Grantmaking and resource distribution/allocation in the new normal (Jody)

As budgets are affected by revenue loss and cuts, how are LAAs re-aligning, re-imagining and re-engineering resources (grants, training, services, etc.) to maximize impact? How do we hear what communities need beyond the money? What relationships can we leverage in support of the community to open access to more resources?

Participants: Jody Ulich – Sacramento, CA, Kerry Adams Hapner – San Joe, CA; Mitch Mechaca – Phoenix, AZ; Holly Becker – Tulsa, OK; Danielle Brazell – Los Angeles, CA (scribe)

Jody (Sacramento): In last year’s budget, we had increased the grant program from $1 to 3 million. This FY we were on track to expand again. In light of COVID-19, the request has been placed in a parking lot. Currently up to eyeballs in CARES Act $7.5 with a promise for an additional $12 million. Working with the parks department and police dept. and how we might be able to create intersections on services in alignment with those departments.

Kerry (San Jose): Reliant on TOT (projected) Taking an iterative and phased approach. Spring the agency makes recommendations based on next fiscal year. San Jose took a downward projection drawing from reserves. 10% Proposing to increase the contingency to 30%

Copying CARE guidelines - San Jose and Sacramento

Mitch (Phoenix) has talked with 18 cities across the country.

Holly (Tulsa) (AHA Tulsa) Private 501(3) and not a grantee organization. We are the city’s partner with the Tulsa Arts commission founded it in the 1970’s - the Voters approved a measure in 2016 to get funding for arts and culture. They were just about ready to launch in the spring just before COVID-19. They managed to get one round completed and granted $300K to arts organizations. Have another $300K. All grants are going through the City’s Arts Commission. The city contracts directly with the arts organization.

Jody - Went through the grants program knowing that most of these festivals would not happen. We didn’t expend the money because the events have been cancelled. The money isn’t going away. It’s going to go back in the pot and will be used to get us back on track next year. The fund is generated from parking and that revenue is also down. The funding will roll over, but the revenue is down. That’s the scary part. When we come back will we have money in the till.

Kerry. - Opted to pivot project grants to operational. We are all focused on this fiscal year, but what about next fiscal year? Can we save some contingency in reserves for the next fiscal year. People’s comfort level with travel is going to be really low. Surfaced the need for a grant stabilization fund.

Mitch - Phoenix is general funded and have been directed to take 25% reduction.

FY 22 is where we are going to run into a problem because they operate on sales tax revenue and that revenue is equally down.

San Jose is the largest funder in the South Bay Area.

Arts organizations are going to begin to fall soon. San Jose put forward at nonprofit dashboard. Created based on a set of criteria - serving vulnerable communities and if so will they pose a risk to the city in terms of closing the services. What’s their want award, who do they serve, and their most recent audits. So there’s a way to identify the highest need based on service to the most vulnerable communities. The organizations are shaky in a healthy economy. Then we have the triage conversation about how to infuse resource to help them survive.

Mitch - City Council members (conservative) have called the question of how to help fragile organizations to close gracefully.

Holly - The Arts Community is not asking for a lot, because the program and grants are so new. Our shakiest groups are not making the cut. How do you ensure equity when these groups are not making the grade?

Jody - Created a cohort of coaches to help / assist emergent groups apply successfully. Coaches receive 1 coach x 3 organizations annual contract $35K. You have these three organizations and get them up to speed. Currently have five coaches and are trying to get another. 20-25 nonprofits are in the highest act. But they have included for-profit, individual artists, as well nonprofit arts organizations. We are struggling with getting the word out about CARES ACT funding to the individual and commercial/for profit creative individuals.

Phoenix - having a tough time getting individual artist funding. But it has been the most tedious because of the federal guidelines.

Casemaking/Value proposition of the role of the LAA in recovery and rebuilding (Jonathon)

How do we preserve and protect the agency during this transition? How do we convey the value of the work LAAs do in community? How do we make visible the work that community may not be aware of? What relationships should we be centering to ensure understanding? What influence do we have with other arts funders?

Government Offices

* Uncertainty about funding and impact of COVID on being able to spend money on public art and programs
* Departments pitted against each other for CARES Act Funding
* Internal (City) partnership are helpful but don’t necessarily translate to funds
* Arts and culture offices showing their value as a way to facilitate difficult dialogues and conversations on race
* Assumption that grant funding will float the arts programs, and that it’s too hard to justify government spending on arts
* Case-making has to be public case making, not just internally
* Parks + Libraries tend to be pitted against Arts + Culture. Despite partnerships and collaboration across departments, Parks + Libraries are still prioritized and seen as more necessary. Arts still seen as elite.
* Value add arguments include: healing, civic engagement, social cohesion, connection to social fabric, connection to education, personal impact and community impact.

Non-governmental NFPs/agencies

* For separate agencies/nfps: what happens to the City’s LAA status if they aren’t re-contracted or City stops funding the NFP? Can the City still apply for NEA $?
* City is leaning on external LAA to work with BLM
* Public has mixed understanding of the role of the non-City LAA, what’s in their power and what isn’t

General Notes

* LAAs are picking up the work of race relations - are we becoming the PR tool for cities or do we actually have standing internally to do that work well? (This is Kara’s interpretation of some of the conversation)
* How can USUAF say what our value is so that AFTA can argue for that and fed funding?
* Are LAA’s being included in recovery frameworks?
* Mayor’s will listen to each other - can we influence the congress/conference of mayors?
* Are there other geographic levels that make sense? Counties?
* Can we use a neighborhood-based model that talks about placemaking strategies in recovery and arts+culture’s role in that? Intersection between small biz, non-profit spaces, libraries, arts, etc.
* Community voice - uplifting of neighborhood voices. Placemaking that amplifies local voices.

The role of the LAA in addressing civil unrest and advancing social justice (Patrick)

What role do LAAs play when leading or supporting equity efforts and understanding which role to play and when? Is there something we as LAAs can do that would help to fill voids that develop from defunding police in localities? How do we use our resources to create safe spaces for dialogue? What are the boundaries of what we can and can’t do as LAA leaders?

Something we as LAAs can do to help fill voids that develop from defunding police

Not every city has gotten to that level yet

Two paths:

Move functions of police out to other depts of the city – parking, homelessness outreach

Reduce budgets without clearly identifying what that means

Police don’t prevent crimes, they enforce the laws (in theory)

How could resources allocated to police depts be somewhat repurposed to support other things police are in place to enforce

Instead of police overtime, what if we invested in homelessness solutions? Or after school arts programs?

Policing has lost its relationship to community development – how can we reengage that connection?

Power imbalance – police have guns which makes it hard to create dialogue

Who does safety? What’s included in that work?

Cultural Equity ≠ racial equity – Don’t confuse the two or use them interchangeably

Arts community seems to be leaning in to racial equity

Limited ability to talk about/act around issues of race for some city entities

Safe space for a conversation about race is not the same as an engaged space for a conversation about race – stop saying safe space and being fragile; start saying engaged space where people are addressing important topics

Fragility is real and has to be overcome

Cant ask POC to pass into the white spaces – have to be legitimately engaged in the space together

How do we make people feel safe where they can be honest AND engaged?

Everybody wants to belong, but we all have to be willing to be uncomfortable

Building trust – have to listen and have good instincts about what feels right

Racism doesn’t just hurt POC – COVID has laid bare how woefully unprepared our field was for the shock

Generations of structural inequity have been exposed

Actually can now reimagine more just systems now in ways we may not have been able to in another moment

COVID and BLM are two different issues – can be tackled simultaneously but can do one well and not the other

Have to admit we don’t have the answers – course correct before the bus goes off the cliff

Bureaucracy doesn’t live in imagination space

LAAs job is to create a civic narrative, social cohesion

Transportation Dept doesn’t do that – LAAs are a community’s social capital

Belonging is gaining traction as a concept – how real is it? TBD

Funding Program Changes

Many groups of color don’t apply

LAAs have opportunity to reconsider models, bridge gaps

Many artists/small orgs never wanted to be “in the system” but if they are not in the system, cant get funding/support

Don’t have business skills or relationships that make it possible

LAAs may need to work on an individual level – can’t all be organizational/structural

POC and orgs staffed/run by POC have been left out of the conversation for so long – difficult to bring them in

Looking at recommendations to fund in “reparations” model –

Fund BIPOC/historically marginalized orgs first

Biggest cuts to white, Eurocentric orgs

Legal challenges difficult for cities to imagine/anticipate

Unique opportunity for LAAs to lead the conversation, but difficult to bring people along

Tension between black/brown

How do we use our resources to create safe space

What are the ?? we can/cant do as LAAs

What are the tools we have

Hard to invite orgs in – asking them to make the case for the LAA

Lean into arts and social impact – don’t just use grantmaking as the tool

Set an example of how the arts intersect other community priorities, bring in new partners/funders

What is a “just city”? A “just organization”?

Do you need public funds? Can private sector lead here?

Leadership matters – City has to stop debating whether this is important or not before progress can be made; cant fight about the relevance and about the process at the same time.