SIAP

**Social Impact of
the Arts Project**

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An Assessment of Community Impact
of the Philadelphia Department of Recreation
Mural Arts Program

SUMMARY
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Purpose of the Study

This report represents a first attempt to assess the community impact of the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program. The study was initiated to respond to issues that had arisen as a result of the notoriety, growth, and institutionalization of the Mural Arts Program since its move in 1996 from the Mayor's Anti-Graffiti Network to the Philadelphia Department of Recreation. As MAP sought to transition "from a grassroots organization to a professional, sustainable organization," it increasingly solicited contributions from private foundations, corporations, and individuals. The strategy worked. By 2001, thanks to $1.2 million of private support, Mural Arts had become a $2 million annual operation. Meanwhile, a grant from the Ford Foundation to undertake MAP's first business plan also made possible its first evaluation of program impact.

The impact study had two main purposes. The first objective, given the centrality of MAP's social and community mission, was to document the impact that murals have had over the past decade on Philadelphia neighborhoods. The second objective was to build the program's internal capacity to monitor its activities and maximize its impact by making the most effective use of the resources that it marshals.

The project involved a working partnership between the staff of the Mural Arts Program and the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) over a two-year period. The reconnaissance and data collection phase of the project was undertaken from September 2000 through December 2001. Data analysis was undertaken during the spring and summer of 2002. SIAP submitted a draft final report in October 2002. This summary accompanies the revised version of that report.

Assessment Tools and Outcomes

The study developed and tested three types of assessment tools: a data collection methodology, which is essential to any monitoring or evaluation system; a community leveraging model; and a community impact model. These tools, described below, served both as an approach to the design and implementation of the study and as tangible outcomes of the project.

MAP Case Study 2001—A Data Gathering Methodology

At the core of the impact study was systematic data-gathering and database management, dubbed "MAP Case Study 2001," which was developed and piloted by MAP staff. The new data-gathering system centered on the Project Notebook, a three-ring binder for each mural-in-progress that would serve as a repository for *all* information pertaining to that site. A "mural checklist" at the front of the Project Notebook was intended to ensure a uniform data-gathering method and aid in soliciting missing information. Database management by the Mural Projects Coordinator involved two steps: (1) consolidation and clean-up of MAP's historic database of murals produced since its founding in 1984 and (2) updating and expansion of the mural database with current project information.

The case study demonstrated MAP's capacity to collect data systematically on community process as well as mural production. It also illustrated the value for community liaison as well as program assessment of compiling an archive by site for each mural project. The case study pointed to the strengths and shortcomings of different data-gathering practices; created a database foundation upon which the program can build; and provided baseline data for future assessment.

The Community Investment in Murals—A Community Leveraging Model

An innovative assessment tool resulting from the study was a method to analyze the *community inputs* to the Mural Arts Program through development of a "community leveraging model." The goal was to determine the potential of the City of Philadelphia to leverage community investment in murals. Whereas private foundation or corporate grants and individual donations to MAP have clear fiscal impacts, the economic value of community investment in the City's mural program is not recognized. The leveraging model is a tool for assessing the level of community investment made possible by City funding of mural—that is, the "value added" to City investment.

The methodology drew upon the widely respected work by Dr. Ram A. Cnaan of the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work, which documented the substantial economic contribution by religious congregations to the welfare of urban communities. Dr. Cnaan conducted a national study to assess the imputed value—or replacement cost—of the in-kind support, labor, space, and subsides that congregations provide to social programs free of charge by calculating what these services would cost a secular provider.

Using a comparable approach, SIAP applied an economic valuation to non-economic contributions to the mural process in order to draw attention to the value of community engagement. Specifically, we identified eight types of activity that constitute community contributions to the mural process: use of exterior wall, use of vacant lot, use of indoor space or facility, use of utilities, volunteer hours (adult and youth), staff "pro bono" hours (organizational partners), professional "pro bono" hours (artists), and in-kind support (property owner and organizational partners). We then assigned a dollar value to all community inputs to the production of murals.

The study found that Philadelphia communities are making considerable, quantifiable social investments in murals that range in value from an estimated $2,700 to $15,700 per project. The value of community contributions for a typical mural project in a residential neighborhood is estimated at $8,500. Moreover, these community contributions represent a sizable return on City investment, which ranges from $10,000 to $15,000 per mural. Thus, every $1.00 of City funding leverages roughly $ .25 to $1.00 in community contributions—$ .65 for the "typical" mural—or a 25 to 100 percent return on investment. Thus the findings of the community leveraging analysis serve as a case for support for increased public—as well as private—investment in the Mural Arts Program.

The community impact study began with the question of how Philadelphia communities benefit from the City's mural arts program. The community leveraging analysis showed an unexpected impact—the City as beneficiary. However, the City gains not only fiscal but social benefits. For a government agency, costs and benefits are never

calculated in economic terms only. A community mural represents what is called a *public good*, both as a process and a product, and is therefore worthy of public investment. While these features of the Mural Arts Program have received increasing recognition, the economic calculation of what is essentially social capital helps highlight its value.

Murals and Social Capital—A Community Impact Model

Finally, the study produced a framework for understanding the community impact of murals—the *social capital* theory. Social capital refers to the *value* of networks of relationships to individual and group well-being. The impact analysis pointed to a model whereby murals promote the creation of social capital (as indicated by cultural participation), which in turn contributes to positive community outcomes (as indicated by property value increase).

The approach was, first, to develop a conceptual model of *how* murals might have an impact on a local community. We explored three concepts: individual inspiration, creation of amenities, and development of social capital. Second, we developed a method to *measure the community impact* of murals. Due to data limitations, the broad question of community impact was reduced to a simple question: did neighborhoods with a mural do "better" on community indicators than other neighborhoods? We looked at murals completed before 1995 and examined community outcomes after that time.

The overall finding was that murals do not represent a silver bullet that—on their own—can transform a neighborhood. However, they often serve as an *indicator* of a neighborhood that has the ingredients to create revitalization, including a diverse population and a strong civic life. To the extent that murals serve as an expression of that transformation, we can say that they have an impact in stabilizing and sustaining processes of community revitalization.

The conceptual issues associated with community impact underline the limitation of existing data on both murals and communities. Murals are unlikely to have a single impact on social capital. A provocative mural image might spur particular forms of interaction. A "mural park" too would bring people together. Murals that were a product of a full process of community design are the most likely to be associated with social capital creation. A database that tells us only where and when murals were painted—like MAP's historical database—is unlikely to provide a demonstration of possible impacts. At the same time, there is a need for a wider body of evidence on community outcomes and social capital indexes. Information generated by the 2000 census and several social indicator projects currently underway in Philadelphia promise to provide current data on community change in the future.

The social capital model offers the Mural Arts Program a potential policy framework, a guide to the use of murals as a tool of intervention in neighborhood dynamics. Specifically, such a framework could help MAP shape its programming to achieve greater fulfillment of its mission to engage, beautify, and revitalize communities. The social capital theory, in other words, would enable MAP to use a community impact model to develop—and eventually test—a *community impact strategy*.

Major Findings

Social Geography of Murals, 1984-2001

The Mural Arts Program is justifiably proud of the magnitude of its work over the past two decades. From its inception in 1984 under the Mayor's Anti-Graffiti Network through 2001, the program produced a truly impressive inventory—over 2,000 murals located in 57 of the city's 69 neighborhoods.

Our historical analysis of the location and social geography of MAP's murals presents a split image. The dominant finding is that murals created over the years have been concentrated in the city's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Sections of the city that have high poverty, low household income, and high indicators of housing distress are all likely to have had many murals.

This dominant image, however, is crosscut by several other factors. First, diverse sections of the city—neighborhoods that are heterogeneous either economically or ethnically—are likely to be the location of many murals. Second, institutional presence, both in terms of cultural providers and other types of social organizations, has a clear effect. Neighborhoods with the highest concentration of social organizations per capita are about five times as likely to have a mural as areas with the fewest organizations per capita.

Finally, the relationship of cultural participation to the presence of murals is bifurcated. Neighborhoods with very high *or* very low rates of participation in regional cultural activities tend to have many murals. Meanwhile, areas of the city with middling levels of cultural participation tend to have fewer murals.

Murals and Mission, 2001

MAP Case Study 2001, a data collection pilot project, enabled a look at the community mural program in light of the overall mission of the Mural Arts Program and its public art, youth, and community objectives. (See MAP Mission and Goals, page 5.)

As a ***public art program***, MAP is notable for its breadth and accessibility, "providing art as a city service" to neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia. During calendar year 2001, the Mural Arts Program produced from start to completion 120 murals. Of these, 104 murals (87%) were painted on outdoor walls, and 16 (13%) were painted indoors. An additional 19 mural projects were started in December 2000 and completed early in 2001. Finally, ten projects involved the restoration and clean up of existing mural sites.

Of the 2001 inventory, 80 percent were completed within two months and 95 percent within three months. The time required to produce a mural, including assembling and dismantling of the scaffolding, ranged from one day to 21 weeks.

During 2001 the Mural Arts Program employed a total of 99 artists to fill 113 positions available in its two core programs. The community mural program employed 77 mural artists, designers, and assistants; and the Big Picture art education program employed 36 artist-instructors and assistants. The vast majority of artists and

Philadelphia Department of Recreation
Mural Arts Program—Mission and Goals

Mission Statement[1]

"The Philadelphia Department of Recreation Mural Arts Program is a public art program that works in partnership with community residents, grassroots organizations, government agencies, educational institutions, corporations, and philanthropies to design and create murals of enduring value while actively engaging youth in the process."

The Mural Arts Program accomplishes its mission through five main objectives:

- Work with communities to create murals that reflect and depict the culture and history or vision of those for which they are created.

- Develop long-term, sustainable collaborations with communities that engage partners in a visioning and design process (the mural process).

- Promote understanding of visual art through educational programming for children and youth, foster youth development through art, and provide mentorship opportunities for high-risk students through exposure to professional muralists.

- Use murals and the mural design process as a tool of community engagement, blight remediation, beautification strategy, and demonstration of civic pride.

- Generate professional development opportunities for artists who are committed to working collaboratively in communities to create murals and visual art education projects.

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[1] The Mural Arts Program mission and goals statement cited above reflect 2002 modifications.

instructors—88 percent—resided in the city of Philadelphia and, with a few exceptions, the balance were residents of the metropolitan area.

New mural registration and artist's statement forms promise to provide useful and consistent information about each mural and the mural process. However, of the 137 new murals eligible for registration in 2001, the artist completed a registration form for only 32 projects (23%) and an artist's statement for only 35 (26%).

MAP's *focus on young people* and "fostering youth development through art" dates from its founding as part of the Mayor's Anti-Graffiti Network. In September of 2000, MAP expanded its newly developed Big Picture Program, a year-round mural painting curriculum, to 18 sites in 15 neighborhoods throughout the city. During the year, 285 middle-school aged children participated in after school workshops and 180 participated in summer workshops.

Youth participation in community mural projects takes a variety of forms. By and large, MAP's art education programs operate independently of its community mural program. However, the programs do intersect. Of the 139 murals completed in 2001, young people were engaged with 69 (50 percent) of the projects. While the Big Picture Program accounted for the vast majority of workshops, partner institutions and MAP mural artists offered about one-quarter of the training opportunities associated with murals. Informal mentoring by individual muralists as well as art student internships provided additional avenues for youth engagement.

The Mural Arts Program seeks to foster *community goals* through the creation of public art. MAP is therefore structured as a responsive City program that allocates community mural services via a competitive selection process based on request and application by a local community or institution.

Mural projects completed in 2001 were distributed throughout the city. Sites were located in Center City and in 37 of Philadelphia's other 67 neighborhoods. Nearly half (49 percent) of the murals completed during the year were located in North Philadelphia, largely east of Broad Street. Another 17 percent were located in West Philadelphia, and 15 percent in South Philadelphia. Northeast and Northwest Philadelphia saw the fewest mural projects during 2001.

The Mural Arts Program uses a variety of neighborhood, downtown, and regional sites for its murals. Nearly three-quarters of the murals produced during 2001 were based at institutions, generally community or recreation centers, schools, or social service agencies. Only 23 percent of murals were at residential sites.

For most community mural projects, MAP maintained active contact with key individuals as well as representatives of partnering community organizations. However, mural projects were highly variable in their level of community involvement. For example, of the 116 outdoor murals completed during 2001, MAP held a dedication ceremony for only 22 projects (19 percent). Of the 58 Project Notebooks maintained, only 12 (21 percent) had a community mural request application on file.

Most mural projects were not proposed as part of a planning process. Only 19 of the 104 permanent, outdoor murals produced during 2001 were part of a larger institutional, site, or neighborhood plan. In fact, only forty-two percent (42%) of mural

projects were initiated by a neighborhood-based organization or local resident. In 18 percent of the cases, an institution (or individual) from outside of the neighborhood of the proposed mural site took the initiative. In 40 percent of the cases, it was the Mural Arts Program itself that took the lead a mural project.

In addition to community residents and grassroots organizations, the Mural Arts Program partners with government agencies, educational institutions, corporations, and philanthropies—largely as fiscal sponsors. In 2001 only 45 percent of mural projects were supported exclusively by the City of Philadelphia. Private sponsors (26% foundations, 23% other non-profit organizations, and 4% corporations) contributed to 53 percent of all projects. Finally, two percent of projects received State Empowerment Zone funds.

Recommendations

Organizational Recommendations

Make a commitment to building data-gathering and data-management capacity as a tool for program evaluation and community impact assessment.

Over the past two years, the Mural Arts Program has made tremendous progress in data collection, moving from largely anecdotal evidence to development of a statistical database accompanied by qualitative project archives. The MAP Case Study 2001 demonstrated that the program has the organizational capacity to collect and maintain data on the community mural process. However, the study also shows that existing data and current data collection practices are still inadequate to validate MAP's hopes for and claims about its benefits.

Ultimately, the goal of MAP's data gathering efforts is to be able to determine what matters vis-à-vis community impacts. Do murals with more community process generate greater social benefits that those with little community involvement? Do murals of higher artistic quality or design generate greater social benefits? Do murals with youth participation—and/or an arts training component—generate greater benefits than those without? How do outdoor murals differ from indoor, permanent from temporary? Do murals function as an *inspiration for* or an *indicator of* neighborhood beautification, site improvement, or other forms of community engagement? To answer these questions, Mural Arts will need to gather more precise data, more purposefully, over the next several years.

Meanwhile, we recommend that MAP continue to upgrade its data collection tools and give a higher priority to the systematic collection, integration, and use of data by staff. Below are some specific suggestions.

- ❑ *Continue to upgrade data collection tools.* In January of 2002, MAP issued a new mural application form and established two annual deadlines for submission. MAP also listed seven criteria that will be used by a panel to assess and select proposed mural projects. We suggest that staff test a sample of applications—including applicant data as well as panel review reports—for database and assessment potential. Is the information requested easy to retrieve, easy to input, and useful? Is there missing information? Staff would then review and discuss

the results to determine if the application form or panel-review criteria should be amended.

❑ *Give a higher priority to the systematic collection of the data.* The new application process provides an excellent opportunity to ensure that each Project Notebook is complete with *all* relevant documentation. Staff should review, expand, and implement the Mural Checklist. For example, each notebook should contain—as a start—a mural application, panel review form, mural registration form, and artist's statement. A form documenting involvement by MAP art education programs should also be on file. We also recommend compiling systematic data on mural applications that are rejected.

❑ *Track time series data on mural process as well as mural production.* The dates currently compiled on the mural database represent "start time" and "end time" for the actual production and painting of the mural. To accurately represent the mural process, and the relationship of MAP to a community or institution, other dates—such as application, authorization, community meetings and events, or related workshops—are also important.

❑ *Develop a community archive and database.* In addition to a mural database, we recommend that the mural program maintain a community contact/organizational partner database that includes geographic and contact information (address, zip code, telephone number) as well as neighborhood.

At the close of each mural season, once relevant data have been entered on the mural database, we recommend that Project Notebook hard copy (and rejected applications) be filed by neighborhood as a community archive for use by staff. The community archives and database could help realize as well as monitor MAP's commitment "to develop long-term, sustainable collaborations with communities."

❑ *Obtain the technical assistance required to develop an integrated database and networked computer system.* MAP Case Study 2001 laid the groundwork for a set of databases to be linked by a unique identification number (mural site and/or workshop site ID): community mural database; community contact/organizational partner database; artist/instructor database; arts education site database; arts education student database; and project sponsor and fiscal information database.

Staff responsibility and time for data entry and maintenance would require planning. Ideally all staff would be able to access databases for consultation.

Modify the community leveraging model on a periodic basis to update estimates of community investment.

The study has produced a leveraging model with assumptions and formulas that MAP can revise and update as it improves documentation of community inputs. We recommend that MAP staff refine the assumptions and, if valid, reduce the range between the "high" and "low" estimates of community investment in murals.

During mural season, staff could identify a representative sample of mural prototypes—based on "low," "medium," and "high" community participation—to track intensively (that is, complete the Project Notebooks). It would be desirable to improve

documentation of involvement, in particular, by organizational partners as well as by property owners and other individual community members. Documentation of local participation at community meetings and events and of regional participation—e.g., community service volunteers—could be improved through consistent "sign-in." It would also be useful to keep complete records of the cost of scaffolding, paint and materials, as well as artists' fees. For each mural prototype, it would also be useful to log actual MAP staff and artist involvement.

Ideally, of course, this level of mural documentation would become routine for all projects. Finally, a tally of murals by participation prototype would enable MAP to estimate aggregate community investment annually.

Refine and expand the community mural evaluation system.

In the early months of 2002, MAP worked with a committee to design and implement a set of Mural Project Evaluation forms. A *muralist* form focuses on the experience of the mural artist and his/her relationship to the community. An *arts panelist* form asks for the response of an impartial artist to the mural image, technique, and overall site. A *community stakeholder* form asks for the response of a local community resident to the mural process and image.

We recommend that MAP assess the feasibility and value of the tools in place to date toward a goal of systematic evaluation of the community response to murals. Other feedback strategies might include: (1) a self-addressed postcard delivered to every residence within a given distance of the mural site and/or (2) an evaluation form for participating community organizations and institutional partners. Evaluation forms should elicit respondent information—relationship to the project, level of involvement, location or address—as well as his/her reaction to the finished mural.

MAP's wall inspections and attempt to document each site with a pre- and post-mural slide photographs provide additional vehicles for evaluation. A routine pre- and post-site survey and slide photograph could be used to determine whether a mural is associated with other signs of "attention to" (community engagement) or "use of" (amenity value of) the site. Perhaps, for a sample of mural projects each year, a photo series could include six-months later and one-year later views of the mural site and adjacent properties.

Ideally, a community evaluation would test the various theories of community impact posed by the study—individual inspiration, amenity value, and social capital. It is likely that the type of mural, type of applicant, and neighborhood context of murals would generate differing kinds of impacts. In fact, the "community" or "communities" impacted are likely to vary with different types of mural projects.

Programmatic Recommendations

Address the programmatic implications of the shortfall between the community mission and day-to-day reality of mural production.

MAP Case Study 2001 highlighted the fact that few mural projects actually go through a full community process. This disjuncture between MAP's mission and its day-to-day reality is an issue that deserves attention. We recommend that MAP consider some alternatives—in particular, *either* expand the program in a way that it can routinely incorporate a full community process *or* reconfigure the program to produce fewer murals with a higher level of community participation. Either change is likely to require, first, convincing the City to take a fresh look at the *process* vs. the *product* of murals as public art and, second, a review of the commitment of and stipend for the mural artists.

The study also raised the question of how and by whom a mural is initiated. It appears that there are three principal types of murals: neighborhood-centered, institution-centered, and artist- (or sponsor-) centered. The Mural Arts Program might consider whether there should be explicit categories of mural projects with different application forms, procedures, and selection criteria.

Neighborhood-initiated projects, for example, might be targeted to "active" communities and require evidence of related community planning or revitalization efforts. Institution-initiated projects might be targeted to poorly-organized, underserved communities and require a particular set of conditions for community partners. Artist- or sponsor-initiated murals might be targeted to gateway sites or destination locations identified by City planning and tourism initiatives and require evidence of substantial private support.

Recognize the community contribution to the City of Philadelphia repertory of mural art.

The community leveraging analysis was designed as a way to speak to external audiences by elevating the value of the mural program in the eyes of public and private officials who need to justify decisions in economic terms. However, it can also serve as an internal consciousness-raising exercise for the Mural Arts Program. MAP devotes considerable resources toward raising foundation and corporate support as well as making its case annually to the Recreation Commissioner and City Council. By contrast, because community investments in murals are largely invisible, they generally do not affect MAP decision-making. The community leveraging analysis is an alert to Mural Arts and other City officials to recognize and honor the community contribution to their success.

Adopt the "social capital model" as a working philosophy of how murals impact Philadelphia communities.

The assessment of community impact does not tell a simple story of how a mural is "good" for the neighborhood. Rather, how good a mural is depends on what everybody else is doing. Essentially, the collective benefits of murals derive from the quality of community process and engagement in the context of existing community infrastructure and overall neighborhood health. The impact study compels us to take a broader view and look at murals in community context, that is, how they function as part

of the neighborhood ecology. Murals are part of *a community ecosystem* in that they are a way to engage and mobilize people to address other local issues. Murals are part of *a cultural ecosystem* in that they intersect with other cultural programs and traditions, urban design, and local history.

The social capital model of community impact suggests that MAP modify its claims of the centrality of murals, e.g., murals as agents of social change, and rather promote their leveraging and bridging potential. Programmatic decisions—in particular, that give priority to community-initiated murals, to murals that support other community projects, and to murals that complement or coordinate other cultural resources—could help multiply the benefits of local initiatives and promote the spin-off necessary to maintain momentum once MAP leaves the neighborhood. In addition, MAP's bridging roles could be articulated and integrated into program design. MAP could, for example, "empower" its local community or organizational partners to manage a group of community service volunteers to advance a particular project.

The Philadelphia Department of Recreation Mural Arts Program is an established public program with a nonprofit arm and substantial private support. Mural Arts is in a strong position to serve a range of constituencies—neighborhoods, young people, and artists—and to connect these often isolated and vulnerable groups. Thus MAP holds a unique opportunity as a bridging institution—to mobilize networks and to connect grassroots and community organizations with regional resources, government agencies, and private grant-makers. Therein lies its greatest potential to benefit Philadelphia communities.