



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Arts-based Community Development Investment for East St. Louis, Illinois Creative Exchange Lab one of 69 National Endowment for the Arts *Our Town* applicants selected nationwide**

East St. Louis, Illinois—National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Jane Chu announced 69 Our Town awards totaling almost \$5 million through the Our Town program's fifth year of funding. The Creative Exchange Lab (CEL) in partnership with Harris-Stowe State University's (HSSU) Center for Neighborhood Affairs has been recommended to receive \$50,000 to develop a revitalization plan with the residents of one East St. Louis neighborhood that will use culture and the arts as an economic and community catalyst. The NEA received 275 applications for Our Town this year and will make grants ranging from \$25,000 to \$200,000.

The Our Town grant program supports creative placemaking projects that help to transform communities into lively, beautiful, and resilient places with the arts at their core. Since the program's inception in 2011 and including these projects, the NEA will have awarded 325 Our Town grants totaling almost \$26 million in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

The East St. Louis Project will involve a team comprised of architects, planners, and urban designers associated with CEL and HSSU. The team will work with the City of East St. Louis to identify a partner community where existing cultural and creative assets and residents will drive the development of a neighborhood plan. A local artist and a high school student from the community will be essential members of the planning and design team.

"The Our Town grant is a tremendous opportunity for both CEL and the City of East St. Louis," said Jasmin Aber, the Executive Director of the Creative Exchange Lab. "Our mission is oriented around the premise that architecture, art, and design can not only improve the quality of life in distressed communities, it can literally be a catalyst for revitalization. East St. Louis has a unique and an amazing cultural heritage. The Our Town grant will take this asset and make it into a force for transformation. We are looking forward to working with the Center for Neighborhood Affairs (CAN), the City of East St. Louis, and the residents to make this redevelopment plan a model for the rest of the country."

For a **complete listing of projects** recommended for Our Town grant support, please visit the NEA web site at [arts.gov](http://arts.gov). Project descriptions, grants listed by state and by project type, and resources are available as well. The NEA's online resource, [www.ExploringOurTown](http://www.ExploringOurTown), features case studies of more than 70 Our Town projects along with lessons learned and other resources.

The Twitter hashtag is #NEAOurTown15

Creative Exchange lab is space that offers its members the resources needed to bring people, experts and ideas together. We are focused on employing the discipline of Architecture & Design for greater good and for social change where needed. CEL is an incubator for ideas and projects to help improve the fabric of our neighborhoods and our cities.