

GIA 2006 Conference: Beantown Remix

Session transcription

Community Building Potential of the Arts

Organized by Janis Foster, executive director, Neighborhood Small Grants Network

Presented by Janis Foster; Che Madyun, small grants consultant, Mabel Louise Riley Foundation; and Joel Ratner, program officer, The Cleveland Foundation

Foster: Good morning everybody, how are you this morning? I am Janice Foster, I'm executive director of a group called Grassroots Grantmakers, and I'm delighted to be with you this morning. We're going to spend about 90 minutes talking about the community-building potential of the arts.

And with me I have Joel Ratner, who is with the Cleveland Foundation and manages a program there called Neighborhood Connections, and you'll be hearing a lot about Neighborhood Connections.

And Che Madyun is from right here in Boston and is the Small Grants Coordinator for the Mabel Louise Riley Foundation Small Grants Program and has a long history with the W Street Neighborhood here in Boston. And she'll tell you a little bit more about her work.

But I'm really excited to be here. Grassroots Grantmakers is a network of funders who fund nonprofits that are usually formed and run by residents in neighborhoods and rural areas, and they're really focused on their neighborhood, including the quality of life in their neighborhood or their community.

So it's people who decided to turn off the TV and get off the couch and put their good ideas into action with their neighbors. Typically it's emerging more in formal type of organizations, and so we're a network of funders who share that interest and share information about how to do that effectively.

We saw the Grantmakers in the Arts conference information come across my email. I sent an email out to our members and the folks in our network and said, of you Grassroots Grantmakers out there, how many of the grants that you provide are arts-related? And I just got a flood of replies, tons of them! And I wasn't surprised at that, that was sort of the hunch I had, but that kind of led us to put this session together and we're really delighted to be here and that you're here with us this morning.

Just a couple of ground rules. I understand that this session is being recorded, and so I was asked by the staff of the Grantmakers in the Arts to make sure that when we get to the point where we're all talking and you're asking questions

and making comments, that even though we're in a pretty reasonable sized room and we don't really feel like we need microphones, we all need to use one.

So here's what we had in mind for this morning. I'm going to start off and just give a very brief overview to grassroots grantmaking and kind of set the stage for talking about art in the context of community building.

(More people arrive.)

So I was just getting started, you haven't missed anything so far.

I'm Janice Foster, I'm the executive director of Grassroots Grantmakers which is an affinity group of the Council on Foundations who are a network of funders who are interested in supporting resident-led organizations that are really working on their neighborhood or their own place.

So I was just saying how we imagined this morning. I'm going to start off with just a very brief overview of what we mean by grassroots grantmaking, and try to set the stage for a conversation about art in that context.

And then Che and Joel, who are really on the ground with this kind of work right now, Che in Boston and Joel in Cleveland, are going to talk about some community building potentials in the arts and their experience and their programs.

And then hopefully we'll have plenty of time for discussion, I'm sure you all have stories to share, and there's a lot of wisdom in the room. There always is, and that is often where the most important learning in these sessions comes from, that's been my experience, I'm sure it's been your experience. So hopefully we'll have plenty of time for that.

And I will say before I get going, I have this funny thing that happens to me, I think of myself as a very techno-savvy and friendly person, but whenever I'm making a presentation usually equipment does something it's never done before, no one has ever seen it do that. It may not happen, the last one I did, it didn't happen, but I always feel like I relax a little bit if I have that confession at the front-end, and so people aren't really surprised and horrified. I'm used to it, and we'll figure it out, okay?

So, Community Building Potential of the Arts, and here we go!

So Grassroots Grantmaking is a grantmaking strategy that is really about three primary things. It addresses local priorities, very, very localized, it's connected with a place. And it's really focused on helping residents tackle the issues that they feel that are most important.

And so our little tagline to our organization is "We Begin with Residents." And it's not that we aren't interested in neighborhoods and places and that is our primary interest, we are, but what we're most interested in is having the resident voices be involved in whatever happens in that neighborhood or community. And not involved in terms of weighing in and giving an opinion, but really

helping shape agendas.

And so this is about local priorities with residents as a very important driver of what happens in that community.

There is a high value for civic engagement, and so it's really also about kind of citizen democracy, it's helping people be citizens, be active in their own community. And the word "citizen" I know with all the immigrant stuff that's going on in the country right now, is a little bit loaded, but what I mean by citizen is the individuals who are the most important people in a democracy, versus clients. Where the root word for "client" in Latin is the same word as the root word in recline or decline, lay down, basically. And so if you think about this dichotomy between citizen and client, we're really about inspiring and supporting and increasing people in their own neighborhood being active and empowered and acting as citizens.

This is also work that builds communities, it helps people come together. Because even though one person can do something, and we've all heard stories of what one person can do and the difference that one person makes. Generally the power comes when people get together, even three or four people get together.

When de Tocqueville was touring the United States and looking at this crazy place called the United States when our democracy was pretty new, one thing he noticed was that the difference between the United States and France and England where he had spent most of his time, was these local associations. He said in France and England if you want to see something get done, you either look to the nobility or to the government. But in the United States people just formed groups and without asking anybody's permission, they decided what to do and did it! And he said, that is the genius of America. And so we're really about promoting that as well.

So those are very lofty goals. So if you think about what grassroots grantmakers do, this is kind of like the Alcoholics Anonymous test, if you can answer yes to three of these questions you are probably an alcoholic? So this is kind of like this, if you can answer yes to two or three of these questions you're probably a grassroots grantmaker and may not even know it.

But grassroots grantmakers generally invest in resident-driven programs, so I'm just going to check them all.

Invest in resident-driven programs. And again it's activities that residents in neighborhoods think up and decide to do, and then they are the doers. Grassroots grantmakers work with groups of neighbors, and this could be urban or rural. They develop local leaders, and so this really is, there is a strong leadership development component here.

They encourage an asset-based approach to community engagement, and that is instead of just focusing on what is broken and wrong, they really try to help uncover and support and develop the talents and assets that are inherent in any community, no matter how troubled it looks from the outside.

They know that small grants can make a difference, because they've seen it happen. And they provide a vehicle for these very local solutions in their grantmaking work.

Now who are they? Well, we say in our network, welcome, and we do welcome funders of all kinds. And we define funders in the broadest sense possible. A lot of community foundations have a very strong place-based orientation. Private foundations, family foundations, corporate, local government, other private and public grantmakers.

And so we have right now in our membership, we have a membership of about 35 organizations in the US and Canada, so we've been an informal organization, just have formalized our structure in the last couple of years. And what we know is that the people that connect with us, we're just discovering grassroots grantmakers all over the place.

And so I was just recently at the Association of Small Foundations conference down in New Orleans and had a fascinating conversation. People do this work internationally. So basically, grassroots grantmakers are kind of everywhere, and it's any kind of organization, typically, that has a connection to a place and is interested in engaging residents in that place.

We did a survey recently of folks who participate in our activities, and so just to follow up on who are grassroots grantmakers, we found that they're from very large, like the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which we know how large the Kellogg Foundation is, to very, very small, maybe a brand new beginning maybe family foundation that's not even staffed yet.

Where are they and where is their focus? Some focus in metro areas, the whole metro area. Some focus in cities. Some focus in just a neighborhood or two in their community. Some focus in rural areas.

The program size of grassroots grantmaking programs is anywhere from less than \$25,000 a year to a million dollars a year or more. The neat thing about grassroots grantmaking programs is that small grants is an important tool, so it's not real money-intensive, and so this was a strategy that is kind of open and available for any size of grantmaker.

The source of funds come from many models. Some funders fund this exclusively themselves, but we have members where there's a 27 member grantmaking pool, pooling resources for resident-driven organizations in their community. And really created a nice collaboration of grantmakers that has then gone on to think about how to plug residents into larger strategic issues in their community.

Generally, the impetus for beginning an aggressive grantmaking program is a strategic decision on the board. Joel might tell you, but I'm going to talk his story a little bit.

The Cleveland Foundation, a very large and well-respected community

foundation, like the second largest in the country right now, had a long history with community development, bricks and mortar and economic development work that in some planning noticed that the connection with residents really down at the neighborhood level, wasn't as strong as they wanted it to be. And so they launched an aggressive grantmaking strategy strategic decision because they saw something missing in their menu of work.

Duration, we've had grassroots grantmaking programs on the ground for ten years or more, and that is important because this is not kind of a risky, new, weird strategy, we have people that have been at the work, been experienced, and we have over time collected a lot of examples, a lot of different ways, a lot of different documents, application forms, just a lot of variety out there about the way people are doing this work. And there's tons of information out there in the grantmaking community to share.

The tools of grassroots grantmaking are pretty simple. Small grants, they generally range from average \$2,000 to \$5,000, some up to \$10,000. But the thing that's important about small grants is that they're not small because they're insignificant, and they're not small because they're just seed money, they're not small because it's a risky kind of venture, it's small because it's scale-appropriate for the types of organizations they're going to.

Most of the time the first grant to one of these resident-led organizations is the first interaction they've had with the foundation. And quite often these are most typically non-staffed organizations, so it's run by volunteers, and a large grant, in my experience of running these programs, our largest grants actually sometimes turned out to be the most problematic, because the group just didn't have any experience managing a grant or really running a project together.

Technical assistance, and I put non-technical assistance to just kind of signal that because these are emerging in relatively informal organizations, it's really important to build in all kinds of help for them. And it can be help like come to a training class, to help as in sitting across the table with a cup of coffee, problem-solving together. So there are tons of models about how folks have put together strong technical assistance programs in their communities, but that we know of grants plus technical assistance really is an important combination for success in this work.

Relationships are very key, more key actually I think than more traditional grantmaking. And then the community stories, what is happening in all these neighborhoods, are always interesting, always fascinating, always are good stories to tell your board and your grantmaking partners. But they kind of take on a higher level of importance as they inspire and really teach other community organizations out there, and kind of show what is possible.

We know from an evaluation that we have recently done of grantmakers that have been in this business for about 20 years, that there is a path to greater impact that the small grants plus technical assistance and the amount of staff that will really help you build those relationships, that's where you really get something done. That these programs have got to be very much tailor-made to their own community, there is not an off-the-rack kind of way to do it.

The grantmakers who are most effective, really get out there and tailor-make these programs to their own communities. That if it's an ongoing activity and not just a time-limited special project, that you'll get further that way.

If it's part of a larger strategy like just what I described with the Cleveland Foundation, versus a nice little program on the side, that is very important. And then one of our members described that their work is now a platform for their other work, versus a special program.

And it all kind of comes down to valuing resident voice and trying to connect resident voice into your other work and help it inform the other work that you do.

Now grassroots grantmaking in art, this is kind of my segue slide to having Joel speak to you next. But what we have found in talking about what is the impact of funding community-based art through grassroots grantmaking programs is that certainly a project happens so you do have a product at the end. You have the mural or you have the dance company, or you have the community flyer.

But the art is just a very, very powerful vehicle for building community and decreasing isolation, getting people together, expressing cultural traditions in a very safe and powerful way in a community, particularly a community that is changing with new immigrants coming into the community.

That it's a way for people to really see and express and learn about themselves. That it is a way to create the strongest sense of place for the community and really help that place be something that people in the neighborhood can grab onto in a stronger way. And that people from outside the community can identify with in a different way than just a set of problems or a set of statistics. All kinds of ways.

And so what we've seen is that grassroots grantmaking can be an important catalyst with art as a focal point.

So with that, let me turn the program over to Che.

Madyun: I'm Che Madyun, I live here in Boston. I've been here almost all of my adult life, but I will not tell you how long that is, I'd be giving away priceless secrets.

I live in the W Street Neighborhood, I don't know if anybody knows anything about the W Street Neighborhood. So in general, because this is Boston where they threw the tea in the water, so we do have a history of kind of being, you know, rabble-rousers here.

In my neighborhood we have a history of challenging authority as well, where residents pretty much decide a lot of what happens in my neighborhood. And with that spirit, when the Annie E. Casey Foundation, who had already been a funder in my neighborhood for their Rebuilding Communities initiative, approached us about funding for their Making Connections initiative, one of the things that they wanted to do was to have a small grants fund.

Now W Street had had a small grants fund, the W Street Neighborhood Initiative, where they were allowing residents to make decisions about who would get some of this funding. So I was a panel member there, I rolled that thinking into creating this new fund which is called the Family Strengthening Small Grants Fund.

And in pulling together residents to think about what it is they wanted to see happening, and what would make their neighborhood continue to be stronger, the arts did not come in as a separate piece, it came in as part of the whole. When they were talking about how to strengthen the fabric of their neighborhood, they were hoping that we would have folks come in to bring some arts projects.

So what has happened over the years?

In 2000, when we started our fund, I pulled together this resident panel. They developed a criteria. They also review the grants. And the Mabel Louise Riley Foundation where this money is held, now is a joint funding project between both of those foundations.

They don't second-guess what the residents decide is fundable. When they present who is going to receive the money, the Riley Foundation cuts that check and mails it off. I just wanted to put that out there because that's a very unique situation that I find that we are in here in Boston, in my neighborhood in particular, and I haven't found any other foundations that have allowed that to happen without them, you know, having that second pass-over saying whether they can or cannot be funded.

So they hired me as their consultant to work with the resident panel. And also to reach out and look out to see which groups are out there to be funded.

And the residents have continued to have the fund be for emerging new organizations, with a priority for volunteer groups' associations and residents. There are a lot of residents who are doing different kinds of projects in their neighborhood who are not 501(c)3s.

And so depending on the kind of project will determine whether or not they have to partner with a fiscal conduit, and sometimes they don't have to.

For example, the Mary Hill Drum and Bugle Corps, those who are from the southern part of our country, I know drum and bugle corps are very popular and they are a show within themselves, and the competition that happens between them is phenomenal, I love it!

Well here up north, drum and bugle corps...and I love Boston, but the only time you really see a drum and bugle corps band is when you go to a parade where the drum and fife people are reenacting the American Revolution.

So there were a group of youngsters who wanted to have a drum and bugle corps. I mean even the high schools don't have marching bands. A few here and

there, but it's not something that is readily accessible.

So there were a group of youngsters who wanted to have a drum and bugle corps, and I think maybe about eight or nine years ago they did have one at the Black Vulcan Society, and they wanted to revive that.

So they had been rehearsing, and realized that they weren't able to get new members because the young people that they were recruiting could not afford drums. And then they learned about the Small Grants fund. And so they wanted to purchase drums for the youngsters.

So what they did that first year instead of trying to partner with a 501(c)3, we set up an account at a store that they identified, and they were able to go in and purchase the drums they needed, and the foundation did a voucher thing where they told the store how much money they were able to spend. And they went in, they purchased their drums, they went on back home, and the foundation took care of the bill. So that was how we took care of that one.

Within those two years they got a chance to perform in some of those fife and drum parades! And that was actually very exciting because they actually played, you know, real band music that had modern songs in it, so that was exciting, and then seeing the youngsters of course is always exciting.

Well two years later they got good enough that they were invited to compete in the Vulcan Society countrywide competition. So they applied for another small grant to pay for the bus.

They showed how the parents had raised money for the hotel for the children, and you know, had snacks for them and things like that, those who needed to have their uniforms fixed up. And all they needed was money for the bus. So once again we set up an account for them with the bus company that they identified, so that they could have the bus to go to Chicago to compete in the competition. So that was an example of one of the small grants that we did.

And I know there are some who don't think that drum and bugle corps are necessarily artistic, but when you think about the fact that, you know, you have youngsters who were learning how to play these drums, some of them did not have music in their schools, so they were getting their first drum lessons from this program, you know? And just the configuration and the movement that they have to do, the dance steps involved in it, is actually very, very incredible.

Another small grant that we gave to... there was a woman about 20 years ago in the Mount Pleasant area, she had started a "tot-lot". And there was vacant land that was adjacent to one of the Catholic institutions that was just sitting there, and she had gone to them and convinced them that they should put some swings and things in that lot.

And so for a number of years, she ran, in the summer, a program where youngsters who didn't go to day camps in the summer, who were just running around the streets, they could come into this tot-lot. She called it a tot lot, but she had youngsters there up to at least age 12, so it was pretty like 6 to 12 they were

coming there. And she would provide activities on a day-long basis for these youngsters.

And she started trying to take them on different field trips in the neighborhood, and she was actually able to, maybe for the last six years, get funding through the church. I mean the funding came from the city, and the church was the active fiscal conduit, to have two or three young people be counselors in the summer.

They decided that they wanted to incorporate an arts and crafts component, and so they started doing that. And then that whetted the youngsters and they started saying, "Well why can't we do plays? Why can't we have dance classes?"

So they were able to apply for a small grant, to hire a director to bring the youngsters together to create their own skits, initially, that became a full-fledged production that they put on at the end of the summer. And they also hired a choreographer who taught African dance, so they had African dance workshops, and they also had a presentation. They were able to have the classes in the local community center that had opened up, as well.

So basically the small grant paid for the salaries for them to bring these artists in and for any of the equipment that they needed to use for their final performance. So that was one way that that happened.

And then another one I wanted to share with you – I like to tell stories – Celia Ayalla, she's a woman from the city of...I think it's pronounced "Loisa"? I may not have said that correctly, in Puerto Rico. And in her city, it's an Afro-Latino community where folks acknowledge the fact that they are of African ancestry as well as Spanish ancestry. And they have a whole series of dances and songs and stories and music that they have created that she has brought to the neighborhood.

And she wanted to really have a chance to get out and teach others about the culture that she comes from. So she put in for a small grant to do workshops and lectures in school systems in other nonprofit organizations where they have their after-school programs or other kinds of functions. And she wanted to be a part of some of the street festivals, they have a lot of street festivals here in the Boston area.

So she received a small grant to be able to do that. And it was actually very interesting because there are a lot of people who are not aware that there is an African element to the Puerto Rican culture, and she really wanted to bring that out. So she brought an aspect to Boston that had not really been talked about much, let alone seeing the artistic work that comes from it. So that was another special thing that happened.

And one more. Two years ago...I can't remember her name now, isn't that something? Old age, creepin' up on ya. She's a visual artist who had an idea that she wanted to figure out a way to incorporate her gardening – because she does community gardening as well – to incorporate community gardening and her visual arts.

So she approached one of the housing developments in our neighborhood, you know, they prefer to be called housing developments now, no more do they want people to call them "projects." She went to their community center, they all now have community centers onsite, and worked out a program where youngsters from that particular housing development would, as their summer job... The community center got money from the City of Boston, the City of Boston does a job program every summer where nonprofit organizations get money to hire young people to work for their summer jobs.

So she was able to get some of the young people to come as their summer job to work in the garden, to learn about gardening, and she also had a component where they were journaling about what they were experiencing in life, and also to learn about the different kinds of food that they were growing, the different kinds of plants and flowers that they were growing, and to create murals and collages around what they were discovering.

So she did apply for a small grant because she didn't have the money to get the materials, the community center didn't have the money for the materials, and the city wasn't going to give her money for materials, they just gave them money to be able to hire the young people. So she did apply for a small grant for that.

And what she found in working with the youngsters, that there were a number of families who either their grandparents or their great-parents were farmers, whether it was from a country that they had come from, or whether they had come here, north, from the south. Many of them had, you know, agricultural backgrounds.

So she invited their grandparents who were here to come and participate in these sessions, and so there became this intergenerational thing that happened where they were sharing how they used to do art and dance and sing for entertainment, because they didn't have the TV and the radio and all of those pieces. And so then that changed, really, how those collages were being formed and these artworks were coming about.

Unfortunately, someone in that housing development got shot during that summer. And what she did was she incorporated the pain that everyone was experiencing from that incident, into the artwork, and they now have a memorial that they created in that garden, for this young person who lost their life. So I mean it was unfortunate that that had to happen, but it also was a tool to really help cement and heal the youngsters who were involved in that program.

So she has repeated that, and she has been able to get her own 501(c)3 now. And so she's doing that now every summer. That was...I think that was three summers ago.

And one last thing I do want to say, I forgot. With the Mount Pleasant Street group, I had a session, I do it about once a year where the grantees come together and they share what their projects are and they learn from each other.

And she hooked up with the Mother's Club. The Mother's Club, they had received a grant because they do quilting, and they have women who are in their

60s, 70s, and 80s, and they teach younger people how to quilt. And then they take the quilting and they work with another organization where this becomes part of a package, I think it's called the Well Baby Visit, or something, but they bring a packet to the new moms in the neighborhood with a quilt and other things for the new mother and the new child. And so they were taking these quilts and they were putting them in this packet.

Well she hooked up with the girl from a mother's club to come to special sessions that she was having in the month of January, at the new community center, so the Mount Pleasant youngsters were learning how to quilt with the women.

And they decided to use first-aid as their theme, and so when they did their quilts they decided to give them to folks who were the sick and shut-in, they used to say that? So that's what they did with their quilts.

So they now have a relationship where they have quilting as part of their program with these older women. That's all.

Foster: Now we're going to hear from Joel, and we heard some stories about kind of what one of these grants might look like, and one of the things we wanted to talk about today is, well okay, now you are interested in doing this kind of work, maybe you're doing it already, but what is the difference if you're sitting there with proposals in front of you, and they have an arts component? What is the difference between a good project and a great project that has a lot of community building impact? So Joel...

Ratner: I'm going to give a big picture of our program and I think you'll see why it's relevant as I go on. Three things that we have learned from our neighborhood work about the arts:

Number one, that arts are an important part of the neighborhood, that they're integrated into what's going on in the neighborhoods, and their organic flowering, if you will, of things that are going on in the neighborhood.

Number two, that people are doing it, it's participatory, and it's active, so the arts are not distant, they may not be recognizable in a way that some people think about it, but people are involved in the arts in the neighborhood.

And number three, that the arts are valued by local community leaders. Again this may be a sense that people don't care about the arts, they don't value it, don't think it's important, but our experience shows otherwise.

And I'll talk too then about how our program takes those assumptions and how we go on to support our organizations.

So Janice referred a little bit to our experience at Cleveland Foundation, it's a very large community foundation, and working actually with the George Gund Foundation in Cleveland over the last 20 years has made a significant investment in our neighborhoods. Actually the majority of the neighborhoods within the city limits are facing serious problems related to poverty and all those things that go along with it. A great deal of the wealth in Cleveland is in the suburbs.

So the foundation has made a significant investment in the neighborhoods in the city. And that investment has really focused on building up a system of community development corporations in each neighborhood that will support the development of the neighborhood, commercial and residential, until the private sector kicks in.

Some of you from the coast may not recognize this situation, but the private sector has not, in the last decade, been terribly interested in our cities in the way that has happened in Boston and Los Angeles and some other cities. So the key development corporations were very key tools in supporting development in the neighborhoods.

But that development was largely bricks and mortar development, so it meant building and rehabbing houses and trying to find developers to come in and build a shopping center and making sure there were stores and safe places to live for people in the neighborhoods. All of which is critically important.

But over time the foundation saw that there was a piece lacking, and that was that the question really came up, how are we investing in the people who live in the neighborhoods, the people who are already there? And what are we doing to support their ability and their capacity to be involved in the neighborhood and to be a part of a neighborhood improvement strategy.

So about five years ago the foundation decided to support this small grants program, and they devoted \$650,000 a year, so we had \$650,000 a year to give out in small grants. It is a citywide program, the city of Cleveland is now about 430, 450,000 people. And we divide the city into 26 neighborhoods. And together we have \$650,000 that the foundation gave us to invest in people and to support their attempts to do positive things in the neighborhood.

And one of the key things that I want to say today is that the program didn't... I'm here a little bit by accident, because the program was not an arts program at all. The money was meant to be for community people to do things that they cared about, that they thought were important in their neighborhoods, and I'll tell you a little bit about how our process works, so how we get to what's important.

But one of the things that I think is key is that the arts now are number two area of funding, versus education, number two is the arts. So the people in the neighborhoods were, again, were doing art, and the people who review our proposals – I'll tell you about that – are saying arts are important. Of the \$650,000 we give out each year, approximately \$100,000 goes to arts projects, so roughly one-sixth. And again, I will tell you that was a little bit of a surprise to us, we didn't know it would happen that way, and we've learned a lot from that. And again, that's pretty consistent.

So the program was set up to be innovative and to be different from the way the foundation normally gives out grants. So first of all, we give grants to groups that are not 501(c)3, and this is key. Many of the small arts groups are learning the nomenclature, they don't know what a 501(c)3 is, they just know they're

giving kids music lessons, they're doing dance, or they want to do a community mural. So roughly 50%, 50-55%, it varies around there, of our grantees are not 501(c)3, and again that has been very important for the young art groups.

So we give to groups that are not 501(c)3. We provide extensive technical assistance. So again the idea is that the money is important, but the groups tell us that the advice and the support and the connections that we provide them are equally important, some say more important, some say much more important, than the money. So the money is a piece of it, but the ongoing support that the foundation provides through our technical assistance effort, has been very key.

And I will tell you that the arts groups are probably, of all the number one... I told you, number one is education, number two is arts, number three is neighborhood beautification, after that security. Of all the kinds of groups, the arts groups are the most interested in technical assistance. And I'll go as far as saying they're the smartest at putting it to use. They're really interested in the technical assistance, they call a lot and ask for help, and then they follow through on that.

Our technical assistance comes in a number of forms. First of all, we go out and actually meet with each grantee after we provide them the grant.

So the first step is, they are told they get the grant, and then we have a mandatory session for all granted groups. We have two deadlines a year, we give out roughly 80 grants per round, so roughly 160, 170 grants per year. After each round of funding we bring the groups together and we talk to them, because again the assumption is that a small arts group maybe has not received \$5000 before, this may be the most money they've ever received. Or they just might not have a lot of experience in handling the money or in actually doing the project that they won.

So we bring them together. We talk to them about some of the legalities of handling the grant money, the final report, some of the basics. We ask them to fill out an assessment form so we can see how prepared they are to follow through with the program.

And at each of those meetings we have them introduce themselves, because one of the most important parts of technical assistance is that peer learning, that there's a neighborhood group on one side of the city that's providing music lessons, and there's one on the other side, and they never heard of each other. Or one may actually already be a 501(c)3 and have an employee and the other doesn't. So that they have experience that they can share. And again that sharing of experience between the groups has turned out to be a very important part of technical assistance.

So we meet with them individually. We provide workshops. Again, based on the assessments they fill out, we look at what they want.

Number one, you won't be surprised to hear, they want to find out how to get more money. Makes sense, right? Looking for funding.

So we provide workshops, we actually have a foundation center, many of you may be familiar with a foundation center, we have an office in Cleveland, we're very fortunate. So we don't reinvent the wheel, we basically have asked the foundation center to do some of their workshops which they have put together. And we bring them out to the neighborhoods, so we'll basically do it in a neighborhood library in the evening, and it will be the content of the foundation center, but it will be for neighborhood people who maybe never heard of the foundation center, or are just not familiar with that kind of material.

So we do workshops, we meet with them one-on-one, and we try to connect them to each other. And I told you the first time we do that is when we bring them together, they hear of other groups doing interesting things.

And after that we, now over five years, we distributed over 1.9 million dollars, 516 grants, to approximately 450 groups. So 450 to 516, the difference there is that groups can come back and get funded again. So about 450 community groups.

Now again, those aren't all arts groups but are groups just doing anything in the neighborhood that they feel improves the quality of life.

The unique aspects of the program are that we fund groups that are not 501(c)3, and I still think that's very important for the arts students. We provide excessive technical assistance, again our students are very interested in that and are taking wonderful advantage.

Another unique aspect of the program is that the foundation has turned over the grantmaking to a committee of community residents. We have 18 Cleveland residents, each with a background in neighborhood involvement, who review the proposals and make final funding decisions. And I do mean final, they really review the proposals, they read them, they interview about three-quarters of the proposals of the group that submitted proposals – not all of them, but many of them – and then they decide who gets funded. So that we make about 175, 180 grants a year.

We receive roughly twice that many proposals. We have a deadline in August and we have a deadline in February, it varies a little. So a committee will receive a stack of proposals. We divide them into subcommittees because 180 proposals is too much for anyone to read. So our 18 people are divided into six groups of three. So it means they read roughly 30 proposals.

Again, these are neighborhood activists, about a third are retired, about two-thirds are working people. We don't pay them, they're community volunteers. And they are, by definition, community volunteers who are involved in their own neighborhood, so they are people who are working really hard, so we try to make the load on them as light and as realistic as possible.

So they read roughly 30 proposals over a two-week period. They come in. We give them dinner. They decide who they want to interview. Over four weeks they do around 20 half-hour interviews at locations in the neighborhood. And then they come back the following week, discuss the interviews, decide who

they're going to fund, and make recommendations to the full committee. So most of the work is done in that subcommittee.

And again, one of the reasons I'm talking about our grantmaking process is because these, again, are not people who...only one or two of them I would say came from an arts-oriented group, but they're valuing art because the arts groups are, again, our second most highly funded area. So they're saying that arts groups are doing important things in the neighborhood.

Our standard is, we give money, the program gives money to groups that are empowering people, that are giving people in the neighborhood the chance to do something meaningful, something that they have said is important. You know, a grant-making committee by funding so many arts groups is saying that the arts are an important part of community change, and an important part of community activity.

I'm going to just briefly, if I can, give a couple of examples, and then just refer you to this sheet which I hope you'll take a look at later.

Some of the groups we've funded, and Che told some great stories, one I'll tell you is a group called A Joyful Noise, it's basically a retired pastor and his wife who are musically inclined and decided they wanted to provide music lessons to kids in the neighborhood.

And this is a neighborhood that has drug problems and has crime issues, and this is a serious urban neighborhood. And as is probably the case for many of you, the schools now have cut a lot of the arts education, there's not enough arts education going on in the schools, so it's really being left to small community groups like Joyful Noise.

And they basically started with nothing, I think the only money they've ever handled is the money they got from us, now they're trying to do some fundraising and we're trying to help them.

But they asked for people who could give group lessons, and they started recruiting from the schools. They went to the principals of the local schools, they said, who is interested in after-school music lessons, because so-and-so who was willing to teach trumpet, they basically looked around the neighborhood and beyond for people who would give second-hand trumpets. And whenever they could get someone who would teach an instrument and enough of those instruments, they'd offer a course for the kids in that instrument.

And they now, after the second year, they have about 75 kids taking music lessons. They have essentially lined up people at the door, again showing their interest in this. This is, again, a lot of string instruments, a lot of classical instruments in a neighborhood that you wouldn't necessarily have thought that would be what people want. But there is an interest in it, and by making it available people are essentially lining up for it.

And I think also I actually spoke to Grantmakers in the Arts last year and they started throwing around words like building an audience, and what about

quality, and things that I frankly don't think about with the arts because I make it about participation, getting people involved.

But I don't think they're mutually exclusive. Do I think Joyful Noise is building an audience? I can't tell you if one of those kids is ever going to end up in the Cleveland Orchestra, but I can tell you that some of those kids will end up going to the Cleveland Orchestra, and they already have since we've tried to connect them with the orchestra, they've gotten some free tickets.

So this really is about building an audience, but it's about connecting people who have an interest in it and giving them a chance to participate. And I would say Joyful Noise has had a very important impact in the community because parents see that someone cares, someone loves to provide free art lessons, of course free music lessons, the lessons are free for the kids. And it has really been a joy – pun intended – to watch this group develop.

I'll just tell one other story about a mural program, I'm sure you all have seen mural programs. We have funded a lot of mural programs and it's very interesting to me because there are so many ways to do a mural valuing different aspects of participation versus valuing different aspects of art, that I would argue to you that they are not exclusive.

I can think of one project that is artistically bad that also had low participation. They said they thought they were going to get a good project by basically keeping people away from it, but I would argue it's one of the cheesiest murals that we have around.

And some of them that have really maximized participation are, I think, pretty good artistically, and certainly have had a very positive impact and have a lot of participation.

The one, frankly, that I think of as bad, they did it once, the people involved to paint, they wanted a professional artist to paint, so they allowed participation by putting together a community committee to choose from a group of murals, to choose from a group of proposals of what would be painted there. And again, they got people involved with choosing it, but not the right people, obviously.

And on the other end of the spectrum is an artist who was brought in who had experienced working with community to create a mural. And it's a mural in a neighborhood that's called Slavic Village Improvement, as you can hear from the name it's an old Eastern European neighborhood, but it's actually now about one-third African American, and frankly one of the issues in the neighborhood is the growing African American population.

So the mural provided an opportunity for people in the neighborhood to talk about the ethnic changes in the neighborhood. And it was something that was on everyone's mind. People were talking about it, but they weren't talking about it openly, they weren't talking about it with people who were different from them. So the mural provided a wonderful opportunity for that to happen.

And one of the questions that often comes up is, the people in the mural, what

are they going to look like? Are they going to be black? Are they going to be white? Are they going to be Hispanic, for instance this has happened in a number of our murals.

And where the process is managed well, it provides a wonderful opportunity for people in the neighborhood to talk about this, for there to be some dialogue about it which may not be happening anywhere else in the neighborhood.

And obviously it's key, because again it's happening, but it might not be happening in a positive way. And the change is going on in the neighborhood.

So the mural allowed for that dialogue to take place, and for people to feel good about that dialogue. And of course some people in the mural are black and some are white and some are Hispanic, just like the neighborhood. And there's an incredible sense of ownership of that mural.

And actually after they did it, they wanted to make a movie about it, and they got a lot of people, so it was such an important thing for them. And they had a large amount of people participate. Artists again are very skillful at designing blocks and working with the people, the painter people actually got to put the brush up against the wall and paint. And again, it's really become a focal point in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood continues to have a lot of issues around race and around other things. And sometimes people connect with race.

So the point here is that it became a process. So it wasn't a product, there was an artist involved, and she certainly is partially an expression of her artistic temperament and design, but it's also an expression of the artistic desires and abilities of a lot of people in the neighborhood. So it was really something that involved a lot of people.

I think the key to arts in the neighborhood is participation, so it's about process, not just product, and again I'm suggesting to you that you can have a good product and a good process. That you can have bad of both and you can have good of both, if you think about how you're going to do it, and if you're careful.

But really the key to a great community building arts project is genuine, meaningful participation in the neighborhood.

And on the sheet, we talked a little bit about how that's particularly true in neighborhoods where either there's changing demographics or it's a demographic group that may feel that they've been left out, that they don't have a chance to participate in maybe the wider arts community. And there's a chance, again, particularly for youth to identify with something that is close to home but may not have a community expression.

We're actually funding a Native American dance troupe this round, we're just giving them their money this time. And it's basically led by a young Native American guy who's in his early to mid 20's and Cleveland does not have a big Native American population at all. And he says these kids are isolated and feel

they...in Cleveland no one is talking about Native Americans, and they have a chance to come together to feel good about that kind of ancestry and feel good about being in that community, to understand that there is a community, and to do something positive and again participatory, which is arguably a really wonderful artistic expression.

So we think that community buildings arts are really great partners and that there's wonderful things, we're very happy about the way the program has developed.

Foster: Thank you. Well, you all selected this session this morning out of a lot of interesting topics, and so I know that you have either things to share or questions that you came with. So let's just open this session now to all talking together.

So what I have to remind you is you're supposed to talk from the mic. So yes?

Q: I'm Martine Kellett from New England Biolabs Foundation. I have actually a question about the process. You say you don't want 501(c)3 which are private foundations, does that mean you don't fund community foundations, and are your grants considered grants to individuals?

Ratner: We fund groups that are 501(c)3 as well as groups that are not. And our priority is funding small groups. We say we don't fund individuals, but often a group is one or two or three people who have come together to start something in the neighborhood.

The reason we say we don't fund individuals is because we want that individual with an idea to at least go to two or three other people who will work with that person. And if they can't get anyone else to help them, arguably they're going to have a hard time succeeding and doing the project.

So essentially by saying that we fund groups, we ask them to take the first step in reaching out and connecting to other people in the neighborhood, again proof that there is going to be an ability to accomplish the project.

Q: What are they? Are they individual?

Ratner: All of the groups that are not 501(c)3 are required to get a fiscal agent. The Denver Foundation I know gives money directly to groups that are not 501(c)3 and we believe also that that is legally possible.

Madyun: Can I just interject one thing? Last year I had a conversation with Patrick from the Denver Foundation, and what he said, because they're a community foundation they actually have a pool of money for that particular grant, where the investors have agreed that it's okay to directly fund an individual. So for them it's not a legal issue because their paperwork doesn't say that they can't do that.

Some organizations, like my organization, says that they can't fund individuals, so that's how we worked around that. So we just depend on the charter of the foundation.

Foster: And actually, community foundations as 501(c)3s actually can fund non 501(c)3s but a lot of them choose not to.

And of our membership base there's a lot of different ways, creative and good ways, to handle either if you're a private foundation or a family foundation organization that legally can't fund a non 501(c)3, there are a lot of creative solutions. And it's usually about fiscal agents.

Sometimes it's creating a connection between a neighborhood group and another established nonprofit in their neighborhood, so that actually you're building that connection and a relationship within the neighborhood that has kind of dual goals there of kind of making the funding workable for you as a foundation, also creating a stronger connection in the neighborhood.

Other member organizations set up, have one organization that might be a nonprofit management center, might be a United Way, it might be some kind of technical assistance in a remediary that they use as the sole fiscal agent. So they have one organization they work with.

There are all kinds of creative ways to not just circumvent that challenge but really make it work and really make it be a strength of the program.

Ratner: We made the decision again, we didn't want to fund individuals because we want people to reach out to find someone else who will work with them. And when we fund groups that are not 501(c)3 they need to find a fiscal agent because we wanted them to reach out.

Our program is called Neighborhood Connections, the research shows that people who are connected make for stronger neighborhoods, and we wanted to encourage those connections.

Q: Hi, my name is Charnita Johnson and I'm from the Skillman Foundation in Detroit, and we have a very new small grants program. And everyone on the panel has helped me put it together, so thank you and I hope I didn't get on your nerves too much.

A comment and a question. Actually we partner with a state agency that allows us to make grants to organizations that are not established 501(c)3s, but they have to be about a nonprofit activity, so that was really helpful for us.

But my question is, and I guess I'm trying to figure out if this is a normal occurrence and how we can kind of mitigate it at this point, because we've only been running the program for about four or five months.

But we've gotten requests from a lot of larger agencies, and we don't really want that. And so I just want to know if that's sort of a normal occurrence and how do we stop it?

Madyun: Well it is a normal occurrence, especially when you first start out, and when they get turned down enough times they'll get the message.

Ratner: I agree, I think every small grants program deals with that with the proposals that are written by professional grant-writers from small or not so small organizations.
Again, since the foundation is not a step, it's not deciding who gets funded, but we have this committee, that is we continue to discuss it with the committee.

Now frankly they have a bias against those organizations. So we have regular discussions with them about that topic. And again I think the answer is that we tell them that the program, if they ask, and we have sessions where we talk about how to get a grant, and we emphasize that the grants are for neighborhood small groups.

Now they may hear that and they may not believe it, or they might be clever in trying to disguise it, and I won't say it never happens. But the committee has a bias towards real grassroots groups.

Foster: And I would say too, this is a highly relational type of grantmaking, it's not your typical just paper transaction. So Joel talked about interview, Che has people from her own neighborhood making decisions. And the program that I manage we did site visits with every application.

And so those conversations, when you really sit down with people and talk about where the idea came from and who's going to be doing what, you know, it kind of comes out.

And one memory I had, the people that we were visiting with, the residents, they didn't know where the idea came from, because the idea basically, someone in their organization put their name on it, but someone else actually came up with the idea and is pretty much going to be doing the project, and that was not one we did.

Ratner: Then my one other experience, we had a citywide group that sometimes wanted to do a neighborhood graffiti festival. So it was a neighborhood-based project and the committee funded them for two years. And as part of a technical assistance I would go and meet with them and I developed a relationship, and after two years I told them they probably shouldn't apply again. So it was really just a pretty clear communication, you guys aren't really right for us.

And I talked to them a little bit about other sources of funding and going to businesses in the neighborhood, so the idea was not to leave them high and dry but to help them develop other appropriate sources of funding.

Johnson: Well we do have a resident panel that reviews the applications and they're becoming quite violent about the large... *(laughing)* So thank you.

Foster: And I think the issue is, you know, what I've heard from our members is, like Steve, Joel and Che are associated with programs where residents are making decisions about the grant requests, and I'd like to say that's typical. It's not.

In many cases it's the more traditional, it's the board of a foundation or a more typical grantmaking committee. And I think in that case it's especially important

to do a very thorough orientation and kind of training with them about who are neighborhood groups, what do these groups look like, you know, what do you really look for in a proposal. And really get them out into the community, getting them out to visit so they can see firsthand how it all works. With residents on the panel, you have to do that but not to the extent that it's more typical foundation trustees.

Q: Hi, I'm Lisa Kremin with the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta and the Metropolitan Atlanta Arts Fund. We actually have a neighborhood fund and you may know about it, it's been operating for 10 or 12 years and very effectively to majority non-incorporated community neighborhood groups with a heavy technical assistance program, from which has grown, actually, when neighborhood leaders tend to emerge they're encouraged to become something that has now been formed and functioning for many years, which is a neighborhood leadership institute, which strengthens neighborhood leaders to take their leadership to a higher level outside of their neighborhoods if they're so inclined.

But my question is about something else, which is because this fund has not really done much in terms of arts and culture, very, very few, just a handful of grants over the past ten years, to anything arts-related.

My interest is in any expertise you can lend to the issue of encouraging maybe non-primarily-English-speaking marginalized arts and cultural programs and projects, how do you get those kinds of marginalized international communities that tend to really stay very closely among themselves, may not have strong English skills. How do you engage them into applying for a program like this? And how have you dealt with language and communications issues?

Madyun: I appreciate the question. Our materials are in three languages, English, Spanish and Cape Breton Creole. And one of the advantages I have is I have a place-spaced grant fund, so I only have to deal with my neighborhood, and those are the three dominant communities in my neighborhood.

So because I also live there, I know folks who translate the materials for me. The Cape Breton radio station for example usually airs when it's time to do the grants. So people are able to submit their applications in their own language, and then I have panel members, or sometimes I hire someone else, or maybe a forward panel to actually translate it so those of us who don't speak those languages know what the applications are saying.

And what I've found is that when you don't live in a neighborhood where you know the people, you have to kind of figure out ways to put yourself in social situations where you're interacting with folks so you can get to know people, so that you can partner with people to help you in that effort.

Also too, when you go to different social activities and, you know, looking at their papers, sometimes they do have things in English that you can find out what's happening and you can go to those functions. And when you can find someone who you can be a friend with who can read stuff in their own language, or say, "I know you're interested in such-and-such thing. They have something

happening over at the such-and-such a place. Come on, why don't you come with me?"

So you start building up your own relationships with people that can help inform your work, and then you'll learn who some of these other groups are in the neighborhood.

The other advantage that I personally have, that I also used to work at the community theater in my neighborhood, first as the director of education and outreach and then as the theater manager. So I knew a lot of the arts groups already, you know, in the city, so I could draw from that as well.

So I would just say just reach out and take some of your personal life and go be in other people's lives.

Rankin: The only thing...I agree with that, which is to say it is difficult. But the corollary of that is that you're going to need to make more of an effort. And really that's making a decision, and that might mean staff time, it might mean an intern, it might mean, you know, a consultant in that area who either has those connections or will go out and build them and go into that community. And as many blocks as there are normally for small groups to fill out a proposal, there are that many more for groups that are outside of the dominant culture or don't speak English.

So you're going to have to do those things or it will not happen. It won't automatically happen, it's going to come from a conscious decision to make those steps, and to really work hard.

Kremin: Have you done many at Cleveland?

Rankin: Yes, but it was hard. We funded, for instance, the Vietnamese group, now there's a Somali group that we've funded. We also did some education with our grantmaking committee about it, because remember they're making the decisions.

So when those proposals started coming in, we reminded them of the language and cultural obstacles, because some of the proposals didn't look so nice, to be honest. And again, that was because English was hard for some of the people writing them. So we talked about it, again, we lifted up that discussion about how hard it might be for those groups.

It's an ongoing process though, to get those groups to keep the proposals coming in from those groups. And it requires just a higher level of effort.

Foster: I guess I have two follow-up comments on that is that, first of all, the outreach at the front-end of these grant processes does really take some thought. And across our members, people have approached that in all kinds of ways. But these aren't groups you're going to find in the phone book or in any kind of nonprofit directory.

So there's kind of going out, I know Joel does a lot of outreach and sessions out in communities before the grant round to let people know that this is coming up

and this is an opportunity. And so there's a different kind of outreach that you do.

And then the second point is that we do have members at the Seattle Foundation and the Denver Foundation are the two, and the Community Foundation in Silicon Valley has done a lot of multi-ethnic funding. And I don't know how much of their funding is arts-related, but they have a lot of experience working with language barriers.

And then the third point is that we do as our network, one of the ways we get together and help people exchange information is that we organize what we call Topical Conference Calls, every year about six, and sometimes six to eight of them. We get people on the phone around the topic.

And I just did a survey of our people that participate in those. The topics that they're interested in us organizing a call around for next year and dealing with these language barriers in multi-cultural communities, and particularly the language barrier, that was one of the top-rated topics.

So we will be doing something on that, and certainly if you're interested you're all invited to participate.

Q: Hi, my name is Jeremy Liu, I'm the executive director of a CDC but also on the board of the Newman Foundation for the Arts, sort of living in both of these worlds. And we might think we're small but we're not, I know we're not that small as a CDC.

But anyway my question is, has there been much discussion or debate around how the world of microfinance is starting to connect with the world of small grants?

And microfinance being the move now to... I mean the guy just got the Nobel Prize, right? I mean that whole world. Because that was specifically created out of the structure of saying that, look, a lot of communities don't use banking services like that.

So you know, microfinance is not just about the size of the grant, it's a culturally appropriate way of actually delivering that money, whether it's in the form of a grant or a loan or whatever it is.

I'm curious if there's been that intersection or that conversation or that looking at that field to say, hey, what are we learning about the way people use capital? Because lots of different communities have like lending pools. And maybe actually the question is...maybe it's not about small grants at all, maybe it's actually about small loans, because so many artists and cultural groups are entrepreneurs ultimately, as well. And how does that play out?

And do you see that happening more? Are foundations going towards that? Or is there some possibility there for something interesting and new to create programs in that way?

Because I don't want to get hung-up on the language thing because I think culture is ultimately the challenge. I mean language is, but as we become increasingly multilingual, I think the challenge is going to still be the cultural piece that people just don't apply...

I mean how many cultures in the world actually have this thing called "grants" and get money from nowhere, right? I mean that's actually a pretty foreign concept probably to most of the world except for the West, so that's just a question. Thanks.

Ratner: I'll say I think that we're just beginning to talk about it, and I have heard it come up, and I think that that's going to be one of the next things that we look at and that other people look at.

So some of our grants actually go to people who are doing either job training or doing sort of entrepreneurial things to help people in that neighborhood start businesses, or to business associations. So there is already sort of again just organically coming up in the neighborhoods an interest in that kind of thing.

Obviously these distressed neighborhoods need nothing more than people who are working and earning a salary.

Foster: And I think there are just tons of opportunities for more exchange in learning about that, certainly, you know, I think there's knowledge, and that there hasn't been as active an interchange and exploration of what can we learn from each other? I think it would be tremendously exciting.

Q: Kita Sullivan, I'm the diversity fellow at the Barr Foundation. My question actually has to do a little bit with technical assistance and follow-up, and maybe Che you could talk about this

Which is, after you've provided these grants to the organizations, what kind of follow-up is done with them, not just to see how the grant affected them, but to see what their stability is, and the continuing relationship with the neighborhood.

That I think, you know, we're all interested in developing groups that thrive and bring the neighborhood together, and that really works with the assistance after the grant, more than the assistance during the grant. And so what kind of things do you do to bolster that community life that that group has started or participated in?

Madyun: The program that I'm involved with actually has a very small technical assistance component, it's not quite as structured as what Joel presented, and so it's really done on a need-by-need basis, group-by-group basis.

And some of the grants, it was understood that they were one-time grants. Sometimes it's because the structure pretty much was already able to run itself and did not want to necessarily grow any bigger than what it was.

So I say it's kind of spotty, and since I'm a person of one, it really kind of

depends on either whether they reach out afterwards, or whether I stay in contact afterwards.

However, with it being a place-based...we're talking about a neighborhood that's about two miles radius, so it's a lot easier for me to kind of know what's going on, even if I just happen to be at someone's house that evening and they say, "Oh, blah, blah, blah." I'm saying, oh, I'd better go check up on that. But it's not as structured.

And so if we were to grow this program it would definitely have to take all of these components into place, because when they do want to grow, and I've had one or two groups, not arts-related, that wanted to grow. That's how I learned here in Massachusetts, I did not find a connector. It's like either you can get this money at the start-up, or if you've already been established there's money for you. If you're somewhere in the middle, you're kind of floundering like that.

And so there is an opportunity there probably to have some kind of conversation to figure out, okay, well what do we do about people who are in that middle stage of growth and development?

Ratner: I think, two things I'll say, even though we're more structured. I do think it's a lot about just staying in touch and that personal relationship. Again, I told you that's really key to our program.

So one thing we do is, I told you we have workshops about every eight weeks, and once somebody is a grantee, even if they come back and ask for another grant and don't get funded, they're on our mailing list and they're invited to all our workshops. And they do come! And I see people who got a grant a couple years ago who will show up for a workshop that they think is relevant. So we do that.

We try to have workshops where we bring together like groups, and we did actually have all our arts-related grantees come together, we actually had the arts program, senior program officer at the time, talk to that group because they all wanted to get in front of her anyhow, and she had a chance to talk to them about the difficulties she faces, and why it's going to be difficult for them to get money from the foundation generally. So it's very useful on both sides. But the part they said that I liked the best was just coming together.

I will sometimes say to groups in a setting like that where I'll see someone, or again in just the outreach that I do, when are we getting another proposal? I kind of push them, what's the next step? How are you guys doing? So again, it is just about that personal relationship, no matter how many structures you create. And trying to stay in touch.

Foster: And on that side, these are relatively staff-intensive programs because it requires that highly relational type of grantmaking. In this case Joel works full-time with his program, and Che...

Madyun: I do part-time. Could I also ask you? I also have TAs for this, as well, so I just wanted to put that out there.

Foster: There are cases within our membership where folks manage a grassroots grantmaking program as just one part of a much larger portfolio. In those cases when they're successful, they have found a way to get that relationship time out there, they may contract with a technical assistance provider, they may have someone that can be the on-the-ground person even though if they as a foundation program officer cannot do that.

Ratner: The only thing I'll add is, our program is very staff-intensive. It is me, all of me, but it's not just me, we have two full-time staff for the program, plus a half-time person we contract from a neighborhood organization that works with me on technical assistance. So we're essentially 2½ people out there as much as we can be.

Q: Hi, I'm Stewart Post from Independence Community Foundation in Brooklyn. We're a generalist community development foundation, about 90-something million dollars. Our grants are mostly in the \$5-25,000 range.

But we do have a small grant program that we're very excited about. It's \$500 and under, and what we're really proud about is that in our guidelines there's literally a tear-off sheet that would take about five minutes, three minutes to fill out.

And I think the key to the success of the program is that it's such a user-friendly application process, and it's also not a lot of due-diligence, it's a phone call. And I guess that about half of the applications are from arts organizations, all very sort of community-based, and half community beautification. It's all over the map, the local Little League team...

But something that has not been mentioned before is that I would say that about half of the grants that we have are one-shots. It's a small group, they don't want to be anything else, and it's for community purpose.

But half of the grants, I'd say maybe a third of the grants, are for startup organizations. And because it's not a lot of due-diligence, we can very easily give a \$500 grant to an organization, they can go to other people in the community and say, "Oh, look! Independence gave us \$500" and leverage our support.

And my sort of poster child of success is a guy that actually we declined his letter of inquiry, just either my fault, their fault, it didn't register. He called on the phone, he sounded like a great guy, he was very passionate about the program. I said, look, apply for the \$500 program...you'll get it. He got it.

Now, three years later we're about to approve a \$10,000 grant to him, and more significantly, he's gotten major funding from all sorts of people.

So we see time and again that our small grant program leads to other things.

And I just wanted to add about immigrant outreach. I was at my Russian barber a couple of years ago for my \$8 haircut, and he could hardly speak English, but he asked what I did for a living, and I said, and he said, "Oh, I have a booker and

theater company in Regal Park.” And I said...apply! Gave him my business card. And sure enough, we became one of his grantees. So that became the most expensive haircut anyone has ever gotten.

Foster: Thank you for sharing that. You know, and you talk about groups getting connected to bigger funding sources as they grow, that’s one of the reasons we really believe that these kinds of programs aren’t really good as a time-limited activity. It’s more of a...something that almost needs to be there, it’s an ongoing program.

You know, people in neighborhoods change and people...if something happens in their life and so a leader today may not be a leader tomorrow.

And we view this as kind of an onramp, this is an onramp that always needs to be there for new ideas and new people. And sometimes the people get on the onramp and they get right off; other times they get on the onramp and they do get connected. But it is that onramp idea that I think is very important.

Q: Dina Epstein from the George Gund Foundation in Cleveland. I want to continue this and sort of talk about the graduates, if you will.

Do you look to have graduates? Have you had graduates? It’s that transition, because we see folks who come to us and they don’t say they’ve gotten a grant from Neighborhood Connections. We’ve gotten a grant from the Cleveland Foundation. They’re smart, yeah!

And as we look at it, we do a lot of small grantmaking, but not a grassroots grantmaking. And trying to sort of decide, can they meet our expectations, which are different than your expectations? And how do you work with them to help them understand the different kind of expectations? And are you encouraging them to sort of make this transition...or just stay?

Ratner: We leave it up to them, but I will tell you a lot of the arts organizations are interested in making that transition. And I would say almost all the arts organizations want to become a 501(c)3.

There are other kinds of groups that are content on not going down that path, but all the arts organizations, virtually, or maybe all of them want to become a 501(c)3.

I’m not sure if you’re aware of our Connecting Circles program, so we saw that there were groups that were interested in more than something ongoing. They weren’t ready for sort of...in Cleveland we have an organization called Business Volunteerism, it provides technical assistance, but for larger nonprofits.

Foster: You have to have a staff member.

Ratner: Yes, and it’s expensive. So our groups clearly were not ready for that.

So we created a program, we’re now in our second year, called Connecting Circles, which provides basic organization building skills to groups that are

either new nonprofits or are interested in becoming a nonprofit.

Janice Small, who some of you may know, provides the content, and she meets with them over the course of the year and has a lot of phone calls, and basically gives them some basic skills in building a board and writing a grant and creating a fundraising base, and managing volunteers.

And we let about, I think, seven or eight groups a year in to it, and there's been one or two arts groups that, last year, and again this year, that are in it. So we do try to give them the skills to go to the next level if they're interested. And I guess arts groups are interested.

Epstein: And are you doing that up here?

Madyun: Not really... Many of the groups that I've had come across the table... Well for the arts groups, not really. I actually had a lot of arts groups come across the table, so I will have to work on that. But I've had a lot of groups that have art within their program come across the table. But the groups that have done something similar have been the sports teams.

We have two sports teams that we've been funding now for awhile. One is a soccer team and the other one is a baseball team. And they've needed a lot of support to grow their organization because as their players have gotten better, they've started to compete, first, you know, on a statewide basis, and then New England basis, and now they're competing across the country. So they've had to strengthen how their organization works, they definitely need funding from other sources because you know, there's a lot of uniforms and a lot of bus trips and a lot of Gatorade.

Epstein: It seems to me that if someone's successful, they're going to want to keep doing what they're doing. And this requires ongoing funding.

Madyun: Yeah.

Ratner: I think that's right, and the conundrum is, what do you do with them? We've said, you know, there are no guarantees you're going to survive. And I sit down with them a lot, I always say arts funding is very tough, that's the first thing I say to the arts groups. It is, and I want them to be aware of it. They say, "Well we'd love to have a bunch of this."

I told Joyful Noise, don't hire anyone until you absolutely need to. One of your greatest assets is that you have no expenses. They get the music teachers for free, they get their instruments for free, they're out of a church that gives them space for free. Basically they're spending almost nothing. I said, keep it that way as long as you possibly can, and don't take on any expenses until you absolutely need to. And I told them to work on Issue 18.

In Cleveland we have just created, thanks to Dina and some others, for the first time, public funding for arts groups. And I told them that you'd better get involved with this because this is the key to your success, it's the only way you're going to get operating funding is if this thing passes, which it did!

Foster: And I think we're right at the top of the hour. Shall we do one more quick question?

Q: Thank you for all your stories and the process. Somebody has got to ask this question, so I apologize in advance.

Do you do anything to aggregate up towards results? Are there any community indicators? Do you use any social capital kind of indicators or ways in which you report out after a few years on what you think you're accomplishing in aggregate?

Ratner: That's a good question because essentially we're a social capital program, those of you who know about the work of Proper Putnam, I mean that's what we're doing, trying to give people tools in the neighborhood to get involved. And again, we say we don't care what you're involved with, we want you to be involved and engaged and increase participation. It's obviously very hard to measure social capital.

To the foundation's credit, the first day they brought me in, there was also an evaluator sitting at the table, and from the beginning when we started talking about what the process would look like. And we do regular evaluations which are very extensive, the foundation has made a significant investment, the program has made a significant investment, to evaluation looking at quantitative and qualitative measures.

So we're trying to do it. It's not easy, because the programs are so different from each other. And there are countervailing trends in some of the neighborhoods. In some neighborhoods positive, in some neighborhoods negative, that obviously are at least as powerful as the amount of money we're able to put into any individual neighborhood. So it's very hard to measure.

We are regularly looking for ways, and again, we are doing an evaluation of the program.

Q: Is the evaluation published?

Ratner: Yes, I'm happy to provide you...it's extensive, I mean the full evaluation every year runs to 60 or 70 pages. We usually try to do a 12 or 15 page executive summary, I'd be happy to provide it to you or anyone else who is interested.

Foster: We have a few other members working that way. I'll be happy to talk to you about the approaches.

Madyun: I just wanted to say really quickly, the Mabel Woods Riley Foundation is an interesting group of gentlemen, the trustees. They actually don't like those kinds of evaluations. And so when we were putting this together I said to them, well we have to be able to know whether or not they're doing what they are able to do. And they agreed, because they came to the focus group as well, they agreed that they wanted the groups to define what means success for their project. And then we will evaluate whether or not they've done what they've said they've done.

Has any of that been compiled in something that's for public distribution? No. A year ago I had a session where I invited some other funders to learn more about what we were doing with this program, and I did something up at that point.

So there's nothing really that you can go on the Web to find. But the groups do have to do a grant report where they assess whether or not they've done what they said they're going to do.

Ratner: That's obviously why these programs are so hard to evaluate, because in my opinion they're doing so many things. I mean they're growing small groups, they're increasing participation in the neighborhood, they're increasing leadership. I didn't really talk about it, but we have some really wonderful success stories of people who have gone on to higher levels of leadership in the community. So there are a lot of different pieces, it's a pretty complex picture.

Foster: I wish we could just keep going on morning, it's a very fascinating conversation, but I really want to thank you for being here, and we'd be happy to talk with any of you informally after we formally adjourn, and thanks for being here.