Feb 2018
Cultural Partner Engagement Session

A report on the key findings and areas for opportunity

Community Innovation Network

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

In January 2018, CAC retained the Community Innovation Network to facilitate a two-hour meeting on January 31 to kick off a process for CAC to continue engaging cultural partners throughout 2018 in a way that builds strong, authentic relationships that allow CAC's work to be informed by its cultural partners and funded organizations. Although CAC has a history of engaging its cultural partners, the 2017 decision to reduce 2018-19 General Operating Support was met with strong opposition among some partners, including criticism as to how CAC has previously engaged cultural partners in its decision-making.

CAC requested that this facilitated session be a space for CAC to share where it is at as an organization, hear the ideas, thoughts, and concerns from their cultural partners, and determine how best to create feedback loops and engagement pipelines between CAC and partners. With this in mind, the Community Innovation Network developed a three-part program for the event that included a short presentation by CAC, an interactive gallery walk where participants could learn more about CAC, engage in a discussion about CAC's funding and allocation practices, and provide structured feedback to specific questions about communication and transparency.

The purpose of this gathering was to be the first of a series of ongoing conversations to open CAC's process and engage partners more in deeper and more impactful ways. More than 75 people representing 55 CAC-funded organizations participated in the session.

GOALS

The Community Innovation Network designed a deliberative approach for convening and facilitating an engagement with CAC's cultural partners with the goals of:
1. Provide a structured and productive space for organizations that receive CAC funding to understand past decision-making and CAC's funding practices.
2. Provide a structured/productive space for CAC to hear concerns/needs of partners, and allow these organizations to air grievances and concerns to CAC staff/board.
3. Create a format that allows for developing mechanisms for CAC to get deep information on how to design greater feedback loops within their system and promote greater collaboration, engagement, and support among CAC and the institutions they fund.
4. Lay the groundwork for long-term trust-building between CAC and its cultural partners.

KEY FINDINGS FROM CULTURAL PARTNER CONVENING

Operations and Grantmaking

1. Many cultural partners appreciate CAC's work, and the integration of feedback into its programs and policies.
2. Cultural partners desire to be part of CAC's decision-making processes related to funding allocations, grant applications, and review processes for grants, and have strong opinions and ideas about changes and improvements to CAC's grantmaking allocation policies, funding formulas, and overall operations.
3. Many cultural partners want simpler grant applications, and support during the application and review processes.
4. Some cultural partners desire multi-year funding for project support.

Communication

5. Many cultural partners believe CAC is doing a great job of sharing information with cultural partners.
6. Many cultural partners indicated a desire to have more in-person sessions with CAC individually and in small groups.
7. Some partners feel that more openness, transparency, simplicity, clearer writing, and information presentation would benefit cultural partners.

Understanding and Trust of CAC

8. Many cultural partners desire increased diversity and transparency inside of the organization.
9. A number of cultural partners are concerned about CAC's sustainability as an organization, as a result of decreasing tax revenue.
10. Many cultural partners generally lack understanding about how CAC and its programs operate.

CULTURAL PARTNER RESPONSES, DETAILS BY KEY FINDING

Responses from the Gallery Walk included the opportunity for participants to vote in support of other's comments. The number of dots indicates the the number of additional participants supporting the original poster's idea. Most responses in this section are verbatim written quotes from attendees at the session.

Operations and Grantmaking

1. **Many cultural partners appreciate CAC's work, and the integration of feedback into its programs and policies.**
   - Thank you, CAC. You boosted us when we needed it most!

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- Very much appreciate what you have done to simplify the grant application + reporting processes.
- Keep shortening the application! It got better after the last change…
- GOS is so critical-fills the gaps. Continue to prioritize it (5 dot votes)

2. **Cultural partners desire to be part of CAC's decision-making processes related to funding allocations, grant applications, and grant processes. They have strong opinions and ideas about changes and improvements to CAC's grantmaking allocation policies, funding formulas, and overall operations.**

When asked if they could change one thing about CAC's grant programs or processes, cultural partners demonstrated a desire to put parameters or control how other organizations' interact with and receive funding from CAC. Specifically, they mentioned:
- Put a cap on the amount the largest organizations can receive (7 dot votes)
- Individual artist grants have been transformational for our arts pool. Keep this a priority (even over PS?) (1 dot vote)
- More project support/less operation support (1 dot vote)
- Decrease percent of project funding if GOS is decreasing (1 dot vote)
- In 2017, CAC should have put a freeze on adding new grantees for operating support, which would have given current grantees more time to prep for the drastic decline in their grant award amounts. (1 dot vote)
- If revenue is declining why wouldn't CAC limit the number of grantees & focus on organizations that serve the most residents?

For the same question, cultural partners demonstrated a desire for changes to the way that CAC allocates dollars in general. Specifically, they mentioned:
- More project support/less operation support (1 dot vote)
- Decrease percent of project funding if GOS is decreasing (1 dot vote)
- Bi-annual instead of annual grants
- Project II support is now $5,000 tops – can there be 10,000 or somewhere between? Though very helpful, even $5,000 doesn't go very far. (1 dot vote)
- CAC has articulated value shifts but not clearly how+why this is their responsibility
- Maybe mission drift? (2 dot votes)

In addition, many cultural partners also demonstrated a desire for CAC to overhaul the way it approaches General Operating Support. It is important to note that these responses demonstrate significant areas of disagreement and conflict among cultural partners. Specifically, they mentioned:
- The GOS formula (2 dot votes)

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- o Desire to discuss the allocation for GOS over the long term.
- o Desire to cap the GOS maximum grant award.
- GOS process and requirements less stringent (1 dot vote)
- Consider lower budget level, etc. for a group to qualify
- Consider how the maximum award is calculated – move to base on public benefit, not related to arts budget size
- Consider smaller organizations have smaller comparable revenue and expenses, while larger organizations have more development power and higher donations, giving them a leg up in the current formula.
- Have you ever thought that the different sizes of the organization, dividing them into groups according to size and making allocations that way?
- In 2017, CAC should have put a freeze on adding new grantees for operating support, which would have given current grantees more time to prep for the drastic decline in their grant award amounts. (1 dot vote)
- Grandfather in all GOS organizations in good standing. No future proposals, only reports. (1 dot vote)
- Would CAC ever consider for GOS – once you're in you're in. Don't have to go through panel review process – would take extra work off.

3. **Many cultural partners want simpler grant applications, and support during the application and review processes.**

   When asked if they could change one thing about CAC's grant programs or processes, cultural partners articulated specific changes to the grant application, support during application, and review process. Specifically, they mentioned:
   - Longer character counts for goal setting applications and reports (4 dot votes)
   - Allow more space for info in narrative section + apps (1 dot vote)
   - The application questions do not allow orgs to expressively articulate their programs and audience (1 dot vote)
   - Grant making process – Provide more time and active interaction in the review process (1 dot vote)
   - The cultural database [Cultural Data Project – DataArts] is not that relevant for project support (1 dot vote)
   - Keep shortening the application! It got better after the last change… (1 dot vote)
   - Add a mail-in application option for grassroots Project II applicants
   - Offer tools and opportunities for orgs to put their programs in the context of what committees find relevant –and use this to help us report impact in our mid/year end reports

4. **Some cultural partners desire multi-year funding project support, and increased length for multi-year funding in general operating support.**

   When asked if they could change one thing about CAC's grant programs or processes, cultural partners requested multi-year support in many ways. Specifically, they mentioned:
   - Allow multi-year requests (3 dot votes)
   - Multi-year for project support II
   - Stick with multi-year [for General Operating Support] (1 dot vote)
   - 2 year cycle for project support (1 dot vote)
   - Make applying for gen op every four years (1 dot vote)

Communication

5. **Many cultural partners believe CAC is doing a great job of sharing information with cultural partners.**

   When asked how CAC can most effectively share information with its cultural partners, many partners expressed their approval and satisfaction with how CAC currently shares information. Specifically, they mentioned:
   - Doing a good job already (8 dot votes)
   - Great job ☺ Email, word of mouth, newsletters, subscriptions (2 dot votes)
   - Love the emails, do more on social media + small group/one-on-one sessions in person (4 dot votes)
   - Doing a good job. Always responsive. Thank you. (1 dot vote)
   - Currently doing a great job! (1 dot vote)
   - You're on a good track now. All good (1 dot vote)
   - Feel very well informed. Love the ability to click through for more detailed document.

6. **Many cultural partners indicated a desire to have more in-person sessions with CAC individually and in small groups.**
   - Love the emails, do more on social media + small group/one-on-one sessions in person (4 dot votes)
   - Continue meetings like this (1 dot vote)
   - E-mail but consider occasional phone chats w/CAC project managers (2 dot votes)
     - And senior leadership and board members
   - It'd be nice to have more face-to-face time w/the CAC staff (for each organization) (1 dot vote)
   - Small group discussion

7. **Some partners feel that more openness, transparency, simplicity, clearer writing, and information presentation would benefit cultural partners.**

   When asked how CAC can most effectively share information with its cultural partners, some partners expressed a desire for more openness, transparency, simplicity, better writing, and

information presentation would benefit cultural partners. Others believe that CAC should be doing a better job of communicating with their partners, but did not articulate what that could look like. Specifically, they mentioned:

- Streamline communications- infographics, highlights, bullets- less dense than currently (1 dot vote)
- Stop using obfuscating language.
- Would like to know your findings from comm. Surveys done in 2015 (?) What did you learn? (1 dot vote)
- In the future (if it happens again) stem the flow of misinformation
- How can CAC help to provide a conversation forum to find funding for the arts broadly?
- Great job working w/"normal" people (1 dot vote)

In addition, cultural partners suggested tactical changes to CAC's communication methods:
- Specificity as relates to potential declines
- Problems uploading photos to event page. Have to retype everything for each event. Streamline?
- Put all meeting dates on 1 page (board, grant policy, etc.). I missed some important meetings because I was looking at board meeting page.
- Networking – sharing info about arts orgs
- Share more information via the newspaper (1 dot vote)

Understanding and Trust of CAC

8. **Many cultural partners desire for increased diversity and transparency inside of the organization.**
   When asked what part of CAC's work they want to know more about, cultural partners expressed a desire for increased diversity and transparency inside the organization. Specifically, they mentioned:
   - I'd like to know more about the roles of CAC staff as administrators.
   - I'd like to know more about CAC's internal operations (2 dot votes)
   - How do you manage to attract/retain great staff talent as you cut your own expenses?
   - Have more diversity within CAC Administration
   - What about plans for Diversity Initiative (2 dot votes)

9. **A number of cultural partners are concerned about CAC's sustainability as an organization as a result of decreasing revenue.**
   When asked what part of CAC's work they want to know more about, cultural partners expressed a strong concern for CAC's sustainability, illustrating a lack of understanding about CAC's decreasing revenue and what role CAC as a public agency, can or can't play in securing additional public funding sources. Specifically, they mentioned:

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- Do you cap the funding of organizations you support since the pool is growing? (2 dot votes)
- What happens when cigarette tax runs out? (7 dot votes)
- Any plans to pursue other revenue streams (5 dot votes)
    - Have we looked at other areas where we could make income to keep CAC stream on up?
- See: CPAC ☺ (2 dot votes)
- But let CAC grantees know- what's up? How can we help? (2 dot votes)
- What is the plan for finding more funds now that the tax revenue is steadily declining? (3 dot votes)
- CAC should convene arts organizations to discuss the future of funding in the community, find ways to venerable institutions to get funded/started, support fundraising efforts among art institutions, and foster more collaboration in the community.

10. **Many cultural partners generally lack understanding about how CAC and its programs operate.**

When asked what part of CAC's work they want to know more about, cultural partners expressed a lack understanding about how CAC decision-making, operations, and revenue, grant panels, and grant programs operate at a basic level. They recognize their lack of understanding and they have a desire to learn more. Specifically, they mentioned:

- CAC decision-making, operations, and revenue
    - Does or can CAC get grants + donations separately from the tax? (1 dot vote)
    - Does CAC take into account duplication of efforts among grantees when decisions are made?
    - How does CAC communicate to the general public?
- Grant Panels
    - Why some panel members seem to not have read the application (1 dot vote)
        - For which they are the principal
    - How panel members are selected (3 dot votes)
    - Is there any other factor from the panel scoring GOS other than eligible revenue?
        - Have staff and board adequately reviewed other formulas?
        - What counts as revenue within the formula?
        - CAC should credit organizations who offer free admittance in the formula
        - CAC should credit organizations who support underseved populations in the formula
- Grant Programs
    - What fits in with the allocation policy discussion?

o   Is the GOS grant for two years?
o   More sharing of where projects are for joint, sharing of artist, performance
o   How to make the transition from PS to GOS
o   How are the mid/year end reports used? Can they affect grant amounts?
o   Criteria, cut-off decisions, what constitutes a "no"
o   When/if will multi-year recipients have to go through the full application process again? (3 dot votes)
o   Where the awards are made
o   Mapping across the county
o   Who can apply for GOS and how is it decided?
o   What type of project support grants are favored? (2 dot votes)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING CULTURAL PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

1. Feedback from cultural partners at the January 31st gathering illustrate trust and understanding of CAC among CAC's cultural partners can be categorized into three broad types:
   a)   Those who are happy with CAC's operations and practices
   b)   Those who are angry with CAC's operations and practices
   c)   Those who don't understand what is happening

   Lack of trust, might reflect lack of knowledge, and conversely, an increase of knowledge and understanding of CAC's operations has the potential to create either increased satisfaction or dissatisfaction with CAC. It is critical for CAC to continue to engage partners in all three groups, increase their awareness and knowledge of CAC, and use their input to shape CACs operations on a strategic level.

2. Cultural partners shared many positive comments about communication and information sharing by CAC. It is clear they have deep appreciation for the day-to-day communication with CAC. Other cultural partners express competing views, and these perspectives mainly relate to how CAC communicates when changes are being considered or when difficult decisions are made. In order to alleviate this, CAC must maintain the 'day-to-day' communication practices with cultural partners, while increasing opportunities for cultural partners to shape changes or difficult decisions before the results are finalized.

3. Cultural partners crave more direct interaction with CAC leadership and staff. CAC should continue forums that allow cultural partners to share their feedback and ideas, and learn about CAC. These practices reinforce transparency and accountability, and can be structured to avoid public berating by a few individuals.

4. CACs engagement of cultural partners in the January 31st gathering yielded mainly the development staff from organizations. From observation, it appears few executive-level staff attended. While

engaging development staff is important to shaping grantmaking, CAC will see the benefits of increasing transparency and accountability in engaging executive-level decision makers within cultural partners as well.

5. There is an opportunity for CAC to create ad hoc advisory groups or task forces to biennially review specific programs and make a set of recommendations (Option 1, 2 and 3), outlining the pros and cons of each. There are many creative and knowledgeable partners that could help think through the issues when making a change. There are a lot of concerns about the formula and some suggestions for how to make it more equitable. This might be a place to create a group to study options for CAC to advance in this area.

6. CAC should clarify how it makes policy and program decisions and the type of engagement it seeks for each decision. Many partners have strong opinions and want to sway the organization, though a standard approach that gives equal space and voice to all partners would pave a future for more democratic decision-making. For example, using a survey is a better way to guage how the majority feels about an issue and publicizing the results will provide another layer of transparency and accountability to CAC's decision making. It is important to be clear when CAC intends to make the decision after seeking input from partners.

7. Cultural partners share a significant anxiety about the future of funding, and are looking to CAC to proactively seek ways to maintain support, including pursuing new sources of revenue. This is an ideal opportunity for a collaborative approach, drawing on partners and other stakeholders to work with CAC board and staff.

8. There are many concerns about treating large and small organizations the same, for example, applying the formula the same way to all. If this does not change, it might be worth considering how to better support smaller organizations without development staff. Submitting their applications and doing fundraising are challenges that negatively affect them.

9. In addition to CAC's organizational commitment to equity, standardizing and applying a racial equity lens to staffing, engagement, and grantmaking is critical to the future of CAC's work and funding. It is clear that partners are at different levels of awareness of and commitment to racial equity. We encourage CAC to provide encouragement or incentives for members to attend the REI Phase I workshop. In addition, CAC can articulate its commitment to racial equity with supportive data on Cuyahoga County and the need for addressing issues of inequity, and regularly publishing its data disaggregated by race.