

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY HUBS FOR ARTISTIC, CULTURAL, & CREATIVE LEARNING: An Approach

*This is intended to be a discussion draft
and will be updated at the completion of a
feedback process in Summer 2023.*





Creative Generation believes that youth create change. We are a values-forward, global collective that collaborates with young creatives and those who cultivate their creativity to take local actions towards global changes in pursuit of a more just world. Founded in 2019, Creative Generation operates five signature programs: The Campaign for a Creative Generation, the Institute for Creative Social Transformation, The Academy for Creative Leadership, the Incubator for Creative Impact, and the Foundation for a Creative Generation.

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The **Institute for Creative Social Transformation** works to research, document, and contribute knowledge and understanding to the field of practitioners dedicated to cultivating the creative capabilities of the next generation in order to activate efforts of social transformation in thriving communities and towards more just societies.

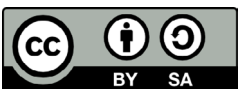
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Suggested Citation:

Joos, E. & Poulin, J. M. (2023). *Developing Community Hubs for Artistic, Cultural, and Creative Learning: An Approach*. Creative Generation. DOI Forthcoming

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Background

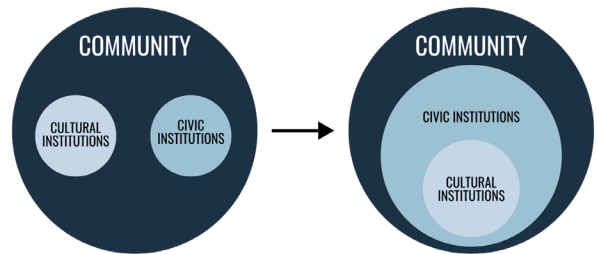
From 2022-2023, Creative Generation engaged with a number of organizations committed to cultivating creativity in young people to better understand the role these organizations play as catalysts for artistic, cultural, and creative learning in their communities. Throughout a variety of contexts - ranging from large cities to rural communities - a common question was explored:

What are the attributes of a Community Hub for artistic, cultural, and creative learning?

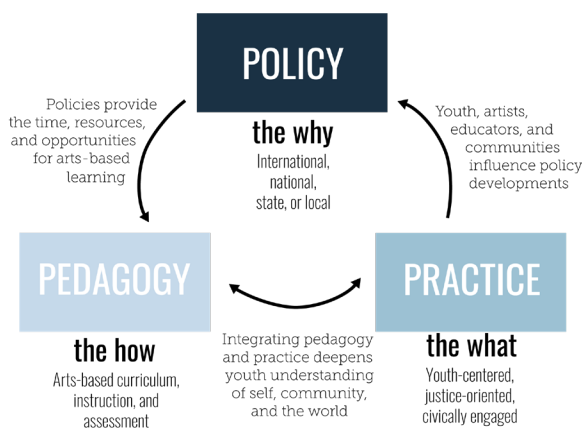
Throughout this replicated, community-engaged process, several themes were illuminated to empower organizations and their many constituents to collaborate towards a shared vision.

Within the foundational research of Creative Generation, exploring the conditions which most effectively cultivate creativity in youth, a fundamental organizational shift was identified, which had a marked impact differentiating programs within the study: institutions - be they schools, cultural organizations, community-based nonprofits, or otherwise - must also recognize their role as civic

institutions and employ their artistic, cultural, and creative practices to that effect.¹ *This shift is represented in the graphic above.*



During the COVID-19 pandemic, this shift was accelerated and amplified with an increased number of arts-based youth programs harnessing their positionality to most acutely address the changing needs of the youth and communities they served.²



Alongside the organizational shift, a parallel shift in practice was identified: one that advocates for the deeper connection between artistic pedagogies and civic and social practice. *This integration is depicted in the graphic at left.* Throughout 2022, practitioners from across the United States contributed insights on their practice to develop an enriched understanding of arts integration. This enriched definition articulates the intersection between artistic, cultural, and creative teaching and learning with numerous elements of education and human development.³

¹ To read more about this work, check out this blog and its linked resources: <https://creative-generation.org/blog-1/bridging-to-as-systems-change-to-improve-pedagogy-policy-and-practice>

² For the collection of articles published in *Arts Education Policy Review*, check out: <https://creative-generation.org/news/special-issue-of-arts-education-policy-review-focuses-on-community-arts-education-in-covid>

³ To learn more about this work, check out this blog and its linked resources: <https://creative-generation.org/blog-1/towards-an-enriched-understanding-of-arts-integration>

Attributes of Community Hubs for Artistic, Cultural, and Creative Learning

Throughout our previous research, it became clear that the intentional and strategic cultivation of certain conditions within an organization led to the success of community-based and integrated learning for youth. This often occurred with an artistic, education, or community-based organization at the center.

Considering the input from constituents across educational, cultural, and civic organizations in a broad array of communities, we - at Creative Generation - sought to understand the attributes of a central organization which cultivates the conditions for artistic, cultural, and creative learning to thrive. A number of trends emerged.

A Community Hub for artistic, cultural, and creative learning cultivates the conditions and capacity for...

- **Learners to create;**
- **Spaces where arts integrate with learning and human development;**
- **Artist, culture bearers, and creatives to collaborate;**
- **Families and caregivers to be welcomed and participate; and**
- **Neighbors and the community to engage as supporters and potential collaborators.**

These conditions and capacities can be interpreted as the long-term objectives, which a number of individuals can strive to achieve. When examining myriad existing or aspiring Community Hubs, the following constituents participated in the process:

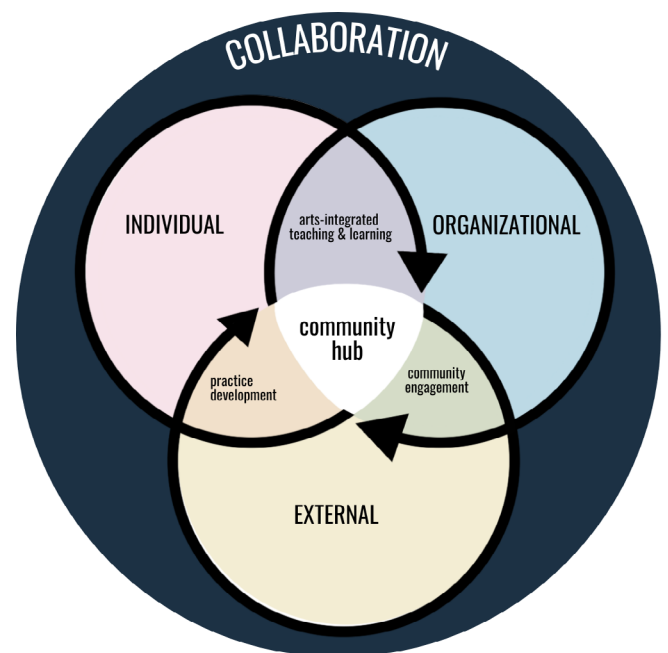
- School Leaders
- Arts Educators
- Non-Arts Academic Educators
- Students
- Families & Caregivers
- Community Partners, like cultural and youth-serving organizations

A Process to Create a Community Hub for Artistic, Cultural, and Creative Learning

As a subset of the organizations with which we worked, two arts-integrated schools participated in a months-long inquiry to understand the processes and strategies, which achieve the above attributes. The below diagram articulates a set of relationship-oriented processes, which enable an organization to take on the role of “Community Hub” at the center of a region’s cultural and education ecosystem. This framework is derived from working continuously with schools and organizations in diverse communities and varying contexts, with a range of types of available resources, district/state policies, and community cultures.

The three relationship-oriented processes include:

- **Individual:** The cultivation of individual educators, school leaders, parents or caregivers, students, or community members.
- **Organizational:** The development of intra-organizational relations within an educational or cultural organization committed to cultivating creativity in youth.
- **External:** The fostering of relationships with external, community-based organizations with direct or integrated interests and investment in the community’s youth.



To begin the process, constituents may start their work in any location within the framework, as each leads to and informs the other: due to the ever-evolving nature of schools and organizations, the process is ongoing and may never be completed.

Throughout the integrative framework - specifically, within the intersections of each process - are outcomes that can materialize when the relationships between two of the processes are in alignment:

- **Arts-Integrated Teaching & Learning:** An outcome of collaboration between individuals within the organization.
- **Community Engagement:** An outcome of collaboration between the organization and external constituents.
- **Practice Development:** An outcome of collaboration between external constituents and individuals within the organization.

Components of a Community Hub for Artistic, Cultural, & Creative Learning

Throughout this work, consistent profiles of the constituents and outcomes involved in the aforementioned framework consistently emerged.

Individual

A Community Hub would not exist if not for the individuals who contribute to it.

To effectively support the Community Hub framework, it is essential for the individuals to engage in a critically reflective process to identify their personal and professional identities and the intersections between.

Within this work, the individuals employ an ethos of invoking their purest “multi-hyphenate” natures. This process creates a space for individuals to hold not one, but multiple identities, such as parent, sibling, spouse, artist, community leader, teacher, and more. Identifying the multitude of perspectives held within individuals contributing to the effort is a critical component of the hybrid entity of the Community Hub.

In addition to this reflective work, it is essential that individuals also see themselves as conduits that act as connectors or bridges between one realm they occupy individually (e.g. the classroom) with another (e.g. home, church, community choir, local arts museum, etc.). For example, a ceramics teacher at a local public high school who is also a member of a local ceramics guild has the ability to leverage the relationships in both spheres to create more experiential learning opportunities to benefit students (e.g. artist-in-residence opportunities or student internships). This can also happen at the policy level as well. For example, because of that teacher’s bridge-building between school and arts context, they may also feel empowered to occupy a seat on the city council or a local arts commission to provide perspective and decision-making power informed by their work in the classroom and as an artist.

It is this aspect of the “Individual” level of the Community Hub framework that not only provides the broader landscape critical perspectives from the front lines (e.g. classrooms), but also empowers these individuals to see themselves as agents of systems-wide change.

Organizational

A Community Hub is most successful when individual learning becomes community learning.

This process of intra-organizational development builds and strengthens the foundation upon which the following occur:

1. A shared vision is created and well communicated between leadership, staff, and collaborators;
2. A strong alignment between administrative objectives and teaching and learning objectives; and
3. Clear communication channels between practitioners, partners, and organizations around funding availability and opportunities for collaboration.

It is essential that these systems and strategies help build an organizational culture and operational system of collaboration, trust, organizational identity, and mutual learning that are essential to the overall function and well-being of the organization. In this way, individual educators, students, parents and caregivers, school leaders, etc. feel they have the structure, support, and agency from which they can launch beyond the walls of the organization and leverage their individual power.

External

A Community Hub achieves its objectives when external collaborators are engaged.

The role of external collaborators in the Community Hub framework is to engage with and support efforts of cultivating creativity in youth in tandem with peer organizations. This can manifest in the form of offering subsidized programming or events, utilizing shared facilities, collaborating on shared grants, facilitating use of materials, generating knowledge, providing internship or professional development opportunities for students and teachers, or more - really, any collaborative opportunity which aligns with the shared vision of the Community Hub.

These relationships can range from one-time events (e.g. a choir teacher collaboration with a local Earth Day or Indigenous Peoples' Day event) to sustained connections (e.g. a semester-long internship program at a local museum, studio, or social service organization for high school seniors).

Intersectional Outcomes

While the big-picture vision of these three relationships working together is to establish a thriving, Community Hub for artistic, cultural, and creative learning, there are additional intersectional outcomes that can occur when two of the processes are in healthy, balanced, and mutually beneficial alignment.

These intersectional outcomes point to the contextual nature of this work, reinforcing the notion that schools and organizations can begin this work in any location within the framework and yield growth throughout the process depending on their unique circumstances.

Arts-Integrated Teaching & Learning

At the intersection of individuals and an organization, we have the outcome of arts-integrated teaching and learning. Educators, school leaders, parents/caregivers, and students have knowledge and lived experiences which are reflected in their personal and professional multi-hyphenate identities. Here, the organization is positioned to provide complementary systems and structures that enable these individuals to not only share their expertise, but give them the agency to collaborate with others to grow and fortify strong arts-integrated teaching and learning practices within the organization. Examples of these systems and structures may include:

- Providing designated time for teachers of different content areas to collaborate on arts-integrated units;
- Upholding consistent communication pipelines between leadership and staff that establish a shared organizational vision and objective; and
- Articulating individual roles, responsibilities, and processes within the organization so individuals understand funding availability and protocols to see their collaborations and visions through.

Community Engagement

This intersectional relationship occurs between external constituents and an organization. No matter how well a single organization operates internally, there are still limitations to how much it can do on its own. Therein, when its mission, vision, systems, and structures are in alignment, it can more easily identify growth areas and target what kind of external support could be used to go beyond those limitations. The complementary role of external constituents is to provide that support, establishing potential pathways for collaboration, additional funding/resource allotment, and, over time, increased engagement from the community to cultivate wider-ranging opportunities that support the ongoing mission and vision of the organization.

The collaboration between an organization and potential external constituents can exist in mutually beneficial outcomes. For example, a high school social studies unit that collaborates with a choir class on the use of songs in different periods of wartime throughout history may partner with a local historical society as an external collaborator. The outcome of this intersectional relationship could result in the mutual engagement of high school students with community elders to create a bridge in the community that would not have existed previously.

Practice Development

This intersectional outcome occurs between external constituents and individuals within an organization. Just as professional development is a common practice within organizations, this relationship highlights the importance of individuals learning and exchanging knowledge to continuously develop and enhance their practice. This applies to all individuals within an organization, including teachers, students, and leadership.

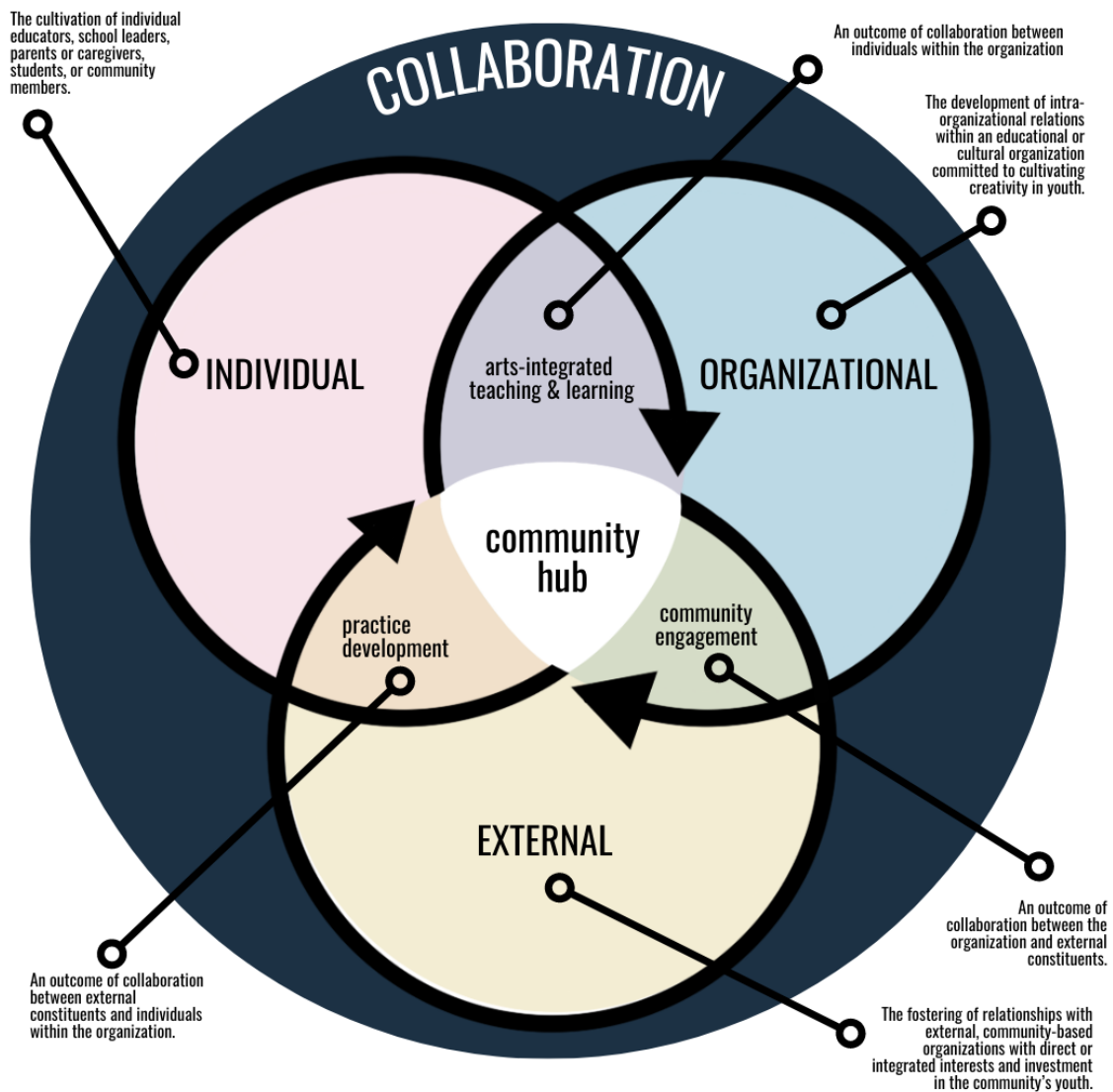
An example of this kind of intersectional outcome could be creating more artist-in-residence programs with local visual artists in a school district's visual arts program. Not only does this exchange enhance the artistic experiences for students, it also introduces the school's teachers to new methodologies and creates employment and teaching opportunities for the resident artists. Further, the artist-in-residence gains skills from the education sector like classroom management, evaluative experience, and more.

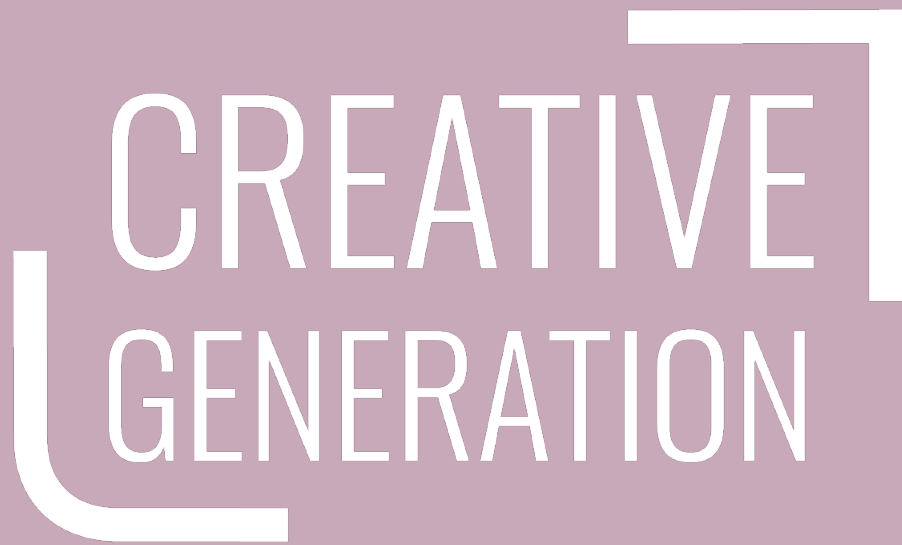
Related to the individual identities of those in an organization, this process also provides peer-to-peer connection strengthening the fabric of the local cultural community.

Conclusion

When an organization is working harmoniously and autonomously towards the goal of cultivating creativity in youth, it must leverage its position both within and outside of the organization's walls.

While the entities of this model are situated in relatively different scales and capacities, what they all share is a vested interest in the artistic, cultural, and creative education of youth. Therefore, the center of this model, the "Community Hub," is not necessarily a place, but rather an idea under which a gathering of these individually impactful yet collectively systems-altering entities can create lasting effects on the community for generations to come.



The logo features the words 'CREATIVE' and 'GENERATION' stacked vertically in a white, sans-serif font. The text is enclosed within a white graphic element consisting of two L-shaped brackets: one on the left side and one on the top-right side, forming a partial frame around the text.

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