

Module 5: Partnerships

Welcome back! My name is Tyiesha Radford Shorts and I am an artist and art organization board member. I will be your guide through Module 5: Partnerships. In this module, we will discuss the importance of partnerships with individual artists, how to measure the success of a given partnership or collaboration, and the different ways in which you can partner with artists—including grants, funding and awards; professional development; and neighborhood revitalization and historic preservation.

LESSON ONE – Why Partner with Individual Artists?

As an arts organization, your local relationships have likely been built over the course of years (possibly even decades), depending on the age of the organization. The sponsors, artists, and community officials with whom you work have become quite familiar with your organization's programming and culture. You frequently attend similar events and interact with homogenous audiences. As a result, it might be difficult for all partners involved to realize a desired growth in your respective organizations or strong footholds in the communities you seek to serve. This is a great time to evaluate your organization's mission and vision, and seek new partnerships with individual artists.

We will begin this lesson by examining what partnerships are and how they offer mutual benefit to arts organizations and artists alike.

Although no common terminology exists among organizations, the Wallace Foundation describes "*partnerships*" (or collaborations, joint ventures, or alliances) in its Cultural Collaborations study as "a coordinated collaboration between two or more parties to achieve a common goal. In principle at least, each participant also contributes resources, such as financial assets, organizational capacity, public image, and constituency characteristics."

We likely have ideas about what each of the listed contributions are; but let's take a look at what each resource could potentially be.

Financial assets are often associated with cash or cash equivalents. While cash is an asset, financial assets among artists and arts organizations are items, both tangible and intangible, that represent economic value and ownership. Tangible (but non-monetary) financial assets include inventory (i.e., paintings, crafts, apparel), real estate (i.e., buildings, land), equipment (i.e., 3-D printers, computers), and vehicles. Intangible assets include logos, trademarks, copyrights, patents, and goodwill (which we will discuss a little more in the "public image" section).

Organizational capacity is mostly related to how prepared the staff, administrators, and ambassadors are to carry out the needs of the organization. As an artist, capacity refers to an

individual's ability to execute certain tasks on one's behalf. Some dimensions of capacity include the following:

Networking or advocacy, marketing, program development or strategic planning, familiarity with information technology, and operations and governance.

Mutual capacity building is ideal in a partnership, but might not always be achievable. Ultimately, we want to keep in mind a rule from a previous lesson, which is that any incongruities should be to the advantage of the artist, not the organization.

Public image is something that is a little more subjective and less tangible than any of the other resources mentioned. No matter how much marketing is done, you can not control your brand—the way your audience thinks about your organization or an artist's artistry. However, once a good public image is achieved (and maintained), it becomes a source of capital for an organization or public figure. Consider the instant legitimacy that artists like Amy Sberaldo or Kehinde Wiley would have on collaborative programming with your institution. Now consider whether your institution would lend the same capital to a lesser-known artist in your locale.

Constituency characteristics are not as easy to define as the aforementioned contributions simply because no one community is monolithic. Each community contains fluid intersections that are sometimes difficult to identify concretely. This is where honesty and transparency are required. If you recognize that your traditional audiences are predominantly white and woman-identifying, try partnering with an artist who is South Pacific Islander and transgender. Beyond the diversity of thought that this artist can bring to your organization, there will also be a diversity of audience and a broadening of impact.

Now, consider how a partnership or collaboration can be mutually beneficial to both your organization and to the selected artist(s). In addition to the common goal that both parties want to achieve, how does the partnership add value beyond the finite term? If done well, the effort can:

- Expand artistic programming and services
- Engage new donors
- Attract other artists
- Expand your organization's reach
- Broaden your audience

Is everyone in your organization a sculptor or craft-maker? If not, how could you benefit from collaborating with a potter, for example? By inviting a community artist to hold a residency in your organization, that artist could host workshops with local hospitals. Is your organization seeking to expand donor relations? Try partnering with an artist who appeals to a younger audience and watch how new owners become engaged. In short, a successful partnership will lead to a competitive advantage for both your organization and your partner(s).

Not all partnerships have the intended result. Some partnerships, when there is little or no consideration given to the mutual benefit of each party, can be exploitative or cause more harm than good. An example of this can be found in the August 2017 Canada 150 celebrations where mainstream arts organizations were funded to collaborate with individual Indigenous artists. Several of those artists have since reported that they had little autonomy in the creative art-making process or the curation of art exhibitions. Additionally, many of the partnerships were temporary and did not last beyond the life of the grant—making for less of a partnership and more of a transactional relationship.

Activity

You should have an idea of how a partnership between your arts organization and an individual artist works and the mutual benefit that this partnership should bring to both or all participants. Now I will offer some exercises that will help to put these outcomes into context. With each reading, I'd like you to take some time to consider the implications that successful collaborations will have on your organization and your local arts community.

First, read the Wallace Foundation's [Cultural Collaborations Study](#), then read The Atlantic's [Does Artistic Collaboration Ever Work?](#) and [This Magazine's](#) article on the 2017 Canada 150 collaborations.

Next, take time to have an honest reflection and answer the following questions: What type of partnerships does your organization currently have with artists? How could your organization benefit from a renewed partnership initiative with artists? What type of value would an artist receive from partnering with your organization? Consider these questions as you create a partnership model using the information from the next lesson.

LESSON TWO – How to Evaluate Your Partnership with an Artist

In this lesson, we will review the considerations that should be given when evaluating the efficacy of a partnership between your organization and an artist. These will apply to a two-party partnership or, as we will discuss later in LESSON FOUR, a multi-party collaboration.

Set goals: Before approaching an artist to develop a partnership, your organization must first determine what its primary short-term and long-term objectives are. Will you seek to broaden your audience? Increase building or staff capacity? Strengthen relations within your neighboring community? Or expand the size and scope of your organization? Once you have determined what your immediate and present needs are, then you will want to identify the types of partners who will help you meet those needs. You will want to ensure that the selected artist agrees with the goals as they have been identified (and that you agree with his/hers/theirs) prior to forming an official partnership.

Make sure everyone is on the same page: Now that you have identified an artist who is aligned with the organization's goals, you will want to determine how best to come to a decision during the planning and implementation of the partnership. Does decision-making involve unanimous voting, consensus, or some other measure? Will the organization be responsible for programming minutiae while the artist handles large-scale ideas? Or will both parties come together frequently to make decisions in tandem? Going into a partnership with an idea of how it will work will save the guess-work during the initial phase.

Communicate: Good communication from the start can be the determining factor in the viability of the partnership. Each participant should have a clear understanding of the frequency and manner of communication during the partnership. Take into consideration the distance between the participants, the abilities of the participants, and the roles each participant will fulfill. Does this require that all participants will meet weekly? Not exactly, but it could. Will each staff member of your organization need to respond to an email chain before a decision is made? Not necessarily. The nature of your partnership and the needs of each participant will dictate how your communicative structure is designed.

Commit adequate resources: When initially outlining the terms of your partnership, there should have been a clear indication of what resources each party would contribute. Once the implementation of the programming has begun, it is important to ensure that those resources are, in fact, being offered. For instance, if your organization agreed to offer a stipend to the artist for a collection of pieces, your organization will want to ensure that those funds are actually provided. This ensures that the partnership continues to be beneficial for the artist while building trust in your organization.

Revisit goals: If you find that your organization is not able to meet desired standards or if it has been determined that the partnership is not meeting the initial objectives, the first response might not be to terminate the partnership entirely. Instead, revisit your shared goals. What was

listed as an immediate objective, might serve both parties better as a long-term objective. Perhaps a desired constituency can be reached through a multi-party collaborative instead of a two-party partnership. Make allowances for proverbial bumps in the road that may delay intended outcomes. This can be done through interviews and surveys where each partner self-reports their perspectives on progress. Or, stakeholders can complete evaluations to offer feedback on the added value of the venture. Partnerships work best when all parties see a return on their investments.

Mutually decide the best way to move forward: The initial term of your partnership has come to a close. Your organization and the artist enjoyed the collaboration. Do you continue working together in a different capacity? Do you extend the life of the original partnership? Maybe you replicate this partnership with other organizations or other artists? Partnerships are fluid and ever-changing. They are also tools to increase the positive impact that the arts have on our communities and society at large.

Activity

To summarize, partnering with artists requires strategic planning on the part of the arts organization prior to fomenting an official partnership. Determining shared goals, establishing clear communication, and maintaining flexibility help to build trust among identified artists and potential partners. To examine how other partnerships are measured, read the Urban Institute's brief on [Partnerships between Large and Small Cultural Organizations](#) and consider how the outcomes of those partnerships were evaluated.

Measuring partnerships with individual artists can be a difficult task for most arts organizations. Interview two artists with whom you would like to partner and ask what metrics they would consider when gauging a potential partnership. For example, what are their immediate and long-term goals? How would they hope to expand a partnership beyond a predetermined objective?

LESSON THREE – How to Get the Most Impact from Your Funding

Now that you have decided to partner with an artist and you have identified the way to evaluate that partnership, you will want to determine exactly what that partnership looks like. In this lesson, we will quickly review the most common partnership – funding.

Many arts organizations are familiar with the process of funding artists or art projects. The organization's level of risk increases as the funding amount increases and the necessary labor directly tied to art-making decreases substantially. This can be a great thing for smaller organizations with fewer human resources. However, when funding is the preferred method of partnership, the application and awarding processes become routine and often become missed opportunities for growth. Let's look at factors that can help your funding make the most impact.

Process over product: Arts funding varies in scope. Some grants are for a specific purpose or have a stated outcome in mind. In order to maximize these types of grants, it is important to consider that artists are problem solvers who strengthen their communities through the making of art. Focus your award on the process of art-making instead of the product itself. Is the artist including your organization's constituents in the process? Will the artist draw attention to an important issue? Consider the journey an artist takes in the art-making process along with the final product.

Transferrable funding guidelines: Does your funding apply to media artists and visual artists alike? If not, maybe it should. Consider the breadth that a literary artist could bring to a project over a performing artist and vice versa. Some grants don't receive the desired impact because the scope of funded artists was too narrow. This is a great time to evaluate the immediate and long-term goals of your organization as well. If your organization would like to have more spoken word performances accompany some of your visual art projects, take a look at your grants to see what growth can be made.

Include artists in your process: Artists can best describe their funding needs. They can honestly say if a timeline is sufficient or too restrictive, if guidelines inhibit the artistic process, or if they no longer feel autonomy in the creative process. Make a regular practice of including previous awardees in the development of your funding guidelines. This practice serves many purposes – namely, lengthening the partnership beyond the life of the original grant.

Don't make one artist be all things: As your organization seeks to broaden its audience, consider the "ask" of some of your individual artists. Is an artist who identifies with a marginalized group the only recipient from that group to receive an award? Why? Did other artists who share that identity apply? If so, why were they not selected? Be sure that you are not expecting one artist to represent an entire community.

Continually evaluate funding guidelines: As your partnerships grow, so should your organization. There should be a constant practice of evaluating your funding guidelines to ensure that the work you support is relevant and reflective of the communities you serve. For instance, a fellowship supporting an artist who travels to Yemen in 2000 should have different considerations when supporting a similar artist traveling to the same country in 2017. Travel restrictions, political implications and the like will weigh heavily on the resulting art production.

Activity

Your organization likely has a “flow” when it comes to grants, awards and fellowships. These are necessary for artists and art collectives who don’t have equal access to capital. To ensure that your funding processes are the most equitable, evaluate the grants that your organization is responsible for. How long has each grant been available to artists? When was the last time you revised your guidelines? How frequently do you solicit artists in developing those guidelines? If you are unsure of the response or if it has been more than five years, now may be a good time to consider revamping your processes. Remember, your partnership with artists should meet their goals as much as yours.

Read the WITF article, [“For minority artists, race plays a factor in the hunt for funding.”](#) Are there trends in the Pittsburgh arts community that reflect your locale? How diverse are your organization’s employees? Do they reflect the communities you wish to serve? How can you attract a more diverse staff?

Next, speak directly to two or three artists within your community about arts funding sources. Are there common trends that exist? What funding sources exist in the field and how do artists become connected to them?

LESSON FOUR – Partnership Beyond Funding

In this lesson, we will look at partnerships that are not based on funding relationships.

Let's begin with professional development. Some organizations have exhausted funding sources or don't see grants as the most sustainable form of partnership. As a result, consider professional development opportunities for artists as an option. For instance, your organization can partner community artists with local attorneys, graphic designers, insurance agents, and engineers to discuss the production element of their artistic craft. Being a talented singer is one thing; knowing copyright law for your song lyrics or how to create graphics for your album cover are different matters entirely.

Next, we will consider exposure and promotion. The Greater Columbus Arts Council of Columbus, Ohio (along with other arts organizations and individual artists) marries both with a project called Columbus Open Studios & Stage. For several days, the Council coordinates a tour of the city where individual artists open their studios to the general public. Art lovers are able to visit artists and observe art-making in real time while forging connections and contributing to the local arts economy.

Now, we will look at how providing physical space can make a smaller organization self-sustaining. Creative Control Fest (CCF) is an annual conference and festival designed to highlight the achievements of creatives of color in the creative industries. Now in its seventh year, the organization, which does not own a physical building, has been able to partner with the Columbus College of Art and Design, the Columbus Museum of Art, and the Lincoln Theatre to host programming and reach broader audiences. CCF reaches constituencies that the larger arts organizations don't yet have the capacity to reach, while introducing its stakeholders to institutions they might otherwise not have had reason to engage.

Finally, we will discuss historic preservation. This is where partnerships expand to collaborations as, in most cases, local municipalities must join the partnership. In developing neighborhoods, many buildings or residences are categorized as historic structures. The preservation and beautification of these structures become equally important. Sometimes, however, cities overlook developing areas until there is more of a public interest, leaving the residents and local artists to get creative about the utility of the spaces. Watch Theaster Gates's TEDx Talk where he describes his Chicago collaboration in "How to revive a neighborhood: with imagination, beauty and art" and consider the ways that your organization can revitalize the communities it serves.

Activity

Now that we have considered alternative partnership possibilities, spend some time visiting the websites of other arts organizations. Analyze their available partnership opportunities. What stood out most to you? Were there any opportunities that you felt could be useful to the artists you serve?

Congratulations! You have now completed Module Five! Take the quiz and see how much you remember.