

ABSTRACT

Please answer questions in space provided Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

Project Name The Heidelberg Project

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1. Give a brief overview of the project, including major project goals.

In an area once known as “Black Bottom” or “Paradise Valley,” Heidelberg Street was once part of a thriving community. This is a predominately African-American neighborhood in Detroit, where Black migrants from the South were required to live. It was once home to more than 300 African-American owned businesses. In the 1940’s, this area was the cultural and economic heart of the Black community in Detroit. By 1970 the community would virtually be destroyed. This destruction was attributed mostly to the 1967 riots. Poverty, abandonment, drugs, crime, and despair characterized this once pulsating neighborhood. The damage is still visible in the vacant lots and abandoned homes and buildings that litter the community. Contained within two blocks of this historical area is the Heidelberg Project.

The Heidelberg Project is an open-air art installation located in an urban community on the east side of Detroit. It was created 18 years ago as an innovative response to the blight, decay, crime, drugs and hopelessness that currently plague the neighborhood. Founded by Tyree Guyton, the Heidelberg Project is organized as a non-profit art environment created to develop awareness for the arts in an underserved area. The mission of the Heidelberg Project is to inspire people to use artistic expression in novel ways to enrich and improve their lives, and beautify and preserve the community in which we live, work, and play.

Since 1986, Guyton has labored to reverse some of the devastation caused by the 1967 Riots. He began his work on Heidelberg Street where he was raised. Armed with a paintbrush, a broom, and neighborhood children, Guyton began cleaning up vacant lots on Heidelberg and Elba Streets on Detroit’s east side. From the refuge he collected, he used his artistic talent to transform the street, the trees, the house and the sidewalks. Vacant lots literally became “lots of art” and abandoned houses became “gigantic art sculptures.” The lesson that was taught us by Guyton is that much like our society discards “things,” we often discard communities and ultimately people. Guyton’s vision provided a flicker of hope and explored new possibilities.

In 1989, Guyton’s work on Heidelberg Street was officially incorporated as the Heidelberg Project. According to John Beardsley, Sr. Professor of Art and Architecture at Harvard University and author of *Gardens of Revelation*, the Heidelberg Project is regarded as one of the most influential art environments in the world.

2. Why does the project merit the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*? (You may wish to consider such factors as: effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues; design quality.)

Vision, Courage and Tenacity.

In April of 2004, the Heidelberg Project became the recipient of the Environmental Design Research Association’s (EDRA) Place Design Award and is currently featured in the Fall 2004 edition of *Places*, a Forum of Environmental Design. In this edition of *Places*, one juror comments, “you go to places and hear people complaining that their city isn’t good, that if only they had the answer. ‘Oh we’ve got to plan for this, but it’s never happened.’ And this is the most hopeless place there is, and this guy just did it himself.” Still another juror says, “you could get an army of professional and a bucket-load of federal money and it wouldn’t be nearly as good.” Additionally, the Heidelberg Project was the only Design that was voted unanimously by the EDRA committee.

The area where the Heidelberg Project exists is satiated with drugs, crime, poverty and despair. It is a community that many would drive out of their way to avoid. Guyton’s method of revitalizing the community using found and discarded materials and incorporating it into the infrastructure of the neighborhood was symbolic of how the community and its people had become discarded. This symbolism resounded piercingly as not only had the community been revitalized, so had the people. Guyton literally breathe life back into his community. The Heidelberg Project became a social commentary challenging perceptions of urban blight and raised awareness both from within and without the community. This new awareness has led to innovative programs and services for the community.