

# Creativity in Practice



**CEOs** for Cities

## Creative Cities Network, Meeting Four

Building on the understanding of creative cities developed over the past year, the Network met in the inspiring home of Christine Forester to elaborate on how to develop the conditions for creativity and develop the capacity for creativity in their cities.

Highlights of the conversation are captured here:

### CEOs for Cities Introduction – Carol Coletta:

The importance of creative cities is self-evident when you look at the best indicator of a city's success: talent.

Creative cities provide one important means of developing and leveraging that talent. Creative Cities provide the **conditions in which people – even the most unexpected – can be developed into a powerful talent resource**. And as a result, a creative city actually produces creativity, by way of its human capital.

To do that requires fostering **the conditions for creativity: Openness, Connections, Aspiration, Opportunity and Food for Thought**.

How can you be intentional about bringing these conditions into being?

A diagram shared at the meeting representing the different ways creative city thinking has evolved is attached.

### Ethan Seltzer:

Beside the flat and spiky world-views, in Portland a **“sticky” world is important**. Portland has an influx of young talent, but needs to keep those people.

There is no set formula or project that will achieve a creative city. A city needs to enable certain conditions and frameworks within which creative cities can happen; to generate a culture of creativity. **The creative city is not a “project.” It is a synthesis**, drawing together good people, good places and good leadership.

Learning from Portland –

- **People want to have fun:** satisfaction and enjoyment are experienced through collective cleverness.
- Nothing happens without the sense that the conditions exist which **enable people to step up and take control and responsibility** to make things happen.
- The key is to create the conditions for **optimal serendipity**. Provide the opportunity for diverse people to interact and act freely in public.
- Good things take time and luck.
- **Distinctiveness** is important. Global reach stems from local excellence.

### Discussion:

As Ethan reminded us, fundamentally creative cities are about **“connecting people with people and ideas with ideas.”**

Civic engagement and empowering people in all things public is vital. A key turning point for Portland was its **palpable civic intention, culture of participation and active citizenship**.

Providing access, opportunity, chances to connect, exchange, mixing different people and a framework for optimal serendipity are important elements of

creative cities that can also become an **economic force of their own**.

Critical challenges identified throughout the discussion included:

- How to reach a tipping point.
- The need for leadership.
- Developing civic engagement around a positive vision, not negative hurdles.
- Developing new skill sets for a more democratic and participative environment.

So what can we do?

The group discussed approaches including:

Different cities have **different starting points for leadership**: top down, middle layer, emerging leadership, or grass roots and public participation. Each can provide a foundation to effect change. Cities need to identify where their strength lies and use it to bring along the whole continuum of leadership.

**Concentrating and amplifying the assets** of a place can project a presence beyond their scale and help draw people to the buzz.

**Connectors and champions play a vital role** in the community but haven't traditionally been recognized or supported.

Enable people to take action for themselves and engage them as active participants, where people take responsibility to bring about change and **co-create the future they seek**. The idea of "civitas" can help generate a sense of "worth of place".

Change the conversation about a place: what it is, what it wants to be and who is going to get it there. **Change thinking and action will follow**. Words and dialogue matter.

Keep the spirit of fun and light-heartedness around creative cities.

## The Right Framing?

The question of whether creative cities is the right framing for these ideas arose. Certainly the term creative cities has been interpreted in a number of

ways with different implications. This has often led to confusion around the term and the need to define thinking about it. It's a question we have regularly considered throughout our work.

Here are some reasons we still see value in this framing currently:

- **It encapsulates the importance of culture change and reinvention** which are such vital elements of creative cities, and are **an imperative for today's cities**. Creative Cities are a process and provide a framework or mechanism for a culture of change and changing of culture;
- The concept brings people to the table and galvanizes interest;
- It has a **resonance for a wide range of leaders** almost intuitively;
- The **emphasis on process and adaptability means we can keep building on the insights** of experts who have contributed great thinking, yet it allows evolution of thought and tailoring of ideas to place;
- It is an inherently positive concept. **The impetus for change comes from interest in the future**, a striving for a better place for all. Creative cities provide a vehicle for change;
- Creativity is profoundly personal and intimate, so the concepts connect with people in ways other framings can't. Creativity is something everyone can do and has the capacity for – **it's accessible and achievable**.

## What it all means for cities:

**Repositioning:** Discussion throughout the San Diego Strategy Session suggested the creative city offers a key opportunity for city success. It is a strong mechanism for cities to become more talented, connected, innovative and distinctive.

As Chris Ronayne suggested, cities require the "**intersection of ideas, places and purpose**". Dan Yankelovich reminded us a sense of public life and citizenship is going to be vital for all cities. And Enrique Penalosa reinforced that "democracy is not poetry": it must be lived and all **choices should be for the greatest possible public good**.

The inherent people-centric focus of creative cities makes it a powerful approach to ensuring cities are designed for people, for talent. It provides a platform to address a range of pressing

issues today's cities face by enabling a culture of engagement and civic spirit, striving to be the best we can be, and a compelling story of place.

One area ripe for exploration to boost civic engagement is social networking. New tools offer one opportunity to leverage creative cities ideas, providing platforms for people to generate their own opportunities, connections and activity. Where is the intersection of real civic agency and new methods?

## **The Creative Cities Network/ What Next?**

This fourth meeting of the Network wraps up the first phase of the program. CEOs for Cities will be drawing together the conclusions of these discussions into a set of tools to **help city leaders communicate their efforts and galvanize support.**

In this second phase, CEOs for Cities is testing how conditions for creativity can be enhanced in alignment with city efforts to tackle a range of other issues, such as attraction of talent, and tourism and economic development. We will be consulting to specific cities to **leverage creative cities principles in strategies to advance their goals.**

We are interested in bringing this conversation to your city to explore its unique assets, and how these can contribute to developing the conditions for creativity. **How can creative cities principles help your city strengthen its talent, connections, innovation and distinctiveness?** How can your city engage people to make that happen? If you would like to host a local convening, contact Rebecca Eggleston at [reggleston@ceosforcities.org](mailto:reggleston@ceosforcities.org)

The Network will meet again at CEOs for Cities Fall National Meeting to share participants' insights learned from creative cities in practice.

## **Thank you to all our contributors at this session:**

Mr. Eric Avner, Vice President – Community Development, Haile/US Bank Foundation  
Mr. Kip Bergstrom, Executive Director, Stamford Urban Redevelopment Commission  
Mr. Richard Earnest, Deputy Mayor, City of Del Mar  
Mr. Pete Ellsworth, President Leger Benbough Foundation  
Ms. Christine Forester, Principal/Owner, Christine Forester Catalyst  
Ms. Victoria Hamilton, Executive Director, City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture  
Ms. Peggy McCormick, President, Atlanta Development Authority  
Ms. Lucy Meade, Director of Marketing and Development, Venture Richmond  
Mr. Scott Peters, Commissioner, San Diego Unified Port District  
Ms. Eve Picker, President, No Wall Productions, Inc.  
Mr. Larry Quick, City of Stamford  
Mr. Brad Raulston, National City Redevelopment Director  
Ms. Deanne Roberts, Chairwoman, ChappellRoberts  
Mr. Rick van Schoik, Director, North American Center for Transborder Studies, Arizona State University  
Mr. Ethan Seltzer, Director, College of Urban and Public Affairs, Portland State University  
Mr. Steve Silverman, Urban Council  
Ms. Dale Steele, President, Public Market Group  
Ms. Cheryl Thomas Strickland, Managing Director, Tax Allocation Districts, Atlanta Development Authority  
Mr. Diego Velasco, MW Steele Group  
Ms. Chelsa Wagner, State Representative, Pennsylvania, House of Representatives  
Ms. Suzanne Walsh, Senior Program Director, Lumina Foundation  
Ms. Isabelle Wasserman  
Ms. Renee Zientek, Assistant Vice Chancellor, University of Michigan-Flint