

**Legal Name**

Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois

**Project Title**

To support Making Communities Visible: utilizing the Krannert Center and SITI Company to engage community groups in activities that shift the paradigm of contemporary expectations about what art means through an expanded sense of community

**DDCF Grant Number**

2013026

**Project Progress and Successes****Mission**

Krannert Center for the Performing Arts is dedicated to the advancement of education, research, and public engagement through the pursuit of excellence and innovation in the performing arts. Embracing the art of the past as well as the art of our time, Krannert Center supports the belief that creativity is a core human characteristic and that the arts hold uniquely transformative potential. Through its multiple and integrated roles as classroom, laboratory, and public square, Krannert Center serves as a touchstone for the exploration and expansion of human experience.

**Overview**

The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation-funded Making Communities Visible project has strengthened the Center's capacity to further its mission by engaging four unique communities within the broader Champaign, Urbana, and University of Illinois community who historically have not been sufficiently visible within Krannert Center. With a three-year goal of transforming passive cultures into active cultures, in year one the project team--led by Anne Bogart and members of SITI Company, along with Krannert Center engagement staff--explored relationships between community and theater by embracing Bogart's belief that "theater is distinguished from other art forms in that its subject is always social." These four diverse yet specific communities examined social issues and obstacles within their respective groups while exploring the rich world of art and theater through both dialogue and active participation. The project proposes to shift the paradigm of contemporary expectations about what art means through an expanded sense of community, with the ultimate goal of building a sustainable model for community-wide participation in the arts at Krannert Center.

Throughout the first year of Making Communities Visible, Anne Bogart and members of SITI Company led numerous conversations and workshops, many of which took place outside of Krannert Center in locations familiar to each group. By embedding Anne Bogart and members of SITI Company within various components of the community and asking questions like, "How are we getting along or how could we get along better?" the project revealed approaches to utilize the transformational potential of the arts in mutually beneficial ways.

Significantly contributing to the Center's understanding of each community and the quality of the Center's relationship with each, Making Communities Visible has also greatly informed future methods of planning and design (both within the scope of the project and the Center's ongoing engagement mission), created greater confidence in the Center's ability to create sustainable models for engaging a more diverse audience, and encouraged change in the Center's organizational culture. Krannert Center for the Performing Arts is deeply grateful to The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation for its support of this important initiative.

#### Schedule

Anne Bogart and SITI Company members Ellen Lauren, Leon Ingulsrud, Stephen Webber, and Gian- Murray Gianino were in residence for a total of 44 days over three residency periods during the 2013-14 project year (October 17-20, April 9-14, and May 29-June 1). Due to scheduling conflicts, Bogart and SITI Company members were unable to be in residence during the proposed "Summer Planning Intensive"; this residency was replaced with a series of in-depth conference calls in the Summer of 2013. Between residency periods, Krannert Center staff continued conversations with each community through multiple meetings and attendance at community events. A complete listing of activities and itineraries is included in the attachment section of this report.

#### Communities

Four distinct communities--spanning age, ethnic, educational and economic backgrounds reflective of the Champaign-Urbana community at large--were identified for participation in the project: African American members of a faith-based community, young professionals who are 25 to 40 years of age and have not attended performances at Krannert Center, first-generation University of Illinois college students, and families from Urbana's Leal Elementary School who speak English as a second language.

Each community experienced an individualized tour of the Center with Anne Bogart, members of SITI Company and Krannert Center staff, designed to address each community's needs in terms of knowledge, understanding, and perceptions of the Center. Offering personalized contact with various Krannert Center staff members--including the directors of the scene shop, props shop, lighting/audio departments, development, and marketing--Anne Bogart and members of SITI Company were able to encourage conversation that revealed relevant perceptions about the arts and the role of the arts in daily life. Over the course of the year, community members engaged in Bogart-led conversations, workshops, presentations, and meetings, all individually designed to familiarize the project team and communities with one another's goals, aspirations, concerns, and more. The entire project team also invested considerable time in processing the community experiences and determining next steps in relationship- building. Between artist residencies, the Krannert Center engagement team continued key activities as determined by the project team, maintaining contact within communities and inviting communities to be engaged with the Center through performances, special events, and continuing conversations.

#### African American Members of a Faith-Based Community

Through honest and insightful dialogue with various members of this community, the project team learned of a variety of small, independent efforts within the community that provide arts experiences for youth, a high-priority for the African American faith-based

community who already embrace the capacity of the arts to change lives. Nathaniel Banks, Director of the newly launched Banks Bridgewater Lewis (BBL) Fine Arts Academy, emerged as a leader within this community due to his sustained arts advocacy and education efforts over time within the African American community and previous engagement with Krannert Center through the Center's Jazz Threads Initiative several years ago. Since the BBL Fine Arts Academy provides small group lessons and ensemble rehearsals to supplement the local middle and high school band programs while providing free and/or low cost instruments, Mr. Banks is a strong arts advocate, educator, and leader within the Champaign-Urbana African American community.

The challenges facing arts education in the African-American community are considerable, with costs, access to funding, and lack of professional development opportunities as ongoing barriers to success. Embracing the potential of collaboration with the BBL Fine Arts Academy during the project's second year performance phase while simultaneously supporting the long-term viability of the fine arts academy, the project team focused on learning more about the academy's needs including the establishment of the organization as a 501(c)(3) in order to qualify for grants; education in the areas of performing arts performance, production, and management; and fundraising expertise.

With the goal of the project to utilize the extraordinary talents of Anne Bogart and SITI Company artists along with the human, physical, and financial resources of the Center to activate this community within Krannert Center, it became clear to the project team that the opportunity to assist and support the BBL Fine Arts Academy while collaborating on a production during the second year of the project gave meaningful direction to engagement efforts within this community. With community members motivated to produce Dreamgirls as their contribution to the performance phase of the project's second year (enabling community members to actively engage in the arts while learning about the process), Anne Bogart, SITI members, and Krannert Center staff are prepared to offer support in directing, acting, stage management, production, and fundraising expertise. Currently, meetings are underway with various community members to carefully determine roles and responsibilities between Krannert Center, Anne Bogart, SITI Company artists, and community members to carefully shape the deeply collaborative work.

#### Young Professionals 25-40 Years of Age/Never Attended Performance at Krannert Center

Young professionals who responded to our invitation to engage with Making Communities Visible are passionate, diverse, socially aware, and represent a number of professions within the community, including politics, youth engagement, community and social work, activism, education, performing and visual arts, and more. These young professionals are connected to public school communities, youth organizations, communities of color, artist communities, and local families with diverse ethnic origins.

Anne Bogart quickly recognized a consistent theme among these passionate young adults and their moniker was changed to "Entrepreneurial Change-Makers" in recognition of their passion for improving their communities. While the Center chose a community whose members had never attended performances at Krannert Center, it was still a surprising discovery to learn that only a few of these dynamic professionals had any knowledge of the Center's work or its potential to inform and empower their own passionate work. Anne and SITI Company artists quickly dispelled these misperceptions through dialogue and workshop activities, waking them to the possibilities of deep engagement with the arts to further their own passions and contribute to the local community in meaningful ways.

At the completion of the project's first year, these individuals are prepared to work closely

with Anne Bogart and SITI Company in two areas of focus. Due to their shared commitment to improving the local community, many are eager to assist the project team with the African American community's Dreamgirls project next year, identifying this as a significant opportunity to support communities of color. They are also eager to engage in creating a performance that will advance their individual passions as change-makers.

Based on input from this group, the Center is also pursuing two separate initiatives beyond the scope of the grant in order to deepen the Center's engagement and lower the barriers to access. These include the creation of an Equipment Borrowing Center (where art-making/production equipment would be available for emerging local artists) and an engagement lounge outside the current engagement office (a comfortable, inviting, and less formal space for individuals to use while working on shared projects with the Center).

#### First-Generation University of Illinois Students

A shared trait of the first-generation college students was an overall lack of exposure to the performing arts, informing decisions regarding engagement and residency activities. Additional emphasis was placed on deepening their understanding of the Center's environment, mission, and programs while increasing their comfort level and familiarity with the Center. The project team also invited these students to a variety of additional events such as Krannert Uncorked/Unplugged (free public events in the Center's lobby with live music) and public performances of their choice.

SITI Company's first workshop with this community had a dramatic effect on many individuals, wherein the capacity of the arts to further understanding of complex issues was revealed, allowing students to begin to conceptualize a performance installation within the Center's black box space, the Studio Theatre. With a tentative theme of "getting unplugged", the students began to imagine an arts experience where attendees left their cell phones and other electronic devices outside the theatre and became immersed in a creative environment without the distraction of everyday life.

#### Families Who Speak Spanish as a Second Language from Leal Elementary School

The complex nature of this community--with stakeholders including Leal faculty, administrators, parents, and students--necessitated a complex set of interactions with various individuals in order for the partners to learn about one another and determine a firm direction for the project that would serve the needs of the community. From staffing an information table at Leal's Multicultural Night, presenting at an all-school assembly and conducting a participatory workshop to meeting with faculty, administrators, and families, the project team began to understand the intricacies of school life, the goals of the school, and its newly designed Dual Language Program--an alternative to Transitional Bilingual Education that develops two-way Spanish and English language proficiency among native speakers of each language--and the dynamics of a school whose students come from varying socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds including low-income Mexican immigrants, more affluent university-affiliated immigrant families from many nations in the Spanish-speaking diaspora, and English-speaking children.

Upon completion of several activities that solidified relationships and mutual understanding, key Leal faculty, administrators, and Dual Language Program family liaisons collaborated with the project team to determine ways to incorporate Making Communities Visible into the curricular and community- building goals of the school, while creating a performance event at Krannert Center.

## **Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project**

### Sustained Participation by Community Members

Although the project's first year goal was achieved, sustained participation by community members throughout the year was an ongoing challenge for each of the communities involved. Busy schedules, a general lack of experience with the arts, reluctance to engage, and the inherent transitional state of this university-based community are likely contributing factors.

### Complexity

The complexity of the project, with four separate and disparate communities each with numerous representatives, combined with SITI Company's and Krannert Center's mutually full calendars, created an ongoing logistical challenge.

### Maximizing Project Team Cohesiveness

Although the relationship between SITI Company, Anne Bogart, and Krannert Center is long standing, the majority of this particular Krannert Center engagement team had never worked with SITI Company prior to the onset of Making Communities Visible. While building relationships with the community partners, Krannert Center staff and SITI Company were simultaneously building their own relationship with one another, and it became clear early in the process that the project team needed additional time to become more familiar with one another's skillsets, personalities, and passions in order to devise collaborations that were most impactful. This proved to be an important part of the process and greatly informed future work.

## **What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?**

Regardless of past experience with a community group, it takes a great deal of time and effort to forge meaningful and trusting relationships with individuals before work can commence on a particular project. As a result, the project team invested time in simply being present in each of the communities by attending events within those communities unrelated to Making Communities Visible with the goal of helping to build trust and authenticity to the relationships.

The inclusion of targeted participants earlier in project definition--prior to the application submission-- emerged as a critical component for successful and responsive institutional engagement. Each partner must contribute to project creation in order to cultivate a sense of equality and mutual respect. Entering a relationship with preconceived ideas, plans, and assumptions was understandably negatively perceived by many of the community members. While the process for conceptualizing the grant was thoughtful and deliberate--with the engagement team carefully identifying the four groups while Bogart conceptualized ways to intersect her work and passion within those communities--their active participation at this stage of the process would have significantly benefited the project. This would have allowed for Krannert Center and SITI Company to more fully understand each community's wants, needs, and goals for the project. Additionally, these early conversations would have served as an introduction and overview of Krannert Center while better defining the appropriate scope and scale.

**Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.**

African American Community:

- Banks, Bridgewater, and Lewis Fine Arts Academy Website: Used within the African American Community as an example about efforts for arts education.  
<http://www.mobettamusic.org>

Young Entrepreneurial Change Makers:

- One People CU Website: A local Champaign-Urbana organization that coordinates events and activities to raise awareness and support for various causes and performers. Its mission is to serve the local and global community through the arts.  
<http://www.onepeoplecu.org/#!the-lounge/cqc6>

First-Generation College Students:

- CollegeBoard's First-Generation Students: An informational article about how to counsel first-generation students. <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/guidance/prepare/first-generation>
- The George Washington University's Article about First-Generation students and mentorship: This article discusses about how and why mentorship is critical to ensure a first-generation student's success. <http://columbian.gwu.edu/mentoring-program-eases-way-first-generation-students>
- Wexner Center for the Arts Website: An article about a new view of museums for a First-Generation college student.  
<http://wexarts.org/blog/new-view-museums-first-generation-college-student>
- An academic article about First-Generation college students and evidence about their college experiences and outcomes  
[http://www.heritage.edu/Portals/0/pdfs/Faculty\\_and\\_Staff/CILT/Research\\_Related\\_to\\_Success\\_of\\_First\\_Generation.pdf](http://www.heritage.edu/Portals/0/pdfs/Faculty_and_Staff/CILT/Research_Related_to_Success_of_First_Generation.pdf)

Leal Elementary School:

- Leal Elementary School web site: <http://www.usd116.org/leal/>
- Illinois State Board of Education "School Report Card" for Leal Elementary  
<http://www.illinoisreportcard.com/School.aspx?schoolId=090101160222005>
- Dual Language Program for the Urbana School District  
<http://www.usd116.org/index.php/district/bilingual-programs/dual-language/>
- Bilingual and Multicultural Programs (Transitional Bilingual Education)  
<http://www.usd116.org/index.php/district/bilingual-programs/>
- Urbana Elementary Fine Arts <http://www.usd116.org/finearts/>
- Leal School PTA <http://lealschoolpta.webs.com>

**If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N**

If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).

Please contact Senior Associate Director Rebecca McBride at [rmcbride@illinois.edu](mailto:rmcbride@illinois.edu) or (217) 333-6720.