

FOR INFO

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CREATE
PORTAGE COUNTY

Accelerating creativity, connection,
and collaboration to advance vibrant
and welcoming communities.

MAKING CREATIVITY CENTRAL TO SMALL & SMART PLACES

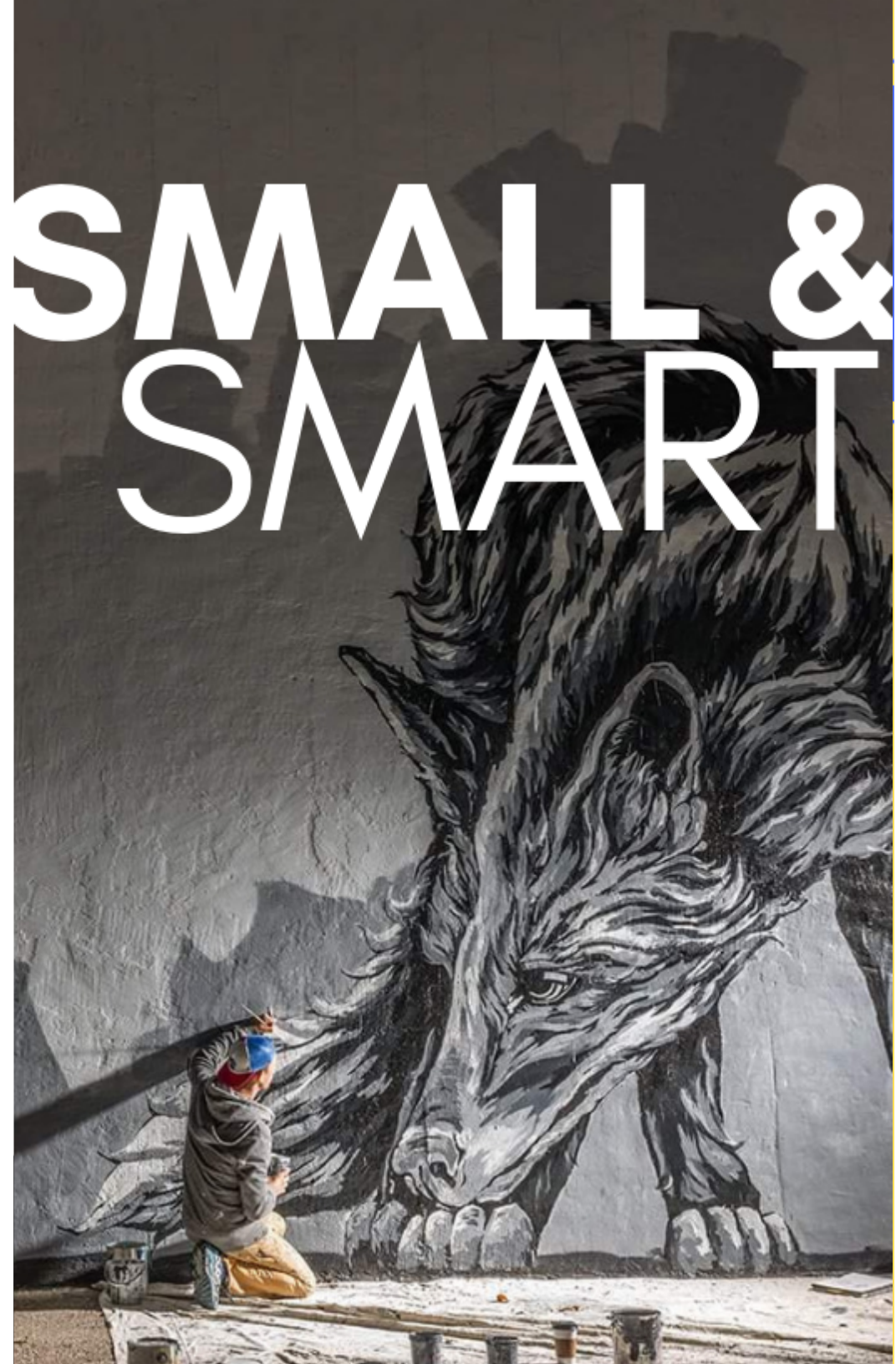
Wisconsin has consistently ranked 50th for start-up activity in the US. In our efforts to understand this lag, we discovered many resources in support of new ideas, but all on the other side of a river that had no bridge. People here weren't seeing themselves as entrepreneurs.

We found a bridge in shifting the culture of our community.

Our strategy uses placemaking to activate our creative identity, social capital to connect people that identity, and ecosystem building to ensure that more creative ventures succeed. This success completes a circle that further strengthens our reputation for creativity and innovation. The result is a thriving 21st century small town.

By leveraging culture as the ultimate accelerator, CREATE is making creativity central to contemporary small communities, project by project, one empowered person at a time!

SMALL & SMART



CREATIVITY

In **creative placemaking**, partners from public, private, nonprofit and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, tribe, city or region around arts and cultural activities.

National Endowment for the Arts

STRATEGY 1:

Elevate the creative identity of your community.

We install murals, paint trash cans, hide geocache-able sculptures, and make art out of road construction barrels. We promote live music, film, and visual arts experiences. We relentlessly celebrate our local makers and innovators. We make strategic "Arts-AND" investments that imbed creativity into every sector, solution, and situation we can manage. We make creativity central to what people love about this place.

IN OUR FIRST 3 YEARS, CREATE PAID MORE THAN **\$200,000 TO ARTISTS**, WHO ADDED NEW PUBLIC ART AND ARTS EXPERIENCES TO OUR COMMUNITY.



CONNECTION

Social capital refers to the collective value of all social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other.

Bowling Alone + Robert Putnam

STRATEGY 2:

Connect more people to that creativity—and to each other.

We celebrate community as the most vital resource to start-ups and projects. We throw pop-up parties and pitch contests to bring people together around the arts and innovation. We use those experiences to grow visibility, access, support, and camaraderie. We play connector-in-chief, proving over and over again that the right introduction is the best path around an obstacle. We connect people to what is possible.

IN OUR FIRST 3 YEARS, CREATE CONTRIBUTED TO **A MORE THAN 60% DECREASE** IN THE PROJECTED WORKFORCE SHORTAGE FOR OUR REGION.



COLLABORATION

The essence of an **entrepreneurial ecosystem** is its people and the culture of trust and collaboration that allows them to interact successfully. The ecosystem allows for the fast flow of talent, information and resources so that entrepreneurs can quickly find what they need at each stage of growth. As a result, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

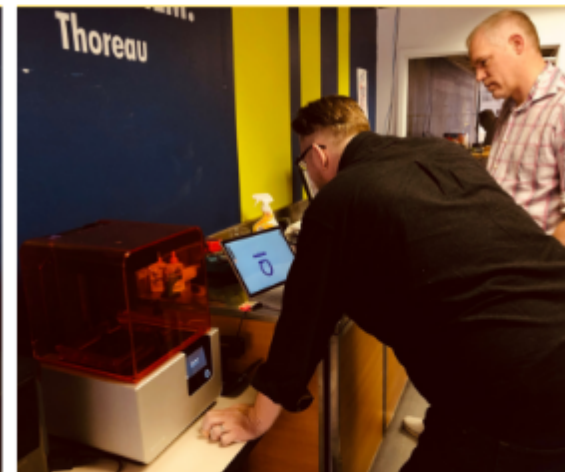
The Kauffman Foundation

STRATEGY 3:

Establish a central hub for collaboration and innovation.

We champion the concept of community-grown businesses. We share. We open our work space to others who need it. We fill that space with useful technology. We facilitate meet-ups and cohorts and co-ops and book talks and community forums. We get people thinking together. We give our ideas freely. We coach and mentor and partner. We help turn ideas into projects and projects into businesses. We root for the success of others as we know it is tied to our own.

IN OUR FIRST 3 YEARS, CREATE HAS ALREADY SUPPORTED MORE THAN **50 SMALL BUSINESSES AND START-UPS** THROUGH OUR HUB.



THE RESULT

COMMUNITY-GROWN BUSINESSES GROWING COMMUNITY WEALTH

Thriving communities grow and sell their creativity instead of relying on the creativity of other places. We see an economic development strategy in paying closer attention to that directional flow. Resilient and prosperous community will...

1. Invest in support networks, shared work spaces, and co-ops to launch and accelerate start-ups.
2. Think local. Leverage reverse pitches, supply-chain businesses, and living labs to imagine new businesses.
3. Support historically marginalized populations as leaders/owners of community-grown businesses.
4. Invest in second-stage businesses. Scale up their creativity.
5. Support transitions to employee ownership as an exit strategy and practice of community culture. Use ownership to grow wealth and keep businesses and workers here.

Want to learn more? Check out the Edward Lowe Foundation's work on **economic gardening** or the Kauffman Foundation's work on **building entrepreneurial ecosystems**.



Interested in bringing this model to your community? We can help! From speaking engagements to long-term project management, CREATE works with small communities across the U.S. not only to develop and execute strategic projects but also to grow your community's capacity to carry on the work. Visit [**createportagecounty.org/consulting**](https://createportagecounty.org/consulting) to learn more.

CREATE is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit funded in part through the collective contributions of businesses and individuals who believe in our work. To join this community of supporters, visit [**createportagecounty.networkforgood.com!**](https://createportagecounty.networkforgood.com)