Learning from Artists: Four Focus Groups Conducted for ARTISTS UP

To inform the work of 4Culture, Artist Trust and City of Seattle Office of Arts & Culture

Final Report   2015

Prepared by Claudia Bach

with Susan Kunimatsu

advisarts
consulting

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Final Report

AdvisArts Consulting, June 2015

Introduction

This report draws together what was learned through four artist focus groups organized by Artists Up (AU) between July 2013 and April 2015. The intent of this research was to hear directly from artists so that their voices can better inform the planning and activities of 4Culture, Artist Trust and the City of Seattle Office of Arts & Culture. These focus groups brought together forty-two artists to explore issues, concerns and barriers related to artist support in Seattle, King County and Washington State. Participants represented a broad range of artistic disciplines and practice. All generously shared their experiences, and identified ideas and recommendations for change. The initial focus group was held with Latino/a artists in 2013. The second and third groups were convened in 2014: one with Asian, Asian American and Asian Pacific Islander artists, and another with African American, African and Black artists. The fourth and final group was held in April 2015 with Native artists.

All four focus groups were conducted by AdvisArts Consulting and made use of the same question protocol (Appendix A.) A Summary Memorandum was developed for each group, and identified key findings and recommendations from that focus group. (See Appendix B for a listing of all findings and recommendations.) For this final report the consultants compared the findings and recommendations documented for each of the four groups to identify actions that can strengthen support for artists from these communities. The insights shared by these artists provide rich material to help shape the work ahead for Artists Up as a collaborative, for the individual agencies, and for peer arts agencies and organizations.

Background

Artists Up is a collaborative effort by Artist Trust, 4Culture and Seattle's Office of Arts & Culture to work together to explore and create opportunities towards the goal of better serving individual artists, especially artists in Seattle, King County, and Washington State who are not currently engaged with these organization's funding opportunities and programs for individual artists. The three organizations started this effort in 2012 and developed the following statement of purpose:

ARTISTS UP Statement of Purpose

ARTISTS UP is a joint initiative to improve our ability to serve our respective and combined constituencies of individual artists in Seattle, King County and Washington State.

We seek to have our programs and services better meet the needs of the full spectrum of individual artists, including artists of color, ethnic minorities, limited/non-English speaking artists, non-traditional and rural artists, artists with disabilities, elder artists, and artists new to our communities.

Our goal is to better communicate, build and maintain relationships with artists, especially those currently underserved, so that:
1. *They are aware of and can access those programs of interest to them.*
2. *We develop and deliver programs, as individual agencies and as allied agencies, that are best suited to these artists.*

By undertaking this initiative and related research we expect that the needs, perspectives and experiences of these artists will be better understood and will shape the future work of our agencies separately and together, permitting our communities to benefit from the diversity of artists and art forms here in Seattle, King County and Washington State.

Representatives of the three organizations worked in 2012 to shape the statement of purpose and undertook a scan of relevant selected programs and projects of interest from around the country. The resulting Research Scan Report helped Artists Up select an initial set of programs. A decision was made to provide information and resource gatherings, and to hold focus groups, with artists from four communities of color: Latino/a artists, Asian, Asian Pacific Islander and Asian American artists, African American, African and Black artists, and Native artists.

Reaching Out and Listening, 2012-2015

The first group of artists convened was during the summer of 2013: Two public information sessions and an invitation-only focus group with Latino/a artists were held. The first information session provided artists an opportunity to meet staff from each Artists Up agency as well as the Washington State Arts Commission and Bellevue Arts Commission and learn about funding programs offered by each entity. At the second session a panel of five Latino/a artist panel explored their career and funding experiences as artists working in various disciplines and from a variety of backgrounds. These artists also provided pre-event outreach in the community. The artists shared their pathways, challenges and successes. Approximately forty-five artists attended these sessions. Interpreters were provided for both these sessions although only two participants ultimately used this service. An extensive Spanish/English packet of materials was

developed and distributed that included information on funding programs, public art programs, geographic eligibility maps, a bilingual glossary of terms relevant to funding, a listing of local arts agencies, as well as biographies of the presenting artists. Additionally, each artist on the panel compiled their own list of *Tools, Tips & Resources* for inclusion in the packet. The packets are the most extensive set of Spanish/English materials heretofore developed by any of the agencies, individually or collectively. Evaluation forms were collected at each of these two sessions and data was compiled. The focus group was held with eleven artists a few weeks later, facilitated by Claudia Bach of AdvisArts. A 2013 Summary Memorandum was developed by AdvisArts that identified six key findings from the focus group, and provided recommendations for future actions based on the input from the resource sessions and the focus group.

Artists Up used the experiences from 2013 in gathering Asian, Asian American and Asian Pacific Islander artists in spring 2014. A resource evening was held in June 2014 building on the most successful elements of the inaugural year. It was held at Asian Counseling and Referral Services in Seattle and more than sixty individuals attended representing a mix of backgrounds, artistic disciplines and levels of experience. The evening provided artists the opportunity to speak in small groups and one-on-one with representatives from the three Artists Up agencies, ArtsWA (Washington State Arts Commission) and the Bellevue Arts Commission, as well as with seven peer artists who had received support from those organizations and who agreed to serve as Ambassadors in their respective disciplines and communities. A *Tools, Tips & Resources* handout was compiled from those artists and included in the resource packet for all attendees. Time for networking was provided before and after the program. A focus group with thirteen artists followed at Yesler Community Center in Seattle later that month, also facilitated by Claudia Bach. AdvisArts prepared a Summary Memorandum in July 2014.

In October 2014 an information and resource session was held at the Northwest African American Museum (NAAM) in Seattle with a focus on African American, African-born and Black artists. Seven individuals working in a variety of artistic disciplines served as community Ambassadors, and worked in advance to invite artists. Nearly one hundred individuals attended. This was followed later in October by a focus group attended by ten artists. Tools and tips from the Artist Ambassadors were assembled and made available online. The focus group was held at the Douglass Truth Branch of Seattle Public Libraries, and facilitated by Claudia Bach. The Summary Memorandum was completed in October 2014.

Artists identifying as Native American were invited to a fourth information and resource session held at Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center, Discovery Park in April 2015. Eleven Artist Ambassadors worked with Artists Up and brought together more than seventy artists to attend this session that included informational roundtables and resource tables. Tools and tips on career issues were collected from Ambassadors for online distribution. A week later a focus group was held, also at Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center. Eight

artists attended, with one additional artist providing input via email. Claudia Bach again served as facilitator and developed a Summary Memorandum completed in May 2015.

The four Summary Memoranda developed by AdvisArts serve as the basis for this final June 2015 report that synthesizes what was learned through the four focus groups. The areas identified for action are meant to inform the work of 4Culture, Artist Trust and the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, as well as their collaborative work as Artists Up.

Five Areas for Action

A review of all the findings and recommendations from the four focus groups illuminates key areas for action. The areas outlined here highlight the core themes that bridge the concerns and perspectives of the forty-two artists convened. Elements overlap between the areas. These five areas for action reflect the consultants' synthesis of the ideas and suggestions that emerged from the participating artists.

> Action Area 1: Build and invest in opportunities for artist-to-artist knowledge sharing, networking and peer-to-peer assistance.

> Action Area 2: Develop and refine tools and communication pathways to increase the chances that artists of color will have success in competitive selection processes.

> Action Area 3: Design and boldly experiment with new ways of selecting artists as recipients of funding and non-monetary support.

> Action Area 4: Commit to building and maintaining trust relationships with individuals and organizations connected to communities of color and immigrant artists. Plan for adequate resources to sustain such efforts over time.

> Action Area 5: Increase the number of artists of color engaged with matters of policy and planning for Artists Up organizations.

A list of selected strategies and tactics identified follows each action area in this next section. These provide an array of possibilities for Artists Up, as a collaborative entity, and for Artist Trust, 4Culture, and the Office of Arts and Culture, as well as peer organizations, as they pursue issues of equity and access for all artists they wish to serve.

It is important to keep in mind that the four Summary Memoranda have additional information provided by the individual focus groups. These should be consulted for additional details and to more fully explore the specific interests and concerns of Latino/a artists; Asian, Asian American and Asian Pacific Islander artists; African American, African and Black artists; and Native artists. (Appendix B. provides a summary of findings and recommendations from each of the four groups.)

Action Area 1:

Build and invest in opportunities for artist-to-artist knowledge sharing, networking and peer-to-peer assistance.

Learning from other artists is powerful and inspiring. Artists seek examples of artists who are from their community or background and who have achieved career success. Artists of color feel they do not see enough artists who share their race or ethnicity in the world of arts funding.

Many believe that artists of color face a variety of potential hurdles when entering the world of organized resources and funding. These include a lack of knowledge of opportunities, not knowing anyone who has successfully navigated these systems, not writing or speaking the "language of funding," and for some, English language barriers. Artists gain information as well as encouragement from working with artists who have shared cultural roots. Artists, rather than agency staff, can often interact in more informal community settings and this makes for a more grounded connection. Such contact builds and strengthens artist networks and the community.

One-on-one and small group learning, and informal relationships are seen as being most effective for reaching and coaching artists who are new to arts agencies. Cohort learning, especially when grounded in a shared artistic discipline or a similar cultural background, can lead to sustained change. Some opportunities may be best suited to a specific racial or ethnic background, others to all artists of color, and some for all artists regardless of background.

Artists are underutilized by agencies as partners and allies in reaching and supporting other artists. The Artists Up Ambassador program, the fledgling approach that emerged over the course of these focus groups to connect with artists in the community, was seen as a potential platform for future artist-to-artist endeavors.

It is important to respect the time and effort of artists who take on such roles. Some artists are able and willing to do so as volunteers, but for most it is not possible to do such work in a sustained manner without reasonable financial compensation. Fairly compensating artists for such work demonstrates the value that agencies have for artists. Artists who do such work on behalf of arts organizations and agencies should be compensated at prevailing rates.

Selected strategies and tactics related to artist-to-artist support:

- Create regular informal artist-to-artist networking opportunities with a professional skills training component, and chances to share and discuss one's art with artists of a similar background. These might be similar to what is done for ethnic festivals at Seattle Center where training is provided and information is shared.
- Build a professional development program that is tied to actual grant opportunities, and in which participants work on and submit applications over at least twelve months, including grant reporting and follow though.

- Hold a "Grants Café" two or three times a year where artists of color can share skills, and ask questions, in a safe environment.

- Provide a stipend to grant-funded artists of color to actively share their experience of navigating arts agencies processes. Develop ways for these artists to be asked questions by other artists, and to share experiences and stories in person and/or online. Train these artists to teach and pass on application skills: how to develop work samples, create budgets, how to speak grant language/ vocabulary, etc.

- Develop formal artist-to-artist mentoring or coaching. Include a way for an artist to request that a fellow artist coach them through a situation or opportunity.

- Provide a platform for AU Ambassadors to continue to meet as catalysts for artist community building.

Action Area 2:

Develop and refine tools and communication pathways to increase the chances that artists of color will have success in competitive selection processes.

Artists must be connected to an information pathway if they are to consider applying or participating in agency opportunities. Once an artist is aware of an opportunity the artist must then assess if they feel they have the skills, materials and time for tackling the application process. Participating artists shared many examples of how these elements each represent hurdles to applying.

Some artists feel they are well "hooked in" via list serves and email notification, while others are not well connected to these. Receiving an e-newsletter or blanket notification is often not enough to make the opportunity feel accessible. Personal or more targeted communication is more likely to encourage a willingness to proceed. This is fed, in part, by the factors noted in Action Area 1 — not knowing any or many artists for whom the process has been successful.

Skills, tools, materials, and the nuances of the funding world's "do's and don'ts" remain unclear for many artists who are ready to apply. Existing tools do not adequately fill the desired needs. While some artists are very familiar with online tools, or have attended workshops and sessions they felt were useful, many are not, and they know many other artists who are not aware of such resources.

There is enthusiasm for a "toolbox" that includes very explicit examples of the types of materials expected. Artists want to see samples of what a good application and support materials look like. They also wish to see examples of "bad" applications, with a clear and easy explanation of why this was considered a poor application. Annotation of examples (both good and bad), step-by-step graphics, "quick start" guides, and samples of each required application component are seen as useful. Online skills are recognized as increasingly fundamental, and this is an area where training needs vary broadly. Many artists are fluent and comfortable in the digital world, while for others it is intimidating and problematic. Standardized digital formats for applications and work samples are strongly desired, with hands on assistance needed by some artists.

Many of the suggestions made by participating artists are linked to Action Area 1: providing opportunities for artists of color to help each other with the process of developing and using the skills and tools for professional development. Small workgroups or cohort learning, skill-building tied to networking sessions or at artist–attended events, or other in-person learning and communication is seen as essential, in tandem with strong online tools.

Selected strategies and tactics related to tools and pathways:

- Designate AU agency resources for Ambassadors or other "cultural liaisons" or street teams of trusted artist peers to develop and nurture relationships directly in communities.

- Create an "early release" system for information on funding opportunities to reach artists of color, and use Artists Up Ambassadors to follow up.

- Provide examples showing the type and quality of materials expected for applications, with work samples. Provide access to such information in Spanish.

- Provide annotated examples of invoices, contracts and other business tools.

- Provide templates for community-based arts projects.

- Show pathways for various types of artists' careers, using simple creative graphics to indicate likely building blocks for a career in various art forms, including public art.

- Have tool-building opportunities at events so that artists can access direct assistance, such as a skilled writer to help with writing a bio, or a photographer taking headshots.

- Develop a free yearlong grant-writing cohort specifically for artists of color, and an on-the-ground grants advocate who helps mentor individuals of color with their applications.

- Create rosters similar to the Ethnic Heritage Roster for other art forms beyond visual arts, and for artists of particular backgrounds to find each other by discipline.

- Provide more feedback on why an artist was not selected in competitive selection processes

- Match business and technology professionals of color with artists of color needing related assistance.

- Increase access to skilled individual staff members at agencies, finding ways to align that need as grant deadlines approach. Provide more opportunities for review of draft grant applications and more clarity that it is appropriate to request such review.

- Provide more project management support for public art projects so artists don't spend so much time hiring all the trades, technicians and negotiating contracts. Develop vetted subcontractor and vendor rosters.

- Consider ways to add an additional year to an artist grant via a simplified application add on.

Action Area 3.

Design and boldly experiment with new ways of selecting artists as recipients of funding and non-monetary support.

Communication, tools and peer support may increase the number of applications, but to what end? A larger pool of applicants, in and of itself, is not a goal for artists. The change that speaks most loudly is the number of artists of color who are receiving funding or other forms of support. The widely used peer panel review systems is seen as problematic in that it tends to mostly support existing systemic patterns. There is interest in seeing more experimentation in how artists are selected for support. Participating artists hope to see Artist Up agencies move beyond current methods, and actively explore how decision-making power can reflect broader ideas and understanding of art and its creators.

Increasing the number of artists of color who sit on selection panels is seen as essential, if that is the core method that persists. Many artists who participated in the focus groups had never sat on a panel, and were unclear how artist panelists are selected. Educating *all* panelists on more expansive cultural perspectives is seen as desirable. Some artists are concerned that the considerable time and limited compensation for panel participation does not make it possible for many artists from their community to participate.

Funding that is focused on a specific project with a specific outcome, rather than a more ongoing concept of art making, is problematic for artists from some backgrounds. There is hope for more ongoing support of artists:

supporting a career not just project by project.

A number of suggestions focused around the idea of empowering individuals or organizations rooted in specific communities of color to select artists for support. This may be monetary or non-monetary, or a combination of the two.

Some saw the emergence of the AU Artist Ambassador program as a platform for such grantmaking: an opportunity to pilot discretionary funding in new ways. Selection through nomination or the advocacy of other artists is seen as being more culturally appropriate, especially for those artists whose cultural background makes a competitive selection processes uncomfortable. There is interest in seeing trusted and respected intermediaries play a role in selecting artists since this is likely to be more closely tied to community values.

Public art selection, and the larger issue of working as an artist in this arena, was primarily described as being complex, with a low chance of being selected since the pool of prospective artists is essentially small and is seen as having a different educational and resource history. Receiving and managing a public art commission is seen as high risk for the artist. A few artists had successfully navigated public art opportunities. Some artists see a strong disconnect between the current public art system and the needs and desires of communities of color. There is hope for a more locally focused

approach on selection of artists and the creation of the work in those communities.

Some artists desire better data and more transparency on the number of applicants of color, and the number of those artists who have success in the funding process as a benchmark. Artists of color who applied in the past and were "almost funded" may be an important pool of recipients for some forms of support.

Selected strategies and tactics related to selection processes:

- Provide funds for at least three years to pilot a new grant program to be designed and distributed by Artists Up Artist Ambassadors.

- Permit artists of color to advocate for or nominate a fellow artist to receive support rather than requiring the individual artist to toot their own horn.

- Create a pool of discretionary funds available only to individuals who have participated in AU learning/training programs.

- Develop new public art selection criteria that are more responsive and attentive to working with artists who reflect the face and heart of a particular place, or neighborhood.

- Provide panelist training to permit broader range of artists to sit on panels, and require Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) training for all panelists. Seek opportunities to make first time panelists strengthen their voices in selection processes.

- Examine the way the term "quality" is used to create exclusion.

- Match small amounts of grant money with other types support or resources such as: space, access to equipment, community/audience access. Agencies might partner with arts organization to offer a residency plus funding.

- Consider distributing award amounts on a monthly basis, like a stipend.

- Ensure that artists are not expected to produce art that reflects their race or ethnicity.

- Expand the use of artists of color on panels and in advisory roles.

- Consider using crowd sourced selection methods on occasion.

- Provide funding to support places, programs and opportunities where artists of color already gather. Explore having community or neighborhood organizations serve as intermediaries: assisting artists in applying, and/or serving as the selection panel. Use existing hubs, arts and non-arts, to provide information and direct service training for artists.

- Link teaching artist funding to funding for that artist's own work or time.

Action Area 4.

Commit to building and maintaining trust relationships with individuals and organizations connected to communities of color and immigrant artists. Plan for adequate resources to sustain such efforts over time.

Relationships between individuals are at the heart of building trust, communication and connection. AU agencies have individual staff members who have made concerted and successful efforts to build and maintain such relationships with communities of color. This is perceived as often built on a staff member's personal commitment to issues of equity, but it is not seen as being an agency-wide approach. The commitment of the AU agencies to the efforts of Artists Up, or other efforts focused on artists of color, are applauded but with caution. There is considerable concern that such efforts come and go, but that sustained commitment must be linked to leadership, staffing and actual dollars for implementing initiatives.

AU agencies can look for new ways to work in partnership with community representatives and leaders to more effectively serve artists from communities of color. There is value in developing a more robust system of using accomplished artists and well-respected community organizations as conduits and decision-makers.

Artists Up has opened the door for frank conversations around complex topics including equity, race, class, identity and systemic barriers. The participating artists shared many thoughts and hopes for the future for the artists in their community. A number of artists voiced concern that such initiatives set expectations for change, and that there may not be the financial and leadership commitment suggested by the creation of Artists Up. There is guarded optimism for action.

Selected strategies and tactics related to building relationships:

- Develop relationships with existing organizations in targeted communities, and permit them to serve as conduits to agencies by helping with artist applications and/or as serving as the intermediary grantee.

- Build on AU Artist Ambassador relationships

- Hold to a baseline assumption of pay, even modest pay, when asking for artists' time.

- Assess existing funding programs to see how they seek to build trust and share risk together with artists of color who are recipients. Consider what the risk to the artist is, and how agencies can "invest" in that artist and mitigate the individual's risk.

- Undertake media awareness and publicity locally and nationally to highlight the accomplishments of artists of color.

Action Area 5.

Increase the number of artists of color engaged with matters of policy and planning for Artists Up organizations.

Artists of color who choose to engage with the world of organized funding often do so with a sense of wariness. There is an assumption that they must adapt to prevailing systems, even when those systems do not feel appropriate or comfortable. Participating artists voiced concern with how well their perspective is understood or taken into account when planning, allocating resources, and setting policy.

For some communities this is primarily about accessibility and the hope to see agencies become increasingly connected to their communities in respectful and meaningful ways. For the Native community there are some very specific issues related to complex political, religious and legal concerns that circle around authenticity, enrollment and federal recognition of tribes. Artists and leaders from communities of color are best positioned to work with agencies to navigate and set a mutually beneficial path for the future.

Artists of color spoke of the ongoing balancing act that can occur around artistic identity. Many artists voiced a sense that funders often ask and expect artists to fit in a specific ethnic or racial box. While participants uniformly noted pride in their respective background and heritage, they do not want there to be expectations that pigeon hole their creative work. There is discomfort and frustration with narrow approaches. Some artists also feel that they are asked to carry roles and jobs that they are not suited to or trained for: social service provider, educator, business entrepreneur. They want to make sure these issues and concerns are being considered, and adhered to, as programs are developed.

Opinions vary among participating artists on the pros and cons of artist funding or programs that are focused on a particular ethnicity or race. That said, most see the need to level a playing field that is built on a history of unequal access to resources, and a system that favors those who are most comfortable with the dominant culture's modes and methods. Including and empowering artists of color in decision-making roles is seen as a meaningful way to shift the existing paradigm.

Selected strategies and tactics related to policy and planning:

- Work with AU Ambassadors and other artists of color to identify a larger pool of potential participants to sit on various decision-making bodies.

- Create and share with other agencies expanded rosters of artists of color willing to work with agencies.

- Include artists of color as members and/or advisors on all policy and planning bodies.

- Create and use a clear set of protocols for AU partner agencies when dealing with culturally- specific legal issues or traditional frameworks, such as defining a pathway that places the determination of Native American authenticity back in the Native community.

Next Steps

The focus group research identified clear opportunities for action. Some suggested actions are small and simple, while others require more substantial changes, with significant commitment of time and resources. There are areas where change will be most effectively addressed by Artists Up as a collaborative, and other ways that each of the three Artist Up agencies can use this information to shift the work they do individually. A number of steps can ensure that this information spurs action.

1. Share what has been learned with organizational leadership at the staff and board/commission level.

2. Share with artists what has been learned, building trust that the voices of the artists who came forward to participate in this process were heard.

3. Identify which actions are within the purview of Artists Up as a collaborative, and prioritize a timeline for action on selected issue.

4. Identify a process and timeline for sharing with staff and identifying action within 4Culture, Artist Trust, and the City of Seattle Office of Arts and Culture.

5. Explore ways to disseminate this information to inform other organizations and share with the larger field.

6. Plan to assess, evaluate and report change over the next three to five years, sharing progress of joint and individual actions of the three Artists Up agencies.

The formation and work to date of Artist Up is evidence of the interest and commitment these agencies share to "better communicate, build and maintain relationships with artists…currently underserved, so that: They are aware of and can access those programs of interest to them, and to develop and deliver programs…that are best suited to these artists." With the input provided by the artists participating in these focus groups Artist Up and its parent agencies are now poised to tackle these goals with new clarity and purpose.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the artists who gave generously of their time to inform this research. Every effort has been made to list individuals and organizations appropriately. Please contact heather.dwyer@4culture or Irene.gomez@seattle.gov if you note any errors.

Artists Participating in the Artists Up Focus Groups, 2012 – 2015
Denotes that the artist also served as Artists Up Ambassador

Humaira Abid – Visual
Juan Alonso-Rodriguez – Visual *
Amma Anang – Performing *
Roberto Ascalon – Literary/Performing *
Nilki Benitez – Literary
Tyrone Brown – Performing *
Ricardo Campagnoli – Visual
Eloisa Cardona – Performing *
Brian Chin – Performing *
Carina del Rosario – Visual *
Marita Dingus – Visual/Public Art *
John Feodorov – Visual *
Roger Fernandes – Visual *
Alma Garcia – Literary *
Diana Garcia-Snyder – Performing
Maria Gargiulo – Media/Film *
Boris Gaviria – Visual
Yonnas Getahun – Mixed/Performing *
Joshua Heim – Administrator *
Loriann Hernandez – Curator
Paul Jackson – Media

Jacque Larrainzar – Performing
Natasha Marin – Literary/Performing *
Yeggy Michael – Performing
Saya Moriyasu – Visual Haila
Old Peter – Visual * Cristina
Orbé – Performing * Shaun
Peterson – Visual Kristen
Ramirez – Visual Tracy
Rector – Media/Film *
Philip H. Red Eagle – Literary/Visual*
Lonnie Renteria – Media/Film *
Fern Renville – Performing *
John Romero – Visual *
Latha Sambamurti – Performing *
Norie Sato – Visual/Public Art
Tay Sianghui – Mixed/Performing
Steve Sneed – Administrator
Rafael Soldi – Visual
Val Tan – Mixed/Performing
Elissa Washuta – Literary *
La-Tonia Denise Willis – Media/Film *

Resources and Networking Hosts

Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute
Asian Counseling and Referral Service
Northwest African American Museum
Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center

Focus Group Meeting Hosts

Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute
Yesler Community Center
Seattle Public Library, Douglass-Truth Branch
Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center

Artists Up Partners

Artists Up Artist Ambassadors, 2012‑‑2015

Peter Ali Juan

Alonso Amma

Anang Roberto

Ascalon Tyrone

Brown Eloisa

Cardona Brian

Chin

Michelle de la Vega

Carina del Rosario

Marita Dingus

John Feodorov

Roger Fernandes

Alma Garcia

Maria Gargiulo

Yonnas Getahun

Joshua Heim

Natasha Marin

Haila Old Peter

Cristina Orbé

Tracy Rector

Philip H. Red Eagle

Fern Renville

John Romero

Latha Sambamurti

Jovino Santos‑‑Neto

Rodrigo Valenzuela

Elissa Washuta

Andrea Wilbur‑‑Sigo

La‑‑Tonia Denise Willis

Artists Up Project Team, 2012 ‑‑ 2015

Payton Bordley – Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Intern

Heather Dwyer – 4Culture, Project Manger

Zoe Funai – Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Administrative Support

Irene Gómez – Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Project Manager

Miguel Guillén – Independent Consultant

Marcia Iwasaki – Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Public Art Project Manager

Barbara Mizoguchi – Artist Trust, Grants Program Manager

Additional In‑‑kind Research Support

AdvisArts Consulting

For additional information on Artists Up please visit www.artistsup.org

AdvisArts Consulting, Seattle www.advisarts.com 206‑‑789‑‑2418 claudia@advisarts.com

Appendix A.
Artists Up Focus Group Protocol

1. When you think about support for you as an artist, what kinds of support come to mind? Which are most important? PROBE: Project grant, technical assistance workshops, fellowship awards, seeking a mentor? What are pros and cons of project orientation?

2. If you were handed a box that contained everything you needed to move your career to the next level, what would be in that box today? What would have been different earlier in your career?

3. Can you identify one thing/barrier that recently kept you back from pursuing an opportunity for which you were eligible? What would have helped you overcome that barrier?

4. Funding source/avenue: What entities (arts organizations, businesses, other kinds of organizations) do you feel are most trusted/ best at reaching those who make art in the _____ communities of the Seattle area? If someone other than a government agency is offering funding does that make it more approachable? Is ethnically focused funding/support a positive or a negative?

5. Do you consider opportunities to network a type of support as an artist? What kind of networking is most useful/important to you?

6. Do you consider there to be a hub for the _____ community in this region? How does this impact _____ artists?

7. Communication: How is it you are here tonight? What was the communication path that got you here? What do you believe are the best pathways for reaching _____ artists? What or who do you consider to be your best source for information related to your career?

8. For those of you who attended the earlier information session, what might have made the gathering more resonant for _____ artists? For you? What about those who are not connected to an "arts scene"? If there were meetings that were discipline‑specific, would that have been more inviting/valuable to you?

9. What is the best way to assess the background and experience of an artist, in your opinion?

10. Is there anything else that you think funders/supporters should keep in mind in strengthening opportunities for artists in our region?

11. Of the things we've discussed this evening, what seems most important to you?

Appendix B.
Findings and Recommendations from each of the Artists Up Focus Groups

A brief summary of findings and recommendations from each focus group is provided here. The order of findings and recommendations does not imply prioritization or importance.

The full Summary Memorandum from each focus group, including strategies and tactics related to the recommendations, can be requested by contacting Irene.Gomez@seattle.gov or Heather.Dwyer@4Culture.org Additional information on Artists Up can be found at www.artistsup.org

LATINO/A ARTISTS Focus Group 2013 (Abbreviated)

Finding 1: Financial assistance is very much needed, but other forms of non-monetary support are also very important.

Finding 2. A focus on "project" funding often does not align well with ways that these artists work and their wishes for how support is delivered.

Finding 3. There are a number of barriers to pursuing funding from agencies:
- a.) The perception that there is a low likelihood of receiving the funding
- b.) The investment of time and costs in preparing applications
- c.) Trying to define appropriate "outcomes" that meet funder expectations

Finding 4. Latino-focused funding is a double-edged sword, yet raises important questions regarding equity in support.

Finding 5. There is a lack of a "hub" in the Seattle area that can serve as a Latino cultural and artistic center.

Finding 6. Clear communication, consistent programs, personal relationships, and active opportunities for input are key for Latino artists to gain knowledge and trust with arts agencies.

Recommendations

1. Make better use of the knowledge held by artists to help fellow artists.
2. Increase professional assistance to artists from agency staff and/or trained, paid supplemental staffing.
3. Provide targeted information to reach Latino/a artists and communities.
4. Examine types and forms of funding and support for ways to enhance flexibility.
5. Improve access to technical and technology skills.
6. Identify ways to simplify and coordinate application processes.
7. Value and fairly compensate artists for their time.

ASIAN, ASIAN AMERICAN, and ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER ARTISTS
Focus Group 2014 (Abbreviated)

Finding 1. Financial support for artists is key, but money is only one dimension of the support that artists need and want from Artists Up agencies.

Finding 2. Selection processes are a critical gateway function and there is the potential for new approaches that can result in greater equity and diversity of artist support.

Finding 3. Committed effort and resources are needed over time for agencies to build relationships with a broader group of A, AA and API artists.

Finding 4. Public art is a world of its own and often requires different targeted strategies to reach a broader range of artists.

Recommendations

1. Develop a comprehensive, example-based, toolbox for artists.
2. Build multiple pathways to assist artists in navigating agency programs.
3. Diversify and experiment with selection processes.
4. Support artist-to-artist networks.
5. Take the long view in building committed relationships in marginalized communities.
6. Look at monetary, non-monetary and job-related opportunities as interrelated pieces in artist support.

AFRICAN AMERICAN, AFRICAN AND BLACK ARTISTS Focus Group 2014
(Abbreviated)

Finding 1. Selection processes are perceived as the key barrier to the inclusion and participation of Black artists in programs and funding in Seattle and King County. Public Art selection processes are seen as being particularly inappropriate to Black artists and communities of color.

Finding 2. The actual number of artists of color to receive funding is seen as the essential issue. There is a desire for relevant data on artists of color funded (number of applications and number of recipients) to be collected, tracked and shared transparently.

Finding 3. Networks among Black artists — face-to face and online — are of strong importance as ways of sharing information, building supportive community and encouraging artists to persevere.

Finding 4. There are artists for whom grant writing, technology, and knowledge of the system is challenging. Participants, however, see larger systemic issues of racism and its legacy, and related issues of lack of access and knowledge, as more significant barriers.

Finding 5. There is interest in seeing more substantive ways to support full time professional artists who are benefiting the whole community. Grant opportunities are often seen as requiring too much effort for too little remuneration.

Finding 6. Participants believe the power of art to create and reflect community values and legacy in the public realm is not being realized or supported in communities of color. Public art, and the way it is selected, is seen in general as being deeply disconnected from community and place.

Recommendations

1. Create opportunities for artist‑to‑artist / peer‑to‑peer assistance and mentorship and build opportunities so that Black artists will be in a position where they "knew better to do better."
2. Take advantage of tech expertise in the region by creating a system to aggregate and match techies who are willing to help artists with their technology needs.
3. Build and test new and bold selection processes.
4. Let artists be artists – don't ask them to be other things. Let them benefit the community by making art, and don't ask Black artists to fit in Black artist boxes.
5. Be clear if Artists Up really has resources to act on recommendations. Don't set up expectations for change without there being dollars behind it.
6. Move beyond racial and ethnic focus in Artists Up programs to be inclusive of all people of color.

NATIVE ARTISTS Focus   Group   2015 (Abbreviated)

Finding 1. Artist to artist support is a powerful and important way of building Native artist capacity and community.

Finding 2. Reach out to Native artists where they are.

Finding 3. Calls for submissions and selection processes should have explicit definitions and expectations related

Finding 4. Issues of authenticity within the Native community should be adjudicated within the Native community.

Finding 5. Native artists often experience the world of competitive funding as being contrary to cultural norms.

Recommendations

1. Improve artists' resource materials and access in-person, online and beyond the office.
2. Actively support Native artists as conduits of skills, networks and resource sharing with other Native artists.
3. Use Native organizations and institutions, both formal and informal, as intermediaries to more effectively reach a broader range of artists, and to ensure that issues around authenticity are handled within the Native community.
4. Establish Artist Up agency protocols for handling Native American-specific issues, with leadership from the Native community.
5. Increase Native artist involvement in policy-level planning and in selection processes for Native and non-Native arts.

See www.artistsup.org for additional information on Artists Up.