

New Knight report: how arts organizations adapted during COVID-19



From Priya Sircar, Knight Foundation <web@knightfoundation.org>
To <sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org>
Reply-To <web@knightfoundation.org>
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Four arts orgs in Philadelphia and Detroit used lessons learned from adaptive capacity training to innovate, thrive

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Dear Stephen,

I'm excited to share with you the stories of four arts organizations that innovated and adapted during the pandemic.

They are among 26 organizations in Detroit and Philadelphia who took part in adaptive capacity training run by EmcArts and supported by Knight Foundation in the fall of 2019. While the timing was coincidental, the training was valuable when COVID-19 arrived a few months later.

Read **Adapting in Crisis: Case Studies of Resilience in the Arts**

- **The Bearded Ladies**, a self-described "experimental cabaret" group from Philadelphia, emerged from the training determined to find radical new ways to connect with the community. Amid the pandemic, they used a 15-foot "Beardmobile" as a mobile theater for community performances -- and as a vehicle to connect with people outside of their circles during the protests for racial justice.
- **RAIR**, or Recycled Artists in Residence, explores and celebrates the artistic potential in urban waste flows. They focused on financial sustainability during the training, only to have to cancel their signature "Trash Bash" fundraiser due to COVID. In response, they live streamed a fundraiser from a Philadelphia-area trash reclamation site, with mystery gift boxes and an online auction replacing their customary silent auction of works by local artists.
- **Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit** conducted a series of "small experiments," such as splitting into small groups to practice, leveraging digital platforms and bringing in virtual mentors and instructors. Because they kept iterating, these small experiments added up to big change for the 30-year-old organization.
- **Planet Ant**, a Detroit performance space and creative hub, emerged from training determined to maintain intimacy amid rapid growth. When COVID-19 made the intimacy of live performances impossible, it invested instead in cameras, lighting and other technology that allowed creators to connect with new audiences from more angles.

Many arts organizations have innovated and adapted during the pandemic; these stories are interesting because they show how adaptive capacity training helped participants learn new approaches for responding to uncertainty, so they could find a way forward rather than getting stuck in the problem. I hope you'll dive into the report, explore the lessons, and share it with your friends and colleagues.

Best,

Priya Sircar
Director/Arts
Knight Foundation

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