

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

UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY

Ann Arbor, MI

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Take Note

- UMS adheres to an informal staff mantra, 'EINO': Everybody In, Nobody Out.
- As a result of successful community engagement for a specific festival, several of the original organizers deepened their involvement by establishing a foundation to promote and financially support the presentation of Arab artists at UMS. They also continue to serve as advisors for future UMS projects with a focus on Arab culture, including the selection of artists. Other committee members joined the UMS Board or became annual donors, either as individuals or through their corporations.

Overview

For University Musical Society (UMS), accessibility is integral to its organizational mission: creating opportunities and removing barriers to encourage participation in the arts by as many people as possible. To address specific issues of arts access for underserved audiences, UMS created the Global Programming Initiative, a structured plan to ensure continuity and depth in UMS's community engagement, with a special focus on four regional cultural communities underserved in the arts. UMS focuses its global programming curatorial efforts on one specific group each year, deepening its engagement with that community while maintaining existing connections with other community groups through continued programming.

The Global Programming Initiative has two major goals: to increase and ensure arts access for African/African American, Arab-American, Mexican/Latino ('Americas'), and Pacific/Asian communities in the southeastern Michigan region, and to contribute to the better understanding and appreciation of these communities' traditions.

UMS has the ability to provide context for culturally-specific programming through its well-established educational programs; its many partnerships with cultural and service organizations, colleges and universities, and school districts; and its staff members' expertise in community engagement. These attributes put UMS in a unique position to increase arts access in the region and disseminate culturally-specific art to wider, broader audiences.

Commitment

Strategic Concepts

- UMS cultivates relationships with key members of the underserved community over extended periods of time, ensuring that the community takes ownership of events. Over time, community leaders promote UMS events and activities.
- UMS engages new community members in activities that are in keeping with their cultural traditions.
- UMS is committed to equitable partnerships and is cognizant of the many differences that can exist between organizations—differences of size, purpose, location and cultural tradition.

Professional Development

- UMS staff members volunteered at Arab community events in order to deepen their understanding of Arab-American culture and strengthen their relationships with the community.

Leadership in the Community

- The Global Programming Initiative has received regional and national recognition through grants awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Whitney Fund, an affiliate fund of the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan.
- UMS introduced key business, civic, and government leaders from the Ann Arbor Arab-American community to their counterparts in Dearborn and Detroit, thus strengthening community ties and providing a region-wide forum for people sharing an interest in Arab-American culture.

Effective Practices

Community Engagement

UMS worked in partnership with the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services to present a season-long Arab World Music Festival. By working with leaders in Ann Arbor's Arab communities, UMS was able to organize events in keeping with Arab hospitality traditions, generating Festival interest and engendering trust in UMS.

UMS created an Honorary Committee for its 2004-2005 Arab World Music Festival, complementing grass-roots efforts to increase arts access for regional Arab-Americans. The Committee advised UMS on planning and helped evaluate project outcomes.

Implementation

UMS has taken a long-term and sustained approach to engaging a culturally-specific community:

- First, UMS began to establish relationships with key organizations in the community in the 1990s.
- Next, UMS made long-term commitments to present Arab artists annually, to attend events hosted by its partner organizations, and to take on volunteer roles in the community.
- Then, UMS worked to cultivate relationships on a person-to-person basis.
- Finally, UMS presented a season-long Arab World Music Festival in 2004-2005

Evaluation

UMS measured the success of the Global Programming Initiative based upon the continued engagement of community members. A subgroup of the original Committee continues to serve as advisors for future UMS Arab culture projects. Other Committee members have joined the UMS Board or have become annual donors, either as individuals or through their corporations.

Challenges

UMS built genuine, long-term relationships with diverse communities of shared cultural heritage by using Sharon King's four principles of partnership: communication, cooperation, vulnerability, and reciprocity. They reported that the last two principles were the most important and the most challenging because they required good listening skills, humility, and a commitment that both partners benefit from the relationship.

Advice

- Utilize varied forms of promotions. UMS used print and broadcast media, UMS's website and email listservs, direct mail postcards, statewide networks for educators, UMS brochures and publications, and a playlist partnership with iTunes.
- Don't forget grass-roots promotional efforts, including social events and word-of-mouth endorsements, which proved especially successful with initiatives involving culturally specific groups.
- Employ Sharon King's four principles of partnership: communication, cooperation, vulnerability, and reciprocity.



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