



Monograph

Monograph is one of the benefits of membership in Americans for the Arts.

In 2006, the Wisconsin Arts Board (WAB) looked back at the five towns that participated in the first “access” grant funded by the National Endowment for the Arts in the late 1960s. This was a seminal rural arts development program managed by the University of Wisconsin’s Office of Community Arts Development at the College of Agriculture.¹ The WAB study included interviews with elderly local artists, archival documents, a survey conducted in 1973 and replicated in 2005², and conversations with some of the field’s earliest practitioners. A team including one of the original project directors, the interviewer, and six arts administrators articulated 50 “lessons learned” from these sources, which Americans for the Arts now present to you in this *Monograph*.³

Effective Community Arts Development: Fifty Years, Fifty Tips

By Maryo Gard Ewell

Introduction

The first local arts agencies started in the late 1940s and led to the creation of Community Arts Councils, Inc. (CACI) in Winston-Salem, NC, 50 years ago. CACI is the ancestor of today’s Americans for the Arts and as we look ahead to our 50th anniversary in 2010, we want to take this occasion to reflect upon effective arts development as we celebrate this movement that has grown from about 400 local arts agencies in 1960 to an estimated 5,000 today. The local arts agency (LAA) movement has had a lasting, indelible impact on the arts in America.

Local arts agencies are a growing presence in communities across the country. Each provides vital services to sustain its local arts industry, and endeavors to make the arts accessible to every member of the community. As such, each LAA in America is unique to the community that it serves, and each changes as its community changes—no two are exactly alike. In 2008, local arts agencies administered an estimated \$858 million in local government funds for the arts to support cultural organizations, provide services to artists and/or arts organizations, and present arts programming to the public.⁴

Americans for the Arts is committed to the continued health and well-being of the arts in America. The last 50 years have certainly demonstrated that by helping the nation’s local arts agencies deliver programs and services at the local level, we’re helping the arts continue to thrive. These 50 tips are a resource to remind us of where we’ve been, what we’ve learned along the way, and how to best equip ourselves for securing the future of the arts in America through effective community arts development by local arts agencies nationwide.

Start with a Big Idea

1 If would-be arts developers aspire to enable “more art for more people,” they are thinking too small. That is an idea for arts people. There must be an idea, a philosophy, about all people and the way that people can live—and live together. The goal is a human community, not merely an arts community.

2 This philosophy must simultaneously imagine an evolution of the arts and an evolution of the community and its many systems. Just having more arts available will not necessarily make the community a better place to live. Arts developers should articulate a thrilling vision of what a meaningful, healthy community for all people could be, and how the arts can help make it so. This is what we mean by “community arts development.” It is typically spearheaded by an entity originally known as a community arts council or

a local arts agency. In 1969 Robert Gard said, “One of the first principles of community arts councils should be the assumption that they are and should be an instrument of social change affecting change in both the arts and community life in general...they should be experimental...in order to develop a community of creative abundance.”⁵

3 Democracy is perhaps the biggest idea in America. Why not ground arts development work in furthering democracy? This is, after all, what all people living in America have in common, their commitment to democracy. This can mean three distinct things, and all are important:

- Creating more access to the arts. This is what most people think of, and it is the “more arts for more people” idea.
- Enabling all people to participate in art-making that is based in their own personal story, worldview, vision, and culture.
- Using the arts to raise important questions, and engaging people in dialogue about them.

4 Community development includes economic development, agriculture, natural resource conservation, transportation, housing, health, social justice movements, and more. The effective arts developer will partner with some or all of these efforts, for goals will overlap.

5 Community development is a process based on an assumption of local wisdom and an assumption that most of the resources needed to get something done are right there in the community.

LAA's & Partnerships

Ninety-six percent of local arts agencies maintain at least one collaboration or partnership with other public or community agencies (e.g., school districts, parks and recreation, social services, economic development, chamber of commerce). Eighty-nine percent have three or more ongoing collaborations.

Exercise Leadership

6 Effective community arts developers share a profound commitment to all of the people in their community and an interest in their stories.

7 They share a belief in the inherent creativity of the people in their community.

8 They share an enthusiastic awareness that this creativity may lead to something other than art as they know it.

9 They share an understanding that they aren't leading people to art. Rather, they are bearing witness to the creativity of their neighbors.

10 They are trying to change the preposition, from "arts *for* the people" to "arts *of* and *with* people."

11 Arts developers are in it for the long run. They walk with the great arts and community visionaries who have come *before* them.

12 Arts developers are in it for the long run. They walk with the great arts and community visionaries who will come *after* them.

Americans for the Arts defines a local arts agency (LAA) as a private nonprofit organization or an agency of local government that provides services to artists and arts organizations, awards grants to artists or arts organizations, participates in community cultural planning, presents programming to the public, and/or manages cultural facilities. Through these activities, LAAs promote the arts at the local level, endeavoring to make them part of the daily fabric of community living. Each LAA is as unique as the community that it serves, and each can change as fast as its community changes. All, however, share the goals of serving the diverse art forms in their community and making them accessible to each member of that community.

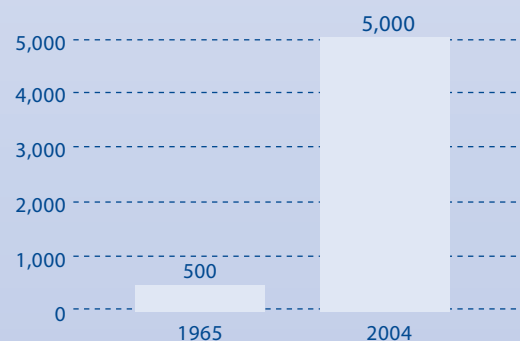
Local Arts Agency Programs:

Cultural Programming	92%
Services to Artists and Organizations	89%
Facility Management	62%
Grantmaking	50%
Cultural Planning	22%

Grantmaking LAAs Fund:

Organizations	35%
Individuals	25%
Both	21%

Estimated Growth in Number of LAAs



13

At the same time, they need to survive to be effective in the short run. They cultivate an understanding of the unique psychology of their place and a curiosity about the best way to work successfully within and with their local community process.

14

Effective arts developers share a slogan: Inquiry and experimentation!

15

Arts developers joyously claim the full range of community endeavor, caring little or not at all whether activities are done by for-profit groups, nonprofit groups, individuals, or informal gatherings of people in church choirs or high school bands.

16

Arts developers instinctively see restaurants and fields as stages, snowboarding as choreography, advertising as poetry, birthday parties as theater. If it's creative, if it aspires to excellence—then it's part of the world that they claim.

17

Effective arts developers are always asking themselves, “How can I use this situation? How can this person fit in?”

18

Effective community arts leaders recognize the many instances of “them” and “us” in the community: artists and nonartists; English-speakers and non-English-speakers; old-timers and newcomers; young and old; individuals with a certain worldview and individuals with

an alternate view. Effective arts developers ask, “How can these groups be brought together?” “The articulate, neighborly sharing of excellence in art”⁶ is what a local arts agency is about.

19

Community arts leaders understand that the creative resources that are needed are probably right at home. Thus they know that while some of their work involves coaching, the bulk of their work involves uncovering latent creativity and encouraging it to flourish.

20

Arts developers nurture others:

- By sharing power, even though they know that by giving power away, the arts and the arts institutions as they know them may be changed.
- By identifying and working with the leaders among the next generation, ethnic and cultural groups, the elderly, newcomers, residents of housing developments, business groups, religious groups, and others.

21

Arts developers challenge others:

- By providing settings in which people who don't feel that they are creative can express their creativity.
- By insisting that their neighbors live up to their creative potential.

22

Effective leaders may be simultaneously insiders and outsiders. They accept this even if it makes them uncomfortable. Some outsiders have lived in the community for years and years. Some insiders may not have lived there very long. The question is not one of longevity so

LAAs & Arts Education

Sixty percent of local arts agencies implement **arts education** programs and activities, including providing artists in schools, teacher training, and arts education advocacy.

much as of perspective. Leaders know that it is important to cultivate both roles and to be conscious of which role they are playing at a given time. And they know that it is important to put aside any longing to play just one role, insider or outsider, because they're at their most effective when they can play both.

23 As insiders, they know how things work and who makes things work, and they are reputable and broadly trusted.

24 As outsiders, they can compare their community to others. They are not parochial. They are alert to what is happening culturally in the state or the nation. They are constantly thinking about how to bring new ideas home. Sometimes it's in the outsider role that leaders find adrenaline and the courage to carry on. In the outsider role, leaders see more clearly unrealized possibilities in the community and can identify new resources to get things done. Outsiders can sometimes pose questions that insiders cannot. They can bring in new language. They may be more likely to notice the stories that a community tells about itself. Are they stories of successfully overcoming odds? Or are they about being worn down by outside forces? These stories may give the leader clues about developing a plan for gathering the resources needed.

25 Community arts leaders are not only arts people. In fact, sometimes the longest lasting creative leadership comes from someone who thinks of herself as an economic development specialist or thinks of himself as an environmental activist.

26 Leadership is not just visible activity, and it certainly is not management, although some leaders are also effective managers. Effective community arts developers are people who lead by listening and asking questions, people who lead by encouraging others, people who are willing to spearhead a risky idea, people who seem to know everyone.

27 Successful leaders know and participate in many community systems and groups. This enables them to understand the multifaceted realities of how their community works.

28 The breadth of the ideas of effective community arts developers may threaten some who consider a passion for the arts as a way of distinguishing some people from others, rather than a passion for the arts as the basis of discovering common humanity. Effective community arts developers are not defensive about their perspective.

29 Effective community arts developers are passionate about the place where they live.

Merge Creativity, Excellence, and Community

30 A community arts development approach transcends singing or painting. The community arts developer sees no conflict between process and product, between quality and broad participation. In the synthesis of good community process, some technical coaching, and each person's creative outlook on the world lies the potential for exciting art.

31 “There is a vast and noticeable difference between letting a thousand flowers bloom and permitting everything to come up in weeds.”⁷ There must be standards of excellence, but the community may be inventing an excellence that is its own, marrying the flavor of the place with the freshness of local people's ideas and visions.

32 Articulating quality begins with a profound respect for the people.

33

The professional artist who is also a community arts developer plays the role of coach, not teacher.

34

Participating in art-making enables a person to be a more judicious and open audience member.

35

The words *art*, *ideas*, and *creative activity* could someday become synonyms. Why not now?

36

Someone in a small Wisconsin town said: “We don’t think of our Sand County Players as art. It’s just what we do.” Isn’t that what we most aspire to?

37

There is no single arts scene. Many can coexist. Each should support the others.

38

We may need to help find ways that people can talk about the arts. Most often, when we are talking to one another or writing for the newspaper, we simply describe what we see and leave it at that. We need to ask if there is a way to move beyond description into conversation that includes opinions about both the art and the ideas that the art is leading us to.

LAA's & Funding Innovations

Many local arts agencies have facilitated the establishment of local option taxes in their communities—designated tax revenue streams used to fund the arts. Examples include St. Louis’s property tax (\$60 million per year), San Francisco’s hotel tax (\$25 million per year), and Denver’s sales tax (\$40 million per year).

39

Locally made art can grow from local history or from the stories of people who live in a place or from metaphors about the meaning of living in that place.

40

The local arts agency considers local resources. Are there no choreographers in town for the musical you’d like to write about the history of the town? Perhaps there are retired professional ice-dancers living there. No composers in town? Probably there are garage rock bands who write their own songs. No set designers? What about the graphics designer for the advertising agency? Engaging the nontraditional artist in the community arts development process may lead to art products that are fresh and exciting.

41

Labeling activity as “fine,” “folk,” or “community arts” is irrelevant. What matters is that it be joyous and sincere, grounded in a commitment to excellence and challenge.

Consider Structure and Infrastructure Issues

42 The old style local arts agency includes artists, art lovers, representatives of arts organizations, and perhaps representatives of the business community or the media. A community arts development action group includes arts organizations and artists, but also people representing those other important community concerns where the arts can make a difference: an environmental activist, someone from the nearby military base, someone from the hospital.

LAA's & Cultural Planning

Local arts agencies typically lead community **cultural planning**—a community-inclusive process of assessing local cultural needs and mapping a plan of implementation. In communities with a cultural plan, local government arts funding grows at a significantly faster rate than communities without a cultural plan.

43 The mission need not be strictly an arts mission, but rather, a broader community mission. One leader said, to paraphrase: Land is bigger than the arts. It's love for the land that we all have in common here, and that made the arts stick because we connected the arts with something bigger.

44 The group can be nonprofit or for-profit, tax-exempt or not, part of another agency, completely informal, or even intentionally temporary, depending on what makes local sense. In one small Wisconsin town, the theater group does not have nonprofit status, does not aspire to a facility of its own, does not seek grants, is not in the database of the state arts agency, and does not keep its income. Instead, the group gives its income to other deserving groups in town. Yet in a survey, 83.3 percent of the people in the community knew about the theater's performances, an almost unprecedented awareness of local arts activity.

45 The structure should be flexible and loose enough to maximize creative exploration and avoid institutionalization. By institutionalization, I mean creating a structure whose maintenance could ultimately take priority over the original stated purpose.

46 The service area can be organic. It need not be a municipality. It could be a planning region, a local telephone calling area, a watershed.



Hello Neighbor by Julie Keefe and Tyler Kohlhoff.
Commissioned by Caldera.
Photograph by Julie Keefe, Tyler Kohlhoff, and Matt Hansink.

47 The local arts agency should pay attention to community demographics and be aware of who is and is not participating.

48 The effective community arts developer knows that there are quite different strategies for attracting more people like current participants, creating an increasingly meaningful experience for regular participants, and engaging new kinds of participants. The RAND Corporation's research on participation in the arts is invaluable.⁸

49 In one of the small Wisconsin communities studied, a participant said, "Our arts council used the Tupperware Party as our model for assessing the community and getting people engaged—neighbor by neighbor, block by block."

50 It is important to be clear what success means. It isn't always numbers. If the mission is clear and grounded in a philosophy of community-building, the correct evaluative questions will emerge. For example, if a goal is the building of community relationships, evaluation will include assessing the health of the ecosystem—the relationships—not the budget growth of arts institutions or the number of arts events.

El Intercambio by Larry Kirkland.
Commissioned by the Texas Tech
University System. Photograph by
Shayne Hensley.

Conclusion

In 1969, Ralph Burgard, the first director of Arts Councils of America (formerly Community Arts Councils, Inc.), said local arts agencies “must ultimately be concerned with the confrontation of art and people, not art institutions and people...”⁹ In that same year, Robert Gard, founder of the Office of Community Arts Development in the College of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin and the first person to write about rural arts councils, said: “If you try, you can indeed alter the face and the heart of America.”¹⁰

In this, our community arts development work, the ordinary and the extraordinary come together. The insider and the outsider share something meaningful. Beauty merges with the daily stuff of living. The singer and the engineer find common ground. The past, future, and present meet.

These tips come from our collective past, and will hopefully shed light on topics new and old; inspire leaders who are veterans in the arts and those who are just now emerging in our field; and remind us all that the small steps we take each day are making a difference. Looking forward, what will be our 50 tips to the next generation? We must take the past and learn from it in order to move forward.

- ¹ Robert E. Gard was director of the Office of Community Arts Development and the first to write about rural arts councils.
- ² This survey looked at interest in the arts in the five “test” communities in rural Wisconsin, compared to four “control” communities. The findings suggest that, even though 35 years have passed and few people remember the project, there may be a special response to the arts in the test communities that could be linked to this project.
- ³ Thanks to Steve Duchrow, Sara Ebel, Heather Good, Karen Goeschko, Anne Katz, LaMoine MacLaughlin, Miranda McClenaghan, and Dr. Michael Warlum who worked with me on the 2005 Wisconsin study, made possible by the Wisconsin Arts Board and the National Endowment for the Arts. And thanks to four key founders of our field: Ralph Burgard who wrote *Arts in the City* in 1969, and Robert Gard who wrote *The Arts in the Small Community* that same year (both are now deceased); and Phil Hanes and George Irwin, who founded America’s first two community arts councils, helped to found Community Arts Councils, Inc., and are still influencing the creative life of their communities.
- ⁴ Americans for the Arts, “Government Support for the Arts: Federal, State and Local 1994 to 2009,” one pager, 2009, www.AmericansForTheArts.org/pdf/get_involved/advocacy/research/2009/govtfunding09.pdf.
- ⁵ Robert Gard et al., *Arts in the Small Community: A National Plan*, (first draft, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, 1969).
- ⁶ Robert Gard et al., 9.
- ⁷ Robert Gard et al., 96.
- ⁸ Kevin McCarthy and Kimberly Jinnett, *A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001).
- ⁹ Ralph Burgard, *Arts in the City: Organizing and Programming Community Arts Councils* (New York: Associated Councils of the Arts, 1969).
- ¹⁰ Robert Gard et al., 98.



Sign of the Times: Phase II by Seyed Alavi in collaboration with former Emery High students who worked on the project. Commissioned by the City of Emeryville, CA Art in Public Places Program. Photograph by Lisa Sullivan.

All images in this *Monograph* are from the Americans for the Arts Public Art Network *2009 Year in Review*. The *Year in Review* CD features 40 outstanding public art installations from across the country and is an invaluable advocacy and funding tool for public art administrators, art commissioners, architects, designers, and educators. The *2009 Year in Review* CD is available for purchase from the Americans for the Arts Store at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/Store.



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