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RETROSPECTIVE

From START to Finish:

Lessons from The Wallace Foundation's
Work with State Arts Agencies



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2001, The Wallace Foundation launched a \$12.5 million initiative to help a set of small state government offices known as state arts agencies, or SAAs, develop policies and practices to make the arts a greater part of more people's lives. This report is a look at that effort, the State Arts Partnerships for Cultural Participation initiative, START. Researched and written by Wallace staff members and based in part on a survey of START participants, it describes what the initiative set out to do, discusses its achievements and shortcomings and reflects on the findings.

The Wallace Foundation has long worked to increase the number and diversity of people who engage in the arts, as well as to make that engagement more meaningful. The foundation initially supported such "participation-building" ventures at individual arts institutions, but in the late 1990s, it began exploring whether other types of organizations – specifically, those that fund the arts – might produce more widespread change. One result was START, which centered on agencies that, although small, are the nation's leading source of public arts funding. The idea, the foundation said at the time, was to encourage SAAs to "develop new or enhanced standards, practices and program strategies that build greater local participation in the arts."

The 13 SAAs selected received awards from \$500,000 to \$1.1 million to carry out three- to five-year efforts such as training their own and arts organization staff about how to build participation, assessing whether grant-making requirements should place more emphasis on building participation, and supporting participation-building projects at arts groups. Teams of officials from each SAA were also required to take part in frequent Wallace-sponsored training sessions. At first these gatherings focused on participation, but later they also tackled broader issues about how an arts agency determines and realizes its value to the public.

For the grantees, START proved "transformational," as one participant put it, offering the agencies' staff a rare opportunity to re-think how SAAs could best serve the public and the arts. As START's ideas about participation and "public value" spread beyond the grantees, the initiative influenced the field, too. Still, Wallace senior staff members developed reservations about START once its focus widened to encompass agency effectiveness, concerned that this shift had diverted attention from the main goal of building arts participation. In addition, neither the foundation nor the SAAs developed adequate ways to track and measure START's progress, in no small part because the development of a "theory of change" – or, a way to clarify initiative goals, map the course to reach them and, implicitly, provide guidance on how to measure progress – had yet to become standard foundation practice.

KEY FINDINGS

- *START spurred most grantees to place more emphasis on arts participation.* For example, 82 percent of survey respondents said that because of START, they had funded new grant programs aimed specifically at boosting participation. Whether SAAs substantially shifted funding to participation-building activities is unknown, but two-thirds of respondents reported that a higher proportion of their budgets was currently devoted to arts participation than prior to START.

- *START training left a positive imprint on the SAAs.* Respondents gave high marks to the initiative’s education endeavors and what START had taught them about both arts participation and public value.
- *The agencies were greatly influenced by ideas about public value.* All respondents reported, for example, that as a result of START they communicated more actively with the public, government officials and others to whom they answer.
- *START’s effects on building participation are unclear* because the foundation didn’t initially specify measurements and the SAAs had difficulty establishing them on their own.

KEY LESSONS

- *A “learning community” can be invaluable.* Ideas from the learning sessions helped grantees and influenced the SAA field. One wholly unexpected result of START was the development of an effective model for executive education for public agencies.
- *Initiatives need a map and measures.* When START seemed to drift from participation to public value, foundation staff members had little way to assess what this meant and whether it was a positive development or an unnecessary detour.
- *Assessing grantee “readiness” for an initiative is crucial.* Wallace didn’t fully grasp what, or how much, grantees needed to learn to lead change at the SAAs. An early assessment of SAA “readiness” in this area might have left Wallace senior staff members less surprised when public value training seemed to pull START in a new direction.

THE INITIATIVE

BEGINNINGS

In keeping with the philanthropic impulses of Lila Acheson Wallace, who established the predecessor philanthropies to The Wallace Foundation with her husband, the foundation has long tried to get more people more deeply involved with the arts. Often, the foundation has targeted its efforts at individual arts institutions,¹ but during the latter part of the 1990s, the foundation's staff began to ask whether other types of organizations could be part of a strategy to produce more widespread results. In 1997, the foundation took a first step in this direction when it launched the Community Partnerships for Cultural Participation initiative, which worked with community foundations to strengthen cultural participation throughout their localities. This effort achieved some success, including establishing community endowments for arts initiatives. But whether it spurred an overall increase in arts participation was doubtful, and Wallace decided an institution with arts as its center – unlike community foundations, which serve a range of philanthropic interests – might be a stronger lever for change.

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report draws on sources including grantee files from The Wallace Foundation; documents prepared for Wallace's board of directors; published reports about START; state arts agencies' websites; a foundation survey completed online in summer 2009 by officials from 11 of the 13 START state arts agencies; and interviews with 20 people close to the initiative, including Wallace and state arts agency staff members. Conducting a formal, in-depth evaluation of START was beyond the report's scope, but the retrospective offers insights that could benefit, among others, funders interested in learning more about the design and oversight of large initiatives; policymakers seeking examples of agencies that have attempted institutional change; state arts agencies and related groups such as local arts councils; and arts organizations. The publication also reflects Wallace's belief that foundations have an obligation to report on the results of their work as a matter of public accountability.

Wallace found a candidate in state arts agencies, or SAAs, which distribute state and federal arts funding to museums, theater companies, arts festivals and myriad other arts institutions.² Located in every U.S. state and territory, SAAs typically control less than one-tenth of one percent of a state's budget, and the arts funding they oversee is relatively small compared to that of the private sector, whose contributions account for more than 85 percent of arts funding.³ Still, SAAs are influential and far-reaching funders in the arts world, dispensing close to \$300 million in public funding annually to about 5,000

¹ Today, for example, the Wallace Excellence Awards initiative supports exemplary arts organizations in selected cities to identify, develop and share effective ideas and practices to reach more people.

² Most SAAs were set up shortly after the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965, in part to distribute federal funding within the states but also to act as a state counterweight to federal arts governance. Julia Lowell, *State Arts Agencies, 1965 – 2003: Whose Interests to Serve?*, 2004, The RAND Corporation, p. 5. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/ArtsParticipation/Pages/StateArtsAgencies1965-2003.aspx>

³ *How the United States Funds the Arts*, National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, p. 1. <http://www.arts.gov/pub/how.pdf>

communities and 24,000 projects.⁴ The vast majority of this money over the years has provided institutional support for arts organizations or funded the creation, exhibition or preservation of art.⁵

START's central idea, then, was to encourage these agencies, as the single most important source of public funding for the arts in the nation, to devote more attention to promoting arts participation among the public. More specifically, as the START "request for proposals"⁶ said, the goal was "to help state arts agencies develop new or enhanced standards, practices and program strategies that build greater local participation in the arts and culture."

Funding government agencies was a significant departure for Wallace, which until 2000 had confined its support to the private, non-profit sector. But in part because the SAAs were small, they presented what one foundation senior staff member describes as a "low stakes" opportunity to test whether a private foundation could work fruitfully with public agencies. With that as a consideration, Wallace's board of directors approved START in September 2000, and all 56 state arts agencies were invited to apply to take part. Some 21 responded, with SAAs from 13 states then selected: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina and Washington. Wallace provided the SAAs about \$9.6 million total, in three- to five-year grants that ranged from \$500,000 to \$1.1 million. Wallace also awarded Arts Midwest, one of six regional groups representing geographical clusters of SAAs, \$1.35 million to provide training to grantees about building participation and to disseminate participation ideas to the field. In addition, the RAND Corporation received \$1.5 million to research and publish a series of reports stemming from START.

START got under way officially with grant awards to the SAAs in March 2001. Each grantee proposed to carry out a number of projects, and the ventures ranged widely. For example, the California Arts Council sought to establish an arts marketing institute that would promote arts participation through research, assistance to arts groups and communication, while the Massachusetts Cultural Council planned to focus attention on the state's 160 local cultural councils – organizations and agencies that support the arts in individual communities. But there were common approaches, too, among the 13 grantees. Most planned to train the staff of arts organizations, arts councils and others (including SAA board members) about how to build participation the arts, and to find ways to spread ideas about arts participation more widely in their states through case-study publications or other means. A number sought to place greater emphasis on participation-building goals in their grant-making programs. And

⁴ *State Arts Agency Funding and Grant Making*, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, March 2010. http://www.nasaa-arts.org/Research/Grant-Making/2010_funding_and_grantmaking.pdf

⁵ From 1987 to 2004, according to one analysis, SAAs devoted on average about 70 percent of their grant funding to institutional support of arts organizations and to the creation, exhibition or preservation of artworks, while well less than 10 percent was dedicated to building arts participation. See Laura Zakaras, Julia F. Lowell, *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement and State Arts Policy*, 2008, The RAND Corporation, pp. 77-78. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/ArtsParticipation/Pages/cultivating-demand-for-the-arts.aspx>

⁶ Wallace generally invites specific organizations to apply for the foundation's grants, asking that they complete an RFP, "request for proposal."

several proposed using START funding for projects that individual arts organizations would undertake – bringing more arts experiences to underserved communities, for example, or working through unconventional venues, such as places of worship or social service agencies. [See chart beginning on p. 17 for more detail]

LEARNING ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Whatever the differences in their individual undertakings, all grantees took part in frequent START gatherings to share ideas and information, and learn. Once or twice a year, the grantees met face to face in meetings hosted by Wallace and Arts Midwest at various locations throughout the country. These sessions were supplemented by monthly conference calls built around guest-led discussions on topics important to START or grantee-led presentations in which representatives of one or more SAA would highlight a problem the agency was grappling with and seek input from the group. To try to ensure that the ideas presented and discussed would filter throughout the agencies, the foundation required the executive director and senior staff members of participating SAAs – not just the project directors for the Wallace grants – to take part.

For the initial gatherings, participation-building was top on the agenda, and attendees prepared by becoming familiar, at Wallace’s request, with *A New Framework for Building Participation the Arts*⁷, a Wallace-commissioned RAND Corporation publication that outlined approaches for arts organizations interested in getting more people engaged in the arts. Among other things, the *Framework* offered an expanded definition of “participation building,” which included efforts to accomplish one or all of a trio of goals: broadening, deepening and diversifying participation. RAND also identified appropriate strategies for these three kinds of participation-building, as well as the obstacles organizations could expect in pursuing each.

In part because the Framework focused not on funders (such as SAAs) but on arts organizations, it took the grantees some time to figure out how to apply the publication’s lessons to their START work. Eventually, many of them did, but not on the original schedule of the Wallace grant and not without a number of unforeseen detours, as will be described later in this report.

The SAAs ran into other snags early on, too, most notably the recession of the early 2000s, which, though relatively short-lived,⁸ inflicted financial wounds, some severe, that did not begin to heal until the 2005 fiscal year⁹. “The economy went south, and we had mid-year budget cuts,” recalls Ken May, now acting director of the South Carolina Arts Commission. “This caused huge distractions.”

⁷ Kevin F. McCarthy and Kimberly Jinnett, *A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts*, The RAND Corporation. 2001. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/ArtsParticipation/Pages/NewFramework.aspx>

⁸ Economists say that the recession began in March 2001 and ended in November 2001. *Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions*, National Bureau of Economic Research. <http://www.nber.org/cycles.html>

⁹ In the early 2000s, state legislative appropriations for SAAs declined steadily each year from a total of about \$447 million in 2001 to about \$277 million in 2004. The decline began reversing itself in 2005, when about \$294 million was appropriated. See p. 2 chart, “State Arts Spending Holds Steady,” National Assembly of State Arts Agencies press release, Feb. 7, 2005.

THE INITIATIVE TAKES A TURN

Against this backdrop, Wallace added a new component to START's training agenda when it recruited Mark Moore, a Harvard professor and author of a seminal book about government management, to provide executive education.¹⁰ In July 2002 at a START gathering in Marlborough, Massachusetts, Moore kicked off what would become nearly two years of educating and informal consulting with the START grantees, offering them a new vocabulary and structure for their work.

At a time when SAAs were going through what one observer described as the 'resource meltdown' of the 2001 recession, public value concepts offered a fresh approach to the SAAs' political management challenges.

Combining lessons about managerial effectiveness with political management concepts, Moore emphasized the need for government agencies to understand "public value:" the benefits the citizenry wanted and needed and that the agencies could supply. Moore also argued that a core responsibility of public agency leaders was to engage with their legislators, governors and other "authorizers" who confer resources

or legitimacy on the agencies. The SAA leaders needed, first, to hear what the authorizers' priorities were, Moore asserted, and, second, to explain to them the ways in which the agencies delivered on those priorities.

These notions would hardly strike most public management veterans as news, says Anthony Radich, who followed START closely as executive director of the Western States Arts Federation, the regional SAA group covering the 13 western states. But many SAA leaders did not come from public management backgrounds, he stresses, and, therefore, their agencies were often guided by what Radich calls "the castor oil" argument – arts are good for people and, ipso facto, merit taxpayer support. Moore argued that agencies should be guided instead by deep consideration of how the arts, through public funding, could fulfill public wants and needs.

Moore's ideas also challenged a notion, long held in at least some agencies, that SAAs were somehow more akin to private than public funders. For many of the grantee SAAs, this was empowering. "We'd been this odd stepchild within state government, working alongside non-profit organizations in the state," says Vicki Vitiello, senior program director for arts participation and learning at the North Carolina Arts Council, where she helped manage START. "We had been working for the public all along but did not use all the government tools at our disposal – like access to other state agencies, clout and the authorization of the people. Learning to do so was a beautiful shift." In addition, at a time when SAAs were going through what one observer described as the "resource meltdown" of the 2001 recession,

¹⁰ Mark H. Moore, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*, Harvard University Press, 1997.

public value concepts offered a fresh approach to the SAAs' political management challenges. The ideas prodded grantees to question the ingrained habit of many SAAs to refrain from forceful engagement with public officials, for fear of politicizing grant-making decisions.¹¹

Moore's teaching offered some grantees a new way to conceive of and shape their work, while giving virtually all of them a new way to communicate, "a matter of rewording what we were doing so the public value came through," as Gerri Combs, former executive director of the Kentucky Arts Council, puts it. The result was that by almost all accounts, the Marlborough meeting became a watershed moment for START. "People left that first convening just lit up," says South Carolina's May. "They were electrified."

Many grantees returned to their state capitals to reconsider their agencies' efforts in light of public value ideas, and initially foundation senior staff members were impressed by rave reviews they heard about the training sessions. Nonetheless, as time wore on a number of senior staff members at the foundation grew concerned that this new public value focus might overshadow the participation-building work that was the goal of the initiative and Wallace's longstanding priority. "START seemed to help the state arts agencies use the public value framework to strengthen their position, the obvious problem being that this was not tied directly to increasing participation," one Wallace senior staff member recalls thinking when initiative's direction seemed to change.

Foundation misgivings notwithstanding, many of the START SAAs spent the years after the Marlborough meeting juggling both public value *and* participation-building projects. Much of that activity will be discussed in the next section of this paper, but the work in the state of Washington was one example. There, the SAA applied the public value teachings by developing what Kris Tucker, executive director of the Washington State Arts Commission, calls "a new conceptual framework for understanding, documenting and communicating about our work," one that led the agency to more effective discussions with state legislators, among other groups, she says. At the same time, the commission launched a START-supported participation-building endeavor to develop the arts in some 20 underserved communities, including rural areas like the small and largely Hispanic city of Wapato, where 200 students worked with local artists to produce metal sculptures that helped turn a vacant lot into a park.

¹¹ Julia Lowell, *The Arts and State Governments: At Arm's Length or Arm in Arm?*, 2006, The Rand Corporation, p. 9. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/ArtsParticipation/Pages/the-arts-and-state-governments.aspx>

FINDINGS: START'S Accomplishments and Shortcomings

START set out to help state arts agencies develop practices and policies “that build greater local participation in the arts and culture.” Did it accomplish this goal? The answer is, “in part.” Responses to a survey of SAA grantees and interviews with some of the participants and others tell the story of an initiative that brought important new ideas and ways of working to both the START agencies and the broader SAA field. Whether these changes led to START’s ultimate goal – engaging more people in the arts – remains unknown because START grantees and the foundation were unable to measure the results of their work. But if it can be acknowledged that there are milestones along the route to greater arts participation, the grantees reached a number of them.

MANY SAAS CHANGED IN WAYS INTENDED TO PROMOTE PARTICIPATION-BUILDING

In July 2009, representatives of all 13 START SAAs were asked to complete a 20-question online survey about the initiative. Representatives from 11 responded, and their answers suggest that one of the signature achievements of START was that it spurred agencies to reorient their work and place new emphasis on building arts participation in their states in ways that continue to this day:

- A large majority of the agencies (82 percent of the responding SAAs) said START had prompted them to fund “new grant programs aimed specifically at boosting participation.”
- Close to three quarters (73 percent) rewrote “one or more program descriptions to require grantees to include participation-building as a goal.”
- Ten of the 11 agencies that responded to the survey said that that because of the initiative they had “required some or all grantees to report on their grants’ effect on building participation.”
- Two-thirds of the agencies altered staff responsibilities to stress participation.

In some states, the changes touched grant programs agency-wide. New Jersey’s SAA, for example, not only introduced a “Building Arts Participation” grant program, but also began to weigh participation-building in all grant areas, including the largely freed-from-strings operating support grants that arts groups covet,¹² says Steve Runk, executive director of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

¹² The application for the Council’s general operating support grant, which generally commits the council to three years of funding for the grantee arts organization, says that candidates will be evaluated on criteria including “active efforts to identify and remove barriers to building broader, more diverse audiences and deeper arts experience.” Applicant organizations are asked to submit a narrative that discusses three issues: “mission/history,” “artistry and programming,” and “public benefit and access.” Among the questions candidates are told to respond to in this last area are, “how does the organization identify, measure and document its public benefit?” Applicants are also asked to “state the organization’s established goals for broadening, deepening and/or diversifying that participation and reach, as well as any specific efforts and strategies undertaken or planned in those regards;” to describe “any efforts to eliminate barriers to participation and to increase access for and outreach to underserved communities;” and to answer “what other barriers to participation (economic, geographic, cultural, linguistic, physical, transportation, perceptual, etc.) has the organization identified, and what strategies are in place to overcome them?” *Organizational Grants: Guidelines and Applications, 2009-2010*, New Jersey Council on the Arts, pp. 23 - 24. <http://www.njartscouncil.org/pdfs/Grants-OrgGuidelines.pdf>

For some START SAAs, one approach for building participation involved reaching out to smaller arts groups that had potential to tap new audiences but lacked sophisticated grant-writing machinery. After the South Carolina SAA simplified its grant application to model it on tax preparation software that emphasizes fact over narrative, smaller arts organizations became “as competitive” for grants as larger counterparts better equipped to devote time and effort to lengthy prose, according to May. Whether such changes succeeded in substantially shifting SAA funding from other priorities to participation-building remains unknown, but two-thirds of survey respondents did report that a greater proportion of their agency budgets had been devoted to arts participation in recent years than prior to START. It’s also clear

These accomplishments are all the more notable because they did not happen easily.

that grantees took the participation-building ideas of the *RAND Framework* seriously, as evidenced by the frequent mentions on SAA websites today of agency dedication to “broadening,” “deepening,” and “diversifying” participation.

These accomplishments are all the more notable because they did not happen easily. For one thing, with the *RAND Framework* Wallace gave START grantees a set of ideas about how arts groups could build participation – but little guidance on what government funders could do to prod arts groups to take these actions. This confusion surfaces in the survey, where 9 of the 11 respondents indicated that the initiative’s goals were, at first, not completely clear to them. “That was a place where the learning design might have been better planned,” says one informed observer of START.

In addition, the changes did not occur without resistance, especially from arts organizations accustomed to grant-making tilted heavily toward artistic merit, with little consideration of matters like participation. Combs, the former executive director of the Kentucky Arts Council, recalls the friction that developed when the council introduced grant guidelines that asked arts groups to report on such matters as their impact on their communities and how they were reaching their audiences. “They felt we shouldn’t ask [such] questions, that they were beyond reproach,” says Combs, who today heads South Arts, representing SAAs from nine southern states. “... It didn’t make us heroes at all.”

START TRAINING AND LEARNING LEFT A POSITIVE IMPRINT ON THE SAAs

By establishing a vibrant “learning community” of SAA grantees, START schooled a significant portion of the nation’s state arts agencies. When asked to rate the aspects of START that had had the most significant impact on them on a scale of “1” (“not at all significant”) to “6” (“extremely significant”), the survey respondents gave some of their highest marks to the initiative’s education endeavors. “Learning about and discussing what ‘building participation’ in the arts means” earned an average score of 5.8, while “learning from other START grantees” earned a 5.6, as did “Mark Moore’s teachings on public value.”¹³ In a typical answer to a

¹³ In fact, the only aspect of START that surpassed learning opportunities for impact on SAAs was the START grant itself, respondents said.

question about what worked best in START, Lori Meadows, executive director of the Kentucky Arts Council, replied: “The training; reading; opportunity to meet with the ‘thinkers and doers;’ time spent working with our peers in other agencies. We continue to use what we learned through the START initiative and what we learned allowed us to make some incredible changes in our agency.”

In addition, some grantees have gone on to adapt START learning techniques for their own use. The New Jersey State Council on the Arts, for example, has created a “community of learning and best practice,” in which arts organizations meet regularly to discuss what might be holding people back from taking part in the arts in the state and to develop ideas for removing those barriers. The Massachusetts Arts Council has applied other “learning community” principles to its work; it requires for instance, that at least two staff members from arts organizations participate in Council training programs so that the ideas and information that emerge have a better chance of taking hold in the organizations. The Council has also developed training programs that run for extended periods, so participants can try out what they’ve learned and then bring their real world challenges back to the group for brainstorming.

Furthermore, teaching and learning about participation went beyond SAA offices. Going into the initiative, many SAAs said they intended to use a portion of Wallace funding to educate arts groups about engaging more people in the arts, and according to the survey, the agencies did just that: all respondents reported having “provided more or better training on building arts participation to arts organizations.”

THE AGENCIES PUT PUBLIC VALUE IDEAS INTO EFFECT

It’s hard to overstate the influence of the public value teachings on the SAAs, especially in invigorating the agencies’ responsiveness to state residents and government decision-makers. Fully 100 percent of respondents said that as a result of START’s emphasis on public value, they had “worked more actively to communicate with state legislators, the governor and/or other state government officials about the importance of the arts.” And 10 out of 11 said they had “increased efforts to communicate with the public about the value of arts participation,” a finding clear from even the most cursory visit to the agencies’ websites today. In early 2010, North Carolina’s, for example, announced a survey “to seek the opinions of New Hanover County and Wilmington-area residents on the role of the arts in community life and the importance of an arts council to the region;” Ohio’s invited readers to post stories on the SAA website about what the arts meant to them; and Arizona’s featured photographs from the latest Arizona Arts Congress in Phoenix, an annual event at the state capitol where “the value and impact of public funding for the arts and arts policy are discussed and debated between legislators and arts advocates.”

Moore, the Harvard professor, recalls that at first, many SAAs rejected his exhortation that they become a louder voice on the public and political stage. But eventually, they embraced the idea. Perhaps the best known example comes from Montana, where in the late 1990s fiscal conservatives in the state legislature and others opposed to public funding for the arts had led an effort to eliminate the state’s arts agency altogether. Influenced by START, Montana

Arts Council officials launched a “listening tour” throughout the state to meet legislators face to face, learn what they valued and then connect those values to the arts and creativity.¹⁴ These activities eventually built legislative support for the agency’s work, but the sequencing was key: listen first. In Arizona, the SAA produced “52 Reasons to Support the Arts,” a deck of cards, each sleekly illustrated to give a different argument for the benefits of culture. And when, in the middle of START, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts faced a state budget crisis so severe that the agency’s dissolution became a real possibility, the SAA joined forces with other threatened agencies in a loud and persistent public relations campaign that ultimately saved the arts council.¹⁵

It’s also important that the public value teachings had impact beyond the 13 START grantees. The word was spread in a number of ways. Arts Midwest published Moore’s co-authored book *Creating Public Value Through State Arts Agencies*, for example, while the group that represents SAAs throughout the country – the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies – has

incorporated public value teachings in its trainings for SAA staff and trustees, and in its publications.¹⁶ Today, you “can’t go in a room with SAA leaders and not hear about ‘public value,’” says Radich, of the Western States Arts Federation. START, he said, made “a fundamental difference in a field that had a real need.”

Today, you “can’t go in a room with SAA leaders and not hear about ‘public value.’” START made a “fundamental difference in a field that had a real need.”

Arlynn Fishbaugh, executive director of the Montana Arts Council, sums things up this way: “Mark Moore totally changed our lives. It was his public value work that was transformational for the entire state arts agency field in America.”

THE EFFECT OF THE SAAS’ START EFFORTS ON BUILDING ARTS PARTICIPATION IS UNCLEAR

A major shortcoming of the initiative was its failure from the outset to find ways to gather credible evidence for whether or not SAAs singly and collectively succeeded in accomplishing START’s ultimate goal: building arts participation.

Eighty-two percent of the SAA respondents said they had obtained evidence of changes in arts participation in their states since START had gotten under way. But fully two-thirds

¹⁴ Lowell, *The Arts and State Government*, pp. 25-31.

¹⁵ Mark H. Moore and Gaylen Williams Moore, *Creating Public Value Through State Arts Agencies*, Arts Midwest, 2005, p. 44. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/ArtsParticipation/Pages/creating-public-value.aspx>

¹⁶ It should be noted, however, that several people interviewed for this report – SAA staffers and outside observers of START – believe that more could have been done to disseminate lessons to the field, through such means as pairing START SAAs with non-START agencies in a kind of mentorship program.

also found the evidence they had gathered was either “not very” or “not at all” reliable. Among the agencies that sought to track arts participation, there were few discernable patterns of performance. One SAA reported “anecdotal” evidence that despite budget cuts at the SAA, arts participation in the state had been “good.” Another said that trends it was watching indicated declining participation in the arts. Still another said that because it had changed the definition of what constituted the arts, comparisons between now and the past were difficult to make.

This dearth of “metrics” comes as little surprise given how daunting the task of performance measurement can be, especially in the arts. Difficulties range from the expense and time it consumes to political tensions over what should be quantified and assessed.¹⁷ Still, Moore says that one of his disappointments in working with the agencies was that they had been unable to make more progress in trying to assess the impact of their work. Such measurements are a key to discerning strengths and weaknesses of government efforts and then correcting the uncovered problems, he believes. They also could help the agencies press a stronger case for themselves with decision-makers. “Until you get there,” Moore says, “you are going to have trouble exerting much leverage.”

Moreover, the lack of measurements left Wallace and the field with a serious hole in considering the outcomes of START. In interviews, several Wallace senior staff members remarked that, in retrospect, the foundation hadn’t focused enough attention on metrics when it designed START. A few years into the initiative, as part of a larger annual effort at Wallace to assess the foundation’s overall effectiveness, Wallace began to collect information about START SAAs’ efforts to increase participation and improve the agencies’ ability to deliver public value for their states. The foundation looked at such things as whether the grantees perceived that political support for their work had increased, whether START agencies had adopted performance measures tied to participation and whether there had been changes in annual legislative appropriations to the arts agencies. But this late-in-the game attempt to systematically track results didn’t yield a reliable accounting of progress¹⁸ and remained unpopular among START agencies because they didn’t see the connection with their work. One Wallace senior staff member today laments the inadequacy of the belated attempts at performance measurement: “We weren’t using [reliable] measures, so there may have been fabulous benefits to START, but we don’t know now, because we had no [adequate] metrics,” the staff member says.

¹⁷ Moore and Moore, *Creating Public Value Through State Arts Agencies*, pp. 90-91.

¹⁸ Problems ranged from questions about the validity of data on attendance at arts events to difficulty interpreting trends in legislative funding.

LESSONS

START showed, for starters, that a foundation could successfully carry out the task, then new to Wallace, of working effectively with a government agency. START also demonstrated the potential power and influence of foundation-established “learning communities.” But START also highlighted the difficulties that can emerge when certain essentials in design and implementation of an initiative are insufficiently attended to, namely mapping out the steps of an initiative from outset to goal; developing intermediate and long-term measurements to determine what progress is being made; understanding the “readiness” of grantees to tackle the assignment; building in adequate time for an initiative to gel; and planning graceful initiative conclusions.

A FOUNDATION CAN WORK SUCCESSFULLY WITH GOVERNMENT

In 2000, when the foundation was shaping START, the idea of Wallace’s supporting public agencies was untested and Wallace staff members harbored doubts about it. They wondered, among other things, if politics or bureaucracy would hamper progress or if philanthropic giving to government could be viewed as an intrusion of private agendas on public institutions. The ways of government did end up interfering with START sometimes, as Wallace learned when state budget-cutting proposals began to divert grantees’ attention. But fears that the initiative might be criticized as a private encroachment onto government territory proved unfounded in this case and START succeeded in assisting a group of agencies that wanted help. “One overarching lesson is that public-private collaborations can work and can be tremendously influential, more influential than the public sector or private sector by itself,” says Kelly Barsdate, chief program and planning officer for the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.

A “LEARNING COMMUNITY” CAN BE AN INVALUABLE PART OF AN INITIATIVE

As noted above, survey respondents singled out the “learning community” as one of START’s chief accomplishments. Perhaps even more important is that the START training had influence beyond the 13 SAAs, and the ideas have spread to the field in general. The statewide arts “listening tour,” for example, is now common among SAAs, according to Barsdate.

One wholly unexpected result of START was its development of a highly effective approach for executive education, one that now serves as a model for Harvard as it designs training programs for other groups, according to Moore. Key aspects of that model include:

- replacing lengthy sessions with numerous shorter meetings over a longer period of time, in recognition of the fact that people often learn best through repeated exposure to the same idea;
- requiring teams spanning different levels within the organization (executive directors, managers, board members) to take part in training, because the bigger the number and the higher up the participants, the more likely the knowledge will be taken back to and spread throughout the organization;

- developing conference-call sessions organized around carefully thought-out lessons and presentations. This gives budget-conscious public agencies a low-cost alternative to the expensive, face-to-face consulting common in the corporate world and helps keep the learning going between in-person meetings;
- complementing discussion of theory with discussion of current agency work and using the latter to give the theory meaning and usefulness.

David Fraher, who as executive director of Arts Midwest, was intimately involved in planning START’s training, adds another item to the list: demanding much of the participants. “We really made people work,” he recalls. “They had to think hard to participate in this program.”

INITIATIVES NEED A MAP AND MEASURES

START suffered from the lack of an explicitly stated strategy, or “theory of change,” that mapped out the goals of the initiative, what Wallace support would do to advance those goals, the expected results, and how the foundation and the grantees would measure progress. During START’s heyday, the development of such theories of change was not yet standard procedure at Wallace. The result was that certain important questions remained unexamined in detail, among them how much clout SAAs might reasonably be expected to

exercise over arts organizations, given the relatively small proportion of public funding to the arts compared to private funding.

“The START work would have benefitted from a mid-course, strategic discussion.”

Moreover, when START seemed to drift from an emphasis on partici-

pation to an emphasis on public value, foundation staff members had little grounding from which to examine what the shift meant and to determine whether it was a positive development or a detour from the core goals of the initiative that demanded a timely, effective response. “The START work would have benefitted from a mid-course, strategic discussion about the aims of the initiative and its success measures that in retrospect might have led either to a course correction to link it more closely to participation-building or confirm that the broader aim of creating public value was sufficient,” one Wallace senior staff member says. “But as it was, we were stuck in no-man’s land.”

The lack of a theory of change hurt in another way, too, because once public value ideas and activity unexpectedly stepped in, charting progress – a tricky business under the best of circumstances for an initiative – became close to impossible. What along the change-chain was to be tracked: Whether the SAAs improved their public management skills? Whether this led to new or different agency practices? Whether these changes caused arts organizations to work harder to broaden, deepen and diversify their audiences? Whether any of this resulted in more people taking part in the arts?

This was frustrating for a foundation that has become increasingly determined to secure hard evidence of the effectiveness of its initiatives. But it was also frustrating for START partici-

pants, at least one of whom came away with the impression that Wallace lost interest in the initiative after concluding that its effects could not be quantified. “Because there wasn’t a lot of ‘wow, look at these numbers!’ immediately, I think the foundation didn’t know what to do with it,” said one SAA staff member who took part in START.

START’s unexpected turns also slowed and changed the direction of RAND’s commissioned research, which was to have been completed by 2005. Originally planned as six short reports documenting SAA participation-building efforts and identifying “best practices,” the research ended up looking at SAAs in general, documenting their history, analyzing their situation and offering suggestions for possible future directions. Ultimately, four RAND publications were published, the last in November 2008. Works in the series have been requested by, among others, SAAs looking for training materials for their boards. And the third report in the series, *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement and State Arts Policy*, has become the Wallace website’s most downloaded arts publication, an influential exploration of how public and private institutions and policy can support greater appreciation of the arts among more people, ultimately boosting arts participation.

ASSESSING GRANTEE “READINESS” FOR AN INITIATIVE MATTERS

Wallace did not fully grasp what, or how much, SAA managers needed to learn in order to lead change at their agencies. If there had been a detailed assessment early on of SAA “readiness” to re-examine and re-order agency priorities, with all the political difficulties that might entail, foundation senior staff members might have been less surprised when public value training, with its emphasis on political management skills, seemed to pull START in a new direction. “I think I didn’t appreciate that the career paths for people who end up in these jobs do not include the kind of organizational development, change management, strategic planning concepts you might have in MBA programs or similar programs,” says one Wallace senior staff member. In retrospect, this staff member believes that the training “might have been a necessary precursor to the kind of change we were looking for,” rather than a detour.

CHANGE TAKES TIME

Recognition of the SAAs’ readiness for this kind of work would also have given Wallace a more realistic idea of how many years START would need to be successful. A number of SAA officials interviewed for this report remarked that change did not take hold in their institutions after one “aha!” moment. In North Carolina, for example, it was one step for staff members who attended the Wallace training sessions to learn and fully absorb the material, and another to pass the lessons along to colleagues back home so the agency as a whole could change. “I think that’s the biggest lesson of all: that change takes forever,” says Vitiello of the North Carolina Arts Council. “There has to be a constant reinforcing long-term, ‘we believe this.’”

Moreover, an expectation that in a multi-year venture something unexpected – such as recession – was bound to occur and affect grantees might have led to greater equanimity at the foundation about the initiative’s pace.

INITIATIVES BENEFIT FROM GRACEFUL PARTINGS

The last of the SAAs' START projects was to have ended in August 2006, but none of the 13 SAAs finished on time, and in at least three states, grant work was continuing in 2009. The primary reason for the delay was likely START's unforeseen road bumps, such as the time required to insert RAND Framework ideas into grantee projects, the toll the recession took on SAA managers' attention, and the time and energy the SAAs needed to devote to shaping agency work around public value. One result of the staggered (and extended) completion dates may have been the sense, reported by a few grantees, that the initiative ended for them without an appropriate feeling of closure. "It felt like it sort of fizzled," is how one START participant puts it. Some of the START grantees were clearly looking for a stronger foundation acknowledgement of the significance of their efforts.

In the end, no one could produce firm evidence that the hard work of these START grantees got more people from more diverse backgrounds to spend more time more deeply engaged in the arts. But in 13 small state offices from Trenton, New Jersey to Olympia, Washington, public servants who set out almost a decade ago to change how they do business so that the arts might become a bigger part of people's lives believe START made a difference. "If we asked the staff in 1998, 'who are you here to serve,' probably a lot would have said, 'arts organizations, artists, and schools doing a good job of arts education,'" says May. "Now you'd hear, 'we are here to serve the people of South Carolina and make it possible for them to enjoy the benefits of the arts in their communities.'" ■

APPENDIX A: THE 13 START SAAs: ORIGINAL GRANT GOALS AND STRATEGIES¹

STATE ARTS AGENCY	GRANT AMOUNT	PROGRAM SUMMARY AND GOALS	PROGRAM STRATEGIES
ARIZONA COMMISSION ON THE ARTS	\$500,000	The Arizona Commission on the Arts will increase knowledge and understanding of the research, critical thinking, trends and practices that foster cultural participation both among its internal board and staff, as well as among groups and individuals participating in its programs. Enhanced knowledge will enable the board, staff and peer consultants to better communicate the value of investing in arts participation to policymakers and the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and consultants conduct an agency assessment. • Train staff, peer consultants and practitioners. • Focus annual conferences on the theme of participation. • Provide funding for some trainees' new ideas. • Publish case studies.
CALIFORNIA ARTS COUNCIL	\$500,000	The California Arts Council will create an Arts Marketing Institute that will promote audience participation through research, technical assistance and information dissemination. This process will lead to the adoption of effective strategies to manage the growth of new arts centers/performing venues in relation to their audience potential and revision of grant guidelines to require applicants to define strategies to increase participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with other state agencies to research arts audiences and resources to create a statewide cultural map. • Convene six regional meetings about participation and an annual statewide marketing conference. • Conduct an annual publicity campaign to promote visibility of the arts.
CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON THE ARTS	\$500,000	The Connecticut Commission on the Arts will enhance practices for building participation through a new pilot program involving partnerships with 24 social service agencies, 40 arts organizations and 20 schools. The new program, titled Urban Arts Initiative will improve staff training on participation building, create a user manual for arts organizations, establish benchmarks for the effectiveness of arts groups in building participation and create a web page documenting and dissemination lessons on effective practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create benchmarks for assessing participation among grantees. • Create arts professional training for benchmarks. • Design and implement a professional development program for participation building. • Develop roster of high quality participation building mentors and technical assistant providers. • Create Urban Arts Initiative web page. • Conduct annual conferences for arts managers on participation building.
KENTUCKY ARTS COUNCIL	\$500,000	The Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) will work...with the state's local and regional arts organizations to develop new standards and practices that enhance the capacity of the state's arts organizations to expand participation in the arts. KAC will invest in new research to better understand state participation in the arts, staff training and leadership development to increase knowledge and application of best participation-building practices. Documentation and dissemination of best practices for building participation will take place through statewide conferences, the internet and publications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review an assessment of all arts council funding programs. • Establish a set of best practices for arts participation for organizational support programs. • Train council staff in assessment model based on best practices. • Create new grants category for new projects to increase participation in the arts. • Establish an annual best practices training course for grant seekers. • Document and distribute results via statewide conferences, expanded web communications and print media. • Create and maintain a new database system to collect statewide participation data.

¹ The information in this chart comes from each START state arts agency's original grant agreement. Over the course of the multi-year grant period, some of the SAAs' goals and strategies changed from what was initially specified.

STATE ARTS AGENCY	GRANT AMOUNT	PROGRAM SUMMARY AND GOALS	PROGRAM STRATEGIES
MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL	\$900,000	The Massachusetts Cultural Council will work with its network of 160 statewide local cultural councils to implement grantmaking standards and practices that enhance participation in the arts. Working with partners such as the Nonprofit Finance Fund and the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Project, the agency will enhance technical assistance for arts organizations, improve statewide research on participation and create a comprehensive toolkit for arts managers on effective participation building.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a survey of cultural organizations to establish baseline data on existing arts participation. • Conduct a comprehensive literature review on effective practice for building participation. • Establish a statewide advisory committee to assist in project planning. • Carry out an organizational capacity-building assessment to identify existing needs and resources in participation building. • Work with Nonprofit Finance Fund and the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Project to establish capitalization needs for state cultural organizations. • Implement staff training program to enhance understanding and practical knowledge of participation building. • Create a professional development series to train local cultural council staff on effective participation building strategies.
MINNESOTA STATE ARTS BOARD	\$1,100,000	The Minnesota State Arts Board will partner with Minnesota's 11 regional arts councils and arts organizations across the state to implement programs that will bring the arts to new audiences, enrich the experience of current audiences and foster the exchange of participation-building strategies and techniques. The arts board will coordinate leadership training for its staff and the directors of the regional arts councils, refine and reinforce its standards for monitoring audience development efforts, and revise program guidelines and reporting systems to gather more detailed information about arts audiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate leadership training for arts board staff and regional arts council directors. • Conduct 14 training workshops for leaders of 250 arts organizations. • Revise arts board and regional arts council guidelines to reflect refined standards for monitoring audience development efforts. • Make small grants to participating organizations to design and implement participation-building projects. • Publish and distribute information about participation-building best practices. • Convene a meeting of all participating organizations to plan future statewide participation-building strategies.
MISSISSIPPI ARTS COMMISSION	\$700,000	The Mississippi Arts Commission will conduct research on current and potential arts audiences, for-profit cultural resources and the practices of arts organizations to identify and operate new grantmaking strategies that will best help grow participation. Funded activities will include review of best practices in participation building, examination of participation in Mississippi, assessment of arts organizations current expertise, study of the commercial arts industry, analysis of the arts commission's current strategies and development and implementation of grantmaking and training programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research on arts audiences and amateur artists in Mississippi to develop grant programs that enhance arts participation and strengthen the quality of amateur work. • Conduct research on the state's commercial arts industry and its potential to develop grant programs that form partnerships between nonprofit and for-profit arts groups in efforts to grow participation. • Analyze best practices in participation building and arts organizations current levels of expertise to develop and implement training programs to boost their skills.

STATE ARTS AGENCY	GRANT AMOUNT	PROGRAM SUMMARY AND GOALS	PROGRAM STRATEGIES
MONTANA ARTS COUNCIL	\$500,000	The Montana Arts Council (MAC) will revise and expand current grant programs, provide training opportunities for grantees and other groups, and publish and distribute case studies of participation-building efforts of five grantee organizations. The arts council will involve members of the Montana state legislature as proposal review panelists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise grant program review criteria to emphasize lasting partnerships among community organizations, tribal groups, for-profit partners, religious and service organizations and artists and arts organizations. • Distribute multi-year grants for up to 15 organizations to expand participation by enhancing public programs, building capacity and strengthening community partnerships with businesses and community organizations. • Select five participating organizations to serve as demonstration sites, sharing their experiences with colleagues at annual meetings, forums and workshops."
NEW JERSEY STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS	\$900,000	The New Jersey State Council on the Arts will analyze audience data, implement new information gathering and analysis systems, provide technical assistance for arts organizations, refine its policies and evaluation criteria, and refine and expand grant programs to increase their impact on public participation in the arts. The goal of this grant is to create more effective governmental arts agencies on the state and local level, that support a wider array of programs that engage more diverse people in arts activities that have a deeper impact on their lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize planning process with the state's 21 county arts agencies and 7 regional folk arts centers. • Implement new systems of audience information gathering and analysis through grant reports and independent research. • Provide professional development opportunities to improve board and staff skills at NJSCA, its partner organizations and arts groups statewide. • Review current funding programs and evaluation procedures to emphasize effective use of valid data to set better standards and clearer criteria. • Design and implement an annual program of participation-focused grant support to county arts agencies.
NORTH CAROLINA ARTS COUNCIL	\$1,000,000	The North Carolina Arts Council will strengthen its capacity, and that of partner arts groups and local arts councils, to increase and enhance local arts participation. Arts providers will receive training, financial support and technical assistance to adopt and practice new standards for engaging audiences and participants. These standards will also be thoroughly integrated into the grant-making policies, behaviors and practices of the North Carolina Arts Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six consultants will be trained to provide technical assistance to a target group of 50 arts organizations. • Participating arts organizations will attend a two-day training session. • After they receive training, the arts organizations will be eligible for implementation and technical assistance • North Carolina arts funders will be convened to share information and promote participation efforts. • A culminating meeting of all participants will be held and made available to arts professionals statewide via teleconference. • The North Carolina Arts Council will revise its guidelines, report forms, data collection efforts and staff structure to reflect its core value of promoting participation.

STATE ARTS AGENCY	GRANT AMOUNT	PROGRAM SUMMARY AND GOALS	PROGRAM STRATEGIES
OHIO ARTS COUNCIL	\$1,100,000	<p>The Ohio Arts Council will conduct research, disseminate the findings of current reports, expand and enhance grant programs and provide technical assistance to arts groups to increase public access to high-quality cultural experiences. The council will evaluate and revise its programs to reflect the findings of the recent research, The State of the Arts Report 2000. This report shows that many citizens participate in arts and cultural activities through non-arts organizations such as faith-based institutions and community festivals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create effective statewide strategies for building participation through implementation of recent research and staff training. • Develop, test and deploy online tools and resources to bolster the organizational capacity of smaller arts organizations and link them with online professional development workshops, classes, funding opportunities, periodicals and other resources. • Enhance the Community Development Initiative that helps connect communities' arts activity to civic and economic resources. • Develop a new grant program that provides support to regional programs that directly address findings from The State of the Arts Report 2000. Funded projects may include community-wide arts marketing and promotion efforts or projects that build strong relationships between arts groups and school districts.
SOUTH CAROLINA ARTS COMMISSION	\$800,000	<p>The South Carolina Arts Commission will increase its capacity, and that of arts organizations throughout the state, to engage and involve new participants in the arts by conducting research and disseminating the results, offering training programs, revising its programs and guidelines, providing direct support for two or three demonstration projects, and documenting and disseminating case studies of successful participation-building efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and revise agency practices to improve public access, deepen understanding of and connections with various constituencies and promote broader participation in the arts throughout the state. • Develop a learning community among arts organizations participating in training workshops by maintaining regular telephone contact, frequent site visits and an e-mail listserv. • Support several long-term Whole Community participation initiatives that grow out of collaborations among organizations that participate in training workshops. • Conduct research into South Carolina arts audiences and engage consulting expertise to create a participation curriculum for arts providers that will be offered at training workshops during years one, two and three.
WASHINGTON ARTS COMMISSION	\$500,000	<p>The Washington State Arts Commission will develop, implement and assess the impact of new and expanded grant programs that increase arts participation in currently underserved communities. The commission will strengthen its skills and capacity by developing new tools and criteria for measuring arts participation. Documented results of this program will be used to justify requests for budget increases from the state legislature.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a new grant program called Community Initiative Projects that will support approximately eight demonstration projects in communities underserved by the arts. • In addition to distributing planning and implementation grants, Community Initiative Projects will provide technical assistance, leadership development and evaluation resources to participating arts organizations. • Enhance the current Project Support Program to include grants for arts programs in underserved communities. • Analyze and document the results of funded projects and impact of the programs on the Washington State Arts Commission.



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