



Arts and Culture

Arts and Culture: Elemental Contributors to Social, Creative and Human Capital

Arts Education Partnership

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Comments by Eric Friedenwald-Fishman

Thank you for participating in this gathering to explore the power, impact and opportunities for innovation with art and education.

It is always such a charge to gather with the rest of the choir and enjoy our own music. This room is full of such creative and cultural energy and power for change that it energizes and inspires each of us to keep doing this work. Yet, I worry that we are not collectively reaching as far beyond the choir as we must to unleash the potential impacts that art and culture have to offer our community and the world. For too long we have all allowed art and culture to be treated as a nicety — the first budget cut, the last investment made, the tertiary quality-of-life mention of our elected leaders. In the last 30 years, we have seen our nation's public and private investment in the arts decline as we have scrambled to communicate relevancy through the frames of education, tourism and economic development — *all* of which are true — but also undersell the critical power of arts and culture.

I have had the opportunity to work nationally and internationally on issues including poverty alleviation, educational equity, environmental health, national arts funding and many others. Increasingly, I see that the solutions to our most critical problems cannot be solved through institutional hierarchy or traditional policy and enforcement models, but rather through collective action, dispersed innovation and shared responsibility. For example: about 35 years ago we had a water pollution problem, we passed the clean water act and enforced shutting down 100,000 pipes that dumped toxic waste into our rivers. Today MORE river miles are polluted (not from industrial polluters, but from non-point-source pollution — the actions of every American ending up impacting their watersheds).

There is no way to monitor and enforce every American conserving water, making alternative transportation choices, etc. However, when people and communities are armed with **information, imagination and the ability to engage each other**, we can change public will and thus change our actions and impacts. This is true for preventing child abuse, dealing with global warming, closing the educational achievement gap, and addressing the severe economic disparity that threatens our core American legacy: *real opportunity for all*. For the last century, **financial and institutional capital** have been the priority leverage points to address our society's challenges. I deeply believe that now **human, social and creative capital** will have the greatest impact.

Continued



And this is where **arts and culture are the necessity**.

There is no discipline, sector or issue area that nurtures, protects and sparks the **creativity and innovation** we need every citizen to command more than arts and culture.

There is no approach that breaks barriers, connects across cultural and linguistic differences, and engages our shared deeply held values more than arts and culture.

There is no investment that strengthens our core human asset — **the ability to connect with each other, to be moved to action and to make collective choices** — more than arts and culture.

All of us must be messengers and champions for increasing our community's value of and investment in our cultural capital (not to serve our institutions, our field or our careers, but rather to create the just, equitable, sustainable and meaningful society that is our shared desire and our grandchildren's birthright). As a community we must use our power to tell stories, communicate across cultures and gather community to engage and empower all people to be change agents. I hope we will push each other and support each other in reframing the discourse and the debate in ways that harness arts education as a vector for a desperately needed innovation pandemic and will establish arts and culture as a core community priority and ultimately the legacy of this generation of champions.

Thank you.

Eric Friedenwald-Fishman is the creative director of Metropolitan Group a leading social marketing firm with offices in Chicago; Portland, Oregon.; San Francisco; and Washington, D.C. He has worked extensively with leading foundations, nonprofit organizations, public agencies and social enterprise businesses to promote social equity, literacy, educational access, arts, heritage and culture. He is the co-author of *Marketing That Matters* (Berrett & Koehler) which has been translated into six languages, is the primary author of Metropolitan Group's *Public Will Building Framework: an approach for sustainable social change* and is the 2008 recipient of Northwest Business for Culture and the Arts' Exemplary Business Volunteer for the Arts award. Other articles and presentations are available at www.metgroup.com.



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Metropolitan Group is a full-service social change agency that crafts and integrates strategic communication, creative and resource development services that empower social purpose organizations to build a just and sustainable world.

Metropolitan Group was founded in 1989. MG works exclusively on behalf of social purpose organizations — government/public agencies, nonprofits / NGOs and socially responsible businesses. We work as a team with our clients to create results, including sustainable attitudinal and behavioral change; increased participation, program use and awareness; and expanded resources and capacity. We have developed a Public Will Framework, which organizes social impact campaigns to have long-term and movement-building impact. Public will building works by linking issues to existing closely held values and integrating grassroots outreach with traditional media. Visit www.metgroup.com to see the article “Building Public Will.”

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