

ARIZONA HUMANITIES NEH MID SITE VISIT REPORT

OVERVIEW

Since the site visit in January 2012 Arizona Humanities ("AH") has made significant progress addressing strategic issues identified by the site team, and also in advancing AH's long term goal to be the recognized leader of the humanities in Arizona. Although the recession and cuts in both federal and state funding posed challenges for the organization, hard work and persistence, and thoughtful collaborations and partnerships, have allowed AH to emerge with new focus and determination to expand our reach and reputation in the community, and to develop new ways to engage the people of Arizona in the humanities.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Infrastructure and IT

During the 2012 site visit, the NEH site team observed that staff lacked the necessary tools to get work done. Computers, software and equipment were out of date, and furnishings were generally of poor quality. The work environment has since been transformed, and resource deficiencies addressed. Specifically, the old office furniture was replaced, and bookcases, lateral files and desks were added, along with two new copiers, commercial refrigerator, freezer and new business phone system. The old computer equipment was replaced with touch-screen all-in-one desktop computers, and cloud data storage. Migrating data to the cloud will protect our intellectual property and data against natural and other disasters. We have two new projectors, a conference telephone, and audiovisual equipment, including a portable screen, speaker and microphones, and new lecterns and seating for meetings and events.

We obtained new software through the Microsoft *TechSoup* program, which sells deeply discounted software to nonprofits. We are currently in the process of migrating to Foundant grants software, which will enable regrant and Arizona Speaks applicants to apply for grants, and reserve speakers online. The successful implementation of Foundant will make the programs and grants application process more accessible, and will also promote work efficiency. In the near future the board Grants Committee will simply login to review grant applications online. We now offer grant webinars, which have proved to be popular and allowed us to reach more grant applicants. Though technology transformations have taken time, patience and training, they are essential to AH's business stability and future growth.

Historic House

The NEH team noted both the blessing and burden of occupying historic office space. In particular the site team stressed the need to balance competing interests so that local "Phoenix-centric" branding would not overshadow AH's statewide mission. The newly renovated house has contributed immeasurably to the rebranding of Arizona Humanities. The events and

programs held at the house have brought new attention to AH and our mission, increased our community outreach and education, and fostered civic engagement through lively discussions on books, films, politics and history, to name a few. The timing is fortuitous. We are on the newly established light rail and in the heart a new cultural corridor. The university has added new campuses and a law school, and business growth is on the rise, all increasing the population density and vibrancy of the surrounding community. The newly formed Hance Park Conservancy, a consortium of nonprofits and businesses around the park next to the house, are working to implement a Master Plan which is to mirror New York's Central Park.

Previously the house was rundown, with no hot water, missing faucets and fixtures, inadequate lighting and storage, a dilapidated interior and exterior, and no ADA access. Since the site visit the property has been renovated and now features a wheelchair lift, porch handrails and new ADA accessible restroom. The office is not only inviting, but also more functional. It has been re-wired to support modern office equipment, and has safety lighting, emergency exits, and new security system linked directly to the City of Phoenix police department. There are 26 motion detectors from attic to basement, glass break detection, and emergency lighting for power outages, among other features. Despite these improvements the house still poses challenges. We are the stewards of the property and primarily responsible for upkeep and maintenance. We have borne the burden of trespass and vandalism to the property, and as noted by the site team, at times been "distracted" from our mission. Ultimately if we are to remain in a historic house we must address these issues, and develop a plan for house administration, which could include active pursuit of revenue generation through facility rentals and naming opportunities. Our goal is to have outside (non AH) programs staffed by contractors, and not staff, so that we can focus on our mission.

Visibility and Communications

For the past year and a half we have actively undertaken steps to increase our community presence by rebranding the organization. We have dropped "Council" from our name after 40 years, and reintroduced ourselves to new friends and old. The rebranding of AH is an accomplishment we are proud of. Our website has been redesigned, and content is now managed by staff, rather than an outside firm. We can communicate in a more timely fashion and have developed new audiences through our e-communications and social media. The rebranding has caught the attention of former and new patrons of our humanities programs who have commented on the "new energy" and "easy navigation" of the website, and expressed appreciation for the *Humanities Happenings* e-newsletter and e-blasts about upcoming programs and events across the state.

We have new marketing materials, logos, fliers, annual report, and social media communications including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. We distribute book bags and books, water bottles and other items to promote awareness of who we are and what we do as we implement programs and events, and also as we support the programs and events of our community stakeholders. During the past year we have been featured in the Downtown Devil, Frontdoors magazine,

Arizona Republic, and even in *Humanities* magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities, to name a few. Our rebranding has not been limited to marketing, but is also reflected in the programs and grants, and partnerships and collaborations described below.

Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations

AH has made considerable progress towards its goal to expand our reach through strategic partnerships. We have worked with the Phoenix Center for the Arts to bring arts and humanities to 8,000 annual festival-goers, and have received the financial support of the Arizona Commission on the Arts for this event. We have also received financial support from APS and SRP (utilities) to support the festival and our *Primetime* family literacy program. We have partnered with ASU Project Humanities, the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy, and ASU Performance in the Borderlands, to bring innovative humanities programs to new audiences across the state, and in particular to reach a younger demographic. We have partnered with 12 different organizations, including the Pat Tillman Veterans Center, to develop and implement our new veteran programs, and with the City of Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture, Parks Department, Phoenix Burton Barr Library, Hance Park Conservancy, Valley Leadership, University of Arizona Poetry Center, and the Arizona Women's Hall of Fame, among others. These collaborations have helped us reach new audiences, including teachers, students, and families. New partnerships are pending with the Desert Botanical Garden, Tucson Police Department, Black Chamber of Commerce, and the Arizona Women's Foundation's Young Professionals, to name a few. .

The site team strongly encouraged AH to develop ways to advocate for our mission through the rich grantee network that we have developed. This is an area where there is still room for improvement. We highlight grantees monthly in our newsletter, and hold board meetings at grant sites, to engage the board directly with grantees. However we have not yet connected grantees to one another, other than through the web, or occasional invitations to attend events. In the future we plan to hold an event solely for the purpose of fostering grantee connections.

Grants and Programs

We have been successful in our primary mission of granting funds for the enrichment of the humanities in Arizona. We have strengthened our regrants through technology and the addition of webinars as noted above. We have cultivated new grantees through partnership grants to organizations that typically do not have dedicated grant-writing staff. We have launched several innovative programs during the past year. *Board Mixers*, with targeted special guests, have generated new interest in Arizona Humanities, and re-introduced us to former friends and patrons. We have also hosted Author's *Nights*, films, workshops, community conversations and open houses. These events have been critical to introducing AH to members of the community who were unfamiliar with our grants and programs. We have also updated our roster of speakers and topics, rebranding the former *Speaker's Bureau*, to *Arizona Speaks*. We successfully implemented the Smithsonian Museum on Main Street *Journey Stories* in six rural communities. Our goal in the coming year is to add a steaming video component to capture our speakers, and

to identify new programs for rural communities. We will continue to encourage civic engagement and community dialogue through the launch of "Frank Talks," and also honor and preserve our founder's memory. We also want to grow our veterans programs, which are a new and dynamic addition to our community programs.

Finance Administration

We have continued to make progress in finance administration. We have completed four successful audits with no material lapses in internal controls or risk management. We have benefited from the expertise and oversight of an actively engaged Treasurer who has been accessible to the board and staff, and who has closely participated in the oversight of the audit, financials and annual budget process. We reviewed and addressed issues with the employee pension plan and IRS Form 5500 compliance, and established an endowment for the first time in 40 years, and reduced the cost of the audit. Staff training and development has increased, and the staff has more actively participated in the annual budget process. There is still work to be done. We need to update written finance policies and procedures. We also need to develop written policies and procedures for investment management, reserve and estate giving, and the endowment, that will contribute to AH's long-term financial stability. The Finance Committee will continue to work on board training, so that the board can be fully conversant in financial oversight.

Development and Fundraising

Fundraising and development activities have measurably increased during the past five years, but we have only been moderately successful in this area. AH is still overly dependent on the NEH for funding, exacerbated in recent years by the loss of state funding from the Arizona Department of Education and Department of Libraries. Progress has been made with respect to changing the institutional culture of AH and of the board of directors. Prior to the recession, fundraising was not a priority. Now funding diversification is a strategic goal. We established an endowment, an important first step, but need to establish goals and policies for long-term growth.

AH has been successful in receiving the full allocation of NEH matching funds for the past three years. In 2014 we received two new grants for veteran's programs from the Maine Humanities Council (\$9,500) and the NEH (\$10,000), and unrestricted gift from SSP America (\$1,000). In the coming year, we expect to apply for additional competitive funding through the new NEH Common Good initiative, among others. We need to identify and apply for more grants that support specific areas of programming. We also need to identify corporate entities who are interested in volunteer and sponsorship opportunities, and who want to give back to the community by supporting cultural programs.

Recently the board adopted a minimum annual contribution of \$1,500. Board giving has increased, but the board has yet to meet its annual fundraising goal. This year the board's active participation in the awards ceremony and silent auction, and the introduction of *Board Mixers*

has increased the profile of AH. These efforts must be continued to meet our long-term goals of friend-raising and fundraising. In the future the staff will be working more closely with board members to align their skills with specific needs. Board contacts are critical to build relationships that extend beyond one-time donations and sponsorships. We need the support of the board to not only identify leads and prospects, but also to meet funding prospects and make introductions to key staff.

The Executive Director's fundraising and advocacy duties have been elevated. The reorganization of staff and the addition of an Assistant Director position, will allowed the Executive Director more time to pursue these strategic objectives. We are in the process of developing a fundraising plan, and updating the Development Plan to include more specific action steps and goals for key staff and the board.

Staff Development

The staff has been an integral part of the execution of AH's strategic goals. Over time, the staff has been restructured to encompass cross-training and increase overall professionalism. Job descriptions and duties have been updated to reflect organizational changes, and new positions have been added. The Marketing and Communications Coordinator position was added to expand our social media and web communications. The Marketing and Programs Assistant position was added to provide administrative support across the organization. The Assistant Director position was created to address AH's need for more administrative and HR support. All staff jobs require strong written and oral communication skills, computer and organizational skills, the ability to multi-task and work as a team.

We have been challenged by the institutional changes described above. The office renovation, multiple moves, and the implementation of new software and equipment, have required the staff to adapt to major institutional changes. While change has not been easy, it is necessary for the long-term success and stability of AH. Prior to the recession there were five Executive Directors in a six-year period. We have now had the same Executive Director for five years, and have made efforts both to retain staff as well as address staff performance deficiencies through training, education and professional development activities. Compensation and benefits are competitive. The staff receives vacation, sick, retirement, vision, dental and major medical benefits with only a modest \$25 copay. The personnel manual is being revised to reflect the administrative policy and procedure changes we have undergone, and also for compliance with state and federal law.

Board Development

The NEH team observed during its site visit that the board lacked diversity and was heavily academic. Since then the board has expanded its development and recruitment efforts and successfully recruited more diverse candidates from across the state, and from the corporate community. However, as time has gone by the board has become more heavily corporate, and must now seek board members with academic strength in the humanities to replace outgoing

humanities scholars. Board members have participated in board governance/ fund-raising training through the generosity of the Virginia Piper Foundation. There has also been periodic training at board meetings. However there is still room for improvement in this area, and in particular with board/staff roles and relationships. It has been challenging when the board has deviated from the budget or its fiduciary duties. The staff cannot effectively plan or execute programs which are not budgeted. The board must more consistently refer to the Strategic and Development Plans as it moves forward, and refrain from engaging in the day-to-day management of the organization and staff. We will continue to provide training on the board's fiduciary duties, and also to establish an annual board self-assessment process.

Conclusion

Since the January 2012 site visit AH has accomplished much, despite economic and organizational challenges. Through the efforts, perseverance, and contributions of staff and board alike, AH is moving towards a bright and vibrant future. The importance of the humanities has only been underscored by the historic events unfolding. The civic engagement we promote, and the cultural exploration that we encourage, is essential not only for democracy to thrive, but also to protect and preserve the “Common Good” which is our mission. NEH support has been critical to our success for over 40 years. For that we give thanks, as we look forward to the next 40 years.