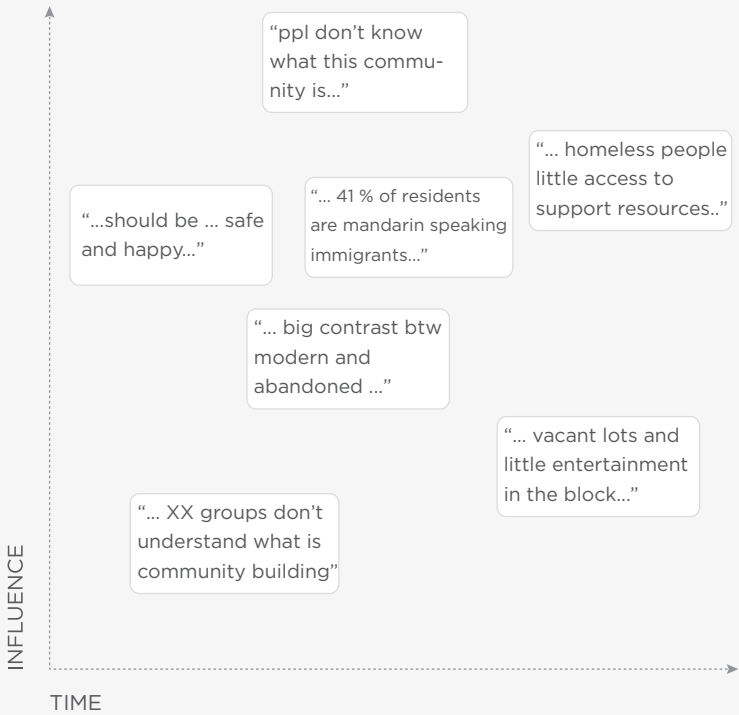


# Influence Timeline

**WHY?** Mapping out your detailed observations and stories you learned in the community and visually comparing the influence of each finding will help you to understand a broad picture of the community.

**HOW? Step 1.** Take a piece of blank paper and draw vertical and horizontal lines, representing the influence and timeline. **Step 2.** Think backward about what you observed and learned, secondary readings, quotes, actions, objects, individuals or interactions involved in your process of research. **Step 3.** Write down each event on one post-it and place it in the grid according to when it happens and how much influence it has on you. Try to map all the observations or stories out in the grid.

\* Note: Video instruction to be developed.



# Interest List

**WHY?** Listing specific groups of people you feel connected to or interested in interviewing with will help you identify and prioritize your audience or potential partners as well as which issues you might want to address.

**HOW?** List or categorize specific groups of people you feel connected to or interested in interviewing with. Prioritize them and ask questions:

- Where could I find and talk to them?
- Who do I know may be accessible to the groups?
- What are my possible **obstacles** in this outreach?
- What am I **expecting** from the potential interview?

	GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C
Where could I find and talk to them?			
Who do I know may be accessible to these groups?			
What are my possible obstacles in this outreach?			
What am I expecting from the potential interview?			



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## Visual Bio

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Tian Cai, 蔡恬, was born and raised in Shanghai. Prior to attending University of the Arts, she received a BA in Integrated Art and Design from Shanghai Institute of Visual Art (Fudan University). In 2011, she travelled to the United States to study Human Centered Design in the Master of Industrial Design program. Tian is passionate about creating meaningful interactions between artwork and its audience through design thinking.

She is actively looking for creative collaboration with Social Practice programs and artists to promote positive social impact. If curious or have feedback, please contact Tian at [tcai.shanghai@gmail.com](mailto:tcai.shanghai@gmail.com)

