



## Funding Advocacy for Arts Education: A Worthy Investment

Arts programs are an essential part of every child's education: They make youth more innovative, creative, and better critical thinkers – vitally important skills for the 21st Century and for the country's workforce development. No teacher should be forced to choose between math, reading, physical education, music, language and art – but today, that's just what's happening. Too many kids are missing arts programs as a core part of their education because our public policies have led to limited instructional time for the arts, and decision-makers are cutting or re-allocating arts education funding due to severe budget cuts. Unfortunately, it's the kids most at risk who bear the brunt of this, making arts education an issue of equality, education reform, and social justice.

Foundations have made incredible contributions toward including the creative process as a part of a quality education, awarding hundreds of millions of dollars each year in grants for multidisciplinary arts education, performing arts education, visual arts education, museum arts education, and literary arts education. However, very little of these funds are directed toward advocacy efforts that would guarantee the policies, funding and instructional time necessary for effective arts education in the classroom and during out-of-school time. As a result, foundations have helped solve a short-term problem by underwriting arts education programming where it would otherwise be missing – but more investment must be made to ensure that these programs are part of our school curriculum over the long term.

As a society, we would never accept the idea that private funding would be necessary to cover the costs of reading or math instruction for our schools. We simply cannot, and should not, accept this situation for arts education.

If we want to reverse this alarming trend and move toward a societal expectation that every child, every day, has access to the arts as part of his or her education, we must advocate to affect public policy, ensure that candidates are aware that arts education is a core issue affecting the communities they wish to serve, and impact decisions about how resources are allocated. We must educate stakeholders on the necessity of arts education to set up each student for success in school, in work, and in life. And we must hold accountable our school districts, local, state and federal governments for making the arts an essential part of the quality education that every child deserves.

Funders have an important role to play by supporting organizations whose arts education advocacy plans:

- Are positioned to be effective, with clear goals and objectives, strategies and tactics, targets and audiences, and messages;
- Are collaborative, bringing together multiple constituencies and stakeholders to ensure the best interests of every child are brought forward; and
- Develop leadership for long-term movement building.

Arts education services providers are well positioned to participate in these advocacy efforts. They already have a deep investment in schools and the community, as well as the history with and connections to key decision-makers. Their work also gives them access to key stakeholders and the ability to motivate students, their families, teachers, school leadership and others.

In this time of diminishing commitment to arts education, supporting arts education advocacy can have tremendous impact by:

- Influencing specific policies and decisions that define the funding and instructional time necessary for effective arts education in the classroom and during out-of-school time;
- Changing how teaching happens through improved systems, accountability and quality practices that deliver on the transformative promise of effective arts education;
- Increase public funding allocated for arts education;
- Building a movement by sparking new partnerships and engaging key stakeholders, including developing youth leaders; and
- Benefiting our communities.

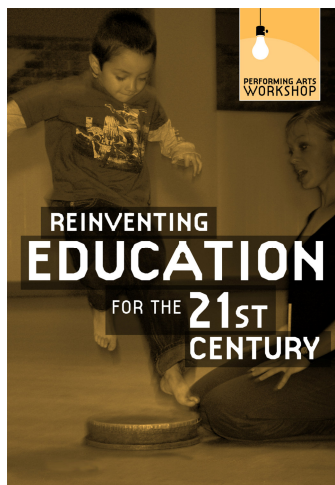
Investing in advocacy pays off in both the funds generated for the community and in less tangible benefits. According to a study commissioned by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, for every dollar invested in community groups' advocacy, organizing and civic engagement (\$75.5 million total), they garnered \$91 in benefits for their communities, as well as non-monetary impacts such as cleaner air, better working conditions, more balanced immigration enforcement, greater student access to college-prep classes and more responsive services for LGBTQ, limited English proficient residents, and helping marginalized groups find a voice in the democratic process.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, an investment in arts education advocacy is an investment in developing well-educated, resourceful and creative people that participate in a more successful, sustainable and just community.

**When institutional funders invest in this change, they can also leverage their influence and serve as connectors in the arts education movement. They can achieve more impact through:**

- **Direct funding of arts education advocacy, and publicizing these grants and the rationale for why they were made;**
- **Serving as pathways to other potential direct funders;**
- **Organizing arts education advocates to work together toward common goals;**
- **Convening and encouraging like-minded funders to unify around clear goals and outcomes for arts education advocacy that they can help support;**
- **Publishing thought-leadership pieces about why it's important to fund arts education advocacy; and**
- **Inviting arts advocacy leaders to present at key meetings and conferences.**

While no one can predict specific outcomes from arts education advocacy efforts, strategic and diverse support from institutional funders will demonstrate the leadership and public will behind preserving and expanding arts education funding and encouraging best practices in arts education.



<sup>1</sup> Lisa Ranghelli and Julia Craig, *Strengthening Democracy, Increasing Opportunities: Impacts of Advocacy, Organizing and Civic Engagement in Los Angeles*, [http://ncrp.org/files/publications/gcip-la\\_report\\_low\\_res.pdf](http://ncrp.org/files/publications/gcip-la_report_low_res.pdf) (March 2010).