

Project Name Project Row HousesLocation Houston TX

1. Describe briefly the project's design and implementation.

Project Row Houses (PRH) was founded by artist/activist Rick Lowe, who discovered the abandoned, crime-infested 1 1/2 block site of 22 identical, adjacent shotgun-style houses in one of the poorest African American communities in Houston, Texas. These small (600 sq. ft.) historic shotguns are being demolished in Freedman's Towns across the South. Lowe conceived a public art project where African American artists would create site specific art works in one house each. He believes that art is capable of spiritually healing the lives of individuals and communities by helping people recognize the beauty and wisdom in their own culture. With seed funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, artists led community and a broad spectrum of volunteers in completely restoring the site/houses. Through demographic research and talking to neighborhood residents, the public art concept expanded to interdisciplinary art and education programs, historic preservation, and community services. This level of urban revitalization has not been achieved in Third Ward for fifteen years. In just three years, PRH renovated and programmed the site/houses as follows:

- 8 Gallery Houses
- 2 Administrative Houses
- 1 House for After-School/Summer Programs
- 1 Sisters in Progress House: empowerment programs for African American women
- 7 Houses for Young Mothers Residential Program: housing, day care, and services promoting self-sufficiency for single mothers and their children
- Community Garden where five houses had been torn down
- 1 Spoken Word House
- 1 Woodworking Shop
- 1 Storage House

2. What local urban issues did this project address? What were its goals? Were there issues that, in your judgement, might have been addressed but were not?

In the shadow of downtown Houston's spectacular skyline, our demographic profile is typical of the nation's inner city quality of life: 40% land use vacancy rate; 98% of the population is African American; 40% of household income is under \$5,000; 59% of those under the age of 25 did not complete high school; and over half of the children are born to single, teenaged mothers and raised below the poverty level. Building upon the pristine quality of the rehabilitated houses and courtyard connecting the back porches, PRH is a gathering place for dialogue engaging the community in cultural, social, political, and educational issues. The art produced within this framework of cultural self-definition and collective identity is inherently bound up with the traditions, history and social values of the African-American community. PRH's mission is to cultivate a new vision of opportunity through the arts by introducing community residents to positive black role models and creative ideas literally in their own backyard. The celebration of African American history and culture raises the self-esteem of children and parents in the after school programs; resident mothers and babies; and informs city-wide audiences averaging 100 per week and 1,000 for art openings.

3. Describe the financing of the project. Do you think it could be replicated?

PRH has consistently tried to develop funding from the City of Houston with no result outside of program funds from the local arts council. Out of necessity, artists are accustomed to working with limited and alternative resources and to developing publicity for projects. In the first year of operation, the NEA award of \$25,000 leveraged an additional \$113,000 in contributions from corporations, foundations, and individuals and \$136,000 in-kind construction materials and services. Amoco Corporation and Home Depot provided employee/volunteers and material to restore the exterior of 12 houses. Chevron U.S.A. organized a workday with over 300 community and corporate volunteers and fully renovated one residence. Three Houston museums, a contemporary art center, two families, a neighboring church, and a black sorority restored one house each. U.S. Home, Masco Corporation and *Woman's Day Special Interest Publications* recruited interior designers and contributed furniture and fixtures to create beautiful individualized interiors for six YMRP houses and day care valued at \$120,000. The Meadows Foundation awarded \$100,000 for rehab and program start-up costs. Our experience with creative ways of developing broad-based support convinces us that this program can and will be replicated in other locations. PRH is currently developing projects in the Watts area of Los Angeles and East St. Louis.

4. Why does the project merit the Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment?

Recognition by the Rudy Bruner Award for PRH's innovative approach to urban revitalization would promote the concept on a national level so that community's across the country would look at their geography, architecture, cultural traditions, and creative use of existing resources to adapt the PRH model. Throughout the ages, artists have been recognized as the visionaries of society. Houston artist Jesse Lott says, "As an artist, I believe it is a personal responsibility to help people recognize the value in material very often discarded by society . . . An artist possesses the power to transform objects and add new value to them. This transformation creates a new range of materials, a new pool of expression, and new participants in the world of creation. It can create a revolution in the mind of an individual that is creative and expansive, not destructive."

PROJECT PROFILE

Project Name Project Row Houses Location Houston, TX

Owner Project Row Houses, Inc.

Project Use(s) Public Art and Cultural Education, Transitional Housing for Young, Single Mothers

Project Size 1 1/2 Blocks/22 shotgun-style houses Total Development Cost \$350,000

Annual Operating Budget (if appropriate) \$350,000

Date Initiated September 1, 1993 Percent Completed, December 1, 1996 95%

Projected Completion Date (if appropriate) March, 1997
 (Attach, if you wish, a list of relevant project dates)

Application submitted by:

Name Deborah Grotfeldt Title Executive Director

Organization Project Row Houses

Address P.O. Box 1011 Houston, TX 77251-1011

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E-mail # _____

Key Participants (Attach an additional sheet if needed)

Organization	Key Person	Telephone
■ Public Agencies	_____	_____
■ Developer <u>Project Row Houses</u>	<u>Rick Lowe/Deborah Grotfeldt</u>	<u>(713)526-7662</u>
■ Professional consultants:		
Architect <u>Sheryl Tucker</u>	_____	<u>(713)743-2367</u>
Landscape architect <u>Urban Harvest</u>	<u>Bob Randall</u>	<u>(713)529-1492</u>
Urban designer	_____	_____
Planner	_____	_____
Lawyer <u>Drayden, Wyche & Wood</u>	<u>Charles Drayden</u>	<u>(713)965-1020</u>
Other <u>Heimbinder Family Foundation</u>	<u>Isaac/Sheila Heimbinder</u>	<u>(713)465-3143</u>
■ Community group(s) <u>Sisters in Positive Progress</u>	<u>Pat Hunter</u>	<u>(713)526-7662</u>
<u>Trinity United Methodist Church</u>	<u>Rev. Robert McGee</u>	<u>(713)528-2356</u>
■ Sponsor	_____	_____

Please indicate how you learned of the Rudy Bruner Award in Urban Excellence. (Check all that apply)

[] mailing [] media [] previous RBA entrant [XX] other

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Signature Deborah Grotfeldt