

3rd Working Open Community Call Notes + Resources

Question 1: Facilitated by Monica Valenzuela, Staten Island Arts: *“How and when should we communicate out to our people about our experiments and prototypes, and what might be some useful tools and strategies to do so?”*

Monica - Most of our communication has been in-person, and more intimately curated groups of people or through national level blogs like ArtsFwd. We have been thinking about how to communicate out what we have been doing with EmcArts and along the way. We have a lot of data, photographs etc. of different ways we have documented our experiments, and we need to make sense of them and share them on a local level.

We are a local arts council, and very grass roots with a lot of people depending on us. And we value transparency with our constituents. But this way of working open is very new to the way we approach change or a challenge.

I have 3 sub-questions:

1. What are the best practices of sharing information; sharing things out visually, in person and digital? Inviting people into our space was very helpful but I think we can do much better by sharing things digitally as well.
2. Frequency of sharing information. Sharing in real time is also messy! How do you manage that vulnerability?
3. One way vs. Two way sharing of information, when do you use them and how do you handle the feedback?

Krisiti – One thing that has helped us is to figure out who have you been sharing with? That could help you formulate some answers to those questions.

Monica – For us it’s mostly county and citywide level. That’s where we do majority of the work. And it’s mostly individuals who are practicing artists, who may have received grants from us or participated in a workshop with us. But it also includes arts organizations like local theatres, museums, etc. We also reach out to arts administrators, local agencies, funders and partners in the community like the parks department etc. And also the private sector development that’s happening on the island. The emergent questions is, **Is there a different way to communicate out to those different folks?**

Nayana – Managing different segments of your audience is a challenge. In our sector itself, there is a major reliance on the documentation of what we do and the successes. The problem about sharing progress is that you're expected to tell the story of what you succeeded at instead of the complex questions that arise during the process. Funding plays into that with the reports that you create at the end of projects.

Kristi – From a funder’s perspective, we are a mid-sized organization and really interested in learning. We also learned from our grantees that people are also very interested in the learning process, how you got there and knowing that it’s ok that you take risks and have failures. We had an event where grantees spoke to other grantees about their experiences in the past year. They wanted to know what the stumbling blocks were.

Monica – There are positive ways of looping people in. We have a highly visible place in a transportation hub, and we’re really working open! Our “mistakes” were also very visible. It’s been a challenge to receive feedback. The participating artists are also a part of the debriefing of the experiments. They don’t come on board knowing that our programs are experiments. People weren’t hired as consultants, but ended up taking on the role through the process. By making yourself vulnerable and inviting people to participate, we saw good results in the end. We also saw that while collaborating, changing the language from “You should do this” to “What if we did this?” made a huge difference to the outcome of these experiments and how we received feedback.

Louise – It makes me think (as a consumer of products, or an audience member/participant in arts activities) about the difference between being a part of a new thing/experiment and feeling that it’s random versus feeling that it’s actually a shift in a mentality that I can recognize. Raises the question of whether participants recognize these shifts?

Monica - We have tried to be intentional with our programming. Having people trust that we are being intentional made it easier to invite people into the process. I think when you are involved in an experiment; your trust in it is increased when you see some change or impact as a result. And we’re lucky to have leadership that shared and received information in a democratic way.

Nayana - In the field, organizations are often trying to communicate a lot of things at once to their audiences while also trying to create deep stakeholder engagement. And finding that balance of asking people to be involved in their experiments and also shape its direction. Some tools and strategies work for one purpose but not another. I am thinking about the digital strategies we use to get the word out and some of the problems like e-blast fatigue. How do you inform people of something and make an ask of them when they are already pretty activated in your database? How do you avoid using the same mechanisms over and over again? Have any of you had any success around doing this differently?

Sara – That’s one of the questions I’m wrangling with – how to avoid that fatigue? The same people are pulled into these groups (or communication loops) and it becomes representative of their voices, and programming becomes geared towards

what they've expressed. Are they really representative of who we should be programming for?

Kristi – Something we have seen with our grantees, their practices are about making sure that their community is engaged, and has their voice. Especially in relation to the diversity of voices – not just the person who is always raising their hand, but also the quiet one in the back of the room. How are we consciously trying to think of people who aren't in the room?

Louise – Yes, and so many of our musings revolve around social media. And we forget that there are many segments of people who don't have access or use these mediums/channels that we are trying to become experts at.

Monica – Who are you sharing with becomes an important question. It's easy to exhaust people with e-blasts. As a service organization, we have so many different programs that work with different groups of people. We just did an end of year video, where we asked our community of grantees to come on camera and pick an animal that was representative of them—more than once, they picked the elephant. Because then you're big, strong, and people can't mess with you, but you have a trunk that is also flexible and resourceful – pick things off trees, the ground etc. I thought it was a powerful way to talk about how flexible we need to be with communication. For example, the kids in our youth program, I have to wait to see them in person to communicate with them, whereas there are funders, who you can't even get on the phone but love the email PDFs we send.

Nayana – I'm resonating with the idea of how to adjust your strategy and account for the fact that dissemination channels are not necessarily inclusive. I just wanted to share an experiment that we tried, and that we are still in the process of trying at EmcArts. We have a new program called Community Innovation Labs, which is piloting in two cities across the country, Winston Salem, NC and Providence, RI. Our aim is to embed artists in complex social change and issues. The labs focus on different issues in Winston Salem (structural inequities in income, employment and wealth disparities) and Providence (gentrification and community and public safety). We've had several moving pieces with various local stakeholders coming from different perspectives. We didn't want to just produce long text pieces in documenting the process, but we got local artists to create photo-essays of the process as it's unfolding. Not necessarily just to document the process, but to create a reflection of it from an artist's perspective. This way they become part of the local innovation change process, while furthering their artistic practices. This is different for our blog posts to have a heavily visual content strategy. We're still using the same channels, but we're trying to shift the way that we think about the content.

(Check out the photo essay here: <http://artsfwd.org/photo-essay-systems-in-winston-salem/>)

Kristi – That's really cool because there's so many ways that you can then package that. You can tease the content easily through Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. A bunch of pictures is way better than long wordy newsletters.

Nayana – Yeah and one of the questions I've been grappling with too is that of vulnerability. How do you translate a vulnerable process of change into long descriptions of words that will actually be interesting? A lot of the times you don't know what it is until you've actually tried and tested it. So I like the option of taking photographs to explore that. You make it more interesting with pictures, videos.

Monica – This makes me think of Freshkills Parks, a former landfill and a multiple-lifetimes kind of project. And the change that is documented is very slow. We've partnered with them to send photographers, to help them show these small changes that happen. There's a tenuous history there with the community, and it's a long project where it's difficult to show constant change. The photographers had a private tour, and each of them had a different perspective emerge from the space. Some of their pictures looked like an alien landscape, and others that looked like it was the middle of Kansas. They had a partnership with Urban Omnibus to share out this information. The aim is to have a huge park, 12 times the size of Central Park. The images have been a very important catalyst in spreading awareness about this project. **Urban Omnibus has all the images they have been sharing**

(Urban Omnibus: <http://urbanomnibus.net/2015/06/freshkills-capturing-change/> & <http://urbanomnibus.net/2015/11/capturing-change-from-freshkills-west-mound/>)

Nayana – That reminds me, Kristi you had mentioned an organization a little while ago, I just wanted to make sure that we got the name of it.

Kristi – It a project called Boundaries and Bridges, coordinated through Widener University in partnership with local community artists. It grew out of an initiative called Chester Made.

(Chester Made: <http://www.chestercity.com/chester-made-arts-culture/>)

More info on the project on Widener University's newsletter, Pg 4: <http://www.widener.edu/news-events/whatsup/vol10/Whats%20UP%20Vol.%2010.8a.pdf>

More on WU's Student Media Site: <http://www.theblueandgold.com/2015/11/19/community-bridge-bridges-community/>)

Question 2: *“What are some strategies for managing the discomfort of change, and how do you garner internal support while embarking on an innovation journey?”*

Hana – Center Stage started at EmcArts by exploring innovation at the intersection of the arts and technology, but our area of investigation quickly changed to testing organizational change. We are 3 years into the new vision and strategy set forth by our new artistic director and has forced everyone in the organization to think in new ways about how we produce art. And it has been a journey of really testing this idea of change. So my main question is what are some of the strategies people have used to manage the discomfort around change? Have you come across successful strategies to garner internal support when initiating change processes around innovating the way in which we produce?

I have a specific question too which relates to the concept of transparency in your company. What does transparency mean to the different stakeholders in your organization and how is it practiced?

Kristi – We’re just 3 people in our organization and sometimes transparency means all of us talking constantly! How do you draw the boundaries between sharing enough and sharing too much? And I think this is applicable to all sizes of organizations. And then, as a funder, we’ve been thinking about how we can be transparent about our internal work for an external audience, especially in grant making, funders etc.? We’re always soliciting feedback from the organizations we work with and also from those we don’t work with. Main concern is, either as a funder or being funded, do you want to have people looking too closely inside your closet?

Hana – Yes, transparency is a process. We have about 100 employees. And we found that there's a miss around (with external stakeholders like actors etc.) about how the work is actually made, where the money is going, how the process works etc. But this is true internally as well with different departments not being clued into the process. Once of our recent exercises is the Transparency Project, where we got each department into our artistic play space. And we asked them to participate in the process of developing a season. We walked them through it, where the process starts and so on, and became quite a fun thing. It was revelatory to them and us in understanding how the process works and the various information belts that existed. It really opened up a space for conversation. We had questions of how to push it further; does every department do that? It was revelatory to us the types of mythologies that exist for the different departments. Has anyone here addressed that?

Sherrine – This reminds me of a platform that NET has just recently employed called **Slack!** It’s got different channels for communication and is a free membership app for non-profits with the capability of having a lot of users on it. There was a disconnect between staff and board, especially. Now we have an updates section where staff from different departments put up updates about what they're doing, and staff and board are kept in the loop in real time. And it is linked to your phone, with capabilities to tag people etc. You can have a private channel where you can work on your experiments and figure things out internally, and it has also helped in uncluttering our email. It’s opened up a lot of transparency between disparate groups at NET.

(Slack App: <https://slack.com/>)

Hana - Have any of you experienced a major philosophical shift in your organizations? And how has that been addressed? We’ve found that there is a landmine of complexity in this.

Sherrine – My next question is about a philosophical shift in our organization. So I feel like we’re in the process of something and we’re still figuring it out.

Nayana – I have a resource to share. A lot of my work in the last 10 years has been about helping non-profit organizations to incorporate a social equity lens (especially around race and gender) into their work. Your question around philosophical shifts has become really salient in that. I have found a tool produced by the Social Transformation Project called **The Wheel of Change** to be very helpful. It’s a really simple diagram that shows the cyclical & iterative process of organizational change around the areas of organizational structure and policies. And the third area is behavioral shifts. I’ve used it successfully to help leadership teams in organizations to shift thinking and have more transparent conversations across the whole organization about what strategies you are using. I found that to be very useful because whatever you are trying to shift has to do with one of the areas that this tool talks about. It’s nested within a larger report called Transforming Organizations, which has some really good case studies about organizations that have gone through massive changes in mission etc.

(Wheel of Change by Robert Gass/Social Transformation Project.

Report is titled [Transforming Organizations: A Guide to Creating Effective Social Change Organizations](#)

[FULL PDF](#)

[Wheel of Change image](#))

Hana – It’s interesting when our Artistic Director introduced a new value statement, which placed a lot of value not just on the

ways in which you do your job, but also the quality of the work and the way in which we communicate. And it was surprising how much people struggled with that. Like one of the values was to walk into each interaction with giving the benefit of the doubt. It's not so much a struggle with the values themselves, as it is with dealing with them being carved and defined in such a specific way. We're in the process of creating behavioral and organizational shifts to have an environment that would help us be more efficient and transparent.

Louise – How did you view the feedback to this shift? Of people being taken aback to the new values?

Hana – We recently published The Who You Be document, which is a vision scape for the next 10 years for our company. It integrated the vision for our different programming and spaces and really exploring how to combine art with technology. Previously, social media and digital spaces were only for marketing. Recently we just created a guerilla street theatre project called My America Too. Recorded it with three cameras, edited it and released it as a short. There was a phase when people were not sure about the change in values. Then people were digging into the conversations of actually applying these values – a vision that everyone accepts. Once we got past that conversation, it opened up a space for people to speak their truth into the room after a very long time. Each of the department heads were tasked with taking this conversation back to their teams and really talking about it. **The feedback was that perhaps the timing of this was not ideal.** We were moving to a new space, we're having a major renovation, it was the start of a hectic season etc. So there might be a re-launch that we'll have to do after the New Year. But sometimes it feels like we're throwing darts in the dark!

Question 3: Facilitated by Sherrine Azab, Network of Ensemble Theaters: *"What distinguishes member organizations from movements and what are the motivating factors for people to join them?"*

Sherrine- In the Innovation Lab, we are trying to focus our experiments on how can we go from being a member organization to something that looks more like a grass roots movement. We have had a lot of success when we communicate with our constituents in person, then they are really excited and ignited. People were excited about how we were becoming more inclusive of cross sector partnerships and collaborations. A part of becoming a movement is continued activation. How do you have that when you have membership that is already over-taxed? And at capacity? At our national gathering, we had a cultural mapping exercise, where we tried to figure out where we were on the spectrum of how active you can be? I'm also asking- what is it that gets people ignited to move from an organizational membership to a movement? I think that we are stuck in the "we don't know what it looks like, so it's hard to communicate it" phase.

Nayana - Two things come to my mind, from my own perspective of the ways in which I feel engaged in movements versus specific organizations. I'm thinking of movements that I would ally myself with, especially reproductive, immigrant rights. A big draw for me is not just scale, but also the possibility of movements to reach across sectors and really take an integrated approach to do whatever work they're trying to do. I don't feel as relegated to a specific area like I do with an organization.

Sherrine – There's also a divide in the membership. We are going in the direction of being more focused on cross-sector partnerships, whereas other sections of the membership aren't, and they are what we call "aesthetically driven." We're not excluding it in our language but it's just an "and", we're just adding on to what we've already done. But we don't have the clear language yet, so it's hard to get people on board while we're still figuring it out. But it's happening, mainly in the public and around activation. All of our experiments are around activation. Our executives are going on listening tours, we're paying people to go on dates to talk about co-creation and collaborative practice, and we've hired 4 local organizers to try to activate distinct parts of the country around these practices as well. Those all feel like movement building. Now the question is **What is the next step of what they do? We're building a movement to what?**

Nayana - That makes me think of accountability and direction in movement versus organizations. For example, Alternate Roots in the South is an organization that is movement oriented with a legacy of movement building. Leadership and direction is situated there, but they are also so deeply integrated across the whole region. And I'm remembering the kinds of frustrations I felt with movements/organizing in New York and elsewhere where it's diffused. How do you strike that balance between accountability and direction and strong leadership but also having a really decentralized process that feels inclusive? So that it's not just one organization framing the rhetoric around the movement. Coalition building is an essential piece of that. I realize that I'm looking at the second part of your question – what are the motivating factors for people to join movements and was just speaking from my own experience around that.

(Read the Alternate Roots case study: <http://artsfwd.org/case-study-on-alternate-roots/>)

Sherrine - Right now we're gathering so much data, that we actually haven't been able to filter through it all yet. So some of these comments are going to be really useful to have as we try to figure out where we are going with it all.

Hana – You mentioned before a divide with your constituents- those who were interested in moving towards a movement and those who were not. Is there a sense of the end result/desire of the members who are interested in this shift? Have they expressed anything?

Sherrine - Most people don't want to feel excluded, and want to feel like their values are also being addressed. I feel satisfied with hearing those responses. I think it's going to be a question that will be coming up throughout the process.