

# **Design in the Public Realm: Four Initiatives by the Design Discipline of the National Endowment for the Arts**

Facilitator:

MARK ROBBINS

Director of Design, National Endowment for the Arts

It is self-evident to most practitioners in the design professions that architecture, landscape architecture, planning, and the allied arts can all have a profound impact on the quality of the public realm. The participation of designers is critical in the way cities and communities are conceived and built. Too often however, a false split between design and social engagement is inscribed within architectural discourse. In addition outside of the profession, the public and political awareness that design has any role at all in the formulation of cities, infrastructure and public space, is limited at best. A series of initiatives by the Design Discipline of the National Endowment for the Arts seeks to address this chronic situation.

The NEA has recently approved an allocation of \$675,000 in new Leadership Initiatives that will nurture design talent and help to improve the overall quality of design across the country.

These four new programs will focus on the design of public projects, reworking out-of-date suburban malls, examining the design of new schools and the revitalization of old ones, and finding ways that design can enhance the quality of life in rural areas.

The initiatives are part of a concerted effort by the NEA to develop public awareness about design, serve the varied design disciplines, and act as a conduit for design expertise for other federal agencies, arguably the largest consumers of design. The NEA is also working to increase the number of design grant applicants. Paired with enlarging the pool of applications for grants to organizations, these new programs will improve the quality of design in the public realm and advance innovative work in the field.