



**Envisioning Community Sustainability  
Through the Arts  
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October 17, 2012**



## Pratt Center: Mission and Goals

The Pratt Center for Community Development works for a more **just**, **equitable**, and **sustainable** city for all New Yorkers.



Community-Based  
Organizations



Small Businesses



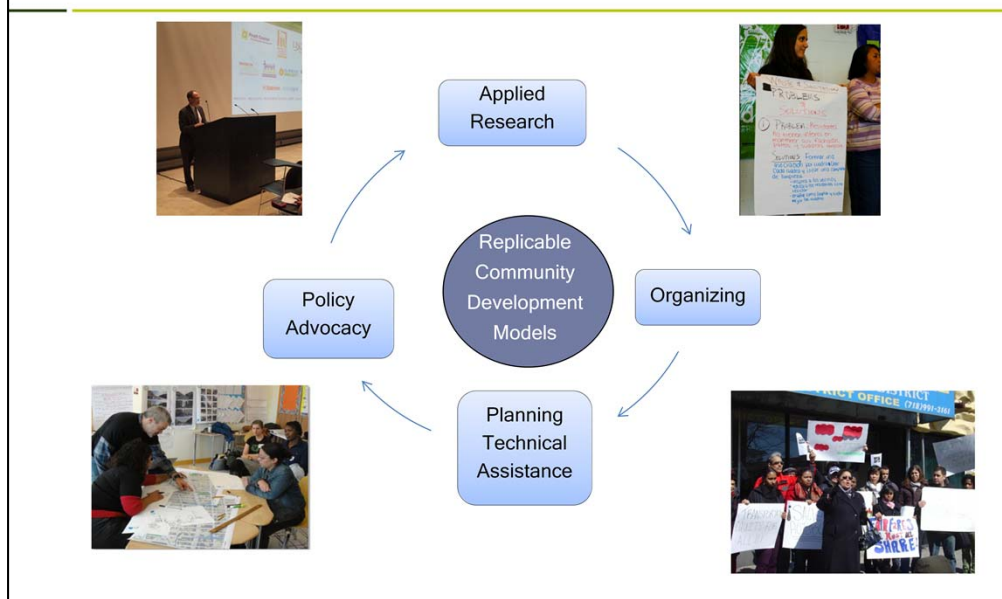
Local Government



Since its earliest beginnings, Pratt Center has developed innovative programs and solutions that address the root causes of economic and environmental problems in low- and moderate income communities.

The organization was launched 50 years ago at Pratt Institute, as NYC's low and moderate income neighborhoods were facing disinvestment and demolition by neglect. We created non-profit planning and architecture practice affiliated with Pratt's Grad School of Architecture and progressive City and Regional Planning program to help communities rebuild their housing and their communal lives. For the students, Pratt Center offered a service learning experience that no other school in the country was offering. Currently the Center is staffed by 12 professional planners, sustainability specialists, and economic development specialists and a number of policy experts who consult with us on specific issues and projects. We host 15 graduate Fellows every school year from the planning, architecture, environmental systems and arts programs at the Institute.

## Pratt Center: How We Work



We work toward this objective by undertaking Applied research, grassroots organizing, TA to CBOs, and policy advocacy, and most importantly our work is premised on the notion that change can only come about when all of these elements are working in tandem. You can't craft and advance good policy unless its attuned to the voices and needs on the ground; you can't know provide planning or architectural support to a community by conducting research divorced from that community's lived experience, so really all of these arrows could be flowing in multiple direction, cant emphasize that enough.

Pratt Center's planning and equitable development work has always been in done partnership with community-based organizations, and we strive to evolve and shift our programs in order to best to respond to the needs of low and moderate income communities and the CBOs that serve them.

While preservation and development of affordable housing continues to be a primary function of Community Development organizations, many of Pratt Center's traditional partners are turning to the problem of global climate change – looking both at the devastating effect in can have on their communities if left unaddressed, and at the job creation opportunity that addressing it presents.



### Holistic Sustainable Community Development

- Environmental assessment and brownfield remediation
- Green open space and stewardship
- Access to healthy & affordable food
- Green job training and local sustainable businesses
- Community sharing of best practices



- NY's low-income communities often carry the heaviest environmental burdens – they have the worst air quality, the fewest parks and street trees, and the highest level of environmentally-related illness. Where housing stock is old and in poor condition, residents experience the health impacts of poor indoor air quality and disproportionate financial burdens of high energy and water costs. Low-income residents stand to benefit significantly from improvements to energy efficiency and environmental quality – but they also confront higher barriers than their more affluent neighbors in planning and implementing those improvements.
- In 2009 we launched a new Sustainable Communities Initiative in response to these challenges and the struggles of our partners in low and moderate income communities to address the poor energy efficiency and costliness of 1-4 family buildings, the continued prevalence of land too polluted to be redeveloped, and the inaccessibility of health foods and green spaces.
- The urgency to transition to a low carbon, sustainable society has not really seeped into our daily life, yet change is required at virtually every level, from individual behaviors to government action.
- In programs such as Brooklyn Greens – which enables us to work holistically in three Brooklyn communities – we're committed to an ambitious strategy to shrink the communities' carbon footprint, create employment opportunities, and to make environmental sustainability a core value in local culture.
- Our sustainable community development programs involve a variety of planning activities and studies, and perhaps most important, we facilitate sharing between communities and CBOs to spread knowledge and best practices about making communities more ecologically and economically more sustainable.



Launched **Five Energy Retrofit Outreach Campaigns** in Low-income Communities

**740+ low-income homeowners** enrolled in 18 months

**9 New York City CBOs** supported through Statewide program Green Jobs Green NY

A signature component of this work is Retrofit NYC BxB, which is working at the house-by-house level to lower low/moderate income homeowners' energy use and costs, through building retrofits subsidized by state and utility incentive programs.

We began several years ago with a model block in Bedford Stuyvesant, expanded to five communities in four boroughs, and are now working in 9 neighborhoods citywide, with a strong and capable CBO partner in each community, to reach homeowners and tenants and assist them in retrofitting their buildings for energy efficiency.

This work has been generously supported by private philanthropies, the New York City Council, and New York's statewide energy research and development organization NYSERDA.

## Reciprocal Approaches to Sustainable Community Development

- Integrating **sustainable community planning** into local arts and culture
- Integrating **arts and culture** to support sustainable community planning



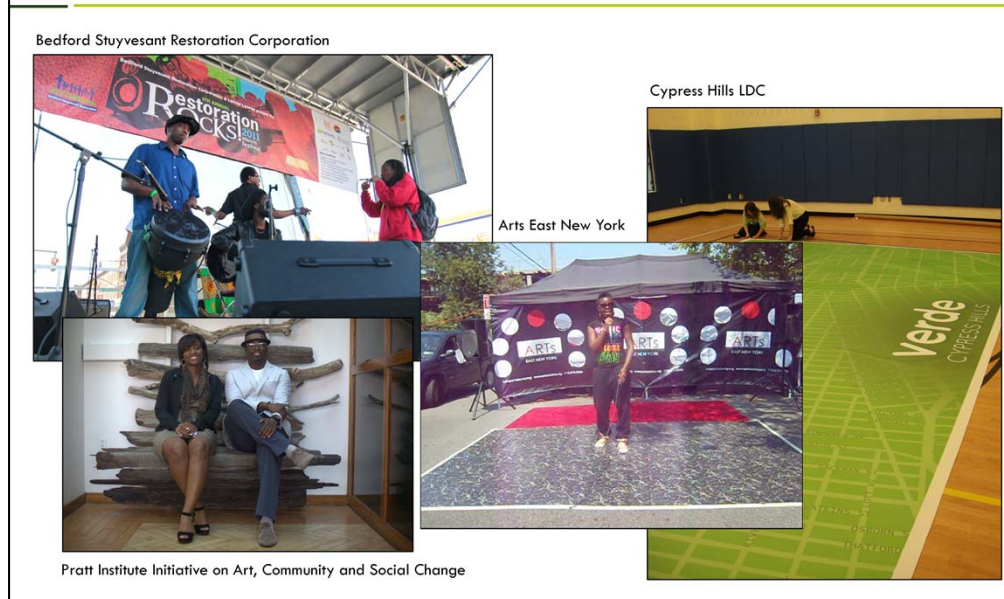
While some community residents are eager to lower their energy bills and take other actions to address local environmental issues, after launching this work we and our community partners recognized that we had not yet sparked the level of community dialogue and participation that we know we'll need if our ultimate sustainability goals are to be achieved. By nature, it's difficult to engage community residents in planning and sustainability efforts – they're busy raising their families, trying to make ends meet, and facing the challenges of living in under-resourced communities.

Early on in the development of our programs, we were aware that to be successful, we needed to adopt a new, innovative approach to reaching community residents not just on the neighborhood level, but on the individual level. We formed a hypothesis that by providing resources to integrate environmental themes into arts and culture practice, and by connecting the sustainability work of our community partners to artists and arts organizations, we could communicate issues and ideas - and inspire action - in a culturally organic way that a planning meeting or workshop could not. And we recognized this as a two way street – believing that using art and culture practice to offer an additional way for the communities to tell us their story would animate them, and us, as we sought to address environmental challenges.

In 2011, the generous support of the Rockefeller Foundation's Cultural Innovation Fund enabled us to explore this new approach, and we launched a program with a goal to integrate sustainable community planning into local arts and culture events, and to integrate arts and culture into sustainable community planning efforts.

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## The Key to this Work: Partnership



Some of the most creative strategies for change come about through the collaboration of partners from different disciplines, sectors, cultures, and generations. So for us, the key to this work is partnership – between Pratt Center and community-based organizations, and between Pratt Institute as an academic institution and communities that can benefit from its resources. Specifically we focused the arts integration approach in the communities of Bedford Stuyvesant and Cypress Hills/East New York Brooklyn, and we partnered with two of the city’s strongest and most capable CBO organizations - along with a young, innovative arts collective in East New York - to produce creative culture, arts, media and organizing strategies to engage neighborhood residents and artists in sustainable, environmental action. Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (BSRC)  
Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC) Arts East New York (Arts ENY)

We also had a goal to leveraging the greater resources of Pratt Institute for the communities’ benefit. As renowned art and design school, we felt Pratt could function as a more effective conduit for arts educators working in the community. Faculty members from diverse disciplines who are organized as the Institute’s Initiative on Arts, Culture and Social Change were eager to partner with us on this project. And to the planners at Pratt Center, we saw collaboration with this group as an opportunity to learn strategies for linking art to social change, from experienced teaching artists and academics at Pratt who are experts in this field.

## Integrating Sustainable Community Development into Local Arts and Culture

Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn



The first approach involved working with existing arts and culture initiatives and integrating the goals of sustainable community development with their ongoing activities.

In Bed Stuy we have had a great opportunity to do so. You may know Bed Stuy Restoration as the first CDC in the country, the model for community development that formed in the 1960s. In addition to developing affordable housing and providing social services to the Bed Stuy community – and more recently to emerging as a leader in community sustainability efforts of all kinds - Restoration also has a robust Arts and Culture program, with the Billy Holiday Theater, after school arts activities, and an exhibition space in the headquarters building Restoration Plaza.

Our collaboration sought to enhance those relationships to connect the arts to community sustainability issues, as well as to the very robust programming Restoration was running to address environmental concerns in the community. These things were not connected; through our partnership we sought to connect them.



# Amplify Action

Sustainability Through The Arts

## Green Guardian

By: Robert DeJesus



The Amplify Action exhibit transformed Restoration's headquarters building into a space where conversation about Sustainable Communities could happen.

- A call for submissions inspired more than 125 artists to submit proposals engaging a variety sustainability themes that allowed Restoration.
- Dozens of artists from the Bed-Stuy community, as well as from 12 states and 4 countries worldwide, explored topics such as Ecology, Equity, Environmental, Resource Conservation, Efficiency, Agriculture, Infrastructure, Environmental Justice, and Health through their works of art.
- The art exhibition and public programs demonstrated that the arts are a powerful tool for engaging communities in sustainable practices.
- Constructed of plastic 'Gain' detergent bottles the work refers to the Green movement and its concern with ecology conservation. In particular the work encourages dialogue about recycling and upcycling.

# Amplify Action

Sustainability Through The Arts

**Cold Storage**  
By: Adam Brent



The artists' contributions facilitated the Bed Stuy community (and beyond) in experiencing architecture, structures, art and objects emotionally. Their work enabled us to reframe the conversation about ecological harms and global climate change, to prompt an active dialogue about what "the sustainable community" is and should be.

# Amplify Action

Sustainability Through The Arts

## In-Tree-Net

By: Kristen and Marek Wilde



Many of the works engaged themes of environmental alienation and mechanisms of culture, and explored the dilemma between systems of Nature and artificial structures, prompting viewers to consider the influence of architecture and art on the understanding of Nature.

During the 4 month run of the exhibit, Restoration and Pratt co-hosted public forums, gallery tours for children and adults, and teacher trainings – all focused on exploring the connections between art and the sustainable community.

# Restoration Rocks

Live Healthy, Live Well, Live Green



Restoration Rocks was a second large-scale effort to connect sustainability themes to Bed Stuy Restoration's ongoing arts programming and to bring about a broad public dialogue about environmental action and creating the sustainable community.

Restoration Rocks is an extremely popular annual street festival and concert.

- Last year, Pratt and Restoration re-branded the festival with the theme "Live Healthy, Live Well, Live Green!" and brought conversation and vendors to engage the Central Brooklyn community in sustainable living and celebrating the pride of Bedstuy!

# Restoration Rocks

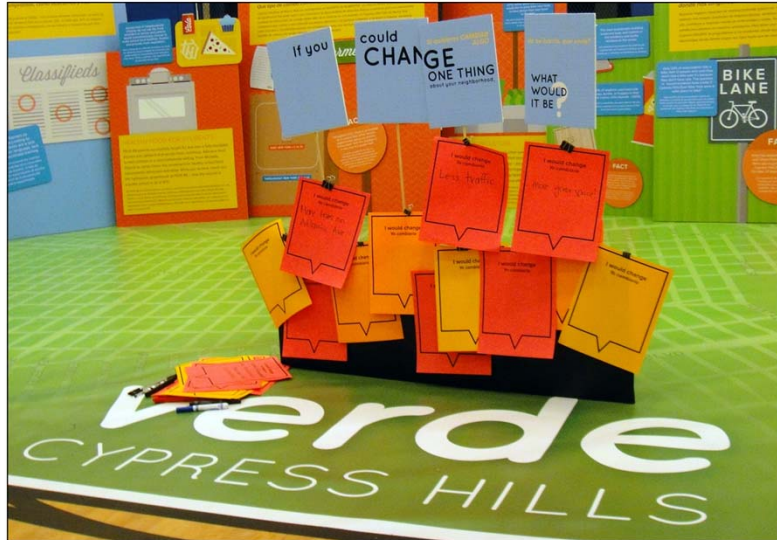
Live Healthy, Live Well, Live Green



- The concert itself, featuring Mos Def, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, and other local musical artists, was a huge draw. In between acts a variety of local and national celebrities used the stage to talk about environmental issues such as energy consumption and access to healthy foods.
- Healthy food vendors, local farms and agricultural institutions, green businesses covered Fulton Street in the “Live Green” Street Fair,
- A variety of non-profit conservation and health organizations took part, including our outreachers for Retrofit Block by Block.

## Integrating Arts and Culture to Support Sustainable Community Development

Cypress Hills/East New York, Brooklyn



Our second approach for bringing arts and culture to bear on issues of community sustainability issues was to use arts as a communications tool within the context of ongoing community planning work, to involve the arts from the inception of program design and development, and to create ongoing relationships that expand the understanding and options for all stakeholders devoted to addressing global climate change within their communities.

In Cypress Hills/East New York Brooklyn, we had the opportunity to do this. CHLDC is a 35 year old powerhouse community development organization. Their multi-year initiative, called Verde, is focused on community transformation at every level, from individual energy and food consumption behaviors to the redevelopment of vacant polluted land. Pratt Center's role is to provide technical assistance in the form of economic market studies, land analysis, and the design of public workshops to engage the community in this critical dialogue.

# Energy Block Parties

Dynamic Cultural Activities to Bring People Together

Energy Block Parties transformed public streets and a church parking lot into a spaces that engaged Cypress Hills residents in sustainable practices.



 **Pratt Center**  
for Community Development

- Cypress Hills had a robust schedule of outreach events planned – tree giveaways, planning workshops, and energy retrofit education sessions. Through collaboration with the young, dynamic group Arts East New York – which focuses on engaging youth in the arts in East New York’s housing projects – the workaday planning and outreach sessions were truly transformed.

# Energy Block Parties

Dynamic Cultural Activities to Bring People Together



- Arts activities drew people to the tree giveaways and street outreach events, creating lively public gathering spaces where Cypress Hills and Pratt conducted energy efficiency educational sessions; as well as conversations about healthy eating, and tree and garden stewardship.
- Participants were engaged and entertained with live music and in creating a community mural where residents expressed their hopes for their neighborhood.
- Children learned about the importance of being environmentally conscious and the benefits of recycling, gardening, and eating healthy.



# Verde Summit

## Creative Exploration of the Sustainable Community

Using the arts to explore what makes a neighborhood environmentally and culturally sustainable.



- Cypress Hills' 2-day community planning event, The Verde Summit, gave us the opportunity to foster new creative partnerships that build the capacity of our CBO partners by enhancing their ability to engage their community.
- We introduced a new community engagement method that none of us had used before - the City as Play approach invented and developed by James Rojas, a planner and artist from Los Angeles. James' teaching and training of Pratt and Cypress Hills planning staffs gave us a whole new material language and creative vernacular to work in.
- Using legos, pipe cleaners and markers we led community residents to "vision" the sustainable community. Unlike what professionals do, this worked well with community members who are intimidated by the tools of planning and architecture.
- For the kids and adults who participated, the method allowed them to visually talk to us about their hopes and dreams for improving their community.
- For the professional planners among us, it challenged the paradigm of how to visually plan a community. Instead of computer generated maps this was abstracted through a hands-on exercise.
- The City as Plan method gave community members a new, creative way of seeing and conceiving of their world – and despite the fact that there was no canvas and paint, people were making art.
- This method also transformed US as a community planning tech assistants – instead of giving out maps and markers (which community folks NEVER want to use) we poured out legos and odd bits and bobs – and people were eager to participate.

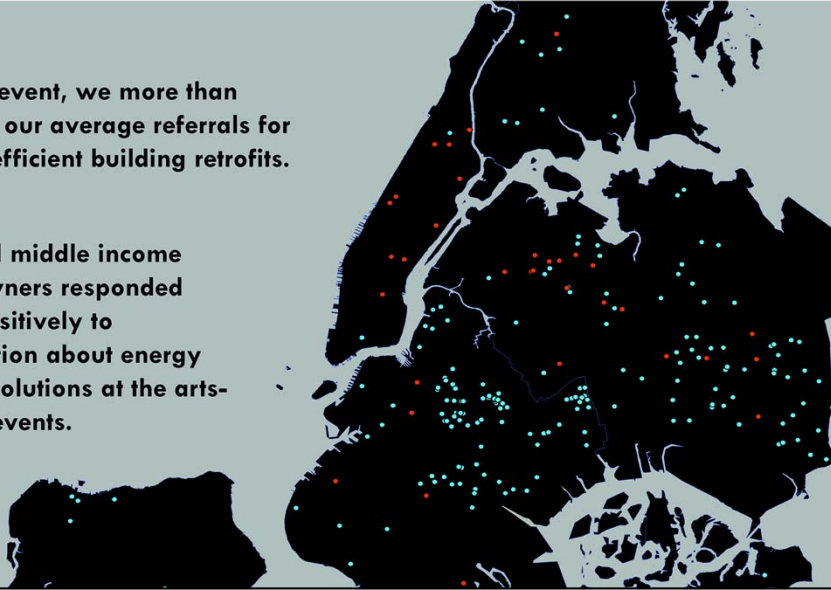
## Impacts and Outcomes



- So our work connecting the arts to community development – and vice versa – has had some very significant impacts.
- As the work was unfolding it was readily apparent that leveraging the arts in addressing global climate change was allowing us to reach a much larger and broader constituency than our planning workshops had ever reached before. We engaged the participation and interest of **over 6,500 people**.
- In addition there were some very positive quantifiable results...

## Strengthening Energy Retrofit Programs

- At each event, we more than **TRIPLED** our average referrals for energy efficient building retrofits.
- Low and middle income homeowners responded more positively to information about energy saving solutions at the arts-related events.



- Because of our much more vast reach, we were able to strengthen our energy retrofit work providing low and middle income homeowners with cost effective energy saving solutions.

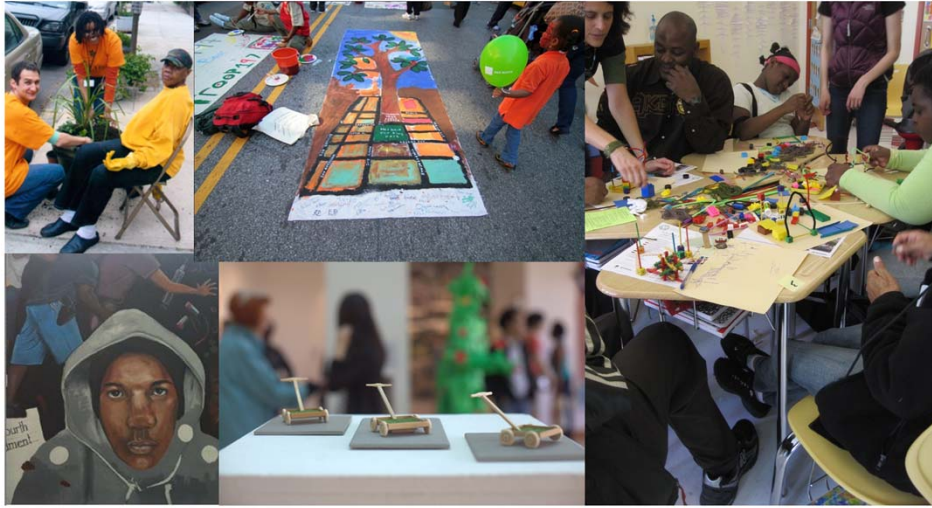
## Strengthening Sustainable Community Development Efforts



- Over 220 residential retrofits completed
- 1,000 trees planted with several stewardship trainings
- Community energy efficiency company with 6 local jobs created
- Farmers' market feasibility study completed
- Community garden workshops with over 200 participants
- New partnerships: BIDs, Fresh Bodegas, Green Thumb, NYRP, contractors
- Leveraged over \$1.5 million for Community Development projects

- Our enhanced ability to reach individuals with the important message of sustainability greatly assisted our efforts in a variety of program areas where we were working with the community to improve conditions in some way.
- In addition, the success of these efforts assisted our community partners in securing over \$1.5 million in additional funds for community development projects in their communities. These funds are being used to implement significant community-based initiatives and projects to address global climate change.

## New Strategies for Pratt's Community Development Work



- For Pratt there were very big impacts as well – the partnerships we entered into, and the new methods and approaches we adopted, pushed our thinking and practice to new imaginative and transformative places. It impacted our work, and because so many of our planning staff are also teachers, it will have a multiplier effect into the future.
- The arts approach helped us reach the impacts we have long worked at, by allowing us to normalize sustainable values and behaviors. The arts created an active dialogue, as well as momentum and excitement around sustainable practices.
- The work validated something we have always believed: that engaging the broader community is essential to community transformation. But further, it showed as a new way to achieve that broad level of engagement.
- Community involvement and engagement translated into concrete efforts to generate sustainable communities through energy retrofits, tree plantings, vacant lot transformation, etc.

We feel it's an approach that other organizations can take as well.



**Thank you!**

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