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# Funding Leadership-Development Training for Cultural Activists: A Reflective Essay

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*Keywords:* Leadership-development training, cultural activists, funding, social change, grantmaking, arts and social change

## Key Points

- Throughout history, artists have led grassroots movements of protest, resistance, and liberation that have culminated in transformational change. Often, these artists have been overlooked or given too little attention by funders, even though the consequences of their courageous crusades include censorship, imprisonment, torture, and even death.
- There are a number of models for leadership-development training for cultural activists.
- Opportunities for these cultural activists to engage in special leadership-development training can enhance individual campaigns for social justice; provide opportunities for them to network, strategize, and reflect in safe spaces away from the turmoil of day-to-day organizing; and allow them to examine theoretical frameworks related to grassroots crusades, ethical responsibilities, and their role in relation to the communities they serve.

## Introduction

In May 2008, I enrolled in a master workshop with Augusto Boal, the father of Theatre of the Oppressed, and his son Julian at the Brecht Forum in New York City. A great deal of time has passed since this special session, but it is significant because it was the last occasion Boal came to Manhattan. He died on May 2, 2009.

The workshop was just one of many training sessions in leadership development I attended during my 10 years in Manhattan.<sup>1</sup> As a longtime cultural activist and budding scholar, I felt these experiences were essential to my personal and academic growth. This particular session, on Rainbow of Desire and Forum Theatre, was designed for novice and experienced facilitators and practitioners of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The techniques are innovative approaches to public forums, rooted in Brazilian popular education models and the cultural movements of the 1950s and 1960s. The platform is designed to invent ways of confronting oppression in a participatory democratic way.

Boal began every session with a discussion of the Theatre of the Oppressed tree. Participants assembled around a large ink drawing of a powerful oak or redwood. Boal started off with his mantra: theatre of the oppressed, by the oppressed, and for the oppressed. Then he pointed to the roots and fertile ground, the words “Ethics, Solidarity, and Philosophy” scrawled across the bottom left side and “Politics, Multiplication, and History” on the right. He emphasized that Theatre of the Oppressed is a blend of unique, independent

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<sup>1</sup> The Ford Foundation generously subsidized my educational pursuits during my tenure as a program associate there from 2002-2004. I financed the rest throughout my stint as a student in Antioch University’s Ph.D. program in Leadership and Change from 2005 to 2010.

techniques that are interconnected and that the tree draws its nutrient sap from the roots.

Boal would then direct our attention to the trunk: “Games.” He explained that games incorporated two fundamental societal traits: They have rules and they offer creative freedom. “Without rules, there is no game; without freedom, there is no life” (Boal, 2006, p. 4). Games are played throughout the workshop; they help build community.

Next, Boal steered our attention to the branches and leaves, the heart of the system. He briefly described his Theatre of the Oppressed armory. “Image Theatre” was on the lower branch; “Forum Theatre” was near the top. Each leaf illuminated the other techniques: “Newspaper Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, Invisible Theatre, and Legislative Theatre.” “Direct Action,” although not a specific Theatre of the Oppressed method, had its own petal. In the context of Theatre of the Oppressed, direct action happens when this form of creative expression moves from the stage to the streets.

Lastly, Boal underscored the fruit on the soil and the bird in the sky: When the produce drops to the earth the bird swoops down, grasps it in its beak, and transports it to other commonwealths. The Theatre of the Oppressed seeds spread and the transformative power of art takes hold.

Boal would then summarize this segment of the session, which is also documented in *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*: “The objective of the whole tree is to bring forth fruits, seeds and flowers: this is our desired goal, in order that the Theatre of the Oppressed may seek not only to understand reality, but to transform it to our liking” (Boal, 2006, p. 7).

Augusto Boal may be physically gone, but his presence looms large. His son has picked up the torch and Boal’s many disciples continue to educate the next generation of cultural activists. What follows is a reflective account of my experiences with this type of leadership-development training and an invitation to funders to invest in similar programs for other cultural activists.

*Theatre of the Oppressed gatherings attract arts professionals and practitioners, academics, social-change activists, community development advocates, and an assortment of people from other fields. ... Everyone in attendance could be considered a cultural activist. But that term is not clearly defined, and therefore creates a conundrum for grant seekers and funders.*

### Definition of Terms

Theatre of the Oppressed gatherings attract arts professionals and practitioners, academics, social-change activists, community development advocates, and an assortment of people from other fields. They engage in the process for a variety of reasons.

During the 2008 session, most of the participants were there to rub shoulders with Augusto Boal and hope that his wisdom would translate into real transformation, both personally and for the demographics they support. Everyone in attendance could be considered a cultural activist. But that term is not clearly defined, and therefore creates a conundrum for grant seekers and funders. Other terms – social change, community building, civic engagement, civil society, participatory democracy, the arts – are just as ambiguous. The lack of common vocabulary creates barriers, and it’s important for all stakeholders to be on the same page.

For the purpose of this article, social change is defined as a slight shift, an alteration, or a rever-

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sal in the status quo that brings about institutional or systemic change. Social change is embodied in new laws, procedures, and policies that alter the nature of institutions and, in time, the hearts and minds of people (Collins & Rogers, 2000). Therefore, social-change projects and the artists and cultural activists who spearhead them address the root causes of problems rather than the alleviation of symptoms. In most cases, the goal is systemic change.

A social movement, on the other hand, is the shared activity of individuals, nonprofits, and other social organizations to mobilize citizens at all levels of society to influence politics broadly and, ultimately, to achieve genuine social change as it concerns the rules, processes, and practices of society, the market, or the government (Riker, 2001). As with concepts like cultural activism and social change, scholarly analysis of social-movement terminology and praxis is controversial. T. V. Reed, director of American Studies and professor of English at Washington State University, notes that “more than 50 years of scholarly analysis has not generated an agreed upon definition of social movements”; he argues that this is “less of a problem than one might think, since both ordinary folks and ordinary scholars, though they may argue about borderline cases, know a movement when they see one” (2005, p. xiv).

It’s important to note the intricate relationship between artists and social movements. They are encased in what French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu coined the “cultural field” – “social space where cultural texts exist in relation to each other and in relation to texts in other social, political, and economic fields” (Reed, 2005, p. xvii). The artist and the arts are the key force in shaping, spreading, and sustaining the movement’s culture and, through culture, its politics. The songs, sculpture, poetry, literature, dance, film, theater, and murals become personal and movement narratives, or a “bundle of stories” that “contribute to the construction of a group’s ‘idioculture’ and are among the interpretive materials from which movement narratives are fashioned” (Davis, 2002, p. 54).

Additional vocabulary worth mentioning includes “civic engagement” and “community building.”

Civic engagement refers to the commitment to participate in, and contribute to, the improvement of one’s neighborhood, community, and nation. There are many ways in which people participate in civic, community, and political life and, by doing so, express their engaged citizenship – from proactively becoming better informed to participating in public dialogue on issues, from volunteering to voting, from community organizing to political advocacy. Civic engagement may be either a measure or a means of social change, depending on the context and intent of efforts. (Korza & Bacon, 2010, p. 11)

Cultural activists spearheading civic-engagement initiatives are the ones who kindle fires, arouse the imagination, and rally the troops. Their triumphs, no matter how small, culminate in real transformational change. Community building refers to “the process of building relationships that helps community members cohere around common purpose, identity, and a sense of belonging, which may lead to social or community capital” (Korza & Bacon, 2010, p. 11). This category is reserved for cultural activists whose strategies and tactics are the cornerstone of civic, social, and community change.

### Benefits of Leadership-Development Training for Cultural Activists

Scholars and practitioners such as myself believe in the transformative potential of leadership-development training for cultural activists. These types of educational forums, which are designed to challenge myths perpetuated by the dominant ideology, are empowering. They have the potential to yield extraordinary benefits.

For example, subjugated groups assembled in safe spaces can confront issues pertaining to who wields power and why. They are able to see their reality, analyze the root causes of their problems, and develop strategies and tactics to change the situation. These gatherings also allow cultural activists to examine theoretical frameworks related to grassroots crusades, ethical responsibilities, and their role in relation to the communities they serve, away from the turmoil of day-to-day organizing. Being away from front-line activity is a way to learn, reflect, and recharge without interference. The get-togethers are also an opportunity for cultural activists to network and build support for individual campaigns for social justice.

During the many training sessions I attended with Augusto Boal, he discussed the benefits of this work:

We must all do theatre, to discover who we are and find out who we could become. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, the people who come on stage to recount an episode of their lives are simultaneously narrator and narrated – for this reason, they are able to imagine themselves in the future. People go on stage to do theatre, because theatre cannot be done alone and in order to all say “I,” before coming together in another beautiful word: “we!” The theatre is a mirror in which we can see our vices and our virtues, according to Shakespeare. And it can also be transformed into a magic mirror, as in the Theatre of the Oppressed, a mirror we can enter if we do not like the image it shows us and, by penetrating it, rehearse modifications of this image, rendering it more to our liking. In this mirror we see the present, but can invent the future of our dreams: the act of transforming is in itself transformatory. In the act of changing our image, we

are changing ourselves, and by changing ourselves in turn we change the world. (Boal, 2006, p. 62)

Funding for these types of training sessions for cultural activists is negligible. A 2003 report released by the Urban Institute examined philanthropic support for developmental programs for artists and concluded:

The current, apparently sparse, nature of such funding is not nearly enough to meet demand or reduce the fragility of many of the organizations and programs that are critical to artists' training needs. (Jackson et al., 2003, p. 63)

That research didn't include an analysis of leadership-development training for cultural activists. But a few years before that study, the Rockefeller Foundation took an in-depth look at the field of community cultural development, a genre more closely related to cultural activism. That report concluded that “the field needs to devise high-quality training opportunities consonant with its values and approaches. Any field needs ways of extending itself by passing along knowledge and skills” (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, p. 84).

Such programs, however, should not be housed in academic institutions; it was one point of consensus in the study.

An academic program removed from ‘the trenches’ of day-to-day work cannot succeed. People should get together for training in critical analysis of how change happens – power analysis, cross-cultural communications, conflict resolution, problem-solving, group process .... We need more discussion of experience: What's changing? What adjustments are needed? ... People are coming out of university settings, getting a conservatory approach to the craft, just focusing on your chops. [To put them into community development work] is really dangerous for the communities being led by these artists, dangerous for organizations working with them. (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, p. 85)

### Inadequate Training Can Have Dire Consequences

In spite of the benefits, there are shortcomings to pedagogical models like Theatre of the Oppressed. Cultural activists with limited or otherwise inadequate leadership-development training can be hazardous to the populations they support. I have experienced these scenarios and worried about the potential damage to marginalized populations.

For instance, Theatre of the Oppressed wrestles with problems of exploitation and domination from a people's viewpoint. It is a bottom-up model. The production is collectively owned. Spectators become "spect-actors." A spect-actor physically and mentally engages in the drama. At any moment, the spect-actor can stop the action, invade the stage, and attempt to spawn archetypal images of a desired reality. No longer passively watching from the seats, the spect-actor is transformed by sharing in the theatrical process. The radical shift from conformity to civic participation can translate to the community at large. This is what makes Theatre of the Oppressed a threatening phenomenon for the ruling class, so it is essential to introduce the popular techniques to neophytes in an ethical and responsible way. This isn't always how it happens.

The method is complicated. It has taken me years to understand the intricacies of the Theatre of the Oppressed system. It is impossible for a novice to learn the pedagogy over a three-day period. Even so, during the workshops with Augusto and Julian Boal, I conversed with Theatre of the Oppressed rookies who were eager to transfer their knowledge to an exploited populace. This behavior concerned me from the outset. I publicly challenged Augusto Boal on numerous occasions about his students' haphazard spreading of the radical genre, and conveyed my apprehension to Julian Boal and other facilitators. After all, there are no prerequisites for enrollment. There is no required reading prior to the sessions, only recommendations. There is no school or certification program. Anyone can do it. So people from all walks of life who spend three intensive

days studying Theatre of the Oppressed techniques can apply what they have studied without a cogent foundation. I believe a troublesome precedent has been set by this practice. To unleash a group of untrained enthusiasts who barely grasp the mechanics of the techniques and lack a solid theoretical framework can wreak havoc on a community and place marginalized populations in harm's way.

Organizers have been grappling with this dilemma for years. Si Kahn, founder of Grassroots Leadership and a topical singer-songwriter, relegated an entire chapter to the problem in his latest book:

No matter how well we do our work, however conscientiously and carefully, even the best organizers occasionally make people's lives worse – sometimes for a while, sometimes forever. Those we challenge – those who hold power over other people's lives – didn't get where they are by accident. They're not interested in losing the wealth and ease of life they enjoy. When they fight, they fight hard, and they fight to win. (Kahn, 2010, p. 61)

The consequences for confronting the established power elite can be dire – not only for organizers and cultural activists like Augusto Boal, but for entire communities incited to action because of the art. People can get hurt, physically and mentally. In Brazil, following the April 1, 1964 coup, dissidents were beaten, incarcerated, raped, tortured, and executed.

Augusto Boal was among them. People lost their jobs, were harassed, blacklisted, and Boal was jailed, tortured, and forced into exile. As cultural activists and practitioners of the Theatre of the Oppressed,

We bear at least some responsibility for what happens to the people we've encouraged to take these risks. It's easy to say, "It's the fault of those in power." But it is the organizer who says, "You don't need to take this any more. You need to stand up and speak out. You need to challenge injustice, for your own and your children's sake." If people don't listen

and don't do what organizers ask them to do, the conditions they want to challenge and change might continue for the rest of their lives -- but they might not suffer the loss and pain they now have to live with. (Kahn, 2010, p. 62)

Now that Boal has died, it is up to Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners like myself to carry on the method ethically and conscientiously. The system is grounded in theory, praxis, and action. Sometimes, Boal was so eager to pass on his knowledge that the heart of the practice was lost on workshop participants. The task at hand is to take Theatre of the Oppressed back to its roots so that the techniques continue to be an effective tool for transformational change – personal and societal.

Financial backing from philanthropic institutions could address some of the problems associated with this type of leadership-development training for cultural activists. Sessions could be extended, with more emphasis placed on theory and best practices. The nuts and bolts of leadership-development modus operandi could be studied in a historic framework. This way, cultural activists who lack a background in movement building and organizing will have a clear understanding of the context in which the techniques were created. This is financially possible only with funding from foundations.

Cultural activists must be ethical organizers. Funding for leadership-development training can ensure that we are

... absolutely certain the people we work with truly recognize the risks they're taking, the things that could go wrong, the losses they might suffer, before they make the decision to act, individually or together. For the most part, the communities where we organize are not our communities. The people we work with are not our families, our friends, or our neighbors. When the organizing campaign is over, whether the battle is won or lost, whether the organization is built or not built, we leave. They stay. So whatever decisions are made must be theirs, not ours. (Kahn, 2010, p. 65)

*Financial backing from philanthropic institutions could address some of the problems associated with this type of leadership-development training for cultural activists. Sessions could be extended, with more emphasis placed on theory and best practices.*

Like Theatre of the Oppressed, leadership-development training currently available to cultural activists is not perfect. There are inherent flaws and risks associated with the techniques. The benefits, however, far outweigh no preparation at all.

### **A Model for Leadership-Development Training for Cultural Activists**

The 2001 Rockefeller Foundation report concluded that training for cultural activists is “non-existent,” and a recommendation was made for investment in explicit instruction in the field:

Ongoing, practice-based training is widely perceived as both the best approach and a crying need. Many experienced practitioners active today entered this work having been trained as artists and simultaneously involved in social justice movements. Clearly, they prize the type of on-the-job training through which they formulated their own approaches; and when their organizations are able to add new community artists to their staffs, they try to replicate it. But no one has been able to obtain the resources that might enable them to formalize and extend this type of training beyond the few incipient community artists who receive training as newcomers to their own organizations. (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, p. 85)

The researchers also examined various training models for cultural activists and found that when

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asked to name the most powerful international influence on community development practice, the majority of study participants chose popular-education paradigms credited to Boal and to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Adams & Goldbard, 2001).

I emphatically endorse this leadership-development training model for cultural activists as well. Today, Theatre of the Oppressed techniques are practiced in Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, England, Estonia, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, North and South Korea, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Mozambique, Nepal, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United States, Uganda, Wales, and the West Indies (Theatre of the Oppressed, n.d.). Cultural activism, which utilizes the various components of the system, has grown by leaps and bounds. With so many people around the world participating in this training, funders should really take notice.

#### *The IWW*

The rich history of popular-education pedagogy and the arts for social change can be seen at the turn of the 20th century, when the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) incorporated songs in its organizing campaigns.

Fred Thompson, an organizer for the IWW and onetime editor of its newspaper, *The Industrial Worker*, discussed horizontal, transformational leadership in a 1957 article, "The Art of Making A Decent Revolution":

Our hope is that workers will build large and effective unions that are run by the rank and file; that the structure of these unions will correspond to the actual economic ties between workers, so that workers on every job will be in a position to determine more and more what happens on that job; and through a collective class-wide structure, decide what happens in industry as a whole. It is in this way, as we see it, that the working class can reshape its world into something consistent with our better aspirations and with the technical capacities mankind has developed. (Kornbluh, 1998, p. 385)

Thompson also made his case for transformational leadership on a personal and societal level:

If you look to the joint action of yourself and your fellow workers to cope with your problems, you move forward with time into situations where steadily you and they cut a larger role in life, where the decisions about your work are steadily more and more made by you fellows, where the product of your labor steadily redounds more and more to your benefit, where the world more and more becomes as you wish it. (Kornbluh, 1998, p. 387)

#### *Highlander Research and Education Center*

The popular-education archetype is also the heart and soul of the Highlander Folk School, now known as the Highlander Research and Education Center. Launched in 1932 in Monteagle, Tenn., the organization is a place where "average citizens can pool their knowledge, learn from history ... and seek solutions to their social problems" (Dunson, 1965, p. 28).

The integration of cultural expression with horizontal leadership-development training has been a component of the school's curriculum since its earliest days. Zilphia Mae Johnson, a singer and musician who joined the Highlander staff in 1935, incorporated the arts into every facet

of the program. The daughter of an Arkansas mine owner and graduate of the College of the Ozarks was determined “to use her musical and dramatic abilities in some field of radical activity” (Glen, 1996, p. 43); Highlander was the perfect venue. Johnson married Myles Horton, one of the school’s founders, in March 1935, about two months after attending her first labor workshop at the adult education center there (Glen, 1996). Ralph Tefferteller, an early Highlander staff member, recalled her contributions:

When people like Zilphia would get songs going on the picket lines, you could feel people’s spirits rising. Or in workshops. If ever there was a person who could invigorate and move a group of adults with musical participation, she was the prime example of an artist at work. The walls of the old building at Highlander rang with the songs of people during those years, and with the music which she generated and was always encouraging individuals to create in their own way .... She knew, and would use, anything that seemed to suit the occasion – popular music of the late ‘20s and early ‘30s, Broadway tunes .... I’ll never forget how effectively she used the song “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” in little playlets to arouse the emotions of either working people or people to who[m] she was trying to give some appreciation of what the life of the unemployed worker was like. ... She had an infectious type of presentation that enveloped you and drew you in. You weren’t on the outside as a spectator – you became wholeheartedly involved with the moment. ... People coming from wherever – factories, sharecropper country – brought a little of their lifestyles with them to workshops, and ways they had learned to communicate with each other, and singing was one of those ways. The old songs became vehicles for carrying new messages, and singing became a unifying force. (Carawan, n.d., pp. 3-4)

Before she died in 1956, Zilphia Horton amassed 1,300 songs from unions, progressive organizations, traditional Appalachian culture, and the South (Dunson, 1965). These songs played a significant role in the decades ahead: “We Shall Overcome,” which she co-authored with Pete Seeger, Guy Carawan, and Frank Hamilton, became the anthem of the American civil rights

movement and today is sung around the world.

About three years after Zilphia Horton’s death, Guy Carawan, a folksinger from California, joined Highlander and revived the cultural program. He first visited the school in the summer of 1953 with encouragement from Seeger and, after hearing one of the Rev. Martin Luther King’s orations at a Boston church in 1959, was moved to call Myles Horton and volunteer at Highlander. Carawan told Horton that he knew some labor-movement songs and could play guitar and banjo. Horton told him, “Come on down. We really miss the work that Zilphia did here” (Carawan & Carawan, 2010). Highlander pedagogy served as the predominant training model for cultural activists who immersed themselves in civil rights work in the South.

The Highlander work continues with the Zilphia Horton Cultural Organizing Project, created to “strategically use art and culture to promote progressive policies with marginalized communities across Central and Southern Appalachia and the U.S. South” (Highlander Center, n.d.). Among the goals of the program are to help organizations expand the role of art and culture in their organizing and advocacy efforts, enrich the work of artists and cultural workers and organizers by providing a strategic opportunity to engage community issues and to work with and learn from grassroots organizations, and to inspire people to develop cultural tools – including song, video, or other performances or works of art – that draw on local cultures and address community concerns (Highlander Center, n.d.).

The funding class could learn a tremendous amount from studying Highlander’s 80-year history. By evaluating this type of leadership-development training model for cultural movers and shakers, program officers and donors can assess how artists incorporated the information into grassroots campaigns and mobilizing social movements, reflect on the victories realized and dreams deferred, and determine how to partner with organizations and individuals immersed in this work.

### *Theatre for Development*

Theatre for Development was conceived in Botswana in 1973 by a group of educators from the local academy of higher learning; they launched an experiment that connected Freirian concepts to a personal and societal transformation project using theater as the catalyst. Ross Kidd, among the early pioneers of this work, was at the time a professor at the University of Botswana; Martin Byam, one of Kidd's colleagues, and Jeppe Kelepile, a Botswana community counselor, were also project architects (Byam, 1999).

The Theatre for Development idea sprang from a village colloquium held in partnership with the University of Botswana; drama was used to accentuate community problems. Previous approaches to generate civic engagement had failed, so Kidd and the others opted to merge Paulo Freire's methods with popular culture. The Botswana initiative was called Laedza Batanani.

Other universities in Africa introduced Theatre for Development projects in the 1970s, with varying degrees of effectiveness. The programs' success was limited because they failed to fully include community members in decision-making. These projects also attempted to address local issues without establishing those issues' links to a colonial past, leaving no real possibility for the development of critical thought (Byam, 1999).

Laedza Batanani and the other projects deserve credit, however, for setting the Theatre for Development movement in motion in Africa and for being the first programs of their kind in the region to attempt to implement Freire-based participatory platforms for solving problems. Another highlight of this model was the integration of traditional indigenous art forms into educational practices.

Kidd acknowledged shortcomings in these early commissions and recommended that future Freire-based popular theater strategies "dispense with taking plays to the people. The leaders should work to create plays with the community" (Byam, 1999, p. 45). A few years after the

Botswana experiment, the Kenya Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre did just that. It was the first program to produce plays from the ground up – a radical departure from the programs sponsored by government officials or institutions of higher education. Kidd praised the Kamiriithu Theatre for Development model in a 1982 article, nine years after he and his colleagues carried out the Laedza Batanani in Botswana.

Popular theatre in the Third World often claims to be a tool of protest and struggle and a means of social transformation, but rarely does it challenge the status quo in a significant way. Too often it becomes as marginalized as the peasants and workers it represents, with little real impact on the society as a whole. One significant exception has been the popular theatre work of the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre, a peasant- and worker-controlled organization in rural Kenya. ... It's a concrete example of what a people's national theatre should be – accessible to and controlled by the masses, performed in their languages, adopting their forms of cultural expression, and addressing their issues. (Kidd, 1982, p. 47-48, 59)

These are just a few of the examples philanthropic institutions and donors can explore; hundreds more are meticulously documented. With the investment of time and financial resources in this special form of leadership-development training for cultural activists, artists can make a significant contribution in the communities where they work.

### **Grantmaking for Arts and Social Change**

Interest in grantmaking for arts and social-change initiatives has been on the rise since the release of the Urban Institute and Rockefeller Foundation reports. Korza and Bacon (2010) write that in 2008, philanthropists discussed the topic at various sessions during the Grantmakers in the Arts conference and Americans for the Arts' National Arts Policy Roundtable convened to discuss the arts and civic engagement. In 2009, the Arts & Democracy Project helped spearhead a White House briefing on art, community, social

justice, and national recovery and Opportunity Agenda convened its first annual Creative Change Retreat in Telluride, Colo., to explore the intersection of arts and social justice.

Still, the study conducted by Americans for the Arts in 2010 found that there are still significant barriers to supporting arts and social-change activity, and identified five major roadblocks: deficient funds, ambiguous language, inconclusive data, subject-matter incomprehension, and unsuitable organizational fit (Korza & Bacon, 2010). Even though there was no mention of leadership-development training for cultural activists in this research, the information is still relevant. The final report contained the following recommendations for securing more buy-in from philanthropic institutions. I agree that these are necessary next steps:

*A major campaign to elevate funder awareness.* There is insufficient information about the value of arts for social change. Grantmakers often have a difficult time connecting the dots; they don't comprehend how creativity is an integral part of building communities and movements. Knowledge can translate into dollars, and dollars are necessary for leadership-development training for cultural activists.

*Interdisciplinary partnerships.* The distinctive characteristics of arts-for-change work require the amalgamation of fields and a collaborative approach. This type of cooperative spirit could be found among the program officers at the Ford Foundation, where I found cross-pollination to be intrinsic to the institutional culture. Portfolio ambassadors foster relationships, attain an acute understanding of one another's priorities, discuss areas where they can converge on grantmaking – and then they sign the check. I witnessed this time and again. For instance, the Media Production Fund received buy-in from Ford's human rights unit for a number of documentary films. Ford program officers also supported leadership-development training for cultural activists on a number of occasions, and invested in programs like the Highlander Research and Education Center and the Rockwood Leadership Institute.

*Ford program officers also supported leadership-development training for cultural activists on a number of occasions, and invested in programs like the Highlander Research and Education Center and the Rockwood Leadership Institute.*

*Next-generation cultivation.* “Interviewees identified next-generation and individual donors as likely supporters because they tend to more readily understand and embrace the power of arts for change” (Korza & Bacon, 2010, p. 66). Nurturing the next generation of donors and grantmakers could also bode well for cultural activists who require leadership-development training. The rise of movement building via social media is a great opportunity to creatively reach younger potential contributors and organizers. Cultural activists don't necessarily recognize the benefits of leadership-development training. And if they acknowledge that there is a need for this type of educational component, they aren't aware of the outlets that could be made available to them or the financing that would allow them to attend. A social media awareness campaign could have a ripple effect that could lead to a serious personal and financial investment in these types of model programs.

*An elevated profile of arts-for-change initiatives and an evaluation system to examine impact.* Philanthropic institutions have a tendency to place impractical demands on grantees when it comes to measuring outcomes. Respondents to the Arts and Social Change survey noted that “funding arts for change work is hindered by a lack of rigorous but accessible documentation, metrics for impact, and effective case-making materials from the field” (Korza and Bacon, 2010, p. 7). The report suggests that funders act to remedy this:

*Ordinary people, usually locked out of the political process, learn to write their own life scripts to battle oppression. ... With serious support from program officers across the spectrum, this training can be sound, virtuous, and effective.*

Investments in documentation and evaluation, related to grant initiatives, can help build a body of evidence regarding the social impact of the arts. When funders invest in evaluation and support evaluators and researchers to work with grantees to devise or adapt evaluation models, ... [g]rantees benefit from opportunities to work with professionals – building skills in planning evaluation and documentation and in collecting, analyzing, and using data. Researchers and evaluators learn about the particular challenges of assessing the social, civic, and aesthetic impact of the arts as they contribute their expertise, ideas, and approaches. Funders obtain credible data. Further, they can define opportunities to aggregate and compare or contrast information. Dissemination of the resulting processes and reports can add to field knowledge. (Korza and Bacon, 2010, p. 67)

### Conclusion

Increasingly, artists and arts organizations are leading initiatives for social change. Even though their contributions are rarely chronicled, communicated, or appreciated, they continue to make important efforts as community and movement builders, organizers, activists, and catalysts for change.

Funders need to invest in arts-for-change work in general and leadership-development training for cultural activists in particular. And any investment in such training should include popular education models. In an ideal world, the methodology is community specific and tailored to fit the

needs of diverse marginalized groups. Ordinary people, usually locked out of the political process, learn to write their own life scripts to battle oppression. Participation in this democratically oriented approach can be liberating – and dangerous. With serious support from program officers across the spectrum, this training can be sound, virtuous, and effective.

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