



TOWARD THE FUTURE OF ARTS PHILANTHROPY

The Disruptive Vision of the
Memphis Music Initiative

*(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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TOWARD THE FUTURE OF ARTS PHILANTHROPY



MMI 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?



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



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.

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

- Kasper, G., Ramos, H. A. J., & Walker, C. J. (2004). Making the case for diversity in philanthropy. *Foundation News & Commentary*, 45(6), 26-35.
- National Philanthropic Trust. (2017). *A History of Modern Philanthropy*. Retrieved March 18, 2017 from <http://historyofgiving.org>

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

Derron Hall
MMI Director of Partnerships
and Research, Project Advisor

Participation INK
info@participationink.com
t. 520.261.9076
901 N 13th Avenue, Suite 113
Tucson, AZ 85705