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**Artist Service Organizations:
from Technical Assistance
to Tactical Advancement**

Moderator: Carlo Cuesta
The Playwrights' Center

Panelists: Tomas Benitez
Self Help Graphics
Linda Myers
The Loft
Eric Ziegenhagen
Chicago theatre artist

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Cuesta: I will start with a little story to outline what we are going to be talking about today on this panel. A couple of weeks ago, I was in a room full of playwrights evaluating and revising our mission statement. Now, I can't think of something more daunting! Being in a room full of experts at plot, theme, subtext. I had been told in the past – many years ago when the Playwrights would get together – that it would take days for them to come up with our mission statement. This time, they weren't the only ones in the room. We also had theatre enthusiasts in the room, neighborhood members from our surrounding community, as well as community leaders. You would think that that would be the recipe for the longest meeting known to humankind, but we did the job in about 45 minutes. It was amazing! It wasn't "Kumbaya" all of the way, but the conversation was very intense, very focused because everyone in the room recognized that we were behind.

We are undergoing an incredible transformation at the Playwrights' Center that started about two years ago. For many, many years of our thirty-year history, we have very much focused on providing services to help artists cultivate their potential. Now this key constituency was telling us something different, they were telling us that they wanted to connect with audiences and that they also wanted to see us help build the community for new work.

We assembled a terrific panel here today of people in the arts service field as well as an artist representative. I will introduce them in a moment. We are going to talk about the transformations in the arts service field that we have seen in the last couple of years, the choices that have been made, as well as the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead of us.

Let me introduce the panel. On my left is Eric Ziegenhagen who is a playwright and director based in Chicago. On my right is Tomas Benitez from Self Help Graphics and Art. Also sitting to my left is Linda Myers who is the executive director of the Loft. I am going to start with you, Linda, because we are in your home here, this wonderful home. If you could, tell us a little bit about Open Book and tell us a little bit about the process of how we have gotten here.

Myers: Welcome! I am always so excited to have an excuse to lure people into our wonderful space. I see people in the audience who helped us get here and so I am especially pleased to see you.

This is a collaboration. Open Book is the name of the building. The three partner organizations who founded the building are the Loft Literary Center, which is 26 years old now and this country's largest independent literary center; Milkweed Editions, which is a literary press and one of the largest general literary presses in the country; and Minnesota Center for Book Arts, which you will see later and has a to-die-for gift store and beautiful, beautiful artworks.

When we at the Loft realized that we were going to be kicked out of our sixth home in 23 years, it occurred to us that pretty soon we would be 25 and it was going to be time to buy a house. We were getting to the point of being almost a grown-up and we should think about our future. We knew that being a small arts organization – even though large by literary organization standards (that is just a commentary on the field and how it has not, until quite recently, even defined itself as a field) – we could never have launched a capital campaign on our own unless we had a compelling vision.

We did a number of meetings in the community and many, many people showed up saying, "Great idea! Let's go in this together!" But after about a year of meetings, when we talked about rolling up our sleeves and seeing who would do the work, the room cleared and still present were the Loft, Milkweed Editions, and Minnesota Center for Book Arts.

Then we did about a year of planning, getting to know each other; we likened it to falling in love. We dated, we had a few fights, we invited in the extended family of our boards of directors and our staffs and our constituents, and we then got serious.

We wrote a planning grant and we were blessed that four local foundations gave us planning money. We weren't certain if the answer would be Yes, we will do this, but in fact, that was the decision. Then very, very quickly, after talking with members of the field throughout the whole state of Minnesota to find out what can

we do to make this your community space, publishers came down from greater Minnesota, Northern Minnesota, other literary centers in town, as well as MFA programs at the universities and said what they would like to see here.

Shortly thereafter we bought this facility which is about a 100-year-old...it's actually three contiguous buildings over a hundred years old. Most recently, they were warehouses but in past times we think they were rooming houses, retail stores. We renovated the building very, very quickly, launched a capital campaign, and in less than eighteen months, all three of us moved in.

None of us has merged. The Loft still has as its mission to foster a community for writing, and the artistic development of individual writers, and an audience for literature. Milkweed still has as its mission to serve the creation of literature because of its humane and transformative effects on society. And Minnesota Center for Book Arts is about the creation and preservation of the book as art. So we operate together in this facility, but we have not merged.

One of the things we did in the capital campaign, which raised a little over \$7 million to date, was to build a reserve fund which will maintain the building for over forty years. We created a separate 501(c)(3) whose purpose is to be a holding company for the building, and two of us from each of the three partner organizations serve on the Open Book board along with a community member.

None of us owns the building, per se; none of us is liable should one party have to leave. We see this as a way of modeling the ways in which organizations without a lot of money and without a lot of capital can come together and do something that, we think, there is no model for, certainly not in our discipline. Welcome to Open Book, we are thrilled to be here.

Cuesta: I am going to put you back on the spot again. Briefly, could you tell us why you think you are on this panel for this particular subject?

Myers: The Loft started – guess where? – in a loft. In a little bookstore over near the Univer-

sity of Minnesota. Marly Rusoff, who is a publisher in New York now, was a twenty-something, young bookseller living near the University, opened the Rusoff Bookstore, and had a loft in her bookstore where people like Robert Bly and Garrison Keillor and Carol Bly and Patricia Hampel and Jim Moore and a number of other writers gathered who really didn't want to have to move to New York to continue practicing their craft, and their desire was to create a writing community.

After about a year, Marly was having difficulty paying rent on the loft part of her store, and so Garrison and Robert and a number of people decided to tell stories, charge fifteen bucks a head, and a hundred people came and joined The Poets Club. That was the beginning of the Loft. It was created by writers for writers.

I have a writer on the board currently who was one of the founders, Jim Moore. Jim tells the story that the Loft's first real diversity struggle occurred in the late 1970s – not about inviting in diverse groups of people, because the founders were in fact quite diverse, but about whether or not fiction writers and creative non-fiction writers could join the Loft because it was a poets' club. In fact, they were invited in.

We speed to the 1990s and find the Loft an organization that is involved nationally in the field. Thanks to the NEA, in the mid 70s we learned that what we are is a literary center. At that time they had a funding category for literary centers; and so, the Loft learned what it was.

We began because we are founded by writers, for writers, serving writers in ways they wanted to be served. Giving them opportunities to read; eventually giving them money to teach others who wanted to write. Eventually being able to offer, thanks to the Jerome Foundation, a wonderful program called the Mentor Program which brings in internationally-known writers to work with emerging Minnesota writers.

Then we began re-granting money, thanks to the McKnight Foundation, and now we are able to offer several large fellowships to accomplished Minnesota writers. We offer classes to 2,000 people from ages seven to eighty-seven, from very, very beginning to quite advanced.

We have programs for children in the summer, in the public schools, for teen moms and their children. We have a weekly radio show and a monthly magazine, etc., etc.

The Loft began to be seen as a leader in the field. We started mentoring other literary centers: The Guild Complex in Chicago, which is now eleven years old; the Hugo House in Seattle, which is now three; and several others. We find ourselves saying, Well, let's get together as a field. Let's advocate for literature. Let's understand that there is strength in numbers. I think I have been invited to be on this panel because of the history of our organization.

Cuesta: Tomas? Why do you think you are on this particular panel in relationship to your organization?

Benitez: I will give just a bit of background about Self Help. The place started in the heart of East L.A. in the late 60s, early 70s – which was this wonderful, tempestuous, rancorous time in America when everything was being challenged and identity was being put forth. The Chicano political movement was the heart of the community at that time, from which we were the cultural wing, the artistic movement.

It started with this wonderfully irascible, cantankerous, chain-smoking nun, Sister Cara Bocalero, who had been raised in East L.A. Not religious, and certainly not proselytizing, but the most spiritual person I have ever met. A group of artists, both Chicano and Mexican – and if you think there is a difference, you are correct and they will be glad to tell you so – created something from a simple profound idea which was: A place in the community in which to do art.

Now the “do” is the service which I think justifies why we are here. Because creating space – there was not a lack of talent, a lack of vision, a lack of creativity – there was a lack of resource. Simply put, if you were to take what you had from our community and go into other arenas, many times the process meant you had to divest the very thing which informed your creativity, your culture. To go to UCLA and study as such meant you were going to lose

much of what you had that got you to that point. The idea was to do something in the community and do it incorporating the cultural element.

Self Help is a printmaking organization. We have done limited edition, quality art on paper, for the last thirty years. I like to tell people that we started off humbly as a small, community-based, visual arts location in the heart of East L.A. and, after thirty years, we are a small, humble, community organization. We have developed an international following because we have been able to take our paper and put it around the world.

It maintains its integrity as a service organization in this way. We do not separate what we serve artists and how we serve community. Simply put, we do not separate the context. I have great respect for service organizations that focus on artist services. We provide opportunity: Come and do limited edition printmaking, take that edition and use it to develop your career. Come and take advantage of collective resources in printmaking, which is otherwise expensive and hard to access. There are programs which fall out from there.

We lost our founding director about three years ago and we have been going through a transition. Thanks to the wonderful help and support of the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the J. Paul Getty Grant Program, we have been given the opportunity to reevaluate who we are and what we do. I have been heartened to hear from all of the governance dialogue and the artists' dialogue, and the staff, that at the heart is our mission: serving artists, local community, audiences, presenting Chicano art as part of the American fabric. The heart of it is serving artists and is what makes us an arts service organization and why I am on the panel.

Cuesta: I would like to get back to your point about not separating the contexts of artists and community. But first, let's go to our resident artist on the panel. Can you just give us a little background.

Ziegenhagen: I think I am here because I have been a working artist in a number of different communities, and service organizations have

been at the center of some of those artistic communities. I started out as a playwright. I guess I started playwriting in my mid-teens, in the mid 80s, at the Playwrights' Center here, and absolutely because that organization was here and there was a community of active playwrights, and there were theatres in town producing those plays. All of that was why I started writing plays. I have continued to work as an independent artist who has benefited from some of these organizations – and sometimes has been frustrated by these organizations as well. I've never served an administrative role or anything in any of these organizations. I have pretty much been an artistic member, and that's probably at the core of why I am here.

Cuesta: Great! Thank you, Eric.

Let us go back to you, Tomas, and I think this first question. If you could address it in the context of what you were getting at in terms of artists and community. How does an organization create a vision for what is best for the future of the field as it speaks to what artists believe they need now?

Benitez: It's by incorporating the artist's voice. Very simply, the organization was created by a group of local artists who were actively engaged in art making. Part of their philosophical context of art making was community service at that time. Those needs have changed, those needs have developed, matured, become more professional and specialized. But there remains another generation of artists in which the same thing applies. Therefore, the same acting principle applies, which is: If you want to create an organization that is going to serve artists, why don't you ask the artists to be involved in the organization, ask their voice, and actively pursue their participation? It maintains the relevance of the organization. I think when we become too self-sustaining, we may become something else, and it may not be a bad thing, but it's not what you were intending to do which was create opportunity and service to those artists. Whether they apply it to community or not, whether they have that context or not, is not as important as whether we provide the opportunity for them to make that choice.

Cuesta: It sounds like our particular organizations may not have come about to where we are now as holistically as Tomas is speaking. Can you speak to the question of the balancing act of meeting the artists' needs as well as meeting the needs of the field?

Myers: I think it's the same thing. Artists who have founded an organization, obviously, have a great deal invested in that organization and sometimes invested in the culture they created at the time of the founding. Consequently, I think there was a time when a number of Loft members, for example, wondered, why is all of this attention being paid to young people? To programs in schools, to a summer creative writing day-camp, to teen moms, to audiences, in fact. We started offering courses for readers and for lovers of literature and for book lovers and expanding our reach in that way.

There was a fear, and it hasn't lasted, for perhaps two or three years that if we took the writer out of being the only person in the center of the Loft's embrace and if we welcomed in readers and book lovers, we would, therefore, be pushing the writer out.

When the Loft did its current strategic plan, we did a similar thing. We brought 200 community members in; from funders to librarians, to publishers, to writers, to teachers. And we asked: What is the field of literature going to look like in the twenty-first century and how can the Loft serve writers in the best possible way?

Time is proving that, as we have looked to the creation of the literature as a major part of our focus and the fostering of audiences, writers get it. Judith Guest who, for many years, was very active in the Loft, said to me about four years ago when her fourth novel came out ten years after the third novel, she said, It is an entirely different business right now! I cannot believe how different the publishing world is. She thanked me for her realization that the Loft has stayed ahead of what writers immediately thought they needed. It's a balancing act, but I don't think it's either/or.

Cuesta: Where does the artist view the role of community in the arts service organization?

Myers: Speaking for all artists, everywhere, in the entire world!

Benitez: We are all artists!

Question: And community being everybody else who is not making this stuff!

Ziegenhagen: I think we always benefit from an audience, and I think having an audience of people other than the practitioners is really a necessary part of an organization. It's what separates it from graduate school, in some ways. Doing things as a playwright or as a director, putting things on for other theater people is an enriching thing because the ideas are at work there as far as what works on stage and what are the best ways to go about it.

In the end, at least I know as far as my own concerns go, the real test of a play is if it's working for people who do something else with the rest of their time. If it's a Friday or Saturday night and they are coming to see a show, I really want to put on something that is going to be interesting for people who aren't interested in the medium of it.

There is a good balance in a thriving artistic community. There is that balance between the practitioners who are really interested in the medium and how the medium of it works. On the other side, we are also interested in how it works for people who don't care about the medium.

Cuesta: Tomas, do you find in your organization difficulty or complexity in terms of meeting different constituencies' needs?

Benitez: Yes, all the time. I like to say that the best thing I can say about the nonprofit world is that it beats working. Because we are really privileged to be doing what we are doing and we are willing to work inordinate hours for ridiculous sums of money. That does not necessarily mean that as a principle we should try and work toward changing that to get new leadership. But we are dealing constantly with the balancing act. In our mission it says we are here to serve artists, audiences, local community, and present the work that is coming from there as part of the American aesthetic, and so

that just leaves us everything in the world to try and serve.

In our programming priorities, we have to reflect that mission. The Chicano art movement is still living within the age of its founders, who have become middle-aged people. I like to think of fifty as being young enough, but it's at the cusp of middle age. And we are also looking at a whole generation which is saying, What are you dinosaurs still doing here?

We have got these different kinds of needs that are more sophisticated – technologically, it has changed – as well as a community which is, at once, the most stable community in Los Angeles and yet is the focus of the most momentum of immigration and changing demographic. We are constantly in flux in terms of trying to maintain that.

What is really great is when you can find something that will provide the opportunity professionally and serve the artists, engage the community, draw the audience, and further the participation of Chicano art and culture as part of America's aesthetic. Those happen less frequently than I would like to brag about but that is our goal. It is the constant dialogue that helps us try to maintain making those connections that I hope to try and stimulate.

Cuesta: I might be putting myself on the spot by asking this question, but you mentioned earlier that sometimes arts organizations have frustrated you. One of them could have been the Playwrights' Center, at some point. Does that have anything to do with how you feel your needs were or were not being met?

Ziegenhagen: A frustrating thing I have found in a general way – and this is just what has happened with theatre and with playwrighting – is the requirement of packaging things before they happen. I know everybody who writes mission statements for organizations has this same problem. If packaging is rewarded more than the final version of something, or if the people who were best at writing proposals were the ones getting funding or recognition instead of actually doing the best work – that is a frustrating thing. That is something that a lot of writers I know deal with; it's something

that I have dealt with, as somebody who is not very good at putting together a synopsis, for example.

Benitez: Can I ask a question?

Ziegenhagen: Sure.

Benitez: I want to ask you because this is a discussion that we have had.

Process seems to be very hard to support. We find ourselves more and more having to deliver the goods. If people put their money forward, they should be able to ask for the goods. That is part of the deal. If you want to be a revolutionary, that is great – do it on your own dollar and dime! But if we are here doing an exchange, that is the deal. But the process part of it is extremely difficult and I find that hard to support. And I am wondering if you find that to be the case?

Ziegenhagen: Something I found, as a playwright, is that I can work on something for a year or two without showing it to anybody and then can have a draft that is structured from beginning to end. At the same time, I can very much benefit from a reading and a discussion and hearing good professional actors read a play and hearing people talk about a play.

There are times when I haven't been sure of what my role was in a developmental organization like the Playwrights' Center, where the point of it wasn't really to collaborate on the creation of something, but, at the same time, it was to work on something that had been created by a single voice and a single mind. I don't even know if it needs nurturing before it gets sent out in the world, but it definitely benefits from that. As far as process goes, that has been my own experience.

Cuesta: What do you see as the challenges in terms of balancing needs or, in essence, in terms of what Tomas has said in terms of finding the resources to give your artists the space to develop their work.

Myers: We all face a world where the needs are much greater than the resources. Organizations, just like humans, since organizations are made

of humans, have to make choices about what we target and what we focus.

In the case of the Loft, we really had to say, Okay, just because we are relatively large in our field, we can't be all things to all people. How do we best serve our mission? One of the wonderful things about the arts community is that it's dynamic. The Loft decided that it was very important to focus both on advanced writers – which we did in this last strategic plan – and also to focus on developing younger audiences to be both writers and readers as a way of supporting literature. As we did that, of course there were some people who felt lost.

Then a wonderful thing happened. Another organization started up. In the case of the Loft, it's an organization called SASE: The Write Place. Carolyn Holbrook, who founded SASE, formerly worked at the Loft, and was quite aware that we couldn't be all things to all people. There was a sort of oppositional tone in the beginning.

Now Carolyn and I have lunch more frequently, and I show up at SASE's benefits and people go, "Huh?" The last time Carolyn and I had lunch, she was complaining about how her constituents are so annoyed that SASE is becoming more institutionalized and everybody can't do what they wanted in the beginning. It has lasted almost eight years. It's not the same organization.

And lo and behold has sprung up a new organization called Art Temple. And their tagline is: Not as Lofty as SASE! This is wonderful! This is wonderful!

Because SASE has existed, the Loft has been able to say, "Okay, we can stop doing the fourteen series of meetings that we did in coffeehouses, because SASE is doing them." Because we can do that, we can focus on some other things. It's a wonderful thing for the writers. We have a number of writers who teach at both organizations, who win grants at both organizations, and that's as it should be.

Cuesta: Going back to the process question and the question of needs. How are the decisions informed of how the limited resources are doled out?

Benitez: I was cut from the cloth of a cult of personality. One of the problems with losing someone so great from the personality of your organization is having the hole to fill. But the culture was in motion so, initially, it was easy.

My job has been to diversify and organize governance and really make the board active. Karen, bless her heart, really had no need for a board. I think you find that across the country with nonprofits; I don't think that I am telling secrets out of school. But I have a great need, and so, making sure that artists are involved in the board was something that Carolyn always wanted even if it was on paper. Now it's very active, creating a variety of voices which is an artists group, an active board of funders that are at different levels.

Staff is still critical in terms of how we develop our strategy to try and stay ahead of the game and keep the doors open. It's about trying to be vital within what's available in our strategy. I find frequently that people will miss the culture of spontaneity that Carolyn presented when she was there. But that culture was also nurtured by somebody who could make a choice about a program like that [*snaps fingers*]. And it would be the direction we went in. Whereas I am trying to set up a hierarchy, if you will, or at least a governance that will balance that, because I don't think it's healthy in the long run if we have this.

At our place we make decisions and we spend a lot of time trying to make sure that artists are involved in teaching, they are involved in printing, they are involved in staff. That is also an interesting conflict, trying to get people when they are being drawn, and onboard, and then having groups in which they can feed the dialogue. That is how we try to reach it and still struggle to keep all of those conversations going.

Cuesta: We find at the Playwrights' Center that there is this fundamental tension; it's not a negative tension, but it's a tension that exists between the artists who belong to the center and find themselves in a place where there is this need to promote the community life of the Playwrights' Center but also to promote their own personal goals.

Eric, do you think artists have the ability to look at the needs of the whole arts community or the needs of the whole arts organization?

Ziegenhagen: The way that I started – and I was part of the Young Playwrights Program at the Playwrights' Center – was a community effort. They had this core group, of August Wilson, Lee Blessing, and all of these folks developing new plays in the mid 80s. They didn't necessarily need to give their resources over to new developing writers, and we were writing our creaky first plays. But they did and I was a part of it and I wasn't entirely conscious that I was benefiting from what would be an outreach program, instead of just being treated as a playwright. I guess that was a case of being part of the program, but brought into the fold not in the sense of it being a special program. I had the same resources and felt a community among the core members.

The other side of that is, I try not to do a lot of work for the sake of putting it on a resume. Like it's my own values or something where I don't want to do things that are just going to look good on paper, and so in that way, I'd say that I always am attracted to organizations that might operate by those same principles as far as doing things that have a specific purpose in their final execution more than just developing a brand, I would say, or developing an identity.

Benitez: One of the things that I am finding, at least in discussion with artists, and I really took heart in hearing you talking about, "We Are Not as Lofty as SASE," you know that contemptible *informata* that the groups give you.

I had a conversation with Juan Caddio, who has been around since the very beginning with the California Arts Council and was a member of the Royal Chicano Airforce who sponsored the Young Impudent Pilots of the Royal Chicano Airforce. These beloved Chicano dinosaurs are still running around terrorizing Sacramento. Juan was talking about how, Tomas, we are trying everything we can. This is coming with a state mandate in terms of trying to tie in the program, and so they have multicultural entrée and are trying to make it really easy for access to the state, to their credit.

But there is a level that is not going to come unless they come forward. That is something to take to heart, which is there are three or four small, independent-minded, community-based groups, galleries that are operating right now. A couple of them have an attitude of, "We are going to be better than Self Help. But can you lend us your tables and chairs?"

But what's exciting is that they are trying to capture spontaneity. We have been given the ridiculous challenge of trying to re-firm the foundation of the organization and maintain the spontaneity that gave us our personality. Some of it spills and you can't do it all. I think recognizing that you can't do it all, that there is a level where you may not be able to serve that part of that group because they are not exactly sure what their services need yet.

I have Patsy Valdez who is saying very clearly, Anything you can do to make me part of the national picture, no problem! Patsy has taken thirty years to get to that point. But there is another group that is not part of it and I think that is really okay. I think that the bubble-over is meant to be part of who our network is.

Myers: One thing we have been able to do at the Loft, thanks to moving to this facility, is try to recreate some of the energy of the founding years. Now we have a facility that is not run by the janitor who kicked people out at nine o'clock in the old elementary school where we were, and where we didn't have access to the quote "performance hall" except one weekend evening a month – it was a gym. We didn't have any control over that space.

We have been in this facility less than six months and we already have three series up and running that were ideas that came to us from our membership. A series called Open Ended, which is a work-in-progress series that Bart Schneider suggested. He's the editor of what used to be *The Hungry Mind Review* and is now *Ruminator Review*. We have a playwright who asked to do a series where he is gathering together people to read around a certain theme. We also are doing all kinds of sponsorships around book clubs that we could never have done without moving to this facility. What is happening is that a whole rebirth of little, tiny

communities is occurring thanks to the fact that we were able to share our resources.

Cuesta: At this point, why don't we open it up for questions.

Benitez: It's the infamous Roberto Bedoya.

Bedoya: I'm the executive director of the National Association of Artists' Organizations. I have a question and a comment. When I saw the brochure I actually was bothered by the title because I think it conflates what service organizations exist and then the function of the arts organization in service to its constituency. I thought it was just going to be a panel of artists and service organizations that exist as intermediaries for arts organizations and how arts organizations address their needs as organizations in service to artists. I wanted to ask you to make those distinctions among understanding the relationship between arts service organizations and an organization who works in service to artists.

I am very tied to a comment that Tomas said about the national charge that an organization has and how you feel that you are circulating the information. So that if you are a Chicano artist in Texas, how do you find out what is going on in Northern California?

Myers: I can say in literature that we just had a national conference in this room this past Saturday of literary organizations that range from the Academy of American Poets, Poetry Society of America, the Loft, other independent literary centers, cowboy poets, and the "slam" organizations of the country. Forty different organizations coming together, trying to create some sort of a network that would serve the whole field. All of these are organizations whose primary work – except for the Academy and Poetry Society – is to serve artists in their own local communities. So it certainly is an effort going on in the literary field, the realization that, as we work to serve writers and to advance the field, there is a need to have a national conversation. My own bias is that culture happens pretty locally but the world is getting smaller and smaller, so the Loft certainly can't attempt to serve the whole nation

but we can try to be a model and communicate and exchange ideas. But I think it's probably different in different fields.

Audience: I was going to say that you had mentioned earlier about making things locally and then putting it around the world through the paper. I think that's something that I always realized – particularly in theatre. If you go to New York and you see the theaters that have these international reputations, they can be rooms the size of this room. Or you go to a reading series at a location that has a big reputation and it's a third of the size of this room. There's always the locals, it's the local communities and there is a focus on that. Somehow by staying that way, it can still be known around the world.

Benitez: It's funny because that idea of Act Locally and Think Globally has been used, I just can't remember where it's paraphrased from. But we try to stay away from that, otherwise it makes the funders scared.

Sometimes people say, Well, what is Chicano art? Which is just the worst thing you can ask me. What is a Chicano? Oh don't! You know, I don't know yet, I'm still learning! Because it's growing, it's emerging. What happens is that we figure out that the way to look at it is the individual expression, when seen as a whole, is what provides the collective identity and becomes a little bit easier to identify.

Going back to that idea of national, I don't think it's possible. As a CBO located in the heart of East L.A. – we are between half a million and a million – we are doing a great job, we are retooling for the next century. But there is no way that we can effectively do the national dialogue without the linkages. We are even doing it in the state right now with a group called LAN, which is Latino Art Network. Even that has been difficult, at the organizational membership level, not even filtering to individual artists or smaller groups.

It's critical and I think that how we can facilitate that dialogue between the members of the orgs and getting to our mutual audience – which is artists and the communities that respond to artists – that still maintains the key.

What we both know is that there is a great opportunity for support in that arena because of the lack of effective linkages, or at least accelerated linkages per need right now. What we are doing, we are doing well, but it's still hard to get to that channeling process. Even internally, having time sometimes to facilitate those memberships and field the memberships and field dialogues means that if I am here, I am not at Self Help.

Cuesta: I would agree with that. I think effective linkages on a national level become more and more difficult but become more and more realistic as time goes on, that you have to put your focus there.

I think the five playwrights who founded the Playwrights' Center thirty years ago didn't think that they were going to be a national organization. What inevitably happened was their work started getting produced nationally and people started to recognize us as a national organization even though we didn't really do any national outreach, per se. Our outreach was our members going out and being very good ambassadors for us. Now, thirty years later, we find ourselves having to reconcile – now that we have a national membership, a national presence – how do we continue to make those effective linkages? It's very difficult.

Wilson: My name is June Wilson and I work with the Minnesota Dance Alliance. It's a service organization. We are finding as we get to this twenty-year mark that there are issues surrounding the artists who were active in our organization in its founding and the whole new group of artists coming in. You don't just come to get served. In order for your needs to be met, you have to be active in the organization as well. We are interested in hearing the artist's voice, but often the artist is not there for a lot of reasons. I mean a lot of it is resources.

So trying to look at some of those needs in terms of, one, they are open to the artist's voice. And then encouraging artists that, This is what it has to be: in order for us to fully meet your needs, we need to hear your voice and we need you to be there. Specifically in terms of changing the kind of arts and initiatives for the arts, we talked about the organization and a

whole new group of artists coming in. How do you get that information out and what has been your struggle?

Myers: I have never been a grantmaker, but it strikes me that the whole issue of allocating resources and being a steward is very complicated. As service organizations, which often have the responsibility of re-granting funds, we become the sugar daddy, sugar mama. There is a love-hate relationship because, suddenly, we stand – in the minds of some artists – between a pot of gold and themselves.

You are absolutely right, June, that if you have a membership that is simply saying, Gimme, gimme, gimme, but doesn't say, How can I help? What programs could I volunteer to see happen that are not happening right now, because your staff can't do everything? We could open this up and I am sure you all would have horror stories. But it's challenging in a world where resources are not infinite.

Benitez: One of the things I think is really interesting is that the needs have shifted. The spirit of the people that founded Self Help thirty-some-odd years ago in the heart of this tempestuous time, have gotten older. In those days, we weren't talking about having a health plan. We were talking about changing the world with this march. Now, what we are looking for is trying to figure out: How can we get a good dental plan for these guys?

One of the things is recognizing that there is that inevitability in the shift, therefore, the new dynamic. Pete Wilson, the former Governor of California, was the godfather of the modern Chicano movement because he provoked so much visceral response. We had so much fun hating that man for what he was doing. What he did was to provide a lightning rod by which this whole other generation of students was invigorated. With them came this other generation of people who are looking at making art and being creative in the context of their community.

Now what we are dealing with is expanding how we are trying to create needs, because people who are thirty years down the road and don't even have the reputation of Frank

Romero or Patsy Valdez, they are just looking for work, thirty years later. And we have got these young kids who are saying, "We want..." So there is that thing too.

One of the things that the young people bring to us and that we must adapt to is technology. The concepts of community service do not have to be sacrifice, they can be social enterprise; they can be proactive; they can be community building, and having to adapt to that. There is nothing romantic about being poor and starving. That is for people who aren't in the business. Poor and starving artists that I know have no romance attached to that.

Those are part of the things which are bringing other ways of creating resources and generating that. But you are absolutely right in this sense – from the very get-go, Self Help had a caveat. This is where the nun comes back in, you know, the Franciscan philosophy. The caveat was, there is a trade. When we had residencies – and we no longer have onsite residences – you had to be picking up the mail or driving the truck, something had to be part of the deal. The participation moves away from the paternalistic structure; moves away from the imperial structure. We do for you and we are great at it but the deal is to trade so that we are doing together. That has been part of the dialogue that we have been going through. We have jobs. We got a job doing a poster for a national campaign reaching into Latino communities to talk about overcoming barriers to dialogue about AIDS. It's conscripting artists, working with clients, and doing a job which is different from the kind of projects we do. There are still people who are saying, "You are selling out!" No we're not, we're paying the rent. You are still able to work within the confines and you are learning how to do a job.

These kinds of things are still part of what has to advance. I also think it's critical that we keep working with those national organizations. If they are arts service organizations, they are having many of these kinds of dialogues and discussions within their membership too. Just like you just illustrated.

Question: Now The Loft is interested in new literature, the Composers' Forum wants to

develop audiences for new music, the Playwrights' Center wants to develop audiences for new theatre. I am wondering about who is driving these changes. I guess I don't fully believe that there are young artists who are coming and saying, Don't give me the \$10,000 scholarship, you spend that money on developing audiences and getting more interest in the field in general. I am wondering, is this a trend? Is it a natural progression?

Cuesta: I don't think it's one single element. I don't think that you can put it on saying that at this moment in time certain trends show, or organizations are at a certain economic state that they have to diversify their funding phase in such ways.

When we looked at the question, we looked at how can we improve the development process for artists. It was very simple for us to think about, well, why not enlarge the development process for artists to include not only the conception of the idea and helping them to conceive the idea, but also taking it through the first production. Because in many ways, when you are working with a playwright on a new play, you have to actually give them the opportunity to go through that first rehearsal process because that's as much a part of the development process as is being in the room six months prior trying to figure out, Well, does this scene work? Does that scene work? They really are not going to know if the things are going to work until they are in that performance rehearsal process and then they finally have it in front of an audience and it's opening night. I think that from that came the desire that you have to have that opening night, you have to have that audience at that opening night.

I think that there are also other tangential benefits to all of that. It brings a broader base of support to an organization. It brings in an energy, an influx of people that the organization would not normally see if it was just focusing – as we have done for many, many years – on the playwright in that closed room with just the collaborators. It brings an energy that enriches the process. I think that, yes, it was the playwrights who have driven us to where we are today. I think it is also the professionals in

the field – who are a part of helping the playwright along, sort of saying to ourselves, How can we improve this process that we have developed here?

Myers: I think that is a great question because I can't imagine a young writer saying, Give \$10,000 to anybody but me, me, me, me.

On the other hand, I think that as we, again, look at resources and look at responsibility within community, that it is our responsibility as a staff, as a board – comprised partly of writers, partly of other individuals who bring other things – to be looking ahead and looking out. Because a writer, in particular, is not necessarily doing that. He or she is working on the piece, the craft, we would hope.

It's just really clear to me that when a young person comes out with his magnum opus and realizes that most of the publishing houses have merged with Viacom and Paramount, he doesn't have a prayer of getting published. If they do get published, and they do a reading, nobody will come. It's not serving those writers in the end. So, to give the writers not only classes and mentoring opportunities around craft, but opportunities for professional development which tell them about the reality of the marketplace. Literature, in particular, comes up against the commercial world, and I think it's another reason why the independent literary field is a lot behind the performing arts in being a powerful, unified voice. It's just plain our responsibility to help the writer; to say when you come out of your garret or your studio with your piece, that's not the end of the story. It's just barely the middle of the story.

Ziegenhagen: I would say that I think that there will always be both kinds of organizations. I am part of a group that I guess is called the Chicago Directors' Forum – we barely have a name for it even. What I mean by the two different kinds of organizations is I think there will always be artist-led organizations, and then I would say non-artist led organizations. I don't know what you call them. The Chicago Directors' Forum, it doesn't exist on paper, it's not a formal organization; but we go and we can get in free to plays.

It's good to have that. You just put up with the problems of, well, we can't get any money from being part of this organization. There are problems with that but then there would also be problems with the Directors' Forum as an institution, with a board, and everything else.

Amy Ryberg has put on evenings of one-acts that were a way of putting on shows from beginning to end. I think of that as not in conflict with something like the Playwrights' Center in the sense that there is a group of artists who want to see something put together; nobody is really going to get paid for it.

I think that the best communities have both of those. As an individual artist, the main thing is to just navigate between them and reap the benefits instead of resenting what isn't there with them.

Benitez: I do think that you will find a conflict there – not a conflict, but perhaps a different kind of response depending upon the size of the organization and the mission.

The Eighteenth Street Complex in Santa Monica has a program called Res Artists which is going to be bringing sixty artists from around the world to come and have a conference with artists in Southern California in November. And Eighteenth Street is relying upon the fact that it's known to be the place where that happens, and so it is fulfilling, to some extent, that idea.

It's only fair to say that, strategically, part of what we are doing has been done not with the artist in mind. To a great extent, the cultural wars did two things. Number one, they wiped out individual support for artists of any significant level and we must recognize that that is a loss. Number two, they put us into a strategy of survival. Now we are at the point where we are reconciling that conversation. We recognize that who we are and what we do without the artist is ridiculous, there is no point to it. Nice car, but we got no gas to go.

There must be participation, presence, and dialogue in which the individual artist is part of an organization at any level. It's not fair to say that we can meet all of those needs. I think it's fair to say we must try and engage the dialogue. We will find along the way that, perhaps,

there will be times when we have to re-evaluate who we are and where our resources and priorities are. How we can do that – to have artists' voices – is to put artists on boards; put them significantly in points of governance and decision; and recognize that they will be part of a clamorous dialogue. There are times when artists are absolute idiots in understanding certain things about running organizations, and there are times when administrators are absolute idiots about understanding artists. So, recognizing that is at least a good place to start. I think that is part of what goes forward.

Taking a look at what we do and why we do it goes back to the question of audience and community. There are large organizations in Southern California that are actively pursuing the Latino community because in California we are going to be 51 percent in forty years. So I'm thinking, wait a minute! Now, how do I do this so that I'm not in conflict? But I am in competition because if I don't go after some community, I am going to be outdated. That is something that artists should be concerned about. So it's a combination of those things.

But I would say that all along, what we think we have tried to do is to carry along the individual artists, but there are times when we don't.

Cuesta: Time for one last question.

Question: Tomas, you were just talking about the artists who move into those positions of power in institutions. In my mind, I am lumping that with a trend – and I know it could be disputed whether it is or not – but a kind of professionalization of the arts where more and more students come out of colleges and universities and then go straight into working for companies. They still consider themselves artists, and they are in a position of quote/unquote "power," you might say.

I just wonder what you feel about the traditional role of the artist as outsider – with potential to come up with a radical statement, a challenging statement, penetrating, in whatever field, in whatever way. Whether it's an aesthetic kind of a statement; like in playwriting like Beckett or, politically, like Arthur Miller's *The*

Crucible. Do you feel that the traditional role of the artist is in any way endangered by this trend towards professionalization?

Benitez: Yes. Yes. People can be bought off and artists are not immune to that – take a look at Koontz. But I think that part of it is recognizing that there is always going to be that group that enjoy being on the fringe! Thank God they enjoy being outside the institution, because they are a pain in the neck otherwise!

Ziegenhagen: It goes back to that thing about the trouble with mission statements and the trouble with synopses, and the trouble, in a way, with being part of a movement that has been legitimized.

Myers: How awful.

Ziegenhagen: I think what is difficult is that when you start describing your work with the vocabulary that is done to please the institutions, it can be problematic. Because you are creating something that is derivative of something that has already been legitimized.

When you are working in a medium where you don't want to break something down into how it can be described, it's hard to legitimize what you are doing aesthetically. As opposed to if you have a vocabulary that has already been used. It's just hard to re-invent a medium and give a vocabulary to it and be part of an institution by doing that.

Cuesta: We, at this point, are going to give folks the opportunity to go to a demo at the Minnesota Center for Book Arts. Peggy, do you want to stand up and introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about what is going to be happening?

Peggy: I am Peggy Korsmo-Kennon, executive director at the Minnesota Center for Book Arts. We are really pleased to have at least an hour of your time to share with you a little bit about what we do. It's a place where the visual arts meets the literary arts, it comes together in different ways.

Cuesta: Before everybody goes, I just want to thank the panelists. I also want to thank Laura

Zimmerman from the McKnight Foundation who really helped formulate the questions and helped me work the logistics of this panel. So thank you.

Zimmerman: Thank you, Carlo.

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