TOWARD THE FUTURE OF ARTS PHILANTHROPY

THE CHALLENGE

As much as the city of Memphis is known around the world for a rich legacy of arts and music, young people in Memphis, particularly under-resourced black and brown youth, had declining access to high quality music engagement programs. Upon analyzing in-school offerings and the landscape of music and arts nonprofit organizations serving youth in the parts of the city with the highest poverty rates, it became clear that these institutions were suffering from insufficient capitalization and historical underinvestment, a practice known as philanthropic redlining.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE

The Memphis Music Initiative (MMI) was conceived to take a bold approach to expanding opportunities for young Memphians to access youth development through music, an approach led primarily by people of color and rooted in equity, social justice through arts, anti-paternalistic partnership, and prioritizing black and brown community voices.

MMI practices disruptive philanthropy—a conscious giving practice that reflects an awareness of how traditional philanthropic strategies 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.

Early MMI pilots proved that traditional philanthropic approaches would be insufficient and perpetuate inequality. MMI needed to form true partnerships with organizations and co-create adaptive solutions to the complexities of organizational reinvestment. By providing both direct programming to young people and listening to the needs of music nonprofits serving students living in poverty, MMI has forged a distinctive and holistic approach to boosting the scale and quality of arts programming in Memphis.

MMI’s new study - Towards the Future in Arts Philanthropy aims to illustrate this distinctive approach and offer perspective on strategies that can be adopted in the field.

DISRUPTIVE PHILANTHROPY IN PRACTICE

MMI looks at grantee selection from an equity lens:
- 95% of 2017 grants went to organizations with black and brown leaders;
- Half of grantees had budgets under $100,000

In 2017 alone, MMI grantee organizations saw strong results from MMI’s philanthropic approach:
- The number of youth served by organizations in MMI’s Institute for Nonprofit Excellence (INE) increased by 40%;
- Donations to grantees in the INE program increased an average of 20%.

STUDY OF PHILANTHROPIC REDLINING AND DISRUPTIVE PHILANTHROPY

In the Toward the Future of Arts Philanthropy, you’ll find:
- A review of the historic landscape and lack of equity in arts funding;
- An overview of MMI’s disruptive philanthropic approach rooted in equity, and;
- A discussion of the challenges and opportunities in implementing a disruptive philanthropic approach.

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