

Story Behind the [ArtPrize](#) Story:

Rick DeVos, Honorary Member of American Institute of Architects, Michigan

(excerpt from an interview by AIA MI)



Rick DeVos became an Honorary Member of AIA MI in 2011, in recognition of his role in establishing ArtPrize. Rick is the architect and driving force behind [ArtPrize](#) in Grand Rapids. He has passionately discussed on an open platform the importance of a vibrant and flourishing City core. Rick's thesis behind ArtPrize is to use an art competition as a conduit to bring all ages to the City to view and discuss art. The competition leverages existing urban space as venues for art experiences. This creates a flurry of activity exposing the installation and construction of art to the public.

Intentionally simple in its name, ArtPrize is the world's largest art prize. In 2012 ArtPrize awarded \$560,000 in prizes: \$360,000 awarded by public vote, and \$200,000 awarded by a select group of art experts.

When asked how he came up with the idea, Rick responded:

“Over the last few years in particular, I've had the privilege of many great cultural events like the Sundance Film Festival, the Telluride Film Festival, and SxSW. Because of this exploration, for some time I have thought that Grand Rapids would be ripe for putting on a large cultural event. Grand Rapids has a great history of design and public art, a walkable downtown, a surprisingly large student population, and strong cultural institutions like the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, the Grand Rapids Art Museum and the Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park. All of these seemed like, and have proven to be, a strong foundation to build on.

Initially, due to all of my engagement with film festivals, I thought seriously about putting one on in Grand Rapids. However, the nature of film festivals (due very much to the nature of the medium) is that they are highly centralized and controlled. You have a small committee that reviews films and accepts them, highly specific kinds of venues, and a very rigid screening schedule with capacity and limitations, adding even more layers of complexity and centralized decision-making. Thinking about how film festivals work, my team and I started to wonder what the opposite would look like. What could we do that was extremely open, decentralized, and allowing of a wide variety of media and expressions, not just film? How could it be a catalyst and let innovation and creativity happen on the edges instead of trying to plan and control all of it at the center? What sort of relationships would form between artists collaborating with other artists and their host venues?

I started to think about how to get a large group of artists interested in showing their work, and a large swath of the public interested in looking at that work, but at the same time go beyond the traditional artist-public relationship of buying and selling that a standard art fair is built around. I thought that models like X-Prize were particularly interesting as a catalyst and organizational model because they create a large incentive for attaining a particular goal, which in turn entices a large group of individuals and teams to go after that goal. It seemed like a pretty straightforward idea to create a very large art

prize to gain the attention of a broad cross-section of artists, but the question then became how to get the larger public interested and invested in the process beyond passively shuffling through.

Very quickly, the idea emerged of having a public vote--tangible public feedback--as an incredibly powerful tool of getting people looking, engaging, and debating. We then decided to go even one step further, and we opened up who could host a venue--and thereby opened up curation for the event-- by just setting a border, minimum open hours, and a couple of other basic things. Our role as ArtPrize (the organization) focused on becoming a facilitator of relationships between artists, the venues hosting them, and the people physically in the city and taking part in the event rather than trying to plan every detail for all of those parties. The number of artists, the number of venues, the number of collaborations, the variety and quality of the work, and the buzz that we feel happening in the city are all-amazing. We are honored to be a part of it. We would love to have you join us. Come and see."

