

MACHINE PROJECT

Guide to

STARTING YOUR OWN ART SPACE

Written by Mark Allen

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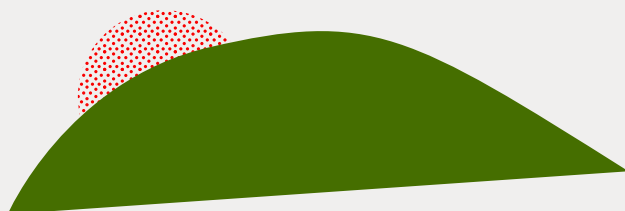
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Introduction

Hi! I'm Mark Allen. As Machine Project's founder, primary director, and curator, I've produced hundreds of interactive artworks, performances, and workshops over the past fifteen years. Some were successful; others were terrible and embarrassing. With this tool kit and its two companions, I'd like to help you to maximize the successes and minimize the embarrassments (though those are helpful, too).

Machine Project, founded in 2003, is a nonprofit presentation and educational space investigating art, technology, natural history, science, music, literature, food, and whatever else humans like to do. Machine began as a place for me to sleep, experiment, make a mess, and host my friends' work. Since those early days, we've grown into an internationally-recognized organization working with both artists and institutional partners to create the conditions for new ideas to emerge into culture.

About This Guide

This tool kit is for anyone who is considering starting an arts or cultural organization. We will guide you through the ins and outs of conceptualizing, setting up, and running your organization. We'll also go over the different kinds of organizations and their financial and legal implications, as well as more content-driven concerns like defining and sticking to your mission, figuring out your programming, and measuring success. Throughout the tool kit, we'll also address more existential matters, such as the lifespan of an organization, the need (or not) for physical headquarters, and the perils of crowdfunding.

This guide will cover certain aspects related to 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations, including the pros and cons of becoming one, or not, and the various administrative considerations. But given the wealth of existing resources focused on not-for-profit organizations with 501(c)3 status, our focus will be more directed towards the needs and wants of smaller organizations and alternative structures.

Why Start Your Own Art Space?

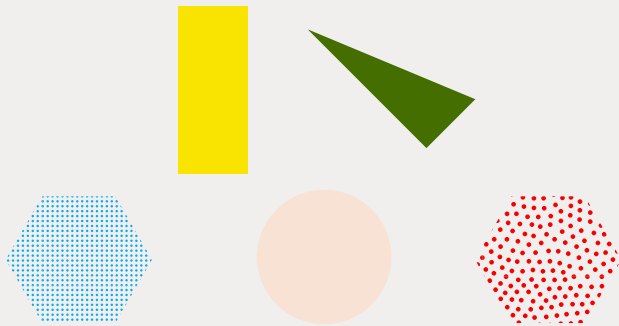
Independent art spaces can harbor creative communities, serve as a venue for artists to show and discuss work they're interested in, and provide a context for forms of expression that may not fit in elsewhere.

Creating your own organization is a proactive way to remold the art world into something that more closely reflects the ideals and values of your community. Community can serve as a powerful antidote to the feeling that the art market is but one more embodiment of the classic winner-take-all economy. Only a small percentage of people who self-identify as artists earn above the poverty line; of the artists who do earn above that line, very few make a comfortable living from their work alone. This asymmetry in earnings can be discouraging, and it can be difficult to feel allegiance to a community with such dramatic inequalities. Furthermore, although diversity is a key conceptual and philosophical value in the art world, few of the top earners are women or artists of color, and the high costs of MFA programs further amplify the strong class divisions.

By starting your own art space or community center, you can create a context for the kind of work you want to see more of in the world. This is especially valuable if your community currently lacks either physical spaces to discuss, perform, and make such

work, or metaphorical space for experimentation and innovative thinking.

There are many ways to try to change the world. Starting an art space with your own community and friends is a good place to start.



Types of Organizations

Informal

When you're starting out, your organization will likely be an informal one. As such, it will be part of a rich field. An informal arts organization can be nimble on its feet and with its mission and programming can take many shapes. There are valid benefits to functioning as an informal arts organization, including the lack of restrictions, defined terms or boundaries. However, there are also limitations around raising funds, selling of goods and services and compensation.

For-profit

For-profit organizations are businesses that make money through the sale of goods or services. For example,

an art gallery is a for-profit business. This is a perfectly fine model, especially if you are able to sell artworks or other goods. If the kind of culture you wish to support overlaps with the production of physical goods, and you overlap with people who might want to buy those goods, a for-profit business might be right for you.

Nonprofit

A nonprofit is a tax-exempt organization that serves the public interest. In general, the mission of this type of organization must be charitable, educational, scientific, religious, or literary. The public will expect to be able to make donations to nonprofit organizations and deduct these donations from their federal taxes. The difference between nonprofit and for-profit organizations is that nonprofits use their profits to advance their programs, while for-profits distribute their profits to their owners or stockholders.

Legally, a nonprofit organization is one that does not declare a profit and instead utilizes all revenue available after normal operating expenses in service to the public interest.

There are many kinds of nonprofits—the Internal Revenue Code defines more than 25 types of organizations that are exempt from federal income taxes. They tend to fall into five main categories:

- **Trade associations**, organized to advance a group of people who have a profession in common (for example, Association of Research Librarians, International Association of Meeting Planners). This group also includes chambers of commerce and unions.
- **Charitable organizations**, which must generally demonstrate a benevolent component. This is a diverse category, including religious groups, museums, environmental and educational organizations, libraries, and the many helping groups referred to as “charities.” They are also referred to as 501(c)(3) organizations, because that is the number of the IRS Code under which they are described. What separates a charitable organization from other types of tax-exempt organizations is its purpose: it must benefit the broad public interest, not just the interests of its members. It must serve one or more of the following purposes: charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering national or international amateur sports competition, or the prevention of cruelty to children or animals. Most people refers to this category when they refer to nonprofit organizations.
- **Social clubs**, such as country clubs and fraternal organizations.
- **Governmental groups**, including city, county, state, and federal agencies.
- **Political groups**, generally organized to promote certain policies, issues, or candidates for political office.

If you’re thinking of starting a nonprofit organization, the key question to ask is, who will benefit from the activity? If the answer is that you or your family will benefit, then it’s a good idea to start a for-profit company rather than a nonprofit organization. If your answer is that the community or the public at large will benefit, then a nonprofit structure may be the best route.

Main Differences

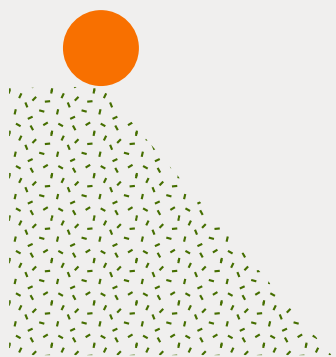
- As a for-profit, the owner(s) can earn significantly more money if the business is succeeding. As a nonprofit, earnings above and beyond overhead and salaries must be funnelled back into the organization to further its mission.
- As a for-profit organization, you pay taxes; as a not-for-profit, you don’t.
- As a nonprofit, you can apply directly for government and foundation grants; as an informal or for-profit organization the only way to apply for grants is through a fiscal sponsor.

Main Similarities

- Both for-profit corporations and not-for-profit foundations need a board of directors.
- Both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations can sell things.

Hybrid Business Models

Hybrids—interesting cultural models that are not traditional nonprofits—are becoming more common. This may be a for-profit business with a nonprofit-type component or offshoot. People also find weird ways of making money and funnel that into other kinds of cultural things. In general, it’s helpful to think about culture as an ecosystem which includes a multitude of organizational types.



A Pragmatic Approach to Getting Started

Doing By Doing

Are you the kind of person who gets excited and starts making things? Or are you more of a thinker who must work out every detail in advance before pulling the trigger and pressing go? Either approach can work when starting your own organization (see below), but it's good to remind yourself that you don't have to get everything right from the start. The best way to get started is by getting started, whether or not it's exactly according to plan, and to learn from the experience as you go. Once you've started, whether it's with an exhibition in your living room, a performance event in a park, or a fundraiser to get things off the ground, the odds are in your favor that something else will come

out of it. If you get stuck in the planning phase, it's harder to reach that place of creative iteration.

Ease The Pressure

While the first step might be daunting, it's helpful to remember that creating an art space or organization doesn't require huge sacrifices right from the start. In order to relieve some of the first-time pressure, remember these three considerations:

- **Do something small:** Whatever you do, it can be at a small scale. You can start an art space in your house or your garage, and you can plan your first event for next week. In Los Angeles, for instance, there's a long tradition of starting organizations in one's house or apartment.
- **Do something with people:** You don't have to do it alone. Starting a space with others is a great way to start something without dramatically upending your life. You can share energy, ideas, and financial resources, and make use of people's different skills and interests.
- **Do something temporary:** Know that whatever you start can be temporary. There's a prevailing idea that institutions need to last forever, but of course in the world things are born, they feed other things and then they might die, get eaten, and grow into a tree. While longevity is generally not determined at the start, it's good to keep in mind that no organization must exist forever. It can and it may, but it doesn't have to, and the daunting prospect of permanence shouldn't keep you from getting something off the ground.

Mission & Voice

The central part of starting an organization is determining its mission, often through a mission statement. What are your goals and how will this organization help to accomplish these goals? A mission statement should articulate answers to these two questions.

At the start of a project, the mission may be immediately obvious. Maybe you want to create a venue for experimental sound projects from Japan, or promote the work of underrepresented groups in public space. It's fine to have a simple and direct mission, like creating a space for art you admire.

It's also possible that you start out without a clearly articulated mission. Your mission might seem so broad as to be meaningless, like "support art" or "make a place for people to go." If you are an artist-driven organization, especially if you're the artist founding the organization, your mission will surely be different than a more functional/practical/pragmatic organization. Embrace the flexibility.

At Machine, we have seen many of our initiatives picked up and replicated as better versions by other organizations, whether it was supporting experimental music, or offering classes in sewing and other craft practices. We see this as a real win. Our mission wasn't "Be the only venue for experimental music" but to make a home for something interesting that

didn't have a home. It's useful to differentiate between your personal motivations or mission and that of your organization. These two things might be in alignment, or they might be very different. Your interests may change over time, and so may the environment you are working in.

A Specific Mission

A specific mission statement has two purposes: to explain to the world what you are doing, and to guide your decisions. The advantages of a specific mission statement are clear: you know what you are doing and the world knows what you are doing. You can communicate this to other people, funders, audience, employees, volunteers.

And it works both ways: once your organization is growing, people may have ideas of what you should be doing, or different opportunities may present themselves. With a specific mission it is easy to tell if these opportunities conform to what you are trying to accomplish, or if they don't at all. A clear and specific mission makes it easy to avoid doing things that lie outside the scope of your mission. For instance, if you define your mission as documenting irresponsibly dangerous performance art, it will be easy to explain why you're not putting on programs for children. Staying focused on your mission will help to avoid getting distracted.

An Ambitious, More Ambiguous Mission

Though risky, working with a more open mission statement can also work in your favor, creating room for multiple audiences and reflecting that the most interesting things often happen in the in-between spaces. Sometimes the richest approaches can't be so accurately crushed down into a punchy sentence. It also allows people to project their own ideas onto your organization: different supporters may identify with you, or in their minds believe that your mission is directly aligned with their interests. With a more loosely defined mission, you can become what your audience wants you to be, and this can lead to increased loyalty, interest and support.

Rather than thinking of it as an ambiguous mission, focus on other vocabulary: is yours an intuitive mission? The advantages of the intuitive mission statement is that you can create an organization that can quickly and nimbly change its focus in response to changes in the culture or cultural ecosystem. Since you can't rely on your mission to define what you will and will not do, it requires being acutely in tune with your organization, and a willingness to stay on your toes. With a more ambiguous statement, clear leadership and communication is crucial in order for team members and/or staff to stay on the same page.

Whether you decide to focus your mission narrowly or leave it open to interpretation, what's important is you have fun, grow as an artist, and become a part of something you believe in. Ideally this will all fall in line with your mission.

At Machine, our ambiguous mission has probably prevented us from getting funding from some larger foundations. We make sense to organizations like the Andy Warhol Foundation and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation because they were started by artists, are funded by artists, and are run by people who love the arts. But larger foundations ask us about our mission and goals, and we don't always have clear answers. Nevertheless, you need to be able to explain what you do when you're trying to get support.

Name

Naming your organization is key, but it can feel like the hardest part. Because your name is a defining part of the organization, it means packing a lot of meaning into few words. Consider the different implications of the names you think of. Can it mean different things to different people, and if so, is this a positive effect of the name, or a negative one?

The name of your organization should ideally convey a sense of specialty without acting like a barrier.

Use the power of ambiguity to your advantage. It should make people ask themselves a question but not be so mysterious that you lose people's interest. If possible, the name should encapsulate one or more aspects of your mission. Another consideration is whether you can secure an appropriate URL for it. People should be able to google your name and find more information easily.

That said, the name ultimately does not define your organization. In fact, it's not uncommon for people to feel conflicted about the (existing) names of their organizations. Often they've inherited the name or the mission of the organization has changed since they came up with it, or maybe it seemed like a good name at the start and now, less so. The truth of the matter is that over time most pre-existing associations with the name of the organization will be replaced by the history you create with your organization.

At the time when I set up Machine Project, I was doing a lot of stuff with technology so I thought, "Oh, Machine Project. I like the idea of a project. It's not a gallery." Over time, I've redefined the name as I've become interested in other things. Now I look at it like we're a machine for making ideas; you feed in people, resources, context, and opportunities, and out of that we generate art, ways of looking at the world, and ways of operating in it. In a way the name both matters a lot and not at all. The words Machine Project just become the symbol for what takes place and what we do.

Space

When starting an organization, it's important to define your physical space. Will you operate out of your living room or garage? Or will you rent or share a space? Having a space allows you to ground your organization's identity not solely in your mission but also in a physical location. Having a physical space can help with a more ambiguous mission because the physical location reinforces the organization's identity. No matter how small, your space can function as a home base, a club house, mission control, head of operations. Having a physical space can also improve the porosity and inclusiveness of your organization. But when you first begin a project or organization, rent will also likely be a major expense. Once the organization grows over time, it will become a smaller proportion of your total costs.

Renting Vs. Buying

Buying a space might seem like a tempting option if you're in an area with cheap real estate, and fixing it up could be a fun part of getting started. Or the idea might be to combine your primary residence with an arts venue to produce cultural events. For example, curator and artist Andrea Grover created a wonderful microcinema in Houston called the Aurora Picture Show. It was in a small church with a small house attached to the back, which she purchased in Houston.

But even with low prices, if this is your first time starting an organization, buying a space is a big leap. Owning may provide economic security over time, but it might come at the expense of flexibility. It's a clear example of the risks of infrastructure: it makes your possibilities more rigid. If you want to be a nimble organization that embraces a temporary or changing mission, you might be better off with a rented, temporary space at first, or forever.

Finally there are many examples of spaces that eventually organized a capital campaign and bought their building, such as the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles (one of our art space heroes).

Homespace

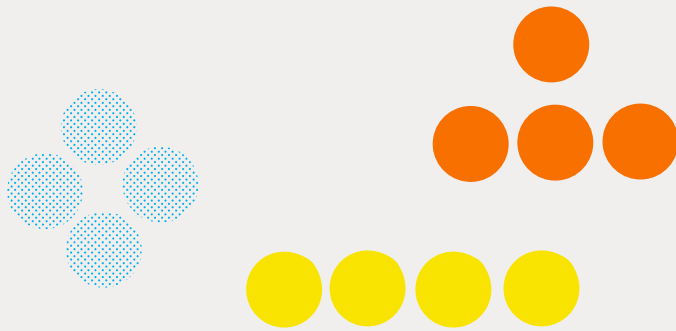
If you choose to set up your organization in your home, there are a few considerations: it's a great idea if it suits you and your life, and it's a great way to save money. Doing something at home is an especially good idea for your first project, because it keeps costs and complications way down. But you should think about whether this project is your whole life. Are you connected to all your friends through this project? Is this what you think about all day? Is this all the culture you consume? There can be points where it's very exciting, but there may also be points where you want to create some distance. Or, down the line, you

might have a partner who doesn't enjoy living in a warehouse.

No Space

On the other hand, not having a space frees you from paying rent, allows you to be very flexible, to cultivate an even more robust form of identity by requiring the audience to fill in the cracks. For instance, your organization may work by making use of public space, or rotate between spaces depending on the type of event you are organizing. It may be a traveling organization, or an itinerant model. One thing to note is that the less consistent a physical location and schedule, the stronger your reliance will need to be on branding your organization for people to remember who you are.

For us at Machine, the advantage of having a physical infrastructure has a lot to do with the way people think about us. Since we do such a variety of interdisciplinary events, we would have a hard time conveying what we're about without one consistent factor: our physical space.



People & Internal Structure

People/roles

When you start out, it may just be you running the show, but the odds are you'll soon enlist friends or helpers. Below, we outline the perks and downsides of running the show by yourself, and the roles you'll likely want to fill once you start building your team.

Show Of One

There's a lot to be said for doing things by yourself at first: most certainly, you learn how to do everything. Since what you are doing is driven by your own aesthetic, it's easier to have a consistent voice in communication and in curation. You can't blame other people when things don't go how you want them to. When

and if you do hire people to take on some of the work, you have an understanding of what's involved in the jobs.

You'll probably have another job, unless you're independently wealthy, so it's important to be realistic about how much you can get done. Be generous with yourself, and remember you're doing this for fun. We've found it most productive to focus energy on the parts of organizing that you're personally most excited about. This does tend to result in a lopsided organization ("Amazing curation! Terrible publicity!" or "Terrible curation! Amazing publicity!") but a good life strategy in general is to get great at what you are good at, rather than trying to get good at the things you're bad at.

Staffing

Once you arrive at the point of adding people to your team, whether they're actual hires or volunteers/interns, a good rule of thumb is to think about the kinds of personalities and skill sets that will benefit your organization. Are you the people person who's not so good with numbers? Or is management your strong suit? Evaluating your own strengths and weaknesses in an honest manner will help you decide which people with what skills will help you round out the organization. Below, we outline the kinds of roles you'll likely

look to fill. Often, organizations will start by hiring an operations manager, a financial supervisor or bookkeeper, and a grant writer (if you're a nonprofit). Some of these roles may overlap, some may be part-time, or hourly, some may be done by board members, or even volunteers. But you'll have the best sense of what roles will be best for your team: use your intuition to bring people on board according to your needs and priorities.

- **Writing:** whatever you are doing, it's probably going to involve some writing. That can be as simple as crafting an email, press release, or social-media post describing an artist project or event, or as complicated as hacking your way through a NEA grant application, or even writing a tool kit on how to start your own art space!
- **Curating/Creating:** you'll need creative ideas for what your space is going to do. Everyone can do this part as long as they're engaged and enthused with your mission. We've written another tool kit on the topic of curation called Curating and Planning Events.
- **Bookkeeping/Accounting:** large or small, you want to have some grasp on the finances of your organization. At the basic level, that's making sure you don't spend money that isn't in the bank, and accurately predicting that you will have enough money to pay the bills. As you grow, that might include cash-flow projections, hiring and paying employees, 501(c)3 tax returns, or financial analysis and reporting to funders and boards.
- **Legal:** it's useful to have a lawyer's eyes on documents like leases, contracts, partnerships, etc. If you have a lawyer friend (or if you are a lawyer), you might be able to get occasional legal help for free. When you're a small organization, legal issues tend to be occasional and not super complex. If you get to the point of setting up a 501(c)3, it's good to get a lawyer's help with filing the paperwork (and a lawyer is a classic board-member

job). Many cities and states have organizations like Lawyers for the Arts, which provide free legal services to the art community.

- **Raising money/development:** as noted in the financial section of the tool kit, there are multiple ways to raise money, and they require different skill sets. All fundraising rewards methodical, organized, and long-term strategy because it depends so much on building relationships. Development of individual donors can be a multi-year process.
- **Donor development:** good listening skills might be the most important thing for donor development, as well as empathic and warm personality types. Most everything about running an organization is easier with higher emotional intelligence, donor development perhaps most of all.
- **Grants:** establishing and cultivating relationships with foundations and grant officers will go a long way in producing grant funds. Once you receive a grant, the importance of grant reporting (after you complete your project) is often underestimated. Done properly, a grant report lays the foundation for the next grant request.
- **Communication:** sharing the mission and goals of the organization internally and externally is key to engaging with your community. Humans tend to relate to the world in terms of people—a human face to the organization can be very important to its success. In our experience, it's helpful for the efforts of curatorial work and communication be as close as possible.

Internal Structure/Leadership Structure

Once there are a few of you, you will likely be faced with the need to figure out a decision-making structure. In fact, this should be the first thing you think about when growing a team. The decision of what

leadership structure to work with can be driven by both philosophical and pragmatic concerns. From a philosophical point of view, the way decisions are made is often central to how an organization makes meaning in the world: You may decide to structure your organization as a non-hierarchical cooperative or collective. Or you may find pragmatically that this kind of horizontal structure is an unacceptably slower way of working if no one person or small group of people has the power to make decisions. There are many possible structures, but we recommend being deliberate in how you choose one, and to be transparent in how it works.

Cooperative/Collective

If you decide to work as a non-hierarchical collective or cooperative group, it can have benefits beyond embodying democratic ideals. We believe that consensus-based systems are far superior to democratic systems in cultural organizations. In a consensus-based organization actions are taken only when everyone agrees it's a good idea. It's usually better not to do something if people don't agree anyway; with a majority vote system someone is always unhappy. While using a consensus system may take a lot of work, talking until you come up with something everyone can agree on often works much better.

Machine Project's founding board member

Jason Brown describes a cooperative collective as *The Parable of the Invincible Blob*. The blob moves slowly, because one part of it tries to go this way, and another part tries to go a different way. The blob moves slowly because decisions are made collaboratively through a group process. But if a bird comes down and eats a part of the blob, the rest of it keeps moving. If someone leaves the blob, another person can easily take over.

Leaders & Hierarchy

Another model is based on strong single-minded leadership, rooted in the figure of the Benevolent Dictator, someone entrusted with the power to make decisions. This model is useful because it means decisions get made, and that they get made by a designated person, rather than a de facto leader. (While more spontaneous power relations can work, at least for a while, we believe it's better to be deliberate and transparent when it comes to governing structures.)

It is important to put emphasis on this form of organizing as being a Benevolent Dictator, because the currency that moves small organizations is good will and enthusiasm. Oftentimes, people collaborating at arts organizations are volunteers, or people working hard without much pay. Furthermore, while having someone designated to make decisions can be more efficient, it helps to do it in a way that empowers every-

one else to also bring new ideas and pursue the work they want to do.

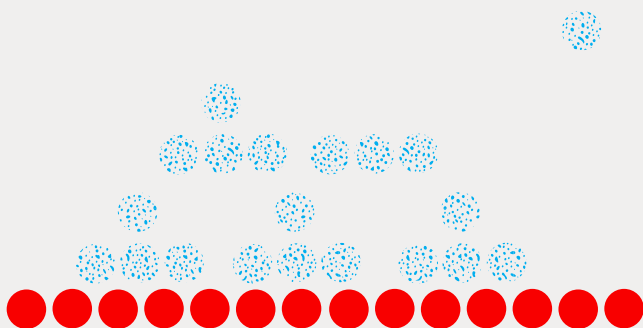
Ultimately, whether it's a single person or small group at the top, most organizations will benefit from developing some form of hierarchy. Hierarchies are efficient for enacting a policy or system, and if well organized and transparent, they will guarantee that everyone understands their role and responsibilities within the organization. We advocate for a flexible and transparent system in which the hierarchy or structure put in place doesn't deactivate a free flow of ideas, so that the kind of chaotic energy that feeds art and culture isn't lost.

Volunteers And Interns

If you're reading this guide because you wish to start an art organization, you will probably be relying on your own social capital to accomplish things. Social capital can take the form of reputation, resources, and connections, but it often boils down to the question of how people feel around you. You want people to feel good, and you achieve that by listening and abiding by principles of transparency, reliability, humor, warmth, respect. This will be especially important when you're dealing with volunteers or interns. Because they are not paid employees or contract workers receiving money in exchange for their work, the currency of the ex-

change is measured differently, and it's important that their work is not only duly recognized but that the benefit that they get in exchange for their work is taken into consideration.

One of Machine Project's earliest volunteers, Tatiana Hernandez, went on to become not only one of our longest and most dedicated board members, but also a prominent grant officer in the foundation world. Keep your volunteers happy!



Finance & Fundraising

Fundraising

Every organization needs money to function unless you plan to pay for everything yourself. There are different ways to raise money: foundation grants, government grants, membership, workshops/ticketed events, benefits, individual donations, corporate support, crowdfunding. The sources of income will vary according to the type of organization. While many forms of fundraising are available to small organizations or business corporations, 501(c)3s are the only ones able to apply for foundation and government grants directly. If you're not a 501(c)3, you may be able to apply for grants through fiscal sponsors (more on that below).

fig. 1: Ways to make money and who gets to do it

Type of income	for-profit organizations	nonprofit organizations [501(c)3s]
foundation & government grants	no	yes
membership	n/a	yes
workshops/ticketed events	yes	yes
benefits	yes	yes
individual donations	n/a	yes
corporate support	n/a	yes
crowdfunding	yes	yes
direct sales	yes	yes

Foundation & Government Grants

If you're a 501(c)3, you are eligible for grant funding either via governmental grants or foundation grants. Both are highly competitive and labor intensive, but often offer the best return on investment in terms of work/money ratio.

General Recommendation/Tips For Writing Grants

- **Spaces & grants:** People sometimes ask us whether we recommend getting a physical space for the organization first, or whether one should apply for grants and then look for a space with funding in pocket. Our experience is that getting a grant is more about track record and visibility and less about physical infrastructure. If you've got a physical space and nobody's heard of anything you've done, it will be very difficult to get grant funding. However, if you've developed twenty public art projects with experimental architecture and you've received significant national press then you're probably ready to start applying for grants.
- **Mirroring language:** A key thing to remember when writing grants is to look at the language the grant-givers use and state your organization's goals in their context. This shows alignment between your goals and the goals of the foundation.
- **Show prior fundraising:** When applying for a grant, or funding in general, it often helps to indicate if you've already received funding or a pledge for funding from another funder for the project. For example, you might ask Foundation A for \$20,000 but in the budget show the project costs are \$60,000 and that you already have funding already committed from Foundation B. Even if Foundation B is not a big name such as Ford or Rockefeller, showing that money has been committed to a project is always convincing.
- **Fiscal Sponsor:** If you want to apply for a grant but you're not a nonprofit organization, there are some options other than rushing to file for 501(c)(3) status. You can apply for grants through a fiscal sponsor that has 501(c)(3) status. A good fiscal sponsor can help by providing tools and resources such as financial management and advice, in addition to the ability to accept funds from foundations and certain donors who are required to give funds to a 501(c)3 organization. As payment for allowing you to apply for grants through them, a fiscal sponsor can take anywhere

between 5% to 10% of the granted funds as an administrative fee. Fulcrum Arts (formerly known as Pasadena Arts Council) is a popular choice in Los Angeles. Fractured Atlas is a national fiscal sponsor that many arts organizations work with. It's a good idea to research fiscal sponsors in your region and to find a partner that is a good fit for the needs of your organization.

Membership

A membership program creates a more official giving process for your donors and establishes a way to systematize donations. Generally, membership programs are based on different levels of exchange: in exchange for a yearly tax-deductible donation, members will receive certain benefits (discounts, special newsletters, exclusive access, etc.). People invest in organizations that they perceive to be effective, so in order to run a successful membership program you must first attract people to become members based on a robust perception of your mission and importance, and keep members engaged via ongoing strong programming and by offering them ways to feel more included than if they weren't members.

Workshops/Ticketed Events

If your organization organizes events, workshops, or classes, you'll be faced with the decision of whether to offer those for free (another way in which your organi-

zation's philosophical stance may come into play), or to charge an entrance fee or request a donation.

There are pros and cons to both approaches. If you decide to charge, you can earn money and create a clearly measurable method for evaluating if the programming appeals to your audience, and/or if your marketing efforts are effective. Charging for events can also help create a perception of value around what you're doing.

The pros of not charging are that your organization will be accessible to people from all kinds of economic backgrounds, thereby contributing to an economy of free exchange of knowledge and ideas. Your currency becomes something other than money: people's time and attention as a form of economy. Finally if you don't charge, it's harder for people to complain that they want their money back when the penquin quartet you advertised fails to show up.

The question of money is also something to consider on a scale of utopism to pragmatism. At Machine Project, we take the pragmatic approach: we like for stuff to happen, so we do whatever works. When it comes to classes, our pragmatic answer is that if we don't charge money, we can't pay our artists to teach. But we deeply respect people who make their decisions from a philosophical viewpoint even if it's not the most practical way to do things—we have room for both pragmatics and utopists in our world! You'll nat-

urally figure out where you fall on the spectrum in the process of organizing things.

Benefits & Auctions

Many organization do some kind of annual benefit event. These parties tend to be a lot of work for the dollars raised, unless you have a set of donors who are willing to pre-purchase tickets for high dollar amounts. Best practice is to do them every year if you are going to do them; to do them at the same time of year; to have a repeating theme or motif; to understand that the money comes less from ticket sales at the door and more from having created a highly visible public context for donors to contribute. A cautionary note—annual benefits can take up an enormous amount of energy, time, and headspace which could otherwise be put towards programming and mission.

Auctions of donated art works are a classic way of doing these events. We have mixed feelings about these: while they are a way for the artists connected to your organization to contribute, the pressure on artists to donate to multiple auctions undercuts their own market and ability to support themselves by selling their art. They also tend to work better for larger, more connected organizations that will have access to higher profile art that donors and guests will be enthused to bid on.

Individual Donations

Organizations can also build relationships with donors outside of membership programs with people who feel invested in the organization and are willing and able to offer financial support for specific programs. A program of developing donors needs to be built up over a longer period of time to be sustainable, and it requires meticulous attention: you have to keep track of everyone who supports the organization and communicate with them and pay attention to them, which can often be very time-consuming. More established organizations might eventually invest in what's called a CRM (customer relationship management) system to process, track and organize donor info.

Hand-in-hand with developing a donor base comes asking people for money. Like cultivating donors, asking for money is a skill that's often developed over time. At the beginning it can be uncomfortable, but it helps to shift how you think about asking people for money. If somebody can afford to support a project they're interested in, they don't have to start their own nonprofit. They can build something they believe in and be involved in the community through their contribution. To the right person, that's a real gift.

Corporate Support

It's becoming increasingly harder to secure corporate donations in the form of funds. Typically, corporate partners want something in exchange for their donation or will offer non-monetary forms of support such as marketing, in-kind donations, donated services, or staff expertise. Choose the right corporate supporter and ensure a relationship is beneficial to both you and them.

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is useful when you are working on a specific project for which you need to raise funds. It usually involves a PR campaign and is built on momentum. The more people donate at first, the more other people will be encouraged to donate as well. Since crowdfunding campaigns often include a pre-sale or exchange ("donate money and in exchange we'll send you a postcard!"), it's important to take into account the amount of resources that the campaign itself will cost you. Will you have two people from your staff devoting a whole week to mailing out postcards? Think carefully whether this is the best way to allocate resources. That said, crowdfunding campaigns, if organized effectively and coupled with a smart communications strategy, can become the best publicity tool for the project itself.

Direct Sales

Both not-for-profit and for-profit organizations can sell things. However, the income from sale items might be subject to federal income tax, depending on whether they help the organization further its purpose.

Managing Your Finances

Financial management is one of the most important elements in managing an organization. You will need to develop at least basic skills to analyze and track the financial condition of your organization. A lack of proficiency is asking for trouble.

In the beginning you might opt to do the basic bookkeeping yourself, although you should get a professional to help you set up a system. Eventually you can hire a freelance bookkeeper to help you with this process.

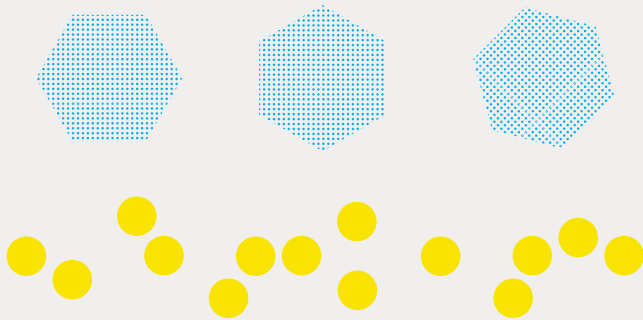
Here is a good primer to walk you through the various processes involved in nonprofit financial management: <https://managementhelp.org/nonprofit-finances/basics.htm>

General Recommendations

As with leadership and hierarchy, economic models and financial structures become more complicated the larger your organization. However, when you are starting out, some rules of thumb:

- **Opt for small:** The metastasizing logic of capitalism suggests continual expansion as the only way to survive. Everywhere we look we see galleries and museums building larger and larger facilities. We would like to argue for another model, where being smaller allows greater freedom and flexibility. Also, it costs less money: low budget, high freedom.
- **Aim to save:** The best way to raise money for an organization is to find a way to do things that don't cost money. Every dollar you don't need is the equivalent of a dollar raised. When first starting out, rent tends to be a major expense. Therefore replacing that cost is a great way to spend money. Could your project take place in another organization's space? If so, is there another organization that would like to host you? Do you already rent a space (home, garage, studio, storage space, car, shed, swimming pool, sidewalk) that could be used for cultural programming? Can your projects take place in public?

At machine we embrace the motto that the best way to raise money is to save money! Don't let your organization become a money-eating giant baby! Stay lean! Remain unfettered! Stay free!



Advisors

Advisors For Informal Organizations

When you start an informal arts organization, you won't need to name a board like you would if you were starting a nonprofit, but you'll likely find that having a small group of advisors can be helpful. A good rule of thumb is to find people with expertise in your general field of interest and get them involved, and keep them close as go-to advisors.

Nonprofit Boards & Governance

Nonprofit organizations legally require that you have a board. The purpose of a board of directors is to provide oversight; they are basically a group of people looking out for what the organization is doing, making sure

they're working towards their mission, and providing oversight to ensure responsible financial management. A board also has a duty to support and help the organization through expertise, connections and financial contributions.

Startup Board

When you're just starting out with a nonprofit, you will probably have what's called a startup board. This board will include your friends and supporters who believe in you and are willing to vouch for your new organization. As the name indicates, a startup board will help you get set up, often provide moral support more than anything else. Once you've gotten off the ground, you'll need to transition into a board with more clearly defined objectives and functions: one that can help you fundraise or provide other services to help sustain your organization.

Inviting Members On Board, And Defining Roles

Before you start gathering the members for your board, it's important to think about what you are asking them for, and what roles they can play. If you're asking somebody to join the board because they can provide financial support, or legal counsel, it's important to be

clear on what you want and to be straightforward when asking for it. The people you ask may say no, but that's not such a bad thing. They might not be willing to lend that level of financial support, or may not have the time to help out. It's better not to waste anyone's time. Everyone's life will be easier if roles are clear from the beginning. Having some kind of job description for board members, even an informal one, can do a world of good for aligning expectations and making a good match.

Key Members

Without a doubt, the number one person to have on your board is a lawyer. If your organization collaborates with an institution, for instance, they'll want to sign a contract. To avoid signing away all your intellectual property or be liable for anything going wrong, it is important to have a lawyer who can review and/or rewrite contracts, review or file your 501(c)3 paperwork, and do all that important lawyer stuff that lawyers do. Other good people to have on the board are accountants, media professionals, foundation officers, marketers and publicists.

Giving And The Board

Most board members expect to make regular financial contributions to nonprofit organizations as part of their

support of the organization's wellbeing and management. Our experience is that it's best to have a consistent and clearly articulated expectation of giving for all board members. Having a board that gives a set financial contribution every year also helps your chances when applying for competitive grants.

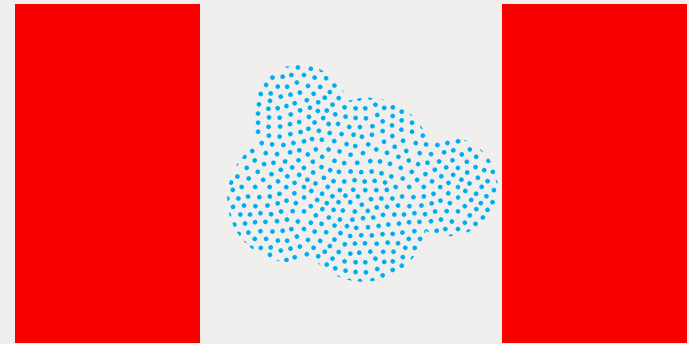
Terms Of Service For A Board

It is good to provide board members with an expected term of service. This provides a natural end point to their commitment and allows for an easier transition-off from the board. Some board member's may opt to extend their service past their term. This may or may not be a good thing, but having a set term will ultimately provide the necessary structure to handle what might otherwise be an uncomfortable exchange.

Artist Advisory Board, Curatorial Committees And Community Representation

Many organizations create additional groups of supporters, to help with fundraising, represent the ideas of the community, connect the management of the organization directly to artists, or to help make curatorial decisions. These individuals can be helpful in providing a particular focused area of support for the organization without carrying the responsibility that comes

with board leadership. You will have a better sense of whether your organization needs additional support once you have established your primary board, mission and programming structure.



Programming & Curation

At the core of your organization will be your programming: what events, exhibitions, conversation series, workshops, etc. you organize for the community and public.

Events

Events are an easy way to try out new ideas, to make propositions about how we can live our lives in different and more rich ways, and to bring people together to share experiences. If you are a professional curator working at a museum it might take a two or three years to develop an exhibition. With an event, you can be more nimble, spontaneous, and the resources needed and expectations from the public will be much lower. You might think of an idea on Monday, make an event page and invite people on Tuesday, hold the event on Friday, debrief on Saturday, and by Monday, be think-

ing of new and more ways to build on what you learned the previous week. With events you can try and fail quickly, dust yourself off, learn from the experience, and apply what you learned about the results quickly to the next thing. Please see our Guide to Curating and Planning Events for more on this topic.

Exhibitions

While exhibitions take a bit more planning, they also can be developed in an agile manner. With any programming you do, we believe the best projects come from thinking about what's missing from the local art ecology. Spaces that replicate the exhibition strategies of commercial galleries or museums might have good intentions, but will inevitably suffer from having comparatively fewer resources than the spaces they seek to emulate, and in the process, don't offer an alternative voice. That said, exhibitions are a tried and true way to make meaning and context around art objects and installations. The question to ask is what your organization can do that no one else can. Are you in contact with artists who are unknown by the mainstream? Does your exhibition program have a point of view too difficult, or eccentric, or challenging for galleries or museums? Can it react faster to changes in the culture? Play to your strengths! Please see our Guide to Curating and Planning Events for more on this topic.

Workshops

Workshops constitute a great way to share skills and knowledge with the community in a slightly more structured manner than through events. They provide another way for thinkers and makers to engage with the community around you, and to share their knowledge in a more structured manner. Charging a fee for workshops can also be a practical way to raise money for your organization. Please see our Guide to Workshops for more on this topic.

Generating Ideas For Programming

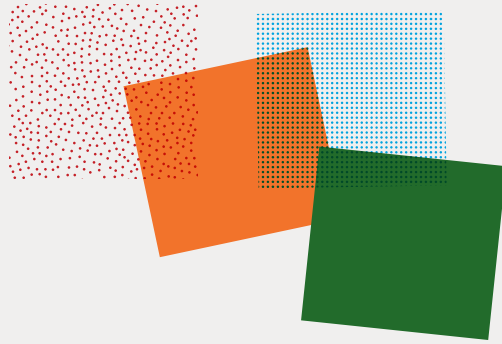
The ideas for events, exhibitions, and workshops can be internally generated, submission-based or community-generated, or commissioned.

- **Internally-generated:** at Machine Project, many of the events and activities we organize are internally generated. We have a staff meeting once a week where we pitch ideas to each other. We also evaluate random proposals that people send us, which account for about twenty percent of things we program.
- **Submission-based/community-generated:** if you open it up to your community to propose ideas for programming, your job will be to define the parameters for submissions clearly from the start. This will make your job easier when you're going through submissions.
- **Commissioned:** a commission may result from your desire to work with a given artist and/or group, or to see what comes out of proposing an idea to an artist to see what they do with it.

General Ideas And Principles For Programming

- **Shaping ideas:** Whether ideas are generated internally or submitted by members of your community, part of your organization's job will be to help mold ideas to suit a given format for presentation. For instance, someone might have an idea for a workshop, but it would work better as a lecture. Or someone might have an idea for a lecture that might work better as a performance. It's our job to recognize an idea with potential and help develop it.
- **Survival of the fittest:** We believe in the evolutionary model of "survival of the fittest" as applied to ideas. If there is an idea but people aren't excited about it or willing to champion it, it eventually dies. So if everyone feels lukewarm about an idea, the odds are it won't succeed. On the contrary, if someone is really behind one proposal and pushes for it, the chances for its survival are high.
- **Improv:** There's also the improv way to look at it, meaning that we'll give anything a shot. If someone has an idea, for instance, even if it seems like a fantasy idea, we'll actually try to do it. Or we might take an idea and then take it too far just to experiment. One idea can often teach you about, or lead you to the next idea, so that brainstorming might feel like one giant, connected research project.
- **Iteration:** Ultimately, we've learned that projects tend to be iterative. You usually don't start out with the perfect idea and then do it. You start out with an okay idea and as it changes, you learn from it. This is a central principle within Machine Project: we prefer to put on a project even if it isn't the best one ever, or the most perfectly planned one ever. We're not saying we set the bar low, but rather than spend all our time planning, we'd rather just do something and learn from it.
- **Author driven vs. content driven:** While the art world focuses mostly on artists and makers, programming at an arts organization can shift the focus on conjuring, developing, and sharing stories, thus recalibrating the value of the single maker.

Please see The Machine Guide to Curating and Planning Events for more on these topics.



Communication

Why Communicate

Communication lies at the heart of art and culture. When we dream up new ways to conceive of, think about, or connect disparate ideas and concepts it's in order to communicate them to the world in inventive or challenging ways. While this sort of communication will be the bread and butter of an arts organization, getting the word out about your organization and your program will be instrumental to building and expanding your community, raising the profile of your organization, and attracting media attention, all of which may ultimately translate into financial support.

Growing your audience therefore proceeds best in an organic, incremental manner, rather than through artificial means. The goal is not to convince the most people to buy into something, but to provide

an opportunity for the right people to hear about something they might enjoy.

All publicity and communication from your organization has the same ultimate goal: to engage and expand the community beyond your immediate circle of family and friends. An updated and engaging website serves as a starting point for people wishing to learn about your organization; emailing members about events keeps them informed of what's going on and feeling engaged; and social media helps build the community virtually and helps people feel involved even when they cannot attend in person.

How To Communicate Effectively

In addition to establishing an organization's name and mission, it's crucial to craft a public identity that will convey to others what your organization is all about. Branding has a bad rep nowadays, but it can be a useful tool so that people will begin to associate your organization with your mission via the events and activities you produce. Communicating to people about what you are doing and inviting them to be part of it is crucial to surviving as an organization. Although words like "branding" make it sound like we're venturing into the land of corporate speak, we are actually in diametrical opposition to advertising, which attempts to get people to buy, over and over again, that which they don't need.

In the work of an arts organization, promotion of events is a way of making sure that those who do need to see something will see it. Our secondary goal is to provide enough clues to those who would not enjoy seeing our event, so that they know to skip it. Coming up with a coherent plan for branding and publicity is instrumental to establish your voice as an organization, and to set a consistent tone, both verbally and visually.

From the start, when we began using email newsletters as our main form of communication, we crafted a specific tone. It is that of an optimist who sees the absurd irony of life; it is friendly, self-mocking, slightly absurdist, interested in hijinks. We were seeking a voice that conveys inherent contradictions: something written in the third person that addressed the audience directly; the voice of an organization called Machine that would sign an email with “love,” like a computer network that was inappropriately familiar.

Ironically, larger businesses adopted this method of speaking to consumers much earlier, especially giant corporate brands trying to be your friend and belie their true size. Whereas, the mode for smaller organizations has often been to try and look bigger or more official than they are, like lifting your jacket over your head to fool a bear into thinking you are larger than you are. Our innovation was to try to look like the size we

were, while retaining a slight tone of mockery around being an organization at all.

Crafting Your Visual Identity

The same way brands and companies use typefaces, shapes, and distinct colors to establish a visual identity, arts organizations will benefit from working with a graphic designer or art director to come up with a logo and a system for visual communication. This may seem expensive, or a luxury for a small arts organization, but it will go a long way to help convey a sense of familiarity and establish consistency across all your forms of communication: logo and signage, stationery and business cards, website, email newsletter, etc.

Website

A website is typically the main way people will learn about you when they look you up online, and it's also where you can direct writers to find more information about your events. You don't need to start with a fancy site, you can put up a simple blog page, or use a template-based website service.

Your website can also serve as an archive of your previous projects or events, thus providing an invaluable resource to people looking to understand

your organization through time. While this won't be necessary at the beginning, once you've organized a critical mass of events and activities, think about how you can make your website the repository of your organization's history.

Email

In addition to your website and social media channels, you may consider an email newsletter. At Machine, we have specific goals with email: the newsletters are designed to convey our sensibility, express a sense of welcome, and get information out efficiently.

When putting together a newsletter, keep in mind that people lose interest with every sentence. Try to write like a newspaper reporter, with the most important information at the top. Also, think about the frequency of your newsletter. If you set up something too frequent, you might be creating too much work for yourself and risk annoying people who might then unsubscribe. Alternatively, if your emails are too sporadic, they might be ineffective for letting people know about events. Find the right balance.

Social Media

While it's generally acknowledged that social media is destroying everything good about the world, one of the best ways to spread the word about a project is for your audience to write about it and/or share it on social media. It's a great free and fairly easy tool to advertise and make information accessible. With social media, it helps to think visually, and to not underestimate the importance and power of images. Think of how you will generate pictures. Do you have someone taking photos at your events? Do you set up a channel for people to send pictures cleared for use? Be mindful of copyright infringements if you use pictures from the internet.

Media as a critical tool for ongoing engagement: If managed successfully, your communication tools—email newsletter, website, social media channels, etc.—can create a parallel reality out in the world. Some people might never come to your events, or live far away, but eagerly follow what you are doing via your social media channels.

Whether it's to attract people to your space so that they can experience an irreproducible live event, or to assuage those that can't attend for one reason or another, small organizations can effectively use social media to offer people opportunities for an experience that will enrich them. So when you're writing about or

describing an event, aim to be welcoming and informative, and emphasize the transitory, valuable, irreplaceable, and fundamentally not reproducible aspects of an event or performance.

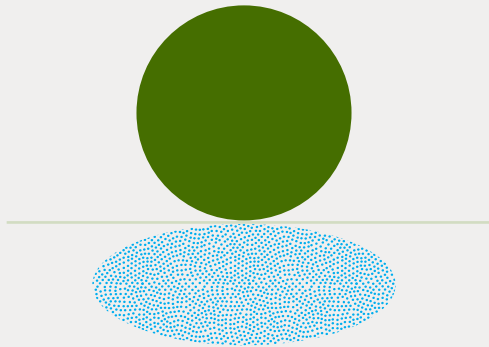
Press

Depending on where you live and work, art and culture writers may be numerous or sparse, easy or difficult to access. A good rule of thumb is to do your research, find out who is writing about what, and craft personalized pitches that include a short, surprising, and specific description. While press releases tend to be the standard for galleries and museums, we have found that what works best is a personalized approach. For example, if we're doing a project on experimental architecture with bamboo, we'll research who's writing about this, or what kind of blogs would be interested in the subject matter. Personal relationships and press are how everything gets done, and these can be built quite easily through research.

It's crucial to have all the information prepared and on hand when contacting a writer, blogger, or journalist. If you want them to write about something you're doing, you should be able to give them the information they need on the spot, including a one-sentence or short description, images, and indications on where they can go to obtain more information.

Once you've convinced someone to attend and then write about an event or show, it can quickly become a food chain: the small blogs get picked up by larger blogs, which in turn get picked up by the bigger sites. A fun example of that occurred at Machine with a cable-detangling contest we organized with Steven Schkolne in 2008.

One blog picked it up (maybe) because it was such a dumb idea, then all these Japanese blogs picked it up, and then the Japanese mainstream media wrote a story about the new craze in America: cable detangling. It was proof of the fact that art circulates in many ways: it can circulate in the press, in person, and in peoples' imagination. There might now be a group of Japanese people who have a very particular idea about America based on our event.



Measuring Success/ Assessment

Why Assess?

Assessment of your work serves two functions:

- **To get better at what you do:** By measuring and evaluating what you do, you can decide how you might improve your processes, see what worked and what didn't work, and build on the interesting ideas that emerged out of a project.
- **To convince other people of the value of what you are doing:** For some funders, concrete proof of results and impact is essential to getting support. To others, less so. In my experience, foundations which are solely arts-focused are the least interested in assessment, especially those which are the estates of artists (Warhol, Rauschenberg). The larger a foundation, the more value tends to be placed on assessment. Foundations which fund the arts as only part of their portfolio (Ford, Irvine, etc.) tend to place a high value on assessment, since measuring impact is a big thing in humanitarian and education causes.

In general terms, assessment can be either qualitative or quantitative.

- **Qualitative assessments** might measure whether the audience enjoyed the event, whether the experience of working with your organization was positive for the artists; whether the work produced was of “high” or “good” quality. Qualitative measurements tend to be subjective and therefore difficult to measure..
- **Quantitative measurements** refer to information that can be measured, usually with numbers. For instance, how many people attended your event, the impact on local economies, or the demographics of the audience.

Incorporating Qualitative Assessment Into Your Everyday Habits

For the artistic work of an organization, especially a smaller organization, qualitative assessment can be extremely useful. At Machine, we do a report after major projects which reflects on what went well, and what we could learn from. We recommend post mortems no matter the size of your organization, even if you only spend 15 minutes after an event writing down some notes on what happened. We recommend putting it into written form, even if it's informal, so you can go back later to reference the information.

If you are producing an event in a way that's new, or if it's bigger than something you've done before, or if you feel (for whatever reason) the stakes are

high, we recommend doing a premortem and in process check-in.

We have found it's useful to do an imaginary premortem before the event to image what will happen and spot possible problems before they happen. We buy a lot of fire extinguishers this way.

We also like to stop in the middle of a project and take a minute to reflect on what's going well and what is going poorly. If we were able to go back in time to the start and do the project differently, what would we change. Are there initial assumptions we made that were wrong. Is there anything we should or can change now?

Finally, It's often better to solve problems by doing less rather than by doing more. Try to see if you make an event better by not doing something, rather than thinking of a bunch of things you have to do.

Citations

Citations are a way to see if your influence is reaching the world. In academia, a scientist's influence and importance is directly correlated to how many times her or his papers are cited. This means that the research cited is being used, referenced or built upon. This metaphor can hold true for the arts as well.

At Machine we function as an incubator for the projects we organize, but the ideas around our projects also circulate in a broader realm through the media, and can be measured by how the work is written and talked about. This works on a large scale with news outlets like the *New York Times*, but can be just as impactful when the organization is mentioned or referenced on smaller outlets, like blogs, or via social media channels.

The Hammer Report

At Machine, ideas are developed by prototyping, executing, and then studying a project. The study or reflection stage is then shared with the field as an example or set of ideas for others to build upon. The book we produced with the Hammer Museum, *Public Engagement Artist in Residence*, is a good example of this way of working. In this book, we shared the working process of a year-long intervention into the daily life of a contemporary art museum. The book was produced as an alternative to the usual method of documenting projects according to what was available to the public to see and experience. We thought of the metaphor of the swan swimming—you see the the swan gliding across the water, but not the frantic churning of the feet under the surface propelling it forward. *Public Engagement Artist in Residence* tries to show the underwater view, the “feet of the swan.” This behind-the-scenes report has been used and referenced by others in the

field, from being assigned reading for the Los Angeles County Arts Commission staff to a citation in grant guidelines by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

Public Engagement Artist in Residence is available as a free downloadable book on Machine Project's website <http://machineproject.com/publications/>



Risk, Insurance, and Permits

Organizations both large or small need to consider insurance. Even when you are starting and are small, it's smart to realize anything that happens in public can lead to lawsuits. If someone slips and breaks their arm, gets electrocuted by faulty wiring, or eaten by sharks at one of your events, they could sue you and/or your board of directors.

Once your organization grows, you may choose to become a bona fide business or nonprofit, and one of the benefits of becoming a corporation is to reduce personal liability. If someone slips at your event once you're a corporation, they'd be suing the corporation rather than an individual within the organization. Other insurance that you might need will depend on your assets. If you have assets, insurance becomes much more important because people are more likely to sue you.

Since navigating insurance can be knotty business, we recommend finding a broker you like, and having him or her advise you on the types of insurance that will be best suited to your organization. What follows is a breakdown of the main types of insurance we recommend a small organization or nonprofit to consider.

- **General Liability:** covers and provides protection against claims associated with accidents, injuries and negligence. We sometimes increase our coverage in this area for larger projects outside our storefront.
- **Workers' Compensation:** covers wage replacement and medical benefits to employees injured in the course of employment. (Mandatory if you employ full-time individuals, though laws vary depending on the state.)
- **Property Insurance:** covers loss and damage of company property due to a wide variety of events such as fire, smoke, severe weather, vandalism, etc. (Optional but recommended.)
- **Directors and Officers (D&O) Insurance:** is a liability policy that indemnifies all board directors and officers for “damages and defense costs arising from lawsuits alleging various wrongful acts.” It’s an absolutely essential policy to maintain, as it protects directors from exposure to personal liability.



In Conclusion...

My hope is that this guide will inspire and encourage independent programmers, organizers, and can-do curators across the country. At the very least, I hope it answered a few questions and eased some anxieties.

You're about to embark upon a crazy adventure full of rewards and challenges—get out there and do some stuff!