



Stability. Experimentation. Growth.
LA County's Organizational Grant Program in 2014

Brandon Turner and Bronwyn Mauldin
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Executive Summary

Grantees of the Organizational Grants Program (OGP) of the LA County Arts Commission (LACAC) are required to submit annual reports that act as a compliance check, an evaluative tool for the grantee to track progress on their proposed project, and a mechanism for LACAC to identify opportunities for program improvement. This study utilized grantee reports to identify major interests and concerns for OGP grantees and an assessment of how LACAC's professional development (PD) offerings could be more responsive to those interests and concerns.

Between July 1, 2013 and May 15, 2014 a total of 160 organizations submitted final Year Two reports for the OGP FY12-14 grant cycle. A sample of 42 organizations was drawn and the text of their reports analyzed using qualitative coding methods. These findings were then compared to data on participation by grantees in LACAC's PD offerings.

Key findings from this analysis include the following:

- Several organizations are undergoing some form of board development through recruiting new members, board training or restructuring for more effective governance.
- Grantees report an increased stability as a result of new staff, increased staff time and/or the prioritization of administrative functions. With additional staff support, organizations now have freedom to pursue goals beyond basic administration.
- Organizations are reporting increased fundraising efforts as we emerge from the economic downturn.
- Some organizations are using surveys and data collection to learn more about their audiences.
- Organizations are undergoing planning processes for future programmatic and administrative goals. These processes may or may not be formalized strategic plans.
- Grantees are experimenting with programming outside of their normal venues in efforts to engage with audiences in new ways and bring programming directly to the community.
- Increased capacity has allowed organizations to consider expanding their programming to different communities and venues. Organizations are able to develop additional partnerships and are planning to tour their programs.

This report finds that LACAC's PD offerings are largely in line with needs expressed through the reporting process in terms of **staff roles** and **fundraising**. The findings here suggest LACAC may want to investigate further whether PD related to **data**, **administrative growth** and **audience development/engagement** are appropriately matched to grantee needs. The report concludes by laying out a series of steps LACAC is currently engaged with to improve technical assistance and PD offerings for OGP grantees and across the entire organization.

Background

Each year, grantees of the Organizational Grants Program (OGP) of the LA County Arts Commission (LACAC) are required to submit annual reports. The annual report acts as a compliance check, an evaluative tool for the grantee to track progress on their proposed project, and a mechanism for LACAC to identify opportunities for program improvement.

The Year One report acts as a midpoint status report for the proposed project, asking about challenges and successes of the project and how progress of the project is being measured. The Year One report is also an opportunity for the organization to assess any technical assistance needed to successfully complete the project.

The Year Two report acts as a self-evaluation for the entire two year OGP project. This report asks grantees to describe what happened over the course of their grant using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The report asks how this project has impacted the organization and how these findings will inform future planning. The report also asks grantees to provide one example of how the OGP project has made an impact on their target audience or community over the last two years. Finally, the report gives the grantee an opportunity to provide any suggestions as to how LACAC could better support their organization.

A total of 160 organizations submitted final reports for the OGP FY12-14 grant cycle. These reports were analyzed to uncover common trends, themes and experiences across this group of grantees. These findings are then compared to data on participation by grantees in LACAC's professional development (PD) offerings to determine whether they are responsive to the priorities and needs of grantees.

Methods

OGP staff began by reviewing the Year Two reports submitted by grantees between July 1, 2013 and May 15, 2014, pulling quotes to answer the following three questions:

- What's the most surprising thing you saw in this report?
- What other kind of support did this grantee suggest?
- What is a quote that captures a key element of this report?

In order to establish *a priori* codes, a small sample of organizations was selected and their quotes open coded. The list of codes created through this process is as follows:

- Board Issues/Development
- Staff Roles
- Fundraising
- Data
- Administrative Growth
- Audience Development/Engagement
- Program Changes

The full set of 160 organizations was sorted into clusters based on OGP level (a proxy for budget size) and arts discipline. Individual grantees were drawn randomly from each cluster in proportion to their share of the total, such that 42 organizations (26 percent of all grantees) were selected. Table 1 shows the breakdown.

Table 1. Cluster sampling breakdown

Discipline (total grantees)	OGP I	OGP II	OGP 2.5	OGP III
Arts Education (19)	1	2	1	1
Arts Service (2)		1		
Dance (14)	2	1	1	
Literary Arts (1)	1			
Media Arts (8)		1		1
Multidisciplinary (18)	2	2		1
Music-Choral/Opera (15)	1	1	1	
Music-Instrumental (24)	3	2	1	1
Presenting (5)		1		
Theatre (33)	3	2	1	1
Traditional & Folk Art (4)	1	1		
Visual Arts (17)		1	1	2
Total Sample (42)	14	15	6	7
All Grantees (160)	63	61	17	19

Quotes pulled from the 42 organizations in the sample were then coded using the *a priori* codes listed above, using Dedoose qualitative data analysis software.

Findings

For each of the seven codes used in the qualitative analysis, a summary of findings is presented, along with representative quotes.

Board Development

Over the past year several OGP grantees reported working on board development and associated issues. A few organizations reported growth in the size of board as well as the recruitment of new board members. Some organizations are working on strategic planning initiatives that will allow their boards to set goals and benchmarks. One organization reported board development and learning through the Annenberg Alchemy program. Another organization reported administrative challenges because of the loss of several board members.

“[We have] also gone through a major reorganization of the board of directors. In year 1 we lost 75% of our board of directors due to the fact that the majority of the Board were either related or were close friends. When one person left, then the others didn't want to stay without that connection. It had caused us some serious challenges, both financially and from a support standpoint.” **OGP 2.5**¹

“The development hire also created capacity for the executive director to work closely with the board to pursue goals set out in the 2013-2017 Strategic Plan, including the transformation of its composition and its capacity to leverage financial and political support.” **OGP II**

Staff Roles

Some organizations have increased capacity through additional staff support or additional hours for current staff. A common theme throughout the reports is that with additional staff support, organizations now have freedom to pursue goals beyond basic administration. A few organizations reported setbacks because of the changes and turnover in key staff positions.

“Having paid staff positions has helped us to formulate more reasonable expectations about what can be accomplished in any given work period.” **OGP I**

¹OGP categories are based on the organization's annual budget size. In 2013-14, OGP budget categories were as follows: OGP I = \$99,999 and less; OGP II = \$100,000-499,999, OGP 2.5 = \$500,000-1,499,999; OGP III = \$1.5 million and greater. These budget categories were subsequently revised in the 2015-16 grant year.

“The OGP support of this position provided additional paid hours that allowed us to move past the treading water state that we have been in and begin to move forward, creating a new approach to getting our plays, musicals and arts education classes to children and families.” **OGP II**

“We have learned that training non-volunteer staff to handle the non-artistic elements of our work is an effective way of spreading administrative work outside of our company membership. Doing so not only ensures that the company is less taxed with administration, but ensures more accountability because the staff is paid.” **OGP I**

Fundraising

Many organizations reported an increase in successful fundraising activities with the help of new and experienced staff or by activating a new donor base.

“OGP support enabled [us]to hire an experienced fundraising professional rather than a development consultant or entry-level person.” **OGP II**

“Additionally, this year, through the generous support of individuals and sponsors we were able to raise more than \$50,000 which provided the necessary resources to purchase a bus.” **OGP III**

“We feel that this was a crisis from which we have emerged positively, ready to take on building a larger and more diverse donor base” **OGP 2.5**

Data

A few organizations focused on collecting and analyzing data to reinforce growth and impact.

“The audience surveys, both online and at the concerts guided [our] artists and administration in providing the most valued content and the most usable communications about the programs.” **OGP I**

“The audience surveys distributed at the concerts requested demographic information, such as geographic area, age, marketing reach, social networking preferences, and interest in contemporary music. One outcome of the survey was that half the audience preferred to receive information via email/internet, and half by brochures mailed to home addresses.” **OGP I**

“Through key learnings at the Los Angeles County Arts Commission invoicing workshop from a previous granting year, we established a formal audience survey that did not exist prior. These surveys illuminate insights about our audience, programming, and venue.”

OGP I

Administrative Growth

Another theme across the reports is that many organizations are experiencing administrative growth. As a result, many organizations are formally planning for the future in different ways. One group of organizations reported they are currently undergoing or recently completed a strategic planning process. Some organizations reported significant changes to administration. A small group of organizations reported changes in financial systems or accounting practices.

“The OGP project informs future planning by emphasizing the importance of administrative support and artistic payment.” **OGP I**

“The impact of the OGP project on our organization as a whole has been monumental. The amount of time wasted and the frustration of supporters and staff with our inability to maintain systems, fundraise and engage audiences had reached an all-time high. We were grateful to have a two year period to roll out significant changes in all areas.” **OGP 2.5**

“We approved a final draft of a three-year plan. The entire board had input on this plan and is invested in its success.” **OGP II**

Audience Development/Engagement

Many organizations are devoting staff time to audience development efforts. Organizations are reaching out to new and diverse communities. Some organizations are talking specifically about increasing access to community with programming. They are providing increased access by offering free admission and transportation, or by delivering programming directly to the community with site-specific work.

“With the help of our [vehicle], however, we have been able to meet our youth on their terms and turf. As a result, we've greatly increased our ability to engage our youth far beyond the classroom workshop cycle.” **OGP II**

“In an effort to even further increase accessibility and engage new visitors, we are expanding our Public Engagement program, which initiates collaborations with artists to develop and present works that create an exchange between the museum and visitors.” **OGP III**

“As an OGP grantee, we are now able to use TRG Arts’ shared mailing lists to target more theater-going populations in the San Gabriel Valley area. And with updates to our website, we are now better able to make our theater known to new potential patrons, including those who live outside the San Gabriel Valley area.” **OGP II**

Program Changes

Many organizations report they are exploring new programs and initiatives. A small group of organizations are expanding partnerships or touring productions. Some organizations also report program changes as a result of strategic staff changes or additions.

“These past two seasons have been a time of growth and change for the chorus. We have not only passed [a major] milestone in our history, we have found an artistic director who can raise the group's performance level to even higher levels of quality.” **OGP 2.5**

“The success of the OGP project will open up new doors to performing arts centers across the country that are interested in our continued innovative work and encourages us to not only tour this new work, but to also continue brainstorming ways to further expand [our discipline] as an art form and pursue artistic opportunities and collaborations in the future.” **OGP II**

“This spring we have begun a partnership with a local elementary school, bringing teaching artists into the classroom and allowing every student at the school to learn about theatre arts, culminating in a performance for fellow students and family.” **OGP III**

Grantee Participation in LACAC's Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

In addition to its grantmaking, LACAC manages a professional development (PD) program which provides technical assistance and leadership development opportunities to its OGP grantees. Each year, LACAC offers a variety of workshops and convenings as well as scholarships for OGP grantees to participate in PD opportunities taught by other local providers.

PD provided by LACAC begins with its grantseeker workshops. In 2013-14, more than 150 prospective OGP applicants attended seven workshops in locations throughout LA County. Each workshop, in addition to covering the basics of how to apply for an OGP grant, offers introductory training on a different PD topic. In 2013-14, topics covered included program evaluation, designing grant projects, arts education and grantseeking basics. Staff are also available by appointment for "Office Hours," during which they provide one-on-one guidance and information.

Also in 2013-14, 162 individuals participated in two LACAC-managed Arts Tune-Ups that covered a variety of topics relevant to arts nonprofits, including advocacy, community and cultural outreach, fundraising, marketing and crowdfunding. Forty-five participants attended an additional convening that covered many of the same topics but with a particular focus on dance.

In this year, LACAC directly offered workshops on reporting and evaluation as well as human resources topics. LACAC extended its PD reach further by providing scholarships to staff, board members and volunteers from OGP grantee organizations with budgets under \$1.5 million. In total, 26 percent of eligible OGP grantees took advantage of these workshops, an increase of 16 percent from the prior year. LACAC also offered scholarships to OGP grantees to attend regional conferences. Table 2 summarizes participation in these PD opportunities in 2013-14.

Table 2. Participation in LACAC-supported PD workshops and convenings

Provider	N individuals*	Topics covered
LACAC	118	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation• Reporting• Human resources
Center for Nonprofit Management	195	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grant writing• Evaluation and planning• Fundraising• Meet the arts funders• Nonprofit accounting• Leadership development
Long Beach Nonprofit Partnership	57	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organizational sustainability• Fundraising• Leadership development
Southern California Leadership Network	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership development
Executive Service Corps of Southern California	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership development
Conferences	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arts marketing• Communications• Theatre• Nonprofits

*These are not unduplicated counts. Some individuals may have participated in more than one PD event.

For more details on PD offerings that year, please see LACAC's [2013-14 Professional Development Program Final Report](#).

Discussion

The guidelines of the OGP program allow flexibility for organizations to apply for projects that suit their organizational needs; if awarded a grant, organizations then report on the successes and/or challenges of those projects. This analysis of OGP project reports for 2013-14 found seven key trends for organizational, administrative and artistic growth across the pool of grantees. Organizations are bringing in new administrative staff, launching new programs and connecting with audiences in new ways. For some organizations the OGP grant is an opportunity to invest in administrative capacity and move beyond some of the very basic goals of keeping the doors open. For other organizations, the OGP grant offers an opportunity to design a project that reaches new audiences and communities in creative ways. Analysis of these reports suggests that in the wake of a large economic downturn, organizations are moving forward and are no longer focused on basic survival.

This analysis of OGP reports also allows us to assess whether LACAC's PD offerings are relevant to those interests and concerns.

LACAC's focus on human resources both through the workshops provided and through scholarships appears to be in line with changing **staff roles** identified in the OGP reports. As organizations emerge from the recession, more staff may continue to be hired and/or more volunteers may become paid staff. One area LACAC may wish to explore is training in volunteer management, including management of the volunteer-to-staff transition. This may be as simple as sharing more information more effectively about the range of related trainings available through the scholarship program. The fact that LACAC supports both staff and volunteer board members to participate in much of the PD provided can contribute to **board development**. Whether grantee board members are taking full advantage of these opportunities is unknown and may be worth investigating further.

Scholarships both for gaining skills in grant writing and to network with funders, as well as the grantseeking basics provided at OGP application workshops, are in line with the high priority grantees put on **fundraising**. LACAC may wish to expand the exploration begun in 2013-14 in PD offerings in other types of funding, such as crowdsourcing.

Only a few organizations reported on their **data** activities, but those that did saw the value of that work. LACAC has focused evaluation-related workshops on entry-level activities, which may be why smaller (OGP I) grantees reported on this in particular. This suggests there may be an opportunity for LACAC to develop additional, sequenced training in more advanced data collection, analysis and reporting methods.

Many organizations stated they are beginning to move beyond basic administration and/or have launched new or strengthened programs. LACAC's PD offerings related to planning, accounting and organizational sustainability may help to support the **administrative growth** grantees reported in 2013-14. This is an area LACAC could investigate further to determine whether PD offerings are adequately responsive both in subject matter and in quantity to grantee needs.

Analysis of the grantee reports found many organizations are experimenting with new models for outreach and public engagement. To date, LACAC has not provided significant PD to OGP grantees in **audience development/engagement**. This is an area of high interest to arts organizations not only in LA County, but across the U.S. It is also an area where LACAC has gained experience and knowledge in recent years through the Production and Civic Art divisions. The concept of "engagement" is a broad one, used by many different arts organizations to mean many different things. LACAC could investigate this further to determine how we might best support OGP grantees in their effort to engage audiences. Many of the **program changes** grantees are making are in support of audience engagement/ development. Some of the PD in planning that LACAC provides may help support grantees in this area.

Next Steps

This analysis of OGP grantee reports is part of a broader LACAC initiative to continuously improve technical assistance offerings across the entire organization. Based on early findings from that study and informed by the findings in this report, LACAC has undertaken all of the following tasks:

1. Revising the OGP application and reporting process, with the goal of gathering the most useful data with the fewest questions;
2. Creation of a cross-division task force responsible for coordinating technical assistance and professional development offerings among all the stakeholders LACAC serves (artists, arts organizations and arts educators);
3. Exploring new methods and mechanisms to deliver technical assistance and professional development;
4. Improving communication materials so that OGP grantees and other eligible parties are more fully aware of the technical assistance and professional development resources available to them; and
5. Investigating ways to use the LACAC website and social media to more effectively support technical assistance and professional development for our stakeholders.

LACAC is also developing a process for reviewing OGP grantee reports regularly to stay informed about grantee successes and challenges, and to continue to be responsive to both.