STRENGTHENING THE FIELD OF ARTS, CULTURE
AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION THROUGH DM&E

Background for June 7 Webinar

What would it take for the arts and peacebuilding field to develop evaluation strategies that honor both artistic processes and peacebuilding imperatives?

What changes would allow the arts and culture sector to be even more effective than they already are in achieving peacebuilding outcomes? When artists, peacebuilders, funders, policy-makers and researchers consider this question, monitoring and evaluation considerations figure prominently. In an April 25, 2018 Learning Exchange, 13 scholars and practitioners were convened to explore similarities and differences between the monitoring and evaluation approaches of two broad wings of the Arts, Culture, and Conflict Transformation field: arts/arts-for social change and peacebuilding/peacebuilding-and-the-arts. This Learning Exchange was organized by **IMPACT: Imagining Together Platform for Arts, Culture and Conflict Transformation**, a planning initiative based at Brandeis University, funded by the Andrew J. Mellon Foundation, joined by DME for Peace, a program of Search for Common Ground (a global peacebuilding NGO) and Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts that promotes arts and social change.

This document highlights some of the key take-aways from the April 25th learning exchange. As you read them, please consider the following questions:
1) Do these insights and questions resonate with you? What do I agree or disagree with—and why?
2) What should IMPACT and its partners explore in the future in the arts and peacebuilding space – especially in relation to Monitoring and Evaluation?

Bring your reflections to the June 7, 2018 global webinar, hosted by Search for Common Ground's DM&E project.

Preliminary Takeaways from April 25 learning exchange

Similarities in M&E Approaches Between Arts-based social change and Peacebuilding-based Initiatives
- **Similar issues in communities:** Community problems that arts- and peacebuilding-based work seek to transform are often similar.
- **Complexity:** M&E systems need to be responsive to dynamic, complex contexts, and attend to emerging theory on complexity.
- **M&E at multiple levels:** Approaches must consider changes both in people and in systems.
- **Minimizing harm:** The goal of minimizing harm in arts- and peacebuilding-based initiatives needs to be intentionally preserved in M&E activities. Important principles include conflict sensitivity, as well as centering community concerns and priorities in any intervention and evaluation.
- **Focus on building human capacities:** An M&E approach needs to consider changes in people's capacities for imagination, listening, communicating, embracing paradox, and others. In other words, there is a need to understand what's going on in people's heads.
- **Focus on building organizational and community capacities:** An M&E approach needs to address groups' capacities to ask questions of their own practice, and to work collaboratively, to build coalitions, to embrace paradox and complexity, and to think flexibly and creatively.
- **Process is critical:** Much of the potential transformative benefit of both arts and peacebuilding initiatives is in the process—as much or perhaps more than outputs and some outcomes.

Significant Differences and Questions for Moving Forward
- **Emergence.** Both arts-based social change and peacebuilding-based initiatives are characterized by emergence in issues and relationships. However, peacebuilding organizations tend to operate—and evaluate—based on pre-articulated goals and plans. Many initiatives based in the arts prefer for issues and goals to emerge from the practice itself. *Can evaluation questions and protocols be designed to honor the emergent dimensions of arts-based peacebuilding initiatives? Can evaluations be designed to honor both goal-driven and emergent imperatives?*
- **Replicability and scale.** Peacebuilding organizations often ask about replicability and address questions of scale. Arts-based social change organizations tend to value originality and uniqueness of each effort. *Are there aspects of arts-based social change practices that are replicable and scale-able? (Perhaps underlying ethical commitments, such as reciprocity.) Are there examples of excellent arts-based social change practice that respond to concerns about replicability and scale-ability in some ways?*
- **Differing priorities.** Donors to arts-based social change initiatives and to peacebuilding organizations appear to get excited about different factors. *What does this mean for evaluation questions that aim to satisfy both arts and peacebuilding stakeholders? How similar or different is the information that each need to make decisions about their programs?*
- **Accountability versus learning.** Although people based in the arts-for-social-change world and the peacebuilding-and-the-arts world all value evaluations designed for both learning and for accountability, some peacebuilding donors appear to require more frequent, more quantitative reporting. This commitment can supersede evaluations that would be of more use to improve practice. Some funders understand evidence of continuous improvement (learning, inquiry, evaluation) to be a form of accountability. *Through what strategies could practitioners, researchers and evaluators engage donors in conversations about this? [Note: there is a misperception that the arts field doesn't value numbers or quantitative data.]*

Emerging Trends and Bright Spots
- Countering Violent Extremism work is pushing toward greater understanding of how people change, which might validate arts-based social change contributions.
- New insights from Neuroscience are contributing to conflict research.
- Developmental Evaluation is gaining credibility amongst practitioners and donors in this space.
- There is more interest in matching evaluation methodologies to research questions, and embracing a diversity of thought in relation to quantitative and qualitative methods.
- Evaluation approaches are emerging from the creative placemaking arena of the arts field. Theory development is more mature, and there is more emphasis on responsiveness to communities.
- Evaluation frameworks are sometimes being used to look at aspirations vs. realities, especially in terms of community engagement.
- The importance of ethical frameworks is being recognized

IMPACT: Imagining Together Platform for Arts, Culture and Conflict Transformation

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Background Readings
- **IMPACT website**
  http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/peacebuildingarts/impact/index.html

- **IMPACT project description**
  http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/peacebuildingarts/impact/project-description.html

- **IMPACT values statement**
  http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/peacebuildingarts/impact/values-statement.html

Other Readings
- "How Art Works," NEA. https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/How-Art-Works_0.pdf
- "Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change"
  http://www.animatingdemocracy.org/aesthetic-perspectives and "Continuum of Impact"
  http://www.animatingdemocracy.org/continuum-impact-guide Animating Democracy
- John Paul Lederach's *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace,* Oxford University
  Press, 2005.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation of Participatory Theatre for Change, a publication by Rebecca Herrington
  (Search for Common Ground in collaboration with UNICEF)**
  http://www.dmeforpeace.org/resource/monitoring-and-evaluation-of-participatory-theatre-for-change/
- **United States Institute of Peace *Insights* Newsletter: Arts and Peacebuilding**
  https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/08/summer-2015-insights-newsletter
- **Understanding an Enemy Is Like Understanding a Poem: Art and Peace in Theory and Practice** by
  Cynthia Cohen, Brandeis University (attachment)
  Chapter in the forthcoming *Promoting Peace through Practice, Academia and the Arts,* edited by
  Walid Lofty and Cris Toffolo, published by IGI Global]

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