Learning from ArtPrize Grand Rapids

As Flagstaff Arts Council, its festival planning committee, and partners continue to pursue the dream of launching Dark Sky Arts & Ideas Festival (wt) in 2023. Inspiration is drawn from many different successful events around the country and world. As we continue on our journey to create an event that is uniquely Flagstaff we will highlight examples of those events on our website.

Our initial case study is ArtPrize Grand Rapids.

ArtPrize Grand Rapids is the world's largest art event. It started just 11 years ago in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Before the pandemic disrupted the 2020 event, ArtPrize was giving away $500,000 per year in prizes and tens of thousands of dollars in grants to support participation in the event. The majority of ArtPrize award winners are local to Michigan.

The following shows a glimpse of what ArtPrize is about and how it came to be.

**How ArtPrize Grand Rapids Works**

There are three basic components to the ArtPrize format:

1. **Anyone can be an artist.** ArtPrize prides itself that "any kind of artist from anywhere in the world can register to participate. The event is entirely free to public to participate."
2. **Hundreds of possible venues.** From museums to laundromats to bars to auto body shops, anywhere can be a venue.
3. **Prize = catalyst.** Winners are decided by a public vote and jury. More than $500,000 in prizes are awarded each year.

Learn more about ArtPrize's history on its website here: [https://www.artprize.org/history/story](https://www.artprize.org/history/story)

**Public & Juried Prizes**

Critical to ArtPrize's success are the significant prizes that it awards, a total of $500,000 per year with two $200,000 grand prizes. The attention gained because of those prizes significantly raise the profile of the event. In its first year, ArtPrize spent just $5,000 on marketing, attracting tens of thousands of patrons. Without the significant prizes offered, marketing expenses would have had to been significantly increased. Instead, artists and creators benefited.
As showcased in the “More Art Upstairs” documentary, ArtPrize awards both a public vote prize and a jury prize. This combination is critical to the unique success of ArtPrize Grand Rapids. The public almost always has a different opinion about what should win the grand prize than the jury does. This leads the community into a lot of conversation about what art is, and what is good art.

A public vote eliminates gate keepers and the public gets to decide what they like rather than being told what to like. The event is both critically acclaimed and publicly acclaimed.

Learn more about past winners here: https://www.artprize.org/history

ArtPrize Guiding Principles

ArtPrize's guiding principles are simple yet deeply meaningful. When combined with the basic components of the event (anyone can be an artist, hundreds of venues, and prize=catalyst) and the unique dynamics of the Grand Rapids community the event known as ArtPrize is born.

ArtPrize:
- Is Open.
- Celebrates Artists.
- Is a Catalyst.
- Transforms Urban Space.
- Is an Educational Experience.
- Challenges Everyone.
- Generates Conversation.
- Promotes Social Good.
- Embraces Technology.
- Is an Evolving Experiment.

You can learn more about their guiding principles here: https://www.artprize.org/about/mission-guiding-principles

Key Takeaways from ArtPrize

We will continue to evaluate what makes ArtPrize so successful, but our initial takeaways that inform how we might approach an event in Flagstaff are:

1. Be radically open and create a dialogue between the public and the art establishment.
2. Healthy competition and large prizes (paired with grants to support participation) are catalysts; catalysts that have transformative impact for the winners and that gain significant public interest.
3. Be a platform that allows the community’s and region’s creativity to shine. It’s not the event, it's the people.
4. By activating many places, traditional and non-traditional, and involving as many people as possible the event becomes a part of the community’s identity.
5. A large event can foster culture year round.

Visit ARTPRIZE.ORG to learn more about this inspirational event.

April 19th, 2021 | Uncategorized