BUILDING ARTS PARTICIPATION

NEW FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD

Arts and Non-arts Partnerships

Opportunities, Challenges, and Strategies

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IN THIS BRIEF

- Mutual Benefits of Partnerships between Arts and Non-arts Groups
- The Connections of Non-arts Organizations to the Arts
- Partnership Assets Can Also Be Liabilities
- Understanding the Risks
- Types of Partnership Risks

Arts and Non-arts Partnerships

Opportunities, Challenges, and Strategies

Organizations of all types are increasingly forming partnerships—including with organizations outside their fields—to help them carry out their missions. The arts are no exception. Many are working with agencies not primarily devoted to the arts—educational, health, religious, youth development, human services, recreational, and community development organizations—to accomplish both artistic and community service goals that might otherwise be far more difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Such partnerships are not easy to forge or maintain, however. Success depends on each partner's willingness and ability to live up to its part of the bargain. Partnerships involve risks, because arts and non-arts organizations differ in many ways. At stake are reputations, constituent relations, organizational missions, and investments of time, money, and expertise if a project does not go well.

Fortunately, important practical lessons are emerging from the experiences of arts and non-arts collaborators that can help organizations identify and reduce these risks. This brief draws on the experience of partnerships supported by the Community Partnerships for Cultural Participation Initiative, funded by The Wallace Foundation,[1] between 1998 and 2002, to offer lessons on

[1] In 2003, the foundation changed its name from the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds to The Wallace Foundation.

- Assessing the benefits arts/non-arts partnerships can bring to both parties
- Diagnosing potential partnership problems in advance
- Choosing partnerships that have a good chance of succeeding
- Developing strategies to maximize the chances of success[2]

Mutual Benefits of Partnerships between Arts and Non-arts Groups

The major benefits arts groups in our study sought from collaborating with non-arts groups were greater public credit for community involvement, connections to new communities of potential participants, and wider opportunities to carry out creative work. The benefits non-arts groups sought were better programs and a reputation for being more effective in their community work.

Example: A partnership between five small theater companies and a public library system's central office involved a series of plays performed in branch libraries. The project deliberately placed theater performances in neighborhoods with different populations from those usually served by the theaters. The library earned the reputation of presenting high-quality theater performances. The theaters received the benefit of exposing their work to audiences that had little prior experience with live drama.

Example: A partnership between a large art museum and a major community development organization involved the creation in a poor neighborhood of a visual art gallery that engages youth in all aspects of gallery operation. The community development organization benefited from introducing youth to a variety of careers in the arts—everything from making art to managing the business. The art museum gained a new audience and public credit for helping train disadvantaged youth.

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[2] Supporting data come from two one-page mail surveys conducted in 2000 in five communities—three metropolitan areas (Boston, Detroit, Kansas City) and two California counties (Santa Clara, Humboldt). The arts survey was mailed to almost 6,500 organizations of which more than 1,300 responded, the non-arts survey to over 2,200 organizations of which more than 550 responded. In addition, in 2001 we interviewed staff of arts and non-arts organizations involving 28 community foundation–funded partnerships in nine communities to learn in much greater detail about the benefits and challenges of partnership projects.

The Connections of Non-arts Organizations to the Arts

Arts groups can also take advantage of the already high involvement of non-arts organizations in the arts. More than half (53 percent) of our survey respondents "present, support, or otherwise participate in" arts and cultural activities; one in five (20 percent) do so frequently over the course of a year—at least once every two months on average.

Involvement by non-arts groups in the arts takes many forms, meaning that arts groups can choose their own best way to attract, increase, and deepen others' involvements in the programs and events they offer. Most frequently, non-arts groups organize group participation in arts programs; nearly a third of groups (31 percent) participate in this way (see exhibit 1). Other ways include providing venues for events (24 percent), helping organize programs or supply volunteers (21 percent), contributing to funding or sponsorship (20 percent), and advocating for the arts (11 percent). Two-thirds of all organizations that participate in the arts are involved in more than one way, and 18 percent are involved in four or five ways.

Involvement rates are greater for some types of non-arts groups than for others (exhibit 2), but all are involved in arts and culture activity to a relatively high degree. For even the least involved group—health-related organizations—almost half (46 percent) are involved in some way. For youth development, community development, educational, and recreational organizations, about two-thirds (anywhere from 63 to 67 percent) are involved with the arts. This diversity of groups affords multiple opportunities for potentially productive arts/non-arts relationships.

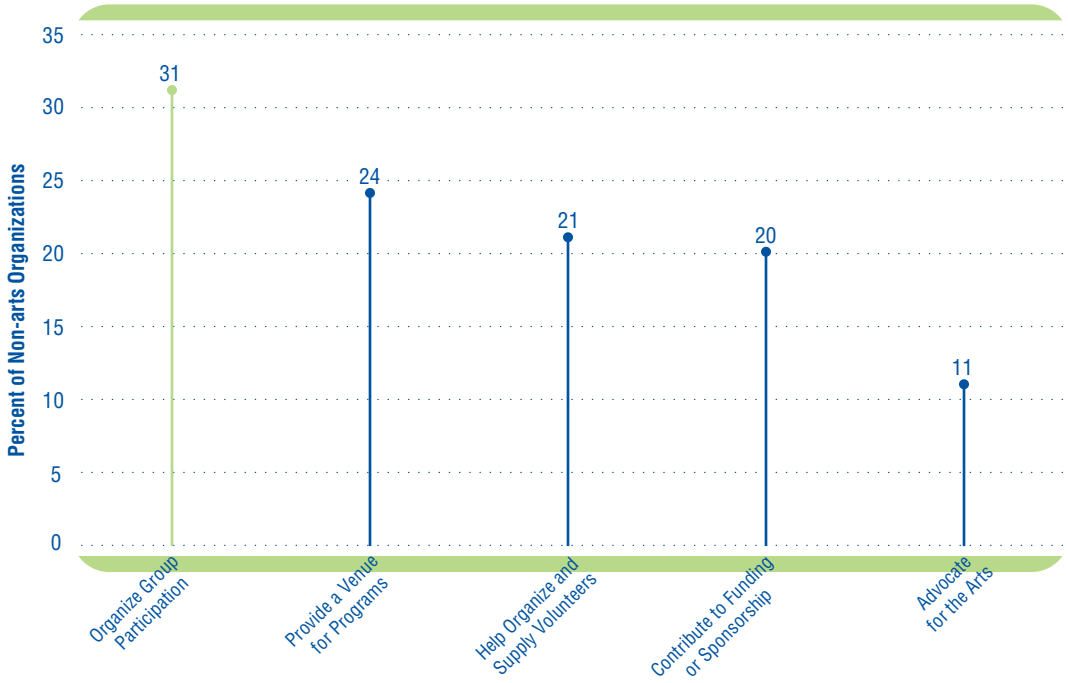
The partnerships we studied reflect the diversity of organizations and activities. As exhibit 3 shows, non-arts partners came from educational, religious, youth development, human services, and community development sectors. All of these organizations helped with the production of programs or events, principally by supplying students, volunteers, and other amateur participants, and also by arranging group attendance, developing programs, and providing spaces where exhibits or performances could take place.

Partnership Assets Can Also Be Liabilities

Partnerships create value because they bring together the different assets of arts and non-arts partners. But partners' assets can also be potential liabilities. The very advantages arts partners may seek from a particular non-arts partner can create tensions that make collaboration difficult.

EXHIBIT 1

HOW NON-ARTS ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATE IN ARTS ACTIVITIES



SOURCE
Urban Institute:
Non-arts Organization Survey 2000

NOTE
N = 1,343. Percentages total more than 100 percent due to multiple responses.

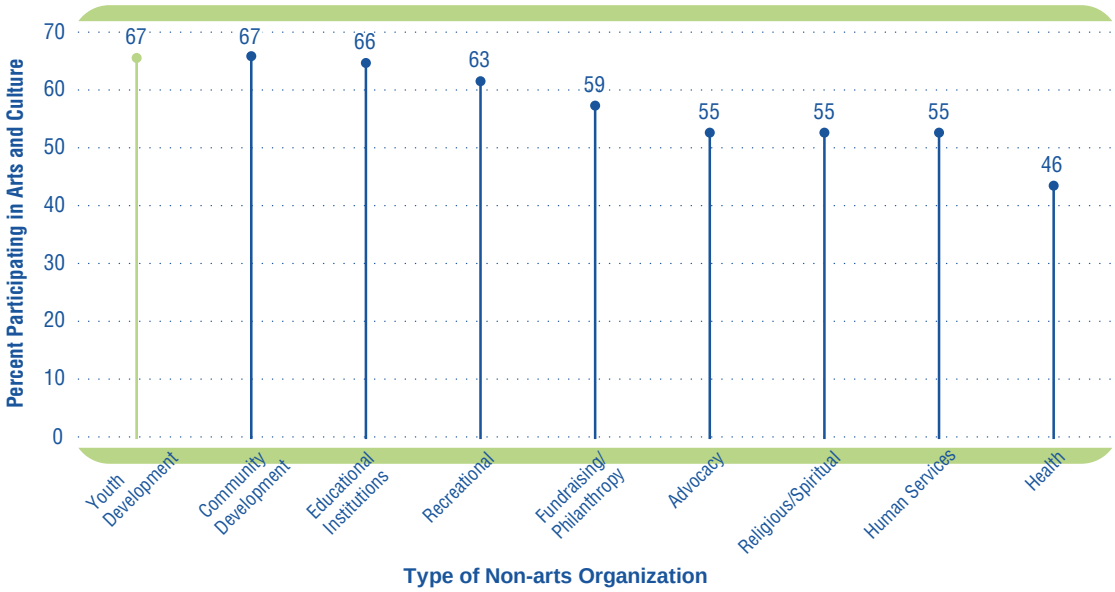
Identifying these potential liabilities can increase the chances of success.

To help compare the contributions of organizations with joint project work, we classified organizational assets and corresponding liabilities into four types:

- Community reputation—the public's view of the organization, its activities, and its contributions to the community.
- Constituent scope and strength—the number, diversity, and clout of stakeholders with a legitimate claim to influence the policies, programs, and practices of organizations.
- Organizational capabilities—leadership, staff talent and time, financing, programs, facilities, internal systems, and other aspects of organizational capacity to carry out an organization's mission.

EXHIBIT 2

TYPES OF NON-ARTS ORGANIZATIONS THAT PARTICIPATE IN ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES



SOURCE
Urban Institute:
Non-arts Organization Survey 2000

NOTE
N = 1,343. Percentages total more than 100 percent due to multiple responses.

- Mission and culture—the generally accepted social purpose of the organization and the blend of values, beliefs, and attitudes that organizational members share as they pursue these purposes.

Exhibit 4 shows the most typical asset-liability correspondences found among our study organizations. Potential assets are on the left. The corresponding potential liability is on the right. For example, a reputation in one part of the community for creativity, insight, and cultural conservation and innovation may be seen as elitism, insularity, and narrow organizational interest in another part of the community. The terms in the chart are characterizations that we heard project partners and other community members use to describe their general perceptions of different organizations.

For example, in one project, a community-based arts agency used its connec-

EXHIBIT 3

TYPES OF GROUPS AND PROJECTS INCLUDED IN FIELD RESEARCH

Types of Non-arts Partners (# of Projects)	Types of Arts Partners	Types of Projects
Schools and Libraries (5 projects)	• Cultural council • Musical theater • Arts incubator • Visual arts gallery • Artist colony • Dance company	• Arts in curriculum • Artists' residency programs • Summer dance camp • Theatrical performance series
Social Service Organizations (10 projects)	• Rural CDC arts program • Children's theater • Artist support organization • Arts and humanities councils • Annual arts festival • Coalition of small cultural organizations • University printmaking shop	• Intergenerational oral history • Neighborhood health festival • Mural project by incarcerated teens • Art exposure for adolescents • School grief and loss program • Youth theater production • Printmaking classes for seniors • Exhibit on Latino culture • World music festival and year-round performance series
Housing and Community Development Organizations (5 projects)	• Art and performance gallery • Art college • Immigrant museum • Theater company • Latino arts and cultural center • Large art museum • City cultural affairs department	• Youth development and cultural tourism • Community oral histories • Youth-focused art gallery • Business and cultural promotion • Community mural project
YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs (4 projects)	• Large theater company • Oral history center • Photography training studio • Dance company • Large performing arts center	• Cross-neighborhood oral history program • Mural and banner project • After-school dance program • Summer Shakespeare camp • Musical concert by developmentally disabled adults and teens
Religious Congregations (4 projects)	• Local art commission • Rural heritage association • History museums • Art promoters • Large orchestra	• Preservation of religious artifacts • Musician residencies • Arts activities for children in public housing • Community-based play drawn from resident interviews

tions throughout the cultural community to bring arts and cultural organizations together in a coalition of groups interested in promoting arts in a Hispanic, low-income area of the city. This agency was able to complement the work of a community development agency, whose focus was business promotion. But in another similar project, the arts partner lacked the skills needed to work with community residents, which led to a disappointing

EXHIBIT 4

ATTRIBUTES OF ARTS AND NON-ARTS ORGANIZATIONS, PHRASED AS PERCEIVED POTENTIAL ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

	Perceived Potential Assets	Perceived Potential Liabilities
Arts Organizations		
Reputation	Creativity; insight; cultural conservation and innovation.	Elitism; insularity; narrow self-interest.
Constituency	Elite patrons and donors. Strong attachments formed by subscribers and other patrons.	Only focused on arts; appeal only to elite or *avant garde*; lack of community support.
Capability	Staff artistry; cultural awareness; performance or gallery space; connections to arts and cultural funders.	Limited to specific types of performance or exhibition space; reliance on individuals with rare skills or talent.
Mission	Arts and cultural creation or preservation. Emphasis on quality of art.	Inflexibility in pursuit of creative excellence and artistic control.
Non-arts Organizations		
Reputation	Dedicated and hardworking staff; advocates for the least fortunate.	Self-righteous; suspicion of creative ideas and approaches.
Constituency	Minority and low-income communities and adherents to social causes; diverse support from foundations, government, and individuals.	Demands for social programming; resistance to departures from customary activities; hamstrung by community process and pull of multiple interests.
Capability	Knowledge of program services and educational models and practices; ownership of facilities.	Overworked and underfunded.
Mission	Mission of social and community improvement. Emphasis on efforts to help least advantaged.	Sense of entitlement to public and community support.

turnout at community meetings, low participation in a community art project, and few community murals that would have heightened the visibility of target neighborhoods.

The experiences of arts and non-arts partners in the study point out important lessons regarding assets and corresponding liabilities.

For non-arts agencies, the fundamental benefit of partnership was the creation of quality programming. This, in turn, led to increased community and client involvement, improved public reputations, and more active constituent support. Schools and human service agencies, for example, used arts partners to help engage students or clients and get them to participate

more actively in their services. Community development agencies came increasingly to recognize the importance of cultural programming as a powerful form of community organizing. *The lesson:* A commitment to quality necessary to realize these benefits brings with it standards for product and performance that also place considerable demands on participants. Non-arts partners need to respect those standards—and the demands they bring—to reap the benefits of arts partnerships.

For arts agencies, the primary benefits from non-arts partnerships were increased community awareness of their mission and services and improved outreach and involvement. In one project, for example, murals aimed at fostering a shared community identity were created across the county. Individual neighborhoods participated in projects designed to present positive images of the neighborhood to local residents and outsiders. In addition to beautifying the neighborhoods and reinforcing the community's assets, it was hoped that the murals would also attract tourists interested in learning more about the neighborhoods. While this project was successful in accomplishing its goals because the community was involved at every step, not all mural projects can claim the participation of artists or arts organizations that understand and value the everyday politics of community projects. *The lesson:* Arts organizations need to recognize that non-arts organizations often have processes developed specifically to promote community engagement and client participation. Artists accustomed to having full artistic control may view these processes as compromising their artistic integrity. But if the legitimate requirements of non-arts organizations are not accommodated, the anticipated increases in community visibility and involvement cannot be expected to occur.

Understanding the Risks

Just as financial investors risk their assets if projects fail, arts organizations and non-arts groups also risk reputations, time, money, or other assets in partnerships. These potential risks should be clear to each party.

Example: A music society formed a partnership with a church diocese. The music society, seeking to reach out to new audiences, committed to performing its standard repertoire in churches throughout the city. This performance program required the society's leadership to be willing to (1) maintain the arts organization's reputation for high artistic quality in an unfamiliar venue; (2) convince its board that the strategy would translate into new audiences; (3) commit musicians' time and the resources to pay them; and (4) take on this new initiative without distracting from its core mission. For

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their part, the churches had to (1) preserve their loyalties to their community while committing to a new endeavor that some in their communities might see as elitist; (2) encourage congregants to accept music they may not be accustomed to; (3) agree to invest their church choir's time to rehearse; and (4) not let musical performance overshadow worship as the reason for congregating. In fact, one church decided that these commitments weren't worth making, and its withdrawal from the project caused the music society a significant loss in invested time and effort. Fortunately, other congregations deemed the gains from participation worth their investments, and both they and the music society accomplished their artistic and community goals.

Types of Partnership Risks

Partnerships can fail for three major reasons: partners can't carry out their assignments ("capacity risk"), won't do so ("commitment risk"), or can't agree on what counts as success ("culture risk"). There is also a fourth type of risk—the risk of unanticipated costs. All projects face the last risk, but partnerships can aggravate it, leading to what might be termed a "partnership tax."

Capacity risk refers to the inability of partners to carry out assigned tasks in a given partnership. *Example:* A well-meaning artistic director of a dance company, collaborating with a youth development agency, expected that bringing different groups of teens together to participate in a performance would be relatively straightforward due to their shared interest in dance. She discovered that not only were there cultural and class conflicts among the teens, but that she was wholly unprepared to deal with them. To ensure that the project continued to its successful conclusion, non-arts partner staff agreed to attend all rehearsals to help prevent or resolve conflicts.

Commitment risk refers to insufficient motivation by one or more partners to carry out an obligation. Mismatches in organizational priorities turned out to be the most common form of commitment risk. *Example:* A cultural coalition came together quickly to seize an unusual opportunity to work with the Latino business community to create and package new local dining, arts, and entertainment programs and events. The non-arts partner charged with bringing business people on board—an entrepreneurial but somewhat overextended community development corporation—became less and less willing to press ahead, distracted by the need to seize fleeting real estate development opportunities. As a result, the overall effort stalled.

Corporate culture risk refers to differences across organizations that can disrupt smooth working relationships

between arts and non-arts partners. These are expressed in work styles, ways of thinking, and notions of professionalism, among other aspects of everyday work. *Example:* A community social services agency sought to nurture professional artistic talent within the immigrant community it served by sponsoring photographic documentation of Latino foodways, rituals, customs, and aspects of everyday life. Its historical society partner eagerly agreed to curate and present the resulting work as a way to diversify participation in its own offerings and to improve the quality of its programs. However, the non-arts partner did not know that a professional exhibit can take a year or more to produce and was initially confused by what seemed to be indifference on the part of its larger partner. Tension around the delay had to be defused, which required the non-arts partner to learn about the curatorial process, understand why it was important for the project, and explain it to an expectant community.

Responding to Risk

Diagnosing the problems that give rise to risk enables partners to deal with it effectively. The fundamental requirement is to distinguish between "structural" and "situational" difficulties. The former may be so intractable as to preclude project success. The latter can be successfully overcome.

Structural difficulties arise from mismatches between organizational capacities, priorities, and cultures that are so severe that successful project completion becomes highly unlikely or impossible. *Example:* Following the 1999 tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where two students shot and killed 12 schoolmates and a teacher and then themselves, a school district, a coalition of grief and trauma counseling agencies, and a children's theater group formed a partnership to produce a new play written by and for high school students to explore effective ways to respond to loss. Coalition members and the teachers they trained would lead post-production discussions with students. But the arts organization's desire to push ahead rapidly, the coalition's need to secure a time-consuming

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consensus among members at each step, and the school system's indifference to the teacher training component of the project proved fatal to the partnership's long-term viability. Although a very good play was written and performed, the partners abandoned their efforts to develop a continuing, school-based grief counseling program centered on the arts.

Situational challenges most often concern problems of communication, staff turnover, and other issues that are common to any type of project, not just partnerships. These can be handled readily with sufficient energy and creativity on the part of the partners, using communication, role clarification, and accountability strategies.

Communication. Communication problems were common in the arts/non-arts partnerships in this study. But as long as partners are genuinely willing to work hard at collaboration, certain strategies can help them talk to each other more clearly. Better communication can be achieved, for example, by identifying more responsive contact persons within partner organizations, or by scheduling regular meetings, in person or on the telephone, to review project status.

Role Clarification. Some partnerships got into trouble because partners were unclear on responsibilities or who would handle a particular project task. The best way to avoid such ambiguity is to map partner responsibilities to specific goals and tasks at the time of project development, well before any work begins.

Accountability. Closely tied to clarity about roles and responsibilities is accountability for carrying out tasks. While the lead agency as defined in grant award documents is ultimately responsible for successful completion of the work, true accountability is more broadly shared. This means, among other things, that all partners need to be clear on the full range of tasks to be performed and the parties responsible. Further, and related to the communication issues noted above, partners must have some way of reporting on progress to one another.

Confronting the "Partnership Tax"

Partnerships, by their nature, can encounter unplanned and uncompensated costs. They are time- and management-intensive, partly because arts and non-arts partners need to accustom themselves to different ways and styles of communication and sometimes because physical distance creates logistical challenges and expenses. Planning and designing effective relationships require staff time even before actual project work begins. Coordination across organizational boundaries drives up staff costs. Some arts partners chose non-arts partners precisely because they were adept at handling such logistical issues. But in many other instances, these "partnership taxes" were unanticipated and serious, and the funder did not provide

enough money to cover those unplanned expenses.

The existence of this "partnership tax" on arts/non-arts partnerships contains an added important message for public and private funders seeking to promote such cultural collaborations. Prospective arts and non-arts partners are legitimately wary of entering into "bad marriages" motivated mainly by grant seeking and therefore likely to fail when unanticipated costs arise. If funders want to encourage successful and enduring partnerships and the public benefits they convey, they need to help identify, plan for, and cover the full range of expenses that these partnerships are likely to encounter.

Partnerships between arts and non-arts organizations can confer benefits on both parties if the benefits are mutual . . . and the potential risks and costs are anticipated.

Conclusion

Partnerships between arts and non-arts organizations can confer benefits on both parties if the benefits are mutual and in accord with their respective missions and if the potential risks and costs are anticipated and addressed. Non-arts agencies can gain fresh, high-quality programming that stimulates new thought, activity, and involvement among their constituencies. Arts and cultural organizations can broaden community awareness of their missions and services, thus increasing the public value of their activities and offerings. Beyond that, such arts/non-arts collaborations provide a further and more enduring dividend for the participating organizations and the communities they serve. As arts and non-arts groups accumulate skills and experience in effective partnerships, additional possibilities for productive collaborations present themselves, leading to more and better opportunities for people to participate in cultural life.

EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR CULTURAL PARTICIPATION INITIATIVE

In January 1998, The Wallace Foundation commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct a five-year evaluation of the CPCP initiative. The initiative is part of the Foundation's long-term commitment to support a range of cultural organizations and private and public arts funders to enhance broad participation and make the arts and culture an active part of people's everyday lives. This policy paper is one of a number of publications from the study, including *Reggae to Rachmaninoff: How and Why People Participate in Arts and Culture; Cultural Collaborations: Building Partnerships for Arts Participation; Arts and Culture: Community Connections; Arts Participation: Steps to Stronger Cultural and Community Life;* and *Participation in Arts and Culture: The Importance of Community Venues.* Further publications are planned, exploring the policy and practice implications for building arts participation based on the CPCP evaluation. For additional information on the CPCP initiative or to order or download other publications, visit The Wallace Foundation web site, http://www.wallacefoundation.org.

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—Expand participation in arts and culture

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