

Their eyes exhibit the truths
The creative energies
The needs
Their walls, doors, streets cry — come forth
The support is here
The form is you and I
The center for our growth

P. J. Gibson

Building

an

Institution

the
neighborhood
arts
center



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Building an Institution

the neighborhood arts center

MEDIA ASSOCIATES INC.
WASHINGTON, D.C.

for

THE EXPANSION ARTS PROGRAM FOR THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS



Preface

Earlier in American history cultural activity proliferated in small towns, villages and rural areas, as each neighborhood developed a self-sufficient creative spirit which nurtured its soul. Artists and artisans gathered at local fairs, on holidays of national significance, in their homes and in churches to celebrate the spirit of creativity. They shared works and wares in a spirit of goodwill which enhanced the quality of life and brought beauty to people's hearts in a pioneering way.

Urbanization choked off this organic expression of community life. Large urban centers—New York, New Orleans, Los Angeles and Chicago—became the focus for artists and the melting pots of creative thought, draining neighborhoods of their best talent. The ivory towers of our cultural centers were here to stay, and neighborhoods were bypassed by the cultural mainstream. In recent years this trend has changed.

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Introduction

During the last decades neighborhood people, searching for identity and continuity, have begun to reexamine their role in the creative process. They have recognized that, by developing their own resources and providing an arena for creative expression, they can establish a cultural focus which welds together many segments of the neighborhood. Starting, sometimes with one small project, they have been able to develop a heightened sense of participation, fellowship and community need. Once a project begins, local residents usually become aware that they can be creators, rather than simply consumers, of culture and that they have historic roots in the creative process.

A burgeoning cultural awakening is happening in neighborhoods throughout the country, in both urban and rural settings. This renaissance is creating a demand for institutions which serve people's creative needs. Organizations and institutions have sprung up to meet these needs in a variety of ways. Although the groups may differ in specific areas, there are certain characteristics that are shared by all organizations which we call community or neighborhood institutions: each organization has grown out of the neighborhood it serves, each encourages citizen participation in the arts and each opens itself to help fill other needs of the neighborhood. Among the kinds of organizations found under the general category of neighborhood institutions are:

1. The *community cultural center* which typically provides training and instruction in different art forms and which offers performing and exhibition space for the neighborhood on an on-going basis. Very often, these groups are able to serve as centers for neighborhood life in other ways as well—a service that will be explored in pages to come.

2. The *neighborhood arts service organization* is one which generally offers administrative, developmental, promotional and programmatic services for a broad variety of neighborhood-based arts organizations. Such services may include equipment loans, publicity and sponsorship of activities. Although not presenting or teaching institutions, these groups provide essential services to others who do teach and present in the neighborhood; moreover, service organizations that are successful establish very close ties within their neighborhoods.

3. *Community arts consortia* are affiliations created by two or more neighborhood-based arts programs who share their financial development, administration, technical and/or promotional resources while maintaining artistic and programmatic autonomy. Once again, while these organizations are not directly involved in presenting or teaching of art, they are devoted to the survival of those organizations that do and will tap resources in the neighborhood to foster such survival.

4. Another neighborhood arts activity is the *regional tour event*, a happening that has reappeared in the neighborhoods of this country following a dormant period. These festive events bring together community arts groups of all types from a mini-region to a central site to present a festival of events, generally coordinated by a local sponsor.

Each of the above listed arts groups and events has its own orientation of energy. Each must have roots sunk deep in the neighborhood, otherwise it cannot function—nor even have a reason for existing. In each case these organizations are providing, or supporting an organization which provides, an enriching confluence of ideas and participation in the cultural ethos of a neighborhood. The groups feed into and draw upon the resources of the major institutions of culture; however, they have a local flavor that brings integrity and excitement to residents of the neighborhood. The character of this art experience usually brings local residents to the awareness that they can be creators, rather than solely consumers, of culture and that they have historic roots in the creative process.

The Expansion Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts feels that the continued health and growth of neighborhood institutions must be encouraged and assisted; thus, the Program is sponsoring the publication of this booklet with the intention of providing advice on the subject of institution building at the neighborhood level. A more detailed publication on the managerial aspects of the community arts center may be found in *Basic Management: The New Arts Center* (volume 1) in this series.

CHAPTER 1

**Getting
Started:**
the first
important
step

When the idea of a neighborhood arts center first germinates, organizers should plan a meeting with a small core group from the neighborhood concerned to present a proposal and feel out interest. However, before such a meeting is called, the organizers must explore and answer for themselves the basic, preliminary questions about the feasibility of establishing such an organization. Among the most basic questions are the following:

- What are the advantages of this particular community having an arts center?
- Are there other organizations that already provide the same services?
- Is there sufficient need and appeal to justify organizing a center?
- What community preparation will be needed to launch a center?
- Which are the best organizations and institutions with whom to work?
- Will volunteer services be needed?
- How should volunteers be enlisted?
- Is the goal of establishing a center attainable in light of existing economic conditions?

The answers to these questions will provide the organizers with facts upon which a beginning proposal can be constructed. In addition, prior to an organizational meeting, the organizers might want to carry out a neighborhood poll, based on this type of questionnaire:

“Would you like to see an arts center in this neighborhood providing the following services: instruction in dance, theatre, photography; exhibits of work done by neighborhood children; etc.? List them by function. If so, please sign your name and address on this petition.”

Such a poll can start the ball-a-rollin’ and, if the community responds affirmatively, can be a most welcome source of support and future resources.

Armed with a proposal, answers to the basic questions and the results of the neighborhood poll, the organizers are ready to ask for a meeting with a small group

which should reflect a combination of grassroots people, professionals and businessmen. This meeting should deal with two issues:

- 1) the feasibility of the project based on available data, and
- 2) certain questions, the answers to which should be the basis for the next stages of planning.

The organizers must have some idea of the type of feedback they will want to get from this group. They should strive for clarity in the discussion and should establish themselves as serious and efficient organizers. The discussion should provide a handle on public reception, public support and public opinion regarding the idea of establishing a neighborhood arts center. Some of the questions directed to the people at the first meeting might be:

- Is the idea feasible, and can community support be generated?
- What will be the most effective way of stimulating community participation?
- If this group supports the proposal, would the group back the idea with money, influence and participation?
- Will this group participate on the Board of Directors, or will there be a separate Board and, if so, what will be this group’s relationship to the Board?

Conduct a feasibility investigation.

- Will this group become the operations staff, with one of its members as Executive Director?
- Can support from the local business community be tapped?

It is important for the organizers to offer the group an opportunity to see the direction of their thinking and the seriousness of their preliminary investigations on these matters. On the other hand, it is equally important that the organizers be open and receptive to the comments and reactions of

those whom they are consulting. Assuming that all goes well, in that the group and organizers see eye-to-eye on the potential of the project, planning will proceed.

It is advisable, when exploring the idea of founding a neighborhood arts center, to conduct a feasibility investigation—which may be patterned after the above outline or may take a different shape—to gauge the practicality of the original ideas and to begin a catalog of the resources and support available.

The distinction between a feasibility investigation and planning is an important one. Once the feasibility has been demonstrated, the planning phase begins. However, planning continues throughout the life of program and center. Long-term planning should be given ample consideration during the planning process. Although it is easy to forget, planning is not done for once and for all. Flexibility is one of the few absolute requirements for successful development of a neighborhood arts center. If you find that something you planned is not working out as you thought it would, stop; assess what's going on and, if necessary, make a new plan. Planning should be fluid, flexible and above all, a continuous operation.

During the earliest planning phases there will be many psychological problems

confronting the organizers. They have to generate enthusiasm, as well as minimize apathy and disinterestedness in certain sectors of the community. They have to learn to accept rebuffs from people whom they respect, especially artists, who may not consider the proposed arts center a high priority. They must have complete faith in the validity and integrity of their project, as they may be accused by detractors of being paternalistic, cultural rationalists, social workers in disguise, rip-off artists or apostles of a pacification program. The criticism and name-calling can be discouraging, but the organizers must work hard during this period to instill community confidence in their work and future projections. Therefore, serious planning is vital at this stage, for it affords the organizers an opportunity to see where they are going and what they must accomplish. Of course, there can be a few lucky breaks which catapult the project ahead of its schedule—such as the unexpected acquisition of certain monies, excellent facilities or equipment—but such fortuitous events should not negate further planning and organizing. Centers, therefore, evolve through the energy, vision and creativity of the organizers and sometimes through luck and a series of unexpected events. Regardless of whether it is perseverance or luck, ongoing planning is a must at specified stages of development.







CHAPTER 2

Getting The Center Started:

involve
the community
in the early
stages

Growth and survival of the center may depend upon the organizers' ability to utilize fully all the talents in the community to the advantage of the center. In the earliest phases of planning, bring in representatives from social clubs, schools, businesses, etc. People like to be involved in projects from the beginning—they sometimes resent being called on only when there is a crisis. Some things that can be done to involve diverse groups from the outset include:

- Ask a local bank, or other business organization, to allow you to use its board room for your meetings.
- Check with local corporations to see if one would be willing to print your literature in its printing shop and, perhaps, another would be willing to donate some used office equipment.
- If you plan to serve young people, invite parents to become involved in early planning phases; solicit their suggestions.
- Call on your utility companies — gas, telephone, electric. Some of these companies will offer management seminars to Boards of Directors, staff members, etc.

- Contact professional artists who live in the community. They might not be able to work fulltime at the center but might be honored to contribute an evening's lecture or performance.

It is important to explore these avenues and to nurture relationships that can enhance the scope of the center. This thrust should emanate from the creative dynamism of the center's activities or the quiet diplomacy of its sophisticated leadership.

Every community has these types of resources. You must reach into the neighborhood and take advantage of their presence. This goodwill promotes neighborhood self-respect and solidifies community spirit. Local residents will take pride in this gesture, for it legitimizes the fundamental reason for the center's existence: to act as a conduit of cultural enrichment through the expansion of existing resources.

Utilize fully all the talents in the community to the advantage of the center.



SPACE: A ROOF OVER THE HEAD

NEIGHBORHOOD INSTITUTIONS NEED LONG-DISTANCE RUNNERS

The center will need workers who have the tenacity and ability to stay with a project until the very end. In addition, there is a need for administrators, workers and volunteers who will stick by the organization through good and bad times. They must have faith in the cultural mission. Motivation and determination must always be encouraged. Some people don't have expertise or an excellent track record in the field, but they are highly motivated and possess the ability to acquire the technical skills to perform well. Encourage these persons. On the other hand, you may have a highly skilled person in your center who is blase and will not give the necessary input which is especially crucial during the building stages. You must be careful in enlisting the latter. Of course, the best situation will be to have a highly motivated expert who has a good track record of neighborhood involvement. This is the best of all possible worlds and the kind of worker/volunteer that you need to build the center.

Above all, it should be remembered that a neighborhood institution is founded and exists to serve the neighborhood. Residents must be made aware that the center exists for their use. The center, while the focus of cultural life, should also be available to the community for other resources: club meetings, social events and so forth on a space-available basis. The primary focus is, and always will be, cultural. Nevertheless, the neighborhood institution, when functioning at its very best, serves as an essential neighborhood nerve center for life in all its diverse forms.

Often, people ask what is the best location for a neighborhood arts center. The best location is any available space that is accessible to the residents of the community. (For a full exploration of the in's and out's of acquiring, designing and adapting space, see, *Dealing With Space*, volume 4 in this series.)

As you examine available spaces you should consider the following:

- 1) What area you expect to serve.
- 2) Who will be your clientele.
- 3) What types of multi-discipline activities you are going to have in the center.
- 4) How you plan to deliver services.

The answers to these questions can assist the organizers in planning efficient use of space and resources. For example, if you are planning to serve senior citizens in the center, it is advisable to obtain a ground-level facility rather than a four-story house with poor stairways.

On first discovering an available space, it is useful to consult with local architects, carpenters, builders, structural engineers or designers who can provide you with ideas for the best utilization of the space. Once you know what type of activities you propose to conduct, use the space creatively. Be imaginative and innovative.

The physical site is a crucial aspect of your program. You are establishing a permanent structure with a wide range of objectives and possible functions which will serve as an integral part of the community's life. You will be providing space, necessary equipment and professional guidance for the whole neighborhood in a setting that did not exist before. Wherever the center is located, emphasis must be placed on cultural activities and the development of a learning environment for creative expression.

RUNNING THE NEIGHBORHOOD ARTS CENTER: WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT

Responsibility should be carefully delineated, so that the center can implement and execute policy decisions efficiently. In addition, an atmosphere of seriousness and professionalism should be established in the center. Avoid cronyism and sentimentality. Get the best person for the specific job to be done.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The *Board of Directors* should be responsible for establishing the policies that govern the operations of the center. The Board should be able to appoint and dismiss the Executive Director. Planning, fund-raising and public relations matters should be jointly managed by the Board and the Executive Director. The ultimate survival of your organization may depend on your having a Board who will work hard in the interest of the center.

The *Advisory Board* is composed of strategic persons whose expertise can be valuable for the improvement of the center's operations and artistic product. Generally, Advisory Boards do not play a role in an organization's policy-setting structure; they exist to provide specialized advice and talent.

Auxiliary Support Groups are neighborhood-based organizations which might take on some aspect of the center's program as a special project they will sustain financially and professionally. Volunteers are an essential element of support, and they should be encouraged, motivated, trained and supervised by the Executive

Director. For volunteers you need doers, not talkers. Beware of volunteers with grandiose schemes for organizing a whole city or region.

The Executive Director must be a competent person, with administrative skills and a critical eye for artistic excellence and quality performance. This person must be able to discuss professionally the arts product of the center's program. In the job profile, the organizers should look at organizational skill, management, efficiency, imagination, warmth and compassion, but neither sentimentality nor paternalism in human relations. The Executive Director may be recruited from outside the community, but the employment contract should designate that the person must live in the community on appointment. The latter is important, for it is absolutely necessary that the Executive Director be thoroughly familiar with the resources and social services available to the community. If the Executive Director should resign or be dismissed, there must be an immediate search for a new person, since it is not sound policy for the center to be administered by ad hoc leadership.

The Executive Director must devote full-time energies to the center, knowing exactly what to do and when to do it. Second guessing should be the exception rather than the rule. The following might be some of the basic tasks:

Strategy

Functions to fulfill policies and aspirations of the Board of Directors and the community being served.

Education

1) Develops the center as an alternative learning vehicle in addition to its ongoing artistic work.

2) Organizes lectures, seminars, workshops, conferences and festivals.

Organization

1) Manages the operations staff and the physical plant.

2) Attempts to improve the quality of life in the community by introducing cultural activities that strengthen inter-

personal relations with dignity and self-respect.

3) Maintains a high level of artistic integrity.

Sources of Funds

Analyzes funding potential and pursues various alternatives for income-generating activities, gifts, contributions and grants.

Scheduling

1) Prepares a complete timetable with due dates and deadlines for each activity.

2) Plans and organizes all meetings that are functionally related to the life of the center.

The Operations Staff should handle both artistic and administrative matters. At this level, there are three important persons who must be carefully recruited, for they will perform critical tasks in the life of the center. They are an efficient secretary, a competent bookkeeper and a skilled janitor/maintenance man.

A Note of Caution! Often, practicing artists themselves are the originators of neighborhood arts groups and may become Executive Directors of these new organizations. Asking an artist to be both artist and administrator is asking the person to do two rather different full-time jobs. Experience has shown that it is often advisable to allow the artist to do his or her thing and to hire an administrative person to take on the management, fund-raising and public relations responsibilities that must be discharged to maintain an effective neighborhood center. The artistic life of your center will be more vital if the artists are left free to provide artistic services and products. Don't ask artists to wear too many hats!

Don't ask artists to wear too many hats.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

As a neighborhood cultural center—essentially a community-based organization—there are certain financial management techniques, in addition to the general fiscal management guidelines for all groups (see the *Expansion Arts Primer on management, volume 1*), of which your organization should be aware. In addition to observing the normal fiscal management principles, those running a neighborhood arts center should be alert to the following avenues:

Strategically tap all the resources in the community. It is important to tap all the resources in the neighborhood, especially material resources from the local business community. As a result of the opening of the center and its multi-faceted cultural activities, the local businesses could realize some increased economic benefits. The Board of Directors and the Executive Director should emphasize the economic significance of the center to the business community and explore reciprocal arrangements through advertisements, gifts, grants, etc. They can point out the tax benefits of supporting the center to the local businessman. Point out that it's good business to support the center and that this responsible participation could lead to the center's self-development and self-sufficiency. If you are short of money, you may ask your local businessman for materials—e.g., lumber or bricks; or you could approach the local union to donate the services of specific craftsmen in certain aspects of building or remodeling. Write to wholesalers or retailers requesting some help and show them how their assistance could be a tax write-off. Write to professional societies of plumbers, carpenters, electricians, architects, engineers, who might be of some assistance. It doesn't hurt to ask. Acknowledge all gifts promptly. Publish a complete list of contributions from time to time. At this level you should actively involve your auxiliary support groups, your trained volunteers and the community-at-large, with each group using its leverage among a specific clientele.

Develop earned income-bearing projects, with emphasis on becoming self-sufficient. A cultural center might start out as a nonprofit organization dependent on foundation grants and funding from charitable organizations. In the earliest stages of development, this would determine the parameters of operation; yet, the leadership should develop an attitude of ingenuity which allows the center to generate income and to strive for self-sufficiency.

In our rich heritage, artisans, craftsmen and local community artists have produced excellent work in handicrafts, furniture, pottery, quilts, leather goods, jewelry, iron grills, etc. These skills were passed on within the community, and people took pride in their creative achievement. The items the artists created were generally displayed and sold at community fairs. Today, this tradition is endangered, for community people are losing their skills from nonuse as we turn everything over to industry and automation. Even printmakers and graphic artists are no longer framing their work as they once did. Picture framing has become a specialized field.

The neighborhood cultural center can become the focal point for the revitalization of these skills, which have an income-generating potential. Many functional items can be produced by the center and sold in an arts and craft store, a boutique or a museum owned by the center. These items may include scarves, sculpture, jewelry, pottery, leather bags, clothes, handicrafts, paintings, folk instruments, prints, posters and woodcuts. In addition, there may be earned income from other projects, such as public performances, lectures and films. Finally, the center could perform promotion, management and production services for several of its artists. The successful alumnus of a neighborhood arts center should also be asked to contribute generously to its ongoing work.

Annually, the center should mount a celebration activity to raise funds, as well as to show the larger community the scope of its activities. It would be useful for the center to become a recruiting locale for art schools, universities and professional talent scouts.

The neighborhood arts center should strive for economic self-sufficiency. Crafts shops, boutiques, performances, celebration activities can all be geared toward producing some income for the organization. In the financial planning of the center, provision should be made for ways to earn income from the earliest stages of development and there should also be an overall plan for the center to become totally self-supporting within its own community.

COMMUNITY PUBLIC RELATIONS

Making a Good First Impression

Your first contact with the larger community is very important. If the essential groundwork is well laid, the community will be aware of the cultural and social contributions of the organizers, and, at the launching of the project, the organizers should be able to solicit the active participation of influential residents. As part of the opening ceremony, let the local people see the imprint of *their* creative work on display. The organizers of the arts center should make it clear that the organization is merely an extension of the creative work in which the community has already been involved. Highlight the evolutionary process and credit the principle contributors of time, talent, ideas and money.

The media should be well informed of the activities planned for the opening ceremony. For credibility's sake, the organizers should make certain that everything comes off smoothly, right down to refreshments and entertainment. Remember: a first impression can be a lasting one, and an interested and receptive press can be a powerful ally, indeed.

Ongoing Relationships with the Community

Don't just go in, open a building and wait for the people to come in and participate. You must reach out to the people, provide a meaningful program and

solicit their active participation. As you touch bases with them, you should be constantly checking out what they want and encouraging their input into the work of the center, as you have from the very first stages.

The residents of the community must feel that the center belongs to them—that they can participate freely in its activities and that it will serve their cultural interests. They must see it as a place where all people can go and find courtesy, dignity, self-respect, information and entertainment. They must be made to feel that they were responsible for bringing it into existence. The center must never give the impression that it is the exclusive property of a single person or group of people, even though that group might have been the architects of the original idea.

In organizing community support, the organizers should make certain that many local organizations get involved actively. Let the people know that the center exists, that it proposes to expand its range and that it is in the community to stay. Avoid the come-today-gone-tomorrow syndrome. Let your bucket down into the community and produce results. Tell people in simple terms what the center is going to do and how it proposes to accomplish its objectives.

Touching bases with the people and surrounding organizations is vital. This should be carefully planned and recorded, for the most mileage must be made from these everyday contacts. The center can be a place where local organizations hold meetings or fundraising functions. The center might even be able to point these organizations toward scarce resources and provide technical assistance in areas of its operational expertise. For example, a center that functions partly as a neighborhood art service could provide technical assistance and art services to groups, agencies and individual artists affiliated with it. Some areas covered could be: resource and referral services; promotional equipment and materials; technical assistance; sponsorship of activities; equipment banks and provision of detailed resource information on performing groups and individuals, booking agencies, exhibition facilities and performance locations.

The residents of the community must feel that the center belongs to them.



Leaders in the neighborhood arts center should be aware of the way community residents get information. Does everyone read the local weekly or daily newspaper? What radio stations are popular? Contact those stations and ask for air time for Public Service Announcements about the center's program. Explore possible programs with the local television stations; often, they will invite community groups to take part in public affairs programs.

Where do people in your neighborhood congregate? Is there a shopping center, a favorite eatery? Put up posters where people gather and will see them. What do the local politicians do to get their word out during a political campaign? Sometimes, good ideas can be found by watching campaign workers. The trick is to figure out how people in your neighborhood find out about things. Then use those methods yourself. They often do not involve large amounts of money, just time and ingenuity.

The center's organizers must nurture their relationships with the media to get the story out. Media coverage should pinpoint the creative work that is already taking place in the community and the tremendous advantage that the center can provide as it expands on existing activities.

Stretch your imagination to come up with new ways of promoting the center's visibility and getting the word out to the local community. Use creative graffiti or paint murals at strategic locations. Get buttons and bumper stickers, if you can afford them, or encourage the workers of the center to make them. Buttons like "Support your Local Artist" and "You gotta have Art" can be very attractive slogans.

Support: there can't ever be too much support for your ideas. Get the mayor, the alderman, the state assemblyman or state senator to write a letter or make a statement on behalf of the center. Any public official can write a form letter endorsing the idea of the center. You want them on your side, not against you.

Alliances: some arts centers find it advantageous to develop alliances with institutions having a high degree of credibility in the areas within which they are functioning—e.g., an art institute, a university, a church. However, the concern here must be to gain credibility while maintaining the autonomy of the center's operations and pursuits.

Deliver the Best Quality Product and Build with Confidence

The only way in which to build the community's confidence in its efforts is through excellent performance. Let the people be proud of what they are producing, and they will encourage others to participate actively. The community must feel comfortable with the level of responsibility demonstrated by the center and its activities.

You must always be concerned about the high level of artistic performance that you mount and the quality of instruction that you provide your participants. People have come to the center to study, learn and develop their creative potential; it is vital to introduce them to the best teachers and artists who can serve this attitude and need. Furthermore, if the participants at the center are serious, dedicated and disciplined, professionals will applaud the activity and offer their services when approached.

Two guiding concepts must be followed:

- 1) Deliver a quality product that everyone can respect and take pride in.
- 2) Develop a determination to accomplish established goals and priorities by facing up to the challenge of the moment.

You must develop a professional stance toward the creative life of the center. It is better to have a revolving teaching staff of competent professionals, than to have a single, mediocre, full-time person. Get superior people to teach, perform and exhibit, so that the community-at-large will respect your work. You can develop and



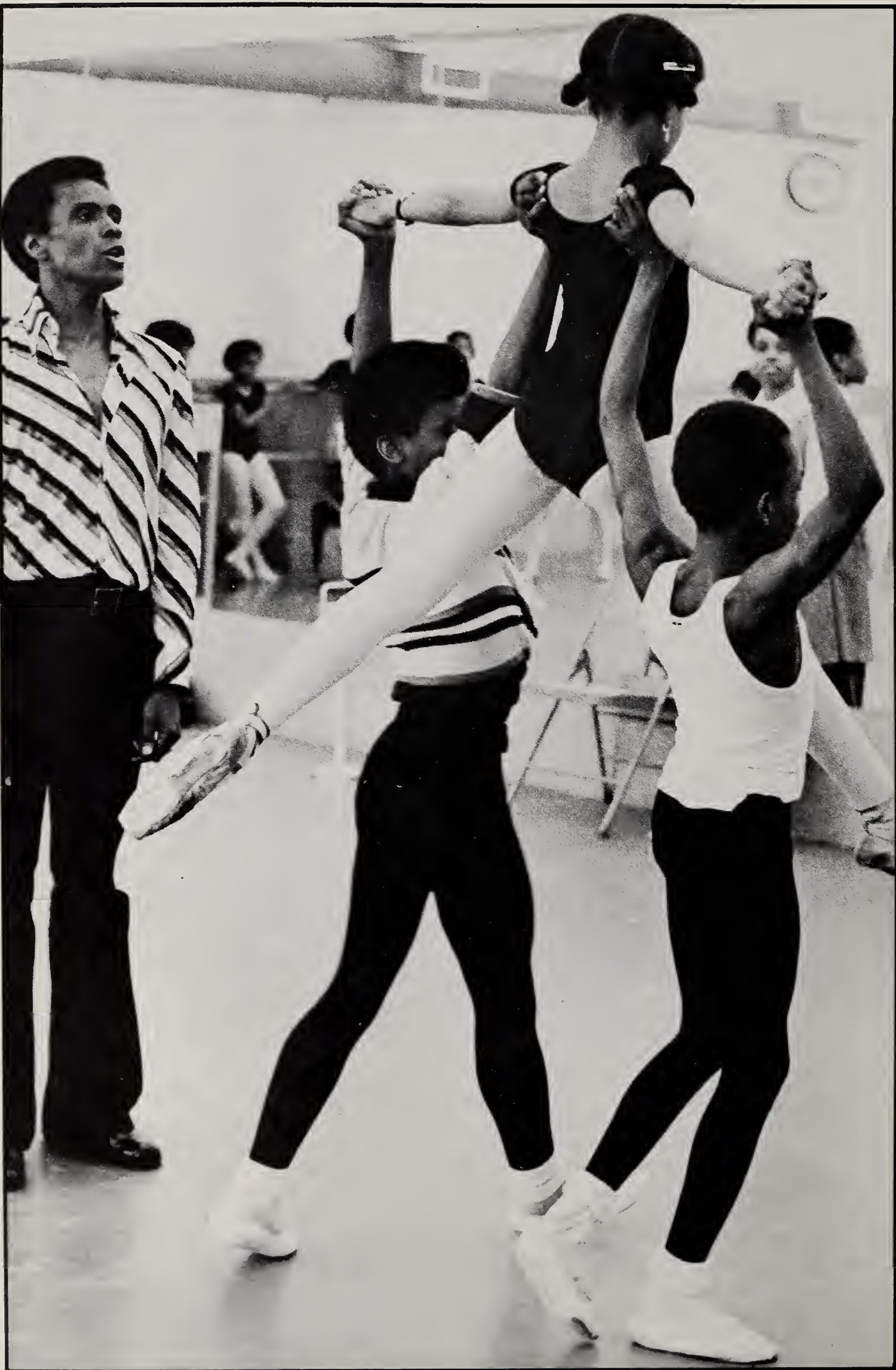
Always project efficiency, reliability and the ability to deliver on time.

train young people through association with serious professionals. An excellent arts program is better than the busy work of an arts and crafts program. Avoid busy work and unprofessional training. Don't give the community mediocre exposure; nothing but the best is good enough for them.

During the first year of operations, in particular, you must check the credibility and reliability of the artists whom you have asked to perform or mount shows at the center. If an artist has a reputation for being unreliable or "shaky" in public appearances or performances, you should investigate this very carefully before you schedule the person. In the beginning, the center must not be handicapped by depending on unreliable artists who might fail to show up. This could cause the community to lose faith in your projections.

There is another problem which might easily arise: a very reliable artist might be stranded at the airport as a result of inclement weather or delayed by some other contingency. Consequently, this artist can't show, and the general audience came especially to see his/her performance. You should always have a good enough back-up person or group to offset this contingency. The latter should be able to carry on the show without destroying the expectations of the audience. Scheduling your festivals, performances or exhibitions should always project efficiency, reliability and the ability to deliver on time.

People respect a professional who delivers a product or service on time as advertised. Community residents have been disappointed frequently. Don't disillusion them. The key is sincerity and excellence on the part of all those who are associated with the center's operations, especially the professional and management staff.



**The
Unexpected:**
helpful
suggestions

CHAPTER 3

PROBLEMS, PROBLEMS, PROBLEMS

Your proposal has been turned down; the Executive Director quit; the Chairman of the Board, who is a hard worker and a good fund-raiser, is transferred to another location; the basement gets flooded; the roof starts leaking; the telephone company won't install a phone unless you make a \$200 downpayment; the dance teacher is pregnant and she decides to quit; the art exhibition is ruined by a rainstorm the night before the opening; you haven't been able to pay the secretary for three weeks and her confidence is diminishing; the main attraction professional group doesn't show up on the night of a benefit concert; some technical equipment has been stolen and you need it urgently; the film projector will not work and the only person who knows how to fix it can't be located; according to the media, people associate a fight outside the center, during which somebody got shot, with what's going on in the center; someone slipped in the center and injured himself seriously, and you don't have proper insurance coverage. Whew! You've got all the problems in the world! Now, what are you going to do about them?

Stay loose! Take care of other matters on time and as they arise. When the crisis arises, your mind and spirit should be free to make on-the-spot decisions. So stay caught up in your developmental chores, conserving creative energy for the inevitable crisis. *Stay loose.*

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

Creative leadership is getting things done efficiently with a minimum of conflict and confusion. The center must have responsible officials who can work together in harmony and with integrity at all opera-

tional levels. The leadership should have vision, imagination, flexibility and discipline. All segments of the community should feel free to discuss new ideas and innovative projects with the leadership. Creative leadership should be encouraging of, and receptive to, new ideas from the community-at-large. Don't wait for professionals and artists to suggest alternative ways of doing things. If you look, you will discover that the broader community has its own genius; its voice should be heard. People must believe that the center is a place where they can be recognized and respected for their ideas, their work and their contributions.

A leadership training program, with special emphasis on training young people from the community, should be developed as an ongoing aspect of the center's operations.

Above all, do not be afraid to stop, take time out and look at the way things are running. If you have serious problems, look back at your original plans; why didn't they work out? Has the situation changed? Be flexible; you can always take time to replan. Pausing a few moments, a day or two, to take stock, reassess and revise plans and goals does not mean you have failed; it shows that the center's leadership is flexible and can adapt to changing conditions. That's admirable!

DON'T GROW TOO FAST, TOO SOON

Some neighborhood arts centers spread themselves too thin by engaging in many activities without the resources or capacity needed to deliver a quality product. Some administrators get carried away, and they believe that by expanding the range of their program offerings the center's operations will become more vital to the community. Leadership should be conscious of this position and cautioned against unplanned and nonsystematic growth projections. The center must be built steadily and systematically. The

foundations must be solid before you start to expand. You must try to establish strong local and regional bases before you launch out on overly ambitious projects. One major program disaster could destroy years of hard work and diminish participatory enthusiasm. This does not mean that leadership cannot be enterprising. On the contrary, creativity demands enterprise, but suggests that there must be serious planning and programmatic discipline.

Excellence is the key. Provide a quality product to your constituency and they will take pride in, and identify with, a sound operation. Stay away from paternalism, sentimentality and mediocrity. Set high standards for your work and achieve them. Set attainable objectives and work hard to realize them. Always get the best available talent to do what you want within the limitations of your resources. Don't attempt to mount a production you can't afford; if it fails because you are out of money, your program can be severely embarrassed. It is important to know what you can accomplish and when to stop. Always keep your eye on the budgetary schedules, so that existing projects are not thrown out of line and new proposals are not made unattainable.

Identifying realistic goals, developing the self-assurance that makes achievement of these goals possible and being able to implement a program to achieve them are important to the welfare of any family. The organizers of any program should demonstrate ample proof that, through the activities of the center, the well-being of the community is ideally served and the quality of life is enhanced.

SPIN-OFFS

List all the spin-offs you can think of. For example:

- 1) You can sell the work of the artists at the center's museum.
- 2) You can produce records and develop an independent label.

- 3) You can make films or videotapes, which can be rented as teaching aids to various groups.

Spin-offs can be unlimited. Actually, they are only limited by the creative imagination of the participants in the center and the allocatable resources.

In a neighborhood arts center, one can develop income-generating products and expand marketing skills which will help the center in its attempt to become self-sufficient.



Be aware of the enormous economic possibilities that could spin-off from a well-run center. Build libraries, archives, museums, preschools, production and management enterprises, art supplies cooperatives; organize educational visits to historic sites; conduct exchange programs with other centers; organize conferences with organizations similar to yours to exchange ideas, share problems and find solutions; recruit talent from prisons and provide alternative educational opportunities for the gifted; publish pamphlets, books, poetry of gifted young writers; sell pottery, glassware, canned fruit; on and on and on.

GETTING THINGS DONE: A FEW REMINDERS

Tips for taking care of business effectively:

1) The flow of responsibilities and decision-making must be clearly delineated and understood.

2) Planning is critical to the life of the center. It helps you to see where you are going and which projections make sense in light of available resources.

3) Proposals for grants must be properly submitted.

4) Reports to funding sources and program participants should be professionally presented.

5) Introduce proper accounting methods and final reports, which must be submitted by due dates.

6) Bills must be paid promptly, so that essentials—such as telephone service, gas and electricity—are not cut off.

7) Final records, program records, inventory records and personnel records should be kept separately, with easy access to specific information for working purposes.

8) All records and program materials should be centralized and securely maintained in case of fire or burglary.

9) Vacancies must be filled as quickly as possible with the most competent person available, and the decision should not be postponed.

10) The building should be kept clean, safe, orderly and efficient. Hire a custodian who can perform maintenance duties for equipment, as well as physical plant. A multi-skilled custodian can be a tremendous asset and well worth the money. In early stages, be prepared to provide security services, depending upon the demographics of the neighborhood.

11) Classes, workshops and seminars should meet promptly as scheduled.

12) Public presentations should be honored as advertised, except in extreme situations which can be explained honestly to the public.

13) Draw a line between artistic creativity and managerial creativity.

14) Avoid sloppiness in operations and art products developed for public consumption.

15) Document all the activities of the center, reserving some period for critical review.

CONCLUSION

There is an environment of the spirit, which should be nurtured in the local community through a healthy program—theatre, music, dance, film, photography, painting, sculpture, creative writing, puppetry, jewelry making, etc. It is an attempt to bring professionals and local residents together, which could be a new release of creative energy and hope. The idea is to make the creative experience a neighborhood thing, a community gathering, a celebration organized from a central location. It will represent the RE-CREATION of cultural life in your community.

Document all the activities of the center.

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