

Nonprofit Capacity Building Needs Assessment Arts Community Conversation Summary

**Andy Davey, Madison Community Foundation
Sharon Lezberg, UW Extension-Dane County**

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Introduction: Nonprofit Capacity Building Needs Assessment

The ability of nonprofits to have a positive and lasting impact depends largely on their organizational capacity, the skills and training of staff, and the availability of resources needed to support programs. Extension-Dane County and Madison Community Foundation are hosting a series of conversations with leaders of non-profit organizations to understand the needs for training and capacity building, as well as the resources currently available to support the non-profit sector in Dane County. We are focusing our research in four mission areas (which correlate with Madison Community Foundation's grantmaking focus areas): youth out-of-school-time, environment, arts, and community development. The results of these conversations will inform non-profit serving organizations and suggest ways that funders, educational support organizations, and consultants can help to address gaps that are identified.

This report is a preliminary summary of findings from a community conversation with arts nonprofit leaders, held on October 10th, 2019. The gathering included 23 people at four conversation tables (plus facilitators and notetakers). The analysis draws primarily from this conversation but is supplemented by findings from the pre-gathering survey and some additional interviews. This report is preliminary because we will produce a full report across all sectors once our research is complete.

Key Gaps in Skills and Training: Fundraising, Human Resources, and Data Management

Often leaders of local arts organizations are themselves artists and have had little formal nonprofit management training. Most learn on the job; some have found this kind of urgent and spontaneous learning fun and rewarding but all participants agreed more formal skill-building opportunities would be very valuable. Participants said that access to affordable training across the spectrum of nonprofit management skills would be appreciated but there were a few areas that arose repeatedly: fundraising, human resources, and data management.

Various participants expressed the need for additional grant writing training and assistance, especially for small arts organizations which have few or no paid staff. On the other hand, several people noted that the UW Fundraising and Development workshop is an excellent resource and that it should be made accessible to as many arts organization staff members as possible, especially since there is high turnover among those doing development work. Many

also noted, however, that there is a limited pool of philanthropic grant dollars and argued for both better relationships with local businesses and advocacy for public dollars for the arts (see more below).

Several of the arts leaders noted the dearth of training available for human resource management and said this was the most urgent need. They noted the need for support on everything from how to create and manage a basic payroll system to how to resolve conflicts between staff members. On a related note, some said that a human resource shared service platform could be very beneficial. In other words, multiple organizations could pool resources to hire a third party or share resources to manage staff, provide health insurance benefits, and manage budgets and accounting. This collaborative model used to exist for some organizations but apparently there is no common and accessible model currently for Dane County arts organizations. Many also expressed the need for public safety training, for instance CPR training (see more below). A couple participants mentioned the need for training and resources to help staff with self-care, such as learning and implementing mindfulness techniques to avoid burn-out.

Another area of significant need is data management, both in terms of training and technology. Several people mentioned the need for more sophisticated donor data systems, and training for all appropriate staff on how to use those data systems. Many small organizations rely on rudimentary spreadsheet software to track donors. There was also discussion of training and assistance on how to collect and analyze data to evaluate program impact, including how to identify meaningful metrics from the outset.

Specific Needs for the Arts Sector

Public Safety

A common need we researchers did not expect was for public safety training and planning. Many of these arts organizations host public performances and festivals or host museums and spaces that are regularly free and open to the public. Many of these same organizations, however, don't have plans in place for when a disastrous event might happen, such as an active shooter, or have staff without training for emergencies. Moreover, there was widespread agreement among participants that affordable CPR training for their staff would be very helpful.

Alien Cultures: Melding Business, Nonprofit Management, and the Arts

Several participants discussed how, as people with backgrounds in the arts and humanities, they've experienced a kind of culture shock in the world of organizational management. For instance, a few people mentioned the need to use different parts of their brains to think mathematically when developing budgets and managing finances. Others spoke of the need to pair their free-flowing creative style with organizational discipline and structure. One leader also mentioned the desire to better understand business and for-profit culture, including key concepts and jargon, in order to better communicate and relate to her board members. Overall,

there was a sense that an orientation for artists to the cultural norms and practices of nonprofits and businesses would be a helpful resource.

Facilities

Participants were pleased that the new Madison Youth Arts Center (MYAC) will help meet a longstanding need for rehearsal, performance, and administrative space for arts organizations. That said, MYAC will only partly meet the need in the city. A number of participants also discussed the need for accessible storage space for things like equipment, sets, and costumes. Moreover, they said a centralized storage location and/or a system for tracking these items would allow organizations to share resources and store and use them more efficiently. There was also discussion about the need for housing for visiting artists. One participant mentioned that arts organization staff often resort to hosting people in their own homes, which is an unsustainable solution.

Supporting Independent Artists

Organizations that promote the arts often have a dual mission to support individual artists by showcasing their work and paying the artist for performing or for installations. While these artists are not staff of the organization, they are contracted for specific work or paid for performing. While arts organizations are advocating for community support of the arts, they are also trying to assure that creatives can make a living doing what they love to do. Some leaders noted, however, that they work hard to ensure artists are paid but then they don't pay themselves for the substantial administrative labor they do to produce the art. They noted that both art making and arts administration needs to be valued and funded.

Advocacy

One common theme among the table conversations was the need for more coordinated advocacy efforts by and for arts organizations in Madison. One person mentioned the much larger percentage of public funding for the arts in places like Minnesota and Philadelphia and proposed influencing policymakers to provide more funding at the city or state level here. Several participants noted that there doesn't seem to be an individual arts organization in Madison that currently has the capacity to organize and lead these advocacy efforts; some suggested a new nonprofit may be warranted, others gravitated towards the need for a focused coalition. One participant said that audiences might be better educated about all of the labor and talent behind-the-scenes that makes art possible, and be invited to engage as citizen advocates for the arts.

There was some discussion about why some people in the arts community are less enthusiastic about advocacy efforts. Participants believed those who lack enthusiasm are jaded about advocating for more dedicated funding because they have tried to secure this type of public funding and met significant resistance. One person, however, had hope that the new mayor of Madison might provide some positive momentum and new opportunities. Another person mentioned a specific policy idea that they thought could make a difference: a hotel tax that

would pay for hosting visiting artists. Many participants believed that an important message in any advocacy campaign would be to highlight the role of the arts in generating economic activity.

Boards of Directors

Participants indicated that they rely on the board in numerous ways. Executive Directors turn to board members for support, expertise, and problem solving, particularly on those issues that involve non-profit management. Board members who have organizational, legal, or financial expertise are particularly important, and often difficult to find. One participant emphasized that board members with this type of experience can provide training to other board and staff members, thus building the capacity of the board. Board members also are instrumental in fund-raising and donor recruitment. All organizations, but especially volunteer-run or those with limited funding, rely upon passionate and committed board members to support executive staff and program initiatives.

Participants were concerned with recruiting board members who come with board experience or experience with running an arts organization. As mentioned previously, managers of arts organizations tend to have backgrounds and expertise in the arts, and the language of non-profit management is an acquired language – one which experienced board members can help facilitate. Participants were also concerned that Board members reflect the diversity of the community. *(Please see the section on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for a deeper discussion on board diversity).*

While some board members come to the organization with prior experience, participants shared that most board members need to be trained about their role. Training topics mentioned to improve board performance included understanding the business structure of the organization; understanding the role of board members in strategic planning and financial decision-making; interpreting financial statements; building a partnership with staff; fund-raising, and governance.

Collaboration

We asked participants, both in the survey and in the discussion session, to comment on opportunities for collaboration, and how collaboration might serve to strengthen capacity for the arts sector as a whole. While participants discussed the value of collaboration, they were also wary of funders and others pushing collaboration for its own sake. Participants stressed that collaboration is built on personal relationships and trust. Collaboration is fostered when organization representatives have the opportunity to make connections, to share projects with one another, and to have an understanding of different organizations in the art space.

Collaboration in Grants and Events

Many leaders noted that grants can be a way to facilitate productive collaborations but only when the collaboration emerges organically out of the work and is led by the organizations themselves. Collaboration doesn't work when its pushed primarily by a funders own agenda.

Moreover, collaboration is difficult and takes significant time and effort; funding must be commensurate. Often larger organizations, or those with a facility, are in a better position to invite collaboration or to be the lead organization in submitting a grant application that includes a collaboration component.

Another space where arts organizations could enhance collaboration is in holding multi-organization events. Organizations can look for synergies when planning or designing events. Additionally, there is opportunity for cross-marketing of performances.

Information Hub (Non-profit Space for Learning and Collaboration)

A number of participants suggested that a non-profit-serving organization could convene gatherings to build connections that lead to collaboration among arts organizations. Discussions emphasized the value of having a place for staff and personnel of non-profit organizations to come together for training, resource sharing, collaboration, and peer networking. Participants mentioned that it is hard to find information about what training programs and funding opportunities are available. This information is especially difficult to find for people newer to the field and for those who already feel marginalized because they're not part of the dominant culture. Many people mentioned the need for a centralized information source such as a database of local resources. Local agencies and resource serving organizations host training programs and information sessions, but there is no consolidated source of trainings available – instead, the information about these programs is dispersed randomly. Moreover, improved marketing and promotion platforms would be beneficial. Participants noted the inefficiency of having to constantly send out marketing notices to multiple listservs and venues.

Co-working: Opportunities for Sharing Space and Administrative Functions

The issue of facility space came up several times in our conversations. As mentioned above, shared space could provide rehearsal, performance, and administrative space, as well as storage space for props and set materials. As noted above, participants suggested that there is opportunity for models of collaboration (co-working or cooperatives) where administrative functions could be pooled (financial software platforms, bookkeeping and accounting services, health insurance, payroll and human resources services). One participant mentioned how beneficial it was to work with a marketing professional for promoting a recent event and said that a way for multiple organizations to gain access to these kinds of professionals (without having to hire them as staff) would benefit the whole sector. Cooperative arrangements could also be utilized to provide resources for independent artists.

Networking

Activities that promote networking are essential for building relationships and can set the stage for future collaboration and peer learning. Many participants mentioned the “Art Party” as a wonderful space for artists and arts organizations to build relationships of mutual support. Several participants said, however, that it would be beneficial to have a similar networking

activity that provided a more focused program whereby participants could learn or strategize together about a specific topic.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Both in the survey and in discussion, the issues of diversity, equity and inclusion were priorities for organizations. Participants talked about these issues across many aspects of their organizations: composing staff and boards; casting and showcasing of artists; engaging audiences and the wider community engagement; and fostering program participation and active involvement in the arts.

Staffing and Expanding the Talent Pipeline

Several participants commented on the need to train white staff on issues of diversity and equity, acknowledging that many local organizations have a history of being staffed primarily by white people. Organizations such as the YWCA provide important training opportunities, including “Creating Equitable Organizations” and the Racial Justice Summit. These training programs help establish a common language and understanding of the central issues. In order to address equity, current organization staff will need to understand gaps in equitable access and become champions of the cause.

Organizations are also trying to diversify staff composition. This is a slow, but necessary, process. Several participants talked about the “pipeline” of people in arts management. They voiced the concern that the arts are often perceived as the exclusive domain to those with higher income levels, which would translate to a limited demographic of people interested in finding work in the field. This perception was challenged by others in that there are jobs available both in arts management and in art as an entrepreneurial enterprise that is available to all. In general, discussants agreed that there is a need to change the perception about the arts demographic. This may also indicate the need to bring attention to forms of art and practices of art that are more accessible to a wide spectrum of the community.

Several of the organizations represented at the conversation had specific programs to train youth to work in the arts. In at least one of the larger organizations, teens of color are hired every summer and provided with job training and mentoring. Many of these teens end up getting hired by the very agency that provided the initial training. One participant suggested that this job training program could end up being a training ground for young people interested in working in an arts related organization, and would serve all arts organizations by expanding future staff diversity.

Board membership

Diversity on the board of directors itself is a critical step for organizations that are intentionally seeking to expand engagement with racially and culturally diverse audiences. Board members are ambassadors for the organization, and a diverse board can build relationships throughout the community. Many participants spoke of the difficulties in recruiting diverse board members. In

recognition of the need to expand participation on boards, participants shared recruitment strategies. For some organizations, nominating committees are established solely for recruitment. In some organizations, committees open to non-board members are a way to engage new people with the organization, and serve as a pipeline for board leadership. Several participants noted that their entire board is held responsible for recruiting a diverse slate of board candidates.

Casting or Showcasing Artists

For some organizations, casting of actors is a starting place from which to build greater diversity in the organization, and a message to audiences that diversity, equity, and inclusion matters. Once again, the issue of pipelines surfaced in this discussion. Young people may question whether there are job opportunities in the arts, or whether they can make a livable wage as an artist or performer. Some organizations focus on introducing young people to various forms of the arts, in order first to spark interest, creativity, and self-expression, and to introduce young people to potential professions in performance or visual arts. For those organizations that do not work specifically with young people, there was a desire to increase opportunities for youth to have access to performances and to see artists of color in those performances.

Audiences, Community Engagement, and Program Participation

Diversifying audiences is an important step in changing perception about the arts. Performance organizations have, for years, been making progress to diversify entertainment options and the diversity of performers. One participant emphasized the need to be connected to the community in order to understand perceptions and develop culturally diverse programs. Arts organizations are situated in various contexts – some embrace a community service or youth education role, and develop programs that address the needs and interests of a racially diverse population or of specific audiences or demographics. Other organizations recognize that their niche is more specific (such as performance-based or visual arts showcasing organizations). One participant specified that they found opportunity in collaborating with social service organizations or smaller organizations that reach racially diverse populations in such a way that they could bring their expertise to support the work of these organizations, rather than trying to create programs of their own.

Involvement in the Arts

There are many ways in which people engage the arts but the challenge for arts organizations is to offer programs, venues, and performances that appeal to a wide range of people. All too often, the economics of running a performance or exhibit space limit the participation of diverse audiences. In other words, if ticket sales are a significant source of revenue, and only people with higher incomes can afford to pay those ticket prices, then the potential audience is relatively narrow. That said, participants also said the focus can't just be on ticket prices but also on increasing public funding for the arts.

In small group conversations, it became clear that having a wide range of organizations focused on different audiences is a key structural element to address the diverse ways in which

individuals engage the arts. For those organizations with long histories that focus on a white or affluent demographic, there is a need to first establish internal structures that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion, for instance through racial equity committees, inclusion statements, and youth job internships.

Messages to Funders

There was a strong consensus among participants that there is not enough funding for professional development for arts organization staff and leaders. In addition to more funding, it's important that professional development opportunities are provided locally. Traveling to conferences and workshops is not only expensive but also logistically difficult because many artists and arts organization leaders (such as those on volunteer working boards) have other full-time jobs and limited time. Some said that the current training opportunities available in our community do not address the specific nuances of running an arts organization. Some people mentioned it was more helpful to connect with peers in other communities doing similar work. A few participants mentioned that easily accessible online webinars would be appreciated because they can be viewed on a flexible schedule and tend to cost less.

Those representing small organizations encouraged funders to provide more capacity building grants to emerging but promising arts organizations, and ensure the grant application process is not onerous. As mentioned earlier, there are many small arts organizations in our community with few or no paid staff that don't have the resources to write extensive grant applications. Moreover, leaders also said that grantmakers should allow for the essential administrative costs to be covered by grants, not just the narrow program costs.

One participant, a veteran of the Madison arts community, said that many local artists and organizations leaders are carrying enormous student debt. Low wages and poor funding don't allow them to pay off that debt. This situation creates significant stress and limits their freedom and creativity. This leader believed that funders could have a significant impact if they created funds dedicated to paying of educational debt for artists.

Several people also emphasized the ways that for-profit businesses benefit from the arts, in that arts organizations bring people to the community and build the local economy. Philanthropic funders can serve a relationship-building and advocacy role by encouraging for-profit businesses to provide sustainable funding for the arts.

Important Resources Currently Available

Organizational representatives shared information about resources they tap into currently, and also imagined structures that could improve resource availability and sharing.

When conversation participants were asked where they turn to for organizational or management issues and support, the vast majority stated that they consult with board members. Additionally, participants rely on people in national professional networks – most typically networks that address a specific component of the arts world (e.g., music by genre, theater by

genre, youth camp, museum by genre, etc.). Peer to peer networking within these networks was regarded as extremely important. Similarly, where a specific network did not exist, professionals seek other professionals in different locales who are doing similar work.

Some of the local resources mentioned included:

- Dane Arts (which provides capacity building resources, support with specific inquiries, and assistance with grant proposals)
- Madison Community Foundation (consulting support)
- UW Fundraising and Development Conference (for fund-raising know-how)
- Association of Fund-raising Professionals (AFP) (for professional development and networking with fundraising professionals)
- Bolz Center for Arts Administration (seminars and workshops on specific topics)
- Madison Nonprofit Day (for workshops and networking with other nonprofit organizations), and MadTech (technology training workshops)
- Numbers 4 Non-profits (provides bookkeeping training)
- SCORE (consulting support from business and non-profit professionals)
- YWCA (racial equity training)
- Art Party (networking, relationship building)

While what currently exists is useful and appreciated, many participants noted that it is hard to know what training resources are available, as there isn't a centralized information hub to share information about events, training, and grant opportunities. As indicated above, many participants agreed that it would be useful to have an information hub for peer networking, as a centralized source of information, and as a location for training. Like a Chamber of Commerce, a hub would identify services that all members could utilize and share with each other. A resource and information hub could also take on development of policy documents that could be modified and utilized by all in the sector (e.g., by-laws, employee manuals, sexual harassment policies, equity & inclusion policies, etc.).