Building Meaningful Relationships in Community

Association of Performing Arts Presenters
Leadership Development Institute – 2012
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NYU Wagner Research Center for Leadership in Action

Acknowledgements

Cooperative Inquiry

- A way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests, in order to
  - understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things
  - learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better

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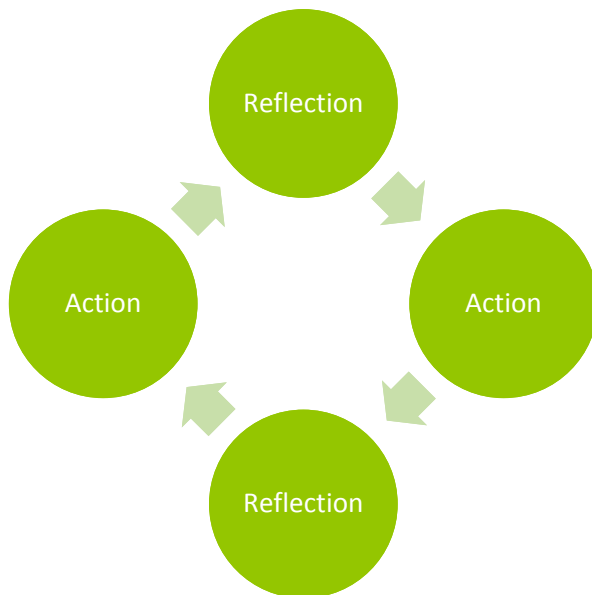
Session Outline

- Guiding Question
- Making the Case for Engaging Community
- Four Practices to Build and Sustain Meaningful Relationships in Communities
  - Build Organizational Culture
  - Connect within Community
  - Involve Artists
  - Evaluate Impact
- Conclusion

Guiding Question

- How can we, as performing arts organizations, build and sustain meaningful relationships in our communities?

Making the Case

- Why is it important to know and connect with community? How does knowing and connecting with communities help us build and sustain successful, relevant arts organizations?

If we are to initiate or re-establish human and organizational connections in our communities, we must develop long-term and meaningful relationships

Maintaining these relationships is vital to the future of our arts organizations and requires genuine openness, dedicated resources and continuous evaluation

Making the Case: Questions for Reflection

- How would you define your community?

- Does your mission statement help define your community?

- Who does your organization current serve and how?

- With whom would you like to connect that you are not reaching now?

- What would be lost in your community if your organization did not exist?

Making the Case: Discover an Exemplar

Choose a performance you view as culturally successful and ask:

- Who did it serve?

- Did it invite dialogue and open discourse? How?

- Did it expose your community to something new? What and how?

- Did it reinforce diversity, cultural truths or already established communal ideas?

- Did it create sustainable partnerships with other arts or service organizations?

Making the Case: Shared Concepts

- The very origins of art were communal, a means of expressing ideas and connecting to fellow human beings

- Human connections serve the social health of the community and create a common good

- The absence of shared cultural experiences indicates a breakdown in the cultural fabric and threatens the relevance of our work and the sustainability of our organizations

Practices to Build Relationships in Community

- Build Organizational Culture
- Connect within Community
- Involve Artists
- Evaluate Impact

Build Organizational Culture: Idea in Brief

- Internal culture of engagement is essential
- Each organization's approach will be informed by its unique mission and core values
- Start from where you and your organization are today

Build Organizational Culture: Tools and Tactics

Internal Audit

- Current organizational practices of knowing/engaging community
- Staff attitudes/values
- Current partnerships/relationships
- Reflection on successes/challenges

Staff Action

- Collect feedback from your organization's patrons on a regular basis and discuss it with staff at short, weekly meetings
- Integrate community engagement into your mission and/or strategic plan
- Include community engagement as a part of job descriptions
- Engage your community via social media at least once a day

Build Organizational Culture: Best Practices

- Maintain your organization's unique approach
- Involve staff
- Include community engagement in job descriptions
- Reflect and share learning regularly
- Build momentum
- Integrate into mission, vision and strategic plan
- Use your influence

Engage within Community: Idea in Brief

- Each organization resides in a unique community
- Geographic, socioeconomic and political realities of the community inform the organization's approach
- Becoming a good organizational citizen involves both seeking out communities you don't usually interact with and making your organization available to others

Engage within Community: Tools and Tactics

- Community Interviews

- Participation in Community Events

- Exemplar Interviews

Engage within Community: Tools and Tactics

Community Interviews

- When have you felt that our performing arts organization really understood our community?

- When have we successfully built relationships with and within this community?

- What should we understand about this community?

- Tell me a story about an experience you've had with our performing arts organization.

Engage within Community: Tools and Tactics

Participation in Community Events

- Attend events that expose you to parts of your community you do not know well

- Share your interest in community engagement

- Document what happens

- Share your learning with your team

# Engage within Community: Tools and Tactics

Exemplar Interviews

- Find people whose capacity for community engagement you admire

- Ask them about their approach

- Document and share your learning with your team

Engage within Community: Best Practices

- Set and communicate clear intentions free from agenda.
- Identify a number of organizations/communities and offer services or support (no agenda).
- Allocate resources (in kind) toward sponsorship of other organizations/communities.
- Actively engage with community: ask questions and listen.
- Create a network with individuals in communities you want to engage.
- Participate outside your organization (karma banking).
- Communicate/share learning.
- Dedicate focused work on building relationships with honesty and integrity.

Involve Artists: Idea in Brief

- Artists are key stakeholders in the arts ecology and should be involved in connecting their work with communities
- Ideal community engagement is based on a three-way conversation between artists, presenters and communities

Presenter
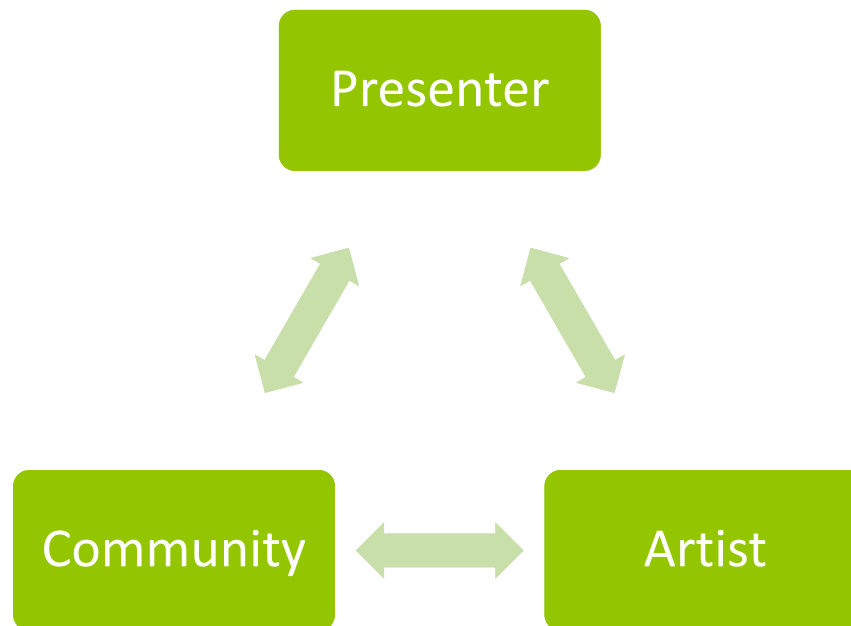
Community

Artist

Involve Artists:
The Presenter's Role

- To research and understand their own community
- To research and understand the work of the visiting artist(s)
- To be a "matchmaker" between appropriate community constituents & artists(s)
- To create context for their community constituents about the artist
- To cultivate and encourage curiosity and openness in its audiences/ communities
- To understand and facilitate how the artist(s) wants to work in the community
- To help the artist choose the appropriate work or process while visiting the community

Involve Artists: Tools and Tactics

Interview Artists

Questions to ask artists:

- What are the primary themes of your work?
- What kinds of conversation do you want to have?
- With whom are you looking to connect?
- What do you like doing? What do you not like doing?
- What do you dream of doing?
- What has worked well in the past?
- What resources can you provide us to support your engagement goals?
- What can we do without you here?

Involve Artists:
Tools and Tactics

Case Analysis: Identifying Examples

- Successful community engagement with and without artists, inside or outside your organization

Involve Artists:
Best Practices

- Promote open and transparent communication among all parties
- Clearly articulate and agree upon shared goals before beginning a project
- Commit the necessary time and resources.
- Utilize a variety of formats
- Know the communities and the artists and facilitate a successful match of work, theme, personality and skill
- Evaluate throughout the engagement
- Connect community engagement activities to community members seeing the artistic work itself
- Cultivate curiosity and resilience in audiences and communities and actively foster trust
- Don't be afraid to take on community engagement around the work without the artist present
- Consider changing your model to stretch over longer periods of time and/or multiple visits
- Take responsibility, as a presenter, to initiate and maintain engagement

Evaluate Impact:
Idea in Brief

- Stakeholders increasingly demand evidence of impact
- Evaluation can also serve as an internal learning process
- Effective evaluation practice starts in the planning stage
- Evaluation is an opportunity to engage community

Evaluate Impact: Tools and Tactics
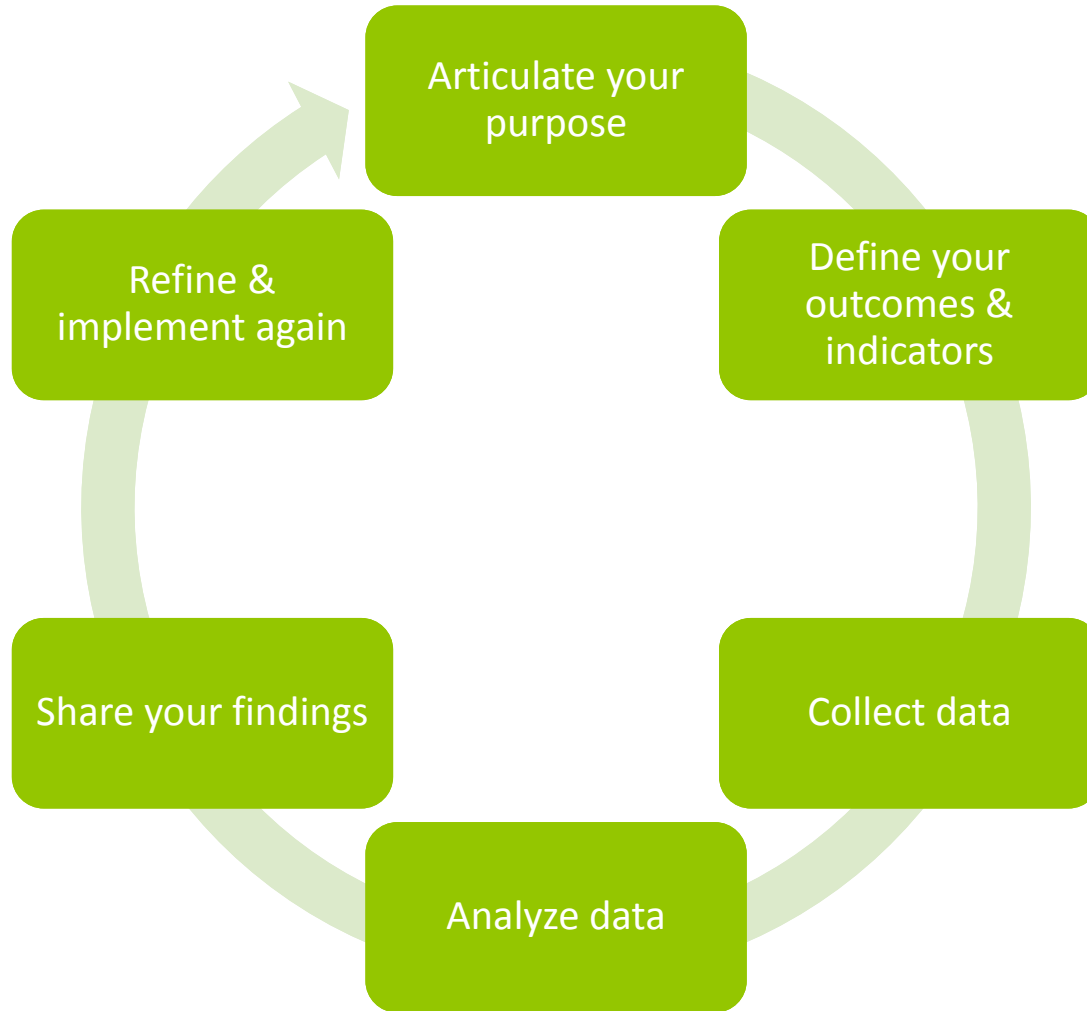
Evaluate Impact: Best Practices

- Early
- Often
- Rigorous
- Realistic

Conclusion

- Don't feel overwhelmed. Start from where you are
- Keep an eye on the APAP website for more information coming late-summer.