

Michigan Municipal League

Ponyride



michigan municipal league
Better Communities. Better Michigan.



PROJECT DETAILS:

NAME:

Ponyride

DATE:

2011–Present

LOCATION:

Detroit, Michigan

CATEGORIES:

Live, Work, Play
Entrepreneurship
Arts & Culture

THE GIST:

Ponyride is a creative incubator that provides artists and socially conscious entrepreneurs with an affordable space in a hip environment to work on their craft. The low purchase price of the property and the generous outpouring of community support means tenants can rent studios for as little as a dime or a quarter per square foot—and that artists and small businesses can thrive.



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PROJECT SCOPE:

The Challenge:

How can the foreclosure crisis have a positive impact on creativity in our communities?

Overview:

Ponyride is located in a 30,000-square-foot warehouse in Detroit's Corktown, a lively and vibrant neighborhood with new and old cafes, shops, and bars. Using an "all boats rise with the tide" rent subsidy, the incubator provides cheap space for socially conscious artists and entrepreneurs to work and share knowledge, resources, and networks. By providing the residents with subsidized spaces, creatives at Ponyride are able to focus on their work without sweating the details.

Current creatives in residence include coffee roasters, furniture makers, metalsmiths, dance instructors, fashion designers, and filmmakers. One of the only stipulations is that each tenant share their work with the community by providing at least 63 hours of classes a month. The artists' financial freedom and creative collaboration have made Ponyride a local hub for creativity and platform for light manufacturing.

Accomplishments:

- Completed 60,000 volunteer hours with local artists, students, and entrepreneurs.
- Created an education program requiring on-site studios to provide 63 hours of classes a month.
- Incubated 15+ creative enterprises including Detroit Denim, Empowerment Plan, Order & Other, Stukenborg Letterpress Studio, and Smith Shop Detroit.
- Hosted internationally renowned artists Steven Coy, Noah Kaminsky, and Zak Meers.

Organization:

Ponyride is led by an executive director and visionary developer. The team also includes an architect, a marketing coordinator, building manager, and program developer.

Budget:

Ponyride's warehouse was originally purchased for \$100,000 by local entrepreneur Phil Cooley. Private donations, upcycled materials, and volunteer support have kept the build-out lean. The incubator is currently applying for their 501(c)(3) status and is seeking additional grant funding for facade improvements.

Funding:

Additional funding is provided through their space rentals. The creative incubator rents the space out for as little as a dime to a quarter per square foot, which includes the cost of utilities. Ponyride also has a membership program that allows participants to use their office space for \$25 a month or rent a desk for \$100 a month.

Participants:

Ponyride boasts an eclectic list of tenants. From printers to fencers, the low barrier of entry for renting space allows all sorts of talented creatives to sign on. Current organizations or businesses that call Ponyride home include: Hunt & Noyer Woodworks, Empowerment Plan, En Garde, Detroit Denim, Order and Other, RunJit, and Stukenborg Letterpress. Ponyride is also made possible by countless volunteer hours donated by friends, family, and fans.

Inspiration:

Ponyride explores the potential positive impact the foreclosure crisis can have on creativity in our communities. It engages a varied group of artistic or socially conscious entrepreneurs, giving them the opportunity for production, community outreach, and education. One of its signature goals is to turn the notion of foreclosure on its head, showing how cheap rent can help some creatives thrive, in turn building a more integrated and diverse community and economy.



Actions Taken:

1) FIND THE RIGHT FORECLOSURE.

Ponyride is located in Corktown, Detroit's oldest neighborhood and a contemporary creative hub. The warehouse is a hidden architectural gem; however, the 30,000 square feet was an intimidating scale for prospective buyers. Consider your operation, and find a building that has room to grow but can be programmed to meet your immediate needs.

2) CONSTRUCT A PLAN.

Ponyride worked with a local architect to create building plans that would address all of its long-term goals and short-term needs. Setting bold goals and a timeline will keep the team focused. Use repurposed and salvaged materials to keep your investment lean and the space green.

3) LISTEN TO YOUR TENANTS.

The incubator is home to long-term studios that allow artists and organizations to focus on their crafts and missions and to share their expertise. One of the most interesting aspect about Ponyride is watching its talented entrepreneurs pitch in and restore the building. Walking around Ponyride, you get a true sense for the entrepreneurial, roll-up-your-sleeves energy in Detroit. Sheetrock and piles of fiberglass insulation await installation. The creatives who call Ponyride home have been involved in the visioning and planning processes, and because of their input the space feel authentic and meets all of their needs.

4) ENJOY THE PROCESS.

The space's focus on craft and hands-on problem solving is palpable in the layout of the building and the business models of its inhabitants. A monthly schedule is painted on the wall and signs for chores hang in bathrooms and hallways. It is an organic creative incubator and stays flexible and learning from process and collaboration.

5) CURATE AND VISION.

Ponyride's success depends on its diverse tenants and unique programing. The team seeks creatives and innovators who bring new skills and vision to the space and hosts unconventional events and classes. One of the tenants in the building is Veronika Scott. She created a company that provides a self-heating coat that turns into a waterproof sleeping bag for homeless individuals in Detroit and other cities around the country.

6) OPEN YOUR DOORS.

Every Wednesday evening Ponyride opens its doors for Volunteer Night. This is the opportunity for artists, neighbors, and new recruits pick up hammers, paint, and build the space. Make the construction party an event for both the curious fan and dedicated tenant.

7) PROMOTE EDUCATION.

Ponyride requires that each tenant share their craft with the local community. It is one of the only stipulations for joining the incubator. Each member must teach 63 hours of classes a month. From jewelry-making to fencing, participants learn new skills and experience a working studio. Ponyride also hosts short-term artists in residence to share their talents and expertise with Detroit. The space has a small apartment unit for guest artists, critics, and lecturers.



8) PLAN NEXT PHASE.

Ponyride is constantly evolving. While the coffee shop, dance studio, light manufacturing workspaces, and woodshop are occupied, there is still a significant amount of square footage that needs to be developed, and several facade improvements that need to be done. Top on the to-do list includes a vibrant co-working space on the second floor where participants will be able to rent a desk for \$100 or use of the space for \$25 each month. Always conscious of time and funding, Ponyride is always problem-solving and growing in hopes of supporting its entrepreneurs and other creatives living and working in Detroit.

Lessons Learned:

- Place vs. Space
"It's hard work and constant maintenance. Garner a team of core participants and volunteers to support your work."
- Say Yes.
"Let people come in and participate. Keep your doors open, but also be mindful and purposeful with your time and resources."
- Value Process.
"Learn from the process. When you are working on a new project it is easy to become frustrated. Believe in your work and stay positive."

Experts:

Kate Bordine, Ponyride Executive Director, kate.bordine@gmail.com

Documents:

Brochure
Architectural Plans
Rendering

The Center for 21st Century Communities

Building 21st century communities

Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan's future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is *place*. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at mml.org.

Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

What we know...

Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan's future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? *Place*, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

What we offer...

Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a "one-stop-shop" for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.



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