

Module 2: Helping Artists Thrive – How to be a Coach

Welcome back. I will now be guiding you through Module 2: Helping Artists Thrive – How to be a Coach. Within this module, you will examine the skills needed to be a responsible leader within nonprofit art organizations and your relationship to constituents of public arts agencies. Through the examination of readings and interviews, you will enhance your knowledge and ability to be a coach, implement assessment tools, and offer resources to artists.

LESSON ONE: The 4 E's – Empathy, Equity, Education and Empowerment

What do these terms mean and how can they define your approach within your role as an administrator and the support that your institution provides?

First we will start with empathy. Empathy can be defined as, “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another (of either the past or present) without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). As an administrator, how do you come to understand or process the feelings and experiences of the artists you engage with? This is a particularly critical question to consider, especially if you are working with artists who are of races and ethnicities that differ from your own. How can you seek to be more understanding and aware of their individual and shared experiences based upon your place within our social hierarchy? Although you may be considered an expert in your line of work, your training cannot always account for someone’s lived experience and how it may affect their practice and perception of the world around them. Before listening to lead, you should seek to listen, understand, and affirm where possible.

Next, let’s discuss equity. Although the literal definition can be stated as, “the quality of being fair and impartial,” many organizations internally struggle with defining this term. While I can’t make that call on your behalf, I have gathered a few points of reference from the Center for Social Inclusion that can be used as a way to assess how equitable a situation is. Although these points are framed to discuss racial (in)equity, they can be applied in an intersectional way to other marginalized groups.

When we achieve racial equity:

- People, including people of color, are owners, planners, and decision-makers in the systems that govern their lives.
- We acknowledge and account for past and current inequities, and provide all people, particularly those most impacted by racial inequities, the infrastructure needed to thrive.
- Everyone benefits from a more just, equitable system.

Regardless of your background, you operate in a place of power and privilege as someone who has input in how resources are distributed or programs are developed and implemented. Factors such as implicit biases, social influence, and personal identity will inform your decision-making at some point in your career. Even if it is not intended, there will be an instance where you will fail to consider or include a specific demographic or group in the

process of developing your programs, application processes, etc. As an administrator, you should work diligently to consider an individual's multiple identities and how those identities impact one's ability to participate or engage. It is your responsibility to be well educated and take action to prevent perpetuating further exclusion or discrimination. I have compiled a list of factors to consider when thinking about equity.

- i. Supporting artists of color: When engaging with or providing opportunities for your community of artists, how intentional are you about supporting and ensuring representation for artists of color? Are there opportunities to support culturally specific work that may not be traditionally funded or has historically been under-resourced?
- ii. Supporting artists with disabilities: In addition to ensuring that you address physical barriers within your space, consider how you can think about access more deeply. How are you gathering information about the kind of support artists need while also managing a visible or invisible condition (i.e., data and firsthand account)? For example, perhaps there is a health-related expense that should be considered when thinking about eligibility terms, or advocacy support for more accessible working spaces and conditions.
- iii. Supporting artists across gender and sexuality spectrums: In addition to physical representation, what are other forms of tangible support? Are there organizations that are more deeply engaged with the LGBTQ community that can facilitate engagement and assist with educating you on challenges faced by those artists?
- iv. Supporting artists who are parents or caregivers: What accommodations can be made to ensure that artists can further their careers without heavily impacting their family's needs? Examples of special accommodations include allowing children to accompany parents at residency programs, offering unrestricted stipends for incurred expenses, and flexibility with dates and times that account for school events, etc.
- v. When thinking about literacy and communication, consider if you are offering information or applications in both electronic and hard-copy forms. If an artist or group has not previously participated in your application processes or has limited experience with grant-writing, perhaps you can consider having open question and answer sessions, feedback workshops, or facilitate connections to community-based writing support.
- vi. Unreliable or limited access to transportation may often prevent participation or access to events, shows, or other development opportunities. Is it possible to offer transportation? Can you be flexible in where you host events and convene with artists?
- vii. Low-income and low socioeconomic status are common issues for working artists. If an artist needs to create work but is unable to afford materials, how can administrators offset these costs or facilitate connections to artistic resources?

This may include offering a scholarship or fellowship that subsidizes material costs, establishing a discount system with a local vendor, or locating cooperative spaces that have open studio days and/or are willing to consider bartering and collaboration.

Now, let's move to education. Professional development for individual administrators and teams cannot only expand on the skills an administrator already possesses, but should also assist with refreshing one's way of thinking and providing added exposure to new methods of problem solving. Research should always be a continual part of your work. How are you staying engaged with and aware of funding trends and contemporary issues in the field, while also staying aware of who is producing what within your own communities? This may include reading articles, contributing to journals or other publications, and simply attending events or jurying panels, while being connected to listservs or newsletters that frequently publish opportunities one can share with one's network of artists.

Professional development on both an institutional and individual level aid in one's growth and development of various skills as an administrator. If you are seeking to become a more effective coach, you need to be able to assess your strengths, areas of improvement and where you may have untapped potential.

- As an institution, does your organization offer opportunities for its employees to develop leadership skills, foster teambuilding, and strengthen its mission and vision? Where are entry points for you to participate or suggest tools that can assist in this growth?
- Are there other tools and opportunities such as conferences, courses, field work or special projects that can further enhance your expertise within your specific role?

Lastly, we reach empowerment. Administrators should keep in mind that empowerment extends beyond offering resources or doing the work on behalf of artists to help them succeed. This requires you to ask the question, "When do I step up versus taking a back seat?" When an artist or group seeks your involvement, are they asking for direct input and action or less formal engagement? Where can artists lead the charge or call, while you act as more of a moderator or facilitator that reassures from the sidelines?

Activity

"The 4 E's" are part of a continuous process of growth and development as an administrator, which require time to understand and implement in your own life and practice.

The activities for this lesson will require honesty and introspection as you work through them. First view and reflect on, [What is equity in the arts?](#), a short film which was produced as part of the 2015 Emergence Symposium.

Visit the W.A.G.E. or [Working Artists in the Greater Economy](#) website and learn how this group of cultural workers strives for equity in the arts from a financial standpoint.

Read [Striving for Diversity and Equity in the Arts](#) from the MacArthur Foundation. This is a brief account of how Enrich Chicago is seeking to address inequity and how organizations can discuss this process in an honest and vulnerable way.

Also, read Policy Link's [Creating Change Through Arts, Culture and Equitable Development Summary](#). Although this report is written from a policy perspective, there are several examples of how the arts can be utilized to address various human rights issues.

Lastly, read the National Council of Nonprofits' [Why Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Matter](#).

Exercise + Reflection

After reading the article, complete a project implicit quiz and at least one additional exercise or set of questions. What were your findings? How does this impact how you viewed the personal perceptions of others, and what are some changes or actions that can be implemented to further educate yourself and/or others on bias and creating equitable conditions for the artists you serve?

LESSON TWO: The "Who" – Knowing Your Community and How You Impact It

First, think about how you define "*community*." How are all of the people, organizations, and places around you interconnected? How do they influence the work that you do and reflect that artists that you serve? What are your methods of outreach and/or engagement? Considering your responses, how would you define community engagement? I appreciate how the National Guild for Arts Education frames this term. Their statement reads as follows:

Community describes the people and organizations that are related to a community arts provider's mission: students, parents, families, artists, partner organizations, schools, government agencies, and so on. *Engagement* describes an active, two-way process in which one party motivates another to get involved or take action—and both parties experience change. Mutual activity and involvement are the keys to community engagement.

This framework highlights the fact that there should be a reciprocal exchange in order to consider the engagement effective.

Let's take a moment to discuss a term that is closely connected to the previous lesson: cultural competency. Cultural competency and respect are important factors in building relationships and trust within a community, especially when a high level of diversity is present or when the staff of an institution may not accurately reflect the community in which it is embedded. The University of Kansas Community Tool Box describes cultural competence as:

The joining of *cultural knowledge* (knowing some cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviors of another ethnic or cultural group),... *cultural awareness* (being open to the idea of changing cultural attitudes),... and *cultural sensitivity* (knowing that differences exist between cultures, but not assigning values to the differences, i.e., better or worse, right or wrong).

Being culturally competent allows you as an administrator to not only validate the differences in others, but also to become better equipped to assess data and needs from various points of view.

This leads me to my next point of discussion: history and social climate. Communities are evolving and changing. Before someone is an artist, one is a citizen—effected by their immediate surroundings. Having a holistic view of the impact a community's social climate has on artists requires viewing them first as individuals – acknowledging their personhood and humanity. This includes developing an awareness of issues and themes across multiple sectors that impact an individual's way of life and the correlation that impact has with one's ability to maintain a practice. Consider the history that lives within the community you serve. Have there historically been tensions between various groups or neighborhoods? How is the current housing market impacting the community-at-large? Perhaps there are food deserts or infrastructure problems related to natural resources. Where do your artists fit within these scenarios, and how can they be supported while navigating these issues? In the case of more socially engaged artists, support comes in the form of assistance with projects or initiatives that directly address these societal issues on micro-levels.

Additionally, when making decisions as an administrator and coach, it is important to be mindful of insularity and siloed efforts. Is your scope of influence limited or exclusive to other colleagues or administrators that share your frame of thinking? The way you seek to engage your community should be reflective of input gathered directly from it, paired with your own knowledge and experience within your role. This requires a "bottom up" communication approach. In addition to understanding how information is shared within this immediate network, you should be consulting with key community members, artists and culture bearers in developing solutions to serving the creative communities they exist in; being sure to acknowledge their efforts and time in a way that honors their expertise and contributions. Don't be afraid to also reach out to individuals that work across sectors (such as city officials) or people who might be new to you in your current role. They may possess insight on how artists impact their field of work or study, and may be able to connect you to creatives who you have had limited to no engagement with.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to look at assessment and feedback practices. What are the ways that you receive feedback from artists within your community? Is it a one-time exchange or continuous sharing over a period of time? Tools that can be utilized to garner feedback include developing focus groups, collection of oral statements during events, or surveys. One thing to note when crafting surveys is to be certain of the information you're seeking to gather and how to structure open and closed questions in a way that is clear and allows the contributor to understand what it is that you are asking. For example, asking about effectiveness on a scale from one to ten does not offer much specificity, while leaving additional space for commentary or simply asking for an individual's opinion allows for added depth in a response. Most importantly, there should be a clear plan and timeline for where this information will live and how it will be utilized. This sort of data collection assists with preventing the siloing that was discussed earlier and collecting real-time perspectives, so utilizing this information in a timely and responsible fashion is key.

Activity

Thus far, we have covered the various facets to understanding community and how to think about engagement, in addition to being attentive to the ways that we as administrators make decisions. For your next set of activities, I would like to you read and reflect on Zocalo Public Square's [Audience Engagement is Not Community Engagement](#). Also, visit [The Laundromat Project](#) website. This organization is an example of how an institution and community join forces to push forth creativity and social change. I encourage you to specifically read through their value statements and consider how your community interprets your organization's values and ethos. How is this viewpoint communicated through words and actions, and is it in alignment with their perceptions?

Additionally, I have provided you with a link to the [Knight Foundation](#) website. In the attached link, you will find various examples of tools for program and grant assessment. Select one of the provided resources and use it to evaluate any selected area(s) of your program that relate to artist services, community engagement, analysis or involvement. How does this tool differ from what you currently use? What can you conclude from your findings?

Lastly, get out into your community! Set aside time to attend a screening, performance, or showing of local artists' work that you might have never seen or considered attending. Make note of who is in the audience, supporters that may be listed on materials, the personal background of the artist(s) and content within the work. How do these participants resemble or differ from the artists and audiences with which you currently engage? Consider the reasons that you had not engaged with this work previously (personal preference, time, etc.) and how you can implement viewing new work more frequently? What are some points of entry within your organization or an affiliate that could be useful to this artist or group and how can you share that information?

LESSON THREE: Resource Management – Maximizing What You Currently Have

We often sit on untapped potential within our own institutions and personal networks. Let's discuss how we can begin to uncover our internal, external, physical and human capital.

Let's begin with internal human capital. What are the silent skills or experiences that administrators and colleagues possess that could offer a new or alternative perspective on serving artists? Dialogue and collaboration may assist in uncovering these resources. Work on getting to know your colleagues and their areas of expertise, in addition to assessing your own. For example, could a part of your design team act as an editorial eye for an artist's website, or create a one-pager with best practices for distribution? Once uncovered, how can you approach your senior team with recommendations for collaboration or engaging colleagues more effectively? This could potentially save you an added expense in the long run by removing the need to contract out for work.

Next, we'll review external resources. Who within the community has available resources, or the potential to shift the way that they engage with artists? Are there any groups that you have

worked with in the past that could act as a great long term partner? Look at organizations such as A Studio in the Woods, which is partners with Tulane University in New Orleans, LA; or a residency fellowship initiative led by 3Arts, a Chicago-based arts nonprofit that incorporates four other national programs into conversations around diversity, disability and access.

Physical space applies to both internal and external capital. Space continues to be an ongoing issue for artists and administrators alike. Is there a way that your organization can rethink its use of space to be more inclusive? Does an external entity have a space that could be maximized further? Perhaps you have an existing partner who would be willing to provide a multipurpose space free of charge, for a subsidy on weekends, or during specific time slots to artists looking for a place to host events, conduct interviews, or organize. Are there public spaces that can double as areas for rehearsals or performances?

The artists you engage with directly are also a resource. How do you adapt your language and actions to solidify that relationship and how is it perceived? For example, the McColl Center for Art + Innovation (based in North Carolina) utilizes artists as co-leaders for their Innovation Institute, a creativity training program for individuals, teams and organizations working in various nonprofit and for-profit settings. The artists you serve should be well equipped to act as your ambassadors, so you, as an administrator, must provide them with necessary tools to promote the work that you do in the field.

One final point of consideration is that resources do not always have to be monetary. As an administrator, your expertise and time are valuable. How can you offer knowledge and insight in a way that can open the pathway to added revenue or success for an artist? Extending facilities, connecting artists and sharing cultural capital across organizations can create robust experiences for administrators and artists alike.

Activity

Now that you are brainstorming about your organization's untapped potential, let's apply those findings practically.

For this activity, you will be revisiting Policy Link; this time reviewing the [full version](#) of the summary you read earlier. As you read, make note of who was involved and how they contributed to the development of their designated area of the project. How did their expertise and internal resources manifest in a tangible way? How can some of these planning tools and strategies be used in your own resource management and assessment efforts?

For part two of this activity, I challenge you to make a working "resource" list. Using the discussion points in the video as a guide, assess and list the following:

- Social capital you have as an administrator and how it can be utilized to further support artists.
- Groups or organizations within your community that possess tangible resources that can assist in artist development.
- Internal or external spaces that are under-utilized or could serve as multi-use spaces for events, meetings, rehearsals, etc.
- Artists who can act as consultants and ambassadors for your institution or bridge makers for their own communities.

These are merely examples to begin with. Feel free to think more expansively across sector and geographic region. Once you feel as though you have a robust list, create a plan for engaging with these resources that can aid you in your role and how you directly serve your artists.

LESSON FOUR: Collaboration + Exchange – Working Smarter

When supporting artists, administrators often speak of the exhaustion that comes with attempting to do so much with such little funding, time, etc. How can you work smarter and divide tasks or initiatives in a way that allows for balance and also involves other members of your community?

The most common way to accomplish this goal is through partnership. How do you approach exchange and conversations within partnerships? Do you have language for how you speak about relationship building with others and what your organization seeks to achieve? Our last lesson discussed on understanding potential resources. Once you have identified points of connection, follow up with colleagues and institutions to discuss strategizing and sharing ideas. All parties involved should go through the exercise of identifying what they have to offer and how they can best be of service. In many instances, you may be capable of taking on a specific role within a project, but another person or team may be better equipped to do so. It's about being able to identify your own capacity and honestly communicating what you are able to personally manage within your scope of work.

Creating accurate and thoughtful plans of action aids in success for all parties involved. Some initiatives are one-time occurrences or pilots, while others require deeper investment. Be very aware of how you categorize these engagements and create clear language for what subcategories each partnership fulfills. Ensuring ample time and budgetary planning is key. Organizational "courtship" conversations may occur over a period of months or upwards to a year preceding the actual event or initiative itself.

You should be able to look at the collaborations and partnerships you have engaged in and be able to identify who was served, what elements were successful or in need of improvement, and how the exchange evolved over time. If you find that a partnership has become stagnant or no longer meets your needs or the needs of your artists, do not feel guilty about shifting your focus. The bottom line is that you are seeking out ways to be most effective in helping artists thrive, which means that quality takes immediate priority over quantity. Communicate your intentions to move forward clearly and with enough time for a partner to prepare or close out any final expenses or documentation.

Using topics from previous lessons, let's discuss ten scenarios that serve as examples for the ways in which providing resources to artists can be rooted in collaboration or exchange across various sectors:

1. Legal work is a common aspect of an artist's career. Many organizations partner with lawyers to provide clinics to discuss legal questions and review legal documents or secure subsidized rates for artists as clients.

2. Space has presented itself as an ongoing challenge for artists. Locate and secure community organizations that would be willing to providing space to meet, organize, and strategize. Consider members of your staff who could also act as support and accountable parties.
3. Work with consulates or translators to provide resources in multiple languages or assist with language barriers in application processes and other forms of engagement.
4. Have members of a local birthing or child development community assist with providing childcare at events that require artist-parents' participation.
5. Contract past grantees, recipients, or working artists as panelists or ambassadors in workshops related to your organization's opportunities (answering Q & A, offering insight, etc.). This is another way to financially support artists while creating opportunities for individuals who have completed your programs to give peer-to-peer insight to new artists seeking to engage.
6. Work with local or regional presenting institutions to connect artists to other local curators, academics, etc. This can include collaborations for portfolio reviews, recommending artists for talks or visiting lectures, and organizing open studio events.
7. Collaborate with local arts councils and other arts centers as a contributor to an artist database or a platform for artists opportunities.
8. Leave your physical location to offer services or contribute to another institution's programming. This may include hosting an iteration of one of your programs in a space that allows you to reach a new community.
9. Consider tailoring workshops to suit tangible needs. Organize other arts workers to act as professional development consultants (writing development, building financial literacy, one-on-ones, etc.) for application processes.
10. Find creative ways to barter or compensate artists for their time. When requesting an artist's participation and time, ask yourself, "Does this benefit me or my organization more than the artist?" If the answer is skewed in your favor, then you need to assess: 1) Why that is the case, and 2) How you can find compensation. If compensation is an issue, you should consider speaking transparently about your resources and ask the artist what they need, followed by finding ways that you can fill that gap. Or, simply wait until you are able to offer something tangible. For example, an artist I know worked out an agreement with an organization that allowed him to use their medium format printer to recreate editions of his work in exchange for his participation as a jury panelist.

Activity

Hopefully these examples serve as inspiration for how you can think more creatively about how you define partnership and address artists' needs from a holistic perspective. Your activities for lesson four include the following:

Read and reflect on [The Currency of Connection](#), featured on Americans for the Arts ARTSBLOG, and Bill Flood's and Beth Vogel's [The Arts in Cross-Sector Collaborations](#).

Also, visit the webpage for [The pARTnership Movement](#) to see an example of how arts organizations can use their platform to foster collaboration across sectors. Then read GIA's [In Support of Individual Artists](#). Although written from a funder's perspective, I encourage you to think about how your role as an administrator is key in advocating for artists' needs and how you can continue to educate funders and other decision makers about what's happening on the ground, while informing publications such as these.

Exercise + Reflection

Contact one or two current or previous organizational partners, or perhaps a group that you would hope to partner with in the future for a brainstorming session. Based upon what you've learned from these modules, approach this meeting with the goal of developing the blueprint collaboration that could be executed in the near future. What are the needs of the artists you serve and how can joining forces assist in meeting those needs? Consider what resources you both bring to the table, your capacity (staff and time), financial implications, along with what they are seeking to accomplish and receive from the exchange.

Congratulations! You have now completed Module Two! Now that you have examined various skills and tools to apply to your approach as an administrator, move forward to the quiz and test your knowledge on each lesson. Again, my name is Sharbreon and I hope that you have had an enriching and informative experience. I wish you all the best as you continue to support this amazing field.