



NEW GENERATIONS: FUTURE LEADERS

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Prepared by Anna Becker
Arts Management Resources
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Generations: Future Leaders Program Assessment

“The program encouraged me to consider myself as a career not-for-profit theatre artist with a great deal of potential within this field. This is due in part to the tangible results of the excellent mentorship that taught me managerial skills and artistic leadership habits. It is also in part due to the symbolic weight of the grant itself and the seriousness of purpose that the title 'New Generations: Future Leaders' conveys both to peers within the host company and within the American theater community at large.”

– Survey Respondent

New Generations: Future Leaders

New Generations: Future Leaders has been cooperatively designed by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Theatre Communications Group (TCG). The resulting program supports the cultivation and strengthening of a new generation of theatre leadership through mentorships with accomplished theatre practitioners.

Program Assessment Objectives & Methods

The primary purpose of the New Generations: Future Leaders program assessment was to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in readying future artistic, managerial, and producing leaders and instilling in them a dedication to the not-for-profit theatre. Additionally, the assessment aimed to examine the program’s structure and printed materials.

A detailed online survey containing 28 questions for mentors and 37 questions for mentees, many of which required narrative responses in addition to multiple option selection, was sent to all individuals that received a New Generations: Future Leaders grant – mentors and mentees alike - in Rounds One through Five. Participants in the survey were given the choice of responding anonymously or providing contact information, at their discretion. Individual responses were collected and cumulative statistics were compiled, while follow-up telephone calls and e-mail inquiries were conducted for further illumination on a variety of issues.

Survey Content & Responses

Long-term Impact

The primary emphasis of the survey was to assess the program’s overall effectiveness in training and cultivating future not-for-profit theatre leaders. These outcomes were measured by asking the mentor and mentee about the quality and quantity of their contact, and their assessment as to whether their program goals were met. Additionally,

mentees were asked about the range, depth, and quality of opportunities provided, the use and impact of the program's travel funds, the effectiveness of the networking opportunities, and their current status in the field.

A total of 44 mentors and 45 mentees from Rounds One through Five were asked to complete the survey and 27 mentors (61%) and 28 mentees (62%) responded. We conducted follow-up telephone conversations with 10 of these respondents and email follow up with two.

The survey responses and follow-up contact provided generally consistent feedback overall. The Future Leaders program is viewed by mentors and mentees alike to be an important and effective program, with a wide range of positive outcomes of an expected and unexpected nature. Mentees uniformly agreed that the program offered them the opportunity for invaluable practical experience, the ability to gain an overview of the field, and forge a professional identity. Mentors found themselves with new knowledge and strategies in relation to their leadership skills, fresh perspective on their institution and its activities, and a renewed confidence and commitment to nurturing young theatre practitioners.

Although five survey participants stated that they have since left the field, a closer examination reveals that three of these respondents have become professors of theatre and, therefore, have become important contributors to the field in another capacity.

The Value of Networking

Another area of investigation contained in the survey focused on the value of disseminating and sharing experiences with current and former program grantees. While 75% to 89% of the responses indicated that there were sufficient opportunities to meet, network, and learn from other participants and that these opportunities were beneficial, some recommendations for information-sharing emerged that might be useful. In open-ended responses and in follow-up telephone calls, several participants discussed the potential benefits – in terms of confidentiality and a broadened perspective - of meetings strictly for mentors and strictly for mentees (as opposed to mentor/mentee meetings), as well as the opportunity for mentees to talk with mentors other than their own.

Program Structure

Another goal of the survey was to assess the program's overall structure. Specifically, we sought to discover whether the program activities were properly supported financially, if the written and interpersonal communications were effective, and if the selection process was clear, thorough, and fair. In addition to the 55 grantee responses, we sought responses from 56 former New Generations panelists and 39 (70%) completed the survey. We made follow-up phone calls to three of these panelist-respondents, to provide another lens on this set of information.

The survey showed that 43% of the mentee-respondents regarded the funds provided for program activities as insufficient. In the open-ended responses asking for elaboration on this response, two issues emerged: (1) A large majority of these respondents participated in mentorships in urban areas where the cost of living is particularly high; and (2) the costs of health insurance was a hardship for many mentees whose host theatre did not provide it.

Funds to cover student loans and travel funds were met with much higher praise from respondents, many of whom cited significant long-term impact from the ability to pay down their debt and for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunities provided by the travel funds.

With regard to the two-year grant program timeframe, 89% of respondents agreed that it was appropriate. 89% to 93% of respondents found the timeframe from application announcement to deadline and from deadline to award to be appropriate. Responses that related to the quality of the application questions as well as the support, orientation, and communications from TCG staff ranged from 82% to 100% positive.

Of the 39 panelists surveyed, 97% to 100% found the guidelines and application form to be clear and comprehensive, and found that TCG conducted the panel meetings in an informative, professional, and equitable manner.

Differing Opinions

Differing opinions for the above information represent, at its highest, 18% of respondents. None of these opposing responses suggest that the program is ineffective or of little value. Rather, they are primarily focused on the desire for a stronger orientation process for both mentors and mentees. There was some feeling on both sides that the mentor or mentee was either inadequately prepared or unclear as to the concept of a mentorship.

Suggestions for the enhancement of the orientation component ranged from: site visits by TCG staff; an in-depth orientation meeting *prior* to the start of the program; or an orientation workshop, site visits and/or monitoring by an independent consultant to ensure confidentiality. With regard to confidentiality, some grantees discussed their concerns about revealing difficult aspects of the mentorship with TCG staff for fear of being labeled as “difficult” (if a mentee), or out of concern about future funding (if a mentor). In no case did a participant suggest that TCG staff gave the impression that such repercussions might occur.

On the other end of the program spectrum, some respondents mentioned a need for a more clearly defined exit strategy for the mentee. Some mentees suggested that the transition from the mentorship to the “real world” was abrupt, and some mentors said that they felt ill-prepared to help their mentees move on. Suggestions ranged from offering individual career counseling to mentees to providing them with a subscription to ArtSEARCH to individual exit meetings with TCG’s program director.

The above-stated opposing responses suggest that it might be appropriate to consider adding instructional components at various points in the program.

Conclusions

There was strong appreciation for the New Generations: Future Leaders. A small percentage of suggestions for improvement centered on two issues: program funds for mentees in expensive urban areas and a strengthened orientation/exit component.

There was uniform agreement that the New Generations: Future Leaders program is a visionary and highly important program for the overall survival and growth of the not-for-profit theatre field and its practitioners. The program provides an in-depth view of the field, real-life practical experience, unique and individually tailored opportunities for exploration, and an introduction to the American theatre community.

“I think this is one of the great grant programs of all time. The mentee benefits, the mentor benefits, the institution benefits, and the field benefits.”

New Generations: Future Leaders Program Assessment Detailed Findings

Introduction

Survey Responses for the New Generations: Future Leaders program assessment were uniformly positive, with not a single response suggesting that the program is in any way unworthy. Though there were no recommendations for significant program overhaul, some suggestions were made regarding the program’s structure which might prove useful in future program enhancements.

This report will focus primarily on conclusions drawn from the survey regarding the impact of the program on the mentees readiness for, and dedication to, leadership in the not-for-profit theatre. Additionally, the report will focus on the impact of the program on the mentors and their institutions, and details of program structure.

In order to gain detailed responses both from the perspective of the mentors and mentees, separate surveys were created for each group. The survey responses combine to offer some universal conclusions about the program, and separately offer a picture of each survey group’s experience. This report will detail the results from these three vantage points.

Profile of Survey Respondents

Surveys were sent to all mentors and mentees that participated in rounds one through six of the program. We received 28 mentee responses and 27 mentor responses. Follow-up telephone calls were made to five mentees and four mentors. E-mail correspondence was conducted with two mentors that were not available for telephone calls.

Responses were submitted by mentors and mentees that represented a wide range of organizations, with a heavy concentration (71-78%) of organizations that produce new and/or contemporary works. 79% to 93% of respondents were from urban organizations. 67% of mentor-respondents were artistic leaders and 41% were managing leaders (the total of 108% suggests dual roles in some cases). From 4% to 11% represented literary, production, and education departments. 39% of the mentee-respondents classified their mentorship as “wide-ranging,” and 29% each classified their mentorship as either “primarily artistic in nature” or “primarily managerial in nature.” 4% of mentee-respondents engaged in a mentorship that was “primarily production-oriented.”

Long-term Impact

“I think I spent many years prior to the program uncertain of what I wanted to do with my life. In a way, that's the reason I even came to [the host theatre] -- because I had nothing more pressing to do with my life. What's come of it is a profound sense of identity that I never thought I'd find, working with these fellow artists, engaging with these amazing audiences, living and working and creating.”

As mentioned in the Executive Summary above, we sought clues about the long-term impact of the program by asking the mentor and mentee about the quality and quantity of their contact, the types of opportunities provided, the use and impact of the program's travel funds, and the effectiveness of the networking opportunities. The premise being that if the respondents agreed that the mentee was being provided with substantive meeting time, practical opportunities for professional growth, international exposure, and an introduction to the theatre community, it would be reasonable to assume that lasting impact was likely to have been generated. Additionally, the survey directly asked respondents to assess whether their program objectives had been met. Finally, the survey inquired as to the mentee's current professional status as an objective measure of the retention of mentees in the not-for-profit theatre.

The results clearly point to the program's achievement in readying a new generation of not-for-profit theatre leaders. Additionally, the survey revealed that there are a great many other beneficial outcomes of the program with respect to the experiences of the mentors. These outcomes impact the field at large in a variety of positive ways.

What follows is a breakdown of the experiences and outcomes of the program, separating mentors from mentees in order to provide a more detailed view.

The Mentee Experience

“The New Generations: Future Leaders program is an incredible resource and I count myself deeply fortunate to have participated. The program did feel overwhelming at first - a new company, a new job, plus the TCG community all asking me to consider my professional identity. It took a few months to understand how this shift would really feel 'on the ground' rather than on paper, as in our grant proposal. The grant period, while turbulent, was ultimately a crucible in which my professional identity and career goals took shape. The program staff felt very helpful and available.”

Overall, the responding mentees felt that the time they spent with their mentors was sufficient in terms of quantity and quality (79%) and that they were given opportunities to be engaged in the life of the theatre (96%), take on challenging projects or tasks (93%), observe the mentor in action (96%), and take on a diverse range of tasks and responsibilities (89%). An impressive 96% of respondents stated that the objectives of their mentorship were achieved.

All respondents agreed that the program's travel funds positively impacted their mentorship, and 89% found the program's networking opportunities to be beneficial.

With respect to the two-year timeframe, 89% of respondents stated that it was appropriate.

The above statistics, along with open-ended survey answers and follow-up telephone calls, indicate that the program provides long-lasting benefits to the mentee in the form of a practical and broad working knowledge of the field and a particular organization, introduction to peers and leaders in the field, and the opportunity to test, explore and bring his/her talents and goals into focus.

“The Mentorship program greatly enhanced my commitment to working in the not-for-profit theatre by giving me a chance to explore my own skills and challenge myself and also by connecting me to a wide range of colleagues and contemporaries, who offered new perspectives on what could be done in the non-profit world.”

The Impact of Travel

“It was the seed to where I am today--the international connections made while traveling continue to fuel my work today. It is such an important part of the self-reflective portion of this program.”

As mentioned above, 100% of respondents stated that the travel funds positively impacted their mentorship experience. Survey respondents utilized their travel funds in a variety of ways: to travel to national and international theatre festivals, to meet with artists and artistic leaders in other theatres, to attend theatre conferences, and to see the work of regional and international theatre companies.

These experiences were viewed as enormously impactful because they provided a larger view of the field than the mentees otherwise would have been exposed to, and provided introductions to future collaborators, colleagues, and employers. As mentioned in the above quote, taking time away from the intense environment of the mentorship gave mentees the opportunity for distance and reflection – a breather. Mentees were able to come back to the mentorship environment with a renewed perspective and commitment as a result of the physical distance and benefits of viewing how others think about and make their work.

“I met a lot of people across the country and internationally as a result of the mentorship, which created many opportunities for me over the years.”

Financial Support

The survey question that asked about the sufficiency of program funds resulted in the widest disparity in responses. 57% responded that the funds were sufficient, and 43% said they were not. This question also asked for elaboration if a respondent did not think that the funds were sufficient (so that we could determine if a respondent thought the funds were excessive or insufficient, and to find out why they felt this way). Two responses rose to the top: (1) mentorships in locations with a high cost of living could not

be supported by the funds provided; and (2) the cost of health insurance significantly reduced the funds available. One respondent suggested that, given how health care costs have risen in recent years, he would not be able to participate in the program today. Given the significant time-commitment required of most mentees, the ability to supplement their income by taking on other work was limited.

Conversely, the travel funds were met with a 100% positive response in terms of its positive effect on the mentorship. As well, several respondents remarked on the short- and long-term benefits of the funds for student loan payments. In that regard, 47% of respondents stated that, if there hadn't been student loan funds available, they would have had to take on extra work to cover these payments, 29% said it would have hindered their ability to participate in the program, and 24% said they would have gotten behind on their payments during the grant period.

Where are they now?

When asked how and if respondents were working in the theatre field, 54% said that they were working on staff in an artistic or managerial capacity and 29% are working as independent artists, producers, or managers. 18%, or five respondents, stated that they have left the field. Of these, three are now theatre professors which, it could be argued, does not constitute leaving the field.

We asked respondents to provide us with their job titles and their responses indicate that a large majority of them now hold high-level positions in a not-for-profit theatre, such as Executive Director, Artistic Director, Producing Director, and Managing Director positions.

The Mentor Experience

“It has been refreshing to be forced to analyze and communicate why I make some of the decisions that I do. I think that analysis ultimately makes me a better artist and administrator.”

In order to measure other possible effects and benefits of the Future Leaders program, the survey asked mentors if the program had a significant long-term impact on their professional career path or goals. We received a 71% positive response to this question, which also allowed for additional, open-ended response. Open-ended comments offered some clear results: (1) many mentors found great enjoyment and a sense of confidence in their abilities and therefore continued to mentor in other capacities after the program ended; and (2) the necessity of sharing their management strategies and decision-making process gave the mentor new insights into his/her leadership style and, in some cases, refreshed stagnant thinking.

“I found that I enjoy working with emerging professionals and have begun relationships with 2 MFA Management programs, bringing in a new MD assistant/intern every year.”

This is more demanding (a learning curve every year) but satisfying and a service to the field.”

Impact on the Host Theatre

The survey also sought to measure the impact of the mentee on the host theatre. Responses here indicate that 93% of mentors believe that their mentee had significant impact. In the open-ended portion of this question and in follow-up calls, the mentors discussed a variety of results. One mentee introduced the theatre to artists they were previously unfamiliar with that are now collaborators, and another brought significant knowledge of video production technology and incorporated this media into the host theatre’s productions, promotional videos, and web site. One mentee’s musical knowledge helped to enhance the host theatre’s performances and training program, and another developed strong board relationships and created new ways of communicating with them. There also were several examples of the mentee’s contribution becoming so vital that a new staff position was created for its continuation (with or without that particular mentee).

Guidelines and Structure

“I loved knowing I could call TCG staff and talk through anything. I also loved that they put other mentees in contact with me if his or her situation was similar to mine. They had a great sense of what was going on with all of us, so it felt like I was connected to a big extended family who knew me and my needs.”

The survey quite clearly showed that New Generations: Future Leaders mentors and mentees largely approve of the program’s guidelines and structure. Positive responses with respect to the timing of the application and award, and the appropriateness of the application questions ranged from 82% to 100%.

With respect to the program timeframe, there were some suggestions for change from the opposing minority. Specifically, mentor-respondents suggested that it was challenging to identify a candidate and then ensure that they would remain available for the program until the announcement was made. In these cases, the respondents suggested a shorter timeframe between application submission and award announcement.

As stated in the Executive Summary, of the 39 former panelists surveyed, 97% to 100% found the guidelines and application form to be clear and comprehensive, and found that TCG conducted the panel meetings in an informative, professional, and equitable manner.

“TCG has really poured their hearts and souls into this program -- terrific leadership, clarity, responsiveness. I really liked the two-step application process, which allowed me to conduct a thorough search for the best candidate after I already had a preliminary indication that our chances were at least reasonable. The search process itself was incredibly valuable, since I talked with about 20 emerging directors in New York, Chicago, DC, and elsewhere.”

Open-Ended Responses and Recommendations

“It would be helpful for more opportunities to communicate mentor to mentor, mentee to mentee, and mentor to other than our primary mentee. This could broaden the mentees understanding of the whole field, and chance to establish relationships with a number of theatres.”

As mentioned above, both the mentor and mentee surveys provided ample opportunities for open-ended responses. A handful of similar suggestions emerged from these open-ended responses and from follow-up communications. Some of these suggestions are listed above but, for ease of reference, all such suggestions are listed here:

- The need for assistance before and during the grant program in order to define, structure, and maintain a positive mentorship experience. Such assistance could come from TCG staff, an outside consultant, or the establishment of a buddy system with former mentors and mentees;
- The need for outside assistance in developing an exit strategy for mentees;
- Because travel fund expenditures can burden mentees that are already stretched financially, it was suggested that reimbursements be made in a more timely fashion; and
- Consider a guidelines amendment that allows the relationships to continue beyond the mentorship program.

“I most valued the personal meetings with fellow mentees, at conferences or New Gen sessions. It was invaluable to have in-depth discussions with others who had gone through the program in the past, or who were currently going through the program. Larger group sessions, including teleconferences, did not offer as much useful information since there was little opportunity to go into depth on the particular challenges and opportunities that each individual faced. In general, having relationships with other Mentees was very valuable in gauging the success of my own mentorship and the expectations of the program. I think these relationships gave me a needed sense of context and also a network I could draw on if in a state of doubt or crisis.”

Conclusion

The results of the New Generations: Future Leaders program clearly show that the program is considered to be very positively impactful for mentees, mentors, and the host theatres. Combining the multi-pronged subjective responses from the survey with the objective data regarding the current professional status of mentees, it seems apparent that

the program has been constructed in such a manner as to provide meaningful, useful, and long-term impact. A handful of recommendations from a minority of respondents may be worthy of consideration for further enhancements to what is already a much-lauded program.