

# ART AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: MAPPING THE CONNECTIONS

## A TOOL OF THE WALKER ART CENTER, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

For more information about this resource or to learn more about the Walker Art Center's Civic Engagement Activity, visit their website at <http://learn.walkerart.org/civic.wac>.

*Art and Civic Engagement: Mapping the Connections* is a new initiative at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN, that culminated in the publication of a “process map” tool. This new resource incorporates national field research about art and civic engagement, conversations with artists and colleagues, and insights drawn from interviews with 30 community activists and leaders in the Twin Cities. The tool is intended to help curators and staff members, whether veterans or new to the job, understand how the Walker defines civic engagement and what elements need to be present in future programs to encourage civic participation or dialogue. The impetus for this project emerged from an acknowledgement by the Walker that, in order to become a more civically engaged institution, they needed to develop a deeper understanding of the issues facing the community, as well as the ways the community perceives the Walker.

One of the Walker Art Center's primary institutional goals is to be a space for civic engagement—opening the exploration of compelling civic issues as they relate to contemporary artistic practice. When the Walker began a large renovation and expansion project in 2003, the staff took this opportunity to evaluate progress towards their goal. Walker staff conducted interviews with leaders from social service, business, media, education, faith-based, and arts organizations, asking a variety of questions about the ways that art can be relevant to civic issues. The overall findings were compiled into a map, designed and conceptualized by Amy Pogue Brady, a former Research Fellow at the Design Institute at the University of Minnesota. The process outlined in the map is designed to assess the social potential of individual works of art, exhibitions, performances, screenings, and other cultural events, in order to better create future programs that foster civic engagement.

In the early stages of planning for the expansion, staff members used the concept of a town square as a metaphor for the kinds of social experiences the new spaces were being designed to offer. In the envisioned town square, four different roles were identified that art, artists, and programs can play to foster civic engagement—later known as the “4C Model of Experience”—the four Cs standing for *container*, *convener*, *connector*, and *catalyst*. The *container* provides physical, emotional, or psychological space for engagement, even if it requires the institution to let go of specific goals in order to allow participants to find their own way through the experience; the *convener* provides the purpose and the call for a formal gathering; the *connector* provides a platform to assist people with bridging their differences and bonding through their similarities; and the *catalyst* provokes awareness, response, or movement on an issue that is inactive or polarized. Through the use of these four roles, the Walker believes an event will result in genuine civic involvement by participants.

Additionally, through further definition of the term “civic engagement,” the map identifies four ways that visitors become civically engaged: through *commentary*, *dialogue*, *action*, and *leadership*. Together, these four avenues are called the “Spectrum of Civic Engagement Activities,” and each term is defined through examples and key questions: *commentary* is “a public expression of personal opinion or belief in the form of written or spoken statements, explanations, or criticisms;” *dialogue* consists of “the process of individuals or groups sharing and learning about the beliefs, feelings, interests, or needs of others with the goal of improving understanding and trust;” *action* is “a mode of addressing an issue, policy, or event in a direct manner that attempts to make an immediate or measurable change;” and *leadership* “involves the ethical use of power and empowerment, leading by example, exerting influence, and inspiring others to realize their potential.”

Curators and programmers at the Walker will experiment with a variety of different upcoming activities using the map as their tool. A workbook in the form of a PDF document is being developed to accompany the map, to be posted on their website at <http://learn.walkerart.org>. Map creators hope that their guide will have wider applications beyond their own staff, and that the map will ultimately assist other members of the field in museum education and programming with creating more innovative civic events.

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