



DORIS DUKE
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

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AUDIENCE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 2018

BEST PRACTICES FOR FUNDING AUDIENCE BUILDING/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

While the pool of funders who are supporting focused initiatives in the areas of audience building and community engagement remains small, increasing numbers of grantmakers are considering these activities as essential components of other funded activities including creation and presentation, capacity building, and education & outreach work. To support effective grantmaking, we have gathered some of our learning around what it takes to nurture and develop this work and how funding partners can best support and sustain audience building and community engagement in arts organizations.

Funding audience building/community engagement work carries with it the politics and history of resource distribution within the arts sector and within our communities. With initiatives focused on building relationships between individuals and institutions who have not traditionally worked together, how the resources are introduced into the equation is important. Partners with control of the money often have an added measure of power and authority in these relationships. Conscious grantmaking demands a careful consideration of how these funds are distributed such that arts institutions and community nonprofit partners are equally engaged and accountable and that the division of 'haves' and 'have nots' both within the community and within the arts sector (large white institutions have/small diverse institutions or artist have not) are not perpetuated.

Who is funded depends to a great degree on who is applying for funding. As the full picture of the activity

around performing arts and community engagement has emerged, many funders have become concerned about the lack of applicant diversity. Partly this is related to the structure of the grant programs and partly it is a result of the communication or membership networks through which grantmakers are connected. At the same time, even a diverse pool of applicants does not result in a diverse group of grantees unless the selection process, panel composition and decision-making parameters are all considered to ensure equity and access.

As a result, funders have adapted application processes, decision-making processes and the distribution of funds to address some of these imbalances and ensure greater equity and effectiveness in distributing funds. From proactive recruitment and consideration of non-traditional applicants to diverse panels and inclusive guidelines, to joint funding agreements between artists and organizations that put art makers in control of

decisions about how resources are used, new practices are proving effective in changing the flow of funding and the dynamics within funded consortia. More can still be done in all of these areas.

SEED CHANGE OR SUSTAIN PRACTICE?

There is an existing network of artists and arts entities who have established practices in community engagement and social practice art. These artists and organizations often have undertaken the work in spite of the lack of significant funding to support it. At the same time, there is an established infrastructure of artists and organizations who have been embraced and supported as performing arts creators and presenters, many of whom need to forge stronger connection with the communities in which they work. An important question, then, for funders to consider is whether it is best to focus funding on supporting the practitioners who have been doing the work or to invest in developing new practices within those organizations who need to catch up to their peers when it comes to community relationships.

In doing so it is also important to consider the level of genuine commitment to the work and the accountability around it. With resources on the line, few organizations are going to admit they don't value community engagement. It's the responsibility of the field to hold organizations accountable for using these resources responsibly for the benefit of the whole community. Funders should be clear about expectations and call out artists and organizations when they aren't fulfilling their commitments to community.

GRANT SIZE AND DURATION.

For many funders generating impact instinctively means focusing on fewer larger and longer grants with the intention of adequately supporting the necessary scope of the work. While this kind of grantmaking does have considerable impact for funded projects, several program administrators have observed a downside. With significant sized grants, some smaller and grassroots organizations found themselves unable to compete for or manage budgets that overwhelmed their administrative capacity. Focusing on larger grants also seems to encourage applicants to be overly ambitious and, in many cases, projects had to be re-sized and expectations realigned to be more realistic as grants progressed.

Through trial and error, most grant programs that initially offered few large grants have adjusted grant size but have

also continued to find ways to more fully support their grantees through access to additional resource pools (for travel, evaluation or next-step work on initiatives), inclusion of general operating support or provision of technical support.

An important aspect of these funding programs is the time and flexibility for artists and organizations to try new ideas and adapt them over time. This is not 'one and done' work. It requires the sustained commitment of practitioners and their funding partners to be successful.

FOR MANY FUNDERS GENERATING IMPACT INSTINCTIVELY MEANS FOCUSING ON FEWER LARGER AND LONGER GRANTS WITH THE INTENTION OF ADEQUATELY SUPPORTING THE NECESSARY SCOPE OF THE WORK. WHILE THIS KIND OF GRANTMAKING DOES HAVE CONSIDERABLE IMPACT FOR FUNDED PROJECTS, SEVERAL PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS HAVE OBSERVED A DOWNSIDE.

SUPPORTING ITERATIVE DESIGN AND RISK.

To create the potential for real change, there must be room within these programs for organizations, artists and community to take risks and time for them to iterate and adjust approaches. This requires funding programs with flexibility, funders with a commitment to supporting and understanding each grantee and their work individually, extended grant periods and evaluation parameters that allow for and embrace 'failure' as part of learning and risk. All of these programs, without exception, require intensive, hands-on work. In the Building Demand program, for example, the foundation works closely with each grantee in developing their own theory of change and evaluation criteria while for Building Bridges, site visits and ongoing coaching from assigned project advisors are critical to keep projects on track.

FUNDING WHOLE SYSTEMS RATHER THAN ISOLATED INITIATIVES.

Many re-granting partners discovered that funding an initiative in isolation was not sufficient to sustain the work. As a result, programs like Audience (R)Evolution and Building Bridges created specific program priorities around funding consortia while Engaging Dance Audiences and the National Performance Network's Performance Residency Fund provided operating support alongside project support to recognize the commitment of overall organizational resources and focus to the work.

QUESTIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

- ❓ Could funders work together or across funding silos to more effectively support and sustain audience building/community engagement work?
- ❓ Must funding for audience building/community engagement be distributed in discipline silos? Are there different ways to consider how these funds are distributed?
- ❓ What percentage of funding should go to existing grassroots organizations and artists who have been consistently building community engagement versus established arts institutions who need to create relationships in their communities?
- ❓ Does the intensity and duration of funder interaction required for these kinds of engagement initiatives make it difficult to scale grantmaking programs?

PROJECT PROFILE



Photo credit: Ivy Maiorino

The Theater Offensive – River See Residency

In 2012, The Theater Offensive brought Sharon Bridgforth to Boston through the NPN Residency Program. They were so inspired by her work, they began exploring a long-term community-based collaboration that would connect Sharon more deeply with the Boston LGBTQ community, including artists, and would culminate in a performance of *River See*, a theatrical jazz performance incorporating community members.

Sharon conducted 4 visits over 2 years prior to the performance at The Theater Offensive, to work directly with over 70 neighborhood residents. She uses gestural language to communicate requests to the cast and the audience/to create a moving soundscape that supports SEE in her journey. The work is activated as jazz through this improvisational composition process that happens live during performance. Everyone present is responsible for the journey.

[Learn about the River See Residency](#) →

[Learn more about The Theater Offensive](#) →

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation has worked with five re-granting partners to support the exploration and implementation of new ideas in audience building and community engagement. Since 2001, the foundation has supported almost 60 rounds of funding in nine different funding programs. These programs, in addition to the foundation's own *Building Demand for the Arts*, include Dance/USA's *Engaging Dance Audiences*, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters' *Creative Campus* and later *Building Bridges*, National Performance Network's *Performance Residency Fund* (now *Artistic Engagement Fund*) and *Community Fund*, Theater Communication Group's *Future Audiences* and later *Audience (R)Evolution* and EmcArts' *Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts*.

Through these programs, more than 300 projects have been supported involving more than 220 performing arts presenters, producers, universities and service organizations in thirty-five states and DC. The total financial investment in this work exceeds \$42 Million.

This series of articles shares the learning from this body of work and recognizes the considerable contributions of the foundation's grantmaking partners and the commitment and creativity of the artists and organizations who have continued to advance audience building and community engagement through initiatives undertaken with the support of these granting programs.



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