

Trenton: Creative Ideas Taking Hold



In January, a diverse group of community members from commerce, education, philanthropy, government, culture, faith-based & social service sectors gathered to discuss how to use creativity and innovation to impact Trenton's future. Over one and a half days, the [open space convening](#) bypassed PowerPoint presentations and panel discussions for more than 50 authentic, community-led conversations. Outcomes included:

Mixed-use Entrepreneurial Training Center:

REPENT, a recidivism prevention program, local

organizational development professionals and members of the UIH met to discuss needs for a mixed-use building so recently released inmates have both a place to live, access to entrepreneurial training, and a storefront to launch pilot businesses. This group is currently working on a white paper for a funding request.

Trenton Board of Ed Youth Summit: Kathleen Smallwood Johnson organized a summit on April 12th and brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to delve into implementation of this idea. The College of New Jersey hosted the Summit. 45 students from 6th-12th grade took the lead as the primary planners for this summit.

[I Am Trenton Community Foundation:](#) The I Am Trenton Community Foundation awarded additional points in the scoring of their 2014 grant cycle for projects that were born out of Creative Trenton. I Am Trenton also summarized and made the Book of Proceedings of Creative Trenton available on their website.

Mass Incarceration Education: Westminster Presbyterian worked with partners from Creative Trenton, notably, the Campaign to End the New Jim Crow, on public events diving into issues of mass incarceration. Events were held in Princeton on 2/21/14 and at Union Baptist in Trenton on 3/8/14 and included films and community discussion.

Education Panel / Mayoral Candidate Forum: Two groups emerged from Creative Trenton who were deeply engaged in tackling educational issues. Within two months, the groups merged into the West Ward Alliance Youth Collaborative to host a two-part event - a panel discussion with various educators and a mayoral candidate forum on education issues. The West Ward Alliance Youth Collaborative worked in partnership with The Citizens Campaign, and a number of other civic and education groups in Trenton. Speakers included Dr. C. Roy Epps, President of the Civic League of Greater New Brunswick, Kathleen Smallwood Johnson of the Trenton Board of Ed., Francis Blanco of the Living Hope Empowerment Center, and George Anthony, national conflict resolution expert. Trenton High teacher Jerell Blakeley spoke about his proposal to integrate a civic leadership class into the high school curriculum, gathering signatures from the attendees. At the end of the

forum, Kathleen Smallwood Johnson received a text from the Superintendent of schools saying that he would support Jerell's proposal, which was recently announced in the *Times of Trenton*.

Guide for New Mayor: A member of the new Mayor's transition team who participated in the Creative Trenton convening transcribed the notes from Creative Trenton – verbatim – into a community feedback forum intended to help inform the new administration about issues of importance to the community.

After-School Transportation: Artworks planned to host a meeting to discuss how to tackle transportation for students to potential after school activities.

Creative Trenton "Braintrust": Creative Trenton is viewed as a "braintrust" and connector for community resources. The Trenton Health Team is starting a new initiative centered on mural arts and healthy living, and the executive director contacted Creative Trenton about identifying artists, funding sources and other community partnerships to help move the initiative forward.

All of these activities have occurred within seven months of the Creative Trenton convening in January.

Creative Trenton Participants

