

Snapshot



The Context

COCA (Center of Creative Arts) is a multidisciplinary arts education organization founded in St. Louis, Missouri in 1986. COCA's award winning educational programming, workshops, performances, and camps are created with the belief that everyone has creative potential, and that the arts can enrich everyone's life. COCA entered EmcArts' Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts in 2009 after launching a successful series where innovative business leaders spoke on linking arts and business concepts. The resulting program, *COCAbiz*, builds on that success through programming that combines the unique strengths of arts education— things like non-linear processes, thinking by doing, vulnerability, and deep questioning—with traditional business strategies.

The Innovation

COCAbiz is an immersive arts experience that helps business professionals and corporate teams merge techniques from artistic practice into their professional lives. The program is comprised of customized trainings, workshops, talks, conferences, and special events that bring professional artists and business leaders together to solve problems in creative and innovative ways.

The Impact

The *Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts* provided COCA with a container for exploring new ideas as well as the space and time to engage them fully. Since developing *COCAbiz*, COCA has learned that their ability to model creativity in a business program has allowed them to expand their impact in critical ways, including:

- **Expanding Relationships and Recognition in St. Louis**

Creating *COCAbiz* has allowed COCA to make deeper connections in the business community, which in turn has expanded its donor base and exposed a wider cross-section of the community to COCA's programs and activities.

- **Increased Contributed Revenue**

COCAbiz has had a large financial impact on COCA. *COCAbiz* continued to generate contributed and earned revenue for the organization beyond initial seed funding during the first two years, earning \$151,224 in fiscal year 2012, \$131,170 in 2013, and \$87,000 in the first half of 2014.

- **A New Pathway to COCA's Mission**

COCA's mission is enriching lives and building community through the arts. *COCAbiz* builds on this work by expanding its definition of community and audience. By working with local and national business leaders, *COCAbiz* creates rich arts experiences that have relevant meaning and influence.

The Lab

Highlighting variance is a challenging but very powerful tool in the creative process. When COCA learned how to make difference constructive rather than combative, *COCAbiz* became more evocative, credible, and ultimately sustainable. The Innovation Lab, a program of EmcArts, was created to assist nonprofit organizations in designing and prototyping new ideas and to launch real-life projects that address complex challenges facing their organizations and the arts and culture field at large. COCA emerged from the Innovation Lab not only with a solid concept for *COCAbiz*, but also with new insight into their capability for adaptive change.