

# **Evaluation Plan: Starksboro Art and Soul Project**

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**An outline of ideas for a three-phase evaluation plan designed to address stakeholder concerns and meet their thresholds of acceptable evidence.**

**Section I      Overview**

**Section II     Evaluation of Project Processes**

**Section III    Evaluation of Project Outcomes**

**Section IV    Evaluation of Project Impact**

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*Arts and Civic Engagement Impact Initiative***

## Section I. Overview

Art & Soul [[www.orton.org/projects/starksboro](http://www.orton.org/projects/starksboro)] is a project of the Orton Family Foundation [[www.orton.org/](http://www.orton.org/)]. The Orton Family Foundation, in partnership with the Town of Starksboro and the Vermont Land Trust [[www.vlt.org/](http://www.vlt.org/)] hypothesize that, by getting in touch with deeper community values and connections to place, citizens will be able to improve upon traditional approaches to planning and make better decisions about the future of their communities. With the Art & Soul Civic Engagement Project they are testing whether the use of different forms of art will catalyze articulation of the unique assets of a community, in turn impacting community decision-making. The project is being piloted in Starksboro, VT, with artist-in-residence, Matthew Perry. It is applying arts-based methods of community engagement to generate and inform conversations around values and community. Through storytelling, painting, dance, music, theater, media arts, photography, sculpture, poetry and prose and/or video, Starksboro is bringing together disparate groups of citizens to address the positive and negative aspects of the community. Townspeople will identify ways to reflect the articulated values and aspirations sparked by the story gathering and art making projects in concrete actions, policies and choices shaping the future of Starksboro and its land use. The Foundation will support the community in implementing these actions through technical assistance and additional funding for eligible activities.

The Arts and Civic Engagement Impact Initiative is exploring approaches to developing evaluation plans and strategies for communicating the results of arts and civic engagement projects with the goal of developing tools that can be used by the field. As part of that effort, we have experimented with using a systematic inquiry approach with several current projects to develop outlines for evaluations that could yield evidence that meets the interests of a range of stakeholders.

To conduct the inquiry process for the Art and Soul project, we convened a representative group of stakeholders including funders, a local community leader, and partners. The process involved identifying the various audiences for evaluation results and their top issues and interests, the ideal project results from their perspectives, and their thresholds of evidence, i.e. what would be convincing to them. Through the process we also identified implementation features that would be important to achieve maximum results from stakeholders' perspectives. In the case of the Art and Soul project, stakeholders include: local elected and appointed officials; civically engaged citizens of Starksboro; citizens who are not yet civically engaged, including specific targeted subgroups; the Orton Foundation staff and board; and partners such as the Vermont Arts Council and Vermont Land Trust who might adopt similar processes in other communities.

Stakeholders hold a range of expectations for the Starksboro project from fairly straightforward concrete accomplishments, e.g., an art product is produced, to community transformation, e.g. younger residents and newcomers begin to assume leadership positions. We have attempted to capture that full range of desired expectations in the

outline of an evaluation plan organized in three phases: process (short term); outcome (during the life of the project); and impact (long term, post project results). While the impact phase may be beyond the scope of an evaluation envisioned by the Orton Foundation, we believe the other two phases are within the intended scope of evaluation for the project.

For each of the three phases, we list the major questions to be answered in an evaluation; potential data collection instruments and strategies that are appropriate for the indicators; the indicators of behavioral or attitudinal change that would be used to respond to the questions; notes about the target sample for a particular data collection strategy; timing of data collection; and, where relevant, any appropriate comparisons that might be made. The indicators can be used in a number of ways: a beginning point for developing instrumentation; the framework for content analysis of documents and records; a frame for other types of documentation, e.g., the film documentary; and a file structure for maintaining anecdotal information about the project.

The attached evaluation outlines represent a menu of options, and we recognize that the project evaluator would likely draw from them a more focused set of activities to fit resources available for the evaluation.

## **Section II. Evaluation of Project Processes (short term, during project)**

### **Evaluation Questions related to Project Processes**

1. **Implementation variation.** Has the Art and Soul project been implemented as envisioned? If not, what types of adjustments were made?
  - a. What are the lessons learned about implementation?
  - b. What types of issues have been surfaced by the project?
  - c. Which issues have become the focus of the project and why?
2. **Community reactions.** How do community members react to the activities of the Art and Soul project?
  - a. Who has participated? Who has declined participation? How has participation evolved?
  - b. Which aspects of the project do community members find valuable? Which aspects fail to engage their interest?
  - c. Have there been any unintended positive or negative consequences?
3. **Art product/process.** In what ways does the “product” of the artist in residence take on meaning for community residents?
  - a. Do community members see the connection between the Art and Soul project and land use planning?

### **Data Collection Instruments/Methods for Project Processes**

1. Guided reflection discussion with project leaders—a structured annual opportunity to debrief various processes
2. Orton survey
3. Interviews: elected officials/ committee members; community stakeholders
4. Records review—uses indicators as a guide for content analysis of themes in documents
5. Focus group (structured experience based on stories/artist-in-residence project)

## Indicators related to Project Processes

Evaluation Question	Behavioral/attitudinal indicators of change	Instrument/ Method Sample	Timing Comparison
Lessons Learned during Implementation	Project leaders make adjustments during implementation to improve effectiveness	Guided reflection discussion with project leaders	Annual
	Process surfaces full range of land use/community planning issues	Interviews with elected officials/ committee members and other community stakeholders	After “completion” of artists in residence project
	Local artists become involved with Art and Soul project and/or other community engagement/ community planning project	Guided reflection discussion with project leaders	Annual
	Connection between art product/process and land use issues/planning is explicit	Guided reflection discussion with project leaders	Annual
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Art and Soul Project/Process Perceived as Valuable	Increased number of participants in various activities, including repeat participation and expanding (“snowballing”) participation	Records—attendance/participation	Event-generated
	Elected and appointed officials publicly endorse project and its value and participate in activities	Records--participation	Event-generated
	Long-term residents believe project has makes explicit the values that are of importance to them	Interviews or focus groups with sample of long term residents	After “completion” of artist-in-residence project
		Orton survey subsample	Pre-post; compare w/other communities
	Long-term residents and newcomers acknowledge the similarities in their perspectives about the community as seen through stories/art “product”	Focus group (built on structured experience around stories and artist-in-residence product)	After “completion” of artist-in-residence project
	Individuals see potential “application” of similar processes to other community opportunities/issues	Interviews with elected officials/ committee members and other community stakeholders	After “completion” of artist-in-residence project
		Orton survey subsample	Pre-post; compare w/other communities
	Process surfaces full range of land use/community planning issues	Interviews with elected officials/ committee members and other community stakeholders	After “completion” of artists in residence project
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Art Product/ Process Perceived as Meaningful to Community Residents	Community members express pride in “product”	Interviews with community stakeholders	After “completion” of artist- in-residence project
	“Product” is identified as part of community assets/referred to as town resource	Interviews with community stakeholders	After “completion” of artist- in-residence project
	“Product” is used as touchstone in community conversations	Interviews with community stakeholders	After “completion” of artist- in-residence project

### **Section III. Evaluation of Project Outcomes (by the end of the project, 3 years)**

#### **Evaluation Questions related to Project Outcomes**

1. **New capacities.** To what extent does the Art and Soul project built the Starkboro community's capacity for land use planning?
  - a. In what ways, if any, has the community been successful in engaging diverse voices in planning?
  - b. To what degree have community leaders learned to address potentially polarizing issues that arise during the planning process?
2. **Efficacy.** How does the Art and Soul project affect elected and appointed officials' sense of efficacy, i.e. the confidence that their actions make a positive difference in the community?
3. **Perspective on future.** To what extent does the Art and Soul project affect the perspectives of the citizens of Starksboro on the future of the community?
  - a. Do citizens increase their confidence that the community can solve planning and economic problems?
  - b. How do perspectives on the future of the community vary by length of residency?
4. **Effect of arts/culture.** How does the incorporation of arts/culture strategies as an integral component affect the outcomes?
  - a. To what extent are the patterns of results in Starksboro different than results of other Heart and Soul community projects?

#### **Data Collection Instruments/Methods for Project Outcomes**

1. Orton Survey—potentially augmented with additional questions at post assessment to address indicators more specifically; sample could be larger at post assessment to ensure additional coverage of subgroups, e.g. members of commissions, elected officials.
2. Interviews: elected officials/ committee members; community stakeholders
3. Records and document review—using indicators as a guide for content analysis of themes in documents
4. Focus groups
  - Mobil Home Park residents
  - citizens connected to school community
  - community stakeholders

## Indicators related to Project Outcomes

Evaluation Question	Behavioral/attitudinal indicators of change	Instrument/ Method Sample	Timing Comparison
Develop New Community Capacities	Elected officials/appointed members of committees are aware of/adopt/use strategies for proactively engaging members of community	Orton Survey subsample  Interviews with elected officials/ committee members	Pre-post change; compare degree of change w/ other communities  Post—end of project
	Previously uninvolved and also marginalized members of community participate in land use planning	Interviews with elected officials/ committee members	Post—end of project
		Records review—minutes of public land use planning meetings	Time series—tracking of participation in public hearings; compare trend over time
		Orton Survey subsample	Pre-post change; compare degree of change w/ other communities
	Different mix of individuals, including those who have not previously been involved, seek appointed/elected leadership roles in community	Records review—election and committee application	Time series—tracking individuals; compare trend over time
	Residents of Mobile Home Park represented in community discussions of issues/advocacy	Records review—minutes of meetings	Time series/ trend—tracking of participation
		Interviews with elected officials/ committee members	Post—end of project
		Focus group of Mobil Home Park residents	Post—end of project
	Citizens who identify primarily with school community become engaged in community discussions of issues/advocacy	Records review—minutes of meetings	Time series/ trend—tracking of participation
		Interviews with elected officials/ committee members	Post—end of project
		Focus group of citizens connected to school community	Post—end of project
Enhanced sense of efficacy by officials for community	New forums for public discussion created	Interviews with community stakeholders	Post—end of project
	Those with differing opinions on issues express ability to understand issues from others' viewpoints.	Orton Survey	Pre-post change; compare degree of change w/ other communities
		Interviews or focus groups with community stakeholders	Post—end of project
	Officials take action on persistent problems related to planning/land use	Interviews with elected officials/ committee members	Post—end of project
	Officials reference master plan in their deliberations about community's future	Interviews with elected officials/ committee members	Post—end of project

improve- ment	Officials believe that they have support of community members in the execution of their roles	Interviews with elected officials/ committee members  Orton Survey subsample	Post—end of project  Pre-post change; compare w/ other communities
	Community leaders make attributions linking Art/Soul product/process to achieved community solutions or progress toward solutions	Orton Survey subsample  Interviews or focus groups with community stakeholders	Pre-post change; compare w/ other communities  Post—end of project
Increased confidence on part of citizenry about future of Starksboro	Increasing numbers of residents believe solutions to community's planning and economic dilemmas are achievable and will bring positive changes	Orton Survey	Pre-post change; compare degree of change w/ other communities
	Consensus that community master plan represents agreed upon and positive community vision	Orton Survey	Pre-post change; compare degree of change w/ other communities
	Master plan and/or community vision statement identifies what community wants to preserve/grow/which elements are likely to change; acknowledges themes that emerged through Art and Soul project	Document review—thematic analysis of plans	Event-related/review when complete
	Views of long term residents and newer residents about community vision are similar and acknowledged to be similar; residents reference products/activities of Art and Soul project in understanding of vision	Interviews or focus groups with community stakeholders	Post—end of project; comparison by length of time as resident

## **Section IV: Evaluation of Project Impact (long term, post project)**

### **Evaluation Questions related to Project Impact**

1. **Diverse Population.** To what degree is the community of Starksboro able to maintain a diverse balance of residents, including long term residents able to maintain their homes and also newcomers and younger people who are attracted to the community?
2. **New Leadership.** To what extent are younger residents and newcomers to Starksboro able to assume leadership roles related to planning and land use over time?
  - a. As changes in leadership occur, how do longer term residents react, i.e. do they continue to have confidence in the future of the community or do they have concerns about changes to community character?
3. **Social Capital.** To what extent does the community of Starksboro “grow” social capital?
  - a. How is the social capital in Starksboro applied to land use issues?
  - b. Does the community of Starksboro continue to have access to social capital that was developed during the Art and Soul project?
4. **Statewide Influence.** Has the experience in Starksboro influenced other communities in Vermont to include arts/culture experiences in building the capacity to improve land use planning?

### **Data Collection Instruments/Methods for Project Impact**

1. Periodic community survey—a short annual or biennial survey related to planning; universe sample
2. Interviews:
  - community stakeholders; Vermont Arts Council; Vermont Land Trust
3. Records and document review—content analysis based on indicators
4. Focus groups
  - newcomers and younger residents

## Indicators related to Project Impact

Evaluation Question	Behavioral/attitudinal indicators of change	Instrument/Method Sample	Timing Comparison
Community Population Diversity	Community maintains and/or develops diverse population	Records—review Census records/property transfer records	Trend analysis
		Interviews with community stakeholders	Post project long term
Successful Transfer of Community Leadership	Younger people and/or newcomers elected and/or appointed to community positions, including selectpersons/ land use boards	Records review—election and committee application	Time series—tracking individuals; compare trend over time
		Interviews with community stakeholders	Post project long term
	Younger people and/or newcomers make proactive decisions to settle in/stay in community	Focus groups or interviews with newcomers and younger residents	Post project long term
		Periodic community survey—subgroup analysis by age/length of residency	Annual /biennial survey—comparison by subgroup characteristics
	Long term residents feel continue to have confidence in direction/future of community	Periodic community survey—subgroup analysis by age/length of residency	Annual /biennial survey—comparison by subgroup characteristics
Increase in Social Capital in Community	Increased number of people who see themselves as bridging gap between “cultural” boundaries (old timer/new comer; school/ non-school, artists/elected officials, etc.)	Periodic community survey	Annual /biennial survey—comparison by subgroup characteristics
	Networks/relationships built during Art and Soul project are sustained and applied to addressing community issues	Interviews with community stakeholders	Post project long term
	New/emerging relationships and networks are engaged in addressing community issues	Interviews with community stakeholders	Post project long term
Arts Viewed as Viable way to Enhance Planning	More Vermont artists develop community engagement skills and experiences	Interviews with Vermont Arts Council	Post project
	Increasing requests to Vermont Arts Council for support of community based projects associated with land use/planning issues	Interviews with Vermont Arts Council—grant requests	Post project
	Increasing requests to Vermont Land Trust for support of community based projects	Interviews with Vermont Land Trust	Post project