

## Evidence & Impact — Arts as a Placemaking Catalyst for Resilient Communities

### Headline Evidence

- Arts and culture are a major economic driver in Ontario: the culture sector contributed over \$26 billion to GDP in 2022, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs — clear proof that cultural activity builds both prosperity and resilience. [Ontario Arts Council]
- Creative placemaking is a recognized strategy that transforms overlooked spaces into vibrant hubs of activity, yielding social, economic, and physical benefits: livelier commercial areas, stronger networks of trust, adaptive reuse of infrastructure, and improved perceptions of safety and belonging. [NEA]

### Proven Community Examples

- Mabelle Arts (Toronto): In the Mabelle Park high-rise community, arts have turned what was once an underused, unsafe green space into a hub of festivals, gardening, outdoor cooking, and performance. Residents of all ages and backgrounds now co-create cultural life, building trust, safety, and belonging.
- Base 31 (Picton): On the site of a decommissioned WWII air training base, Base 31 is reimagining industrial heritage spaces as studios, performance venues, and creative hubs. This adaptive reuse shows how cultural programming can preserve history while fueling tourism, economic growth, and local pride.
- City Repair (Portland, OR): Painted intersections and tactical urbanism projects demonstrate how low-cost, art-led interventions can turn traffic corridors into living gathering places, fostering civic participation and everyday community ownership.
- Department of Illumination (Prince Edward County): With lantern parades and participatory festivals, DOI brings residents into the streets to celebrate creativity, showing the power of collective art-making to transform public life.
- Kemptville Campus (North Grenville): With large-scale industrial and institutional spaces awaiting revitalization, the Campus is a prime candidate for arts-driven activation. Using community arts to animate these underused sites can accelerate adaptive reuse and embed the campus in the town's social fabric.

### Research-Backed Outcomes We Can Claim

1. Increased public use of space & sense of belonging: Studies show people are 50% more likely to spend time in areas where placemaking interventions are present.
2. Economic spillover: Arts and cultural activations stimulate local business, generate visitor

spending, and increase investment attractiveness — complementing the proven \$26B annual value of Ontario’s culture sector.

3. Social networks & resilience: Participatory arts build volunteerism, cross-cultural understanding, and civic pride — the social assets communities draw on in times of change.

4. Adaptive reuse & preservation: Industrial and institutional sites like Base 31 and Kemptville Campus show how arts programming can breathe new life into dormant infrastructure, preserving heritage while generating new economies.

### **Suggested Evaluation Metrics**

- Participation & reach: number and diversity of participants (age, cultural background, neighbourhoods).
- Activation of underused space: dwell time, foot traffic counts, and frequency of use pre/post programming.
- Economic indicators: local business feedback, vendor sales, tourism data during events.
- Social impact: surveys on belonging, neighbour interactions, and perceived safety.
- Built outcomes: number of spaces repurposed; number of temporary installations adopted as permanent.

### **Short Funding Pitch Paragraph**

Evidence from across Ontario and beyond shows that arts-led placemaking is one of the most cost-effective tools for revitalization. From Toronto’s Mabelle Arts, where residents transformed a neglected park into a thriving cultural commons, to Picton’s Base 31, where a former military base is reborn as a creative hub, community-driven art has proven its ability to build belonging, attract investment, and preserve heritage. Inspired by Portland’s City Repair and the Department of Illumination’s lantern parades, this project proposes to animate the underused industrial assets of the Kemptville Campus with collaborative arts programming. The result will be a new community hub — a place where creativity, connection, and resilience take root in the very heart of North Grenville.