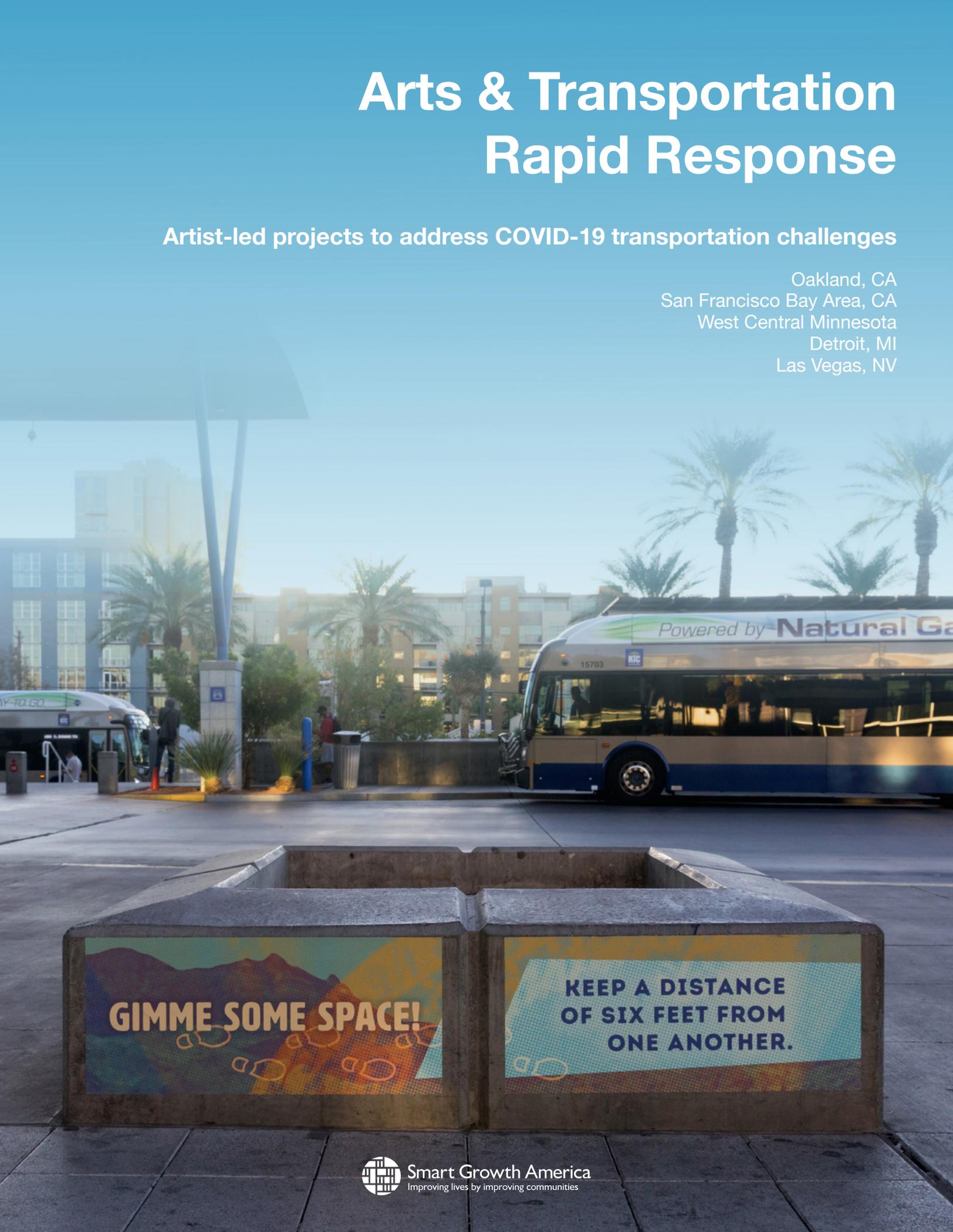


# Arts & Transportation Rapid Response

Artist-led projects to address COVID-19 transportation challenges

Oakland, CA  
San Francisco Bay Area, CA  
West Central Minnesota  
Detroit, MI  
Las Vegas, NV



**GIMME SOME SPACE!**

**KEEP A DISTANCE  
OF SIX FEET FROM  
ONE ANOTHER.**



Smart Growth America  
Improving lives by improving communities

## Acknowledgements

The Arts & Transportation Rapid Response, an initiative of Smart Growth America's Arts and Culture program, would not have been possible without the artists, agency staff, and photographers' hard work, flexibility, and commitment to creating culturally specific and community relevant projects under a short timeline.

We would also like to thank Jen Krava at Forecast Public Art for her assistance in matching artists with the selected agencies, and the invaluable expertise she provided throughout the project. Forecast Public Art, based in St Paul, Minnesota, is a national nonprofit organization that activates, inspires, and advocates for public art that advances justice, health, and human dignity.

This project was completed under the leadership and guidance of Ben Stone, Director of Arts & Culture. The primary author of these case studies was Mae Hanzlik, Program Manager at Smart Growth America. Ben Stone and Stephen Lee Davis, Communications Director at Smart Growth America, edited these case studies. These case studies were published in November 2020.

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*Cover photo of the project in Las Vegas by Mikayla Whitmore.*

## Project teams

### Oakland, CA

- Jonathan Brumfield, Artist
- Noel Pond-Danchik, Oakland Department of Transportation
- Warren Logan, Oakland Office of the Mayor
- Jason Patton, Oakland Department of Transportation

### San Francisco Bay Area, CA

- Tosha Stimage, Artist
- Jennifer Easton, Bay Area Rapid Transit
- Linton Johnson, Bay Area Rapid Transit
- Alicia Trost, Bay Area Rapid Transit

### West Central Minnesota

- Naomi RaMona Schliesman, Artist
- Wayne Hurley, West Central Initiative
- Jill Amundson, West Central Initiative

### Detroit, MI

- Ndubisi Okoye, Artist
- Samuel Krassenstein, City of Detroit
- Shelby Howard, Detroit Planning and Development Department
- Erika Linenfelser, Detroit Department of Public Works
- Katherine Braggs, Lasky Recreation Center

### Las Vegas, NV

- Ashley Hairston Doughty, Artist
- Mark Salinas, Public Art Consultant
- David Swallow, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada
- Brij Gulati, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada
- Catherine Lu, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada
- Wycliffe Mudambi, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada

## Introduction

In partnership with Forecast Public Art and with funding from the Kresge Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, Smart Growth America (SGA) launched the Arts & Transportation Rapid Response initiative during the summer of 2020 in the middle of the world's worst pandemic in more than a generation. The project sought to partner transportation agencies with artists to develop creative solutions to COVID-related transportation challenges, with the hypothesis that artists' creative practices would enhance agencies' responses to quickly shifting new demands related to mask wearing, social distancing, and communicating rapidly changing rules and regulations.

After issuing an open call for proposals, SGA received an unprecedented number of applications—almost 200—and selected five agencies to include in the initiative. Each of the selected projects committed to addressing COVID-related transportation challenges and systemic inequities and to do so in unique, creative ways, with the support of local artists. These agencies were:

- **Oakland Department of Transportation (Oakland, CA)**
- **San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit—BART (San Francisco Bay Area, CA)**
- **West Central Initiative (West Central Minnesota)**
- **City of Detroit (Detroit, MI)**
- **Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (Las Vegas, NV)**

SGA and Forecast curated five artists to partner with these agencies, who were selected through a nationwide open call for artists, conversations with local arts nonprofits and arts councils, and the review of artists' portfolios. The selected artists included:

- **Jonathan Brumfield for the Oakland Department of Transportation**
- **Tosha Stimage for the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART)**
- **Naomi RaMona Schliesman for the West Central Initiative (WCI)**
- **Ndubisi Okoye for the City of Detroit**
- **Ashley Hairston Doughty for the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada**

See the appendix on p.20 for biographies of these distinguished artists.

## Five different projects, but consistent throughlines

Despite the disparate locations and contexts, there were many throughlines that connected the work. Each artist faced the challenge of starting by soliciting input from the community members who would be impacted by their work. While community engagement is often a challenging part of most transportation projects, the quick pace of the initiative and COVID's limitations on in-person meetings made engagement particularly challenging.

The projects all used art and design to alter behavior and make transportation users safer in a range of ways; from wayfinding signs, to clearly articulating mask regulations, the artists conveyed rapidly changing, confusing, and often political messages in culturally specific and community relevant ways, often with a focus on the dignity of the transportation users.

And finally, though the transportation agencies had a range of experience working with artists in the past, each had to learn how to bring their partnered artist up to speed on complex internal approval and installation processes, just as the artists each had to learn how to use their skills and limited budgets to impact massive, bureaucratic systems.

## Lessons for artists, lessons for transportation agencies

A few recurring themes and lessons emerged from each of the five projects: Each artist began their work by addressing the monumental challenge of soliciting input from a community in the midst of a pandemic that has made in-person meetings nearly impossible. In response to this reality, the artists found that they had to substitute online meetings, surveys, and one-on-one (masked, socially distant, and outdoors) meetings in place of larger group meetings. Additionally, the project team members found that the pilot projects themselves became an effective form of engagement; by producing something quickly and unveiling the work before it was finalized, the pilot projects then solicited input from the community in the form of people expressing their feelings about the pilot projects. In fact, this input was much more valuable than input on an abstract project idea, since people were able to respond to something tangible.

The project teams also learned that there are benefits and challenges to working at such a rapid pace. On one hand, the rapid pace allowed for helpful information and new safety protocols to be communicated at an appropriately quick pace. On the other hand, some teams learned that their attempts to circumvent some processes for the sake of moving quickly were not actually feasible, resulting in additional time needed to implement the projects.

Finally, each artist played a crucial role as a translator for their partner agencies. Because the artists were members of the communities served by the transportation agencies, the artist brought local opinions and needs into the agencies, both supportive and skeptical. After becoming familiar with the agencies, they also took on the role of translating the agencies' work and decision-making processes to their neighbors and community members. This dissolving of the us-versus-them/community-versus-agency dynamic helped each of the five teams create more effective and meaningful work.

## Project summaries





## Redesigning Slow Streets to reflect community & culture in East Oakland Oakland, CA

The City of Oakland worked with artist Jonathan Brumfield to pilot a solution for more aesthetically pleasing, sturdy Oakland Slow Streets barricades that better reflect East Oakland culture and still support safe distancing while traveling and exercising during the pandemic. Brumfield, in partnership with East Oakland residents, built a set of four barricade planters and a set of corresponding culturally-relevant signage.

### The challenge

The City of Oakland launched their Slow Streets Program in April to support physical activity and reduce overcrowding on trails, parks, and sidewalks during the pandemic by closing over 20 miles of streets to motor vehicles. After implementation, the city set out to evaluate the program and gather feedback from residents across the city. Residents in East Oakland—an historically predominantly Black community that has undergone decades of disinvestment—shared that the Slow Streets barricades were unattractive and confusing, and not meeting the needs of the community. The city sought to respond to the community through this project by working with an artist to pilot a solution for more aesthetically pleasing, sturdy Oakland Slow Streets barricades that better reflect East Oakland culture.

### The project

With help from Forecast Public Art, Smart Growth America selected and hired East Oakland-based artist Jonathan Brumfield. In addition to being an artist, Brumfield works with young people at a local non-profit and higher education institution, and is deeply aware of the disproportionate impact COVID has had on his Black and Brown neighbors and his community's concerns with the Slow Streets program. Keeping that front of mind, he worked with neighbors and the city to design a culturally-informed, beautiful, sturdy barricade that improved access to healthy food while still supporting safe transportation and recreation.



Before drafting designs, Brumfield reached out to neighbors and young people to share his project goals and learn more about which Slow Streets location should be used to pilot this new design and what they'd like to see included. This was the source of the idea of creating barricades that doubled as mini-community gardens. Brumfield then worked with a family in East Oakland to build a set of four barricade planters and painted artwork on the exterior of the planter that featured people riding scraper bicycles—a unique aspect of Oakland culture—children walking, people pushing strollers, and words of hope, including “Heal”, “Justice”, and “Grow.” Brumfield also created a corresponding set of signage to accompany the planter that featured similar artwork.



### Project team:

- Jonathan Brumfield, Artist
- Noel Pond-Danchik, Transportation Planner at Oakland Department of Transportation
- Warren Logan, Policy Director of Mobility and Inter Agency Relations at Oakland's Office of the Mayor
- Jason Patton, Senior Transportation Planner at Oakland Department of Transportation

Brumfield worked with a family in the East Oakland neighborhood to create the planter barricades. Those individuals were Mizan Alkebulan-Abakah, Sizwe Andrews-Abakah, and their children Fiyah, Omega, Pharaoh, and Saba; and Ajman Thrower.

### The results

In early October, 2020, Brumfield, in partnership with the Oakland Department of Transportation and the Office of the Mayor, unveiled the planter barricades. The city is currently working with Brumfield to replicate the artwork from this project and incorporate it into their permanent Slow Streets signage.



 **Libby Schaaf** ✓  
@LibbySchaaf

We launched [#OaklandSlowStreets](#) Phase 2 & unveiled a new kind of installation - public art on Slow Streets.

[#OaklandSlowStreets](#) brings people outdoors and into their community; our amazing artists invite them to stay and feel a sense of belonging in [#Oakland](#).



**“This came out of community voice and if there is one thing I know about my hometown of Oakland, it is that we celebrate, we heal, we express ourselves through art and also through food. [...] This is a traffic calming device that is both of these things. [...] That is how we are as Oaklanders, we heal through our art, we heal through our dialogue with each other in deep community.” - Mayor Libby Schaaf**

The initial feedback following the unveiling has been largely positive. Brumfield has already been approached by other elected and community leaders who are interested in building planter barricades for their Slow Streets.

Other cities around the country who are seeking to launch similar initiatives should consider the following reflections from the City of Oakland and Brumfield’s work:

**Work with artists who are rooted in their communities.**

Feedback and concerns from East Oakland residents about the Slow Streets program was the impetus for this project. One of the reasons Brumfield was well suited for this project was his expertise as an artist as well as his expertise as a resident embedded in his community. Brumfield’s deep understanding of East Oakland residents’ concerns and feedback was crucial to the success of the project. Brumfield spent a considerable amount of time as the face of the project at the intersection where the barricade planters would soon be placed. He talked to neighbors, fielded questions, built the planter barricades with neighbors, and shared flyers. Having a trusted voice from within the community serve in this role was vital for the project’s success—and something for other communities to seek to emulate.

**“We loved having an artist who was also an organizer [...] it made it so much more than a partnership between the city and an artist but a project that came from and was rooted in the community.” - Noel Pond-Danchik, Transportation Planner at Oakland Department of Transportation**

**Be experimental and test out new approaches.**

From project inception the city approached this project as a pilot to test out if an improvement to Slow Streets barricades would improve the reception of the project. This allowed the city to be more flexible and experimental in its approach.

## Don't forget about maintenance.

Even though this was a pilot, throughout every step of the project Brumfield and the project team considered the long-term maintenance needs of the project. The planters are durable and built to last, but maintenance is still required to ensure longevity.

Below are a handful of examples of how the team thought about the long-term future of the planters:

- **Who would water the plants in the planters?** Brumfield is coordinating with a local non-profit to have their youth interns water the planters moving forward.
- **What if the artwork was damaged?** Brumfield built the planter so that the art could be easily replaced without interfering with the structure of the planter.
- **How can we ensure the community feels ownership of the planter?** From the beginning, Brumfield worked with neighbors near the Slow Streets location. He spent time at the intersection and had conversations with people who were curious about what he was working on; he sought and incorporated community feedback; and he worked with and paid a local family to help build the planters.

**“We came up with something that would benefit our community and feed our people.”**

- Jonathan Brumfield, Artist

*All Oakland photos courtesy of Kahlm Davis.*

## Destigmatizing mask wearing on Bay Area Rapid Transit San Francisco Bay Area, CA

Bay Area Rapid Transit worked with artist Tosha Stimage to pilot an approach to normalize the culture of wearing a mask on transit and deconstruct the racism worsened by COVID-19. Stimage designed and implemented a campaign consisting of popups, posters, and video montage that encouraged riders to reimagine masks and their benefits.



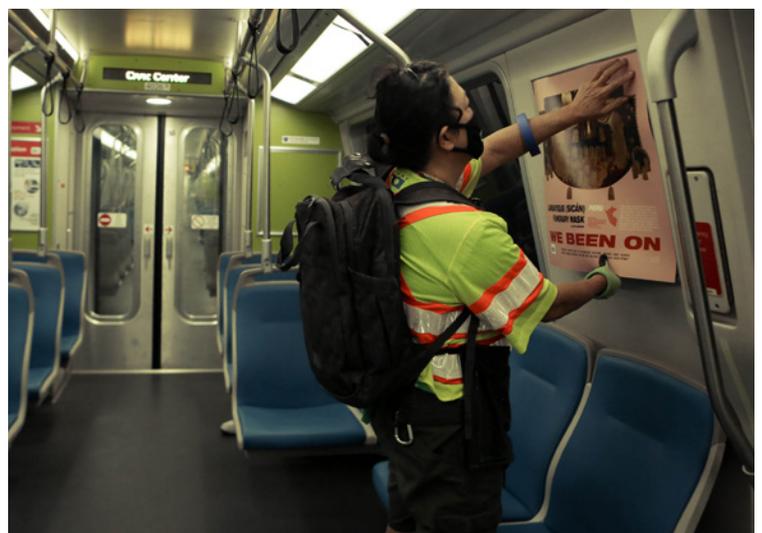
### The challenge

Nationwide, the spread of COVID-19 has resulted in serious issues and concerns for people of color, in particular Black, Brown, and persons of Asian descent, due to racially-motivated harassment and violence. Additionally, the political battles over masks has created a hostile environment that has caused transit users to distrust and profile one another. San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) recognized the additional stigma facial coverings may attach to people who already experience discrimination while they sought to ensure that transit is safe and as welcoming as possible for all riders.

### The project

With help from Forecast Public Art, Smart Growth America selected and hired Bay Area artist Tosha Stimage to work with BART to pilot an approach to normalize the culture of mask wearing on transit and address racism worsened by COVID-19.

Stimage designed and implemented a campaign that encouraged riders to reimagine masks and celebrate their benefits and long history. With riders in mind, Stimage created a series of eight unique print posters featuring different cultural masks that were installed in BART stations and trains. Each poster included information about the mask's culture and use, as well as a powerful tagline intended to encourage people to rethink the benefits of wearing masks: **“Whether storytelling or celebrating culture, masks have always served a useful function. This time they can help us protect each other.”**



Tosha also held two popups at Civic Center station in downtown San Francisco to educate riders about the rich history of mask wearing. Tosha and BART staff safely engaged with riders and handed out about 300 giveaway bags containing masks, hand sanitizer, alcohol wipes, individual hand straps, and postcards—so riders could stay in touch with friends or family far away. To add another visual element to the pop-up, Stimage worked with another artist to create a video montage of different ceremonial uses of masks.

## Project team

- Tosha Stimage, Artist
- Jennifer Easton, Art Program Manager at BART
- Linton Johnson, Strategic Program Manager at BART
- Alicia Trost, Chief Communications Officer at BART

## The results

From the outset of this two-month project, BART knew that they wouldn't eradicate the ingrained racism that exists on public transportation. Instead they hoped to open a dialogue that acknowledged the racism experienced by riders of color—especially Black, Latinx, and Asian American people—and then pilot creative solutions to address it. By working with Stimage, BART was able to effectively convey the importance of masks in a visually engaging, joyful way that didn't look like a traditional transit message.

**“By working with an artist we got a unique solution that is both attention getting and subtle yet impactful in delivering the message.”** - Jennifer Easton, Art Program Manager at BART

For transit agencies around the country seeking to launch similar initiatives to retain or welcome back riders, consider the following reflections from BART and Stimage's work:

### Acknowledge and appreciate your riders.

The pop-ups hosted by Stimage and BART brought unexpected levels of positive feedback from customers who appreciated being seen and offered a small gift. Rider appreciation, especially during stressful times like these, goes a long way in helping people feel they've made the right choice in staying with or returning to transit, and transit agencies will need to make riders feel safe and welcome in order to regain ridership and survive today's financial challenges.



### Set loose project parameters to leave room for creative exploration by the artist.

As with all projects, setting goals and parameters is important, but if your agency is seeking to creatively address a challenge, then it is important to be flexible and open to bold ideas and provide space for creativity. Providing room for the artist to adjust direction and brainstorm daring solutions, especially in the early stages of the project, will pay off in the end.

### Prioritize space for dialogue and trust-building on project teams, especially for projects with short timelines.

Addressing racial profiling and bias is not a simple or easy problem, and addressing this within a system like public transportation is even more difficult. To do so effectively requires project teams to make space for trust-building and dialogue, and be honest about potential issues up front.

**“You can't replace the human element of things, there is just something about seeing and engaging with people.”** - Tosha Stimage, Artist

*BART photos on page 9 photos courtesy of Cinque Mubarak, page 10 photo courtesy of BART.*



## Creating a toolkit for in-person and virtual community engagement in rural Minnesota West Central Minnesota

West Central Initiative (WCI), a rural regional planning agency in west central Minnesota, worked with artist Naomi RaMona Schliesman to come up with creative, safe ways to engage the community during COVID-19 and better inform their Safe Routes to School planning. Schliesman designed a versatile kit consisting of engagement tools that WCI will use during (and after) COVID to reach a wider range of people in the community.

### The challenge

West Central Initiative (WCI) is a rural regional planning agency that serves a nine-county region in west central Minnesota. In addition to economic development and transportation planning, WCI works with students, parents, teachers, community members on Safe Routes to School (SRTS) planning, engagement, and encouragement activities. However due to COVID-19, WCI knew they wouldn't be able to engage stakeholders like they had in the past. WCI sought to work with an artist to design a community engagement toolkit they could use during (and after) COVID to reach a wider range of people during their Safe Routes to School planning.

### The project

With help from Forecast Public Art, Smart Growth America selected and hired artist Naomi RaMona Schliesman, based in Fergus Falls, MN, to design and develop a Safe Routes to School community engagement kit.

Schliesman started by working with WCI staff to outline engagement needs and goals—both virtual and in-person—and then conducted school site visits to better understand possibilities for in-person engagement. Based on that information, Schliesman created a multilingual kit that included street stencils, play sculptures, rainbow barricades, coloring page pennants, bike decals, a bike sculptural table, and even a new logo.



Because some rural towns may only have a couple hundred people, equity discussions can quickly devolve into “othering,” sometimes harmful conversations that call out specific individuals who hold those identities. To enhance WCI’s Safe Routes to School work and make equity conversations more productive, the new toolkit features six characters known as “The Rainbow Friends:” Bear, Deer, Duck, and Frog who are native to the area, and Elephant and Kangaroo, who recently moved to Minnesota, who hop, walk, bike, and roll to school. Jill Amundson, Associate Planner at West Central Initiative, says these characters will be key to the success of the program. “These animal characters allow us to speak about equity issues in smaller communities more effectively,” Amundson said.

WCI has already started working with external partners, like Minnesota Department of Transportation and local schools, to implement the toolkit virtually and in-person. In Ashby, MN and Henning, MN, where school is currently taking place in person, Schliesman and WCI set up the bike sculptural table and play sculptures which are intended to pique community members interest and open conversations on Safe Routes to School. They also used the toolkit’s footprint stencils and spray chalk to create paths leading up to the schools and walking circles that students can use while remaining socially distant. In Ashby, MN, they placed the rainbow barricades alongside the nearby busy highway to provide students with separation from vehicles and to serve as a visual cue to drivers to slow down.



### Project team

- Naomi RaMona Schliesman, Artist
- Wayne Hurley, Director of Planning at West Central Initiative
- Jill Amundson, Associate Planner at West Central Initiative



## The results

This is just the beginning for the toolkit. WCI has plans to roll out components of the toolkit in each of the nine counties they serve in the coming year. “It’s going to be such a great resource for us to have as we continue our work to make the communities in our region safe, fun, and easy places for people of all ages to walk and bike!” says WCI’s Planning Director, Wayne Hurley.

For planning agencies around the country seeking to launch similar initiatives, consider the following reflections from WCI and Schliesman’s work:

### Work with a local artist who knows your community

Schliesman, who lives and works in WCI’s nine-county region, unsurprisingly has significant insider knowledge of and connections to the communities. This, paired with her fresh perspective and inquisitive creative style, was key to the success of the project.

**“By asking questions and suggesting new ideas and approaches to that work, it got us thinking about it in a way that we hadn’t previously. It’s sometimes easy to get into your routine when you do this work, and having Naomi involved in the project brought an infusion of energy that helps recharge us and the work we do.”**

- Wayne Hurley, Planning Director at WCI

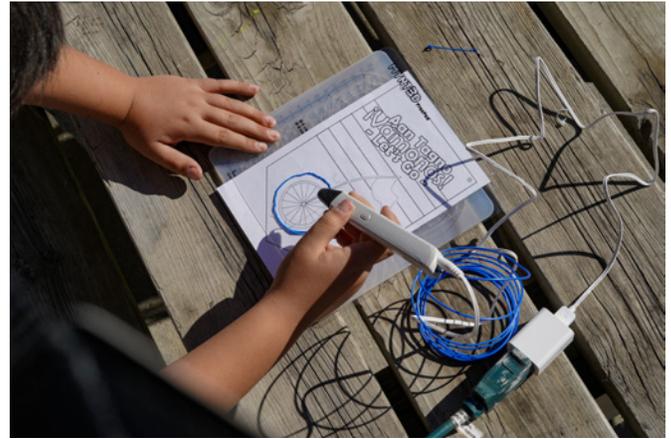
## Flexibility is key, especially during COVID-19

Especially during COVID, being able to adapt to changing situations and demands may mean the project doesn't look exactly like what you envisioned, but may end up better reflecting the needs of the community. This project was originally scoped to be a virtual toolkit, however as the pandemic conditions evolved in the summer it was clear that creating a toolkit that worked in person as well would be more valuable in the long term.

## The power of word-of-mouth in rural communities

Of the two toolkit installations that were completed, WCI and Schliesman found that the installation at the school located in the center of downtown led to deeper conversations with community members. Because of that school's proximity to the grocery store and the community center, more people ended up stopping by and asking questions during the installation compared to the school that was located closer to the edge of town. Those conversations led to other community organizations and newspapers sharing the work and the project.

*All WCI photos courtesy of Ne-Dah-Ness Rose Green.*





## Piloting wayfinding to connect community to resource centers in Detroit Detroit, MI

The City of Detroit worked with Detroit-based designer Ndubisi Okoye to help bridge the first- and last-mile gaps between bus stops and the city's recreation centers that are providing crucial resources during COVID-19. Okoye designed a set of welcoming, colorful wayfinding signage to guide residents and provided a possible template for creating a productive relationship with an artist in the future.

### The challenge

Detroit has been hit particularly hard by COVID-19 with one of the highest mortality rates in the country, compounding existing public health issues and complicating efforts to provide access to basic services. Throughout the pandemic, the City of Detroit has used its recreation centers to provide access to critical resources such as food, employment resources, cooling centers, and other programming for vulnerable community members, many of whom are accessing these centers for the first time during the pandemic.

Among large U.S. cities, Detroit is considered one of the least dense with housing, jobs, and food spread out throughout the city. This makes getting around more difficult especially for the quarter of its population who solely rely on transit, biking, walking and rolling to access essential services and places. The city's recreation centers are spread around the city but often just far enough from bus stops that they can be difficult to find. To bridge the gaps between bus stops and the nearby recreation centers, the City of Detroit sought to partner with an artist to pilot eye-catching wayfinding to guide residents to resources.

### The project

With help from Forecast Public Art, Smart Growth America selected and hired Detroit-based designer Ndubisi Okoye to create welcoming wayfinding to guide Detroiters to nearby recreation centers and resources.

Considering the short timeline of the project and hopes of replicating the wayfinding in the future, Okoye and the City of Detroit decided to focus their efforts on wayfinding for one recreation center. In partnership with the

Detroit's Planning Department, Department of Public Works, and Lasky Recreation Center staff, Okoye designed a set of wayfinding signs that would be placed along the half-mile route separating the bus stop and Lasky that could help connect people in the neighborhood with the resources at Lasky. Okoye worked with the city staff to collect community feedback to inform the final sign design. In an effort to make the signs stand out from other city signage, Okoye used bold colors and design techniques as well as spray painted arrow directions on the ground beneath the sign. To increase accessibility of the signs and reinforce that all are welcome, the signs feature messages written in Bengali, Arabic, and English and simple symbols illustrating the resources available at Lasky.

**“We wanted to have a wayfinding system that could translate between cultures and could connect people to the resources they need.” - Ndubisi Okoye, Artist**

### Project team

- Ndubisi Okoye, Artist
- Samuel Krassenstein, Transportation and Infrastructure Advisor at City of Detroit
- Shelby Howard, Urban Planner at Detroit Planning and Development Department
- Erika Linenfelter, Mobility Planner at Detroit Department of Public Works
- Katherine Braggs, Supervisor at Lasky Recreation Center

### The results

Thanks to successful partnership between Okoye and the city, there is a set of 17 beautifully designed signs in the ground outside of Lasky Recreation Center that are directing residents to crucial resources during COVID-19. Indirectly, the city developed a new process for designing future wayfinding for connecting residents to other crucial city resources.

**“Lasky Recreation Center was trying to achieve awareness and let the community know that Lasky is here to serve.” - Katherine Braggs, Supervisor at Lasky Recreation Center**

For cities around the country seeking to launch similar wayfinding initiatives, consider the following reflections from City of Detroit and Okoye's work:

### Keep your wayfinding simple and accessible, but make it stand out.

Wayfinding should clearly communicate the message and ensure the viewer can reach their destination. It should be accessible and stand out from other signage. In the case of Detroit, these signs use symbols, multiple languages, and bold colors and design to achieve this. Signs were placed prominently along a walking route and were paired with spray painted arrows in between signs to guide pedestrians to the Lasky Recreation Center.

### Take the time to identify all potential stakeholders, guidelines, and approval processes.

With such a short timeline, it's more difficult to identify every person, process, and guidance that needs to be involved. Take the time to think through the internal and external stakeholders who should be consulted and who will need to approve the final product. Consider all the design guidelines and standards that might need to be taken into consideration—this is particularly important for permanent projects. Most importantly, stay flexible with your timeline and build in buffer time at the end of the project to ensure that last minute changes can be made.

*All Detroit photos courtesy of Bre'Ann White.*





## Using friendly messaging to keep essential workers and tourists safe in Vegas Las Vegas, NV

The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada worked with artist Ashley Hairston Doughty and public art consultant Mark Salinas to design signage that would effectively educate the public about social distancing and safe transit riding practices at their main transit hub, the Bonneville Transit Center.

### The challenge

Like most transit agencies, the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC) has faced a number of challenges due to COVID-19, but has remained committed to providing safe, excellent public transportation to its community. RTC serves the Las Vegas metro area and is responsible for connecting frontline workers, residents, and tourists to employment, essential destinations, and attractions. (While tourism is down significantly from 2019, Vegas has still welcomed millions of visitors since the beginning of the pandemic—over 1.7 million visitors in September alone.) RTC sought to work with an artist to design and implement creative signage at one of their main transit hubs, the Bonneville Transit Center, to more effectively educate the public about social distancing and safe transit riding practices.

### The project

With help from Forecast Public Art, Smart Growth America selected and hired artist Ashley Hairston Doughty to design creative signage and public art consultant Mark Salinas to provide additional guidance and arts administration expertise.





## The results

While the signage was just installed at the end of October, the hope is that it will help encourage people at the Bonneville Transit Center to wear their masks properly (pulled up over their noses) and keep at least six feet from one another. Moreover, Doughty hopes that the signs make people realize that “by following these protocols, we are keeping each other safe.”

For transit agencies around the country seeking to launch similar messaging initiatives, consider the following reflections from RTC and Doughty’s work:

### Be deliberate about where you place your signage.

Through a series of in-person site visits, accompanied by the contracted vinyl specialists, Doughty and RTC deliberately selected certain locations to place the signage. For example, they took into consideration where people arrive at the station, where they board the buses, and where they sit and relax. Doughty shared that if people are coming off the bus they’ll mostly encounter vertical elements, whereas if they are sitting and relaxing in the plaza area they’ll find more signage on the ground.

**“In order to implement the project effectively, placement of the artwork is critical. We organized site visits with various staff and the artist to discuss different onsite locations and different perspectives.”**

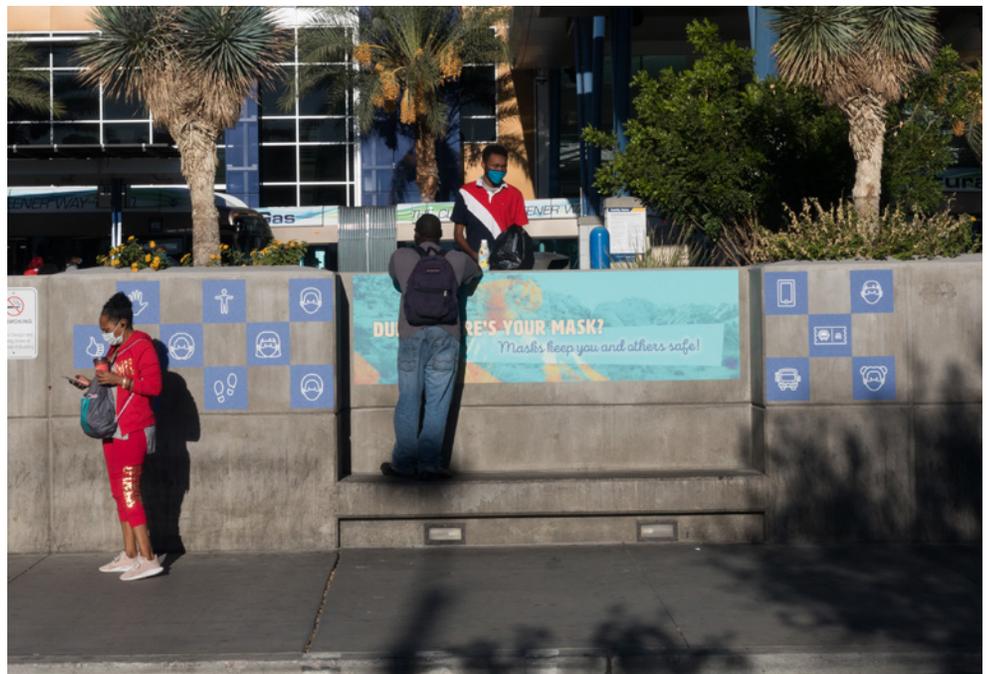
- Brij Gulati, Director of Capital Projects at RTC

### Use friendly language to improve compliance with COVID safety protocols.

Doughty’s approach of using friendly, informal language intentionally contrasts with standard COVID protocol messaging. The goal is that by using friendly messaging— informed by people who use the Bonneville Transit Center everyday and live in Las Vegas— people find it more relatable and are more likely to comply with COVID safety guidance.

### Explore material options early.

For projects with short timelines, Doughty recommends exploring project material options early in the process and seeking out price estimates before even beginning the design process. After deciding on materials and vendors, she suggests working closely with them, as their expertise can help save time in terms of sizing and location selection. This is especially important when working in an environment as harsh as Las Vegas, with its strong, color-fading sun. For this project, Doughty used vinyl for its long-term durability and ability to adhere to various surfaces including concrete and glass without creating a trip hazard or obstructing the ADA accessibility of the station.



*All RTC photos courtesy of Mikayla Whitmore.*

## Appendix - Arts & Transportation Rapid Response Artist Biographies

**Tosha Stimage** b.1982 is an artist living and working in Berkeley, CA. Stimage holds a BFA from the Columbus College of Art & Design and an MFA from California College of the Arts. She is a recipient of numerous awards and residencies including; The Murphy Cadogan Contemporary Art Award, The Toby Devan Lewis Award, Svane Family Foundation Grant, Facebook Artist in Residence, AICAD Teaching Fellow, Real Time and Space Artist in Residence, and YBCA Political Power Fellow.

**Jonathan Brumfield** graduated from San Francisco State University with a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice in 2000. Since then Jonathan's professional trajectory has been consistently focused on urban youth, from ages 12 -21 years of age, providing intense case management services and facilitating urban arts workshops and classes in community and school settings reaching the most disengaged students. Jonathan is an accomplished artist, in custom clothing, logo & tattoo designs; mural painting with aerosol; Hip Hop calligraphy; airbrushing; and illustration but the list goes on. Being an aerosol writer since a youth in 1989, Jonathan has used his art form in many ways from destructive to constructive. His educational experience had its trials and tribulations just like his students, which makes him very relatable to the young people while his tour of duty in the Urban Art world has made him very reputable amongst the youth as well. Since 2005, Jonathan has worked at Safe Passages as an Urban Arts Instructor, case manager, and program manager. The success of his work has propelled Safe Passages to develop the Get Active Program to increase the organization's capacity to effectively engage the hardest to reach students, in their learning process with an emphasis on men and boys; and to expand Jonathan's reach in terms of training and mentoring others to carry the baton of social justice and cultural empowerment with the youth. Jonathan received his master's in Ethnic Studies with an Africana Studies emphasis from San Francisco State in 2015. He currently teaches through the dual enrollment process for Peralta at several Oakland Unified School District sites. He has also been a leading figure within Oakland's spray can art community as one who promotes Hip Hop Restorative Justice, giving back to the community through the visual art form by going over the blighted buildings with murals that represent the community.

**Ashley Hairston Doughty** is a visual storyteller, explaining personal experiences through verbal and visual language. Much of her practice deals with socio-economic, racial, and gender-based issues, particularly those relating to cultural misconceptions and the development of personal identity. Doughty's distinctive perspective has grown through residing in nine different cities throughout her lifetime, mostly in the southeastern, midwestern, and southwestern United States. Although trained as a graphic designer, Doughty's artwork often crosses multiple media, including typography, illustration, writing, fiber and materials, and book arts. She shares and encourages such art-making as an Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and through her design studio, Design Kettle. Doughty's work is included in the Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection in Chicago and has received awards from the Caxton Club, the College Book Arts Association and Arion Press.

**Mark Salinas**, supporting Ashley's work behind-the-scenes, is a governor-appointed Board Member of the Nevada Arts Council and the former founding Director of the Carson City Department of Arts & Culture. As a public arts administrator, Salinas has founded community-affairs organizations within government, non-profit, and commercial sectors utilizing over 25 years' experience as a creative contributor to the museum, gallery, fashion, film, and theater industries. Prior to his 2016 relocation to Carson City, Salinas lived in Queens, New York, having worked for such organizations as Pace Gallery, Brooklyn Art Museum, and the World Trade Center Site Memorial Design Competition. He is the founder of the non-profit community organization, 7Train Murals. Salinas is a 2019 recipient of the Nevada Humanities Rising Star Award and the first Nevadan inducted into the National Association of Latino Arts & Cultures (NALAC) Leadership Institute.

**Naomi RaMona Schliesman** is a nationally known visual artist that lives in Minnesota, and is an active advocate for the arts. She has her BFA with an emphasis in sculpture from Minnesota State University Moorhead, and an MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Schliesman has received a Fellowship from Ragdale and Kimmel Hardening Nelson Center for the Arts, was awarded 2nd place for Miami University Young Sculptors Competition

for William and Dorothy Yeck Award, and was a LEAP finalist for the Society of Contemporary Craft Award. She has traveled abroad to Italy, Scotland, Ireland, France, United Kingdom, Netherlands and Belize to study art and has done artist residencies at Vermont Studio Center, Kimmel Hardening Nelson Center for the Arts, Ragadale, The Traveling Museum and Hospitalfield Arts. Schliesman currently serves on the Public Arts Commission for The City of Fergus Falls, and continues to collaborate with artists and organizations nationwide and exhibits her artwork nationally.

**Ndubisi Okoye** is a multidisciplinary artist with a passion for art and design that tells a story. Through his drawings and murals, he creates unique stories to motivate, represent, and inspire people throughout the African Diaspora. Okoye's combinations of typography, geometric shapes, vibrant color palettes, and tribal patterns represent an improvised rhythm throughout his work that is aimed at uplifting and motivating the viewer. He draws inspiration from many areas of his life, including anime, movies, music, poetry, and graphic design. He creates art to reflect the African Diaspora, his faith in God in the presence of indifference, and call attention to political issues. He wants to show the power, beauty, and complexity of blackness. Okoye graduated from College for Creative Studies in 2015 with a B.F.A in Advertising Design. He has worked as an Art Director for many advertising agencies working for clients such as General Motors, Chevrolet, Ram, Chrysler, Dodge, Camaro. Simultaneously, He has also done murals for Universal Music Group, Carolina Panthers, Mercedes Benz, GM, and HGTV. In both commercial Advertising and Fine Arts, he continuously finds ways to enjoy and excel at both in Detroit, Michigan.



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