Building Meaningful Relationships in Community

Association of Performing Arts Presenters
Leadership Development Institute – 2012
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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

Peter Reason & John Heron
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
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

- Articulate your purpose
- Define your outcomes & indicators
- Collect data
- Analyze data
- Share your findings
- Refine & implement again
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.