

What is the Re:Center Project?

Re:Center is a creative placemaking initiative anchored by a citizen-powered collective process. This cultural organizing work combines strategies in community arts engagement, artistic excellence, asset mapping, and program development to more fully activate key areas of need in throughout Chicago Park District’s fifteen Cultural Centers. Together, community members, artists, and park staff work to re-imagine Chicagoans as cultural stewards of our public parks.

Participants undergo a process of mutual listening and co-creation as they reflect on and respond to the role of parks in local citizens’ lives through four phases of gathering: The Listening Party, The MeetUPs, The Feature, and Circulations. Through Re:Center, we aspire to build intentional partnerships and long term relationships between parks, artists, and communities that enhance quality of life for all.

We endeavor to...

- + Cultivate relevant programming that considers the interests of the community
- + Develop community members as stewards of cultural center/park space and place
- + Increase communication between park staff and community
- + Create platforms for community-driven forms of artistic expression

This guide is a publication of the Chicago Park District’s Arts & Culture Unit in the Culture Arts & Nature Department. The Arts & Culture Unit envisions parks and cultural centers as vital spaces that encourage all Chicagoans to explore the arts and their power to enhance quality of life, neighborhood development, and community dialogue. The Arts & Culture Unit connects Chicagoans to arts experiences in their local parks through events and programs that help develop understanding, knowledge and appreciation of a wide variety of art forms and processes, and their diverse and unique cultural expressions. By integrating arts and culture into all Chicago neighborhoods we strive to encourage a life-long commitment to arts learning, neighborhood expression, and cultural advocacy.

Re:Center Community Guide

A field guide for
cultivating cultural
stewardship



Listening Party



MeetUP



Feature



Circulations



Phases

1 Listening Party

- + One night event at which invited guests participate in a large dialogue moderated by members of the community, event organizers, and invited guests.
- + Guest are encouraged to discuss what makes up the past and current condition of their Cultural Center.

2 MeetUP

- + Participants from the Listening Party are invited to return to a more concentrated dialogue. Questions and comments from the initial Listening Party are discussed as a point of departure for future programming.
- + Returning participants volunteer to meet as a group over a period of 3-4 months to develop strategies to improve Cultural Center as well as broaden the programming.

3 Feature

- + The group's final event is produced with support from Chicago Park District, the Cultural Center supervisor, and any invited participants. The Feature event can be anything that is developed by MeetUP participants. This could be a performance, exhibition, publication, tour of the Cultural Center—the MeetUP participants decide.

4 Circulations

- + A series of inter-park circulations culminates the yearlong community engagement process between community agents and the Chicago Park District

Recognize

Recognize who you are in this work. What preconceptions, identities, and experiences do you bring to the table when doing this work? Don't decide the outcome before the process begins. Process is critical, but not rigid. Continue moving forward knowing the process will evolve and adapt. It takes time to build relationships.

Research

Make a map of what already exists—places, programs, relationships, etc. Respect the work that has been done already. Connect to existing partners in the community.

Invite

We are always grappling with ethics of representation and power—who has it, who gives it, who is at the table to make decisions about the kinds of cultural activity a community will have access to? Consider how you craft the invitation for others to enter and join the conversation. Who needs to be at the table? Who isn't here? And why? How do make space for others to enter and to participate?

Listening Party
Who doesn't use your park?
Who uses your park?



Listen

Bring people to the table to begin dialogue about what was, what is, and what could be. We do this through a *Listening Party*, where we celebrate and interrogate what has existed in the past, what exists now, and imagine what could exist in the future.

Gather

Bring interested individuals together to continue the conversation. Remember that play, risk, and experimentation are integral tools to community cultural planning processes, and that process is slow cooking work. Change is incremental. Let the early adopters help you model the work...Let those who already value the work help you create buy in, and help you guide what is relevant in the unique circumstance that is your cultural center or park.

Imagine

Brainstorm about how the assets and resources within the group could come into play in the form of a project/process. Think big before getting specific.

MeetUP
What format can these meetings take?
Who is already meeting at your park?



Make this process your own.

Plan

Don't just talk. Make ample space for people to learn how to plan and implement community planning processes themselves... with confidence! Get specific about what you want to see—set goals and expectations, both short term and long term. Plan a budget for your project.

Make

Create a work plan and *make* the thing/s you have imagined—performances, workshops, exhibitions, showcases, workshops, conversations, resource fairs, etc. Activate people power from the park and the community. This is an opportunity to issue another invitation. Along the process you'll discover new points of access that people can comfortably enter.

Feature

What do you want the community to know about your park?
What does this look like? Participation? New classes? New groups?
What Cultural Center Priorities would you like to expand on?



Share

Invite the public to view the process you've been a part of. This could be a performance, exhibition, open house, etc. Bear witness to the importance of this everyday work and honor the culminating experience the group has planned and shared together. Recognize that through planning and action, you can reach some of your short (and perhaps long) term goals.

Document

Take photos. Take videos. Collect audio. Make sure that someone who is not familiar with your process captures the pulse of it from looking at this documentation. Share input and data as the work happens to keep people engaged and to keep the momentum of the process going.

Evaluate

Circle back on your short and long term goals, to see what you've met, what obstacles you faced, and where you can go from here. What were some of the major successes and challenges? What ideas do you have for the future after going through a process together?

Circulations

How do you want to connect with other Cultural Centers?
What resources do you want to learn about for your Center?



Roles

Our parks and cultural centers are made up of an ecosystem of neighborhood agents working to strengthen cultural programming, refine priorities to speak to those who access and make use of the space, and engage communities to become involved in all that our public parks have to offer.

Park Supervisor/ Cultural Staff-Programmers/ Administrators

Runs daily operations and programs; supervises staff, and maintains facilities; listens to community members' interests and works to integrate them into programming schedule

Cultural Liaisons/Community Engagement Personnel

Researches and identifies community resources, assets, and stakeholders; builds relationships and supports planning and implementation of community-driven projects

Community Members/Audience

Contributes to and helps plan the cultural programming priorities for a neighborhood specific location, responding to the interests and needs of the community groups that use the space

Artists

Responds creatively to communities' interests and needs by imagining conversations, collaborative processes, workshops, classes, events, and other forms of programming