



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 16, 2009

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Artspace receives \$1 million Ford Foundation grant to create Predevelopment Fund

AWARD EARMARKED FOR PROJECTS THAT ADVANCE CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Artspace Projects has received a grant of \$1 million from the Ford Foundation to establish a national Predevelopment Fund for projects that advance cultural diversity and community engagement by creating affordable space for artists and arts organizations.

Artspace, the nation's leading nonprofit developer for the arts, will use the grant to underwrite predevelopment costs of projects that create or preserve affordable space for diverse artists and arts organizations, according to Artspace President L. Kelley Lindquist.

The grant will function as a "revolving fund," Lindquist said, in that dollars used to pay for a project's predevelopment expenses will be returned to the fund when the project's permanent financing becomes available. In this way, the same dollars can be used several times over the four-year life of the grant.

"This grant has the potential to leverage the creation of several new Artspace projects," said Artspace Board Chair Rebecca Yanisch. "But no less importantly, it has the potential to have a transformative effect on this organization by giving us the flexibility to accept projects we might otherwise have to pass up."

"We are excited to make a grant that will advance Artspace's innovative practice as the leading nonprofit developer of live/work space for artists," said Roberta Uno, the Foundation's Senior Program Officer for Arts and Culture. "This will enable Artspace to strengthen its collaborations with culturally diverse projects, diverse artists, and organizations. We look forward to the new types of projects and practices that Artspace will forge in response to America in the 21st century."

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Artspace has long been interested in working in culturally specific communities. In the mid-1990s, the Minneapolis-based nonprofit explored the potential of a live/work project designed to serve Native American artists in North Dakota but was unable to find funding. Artspace projects are in operation in culturally specific neighborhoods of Chicago and Duluth, and an Artspace mixed-use project designed to serve the artists of El Barrio, a Latino neighborhood of East Harlem, is currently in predevelopment in New York.

“We are very excited about partnering with community-based groups such as the tribal councils of the Dakotas or El Barrio’s Operation Fightback in East Harlem,” Lindquist said. “Moreover, we understand that working with such groups requires a different approach than, say, working with municipal governments in Buffalo or Saint Paul. What we learned in the mid-1990s is that the first order of business is to listen with an open mind.”

An Artspace live/work project designed to serve a culturally specific community might look and function quite differently from a “typical” Artspace project in an urban center, Lindquist said. “A Native American group, for example, might want our help in developing an historically accurate pow wow center; a native Hawaiian group might wish to have a residential facility that includes shared kitchens, living spaces, children’s play areas, and expanded community spaces.”

Artspace’s short-term goal is to utilize all grant proceeds within a year to move a project now in predevelopment to closing and the beginning of construction, at which time permanent financing revenue will be used to replenish the fund and leverage additional predevelopment dollars for other projects.

Established in 1979 as an advocate for the space needs of Minneapolis artists, Artspace made the leap from advocate to developer in the late 1980s. Since then, the scope of Artspace’s activities has grown dramatically. To date Artspace has completed 24 major projects in 12 states. Nineteen of the projects are live/work projects, in which each residential unit contains sufficient extra space for an artist’s studio. In aggregate, these projects contain 846 units. In the mid-1990s, Artspace broadened its mission to include non-residential projects, performing arts centers, arts districts, and a wide range of advisory services.

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