Elk Knob Community-Based Art Project

Appalachian State University
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Project duration
August 20, 2013 – May 1, 2014

Today’s date
April 14, 2014

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Final Report Narrative

Title of Project: Elk Knob Community-Based Art Project

Grant Period: August 20, 2013 – May 1, 2014

Grantee Name: Appalachian State University

Project Director: Thomas S. Hansell

Description of Project:

The Elk Knob Community-Based Art Project is an ongoing collaborative effort between students and community members to promote sustainable development in the communities surrounding the Elk Knob State Park in Ashe and Watauga Counties, NC. During the fall semester of 2013, students engaged in community-based research about the culture, history, and natural world around Elk Knob. These students worked with the Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization (EKCHO) to create new works of art based on a community created public art plan. Students assisted with the Elk Knob Community Day in September, then met with community members to present their design throughout October. The students also presented their final design to the board of the Meat Camp Volunteer Fire Department. Finally, students collaborated with community members to create and install public art at two local volunteer fire departments during November. The students documented the process and developed a presentation to the Appalachian Regional Commission’s Appalachian Teaching Project December 6 and 7, 2013.

Activities:

- September 5, 2013 – class meets with EKCHO art committee to look at prospective sites for the public art project.
- September 14, 2013 – class participates in EKCHO’s annual Community Headwaters celebration at the Elk Knob State Park. Students present historic photos, gather information for a survey, and ask residents to place memories and ideas on maps to help plan the community art project.
- September 26, 2013 – students present first draft of art plan to EKCHO art committee. The committees feedback helps the students modify their plan.
- October 3, 2013 – students present revised plan to EKCHO art committee for approval.
- October 8, 2013 – students present plan to the board of the Meat Camp Volunteer Fire Department.
- October 15, 2013 – students present final plan to EKCHO board of directors.
- November 9, 2015 – students collaborate with EKCHO on the second annual community art day to help paint the tables.
- November 14, 2015 – students work with members of EKCHO and Meat Camp volunteer fire department to install the tables on site.
- March 28, 2014 – faculty member Tom Hansell presents the Elk Knob Community Art Project as part of a panel on arts based research at the annual conference of the Appalachian Studies Association at Marshall University in Huntington, WV.

**Project Outcomes:**

Students collaborated with local organizations to create new works of public art that honor the culture and heritage of the Elk Knob Community. Specifically, the class worked with members of the Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization (EKCHO) to design and construct two picnic tables that include maps and local quilt patterns. Students produced a Community Art Day event in the Elk Knob Community, where multiple generations of local participants worked on art projects that reflect their community. The work the students created was installed at two local volunteer fire departments. The relationships between students and community members helped build leadership skills among both groups, and the networks that resulted from reaching out to local fire departments helped build social capital in this marginalized community. Our process of collaboration was carefully documented and will serve as a model for future creative projects.

**Problems Encountered:**

Our plan was ambitious and required both students and faculty to work many late nights and weekends to reach our goals. Specific problems included the time involved in transporting students from campus to the community, and the logistics of creating an off-campus project around students’ regular class schedules.

**Program Continuation and Sustainability:**

Evaluation meetings with both students and community members encouraged us to continue the project. In order to access more resources, we have applied to the North Carolina Arts Council for an artist fellowship to continue this work. We also plan to request financial support from the Watauga County Arts Council. The partnerships with volunteer fire departments will help broaden the base of support for the Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization and help their projects reach a broad and diverse range of community members.

**Conclusions and Recommendations:**

The Elk Knob Community Art project was well received by the community and students. The students’ work is now part of the community. We plan to continue to work with the Elk Knob Community Heritage Council to implement more parts of the public art plan in the future. For fall 2014, we will work with the community to update the public art plan, which is set to expire in 2015.
Attachments (in PDF format):

- Community Art Day Press Release
- Community Art Day Flyer
- Photographs showing students in action

Note on Required Match

Tom Hansell committed 20% of his fall 2013 effort to this project for a total match of $5400, which fulfills the committed cost share for Appalachian State University