

**SEMI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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**Movements that Express: Arts and Cultural Advocacy for the
Advancement of Human Rights**

Wednesday, July 18, 2012
10:45-12:15

*Please note that these notes have not been reviewed
by the speakers or organizers of this session*

Session Organizers:

- Mai Kang, Grants Director, Astraea Foundation; Monica Enriquez, Program Officer, Astraea Foundation

Facilitator:

- J. Bob Alotta, Executive Director, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice

Panelists:

- Jackie Williams Kaye, Director of Research and Evaluation, Wellspring Advisors
- Sham-e-Ali Nayeem, Program Director, Leeway Foundation

Sponsor:

- Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice
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This session discussed the effect of art and cultural advocacy for social change. The panelists engaged with and complicated the idea of measurable outcomes. They introduced a usable framework to evaluate the impact of art and cultural advocacy in different terms.

Some key issues addressed included:

- The unquantifiable and the quantifiable effect of art and cultural advocacy
- The challenge of acquiring funds
- The call for a nuanced discourse
- Concrete examples of art and cultural advocacy for social change

Bob Alotta acknowledged the struggle that grant makers encounter trying to convince donors to fund art activism. The notion that outcomes should be measurable is anathema to the power that Astraea looks to ascribe to and that which Astraea supports. Astraea is trying to engage with the idea of measurable outcomes and find tools to evaluate impact as its relevant to Astraea's work. Three key questions guide Astraea's approach

- How we create an enabling environment to support legal change and policy implementation?

- Can we measure the impact and if so how?
- If we can agree that there are useful strategies, are funders in a position to measure impact?

Bob then went on to share examples of recent grantees:

- OTD set up photo exhibit of naked, trans individuals and partners and families shown in public plaza. Purpose was to celebrate trans bodies and denounce transphobia and challenge idea that there are more bodies than just traditionally male and female. Exhibit was launched alongside anti-discrimination law. Law signed last Thursday.
- This is art project launched alongside policy change work. The mayor spoke at the exhibit in support of the law. They were very strategic about alliances
- None on record: stories of queer Africans. Many stories of people in exile.
 - Bisi was first and only man to come out publicly in Nairobi. Mother liquidated assets and bought him ticket to London. Underscores need for asylum cases as well as ways of keeping people connected to home and create enabling programs.

Sham-e-Ali: Leeway Foundation supports women and trans artists in Philadelphia across all disciplines. Sham-e-Ali then shared tangible examples of effects that show how we may come outside the box of defined identities and think of ways to think about things in new ways. Art expands visions of what we can imagine for a more just world.

- Ex: visual artists created public art project that explored effects of migration in Mexico and in US. Artists from each country will join the two worlds to create a large public art project. Youth will be creating transportable murals and then bring them to Philadelphia. End result is message for both communities and create connection between experience that is often physically separated. Example of a bridge between communities through creation of art, blog, photography, skype. Youth will have a space to share and create connections with indigenous teens in Mexico. Within the project is pride in identity and opportunity to speak about things they cannot easily speak about. Also creates opportunity to learn technique of mural and meet mentors and learns skills to provide platform for expression.
- Ex: produced 30 min radio program documenting potential of radio for social change. First part includes perspectives of local African immigrants and experience of leaving; second part is radio producers living transnationally; The program asks: what does it mean to be African?
- Ex: Paraíso: photography exhibit in Bahia engages issues of race, sex, class, and afro-religion. Exhibition is a safe space where people have the opportunity to see ways in which lgbt youth are involved in religions practices and to see sense of responsibility and solidarity in the history of Brazil. A way of reimagining the face of Brazil. The project raises consciousness around race, economics, and politics.

Gist is connected to the power of supporting art and culture because it expands the notion of what ways we can make change and creates a solidarity that does not get captured. It inspires sense of humanity and understanding that goes beyond language.

Jackie: Elucidates the challenges of arts funding: lack of understanding among funders of the role of arts, lack of evidence of value, and the need for more credible evidence of the contribution of arts. Leads to 3 questions:

1. What social change outcomes can be achieved?
2. How can we explain the connection?
3. How can we document and evaluate contributions?

It is necessary for people to understand strategy of arts activism. If they understand the strategy, They'll have more confidence that it will leave to outcomes

Presents a framework for think about public policy outcomes: if u want policy change you need to start with *awareness*, so you make a choice about whose awareness you need to address

- Jackie presents a chart to visualize the trajectory of art activism and the spheres it engages.
 - On the side the table reads: awareness→will→action
 - On the bottom the table is labeled audiences and reads:
public→influencers→decision makers
 - Idea is to move your way up the table

Most of the effect is seen in public awareness and public education campaigns. Once you have intervention that gets people talking to each other, then you move out of awareness and into willingness to act.

- Bobs case influences all audiences (public, influencers, decision makers) so it is a more efficient fundraising approach.
- Point is: social change requires comprehensive approach with multiple actors. There is rarely one actor that can make it happen so when you think about art approach give yourself permission to think about impact within broader range of strategies. Art is component of something bigger. Jackie goes on to give examples of how art can strengthen campaigns. Draws attention to particular aspects of campaigns that are strengthened by arts.
 - Ex: community organizing: research shows that participatory settings and interpersonal relationships are important for sustaining participation→ art provides that and also brings out creativity that can reduce burnout
 - Also, need people that are set on a particular issue to engage with other issues. Arts centers provide resource to introduce people to multiple issues.
 - Ex: advocacy and capacity building needs ability to develop strong messaging: arts helps extract and communicate core point of something complicated. Need ability to create, educate and grow consciousness: art can expand reach and reaches those less likely to be engaged through traditional approaches, and puts emphasis on shared experience. Need ability to work with media: art can be effective hook and tell a story in compelling way.

Asks: how can arts and cultural approaches contribute to policy change? How can we evaluate it?

- Shares example of government in Asia that wants to increase helmet use.
 - First pictures of one particular street corner show that only 2 people are wearing helmets. Later, Jackie systematically takes pictures of same street corner. After a couple months, almost everyone is wearing helmet.

- If you are going to get people to wear helmets, one needs to think about how to wear them and arts was away to think about how to conceive of helmets as something people want to wear and to promote public awareness campaign.
- Think about not just how arts and culture fits into social campaign but how can you use it to document change that happens? Numbers and stats wouldn't have been as powerful as photographic evidence.

We need a clearer articulation of where we want to get and how art helps us get there. Sometimes it could mean talking about where we want to get to *first* and then talk about how. We need to think through first two questions (see above) and that will make it easier to get to the third one.

Bob: The intention was to let audience use this framework and to see how it works into your work. It challenges a linear timeline that marks WHEN something is achieved and begin to think smaller increments of time. What would questions be in smaller 3 stages:

- Before right attained; when the right is attained; when the right is implemented

Also naming something as an arts practice is a value decision and we need to make a decision to do that. In this day and age we don't have to challenge the effect of advertising yet advertising uses and appropriates arts strategies. Astraea has been shy to use tools of evaluation because it is a conservative strategy but it means we were not claiming our own wins .

Question for the audience: could you share if anything seems helpful and what are the obstacles you face?

Answer from the audience: Individual observed tension because from the advocacy side we continually have to work towards justice but we also have to be careful not to treat art as utilitarian. There is value in art because it is good art. We cannot treat artists as tools. That being said, wants to share example of strong families campaign reimagine what makes a family. Around mothers days they worked to design alternative mothers day cards to reflect what other families looked like. These e-cards got picked up in lots of different places and people were happy to see depictions of non-hallmark representations. Some e-cards had political action connected to it. One case said that when arrested people could make arrangements for children.

Comment from Jackie: The first point is important. That was part of the confusion because it seems to me that people haven't landed on the role of arts and culture. When arts is the chosen strategy there is a tendency to make the strategy we like fit with the goals and outcomes of the plan.

Comment from Audience: Our donors see it as a luxury when we have other big issues in the world. How can we communicate that art is important to promote creativity and wellbeing when sometimes we need to respond with answers? And sometimes our grantees just want to have fun and why not?

Comment from Jackie: Donors and funders all have their importance meters. There is a tendency to think other people are taking care of that and art is not as important. If you were able to

show the arts contributions to a community then make them go away and show what you are left with there would be a way.

Comment from Bob: Pull that tool out of your pocket. Also, is our intention only to survive or is it also to live?

Comment from Sham-e: We need to push that art allows us to imagine.

Comment from audience: There is a limitation to art within the disability realm though there is a lot of funding for using art. I think its great for the individual person, but its been very limiting in terms of its one of the only realms that is given to people with disability. I want to put that out there because I think it's a real problem and puts me off from funding any artistic component. I think it would have to be presented in this bigger picture and seen as part of a political strategy and we can't be part of art for arts sake.

Comment from Bob: I would be inclined to turn it on its head. I think the definitions of what constitutes art are quite limited. If that's where the funding is, I would unpack it in a broad way and use it to fund other forms of art. I think there would need to be a lot of donor education. I would use it as a tool. Part of our work is philanthropic advocacy. Its very easy to receive very narrow funding so we need to assert that these communities are always intersectional.

Comment from audience: The challenges have been consistent. One is about of quality because there is no doubt about efficacy and the question is on quality of the product. The second question comes up about protection of any individuals on film. The third point is self=selection of people. Some of the arts is potentially preaching to the choir.

Comment from Sham-e: in terms of quality the quality issue, we have a panel of peers and other artists that are selected to make decisions on larger framework. It answers to the question of quality and has a particular perspective: To select work not only in terms of artistic excellence but also art for social change in particular

Comment from Bob: Self-selection can be okay. Not all grant making must be in terms of broad sweeping change. It's not always a terrible thing if that community needs that. I don't think it always has to read as elitist but sometimes its self-education. It's not inherently a bad thing, only if it is in contradiction to the goal of that project. We often see fun work that speaks to the experience of a community that have never had that voice before.

Comment from Jackie: We do not think differently about quality in any other aspect of grant making there is no need for a different strategy.

Comment from Bob: The issue of safety is part of the commodification of the people involved and that is an important issue that needs to be problematized. There are values that need to be embedded in any kind of funding. The photography exhibit was such a radical project so for me the evaluation piece was done for me. Bob suggests we should use different measures of evaluation. Uses AIDS project as an example. It helped people to say AIDS. Sometimes we don't know how it evolves into change, it can be much more than that. All of the actions that happened around ACT up is now a historical document that lives. A lot of these artists are now members of history that we otherwise would not see

Comment from audience: Memorialization is a form of art. Act up is particularly interesting. Great example of interlocking strategies and art is so important in holistic strategies. In Cambodia we evaluated genocide site. Mostly foreign tourists came by so I was skeptical but after 2 weeks I had a different idea because every single person said I came here and I didn't know anything about this. So, despite its problems, it's very important.