Value Creation: I established relationships with eight people who will serve as artists and advisors for a project to create public murals in the Fremont East district in Las Vegas. These connections are valuable foundations serving the Downtown Project’s mission to promote art in its community. I successfully gained support for an idea for an initial mural project, taking the first steps to mobilize resources to realize this idea. I connected with a prominent local artist in the area who is highly interested in being a part of this project to create a mural at the Downtown Terrace Apartment Complex.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Downtown Project does not presently have an organized plan for creating public art in downtown Las Vegas. While the DTP supports the city’s monthly arts festival “First Friday” and the local creative collective Emergency Arts and just recently announced its first-ever Arts Contest, the DTP does not yet have a plan for strengthening the presence of art in Fremont East. Thus, I decided to explore a way for the DTP to create public art in its neighborhood thereby addressing its mission to “make the arts a core part of our community.”

Given the DTP’s recent launch of the DTP Arts Contest, which is soliciting arts submissions from community members inspired by their neighborhood, it’s clear that the DTP values public art as a part of its efforts to invigorate the downtown community. Public art is an important way through which communities can make a statement about what they value. Getting local artists, students, volunteers, and the general citizenry involved in creating murals will enable the downtown to tell its story in a creative, public fashion. The community can quite literally display its soul on its walls.

I spoke with Jeanne Markel at The Downtown Project first, who expressed interest in my suggestion that I create the foundations of an implementation strategy for a DTP sector of my choice based on research on successful community-building initiatives in other cities. She liked my idea of going beyond the foundational guiding material in Triumph of the City and Richard Florida’s book The Rise of the Creative Class as a way to think about how to invigorate the Fremont East District.

I made it my mission these past few days to learn about Las Vegas’ public art community and understand the potential for creating public art in Fremont. In particular, I focused on the creation of murals. By connecting with several key leaders in the city’s public art and muraling communities, I learned about the current state of public art in the Fremont East district and discussed ways to enhance the area through a muraling project. I gained the preliminary background knowledge on how muraling has been performed in the city historically and on what is required in order to create a single mural versus a mural project, given rules and regulations, financial considerations, and physical labor, among other things.

I spoke with eight people in total and contacted at least as many more. After speaking first with Paco Alvarez, the preeminent arts blogger of Las Vegas and a Vegas historian, Jennifer Cornthwaite, the co-founder of Emergency Arts, the coworking space for artists in Fremont East, and Esther Carter, the Executive Director of the Committee for Las Vegas’ Centennial Celebration, it became clear to me that muraling is a valued public good in Las Vegas and that this is a project worth pursuing.

I pitched this possible idea to the eight people I spoke with: that the DTP increase the number of murals in the Fremont East district beyond the three that are currently there and that it do so by starting with a single mural painted by the tenants of the Downtown Terrace Apartments – VFA fellows and TFA teachers. All of the people who I spoke to expressed interest in this idea.

I established relationships with the following people, often detailing the role and efforts of the Downtown Project and Venture for America and its fellows for the first time and drumming up interest in and gathering support for a mural project in downtown Las Vegas:

-Jerry Misco, prominent artist and muralist in Las Vegas, friend of Tony Hsieh’s

-Paco Alvarez, longtime Las Vegas arts blogger

-Jennifer Cornthwaite, co-founder and owner of Emergency Arts

-Esther Carter, Executive Director of the Committee for Las Vegas’ Centennial Celebration

-Richard Hooker, chair of the “City of 100 Murals” project for Vegas’ 2005 Centennial

-Susan Cervantes, founder and Executive Director of Precita Eyes Muralists in San Francisco

-Mr. and Mrs. Edward Bloom, two of the first leaders of public arts initiatives in St. Petersburg, Florida; Mrs. Bloom sat on the city’s Art and Public Places Committee for nine years[[2]](#footnote-2)

Of note:

-**Jerry Misko** offered himself as the artist for the muraling project at the Terrace complex. He wants to work with the VFA fellows to realize a design for the space and figure out funding for the project. He would like to meet with interested leaders of the project to discuss it further. He recommended Karen Poncik as an excellent additional resource.

-**Paco Alvarez** connected me with Jerry Misko, a prominent Las Vegas artist who has done several murals in the city, including one at the Emergency Arts complex. He also gave me the name of Alex Huerta, another artist who he said would be happy to be connected with the DTP and muraling initiatives. He happily offered to be an advisor to the project in the future.

-**Jennifer Cornthwaite** extended an invitation to meet with her and one of the Emergency Arts artists who has many connections with people who create community murals in the city. She expressed great interest in helping flesh out a clear long-term, large-scale plan for a Fremont East muraling project if a team from the DTP sought action.

-**Richard Hooker** offered his expertise, connections, and the City of Las Vegas Cultural Affairs Office’s resources for a DTP muraling initiative. He offered his contacts at Home Depot, Target, and Behr Paint, who donated supplies to the Centennial’s muraling projects, as resources. He shared my idea with his colleagues, emphasizing that the DTP stay in touch with him, as they are very interested in working with the DTP on this potential project. He recommended a Las Vegas public arts initiative called the Zap Project as a useful case study to examine. He recommended that the best source for hundreds of local artists’ contact information is the Las Vegas Arts Commission Artist Registry.

-**Susan Cervantes** walked me through the step-by-step process that Precita Eyes follows to create a mural, including an average cost breakdown. She detailed the key elements to the mural design process and how Precita builds community through the involvement of community members.

I sought a viable initial model for the display of meaningful public art that engages and builds community and could be a springboard for a larger mural initiative in Fremont. After doing research on everything from Philadelphia’s famous murals to Berlin’s graffitied streets, I landed on Precita Eyes’ mural project in the Mission District in San Francisco as an applicable model (<http://www.precitaeyes.org/>). The community-based mural organization’s mission is to beautify its urban environment by collaborating with local communities to create physically and conceptually accessible art. Precita muralists have worked for 35 years to bring vitality and color to the once struggling Mission, not unlike the DTP’s mission. Over the years, the organization’s community-focus has contributed to the growth of the neighborhood’s economy by creating jobs for artists and by attracting thousands of tourists to see its murals.

Based on the Precita Eyes Model, A Draft Outline for the Community Mural Design Process:

1. Community members come forward with an idea for a mural.
2. Mural leaders and funders partner the community members with a local Lead Artist.
3. The lead artist leads a Designing & Planning workshop with any and all community members involved in the project. Workshop steps:

-Develop mural theme.

-Each community member sketches, brainstorming potential images for the mural.

-Group discussion of the story the community wants to tell.

-Every individual presents their sketches to the group, describing their image choices.

-Group lists *all* the images that group members draw. Discuss how the images connect to one another. Begin to visualize a story with every individual’s ideas incorporated.

1. The group creates a rough composite sketch of all the images on a full-scale draft paper, under the direction of the lead artist.
2. The lead artist develops the vision to full scale on draft paper.
3. The lead artist presents the draft vision complete with color and a narrative to the community members and the owner of the property the design will be painted on.
4. Artist receives feedback.
5. Approval of the design by the community.
6. The lead artist sketches the design at the mural location.
7. Decision made on who will paint the piece. If the community will contribute, the lead artist creates a schedule with instructions for when the community may participate over the course of a few weeks or may invite the community to paint the mural altogether in a short span of one or two days.
8. One day is devoted to touching-up the mural.
9. A protective coating is painted on the mural.

1. This entire complex is owned by Tony Hsieh. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. These are Dan Bloom’s maternal grandparents. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)