

Legal Name
Arts Midwest
Project Title
To support a public will building effort that will connect the arts to the closely held values of Americans--resulting in an increase in support for, appreciation of, and access to the arts.
Project Progress and Successes
<p>Since we last reported to the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation in summer 2013, Arts Midwest has made key progress toward the goals set forth in our "Building Public Will for the Arts" initiative. These successes are in no doubt thanks to the leadership investment of the Foundation, which has been critical to our ability to move forward with our ambitious but important plan.</p> <p>As proposed, the Building Public Will for the Arts initiative seeks to use a social change strategy developed by our project partners, Metropolitan Group, to build support for, appreciation of, and access to arts experiences, and to reinforce to the public that the presence of a strong and supported arts community is a beneficial and essential component of everyday life. While these goals are significant, and will require a multi-year and multi-faceted effort, we are pleased to report that we are launching the research and testing phase in the coming months. During this time, we will begin a meta-analysis of existing research -- reviewing recent surveys and literature conducted by key industry partners (e.g. the National Endowment for the Arts, Americans for the Arts, etc.) to immerse ourselves in the extensive body of data available to date. We have already begun to identify relevant materials for this analysis and are pleased to reference such studies as "How Art Works: The National Endowment for the Arts' Five-Year Research Agenda, with a System Map and Measurement Model."</p> <p>While much material already exists, and while this material will no doubt be incredibly informative to our process, we are also expecting that our meta-analysis will help us identify those questions relevant to our project where we do not have data. These questions will likely prod societal value drivers; what do people value for their families, communities, civic life? And these questions will ultimately help us shape our new research, which will be both quantitative and qualitative in nature, and which will allow us to explore how the arts might align with these values. To begin this research, we are pursuing national research partners adept in social change research and consumer behavior. Once contracted, we will begin to form survey instruments and tools that will gather data and inform our communications campaign. While we ultimately hope to apply our findings and strategies to a national campaign that shifts the normative expectations about the arts in our society, in this first phase, we have identified two demographically diverse markets for research and message testing. We are already in conversation with potential funding and program partners in these areas and look forward to keeping the Foundation informed about our progress.</p>
Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project
This initiative is still in the very early stages, so while we have encountered some obstacles to our work, none have resulted in failures toward achieving our goals. At their root, these

challenges have manifested in two ways: research and messaging.

As mentioned above, we seek to identify societal values and to connect those values to the values inherent in the arts. While there has been extensive research conducted by leaders in our industry on questions surrounding arts participation, arts education, perceptions of the arts, the value(s) that the arts provide, etc. -- and while this research has been critical in our field's ability to understand and shape its role in our society -- we have not identified existing research that examines value drivers. These questions, for example, step back from the "why do you value the arts" questions (important in their own right) to uncover the more abstract "what do you value" responses, have yet to be asked within the arts framework. In launching this project, we have identified a need to take on these research questions, as their findings will inform the foundation of our message frameworks.

Beyond the need for new research frames and data, we have also encountered some obstacles when discussing the project with potential partners and funders. Here, we are challenged to help individuals understand the difference between this project and traditional advocacy or marketing strategies. As noted, "Building Public Will for the Arts" is a long-term initiative that seeks a shift in normative expectations of society. The project does not seek to develop messages that respond to the immediate federal budget argument, advocate for the arts in schools, or craft the careful response to criticisms of the arts from national leaders. These messages are already being managed and framed by our local and national advocacy and service organizations. And while we hope that our findings will help inform and support future message frames around these issues, our initiative is somewhat more abstract. It will not manifest in specific "wins" in the budget cycle and it will not see quick results measured by a pass or a veto, or by the number of congresspersons contacted about a ballot measure. Rather, this initiative will happen over multiple years to shape a new societal demand for the arts. While both strategies -- these short-term advocacy initiatives and this longer-term project to shift normative expectations -- play unique and essential roles in strengthening and sustaining our field, we have encountered some challenges in effectively distinguishing their roles. As we move forward, we will continue to craft language that acknowledges both the strength and importance of existing advocacy efforts and that outlines the need for our effort. We anticipate that this language will ultimately help us cultivate and secure new project partners and will allow us to manage project expectations and outcomes.

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

We believe that our key challenges offer a learning opportunity for our project as well as the field. Within the context of research, we are broadening our search for relevant studies conducted in other fields (e.g. environment, health, etc.) that explore similar questions about values drivers. We are also exploring the theory of subjective wellbeing -- a notion that examines happiness and life satisfaction -- in an effort to ascertain the values that drive health and positivity, and that, we expect, will have a strong link to our findings about how our existing values and the values within the arts are interconnected. While this expansion into other sectors is certainly critical to our process, we also see applicability to the broader field, as there is much to learn from other industries about our audiences, their motivations, and the varied approaches to engrain the arts in their expectations for society.

Secondly, our challenges around messaging the project have resulted in a clear lesson that we must be careful in distinguishing between our "Building Public Will for the Arts"

approach and the ongoing efforts in marketing and advocating for the arts. Through all phases of this project -- conception, developments, and launch we intend to make it clear that the existing marketing and advocacy strategies are essential to our success as a field. Indeed, we would likely not be in a place to pursue this project were we constantly in need of crafting our own messages that spoke to the strength of the arts in our education, our communities, and our economies. Therefore, we see our goals, process, and outcomes, as an inherently separate initiative--one that is a complement to the work of our field and one that will strengthen our collective ability to pursue the arts. We look forward to sharing additional messaging about these distinctions with the field as it is developed.

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

None at this time.

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).

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