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For Immediate Release

New Study Examines Creative Placemaking in a Changing Community
*Pre/Post research examines the role of community identity, collective memory,
shifting perceptions and equitable belonging at Levitt Pavilion Denver*

May 13, 2021 — What is, and what should be, the role of the arts in communities undergoing change?

A new white paper, [*Listening to the Music of Community Change: Findings from a Pre/Post Research Study at Levitt Pavilion Denver*](#), examines how a new outdoor music venue has shifted perceptions of a Southwest Denver neighborhood and park over time. The study's release follows a pandemic-fueled wave of interest in public spaces and offers timely insights for civic leaders, practitioners and funders seeking to build more equitable and thriving public spaces.

Commissioned by the Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation and conducted by Slover Linett Audience Research, the study focuses on Denver's Ruby Hill neighborhood, a largely residential, predominantly low-income Hispanic/Latinx community. Reflecting on fieldwork conducted during the "pre" phase of the research in 2013 (before design and construction of Levitt Pavilion Denver began) and the "post" phase in 2019 (during the pavilion's third concert season), the white paper explores shifting perceptions of Ruby Hill Park, the local area, and the pavilion through the lens of lived experiences of local residents and park users; the role of collective memory in shaping attitudes toward the arts investment; and how equitable practices and processes can further a sense of belonging while fostering long-term investment in the community.

The new report is a case study of how a creative placemaking project can be positioned and programmed to become a community asset that is reflective of a neighborhood's local character and inspires community attachment, while also being responsive to the dynamism of a rapidly growing and changing metropolitan area.

"As we reflect upon a year of tremendous challenges, loss and hardship, when many of our country's inequities were laid bare, the role of the arts in fostering community and a sense of belonging has taken on even greater importance," says Sharon Yazowski, executive director of the Levitt Foundation. "This research has already informed our work, as we hope it will inspire others, to broaden inclusionary practices and support creative placemaking in communities undergoing change, with equity at the forefront."

The Levitt Foundation focuses its funding and research on creative placemaking, believing in the power of public spaces to create a more just and equitable society, and the power of the arts to inspire joy, nourish well-being and create shared community experiences that foster connections. The Foundation partners with communities across the country, providing grants to activate underused public spaces through free, live music. In addition to its grantmaking, the Foundation has been part of the creative placemaking field's dialogue and evolution and has

committed to research and critical self-reflection, both to contribute to the field and to inform its own programs and practices.

In 2013, the Levitt Foundation commissioned Slover Linett to conduct a three-part study to better understand and document the impact of permanent Levitt music venues, focusing on community-level outcomes. The first two parts of the study were published as a white paper in 2016, [Setting the Stage for Community Change: Reflecting on Creative Placemaking Outcomes](#). Among other findings, that document explored how the experience of free Levitt concerts fosters social interactions within groups and across demographic boundaries, which, in turn, builds social capital.

The 2021 white paper presents the third part of the research, a [Pre/Post Research Study at Levitt Pavilion Denver](#), which explores the precursor to social capital—a sense of belonging. Slover Linett focused on the unique “situatedness” of Ruby Hill Park, including its location and history of use, in order to understand the preconditions for Levitt Pavilion Denver’s creation and how it has begun to contribute to a sense of place and overall community vitality.

Slover Linett used largely qualitative research methods to understand the role and impact of Levitt Pavilion Denver over time and across multiple definitions of “community,” inviting a range of perspectives on the pavilion and its concerts, the park, surrounding neighborhoods, and Denver as a whole. The researchers aimed to be attuned to systemic drivers of equity and inequity in the local community context and listen for perceptions among area residents, Denver community stakeholders, and concert attendees about how Levitt Pavilion Denver has (or could) play a role in shifting those dynamics.

“This research has been a rich conversation with many voices, including longtime local residents and more recent arrivals,” says Tanya Treptow, PhD, lead author of the study and Slover Linett’s vice president and co-director of research. “By exploring these multi-layered, intersecting perspectives, we hope that this case study honors the complexity of communities and uncovers insights that can be useful to a wide range of practitioners and funders of creative placemaking and equitable arts-and-community-development projects.”

The **Key Findings** section of the report assesses how the Levitt Pavilion Denver nonprofit organization has helped create a stronger, more equitable community of music lovers in Denver; the opportunity and potential challenges for Levitt Denver to foster long-term investment in the local community; how Levitt Denver has created a nurturing environment for musicians; and the delicate balance of sharing resources in a complex landscape given the public/private partnership between Levitt Denver and the City. The final section of the white paper offers **Suggestions for the Field**, co-authored by Slover Linett and the Levitt Foundation—guidance to those working in, or philanthropically supporting, a range of creative placemaking efforts, from music-based projects to those involving other arts disciplines or taking place in diverse community contexts.

[Read full white paper.](#)

[Read the executive summary.](#)

About the Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation

The Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation is a private family foundation that exists to strengthen the social fabric of America. Through its commitment to **creative placemaking**, the Levitt Foundation supports the activation of underused public spaces—neglected parks, vacant downtown lots, former brownfields—into welcoming, inclusive destinations where the power of free, live music brings people together to create more equitable, thriving and sustainable communities. The Foundation’s primary funding areas include **permanent Levitt venues** and the **Levitt AMP [Your City] Grant Awards**. Both of these programs present free concerts in outdoor, open lawn settings featuring high-caliber talent in a broad array of music genres and cultural performances. Permanent Levitt venues

and Levitt AMP concert sites attract people of all ages and backgrounds and reflect the character of their town or city, while benefitting from the framework and best practices of the Levitt program.

The Levitt Foundation invests in community-driven efforts that harness the power of partnerships and leverage community engagement. Levitt venues and AMP grantees partner with local nonprofits and community groups to inform programming, outreach and engagement, embodying the Foundation’s funding philosophy and core values to support projects that are inclusive, catalytic and dynamic and create connectedness and joy. Reflecting its ongoing commitment to self-reflection and contributing to the creative placemaking field, the Levitt Foundation invests in research to evaluate the social impact of Levitt programs in communities, which in turn informs the Foundation’s evolving philanthropic practice. Learn more: levitt.org

About Levitt Pavilion Denver

Levitt Pavilion Denver is a nonprofit dedicated to building community through music. Located in Ruby Hill Park in Southwest Denver, each year the outdoor music venue presents 50 free concerts featuring local, regional, national and international acts in a broad range of music genres. Steeped in a mission to bridge cultural gaps, erase divisions and embrace differences, Levitt Denver celebrates the local—including musicians, the business community, arts and culture organizations and other nonprofits. Featuring a relaxed open lawn setting, easily accessible location and family-friendly environment attracting people of all ages and backgrounds, Levitt Denver functions as a nexus for local nonprofits, musicians and arts groups across the Rocky Mountain region. Outside of the free concert series, Levitt Denver’s state-of-the-art amphitheater is used by schools, arts organizations, outside promoters and nonprofits. Learn more: levittdenver.org

About Slover Linett

Slover Linett is a social research practice for the cultural and community sector, broadly defined to include the arts, museums, libraries, parks and public spaces, public media, science engagement, placemaking, and philanthropy. Founded in Chicago in 1999, the firm uses a range of equitable research and evaluation methods—from community ethnography and asset-mapping to quantitative survey research, advanced statistical modeling, and generative, co-creative workshops—to illuminate public perceptions, values, behaviors, outcomes, and new possibilities for relevance. Slover Linett’s mission is to help practitioners and policymakers increase equity and access, deepen engagement, and meet human and community needs. Its Chicago-based staff includes social scientists from disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and public policy, many with advanced degrees. Clients have ranged from The High Line, New York Public Radio, and the Library of Congress to Carnegie Hall, the Knight Foundation, and Nina Simon’s Of/By/For All movement. During the pandemic, Slover Linett helped lead Culture & Community in a Time of Transformation: A Special Edition of Culture Track, a national audience and population study in partnership with LaPlaca Cohen, Yancey Consulting, and NORC at the University of Chicago, with generous support from the Wallace Foundation, Barr Foundation, William Penn Foundation, Terra Foundation for American Art, and Art Bridges (a Walton family initiative) and crucial in-kind contributions from Microsoft and FocusVision. The first wave of the online survey became one of the largest quantitative studies of cultural engagement in U.S. history and led to a BIPOC-focused analysis and report released in December 2020, “Centering the Picture: The Role of Race & Ethnicity in Cultural Engagement in the U.S.” The 2021 phases of the project will amplify the voices of Americans of color and focus more deeply on the participants served by community-embedded organizations, from public libraries to independent music venues. Learn more: sloverlinett.com and twitter.com/SloverLinett.