

# Shaping a Critical Discourse

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A Report on the Joint Convening  
of Artography: Arts in a Changing America  
and the Animating Democracy/  
Working Capital Fund Exemplar Program

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## BACKGROUND

From May 14–16, 2007, grantees from Artography and Animating Democracy/Working Capital Fund Exemplar programs met together in Chicago to share their experiences, reflect on the lessons they learned, and consider ways they might draw on the collective power of their work. The Artography and Exemplar staffs, mindful of the considerable common ground shared by the grantees, were eager to provide an opportunity for these organizations to come together. The participating groups are leaders recognized in the field for their exemplary community-based practices and their creative innovations in relation to changing demographics. The Ford Foundation supports both Artography and the Exemplar program.

**Artography: Arts in a Changing America** is a two-year pilot grant and documentation program being incubated by Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC). Its goals are to recognize, strengthen, and chart the expanding realm of cultural aesthetics and organizational practice as seen through a lens of the changing demographics in the United States. Through a nationwide open call for applications and a peer grant review process, LINC made grants to nine small to mid-sized nonprofit organizations that exemplify artistically visionary and community responsive practices.

**The Exemplar Program** recognized 12 small to mid-sized arts and cultural organizations from across the country for outstanding cultural work in their communities and in the field, based on their participation in the Animating Democracy program of Americans for the Arts and the Working Capital Fund of LarsonAllen Public Service Group. Through grants for operating support, knowledge/capacity building, and field advancement, the two-year Exemplar Program aims to foster a holistic and integrated approach to organizational health, institutional growth, civic engagement, and aesthetic investigation. It is being implemented by Americans for the Arts in collaboration with LarsonAllen Public Service Group.

See [Attachment 1](#) for a list of convening participants and [Attachment 2](#) for the meeting agenda. Profiles of the Artography and Exemplar cohort members are included in [Attachment 3](#).

## THE CONVENING

The convening’s primary purpose was to provide time for peer exchange around artistic, institutional, civic, leadership, and other field-related matters.

The staff of the Artography and Exemplar programs worked with twenty cohort members to identify topics of interest and to develop the convening design and structure. Twenty-nine individuals participated in the overall planning of the convening as well as presenting or facilitating parts of it. Seven cohort members, in close consultation with staff, developed the two topical tracks, Aesthetics and New Ways of Working. See Attachment 4 for a list of cohort planners. The convening was shaped by the following guiding principles defined by the cohorts:

- Draw on the experience of the cohort members
- Have sufficient time and a limited number of topics in order to provide for deeper discussion
- Encourage diverse points of view and constructive debate
- Get a sense of place in Chicago
- Provide unstructured time for informal networking and continuing conversations

The first day was hosted by the National Museum of Mexican Art, a participant in the Exemplar program. It began with separate meetings of each of the two cohorts. Participants received a tour through the museum galleries, including an introduction to the *Arte Textil Maya: Collections of the Centro de Textiles del Mundo Maya* exhibit by curator Cesareo Moreno and education staff member Luis Tubens. The musical ensemble, Sones de México, performed a number of regional styles of the Mexican *son* and original work.

In advance of the convening cohort members had been asked to: “Find (or make) and bring a postcard completed as follows: On the postcard, respond to the questions “Where are we coming from? Where do we want to be? You can interpret “we” as yourself, the arts worker, your organization, or the field.” Participants talked about their postcards on the first night to introduce themselves. The cards were then displayed during the convening and are also included throughout this report.

The second day began with Urban Bush Women dancer Paloma McGregor warming up the group by inviting participants to step outside of their comfort zones by expressing some abstract concepts through movement. Participants then chose between two day-long session tracks—Aesthetics or New Ways of Working—to engage in a focused discussion that would build through the day. In the afternoon, the conversations continued on site visits to local arts organizations. The Aesthetics group toured murals created by the Chicago Public Art Group and visited the Experimental Station, “an incubator of innovative cultural, educational, and environmental projects and small-scale enterprises” on the South Side of Chicago. The New Ways of Working group traveled to the West Side to visit Redmoon Theater, a group that “creates theatrical spectacles that transform streets, stages, and architectural landmarks into places of public celebration.”

On the third day, the whole group reconvened to consider “the power and potential of their own leadership to advance the aesthetics, ideas, and values they care about” and identified opportunities for action. This included topics concerning organizational leadership, leadership in the arts and culture field, and leadership in a larger social context. Issues that resonated with the group were discussed further in small groups that set goals for future work. The convening ended with a closing call and response led by CK Ladzekpo.

**A note about the report:** Several people contributed meeting notes for this report: Diane Espaldon, Pam Korza, Karen Mueller, and Michael del Vecchio from the Exemplar Program and Toni Hsu, Judilee Reed, and Vanessa Whang from Artography. The author also acknowledges the additional contributions made by del Vecchio in organizing the note-taking, and Korza, Whang and Barbara Schaffer Bacon in critiquing drafts of the report.

## SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

The convening continually revealed and embraced the creative tensions and contradictions of working in the context of changing demographics, engaging generational shifts and new approaches to collaborative community practices, having diverse value-based structures, and being a cultural agent of change. The overarching themes and questions that arose for the gathering are outlined below:

### ***Affirming values***

How do we define and enact our values on our own terms? This includes what underpins our missions and purposes, standards of excellence, aesthetics, and social relationships. How can we better articulate what motivates us to do what we do, how we do it, and what is at the center of our work? Examples of programs and structures that reflect these values include collaborative models of curating and producing work, partnerships built on trust and respect, and a willingness to, as Paloma McGregor put it, “expand the history that is being understood and reframe the contemporary context” and move beyond “labels and packaged identities.” Commercial hip-hop, on the other hand, offers an example of how a transformative and self-determined cultural movement based on values of diverse and free expression can be co-opted and restructured by a consolidated media.

### ***Engaging in critical dialogue and learning***

How do we create safe spaces (physical, written, and virtual) for critical dialogue and learning based on the products and processes of our work? Maribel Alvarez named an “ethical commitment to interrogating aesthetic practice” as an integral dimension of cutting edge “aesthetics that matter.” Dialogues about political contradictions, structures of selection and curation, approaches to collaboration, and questions of whom we make art for and why we make it, can be challenging—even among sympathetic colleagues. Is a criticality of practice part of our organizational cultures? Do we have a language for this critical practice? If, as Olivia Gude suggested, “a great critique is one that sees what the work is about and helps you better realize it,” who are we willing to hear criticism from? For some, this needs to be a person with whom they share a social change purpose, for others, this is not required. What are the settings where we can push beyond what has become comfortable in order to do the learning and unlearning that are part of being at the front of cultural change?

### ***Making the case***

What is our value to our communities and to the arts ecology? How can our worth and assets be described other than in financial terms? How can we communicate this value not only amongst ourselves, but also to the arts and culture field, to other sectors, and the media and policymakers? What is the most effective way to make our case? It was suggested that overview documentation and analysis of a body of community-responsive work, something bigger than any one of the groups, would be helpful. Jordan Simmons said, “Our folks at home need to see we exist in a broader field.” What are the stories of resiliency that can be shared and the unique characteristics that can be quantified? Sometimes the need is for something simple and persuasive like a map reflecting assets, e.g. social networks, cultural competencies, and responses to changing demographics. A comparative analysis can be a powerful way to demonstrate cultural equity and inequity.

### ***Sustaining the work***

How do we sustain our work and stay true to our missions and purposes? How do generational shifts, leadership transitions, institutional partnerships, marketing and technology initiatives, and foundation grants renew and stabilize—or derail—organizations? Groups are raising endowments, engaging in a community-building approach to fundraising from individuals, and using technology to increase audiences and donors. They are also integrating their work into curricula and textbooks; adapting their work for corporate clients; and partnering with larger institutions, public agencies, and community development corporations. Staying true to mission can raise questions about who you choose to partner with, whether you are compromising the integrity of your creative work, if issues of class and lack of infrastructure will limit access in communities, and how virtual networking could replace face-to-face relationships. Generational shifts and leadership succession also draw attention to whether the mission itself continues to be relevant.

### ***Taking action***

In a broader context, there is a window of opportunity in a country that is hungry for hope and change. How do we seize this moment and become cultural agents of this change? Dudley Cocke pointed out that as organizations rooted in place and culture, as well as engaged in transnational communities and international exchanges, the cohort is well positioned in a post-industrial global context. What's needed is to be responsive to the concerns of our communities, engage with other sectors, and be proactive. Nicolás Kanellos challenged the group to answer his questions: "How do we influence the media? How do we get a seat at the table in Congress? How do we talk collectively to foundations and corporations? What are better ways of interfacing with the educational system?" The cohort considered what power it has collectively and how it can best use this power to write policy, not just change it.

### ***Understanding a theory of social change***

What is our relationship to the mainstream? Do we want to adapt to it, redefine it, or reject it? Many of the groups engage in strategies both inside and outside dominant systems, integrating or becoming the mainstream while retaining grassroots practices, cultural traditions, and creative innovations. But do we internalize and replicate mainstream values when we work in these structures? As expressed by Osvaldo Sánchez, "Is it our goal to fit in and be successful in this society or is our goal to transform society?" Artistic practice has the power to change people's point of view and question the status quo. Are we creating transformative social models or becoming shaped by the market, mass media, major institutions, and other mainstream structures? Change can also be a negative force that threatens a traditional and holistic worldview, cultural continuity, and the affordability of a community. We need to articulate our theory of social change and develop a critical discourse around it that will hold us accountable to our values.



## AESTHETICS TRACK

### Track Overview

The aesthetics track explored questions of process and product, meaning making, values and standards, and the changing circumstances that influence how and why we make art. It built on the recognition that grantees of the Artography and Exemplar programs bring a broad array of approaches and diverse contexts to aesthetics and making art. The session began with conversations examining two questions with an interviewer and three participants kicking off each conversation. Then all participants joined in through large and small group discussions, relating the questions to their creative work and programs.

*Question 1: In the making and exhibiting/presenting of art, how do we know when it works?*

Interviewer: Michael Rohd, Sojourn Theatre

Participants: Osvaldo Sánchez, Installation Gallery; Jordan Simmons, East Bay Center for the Performing Arts; and Laurie Woolery, Cornerstone Theater

*Question 2: How are creativity, aesthetics, and creation of work being affected by shifting contexts?*

Interviewer: Maribel Alvarez, University of Arizona, Tucson

Participants: Dudley Cocke, Appalshop; Theresa Secord, Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA), and Jorge Valdivia, National Museum of Mexican Art

The afternoon site visit included a tour of murals created by the Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG) and a visit to the Experimental Station where Dan Peterman and Connie Spreen joined a continuation of the morning's discussion. The group also experienced a sound installation by CPAG's Juan Chavez at the Hyde Park Art Center.

### Key Themes

The following is a summary of themes that resonated during the aesthetics sessions. Please note that it cannot include the full richness of the discussion, and many other important points were made as well.

#### *Approaching aesthetics*

Participants were drawn to the aesthetics track for several reasons. "I am both the artistic director and the executive director. The split is not balanced. I'm here to get rejuvenated on the artistic side," said Kumani Gantt of Village of Arts and Humanities. While Gantt came to reconnect as an artistic director, Marina Tristán stretched out of her customary focus on day-to-day operations and marketing at Arte Público Press to explore. Olivia Gude of CPAG was drawn to a discussion about a "progressive aesthetics" that is "more holistic and embodied" to use in her teaching. Some of the group had to get past the baggage that the word "aesthetics" can carry; it is considered a buzz word or loaded concept that needed qualification. It was pointed out that the notion of aesthetics was tied to an 18<sup>th</sup> century idea of a science of beauty, seen as mechanical or evoked a narrow canon that was used to privilege the work of some and exclude that of others. Osvaldo Sánchez asked whether in fact, "this debate about the aesthetic may push us to hide. People find formal mechanisms that legitimate what they are doing. Dealing with an aesthetic as the main problem would not drive you to structural change." The participants wrestled with reframing the conversation and unpacking the baggage of aesthetics in order to move on to the questions.

### ***Doing and making***

The conversation was reframed, in part, in terms of the creative agency of doing and making. “My aesthetic is having people do and not be done to,” said Jordan Simmons. He told a story about a young girl who had struggled in an East Bay Center ensemble until this year. “She changed her body relationship to the ground, dealing with gravity and relaxation of the body in another way. It was a moment when she plugged in. She changed her perception of her relationship to the world through her movement.”

Roberta Uno of the Ford Foundation spoke of the “aesthetic shift that comes from doing something...in making things you start remaking the world, re-imagining it.” In indigenous communities, said Theresa Secord, “we center on the making.” She described the spontaneous and natural process in which people make baskets, carry out interviews, engage in dialogue, teach language, sing ancient songs, pound ash, and celebrate their culture—all of which is holistically connected to their creation story.

Installation Gallery is reconsidering the relationship between art and audience shifting from a consumer approach to one of co-production. Osvaldo Sánchez asked, “Where is artistic production located?” His story about a workshop involving model airplane pilots across the U.S.-Mexico border emphasized the process of co-production with artists and community members, and warned against “aesthetic fetishism.” “It was the shared experience of flying together over the border fence...a concrete coming together, but not necessarily through the aesthetic. Human emotion was the quality of the experience.”

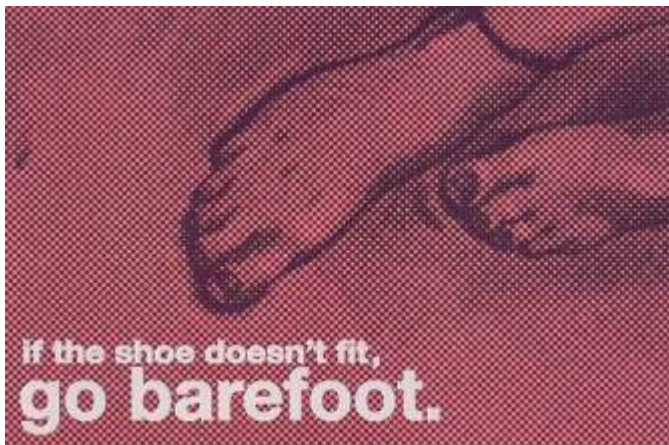
John Borstel of Liz Lerman Dance Exchange offered a definition of aesthetics based on how an artist is mediating the relationship between art and audience. He raised the question of participants versus audiences and asked if the entire audience could be considered participants. Rosie Gordon-Wallace asked, “How can we all be cells, where you replicate/infect your medium and also send out witnesses?”

There was discussion about whether “bearing witness” was also a form of “doing.” Simmons recognized “change through observation” as well as direct participation. Gude described a process of “symbolic participation” where a community member who did not directly participate in a mural feels an ownership in it because his friend or relative did. Considering Sánchez’s question about where artistic production is located, Michael Rohd raised the issue of accessibility, and whether there are situations where people who participate in a co-production might feel left out of the form the work ultimately takes.

### ***Mission and purposeful choices***

When the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts had to make difficult choices about budget cuts, the staff made their decision from a shared sense of purpose, not a definition of an aesthetic. Simmons commented, “Because I work with youth, the main purpose is to nurture them. That provides a clarity within which many different aesthetic views can live.” Many others in the group also spoke about their creative work through the lens of mission and purpose. For Cornerstone Theater, a collective of very diverse artists, what they share in common is the mission. Laurie Woolery described the healthy tension experienced by the company when they worked with a guest director who had a different aesthetic and approach from that of their longtime artistic director. Yet ultimately the play was “still Cornerstone;” the company’s mission could hold multiple aesthetics. Said Woolery, “We keep going back to mission. What is this for and is the mission still relevant for the company?” Questions of mission relevance as well as

mission clarity resonated in the group. Mission can draw young artists to an organization, but can also become a “brutal box” inhibiting innovation.



*...Constant awareness and acceptance of putting on big boots and willingness to go barefoot  
rebirth*

—Laurie Woolery  
Cornerstone Theater Company

### **Shifting contexts**

In describing the ethnographies that she is writing of three of the Artography organizations, Maribel Alvarez emphasized the importance of the context for their work. In the case of Diaspora Vibe, “Miami is a place of arts organizing engendering change through civic dialogue...who gets what, why, and when?” Diaspora Vibe’s Rosie Gordon-Wallace painted a vivid picture of Miami as a city where “neighborhoods are zip-coded by culture, like cultural apartheid,” and gentrification challenges art-making through the displacement of emerging African American artists who no longer have access to workspace.

Setting up the discussion about the relationship between aesthetics and shifting contexts, Alvarez noted the “iconic moments of American

imaginary—poor folk, Indians, and our latest national fantasy (or nightmare), Mexicans. Each of these communities has a lot to say back.” For the National Museum of Mexican Art, place mattered from the start when they chose to locate the museum in the working class Mexican-American neighborhood of Pilsen rather than downtown.

Acknowledging its relationship with place, Radio Arte, the museum’s radio station makes its studio visible to the neighborhood through a street-level storefront. The museum also defines its community as Mexicans on both sides of the border, and is connected and in dialogue with transnational communities.

Dudley Cocke described the concentric circles of Appalshop’s community. The “bulls eye in the circle is where we are,

Recovering the past, creating the future  
“El Olvido” by Judith Ortiz Cofer

*It is a dangerous thing  
to forget the climate of your birthplace,  
to choke out the voices of dead relatives  
when in dreams they call you  
by your secret name.*

*It is dangerous  
to spurn the clothes you were born to wear  
for the sake of fashion; dangerous  
to use weapons and sharp instruments  
you are not familiar with;*

\*From Terms of Survival  
(Arte Público Press, 1987)  
From the postcard of Marina Tristán,  
Arte Público Press

10 counties in southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and eastern Tennessee.” The circles move out to include cultural exchanges all over the world including youth in Indonesia and rural communities in China. These exchanges are “anchored by a strong sense of place, a root” that complicates the stereotypes and mythologies that Alvarez referred to. When Appalshop began its exchange with the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, they identified for each other their strong rootedness. “A bridge has to be anchored on both sides before a span is made...We both expected our tradition as tradition to be strengthened and at the same time something new [would be] experienced.” Cocke also raised the concept of “suppressed context,” such as Native American influences in Appalachian culture.

### **Economics and cultural ownership**

Norman Akers of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) spoke about the challenges of the Institute’s Santa Fe context, a major tourist destination where markets determine the aesthetic. When IAIA shifted from a two-year to a four-year program, it also shifted the balance of “maintaining our truth,” and could train young people to experience their own potential. Students moved from creating products for the Santa Fe tourist market to engaging in “processes reflecting our own philosophies.”

For the members of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA), the marketplace has historically been part of the function of their work. “We’ve sold baskets in that place for 200 years,” said Secord. “People contemporize baskets for marketing reasons and to assert their own identities.” This is part of the dynamics that keep tradition alive. Still, there is concern about the survival of some basket-making traditions, such as pack baskets for fishing that young basket-makers cannot afford to continue making, and fishermen cannot afford to buy. MIBA is committed to fair trade where baskets are bought on the weaver’s terms.

Akers and Secord also identified the complexities and contradictions of the rise of the casino industry for some Native communities. Akers described how it “changed the dynamic of how we interact.” When he goes home, the people who used to share stories and traditions now talk

about which casino they’ll go to. Secord also noted the changes in communities “where languages and art forms were dropping off.” On the other hand, many tribes who couldn’t afford a museum or cultural center now have one.

Cocke identified economics as a defining context for art in this country and cultural equity as the defining issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not only have we lost sight of class, the affinity that Appalshop shares with many groups of color, but the arts have gotten stuck in an old economic paradigm. Regional theater, for example, has adopted the dominant industrial economic model where “plays are assembled like an assembly line in Detroit...We’re in a ‘postindustrial’ moment, but the arts haven’t made the shift.” Cocke sees this as a place where this cohort can take a leadership role, given its ability to engage the global through grounding in the local.



*We are coming from Asian-American theater and going beyond Asian America and beyond theater.*

—Maria Josephine C. Barrios  
Ma-Yi Theater Company

Who controls the economy and owns the means of production—be it a recording studio, a record label, consolidated media, the Internet, or even the airwaves—has an impact on aesthetics and cultural equity. Silvia Rivera of the National Museum of Mexican Art used the example of hip-hop to demonstrate how a culture born to urban youth who wanted a voice to express their experiences can become commodified, exploited commercially, and mass-produced. “It’s all about the venues and the forms we own.” Rivera described how hip-hop started changing when the media consolidated, with increasingly narrow media ownership limiting the diversity of voices that could get heard. She asked, “What is a sustainable economic model for this work?”

Juana Guzman of the National Museum of Mexican Art urged the group to “take a hard look at ourselves” and consider what it will take to become economically viable for their own survival and for the good of their communities. Her museum is a good illustration of the positive economic impact—\$9.5 million—that a cultural institution can have in a community based on a study by C3D in North Adams, MA.

### ***Authenticity and first voice***

Creating opportunities for people to speak for themselves, represent their own aesthetics, and define for themselves what is valuable was the reason many of the groups in the Artography and Exemplar programs came into being. Appropriation makes the need for cultural ownership acute and the question of first voice urgent. Moreover, self-determination is tied to cultural equity, economic support, and the ability to leverage power.

And yet while recognizing the need for first voice historically and currently, some people also explored the limits of self-expression and the politics of identity. Sánchez acknowledged first voice as a starting point but asked “whether national identities are hiding much more complex identities.” He noted how “demographics exist in different dynamics.” First voice does not guarantee progressive change or necessarily reflect social justice values. Said Alvarez, “We can no longer say a Latino organization is per se progressive, just because it’s Latino. Many are not. What are the communities, what are the values, what are the strategies?” For Sánchez the question is, “Which models get us to which values? Do you buy Corona or from a local microbrewery for your event if you want to send a message? Is first voice enough?”

Paloma McGregor of Urban Bush Women raised the question of expanding identity and valuing different forms within a culture. “How do we continue to push open the languages and rip the labels to show how divergent the roots are? The roots spread in different directions and they are feeding from different places. I do have concerns as a black dancer, inspired and enabled by the tremendous historical strides of those who came before, about also becoming trapped by old missions and notions that are held by organizations, the field, and communities. The pioneers, in my mind, should be seen as the beginning of a long and evolving legacy, not a static rubric for all who come after.”

Cassie Chinn noted that at Wing Luke, “often times we can instinctively tell if [something] has an Asian-American aesthetic as opposed to one from outside.” This notion of authenticity addresses the question of who gets to determine the meaning and value of a work and define excellence in relation to it. Juana Guzman offered an example of how these questions can play out in a policy-making setting. She affirmed Rudy Guglielmo’s (past) work at the Arizona Arts Commission to gain recognition for the first voice aesthetics of Native American basket-makers, and to create a context where basket-makers could set the standards for their own work.

Roberta Uno recognized that “if we allow excellence and aesthetics to be defined by one group and don’t define it for ourselves, we will get marginalized.” However she also described ways that protocols and standards can be set within “diverse voice networks.” “Who you learn from, how you honor them, and how you are responsible to them, even if you innovate” are key issues. She offered the example of a Hawai’ian basket weaver who founded an alliance that developed its own way of training outsiders. He was not a native Hawai’ian but had grown up on a coffee plantation and carried that knowledge with him. What was important in this case was the honoring of tradition, his being given permission to participate by native Hawai’ians, and his “geneology of cultural practice.”

### **Creative, holistic, and value-based approaches**

Coming from “15 years of work primarily defined by the expectations of the art world” InSite is moving towards “a structure that better fits our progress, our interests, and our criteria.” Michael Krichman noted how InSite is rethinking the balance between process and product in the work (with a greater emphasis on the former), creating structures to enhance co-production with community and other artists, questioning when public events are appropriate or not, and considering the best ways to document process-oriented work. One of the ways this is expressed is through the curatorial process that Sánchez has put into place for InSite, opening it up to an outside group of curators who come in to critique and inform his process.



—Theresa Secord  
Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance

Dan Peterman offered another example of a dialogic approach to curating where the curator is in dialogue with a person (the artist or someone else) who can advocate for the work to deepen an understanding of its context and intentions. The Experimental Station site visit offered further evidence of this group’s value-based and holistic programming. An incubator of arts projects with the goal of building an independent cultural infrastructure, the Experimental Station designs its schedule to respect the flexibility of timeframe needed for experimentation. The space echoes Peterman’s own artistic practice which connects art and ecology. The building is constructed with recycled materials and designed for multipurpose use, drawing on “the ecological principle of diversity, recognizing the dynamic treasure of resources that a diverse and complex environment brings.” This diversity includes independent publishing, contemporary art, experimental music, visiting writers, organic gardening, bulk food purchasing, ecological initiatives, and a bicycle shop/youth education program.

In the context of selecting work for a citywide festival, CK Ladzekpo of East Bay Center for the Performing Arts raised the question: “How do you evaluate someone’s work in a multicultural, multiethnic environment? People say, ‘you are not from my culture, you can’t understand what I do,’ but it’s a multicultural audience.” For Ladzekpo, it is a question of how to think of the whole



community, not just of oneself. The Arab American National Museum/ACCESS does a lot of multicultural programming, including the Festival of Colors—a three-day festival of music from around the world. Public Programming coordinator Lauren Bass noted the importance of staying true to your mission and having a long view. When programming happens over time everything does not have to be accomplished in a single event, such as having representation of each stakeholder’s culture. It also helps that they partner on the festival with diverse groups such as New Detroit, a coalition of leaders from civil rights and advocacy organizations, human services, health and community organizations, business, labor, foundations, education, media, and the clergy.



—Shay Wafer  
Cornerstone Theater Company

Vanessa Whang of Artography spoke of “the complexity of working in a globalized world” where people don’t necessarily know the context for the work. Curating within this multiplicity requires “an enormous amount of responsibility to understand and contextualize the work and to know whether you know enough.” Whang also raised the issue of appropriate spaces for work that comes out of different cultural systems. “Not all performance makes sense on a proscenium stage in a hall with fixed seats, or in a two-hour time frame. There are not enough arts centers that are designed to accommodate diverse cultural practices.”

#### **Creating a critical discourse**

For Maribel Alvarez, an “ethical commitment to interrogating aesthetic practice” is an integral part of the cutting edge practice of an “aesthetics that matter.” Making this commitment to critical discourse is not always easy, given a history where the work is misunderstood, misrepresented, and invalidated. Alvarez also noted that being at the front of cultural change means that “a large part of learning has to do with unlearning—words, structures, protocols, practices, markets. Where are the safe places that can encourage and nurture critical dialogue, learning and unlearning? How can we create a language for critical practice?”

The question also arose: what criticism has value for you? A dialogue between Olivia Gude and Michael Rohd illustrates two perspectives on this question. Rohd disagreed with Gude’s position that she was only open to criticism from those who come with a social justice perspective. Rohd explained, “I have colleagues who don’t share my passion, but in the art form and experience that I am trying to create, I have a lot to learn from them, and they can learn from me.” He relayed what a director once said about a community-based company: ‘I don’t think their work is strong but I can’t say that because it will seem like I’m not down with the activism.’ But Rohd went on to say, “I want respect for the work and not just the intention.” Gude responded that “criticism without empathy for what people are trying to achieve” and from people who think they are “ideologically neutral” can be harmful to artists. For her “a great critique is one that sees what the work is about and helps you better realize it.”

Maria Josephine Barrios of Ma-Yi Theater Company named three kinds of critical discourses: “what our peers think, what scholars think, and what audiences think,” noting that often what the audience thinks is different from the other two. She asked the other groups what they are

doing to address this gap. Her company is engaging with the audience through surveys to better understand their perspective.

Critical discourse may require engaging the challenging topics of excellence and ethics. The group acknowledged how some notions of quality and excellence have been used to exclude cultures and aesthetics. However others came up as aspirations and were considered in many ways throughout the day's discussion. Gude believes that "critical practice is about asking questions about conscience." She quoted Tolstoy's *What is Art?* in which he defines good and bad, not only in terms of quality, but also in terms of ethics. The group related ethics to a variety of things: political issues raised by controversial subject matter, issues of representation and inclusion, the ethics of "the structures of selection" and of the "display of projects in contested areas," and "the ethical question of who do we make art for and why do we make it?"

Some "rough edges" arose in the day's discussions. Groups are not validated by their own communities. So-called model programs' success cannot be replicated due to different contexts for their work. Historical aesthetics shift in contemporary contexts. Groups fight among themselves over what is the best way to have impact or over scarce resources. Addressing this last theme, Ladzekpo told how "in Ghana, there is a story about a multi-headed crocodile with one stomach. The heads fight with each other to feed the stomach. But it's all one stomach, so how do you stop the fighting?" There was a willingness to engage the rough edges and tensions inherent in expanding aesthetics and embracing change. While the participants recognized the challenges and risks of this work, they also drew on the tensions as a source of creativity and energy.



## NEW WAYS OF WORKING TRACK

### Track Overview

How are Exemplar and Artography groups viewing and acting on limits and opportunities? How are they moving in new, alternative ways and engaging new people and sectors? Participants choosing this line of inquiry explored the question:

*What are new ways of working that are advancing interests and concerns on organizational community, and broader (cross-sector/national/ international) levels?*

The track proceeded through a brief plenary discussion followed by three concurrent sessions in the following areas: [technology](#), [partnerships](#), and [new models and structures](#). These sessions had various structures reflected in the summaries that follow.



—Photo by Chase Jackson 8/06

*The Baths, Virgin Gorda BVI  
Where do we want to be?  
On the other side—in the open,  
seen and heard for who we are NOW  
Leading stakeholders up the ladder  
so they can see beyond—see US*

—Chase Jackson  
Village of Arts and Humanities

### New Ways of Creating and Working through Technology

*Presenters: Daniel Gumnit, Intermedia Arts; Nick Szuberla, Appalshop;  
Zoey Kroll, Civic Actions. Facilitator: Judilee Reed, LINC*

From e-mail and databases to online communities and networks, this session explored new ways of integrating online communication and collaborative digital technology into an organization's mission and day-to-day activities. Case studies ranged from the use of online audio broadcasts in addressing human rights issues to community-based digital spaces serving new immigrant communities.

The session began with participants identifying their interests, opportunities, and concerns:

- Impact of technology on isolation related to communities, activism, and fundraising
- Integrating the technology platform into the physical platform (e.g. combining Internet-based interactions with festival activities)
- Ways to use technology to deepen partnerships over time and in a manner that uses resources efficiently
- New and better ways to use websites in a participatory manner with community
- Use of technology as an inclusive art-making tool
- Creating working efficiencies, reaching people, and integrating technology into nonprofit and educational programs
- Licensing ideas that have the potential to create a great deal of cultural capital that can be integrated into the educational system

- Using social networking, e.g. MySpace, to broaden participation and drive people to your website
- Maintaining the integrity of the artistic vision
- Issues of class and lack of infrastructure and access in communities
- At the Vietnamese Youth Center young people want to do traditional arts, but not combine technology and traditional art to make a new form of art
- The jargon related to technology—everyone is at a different level of familiarity with the language



—Photo by Daniel Gumnit

### **Presentation by Daniel Gumnit, Intermedia Arts**

Intermedia Arts has been investing in technology to support cultural participation by Minneapolis' large immigrant community. Intermedia's Digital Media Lab includes high-powered pc stations and a large server that is set up to encourage people who do not have access to technology and put technology in their hands. This includes new immigrants, who can tell their own stories within their communities and also communicate back home to their countries. Intermedia's Digital Community Advisory Committee, supported

by Blue Cross Blue Shield, pays community advisors from the immigrant community to come in and help design ways technology can be most useful to them. Intermedia has been working a lot on infrastructure, including installation of HDTV and video equipment in its lab in order to have high definition quality presentations in its theater. Using MySpace social networking for such programs as B Girl B: Women in Hip-Hop, enables them to include artists from all over the world. The B Girl B MySpace page drives visitors to the Intermedia website and has also brought in thousands of dollars in contributions. In the case of Intermedia's Naked Stages performing arts program, MySpace pages drove people to online forums by a factor of 10.

### **Presentation by Nick Szuberla, Appalshop**

Appalshop's Holler to the Hood is a multimedia project addressing the growth of prisons in Appalachia as a strategy for economic development. The project engages technology in several ways. It grew out of a hip-hop radio show on Appalshop's radio station where they received 200–300 letters from inmates regarding human rights violations at a nearby supermax prison. They organized a Calls from Home call-in show involving the prisoners families, who they communicated with by e-mail and who listened to the show via the Internet. As people called in, Appalshop developed a database. Prisoners began seeing the show as their space. To take the program national, Appalshop partnered with the prisentalk.com webmaster. For those people who didn't have access to the web they offered a "House Party Version" download. Also part of this project was a documentary about the human rights violations in the supermax prison, which many people saw online and through community screenings. People called in with their experiences, videos, and stories about being in the prison. The Thousand Kites project is a collaboration with Roadside Theater (another part of Appalshop), creating theater from prison stories gathered through community residencies and submitted on the Internet. Appalshop is

working with Free Range Graphics on a viral marketing campaign for this project that includes social networking sites such as MySpace, blogs, and fundraising with groundspring.org as a tool.

### **Presentation by Zoey Kroll, Civic Actions (with additional information from Judilee Reed, LINC)**

Civic Actions designs websites for progressive groups, offering a way for organizations to use tools and develop them as they use them. LINC has a series of case studies about artists' spaces around the country that include details about funding, marketing, and the challenges they are facing. Civic Action is working with LINC to develop the best way to get this information out to people who are interested in it, and more broadly, to network and share information as a community. They created NINA, an all-database system, using open source management as a tool that could be used for this or any set of information. Combining the case studies, narratives, and what people are interested in (mostly funding), they built a site where you can create your own case study or search for other related projects. Civic Actions is working on developing a search tool to facilitate this exchange of information.

Judilee Reed describes NINA further. More information relevant to artists is being put on the web every day. But for artists who turn to the Internet for information and resources that can have a direct impact on their professional lives, the current situation is far less than ideal. Arts organizations tend to set up their own, self-enclosed database systems, without much thought about how they might interconnect with others. This path of development reflects the nature of the arts field; there is little deliberate coordination between arts groups, and a strong, intuitive resistance to large, centralized, hierarchical systems.

NINA will improve artists' access to information that affects their lives and careers. Instead of the fragmented terrain that artists must cover today to track down answers to questions about the resources and opportunities available to them, NINA will link together these disparate data sources into an integrated, searchable network. From the artist's perspective, it will effectively be a one-stop shop. But from the perspective of the information providers, it will be a system that enables them to gather and distribute information as they always have—independently—following their current business models. NINA extends the effectiveness of all participating organizations by extending the reach of their data, while making it easier for artists to search through it and refer it to one another.

Artists will access NINA through the websites of its participating organizations. NINA, as a brand, remains quietly in the background. Most artists will likely never notice the presence of NINA—but they will realize quickly that the NINA partner site has become a doorway into a wide range of information from across the web.

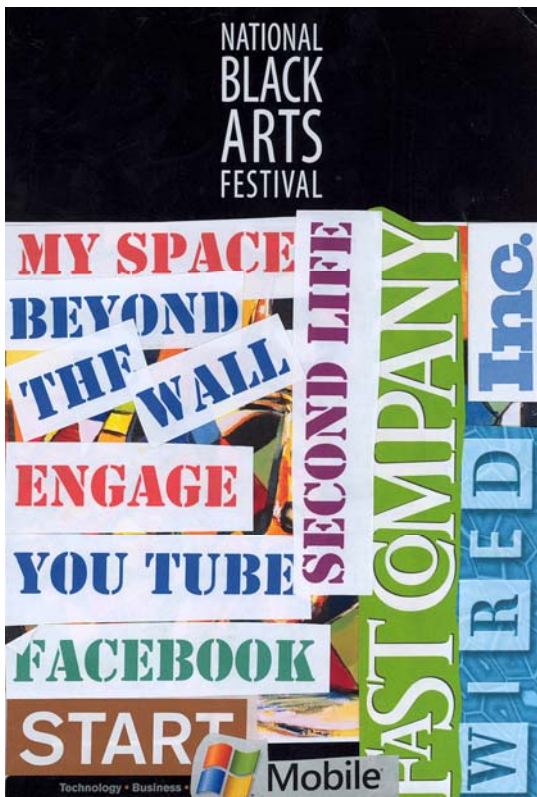
## **Themes From the Presentations and Discussion**

### ***Reciprocal relationship with the community***

A repeated theme concerned the importance of using technology to further a reciprocal relationship with a community, while recognizing that technology ultimately can't replace human interaction. This means moving beyond a static or passive use of technology as a means to impart information to social networking, creating spaces for participatory interaction and community ownership. To do this effectively, it is important to ask people in the community what technology they are using to get their information. The definition of community becomes more diverse and complex through technology, with as many or more people engaging with the organization via the Internet rather than physically walking through the door.

***The digital world is not just about marketing, it's also part of programming***

In Appalshop's case, the Thousand Kites Project website allows people to share their stories, using the play as a catalyst for an ongoing story-based dialogue. Appalshop's radio station, an integral part of the Kites program, is available via the Internet, greatly increasing the reach of this interactive programming. Intermedia Arts, whose work is national and international, is intent on broadening the dialogue around their programming by making their virtual presence as palpable as their physical presence. Artists from all over the world are talking about positive aspects of women in the hip-hop world on their B Girl B MySpace page. Content management systems enable organizations to track the people who are coming to their sites.



*Wow! Almost 20 years*

*How do we make art a viable and definable component of daily life?*

*How do we expand to serve shifting demos in a shifting world?*

*We are not afraid to shatter conventional wisdom and create new paradigms—*

*We fearlessly build with blocks of technology and take art to the people. Not afraid to explore nor engage—*

*20 years into the future looks great!*

—Leatrice Ellzy

National Black Arts Festival

***Challenges related to organizational cultures***

“The biggest challenge is around culture—that is to say organizational culture,” said Gumnit.

“When you embark on a project like this you have to change your organizational culture in a huge way. There’s as much resistance to positive change as there is to negative change.” For Szuberla, this session was “an opportunity to discuss something that is difficult to have as an organizational dialogue.” He appreciated the opportunity to have a positive discussion with peers facing similar issues.

***Intention and expertise***

Gumnit urged people to be intentional, given how large the boundaries of an organization might become once you start opening up to online options. Appalshop, for example, experienced increasing expectations for its work, and had to do lot of thinking about workflow and their

goals for putting video clips online. Participants in the session asked about the level of expertise needed to use these systems. Reed noted, “We’re using Drupal (a content management system), but we don’t have a lot of expertise. The tool is very flexible so that non-techies can make a fair amount of changes without a lot of trouble.” Gumnit suggested looking at opportunities to contract with people in organizations’ own communities. Expertise also extends to the user, and it is important to be sensitive to and involve a whole spectrum of people: from those who are really experienced to those with less experience. Engaging with technology often starts with the youth.

### Lessons Learned

- It is important to ask: Why are you doing it? What does success look like? Is this a good means to advance your mission?
- Keep in mind that what success looks like will change.
- Stay focused on the community.
- Don’t just think about your website, move it towards the social networking world. It’s not just about being stationary, it’s about interacting with folks.
- Don’t promise something to the community that you can’t come through on.
- Don’t make a kindergarten, i.e. don’t make something you have to watch, baby-sit, or maintain every day.
- It will take longer and cost more than you think.
- This is a journey, not a destination.

### Resources

**Data Place**—A resource for social, demographic, housing, income, employment, etc information, [www.dataplace.com](http://www.dataplace.com)

**Drupal** is a free software package that allows an individual or a community of users to easily publish, manage and organize a wide variety of content on a website. Intermedia created a program around its Institute for Community and Cultural Development, where they posted a series of questions about “the art of cultural development” such as “How can community driven art transform and improve the American society?” and encouraged people to respond. [www.drupal.org](http://www.drupal.org)

**Civic Actions**, described above. [www.civicactions.com](http://www.civicactions.com)

**ebase** is a series of Filmmaker Pro templates developed for use by nonprofit organizations to manage their relationships with their community: members, donors, activists, clients, volunteers and constituents. [www.ebase.org](http://www.ebase.org)

**Free Range Graphics:** Appalshop is working with Free Range Graphics on a viral marketing campaign (see attachment 7). Based in Washington, DC and Berkeley, CA, Free Range Graphics offers “top-quality design, communication, and strategy services to companies and organizations whose vision goes beyond turning the world into a strip mall.” [www.freerangegraphics.com](http://www.freerangegraphics.com)

**Google Analytics** allows you to embed code into your website to track who comes to it and how people are using it. [www.google.com/analytics](http://www.google.com/analytics)

**Google Ad Campaign** helped Appalshop to sell things. There is a cost for each click, and you set a limit of dollars to be spent per day. It shows how many sales you get per day, allowing you to see the cost ratio. The ad campaign is organized around specific key words. The closer you narrow your search, the more you narrow in on your audience. [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)



**Groundspring.org** “provides simple, affordable, and integrated services for small to medium-sized nonprofit organizations to help them become effective users of Internet technology in their fundraising and management of donors and supporters.” It allows Appalshop, at a cost of about \$25 per month, to process donations, add folks to e-mail lists via forms, send e-blasts, and track who is responding. It can use an existing database to get information. [www.groundspring.org](http://www.groundspring.org)

**MySpace**—Both Intermedia and Appalshop use the social networking site, MySpace, and also drive people from MySpace onto their organizational websites. MySpace can be a tool for fundraising as well. [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

**Open Source** is a movement to create software that is free and open—all of the new versions of that software would be free to the user and the programming code open as well. You don’t have to pay for the software, but there is a cost for the implementation. [www.opensource.org](http://www.opensource.org)

## Ventures in Partnerships

*Presenters: Stephanie Hughley, National Black Arts Festival, and Jon Pounds, Chicago Public Art Group. Facilitator: Debra Padilla, SPARC.*

Stephanie Hughley of The National Black Arts Festival (NBAF) and Jon Pounds of Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG) stimulated a discussion about new approaches to partnerships to expand capacity and achieve sustainability, cross sectors to meet community goals, and advance artistic investigation. As described by session facilitator, Debra Padilla of SPARC, the presenters “will bring both a microscope and a telescope to the concept of partnerships—each will share commonalities and where lessons were learned.” Drawing on SPARC’s years of partnerships which range from the Otis School of Art and Design to the community-based environmental group, Mujeres de la Tierra, Padilla raised questions about the defining covenants of partnership, “shifting the paradigm in partnerships to assert our currency,” and what direction we sail the “ship” in a partnership.

### Presentation by Stephanie Hughley, National Black Arts Festival

National Black Arts Festival is almost 20 years old. The first festival in 1988 had many partners, including the Woodruff Arts Center and the High Art Museum. There was a sense of real collaboration, including shared funding. Now there is a need for more definition of what partnership means, looking both at long- and short-term relationships and determining if they are programmatic, institutional, or both.

NBAF needs to collaborate to address sustainability issues. It has been formally exploring a partnership with the Woodruff Art Center in Atlanta, which includes four institutions—the High Art Museum, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Alliance Theater, and Young Audiences. NBAF and the Woodruff Art Center are asking how to reduce costs for both parties, raise money together, and reduce costs if they collaborate on programs. Originally, the idea was to possibly become a division of the Woodruff Art Center, but this is being reconsidered by the NBAF. The process of exploring this partnership was supported by a Field Advancement grant from the Exemplar Program and included national research about partnerships between presenting organizations, between large and small cultural organizations, and between culturally specific and mainstream organizations.

NBAF's goals for a partnership with the Woodruff Art Center include:

- Each organization retains its own voice, identity, brand, decision-making power and aesthetic
- Ongoing opportunities for collaborations on the development and presentation of major artistic projects, marketing, and fundraising that increase financial support for both organizations
- NBAF and its artists gain greater local and national visibility
- NBAF enriches the offerings of the Woodruff Art Center
- NBAF has consistent professional spaces for artistic development and presentation
- Both institutions develop new audiences
- Board exchange among partners that allows for closer bonds and understanding, possibly to share board members
- Creating a learning environment for both institutions

**Lessons Learned** (these lessons are from the presentation and discussion of the NBAF but are relevant to most partnerships):

- Partnerships take time. There must always be trust between organizations and it takes time to build a relationship and trust. If trust is lost, there cannot be a successful partnership.
- Distinguish between short-term and long-term, programmatic and institutional partnerships.
- The keys to successful partnerships are communication, cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual vulnerability. Communication must be open and honest.
- Define relationships with each partner separately and clarify partner roles. One size does not fit all. See one another as artistic equals and respect each other's intellectual property. Understand shared and divergent values and cultural competencies. Address issues of equity and parity (whose voices are at the table?).
- Develop both personal and institutional relationships and factor in the impact of staff transition. Get vertical integration and buy in.
- Develop written agreements where finance and space resources are involved.
- Clarify fundraising goals, considering who has which funding relationships: who asks, who benefits, and the allocation of gains and risks.
- Clarify marketing and branding, considering who gets what. Acknowledge different timelines for different kinds of organizations. Address issues of identity and credit.
- Successful partners create a learning environment for all, and non-arts community leadership is highly valued. Build in regular opportunities for honest assessment of the relationship and measures for success.
- Outside documenters and knowledgeable advisors can help debrief and recap what to consider as prospective partners move forward. Intermediaries can be a double-edged sword, however. Sometimes the partners prefer to communicate with them rather than directly with one another.

### **Presentation by Jon Pounds Chicago Public Art Group**

(The presentation included images.)

Historically, Chicago has been known for the segregation of political institutions and transportation systems that forced a massive segregation in the '60s. Chicago Public Art Group was formed by William Walker and John Pitman Weber who said, "we need an organization if

we want a movement.” CPAG has never had an artistic director, so the look of what they do varies with what each artist does. This makes for a relatively eclectic program and an important place to examine common values across racial lines and discuss issues. They develop artists carefully, often using core artists to collaborate with newer artists and to challenge and critique each other. The CPAG director is involved in the critique as well. They want artists to make a living and have a good lifestyle. To accomplish this they have taken on commissions that are often community-based. CPAG works with about 40 artists a year, and the amount they are paid ranges between \$4,000–\$30,000. As an organization, CPAG tries to find as much work as possible so they can consistently support artists. They say that an artist should get at least what a teacher gets paid.

CPAG is involved in two kinds of partnerships: with artists and with agencies. CPAG’s partnerships are driven by their artistic engagements and principles related to the exchange of economics and the importance of youth. For CPAG, every cultural exchange at its base is economic: “There is no neutrality. Stronger organizations have a responsibility to help out less strong ones. We believe that if we haven’t helped them, we have hurt them.” Pounds spoke about the economic risks CPAG faces when the artist has to get started before the money comes in.

Pounds described the challenges and opportunities of partnerships. When working with city agencies and larger arts organizations, it can be hard to get full acknowledgement of artists, get paid in a timely manner, and to deal with the bureaucracy. On the other hand they provide opportunities and financial support. CPAG also partners with Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a group working on community development and job training on the neighborhood level. LISC is now interested in public space and public art. CPAG has worked with LISC in a variety of ways but does not have long-term funding from them. They need to work out their differing vocabularies, however LISC is willing to trust CPAG when they identify artists. CPAG always has at least one partner in their public art projects—an agency, and now sometimes the corporate world. This has increased their earned income. Projects often have several partners, which can get messy.

## **Further Discussion**

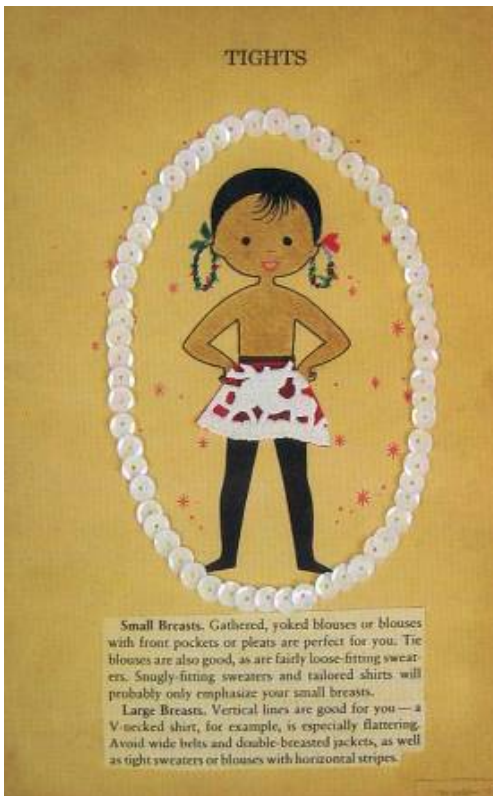
### ***Economics***

Hughley noted how NBAF shared CPAG’s experience of cash flow challenges, having gotten burned financially three times over 18 years. Anne L’Ecuyer of Americans for the Arts raised the issue of the accessibility of financial credit: “The question of who pays first is related to the issue of credit...the arts are often the first ones in the pool.”

### ***Partnership tensions***

Tensions can arise around the interests of the commissioning agency and those of the artist. At times, CPAG plays a brokering role in the negotiations as an intermediary. The group also discussed the relationship between the artist and the community. How does this relationship get brokered, does the artist feel compromised in his/her work, and what happens if there is a controversy? SPARC sends two artists because they believe the community should have a choice of which artist to work with. Pounds noted that in Chicago, you can do what you want if you have the permission of the wall owner. Controversy does not happen often, but when it does, CPAG intervenes when appropriate, or else finds the right party to do so.





—Artwork by Maria Gaspar

### Citywide (macro) and community-based (micro) approaches

The relationship between macro and micro approaches played out through a question about the relationship between commission-based work and community-based work (CPAG sees their work as both) and the issue of sustainability. Working citywide, CPAG does short-term projects that they don't have to sustain. Being "restless and itchy," they haven't tried to develop long-term commitments. In contrast, Redmoon Theater has worked with one partnership in a school for 13 years.

While CPAG "is very aware of racial and intergenerational representation in its projects," Pounds noted that, "in our partnerships with artists, race comes into play and then recedes." His experience is that younger artists are interested in aesthetics and capacity, and then race. Maria Gaspar, also of CPAG, made a distinction between the citywide macro work that CPAG does and that of community-based programs. "But, take a place like the Village in North Philly. Race is not irrelevant. I think that there are fewer students finishing high school, high mortality rate, and a depressed economy."

### Emerging Models: Operational Growth and Sustainability

*Presenters: Anan Ameri, Arab American National Museum; Beth Takekawa, Wing Luke Asian Museum; Jane Hirshberg, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange*

Drawing from three examples, the session presented challenges and solutions for building and sustaining organizations. Anan Ameri of the Arab American National Museum considered how to build and sustain an ethnic museum and described how AANM chose to be affiliated with a social service organization rather than be an independent museum. Beth Takekawa of the Wing Luke Asian Museum shared how it has aimed to integrate sustainability with its recent capital campaign and new facility development. Jane Hirshberg of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange presented recent experiences rethinking programs for income-earning potential and establishing partnerships with business sectors to diversify revenue.

#### Presentation by Anan Ameri, Arab American National Museum

Anan Ameri observed that as a smaller organization, you think if you achieve your growth goals, all problems will be solved. But that's not the case. Even if you're a larger organization, you can't remain static. ACCESS (parent organization of the Arab American National Museum) is a large organization. In 1987, it added a cultural component to "tell America who we are as Arab Americans." From 1987–97 the cultural program had an average annual budget of about \$200,000. In 2000, it decided to grow, and made the decision to establish a museum. The next year, 9/11 only highlighted the importance of this endeavor. By 2007, AANM had grown into a \$2.5 million museum with a \$3 million endowment.

How does a grassroots organization rooted in community move to become a professional organization? People think there is a contradiction between being grassroots and being

professional, but there shouldn't be. One challenge is that there are not many Arab American museum professionals. How can the Arab American National Museum be an ethnically-specific museum, yet inclusive? It grew out of a movement that began in the 1960s. What does this mean for the future leadership of the museum? How can it cultivate the right kind of leadership that ensures a continuing connection to community? Sustainability is not only about money, but also about leadership. How can the museum continue to build its endowment?



*I come from the 60s. I come from an activist background, from non profit grassroots organizations— worked mostly with immigrant groups—Arab Americans. I come from a belief that all people deserve quality arts. To look at poor & immigrants' needs in a comprehensive way. Art is not only for the rich and wealthy.*

—Anan Ameri  
Arab American National Museum

## Further Discussion

### Endowments

The advantage of an endowment is having interest earnings as a way to ensure money for targeted line items in your budget. Endowment can mean different things for different types of organizations, including those without buildings. It can be considered creative capital earmarked for the creation of new work. The Arab American Museum received endowment funds from a National Endowment for the Humanities challenge grant and the Ford Foundation. They also discovered that people who weren't interested in providing major funding for ACCESS's social services were attracted to investing in the museum. Cornerstone Theater's endowment came from a funder. They found it confusing to ask donors to contribute to the endowment since they were asking them for annual fund gifts as well. Wing Luke originally had the larger goal of combining an endowment with their capital campaign, but they decided to focus on the capital campaign first. An endowment is a critical part of their plans for the future. This was also the case for The National Museum of Mexican Art, which did its facility campaign first and then raised the endowment which now amounts to \$1 million.

### Working capital, cash reserves, and commissioning circles

Diane Espaldon cautioned the group that depending on your organization's stage of development, it may be better to focus on building working capital instead of creating an endowment. Before permanently tying up funds in an endowment, an organization should be able to raise its annual fund pretty well and should have enough unrestricted, flexible money for operating. Growth stage organizations particularly need unrestricted, flexible funds.

Sam Miller of LINC suggested that groups might want to consider a cash reserve fund, which is meant to manage volatility. There can be a danger in going straight from the annual fund to developing an endowment because you'll be tempted to use the endowment to manage financial volatility. Shay Wafer of Cornerstone Theater advised the group to definitely have policies in place governing the cash reserve regarding payback, etc. She is familiar with one organization that used its cash reserve to "cover up" annual deficit spending. Urban Bush Women is building a "commissioning circle" for new works. For them, this is like a cash reserve.

### **Organizational models**

The group also spoke about an organizational model with an umbrella 501(c)3 and departments with dedicated revenue and cost centers, as well as an organizational model that has an umbrella 501(c)3 and several subsidiaries that are 501(c)3s.



*I first made this collage, representing who the Wing Luke Asian Museum was to me, in 1997. When I had to share about the museum in far away places, it was comforting to bring images of my Wing Luke family, including a tucked away photo of my grandma, and a good & necessary reminder of why I do what I do. Since then, even though we're fully immersed in a capital campaign, building a new building, what the museum means to me and where I want us to be remains the same.*

—Cassie Chinn  
Wing Luke Asian Museum

### **Presentation by Beth Takekawa, Wing Luke Asian Museum**

Wing Luke is 40 years old, with 10,000 square feet on-site and some off-site space. It is moving to a historic space that is 60,000 square feet and will be mostly museum with one retail space. The capital campaign goal is \$23 million. As of December 2006, they have raised \$19.5 million. The construction project was 30 percent complete as of December 2006, on time and on budget. Wing Luke tried to approach its capital expansion and capital campaign the way they approach their community work. It was less about institution building and more about community building. The hardest thing was "asking our own people for money." They began to see that asking is another way of involving the community in their work.

## Lessons Learned

*A heavy emphasis on planning where staff, board, and community volunteers were involved in all planning processes*

*A capital campaign that builds organizational capacity rather than sucks up operating funds*

- They started with the board, which was grassroots. They expanded and developed their board. A certain kind of vision can attract a certain kind of person. They got 100 percent participation from the board on the capital campaign. It enabled board members to go out and ask others more readily.
- They had campaign counsel; they couldn't do it themselves. There were communication issues with the campaign counsel because they came from a different world, but Wing Luke staff communicated with them when they thought their strategies wouldn't work for the community.
- Two line staff members chaired a staff campaign. Now they are at \$90,000 from staff through multi-year pledges. No staff member pledged less than \$1,000. Success was largely due to leadership by line staff rather than management.
- They thought their annual fund would shrink during the capital campaign, but it didn't. This is because they expanded and broadened their donor base instead of going back over and over to the same narrow donor base they had in the beginning. This is what their campaign counsel told them would happen, but they didn't believe it until they saw it. Another "standard" from the campaign counsel also worked for them: in building relationships with individual donors, there should be five to seven "touches" in between asks for money.

*A community-based approach to building planning and design*

- Wing Luke decided not to have a café in the new museum but instead to encourage visitors to patronize community restaurants. They will have "basics" such as drinks and snacks for visitors but not a café or restaurant.
- They chose their architectural firm on the basis of their willingness to get community input *before* design, i.e. their willingness to work a "dense process."

*A construction project that not only comes in under budget but generates additional equity*

- Wing Luke selected a CDC with expertise and experience as their construction project manager. The CDC is also motivated by its own community development mission.
- They brought the general contractor in at the design phase through a small contract. Then because the contractor got the full contract later on, they donated their pre-construction fee back to the museum.
- "Value engineering"—They worked to keep construction project costs in line while *not* cutting program expectations. To do this, all the right people and skills have to be at the table to adjust the plan with this in mind.
- They used new market credits (federal dollars for low income neighborhoods). There is a complicated formula and eligibility for this, but they ended up with \$2 million more than they put in.

*Remembering to celebrate the accomplishments and successes along the way*

- Takekawa shared the following documents with session participants: [list of Wing Luke's planning documents](#), [board development materials](#) (desired characteristics, [a matrix of current board member characteristics](#), and skills including give-get capacity), [sample capital campaign report tracking progress](#), and program planning model. **For Wing Luke's community-based exhibition model, go to:** <http://www.wingluke.org/process.htm>

## **Further Discussion**

### ***Board development***

Wing Luke's list of desired board characteristics doesn't list a specific financial commitment. Instead, they were looking first and foremost for passion in prospective board members. Also, there is nothing in their bylaws that states that their board members have to be from their community, so they could draw upon a range of people. They found that the people who have the most money aren't necessarily the ones who give the most money. They developed their campaign goals based on a capital campaign feasibility study.

Chase Jackson of the Village of Arts and Humanities reflected that their bylaws require that 51 percent of board members be from "the community." They are re-examining the definition of "the community" as the organization evolves.

### ***Transition***

Wing Luke has a "transition reserve fund" in their budget but may need to look more closely at the issue of the volatility of the first three years in the new facility. They plan to phase in program expansion and have left 11,000 square feet in the new facility vacant, both for program flexibility and for savings. They are operating as if they are already in transition to the new facility and have been making program and staff planning/adjustments accordingly.

### **Presentation by Jane Hirshberg, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange**

Jane Hirshberg framed the session by recalling a basic theme that emerged from an Exemplar introduction: "organizational poverty sucks." Dance Exchange came up with several ideas to diversify revenue streams. She focused here on earning income by "packaging what we usually customize." An important concern they are keeping in mind while exploring new models is "how do we keep our integrity while doing new ways of working?"

Performance fees have been the primary income for Dance Exchange. When Hirshberg took the managing director position, she knew Dance Exchange needed to diversify its financial resources. So staff began to look into increasing individual donors (a work in progress) and earned income. They examined earned income ideas and opportunities through the following framework: high mission/low risk, high mission/high risk, low mission/low risk, and low mission/high risk. They decided to focus on high mission/low risk ideas and hired a strategic marketing consultant to consider all the ideas they had. The consultant encouraged them not to throw out any of the ideas but to create an "umbrella concept" for the earned income initiative.

Liz Lerman is the founder of the Dance Exchange but they have moved to a "leadership team" model. Lerman has no intention of leaving the organization at this time but wants to change her



role. With this context, they found common threads in their earned income ideas: legacy, toolbox, and “diversify the genius” by allowing multiple voices and visions.

Ideas include:

- Creativity workshops for corporate workplaces
- Training programs for artists
- Advancing their “critical response” practice through various platforms beyond their current book
- Use (e.g. rental) of their facility
- A statewide endeavor that would attract both public and private funds

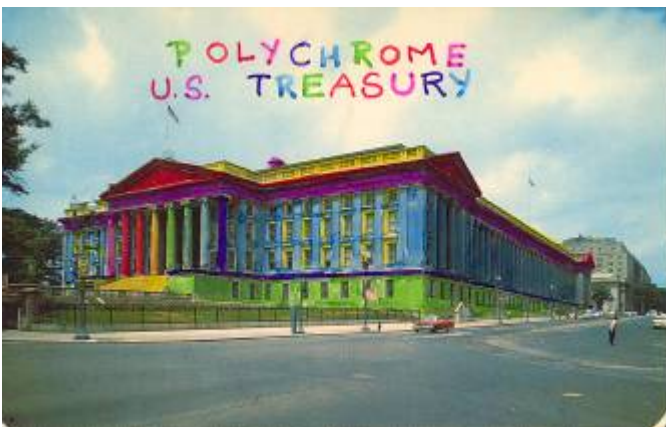
It became clear that their biggest deficit was staff capacity, i.e. not having enough people to do the current work and develop these new ideas. So they started to focus on how to transform Dance Exchange’s Institute for working artists and on creativity workshops for corporate workplaces. For the creativity workshops, they are partnering with Americans for the Arts’ Creativity Connection which is helping Dance Exchange figure out how to pull out elements of their tool box that corporate executives will find particularly beneficial. Liz Lerman is very involved in the development of the workshops. They will make a presentation to the board in June on the institute and the creativity workshops. (Some board members have been involved since the beginning.) Overall, this earned income exercise is giving them good practice in how to adapt tools, expand marketplace, and diversify income.

## Further Discussion

### *Ethical considerations*

Shay Wafer asked Hirshberg if Dance Exchange has had any discussions about what types of corporations they will or won’t work with. The question resonated; Dance Exchange currently works with defense contractors and they have a relationship with Boeing. Sam Miller noted that an organization could think about this question in a couple of ways: only work with companies that are already “with us” or work to change corporate practice like shareholder activists do. Said Hirshberg: “There is a lot we can learn from working and creating in these new environments.”

Wafer responded that they may be able to have far-reaching impact if they engage with entities that are “not like us,” e.g. pharmaceutical companies. But at the same time, they can’t sell their souls. Cornerstone, for example, is quite restricted in tying fundraising to their organizational values.



*If Hollywood really wanted to fight global warming, they’d close up shop and tell us all to imagine the movies in our heads.*

—John Borstel  
Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

Espaldon affirmed that it is important to tie the pursuit of money to your organization’s mission and values. If traditional corporate sources don’t work for you, for example, then you’ll need to figure out what does (e.g., adjust like Wing Luke did in the previous example) and/or be willing to live within more limited resources, and by extension, more limited organizational capacity. The group also talked about how it is important to ensure that, not only earned and contributed income sources, but also investment policies, vendor relationships, and other financial/business practices are consistent with your mission and your organization’s growth path.

## LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE

### Track Overview

“How do we lead?” was the overarching question for this session. Participants explored the power and potential of their own leadership to advance the aesthetics, ideas, and values they care about. Leadership was discussed at the macro and micro levels, considering change in a larger social context, in the arts and culture sector, and in their own organizations. The group also considered how strategies might be moved forward through the leadership of the Exemplar and Artography program cohorts.

The leadership exploration began with Maribel Alvarez interviewing Roberta Uno on her own leadership, program philosophy, and insights to provide a context for the day. This was followed with a dialogue about leadership and change involving Dudley Cocke of Appalshop, Juana Guzman of the National Museum of Mexican Art, and Olivia Gude of Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG). Their discussion stimulated a group discussion addressing the questions: “What do we want to change?” and “What power can we exercise to make change?” along with other topics.

The next part of the conversation focused on leadership and change in the arts and culture sector. Diane Espaldon of LarsonAllen Public Service Group interviewed Rosie Gordon-Wallace of Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator and Nicolás Kanellos of Arte Público Press about how they have made change through the work of their organizations and about the change they would like to see in the arts and culture sector. This opened up into a group discussion.

The session concluded with five breakout groups meeting on topics identified for further discussion: Demonstrating Impact and Value, Leadership Transition, Web Collective/Technology, Change and its Relation to the Mainstream, and Making Contemporary Work in Community.



*Together we vision  
Boldness in the face of change  
“Wildly intentional”  
Be brave girl!  
Celebrate the past  
Mentor*

—Theresa Sweetland  
Intermedia Arts

### Key Themes

The following is a synthesis of themes that emerged out of the sessions related to leadership:

#### **Audacity and persistence**

“Carlos said ‘I’m not just going to talk about the inequities, I want to do something about it.’ No one believed he could do it. He did it slowly, nothing got in his way. ‘We have a right to have a place for our culture. He got others to join in with him in this effort and allowed them to be leaders...asking them to join him in this journey.’”



Juana Guzman’s description of Carlos Tortolero’s leadership of the National Museum of Mexican Art exemplifies many of the characteristics of the cohort organizations and their leaders. Audacity—doing what doesn’t seem possible to others—is a frequent theme in their creation stories. They don’t give up when the going gets tough, and often get tough themselves, as “cultural warriors,” standing up for what they believe in. This also means having a long-term commitment characterized by consistency and integrity, patience, and resilience.

### **The leadership continuum**

Tortolero has also exemplified a commitment to fostering a continuum of leadership encouraging and mentoring young leaders through the years. Roberta Uno emphasized the important legacy of the leaders that come before us—cultural leaders such as Jack Jackson of Inner City Cultural Center in Los Angeles, and our mothers and grandmothers. “It never occurred to me that I couldn’t be a practicing artist, teach, and raise a family. I was raised by someone who did that. My mom raised four kids, was a school teacher, protested against the war, and had been in an internment camp.”

Olivia Gude spoke of being part of a continuous tradition of artists training artists, both in the mural movement and more broadly through national organizations like the Alliance for Cultural Democracy. Dudley Cocke described the process of “mentoring into a tradition,” paying homage to National Endowment for the Arts Folk Arts director Bess Hawes, one of his mentors.



—Image by Judy Baca

*Like SPARC, I came into being in 1976. We share 30 years on this earth. As an organization we have been gathering, planting, and gardening. Like the woman on the front—guarding and holding fast to what we’ve gained. Once we have fully harvested the fruits of our labor, we are committed to release new seeds, pollinate and re-energize a new generation of artists and community builders, that will feel inspired to take ownership of this garden—so that all generations are nourished, and our work and legacy prosper.*

—Pilar Castillo  
SPARC

### **Connecting with others**

“A willingness to go into situations of difference” is part of Uno’s leadership tool kit. This involves having the sensitivity to engage people on their own terms and the integrity to remain rooted in one’s own values. It can mean functioning in foundation board rooms, going door-to-door to consult with the grandmothers in a community, or learning about basket-making and native culture by making a basket with members of Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance. Said Maribel Alvarez, “There are knowledges that are always suppressed, even in a hyperactive discourse. The elders in Maine would be quiet here [at this convening] but in a circle making baskets, they are engaged in an intellectual discourse. How do we tap into that?” Being willing and able to connect with people in diverse sectors and communities requires an

acknowledgement of multiple forms of leadership (including communal as well as individual) and a respect for diverse forms of knowledge. It also requires an honest reckoning of privileges and prejudices, as in the case where an Asian American is treated as an “honorary white person.”

### **Cultural citizenship and global leadership**

Nicolás Kanellos described how, as part of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, activists wrote legislation, used theater to train people to poll watch, and democratized the curriculum. They were leaders by example and cultural citizens who affected cultural policy through their practice. More recently, Sojourn Theatre was invited to work with the city of Portland, OR to integrate theater into city planning and create a space for understanding across multiple perspectives. Michael Rohd also serves on the city subcommittee that is developing the Portland city plan for the next 25 years.

*Serenity, peace, calmness, spirituality, splendid, powerful, invoking, greatness, stillness, strong, quiet, more than one, unexplainable, kind, gentle, wise, thoughtful, empowering soaring, heart, We all are this when we work together.*

—Judy Young  
Vietnamese Youth Development Center

“Institutions like ours not only have and deserve a place, but are critical for the global society we live in. We have to be bold and courageous enough to take our space,” said Stephanie Hughley. Dudley Cocke pointed out that, unlike many arts organizations that have become “isolated from the other sectors and concerns of the American people,” cohort members engage globalization and demographic change from a place of rootedness in their communities and cultures. He challenged his colleagues to consider what unique opportunities they have to lead and what actions they could take together.

### **From the margins to the mainstream**

A major topic of discussion, and an underlying tension, concerned the question of moving from the margins to mainstream. People affirmed the power of grassroots. They were inspired by how Diaspora Vibe went door-to-door to talk to the grandmothers to “get their blessing” when the organization moved into the neighborhood. Arte Público Press, situated at the University of Houston since 1980, has not abandoned grassroots strategies, such as its book tours in the small towns of Texas where they are greeted in libraries with punch and *pan dulce*.

Like many of the groups, Diaspora Vibe and Arte Público Press engage strategies both inside and outside dominant systems. Kanellos and Gordon-Wallace described their processes of engaging the mainstream. Diaspora Vibe moved into Miami’s Design District and learned how to run something recognized as a “real organization,” seeking grants and building a board. In the case of Arte Público, the organization has integrated itself “into the system” by developing masters and Ph.D. programs based on its Recovery Project and becoming a major supplier of educational materials. Both also spoke of the challenges of engaging the mainstream. “I feel like a size 10 fitting into a size 4,” said Gordon-Wallace who struggles to find a place for immigrant voices and methodologies in the increasingly corporate Miami-Dade County. For Kanellos, the university can be “a very protected system.” In addition, the increasingly consolidated mass media has significant influence and power over Arte Público’s work.

Juana Guzman reframed the mainstream as the groups in the cohort. She challenged the groups to “find a new center of power within ourselves” and offered as an example how Carlos Tortolero convened a meeting of Latino museum leaders within the American Association of Museums conference, at the National Museum of Mexican Art, when that conference did not serve their needs.

Oswaldo Sánchez wondered, “if we are creating another elite, a vertical structure.” In response to discussions about marketing, he asked whether this approach was in contradiction to social justice values. “How much are our groups shaped by the structures that are part of the culture... Is it our goal to fit in and be successful in this society or is our goal to transform society?” He reminded the group that not all community-based work is alike, nor does it have the same intentions. Cocke proposed doing an analysis of the macroeconomic system and the place of the cohort groups within it, factoring in their values. He asked, “How does democracy work in a somewhat extreme capitalistic system? It isn’t just about making adjustments within the reigning system.”

*We are coming from the margins to transform American culture. We have been displaced, disgraced, replaced, and coopted. But we shall prevail in making this a culture honest and reflective of the people who created the nation and make it work.*

*Mañana será nuestro.*

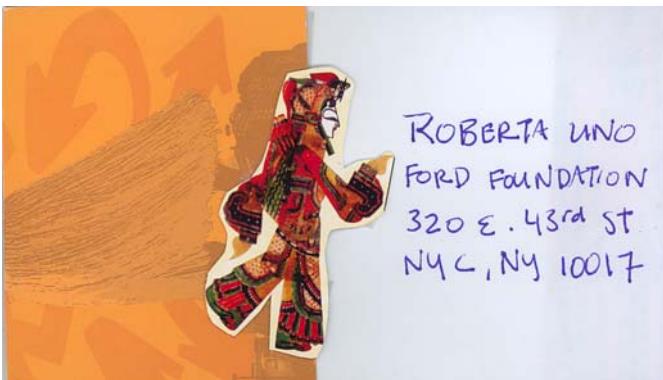
—Nicolás Kanellos  
Arte Público Press

### **21<sup>st</sup> century philanthropy**

A series of questions related to funding were raised in the discussion. What does responsible philanthropy look like, where its values are consistent with the work and funders are “radical and self reflexive?” How can funding for excellence and transformation replace funding that preserves status quo social and cultural hierarchies? How can the intermediaries that connect foundations with the field better reflect the diversity of its changing demographics? How can the

field both lead and follow funders? What is the language and code of behavior for creating a critique as part of an ongoing conversation between funders and the field?

Uno offered some insights about changes made at the Ford Foundation where president Susan Berresford had transformed the institution from a white male staff to multicultural one. Uno was hired by an African-American woman, in a division that had a Native American, African, White, and Asian-American staff. Uno described how Ford is a foundation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with an enormous responsibility to the social justice and human rights values of an



—Roberta Uno, Ford Foundation

institution committed to existing into perpetuity. New philanthropies tend to be more entrepreneurial, more like venture capitalists with a hands-on approach and a desire to see results in their lifetime.

The group also considered alternatives to funding to decrease dependency on it. What are the different kinds of revenue streams that participants could create from their own visions? The Old Town School of Folk Music was named as an example of a group that earns most of its

revenue through training and ticket sales. CPAG's work with city agencies and Dance Exchange's efforts to package what it does for others are two other examples of income streams. Michael Rohd added however, "my organization is a nonprofit model, the value of what I do can't work in the free market economy." And while dependency on philanthropy can be dangerous, Barbara Schaffer Bacon reminded the group that philanthropic money is your money [for the public good] and "we should do everything we can to make the case to philanthropy about your work."

### **Opportunities for action**

*"People are really hungry for the change they want to see in themselves and the world...this time isn't always going to exist, it's a window."*

– Kumani Gantt

*"What is the opportunity we don't want to miss?"*

– Michael Rohd

Participants identified areas for action where they could take a leadership role individually and with their combined power as cohorts supported by the Ford Foundation. They sensed a window of opportunity being open that shouldn't be missed and a political moment when people really desire change.

Jon Pounds asked, "How do we go beyond succeeding to moving forward and being propositional? What are the proposals we have for 30 to 40 years from now?" Kanellos challenged the groups to answer, "how do we influence the media...how do we get a seat at the table in Congress? How do we talk collectively to foundations and corporations? What are better ways of interfacing with the educational system?" His presentation illustrated how artists and intellectuals in the past engaged policy proactively as well as reactively. Caron Atlas offered the example of the New Rules Project of the Institute for Local Self Reliance, which introduces model rules related to media policy and sustainable development that can be adapted by individual communities ([www.newrules.org](http://www.newrules.org)). What are the new rules that the cohort groups want to propose for cultural policy?



*Farewell to where we're coming from—separate orbits  
around the sun—predictable and isolated.  
Greetings from where we are going—an inter-dependent  
weave of unexpected textures and colors.*

—Caron Atlas, consultant + cultural organizer

Throughout the convening people named the need to articulate the vision and value of their work and its theory of social change. An overview documentation and analysis of the body of work, something bigger than any one of the groups, would be helpful. Said Jordan Simmons. "Our folks at home need to see we exist in a broader field." What are the stories of resiliency and adaptation that can be shared and the unique characteristics that can be quantified?

The group recognized its potential to get things accomplished collaboratively with greater impact than working alone. Ideas included creating a collective on the Internet that combines the power of the cohort, developing creative collaborations, and sharing resources with one another in a more intentional manner.

## Breakout Topics

Five breakout groups were created to discuss some of these topics and others that emerged throughout the convening. Click on the title below for more detailed notes from these conversations.

### [Demonstrating Impact and Value](#)

This conversation explored the question of how to demonstrate the worth and value of the work outside of the field. The group identified unique elements of their work that could be quantified as well as qualified and aggregated to elegantly and simply represent the Exemplar and Artography cohorts. Related research and Internet tools that can be resources to this work were also identified and considered. The group noted the value of an asset-based orientation and the power of a comparative analysis. Animating Democracy and LINC agreed to continue this work.

### [Leadership Transition](#)

Shay Wafer and Kumani Gantt presented the challenges and the opportunities that arose as a result of the leadership transitions of the founding directors of Cornerstone Theater Company and the Village of Arts and Humanities. The group discussed the impact of the transition on the managing director and other staff, the role of the board, the needs of the successor, programming transitions, and relationships with funders. They agreed that the experiences and lessons learned by Cornerstone and the Village of Arts and Humanities were valuable resources to be shared with this cohort.

### [Web Collective/Technology](#)

This discussion carried forward the idea proposed by Nicolás Kanellos to build a collective website, possibly called “Our America,” to serve as a promotional hub with links to individual websites and/or a central clearinghouse or store to market groups’ merchandise. The group plans to continue this discussion via e-mail and carry out initial research about the successes and failures of related efforts and potential financial resources for the site. Drawing on this information they will sketch out possible technical requirements, commitments, and costs; define who is the managing body; and consider developing a business plan.

### [Change and its Relation to the Mainstream](#)

Oswaldo Sánchez initiated the discussion with a series of questions: How is power distributed? When we talk about change, national identity doesn’t work anymore. Is our goal to become rich and famous? Are we looking for new vertical powers? What is a “community initiative”? Artistic practice has the power to change people’s point of view and question platforms. The group discussed whether we are looking to create functioning spaces as social models or replicating mainstream values by internalizing them and representing our work through mainstream structures. There is a need for a theory of social change and a criticality of practice. Is there a language for this?



### Making Contemporary Work in Community

This discussion was framed by Rosie Wallace-Gordon around her concerns about the politics and critical analysis that needs to happen around doing contemporary work in communities: Who are we making the work for? What is the impact on the artist once the work is done? What happens next? Others spoke about the limits of labels and packaged identities, the need to break down the dichotomy of traditional and contemporary, the lack of informed criticism about this work, the need for visual (re)education, and artists as vehicles for social change.



*...It seems we are like the moon—  
Born,  
Grow slowly,  
Then fade away, to reappear again  
In a never-ending cycle.  
Our lives go on  
Until we are old and wise  
Then end.  
We are no more,  
Except we leave  
A heritage that never dies.*

—Rita Joe (Micmac)

—From Jennifer Neptune's postcard  
Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance