

## The James Irvine Foundation Artistic Innovation Fund: A Theory of Change

The Artistic Innovation Fund (AIF) will contribute to significant learning and impact in the field of arts and culture by

- supporting arts and culture organizations to remain of authentic value to their communities in the shifting landscape of the arts and culture field, and in a highly competitive and rapidly changing California;
- enabling high profile arts organizations in California to experiment with innovative approaches in focused areas of interest, and to develop their capacity to adapt to changes in their environments;
- using the experience of AIF grantees to build valuable knowledge for the arts and culture sector, and about the ways that grantmaking can support innovation.

We have some theories about the conditions and actions needed for our strategies to be successful.

1. The first aspect of our theory is that we need to continue our commitment to developing a healthy ecology of arts organizations by **focusing targeted investments on institutions that have a known track record of artistic excellence and adaptive capacity, credibility, and influence in their respective fields.**

So, we will:

- ◆ Invite arts and culture organizations with budgets of \$7 million or more to apply for three-year grants of significant size on a competitive basis.
- ◆ Select organizations that propose innovations that have implications not only for themselves, but also for the field at large.

2. The second aspect of our theory is that our targeted investments in these organizations will require a **focus on funding organizational innovations in three core areas: artistic capacity, constituency engagement, and organizational management.\***

So, we will:

- ◆ Shift our grantmaking focus from supporting general operating costs to supporting innovations that require new ways of working. (Recognizing that innovation requires operating assistance as well as project-specific funding.)
- ◆ Develop a definition of innovation that will inform the creation of learning tools and criteria against which we will measure success.

3. The third aspect of our theory is that, for innovations in larger, established cultural organizations to be sustainable and enter common practice, **we need to help strengthen the adaptive capacity of each organization as a whole.**

So, we will:

- ◆ Require grantees to participate in on-going cycles of taking action and reflecting on the results of those actions so that they may develop their ability to self-evaluate and continuously improve.
  - ◆ Capture the lessons learned from the program to inform and improve our grantees' practice and our own grantmaking.
  - ◆ Assess grantees less on the individual success or failure of any one innovation, and more on their growing ability to learn from their experiences and to apply this learning in the interest of more generative adaptations.
  - ◆ Look for grantees to develop some specific characteristics of high capacity in innovation and adaptation over time, and consider discontinuing our investment in those that do not grow their capacity.
4. The fourth aspect of our theory is that, for the lessons we learn about innovation and adaptive capacity to impact the arts and cultural sector as a whole, we need to **develop a new structure of communication about, and field engagement around, these innovations.**

So, we will:

- ◆ Support a thoughtful inquiry into the ways that fields of practice are impacted and change.
- ◆ Develop innovative strategies to engage the arts and culture field at large, individual artistic fields of discipline, and the philanthropic field around our learnings.

\*Three core areas of focus derive from lessons and experiences of Irvine's Cornerstone Arts Organizations Initiative (1998 - 2006), and from learning in the *Critical Issues Facing the Arts in California* (2006), a working paper from the James Irvine Foundation.