

Strategic Planning in the Arts: A Practical Guide

Educational Programming

When developing education and outreach plans, an organization must clarify its goals. Defining purpose, target audience, and method of delivery will direct the development of educational programs that are effective in practice - not just on grant applications.

Many arts organizations feel a deep commitment to building the next generation of art lovers and creative artists. Their mission statements clearly and explicitly attest to this commitment. Other arts organizations are feeling pressure from corporate, foundation and government funders to mount educational programming for underserved audiences and, to a lesser extent, to train talented young artists without the resources to pursue arts training on their own. For both types of organizations, there is an increasing focus on developing and implementing education and training programs.

When developing education and outreach plans, the organization must delineate its goals. Is the purpose to expose under-served audiences to the art form? to use the art form as a method of building character? to use the art form to reinforce academic subjects? to train young professionals? This decision will affect the design of the outreach programming.

EXPOSURE

Many arts organizations develop outreach programming meant to expose the uninitiated to the beauty of the art form. Of course, the first decision is to select the target of these outreach efforts. Some arts institutions focus exclusively on children, others to selected ethnic communities, senior citizens or even prisoners. This selection must depend on the mission of the organization and the availability of funding. These programs are crucial since many public school districts have been forced to abandon arts programming altogether.

Performing arts organizations that rely on touring are under increasing pressure to provide more outreach services while residing in tour cities. The local funders want to know that something was left behind when the company leaves for the next tour city. In-school programs and children's performances are becoming routine for many touring companies.

Ideally, the programs developed for this audience would be coordinated so that arts education would be pursued in some reasonable manner. At present, many students receive a mixed bag of programs that are not integrated into a meaningful curriculum.

One must question, for example, the lasting impact of the traditional method of exposing young people to the arts - the one hour assembly program. Repeated exposure for a limited number of students appears to be more effective than one lecture-demonstration for thousands.

BUILDING CHARACTER

With increasing frequency, arts organizations are developing sophisticated programs that use arts training to instill self-discipline and self-esteem. The joy of improving one's dancing (or painting or acting) skills and developing the discipline to excel in an art form are important life experiences. Requiring extended exposure, these programs can be quite costly to mount.

Funders have become more savvy in differentiating between outreach programs. Underwriting for serious efforts that affect young people is available; substantial funding is no longer available for superficial, poorly designed programs. Of course, receiving funding for any program will depend, in some measure, on the reputation the organization has developed for its education and training programs. The techniques for building visibility apply as much to an outreach program as to a performance or exhibition series.

REINFORCING ACADEMIC LESSONS

Curriculum-based arts-in-education programs use the arts to reinforce academic lessons. Rather than teaching dance for the love of movement, curriculum-based programs might use dance to teach mathematics (by focusing on counting), or use the fine arts to teach science (by using plants and animals as models).

Those organizations without substantial experience in this area need to access pedagogical expertise when developing their programs. Outside experts can also offer invaluable assistance by evaluating the effectiveness of the organization's programs. An independent evaluation that suggests ways of improving effectiveness is essential for new program development. Any serious funder will demand a strong evaluation process. The temptation to design one's own education and outreach programs without this feedback should be resisted. Without the expertise of a trained professional, many outreach programs are ineffective.

TRAINING YOUNG ARTISTS

Many arts organizations sponsor their own schools, especially regional dance companies and theater companies. These schools are intended to train amateur, pre-professional and professional artists, frequently of any age.

Any arts institution that chooses to create a school of music, dance, theater, or visual arts should do so simply because of its role in achieving the organization's mission. One corollary benefit these programs offer is the opportunity to employ retired artists as teachers. For many artists, especially dancers, the length of the performing career is short. Schools, and other education programs, allow retired artists to use their experience to help others while earning a living in the profession.

Few arts organizations actually earn a profit on their schools. Schools are expensive to operate and time consuming to manage. They require a substantial amount of staff, from registrars to

teachers, business managers to guidance counselors. Schools, especially dance schools, also require a great deal of space. While schools can earn some income, many of the best students will be on scholarship. The challenge is to market the school well enough to attract those who can and should pay for their classes and to use some of this revenue to support the scholarship students.

The difficulty keeping company-sponsored schools solvent suggests that a detailed plan should be developed. The planning process can be based on the same framework described in this book:

- The school's mission must be formulated. Is the school trying to train pre-professional artists? to offer high quality training to young amateurs? to adult amateurs?
- An environmental analysis will describe the pressures facing arts academies today and in the future.
- An internal analysis will reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- A series of strategies addressing artistic plans, marketing and development efforts, staffing levels, etc. should be developed.
- A plan for implementing these strategies must be included.
- A forecast of projected financial results for the school should be completed.

If managed well, a school can provide important arts training while offering the potential for earned and contributed income and increased organizational visibility; if managed poorly, a school can be a major drain on resources.

Many arts institutions have designed educational programs that achieve substantial economies of scale. This allows the organization to lever its efforts and also gives a funder the benefit of affecting more people with one gift. For example, some organizations have embarked on teacher training, instructing public school educators in the methods for teaching art in their classrooms. One teacher training program can affect hundreds of students each year. Others have embraced satellite or online technology that bring education programming to many times the number of children and adults that traditional in-person programs can.

One method for accessing the funds needed to create larger educational programs is to collaborate with another cultural or educational institution. So many organizations are developing similar programs that combining resources can be a highly efficient approach.

Local public schools, colleges and family service agencies have resources cultural institutions do not have; collaborations can help meet both institutions' missions and financial objectives. Joint ventures also give the arts organization access to the Board and donors of another institution and the public endorsement of that institution.

While many organizations are introducing educational programming simply to please major funders, those organizations seriously committed to these endeavors are making a difference. Careful planning of all elements of these programs must be pursued to ensure that the programs are as effective as possible and that the funding covers costs. If arts organizations can find ways to coordinate their efforts, the future of arts attendance and performance will be assured.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH PLANNING ISSUES

Each of the following issues should be addressed in the education and outreach plan:

- Do any education and outreach programs exist?
- How have they been successful?
- What areas are not reaching their potential?
- Can/should some programs be combined or eliminated?
- Which education and outreach programs are planned?
- What is the purpose of these programs? to expose under-served audiences to the art form? to use the art form as a method of building self-esteem? to use the art form to reinforce academic subjects? to train young professionals?
- How do these programs serve the organization's mission?
- How should this programming be managed and staffed?
- Does the organization have the necessary staff to implement these programs effectively?
- Is there an evaluation and assessment process specified for each program?
- Is each program likely to be attractive to funders?
- What is the possibility for establishing a joint venture with another organization? Would a joint venture enhance the program?
- How can these programs gain more visibility?
- How can technology be employed to increase coverage and reduce expenses?