

FUTUREFARMERS BUILD-YOUR-OWN-HEADLANDS-RESIDENCY KIT  
Cooley Windsor

Artist residencies are like organ transplants. More people need one than there are available. One year, Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown had 1,100 applications for 18 residencies. That yields an acceptance rate of 1.75% Your chances of getting into Harvard that year were significantly higher: MacDowell had a 17% acceptance rate that year. Yaddo was up to 20%. Those odds are daunting. People with talent, and projects that need working on, are lined up. Futurefarmers recognizes this and wants to help.

The great playwright David Mamet, before he lost his mind, he pointed out that if you want to be an actor you are better off starting your own theater company, and staging your own productions, even if it means performing in your own living room in front of your friends who are crowded around in folding chairs and crouched on the floor. It may not be perfect, but it is better than sitting alone by a phone that doesn't ring. You get roles. You gain experience. You have the opportunity to get better. You get time in the studio, and for an artist that is the key.

So Futurefarmers wants to help you provide yourself with the close equivalent of a Headlands Center for the Arts residency Headlands is as good as it gets, and Futurefarmers can offer you odds of 100%. Here is how.

First, you need to think of your project and define your 90-day timeline. Even though you are going to provide your own residency you need to work on your application. Frequently as artists we plan a whole giant thing, an enormous project that might take years, but a residency is not that long. You should define something that can be done working part-time in 90 days. So we're not saying don't work on a novel. What we are saying is plan a chapter. We're saying work on scenes. Break down big projects into smaller parts and plan which parts to work on in the relatively brief time your residency can provide.

Think of it this way Karen Pryor, one of the pioneers in marine animal training, notes that many dog owners have difficulty training their dogs to play Frisbee because they fail to recognize that it's a behavior chain consisting of three parts. The first is the dog chases the Frisbee, then the dog catches the Frisbee, and then the dog brings the Frisbee back for another throw. So, Pryor points out, each behavior must be trained separately, and the last behavior in the chain, retrieving, must be trained first.

Artists are that way too, and to permit ourselves to work inside our imagination is much like training a dolphin, and that is how Futurefarmers asks you to think of the artist residency you are going to build for yourself. The first important thing is to decide something you can reasonably do in a 90 day period and make a plan for doing it,

and define the steps in increments small enough that you always have a realistic chance for success.

Once you have in mind what you are interested in doing, Futurefarmers' second step is for you to look around for another artist you want to share your residency with. Usually we think of an artist residency as all about us wonderful us, us as the entire center of attention, but if that were a residency you could do it at your kitchen table. Amy Franceschini founded Futurefarmers as an artists collective, and residencies are also a form of collective, even when one is working individually. The experience is a shared experience with the other artists in residence. So you should look around and identify an artist whose work you are interested in, whose work you would like to support and who you would like to support your work, and ask them to join you for a three-month shared experience. It might be a collaboration, but it might not. It might just be keeping in touch and showing each other what you are doing for the defined period of the residency. It might mean you keep the other person's kids on Tuesdays and they keep yours on Thursdays. It might mean you sit quietly next to each other, or apart, on nice days by Lake Merritt and draw or write. But the main thing is to engage and reinforce with someone else consciously as an artists community.

The third thing is to make a commitment to your project over the 90 days and to get other people in your life to join you in the commitment. That is one of the helps of a residency. "I'm sorry I can't join you this weekend. I'm working at my residency. I'm sorry I can't help you. I'm working on my residency" For the three month period, it's important to move your own art to the forefront and to let other things slide back one notch to accommodate you for the length of the residency you are building for yourself.

"Kids, I am working on an art project for three months, so on Thursdays you are orphans. Do you know what orphans means? Orphans eat cereal for dinner and play outside alone and act happy even though they're sad. So go outside and show the neighbors how brave you are."

You should budget some money for yourself and the person who is sharing the residency with you and attend some arts events together: It doesn't have to be a lot. Headlands Center for the Arts' public programs would be ideal. You can attend events, introduce yourself to artists in residence, talk to them about projects and the residency-yours and theirs-and for \$20 eat Keith the chef's superb artist dinners after the events. It may seem harsh, but as an artist, if you think of Alice Neel or Mark Rothko, just because your spouse and children are eating cereal for dinner doesn't mean you have to. Plus Futurefarmers is only recommending you do this in increments of 90 days.

We also want to suggest that you use the residency period to expand your art practice. This can help you. If your life is so filled with activity that you cannot breathe, instead of working on a novel you might want to consider briefer forms, like writing skits or monologues,

until you reach a period when you can have more time. A residency can provide an excellent opportunity to work in new genres. On the other hand, you may also want to reconsider how you are scheduling your life and determine whether you need to make some changes in the way you live. Residencies are good for that too.

It is important not to be afraid of failing. That's what writers block is - it is paralysis created by perfectionism. The one thing that revision cannot correct is silence. Many people want an art practice but are afraid that their talent will not be sufficient and thus are afraid to push on it. But here again we want you to think of the divine Karen Pryor and dolphin training. The trainer looks for desirable behaviors to reinforce and ignores all other behaviors. Doesn't punish them. Doesn't correct them. Watches for desirable behaviors to reward and reinforce, and ignores everything else. You have to figure, if this humane and generous system can get a killer whale to leap 20 feet into the air on cue, it can get a poem out of me. That is a residency.

There are three elements that the do-it-yourself residency shares with other residencies. First, it will be over all too soon. That is just how it is. Second, regardless of what you do it will feel like you could have done more. Could have and should have. This is part of art. There is always discontent. Few projects end up as glorious as the vision that spawned them. The artist David Wojnarowicz speculated in his diary that perhaps what he wanted was for people to faint when they saw his work.

But the third element is that our discontent should be welcomed. It guides us. Are we spending enough time on the manuscript? Should we be sending things out more? Is this work trying to say something that we are not hearing? Can this piece be made better or is it done? What should I do next?

Here's what you do next. The Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito is approaching its 30th anniversary That's an important one. You should make a gift. If you have money you should give Headlands some. You know what they say: Give until it hurts and then keep giving. You should attend Headlands events. You should bring your friends if you have any and your family if you have one. If you need a residency you should apply. And you should also bear in mind that even if you do not receive a residency from an arts center, you can provide yourself and your creative partners with one on your own. That is one of the truly great things about art. As the artist Benny Andrews points out, there is no admission price to art. It's like a street fight. You just get in there and start swinging.