



# TOWARD THE FUTURE OF ARTS PHILANTHROPY

The Disruptive Vision of the  
Memphis Music Initiative

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*(Front cover) Student performance of MMI grantee  
Harmonic South Strings Orchestra summer program based  
in the Soulsville neighborhood.*

All photos of MMI projects by David Rosenberry, [www.davidrosenberry.me](http://www.davidrosenberry.me)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# TOWARD THE FUTURE OF ARTS PHILANTHROPY

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*MML grantee Memphis Jazz Workshop youth performance during summer 2017 at Trezevant Manor, a senior living community.*

# WHAT DO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN ARTS FUNDING AND PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?



Images from the 2017 MMI Works Summer Internship orientation sessions. The number of youth enrolled and the number of work sites available doubled from its inaugural year in 2016.

Over the past several years, many authors—including arts practitioners, academics, and funders—have put forth theories and frameworks that provided guidance for, but few extant examples of, what arts equity looks like in action. Since early 2014, the Memphis Music Initiative (MMI) has engaged in a unique form of arts philanthropy that is a promising approach for equity and inclusion.

Using a variety of qualitative methods, this study evaluates the funding and programmatic practices of MMI in the broader context of arts funding, arts education, youth development, and community empowerment to discern the fundamental elements of the model, its effectiveness, and the lessons that others who are committed to equity might learn. The analysis is situated in a larger discussion of (a) the effects of race and place on access to funding and resources, which we call *philanthropic redlining*; and (b) the sustained and good-faith commitment to combat this phenomenon through the practice of *disruptive philanthropy*.

## Arts Philanthropy and Racialized Communities

The meaning and practice of philanthropy has evolved over time. Philanthropy today is defined as “the practice of organized and systematic giving to improve the quality of human life through the promotion of welfare and social change” (National Philanthropic Trust, 2017). Although there have been seismic shifts in the demographics of the United States, these have not been mirrored in private foundations nor in their grantmaking practices (Kasper, Ramos, & Walker, 2004). Large foundations still give only a modest amount of funding to nonprofit organizations that are rooted in racialized communities.

Contemporary arts philanthropy follows the archetypal trends of the larger nonprofit philanthropic landscape; funding initiatives that are responsive, place-based, or focused on collective impact can all be found within the arts sector. Regardless of model, arts funders are increasingly focusing on relationship building, technical assistance, capacity building (including continuing training for arts leaders), collaboration, innovation, and donor involvement. Funders are also increasingly encouraging nonprofit

arts organizations to move to becoming more market-based, with a focus on audience development and fee-for-service as core revenue streams.

While these approaches may be efficacious for mainstream arts organizations, it is not so for culturally based, folk arts, or community-based arts organizations. Historically, responsive funding in the arts has focused primarily on building institutions to preserve and present arts and culture based in the classical European canon. Place-based and collective impact arts funding initiatives primarily have focused on fostering economic and community development that serve dominant community interests. If the funders have equity-related interests at all, they often focus on the importance of arts engagement to provide access to “high arts” to racialized communities.

Mainstream approaches—both public and private—to arts funding generally and diversity specifically, are insufficient for racialized communities. A multitude of structural and institutional criteria impact the ability of racialized arts organizations to attract funding, especially transformative

funds. These include (a) what is considered to be art; (b) the perceived purpose of the arts in relationship to communities, society, and the nation; (c) the requirements put in place to receive funding; (d) how, and whether, diversity, equity, and inclusion should impact arts ecosystems, funding, and programming; and (e) the value of arts organizations based on subjective criteria including size, budget, composition, mission, and impact.

This philanthropic redlining has resulted in a chronic lack of resources and lack of access to funding networks among racialized organizations, which makes them much more vulnerable than mainstream arts organizations. Racialized organizations have been historically excluded from circles of wealth, and this is acutely reflected in Memphis.

## Identifying a New Model: Disruptive Philanthropy

Disruptive philanthropy is a practice of conscious giving. It is informed by an awareness of how traditional strategies of philanthropy exclude communities, organizations, and practitioners that do not meet certain privileged criteria, even if their

inability to meet said criteria is a result of historical neglect from both the public and private sectors. Disruptive philanthropy:

- ▶ starts with the understanding that institutional and structural racism shapes (arts) funding and produces inequities in resources and opportunities;
- ▶ assesses how resource and opportunity inequities manifest (e.g., transportation barriers, technology disparities, professionalization gaps, lack of access to professional and funding networks, absence of key organizational components such as a board, lack of remuneration for full time staff);
- ▶ includes sensitivity to the particular history and development, mission and scope of each organization, and to the communities they serve;
- ▶ eschews one-size-fits-all approaches;
- ▶ shapes funding practices to eradicate the barriers that result from entrenched forms

of discrimination, including racism, and disinvestment by geographic location.

- ▶ creates tools to evaluate the effectiveness of models implemented, which allows responsiveness to extant needs, pivots in real time, and tailored approaches; and
- ▶ measures impact.

This practice of aware, informed, and conscious grantmaking disrupts normative standards of giving in the broader philanthropic landscape and models a new way of understanding philanthropy with a racial equity lens. It is an anti-paternalistic model of giving that supports communities and organizations in expanding their capacity. Ultimately, it privileges group autonomy. In the final analysis, disruptive philanthropy is a funding practice that intentionally reveals, critiques, challenges, and seeks to upend philanthropic redlining.

## PHILANTHROPIC REDLINING

Philanthropic redlining is a set of funding practices in which an organization's size, racial or ethnic constitution, demographic served, artistic designation (e.g., "high art" or "community art"), and/or location results in: (a) exclusion from funding altogether, (b) grants that are substantially lower than comparable organizations; and/or (c) forms of funding that discourage capacity building. Such practices also preclude the funding of organizations that may need substantial development and/or wraparound services that would ensure their viability. A particularly pernicious

reality is that the very foundations that ostensibly exist to reduce inequity continue to reproduce inequitable practices and effects through forms of philanthropic redlining.

Philanthropic redlining is an institutionalized and normative feature of funding that tends to disadvantage organizations that are deeply embedded in disinvested, highly impoverished, and racialized communities that lack services, resources, and other types of support. Moreover, because these organizations are underfunded and may operate with values that diverge from the mainstream, they are excluded from

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE OF DISRUPTIVE PHILANTHROPY: THE MMI MODEL

MMI uses music to address issues of access and participation, relationship building, and equity in a bidirectional and sustained way. It has incorporated several types of music engagement, including band, orchestra, choir, and hip-hop production. Such diversity allows responsiveness to the interests of youth, schools, and the community at large. Music education and programming become tools for youth development and community engagement, as opposed to products or commodities imposed upon—or inserted into—the community.

MMI operates within the unique context of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee. The

city and county have a profound impact on the mission, vision, and philosophy of the organization. The history and context shape MMI's work: Memphis is a majority-minority city, with socioeconomic challenges that are informed by the confluence of its negative racial history, its ambivalent relationship to Black cultural capital, and its labor market. Most relevant to this study is the systematic neglect of Black residents that constitutes the political economy of Memphis. Trends in educational policies, housing, and employment in Memphis reveal how opportunity in this city—or lack thereof, in the case of Black folks—continues to be plagued by ghosts of the city's past.

Many barriers, including the socioeconomic climate, undermine youth success. MMI is critically aware of how historical trends of racial discrimination have come to bear on wealth accumulation in the city, on

considerations of best practices, from participating in important conversations around funding, and from important networks of funders and peer organizations. Thus, philanthropic redlining is a practice that overwhelmingly limits opportunities and possibilities for racialized communities. While many funders espouse a commitment to racial equity, and may have initiatives or staff members dedicated to issues of diversity, the choices they make in grantmaking, and the parameters they set for the procurement of dollars, do little to challenge—and in fact tend to reproduce—gross inequities in funding allocation.



arts giving, and on youth access to quality arts education. Its grantmaking reacts, responds, and seeks remedy to the gross maldistribution of Memphis's abundant resources.

MMI uses existing cultural assets to address the pressing needs. In its work from 2014-2016, it used four primary strategies to encourage youth success:

1. **MMI provided in-school programming to sustain existing music education and expand instruction** through partnerships with local musicians. MMI worked directly with students, parents, school and city leadership, and nonprofit professionals and musicians to support and strengthen existing in-school music education.
2. **Through its strategic growth grants to arts organizations, MMI supported extended learning** to expand high-quality out-of-school programs to reach more youth and remove barriers to youth engagement and participation. This grant program fostered and supported high-quality music engagement opportunities by addressing barriers to organizational success and making targeted investments in program growth, planning and support, and transportation.
3. **Through its community cohort grants, MMI supported innovation spaces** in collaboration with community leaders, organizations, and musicians. The strategy brought quality programs to communities and identified, elevated, and grew existing music programs and

activities that were already happening in those communities.

4. **Through its *Institute for Nonprofit Excellence*, MMI focused on executive-level leadership** and organizational development within community arts organizations. Many of these organizations have not received substantive capacity investments to position the organizations for sustainability or growth. MMI's investment of funding and consultative support sought to ensure organizations that primarily serve racialized communities would be operating for years to come.

Through these approaches, MMI seeks to ensure that each of Memphis's many communities have places where youth can jam with local musicians; learn, play, and hear music; and contribute to (and benefit from) the city's important musical and cultural legacy. MMI brings music instruction into neighborhoods, community centers, and churches to remove barriers to participation for Memphis youth and to ensure that the city's cultural products remain true to its communities.

Lessons learned from past MMI programming have led to innovations in its current practice. Newer initiatives, such as the *MMI Works* arts apprenticeship program, the *MMI SummerBeat* creative youth development programs, and the *Program Development Institute* reflect organizational learning, wherein staff use data and analysis to support new program development.

Through its work, MMI builds coalitions and develops strategies that challenge the norms of arts philanthropy. As a funder, MMI is at the forefront in implementing innovative funding techniques that provide not only dollars but also professional and organizational support, access to funding networks, space for peer organizations to interface, and development services. In this way, MMI is integral to the cultivation of a sustainable, racially conscious arts ecosystem in Memphis. More importantly, for MMI the community is an integral part of the arts ecosystem, not separate from it. The MMI practice of disruptive philanthropy is composed of five key components, which are summarized on the following pages.

#### **Challenging the High Art/Low Art Dichotomy: Valuing All Art**

Across the interviews conducted for this study, the theme of high art versus low art manifested in a variety of ways. Historically, mainstream organizations that center what is considered to be high art, such as ballet, classical music, and painting, have received meaningful sums of financial support. These legacy organizations (the symphony, the orchestra, the ballet, the art museum, the opera) have often been supported and held as the standard of what is considered valuable, quality art. Meanwhile, art forms that were historically developed by African Americans—commonly referred to as community art—have been underfunded and considered low art, even as many of these art forms have served meaningful humanistic purposes such as storytelling, cultural memory, and resistance.

Not only did MMI fund organizations that have a range of musical practices, but its music fellows taught a variety of music programs in schools. For instance, MMI Fellows were observed leading in-school classes ranging from piano lessons and orchestra to hip-hop lyricism, gospel, and soul music. As MMI develops a Black arts ecosystem, its effort is not to replicate what mainstream arts ecosystems look like in most major cities, which often trace traditional high art/low art binaries. Instead, informed by a historical consciousness of inequity in the arts, MMI makes available a wide range of arts opportunities that they believe offer unique cultural capital for empowering communities and inciting social change.

#### **Cultivating a Black Arts Ecosystem**

The leadership and partners of MMI stressed the importance of a thriving arts culture for matters of social justice and also for youth development. In its efforts to support arts and artists in Memphis that are invested in community uplift, MMI has stressed that this cannot be an individualistic endeavor for single artists or a few independent arts organizations. Therefore, this organization has been intentional in its vision to build a Black arts ecosystem, taking a communal approach to blending the arts and community vitality in Memphis. The vision is to incubate relationships and organizations that can have longevity in empowering communities through the arts, particularly for those Memphians who have been overlooked.

Commenting on this aspect of MMI's giving practices, a grantee highlighted MMI's *Institute for Nonprofit Excellence* as useful in forging relationships that might serve as a foundation for this arts ecosystem. As this person stressed, there is value in sitting at the table with similarly aligned organizations that invest in arts with broader community development outcomes in mind. Through this approach and many others, MMI has forged strategic partnerships with both established non-Black arts organizations and historically underfunded Black arts organizations. By facilitating these relationships, MMI has fostered high quality and engaging arts education for young people in underserved communities.

### **Being Invested in Community Versus Investing in Communities**

MMI has offered wraparound services not only for its grant recipients but also for the larger community it serves. This translates into an asset-based approach that (a) values an arts organization's unique strengths and contributions, (b) provides assistance to expand organizational capacity (in areas such as operational infrastructure and strategic planning), and (c) simultaneously offers creative community programming that helps to increase arts literacy in the communities on MMI's radar. While MMI's approach has been to fund community arts initiatives and organizations, it is first and foremost invested in the wellbeing of the local community, in imagining a more vibrant future through forms of arts practice.

### **Having a Dual Structure: Grantmaker and Programmer**

One of MMI's advantages is that even though it is a grantmaker, it also implements its own programs, which allows MMI to apply a specific funding philosophy and to assess its effectiveness. Combined, the dual processes of allocating resources and implementing programming helps MMI (a) to ensure its theories are informed by practical experience, research and data collection, (b) to develop and revise programs based on the evolving theories, and (c) to support organizations within the arts ecosystem based on coherent theory and practice. This makes the organization more efficient, more responsive to community needs, and able to make strategic pivots in real time.

### **Using Data to Support Practice**

Data analysis is an embedded and essential component in MMI's approach. MMI staff realize that evaluation is necessary for quality improvement, for ensuring the effectiveness of the programs, and for administering the best organizational support possible. In a nonprofit landscape that is moving increasingly toward evidence-based practices, MMI prepares its grantees to be competitive by providing them with knowledge, skills, and tools for data collection. As data and evaluation become standard requirements for receiving philanthropic dollars, MMI is ahead of the curve in its own practices, and in the services it provides to its grantees and partners in this area.

## **THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF SCALING DISRUPTIVE PHILANTHROPY**

Disruptive philanthropy is an accountability practice informed by knowledge of historical trends of wealth accumulation and exclusion that has been shaped by structures of power that reinforce oppressive hierarchies of race, class, and gender. As more public goods and services are relegated to the private sector, it will be increasingly important to be vigilant in combating philanthropic redlining and to be conscious in creating more equity in funding.

MMI's promising practices provide a framework for other philanthropies to adapt to bring about true diversity, inclusion, and equity in the arts. The challenges to implementing the MMI model are numerous; time, resources, and staff commitment are significant, and the constraints of conventional funding models can be difficult to surmount. Nonetheless, as MMI demonstrates, disruptive philanthropy is a worthwhile, essential endeavor for those who care about real equity and social justice.

Disruption is not a one-size-fits-all process. The specifics must be tailored to the vision, mission, and aim of an organization, and to the communities it seeks to serve. Answers to many key questions—and concomitant strategies and tactics—must be derived from a genuine understanding of what exists and what is possible.

- ▶ What is the unique artistic and cultural heritage of racialized groups in the geographic area?
- ▶ What is a critical need in the community that the cultural assets can be mobilized to address?
- ▶ What are the historical and contemporary dynamics?
- ▶ How does the arts dichotomy manifest?
- ▶ Who owns disruption—the organization or the community?
- ▶ What is the current state of linkages between and among culturally specific arts organizations? Between the arts organizations and the community?
- ▶ What are the unique strengths and needs of individual organizations? How do we best support them?
- ▶ What specifically do we hope to achieve with disruptive philanthropy? How will we know we achieved it?
- ▶ What will a thriving arts ecosystem look like?

Diversity, equity, and inclusion can be more than buzzwords. They can form the core of a philanthropic practice that prioritizes the incubation and cultivation of community organizations, as MMI's practices show.

### **References**

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- National Philanthropic Trust. (2017). *A History of Modern Philanthropy*. Retrieved March 18, 2017 from <http://historyofgiving.org>

FROM THE FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# FOSTERING EQUITABLE ARTS ORGANIZATIONS TO CREATE EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES

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*Student participating in MMI grantee  
PRIZM Ensemble's 2017 Summer Music  
Camp at First Baptist on Broad Church.*



MUSIC AND THE ARTS OFFER A POWERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE NEW NARRATIVES THAT ELEVATE THE CULTURAL ASSETS OF TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES AND HELP FOSTER A SENSE OF AGENCY, EMPOWERMENT, AND BELONGING.



Unfortunately, traditional arts funding has prioritized exposure over engagement, and often creates an arts conversation in which poor communities and communities of color are excluded, although they have the most to contribute.

Those of us who work in these communities recognize the very important role music and the arts can play in driving youth and community outcomes. For so many black and brown communities, music is not only the soundtrack that surrounds us but also our way of navigating and documenting our path forward. Furthermore, we know that equity in the arts is about more than attracting

diverse audiences to mainstream events and institutions—it's about fostering spaces where traditionally underserved communities feel not just welcome, but at home. It is about ensuring that communities see the arts community as existing for them and dedicated to elevating their voice and perspective. It is about creating and supporting a black and brown arts ecosystem, of artists and arts organizations, that allows black and Latino communities to tell their stories beyond the white gaze.

As MMI's work continues to evolve, we challenge ourselves to reject traditional philanthropic models that don't serve our communities well, in search of an approach that is more inclusive and asset-based. A hallmark of MMI's work is meeting black and brown arts organizations where they are by shedding the conventional and highly exclusive philanthropic requirements for accessing funding, supports, or even a seat at the table. We don't define or limit an organization's potential impact because of its starting point—we embrace that starting point as a point of departure and deploy the resources critical to enhancing their programs, operations, strategies and sustainability. We don't ask organizations that have been overlooked and undercapitalized to compete in a race for dollars when their starting line has been moved backward; instead, we attempt to change the game and the entire playing field on their behalf. We endeavor to engage with music organizations by relinquishing the normative funder/grantee dynamics and creating true partnerships that honor the organization's voice in what will make them more successful. We encourage,

but do not force collaboration. We lower the barriers to engagement by not requiring overly burdensome applications and reporting.

This is the work of the Memphis Music Initiative—to use investments in high-quality music engagement activities and organizations— with a specific focus on Memphis's black, Latino, and traditionally underserved communities—to drive student, youth, and community outcomes, while building an equitable arts ecosystem that supports and sustains the creative class as a social justice and economic driver in our city.

In late 2016, MMI commissioned a study to explore and analyze our philosophy, practices, and approach in hopes of both improving our work and sharing our learnings with others engaged in creative youth development and philanthropy. The results, contained in this report, offer a compelling perspective on both the challenges and opportunities of implementing MMI's strategy of disruptive philanthropy.

We hope that you will find *Toward the Future of Philanthropy* as thoughtful and insightful as we have, and we hope the findings spark conversation and change within the sector.

**Darren Isom**  
Founder and Executive Director  
Memphis Music Initiative

*(Previous page, top) MMI Fellow Ty Boyland teaching music production at Cloud901 at the Memphis Public Library. (Bottom left) PRIZM Ensemble member Shawn Edmunds, teaching students at White Station Middle School. (Bottom right) MMI Works youth interns at Levitt Shell, an open-air amphitheater located in Overton Park.*



INTRODUCTION

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

MMI Works youth tune a guitar at Visimle Music Collage work site.

## WHAT DO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN ARTS FUNDING AND PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?

Over the past several years, many authors—including arts practitioners, academics, and funders—have put forth theories and frameworks that provided guidance but few practical examples of what arts equity looks like in action.

Since early 2014, the Memphis Music Initiative (MMI) has engaged in a unique form of arts philanthropy that is a promising approach for equity and inclusion. Using a variety of qualitative methods, this study evaluates the funding and programmatic practices of MMI in the broader context of arts funding, arts education, youth development, and community empowerment to discern the fundamental elements of the model, its effectiveness, and the lessons that others who are committed to equity might learn. The analysis is situated in a larger discussion of (a) the effects of race and place on access to funding and resources, which we call philanthropic redlining; and (b) the sustained and good-faith commitment to combat this phenomenon through the practice of disruptive philanthropy.

*Toward the Future of Arts Philanthropy* is divided into three sections.

- ▶ The first, *Arts Philanthropy and Racialized Communities* provides the context for this study and describes the key frameworks that will be used throughout.
- ▶ The second, *The Memphis Music Initiative Model*, describes MMI programming and outlines the ways in which MMI has challenged dominant modes of philanthropic giving through (1) challenging the high art/low art dichotomy, (2) cultivating a Black arts ecosystem in Memphis, (3) being invested in communities as opposed to merely investing in them, (4) acting as both a grantmaker and a programmer, and (5) using data to support practice. MMI's policies, practices, and methods reflect its embeddedness in—and responsiveness to—the communities it serves.
- ▶ The final section, *The Challenges and Opportunities of Scaling Disruptive Philanthropy*, presents a set of questions to cultivate and guide disruptive practices in philanthropy.

This report is for persons who directly participate and have a stake in arts philanthropy. Specifically, it is aimed at those who are invested in making arts philanthropy more accessible, inclusive, and supportive of artists and organizations that have been historically marginalized and overlooked. Foundation leaders and program officers, arts service organization staff, and others interested in issues of equity will benefit from the information found within.

SECTION 1

# ARTS PHILANTHROPY AND RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES

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*MMI Works youth receiving keyboard  
instructions at Visible Music College.*

## THE MEANING AND PRACTICE OF PHILANTHROPY HAS EVOLVED OVER TIME.

Philanthropy today is defined as “the practice of organized and systematic giving to improve the quality of human life through the promotion of welfare and social change” (National Philanthropic Trust, 2017). There are a variety of players in the philanthropic realm, including individual donors, donor-advised funds, as well as community, private, and public foundations (Foundation Center, nd).

“Racialized” is used as the preferred term over others, including “minority,” “of color,” and “underrepresented” (although these terms appear in the paper when quoting or referring to other sources). “Racialized” connotes that the construction of racial meaning is ongoing, and has particular effects according to group, time period, and location. Persons and groups that are racialized tend to have a modal experience of marginalization, discrimination, structural and material lack, and diminished life chances.

Grantmaking is one of the most common means of charitable giving. Although there have been seismic shifts in the demographics of the United States, these have not been mirrored in private foundations nor in their grantmaking practices (Kasper et al., 2004). A study conducted by the Greenlining Institute (Gonzalez-Rivera, Donnell, Briones, & Werblin, 2008) is instructive. They examined the 25 largest national independent foundations by asset size and concluded that (a) while there has been a modest increase over time, giving to minority nonprofits remains notably low, and (b) such nonprofits receive a larger number of grants in relationship to grant dollars, which means they are receiving smaller grants when compared to mainstream organizations. The study found that nationally: 12 percent of the grants sampled were given to minority-led organizations; 8 percent of grant dollars were awarded to same; 2.3 percent of grants and 2.7 percent of grant dollars were received by African-American organizations. Of the 25 foundations sampled, 14 gave less than 10 percent of grants to minority-led organizations, and 18 organizations gave less than 10 percent of grant dollars to same.

Contemporary arts philanthropy follows the archetypal trends of the larger non-profit philanthropic landscape. Arts grantmakers engage in the three general approaches to grantmaking: (1) responsive, (2) place-based, and (3) collective impact. Arts funders are increasingly focusing on

relationship building, technical assistance, capacity building (including continuing training for arts leaders), collaboration, innovation, and donor involvement. In the context of decades-long decreases in public funding, especially for arts education, funders are also increasingly encouraging nonprofit arts organizations to move to becoming more market-based, with a focus on tickets/subscriptions and fee-for-service as core revenue streams, and increasing the role of the artists and arts organizations in cross-sector issues.

While all of the above may be efficacious for mainstream arts organizations (read, “high art” organizations), it is not so for culturally based, folk arts, or community-based arts organizations. Traditionally, responsive funding in the arts (i.e., cultural patronage) has focused primarily on building institutions to preserve and present arts and culture based in the classical European canon. Place-based and collective impact arts funding initiatives have focused primarily on fostering economic and community development that serves dominant community interests. If the funders have equity-related interests, they often focus on the importance of arts engagement in providing racialized communities with access to “high arts.”

The discrepancy between mainstream and racialized organizations is reflected in giving practice: in 2012, 80 percent of foundation giving in the arts went to

### ARTS AND CULTURE GRANTMAKING BY FOUNDATIONS

Grantmaking in the arts and culture sector is concentrated among relatively few funders, mirroring the trends of the larger philanthropic landscape. Giving by the top 50 foundations that fund arts and culture grants is summarized below. (Foundation Center, 2017).

Arts and culture grants share, 2012



Arts and culture grants by 50 largest foundations, compared to all foundations, 2012



Number of arts and culture grants given by 50 largest foundations, compared to all foundations, 2012



[View the data tables](#)

less than 10 percent of arts organizations receiving grants that year (Foundation Center, 2017d).

### MAINSTREAM APPROACHES: FOUR DIMENSIONS

Mainstream approaches to evaluating arts funding tend to focus on four dimensions: (1) the relevance of the arts to economic development, especially its ability to generate employment, tourism, and tax revenue; (2) the ability of the arts to enhance the quality of life, especially in the

realm of leisure; (3) the role of the arts in reproducing the nation; and (4) the social value of the arts—especially its ability to improve the moral or political climate. This is especially true for public funding of the arts, which tends to heavily influence the philanthropic sector. Given this perspective, the approach to equity and inclusion tends to center on the “two M’s of diversity: morality and the market” (Kasper, Ramos, & Walker, 2004), and on encouraging voluntary action and initiatives among foundation leaders (Bearman, Ramos, & Pond, 2010). As such, policy recommendations have generally included five broad strategies: (1) embracing different culturally relevant experiences and backgrounds; (2) promoting and advancing the careers of diverse employees; (3) creating an accommodating—not isolating—environment for diverse staff; (4) getting more racialized folks into the audiences of programs implemented by mainstream organizations; and (5) increasing the arts participation of racialized communities.

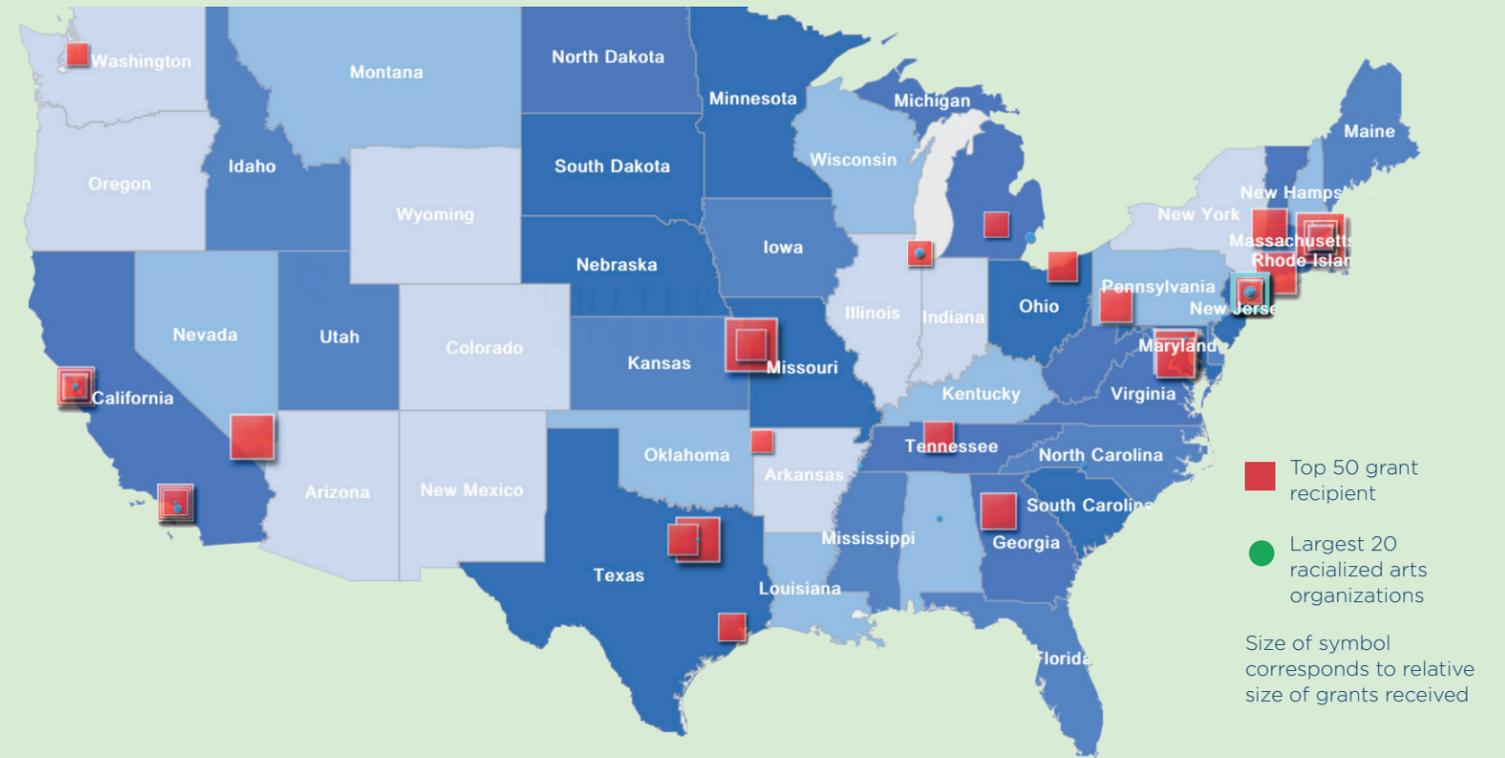
There have been several studies commissioned, position papers written, and working groups formed to analyze the sustainability of organizations and the role of arts philanthropy in fostering a healthy arts sector. Much of the inquiry centers on how racialized organizations compare to mainstream ones, and the implications for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## FOUNDATION ARTS AND CULTURE GRANTS, TOP 50 RECIPIENTS AND TOP 20 RACIALIZED ORGANIZATIONS, 2012

The top 50 recipients of private arts and culture grants are located in 22 cities in 17 states (Foundation Center, 2017c). Only one organization, the Nashville Symphony Association, is located in Tennessee.

The largest 20 arts organizations from racialized communities are located in 12 cities in 10 states. These organizations received smaller and fewer grants, compared to the top 50 list.

[View interactive map](#) →  
[View data table for top 50 recipients](#) →  
[View the data for racialized organizations](#) →



A 2015 study by the DeVos Institute of Arts Management found that arts organizations in racialized communities are, in general, much less secure and far smaller than their mainstream counterparts. According to the report:

[T]hese organizations, the funding community, and everyone who values a diverse, vital cultural sector must: build stronger boards that lead arts organizations of color; invest in management education and effective staff leadership; prioritize great art rather than new buildings; and encourage responsible philanthropy that promotes long-term growth and fiscal health.

These organizations are absolutely essential to the American arts ecology. In addition to producing remarkable art, they provide access to the arts for communities of color, bring arts education programs to children who have lost access to it in their public schools, and offer training for emerging artists, ensuring a pipeline of talent that will continue to reflect distinctive perspectives and experiences that may not otherwise be seen in mainstream or Eurocentric arts. They may also defy expectations, correct historically propagated racial stereotypes, or simply delight their audiences (DeVos Institute of Arts Management at the University of Maryland, 2015).

In response to the DeVos study, the Southern Methodist University National Center for Arts Research (NCAR) explored the extent to which the form and function of culturally specific organizations differ from that of mainstream organizations, and assessed the implications of concentrating funding in a smaller cohort of culturally specific organizations (Voss, Voss, Louie, Drew, & Teyolia, 2016). Their findings were numerous.

Regarding form and function, NCAR found that culturally specific organizations tend to predominate in disciplines that have smaller average budgets, including

community-based art, arts education, and multidisciplinary performing arts; and tend to be underrepresented in sectors that have larger budgets—including museums, opera companies, and orchestras. They also found that these organizations tended to be younger in age than mainstream organizations. However, controlling for age and sector, budgets and physical facilities (which are two indicators of security) tended to be equivalent between culturally specific and mainstream organizations.

Moreover, the NCAR study found that while culturally specific organizations tend to have performance characteristics that set them apart from mainstream organizations—specifically less spending on marketing, less earnings from subscribers and members, lower trustee giving, and higher support from public sources—this was more a reflection of their comparative age than of their weakness or unsustainability. In other words, their distinctiveness can be attributed to their newer organizational form. Thus, the NCAR study is extremely important because it takes culturally specific organizations on their own terms, and disproves the contention that they are comparatively unstable.

In 2011, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) challenged funders to embrace equity as a part of their missions:

Each year, foundations award about \$2.3 billion to the arts, but the distribution of these funds does not reflect the country's evolving cultural landscape

and changing demographics. Current arts grantmaking disregards large segments of cultural practice, and consequently, large segments of our society....

Regardless of its history or primary philanthropic focus, every foundation investing in the arts can make fairness and equity core principles of its grantmaking. It can do so by intentionally prioritizing underserved communities in its philanthropy and by investing substantially in community organizing and civic engagement work in the arts and culture sector. By doing so, arts funders—individually and collectively—can make meaningful contributions toward a more inclusive and dynamic cultural sector, and a fairer, more democratic world (Sidford, 2011).

NCRP suggested that funders could move toward supporting arts equity using a variety of strategies including: (a) working harder to ensure that funds for preserving the Western European canon directly benefit underserved communities; (b) recognizing and supporting work in canons outside the European tradition; (c) nurturing new works, including those focused on social change; (d) expanding arts education for those with the least access to it; and (e) integrating artists and the arts into community planning, especially processes that engage underserved communities.

Grantmakers in the Arts released a revised public statement (*Racial Equity in Arts Philanthropy: Statement of Purpose and Recommendations for Action*, 2017) on its commitment to making “racial equity in arts philanthropy a primary focus of the

organization” and to addressing institutional racism and structural inequities through their educational and funding activities. To follow their lead, they suggested that grantmakers “consider root causes and systems to understand historic inequities in funding ALAANA [African, Latino/a, Asian, Arab, and Native American] artists and arts organizations” and “execute a course correction with explicit intent to structurally change funding behaviors and norms compensating for past neglect and move forward with equal opportunities resulting in better funded and supported ALAANA communities, artists and arts organizations.”

The report *Creating Change through Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development*, (Rose, Daniel, and Liu, 2017) offered six strategies for using policy to support arts, culture, and equitable community development in racialized communities: (1) map artistic cultural assets with a focus on endogenous cultural resources; (2) evaluate economic conditions, including current investments in public works, arts, and culture; (3) identify barriers to resources and restructure processes to engender access; (4) work with artists, designers, young people, and culture bearers to engage the community and inform equity-driven processes; (5) expand equity-focused arts and culture investments across public agencies; and (6) ensure that governance and staffing are representative of the populations served.

Another effort focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion was the *Diversity in*

*Philanthropy Project*, which was developed by presidents of several large foundations including the Kellogg Foundation, The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the California Endowment. The primary aim of this 3-year campaign was to “exemplify diversity, inclusive practice, and attention to social equality in foundation board and staff composition, operations, and grantmaking” by focusing on three primary strategies: (1) voluntary diversity and inclusion initiatives at the individual and field levels; (2) developing a national system of data collection, analysis, and accountability; and (3) encouraging the creation, coordination, and dissemination of “knowledge resources.” Since the campaign’s organizers knew that the philanthropic sector’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion was “lackluster,” they were satisfied with raising awareness, expanding the representation of racialized folk in mainstream organizations, increasing the engagement with racialized communities in mission statements and practical work, and expanding the field’s capacity for change. In other words, the overwhelming emphasis was on educating mainstream organizations, encouraging them to track and measure diversity, and holding them accountable in doing so (Bearman et al., 2010).

These mainstream analyses of equity in arts philanthropy, and solutions proposed, fall short. They fail to consider key structural factors, which are discussed in the following section.

## ASSESSING THE PROBLEMS INHERENT IN ARTS FUNDING

For racialized communities, both the public and private mainstream approach to arts funding generally, and diversity, equity, and inclusion specifically, are insufficient. A multitude of structural and institutional criteria impact the ability of racialized arts organizations to attract funding, especially transformative funds. These include (a) what is considered to be art; (b) the perceived purpose of the arts in relationship to communities, society, and the nation; (c) the requirements put in place to receive funding; (d) how, and whether, diversity, equity, and inclusion should impact arts ecosystems, funding, and programming; and (e) the valuing of arts organizations based on subjective criteria including size, budget, composition, mission, and impact.

With respect to philanthropic and nonprofit foundations, “large, conservative, Eurocentric

arts organizations” receive the lion’s share of funding, and this is justified because they satisfy extant evaluation criteria. Thus, “the sector’s definition of what legitimately constitutes ‘the arts’ doesn’t reflect America’s evolving demographic” (Horwitz, 2016).

Racialized organizations are more dependent on public funds than mainstream organizations. Indeed, funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has been integral to the ability of “community” or “grassroots” organizations—often coded language for racialized or rural organizations—to attract private dollars: “Over the last five decades, the NEA nurtured grassroots organizations that existed off the radar of private donors, while bringing prestige and attention that has helped them raise their profiles” (Gilbert, 2017). More often than not, public grants put racialized organizations on the radar of philanthropic organizations. This is particularly problematic,

given that funding from the NEA, as well as state arts agencies, is perennially under threat. Moreover, the dedication of mainstream philanthropic foundations to diversity tends to be mercurial, and times of crisis, such as economic downturn and the concomitant reduction in resources, rationalize a turn away from issues of diversity (Bearman et al., 2010).

For Black communities in particular, art is not meant to be a life-enhancing form of leisure; art, in many ways, is an expression of life itself. Art necessarily serves the function of combating racial discrimination, shaping a sense of identity and community that fortifies against the gross inequities of everyday Black existence, and rejecting mainstream values and depictions that denigrate Black life. In other words, art tends to be inextricable from social justice. Black music, because of its originality, ingenuity, and intimate connection with Black reality,

has been especially important. For the mainstream society, art can be a powerful way to keep a polity together. However, for those whose citizenship and belonging has been ambivalent or dubious at best, art has been the means to not only challenge their foreclosure from the state, but also to create their own counter-publics (Dawson, 1994). In effect, the arts are a form of world-making. Because Black art is often an expression of dissent and the struggle for liberation, it is more likely to challenge or disrupt the moral and political climate than to “improve” it. Furthermore, Black arts organizations do not want only representation in mainstream organizations and increased arts participation. They also seek (a) to develop audiences for their endogenous arts programming; (b) to increase the number of racialized professional artists—in other words, those that are able to make a living as an artist; (c) to build the capacities of racialized organizations; and

### PUBLIC FUNDING FOR THE ARTS, 2012

Over the past several decades, public funding for the arts has steadily declined at both the federal and state levels. This has a significant impact on racialized organizations, which tend to be more reliant on public funding. The 2012 funding levels presented here are lower than the decade before by 10 to 30 percent.

[View the data table](#) ↗

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

**\$116.8  
MILLION**



STATE AGENCIES (COMBINED)

**\$260.1  
MILLION**



TN COMMISSION ON THE ARTS

**\$5.67  
MILLION**



TCA - SHELBY COUNTY

**\$1.16  
MILLION**



(d) to secure support for racialized artists' entrepreneurship (MeWe306.com, n.d.).

Critiques of place-based arts funding echo this schism, especially as it relates to the concept of creative placemaking—which often assumes that place is a blank slate to be written upon—versus creative placekeeping—which assumes that each place has an extant culture and cultural resources.

At a moment when cities are rapidly being transformed, I worry that the people proposing and implementing policies are not thinking about spatial justice. That the speech of the poor and of communities of color is not heard is in part because of a devaluation of an expressive aesthetic... which does not jibe with the entitlement of the white spatial imaginary that dominates the understanding of the public sphere (Bedoya, 2014).

In racialized communities, art and creative expression “embodies its essence and is crucial to its well-being. Through making art... communities preserve, invent, and assert their identities; transmit heritage; and comment on their existence (Jackson, 2008).

Disparities in the very understanding of the purpose of arts, and the funding criteria derived from such understandings, result from the reality that, “Large, mainstream arts institutions, founded to serve the public good and assigned non-profit status to do so, have come to resemble exclusive country clubs. Meanwhile, outside their walls, a dynamic new generation of artists, and the diverse

communities where they live and work, are being systematically denied access to resources and cultural legitimization” (Horwitz, 2016). The outcome has been an entrenched practice of philanthropic redlining insofar as the “grassroots,” “community,” or “low-art” perspectives of racialized organizations undermine their contention for funding from private foundations, or circumscribe Black possibilities in the arts, e.g., there is funding for Gospel but not for opera, or Blues but not orchestra. What is more, because racialized organizations tend to be more “creative and entrepreneurial” as opposed to “traditional” or “classical,” they struggle to attract long-term investments (MeWe306.com, n.d.).

Nicole Branch<sup>1</sup>, executive director of an organization that provides music opportunities and mentoring to young African American women, argued that one of the biggest barriers faced by racialized organizations is fundraising, given the overemphasis on and preference for mainstream arts organizations. Because of this challenge, the position of her organization, like so many other community-based cultural organizations, is precarious, a result of the lack of resources and lack of access to funding networks.

Right now because of certain barriers [to] grant opportunities or other things that have been stumbling blocks for fundraising that affects us a lot in retaining full-time choir directors, full-time executive team. That's been our

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, interviewees are referred to by pseudonyms. A descriptive list of interviewees is provided in Appendix A.

biggest obstacle...There are certain circles that we just don't feel we can get into, we don't know exactly why, or what it is... so it's been kind of a struggle the past few years.

Chronic lack of resources and barriers to funding access are not uncommon for racialized organizations, and tend to make them much more vulnerable than mainstream arts organizations. Racialized organizations have been historically excluded from circles of wealth, and this is acutely reflected in Memphis. This has real effects on how, and if, they exist as organizations.

## NAMING THE PROBLEM: PHILANTHROPIC REDLINING

*Philanthropic redlining* is an analogy to the historical practice of redlining in which banks and other institutions would deny access and services—including home loans, insurance, business ventures, and health care—to particular neighborhoods based on their racial, ethnic, and class constitution. In the early 1930s, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) began creating color-coded maps to categorize neighborhoods according to the level of risk for investment, with redlines demarcating areas considered risky. The maps were used by private and public entities for years afterward to direct investment and services in discriminatory ways. The effect of this capital disinvestment was low property values, entrenched racial segregation, and the concentration of poverty.

Philanthropic redlining is a set of funding practices in which an organization's size, racial or ethnic constitution, demographic served, artistic designation (e.g., high art or community art), and/or geographic location results in: (a) exclusion from funding altogether, (b) grants that are substantially lower than comparable organizations, and/or (c) forms of funding that contravene capacity building.

Such practices also preclude the funding of organizations that may need substantial development and/or wraparound services that would ensure their viability. A particularly pernicious reality is that the very organizations that are funded specifically to reduce inequity continue to reproduce its logics and effects through forms of philanthropic redlining. Thus, according to Paul Dirks, an MMI leader, philanthropic redlining is “a systemic process of gerrymandering funds so that certain people don't have access to them, or the creation of barriers to limit individuals from having access to funds.” The effects of this lack of access accumulate over time.

Funding criteria such as 501(c)(3) status, legacy status, size and composition of a governing board, and type of programming further philanthropic redlining by intentionally or unintentionally excluding groups that have been historically marginalized. As Branch observed, the newness and size of her organization, and its lack of 501(c)(3) status, precluded access to certain funding pools. While there was a pressing need for a full-time

staff and executive team to implement more programming, she understood that barriers to grant opportunities presented stumbling blocks for fundraising.

The lack of access to resources was a common concern. Dirks stated, “[E]ssentially we have funders who at this moment are like, ‘Hey, I could only fund organizations who have a least \$1 million-a-year budgets.’ In order for an organization to have \$1 million-a-year budget, in most instances they probably have existed for at least 10 years, and they’ve gotten support in some way for at least 10 years from a multitude of sources.”

Kenya Washington, executive director of an arts organization located in South Memphis, emphasized that the small dollar amounts of the grants received from funders led to a small operational budget, which forced her organization to focus most of its attention on arts education. Additionally, her organization was focused on creating programming that could generate immediate revenue instead of focusing on efforts that promote long-term sustainability. The dearth of grants available to small minority-led organizations for capacity and strategy building presented Washington with formidable challenges.

Yet another form of philanthropic redlining is the funding of initiatives focused on getting racialized populations “engaged” as audience members of mainstream arts organizations while simultaneously neglecting the support and development of endogenous ones. Stated differently, the effort is not to provide longevity for racialized forms of

arts practice but rather to use “diversity” to buttress mainstream visions of inclusion. In such initiatives, philanthropic dollars continue to provide strong and rich support for mainstream organizations while only superficially serving racialized populations.

Philanthropic redlining is an institutionalized feature of grantmaking, which disadvantages arts organizations that are deeply embedded in **disinvested**, impoverished, and racialized communities that lack services, resources, and other types of support. Moreover, because these organizations are underfunded and may operate with values that diverge from the mainstream, they are excluded from considerations of best practices, from participating in important conversations around funding, and from important networks of funders and peer organizations. Thus, philanthropic redlining is a practice that overwhelmingly limits opportunities and possibilities for historically underrepresented communities. While many funders espouse a commitment to racial equity, and may have initiatives or staff members dedicated to issues of diversity, the choices they make in grantmaking, and the parameters they set for the disbursement of funds, do little to challenge the gross inequities in funding allocation.

## IDENTIFYING A NEW MODEL: DISRUPTIVE PHILANTHROPY

Disruptive philanthropy is a practice of conscious giving—that is, a practice informed by an awareness of how traditional strategies of philanthropy exclude communities,

organizations, or practitioners that do not meet certain privileged criteria, **even if their inability to meet said criteria is a result of historical neglect from both the public and private sector.** Disruptive philanthropy:

- ▶ starts with the understanding that institutional and structural racism shapes (arts) funding and produces inequities in resources and opportunities;
- ▶ assesses how resource and opportunity inequities manifest (e.g., transportation barriers, technology disparities, professionalization gaps, lack of access to professional and funding networks, absence of key organizational components such as a board, lack of remuneration for full time staff);
- ▶ includes sensitivity to the particular history and development, mission and scope of each organization, and to the communities they serve;
- ▶ eschews “one size fits all” approaches;
- ▶ shapes funding practices to eradicate the barriers that result from entrenched forms of discrimination, including racism, geographic location, and size;
- ▶ creates tools to evaluate effectiveness of models implemented, which allows responsiveness to extant needs, pivots in real time, and tailored approaches; and
- ▶ measures impact.

This practice of aware, informed, and conscious grantmaking disrupts the normative standards of giving and models a new way of understanding philanthropy with a racial equity lens. It is an anti-paternalistic model of resource allocation that supports communities and organizations in expanding

their **organizational capacity.** Ultimately, it privileges group-autonomy. In the final analysis, disruptive philanthropy is a funding practice that intentionally reveals, critiques, challenges, and seeks to upend philanthropic redlining.

## Disruptive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the service of disruptive philanthropy includes several components. First, it **entails the recognition** that enduring racialized governing policies, institutional practices, and societal norms, both conscious and unconscious, have resulted in unequal access to funding, services, and other resources for historically marginalized organizations and the communities they serve. Second, it **maintains a commitment** to building opportunities for all populations and cultures to contribute their art forms and to participate in arts programming, because all contributions are essential to a rich and vibrant understanding of humanity. Third, it **harnesses the unique tools** of artists and arts organizations from a multitude of backgrounds to the identification, critique, and struggle against inequality, discrimination, and injustice. Finally, it requires the explicit action of public and private funders to change behaviors, norms, ideas, and practices that reproduce social inequalities that exacerbate the conditions of racialized and underrepresented communities.

Those who are deeply committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the service of disruptive philanthropy must give up all forms of privilege that reinforce inequality, oppression, exclusion, and domination.

## THREE EXAMPLES OF MMI'S TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

For MMI, disruptive philanthropy means creating the conditions for a grantee organization to thrive by helping them build a sustainable infrastructure. This requires tangible resources, including support services and consultation, relationship building and access to professional networks, along with funding.



Participants reflecting during the In-School Music Engagement Fellowship Professional Development session, spring 2017.

### Support and Consultation

If an organization has demonstrated a commitment to arts education and social justice but doesn't have 501(c)(3) status, disruptive philanthropy means providing the resources to help said organization secure an interim fiscal sponsor, or assisting it to establish a board of directors, file paperwork to secure a 501(c)(3) status, and supporting strategic planning. Emphasizing this point, Lisa Cole, MMI leadership team member, noted that MMI provides, "intensive and specific technical assistance that is really tailored to give nonprofits as much support as needed to be responsible, responsive, and increase their scalability to serve young people in the music engagement realm."

### Relationships and Networks

Creating real and meaningful relationships with grantee organizations based on their needs and visions counters the norms of philanthropic giving. Nicole Branch reflected on how MMI functioned as more than just a funder. "I feel like with MMI we have a partnership," Branch stated. "They go so much further than just a check. I mean, to me the check is last on the list. It's the experiences, the connectivity, the training, the teaching that they are giving us that excites me more than the check does." She found that the wraparound services MMI provided were so tailored to the organization's need that she "[felt] selfishly like this [MMI] was just created for our group." These services included providing a lawyer to help secure a 501(c)(3) status, providing the supports for the organization to hire some full time staff to solidify daily operations and organizational stability, helping them to build in assessment protocols to measure their success and identify areas where they might want to improve.

### Transformative Funding

Providing transformative funds—a sum that allows an organization to develop sustainable infrastructure—is fundamental to disruptive philanthropy. What is considered a transformative sum will be different for each organization. As Washington explained, "[MMI's] funding has been phenomenal. I was able to get instruments, that was another thing, we didn't have instruments for students... I suddenly had enough instruments for everybody, but that was one worry I didn't have. When it comes to music, I spend \$1000, \$1200 out of my pocket in a heartbeat for music. I don't have to do that now... It's like I have a backing now, it's like I have a foundation now. Whereas I was just winging it before, because it was all on me. I have somebody backing me now and I am able to bring in one of your best violinists from some other part of the country to give the children a workshop. I am able to bring in an African American string player because you don't see a lot of them, but I am able to show these kids there are other African American string players... I had three interns that they sent to help me. That was a big help, because all you had to do was tell the interns what you needed, and I could be in two places at one time. It was like extra arms, that was a big part of the success of my camp this summer."

### Key Definitions: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

**Diversity:** The representation and incorporation of individual differences, including language, culture, and life experiences; and social differences, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual identity, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability status, as well as cultural, political, religious or other affiliations in all facets of an organization's composition, policy, and practice.

**Equity:** The eradication of barriers and the creation of opportunities for historically underrepresented populations to participate in organizations and on boards; to have equal access to funding and resources; and to participate in quality and culturally relevant programming. Equity also requires a level of cultural competency, or awareness and sensitivity of one's own cultural location; the recognition of cultural differences and subject locations, and attitudes toward them; the appreciation of and respect for different cultural practices, norms, values, and worldviews; and empathy and awareness in cross-cultural interactions. Cultural self-determination is a crucial dimension of equity.

**Inclusion:** The conscious, intentional, and sustained engagement with diversity in an effort to increase awareness, knowledge, understanding, and ultimately opportunities for populations that have historically been marginalized and excluded.

SECTION 2

# THE MEMPHIS MUSIC INITIATIVE MODEL

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*MMI grantee PRIZM Ensemble's classical instrument instruction session at White Station Middle School.*

FOUNDED IN 2014, MMI IS A GROWING ORGANIZATION WITH A STAFF OF FIFTEEN (AS OF MAY 2017). A MAJORITY OF MMI'S LEADERSHIP POSITIONS ARE STAFFED BY ARTISTS AND PEOPLE OF COLOR.

MMI uses the arts, specifically music, to address issues of access and participation, relationship building, and equity in a bidirectional and sustained way. Music education and programming become tools for youth development and community engagement as opposed to products or commodities imposed upon—or inserted into—the community.

MMI has incorporated several types of music engagement, including band, orchestra, choir, and hip-hop production. This is important for several reasons:

1. Memphis is a city that has a strong musical legacy. Therefore, a variety of genres of music should be represented in music programming.

2. Insofar as MMI serves primarily Black and Latino students—many of whom have had little exposure to real instruments—exposure to musicians who look like them or who, for instance, play violin, clarinet, bass, or trumpet, significantly impacts perceptions of what is possible.
3. Students are introduced to a multitude of life and developmental skills related to music engagement.
4. A variety of arts practitioners throughout Memphis are engaged, bringing a diverse wealth of knowledge and skills.

Such diversity allows responsiveness to the interests of youth, schools, and the community at large.

## MMI MISSION, VISION AND CORE VALUES

### Mission

MMI is a community initiated and developed grantmaking initiative to use high-quality music engagement to drive student, youth, and community outcomes.

### Vision

Memphis invests in its youth, its communities, and its musical legacy by broadening and strengthening existing music engagement offerings in and out of schools and supporting youth-centered, community-based music spaces.

### Core Values

**Impact.** Music and the Arts are essential elements for social impact. At MMI, we commit to promoting music and arts engagement as a tool for communities to make relevant, local change.

**Voice.** At MMI, we commit to honoring the voices of the communities that we serve. We believe that community members are uniquely positioned to offer solutions to the problems that they face. This means creating spaces, processes, and celebrations that encourage every level of partnership to impact the work in our communities.

**Equity.** At MMI, our investments are designed to use music and arts engagement to create equitable access to opportunities and experiences, particularly in historically underserved Memphis communities.

**Change.** Meaningful change requires discomfort. At MMI, we challenge ourselves and our partners to engage in difficult conversations about equity and access for Black & Latino communities in Memphis arts communities.

### Impact Statement

Memphis cultivates a thriving arts and culture ecosystem that enhances the quality of life of residents, provides critical developmental opportunities for youth, and ensures the growth and vibrancy of the city.

### Current Initiatives (as of June 2017)

MMI's current initiatives fall in three areas described below.

- ▶ Direct programs to provide high quality engagement in the arts. The *MMI Music Fellows* work directly with students, parents, school and city leadership, and nonprofit professionals to support school-based education for youth. MMI Works program provides internships, externships, and apprenticeships at music venues across the city and supplements that hands-on experience with a professional development curriculum.
- ▶ Indirect programs to expand quality of and access to out-of-school time programs. The *Program Development Institute* bolsters existing music engagement programs, supporting the quality, refinement, and measurement of programs. The *MMI SummerBeat* program provides support to a variety of providers of music engagement programs, from churches to small organizations, during the summertime, to ensure that youth have meaningful, positive music-related activities during outside-of-school time. SummerBeat also provides MMI with an opportunity to engage with organizations that have smaller music programs, like churches and community centers, to ensure that there are music engagement opportunities embedded in a wide geographic and cultural spectrum across the city.
- ▶ Indirect programs to expand capacity of arts organizations through its *Institute for Nonprofit Excellence (INE)*. The INE focuses on organizational development, including leadership competencies, sustainability approaches, strategy development, and governance practices among Memphis arts organizations.

## EMPOWERING YOUTH AND FAMILIES THROUGH MUSIC

MMI operates within the unique context of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee, which has a profound impact on the mission, vision, and philosophy of the organization. The history and context both shape and inform MMI's work. The confluence of context and approach are described and explored below.

### Addressing Race, Culture, and Socioeconomics in Memphis, TN

Memphis is known for its innovation and creative cultural capital. However, it does not fit neatly into an easily identifiable regional category. As a city in the mid-South that is historically understood as the capital of the Mississippi Delta, it is neither the deep South nor the urban North. As such, the city's unique positioning in the historical and economic landscape means that it is not your typical southern city.

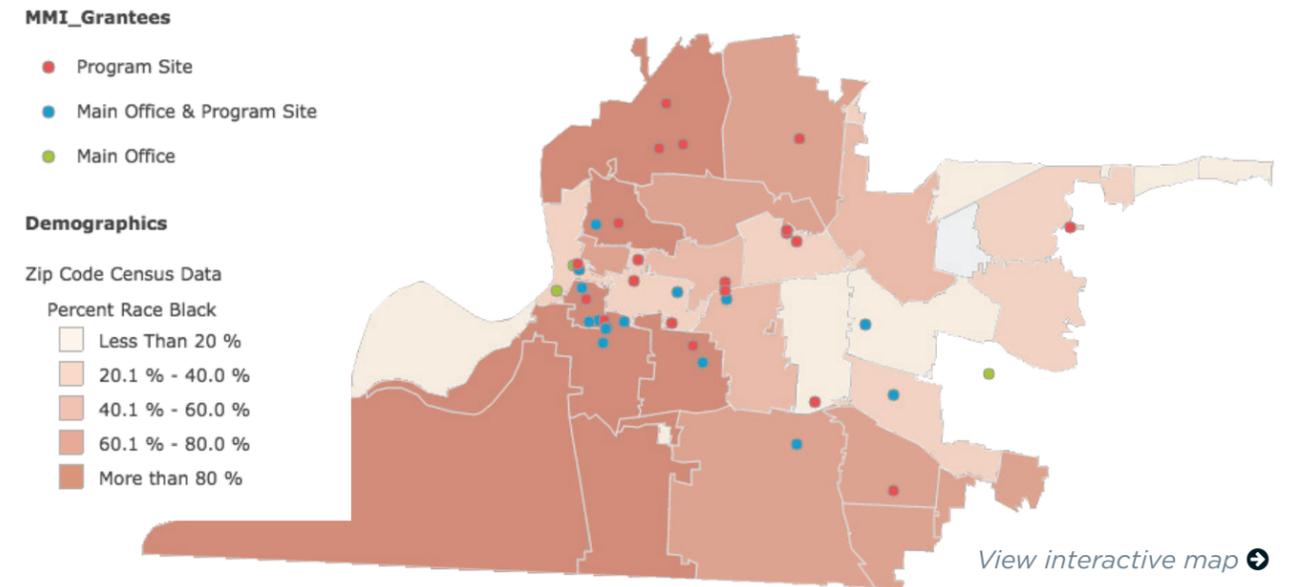
Memphis occupies a peculiar historical identity; it is perhaps best known for its iconic racial history that informs the city's identity in a global context. Particularly noteworthy are the activism of the renowned anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s support of the sanitation strike and subsequent assassination in 1968. According to Zandria Robinson, "Memphis is a place where you can examine snippets of 'old' and 'new' South as they collide with one another in urban space. It's where the things that we popularly think make southerners southern

intersect with the things that we popularly think make black folks black" (Pop South, 2014). Today, "Memphis occupies a unique status as a distribution center in the global economy, but the city continues to struggle with social and economic inequalities as well as its collective identity" (Rushing, 2009).

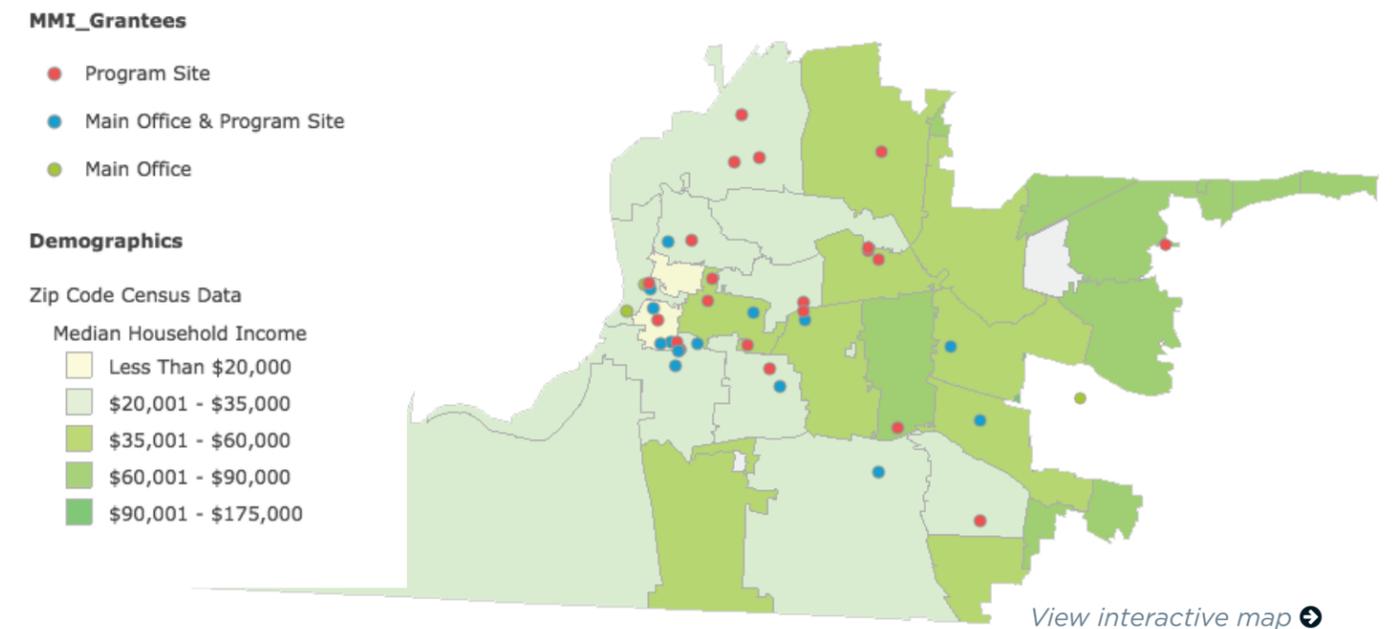
Memphis is a majority-minority city. Both its adult and youth populations are overwhelmingly Black: 65 percent of all Memphians and 71 percent of children are African American. Despite these demographics, the city's power relations are reminiscent of the Old South—a time and space in which white rule ensured the economic exploitation, social subordination, political disempowerment, cultural relegation, and second-class citizenship of its Black inhabitants. One of the city's great paradoxes is that "Black urban demographic dominance and middle class status do not often translate into broadly useful public political power." Memphis is reflective of a cohort of "Soul Cities" that are characterized by "expansive and rich white canopies with wider, poorer black bottoms" (Robinson, 2014).

The current socioeconomic challenges faced by Memphians are informed by the confluence of its negative racial history, its ambivalent relationship to Black cultural capital, and the city's labor market. Most relevant to this study is the systematic neglect of Black residents that constitutes the political economy of Memphis. Trends in educational policies, housing,

## MEMPHIS RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS AND MMI GRANTEE SITES BY ZIP CODE



## MEMPHIS HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND MMI GRANTEE SITES BY ZIP CODE



and employment in Memphis reveal how opportunity in this city—or lack thereof, in the case of Black folks—continues to be plagued by ghosts of the city’s past. The deep racial and economic divisions of the city are significantly reflected in the city’s schools. Pohlmann (2010) points to the racial implications of the redistricting of Shelby County Schools; the hodgepodge nature of the district, which is comprised of various charter organizations and ever-changing educational governing entities, and that has the most negative impact on Black and marginalized students; and the poor academic performance of Memphis/ Shelby County Schools. One example of the deeply troubled nature of these schools is that in 2016 Shelby County had an average composite ACT score of 16.8, with 7 percent of these students being college ready. This is in contrast to Knoxville County Schools, the highest performing district in the state, which has an average composite ACT score of 20.5 with 24 percent of its students being college ready (Boehnke, 2016).

Another indicator of the racial and economic divisions that plague the city is the shutting down of Memphis public housing as part of new strategies for city planning and development. It is primarily low-income Black families that are being displaced in this process. Moreover, the “selling [of] Memphis” by city officials “offering typically southern industrial recruitment incentives, marketing cheap land and natural resources, and maintaining a low-wage labor market, have generated and reproduced inequality.”

According to Rushing (2009), “The city’s high level of poverty and low level of educational attainment are deeply rooted in the city and regional economic structure, as well as historic patterns of rural-urban migration and ties to agricultural and industrial development.”

MMI is critically aware of how historical trends of racial discrimination have come to bear on wealth accumulation in the city, on arts giving, and on youth access to quality arts education. The organization’s grantmaking reacts, responds, and seeks remedy to the gross maldistribution of Memphis’s abundant resources.

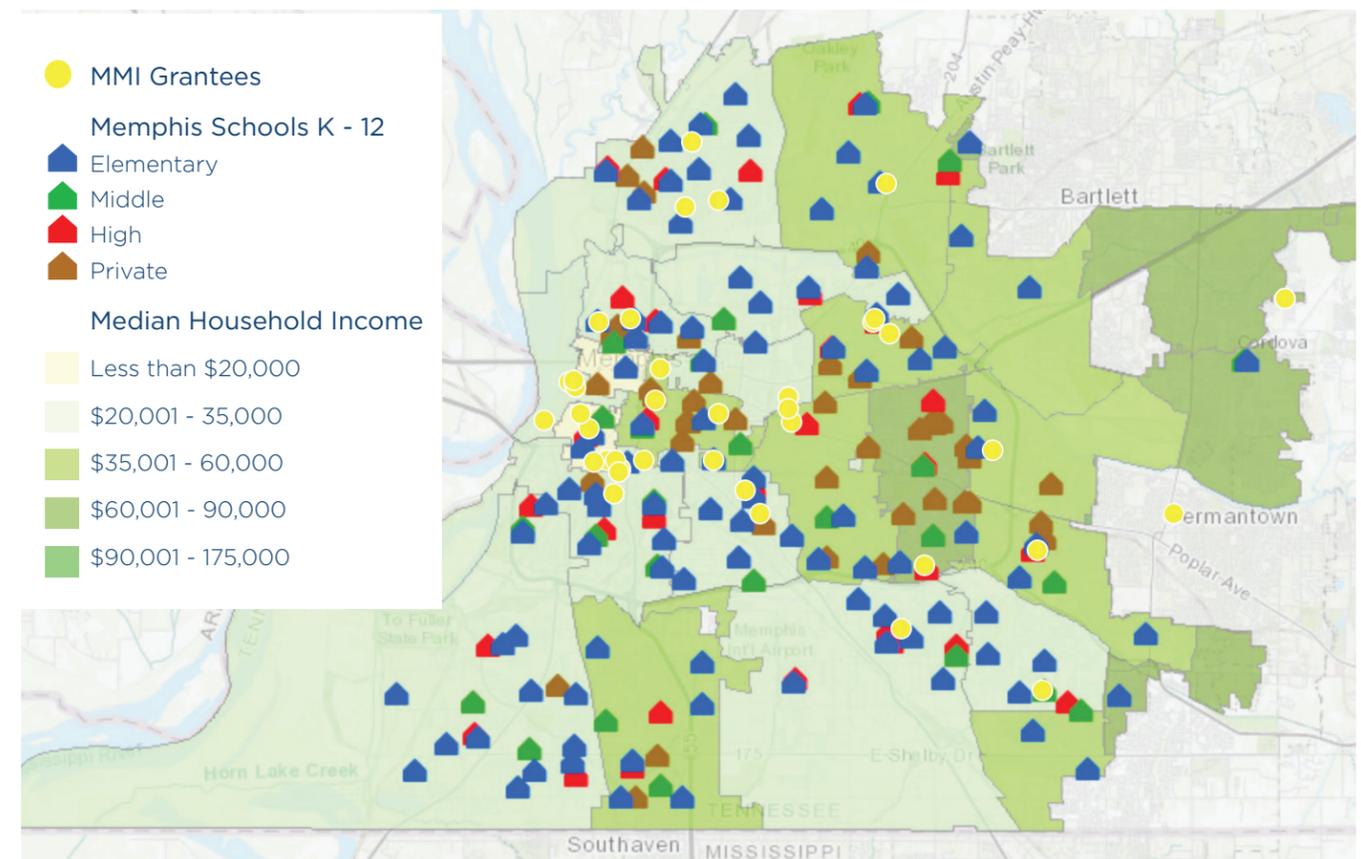
### Using Community Cultural Assets to Address Community Needs

MMI uses existing cultural assets to address the pressing needs. In its work from 2014-2016, it used four primary strategies to encourage youth success:

1. MMI provided in-school programming to sustain existing music education and expand instruction through partnerships with local musicians. MMI worked directly with students, parents, school and city leadership, nonprofit professionals, and musicians to support and strengthen existing in-school music education.
2. Through its strategic growth grants to arts organizations, MMI supported extended learning to expand high-quality out-of-school programs to reach more youth and remove barriers to youth engagement and participation. This grant

## MEMPHIS K-12 SCHOOLS AND MMI GRANTEE SITES

[View the interactive map](#)



## CHALLENGES TO YOUTH SUCCESS

Despite Memphis’ strong cultural assets, many barriers undermine youth success:

- ▶ Racial and socioeconomic segregation continues in Shelby County, with Black families, particularly those that have a low income, less likely to live near new expanding job opportunities in outlying areas.
- ▶ 40 percent of Memphis youth live below the poverty line, which is nearly double the national rate.
- ▶ Neighborhoods with high poverty rates tend to suffer from under-performing schools.
- ▶ More than 26 percent of youth in many of Memphis’ most underserved neighborhoods don’t graduate from high school. (Urban Child Institute, 2013)

program fostered and supported high-quality music-engagement opportunities by addressing barriers to organizational success and making targeted investments in program growth, planning and support, and transportation.

3. Through its community cohort grants, MMI supported innovation spaces in collaboration with community leaders, organizations, and musicians. The strategy both brought quality programs to communities and identified, elevated, and grew existing music programs and activities that were already happening in those communities.
4. Through its *Institute for Nonprofit Excellence* (INE), MMI focused on executive-level leadership and organizational development within community arts organizations. Many of these organizations had not received substantive capacity investments to position the organizations for sustainability or growth. MMI's investment of funding and consultative support sought to ensure these organizations that primarily serve Black and brown children would be in operation for years to come.

Through these approaches, MMI sought to ensure that each of Memphis' many communities had places where youth could jam with local musicians; learn, play, and hear music; and contribute to (and benefit from) the city's important musical

and cultural legacy. MMI brought music instruction into neighborhoods, community centers, and churches to remove barriers to participation for Memphis youth and to ensure that the city's cultural products remain true to its communities.

Combined, these strategies offer a comprehensive approach to arts engagement and arts education that puts into practice the organization's theory of change. By investing in, supporting, and building the capacity of schools, individual musicians, youth and community arts organizations and their leadership, MMI will ultimately impact youth and families, schools and school districts, and the community as a whole.

#### **Engaging in Arts-based Youth Development**

MMI's specific focus on youth development through the arts is an attempt to redress the racial and socioeconomic ills of the past through deliberate investment in the city's future. Research shows that arts-based programs can help youth to develop the skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed to overcome these barriers and succeed in school and life. Yet, there is an equity gap between the availability of high-quality arts education for students in schools in areas with high poverty. In Tennessee

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*(Following page) MMI grantee Harmonic South Strings Orchestra student recital performance. HSSO provides music education to youth regardless of skill level.*

## **THE VALUE OF ARTS EDUCATION**

Arts advocates have long extolled the benefits of arts education for children. According to research, arts education prepares students for school success by

- ▶ instilling motivation to learn and substantively engage with the curriculum.
- ▶ improving performance in language art and literacy more broadly.
- ▶ increasing math performance.
- ▶ cultivating and encouraging critical thinking skills.
- ▶ strengthening student relationships with school culture.

Research also demonstrates that arts education prepares students for success in work and life, with a focus on so-called 21st century skills including promoting creativity, developing problem solving skills, promoting cooperation and communication, building leadership potential, encouraging persistence and patience, instilling a sense of community responsibility and delayed gratification, and facilitating cultural sensitivity, understanding, and appreciation. Lastly, research indicates that arts education gives students an academic advantage (ArtsEdSearch, n.d.; Arts Education Partnership, 2013).

The key issue is that not all students have equal access to arts education, and those with access do not always receive high quality arts education because of large class size, or a lack of breadth, depth, and scope within the students' arts experience. If we believe in the benefits of arts education, then it makes sense to ensure that youth, students, and communities, especially those in underserved areas, have access to quality arts education.



public schools, access to music instruction is below the national average and access to arts integration is below both national and regional averages (South Arts, 2014); less than 5 percent of Memphis youth have access to after-school music programming compared to 15-20 percent in similar cities (MMI, 2015).

Youth development is one of MMI's key objectives, in part to address the lack of opportunities for Memphis youth. Paul Dirks summarized the need:

What does it mean for there to be a whole city that just hasn't looked at young people as valuable enough to invest in them? Very specifically, young people who happen to be Black, and happen to be just people of color because as we know, historically, Shelby County doesn't have an issue creating opportunities, because if you look at municipalities for example, you have less than five or so municipalities and those are well-funded municipalities who create opportunities, and when there is any opportunity for individuals from various socioeconomic classes to interact with each other via physical location, there's definitely a white-flight narrative.

Positive youth development is defined as an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and

promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths (Youth.gov, n.d.). All of the strengths of arts education correlate to the research and evidence-based best practices related to youth development.

In positive youth development, practitioners seek development or improvement of knowledge, attitudes, abilities, or behaviors in several key outcome areas: youth self-esteem and self-efficacy, youth personal and social development, strong family interaction, enduring and respectful relationships with adults, investment in schooling, positive interpersonal skills, sensitivity to community needs and issues, productive and responsible decision making, academic excellence, and preparation for careers and the job market.

In both its in-school and out-of-school programming, MMI creates positive developmental settings in which youth experience physical and psychological safety, developmentally appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, tools to build self-esteem, and opportunities for skills building.



(Top left) MMI Works intern gains experience as a production apprentice at Levitt Shell, summer 2016. (Top right) MMI Summer Beat grantee Memphis Jazz Workshop performance. (Bottom) Stax Music Academy student percussions performance at the Soulsville USA Festival, fall 2016. Both organizations received grants and support from MMI.

## INVESTED IN COMMUNITY: AN INTERVIEW WITH FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DARREN ISOM

The Memphis Music Initiative works creatively with communities on their own ground, on their own issues, through cultural practice. MMI's deeply rooted approach reflects the principles of community cultural development, such as equity, social justice, self-determination, cultural democracy, and collaborative cultural production.

Equity, or the lack thereof in Memphis, gives rise to MMI's work. Darren Isom, MMI founder and executive director, noted the historical factors that continue to affect Black Memphians:

Memphis is a majority Black city with a Black population that is significantly underrepresented and unengaged and more often than not erased from the city's political and economic arenas. Two years ago, an economic study of the city revealed that of the millions of dollars spent annually at private businesses here in Memphis, a mere 0.08 percent of those dollars went to Black-owned businesses, this is in a 65 percent Black city. I remember reading the study results in complete confusion. How could a city so steeped in Jim Crow and segregation, systems that forced the Black community to rely on itself for support, escape that era with such a limited Black infrastructure? And herein lies the dilemma that is Memphis; it's a majority Black city that has made a business of Black exclusion.

Data from a variety of sources indicate that the Black arts sector is under-resourced although there is a significant amount of

both public and private arts philanthropy. Isom commented on this inequity:

What's unique about Memphis, is that while you have extreme levels of poverty here, it's also a city with pockets and communities of extreme wealth. Unlike the poverty, the extreme wealth is an anomaly for the region—Memphis is one of a limited number of Southern cities with large, well-endowed private and corporate foundations.

The work becomes engaging with those foundations in a way that ensures that their giving practices don't mirror or recreate the inequitable systems they are products of—the work is to offer a philanthropic approach that elevates and prioritizes communities and organizations that have to date been left out of the fold.

In order to support cultural democracy and self-determination—equity in the transmission and implementation of aspirations, ideas, values—one must acknowledge (a) that some groups in society have greater access to resources and political processes than do others, and (b) that as a consequence, these groups also have greater power to construct dominant value system that often precludes and oppresses other groups. MMI understands both and adds that one must also be invested in community—listening deeply, uncovering community values, caring about the wellbeing of the local community, and engaging in cultural production that can improve contemporary reality. For example, Isom explained how understanding Black values related to music leads to a different view of arts engagement:

Within the Black community and communities of color, music and the arts are more than mere cultural distractions; they are a way of navigating the world. Music and the

arts offer us a sense of joy, beauty, and purpose in a world that is, more often than not, joyless, ugly, and chaotic. Thinking musically and artistically offers us a sense of self-empowerment and agency; we don't just engage in music and the arts, we embody them and excel at them. They allow us to tell our story and create our own narrative. This said, when we invest in music, arts, and creative expression for black and brown youth and communities, we do so with eye on equity and the goal of empowering these communities with powerful narratives that serve as tools for success.

Another example: Research shows that music engagement and music-based education foster academic and positive youth development. Given that, Isom asks, "Why don't we have musical programs at summer school? Or, for the kids who are in juvenile justice? Seems to me it's even more important [in those settings]." He notes, however, that often the response from others is, "Those kids don't deserve it."

MMI's disruptive philanthropy counters the narrative that some people deserve and others don't, or that some arts and arts organizations are more meritorious than others. It intentionally funds organizations and programs that support a wider range of artistic expression, have a wider variety of participants, and that do not stigmatize endogenous art forms. Speaking to this point, Isom offered that irrespective of historical trends in what has been valued and not valued in the mainstream art world, Black artistry has been about survival. MMI is interested in a Black arts ecosystem to support efforts to eradicate oppression; therefore, it intentionally evades traditional arts binaries because they do not reflect the organization's core mission. He noted:

What's distinctly missing here in Memphis is an arts ecosystem, particularly for Black arts organizations

and organizations that focus on serving the Black community. The work, our work, is about creating an ecosystem of highly functioning and high-quality Black arts organizations and organizations that serve the black community who understand the value, importance, and critical nature of their work—organizations that look to celebrate their communities and who see our cultural, artistic, and musical attributes and products as more than enough.

There is a need, from a Black arts perspective, to model what best practices look like and to offer a narrative that counters the less equitable one that we're living under, a need for a narrative that demonstrates what a Black arts ecosystem should look like in a 65 percent Black city. What does it look like to have an ecosystem of Black organizations? What does it look like to have a community of Black leaders? What does it look like to have a community of Boards that are majority Black? These are all things that don't exist now in Memphis.

But to do this, you have to first believe in the communities you're working with—which isn't always the case. You have to believe that what you're doing is important—urgent even, and drives critical outcomes. Finally, you have to appreciate that although work is hard and takes time, it's important work—work worth fighting for.

MMI is intentional in being invested *in* community, taking a communal approach to blending the arts and community uplift in Memphis.

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE: DISRUPTIVE PHILANTHROPY

The philanthropic landscape in Memphis is part of a historically constructed imbalance of power and wealth. The trends in arts giving in Memphis parallel the political-economic history whereby Black people have been excluded from equitable opportunities to garner resources. The circulation of arts philanthropic dollars in the city reproduces the trend of egregious neglect of the city’s largest demographic.

Disruptive philanthropy is an insurgent practice that fundamentally challenges philanthropic redlining. MMI uses five key strategies in its practice of disruptive philanthropy: (1) challenging the high art/low art dichotomy; (2) cultivating a Black arts ecosystem; (3) being invested in community as opposed to merely investing in a community; (4) having a dual structure in which they operate as both a grantmaker and a programmer; and (5) using data to

support programming. This section details MMI’s approach.

### Challenging the Arts Dichotomy

Across the interviews conducted for this study, the theme of high art versus low art manifested in a variety of ways. Historically, organizations that center what is considered to be high art, such as ballet and classical music, have received meaningful sums of financial support. These legacy organizations (the symphony, the art museum, the ballet, the theater, the opera) have often been supported and held as the standard of what is considered quality and valuable art.

As Dirks noted, “Your symphonies, your older, established organizations, which is essentially coded for your white organization[s] [are well-funded]. If you aren’t necessarily in that space, then what it means is that you only have access to small dollars, you only have access to \$5,000 at a time, or \$10,000 at a time, and that’s if you created something that’s really good.” In other words, art forms that were

historically developed by African American communities have been underfunded and deemed to be low art, even as many of these art forms have served meaningful humanistic purposes such as storytelling, cultural memory, and resistance. MMI is woefully aware of this reality and intentionally disrupts the dichotomy by funding organizations and programs that support a wider range of artistic expression and that do not stigmatize art forms based on this worn logic.

With an historical understanding of the arts in America, MMI brings different evaluative thinking about why art is valuable and the work it does and can do in communities.

### Cultivating a Black Arts Ecosystem

The leadership and partners of MMI stressed the importance of a thriving arts community for youth development but also for matters of social justice. In its efforts to support the arts community in Memphis that is invested in both, MMI has emphasized that this cannot be an individualistic endeavor

for single artists or a few independent arts organizations. Therefore, MMI is intentional in its vision to build a Black arts ecosystem, taking a communal approach to blending the arts and community uplift in Memphis.

The Black arts ecosystem that MMI envisions is a collection of mutually sustaining arts organizations, artists, and arts pathways that are informed by the community in which they are embedded, and that are intentional in maintaining a thriving and evolving Black arts community. Dirks commented on how the need to incubate a Black arts ecosystem became strikingly apparent early on. “As we were doing the work, initially we were focused moreso on youth development outcomes ...we realized very quickly that in order for us to create a critical mass of opportunities for young people, we would also need to get into the business of building organizations, building ideas, but also supporting organizations that already existed.” In order to create meaningful opportunities for youth development in relationship to the arts, MMI

## ARTS GRANTS IN MEMPHIS, 2012

In 2012, nearly \$10 million in private and public grants went to arts organizations in Memphis. **Only 12.7 percent of private dollars, and 8 percent of public dollars, went to racialized organizations.**

[View the data table for private funding](#)

[View the data table for public funding](#)

TOTAL PRIVATE GRANTS	PRIVATE GRANTS BY DISCIPLINE	PUBLIC GRANTS	PUBLIC GRANTS BY DISCIPLINE
<b>\$8.85M TO 58 GRANTEES</b>	<b>MUSIC</b> \$2.97M <b>MULTI</b> \$1.67M <b>VISUAL</b> \$1.35M <b>DANCE</b> \$697,650 <b>THEATER</b> \$489,656	<b>\$997,757 TO 51 GRANTEES</b>	<b>THEATER</b> \$221,750 <b>VISUAL</b> \$191,393 <b>MULTI</b> \$186,420 <b>MUSIC</b> \$177,190 <b>DANCE</b> \$106,560

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recognized the need to curate a community of organizations, artists, and initiatives that formed an interconnected system of arts, youth development, and community empowerment.

With this aim in mind, MMI has been intentional in its grantmaking processes. MMI has not simply waited for organizations and artists to reach out to them as a funder, but it has aggressively sought out organizations. In its efforts to socially engineer a Black arts ecosystem, MMI has supported a variety of arts organizations.

Many of MMI's grantees commented on the benefits of the Black arts ecosystem vision and model. For instance, Kenya Washington stated:

I had three interns that they sent to help me. That was a big help, because all you had to do was tell the interns what you needed, and I could be in two places at one time.... When you got 93 children and you got them ages 6-18, you need extra people, you need eyes for security. You need somebody with the little ones at all times, even if they are just going to the restroom. With the big ones, you need people up working with them, you need eyes on the big ones too. So, the older ones too, so just the use of the interns, that was a great help this summer...Each of my interns played a string instrument, and so the one that played cello, he sat with the cellist, the one who played violin, I had two on violin. I made sure the interns were with them all day long.

Washington's comments capture how the wrap around services MMI provides ensure that organizations have resources they need to thrive, which helps to build the ecosystem. MMI is intentional to forge partnerships between local artists and Black arts organizations because it understands these pathways and partnerships have long-term benefits for the local community.

The ultimate purpose of the Black arts ecosystem is to embed high quality arts education and arts engagement opportunities for young people within the broader context of the community. MMI has forged strategic partnerships with both established arts organizations and historically underfunded Black arts organizations to build such an ecosystem. The vision is to incubate relationships and organizations that can have longevity—empowering Memphis communities through the arts, particularly those Memphians that have been overlooked.

Glenda Martin, executive director of a grantee organization, highlighted that MMI's cohort model was useful in facilitating relationships that might serve as a foundation for this arts ecosystem. As she stressed, there is value in sitting at the table with similarly aligned organizations that invest in arts with larger missions of community development in mind. "My current cohort group...is represented by most of the major arts organizations in the city. I was shocked to even be asked to come to the table to be on this."

Martin emphasized how the cohort meetings provided an opportunity to recognize how

peer organizations face similar challenges and it also created opportunities for collaboration to support the larger vision that they all care about—empowering their communities through the arts. Comparing the current state of Black arts in Memphis to MMI's desired end, she stated, "I look at now where we are in the city...it's a lot of separation and division when it comes to the African-American arts period. Everybody has their own thing, their own audience." But Martin is hopeful that "if we pull together and it becomes what it probably should be," a thriving Black arts ecosystem can be a powerful tool in mobilizing the community.

### **Being Invested in Community Versus Investing in Communities**

Given its vision of cultivating a Black arts ecosystem, MMI has offered **wraparound services** not only for its grant recipients but also for the larger community it serves. This translates into an **asset-based approach** that values each arts organization's unique strengths and contributions. MMI meets organizations where they are, providing assistance to expand **organizational capacity**. This approach is particularly important because, as Dirks noted:

In many instances, these are people of color who are starting organizations, [and] they aren't necessarily starting it from a seed funding of \$500,000 or something. In many instances, it's an individual who's putting it on their back and saying: I'm going to do this thing because I think it's important. What they immediately see is that there is no support and help with their 501(c)(3) status.

While MMI's tactic is to fund community arts initiatives and organizations, it is first and foremost invested in the wellbeing of the local community and in imagining a future that looks better than the contemporary reality.

MMI funds arts organizations in a manner that helps them expand their capacity, demonstrating an investment in the longevity of a Black arts ecosystem and a recognition of how certain barriers have previously prevented this from happening. Martin noted:

I have never in the history of what I do, ever seen an organization that is so hands on from a supportive standpoint.... They provided us with consultants throughout the entire process. They came through, maybe every other week, just to make sure everything was okay. They provided us with interns. They provided us with someone that would assist us as far as program management. Or not so much just program management—more of a fellow. They attended both performances. They strategized with us....That extra bit of encouragement and training and instruction is, I think, the one thing that will help an organization that is striving to increase their capacity get it, the know-how to increase their ability to sustain themselves...So, this organization, to me, as a funder, is more than a funder... They fund, but they help you strategize. They help you become successful.

Martin's account is indicative of how MMI takes a holistic approach to incubating the

organizations it supports. The full burden is not on the organization to prove their ability to grow and expand. Instead, MMI has demonstrated a commitment to partnering with community arts organizations to help them identify opportunities for growth.

Leaders of MMI are conscious of the various barriers that have kept Black arts organizations from receiving transformative sums from traditional foundations and philanthropic organizations. They are also sensitive to the effects that these barriers have had on the success of small Black arts organizations. Washington shared, "...I was doing everything out of my pocket, and when I didn't have the money we just couldn't do it, because so many of them [the youth] couldn't come up with the money. So, if we had a big performance, for instance, when we performed for President Clinton, I took my money and had the girls' hair done, because nobody else was going to do it. I took my money and made sure the guys had tuxedo shirts and those who already had one, I made sure they were clean and white..."

MMI is intentional in creating a different type of funding criteria that reflect the contexts of artists and organizations that are in and of the communities they want to impact most. Standard eligibility criteria—such as 501(c)(3) status, minimum size of operating budget, or established board of directors who financially contribute to the organization—are not used as the primary evaluative measures of a potential grantee's merit. Given the historical patterns of wealth accumulation and philanthropic giving, to use unduly exclusive criteria would be

inconsistent with MMI's practice of disruptive philanthropy and would instead reproduce the status quo in arts funding.

"Yeah sure, the orchestra is going to have great numbers, the ballet is going to have great numbers," said Rachel Pickney, an MMI partner, "but some of these institutions [Black arts organizations], no. They have boards—they're their fellow next door neighbor. They're trying to come up with some ideas on getting people together and they're grassroots, but they don't—they're lucky if they get a few hundred dollars together." Pickney went on to challenge the process of inequity that persists in traditional giving practices, "But, how are they going to be on the same level as the ballet? Some of these institutions have so much money...And my thought is like hey, they need to start hearing that, for years and years and years you've been benefitting, now, we have got to..." Thus, there is a need to redirect and do more aggressive funding for organizations that have been historically undervalued and underserved, largely as a result of structural racism and class discrimination. Recognition of this historical trend and its detrimental impact on the development of a Black arts ecosystem in Memphis helps to drive MMI's giving strategies and vision.

Meeting organizations where they are also means not forcing organizations to be something that they are not, or to do programs that are not in the scope of their mission. Given the financial need of many Black arts organizations, they often develop programming to meet criteria of whatever funding opportunities become available. This often means stretching themselves

to meet certain eligibility requirements for small sums of funding, at times for projects that are not in alignment with their core vision. Pickney suggested that this was one of the unfortunate results of traditional arts giving practices, "I blame the funding committee, which comes up with whatever the sexy thing is of the day. Whether it's arts education, community arts, or community engagement, they [arts organizations] come and twist themselves—like they create a project so that they can get that money. But then, they're adding to all the things they do, and they never really focus on what exactly they do. That's not good for your organization."

Such overextension is exacerbated by the fact that the amount of time and resources needed to secure and report on these small amounts of funding is, in many instances, more than the actual economic value of the grant. MMI is intentional not to reproduce this cycle. For instance, grant recipient Glenda Martin shared how MMI allowed her organization to re-submit their grant application after they developed a strategic plan and realized that the proposed programming was outside the scope of the refined vision.

#### **Having a Dual Structure: Grantmaker and Programmer**

One of MMI's advantages has been that even though it has been a grantmaker—administering transformative and more modest sums, and connecting programs to important non-monetary resources—it also has implemented its own programs that allow it to apply a philosophy and assess its effectiveness. Combined, the

dual processes of allocating resources and implementing programming help MMI (a) to ensure its theories are informed by practical experience, research and data collection, (b) to develop and revise programs based on the evolving theories, and (c) to support organizations within the arts ecosystem based on coherent theory and practice. This has made the organization not only more efficient but also more responsive to community needs.

MMI's professional development (PD) workshops provide examples of how the dual structure promotes the practical application of theory and catalyzes support for organizations. Topics for workshops reflect the practical experience of MMI staff and the information collected about strengths and needs of individual artists, arts organizations, and the ecosystem as a whole. Both the music fellows and leaders from grantee organizations have attested to the thoughtfulness with which MMI selected speakers from around the country to lead seminars on organizational infrastructure, race and inequality, strategic planning, and more. Many of the music fellows expressed that some of their most meaningful experiences with MMI came in these workshops. Tyrone Maddox shared, "I literally leave the sessions, like, feeling overwhelmed that these people are giving me information to become a better human being, you know?... And, I think it's... an example of really the kinds of dialogue that need to be happening around the nation, you know? And, it's just profound. Absolutely mind blowing."

Echoing this sentiment, Paul Hudson, also a music fellow stressed, "I think that the PD

sessions are amazing at bringing in people who probably would never be brought in by big time organizations because [it requires] getting comfortable with the uncomfortable. Those people that MMI brings in get comfortable with the uncomfortable. They actually question—they have PD sessions about race, on working different with other personalities.”

In discussing the impact of the PD sessions, music fellows and grant recipients often stressed that these workshops were emblematic of how MMI’s funding practices represented their commitment to reimagining Memphis and the world. Through the workshops, MMI offered more than monetary resources; they brought unconventional ideas to their grantees—which, according to the fellows, helped them to be even more engaged and effective. Thus, as a grantmaker and a programmer, MMI is able to reimagine and create the conditions for what working and operating in the city can look and feel like.

### Using Data to Support Practice

Nonprofit organizations of all sizes often lack the capacity to systematically collect data, to turn that data into information through rigorous analysis, and to take the time to reflect on and learn from the information (Major & Brennan, 2011; Morariu, Athanasiades, Grodzicki, & Pankaj, 2016). Arts organizations that continually struggle to procure resources face significant challenges in identifying appropriate key metrics, determining how to measure them, and collecting and analyzing data (Vakharia, 2013).

MMI has supported the Black arts ecosystem in Memphis by offering tools to use data effectively. Nicole Branch noted:

MMI support in this area ranged from the assessment tests to some of the training pieces ...We’re really excited about measuring more of what we’re doing. You know, it’s kind of hard when you’re an intern program to quantify, qualify, you know, to measure relational stuff. But there are other things that happen in the relational process that you can measure and so we are, we’re just more, we’re thinking more in those terms and I think they’ve [MMI] got our brains just firing up.

MMI is unique in that from its inception it has engaged in routine and rigorous data collection related to both process and outcome measures. It has consistently used data to drive organizational learning and decision making about program updates and quality improvement:

The in-house data driven culture for Memphis Music Initiative exists to ensure that we are achieving and meeting the mission and vision of MMI. It also serves as a best practice model for our partner organizations and hopefully as a national platform for other collaborative initiatives. The data driven culture takes a multi-pronged approach seeking to answer the following questions in order to make actionable organizational and procedural changes.

How do we know what impact we are having on students, schools, and communities?

Which practices allow for the most gains and achievements in student efficacy?

What practices and methodologies are transferrable to partner organizations?

What practices and methodologies can be replicated nationally? (MMI, n.d.)

For example, a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used to evaluate the *MMI Music Fellows* program, including pre- and post-experience surveys of students; focus groups with fellows and teachers; rubrics completed by MMI staff; and school student discipline data. Data reporting and analysis tools such as data dashboards have been used by fellows, school partners, and MMI staff to gain insights for future program planning.

Across time, MMI has refined and strengthened its approaches to formal and informal program evaluation. Lessons learned from past work have led to adaptations and innovations. The *MMI Works* program and *MMI Summer Beat* creative youth development program were two new initiatives in 2016 that resulted from a review of the school-based and extended learning programs. The review identified a gap and an opportunity: Youth development should not stop when the school year ends, and the summer provides an opportunity for more intensive extended learning opportunities.

Collection and analysis of data from the grant cohorts and INE helped MMI to identify both enduring and emerging challenges within arts organizations—and the arts ecosystem as a whole—related to middle management capacity. The *Program Development Institute* was created to support mid-level managers of arts organizations in improving program design and implementation, increasing their competencies in nonprofit management. It also builds on classroom success, employing MMI Music Fellows to take what has been learned in classrooms into community organizations.

*MMI Works*, *MMI Summer Beat*, and the *Program Development Institute* show different aspects of MMI’s organizational learning process. Continuous data collection and analysis, and responsiveness to critique and suggestion, allows them to strengthen existing programs, dispense with approaches and techniques that are not effective, and create new, more far-reaching initiatives that address the most pressing gaps and oversights. Additionally, consistent feedback allows MMI to create additional avenues of engagement for the artists, organizations, and youth with whom they have already built relationships, thereby fortifying the extant Black arts ecosystem. In sum, MMI’s embedded feedback loop promotes effectiveness in real time; a greater and more targeted impact on communities through new programs and initiatives; and increased opportunities for its current partners, which strengthens these relationships and networks.

## THE FIVE STRATEGIES IN ACTION: THE MMI MUSIC FELLOWS PROGRAM

Recognizing the lack of exposure to arts education in the underserved communities of Memphis, MMI developed the *Music Fellows* program to support in school-based arts education for youth.

This program places music professionals in classroom settings to provide high quality music engagement for youth across the city, particularly in the areas of highest need. The term “engagement” is used rather than arts education to underscore the difference in MMI’s approach.

**Challenging the Arts Binary.** Fellows taught a variety of music programs that disrupt the arts binary. MMI Fellows were observed leading classes ranging from piano lessons and orchestra to Hip Hop lyricism, Gospel, and Soul music. Informed by a historical consciousness of inequity in the arts, MMI makes available a wide range of arts opportunities that it believes offer unique cultural capital for empowering communities and inciting social change. While art forms historically associated with Eurocentric ideas of artistic expression have been on the receiving end of philanthropic dollars historically, MMI intentionally has funded art forms that are meaningful to the community it is invested in and that have the capacity to touch the lives of those most in need.

**Black Arts Ecosystem and Being Invested in Community.** The *Music Fellows* program is reflective of both the commitment to building a Black arts ecosystem and to meeting the community where it is through wraparound services.

The program moves students beyond appreciation to participation and skills building. The fundamental purpose is to offer Memphis youth meaningful exposure to the arts in a way that is engaging and developmentally positive. To this point, Henry Reynolds, a music fellow, shared, “That’s the part they [MMI] really focus on—engagement. It’s the music, that’s the tool, but the engagement is the important part.” This is the lens that shapes what it understands as meaningful funding toward a Black arts ecosystem in Memphis. As MMI works to develop a Black arts ecosystem, their effort is not to replicate what mainstream arts ecosystems look like in most major cities, which often trace traditional high art/low art binaries.

**Having a Dual Structure.** An important benefit of MMI’s dual role is that it allows the organization to be innovative and creative in how it engages grantees and the larger community. This was manifested in the way MMI paired music fellows with schools in which they would be working. To match fellows with school sites, a “speed dating” event was organized where fellows met representatives from partnering schools; in the process fellows and schools had opportunities to select their top choices

and MMI identified matches. In describing the process, Fellow Hudson offered, “So they went through the process and they did a fellow match... speed dating thing... The funny thing is that I could have never imagined myself at a Catholic school. ... And, the Catholic schools wanted me! And, so, I was like, ‘Wow.’”

MMI was successful in its approach because as a grantmaker, they were able to bring together different community interests, and as a programmer, it was invested in creating the best possible outcomes for the fellows, the schools, and the broader communities served.

**Using Data to Support Programming.** *MMI Music Fellows* began as a pilot project. Findings from an external evaluation indicated that the fellows were having a significant influence in three key areas: (1) helping young people develop a clearer sense of self, (2) providing them with a pathway for healthy self-expression through music, and (3) coaching them through more pro-social interactions with peers and adults, while also exposing them to local professional music networks (Happel-Parkins and Jamerson, 2015). Thirty-one recommendations were made for program improvements, which were used to refine the program in year two. MMI uses data to refine community engagement, increase the quality of programs, and aggressively promote and pursue equity.

### 2016-2017 In-School Fellows

Mariama Alcantara  
David Bassa  
Ty Boyland  
Yennifer Correia  
Jawaun Crawford  
Andre Dyachenko  
Tonya Dyson  
Christopher Franceschi  
Julian Henderson  
Claude Hinds III  
Kerry Holliday  
Sabrina Hu  
Shayla Jones  
Marcus King  
Wes Lebo  
Stephen Lee  
Betty Lin Gallardo  
Justin Merrick  
Hannah Monk  
Gerald Morgan  
Michael Mosby  
Sean O’Hara  
Ryan Peel  
Marisa Polesky  
Jennifer Puckett  
Ajibola Rivers  
Joel Schnackel  
Rufus Smith  
Rafaela Spencer  
KeDavion Taylor  
Ashley Vines  
Mersadie Wells  
Iren Zombor

## THE FIVE STRATEGIES IN ACTION: MMI WORKS

Started in 2016, *MMI Works* is a college and career readiness program that promotes youth leadership and youth voice by providing access to music and arts training.

Youth are invited to explore professional and technical skills by working with various organizations and businesses spanning across Memphis. MMI provides opportunities for youth to have culturally enriching experiences that stimulate creative expression, promote youth ownership, and improve academic and life achievement.

Given MMI's promotion of youth development and social justice, this program does more than create job opportunities: The initiative places a high value on cultivating relationships between the students, MMI staff, and the arts organizations that partner with this program.

Program staff meet with participants on a weekly basis to develop workplace professionalism, and to build on Black culture and social norms. Students receive advice on financial planning, tips for college readiness, and intentional engagement in critical dialogue about themes such as art, social justice, and the future of Memphis.

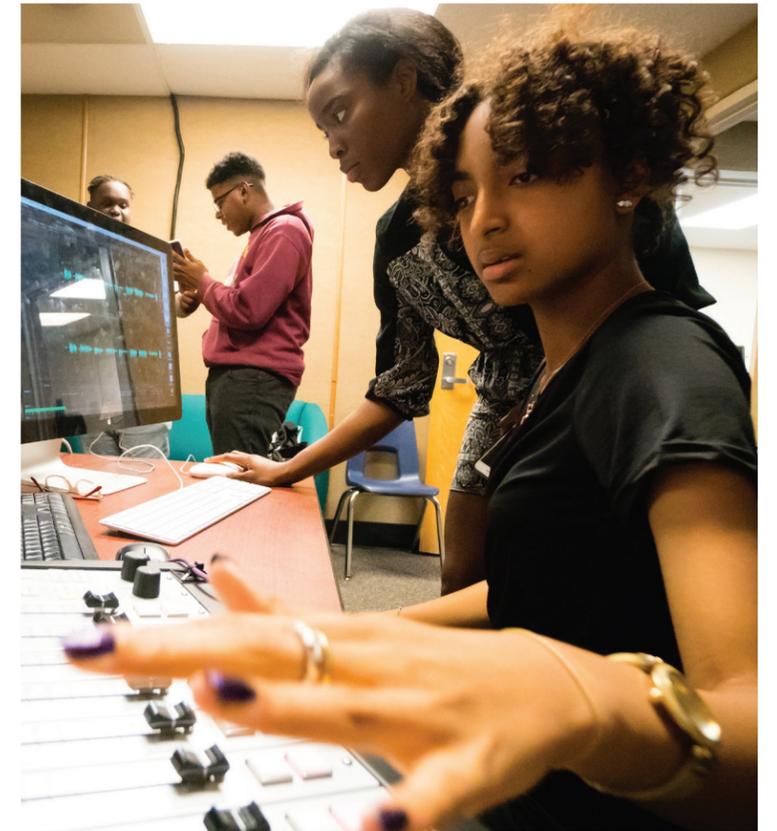
While *MMI Works* is primarily a summer program, many of the students have music fellows in their classrooms during the academic year, and MMI maintains contact with the students after the summer has ended.

**Challenging the Arts Dichotomy.** By placing students with partnering organizations with a variety of specializations—including opera, orchestra, dance, and visual art—*MMI Works* ensures that youth are being exposed to many different music and art forms. This means that MMI shows no preference for any one genre or approach, but instead focuses on the skills and opportunities that these organizations can offer local youth.

**Cultivating a Black Arts Ecosystem and Being Invested in Community.** Many of the students in *MMI Works* are also participants in other community spaces funded by MMI, thus capturing the Black arts ecosystem in motion. The primary thrust of *MMI Works* is to develop young leaders who are professionally trained and engaged within their communities. By placing them with local organizations, young people are not only exposed to role models right where they are but are also given opportunities to grow and thrive locally. Moreover, through their interaction with supportive art professionals who value and promote teen voice and agency, youth develop the confidence and vision to impact their immediate circumstances.

**Having Dual Structure.** Through *MMI Works*, MMI leverages its role as grantmaker and programmer by building relationships between organizations they fund and youth in underserved communities. These relationships allowed MMI to assess the needs of youth and grantee organizations and to innovate a three-tiered training track. By offering internships, apprenticeships, and externships, *MMI Works* is able to provide a more tailored and comprehensive service to youth and to partnering organizations.

**Using Data to Support Practice.** On the first day of orientation, *MMI Works* participants receive a survey that asks, among other things, what they hope to learn; what job experiences they hope to have; and how they hope to develop professionally. At the end of the program, both the youth and the participating organizations are given an exit interview that evaluates their experiences. These data collection instruments allow MMI to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the program, to evaluate the benefits of the program to its participants, and to strategize on how to continually improve its approach. This helps to ensure that *MMI Works* will be a viable and vital program to Memphis communities for years to come.



*MMI Works* professional development field excursion to the studios of Memphis cable station WQOX-TV.

## MEMPHIS MUSIC INITIATIVE STAFF

### DARREN ISOM

#### Founder & Executive Director

As MMI's founder and executive director, Darren Isom both developed and leads the \$20M philanthropic initiative that uses high-quality music engagement programs and activities to drive student, youth, and community outcomes in Memphis. A proven strategic leader and nonprofit professional, his career demonstrates his commitment to amplifying community voice and engagement in developing and leading innovative, high-impact youth and community programs, practices, and philanthropy. Prior to MMI, Isom was a manager at The Bridgespan Group where he was a strategic advisor to nonprofit and foundation leaders in youth and community development, foundation strategy, and education policy.

Before Bridgespan, Isom worked as the art, design, and public programming director for Times Square Alliance, planning and implementing programming for public art and performance initiatives throughout the Times Square District. Prior to working at Times Square Alliance, Isom served as VP of programs for Groundwork, a start-up youth services organization in East New York, Brooklyn, helping young people in underserved communities develop their strengths and skills through experiential learning and enrichment programs. Before joining Groundwork, he worked as the



director of global logistics for CSI, an international trade finance group, where he managed strategy, organization, and change management projects in Belgium, Spain, France, The Netherlands, and Germany.

A seventh generation New Orleans native, Isom is a graduate of Howard University, Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, and Columbia Business School's Institute for Nonprofit Management. An activist for disconnected youth and LGBT communities of color, he has served as an advisor to the leaders of several Bay Area and national foundations and currently serves on the board of Beloved Community, Collage Dance Collective, and Creative Works.

### MORGAN BECKFORD

#### Coordinator, In-School Partnerships

Morgan Beckford is the coordinator of in-school partnerships for MMI's In-Schools Team. Her roles include recruiting new fellows and schools and connecting the in-schools network to a variety of community organizations and after-school and summer programs. In her roles outside of MMI, Morgan primarily acts as the Opera Memphis Conservatory director, with the hopes of cultivating the relationship between Memphis-area students and the performing arts. When she is not working with Memphis-area students, she teaches private voice lessons, adjudicates



the Memphis High School Musical Theater Awards, performs with the Opera Memphis chorus, and sings and plays handbells at Germantown Presbyterian Church.

### TAWANNA BROWN

#### Program Manager, Community Music Grants

Tawanna Brown is a native of Chicago with paternal roots in Memphis and Milan, Tennessee. She has worked as a staff and board member, peer coach, and community volunteer within not-profit, governmental and educational sectors. She brings experience in a variety of areas: program and organizational operations, youth and parent engagement, participatory evaluation and grant writing and management. Brown is particularly inspired by the cultural wisdom and metaphors embedded within the collective stories of communities.



### BRITTNEY BOYD BULLOCK

#### Youth Program Manager

Born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, Brittney Boyd Bullock has worked as Project Manager at the Urban Art Commission managing the city's largest public art archive, and as the partnerships and community engagement manager for Crosstown Concourse & Crosstown



Arts overseeing a variety of collaborative creative programs and exhibitions. At MMI, she helps to build sustainable relationships with Memphis's youth while implementing youth-led and youth-driven programs. Her passion for cultivating trust and lasting relationships has helped to naturally create opportunities for collaboration with various communities, organizations, and artists that invite participation from a broad range of backgrounds and expertise.

As a former fellow and now mentor of the ArtUp Fellowship, her interests in community engagement and social change have led her to an artistic practice that embraces the idea of redefining why to create and how to create. In 2017, the Kresge Foundation awarded a grant to Bullock and her community partner to implement a creative entrepreneurship project that used art as the vehicle for civic practice and social enterprise. As a freelance artist, she is most interested in art that questions and analyzes identity, culture, and the notions of power and ownership.

### KIESHA DAVIS

#### Director, Grantmaking and Capacity Building

As Director of Grantmaking and Capacity Building, Kiesha Davis leads a team responsible for the stewardship of MMI's support approaches and investments in partnership with funded music engagement organizations. She brings to the initiative extensive experience in



building and fostering grantee relationships, amplifying collaborations to address community level outcomes and expertise in developing large-scale, multi-million dollar grantmaking frameworks. Prior to joining MMI, Davis provided leadership on various strategic initiatives to increase behavioral health access through the investment of \$40 million annually on behalf of St. Louis County children, youth, and their families, with a focus on school-based approaches and interventions. She led the coordination of immediate youth-centered mental health response efforts in the wake of the 2014 unrest in Ferguson and throughout her tenure brokered expanded access to early childhood screenings and early identification interventions for underserved communities. Additionally, she provided leadership in the development of innovative and targeted grantmaking programs which resulted in investments of nearly \$10 million over two years and expanded the continuum of behavioral health services for the St. Louis region's children and youth.

## DERON HALL

### Director, Partnerships and Research

Deron Hall has developed and led multi-million dollar social impact strategies executed by schools, nonprofits, philanthropies and others.



Stemming from his work as executive director of Cincinnati Outreach Music Project, a creative youth development

initiative that served nearly 800 students each school day, he was featured on the front page of the Cincinnati Enquirer sparking the conversation, "Can Music Rescue a Life."

He was a graduate research fellow at the University of Cincinnati, where he studied, "replicable and sustainable arts-based intervention programs for at-risk youth," leading to presentations on behalf of the U.S. Department of State with (1) Community Arts Center Directors from Dakar, Senegal, Africa, and (2) artists and administrators from Iraq representing the Ministry of Culture, University of Baghdad, and the Iraqi National Symphony.

Following his work in Cincinnati, Hall directed global partnerships, operations, philanthropy, and research as the director of partnerships and operations for MMI. He serves as an arts/equity/philanthropy subject matter expert on grant panels across the nation including the Heinz Endowments and the National Endowments for the Arts.

A graduate of the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (MM '13, Music Education, French Horn) and the Executive Program in Arts and Culture Strategy at University of Pennsylvania, he currently serves as the chief executive and innovation officer with Memphis Arts Engine, a social impact design firm creating the innovations of tomorrow, today.

## AMBER HAMILTON

### Chief Operations and Strategy Officer

Amber Hamilton is a seasoned leader, coach, and trainer with extensive experience in leadership strategies and nonprofit management. She started her career in professional sports management, first as an intern for the NFL, then moving on to become the assistant director of player development for the NFL Players Association. Amber discovered her passion for community engagement and redirected her career to focus on working with community organizations and non-governmental organizations. She began working at Fannie Mae in its Office of Community Giving, as a senior manager directing the employee volunteer program and overseeing grants to community partners. Hamilton went on to lead a national group of nonprofits during her tenure at Rebuilding Together, where she served as a vice president overseeing 165 local affiliates.

She has a bachelor's degree in political science from Howard University, a master's degree in executive leadership from Georgetown University, and a certification in executive coaching from Georgetown.

## JOHNNY KROEZE

### Director, Finance & Operations

Before serving as director of finance and operations, Johnny Kroeze spent



nine years as the director of finance and administration for the Mississippi Children's Museum, a 501(c)3 nonprofit. There he was responsible for all financial, human resource, information technology, security, and administrative needs of the museum, and oversaw the original \$26.6 million capital campaign that made the museum a reality. Prior to the museum, he served in many capacities in the financial services and telecommunications industries. He has committed himself to serving in nonprofit cultural organizations that advance the rights and access of underserved communities and populations to educational and other opportunities. Through first-hand experience, he has seen how vital this work is. Kroeze is a native of Jackson, Mississippi, and holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the University of Mississippi, and a Master of Business Administration degree from Millsaps College.

## CRYSTAL LIPFORD

### Program Coordinator

Crystal Lipford provides support for the MMI extended learning program *MMI Works*. Lipford is a native Memphian with a devotion to music, arts education, youth development and the community-at-large. A savvy marketer by day and a local musician by night, Crystal has worked in the nonprofit community for more than 10 years. Her past experiences and commitment to the community have deepened her appreciation for how nonprofits seeks



to improve the quality of life for the city, country, and the world.

## VICTOR SAWYER

### Fellowship Coach

Victor Sawyer serves as a fellowship coach for MMI, working with a team of teaching artists to create engaging and impactful arts programming for youth in underserved communities throughout the Greater Memphis Area and as an instrumental instructor at the world famous Stax Music Academy.



As a freelance trombonist, Sawyer frequently records at legendary studio such as Sun, Royal, and Ardent. He has performed at the North Sea Jazz Festival, South by Southwest, and Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola in New York City's Lincoln Center.

## JANET THOMPSON

### Coordinator, In-Schools Leadership and Engagement

Janet Ware Thompson has spent her adult life in service to the students of Memphis and Shelby County. She began her career in education as a classroom teacher. From there she



transitioned into the role of professional school counselor and was later recruited and served in an administrative role in Memphis and Shelby County Schools for nearly three decades. Thompson joined MMI in September 2016, managing the In-Schools Team, which currently provides arts engagement in more than 60 programs across 33 parochial, public, and charter schools.

## LUCIE THOMPSON

### Finance & Operations Manager

As a native Memphian, Lucie Thompson feels the divided nature of this city, both past and present, very deeply. One of her earliest memories was being awakened by the sound of marching in the streets after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Having worked as an office manager in the non-profit sector for decades, she leaped at the chance to mend her home town and support the disempowered youth of Memphis through the work of the MMI. Lucie has two sons who are almost grown and a husband who will never grow up.

## DOUG WADDILL

### Program Manager

Doug Waddill is a program manager for the *Institute for Non-Profit Excellence*. He worked as the director of education for the Greater Houston YMCA and previously served as an elementary school principal. He loves seeing how all non-profits can find ways to work together to create opportunities for youth leadership, learning, and development.



## LECOLION WASHINGTON

### Director, In-School Programs

Lecolion Washington has established himself as a leader for the next generation of arts entrepreneurs, and he has been a staunch advocate for the relevance of music as an agent for social change. He was the co-founder and executive director of the PRIZM Ensemble, an organization whose mission was to build a diverse community through chamber music education, youth development, and performance. PRIZM has community engagement and youth development programs all around Memphis including the PRIZM in the Schools Program and the PRIZM International Chamber Music Festival. In addition to his work in



the community, Washington served as a bassoon professor over the course of 14 years, and he was tenured in 2008 at the age of 33. His CD entitled *Legacy: Music for Bassoon by African-American Composers* was released on the Albany Records label. Washington was the first non-string recipient of the MPower Artist Grant from the Sphinx Organization, and he received support to embark on a global concert and masterclass tour during the 2015-2016 season. The tour featured solo and chamber music performances in cities such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Toronto, Cape Town, Linz, and Zurich. In 2015, he was named by the Memphis Business Journal as one of the Top 40 under 40.

## GAVIN WIGGINSON

### Fellowship Coach

Gavin Wigginson is a proud Memphis native and currently serves as a fellowship coach with MMI and as the concert choir director of Memphis's only HBCU, LeMoyne-Owen College. After earning both a Bachelor of Music (2006) and Master of Music (2008) in vocal performance at The University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Gavin pursued a doctorate in Musical Arts at The University of Kentucky. In 2010, Gavin made his recording debut as Alfredo with Albany Records in *Die Fledermaus*. Gavin has performed professionally across the US and as a member of the acclaimed American Spiritual Ensemble.



SECTION 3

# THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF SCALING DISRUPTIVE PHILANTHROPY

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*MMI Summer Beat grantee Harmonic  
Sounds Strings orchestra recital.*



This report has described a model that holds promise for other organizations seeking to transform philanthropy to bring about true diversity, inclusion, and equity in the arts. Although they may be challenging, MMI's promising practices provide a framework for others to adopt and adapt.

MMI understands that art is critical for communities to imagine societal transformation. It emphasizes the importance of artistic expression for expanding youths' capacity to imagine the world anew. It also makes a commitment to supporting artists and arts organizations. This means working to ensure individual artists are supported in professionalization, livelihood, space, and having a peer group for ongoing support. It also means working to create the conditions for arts organizations to be well-funded, to have deep roots in their communities, to have a voice in the larger philanthropic landscape, and to have the flexibility and resources to evaluate their effectiveness and to respond effectively to challenges.

MMI recognizes a wide range of art practices as valuable cultural capital around which a community can mobilize. In Memphis, the practices are music, dance, and cultural forms endogenous to African-Americans. In other communities, the cultural capital will likely be different. This means having significant and meaningful relationships (embeddedness) in a specific locality.

Relatedly, MMI meets Black arts organizations where they are and helps them expand their capacity. This means making a conscious decision to fund organizations without forcing them to adapt their mission to meet MMI's aims in order to receive funding. Moreover, MMI encourages its grantees to build partnerships with those who may not have the same vision but who are deeply committed to developing a viable and sustainable Black arts ecosystem.

The challenges to implementing the MMI model are numerous; time, resource, and staff commitment are significant, and the constraints of conventional funding models can be difficult to surmount. This form of disruptive philanthropy also necessitates ongoing knowledge of the communities, spaces, and places to which funds are being allocated, in order to ensure that practices are articulated to the needs of those who have historically been overlooked and marginalized. Nonetheless, as MMI demonstrates, disruptive philanthropy is a worthwhile—and essential—endeavor for those who care about real equity and social justice.

The practice of disruptive philanthropy begins with questions that cultivate and guide the work. Said inquiry must be tailored to the specific vision, mission, and aim of the sponsoring organization and to the communities it seeks to serve. Disruption is not a one-size-fits-all process; answers to the questions on the following page, along with strategies and tactics, must be derived from a genuine understanding of what exists and what is possible.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion can be more than buzzwords. They can form the core of a philanthropic practice that prioritizes the incubation and cultivation of community organizations, as MMI's practices show.

Disruptive philanthropy is an accountability practice informed by knowledge of historical trends of wealth accumulation and exclusion that has been shaped by structures of power that reinforce oppressive hierarchies of race, class, and gender. As more public goods and services are relegated to the private sector, it will be increasingly important to be vigilant in combating philanthropic redlining and to be conscious in creating more equity in funding.

Empowering through the arts	
Key Questions	Important Aspects
What is the the unique artistic and cultural heritage of racialized groups in the geographic area?	Understand community cultural development Evaluate cultural resources of a given community Recognize the importance of history and of contemporary reality to artistic production
Using the community's cultural assets to address community needs	
What is a critical need in the community that the cultural assets can be mobilized to address?	Identify cultural assets Identify community needs Ensure sufficient number of professional artists within community
Addressing the dynamics of race, space and place	
What are the historical and contemporary dynamics?  How do I elevate my consciousness to consider other perspectives as being worthy of time and consideration?	Assess the racial history of a given place Consider how that history impacted contemporary inequities in resource allocation Evaluate the barriers faced by racialized and other marginalized communities based on place and space
Challenging the arts dichotomy	
How does the arts dichotomy manifest?	Identify the forms of art that are considered "high" and those that are considered "community" (usually understood as "low") Actively work to challenge this understanding through the equitable allocation of dollars and other resources Promote intersections among different art forms that help to dissolve the mainstream/cultural dichotomy
Being invested in community	
Who owns disruption—the organization or the community?	Consider how expert is defined Understand who gets to be the expert Evaluate which voices are heard and which are silenced
Cultivating an arts ecosystem	
What is the current state of linkages between and among racialized arts organizations? Between the arts organizations and the community?  What are the unique strengths and needs of individual organizations? How do we best support them?	Create intentional links between arts organizations to strengthen community ties Foster space for organizational leaders to learn effective strategies from one another Facilitate critical discussions around broader visions about the relationship between art, individual development, and community empowerment. Provide a full service, individualized wraparound approach Fund community organizations that stimulate the community's artistic assets that have been historically underutilized Create spaces for collaboration and intersection for sustainability purposes
Having appropriate structure	
How do we ensure appropriate research and development? Adaptiveness and flexibility?	Assess the status quo of internal and external behavior to align with democratic approaches to wielding power
Using data	
What specifically do we hope to achieve with disruptive philanthropy? How will we know we achieved it?  What will a thriving arts ecosystem look like? What is our capacity to collect, analyze, and learn from data?	Backwards planning and radical honesty—asking "what needs to be true," taking stock of that response from multiple community embedded stakeholders and then doing <i>exactly</i> what is necessary Radical imagination—making space for reality that potentially would have already existed had the values of equity and inclusion been present and in the room when decisions of the past were made (which ultimately creates something that is functionally and critically relevant to the lives of human beings along the spectrum of socioeconomic diversity).

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# STUDY METHODS

## DATA COLLECTION

### Interviews

Two researchers conducted 16 open-ended interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including executive board members (N=6), members of grantee organizations (N=5), a peer organization (N=1), state funders (N=2), and national funders (N=2). The interviews ranged from 30 - 90 minutes in length. All interviews took place at the MMI office, with the exception of four phone interviews. All interviews were transcribed for analysis. A descriptive list of interviewees is provided in Table A.

### Focus Groups

One researcher conducted two focus groups, each consisting of four fellows. Both male and female fellows participated, of multiple races and ethnicities. Each focus group lasted about 90 minutes, consisting of seven open-ended questions and semi-structured discussion. The focus groups were transcribed and later analyzed alongside interview data.

### Site Visits

Two researchers visited seven school sites—a combination of middle and high schools, and charter, parochial, and public schools—with fellow-led and teacher-led programs. Researchers visited a combination of choir, orchestra, band, and music production programs. Fellows observed were of both genders and multiple races. Class sizes ranged from 10-35 students.

Researchers also conducted four MMI grantee site visits. These visits included tours of organizations' facilities, musical performances, and observations of daily operations and the work of these organizations in practice. Field notes were taken at the conclusion of all visits.

### Geospatial

Data from several sources were collected to map funding of the arts nationally, in Tennessee, in Shelby County, and in Memphis, and discern patterns in distribution of funding. The research team used data from 2012, the year for which complete data sets were available from all sources, to allow comparison.

Table A. Descriptive List of Interviewees

Pseudonym	Description	Synopsis of interview
Nicole Branch	Founder and executive director of an arts organization located in north Memphis; grantee	Provided description of what it's like to be an MMI grantee and how it compares to previous experience with seeking funding in Memphis. Provided content for conceptualizing MMI's funding model and impact.
Paul Dirks	MMI senior leadership team member	Provided background on MMI's approach to giving; why they do things the way that they do when it comes to arts funding in Memphis. Provided detailed examples about how MMI sets itself apart from broader philanthropic landscape.
Kenya Washington	Executive director of an orchestra in south Memphis; grantee	Provided description of what it is like to be an MMI grantee and how it compares to previous experience with seeking funding in Memphis. Provided content for conceptualizing MMI's funding model and impact.
Glenda Martin	Executive director of an arts organization; grantee	Provided description of what it is like to be an MMI grantee and how it compares to previous experience with seeking funding in Memphis. Provided content for conceptualizing MMI's funding model and impact.
Rachel Pickney	Community partner	Provided detailed information about the philanthropic landscape for arts giving in Memphis as someone that works within this industry. Helped provide clear information as to why MMI is different than its peer orgs.
Cori Jones	Out of state peer organization	Shared examples of and experiences with philanthropic redlining in the broader philanthropic landscape. Provided context to compare against MMI's experience in Memphis.
Natasha Williams	MMI staff member	Provided information on MMI practice of giving from the perspective of someone who implements its vision. Also gave detailed information on strategic partnerships and youth development component of MMIs work.
Sarah King	Former fellow and current strategic partner	Provided info about the MMI Fellows program and working with MMI as a strategic partner, and as a grant recipient.
Lisa Cole	MMI staff member	Provided detailed information on MMI grantmaking practices. Provided content for conceptualizing disruptive philanthropy.
Dante Norwood	MMI staff member	Provided Info about the the MMI Fellows program and how it is received by schools.
Nancy Freeman	MMI staff member	Provided info on MMI Fellows program and its strategic partnerships.
Clara Jakes	Former MMI Fellow	Provided info on MMI Fellows program and its strategic partnerships.
Vernon Reed	Federal arts policy, research, and advocacy	Provided details about federal funding for the arts and how it's disseminated in the state of Tennessee..
Shaun Jackson	MMI out of state peer organization	Provided detail about their orgs funding model and how it compares or diverges from MMI's model. Made clear what it means to fund projects across cities/states vs being an org fully invested in one particular community.
Daneshia Blackman	MMI out of state peer organization	Provided detail about their orgs funding model and how it compares or diverges from MMI's model. Made clear what it means to fund projects across cities/states vs being an org fully invested in one particular community.
Trent Woods	MMI senior leadership team member	Provided details on how MMI's vision is communicated and embedded in organizational culture. Also provided detailed info on MMI Fellows program

## ANALYSIS

Overall, this study was an institutional ethnography of MMI. The collection of interviews, site visits, and social engagements with staff and fellows over the course of 10 months informed the research team's understanding of MMI's mission, norms, and standing within its local context. Other methods also included a structured review and critical analysis of secondary literature on relevant topics (such as philanthropy and racial equity, arts and youth development, the racial and political context of Memphis as a city); archival research of MMI's internal documents; and a qualitative coding using Dedoose (an online qualitative analysis software). Geographic information system (GIS) technologies and GIS-based analysis were used to enhance the ethnographic methodologies.

After all interviews and focus groups were transcribed, the researchers engaged in an open coding process. To begin, researchers read the same three interview transcripts and each developed a list of codes/themes that emerged across them. The researchers then chose one interview to code independently, using the agreed upon coding scheme, then discussed results to ensure that a reliable consensus was achieved on the application of the coding scheme.

After reaching a consensus on the list of codes and their descriptions, this list of codes was uploaded to Dedoose. Codes ranged from themes such as "barriers to funding" and "Memphis as place" to "arts and social justice" and "high/low art binary." The coding scheme consisted of 13 codes, which were then used to analyze all transcribed data using the Dedoose software. By coding the data in this way the researchers were able to assess relevant information across interview data in a systemized fashion. For instance, references in interviews that alluded to Black arts organizations and artists working together, or creating arts pathways for youth in the city, were coded as "Black arts ecosystem" thus permitting researchers to explore this theme across the data and hone in on this specific characteristic of MMI's model and vision.

Basic spatial analysis using GIS, including creation of overlays and buffers, was completed to explore factors the distribution of arts funding in Memphis, Shelby County, and Tennessee, and its relationship to racial and socioeconomic factors.

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# GLOSSARY

**Asset-based:** An approach that recognizes and values the knowledge, skills, and lived experience of a group, neighborhood, organization, or community; and makes use of those existing strengths, resources, and potentials to achieve positive change.

**Backbone organization:** An organization dedicated to coordinating the various aspects and collaborators involved in a collective impact initiative (Collaboration for Impact, nd, <http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/collective-impact/the-backbone-organisation/>).

**Bidirectional:** Operating in a way that is beneficial to each party involved.

**Capacity building:** Increasing the ability of an organization to perform, yield, and/or sustain itself.

**Collective impact grantmaking:** An approach that seeks to address complex social problems by fostering collaboration across a wide variety of social sectors. It is based on five key elements: (1) a shared understanding of the problem, a common agenda for change, and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions; (2) shared data collection, measurement, and analysis for alignment and accountability; (3) a plan of action that outlines and coordinates mutually reinforcing activities; (4) open and continuous communication to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation; and (5) a backbone organization to serve the convener coordinator for the initiative (Collaboration for Impact, nd, <http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/collective-impact/>).

**Community:** A social group whose members live in a specific location and often share a common cultural and historical heritage.

**Conscious:** Fully aware and sensitive to a phenomenon.

**Cultivate:** To promote or improve the growth of something through attention and direct effort.

**Dichotomy:** Division into two mutually exclusive, opposed, or contradictory groups.

**Discrimination:** The unjust and prejudicial treatment of a group of persons based on social categories including race, gender, religion, nationality, and sexual orientation.

**Disruptive philanthropy:** A practice of conscious giving informed by an awareness of how traditional strategies of philanthropy exclude certain communities and organizations that do not meet privileged criteria, even if their inability to meet said criteria is a result of historical neglect from both the public and private sector.

**Disinvested:** Characterized by the withdrawal or withholding of essential investment, aid, and resources.

**Disinvestment:** The conscious process of withdrawing or withholding essential investment, aid, and resources.

**Diversity:** The representation and incorporation of individual differences, including language, culture, and life experiences; and social differences, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual identity, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability status, as well as cultural, political, religious or other affiliations in all facets of an organization--including composition, policy, and practice.

**Ecosystem:** A system or group of interconnected entities formed by their interaction with and within their environment.

**Equity:** The eradication of barriers and the creation of opportunities for historically underrepresented populations to participate in organizations and on boards; to have equal access to funding and resources; and to participate in quality and culturally relevant programming. Equity also requires a level of cultural competency, or awareness and sensitivity of one's own cultural location; the recognition of cultural differences and subject locations, and attitudes toward them; the appreciation of and respect for different cultural practices, norms, values, and worldviews; and empathy and awareness in cross-cultural interactions.

**Embedded:** Incorporated or rooted in a community so as to become an essential part or component.

**Endogenous:** Derived from within or internal to a community.

**Eurocentric:** Concentration on the superiority of Europe and its cultures, peoples, and heritages that results in the exclusion and marginalization of, and discrimination against, other groups and their contributions.

**Extant:** Currently in existence.

**Foundation:** A non-governmental entity—a nonprofit corporation or a charitable trust—with a principal purpose of making grants to unrelated organizations, institutions, or individuals for charitable purposes. There are two broad foundation types: private foundations and grantmaking public charities. A private foundation obtains its money from a family, an individual, or a corporation. A grantmaking public charity (also known as a public foundation), get its support from diverse sources, which may include foundations, individuals, and government agencies (Foundation Center, n.d.).

**Grassroots:** Relevant to phenomena “on the ground” and to common, everyday people and their existence.

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**Inclusion:** The conscious, intentional, and sustained engagement with diversity in an effort to increase awareness, knowledge, understanding, and ultimately opportunities for populations that have historically been marginalized and excluded.

**Individualism:** The pursuit of individual over communal or collective interests.

**Initiative:** An act, program, set of practices, etc. meant to set something in motion.

**Innovation:** Something novel or different; process by which changes in something established are introduced, especially by new methods, ideas.

**Infrastructure:** The basic underlying structure and framework upon which an organization is based.

**Institutional barriers:** Policies, practices, and processes embedded in an organization, entities, and services that result in the systematic exclusion and marginalization of certain groups of people.

**Mainstream:** The principal or dominant tendency.

**Normative standards:** Forms of evaluation that are representative of dominant understandings in society.

**Organizational capacity:** Knowledge, processes, and resources that nonprofits need in order to meet their missions. Key capacities include: leadership; mission, vision and strategy; program design and delivery; staffing; volunteer management; fund development; financial management; marketing and communications; technology; and strategic relationships. Capacity varies based on a range of factors such as the organization's size, lifecycle stage, program model, revenue.

**Paternalistic:** The principal or practice of intrusive and often condescending management or governance.

**Philanthropic Redlining:** A set of funding practices in which an organization's size, racial or ethnic constitution, demographic served, artistic designation (e.g., "high art" or "community art"), and/or geospatial location results in: (a) exclusion from funding altogether, (b) grants that are substantially lower than comparable organizations; and/or (c) forms of funding that discourage capacity building.

**Place-based grantmaking:** A process that focuses resources within a specific geographic area (as compact as a neighborhood or as large as a region) to foster long-term, sustainable change. There are several characteristics of such initiatives: use of backbone organizations; intensive engagement of key stakeholders (including community members, who are co-creators of change); inclusion of a variety of partners across social sectors; use of local data in planning and decision-making; and a long-term commitment.

**Racialized:** Persons and groups constituted by the ongoing construction of racial meaning that has particular, usually detrimental, effects. Such meanings vary based on time period, and location. Those who are racialized tend to have a modal experience of marginalization, discrimination, structural and material lack, and diminished life chances.

**Responsive grantmaking:** A process in which grants are awarded in response to proposals that are received. Ostensibly, this means that the applicants, through their "ask," drive what is funded. A responsive grantmaker is one whose philosophy is to have grantees driving the giving agenda, for the most part. This includes accepting unsolicited proposals as well as having flexible project designs, proposal formats, and reporting. Typically the foundation will define to some extent what is to be addressed but allow significant latitude for how that issue will be tackled (Alliance for Philanthropy and Social Investment, 2008).

**Scaling:** The process of adjusting in amount or size based on the requirements of a given model.

**Structural barriers:** Obstacles that are inherent in a context or environment and that have a negative impact on circumstances and outcomes. Examples include: poor housing, insufficient income, inadequate education, and nonexistent public services.

**Social justice:** The equitable distribution of advantages and opportunities and of efforts to eradicate disadvantages within a society.

**Transformative funds/ transformative funding:** A sum that allows an organization to develop sustainable infrastructure--staffing, program research and development, outreach and engagement, marketing and communications, information technology, data collection and evaluation—for long-term viability and growth.

**Wraparound services:** All-inclusive, comprehensive, and holistic services that aim to maximize the success and longevity of an organization.

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## PROJECT TEAM

### **Charisse Burden-Stelly, PhD**

Charisse received her PhD in African Diaspora Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. She is currently the 2016-2017 Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of African-American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research interests include the 20<sup>th</sup> century Black radical tradition, African diaspora theory, neoliberal globalization, economic development, and global capitalism and anti-blackness.

Her current research project traces the ontological, epistemological, and structural foundations of antiradicalism/antiblackness between 1920-1980. She is also conducting research for a second manuscript on the statist pedagogy of “Culturalism,” with a particular focus on Ghana, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica—postcolonial societies organized around discourses of Blackness and Africanness. She seeks to explain the manner in which culturally coded forms of anticolonial nationalism, in their various guises as Marxist, African Socialist, Social Democratic, Non-Aligned gave way, eventually, to globalized forms of Neoliberalism. Dr. Burden-Stelly’s research has appeared in journals including *The CLR James Journal* and *Souls: A Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*.

### **Jarvis Givens, PhD**

Jarvis is a Dean’s Postdoctoral Fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and earned his PhD in African Diaspora Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. His research interests include: 19th and 20th Century History of African American Education, Education and the African Diaspora, and Race and Urban Schooling. He is currently working on a book that analyzes the relationship between Black education, freedom, and affect through Carter G. Woodson’s philosophy and influence on schools during the Jim Crow period. More broadly, Givens’ work is concerned with the dialectical relationship between schooling and Black life in the 19th and 20th century African Diaspora. The hallmark of his research is combining historical

methods with critical theory to expose what history can offer about contemporary challenges in Black schooling.

Beyond his historical research, Jarvis has also studied the educational experiences of Black students in Oakland, CA, since 2011. This ethnographic project first looked at Oakland’s African American Male Achievement (AAMA) Initiative, then expanded to a larger study on schools that were identified as successful in supporting achievement amongst Black students. His research has been supported by two Ford Foundation Fellowships, and has been published in journals such as: *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *Harvard Educational Review*, *Souls: A Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* and *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*.

### **Elizabeth Burden, MS Chief Executive and Creative Officer, Participation INK**

Elizabeth has been a consultant for 25 years using creative processes to encourage visionary, disruptive, and radical thinking in both informal groups and formal organizations. She provides consulting services in organizational development, strategic planning, program planning and evaluation, curriculum development, and facilitation. She has extensive experience in grant writing and fund development, community mapping and geospatial analysis, and media relations and marketing.

Elizabeth is also an artist. Her installations feature conventional and non-conventional media—painting, sculpture, video, digital media, mapping—to interpret and reinterpret history and community stories. She engages in civic-practice art, which uses artistic processes to engage individuals, communities, and institutions in using creativity to address social issues.

The common thread that runs through all her work is to look at old realities anew, to confront those realities, reflect upon them, shape them, and transform them—whether through artistic practice or through community process, she believes we all can be catalysts for change.

Charisse Burden-Stelly, PhD  
Jarvis Givens, PhD  
Elizabeth Burden, MS

Derron Hall  
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