

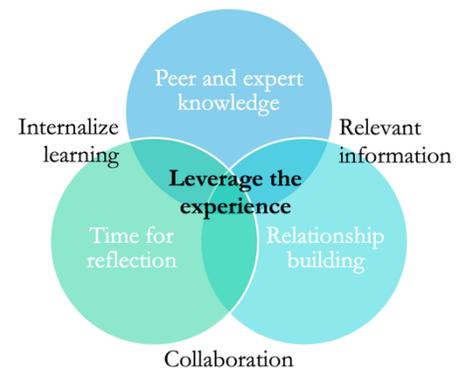
ArtsLab Strategic Planning Summary

2016

The ArtsLab program of Arts Midwest has a proven record of helping small and mid-sized arts organizations thrive. In 2016, Arts Midwest leadership staff members and ArtsLab curriculum team members, participants, and stakeholders participated in a nine-month process to identify the essential features of ArtsLab’s model and plan for how to sustain and grow the program in the future. The following is a summary of this important work.

ArtsLab’s Essence and Benefits

ArtsLab does a remarkable job of defining and refining the ideas that drive its capacity-building program’s content and delivery. During this process, the ArtsLab curriculum team reviewed and affirmed the value of ArtsLab’s existing content and process-guiding documents. In-depth participant and stakeholder interviews gave a fresh perspective on what is essential and beneficial about ArtsLab. We organized the findings from these interviews into three essential components and four compounding benefits, shown in the diagram and detailed below.



Three Essential Components of ArtsLab’s Model

ArtsLab balances peer and expert knowledge. Achieving an effective mix of peer and expert knowledge allows everyone to contribute and learn.

The single most important thing that ArtsLab does for an organization is simply give you time. That is a phenomenal gift. To take time is often a challenge, but it is so vital for your ability to ask big questions, work through them, and start to come up with answers.

– ArtsLab ND Participant

ArtsLab provides much-needed time for reflection. Time for reflection incubates the complex processing, thinking, and learning that organizations require to make crucial decisions about identity, audience, resources, leadership, and sustainability.

ArtsLab facilitates relationships. At ArtsLab, networking is substantive and meaningful. Participants build relationships through teamwork and networking.

Four Compounding Benefits of ArtsLab’s Model

Participants receive relevant information. When participants build relationships with each other and their instructors, their needs are better understood, and they give and receive more of the knowledge in the room.

Participants internalize learning. When participants combine a better understanding of their own organization with relevant knowledge from peers and experts, they internalize their learning.

Participants collaborate. When participants refine the identity and purpose of their organization together and build relationships with others who have done the same, mutually-beneficial collaborations become possible.

Participants leverage their ArtsLab experience. When participants combine clear plans, relevant knowledge, and mutually beneficial relationships, they leverage the ArtsLab experience into greater benefits.

To know the people in the cohort, their struggles, and what's behind the scenes – you feel like there is more of a community built because of that. Yeah, we are part of the same community, but we don't have anything to build our community. ArtsLab did that.

– ArtsLab MN Participant

Strategic Directions

ArtsLab has a culture of continuous program planning. At the culmination of this planning project, members from the Arts Midwest leadership staff and the ArtsLab curriculum team concluded that in its next phase, the ArtsLab program should:

Retain the cohort model. The cohort model of capacity building is a core strength of ArtsLab. It is valued by participants, and proven to be effective through evaluation.

Retain a mission focused on the arts. While cohort capacity building can apply to any organization, ArtsLab's mission, expertise, unique contribution, and relationships are in the arts.

Grow the program. In order to thrive, the ArtsLab program must continue to grow. ArtsLab fills an identified need, produces proven results, and has opportunities to grow in scale or scope.

Explore new partnerships. New partners can increase ArtsLab's reach, visibility, or scope of programs by exposing the program to new participants or markets.

Develop new funding relationships. Arts Midwest should develop its capacity to maintain and grow relationships with current and future ArtsLab brokers, funders, and stakeholders.

The greatest need for capacity building is with small and mid-sized arts organizations. Organizations of this size can be very dynamic, but are still living hand-to-mouth. They are constantly changing and have to figure out their futures or they are going to fold. Many of these organizations are crucial to the arts ecosystem.

– ArtsLab Funder

Strengthen marketing and communications. ArtsLab has a strong brand among those that know it. In order to grow in scale or scope, ArtsLab will need to attract new audiences through strong marketing and communications.

Increase internal alignment between Arts Midwest and ArtsLab. The ArtsLab program and Arts Midwest as a whole both have much to gain by more closely aligning their shared future.