Leveraging the Mindfield and Creative Wayfinding in Brownsville

A McClure Playbook
INTRODUCTION

In June 2018, the City of Brownsville, Tennessee, issued a call for artists for a creative wayfinding system that incorporates metal sculpture as placeholders for signage. With funding support from the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), the effort seeks to strategically build on the success of the Mindfield, the largest outdoor sculpture in Tennessee.

The initial investment in the wayfinding system is just the beginning. As a starting point, the signage will direct residents and visitors to key sites throughout Brownsville. It will create another tourist draw in the community. Most importantly, however, it will provide the community the opportunity to collaboratively plan for the future.

By coming together around creative wayfinding signage, Brownsville will be positioned to grow its tourism industry, better attract and retain talent, and strengthen its collaborative spirit, thereby propelling future successes across a variety of topics.
The biggest opportunity that comes to Brownsville via the creative wayfinding system is the chance to create a cohesive community identity. When one arrives to the community, there is little in the way of gateway features that indicate the community’s support and enjoyment of the arts. Brownsville groups must come together to build on the emerging identity - the creative metal sculptures that pay homage to the Mindfield - and leverage that to grow tourism, increase the sense of community pride, and help youth see that Brownsville can, in fact, be their future. This will be accomplished through a multi-pronged approach that should include:

Brownsville already is well on its way to becoming a public art destination. With the Mindfield in place and the creative wayfinding signage soon to be underway, the community is coming from a strong position. Now is the time to think strategically about how to grow this effort while boosting community connectivity and celebrating the many facets of the community’s history. Community members and organizations should be asking:
1. What is the **overarching theme** for Brownsville?

2. What are the **key locations** that are decision points for people moving throughout the community? Are there other locations we want to drive people to in order to boost economic development?

3. How can we make sure these locations are **safe & accessible** for pedestrians, bicyclists, and groups on tour buses?

4. What **specific themes** should we lift up for in each location? Where should we highlight the community’s agricultural heritage? Music? Mindfield? Other themes?

5. How can we link the different installations together? Is there a consistent mark on the sidewalks and/or roadways that leads people from one installation to another? Are the connections themselves art?

6. What **other mediums** can we explore?

7. How can the **business community** and other community organizations embrace the community identity? What role(s) can they play?

8. Should we create design guidelines for entities that want to tie into the community identity?

9. Should all the pieces be **permanent**, or should some of them **rotate** to keep people coming back?

10. How should we **illuminate** the pieces to showcase them in the evenings and make sure people feel safe when visiting them?

11. Should we create a **public art district**?
CASE STUDIES

1. Downtown Pathways
https://www.arts.gov/exploring-our-town/downtown-pathways

El Paso, Texas, was seeing a resurgence in two downtown-adjacent neighborhoods. While this was a positive development, the two neighborhoods were separated by a private parking lot, turning what should have been a five minute walk into a twenty minute walk. To encourage continued development and support healthier habits, the City moved to transform the underused area into a visually engaging public space and connection.
2. Charlotte Rail Trail Framework Plan & Public Art Master Plan

http://www.charlotterailtrail.org/plans/

The Rail Trail Framework Plan recommends how to transform 70+ found spaces into a network of unique commons and activity areas. The Plan provides programming ideas, design guidelines, management structure and funding strategies to guide future development, governance and maintenance of the Trail. The Public Art Master Plan offers guidance and inspiration to anyone creating public art along the Trail. The Plan identifies guiding principles for all artwork to create a curated gallery experience along the Trail.

The Public Art Typology describes the physical opportunities that exist along the Trail as well as appropriate media and programming. The Implementation Strategy recommends a selection processes and some creative projects for specific locations.
Columbus, Ohio, had never had a public art program. In 2012, the community came together for a temporary installation that was designed to move the City towards a more permanent program. The 360-acre site became an open-air gallery featuring 13 diverse projects from over 50 local, national, and international artists.
Art in Public Places is a large-scale outdoor sculpture program showcased throughout Knoxville, Oak Ridge, and Alcoa, Tennessee. The annual rotating installation is one of many Dogwood Arts programs focused on providing access to the arts for everyone, promoting awareness of the strong visual arts community thriving in our region, and creating a vibrant and inspiring environment for residents and visitors to experience. Over the past eleven years, Dogwood Arts has curated and installed over 220 works of art, and the Art In Public Places program has gained national recognition as a platform for world-class artists.
In 2000, the Metropolitan Council of Nashville and Davidson County adopted a public art ordinance dedicating one percent of the net proceeds of any general obligation bond issued for construction projects to fund public art. The goal of the public art program is to strengthen the positive reputation of the community, enhance the civic environment, and enrich the lives of citizens and visitors.
STRATEGIC COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

As Brownsville works to define and craft its cohesive community identity, more community partners must be engaged in the work. One of the resounding themes of the site visit was how do we keep young people in Brownsville? How can we help them understand that there are multiple opportunities in the community, beyond working in a factory or in a field?

By engaging more partners, the community can start to tell that story from a variety of perspectives. What resonates with one person will not have the same impact on another. The community must make a concerted effort to show that visual artists, engineers, doctors, musicians, welders, and more all have a place in Brownsville; ultimately, it will take all of these groups to achieve a “better Brownsville.”

The core group working on the creative wayfinding signage effort currently includes:

- West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center
- Tennessee College of Applied Technology
- Main Street Brownsville
- The City of Brownsville

This leadership team should be strategically expanded. The first contacts should be to:

- Brownsville Haywood County Chamber of Commerce
- Haywood County
- Haywood County Schools
- Community Foundation of Greater Memphis
- The Brownsville-Haywood County Arts Council

Once these groups are on board and working to support the cohesive community identity, the team should again look to engage other partners. Secondary partners to seek out include:

- West Tennessee Healthcare foundation
- Small business owners
- Industry leaders
- Artists
STUDENT GROUP AND #BVILLE BEST

With these partners, begin to explore what further opportunities exist. Consider hosting regular art walks that include the artists. Also explore what collaboration opportunities exist with local shops and the farmers market. Consider pop-up events to activate vacant storefronts and get people - including potential buyers - in the building.

Additionally, consider forming a student group (or multiple groups) to engage the people already in Brownsville so that they, too, can help share that message. Insights shared from their peers will be better received than those coming from people who focus on talent attraction and retention on a daily basis. Ideally, start this pipeline at the middle school level so that the youth are able to see a path forward from an early age.

» Nasher Sculpture Center: 
  http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org/learn/teachers-students/student-advisory-board

» Tang Student Advisory Center: 
  http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org/learn/teachers-students/student-advisory-board

» Colby Museum of Art Student Advisory Board: 
  https://www.colby.edu/museum/colby-students/student-advisory-board/
Also consider **#BvilleBest** ambassadors that the leadership team can arm with messaging and images to share on their respective social media channels. Build a database of existing contacts to begin and then grow the list from there. People will be more likely to share a message that is pre-written for them rather than having to develop content on their own. Make sure to include the #BvilleBest hashtag with all of these posts.

» **How to Build a Social Media Ambassador Program:**
Sixty-six percent of people around the world say they trust earned media — including recommendations from friends, family and online reviews — above all other forms of advertising. Consumer brands and nonprofits are harnessing the power of social media ambassadors to build excitement and spread the word about new products or initiatives. Social ambassadors can help raise brand awareness, drive website traffic, generate sales or donations, and grow brand communities. Unlocking the power of social media ambassadors is essential to meeting your digital marketing and business goals.
https://socialfactor.com/build-social-media-ambassador-program

» **Babson College:** The Social Media Ambassadors provide key insights into life at Babson and tell true Babson stories—appreciated by the entire community.
http://www.babson.edu/social-media/ambassadors/Pages/home.aspx

» **University of Virginia Darden School of Business:** The Social Media Ambassador Program is an easy way for alumni to help share the amazing accomplishments and news coming out of Darden. We curate “social-sized” snippets from the best news from Darden and share them in monthly emails. All you have to do is copy and share them on the social channel of your choice.

» **National Kidney Foundation:** Social media has changed the way we communicate. It has given all of us a powerful opportunity to inform, engage, and stay connected. That’s why we are actively recruiting social media volunteers to help us reach renal health care providers who may be interested in attending the NKF Spring Clinical Meetings, and will appreciate first-hand information from their colleagues — you! As a past participant, your testimony is one of the most powerful ways to spread the word. We hope we can use your influence by your becoming a Social Media Ambassador.
https://www.kidney.org/spring-clinical/social-media-ambassadors
ABOUT CREATIVE PLACEMAKING™

Creative Placemaking® is a people-centered approach to building strong, vibrant communities. It helps communities achieve economic and population growth through cultural and entrepreneurial amenities, concepts, and catalytic projects.

McClure’s goal is to learn your community’s needs, help address your challenges, and provide a comprehensive strategy, engaging our partners when and where their expertise is needed. We work with you to create the amenity, determine how to finance it, and then help identify the resources to build and operate it.

Once a community is thriving and has the amenities that can attract and retain top talent, businesses relocate and/or expand, growing the local economy and enhancing quality of life.

The McClure placemaking team currently works to revitalize and reinvigorate communities in ten states, primarily in the Upper Midwest and Mississippi Delta regions. To date, the placemaking team has designed amenities such as cultural centers, breweries, restaurants, area-wide beautification strategies, professional incentive programs, theaters, makerspaces, co-working spaces, residency programs, and aquatic facilities, among others.

To learn more, visit www.mecplacemaking.com.