Civic Engagement and the Arts:
Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper focuses on one aspect of the social impact of the arts: their influence on civic engagement. Its purpose is to assess the current state of knowledge about the relationship between the arts and civic engagement and to suggest documentation and evaluation strategies that artists, cultural and community organizations, philanthropists, and public agencies could take to improve the quality of that knowledge. Our approach was to review literature drawn from the social sciences, the humanities, and public policy in an attempt to bridge theory with practice and research with evaluation.

The review was commissioned by Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, for its Arts and Civic Engagement Impact Initiative. To provide the Initiative with an evaluation approach that would be credible across fields and audiences, we structured the narrative as a conventional research design. That is, we define terms, conceptualize relationships among variables, identify methodological challenges, and assess data-gathering strategies. Lastly, we make recommendations for improving our ability to document and explain the impacts of the arts on civil society.

An evaluation design is only as good as the concepts and rationale that drive the inquiry. Theory of change, for example, a participatory methodology developed to evaluate social change initiatives, requires clear articulation of social goals, near-term outcomes, and the underlying logic of the change process. Part 1 explores key concepts and theories about civic engagement, the arts and culture, and the relationship between these two spheres of community life. We first define civic terms—namely, civic engagement; social capital; the public sphere; community capacity and civic capacity; the arts, culture, and humanities; social inclusion; cultural citizenship and the cultural public sphere.

We then discuss theories of action—that is, ways that the arts could influence patterns of civic engagement. Here we discuss three conceptual paths that practitioners use to link the two. *Didactic theories of action focus* on the ability of the arts to instruct or persuade the populace, for example, in political campaigns or social movements. *Discursive theories of action* focus on use of the arts to provide settings in which people can discuss issues, form connections, and take action. Much intentional arts-based civic work falls into this category, as does the use of civic ritual to define membership in a particular public. *Ecological theories of action* view all cultural participation as a form of civic engagement and assert that the arts generate a variety of spillover effects—or unintended consequences—that increase social capital and community capacity.

Part 2 moves to a set of practical considerations for evaluation, specifically, methodological issues and data collection strategies. Whatever one's theory about how the arts influence civic engagement, moving from theory to actual measurement of change poses a set of challenges. One is *unit of analysis*—what or whom to study. Civic engagement is an individual-level variable—only individuals can act upon or believe something—but the causes and effects of those actions are linked to higher levels of aggregation (groups, locales). A related issue is *causal inference*. Because they are nested in a hierarchical system of causes and effects, looking for direct and immediate links between the arts and civic engagement is likely to underestimate their relationship. Approaches that take time and space into consideration (longitudinal and hierarchical studies) are likely to produce more accurate results and show larger effects.

Another challenge is *selection bias*. For arts-based civic engagement programs, *self-selection* is a predictable concern and makes the issue of *comparison and control groups* particularly important.

In any case, all research is ultimately about comparisons, whether explicit or implicit. At its most simple, an evaluation study should consider the compared-to-what question. Other challenges are *retrospective data*, the limits of data gathering via methods that rely on the unreliable faculty of memory; and *obtrusiveness*, the impact of an intrusive methodology—such as an audience survey or pre/post-test—on one's findings.

Given these issues, we assess the major data-gathering strategies of social science. *Surveys* are the lowest common denominator of social research. Although cheap, flexible, and easy to target to a particular audience, surveys are the method most vulnerable to the measurement challenges noted above. Survey research holds promise for examining national or even regional patterns of civic engagement but offers little for practitioners. As an alternative, researchers advocate *direct measurement of behavior*—typically via administrative record data (such as class registration, ticket sales, membership, sign-in sheets)—and *community mapping*. Arts participant records with address data can be mapped, linked, and analyzed with a wide variety of other community data. *Qualitative methods* can profitably complement a quantitative approach to the direct measurement of behavior. *Ethnographic studies*, in particular, are a way to document and understand the relationship between cultural practices and civic engagement. *Social experiments* are increasingly the state of the art in social policy initiatives but have had little role in arts research. Short of a true experiment, *quasi-experimental designs* that integrate elements of experiments (such as a control group or interrupted time series) can play a role in assessing the effectiveness of an arts "intervention" and add credibility to one's findings.

While no single methodology is suitable, collectively these methods can be used to build a body of evidence on the role of the arts in civic engagement and social action. We suggest a division of labor between practitioners and researchers, each using a variety of methods best suited to their expertise and mission. Agencies undertaking initiatives can play a critical intermediary role in fostering evaluation research.

The recommendations in Part 3 discuss this three-tier approach to evaluation. For practitioners at the *organizational or program-scale*, qualitative methods offer the most promise. The thorough documentation of the creative here-and-now is the essential starting point for making a case for the arts' importance. Practitioners are also central to quantitative data collecting that enables community mapping and analyses. Arts organizations' administrative records are the source of broad-based, systematic data on participation. Researchers at the *regional-scale* are in the best position to integrate these direct measures of cultural participation with other indicators of community and civic engagement. Teamed with a regional household survey, researchers could examine the ways that individual participation is nested in a community context. *Initiative-scale* strategies open up the possibility of introducing experimental and quasi-experimental methods into the study of the arts and civic engagement, undertaken by community arts groups with their regional data partners.

Studying the link between culture and civil society and the role of arts-based civic engagement within this field is a demanding task. Yet, as other fields of social policy and practice make clear, a productive collaboration of practitioners, researchers, and grant-makers can contribute both to better practice and a fuller understanding of that practice.

INTRODUCTION

The arts have long been seen as a powerful influence on society. Over the past several decades, however, scholars and advocates have devoted increasing effort to developing systematic approaches for gauging this influence. Economic development and academic achievement, for example, have been linked to involvement with the arts. In addition, scholars have examined the arts' impact on social and community life.

This paper focuses on one aspect of the social impact of the arts: their influence on civic engagement. Its purpose is to assess the current state of knowledge about the relationship between the arts and civic engagement and to suggest documentation and evaluation strategies that artists, cultural and community organizations, researchers, philanthropists, and public agencies could take to improve the quality of that knowledge.

The narrative is based on a review of current literature and research, including unpublished reports and Internet sources, that shed light on the intersection of the arts and civic engagement. Generally, our approach has been to draw from the social sciences, the humanities, and public policy in an attempt to bridge theory with practice and research with evaluation as a way of understanding this community-based work.

The paper's strategy is that of a conventional research design. In Part 1 we define terms and conceptualize relationships among variables, and in Part 2 we identify methodological challenges and assess different data-gathering strategies. Lastly, in Part 3, we make a set of recommendations for improving our ability to document and explain the impacts of the arts on civil society.

CONCEPTUALIZATION ISSUES

In Part 1 we draw from the literature key concepts and theories about civic engagement, the arts and culture, and the relationship between these two spheres of community life.

Section 1.1 defines what we call *civic terms*—namely, civic engagement; social capital; the public sphere; community capacity and civic capacity; the arts culture, and humanities; social inclusion; and cultural citizenship and the cultural public sphere.

In Section 1.2 we discuss *theories of action*—that is, ways that the arts *could* influence patterns of civic engagement. Here we discuss three conceptual paths that practitioners use to link the two: didactic theories of action, discursive theories of action, and ecological theories of action.

SECTION 1.1 DEFINING CIVIC TERMS

A research or an evaluation design is only as good as the concepts and rationale that drive the inquiry. The conceptualization of both *civic engagement* and *the arts* presents challenges that complicate the task of data gathering and measurement. Civic engagement overlaps a variety of concepts in the social science literature, including social capital, public sphere, community capacity, and civic capacity. Similarly, the arts and culture can be seen as a discrete sector of the economy or as a much wider set of activities that occur in formal and informal settings.

Animating Democracy supports civic engagement both as an end in itself and a means to further civic or social impacts as indicators of social change. Several evolving concepts—social inclusion, cultural citizenship, and cultural public sphere—have special potential as a focus of arts-based civic engagement in that their emphasis is on civic and social processes rather than outcomes or impacts.

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is a term that is both expansive and contested. As a point of departure, for a working concept that is both credible and useful, we shall use Michael Delli Carpini's definition: *individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern* (American Psychological Association 2008). This definition says more than appears. First, it suggests that civic engagement is about behavior. Although one's attitudes and beliefs are potential motivations and consequences of civic engagement, engagement itself has to do with action. Second, civic engagement is purposive and conscious. One's actions are designed to do something; civic engagement does not occur by accident. Finally, civic engagement is public. It can occur in either individual or collective settings but is directed at issues of public—not private—concern.

Another common distinction in the behavioral literature is between political and civic engagement. Zukin *et al*, for example, define *political engagement* as "activity aimed at influencing government policy or affecting the selection of public officials." In contrast they describe *civic engagement* as "participation aimed at achieving a public good, but usually through direct hands-on work in cooperation with others, typically in nongovernmental settings" (Zukin *et al* 2006).

The literature also distinguishes political and civic engagement from public voice and cognitive engagement. *Public voice* refers to the ways citizens express their views on public issues, such as writing letters to the editor, engaging in public dialogues, participating in e-mail campaigns, or signing petitions. *Cognitive engagement* refers to paying attention to public affairs and politics, such as following the news or talking politics.

Zukin *et al* propose a model of the determinants of civic engagement that, while linked solely to American studies, is instructive. Although based on cross-sectional data, the authors propose an eight-stage model of how civic behavior is determined: personal and family characteristics; early socialization; education; formative attitudes and behaviors (television watching, generational identification); social capital; political capital; attitudes about government and politics; and mobilization.

As noted, generational identification, a key element of the changing nature of civic engagement, is integrated in the life-cycle model. Zukin *et al* have identified four significant age cohorts: DotNets (ages 15 to 25 in May 2002), GenXers (26 to 37), Baby Boomers (36 to 56), and Dutifuls (57 and up). The influence of generation, however, is complex. Young adults are not politically disengaged, as argued by Robert Putnam and others, but rather they "have remixed the participation soundtrack." Certainly, the 2008 Presidential election suggests that this "remix" has important and unpredictable implications for the future of civic engagement.

An important point made by the model is that civic engagement is deeply embedded in an individual's background and life-experience. Indeed, estimates of the relative importance of these factors indicate that early socialization and education are among the three strongest influences. This model underlines that while one's immediate context—say, exposure to new ideas through the arts—may influence civic engagement, this effect is likely to be quite modest.

The embedded nature of civic engagement poses another challenge. If one's chances of being civically active are a product of one's early socialization, then any correlation we find between an individual's cultural involvement and civic activism should not be taken to assume causality. In many cases, one's cultural and one's civic engagement might both be a product of other variables—including family background, early socialization, and education.

Indeed, the developmental path to civic engagement points to a broader inquiry—that is, what the relationship between the arts and civic engagement across the life cycle? In particular, to what degree is cultural participation a factor in the early socialization and education of active citizens? How do the arts fit into the eight-stage model of engagement in public and civic life?

Social Capital

If we use a behavioral definition of civic engagement, we need to distinguish it from several related concepts. Social capital refers to the social resources one possesses as a result of one's social network. While certainly related to civic engagement, the terms are conceptually distinct. Most importantly, social capital refers to a set of resources that have the potential to influence behavior, while civic engagement refers to the behavior itself. Indeed, controversies in the social capital literature include the extent to which these resources are put to public or private purposes and the extent to which they are used to include or exclude different individuals or groups.

Robert Putnam—the scholar most closely associated with the concept of social capital—has focused on the psychological dimensions of social capital, that is, its association with social trust as a lubricator

of social interaction. Putnam argues that a rich civic life not only provides individual benefits but promotes democratic institutions and economic vitality as well. From Putnam's standpoint, then, three "goods"—civic engagement, democratic institutions, and economic development—are tightly related, with the first "good"—civic engagement—playing a pivotal role (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993).

The argument that social capital is linked to political and economic vitality has not gone unchallenged. Increasingly, scholars of social capital have viewed it as more a private than a public good. From this perspective, social capital derives from one's ability to use one's social network to secure resources that might not otherwise be available. These resources might include intangibles like trust but frequently relate to more concrete benefits. The literature on finding employment and the centrality of connections to that process, for example, fits well with this view of social capital.

The implications for civic engagement of a more concrete, private conceptualization of social capital are less clear. Alejandro Portes, for example, suggests that social capital has as strong a capacity to exclude groups and individuals as it does to include them (Portes 1998). It is not difficult to imagine—in a diverse setting, for example—that each group forge strong bonds that degenerate into a zero-sum game of blocking the other groups' ambitions.

The controversy over social capital is consequential for the arts. Dwyer has proposed a set of near-term "outcomes" that connect arts-based civic engagement to long-term social impacts, including "heightened awareness or deepened knowledge of civic/social issues; increased understanding of other perspectives; increased or more diverse participation; increased capacity for engagement and dialogue; new relationships built and/or existing relationships strengthened; and connections made that cross institutional boundaries such as policy domains or sectors" (Dwyer 2008). Clearly, community outcomes are consistent with a "trust" conceptualization of social capital but fit uneasily with one that focuses on its private uses.

Public Sphere

Another concept of relevance to this discussion is the idea of the public sphere. A number of social theorists, including Hannah Arendt and Jurgen Habermas, have argued for the importance of a space of freedom and dialogue as critical to the emergence of modern political thought. As with social capital, however, controversies over the concept cloud its application to arts-based civic engagement. Arendt places the arts at the center of her conceptualization of the public sphere, while Habermas is suspicious that dramatic flourishes can undermine the public sphere as a setting for undistorted, rational interaction.

Arendt believed that the public realm must have a spatial embodiment within which people can engage. "For real politics to be going on, it is not enough to have scattered private individuals voting separately and anonymously according to their own lights. The people need to be able to see and talk to one another in public: to meet in a public space so that public concerns will become visible to them" (Canovan 1985).

For Arendt the arts—and especially the performing arts—offer an apt analogy for participation in the public sphere (Canovan 1985).

> When her focus is on political action in the public arena . . . Arendt draws heavily upon metaphors from the performing arts: music, dancing, but above all drama. The dramatic analogy is very clear in her emphasis upon appearance in public, upon stepping out into the bright light of the public stage, upon the self-revelatory character of action and upon the need for an audience to see and remember what is done. This assimilation of politics to performance is by no means her only cultural analogy, however. . . . [H]er conception of the public realm is very strongly influenced by architectural analogies concerned with the framing of public space within which citizens can move, the foundation of durable, worldly political constructions, the building of "a house where freedom can dwell."

The most influential theoretician of the public sphere, Jurgen Habermas, by contrast, sees the use of drama, story telling, and performance as potentially distorting. For him reason and argument are the only foundations of public exchange (Triadafilopoulos 1999). As Warnke notes, in Habermas' public sphere, we should "assume that only the force of the better argument may hold sway" (Warnke 1995).

This tension between the public sphere as a purely rational domain or as a sphere of contest and debate where performance is central has implications for the role of the arts in civic engagement. Following Arendt, the arts enter the public sphere as a "persuader" that takes what might be a dry and easily ignored reality and makes it vivid and attention grabbing. Yet, if the arts' role is to move beyond the purely rational, it is placed in potential conflict with that truth, no matter how dry or boring.

Community Capacity and Civic Capacity

Community organizers and community developers have generated a body of work on two related concepts—community capacity and civic capacity—that help to reframe and advance social capital theory and the relationship of social resources to resilient communities (Saegert, Thompson, and Warren 2001). Community capacity, articulated by Chaskin *et al*, is about developing diverse resources and social networks at the grassroots level. Civic capacity, identified with Clarence Stone, addresses the relationship of local communities with citywide and regional agents.

Community capacity building, according to Chaskin, focuses on developing the abilities and relationships used by a community to address its challenges (Chaskin et al 2006).

> Community capacity is the interactions of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of that community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organized efforts by individuals, organizations, and social networks that exist among them and between them and the larger systems of which the community is a part (Chaskin et al 2006).

As this definition makes clear, capacity building is focused on a bottom-up development of individuals, groups, and the community as a whole so that it can secure and mobilize resources to address the problems faced by the community. Although it gives some attention to the actual processes through which those solutions move forward, capacity building is just that, an ability to do something, not so much actually doing it.

In contrast, as described by Stone, civic capacity focuses not only on building the broader civic community but also on doing something (Stone 2005):

Building Civic Capacity

SOURCE: SAEGERT 2006.

[C]ivic capacity … [is] a concerted effort to address a major community problem. By "concerted" I mean special actions to involve multiple sectors of a locality, including both governmental and nongovernmental. The label "civic" refers to actions built around the idea of furthering the well-being of the whole community, not just that of a particular segment or group.

In contrast to community capacity, which focuses on abilities, civic capacity is focused on accomplishments. Specifically, a city has civic capacity when different sectors can work together to solve problems. As Stone writes elsewhere (Stone 2001):

Civic capacity concerns the extent to which different sectors of the community—business, parents, educators, state and local officeholders, nonprofits, and others—act in concert around a matter of community-wide import. It involves mobilization—that is, bringing different sectors together but also developing a shared plan of action.

The two concepts clearly are complementary. Community capacity building involves developing abilities—leadership, social connections, skills—that give a community the ability to tackle problems. Civic capacity takes those abilities and puts them into action. Indeed, Susan Saegert has proposed that the two elements can be thought of as a single system, one that builds a community's resources and another that applies those skills to a problem. Saegert goes on to suggest that viewing these processes as complementary reduces the tension between confrontational and cooperative strategies for undertaking community work. For Saegert the outcomes of community capacity building—social capital, leadership, and human capital—are the raw material for implementing civic capacity strategies (Saegert 2006).

Relationship between community capacity-building and civic capacity

The concepts of community capacity building and civic capacity could provide a link between *ad hoc* arts and humanities grant-making and programming and a larger mission to engage residents and communities in how to address the challenges they face. Individual arts programs are most likely to impact civic engagement via social capital building and fostering of the public sphere. Programmatic

efforts that are mission-driven, ongoing, and networked with the broader community sector could over the long-term impact civic as well as community capacity. However, foundations and public agencies that support arts-based civic engagement in a given locale have the greatest potential to build community capacity and activate links with civic capacity.

Arts, Culture, and Humanities

The arts and culture as concepts are a no less knotty definitional issue. Several distinctions are important for the purposes of this paper.

First, we use a wide interpretation of the arts and culture that encompasses all the artistic disciplines and the humanities, including the range of folk and cultural expressions. Civic and social goals can also be addressed across the full spectrum of community-based, experimental, and mainstream arts as well as popular culture. The term *arts-based civic engagement* draws upon Animating Democracy's work and embraces activity in which civic dialogue or engagement opportunities are embedded in or connected to the arts or humanities experience. That experience may occur in the process of creating or participating in art or relate to the presentation of art. Process and/or presentation provide a key focus, catalyst, forum or form for public dialogue or engagement. In addition, the arts may provide a direct forum to engage in community planning, organizing, and activism (Animating Democracy 2003, 2008).

Second, the cultural sector is composed of a variety of subsectors. In addition to formal nonprofit organizations and public arts agencies are commercial cultural firms and an informal sector that includes participatory groups and independent artists or companies (DiMaggio 2006). While much arts-based civic engagement activity is initiated by the nonprofit arts sector, the informal sector also deserves attention. The use of the arts by social movements, to take just one example, typically occurs outside of established nonprofits. The use of the arts as part of civic rituals is also likely to occur in a variety of commercial, nonprofit, informal, or governmental settings.

Finally, we distinguish the arts and culture by their intention. On the one hand, as demonstrated by the work of the Social Impact of the Arts Project at the University of Pennsylvania, community engagement and social change can occur as an *unintended consequence* of collective arts and cultural activity. In any case, a significant literature suggests that television and the privatization of leisure have eroded civic engagement (Hooghe 2002; Maras 2006; Moy, Scheufele, and Holbert 1999; Putnam 2000). Simply getting people out to a performance, exhibition, festival or workshop—whatever the content of the artwork—contributes to social network building and community engagement

On the other hand, there is a notable field of arts practitioners who employ the arts with explicit intention to stimulate civic engagement and advance social or civic change. In this paper, while the full spectrum is acknowledged, particular focus is on artistic endeavor that is *intentional* in its civic or social goals. The goal of Animating Democracy's current initiative is to strengthen the evaluation capacity of arts practitioners who are invested in making social change and to demonstrate how these practitioners contribute to and generate civic engagement and outcomes as effectively as or perhaps more effectively than other endeavors.

Social Inclusion

Several contemporary concepts highlight the ways that the arts and culture contribute to civic engagement. One is social inclusion, which has become increasingly common in social policy discourse with the European Commission and in the United Kingdom and Australia. The UK's Social Exclusion Unit, established under New Labour, defines social exclusion as: "a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown." This definition implies that social inclusion is simply the condition of *not* being socially excluded (Barraket 2005). In contrast, the UK's Department of Culture, Media, & Sport points out that it is more useful to view social inclusion as a process rather than a condition. "[S]ocial exclusion represents separation/alienation from the political, economic and frequently socio-cultural processes of society. Room (1995) stresses this relational aspect of social exclusion in light of little participation/integration and, importantly, power" (Long *et al* 2002). As summarized by Barraket:

> [Social inclusion is described] as measures taken to reduce the impacts of social exclusion in terms of specific outcomes (such as health, employment, education), while also seeking to address the broader processes that bring about such exclusion in the first place. In this sense, social inclusion is not a condition of being, but an active process by which the personal and structural impacts of socio-economic disadvantage are addressed.

Barraket's review finds evidence that arts activities contribute to social inclusion outcomes for disadvantaged individuals, groups, and communities—in particular, enhanced personal development, improved social cohesion and reduced social isolation, and active citizenship. There is little evidence, however, about the effect of the arts relative to other factors in fostering social inclusion.

Cultural Citizenship and the Cultural Public Sphere

Finally, the concepts of the cultural public sphere and cultural citizenship are an attempt to redefine the public sphere and citizenship in light of a global and information-based society. Citizenship is conventionally associated with political and civic rights and responsibilities. Its cultural dimensions are usually limited to the right and freedom to express one's own culture and beliefs and the responsibility to accept the right of others to do so. Contemporary theorists, however, have expanded upon Habermas' distinction between the political public sphere, grounded in the news of the day, and a broader forum he termed the literary public sphere. Jim McGuigan's concept of the cultural public sphere, for example, includes popular culture, the full range of media, and the articulation of both personal and public politics (McGuigan 2005).

Burgess, Foth and Klaebe propose cultural citizenship and the cultural public sphere as an alternative view of civic engagement. "Bona fide citizenship is practiced as much through everyday life, leisure, critical consumption and popular entertainment as it is through debate and engagement with capital 'P' politics" (Burgess *et al* 2006). The authors use the findings of case study research on digital creativity at Queensland University of Technology in Australia to illustrate the opportunities of new media for social network development and the formation of communities of interest and practice at local and global levels. They found that everyday creative practices like online chat, photo-sharing, and storytelling "can have both intended and unintended consequences for the practice of cultural citizenship. … [U]npredictable forms of everyday and ephemeral creativity and engagement … make up active participation in the networked cultural public sphere."

SECTION 1.2 THEORIES OF ACTION—WAYS THE ARTS COULD INFLUENCE

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Concepts are the building blocks of theory. If we are interested in measuring the impact of the arts and culture on civic engagement, we must first make a plausible case that the arts and culture *could* influence patterns of civic engagement. In this section we identify three conceptual paths that practitioners use to link the two.

• *Didactic theories of action* focus on the ability of the arts and culture to instruct or persuade the population. Social movements provide the best contemporary example of a didactic approach.

• *Discursive theories of action* focus on the use of the arts to provide settings in which people can discuss issues, form connections, and take action. Discursive theories are most closely associated with the concepts of social capital and the public sphere. Much intentional arts-based civic work would fall into this category, as would the use of civic ritual as a means of defining membership in a particular public.

• Finally, *ecological theories of action* focus on the unintentional consequences of cultural engagement. Ecological theories view all cultural participation as a form of civic engagement and assert that the arts generate a variety of spillover effects that increase social capital and community capacity.

Didactic Theories of Action

The first path—a didactic approach—sees the arts and culture as instructive; they can be used to improve the public's understanding of civic issues and its moral stance. A morally instructive approach to the arts has a very old history; it can be traced back at least twenty-three centuries to the Greeks' belief that the arts promote virtue.

The Progressive era—roughly from the 1890s to the 1920s—was an era much like our own in which rapid economic and social change raised fears of social disorder and breakdown. As reformers mobilized to promote civic order, they often deployed cultural strategies. The settlement house movement sought to "Americanize" immigrants, often through the provision of cultural programs along with social services. During this period, the "civic pageant" became a particularly popular means of "uplifting" the masses. These public performances (the 1914 Pageant and Masque of St.

Source: http://stlouis.missouri.org/citygov/parks/forestpark/history/pageant.html

Audience at the 1914 Pageant and Masque of St. Louis. Over four nights, more than 100,000 people attended the open-air performance on Art Hill in Forest Park.

Photo from Shepp's World's Fair Photographed, Chicago and Philadelphia, 1893.

Louis drew hundreds of thousands of people to Forest Park) were intended as a means of lifting up the city's population and inculcating civic values.

The same belief in the ability of art and beauty to improve civic virtue informed the City Beautiful movement in architecture and urban planning of the early twentieth century. City Beautiful proponents saw replacing disorder and squalor with wide boulevards and monumental structures as a strategy for improving the population—and especially its poorer and foreign-born members (Boyer 1978; Glassberg 1990). Progressives believed that these environmental changes would have a strong impact on the urban masses. Commentators on the "White City" of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair noted the profound effect that its orderly promenades and classically inspired architecture had on the behavior of visitors (Trachtenberg 1982). Daniel Burnham, who directed the Fair, later developed the Plan for Chicago, which again used the physical environment as a means of instructing and civilizing the population.

In our era, the arts have been used as a didactic strategy by a variety of political movements. The "new social movement" literature sees cultural change as central to social change efforts. Benford and Hunt analyze the dramaturgical elements of several social movements, including scripting, developing dramatis personae, and staging (Benford and Hunt 1992). The activities of ACT-UP—the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, a direct action AIDS/HIV movement—illustrate the use of dramaturgy as social action (Petty 1997). Graphics like the SILENCE=DEATH and tombstones and coffins as symbols of the cost of delay and indifference became lasting icons of the struggle for greater public attention on behalf of people with AIDS/HIV.

The didactic approach to the arts and civic engagement, however, had a rough century. The rise of mass media and the technologies of persuasion have raised the specter of the arts as simply one technology that could be used to manipulate public opinion for either good or ill. The twentieth century experience with propaganda and commercial culture suggests that the power of cultural symbolism, while undeniable, can be deployed in the service of lies as easily as truth.
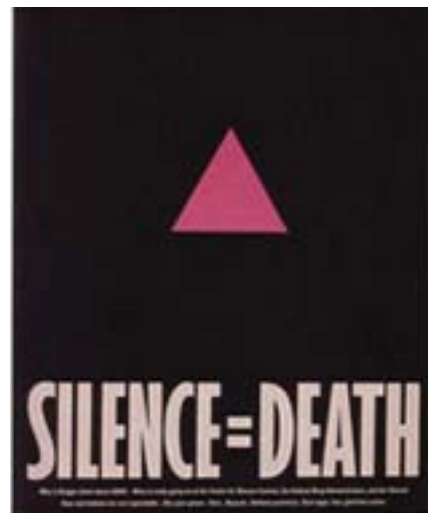
ACT-UP's silence equals death graphic was created in 1986 by Gran Fury, an ad hoc committee dedicated to exploiting the power of art to end the AIDS crisis. For the story of ACT UP/New York, see http://www.actuporalhistory.org/.

During the 1980s and '90s, postering accompanied direct action street drama to raise awareness and generate activism about AIDS. Artist-activist Keith Haring produced the ignorance equals fear lithograph for ACT UP in 1989.

The debate over the nature of the documentary provides one lens through which to explore this dilemma. What are the ethical standards that govern the discipline? Can subjects be paid? Can scenes or events be staged? When does the effort to create a documentary cross the line and simply become a work of fiction. Even when a documentary eschews a particular political stance, the use of technical features like camera angle or framing of subject introduces interpretive elements into the work (Renov 1993; Stones 2002).

Discursive Theories of Action

The didactic approach, then, has more recently been eclipsed by what we call a discursive approach that focuses on the arts as a means of furthering public dialogue. This approach has a number of strands: artist as provocateur or animateur of dialogue; civic ritual and the construction of community; public art, public space, and place making; the arts as a social inclusion strategy; and discursive space as a work of art.

Practitioners of the discursive approach divide over whether civic dialogue is an end in itself or a means to other ends. Advocates of deliberative democracy believe that increasing the number of persons involved in political debate should be the goal of a democracy. For other practitioners, discursive engagement is a means to a broader end, either raising people's consciousness about a particular issue or empowering them.

Discursive approaches are likely to burgeon with the remaking of cultural and civic life by new generations, new immigration, and new media. Today's artists, youth, and migrants engage local conversations within a global network.

Artist as provocateur or animateur

Somewhat tied to the didactic approach, the arts can be seen as *provocateur*, challenging people as a means of provoking discussion, or *animateur*, motivating people to collective action. Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, in its initial phase illustrated the link between the didactic and discursive theories of action. In its view, the arts can stimulate civic dialogue by bringing forward personal stories and the human

Digital garden screening at Sara Roosevelt Park in New York City's Chinatown arranged by Manhattan Neighborhood Network. Local advocacy and activist communities are partnering with filmmakers "like never before."

dimensions of issues, reflecting multiple perspectives, giving permission for emotion, and eliciting new ways of thinking through metaphor, humor, and abstraction. Civic dialogue as one form of civic engagement is "dialogue about civic issues, policies, or decisions of consequence to people's lives, communities, and society" (Animating Democracy 2003).

> Meaningful civic dialogue is intentional and purposeful. Dialogue organizers have a sense of what difference they hope to make through civic dialogue and participants are informed about why the dialogue is taking place and what may result. The focus of civic dialogue is not about the process of dialogue itself. Nor is its intent solely therapeutic or to nurture personal growth. Rather, civic dialogue addresses a matter of civic importance to the dialogue participants.

Animating Democracy's Web site provides case studies of a wide range of arts-based civic dialogue projects. Examining implementation and impact, these case studies and related publications illustrate the principles and practices of how art animates civic dialogue and engagement.

The Arts and Democracy Project is an organizing partner of the Detroit-based Center for Civic Participation. The Project's goal is to "build the momentum of a cultural movement that draws on a rich history of arts activism, social justice organizing, and grassroots engagement" through forums and events that engage these questions:

> How do arts and culture play an active role in our democracy?
> What forms of cultural expression move people to participate in decision-making?
> What forms of activism and organizing are best linked to arts and cultural work?
> How can this work become more strategic, effective, and sustainable?

The website provides descriptions of 85 organizations and projects across the country that illustrate the diversity of approaches to linking art, democracy, and social justice. A few examples are: Asian Arts Initiative in Philadelphia; Voices Breaking Boundaries in Houston; Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan; the Sojourn Theatre in Portland, Oregon; and Appalshop Radio Station WMMT-FM in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

The Community Arts Network promotes and facilitates online dialogue about artists as provocateurs as well as the multiple discursive roles of the arts. The CAN Reading Room is an extensive resource of articles, essays, and case studies for understanding and documenting the role of the arts in community development, civic engagement, and social change. Essays are archived by month back to August 1999, the founding of the Community Arts Network by Art in the Public Interest (Burnham and Durland 1998).

PHOTO BY SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE ARTS PROJECT, 2007.

The Up North Education to Power parade by Spiral Q Puppet Theater and the North Philadelphia Puppet and Parade Collaborative, June 2007. Over 300 people and 23 organizations participated in a puppet parade calling for equality in education. "Knowledge is POWER!" "Inteligencia es PODER!"

Civic ritual and construction of community

In contrast to the artist as provocateur, a more common view among arts practitioners is that of the discursive space itself as a work of art—a place where creativity and "magic" occur.

One important element of the public sphere is its role in creating a public out of diverse or isolated groups. This creative aspect of the public sphere takes on great importance in diverse social settings in which differences of ethnicity or social standing can create fissures that are difficult to overcome.

Roger Sanjek's study of social and racial change in the borough of Queens, New York illustrates the role of civic rituals in the (re)creation of a sense of community. As part of a self-conscious effort to create a sense of a public that transcends these social divisions, members of Queens' community associations revived a number of long-dormant civic rituals, including a tree lighting ceremony at Christmas time and the observation of Memorial and Veterans Days (Sanjek 2000).

The Names Project, which has coordinated the creative development and display of the AIDS Quilt, is another example of the use of civic ritual in the service of constructing a public. Indeed, within the AIDS activist community of the 1990s, the Quilt's emphasis on memorialization and inclusion was seen as blurring the battle lines over public policy responses to the epidemic (Petty 1997).

Public art, public space, and place-making

A discursive theory of action is often tied, as these examples suggest, to the idea of public space. Public artists, in particular, view their work as contributing to the creation and animation of public spaces that will increase opportunities for citizens to engage one another. Many mural projects, for example, have been tied to place making as a means of expanding community engagement or improving the quality of life (Nowak 2007).

Public art conventionally refers to a work of art in any medium that has been planned and executed with the intention of being sited or staged in the public domain, usually outside and accessible to all. Once associated with monuments and memorials, public art in practice has evolved so that the emphasis increasingly is on process—an artist and community collaboration—as well as product. In England the public art think tank Ixia has developed formal guidelines for public art as a creative process within the planning system (Ixia 2007). Ixia recommends that local planning documents incorporate the following definition of public art—"a process of engaging artists' creative ideas in the public realm." To expand definitions of eligible public art for purposes of local planning, Ixia recommends identifying a variety of roles that artists can play:

- artists as members of design teams, working collaboratively and contributing to the use and form of developments through research, reflection and propositions in relation to context;

- artists working to engage creatively with communities in order to explore and articulate issues of significance; and

- artists working as commentators and provocateurs producing permanent, temporary, or process-based public art.

Some urban and community planners are using community art workshops as part of a streetscape project or neighborhood revitalization effort. The Community Planning website, hosted by London's Royal Town Planning Institute, shows how planners use art workshops to engage local people in the physical planning and design of their environment. StreetFilms, a community media project, documents

livable streets practices worldwide. Its on-line video, "HOP, SKIP, and JUMP aboard a Boulder Bus," for example, tells how Boulder, Colorado transportation planners encouraged commuters to use transit by asking residents to design bus routes and decide the frequency of operation. Each high-frequency bus line now has its own color scheme and identity—with names like Stampede, Dash, Bound, and Bolt—all designed by residents.

The use of public art to engage communities in the design and construction of meaningful neighborhood gathering places is the mission of the Pomegranate Center in Issaquah, Washington. "Reinventing the commons for the common good," Pomegranate sees its work as the heart of a larger movement:

• to re-imagine and transform communities so that they are anchored in their natural settings and produce local identity and culture;

• to create cities with well-defined and vital public spaces and in a way that protects our air, waters, soil, plants and animal; and

• to re-envision cities as collections of urban villages.

PHOTO CREDIT: POMEGRANATE CENTER
SOURCE: WWW.POMEGRANTE.ORG

Esperanza Housing Project, Mattawa, Washington, 1999-2000. Pomegranate Center, with the Housing Authority of Grant County in eastern Washington, created an outdoor gathering place for migrant farmworkers. Pomegranate's model is to involve community members from initial design to construction to eventual programming and stewardship.

Founder Milenko Matanovic describes Pomegranate's twenty-year history and methods in his recent book, Multiple Victories: Pomegranate Center's Art of Creating Community-Crafted Gathering Places (Matanovic 2007).

Arts as social inclusion strategy

In a discursive context, the arts can serve as an invitation and safe place, drawing in individuals and groups who have historically been excluded from public dialogues. This approach—the arts as a strategy of inclusion—provides a particularly attractive avenue for those who wish to pursue the use of arts for civic engagement.

Historically, settlement houses often used arts and cultural programs to engage migrant populations. Contemporary evidence suggests that the arts and culture—because they view immigrants' background as an asset, not a deficit—can serve a similar role (Stern, Seifert, and Vitiello 2008). Indeed, Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial in South Philadelphia began over 100 years ago as an arts program in a settlement house. Today Fleisher and its resident artists collaborate with local social service agencies (some of which also evolved from settlement houses), public schools, and community organizations to use the arts as a draw for new immigrants and their children and to support their academic and social development.

Arts as engagement

Finally, discursive theories of action underline that many forms of cultural participation are civic engagement and so have implications for the kinds of cultural activities included in the inquiry. For many years, the study of cultural participation—then called cultural consumption or audience development—was linked closely to marketing and focused on increasing paid attendance at cultural events, as implied by the inelegant expression "butts in seats." If we view cultural involvement through the lens of civic engagement, however, we are less likely to focus on passive participation at cultural events and more likely to focus on active forms of arts participation.

New forms of arts engagement reflect current trends in participatory culture as well as artist-centered collective creativity. People are seeking active and participatory arts opportunities—for example, taking arts classes, joining a community theater group, singing in a church choir, belonging to a book club, or playing in a band. Nationally, according to a Rand study, small local nonprofit performing arts groups are proliferating and "an even larger and growing number of amateur performing arts organizations [are filling …] the demand for hands-on participation for avocational artists" (McCarthy et al 2001). At the same time, professional artists (alone and with groups) are working with community members on projects (such as mural-making, media arts, dance, and theater) that result in the creation of new works of art. "These kinds of collaborations place great importance on process, the inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives, and depth of audience engagement" (Bradley 2008). Active arts engagement is likely to generate community outcomes around building social capital and expanding social networks that are comparable to those associated with intentional arts-based civic engagement.

The Art of Engagement
Source: http://islandsinstitute.ning.com/

This on-line network exists as an ongoing open space for international dialogue on the Art of Engagement. It is experimental, co-created and free. Here are some of the questions that draw us together:

- How do we image and imagine the work of art at this moment in history, when the survival of he planet is threatened?

- What role can art play in transforming the current cascade of social and environmental crises?

- Can we develop a way to create culture, to research, learn and teach with/in ecological systems?

- Where does art intersect with social struggle?

Ecological Theories of Action

The unintended consequences of cultural engagement lead to an ecological theory of action. In contrast to the didactic and discursive approaches, which focus on purposive action, the ecological approach focuses on the social impacts of art making—regardless of intentionality—on civic culture and community vitality. Relying heavily on social capital and community capacity-building as a pathway, the ecological approach suggests that the social and institutional networks associated with cultural activities provide a spark to other forms of civic engagement.

The ecological theory shares with discursive theory a focus on more active forms of arts engagement. Where the didactic approach carries the risk of spectatorship—in which a passive public absorbs messages that influence their beliefs and behavior, the discursive and ecological approaches both hitch their wagon to more active forms of cultural participation. However, unlike discursive approaches, which can engage communities of affinity and multiple geographies; ecological theories of action assume a given social environment or place community.

Community vitality, social health, and cultural indicators projects are generally based on an ecological theory of action. The Urban Institute's Arts and Culture Indicators in Community Building Project (ACIP) used its connection to the National Neighborhood Indicators Project to call for a broad definition of culture as a "systems" approach that sees community well-being and cultural vitality as interdependent elements. In its 2002 report, ACIP called for a broad definition of culture as essential to the measurement of its impact on urban communities. The report defines the arts, culture, and creativity as a continuum of activities—from amateur to professional, from informal to formal—that happen in arts-specific (such as theaters, galleries, and museums) and non-arts-specific places (such as community centers, church halls, parks, schools, libraries, restaurants, and night clubs) (Jackson and Herranz 2002).

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Philadelphia Live Arts Festival 2008 at FDR skate park in South Philadelphia. Emmanuelle Delpech-Ramey's "Oedipus at FDR" drew on the theatricality of skateboarding to explore ancient and modern notions of truth, judgment, and death.

Research conducted since 1994 by the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) at the University of Pennsylvania has also contributed to an ecological view of the arts and its relationship to community. SIAP's studies of metropolitan Philadelphia have documented the link between cultural engagement and social diversity, community capacity-building, and neighborhood revitalization. These findings point to a relationship between community arts and "collective efficacy"—a term coined by public health researcher Felton Earls to describe "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good" (Stern and Seifert 2008). SIAP's working

papers and publications are available on its Web site at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice.

An ecological theory of action works for activist-theorists. Arlene Goldbard finds the concept of social capital important to community cultural development as well as cultural planning. She notes that the concept was introduced in 1961 by urbanist Jane Jacobs (in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*) and cites Helen Gould on the intrinsic relationship between social capital and culture (Goldbard 2006).

At its simplest, culture is itself a form of social capital. When a community comes together to share cultural life, through celebration, rites and intercultural dialogue, it is enhancing its relationships, partnerships and networks—in other words, developing social capital. Conversely, when a community's heritage, culture and values (in all their diversity) are overlooked, social capital is eroded, since it is often within these roots that the inspiration for people to act together for a common purpose can be found.

The Australia Council for the Arts has tested an ecological theory of action—specifically, the impact of community cultural development on community well-being. In a report called *Art and Wellbeing: A Guide to the Connections between Community Cultural Development and Health, Ecologically Sustainable Development, Public Housing and Place, Rural Revitalisation, Community Strengthening, Active Citizenship, Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity*, case study material is grouped under these seven themes, which represent Australian government priorities (Mills and Brown 2004). The researchers found that

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

community-based creative processes, when embedded in an agency's policies and strategies, can contribute significantly to all of these objectives.

Whatever one's theory about how the arts influence civic engagement, moving from theory to actual measurement of change poses a set of challenges to evaluation design and methodology. In Part II we discuss a set of practical considerations: formulating the problem, methodological challenges, and data collection strategies. We conclude with a look at the implications of measurement challenges for evaluation research.

FORMULATING THE PROBLEM

The rationale that drives social research generally starts with a theory that explains observed patterns and hypotheses that predict consequences of a planned action. To undertake evaluation, practitioners will need to articulate their theory of action and the logic that connects their arts programming to civic engagement and societal change.

Conventionally, the research process follows a model of scientific inquiry. Because social scientists agree to use a scientific method to ask and answer important questions about human behavior, they can share and compare methods and findings and build upon previous work. Like the creative process, "doing science" is an iterative process "that begins with a question and ends with asking new questions" (Salkind 2009).

A logic model is an adaptation of the model of scientific inquiry to the field of evaluation. A logic model spells out the rationale or theory behind a program and the underlying assumptions about why the program will work. Typically, a logic model is a diagram or flow chart that outlines what causes what. Unlike the wheel of science, however, logic models tend to be linear without feedback loops or other iterative inquiry.

Articulation of theory and rationale is central to research design and critical to program evaluation. Without clarity and consensus on program goals, planned inputs and outputs, and anticipated or desired outcomes and impacts—evaluation is effectively impossible. How otherwise to determine program success?

Methodological Challenges

Measurement of concepts and theories of action is doable but challenging. Here we focus on six methodological challenges: unit of analysis, retrospective data, selection bias, intrusiveness, causal inference, and comparison and control groups.

Unit of analysis—what or whom to study

Civic engagement itself is an individual level variable—only individuals can act upon or believe something—but the causes and effects of those actions are linked to higher levels of aggregation. Groups (families, schools, congregations, organizations) and locales (neighborhoods, regions, cities, nations, even continents) often have distinct civic cultures that influence the likelihood that individuals

**From The Practice of Social Research (1989)
by Earl Babbie**

Cultural Traditions and Social Research
Although it is normal to contrast cultural traditions with science, it is useful to note some similarities. In particular, people want their individual and social behaviors to (1) make sense and (2) correspond with reality. If you lived on the slopes of an active volcano, it might make no sense to you to throw a bottle of gin into the crater, but to the traditional Hawaiians, placating Madam Pele is the only sensible action. And they will offer voluminous examples of danger being averted in just that fashion—as well as darker tales of what happened to those who annoyed the goddess of volcanoes.
The belief systems and anecdotal evidence of cultural traditions correspond roughly to the roles of theory and statistics in social research. Scientists also want things to make sense, and that's the role of theory. And in the realm of concrete, observed events, scientists demand that their theories be borne out in fact [… and that's the role of] statistics. …

In our understandings of things in everyday life, we may "go wrong" … we may cite "evidence" that is not logically related to the belief system we want to substantiate. … In social research, by contrast, theories are always fair game for testing and subject to disconfirmation. No theory is sacred, even though individual scientists sometimes lose sight of that, at least temporarily. …

will engage. Thus, civic engagement and the arts need to be seen as nested phenomena that take place in a hierarchical system of causes and effects.

This point is associated with Dwyer's concern with "context" as an important influence of the potential power of a particular program. Indeed, this interaction between context and a program can have unpredictable implications (Dwyer 2008). In some cases, an environment might provide particularly fertile ground for a particular intervention. Efforts to engage a community over issues of racial difference, for example, are more likely to bear fruit in a community that has already begun such a discussion than in one where it has been suppressed. Viewed at the program level, the former might be considered a success and the latter a failure unless the contextual factors are taken into account.

The unit of analysis issue—that is, whom or what is studied—poses great challenges to the work of individual programs or organizations. First, organizations are unlikely to operate in enough different types of communities to be able to assess these wider ecological influences on their functioning. Second, they are unlikely to be in a position to monitor variations in their environment to account for its influence on program outcomes.

As a result, the challenge of unit of analysis argues in favor of approaches that look across organizations, neighborhoods, regions, or nations to judge how similar strategies of arts-based engagement encounter success and challenges across these different settings.

Retrospective data—the problem of memory

Memory is an unreliable faculty. People forget or, worse, they "remember" incorrectly. Many of the data-gathering strategies that one might use to assess the impact of the arts on civic engagement rely on memory; and the data, therefore, are prone to error.

The problem of memory is compounded when the phenomenon one is measuring is viewed as either socially desirable or undesirable. As one might expect, we tend to "remember" doing things that are desirable (even if we didn't do them) and forget things that are viewed as undesirable. This explains why Sidney Mintz found that Americans' reports about what they eat account for only about half of all of the calories that disappear in a given year (Mintz 1985).

Although we may at times doubt it, both cultural participation and civic engagement are viewed as desirable activities. As a result, they both tend to get over-reported. The problem of over-reporting has long been identified in the Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts commissioned regularly by the National Endowment for the Arts as well as in similar surveys of civic engagement.

Selection bias—a threat to study validity

A third methodological problem in measuring the link between civic engagement and the arts is biases that arise from the way data are collected. Clearly, research designs historically have tended to exclude people of color and members of less advantaged social groups. In the case of the practitioner-initiated studies, *self-selection* is probably the most common form of bias. Active cultural participants and active civic participants are relatively small proportions of the population. If you hold an event—say, a play about AIDS prevention followed by a discussion—it is this small sub-population that is likely to turn up. If this is the population you use to estimate the link between the arts and civic engagement, you will introduce a bias into your analysis.

Ironically, self-selection may create perverse estimates of the effectiveness of a particular program. An arts-based intervention about AIDS might be very useful for the general population (which is generally ignorant). If a representative sample of the American population were required to sit through such a program, it might indeed raise people's consciousness and desire to act. However, people who choose to attend such an event probably are already quite well informed compared to the general population. If they reported honestly, one might conclude that the intervention was ineffective.

There are a variety of ways to address selection bias. At the very least, one should collect data on the study sample that can be compared to characteristics of the general population. If one finds significant differences, it might provide a basis for speculating about who attended and who did not. One could also identify a control or comparison group with which to compare the sample.

Yet, even these efforts may not solve the problem. Caterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga, for example, sought to estimate the impact of arts involvement on academic achievement using the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Survey. In order to estimate the effect of arts involvement, they compared students with or without arts involvement and controlled for socio-economic standing. However, because students chose whether to take art classes, it was impossible to conclude that the academic achievement differences they found were attributable to their exposure to the arts (Caterall *et al* 1999).

Indeed, a careful review of the literature on the arts and academic achievement concluded that existing data fail to support the case that there is a causal link between arts involvement and academic achievement (Winner and Cooper 2000). Instead, the authors concluded that highly motivated students chose to pursue the arts and to get higher test scores. The common cause—motivation—explains the spurious correlation between the arts and academic achievement.

A pure, random-assignment experimental design provides the best way to address selection bias. Using our AIDS example, one could have two performances, one with and one without a discussion, and then ask audience members to assess how much they learned. If those who attended a discussion reported they had learned more, one could fairly conclude that the discussion was effective. Note, however, that even this design would not account for the overall impact of the program, only for that attributable to the addition of the discussion.

Obtrusiveness—impact of methodology on findings

An element of data collection strategies that may create a particular burden for arts-based civic engagement programs is their intrusiveness. Audience surveys, for example, can be irritating to someone who just wants to enjoy a performance or exhibition. Pre- and post-tests in an arts residency could curb the enthusiasm of young people who might otherwise welcome the arts as a vehicle for expression and an alternative to curricula. A questionnaire—when interjected into an intense discussion of discrimination, racism, or community conflict—may seem more than irritating. For example, a Philadelphia-based activist arts program had implemented a thorough system of feedback, but many participants objected that the data gathering undermined their enjoyment of the event.

Causal inference—need for time and space considerations

As the literature on the development of civic engagement demonstrates, civic participation is a complex phenomenon with many causes, some immediate and others going back years and decades. If we combine this insight with our earlier point about the nested quality of civic engagement, we can conclude that looking for direct and immediate links between the arts and civic engagement is likely to underestimate the relationship. Approaches that take time and space into consideration are likely to produce more accurate results and show larger effects. This suggests that longitudinal and hierarchical studies would be the best approach to studying this relationship.

Dwyer suggests that this issue be addressed through a focus on the short-term or intermediate outcomes of programs, like raising awareness and expanding participants' social networks. This approach does not solve the core problem. From the standpoint of a logic model, *outcomes* are outcomes only if they are tied to *impacts*. The anticipated short-term effects of arts-based civic engagement—heightened awareness or deepened knowledge of civic or social issues, increased understanding of other perspectives, increased or more diverse participation, increased capacity for engagement and dialogue, new relationships built and/or existing relationships strengthened, connections made that cross institutional boundaries such as policy domains or sectors—are legitimate outcomes that are worth documenting. In the absence of broader impacts, however, they may be seen as relatively modest accomplishments, especially by those not inclined to acknowledge the civic power of the arts. There is nothing wrong with this strategy on scientific grounds, but a widespread documentation of small effects may not be in the best interest of the field.

Comparison and control groups—compared to what?

All research is ultimately about comparisons, whether explicit or implicit. To understand a phenomenon, we need to know how it is distinctive, what differentiates it from other phenomena. The issue of comparison is particularly important for understanding the relationship between the arts and civic engagement because of the threat posed by selection bias.

Comparison groups are also relevant for case-making efforts. To make the case that some programs are worth funding—at least in a world of finite resources—one has to argue that they are in some way better than the proposed alternatives. Of course, one could avoid instrumental arguments and instead argue that the arts are intrinsically important, as a Rand Corporation study has proposed (McCarthy *et al* 2004). Although pleasure and captivation are indeed intrinsic values, the remainder of Rand's list of intrinsic qualities—capacity for empathy, cognitive growth, creation of social bonds, and expression of communal meaning—do not seem that far removed from the list of "usual suspects" of instrumental benefits. What is distinctive about Rand's conclusions is that they combine a political strategy (build a broader constituency for the intrinsic value of the arts) with a research strategy (identify the social benefits of the arts). In any event, it does not get practitioners out of the box of case-making comparisons.

Considering the arts and civic engagement, we have two arguments to consider:

*   the arts do a better or different job than X at promoting civic engagement; and

*   arts-based civic engagement is better or different than Y at accomplishing a broader set of social impacts.

The first, more general case is typically framed around the complementary role of the arts. For example, one could argue that a voter registration drive aimed at young people would be more successful if it incorporated an arts element. Similarly, one might argue that because participants in arts programs are more ethnically and economically diverse than those in other voluntary activities, they build bridging social capital more effectively than other activities (Stern and Seifert 2007).

The second case poses a greater challenge. What is the "Y" that arts-based civic engagement is better or different than? On the one hand, one could argue that arts-based civic engagement generates better or different impacts than other arts activities. On the other hand, one could argue that arts-based civic engagement generates better or different impacts than other civic engagement strategies.

As the Animating Democracy Initiative moves forward, unpacking these distinctions will be a necessary element of understanding and advancing case-making efforts.

Data Collection Strategies

"Much evidence for positive impacts of arts and cultural participation" according to an Australian review of the evidence, "is not convincing." Among the reasons cited for this failure are: "studies do not have clear social objectives; studies are badly-designed; outputs are prioritised over outcomes; terms and concepts are used inconsistently; expertise in evaluation is inadequate in the arts; the theoretical basis for evaluation is lacking; cultural organisations' goals are not related to social impact;

and, causality (or even association) are seldom demonstrated" (Australian Expert Group in Industry Studies of the University of Western Australia 2005).

What is evidence? PolicyHub, a UK government resource center, describes "research and evaluation evidence" as one factor that contributes to policy-making. In any case, policy- and grant-making decisions are increasingly based on evidence rather than opinion. Evidence is based on "the findings of scientific research (including social scientific research) that has been gathered and critically appraised according to explicit and sound principles of scientific inquiry." In addition, "the opinions and judgments of experts that are based upon up-to-date scientific research" also constitute high-quality, valid, and reliable evidence. PolicyHub provides a simple guide to the different types of evidence that are generated by different research designs and data collection strategies. These include:

- *Experimental and quasi-experimental evidence*—controlled, time-series, and comparison studies yield findings about the relative effectiveness of one intervention compared with others or doing nothing at all.

- *Survey and administrative evidence*—social survey and administrative data sets provide valuable information about the nature, size, frequency, and distribution of a problem or a topic under investigation.

- *Qualitative research evidence*—systematic collection of data on opinions, attitudes, or perceptions of stakeholders yield findings about why a program works (or fails to work), how it works, for whom, and under what conditions it works or fails to work. Methods include theory-based, goals-based, or goals-free evaluation; in-depth interviews, focus groups, or consultative techniques; ethnographies, observational, or participant-observational studies; and conversation or discourse analysis.

Given the methodological challenges associated with the documentation of the arts and civic engagement, what opportunities exist? Here we assess the major data-gathering strategies available through the social sciences: surveys and questionnaires, direct observation of behavior and community mapping, qualitative methodologies, and experimental and quasi-experimental approaches.

Surveys and questionnaires—there ain't no such thing as a free lunch

Surveys are the lowest common denominator of social research. They have many obvious features that recommend them; they are cheap; they can be targeted to a particular audience; and they are flexible. Their drawbacks, by contrast, are less obvious and easily overlooked.

Most surveys are a single "snapshot" of a sample of respondents, what researchers call a cross-sectional survey. Occasionally, a research design is based on a series of snapshots that allows one to look at change in a population over time. Less frequently, a research project will follow a group of respondents over time, what is called a longitudinal design.

As we noted earlier, civic engagement appears to be a deeply embedded phenomenon. Individuals develop their attitudes and behavior around civic engagement across their life cycle, which makes a longitudinal design that follows people over years a very attractive alternative. Recently, for example, several authors (Zaff, Malanchuk, and Eccles 2008; Gardner, Roth, and Brooks-Gunn 2008; Peck, Roeser, Zarrett, and Eccles 2008) have discovered that one's civic engagement activity during

adolescence is associated with higher levels of engagement and more success later in life, a finding that would be impossible without longitudinal data.

Unfortunately, longitudinal research should be labeled: "NOT FOR AMATEURS." Implementing longitudinal studies is expensive to start and can become more expensive over time as one devotes more and more energy to finding one's original subjects. If these respondents cannot be found, the sample may become unrepresentative and too small to analyze. For these reasons, it is unlikely that practitioners could successfully undertake longitudinal projects without substantial outside technical and financial support.

As a result, organizations focus on cross-sectional or "snapshot" survey research. The arts world has been overrun by marketing professionals, who have made the audience survey (that slip of paper that inevitably slips out of the program and onto the floor) as common an experience for theater-goers as having their feet fall asleep. Still, there are a number of ways that survey research could be applied to the study of the relationship of the arts to civic engagement.

- Much of what we know about civic engagement comes from relatively large national surveys of the topic. For example the National Civic Engagement Surveys, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, surveyed a representative national survey of Americans about their civic and political engagement earlier in this decade (Zukin *et al* 2006).

- Robert Putnam's writings on social capital, by the same token, have been largely based on the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Council and on a set of surveys of individual localities undertaken by his research center (Putnam 2000, 2007).

- A variety of studies have tried to measure the impact of deliberative democracy projects using pre-post test methods. (For a review of these studies, see Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs 2004.)

If we examine the possibilities of survey research against the six methodological challenges outlined above, we conclude that these methods have promise for examining national or even regional patterns of civic engagement but hold less promise for practitioners. Although they would be vulnerable to the problem of retrospective reporting, national or local surveys can tell us about overall levels of engagement and their relationship to the demographic characteristics and other behavior of respondents. For example, the National Endowment for the Arts was able to use the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts to examine the ways in which arts participants were different from the rest of the population with respect to civic engagement (NEA 2006). By combining survey data with geographic data on respondents' neighborhoods, analysis could also disentangle the role of neighborhood and individual characteristics on patterns of civic engagement (Stern and Seifert 2000).

At the program level, surveys typically use a pre- and post-test format. This design suffers from the lack of a comparison group, selection bias, and intrusiveness. While pre- and post-tests may be able to demonstrate changes in some immediate effects, it would be difficult to attribute to the program in a rigorous way any significant changes found. Gathering data on subjects at multiple points before and after the intervention would allow the use of interrupted time-series methods, which would improve the overall quality of these data. However, time-series methodologies require significant technical and financial support (see quasi-experimental section below).

Direct measures of behavior—community mapping
Given the problems of self-reports of past behavior, a number of researchers have advocated

methods that directly study behavior. For example, Robinson and Godbey used time-diaries as a means of studying how people used their time (Robinson and Godbey 1997). They discovered that studies that relied on retrospective estimates of time spent in paid employment and domestic work reached incorrect conclusions about how "overworked" Americans really were (Schor 1991).

While time diaries are beyond the technical capacity of most organizations to implement, other direct measures of behavior that are quite accessible to practitioners have been used to gauge civic engagement. Organizations' administrative records—specifically, address lists of class registration, ticket sales, membership, and patron sign-in—have been combined with geographic information systems (GIS) to expand our understanding of civic and social impacts of cultural participation (Stern and Seifert 2005a). In contrast to audience surveys, these methods rarely require participants to devote more time to filling out forms than they would spend otherwise. Organizations often resist the systematic use of administrative data, but judged by the increasing use of such data for marketing, this resistance is likely to decline over time.

Concretely, geographic analysis of participant data would allow an organization to identify where it is and where it is not drawing participants and how this correlates with other social characteristics. For example, a program focused on anti-racism training could find out if its participants are over- or under-represented in sections of the city with particular ethnic and social class profiles. If different groups pooled these data, each could compare its participant pattern to that of other arts-based civic engagement programs.
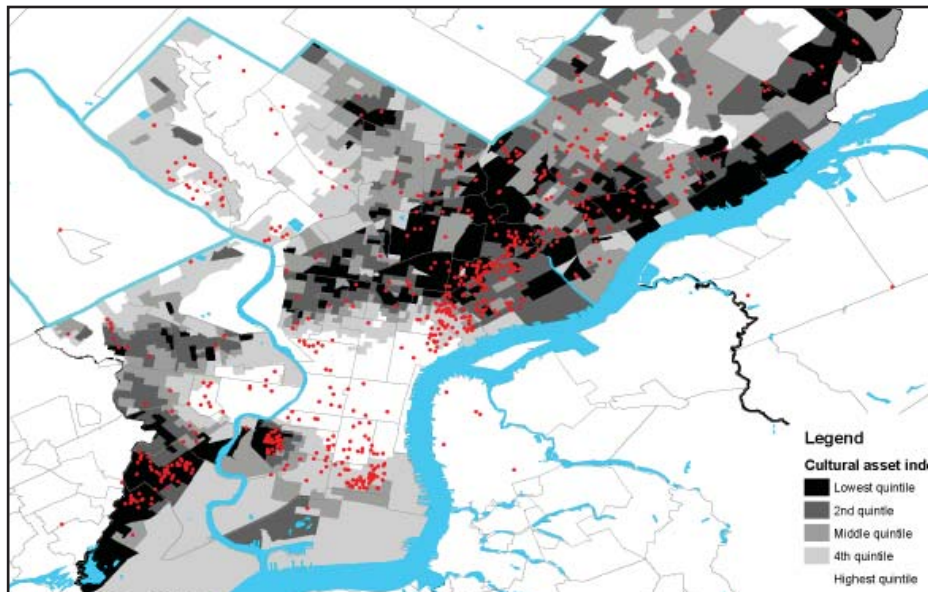
Systematic collection of participant address data would allow arts-based civic engagement programs to link to initiatives using community mapping as a way to mobilize civic actors to identify and respond to issues in their community. As the Student Action for Change explains:

> Mapping is a core community building skill that is a way of life for the best community organizers. …When you hear the word "mapping" you probably think of a traditional street map that tells you where something is located and how to get there. Community mapping does the same thing, except the purpose is to evaluate your campus in regard to student voice and student civic engagement. It will also help you locate assets for getting involved and making democratic change on your campus. It can help you get started on implementing desired civic changes.   Most importantly, mapping is a tool that initiates a community building process on a campus that helps locate allies and resources so that change is possible.

Community mapping provides the greatest promise for demonstrating the link between cultural engagement and a wider set of civic outcomes. Because GIS allows researchers to integrate data from a variety of sources and link them to neighborhood ecology, mapping provides a means of documenting relationships that would be impossible at the individual level.

In a study of the impact of murals on their community, for example, Stern and Seifert combined evidence on Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program with data on the characteristics of the neighborhoods in which murals were located. The study found a correlation between the concentration of murals and a number of indicators of neighborhood well-being. The study, however, discovered that murals were not a "magic bullet." Murals alone were not related to neighborhood improvement, but rather it was the combination of murals and the presence of other cultural programs (Stern and Seifert 2002).

The mural study points to one potential stumbling block in assessing an individual program's impact. Without data on other forms of social action, the study could have been used to demonstrate that murals were causally related to neighborhood improvement. In fact, a study of the impact of tree planting with a similar design but without data on other forms of civic engagement concluded that "streetscaping imparts a considerable increase in surrounding home values as well, on the order of a

Legend
Cultural asset index
■ Lowest quintile
■ 2nd quintile
■ Middle quintile
□ 4th quintile
□ Highest quintile

This map plots complaints of racial or ethnic harassment filed with the Philadelphia Human Relations Commission in 2001 against the concentration of cultural assets in the Philadelphia neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with many cultural assets had half as many complaints as those with few assets.

twenty-eight percent gain in value relative to similar homes in comparable areas without streetscape improvements" (Wachter and Gillen 2006).

As this example suggests, improving the quality of one's analysis—by incorporating a fuller view of neighborhood context—may not improve the impact of one's findings. While the mural study with its modest conclusions had little impact on public policy, the tree planting study—despite its use of a less complete data set—has been credited with changing the policy discussion of the role of greening programs.

Community mapping can also be used to examine the association between cultural engagement and other forms of civic behavior. The Philadelphia Human Relations Commission, for example, maintains a database on complaints of racial and ethnic harassment. By integrating these data with those on cultural and civic engagement, one could determine—controlling for demographic and economic conditions—whether parts of Philadelphia with high levels of civic engagement had significantly fewer ethnic harassment complaints than other sections of the city.

Community mapping does not solve the challenge of causal attribution. As the tree planting and mural studies show, some correlations may be misleading. To the extent, however, that community mapping identifies durable patterns that relate individual behavior to neighborhood characteristics, it addresses many of the methodological challenges of civic engagement research.

Qualitative methods—understanding the why and how of behavior

Qualitative methods and ethnographic studies, in particular, are a way to identify and understand the relationship between cultural practices and civic engagement, especially in informal or "under-the-radar" settings. Qualitative observation can profitably complement a quantitative approach to the direct measurement of behavior.

Two sets of ethnographic studies that document the informal arts in Chicago and Silicon Valley, respectively, have found that immigrant cultural practices are central to the building of immigrant communities' social capital and capacity to engage civically (Wali, Severson, and Longoni 2002; Moriarty 2004; and Wali, Contractor, and Severson 2007). The Silicon Valley study noted the importance of participatory arts to community capacity-building in immigrant communities. Informal culture contributed both to developing community self-identity and to linking immigrant communities to the wider social structure. The 2007 Chicago study found that the artistic and cultural activities and networking assets of Mexican immigrants contribute to neighborhood social and economic vitality. Cultural activities were deeply embedded as well in Mexican civic practices, which became particularly important in efforts to mobilize against anti-immigrant attacks during the past decade.

This emphasis on the creative here-and-now demands methods that focus less on the consequences of civic engagement and more on its immediacy. As discussed above, discursive theories of action place great emphasis on the public sphere and its potential for generating creative perspectives on social issues. As Eliasoph says:

> Civic practices have the potential to unleash a creative, meaning-making, magical source of power that "springs up between men and vanishes the moment they disperse. . . ." (Eliasoph 1996).

Cultural organizations across the U.S. have developed models that use ethnographic methods to engage communities directly with artists and creative processes. Of particular promise are the practices of embedding folklorists, humanities scholars, oral historians, or cultural workers in organizations, on projects, or in community settings. (See, for example, the Philadelphia Folklore Project, which provides technical assistance in folk arts and sustainable culture to grassroots community groups; Georgia's Swamp Gravy oral-history based theater; Junebug Productions' ColorLine Project, a story collecting and performance work about the Civil Rights Movement; Scribe Video Center's Precious Places neighborhood documentary videos project; or the Queens Museum of Art's Crossing the Blvd project, a multi-disciplinary expressive documentary of "strangers, neighbors, and aliens" in the borough of Queens in New York City—to name but a few).

To date the use of ethnography by arts organizations has been largely for documentation—both as creative process and product—of vulnerable cultures, communities, and places and often with a view toward broader goals of political voice or social inclusion. Such models, however, are applicable to evaluation purposes. They suggest the compatibility of ethnographic practices to community arts settings; the feasibility of technical assistance collaborations as a way to acquire field method expertise; and the potential use of documentation to describe and assess the contribution of arts programs to achieving civic or social goals.

In Animating Democracy's earlier work, for example, an experiment called "Critical Perspectives" tested the use of participant observation to document the processes and outcomes of arts-based civic dialogue. In each of three projects, the director and three unaffiliated people were invited to be participant-observers and write about the work. To varying degrees humanities scholars, ethnographers, sociologists, journalists, critics, and community residents were embedded in this set of arts-based civic dialogue projects. The goal was to generate multiple writings from different perspectives and vantage points that would provide a comparative view of the efficacy of the projects as well as raw documentation of the experiences.

The use of interview methodology to document the community processes and civic outcomes of public art is illustrated in Tom Finkelpearl's *Dialogues in Public Art* (Finkelpearl 2001). Finkelpearl conducted twenty in-depth interviews with people who create and experience public art—including

an artist, a bureaucrat, an architect, a local a resident, and a community developer—to document its multiple perspectives. The book organizes the interviews into four parts: controversies in public art, experiments in public art as architecture and urban planning, dialogues on dialogue-based public art projects, and public art for public health (Finkelpearl 2001). These themes highlight the multiple intersections of public art with civic engagement.

Although qualitative methods alone cannot demonstrate the effectiveness of culture as a civic engagement strategy, the thorough documentation of the "magic" created by the arts as they occur is the essential starting point for any effort at making a case for their importance.

Experimental and quasi-experimental approaches

Increasingly, social experiments are the "state of the art" in social policy interventions. As in an eighth-grade science lab, the concept is to compare the results of a "treatment" group with that of a control group. If proper procedures are followed, one is able to conclude that any statistically significant difference between the two groups is attributable to the treatment (Riccio and Bloom 2002). Many of the policy innovations of welfare-to-work and a variety of other social fields have been driven by social experiments.

True experiments have had relatively little role in arts research. Even in arts education scholarship—where the opportunity to assign individuals and classrooms randomly to a treatment or control group is greater than in non-institutional settings—there are only a handful of studies that have tested intervention (Winner and Cooper 2000). Certainly, these are not methods that practitioners could easily adapt to their evaluation needs.

Short of a true experiment, a variety of quasi-experimental designs that integrate some elements of experiments have played an important role in assessing the effectiveness of interventions. In particular, quasi-experimental approaches can move research beyond weak pre-test/post-test designs and add credibility to one's findings.

As we have noted earlier, simply adding a control group to a pre-/post- design removes a number of objections to the interpretation of a study's results. In addition, adding multiple measurement points both before and after an intervention converts a pre-/post- design into an interrupted time-series. A time-series design removes the problem of statistical regression (or regression to the mean) in the case where high scores on a pre-test will tend to decline over time while low scores will tend to go up. In addition, an interrupted time-series would allow researchers and practitioners to assess the nature of an impact: is it instantaneous or delayed? does it decline over time? (Cooke and Campbell 1979).

Implications for Evaluation Research

Articulation of theory, rationale, and methodology is essential to the credibility and utility of the research or evaluation results. Systematic inquiry and documentation by practitioners will help address concerns raised by the Initiative—in particular, how to design program evaluation that is meaningful to particular communities and local context but can be generalized to other peoples, programs, and places. The model of scientific inquiry makes explicit not only *what happens if* but also *under what conditions* it can or does happen.

No single methodology reviewed here can address all of the challenges involved in measuring the social impacts of the arts. With Matarasso we conclude that "none of the methods used to assess the social impact of participating in the arts was internally or independently satisfactory" even though "collectively they have produced a substantial body of evidence on which to build" (Matarasso 1997).

Rather than endorse one particular approach, we suggest a division of labor between practitioners and researchers, each using a variety of methods best suited to their expertise and mission. In the following section, we outline a set of recommendations that collectively can build a credible case for the contribution of the arts to civic engagement and social action.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
CONNECTING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The methodology review leads us to a set of recommendations about where those interested in demonstrating the impact of the arts and culture on civic engagement should place their emphasis. Here we build on Dwyer's suggestion to view the issue of civic engagement up-front and consider its implications for decisions about arts program implementation. She points to a range of data-collection strategies that can produce quality evidence and recommends that advocates and practitioners customize an evaluation design to serve a particular purpose or audience (Dwyer 2008).

To generate high-quality, valid, and reliable evidence regarding the social effects of arts-based civic engagement work will require systematic data collection and coordination by agents at three levels: the organizational or program-scale, the regional-scale, and the initiative-scale. The most effective approach, therefore, would be a division of labor among practitioners, researchers, and policy or grant-making agencies.

In Part 3 we discuss this three-tier approach to evaluation. Section 3.1 recommends *organizational or program-scale strategies* that can be effectively undertaken by practitioners. Section 3.2 recommends *regional-scale strategies* most effectively undertaken by researchers. Section 3.3 recommends *initiative-scale strategies* that can be most effectively undertaken by policy or grant-making agencies. We conclude with a look at the policy context of practice.

SECTION 3.1—ORGANIZATIONAL OR PROGRAM-SCALE STRATEGIES

Arts practitioners interested in civic engagement case-making should bear in mind the sober reality often faced by social scientists: what you can measure easily isn't important, and what is important, you can't measure easily. Every data-gathering strategy entails costs, many of which are not obvious. While many providers are enthusiastic about having research results, they often see data gathering as a diversion from their core mission.

Practitioners, therefore, must first determine the *utility* of an evaluation study and identify the *audiences* for the work. Broadly, there are three uses of and audiences for this type of evaluation research: *internal use* by organizational staff and board to enhance the quality and effectiveness of arts-based civic engagement programs; *peer review and exchange* toward dialogue and field-building among community and activist arts practitioners; and *external reporting* to grant-makers, public policy-makers, community and civic leaders who shape agendas and deploy resources.

Arts practitioners must then define the critical variables; develop a theory of change that connects their civic and social goals with their arts programs; and, finally, link these concepts and rationale to meaningful indicators and feasible data-gathering methodologies. Ideally, the multiple uses of—and audiences for—program evaluation will be interactive and feed a body of practice-based evidence. Here we discuss five strategies to help practitioners view evaluation as an organizational process as well as a product:

- Become a learning organization.

- Develop an approach based on principles of participatory evaluation and collaborative inquiry.

- Build capacity for qualitative evaluation methodologies with a regional folklife or local ethnography center.

- Develop simple, in-house systems for broad-based participant data gathering.

- Partner with a regional data and mapping center.

Becoming a Learning Organization

The first step for artists and cultural leaders who want to demonstrate their impact is to develop an organizational structure conducive to reflection and engagement—that is, become a learning organization. A learning organization, says Peter Senge, is an environment:

… where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole (reality) together.

A learning organization embraces not only the "adaptive learning" necessary for survival but the "generative learning" that enhances people's capacity to create. In a learning organization both the individual members and group culture encourage knowledge sharing within and without, experimentation, collective problem-solving, and development of innovative ideas (Senge 1990).

Revisit mission

Self-evaluation cultivates a learning organization, helps staff better understand the evaluation process, and clarifies the connection between evaluation and the organization's ability to bring about change. The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development calls self-evaluation "an empowerment tool for organizational and social change." Before embarking on evaluation, an organization should revisit its overall mission and vision of what it wants to accomplish over the next few years. "A strong mission statement prepares the organization to undertake an evaluation of this mission" (PERC 2008).

Construct a theory of change

With mission confirmed the organization is ready for theory of change, which is both a theory of action and a participatory methodology that originated in evaluation of social change initiatives. A theory of change is "a specific and measurable description of a social change initiative that forms the basis for strategic planning, on-going decision-making, and evaluation" (ActKnowledge 2008). "In short, a theory of change explains why the things we do should produce the results we intend" (Innovation Center 2005). Theory of change is a five-stage process:

1—Articulate long-term goals and outcomes, the assumptions behind them, and the underlying logic about the change process.

2—Do backwards mapping to connect the preconditions or requirements necessary to achieve those goals.

3—Identify interventions the initiative will perform to create the desired change.

4—Develop indicators to measure outcomes that assess initiative performance.

5—Write a narrative to explain the logic of the initiative.

"Backwards mapping" is central to theory of change. The organizations and partners involved in a change effort need to "think in backwards steps from their long-term goal to the intermediate and then early-term changes that would be required to cause the desired change." These connected outcomes or "pathway of change" is the skeleton around which the theory is developed. The theory of change—in addition to being a planning, decision-making, and communications tool—will become the framework against which the organization's success can be evaluated (ActKnowledge 2008).

SOURCE: INNOVATION CENTER FOR COMMUNITY AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT 2008

Planning and Evaluation Resource Center at www.evaluationtools.org/planning.asp

Develop a logic model

A logic model is a visual representation of a theory of change and helps make an organization's theory explicit rather than implicit. Group development of a logic model helps build a shared understanding of the theory of change. A logic model is also useful to identify gaps in the theory or logic; to focus attention and resources; and to involve stakeholders in the design, process, and use of evaluation.

| PROGRAM GOALS ~ Desired effects or changes to be produced by program operation | → | RESOURCES/ INPUTS ~ Staff, time, facilities, contributions, investments | → | OUTPUTS ~ Direct program activities, processes, services, events | → | OUTCOMES ~ Initial & intermediate changes in participant knowledge, behavior, skills after program; changes in communities that set stage for impacts | → | IMPACTS ~ Fundamental and long-lasting systemic change |

SOURCE: W. K. KELLOGG 2004.

A logic model is a program evaluation tool that shows the relationship between inputs, processes, outcomes, and desired goals. The model is read as a series of "if … then…" statements.

A Theory Approach Logic Model
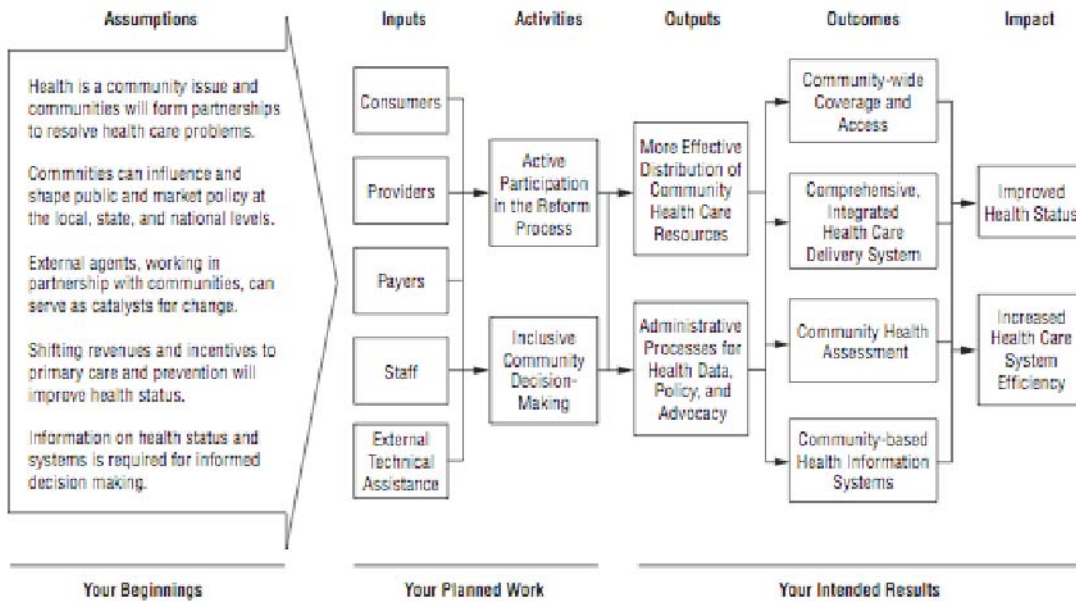
SOURCE: W. K. KELLOGG 2004

Example of a theory logic model adapted from the Kellogg Foundation's Comprehensive Health Models of Michigan.

There are three types of logic models: theory, outcomes, and activities approach models. Theory approach models emphasize the big picture and focus on the theory of change and underlying assumptions behind the program design and plan. Outcomes approach models generally subdivide outcomes and impacts that describe short-term (1 to 3 years) and long-term (4 to 7 years) outcomes and impacts (7 to 10 years) expected to result from the program. Activities approach models focus on the nuts-and-bolts of implementation (W.K. Kellogg 2004).

Theories of change and logic models set the stage for evaluation and are a key to becoming a learning organization. An organization's theory of change identifies *what actions*, *with what people*, *in what setting* will produce *what outcomes*. Logic models guide evaluation by helping the organization to develop questions about context, implementation, and outcomes.

Building Organizational Evaluation Capacity

To incorporate evaluation routinely into the life of your organization, see *A Checklist for Building Organizational Evaluation Capacity* (Volkov and King 2007). The authors make recommendations about organizational context, infrastructure, socialization and peer learning structures, and resources needed.

See also Western Michigan University's Evaluation Center and its Evaluation Checklists website, which can be found at www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/.

Participatory Evaluation and Collaborative Inquiry

An approach based on principles of participatory evaluation and collaborative inquiry is likely to fit one's program as well as contribute to a body of practice-based evidence. Moreover, if practitioners develop a network of regional and community data partners, it is conceivable that a cost-effective, two-tier evaluation structure will evolve.

Participatory evaluation

Evaluation methodology should reflect the core values of the field. Arts-based civic engagement validates the principles of participatory evaluation. Participatory evaluation is "controlled by the people in the program or community. It is something they undertake as a formal, reflective process for their own development and empowerment." Participatory and collaborative models actively involve program staff, organizational partners, and/or program participants in the evaluation process. Michael Quinn Patton's principles of participatory evaluation distinguish it from conventional approaches where evaluation is done *to* people (Patton 2002).

Arts-based civic engagement also validates principles of arts engagement. Arlene Goldbard has identified a set of participatory principles for the international field of community cultural development where "the judgment of success rests with the participants." Her indicators of success are intended to guide evaluation of community cultural development projects (Goldbard 2006).

- Practitioners and participants develop a mutually meaningful, reciprocal and collaborative relationship, useful and instructive to all.

- Participants enter fully into roles as co-directors of the project.

- Participants experience a deepening and broadening of their cultural knowledge, including self-identify, and a greater mastery of the arts media deployed.

> **From Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods (2002)**
> **by Michael Quinn Patton**
>
> *Principles of Fully Participatory and Genuinely Collaborative Inquiry*
>
> • The inquiry process involves participants in learning inquiry logic and skills, for example, the nature of evidence, establishing priorities, focusing questions, interpreting data, data-based decision making, and connecting processed to outcomes.
>
> • Participants in the process own the inquiry. They are involved authentically in making focus and design decisions. They draw and apply conclusions. Participation is real, not token.
>
> • Participants work together as a group and the inquiry facilitator supports group cohesion and collective inquiry.
>
> • All aspects of the inquiry, from research focus to data analysis, are undertaken in ways that are understandable and meaningful to participants.
>
> • The researcher or evaluator acts as a facilitator, collaborator, and learning resource; participants are coequal.
>
> • The inquiry facilitator recognizes and values participants' perspective and expertise and works to help participants recognize and value their own and each other's expertise.
>
> • Status and power differences between the inquiry facilitator and participants are minimized, as much as possible, practical, and authentic, without patronizing or game playing.

• Participants feel satisfied with what they have been able to express and communicate through the project.

• Participants' self-directed aims for the project have been advanced and any aims for external impact achieved.

• Participants demonstrate heightened confidence and a more favorable disposition toward taking part in community cultural life and/or social action in the future.

The principles guiding an Irvine Foundation project called *Connecting Californians* captured the spirit of arts engagement, civic engagement, participatory evaluation, and collaborative inquiry. The project explored the intersection of community, the arts, the humanities, and community organizing—in particular, the use of narrative to catalyze civic engagement and the role of story in strengthening communities. The report, *Finding the Art of Community Change*, recommended three core values to guide the design and evaluation of arts-based civic engagement initiatives (Cocke *et al* 2001).

• *Engagement*—projects that focus on local community expression and problem solving and engage a broad range of residents in every aspect of the project. Civic participation is a key objective.

• *Inclusion*—projects that reach across dividing lines in the community and operate in an equitable way. Boundary bridging is a key objective.

- *Inquiry*—projects that have authentic interest in learning purposefully, in trying new ideas and approaches. Building knowledge from practice—through evaluation, documentation, and communication—is a key objective.

Generally, both the processes and the findings of participatory evaluation are accessible and understandable to non-researchers. As Patton observed: "In combination, constructivist, dialogical, and participatory approaches offer a vision of research and evaluation that can support deliberative democracy in the postmodern knowledge age" (Patton 2002).

Collaborative inquiry

The last three organizational-level recommendations advise practitioners to partner with local organizations to undertake program evaluation. In short, we suggest that practitioners work directly with a regional research center to answer summative or outcome evaluation questions. We also suggest that practitioners, in consultation with humanities or folklife centers, develop methods to answer formative or process evaluation questions.

Finally we suggest that arts and cultural organizations partner with other community-based and activist groups working toward the same civic engagement goals. A collaborative evaluation design could help to illuminate what the arts bring to civic engagement and social activism.

Building Qualitative Evaluation Capacity

At the organizational or program scale, qualitative methodologies offer the most promise. Qualitative methods are accessible to non-researchers and complementary to participatory evaluation. Qualitative methods support environments where creativity, spontaneity, and expression are valued. Methods such as participant-observation or informal interviewing tend to be less intrusive than asking all participants to complete a test or questionnaire. Finally, qualitative methods as well as data can become valuable tools for a learning organization.

To understand the use of qualitative methods for evaluation, cultural organizations can consult a guidebook called the *Qualitative Evaluation Checklist* (Patton 2003), downloadable from the Western Michigan University Evaluation Center Web site. The guide walks through the rationale and uses of qualitative research as well as the approaches and methods required to collect "high quality and credible qualitative evaluation data." Michael Quinn Patton's introduction gives an excellent synthesis of the value of qualitative methods and where the findings are—and are not—useful. He makes several points.

- Qualitative methods are often used in evaluations because they tell the program's story by capturing and communicating the participants' stories. Evaluation case studies have all the elements of a good story. They tell what happened, when, to whom, and with what consequences.

- The purpose of such studies is to gather information and generate findings that are useful. Understanding the program and participants' stories is useful to the extent that those stories illuminate the processes and outcomes of the program for those who must make decisions about the program.

- The methodological implication of this criterion is that the intended users must value the findings and find them credible. They must be interested in the stories, experiences, and perceptions

of program participants beyond simply knowing how many came into the program, how many completed it, and how many did what afterwards. Qualitative findings in evaluation can illuminate the people behind the numbers and put faces on the statistics to deepen understanding.

Developing an Evaluation Plan

An evaluation plan reflects the organization's values, mission, and goals and guides the evaluation process. A number of steps are involved in developing a plan.

1—Determine your organization's evaluation goals and capacity. Identify the resources needed—project scale and costs, staff and time requirements, services, materials, and facility needs.

2—Form an evaluation team. Convene a diverse group of stakeholders and choose a team leader. Core team members should be involved in the theory of change process and logic model development.

3—Identify your evaluation purpose and audience—which can be at the organizational, program participant, or community level. What are your civic or social goals and how do you expect them to be achieved? What other groups share these goals? Who will be interested in the findings?

4—Formulate the key evaluation questions. Decide whether to focus on the process of your work ("improve" questions) or the outcomes of your work ("prove" questions). Both kinds of questions generate information about the success of the program and lay the groundwork for sharing the findings.

5—Choose an evaluation methodology. Your data gathering strategy should fit your questions. What do you need to know and how can you best collect this information? Quantitative methods are numerical and are best for answering how-many or how-much questions as well as who, when, and where. Qualitative methods are best for answering questions about why or how something happens.

6—Inventory in-house data sources, especially administrative records and data on all types of participants. What kinds of information do you already collect? What questions can you answer with existing data? What new data will you need to collect?

7—Develop a timeline for completing the proposed evaluation. Continue to build staff capacity and data management systems to enable comparative and longitudinal study.

Patton's *Checklist* provides an overview of qualitative evaluation, including three methods for collecting data—direct observation, in-depth interviews, and document review; how to approach the fieldwork, including ethical issues; instrument design that anticipates data analysis; data interpretation and analytical techniques; and the function of the evaluation report. As shown in the text box below, qualitative methods highlight the importance of *context* to all aspects of data collection.

Collaboration with a regional folklife or local ethnography center is one way for cultural organizations to build capacity to undertake qualitative evaluation. To learn more about ethnographic concepts and tools for documentation, as well as folklife services and resources in their state, practitioners can consult the Web site of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. A downloadable introductory guide is called *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques*.

A Ford Foundation report suggests that for poorly understood social institutions, qualitative findings would not only improve evaluation but contribute directly to case-making (Sutton *et al* 2006). The national study of 88 urban youth programs, self-described as committed to social justice, recommended that youth programs create more compelling narratives.

> A stronger narrative of an alternative model for youth development, with a coherent vision of their organizations, would clarify to funders what programs believe in and practice, and also what youth accomplish in the here-and-now to improve themselves and the deplorable conditions in their communities.

The Ford report also recommends that researchers conduct large studies of justice-oriented programs that build and test theory and that they consider employing youth as ethnographers in the programs and communities under study. Three points are notable: one, that large-scale studies should

integrate qualitative research; two, that community representatives be trained as ethnographers; and, three, as the authors point out, "needless to say, longitudinal studies are needed."

In-house Participant Data Gathering Systems

As discussed in Part 2, administrative records that can be used for community mapping are the best form of quantitative data gathering at the organizational level. Unlike survey methods, administrative records produce direct measures of behavior. Development of simple, in-house systems for gathering broad-based participant data is central to building evaluation capacity. Maintenance of a participant database, in particular, provides the infrastructure for program evaluation.

• A participant database can be constructed from routine record-keeping (registration, ticket sales, membership, and mailing lists) and visitor tracking (sign-in sheets or address cards). These methods are relatively simple to administer and unobtrusive to patrons.

• A participant database enables an organization to compare and contrast program participation, cross-participation, participation over time, or intra-household participation.

• A participant database provides a sampling frame from which a random sample of participants can be drawn for a qualitative study (e.g., a phone survey or in-person interviews). With a random sample, even a small study can generate representative findings.

• Geo-coding by participant address by a regional mapping partner enables aggregation of data by neighborhood (census block group), linkage with participant data from other community or cultural organizations, and linkage with data on neighborhood characteristics.

As an organizational baseline, the database can include all categories of participants—individuals, organizations, and artists—and all types of relationships:

• *individuals or households*—e.g., program participants, staff and board members, volunteers, members, donors, and mailing lists;

• *artists*—e.g., teaching and staff artists, contract artists, artists in residence, visiting artists, performing groups; and

• *organizations*—e.g., organizational partners (arts and non-arts), coalition members, schools and community-based organizations, businesses, funders, elected officials, and media contacts.

For data-sharing with a regional mapping partner (see below), the key attributes for each participant are the geographic descriptors (street address, city, state, zip code). A basic spreadsheet program (such as Excel or Access) is the most versatile format in that the data can be easily converted for geographic (GIS) or statistical (SPSS) analysis.

From Qualitative Evaluation Checklist by Michael Quinn Patton, 2003
Western Michigan University, Evaluation Checklists Project

Qualitative Methods
Qualitative evaluations use qualitative and naturalistic methods, sometimes alone, but often in combination with quantitative data. Qualitative methods include three kinds of data collection:

1—direct observations. Fieldwork descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience. Data consist of field notes: rich, detailed descriptions, including the context within which the observations were made.

2—in-depth interviews. Open-ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable.

3—document review. Written materials and other documents from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries, letters, artistic works, photographs, and memorabilia; and written responses to open-ended surveys. Data consist of excerpts from documents captured in a way that records and preserves context.

Data Collection via Fieldwork
The data for qualitative evaluation typically come from fieldwork. The evaluator spends time in the setting under study—a program, organization, or community where change efforts can be observed, people interviewed, and documents analyzed. The evaluator makes firsthand observations of activities and interactions, sometimes engaging personally in those activities as a "participant observer." For example, an evaluator might participate in all or part of the program under study, participating as a regular program member, client, or student. The qualitative evaluator talks with people about their experiences and perceptions. More formal individual or group interviews may be conducted. Relevant records and documents are examined.

Data Analysis
Extensive field notes are collected through these observations, interviews, and document reviews. The voluminous raw data in these field notes are organized into readable narrative descriptions with major themes, categories, and illustrative case examples extracted through content analysis. The themes, patterns, understandings, and insights that emerge from evaluation fieldwork and subsequent analysis are the fruit of qualitative inquiry.

A recent trend among cultural organizations—often encouraged by funders—has been contractual relationships with web-based data management services. For example, Success Measures Data System (SMDS) is a subscription-based service available through NeighborWorks America with a focus on outcome-based evaluations for community development groups. Another service called ETO (Efforts To Outcomes) is performance management software developed for social and human service organizations. Such services are likely to ease an organization's data management and reporting for funders and boards of directors. However, external management and privatization of administrative data could constrain a cultural organization's internal capacity building, building out to broader coalitions, and linking up with regional data centers. Alternatively, developing in-house capacity for data collection and management—even with external technical or research support—would contribute to a group's ability to institutionalize evaluation.

Regional Data and Mapping Partners

The Urban Institute's Arts and Culture Indicator Project (ACIP), in its review of the state of data and research across the U.S., discovered "ample evidence of a maturing field of community arts." However, although the fields of anthropology, folklore, and cultural studies have provided rich case studies of arts and cultural practices in communities, ACIP found that these studies were typically done in isolation from current policy debates (Jackson and Herranz 2002). We recommend, therefore, that cultural organizations *both* undertake qualitative studies *and* link up with regional data tracking and mapping centers—be they colleges or universities, think tanks, public agencies, or foundation centers.

Regional partnerships can be shaped or even initiated by the community arts sector. A New York City project called Place+Displaced: Mapping Cultural Vitality for Civic Participation links artists and cultural organizations in neighborhoods undergoing gentrification with each other and with Pratt Center for Community Development. (To date, Williamsburg, Greenpoint and Bushwick in Brooklyn and Long Island City in Queens are involved.) The community mapping process uses "participatory action research" to generate neighborhood data, while Pratt does the analysis of changing demographics and real estate patterns. Project data will be available for community partners to use "as a tool for political engagement and community empowerment." Fractured Atlas, project coordinator, will work at city and state levels to advocate on issues identified through the mapping (Fractured Atlas 2008).

Foundation initiatives that focus on a given community or region afford an opportunity to forge practitioner-researcher partnerships and enable assessment of community impact. A Knight Foundation initiative in North Philadelphia and Camden, N.J., for example, involved data partnerships between the grantees and the Social Impact of the Arts Project at the University of Pennsylvania to assess the impact of the initiative on cultural participation in five low-income urban communities.

SECTION 3.2—REGIONAL-SCALE STRATEGIES

At a regional level, methods that use direct measures of civic engagement and cultural assets have much to recommend themselves. Ideally, as we have discussed above, ongoing data partnerships between arts and cultural practitioners and local research centers would enable the undertaking of a multi-faceted approach to the collection and presentation of empirical evidence.

Indicators and Benchmarks

At the program level, arts practitioners can use theory of change and logic models to identify the civic and social outcomes as well as the long-term impacts they expect to achieve. The next step is to develop indicators, which are measurable ways to track anticipated outcomes and impacts. Benchmarks, a type of indicator, refer to the level of change an organization expects to make from its baseline. That is, how much of a change in a given indicator an organization would expect participants to make relative to people not participating in the program.

The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development recommends five guidelines for choosing indicators. Indicators should be reflective of the program's activities and outcomes; easily measurable; adaptable to changes in program activities; logically connected to what is measured; and understandable to all stakeholders. For example, a community-based program designed to enhance youth civic engagement (outcome goal) might choose the following participant indicators: communicates with elected officials about social policy; participates in volunteer activities; votes (if of voting age); and demonstrates knowledge about public policy (PERC 2008).

Different types of indicators can be measured using different data collection strategies. Here we discuss two types of methods—community mapping and regional household surveys—that we recommend be undertaken at the regional level.

Community and Cultural Data Mapping

A number of centers have begun community and cultural mapping projects that compile organizations' participant databases to provide a regional portrait of community and cultural engagement. Data on other cultural assets (such as presence of cultural institutions, resident artists, and for-profit cultural providers) and social networks (such as participant networks, organizational networks, and artist networks) can be collected and integrated into a regional cultural database. Data for community indicators come from a wide variety of sources such as the census; vital statistics; community and social service agencies; school districts; and city, state, and federal government agencies.

Computer software advances have opened up largely unrealized possibilities for cultural mapping. Geographic information systems (GIS), which assign a location coordinate to every data point, provide a means of linking cultural indicators to other community and social indicators, including those of civic engagement. Use of GIS in conjunction with social science statistical programs enables analysis of the relationship between unlike indicators and whether a relationship is statistically significant. Programs like Pajek and IKNOW (Inquiring Knowledge Networks on the Web) enable the analysis and graphic drawing of large social networks.

A Chicago-area collaboration between the Field Museum's Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC) and the Science of Networks in Communities (SONIC) research group at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign demonstrates the network analysis potential of community mapping. The study combined qualitative ethnographic research methods (focus groups, participant-observation, and semi- and unstructured interviews) with quantitative social network analysis. Data on the artistic and social networks of recent Mexican immigrants were linked with regional mapping capacity. The research team found that the immigrants have contributed to the social, cultural, economic well-being of metropolitan Chicago neighborhoods, organizations, and institutions (Wali, Contractor, Severson *et al* 2006).

Regional Household Surveys

Surveys and questionnaires, as we have discussed, have a number of liabilities as a method for demonstrating the link between the arts and civic engagement. At the organizational or program level, the problem of self-selection presents an overwhelming obstacle. Survey methods at the regional level provide a bit more promise. Although the issues of over-reporting and the lack of longitudinal data raise concerns, a well-implemented regional household survey—especially if replicated over time—could provide useful data. Teamed with a systematic gathering of direct data on participation (see organizational-scale strategies), a regional survey could allow researchers to address the ways in which individual participation is nested in a community context.

Community surveys helped shape and monitor the comprehensive plan for the cultural transformation of Silicon Valley. Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley (CI-SV) was a ten-year initiative (1997 through 2006) established to implement that plan. CI-SV sponsored multi-tiered research using qualitative as well as quantitative studies to identify and track cultural objectives for this fast-growing, polyglot region (Moriarty 2004; Alvarez 2005).
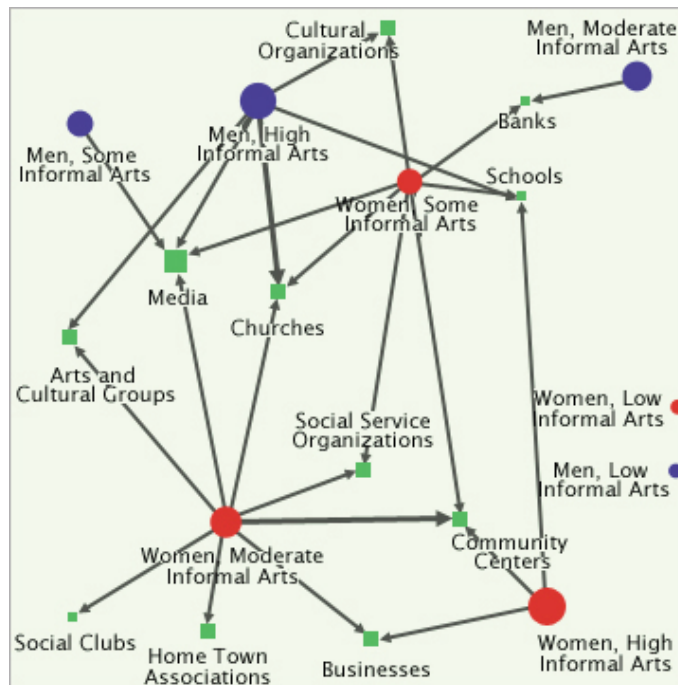
SOURCE: WALI *ET AL* 2006.

www.fieldmuseum.org/creativenetworks/network_providing.html

Network diagrams or sociograms represent individuals or organizations as nodes and relationships as a line between nodes. This diagram shows how Mexican immigrants in Chicago, based on survey findings, provide resources—information, material goods, or services—to organizations in their daily lives. Informal arts involvement, for both women and men, is related to the density of their daily networks.

Two national surveys could be a resource for evaluation design of arts-based civic engagement initiatives. The National Endowment for the Arts' 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, involved a survey of adults aged 18 and older about their involvement in the arts as well as other civic, volunteer, and social activities. CPANDA, the Cultural Policy & the Arts National Data Archive, makes these survey data available (one of five NEA SPPA data sets on surveys conducted from 1982 to 2002) as part of its interactive digital archive. CPANDA, developed with support by The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a collaboration of Princeton University's Firestone Library and Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies.

The National Youth Civic Engagement Index project, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts between 2001 and 2005, collected data on individuals ages 15 and older through a set of surveys on The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: National Civic Engagement Survey I (Spring 2002), National Civic Engagement Survey II (Fall 2002), National Youth Survey of Civic Engagement (2002), and National Youth Survey (2004). CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University's Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, these survey data available on its webpage. CIRCLE conducts research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages 15 and 25 and is a clearinghouse for related scholarship.

The NCES questionnaires provide a comprehensive set of tested indicators that describe three dimensions of engagement—civic, political, and expressive (public voice), as well as cognitive engagement. As shown in the text box below, the survey included 19 behavioral items and four cognitive items (Zukin *et al* 2006). The text of the questions associated with each of the 23 indicators is available on the CIRCLE Web site.

Field Development via Field Schools

One way to support evaluation for learning and the two-tier model discussed above—that is, ongoing partnerships between arts practitioners and regional data centers—would be through the sponsorship of field schools. A field school is a program that gives participants hands-on experience with the entire process of fieldwork, from planning to presentation of findings, with professional feedback throughout. A field school is also model for training people in cultural documentation and for mobilizing people with an interest in documenting local culture and local community life.

Conducting field schools on-site with regional research partners could generate data as while increasing local capacity. Every year, in partnership with an educational institution in sites throughout the U.S., the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress sponsors at least one intensive, introductory three-week field school on cultural documentation. Instructors include archivists, folklorists, archivists, documentary photographers, and local community scholars as well as Folklife Center staff. Participants include cultural activists, oral historians, museum curators, arts and humanities council staff, teachers, librarians, and students of folklore and related fields (United States 2008).

The field school model is not exclusive to folklore. The Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy in collaboration with the Southern Oregon University runs a field school each summer in Ashland, Oregon on social ecology and public policy. The Center defines social ecology as "the theory and practice of enhancing alignment between formal and informal societal interests to foster balance between the human and physical environments." The program offers a guided, intensive community fieldwork experience to understand current conditions in a given geographic area. The goal is to train competent generalists in applied social science who are capable of applying ethnographic and social ecology methods to a wide variety of policy areas (CSEPP 2008).

SECTION 3.3—INITIATIVE-SCALE STRATEGIES

Foundations, public agencies, and other policy and grant-makers with a local or regional focus are in a unique position to foster evaluation research on the civic and social impacts of the arts. The Urban Institute's Arts and Culture Indicator Project (ACIP) found, however, that formal data collection among foundations and arts agencies showed inconsistent practices; data collection centering on grant requirements, organizational financial conditions, and narrow definitions cultural participation; and a lack of underlying conceptualization about the societal value of the arts and culture (Jackson *et al* 2002). Here we discuss evaluation methods, approaches, and principles of particular relevance to grant-makers and public agencies interested in using investments in evaluation to advance this inquiry.

The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: National Civic Engagement Survey I Spring 2002

The Core Indicators of Engagement

Civic Indicators
- Community problem solving
- Regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization
- Active membership in a group or association
- Participation in fund-raising run/walk/ride
- Other fund raising for charity

Political Indicators
- Regular voting
- Persuading others
- Displaying buttons, signs, stickers
- Campaign contributions
- Volunteering for candidates or political organizations

Indicators of Public Voice
- Contacting officials
- Contacting the print media
- Contacting the broadcast media
- Protesting
- E-mail petitions
- Written petitions
- Boycotting—NOT buying a certain product
- Buycotting—buying a certain product
- Canvassing

Indicators of Cognitive Engagement
- Following government and public affairs
- Talking with family and friends about politics
- Political knowledge
- Attention to the news media

SOURCE: CIRCLE (CENTER FOR INFORMATION & RESEARCH ON CIVIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT)

Note that the NCES questionnaire fielded in November 2002 is available on-line and can be found at www.civicyouth.org/?p=149. See also: Zukin *et al*, 2006

Experimental and Quasi-experimental Methods

Finally, we consider the possibility of introducing experimental and quasi-experimental methods into the study of the arts and civic engagement. Experimental design should be undertaken only an agency or institution with commitment and adequate funding, time, and capacity. Quasi-experimental methods require rigorous design but are more flexible in implementation. Community-based arts organizations, in consultation with their regional partner, could undertake useful quasi-experimental studies to test hypotheses or methodologies.

The most modest recommendation along these lines is simply to consider the "compared to what" question. Is there a control group to which one could compare one's efforts? While such an approach does not overcome the self-selection problem, it does provide investigators at the individual, organizational, and regional levels a means of making one's question explicit, particularly if the focus is on relative effectiveness. For example, what is the value-added of having a discussion of a play or an exhibit after it is viewed compared to just viewing the play or exhibit? What is the optimal length of time to plan follow-up programming to maximize changes in participant behavior? There are a variety of implementation issues where the use of explicit controls could improve the quality of evidence and ultimately the quality of programming.

One can imagine more ambitious uses of experimental, case-control methods (like those being used in a variety of policy fields) to study arts-based interventions. The complex nature of contemporary civic engagement poses some challenges, but these could be overcome with sophisticated hierarchical models for study designs.

The adoption of an experimental approach to the study of arts-based civic engagement, however, would require a relatively large change in the culture of cultural policy, funding, and programming. Currently, the field is dominated by an emphasis on genius and the extraordinary—what some have called the "black swan" phenomenon. Moreover, advocating the random assignment of neighborhoods to a "treatment" or "control" group would likely face strong opposition from artists, organizations, neighborhoods, and funders. At this point, the adoption of relatively modest quasi-experimental approaches appears more practical.

Evaluation Approaches for Action Research and Reflective Practice

Happily, funding agents have begun to restructure as learning organizations. Canada's J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, for example, undertook a two-year consultation on "becoming a learning organization" in order to become a more effective philanthropist, specifically, to pursue its two-pronged mission of promoting civic engagement and building resilient communities. The Foundation found that:

> … the value of our support goes well beyond money, and extends into the learning and knowledge developed through the programs and projects that we fund. This insight was important for us as a foundation whose mission addresses complex social problems that cannot be solved through funding alone. Foundations have a unique opportunity to establish models for cooperation and knowledge sharing and to leverage financial investments. Unlike money, discussants saw knowledge as a "public good" that does not run out (J.W. McConnell Family Foundation n.d.).

Measuring advocacy and policy

In their guide to measuring advocacy and policy, commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Reisman *et al* recommend that a funder start with a theory-of-change process to clarify its view of what success will look like, both in the short- and long-term. Moreover, to design appropriate evaluation, the funder needs to articulate its conceptual model—social change, policy change, or advocacy—and then identify the types of outcomes important to its advocacy or policy work (Reisman et al 2007).

A *social change model* targets large-scale societal change. This broad model includes both policy change and advocacy but is focused on actual improvements in physical and/or societal conditions (e.g., poverty, the environment, or health). A *policy change model* targets changes in the policy arena, including policy development and implementation. Policy change can alter the structural and normative context of communities and institutions, a precondition to improved social and physical conditions, but policy is not itself social or physical. An *advocacy model* targets advocacy as a tactic for achieving social or policy change, such as framing the issue, developing alliances, and gathering and disseminating data. Advocacy efforts provide the infrastructure that leads to policy change and, subsequently, to social change.

- A funder's theory of change will determine what kinds of outcomes or indicators of success will be the basis of evaluation. The guide identifies the following six distinct categories of outcomes for the measurement of advocacy and policy work.

- *Shift in social norms*—the knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviors that compose the normative structure of culture and society.

- *Strengthened organizational capacity*—the skill set, staffing and leadership, organizational structure and systems, finances and strategic planning among non-profit organizations and formal coalitions that plan and carry out advocacy and policy work.

- *Strengthened alliances*—the level of coordination, collaboration and mission alignment among community and system partners, including nontraditional alliances.

- *Strengthened base of support*—the grassroots, leadership, and institutional support for particular policy changes; including increase in civic participation and activism, allied voices among informal and formal groups, coalescence of dissimilar interest groups, actions of opinion leaders, and positive media attention.

- *Improved policies*—the stages of policy change in the public policy arena: policy development, policy proposal, demonstrated support, adoption, funding and implementation.

- *Changes in impact*—the ultimate changes in social and physical lives and conditions that motivate policy and advocacy work.

In the past policy adoption alone was the measure of success of advocacy and policy work. The above categories recognize that preconditions are necessary for improved policies and represent "the essential changes in lives, community conditions, institutions and systems that result from advocacy and policy work" (Reisman *et al* 2007).

Outcome mapping

Outcome mapping is a method that has evolved in response to the challenges of international development programs to assess and report on development impacts. Because the essence of development is people relating to each other and their environment," outcome mapping focuses on people and organizations. The method represents a shift away from assessing the products of a program (poverty alleviation, reduced conflict, policy relevance) to monitoring changes in the behavior of people, groups, and organizations with which a program works directly (Earl *et al* 2001). The International Development Research Centre in Ottawa has taken a lead in adapting this approach to development research and evaluation and is a resource for materials on how to understand and use this methodology.

From Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs by Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, an Terry Smutylo

International Development Research Centre, 2001

Outcome Mapping
- Defines the program's outcomes as changes in the behavior of direct partners.
- Focuses on how programs facilitate change rather than how they control or cause change.
- Recognizes the complexity of development processes and the contexts in which they occur.
- Looks at the logical links between interventions and outcomes rather than trying to attribute results to a particular intervention.
- Locates a program's goals within the context of development challenges beyond the reach of the program to encourage and guide innovation and risk-taking.
- Requires the involvement of program staff and partners throughout the planning, monitoring, and evaluation stages.

Developmental evaluation

Developmental evaluation is an emerging methodology for the assessment of social innovation. In contrast to techniques based on a linear logical approach, which are useful for solving problems with clear boundaries, developmental evaluation is an iterative methodology that is more useful for addressing complex social problems or for working on early-stage social innovations. In 2008, as a product of its Sustaining Social Innovation initiative, the McConnell Foundation published *A Developmental Evaluation Primer.* The primer elaborates the methodology and its key features— framing the issue, testing quick iterations, and tracking the trajectory of the innovation—as described in the text box below (Gamble 2008).

From A Developmental Evaluation Primer by Jamie A. A. Gamble

The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, 2008

Developmental Evaluation
Developmental evaluation is an emerging methodology for social innovators.

1. Framing the issue
Social innovators are mobilized by a powerful sense that something needs to change. They may have a new perspective or approach to a historically stubborn issue, or may see, in a new way, the intersection between multiple issues. As innovators work on these issues, their understanding moves from a vague understanding to increased clarity. New learning may cause a shift in thinking which prompts another cycle of uncertainty and clarification. Developmental evaluation supports innovators in the conceptualization and articulation of the problem by helping to frame the issue and its dynamics.

2. Testing quick iterations
Many people who develop and deliver social programs naturally experiment. New ways of doing something are tried, often based on feedback loops and perspective about changing needs and demands, which can lead to improvements. Developmental evaluation brings a measure of rigor to the learning generated from these experiments. As new programs roll out, leaders intuitively make observations and refinements. Developmental evaluation is intended to make visible the intuitive and the tacit, to help leaders be more systematic about subjecting relevant data and observations to interpretation and judgment.

3. Tracking the trajectory of the innovation
A standard characteristic of problem solving is that once the problem solver experiences the "eureka moment," the path to the solution seems obvious. When innovators look at projects retrospectively, the description of going from beginning to end appears seamless and direct. Key insights about how something was successfully accomplished are often inaccessible, which doesn't help the next person trying to solve a similar problem, or the original innovator in trying to apply the learning process in other situations. Developmental evaluation records the roads not taken, unintended consequences, incremental adjustments, tensions and sudden opportunities. The tracking reveals what it takes to create something new, which makes the decision-making along this path more transparent and generates valuable data useful for dissemination. Such documentation also supports accountability as well as a high degree of flexibility.

Principles of Effective Evaluation for Grant-making Initiatives

Effective evaluation would certainly contribute to our understanding of the civic and social impacts of the arts. In closing, we offer a set of "evaluation lessons" drawn from a review of public policy grant-making evaluation (Snowden 2004) and a review of arts and social inclusion literature for a policy agency (Barraket 2005).

- Incorporate evaluation into the design of grant-making initiatives and programs. Articulate theory of change, assumptions, and clear objectives against which to evaluate outcomes and impacts.

- Involve grantees in the evaluation design. Use evaluation to build grantee capacity.

- Measure outcomes not just outputs—that is, the impact of program activities on the lives of participants or communities—using multiple evaluation methods.

- Plan for the collection of baseline data to enable comparison and track change. Indicators should be based in a strong strategic framework.

- Combine quantitative and qualitative data to strengthen evaluation. Value narratives and storytelling in evaluation.

- Focus public policy evaluations more on improving practice than proving impact. Measuring collaboration is critical to public policy assessment.

- Ensure that public policy evaluations take into account the dynamic policy environment. Measure the depth and sophistication of public policy strategy.

- Ensure that evaluation methods are meaningful to staff, practical within the resources available, and can be employed by the practitioners involved.

CONCLUSION:
THE POLICY CONTEXT OF PRACTICE

Arts grant-makers and community arts practitioners, despite differing evaluation needs, tend to converge on approaches that report program outputs framed with anticipated transformational impacts. Thus, evaluation studies tend to fall short on evidence that connects arts initiatives with their social goals. To build this bridge, a regional research center is likely to be the key activator.

SUSTAINED INVESTMENT AND LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

Officially, grant-makers request evaluation to answer questions of relative value. That is, given the scarcity of resources relative to demand, can it be demonstrated that funds invested in arts-based civic engagement work will *either* be more effective than other approaches *or* produce lasting value for a given community? Assessment of social and civic impacts, however, requires longitudinal studies and the systematic tracking of results over time. In Goldbard's view:

U.S.-based funders have not been willing to make the sustained investment in evaluation necessary to answer such questions … Indeed, the intensity and complexity of evaluative demands seem to rise in inverse proportion to the resources at risk: small, marginal, experimental projects are much more often expected to quantify and substantiate effects than are their red-carpet counterparts (Goldbard 2006).

Likewise, in their outcome-mapping manual, the International Development Research Centre addressed the pressure by donors on development organizations "to struggle to measure results far beyond the reach of their programs." The authors warn: "As they are currently applied, the concepts of 'attribution' and 'impact' can limit the potential of programs to learn from evaluations of development efforts" (Earl *et al* 2001).

Even with commitment and funding, somebody would have to do the work. A local university or planning agency could provide technical assistance to practitioners in the collection of participant data as well as in the design and implementation of qualitative study; aggregate and integrate data collected by practitioners; and undertake longitudinal study of civic, community, and/or social phenomena. Moreover, because the mission of a research center is inquiry rather than funding, advocacy, or case making, the findings would lend credibility to program evaluation and have greater potential to inform policy-making.

INTEGRATED APPROACHES AS A BASIS FOR EVALUATION

Another barrier to effective evaluation of arts-based civic engagement is a "conceptual limitation" in understanding the social effects of the arts, as found in the arts and social inclusion report. "Virtually all the literature related to these topics is 'arts led', rather than 'social inclusion led'—that is, the literature takes the community arts projects and programs as its analytical starting point." Thus we know little about the effect of arts programs that are integrated into broader community and personal development initiatives or conducted in partnership with other community or social action organizations. "This gap suggests the important role of [public policy agencies] in modeling and evaluating integrated approaches" (Barraket 2005).

In a sense, participatory place making offers a valuable model of integrating arts practice, cultural conversation, and civic engagement. Arts-based civic engagement is just beginning to be tapped as a community planning tool. Multi-year planning cycles and multi-faceted mandates inhibit the integration of arts programming. However, arts-based civic dialogue could foster citizen participation in many aspects of planning, such as cultural asset mapping, community history, community visioning, streetscape design, and the role of public art. With an integrated approach to community planning, evaluation could assess the contribution of the arts to civic engagement.

ROLE OF THE ARTS IN ANIMATING DEMOCRACY

The changing nature of civic engagement in the U.S. is under study, but the role of the arts by and large is not a part of that inquiry. Studying the link between culture and civil society and the role of arts-based civic engagement within this field is a demanding task. It must take into consideration the theories of action that drive different programs and the limitations imposed by resources and methods. Yet, as other fields of social policy and practice make clear, a productive collaboration of practitioners, researchers, and grant-makers can contribute both to better practice and a fuller understanding of that practice.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

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