

A photograph of a diverse group of people sitting at tables in a community meeting or workshop. The image is overlaid with a teal gradient. The text is centered over the image.

ThriveOn Collaborative Arts Community Engagement Report

By Piper Anderson

CORE PRINCIPLES

As we gathered community members, civic, business, and cultural leaders, and residents, we grounded the process in a set of core principles of community engagement. These principles were also echoed back to us in the feedback from residents.

Transparency

In each session, we committed to keeping residents informed and engaged at every phase of the development process.

Collaboration

Since the launch of the ThriveOn Collaboration, residents have been invited to take part in sharing their feedback, ideas, and visions for how the partnership and the building can be a resource to the community.

Shared Decision Making

The community engagement sessions, along with the community advisory committee and working groups that include resident representation, reflect a commitment to shared decision making with community members. That commitment should extend to curatorial and programmatic decisions.

Honor Community Narratives

Stories are adaptive. The stories that we tell about a community can shape identity, relationships, and what feels possible for the future. It's vital that ThriveOn King endorses narratives that honor and advance community visions for the future.

Summary

Since 2019, Create Forward has supported the ThriveOn Collaboration in developing a community engagement strategy grounded in a commitment to centering community voices and equitable distribution of resources. We continued this effort in the fall of 2022, working with the community engagement team to engage residents in the neighborhoods surrounding ThriveOn King to envision the arts within the new development.

Residents were invited to participate in three community engagement sessions between September-November 2022. These sessions were an interactive creative brainstorming process to create a shared vision for the visual and multimedia arts in the community space at ThriveOn King. America's Black Holocaust Museum hosted all the community sessions.

The entire engagement was organized by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation community engagement team and facilitated by community engagement consultant Piper Anderson from Create Forward. In addition, we also facilitated one information session for Milwaukee-based artists at the Foundation.

This report synthesizes the feedback received through these sessions and provides a potential roadmap towards a cohesive curatorial vision for the arts at ThriveOn King.

Community Participation

Session 1 (09/20)	Session 2 (10/15)	Session 3 (10/29)	Session 4 (11/18)
25	40	25	85

With each session, attendance grew indicating a growing interest in the project and a desire to have a voice in how the arts and culture are deployed in the development of the space.

Themes and Narrative Arc

Over the course of the three sessions with neighborhood residents and community members, a set of themes began to emerge. These are the concepts, stories, and values that community members want to see reflected in the artwork within the building's community spaces.

The themes have been divided into sections to reflect a cohesive narrative arc.

Honoring the Past: History of A Vibrant Community

- Respect what was and for now
- Indigenous peoples of the land
- Community Heroes of Halyard Park: The vision and dream of an African American Suburb
- Black Business: historical and present
- Markers throughout the building that represent landmarks
- Bronzeville entrepreneurship legacy
- Local archives from newspapers and churches

The Present: Portray Community Connections

- Intergenerational connections
- A sense of belonging, welcoming into the environment
- Represent the diversity of the community
- Respect for elders
- Parking Garage: imagery should make a bold universal statement.
- Images of children that instill pride in their identities and advance their imagination and creativity
- History of thriving Black families and businesses (before the freeway was built)

The Future: Adding to a spectrum of Narratives and Perspectives

- Untold stories
- Stories of people displaced from their homes in the neighborhoods
- Images of community resilience
- Balance positive and negative POV
- Spiritedness and curiosity
- Participatory art and storytelling

ThriveOn Work Group Themes and Ideas

What kinds of art would you like to see on the walls?

- Active creation of art
- that tells a story No
- static
- QR Code to learn more about the artist/history/piece
 - Tech and art intersection
 - Walking in and feeling at home
 - Vibrant, colorful
 - Art on the floor (pathway, trail, history, lifecycle)

Themes/Celebrations

- Juneteenth
- Garfield Days
- Food
- Games
- Music
- Culture
- Inspiring those who are coming up, while inspiring those who are already here
- Working together to uplift one another's values

Artistic Mediums

- Mixed media
- Mosaic – multiple reflections in one piece
- Sculpture
- Music
- Art that brings in all the senses
- Touchable
- Floor art integrated into missing pieces of the floor – could those be replaced with art
- Light as it shifts throughout the day
- Art you can take - vending machine to buy local art
- Art that you leave

Hopes and Dreams for the community

- Sanctuary
- Home-like to feel engaged and inspired
- Ownership
- Precious space
- Where people want to take care of it

Ideas for the Parking Garage

- What is something that is pleasant to look at?
- Fits organically into the community
- Balance visual aspect with wayfinding (how to find your way into the building)

What are the values of the ThriveOn Collaboration that should be demonstrated through art?

- Community environment
- Diversity
- Listening to the community
- Togetherness
- History
- Before and after the freeway

What do artists need to know about this community?

- Stereotypes to avoid - all stereotypes
- Understanding history with long term residents (Halyard Park and Bronzeville)

Who are the people and how should they be represented?

- Dr. Howard Fuller—impact on education
- ECE, Malaika Early Learning Center
- Beechie Brooks-Halyard Park
- Royal Capital
- Bronzeville as a thriving business community
- Vel R. Phillips
- The future-young people

VISITOR GOALS

In our last session, we brought together artists and community members to complete an audience development exercise. This was our largest and most diverse participant group. Participants were divided into groups based on demographics they identified with. We focused on four demographic groups: families with children, single millennial adults, elders, and youth. We invited each group to think about the curation of art installations and programming at ThriveOn King through the lens of this audience demographic.

Across every demographic group, there was a sense that the way people were invited into the space matters. "The Invitation" is a process of trust and

relationship building. Events need to feel welcoming, accessible, and aligned with the interests and values of the audience group.

There was a small group of young people present at this session who shared their ideas, but **more feedback directly from youth is needed to better understand how to engage and welcome young people into the space.**

Visitor Interests by Demographic Group

Families with Young Children

Consistent, educational components for kids

Hands-on demonstration, classes, education

Bring families and children to the table to make the decisions - a suggestion box or some sort of outreach effort to gain their insights

Art that you can touch

Developmentally appropriate experiential art/Art Making experiences

See aspects of their culture, people who look like them

Accessible for a range of

developmental needs

Ways to learn about other cultures.

Positive images of Black culture/African cultures

Single Millennial Adults

Programming that is inviting and interesting to a diverse range of people.

Invitation is a process and takes consistency.

Work that isn't intimidating: don't need to be an "expert" to understand the work.

Opportunity for dialogue and cultural exchange.

Accessible to a range of learners

Offers an escape

Sense of shared ownership created through participation

and engagement.

Sense of community created through the arts.

Artists share their process with visitors

Interactive

Parties, theme nights, events

Elders

Opportunities to remember and reconnect to the history of the community.

Oral history and community story telling opportunities

Opportunities for hands on participation through mural painting.

Celebrations of anniversaries and milestones for the community and for individuals who have contributed to the community

Gathering around food

Intergenerational

exchanges and opportunities to learning from the past/present - build/grow connection between the generations

Hands on arts experiences

Youth 16-25

Mental health through the arts

Invitation through participation

The future

A voice at the table-participate in deciding the kind of work that comes into the space.

Artistic Mediums

Community members shared their ideas about the types of art they would like to see in the space. There was strong interest from all demographic groups that what would consistently encourage them to engage with the arts in the space is interactive and experiential process-oriented work.

Multimedia

- Video/ Projections
- Lighting
- Auditory work
- Listening booths

Participatory

- Facilitated participatory art with residents, youth
- Selfie/photo area
- Interactive works that engage children
- Oral history/ narrative work
- Experiential work
- Education
- Arts Workshops
- Social Media
- Intergenerational exchanges

2D/3D Works

- Photography
- Sculpture or 3D works
- Motion/kinetic art
- Textiles
- Murals
- Archival Works
- Mosaics

Programming

- Dance
- Music
- Poetry
- Presenting Youth artists and performers
- Literary work

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the community engagement sessions, a narrative arc emerged that reflects the past, present, and future of the community. As the project management team begins to develop the Call for Arts, consider the balance of how works will reflect this progressive community story.

Communicate a cohesive aesthetic and contextual vision for the arts across a range of mediums with a primary focus on the visual arts in identified areas. Once the visual art component of the plan has been defined, allow it to serve as the foundation for programming that complements the visual works.

The artists contracted and art acquired or commissioned should reflect the vibrancy of the neighborhood, respect the cultural history of Bronzeville, and celebrate the future of the community. Continue to work with the community as an accountability partner to ensure that the story being told about the neighborhood aligns with their vision.

Lastly, continue to engage stakeholders as participants in all aspects of the process. Provide regular updates on how their ideas are being integrated into the design plan and seek feedback as artists are selected for various art opportunities throughout the building.



Acknowledgements:

Visioning sessions for neighborhood residents and artists were designed and facilitated by community engagement consultant Piper Anderson for Create Forward.

Mini- working group visioning session was facilitated by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's community engagement team.

Greater Milwaukee Foundation Community Engagement Team:

- Darlene C. Russell, Director of Community Engagement
- Madeline Riordan, Community Engagement Manager
- Zipporah Turnbull, Community Engagement Fellow

Neighborhood Visioning sessions were held at America's Black Holocaust Museum. Many thanks to their staff for hosting us and supporting this work.

Report Written by Piper Anderson
January 2023