

Legal Name

Lookingglass Theatre Company

Project Title

Support to establish a Civic Practice Lab to transform how Lookingglass engages constituencies and develops stakeholders, placing assets of creativity and collaboration in service to, and in relationship with, non-arts partners.

Project Progress and Successes

Lookingglass Theatre Company, recipient of the 2011 Regional Theatre Tony Award, is dedicated to the development and presentation of innovative, cutting-edge theatrical works and sharing its ensemble-based techniques with the next generation through Education and Community Programs. Led by an ensemble of 24 artists, Lookingglass is guided by an artistic vision centered on the core values of collaboration, transformation, and invention.

The Doris Duke Charitable Fund provided support to establish the Civic Practice Lab to transform how Lookingglass engages constituencies and develops stakeholders, placing assets of creativity and collaboration in service to, and in relationship with, non-arts partners, assessing if these activities build demand for theatre.

Over the past fourteen months, partnerships have been established with four organizations and we've engaged exploratory conversations with many other organizations.

Though each partnership is unique, in general, the objectives of the CPL's work with these organizations is to build frameworks for dialogue around polarizing issues; build coalitions for problem-solving; and build communication strategies for internal and external stakeholders. Through these activities, Lookingglass and its new work development techniques are reaching new constituencies and potentially developing new stakeholders. Confirmed partners include:

- Chicago Parks Department (CPD) Arts and Culture Unit:
The CPL is facilitating conversation between the 15 Chicago Parks designated as Cultural Centers on its first-ever collaborative process to develop shared values and strategies around notions of public, neighborhood-specific participation.
- Communities in Schools of Chicago - CISC (through them we are working with Crown Academy Public Elementary School and Chicago Public Schools CPS):
The CPL is helping create a project that will bring together mental health providers, Chicago public school staff, and middle school students to build a flexible, experiential mental health workshop. The program will respond to the challenges encountered at each location, and focus on anger management and other socio/emotional learning needs.
- Roosevelt University:
The CPL is assisting Roosevelt University on a campus-wide, service-based pedagogy, facilitating opportunities for faculty and staff to engage with stories and perspectives on the school's mission and how it manifests in the classroom.
- Working Women's History Project: the CPL is currently in the co-design of its partnership.

The formalized assessment is under construction. For now, indications of the CPL's success includes:

- Several CPD Park Supervisors have taken us aside and expressed their gratitude to Lookingglass, saying they needed someone on the outside to facilitate the conversation about transforming the Chicago parks from passive centers for community enjoyment into radically inclusive centers of community engagements. "We needed someone on the outside to listen and guide the conversation..."
- Through CISC, our partners at Crown Academy School and at Communities in Schools of Chicago have expressed to us that they recognize the theatre practice and partnership expertise is assisting them in finding a way to bridge a long-unmet need with comprehensive services. They recognize the CPL as "facilitating possibility."
- At Roosevelt University, the head of the human rights center on campus spoke about the specific value she sees us bringing to the campus conversation through our facilitated listening session with faculty and staff, and the potential for the CPL to work more deeply with the school.

Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project

- Partners that are pressed for time and resources:
At early stages of partnership, getting partners to commit the necessary of time required for planning and co-design to conduct needs-based practice effectively.
- Creating buy-in:
Overcoming the initial perceptions and assumptions of individuals who didn't agree to the partnership, but are impacted by decisions made by their "higher ups." These individuals can sometimes end up in the room, and in the work, without having "agreed" to participate, which can be challenging for all participants. Once the work gets underway, all is fine. Those initial encounters demand tactical conduct, thoughtful communication, and patience.
- Working with partners amidst times of transition:
Over the course of the 12-months alone, 3 consecutive main contacts left the CPD, meaning all the time, effort, energy and investment in the CPL/CPD partnership was engaged 3 separate times. In the process, meetings with the CPL became major contributors to the CPD's continuity during transition and made the CPL's value even clearer.

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

Commission-based relationships with artists yields better results than hourly wage-based relationships:
The CPL is transitioning its work with Lookingglass artists, and beginning to establish "commissions" to become civic practice artists. The fee structure is commensurate with an artist's commission to write or lead an early-stage project for Lookingglass. We observe that framing the relationship the artists have with the CPL as a commission invests the artists in the work to greater degree, and enables the artists to better understand that Lookingglass views their participation in the CPL as a significant artistic responsibility to which they gain access through Ensemble membership. The commission is equivalent to what an artist would have been paid as hourly CPL staff member.

An "insider/outsider consultant" is a major asset to systems integration:

The CPL has commissioned artist Amanda Dellheimer Diamond who was on a TCG Grant working with Lookingglass over the past 2 years on a visioning process. She is uniquely positioned from a systems integration perspective, and is helping to identify ways that Civic Practice Lab values and practice can support Lookingglass as it works across constituencies of artists, staff, and Board to identify and manifest a sense of coherent vision. Partnering with a collaborator who knows the company well but is not on staff supports the CPL's effectiveness and seems particularly important to the goal of having the work of the CPL continue beyond the grant period.

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

HowlRound Article:

<http://howlround.com/translations%E2%80%94cpcp-update-1-lookingglass-theater-and-the-civic-practice-lab>

Civic Practice Lab Infographic:

See attached document

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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