

Grantee Name
South Arts Inc
Project Title
To support ArtsReady; an online tool to help organizations in the arts sector plan for and respond to emergency situations
Project Progress and Successes
<p>Over 400 Premium Members have signed up to use the ArtsReady online readiness planning platform. By utilizing the tool's five modules, arts organizations spanning 46 states and Washington, D.C. have developed comprehensive and unique plans addressing their specific assets (physical, human, and artistic) and challenges. Since the resulting continuity plans are based on specific information from within the organization, the results are highly customized to address the needs and scope of their organization. As one of our Premium Members recently described it, "Our intent is to minimize the problems of confusion and indecision that often accompany emergency situations. Flexibility and rationality are key to successfully managing any emergency. We stress human safety above material loss at all times."</p> <p>Since launching in 2011, ArtsReady has gained traction with arts organizations throughout the country and initiated dialogues about the need for preparedness. Throughout this startup phase, we have reached a level of "brand awareness" through the engagement of a core and expanding group of partners and allies, and are continuing to expand our reach. These partners subsidize the tool for their constituents and/or provide in-kind support through promotion, professional development, and providing an ArtsReady presence at national arts conferences and webinars.</p>
Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project
<p>The ultimate goal and mission of ArtsReady remains unchanged: improve the sustainability and resiliency of arts organizations throughout the country. In the two years following the Fund for National Projects support, South Arts has used a data-informed approach to track the original business plan and projected growth rates. During this time, which included a formal evaluation in 2013, we have learned a significant amount about how ArtsReady is used by and perceived by Members, and adapted our plans from the pre-launch projections to best suit the post-launch realities.</p> <p>From experience and feedback, we have learned that addressing emergency preparedness planning causes people to confront unpleasant scenarios that may seem abstract and not immediately pressing, therefore the time and effort it takes to recruit users is considerable. The period necessary to move constituents from a prospect to a Basic Member to a Premium Member takes more resources and a longer time than anticipated, as does the recruitment of Subsidizing Partners. Bringing constituents beyond that inertia involves regular and one-on-one communications through a variety of channels. The most valuable communications channel available to overcome this hurdle are direct, in-person conversations at performing arts conferences.</p> <p>Because of this elongated communication period, our recruitment rate has been slower than anticipated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-launch Projections for 2013 (as of 2011): - 3,500 Basic and 1,250 Premium Users - 70% Renewal Rate - 27 Subscription Underwriters/Subsidizing Partners - Post-launch Results (as of March 2014):

- 783 Basic and 407 Premium Users
- 71% Renewal Rate
- 13 Subscription Underwriters/Subsidizing Partners

To address these realities, South Arts has taken an iterative approach to developing ArtsReady towards a fully mature product, refining the model to best match the needs of our constituents. Specifically, our approach has grown and changed in four distinct capacities since receiving initial funding.

- **Communication Strategies:** With DDCF funding, we partnered with strategic marketing firm Bcauz Marketing to refine and focus our communications and messaging related to ArtsReady. Our primary strategies for recruiting new members to the program include participating in performing arts conferences, conducting direct sales, and establishing a wide network of Partners. To support these strategies, we have enacted the following recommended tactics:

- designed and produced a visually compelling and interactive exhibit booth for conferences
- developed key pieces of printed collateral material, including a brochure discussing the program and customizable postcards for targeting specific constituents
- refined our electronic communications through compellingly-crafted subject lines and strategically-timed email campaigns to reinforce our messaging

- **Membership and Partner Growth:** As discussed above, membership and partner growth is an area that faced major revisions from preliminary estimates. Guiding arts organizations through our customer lifecycle from Prospect to Basic Member to Premium Member requires additional investment of staffing and resources, which are now coming into alignment. The growth rate continues to accelerate, with 40-50 Basic and Premium Members joining each quarter. We currently have members in 46 states and Washington, D.C. As one of our communications strategies, ArtsReady also relies on a cohort of partners ranging from Local Arts Agencies to National Service Organizations to promote ArtsReady and emergency preparedness to their members. We currently have 26 Partners, divided into Subsidizing, Associate, and National levels, which are delineated later in this report. The continued development of these partner relationships is integral to the acceptance of emergency preparedness as a core aspect of responsible stewardship by arts organizations. It is also clear that funders must help drive this new practice of readiness planning through expectations of their grantees. South Arts is piloting this approach, and is currently in year three of a five-year incremental process which, by year five, will make the existence of a readiness plan a requirement to apply for regional touring grants.

- **Organizational Capacity:** To address the increased capacity needed to support ArtsReady with recruitment, retention, and member assistance, South Arts created a new, half-time Membership Manager position in 2013 focused solely on these efforts. South Arts has also engaged freelance web developer Erik Ostrum to oversee technical modifications to the site such as back-end administrative tools, as well as improvements to Member billing and signup modules. We are currently seeking a new consultant for our Local Arts Agency partnership development position (the optimal candidate would be recently retired from the LAA field with a strong network of relationships with, and knowledge of, LAA priorities and operations); and soliciting additional guidance from LAA leaders including Americans for the Arts. LAAs are a prime audience segment due to their funding and authority relationships with local arts organizations, including presenters, dance companies, and theatres. The ArtsReady team is led by South Arts' Deputy Director and ArtsReady Director Mollie Quinlan-Hayes supported by a core staff comprised of South Arts employees.

- **Awareness:** In the field, there is increasing awareness that readiness is a necessary part of business. As a result of our regular presence at performing arts conferences and recruitment of influential National, Regional, and Subsidizing Partners, the discussion of emergency preparedness as a core business function for arts organizations has begun, but still has a long way to go until the point when every organization has a plan is an industry standard.

These evaluations have resulted in refining both the tool and our training efforts, such as instituting quarterly training webinars for Premium Members (also soon to be available on-demand); plans to create short (60-90 second) inline videos and other visual guides to help users through the Assessment and To-Dos; and improving users' ability to sort and export their To-Dos.

We have also identified that many users complete some, but not all, of their To-Dos. Our surveys and anecdotal input point to several reasons for this. Completing these tasks is work; it cannot be done in just several hours. Organizations must commit the time and energy to work through this section, often including multiple team members who may have varying degrees of investment in the value of the process. Although the ArtsReady tool is designed to be intuitive and self-guided, we find that providing additional motivation, support, and guidance helps Members to move more quickly and thoroughly through the tool. We are driving behavioral change, so tools such as congratulations upon key step completion, email prompts and a progress pod on the Member's online dashboard provide psychological support. Our series of email prompts, targeted at users who have stalled at a particular point in the tool, encourages them to make incremental steps. We are also expanding our communications to provide tailored messaging for different roles within the organization: Finance/Human Resource directors respond to different messages than House Managers. For organizations with multiple facilities or departments, we are developing specific guidance for them to use the tool to coordinate more than one plan.

User feedback and evaluations have also prompted us to refine the schedule with which users receive emails related to pending items in their To-Do list. Users now receive weekly emails instead of daily reminders, which has resulted in greater satisfaction with the service. Similarly, users now receive more consistent, reliable notifications from ArtsReady to keep them up-to-date on their account and renewal status.

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

A primary lesson is that significant changes in arts management practice take time, and require vision and leadership by funders and authorizers. Just as private and public funders have moved the field to incorporate strategic planning and professional audits into standard activities, an expectation of business continuity planning must be set by funders, as not only a way to protect individual organizations but to protect the funder's investment in that organization.

Lessons about best readiness practices that have been learned through this project are shared on an ongoing basis across the country, since ArtsReady is built on the principle of community design. The online tool, our professional development and technical assistance offerings, and our educational materials and Library content were all established, and continue to grow, based on the experiences and best practices of our field. ArtsReady constantly addresses emerging issues and lessons learned. Professional development sessions at conferences and our own webinars are redeveloped regularly to involve members of the field who've undergone crises; our Library is culled and updated with new information (for instance, after a webinar in which a constituent asked for guidance on active shooter situations, we identified and posted an FBI-developed resource for houses of worship and other public spaces). We also regularly engage with our Partners to understand how their constituents respond to ArtsReady. Thereby we improve our service and retention activities and also make the project launch with new Partners more successful.

Research conducted in 2013 found, for example, that out of 82 surveyed arts organizations in the hurricane-prone city of Houston, 56% did not have a Readiness Plan. Of those, 87%

said they were not in the process of developing one, and the same number said they did not have the budget for it. Of those that reported having a plan, a significant percentage have gaps such as no offsite data backup, no equipment inventory/documentation, no plan for alternate facilities, and no plan for communication with patrons in an emergency. With increased capacity, the ArtsReady team can reach out to such organizations collectively and individually to increase awareness of our available and affordable resource.

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

www.artsready.org
www.southarts.org

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.
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