



A Philanthropy at Its Best® Report

FUSING ARTS, CULTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

High Impact Strategies for Philanthropy

By Holly Sidford

About the Author

Holly Sidford is president of Helicon Collaborative, a consulting company that helps people and organizations understand their evolving contexts and generate innovative strategies to propel change through arts and culture (www.heliconcollab.net). She is a strategic planner, program developer and fundraiser with more than 30 years of experience working with diverse nonprofit cultural and philanthropic organizations. Before starting Helicon in 2007, Holly was a principal at AEA Consulting, an international consulting firm. Prior to that, she founded Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), a ten-year national initiative to expand support for creative artists, and spearheaded the national research and planning on which LINC was based. Holly was program director for arts, urban parks and adult literacy at the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund from 1992 to 1999, and has held leadership positions at the Ford Foundation, The Howard Gilman Foundation, the New England Foundation for the Arts and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities. Holly holds a bachelor's degree from Mount Holyoke College and a management certificate from Columbia University. She lives in Brooklyn, N.Y. with her husband and daughter.

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*Cover: "Don't Hesitate, Communicate," Shoulder To Shoulder City-Wide Youth Banner Project, 2000.
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Executive Summary

Culture and the arts are essential means by which all people explain their experience, shape their identity and imagine the future. In their constancy and their variety, culture and the arts allow us to explore our individual humanity, and to see our society whole. People need the arts to make sense of their lives, to know who they are. But our democracy needs the arts, too. The arts animate civil society. They stretch our imagination. They increase our compassion for others by providing creative ways for us to understand and deal with differences. The arts protect and enrich the liberty, the human dignity and the public discourse that are at the heart of a healthy democracy.

Every year, approximately 11 percent of foundation giving – about \$2.3 billion in 2009 – is awarded to nonprofit arts and cultural institutions. The distribution of these funds is demonstrably out of balance with our evolving cultural landscape and with the changing demographics of our communities. Current arts grantmaking disregards large segments of cultural practice, and by doing so, it disregards large segments of our society.

A growing number of artists and cultural groups are working in artistic traditions from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific Rim, as well as in new technology-based and hybrid forms. They are using the arts in increasingly diverse ways to engage and build communities and address the root causes of persistent societal problems, including issues of economic, educational and environmental injustice as well as inequities in civil and human rights.

Much of this work is being done at the grassroots and community levels by artists and relatively small cultural organizations. Yet, the majority of arts funding supports large organizations with budgets greater than \$5 million. Such organizations, which comprise less than

2 percent of the universe of arts and cultural nonprofits, receive more than half of the sector's total revenue. These institutions focus primarily on Western European art forms, and their programs serve audiences that are predominantly white and upper income. Only 10 percent of grant dollars made with a primary or secondary purpose of supporting the arts explicitly benefit underserved communities, including lower-income populations, communities of color and other disadvantaged groups. And less than 4 percent focus on advancing social justice goals. These facts suggest that most arts philanthropy is not engaged in addressing inequities that trouble our communities, and is not meeting the needs of our most marginalized populations.

There are some hopeful signs, however. A growing number of funders outside the arts – foundations with a primary focus on education, community development, health or social justice – are partnering with artists and arts organizations to reach their programmatic goals. The Arts and Social Justice Working Group is enlarging resources for artists and organizations doing this work, and is fostering collaborations and disseminating information about effective approaches.

Americans for the Arts' recent report, *Trend or Tipping Point: Arts and Social Change Grantmaking*, confirms that there now are more than 150 funders active in this area. The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) has identified more than 140 arts funders who gave at least 20 percent of their funding to benefit marginalized communities. This growing cohort of funders are responding in creative ways to changes in our country's demographic profile, as well as to evolving aesthetics and cultural practices.

But much more can and needs to be done for arts and culture funders to stay current with

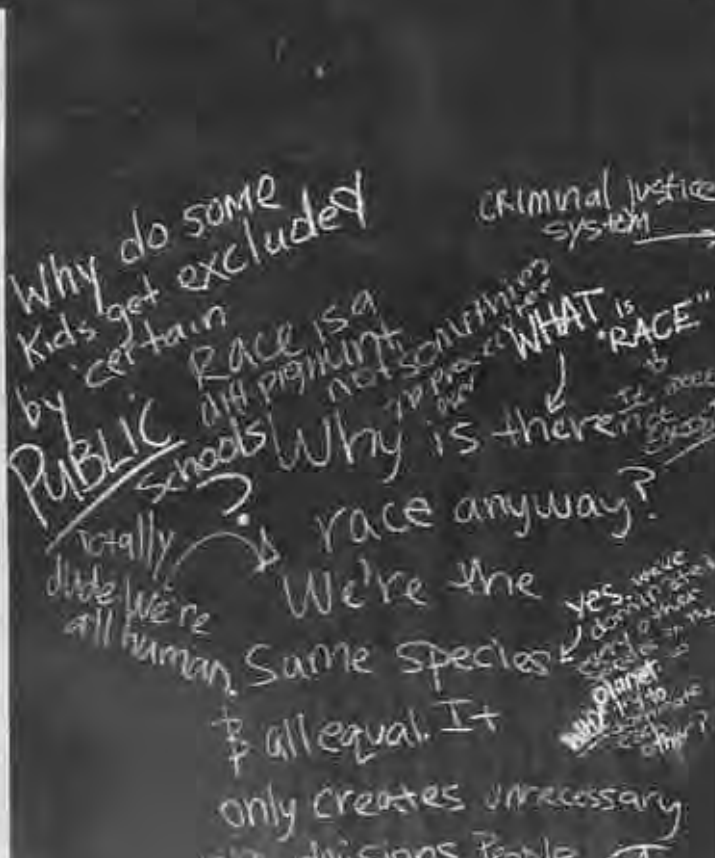
the changing field and relevant to the needs of our communities. There are compelling humanistic, demographic, aesthetic and economic reasons for foundations funding the arts to allocate more of their resources to directly benefit disadvantaged communities.

- **Demographic:** Art-making reflects a society's current demographic features as well as its intellectual, spiritual, emotional and material history. Both the products and the processes of the arts evolve in tandem with the profile of a people. This fact makes addressing our country's changing demographics fundamental to effective philanthropy in arts and culture today.
- **Aesthetic:** Tradition bearers, activist-artists, teaching artists, hybrid artists – they go by different names and they have different approaches, but together they represent a growing segment of the artist population, and their work is expanding the scope of artistic practice and the role of the arts in improving the lives of disadvantaged populations. These artists are frontrunners in the movement to use the arts to address social, economic and political inequities and improve opportunities for all. They are

powerful and worthy partners for funders of all kinds, and it is time to broadly validate and support their practice.

- **Economic:** The reverberating impacts of the recession, the current political climate and the widespread hostility to government spending threaten prospects for arts and culture funding. These trends are shifting the funding landscape for all cultural groups, but they are most ominous for the artists and organizations based in and serving lower-income communities and other marginalized populations. The shifts in public sector funding have both immediate and long-term implications for the cultural ecosystem, particularly for the smaller, newer, edgier parts of that system and the artists and groups serving our least advantaged communities. Private funders cannot replace the role of the public sector, but public sector shifts make it important for private funders to reconsider the balance of their grantmaking in the arts.

Reviewing data on these issues and arts funding patterns not previously compiled, this report makes the case for changing arts and culture funding strategies. It suggests



ways that all funders of the arts – regardless of their primary focus – can move toward more inclusive and responsive grantmaking:

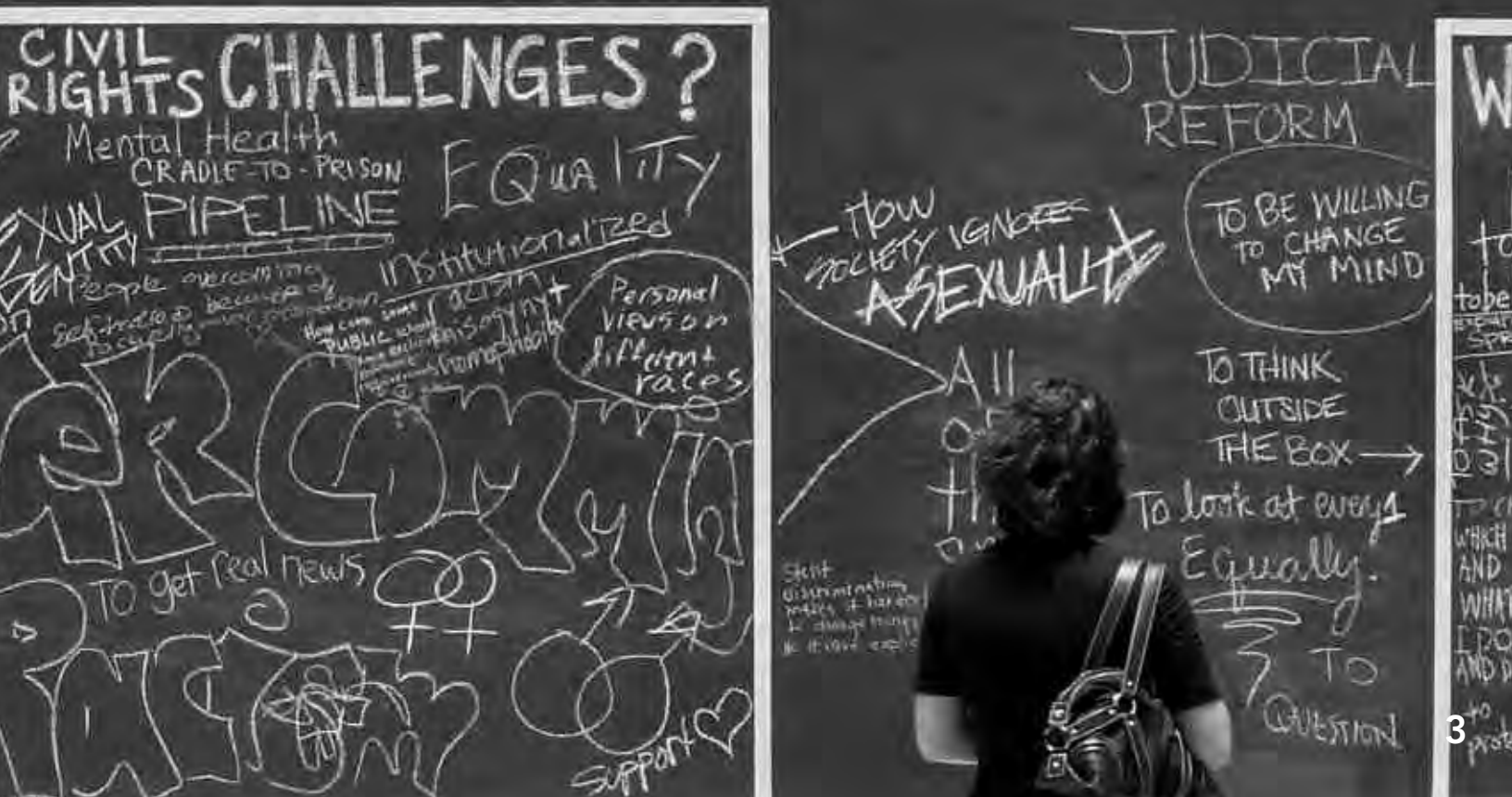
- **Sustaining the canons** – funders primarily concerned with preserving the Western European canon can work harder to ensure that their grant dollars directly benefit underserved communities; they also can recognize and support work in canons outside of the European tradition.
- **Nurturing the new** – funders focused on new work can expand their understanding of and support for the expanding universe of artists and art forms being practiced in the U.S., recognize art and social change as a form of art-making and expand funding for social change or social justice arts.
- **Arts education** – funders concerned with education and youth development can expand arts education for children with the least access to it; strengthen and grow both in-school and out-of-school programs; and redouble efforts to affect policies that will integrate the arts into basic school curricula.
- **Art-based community development** – funders concerned with community develop-

ment can expand support for endeavors and organizations that braid artistic and community goals, integrate artists and the arts into community planning and collaborate with funders in other fields to integrate strategies and advance mutual goals.

- **Art-based economic development** – funders concerned with economic development can ensure that artists and arts organizations are integrated into these programs in ways that benefit lower-income and other marginalized populations, support community-driven planning processes that engage underserved communities, and make certain that lower-income people are not displaced by economic development projects.

This report is a call for funders to reflect on their policies and practices in light of demographic, aesthetic and economic trends. It is also an invitation to engage in a fresh field-wide conversation about the purpose and relevance of philanthropy in the arts today. We hope the result of this reflection and discussion will be a more inclusive and dynamic cultural sector and, through the arts, a more equitable, fair and democratic world.

Temporary chalkboard installation at the site of Homer Plessy's arrest in New Orleans. The piece was created as part of a public Plessy Day event on June 7, 2008. Photo courtesy of Transforma.



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"With this report, NCRP reminds us all that arts and culture can no longer be understood to be the province of society's elites, but rather, that arts are expressions of the very essence of what makes a community whole, what makes it vibrant. Building socially just and sustainable communities requires funders to pay as much attention to the artistic and cultural fabric of our places as we do to economic opportunity and environmental health. It urges us to break away from our traditional notion of arts and culture as happening merely in stately opera houses, concert halls and museums, but instead, as existing and thriving throughout our communities."

—Phillip Henderson, President, Surdna Foundation

"This is great data and even better analysis for all who wonder about the contributions of arts and culture to our democracy. It's a compelling call to cultural funders to review and reconsider their policies and practices in order to keep pace with the growing number of artists and cultural traditions from diverse cultural backgrounds that are animating our civil society today."

—Peter Pennekamp, Executive Director, Humboldt Area Foundation

"In this useful and thought-provoking NCRP report, Holly Sidford prompts funders to use our imaginations, take more risks and advance the arts in ways that contribute to our democracy. She argues that 'equity' and 'quality' need not be at odds in our valuation of the arts, and that broad access should be a core principle of all arts grantmaking. She asks us to question our assumptions about the ways in which our own grantmaking strategies might either inadvertently hinder or strategically advance the arts."

—Claire Peeps, Executive Director, Durfee Foundation

Art and culture are fundamental elements of a society, essential means by which people shape their identity, explain their experiences and imagine the future. In the United States, institutional philanthropy is a key contributor to arts and cultural institutions and to artists; it is an important stimulus to progress in this field. Each year, foundations award about \$2.3 billion to the arts, but the distribution of these funds does not reflect the country's evolving cultural landscape and changing demographics. Current arts grantmaking disregards large segments of cultural practice, and consequently, large segments of our society.

Fusing Arts, Culture and Social Change outlines compelling demographic, aesthetic and economic reasons for foundations to rethink their grantmaking practices to stay current with changes in the cultural sector and to continue to be relevant to the evolving needs of our communities. Regardless of its history or primary philanthropic focus, every foundation investing in the arts can make fairness and equity core principles of its grantmaking. It can do so by intentionally prioritizing underserved communities in its philanthropy and by investing substantially in community organizing and civic engagement work in the arts and culture sector. By doing so, arts funders – individually and collectively – can make meaningful contributions toward a more inclusive and dynamic cultural sector, and a fairer, more democratic world.

This is the third in a series of reports from the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) that invites grantmakers focused on specific issues to reconsider their funding strategies to generate the greatest impact. A report for education grantmakers was published in October 2010 and for health funders in April 2011. A fourth report for environment and climate funders will be published in early 2012.

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