

EmcArts Program on the Arts in Complex Community Change

Helping cultural organizations build their capacity to work adaptively in complex conditions

As of August 2, 2018

Introduction

These days, our neighborhoods and communities are complex systems in which many individuals and agencies interact, resulting in unexpected behaviors alongside entrenched repeating patterns. In this kind of unpredictable and swirling context, traditional approaches to planning for change simply aren't up to the task.

To work effectively at the community or neighborhood level nowadays we must navigate the complex dynamics at play, and bring an experimental mindset to learning our way into "next practices" for a brighter shared future. Artists and arts organizations can contribute uniquely to these efforts, not only through arts-based community activities, but also by offering their embodied knowledge of how to operate in complexity and leading groups to discover their own creative solutions. The strategy of bringing these artistic skills to community development work is rapidly catching on, as can be seen in the popularity of "creative placemaking" programs, but there's still a long way to go in shifting attitudes and building the capacity to think and act differently when the conditions are complex.

EmcArts' new series provides unique capacity-building support for arts organizations and community-based agencies across the social sector working on complex community change – opportunities to slow down, reflect and learn how to make real progress in changing the dynamics of complex systems through the arts. The proven workshop designs are for groups of staff in a single organization (for instance, a local chapter of a national service agency), or teams from up to 15 different agencies who are looking to work together on significant community challenges. Organizations and leaders who will find this program beneficial include those seeking to strengthen their adaptive capacity for community change, as well as agencies who want to network with others and move beyond the "low-hanging fruit" of short-term arts-based projects in order to engage in deeper systemic change.

In the sequence of Workshop activities, participants begin by reflecting on the current conditions, opportunities for change, and long-term possibilities around their community-based work. They then identify the complex challenges they face, distinguishing those challenges from ones that are complicated or obvious. Participants explore responses to complex challenges that move away from traditional linear planning and implementation toward emergent practices that can be discovered and developed through small experiments, rapid learning, and repeated prototyping. For many agencies, this is initially a counter-intuitive strategy, but it is gradually recognized as the only productive way to respond in complex conditions.

In this program, participants deepen their exploration by investigating the nature of complex systems. They use tools to analyze the community dynamics at play in relation to a selected complex challenge in community change. Grounding their new insights in practical next steps, participants then explore potential new strategies that integrate the arts, and design immediate experiments to test their viability. Developmental evaluation techniques allow them to rapidly assess progress, in order to make adjustments and strengthen their innovation.

The series offers participants a wide range of practical tools and techniques that they can take home and continue to make use of among themselves and with other stakeholders. EmcArts is committed to arts-based experiential learning, so each Workshop includes a number of creative exercises to reframe thinking and advance new understanding.

Program Goals and Intended Outcomes

The Workshop Series is designed to increase participants' awareness of what it takes to innovate, to support peer-to-peer sharing of effective "next" practices, to help participants devise responses to complex community change challenges, and to build the necessary skills and capacities to effectively design and implement adaptive arts-infused initiatives at the organizational and system level.

By working in home teams, as well as exploring challenges cross-organizationally and developing new support networks, participants will gain new perspectives and acquire new knowledge. They will practice these skills in order to become adept at applying them in the future to complex community challenges that they seek to address, singly or via newly-connected friends and colleagues.

Program Details

The series of hands-on Workshops will be implemented in 2019 as six half-day sessions in two communities. The Workshops will be held in pairs, each set of two half-day gatherings taking place about one month apart, with the participating teams advancing work between sessions. The Workshops, led by EmcArts staff and guest community change facilitators, together constitute a curriculum in innovation for change work in complex community systems, grounded in the situations and real issues of each organization taking part. Facilitators will also be available for periodic consultation with participants in between workshops.

The six Workshops cover topic areas as follows, with multiple segments designed to foster different learning methods. Each uses a variety of artistic and experiential processes to embody learning and engage the whole person, rather than relying solely on information transfer. The program is grouped into three blocks, each of two inter-related workshops.

Part 1: Organizations responding to Complex Challenges

Workshop 1: The roots of innovation in community change

Participants explore the current state of the environments in which they work, identify turning points in the past that have led up to the current conditions, and imagine future states and how they might get there. They then distinguish between different kinds of challenges that they face in their community change work, and select one or more challenges to address.

Workshop 2: Responding adaptively to complex community challenges

Participants explore the dynamics of complex adaptive systems, focusing specifically on local conditions and building their understanding of why patterns evolve and are difficult to change. They then identify long-held assumptions associated with their complex challenges, and generate new hypotheses ("hunches") about alternative directions for future success. They develop their new hypotheses into multiple small experiments with radical intent that they can implement as a form of action research.

Part 2: Building Networks and Systems

Workshop 3: Network formation and development

Using network analysis and other tools, participants determine how robust and effective their community change network currently is, and identify steps to further strengthen the network for effective action. Peer-to-peer feedback on small experiments is given and received in small cross-organizational groups, using a formal technique for rapid critique, in order to improve the research.

Workshop 4: The roles of artistic development in systems-oriented community change

Introduction to artistic processes and practices as ways to build capacity and advance change in complex systems, not just as outputs from the work. Participants engage with artists from the EmcArts team, working alongside local artists involved in community change, to advance awareness and understanding of embodied learning through the arts across the local network.

Part 3: People and Resources

Workshop 5: Resourcing complex community change

Participants consider eight observed shifts that are emerging in the structures of adaptive organizations and their deployment of human capital. They consider shifts they wish to accomplish, what obstacles they face, and what next steps they can take. Participants together determine a set of criteria to use in determining budget reductions (letting go of activities) and/or re-allocating financial resources to innovative initiatives. They then apply these criteria to their full suite of programs and consider next steps.

Workshop 6: Embedding complex community change in the business

Participants use the Organizational Culture Assessment Index to visualize their current and desired cultures. They then turn their desired culture shift into a physical tableau, which is presented to the others and debriefed for how the transition is accomplished. Each participant considers his or her personal leadership roles in advancing culture change and enrolling others to ongoing adaptive work. Groups share their thinking and look for mutual support roles they can play for each other beyond the Workshop Series.

Program funding

Each series costs \$100,000, to cover EmcArts fees and expenses, guest faculty, local venue and catering. The Kresge Foundation is providing \$70,000 per Series. The balance of \$30,000 for each Series will be provided by one or more local funding partners in each community.

Program Timeline

Workshop dates for 2019 are approximate, and will be worked out in conversation with host communities.

- October 31st, 2018: **Letters of Interest** due from host communities
- November 8th: Notifications of acceptance for communities
- November 29th: Host/funding partner agreements signed
- November 30th: Application guidelines released for organizations to participate
- December: Planning and design work with host communities
- December 17th: Participant applications due
- December 21: Notifications of acceptance for participants
- February 5th – 6th: First & second workshops in Community #1
- March 20th – 21st: Third & fourth workshops in Community #1
- April 9th – 10th: Fifth and sixth workshops in Community #1
- May 15th – 16th: First & second workshops in Community #2
- June 11th – 12th: Second & third workshops in Community #2
- July 9th – 10th: Fifth & sixth workshops in Community #2

About EmcArts

Inspired by the arts, driven by a world in transition, EmcArts works alongside individuals, organizations, and communities as they take on their most complex challenges. Through advancing processes and practices of innovation and adaptive change, EmcArts strengthens the resilience of individuals and organizations in the arts and social sectors. Through carefully designed and facilitated workshops, coaching, and labs, we create space and conditions to navigate uncertainty, test innovative strategies, and build adaptive cultures. Our current programs include *Community Innovation Labs*, *New Pathways*, *Arts Leaders as Cultural Innovators (ALACI)*, tailored Services for Single Organizations, and our resource-sharing and storytelling web platform, ArtsFwd.org. To learn more, visit www.EmcArts.org.

Feedback on Previous EmcArts Community Workshops

- *The training was one of the best, if not the best trainings that I have attended. I have continued to have “aha!” moments and utilize the framework, especially the quadrants [Cynefin] in everyday community development.*
- *I thought the Workshop was brilliant and insightful! Rarely do we take time out of our day to think about systems and how we can or do inter-relate in this systems-based approach. Our group actually achieved some traction on the idea of integrating arts and culture into distressed areas of our city and so now I even have a few more resources to follow up on.*
- *The process by which everyone around the table came to understanding around a single purpose - it was a struggle at first, but the struggle may sometimes be needed to get to a place of mutual understanding.*
- *Excited to use these workshop activities and analysis tools in the process of developing stellar arts-based responses to community challenges.*

Community Application Guidelines

DUE DATE: October 31st, 2018

Letters of Interest should be submitted to Liz Dreyer, Senior Program Manager, at LDreyer@EmcArts.org.

If you are interested in bringing an *Arts in Complex Community Change* program to your community, please submit a 2-page Letter of Interest addressing the following questions:

1. Why are you specifically interested in the *Arts in Complex Community Change* program?
2. In what community will the program take place? Tell us a little about the community and why this program is a good fit.
3. Which local organization(s) will serve as host (raising local funds, recruiting artists, and helping organize the Workshops)?
4. Do you have initial recommendations about the mix of organizations that might be invited to participate? Please tell us a little about those organizations and the work they're currently doing in the community – Are they working with community partners? How are they currently engaging the community? Are there effective cross-organizational collaborations?
5. Do you have access to the necessary local matching funds for the program (\$30,000 for the *Arts in Complex Community Change* program)? What are likely sources for the funds? When will commitment be confirmed?
6. What are your goals for the impact of this program in your community?
7. What would be your ideal schedule for the program? Do you have any difficulties with the dates suggested above?