

Key Lessons from the Field of Cultural Innovation

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Table 1: Grants in Focus Area as Compared to Grants in Larger Field of Arts & Community Development 2005-2011

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Purpose of This Review

The time is right for an urgent re-examination from the widest possible perspective, of the role creative expression already plays and could play even further, in driving the social innovations and in building the individual and collective resilience we will need to survive and thrive in an increasingly uncertain future.

Clare Cooper, Mission Models Money

The primary purpose of this knowledge synthesis is to provide the Rockefeller Foundation staff with a broader context for considering the findings of an independent evaluation of the Foundation's Cultural Innovation Fund (CIF). The synthesis has been designed to help key audiences understand the state of play, common concepts, challenges, questions, and key lessons from arts organizations who are already engaging innovative strategies and practices.

We selected 26 resources as the basis for our knowledge synthesis (see Annex 2). The final set consists of a combination of evaluations, case studies, white papers, and conference proceedings produced by arts organizations, private foundations funding the arts, evaluators of arts programming, government agencies funding the arts, and think-tanks. These reports represent intentional efforts to share lessons learned from programs and funding initiatives that focus on cultural innovation and its relationship to community in terms of engagement, resilience, and change. They aim to move beyond a mere descriptive analysis of programs by trying to understand the impact those programs generated. In addition, there are several resources in the knowledge base that serve to provide context for these lessons in terms of understanding the larger field of resilience studies and new approaches for evaluating innovation more generally. With the exception of two resources all of the resources can be accessed and downloaded at <http://artsinnovation.issuelab.org>. For more information on the process by which these materials were selected, please see Annex 3 (Methodology).

One of the greatest challenges in synthesizing lessons about cultural innovation strategies is the diversity of methodological approaches and levels of analysis used to describe and evaluate related activities. Innovation is described and studied at the level of the individual, the organization, the community, and even at the level of the "ecosystem"; resulting in a fragmented body of knowledge that is challenging to synthesize. Yet this heterogeneity is also reflective of the real diversity in how innovation is expressed throughout the broader cultural system and the full range of activities being funded. While the differing levels of analysis may limit our ability to easily distill concise lessons from this literature, they also mirror the very real complexity and richness of this system.

Lessons

The reports, case studies, and evaluations used for this synthesis were selected on the basis that they describe activities and strategies that address cultural innovations and their relationship to local communities. Yet some of the most valuable lessons drawn from this body of knowledge are those that are focused instead on improving the innovative capacity of arts and culture organizations themselves to innovate rather than on specific community level impacts.

While the adoption of innovative practices are often motivated by the needs of surrounding communities, they are just as often motivated by the need for organizations to adapt to an increasingly dynamic operating environments that threaten organizational health and impact operations. As a result organizations are as often the beneficiaries and targets of innovation as individuals or groups in the larger community.¹

This focus on *designing for organizational adaptability and innovation* dominates the lessons gleaned from this review (see lessons 2, 3, and 4). The review also surfaced key lessons relating to *funding trends and capital needs* in the area of cultural innovation (see lessons 1 and 3) and *the absence of a common language to describe arts innovation* (see lesson 5).

LESSON 1. Foundation funding in the area of cultural innovation is small, but growing.

In order to place this synthesis into a larger context we analyzed foundation grantmaking in the area of cultural innovation over a seven-year period using data from the Foundation Center's grants database. Our initial search criteria included the same keywords that were used to identify relevant literature. We then expanded our search incrementally to show the cumulative number of grants made in this and closely related areas (see Figure 1).

While still small in number in relation to grant making in the arts more generally, foundation grantmaking in the arts with a specific focus on innovation, experimentation, equity, resilience or cultural value has been steadily and incrementally growing over the period reviewed, from 18 in 2005 to 50 in 2011.

Recognizing that grantmakers do not all use the same words and phrases to describe their investments and efforts, and that arts and cultural innovations are often used as strategies within the larger context of community development, we performed an additional search to identify grants made in the larger field of "arts and community development." This resulted in a much larger pool of grants (see Table 1). It is highly likely that this larger group of grants includes many that would be relevant to the kinds of investments and intended impacts that the

¹ It is unclear whether the literature's focus on internal, organizational change is an accurate reflection of where the impact of innovation is actually being felt, or whether it reflects a tendency for evaluations and knowledge products to emphasize organizational (or self) learning over measuring external change.

Rockefeller Foundation is most interested in, but identifying these grants would require a more extensive analysis of the data that was outside the scope of this synthesis.

Figure 1:²

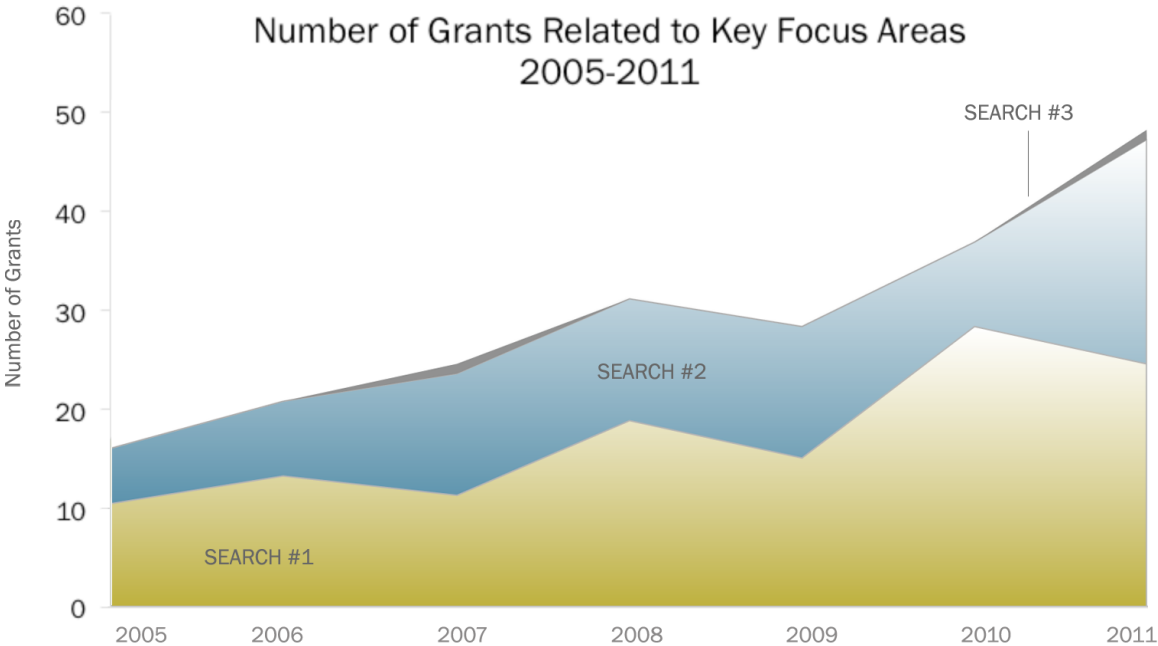


Table 1:

Number of Grants	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Specifically focused on "innovation, equity, resilience," etc. (Search #1)	17	22	26	33	30	39	51
For "arts & community development," in general (Search #3)	471	593	656	791	675	779	712

² Search #1: Grants with a **primary purpose** of the arts that include the following key words in the recipient name or grant description: "innovation", "experiment*", "resilience", "equity", "cultural value", "cultural experience".

Search #2: Additional grants not already found in search 1, with a **primary or secondary purpose** of the arts that include the following key words in the recipient name or grant description: "innovation", "experiment*", "resilience", "equity", "cultural value", "cultural experience".

Search #3: Additional grants not found in searches 1 or 2, **with a primary or secondary purpose of arts and community development** using a broader set of key words: "innovation", "experiment*", "resilience", "equity", "cultural value", "cultural experience", "urbanism", "livability".

LESSON 2. Innovative programming and organizational change at arts organizations are mutually reinforcing.

Many of the challenges that Arts Innovation Fund grantees described concerned the very capacities that the innovation literature suggests are necessary for innovation and creativity. (Rabkin et al., 2012)

The last several years of experimentation and investment in the field of cultural innovation have shown that the skills needed to successfully operate in today's arts and culture sector mirror the core capacities required to innovate with external audiences. The design of arts organizations and the cultivation of their innovative capacity are closely related to external impact and cannot be ignored as simply belonging to the domain of "organizational development".

- Based on their own work as intermediaries and service providers to arts organizations, EmcArts observes how **organizational changes are leveraged to stimulate fresh thinking about organizational values and purpose, subsequently leading to innovations in practice.** In Richard Evans's 2010 report for Grantmakers in the Arts he explains that, "to innovate, organizations have to "resurrect, examine, and then break the frame" created by old assumptions." (Evans, 2010).
- In a 2012 evaluation of its own Arts Innovation Fund the Irvine Foundation **further describes this virtuous cycle; innovations prompt organizational change that often results in organizations becoming more collaborative, less hierarchical,** and better prepared to sustain innovative practices.
- As expected, new organizational developments and newly meditated values can also be quite disruptive to existing dynamics. Both Irvine and EmcArts have found that **supportive services such as strategic coaching are critical in allowing organizations to surmount disruption that accompanies new development and instead embrace creative change.** "Incorporating process facilitation and consulting services into the initiative made the experiences richer and the learning deeper for most grantees...because reflection is an essential element in the process of navigating the new and making change happen" (Rabkin et al., 2012). Traditional consultants and facilitators are identified as possible partners in this process as are "smaller and community-based arts organizations, whose leaders and staffs are veterans of such practices" (Rabkin et al., 2012).
- In a 2011 report from Partners for Livable Communities the authors note that efforts by organizations to truly engage communities in a mutually beneficial relationship can be difficult and may challenge core operating assumptions, disrupt patterns of behavior and programming, and may even mean "becoming involved in political, social, and economic issues in the community often buffeted with turmoil, complex power dynamics, and competing intentions" (Jackson, 2011). As a result, organizations need to develop new skill sets so that they can navigate change effectively.

- Essential skills and capacities mentioned across the literature include: clarity of purpose and a culture of shared values, intentional reflection and strategic flexibility, exposure to and an understanding of alternative business models, situation awareness and mindful of new opportunities, multi-dimensional leadership, strong social networks both internally and externally, transparent communications, diplomacy, collaborative creativity, integrity, humility, agility, courage and a commitment to relevance.

LESSON 3. Promoting and sustaining cultural innovation requires an increased tolerance on the part of funders and practitioners for failure, paired with sufficient risk capital.

If your agenda is innovation, then you have to be about funding failure. If your agenda is excellence, then you're funding the status quo. (Sato, 2007)

Discussions of innovation inevitably lead to considerations of risk and risk tolerance, and a re-envisioned approach to the notion of failure that could help to further refine interventions. However, failure is not often tolerated in the arts and culture sector, as can be seen in the metrics used to evaluate the quality and impact of investments (financial or otherwise). “There are many good ideas, but no tolerance for failure” (Sato, 2007). Many arts and culture organizations are working to sustain their innovative practices while simultaneously managing threats in their operating environments. Consequently they find themselves walking a difficult line between stability and change; a line that requires **an increased tolerance for failure in organizations and funders alike**.

To continue to walk this line **cultural innovation efforts will also need greater financial stability**. Bernholz, Evans, Rabkin et al, Robinson, Sato, and Susan Seifert and Mark Stern all speak to the necessity of risk capital in supporting organizations to innovate.

As part of the effort to better manage and tolerate risk there is also interest among practitioners in understanding how traditional financial planning and the 501c3 business model could evolve to accommodate new forms of [risk] capital and optimize returns on investment. “Innovation should be part of the cost structure of a healthy organization, but resources and an effective business model are prerequisite to that goal” (Sato, 2007).

LESSON 4: Arts organizations that embrace a network mindset and distributed leadership styles are more likely to achieve positive impact.

Embracing a new way of thinking and working that is rooted in shared understanding and an impact orientation to engagement, grantmakers can effectively use the power of networks to grow their own impact as well as that of their grantees. (Monitor 2012)

In addition to an organization’s ability to invite diverse inputs and employ modular approaches, **a critical contributor to its innovative capacity is its own leadership style**. Both translational and distributed leadership styles leverage the power of networks, bringing different constituencies and organizations together, and brokering relationships and activities across

traditional boundaries. This kind of leadership both complements and enables the sort of engagement and experimentation that is at the heart of arts innovation.

A 2012 report commissioned by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation highlights ways in which leaders who can distribute authority and responsibility across the organization “see themselves as part of multiple systems – community, arts and culture, nonprofit, etc. [and] also exercise civic leadership and engage in civic conversations” (Helicon Collaborative, 2012).

In its 2010 report the Opportunity Agenda describes how its own **model of distributed leadership built upon a network of "connectors,"** enhanced the impact of its Immigration Arts and Culture Initiative. “Connectors are an important piece of the social change puzzle. These are the people and organizations that are “bilingual” in art and advocacy. They can connect the right artists with the right advocacy campaigns, and they can affect collaborations that make an impact” (Opportunity Agenda, 2010). The Initiative also supports professional development for immigrant youth as a means of cultivating a more diverse supply of next generation leaders and building critical nodes of networked innovation. This kind of networked strategy, paired with distributed leadership ensures that diverse constituencies and top down centers of power engage meaningfully and on equal footing.

A study commissioned by The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation illustrates ways that even small budget arts organizations can **leverage greater distributed leadership and benefit from increased network connections.** “People must build and use their connections to sources of income and political influence, and must have the social skills necessary to engage others in their arts activities as part of their organizational processes. Because of these connections and access to resources, they can serve as a conduit to other sections of the community” (Grams and Warr, 2003). In its study of the relationship between community leadership, social capital, and resilience the Carnegie UK Trust found that, “effective decision-makers are distinguished not so much by the superior extent of their knowledge as by their recognition of its limitations.” (Wilding, 2011)

There is a strong relationship between distributed leadership, a networked mindset, and innovative capacity. A networked mindset and associated practices can benefit organizations in ways that are closely aligned with the requirements for innovative and adaptive capacity: “weaving social ties, accessing new and diverse perspectives, openly building and sharing knowledge, creating infrastructure for widespread engagement and coordinating resources and action” (Monitor Institute, 2012) are all activities that underpin engaged innovation. While a networked mindset that prioritizes “openness, transparency, relationship building and distributed decision making” (Monitor Institute, 2012), shares the characteristics of innovative organizations.

LESSON 5: The arts and culture field lacks a common language with which to talk about innovation.

Diverse stakeholders operating in the cultural innovation “space” define and talk about their work in very different ways, lacking a common language with which to talk about innovation and describe their activities. While this could be attributed in part to varying contexts and

Context

In addition to the twenty reports that make up the bulk of the knowledge base, and which are focused on innovation in the field of arts and culture, the research team also chose to include several reports that go beyond this specific field of activity. While they represent only a small sampling of the available literature on these topics these reports (Beer 2012, Bernholz 2011, Healy 2012, Kania 2011, and Scarce 2011) offer valuable context for understanding organizational strategies for achieving resilience and sustaining innovation, and context for how we might approach the evaluation of innovative strategies so that we don't undercut the very purpose and intention of efforts like this review.

The following lessons are drawn from those select readings:

Lesson 1: Modular approaches to organizational design can enhance organizational resilience and the capacity for innovation.

Modular systems and processes function more optimally than static systems under changed circumstances, assumptions, or conditions. (Zolli and Healy, 2012)

One of the ways in which organizations are designing for increased resilience and adaptive capacity is by embracing modularity. In their 2012 book on resilience Zolli and Healy describe how a modular approach can enable greater autonomy for a system's constituent parts, promote distributed intelligence, and support organizations' adaptive capacity -- the basis for innovation. According to the authors, modularity can provide organizations with increased flexibility and, by extension, capacity to act responsively as it allows for ongoing reconfiguration and adaptation.

The value of modularity is echoed in Nick Wilding and the Fiery Spirits Community of Practice framework for community resilience. Wilding suggests that those communities of practice that are becoming more resilient, more engaging, and more inclusive are also those that stress the importance of feedback, continuous learning, diversity, and localized infrastructure or modularity.

While the concept of modularity is discussed in several of the reports we reviewed, very few organizations describe intentionally applying the concept when designing their cultural innovation strategies. Yet, organizational efforts to mitigate risk have resulted in behaviors that resemble modular forms, even if unintentionally. For example, participants in the Irvine Foundation's Arts Innovation Fund described to evaluators how, "organizations insulated themselves against the risk of innovation by creating buffers between core programs and experimental projects" resulting in "contained innovations" (Rabkin et al., 2012), which may in practical terms serve some of the same functions as modularity.

Lesson 2: Adaptive organizations are characterized by a diversity of opinions and expertise as well as porous boundaries and a culture of experimentation and re-use.

In this new era, successful organizations will more deeply recognize and engage with the creativity and artistic potential of the larger community and the dominant organizational model will change to one that is porous, open, and responsive. (Evans, 2010)

Organizations that allow for a **diversity of opinions and expertise** and actively encourage idea sharing across organizational, departmental, and disciplinary boundaries are better positioned to implement and sustain innovation. In her 2011 paper on evaluating innovation Lucy Bernholz explains that the unpredictable nature of the “innovative space” requires that organizations engage in a continuous and strategic learning process that allows for cognitive diversity.

We see similar discussions about the importance of diverse inputs and strategic learning in Wilding’s work on community resilience, Zolli and Healy’s discussion of resilience strategies and even in Jane Jacobs seminal work on American cities, “cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”

Lesson 3: Traditional evaluation approaches can inadvertently undermine innovation.

Innovation is by definition amorphous, full of unintended consequences, and a creative, unpredictable process — much like art. (Bernholz, 2011)

It is questionable whether traditional evaluation can produce the kind of actionable insights needed to accelerate learning during the innovation process. A study by Blueprint Research & Design posits, “foundations who apply [standard] formative and summative evaluation approaches to their investments in innovation are not only missing an opportunity to obtain actionable data that increases their chance of success; they are also working at cross-purposes with their own social change investments... **When a formative or summative evaluation approach is applied to an innovation that is still unfolding, it can squelch the adaptation and creativity that is integral to success**” (Bernholz, 2011).

Developmental Evaluation is proposed as an alternative way to evaluate innovation, one that “informs and supports innovative and adaptive development in complex dynamic environments... asking evaluative questions, applying evaluation logic, and gathering and reporting evaluative data to support project, program, product, and/or organizational development with timely feedback.” (Patton, 2011) Lucy Bernholz explains that the five key characteristics that distinguish developmental evaluation from other forms of evaluation are, “the focus of the evaluation (typically on modular components and the system of change as a whole), the intentionality of learning throughout the evaluation, the emergent and responsive nature of the evaluation design, the role and position of the evaluator, and the emphasis on using a systems approach for collecting and analyzing data, and for generating insights” (Bernholz, 2011).

Developmental evaluation's use of real-time data to enhance practice complements the way that feedback loops; audience engagement and incremental adaptation have already been highlighted as strategies for supporting innovative practices.

The Blueprint report also advised that, “**Strategic support for innovation requires a plan to share and promote the adoption of the ideas that are generated.** It is not enough to fund the generation and refinement of new ideas — success requires attention to how they are spread, adopted, adapted, and put into action” (Bernholz, 2011). Success at the larger, system-wide level requires that innovations be spread beyond their originating organization and into the broader community. (The limited number of evaluations available to us for this synthesis only underscores Bernholz's point.)

Conclusions

Our synthesis of 26 reports, case studies, evaluations, and conference proceedings included in this review revealed:

- A body of literature that uses the language of innovation, equity, and resilience but focuses primarily on impacts felt internally by arts organizations that are engaging in pioneering practices;
- Valuable lessons about, and models for, building arts organizations' capacity for innovation and adaptation;
- The need for alternative and more externally focused evaluation practices;
- The need for further synthesis of the additional body of literature that focuses on impacts at the community level but which lies outside the chosen language and conceptual frames used for this knowledge synthesis; and
- The need for broader sharing by grantmakers of the knowledge they gain from grantees.

In addition, the literature's raises some important questions about the larger field of arts innovation, such as:

- What can organizations that employ different language and/or conceptual frames tell us about the convergence of arts, equity, and innovation?
- Is some of what we are learning about organizational resilience applicable (or scalable) to resilience at the community level?
- How can grantmakers and the broader evaluation community support organizations' capacity to measure and understand external impact?

- Given the focus on larger and more established organizations, what can we learn from smaller initiatives that might not be operating at the same scale?
- And finally, how useful are the conceptual frames of innovation, equity, and resilience to organizations in shaping their activities?

Because the CIF's approach to innovation specifically focuses on convergent strategies (i.e. new practices drawn from complementary disciplines) a broader supplementary inquiry would likely yield additional important insights. We encourage a deeper examination of these adjoining domains in the future: art and social practice, arts education, cultural engagement and informal arts participation, arts and social change, social justice and/or civic participation, cultural diversity, cultural democracy, arts and community development, culture centered revitalization, publicly supported cultural equity programs, arts and social capital and social network analysis.

Annex 1: Key Terms and Definitions

These definitions were central to the execution of our search strategy and used to determine whether a knowledge product would be included in this synthesis and our analysis of the larger context for grantmaking in this area.

Innovation: New practices (often drawn from complementary disciplines) to achieve organization's mission and leave more positive social relations in their wake. Innovation is considered "in context," that is — what is innovation for one organization may not be for another. The ultimate impact of innovation is externally focused and intended to improve the conditions for the population(s) an organization serves.

Equity: Equality of access to opportunity (vs. equality of outcome). Equity is improved as a result of organizations operating in innovative ways that generate increased access and new opportunities for poor and vulnerable populations to build social capital by engaging with arts and culture.

Resilience: Ability to withstand, adapt and thrive in response to stress and change. "Change" includes significant shocks to the system; "stress" is ongoing pressure and demand. In the context of the cultural sector the elimination of a particular funding source could be seen as a "change" and adapting to the new operating environment a "stress" that could stimulate thoughtful evolution.

Annex 2: Knowledge Base/Reference List

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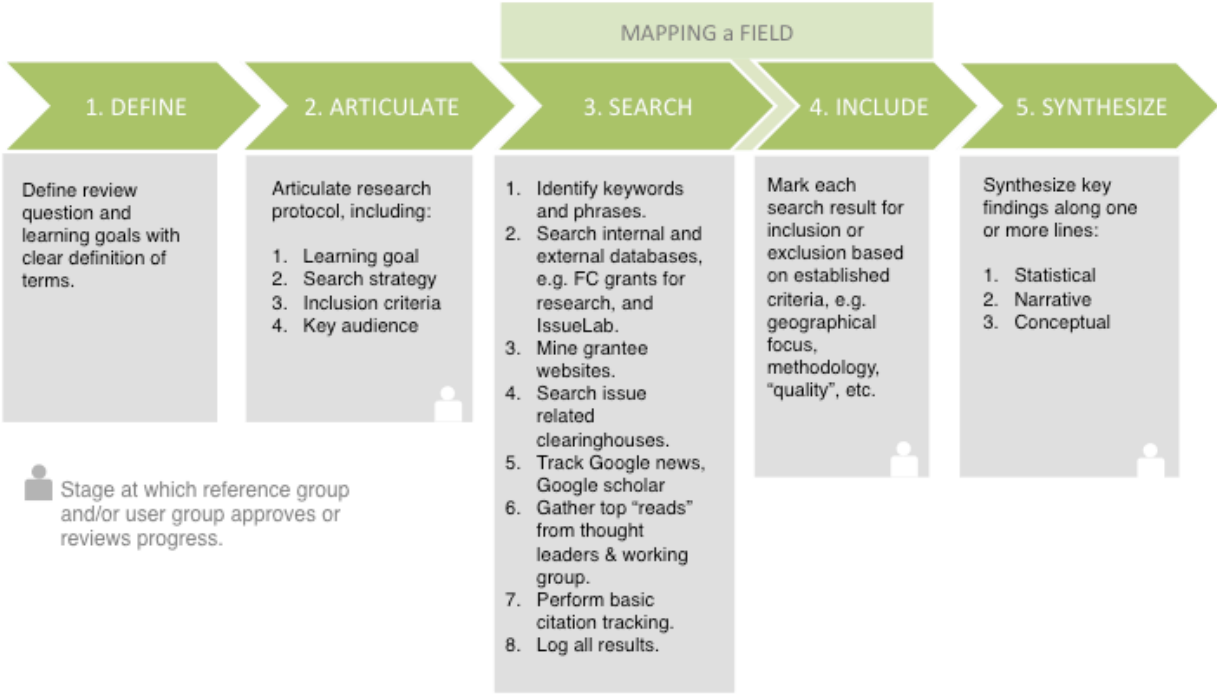
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Annex 3: Methodology

Like all meta-syntheses, this one attempts to integrate results from across a number of resources and studies. But in contrast to the meta-synthesis of quantitative studies (or even the synthesis of more traditional evaluations), extracting and summarizing findings from this knowledge base required a more interpretive approach. Challenges naturally arise in summarizing lessons from a knowledge base that utilizes different levels of analysis but that also includes radically different kinds of knowledge such as case studies, evaluations, conference proceedings, and white papers.

Although this more interpretive approach is inherently biased, our hope is that the systematic way in we approached searching, selecting, and summarizing findings can mitigate some of that bias, or at the least make the process more transparent for other researchers and practitioners who wish to do their own synthesis or update this one.

In an effort to make this work as inclusive, transparent, comprehensive, current and participatory as possible our approach includes the five following steps:



Our search strategy was grounded in the learning goals of the Cultural Innovation Fund, using an agreed upon set of keywords and phrases that described the field of arts innovation through the Rockefeller Foundation’s frame of equity and resilience. Our initial search of grants databases (both private and public), websites of both grantmakers and nonprofits working in this field, issue specific clearinghouses, and citations within the reports themselves resulted in 87 related resources.

The search and selection process revealed two major challenges:

1. The first was the scarcity of evaluative knowledge about arts innovation, which was not surprising given the relatively small scale of investment to date in what is still an emerging field. Regardless, the evaluative knowledge base represents a real gap in knowledge that deserves attention as the field further develops.
2. The second challenge came in defining and redefining the scope of what resources should be included in the synthesis given the interrelatedness of work being done in this field. By its very nature arts innovation is at the intersection of many fields, such as arts education, urban renewal, and community engagement.

A final list of 26 resources was selected from the search results by reviewing each resource against the following set of selection criteria: alignment of the content with the original set of keywords and conceptual frames defined by the group; geographical similarity in terms of size, specific populations, and city resources to New York City, and; focus on specific populations that are of particular interest to the CIF (what the Rockefeller Foundation defines as “poor and vulnerable”). Program officers and evaluators at the Rockefeller Foundation then reviewed the complete list of search results against the 26 selected resources to ensure that the final selection was representative but also didn’t exclude any of their “must-reads”.

Based on that review a small number of additional resources were added to the knowledge base, such as the seminal work by Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of American Cities*, and the more recent work by Healy and Zolli, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*. The group felt that these works provided a broad and valuable context for the more specific findings and lessons contained within the other resources.

Our intent in following these steps was to remove as much bias as possible in the early stages of the synthesis so that the real interpretive work happens in the extraction and summary itself, rather than in the search and selection of resources. In this way readers and practitioners are welcome to offer their own interpretation of what “rises to the top”.

We greatly value the knowledge and wisdom that is currently embedded in the social sector’s literature and are seeking new ways to make that knowledge more accessible and useful. And so we welcome any insights or recommendations on how we might improve our approach to this kind of meta-synthesis.