

EmcArts

YEAR IN REVIEW 2013

Over the past year, we've worked with arts and culture organizations across the country to celebrate their innovative practices and strengthen their capacity to adapt. It's been a period of tremendous growth and discovery for EmcArts. In this report, we share where we've been and what we've learned.



**Place-based
Programs**



**Innovation Lab
Participants**



**National Innovation
Summit Communities**



ArtsFwd

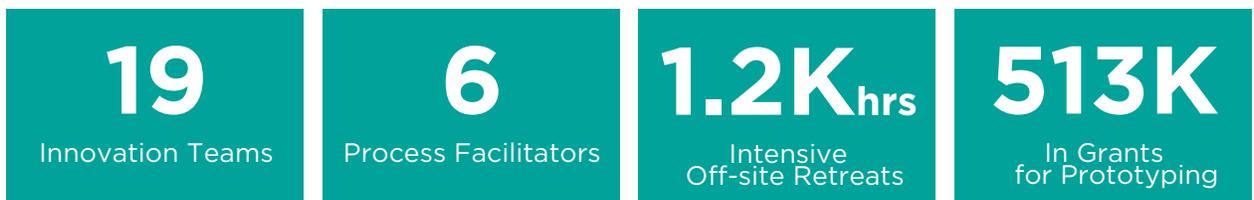
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Place-based Programs



National Innovation Labs



National Innovation Summit for Arts & Culture



ArtsFwd & Activating Innovation



Our Year in Review

By Richard Evans, President, EmcArts

“One cannot discover new lands without first consenting to lose sight of the shore.”

- Andre Gide

Leaving the Shore was a recurrent metaphor for a tremendous year of discovery at EmcArts.

We piloted experimental new programs for arts development agencies and youth and family service agencies. We conducted our place-based program *New Pathways*, in five communities, engaging 675 participants from 75 organizations. In our three national *Innovation Labs*, we took teams from 19 organizations on a deep dive into incubating innovations as adaptive responses to their complex challenges, clocking up over 1,200 hours of intensive off-site retreat time, and regranteeing over \$500,000 in support of prototyping. Online, *ArtsFwd.org* reached a half-million pageviews, and our *Business Unusual Challenge* collected 75,000 votes in the space of four weeks.

The new lands we were seeking came most clearly into view at our first National Innovation Summit in Denver in October, where 250 participants from more than 60 highly adaptive organizations, along with 1,500 virtual participants, shared their struggles and achievements – revealing to all of us the candor with which they critique their efforts and learn aggressively from their experimentation. We learned from these participants that more unusual gatherings of this kind would be welcome.

As a social enterprise for innovation and adaptive change, we at EmcArts are always trying to maintain a fine balance between ongoing consistency and radical departures. It would be all too easy to settle into familiar patterns as they become successful, and exploit them as far as we can. But something in our ethos, our DNA, makes us regularly test new approaches, open up unexplored paths, and perturb ourselves with contrary thinking. In 2013, we asked disruptive questions, including: “How can we move from fostering single innovations to strengthening the capacity of organizations to adapt and repeatedly innovate?” and “Can we support and facilitate the work of adaptive change among individual leaders, organizations, and communities in an integrated way that will help change stick?”

So this year, we began an exploration of adaptive leadership, leading to the launch of our new and, we believe, ground-breaking leadership program, *Arts Leaders as Cultural Innovators*. From the *Innovation Summit*, we published a *Mosaic of Learning about Adaptive Change* that explores what adaptive capacity really looks like in action through the eyes and experience of Summit participants. 2014 will see the learning from all these “next practices” brought decisively into the wider field – new lands are definitely forming.

Our Place-based Programs

Featured Story: DANCECleveland

This year, as a part of our Incubating Innovation program in Cleveland, EmcArts worked with DANCECleveland to develop an innovative new strategy called the Dance Advance Team (DAT).

The Challenge

The DANCECleveland staff was looking to build new and more diverse audiences by harnessing the social power of personal invitations.

The Innovation

Starting with the half-baked idea to “use professional dancers to help spread the word in an organized way,” the Dance Advance Team was born. DAT is a 15-member group of dance professionals who serve as advocates, working through their own personal networks - called “affinity groups” - to publicize events, bring audiences to dance performances, and promote learning about dance.

The Impact

Nearly 10 percent of DANCECleveland’s audience now comes from the affinity groups, and about half of these are first-time attendees. Moreover, an overwhelmingly high percentage report that they enjoy the performance, feel comfortable in the theater, and would like to come back.



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Executive Director, Pam Young, is proud to say:

“Our little test knocked our socks off in terms of how successful it was. The wonderful part of incubating a test idea is just that: It doesn’t necessarily have to be successful. We are very fortunate that our project was successful, but the amount of learning has also been extremely deep and wonderful.”

[Learn More +](#)

Visit the Innovation Stories section on ArtsFwd.org to watch a short documentary about the Dance Advance Team.

DANCECleveland participated in Incubating Innovation as part of the Engaging the Future program of the Cleveland Foundation, which is designed and facilitated by EmcArts.

Our National Innovation Labs

Featured Story: Levine Museum of the New South, Atlanta History Center, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

This year, as part of the Innovation Lab for Museums, EmcArts worked with the Levine Museum of the New South, the Atlanta History Center, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute to develop an innovative new strategy called the Latino New South Project.

The Challenge

Recognizing that in the past 20 years, the southeastern U.S. has experienced the nation's fastest percentage growth in Hispanic newcomers, these three museums were looking to stay relevant by engaging Latino communities as full partners.

The Innovation

Starting with the half-baked idea to develop a "learning network" to explore the Latino experience in the southeastern U.S., the Latino New South Project grew to include a community listening session, convenings with scholars, cross-cultural and bilingual programs and exhibits that align with and reflect Latino audiences, and a new culturally sensitive evaluation system.

The Impact

The Latino New South project has directly impacted the museums' strategies regarding audience engagement, bilingual marketing, building partnerships, social media, program development, and their overall approach to Latino audiences. This increased attendance also had an unintentional positive outcome: Latino organizations and community members began to see the museums as a safe place to host their programs and engage in conversations with people of different backgrounds.



President, Emily Zimmern, says,

“The Latino New South Project has been well received among Latino and non-Latino communities alike. Thanks to the Innovation Lab, our museums have strengthened both our cultural competence and our organizational capacity for long-distance collaboration. Because of our work together in the learning network, we are better able to serve our communities.”

The Innovation Lab for Museums is supported by MetLife Foundation.

Our Activating Innovation & ArtsFwd Initiative

Featured Story: Boston Children’s Chorus

This year, EmcArts began work with Boston Children’s Chorus, the Winner of the ArtsFwd Business Unusual National Challenge. EmcArts will support BCC over the next year with facilitation and a grant as they develop an innovative response to a pressing challenge.

About The Challenge

The Challenge was a new initiative inviting arts organizations from across the country to submit a persistent, complex challenge they are facing. Finalists were selected by vote for the chance to crowdsource new ideas from a wide variety of contributors. Ultimately, BCC won a package of grants and resources worth \$35,000 to prototype an innovative approach.

BCC’s Complex Challenge

Because meaningful relationships don’t automatically form just by bringing diverse people together or by physically locating programs in neighborhoods where the population is predominantly people of color, Boston Children’s Chorus’s challenge is to inspire a sense of belonging across social and racial lines by developing a strategy to integrate anti-bias, identity-discovery and empathy training into their existing music education curriculum and by maintaining a discourse on issues of race and class, in the context of their music, with their audiences.



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Executive Director, David House, says:

“This was a hugely competitive challenge that required an immense collaborative effort from the BCC community, and it speaks to the innovative culture within our organization. We are grateful for the opportunity to work closely with EmcArts over the next year. Our work will bring BCC closer to inspiring a sense of belonging across social and racial lines for hundreds of Boston youth.”

[Learn More +](#)

Visit ArtsFwd.org/challenge to learn more about the Business Unusual Challenge and Boston Children’s Chorus.

The ArtsFwd Business Unusual National Challenge was funded by EmcArts as a prototype of our Activating Innovation program.

The National Innovation Summit for Arts & Culture

Featured Stories: Summit Talks on Citizenship and the Arts

In October 2013, the first National Innovation Summit for Arts & Culture brought together 63 organizations from 12 communities in Denver, along with 1,500 virtual participants, to explore the challenges, discoveries, and achievements of daring to depart from traditional approaches. At the Summit, there were 18 workshops, 4 art experiences, 30 games, and 27 Talks.

Three of the 27 Talks were about Citizenship and the Arts, and by that we mean stories of artists and arts organizations using their unique capacities as citizens to advance broader civic agendas, including social justice, civic vitality, and social innovation.



Howard Shalwitz, Artistic Director,
Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company
Finding Your Itch and Scratching It



Lisa Hoffman, Director of Environmental Programs,
McColl Center for Visual Art
Artist-led Ecosystem Interventions



John Davis, Executive Director,
Lanesboro Arts Center
Small Town, Big Vision

Learn More +

Learn more about the Summit and watch all 27 Summit Talks at ArtsFwd.org.

Lead national support for the National Innovation Summit for Arts & Culture was provided by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and the host sponsor in Denver was Bonfils-Stanton Foundation.

What's Next?

As organizational innovation becomes more widely recognized as a powerful driver in creating new public value, leading organizations are making adaptive change work part of their core business – rather than a marginalized effort by a few heroic champions.

On staying continuously adaptive, past participants in our Innovation Lab have said:

“I think we are all learning the importance of having a place to experiment, to try out new ideas with an audience. Those ideas will come from all parts of the Center. Three years from now I think we will see Off-Center as an integrated part of the Center—a connecting piece that reminds us to include innovation in all of our thinking.”

– **Director of Development,**
Denver Center Theatre Company (DCTC)

“What’s actually necessary is to generate staff and board buy-in ... but not make it everybody’s responsibility to carry that innovation on their own shoulders. People should perceive it as an important element of the organization, but not absolutely everyone’s personal burden to make it work.”

– **Managing Director,**
Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company

Just as companies like Woolly Mammoth and DCTC are already pushing through to this next stage of being highly adaptive, we expect more in the field in 2014 to begin to explore the processes and “muscles” needed to generate adaptive cultures. By developing new ways of thinking and acting internally, organizations of the future will sustain changes in external relationships and achieve greater relevance and impact.

In 2014, EmcArts will test our expanded services through multi-year programs in Alaska and in western Canada, in preparation for engagements across rural America. We will build local capacity for adaptive assistance by forging alliances with place-based service agencies. We will further develop our cross-sector work by involving arts organizations alongside their peers in health and human services via programs that address complex shared challenges. And we will respond to demand by making a selection of our programs available to single organizations, as well as program cohorts.

2014 will affirm that those with the courage to leave the shore are waving, not drowning, and we can all join them there.