

Chapter 8

Giving to the Visual Arts: What Motivates Individuals

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines various reasons for individuals to donate to the arts, focusing on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Materials from organizations such as the Knight Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts are included to illustrate who sponsors the arts apart from individuals. A variety of donors' interviews are included in this examination to further understand who gives to the arts and what motivates them including reasons such as civic duty, providing education, and other personal reasons.

INTRODUCTION

The visual arts interact with numerous communities across the United States every year. Although many visual arts organizations generate revenue, their earnings alone are not sufficient to continually provide goods and services to their communities. Funding that is not grant based or earned revenue, consists of contributions from donors at all income levels. Some donors receive benefits in return, others do not. If the decision to give is not incentive based, then what makes an individual or household give to a visual arts organization? Aside from financially beneficial extrinsic motivators, donors give to visual arts organizations for intrinsic motivators such as community development, personal advancement, and educational programming.

Although the arts are culturally essential, they regularly struggle to raise sufficient funding in the United States. The arts require sponsorship like any other organization.

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In 2012, the National Endowment for the Arts published a study, “How the United States Funds the Arts,” that consisted of data collected from not-for-profit performing arts groups and museums in the United States from 2006 to 2010. Earned income for these organizations comprises only 40.7% of revenue; grant and endowment based income comprises 14.4% of revenue; contributed income comprises the majority of revenue equaling 44.9%. Contributed income is broken down into six categories with their corresponding contributions as follows (percentages are of total revenue): Federal (1.2%), State (2.2%), Local (3.3%), Corporations (8.4%), Foundations (9.5%), and Individuals (20.3%) (NEA 1). In regards to government funding, Federal contributions are the lowest. Individual giving comprises most of the contributed income.

Federal, State, and local funding comes from taxpayer dollars and is distributed to arts organizations across the United States accordingly. Although taxpayers do not choose directly to sponsor the arts when paying their taxes, their money is used for that purpose indirectly. These three levels of government decide how much funding the arts receive, but the money comes from individual citizens. The Federal government contributes the least because there are numerous organizations across the country, therefore only a small amount can be given to each arts organization. Although their scope is not as broad, state and local funding faces the same challenges as the Federal government. The problem with any government funding for cultural institutions, specifically state funding, is that the “art has to correspond with the observation structures of their sponsors. As a consequence art directors of cultural institutions who are influenced by the code of choice of the state might lose their intrinsic motivations to stage other pieces and forms of art” (Krueger 10). The responsibility of arts organizations to reflect the preferences of those who fund them is not limited to governmental funding, but all forms of contributed income.

Grant and endowment income is earned through individuals or representatives from organizations writing proposals for projects or exhibitions that benefit a community. There are numerous organizations across the country that provide grants for individuals and organizations related to the arts. The Knight Foundation is one of many grant providing organizations that offer funding for arts projects in various cities in the United States. Grant funding is competitive and the writers for these grants must be highly skilled. Many grants deadlines are short and so a well-crafted proposal must be quickly written. Although grants contribute 14.4% of all revenue, they are meant to “complement, and do not replace other means of arts funding” (NEA 3). Different grant providers prefer different types, forms, and audiences of art and so organizations that apply for grants must either cater to the grant provider in order to increase their chances of obtaining funding, or they must seek grant providers who prefer the types of art and programming that the organization offers.

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