A Toolkit for Mississippi's Arts Organizations

The Mississippi Arts Commission (MAC) serves as the statewide voice for the arts. The agency strives to increase the public value of creativity, working to build our state's creative economy.

The objective of this manual is to offer basic information on the issues surrounding diversity, as well as to provide strategies for arts leaders who want to increase the diversity of their organization and its offerings. MAC hopes to stimulate the work of arts and cultural organizations so that we become a true mirror image of our communities.

The topics included are not meant to be exhaustive. You are encouraged to adapt this information based on realistic strategies and timelines that will work best for your community.

Introduction

MAC's mission statement is: <u>to be a catalyst for the arts and creativity in Mississippi</u>. Government support, along with the private sector:

- provides for the inclusion of all citizens in diverse arts experiences;

- ties arts to economic development through partnerships and collaborations;

- offers credibility and insists on accountability;

- ensures openness of decision making; and

- provides leadership in cultural policies

MAC encourages the organizations funded by its grants and services to seek inclusion and participation from the communities and neighborhoods served around the region of the state.

Diversity is defined as the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different. The dimensions of diversity include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status. The cultural organizations in our state should be a reflection of that diversity. While diversity itself is not a value-laden term, the way that people react to it is driven by their own values, attitudes, and beliefs. Arts and cultural experiences that include the diversity of a community help to grow and strengthen it. MAC wants to support diversity in communities around the state. We understand that building diversity is a large task and no one organization can be tasked with changing the world. It is with this understanding that we encourage organizations to begin having conversations that will lead to strategies to engage the different groups in their community.

It is also important for arts organizations to educate themselves about, and connect with, the diverse beliefs and values of the public. Cultural institutions should recognize and respect the diverse beliefs found in their community. But in order to do that, strategies for building diversity must be in place.

Arts organization staff and board members should examine their own attitudes, realizing that people may think differently. Then they should look at the demographics of their community and consider who is not being served by their organization.

MAC defines diversity in arts organizations as:

- Presenting performances, exhibitions, arts education programs, or other services to the public as its primary function with a desire to reach all segments of the population.

- Creating programs that are inclusive by involving the community in planning, implementation and evaluation of its programs.

- Involving planners and participants that reflect the community's demographics.

- Providing access to the arts for the state's residents with emphasis on maintaining and expanding programs and services.

- Finding board members who reflect the community and contribute to the organization.

Anecdotal Information:

- Theatre groups such as the Natchez Little Theatre and Theatre Plus in Port Gibson, as well as others around the state are implementing "color blind" casting practices (casting a role without considering the actor's ethnicity.)

- Choirs and choral groups are singing 'hallelujah' as we listen to their harmonies and see faces that represent the people living in their communities.

- The Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Mississippi Museum of Art, Ohr O'Keefe Museum of Art, Meridian Museum of Art, Walter Anderson Museum of Art and others are offering diverse programming that encourages the community to get involved because of the intentional variety of programming

- Museums are employing senior citizens and persons living with disabilities as part-time and full-time employees and job duties have been adapted to accommodate their needs.

- Symphony orchestras collaborate with schools for student centered performances.

- Arts organizations offer reduced price tickets to specific groups as part of their outreach.

- Statistics gathered in a 2010 study conducted by MAC shows that organizations funded by MAC who have spent at least 3-5 years working on diversity have achieved a measure of success:

- o Children with both learning and physical disabilities have participated in Ballet Mississippi classes.

- o The Craftsmen's Guild offers summer camps for children/youth with disabilities free of charge so that children with special needs receive art/craft classes taught by master craftsmen, some of whom have disabilities themselves.

- o The DeSoto County Arts Council hosted an art for autism program in partnership with a local hospital and foundation.

- o The Lauren Rogers Museum of Art organizes a Very Special Arts Festival each year for school children with disabilities from a six-county area.

Diversity and Cultural Proficiency Assessment Tool

Does your organization reflect the community it serves?

Communities are multifaceted and ever changing. An organization should periodically ask itself how they can be sure that they are delivering the highest quality and most culturally proficient services to the community.

The following is a list of assessments that can be adapted to meet the needs and capacities of your organization. It is a starting point for evaluating the diversity and cultural proficiency of your organization and will help in identifying activities and practices that are in place or need to be implemented. Your organization is encouraged to adapt this information based on strategies and timelines that are realistic for you.

Community Diversity

- Do you monitor the ongoing demographic changes occurring in your community (this is something to consider doing at least every three years)?

- Do you actively use this data for strategic and outreach planning?

- Have you identified community organizations, schools, churches, businesses and publications that serve racial and ethnic minorities for outreach and educational purposes?

- Do you have a strategy for partnerships with others that includes the community served?

- Do the organizations you partner with reflect the diversity of the community?

- Have you met with community leaders to gauge their perceptions of your organization? Have you sought their advice on how you can better serve them?

- Have you conducted focus groups and surveys within the past three years in your community to measure the public's perception of your organization as it relates to diversity and cultural issues? How do you act on this information?

- Are the individuals who represent your organization reflective of the demographics of the community?

- Does your organization have a strategy to ensure that you are utilizing businesses in the minority community for products and services that you purchase?

- Are your public communications (such as reports, advertisements, and web sites), accessible to and reflective of your community?

Cultural Diversity

- Do you regularly monitor the racial and ethnic diversity of the people you serve?

- Do your internal and external communications include your commitment to providing culturally proficient services (i.e., the ability to interact with people of different cultures and socio-economic background)?

- Do your evaluations and surveys take into account the diversity of your patrons?

- Do you compare patron satisfaction ratings among diverse groups and act on the information?

- Has your staff and volunteers received special training in diversity issues?

- Has your organization identified qualified people who could help your staff communicate with the public from a wide variety of nationalities?

- Are your written communications available in languages that reflect the ethnic and cultural fabric of your community? Are they offered in alternate formats such as large print for the visually impaired?

- Do your services include complementary and alternative services in planning for inclusion (i.e., large print, sign language interpretation, or audio description)?

Workforce Diversity

- Do your recruitment efforts include strategies to reach out to the racial and ethnic minorities in your community?

- Do the people who recruit new staff for your organization reflect the diversity that you need?

- Do your policies about time off and holidays and religious observances take into account the diversity of your workforce?

- Do you acknowledge and honor diversity in your employee communications, awards programs and other internal celebrations?

- Have you made diversity awareness and sensitivity training available to your employees?

- Do you have a mechanism in place to look at employee turnover rates for variances according to diverse groups?

- Do you ensure that changes in job design, workforce size, hours and other changes do not affect diverse groups disproportionately?

Leadership Team Diversity

- Is there a board-approved policy encouraging diversity across the organization, including the board? Is diversity a part of the board's regular discussions?

- Is this policy reflected in your mission and values statement? Is it visible on documents seen by your employees and the public?

- Does your strategic plan emphasize the importance of diversity at all levels of your workforce?

- Has your board set goals for creating or building services that eliminate disparities to underserved groups?

- Have you designated a member of your board or staff who is responsible for implementing your diversity strategy?

- Have sufficient funds been allocated to achieve your diversity goals?

- Is diversity awareness and cultural proficiency training mandatory for all staff?

- Have you made diversity awareness part of your management and board retreat agendas?

- Does your organization have a mentoring program in place to help develop your best talent, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity?

- Do you encourage employees to further their education?

- Do you have a succession or advancement plan for your management team that is linked to your overall diversity goals?

- Do you require search firms who work for your organization to present a mix of candidates reflecting your community's diversity?

Strategies for Building Diversity

Understanding culture is important so that we will know how to interact with individuals from cultures that are different from ours.

- **Valuing Diversity**: You should accept and respect differences, such as different cultural backgrounds, values and customs, as well as different ways of communicating.

- **Cultural Self-Awareness**: Culture is the sum total of an individual's experiences, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests. It shapes who we are and how we fit into community and society. Reflect on your own racial identity and how it has shaped your life experiences. Personal inquiry is a necessary prerequisite to facilitating inquiry among others.

- **Dynamics of Difference**: Foster a sense of safety around conversations about race by encouraging participants to take responsibility for their own learning and interactions, to respect each other, to avoid blame and snap judgments, and to allow for mistakes.

- **Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge for Diversity**: Culturally competent individuals and the institutions they work in can take steps to institutionalize cultural knowledge so they can adapt to diversity and better serve diverse populations. Learn within the context of culture. Asset mapping is one way to see the benefits of the community on a culture and the culture on its community.

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    Communicate High Expectations: Develop research-based training on theory, culture, diversity, social status, and policy (see Resource section at the end of this document). Create an advisory task force that represents the community.

- **Market with Diversity in Mind: Events and services should be designed to achieve the goals and objectives found in the** long range strategic plan for outreach and marketing to specific audiences. Create a meaningful blueprint that includes sustained inquiry, examination of challenges and a plan. Form strategies to foster justice with an inclusive mindset: who is being left out?

- **Expand Efforts to Increase Public Participation in Programming: Events and services should be driven by evaluation.** Understanding your audience and what they want to experience and learn is a balancing act when it comes to building audience loyalty centered on the mission and vision of an organization. An arts or cultural organization must take stock before coming up with approaches on how to sell an artistic product.

- **Strive to Provide Arts, Heritage and Cultural Education That is Relevant:** Arts education opportunities should be available and offered to all citizens and the challenge is to provide these services in a way that takes into consideration whether the audience is interested in what is being offered. Programming should be respectful and reflective of the community. Research the racial composition and cultural languages represented in the community. Design education activities that reach the broad spectrum of learners and audiences.

- **Create an Atmosphere of Equal Opportunity:** Encourage policies to achieve equal hiring, salaries, and promotion standards. Seek to create an atmosphere of moral and mutual respect, appreciation and appropriate considerations given in various situations with a conscientious regard for one's fellow man/woman/person. Everyone has a right to the opportunity to participate, volunteer, seek employment, serve and be served. Maintaining understanding and level respect can be achieved, but it takes having a diversity and inclusion plan in place before it can intentionally happen.

- **Create Programs That Are Accessible:** Cultural organizations that receive federal funds must make programs, services and activities accessible, including employment opportunities. When developing an accessibility plan, an organization should consider:

  o Appoint an accessibility coordinator

  o Review the ways they interact with constituents

  o Review a checklist on the accessibility of buildings and grounds

  o Ensure that there is a plan for assuring accessibility of public meetings

  o Design print and web-based materials for legibility, ease of comprehension, as well as accessibility by people with hearing, mobility and visual disabilities

  o Accessibility of other communication systems

  o Programming that is respectful and reflective of the community

  o Create partnerships that promote inclusion and access

Action Steps

The following are a suggested series of actions that an organization can utilize in beginning a dialogue on diversity and cultural proficiency:

- Direct your management team to complete the assessment in the previous section. Conduct a meeting to compare your team's responses.

- Ask your planning and community relations leaders to prepare a presentation for your organization's administration on the demographics of your community and your patrons. Discuss the results in light of the assessment results.

- Meet informally with leaders of racial and ethnic minority groups in your community for a candid conversation about their concerns, perceptions of your organization and the services you provide.

- Review the composition of your workforce in light of your community's demographics to determine how well your organization reflects your community's diversity.

- Meet informally with minority employees for a candid conversation about their observations and concerns about their workplace and its environment.

- Put together an internal task force to review the results of Actions 1-5 and recommend next steps. Present these to your board for consideration.

- Put together a long-term strategy to create a more diverse organization at all levels that delivers more culturally proficient programming and services.

Resources

There are a number of books and free resources online that arts and cultural institutions can utilize when developing a diversity strategy:

Online Resources

A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts, by Kevin F. McCarthy, Kimberly J. Jinnett, www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1323.html

Arts for All: Connecting to New Audiences

http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/strategies-for-expanding-audiences/Pages/Arts-for-All-Connecting-New-Audiences.aspx

Arts Participation 2008: National Endowment for the Arts - Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, http://www.nea.gov/news/news09/SPPA-highlights.html

Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy
http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/Pages/default.aspx

The Diversity of Cultural Participation: Findings from a National Survey

//www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/audience-surveys/Pages/The-Diversity-of-Cultural-Participation.aspx

Engaging Audiences

http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/strategies-for-expanding-audiences/Pages/Engaging-Audiences.aspx

Book Resources

Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning, Edited by Fiske, Edward B., Arts Education Partnership, 1999.

Cultural Collaborations: Building Partnerships for Arts Participation, By Ostrower, Francie, Urban Institute, 2003.

Invitation to the Party: Building Bridges to the Arts, Culture and Community,

By Walker-Kuhne, Donna, Theatre Communication Group, 2005.

Take Part: A Look at Trends in Leisure and Cultural Participation among Mississippi Residents, A summary of research for the Mississippi Arts Commission by Western States Arts Federation, 2005.

Engaging Audiences

The Diversity of Cultural Participation: Findings from the National Survey

http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/audience-surveys/Pages/The-Diversity-of-Cultural-Participation.aspx

Take Part: A Look at Trends in Leisure and Cultural Participation among Mississippi Residents, A summary of research for the Mississippi Arts Commission by Western States Arts Federation, 2005,
http://www.performingartsregister.com/pdfs/TakePart_MS_Study.pdf

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