

APAP | MetLife Foundation Case Study
Increasing Arts Access in Underserved Communities

MYRNA LOY CENTER/HELENA PRESENTS

Helena, MT

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Take Note

- The Myrna Loy Center/Helena Presents provides the opportunity for underserved rural communities outside of Helena to experience unique, multi-cultural arts events. It is one of the few organizations who outreach to these communities.
- As Montanans often do not experience the diversity of culture and race present in other parts of the country and the world, the Myrna Loy Center presents many different musical and ethnic performers.

Overview

Myrna Loy Center/Helena Presents includes outreach to rural audiences as part of its mission. It strives to present contemporary media and performance; to support the creation of new work of Montana, regional and national artists; and to nurture a lifelong involvement in the arts through education and

residency. The organization's rural audience is varied, and includes a large percentage of low-income residents. Its outreach extends to youth in very small, rural communities, as well as isolated ethnic groups, including Native American communities.

Commitment

Strategic Concepts

The Myrna Loy Center works to include artists and audiences from underserved communities by:

- Offering programming in those communities;
- Bringing diverse communities together to perform major installations; and
- Providing Montana artists with new outlets and opportunities for professional development through partnerships with creative networks and artists from across the country.

Professional Development

- The organization has a "Grants to Artists" program that provides opportunities for artists near Helena.
- To provide a strong contact with a different culture, the MLC sponsored a three week residency with the artistic director of Omstrab, a Brazilian performing arts company.

Leadership in the Community

Myrna Loy Center/Helena Presents is recognized for its innovative leadership in reaching new audiences within rural communities. The executive director has presented workshops to arts council members at PAE and participants at CMA, encouraging the support of rural arts organizations and outreach, and providing strategies and best practices, including ways to present unknown artists.

The center has also served Montanans with disabilities by offering residences by the National Theater Workshop for the Handicapped and by Axis Dance, whose outreach included a residency at the state school for the developmentally disabled.

Effective Practices

Community Engagement

The organization is tied to many different groups and audiences in Montana, including school districts, other arts organizations, community literary groups, many local artists, the Montana Arts Council, the Montana Consortium for the Arts, and Carroll College in Helena.

Implementation

The Myrna Loy Center works to achieve its goals through programming in outlying communities and partnerships with networks and professional artists working outside Montana. Examples include

- A creation project and residency in Boulder, MT (3,000 residents-30 miles south of Helena);
- An outdoor event with Project Bandaloop on a bridge near Cascade, MT (212 residents, 46 miles north of Helena),
- Residencies in small and rural schools in Ovando, Basin, Lincoln, Montana City, Whitehall (all less than 1,000 residents).
- Partnerships with On the Boards in Seattle and PICA in Portland, which brought young, Northwest-based arts groups to Helena and introduced Montana artists to that network; and
- The “Next Collaborations” program, which paired Montana artists (including high school students) with national artists.

Evaluation

The Myrna Loy Center evaluates its programs based upon anecdotal evidence of audience engagement and interest from new partners to expand initiatives.

Challenges

- Finding fiscal support for work in rural areas is difficult.

Advice

Effective marketing is key to success. The Myrna Loy Center staff has strong relationships with regional newspapers, newsletters, and media outlets, including community organizations in rural areas. In addition, a well-developed website and connections with many regional e-mail newsletters help reach different groups throughout the area.



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