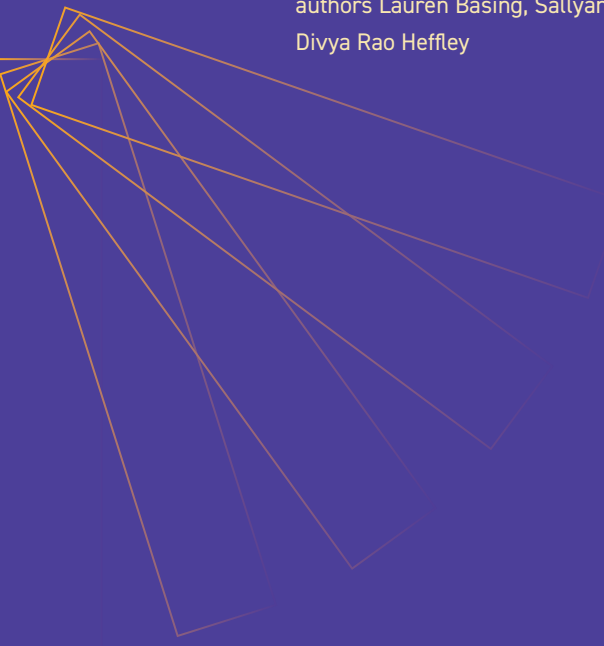




# Fern Hollow Vision Plan: Public Art Recommendations

**February 2025**

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**SHIFTWORKS**

Community + Public Arts



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## About Us

Shiftworks Community + Public Arts is a Pittsburgh-based nonprofit organization working across southwestern Pennsylvania to collaboratively shape the public realm and catalyze community-led change. Through community-engaged artist projects, Shiftworks supports the growth of social, cultural, and neighborhood assets. Shiftworks achieves this by delivering civically engaged public art, artist services, public programming, and client services.

Public art can be a catalyst for community change. Art physically enhances public spaces, making neighborhoods and communal areas more beautiful. Art can also revitalize and entertain, generating economic opportunities. But public art and the practices of artists can also create platforms for and amplify the voices and talents of community members who have been disenfranchised, overlooked, or ignored in civic processes. Through public art projects and programs, communities are deeply engaged in shaping the future of our region—becoming more connected, resilient, and innovative through the process.

### **Shiftworks is guided by four principles:**

1. Artists are agents of social, civic, and cultural change.
2. Community members are highly valued collaborators with expertise in their neighborhoods.
3. Equity and social justice are the foundation of our work.
4. A successful public art landscape depends upon a thriving network of public art practitioners.

Shiftworks believes that the impact of public art is its capacity for catalyzing social change, building cohesion, and amplifying shared knowledge. To accomplish this, the organization provides expertise, tools, and networks to support public arts in southwestern Pennsylvania. This work can only be accomplished with sufficient resources to equitably invest in artists and communities to create public art and lead community-engaged practices.



## Background

The collapse of the Fern Hollow Bridge on February 21, 2022, profoundly impacted Fern Hollow and the surrounding area, including Frick Park and the Nine Mile Run Watershed. In the aftermath of this event, Pittsburgh-based non-profit UpstreamPgh embraced the opportunity to transform this tragedy into a moment for reimagining and revitalization.

In Fall 2022, UpstreamPgh was awarded a grant from the Commonwealth Financing Authority to launch a multi-year visioning process for the Fern Hollow Valley, engaging diverse stakeholders to envision interventions aimed at reinvigorating the site's ecological and social significance.

As part of the first phase of the Vision Plan, UpstreamPgh contracted Neighborhood Allies to support the development of community-driven concepts for the Fern Hollow Valley. Through feedback from surveys, trail walks, and steering committee meetings, two sites in Frick Park—Confluence and Wetland Zone—were identified for potential interventions aimed at enhancing existing park conditions while also highlighting the natural character of the site and supporting long-term restoration.

Building on the work completed by Neighborhood Allies, Shiftworks was brought on to develop and lead an artist workshop to explore creative interventions and applications for the two identified sites. This engagement aligns with our belief that artists are essential stakeholders in community processes, offering fresh perspectives and creative solutions that can significantly enrich a project's development. By engaging artists, we can foster innovation, enrich the cultural landscape, and ensure a more inclusive and dynamic community vision.





## Process

On November 1, 2024, Shiftworks convened six Pittsburgh-based artists: Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Tess Dally, Petra Floyd, Carin Mincemoyer, John Peña, and LaKeisha Wolf, at the Frick Environmental Center for a day-long workshop. The workshop engaged the artists as paid consultants, with the goal of collaborating with them to identify opportunities and points of intervention for artistic development, explore opportunities for community engagement, and inform recommendations to UpstreamPgh for engaging artists in the process.



Fern Hollow Vision Plan artist workshop participants and facilitators, from left to right: Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Divya Rao Heffley, Petra Floyd, Tess Dally, Carin Mincemoyer, John Peña, LaKeisha Wolf, Erica Jackson, and Lauren Basing. Photo courtesy of Shiftworks Community + Public Arts.

The day began with a presentation by UpstreamPgh staff that outlined their mission and the first phase of the Fern Hollow Vision Plan. This included an overview of the organization's work in the Nine Mile Run Watershed and its goals for the Fern Hollow Valley. UpstreamPgh provided the artists with a summary of community engagement activities completed to-date and the ways in which this input informed the conceptual designs prepared by Neighborhood Allies for the two identified sites: Confluence and Wetland Zone. These conceptual site designs set the stage for workshop discussion, opening the door for artists to contribute their expertise and creative perspectives.

Following the presentation, participants traveled to the two identified sites in Frick Park. These site visits allowed artists to explore the physical space firsthand, observe its features, and reflect on its context. During the visits, Shiftworks asked artists to consider the following prompts, designed to guide their observations:

- What key themes or concepts emerge as you explore this space?
- How could this space foster a deeper connection between people and nature?
- What forms of art could invite people to pause, reflect, or interact with this space?
- What forms of art could make the park more inclusive, accessible, and welcoming?
- How does the flow of people through this space influence its energy, and how might an artwork or program engage this flow?

After the site visits, the group reconvened to debrief and share their impressions. Artists divided into breakout groups to discuss their reflections, insights, and ideas for potential enhancements. Shiftworks staff facilitated the discussions and recorded artists' input, which is captured in Appendix A: Workshop Notes.

## Report Structure

Following the workshop, Shiftworks compiled and reviewed the notes from the workshop and developed recommendations for how to incorporate public art into the sites and the overall vision plan for Fern Hollow. These recommendations are included in this report and are structured as followed:

- **Overarching Themes.** The workshop identified overarching themes to guide the implementation and execution of public art. These themes are not site-specific and can be considered for any public art projects within Fern Hollow.
- **Site-Specific Recommendations for the Confluence and Wetland Zone.** These recommendations include observations made about the sites during the workshop, thematic suggestions for artwork at each site, concepts for artist opportunities, and considerations for what types of artworks might be included at each site. These artwork types reflect different modes of working that are frequently engaged by Shiftworks and the artists with whom it works, and are further explored in Appendix B: How Artists Work in the Public Realm.

- **Fern Hollow-Wide Artwork Opportunities:** This section includes recommendations for how artists might continue to be engaged in the planning and implementation of the vision for Fern Hollow. These recommendations are further explored in Appendix B of this document.



## Overarching Themes

The art interventions proposed for the park sites are informed by two overarching themes that are intended to guide the design and execution of the site-specific recommendations: *Accessibility First* and *Making the Invisible, Visible*. Both themes emerged directly from the artist conversations and highlight key considerations for how art can enhance the landscape. They provide a framework for the recommendations, ensuring that the interventions are responsive to both the physical environment and the ways in which people experience it.

### Accessibility First

Ensuring accessibility in public design is fundamental to creating an inclusive and welcoming experience for all visitors. At these park sites, accessibility should not be approached as a singular solution but as a layered consideration that accounts for the many different ways people navigate and experience the environment. While it may not be possible for a single intervention to be fully accessible to everyone—for example, sound-based elements may not be perceivable by all visitors—providing multiple ways to engage with the space can create a more inclusive experience overall. Some may engage with the space through touch, sound, or movement, while others may connect through storytelling, visual interpretation, or moments of quiet reflection. Providing multiple avenues for interaction—whether through tactile maps, audio tours, or artist-designed elements that respond to light and sound—ensures that a broad range of visitors can meaningfully engage with the landscape.

At the Confluence, ideas for potential interventions that consider multiple modes of access include artist-designed bulletin boards and tactile maps to improve wayfinding, as well as adaptive seating options at various heights and depths to accommodate different mobility needs. Similarly, at the Wetland Zone, creating accessible pathways and fostering engagement through multiple sensory engagements is key. This includes introducing gently sloped boardwalks that provide step-free access, artist-designed seating that encourages moments of stillness, and interactive elements such as textural imprints or raised-relief designs that allow visitors to engage with the landscape through touch. Across both sites, accessibility should be embedded in the artistic vision from the beginning, encouraging

multifaceted exploration while also maintaining the integrity of the natural landscape. By prioritizing multiple modes of engagement, these recommendations aim to create a more welcoming and inclusive experience for all.

## **Making the Invisible, Visible**

Art has the power to illuminate what is often unseen or overlooked. By integrating artistic elements into the environment, interventions can bring attention to subtle ecological shifts, such as changing light patterns, seasonal water levels, and the textures of natural materials. Rather than imposing a new visual language onto the landscape, design choices should work with these existing conditions, enhancing the visitor's awareness of what is already present. Materials and forms should be selected with sensitivity to the site, using elements like natural textures, reclaimed wood, or mosaics that reflect the surrounding environment.

At the Confluence, art could reinforce the site's role as a point of movement and interaction by reflecting the confluence of water and trails. A tactile map of local waterways could highlight unseen connections between the site and the Monongahela River, while seating elements integrated with trees or rock formations could encourage visitors to slow down and contemplate their surroundings. At the Wetland Zone, art pieces could draw attention to the wetland's biodiversity and shifting water levels. Interactive features, such as magnifying glasses on boardwalks or stepping stones imprinted with local flora, could provide tactile ways for visitors to engage with the environment. By amplifying these natural inputs, artistic enhancements can deepen the connection between visitors and the environment, making the unseen more tangible.



## Site-Specific Recommendations

Building on the overarching themes that emerged, two discrete sets of recommendations were proposed by the artists. Organized by site, each set begins with a site character that encapsulates the unique role, atmosphere, and function of the space. Within each site, the recommendations are structured into goals (which outline how artistic elements should enhance the site's character) and concepts (which propose ways to implement these goals, supported by ideas from artists to illustrate potential creative directions). Rather than prescribing specific artistic interventions, these recommendations offer a vision for how art can enrich these landscapes and deepen public engagement with the natural environment.

### The Confluence

**Site Character:** A hub for arrival, gathering, movement, and connections.

**Observations:** The Confluence is located at the intersection of the Falls Ravine Trail and Tranquil Trail. The site is characterized as a place of arrival and departure, a place to meet up with companions and exchange information. It serves as a trailhead for various pathways and includes a community bulletin board and public restrooms (to be reconstructed). The group discussed how new and enhanced modes of communication can be integrated into the site, including audio and visual information. There was also discussion about how the idea of the “confluence” – which in this case is composed of paths and trails – can be more strongly connected to the presence of water on the site through artistic interventions.

**Goals for Public Art Interventions:** Artistic elements enhance functionality and amplify the site's multi-modal, interactive character.

#### 1. Nature-Integrated Design

- Incorporate natural forms and ecological features into design elements.
- Integrate creative seating with trees, rocks, or reclaimed materials like logs.
- Use sustainable building methods (e.g., rainwater for bathrooms, natural textures, and mosaics).

## **2. Encouraging Arrival and Exploration**

- Establish clear entry points with informative signage or artistic bulletin boards.
- Incorporate storytelling, history, and local culture via QR codes or artist-curated playlists.
- Design tactile, artistic maps of local waterways to build a sense of place.

## **3. Making Hidden Nature Visible**

- Highlight ecological processes such as erosion or sunlight changes through art installations.
- Integrate interactive features such as birdhouses, bat houses, or observation decks tied to the natural environment.
- Encourage seasonal and time-sensitive art pieces that interact with the surroundings (e.g., sculptures that reflect sunlight differently throughout the day).

## **4. Accessibility and Equity**

- Prioritize inclusivity in design: accessible pathways, adaptive seating, and thoughtful restroom placement.
- Balance spaces for solitude with areas for group gatherings or performances, ensuring they coexist without disruption.



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## Concept 1: Community Interaction and Wayfinding

*Activate trailhead through new and enhanced modes of communication, including visual, audio, and more.*

### Ideas:

- Install an artist-designed bulletin board.
- Incorporate written or audio tours accessible via QR codes. These “choose your own adventure” tours could feature themes such as storytelling, history, or music playlists curated by local artists.
- Include a trail logbook that visitors can sign. Archived entries could become a valuable addition to a future library collection, preserving community engagement.

*Highlight the relationship to the confluence of water.*

### Ideas:

- Install a map highlighting local waterways, illustrating the site’s relationship to the water system and how these waterways connect to the Monongahela.
- Consider integrating a tactile map on one side of the bulletin board or as a mural on the restroom facility.



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## Concept 2: Nature-Inspired Design

*Encourage visitors to sit with nature.*

### Ideas:

- Provide alternative seating options to picnic areas by creating seating using log or rock formations along the treeline.
- Integrate seating options into the surrounding geological features, leveraging the natural shade along the treeline to promote relaxation and connection to the environment.

*Highlight nature through selection of materials and surface design.*

### Ideas:

- Select materials that enhance the natural environment, such as furniture crafted from fallen trees, stained glass in the bathrooms that interacts with natural light, or mosaic and tiles designed to mimic natural textures.
- Incorporate surface textures inspired by natural elements, such as water ripples, feather imprints, or leaf patterns. Add design elements that call attention to the ways in which light interacts with nature, creating opportunities for artful shadows or shimmering effects.
- Prioritize sustainability in material choices. Explore options like rainwater collection for bathroom use, similar to practices already implemented at the Frick Environmental Center.

## Site-Specific Artist Opportunities: The Confluence

With these artwork goals and concepts in mind, the following artist opportunities should be considered for the Confluence:

**Applied Artworks.** With structures being designed for the site, there will be multiple opportunities for Applied Artworks at the Confluence. These structures include the bathrooms, picnic shelter, and walkways. There are opportunities to engage the exterior walls of the bathrooms as canvases to host temporary or long-term murals, either as applied wraps or painted elements. The picnic shelter can provide an opportunity for mounted panels that may also provide weather protection. In locations where there are hard surfaces, such as asphalt or concrete, graphics applied to the ground plane can provide an opportunity.

Key considerations for Applied Artworks in this location will include the intended duration of artworks installed in this manner, and plans for future replacement.

**Artist-Designed Building Parts.** The Confluence also provides an opportunity for artist-designed building parts and site furnishings. This may include the bulletin board / info station, door pulls in the bathroom, and custom glazing – such as stained or etched glass – for windows or skylights into the bathrooms. Other opportunities such as artist-designed seating can also be considered.

Key considerations for artist-designed building parts in this location will include durability and accessibility.



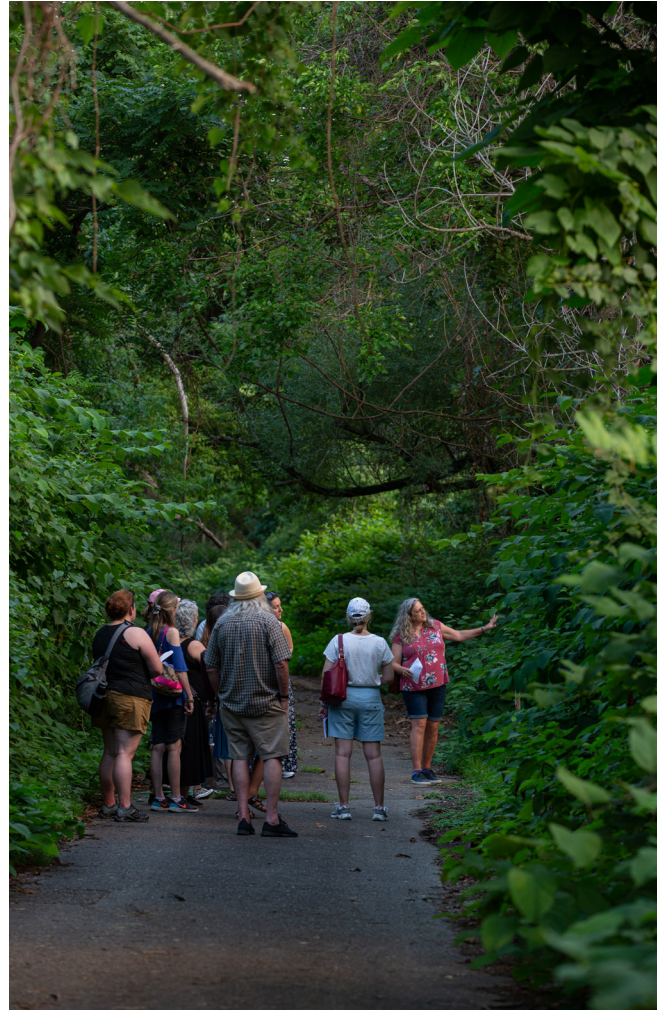
John Peña, *400 Million Years of Water*, 2023.  
Photo by Sean Carroll.



Carin Mincemoyer, artist-designed seating  
as part of *Trail Meander*, 2023. Photo by  
Sean Carroll.

**Public Space Activations.** Centrally located, readily accessible from the trails and parking, and with a large, relatively flat lawn adjacent, the Confluence is an ideal location for hosting artist-led Public Space Activations. Such events - writing workshops, community dance classes, acoustic musical gatherings - can connect people more intimately with the space of the park and encourage community members who do not regularly engage to come visit. This can be supported through stipends to artists to develop and implement activations, and partnerships with other organizations such as the Parks Conservancy or Shiftworks.

To support future activations, improvements could include design elements such as a location for a schedule of activities or infrastructure like access to electricity.



Writer Sherrie Flick leads a Walk and Write tour in Hazelwood, 2022. Photo by Heather Mull.

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## The Wetland Zone

**Site Character:** A tranquil, sensory-rich space for reflection and discovery.

**Observations:** The Wetland Zone is located along Tranquil Trail, at the base of the Biddle Trail stairs. The site crosses Fern Hollow Creek, turning this area into a wetland during seasons with higher rainfall. The Wetland Zone is a quiet place somewhat removed from the activities along the adjacent trails and distinct from the open area of the Confluence, which supports larger gatherings. At times, the tranquility of the site is in notable contrast to the high-energy of the nearby Environmental Charter School. This contrast is not negative; rather, the distant energy and sounds of the schoolchildren heighten one's awareness of the stillness of the wetlands. This dynamic suggests opportunities to explore how such juxtapositions can be engaged to heighten overall environmental awareness.

**Goals for Public Art interventions:** Artistic elements enhance environmental awareness while preserving the ecosystem.

### 1. Sound and Sensory Elements

- Focus on the unique sonic qualities of the wetlands.
- Develop interactive boardwalks that produce sound (e.g., materials that resonate with movement).
- Consider quiet zones for reflection and interaction with seasonal aspects of wetlands.

### 2. Arrival and Reflection

- Use naturalistic features (e.g., logs and stepping stones) to shift the space from a transition zone to a place of stillness.
- Engage the five senses through design elements that highlight wetland biodiversity (e.g., imprinted stepping stones featuring local flora and fauna).

### 3. Art and Interpretation

- Create sculptures or furniture inspired by natural elements (e.g., oversized leaves for seating).
- Consider temporary or evolving art installations, allowing artists to reimagine spaces over time.

- Encourage artistic elements that reflect the cyclical and transitional nature of the Wetland Zone.

#### **4. Balancing Accessibility with Conservation**

- Minimize the ecological footprint of visitors while building in and expanding accessibility.
- Explore creative ways for visitors to experience wetlands (e.g., raised walkways with magnifying glasses to view soil or water life).



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## Concept 1: Arrival and Exploration

*Develop pathways to encourage engagement with the landscape.*

### Ideas:

- Design the boardwalk to follow the natural contours of the trail, creating a seamless flow. Consider widening the bridge to establish a designated access point to the water, enhancing visitor interaction with the environment.
- Design pathways with gentle slopes and ramps to ensure accessible entry while maintaining the integrity of the environment.
- Develop safe, inclusive paths through wetlands to accommodate visitors who may have difficulty navigating stepping stones or uneven terrain, ensuring all can enjoy the natural surroundings.

*Focus attention and slow down; encourage observation and inquiry.*

### Ideas:

- Incorporate stepping stones of varying sizes and textures to enhance experience, drawing attention to specific areas and encouraging a more deliberate pace.
- Install viewing portholes or oversized magnifying glasses along the boardwalk to allow visitors to observe and engage with the wetlands beneath, fostering curiosity and connection to the environment.
- Position seating around trees to offer visitors unique perspectives of the site, allowing for moments of reflection and deeper interaction with the natural surroundings.

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## Concept 2: Engage Artist-Designed Elements to Integrate Educational Opportunities

*Draw attention to the diversity and age of the landscape.*

### Ideas:

- Incorporate sculptures or interpretive elements that highlight the variety of tree species and their ages, fostering a deeper appreciation of the site's natural heritage.
- Establish an Artist-in-Residence of “fallen logs,” where artists are tasked with creating functional or dynamic art installations that integrate seamlessly into the natural environment, using natural materials already available onsite.

*Engage joy and whimsy to build connection to the site.*

### Ideas:

- Design seating elements inspired by organic forms or animals, such as oversized leaves or mushroom-shaped benches. These pieces combine functionality with whimsy, enhancing the natural aesthetic and engaging visitors in a playful yet practical way.

*Integrate artist-designed elements into interpretive and educational opportunities.*

### Ideas:

- Imprint stones with designs that reference native leaves, invertebrates, or animal tracks. These elements could tell a story or spark curiosity, offering a deeper connection to the local ecosystem.
- Install sculptures or totems that represent the park's plant and wildlife, such as the false stag. These pieces can reflect the idea that nature is not binary, celebrating the diversity and complexity of the natural world.

- Create interactive elements that allow visitors to manipulate and engage with information about the Wetland Zone, providing information and hands-on experiences.

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## Site-Specific Artist Opportunities: The Wetland Zone

With these artwork goals and concepts in mind, the following artist opportunities should be considered for the Wetland Zone:

**Artist-Designed Building Parts.** The creation of the new walkway and proposal for “stepping stones” both present opportunities for artist-designed building parts. By conceptualizing the “stepping stones” first and foremost as visual and tactile elements, there is also an opportunity to make these elements accessible to a wider audience, rather than only serving those who can physically walk across them. Similarly, walkway elements, such as railings and informational signage, could be designed to convey information about the site through both visual and tactile means, further enriching and expanding the experience of the space.



Ann Hamilton, handrail  
design for Allegheny  
Riverfront Park, 2001.  
Photo by Annie O'Neill.

A further opportunity is the integration of an artist-designed intervention that responds to stormwater runoff from the higher elevations above the Wetlands. Considering how water moves through the site, an artist could highlight this process in a way that is both functional and visually compelling, creating a stronger connection to the landscape.





John Peña, informational signage as part of *400 Million Years of Water*, 2023. Photo by Sean Carroll.

Key considerations include how visitors with varying accessibility needs will engage with these features. Ensuring both static and interactive elements incorporate tactile, visual, and spatial design strategies will help create a more inclusive experience.

**Free-Standing Artworks.** The Wetland Zone also provides an opportunity to consider the incorporation of free-standing artwork in the form of sculpture. Such elements might include sound elements that are triggered by wind, water, or other movement. Work could be either temporary or integrated permanently into the construction of the site.

Key considerations for free-standing artworks at this location include how the artworks meet the ground, and what requirements they might have for foundations or footings. If there is construction as part of the walkway project, it would be worthwhile to consider whether one or more “platforms” to receive future artwork should be included in the construction.



Ginger Brooks Takahashi, *Drip, Seep, Run*, 2023. Photo courtesy of the artist.

## Fern Hollow-Wide Artwork Opportunities

In addition to the site-specific recommendations that are identified above, there are opportunities for public art engagements that extend beyond the sites.



Alisha Wormsley, *River Roots*, 2020. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**Artist Residency in the Public Realm.** An artist residency in the public realm at Fern Hollow would present a unique opportunity for collaboration and co-creation with community members. Such a project could be undertaken in collaboration with UpstreamPgh, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, and CitiParks, and be physically hosted at the Frick Environmental Center. In addition to the model for residencies provided by Shiftworks via the [Artist Residencies in the Public Realm](#) resource guide, The Environmental Protection Agency's recently piloted [Artist-in-Residence](#) initiative may provide a relevant model for consideration. Through this pilot initiative, the EPA is “investing in arts and culture to demonstrate how arts and culture can help inform government’s efforts to work more effectively with communities, build understanding of water quality and other environmental concerns, build stronger connections between communities and natural resources, and better meet communities’ unique needs.”<sup>1</sup>

**Temporary Public Art Programs.** Another opportunity to consider beyond the specific sites identified in the Fern Hollow Vision Plan is to develop and implement a temporary public art program. Such a program could be engaged to serve as a catalyst for community

<sup>1</sup> “Artist-in-Residence (AIR) Pilot Initiatives,” U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, accessed February 27, 2025, <https://www.epa.gov/urbanwaterspartners/artist-residence-air-pilot-initiative>.



conversations about how adjacent neighborhoods connect to Fern Hollow, as well as raise advocacy for the urban waterway. Potential sites could include not only settings in the park and alongside the waterway, but in neighboring business districts, schools, and community centers. Projects could be undertaken on a variety of scales, ranging from the creation of artist-designed posters and postcards to storefront installations and pop-up events.



Works Progress Studio,  
*South Elm Water Bar*,  
2015. Photo courtesy of  
Elsewhere.



Mary Tremonte in  
collaboration with Gina  
Favano and Gerty Tonjum,  
*SHEd: A Soil Health  
Education Cart*, 2021.  
Photo by Heather Mull.



## Additional Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to provide general guidance for the next phase of the Fern Hollow Vision Plan. These additional recommendations reflect artist feedback from the workshop and align with best practices Shiftworks follows in its work.

### Community Engagement

Shiftworks believes deeply in the transformative power of collaboration between artists and communities. In our practices, artists and communities partner and move through the stages of stakeholder engagement, conceptual design, and final design and implementation together. The following recommendations outline engagement strategies for UpstreamPgh to consider in future public art initiatives.

#### 1. Establishing a Collaborative Framework

To foster meaningful engagement, artists should work closely with UpstreamPgh, community members, and project partners from the outset. A structured process that includes observation, learning, and dialogue helps artists integrate into the community and understand its needs, histories, and aspirations. This can be achieved through:

- Attending community events and gatherings.
- Participating in meetings with local stakeholders.
- Observing and engaging with park users to understand site dynamics.

#### 2. Developing a Community Engagement Plan

Following an initial period of observation, artists and UpstreamPgh should collaboratively develop a Community Engagement Plan. This plan should:

- Outline activities that introduce the artist's practice to the community.
- Provide opportunities for relationship-building and trust development.
- Encourage inclusive participation across different demographics.
- Align with the park's cultural and ecological context.



### 3. Encouraging Community-Led Ideation and Testing

Artists and community members should work together to generate and test project ideas before finalizing a creative direction. This phase allows for experimentation and ensures that the final public art project resonates with the community. Strategies include:

- Hosting collaborative workshops and feedback sessions.
- Facilitating interactive exercises that explore artistic possibilities.
- Prototyping small-scale installations or events to gauge community response.

### 4. Advancing to Final Design and Implementation

The culmination of the engagement process should lead to the development of a public art project that directly reflects community input and collaboration. Depending on the artist's vision and the community's needs, the final artwork may take various forms, including:

- Physical installations that integrate into the park environment.
- Performative or social engagement projects that activate public space.
- Temporary interventions that invite ongoing community participation.

By embedding community engagement in the public art process, a project can become more than an aesthetic enhancement; it can create spaces for connection, representation, and shared experience. This collaborative approach ensures that public art is not only reflective of the community, but also shaped by it, fostering an impact that lasts.

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## Artist Selection

To create a meaningful and impactful artist selection process, the following actions are recommended:

**Engage Local Artists and Design Firms:** Artist selection should prioritize engaging local artists and design firms who have a deep understanding of the community and its cultural landscape. Local professionals offer valuable insight into the region's history, environment, and identity, ensuring that any aesthetic enhancement is both meaningful and relevant. Their familiarity with the area also supports stronger connections between the project and the community it serves, further reinforcing any community engagement efforts as part of the design development process.

**Involve Artists Early in the Design Process:** To maximize impact, it is strongly encouraged that UpstreamPgh and its partners seek to engage artists as early as possible in the design process. Bringing artists in at the conceptual and planning stages allows for deeper integration of creative elements into the overall vision, rather than treating public art as an add-on. This early collaboration fosters more cohesive, site-specific solutions that align with the project's goals for the surrounding environment.

**Explore Tiered Opportunities for Artists:** Another way to expand the impact of public art as a means of community engagement and advocacy is through the creation of tiered opportunities for artists. Such opportunities can range from temporary public art installations or arts-based public space activations to long-term commissions. This approach creates pathways for both emerging and experienced artists to contribute, ensuring a broad range of perspectives and expertise. Temporary projects provide a low-barrier entry point for artists to test ideas, engage the community, and respond to the site in an immediate way. These shorter term interventions can also help to inform long-term projects, which require more planning and funding to execute.

For additional guidance on structuring the artist selection process, the [Artist Selection Process Resource Guide by Americans for the Arts \(2013\)](#) outlines methods for selecting artists for public art commissions, including recommended best practices. This resource can serve as a useful reference for developing a transparent and effective approach that aligns with the goals of the project.

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## Accessibility

While accessibility has been identified as a central element of the overarching themes and reflected in the site-specific recommendations, it is also essential to consider it throughout the planning and implementation process. Ensuring that all aspects of public art interventions are inclusive will support broader community engagement and create a more welcoming experience for all visitors.

### Key considerations include:

**Accessibility and ADA Audit** – Conducting an accessibility and ADA audit of the site and engagement process can help identify barriers as well as opportunities for improvement. This should include evaluating the current site conditions, such as the concrete slabs under the picnic area and bathrooms at the Confluence, which may present challenges for people with limited mobility, as well as reviewing proposed developments to ensure they comply with ADA standards and are accessible for all users.

**Signage** – The park would benefit from additional signage to improve wayfinding and enhance the overall visitor experience. Clear and accessible signage is essential to guide visitors and ensure that everyone, including those with visual or cognitive impairments, can navigate the park easily. Signage should use high contrast and large fonts, as well as tactile elements where appropriate, to improve readability.

**QR Codes** – QR codes can enhance accessibility by providing equitable access to information in multiple formats. These codes can link to content such as audio descriptions, text-based guides, or translated materials, allowing visitors to engage with the space in a way that suits their needs. QR codes should be designed to be screen reader compatible and include options for visitors who might not have smartphone access.

**Budget for Accommodations** – Setting aside a portion of the project budget to support accommodations—such as ASL interpretation, accessible materials, or support for individuals with mobility, sensory, or cognitive impairments—can help ensure that all community members have equitable access to take part in the process. By proactively planning for these needs, UpstreamPgh can be better positioned to encourage full community participation.

By addressing both existing site conditions and the broader needs of the community, the next phase of the Fern Hollow Vision Plan can lead to a more inclusive and welcoming park environment for all visitors.



## Appendix A: Workshop Notes

These notes were collected during the November 1, 2024, artist workshop and reflect the raw ideas and discussions generated by participants. Organized by site and goal, they capture initial concepts for potential artistic and environmental interventions at the two Frick Park sites: Confluence and Wetland Zone.

### Confluence

#### Goal 1: Nature-Integrated Design

- Options for those who want to sit with nature
- Can benches be integrated into nature? (ie: built around trees)
- Can we create seating areas in the round, on both sides of Falls Ravine Trail? This would allow us to benefit from the shade already provided by the trees across the path
- Seating areas integrated into geologic features
- Log seating along treeline
- Rock formation seating
- Reuse old trees for seating and tables
- More formal approach: mushroom formation for benches
- Bathrooms should use rainwater (like at Frick Environmental Center)
- Materiality of building components and surface design:
  - Surface textures drawn from imprints of natural elements
    - Water, scales, feathers.
    - Shadows + shimmering light: Take inspiration from how light can reflect in nature
  - Door pulls
  - Borrowed light / stained glass in bathrooms
  - Mosaics + tile



## Goal 2: Encouraging Arrival and Exploration

- Are there ways for people to get to water and play in it?
  - Cleanliness – Falls Ravine is cleaner. Can people play in that water?
- Confluence of what? What are names of waterways?
- Multi-modal transport. Bike-to-hike?
- Points of arrival
- Bulletin board as a jumping off point for Confluence
- Written or audio tours – QR codes
  - Different options such as storytelling, history, music
- Playlists by local artists.
- Trail guest book. Archive could become part of library collection
- Where are we in relation to water:
  - Waterways ultimately lead to the Monongahela. Can we create a tactile map of the waterways?
- Where are we in relation to the world:
  - Artwork that informs where you are in city, region, and globe

## Goal 3: Making Hidden Nature Visible

- Develop interactions that create a breeze, like a handle you pull that acts as a fan
- How can we highlight or draw attention to the visual manifestations of “hidden nature” and the connections between humans and nature?
- Build connection points to the water
  - Lab, observation deck, etc
- Where are we in relation to time of day/rotation of the earth:
  - Sculpture that changes with time of day + sun
  - Can art installations be seasonal? Or respond to the season?

- Where are we amidst major geologic processes:
  - Artwork that actively invites erosion (ie: rubbing a rock on a rock)
  - Rock seat butt print!
- Artist-designed bird/bat houses
- Shelter roof design augments weather sounds (wind, rain)
- Windchimes

#### **Goal 4: Accessibility and Equity**

- Where/What/Why? What is everything for?
- Furniture that can be used as benches or tables
- Recommend multiple seating options for accessibility
- Lack of accessibility: Concrete pad under picnic benches and bathrooms
- Picnic tables seem to be acting as placeholders. Not intentional.
- The space feels exclusive, not welcoming, like it's gatekeeping
- Everything must be accessible
- Consider integration of electrical outlets into Confluence architecture
- Make space for gathering or for performance (but not disruptive)
- Porta-potty artwork wraps. Show more care to the current environment instead of waiting for a future project to be completed

# Wetland Zone

## Goal 1: Sound and Sensory Elements

- Audio component
- Stillness
- No water – “seasonal” wetland
- Sonic properties for boardwalk. What sound is created when you ride your bike across the boardwalk?
- Engage five senses. Go deeper into experiences.
- Sensory experience

## Goal 2: Arrival and Reflection

- Act of Arrival
- Seating around trees – sit with nature
- Steps. Fallen logs.
- Decomposition.
- The space is characterized by so many different trees and ages of trees – how can we draw attention to this? Can we integrate impressions of leaves into the design somehow?
- Using artist point of view to focus attention
- Feels like a space of transition, yet we’re now asking people to stop here and reflect.
- How can we shift the flow-space of transition with a design that encourages reflection?
- Yes to the concept of a boardwalk. Makes it special and protects environment
- Boardwalk shape should flow with the contours of the trails
- Stepping stones:
  - How do they change behavior, make you focus and slow down?
  - How can we further augment this slow down by designing stepping stones of different scales and textures
  - Impressions/imprints on stepping stones of native leaves, invertebrates, animal life – could be educational

### **Goal 3: Art and Interpretation**

- Concept of totems
- Artist in residence in “fallen logs” where the work all happens through removal instead of accretion.
- Artwork up in the trees
- Interactive semaphore: create elements that communicate information about trail that people can manipulate
- Iconography of wildlife in the park
  - False stag – nature is not binary
- Instead of art that replicates nature, call out the opposite
- Benches or furniture are in the shape of natural elements or animals/wildlife
  - Oversize seating as sculpture in wood or metal (e.g., a large leaf that seats 2-3 people) – art and function

### **Goal 4: Balancing Accessibility with Conservation**

- Do we want to invite people to get off the trail? Or do we need to keep people off the wetlands?
- Don’t cover the wetlands – this is a space of reflection
- How can we get people into the wetlands without stepping stones? Are there other ways for people to access the wetlands? Stepping stones are neither inclusive nor safe. Can we change levels through slopes that are inclusive, e.g.?
- Can we widen the bridge and create an access point to water instead of covering it up?
- Underground viewer – Boardwalk has portholes or oversized magnifying glasses so you can see what's below

## Additional Recommendations

- Hire Pittsburgh-based artists and architects
- Tiered opportunities (i.e., 50 year to temporary)
- Signage is so important
- QR codes are helpful from an accessibility perspective
- Accessibility audit. ADA audit - start with parks



## Appendix B: How Artists Work in the Public Realm

Artists play a vital role in shaping public space, bringing creativity, cultural resonance, and community connections into both the built and natural environment. There are many ways to engage artists in the public realm, including:

- Artist-led community engagement
- Artists as part of the design team
- Integrated artworks
- Applied artworks
- Freestanding artworks
- Artist-designed building parts or site furnishings
- Temporary public art programs
- Public space activations

### Artist-Led Community Engagement

Shiftworks defines artist-led community engagement as a process whereby artists use their creative practices to foster dialogue, connection, and collaboration among community members around shared issues. These engagements may result in tangible works like co-created murals or focus on participatory processes that address community challenges.

An example of artist-led community engagement is *TalkPGH*, a project created by artists Jon Rubin and Nina Sarnelle in 2014. As part of the City of Pittsburgh's Comprehensive Plan process, the artists were hired to create a project that would connect residents with the planning work in order to gather community input. The project that resulted was *TalkPGH* – a mobile television studio that traveled to all 90 neighborhoods in the city and interviewed residents. Because of the creative approach to engagement, a key outcome of the project was gathering the participation of many community members who would not have otherwise interacted with the planning efforts.



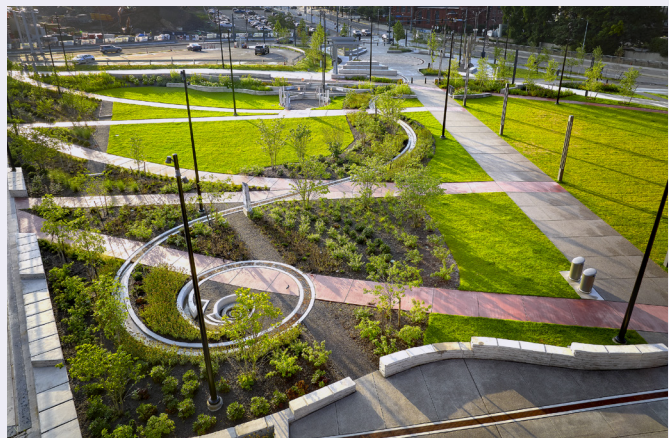
Jon Rubin and Nina Sarnelle, *TalkPGH*, 2013. Photo courtesy of the artists.

## Artists as Part of the Design Team

Artists integrated early into planning and design processes contribute to shaping a project's vision. For these projects, artists are hired based on a fixed fee or hourly rate that pays them to participate in the design process. If the design process results in identifying opportunities for an artwork, the artist on the team may be hired to create that work, or another artist may be selected.

For Frankie Pace Park, Shiftworks collaborated with the site owner and landscape architects to hire artists Dr. Kimberly Ellis, Amir Rashidd, Jann Rosen-Queralt, and architectural designer Lakeisha Byrd to be part of the design team. Their contributions, such as the Sankofa bird walkway, water features, children's garden, and interpretive signage, reflect the community's legacy. Some of these elements were ultimately developed by the artists on the team, while others were incorporated by the architectural designers.

Frankie Pace Park.  
Photo courtesy  
of LBA Landscape  
Architecture

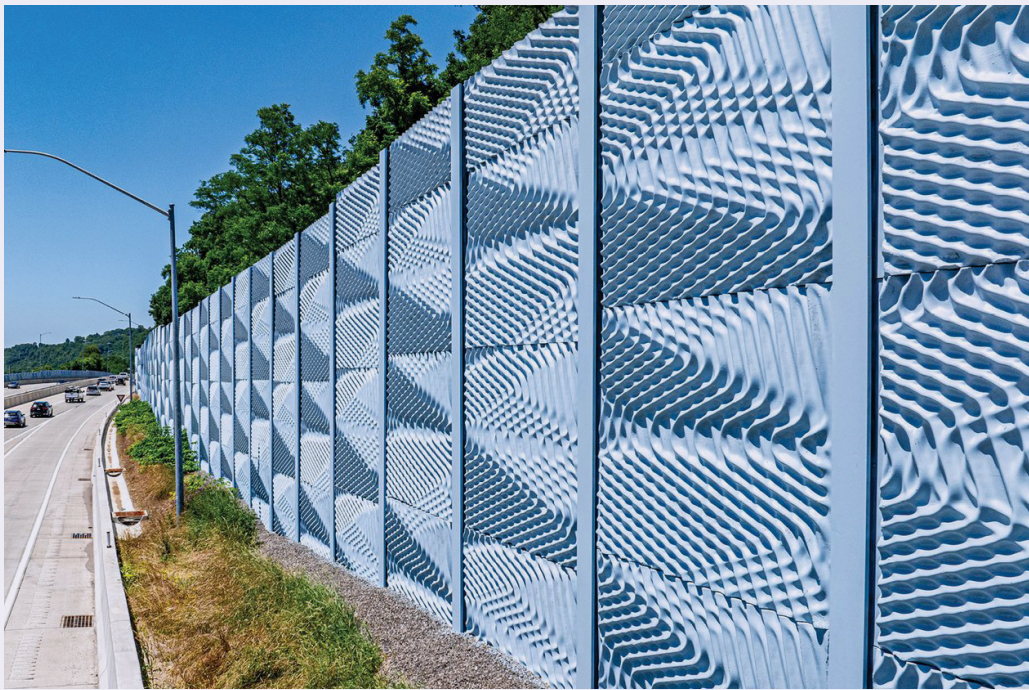




## Integrated Artworks

Integrated artworks seamlessly blend into their surroundings, often using materials already planned for the site, like terrazzo floors or concrete panels. This approach can extend budgets and streamline maintenance. In many cases, the general contractor can perform some of the fabrication or installation, with the artist or fabrication specialist needed only for specific components. Maintenance remains consistent with standard facility practices, and replacements can be managed using original shop drawings without requiring artist involvement.

An example of this approach is artist Brian Peters' *Ripples* in Aspinwall. Here, the artist was hired to design the formwork that would be used to manufacture the prefabricated sound wall panels along the reconstructed highway.



Brian Peters, *Ripples*  
- Route 28 Sound  
Barriers, 2023.  
Photo courtesy Brian  
Peters Studio.



## Applied Artworks

Applied artworks, such as murals, building wraps, or sculptural panels, are affixed to existing structures, offering flexibility for completed sites. Painted murals are perhaps the most abundant applied artworks in public space. Other examples include artist-designed building wraps and sculptural panels installed on building walls and surfaces. Whether temporary or long-term, applied artworks must align installation methods with the existing structures and the intended lifespan of the work.

For her collaboration with the Hill House Association, artist Njaimeh Njie created a series of temporary murals that were installed at sites throughout the neighborhood. The artist employed a variety of installation methods, depending on the existing structure where the work was being installed. At the historic August Wilson House, mural panels were installed on plywood mounted on furring strips that were mechanically anchored into the mortar joints, allowing for future removal and repair. At the Kaufmann Center, the artwork was printed on an adhesive vinyl wrap that was cut and installed on the existing concrete steps of the building.



Njaimeh Njie, *The Vanguard* (top) and *The Village* (bottom), part of *Homecoming: Hill District, USA*, 2016-19. Photo on top by Renee Rosensteel and photo on bottom by Shiftworks Community + Public Arts.



## Freestanding Artworks

Freestanding works, including sculptures and mosaics, can be commissioned post-construction, allowing for independent timelines and expanded community involvement. This approach can have advantages as it detaches the process of developing and implementing the artwork from the construction timeline. In doing this, there may be greater opportunity for community engagement in the process of both design and fabrication. If possible, installation methods should be accounted for as early as possible in the design and construction process. In some cases, it may be possible to anticipate installation needs and incorporate foundations or footings even before the artwork has been developed.

For the Plaza at Hazelwood Green, Shiftworks identified an opportunity to commission a freestanding artwork created by the Mobile Sculpture Workshop (MSW). MSW is a community-based program that teaches youth in Hazelwood and other Pittsburgh neighborhoods welding skills through artmaking. The resulting work, *Barn Swallow*, was a collaboration between the teaching artists of MSW and the welding apprentices.



Mobile Sculpture Workshop, *Barn Swallow*, 2020.  
Photo by Sean Carroll.



## Artist-Designed Building Parts or Site Furnishings

Artist-made building parts add character and beauty to function. These types of artworks can cost the same as catalogue purchases when an artist is given a budget and specifications from which to work. One way of funding these projects is to identify an item already included in the design, such as benches or landscaping, and hire an artist to deliver those services. The artist-designed item can have the same budget as the line item, or it can be enhanced with additional sources of funding. Items can be delivered to the job site and installed by either the contractor or the artist.

For the Plaza at Hazelwood Green, Shiftworks and Monmade worked with several artists to design custom site furnishings that reflected the unique stories of the community. Each furnishing element took the place of a piece that would have otherwise been purchased from an off-the-shelf manufacturer with no connection to Pittsburgh. Three artists – Carin Mincemoyer, John Peña, and Brian Peters – were each paid an artist fee to design custom elements. A local fabricator, Technique Architectural Products, was hired to prototype and ultimately fabricate the site furnishings for the same cost as the pieces that would have been purchased from a catalogue. The result is a space that reflects the unique identity of the community in which it is located.



Clockwise from top:  
Hazelwood Green site  
furnishings—bollards  
by John Peña, benches  
by Brian Peters Studio,  
tree grates by Carin  
Mincemoyer, 2020. Photos  
by Sean Carroll.



## Temporary Public Art Programs

Temporary public art programs are dynamic initiatives that bring short-term artist projects into public space to foster community engagement, spark dialogue, and activate spaces. Temporary public art can serve as a flexible and accessible way to introduce art into public space, allowing artists and communities to experiment with new ideas, address timely issues, and create memorable experiences without the permanence of traditional public art installations.

Temporary projects can include installations, performances, murals, or interactive works that respond to local histories, cultures, and challenges. Shiftworks values these initiatives for their ability to build trust, strengthen social connections, and inspire visions for long-term community development. They also provide opportunities for artists to engage directly with the public and explore new creative practices that can lead to unexpected outcomes.

For the Temporary Public Art and Placemaking initiative, artist Ann Tarantino collaborated with Millvale community members to develop and implement *Watermark*. This two-year installation engaged creative wayfinding elements to connect Millvale's business district to the newly-reclaimed riverfront. It incorporated elements of a painted mural, which visually connected the geographies, and a light-based installation in a pocket park at the heart of the business district.



Ann Tarantino,  
*Watermark*, 2017.  
Photo by Renee  
Rosensteel.



## Public Space Activations

Public space activations are opportunities to engage artists to present work that is not traditionally seen as “public art” in existing spaces – such as music, performance, literary events, dance workshops, and more. Public space activations are a vital means of transforming shared space into vibrant, inclusive environments that foster community engagement, cultural expression, and collective well-being. Such programs can serve as catalysts for interaction, creativity, and social cohesion. They also help participants see well-frequented and overlooked places in new light, and provide opportunities to rethink how public spaces might be utilized in the future.

Through initiatives such as the Pittsburgh Creative Corps, Shiftworks works with both organizations and artists to identify opportunities for public space activations that can foster these outcomes. Working with Riverlife, an area nonprofit that seeks to create, activate, and celebrate Pittsburgh's riverfronts, connecting people through exceptional places and experiences, the Creative Corps hosted two seasons of public space activations along the Allegheny Riverfront. These projects included artist Christiane Dolores' *Rumbón de la Calle*, featuring musicians of the African diaspora, and dance workshops with local groups Pittsburgh Tango Connection and Sanskruti School of Indian Dance. These engagements activated space that had been overlooked in recent years and helped foster conversations about their revitalization.



*Rumbón de la Calle*  
hosted by artist  
Christiane Delores,  
2022. Photo by  
Heather Mull.

## Artist Residencies in the Public Realm

There are many different models for artist residencies. The model that Shiftworks most frequently engages is an Artist Residency in the Public Realm. Through these programs, artists collaborate with communities, organizations, or government entities within public places that are accessible to all. The model emphasizes the artist's role not only as a creator, but also as a facilitator of dialogue, connection, and community-driven change. The process is open-ended and responsive to the unique needs and dynamics of the community, with the artist working alongside residents to envision and implement creative solutions to local challenges.



Arts Excursions Unlimited, Hazelwood Urban Hike, 2017. Photo courtesy of Arts Excursions Unlimited.

In the public realm residency, the focus is on fostering collaboration throughout the process, where the engagement between artist and community shapes the final outcomes. Shiftworks underscores that these residencies are not just about producing art but about building relationships, encouraging creative problem-solving, and enhancing community resilience through artistic practice.

One of Shiftworks' most successful residencies in the public realm was launched as a collaboration with the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – Hazelwood (CLP) in 2014. Through that collaboration, the community and CLP hired artist Edith Abeyta for a two-year residency. The artist and community worked together for one year to get to know each other through group discussions, one-on-one conversations, and different art-making activities. Together, they proposed an arts excursion program that would provide opportunities for community members to connect with arts and culture in the region. The success of this collaboration has been outstanding; now in its tenth year of operation, Arts Excursions Unlimited continues to support community members and participants and foster community-led programming.





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