

The Arts and Humanities in Public Life

Remarks on the Role of Foundations in Cultural Policy Development

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In 1997, The Pew Charitable Trusts began developing a new focus in our national grantmaking program. Concerned about the lack of a strong cultural policy infrastructure, yet heartened by disparate efforts to establish one, we sought to seize the moment, identify suitable partners and build a sustainable cultural policy community that would strengthen public and private support for the arts in the next century. In keeping with the Trusts' overall mission, our interest is in domestic, not international, cultural policy concerns. And our interest in embarking on a program dealing with policy issues is in helping and supporting nonprofit cultural organizations and working artists, although we anticipate directing some of our efforts to learning more about the interactions among commercial, nonprofit, and unincorporated associational cultural activities.

The Trusts' overall goal is to develop the capacity of the cultural community to influence public and private policies on its own behalf and to assure that our nation's cultural resources are sustainable and contribute to the health of our democratic society. Why should we do this? Since 1989, discussions about the role and contributions of the arts and humanities have been polarized and controlled by a minority of policy makers who strongly opposed funding for the federal cultural agencies or, indeed, any government support for culture. We have watched with frustration the inability of the cultural community to articulate its values, its contributions, even to define itself in a persuasive way to policy makers and the public. There is no longer any kind of consensus about how cultural organizations and creative individuals should be supported and sustained. We have neither adequate research nor adequate communications tools and skills to make the case forcefully for culture. Existing data and advocacy capacity have been deployed in fragmentary ways. Until recently, cultural organizations have not been challenged to identify, document, and defend their contributions to the health of their communities.

Consequently, they lack the tools to assess those contributions in ways that are both useful to policy makers and capture their depth and quality by going beyond mere quantitative measurements. Pew, like other philanthropies, has been challenged in recent years by the vast increase in both the extent and complexity of the social needs we face and attempt to address. The pressure on philanthropic resources is enormous. Therefore we have placed increasing value on strategic focus in our grantmaking. Indeed, each of our programs confronts the same kinds of questions, when competing for the institution's

resources, that must be answered in justifying any policy decision:

- What do we want to accomplish through our grantmaking strategies?
- Have we correctly identified a demonstrable need for philanthropic investment?
- Can we apply enough resources to reach a solution?
- Do we know what success will look like, and will we be able to recognize it if we get there?

As with all foundations, what we can do is limited by our resources. Our national program is 40% of our overall cultural grantmaking budget, about \$10 million per year. Given this reality, we have decided that the only way we can make a significant contribution to the health of the nonprofit cultural sector at the national level is by getting upstream of the problems faced by individual organizations and attempt to deal with issues and problems for the system as a whole. It is a very short step from starting to think about the systemic issues for culture on the national level, to thinking about policy needs and realizing the woeful underdevelopment of the cultural community's capacity to operate in a policy environment. In order to be better decision makers about our own resources, we need the same things that public policy makers need in considering cultural concerns:

- Information about the subject at hand, through accessible and useful data and research--ideally, trend data.
- A better understanding of the relationship between the supply of and demand for cultural resources, so that we can be more effective in identifying and dealing with gaps and needs.
- A more accurate picture of the overall environment for nonprofit culture, including such issues as increasing diversity of both creators and consumers of culture; revolutions in information and communications technologies; the huge growth of commercial culture and its impact on the nonprofit sector; the extreme professionalization of nonprofit culture in recent years which has alienated it from amateur and participatory activities.
- Finally, an understanding of what it means for cultural organizations to operate in an outcomes-based, accountability-driven policy environment.

Therefore, the Trusts embarked in 1997 on a process of program design that led to the development of a comprehensive strategy for our work going forward. We made three grants in 1998 which we view as basic building blocks to support sustained work in the future: To the Center for Arts and Culture, to create an inventory of cultural policy resources. To the Princeton Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, to support a program of research and convening activities that will also build the capacity of the center itself. And to Americans for the Arts, for a partnership with the Cultural Policy program at Ohio State University to create the National and Local Profiles of Cultural Support. Also, our National Arts Journalism Program, an existing initiative based at Columbia University, has been incorporated into our new strategy, given the important role of the media and arts journalism in any policy infrastructure. It has been

heartening to see the speed at which the developing dialogue about cultural policy in the U.S. has progressed. More and more foundations are dipping their toes into the cultural policy waters, and we hope that some, like the Trusts, will plunge right in.

How will we know if we have succeeded? Currently, daily searches for arts/cultural policy references turn up dozens of international articles, maybe one every quarter, about US cultural policy issues. It may be another five years before we see even preliminary outcomes, but some of the things we'd like to see are:

- reliable data and info--accessible and used--by the cultural community, policy community and media;
- a press more informed about cultural issues and covering them more;
- a network of effective spokespersons who can be mobilized as a rapid response team when critical or threatening issues arise.

Back to the Conference [Agenda](#).