

June 2020 IH Grantee Spotlight with: TONIKA JOHNSON & MARIA KRYSAN FOLDED MAP

PROJECT: *Folded Map Action Kit (approved April 2020)*

LOCATION: Chicago, IL

ORGANIZATION:

Teamwork Englewood is the fiscal agent for the Folded Map project. Founded in 2003, Teamwork Englewood seeks to unite the many organizations serving Englewood residents and work toward the common goal of building a stronger community.

PROJECT:

"Folded Map Action Kit" is a do it yourself platform for people to engage with the Folded Map project, which brings residents (Map Twins) from opposite ends of the same street, in different Chicago neighborhoods, to meet and get to know one another, thereby bridging the divides created by segregation. The Kit contains guides to the Rogers Park and Englewood neighborhoods, as well as suggested activities to undertake in one's own "Twin Neighborhood." The project team is Maria Krysan, a Professor in the Department of Sociology and senior scholar at the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Tonika Johnson, a Photographer and Social Justice Artist and 2017 Chicago Magazine "Chicagoan of the Year."

UPCOMING EVENTS:

-  Learn about upcoming events at www.foldedmapproject.com
-  Follow Tonika Johnson on Twitter at [@tonikaj](https://twitter.com/tonikaj)
-  Follow Tonika Johnson on Instagram at [@tonikaj](https://www.instagram.com/tonikaj)
-  Like Tonika Johnson on Facebook at [@tonikatonij](https://www.facebook.com/tonikatonij)



Maria Krysan (left) and Tonika Johnson (right).



Q&A SESSION:

***The Q&A session was moderated by Mark Hallett, Program Manager, Grants in May 2020*

Question: *What is the most important thing people should know about your work?*

Tonika: *Folded Map originally, in its inception, was an art project meant to visually demonstrate Chicago's disparity and segregation by comparing mirroring addresses on the same streets on Chicago's South and North sides, while also bringing residents on those streets together to talk about their neighborhood and their lives. Then, once Folded Map was exhibited at Loyola University Museum of Art in 2018 – it grew and evolved to become an educational tool to help people learn about the city's grid map and historic segregation and how it presents itself today.*

Maria: *I would underscore that the reaction to this simple idea – its power, is in how it resonates with people and has helped unleash a social movement. It has created an entree that helps people understand segregation in a personal way. Starting with Tonika's art project, it has since expanded to help begin these conversations about the causes and consequences of segregation.*

Tonika: *The Action Kit [the project funded by Illinois Humanities] is a self-guided list of errands we are inviting people to run in their Map Twin neighborhood. More than 500 people have signed up to Folded Map's contact list to participate in the project somehow, get updates, or to be a 'map twin' in the project. Maria and I realized this is a large group ready to take another step on their journey to expanding their worldview. We knew we would not have the capacity to engage all these people individually. That's how the Action Kit idea emerged. We knew this would offer an opportunity for people to learn more about the city's segregation and not have their own biases guide how they view a neighborhood. So the Action Kit is an invitation to walk in someone else's shoes, document and share your observations with the larger public.*

Maria: *The Action Kit itself has background information to provide context on the historical and contemporary causes of segregation. It's an introduction to segregation in Chicago and to the Folded Map. It also has Welcome to My Neighborhood guides, inspired by the map twins in the original exhibit. What's important is the Action Kit experience is trying to inspire people to experience a neighborhood but not to come as tourists but to see what it would be like to live life in another neighborhood. It is also designed to ask people to reflect on their own neighborhood: How did they end up there, what do they like and not like about it, so one's own life experiences help them think about others. The Action Kit allows people to share their experiences by uploading their photos or videos so we can curate those reports to tell more stories and encourage more people to participate.*

Tonika: *We were well aware of the fact that people are told not to go to the South Side or the West Side, and that there are South Siders, who do not go far north if their work doesn't require, or they feel uncomfortable. So the Action Kit serves as a bridge for people to explore larger Chicago across its racial divide. For South Siders, my feeling was to create an activity that will allow people to see and really observe what they're entitled to as tax-paying residents of this City. If you haven't been to the North Side you should see it and all of the investment it has that the South Side outright doesn't receive. The burden of segregation gets put onto the residents: 'You decide to self-segregate.' But that's not the case AT ALL, we were all influenced to be segregated and my hope is to help people shift the blame and accountability to our elected officials.*

Question: *Who makes your work possible?*

Tonika: *First and foremost, what makes this work possible, is the larger public expressing their appreciation and interest to talk and learn more about segregation. Being interested. When I started on Folded Map, it was literally as an artist who simply wanted to get the idea out of my head. I didn't know that so many people beyond my immediate social circles would be interested and ready to make this a larger citywide conversation. [People are] ready for this conversation, and are fed up with how our city is viewed and feeling helpless...like we can't change it. And of course there are partnerships behind this – there is no way on this green earth I could have done Folded Map's activity kit without my strong partnership with Maria.*

Maria: *It has been an honor to be able to work with Tonika and I feel very lucky that she is letting me join her on this journey. Tonika, and the project, are an inspiration.*

Tonika: *Another group that makes my work possible; that helps keep my ear to the street, is where I live, in the neighborhood I grew up in the Englewood community. Even if the larger city had not responded the way it did, my community pushed me to do the work they knew my heart was into doing. I wanted to hide my artistic social justice pursuits behind community service work, and they weren't having it! They made me claim my title as an artist, they encouraged it and uplifted me for it!*

Question: *How do you see the arts/culture/humanities as being essential?*

Maria: *For me, I first heard about Folded Map when a journalist who was doing a story on this art exhibit, Folded Map, called me and asked if I'd heard of it. He described it to me and I had the phone to my ear and thought 'Oh My God this is brilliant.' I said 'Give me a minute and I'll give you a quote.' I had just finished a book on the cycle of segregation, an academic exploration into segregation, and I thought "This is the thing I have been waiting for. It creates a vehicle, a platform, a thing I can hold onto as an academic. People connect to the art in a way they'd can't with the wonky scholastic research. The two complement one another perfectly.*

Something that art can do is to help people see they are a part of history, not just something lived long ago but that our experience is a continuation of history, and art is the place where people can think about and explore those things.
-Tonika Johnson

Tonika: *I am grateful for art being able to serve as a bridge for people to want to gain a deeper understanding. Beyond pulling people in on a personal level, I'm able to offer people resources to further their understanding about the issues raised in Folded Map. Something that art can do is to help people see they are a part of history, not just something lived long ago but that our experience is a continuation of history, and art is the place where people can think about and explore those things.*