

CATALYZING NEWPORT

(2014 - 2017)

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Catalyzing Newport, a four-year initiative facilitated by the Humanities Council and supported by the van Beuren Charitable Foundation, had four major goals:

1. Providing meaningful access to Newport and Rhode Island history for broader audiences
2. Innovating by leveraging the cultural sector's assets, reputation, and partnerships toward a greater shared community vision
3. Establishing a global model for cultural and historical organizations to contribute to new economies locally, nationally, and internationally and
4. Strengthening the ability of Newport's cultural sector to diversify its revenue streams and attract greater resources



Catalyzing Newport was governed by a Steering Committee of local and statewide humanities organizations facilitated by the Humanities Council. Between 2014-2017, 11 catalysts traveled to Newport to engage with the Steering Community and a variety of community members and organizations. The three-five day residencies included public programs and intensive work with Local Action Teams to identify challenges and pilot creative approaches. More about Catalyst's visits can be found on the project website: catalyzingnewport.org. Catalyzing Newport aspired to and often succeeded in placing renowned historical organizations, leaders, and cultural assets at the forefront of community conversations about Newport's development and prosperity.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The final report on Catalyzing Newport to the van Beuren Charitable Foundation included an analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) and a network evaluation. Steering Committee members were interviewed and surveys of Local Action Team members were distributed. A developmental evaluation midway through the project was conducted by John Shibley Consulting to “stimulate a system to learn.” The report summarized the SWOT analysis and provided “reflections on Catalyzing Newport as an innovation prototype.”

- 11 nationally known catalysts visited Newport.
- 100 Local Action Team members participated.
- 2,000 members of the public were engaged.
- 8 seed projects were carried out, including 36 Hours in Newport, which launched after the final report was submitted.
- 2 Op Eds were published in the Providence Journal.
- Several front-page articles were published in the Newport Daily News.



PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Funder: financial resources, guidance, participation

- van Beuren Charitable Foundation

Steering Committee Members: planning, tours, participation, seed projects

- International Tennis Hall Of Fame
- Newport Art Museum
- Newport Historical Society
- Newport Restoration Foundation
- Preservation Society Of Newport County
- Redwood Library & Athenaeum
- Rhode Island Historical Society
- Salve Regina University

Local Action Teams: workshops with visiting scholars, design and implementation of seed projects

- Brown University
- Roger Williams University
- Rhode Island School of Design
- City of Newport Office of Civic Innovation
- Fab Newport
- Women's Resource Center and Health Equity Zone
- Sankofa Community Connections
- Rogers High School
- Florence Gray Community Center



OUTREACH

- The website catalyzingnewport.org communicated the purpose of the project and provided information about the catalyst visits.
- Posters and postcards advertised seed grant projects.
- Social media promoted lectures and seed grant projects.
- Several events and presentations engaged board members of the Council, Steering Committee, and Funder.
- The project and events attracted news coverage by Newport dailies.
- Council staff and one of the catalysts presented on the project, including at the 2016 National Humanities Conference and Organization of American Historians Conference.



SUSTAINABILITY

Catalyzing Newport aimed to tackle persistent challenges for history, heritage, preservation, and cultural organizations: how to enhance organizational stability and growth, connect resources and assets, develop audiences, and innovate. Catalyzing Newport convened seven major organizations to engage these questions and brought national experts to Newport to work with local teams on recognized community challenges and supported seed projects that contributed to civic vitality and sparked innovation. As the initiative evolved, community development through a humanities-based facilitation process emerged as a key outcome, and the project's network has widened to include schools, community centers, civic planning, and environmental efforts. As placemaking and cultural equity tied to infrastructure planning become central components of national funding trends and resource development, Catalyzing Newport is a strong model for connecting humanities practice to community development and to establishing the basis for greater sustainability among humanities organizations.

The Humanities Council will continue to develop this model and to work with the network in Newport.

