CULTURALLY SPECIFIC ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

While the arts and culture ecology in the US is dominated economically by large institutions primarily working in benchmark arts in the European tradition, the landscape is replete with organizations both formal and informal that draw upon ethnic, folk and religious traditions in their work. The leadership, staff, audiences and programming of these organizations may have been marginalized within mainstream organizations working in benchmark arts disciplines, or within the larger arts ecology. These organizations provide opportunities for communities to experience new forms of art and culture; give artists rooted in ethnic communities the opportunity to practice their art, hone their craft and build audiences; and they are places where people outside the mainstream learn organizational management and board leadership skills. At the same time, the workforce and boards of many culturally specific arts organizations have gained their experience in mainstream organizations. To fully measure the diversity, cultural equity and inclusion in arts and culture across all of LA County, it is important to understand the role and contribution of this set of arts organizations. This part of the arts and culture ecology is often not considered within general frameworks of diversity, cultural inclusion and the arts. Culturally specific arts organizations have been given a separate section in order to ensure that its unique perspectives, concerns and role are not lost in a more general conversation.

Considering their role in the larger arts ecology, literature on diversity, cultural equity and inclusion vis-à-vis culturally specific arts organizations is notably thin. Moreover, the nature of the relationships between large, benchmark arts organizations and grassroots arts organizations and artists has not been fully explored. These relationships are multidirectional and are affected by larger societal forces. This literature review did not identify any research on strategies for drawing upon traditional, folk, and religious arts communities in order to increase diversity, cultural equity and inclusion in arts and culture. There is national research on arts organizations of color and some local analysis of new immigrant and refugee arts activity. A recurring theme in the literature on both of these types of organizations and communities is that they encompass a wide range of activities beyond artistic pursuits in the European tradition. Analysis of culturally specific organizations and arts activity suggests avenues for supporting and strengthening these organizations, but the size of this sector is not known. Moreover, no one has measured the impact on interventions for these organizations on the larger arts and culture sector. This section discusses what and who culturally specific arts organizations are, as well as promising practices toward supporting them.

There is evidence that culturally specific arts organizations include diverse racial and ethnic groups in their staffs, boards, artists, and audiences (Bowles, 1992). According to the survey of organizations reported in Cultural Centers of Color, between 58 and 75 percent of culturally specific arts organizations of color included European Americans. Of the culturally specific groups in this study (African American, Asian American, Latino American and Native American), African American and Latino American organizations were the most likely to be ethnically diverse. There are undoubtedly lessons to be learned from these organizations on fostering diverse leadership and community involvement, but little literature was discovered that investigates this potential specifically.
Literature on arts organizations outside of the European tradition and benchmark art forms has used several different terms to define its object of inquiry, and recent attempts to quantify how many organizations make up this sector have used significantly different definitions. The NEA report *Cultural Centers of Color* uses the term “ethnically specific arts organizations of color” to designate organizations that included more than 51 percent of one ethnic group among their staffs, boards, artists, and audiences and uses “multi-ethnic” to designate organizations with approximately equal groups of at least two communities of color (totaling 51 or more of the organization’s participants) (Bowles, 1992). This report was based on a survey of nonprofit arts organizations of which 543 organizations reported that they fit these criteria. Since then, analyses have been made based on the Form 990 filings of nonprofit ethnic, cultural, and folk organizations collected by the National Center for Charitable Statistics (Rosenstein & Brimer, 2005; Rosenstein, 2006). These studies classified organizations that work in a single artistic discipline in a contemporary or classical non-Western form with their artistic disciplines (for example, Chinese opera was classified under opera) and these organizations were not included unless they were oriented more largely towards cultural heritage or community identity (Rosenstein & Brimer, 2005). The most recent study of such organizations in U.S. and Canada also used Form 990 filings supplemented with extensive research, but instead used the term “ethnocultural, or ethnically/culturally specific, arts organizations” and included in this designation any “nonprofit organization that preserves, promotes, and/or develops, as evidenced from mission statement, programming, or both, the cultures of one or more explicitly identified ethnic group through the arts” (Matlon, Van Haastrecht & Mengüç, 2014).

At the same time, some artists and arts organizations of color interested in participating in mainstream artistic categories might resist efforts to treat their artistic forms separately from mainstream forms (Jackson, 2003; Lena & Cornfield, 2008). As noted in the section about measuring diverse audiences among Organizational Grant Program recipients, culturally specific arts organizations may not wish to identify as culturally specific and may answer survey questions in ways that make them blend in to mainstream organizations in the data. On the other hand, many culturally specific arts organizations argue that they are unique and have different needs than mainstream organizations (Bowles, 1992; Stern et al., 2010). One evaluation of the Canadian Council for the Arts’ programs for Aboriginal art reported that there was significant support for dedicated programs for Aboriginal artists and organizations but also that these programs are not well supported by a discipline based approach (Canadian Council for the Arts, 2015). The challenge of how best to quantify and analyze arts activities in communities of color is ongoing.

The approach of using Form 990 filings is a common method used to capture cultural organizations outside of benchmark artistic disciplines. However this is controversial as it includes White ethnocultural organizations (for example, the Alliance Française). There may be advantages to subsuming “folk” and “traditional” arts into the sector of culturally specific arts organizations. However, this approach risks shifting the focus away from racially and ethnically diverse organizations and missing the challenges these organizations face. For example, one recent study focused on ethnic activities in a specific geographical
area adopted this approach by including African-Americans and Native Americans in a broad study of ethnic activities regardless of how recently arrived those ethnic communities are (Lackey, 2013). While this study notes the distinction between voluntary and involuntary immigration that separates the experiences of African American and Native American groups from other groups of immigrants, the analysis of the data from these groups does not isolate different challenges that these communities might be facing because of these different experiences.

There is another approach that targets new immigrant groups and refugee communities in particular. This research on arts participation in local immigrant communities has drawn on Census data on the foreign born population, supplemented with surveys and interviews or participant observation (Moriarty, 2004; Stern, Seifert, & Vitiello, 2010; Wali, Severson & Longoni, 2002). Some studies of smaller subsets of arts organizations of color have used profiles of arts organizations in addition to or instead of survey data (DeVos Institute of Arts Management, 2015; Farrell & Fred, 2008). One report on folk and traditional arts also used in-depth profiles of communities and traditions and usefully targeted examples of successful support for the traditions profiled (Peterson, 1996).

While these analyses capture a larger universe of culturally specific organizations, there is widespread acknowledgment that communities of color engage in arts activities not captured in these statistics. People of color and immigrants participate in the arts in community organizations like churches and community centers and more informal settings like at home (Bowles, 1992; Peterson, 1996; Bye, 2004; Jackson, 2009; Matlon et al., 2014; Novak-Leonard, Reynolds, English, & Bradburn, 2015; Stern et al., 2010; Wali, et al., 2002). Additionally, looking at the arts activity of organizations alone fails to capture the work of folk artists and other individual artists (Bowles, 1992; Peterson, 1996; Jackson, 2003).

**DEFINING SUCCESS IN CULTURALLY SPECIFIC ARTS ORGANIZATIONS**

Organizations staffed by and primarily serving non-European Americans are subject to larger structural forces like racism and poverty that impede their success (Tseng, 2015). In addition, the conversation around cultural equity and inclusion in the arts and culture sector acknowledges that some of the art forms represented by these organizations face challenges when seeking legitimation from a sector dominated by European art forms. For instance, there is evidence that arts organizations of color are significantly underserved by the philanthropic community (Sidford, 2011).

Yet there is disagreement about how to define success and organizational health for culturally specific arts organizations. Some assume that if barriers to success, such as the lack of resources and opportunity, are removed, arts organizations of color would be as successful as their mainstream counterparts (DeVos Institute of Arts Management, 2015). Others argue that organizational health may look different for culturally specific arts organizations, and therefore they need different supports than mainstream arts organizations to be successful (Stern et al., 2010; Matlon et al., 2014; Voss, Voss, Louie, Drew & Teyolia, 2016).
Funding inequity over time in the larger art ecology has created budget challenges for culturally specific arts organizations. Recently, one major debate about organizational health has centered around how to measure the financial health of culturally specific arts organizations and how funders should encourage the financial health of the sector. The DeVos Institute of Arts Management issued a report in September 2015 that compared the financial health of African American and Latino museums, dance, and theater companies to mainstream arts organizations. They found that the largest organizations of color surveyed had significantly smaller budgets than the largest of their mainstream counterparts. In this comparison, arts organizations of color had fewer individual donors and were more reliant on grants from foundations and government sources. The DeVos Institute concluded from this analysis that most arts organizations of color are struggling and used examples of successful arts organizations of color to argue for leadership capacity building to balance different streams of income. The report further argued that, given the large number of struggling organizations, funders might consider making larger grants to a smaller number of organizations to help foster long term fiscal health.

Some have rebutted this suggestion and argue that the DeVos Institute of Arts Management report ignores the structural racism that has created challenges for arts organizations of color (Tseng, 2015). Others have pointed out that different organizational models may be appropriate for culturally specific organizations to be successful. The National Center for Arts Research (NCAR) issued their own analysis of culturally specific arts organizations in comparison to mainstream arts organizations (Voss et al., 2016). They found that after controlling for sector differences and organizational age, culturally specific arts organizations have similar-sized budgets and physical facilities compared to mainstream arts organizations. In addition, they found that organizations that primarily serve African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos have different financial characteristics compared to mainstream organizations, and they are different from each other. Since their budget sizes are comparable to other organizations with different financial models, NCAR argues that “culturally specific organizations’ distinguishing characteristics deserve to be recognized and understood for what they are, neither good nor bad nor a sign of ineffectiveness but simply a different starting place” (Voss et al., 2016).

Another recurring debate in the conversations about how best to serve culturally specific arts organizations centers around the customary disciplinary boundaries in the arts and culture sector and whether these pigeonhole those organizations and thus limit the support that flows to them (DeVos Institute of Arts Management, 2015). These disciplines largely define what it means to be artistically successful and artists of color may wish to be evaluated on their general artistic merit, not their cultural origins (Jackson, 2003). In addition, available funding for culturally specific art forms in the traditional or folk categories is often much smaller than for the customary disciplines (Lena & Cornfield, 2008). Yet artists may also face challenges when reviewers are unfamiliar with the non-European elements of their work (Bowles, 1992; Jackson, 2003). On the other hand, targeted supports for culturally specific arts organizations outside of the disciplinary categories may still be valuable. Many culturally specific arts organizations argue that they are unique and have needs that are different from those of mainstream organizations (Bowles, 1992; Stern et al., 2010). One evaluation of the Canadian Council for the Arts’ programs for Aboriginal art, for example, reported that there was significant support for dedicated
programs for Aboriginal artists and organizations but also that these programs are not well supported by a discipline based approach (Canadian Council for the Arts, 2015). This debate is ongoing, since the definition of the arts and culture sector itself is often interwoven with the customary disciplinary boundaries.

PROMISING PRACTICES: MODELS FOR SUPPORTING CULTURALLY SPECIFIC ARTS ORGANIZATIONS/ACTIVITIES

Support for culturally specific arts organizations and activities can play an important role in strengthening diversity, cultural equity and inclusion in the arts. Four key areas of support were identified in the literature:

- Targeting and funding folk art activities
- A life-cycle approach to supporting culturally specific arts organizations
- Fostering partnerships with non-arts organizations
- Meeting the needs of new immigrant and refugee arts communities

TARGETING AND FUNDING FOLK ART ACTIVITIES

Direct funding for folk artists and informal folk art associations that exist outside the scope of nonprofit organizations is one approach to supporting their work (Peterson, 1996). Multidisciplinary folk art organizations in particular can potentially play an important role in finding and documenting folk art practitioners, especially since most of these organizations have fieldworkers on staff and include fieldwork in their fundraising appeals. This suggests that organizational support for such organizations is an effective conduit to folk activities not funded elsewhere.

State level apprenticeships have been a popular approach to funding folk arts and these may be especially effective in diversifying the arts and culture sector since a majority of those funded were people of color (Peterson, 1996). This approach can be successful at providing more validation for master artists, leading to more business and economic security for both master and apprentice. The Alliance for California Traditional Arts funds apprenticeships with master folk artists in California, as well as grants to nonprofit and community organizations for California-based community programs in the traditional arts (Alliance for California Traditional Arts, 2011).

Funding for gatherings and conferences such as the Fund for Folk Culture’s Conferences and Gatherings program can help create infrastructure for artisans to identify common needs and strategies. Some art forms benefit from support for occasional meetings, for instance mariachi conferences and festivals where students go to workshops and perform were successful at nurturing this art form. Supported by small NEA and state grants, receiving these funding opportunities helped these organizations to leverage local and grassroots support for mariachi conferences by offering legitimacy (Peterson, 1996).
Support for associations of artisans is necessary from multiple sectors, especially when natural resources are at stake. Cultural tourism offices, highway administration, and land developers are just some of the examples. This again suggests that capacity building for cross-sector partnerships and advocacy would be productive.

### A LIFE-CYCLE APPROACH TO SUPPORTING SMALL ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

A standard nonprofit life-cycle approach to capacity building for nonprofit arts organizations may not match the actual needs of ethnocultural organizations (Matlon et al., 2014). Some organizations may have significant maturity in artistic programming while remaining small organizationally, making them look like “emerging” organizations but making capacity building support for “emerging” organizations inappropriate. Matlon et al. (2014) propose a life-cycle approach that separates administrative and artistic development cycles into four groups:

- Startup; Formalization (Administrative)
- Survival-1; Stagnation; Growth; Renewal; Decline (Administrative)
- Artistic Life Cycle – Endings and New Beginnings
- Survival-2; Sustainable (Administrative)

They evaluated the existing support structure in the US and Canada against the needs articulated by these organizations and artists. From this analysis, the authors developed a detailed set of recommendations for funders and arts service organizations to support organizations in the early developmental stages as well as in the second and fourth categories. All of the recommendations emphasize allowing for flexibility in the supports for ethnocultural arts organizations, recognizing the wide diversity in these organizations and their needs, and tailoring supports to organizations’ needs when possible. These recommendations also highlight the way that ethnocultural organizations have been chronically under-resourced and cannot be expected to operate similarly to mainstream organizations that have been consistently supported over long periods of time. They recommend funders and arts service organizations make their own commitments to cultural equity by dedicating staff time and expertise in order to better support these organizations.

For ethnocultural arts organizations at the startup and formalization phases, the recommendations focus on connecting newly formed organizations to resources through outreach and building online content, culturally specific capacity building services, and developing and encouraging the growth of locally focused but nationally networked ethnocultural arts service organizations.

The majority of the responses from ethnocultural arts organizations in the study were grouped together in the second category, because the needs of organizations in these middle stages of the life cycle are similar. The recommendations for supporting this group focused on providing access to multi-year unrestricted funds, specifically removing features of funding tied to

- minimum operating budgets, paid staff, or amount of annual programming
The report recommends that funders and arts service organizations be open to collaborative organizational models that provide for administrative and programming resource sharing among small and mid-size organizations in these middle stages. Arts service organizations, they recommend, should also move away from institution building support structures and focus on providing resources in the form of

- expertise (banks of potential board members, services identifying volunteer experts in management fields, outsourcing organizations for the fundraising and administrative needs of small organizations)
- tailored fundraising training for targeting the private sector
- access to space
- network of presenters interested in ethnocultural artistic works.

Finally, for organizations in the last category (Survival-2 and Sustainable), this analysis reiterates the need for multi-year unrestricted funds and support for collaborative models for resource sharing, but shifts the focus of support to advocacy and pipelines for staff and leadership. Organizations at this stage need less of the specific administrative and programming resources and need more leadership in their own organizations and in the field. This analysis recommends increasing the racial diversity of arts schools and arts administration programs, internships for emerging artists and arts administrators of color, and support for emerging and mid-career ethnocultural arts leaders.

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**FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS WITH NON-ARTS ORGANIZATIONS**

Partnerships with non-arts organizations may be a fruitful strategy for nurturing arts activities in community organizations that fall outside the nonprofit arts and culture sector. One survey of non-arts partners drawn from the educational, religious, youth development, human services, and community development sectors found that these types of organizations helped with the production of programs or events, by arranging group attendance, by developing programs, and by providing spaces where exhibits or performances could take place (Walker, 2004).

For partnerships between arts and non-arts organizations to be successful, the potential risks and costs of partnership should be anticipated and addressed. Arts organizations should respect the community processes of the organizations that may require a release of artistic control; non-arts organizations should respect the standards for quality products and performance that may place demands on participants if they are to reap the benefits of arts partnerships (Walker, 2004).

Given that arts activity in communities of color often happens in religious communities (Jackson, 2009; Stern et al., 2010), research into arts activity in religious communities would appear to be helpful in developing strategies for nurturing the arts in communities of color. However, the only study to
investigate the potential connection between arts and religious communities did not include enough people of color or from non-Christian religions to produce reliable percentages, other than to note that African-Americans make up a larger percentage of churchgoers than they do of gallery attendees (Wuthnow, 2008). The findings on arts activities in white Christian communities are that choral performance or congregational singing is overwhelming the most frequent arts activity held or sponsored by a congregation, followed by drama and art festivals or craft fairs (Wuthnow, 2008). This research also suggests that religious organizations have underused facilities that could be used by the arts and social networks to promote events.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF NEW IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE ARTS COMMUNITIES

Many of the recommendations and analyses of immigrant arts activity focus on the twin needs for bonding or building community within immigrant groups and bridging to outside or native populations (Bye, 2004; Lena & Cornfield, 2008). Communities must have ethnic-specific spaces for nurturing identity as well as spaces that are permeable to outsiders (Jackson, 2009). Another major theme in this literature is that arts activities happen in multi-service and non-arts sector organizations for immigrant communities, underscoring the need for funding of arts activities outside of the traditional nonprofit arts sector (Bye, 2004; Lena & Cornfield, 2008; Stern et al., 2010). Culturally specific arts organizations are also frequently described as operating more as community centers than strictly arts organizations (Boyles, 1992; Farrell & Fred, 2008). Immigrant hub organizations help artists to connect to both coethnics and native populations, but these organizations may not be seen as traditional recipients of arts funding (Lena & Cornfield, 2008).

Carolyn Bye of the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (St. Paul, MN) offers additional practical funding recommendations for working with new immigrant and refugee arts communities (Bye, 2004). Her first recommendation to eliminate the 501c3 requirement is echoed by other researchers (Lena & Cornfield, 2008). She also recommends that funders focus on community rather than “art” and trust that the community knows what art is of value to them. Her other recommendations to funders include

- Commit for the long haul and expect a labor-intensive process, including language issues
- Ensure grant panelists are culturally informed in order to properly evaluate new immigrant communities
- Be flexible about art forms, funding models, and application processes
- Be wary of the extra burden placed on new communities in asking them to serve on review panels and in other roles