

**Report to the Association of  
Performing Arts Presenters**

***Ensemble Theater Collaborations Grant Program  
2005-2008***

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The Public Theatre: Norman Frisch

# Part 1

## Introduction

### Preface

In the spring of 2009, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (Arts Presenters) approached us to research and write a report with the following goals:

- Document the impact of the Ensemble Theater Collaborations (ETC) Grant program on the grantee companies' capacity;
- Explore the current capacity of companies and what they need to survive and thrive;
- Ascertain what has been learned about ensembles over the past three years since ETC was launched;
- Identify how foundations and service organizations can best assist the field of ensemble theaters in the near and long-term future.

We had co-authored an assessment of Arts Presenters' ETC grant program and its impact on grantees in the fall of 2006, at the request of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation after the first year of a multi-year commitment to this program. Over the course of the program, Arts Presenters awarded a total of 41 project grants (with supplemental creative development support to three organizations) and 27 travel subsidies with funds from Duke, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Ford Foundation. Beginning in 2004, funding also supported the annual Under the Radar Festival and Symposium. See Appendix A for a summary of grants over the three-year history of the program (2005-2008).

Before the scheduled conclusion of the ETC re-granting program, Arts Presenters asked what lessons could be learned about the support system for ensemble theaters in the U.S., using the grantees as a lens to explore the needs of ensemble theaters as a whole. Arts Presenters partnered with the Network of Ensembles Theaters (NET) to secure NEA funding to commission seven case studies and to enrich the research with multiple opportunities for NET members to contribute their experience and information. In April 2009, Arts Presenters convened the last two rounds of ETC grantees in New York City, plus six NET board and staff. Then in June 2009, NET dedicated a full afternoon during its Summit to flesh out key areas that emerged from the preliminary research.

### Program background and history

Arts Presenters' Ensemble Theater Collaborations (ETC) grants program is one of three parts of a national theater funding initiative. Funding from Duke and Mellon supported the Leading National Theater program, which made two-year grants to seven nationally-recognized ensembles in late 2005, and the current New Generations program for individual theatre practitioners, developed with and administered by the Theater Communications Group.

Arts Presenters designed the ETC program based on an eight-month planning process in 2004 supported by a Duke grant of \$160,000. Arts Presenters established and convened an advisory committee and hosted two national theater / presenter meetings that provided field input about project guidelines, criteria, and the application process. Subsequently, Duke awarded Arts Presenters \$1,335,000 over two years to "implement a pilot re-granting program to fund

collaborative projects between ensemble theaters, resident [or regional] theaters and presenters to build the knowledge and capacity of the work of ensemble theaters and expand the reach of their work to audiences nationwide.” Additional funds were forthcoming from Mellon and Ford. Following the 2006 assessment, Duke renewed their commitment with \$500,000 in 2007 for another two years; final grants were made in October 2008.

Overall, the Ensemble Theater Collaborations Grant program is designed to address three distinct needs in the field of ensemble theaters. It provides partnership support to leverage collaborations between ensembles, regional theaters and presenters; travel support to further the face-to-face communications needed to develop strong partnerships; and a festival and conference to expose and connect ensembles to potential partners, audiences and other supporters. Components of the ETC program were:

**Collaboration** grants of \$20,000 - \$40,000, for ensemble theaters and independent artists to partner with regional theaters and/or presenters. Funding was awarded directly to the ensembles / artists unless they did not have their own 501c3 status. Three project grants were augmented with supplementary support.

**Travel subsidy grants** up to \$2,000 to underwrite travel costs and per diems. Travel grants were open to the field, included domestic and international travel, and were not restricted to Arts Presenters’ members. Recipients traveled to see new work and to initiate or further current and potential relationships.

**Under the Radar Festival and Symposium (UTR)** of new theater (including international companies) held in conjunction with Arts Presenters’ annual conference each January in New York City. A hallmark of UTR is the showing of complete, fully-produced work, in contrast to the under-produced, excerpted showcases that are the industry norm.

### Methodology

This report draws upon a range of activities and resources:

- An assessment commissioned by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation in 2006, based on a two-day meeting of 20 grantees in July 2006, written program evaluations, and a series of 13 interviews with advisory committee and panel members, program officers, and other leaders in the field. Many of the findings in this assessment still hold true, despite the different economic environment of 2009.
- A gathering of 29 ensemble theaters, independent artists and associated professionals in April 2009 in New York City convened by Arts Presenters and NET. A detailed report of this gathering by Celia O’Donnell greatly informed this report. See Appendix C for a list of participants, and Appendix D for a summary of the proceedings.
- An on-line survey of NET members in the winter of 2008, completed by 68 companies, or 66% of its membership at that time.

- An on-line survey of ETC grantees in the spring of 2009, completed by 16 companies (38% response rate). About one-third of these respondents and ETC grantees as a whole are also NET members.
- Seven case studies commissioned especially for this assessment, written by peers in the field. The diverse subjects included one presenter (The Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis MN, written by John Killacky), one regional theater (The Public Theater in New York City, by Norman Frisch), three ensembles who *had* received an ETC grant (SITI Company in NYC by Mark Russell, Sandglass Theater in Putney VT by Kathie deNobriga, and Living Word Project in San Francisco by Anna Alves) and two who had *not* (Pangea World Theater in Minneapolis by Andrea Assaf and Sojourn Theatre in Portland OR by Molly Sturges).
- Notes from small group discussions at NET Gatherings, in particular the National Summit of Ensemble Theaters in San Francisco, June 2009. In collaboration with Arts Presenters and NET staff, we framed ten key areas of inquiry raised at the ETC convening, to pursue in smaller group discussions at the NET Summit. See Appendix D for these questions.

## Part 2

### Overview of the Field of Ensemble Theaters

Ensemble theater-making is experiencing a renaissance, and the field continues to expand and innovate. Ensembles are discovering new and hybrid structures, mounting more technically complex work, and working across disciplines and sectors. Many have accumulated a significant body of work, created multi-part productions, and connected with new audiences. Increasingly, universities are teaching ensemble practice, theory and training. Ensemble artists are receiving national recognition for their contributions to the field: Ping Chong, Meredith Monk, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Rosalba Rolon, Bill Rauch, Rhodessa Jones, Elizabeth LeCompte and Anne Bogart have all received United States Artists awards. Four of the six grants from the NonProfit Finance Fund's "Leading for the Future" program were awarded to ensembles. Ensembles are increasingly presented and commissioned by regional theaters and presenters, becoming a driving creative force in the U.S. theater.

Key characteristics of this field are creativity and adaptability, and organizations and artists are discovering ways to sustain themselves over time through partnerships, earned revenue streams and new artistic and administrative practices. While ensemble members have always assumed multiple roles within their ensembles, there is now an emerging hybridity -- ensembles are themselves assuming multiple roles, becoming producers or presenters, or something in between, in an environment with permeable boundaries. Conrad Bishop, of The Independent Eye, provided a metaphor for this fluid nature: "[It's] like a snake shedding its skin to survive -- even though the skin sheds on a regular basis, the spine remains the same. Usually change implies failure, but maybe change is actually successful adaptation. The work necessitates response and change."

To understand the context within which ensembles operate, it is important to understand some of the current conditions, detailed here in Part 2. In Part 3, we will look at some specific factors that challenge or limit the full potential of ensemble theatres.

#### Funding Mechanisms

Ensemble structures, goals and processes are exceptionally diverse: that is both the beauty of the field and the challenge of creating structures and mechanisms to support it. Some ensembles work 'below the radar,' in informal, ad hoc ways, choosing not to pursue philanthropic dollars, or even a nonprofit status. Others *do* seek public and private money and find that most available funding is for project support (including ETC grants). The cycles of project funding can result in inconsistent income levels, sometimes perceived or experienced as instability. This expansion and contraction of budgets takes a toll: there is a risk of losing momentum, exposure, knowledge, expertise, and even personnel. General operating support for administration or seed money is rare; research and development phases and early rehearsals are all too often un-paid labor.

By choice or necessity some ensembles have adopted a project basis as their standard way of working; it allows them to be nimble and remain financially conservative. It also diminishes the consistency of year-round operations and increases the risk of losing ensemble members who need full-time, regular employment. Sojourn Theatre forged a compromise, engaging the ensemble on project-to-project basis, with an on-going managing director to serve as coordinator

of a decentralized work environment. The more complex the ensemble's life, the more important it is to have someone "maintaining these fluid relationships...a complex and daunting business."

### Shifts in Artistic and Administrative Practice

Artistic practices and aesthetics are shifting. While some ensembles investigate the leading edge of the nexus between technology and performance (Builders Association and Squonk Opera, for example), others are seeking the simplicity of "smaller" work. For example, Cynthia Hopkins is exploring more intimate solo work after a series of expensive productions with large casts and extensive technology. The Rogue Artists' Ensemble in Los Angeles is experimenting with a Nano Theatre Cycle, presented in living rooms across Los Angeles.

The evolution of artistic practice continues as ensembles learn new techniques from each other in a rich cross-fertilization: for example, Sandglass learned shadow puppetry from Cambodian masters, and in the process of teaching their own style, gained a keener analysis and articulation of their own practice. The concept of creative exchange is a popular feature at NET gatherings: in 2009 the daily "Collisions" sessions gave practitioners a way to share their specific artistic approaches by creating together.

Ensembles are also exploring new forms that depart from the traditional concepts of theater. Sojourn sometimes produces events, and Squonk Opera's *Astro-Rama* looked more like a rock concert than a theatrical performance.

Changing demographics and immigrant cultures have had an impact on ensembles' process. Cornerstone Theatre frequently engages with different cultural norms and aesthetics of the immigrant communities with whom they work. Pangea World Theatre incorporates multiple languages and gestural vocabularies, sometimes developed collaboratively. "In a unique process, relevant to their experiences and aesthetics, they explore ways to deepen the connection between creative dialogue and artistic creation." (Assaf)

Ensembles' desire to connect more deeply with audiences has also impacted artistic and administrative practices. Bloomsburg Theater Ensemble in Pennsylvania modified their marketing and administrative practices after they asked audiences what they wanted, and discovered that "our audience is not a monolith. We finally realized that we don't have to ask *The Christmas Carol* audience to see the new original work." Bloomsburg experienced a "profound change" in their thinking about how to meet community needs. In response, they invented a "Not For Everybody" series and entirely changed the way they framed and promoted their season.

Independent Eye experienced another dynamic: "changing your artistic practice forces you to expand community. When we went into public radio, it gave us skills we never had before: we're using the development of our work as a way to encounter new folks."

### Service Organizations

One signature of a maturing field is the emergence of service organizations. The Network of Ensemble Theaters, now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year, is dedicated to its constituency of primarily under-served ensembles. NET is 'at the table' in a way it hadn't been before, due in part to its growing membership: attendance at the 2009 Summit was twice as large as at their 2008 gathering.

Other service organizations, such as the National Performance Network, Alternate ROOTS, NALAC (National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures), Theater Communications Group and Arts Presenters also have growing numbers of ensemble theaters as constituents.

### Size and Age of Ensembles

In 2008 NET conducted a survey of its members, to gather basic information about staff and budget size, production capacity, etc. The NET survey was completed by 68 companies, or roughly 66% of members at the time. In order to go deeper, in consultation with Arts Presenters and NET, we developed an on-line survey specifically for the ETC grantees, asking questions about challenges, success factors, impact of the grant, and more. Sixteen ensembles, 38% of grantees, responded.

While none of the responding NET members reported budgets of \$500,000 or more (although NET confirms that some members do in fact have budgets of this size), nearly half -- 46% -- of the responding ETC grantees had budgets of \$500,000 or more. Less than 10% of the ETC grantees had small budgets (\$50,000 or less), in contrast to the 40% of NET members who had budgets of this size.

The age of the ensembles was another area of comparison between the NET and the ETC samples. Among those responding (which, again, does not reflect the entire universe), more NET members than ETC grantees were 10 years old or less: 44% compared with 27%. The number of ensembles at least 30 years old was 20% of the ETC sample, and less than 10% of the NET ensembles. It is perhaps not surprising that the majority of ETC grantees are older organizations with larger budgets, given the competitive nature of the grants.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, given the apparent disparities in age and budget size, we could not assume that the ETC research truly reflected the needs of the more under-served segment of the field represented by NET. Consequently we crafted ten key questions for the NET Summit in June 2009 as a way to gain greater input from the NET universe.

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<sup>1</sup> This data might change if response rates had been higher. Although more than two-thirds of NET members answered their survey, only one-third of ETC members answered their separate survey. About one-third of ETC grantees are also NET members.

### **Part 3**

#### **Challenges and Responses**

This section of the report seeks to identify some of the major challenges that ensembles face and identify some solutions that ensembles have found. When we asked about challenges during the grantee gathering, in the case studies, and in conversations, we were always careful to add “...*in addition to money.*” Not having enough money is a given. It’s safe to assume that no ensemble will say ‘we have all we need (or want).’ The following section details the challenges most frequently identified during the grantee convening in April and at the NET Summit in June.

#### Insufficient Time and Resources for Developing New Work

*By appropriate valuation of the importance of the early stages of work and research and development, the reality of the project scope can be more accurately accounted for. To create a sustaining model of support for Sojourn, research and development must be seen as vital to the overall process of developing work.*  
-- Molly Sturges

An ensemble takes, on the average, two years to create a new work, due in part to the sporadic availability and interconnectedness of time, space and funding. One of the most often-cited challenges was being able to devote intense, concentrated time to creation, to have enough time to develop the work fully. The ETC grant often bought that time: for example, it allowed The Builders Association to work with the Krannert Center for a six-week rehearsal period in a well equipped theater, a necessity because of their complicated set and advanced technology.

Some ensembles have been able to weave together a succession of residencies devoted to nurturing the work in various stages of development, thus sustaining long arcs of development over time. Living Word Project (LWP) created this multi-layered development sequence for themselves:

*During the course of its development, the break/s was created and evolved at a one-month artists’ residency at Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, CA; six weeks in residency at Painted Bride Art Center in Philadelphia, PA; some time at Z Space in San Francisco; a month and a half at the Actors Theater of Louisville’s Humana Festival where they first premiered the show in March 2008; and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN. The Humana Festival residency gave LWP the singular opportunity of bringing the project’s entire cast and crew together for a focused extended period of time to work on one show with full tech support and resources before its first premiere.*  
-- Anna Alves

SITI had a two-week creative lab before beginning rehearsals at the Actor’s Theater of Louisville where they had mounted two prior productions during the Humana Festivals. Similarly, UNIVERSES performed at ATL, presented a workshop performance at Oregon Shakespeare Festival and is continuing to develop the play at Curious Theatre in Denver, with dramaturgical support.

A component of these successful projects was the careful, long-term cultivation of relationships with a range of partners, whether presenters, regional theaters, producers, or a combination. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco served as presenter for both LWP and its

director Marc Bamuthi Joseph (*Word Becomes Flesh*), as co-producer (*Scourge*) and as commissioner (*the break/s*). “As the partnering roles have shifted, so has the challenge to keep responsibilities well-defined and to maintain flexible and resilient working dynamics.” (Alves)

Yerba Buena and LWP learned that clarity and efficiency are necessary for good planning and decision-making. With each of the projects cited, they established a better foundation of understanding and clearer expectations. Other ensembles that worked with institutions also reported that they learned how to negotiate and work with larger, more powerful groups.

Large institutions weren’t alone in making a difference: HERE Arts Center, a 16-year old producing and presenting organization that owns its space in lower Manhattan, has developed a resident artist commissioning / development program. HERE works with about 19 resident artists on a three-year rolling basis, although it “stays with an artist as long as it takes,” sometimes four or five years. Some grantees recommended the further cultivation of such incubators, where significant rehearsal time is underwritten, and the ensembles have access to technology, dramaturgy and other support.

Living Word Project has also created another solution to the issue of time: it develops new work in excerpts, 10 or 20 minutes at a time: “Bite-size works first, that involve one to five people..... That, more than developing a full piece, is a way to scaffold the development structure and fundraising structure and to manage expectations,” says Marc Bamuthi Joseph. Rude Mechanicals is another ensemble that is experimenting with this approach to incremental development.

### Inconsistent Administrative Support

A persistent question among ensembles is, “How can the management practice and structure reflect the collaborative artistic practice? How do we create collaborative management structures?”

A characteristic of the field is that many ensemble artists also assume administrative duties. In some cases, this is a deliberate, strategic choice, reflecting the ensemble’s values. Jump-Start in San Antonio TX, for example is managed by a leadership circle, rather than a single executive; nearly all of its 21 company members have administrative or teaching duties.

Ensemble members of Living Word Project are equally engaged in the administrative side of things. “Each and every artist in the ensemble is a writer / administrator / educator and they are always wearing many hats. ‘Sort of a co-op ethic,’ says Bamuthi,” noting the blurring of lines between traditional job descriptions and an aesthetic of shared administrative responsibility. Integrating the administrative roles with the artistic work can be a useful strategy in holding a steady course.

Ensembles have sometimes found exceptional administrators who understand their aesthetics and artistic process, such as Megan Wanless Szalla, listed as a SITI Company member and described by Mark Russell in his case study as “an important asset to the company, one that cannot be overlooked.”

One ensemble member was direct about the challenge of artists taking on administrative duties: “Everyone’s learning on the job – few of us ever trained as arts administrators in any way. It was just the members of the ensemble who had an affinity for, and interest in, doing this work. Or ended up doing it by default -- no one else could, or wanted to.” While sometimes it’s merely a lack of knowledge / skills yet to be acquired, ensembles have also realized that sometimes an administrative task “just isn’t a good fit in terms of someone’s core temperament / style of being...no matter how many skill-building workshops they take, it’s just not who they are.”

Regardless of various aptitudes or levels of skills, a key challenge is the inability to retain an adequate administrative staff when cash is short. In an artist-driven organization, especially if they are not part of the creative ensemble, administrators are often the first to be laid off, or the last to be hired. Sojourn Theatre had received a three-year grant to hire its first managing director, but now the position has been reduced to part-time. Sojourn, like many other ensembles, is doing more creative work with less infrastructure. John Killacky reports, “[Cynthia] Hopkins is doing all of this [fundraising] alone at this point since she had to let her administrative support go. This not only compromises the full development of the piece, but also threatens the future life of the new work.”

Another aspect of diminished administrative staff is inconsistent or non-existent long-range planning. If immediate marketing and fundraising tasks consume the majority of administrative resources, planning seems a luxury, and many ensembles postpone it. A lack of planning can translate into mis-matched expectations and resources / capacity, or failure to address long-term sustainability. As a result of the ETC grants, some ensembles reported a renewed commitment to planning, feeling that they had missed opportunities by not being prepared, or being overwhelmed at the rate of change because they had not established a basic planning framework.

Management capacity grew among some ETC grantees: Sandglass in particular reported an increase in their skills and confidence especially around fund-raising and planning. Although the field is resourceful at finding its own training or mentors -- it is constantly teaching itself on an *ad hoc* basis -- a coherent system focused specifically on addressing the learning needs of ensembles is lacking. In response, NET envisioned the All-Together Building Capacity program (Ensembles ABC) that will launch in January 2010 for a two-year pilot, funded by Duke.<sup>2</sup>

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*Ensembles ABC draws on a bank of experts and expertise from within our field...The program focuses on expanding ensembles’ organizational fundamentals by tapping existing field experts as mentors and as sources of valuable field-specific wisdom, knowledge and experience, and by creating opportunities for additional peer-to-peer network building and information sharing... The program will offer a menu of professional development workshops and opportunities that build and strengthen ensemble capacity based on the best practices within the field. It aims to pass on exemplar practices with an eye toward the long haul, while fostering the ongoing inter-generational and inter-cultural relationships that are at the heart of ensemble working methodology.*

*-- NET website*

The structure and mechanism of “Ensembles ABC” is currently under development, drawing on input from focus groups held during the NET Summit. Several structures are being considered: one-on-one consulting, mentoring, workshops, other group learning, etc. The NET dialogue reinforced the need for such a program which would provide a structured platform or nexus in which the informal and spontaneous peer exchanges, and learning from other outside experts, could be documented and shared with a wider circle.

Given the amount of time that many managers devote to foundation proposals, there was strong agreement about reducing the administrative burden of writing and reporting. ETC grantees and NET members alike recommended that funders consider the scale and complexity of their application / reporting requirements and make sure that these requirements are appropriate to the size / scale of the organizations that they want to support. They encourage other funders to adopt a two-tiered application process, as Arts Presenters and Creative Capital have already done, so that organizations do not invest significant time in a process if it is unlikely to yield a positive result.

### The Changing Landscape of Touring

*Our work used to be booked before it was even finished -- we could underwrite the development of the next new work with our touring income. Not any more. Now presenters want to see the completed work before they commit to it.*  
– Eric Bass, Sandglass Theater

Some ensembles have little ability or interest in touring: for example, many smaller ensembles are comprised of people with day jobs. Yet touring can represent a significant source of income, artistic inspiration, and visibility. Many ensembles consider it an absolute necessity. For Rude Mechanicals in Austin, “to get the work seen, it *has* to tour. It’s also important to us that we are cultural ambassadors for Texas and the South, representing a progressive voice.” A third of the ETC survey respondents earned a significant portion of their budget (30-50%) through touring.

The environment for touring has changed considerably, especially in the last few years. Ensembles report that presenters are more conservative, wanting to see the full work before booking it. Presenters are working with smaller budgets and are more cautious: the economy has impacted the presenting world like everything else.

In response, ensembles are finding ways to make their touring reach deeper into the communities they visit, sometimes with the help of management companies. After an initial tour organized by HERE, James Scrubs’ one-man show *The Disposable Men* returned to several touring sites for more in-depth encounters. HERE would like to continue touring the companies it helps to support, but Executive Director Kim Whitener says, “we can’t continue to do it without additional support and/or a mediator, a management company.”

Living Word Project reported a very satisfying relationship with the New York City-based MAPP International Productions. MAPP served as a key liaison to Yerba Buena on the logistical details of LWP’s residencies and performances. Cathy Zimmerman, Co-Director and Producer at MAPP states, “We like to think of new ways to activate audience and community.” MAPP also partnered with LWP on the marketing and promotion for tour venues outside of San Francisco. Representatives such as MAPP and Western and Southern (which promotes Junebug

Productions, Roadside Theater and others) provide services beyond merely booking tours. But even that basic service is often not available: several ensembles reported frustration at finding appropriate representation, and suggested the exploration of models for a co-operative arrangement or shared agent. ETC has just completed a case study on four ensembles in New Orleans who are exploring such a model.

In addition to finding agencies that understand an ensemble's aesthetics and community connections, other solutions may lie in re-thinking expectations and escaping historical patterns. Caleb Hammons of Young Jean Lee's Theater Company reported, "The Company finds itself shifting from the art center circuit to the regional theater circuit, which is beginning to offer more opportunities." Sandglass began to question its usual approach to university arts centers when they realized that the Asian Studies Departments might be more appropriate and willing hosts for their Cambodian collaborators.

Many ensembles with space have committed to presenting their peers on a regular basis. Some ensembles report that regional, or statewide, tours have been a manageable and cost-effective form of touring. Three New England ensembles are developing an artist-to-artist network, which values process as well as product and draws on the ensembles' rich practice of collaboration and community engagement. A successful pilot tour in 2009 brought Robert Karimi's *Kaotic Good* to Sandglass (Putney VT), Heartbeat (New Haven CT) and Touchstone Theater (Bethlehem, PA). NET has secured funding from the Irvine Foundation to do ensemble-to-ensemble touring in California (the California Ensemble Touring Initiative, now in its third year), and has been following the New England initiative very closely with an intent to create a nationally replicable model based on the successes of these two initiatives. Attendees suggested that the regional approach would be enriched with the greater participation of local and state arts agencies, particularly rural ones, "enlisted as partners to exchange artists and build new relationships."

A final word about showcases, a conventional way for presenters to see work, which may (or may not) lead to touring opportunities for ensembles. Although hesitant to pass up any chance for exposure, the ensemble field seems to be united in their dislike for showcases, which one ensemble member labeled "the death of theater." Showcases usually allow for only short excerpts, taken out of context, with inadequate technical support. Refreshingly, festivals such as Under the Radar, Fusebox in Austin TX, the Ko Festival in Massachusetts, and Magnetic North Theater Festival (most recently in Ottawa) have committed to show entire works, and to present the work in a context that builds audience understanding with 'added value' through symposia, workshops, open rehearsals, and other forms of audience engagement.

### Visa Challenges and Resources

A common problem for presenters across the country is the inability or delay in obtaining appropriate visas. This problem is shared by a small subset of ensembles that bring in international artists. Visa uncertainties can throw a kink in the best-laid plans: Sandglass was not sure that their Cambodian collaborators would be able to enter the U.S. until the week before the premiere. Fortunately, Sandglass had developed relationships with people of political influence; a series of well-placed calls to Vermont Senator Leahy finally moved things along. This

illustrates a key fact: while resources and information can help to negotiate the visa process, it remains a political issue, with long-term solutions requiring political advocacy.

Some useful resources are already in place. [www.artistsfromabroad.org](http://www.artistsfromabroad.org) is an on-line field-wide resource created by Arts Presenters and the American Symphony Orchestra League that provides guidance for international artists and artist management companies seeking visas for performance engagements in the United States. The site offers the most current rules and regulations affecting artists as well as downloadable toolboxes with worksheets, forms and links. The information is centrally located, current and accessible, but often the field does not widely know about these resources, or how to adapt them to their own unique circumstances. Arts Presenters, TCG and NPN routinely offer workshops on visa challenges and resources at their annual meetings, but many ensembles do not attend these gatherings.

### The (In)Stability of Space

*When you don't have your own theater the challenge of space is very consuming...Even the internet [becomes] our space...[we have to start] thinking of public spaces as 'our space.'*  
Meena Natarajan, Pangea World Theater

Owning (or controlling) a place to develop work, having a consistent location for a home season, being a physical presence in a community can contribute to the long-term stability and sustainability of an ensemble. The NET survey revealed that only 25% of respondents had their own office, performance and rehearsal spaces. Double Edge Theater's farm in rural Massachusetts includes facilities for research, development, producing, presenting, mentoring and hosting. For them "touring is about how to create (or recreate) the generative process that occurs at our home base."

Other ensembles also reported a vital connection to their physical space, despite the costs, in terms of identity, autonomy and flexibility, but 28% of the NET survey respondents did not have their own performance *or* office space. While attendees generally agreed that 'place / space' can greatly impact audience development, they also envisioned 'space' more expansively as "rotating venues, having a home city / town rather than a home venue, and virtual spaces created on-line." Ensembles have taken on the challenge of space in a variety of ways: the New York Neo-Futurists consider the virtual realm to be their administrative space. Sojourn Theater creates most of its site-specific work on the road, somewhat side-stepping the need for rehearsal space in Portland. Pangea developed ways of "making spaces theirs, through shared practices and created rituals," even as they seek the ideal of shared space with other community groups.

Other ensembles are actively pursuing shared spaces: Theater Grottesco is forming an LLC with Santa Fe companies to buy a building. The need for self-determination is driving some ensembles to acquire their own space. Pregones Theater, after losing their long-term space in a church, performed at Hostos Community College while they embarked on a lengthy process of developing their own permanent arts facility in the Bronx. The company built its capacity to raise money from individuals as well as a variety of private and public sources, including economic development and small business funding as well as arts sources. In 2007 Pregones opened their theater that now allows them to host over 150 events a year, including other artists and ensembles as well as their own work, and workshops and other educational opportunities.

In Knoxville TN Carpetbag Theatre uses its space to house literacy and youth programming and to host community / cultural / economic development activities. Rude Mechanicals runs a performance warehouse in Austin TX that they make available to a range of artists at reasonable rates; it also houses the company's variety of outreach and presenting programs. While spaces can be a source of earned income and an opportunity for a steady revenue stream, they are also a major expense, particularly when rising energy costs and maintenance issues are factored in.

Some ensembles have found sustained homes with other organizations: for example, audiences for The Wooster Group and Mabou Mines know to go to St. Ann's to see these ensembles. Long-term relationships with presenters and regional theatres like The Public Theater or Actor's Theatre of Louisville play an important role in helping ensembles establish and maintain a consistent presence without the burden of capital expenditures or the responsibility of real estate management.

Culture Clash of Los Angeles does not have its own space, which led the company to develop different partnerships with area institutions, getting exposed to many different communities and a huge range of audiences. [The company is] "about to be bestowed a home, which may be good, but I think it is also sometimes good to wander," says Richard Montoya. Anna Alves reports that "Living Word never had its own physical space within which to develop their artistic work....Rehearsal space is *ad hoc* in garages, living rooms, and kitchens. They borrow studios from friends and peers or utilize any other space that is conducive and accessible. Work is developed more intently in short-term artist residencies or excerpt performances at other spaces in San Francisco neighborhoods," such as ODC and Intersection for the Arts.

Ensembles that do own their own spaces can benefit from assistance in maximizing use of the space in ways consistent with their missions, generating earned revenue from rentals. Valuable models of shared / subsidized space have been developed by ART/NY and Artists Space in Minneapolis, among others. Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC) has aggregated a range of resources, research and tools related to the development of artist space ([www.lincnet.net/artist-space](http://www.lincnet.net/artist-space)). Its *Space for Change, Building Community through Innovative Art Spaces* program will generate an Artists Space database and includes two funding opportunities: The MetLife *Innovative Space Awards (ISA)* and the Ford Foundation *Space for Change Predevelopment Grants*.

One issue underlying the discussion about space is the tension that arises when artists find cheap space, move in, only to lose the space when rents (inevitably) rise, as property values and taxes rise. Thus arts organizations may become unwitting accomplices to gentrification. Given the authentic connection to community that many ensembles have developed (or aspire to develop), it's important to be part of community-wide dialogues and organizing in support of affordable space for all community members.

## The Challenge of Inequity

*Who defines 'diversity' for an organization or a field has great authority. By virtue of those definitions, they can allow or deny access to opportunities. Therefore, those definitions should be nuanced and should look at diversity both across and within cultural groups.*

*Grantee at April gathering*

Grantees at the April grantee convening raised the issue of inequity through a variety of lenses. Writers / journalists / critics often don't understand the aesthetics of ensemble-based work in general and culturally-grounded work in particular. Theaters of color are often marginalized and under-represented in grant pools, running counter to the country's changing demographics. Even the language typically used in discussing the issue can be problematic. As Dipanker Mukherjee of Pangea World Theater says, "I never got up in the morning and felt that I'm a 'marginal voice,' or a 'marginal' director... The point is, you get up and create your work with integrity and focus... These voices that were supposedly, in everybody's vocabulary, 'in the margins' -- we want to bring them to the center."

Grantees at the April convening suggested that "the benefits of diversity need to be more fully understood. It can be visibility, social solutions, and it can mean good business and financial success." However the field's internal conversations about diversity, its rewards and challenges can be hampered by an incomplete analysis of the political, social, and economic inequities that persist in the U.S., and how they are preserved by often-invisible systems and structures of oppression.

An analysis of grant-making patterns confirms that grant recipients continue to be dominated by ensembles from New York and California (where a large number of ensembles do exist), despite efforts by Arts Presenters to monitor and adjust grantee awards to reflect geographic diversity. One recommendation from the field was to increase outreach to other regions of the country, especially in the formation of panels, and to provide more technical assistance as ensembles develop their proposals. Many local and regional ensembles are at a disadvantage because fewer people have seen their work, placing a larger burden on the quality of support materials such as video. One recommendation addressing the need for strong documentation was for funders to help smaller organizations pay for obtaining appropriate media so that they can better compete.

The issue of having multiple voices equitably represented also plays out field-driven gatherings, such as the NET Summit and the annual meetings of Alternate ROOTS and NPN, where artists and ensembles are having their own conversations about aesthetics, diverse artistic expression, defining excellence on their own terms. Yet power relationships between ensembles and larger institutions (regional theaters, presenters, universities, funders, etc.) often remain unequal. Arts Presenters sought to balance the power dynamic by awarding funds directly to the ensemble when possible. Grantees confirmed that 'bringing something to the table' was an effective strategy, but other barriers remain: different vocabularies, values, staff sizes, and work processes in institutions and ensembles. Understanding and balancing complex power dynamics is addressed in a *Partnership Workbook* written by Bob Leonard, which can be found at <http://alternateroots.org/programs/capp>.

### Legacy, Transition and Training

A challenge cited by some of the longer-standing ensembles is that of legacy and the transition of artistic leadership. Substantial bodies of work by veteran artists such as Meredith Monk, Ping Chong and John O'Neal can be documented, transferred to other companies or otherwise archived. But how can an artistic *process*, developed over decades, be preserved and passed along to subsequent generations? Meredith Monk adopted a strategy of education and documentation, similar to dance companies who seek to preserve a master choreographer's work.

Several ensembles (and dance companies) have responded to this challenge by creating institutes or training centers. John O'Neal envisioned the Free Southern Theater Institute as a way to teach and sustain the Junebug methods and practices, through a partnership with New Orleans-based universities including Xavier, Tulane and Dillard. Sojourn Theatre, Cornerstone, and Los Angeles Poverty Department have all created summer workshops that not only spread their methodology and principles, but also generate earned revenue. SITI is creating a new structure that will allow it to aggregate its tour-based teaching into a central location. Pregones Theater is developing an international training exchange, connecting its many theatre relationships across the world.

Leadership transition will ultimately be a challenge for any ensemble that survives any length of time. Again, many resources exist on the web and elsewhere, addressing leadership transition, but few are specifically tailored to the ensemble practice. Cornerstone Theatre Company and the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange recently participated in a peer process to work through a transition of the founders. A study by Lisa Mount documents this 18-month process of reflective inquiry and action. (For article, go to [www.artisticlogistics.org/resources](http://www.artisticlogistics.org/resources).)

## Part 4

### Support System for Ensembles

The current support system for ensemble theaters looks more like a jigsaw puzzle or patchwork quilt than a coherent system or ecology. Support is rarely comprehensive, sustained, or sequential. When it is, it has significant impact. More often, we see ensembles using their creativity to piece together support, project by project. This includes a mix of funders, presenting and producing partners playing multiple roles, and opportunities to earn revenue. A critical, though under-recognized, part of this system is the support that ensembles provide on their own behalf.

Within this context some transformative grant programs, presenters, and producers stand out. In this section, we will look at these exemplary practices and how ensembles make the most of them. We will also explore how the field is moving to shape a more coherent and sustainable economy for its work.

#### Ensemble Theater Collaboration Grant Program

The Ensemble Theater Collaboration Grant Program (ETC) addressed key gaps in the support system for ensembles by:

1. Providing paid time for research and development of original works
2. Enabling artists to create work of the scale and quality that fulfills their artistic vision
3. Extending the life of the work, whether by touring, longer runs, having a home season, and/or partnerships

The grant to The Civilians to develop *Paris Commune* with the Public Theater in New York offers an example of all three: the grant allowed them to increase rehearsal time, extend the run, enhance the production values, and benefit from the Public's dramaturgy. For Pittsburgh's Squonk Opera, the grant enabled them to make the site-specific, large-scale and technically rich *Astro-rama* available free to a broad public who came to the show through viral marketing. Receiving the grant at a critical juncture, whether it was at the beginning to jumpstart the project or at the end to extend it, heightened the impact of the funds.

The ETC grant added value beyond its own dollars. An important form of validation, the grant helped leverage additional visibility and resources. For Living Word, being recognized as a theater ensemble and being connected to the network of other ETC grantees brought them greater recognition on a national level. This helped position the company to receive grants from other nationally competitive funders such as the NEA and Multi-Arts Production Fund (MAP), residencies outside the Bay Area at the Humana Festival in Louisville and Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, and access to the REDCAT venue in Los Angeles.

Aiming to shift power dynamics by having the artist control the funds, the ETC grant was awarded directly to the ensemble (except in the case of international companies and those that did not have nonprofit status). In the case of the SITI Company, their grant not only allowed the company to make "an artistic leap" in *Hotel Cassiopeia*, by enabling them to develop the piece

through a creative lab, it also made the company look more seriously at their long range plans. As Mark Russell notes in his case study, “The luxury of having their own sizable grant to bring to the producing table gave them a taste of what could be. It was hard to return to life as it was before. . . . They are still in the process of developing a strategic plan, putting the pieces together that will give them long range stability and artistic freedom.”

The grantees appreciated the fact that the program drew on field knowledge. ETC was created with considerable input from the field, and continued to draw on advisors with significant field expertise throughout the program. This included the policy discussions after each panel, and the 2006 and 2009 assessments. Arts Presenters’ flexibility in implementing the program, including its response to challenges raised in the 2006 assessment, is further evidence of its responsiveness to the field. This included becoming clearer about the program’s goals, focusing the convening more on the needs of the field, and collaborating with service organizations that serve ensembles, particularly NET, which became a key partner. Responsiveness is a strength and added value of intermediaries functioning as grant makers

Some continued challenges related to the ETC program are emblematic of the broader challenges of the support system for ensemble theaters, and the arts as a whole. While giving the grant directly to the ensembles gave them control over these resources, it was never intended to decrease the support of presenter or regional theater partners, which happened in some cases. This grant program was intended to fill a gap in the support system, not just substitute for another form of support. Given the lack of coherence in the system, and the hard economic times, it is not surprising that this would occur. Greater communication and clarity in the early stages of negotiating a partnership, and a good Memo of Understanding or contract helped address this situation. Despite the challenges, a small group discussing partnerships with regional theaters at the NET Summit affirmed the practice of awarding grants to the ensemble so there can be greater incentives for regional theaters to work with them. A success story is when a small creative development grant to Lemon Anderson leveraged more than \$50,000 of production support from the Public Theater. The new work premiered at Under the Radar and will be part of the Public’s 2010 season.

Initiatives and project grants can draw attention to a field, fill gaps, and be catalytic, but they can’t build sustainability over time. Intermediaries can be responsive to the field but are ultimately not the ones deciding the future funding of an initiative, which is often shaped by the strategies of foundations. The reality is that the ETC grant program is sun-setting at a time when its support is needed more than ever, without a clear indication that another funder will bring their support to this initiative or one with similar goals.

#### Additional Examples of Exemplary Funding

Local and regional funding sources have been critically important for their multi-year or capital support to companies or their partners. The Oregon-based Meyer Foundation provided Sojourn Theatre a two-year capacity-building grant that enabled them to hire their managing director, and on-going PGE support in Portland persuaded other conservative foundations to support and value the company. The Hewlett Foundation in California awarded significant capital grants to ODC and Intersection, which offer support in the form of space to Living Word.

Sojourn and Living Word also benefited from national support programs. The Multi-Arts Production Fund is a key resource, one of the few grants available for creation. Its 2009 grants support, among others, Living Word, Los Angeles Poverty Department, Watts Village Theater, and Little Globe. The Animating Democracy exemplar grant provided Sojourn \$150,000 over two years and enabled director Michael Rohd to go on salary for the first time. Living Word benefited from the Ford Foundation's Future Aesthetics program, which has not only supported and brought recognition to their work, but also gave its cohort the resources to regrant to their peers and new generations of artists. Ford's support to the Network of Ensemble Theaters and ETC program has been critical to building the field of ensembles, many of whom do not have direct access to national foundations.

Nathan Cummings Foundation has supported, among others, Cornerstone Theater, Rha Goddess / We Got Issues, and Thousand Kites, a collaboration between Roadside Theater and Appalshop media artists. Like Ford, Cummings has also funded intermediaries and presenters that support the field such as the National Performance Network (NPN) and the Hip Hop Theater Festival. Along with its support of travel for ensembles as part of the ETC program, The Andrew Mellon Foundation also funded "Leading Ensemble Theaters" directly and continues its interest in this field. Doris Duke has been a sustained supporter of the ETC program, and other intermediaries like NPN, Creative Capital, Theater Communications Group and National Association of Latino Arts and Culture that help build the field.

#### The Continuum of Presenter and Producer Partnerships

Presenters and producers support ensemble theaters in varied ways. Presenters provide space, commissions (sometimes with presentation, sometimes not), extended residencies, touring subsidies, and access to scholars and students. Some also help with raising funds from other sources and developing partnerships and educational opportunities. Regional theaters may offer some of the above as well as extended runs, dramaturgs, and construction of sets and costumes. Both offer opportunities to show the work where others who might support it can see it.

In our 2006 assessment, Marc Masterson of Actors Theater of Louisville (ATL) noted the "blurring lines between presenters, producers, and ensembles, who are not so easily pigeonholed." He felt that "moving from one world to another was healthy for everyone" and added that there was more synergy between these groups than people often recognize. Theaters are increasingly co-producing in a manner not unlike presenting. Presenters are commissioning and producing work, and regional theaters may have their own resident companies who are artistically excited to work with ensembles.

What makes a difference for the ensembles is the small group of exemplary "activist" presenters and producers, who play a sustained role in nurturing their work and who consistently add value to it. They include ATL, which has provided on-going support for SITI Company since 1995, and functions as a second home for the company. ATL's Humana Festival of New American Plays has also been critical for other companies to book the tours they need to continue the life of their work.

In his case study of the Public Theater, Norman Frisch maps out The Public Theater's range of engagement with ensembles, all with significant benefits. On one end of the spectrum is LABrynith Theater Company, the sole officially designated "Resident Ensemble" over the past five years, featured on its subscription series and other venues, with its directors functioning as "informal associate directors" at the Public. On the other end, Nature Theater of Oklahoma was presented at the Under the Radar Festival, which led to an OBIE Award, 40 weeks of touring, new venues to present its work in New York City, commissions, and the ability to become salaried year round, "...all largely a result of its Under the Radar exposure at the Public."

In his case study of the Walker Arts Center, John Killacky describes a spectrum of engagement for presenting. The Walker's long-term relationship with Cynthia Hopkins and her company Accinosco grew organically over the years, becoming a true partnership. Initially the Walker presented the first work in Hopkins' trilogy, then stepped up and co-commissioned the second work by hosting a two-week production residency, providing the ensemble full access to the Walker's state-of-the-art theater and crew to realize the technical aspects of the work. For the third part of the trilogy the Walker premiered the work following a fully supported two-week residency in its theater. Beyond this support, the Walker also served as a fiscal agent and advocate for grants, and, due to its long relationship, had the flexibility to work with Hopkins when financial realities shifted during the process.

Walker curator Philip Bither describes the value of "exemplary presenters (who) provide space, money, resources, and feedback for solutions without squeezing the lifeblood of an artist's work," giving artists "freedom to make their own work and even fail." In a discussion about presenting at the NET Summit, Sabrina Hamilton spoke about the Ko Festival's commitment to value-added presenting, and "to allow(ing) for 'glorious failures' – especially if a company is to grow artistically rather than stagnate."

Bither notes that "activist presenters" have become few and far between, with most just giving space. "The best practices of the 1980s and 1990s of presenters working to support artists (have) fallen away." Those that exist (which in the ETC program include the Wexner Center at Ohio State University, Krannert Center at the University of Illinois, and St. Ann's in New York City, in addition to the Walker, the Public and Yerba Buena), are critical to the support system, but have often been cut back as their budgets and endowments shrink during these difficult economic times. They also face the dilemma of balancing sustained support for a handful of companies with an interest in seeding the field and encouraging new artists.

## Other Forms of Support

### *Universities*

Because most of the ensembles do not have space in which to develop their work, they often piece together multiple residencies, often hosted by universities. In the case of Accinosco this included a series of residencies at CalArts, the University of North Carolina, and Hunter College, as well as ones at McDowell and White Oak. The university residencies draw on the academic departments, ethnic studies programs, media labs, and space available on campuses, as well as the resources of university presenters. Universities can also provide stable teaching jobs to

ensemble members such as SITI Company's Anne Bogart at Columbia University, Builders Association's Marianne Weems at Carnegie Mellon University, or Sojourn's Michael Rohd at Northwestern University. This has been happening for a while in the dance field with examples including Jawole Willa Jo Zollar at Florida State University and Bebe Miller at Ohio State University. In these cases the artists can cover most, if not all, of their expenses with their university salaries, and have the flexibility to continue to work with their company. Not all university teaching positions are as supportive however, with many artists piecing together adjunct positions with limited pay, benefits, and job security. University relationships can be precarious, subject to university decision-making processes that may not include the theater. The ownership of intellectual property can also challenge an artist's relationship with a university.

SITI Company is taking the initiative to shape a university partnership on their own terms as part of a sustainable and viable model to support the company and centralize its work in New York City. They have received a 5-year Leading for the Future grant (a program of the Nonprofit Finance Fund, supported by Duke) to support their goal of achieving a balance of creation, performance, touring, and training. SITI aims to formalize their training into a degree-granting program in New York City, bringing students to the company rather than traveling to the students. The company is investigating options for both the best university partner and most effective approach to the partnership.

#### *Activist, policy, and social service groups and local governments*

Sojourn has been able to gain support from its broad range of partners: the school system, medical researchers, and the City of Portland. Pangea received indirect support when their human rights partners included the company in their grant proposals for collaborative work around immigration and domestic violence. As Living Word moves out of strictly theater work, it hopes to attract new funding sources that are interested in "hybrid community development work or cross-sector investments around arts and education as well as arts and democracy." Carpetbag Theater acknowledges social change networks as key to the company's success and M.U.G.A.B.E.E. is supported, in part, by collaborating with local ACLUs, schools, and agricultural organizations. Theater Simple used their theater methodology to inform urban planning and development in the city of Mirage, Arizona. In rural New Mexico, Little Globe has developed a multi-year partnership with the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) to combine the theater's culturally-based and participatory approach to community building with SWOP's community organizing for social change.

In San Francisco, Cultural Odyssey's Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women has a long history of partnerships with social service organizations as well as the Department of Corrections. *Requiem for a Dead Love*, for example, was a collaboration with Glide Memorial Church's "Breaking the Cycle" Domestic Violence Project. Funding was provided by a grant from the Commission on the Status of Women of the City and County of San Francisco. Rhodessa Jones worked with women survivors of domestic violence and artists from San Francisco's multi-cultural community in a production that directly addressed issues of violence against women.

Some of the issues identified by artists related to these partnerships with activist, social service, and policy organizations include balancing the partners' goals with "staying true to your art,"

being clear about expectations and communication, censorship, and ownership of the work. Collaborations are often strengthened by bridge people / liaison organizations, partnership agreements that clarify communication and mutual goals, and building on organic relationships.

### *Education programs*

Work in the schools and other youth development programs can support ensemble theaters by generating earned and contributed income, and by developing new generations of arts participants and supporters. Irondale Ensemble, TeAda, Fools Fury, and Sojourn (among many others) offer examples of this work. In the case of Irondale, this consists of workshops in New York City high schools, professional development for teachers, and summer performing arts programs. While this work can provide a steady form of support, it can also be subject to school system budget cuts and leadership transitions. Additional challenges can include large groups, lack of continuity, lack of integration in on-going class work, and censorship. Many artists also support themselves as ‘teaching artists’ in addition to the work they do with their ensembles. On a broader, more policy-focused level, Sojourn Theatre created "Witness Our Schools" a two-and-a-half year documentary theatre and community dialogue project exploring public education in Oregon, which became part of a statewide conversation around equitable, fundable policy. CAPE (Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education) advances the arts as a vital strategy for improving teaching and learning and connects the arts with school reform. The National Campaign to Hire Artists to Work in the Schools advocated for dedicating a portion of the economic stimulus funds to put artists to work in schools and community centers.

### *Nonprofit / for-profit partnerships*

Companies, including Culture Clash, a LA-based ensemble, noted that they were interested in creating their own stimulus by capitalizing on film and TV interest that could support their other work. Living Word is the resident theater of Youth Speaks, whose Brave New Voices program was featured on an HBO reality series of the same name. The Civilians is in the process of putting together a media project, trying to partner both with nonprofits (such as public television and radio) and with for-profit companies (such as on-line production companies). In New Mexico, Q-Staff’s coffee bar helps pay for their theater. Some ensembles and independent artists are looking for alternatives to nonprofit models, which they may not find a good fit for their creative work.

Members of ensembles augment their income with work on other theater, film and audio productions, some of which are for-profit. Examples include M.U.G.A.B.E.E’s sound recording, Mondo Bizzaro’s video services, and various company members who take on movie or television roles and act with other companies. As companies’ work becomes increasingly more technical, they also look to technology companies for support. Fractured Atlas, which began as a theater company and transformed into an arts service organization that now offers health and liability insurance to NET members, has a for-profit sister company that provides IT consulting and custom software development for nonprofit organizations and government agencies.

Cornerstone Theater’s partnership with Gilead Sciences, a bio-pharmaceutical company, to improve HIV treatment in the African American community is now providing 20% of their budget. The purpose of the collaboration is to empower patients in advocating for quality attention and treatment from their providers, with the play’s focus on treatment, not drugs per se.

Cornerstone director Michael John Garcés, quoted in a NET case study on the partnership, reflected that “to be truly community-engaged in a capitalist society means also understanding how to be engaged with corporations. We don’t live like monks pristinely outside that system. We have to confront this sort of thing.”

This nexus between nonprofit and for-profit extends to the federal arts support system with the new National Endowment for the Arts chair, Rocco Landesman, a Broadway producer, and the White House arts liaison, Kalpen Modi, best known for his work on commercial movies and television.

### *Individual support*

Cynthia Hopkins recognized that the future sustainability of her work depended on branching out to the European touring and commissioning markets. She began soliciting contributions from individuals to help bring her work to the Edinburgh Festival where she can reach these markets. This turned out to be “the gift of desperation,” a new source of income. About Productions in Los Angeles marked its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a successful “\$20 for 20” campaign, with 1/3 of the donors giving more than \$20. Some companies find it difficult to develop a base of individual donors without a space or a home season; in some cases venues won’t allow artists to seek donations from their audiences. Meredith Monk has succeeded in developing this base of support, but found it much diminished in the past year. The Obama campaign and on-line entrepreneurial groups like Kiva have inspired some groups to explore using the Internet for grassroots fundraising.

### Ensemble Self-Support

A primary form of ensemble support is ensembles themselves. The contributions of ensemble members are considerable and often over-looked. This can range from the unsung role of the company manager who pieces together a budget by walking in multiple worlds, to the artists who too often donate the time for research and development of their new productions. Many ensembles keep themselves going through a resourcefulness that stretches dollars as far as they can go. Whether they are like Jump-Start, where hosting 50 events a year makes up half of its budget, are booking their own tours, or are creating their own institutes, ensembles often survive through an entrepreneurial approach and a DIY (Do it Yourself) spirit.

Just as ensembles are independent, they are also interdependent, providing a major source of support for one another. This has happened informally for many years, with the creation of NET providing a more formal support system. Ensembles are highly resourceful in sharing services, expertise, and personnel. An example has been the critical administrative role Irondale’s Maria Knapp played in the development of NET.

Many ensembles function as presenters and producers of festivals, providing venues for one another. Regional presenting networks, such as the ones being developed by Sandglass Theater and Living Word, offer a sustainable approach to touring. As members of the National Performance Network, Sandglass, Carpetbag, Pangea, and others present fellow ensembles, often while participating in creative collaborations with them. The partnership between Jump-Start, Pregones, and Legion Arts, all NPN partners, with the Slovakian ensemble Divadlo z Pasaze

extends this creative collaboration and presenting circle into an international sphere. An advantage is that ensembles have a deep understanding and respect for each other's artistic and ensemble process; a disadvantage can be that they may not have the same access to financial, technical, and marketing supports as larger presenters.

Through their training programs and on-going mentorships, ensembles provide support systems for their artists. The democratizing structures of ensembles also provide a unique opportunity for the leadership development of ensemble members. Young artists move from Youth Speaks to Living Word, and then mentor younger artists in high school. Sojourn supports the on-going professional development of its artists by providing opportunities for them to learn from and be pushed by colleagues and ensembles from a wide range of disciplines. Pangea attempts to support as many of their artists financially as they can through employment as administrators, project directors, curators, stage managers, videographers / documenters. The company also aspires to partner with other like-minded, mission-driven organizations, whether in the arts or human rights, to obtain a space and become on-going resources for one another.

### Impact of the Economic Crisis

Without doubt the economic crisis has had an impact on what is already a very lean field. Whole tours have been cancelled, grants that were expected were reduced or not received, public support left in limbo, endowments diminished, and individual contributions reduced. Staffs are cut down to the minimum. Social service partners, counted on to cover some costs, have lost their entire budgets. The communities that the theaters are serving are experiencing hard times.

This is not necessarily something new. For example, while California is currently on the edge of bankruptcy, the state already slashed its arts budget in 2003. It has only resumed grant-making this year as a result of the NEA stimulus funding. Many groups work in cities and towns with few public resources and private funding initiatives for ensemble theaters are few and far between. The trend for presenters to become more risk-adverse was noted in our 2006 assessment; they didn't need an economic crisis to be more cautious. Theaters that work in low-income communities are well acquainted with hard times. In New Orleans, ensembles that have always struggled with scarce support have had to cope with the aftermath of Katrina since 2005. They are in many ways ahead of the curve with their resilience and creative support systems, and exemplify how you can be resource-rich, even with a long history of limited financial support. For Mondo Bizzaro, Katrina created a moment to ask themselves hard questions; it demanded that they figure out who the company was going to be. It solidified their civic values and commitment to be a vital resource for the rebuilding of their community.

It is not clear whether funders will also be ahead of the curve. Some are cutting back their funding as their endowments diminish. *In the Face of Recession, What Are Arts Funders Doing?* is a snapshot by Holly Sidford (Helicon Collaborative) of how funders are responding to the recession, based on information from 22 diverse arts funders. She offers sobering news: "While a few foundations have maintained or even slightly increased their giving compared to last year, most arts funders have reduced current grants budgets by at least 10 percent and some by as much as 80 percent. Most are projecting further reductions." (For article, see [http://www.giarts.org/usr\\_doc/GIARReader\\_20\\_2.pdf](http://www.giarts.org/usr_doc/GIARReader_20_2.pdf).)

Some funders are unrestricting previously restricted endowment and project grants or adding supplementary operating support. The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, for example, is augmenting program support with unrestricted operating support and engaging a process through which “grantees can explore restructuring their artistic program endowments.” The 2009 Multi-Arts Production Fund, (supported by Duke along with Rockefeller and other foundations) included both project grants and additional funds to help “stabilize operating budgets in a time of need.”

While funders may explore unrestricting their funding in response to the economic crisis, this may also be an opportunity to test whether allowing the field to prioritize how funding is used might prove to be the most effective and resourceful way to advance the work. A funder quoted by Sidford asked, “If we can be less bureaucratic and more responsive during this crisis, why can’t we remain that way after the crisis?” Another observed, “If nothing else, this situation should wake all of us up to the importance of understanding nonprofit capitalization and the art of the long view. Maybe this is the beginning of the end of funders’ focus on project grants, and the beginning of more appropriate and informed funding strategies genuinely tailored to each recipient’s needs.”

Steve Bailey’s (Jump-Start) question, “How can we dream during this economy?” applies to funders as well as ensembles. Some people are suggesting that foundations take a stand in this moment and be counter-cyclical. They too, can ask hard questions about their leadership during hard times. How can they not only fill holes but also seek to create a vision for sustainable support?

A foundation president included in Sidford’s snapshot describes three challenges for funders: “first, getting a handle on the extent and impact of the recession; second, exerting leadership — being bold, positive, and opportunistic without being insensitive; and third — and most important — asking ourselves the same tough questions that we are asking grantees: how do we slip the vice-like grip of old mindsets and behaviors and adapt so we increase our relevance, resilience, and meaningful contributions to our community?”

## **Part 5**

### **From Survival to Sustainability**

Moving beyond survival to sustainability requires:

1. Being proactive rather than reactive
2. Having a vision of a coherent and integrated system of support
3. Recognizing the interdependence of ensemble theater with the broader world of which it is part
4. Having the will and commitment to think long-term

Sustainability depends on planning, but the sporadic nature of initiative and project support makes this planning very difficult. There is currently a lack of coherence in support – artists may develop and deepen their work, engage new partnerships, and have greater impact, and just as this is happening, their funding may fall off, because a grant cycle has completed. As John Killacky concludes, “The harsh reality in this case study is, that even with support from programs like Ensemble Theater Collaborations, artists’ work in this country is still undercapitalized with the burden on artists to, in Bither’s words, ‘patch together a coherent process for their work.’”

The elements of a coherent system, identified through this assessment, need to come together for optimal effect, and be supported as related pieces of a whole. They include:

- Sustained funding that enables artists to take the risks needed to fulfill their artistic vision and engage this vision with multiple audiences
- Integrated funding (arts and sources from other sectors) for on-going community and civic partnerships that demonstrate the critical value of theater in healthy communities
- Field-driven service organizations such as Arts Presenters, National Performance Network, National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures, Alternate ROOTS, Theater Communications Group and NET
- Activist presenters and theaters that nurture work over time through multiple and complementary resources
- Catalytic opportunities to extend the life of the work
- Ensemble structures that reflect and best implement the mission of the company
- Multiple ways that ensembles work on their own behalf and in support of one another that enable them to determine and control their own fate
- Sustained affordable spaces where work can be made and resources shared
- Opportunities to diversify support such as building individual donor bases, developing as small businesses and increasing earned revenues
- Professional development opportunities to strengthen administrative structures and operations
- Partnerships with for-profit organizations
- Flexible and secure teaching positions at (and other partnerships with) universities, and in ensemble-based institutes
- Jobs with livable and sustainable wages
- Access to affordable health care and housing

- An integrated view of cultural policy that includes cultural equity and multiple policy areas in other sectors, and on-going seats at these policy tables, locally and nationally

Not only does this system need to be more coherent, it is stronger when self-determined. The ingenuity, creativity and knowledge of the field are critical, and too often under-utilized, resources in the development of funding programs. Organizations like NET that were created by ensembles and remain accountable to them deserve continued support for their on-going work to maximize and create opportunities for the field.

To be robust and sustained, this support for ensemble theaters should also be understood within the context of support for healthy communities and a vital democracy. As many of the ensemble theaters demonstrate, theater is a civic act, and a process that contributes to inclusive community revitalization. “Theater is like bread, soul and church,” as described by San Diego Rep’s Sam Woodhouse, and stimulus is not only economic but also creative. During the Great Depression, the WPA’s New Federal Theater recognized artists as workers and the integral role of theater to the economic and civic well-being and social imagination of the country. Some people are advocating for a new Arts Recovery program and considering what would be needed to gain the public and political will to make it happen. Arlene Goldbard highlighted how “sustainable national recovery requires cultural recovery” in her Catalyst Conversation at the NET Summit.

A compelling example from Mexico, shared at the NET Summit by Susan Thompson of Pilgrim Theater who had participated in the program, was an artist brigade, which toured to large and small communities across the country. A federal program supported by Social Security and the oil workers union, the brigade provided sustained work and a living wage for artists and brought the arts to audiences as large as 4,000. When Mexico suffered an earthquake in 1985, the program had already closed, but its legacy was that it had created a community of artists who could quickly organize themselves, and within a week they were performing for those who were left homeless.

Ensembles and independent artists work in many ways as part of the renewal of their communities. Heartbeat Ensemble joined with the Institute for Regional Policy to explore why young people are leaving Connecticut. Double Edge Theater is part of New England’s Creative Economy initiative, mindful about how to share the benefits of the creative economy across the community. Sojourn is exploring community development and making democracy more accessible through their creative process. Living Word and Youth Speaks are demonstrating the value of imagination and culture in education and the environment. Marty Pottenger is in residence in Portland Maine’s City Hall, working with the police to write poetry and address community issues. When Pottenger was threatened with cutbacks, the police successfully advocated on her behalf.

Repeatedly we learn that we can’t make the case effectively for the value of the arts in isolation of other community needs. At a meeting of five community boards in lower Manhattan, NY to discuss the fate of small theaters during the economic crisis, it was clear that the theaters’ survival depended on making common cause with other groups in their communities. The theaters allied themselves with the small businesses that were also struggling to survive, resulting in a resolution that was signed by multiple community boards. Advocacy for basic benefits like

health insurance or affordable housing is also stronger when contextualized as part of broader efforts.

Theaters are looking at the ways they can contribute to community renewal where imagination and creative process can help shape a sustainable vision for the future. The federal government once again recognizes the value of the arts, both intrinsically and as an integral part of community engagement, evidenced by including the National Endowment for the Arts in the stimulus package. Hopefully this signals the start of a broader recognition and support of the arts as an essential part of our nation's future.

## Appendix A: Summary of grants and funders

<b>Funder</b>	<b>Grant Amount</b>	<b>Project Period</b>	<b>Support</b>
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation	\$250,000	Eight months; April – December 2004	Program planning and research, “Conversations with the Field.”
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation	\$ 1,335,000	Two and one-half years; awarded December 2004 (Project period ending 06/30/07)	ETC – project grants, travel support, one day meeting of grantees and Under the Radar Festival and Symposium
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation	\$ 500,000	Two years; awarded May 2007 (Project period ending 06/30/09)	ETC –a final round of project grants and some costs associated with the Under the Radar Festival and Symposium
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation	\$50,000	Seven months; awarded July 2006 (Project period ending 1/31/07)	ETC evaluation meeting
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation	\$ 375,000	Two years; awarded February 2006. Project period ending (as per extension) 06/30/09)	ETC and UTR – this grant supported Under the Radar Festival and Symposium and travel subsidies for regional theatre artistic directors, presenters or ensembles.
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation	\$240,000	Two years, project period ending 4/30/2010	UTR 2009 and UTR 2010
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation	\$250,000 (pending)	One year, project period ending 4/30/2010	UTR pilot expansion, 2010
The Ford Foundation	\$ 400,000	Two and one-half years; awarded December 2006 project period ending (as per extension: 09/30/09)	Grant supported: ETC –this was for culturally specific organization project grants as part of the Ensembles Theatres Collaborations Grant Program, support for Under the Radar Festival.
The Ford Foundation	\$161,500	Two years; project period ending 12/10/2010	UTR 2009 and UTR 2010

## Appendix B: April 2009 grantee convening participants

### **500 Clown**

Leslie Buxbaum Danzig, Director

### **Arts at St. Ann's**

Marilynn Donini, Director of External Affairs

### **Asia Society**

Rachel Cooper, Director, Cultural Programs and Performing Arts

### **Bond Street Theatre**

Joanna Sherman, Vice President & Artistic Director

### **Culture Clash**

Richard Montoya, Ensemble Member

### **Double Edge Theatre, Inc.**

Matthew Glassman, Associate Producing Artistic Director

### **Hartbeat Ensemble**

Steve Ginsburg Co-Founder

### **Here Arts Center**

Kim Whitener, Producing Director

### **Jump Start Performance Co.**

Steve Bailey, Executive Director

### **Meredith Monk / The House Foundation for the Arts, Inc.**

Olivia Georgia, Executive Director

### **New Paradise Laboratories**

Inger Hatlen, Managing Director

### **Ridge Theater**

Jill Dombrowski, Executive Producer of Arts and Cultural Programming at Montclair University

### **Rude Mechanicals**

Sarah Richardson, Director

### **San Diego Repertory Theatre**

Sam Woodhouse, Artistic Director

### **Sandglass Theatre**

Eric Bass, Artistic Director

### **Squonk Opera**

Steve O'Hearn, Co-Artistic Director

### **The Builders Association**

Marianne Weems, Artistic Director

### **The Carpetbag Theatre**

Linda Parris-Bailey, Executive Artistic Director

### **The Civilians**

Steve Cosson, Artistic Director

### **Theatre of Yugen**

Jubilith Moore, Co-Artistic Director

### **University of Colorado-Theatreworks**

Drew Martorella, Producing Director

### **Young Jean Lee's Theater Company**

Caleb Hammons, Producing Director

### **Youth Speaks / Brave New Voices /**

### **The Living Word Project**

Joan Osato, Producing Director, LWP

### **ARTS PRESENTERS STAFF**

Sandra Gibson, President & CEO  
Scott Stoner, Chief Programs Officer  
Alison McNeil, Programs Manager

### **NET REPRESENTATIVES**

Brad Krumholz, Artistic Director, North American Cultural Laboratory  
Robert Leonard, Virginia Tech  
Nick Slie, Co-Artistic Director, Mondo Bizarro  
Carlton Turner, Artistic Director, M.U.G.A.B.E.E.  
Leese Walker, Artistic / Producing Director, Strike Anywhere  
Mark Valdez, National Coordinator, Network of Ensemble Theatre (NET)

### **CONSULTANTS**

Caron Atlas, Kathie deNobriga, Celia O'Donnell

## **Appendix C: Summary and Recommendations from April convening by Celia O'Donnell**

On April 13 and 14, 2009, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP) convened a group of approximately 29 ensemble theaters and associated professionals in New York City. Primarily comprised of APAP's Ensemble Theatre Collaborations (ETC) grantees, the group also included representatives from the Network of Ensemble Theatre (NET), organizations not funded through the program. Part of an overarching evaluation of the ETC program funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the meeting was facilitated by Caron Atlas and Kathie deNobriga, who are conducting that evaluation. The content of the meeting was also informed by Sandra Gibson, President and CEO, Scott Stoner, Chief Program Officer and Alison McNeil, Programs Manager at Arts Presenters and by Mark Valdez, NET's national coordinator.

As outlined in advance, the goals of the meeting were to:

- Identify the impact of the ETC program on the grantee companies' capacity
- Explore what the companies themselves need to survive/thrive
- Identify how foundations and service organizations can best assist the field of ensemble theatres
- Ascertain what has been learned about ensembles over the past three years since ETC was launched

Using a process very much influenced by an ensemble way of working (valuing all voices and working towards consensus), Atlas and deNobriga guided the lively conversation and helped the group direct their concerns and interests towards a set of recommendations that could inform the work of service organizations, funders, and the ensembles themselves.

The tone of the conversation was informed by a number of forces that are significantly shaping the environment in which all of the companies work:

- The state of the global economy, which is affecting all types of contributed income (public, private, individual contributions) as well as earned income, especially for those theaters that tour domestically and/or internationally
- The political moment, which is inspiring curiosity and cautious optimism across the cultural community
- Transitions/changes throughout national funding institutions and grant-making programs, including uncertainty around the future of the ETC program itself
- The rise of technologies that are impacting not only the very work created, but also the means by which organizations can develop and maintain their audiences and community
- A dawning generational shift, which is causing companies to ask consider leadership and legacy issues

- Building momentum around NET and the ensemble community in general, which seems to be enhancing the spirit of the field as companies feel less isolated and more prepared to tackle challenges in concert with one another

Each participant company had the opportunity to introduce itself, and the ETC grantees also were paired in pre-meeting discussions about their funded projects (see section IV for summaries of the reports). Of the 25 grantee organizations represented, it was determined that approximately 10-11 of the funded projects would not have existed with the ETC program; and of those, 5-6 of the collaborative projects were inspired by the ETC opportunity. Other grantees used the program as an opportunity to “scale up” and build upon existing relationships, as well as to access and leverage new sources of funding.

*Celia O’Donnell has nearly 15 years of progressive leadership in the arts, working at the intersection of development, program design, and communication. In January 2009 Celia launched Bird in Hand Consulting, which focuses on helping creative organizations to maximize and expand upon their assets. Previously Celia was the Directory of External affairs at Creative Capital, the premier support organization for individual artists working in all disciplines.*

## Appendix D: Questions for Discussion at the NET Summit

**Small Group Discussions** *The overall goal is to identify a sustainable support system for ensemble theaters and independent artists. Please include concrete examples to illustrate your points and offer specific recommendations.*

Group 1. **Grants and other contributed income:** Which grants have been most productive, which most harmful? Give examples and recommendations (can't just say give more general support money - be specific.) What are some other examples of useful sources of contributed income (e.g. giving circles, sponsorships)?

Group 2. **Changing landscape of touring:** What percentage of your income comes from touring? How has your touring shifted in the last couple of years? What are useful strategies to support your touring? What are effective catalysts for touring (e.g. Under the Radar)? How has the economic crisis affected your touring? Give examples. What are your recommendations related to touring?

Group 3. **Elements of exemplary relationships with presenters** (all kinds of presenters including ensembles themselves): What ways have presenters supported the work, including those who may not be presenting the work, but may be commissioning it, providing residencies, etc. Give examples. What are your recommendations related to presenters?

Group 4. **Elements of exemplary relationships with regional theaters:** What ways have producers supported the work including those who may not be including it in their seasons but are helping to develop it? Give examples. What are your recommendations related to regional theaters?

Group 5. **Earned income:** What are creative ways that you are generating earned income besides touring and ticket sales that help you build a sustainable economy for your work? Give examples. What are your recommendations related to earned income?

Group 6. **Shifting artistic practice:** Give examples and discuss what is triggering the changes, and the implication of the changes. What recommendations do you have related to this?

Group 7. **Shifting management practice:** Give examples and discuss what is triggering the changes, and the implication of the changes. What recommendations do you have related to this?

Group 8. **Partners outside of the arts:** Give examples and cite challenges and opportunities related to working with non-arts partners. How can this be part of a sustainable support system? What is the impact of the economic crisis on this? What recommendations do you have related to this?

Group 9. **Training and capacity building:** What training and capacity building -- artistic and organizational -- is needed for your group? Give examples of successful programs. What recommendations do you have related to this?

Group 10. **Big picture of a sustainable system:** What would a coherent and sustainable system look like - not just the individual elements but how they fit together, where art and culture are part of community life and are valued? This would include everything from the creative impulse to its many realizations, from health insurance to housing. How does this particular political moment influence the possibilities?

## Appendix E: Consultant bios

**Caron Atlas** is a Brooklyn-based consultant and cultural organizer working to support and stimulate arts and culture as an integral part of social change. She is the project director of the Arts & Community Change program of the Pratt Center for Community Development and Place + Displaced, a community mapping project of Fractured Atlas. Additionally she directs the Arts & Democracy Project of State Voices and is a faculty member in New York University's Art and Public Policy program. Atlas worked many years at Appalshop, the Appalachian media center; was the founding director of the American Festival Project, a national coalition of activist artists; is a consultant to foundations, including Ford and Nathan Cummings; and also worked with, amongst others, National Voice, Animating Democracy, and the Cultural Blueprint for New York City. She has a master's degree from the University of Chicago and was a Warren Weaver fellow at the Rockefeller Foundation.

**Kathie deNobriga** is a founding member of Alternate ROOTS, a service organization for community-based artists in the South; she served as ROOTS' executive director and planning/development director for ten years. During that time she co-edited an anthology of new plays from the southern theatre and initiated a consortium to create the Community Arts Training Directory, now available through [www.communityarts.net](http://www.communityarts.net). DeNobriga was a Fellow in the Rockefeller Foundation's Next Generation Leadership program, and is serving a second term as mayor pro-tem on the City Council of Pine Lake, Georgia, where she is an advocate and practitioner for arts and community development. She is an independent consultant for numerous grass-roots arts organizations, state arts agencies, and foundations interested in building organizational capacity.

Caron and Kathie have previously collaborated, with Helen Brunner, on *Artists' Communities at Work: Lessons Learned* for the Association of Artists Communities, two assessments for the Creative Capital Foundation on grantee impact and program design, and an assessment and program design for the Leeway Foundation in Philadelphia. Kathie and Caron also worked with the National Arts Administration Mentorship Program, publishing their findings in *Report to the Field: A Record and Reflection of Value-based Learning*.