

PROJECT OVERVIEW

MARK RODRIGUEZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CHANGING WORLDS

AMBITIOUS IN ITS BREADTH and bold in its objectives, Ten Thousand Ripples (TTR) is rooted in the belief that art is for people, that community art should contribute to daily life, and that the arts have the power to activate civic engagement, ignite creative ambitions, and foster safe forums for residents to talk. These initial beliefs led artists, arts- and community-based organizations, and leaders from across Chicago to envision, support, and advance TTR in their studios, organizations, neighborhoods, and lives. The project brought about community conversations that cultivated new partnerships and increased access to the arts, while establishing a basis for mutual understanding.

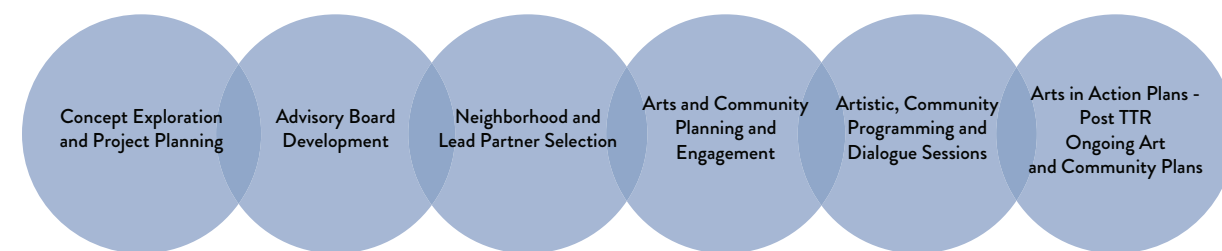
ARTISTIC INSPIRATIONS

The idea for TTR was formed over five years ago, when artist Indira Johnson exhibited an installation of emerging Buddha sculptures at the Chicago Cultural Center. She noticed visitors contemplating the sculptures—many even told her that they felt a sense of peace. For Johnson, who had used the emerging Buddha image for over a decade as a symbol of peace and self-realization, this response resonated. She wondered what reaction the sculptures would provoke if they were located in public spaces, like storefronts or abandoned lots. This thought led to the development of TTR.

FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

To bring this idea to life, we deployed a six-step approach to support the development, engagement, and implementation of the project in diverse communities across Chicago. The diagram below summarizes the various project components that occurred across all communities. While one of the key strengths of the project is its ability to take on a different shape based on the unique needs and interests of each of the neighborhood partners, each community followed the same framework.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK



THE JOURNEY

In 2010, a leading grant from the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation helped seed the project's development and launch a planning process to explore how this inspiring sculpture could impact public spaces and communities. While the image of the Buddha is a symbol of peace for Johnson, it can be a surprising and sometimes provocative one for others, especially when seen on city streets. Early public engagement was of the utmost importance. The planning process began with Johnson inviting leaders from arts, social service, community, and educational institutions to form an Advisory Council to help shape the TTR project. In 2011, Changing Worlds partnered with Johnson to serve as the project's lead agency. Through planning retreats, Changing Worlds and its partners developed goals and objectives for the project, established a framework for community engagement, and adopted a set of desired outcomes and elements across partnering communities. From the onset, a central goal of the initiative was to bring public art to neighborhoods across the city. To accomplish this goal, we sought out strong community-based organizations to partner with as the lead agency in each community. As the project began to move forward, nine Chicago-area neighborhoods stepped up to take part, from South Chicago and North Lawndale on the South Side to Evanston Township and Rogers Park on Chicago's northernmost border.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND TRANSFORMATIONS

As community partnerships were solidified, TTR transitioned from centralized planning to community-based planning and engagement. Planning included research and conversations with both secular and faith-based leaders. This process took on different shapes per community, but across the board it included community forums, installation site recommendations, artistic programming ideas, resource leveraging, and implementation timelines. Over the period of three to four months, hundreds of residents were engaged in brainstorming sessions, community forums, and community arts planning. The process transformed everyday citizens into ambassadors of peace, arts, and culture. Each neighborhood received ten sculptures, which they installed in sites chosen by their residents. From the picturesque Loyola Dunes on the North Side to urban gardens and abandoned lots on the South and West Sides of Chicago, the installations were as varied as the communities we served. Despite these differences, all communities used the image as a creative catalyst to bring people together to engage in conversations about contemporary social issues, promote peace, ignite new ideas for artistic and community programming, and coalesce entities that would not have otherwise come together. A project that started as the idea of one visionary artist has shaped the landscape of numerous communities, created new artistic programming for thousands of residents, reached more than 300,000 visitors from around the world on social media, and sparked a lasting ripple effect. The TTR project highlights the power of the arts to transform public spaces, communities, and lives.