

ENTERING CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

*Diversity and Change
in the Nonprofit Arts*



EDITED BY

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1 *Building Arts Participation through Transactions, Relationships, or Both*

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Arts organizations today find themselves in a dilemma. The artistic mission essentially involves a long-term proposition: that is, to make an important and lasting contribution to the creation and preservation of culture. Yet participation-building strategies until recently have largely been conceived as target-driven, strategic operations—essentially short-term activities designed to identify and convert new audiences. In theory, arts organizations identify desirable groups to add to or more deeply involve in the work of their organizations, then set a course to reach their goals. But just like sailing a boat into the wind, arts organizations have at times found themselves tacking, or zigzagging toward shorter and shorter interim goals as they encounter forces of external resistance; at other times, the weight of institutional constraint slows progress like a dragging anchor.

While touching on the work of numerous organizations, this chapter shows how several different types of organizations—the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (est. 1846), the San Francisco Symphony (est. 1911), the Old Town School of Music in Chicago (est. 1957), and Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis (est. 1973)—are crafting long-term participation-building practices to enable consistent and sustainable change. Their stories reveal two distinct strands of organizational effort, both developed to achieve long-term goals of reaching more people, different kinds of people, and more sources of income. The first strand follows a consumerist orientation and involves transactional practices—the process of capturing and tracking consumer interaction in order to build consumer markets for cultural products. The second has a humanist orientation and involves relational practices—the building of relationships with participants from

local communities that may or may not lead to consumer or donor relationships. But, just like strands of DNA, these sets of practices have distinct characteristics but intersect; they are interactive and interdependent in ways that are important to the participation-building process.

EMERGING FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL BASE

With more than a century of development in the United States and more than five hundred years of development in Europe, Asia, and Africa, the cultural field today is rooted in historic, institutional routines (see Meyer and Rowan 1977; Scott 1991). However, through two strands of effort—relational and transactional practices—arts organizations are challenging long-held institutionalized routines that have been developed according to the aesthetic preferences of patrons who were traditionally drawn from well-educated and wealthy elites (see Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio and Useem 1978; DiMaggio and Ostrower 1992; Halle 1992). These organizations are tapping the knowledge, values, and spending habits of a wider spectrum of people and tastes in order to build new kinds of participation and attract new participants (see Grams and Warr 2003; Cherbo and Wyszomirski 2000; Peterson 1980; Peterson and Rossman 2005). In this chapter, consistent with the language established by sociologist Howard Becker in *Art Worlds* (1982), standardized practices that are embedded in institutional routines are referred to as “conventions.” The transaction is the smallest unit of one type of participation based in economic values and geared toward building consumer markets; the relationship is another type of participation, this one based in humanistic values such as respect, appreciation, trust, and shared interests all geared toward building cultural communities (table 1.1).

With the increased emphasis on marketing and consumer relations since the early 1990s, many arts organizations have been building their own organizational capacity to generate and manage consumer transactions. Most research focuses on the marketing message or on the characteristics of markets themselves rather than on the human interaction

TABLE 1.1. TYPES OF PARTICIPATION-BUILDING PRACTICES

<i>Types of practices</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Environment</i>	<i>Exchanges</i>	<i>Target of activity</i>	<i>Success indicators</i>
Conventional	Legitimacy	Institutional	Authoritative	Experts	Recognition
Transactional	Sales	Technical	Consumerist	Markets	Income
Relational	Human	Participatory	Collaborative	Communities	Range of involvement

that takes place during and after the transaction. As illustrated in table 1.1, transaction building requires an increasingly technological environment to attract consumers, to document and manage the transactions, and to guide the consumer through the range of purchasing choices. The goal is sales, and the measure of success is earned income. This kind of participation building begins with an organization identifying the kinds of products it can produce that consumers want to buy, then producing those items that appeal to local markets. They set in motion a series of economic exchanges with consumers who collectively make up a market. Organizational effort is invested to track and scale up the economic value of the transaction between the cultural provider and participant, shifting a one-time visitor into a more engaged return participant who, through repeated transactions, becomes more involved in the organization, its services, programs, or products.

By contrast, relational practices are designed to produce and guide new forms of human interaction. The relational type of participation building focuses on establishing personal interactions, particularly with communities that cultural organizations have either underserved or never served in the past. Rather than the emphasis being exchanges of authority or money, relationship building is defined as a collaborative activity involving exchanges of trust, reciprocity, and shared interests that are often non-monetary. Relational practices are designed to set in motion social and cultural interaction geared toward building shared understanding among diverse people, with social and cultural equity as a guiding principle. Organizations that prioritize relationship building must create participatory environments, with staff members who are skillful at collaborative work and capable of involving the broadest possible range of people the organization seeks to attract. By establishing participatory environments involving relationships among the full range of people in their locale, these non-profit organizations are tapping into, involving, and presenting the depth and breadth of human experience as only the cultural field can do.

UNPACKING THE MEANING OF TRANSACTIONAL PRACTICES: FINDING INCOME

The push in the 1990s for arts organizations to become savvier in their marketing practices led to the development of what has become a cottage industry of marketing classes, workshops, conferences, books, awards, and consulting expertise. This emphasis on marketing represents a change from conventional practices, as highlighted by Neil Kotler, former senior official at the Smithsonian Institution and now an independent museum consultant and co-author of *Museum Strategy and Marketing* (1998):

Up until, let's say, 20 years ago, the majority view among boards, museum boards and museum directors . . . focused on assembling treasures, superior collections and superior exhibitions. . . . [they believed] audiences would come on their own because of the artistic value and the attraction of such works. (Kotler interview 2004)

The research and organizational coordination that is typically referred to as marketing is a way of reducing the risk of failure by targeting people who have money to spend—that is, consumers—and learning more about their desires, interests, and needs before product development begins.

Some people regard marketing in a narrow sense as “selling.” It's important to make this distinction. Selling is very narrow. It is about selling products that are produced by companies. [Salespeople] have the responsibility of selling and getting [products] off the company inventory. Marketing is a much broader function. That is [a process] of discovering and probing the needs, the wants, the desires of consumers and arranging for them, making the production of organizations, or the producers, responsive to their needs. So it's really quite opposite: one is trying to unload, if you will, products, and the other is researching the consumer and creating products that the consumer wants. (Kotler interview 2004)

What this might mean becomes evident when looking at the transformations that took place at the Smithsonian Institution over the past two decades. The Smithsonian is the nation's massive museum complex, founded in 1846 and operating in 2004 with a \$430 million budget. At the Smithsonian, the practices that invite interactions with consumers, according to Kotler, exist in addition and parallel to its long-held conventional practices, which focus on preserving and presenting great art. The museum's financial data provide a snapshot of how these efforts have worked: in the five-year span from 1999 to 2004, the Smithsonian saw its earned income increase an average of \$1 million annually; in 2004 earned

income was nearly \$110 million, or one-quarter of its total annual revenues.

According to Kotler, the consumable recreational experience is constructed around and throughout everything that already exists within the cultural institution context. Recreational experiences become an add-on for cultural consumers, offering new opportuni-

ties to consume before, in-between, and after experiences with great art. At the Smithsonian's National Gallery of Art, for example, this has meant adding or upgrading dining facilities: creating several dining facilities that cater to different clienteles and adding outside entrances to restaurants so

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NEIL KOTLER

that cultural consumers can dine *in* the museum without going *into* the museum; inserting cafés in lobby areas between galleries to give people a chance to pause from the regular core activities, to socialize, or just to rest; and placing comfortable leather couches with backs and arms in galleries in front of masterpieces, along with providing sample catalogs to review. It has meant adding sculpture gardens or other outdoor environments that allow cultural experiences independent of or in conjunction with indoor experiences. It has meant significantly expanding the size of the gift shop on the lower level of the museum and upgrading the quality of the merchandise while offering items for sale in locations throughout the museum. It has also meant redesigning the former cafeteria to be an extensive food court, including choices of salads, fresh grilled meat and fish, freshly made pastas, and trendy coffees and ice creams. The Smithsonian's new National Museum of the American Indian included from the beginning a substantial food court with selections representing foods from different Indian nations and cultural traditions as part of its original museum concept. The result is that cultural consumers have opportunities to literally consume American Indian culture in the form of an array of grilled, smoked, and steamed foods from various native traditions. In addition, the extensive gift shop includes a large selection of cookbooks, thus enabling museum visitors to cook such delights at home.

The theory is this: giving visitors better seating, more restaurants, and shops keeps the visitors in the museums a longer time and improves the experience. They may go to dine after seeing an exhibit and then go back to see another gallery. They're spending more time in the shops and the dining facilities. . . . You want to keep visitors there longer. These institutions are not abandoning their core activities, education and so forth, but they are adding a lot of other activities alongside to increase the recreation and the attraction. (Kotler interview 2004)

Such practices also give consumers more opportunities to spend money, something particularly important in a museum system, such as the Smithsonian, where admission is free. Opportunities to consume throughout the museum experience ignite the possibility of multiple transactions—the purchase of catalogs, books, gifts, food, snacks, coffee, dessert, or tickets to special events. In addition, capturing a consumer's name and address through a purchase sets in motion the potential for off-site purchases and for scaling up the transaction to include a membership, gift subscription, donation, or more. This means multiple kinds of participation in the array of activities offered by the institution.

Such opportunities for consumer spending in the once-hallowed halls of the museum are a marked change from conventional practices that sought

to isolate aesthetic experiences from consumer experiences. Aesthetic experiences, akin to religious experiences, were designed to enable one to transcend daily life and experience beauty free from crass exchanges of money for services or for token mementos of the beautiful objects observed in the sacred space of the museum.

Building Long-Term Customers

The National Arts Marketing Project (NAMP), created through the Arts and Business Council of Chicago in mid-1990s, offers workshops and conferences to train and support organizations too small to have full marketing departments or to hire consultants to market their work as cultural products. According to NAMP director Julie Peeler the process involves training organizations first to complete a self-analysis to identify organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) and then to embark on a planning process that includes identifying one or more target markets, conducting market research, creating profiles of target audiences, and developing organizational marketing strategies that include meetings, advertising, new programs, partnerships, and more. Successful efforts to build transactions must be carried out over the long term.

The object of the game is loyal, long-term customers. If this is not your goal—you're just wasting your money. It's costing you three to six times more to bring in a new customer than to retain an old customer. And so, if you get yourself stuck in this idea that your job is to bring in a new audience today, then you're wasting your money. You're wasting the organization's precious resources by focusing only on the short term. (Peeler interview 2004)

Successful efforts to build transactions are not just about generating earned income. The real value involves capturing data and mining existing databases to encourage return customers, to build customer loyalty, and ultimately to build a new cadre of committed donors who first demonstrated their participation in the organization through a process of cultural consumption. While transactional practices ultimately build customer relationships, the process of assessment and valuation is expressed in economic terms: money is the medium of exchange, but one carrying powerful symbolic meaning. The transaction building often begins with the offer of a free experience that introduces the customer to a range of purchasing options that may eventually transform this individual into a member, ticket buyer, subscriber, or donor as illustrated here:

We have a "Free at 3" series now where we're inviting families to come [at 3:00 p.m.] for free and to experience some art form. Building participation

means that they enroll in a class, that they buy a ticket or a subscription, that they attend more free events. The ultimate participant is one who comes to our family theatre series and is an education student and then becomes a donor as well. (Pollock interview 2005)

Money also provides a very simple tool for assessment and planning. With income as the gauge of success, organizations can think strategically about the consumer goals of retention, long-term loyalty, crossover spending, and scaling up the value of the exchange. Several organizations have very successfully used this form of participation building to capitalize upon their artistic products, not only building the long-term sustainability of their programs but also dramatically expanding their efforts and their local markets.

Market Dominance: The Case of the Old Town School of Folk Music

The Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago provides a case study of a once-struggling arts organization that repositioned its identity as a learning center for traditional music and adopted a transaction-based approach to music programming. With an expansive roster of teaching artist/musicians and quite possibly the broadest repertoire of musical performance and course offerings available through a single organization, Old Town School not only sustained itself, it expanded and is now seen by many as the dominant provider of music lessons in Chicago. Founded in Chicago's Old Town neighborhood in 1957 by Win Stracke, it was from the beginning a music center that used the potential for music pedagogy to sustain the folk music performance tradition in all its rich history symbolized by such folk icons as Pete Seeger and Odetta. By 2004, the Old Town School's budget of \$8.3 million was still derived from income-producing music lessons. By expanding the scope of its core artistic program—from one centered on folk music made popular in the 1950s and 1960s to one centered on the growing popularity of world music during the 1980s and 1990s—it vastly expanded its potential market. Its program is no longer based on a particular genre of music and music lessons; rather, today it strategically offers music geared to as many possible markets as can be identified. This market-based approach involves delivering a high-quality artistic product, initiating new transactions while strategically building upon current and past music-lesson customers. Such transactions are planned, initiated, captured, and cultivated for the assortment of consumer-oriented participation they enable and for the income they produce. Former executive director Jim Hirsch recounts the history:

I started as executive director there in 1982, and within a year it occurred to me that there were opportunities that were not being taken advantage of. And my thought process was really two fold. Number one, you know, Old Town School dealt in traditional music and every culture has its musical traditions and, you know, as I looked around the city and saw an increasingly more diverse city, I wasn't really seeing that programming represented most anywhere, but of particular interest to me, at Old Town. So, I felt from a philosophical standpoint that it was important that Old Town begin to broaden its product mix and thereby broaden its audience. The second reason for doing it was a very revenue-driven reason. I saw these audiences as potential money makers for Old Town. (Hirsch interview 2004)

The Old Town School's programming, which includes concerts and performances in addition to lessons, offers the organization different ways to access potential customers. Interaction often begins with a free "community engagement" event:

One [program] that Juan [Diés, director of community relations] developed for the Latino community still goes on today. It's a classic point of entry program, called *La Peña*. It's basically a Latin-based open stage night. And I think they run it every other Wednesday or so. It's free admission, even though I think they pass a hat to see if they can get contributions for the performers. They'll have usually one or two feature performers and then they'll have other performers who will come in and play for free. And they do it in the Old Town's beautiful concert space. And it is a wonderful way to be introduced to the organization. It costs nothing to walk in the door for the first time. I think we learned the lesson well, that you have to provide a really inviting, easy, kind of risk-free, point-of-entry opportunity. (Hirsch interview 2004)

This open-stage event introduces potential students to teachers, a variety of Latin music styles, and to a variety of opportunities to learn and to perform. Old Town School expanded its programming in nearly every direction in order to cover a broader range of the music-lesson market than any other music-lesson provider in Chicago. Through market research, Old Town was able to identify the needs and desires of each of its target audiences. For example, Old Town was interested in developing programs for parents and young children. Through its research, it found that location and time were both important variables affecting the decision to participate among people interested in early childhood programs:

With the early childhood programs it was really about geography. Parents were willing to travel about a mile and not a whole heck of a lot more

just because of how difficult it is to deal with a really young child and we were dealing with like, six-month-olds to, you know, three- and four-year-olds. So that sensitivity was a big piece of it. We really needed to come to understand just what their schedule issues were. We eventually learned that you don't schedule early childhood classes during nap time. (Hirsch interview 2004)

According to Hirsch, this research led to the development and expansion of the Wiggle Worms program, an early childhood program for mothers and babies. The program was offered throughout Chicago's suburbs, as well as in city neighborhoods. At Wiggle Worms, children sit on their mother's laps, sing songs, and perform hand motions. According to Hirsch, "It was a cash cow because there were not a whole lot of options for real, real young kids and their parents to do a music program together. The brand, Wiggle Worms, became known by word of mouth through mothers' networks. This program also led to many play dates for Old Town musicians as well."

Other branding efforts led to the dropping the "F word"—as Hirsch refers to "folk"—in much of its publicity. The organization often presents itself as "Old Town School" or "Old Town School of Music," thus allowing it to broaden its reach into other program areas (figure 1.1).

1.1 Advertisement for music lessons by Old Town School of Folk Music. Copyright Old Town School of Folk Music. Used by permission.



We really understood . . . a lot of the barrier and motivation issues, and so we were able to very closely target our message. We were able to obtain a position in the market that I think was pretty enviable. Among the universe of people that were considering taking music lessons, their interest would fit within the model of Old Town. So, it wasn't even a question of where [to take classes], because, once they were past the decision [of] "do I take music lessons?" they were ours. (Hirsch interview 2004)

The result was that a small, somewhat faltering organization, where Hirsch once taught guitar lessons in the early 1980s, grew to become a prosperous music school. In 2000, it was providing music lessons to about 5,000 students a week, with an overall audience of 400,000 to 500,000 annually in two locations. Under Hirsch's direction, the Old Town School in 2000 was earning 80 percent of its \$7 million annual budget. Although the organization did a lot of marketing and programming of diverse musical traditions and engaged diverse audiences throughout the city, Hirsch does not refer to it as "diversity marketing." Rather, the two main motivations behind nearly every decision were "covering the field" and "space use."

And one of the interesting lessons that we learned—and this doesn't really have much to do with diversity marketing—is that . . . our percentage of space use in those buildings was just stratospheric. I mean, when I left, we were at 98 to 99 percent occupancy on space use, from nine in the morning until ten at night. And those spaces were absolutely pumping out dollars. They were open seven days a week. We had vocal classes, music theory classes; there were some craft classes—again, going with the idea of really making the tent as large as possible. We had percussion. And we had a whole drum program, for god's sakes. You know, the other stuff is just . . . product line extension. I mean, if you want to call it diversity you can, but that wasn't the motive. The motive was to try to cover the field as completely as we could and to try to attract the greatest [number] of students and participants we possibly could. (Hirsch interview 2004)

This decision-making process added up to the Old Town School of Music's dominance in the Chicago music-lesson market. Although Hirsch may be considered a prime example of a strong and farsighted leader, the organization's success was not solely tied to his leadership. Hirsch left the school in 2000, and the organization has continued to grow. Its 2003 budget was close to \$9 million, \$7 million of which was earned income. The model envisioned by Hirsch is built around classes and concerts, as it continues to be as of this writing. These efforts remain highly successful in covering organizational and instructional overhead, thus leaving the organization to use foundation support as "venture capital" for new efforts.

The classes were really the big revenue drivers at Old Town, because, you know, you had people that were coming every week; and they were giving you money every week. With concerts, even [with] a frequent attendee, you'd see him six, eight, ten times a year. With classes, we'd see people for classes every week for weeks [and] months on end. . . . And Old Town was lucky in that we had a lot of opportunities, good earned-income opportunities that other organizations don't have. So we were able to create a number of different profit centers within the organization that basically paid most of the overhead, which allowed us to go to the foundation community to seek what in the for-profit world would be considered venture capital. It allowed us to do the more risky things and go after audiences where the payoff wouldn't necessarily be within a short time period. (Hirsch interview 2004)

The success of the Old Town School's market-based approach has substantially changed its orientation from the particular cultural niche once so closely associated with folk music. This change demonstrates the capacity of a broader group of middle-class cultural consumers to support the operations of a nonprofit arts organization. Moreover, it is capitalizing on the broad musical tastes referred to by Peterson and Rossman (2005) as the "omnivore tastes" of contemporary cultural consumers, while enabling multiple opportunities for hands-on participation in music making. The case of the Old Town School provides an interesting front story of organizational transformation that changed from one serving a narrow and diminishing market to one that remained connected to its core purpose by enabling a significantly wider array of return and loyal customers. The transformation was carried out through marketing research, product development, and attention to the desires and needs of a new generation of customer-participants. It illustrates how transaction-based arts participation—one that builds a consumer habit of hands-on participation in a wide variety of musical traditions—is a strategy that can fund an organization's operating budget. It also hints at the kind of internal organizational coordination needed to manage and sustain such efforts.

Two organizations—the Smithsonian Institution and the Old Town School of Music, representing a national museum and an arts learning center—illustrate two different aspects of wider, more varied kinds of arts participation enabled through a transaction-based model. The Smithsonian has seen success in consumer add-ons, primarily in the form of cafés and gift shops. The Old Town School shows how arts lessons can possibly offer organizations a stable and lucrative form of support through consumer transactions because of the built-in potential for the return and

loyal customer. But what happens when the whole process is scaled up from what is essentially a community-based arts organization to an organization with a budget five, ten, or a hundred times its size? A third case, presented later in this chapter—the San Francisco Symphony—will address this.

UNPACKING THE MEANING OF RELATIONAL PRACTICES: FINDING RELEVANT HUMAN INTERACTION

In addition to the kinds of transactions that cultural organizations have been developing to attract newcomers, we identified a fairly broad range of ways in which arts organizations are focusing on relationship building in their efforts to bring in and engage members of their local communities, particularly those people who have little or no previous experience with the organization. Relationship building is described by arts leaders in humanistic rather than economic terms:

- Having an understanding of the wants and needs of the community, the desires of the community and balancing that knowledge against the essentially artistic mission of the organization. (Susan Talbott, former director, Des Moines Art Center)
- Forming authentic, rich, and varied connections between artists and audiences. (Will K. Wilkins, executive director, Real Art Ways, Hartford, Connecticut)
- Building trust within the community. (Victoria Moreland, director of community affairs, Seattle Art Museum)
- Questioning what might we learn from the audience as opposed to how big is our audience going to be. (Ann Barber [pseudonym], advisory committee member)
- Seeing the organization as integral to the daily lives of the citizenry as opposed to a separate entity that is occasionally engaged and occasionally not. (Ken Foster, executive director, Yerba Buena Art Center, San Francisco)
- Developing our models by working with the community in its own space. (Kumani Gantt, executive director, Village of Arts and Humanities, North Philadelphia)
- Going into the community and having a presence there. (Wei Zhou, marketing manager, Newark Museum)
- Opening yourself up to different constituencies, different groups, different markets. That's the only way to do it. (Jeffrey Hermann, producing director at Perseverance Theater, near Juneau, Alaska)

- Inviting new audiences in but also turning some degree of control over to those audiences. (Michael Warr, founder and former executive director, Guild Complex, Chicago)

These ideas suggest the importance of knowing, understanding, and sharing resources with a community as a prerequisite to the community valuing the work of the organization. A consistent theme in relational practices is the importance of the organization acting in ways that are relevant to the communities it has identified in its locale.

Three aspects of relationship building are redefining interactions between organizations and their communities.

First is the notion of reciprocity. Through relationship building, organizations are engaged in the kind of give-and-take that sets the tone for an organization to be viewed as a community participant, or, as Andrea Allen, Education Director of Seattle Repertory Theatre, puts it, a good neighbor. Being a good neighbor means developing and maintaining relationships outside the arts organization's daily art-producing environment. This might mean attending community meetings, sitting on boards of local social service agencies, or exchanging services, favors, and sometimes money, all in support of shared local efforts. Such community-involved relationships seek to move beyond building specific bridges to local venues. The good-neighbor relationship sets out to establish an image of the organization that permeates the community beyond specific events or direct contact with individuals. Through such reciprocal exchanges, arts organizations are seeking ways to incorporate new groups as part of their core constituency. They are also becoming part of these very communities.

Second is the notion of representation. Many different types of organizations founded in the late twentieth century describe their work as community-based, and they locate themselves within a particular community with the purpose of representing the art and issues of that community to outsiders. Examples include the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in Chicago, Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle, and Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Third is the notion of transformation. Long-established canon institutions, such as the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, the Walker Art Center, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, as well as organizations founded in the mid-century era, such as the University Musical Society, the Seattle Repertory Theatre, and the Des Moines Art Center, have undertaken relational activities to transform some of their outmoded institutional practices into those more relevant to their changing local communities.

Together, these community-based, community-involved, and community-relevant relationship-building activities add up to a new role, that of

cultural intermediary, where the arts organization functions between and among diverse communities, as demonstrated through the work of Intermedia Arts of Minneapolis.

Cultural Intermediary: The Case of Intermedia Arts

A midsize community-based arts organization founded in 1972 with an annual budget of \$1.3 million in 2004, Intermedia Arts attracts people to programs at its Minneapolis location and carries out a range of programs in communities throughout the metropolitan area. The organization's hybrid nature is reflected in exhibitions, performances, presentations at the building it owns, off-site conferences, school and community-based workshops, and other events, even including a parade. Its fluid organizational boundaries extend through the typical nonprofit organization of board, staff, contracted artists, and volunteers but also include the fiscal support of artists' entrepreneurial efforts and groups undertaking community service activities. With many of its programs offered for free or paid for and conducted through contractual relationships with artists, schools, or community groups, annual participation is at best estimated in the range of thirty thousand to forty thousand people. One indicator of how it has fared is seen in the growth of its budget over five years (1999–2004), with contributions showing an average annual increase of 13 percent.

Sandra Agustín, artistic director, attributes Intermedia's ability to sustain and expand its programming to "doing programs that are relevant to our community."

We're not serving *a* community, or serving *the* community, we are the community.

SANDRA AGUSTÍN

We think of ourselves as part of this community; we listen, invite, and go to places outside of our building. We go to visual habitats. We're not serving *a* community, or serving *the* community, we are the community. So our responsibility, I think, shifts. We have to look like

where we are. We have to behave like where we are; . . . we're really . . . trying to engage everyone around us that we're interacting with. (Agustín interview 2005)

Intermedia views itself as an integral part of the local community and builds interpersonal relationships among organizational staff, artists, and residents through its web of community-based workshops and programs. Its program focus has always been *intermedia*: that is, involving a variety of media, artistic traditions, and technology. And its core program has always engaged local artists and nonartists in cross-media art exhibitions, performances, and workshops taking place at its organizational site as well as throughout the community in other public and private facilities.

Among some of its largest events are the B-Girl-Be conference of women and girls in hip-hop culture and the annual Art Car Parade. Its recent efforts to build participation—initiated as the program series *Immigrant Status* and focused specifically on the growing immigrant populations in Minneapolis—have enhanced its core mission and transformed its organizational role to one of broker or intermediary between diverse cultural groups within the Minneapolis–St. Paul area. Because of Intermedia’s efforts, immigrant cultures have now joined the fusion created by the work of local adult and teen artists, urban street culture, and other forms of contemporary art.

Through a three-year strategy to build new relationships with the full variety of area immigrant populations, including African, Hispanic, pan-Asian, and eastern European groups, Intermedia now regularly links people and organizations, making possible new kinds of interaction across cultural boundaries. The need for the program was identified through Intermedia’s analysis of local demographic change. Organizational documents highlight the Census 2000 figures which revealed that communities of color in Minneapolis neighborhoods surrounding Intermedia Arts comprised 38 percent of the total population, compared to 23.6 percent in 1990. Through its organizational relationships, it identified substantial populations of African, Russian, and Latino immigrants among the racial and ethnic diversity of its surrounding communities. *Immigrant Status* was designed as a program series but expanded the participatory environment of the organization overall, according to Intermedia’s executive director, Daniel Gumnit: “It has resulted in a broader audience and specifically increased the range of kinds of people who participate.” It is not unusual for programs to develop as a result of the logic and practices of the people that the organization assembles as participants.

Our job is different than, say, a history museum because, [for us,] art is to connect living stories and experiences in hopes that we will ignite other conversations, and perhaps even action. Our hope with *this* program is to shine the light on immigrant artists living in this community, immigrant artists as leaders . . . When we say “we are a catalyst that builds understanding among people through art,” it is not necessarily to win you over to my side, but it is to provide you with more information and [a] context so that you can [understand it and] relate it to your own story. It is about perpetuating culture not just archiving it. We want to break down the “us versus them” and see the commonalities. (Agustín interview 2005)

Examples of how the programming is worked out are seen in Intermedia’s exhibitions on themes relevant to immigrant experience. Its first *Immigrant Status* exhibition, Ndingbe (December 2003–March 2004),

featured the work of seventeen African artists from countries such as Chad, Ghana, Cameroon, Somalia, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria. All the featured artists were recognized artists in their homelands, and they pointed out that the inclusion of artists from different African nations as a curatorial practice was not typically done in the artists' homelands or in exhibitions in which they had participated in the United States. More often, a homeland or U.S. exhibition would explore how an artist's work contributes to or represents its national culture. By contrast, this exhibition series focused on the intermediary culture of immigrant status, a third and often transitory culture produced by the juxtaposition of homeland and U.S. traditions and values. It showed at times traditional techniques, a blending of stylistic approaches, and the struggles these artists face finding people who might recognize the cultural foundations of their work. Moreover, artists featured in the exhibition became the basis for Intermedia's Moving Lives speakers' bureau, a service in which Intermedia sponsors artists as speakers or as workshop leaders with schools and community groups. In several cases, these experiences through Intermedia have launched artists into further entrepreneurial efforts.

Another exhibition in the Immigrant Status series, *Faith in Women* (November 2005–January 2006), brought together seven local women artists through the presentation of their artwork, including painting, pottery, soap carving, textile weaving, and drawing. The women's countries of origin included Mexico, Laos, Ukraine, Egypt, and Iran—several groups that had been settling in the Minneapolis area over the last twenty-five years. The exhibition of these artists' works, plus the exhibition's events and supporting texts, were designed to present women as leaders and, more broadly, to “honor the immigrant women who create and nurture new communities while preserving and passing on their indigenous practices” (Intermedia exhibition pamphlet 2005). Just as in the exhibition of African artists, this range of artistic practices and cultural backgrounds would not likely have come together in any other outside context focusing on contemporary immigration issues. The added feature in this case was gender, and the exhibition showed the ways that women's art both fit into and emerged from immigrant life (figure 1.2).

By incorporating into their programming a wide variety of issues and concerns facing newer immigrant groups, Intermedia instilled elements of its Immigrant Status series as permanent enhancements of the organization's core program. The programming series served as a vehicle to build participation in the arts by removing customary barriers among people from diverse backgrounds. Intermedia's workshops, exhibitions, and performances constituted opportunities to share and celebrate the new expe-



1.2 Installation by Patricia Mendoza for Faith in Women exhibition at Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis, September 29, 2005–January 7, 2006.
Photograph by Timothy D. Lace © 2005.

rience found when diverse people and cultures converge. This was a new experience for many who had never been to an arts organization of this kind, or who in the past had seen the work of Intermedia to be interdisciplinary but not necessarily intercultural. Some past supporters have interpreted the program series as a social service activity for immigrants. However, through smart public relations and the use of art by diverse local groups, Intermedia highlighted how the artists in the series were connected with the larger, majority community—noting that all Americans have the immigrant experience in their own history. Intermedia's new role as an intermediary between cultures and cultural groups thus weaves the work of local groups and organizations into the artistic mix. This set of relational practices is distinct from conventional practice in that it seeks to create a direct link between art and the local communities as a strategy to build participation in the arts.

Intermedia's role as an intermediary between cultures is further exemplified in one of the workshops first held as part of this series. Talking Suitcases was conceived around storytelling and memoir conventions transformed into sculptural constructions inside suitcases. The first workshops sought to shed light on the plight of new immigrant groups who come to the United States as refugees. It was begun as an entrepreneurial effort by artist Susan Armington, who hosts workshops now sponsored by



1.3 Talking Suitcase. *Saying Goodbye*, by Marie Simcox.
Photograph by Timothy D. Lace © 2005.

Intermedia; participants were asked, “If you had to leave your home on a moment’s notice and you had only one suitcase, what would you take with you and what would you leave behind?” The resulting personal vignettes were displayed within an open suitcase (figure 1.3). Such objects became more than containers of personal and family history:

This suitcase is like a journal in three dimensions, something very personal, very handmade, like a journal that is handwritten. It’s your deepest thoughts. These suitcases hold people’s deepest personal experiences and stories in a way that other people can read them just like in a journal. But instead of being a journal, it comes to life in three dimensions. (Armington interview 2005)

Made predominantly by nonartists, the suitcases were presented in an Intermedia exhibition. They represented a new relationship between people and objects, as well as between local people and the arts organization. Through relationship-building activities of this kind, Intermedia engaged people who had not previously participated in any activities at the organization. The objects they created—suitcases representing what was taken and what was left behind—redefined art, the experience of viewing art, and the role of the organization. According to Armington, defining the

activity as “art” allowed interaction that would not have occurred in the normal course of everyday life. “It’s different than ordinary life. Frankly what happens is we can engage in incredibly deep conversations that in normal life there is hardly a place for” (Armington interview 2005). Making a “talking suitcase” in a workshop provided both artists and nonartists with opportunities to test and expand artistic skills, as well as to learn about themselves and others in a nonthreatening environment.

In the workshops, a group of people come together and make suitcases. While the [process of construction] is pretty separate, they share them at the end of the workshop. It is powerful because people really hear other people’s stories. Sometimes they hear parts of their own story in someone else’s suitcase; sometimes they get an insider’s view of someone else’s life. The word “moved” is too trite a word to describe the feelings I have had. Rather, some stories completely changed my view about people from certain parts of the world. For example, I did not know what was happening in Somalia in the personal way it was happening. One man’s story, he’s about twenty-six now, but the story is about when he came home one day from school as a young man and his family was just gone. He came home and a neighbor told him his family was gone. This neighbor sort of adopted him until he ultimately came here. In his suitcase, he had a box. The box represented his home. When he was telling the story he opened it and it was empty; it represented his family that was gone. And not only do you feel it, you can conceptualize it when it is this object. As I said, these are not things to buy or to decorate your homes; they are things that carry powerful personal stories that are also universal in terms of the feelings that we share. (Armington interview 2005)

Workshops such as these led to a new cultural lens through which to view art based not on an abstract notion of “quality” but on the diversity of perspectives and depth of experience. The Talking Suitcases exhibition provided an opportunity for others to see and understand the intimate details of peoples’ lives and struggles. For some participants, the talking suitcase was a self-portrait, a portrait of a loved one, or an important capsule of family history. For others, the content in the art objects provided the catalyst to talk about their own lives and issues they face:

We [had] an exhibition of Talking Suitcases at Intermedia. A lot of people came through and looked at these suitcases. . . . The suitcases often reminded people of their own story and they would start to tell it to us right there. I remember there were some suitcases from girls whose story told of their crossing the border from Mexico to the U.S. [At the exhibition] some other high school girls visited who had done the same thing. They were in a class with people from all over. They just began telling their story. It was

more dramatic than what was in the suitcase because no one in the class had ever heard [their story] before. It started a discussion right then and there about whether it was fair for people to be treated so badly. Another girl said her father had almost died. It was all right there in the gallery that this discussion started. (Armington interview 2005)

This account shows how such relationship-building practices extend into the art-making process, exhibition development, and the visitor experience. The art not only helps make connections among people but also locates an organization in a different place than does an institutional environment centered around the conventional practices of showing only the “best” art. Furthermore, such organizational practices as Intermedia’s are not designed simply to serve as a pipeline for art school-trained artists who might send work around to galleries in hopes of getting shows. Rather, exhibition practices are the result of locally embedded relationships. They are intended to stimulate greater understanding among traditionally segregated groups and to share the lives of individuals in the community. In the larger social context, these exhibitions and programs seek to challenge the beliefs and stereotypes that feed ethnocentricity and racism while offering the alternative of understanding through shared experiences.

Intermedia’s efforts to build relevant human interaction among participants in its organizational activities have been particularly effective in diminishing the cultural obstacles experienced among those having immigrant status. Through making and displaying the art, hosting workshops, and producing written materials, the cultural context such activities create are defined by the commonalities rather than the differences among groups. Their organizational practices build bridges among new immigrant groups and among new immigrants and those long-term citizens who often view themselves as the entitled owners of a national or local culture. Intermedia’s relational practices provide a good example of the kind of bridge building between cultures that many arts organizations are using to build participation in the arts.

THE DNA OF PARTICIPATION BUILDING: BUILDING TRANSACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS AT THE SAME TIME

Transaction building and relationship building have been introduced as separate analytic concepts in order to demonstrate the kinds of distinct organizational practices often involved in building earned-income streams or engaging people who have had little or no experience with a particular art organization. But there is an additional model that combines these two practices—when an organization gracefully blends its skill at building re-

relationships with its expertise in documenting, managing, and scaling up the economic value of transactions. The next example considered here is of a large-scale, complex organization that has streamlined its multiple departments involved in revenue generation and has invested in technology to improve transaction management at the same time that it has sought to build new and improved relationships with a greatly expanded roster of patrons.

The San Francisco Symphony, founded in 1911, had annual total revenues topping \$56 million in 2004. Like the Old Town School, more than 50 percent of its budget is earned from programs. The Symphony has been able to show increases in contributions averaging 8 percent annually, totaling just over \$20 million in 2004. Its program revenues of nearly \$23 million have shown a 4 percent average annual increase over the five-year period 1999–2004. The story of this organizational transformation exemplifies the struggles and opportunities of arts organizations whose core program is built around live performances involving ticket sales.

One challenge faced by the San Francisco Symphony was to find a way to sustain income in the face of declining subscription sales—a trend that many performing arts organizations we interviewed have witnessed over the past fifteen years. According to ticketing services staff at the San Francisco Symphony, subscriptions for its twenty-four-concert series were very popular through the late 1980s. Although the Symphony has a strong base of more than thirty thousand subscribers annually, today most subscribers limit their commitment to a six-concert series. This change is significant. If the same subscribers are now going to one-quarter of the productions, this translates into as much as 75 percent fewer people in seats during a season. From the subscriber side, this trend of committing to a shorter subscription series is associated with both social and technological changes that have resulted in new ticket-buying patterns. Specifically, double-paycheck, baby-boomer families are no longer involved in just one type of social activity. Power and social commitments are shared between partners, and time for socializing is more limited. With audiences less willing to make a full-season commitment, performing arts organizations began to offer a wider range of subscription choices. The San Francisco Symphony went one step further by seeking to make it easier for patrons to participate in Symphony programs. This was the essence of its patron-relations strategy, and it stopped short of nothing to achieve this goal.

At the heart of the strategy was a shift from an inventory-based transaction model to a service-based model. This meant that, rather than the transaction being a record of reduction of inventory, it was a record of contact with a person—that is, a relationship. Every person was considered to be a patron—the highest place on the transaction scale. According

to Afshin Afshar, chief information officer at the Symphony, “Our goal is to build everything around the patron, [and we] make this our motto: the ‘patron-sensory system’ meaning that the patron would be where you start. If you go look at a patron’s record, everything about the patron that you need to know will be within a click or two away from your reach. For us, this translates into better service” (Afshar interview 2005).

The patron-sensory system focused staff efforts on providing service to patrons rather than a yield-management approach that would focus daily decisions around moving ticket inventory. Rather than offering daily ticket specials or price adjustments based upon inventory and demand, the Symphony shifted its practices to encourage customers to want to attend more and to encourage donors to want to give more, based primarily on their experiences of positive contact with staff and the organization. However, the organizational changes required for making such contact easier and more pleasant were not simple in the context of such a large, complex organization. Providing this kind of customer service required improved staff training, better organizational coordination, and improved technology.

Web-based ticketing made it easier and more convenient for ticket buyers and subscribers to purchase tickets. The comprehensive Web site offered detailed information about performances, a wide range of subscription packages from six to eighteen performances, a great array of mix-and-match options, and seat selection that included previews of the vantage point offered by available seats. The Symphony also invested in other forms of technology, including interactive educational Web sites and Web-based merchandise sales. These investments meant that the Symphony had the kind of technically efficient environment necessary to manage the self-service transactions that are increasingly popular with a middle-income, educated population. Technology provided for better market penetration and increased access to ticketing services for these Web-savvy consumers. Web-based ticketing also freed Symphony staff to build relationships—the kind of personal interaction and service that only people can provide.

With this goal of improved customer service, then, the San Francisco Symphony invested in new technology that stimulated a reordering of the organizational practices involved in generating revenue. Like many large and complex organizations, the Symphony had numerous specialized departments involved in generating revenue—fund-raising, marketing, and ticketing—and, within those departments, even more specialized functions such as corporate giving, foundation and individual giving, tele-fundraising, corporate sales, groups sales, telemarketing, subscriptions, and single-ticket sales, to name a few. One can begin to imagine

the duplication of records possible for a single patron. It was not until the year 2000, after years of development by the Metropolitan Opera in New York, that an integrated database was available that had been designed for nearly all the records generated and managed by nonprofit performing arts organizations.

In the past we didn't have any way of tracking [what each independent department was doing]—for example, our marketing department was sending their mailings and so was the development or fundraising department, plus other departments sent their own communication packages. We had no idea that we were sending so many pieces of mail to our patrons. Once [the data integration was complete] all that information was stored in one database. So with one small report, we found out—we were terrified to find out—that there were patrons [who had] received more than twenty mailings from the Symphony in less than two weeks. So we realized we had to change our business processes and have all these different departments work together to make sure we are not flooding our patrons with information, making them numb to our appeals. (Afshar interview 2005)

The Symphony was among the first nonprofit organizations to buy into a software package developed by the Met that integrates discrete departmental databases into a single application. The software was made available to the field through a new nonprofit organization, the Tessitura Network. By integrating all its databases, the Symphony was able to see the problem of interdepartmental competition in its own efforts to build relationships and scale up transactions with customers.

With a new integrated database [Tessitura], we developed a matrix system where we actually share or manage the contacts so we are not hitting the same patrons with mail too often. Same thing goes with our telemarketing and tele-fundraising. Now we can track all that information so our fundraisers, tele-fundraisers don't call our patrons right after telemarketing has called them. And I think patrons appreciate that too. They don't want to be bothered day after day with calls from the Symphony if they can do everything in one phone call . . . Because of this application, we can now have all the information we need to provide customer service in one place. When a patron comes to the window or calls, the call center people and ticket services people don't have to scramble going from system to system or from file cabinet to file cabinet to get their information to give them what they need. Everything is there. With a few clicks they can provide them the information they need or the services they need. So for us . . . this technology has translated into better servicing, better services for our customers, better and faster services. (Afshar interview 2005)

The reordering of its revenue-generating efforts meant that sales efforts were concentrated in a ticketing service, which was considered to be the key point of contact for 95 percent of the Symphony's patrons. They improved interdepartmental coordination by establishing weekly meetings between the ticket services director, the box office manager, and the marketing manager. These meetings resulted in brainstorming about how to interact with callers, strategies that were all documented through the database. Furthermore, the frontline workers no longer simply took ticket orders from customer-initiated phone calls. With all the patron's records at their fingertips, the staff had a wealth of information available that allowed them to engage in a conversation with the patron. They asked return ticket buyers how they liked the last show, how their seats were, if they had problems coming to the theater. In short, they sought to provide more personalized service beyond simply selling tickets. In addition, ticketing agents worked to scale up single-ticket purchases to subscriptions early in the season. They invited every ticket buyer to make a donation, rather than limiting requests for giving to a single time of year or to a special activity by the tele-fund-raising department. The result has been impressive: through customer-initiated calls alone, ticket services brought in \$1.3 million dollars in contributions in 2004.

The point of the improved interaction is clearly twofold: to build relationships with patrons and to increase the value of the transactions. The services provided in any moment of contact are geared toward customer satisfaction. The integration of technology with skilled customer-service staff allows for a more efficient operation overall. Computer-based ticketing can accommodate last-minute cancellations, easier ticket exchanges, and even the resale of a subscriber's unused ticket—making it rare that there are empty seats in the most prized sections. Further, by tracking bar-coded tickets, staff can determine when valued patrons arrive. Web and e-mail technology allow the organization to notify patrons of parking and construction problems. Through the use of sophisticated technology, interdepartmental coordination, and a highly trained customer service staff, small transactions are more easily cultivated into relationships that can lead to transactions of ever-increasing financial value. The patron-sensory approach allows the San Francisco Symphony to deliver highly customized services once reserved for only the most privileged and prized patrons.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter shows, organizations have many untapped resources at their disposal. Their own databases, reintegrated in a new way, can provide new forms of access to community supporters, partners, visitors,

single-ticket buyers, members, subscribers, and patrons. Just as a database of well-documented and managed transactions is a resource that can be mined for new customers, well-documented and nurtured relationships with residents and organizations in their local communities provide organizations with opportunities to mine the cultural, human, and financial resources found within the networks of their interactions.

To build relationships with new or underserved audiences involves relevant programming, reciprocal exchanges, and representation of the people and organizations found within one's community. By preserving the direct link between art and local communities as a strategy to build participation in the arts, there is a new role for the arts organization as an intermediary between local artists, diverse cultures, and cultural groups. The results of such practices are new community ties, new participants in the arts, and a transformed organizational culture, all of which are built on the value of shared human interactions.

By conceptualizing arts participation as transactional or relational, organizations have a number of obvious ways to gauge change. Transactions can be monitored to build return and loyal customers and increased voluntary giving; relationships can be monitored for changes in the number of interactions, in the variety and range of reciprocal exchanges that occur. This variety of participation does not add up to a single arts audience; it reflects the variety of participation that can occur even within a single organization. Rather than being viewed as a single ascending scale, the variety of arts participation found within each organization is best monitored individually, allowing each type of participation to be like the points on a star that may grow longer or recede but will each contribute to the star's brightness.