

Fresh Paint Springfield 2019: Public Art and Economy in the Renaissance of a Massachusetts City



UMASS DESIGN CENTER IN SPRINGFIELD

Fresh Paint Springfield 2019: Culture and Economy in the Renaissance of a Massachusetts City © 2019

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White Lion Brewing

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Brian Gibbons, BriCan Inc
Fran Cataldo, CW Realty
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Related Management
MA Department of Transportation
MassDevelopment
Springfield Parking Authority
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The concept of a **renaissance** connotes a convergence in time and place of heightened engagement and investment in the arts as a platform for creative, cultural, and environmental expression and development. A renaissance emerges like a spark or dynamite, as individuals, organizations, and communities use their intersecting interests and distinct resources to collectively generate new ventures that go beyond what is possible for those working in isolation. As it unfolds, a renaissance produces much more than the sum of its parts and as such, has a ripple effect that touches and attracts a broader spectrum of individuals, instigates new interactions, and enlivens shared spaces and places.

This new renaissance is here. Fresh Paint kick started a new attitude, different businesses and more people buying in. More people will want to come back to downtown, especially when they feel the art. People have a sense of pride. They're walking their dogs and it gives a chance for store owners to tidy up. It's that leap of faith, that's what Fresh Paint showed people. (FPS Partner)

I wanted to celebrate the artistic fabric of Springfield because I believe the arts lead rejuvenation of neighborhoods. Improvements in the neighborhood help residents' quality of life and I want that to be available for children in the neighborhood, including children in my building. Our residents benefit and it's about boosting the overall quality of life for everyone as the city's renaissance moves forward. (Building Owner)

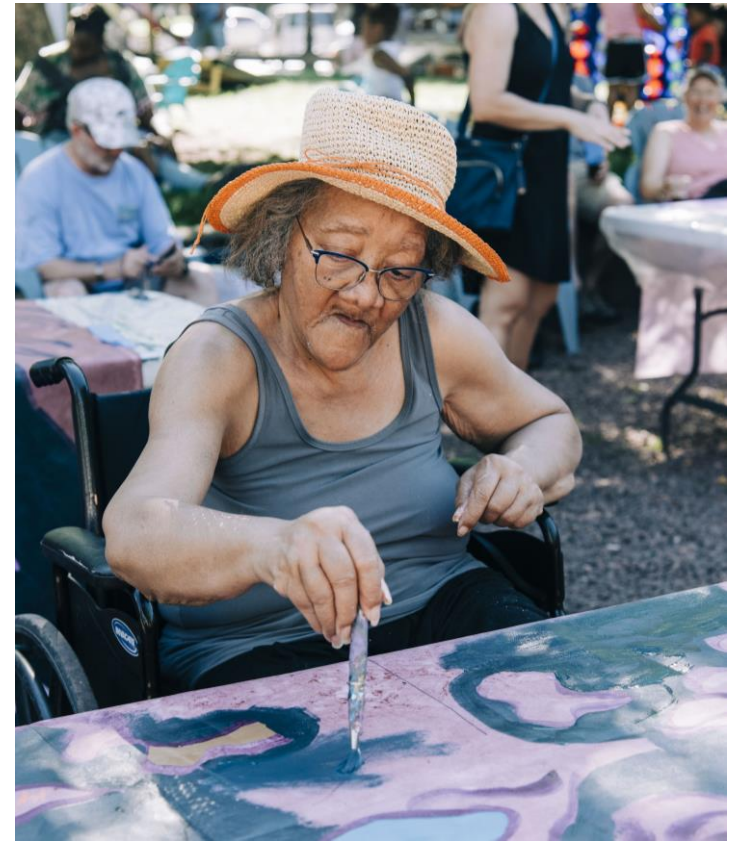


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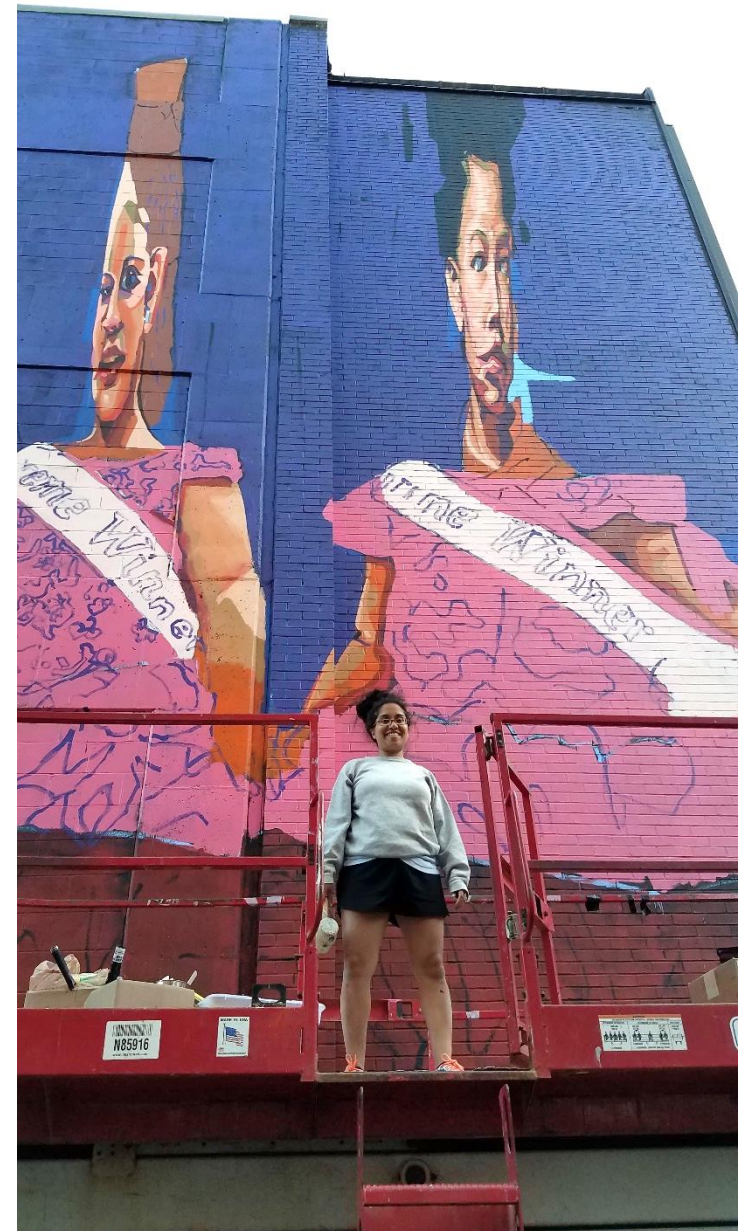
Fresh Paint Springfield:

1. stimulated new investment in the local economy, boosted local businesses and benefitted building owners.
2. increased foot traffic during the festival and permanently improved the walkability of downtown.
3. generated extensive positive media coverage and was effective in improving perceptions of Springfield.
4. created valued public art and built community.
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Introduction

In June 2019, Springfield joined a small cohort of forward-thinking U.S. cities that hold annual mural festivals. Fresh Paint Springfield® 2019 involved 17 professional muralists from the Springfield area and other U.S. cities who, over the course of several weeks, completed 10 large murals in downtown Springfield. During 11 events—including paint parties, gallery exhibitions, mural tours, and a block party—people of all ages participated in painting murals, along with 12 Springfield artists who painted small murals for donation to local community organizations.

The brainchild of festival organizer Britt Ruhe, founding director of the Common Wealth Mural Collaborative® (CWMC), Fresh Paint Springfield 2019 emerged at a fortuitous time. The momentum of a growing cultural and economic renaissance in Springfield was well underway, building on, among other variables, the designation of Springfield's downtown cultural district, the establishment of the Springfield Cultural Partnership, and creation of the MGM casino in the heart of downtown.¹ This context primed civic leaders and organizations to be particularly responsive to an opportunity to test the waters of an innovative venture into urban mural art through supporting creation of the city's first mural festival. Through their involvement in Fresh Paint Springfield, residents, artists, civic leaders, professionals, organizations, businesses, and philanthropic institutions cultivated a rich common ground of community inclusion and belonging—a renaissance in the true sense of the word that has changed the face of Springfield's downtown district and established a new level of involvement and inclusion in the evolution of Springfield.

To study this process, CWMC commissioned a team of specialists from the UMass Design Center and Jessica Payne Consulting to conduct an economic and community impact study of Fresh Paint Springfield. The goal of the study was to measure concrete participatory, financial, cultural, community, and environmental outcomes of the festival. Lara Furtado, M.A. of UMass collected in-person and online surveys and Jessica Payne, Ph.D. of Jessica Payne Consulting conducted interviews to learn from muralists, Springfield residents, business and building owners, and festival sponsors and partners about the process, outcomes, and economic and cultural value of the festival.

This report presents the findings from their study and seeks to capture the energy and excitement that was Fresh Paint Springfield 2019's contribution to Springfield's current renaissance. While mural festivals are by no means a new phenomenon, understanding of their role in stimulating economic and cultural growth is relatively nascent. As such, this study also sought to explore viable impact measures to support accurate, effective communication about the potential benefits of mural festivals, whether in Springfield specifically or in other locales where efforts to invigorate cultural and artistic spaces are underway. Towards that end, we hope that this report will be received in Springfield and beyond as a contribution to the work of future festival organizers, sponsors, muralists and other supporters of mural art and public art.

Finding 1: Fresh Paint Springfield stimulated new investment in the local economy, boosted local businesses and benefitted building owners.

FPS stimulated new investment in the downtown economy.

- FPS emerged as a compelling opportunity for Springfield businesses, investors, sponsors, residents and visitors to make new investments in the local cultural economy.
- \$82,880 in donations from Springfield businesses, municipality, and individuals attracted an additional \$85,000 in donations from outside Springfield for a total of \$167,880.
- The festival production expended just under \$85,000 in Springfield to produce the murals and events. This generated \$127,000 in new sales, \$31,600 in new earnings, and the creation of 1 new job
- The resulting economic impact to Springfield of \$361,481 was 4 times greater than the amount donated from Springfield.

It was a unanimous decision of the board to be a fiscal sponsor. The recognition of arts and culture and the impact that Fresh Paint has in bringing visitors and the community to downtown is critical. (FPS Sponsor)

People were willing to invest so much time and energy and financial resources into making Fresh Paint happen in Springfield. People were actively involved and that's a statement that they understand the cultural impact on the urban environment and on the health and wellbeing of the people who live in Springfield. (FPS Sponsor)

Business owners benefited from an uptick in revenue during the festival.

- Festival visitors spent \$38,556, driving \$60,029 in new sales, \$15,950 in new earnings, and creating another 0.7 jobs in the county.ⁱⁱ
- 22% of businesses surveyed noticed an increase in business activity during and following the festival and an increase in tips and profit of up to 50%.
- 66% reported that the festival introduced them to a new customer base and they received more press and social media coverage than usual.
- 100% of business owner respondents reported that sponsoring the festival was a good use of city and state economic development funds, and that they would like to see FPS happen again.

Fresh Paint brought a lot of people downtown. We saw about a 20-30% increase in business as people were patronizing our restaurant after seeing the murals. Springfield is getting a more welcoming vibe, it's more of a destination where you want to hang out. (Business Owner)

Building owners benefited from beautification of their building walls.

- Building owners' primary rationale for donating walls was to transform their buildings into visible landmarks in order to attract the attention of customers and property and business investors.
- Building owners also used the murals to showcase their active investment in fostering a vibrant, artistic downtown experience and to convey brand messaging about their role in Springfield's cultural district.
- Although quantifying the value added to buildings with new murals is beyond the scope of this study, FPS stakeholders consistently noted that well-kept, beautified buildings attract business, investors, consumers (e.g., tenants, residents, students, audiences, consumers) who might not otherwise consider Springfield as a place to spend their time and money.

This building cried out for a solution and Fresh Paint brought me one. (Building Owner)

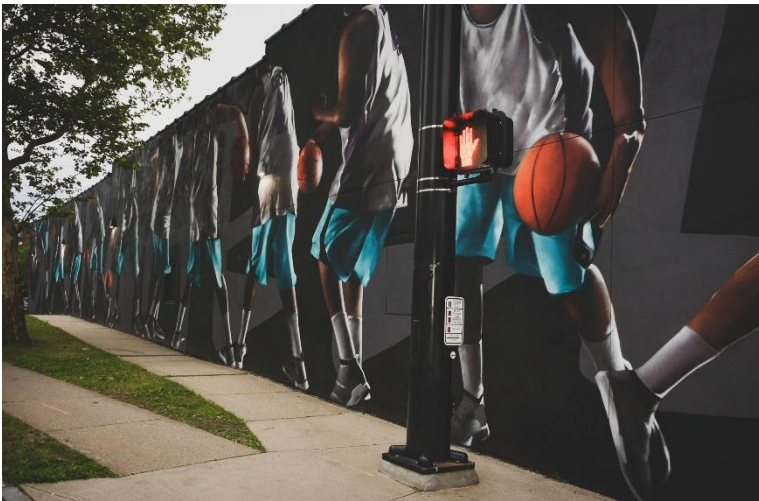
We wanted to attract interest in our property. We bought a building in the heart of the district with the intent to redevelop, so we did a fair amount of stabilization and cleaning of the property to get it into private ownership. It only takes one set of eyeballs on the building to find a buyer and the mural helps with that. (Building Owner)

The festival was one of many positive facets in the public domain that help make investment decisions. People are talking about the murals and that's great. Public, positive word of mouth is what motivates decisions to invest in the long term. That could prompt someone's decision to live downtown when they wouldn't before, or an investor building market rate apartments where they never would have before. (Building Owner)



Finding 2: Fresh Paint Springfield increased foot traffic during the festival and permanently improved the walkability of downtown.

- 72% of respondents said the murals improved the sense of safety and walkability downtown.
- 60% of respondents made a point of walking or driving by the murals 3 or more times during the week of the festival.
- 4 out of 5 of the businesses located in sight of one of the murals noticed more people walking on their block during the festival.
- Downtown businesses report continued queries from individuals throughout the region who intend to visit downtown and want information about the location of the murals.



We're seeing more pedestrians downtown. If you want to get off the train and walk to MGM, there are pleasant experiences on that pathway. That's what makes cities desirable. People feel the murals add value to the properties and to the pedestrian experience downtown. (FPS Partner)

Fresh Paint created a lasting visual impact and contributes to a goal that all of our elected officials and our organization and member organizations have, which is to showcase Springfield as a walkable downtown area. The festival created a vibrancy in the city that you experience every time you see one of the murals. (FPS Sponsor)

An event like Fresh Paint creates more foot traffic downtown, which helps all the folks doing business there and gives it a feeling of safety with more people on the streets. Most of the people who work downtown typically leave to go home. An event like Fresh Paint gets more people out on our streets to have a lunch meeting or a dinner, and maybe even go see more of the murals. Fresh Paint plays a role in that kind of development downtown. (Building Owner)

Finding 3: Fresh Paint Springfield generated extensive positive media coverage and was effective in improving perceptions of Springfield.

TV, radio, print and online media extensively covered FPS, depicting Springfield in a positive light.

- News coverage of FPS via news stories and articles in print, radio, online and TV reached almost 1.5 million people, with almost all media outlets running multiple stories, increasing the likely viewership and impact.
- This coverage has an estimated value of \$138,740.ⁱⁱⁱ
- FPS attracted extensive social media coverage:
 - The FPS Facebook page had 4,861 "engaged users", 85,800 page impressions, and was being followed by 1,304 people.
 - At the end of June, Instagram posts with the hashtag #freshpaintspringfield had been liked over 20,000 times, and the Fresh Paint Springfield Instagram profile has 694 followers.
 - Although FPS did not maintain a Twitter feed, 15 Twitter posts were made about the festival, resulting in 18,718 impressions.
- YouTube videos made by festival attendees were viewed over 30,000 times.

The amount of media coverage of Fresh Paint Springfield was off the charts. Aside from the news coverage we tracked, online sources like MassLive and WWLP have a lot of natives living elsewhere or traveling who check those news links, and virtually all of the media outlets render news with online versions. So we know tens of thousands in the marketplace, and beyond, saw coverage. We are really pleased with that. (FPS Partner)

Fresh Paint exploded on social media. The videos brought images of what was going on, it looked like a commercial. They were fun to see, to see people working and hopping from one mural to another. That got people's attention and they started calling and inviting people to check it out. (Springfield Resident)

Once the murals were completed, I drove around from mural to mural and videotaped it and posted it to our website. I wanted to capture what was happening. I put some music to it and talked about growing up in Springfield and that it's a beautiful place, so come see it. That message got shared so many times. Over 4,000 people viewed it, which for a small company in a small city is a big deal. Our business website had so much traffic that our website host emailed us three days in a row, letting us know that we had hit a high peak of traffic. I hadn't intended that, I had just wanted people to come see the murals and it really worked. (Business Owner)



Engagement with the festival improved people's perceptions of Springfield.

- 75-93% of survey respondents and all interviewees (100%) overwhelmingly reported that the murals and festival events improved perceptions of Springfield as a desirable place to shop, dine, attend events and reside.
- For 100% of respondents, viewing the murals and attending festival events increased the likelihood that they would return to Springfield for other cultural or leisure activities.



Now people come to Springfield and get their photos taken in front of murals that depict positive messages of the city. We're redefining our city. Art and culture and aesthetics bring vibrancy and excitement. And if people are in a place where they feel good, they're more likely to spread a good word and come back. (FPS Sponsor)

Fresh Paint was very celebratory and there was energy, a palpable excitement. The events were well-attended and people were really engaged, they wanted to be part of it. During the block party, the busses were full every time I saw them go by. I walked around to talk with the artists and the bus would go by and all these people would be cheering the artist on and obviously feeling really good about what was happening. (FPS Sponsor)

All of these events help Springfield be more accessible and that helps change the perception of Springfield. People ask me if I'm scared to be in Springfield. Events like Fresh Paint help change that reputation. (Business Owner)

"It's about time for some change. Springfield is a place to love each other and we needed someone to give us some hope and heart. Right now, this is the heart of downtown Springfield. With the casino, and the festival and murals, Springfield is brighter, more alive. You walk downtown, you see the brightness. Now, wherever you look you see art that's made with love and care." (Springfield Resident)

Finding 4: Fresh Paint Springfield created valued public art and built community.

- Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the murals and festival events created valued public art and built community (91-93%).
- 100% of interviewees said FPS built community by creating experiences of inclusivity and belonging in Springfield's downtown. They observed a convergence of individuals diverse in age, race, and ethnicity. The majority also noted that the festival engaged new audiences and individuals who did not typically participate in downtown events.
- 100% of interviewees noted that FPS events generated interactions among individuals of diverse age, race, and ethnicity, in ways that they had not necessarily seen as typical in Springfield.
- The positive reception of the murals among Springfield residents was remarked by all interviewees.



“Most importantly to our organization was the community building, and how the experience was incredibly effective in breaking down social, economic, racial barriers; the public art a close second and thirdly, the ability to demonstrate Springfield as stronger, healthier and a vital and interesting place to visit.” (FSP Sponsor)

The murals communicate that that this is a diverse community and made it more inclusive. Everything was included - people, objects, legacies. There was abstraction, flowers, stories, and something for everyone. Every mural just blossomed. (Business Owner)

Before Fresh Paint, I didn't know a lot about Springfield's history in the Underground Railroad or about the community of Puerto Ricans who live downtown. The murals captured so much about this city and its people and history. Being a part of Fresh Paint taught me so much, introduced me to downtown business, and now I'm more likely to come to events there. (FPS Volunteer)

During the Fresh Paint parties, I saw that people weren't as aware of labels. There were all classes, people were well off, and others were not. Everyone was painting, including the kids. Everyone was gathered around the tables so you were elbow to elbow together. Seeing that interaction and that display of diversity was beautiful. (Business Owner)

Finding 5: Fresh Paint Springfield effectively used public art to engage a diverse group of stakeholders in Springfield's economic and cultural renaissance.

Festival events attracted over 1,800 people, the majority of whom participated for multiple days and in more than one way.

- According to data from survey, aerial, photographic, and RSVP sources, FPS attracted an estimated total of 1,800 participants of multiple age, gender, race, and ethnicity.^{iv}
- Among survey respondents, 45% of participants came from Springfield, 25% from neighboring areas in Hampden County, and 30% came from the Greater Boston area and Connecticut.
- 56% of respondents came specifically for the festival, and 38% were in Springfield for business but also attended festival events.
- FPS consistently engaged visitors more than once and through multiple channels. Respondents attended the festival an average 3.2 out of 8 a total of days. 40% attended one or more events, 76% viewed one or more murals, and 60% also followed the festival online.
- 75% of those surveyed made a point of walking by the murals 3 or more times during the festival.
- The extensive media coverage, with news outlets running multiple stories on FPS, increased the likely exposure of viewing audiences to the festival.

I was really impressed that Fresh Paint brought new people into the conversation about how we can better integrate arts and culture into the economy of the city and what makes a better downtown. When I went to the block party, I looked around and I didn't know anyone there and that never happens. Several hundred people that I didn't know. So we're getting new people to participate in the revitalization of the downtown. (FPS partner)

The paint parties were incredible, with kids and adults and all this diversity and everyone having a great time. The vibe was super energetic and positive and I hope to recreate that over and over again. (Business Owner)

The mural is the perfect complement to our efforts to be part of the renaissance of Springfield. It's an obvious, visual representation of positive change and momentum. (Building owner)

Fresh Paint really helps the community. Art brings us together. I see people on the street, and they were getting a brush and painting on the mural. People in wheelchairs painting! People from all around who had never done this before, all together painting--Chinese, Black, Hispanic. No violence. Just positive. I hope Fresh Paint can keep doing this in Springfield, to bring families together. We need more communication and time together. (Springfield Resident)

Sponsors and business owners recognize the connection between public art and economic development.

- FPS attracted a diverse pool of 12 sponsors that included foundations, non-profits, municipal agencies and private businesses, 82% of which have headquarters in Springfield, 32% are within eyesight of one of the murals, and 27% are downtown but not close to the murals.
- FPS sponsors were predisposed to support the festival, as 80% of supporters had already funded an arts event before. Increasing the amount of public art in Springfield was the highest ranked motivation for sponsoring the festival, followed by providing a boost to the local economy.
- Downtown business owners associated FPS with excitement, positivity, inclusion and connection.
- 100% of the sponsors agreed that the festival was successful in creating public art that will benefit the community.
- 100% of business owners agreed that FPS was a good use of city and state economic development funds and that there should be more mural festivals in Springfield.



Fresh Paint allowed us to be part of something that met all our goals in Springfield about community value, building audiences, authentic outreach, convening, collaborating and connecting. It helped us leverage a connectedness with partnerships and build upon them with other organizations. It created events to bring people into the downtown and increased visibility and powerfully communicated a value proposition for Springfield's downtown district. (FPS Sponsor)

The murals address the bottom line issues in our community. It's about cross-pollination for businesses and the city. With all we have going on, we can attach the murals and the festival to events going on downtown. And there are businesses surrounding the murals, so as folks walk around to see the murals, they can drop in on those businesses as well. (FPS Sponsor)

The murals bring vibrancy to our city and that impacts our restaurants, shops, and business. When people see more things happening here, they are more likely to want to be a resident or to attend a college in Springfield. (FPS Sponsor)

I've always thought we were underutilizing our wall space downtown. I believe in the positive impact at an economic development level of a city that has a "cool factor." The cool factor with Fresh Paint is having wonderful artists activate spaces in a downtown like Springfield with art that people can appreciate. (Business Owner)

Discussion

Mural festivals are good for the economy.

FPS emerged at a fortuitous time as a cultural and economic renaissance in Springfield had already built considerable momentum through the collective efforts of engaged business, civic, and philanthropic individuals and agencies. In that context, FPS made an innovative and multifaceted contribution to the economic revival of Springfield. With combined revenue and sales that were four times greater than Springfield's contribution to the event, FPS more than paid for itself and was widely considered by business and civic leaders to be a worthwhile investment of state, city, and philanthropic funds. Looking forward, stakeholders in Springfield now have ample evidence that Fresh Paint generates a strong economic boost at a relatively modest cost, while simultaneously tapping into and supporting a broad array of economic, municipal and cultural agendas.

Murals transform and activate public spaces.

Across the board, FPS stakeholders agreed that the FPS murals transformed the urban landscape of downtown Springfield. The festival attracted exceptional mural professionals who produced phenomenal and widely appreciated works of art on city walls. The festival galvanized interest and engagement, causing people to travel to and spend time downtown to see the murals, not just once, but for many, several times. During the festival, residents, workers, and visitors forged new pathways for traveling around the downtown district by foot. The murals slowed people down, enhanced walkability, and transformed previously nondescript buildings into landmarks and Springfield's urban sidewalks into gathering spaces for people to appreciate art, pose for commemorative photographs, and learn about the residents, history, and cultural vitality of the city.

Murals appeal to diverse audiences and stakeholders.

Through FPS, sponsors, partners, and other supporters attained shared goals for transforming downtown Springfield into a vibrant, thriving cultural scene. A critical piece of that achievement was the diverse constituents drawn to the festival from within and beyond the downtown district. Stakeholders consistently noted the array of individuals across differences of age, race, and ethnicity who mingled and interacted positively with one another and the muralists. This expansive engagement was embedded in all elements of FPS, from the businesses owned by women and people of color who benefited from festival revenue and sales, to the outpouring of downtown residents volunteering to paint, assist, feed, and sustain the muralists while they worked, and the unprecedented uptick in social media hits produced by a homemade video of the murals that went viral--to name but a few examples.

FPS effectively attracted new and diverse constituents to interact in multiple ways with and through public art. In doing so, the festival was a community building event that used art to catalyze connection, inclusion and belonging--in sharp contrast to what many noted as the more typical negative images of exclusion, division, and disempowerment. Resonating with people across the city, FPS became a common ground to create something better and brighter in the city.

In this sense, FPS was particularly innovative in bringing varied, often unheard and undervalued individuals and voices to the renaissance table to be a part of the new development of the downtown district. When done the right way, a mural festival is a valuable way to incorporate and engage all sectors of a community in times of economic and community transformation.

Mural festivals amplify the impact of murals.

The production and coordination of FPS was also extremely effective in putting forth consistently positive publicity and media attention, resulting in regularly well-attended events. With their celebratory aesthetic, inclusive content, and accessible presentation, the FPS murals, social media representation, and events became a platform for positive images and experiences of the city. Through the festival and the enthusiasm it garnered, residents and visitors alike want to spend more time in the downtown area.

Originally proposed for 5 murals, the enthusiastic reception to the festival among Springfield's civic, municipal, philanthropic, and general population led to an event that was doubled in size. The substantial scale of FPS had a significant role in contributing to its expansive impact. Taking place over an extended timeframe, engaging numerous muralists and walls, and including a variety of events, the festival offered an exceptionally varied menu of ways for individuals to engage. The structure of the festival itself encouraged individuals to participate not just once, but multiple times--whether to see murals in progress, attend a paint party or exhibition, or take a bus tour or organize a family visit to see the walls once they were finished. The principle of 'dosage' suggests that social messages received in multiple ways and instances are likely to be taken in more substantively than what is possible through a singular exposure. FPS furnished an effective number of opportunities for participants to absorb the messaging and community-building impact of the murals and the festival itself.

Behind-the-scenes decisions impact outcomes as much as the art.

The depth and breadth of engagement with diverse stakeholders emerged as one of the most important and unique aspects of FPS. While the outpouring of support and broad engagement in FPS came as a surprise to many, these outcomes were largely tied to intentional production decisions. Inclusion and diversity were guiding principles in all aspects of the festival production, from the selection of vendors and event hosts, to images shown on the festival website and social media feed, to the muralists and the images they created. For example, 50% of FPS production spending was done at women or minority-owned businesses, even though women or minorities own only 12% of businesses in Springfield. This resulted in a consistent and comprehensive communication of the value and respect the festival placed on people who may not typically feel included in downtown events, and the creation of high quality public art that permanently memorializes the value of diversity and inclusion in community life. The impact of these and other elements in creating an event of substantial scale, diverse engagement, and cultural and economic impact suggests that mural festivals are most effective when produced through a comprehensive, aligned, and professionally conceived approach to overall production and delivery.



Conclusion

Findings from this study indicate that Fresh Paint Springfield created a vibrant, accessible opportunity that attracts investors, businesses, consumers, tourists, and residents to be a part of Springfield as an up and coming renaissance city. Because it entailed such a wide range of elements and activities, FPS emerged as an excellent platform for engaging a broad spectrum of individuals in multiple ways to infuse the local cultural economy with new energy and a positive, fresh take. It is thus not surprising that FPS sponsors, business owners, participating muralists and artists and festival attendees view the festival as a worthwhile investment of state and city funds and by extension, are unanimous across that board in wanting to see Fresh Paint Springfield happen again.

Fresh Paint encouraged people to explore and appreciate local public spaces and businesses, even if their primary reason for being in the area was for work or because they live in Springfield. In addition to generating a widely expressed enthusiasm for another mural festival, FPS provided an immediate positive contribution to the local economy, improved the walkability of downtown, enhanced the image of downtown Springfield, and increased the likelihood that people will return to downtown Springfield and recommend it to friends. With discussion already underway for a festival next year, these impacts are likely to grow as planning, fundraising, wall selection, recruitment of muralists and artists, and coordination complementary events gets underway for Fresh Paint Springfield 2020.



ⁱ The Springfield Cultural Partnership is a non-profit member organization established in 2014. The membership constitutes a collective of individuals and organizations jointly committed to “creating and sustaining a vibrant cultural environment, authentically engaging institutions, artists, and the community.” <http://springfieldculture.org>.

ⁱⁱ The festival’s economic impact is calculated based on *new* revenue added to the local economy during the festival itself. This includes 100% of the estimated spending of those who attended the festival from outside the region, and 15% of the estimated spending of local attendees. We used attendance expenditure information provided in the Arts and Economic Prosperity V report developed by Americans for the Arts to estimate the amount of new revenue being added to the local economy from festival attendees.

ⁱⁱⁱ Media coverage tracked included print, TV and radio stories about the festival as well as coverage and interaction on social media. Circulation figures for the news sources were obtained from the media outlets Nielsen ratings, which allowed us to estimate the economic value of each story.

^{iv} The survey sample is not representative of all attendees since it did not include elementary school children and younger participants who were less likely to complete surveys. Though surveys did not include demographic information, interviewees consistently indicated significant diversity of participants relative to age, race, and ethnicity.

