

# What Difference Are We Making? Understanding Civic Impact

ANIMATING  
DEMOCRACY

**SESSION DESCRIPTION:** As cultural organizations address civic issues through their work, assessing artistic and organizational effects often seems easy compared to figuring out what difference they are making at a civic level. This session begins with the premise that it is valuable to set civic goals, and track and assess what difference civically engaged arts and humanities makes on citizens, the issue, and on communities. Presenters will share from their experience the inherent practical, ethical, and interpretive challenges of evaluating civic change and approaches they have taken to defining and gauging civic impact. The session will examine questions such as: What constitutes *civic* impact for various constituents of the project? How do you frame intended civic outcomes that are feasible but that also stretch and connect with broader or longer-term civic goals? What's important to document and track and why? What is less important? How do you document dialogue to demonstrate civic impact? How do you measure what is difficult to measure (e.g., shifts in attitudes and beliefs)? If the long view is key to understanding civic impact, what can you realistically do to track evidence of change?

**SESSION LEADER:** *David Campt, dialogue consultant and facilitator*

**PRESENTERS:** *Florence Kabwasa-Green, consultant to Urban Institute's Cultural Indicators Project; Mat Schwarzman, East Bay Institute for Urban Arts; Jill Chopyak Hogan, Institute for Community Research; Steve Day, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

**RESPONDENTS:** *Jay Brause, Out North Contemporary Art House; Sharnita Johnson, Ruth Mott Foundation*

*Session leader David Campt introduced the session and asked participants, "What is one question that, if addressed today, would make you feel this session was worthwhile?" Selected responses include:*

- What does civic mean? How can you appreciate and identify different forms of civic action that take place in different cultures, internationally and within different communities in the U.S.?
- Are we evaluating to improve or validate our efforts? How do we convince people of the value of what we're doing?
- With limited staff time and funding, what are a couple of tools for measuring impact?
- How do you document changes in attitudes, perception? How do you establish a baseline for those things?
- How do you measure progress when you're dealing with emotional transformation that is both hard to talk about and time consuming?
- How do we consider impact on the individual versus society?
- What's the relationship between belief and action? If you can document a shift in belief does that translate into action? Can you measure that?
- What do we ask of our grantees, how do we get the information we need while being cognizant of what grantees are trying to do, being respectful of it?
- How can funders evaluate how effective they are in grant making?
- How do you use evaluation to justify the value of your work when you have faith you are making a difference?
- Can we measure things we actually learn from—or actually learn from what we measure?

## Civic Impacts

To explore the question "What constitutes *civic* impact," David asked Mat Schwarzman to, "Talk about an arts-based program from your experience that had civic impact. What was the civic impact? What evidence did you have that it

had civic impact?” Mat talked about his work with East Bay Institute for Urban Arts with a youth-based after school and summer program that trains teens to be artist-activists. He was approached by the Urban Institute to research the measurement indicators. They convened learning circles to identify indicators and “came up with the radical notion that the program was about building relationships.” Relationships are indicators of what constitutes “community.” They named 17 kinds of relationships in which there was some kind of exchange between participants (see attached). Mat Schwarzman described his efforts in terms of Social Network Analysis, mapping the relationships generated as a result of arts-based community building efforts. He pointed out that funders tend to rate youth-based projects on jobs, grades, and awards. “These were things we couldn’t have impact on but we could have impact on kids’ relationships.” In starting to gather data, one discovery was that the organization was already gathering useful information.

### Challenges, Dilemmas, Approaches To Gauging Civic Impact

Steve Day offered that civic impact may occur at individual, organizational, and/or community levels. Presenters then offered, from their experience, how each had approached documentation of civic impact focusing on one of these levels:

#### INDIVIDUAL (Steve Day)

- The collective experience of individuals leads to civic change. You can document individual experience and individual change, attitude shifts toward understanding social and civic impacts.
- The Saguaro Seminar on civic engagement in America (headed by Robert Putnam at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government) defined the goal of civic engagement as a “change in the distribution of social capital.” Further, they identified nine different types of social capital that individuals can have:
  - Social trust—based on common participation in activities and groups. High social trust lubricates social interactions and makes community projects easier because everyone’s credentials and motives are established
  - Inter-racial trust—trusting members of other groups in diverse communities
  - Diversity of friendships—having a network of people you know in different corners of the community.
  - Political participation—being informed, voting, protest, participating in groups.
  - Civic leadership—involvement in groups, discussions of school affairs, taking a leadership role.
  - Associational involvement—being a member of affinity group, people who gather to have fun. Sports, outdoor activities, clubs, hobbies, libraries, book clubs, self help, professional groups.
  - Informal socializing—having people over.
  - Giving and volunteering
  - Religious engagement

These categories provide a list of places to look and questions to ask when gauging the impact of your project on the social capital of individuals who participate.

Steve Day worked with several Animating Democracy projects to document individual audience members’ or project participants’ experience using a survey instrument (the survey is included in the Resource section of the National Exchange binder; also found on the Animating Democracy web site, see above). We began with a basic survey that asked questions about intended outcomes common to a lot of ADI projects. There were groups of questions asking if the art got the audience member to participate in the dialogue, if the dialogue was effective, if they were more likely to talk more about the issue or act on it. Appropriate to low-resource evaluations, with low need for validity, there was no baseline established, but participants were asked to rate their own change in attitudes (i.e., “how much more likely are you to discuss this issue with your family than before you saw the play?”). The survey was simple, and it was

tailored and administered by each arts organization, but it did a good job of capturing otherwise unobservable changes for large groups.

#### ORGANIZATION (Jill Chopyak Hogan)

Jill spoke about tracking changes in attitude within organizations in relation to the project, “Living Spaces,” conducted by the Institute for Community Research to explore housing issues in Hartford, Connecticut. The project included a call-to-artists in the New England region to respond to the concept of “living spaces” (i.e. the relationship of individuals and communities to their physical environment, the internal “living space” of identity, the connection between individual and community identity and the physical environment).

We then held a series of dialogues to discuss the concept further, and hosted a three-month exhibit of the selected artists’ work. The first dialogue was between the selected artists and research staff at the Institute to discuss the concept and the differences/similarities between art and research. This dialogue—held before the exhibit—informed several of the artists in the type of work they created. We held three additional dialogues that included Institute staff and individuals from the greater Hartford area associated with service agencies, community-based activist organizations, arts organizations, and local government. These dialogues discussed the concept, often moving into issues related to inadequate housing.

To determine the impact the project had on the Institute and participating artists and organizations, we conducted pre and post-interviews of staff to determine how their perception of the concept of a “living space” shifted from before the exhibit and series of discussions and after to determine the impact the art had on the way they think about their projects, and the inter-relationship between different projects within the organization. We also held focus groups with artists and others to understand how the project impacted their thinking about the relationship between art and research and the concept of “living spaces” as it relates to their lives. ICR uses a participatory framework for our research that brings together a variety of partners—including research participant—to design and implement a research project. We use a variety of software (such as ATLAS.TI) to track themes from qualitative research data..

#### COMMUNITY (Florence Kabwasa-Green)

So, we have heard examples of civic impacts at individual and organizational levels along with ways these have been measured. How do these civic impacts translate at the community level? How can these be measured comprehensively, consistently and reliably over time to provide the community level picture? These are some of the questions which have been tackled by the Urban Institutes Arts and Culture Indicators in Community Building Project (ACIP).

The examples we have heard as well as experiences and initiatives nation wide show that arts and culturally based community initiatives provide opportunities for various sectors of the community to participate and in so doing may have some form of civic impact.

One way to understand this impact at the community level is to develop community level indicators. That is, a set of information which is collected consistently and reliably over time. However, this information cannot be collected in a void and must be collected in association with sound concepts and theories (including clear definitions and language).

#### **Brief Overview of ACIP framework**

The ACIP is an exploratory research project which through local community based collaboratives has developed a) a set of guiding principles and a framework for conceptualization and measurement. These provide a lens through which a broad range of cultural assets in a community can be captured, a b) a tool for organizing information about the various aspects of arts and culture that constitute those assets. I briefly summarize the conceptual and measurement framework below. (Please refer to the monograph [Culture Counts in Communities: A Framework for Measurement](#) for more information on the ACIP).

ACIP’s framework recommends four domains in which inquiry and documentation should take place:

- *Presence*, defined as the existence of whatever creative expressions a given community defines and values as community assets.
- *Participation*, defined as the many ways in which people participate in these creative expressions (as creators, teachers, consumers, supporters, etc)
- *Impacts*, defined as the contribution of these creative expressions and participation in them to community building outcomes (stewardship of place, improved safety, youth development, economic development, civic engagement etc.)
- *Systems of Support*, defined as the resources (financial, in kind, organizational, and human) required to bring opportunities for participation in these creative expressions to fruition.

In our collaborative work, as illustrated by Mat Schwarzman, Civic Engagement emerged as an important element in community based youth development work and helps develop the argument that arts and culture matter at the community level. The group set out to better understand the relationship between their work and civic engagement and has worked to develop a key variable (relationships) for which they can collect information. They have also experimented with appropriate documentation methods.

### Dilemmas or challenges of measuring impact

- Understanding that indicator development is an iterative process.
- Dedicated resources to consistently collect information and make the case and overall staff dedication. (i.e. having a documentation mind set).
- Dedication beyond the specific organization--seeing efforts contributing to the field.

### RESPONSES

Full group discussion included the following key points and questions:

#### Value of documenting and evaluating civic impact

**Jay Brause, Out North Contemporary Arts House:** Attitudinal assessment requires longitudinal study which is very hard, costly, and not practicable for most cultural organizations. Are cultural organizations out of their element trying to evaluate civic impact? Shouldn't we be evaluating whether or not to seriously assess civic impact based on whether it is effective to the organization for the cost involved? Most often, understanding civic impact is the mandate of a public funder, rather than a driving concern of the cultural organization. Is it more effective to get off the arts page and into the Metro section of the newspaper to engage the public's attention?

**Tom Borrup, Community and Cultural Development:** We *do* have an impact and we need to be able to document it. But we should turn away from the success/failure conversation to "what did we learn?"

**Judi Jennings, Kentucky Foundation for Women:** We have to make really difficult decisions about such limited resources. We have to tell stories about [civic] impact of their work and we won't get off arts page until we do that. We should be making the case to the public. It's very vital at this moment.

#### Transparency in documentation and evaluation

**Liz Sevchenko, Lower East Side Tenement Museum:** Sometimes the process of documentation can get tangled up with the development or implementation of the program. How transparent should we be about what we're trying to collect? Do we share goals with participants in advance or does that predetermine for them their responses?

**Jill Chopyak Hogan, Institute for Community Research:** For long-term measurement, there should be transparency because participants may have input into the questions you ask and the things you measure. Being transparent about your methodology is part of the theory of “participatory research.”

### Documentation mindset

**Florence Kabwasa-Green:** There is information that is being collected or could be collected without huge burden if an organization adopts a documentation mindset.

**Mat Schwarzman:** Organizations sometimes just need to make a conceptual shift to realize that they are already gathering certain kinds of data that can be useful in assessing civic impact.

**David Camppt:** There are “invisible impacts,” that is, impacts that you don’t anticipate or may not be looking for that are important to capture. Be alert to invisible impacts that should be made more visible.

### Dilemma of data

**Morrie Warshawski, Independent Consultant:** Data is convincing yet where it exists it is often ignored. Data doesn’t always do the trick.

**Katrina Browne, Traces of the Trade:** Do stories or anecdotes trump data?

**David O’Fallon, MacPhail Center for the Arts:** It has to be *both/and*; stories and data. Information is embedded in narrative.

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**NOTES ON THE NOTES** This key point summary captures some but not necessarily all key points discussed in this session. In addition, presenters drew upon a significant body of experience and knowledge that the session’s limited timeframe couldn’t fully accommodate. With this in mind, the following web sites and links provide further valuable information related to the topic.

### RELATED WEB SITES AND LINKS

**Culture Counts in Communities: A framework for measurement** by Maria–Rosario Jackson and Joaquin Herranz, Jr., a publication of the Urban Institute, 2002.

[www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310834](http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310834)

The report summarizes the research of the Arts and Culture Indicators in Community Building Project ([www.urban.org/nnip/acip](http://www.urban.org/nnip/acip)), an effort to develop arts and culture neighborhood indicators for use in local planning, policymaking, and community building, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.

To link to Urban Institute’s arts and culture work, also visit [www.ccc.urban.org](http://www.ccc.urban.org).

**MAKE THE GRADE: Arts-based Youth Development and The Search for Authentic Indicators** by Mat Schwarzman

On behalf of the Arts & Culture in Community-Building Project (ACIP) of The Urban Institute this report summarizes a research project to develop new ways of measuring the positive impact of arts programs upon communities. The research was conducted over the course of two years and involved a collaborative inquiry group of 25 artists and educators in the San Francisco Bay Area. The results include alternative data collection strategies for community groups to use in their documentation and evaluation efforts. The report concludes by inviting other “arts-based youth developers” and their communities to get actively involved in the development of cultural indicators.

**Institute for Community Research, Hartford, Connecticut**

*www.incommunityresearch.org*

The Institute for Community Research (ICR) uses the tools of research to build community capacity and foster collaborative community-based partnerships. By gathering information in partnership with residents, we are helping communities locally and globally to ask better questions and get better answers about the complex problems they face. We believe this process is the best way to support personal growth, broaden community leadership and foster robust democratic institutions. ICR's work is based upon cornerstone principles of: collaboration and partnership; action research; recognizing the value of culture; and intervention, health promotion and prevention.

PARTICIPANT CATEGORIES OF COMMUNITY-BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS:

Updated June 5, 2001

PARTICIPANT	MEANS OF EXCH.	MEANS OF EXCH.	PARTICIPANT
1. Youth – private self	Fun, Personal Expression, Make Friends	Sense of belonging to culture, community	Youth – public self
2. Youth	Academic Tutoring, Social Mentoring, Business Contacts	Academic Tutoring, Social Mentoring, Business Contacts	Youth
3. Youth - Mentee	Academic/Professional Skills, Counsel, Initiation into Adulthood	A Living, Sense of Purpose, Initiation into Parenthood	Adult - Mentor
4. Youth – Mentor	A Living, Sense of Purpose, Initiation into Adulthood	Academic Skills, Counsel	Child - Mentee
5. Youth – Offspring	Validation as a Creative Individual	Sense of Accomplishment as a Parent	Adult – Parent
6. Youth – Student	Motivation	A better student	School
7. Youth	Access to public resources, internships, jobs	Free labor, Future employees, Aware citizens	City Agencies
8. Youth	Health, recreation, education, professional, civic opportunities	Students, workers, clients, volunteers, activists	Community-based Organizations
9. Youth	Discounts on goods and services, Employment	Customers, Workers	Businesses
10. Adult – Parent	Connections to other parents of children the same age, Employment	Connections to other parents of children the same age, Employment	Adult - Parent
11. Adult – Parent	Introductions to guidance counselors, teachers to get support for their children	Improved student performance through connections with parents	School
12. Adult – Parent	Access to opportunities for their families	Clients, Members, etc. needed to fulfill their mission	Community-based Organizations
13. Adult – Artist	Access to personal, professional relationships	Engaged citizens, students, etc.	“Community”
14. Community-based Organization (ABYD)	Shared Youth, Resources & Information	Shared Youth, Resources & Information	Community-based Organization (Arts-Based Youth Development)
15. CBO’s (ABYD)	Strategic Partnerships Around Shared Issues	Strategic Partnerships Around Shared Issues	Community-Based Organization (Youth, Social Change)
16. CBO’s (ABYD)	Access to \$, Broad Social Change	Fulfill mandate, Sources for Information and Ideas	Foundations, Government Agencies
17. CBO’s	Access to like-minded organizations for Strategic Partnerships	Access to like-minded organizations for Strategic Partnerships	Community-based Organizations