Diversity and Cross-Cultural Engagement

Why is this important?

➢ It is the way we encourage an energetic, relevant, fearless and challenging artistic culture in St. Louis at a time it is critical.

➢ The issue we face is that within a diverse society and arts community, within its history, its practice and critical debate, some are seen as far more equal than others. This presents the paradox of the creative process—diversity rich in inspiration, but the distribution and consumption of the creative product delivered primarily through a network of exclusive clubs.

➢ Diversity is not the problem since it exists all around us. It only has meaning and value when it becomes an active force linked to the drive for greater equality. Equality is exactly where we are now in the region. Community engagement is essential to learning how to support equality within and outside of the arts.

What is Cross-Cultural Engagement?
It is a specific type of community-based engagement where there is active partnering and relationship development with citizens whose knowledge, culture, faith or economic status is very different from our own. The purpose is to address a social need, create opportunities that are more creative or simply build relationships that are satisfying and provide insight and personal growth to all. (Hassel and Holland)

- What is involved in Cross-Cultural Engagement Practice?
- Uses participatory strategies
- Seeks two-way partnerships where there is reciprocity, authentic relationship development
- Involves mutual respect for the strengths of each party
- Means giving up control
- Integrates discovery, learning, and engagement in a seamless way.
- Brings together multiple worldviews around an issue or problem.
- Involves a role shift from expert to co-learner
Trust and relationships between individuals and organizations are built on sincere commitment to recognizing one’s own belief systems and ideology without being defensive.

Demonstrating humility in not trying to control agendas and decisions. Stepping into and listening, learning and reasoning within an entirely different worldview.

Benefits of Cross Cultural Engagement as a basis for Community Engagement

- Increases effectiveness of community engagement efforts.
- Creates breakthrough insights at the intersection of ideas. Johannsen writes that when you "step into an intersection of fields, disciplines or cultures, you can combine existing concepts into a large number of extraordinary new ideas."
- Allows our organizations to develop “relevance radar.”

As a city that is bi-racial it is a moral imperative that arts organizations increase their outreach to the largest minority group of all—African Americans understanding that those in need are significant for a community like ours.

Important to remember, however that cross-cultural engagement can include professional clusters such as business, science, healthcare, academia, seniors and more.