

Image Credit: Ballet Hispánico



Image Credit: San Diego Opera

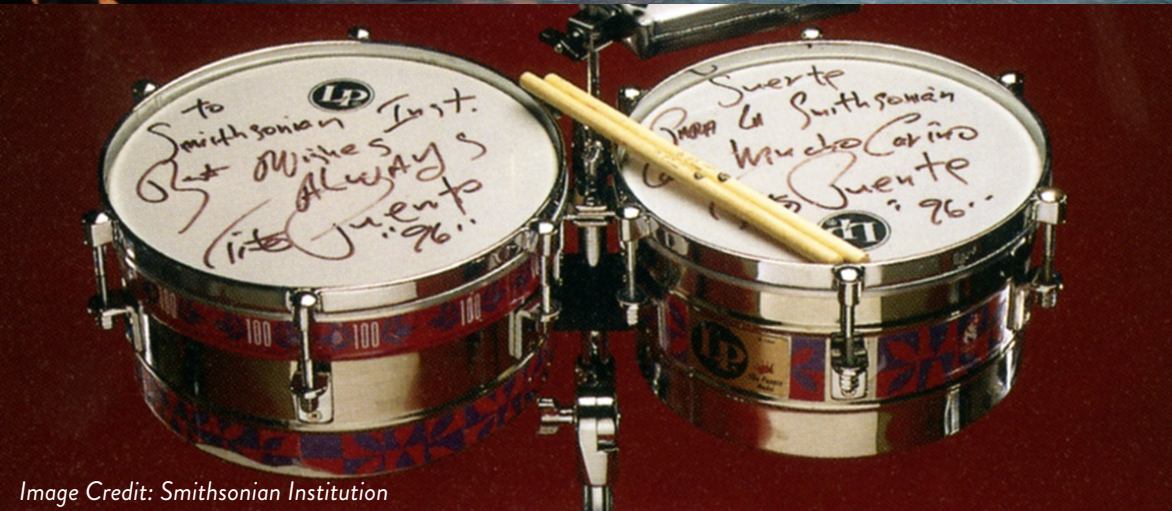


Image Credit: Smithsonian Institution



ADVISORY BOARD for the ARTS

Transforming Arts Organizations Worldwide

## Building Relationships with the Latinx Community

November 2022

# Research Question & Participants

**Research Question:** how have arts organizations built authentic relationships with the Latinx community?

## Topics discussed in our calls included:

- How to build cultural competency as an organization, both internally and externally
- Building programming that engages specific cultural communities
- Resources (personnel and financial) dedicated to initiatives for Latinx/other cultural groups
- Best practices for building long-term, authentic community partnerships
- Measuring organizational progress in engaging with the Latinx/other cultural community

## Interview Participants



# Thoughts From the Field

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## Be careful to avoid incorrect demographic assumptions

“One thing that is obvious for me as a [New Mexico] native is that the Hispanic community here does control a fair amount of resources in terms of power and wealth, so you shoot yourself in the foot if you think about them as poor/marginalized. There are obviously correlations but it’s important to throw out that association.

This is just another market for opera. There’s no obvious reason that Hispanic people would not be interested in *La Bohème*, but there’s also no obvious reason that non-Hispanic people would not be interested in *Zorro*. You don’t have to segregate these.”

## There is broad intersectionality in the Latinx identity

“People misunderstand [the Afro-Latinx] connection. I like here that it is integrated across what we do and how we talk about African-American and Latinx solidarity — some people are both. I think that’s the kind of approach that makes the most sense, understanding its complexity.

Often when people say Latinx it’s not just Spanish-speaking (there’s also Brazil). I try to take a step back and understand context — that’s really important in the museum world. We need people to understand that it’s baked into the history that we’re talking about and to get comfortable with that fact.”

## A nuanced cultural competency and sensitivity is crucial

“We want to approach [the Latinx] community with their own language and terms.

Cultural references are very different. We did a concert in a town two minutes from the border. My colleagues were going to bring Lipton tea, but I said, ‘let’s bring horchata and tamarind water — we need to be aware of what they drink.’

Sensitivity and sensibilities to be developed, and you need someone who is aware of these traditions.”

# Thoughts From the Field

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## Expertise in engaging one culture does not necessarily translate to another

“With our indigenous partnerships we have learned to go more slowly and to be more flexible. We are code switching between an oral tradition and a written tradition — budgets and project management don’t apply here. Indigenous work tends to be with individuals, building deep trust with one advocate in the community. Nothing moves forward without that community.

It’s not the same in the Latino community. We have been working there with organizations, and Latin groups are already working in the written tradition.

## Lack of organizational buy-in can make partners feel unwelcome and offended

“The modeling of whether this is a partnership or a transaction has to start at the top. It’s a lot of work to set expectations of how we’ll work together and how we will respect each other. But it has to get done or else it’s all thrown on our lap, and then we’re the ones who look like we couldn’t do the job we were asked to do.

We spoke to the president of a university and they said yes [to partnering with us]. Then we met the leadership of the theater department and they knew nothing of this, and then another department said, ‘this isn’t really our style.’ No internal communication. Someone thought it was a good idea, but no one got everyone together.”

## Organizations need to leave ego — and sometimes the art form — at the door

“There’s a critical realization that folks that don’t have to come to you... there are 80 million platforms. The value of live performance might not be enough.

There is value in coming to an engagement space in a multidisciplinary way. How do we talk about relevance right now? Personal identity? We know how to mine storytelling. You need to know how to use the form. In the past we’ve done things to move opera forward for the sake of opera; I’ve shifted that to using opera as a tool for other aims.”

# Authentic Relationships (Even Short Ones) Take Time

The most common theme we heard across all conversations was the amount of time it takes to build genuine relationships with members of the community. While a successful partnership is not necessarily measured by its length — we heard of several successful event-by-event collaborations — a long-term commitment to understanding a partner organization is key. **The time it takes to get to a place where a truly authentic partnership can happen is in the years.**

*“I really think that if you want to make a change and you want to start presenting groups that have been marginalized, it has to be long-term.”*

*So often a presenter treats [a Latinx-focused organization] like the Bolshoi, partnering once every two years. Or, ‘we’ll have you once and see how it goes.’ You can’t grow community together that way. You need to be talking and adjusting. People need to start making the long-term commitment.”*

Specific timelines varied across organizations, but generally followed a similar multi-year arc:

## **Phase 1: Building Genuine Relationships**

Get to know the community through its local organizations — but as an attendee and friend. This is not yet the time to ask for or offer anything.

## **Phase 2: Assess What You Can Offer**

Understand the needs of the organizations you have build relationships with and what you have that can benefit them. This may or may not be the art.

## **Phase 3+: Continual Assessment**

Stay in conversation with partners and community groups to understand how to continue or reshape working together.

# Building Trust: A Deeper Look

Whether a partnership is long-term or a short-term event/project, time spent building trust is crucial. We've gathered practices our interviewees shared to ensure a collaborative relationship founded on trust.

## Phase 1

- Showing up to community events to build genuine relationships and listen
- Not offering anything – but thinking through what you want to understand about community members as you get to know them
- Building cultural competency into your organization by hiring from Latinx community
- Inviting community members to things and making clear your willingness to share your organization with them

## Phase 2

- Assessing values alignment with potential partner organizations
- Coming to the table as equals to understand what you both can offer one another
- Changing your own processes to accommodate partners' needs
- Engaging with a few more transactional partners as you deepen your more values-aligned relationships

## Phase 3

- Continuing regular assessment of the partnership from both sides
- Deepening the successful relationships with new programs, events, etc.
- Understanding when a partnership has reached its natural end-point

*It's okay if not every partnership is long-term; some transactional relationships can still have value for your organization and partners.*

# What Does It Look Like To Be Ready for Partnership?

When approaching a community or arts organization for a potential partnership, there are certain steps an organization must take to be prepared. Below we have adapted a framework of steps that Ballet Hispanico shared are important for them to see in any potential partner before agreeing to work together.



## You've aligned your values

- ❑ **Shared purpose:** responsibility lies with the approaching organization to conduct research on the stated values of the community partner and to ensure alignment.
- ❑ **Feasible goal:** your goals for partnership with a community organization must be feasible within that organization's capabilities.



## You've aligned your team

- ❑ **Organization-wide buy-in:** while leadership is often making the decision to partner, they must ensure that the full organization is aware of, understands, and is bought into the partnership to foster a welcoming environment.
- ❑ **Cultural competence:** the organization needs various diverse leaders, including several that represent the cultural group they would like to partner with, when approaching a new community partnership.
- ❑ **Assigned ownership for coordination:** the arts organization must ensure that they have an internal project coordinator for the partnership so that this work does not fall primarily on the partner.



## You've aligned your assets

- ❑ **Internal assessment:** the arts institution has thought critically about the capabilities and assets your organization holds that can be of use to this specific partner organization.
- ❑ **Ideas for a project plan that benefits both partners:** the arts organization has developed thoughtful proposals for how the two partners might work together in ways that are mutually beneficial — and clearly outlines the resources they will dedicate to this work.

# Effective Partnership Includes Adapting Your Process

**On Site Opera** performs an annual short contemporary holiday opera that involves a chorus.

For several recent productions, the company has worked with **Breaking Ground**, an organization in New York that provides supportive housing for homeless and housing-vulnerable individuals. The opera builds a chorus of tenants from Breaking Ground’s buildings to perform alongside professional musicians and singers.



The partnership between On Site Opera (OSO) and Breaking Ground (BG) grew on a foundation of aligned missions. BG knows that the more community connection they can provide within the tenancy, the less likely it is that tenants will return to the streets. They were excited by this opportunity to partner with OSO.

Yet, for the partnership to work, OSO had to go beyond the mission. They were deeply intentional in the way they worked, which often meant abandoning their typical rehearsal processes. In doing so, they created an experience for the chorus members that was enriching and empowering.



## Artistic Direction

Joins professional singers for rehearsal after the singers have already vocally warmed up

Participated in vocal warm-ups with the chorus to build trust and show them that this is part of the process



## Costume Design

Costumes are designed around the characters; production keeps costumes post-production

Costume designer meets with each chorus member to design a costume that reflects them; they keep the costumes after the show



## Rehearsal Schedule

Rehearsals run during a daytime schedule at a central location

Rehearsals are held at night on-site at a Breaking Ground residence to ensure chorus members’ comfort



# Building Community Partnerships Through Listening

OF/ BY/FOR ALL is a non-profit organization that is helping civic and cultural organizations become **of, by and for** their communities. They provide tools, community, accountability and coaching on radical inclusion and how to build truly reciprocal partnerships with community members.

[Starting the conversation with The Partner Power Tool](#) encourages a mindset shift from partner transaction to collaboration, where you actively empower and learn about your existing/ potential partners and thus **foster partnerships built on trust and understanding.**

## Values behind this framework

- ✓ Partners success is our success
- ✓ It is critical to **understand a community** before building something for them
- ✓ **Beginning with partner perspectives** fosters empathy and trust
- ✓ Partner Power helps build a **vision of success together**
- ✓ **Avoids falling into box ticking** and imposing pre-established project ideas

## Empathetic listening to learn about your community of interest first

### Questions to learn about the challenges they face

- What/ who inspires you?

### Questions to learn about the values they hold

- What are you most concerned about in your community?

### Questions to learn about the goals they are pursuing

- What is one of your life goals? ...

### Questions to learn about the commitments they can make

- What is your schedule like?

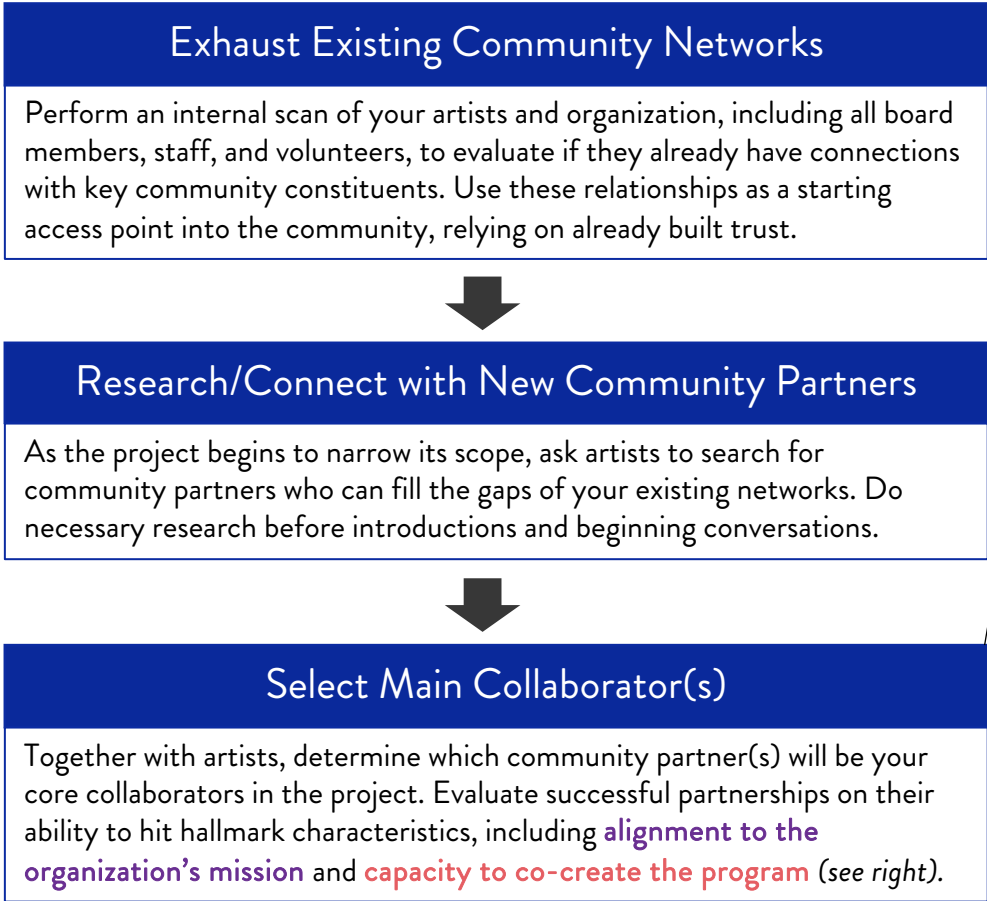
### Questions about what success looks like for your partners

- What does a great day look like for you?

CHALLENGES THEY FACE	VALUES THEY HOLD
GOALS THEY'RE PURSUING	COMMITMENTS THEY CAN MAKE
TO THIS PARTNER, SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:	

# Co-Identifying Relevant Community Partners

## Community Partnership Selection Process



Source: ABA Interviews

# Examples of Organizational Guiding Principles

## University of Michigan Ginsberg Center: Establish Overarching Principles for Projects

OUR PRINCIPLES

WHAT WE DO MATTERS.  
HOW WE DO IT MATTERS, TOO.

connecting civic learning across contexts

*We support students' integrative learning, with an emphasis on reflection.*

starting with community

*We match community-identified priorities with U-M resources.*

centering on equity

*Our students, faculty and staff, and community partners all share their interests, goals, and expectations.*

fostering long-term partnerships

*We establish long-term relationships with our partners beyond the scope of a particular project or engagement.*

acknowledging power

*Our community partners are active agents with deep knowledge about their communities and practices.*

moving from individual to collective action

*We bring together parties with shared interests to amplify positive community impact.*

To ensure project proposals followed their strategic plan's model of collective impact, the Center uses a **set of 6 principles** that proposals must align to.

These principles are part of the rubric for grading proposals and are presented to all applicants.

These principles are **high-level, so they do not rule out specific projects** but serve as an **"invisible hand"** for how to help proposals become more community-centered.

## Bravo! Vail Music Festival Program Vetting Matrix

In implementing new engagement programs, Bravo! Vail uses 6 categories of program criteria to ensure new ideas meet their overall goals and values:

<p style="color: #e74c3c; font-weight: bold;">Identify Need or Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Area of Bravo's mission we're not fulfilling?</li> <li>• Interest/demand for the program?</li> <li>• Is there a demonstrated need?</li> </ul>	<p style="color: #e74c3c; font-weight: bold;">Timing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time constraints on the program?</li> <li>• Ample lead time to plan, fund, market, and execute properly?</li> </ul>
<p style="color: #e74c3c; font-weight: bold;">Departmental Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program further Bravo's engagement vision?</li> <li>• Does it fit in 1+ of Bravo's engagement categories? If not, does Bravo need to create a new category?</li> </ul>	<p style="color: #e74c3c; font-weight: bold;">Evaluation and Metrics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have S.M.A.R.T. goals been defined?</li> <li>• Has this program been tried before? What was the outcome and why?</li> <li>• What are the measurable outcomes that can be assessed to determine success?</li> </ul>
<p style="color: #e74c3c; font-weight: bold;">Organizational Alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will program further Bravo's org mission?</li> <li>• Will the program and its impacts align with Bravo's core values?</li> <li>• Does the program satisfy X number of Bravo's hallmarks?</li> </ul>	<p style="color: #e74c3c; font-weight: bold;">Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial: program cost; seed funding; sufficient funding to sustain 3 years?</li> <li>• Community: appropriate community stakeholders informed and on board?</li> <li>• Human: staff capacity to plan, market, and execute; need new staff/volunteers?</li> </ul>

**Each category is scored from (1) Definitely no to (4) Definitely yes.**  
If the total score is 6-14, the program idea is a "NO"; 15 is "MAYBE"; and 16-24 is "YES."

# Shaping Your Team

Across our interviews we heard the crucial importance of buy-in from the top of the organization to committing to a specific cultural community. Below we have constructed several elements of an organization that would be fully prepared to sustainably engage in this work, based on several elements that practitioners in the field highlighted as necessary.



Commitment from Top Leadership

Full engagement with the Latinx community requires a holistic approach, and so should be unified under buy-in from organizational leadership.



Awareness and Involvement from All Departments

All departments should expect to be involved in Latinx initiatives at some point, and so must be prepared to be pulled in and aware of any external partners involved in projects.



Dedicated Person/Team for Latinx Initiatives

Latinx initiatives should have its own dedicated personnel resources. It is crucial for this team to have Latinx representation for a nuanced cultural sensitivity and understanding.

# Building Internal Cultural Competency with Limited Resources

Recognizing that a full team dedicated to ensuring a holistic commitment to the Latinx community across the organization may not be possible for all institutions due to resource constraints, we suggest a **catalyst team** as a way to start the work.

## Challenges

- Different departments have their own unique goals or measurements of success. There are particularly strong differences between the mindsets of curatorial and education teams, in terms of how to speak about art most effectively.
- Some departments may have more cultural competencies than others, affecting how authentically they can center the Latinx community in their work.
- Collaboration between full departments be challenging to manage or result in ideas not being heard.



## Solution

### Cross-Functional Catalyst Team

- Individuals from various departments come together to form a smaller team that focuses specifically on planning programs for a defined period of time (often the fiscal year). Ideally, members of this team will possess Latinx cultural competence.

## Why It Works

- The first goal of the small team is to create common objectives, giving the group a shared language and metrics that can hold true across the institution.
- A shared language alone is helpful, but the addition of a defined planning period for the small team ensures that action is taken.
- A catalyst team is a much more manageable size that allows for freer idea exchange, but still represents the interests of all departments.

# Broadening and Sharing Capabilities Beyond Physical Spaces

With different tiers of partnerships, organizations are thinking beyond traditional arts programming and outreach to other internal capabilities that partners could leverage and need.

## Physical assets/ less time commitment



Co-working, office spaces



Meetings and conferences



Events and performances



Equipment, AV systems etc.

## Promotions/ moderate time commitment



Ticket inventory



Audience access/ lists



Promotions and marketing



Information sharing

## Skills support/ more time commitment



Grant writing



Project management



Skills, video editing, etc.



Storytelling, crafting