



DORIS DUKE
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Photo credit: Argemis Apollinario



AUDIENCE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 2018

FIELD BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN AUDIENCE BUILDING/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In *Building the Field of Arts Engagement*, Adrian Ellis proposes a structure of field building activities necessary to move from a disparate series of activities to a true field of practice. Considering how much work has been achieved in arts engagement in the past decade and knowing that several of the components of field building are already in place or in development, it seems timely to call for a collective effort toward field building and a shared investment in the future of this important work.

In *Building the Field of Arts Engagement*, Adrian Ellis identifies the elements of field building as: a framework of practice and shared language, training or leadership development, establishment and sustenance of peer-to-peer networks, strategically directed grantmaking by funders, and the creation of avenues for the dissemination of field-wide research.

A FRAMEWORK OF PRACTICE AND SHARED LANGUAGE.

There remains a diversity of opinion about language, related in some ways to the intentions and priorities that different individuals and organizations place on the work. While different organizations favor different terms, these are not so much distinct descriptors as they are parts of a continuum of activity from broadening, deepening or diversifying the groups of people who attend arts events through engaging community cohorts in arts practices to activating civic engagement through arts & culture activities.

At the same time, several efforts have been made at creating a framework or taxonomy for all or part of this body of work.

These taxonomies use a number of different organizing principles including: art form or discipline, project duration, scope and focus of work, practitioner type, target community or participants, level of experience, engagement tactics and approaches and intention or goals of the work.

There is now a sufficient baseline of information and a growing need to launch a unified effort to develop a framework of practice and shared language in order to promote dialog and sharing across networks.

TRAINING OR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Much of the training and skill development in audience building/community engagement practices is learned informally by emulating others or through trial and error. Practitioners interested in developing their capacity for the work need more structured opportunities to learn. Leading practitioners like Urban Bush Women, Sojourn Theater and Ping Chong + Company have started to fill this gap by offering intensives for other arts professionals interested in learning their methodologies.

Beyond training in engagement methodologies, organizations and artists working with their communities need specific skills and knowledge related to cultural competency, adaptive change leadership and evaluation practices. Organizations like Art Equity are providing arts-based cultural training while EmcArts' Innovation Labs have focused on developing adaptive change capacity for the sector. There continues to be a need to expand access to these kinds of training opportunities, to provide training in evaluation and to inform boards and prepare them for the governance needs around this work.

Within the national network, some locations are better served with training resources than others. A national skills/needs audit across existing networks could help to identify what is needed and where and would help to make the case for more distance learning, diploma programs and practicum learning opportunities.

ESTABLISHMENT AND SUSTENANCE OF PEER-TO-PEER NETWORKS

Many of the funders supporting this work have made efforts to connect grantees with each other through national/regional convenings or online platforms. While not all of these peer networks are sustained after the grant period, in several cases lasting relationships or collaborations between organizations have resulted.

The best way to ensure sustained peer-to-peer networks is to use existing platforms with established followings. Social media threads on creative placemaking and arts engagement are already active and can be used to connect practitioners. Convenings of artists and arts leaders, community organizers or social entrepreneurs also offer opportunities to 'piggyback' arts engagement conversations.

The performing arts sector remains somewhat siloed by artistic discipline. To further facilitate important peer-to-peer networks across disciplines, service organizations who regularly convene their constituents should be mindful of making room for arts engagement conversations, opening these opportunities to non-members and partners from outside the sector and inviting practitioners working in other disciplines to present their work and learning.

STRATEGICALLY DIRECTED GRANTMAKING BY FUNDERS

In addition to the ongoing work of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and its funding partners, a number

of other funders and service organizations have engaged in strategic grantmaking in this area including:

- **The Wallace Foundation** - Building Audiences for Sustainability
- **Opera America** - The Opera Fund: Audience Development Grants & Building Opera Audiences (supported by Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation)
- **Theatre Forward** – Advancing Strong Theatre Initiative
- **William Penn Foundation, Philadelphia** – New Audiences/New Places
- **Barr Foundation, Boston** – Audience Diversity Initiative with Arts Boston
- **James Irvine Foundation, California** – Exploring Engagement Fund & New California Arts Fund
- **Arthur M Blank Family Foundation, Atlanta** – Audience Building Roundtable

On the community engagement spectrum of the work, particularly around civic engagement, other funders and organizations in the social change realm are involved – the Arts for Social Change initiative of Americans for the Arts and the Arts & Democracy Project both track funding in these areas.

THE BEST WAY TO ENSURE SUSTAINED PEER-TO-PEER NETWORKS IS TO USE EXISTING PLATFORMS WITH ESTABLISHED FOLLOWINGS.

We can continue to build strategic grantmaking by encouraging funders to work together, to inform each other's practices, to seek out re-granting partners with an understanding of the field of arts engagement and to extend their funding to support organizational partnerships both within the arts and culture sector and with organizations in other sectors.

CREATION OF AVENUES FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF FIELD-WIDE RESEARCH

A considerable amount of information about audience building/community engagement initiatives has been gathered and documented over the past decade or more.

Unfortunately, much of this information is neither accessible nor useable to funders, practitioners and communities in its current form. Several websites contain case studies and an increasing number of these include video, how to information and evaluative summaries. However, finding cases that provide relevant information can be challenging as one must search numerous sites and most do not provide information in a searchable format so the seeker must review many cases to find those that are most relevant.

It is clear that a more centralized and searchable information portal that links to multiple information sources would considerably improve access to information. In addition, packaging information in more useable formats like mini-documentary videos, practitioner-focused guidebooks, training courses and an annual anthology of case studies would increase the impact of these resources.

QUESTIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

- ❓ Who do we need to engage in the various elements of field building?
- ❓ What are the advantages of field building for practitioners, funders and community?
- ❓ How can a more unified approach to language, framework and information access support a robust field of practice? How might it inhibit the diversity of approaches that has made the field successful?
- ❓ What is the case for engaging more funders in supporting this work? How can existing funders help to engage their colleagues?



Casita Maria – BLITZ with Arturo O’Farrill

Bronx-based Casita Maria Center organized Blitz, a form of “guerrilla jazz” featuring a Bronx-based Latin jazz ensemble under the leadership of Arturo O’Farrill. Its mission is to breakdown the traditional boundaries, stereotypes and preconceived notions around jazz in order to promote its growth as a genre and ability to reach new audiences.

BLITZ programming is completely FREE – that means no tickets, RSVP’s or even advanced notifications. Inspired by the origins of Afro Latin jazz, the music takes place in the spaces of daily life and work, from bodegas to tattoo parlors. The BLITZ ensemble often collaborates with other community artists including beat boxer Baba Israel, Afro-Caribbean drum group Legacy Women and Mariachi Academy of New York.

[Check out the BLITZ case study](#) →

[Learn more about Casita Maria](#) →

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*, Theatre 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.



DORIS DUKE
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION