

# Michigan Municipal League Crowdfunded Art Park Builds Community



Ironwood, Michigan



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# Crowdfunded Art Park Builds Community

## PROJECT DETAILS:

### NAME:

Crowdfunded Art Park Builds Community in Ironwood

### PROJECT START DATE:

2014

### LOCATION:

Ironwood, Michigan

### THE GIST:

A public-private partnership opens community gathering space and art park.

A lot had been sitting vacant in downtown Ironwood for years and no one knew exactly what to do with it. In 2014, the city underwent a comprehensive planning process to guide future investment, development, and growth. Through a series of engagement activities including an open house, workshops, surveys, and small group discussions, residents repeatedly said they wanted a public place to display and enjoy local art. It didn't take long for the city to connect the dots, and they got to work creating the Ironwood Art Park.

## OVERVIEW:

The Art Park is a public-private partnership that gives residents and visitors a venue to gather, display art, hold performances, and offer classes. The city raised enough money through crowdfunding and a matching grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) to open the park with new landscaping, electricity, benches, and a performance area.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

The park opened in July 2015, and already the community is proud of its many accomplishments:

- The city raised \$15,711 through an online crowdfunding campaign to fund the construction of the Art Park, which exceeded its goal of \$10,000.
- 118 people contributed to the crowdfunding campaign. "This speaks volumes of the support the community has for this project," said Community Development Director Michael Brown. "People are excited about place-making and this will really help give the community an edge."



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- The community formed a leadership group composed of municipal officials, the Downtown Development Authority, and local artists to help guide the project. This is the first time the city has ever partnered with artists in this way.

### **PARTICIPATION:**

The public-private partnership is a coordinated effort of:

- The city of Ironwood;
- The Downtown Art Place (DAP);
- The Downtown Ironwood Development Authority (DIDA); and
- The Historic Ironwood Theatre

Patronicity, a Michigan-focused crowdfunding site, took on an advisory role through the crowdfunding campaign offering personalized support—including creating a funding strategy and handling communication between MEDC—throughout the campaign. MEDC supported the project through a matching grant.

### **BUDGET:**

Start-up and initial construction costs for the Art Park came in just under \$25,000. This included concrete, landscaping, electricity, benches and more. The city will continue limited maintenance of the park but the DAP will seek grants to support the park long-term. This includes future improvements, art installations, and programming expenses.

### **FUNDING:**

\$15,711 came from individual donations through the online crowdfunding campaign and the city was awarded a \$10,000 matching grant from MEDC's Public Spaces Community Places program. Some materials were also donated, such as chairs and an arbor that were built by a local woodworker.

DAP will secure future funding for the park through additional art-focused grant-making opportunities.

### **HOW-TO:**

#### **1. Listen to the community**

In 2009, the city adopted a master plan which called for more public art. The community also prioritized art and public spaces in their July 2014 comprehensive plan. Residents were sending a pretty clear message and the city listened.

#### **2. Build a creative and collaborative team to lead the project**

After the community brought the idea of an art park to Ironwood, the city formed a committee with representatives from DAP, DIDA, and the Historic Theatre. The committee created renditions of what the park "could be" to use in their crowdfunding drive.



### 3. Raise money

In November of 2014, the committee partnered with Patronicity to kick-off their campaign. Over the next 30 days, each partner worked hard to promote the park, solicit donations, and get support across the community.

Patronicity coordinated the application process to MEDC's grant and the city got approval of their grant within just a few days of submitting the application. After the crowdfunding campaign was over—and the community had met, and exceeded their goal—Ironwood received grant funds from MEDC in early 2015.

### 4. Get to work

The city transferred park designs into formal schematics and construction started in June. The ribbon cutting event took place July 17, 2015 and the city hopes to build the mural within the next year. Art Park partners wanted to give residents even more ownership of space so they plan on having the public create a mural in the park themselves; children and adults will decorate tiles and each will be mounted on the wall to create a large community-driven art display.

### 5. See what happens next

DAP is taking over much of the programming and ongoing art exhibitions in the park. They plan to open the space for organizations to host events, offer classes, put on performances, and display art. As of right now, there aren't any set guidelines for how the park can be used—and that's on purpose! Partners hope the park will be an organic, public space so the city will watch what happens and only make changes or regulations when they really need to.

## LESSONS LEARNED:

### ➤ Really listen to the community

“The park didn’t come out of thin air and it didn’t come from one person,” Brown said. “It started with public planning processes—people put an emphasis on public art and public spaces, so that’s what we prioritized. You’ll run into a lot of resistance for any project you do if you don’t have strong public support and input.”

### ➤ Crowdfund, crowdfund, crowdfund

“Since you know you have the support, go out with a constant, daily message to raise money,” Brown said. “Dedicate one person to manage social media and try to find someone who has experience in marketing. You’ll need to come up with a ton of new ways to say ‘please donate’ and ‘support’ that still catch people’s attention.”

### ➤ Don’t over-plan the future

“See how the public responds and learn from what takes place,” Brown said. “Evaluate before you move forward.”

## CONTACT THE EXPERT:

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Patronicity, [www.patronicity.com](http://www.patronicity.com)
- MEDC Public Spaces Community Places Grant, [www.patronicity.com/puremichigan](http://www.patronicity.com/puremichigan)
- Ironwood 2014 Comprehensive Plan, Chapters 5 & 6 discuss art, available at [www.cityofironwood.org](http://www.cityofironwood.org)
- Ironwood Downtown Blueprint 2009, available at [www.cityofironwood.org](http://www.cityofironwood.org)

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## Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is dedicated to making Michigan's communities better by thoughtfully innovating programs, energetically connecting ideas and people, actively serving members with resources and services, and passionately inspiring positive change for Michigan's greatest centers of potential: its communities.

## 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.



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