



Fusing Arts, Culture and Social Change:High Impact Strategies for Philanthropy

by Holly Sidford

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 the [High Impact Strategies for Philanthropy](#) series of reports 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 one for [health funders](#) in April 2011. A fourth report for environment and climate funders will be published in early 2012.

[View the materials from and listen to NCRP's webinar on "Fusing Art, Culture and Social Change" here!](#)

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*Updated 10/18/2011 for a misstatement on p.27, "Culture for Change."

What some philanthropy leaders are saying about the report

"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



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