



the **James Irvine** foundation

# New Connections Fund

**Accomplishments and Lessons Learned**  
**2004 to 2007**

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*The mission of The James Irvine Foundation is to expand opportunity for the people of California to participate in a vibrant, successful and inclusive society.*

## New Connections Fund

From 2004 to 2007, The James Irvine Foundation provided open and competitive funding through its New Connections Fund (NCF), targeting small and mid-size organizations whose work was well-aligned with Irvine's programs but which had not previously received Irvine funding. Through the NCF, we evaluated more than 1,700 applications and awarded more than 300 grants, totaling \$11 million, to nonprofits across California. This report summarizes the key accomplishments and challenges of the NCF, and provides a number of statistics about the Fund which help to illuminate the reach of these grants and the profile of the typical grantee organization.

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### The typical NCF grantee:

- Was new to Irvine funding
- Was a community-based organization serving a defined neighborhood, city or region
- Had a relatively modest annual budget (Half of grantees had a budget less than \$500,000 per year, and another 30 percent had budgets between \$500,000 and \$2 million.)
- Had been in existence for more than eight years

Nearly two-thirds of NCF grant dollars were awarded from Irvine's Arts program, with the remaining portion divided between California Perspectives and Youth. More than 80 percent of grantees had never before received an Irvine grant, which speaks to the positive ability of the fund to continue to reach new organizations, year after year. Conversely, we were largely unsuccessful in our goal to reach more organizations in Irvine's [priority regions](#) despite personal outreach and workshops in inland areas. Geographic distribution of NCF grantees was, for the most part, commensurate with population proportion in the state.

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## Accomplishments

Several inputs helped us assess the effect of NCF grants, including grantee reports, consultant interviews with grantees and two surveys of NCF grantees. The fund's high-level accomplishments were to:

- **Seed fund new arts projects in all disciplines.** We funded a wide range of artistic projects within humanities, media, and visual and performing arts. We were able to reach a significant number of diverse and ethnically specific organizations, a key benefit of funding relatively small organizations. In addition, many Irvine-funded performances and new work won local acclaim, positive critical reviews or awards. In nearly all of the NCF Arts grants, Irvine funding was critical to the project's ability to be presented or it directly funded the work of a new and emerging artist.

- **Support the voices of ethnic, low-income and immigrant communities.** Through the California Perspectives program, we funded many dialogues between underrepresented communities and public officials, particularly in Southern California. We also identified a handful of applicants with stronger organizational capacity which received larger grants as part of the core California Perspectives portfolio.
- **Help low-income youth apply to college.** In the Youth program, we funded an array of “college knowledge” programs, where community-based organizations worked with students from low-income, ethnic or immigrant communities to help them understand that college is a viable option and to help them successfully apply to and enroll in a postsecondary program.
- **Enable grantees to leverage the Irvine brand to attract other funding.** We heard from a significant number of NCF grantees that they were able to leverage other foundation and individual funding because they had received an Irvine grant. For example, in a 2005 survey of NCF grantees, 71 percent reported that they had been able to attract other funders following an Irvine grant.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

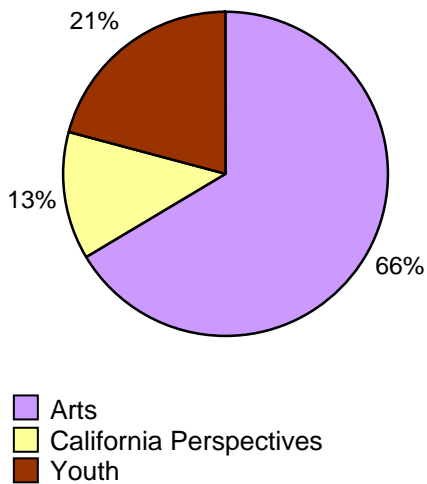
We experienced two primary challenges with the NCF. First, grantees desired greater interaction and connection to the Foundation than the program was designed to allow. Irvine staff, as well, preferred to have greater contact with grantees than the program offered, in order to learn more about the organizations and the communities they serve. Second, we observed that many grantees would have benefited from capacity-building support, instead of or in addition to the one-time project grants offered by the NCF. Organizations in Irvine’s priority regions of the Central Valley and Inland Empire, in particular, have limited access to the kind of capacity-building resources or technical assistance that can help an organization become more effective.

Based on feedback from NCF grantees and applicants, as well as staff reflections, we redesigned the NCF in 2008. A key tension for Irvine was to find alternative ways to manage large numbers of smaller grants without significantly increasing administrative costs. Thus, the redesign aimed to retain the open, competitive nature of this well-received small grants fund and address the challenges. Beginning in 2008, Irvine will offer three small grants fund, one in each of our program areas. See our Web site, [www.irvine.org](http://www.irvine.org), for details.

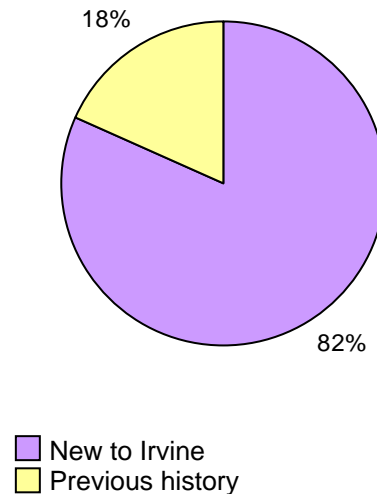
# New Connections Fund Activity, 2004-2007

**Grants awarded** \$11 million; 334 grants  
**Applications received** 1,774  
**Competitiveness** 19 percent of applications funded  
**Median grant size** \$30,000 over 21 months

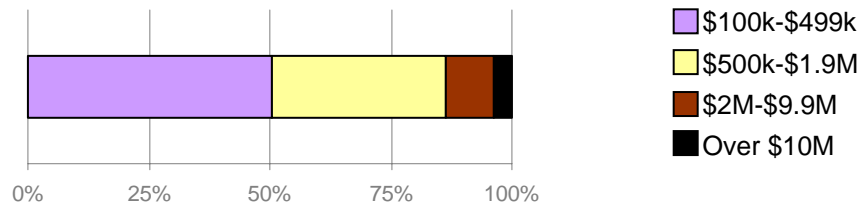
**Grants by program area**



**Organization's history with Irvine**

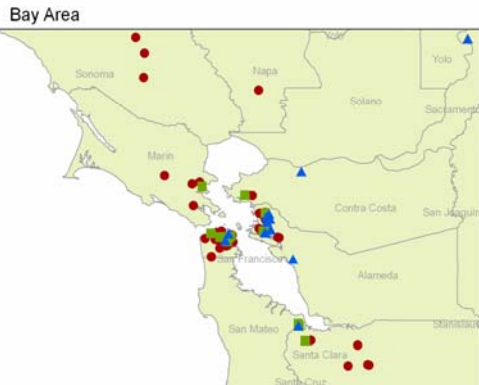


**Budget size of organization**



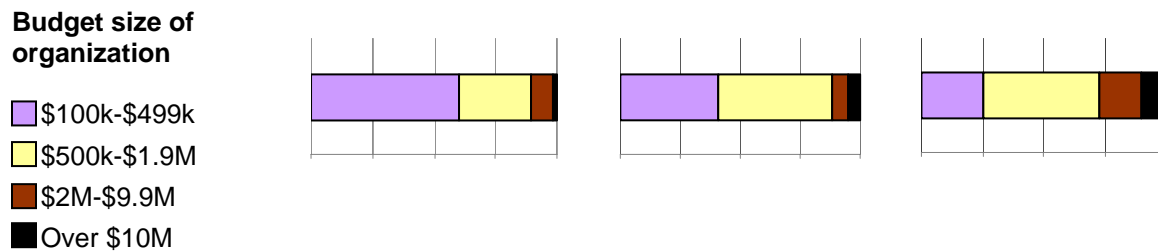
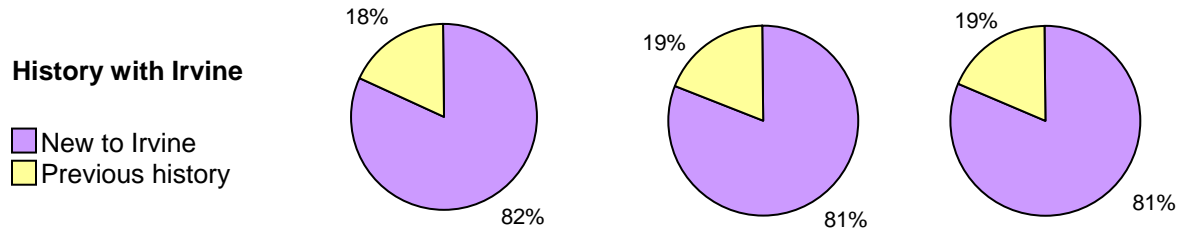
Region served	No. of grants	Percent of total grants	Grant \$\$ (thousands)	Proportion of population
North State	0	0%	\$0	1%
Sierra Range	9	3%	\$250	<1%
Bay Area	95	28%	\$2,846	19%
Central Coast	14	4%	\$488	6%
Central Valley	48	14%	\$1,632	17%
Los Angeles	98	29%	\$3,390	28%
Inland Empire	18	5%	\$587	10%
South Coast/Border	32	10%	\$1,084	17%
Multi-region focus	20	6%	\$731	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$11,008</b>	<b>100%</b>

# NCF Grantees by Location



# NCF Activity by Program Area, 2004-2007

	Arts	California Perspectives	Youth
<b>Grants awarded</b>	\$6.5 million 222 grants	\$1.9 million 42 grants	\$2.6 million 70 grants
<b>Competitiveness</b>	23% of applications funded	14% of applications funded	13% of applications funded
<b>Median grant size</b>	\$25,000	\$50,000	\$41,750



Region served	Arts		CA Perspectives		Youth	
	No. of grants	Grant \$\$ (000s)	No. of grants	Grant \$\$ (000s)	No. of grants	Grant \$\$ (000s)
North State	0	\$0	0	\$0	0	\$0
Sierra Range	8	\$225	0	\$0	1	\$25
Bay Area	70	\$1,856	8	\$339	17	\$662
Central Coast	10	\$495	1	\$50	3	\$143
Central Valley	29	\$911	10	\$463	9	\$259
Los Angeles	61	\$1,927	13	\$588	24	\$875
Inland Empire	11	\$315	0	\$0	7	\$272
South Coast/Border	19	\$524	4	\$200	9	\$360
Multi-region focus	14	\$471	6	\$260	0	\$0
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>\$6,514</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>\$1,899</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>\$2,595</b>