

# From Rust Belt

# to Artist Belt

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## Executive Summary



To view the full report, *From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Challenges and Opportunities in Rust Belt Cities*, please visit <http://www.cpacbiz.org/business/CreativeCompass.shtml>.

# From **Rust Belt** to **Artist Belt**

**Challenges and Opportunities in Rust Belt Cities**

## **Executive Summary**



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# Acknowledgements

## Acknowledgements

The efforts, talents and collaborations that led to the development of this publication From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Challenges and Opportunities in Rust Belt Cities was in a word *extraordinary*.

A number of advisors from inside and outside the arts-and-culture sector helped the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture (CPAC) design and launch the first phase of Creative Compass: the From Rust Belt to Artist Belt (RB2AB) conference. The purpose of RB2AB was to inform local lenders, community developers, real-estate companies, commercial and residential developers, elected and appointed officials and civic leaders about best practices that could integrate artists into a Rust Belt community's development goals. The strong support and professional advice CPAC received from its Creative Compass Events Steering Committee was critical to producing the unique content of RB2AB. Steering Committee members included Angelica Pozo, ceramic artist and chair of CPAC's Programs and Public Policy Committee; Carrie Carpenter, vice president and director of Public Affairs, Charter One Bank; Colleen Gilson, executive director, Cleveland Neighborhood Development Coalition; Sarah Gyorki, executive director, Arts Collinwood; Chloe Hopson, executive director, Passport Project; Tracey Nichols, director, Economic Development, City of Cleveland; Christine Nelson, director, Team NEO; Cuyahoga County Treasurer James Rokakis; Cleveland Councilwoman Sabra Pierce Scott, Ward 8; and Michael Taylor, executive director and president, National City Community Development Corp. Their counsel was central to making RB2AB an event of national scope and interest.

Over 140 people from 11 states attended the May 14, 2008 conference. The outstanding attendance for RB2AB was predicated on its extraordinary group of local and national speakers, including Mark Barone, consultant to Syracuse University's Engagement Initiatives program and founder of the Paducah Artist Relocation Program; Robert Brown, director, Cleveland City Planning Commission; Patricia Cirillo, president and CEO, Cypress Research Group; Amy Green Deines, associate professor of architecture at the University of Detroit and board chair, Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit; Marc Folk, executive director, Arts Commission of Greater Toledo; Brian Friedman, executive director, Northeast Shores Development Corporation; Matthew Galluzzo, district manager for Friendship Development Associates' Penn Avenue Arts District; Nathan Guequierre, senior planner, URS Milwaukee's Sustainability Group; Wendy Holmes, vice president of consulting and resource development, Artspace USA; Barbara Koenen, director, Chicago Artists Resource; Lillian Kuri, special projects program director, The Cleveland Foundation; Ann Markusen, Ph.D., professor of urban planning and policy and director of the Project on Regional and Industrial Economics at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs; Jeremy Nowak, president and CEO, The Reinvestment Fund; Greg Peckham, executive director, Cleveland Public Art; Judilee Reed, executive director, Leveraging Investments in Creativity; Esther Robinson, founder, ArtHome; James Rokakis, treasurer, Cuyahoga County; Mary



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Margaret Schoenfeld, community development manager, Americans for the Arts; and Linda Warren, president, Village Capital Corporation. CPAC's staff and board of trustees are most grateful for their participation and splendid presentations.

CPAC's artist-centered work has been generously supported by the New York-based organization Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC.) A LINC grant in association with the Ford Foundation made the research, progress and presentation of RB2AB and this white paper possible. LINC's counsel and guidance from its president, Sam Miller; executive director Judilee Reed; and a host of leaders in LINC's Creative Communities has been, and will continue to be, invaluable to CPAC's work.

Local funders are at the core of every successful program. CPAC is grateful to The Abington Foundation, The Eva L. and Joseph M. Bruening Foundation, Charter One Bank, The Dominion Foundation, Fifth Third Bank, Key Bank, Northeast Shores Development Corporation and The Ohio Arts Council, which provided support for Creative Compass.

CPAC's ability to open its doors daily for over 11 years to serve the community and produce programs and services such as Creative Compass is made possible through the generosity of operating grants from The Cleveland Foundation and the George Gund Foundation, with additional funding from the Kulas Foundation and the John P. Murphy Foundation.

The greatest assets a nonprofit, arts-and-culture service organization has are the people who guide it and work within it. CPAC's board of trustees supported the development and direction of RB2AB from its inception. Led by past CPAC chairman Dennis M. Lafferty and current chairman Tim Mueller, our trustees provided essential vision, counsel and resolve from RB2AB's inception to its delivery. Several of CPAC's staff members contributed to the production of RB2AB and this white paper. The keen proofreading skills of Barbara Keplinger, administrative manager, came into play many times in refining the many drafts resulting from the paper. Valerie Schumacher, program associate and a multi-talented staff member, effectively applied her design and computer program skills to develop the document's layout and design. Megan Van Voorhis's ongoing attention to operational and program details was fundamental to the success of RB2AB at each stage of its development and launch. Seth Beattie, who developed the RB2AB concept, nurtured it and brought it to life, was a principal force for its success. We were very fortunate to find, and award a CPAC Fellowship to, Kristin Tarajack, a recent graduate of Cleveland State University's prestigious Levin College of Urban Affairs' Masters in Public Administration. Kristin's outstanding research and analytical writing skills were crucial in drafting and refining this extraordinary analysis. Good editors are important to any communication piece. CPAC was fortunate to employ the editing skills and experience of Carolyn Jack, principal of The Genius Group LLC, to produce the final version of the white paper. And special appreciation goes to Deena Epstein, arts and culture program director, The George Gund Foundation. Three years ago Deena



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suggested I look at an interesting program called the Paducah Artist Relocation program. That good advice was the beginning of Creative Compass.

I believe you will find that From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Challenges and Opportunities in Rust Belt Cities contains a realistic assessment of a number of community issues prevalent in the Rust Belt. However, and more importantly, it offers a collection of artist-driven strategies connected to neighborhood-based solutions that are useful for any community nationwide.

Thomas B. Schorgl, president and CEO  
Community Partnership for Arts and Culture



# From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Executive Summary

## The Changing Times in the Rust Belt

The United States has entered a new economic era, a period when our nation's success will depend not just on people with knowledge, but more and more on people who can use their knowledge creatively. Human capital once meant the labor force; today, it encompasses ideas, education, experience and the ingenuity with which workers apply them.

This dawning creative economy offers a new paradigm and a rallying point for people and places aiming to be competitive in the 21st century.

At the peak of the United States's industrial dominance in the early 20th century, the nation's industrial cities enjoyed explosive growth and prosperity. From 1900 to 1950, Detroit's population increased sixfold, Cleveland's almost tripled and Buffalo grew nearly twice as large. During this period, each city's infrastructure – from warehouses to homes to roads – grew enormously; the world looked to America's industrial centers for leadership, innovation and technological advancement. Each city also experienced an artistic explosion, as philanthropists encouraged the establishment of world-class cultural institutions.

But since 1950, the nation's industrial capitals have experienced an equally fast decline. From St. Louis to Chicago to Pittsburgh, they have seen thousands of jobs disappear and thousands of citizens flee.

Many of these cities are now home to only half the residents for which they were built and are likelier to be labeled “fly-over country” than to be recognized for their prominence in research and innovation. And while the Rust Belt's industrial cities still have strong artistic communities, the outside world tends to recognize these urban centers for their problems rather than for their creative workforces.

## Rust Belt Challenges

Rust Belt cities face several challenges, including:

**Low in-migration / high out-migration:** The loss of manufacturing jobs in the Rust Belt has contributed to a decline in population throughout the entire region. Examination of census figures for migration patterns in many Rust Belt cities reveals stagnation or population loss. Especially troubling is the out-migration of younger adults age 25-34.

**Sprawl:** As Rust Belt cities lose population and urban cores empty out, development of new facilities and redundant infrastructure continues in suburban and ex-urban areas.



# From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Executive Summary

**Entrenched poverty:** Rust Belt cities suffer increasingly high concentrations of poverty, which contribute to social ills and quality-of-life losses for the area.

**Slow real estate market:** Rust Belt cities readily illustrate the sustained trend of slowed or stagnant housing markets.

**Vacant properties:** With declining population bases and aging housing stock, it is not unusual for Rust Belt cities to have thousands of vacant properties on the market. Since these cities already face decline, it is difficult for them to absorb the economic and social costs associated with the vacancy problem.

**Foreclosures:** Nationwide, the foreclosure crisis has caused significant disruptions in the housing market. Particularly in Rust Belt cities, foreclosures are exacerbating vacant-property problems resulting from slow housing markets and subprime lending.

**Environmental remediation / brownfields:** The intensive steel manufacturing, petrochemical production and other industrial activities that built the Rust Belt have made soil pollution, or brownfields, an especially acute problem in urban core areas. Many developers hesitate to take on the responsibility for cleaning up these sites and so many prime areas in the urban core remain abandoned.

**Regional brand issues:** Long labeled decaying and undesirable, Rust Belt cities now face the task of revamping their images to attract creative workers who can spur revitalization.

## Rust Belt Assets

All too often, the story of industrial America stalls here. But while the Rust Belt faces significant challenges, it also has a unique opportunity to redefine itself. Other areas in the United States must cope with mushrooming populations and strong market dynamics that can result in overwhelmingly rapid and unplanned growth. But in Rust Belt cities, lower demand for development allows community development professionals to work slowly and strategically to revitalize their cities.

In short, the problems these cities must solve make them the most interesting urban laboratories in American history, with assets such as:

**Low cost of living:** Due to a number of factors, including the high availability of property, the cost of living in Rust Belt cities tends to be relatively low. Most of these cities have costs of liv-



# From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Executive Summary

ing lower than, or near to, the national average, and considerably lower than those in comparably-sized, non-industrial cities. Arguably, this low cost of living gives residents the opportunity to live a higher quality of life in the Rust Belt than they could afford elsewhere.

**Abundant space, especially large industrial spaces:** While the vast surplus of buildings and undeveloped lots presents Rust Belt cities with challenges, it also allows residents to locate affordable space in virtually any neighborhood and to choose where to live based on amenities beyond price and availability. A wide variety of low-priced property is available, including unusual spaces such as industrial warehouses and churches. Moreover, abundant space gives community developers the opportunity to undertake large-scale revitalization projects and invest in nontraditional land uses such as sculpture gardens, pocket parks and community gardens.

**Access to the Great Lakes:** For many artists, Rust Belt cities on lakes are attractive alternatives to expensive coastal living in Los Angeles or New York City, offering similar picturesque settings and the same sense of limitlessness afforded by an ocean view, but at a fraction of the cost.

**Slow real-estate market:** While a slow real-estate market causes problems for community development groups in the Rust Belt, it also gives them opportunity to plan strategically for neighborhood change. Because properties there remain low-priced and do not change hands for long periods, community developers can take time to address potential gentrification by creating permanently affordable housing units or preparing existing residents for homeownership.

**Active redevelopment efforts / community development corporations (CDCs):** Perhaps because development has been so challenging for Rust Belt cities for several decades, they tend to have well-established networks of community developers who advocate for the renewal of core neighborhoods and are ready to assist new and existing residents in achieving and maintaining homeownership.

**A high-quality arts and culture sector:** As previously noted, Rust Belt cities have historically built strong, high-quality arts and culture sectors. As quality of life plays an increasingly important role in where workers choose to reside, this group of amenities may be essential in improving the Rust Belt's competitive position.

## Artists and the Economic Development Connection

Given their unique sets of amenities and opportunities, today's Rust Belt cities enjoy a special opportunity to recruit and retain artists. Research suggests that where artists choose to live is influenced significantly by affordability of space. Moreover, Rust Belt cities provide artists with



# From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Executive Summary

a quality of life – access to existing, robust, arts and culture sectors – and a unique urban backdrop that may not be found in comparable non-industrial cities. But why artists? While artists cannot serve as a cure-all for the challenges facing Rust Belt cities and their neighborhoods, they can play a significant role in revitalization efforts.

## What Artists Offer Rust Belt Cities

**Migration to, and reconsideration of, inner cities:** Numerous studies have indicated that artists can have a migration effect on additional residents. Because artists are often “early adopters” and embrace the challenges and opportunities of a struggling city prior to its revival, their movement into Rust Belt cities may signal to other potential residents that a neighborhood or city core is poised for revitalization.

**Economic impact:** In addition to the production of arts and culture, artists have a positive economic impact on the communities in which they live. They contribute to the entirety of a community’s economic base as artists and have the versatility to work across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. As small-business owners and entrepreneurs, artists generate tax revenue and have the ability to export their work to the broader local, regional, national and global markets, thereby importing dollars to their communities. Industries that support the arts and cultural sector, notably the tourism industry, can also benefit from an increased artist presence. Well-established artists may even be able to offer support-staff jobs to community workers.

**Boost to property values:** Many examples have shown that increasing the proportion of artists in a neighborhood can lead to a rise in property values. For example, the Hampden neighborhood near John Hopkins University in Baltimore has undergone a renaissance since its steel mills were shut down in the 1980s. Artists and young entrepreneurs have recently discovered the area and moved in, opening art galleries and boutiques and organizing arts festivals. In 2000, the median home-sale price in southeastern Hampden was \$58,000. In 2005, that value increased 196 percent to \$171,750.

**Sweat equity:** As a class of workers, artists willingly invest a significant amount of their own time and labor – their so-called sweat equity – in revitalizing their communities, as well as in creating their art. Since many artists are unable to afford high housing or living costs, they are also willing to settle in struggling core areas – areas abundant throughout the Rust Belt. While some individuals view such places as “communities of last resort,” artists often view these areas as “communities of choice” that have an untapped potential for development.

**Engaged citizens:** Artists often play leading roles in efforts to bring back struggling Rust Belt communities, getting involved in neighborhood affairs ranging from public art and neighborhood



# From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Executive Summary

education projects to programming in libraries, community centers, parks, recreation centers, block clubs and neighborhood associations. In terms of voting behavior, artists as a group tend to cast their ballots at a higher rate than the general public and are a politically inclined group.

**Civic vitality:** The civic engagement of artists adds further to the Rust Belt's comeback by increasing civic vitality – the effect of social ties that bind citizens together, resulting in a more open, aware, and inclusive society. Strong social ties encourage citizens to work together for the common good and to think in terms of their place within the broader public realm.

**Youth development / educational enrichment:** The need for an educated and creative workforce has never been greater than in the current economic era. For Rust Belt cities, future successes can be won only by bolstering the educational offerings available for all students. Individual students and the Rust Belt as a whole can reap benefits from integrating the arts into school curricula and/or developing widely available extracurricular arts programs. Both approaches enrich youth educational experiences and further develop the creative skills that Rust Belt residents and their region need in order to compete in the 21st-century economy.

## What Rust Belt Cities Can Offer Artists

**Affordability / low cost of living:** For the urban-core, Rust Belt communities reeling from the foreclosure crisis and the fallout from long periods of unmitigated sprawl, low property values actually serve as a major asset for attracting a base of pioneering artists.

**Active CDEs / CDCs:** An active network of community development entities (CDEs), including community development corporations (CDCs), community development banks, investment companies focused on low- and moderate-income communities, and venture-capital firms for new development, makes a low-income area attractive to artists by signaling that a support structure is in place to provide programs and services to individuals wanting to settle there. Specifically, the presence of active CDCs in Rust Belt cities signals to artists that a support structure is in place and willing to provide programs and services to individuals wanting to settle in struggling areas.

**Existing high-quality arts and culture assets:** Anyone attempting to launch an artist-based community development (ABCD) initiative can benefit from collaborating with Rust Belt cities' existing, high-quality cultural assets. Such assets offer artists opportunities for collaboration and partnership, helping them develop ties that can unite artists, cultural institutions and, ultimately, the community. Partnering with these institutions enhances artists' professional growth and development.



# From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Executive Summary

**Openness / connection to networks:** In dense urban neighborhoods, artists can find the networking opportunities and nightlife they need to sustain and advance themselves commercially. Professional competition tends to be lower in Rust Belt cities than in places such as New York City and Los Angeles, which encourages artists to welcome newcomers and offer them one-on-one support.

**Artist-support infrastructure:** An established artist-support infrastructure is integral to the success of individual artists, as many of them are actually entrepreneurs overseeing small business ventures. Rust Belt cities have such networks ready to provide assistance and professional development opportunities for artists.

**Proximity to other markets:** Artists who settle in Rust Belt cities will find themselves near many major arts markets and in the middle of an extensive transportation network that provides easy access throughout the Rust Belt. But in addition to its systems of roads, airports, waterways and rails, the Rust Belt offers an advanced network of electronic pathways for the exchange of information. Furthermore, strategic investment and revitalization efforts throughout the Rust Belt are developing access to new markets.

**Diverse types of spaces:** As detailed earlier, the Rust Belt contains a plethora of sites ripe for redevelopment, including large industrial spaces, abandoned churches, airports/airfields, train stations, correctional sites and other facilities of unique character. Many redevelopers think artists have an unmatched ability to make creative use of the Rust Belt's unique structures, which have the potential to be transformed into one-of-a-kind residential, studio, rehearsal, performance, gallery or live/work spaces.

## Recommendations for Future Policy

In order to foster ABCD, Rust Belt cities must address issues related to:

- Outdated zoning or building codes, which prevent creative and new planning/building models from being implemented
- A lack of market pressure for space in the Rust Belt and of attention paid to developing low-cost spaces
- Decentralization or displacement of artists resulting from gentrification
- Reinvigorating the Rust Belt's brand image to dispel the negatives associated with the region
- The limited number of artist-space development projects currently in the works
- Helping artists develop markets for their work
- Assisting artists in obtaining financial resources and making financial sources more aware of artist-space development



# From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Executive Summary

## Recommendations for Organizational Action

The following list provides a series of action steps that communities should take in order to make ABCD a reality:

1. Identify the community's challenges, assets and opportunities by conducting research and completing an in-depth environmental scan.
2. Network with the community's diverse groups to gain broad input and support for the effort.
3. Coordinate with intermediaries to develop ways to work with artists and other groups.
4. Develop plans within all agencies and roles for all individuals who are involved, according to their skills and abilities.
5. Determine the overriding goals for each participant and identify a lead organization to oversee the effort.
6. Define means for measuring success and conduct regular evaluations.
7. Keep the media apprised of actions and progress.

## From Rust Belt to Artist Belt

The environmental scan of the Rust Belt and discussion of the benefits that artists can bring to communities show that artists can be major catalysts for economic resurgence in the region and its struggling industrial cities.

Conversely, artists also have much to gain from settling, and being actively engaged, in community development activities in Rust Belt cities. While artists alone are not going to be able to bring the Rust Belt back from decades of decline, they and the cities themselves clearly have a lot to gain from working together, sharing challenges and making creative use of existing assets.

For the Rust Belt, artists have the ability to jumpstart widespread revitalization, reinvigorate communities, build a creative workforce and improve the region's quality of life. For artists, the Rust Belt can provide access to affordable space, a strong and supportive arts and cultural sector, professional development and networking opportunities and outlets for engagement in community affairs. While the debate will undoubtedly continue over what components are needed to bring the Rust Belt back from decline, it is evident that artists have a significant role to play in renewing industrial cities and positioning them for future success, moving the region from Rust Belt to Artist Belt.

To view the full report, *From Rust Belt to Artist Belt: Challenges and Opportunities in Rust Belt Cities*, please visit <http://www.cpacbiz.org/business/CreativeCompass.shtml>.



# About Community Partnership for Arts and Culture

## Our Vision

Arts and culture can establish the Northeast Ohio region as a national center for innovation, a creative workforce, economic growth and a high quality of living.

## Our Mission

Strengthen and advance the arts and culture sector as an essential asset in building a thriving community.

## Guiding Principles (Convene, Educate, Advocate, Lead)

In pursuing its vision and mission, CPAC is committed to:

1. Convening and providing focused leadership for the community's diverse arts and culture constituencies. (Convene)
2. Informing decision-making through credible and informative research that helps develop solutions for evolving community needs. (Educate)
3. Determining and representing the shared interests of the arts and culture sector where community priorities are set. (Advocate)
4. Building partnerships and filling gaps to best achieve shared community goals. (Lead)

## Brief History

In 1997, The Cleveland Foundation and The George Gund Foundation commissioned CPAC to create a regional, community-wide, strategic cultural plan. CPAC sponsored 9 major studies, 42 regional public forums and 30 months of quantitative and qualitative research. The result was a solid plan based on data and the public participation of thousands of residents. Northeast Ohio's Art & Culture Plan was released in May of 2000, and CPAC has served since then as the Plan's steward, responsible for its specific implementation, management and evaluation. Over time, CPAC has evolved into a service provider focused on filling functional gaps identified through the planning process: capacity building, public policy and research.



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