



**Animating
Democracy**

A Program of **Americans for the Arts**

Arts and Civic Engagement: Briefing Paper for Working Group of the Arts & Civic Engagement Impact Initiative

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The Arts & Civic Engagement Impact Initiative is informed and guided by a Working Group of arts practitioners, researchers, evaluators, and funders with keen interest in understanding the social and civic impact of arts-based civic engagement work. This briefing paper, prepared by Chris Dwyer of RMC Research, offered a “springboard” for Working Group discussion as we launched the initiative. It provided a conceptual framework depicting a systematic way to examine how arts-based civic engagement initiatives actually influence or produce important effects and impacts – a working theory of social efficacy. The model served as a backdrop for discussion and examination of the “lived” experiences that Working Group members brought into the room. The paper helped us establish common terminology; surface core questions and interests in areas of social impact evaluation and case making for arts-based civic engagement work; fine tune purpose and focus; and prioritize the research agenda.

INTRODUCTION

Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, is convening a Working Group of field leaders to inform and work together on this initiative that aims to advance understanding of the social efficacy of arts-based civic engagement. This briefing paper is a guide for the initial convening of the Working Group, intended to serve as background for discussion that will help focus a research and development agenda for the initiative. The initiative has ambitious goals:

- 1) Advance understanding of the social efficacy of arts-based civic engagement through multiple methods, including research, theory development, preparation of illustrative cases, and design of tools that can be used by practitioners;
- 2) Determine how to frame the case for the importance of arts-based civic engagement work in a way that appeals to different audiences, including elected officials, policymakers, corporate leaders, community leaders, and arts/culture leaders; and
- 3) Strengthen the work of arts and civic engagement practitioners by providing guides for framing intent, documenting process and effects, and maximizing outcomes.

The Working Group's core consultants are charged with collecting and making meaning of existing information and resources, including research and evaluation findings; translating findings into strategies and tools that are useful for practitioners; developing methods of case-making that have widespread applicability; and disseminating resources to potential users. Work on the initiative will be carried out individually and collectively. The Working Group comprises these contracted consultants¹ and others with expertise in arts-based civic engagement² who will lend key insights and vet findings from their vantage points as field practitioners, leaders, and funders.

At this initial convening of the Working Group, participants will inform refinement of the research and development agenda from their varied perspectives as researchers, practitioners, funders, and other field leaders. We have prepared this briefing paper to help the Working Group use common terminology, ensure there is agreement about purposes, focus and prioritize individual and collective efforts, and bring efficiencies to the overall effort, e.g. sort out areas of overlap.

To guide the Working Group's discussion, the briefing paper includes:

- a conceptual framework or logic model that is a systematic way of depicting a working theory of social efficacy;
- a discussion of the components of the framework that presents terminology and options from the perspective of measurement and case-making; and
- an initial list of questions to guide research explorations; inform design of principles for case-making and communication; and surface the types of strategies and tools that would be useful for measuring effects and impacts.

¹ The consultant team includes: Mark Stern and Susan Seifert, Social Impact of the Arts Project/UPenn; Suzanne Callahan, Callahan Consulting for the Arts; Chris Dwyer, RMC Research; and Maria-Rosario Jackson, Urban Institute.

² Other members of the Working Group include: Maribel Alvarez, Southwest Center, University of Arizona; Kelly Barsdate of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies; Denise Brown of the Leeway Foundation; Claudine K. Brown of the Nathan Cummings Foundation; Dudley Cocke of Roadside Theatre; artist Rha Goddess (I+I+I+ONE); Marian Godfrey of the Pew Charitable Trusts; Leia Maahs and Roberto Bedoya of the Tucson Pima Arts Council; artist John Malpede of LAPD (Los Angeles Poverty Department); Eulynn Shiu of Americans for the Arts; and Marc Vogl of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

The intent of the briefing paper is to prompt discussion and debate among Working Group members, and not to limit possibilities. To that end, at key points in the paper we've asked you to pause, reflect, and make some notes for discussion at the initial convening.

Examples of initiatives. The focus of our work, arts-based civic engagement initiatives, covers a lot of territory. Consider the following as illustrative of the range of possibilities.

- A culturally grounded theater organization leads a multi-year, community arts project for Somali women refugees that builds language and career skills through cultural exchange, provides economic opportunity through craft sales, and raises public awareness.
- A public artist works with communities dealing with land reclamation projects to transform public space and foster awareness and responsibility regarding the environment.
- An anti-violence coalition invites hip hop artists to produce a show to get young people to focus on the issue and identify ways to help stop the violence.
- A municipality contracts an artist-in-residence to engage city employees over two years in art projects to advance diversity goals in municipal departments.

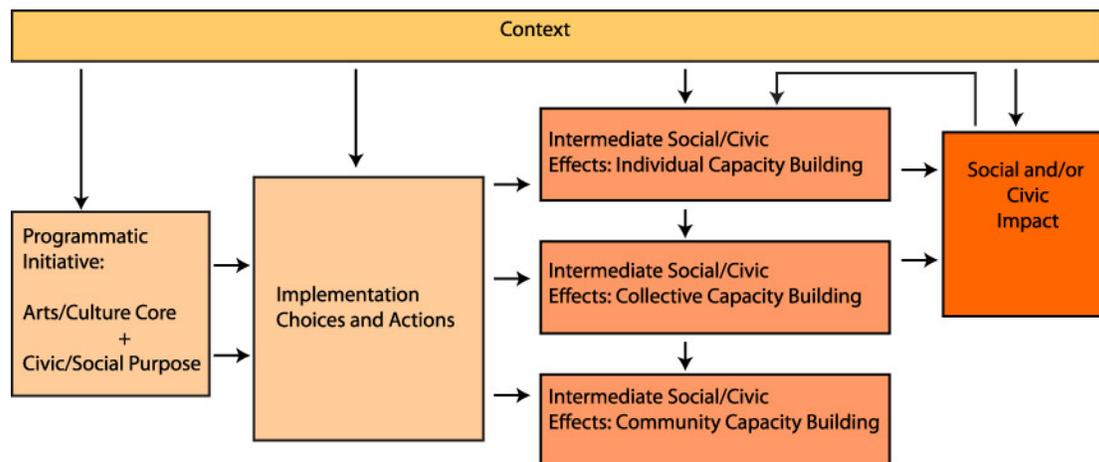
What are one or more examples of arts-based civic engagement initiatives that you have led, participated in, or are familiar with? Be prepared to share an example with the group.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the conceptual framework as diagrammed below is to provide a systematic way to examine how arts-based civic engagement initiatives actually influence or produce important effects and impacts.³ The conceptual framework is a rational-logical perspective on the flow of influences, depicting in the abstract how ideas for civic engagement initiatives might actually unfold in particular contexts. The model serves as a backdrop for discussion and examination of the “lived” experiences that Working Group members will bring to the discussion, and is a base for raising research questions and stimulating thinking about the types of tools that might be useful to practitioners.

³ In this framework, the term “effects” is used to label intermediate changes; “impact” is used to designate concrete desired results that are long term and long lasting. The term “outcome” is used more broadly when referring to both.

The framework can be “read” as applying to a wide range of arts and culture strategies that have a civic intent (whether or not explicit and central) and which are implemented with considerable variation. The model suggests that arts and culture strategies with civic or social intentions are designed to produce intermediate outcomes in the form of capacity that is developed within individuals, groups and networks, and, potentially, larger communities. In some cases those effects may result in visible impacts that go beyond the development of capacity in the individuals and groups directly engaged to create a concrete and lasting change. The purpose of making distinctions among effects and impact is to target areas for measurement and subsequent case-making. Of course, the history of successfully achieving important civic impacts also contributes to building or strengthening capacity (as shown by the arrow from right to left).



The tasks of the Working Group focus on developing theory, summarizing research, and/or building tools to advance field understanding primarily associated with effects and impact. But it may also be important for the Working Group to surface and attend to some elements of design and implementation. For example, it may turn out to be useful to organize measurement approaches according to the arts or civic characteristics of an initiative. Or, as we suggest in the next section, there may be certain implementation choices and processes that, with modifications, can inform measurement options.

Does the framework capture/support your thinking about the path of influences? Are there other major components you would depict on the path to social efficacy? Or would you draw a different sketch? Are there other linkages among key components that you would highlight? (Terms are further defined in the next few pages.)

WALK-THROUGH OF THE FRAMEWORK COMPONENTS

Each component (box) of the framework encompasses a series of related concepts. Below we describe each component for the purpose of surfacing topics the Working Group might discuss, including defining the boundaries of the initiative, confirming the use of common terminology, and providing a backdrop for brainstorming research questions to guide inquiry and develop tools and strategies for measurement and case making.

Programmatic Initiative: Arts/Culture Core + Civic/Social Purpose

This component describes the myriad ways that artistic and cultural processes and products can be combined with civic and social content and purpose.

We use the term “art/culture core” to indicate that the range of creative possibilities is broad, encompassing both creative *processes* and creative *products* in all artistic disciplines. The art/culture aspect of an initiative could be:

- formal or informal, professional or amateur, or a combination;
- fine or applied, traditional, folk, or contemporary arts;
- based on works of the canon or be newly commissioned;
- visual, performing, media, literary, or interdisciplinary arts;
- cultural practice of all types, i.e. cultural expressions of language, ritual, history.

“Civic” and “social” are similarly broad terms, encompassing persistent social issues such as identity; cohesion and conflict; economic and social inequalities; and important topics of public discussion that are global in scope (i.e. race, the environment, educational opportunity, technology, globalization, class differences); as well as those that have particular local meaning (e.g., sense of place, gentrification and displacement, development pressures, community pride, affordable housing). While a civic or social purpose is often thought of as resolving or illuminating issues, problems or challenges, some arts-based civic engagement initiatives may instead be focused on creating, celebrating, or maximizing opportunities or assets. While we are primarily interested in arts/culture work that is *intentional* in terms of a civic or social purpose, we do recognize that some institutions may achieve civic or social effects or impacts through their work without necessarily consciously planning to do so.

While we are interested in initiatives of different “scales,” we are especially interested in programmatic initiatives that are bounded and clear enough in their shape and focus that it is possible to determine (or at least discuss) their contribution to civic or social outcomes.

Implementation Choices and Actions. This component describes the choices that are made for implementation, with special attention to those decisions and approaches that are most likely to influence the nature and extent of effects and impact and inform measurement and case making. In case-making, part of the initiative’s aim is to bring visibility to those “high pay-off” implementation choices that maximize the chances that valued outcomes will result. Further, some implementation characteristics may provide clues about the pool of appropriate stakeholders for evaluation outcomes and also suggest opportunities for learning what evidence is likely to be convincing to them. Hypotheses about how implementation choices could influence outcomes and act as a source for evaluation options are illustrated by two examples:

- The more *diverse the participation* (by role in community as well as demographics) in arts core activities, the more likely that different types of capacity will be developed. To go beyond individual and collective capacity to build community capacity (and affect social impact), it is probably necessary to engage formal and informal leaders from multiple arenas (neighborhood, ethnic, religious/spiritual, political, the work force, municipal, artistic, social service, and so forth). Diverse participants are representative of audiences for evaluation. Their questions, interests, reactions, and insights are the raw material for making the case about outcomes to larger groups of their peers.
- The *intensity and duration* of engagement in arts core activities likely has an influence on the degree to which capacity is built and then applied. Deeper, more intense participation enhances the potential to strengthen collective and community capacity. Engagement over time allows opportunity for reflection and challenge, and for new and more complex dimensions of issues to emerge. Problems emerge and are resolved, building the capacity of the group to do so. Longer duration of engagement may facilitate application and transfer of “built capacity” to other issues, e.g., as knowledge of process and relationships built in one arena are applied to solve an emerging problem in another area.

In addition to the two examples above, other types of implementation choices that influence outcomes and evaluation methods include:

- ways in which the art/culture core and engagement/dialogue strategies are linked;
- scale of engagement, e.g., numbers/proportions involved;
- degree of public involvement in creating art;
- nature/type of civic engagement or dialogue;
- immediacy of the issues addressed;
- specificity of issues that are the focus of engagement or dialogue;
- explicitness of intended civic/social outcomes;
- roles of professional artists;
- creative roles of non-artists;
- engagement of “outsiders”;
- locus of leadership and authority;
- number and types of different partnerships/collaborations involved;
- nature of the contributions of partners/collaborators;
- ways of maintaining momentum/sustaining involvement; and
- institutional sponsor(s) of arts and culture initiative.

Implementation actions and choices are related to measurement and case-making through:

- creating demand for evaluation results;
- offering natural venues for documenting/capturing evidence;
- providing opportunities to learn directly from stakeholders and experts what would be convincing evidence of outcomes; and
- engaging influential stakeholders as participants in the arts-based engagement/dialogue activity.

What are other examples of implementation choices and actions that influence measurement and case-making? In what ways do implementation choices and actions affect measurement and case-making?

Context. The conceptual framework recognizes that community context influences how arts-based civic engagement initiatives are shaped and implemented as well as the nature and success of intermediate effects and longer-term impacts. A major issue for the field is the challenge of documenting effects and impact of arts-based civic engagement initiatives in a way that generalizes beyond a specific community context. For that reason, it is important to understand the role that context plays in the success of particular initiatives in order to provide guidance to others. Contextual variables may influence Working Group members' selection of illustrative cases, for example, to ensure that findings are relevant to many users. Similarly, information about contextual variables should help guide adaptations to tools.

Contextual variables that are important to attend to in describing findings include:

- size and nature of community;
- demographics of community;
- cohesion/polarization within the community;
- history of/related civic engagement initiatives;
- history of/related community arts initiatives; and
- position/history of sponsoring unit(s).

What other community variables should we attend to?

Intermediate Effects. The framework recognizes that the types of outcomes typically ascribed to arts-based civic engagement initiatives are in the realm of social and civic capacity building for individuals, institutions, networks, and communities. These important capacities are labeled intermediate because they are typically prerequisite to impacts.

Social and civic capacity is a constellation of ingredients encompassing:

- *the knowledge and expertise of content (issues) and processes (involvement, dialogue, consensus-building, etc.)* that resides in individuals, groups or subgroups, organizations, and larger communities;
- *access to human and material resources* (the ability, for example, to tap skilled facilitation);
- *systems for collecting, organizing, using, and disseminating information; and leadership;* and
- *common expectations* which includes a sense of group efficacy or collective responsibility, as well as the notion that individual contributions matter to the capacity of the whole.

Following similar distinctions made by Craig McGarvey in defining human, social, and community capital, we have separated (for the purpose of measurement) individual, collective, and community capacities. We specify the three levels in the framework for the purposes of thinking how each component is developed and assessed, how the components affect each other, and how individually and together they produce impact. It is possible to think about building capacity incrementally and/or simultaneously in individuals, groups, or subgroups (labeled collective in the model), and in larger communities, including formally organized communities such as municipalities. Of course, while the object of an arts-based civic engagement initiative may be to build civic capacity, a certain amount of civic capacity is also required in order to undertake and implement such an initiative.

Types of intermediate capacity-building effects typically ascribed to arts-based civic engagement initiatives (along with examples) include:

- Awareness of particular issues is developed (e.g., heightened awareness of a local incident);
- Knowledge of issues is deepened (e.g., understanding various options for treatment of storm water run off);
- Understanding of others' perspectives is developed (e.g., members of the public learn about the traditional values of an ethnic group)
- Facilitation and other dialogue skills are developed (e.g., individuals practice skills of challenging generalizations, clarifying misunderstandings)

- Attitudes are changed in particular directions (e.g., elders develop greater respect for youth);
- Increased numbers and/or different profiles of individuals are engaged (e.g., participants from new immigrant groups join a neighborhood effort);
- New relationships are built and/or existing relationships strengthened among individuals (e.g., leaders from opposing sides of an issue develop an open line of communication);
- Connections are made that cross individual boundaries such as race, age, gender, income, location (e.g., a diverse group of citizens are drawn to work together on a festival);
- Interest groups and networks are built (e.g., an ad hoc committee emerges to advocate for a series of housing policies);
- New relationships are built and existing relationships strengthened among institutions/ organizations (e.g., a coalition of churches forms to address the problem of displaced families); and
- Connections are made that cross institutional boundaries such as policy domains (education, transportation, arts) or sectors (public, corporate, nonprofit) (e.g., members of the police department work with agencies serving seniors).

The above intermediate effects are listed approximately in order from individual to community. Awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and skills are often thought of as individual capacities, but can also be developed and “held” by organizations and groups (i.e., consider an organization that maintains a culture of shared values around the development of knowledge).

What examples of social/civic capacities have you observed?
How have those capacities been documented or measured?

It is not our intention to draw a neat line between intermediate capacity-building effects and social/ civic impacts or to develop rules for distinguishing the two. Rather, we suggest that there is a continuum between the effects of capacity building and visible impact—a continuum that is useful for discussions about measurement and case-making. In some cases, intermediate effects may be accepted as ends in themselves, i.e., awareness of an issue has been developed although no action has been taken or the attitude shift has been insufficient to result in collective action.

Consider also that the fact of achieving a social and civic impact contributes to capacity. For example, the community that has successfully changed a policy in the direction of increased representativeness has now a historical foundation in its repertoire of achieved success, contributing to its capacity to take future actions.

The Intermediate Effects component of the conceptual framework poses specific challenges for measurement and case-making. (Our very challenge in this initiative is to address some of these!) They include:

1. Intermediate effects, however well documented, may be insufficient evidence of value for some stakeholders.
2. Collective and community intermediate effects may be of higher value than individual outcomes but are more difficult to assess.
3. Aspects of capacity that might be most important in the long run, e.g., group efficacy, are especially difficult to measure.
4. It can be difficult to attribute intermediate effects in a rigorous way to arts-based civic initiatives given the many other types of intervening and extraneous variables.
5. Formally connecting intermediate effects in a rigorous way to social or civic impact poses methodological challenges; many variables influence the types of changes represented by such impacts.

What are your experiences in measuring intermediate effects of the types described above?

Social and/or Civic Impact. In the conceptual framework, social and civic impacts are assumed to be concrete desired results—“hoped for” long-term and long lasting results. The impacts are visible; in other words, the change can be discerned by others outside the group. Impacts go beyond knowledge, awareness, skill building, and connections to behaviors and actions.

Types of social and civic impacts (with examples) include:

- An issue is resolved (e.g., fair distribution/allocation of natural resources);
- Consensus has been produced (e.g., agreement reached on location of a community facility);
- Long-standing rifts have been healed (e.g., two organizations that have viewed each other as competitors agree to join together on an initiative);

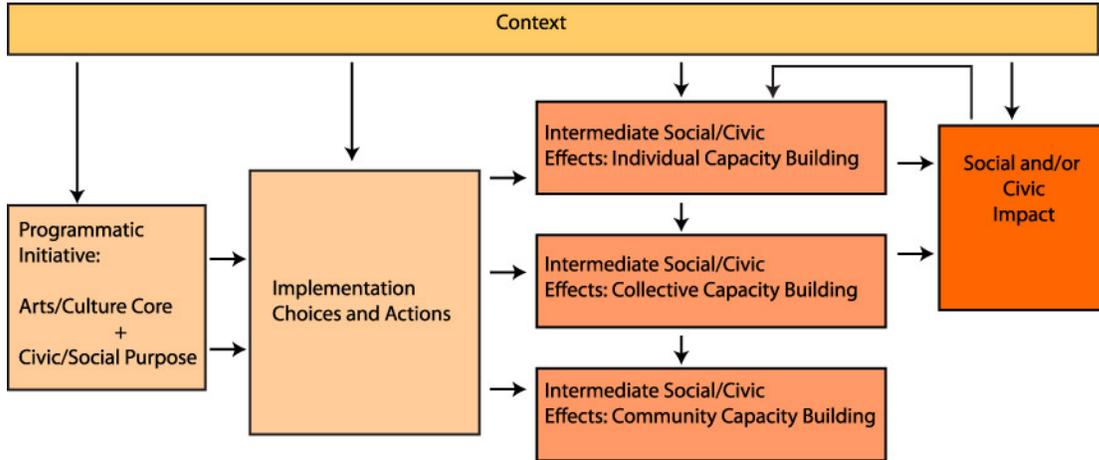
- Policy has been enacted (e.g., community colleges move toward open enrollment for courses);
- An opportunity has been developed (e.g., a safe gathering place is established and maintained);
- A problem has been foreseen and prevented or averted (e.g., collaborators have come together to put in place support for anticipated refugee relocation);
- New leaders and/or new types of leaders have emerged (e.g., members of the resettled refugee community run for school board); and
- Standing mechanisms for problem solving/deliberation are in place (e.g., governing body employs the study group process for community decision making).

The framework makes a distinction between intermediate effects and social or civic impact—not necessarily because impact is more valuable than capacity—but from the standpoint of thinking systematically about measurement and case-making. Separating the consideration of approaches to measurement and case-making for intermediate capacity-building effects and social/civic impact may expand our thinking about options.

The impact component of the conceptual framework also poses challenges in making the case for the value of arts and culture/civic engagement initiatives (again, an important focus for this initiative) for the following reasons.

1. It is difficult to attribute impact to arts and culture initiatives in a rigorous way given the many other types of intervening and extraneous variables.
2. Formally connecting intermediate effects in a rigorous way to social or civic impact poses methodological challenges; many variables influence the types of changes represented by such impacts.
3. Civic/social capacities (intermediate effects) developed through a particular initiative may not yield the intended desired results in that initiative and yet contribute later to a different type of impact.

What examples have you seen of social/civic impact? How have they been documented? What are your experiences in measuring social/civic impact of the types described above?



REFLECTION ON CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As you've followed the discussion in this section, are there any places where you believe terminology is confusing? Please note terms that may need revision and/or further clarification during group discussion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: USING THE FRAMEWORK

We believe the conceptual framework can serve as a springboard for the Working Group's discussion in the following general ways.

- The conceptual framework can be the basis for development of research questions to guide the search for and analysis of existing information.
- Connections among components of the framework can stimulate thinking about the types of tools that could be useful in measuring results; and
- Discussion of framework components might spark thinking about the communication principles associated with case making.
- Discussion of the framework components can help identify variables to structure cases and examples so that the most salient ingredients of successful models are brought forth.

Below is a starter set of research questions for the Working Group to consider.

Overarching Questions

1. What would contribute most to advancing field practice in assessing social/civic efficacy of arts-based civic engagement strategies?

What are the models/exemplars for documentation and evaluation of results?

2. What would contribute most to bringing visibility to and advancing the case for support for arts-based civic engagement strategies?

What are the models/exemplars for communication and case making?

3. What can we learn from other fields about:

- a. measuring intermediate effects (social/civic capacity development) (e.g., from the fields of leadership development, education, psychology, management)?
- b. measuring impact of civic engagement strategies (e.g., from planning professionals, political scientists)
- c. case making and communication

4. Who are the primary audiences for evaluative information about arts-based civic engagement strategies? (e.g. elected officials, policymakers, corporate leaders, community leaders, funders, partners, stakeholders)

What intermediate effects and/or impacts are most meaningful to various audiences?

5. What are guidelines to help define reasonable (and realistic) expectations for evaluation information and evidence of impact in terms of factors such as cost, time, skill, and effort?

Evaluation Methods

6. What is the most essential information to capture in evaluations?

7. Where are the obvious gaps in assessment of intermediate effects and impact (e.g., instrumentation, rigor of design)?

8. What are useful methods for capturing credible evidence of social /civic efficacy?

What are typical obstacles?

9. What types of results/models of evidence do various audiences perceive to be credible?

a. Are there audiences for cases? If so, what are the desired characteristics of such cases?

b. Are there audiences for meta-analyses? If so, what are the desired characteristics of such summaries?

c. How important is longitudinal assessment?

d. What other results/models of evidence are useful or desirable?

Case Making and Communication

10. What communications options (or combinations) are best used to make the case for arts-based civic engagement initiatives and toward what results? (e.g., narrative/story based vs. quantitative, mixed mode presentations, report vs. media presentation, etc.)

11. To what extent is it important to be able to compare the outcomes of arts-based civic engagement initiatives with other civic engagement activities?