

## Promoting Arts Innovation and Excellence

The creation and presentation of new works of art is the lifeblood of a healthy arts community. New work promotes collaboration, evolution of artistic practices, audience engagement, and cultural relevance.

Investments in the arts are often justified by touting the industry's economic impact. In the Metropolitan Portland region alone, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generates more than \$300 million annually.<sup>i</sup> Perhaps more important, however, is the impact the arts have on society by illuminating the human condition. In its recent case statement for the support of individual artists, Grantmakers in the Arts wrote:

The generative power of art accosts our senses and demands our attention. It forces us to ask questions of ourselves and engage others in dialogue, changing our perspective and connecting us to the reality outside ourselves. It is for this powerful and enduring contribution that we remain forever indebted to artists.<sup>ii</sup>

In order for the arts to continue to thrive, individual artists must be given time to create new art and organizations must be given support to connect artists to audiences.

### Barriers to Creating New Works of Art

Although most arts organizations center their mission on the development or presentation of new work, living up to this intention is often a challenge and a financial risk. Creating and presenting new work is challenging for arts organizations for several reasons. Participants in focus groups conducted by The Oregon Community Foundation indicated a lack of connection between arts organizations and emerging artists. Further, presenting new works can negatively affect an organization's bottom line, due in part to the fact that new work may alienate an organization's audience base without dedicated, long-term audience education and development. At a Mellon Foundation convening, performing arts leaders echoed this concern by suggesting that audiences are unwilling to pay for new or unfamiliar work.<sup>iii</sup> Participants in the Mellon convening also indicated that funder emphasis on metrics such as earned income ratios and tickets sold created a disincentive for theaters to take artistic risks.

Most artists are not employed full-time as artists and do not generate significant income from their artwork. In fact, most artists hold multiple jobs — which may or may not be art-related — and consistently earn less than people with comparable education and skills.<sup>iv</sup> This inability to make a living from art is exacerbated in low-income communities, especially for minority artists. Artists in these communities often lack personal and community resources to support their craft, and they may also be isolated by geography and a lack of supportive infrastructure. The pattern of working multiple jobs leaves less time for creative work and means that many artists do not have access to employment benefits such as health insurance. In surveys and interviews conducted by OCF, lack of financially supported time for making art was seen as one of the biggest barriers to creating new work.

Native artists face unique hurdles to obtaining funding.<sup>v</sup> When Native artists use traditional art forms, the work is often focused on their internal communities, making it difficult to secure outside funding. Native art tends to be placed in traditional or folk art categories and is rarely perceived as innovative or fine art. This categorization makes Native artists ineligible for certain types of fellowships and grants. Many Native artists also lack access to technology and grantwriting knowledge, which makes them less competitive for grants and fellowships.

Oregon has a sizeable immigrant population that is often marginalized in the arts community. For example, one OCF interviewee pointed out that although more than 42,000 Southeast Asian immigrants live in Oregon, there is no “well-known infrastructure for refugees and immigrants to credibly present their experiences and assist

[others] in understanding the many different possibilities of what it could mean to be an American or an Oregonian.”

Although audience development and the creation and presentation of new work fall under the guidelines of some general arts funding in Oregon, no designated funding for these efforts exists. In addition, the state has too few funding opportunities for individual artists. NYFA Source, an online database of funding opportunities for individual artists, lists only 52 opportunities available in Oregon, compared to 2,000 opportunities nationwide and 3,300 available worldwide.<sup>vi</sup> In Oregon, fellowships are available through the Ford Family Foundation, OCF, the Oregon Arts Commission and some regional arts councils.

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<sup>i</sup> Americans for the Arts. (2006). Arts and economic prosperity III: The economic impact of nonprofit arts and culture organizations and their audiences. Retrieved from

[http://www.artsusa.org/pdf/information\\_services/research/services/economic\\_impact/aepiii/national\\_report.pdf](http://www.artsusa.org/pdf/information_services/research/services/economic_impact/aepiii/national_report.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup> Artists Group Steering Committee, Grantmakers in the Arts. (2011, October). Support for individual artists case statement. Retrieved from [http://www.giarts.org/sites/default/files/GIA\\_Support-for-Individual-Artists-Case-Statement.pdf](http://www.giarts.org/sites/default/files/GIA_Support-for-Individual-Artists-Case-Statement.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> Ragsdale, D.E. (2009, November). New play development programs in US theaters: A foundation changes its practice of support for commissions, readings, workshops, and premieres. Retrieved from

[http://www.mellon.org/grant\\_programs/programs/documents/NewPlayDevelopmentProgramsRagsdaleNovember2009forWeb.pdf](http://www.mellon.org/grant_programs/programs/documents/NewPlayDevelopmentProgramsRagsdaleNovember2009forWeb.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> Jackson, M., Kabwasa-Green, F., Swenson, D., Herranz, J., Ferryman, K., Atlas, C.,...Rosenstein, C. (2006). Investing in creativity: A study of the support structure for US artists. Retrieved from [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411311\\_investing\\_in\\_creativity.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411311_investing_in_creativity.pdf).

<sup>v</sup> Potlatch Fund. (2005, September). Funding native artists: Empowering the center of tribal life. Retrieved from [http://www.potlatchfund.org/documents/pdf/report\\_final\\_low\\_res.pdf](http://www.potlatchfund.org/documents/pdf/report_final_low_res.pdf).

<sup>vi</sup> New York Foundation for the Arts. (2013). NYFA Source [database]. Retrieved from <http://www.nyfa.org/source/content/search/search.aspx>.