Into the Breach

How Creative Philanthropy Can Reverse the
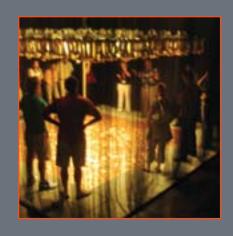Eroding Landscape of Arts Education

Into the Breach
How Creative Philanthropy Can Reverse the Eroding Landscape of Arts Education

An NMC White Paper

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Arts education is in trouble.

In the US in particular, but in a trend echoed around the world, schools are increasingly pressured to divert the scarce resources that are available to them — including time in the school day — to other purposes.

There are many reasons for this shift, notably the restructuring of the core curriculum now some 30 years in the making. But whatever the reasons, what is even more troubling is that their effects have combined into a sort of perfect storm that has dampened not only the hopes of those who believe arts education to be critical — but even discussions within the schools about how to preserve what is left of it.

Increasingly, arts educators and arts education proponents are coming to the conclusion that schools can no longer carry the charge of arts education alone. At the same time, it seems clear that society values these skills highly. Virtually every college and university, every art museum has some sort of significant arts education program. The challenge they face, however, is how to scale these efforts to the level where they could possibly begin to fill the breach in the experiences of children in the arts.

Overall, classic forms of philanthropic support for arts education are largely absent, and even in the broad scope, external funding and philanthropic giving to museums is in decline (Americans for the Arts, 2006). The reasons for this decline are not well-established in the literature, but a likely reason is that funders are increasingly expecting to see clearly defined outcomes result from their support. At the same time, there has never been a greater opportunity for the private sector to affirm the value of the arts (Americans for the Arts, 2006).

In response to these two overarching trends — the erosion of arts education, and the shift in the ways philanthropists are investing their giving — an interesting experiment has been unfolding in Texas that looks at both problems with novel solutions. Since October 2005, the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation has been working with the New Media Consortium (NMC) to help museums across the state learn to scale their education efforts. That experience has shown that the battle is not lost. There is a tremendous opportunity for targeted giving to make a difference and in the process to produce the kinds of measureable outcomes that can show real progress.

It is a story that should be shared, and we shall tell it, along with its rationale, its objectives, and the lessons learned along the way.

The Current Landscape of Arts Education in the US

There is no disagreement in the literature about the benefits of arts education both for the individual and for society. A wide body of research has shown that studying the arts has a positive effect on intellectual development (Gullatt, 2007; Hamblen, 1997; Sternberg, 2006). In addition to the benefits of studying the arts for their own sake, learning in the arts has been shown to cultivate creative thinking, self-awareness, originality, risk taking, and focused perception, among other valuable human qualities such as greater self-confidence, growth of emotional intelligence, greater involvement in social activities, and of course, the beginnings of a lifelong appreciation for the arts (Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles, 2000; Gullatt, 2007; Katz, 2006; Sternberg, 2006). Indeed, there is a veritable mountain of research documenting the impact and importance of arts education.

Yet everywhere one looks, arts education is in serious decline.[1]

46 Crayons, Eva Ekeblad, Göteborg, Sweden, 2007. Flickr/Creative Commons

Over the past three decades, the back-to-basics movement has gradually eroded support for the arts in education, but the most serious challenge to date came in the form of federal legislation. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002), with its emphasis on math, reading, and science and its narrow focus on standardized test scores, dealt a severe blow to virtually all other subjects, including art and arts education.

To meet the requirements of federal legislation like NCLB, teachers and schools are focusing their efforts on preparing children to succeed on easily-scored standardized tests, on which subjects like art have no representation. In the effort to raise scores to satisfy requirements in "the basics," programs for "extras" like the arts are tacked on halfheartedly or even entirely cut from the curriculum (Chapman, 2007).

That trend is worsening, and programs like NCLB are paralleled by local efforts with similar aims.

In Texas, for example, the state where the project that is the focus of this white paper took place, support for arts education has been steadily declining for nearly 25 years. In the early 1980's, several districts, including the Dallas Independent School District, the second largest school district in Texas, cut support for the arts in elementary schools almost completely. Subsequent requirements introduced in the late 1980s to increase attendance and decrease gaps between test scores of minorities and other students pushed aside what little time and funding for arts programs remained in many Texas districts (Tunks, 1997). Arts specialists in the schools have largely been replaced by curricular materials designed to be delivered by classroom teachers who have had little or no arts instruction themselves.

This situation is not limited to Texas. Throughout the United States, similar pressures continue to erode arts education, especially at the elementary and middle-school levels (Chapman, 2007; Rabkin and Redmond, 2006).

[1] There is considerable agreement in the literature that arts education is in serious decline; see Chapman, 2007; Gullatt, 2007; Levin, 2008; and Rabkin and Redmond, 2006 for representative perspectives on this question. Indeed, the authors could find no disagreement on this point anywhere.

[2] Throughout this paper we use the term "museums" broadly, and intended it to include both institutions with and without permanent collections, and those that are exhibition-only.

The Role of Museums in Arts Education

Fortunately schools are not the only institutions that are involved in delivery of arts education. Museums[2] have long recognized education as central to their missions, a view shared by their publics, and a pronounced culture of teaching exists within the museum world. From the early 1900s, John Dewey and the progressive education movement emphasized inquiry (used as a synonym for education) as an ideal for museums to strive toward (Costantino, 2004; Hein, 2006). In more recent times this ideal was codified by the American Association of Museums (AAM) in 1992 through a major report entitled *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums.* This report established education as a critical pillar of any museum's mission, and defined museum-based education very precisely, noting that it "includes exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation, and dialogue" (AAM, 1992, p. 8).

Museums naturally approach their subjects and learning broadly — history, culture, the human spirit, and other aspects surrounding the creation and collection of art pieces are all vital components of museum-based educational offerings. Within museums, education is seen as a comprehensive public service that should involve stakeholders from all levels — trustees, staff, volunteers, and patrons — and encompass every aspect of museum work, from public programs to exhibitions to collection and research (AAM, 1992). Increasingly, museums are being seen as uniquely positioned to provide rich, engaging experiences in visual arts education.

Indeed, over the past century, the growing expectation is that museums will step in to supply missing elements of arts education, and over the years, that has led to broad changes in perspective and policy within the museum community. The past thirty years in particular have seen a major movement to integrate education as part of the central mission of every museum.

In the early 1980s, for example, the Commission on Museums for a New Century documented that museums can and do make a major contribution to education, and strongly recommended that exhibitions and programming reflect that fact (AAM, 1984).

A decade later, in *Excellence and Equity,* the American Association of Museums identified ten actions museums could take to promote and establish the values of inquiry and inclusiveness at each institution (AAM, 1992). Standards and best practices specifically for museum educators, developed in 2005 by the Committee on Education of the American Association of Museums (EdCom), call for museum professionals to "serve as audience advocates and work to provide meaningful and lasting learning experiences for a diverse public" (AAM, 2005, p. 6).

This is a profound shift in mission for museums. One noted author even remarked that "…the great age of collection building in museums is over," (Skramstad, 1999, p. 128), and that there is now an opportunity to embark on another great age — one in which museums encourage, invite, and enable students and the broader public to explore the world of the arts, independently of whether or not arts education is available in schools. There is certainly no question that museums are actively creating rich opportunities for such exploration.

At the same time, it is a big leap from providing rich educational experiences for museum visitors to seeing the museum sector pick up the fallen baton of arts education dropped by the public schools. How can the sorts of experiences that museums have proven they are very, very good at creating be scaled? How can these sorts of programs reach kids and parents outside of the museum walls?

2,000 Paper Cranes, 2007, Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art

Technology in the Modern Museum

Our premise is that a big part of the answer lies in the effective application of technology.

Museums have always been eager to move to new technologies that advance their missions, and digital technology is no exception. Multimedia kiosks and audio tours have been in use for many years, and Internet-enabled kiosks were not uncommon even a decade ago (Anderson, 1999). Indeed, the Internet and other forms of digital technology have become infrastructure — staff depend upon them to do their daily work, and the first contact with the museum for most visitors is increasingly via the Internet. Patrons enjoy the access to digital content that is often discreetly available to them as they wander through the galleries.

The impact of technology is having profound effects on the museum experience, not only through the art itself, or new sorts of digitally enhanced gallery experiences, but also by enabling remote access and the participation of audiences who are not present in the building itself.

Without a doubt, technology (especially Internet technology) is changing the way museums do business, the audiences they can reach, the venues they can inhabit, and the working environment for staff (Anderson, 1999; Thomas, 2007). Filmmaker Selma Thomas noted that, "In little more than a decade, the web has assumed a critical importance to museums, particularly as they relate to audiences" (2007, p. 3).

The youth that are the focus of most museum education programs have grown up in a world filled with digital technology. Recognizing and planning for that fact is essential (Swerdlow, 2008). Where once there was fear that attendance would decline if museums put material online, it is now widely recognized that museums need the worldwide exposure provided by the Internet to promote their work and to bring visitors to the physical museum. In today's world, a lack of a web presence has the effect of making the museum cease to exist to many people who turn first to the web when seeking information (Howes, 2007).

When considering how to scale the rich offerings of museum education programs, this is good news. Added to this is the emergence of web-based software and other tools that are easy to use, and often free, making it a simple matter for museums of any size to generate and post web content (Howes, 2007). Social networking tools offer new avenues for museums to connect with audiences, an aspect of digital media highlighted in an influential report by Americans for the Arts (Americans for the Arts, 2006).

Arts Education in the Age of Digital Media

These trends bode well for those who care about the state of arts education. We find ourselves in a unique moment in time where careful philanthropic investments that focus on raising the capacity of museum educators to expand their audiences could make a significant difference and help to reverse the decline of arts education. Museums seem a perfect place for a rebirth of arts education, using the power of the Internet to expand their reach, and digital media to do it effectively. This was also the premise of the Texas experiment, and it was based on the following assumptions.

The first is this. We are poised at the intersection of three large-scale social trends: 1) arts education is important, though all but gone from schools; 2) in a movement spanning decades, museums have embraced education as central to their purposes; and 3) the ubiquity and low cost of digital tools and the web have opened new pathways we've only begun to explore.

The second assumption is that arts education matters deeply, and must be designed and taught by people who are passionate about it. If it is no longer possible to do that in schools, as much current evidence suggests, then new ideas and new models are needed so that we can connect passionate arts educators with learners easily and broadly. There is common agreement that educational programs provided by museums should be an important part of any solution. Generally, these programs are far more effective than the curricular materials that have largely replaced teachers trained in arts education in schools. The best materials are engaging, effective, and provide meaningful experiences rich in exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation, and dialogue (Zeller, 1987).

Progenitus, Matteo Neivert, 2007, Newcomb Art Gallery, Tulane University

There are critical constraints to be addressed before this vision can become reality, of course. Not the least of these are finding the time and resources for museums to devote to digital media, and the skills to do so. With most museums laboring under limited staffing, tight budgets, and little time, how is a museum — especially a small one — to create such materials?[3]

That was the question asked by the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation in the spring of 2005. What they knew, and what the NMC was able to help the museum participants understand, is that a good part of the solution is embedded in the challenge. The time invested in learning to work digitally pays off in time savings in production. Materials can be created and updated quickly and easily, even by nontechnical staff. User-friendly tools allow content experts and educational staff to focus on what they know best — the subject matter — without having to worry about programming or design. By investing a little effort to understand how to create high-quality, reusable digital media to weave engaging stories about their collections or exhibitions, museums can quickly and easily adapt that media to create targeted online experiences for virtual visitors of all ages.

There is more good news. The experience of the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation and the NMC in Texas is that many obstacles to implementing digital media into museum education practice are small. Often a digital camera or a laptop is all that is needed to open that door.

There is also a basis in the research literature to justify devoting time and effort to learning the tools to work with digital media. For example, the evidence suggests that the kinds of participatory learning experiences that occur in museums, where visitors construct their own meaning and follow "desire paths" or "learning trails" from object to object or place to place, are transferable to an online experience (Walker, 2007). In this context, the techniques of the digital storyteller have tremendous potential.

3 Related and significant challenges, of course, remain after the materials are created if reaching children is the goal, as it must be. Teachers must find time to include such materials into their lesson plans, and parents need to know about such materials before they are likely to use them in family settings. The Texas project is only just beginning to grapple with challenges such as these, but recognizes their criticality.

Researchers agree. New low-cost tools have made it easy to combine media in image, audio, and video formats into digital tapestries (MacArthur, 2007). With a little training and support, museum educators can use a variety of authoring tools to assemble open-ended, exploratory materials that feature content such as artist and curator interviews, images, and video or audio recordings. Pieces can focus on an artist, a type of art, a single work, a collection, an exhibition, a technique, or any other point of entry to the world of art. With digital media and web 2.0 tools, the variety of objects and points of view that can be explored is virtually limitless.

When coupled with the easy access provided via the Internet, these rich materials are available to a wide audience. Students and their parents have an unprecedented opportunity to explore and learn about art and culture.

Studies have shown that for students, looking at an art image on the computer screen reduces the feeling of remoteness and creates a sense of personal connection with the piece that persists during gallery visits (Promey and Stewart, 1997). For younger art lovers, popular culture and media are strong attractors; from a learning perspective as well as an audience-building perspective, researchers are encouraging museums to meet young people where they live — online (Peterson and Rossman, 2008).

Children's museums have long understood that experiences beginning with a real work of art or piece of technology and incorporating problem-solving, hands-on activities have great power to engage young people and encourage exploration and discovery (Skramstad, 1999). Museums of all kinds are now striving to create experiences like these — educational experiences that involve multiple senses and incorporate active thinking. By using digital media as a vehicle for their rich expertise, museum educators can reach beyond the physical space of the museum to provide a variety of such activities to a wide range of learners.[4]

The potential of these approaches has also given rise to a new perspective on the role of museum educators, who are now routinely called upon to understand and access the collections and resources of their institutions, to reach out and connect with audiences, and to create relationships and experiences that raise the quality of life for their communities (AAM, 2005; Hein, 2006; Munley and Roberts, 2006). Whether they work with digital or analog materials, museum educators select and organize content to make it meaningful and useful (Promey and Stewart, 1997). The expertise of the museum educator is increasingly seen as key to the production of effective teaching and learning experiences.

As such, increasingly museums have begun to see that arts education is something that they themselves can deliver, as opposed to the traditional roles of being assistive or supportive to school programs.

[4] This is not at all a new idea in the museum world. The 1992 report Excellence and Equity strongly recommends that museums grow their ability to offer learning opportunities to audiences and specifically suggests that institutions "utilize the growing potential for extending the educational role of museums beyond their walls through electronic media" (AAM, 1992, p. 17). The book The Digital Museum: A Think Guide (Din and Hecht, eds., 2007) continues the conversation, examining the theoretical, practical, and creative aspects of incorporating technology — especially online technology — as part of a museum's normal offerings. Numerous papers, articles, and blog posts echo these recommendations as well.

Challenges for Museums in Delivering Arts Education

So given this, why are we not seeing museums stepping into the breach of arts education *en masse?*

A recent survey of technology adoption in small museums identified financial support as the most significant barrier — which is hardly surprising. Staffing, knowledge of technology, and experience or comfort with technology were next on the list, ranked equally as impediments. Website creation was cited as one of the most common software needs for which there is inadequate support (Spinazze, 2007). The need for staff training is exacerbated by a high rate of turnover and constantly changing technology (Thomas, 2007).

As such, most US museums are not currently in a position to develop the kinds of rich, engaging learning experiences that can address the gap left by cuts in school arts programs. Blocked by lack of time, funding, or staff expertise, or simply unsure of where or how to begin, countless institutions have not yet had the opportunity to contribute to their communities in this way. The limiting factors vary from museum to museum, but tend to fall into groups related to the size of the institution.[5]

Resources are an important part of this equation, and one of the key outcomes of the Texas project was understanding what kinds of resources matter most in stimulating museums to embrace digital tools. While in Canada and Australia, national cultural heritage organizations provide tools, documentation, and portals to content so that even the smallest museums can take advantage of digital media to extend their reach, document their holdings, and create educational materials, such support is still relatively uncommon in the US.[6]

As the paragraphs on the following pages illustrate, however, this is an area where targeted philanthropy even at relatively small levels can make a very big impact. That has been the experience of the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation, a small private foundation with a limited endowment but a deep commitment to Texas arts education.

The Edward and Betty Marcus Digital Education Project for Texas Art Museums

In October 2005, the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation and the New Media Consortium decided to try a new approach that capitalized on the three converging trends identified earlier — the decline of arts education in schools; the clear focus and fresh approaches of museums in arts education; and the ubiquity and low cost of digital tools and the web.

After several months of discussions with museum leaders and educators, they launched a collaboration to address the declining state of visual arts education in Texas by increasing the capacity of virtually every art museum in Texas to work with digital media and make use of digital storytelling tools and techniques. The 3-year, $1.7 million project included training, equipment, software, a program of minigrants, and a unique approach to providing museums across the state easy access to multimedia professionals and content experts.

Over the time since it was launched, the project involved more than fifty Texas institutions and twenty organizations outside of Texas in what is officially known as the Edward and Betty Marcus Digital Education Project for Texas Art Museums.

Three key ideas served as the project's compass. The first was to continuously and actively listen to what museums needed — but to also listen carefully for opportunities to help that might not have been obvious on the surface. The second sprang from the first — to uniquely target needs that were shared by many institutions with focused philanthropic investments. These needs were of special interest because solutions — model rights releases, custom training, access to expertise — could be scaled to help institutions across the state. Both of these ideas were supported by the third idea which was embedded in the overarching aim of raising the capability of museum educators across the state to support arts education.

Detail from *Renaissance to Revolution* website, Mexic-Arte Museum, 2008

5 Historically, the role of the museum educator has been seen as a secondary function among museum staff. This view is gradually changing as museums reconsider their own contribution to arts education and, as a result, begin to recognize museum educators as leaders (AAM, 1992; Burnham and Kai-kee, 2007; Munley and Roberts, 2006). Within the past several years, museum professionals collaborated to codify a set of principles and standards for museum education and a list of best practices for museum educators (AAM, 2005). It is interesting to note that special emphasis is placed upon appropriate use of current technology tools as a principle of best practice (ibid., p. 8).

6 In Canada, the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) promotes the use of information technologies to aid in the development, presentation, and preservation of Canadian cultural heritage; CHIN's portal has been active since the mid 1980s. See www.chin.gc.ca. In Australia, Collections Australia Network (CAN), formerly Australian Museums and Galleries Online and active since 1997, is a public gateway to collecting institutions of all sizes across Australia. See www.collectionsaustralia.net.

Serendipity played its part as well. The foundation learned of the New Media Consortium (NMC) through mutual friends as it was considering new directions for its funding efforts; both organizations were headquartered in Texas, and each brought a unique and complementary set of skills to the table. The Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation had carefully established a reputation for equitably working with virtually every art museum across the state, and enjoyed a great deal of credibility and good will. Over more than 15 years, they had kept a focus on innovative ways to enhance arts education within the state.

The NMC, a consortium of nearly 300 leading colleges, universities, and museums, had similarly worked carefully over the years to establish itself as a respected organization focused on the introduction of new learning and creative technologies to higher educational institutions. At the time, the NMC was also beginning to reach out to museums via its Pachyderm Project. The NMC was known for its inventive approaches, and its skills at discovering impediments to adoption of emerging technologies and addressing them had made it a valued part of the academic landscape.

The two organizations crafted a plan that positioned the NMC in an operational role in which it acted both in partnership with and as an agent of the foundation. In that role, and always working closely with the foundation board, the NMC was asked to realize the foundation's vision of helping museums across the state become adept in the use of digital media and digital storytelling techniques.

The project was implemented in phases, and in the first year of work, the foundation and the NMC met with nearly 200 key Texas museum leaders, trustees, and education directors in a series of meetings held across the state. Presenters and panelists at these meetings included internationally recognized leaders in the use of technology in support of cultural and arts education. These meetings confirmed that the leadership of Texas art museums were largely in agreement regarding the challenges facing the sector in general. As one might suspect, there was less initial agreement on what the best responses might be.

Nonetheless, based on the results of these meetings, virtually every art museum in the state[7] agreed to join a project that would train their education staffs in the tools and techniques of digital media. These multi-day trainings — five in all — were held in cities across the state in 2006, using a custom curriculum[8] designed in collaboration with the Center for Digital Storytelling in San Francisco. Through these workshops, more than 260 individuals were trained in the basics of recording and manipulating digital imagery, audio, and video and in how to assemble digital materials into media-rich stories using the open-source Pachyderm platform.[9]

These trainings provided a unique opportunity for the project staff as well as the foundation trustees to listen to the participants, and a great deal was learned about the challenges that moving to digital media entailed for professionals working in museum education across a range of institutional sizes and types. What was clear was that training was a critical component, but not the only critical component. Most museum education staffs lacked even basic digital tools and equipment as well. The good news was that the technology to do this sort of work had become significantly cheaper, and for most museums, these obstacles could often be overcome with an investment of about $1,000-$1,200. In total, about $50,000 was applied to providing relatively inexpensive but needed equipment for the 36 participating institutions, such as cameras, professional lighting, microphones, and audio and video gear; another $20,000 provided laptops and software where they were needed.

Phase Two of the effort was designed as a way to maximize the investments in training and resources, and to move museums to the point where they were not only able to make use of digital media, but actually doing so on real projects. The premise here was similar to the first phase, in that a relatively small number of dollars were set aside for targeted investments at the museums, while a larger investment was made in resources that could be available to all participating institutions.

7 The Chinati Foundation, the Menil, and the Amon Carter Museum elected not to participate for reasons unrelated to the challenges identified; the Chinati Foundation is located in the remote town of Marfa, Texas, and travel to the major cities for the required meetings would have pulled staff away from the museum for too long. Both the Chinati Foundation and the Menil had a history of outsourcing such activities, and thus had little or no staff to train. The Amon Carter was in the midst of a leadership change and ultimately set out in another direction on its own. Ballet Austin was included for several reasons. One of their projects was done in collaboration with the Art House at Jones Center, but the trustees were also interested in seeing how the approach might work for performing arts organizations.

Year One Projects by Category

Online Educational Materials in Support of Traveling Exhibitions

Cult of Color: Call to Color	Ballet Austin & Arthouse at the Jones Center
The Texas Scene	The Grace Museum

Outreach Projects Aimed at First-Time Museum Visitors (i.e., 4th and 5th Grade Students)

New Art in Austin: 20 to Watch	Austin Museum of Art
The Journey of Pots	San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts
Defining Character	Sid Richardson Museum

Curriculum-Related Presentations for Students in K-12

Interpreting Contemporary Ballet	Ballet Austin
If These Walls Could Speak	Blanton Museum of Art
Contemporary stARTs	Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston
Contemporary stARTs en Español	Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston
From Revolution to Renaissance	Mexic-Arte Museum
Museum 101	Nasher Sculpture Center

Adaptation of Existing Educational Materials to the Media-Rich Pachyderm Format

A/V: Artistic Voices	Dallas Museum of Art
Exploring Architecture for Educators	Kimbell Art Museum
High School Multi-Visit Program	Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Visions of Texas	NTIEVA
Texas Skies	NTIEVA
The Dignity of Work	NTIEVA
European Art from the Collection of the Old Jail Art Center	The Old Jail Art Center
Pre-Columbian Sculpture and Asian Tomb Figures	The Old Jail Art Center

Pachyderm Authoring as Part of Pre-Service or In-Service Teacher Training

Anthony Quinn	Museum of Texas Tech University
Reimagining Space	UT, Austin College of Fine Arts
Multiple Narratives in Pachyderm	UNT College of Visual Arts & Design

School-Related Collection Sharing

FSA Photography	Amarillo Museum of Art
Collection of Dr. William T. Price	Amarillo Museum of Art
Billy Hassell: Migration	Art Museum of South Texas
Dorothy Hood	Art Museum of South Texas
Etruscan and Roman Art	San Antonio Museum of Art
Development of a Participatory Learning Environment	Trammell and Margaret Crow Collection

Open Category for Creative Uses of Pachyderm

LTL Renovation	Arthouse at the Jones Center
Young Artists @ Arthouse	Arthouse at the Jones Center
A Different Kind of Art	Ellen Noël Art Museum of the Permian Basin
A Unique Experience for All	Ellen Noël Art Museum of the Permian Basin
Visitor Voices	McNay Art Museum
Row House Rounds #26 and #27	Project Row Houses
Selected Works from the Boeckman Collection	Tyler Museum of Art

In the second phase, a centralized team of multimedia professionals was hired to work on projects developed by the museums. The team included skills in project management, art direction, multimedia, storytelling, and audio and video production.[10] Members of the team were available anytime for phone or email consultations, and made more than 40 trips to participating institutions.

The centerpiece of Phase Two was a program of small targeted minigrants. These funds were intended to support an easily manageable project with between $2,500 and $5,000 — monies that could be applied to whatever might

be required. As a precondition of receiving minigrant support, participating institutions had to agree to allow broad use of their materials for arts education. The idea was to stimulate the creation of a body of useful digital resources in seven categories.

In selecting these categories, the trustees were hoping to stimulate production across the range of contributions to arts education, thus there were categories aimed at both children and adults, some that supported the creation of primary materials, and others aimed at supporting teachers. The categories, the projects submitted and the participating institutions are listed on the following page.

It is important to underscore that as a central premise of the minigrants, all of these materials have been licensed in such a way that they can be made available to any educational instruction or museum education program. Although all of the 35 projects in the first round of minigrants had direct application to arts education in some form, nearly half (17) addressed categories specifically related to schools, curricula, teacher training, or programs for children. An additional six presentations focused on collection sharing, and making new resources available for teachers and schools.

The categories were intended to ensure that the materials submitted provided enough diversity of content to allow discussion about where and how such digital materials might best be used or applied. In addition to promoting the use of existing materials, one of the categories encouraged the development of new primary source materials with rights that would allow their broad use. The work of the Austin Museum of Art in videotaping twenty important emerging artists in their studios, for example, was done in a way that also secured the rights allowing the content to be used by the local PBS station, KLRU, for a special hour-long program on the topic.

The Dallas Museum of Art digitized previously inaccessible materials in its archives containing original audio interviews about influential artists including Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock, Jacob Lawrence, and Linda Ridgeway — and more than 30 more, all with broad rights for usage by teachers, students, and scholars. Based on the success of the minigrant component, and the overall quality of the works produced, in May 2008, the foundation extended the minigrants to a second year.

Creative Strategies

What made the Digital Education Project remarkable were the strategic approaches used by the foundation, and three in particular are worthy of note. The first two relate to the foundation's novel investment approach; the third ensured that products scaled in ways that could potentially benefit the whole state.

Careful Micro Investment. Over the three years of the project, the foundation invested $1.7 million but each participating institution received benefits worth on average about $15,000 per year. Costs were kept down through the application of a micro investment strategy where each institution received a total of only about $3,500 over that time in direct support in the form of cash or equipment. These investments were intended to solve local problems, unique to a museum or the museum education department, such as the need for a new digital camera, or video editing software. (The remainder of the benefits were in the form of services.)

10 This team, known as the Digital Rapid Response Team, consisted of two full-time staff and several professionals whose services were obtained on a contract basis. If a museum needed some Flash programming, for example, the team would contract those services on behalf of the museum.

Solutions that could be used by any museum. Most of the $1.7 million, 3-year investment was devoted to areas in which all or most of the institutions in the state could benefit — areas such as the development of rights release forms, training, and providing the museums access to a team of highly skilled digital media experts. By seeking out and crafting solutions that many institutions could take advantage of, the foundation was able to scale its investments and greatly multiply the potential audiences for the materials that were being created across the state.

Outcomes and products that would benefit the entire state. Those materials represented the third and most important strategy. While museums had considerable flexibility in deciding what to produce, the foundation required the participants to allow their materials to be assembled into a collection that could be made available to anyone interested in arts education, with full rights assigned to the foundation, the NMC, and museums and schools across the state to distribute and reproduce those materials.

Approaches Used to Scale Investments

These strategies were anchored by a key principle: the project's aim was to help every museum in the state to increase their capacity to use digital media and digital storytelling to advance arts education, whatever their starting point. As such, wherever possible the investments of the foundation were scaled to maximize both the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the funds and activities. Some examples:

- Rather than train each museum's staff individually, regional trainings were held in several parts of the state that were open to all area arts education providers. This approach not only held down costs, but also created local communities of practice connecting area museums, universities, and schools.
- A relatively small amount of equipment money ($50,000) was leveraged by limiting its use to small purchases intended to solve lots of little problems. By addressing these small stumbling blocks in many places at once, this strategy was critical in moving the entire state forward.
- The foundation's choice of a partner like the NMC that also had strong links to museums on the national level allowed it to extend the reach of the foundation and bring in additional expertise.
- Thousands of dollars were saved by engaging a top law firm to develop release forms and digital rights agreements that could be used by museums across the state for a variety of purposes.

The most profound example of how the project used scalable solutions was embedded in the concept of the Rapid Digital Response team. In almost every discussion early on in the project, a recurring theme that was identified was the need for additional staff. The Texas experience documented that there was indeed a need for advanced skills to apply the necessary polish that would make an otherwise solid presentation really compelling, but there really was not generally a case to be made to have that level of skills available in house at any but the largest museums.

The NMC solved this by hiring two full time staff and contracting with two others to provide professional quality project management, videography and video editing, Flash programming, and supplemental training. Team members assisted any institution that needed their help, either via site visits, phone support, or production. The results of this approach were stunning, as it was quickly evident that real professionals could meet the needs of any single institution relatively quickly. As such, it was possible to address almost any need that arose for these services anywhere in the state, with a single team based in Austin.

Outcomes

From the very beginning, the foundation looked for outcomes that would document the progress of the effort. The essential idea was that with a steady focus on informed, specially targeted support, the following critical outcomes could be achieved:

1 Museum education departments would not only have learned, but actually integrated the uses and techniques of digital media into their education and outreach activities in ways that expand their reach.
2 Museum educators would realize that by working together, they can overcome seemingly intractable barriers.
3 A community of digital storytellers would exist across the state that can help to sustain the momentum of the work.

4 A collection of materials would have been created that can be used to address a number of important needs related to visual arts education.

5 Museums would be collecting data on the efficacy of these materials that can be used to improve current and future digital resources and applications.

As the project entered its fourth year, significant progress had been made on all of these goals, and one overarching outcome was already clear — the needs of Texas museum educators related to using and embracing digital tools and techniques are addressable. Across the state, it was palpably evident that museum professional staffs were deeply committed to their missions and open to new strategies. The direct costs of helping them turned out to be surprisingly manageable on an institution by institution basis — an average of just $15,000 per year.

Lessons Learned

Over the course of planning the project, developing the training materials, working with museum staff, and going through the minigrant process, the project team learned much — some expected, some unforeseen. These lessons learned reflect both the complexity of working with a wide range of organizations and the benefits of working with the nearly 500 museum staff, educators and other creative people involved in the project.

Early involvement of museum leadership is critical to success. Clearly, any project involving significant time and resources will be more successful if those in leadership roles understand and value the work that is being done. Whether releasing staff to attend training, approving equipment requests, or allowing finished pieces to be displayed online, the degree of leadership support can make or break a project. Early informational meetings targeted specifically at museum and education directors ensured that when the invitations for the trainings arrived, staff had little trouble receiving approval to attend. Museum leadership was kept informed every step of the way, so that there were no surprises: when it was time to submit a minigrant proposal, the invitation was anticipated and the in-house process was smooth.

Small amounts of carefully applied funding can yield significant results. When it came right down to it, the missing pieces needed by each museum to create and use digital media did not amount to a great deal of expense. Some needed a good digital camera, or professional-quality lighting, or a certain software package; some needed an inexpensive laptop computer or an audio recorder. In every case, equipment and software needs came to no more than $1,000 – 1,200 per institution.

Professional services, too, did not cost very much, considering how widely they were used. A central team provided support in the form of project management, videography, technical support, and Flash programming and design. The project was able to control costs by hiring two full-time staffers and contracting with a third on a part-time basis. Almost every art museum in the state was served by this single team for less than $150,000 per year. While nearly every museum needed some of these services, none of them required all the services full-time; with some creative time management, every one of the 26 institutions that participated in the project was easily served by that same little team.

Intellectual property and copyright are not widely understood. As the museums began developing their ideas, it quickly became clear that a general lack of understanding of copyright and intellectual property laws (IP) and practices was a de facto impediment that would limit what staff felt they could do with digital media at almost every institution. When faced with uncertainty about what the right course was, the typical response was to avoid the issue altogether.

To address this, the NMC set about helping museums see how to navigate these waters. Releases and IP contracts were found that could be adapted to securing rights from artists and collectors in Texas. Attorneys and intellec-

tual property experts were then hired to review these documents, and from them produced a set of releases and contracts that all Texas museums could use, not only for these projects, but generally as a way to negotiate for and secure digital rights wherever needed.[11]

A clear pattern emerged in the scope of projects that were created by smaller institutions as compared to larger ones, and in their approaches to using materials from their collections. Over the course of the project, it became clear that large museums faced a different set of constraints around what they could and could not do with digital media than small museums. Larger museums in general approached their projects differently; they think very differently about how their collections can and should be used, and also have a different set of considerations around issues like rights and the ability to reproduce items in their collections. Smaller museums, generally speaking, did not exhibit the same concerns as the large ones did, which is not to say they did not need to acquire rights or that they are any less scrupulous about doing so; on the contrary, all the participants were very careful in that regard. It was usually easier for smaller museums to secure the rights that they requested, however, and they seemed to have more freedom as to how works in their collections could be used.

Participating staff and institutions require time and assistance to overcome early fears. Initially, skepticism and trepidation was not uncommon at both an individual and an institutional level. Individual participants had concerns about the difficulty of learning the technology and working with digital media. Some feared that they would not be permitted to work on similar projects back at the museum, or that the museum would not support them with equipment and further training, and that their learning would be futile. Institutional concerns tended to focus on cost of acquiring equipment, difficulties with securing copyright releases for materials used, and fear of losing control of their content once it was placed online. Each step of the project was carefully designed not only to acknowledge and address these concerns, both for the participants and for those in leadership roles at the museums, but also for the project leadership and the foundation to learn and understand them.

High-quality, intensive training is essential, and costs can be surprisingly manageable. The skills needed to create compelling, engaging educational materials using online tools are not difficult to learn, but neither do they come naturally to many museum educators. Once pointed in the right direction, however, nearly all the participants became quite engaged in the training and continued to experiment and explore the tools on their own. The key pieces were an orderly training curriculum and a dedicated project staff. The curriculum outlined the process and linked digital media to story and story to learning. The staff provided the participants with hands-on, guided experience with digital tools, and were always available during practice as questions arose.

The hands-on portion of the training, which included experience with software tools, cameras, lights, and recording equipment, was cited as one of the most valuable aspects of the training by participants. Even among the most unsure about using new media, simply being given the chance to assume the role of videographer, audio engineer, photographer, or web designer and experience the tools for a few hours first hand was all that was needed to demonstrate that indeed these tools were accessible, and reverse years of reticence.

Projects like the one described here afford an opportunity for community building that should not be overlooked. Bridges were built both within and between museums. While working on the minigrant projects, staff reported that they appreciated the opportunity to break with typical routines and work with other personnel with whom they do not normally interact. At the trainings, staff worked closely with each other and with their counterparts from other museums — in some cases, with people they had never met before. Cohorts from each training developed close ties as they learned together and shared their work-in-progress at the end of each session. The annual conference offered an opportunity for a "reunion," and the sense of community among the participating institutions was palpable.

In the end, almost all participants reported a very positive shift in their view of technology and digital media, and found it to be not nearly so difficult as they had imagined. The most difficult element for most was digital video; this hurdle was overcome not only with training, but also by providing the services of a contracted videographer for those institutions that simply could not shoot and edit the amount or quality of video needed for their projects.

What Next for Arts Education?

When the Texas project began, the trustees of the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation envisioned a different approach to thinking about arts education, and so set out to try something bold and new. By looking at the state's museums as a resource for all Texans, and actively looking for efficiencies from a sector-wide perspective, they created a model that could easily be adapted to other states and other communities. The final chapter of the Texas project is still to be written, but already gains have been made across the state, and the foundation has successfully catalyzed a tide that has been and continues to lift the capacities of virtually every art museum in the state.

We began this paper with three observations: 1) that arts education is in trouble; 2) that for a variety of clear reasons, museums are a rational choice of institution to work with to reverse that; and 3) that they are willing but not generally able to do this on their own. They need help to do this, and the kind of help targeted philanthropy can uniquely provide. The research shows that the situation with arts education in Texas is not unique, nor is it limited to the United States. Research has clearly documented that current approaches to arts education are in trouble, and new ideas are needed. New models that take advantage of the Internet and digital media, and embrace the techniques of digital storytelling, like the one created by the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation, hold the potential to reach so many learners at all levels of education.

What the Texas experiment has shown is that museums large and small will step up to the plate and embrace these new tools — and that the results can be extraordinary. To do this does not require a great deal of capital, or a vast staff; all it takes is a little creative thinking on the part of funders and philanthropists, a little collaboration, and a community of museum educators who are willing to take a step into the future.

And so what is next for arts education? Absent the traditional provider of this critical foundation, schools, how can we ensure the next generations will enjoy its many documented benefits?

Our view is that the answer lies in the collective power of communities. Museums are avid educators; it is clear they care deeply about arts education — education is very much a part of their missions. It is also clear that existing barriers they may face to using technology are not hard to remove. What is needed is to help them grow their own capacities. To do that, we need more new ideas, more projects like the Digital Education Project, and more local foundations investing proactively.

The best and most practical ideas will be those that scale, and that is the essential virtue of the sorts of strategies employed in Texas. Careful micro investments aimed at local problems unique to a particular museum are not typically something addressed by philanthropy, but it really worked in Texas. If dozens of foundations across the country implemented small programs like this, the impact would be substantial. Targeting ideas that can benefit multiple museums statewide or regionally with larger investments — such as the development of rights release forms, training curricula, or ways to provide several museums easy access to professional expertise — is another easy way to scale the impact of giving.

The most important strategy of the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation was that it worked with museums in ways that would benefit arts education across the entire state — another way to scale investment. If this were done across the country so that the products could be aggregated and shared via the Internet, it would be a tremendous expression of the power of community.

What this project has shown is that investments in arts education do not need to be large to make a difference. They just need to be scalable. What is important is that investments create impacts that are as widely felt as possible. If arts education is to stay a part of the cultural landscape, effort is needed in every community and in every state to help their local museums be a vital part of the solution. We need a starburst of focused activity — in training, in securing needed equipment and software, in access to professional services, in stimulating solid materials to support arts education — and within that starburst is space for a great deal of creative thinking.

Arts education is in trouble, yes. But let's not ring the death knell; the cause is yet not lost.[12]

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