Innovation in Action

Three Case Studies from the Intersections of Arts & Social Justice in EmcArts' *Innovation Labs*:

Featuring: Alternate ROOTS, Hull-House Museum and The Theater Offensive

PREPARED BY:

EmcArts

Forward

EmcArts is delighted to present this report featuring stories of three organizations at the intersection of arts and social justice – The Theater Offensive (TTO), Hull House Museum, and Alternate ROOTS – all of whom participated in our *Innovation Labs for the Arts* program.

During my time at EmcArts, we have supported 49 different organizations in incubating innovation projects – conceiving, designing and testing new strategies to achieve public value that are discontinuous from their previous practices. A few years ago, we were energized to discover that some of the organizations now applying to take part in our *Innovation Labs* process had missions and mandates that put social justice front and center, and were also deeply connected to histories of social movements. For instance, Hull House Museum in Chicago emerged from the settlement movement for immigrant rights; The Theater Offensive produces art for and by queer and trans youth in Boston, and Alternate ROOTS' mission is to dismantle all forms of social and economic oppression in the South. We wanted to explore the impact of our Labs on these groups, and lift up unique lessons, experiments and strategies from their innovation projects

In our research and story-gathering process, we've learned that our Labs create a durable container for social justice arts organizations to better operationalize their values, which allows them to walk their talk and produce equity and justice for their communities more successfully. And importantly, our Lab process is strategically aligned with long-term efforts for social justice, because it encourages systemic change, risk-taking, imagination, and culture-shifting — all of which are essential elements of social movement building.

We also learned that adaptive change and innovation does not always happen exclusively through organizational interventions. Especially within social movements, arts organizations can often be just one player in a broader, networked landscape. At EmcArts, we are conscious and deliberate about supporting adaptive change in different shapes and configurations – both within and outside organizations. This year, we are exploring a new model through our *Community Innovation Labs*, which bring a diverse, cross-sector group of local community members together to address tough social issues with, and through, the arts.

These three profiles, and the essay by Caron Atlas of Arts and Democracy, explore the contours, possibilities and limitations of innovation and adaptive change in organizations that sit at the juncture of arts and social justice. In these stories, you'll find many examples of strategies that create increased alignment between artistic practices, organizational policies, and social justice values like equity, self-determination, inclusion and belonging. You'll also discover ways that these hybrid organizations engage differently with their communities and stakeholders, and come across new, emergent questions about the productive messiness of adaptive change.

We hope that these in-depth case studies will serve as rich and exploratory resources for you and for our field. EmcArts is committed to interdisciplinary and experimental practices and learning, and we look forward to continuing to support individuals, organizations and communities that bridge the worlds of art-making, social change, and innovation.

Melissa Dibble
Managing Director, EmcArts

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SLOWING DOWN IN URGENT TIMES

By Caron Atlas, Director, Arts and Democracy

Introduction

How can creative change makers walk their talk and more effectively enact the change they want to see in the world? What do innovation and adaptive change look like for organizations that have social change as their core mission? This collection of profiles by Nayantara Sen, Maribel Alvarez, Kathie de Nobriga, explores these questions through the experience of Alternate ROOTS, The Hull House Museum and The Theater Offensive (TTO) in EmcArts' *Innovation Labs*.

In times like these art is not a luxury. As Alternate ROOTS wrote to its members: "Battles over immigration, privatized prisons, violence against people of color, stand your ground laws, the end of the Voting Rights Act, Moral Mondays and the Dream Defenders, concentration of wealth in an increasingly small group of people. This is an urgent time for our country, indeed for our world."

Arts & social justice organizations often respond to urgent times with urgent actions. However as part of social movements, they know that the arc of change is long. Truly transformative change builds on the learning, engaging, and envisioning that happens between "movement moments." This includes culture shifts that help people imagine a different future and cultural organizing that animates activism with the transformative power of arts and culture. A key part to this long process is questioning assumptions, affirming values, and aligning mission and action. This requires what Maribel Alvarez describes as "the art of slowing down." The *Innovation Lab* gave Alternate ROOTS, Hull House Museum, and The Theater Offensive a rare opportunity to slow down through a process of creation, reflection and action.

The intersection of art, culture, and social justice isn't new. Traditions of sustained cultural organizing and place-based creative strategies have been integral to activism and movement building for decades. However, this work is currently being institutionalized as a field in a manner that formalizes its practices. This raises its profile and increases recognition, but can also lead to what artist Rick Lowe calls "the gentrification of community arts" where grassroots practices and leadership are excluded.

It is key for those who have built the foundation for this field to be leaders in defining it. Three such groups participated in the EmcArts' *Innovation Labs* program. EmcArts commissioned this series of essays to document their experience and share what they learned. The profile

About the *Innovation Labs*:

EmcArts created the Innovation Lab 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. Forty-nine performing arts, museums, and service organizations have participated in the Lab to date. The Innovation Lab is a three-phase program that provides a strong framework in which new strategies can be explored and prototyped in relatively low-stakes environments before a full launch. The first phase focuses on researching and assessing the adaptive challenge at hand, and developing a cross-constituent team to plan strategies for intervention. The second phase accelerates the project by building organizational momentum through decision-making at a five-day intensive retreat. The third phase involves prototyping, evaluating and refining the adaptive interventions. *Read more about the Innovation Labs.*

writers were selected both for their experience with museums, ensemble theaters, networks, and for their ability to understand this work in a broader arts, culture, and social justice context. They came to the task with a deep respect for the organizations and a desire to learn more about them.

What they learned was that innovation for Alternate ROOTS, The Theater Offensive, and Hull House was about more effectively fulfilling their social justice missions. In these three stories, innovation was about engaging communities, embodying creativity, and deepening existing values. Here, innovation shifted power, flattened hierarchies, and furthered equity and inclusion. It moved relationships from transactions into transformations, built up the leadership of those most impacted by change, and connected self-determination with inter-dependence. Importantly, this approach to innovation within social justice arts organizations values the origins, heritages and legacies of the social movements that they were born from. This innovation looks back in order to look ahead. As Nayantara Sen reflected in her profile about Alternate ROOTS, "In a society that places high value on the role of free markets and innovation as indicators of progress, looking back was in fact a radical move."

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—Caron Atlas, Director, Arts and Democracy

Social Justice Missions and Legacies

Alternate ROOTS, Hull House Museum, and The Theater Offensive's missions are informed by historic social movements and by the belief that participatory arts and culture have the power to make transformative change for a just society. This goes beyond simply generating art with social messages, but rather focuses on creation as an act of liberation and culture as a means of organizing. In these three organizations, for example, storytelling plays a central role that helps restore humanity, reclaim communities, and reshape policies.

Each of the groups falls in a different location on a spectrum of issues, experiences, and approaches to social change. Alternate ROOTS is a network of artists and cultural organizers founded in the South 39 years ago as part of the Civil Rights Movement. It continues to envision itself as a movement building organization that aims to "dismantle all forms of oppression – everywhere" on individual, community, and systemic levels. A member-led organization, ROOTS is programmatically focused on the U.S South, and provides the connective tissue for

artists who have a commitment to making work in, with, by, for and about their communities, and those whose cultural work strives for social justice. As ROOTS entered the *innovation Lab* it had just concluded a strategic plan that moved it "from a place of service to a place of service, action, and reciprocity." The *Lab* allowed this mature network to rethink its structures and practices that had come to lack "the necessary clarity, strategy, and equity" to align with ROOT's social justice mission.

The Theater Offensive began in Boston in 1989 to "present the diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives in art so bold it breaks through personal isolation, challenges the status quo, and builds thriving communities." TTO focuses on individual and community empowerment to create safer and more vibrant neighborhoods, and responds to the realities of high levels of suicides, homelessness and a lack of social services within queer youth populations, TTO uses the arts to organize in four Boston neighborhoods and to open dialogue across race, ethnicity, economics, age, and sexual orientation. The *Lab* helped them explore the relationship between housing and operating their local, place-based work alongside housing and operating the national work of the Pride Youth Theater Alliance (PYTA), as the latter shifted from a funder cohort to an independent network.

Hull House Museum is a historic site dedicated to the legacy of Jane Adams and Ellen Gates Starr, and the Hull House Settlement House they founded in 1889 in the Near West neighborhood of Chicago. Hull House improved the quality of life for new immigrants in Chicago with arts and cultural programs, social services such as a nursery school, playground and adult classes, and by hosting political and social dialogue, and supporting labor organizing. At the state and federal level it influenced legislation on child labor laws, women's suffrage, and immigrant rights. The Hull House Settlement was displaced by the construction of the new University of Illinois Chicago Circle Campus in the 1960s. Social services, including childcare, job training, and housing assistance continued in different sites through the Hull House Association until it closed in 2012. As a result of organizing related to community opposition to the university expansion plan, the original Residents Dining Hall and Hull House buildings were preserved and landmarked, and became the sites for the Jane Adams Hull House Museum, which opened in 1967 and reopened in 2010. The museum describes itself as a "dynamic memorial" that connects its settlement house legacy to the present "by responding to pressing social issues including war, immigration, racial and gender equity, and poverty."

While ROOTS is a network of artists and activists and The Theater Offensive is an ensemble theater, Hull House is a university-based museum, a unit within the University Illinois's College of Architecture, Design and the Arts. Its history of change is both bottom up and top down. Its *Lab* project reflects this explicitly with its challenge of hierarchical practices, embrace of "radical hospitality," and goal of reciprocal community engagement.

Questioning Assumptions

Alternate ROOTS, The Theater Offensive, and Hull House are fully aware of the dynamic nature of their histories and communities, which can often cause tension between remaining connected to their historic legacies while also embracing the diverse needs and cultures of their changing communities. As organizations with social justice mandates that are accountable to the communities they serve, they know that to be effective, they must continually re-imagine their roles, and question their assumptions, sacred cows and organizational mythologies. Are their current practices in alignment with their missions or had they internalized the very inequities and oppressive structures they were seeking to eliminate? Answering this required engaging tensions and contradictions, and surfacing unresolved questions. This inquiry-driven process was the work of culture shifting, and it depended on trust, transparency, and relationships to succeed.

The *Innovation Lab* is designed so that organizations can "shift their ingrained organizational assumptions, and let go of cherished beliefs, in order to develop innovative approaches that are unprecedented for that organization." It provides a space for rigorous reflection where participants with multiple experiences and perspectives can test creative ideas and strategies in an iterative and experimental way. A skilled facilitator deepens dialogue, a residential retreat concentrates focus, and participants "act their way to thinking" by incubating, prototyping, and evaluating innovation strategies. The process encourages participants to take the risk to "fail early and fail often" as they refine innovation projects.

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Living up to core values

At its essence, innovation for the three organizations was about living up to their core values. Even though arts and social justice organizations have explicit mandates for social justice, like all organizations they experience challenges with aligning their behaviors with values. Their best intentions do not protect them from encountering the typical challenges of systems, which contribute to institutional inequities. The *Innovation Labs* provided a rigorous container for these three groups to experiment with new ways of bringing their values and missions into closer alignment with their current realities.

The social justice values that these three groups engaged with included: equity, place inclusion, belonging and self-determination.

Underlying these values was a respect for and embrace of the full humanity of their communities. The Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society explains this concept as follows: “Belonging, or being fully human, means more than having access. It means having a voice, and being afforded the opportunity to participate in the design of social and cultural structures. Belonging entails being respected at a basic level that includes the right to both contribute and make demands….”

Values of inclusion and belonging are fundamental to the *Lab* as well as the *Lab* projects. They inform the deliberate mix of team members, the manner in which they interact, and the work they accomplish. Strong facilitation and attention to group dynamics moves inclusion into agency and agency into action.

In ROOTS’ journey in the *Lab*, nclusion, equity and belonging were evident as well. “The desire to make sure that all voices are heard is infused into the fabric of ROOT’s organizational culture.” ROOTS’ Innovation Ensemble included long-time, founding, and new members; artists and community organizers; staff; and leadership, the diverse group needed to design more inclusive membership policies. More broadly, their *Campaign for Change* engaged all of their members in the project to overhaul their membership structure, which was indicative of their intentional efforts to shift power back to membership, build equitable participation, and generate increased sense of belonging with ROOTS.

The Theater Offensive’s *Lab* project managed the delicate and difficult balancing act between a

commitment to place with a commitment for making national connections and field building. They asked: How can a queer theater company rooted in specific Boston neighborhoods stay focused on priorities like local youth leadership and racial justice, community building across difference, and place-based culture, when also charged with operating the national, 23-member North American Pride Youth Theater Alliance (PYTA)? Was running a national network from a community organization an asset or a contradiction? TTO asked, "How could the national network draw on the capacities of the locally grounded organization?" For example, TTO champions youth leadership and develops and supports youth activists as a core part of its work. This is consistent with the social justice value of self determination and the movement practice of leadership development. Exploring how PYTA could support and operationalize youth leadership became a central focus for their innovation project.

With the *Porch Project*, the Hull House Museum affirmed the value of inclusion and welcomed participation. It "turned the museum's wall inside out" to challenge insularity and directly engage the community's different points of view. This aligned with their Hull House Settlement history and legacy. Jane Addams was a strong promoter of democracy who famously said, "The cure for the ills of Democracy is more Democracy." The museum's goal of being a community hub that advanced the public good carried on the settlement house tradition of being a place where immigrants displaced by industrialization could organize themselves.

By animating its porch as a space where the public had a say, the museum deepened its community relationships. It also intentionally shifted authority from curators and collections to recreation workers and community members. This created a context where the community became a steward of the Hull House legacy at a time when the museum was undergoing a leadership transition.

Reframing Innovation

One of the key assumptions questioned in the lab was innovation itself. For organizations grounded in a history and legacy of social justice movement building, and who have explicit equity mandates to build a more justice society, organizational innovation can be less about doing something new than about realigning their policies, practices and cultures with their original values.

In the *Lab* process, ROOTS reframed innovation as remembrance and return. The language of Rev. James Lawson in his founding statement for SNCC (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) provided a beacon for their work: "The search for a social order of justice permeated by love." Said ROOTS Executive Director, Carlton Turner, "It was about not feeling pressure to create something new just to be innovative. Instead, we looked back to the Civil Rights Movement, to the history of the South, [and] to the history of ROOTS' own formation. This allowed us to select strategies that reflected our organizational values."

As organizations that foster and rely on community ingenuity and resilience, ROOTS, Hull House Museum and TTO also questioned assumptions about who gets recognized as an innovator and what forms innovation takes. Community activists and artists regularly reconfigure unjust social and economic relationships, reframe narratives, and re-imagine the world — all of which are innovative efforts that build towards transformative change. Theater director Dudley Cocke, one of the founders of ROOTS, described how "innovation is prominent in artists' daily work." He reflected that "artists already possess a vocabulary to express innovation and that their lexicon is far more powerful for them than terms formulated by social scientists or innovation consultants." For ROOTS and TTO, this included the valuing of their ensemble practice, which combines creation and innovation grounded in values of shared leadership, transparency, and collaboration.

Questions and Reflections

The following are some questions and reflections about both the *Lab* process and the *Lab* projects to consider while reading the profiles.

Q: Is the *Lab* methodology useful for organizations rooted in social movements where change is already at the heart of their work?

In many ways the answer to this question, underlying this collection of profiles, is yes. The *Lab's* framework parallels the process of cultural organizing and arts-based social change, recognizing that change is not linear but rather an ongoing cycle of creation, reflection, and action. It is aligned with the long-term logics of social movement building, because it understands that

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institutional change (just like structural, societal change for justice) can take a long time, and requires adaptive change. The *Lab* supports the risk taking, imagination, momentum building, and cultural shifts that are at the heart of sustained change. It provides a context where participants can ask themselves critical questions about the consistency of their work with social justice goals. Are their organizations reproducing the conditions that they are trying to change? The *Lab* offers an opportunity to make critical re-alignments that enable organizations to walk their talk.

As social justice groups that catalyze cultural shifts for sustained change, it is particularly critical that groups like ROOTS, TTO, and Hull House Museum practice what they preach. If social justice organizations do not have their houses in order, what are the consequences on the broader social movement ecologies they are part of? If their programs are misaligned from their values and unaccountable to their communities, the consequences may extend beyond their organizations.

In considering the usefulness of the *Labs*, it’s important to also contextualize the landscape in which these organizations sit. Given the networks and ecologies that impact and sustain social justice change — from local communities to broader social movements — does the *Lab*’s focus on organizations limit its ability to fully support systemic change? The Movement Strategy Center identifies holding a broad awareness of a movement ecosystem as a key element of movement building: “By cultivating a movement perspective, we choose to leave behind a more narrow vision and strategy that is based on our organizational needs/capacity and take on an expansive vision and align strategies toward our common movement goals.” Adaptive change in arts organizations is but one step in making cultural shifts and systemic change. Shifting organizational behavior does not necessarily address larger structures of racism and economic injustice, unequal power, and cultural inequities.

The *Lab* focuses on “next practices” rather than best practices, with an eye towards the future. However its focus on non-profit organizational development can miss the key role that artists, activists, and community groups play in the ecosystem, beyond their interaction with arts organizations. This includes, for example, the small unincorporated theaters in PYTA and the Chicago residents who organizing kept two Hull House buildings

from being torn down). A next practice would go beyond a focus on arts organizations; the arts and culture sector; or even the arts, culture, and social justice field. EmcArts is beginning to do just that with its new *Community Innovation Labs*.

Another next practice is incorporating the power of arts and culture in the making of adaptive change, which is exemplified by the *Lab* projects. Art also became part of the *Lab* process over all when ideas were clarified and engaged through artmaking or when the ensemble became a model for team building. Another question in this vein is: how might the *Lab* methodology intentionally build arts and cultural processes into all of its phases?

Q: What are next practices in embracing tensions, including tensions between values?

Key to the *Innovation Lab* approach is an ability to engage complexity and embrace generative tensions. This is also inherent in artistic practices and the creative process. Is there something we can learn from the way art can hold multiple perspectives, enabling to us to see, and to act, in the plural?

For these organizations the tensions run deep, addressing core values such as equity and inclusion. TTO and ROOTS faced a key tension between working deeply locally or regionally and opportunities for national expansion that can build and strengthen the field. TTO reflects on whether their national work will destroy the values that are most precious to them. For ROOTS, will its membership expansion and growing national profile dilute its important support for Southern artists, issues, and communities? Both groups demonstrate through network structures how it can be possible to expand their reach without sacrificing their place-based grounding.

For Hull House, a key tension involved applying their slow museum values to themselves. They wrote in their interim report: "Although we have stated that a slow and reflective process is our goal, our general pace of work and ambition to be innovative are at times in conflict with the concept of slowness. This is of course the crux of the project and we are committed to working through these tensions and contradictions…"

> "In this context of embracing tensions between values, what frameworks are used by arts and social justice organizations to evaluate and balance their values when they are in conflict?
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> — Caron Atlas, Director, Arts and Democracy"

Urban planner Susan S. Fainstein identifies three key values for a "just city"—diversity, democracy, and equity—while recognizing how they can be in conflict with one another. She explains that "when [these values] are in conflict with each, equity should receive priority." Fainstein also proposes evaluating urban policies based on their commitment to justice.[1] In this context of embracing tensions between values, what frameworks are used by arts and social justice organizations to evaluate and balance their values when they are in conflict?

Q: How do you institutionalize innovation beyond the container of the *Lab*?

A key question to consider is how *Lab* projects are sustained after the completion of the *Lab* and what happens if the resources to sustain them aren't available. What is needed to sustain a risk taking approach when the world outside of the *Lab* is less willing to accept failure? How do organizations institutionalize and operationalize their gains and their lessons from the prototyping process, so that they can continue to reap the benefits years later, even after project staff leaves or the *Lab* project is completed? And in the case of collaborative projects where the intension is to shift power from the organization, is the organization even the appropriate entity to sustain the innovation? What, for example, would be the next steps beyond soliciting community input or increased community stakes for Hull House Museum programs when examined against broader perspectives of neighborhood innovation and social change?

Some of the ways the three organizations are moving to institutionalize innovation are:

1. ROOTS is building the process into its annual membership convening, ROOTS Week 2015, A Call to Action: Transformation;
2. Hull House Museum hired a new Executive Director whose experience included the kind of community collaborations prototyped in the *Lab*;
3. TTO created the position of a Youth Organizer for the PYTA network to further organize youth leadership. Leadership development is an important way to sustain change. However at the time the profile was written funding for that position had not been found, raising the question of how to build the infrastructure to sustain change when it isn't a funding priority.

Change is a Marathon

Social justice requires the sustained momentum of movement building and cultural shifts. Shifting power and undoing structures of oppression are long-term commitments. It takes time to build trust, purpose, leadership, and shared vision. Change requires not only aligning organizational missions and actions but also embracing our full humanity and deepest dreams.

If change is a marathon, how do we keep going? Arts and culture help to inspire and renew social movements. But artists and cultural organizers also need renewing. The EmcArts *Innovation Lab* offered nourishment and an opportunity for regeneration. ROOTS week and PYTA convenings do this as well. We need to value this as a critical part of our practice. To sustain our commitment for social justice, we need to engage it with our full selves.

1 Susan Fainstein is quoted from "The Just City: Equality, Social Justice and Growth" panel February 14, 2011 at the New School focus on her book, *The Just City*

ALTERNATE ROOTS

Innovation Through Membership and Memory

By Nayantara Sen

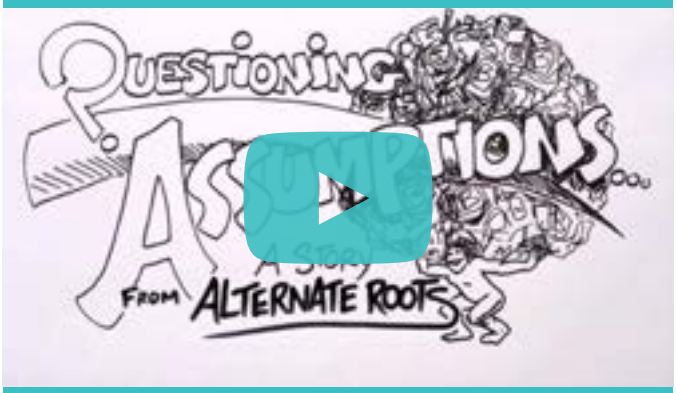
Project Summary

Alternate ROOTS is a 39-year old regional arts organization in the South. As a national resource for artists and cultural organizers, ROOTS champions social and economic justice and provides connective tissue for artists whose cultural work strives for social justice. Over the course of four decades, ROOTS had been incrementally fine-tuning its membership and governance policies, but rapid growth in reach and reputation in the last five years had caused significant "growing pains." A team from ROOTS entered EmcArts' *Innovation Lab for Arts Development Agencies* in 2013 to grapple with the strengths and limits of their current membership structure. They asked: *What is the membership structure that best reflects central values of ROOTS – connectedness, participatory democracy and anti-oppression – while also positioning ROOTS as the organization of choice for community engaged artists in the 21st century?*

Introduction & Context

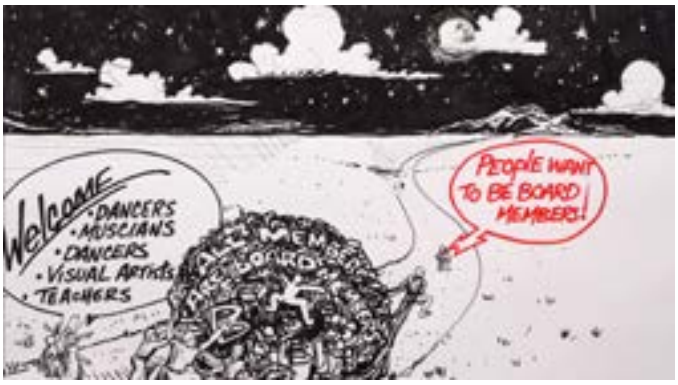
Alternate ROOTS is a regional arts organization based in the Southern USA whose mission is to support the creation and presentation of original art, which is rooted in a particular community of place, tradition, or spirit. As a member-driven resource for artists and a multidisciplinary coalition of cultural organizers, ROOTS strives for the elimination of all forms of oppression, and champions economic and social justice. ROOTS connects and supports artists working for social justice in the South through various programs — by providing grants for artistic assistance and fee subsidies for bringing ROOTS artists into new communities, by hosting regional events and gatherings, and by partnering with groups working on progressive issues. Unlike many other network or service organizations, ROOTS members—who are cultural workers, artists and activists—develop ROOTS programs themselves, while ROOTS provides resources to encourage their stability, capacity, and skills instead of simply focusing on artistic support or service delivery. Since its founding in 1976, ROOTS has steadily emerged in the field of community-based arts as an innovative, responsive thought leader that supports regional cultural organizing and social justice action.

ROOTS was originally founded at the Highlander Center in Tennessee, a training and leadership center for grassroots organizing and regional movement building in Appalachia and the South. The Center's anti-racist legacy and its ties to the Civil Rights movement inspire ROOTS's work, and like the Highlander Center, ROOTS occupies critical intellectual, cultural, and activist space in the South. ROOTS is guided by core principles of Equitable Partnership, Shared Power, Open Dialogue, Aesthetics, and Individual and Community Transformation. Since ROOTS is mission-driven to dismantle all forms of oppression, it also functions as a catalyst for art and action, and an incubator for participatory democracy. These central tenets also lead ROOTS to prioritize deep engagement of members in all aspects of the organization. So when ROOTS undertook an ambitious initiative to increase alignment between its membership and governance structures and its core principles—the



Watch a short animated video explaining the organizational assumptions at the core of Alternate ROOTS's complex challenge

heart of the organization itself — through the *Innovation Lab*, its member-focused identity and values were at stake.



– *Sketches by Ariston Jacks, ROOTS Innovation Team Member*

Over the course of four decades, ROOTS had been incrementally fine-tuning its membership and governance policies, but rapid growth in reach and reputation in the last five years had caused significant "growing pains." In the early 2000s, ROOTS membership had been about 100 people, but at the time of their participation in the *Innovation Lab* in 2013, they had 375 members. Preliminary survey data indicated that close to 1,000 artists in the South were interested in joining their network, or were already an informal part of their network. ROOTS was also growing in other ways besides membership. As a regional organization with a national footprint, ROOTS had recently committed to having a greater impact upon the artists in the South, as well as the larger field of community-engaged art. For most of its existence, ROOTS operated on a budget of approximately $350,000, but by 2013, its operating budget had doubled to more than $700,000. ROOTS's current annual budget is now more than $1million, and for the last few years, they had steadily been increasing staffing capacity. ROOTS was now realizing that in order to support increased demand, expanding programs, and needs of new and future members, they needed to restructure their policies.

ROOTS's original membership policy had three separate categories that did not easily feed into a staggered, strategic engagement pipeline; they also required a high degree of commitment from a subsection of members. Until now one could be a Voting member, which required artists to live in the ROOTS service region[1] and be a Board member, or be a Satellite member, which was a non-voting category open to artists living outside of ROOTS's service region. There was also an Introductory membership category that was that, for a fee of $20, got a one-time discounted registration at the member rate to the annual summertime meeting, called ROOTS Week. Of these three categories, only Voting members could access ROOTS's grants and services such as re-granting programs, which provided incredible financial resources, artistic assistance, and partnership supports.

1 The ROOTS Service Region covers the Southern area of the United States: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

The Voting member category was problematic however, since ROOTS policy mandated that all Voting members be automatically inducted into the Board of Directors. This meant that the ROOTS Board routinely averaged more than 100 members at a time. Voting members also had to be elected by existing members—a process that happened only once a year at the annual ROOTS Week. Given the large size of the Board of Directors, governance functions were managed by a 15-member Executive Committee, which is elected to act on behalf of the Board.

"This old system forced people after a year [into] either becoming Voting members or having no official relationship to ROOTS," said Carlton Turner, ROOTS's Executive Director. This policy assumed that people who wanted to be involved with ROOTS could automatically accept fiduciary and legal responsibilities as Board members. The model also inadvertently set up a barrier to access by requiring artists to attend ROOTS Week in person in order to get voted in. "Even though it's comparatively cheap registration, not everyone can afford to take time off work and travel to ROOTS Week once a year," said Ashley Minner, Baltimore-based visual artist, member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, and the Chair of ROOTS Visual Arts Ensemble, which is one of the many member-led committees and working groups that execute ROOTS programmatic work. ROOTS staff also had recent data indicating that a large number of people had requested subsidies to attend ROOTS Week between 2010 and 2012, and that 80% of these applicants earned less than $15,000 per year. Research also showed that the majority of new members in the last decade were mid-career artists and organizers of color and under 45 years of age. It was clear that those membership policies were an economic hardship for a large section of their constituency. Moreover, ROOTS's commitment to serving low-income communities of color in the South meant that their board was not a fundraising board, since members—who were already struggling to sustain their art—could not financially contribute to ROOTS. This model was also needlessly confusing. "We had a hard time explaining it to each other, let alone new folks," said Kathie deNobriga, Founding Member and former Executive Director of ROOTS.

There were, of course, legitimate reasons why the three-tiered membership structure had originally been set up. Firstly, ROOTS had strong historical and political imperatives for prioritizing cultural workers and artists in the South as Voting members. ROOTS's Southern service areas are connected to its own history of place-based organizing and community resiliency building. The South is also underserved in terms of resources in both art and social justice. Important cultural and community organizing work in the South regularly goes unfunded and ignored by the rest of the country, so it is strategic for ROOTS to continue emphasizing the highest levels of representation and responsibility in its Southern Voting members. Secondly, ROOTS's founding membership valued the rights of members to be fully empowered in ROOTS governance and decision-making. The idea was that each member could decisively use their voices and their power to affect decision-making only if they were a Board member. And lastly, the policy that mandated in-person attendance at the annual ROOTS Week retreat to access Voting membership was instituted to preserve the rich, cultural tradition of relational organizing in the South. "It was always important to ROOTS that people made personal, face-to-face connections at ROOTS Week," deNobriga said. It was understood that in-person relationship building at ROOTS Week facilitated solidarity and trust, which is foundational to a collective that is organizing against oppression together. Yet even with these concrete reasons, ROOTS was struggling to balance the contradictions and ameliorate the barriers set up by the original member policies.

The Membership Innovation Ensemble, a working group of staff and ROOTS members, had been grappling with these contradictions and questions around the strengths and limits of their membership structure for some time. Some core questions they were tackling included: *What is the membership structure that best reflects central values of ROOTS — connectedness, participatory democracy and anti-oppression – while also positioning ROOTS as the organization of choice for community engaged artists in the 21st century? How can we provide more access to ROOTS while simultaneously offering artists' choices about the level of engagement they wish to have? How do we responsibly expand our reach in a way that honors the contributions of its elders and the strengths of the existing member structures, and retains a sense of continuity and history while also reflecting the needs of new members?*

At this time, ROOTS had also emerged from a strategic planning process that surfaced resonant questions for them around other areas of organizational life and function. Their strategic plan included goals for

Core Questions ROOTS addressed in their *Innovation Lab*:

What is the membership structure that best reflects central values of ROOTS – connectedness, participatory democracy and anti-oppression – while also positioning ROOTS as the organization of choice for community engaged artists in the 21st century?

How can we provide more access to ROOTS while simultaneously offering artists' choices about the level of engagement they wish to have?

How do we responsibly expand our reach in a way that honors the contributions of its elders and the strengths of the existing member structures, and retains a sense of continuity and history while also reflecting the needs of new members?

expanding their staff capacity, sharpening the action components of their mission, and strengthening overall stability by bringing organizational structures in closer alignment with their values of inclusivity and anti-oppression. Impending changes from implementing the strategic plan presented tremendous synergistic possibilities for overlap with the *Innovation Lab* process for redesigning membership structures. ROOTS found itself at a critical adaptive change-making juncture; conditions for change-making were clear and urgent, and the timing was strategically opportune. Driven by all these factors as well as the realization that it was now time for a significant organizational overhaul, instead of simply small tweaks and adjustments, Alternate ROOTS was accepted into the Lab in Fall 2013.

PROCESS

> “Most of the different configurations happened in Phase 1 as we tried to unpack what adaptive change was. We wanted to bring in long-time members, founding members, new members, artists and community organizers, staff and leadership of Executive Committee, as well as folks who have been around only a few years but contribute to leadership.”
>
> — Carlton Turner, Executive Director, Alternate ROOTS

About the Lab

Alternate ROOTS was accepted into Round 1 of EmcArts’ *Innovation Lab* for Arts Development Agencies and started the program in January 2013. The *Innovation Lab* is a three-phase program that provides a strong framework in which new strategies can be explored and prototyped in relatively low-stakes environments before a full launch. The first phase focuses on researching and assessing the adaptive challenge at hand, and developing a cross-constituent team to plan strategies for intervention. The second phase accelerates the project by building organizational momentum through decision-making at a five-day intensive retreat. The third phase involves prototyping, evaluating and refining the adaptive interventions. Read more about the *Innovation Lab for Arts Development Agencies*.

According to Keryl McCord, Managing Director of ROOTS, the Lab couldn’t have happened at a better time. “The shape and structure of the strategic plan was modeled on ROOTS’s mission statement,” she said. “And the Lab allowed us to dig deeper into strategic plan implementation.” This meant that efforts to redesign membership structures through the Lab were also legitimized by strategic plan objectives and advanced by ROOTS’s mission and values. The Lab overlapped with their strategic plan implementation for a full year, which allowed ROOTS to operationalize aspects of their strategic plan into new membership proposals. Turner said that the Lab was also the best format for ROOTS to dream and experiment collaboratively and concretely. “We had the luxury of having a dedicated facilitator to work with us on a specific problem for a long time so we could lean on him to draw threads together from different conversations and keep us on track,” he said. “The Lab gave us permission to think outside the box,” added DeNobriga. “It was a catalyst for us to challenge some long-time, deeply-held beliefs about what membership should be.”

ROOTS approached each of the Lab’s four phases in a

smart and intentional way, always taking great care to ensure that the right mix of people were in the room. For each of these phases, ROOTS chose a wide and representative swath of members to participate in dialogues and decision-making. “We tried to cover all bases in terms of skillsets, experiences, history, institutional memory, and exposure to organizational culture,” said Minner. “Most of the different configurations happened in Phase 1 as we tried to unpack what adaptive change was,” Turner said. “We wanted to bring in long-time members, founding members, new members, artists and community organizers, staff and leadership of Executive Committee, as well as folks who have been around only a few years but contribute to leadership.” The desire to make sure that all voices are heard is infused into the fabric of ROOTS’ organizational culture. The team intuitively configured their Lab meetings as diverse spaces, which set them up to succeed from the beginning.

After Phase 1, ROOTS made a bold decision. With the seed grant money, they hired Carrie Brunk, a community organizer and friend of ROOTS, to lead their “Campaign for Change,” the internal name given to membership restructuring efforts. Brunk’s expertise as a community organizer was exactly what ROOTS needed in Phases 3 and 4, when meaningful dialogue and support for the new membership proposals had to be solicited. Ms. Brunk facilitated the campaign, supporting staff and leadership in engaging the ROOTS’ network and systemically collecting their feedback about the proposed policy changes. Guided by ROOTS’ imperatives on creating an inclusive network, the campaign returned continuously to its members - to inform them about what was going on, to solicit questions and concerns, and to check for tension or pushback. The team sent out regular updates and wrote about the Lab on blog posts on their website. The proposed changes to membership policies were moved through the body of ROOTS in this order: First, they were presented before the Executive Committee, which approved them after deliberation. Then, the Executive Committee and Membership Innovation Ensemble jointly mounted a campaign to contact all 150 Voting members in ever widening circles by phone and email to inform them about the proposed changes. Feedback from all Voting members was corralled in a shared spreadsheet, and staff and Executive Committee members reported back regularly on what they were hearing from their constituents.

By the time members arrived at ROOTS Week that summer, they had heard about the ambitious membership restructuring project and were well-prepared to vote on the proposals. “Previously, people had concerns about voting on proposals in-person at ROOTS Week. They were worried about how tense the conversations might get, or if some dialogues would get dominated, or if their voices would be heard. I think that’s what the internal organizing strategy addressed. [Using the strategy] made sure that perspectives that didn’t align with what most members wanted wouldn’t overwhelm the dialogues at ROOTS Week. It also generated a lot of goodwill because people felt they were heard before the proposals went up for voting before membership,” said Brunk. The decision to run ROOTS’s change-making process utilizing Brunk’s experience as a community organizer was unique, given that most arts organizations in the U.S do not hire organizers to run campaigns for internal stakeholder engagement and decision-making. ROOTS’s goal was not to strong-arm people into changing their minds, but rather to craft a process that was aligned with ROOTS values of democratic participation and dialogue that supports people in making their own choices. “The idea was not to convince people about the membership changes, but rather to meaningfully engage everyone in active conversations about whether the changes were good or not. If they felt the proposals were good, they would vote to approve them at ROOTS Week,” Brunk added. That’s indeed what happened. The proposals to change the membership policies were passed by Voting members at the 2014 ROOTS Week in North Carolina. The changes are outlined in the table alongside.

This mindful, iterative process of enrolling members in change-making produced two substantial modifications to ROOTS’s membership policies. Firstly, their new model collapses the original member categories into two simple individual ones—General and Voting—and one new Organizational Membership category. General members can now be based anywhere in the US, and can access ROOTS’s programs and services, but they are not Board members. Voting members, on the other hand, are required to live in the ROOTS service area, and are considered Board members with fiscal and legal responsibility to ROOTS. Voting members must assume trusteeship for ROOTS and play a role in governing the organization, including performing functions such as voting in new members, electing the Executive Committee, and approving changes to by-laws, policies,

ROOTS Adaptive Changes through the *Innovation Lab*: A Summary

Areas of Adaptive Change	'Before' Innovation Lab	'After' Innovation Lab
Membership Categories and Responsibilities	**Voting members** were based in the U.S South, and had access to ROOTS grants and services, but were also automatically inducted to ROOTS Board of Directors, with fiduciary and legal responsibilities. **Introductory Members** got a one-time discounted registration ($20) to annual ROOTS Week Retreat. They could 'convert' to Voting membership through an in-person nomination by another Voting member at ROOTS week. **Satellite members** were non-Southern artists with no fiduciary, Board, or Voting responsibilities.	**New membership structure:** **General members** can be based anywhere in the US, and have the same benefits as Voting members but do not have formal governance responsibilities on the Board. General members are encouraged to participate in the work of the organization, and can access ROOTS services and funding opportunities. ROOTS' programs, services artistic assistance and grants however, continue to prioritize members living in their Southern service region, and additional requirements for eligibility apply in some cases. ROOTS' staff make exceptions to practice in order to serve the mission and strategic plan. **Voting members** are based in the U.S South, and inducted as Board members with fiduciary and legal responsibilities. They play a role in governing ROOTS, voting in new members, and electing the Executive Committee. Voting members can access ROOTS grants and services. **Organizational members** are non-profits, companies, ensembles, co-operatives, community centers, and other organizational structures all over the U.S that are in allyship with ROOTS, and are aligned with ROOTS mission and vision.

Areas of Adaptive Change	'Before' Innovation Lab	'After' Innovation Lab
Membership Benefits and Privileges	**Voting members** were Southern artists who automatically served on ROOTS' Board, and could access all of ROOTS grants and services, including fee discounts to ROOTS programs, eligibility for artistic assistance and partnerships. **Introductory Members** had no access to ROOTS grants and services and no voting privileges, until they converted to Voting membership at ROOTS Week. **Satellite members** were non-Southern artists with no access to ROOTS grants or partnerships, and no voting privileges.	**General Members** can access all the benefits of ROOTS programs, partnerships, re-granting services and discounts even if they do not live in the South. Under strategic direction from staff, ROOTS programs and assistance continue to prioritize Southern members. General members are not required to serve on the ROOTS Board, but are encouraged to participate in the work of the organization. **Voting members** are based in the South and can access all the benefits of ROOTS programs, partnerships, re-granting services and discounts. They are also inducted as Board members with fiduciary and legal responsibilities, and play an important role in the governance of ROOTS. **Organizational Members** may list their organizational news and activities in ROOTS publications and post their profile on the ROOTS website They benefit from regular access and exposure to ROOTS regional network.
Membership Induction	**Introductory members** could sign up for discounted registration to ROOTS Week anytime through an online application. **Satellite members** were inducted in person at the annual ROOTS Week Retreat. **Voting members** were inducted through a system that was infrequent and less accessible. Members had to mandatorily travel to the annual ROOTS Week Retreat and be voted in by existing Voting members.	Applications for all three levels of General, Voting and Organizational membership are now available anytime, and accessible online and by phone. **General and Organizational members** can be inducted on a rolling basis. Applications are reviewed by staff, and there is no requirement to attend the annual ROOTS Week Retreat. **Voting members** can apply anytime, and applications are reviewed and approved quarterly by the Membership Work Group at the annual ROOTS Week Retreat, and two more times during the year on conference calls that are open to all Voting members. Attendance at annual ROOTS Week is not required to be voted in.

and the mission statement. Voting members who leave the South automatically become General members. ROOTS programs and services are now accessible to both General and Voting members, although there is continued focus on re-granting in its Southern service region. The new category of Organizational membership is open to non-profits, companies, ensembles, co-operatives, community centers, and other organizational structures from all over the US that are in allyship with ROOTS and are aligned with ROOTS's mission and vision. All three of these new member categories have the same annual membership dues of $40 per year.

"At ROOTS Week, after this proposal passed, it seemed that members made speedy use of the changes in structure, with about half joining on as Voting Board members, and the other half joining as General members," said Brunk. This development also suggested that ROOTS was on the correct track with these changes . . . that a large number of their members did indeed want the benefits of membership without the responsibilities of being on the Board. Brunk also explained that some members questions and concerns about the proposal changes centered on what exactly constituted democratic participation in ROOTS. "Some people thought that being a Board member is foundational to ROOTS because that's how they can participate in how it's governed," she said. "Other folks argued that ROOTS can actually become more participatory by giving people a choice in how they want to be involved, either as a Board member or not. For example, there was a pretense prior to these changes that just because everyone is a Board member, that means they have access to the same information and knowledge, and are thus prepared to decide and vote on the budget and assume fiduciary responsibility for the organization. Many people believed ROOTS needed an option for people who didn't want that level of responsibility."

The second big change in membership policies was expanded frequency of induction opportunities for prospective members. Now, a simple online membership application is available year-round to all levels of members so that people interested in joining the ROOTS network do not have to wait until the annual ROOTS Week gathering to be voted in. Induction for General and Organizational membership is reviewed by staff on a rolling basis and does not require attendance at the annual ROOTS Week Retreat. Additionally, applications for Voting members are reviewed by a Membership

– *Sketches by Ariston Jacks, ROOTS Innovation Team Member*

Working Group quarterly, at the annual ROOTS Week, and two more times during the year through conference calls and virtual elections open to all Voting members. Voting members can also nominate themselves for the Board if they want. “This new system opens things up and makes ROOTS more accessible,” Minner said. “We’ve also moved our election of new members during ROOTS Week to the middle of the week, on a Wednesday. It used to happen on a Sunday when folks were already tired, packing up and ready to leave. Now we can nominate new members online and elect them more easily.”

These membership policy changes eliminate some structural barriers to access, and the new categories also allow individual members to proactively choose an optimal level of engagement and responsibility for themselves. Turner anticipated that this new membership structure would attract more members. “It’s easier to see a clear pathway on how to enter our network now and to understand the responsibility of membership,” he said. At the culmination of Phase 3 of the Lab, ROOTS had implemented a serious upgrade to their membership policies. Their new structure encourages empowered participation, is more closely aligned with their anti-oppression mandate, and reflects their expanding national footprint.

“At the culmination of Phase 3 of the Lab, ROOTS had implemented a serious upgrade to their membership policies. Their new structure encourages empowered participation, is more closely aligned with their anti-oppression mandate, and reflects their expanding national footprint.”

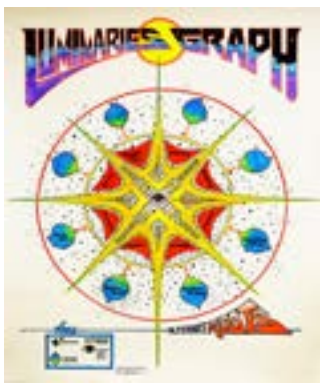
— Nayantara Sen, ROOTS Profile Writer

DISCOVERIES

The team experienced a set of breakthroughs early on in their process that helped them move past difficult conversations about change-making and clarified strategic directions for their project. They discovered that there was a wide gap between policies written in their bylaws and deeply ingrained cultural traditions. Ashley Walden Davis, ROOTS Programs Director, explained that, "Many traditions and practices have been codified as ROOTS 'law' when in fact there are very few times and processes that our bylaws actually mandate." Minner said that the team initially got mired in reviewing these policies before realizing that they didn't have to change them. "We killed a couple of days in Atlanta going through the bylaws, which were sparse and left a lot to be desired," said Minner. "We thought it was going to be intense, that were going to have to call in the lawyers. But then we realized we didn't have to change that much." The parsing out of the distinction between organizational policies and cultural practices at this early juncture allowed the ROOTS team to refocus their attention on culture-shifting and member engagement, instead of pushing through a bureaucratic policy change process with their Executive Committee and Board.

In Phase 2, the team also participated in an unconventional process of using graphic illustration and visual metaphors to analyze their membership and governance structures. During the first meeting of this phase, Ariston Jacks, a visual artist and new member of ROOTS, was doodling in the margins of his notebook and breaking down difficult ideas into visual components. The ROOTS team noticed this, encouraged him to bring his artistry into each subsequent meeting, and provided him with the tools and space necessary to make visual art an intentional part of their overall process and its output. At the week-long intensive in Virginia, Jacks drew the the ROOTS Lumaries Chart, a graphic representation of ROOTS's mission and organizational structure.

Organizational change language is often industry-specific, jargon-heavy, and inaccessible to artists outside the mainstream non-profit fold (which is a large part of ROOTS's base). In multiple meetings, Jacks was able to unpack and simplify these ideas into a



– *Sketches by Ariston Jacks, ROOTS Innovation Team Member*

more accessible, visual language. “I was asking simple questions about the jargon, and this made them go back and revise their approaches,” Jacks said. As he drew, the team began to see connections and gaps between organizational parts that were previously missed. Jacks visually represented their transition over the course of five days, which enabled the team to explain complex ideas to themselves. “I was drawing visual aids that prompted the group to solve problems at a higher level,” said Jacks. “We stumbled upon that. If I hadn’t been in the room, maybe we wouldn’t have discovered it.” This transformative experience was made possible by two things: the strategic value that ROOTS placed on ensuring a diversity of voices—especially the mix of old and new members—was in the room, and the centralizing of art in how they perform their daily work. “Art is our superpower,” said Minner. “We reminded ourselves of that a lot. We took art breaks.” With Jacks’s support, the ROOTS team engaged in an exploration of ideas through art instead of using art to simply capture their thought processes.

EmcArts collaborated with Ariston Jacks to make a short animated video about organizational assumptions at the core of Alternate ROOTS *Innovation Lab* project. See the video here.

A major shift in assumptions for the team centered on the idea of innovation itself. As they workshopped ideas for alternative membership structures, the team realized that the project had less to do with fashioning something new and more to do with creating institutional alignment with their original values of participatory democracy, connectedness and anti-oppression, values that their strategic plan highlighted as well. “We weren’t really there to do something new, but to solidify and advance a strategic direction that was already put in place,” Turner said. “It was about not feeling pressure to create something new just to be innovative. Instead, we looked back to the Civil Rights Movement, to the history of the South, [and] to the history of ROOTS’s own formation. This allowed us to select strategies that reflected our organizational values. We connected with members not through the internet or social media, but through phone calls, through visiting someone, through ownership that’s created by one-on-one engagement.” The team also came up with a beautiful and powerful purpose statement that reflected their vision for the Lab. “We would refer to this purpose statement when things got hard,” said Jacks. “We used it as a reminder to keep us on track.” The reframing of innovation as remembrance and return, or as going back to ROOTS’s history also served a re-energizing purpose for the team. It allowed them to pitch their proposals through the lens of strategic institutional alignment and integrity so that their new membership structure would reflect their original intentions and values instead of simply being a trendy experiment. In a society that places high value on the role of free markets and innovation as indicators of progress, looking back was in fact a radical move. “At one point during our conversations, [Executive Director] Carlton [Turner] gave us an example. He said back in the day, his grandparents used to make their own clothes and grow their own food. That used to be called poor. Now it’s called organic, green and sustainable. For our folks who have Southern roots, this was a strong analogy for us,” Minner explained.

ROOTS’s decision to launch an internal Campaign for Change focused on stakeholder engagement also produced a decisive shift in organizational practice and tested ROOTS’s own assumptions about member participation. The campaign served as an internal model—a test-run or pilot—for how ROOTS could facilitate and operationalize large-scale change-making processes that are in keeping with their values. The campaign systematically demonstrated how to have deep, sustained conversations with ROOTS members that were civil, did not get stuck in inaction, and also advanced the work. The success of the campaign in sharing information, generating trust and transparency, and soliciting buy-in from members indicated that an organizing strategy and lens was the best way for ROOTS to bring alignment and integrity to their organizational intentions, processes, and products. “In the Campaign for Change, the actual policy proposals for membership restructuring were the object, but actually, it was the whole campaign that was supporting institutional change-making,” Brunk said. “The entire campaign was supporting ROOTS in having conversations in positive, democratic ways that advanced the work on timelines and with heavy engagement and buy-in that felt qualitatively different from the approaches they had taken in recent years.”

"Right now, our structures and practices lack the necessary clarity, strategy & equity to live and accomplish our mission. This project will allow us the space and time to analyze and clarify our current practices and envision potential points of transformation and create a plan for action. As a result, all people entering the organization can live and enact the mission and vision of ROOTS and are able to move collectively towards a social order of justice, permeated by love."

— ROOTS Purpose Statement in their *Innovation Lab*

– *Sketch by Ariston Jacks, ROOTS Innovation Team Member*

"The [Lab] experience reaffirmed my belief in teams and that one quality that makes a good team is diversity–intellectual, emotional and spiritual diversity. Two other reflections come to mind: 1) The recognition that innovation is prominent in artists' daily work, and that artists already possess a vocabulary to express innovation and that their lexicon is more powerful for them than terms formulated by social scientists or innovation consultants, and 2) That a large measure of social justice innovation is remembrance. For example, our team adopted the language of Rev. James Lawson in his founding statement for SNCC (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference): The search for a social order of justice permeated by love.

— Dudley Cocke, ROOTS Founding Member"

OBSTACLES & ENABLERS

Digging into this ambitious membership restructuring process wasn't always easy for the ROOTS team, and they did find themselves in many messy conversations about institutional history, oppression and access, and conflict around the proposed changes. Overall, the team agreed that safe space was created for healthy and constructive discord, since the vision of a more diverse, accessible and responsive ROOTS was at the forefront of their efforts. Davis added that at times it was hard not to get bogged down by long-term cultural practices that weren't serving them well anymore. "We were examining these practices and asking, who was the 'we' that agreed to these mythological, engrained practices in the first place," she said. Another challenge the team dealt with was the tendency to make the same decision over and over. "We have a practice of wanting to make sure that everyone has a voice, because we always want to check for engagement and inclusivity," said McCord. "At times it felt hard to make a decision and stick with it."

"Folks were nervous about these big changes, and excited too," Brunk said. "There were concerns [about] what if it's too risky to change? What if the culture is solidified and there's too much resistance? Could ROOTS possibly make enough changes that would stick?" Brunk's experience as a non-artist organizer was an essential asset in this context because it allowed her to see the change-making and engagement possibilities through a community organizing lens. "Every conversation can be changed as long as there's a good organizing plan," she said. To address members' worries about calcified culture or resistance, ROOTS expanded General membership and access to grants and programs to members living outside of the South, even though they originally thought that there would be fears from members about losing their Southern focus. However, this turned out not to be a massive concern because the new membership policy continued to require Voting members, who carry governance responsibilities, to live in the South. "The larger concerns raised were about which view of democratic organization was right for ROOTS in this moment," Brunk explained. "If everyone is automatically a Board member, are you restricting their democratic rights by adding more responsibility, or are you protecting their democratic rights?" This core question was at the heart of most of the Executive Committee deliberations, as well as many of the *Innovation Lab* team meetings.

"The larger concers raised were about which view of democratic organization was right for ROOTS in this moment. If everyone is automatically a Board member, are you restricting or protecting their democratic rights?"

— Carrie Brunk, ROOTS *Campaign for Change* Organizer

In redesigning their membership policies, ROOTS was also diving into a challenge that was core to its identity—the delicate dance between honoring place-based tradition and history, investing resources in the South, and modernizing to meet the needs of diverse and growing members living in all parts of the country. For an organization that embraces change, there was also a cautious tension to make sure that they didn't leave things behind or disregard contributions of founding members. deNobriga explained that as a ROOTS elder and founding member, it was important for her to be involved in the initial phase of the Lab so that she could weigh in about historical practices. "The main barrier was the burden of history," deNobriga. said. "But overall there is a consistently high degree of trust in our leadership. So we are all inclined to say, 'Hey, let's try this new experiment.' "

The level of trust between members, as well as ROOTS's practice of honoring history and building interpersonal relationships within their network, makes them a unique, compassionate, and high-functioning group. Their mindfulness about checking their decisions with all Voting members contributes to a culture of mutual respect and consistently high stakeholder engagement. The fact that the group is artist-led and artist-centered with anti-oppressive tenets at the core of its mission makes ROOTS a creative, adventurous, and fierce organization. During the *Innovation Lab*, ROOTS also re-confirmed that its biggest assets are its members who are empowered and committed to experiment alongside leadership.

> "We were examining these practices and asking, who was the 'we' that agreed to these mythological, engrained practices in the first place"
>
> — Ashley Davis, ROOTS Programs Director

IMPACTS

In the last phase on implementation, ROOTS already has a lot of their work cut out for them. Their new membership structure has the potential to dramatically change their organizational culture, while their strategic plan presents ambitious opportunities for organizational development. Since General and Voting membership categories have significantly fewer barriers to access due to year-round voting online, the ROOTS team expects that this will now attract hundreds of new members. "We're anticipating big changes ahead," said Turner. "We've received large strategic grants to add capacity, and we're expecting more applications for our grants program, more regional events, and an increase in

participation." Expanded programming through ROOTS membership, events, organizational partnerships and grants will have a tremendous impact on the field of socially-engaged arts, and within ROOTS's Southern service region in particular. However, rapid growth of this sort would have to be carefully managed, since it could undermine the personable, relational and community organizing spirit of ROOTS. deNobriga captured this challenge by saying: "The question is really about our organizational culture and how membership reflects our values. We were simultaneously holding conflicting values in balance... we wanted to be small and big, tight and connected, but also broad and inclusive." deNobriga also said that the upcoming work will be to balance quantitative increase in membership with strategies to maintain qualitative relationships—the kind of responsive, durable relationships that ROOTS has always been known for.

"The question is really about our organizational culture and how membership reflects our values. We were simultaneously holding conflicting values in balance... we wanted to be small and big, tight and connected, but also broad and inclusive."

— Kathie deNobriga, ROOTS Founding Member

To manage these upcoming changes, ROOTS is already increasing their capacity and hiring new staff. They are also identifying ways to overlay and intersect changes in leadership development, staff roles and structures with these new membership policies. ROOTS is leaning into these changes with courage and passion, and a high degree of readiness for adaptive change-making. Specifically, they are leveraging the momentum, inspiration and organizational will generated through the Lab's membership restructuring project to catapult ROOTS into expanded organizational growth and stability. There are impending questions around changing staff configurations, work-planning, recruitment pipelines, member-led personnel evaluations, and staff's relationship to members. "The Campaign for Change experience helped with right-sizing and reorienting the relationship between staff and membership in a positive way," said Brunk. "Staff had certain habits before that benefited from a different kind of engagement with membership through this campaign. Now that ROOTS is restructuring staff roles, they will be able to use the Lab process as a guide in proactively reshaping the staff-member connections across the organization."

The impact of ROOTS Lab process has extended far beyond the original complex challenge of membership redesign, and is now spilling its' transformative potential into the broader areas of staffing and strategic organizational alignment. In many ways, the Lab has enabled more congruence between ROOTS membership structures and its core values and ethos, and this

alignment translates into better systems in other areas of organizational life. Davis also believes that now more than ever, the ROOTS mission is relevant to the lives of Americans and Southerners. “These changes allow easier access to the ROOTS community—a coalition of artists, activists, culture workers, and educators working toward the elimination of all forms of oppression.” While there is still more work head, ROOTS members believe that their experience in the *Innovation Lab* has provided new, collaborative models for change-making in the field. From valuing remembrance as innovation, to centralizing participatory democracy, community organizing and arts-making in their processes, ROOTS has been innovating through all phases of the Lab. With its new membership policies, it is now more strongly positioned as a modernized, formidable network that is on the leading edge of the entire field of arts and activism. “ROOTS holds a big space for artists in the South—nobody else does what we do,” Minner said. Increased access to ROOTS means increased access to justice.”

> “The impact of ROOTS *Lab* process has extended far beyond the original complex challenge of membership redesign, and is now spilling its’ transformative potential into the broader areas of staffing and strategic organizational alignment. In many ways, the Lab has enabled more congruence between ROOTS membership structures and its core values and ethos.”
>
> — Nayantara Sen, ROOTS Profile Writer

JANE ADAMS HULL-HOUSE MUSEUM

Epiphanies and Contradictions in the Art of Slowing Down: The Porch Project

By Maribel Alvarez, Ph.D.

PROJECT SUMMARY

In 2014, a team from the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum at the University of Illinois, Chicago set out to question the assumption that more and faster actions in cultural practices are always better. They asked, instead: What would happen if a cultural institution and the cultural workers within embraced a different notion of community impact—one based on the assumption of "slowness?" Inspired by the slow food movement, a team from the Hull-House Museum used the EmcArts *Innovation Lab* process to prototype a new approach to community engagement they called the "Porch Project" to connect more deeply to their surrounding community and to their legacy as a space for service, education, and advocacy for immigrants and low-income residents. In effect, the porch at Hull House turned the museum's wall inside out, and became the site for both curated and informal programs that exponentially expanded the range of experiences for visitors to the museum.

– The Hull-House Museum front porch, which was activated through the Porch Project

> “Responsiveness and speed have become, perhaps erroneously, conflated through the professionalization of community-based work.”
>
> — Maribel Alvarez, Hull-House Museum Profile Wri.

– Students from the Merit School of Music performed for their parents, evoking ull House's historic music programs from the turn of the century.

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

In common usage, the phrase "slow down" can express the ambivalence Americans generally feel towards the marriage of time and enterprise. Spoken in the stern tone of a parent to a child, the meaning is usually virtuous: "*Slow down…you are going too fast to pay attention to what really matters.*" Invoked by talking heads in cable news shows, the words can, ostensibly, suggest trouble: *"this week we saw a significant slow-down in the NASDAQ."*

As a society with roots in Anglo-Saxon Puritan ethics, Americans tend to have mixed feelings about the notion of slowness. On the one hand, we value slowness as an emblem of confidence; we presume that success comes to those who are focused and steady. Fast talkers and "nervous" energy largely breed distrust. On the other hand, we admire swift actions: opportunities have to be *seized*; procrastination is frowned upon, and conventional wisdom tells us that rewards accrue to decisive risk-takers, and permeate every part of our lives, including the way we conduct business.

Although not always explicitly acknowledged, most nonprofit business development models are predicated on the assumption of speedy actions. Stasis is largely considered a symptom of trouble or stagnation: for example, a fractured board, an indecisive executive, or a "set-in-their-ways staff" that causes the institution to move slowly. Organizations whose mandate requires being responsive to community needs has usually meant going beyond the call of duty to add programs that address the latest community issues: a police shooting of a young Black man, an imminent economic collapse, an environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, for example. Responsiveness and speed have become, perhaps erroneously, conflated through the professionalization of community-based work.

The actions that emerge out of these grassroots mobilizations—usually artist-driven—often occur without the benefit of designated grants or set-aside funds. The work that artists and cultural workers put into spontaneous, energizing community-based efforts are usually accomplished with their own bodies and investment through uncompensated labor. As swiftly as the actions bloom, they also quickly wither. The cost of maintaining momentum often proves to be too high. Guerrilla exhibitions might be stymied by curatorial plans that have been drawn months in advance; generative conversations take a back seat to the revenue-generating performance season, and social media campaigns feel scattered in light of responding to the latest viral crisis to hit the blogosphere.

And then there's the pattern where busy organizations tend to fare well in funding competitions, where they are often asked to submit lists of program accomplishments for the last three years, with numbers of people served and group demographics carefully compiled. One unspoken assumption rears its head consistently: more is better, and faster is better.

What would happen if a cultural institution and the cultural workers within embraced a different notion of community impact — one based on the assumption of "slowness?"

What would it mean for an institution already committed to raising awareness around social justice to redefine itself as a place where dialogue becomes actualized? What external and internal dynamics of art-making and cultural interpretation would this shift challenge? And what difference would it make toward the movement for social change?

In 2014, the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum at the University of Illinois, Chicago, set out to investigate and question the assumptions that motivate (and reward) "fast" actions in cultural practices. The Hull-House Museum carries forward the mission of preserving and developing the original Hull-House as a site for interpreting and continuing the historic settlement

house vision of linking research, education, and social engagement in community life.

Hull-House, founded in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, was a place where immigrants gathered to study, debate, and to acquire the necessary skills required to live in their new country. The museum is comprised of two of the settlement complex's original thirteen buildings—the Hull-Home and the Residents' Dining Hall—spaces that were used in a variety of ways to support immigrant life, including as a nursery school, a library, and a meeting place for social and political dialogue.

Settlement houses emerged in the late 1880s, first in England and later spreading to the United States, with more than 500 settlements across the country at the movement's peak in the late 1920s. Upper and middle class citizens would move to settlements and provide social services like education and childcare to the poor residents in urban communities. Reformers hoped that settlements would bridge divisions between the "haves" and "have-nots," creating greater social understanding and exchange in communities. For the poor, settlements served as turn-of-the-century hubs where immigrants who were displaced by urbanization and industrialization could organize themselves, acquire skills, and develop resources for full participation in their communities.

It is hard to overstate the role that settlement houses played in establishing many of the social "safety net" services that today we take for granted. When Addams and Starr first opened Hull-House in 1889, they had very modest goals. Initially, they hoped to offer art and literary education to their less fortunate neighbors, but the Hull-House quickly grew beyond what either woman could have imagined. The settlement house continued to evolve to meet the needs of the community and soon, at the request of the surrounding community, Hull-House residents began to offer classes to help new immigrants become more integrated into American society, such as English language, cooking, sewing and technical skills, and American government. Hull-House became not only a cultural center with music, art, and theater offerings, but also a safe haven, a place where the immigrants living on Chicago's Near West Side could find companionship, support, and the assistance they needed for coping with life in the modern city. Hull House in Chicago, under Addams' fierce leadership, was a pioneer in establishing the first juvenile justice court, the first public playground,

– The Hull-House Museum brought its front porch programming to the South Side Community Art Center, where visitors discussed and demonstrated the African-Diasporic tradition of hair braiding, which is practiced on stoops, in kitchens, and in beauty salons across the globe.

– Hull House offered dialogues about immigration on the front porch for public audiences

the first pre-school day care for children of the poor, the first food pantry and many other core services. These services were developed and cemented on a core belief on human creativity; therefore, arts, language and culture offerings were intrinsic to the Hull House approach to social reform. In 1935, Jane Addams became the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace prize for her work. Before its closure in 2012, the Hull-House settlement became a system of community and neighborhood centers scattered around Chicago.

In its current iteration, the Hull-House Museum aims to establish connections between Addams' legacy and contemporary social issues through continued research, education, and public engagement. The museum is housed in the original Hull-House, where Ms. Addams also lived, and is charged with preserving both the physical historic property as well as developing the programs and exhibitions that tell the story of the social reform and the settlement movement in order to inspire new generations. The social reform mandate of the Museum is part and parcel of its core identity, and this is mostly expressed in the subject matters or topics that comprise the exhibitions and public programs. Although the content of its curatorial program reflects the mission and vision of the original Hull-House settlement, the container of a museum sometimes obscures it.

Hull-House was poised to be displaced from its Near Westside location at Halsted and Polk streets by the University of Illinois's expansion plan to build its Chicago Circle campus in 1965, resulting in an estimated 8,000 people and more than 600 businesses being evacuated. To appease community opposition to the plan—including numerous lawsuits until the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case in 1963—the original Residents Dining Hall and Hull-House buildings were preserved prominently on campus facing Halsted Street. Today, academic and artistic professionals, many of whom live outside of the Near West Side community in which the institution resides, staff the museum although it still functions within the settlement model.

Whereas the original Hull-House sought to give voice to the informal cultural expressions of its residents (covering the range from painting to ceramics to gardening and the culinary arts), the Museum is now professionalized with curatorial expertise, research and pedagogic objectives. There is no question that its exhibitions, public talks, workshops, and events carry a definitive

LEISURE AS HUMAN RIGHT

A popular bumper sticker seen in American roads reads: "*Unions—The People Who Brought You The Weekend*." As the porch of the Hull-House Museum transformed into a lab for informal democratic culture filled with chatter and improvised games, it almost became too easy to forget what protracted social struggles had preceded the basic establishment of leisure time as a hard-earned right of the working class in the United States. The movement to make into law the 8-hour work day, the accumulation of vacation days, the building of public playgrounds—these were humane dislocations of power and capital that Jane Addams strongly advocated for.

In today's social climate, the nonprofit staffer is often neglected as a worker. Often, it is through his or her body and labor that "good work" for society gets capitalized. In most instances, their intellectual labor does not receive any of the protections afforded to tenured scholars. Even in a project that explicitly sought to question the ideology of efficiency, the Porch Project was compelled to offer deliverables. "The irony is that the project about slowness created a lot more work," Marks observed.

social value that favors being inclusive of many invisible community sectors through alliances, partnerships and direct engagement efforts. Nonetheless, it is also clear that the Museum is not a service agency, an activist training hub or an advocacy and organizing grassroots organization. If seen within the context of an institution of higher education, this change is a natural development. When examined in light of the empowering social values that underscore the Hull-House legacy, the professionalization of the cultural work of Hull-House has been a subject of debate and tension for the staff and the community. Whose voice is ultimately affirmed in their programs? What perspectives remained in the shadows? How can visitors to the museum have a more impactful experience leading to reflection and social change?

The idea of "slowness" as a path to explore the larger question of impact intrigued museum staff, and they chose to explore the tensions and contradictions through the *Innovation Lab*. Can impact be measured by quick fixes and "attention-grabbing" hyper activity or does a long-term idea of impact demand a certain lingering, meandering, and reflecting? "Does being hyper-busy all the time stand in the way of forming more meaningful relationships?" said Associate Director Lisa Junkin Lopez. As the staff pondered that question, three distinct dimensions surfaced: the relationship among visitors, partners, and staff.

As the goal of becoming a more effective institution took center stage in their inquiry, it became clear to museum staff that producing more meaningful visitor experiences, creating more substantive and egalitarian community partnerships, and hiring and utilizing more critically reflective staff were all connected in terms of the *time* it took for each of these outcomes to form. In each instance, Junkin Lopez said, time pressures had erected an invisible but very seductive "instrumentality;" in other words, things didn't grow organically, but in almost all cases, situations were intentionally crafted and staged. Performance outcomes steered the interactions to pre-determined parameters: visitors came and saw; partners signed up; staff produced. But, what else was not happening? And most importantly, was something being lost in that process that had intrinsic value to the goal of creating more meaningful and socially relevant experiences that the museum aimed to fulfill?

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It became clear to museum staff that producing more meaningful visitor experiences, creating more substantive and egalitarian community partnerships, hiring and utilizing more critically reflective staff were all connected in terms of the *time* it took for each of these outcomes to form.

— Maribel Alvarez, Hull-House Museum Profile Writer

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PROCESS

About the Lab

Hull House Museum was accepted into Round 3 of EmcArts' *Innovation Lab* for Museums and started the program in July 2013. The *Innovation Lab* is a three-phase program that provides a strong framework in which new strategies can be explored and prototyped in relatively low-stakes environments before a full launch. The first phase focuses on researching and assessing the adaptive challenge at hand, and developing a cross-constituent team to plan strategies for intervention. The second phase accelerates the project by building organizational momentum through decision-making at a five-day intensive retreat. The third phase involves prototyping, evaluating and refining the adaptive interventions. Read more about the *Innovation Lab* for Museums.

Valuing "slow" actions above fast actions focused on efficiency requires somewhat of a counter-intuitive move. It took the Museum staff approximately one year to develop a process that would prototype a different approach to their work. The idea of taking time to let the ideas "cook" during the *Innovation Lab* was important. It was also somewhat contrarian to the habits the Hull-House Museum has developed as a high-performing cultural institution.

There has always been a prized level of intellectual satisfaction in the Museum's style of "guerrilla programming." "Hull-House is quite comfortable taking risks and challenging assumptions," said Annie Marks, a facilitator with EmcArts who worked with the Hull-House team through the *Innovation Lab* process. "As an institution they have good muscle memory to think issues [through] deeply and not hesitate to take new things on," she said.

A few precedents in their own practice offered a good place to start. Among them, the Slow Food Movement, out of which several museum programs had developed over the last six years. A global movement that opposes "fast food" practices by insisting that people rediscover the communal experience of eating, this culinary innovation was one of the first serious inquiries about slowness to emerge in American communities. Also helpful to museum staff was an Alternative Labeling project they had undertaken. In the project, an artist had re-written the wall label that accompanied Jane Addams's travel medicine kit into a 40-page prose poem. Baffled about to what to do, staff decided to design a 30-minute experience around the text: A visitor could sit in Ms. Addams's room and read the poem at leisure while staff served them tea. A third source of inspiration came from several Hull-House Settlement movement pioneers' theories of play and improvisational theater. A Restorative Justice movement project, through which the museum education staff had received training, provided a last source of inspiration. Designed to collectively identify wrongdoings between individuals and within the criminal justice system, this movement teaches the value of "slow healing" through painful conversations.

Informed by these breakthrough ideas, the museum staff chose to explore "slowness" during the prototyping process as a path toward meaningful relationships; they were surprised to learn that they were already closer to creating more meaningful relationships than they expected.

The wrap-around porch that serves as a visible physical marker of the Hull-House building was activated as the centerpiece of the "slow museum" project. More than 6,000 visitors and passersby participated in activities such as conversations, drinks and meal sharing over the summer months of 2014. In effect turning the museum's wall inside out, the porch at Hull-House became the site for both curated and informal programs that exponentially expanded the range of experiences for visitors to the museum. Amongst cookouts, poetry readings, yoga classes, facilitated dialogues, portrait painting workshops, and musical concerts, the public gained a greater role in shaping the museum's activities and programs. A different sense of stewardship around the Hull-House legacy and culture began to emerge.

The wrap-around porch that serves as a visible physical marker of the Hull-House building was activated as the centerpiece of the “slow museum” project. More than 6,000 visitors and passersby participated in activities such as conversations, drinks and meal sharing over the summer months of 2014.

"The porch around the Hull-House building was like a magnet," said Isis Ferguson, the Program Manager who ran the Porch Project. Ferguson supervised four recreation workers who were hired to curate a series of programs and gatherings, many of which grew out of conversations with community organizations and other cultural centers throughout the city. Some popular programs included the *Edge of Desire* poetry workshops which encouraged participants to link sensuality to social organizing: "Let us desire something political," read the advertisement for the program. The *Unselfie* Project asked students age 10 and above to "look close" at another human being and sketch, draw or paint the portrait while exploring "transgressive slowness." A teach-in, organized on a Wednesday night in July, explored the racially discriminatory system of policing marijuana use among Black youth. In late August, the porch was transformed into a Belizean kitchen while people danced to the beat of Garifuna drummers.

Activating the porch around the Hull-House Museum turned out to be a revelation. "A porch, unlike a gallery inside a museum, allows for multiple types of public engagement," Ferguson said. "Some activities were organic and some were planned. Scholars came by and sat with us, university staff stopped by for a cold drink… there's something about sitting. The furniture attracted bodies. Some of the museum staff brought their laptops and sat at the picnic tables outside. It was rejuvenating."

For an organization whose mission is also related to social reform such as the Hull-House Museum, defining what makes a museum function better can be a loaded question. To the extent that being a "better" institution in conventional practice implies doing more to fulfill the mission, slowing down did not feel like a viable option for the Hull-House Museum. "The pace at Hull-House is generally very fast," said Ferguson. "To be flexible to community needs, to galvanize people and be responsive, our approach usually involves quick analysis and a rigorous platform of rapid programming," she added.

The concept of slowness, as part of a prevailing ethos of urgency in social justice movements, has always been like an elephant in the room for museum staff. "We embraced an idea we didn't know at first how to define," explained Junkin Lopez. "We knew that we didn't mean 'slow' as in 'set in your ways' or 'unresponsive,' yet we recognized in 'slowness' the idea of being intentional, and that referred us back to what we valued about our work."

"The first meetings [to plan the Porch Project] were very meandering," noted Marks. "We ate together; we lingered; we listed several options for possible projects, all of which were counter-intuitive to [what the staff saw as their] strengths. In the end, a desire to challenge insularity became the running thread. [They asked questions like:] What if we took the time to engage directly the community's different points of view? Hull-House staff hold their curatorial value so preciously—I mean, they feel strongly that they have things to say, but are they so principled that it also makes them difficult partners? What if they invited the community to just hang out, and chat, and drink lemonade without any pre-determined outcome in mind? [The concept of] slowness by itself didn't convince anyone, but as an idea attached to their working process, it made sense."

– Preparing for a day of Porch activities

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A porch, unlike a gallery inside a museum, allows for multiple types of public engagement. Some activities were organic and some were planned. Scholars came by and sat with us, university staff stopped by for a cold drink… there’s something about sitting. The furniture attracted bodies. Some of the museum staff brought their laptops and sat at the picnic tables outside. It was rejuvenating.

— Isis Ferguson, The Porch Project Program Manager

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– The Porch was used for local meetings, informal dialogues, refreshments, community building and art activities

DISCOVERIES

Reflexivity in their museum practices was not new to Hull-House staff, but up until the Porch project, their focus was mostly confined to matters of content. In many ways, the staff exercise a radical ethics of popular historiography since they take great pride in presenting historically sound and rigorously researched material in museum programs. The Porch Project went further, though, by materializing the insights gained through previous experiments into a new form for approaching how programming is planned and executed. That form utilized community participation as the epicenter of programming. Participation was defined largely in terms of open-ended conversations, structured and un-structured feedback circles, or by taking charge of specific programs that fell outside the purview of museum staff's expertise. For example, the museum will revive Ella's Daughters, a Chicago-based network of artists, scholars, and writers working in the tradition of civil rights activist Ella Baker, through potential programming like youth and adult teach-ins, a reading group, a re-vamped 7 Sisters Campaign, and possible events tied to the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer. In another example the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health installed artwork created by Hull-House youth to provoke conversations around sexuality.

"The Porch project taught us something really special about the meaning of slowness as defined in terms of relationship building," said Junkin Lopez. "In essence, the question we ended up examining had something to do with slowing down in order to sustain ourselves. Our connection to the community is at the center of why we exist as an institution. Sustainability for us will always be connected to going back to the quality of the relationships we form."

But the matter of sustainability also took unforeseen shades of meaning as the project evolved. In some areas the change was welcome and transparent, and was considerable enough to cause a ripple effect after

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— Lisa Junkin Lopez, Associate Director, Hull-House Museum"

the project ended. For example, methods for delivering content were shaken out of their conventional protocols: Staff—already responsive to community desires—was challenged to listen more deeply to an outspoken public, suddenly empowered to evaluate art offerings on the spot. Professional curators skilled at weaving stories of social change in coherent tableaus were asked to leave programming decisions in the hands of recreation workers whose relationships with communities went beyond their role as museum staff. In fact, recreation workers often spent time in dialogue with reform and social-justice minded partners that did not result in direct programs at the Porch. In some cases, the programs on the Porch facilitated "talk-backs" that were not directly related to museum exhibits or themes. For example, a night for updating Wikipedia entries by "queering" them was convened in early September.

Although the floodgates of public engagement were pried open by this variety of happenings, the exchanges between the museum and the public were not always easy. On more than one occasion the museum staff was forced to confront the difficulties of negotiating the commitment to speaking to a public versus listening to it. "The relaxed space of the porch created a transformative hub where new ideas could be voiced," said Junkin Lopez. In one workshop about policing black youth, a young woman of color approached the microphone and made a statement that perpetuated a common stereotype about the role of black women in collaborating with the police to incarcerate black men, and recreation workers were at a loss on how to redirect the conversation away from stereotypes. Afterward, the end, staff spent a great deal of time reflecting on the questions raised and agreeing to a new set of dialogue protocols to help guide future conversations. The group's consensus was that while the museum was willing to make itself vulnerable as an institution that welcomed dialogue, it also needed to remain faithful to speaking up when racist or sexualized statements attempted to derail conversation and circulate simply as "opinions."

Even the porch itself as a site of informal conviviality came to light as an ideological construct that demanded further reflection. In one instance, a community partner's suggestion for a program on hair braiding and African American home businesses raised concerns about holding the program on a university campus. People were concerned about the implications of holding the program away from the specific neighborhood context, making it subject to the voyeurism of non-Black audiences, as well as to the scrutiny of law enforcement. "We learned to think about 'hospitality' more critically, both in the sense of considering the different ways that people learn—not just by what they see but where they see it—as well as how we maintain control of the boundaries of dialogue."

Without a doubt, the Porch project represented a bold step towards reflexivity around museum practices. Expediency commands a seductive hold over most aspects of cultural production nowadays. Given the rootedness of traditional notions of efficiency as ideological constructs in museum practices, Hull-House's staff decided to craft a project that was largely aspirational ("what if" things were done differently) as well as experimental ("let's lead with changes in behavior first"). After the Porch Project, Museum staff felt a greater level of commitment to inviting and sharing knowledge informally among non-experts engaged in open-ended conversation as a routine component of program planning. "After the project ended, we didn't remove the furniture from the porch," said Ferguson, succinctly summarizing the its ethos.

The Porch Project helped the Hull-House Museum push the envelope on those aspects of museum practices

– *Don't Call* was a poster project rooted in conversations about police brutality in urban communities of color. It encouraged visitors to consider dynamics of safety, violence and community accountabil-

that were most clearly implicated in the role of the institution as a social change catalyst in its community. In other words, the lessons learned from the prototype programming had the greatest chance of becoming lasting adjustments in the museum's regular practices the closer they related to the external thrust of service of the organization. In terms of the internal dynamics at play in the institutional setting of the University, the discoveries and innovations were much more modest, and in some cases negligible. Ironically, while the theme of slowness was felt throughout the museum programs, the staff in charge of producing such programs was working more than ever.

Paradoxically, the core funding structure of the Porch Project dictated the terms that constrained staff from slowing down: more programs were held in summer than ever before. In the end, the Lab funds were to support a project, which reinforces that organizations have to continue taking on projects to remain funded. The Porch Project aimed to examine leisure and question productivity as a commoditized form of culture. The only ones exempted from truly "slowing down" were the museum staff and workers. The last chapter of this story, however, has yet to be written. "At some point we had to stop and consider how we as staff were relating to the project's theme as full human beings," Junkin Lopez said. "The staff at Hull-House Museum remains committed to the idea that our work culture can benefit from our slow values and our slow lessons in community building."

> "After the project ended, we didn't remove the furniture from the porch."
>
> — Isis Ferguson, The Porch Project Program Manager

THE THEATER OFFENSIVE

Can A Continent Be Our Neighborhood?

By Kathie deNobriga

The Theater Offensive presents *River See*, a theatrical jazz performance installation by Sharon Bridgforth.
Photo by Ivy Maiorino

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Theater Offensive (TTO) entered the Innovation Lab to design a national organizing model to support and encourage Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) youth theaters nationally through the Pride Yourh Theater Alliance (PYTA). PYTA's mission is to "connect and support queer youth theater organizations, programs, and professionals committed to empowering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and allied (LGBTQA) youth in North America." Through the Innovation Lab process, the TTO team explored these questions 1) how can youth leadership be operationally central to PYTA, and 2) how can the national PYTA network take advantage of the capacities of the locally grounded organization (TTO)?

Introduction and Context

> “The Theater Offensive’s mission is to present the diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives in art so bold it breaks through personal isolation, challenges the status quo, and builds thriving communities.”

ORIGIN STORY, PART I

In 1989, a scrappy guerrilla street theater in Boston, The United Fruit Company, gave birth to The Theater Offensive (TTO), whose mission is to “present the diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender lives in art so bold it breaks through personal isolation, challenges the status quo, and builds thriving communities.” The Theater Offensive is part of a global community that celebrates being out—bringing your full, authentic self to your daily life. For many queer youth, this is a dangerous proposition, exacerbated by the realities of race and class: LGBT youth make up more than fifty percent of all homeless youth nationally. The desire to support these young people, wherever they are in their journey of self-actualization, is one of the LGBT community’s most pressing concerns, alongside the urgent need to shift perspectives and attitudes of the general public.

In 1994, under the leadership of founder Abe Rybeck, TTO responded to a state-wide Safe Schools Initiative, intended to educate teachers in Massachusetts about the needs of LGBT students who are at a much higher risk of committing suicide—more than eight times likely than their peers. Rather than focus on educating the teachers, TTO focused instead on the well-being of the students, creating an environment in which the youth could form meaningful relationships and develop skills for resiliency and personal fulfillment. Thus True Colors: OUT Youth Theater was born, one of the country’s earliest troupes of young LGBT people and their allies.

From 1994 until 2001, True Colors was a project of TTO, hiring professional artists to work within specific schools to create an original performance for the student body. Throughout the project’s run, post-performance surveys consistently demonstrated that students better

– True Colors: Out Youth Theater Troupe performance.
– Photo courtesy: Ivy Maiorino

– The Theater Offensive's Neighborhood Pride Tour at Haley House.
– Photo courtesy: Ivy Maiorino

– True Colors: Out Youth Theater Troupe during rehearsals.
– Photo courtesy: Ivy Maiorino

understood and appreciated the challenges facing their queer class-mates: 95% of audience members agreed or strongly agreed that they better understood LGBT youth issues, with 17% indicating an increase in their acceptance of sexual orientation and gender identity.

After seven years, TTO realized that True Colors needed a more concentrated focus to be truly effective and be more reflective of TTO's central values, beyond a show-by-show project, and in 2001, True Colors became a formal program of TTO. By establishing True Colors as a core program, TTO was able to pay more attention to youth leadership development and create a more diverse core of participants. Currently, 74% of True Colors participants self-identify as youth of color, 55% self-identify as low-income, and 45% identify as immigrant or first-generation Americans. True Colors joined TTO's regular programming, which included a month-long "Out On The Edge" performance festival, a spring collaborative community production, and an annual Gala (a performance event in its own right).

(Re)Evolution

During the financial crisis of 2009, TTO suspended for six months all programming other than True Colors and embarked on a strategic planning process that produced a new vision based on profound change. TTO's adaptive change fundamentally shifted everything about its work. Festival activities became spread out over the year instead of concentrated in one frenetic month, staff positions were eliminated, and programs were reimagined: TTO would no longer create big productions for the whole city of Boston, but instead engage in deep and focused work in the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, Jamaica Plain and the South End. This new program would be called "OUT in Your Neighborhood."

As a result of this plan, TTO coalesced its programming into three major components:

1. Neighborhood Productions: a guest artist, often from outside of the Boston, engages with a neighborhood group, with an outcome of informing his/her own work, in a co-creation, cross-fertilization model. This exchange between national and local collaboration later served as an example to TTO of how the two extremes could be balanced with reciprocity.

2 Cultural Events: TTO performs at community festivals, parades, etc. generated by other community groups to include an authentic queer presence. This is accomplished through True Colors' Creative Action Crew.

3 Collective Creation: the creation of original, collaborative works with neighborhood residents and community organizations, leading to full, mainstage works at neighborhood venues. TTO's collaborations with community groups emphasize the idea of art as an organizing tool and are designed to open dialogue across barriers of race, ethnicity, economics, age and sexual orientation.

Gay Youth at the Center

Woven throughout all three components above is the centrality of queer and trans youth to TTO's vision and goals. True Colors is the platform that rests on these three pillars, and has four basic activities:

- True Colors Troupe engages youth ages 14-22 year-round in theater skills training, devising, and touring. The Troupe meets 2-3 times per week, 40 weeks per year. Members receive a stipend, and peer leaders, chosen by a competitive application process, receive a higher stipend in exchange for specific duties.
- The Training Studio offers a full-range of community workshops, including the Advanced Training Program, which provides opportunities for experienced True Colors members, up to age 29, to engage in a higher level of theatrical training 20 weeks per year.
- Creative Action Crew is a troupe of experienced youth that bring workshops, advocacy and performances further into the community.
- Leadership & Inclusion Council (LIC), initiated by the youth themselves, currently advises on decisions about all TTO's youth-related programming. The next strategic step is to have them work alongside Board committees with a long-term goal of these youth to become TTO board members.

ORIGIN STORY, PART 2

One day in 2009, TTO's managing director Evelyn Francis (who at the time served as education director and founding co-chair of PYTA) received a call from a trustee of the Mukti Fund, a private foundation based in Key West who had heard about TTO's work through a panel for another foundation. Several months later, TTO was invited to submit an RFP to Mukti, and their request was funded.

At about the same time, the Pride Players at the Omaha Theater Company asked Mukti to fund a convening of the emerging field of queer youth theaters. Not unlike their constituents who often felt lonely and isolated, these organizations across the county suffered from a profound lack of connection with other groups doing similar work. With Mukti support, nine queer youth theater groups, along with three foundation trustees, attended a three-day gathering in 2010 in Orlando. The gathering was enormously useful, according to Francis, with cross sharing of evaluation and recruitment tools and techniques of devising original work tailored to this population.

The Mukti Fund asked the group if they would like to convene again, and the resounding "yes" led to a 2011 gathering in Omaha. Mukti then proposed an annual gathering, and the nascent group countered with "yes, if you'll pay for a part-time coordinator." Subsequently Mukti issued another RFP calling for an organization capable and willing to host a part-time coordinator. A peer panel selected TTO from among the three respondents.

Hosted by TTO in Boston In 2012, PYTA had grown to 20 members and began to formalize by choosing an official name, officers and committees. When Rybeck learned about the announcement of the *Innovation Lab*, he was curious and eager to navigate another adaptive change in a non-crisis mode, with good outside facilitation and a thoughtful, thorough process: "We wanted to see if we could initiate another major seismic shift, but without the pain."

Process

ABOUT THE LAB

TTO was accepted into Round 8 of EmcArts' *Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts* and started the program in February 2013. The *Innovation Lab* is a three-phase program that provides a strong framework in which new strategies can be explored and prototyped in relatively low-stakes environments before a full launch. The first phase focuses on researching and assessing the adaptive challenge at hand, and developing a cross-constituent team to plan strategies for intervention. The second phase accelerates the project by building organizational momentum through decision-making at a five-day intensive retreat. The third phase involves prototyping, evaluating and refining the adaptive interventions. *Read more about the Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts.*

TTO's approach during the Lab was deeply rooted in its fundamental values of shared leadership, transparency, and collaboration, values honed through years of ensemble theater making. TTO assembled an Innovation Team of 10 people from 4 states: TTO staff, True Colors alumni, and PYTA colleagues. The team's first step was to conduct a field survey, focus groups, and interviews. When the Innovation Team met in Boston in May 2012, there was lots of data to analyze, but as Rybeck remarked, "The meaning was crystal clear: PYTA groups wanted resources (grants for their work) and peer support and connections."

The retreat week at Airlie proved absolutely indispensable, according to Francis. A strength of the week, and the subsequent work, was the caliber of the assigned facilitator, John Shibley, and the wise use of an assessment tool, the Belbin Team Roles Analysis, which helps team members identify which of 9 key "team roles" that they prefer to play when working with a team. For example, some team members prefer to be a "Coordinator," who has a strong preference for pulling out the best in others, while others prefer to be a "Plant," who loves to generate new ideas. Each team role makes a unique contribution to the team. Rybek praised Shibley's use of the Belbin tool: "He helped us know what to pay attention to, in terms of our team dynamics." He also appreciated Sibley making sure the voices of the youngest members were included throughout the process.

Daunasias Yancey, Rybeck's assistant at the time, agrees, "For example, during one conversation in the retreat, one member of our team asked a question about another's idea that sounded like they were challenging the idea. In fact, they were just trying to figure out how that idea could be put into action. The Belbin Team Roles Review framed the way we worked together and allowed us to feel safer with each other in what could have been a very tense week." Daunasias Yancey wrote more about her experiences with TTO's *Innovation Lab* on ArtsFwd.org. *You can read her posts here.*

In addition to working through the daily agenda developed with their facilitator, the PYTA group met every night and hashed out details around their values, vision, mission, goals, committee charges, and more. This time together not only laid the groundwork for a new organization, but it also allowed the Innovation Team to trust each other and understand what assets each member brought to the table.

Following the June intensive at the retreat center in Airlie, Virginia, the Team began to refine a prototype plan with central questions and expected outcomes that played to TTO's strengths in youth leadership. Through the *Innovation Lab* process, the questions had been further refined: 1) how can youth leadership be operationally central to PYTA, and 2) how can PYTA take advantage of the capacities of TTO?

When the prototype was presented at the PYTA plenary session, it was unanimously approved. The prototype described a strategic partnership with 26 PYTA sites with details about TTO's administration, a shared leadership structure, and the negotiation of separate missions and goals.

PYTA formed A Youth Leadership Committee to guide further research within PYTA (now grown to 23 members), and hired a Youth Organizer to survey 100 youth at various locations. PYTA's leadership accepted the subsequent report on the leadership needs of LGBT youth and their allies, with four key recommendations:

1. Prioritize on-going professional development for PYTA members to enable them to work effectively with youth leaders.
2. Develop a method for directors to share information and solicit feedback from their youth about PYTA
3. Restructure PYTA correspondence and meetings to support youth participation
4. Create opportunities for peer leadership in PYTA

CHALLENGES

TTO accepted the challenge of stepping up its leadership, integrating PYTA into the fabric of its daily existence, and finding ways for the two efforts—hyper-local in four neighborhoods on one hand, and a loose network of diverse sites in North America on the other—to strengthen each other. TTO admits to "past bad experiences with ill conceived attempts," Rybeck says. "We often misunderstand the size of our own ambitions." This process forced them to be more realistic and strategic.

Rybeck was concerned how this new program would affect TTO's work locally as it took on this new initiative on a much larger scale. TTO realized that it was "not so much scaling up, as it was scaling different." For example, because the PYTA coordinator was housed in TTO's offices, it absorbed TTO's culture. It was very important that Rybeck increase his own communication with the PYTA Executive Board, so that they better understood the working conditions of their sole staff member. TTO, which thinks of itself as a family, was challenged to think of its PYTA work more as a business (although it certainly applied business practices to its other programs). Rybeck spent considerable time in conversation with David White, founder of the National Performance Network, which was initially housed at Dance Theater Workshop in New York City. White warned Rybeck that the in-house program could, if not carefully managed, become a "cyst" within the organizational body. To mitigate that danger, Rybeck guided the staff and board to integrate the PYTA staff person into the fabric of TTO's daily life. Although a separate program, answerable to different people, the coordinator of PYTA was treated like a regular staff member.

For TTO, a critical foundational belief is its commitment to locality. "A shift to include national arts organizing as a priority threatens to destroy all that is most precious to us." Additionally, Rybeck wondered if TTO could be as courageous with these decisions as they were earlier, when "OUT in Your Neighborhood" was forged from the fires of necessity..

"You take on something, you lose something—it's a departure, but you can't let the fear paralyze you. We created a team that was brave and insightful. The road to change is not always pretty, but it's the only way to liberation," said Rybeck. Anzel Lee Miller, a member of TTO's Leadership Inclusion Council and a True Colors alumnus agreed. "You have to ask questions every step of the way, and understand the impact of the choices you make," he said.

One issue was the decision-making structure on the Executive Committee of PYTA. At first there was an impulse to make decisions by consensus, but several dissenting voices made reaching consensus impossible. The dissent arose as a result of the wide range of members—from a youth-initiated, all-volunteer program in Madison, Wisconsin and a Youth Club in Toronto with open mic nights, to school groups and teen centers, as well as other theaters. There was wide disparity in capacity, goals, missions, and funding. After some tense exchanges, the Executive Committee agreed to use a super-majority vote for the decision-making process.

Another challenge is the uncertainty with the funding of the PYTA: Mukti plans to spend down its endowment in three years, and currently PYTA is dependent on this single source. As a "funded cohort," PYTA has worked to diversify the funding streams that support the Alliance. Plans are in place to make PYTA more sustainable, including charging membership dues, paying member fees for attending conferences, and covering travel expenses. PYTA also has a goal of working towards 10% earned income; the Finance and Fund Development Committees will be working with a consultant to determine the possible avenues.

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You take on something, you lose something - it’s a departure, but you can’t let the fear paralyze you. We created a team that was brave and insightful. The road to change is not always pretty, but it’s the only way to liberation.

—Abe Rybeck, Founder, The Theater Offensive

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– The Theater Offensive presents River See, a theatrical jazz performance installation by Sharon Bridgforth.
Photo courtesy: Ivy Maiorino

Discoveries

A benefit of a process such as the *Innovation Lab* can be to remind one of what is already known, or make visible the knowledge that is present, but not articulated. Rybeck is now more certain than ever that spending time together on thorny issues creates a very clear shared picture that enables good planning. TTO also (re) discovered the power of a well-chosen team and the benefits of being conscious and scrupulously honest about who brings what to the table.

Another lesson that TTO learned from the *Innovation Lab* process is the habit of setting agendas that always includes coming back to the basic agreed-upon questions. "We're finding that this doesn't limit where else we can go, it just keeps us connected to the work done so far. We are already trying to integrate this approach into our agenda setting."

> "Perhaps the most profound change in our behavior is greater conscientiousness about bringing the right team together when we want to engage in real change."
>
> — Abe Rybeck, Founder, The Theater Offensive

IMPACT

One internal effect was a clear confirmation that TTO did have the necessary innovation skills. "We thought we had those skills, but knew we could benefit from a conscious approach. We were doing the right things intuitively, but now we have ingrained the practices as a discipline." These skills involve how to cultivate a carefully chosen and empowered team, which includes intended beneficiaries, skillful facilitation, dedication of sufficient time and space, increased self- and team awareness (using the Belbin Survey tool), and taking the time to look at the group's balance of advocacy and inquiry. Rybeck reflected, "Perhaps the most profound change in our behavior is greater conscientiousness about bringing the right team together when we want to engage in real change."

A very important impact for TTO is that they are now more nationally visible. Building on their participation in the Theatre Communications Group's Diversity and Inclusion Institute and as a National Performance

– The Theater Offensive presents Jomama Jones RADIATE by Daniel Alexander Jones
– Photo courtesy: Ivy Maiorino

Network Partner, TTO is gaining a reputation as a national leader in the field of queer youth theater. That influences their ability to attract funds outside of their home base of New England, and supplements the funds that support neighborhood-based programming. Francis feels that TTO now has more “clout” in the national funding arena.

At PYTA’s meeting 2013 in San Francisco, a new focus crystallized on incubation projects and mentorship. The Incubation Project awards small grants and a mentor to emerging queer youth theaters. The inaugural round in 2014 was a response to the geographic distribution of the current PYTA members. There was a notable lack of representation in the Southeast and rural areas, so the first four Incubation sites were in New Orleans, Memphis TN, Charlotte NC and Burlington VT.

Based on the field research conducted by the youth organizer Karter Blake, Rybeck said, “It became clear that young people were hungry for deeper leadership opportunities.” TTO saw an opportunity to “up the ante” and help PYTA’s members deepen their understanding and practice of youth leadership. For TTO, this trajectory moves from youth solely in an advisory or consulting role, to youth taking part in decision-making, to organizations being fully youth-led, with adults serving as advisors.

Author Bios

Caron Atlas

Caron Atlas is director of Arts & Democracy, which supports the cross fertilization of culture, participatory democracy, and social justice. She co-directs NOCD-NY, Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY, a citywide alliance of cultural networks and community leaders working to revitalize New York City from the neighborhood up. Caron also teaches for Pratt Institute's Programs for Sustainable Planning and Development and Hunter College's Roosevelt House, and is a consultant for the Ford Foundation. Caron is co-editor of Bridge Conversations: People who Live and Work in Multiple Worlds and Critical Perspectives: Writings on Art and Civic Dialogue; and contributor to Beyond Zuccotti Park, Toward a 21st City for All, The Routledge Companion to Art and Politics, and the Cultural Blueprint for New York City. She is on the district and steering committees for participatory budgeting in New York City and the diversity advisory committee for the New York Department of Cultural Affairs.

Previously she worked at Appalshop, the Appalachian media center, and was the founding director of the American Festival Project, a national alliance of artists working for community change. She has also worked with National Voice, Animating Democracy, Pratt Center for Community Development, Urban Institute, Rockefeller Foundation, Leeway Foundation, Creative Capital, and the Network of Ensemble Theaters. She was a Warren Weaver Fellow at the Rockefeller Foundation and is an alumni of Coro's Leadership New York. She received her BA and MA from the University of Chicago.

Nayantara Sen

Nayantara Sen is an activist, social justice educator, strategic communications practitioner, storyteller and fiction writer. With a background in community organizing, non-profit program management, and interdisciplinary social justice programs curation and development, Nayantara works to advance racial and reproductive justice, immigrant rights, and cultural and artistic activism. Nayantara has previously worked as: Curator of the Foundry Theatre's Dialogue Series in 2015; Project Associate of Brooklyn Historical Society's Crossing Borders, Bridging Generation program on mixed-race identity politics, oral history and storytelling in New York; Program Director of the East Lansing Film Festival in Michigan; and Racial Justice Trainer and Network Associate at RaceForward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation.

As a social justice educator, Nayantara writes curricula, facilitates racial equity trainings, and consults with a wide range of clients on equity strategies and anti-oppression frameworks. She uses popular education, artistic practices and Theatre of Oppressed techniques, and has trained thousands of non-profit professionals, students, educators, funders, grassroots activists, labor organizers and public health activists. She was program staff on RaceForward's Better Together project, which bridges the national LGBTQ rights and racial justice movements, and coordinator for the Better Together Southern Cohort, which was a regional cohort for queer and trans leaders in the South. Nayantara serves on the Advisory Board of Youngist.org, a news media platform for and by millennials, and on the training bench for Border Crossers.org, an organization that exposes K-12 educators to anti-racist pedagogy. She is an M.A candidate at the Gallatin School of Individualized Study at NYU, where she studies Postcolonial and Diasporic Literature, Social Movement Theory and Creative Fiction Writing. Nayantara currently works as the Communications Manager for EmcArts.

Maribel Alvarez

Maribel Alvarez, Ph.D., is an anthropologist, folklorist, curator, and community arts expert who has documented the practice of more than a dozen of the country's leading emerging and alternative artistic organizations. She holds a dual appointment as Associate Research Professor in the School of Anthropology and Associate Research Social Scientist at the Southwest Center, University of Arizona. Through an executive-on-loan arrangement with the University, she currently serves as Executive Program Director of the Southwest Folklife Alliance. She teaches courses on methods of cultural analysis, with particular emphasis on objects, oral narratives, foodways, and visual cultures of the US-Mexico border. In the last few years, Maribel has written and published essays about poetry and food, intangible heritage, nonprofits and cultural policy, the theory of arts participation, artisans and patrimony in Mexico, and popular culture and stereotypes. In 2009 she was a Fulbright Fellow conducting research in rural Mexico. Maribel was the co-founder and executive director for seven years of MACLA—Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana, a contemporary, alternative urban arts center in San Jose, once described as a "lab for intelligent cultural interventions."

Maribel is a trustee of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress; in addition, she has served as faculty for ten years at the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture's summer Leadership Institute in San Antonio, TX. Currently, she is completing two book manuscripts for the University of Arizona Press, one on the verbal arts and lore of workers in the Mexican Curios cottage industry at the US-Mexico border, and another on the cultural history of wheat and flour mills in the state of Sonora in northern Mexico.

Kathie deNobriga

After graduating with honors from Wake Forest University, Kathie's early work included Managing/Artistic director of the Temple Theatre in Sanford NC; Visiting Artist in Smithfield NC for the NC Arts Council; and a member of the professional acting ensemble with The Road Company of Johnson City, TN.

A founding member of Alternate ROOTS, a regional service organization for arts and activism, Kathie served as ROOTS' Executive Director for ten years. She is now an independent arts consultant, specializing in strategic planning, building organizational capacity, staff/board retreats and creative conflict engagement. Her client list includes the Network of Ensemble Theatres, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, and the Georgia Center for Nonprofits. Kathie is also on the Arts & Democracy national team. She trained as a mediator with the Atlanta Justice Center, and after two terms on City Council, now serves as Mayor of Pine Lake, GA.

ABOUT EMCARTS

EmcArts works alongside people, organizations and communities as they take on their most complex challenges. Through rigorous workshops, coaching, and labs, we create space and conditions to test innovative strategies and build adaptive cultures. Our practice is deeply influenced by the artistic process, which we believe unlocks entrenched beliefs and opens up new ways of seeing.

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