INSPIRED LEADERS
SHAPING CITIES

CO-CREATING WITH COMMUNITY

SUMMARY

The Blocks Arts District / Downtown SLC Presents / Downtown Alliance SLC

CITY:	Salt Lake City
STATE/PROVINCE:	Utah
COUNTRY:	U.S.
ORGANIZATION BUDGET:	$500,001 - $1,000,000
PROJECT COST:	$140,000
START DATE:	2/1/24
END DATE:	2/1/25

DESCRIPTION

Since its inception in 2016, The Blocks Arts District has concentrated on amplifying arts and culture through dynamic and innovative approaches. Its mission centers on fostering collaboration among established and emerging arts organizations, as well as with businesses and government entities. Through the Co-Create program, the district has been instrumental in transforming Salt Lake into a premier arts and culture hub. In just one year, it has expanded its reach and established over 20 new partnerships, with a focus on nurturing growth for both individual artists and organizations. Co-Create encourages collaborative efforts to produce unique art installations, performances and projects within The Blocks. By bringing artistic expression to underutilized spaces such as parking garages, vacant storefronts and plazas via temporary installations and activations, the district has successfully energized the area. These endeavors have led to increased attendance, cultivated diverse audiences and connected communities across the city, county and state. Co-Create projects, ranging in budget from $5,000 to $30,000, provide support for both individuals and organizations. Notable initiatives have included the reimagining of pianos, where six artists painted and deconstructed them for display on the plaza of the symphony and opera hall, an art-infused skateboarding event, an all-youth music festival and a public art installation highlighting water conservation. These ongoing initiatives continue to transform The Blocks into a vibrant and thriving arts district.

INNOVATION

The team has emphasized that Co-Create is not merely a grant but rather a collaborative process, where success hinges on the partnership between their team and the artists, even though funding is provided. By fostering new and unique activations in downtown Salt Lake City and collaborating with diverse organizations, they have achieved significant success. Recognizing that creativity should primarily reside with the artists, not solely within their two-person team, Co-Create thrives on this partnership, where shared skills and resources cultivate innovative and truly distinctive projects. Their hope is that this model will inspire other cities to implement similar programs, encouraging creatives to bring their visions to life. They have observed that their downtown community embraces novel ideas and unprecedented events, which is precisely what Co-Create facilitates by providing a platform and opportunity for those with ambitious ideas to unleash their talent with the support of their team, connecting them with spaces, businesses, stakeholders and community members. For the 2025/2026 season, Co-Create applications closed with 34 submissions, doubling the number received in the previous year.

OUTCOME

The inaugural Co-Create project, Key Changes, showcased six local artists who reimagined and reconstructed donated pianos into unique artworks, which were displayed on the Abravanel Hall Plaza from May to October 2024. The unveiling event on May 31st attracted over 200 attendees, and subsequent monthly piano concerts held on the plaza drew a consistent audience. By transforming a previously underutilized space into a public art installation, Key Changes became a vibrant and accessible cultural

experience. The Bachauer Piano Foundation, the project's partner, reported increased ticket sales for their International Artists Competition in June, attributing this success to the enhanced visibility generated by the installation. A similar success was achieved with Pushing Ahead, a project focused on empowering youth through skateboarding. Co-Create provided local artists with a platform to display their artwork on a skateboarding ramp, activating a vacant and underused location at American Towers Plaza, an area surrounded by residential buildings. The event garnered the largest turnout for Pushing Ahead, with 400 attendees, proving to be a significant draw for families and children to downtown Salt Lake City. Both Key Changes and Pushing Ahead effectively demonstrated the power of reimagining public spaces and fostering collaboration to engage the community. By offering creative, free and accessible experiences, Co-Create has successfully activated urban spaces, generated excitement and provided valuable support to local artists and organizations.

EXECUTION

Co-Create applications are accepted annually from November 1st to January 31st. Last year, the program awarded funding to five organizations for collaborative and unique projects, each following its own specific timeline. Initial meetings focus on establishing key elements such as budget, timeline and roles to ensure a successful collaboration for all participants. Upon award, the program facilitates 1:1 meetings with the artist or organization to finalize the timeline and budget and formalize a contract. Throughout the project lifecycle, communication is continuous, utilizing weekly emails and bi-weekly (or more frequent) video or in-person meetings to maintain progress. This ensures adherence to deadlines and keeps the project on schedule for a successful event, unveiling or performance. A notable example is the SLAM Music Festival, an all-youth event for performers under 21, for which $30,000 was awarded to the Salt Lake Academy of Music for its production. During the initial meeting, a budget discrepancy was identified. Through collaborative problem-solving, multiple solutions were devised, including strategic partnerships and utilizing the Salt Lake City Downtown Farmers Market as the venue. This reallocation of resources away from venue costs allowed for increased artist compensation and access to an existing audience, resulting in a mutually beneficial outcome. Ultimately, Co-Create is centered on fostering strong partnerships from inception to completion. Through close collaboration, the program ensures the success of each project, delivering high-quality experience for both the participants and the wider community.

REPRESENTATION

Co-Create thrives on community involvement, actively encouraging anyone with a unique idea to apply, ensuring the program remains inclusive and equitable, with diversity as a paramount priority. Last year witnessed a significant increase in youth attendance, with more children than ever participating in all events. In partnership with Fice Gallery, they hosted an event called Fusion, collaborating with Vectra Management Group, a real estate investment, development and management company that owns a downtown Salt Lake parking garage. This collaboration facilitated a music, art and chess fusion event held on the parking garage's top level. By featuring Ric Wilson, a Chicago native, they highlighted the creativity of diverse artists both nationally and locally, underscoring that downtown Salt Lake City and its Arts District are for everyone. The team observed the impactful community engagement achieved by relocating various local art organizations from their traditional buildings or theaters to unconventional spaces like a parking garage rooftop or a public plaza. This community-driven approach enabled them to attract an audience of at least 300 people per event, with one project drawing nearly 500 attendees.

REPLICATION

In its inaugural year, Co-Create achieved significant success by awarding $140,000 to local artists and organizations, introducing fresh and exciting ideas to downtown Salt Lake City. The partnerships established through Co-Create have unlocked new avenues for growth and creativity, infusing Salt Lake City with vibrant artistic energy, with projects receiving recognition across various news outlets. Entering its second year, the program is thrilled to witness a doubling of applications, anticipating the opportunity to support even more local creators with unique visions. Dedicated to broad community outreach and encouraging universal participation, the ultimate success of Co-Create lies in collaboration and strong partnerships. A distinctive feature of Co-Create is its flexible funding approach; despite allocating $90,000 in its second year, its impact on the city is already evident. With a lean team of two, the program has effectively driven numerous activations throughout Salt Lake City through the power of creativity and collaboration. This model's adaptability makes it suitable for cities of all sizes, large or small organizations, varying budgets and diverse target audiences, enabling the implementation of similar projects that ignite creativity, foster art installations, stage compelling performances and create engaging events. Co-Create has proven to be a dynamic catalyst for bringing innovative ideas to fruition and strengthening community connections.

SLAM MUSIC FESTIVAL













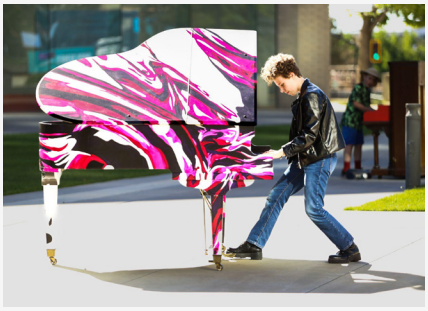




KEY CHANGES

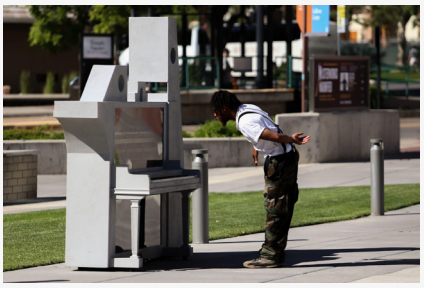


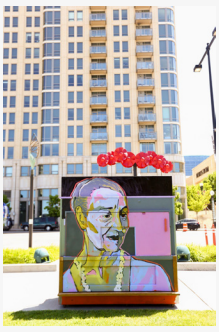










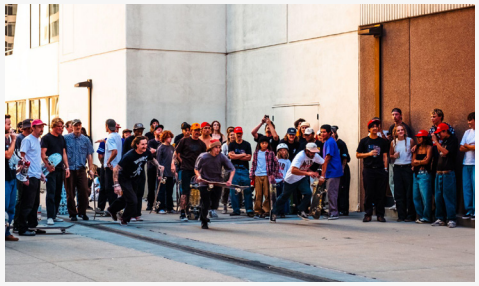


KEY CHANGES - VIDEO



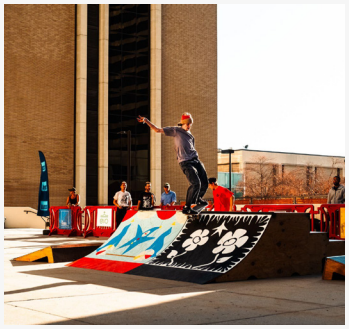
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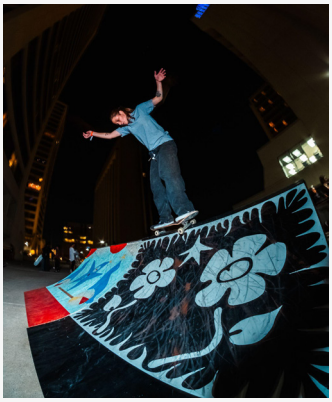




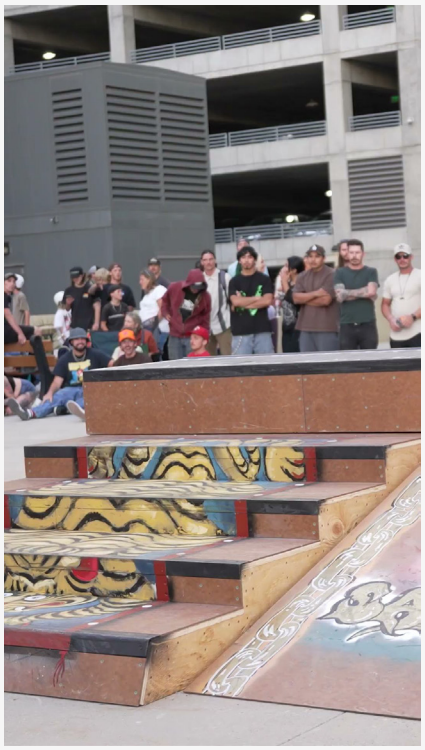








BEEHIVE BATTLE



VIDEO

FUSION

