DORIS DUKE
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EVALUATING AND DISSEMINATING AUDIENCE BUILDING/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

With a growing body of work around audience building/community engagement, it is increasingly important to evaluate the outcomes of this work and to articulate and share what has been learned across the sector and with key supporters and partners. While many are still grappling with these issues, we have learned some of what works and what is important and have identified areas where additional work needs to be done to support and share effective practice.

With so much potential learning and so many great examples of audience building/community engagement in the past several years, there is a desire to share stories and approaches across the sector. While the nature of the work requires that each project be developed with and customized to the community in which it is undertaken there is still valuable learning to be found in the successes and challenges of each.

Initial evaluation measures focused around quantitative measures of attendance, revenue or quantity of programs and events. It became clear to most practitioners that these were not effective means of understanding meaningful engagement and did not adequately reflect the scope and nature of the impact they were seeing in their organizations and their communities. What is needed is a more qualitative, often narrative approach encompassing the many interacting impacts of the work.

Recognizing that there are multiple levels of stakeholders, from community members to arts practitioners to funders and intermediaries, there are likewise many sets of objectives and perspectives on evaluation. Bearing this in mind, all parties should be engaged in framing evaluation processes and the responsibility for measuring and fulfilling evaluation objectives should be shared.

CULTURE OF EVALUATION.

Funding partners involved in supporting audience building/ community engagement initiatives tend to see them as co-learning opportunities and have embraced the challenge of evaluation as part of the initiative process itself. Just as there is no template for designing or implementing a universal engagement program, there is also no template for evaluation. Instead there is a process of evaluation in which desired outcomes, indicators of success and analysis of impact are

developed alongside the programming itself. Funders who have worked with grantees to shape evaluation or provided the resources for organizations to implement their own evaluation approaches, have gained access to greater learning and understanding of impact than those who have sought to create a standard set of outcomes. A culture of evaluation that accepts and values failure as part of the learning process and is neither punitive nor reductive is most conducive to learning.

LOGIC MODELS/THEORIES OF CHANGE.

Some funders and practitioners have found that evaluation is best supported by capturing starting conditions and framing expectations about change with a logic model or theory of change. For them, articulating these ideas or expectations at the outset can provide a framework, subject to adaptation, and a shared vision with partners and constituents.

DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION.

Other initiatives seem to be best served by a developmental approach to evaluation in which outcomes, which may be unknown, are not set at the outset but allowed to emerge through the process. This is often the best approach for complex situations and ideas in which predetermining outcomes limits the capacity for discovery, divergence, and living with uncertainty. These processes focus on capturing learning throughout the process and documenting and sharing the journey of the work.

As the stories and impact of these initiatives are documented, there is a desire to find ways to share them and the knowledge gained by practitioners with others across the sector in the hope of inspiring continued and expanded work. On a national scale, considering the complexity of many of these projects, this can be a daunting challenge. While there is extensive documentation, currently information is largely inaccessible - dispersed online in case studies and web pages or buried in final reports, evaluations or publications. A significant challenge in disseminating information remains creating an accessible and universal platform.

CO-LEARNING.

Many grant programs have built-in components of co-learning to ensure that grantee cohorts are able to learn from each other and access peer support. From multi-day in-person intensives, to webinars and online forums, to annual grantee meetings, to travel funds for site visits to peer programs, these

interactions have had considerable impact for grantees and grant-makers. For the most part, however, these co-learning communities are limited to arts organizations and do not include individual artists or community members involved in the work. Their personal stories and perspective could significantly enhance the sharing and learning that these platforms provide.

NATIONAL & REGIONAL DIALOG.

Opportunities to share and discuss learning more broadly exist at annual conferences and topic-specific regional convenings. At least one prior forum has encouraged cross-disciplinary conversation and shared learning. There are opportunities to expand this reach through cross-sector conversations in local and regional networks and by integrating sharing into national and regional convenings already in place across the arts sector.

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CASE STUDIES & ARTICLES.

Several programs have developed text and web-based information portals to share learning outcomes including Dance/USA's *Audience Engagement Cookbook,* the EmcArt's *Arts Fwd,* TCG's *Audience (R)Evolution: Dispatches from the Field,* Wolf Brown's *CultureLab* and *APAP's Community Engagement Laboratory.* While these resources provide engaging video content, compelling case studies and analysis, the multiplicity of platforms and the density of material is daunting to navigate. A central, searchable portal with accessible content in the form of mini-video documentaries or case study capsules would significantly increase the availability of information across the sector.

Sharing stories is important but it is not the same as sharing learning. While shared stories inspire and engage, shared

learning informs, providing both positive and negative perspectives. Shared learning requires a high level of transparency and comfort with revealing what did not work as well as what did. Sometimes the most important learning comes from failure.

In our desire to inspire and inform, we must be mindful of how we use people's stories. Many of these initiatives have at their core the stories of the community members who have committed to a process of engagement with the artists and organizations. We should not presume to share these stories without recognizing this reality and seeking their permission. As one forum participant said 'We should not use other people's stories to make ourselves look shiny'.

QUESTIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

- ❓ What is meaningful in terms of audience building/community engagement and how does this shift depending on who is measuring it?

- ❓ Are we making progress in reaching new audiences/communities or are we simply reaching more of the same?

- ❓ How can we make the vast amount of information about these practices more accessible and useful to funders, practitioners and community members?

- ❓ How can we involve more artists and community members in the processes of co-learning around these initiatives?

Photo credit: Adam Nadel

Ping Chong + Company/Laguardia Community College – Beyond Sacred

Beyond Sacred is an interview-based theatre production by Ping Chong + Company exploring the diverse experiences of young Muslim New Yorkers. It was commissioned by LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, located in Queens, New York. Queens is the most ethnically diverse urban area in the world with more than 180 different languages spoken in the Borough.

The play is based on interview transcripts conducted by Ping Chong + Company. It was part of a two-year interdisciplinary artistic and academic program meant to challenge stereotypes and illuminate life experiences of culturally identified Muslims in 21st century, post 9/11 New York City.

The performers are all New Yorkers in their twenties. They are not actors. Their stories are real.

Through 2017 more than 10,000 people have seen *Beyond Sacred* nationwide.

Check out *Beyond Sacred* ⊙→

Learn more about Ping Chong + Company ⊙→

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

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

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

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