

Grantee Name

Chamber Music America

Project Title

To support a research project toward alleviating overwhelming administrative burdens faced by jazz musicians and presenters nationwide

Project Progress and Successes

Chamber Music America is currently halfway through its 18-month research initiative, supported by the Fund for National Projects, to determine whether mechanisms can be created and codified to alleviate the ongoing and burdensome administrative responsibilities faced by jazz musicians nationwide.

In 2011-12, CMA collected data through focus groups and surveys, which resulted in the report "National Conversations with the Jazz Field." Funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the project's purpose was to better understand the local and national environments in which jazz professionals function, and to report on the current state of the field, using 2008--the year in which the Great Recession began--as a benchmark.

As the data was compiled and analyzed, one issue emerged as a critical challenge facing the field today: the crushing amount of administrative work that musicians are required to do in order to sustain their careers. While some musicians offered suggestions as to the types of solutions that would be of help, no attempts had been made to study the issue in greater depth in an effort to create models that might begin to solve the problem.

Since October 2013, the beginning of the grant cycle, CMA has done the following:

- Engaged Catherine Maciariello of HieroResources as the facilitator of the project. Catherine had previously conducted an evaluation of CMA's jazz grant programs, was familiar with CMA's constituency as well as with the "National Conversations" project. She was in agreement that the project should combine in-person interviews or focus groups to hear first-hand what the specific challenges of the musicians are; a national survey to reach as many jazz musicians as possible; and interviews with "thought leaders," possibly from disciplines outside music, to begin to gather information about possible solutions or other service-providers who might be working on a similar problem.

- Identified the Focus Group Cities and Timeline for Completion. CMA chose three of the communities that hosted the "National Conversations" as research sites -- New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco. Houston had been proposed as the fourth research site; there were no Southern cities included in the "National Conversations" research, and input from the southern region of the country was an important addition to the project. However, upon further investigation, Houston did not produce as many available jazz musicians as anticipated. We are currently in the process of confirming Atlanta, and have identified a point person in the jazz community who has offered to distribute CMA's invitation to participate to his wide network of musician colleagues.

Thus far, five Focus Groups were held in New York City and two in San Francisco. Chicago is scheduled for September and Atlanta is planned for October.

- Established the Focus Group Protocol. After the timetable was established, Catherine developed the protocol for the Focus Group discussions. The following questions are used as prompts to stimulate discussion:
Which non-musical (administrative) tasks pertaining to your career take most of your time?

Do you choose between completing musical and non-musical tasks during a regular day (for example, practicing your instrument vs. updating your Facebook page)?

Does anyone help you with your administrative tasks?

How many hours each week do you devote to administrative tasks?

Would you characterize your administrative tasks as seasonal or ongoing?

Describe the administrative tasks that take most of your time. How often do you perform these tasks?

Thus far, the focus group musicians have been generous with their time and responses. They have not only answered the questions, but have spoken candidly about particular issues they are dealing with, or specific difficulties they have had with certain tasks.

One musician in his 50s admitted that he did not know how to upload files that were required for various grant applications, and that it had taken him many hours -- in the midst of completing an application -- to find out how to do it. Another artist explained that he had spent countless hours working on his MySpace page a number of years ago, only to find that MySpace had been superseded by Facebook. He decided that he would not invest any time in Facebook "because it was probably going to be surpassed by something else." Consequently, he does not have a presence on Facebook and admits that he should have gotten onboard years ago, but that the prospect of spending more time on the Internet is daunting.

The discussions have been rich, honest, and informative, and the musicians have expressed enthusiasm at having been brought together to help find an answer to the problem they are all dealing with.

- Begun Developing the Survey Instrument.

The survey is slated for distribution October 1. Catherine is working on a draft to be presented to CMA by August 1, and CMA is gathering lists of jazz musicians from its database as well as from colleague organizations throughout the country.

The survey will be input into an online survey mechanism by mid-September in order to be tested. Experience suggests that at least one reminder will need to be sent to the distribution list following the initial contact. It has not yet been decided how long the survey will be left open, but it will not be more than 30 days.

By November 1st, all Focus Groups will have taken place and all survey data will have been collected.

-Begun Discussions with Thought Leaders.

Identifying the problem areas is only a portion of the project. The more challenging component is identifying promising areas to investigate in order to find viable solutions. Although it is not within the scope of this project to solve the problems, CMA expects to be able to determine the following:

1. Given the scope of the issue, is there a possible solution to alleviating administrative burdens;
2. Might there be different solutions for different facets of the issue?
3. Are solutions based solely on the issue or on geographic location as well?
4. Although the presence of technology has been cited as contributing to the problem, might it also present the most viable path to solutions?
5. What is a reasonable timetable to put possible solutions into place?

Thus far, in-depth discussions have been held with Alan Brown of WolfBrown; Vanessa

Whang, Director of Programs at Cal Humanities (formerly CA Council on the Humanities); and Rick Noguchi, Senior Program Officer for the Arts at The James Irvine Foundation. Not only did each of these arts leaders help us to delve deeper into the issue, but also suggested additional thinkers for us to contact. They also recommended that we contact arts leaders outside of the music discipline since others are grappling with similar issues.

One option that has become less appealing is working with college and university internship programs. Originally, this had been suggested during the National Conversations; individual musicians had used interns from local colleges and had had some degree of success. CMA imagined that this success might be able to be organized on a larger scale, but in discussing it further, a number of significant problems began to surface: changes in faculty or administration; changing college/university priorities; varying student schedules; and varying levels of student commitment. While this will continue to be examined, it is unlikely that college/university intern programs will emerge as a universal solution.

Overall, the project has been proceeding according to plan. No surprises have emerged thus far in the Focus Groups, and we are on target to complete the project on time.

Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project

The biggest challenge always, when working with musicians, is scheduling. Bringing musicians together for Focus Groups has proven to be rewarding throughout the years, not only for CMA's information-gathering purposes, but also for the musicians themselves. The gatherings are always successful, but organizing them is extremely labor intensive.

When CMA first invited New York City musicians to attend Focus Groups in January, there was a surge of positive replies. As the dates approached, attendance began to drop off, as it has in the past; rehearsals had been scheduled, babysitters cancelled, someone called for a gig. The process of contacting, reminding, confirming, and reconfirming was arduous. Three focus group times were set for January 21, 2014; and then there was a snowstorm.

Catherine was unable to make it into New York, and the City was virtually shut down. Everyone was contacted, the sessions were postponed and later rescheduled for April, when a snow storm would be less likely.

The end results have been positive, but what should have been a relatively easy process of scheduling was much more difficult than anticipated.

What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?

Because we allocated enough time to complete the focus groups and survey and remain on schedule, the project has not been derailed by the difficulty in setting up the focus groups. We were reminded that everything takes longer to do than you think it will; always work extra time into a schedule that involves more than two people!

Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.

<http://www.chamber-music.org/jazz-report/index.html>

If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N

If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).

Yes. Contact Margaret M. Lioi, CEO, Chamber Music America: mlioi@chamber-music.org