

2003

## Creative Providence

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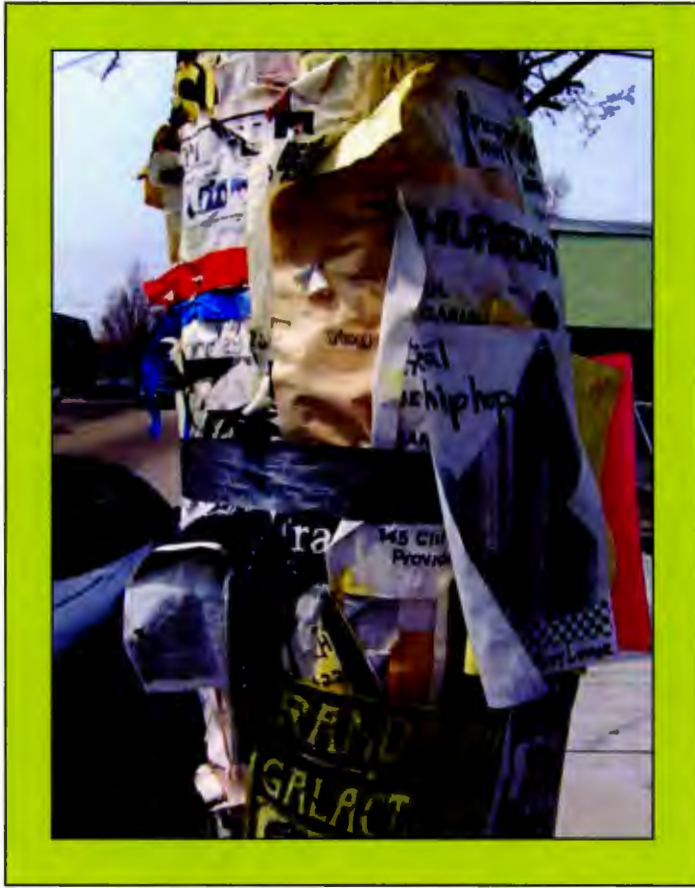
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# Creative Providence

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By Dan Goodman

University of Rhode Island



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Fall 2003

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**MASTER OF COMMUNITY PLANNING**


**RESEARCH PROJECT**

**OF**

**DAN GOODMAN**

**Approved:**

**Major Professor**

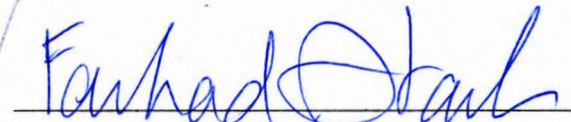


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**Dr. Marshall Feldman**

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## Executive Summary

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This project examines how Providence, Rhode Island is functioning as a creative place. Using the arguments that Richard Florida presents in The Rise of the Creative Class as a framework, it explores a local economic development issue from the perspective of young and creative people. It compares their perspective with Florida's characterizations, provides insight into commonly held perceptions



about the city, and presents ideas on how creativity could be better supported.

In his book, Florida argues that creative people are the building blocks of future economic development. They are mobile and will seek out places with certain

characteristics. He maintains that cities should develop these characteristics, in order to attract and maintain the people that will determine the trajectory of future economic growth. This project explores the application of Florida's argument in Providence and examines the positive and negative implications of the processes that he describes.

It is beyond the scope of this project to place Florida's ideas in context with competing explanations of economic development. However, this context is necessary if any attempts to pursue public policy related to findings presented in this report, are being considered.

I completed sixteen interviews in spring 2003 using a non-random snowball sample technique designed to reach young creative people in Providence. The sample is not entirely representative and has limitations; nevertheless it provides insight into commonly held perceptions of an important group of people in the city. I inquired about their views and opinions in an effort to explore how Providence is functioning as a creative place. While recognizing the difficulty of integrating diverse viewpoints, in this report, I attempt to weave together shared ideas in a coherent and accurate way in the hope that it will inform planning efforts.

Interviews exposed a socially aware young creative community, actively engaged in local issues such as affordable housing and arts education. The people that I spoke with appeared to be motivated by a desire to affect positive social change. By being actively involved in social justice issues, in many cases by starting non-profit organizations, they strived to be a force for revitalization and empowerment. This desire appeared to be an explicit motivating factor in their work.

Interviews highlighted a community that has an intense desire to maintain and nurture authenticity. Several people mentioned the Olneyville, West End, and Southside neighborhoods as areas that represent the authentic, genuine and real character of Providence that they value. The showing of silent films set to live music, the Convergence public sculpture exhibition, and establishments such as the Red Fez restaurant and the White Electric Coffee Shop further represent these characteristics. These events and establishments distinguish Providence from other places because, according to one person, they possess “an attitude that comes through in the experience of them.”

Finally, interviews exposed a notably entrepreneurial group of people, who appeared to be taking innovative and creative ideas and pursuing them with enthusiasm. They had started businesses and non-profit organizations in the city, several of which were spawned from ideas originating in their

undergraduate careers. Many people were now employed by these businesses and organizations. The group exhibited an entrepreneurial spirit by using creative ideas as the starting point for action.

Interviews in Providence supported Florida's claim that creative people are motivated by intrinsic rewards and value diversity and merit. They also supported many of his observations about the changing nature of the workforce. However, they highlighted unique attributes of the local creative community, which include a notably entrepreneurial group with an intense desire to maintain authenticity and to be actively involved in social justice issues.

In addition, interviews indicated that Providence, in itself, has a wealth of amenities relevant to Florida's arguments. Characteristics cited often include a strong community, unique neighborhoods, and a supportive and engaging environment conducive to creative activity. Respondents mentioned that it has a good physical location near urban and natural areas of interest, unique architecture exhibited in abundant mill buildings, and a diverse population. It is a center of artistic talent and above all, has a strong sense of place. Respondents also noted the scale of the city as a vitally important attribute.

Respondents had many ideas about how the creative economy could be better supported in Providence. Their opinions are important to note because they are based on personal experience. Ideas centered on increasing the demand for creative work in Providence, which can occur by increasing access to creative products and by engaging the business community. They argued for the importance of increasing opportunities for communication, for example through targeted marketing campaigns, retreats, and focused networking events. Finally, they noted the importance of increasing participation in local organizing and planning efforts, which could be encouraged by making events participatory and informal.



Future research could explore relationships between diverse occupations while examining ways to build bridges between them. Interviews highlighted a need to explore ways to encourage fiscal stability while retaining authentic character, which people value. Respondents highlighted a need to document other city's successful efforts at increasing communication within their respective creative economy while at the same time; they demonstrated a need to develop a more detailed vocabulary that distinguishes between various aspects of gentrification. Interviews also highlighted a need to pursue studies with greater geographical precision and to document rates of college graduates deciding to stay in Providence after graduation. Future research in these areas could contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding the creative economy in Providence.

Unique strengths of the city identified by this project include a young creative community that is actively working to affect positive social change. They have an intense desire to maintain and nurture authentic characteristics in the city and are notably entrepreneurial. The combination of an engaged and entrepreneurial group with a genuine desire to contribute to the community is a tremendous asset to build on as Providence plans for a sustainable future.

## Introduction

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This project examines the perceptions of young creative people in Providence, Rhode Island. It uses arguments that Richard Florida presents in his book, The Rise of the Creative Class, as the framework for exploring a contemporary planning issue. By presenting Florida's ideas and using them as the organizational basis for interviews with young people in the city, this project explores the relationship between creativity and economic development.

This project brings Florida's argument down to the local level by attempting to conceptualize creative assets in Providence, which Florida argues will play an increasingly important economic role in the future. It highlights common themes and shared concerns regarding the local creative environment and draws parallels between people's perceptions. It presents commonly voiced ideas regarding ways that creativity could be more effectively nurtured.



I am completing this project for Robert Leaver of New Commons (Home of Organizational Futures), Beth Collins of the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council (RIEPC), and in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements for a graduate degree in Community Planning from the University of Rhode Island. Mr. Leaver and Ms. Collins, my clients, asked me to interview young creative people in

Providence to gather information about what they find important and appealing about the city. This information is synthesized in the executive summary and presented primarily in chapters three and four. The other chapters in this report are my own and are meant to provide context. They draw from the interviews and my own research and attempt a more nuanced perspective of the issues at hand.

In this project, I have gathered qualitative information through interviews with sixteen young creative people, identified through a non-random snowball sample technique. I attempt to focus on what is attracting people to Providence and what is pushing them away. I do this by highlighting unique and desirable characteristics, locations, events, and cultural attractions that people find important, and which distinguish Providence from other places. These characteristics contribute to an environment that nurtures the group of people that Florida argues will determine future economic growth. By examining their perceptions, I draw conclusions about how the city does or does not appeal as a creative place.

Documenting perceptions of the creative milieu in the city will inform local and state economic development efforts. It will let outsiders know about the character and extent of creative activity in the city and will provide those engaging in creative activity within Providence with one perspective on each other. This is important because, “Providence lacks compelling collateral materials to demonstrate how pervasive these assets are in the city” (*The Providence Foundation* 2002, 4). It is my hope that this project will contribute in this regard.

In chapter one, I present general ideas concerning the creative economy, which Florida outlines in his book. I present the theoretical and historical foundations of Florida’s arguments and document the methodology that he employs. This information is provided in an effort to lay a foundation for arguments and observations made in later chapters. As has been noted, it is not the goal of this

project to place Florida's argument within a context of competing theories of economic development. In addition, it is not the goal of this work to draw a correlation between the people that I interviewed and direct economic outcomes. It is simply to use one perspective on economic development processes as a framework in which to explore local perceptions.

Florida's ideas are employed as an organizational device; however, they are not accepted uncritically. In chapter two, I critique Florida's argument based in part on the opinions and observations of interview participants. As has been noted, their perspective is based on personal experience in the local creative economy and thus, it offers a unique and important point of view.

By using Florida's ideas as a framework, I am implicitly operating under the assumption that they are valid and applicable to Providence. Given this assumption, in chapter three, I outline the interview process and methodology that I used to complete the interviews. This chapter includes a discussion of limitations of the study sample. In chapter four, I explore the perceptions and opinions that young creative people expressed in interviews. In this effort, I compare what interview participants said with Florida's characterizations. I do this in an effort to highlight consistencies and explore potential variations.

Chapter five details apprehension about Florida's concepts expressed in interviews. It attempts to place organizing efforts regarding the creative economy in perspective. Chapter six includes action plans to better support local creative people. It is assumed that any effort to pursue these ideas would be informed by competing explanations of economic development and would be done in concert with other economic development strategies. Chapter seven includes ideas for future research identified through work on this project.

Using Florida's work as a foundation, my project explores perceptions of the creative milieu in Providence. By highlighting young, creative, and local perspectives, I offer insight into how Providence is functioning as a creative place. This project attempts to contribute to a more meaningful understanding of the characteristics of the local environment that people find important, and that Florida argues will be crucial to future economic development.

## Chapter 1: Richard Florida and Providence, Rhode Island Case Study

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Richard Florida argues that the economy is in a period of transformation in which ideas are becoming the primary driver of economic growth. While owning the means of production, controlling natural resources, and geographic location determined economic growth in previous economic eras; the ability to harness human creativity successfully is now the decisive factor, according to Florida.



He claims that cities and regions that nurture creativity will attract creative people, who are the essential building blocks of future economic growth. According to Florida, “the companies then follow, or in many cases, are started by them” (Florida 2002, 218). There are many competing theories, which explain these dynamic economic development processes in vastly different ways. This study does not examine these competing explanations; rather it simply presents Florida’s argument, as it is detailed in The Rise of the Creative Class, and attempts to relate it to the study area.

Florida defines creativity as the ability to create meaningful new forms and argues that the concept is multidimensional and experiential. He argues that a city’s economic development strategy should revolve around creating an environment that will attract and maintain talented people, because they are the source of creativity. Florida cites the economic modeling of Robert Axtell as support for his argument by claiming that his research demonstrates that, “what matters to economic growth in cities is the ability to attract creative people” (Florida 2002, 265).

In Florida's argument, creative people make up the creative class, which is identified using a broad list of occupations. As such, the basis for the group is economic. According to Florida, "My definition of class emphasizes the way people organize themselves into social groupings and common identity based primarily on their economic function" (Florida 2002, 238). In fact, this group of occupations includes approximately thirty-eight million Americans, or nearly thirty percent of the national workforce (Florida 2002, 38).

In an effort to place these assertions in historical perspective, he outlines four crucial periods of economic transition in human history, each of which he claims were hinged on advances in the ability to harness creativity more effectively for economic purposes. His accounting of these economic phases draws heavily on other's work, and he explicitly recognizes this in his discussion (Florida 2002, 56). However, his version gives greater prominence to the notion that creativity is the key underlying driver of change.

The first supposed shift is the rise of organized agriculture in place of a less organized and more transient system of hunting and gathering (Florida 2002, 57). The agricultural system was more productive per unit of land and more reliable than the previous system. More importantly, the economic transformation brought about by organized agriculture encouraged and rewarded creative faculties because as a system it is "highly amenable to elaboration and improvements" (Florida 2002, 57). Due in large part to this shift, people were able to settle more densely into what would become cities. Florida claims that as a result of this shift, governing systems developed and class structures and power relations emerged.

The second crucial period of transition occurred through trade and specialization. As economic systems developed and became more advanced, people were able to specialize in particular activities,

and this allowed production to become more efficient. Cities became what Florida calls “hubs of creativity” because they were centers of specialization and diverse economic interaction (Florida 2002, 59). Through these interactions, people were able to obtain the goods and services that they needed from various sources rather than having to produce everything by themselves. Eventually, groups of people joined unions and guilds, and these professional organizations formed the basis of political power and advancement (Florida 2002, 34).

The third important economic transition is the emergence of industrial capitalism and the factory system (Florida 2002, 60). This new system was premised on the idea that by bringing together workers, tools, and materials in one central location and by instituting a high degree of division of labor, goods could be produced efficiently and wealth could be generated in proportions previously unimaginable, albeit for only a small segment of the population. Providence grew into a city at this time and the abundant mill buildings that remain in neighborhoods such as Olneyville, West End, and South Providence are a physical remnant of the era. The factory system was a prerequisite to the use of automation. According to Florida, this combination of automated machinery, such as the steam engine and power loom, and a system for using it, unleashed a wave of creativity (Florida 2002, 62).

The fourth crucial economic shift detailed by Florida, is the emergence of the organization age, which encompassed a move to a highly organized economy and society whose fundamental features included large-scale institutions, functional specialization, and bureaucracy (Florida 2002, 62). This economic era focused on breaking down tasks into the most elemental components and transforming human productive activity into stable and predictable routines. Finely honed division of tasks, hierarchy, and bureaucracy created rules, which came to define work in virtually every manner. While these elements enabled advantages such as systematic research and development, increased efficiency, and reduced costs, according to Florida, they eventually created conflict. He attributes this



conflict to the fact that the economic system stifled human creativity. As in all previous economic shifts, the evolving role of creativity is the lynchpin of larger economic change.

By briefly outlining significant historical shifts in the economic system, Florida lays a foundation for his argument that we are currently witnessing another significant shift in the economic structure. As in previous shifts, Florida claims that an emerging understanding and appreciation of the economic importance of creativity is bringing about this transformation. Note that Florida's historical analysis is brief and targeted toward a popular audience. Others have highlighted the economic shifts discussed previously but they explained them in very different ways. The reader should seek out additional research that places Florida's claims in a broader context of economic development theory and historical analysis, if public policy implications are being considered.

Florida claims that these shifts reflect a move toward a system that builds on the strengths of previous eras while more effectively encouraging and capturing creativity. A significant part of his book is dedicated to observations about the changing nature of work, community, and life. Florida claims that people, now more than ever, value individuality, merit, diversity, and self-statement. They are making space for these values and, as a result, are driving a shift toward a horizontal labor market where people change jobs often, identify with their occupation more than with their company, and bear more responsibility for every aspect of their career (Florida 2002, 114).

They are motivated by intrinsic factors such as peer respect and recognition and, according to Florida, management styles have had to adapt to these evolving priorities. He uses observations about the changing dress code, schedule, and workspace as evidence that creativity is being better accommodated in the emerging economic system.

Florida's characteristics of the creative class are dealt with in greater detail in the discussion of interviews in chapter four. However, the element of his argument that is most important presently is the notion that creative and talented people will choose to live in places with particular characteristics. Florida argues that creative people drive economic growth and that they will choose to live and work in regions that offer a certain "quality of place," which he defines through three questions; what's there, who's there, and what's going on? (Florida 2002, 243) This project explores these questions as they relate to Providence.

Drawing from assumptions about mobility and choice, Florida argues that economic development strategies should focus on enticing creative people with an environment that is diverse, tolerant, and open to new ideas. Cities can do this by promoting and nurturing what he calls the Three T's: Talent, Technology, and Tolerance (Florida 2002, 109). Talent reflects issues relating to the workforce, technology represents the existing infrastructure to support creativity and innovation, and tolerance reflects the overall attitude of a place.

Florida builds on his argument by offering what he considers to be three institutions that serve as a foundation for the emerging creative economy and there are examples of each in the study area. The first involves new systems for technological creativity and entrepreneurship, which Florida claims ensure that creativity is not only encouraged, but also financially supported (Florida 2002, 48). It is demonstrated through funding for research and development and through the venture capital system. In Providence, institutions such as the Rhode Island School of Design and Brown University, hospitals such as Lifespan and Care New England, and the Samuel Slater Technology Fund and its four Slater Centers assume these functions (*Initiative for a Competitive Inner City* 2002, 13).

The venture capital system encourages a social structure of innovation by creating an environment where ideas can feasibly turn into economically valuable products. In Rhode Island, the Samuel Slater Centers attempt to provide both money and mentoring to support: Marine and Environmental, Biomedical Technology, Design and Manufacturing, and Interactive Technologies. In addition, the Slater Centers seek to facilitate the development and support of serial entrepreneurs, or people who start many businesses in a relatively small amount of time and angel networks, a financial and professional support system for entrepreneurs.

The second institution of the creative economy involves new models for making things, and can be captured in concepts such as the creative factory and modular manufacturing (Florida 2002, 52). The creative or smart factory encourages workers and management to contribute ideas that may assist in producing products better and more efficiently. Utilizing “just in time inventory” ensures that space and resources are used to the maximum benefit. Modular manufacturing involves outsourcing to specialized contractors, which Florida claims will lower barriers to entry. According to Florida, this allows creative people to focus on innovative product design and subcontractors to focus on improving the manufacturing process.

The third and final foundation of the creative economy is what he terms a “social and cultural milieu” (Florida 2002, 55). This milieu supports lifestyles and cultural institutions that provide the “underlying eco-system or habitat in which the multidimensional forms of creativity take root and flourish” (Florida 2002, 55). By virtue of their abilities, creative people can choose where they will live and work (*Federal Reserve Bank of Boston* 2002, 24). When presented with this choice, Florida argues that they will gravitate towards cities with a thick labor market, recreational opportunities, lifestyle options, opportunities for social interaction, and diversity. They will go to places with a high

quality of place and that have authentic identity. This project focuses on this aspect of Florida's argument.

Because of the broad and nebulous nature of creativity, it is difficult to measure and compare different regions; however, Florida has attempted this through his "Creativity Index" (Florida 2002, 214). The Creativity Index is one of the analytical instruments that he uses to measure and compare a region's creative environment. It is a mix of four equally weighted factors using data compiled for Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA). For the Providence region, the Providence-Warwick-Fall River MSA is used, which includes nearly the entire State of Rhode Island as well as a small part of the State of Massachusetts.

The measures in the Creativity Index do not represent every aspect of the broad concept of creativity and they are not meant to. Rather, they are used because it is assumed that they track along with larger trends and so provide some insight into them. According to Florida, the Creativity Index "reflects the joint effects of concentration and of innovative economic outcomes" (Florida 2002, 289). Accordingly, he argues that the index is the best indicator of a region's overall standing in the Creative Economy and is "a barometer of a region's longer term economic potential" (Florida 2002, 291).

The first Creativity Index measure highlights the proportion of the creative class in a region's workforce. It attempts to quantify the degree of creative talent in the area. According to Florida, it is an important indicator because creative people seek places with a thick labor market, where opportunities for peer recognition exist. The second indicator measures the high-tech industry using the Milken Institute's Tech Pole Index. According to Florida, the amount of technology is important

because it indicates places where new technology will emerge and likely includes places with existing financial and technological infrastructure.

The third measure relates to innovation by tracking the number of patents granted per capita. Florida claims that this indicates the entrepreneurial climate in a region and the fourth measures the size of the gay population, which according to Florida represents an area's diversity, low barriers to entry, and generally accepting attitudes.

Again, Florida relies heavily on the use of indicators, which are specific measures that appear to move in sync with larger trends. Accordingly, the gay population does not in itself symbolize tolerance, but rather is assumed to be an indicator of the type of place that is “open to and supportive of the creative, the different, and the downright weird” (Florida 2002, 206). This characteristic is important, according to Florida, because it attracts the type of people that will determine the trajectory of future economic growth.

Providence ranks 36<sup>th</sup> best of 61 large regions over one million people on the Creativity Index (*Creative Intelligence* 2003, 2). While Providence fairs well on measures of tolerance and a few measures of talent, it does not do as well on measures of technology. Interestingly, Providence does extremely well on measures of diversity. It ranks 34<sup>th</sup> best out of all 331 metropolitan regions in the United States on the Composite Diversity Index, and its scores on the Gay Index, Bohemian Index, and the Melting Pot Index exceed the national average (*Creative Intelligence* 2003, 2).

On measures of talent, the Providence *Creative Intelligence* report finds that the city scores well, with twenty-seven percent of its workforce in the Creative Core making forty-five percent of wages and salaries. However, a “Brain Drain Index,” demonstrates that the city is losing talented young

people to a much greater extent than other cities. According to a recent report, this is likely because Providence is losing the college educated it is creating (*The Providence Foundation* 2003, 5). Statistics and reports such as these were in large part, the impetus for this project. While it is understood that people are leaving Providence after college, what is not as well understood is what particular factors contribute to a decision to stay in Providence, if and when it occurs.

Providence appears to fair not so well regarding technology, ranking 115 best out of 331 regions in the United States on the Tech Pole Index. Additionally, while the patents per capita are slightly ahead of the national average, the patent growth and high technology measures place Providence at the bottom half of all regions (*Creative Intelligence* 2003, 2).

As has been stated, the origin of this project was a perception that economic development strategy could be informed by an exploration of the perspective of young creative people. Drawing from a general attraction to Florida's ideas, efforts have been undertaken in Providence to quantify creative assets and these efforts generally highlight local art and design organizations and businesses, regional hospitals, and strong universities. A recent Providence Foundation report cites the presence of 3,000 artists, 160,000 highly qualified people and \$100 million per year in National Institute of Health research as indicators of the region's creative economy (*The Providence Foundation* 2003, 1). According to this report, two definitively creative clusters: knowledge creation and biological and biomedical sciences are cornerstones of this economy.

Another recent report cites anecdotal evidence that entrepreneurship, architecture, art, and colleges and universities are the strongest assets of the creative economy. According to this report, by naming this creative economy already present, "We see its size and power for the future economy" (*The Providence Foundation* 2003, 10). Florida appears to agree with this assessment by arguing for a

need “to study the institutions of the emerging Creative Age closely, so that we can understand their inner workings and nourish them appropriately” (Florida 2002, 209).

However, existing reports do not tend to discuss less obvious elements of the creative economy. For example, Florida notes the importance of “third places,” which provide the creative community with opportunities for social interaction in authentic and unique yet “off the beaten path” places. This report attempts to contribute information in this regard, again based on the perceptions of a sample group of people.

People are talking about the creative economy in Providence, and the city is often mentioned favorably in discussions relating to the concept. Interviews with young creative people from Providence took place within this context. The purpose of interviews was to explore perceptions of the creative economy and to highlight how a subsection of “creative class” people, perceived concepts and applications relating to the creative economy. For example, while reports, such as the ones cited earlier tend to glow about the vibrant creative economy in the city, in an interview, a young local entrepreneur expressed cynicism by stating that, “If there was a creative economy in Providence, I would be able to make a living.” This project explores anomalies and potential disconnects relating to the concept of the creative economy in Providence, in an effort to inform the broader discussion.

This chapter provided a brief overview of Florida’s argument and briefly related it to the Providence case study. As it uses Florida as a theoretical framework and draws on previous Providence specific creative economy work as reference, it inherently accepts general notions regarding the existence of a creative economy. However, this does not mean that Florida’s entire argument is accepted uncritically. The next chapter highlights shortcomings and limitations of Florida’s argument.

## Chapter Two: Conceptual and Practical Limitations

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Arguments presented by Richard Florida in The Rise of the Creative Class have generated significant excitement in Providence. They have made their way to the study area through the efforts of the “Providence as a Creative Hub” working group. In addition, various people in the city have been working with Catalytics, Inc., a consulting firm associated with Florida. These efforts are attempting to detail how Florida’s concepts are relevant locally. This chapter highlights conceptual and practical limitations that I encountered in interviews and in my own research to inform these efforts, while also providing context for the discussion of interviews in the next chapters.

Richard Florida claims that creative people will determine the trajectory of economic development in a city and will choose to live in places with certain characteristics. As such, he argues that places like Providence need to develop such characteristics consciously in an effort to attract creative people. There is considerable debate as to Florida’s assertions, and in fact, many people disagree with his analysis. Their counter-arguments provide important context when considering the appropriateness of public policy applications, but it is outside of the scope of this chapter to examine them in detail. This chapter strives to simply highlight limitations of Florida’s argument and to note potential dangers of his rhetorical technique. These critiques are based on a careful reading of the text and related discussions with a sample group of people in Providence.

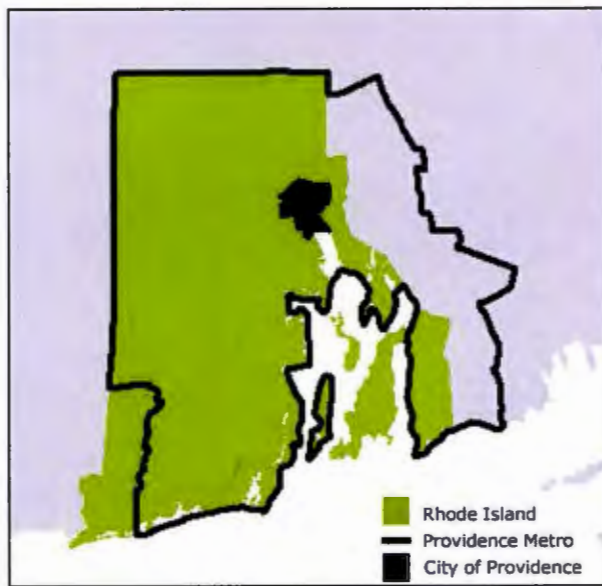
Richard Florida presents a thought-provoking argument regarding the relationship between creativity and economic development. By using exceptionally skilled rhetoric and persuasive logic and by gearing his argument toward a popular audience, he tempts various stakeholders in the economic development process to implement policies based on his perspective. However, there are significant limitations to his argument including the fact that it is based on data at an imprecise level of analysis



and relies heavily on rhetorical simplification and arguably unrealistic optimism. It is important to take note of these limitations in attempting to relate Florida's argument to the Providence case study.

As was discussed in chapter one, Richard Florida uses the metropolitan area as the economic unit of analysis, and therefore he relies on data at the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) level. A

**Figure 1: Comparing the MSA and City of Providence**



**Rhode Island Economic Policy Council 2002**

significant limitation of this approach is that, in doing so, he does not explore the relationship between the core city and the larger metropolitan area. The MSA level of analysis provides a comprehensive picture of the relevant market area and allows for a greater understanding of economic phenomenon such as the “labor shed.” However, by only focusing on these data, Florida ignores distribution issues within what could be a very diverse geography.

As is evident in Figure 1, there is a vast difference between the MSA and the geographic bounds of the City of Providence. Policy makers may be tempted to assume that the city and the larger region will experience trends consistently, but this may lead them to miss important local changes. The MSA level of analysis does not provide sufficient detail for municipal leaders to craft city-specific strategies. For this reason, additional studies on a more precise level, such as at the US Census Block level, are required. Such studies would allow researchers and policy makers to understand whether the city is the hub of the creative economy, or if it is a “hole within a suburban donut” of talent, technology, and tolerance.

The simplified nature of Florida's argument is evident in his assumption that particular words can accurately convey broad meaning and also in his use of indicators. For example, he states that a region's relative amount of technology, talent, and *tolerance* is what determines the milieu of a place. Florida uses the word "tolerance" to convey the degree to which the environment has low barriers to entry for human capital. However, the word does not adequately convey this sentiment, and more importantly, it has strong negative connotations to many people, particularly members of minority groups.

Suggesting that people simply tolerate diversity of lifestyles and cultures implies that they are putting up with them. To tolerate the presence of diversity is not the same as to seek it out and further, to make locational decisions based in part on it, as Florida claims that creative people will do. Recognizing that one word cannot possibly capture an entire argument, a term that may more accurately reflect the point he is attempting would be "open-mindedness." Tolerance is a fundamental factor determining a city's ability to attract creative people; however unfortunately, it is the least well explained by Florida's terminology. In his attempt to make his ideas pithy and memorable, his ideas become oversimplified and vulnerable to misinterpretation.

Florida relies on indicators to make many of his arguments regarding the creative economy. As has been mentioned, indicators are not meant to capture the entire scope of an issue, but rather are used because they tend to be in sync with larger trends. Thus, they are assumed to offer a practical method for gaining important insights about hard to quantify phenomena. However, Florida presents these indicators in such a way that tempts policy makers to mistake the indicator for the key driver of economic success.

For example, policy makers may mistakenly think that because the Gay Index has a strong correlation to economic growth that we should develop policies to nurture the gay community. This is not Florida's argument. While the use of indicators is a valid analysis technique, their simplified nature contributes to a real and tangible danger that the reader may misinterpret their meaning. The persuasive manner in which Florida presents his argument makes this danger especially relevant and applicable.

Another manner in which Florida's rhetorical simplification may cause trouble involves his apparent assumption that all creative people are similar and so can be treated as one large group. The assumption that one-third of the American workforce feels the same way about anything is a matter of considerable controversy. Many of the people that I spoke with noted a tension with regards to this aspect of Florida's argument.

While not necessarily disagreeing with his ideas about the creative economy, several people suggested that it is crucial to differentiate between the people who create the energetic, funky, and diverse vibe such as artists, performers, and musicians and those that make a conscious choice to live within it, such as lawyers, software programmers, accountants, and engineers. While they all use creativity and thrive in similar environments, they are in different economic conditions; they likely have different needs, and potentially share few tangible values with each other. As such, policies directed at the larger group, may benefit certain sectors while harming others, for example, through the process of gentrification. Florida invites us to appreciate the new and growing importance of the creative class. However, in arguing this point, he lures the reader into thinking that the larger group is more similar than it may really be.

Florida's arguments rely on an extraordinarily optimistic and idealistic view of creative people and their potential economic impact, and as a result, he tends to draw unbalanced conclusions. This point was demonstrated in one particular interview. While the respondent had a definitively "creative" occupation, he made clear that his end product relies heavily on the abilities, skills, and specialized understanding of occupations that are not included in Florida's list of creative occupations. He noted that without skilled laborers, such as drywallers and sheet rockers, he would not be able to turn his ideas into a real and tangible product. He therefore cautioned against focusing resources on one particular group in the city, even if he was a member of the group that would benefit.

To be fair, Florida claims that every person is creative and that we all draw on this attribute to varying degrees in the workplace. In his book, he notes the example of an eyeglass factory, which his father worked in, as an example of how creativity pervades all sectors of the economy. But, he fails to account for the complementary and symbiotic relationships between creative and non-creative occupations. This shortcoming caused one respondent to suggest that his arguments may be a "dangerous oversimplification."

In addition to the dangers associated with his rhetorical simplification, Florida maintains an excessively optimistic view of creative occupations by using unrealistic case studies and by glossing over potential negative costs that the group may exert. In order to demonstrate his argument that creative people generate economic value in their ideas, Florida provides examples of representatives of the creative class. However, the people that he cites do not appear to be a representative cross section of the population. As result, a limitation of his argument is that it often assumes an overly optimistic tone.

For example, Florida cites a professor that joins a start-up company for the adventure and a business school graduate who decides to work in a flower shop (Florida 2002, 92). These actions may indeed reflect the creative impulse, however, in several interviews, people suggested that to group these types of cases together with the creative people that they know, in their words the “starving artists,” is not necessarily helpful. More importantly, they cautioned that it could lead to misinformed policy choices.

In addition to his use of unrepresentative case studies, Florida’s optimism causes him to gloss over important negative economic consequences of a rising creative class. He touches briefly on the relationship between the creative economy and the service sector, but he does not offer any tangible prescriptions to address its important implications. The creative class demands more services such as take-out food, child-care, and laundry services. Therefore, in pursuing a strategy to develop and nurture this class, a city such as Providence, which already has more than 50% of its workforce in the service sector, is also increasing the number of jobs that tend to be low wage and that rarely offer benefits or opportunity for advancement (*Cities Count* 2003, 41).

There is a significant gap between creative-class and service-class occupations, and a disturbing link between them. This gap inhibits low-income employees who seek better paying work and enhances the magnitude of issues such as affordable housing, of particular importance in Providence. As service workers look to move up the pay scale to creative-class employment, they often find very few jobs that can serve as a bridge between occupations. According to Florida, the widening wage differential between creative and service-class workers has become a fundamental restraint on growth (*Creative Intelligence* 2003, 1). He acknowledges that by directing the most financial rewards to fewer people, “We make it more difficult to generate the seeds of creativity that were the source of growth in the first place” (Florida 2002, 187). However, he offers few tangible remedial solutions,

and therefore policy makers need to look elsewhere to explain how this troubling situation can be addressed.

The argument that Richard Florida presents in his book is simplified and optimistic. This is due in large part to the fact that he is writing for a popular audience. The simplified nature of the argument he presents in his book is evident in his use of single words to convey broad meaning, use of indicators, and in his assumptions regarding the similarities of creative people. His optimism is evident in his choice of case studies and is enabled by his tendency to gloss over potential negative consequences. The danger of these limitations is that the reader or policymaker may be lured into policies that dedicate efforts exclusively to growing the creative class while forgetting about alternate explanations of economic development processes and more traditional economic development strategies.

Florida invites us to appreciate the growing importance of the creative class through a persuasive and skilled argument. However, because of the manner in which this argument is presented, there is a danger that the reader or policy maker may lose the concept of balance. This chapter was provided in an effort to maintain perspective regarding Florida's ideas, and interviews influenced by them, which are detailed in the following chapters.

### **Chapter Three: Interview Process and Methodology**

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The focus of this project is sixteen interviews, which I completed in Spring 2003 in Providence, Rhode Island. The interviews are qualitative research using a non-random snowball sample technique. By using the ideas that Richard Florida presents in his book The Rise of the Creative Class as a framework, the interviews explore one of many competing explanations of dynamic economic development processes.

The interviews are meant to highlight the perceptions, opinions, and perspectives of a subsection of the population in the city. This project uses Florida's perspective as a framework, or starting point, for discussion. Based on the assumptions inherent in this decision and accounting for the narrow scope of inquiry, this report explores a group with potential importance to economic development planning in Providence.

The impetus for this project was a perception that economic development strategies were being fashioned to accommodate a group of people that was somewhat mysterious to decision makers. Several people noted that while assumptions were being made about the group, they were not fully involved in the process and as a result, little was known about them. This project attempts to shed some light on the group. Sixteen people do not represent all young creative people in the city; however, this project is based on the assumption that exploring their opinions may contribute to greater understanding of some aspects of the larger group.

I utilized a non-random sample technique and chose people because of their "relevance to the research topic rather than their representativeness" of the larger population (Neuman 2001, 196). I did not predetermine the sample size in advance, but rather used a snowball sample technique to

identify and speak with as many people as I could in a limited time. Because I was interested in exploring an interconnected network of people, I pursued a multistage snowball sample starting with a list of people provided by my client recognized as having their “finger on the pulse” of the creative community.

I contacted these people and described the goals of my project. After which, several generously provided a list of other people that they knew that were young and pursuing creative work in the city. As such, the original list of people provided by my clients served as “gateways” to a sample of young creative people in the city, my target population. I contacted them and set up personal interviews at various locations in Providence. On several occasions, the person that I interviewed provided additional names of people that they knew and I set up interviews with them, as time allowed. My only limitation for the sample group was that they were young, ranging from their early twenties to their mid-thirties, and engaged in some type of creative work.

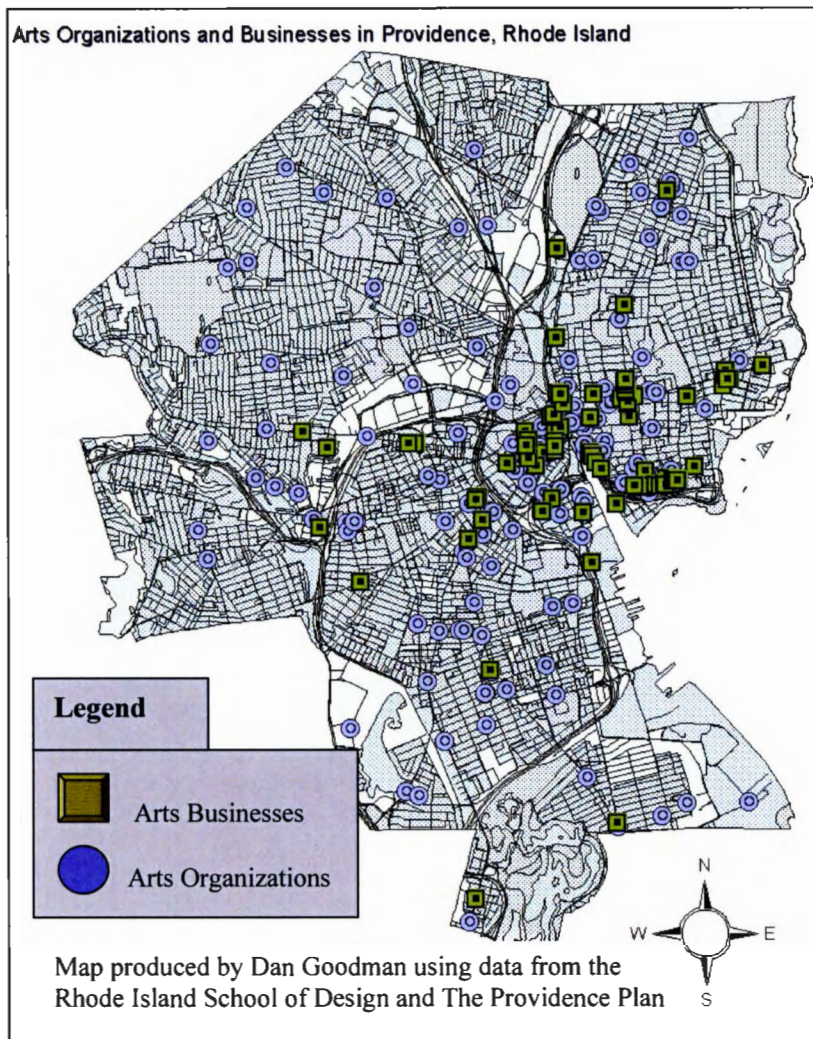
The sample includes, amongst others, studio artists, professors, an architect, small business owners and non-profit organizers. Based on their occupations, all interview participants would be considered to be members of Florida’s “creative class.” Because of the nature of the original list of gatekeepers, this is not a random sample. However, the goal of the project was to seek out a group of people that is relatively rare in the city and therefore, a random sample would not have been appropriate. The people that I spoke with are the ones that agreed to meet a complete stranger and as such, they may be more passionate, informed, and outspoken than the population as a whole.

The sample is biased toward Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design graduates due to the original list of gatekeepers. However, efforts were made to reach out to other groups in the city. In addition, there is a bias toward non-profit practitioners and artists. It is important to recognize that



members of Florida’s “creative class” in more financially lucrative fields such as law, software programming, and engineering are under-represented in this sample, and so statements about the group’s true representiveness must be tempered. Nevertheless, it is an important subset of the larger group because of their role in contributing to the milieu of a place.

**Figure 2: Arts Organizations and Businesses in Providence, Rhode Island**



While it was not my intent at the outset, this project ended up exploring a subsection of the larger creative class, the artists. Several respondents were practicing artists, three of the four non-profits that I encountered had art themes, and the small businesses all dealt in artistic mediums. Figure 2 depicts arts and culture organizations and businesses in the city, based on data collected by an undergraduate course at the Rhode Island School of Design, working with The

Providence Plan. It indicates the prevalence of such institutions in Providence and gives an idea as to the geographic clustering of arts businesses around Downtown and the East Side. Interestingly, arts organizations appear to be more evenly distributed throughout the city.

Richard Florida focuses on the creative class largely because of its potential economic contributions; however, in this project I did not explore this link directly. I did not ask how much money respondents were making, nor how many jobs they had created. Additional studies are needed to track real economic impacts of the occupations represented in these interviews. To be sure, the people I spoke with are generating economic activity through their ideas, but this project operates under the assumption that it is an immensely important group, regardless of traceable economic impact.

Young artists and more traditionally recognized creative types are often the first group to move into unstable urban areas. As such, regardless of immediate economic impact, they are an early indicator of places on the verge of change. More importantly, they are in large part responsible for creating the milieu that Florida argues is so important. Therefore, any examination of Florida's ideas should be informed by the opinions and perceptions of the people that he presumes to speak about. Such an examination can contribute to keeping conclusions and generalizations grounded, and this project attempts to contribute in this regard.

A complete list of interview questions is included in the appendix of this report, however, sample questions included: How long have you been in Providence? Are you a native of or a transplant to the area? If you are a native, what is holding you here? What is pulling you to go elsewhere? If you are a transplant, what brought you here? What is telling you to stay? What is pulling you elsewhere? What do you do for fun, where, and with whom? What do you do to engage with community? How do you define your community? When people visit you, where do you take them? (Eating, entertainment, nightlife, etc.) What are the "coolest" jobs or the best employers? Why? What places, institutions, or events define the "soul" of Providence in your mind? As has been stated, the interview questions

were shaped with the goal of exploring how well respondent's felt that Providence was functioning as a creative place.

The interview structure was open ended and interview participants guided the course of the conversation. In general, I started by asking about the respondent's occupation or affiliation to begin to understand their perspective. I asked related questions regarding how their work tied in with the larger community and eventually attempted to steer the conversation toward how the city and the community were or were not supporting their efforts. Toward the end of each interview, the conversation generally veered toward how the city could better support and facilitate their creative pursuits. Through each individual interview, I tried to draw out how each person felt that the city was or was not meeting their personal and professional needs. This report attempts to highlight commonly expressed observations about the city. It also attempts to highlight commonly voiced ideas about how creativity could be better supported.

People had varying degrees of involvement and understanding of Florida's ideas and organizing efforts in the city related to them. Nine out of sixteen respondents had some exposure to Florida or related local creative economy efforts. If people were aware of his ideas or had been involved in "creative hub" activities, I inquired about their understanding and experience. Their responses are woven into the narrative of this report. If they were not aware of it, I offered a cursory overview of concepts and their application in Providence with the goal of putting my project in context while minimizing bias, to the greatest extent possible.

A list of interview participants follows as Table 1. The list demonstrates the bias toward artist and non-profit practitioners discussed previously. In fact, four of sixteen respondents worked for non-profit organizations, while five of sixteen were either working artists or owned their own business,

which produced an explicitly artistic product. In addition, Table 1 offers the general age range of participants and demonstrates a relatively equal representation, of those explicitly asked, of people who chose to come to Rhode Island and those that chose to stay in Rhode Island (Note: I did not gather this specific information from every participant and recognize, in hindsight, the error of this omission). This is important information because it provides insight into the issue of the “brain drain,” an issue of particular interest at the outset of this project. As has been stated, the “brain drain” is an often-noted phenomenon where a city, such as Providence, plays a role in educating people who then move to other cities. It therefore loses the educated workforce that it is creating and the positive contributions that it could have made to the local economy.

By exploring how the city is functioning as a creative place, this project addresses the “brain drain” by highlighting the perspective of those that are currently living in the city. It examines why they chose to move to Providence and/or why they are choosing to stay. Florida claims that members of the creative class are mobile and will make locational decisions based on certain characteristics. Accepting this piece of Florida’s argument, this project attempts to explore what specific attributes or characteristics in Providence may be performing this role of attracting and maintaining talented people. It is important to note that an important segment of people relevant to this argument (ie: the people that chose to leave) could not be questioned and therefore their perspective is not sufficiently accounted for in this analysis.

I completed interviews in Spring 2003 with the goal of exploring young creative people’s perceptions of Providence. Florida makes claims about the group in his book and my project seeks to examine the extent to which those claims are supported at the local level. In doing so, the qualitative research in this report is meant to provide information about a group of people, of whom currently relatively

little is known. In the next chapter, I detail information gathered from interviews in an effort to explore their attitudes and opinions in depth.

**Table 1: Interview Participants: Occupation, Age, and Origin**

Occupation	Approximate Age	Rhode Island Location of Transplant
Non Profit	Early-Mid 20's	Transplant
University Administration and Artist	Early-Mid 20's	Unknown
Non Profit	Mid 20's	Transplant
Non Profit	Mid 20's	Transplant
Non Profit	Early-Mid 20's	Transplant
Artist and Photographer	Mid 20's	Local
Small Business Owner	Mid 20's	Local
Lawyer	Early 30's	Unknown
Small Business Owner	Early-Mid 20's	Unknown
Graduate Student	Mid 20's	Transplant
Graduate Student	Mid 20's	Local
Professor and Architect	Mid 30's	Transplant
Small Business Owner	Mid 20's	Local
Small Business Owner	Early-Mid 20's	Local
University Administration	Mid 30's	Unknown

## Chapter Four: Creative Providence

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I completed sixteen interviews with young creative people in Providence in Spring 2003 to explore a local economic development issue. By speaking with a sample of people in the city, identified using a snowball sample technique, I was able to compare Richard Florida's arguments with commonly held observations at the local level. This information provides insight into how the city is functioning as a creative place.



Interviews exposed a socially aware community, actively engaged in local issues such as affordable housing and arts education. They highlighted a creative community that has an intense desire to nurture what they perceived to be the

genuine and authentic character of the city, and they exposed a notably entrepreneurial group of people. This chapter attempts to explore these attributes in depth in the hope that it may inform future discussions about Providence's creative community.

In this project, I sought out young creative people in an effort to explore perceptions of Providence. I spoke with people about their own creative pursuits and about their opinions concerning the city that they live in. I asked them to brainstorm on ideas about how their efforts could be better supported. This chapter is devoted to observations of the people that I spoke with. As has been stated, interviews use Florida's characterizations as a starting point for discussion. I offer observations about their motivations, the spaces that they have created, and the styles that they exhibited and draw parallels with Florida when appropriate.

Florida defines the creative class in economic terms through a varied group of occupations, all of which supposedly require people to add economic value through their own individual creativity. According to Florida's analysis, the creative class includes approximately thirty-eight million Americans, or roughly thirty percent of the entire U.S. workforce. This number is up from ten percent at the turn of the 20th century and less than twenty percent as recently as 1980. As such, he argues that creativity is becoming increasingly more influential (Florida 2002, 67).

Florida's ideas have generated activity in Providence, and efforts have been undertaken to bring his broad concepts down to the local level. For example, a recent report cites medical research, knowledge creation, design and business innovation, creative technology, and arts and culture as the five main creative economy clusters in Providence (*The Providence Foundation* 2002, 4). According to this report, these clusters are the anchor of the local creative economy and include approximately 20,000 jobs, or around eighteen percent of the local workforce. This project strives to contribute to the existing base of knowledge about the creative economy in Providence. However, by focusing on the perceptions of a group of local people that function in this creative economy, it attempts to offer a unique perspective.

According to Florida, people within this group seek environments rich in talent, technology, and tolerance. They want a challenging, flexible, and stable job and are motivated by intrinsic rewards. According to Florida, "the best and the brightest want a highly energized environment where everybody is working together and it's challenging" (*Information Week* 2000, 66). He further argues that they seek esteem and self-actualization through their work and while their association to each other is primarily through a respective economic function, "They share a common ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit" (Florida 2002, 77). The occupations of the people I



spoke with are included in Florida's creative class. While they represent the younger and more explicitly artistic subset of this group, they appeared to reflect many of the characteristics that Florida puts forth.

The people I spoke with appeared to be taking innovative and creative ideas and pursuing them with vigor and enthusiasm. They had started businesses and non-profit organizations in the city, several of which were spawned from ideas originating in their undergraduate careers. Many were now employed by these businesses and organizations. As such, the group exhibited an entrepreneurial spirit. One respondent noted the relationship between an entrepreneurial vibe and the city by maintaining that, "In Providence people have an idea and then they figure out how to make it happen...and how to make a living doing it."

Florida maintains that members of the creative class seek environments where they can express their creativity. He says that creative people "prefer more authentic, indigenous, or organic venues that offer a wide range of options and where they can have a hand in creating the options" (Florida 2002, 187). They value individuality and self-statement and seek types of places where people from different backgrounds coexist. This is important because diversity increases the odds that a place will attract different types of creative people with different skill sets and ideas. In doing so, it increases the possibility of generating new combinations. According to Florida, creative people seek places that provide the opportunity "to validate their identities as creative people" (Florida 2002, 218).

Elements of these characteristics and this mentality were apparent in interviews. When asked what he likes about the city, one participant recalled a Guatemalan Parade he had happened upon recently. Other participants mentioned the large immigrant population in the Olneyville Neighborhood and the cohesive citywide homosexual community as significant and positive assets of Providence. As such,

the characteristics that respondents mentioned appear to support Florida's assertion that creative people value open, diverse, and inclusive communities.

According to Florida, the creative class is a meritocracy where individuals get ahead because of their abilities (Florida 2002, 78). He claims that members desire to move up based on these abilities and not on external factors that may have previously influenced professional advancement. Interview participants appeared to take pride in their abilities and interestingly, a primary reason for this appeared to be the type of work that they were engaged in.

Whether working for the business that they started after graduating from college, teaching, or working for a non-profit organization, the people I spoke with had either found or created a job that fulfilled both their personal and professional needs. Florida claims that in doing so, they were diminishing the distinction between work/life and life/life and based on interviews, this characterization seem accurate. They cared deeply about their work and as a result, most did not seem to consider work to be a chore but rather, "disciplined play," as one respondent suggested.

The people I spoke with wanted their professional careers to be challenging and fulfilling. One noted a desire to continuously be "solving problems and articulating solutions." Two separate people mentioned seeking "transformative experiences" through their work and interestingly, both not only sought out these experiences, but strived to provide them to others as well. As Florida claims, intrinsic drive and peer recognition played important roles in keeping them engaged in their work. Challenge appeared to be a motivating factor in their daily professional lives, as was a desire to be continuously learning. One participant noted, "interesting and compelling interrelationships on many different levels" between his private sector and teaching pursuits. He suggested that each informed the other and in doing so, enhanced the quality and experience of both.

Interestingly, not one participant mentioned money when discussing their job, and as such, they did not appear to be overtly motivated by it. An academic advisor supported this observation through comments in an interview. Drawing from personal experience, she noted that the creative people she knows generally do not consider financial incentives to be the “determining factor” when looking for a job. Rather, she said that they looked for work environments that were challenging and that provide the opportunity and “freedom to express themselves.”

However, she noted that the nature of the current economy might be limiting the real choices that people have. When asked if she thought that the young creative people she knows would choose a great city with an uncreative job or a creative job in a less appealing city, she responded that that they would likely go with the job over the city. This supports Florida’s assertions about the importance of the work environment. However, it appears to contradict his assumption that creative people are mobile and will, thus, always have the freedom and ability to choose locations amongst all alternatives.

Many of the people that I spoke with recognized the vital role that creativity plays in their work. Obviously, people who had started a non-profit arts organization tended to have a firm grasp on the importance of creativity. Less obviously though, those who were working in the private sector also recognized creativity as vital to professional success. For example, when describing a web design project that did not include enough attitude, or edge, one participant suggested that it needed a, “little more Fort Thunder,” referring to an artistic collaborative in Providence recognized for its creative energy and innovation. In doing so, he recognized that his product needed to exude creativity, even while acknowledging that he could not define exactly what that meant.

The people I spoke with appeared to be intrinsically motivated, but a primary driving force behind their motivation appeared to be their community. The number of respondents that had started non-profit organizations in the city itself demonstrates this drive. One provided space and resources for local youth to pursue art in their free time while another focused on improving public spaces through installation and performance art. Yet another sought to empower immigrant populations by providing language, economic, and childcare opportunities.

Interestingly, Florida does not discuss at length a genuine desire to contribute to the betterment of the community. The people that I spoke with appeared to be motivated by a desire to affect positive social change and strived to be a positive force for empowerment. Several respondents were actively engaged in social justice issues relating to affordable housing in the city and all appeared to be at least aware of such issues. This desire appeared to be an explicit motivating factor in their work. It is an aspect of their motivations that I observed in interviews that is not parallel to Florida's findings.

Richard Florida claims that changes in the workforce and workplace are driven by a decision to cater to creativity, and again, I found examples of this through interviews in Providence (Florida 2002, 116). These changes can be seen in the motivations described above, but also in the physical spaces and styles that people created. Interviews reflected Florida's observations about untraditional schedules, workspaces, and even appearances and as he would suggest, this could imply an increasing prioritization of creativity.

Recognizing the unpredictability of the creative process, Florida claims that workers demand more flexible schedules and new work rules (Florida 2002, 116). Further, because of their evolving motivations, he argues that the methods employed to manage them have also changed (Florida 2002, 132). Many of the people that I spoke with had started their own enterprises and so determined their

own working schedules and effectively managed themselves. However, their actions still reflected many of Florida's characterizations.

For example, a young entrepreneur in the process of starting his second business in the city mentioned that he, "could sleep until twelve in the afternoon, but then might be up until three in the morning that night working on a business plan." When describing positive attributes of her current job, another respondent noted the fact that she had the flexibility to be at a coffee shop at ten-thirty in the morning speaking with me. One of the founders of a small business in Providence moved to San Francisco, CA but was still actively involved in the daily work of the company, by telecommuting.

The people I spoke with appeared to be determining their own schedules, and as Florida predicts accounting for the sporadic nature of the creative process. Interestingly, they appeared to be working harder and putting in more hours than they would in a more traditional employment situation but content and self-determinism made this acceptable. As Florida would suggest their actions appear to reflect a mentality that says, "I'll work when I can or will and I'll work long hours, but on my terms in my structure" (*Information Week* 2001, 66).

In observing the appearance of respondents, I did not sense that there was a difference between the clothes that they would wear at work and the ones that they would wear on their own time. Again, Florida would likely claim that this is because members of the creative class are seeking to live a experiential lifestyle where there is little distinction between their work/life and their life/life (Florida 2002, 13). He argues that people used to be working for the weekend, but are now working and living and doing everything together and interviews appeared to support this observation. In fact, two respondents were setting up a loft space in a mill building where one corner of the large open space was for the business and another corner served as the bedroom.

According to Florida, the physical structure of the workplace has changed in response to an increasing understanding of the creative process and once again, this was demonstrated in interviews. Florida claims that now work places are arranged in an open office layout that encourages interaction and communication instead of in cubicles and corner offices that discourage it. Many offices that I visited had such open layouts, with little distinction between private and public space and little or no privacy. The layout of the loft apartment in the mill building cited earlier was consistent with Florida's assertion that creative people prefer large open spaces to small confined and segmented spaces.

One participant described such mill spaces as "functionally perfect" because they were built for large groups of people to work together under one roof. In addition, because of design elements common at the time they were built, they have natural light that is ideal for creative pursuits. At one office, bamboo room separators delineated space but the respondent offered that he had most meetings at a coffee shop down the street because he wanted to get out "into the community."

### **Providence, Rhode Island**

According to interview participants, Providence has a wealth of amenities relevant to Florida's arguments. Characteristics cited include a strong community, authentic or genuine places, and a supportive and engaging environment conducive to creative activity. Respondents mentioned that it has a good physical location near urban and natural areas of interest, unique architecture, and a diverse population. It is a center of artistic talent and has a strong sense of place.

Several people mentioned Olneyville, West End, and Southside as neighborhoods that represented the unique and "real" character of Providence, which they valued. These neighborhoods appeared to

be a primary reason why many people observed anecdotal evidence that more peers were choosing to stay in the city after graduation, whereas they used to leave en masse. Additional research is necessary to see if there is data to support these observations.

When asked what establishments and events defined the character of Providence, a remarkably consistent list emerged. This may be due to the bias inherent in the sample, discussed in Chapter Three. Regardless, the list offers insight into what creative people like about Providence.

Establishments such as the White Electric coffee shop, Red Fez restaurant, and Decatur Lounge bar emerged as obvious favorites. According to one person, these places were attractive because they “were off the beaten path and had an attitude that comes through in the experience of them.” Events such as the Convergence sculpture exhibit and the showing of silent films set to live music were also raised on numerous occasions. Organizations such as Community Music Works, Ever Dance, and the Broad Street Studio arose in several interviews. Many people mentioned “authentic” as a vitally important characteristic to them, and they appeared to use the term to mean genuine, real, unique, and distinctive. Respondents valued these places and events because they exemplified these characteristics and as such, they had an intense desire to maintain and nurture them.

Some of the most important reasons that people enjoyed living in Providence revolved around people and community. When asked why they decided to stay and what factors contributed to this decision, many participants mentioned various aspects relating to friends and community. Interestingly, this characteristic is not mentioned by Florida, other than his argument that creative people want to be surrounded by talented peers. However, it alludes to a desire to be grounded, often-noted in interviews.

Many of the people that I spoke with wanted to be engaged in their communities on a deep and genuine level. They wanted to set roots down in a community and in many instances were doing this by melding their personal interests and professional lives. One respondent described his decision to permanently settle in Providence as “empowering” because he was able to focus his energy on one place. He affectionately mentioned meeting in a church basement in Olneyville on Saturday mornings as an example of this newfound commitment. Many of the people that I spoke with wanted real and authentic roles within the community, and they suggested that Providence is an excellent place for this to occur.

The scale of Providence is a positive attribute of the city on many different levels. Many people mentioned that it is big enough to include important cultural amenities such as AS220, Trinity Repertory Theatre, and the Providence Performing Arts Center, but small enough to not be overwhelming. A woman mentioned that the city was “a good place to concentrate,” because it had enough amenities to keep her engaged but not so much that she would be distracted. She mentioned that New York City obviously offered more of everything, but suggested that because it offered so much, people could only afford a cursory experience of most things. According to this person, “there is less going on in Providence, but you know everything better and on a deeper level.” Again, this speaks to the importance of scale and a desire to be grounded in one place.

As has been mentioned, Florida maintains that the creative class is a meritocracy, and in a merit-based system, peer recognition and respect play an important role. According to many people that I spoke with, Providence is ideal in this regard. Many interview participants described the city as small, manageable, and relatively close knit. The size of Providence makes it the kind of place where, “you can make an impact right away,” according to one person. Several people stated that because most people know each other or at least know about each other, the city allows for a great



deal of peer recognition and support. As a result, they felt that their abilities were more likely to be recognized and appreciated in Providence than in New York City.

Another important aspect of scale that people appreciated related to the ability to get business referrals. According to several people, creative work relies heavily of “word of mouth” and for this system to work people need to know each other and they need to be communicating. The compact nature of the city encourages and facilitates this process. According to one person, “In the creative economy, it’s who you know” and he argued in Providence, you know everyone. As such, the scale of Providence was almost universally commented on as an asset that is important to the local creative community.

Providence offers other important business advantages. For example, low overhead for businesses was mentioned on several occasions. According to one person, relatively low expenses offered an advantage for his business over competitors in larger cities. It made starting a business in the city a much more manageable prospect. According to this person, he could have started a business anywhere, but the fact that Providence had lower overhead enabled him to invest more back into the business. This enabled him to grow his business faster than he could have if his rent, insurance, salaries, and other operating expenses were higher. He noted that his business’s prices might not differ substantially from competitors, but maintained that he could afford to offer “more product for the money.”

A final business advantage that the city offered was the perception among potential clients that people in a smaller city would be more likely to spend time, in person, working with them, whereas there was a perception that consultants in larger cities such as Boston or New York would never

leave their own city. According to several people, “face time matters,” and people perceive that they will get more of it from businesses located in places like Providence.

Creative people have always lived in Providence, and they have always contributed to it on many different levels. Florida has elevated their status by grouping them together and emphasizing the increasing economic role of the group as a whole. In the process, he documents traits and characteristics that he claims are now commonly held amongst the group. The interviews that I conducted in Providence are to a large degree consistent with his characterizations. In particular, Florida’s account of their motivations, work styles, and priorities appeared remarkably consistent with my interviews.

However, interviews also highlighted aspects of the creative community that are unique to Providence. Respondents valued scale and authenticity to an extent not reflected in Florida’s arguments. In addition, they were notably entrepreneurial. Perhaps most importantly, they were aware of and engaged in social issues such as affordable housing and arts education and these issues seemed to be a primary motivating factor in their work.

## Chapter Five: Beyond the “Second Phase”

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Richard Florida argues that creative people are the source of ideas, which will increasingly drive economic growth in cities. So the logic goes, to facilitate future economic development, cities should cater to creative people. According to Florida, they can do this by developing characteristics that will serve as the “backdrop for the formation of individual identity” (Florida 2002, 34).



Interviews in Providence supported Florida’s ideas in many ways; however, they also uncovered a certain apprehension about them. This chapter highlights concerns relating to the creative economy in Providence, which people expressed in interviews.

Florida argues for the importance of both attracting and maintaining creative and mobile people. Interview participants provided anecdotal evidence that the city is beginning to do this because of its high “quality of life.” Respondents did not disagree with the economic development rationale for seeking to increase the presence of occupations included in Florida’s creative class. However, they expressed anxiety about how those coming in will impact local character. It is this aspect of Florida’s argument that is the focus of this chapter.

Respondents observed subtle changes in what Florida would call the milieu of the city. They noted The Providence Place Mall, the Waterfire Celebration, and the creation of new high-end housing in

the city, as symbols of these changes. Their concerns provide important context for examining the relationship between Florida's ideas and local economic development strategy.

Among respondents, there was a general consensus that Providence has a funky, energetic and authentic vibe that supports and nurtures creative people and the creative process. People spoke of talented local artists, educational opportunities, authentic and unique physical attributes, and a strong, engaged, and supportive community. According to one person, "you feed off the energy of other people in Providence." Respondents suggested that it has become an attractive place to locate due, in large part, to this vibe.

As such, interviews provided some evidence that young, mobile, and affluent professionals, with a choice of where to live, are choosing to locate in Providence. As has been noted, this is important because, according to Florida, these types of people will determine the trajectory of future economic growth. However, several people noted that they might also be contributing to gentrification and problematic issues relating to housing in the city.

Several respondents noted a perception that the milieu of the city, which Florida discusses at length, appears to be in a period of transformation. Several people observed that rental prices have risen and space has become more limited and restricted in recent years. This is especially important for artists because they need large spaces for their work and often have limited budgets. One artist noted that that he planned to move to Pawtucket, RI in the near future, because he was under the impression that space would be more affordable there. He was not the only one to take note of a perceived relationship between rising prices and the types of people that are choosing to move into the city.

Many noted that young professional people coming into the city could end up pushing them out of it. They expressed concern that this was not being acknowledged in discussions about the local creative economy. They also felt that this aspect was not being presented in news reports. They expressed frustration at the perception that media coverage only highlights the positive side of people choosing to live in Providence, while failing to explore potential negative implications. Recent articles in The Providence Journal and The Providence Monthly provide examples of this coverage.

An article in the Providence Journal describes the desire of middle class Rhode Islanders to move back to the city so that they can live, “in urban neighborhoods with sidewalks and corner stores, where people work and live and the family car is optional” (Gunther-Rosenberg 2003, E1) The title of another article in The Providence Monthly is “A West Side Story” and the byline reads, “This is the story of how a gritty blue-collar mill area is rapidly becoming the hippest place for people to live, work, and hang out” (Triedman 2003, 13).

These articles detail why people are choosing to move back to Providence, and in doing so they provide testimony to a revitalizing urban core, but they focus solely on the perspective of those coming in. Several respondents suggested that coverage such as this does little to examine how these shifts are impacting those that are already living in Providence, such as immigrant communities in Olneyville and artists working in South Providence.

A message on a local list serve dedicated to the issue of affordable housing reflects opinions voiced in interviews. The author argues that “cities may be the new, hip alternative to suburbs, but the tragic result of this cultural shift may be suburbanization of formerly vibrant urban neighborhoods, resulting in displacement of current residents from the neighborhoods they’ve made their homes.”

She goes on to argue, “When homes and livelihoods are at stake, meeting the needs of communities on the brink should take priority over development geared toward the new urban elite.”

Administrators at a local university observed what they considered to be a related irony regarding this process. They suggested that a changing market dynamic caused by people who are mobile and choose to locate in “cool” places threatens to push out less affluent people, many of whom were responsible for generating the vibe that made the area attractive in the first place. One respondent explored this dynamic by brainstorming about a perceived “phased” aspect of Florida’s argument.

According to this person, the “first phase” is essentially the urban evolutionary process described by Florida. Creative people generate an eclectic vibe and energy within the community, which other people want to experience. Eventually, those who are willing and able to pay more, drive up prices and push out original residents. The “second phase” is essentially the culmination of gentrification where affluent professionals have pushed out the creative, artistic and more bohemian types. What is left is a “disnified” version of a creative community that is dominated by formula restaurants and high-end chain stores, which only “manufacture an illusion of authenticity.” The Providence Place Mall symbolized this perceived shift to this and many other respondents.

The Providence Place Mall is located in downtown Providence, and it is by most accounts relatively attractive, profitable, and at the very least, an improvement over what used to be located on the property. The street level restaurants and businesses have generated activity, on one side, which interacts with Waterplace Park. Many participants, however, observed that the mall is not authentic, diverse, or local. They perceived that the stores within it market towards a higher income demographic. Because most businesses are national chains, one person noted that someone inside of the mall, “could be anywhere in the country.” These arguments reflect frustration with larger

corporate trends occurring globally, but they have implications on the local creative environment in Providence. Respondents had an intense desire for genuine and distinctive character and so were troubled by the impression that the city was being increasingly affected by non-local development, and the mall was symbolic of these changes.

The mall represents a large investment of public dollars, which has profoundly affected the physical character of downtown. To be fair, design efforts were undertaken to make the building fit in with local history and architecture, and it provides new tax revenues sorely needed in a city facing long-term fiscal challenges. Yet, many respondents still chose to focus on the perception that it is not authentic or local. They were concerned that the mall centers on commerce instead of community and that it possesses little genuine connection to the local area. According to several people, it reflects a larger and more disturbing shift throughout the city away from authentic character.

Participants highlighted the changing nature of the Waterfire Celebration on several occasions as another symbol of a perceived shift in Providence. There were a wide variety of viewpoints concerning the event and broad generalizations are difficult, but several people visited similar themes in interviews. Many people mentioned that it was an important event because it provides a venue to share space, interact, and build community. Generally, respondents felt that it is a positive and beneficial event for the city; however, they expressed reservations similar to the mall, in that perceived changes in the event may reflect a shift in priorities away from the local level.

According to one respondent, the Waterfire celebration appeared to initially cater to the local population, but he feels this is no longer the case. He observed that it has commercialized in recent years and now appears to be catering to a non-local tourist population. According to this person, the slow, reflective, and intimate intent of the elements of fire, water, and music are “now contradicted

by the experience of a large crowd of people, vendors, and commercialization similar to a Fourth of July parade.” Another person highlighted a similar sentiment in stating that the event “is now measured in terms of hotel rooms rented and restaurant sales.” Again, this shift appeared to many respondents to represent a larger shift in priorities in the city. The mall is generic while Waterfire is “no longer theirs” according to one person.

A final symbol of the changes in Providence, consistently raised in interviews, regards the housing market in the city. Numerous people mentioned the development of high-end apartments and condominiums as indicators that the city is changing. Respondents cited the Rising Sun Mill on Valley Street, the Jefferson project behind The Providence Place Mall, and The Westminster development on separate occasions as examples of new projects that could contribute to raising rents and taxes, through rising property value, throughout the city. While such developments will likely benefit some people, there was a perception that they would negatively impact significant sectors of the population by potentially pushing people out of their neighborhoods. Several people were actively involved in affordable housing efforts in the city because of an impression that this process was already underway in the city.

It should be noted that these arguments were being made based on perceptions not data, but they remain important because they represent what people are feeling on the ground. Their intense desire for authenticity and local character may lead them to disregard important financial considerations. Nevertheless, their opinions are important because they contribute to the perceived milieu of a place, which Florida argues is so important.

Several people that I spoke with expressed concern that Providence’s character is shifting in noticeable ways. Participants worried that the mall represents an increasingly generic and “soulless”



quality of new development in the city. The commercialization and changing target audience of Waterfire represents an apparent shift in priorities toward a regional and tourism market, and the development of high-end housing could raise property taxes and rents, thereby threatening existing residents. Respondents noted a concern that people appear to be enamored with these changes because of how they reflect on the city, but that they may be failing to address adequately social justice issues created by them.

Respondents were particularly concerned about these changes because of a perception that they represented a larger shift occurring in the city, which may eventually threaten the “authentic” character of Providence and their ability to pursue creative work in the city. It is important to note these observations because they reflect perceptions of what Florida argues will be Providence’s, and the entire metro region’s, greatest competitive advantage in the future. Perceptions are a very important component of Florida’s argument, and even if they are not necessarily supported by hard data, they are legitimate because they reflect personal experience.

By highlighting possible negative implications of a growing creative class in Providence, respondents warned against the overzealous implementation of Florida’s ideas. As discussed above, Florida argues for both attracting and maintaining creative people. Interestingly, the city’s perceived success in attracting people is what caused anxiety among respondents. Most people did not disagree with Florida’s basic premise, but they suggested that economic development efforts further encouraging creative and talented people to move in should be balanced against ones that enable original residents to stay. In doing so, the city may benefit from their presence, while maintaining the local character that made it attractive and unique in the first place.

## Chapter Six: Action Plans

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I completed sixteen interviews with people in Providence using Richard Florida's ideas as a framework in which to examine the concept of the creative economy. These interviews provide insight into how the city is functioning as a creative place, according to the perceptions of a sample group of people. Interviews explored how the city could better support creative people and this chapter documents ideas that people expressed.

In this project, Florida's ideas are used as a means to explore a local economic development issue. This chapter details ways that creative people could be better supported in the city, under the assumption that by supporting them you are supporting the creative economy, and by extension the entire community. In doing so, it accepts Florida's

perspective that creative people are worthy of special attention. It is assumed that any attempt to pursue ideas in this chapter would be informed by competing explanations of economic development processes and would be done in concert with other economic development strategies.

**Table 2: Action Plans**

<b>Action Plans</b>
<b>Increase Demand</b> Increase and enhance access to local creative products Engage the business community
<b>Increase Communication</b> Pursue plans for a "Creativity Consortium" Hire a full time "Point Person" for the creative economy at the City of Providence Organize a retreat for leaders in the creative community Hold networking events targeted to young creative people that are informal and participatory
<b>Increase Participation</b> Ensure that all stakeholders play a role in shaping strategies that address the creative economy in Providence

Respondents had many ideas about how the creative economy could be better supported in Providence. Their opinions are important to note because they are based on personal experience. In general, respondent's ideas centered on increasing the demand for creative work in Providence and enhancing opportunities for communication and participation in local organizing and planning efforts.

Interview participants maintained that increasing demand for creative products in the city is the most important way to support local creative people. Increased demand can occur by "educating the consumer," as several respondents suggested. This assumes that if consumers are aware of creative work available locally and they appreciate it, they will be more likely to invest in it. This process can occur by increasing access points to creative products, for example through retail events, and gallery, museum, and retail space. With greater demand for their products, creative people can be more confident in their ability to make a living pursuing their work in Providence.

A key aspect of increasing demand involves local businesses and institutions. Encouraging local businesses and institutions to purchase more of their products and services from local sources has the potential to invigorate the creative economy. If local businesses increased the amount of work that they contracted out to local people, the creative economy would grow. The occupations and skills of interview participants were, in themselves, examples of the commercially applicable creative work available locally.

Respondents specialized in fields ranging from information architecture, to interior design, to photography. Businesses need skills and services such as these, but according to many respondents, many still purchase them from non-local sources. If they decided to give priority to local creators, they could increase the local market for creative products and, by extension, the amount of people

able to succeed in the local creative economy. In doing so, they would be facilitating the development of a creative milieu, which Florida maintains will be so important to future economic development.

In one interview, a respondent envisioned an idea relating to increasing demand that incorporates the business community. He discussed an organizing effort, possibly known as the “Creativity Consortium,” which would be explicitly designed to increase awareness and support of the local creative economy. While it is somewhat improbable, it is an idea worth exploring, if for no other reason than because it is thought provoking.

The basic idea of the “Creativity Consortium” is that local businesses would pay money into a communal account and in return they would get a certificate, good for that amount in the local creative economy. Those with an interest in developing the creative economy would schedule mixer events inviting those who both supply and demand creative products. Representatives of local businesses and institutions would attend the mixer event with the goal of spending their certificate on something that they need. For example, at the mixer events they could find people to fulfill their graphic design, photography, or digital video needs. Producers and consumers would come together and ideally make mutually beneficial arrangements.

The idea of a consortium is optimistic because it would require businesses to invest limited money into something they may feel little connection to or responsibility for. In addition, it would require local creators to envision products with commercial applications and to “sell themselves,” at mixer events, which several artists expressed reservations about. However, it provides an interesting possibility for future research. If such an event were run successfully, it would increase demand for local goods and services and in doing so, could contribute to growing the local creative economy.

Equally important, it would get people thinking about the concept of the creative economy, while allowing organizers to publicize, track, and reward companies or individuals that are notable in their support of it.

Finally, with regards to the expressed goal of increasing demand, several respondents noted a need to define the market that the creative community is attempting to capture and then conceptualize individual or group strategies to effectively reach this market. Admittedly, this is easier said than done. Respondents suggested that there was a need for targeted marketing efforts to reach a defined audience; however, they acknowledged the difficult issue of who is responsible for organizing, funding, and maintaining such efforts. There was a consensus however, on the need for collective action in pursuit of shared interests.

In addition to increasing overall demand, respondents appeared to unanimously agree that increasing communication is a vitally important goal in developing the local creative economy. Interview participants consistently highlighted a need to increase communication because of a perception that creative work is largely dependent on “word of mouth referrals.” Potential ways to increase communication that were suggested in interviews include hiring a full-time person at the City of Providence responsible for the local creative economy, organizing a retreat for leaders in the creative economy, and focusing networking events to target young people.

Several interview participants suggested that the City of Providence needs a full time “point person” responsible for supporting and nurturing the local creative economy. They would coordinate networks of creative people, while facilitating real estate transactions and serving as a clearinghouse for information about available live and work space in the city. This person could provide much needed organizational assistance to young creative people, an often-noted need, while also

coordinating events and fostering communication and collaboration. In addition, they could spearhead the “Creativity Consortium,” discussed previously. They would be both a resource and an advocate for the creative community.

It should be noted that the municipal government is facing challenges in meeting existing financial responsibilities and would likely express reservations about hiring additional staff to focus on one particular issue. While it is true that a creative economy coordinator would primarily focus on one interest group, it could be argued that by facilitating the creative economy, they are providing job opportunities to people in the city. More importantly, they are encouraging the development of a creative, engaging, and stimulating environment that will positively impact all of the city’s residents.

A second suggestion for enhancing communication is to hold an annual retreat to promote coordinated and mutually beneficial relationships between creative individuals and organizations in the city. There was a perception among many respondents that opportunities for collaboration were being missed because people in the community were not always aware of what each other were doing. Organizations may be working on similar projects where opportunities for collaboration exist. However, if they do not know what each other are doing, these opportunities may be missed. An annual retreat could allow leaders in the creative community to highlight plans for the coming year with the expressed goal of identifying avenues for collaboration.

A final suggestion with regards to communication involves targeted networking opportunities. Respondents mentioned a need to envision and organize networking opportunities focused on the young creative class. Several interview participants suggested that networking opportunities might better accommodate the target population if they were casual events centered on a participatory activity. These events could highlight local entertainment and be held at changing venues throughout

the city. Numerous people acknowledged that networking events are occurring throughout the city, but suggested that they were not comfortable at these events. They suggested that if they were organized around a participatory event, included entertainment, and were informal, they may more effectively appeal to people such as themselves.

Finally, respondents noted the importance of expanding participation in the planning process relating to the creative economy. Without fail, interview participants suggested that the best way to envision realistic and innovative strategies to nurture the creative economy is by including young creative people in all aspects of the planning process.

Several respondents mentioned attending organizational events relating to the creative economy in the city, and suggested that “the people sitting around the table” were not representative of them. They felt that young creative people were a minority at these events and so worried that their perspective was not being sufficiently accounted for. A possible way to increase participation is to model meetings and events after the mixer events described previously. Accordingly, they could be informal, participatory, and could include entertainment.

Interviews provided some insight into how a sample group of young creative people in the city felt about the local creative economy. In particular, they provided information about how they felt that their efforts could be better supported. Their responses suggest that increasing demand, communication, and participation are key components of developing the creative economy in Providence.

## **Chapter Seven: Areas for Future Research**

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This chapter highlights areas of future study identified in interviews with a sample group of young creative people in Providence. Future research could explore relationships between occupations while examining ways to build bridges between them. Interviews highlighted a need to explore ways to encourage fiscal stability while retaining “authentic” character.

They highlighted a need to document successful efforts at increasing communication while at the same time; they demonstrated a need to develop a more detailed vocabulary, which distinguishes between the various aspects of gentrification. Finally, interviews highlighted a need to pursue studies with greater geographical precision and to document rates of college graduates deciding to stay in Providence after graduation. Future research in these areas could contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding the creative economy in Providence.

This project uses Florida’s ideas as a framework in which to examine a local economic development issue. Chapter two of this report explores conceptual limitations of Florida’s ideas. The point of these critiques was not that Florida’s ideas are wrong, but rather that certain areas need to be explored in greater depth, particularly as they pertain to Providence. As such, the chapter could serve as an outline of potential ideas for future research. For example, interviews highlighted a need for additional study on the relationships between different occupations. Chapter two notes the dynamic and complex interrelationships between occupations through the discussion of the architect and dry-waller. Additional research is necessary to explore these relationships in greater detail and to conceptualize strategies that account for them.



Additionally, further research would be helpful on possible ways to build bridges to creative value added occupations. Assuming the validity of Florida's ideas, there is a need to research ways for Providence and the State of Rhode Island to encourage people to move between the two groups. One respondent suggested that higher education is the crucial link in allowing this to occur. In Providence, how is higher education functioning? Is it affordable and accessible, and if not, how can it be made so?

**Table 3: Future Research**

Interviews highlighted a need to explore the demand for creative products in Providence and it would appear that this is closely linked to marketing. As noted in chapter six, it is necessary to define the market that creative people are trying to reach and then to conceptualize effective marketing strategies to reach it. Are these marketing strategies individual or group focused? Who is responsible for spearheading them? More generally, what is the

Future Research
Examine potential relationships between occupations
Examine possible ways to build bridges to creative occupations
Explore possible ways to increase the demand for creative products
Define the "market" that local creators are attempting to reach and then envision strategies to reach this market
Explore ways to achieve fiscal stability while retaining "authentic" character
Develop better terms and vocabulary that distinguishes between the different types of gentrification
Document successful efforts at increasing communication within the creative economy in other cities
Document the feasibility of a "Creative Consortium" and develop a business plan
Pursue studies at a more geographically precise level, possibly at the US Census Block level
Document the rates of college graduates choosing to stay in Providence after graduation and pinpoint schools or programs with particularly high retention rates

precise market that is being targeted? For example, is it high end or accessible? While respondents disagreed on what the market should be, there appeared to be consensus that it needed to be clearly defined. Additional research is required to explore this issue in depth.

Interviews also highlighted a need to study how a city such as Providence can achieve fiscal stability without the negative characteristics associated with gentrification. As has been noted, many respondents had an intense desire for authenticity. This resulted in an unsettling paradox, discussed in chapter five, where respondents tended to speak disparagingly about the only institutions and events that were making the city money. While you want authentic and local interests to prevail, you also need funding for the healthy operation of a city. Further research would be helpful exploring ways to become fiscally stable without losing the character and “soul of the place.” This aspect of gentrification was very important to respondents, and it highlights a more general area of future research identified through the interview process.

Interviews demonstrated a need to develop better terms for specific aspects of gentrification. In interviews, many people discussed issues relating to gentrification; however, one person’s understanding of the term may be very different from another’s. In fact, it may include a completely different set of issues. Concerns relating to gentrification uncovered in interviews included housing affordability, professional versus artistic and local versus non-local “generic.” Other important components of gentrification include racial segmentation and not having a middle class. Developing better terms that identify more precisely issues relating to gentrification, would assist in making the conversation more focused.

Interviews also highlighted a need to document successful efforts at increasing communication as a means toward developing the local creative economy. Respondents suggested mixer events, retreats, and even a “Creativity Consortium” to encourage this to happen. Additional research could further explore the concept of the “Creativity Consortium” and a business plan could be prepared that explores in detail the feasibility of the concept. Research that documents other community’s

successful efforts at increasing communication within a local creative economy could provide inspiration and guidance in Providence.

In addition to broad conceptual future research and issues relating to gentrification and communication, interviews highlighted two specific suggestions. As discussed in chapter two, relying on data at the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) level is not enough to understand Providence's role within the larger metro economy. As such, interviews highlighted a need to pursue detailed studies at the local level. Additional studies using more precise data, such as US Census Block level statistics, could flesh out Providence specific trends. The metropolitan region is important for assessing regional trends, but more precision is needed in crafting city-specific strategies.

Interestingly, many respondents perceived an increasing amount of young creative people choosing to stay in Providence after graduating from college; however, this observation runs counter to prevailing data on the "brain drain," discussed in chapter one. As such, interviews highlighted a need to document the rates of students choosing to stay in the city after graduation. Research could be completed using mailing addresses from recent graduates in the last five to ten years to pinpoint emerging trends. Are the universities seeing figures that may support early anecdotal evidence uncovered in interviews? Do certain universities or certain programs within universities have higher alumni retention rates and why?

Interviews undertaken for this project highlighted several avenues for future research regarding the creative economy in Providence. Broad conceptual suggestions include a need to explore relationships between occupations and to examine the local demand for creative products. Pursuing fiscal stability while retaining authentic character and developing more specific vocabulary represent

areas of future research pertaining to the issue of gentrification. Interviews also highlighted a need to pursue additional studies using more geographically specific data. Finally, they highlighted a need for additional research exploring emerging trends regarding college graduates deciding to stay in Providence after graduation. These avenues of future research could contribute to the ongoing conversation regarding the creative economy in Providence.

## About the Author

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## Appendix

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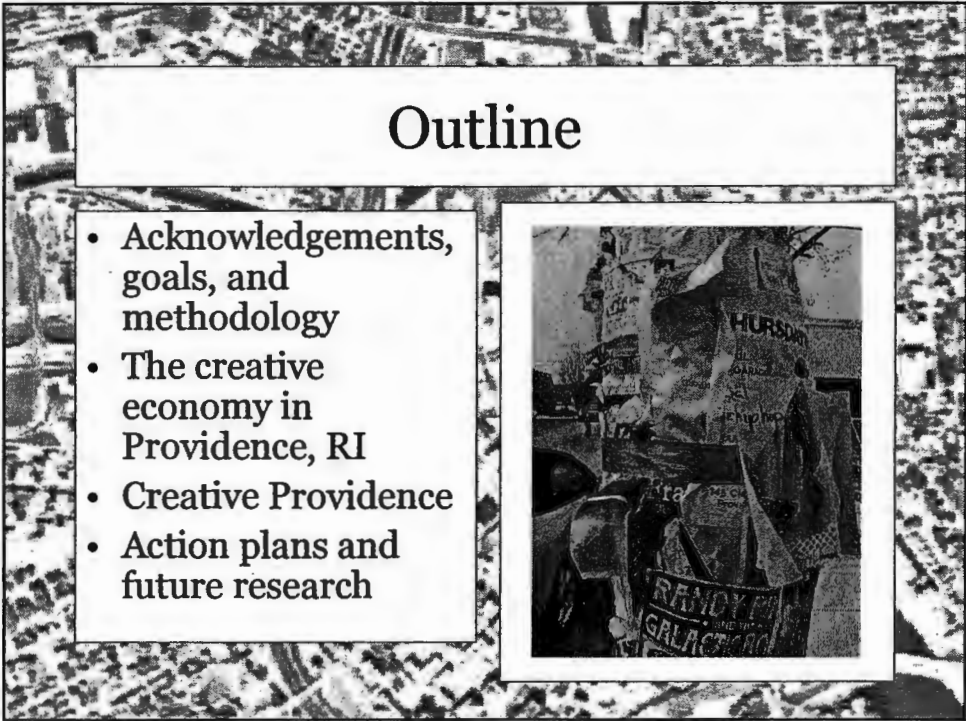
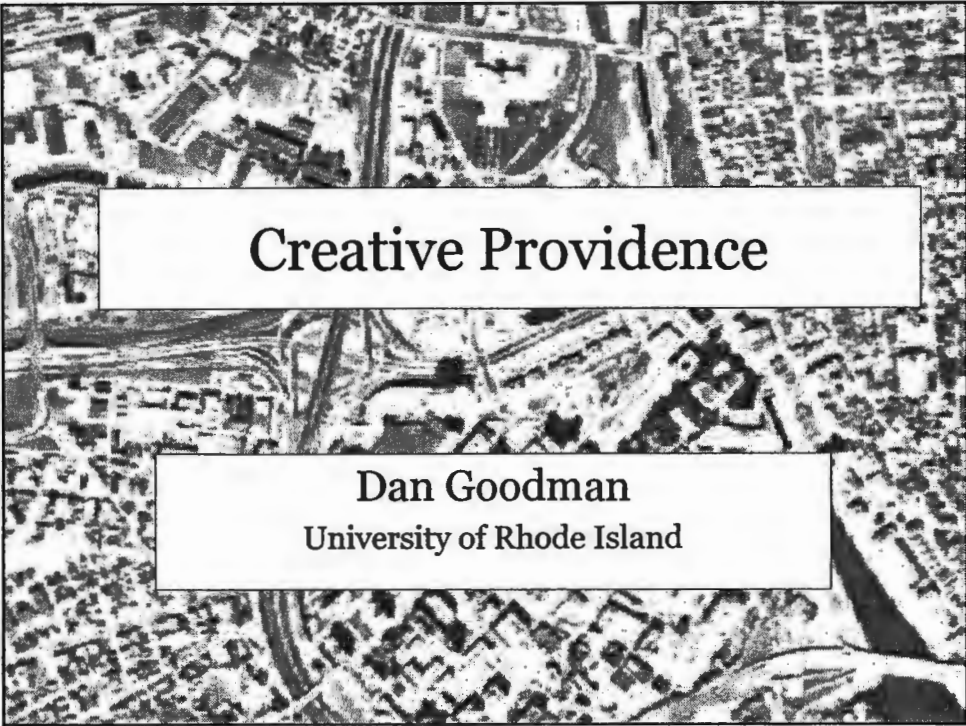
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- University of Rhode Island Department of Community Planning
- Interview Participants



## Goals and Methodology

### Goals

- Personal**
  - Practical and Useful
  - Engage community
  - Examine perceptions
- Project**
  - Explore a contemporary economic development issue and relate it to the local level
  - Explore the "brain drain"
  - Asset analysis

### Methodology

- Qualitative research
- Open-ended interview structure
- Approximately 15 interviews
- Participants
  - Demographics
  - Occupations



## Richard Florida and the *The Rise of the Creative Class*

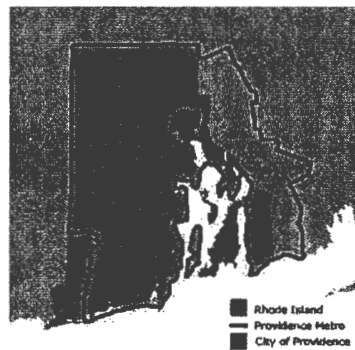
- Methods and Assumptions
- Talent, Technology, Tolerance, and Trees
- Place matters and people matter

Milieu → People → Economic Development

## Critiques

- **Rhetoric**
  - **Simplified**
    - Terminology
    - Measures
    - Assumptions
  - **Optimistic**
    - Examples
    - Analysis of impact
- **Balance**
- **Regional versus local analysis**
- **Conclusions**
  - General argument is not always applicable at the local level
  - It needs to be adapted to fit local situation

### Regional versus local

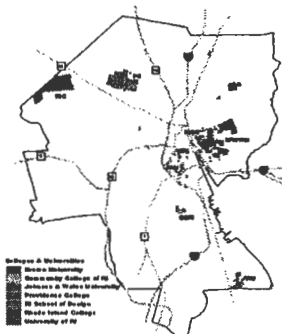


## Current Research

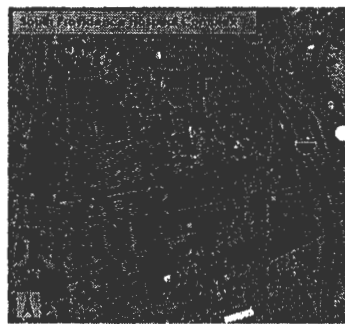
- **Neighborhood Market Analysis: Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (June 2002)**
  - Education and Knowledge Creation is a competitive advantage
  - Growing low wage service sector
- **Regional Creativity Benchmarks: Providence Region: Catalytics, Inc. (October 2002)**
  - Strengths in tolerance and diversity, good on a few measures of talent, poor on measures of technology
  - Brain Drain is a real issue
- **A Call to Action: Building Providence's Creative and Innovative Economy: Providence Foundation, RI EPC, and New Commons (June 2003)**
  - We have the seeds to build a creative economy (opportunities exist)
  - Universities, hospitals, and arts/culture are real assets to build on
  - Things are happening

## The Creative Economy and the Providence, Rhode Island Case Study

- 3,000 artists
- 160,000 highly qualified people
- \$66-100 million in National Institute of Health research
- Demographic data demonstrate that Providence is growing, becoming more diverse, and getting younger

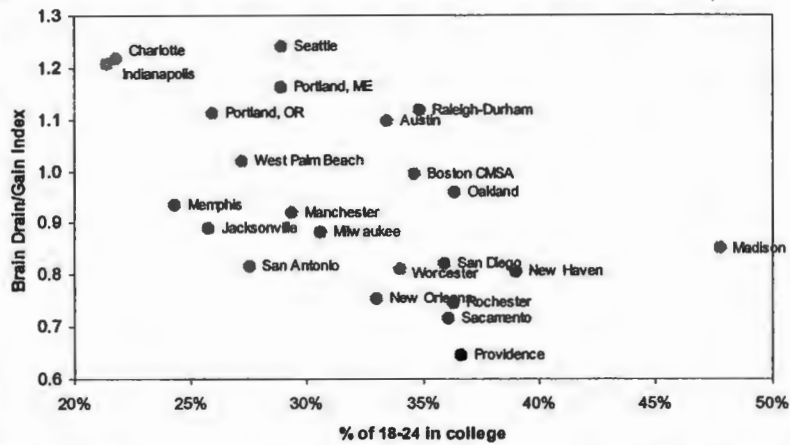


Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, 2002



URI Studio, 2002

## The Brain Drain in Providence, RI



## Questions

- If you are a native, what is holding you here? What is pulling you to go elsewhere? If you are a transplant, what brought you here? What is telling you to stay? What is pulling you elsewhere?
- What do you do to engage with community? How do you define your community?
- When people visit you, where do you take them?
- What places, institutions, or events define the "soul" of Providence in your mind?



## Creative Providence: Working Spaces and Styles

- Schedules
- Workspaces
- Appearances



Catering to the creative process



## Creative Providence: Characteristics

- Motivations
  - Intrinsic
  - Community
- Values
  - Diversity
  - Merit
  - Scale
- Entrepreneurial



## Creative Providence: Assets

- Authenticity
- Community
- Scale
- Location
- Business advantages



## Creative Providence: Needs

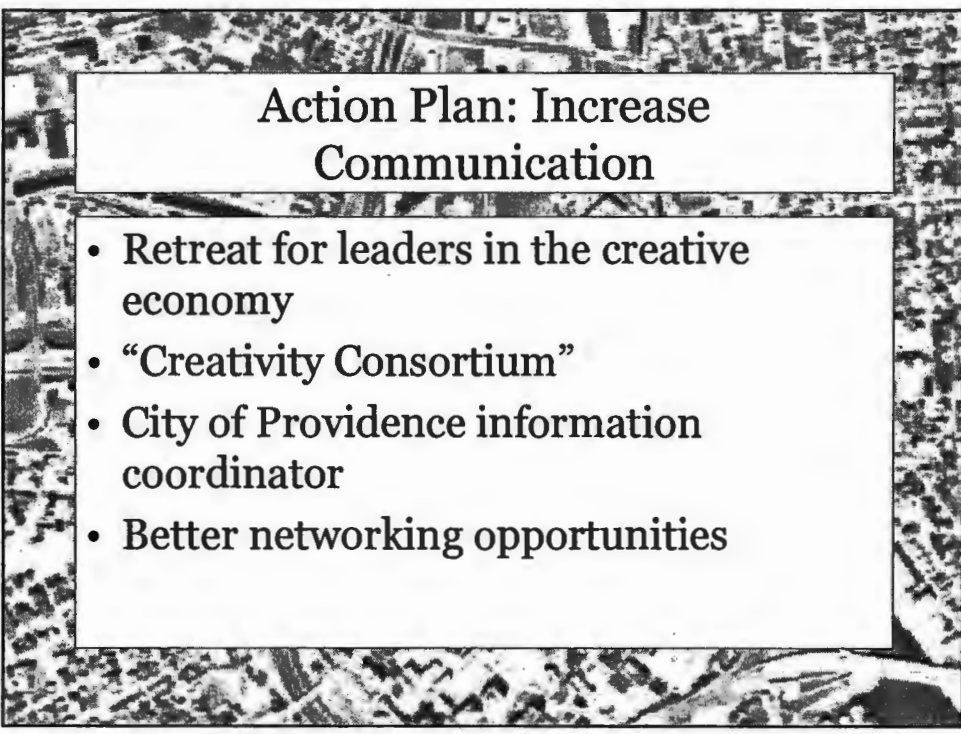
- Increased demand
- Increase affordable housing and work spaces
- Support at the grassroots level
- Venues for communication
- Information





## Creative Providence: Concerns

- Gentrification
- Increased generic, non-local, and chain qualities
- Space
- Perceived misplaced priorities



## Action Plan: Increase Communication

- Retreat for leaders in the creative economy
- “Creativity Consortium”
- City of Providence information coordinator
- Better networking opportunities



## Future Research and Exploration

- Explore relationships between occupations
- Build bridges to creative value added occupations
- Develop better terms for the specific aspects of gentrification
- Detailed studies at local scale
- How do you achieve fiscal stability without the negative characteristics associated with gentrification
- Document successful efforts at increasing communication
- Develop the idea of a Creativity Consortium
- Increasing demand = marketing



## Limitations

- Not a random sample
- Bias
- Economic contributions



## Conclusions

- Richard Florida has made important contributions relevant to Providence, RI
- We need to adapt ideas to local circumstances
- This starts by identifying unique attributes of Providence
- Balance
- Group consciousness



## Questions, Answers, and Discussion

- Is gentrification an inevitable result of market and economic forces in Providence or are there inclusive and equitable strategies to handle it?
- What are the different creative groups within Providence and how are their interests similar?
- What do we do now, today, to plan for an environment that nurtures creativity and entrepreneurship in all forms?

What are your misgivings or reservations?

## **Learning Café Questions**

### **The Creative Economy and Young Creators**

With each topic, we are inviting you explore both opportunities and doubts.

1. Is gentrification inevitable? If so how do you minimize displacement? What is the upside of gentrification? Is gentrification preventable? If so, how? What are your doubts and cautions about gentrification?
2. There are many different creative groups in Providence spanning, design, business, science and art. How are their interests similar? Different? What could be done to help them support and learn from each other? What are your doubts and cautions about forging common interests among creative groups?
3. How do we plan for a climate where creativity and the creative economy are more pervasive? What must be done? What are your doubts and cautions on increasing the climate for creativity?
4. Where is entrepreneurship and creativity most aligned? Not aligned? Where are they most simultaneous acts? With lack of alignment, what can be done to create more alignment? What are your doubts and cautions about aligning more fully creativity and entrepreneurship?

## Interview Questions:

### I. Demographic Information

- Age?
- Race?
- Occupation?
- Where do you live?
- How long have you lived in Providence, RI?

### II. Work

- How many of your professional associates have a tattoo, piercing, etc.?
- How do you dress at work? Is there a formal dress code? Do social norms dictate appropriate dress or is it completely open?
- What is the basic demographic breakdown of the place that you work? If you are self-employed, what is the demographic breakdown of the people that you work with on a day-to-day basis?
- How often do you go to Boston for work? For play?
- How much flexibility do you have at work? (ie: project selection and generation, scheduling, etc.)
- What do you value about your current job?
- When do you work? (9-5, weekends, nights, etc.)
- Where would you recommend a friend locate an office?
- Who are the best local employers? Why?
- What are your career goals?
- Self-employment questions...

### III. Life and Leisure

- Why did you choose to locate in Providence? What were your other choices and what was the "deal breaker?"
- Where do you go to mingle with other creative people?
- Where is the "coolest" place to live in the United States? Why?
- How long have you been in Providence? How long do you plan to stay? What factors would be most likely to make you stay or go?
- How would you identify yourself? (ie: work, family, friends, activities, etc.)
- When people visit you, where do you take them? (Eating, entertainment, nightlife, etc.) Do you schedule visits around any particular events?
- Where would recommend a friend buy a home?
- Where do you like to walk within Providence?
- Where do you go to listen to music and eat?

### IV. Community

- Where do you sense "community" in Providence?
- Where are the ethnic neighborhoods in Providence? If you are not a member of this group, do you still visit these areas? Why?
- Where is the "coolest" coffee shop in Providence? What makes it cool?
- What social organizations do you belong to? (ie: bowling league, gardening club, sports club, church, etc.) How did you find out about these social organizations?
- What is your favorite artwork within Providence?
- What places, institutions, or events define the "soul" of Providence in your mind?
- As it relates to Providence and Rhode Island, when I say the word Talent, what comes to your mind? Open-mindedness? Technology?