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For Immediate Release

## **New Study Examines How Creative Placemaking Projects Build Social Capital in Communities**

*Using Levitt music venues as case studies, research examines value of different impact measurement approaches and reveals implications for the arts field*

**November 3, 2016** — As interest in measuring and understanding the impact of arts investments in community development continues to grow, a new study released today, [\*Setting the Stage for Community Change: Reflecting on Creative Placemaking Outcomes\*](#), offers insights for the field of “creative placemaking” and is a working illustration of what can and can’t be learned from different impact-measurement approaches.

Commissioned by the Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation and led by Slover Linett Audience Research, the multi-year (2013–2016), mixed-method study was designed to explore whether and how permanent outdoor Levitt music venues are bringing about change in the communities in which they operate. The findings about Levitt venues, and the mechanisms by which they affect individual concertgoers and the broader community, offer insights into arts-based strategies to promote social connectivity, a central goal of many creative placemaking efforts.

Through its support of creative placemaking, the Levitt Foundation empowers communities across the country to revitalize underused public spaces through free live music, including the development of outdoor music venues, each providing 50 free, professional concerts to the community every year. Levitt venues—each managed, programmed and supported by a Friends of Levitt nonprofit organization—share a common mission to strengthen the social fabric of their communities by invigorating community life and bringing people together of all ages and backgrounds. The new study sought to examine the social impact of these venues and to further the dialogue on how to measure the outcomes and impact of creative placemaking interventions.

“Levitt venues consistently attract large audiences, which is certainly one measure of success,” said Sharon Yazowski, Levitt Foundation Executive Director, “Though we sought to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations behind audience members attending, their interactions with others while at the concerts, and whether their Levitt experience strengthens their attachment to and influences how they engage with their community—ultimately, is this program meeting our mission of building social capital?”

The study consists of three components:

- 1) Indirect Outcomes Assessment, by Joanna Woronkowitz, Ph.D., is largely modeled after the National Endowment for the Arts’ “Arts & Livability Indicators” system and measures change of various dimensions around five permanent Levitt venues. By providing a test case for using indicators to evaluate a creative placemaking project’s impact, the report discusses the limitations of indicators in outcomes measurement and impact evaluation;
- 2) Audience & Community Outcomes Exploration, by Slover Linett, uses primary qualitative and quantitative data collection among concertgoers and neighborhood residents in two Levitt communities (Memphis and Pasadena, Calif.) to examine how Levitt venues provide opportunities for social interactions that increase both “bonding” and “bridging” social capital, and to explore community-level impacts of Levitt venues;
- 3) Pre/Post Outcomes Study, also by Slover Linett, to be published in early 2019, uses primary qualitative and quantitative data collection to document changes from before a new Levitt Pavilion opens in Denver in 2017 to after it has been in operation for a full concert season.

Slover Linett’s President, Sarah Lee, said she hopes the study will contribute to the field’s ongoing conversation about how to measure the outcomes of creative placemaking projects. “We looked at the arts experience itself—the free outdoor concerts at Levitt venues—and tried to understand the broader effects of that experience on the people and communities involved,” said Lee.

### **Key Findings of the Study**

- The free Levitt concert series offer a *hybrid experience* of both the arts and community connection. They interweave musical, social and community elements, facilitating social interaction not only within attendees’ existing social groups, but also among people from diverse economic and social backgrounds.
- The open lawn setting and free admission of Levitt concerts mean that there are no physical or financial barriers to entry. This fosters the feeling among concertgoers that “all are welcome” and helps facilitate meaningful social interactions across demographic boundaries.
- Levitt venues are perceived to have played an important role in improved safety and the broader revitalization of their immediate neighborhood and surrounding areas. That said, the venues, while playing a catalytic and contributory role, were *not solely responsible* for these developments and were one among several strategies for community vitality.

- The study illustrates the notion that there isn't a "one size fits all" method of assessing the success of creative placemaking projects. Fully understanding the context of a project—and its neighborhood—is key to understanding both the potential and actual impacts of a creative placemaking initiative. To understand that context, existing indicators frameworks should be combined with primary data collection efforts. Project-specific data collection efforts reveal new insights about both the efficacy of creative placemaking projects and the mechanisms by which they operate—insights that would not be reached through an indicators approach alone.

## Implications for the Field

The Levitt Foundation hopes the implications from this study will provide valuable guidance to a wide range of creative placemaking efforts, from music-based projects to those involving other arts disciplines and diverse community contexts.

- In creative placemaking, artistic programming is as important as the setting and venue in providing a compelling and communal experience for participants. Programming can communicate subtle but important messages about who might feel welcome.
- The physical and logistical attributes of a creative placemaking project, such as location and space layout, establish how interactions amongst participants occur and how potential barriers to entry inform who participates and how frequently.
- Communicating clearly about a project's community-building goals to participants and residents can help engage them as informal ambassadors.
- It is important to address the history and sociology of the community in which the creative placemaking project takes place. An in-depth awareness of a community's latent potential as well as its challenges can help initiatives set appropriate goals and devise targeted strategies to maximize impact.
- Partnership, coordination and collaboration are essential creative placemaking skills to ensure that projects address the local communities' most pressing needs and are undertaken in coordination with other community improvement efforts in order to be most effective.

[Read full white paper.](#)

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## About the Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation

The Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation is a private foundation that exists to strengthen the social fabric of America. Through its support of creative placemaking, the Levitt Foundation empowers communities to transform neglected public spaces into welcoming destinations where the power of free, live music brings people together and invigorates community life. The Foundation's primary funding areas include **permanent Levitt venues** and the **Levitt AMP [Your City] Grant Awards**, an annual grants competition. The Levitt network of outdoor venues and concert sites collectively serves more than half a million people annually

through **450+ free, family-friendly concerts in 22 towns and cities**. Permanent Levitt venues are located in cities as diverse as **Los Angeles** and **Pasadena**, Calif.; **Westport**, Conn.; **Bethlehem**, Pa.; **Memphis**, Tenn.; and **Arlington**, Texas. Each permanent Levitt venue is programmed, managed and supported by its own 501 (c)(3) Friends of Levitt nonprofit organization, presenting 50 free concerts every year featuring high caliber entertainment of all music genres. Developing Levitt locations include **Denver** (opening 2017), **Dayton** (opening in 2018), **Houston** (opening 2019), and **Sioux Falls** (opening 2019) amongst other cities. Learn more: [levitt.org](http://levitt.org)

#### **About Slover Linett**

Slover Linett Audience Research Inc. is a social research and consulting firm for the cultural sector, broadly defined to include the arts, museums, science communication, public media, and cultural funders and agencies. The firm's Chicago- and Boston-based team uses the tools of social science research and evaluation to help cultural institutions grapple with strategic questions in areas such as programming and experience design, marketing, outcomes assessment, social impact, community engagement and inclusion, and institutional strategy and planning. For almost twenty years, the Slover Linett team has been committed to making culture more responsive, relevant, and rewarding to more kinds of people. Learn more: [sloverlinett.com](http://sloverlinett.com)

#### **About Joanna Woronkowitz, Ph.D.**

Joanna Woronkowitz is an assistant professor in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University in Bloomington where she teaches and conducts research on cultural policy and nonprofit management. Her co-authored book, *Building Better Arts Facilities: Lessons from a U.S. National Study* (Routledge 2014), examines trends in cultural building in the U.S. between 1994 and 2008. She earned her Ph.D. in Public Policy from the University of Chicago.