

Best Practices for Entering New Communities

Maine Arts Commission Teaching Artist Training

Annie's group:

- Join in the community activities.
- Be humbled by the experience of participants.
- Deeply listening and not making assumptions about the folks we are serving.
- We are all here all to learn from each other.
- Research the organization. What kind of programming is already being done there?
Find out about the organization before going in.
- Utilizing connections to the organizations.
- Volunteer first.
- Be willing to pivot and be flexible. Sometimes it is good to scrap and start over.
- Have your elevator pitch ready - being able to talk about the work you do.
- Own your artistry.
- Talk about why learning and making in the arts is important.
- Adapting artforms.
- Designing materials to be accessible for success at all.
- Create an MOU.
- Learning how to pace the class - not to go too fast.
- Valuing your time and planning.
- Understanding the needs of your students.
- Be willing to stop and start again.

Lynda's group:

- Take time to tour physical buildings to understand layout, meet staff from those in the kitchen who fix food to those you sign the checks, and meet participants.
- Observe and learn about the routines in the culture and consider how you will fit into those routines.
- Meet staff and admin - invite them to visit the class, participate in the class as artists and offer timely invitations to the culminating event.
- Know the janitor and receptionist as they will know the how, where, when.
- Make a place for yourself as a teaching artist in the community through communication with them – staff, admin, participants. Social media, email, installations of artwork, etc.
- See yourself as part of the community.

- Investigate, research and understand the culture of the community – what language is spoken, what is life like in this community, where do people come from, who are they, etc? What are their interests, needs, insights? The community includes the class participants but also staff and administrators.
- Speak the language of the participants.
- Be positive, friendly, supportive, caring, and listen. Really listen.
- Observe interactions in the community and ask respectful questions that will help you understand the culture.
- Ask for support when needed.
- Have a clarity of purpose and be clear about this purpose.
- Don't be shy as you enter a new community. Enthusiasm, research, spend time delving into who the community members are and what their interests and needs are to understand how you fit those needs.
- Be visible. Find a way to make the work you are doing part of the larger picture.
- Keep lines of communication open with the staff, administrators and of course the participants.
- As the teaching artist we are also learners.

Antonia's group:

- Find common ground,
- Learn names and learn about other's interests,
- Share something about yourself.
- Check for understanding.
- Make sure work is challenging enough for participants.
- Don't make assumptions. Get information through proper channels and plan accordingly.
- Create space for all voices to be heard; be able to pull in reticent ones and help tone down dominant voices.
- Engage in conversation; be curious.
- Keep expectations in check; Have a plan B.
- Stay flexible.
- Think about continuity and repetition.

Sarah's group:

- Seek organizations, communities with shared interests or programs you're curious about.
- Making sure the art form is accessible for the most diverse assortment of people OR adapting the art form to address accessibility needs.

- Listening and watching *first*, getting sense of organizational/community culture, not necessarily proposing new ideas right off the bat.
- Make sure what you're offering is a good fit for the community—assessing community needs/wants.
- Be aware of where you are and the importance of modeling attention and patience within the first five minutes.
- Make a point to meet staff, administrators.
- Humility.
- Inviting a collaborative atmosphere.
- Demonstrate vulnerability.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes.
- Humor!

Julie's group:

- Everyone experiences imposter syndrome, no matter your level or experience. Remind yourself you do belong, you have something to give.
- Consciously make connections early on/introduce yourself, this pays back dividends.
- Make sure everyone is heard.
- Invite others to share, then be ready to receive what comes back.
- Dare to be the first person on the dance floor!
- In a school for instance, go straight to the custodian and art teacher. Those partnerships are critical to include everyone in the space.
- Be aware/sensitive of unwritten rules. Such as in an assisted living community, is it OK to approach certain folks etc? There may be a lot to learn about the hierarchy of power. Every site is different.
- Be friendly with people signing you in.
- Be interested in who everyone is.
- There is a lot of relationship-building to do, and it takes time.
- There can also be a lot of change-over of staff, so you may have to make new connections.
- You never know when you walk into a new community, who are going to be the folks you're going to be relying on. So be unilateral and make connections with everyone! I.e. cleaning staff, reception staff, etc.
- Reach out and find the like-minded people, wherever they may be in the community. Connect with folks through shared interests; Thi is the best way to connect.
- Be the one to break the ice.
- Allow yourself to be vulnerable.

- Ask: what would you like? How can I be of service to you? What would success look like for you?
- Include humor!
- Lots of communication - do it in whatever mode is best for the partner - text, email, phone, etc. Do regular check ins.