



An Investment Framework for Supporting the Artists Ecosystem

WolfBrown

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**in association with
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The mission of the Kenneth Rainin Foundation is to enhance quality of life by championing the arts, promoting early childhood literacy, and supporting research to cure chronic disease. Collaboration and innovation are at the heart of all its programs. The Foundation's work is guided by its commitment to change through inquiry, creativity and compassion.

In its role as an arts funder, the Rainin Foundation supports a diverse array of Bay Area artists, artistic projects, and artist support organizations each year. Its significant support of SFFILM provides important resources to Bay Area filmmakers. Through its seed funding of Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST), the Foundation plays a central role in increasing access to space for artists and organizations throughout the Bay Area.

Beyond its grantmaking, the Foundation also works to gain a clearer understanding of how artists thrive and how foundations can support artists more equitably and more effectively. Through its New Artist Pathways initiative, for example, the Foundation is questioning the 501(c)3 nonprofit model and exploring alternative producing and support structures for artists.

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Introduction

About This Report

At the heart of this report is an artistic idea - that there is value in looking at something familiar in a way that makes it seem new and unfamiliar, and even at times strange. In this case, the familiar thing is the complex environment surrounding artists and how they sustain a practice in the Bay Area. The way of making that environment seem new or even strange is a lens adapted from System Dynamics and its application in thinking about ecosystems. This lens allowed us to examine the system of artist support and work towards building a theory about how to strengthen the system as a whole as opposed to supporting the individuals who operate within it.

Part 1 presents a brief overview of the **Analytical Approach**, including the research questions that guided our work, our methodology, and key elements of the ecosystem lens that informed the analysis.

Part 2 offers an **Investment Framework**, based on the analysis, which suggests seventeen ways to support artists in the Bay Area by improving the system in which those artists work. It includes a high-level summary of the proposed investments, a more extended discussion of each investment from an ecosystem point of view, and some thoughts on the applications of the framework and how it might continue to evolve.

Part 3 offers four **essays on different aspects of the artists ecosystem**, including an initial definitional piece that provides background on the ecosystem point of view, and essays that unpack our thinking about two prominent species: artists and philanthropic foundations.

Part 4 offers narratives about **four specific sub-systems of interest** within the larger artists ecosystem, including a detailed treatment of patterns of resource exchanges between the relevant species.

Our research was limited by necessity and focused exclusively on the Bay Area. Because of this, the framework we offer is neither comprehensive nor directly transferable to other communities. However, we believe that some of our general observations will be applicable across different situations, particularly the unique role that foundations play in the arts ecosystem.

Our hope is that the framework serves as a helpful guide to foundation funders and other stakeholders in the Bay Area artists ecosystem to reflect critically on how their investments overlay, or don't overlay, with the seventeen proposed investments, and how, in the long run, they might collaborate or coordinate their funding programs to address some of the gaps.



Understanding the Bay Area Artists Ecosystem

A great deal of scholarly research on artists illuminates how artists construct livelihoods, and what conditions and supports nurture their creativity and allow them to grow and develop as creative professionals. The 2003 Urban Institute report, *Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists*¹, for example, lists six categories of resources that artists need, some of which are monetary and some of which are non-monetary. This study, and others, served to guide our analysis, as did notes from consultations with Bay Area artists previously undertaken by the Rainin Foundation.

The systems of support for artists are complex, to say the least, and vary greatly from city to city. In a given community, there might be:

- foundations that support individual artists and artistic collaborations through competitive grant programs
- foundations that make large open-ended awards to especially accomplished or promising artists
- civic funders that make grants to artists
- artist support organizations and career development programs (local, regional, national)
- a patchwork of local and regional service organizations, producing companies and venues that provide artists with space, know-how, and administrative services

Interviews and focus groups with artists suggest that navigating this hodgepodge of support programs can be daunting. As one Bay Area artist and curator explained in an interview, *“We are not small enough to be a cohesive arts ecosystem and not big enough to have enough support and investment to make small projects seen. We are fractured and fighting for limited resources given the cost of living here.”*

A cohort of foundation funders, like the Rainin Foundation, are curious about the haphazard system of artist support that has evolved over time and what they might do, individually and collectively, to make it more effective and more equitable.

Despite the considerable body of scholarly research offering insight into how artists construct careers, the field lacks a coherent theory about how to improve the *system* – as opposed to simply supporting individual artists and organizations.

¹ Rosario Jackson, Maria et al. [*Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists*](#). A report published by the Urban Institute (2003).



What do we mean by “artists ecosystem”?

This report uses the biological phenomenon of an ecosystem as a metaphor for the complex environment in which artists strive to sustain their creative practice. This is often referred to as the cultural ecology approach. We’ll take Arts Council England former chief executive, Alan Davey’s, explanation of ‘cultural ecology’ as “...the living, evolving network of artists, cultural organizations and venues cooperating in many fruitful partnerships - artistic, structural and financial. The metaphor of an ecology, of a living, balanced environment, expresses how nothing happens within the system without its impact being felt widely.”² as a starting point.

Our research focuses on a particular subsystem within the larger cultural ecology, that is the system of non-profit supports for Bay Area artists. In looking at how the ecosystem metaphor can be applied to the system of artist support consider that ecosystems are populated by species that maintain the dynamic balance of that ecosystem through the exchange of resources. In our example, resources exchanged between species include money, individual benefits such as the experience of meaning and self-actualization, social benefits such as recognition and affiliation, artistry, technical know-how, and leadership.

Using the ecosystem metaphor, this report explores questions such as:

- What “species” exist in this ecosystem? (e.g., artists, space owners, producing organizations, individual philanthropists, foundation funders)
- What resources do species exchange? (e.g., money, artistry, technical know-how, fulfillment)
- Which of these exchanges are robust or weak?
- How has the ecosystem adapted to changing conditions?
- Where would investments in the system be most leveraged?

We believe that the ecosystem metaphor is a helpful tool for looking at the way elements of the artists ecosystem are interconnected. It is important to recognize, however, that the artists ecosystem is not a naturally occurring ecosystem. It is not an organic response to the physical environment of the San Francisco Bay Area. It was built by people who held beliefs, and these beliefs are reflected in the institutions they created and the interdependencies that developed between those institutions. Thus the ‘ecosystem’ we are studying is not independent of the larger ‘constructed cultural hierarchies’ of the Bay Area³. Rather, it was created through a series of policies, actions, and events that resulted in the system we see today. Understanding

² John Holden. *Cultural Ecology*. A Report commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Cultural Value Project (2015).

³ Cultural Affairs Division. *Belonging in Oakland*. (2018).



more of this history sheds light on why some groups of artists are able to find the resources they need within the current system and other groups of artists are not.

Historical Context on the Bay Area Artists Ecosystem

This long history ranges from federal policies like the establishment of the individual income tax deduction and exemption for nonprofits in 1917 to local events like the City of Oakland's most recent cultural plan in 2018. Discussing the full history of arts and culture in the Bay Area is beyond the scope of this report. Other researchers have done an excellent job compiling this history (see Marc Vogl and Kelly Varian's recent report for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation⁴). However, we will discuss a few key policies that highlight the ways in which we can tie elements of the ecosystem's design to inequitable outcomes produced today.

We have bounded this study around artists' livelihoods and the resources they access from each other and from nonprofit organizations and their funders. Not all artists work in a system defined by nonprofit institutions, or institutions at all, although some of the artists working "outside of the system" of nonprofits nevertheless seek resources connected to nonprofit institutions. Because we are focused on how artists exchange resources with each other with other species in the arts ecosystem we must also consider the limitations of the 501c3 legal model as a feature of the system.

This 501c3 model dates back to 1917 and, of course, the history of cultural institutions in this country dates back much further. As is outlined in greater detail in a helpful piece on cultural equity by CreateEquity⁵, our nation's first cultural institutions emerged after the Civil War to preserve and present the European cultural cannon for wealthy white people. This has had a lasting impact. When the tax code changed in 1917 to allow nonprofit organizations tax exempt status and to allow individuals to deduct charitable donations from their income tax, a boom in nonprofit organizations followed. Many of the Bay Area's large institutions came into existence around this change in the tax code, including the Legion of Honor, the San Francisco Opera, and the San Francisco Ballet. As Bill Ivey observed, nonprofit status became "a marker of our fine art scene."⁶

This early history continued to have an impact over the next several decades. Large Eurocentric organizations were successful in securing donations both from individuals and newly established philanthropic foundations. Of course, some

⁴ Marc Vogl and Kelly Varian. *Bay Area Arts Advocacy A Historical Overview*. A report for The Performing Arts Program of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (2019).

⁵ Clara Inés Schuhmacher, Katie Ingersoll, Fari Nzinga and Ian David Moss. *Making Sense of Cultural Equity*. CreateEquity. (2016).

⁶ Bill Ivey. *How Greed and Neglect Have Destroyed our Cultural Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (2008).



philanthropic foundations built their endowments from the fortunes of private sector business titans who made their money, in part, by exploiting cheap labor⁷, another example of the complicated history of inequity within the construction of the arts ecosystem. By the time a conversation began in earnest about the need to support a more democratic culture in the US, art forms originating in Europe already had secured the majority of philanthropic funding and had established the legitimacy and political, cultural and social value systems that would allow them to continue accessing public and private resources in a system now designed to serve them.⁸

The lasting impact of this history is enshrined in large, permanently endowed nonprofit organizations carrying the torch of “high art” in the Eurocentric tradition, while organizations representing other cultures and traditions struggle for resources when they exist at all.⁹ As Helicon Collaborative observed in their 2017 report, “Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy”,¹⁰ large cultural organizations which primarily present western European arts traditions have actually increased the share of philanthropic dollars they receive, even as the communities they serve have diversified, and even after a decade of focus on equity within philanthropy.

We share this context not to undermine the work of nonprofit organizations or their funders but because any discussion of the present day artists ecosystem must take into account the history of oppression and exclusion, and the privileging of western European art forms, that has shaped the nonprofit arts sector into what it is today. Unlike a tidal pool in a natural ecosystem, the system that characterizes the current nonprofit arts sector is not “naturally occurring” but a consequence of both virtuous and unvirtuous beliefs transformed by action into structures and policies, including damaging and racist systems of oppression.

Systems Dynamics

While the artists ecosystem differs from a naturally occurring ecosystem, adopting this metaphor allows us to study the ecosystem using the tools of Systems Dynamics. Holden and others have written about the “cultural ecology” for years, but we

⁷ Edgar Villanuev. *Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. (2018).

⁸ Clara Inés Schuhmacher, Katie Ingersoll, Fari Nzinga and Ian David Moss. *Making Sense of Cultural Equity*. CreateEquity. (2016).

⁹ By Shawn Lent, Katie Ingersoll, Michael Feldman and Talia Gibas. *Who Will Be the Next Arts Revolutionary?* CreateEquity. (2016).

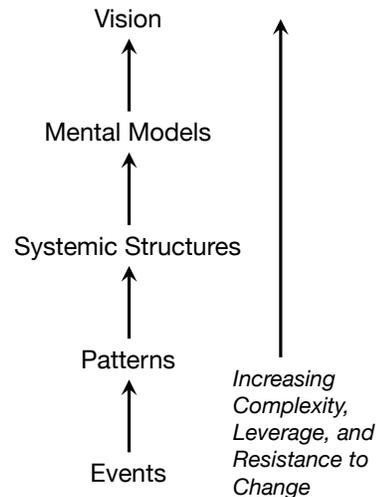
¹⁰ Helicon Collaborative. *Not Just Money*. Report with support from the Surdna Foundation. (2017). Note that the San Francisco Bay Area was identified as the only region studied that had not experienced increasing inequity in the distribution of philanthropic resources, due to a series of efforts by funders to try to achieve greater equity.



wanted to examine more specifically what can be learned by analyzing the artists ecosystem through the analytical lens of System Dynamics. (An in-depth introduction to System Dynamics can be found in Section 3.1.)

It is common for systems thinkers to describe the social world in levels of increasing complexity, with a systems perspective in the middle level.¹¹

- The simplest level is a focus on the **events** in the world, an orientation that focuses on what is happening or just happened. It's the orientation of most daily news stories.
- The next highest level of analysis is a **pattern** orientation, which aggregates datum to see trends. A pattern orientation often uses a graph to capture these behaviors over time or over a large number of events.
- A **systemic orientation** looks at the underlying structures of cause and effect that are the foundation of these patterns. This level of focus is particularly interested in feedback structures, patterns that are closed loops of cause and effect.



This is the level on which this paper functions, using an original systemic lens, that of an ecosystem.

- Higher on the continuum is an orientation that focuses on **Mental Models** or beliefs, the ideas that people hold that leads them to construct systemic structures that achieve certain goals. Many of these ideas are not explicitly held, but influence choices unconsciously. Making change at this level can lead to powerful results, but is difficult, requiring the kind of conversion of beliefs that cannot be compelled by force or threat.
- The highest level is that of **Vision**, the beliefs most deeply held and defended by a community, country or civilization. When a vision changes, everything changes, but it requires a conversion on an enormous social scale.

A systems approach assumes that beliefs and ideas influence the social world, but it does not take those beliefs and ideas as the subject of its analysis. While we have introduced beliefs in the previous section, they are not the focus of this report. A systems perspective also asserts that working on the level of structures is a leveraged investment of resources and attention, more powerful than trying to impact individual events or trends, and more possible than transforming the tacit beliefs of thousands of people or an entire sector. We take this perspective to try and uncover

¹¹ Daniel Kim. Vision Deployment Matrix: A Framework for Large-Scale Change. Accessed at <https://thesystemsthinker.com/vision-deployment-matrix-a-framework-for-large-scale-change/>



investments in the ecosystem that would allow us to change the structures that are in place now to work towards more equitable outcomes, without needing to change the beliefs of every actor in the system.

System Dynamics is interested in describing the web of interdependencies that perpetuate systems and that lead them to produce seemingly counterintuitive and unintentional results. While the artists ecosystem is often understood in egalitarian, progressive, and experimental terms, it consistently produces results at least partly to the contrary, results which many sector stakeholders reject but have so far been unable to change. This is an ideal application of Systems Dynamics – an inquiry into why a system consistently produces results it says it doesn't want.

The ecosystem metaphor used as an analytical tool in this paper does not explain everything about how artists construct livelihoods, but no tool does. We see this lens as a useful way to examine the arts sector as a system – as an arrangement of artists, producers, philanthropists, marketers, craftspeople and audiences that are so interdependent that a change in any one causes change to many or all. Moreover, the tool is helpful in countering the natural tendency to focus on one aspect on the system – the challenge to philanthropy, or the imperative to develop new audiences, for instance.

The distinction between Object and Field, from Gestalt Psychology, may be a helpful analog. The Field is everything that one could pay attention to, all the potential points of focus in the environment. The Object is the thing among all those that we choose to privilege with our attention. When we select an Object for consideration, everything else becomes Field, background. They recede from attention temporarily, until those things, in turn, become the object of study. Look at trees and the forest becomes Field. Look at the forest and the trees become Field.

Studies of nonprofit capitalization make finances the Object. Studies of artists' struggles make artists financial lives the Object. Systems studies like this one take for their Object the connections between entities in the system and the consequences of those connections. As a result, this study, and all systems studies, may appear to ignore or diminish the importance of individuals. That is not our intention at all. It's just the consequence of where we focused our attention. We were asked to study the forest, and, when we did, the individual trees became Field.

Strengths and Limitations of an Incremental Approach

We are studying a system that is flawed by design. Why, then, study this ecosystem at all? Why not simply set off in a new, more just direction? The answer from a systems point of view is clear – new results require a new system. We look at this in two ways.

First, to build a new system without first understanding the systemic mechanisms that allowed the old one to perpetuate inequity risks creating a new version of the old thing.



Second, systems build what they were designed to build. We are examining a system we know is flawed, but it is the system we currently have, and we believe this tool can help us surface the inequities that are built into the ecosystem and look at investments that can shift the system, making it a system that is built to produce more equitable outcomes.

We see two valid approaches to building a stronger, more equitable system of support for Bay Area artists. One seeks to subvert the current system rather than working within it, in order to build new, more equitable systems. We think this is vital work, although it is not the focus of this paper. The second seeks to make incremental improvements to the current system through a stronger understanding of that system's flaws. This "incrementalism approach" is one of the core theories driving the Investment Framework for Supporting Bay Area Artists suggested in this report.

Systems Thinking does not deny the toxicity or power of beliefs held individually or in culture. It chooses, rather, to focus on understanding and changing the structures that are a result of those beliefs, in its own belief that doing so is an underleveraged, powerful way to intervene.



Part 1:

Analytical Approach



Research Questions

In late 2018, arts program staff of the Kenneth Rainin Foundation asked WolfBrown to consider how to advance the Foundation's understanding of the complex systems of support for Bay Area artists, in order to inform the Rainin Foundation and perhaps other philanthropic foundations as to how they can deploy their resources in a way that makes the *system of artist support* more equitable and more sustainable.

The overarching questions driving the research were:

- Can we build a stronger conceptualization of the ecosystem in which artists sustain a creative practice, wrestling down the complexity to a manageable level?
- Where are the gaps in resources? Where are the inequities? Where does the system fail artists?
- What roles do different kinds of intermediaries play in the ecosystem?
- Can we identify leverage points where new resources will have maximum impact on the system?
- What kinds of support lead to sustained benefits to the ecosystem?
- Is there a research-based conceptual model for how foundations might work together to simultaneously support different parts of the ecosystem, so as to make the system as a whole more equitable and more sustainable?

With these questions in mind, we set out to build a stronger understanding of how Bay Area artists produce work and flourish creatively, and, specifically, to posit an *investment framework* that would allow foundation funders to make more informed decisions about where to apply resources in the future.



Methodology

Our methodological approach took the shape of a multifaceted inquiry punctuated by a series of three intensive work sessions at the Rainin Foundation office. To inform these worksessions we undertook several small research studies to better understand different features and components of the artists ecosystem:

- A field scan and review of relevant literature on artists and artist support, including interviews with thought leaders
 - Subsidiary deliverable: “Field Scan: Emerging Trends and New Models in Support for Individual Artists”
- An initial work session, “Mapping the Ecosystem” – exploring the definitional contours of the artists ecosystem
- Qualitative research into “fail points” – Interviews and focus groups exploring areas in which artists are unable to access the resources they need.
 - Subsidiary deliverable: “System Failures: Inequities, Challenges, and Blind Spots Within the Bay Area Arts Ecosystem”
- A second work session focusing on inequities and vulnerable sub-systems
- Project ethnographies – artist-researchers observed six artistic projects funded by the Rainin Foundation to see how our developing theories about the ecosystem play out in the context of actual projects
- A critical analysis of 47 Bay Area “intermediaries” – organizations and programs that support artists – and the differing roles they play in the ecosystem
 - Subsidiary deliverable: “The Role of Intermediaries in the Bay Area Arts Ecosystem”
- A final worksession to consider specific ideas for system-level funding interventions
- This final summative report: “An Investment Framework for Supporting the Artists Ecosystem”
- Critical review of “An Investment Framework for Supporting the Artists Ecosystem” by three arts sector experts
- Revisions to “An Investment Framework for Supporting the Artists Ecosystem” in response to feedback from expert reviewers

Definitional Ambiguities and Limitations

The focus of this analysis is **support for individual artists living in the San Francisco Bay Area, who derive income from their artistic practice in the nonprofit sector.** In adopting that focus, we by no means intend to downplay the vitality that non-professional artists and teachers bring to the cultural tapestry of the region, nor do we want to diminish the vital role that arts organizations fulfill in the cultural lives of Bay Area residents. These ecosystems are interrelated and support one another. Similarly, the for-profit arts, including commercial TV and film, music,



and other creative industries, intersect with the systems of artist support we have explored in this study in numerous ways. All of these together combine to form the “super-system” that might be called the “arts ecosystem of the Bay Area.” Purely for reasons of capacity, we have had to limit our inquiry to one component of the that larger system.

Within the ecosystem of support for professional artists in the nonprofit sector, we identified a number of sub-systems, which we have explored in detail. The sub-systems are defined by central resources that are exchanged between species, and shed light on the dynamics of the relationships and interactions that artists rely on to thrive *as artists*. This research prioritized subsystems defined through exchanges for space, networks, individual philanthropy, and audiences.¹²

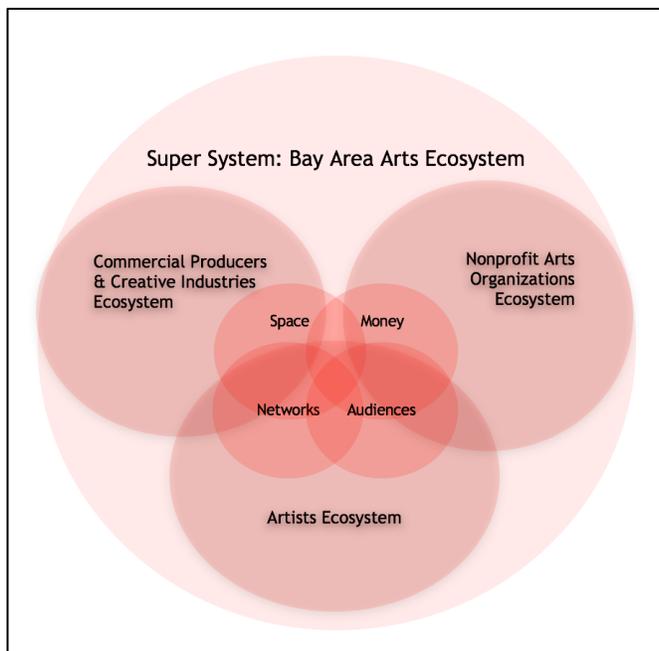


Figure 1: Systems and Subsystems within the Arts Ecosystem

Figure 1 illustrates the way in which these subsystems are nested within the artists ecosystem which, in turn, is nested within the super-system. In explaining the focus of this research, it is important to note that there are many other resources, such as housing, health care, transportation and social support that artists need to thrive *as humans*.

We are acutely aware of the struggle of artists as humans, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A good deal of excellent research has taken this as its focus. Artists struggle with the same economic challenges as workers in many other sectors, such as the need for affordable housing, healthcare, and financial security. These are macro-economic issues shaped by State and Federal policy, and they will not be solved for artists until they are also solved for all workers.

¹² The lack of discussion of formal or informal education and training may particularly stand out as a gap in our analysis and the resulting Investment Framework we have proposed. Other funders may find that an exploration of the education and training subsystem is able to surface additional highly leveraged investment opportunities.

While philanthropy has a bully pulpit from which to advocate that these challenges be solved for all workers, philanthropy, acting alone, cannot solve them. Because of this, this study does not focus on these issues - they are Field to the Object we have chosen to study.

We realize that many artists build livelihoods through both the nonprofit arts sector and the for-profit arts economy, and that many also earn money through non-artistic work. We have not made the for-profit or non-artistic aspects of artist's livelihoods a focus of this study because our remit was to suggest an Investment Framework for philanthropic funders whose current field of vision extends to supporting individual artists and nonprofit organizations that support artists.

In sum, our analysis focused on the unique set of conditions, resources, cultural narratives, obstacles and biases that affect artists who make their work in the Bay Area. A similar analysis in other cities would likely yield different results. **This being said, we imagine there are similarities from city to city in terms of the *components* of a healthy ecosystem of artist support and the kinds of resources that different “species” in the ecosystem exchange for mutual benefit.**

This work is highly exploratory and concepts will likely continue to evolve with further research. Because we were unable to explore every aspect of the artists ecosystem in detail, the Investment Framework is undoubtedly incomplete and should evolve as more is learned about the ecosystem.



The Dual Role of Foundation Funders

As a species, foundation funders are unlike other species in the artists ecosystem. Because they draw their monetary resources from outside the system (i.e., through their seed funders and investment portfolios), their monetary resources are very unlikely to be affected by anything that happens within the arts ecosystem itself. Other species (e.g., artists, producers) may experience dire consequences from monetary shortfalls, but foundations are insulated from this risk.

This autonomy gives foundations the opportunity to balance their self-interest as a species, as defined by their mission, values, and philanthropic focus, with a more altruistic concern for the long-term health of the ecosystem they choose to support.

Our analysis suggests that foundations act in two distinctly different ways in fulfilling their role as a species – they intervene in ways intended to increase the sustainability of the entire system, and they intervene in ways that support individual members of some species over others.

1. Some things foundations do steward the artists ecosystem, funding organizations and programs that serve the whole system, or some part of it. This might take the form of grants to service organizations, or investments in new or renovated spaces.

While these grants may inordinately benefit individual species or members of species, this is a collateral benefit of their primary purpose – to form a more resilient system.

Ideas for supporting the ecosystem might arise from grant applications through established programs (such as a program that supports intermediaries), but can also arise from a funder’s own diagnosis of a shortcoming in the ecosystem. The Investment Framework that follows is primarily concerned with these kinds of *systemic investments* – investments that aim to improve a structural feature of the ecosystem.

2. As grantmakers to artists and artist-run organizations, foundations apply eligibility filters and evaluation criteria to determine “fitness for funding”, – geographical filters, disciplinary filters, career stage filters, quality filters, demographic filters, etc., all of which narrow the pool of artists eligible to apply for and win funding, ensuring their survival. Not surprisingly, once one

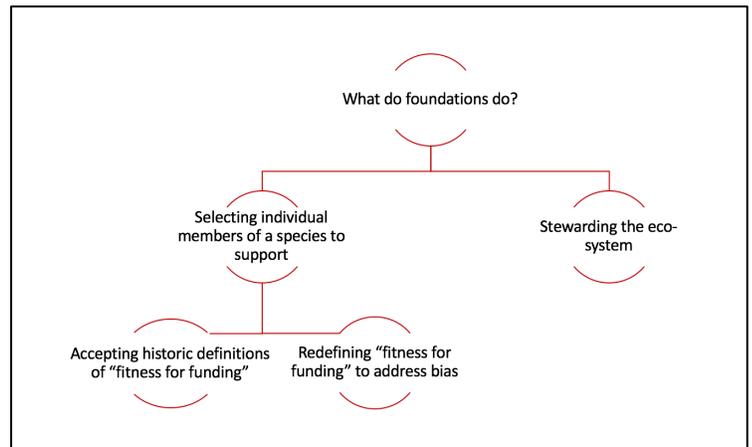


Figure 2: Two Roles for Foundations



funder has identified an arts organization as “fit for funding” by selecting them for a grant, it becomes easier for a second funder to do so. This creates a “Success to the Successful” dynamic, where resources flow towards organizations which have received them before, and away from those that have not.

Many foundations have come to recognize that this selection process privileges certain kinds of artists and organizations based on historical and social advantages, such as class, education, race and gender, and have changed their eligibility filters and award processes to reduce inequities in who can access these funds - essentially redefining what constitutes “fitness for funding” consistent with pro-equity values.

Our research exposed several opportunities for Bay Area foundations to coordinate their grant programs so as to ensure greater continuity and equity of opportunity for artists.

Our hope is that foundations will find the Investment Framework a useful starting point for discussions about how to leverage their support of artists in their dual roles as stewards and selectors.



The Critical Role of Intermediaries

Over the course of our research intermediaries have repeatedly been identified as key players in the artists ecosystem. In using the term “intermediaries” we mean organizations that intermediate in one or more exchanges between artists and some other resource. Some of these organizations identify as artist support or service organizations, but most do not.¹³

Our scan of the Bay Area arts sector produced a list of 47 organizations that act as intermediaries. We’re certain there are more. Across the cohort, we identified the following typologies of intermediaries.

Cultural Hubs. These organizations foster a sense of belonging amongst artists, often in historic neighborhoods or reflecting a shared sense of history, values, aesthetics, or language.

Service Organizations that support a Sector or a Target Group. These are often organizations that provide a wide range of services, from fiscal sponsorship to capacity building for artists working within a shared discipline. Along with operating locally, these organizations often have a regional and national presence as well. Some are powerful organizations that serve as anchors of the artistic community.

Producing Organizations that provide Services to Artists. This subset of organizations intermediate in artists’ exchanges with audiences by supporting artists in self-producing or by co-producing their work. These organizations also act as presenters, often of their own company, but they also make their space and/or presenting skills available to other artists.

Spaces that Provide Services to Artists. This subset of organizations intermediates in artists’ exchanges with audiences by providing space. This category of space providers may also support artists in co-producing their work. Many of these organizations provide more than just real estate, they serve as important meeting places for artistic communities.

Fiscal Sponsors. There are a number of organizations that serve as fiscal sponsors for individual artists or small companies that have not incorporated as 501(c)3’s. These fiscal sponsors offer a range of services from simply acting as a vehicle

¹³ We do not consider producing and presenting organizations that hire artists to be intermediaries because their exchange with artists is direct, and, therefore they are not intermediating. Beyond engaging artists for pay, many of these organizations, however, do, in fact, also act as intermediators, and thus would be included in our definition, as when a dance company takes on a mentorship program, or when a theatre company assists local artists in producing their work.



through which funds can pass to providing extensive fundraising consulting. These organizations also vary from highly specialized fiscal sponsors who may support a small group of dance artists to larger programs that support artistic projects in addition to a broad portfolio of other projects.

Civic Funders. We include civic funders because they provide services to artists outside of funding, from grant-writing workshops to information on accessing health care.

Artists Fellowships & Training Programs. This is a varied group of organizations that support artistry. The support ranges from competitive fellowships to informal training and mentoring.

Unions. Unions are also included on this list in recognition of the support that they provide to artists in their role as workers.

We observed that many of the 47 intermediary organizations play several of these roles simultaneously. A dance company, for example, serves as a co-producer with local artists, and also provides space. A community arts center serves as both a cultural hub and also offers fiscal sponsorship services. In many cases, the hybridization is a result of the organization's own sense of mission – they have concluded that leveraging their resources for the benefit of artists will help them achieve their mission. In some cases, these organizations are intimately familiar with artists' needs and strain their own resources to offer different types of support to try to address the multitude of needs as best as they can. Here hybridization is also a result of scarcity in the landscape of artist support. While it may not be the primary focus of their mission, taking on this role means that these organizations are nevertheless true “ecosystem players.”

The decentralized network of intermediaries providing services and support to artists represents a real strength in the Bay Area ecosystem. A part of that strength comes from its diversity in terms of the breadth of artists being served. Another part of that strength comes from its adaptability – the organizations' closeness to the artists they support and their ability to diagnose, respond, and adapt to emerging challenges. It is important to note that this strength doesn't come easily; intermediaries struggle to meet artists' need for support and often require high levels of philanthropic support to do so. Finally, while this multitude of intermediaries is an asset, it also creates a navigation challenge for artists.

The complex landscape of intermediaries in the Bay Area can be viewed as a naturally occurring network of organizations skilled in adapting to changes in the artist ecosystem. They have evolved to support artists in emerging challenges tied to space, audiences, money, know-how, artistry, and networks.

The main point we wish to convey here is that intermediation is a naturally occurring, if subsidized, “self-help” feature of the ecosystem, and a feature that can be stabilized and even scaled with limited resources. The investment framework that follows identifies a number of opportunities for strengthening the



species called “intermediaries” and also aims to strengthen artists’ abilities to locate and exchange resources with intermediaries.



Part 2:

An Investment Framework for Supporting Bay Area Artists



Thumbnail Guide to the Investment Framework

Investment Area 1: Systemic Investments

Improving Exchanges between Artists and Space Owners

1. Support a Hybrid Species that Holds and Manages Real Estate
2. Support Culturally-Specific Spaces
3. Fill the Role of a “Space Steward”
4. Support Live/Work Spaces for Artists

Supporting Exchanges Between Artists

5. Fund Artist-to-Artist Interactions
6. Support Late-Career Artists in Mentoring Younger Artists

Improving Exchanges between Artists and Individual Philanthropists

7. Offer Incentives to Encourage Individual Philanthropy through Fiscal Sponsors
8. Expand the “Marketplace” in which Artists Meet Individual Philanthropists

Improving Exchanges between Artists and Audiences

9. Strengthen Platforms for Connecting Artists to Audiences
10. Support Local Arts Journalism
11. Support Presenters and Producers in Introducing Audiences to More Work by Local Artists
12. Support a Fellowship Program for Performing Arts Curators
13. Invest in the Species “Creative Producer”

Investment Area 2: Improving Artists’ Access to Foundation Grants

14. Support Artists Working in Community Contexts
15. Offer Grants in Tiers Corresponding to Stages of Production
16. Fund Naturally Emerging Practices
17. Use Influence to Direct Long-term Capital to Artists’ Needs

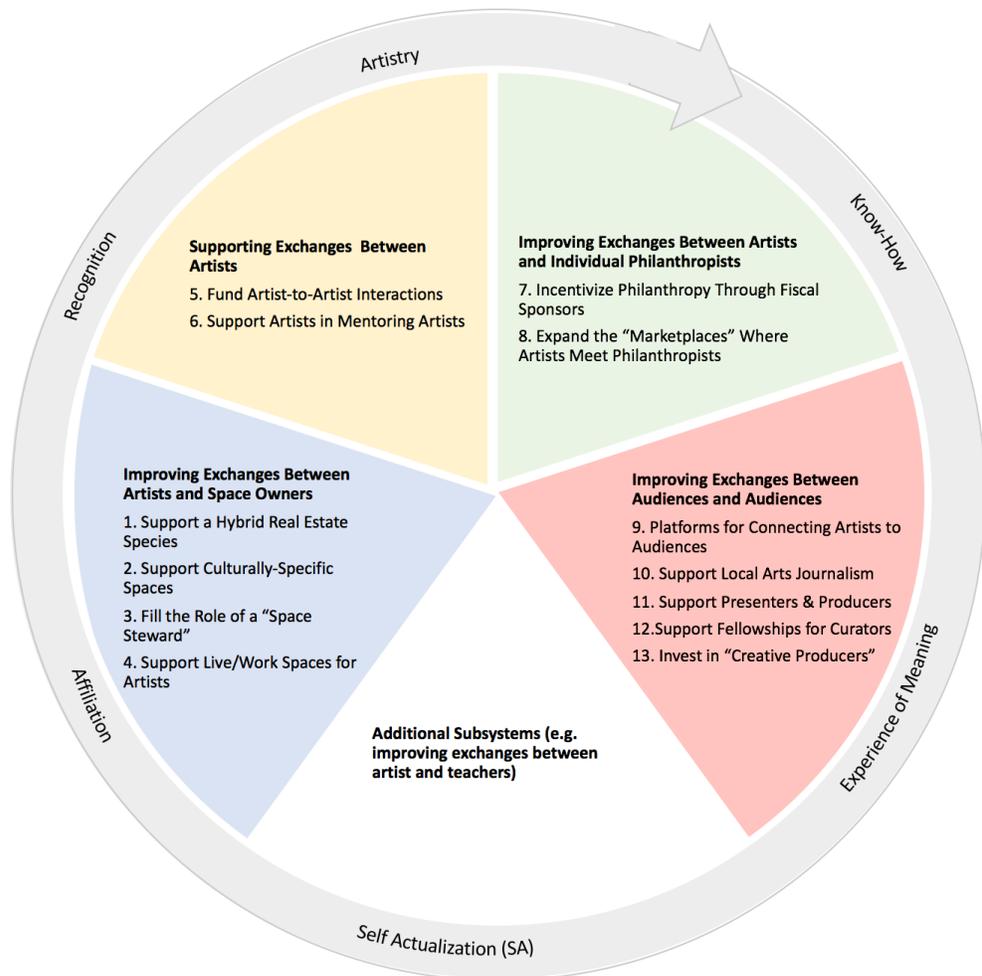


Recommended Investments

Investment Area 1: Systemic Investments

The first section of the framework outlines opportunities for funders to make “systemic investments.” These investment opportunities represent ways in which foundations can act in their unique capacity as stewards of the ecosystem to fundamentally improve exchanges involving artists and other species, with the goal of changing the *system* to make it more resilient and more equitable. Underlying these investments is the notion that the arts ecosystem is sustained through the strength of its exchanges, not through the strengths of its species, and that what is exchanged are tangible and intangible resources.¹⁴

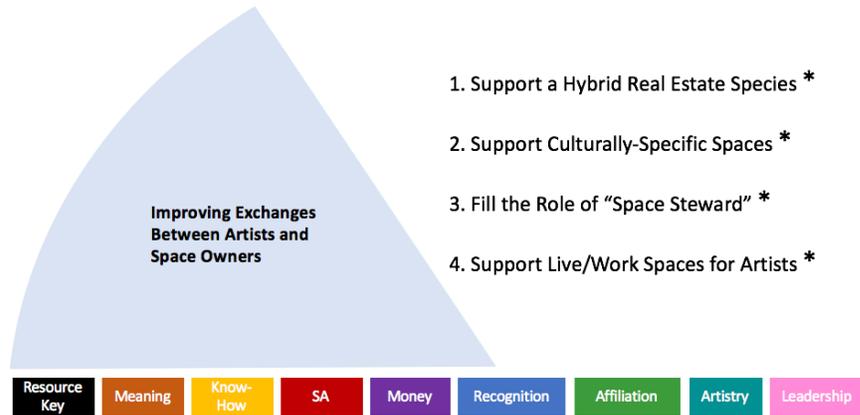
Systemic Investment Opportunities



¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of these resources see the section “Resources exchanged between species in the artists ecosystem” in Section 3.2 on page 51.



Improving Exchanges between Artists and Spaces



* In this subsystem the asset “space” is exchanged. Improved access to space supports all of the resources above

Given the high and rising cost of real estate in the San Francisco Bay Area, space for artists to create and present work is an important and often scarce resource in the artists ecosystem. The availability of space is impacted by market dynamics in the larger super-system in which the artist ecosystem is embedded. In a typical exchange for space, renters (who will later become artists or producing organizations) exchange money with market-driven owners of rehearsal or performance space

for an opportunity to receive self-actualization by being able to make and present work, and potentially money as well, but not until after a delay. This simple exchange is diagrammed in Figure 2. Some of the investment opportunities that follow focus on making this exchange smoother by improving the inventory of space. Other investment opportunities discuss ways to improve exchanges for space by replacing “market driven owners” with “access driven owners” who themselves gain self-actualization by renting their space to artists and arts organizations.

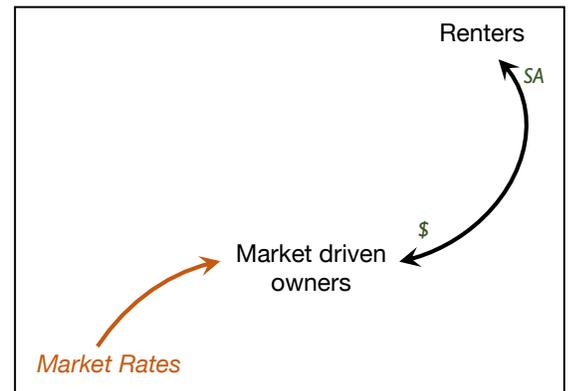


Figure 3: Exchanges for Space

1. Support a Hybrid Species that Holds and Manages Real Estate

Investment: Support a hybrid “real estate” species that owns, maintains, finances, and leases spaces to nonprofit arts organizations serving artists. This species is a hybrid of a for-profit space owner and an arts service organization. Instead of maximizing rental income, it would be motivated

to maximize access to space for artists and arts organizations. This role might be played by a community foundation, a nonprofit service organization, or even a municipal government agency.

This hybrid species could go further in identifying opportunities for transferring property ownership to artists and creating pathways for collective ownership so that artists and organizations who were once tenants could become owners.¹⁵

The Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST), a Bay Area organization seeded and supported by the Rainin Foundation, provides a model for this type of investment. CAST purchases real estate and leases it back to arts nonprofits with the goal of transferring ownership, and also works to educate nonprofit leaders about good practices in real estate acquisition and facilities management.

Ecosystem Objective: The inventory and stability of nonprofit arts spaces within the ecosystem can be improved by acquiring properties on behalf of arts organizations, providing real estate “know-how”, and offering arts organizations favorable financial terms to lease/buy-back the properties. By intervening in the process of acquiring real estate, this investment reduces the potency of the link between real-estate prices and the availability of space for artistic activity. Smaller, community-based, and culturally-specific arts organizations would have more opportunities to acquire or keep space in an escalating real estate market, thereby counteracting market forces that favor large, western-based organizations with access to philanthropy and protecting access to space amongst organizations representing historically marginalized cultures and cultural forms.

There are opportunities for this model to go even farther in stewarding the region’s inventory of cultural spaces. Our analysis also identified a need for facilities management services amongst smaller organizations. In the future, we could see an organization like CAST playing a role in tracking and supervising maintenance work on existing cultural spaces and connecting these organizations with resources to address repair and replacement needs on an ongoing basis.

Exchange Supported: This investment intervenes in the exchanges between artists, lenders, and real estate owners.

¹⁵ Angie Kim of the Center for Cultural Innovation shared this valuable suggestion with us when she provided feedback on this essay.



2. Support Culturally-Specific Spaces

Investment: Acquire, improve, and expand spaces operated by arts organizations working in culturally-specific contexts. Our analysis found that culturally specific spaces play an important role in the ecosystem but are vulnerable to the pressures of the Bay Area’s rising real estate market. The organizations that inhabit these spaces often need support with the high cost of maintaining their facilities, but lack access to wealthy donors who typically support capital campaigns. Note that these investments could be incorporated into the role of the hybrid “real estate” species described in Investment 1.

Our understanding of the current inventory of culturally-specific spaces in the San Francisco Bay Area is indebted to “Mapping Small Arts & Cultural Organizations of Color in Oakland.”¹⁶ Culturally-specific spaces include but are not limited to: Malonga Casquelourd Center, EastSide Arts Alliance, the African American Arts and Cultural Complex, La Pena, Queer Cultural Center, Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, and Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center. Organizations that don’t have their own space, like World Arts West, but serve as important cultural hubs, could be brought into this program.

Ecosystem Objective: This investment works to ensure that organizations and artists working in non-western traditions and under-represented cultural forms have equitable access to space that the ecosystem might otherwise deny them because of structural biases in the levels of philanthropic funding available to these organizations or their capacity to earn revenues. Not only does this investment work to remedy historic injustices, but securing appropriate spaces for these groups will strengthen their overall position in the ecosystem, enhance their ability to sustain networks of artists, and allow them to enhance or expand their programs.

Exchange Supported: This investment intervenes in exchanges between culturally-specific organizations and space owners, and strengthens the capacity of these organizations to own and maintain their own spaces.

¹⁶ Dao-Shah, Anh Thang & Faust, Kate. “[Mapping Small Arts & Cultural Organizations of Color in Oakland](#).” This benchmark report, commissioned by the Akonadi Foundation and the Kenneth Rainin Foundation in 2018, encourages funders to adopt intentional investment strategies to support the long-term stability of this sector.



3. Fill the Role of a “Space Steward”

Investment: Fund a “space steward” role within an existing entity -- someone whose job is to be intimately familiar with the inventory of spaces in the community and artists’ evolving space needs, who can identify gaps in the “scaffolding” of spaces available to artists and make recommendations to funders. These gaps might be defined in terms of seat count, technical capabilities, geographic location, or access to audiences. Because foundations and municipal governments are the two species best positioned to steward the ecosystem as a whole, we see the ideal investment taking the form of a partnership between these two species. Kelley Kahn’s position as Policy Director, Arts Spaces within the City of Oakland is subsidized by the Rainin Foundation and provides an example of such a partnership.

Ecosystem Objective: Our ecosystem analysis found that artists’ abilities to effectively move up the career ladder are sometimes impeded by a lack of specific types/sizes of performance venues that allow them to grow their audiences. For example, without access to a 100 to 200-seat venue, it is very challenging for an emerging musician to jump from playing clubs with 50 people to drawing an audience for a 400-seat venue. In some cases, the problem might not be lack of space, but lack of *affordable* space, or lack of space that meets ADA regulations or offers gender neutral restrooms.

Taking another example, a lack of ADA compliant venues in Oakland might force an Oakland-based artist to perform in San Francisco, adding additional challenges for their Oakland-based audience. The second example highlights the ways in which this challenge can disproportionately impact artists whose work targets under-represented communities. Funding a position that is responsible for identifying and addressing gaps in the inventory of space can result in more equitable opportunities for artists and for audiences.

Exchange Supported: Ultimately, this investment allows for foundation funders to intervene in exchanges between artists and space owners.



4. Support Live/Work Spaces for Artists

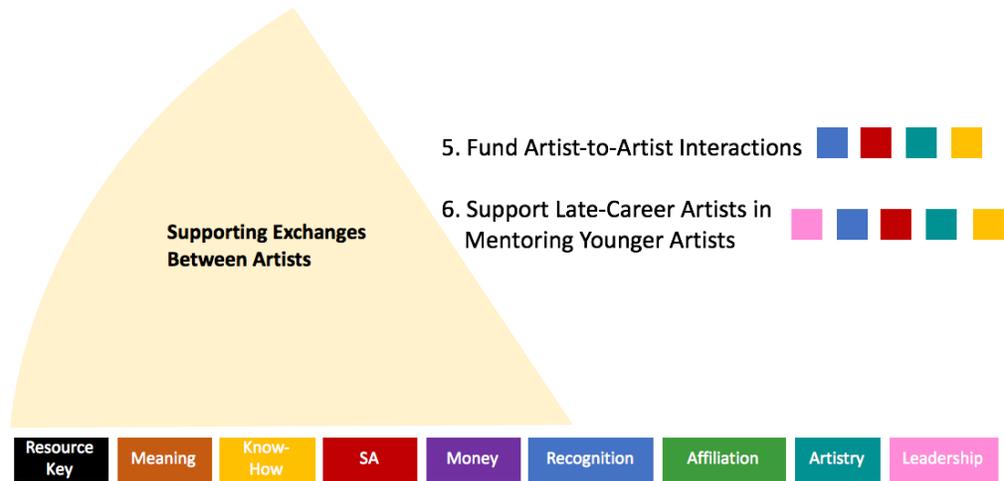
Investment: Support artist live/work spaces. This investment could be made through a hybrid real estate species like CAST expanding to acquire and lease affordable live/work spaces.

Ecosystem Objective: In a region where the cost of real estate is rising, artists' abilities to find affordable housing are impacted along with their abilities to find affordable space to work. Addressing only studio and performance spaces only works to solve half of the problem and artists will continue to be pushed out of the region because of the cost of housing. In order to combat this, investments in live/work spaces would provide artists with space to work and housing security, strengthening the species overall. Because the high cost of living disproportionately impacts low income artists or artists not supported by income from a partner or other sources, this investment counters the development of a species of artists whose diversity is limited by who can afford to be an artist in the San Francisco Bay Area. In large communities, this investment might take the form of advocacy and policy change.

Exchange Supported: This investment mitigates against the pervasive systemic forces pushing artists out of the Bay Area, or out of their artistic practice.



Supporting Exchanges Between Artists



Artists draw upon their personal and professional networks for a multitude of resources, from childcare to technical expertise, to support their creative practice. These resources and their exchange are critical to the vitality of the artists ecosystem, and many of the exchanges do not include money, occurring instead within a Community of Practice.

The investment opportunities in this section focus on strengthening the networks and Communities of Practice where these exchanges take place. We tend to think of individuals within the ecosystem as members of a particular species, and that most individuals identify most closely with other members of their own species. However, our conversations with artists led us to identify two kinds of affiliations that take place within *and* across species: artists’ professional networks and Communities of Practice. These two naturally occurring features of the ecosystem have a subtle but important distinction. Affiliations based on trust, shared values, and an interest in similar artistic practices are what Margaret Wheatley called “Communities of

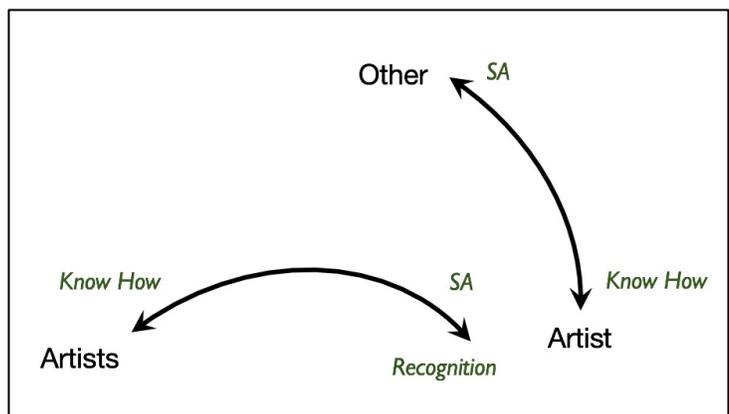


Figure 4: Exchanges in Networks and Communities of Practice



Practice,”¹⁷ (CoP). Artists’ professional networks may also include members of other species within the ecosystem, but exchanges that take place in networks are more transactional. Figure 3 provides an example of artists exchanging resources with other artists and other species.

Since artists’ networks and Communities of Practice are organic, self-organizing, and constantly evolving, they cannot be contrived. Thus, it will be difficult for foundations to directly support them. Instead, funders can look for places in the ecosystem where artists interact with other artists, and support those exchanges in the interest of developing long-term relationships between like-minded, and like-hearted, artists.

5. Fund Artist to Artist Interactions

Investment: Create incentives for organizations and artists to expand artist-to-artist interactions and exchanges, thereby expanding opportunities for artists to make choices to expand their networks.

For example, a funder could issue an RFP to arts organizations and artists inviting proposals to expand artist-to-artist interactions. The funder might receive proposals for convenings, retreats, workshops, showcase events, and more. The form of these interactions should be self-determined by artists. While the distinction can seem subtle, some RFPs may be intentionally designed to support professional networks while others may be designed to support Communities of Practice. Intermediaries may be well suited to facilitate the development of networks, for example, by creating opportunities for artists to capitalize on “the strength of weak ties”¹⁸ in exchanging resources.

Ecosystem Objective: Artists’ networks and Communities of Practice are an important feature of the ecosystem, a great source of resilience, and a remarkable illustration of the power of the ecosystem resource “affiliation.” Within their networks and Communities of Practice, artists exchange all sorts of resources between and amongst themselves – they volunteer for each other, exchange technical know-how, offer emotional support, recognition, and make referrals to external resources. Time and time again in our conversations with artists we heard that the way that work ultimately gets done, despite limited funding, is through the strength and trust of relationships with other artists and the generosity of the community. This intervention would create conditions under which

¹⁷ Wheatley, Margaret. ["Using Emergence to Take Social Innovations to Scale."](#) (2009). Retrieved 18 Apr. 2019.

¹⁸ Granovetter, Mark S. “The Strength of Weak Ties.” *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 6. (May, 1973), pp. 1360-1380.



artists can forge stronger Communities of Practice and networks, further strengthening the species.

Exchange Supported: This investment intervenes in exchanges between and amongst artists.

6. Support Late-Career Artists in Mentoring Younger Artists

Investment: Supporting late-career artists in mentoring younger artists facilitates meaningful exchanges of artistry and know-how, two ecosystem resources. While mentorship is often a valuable resource given for free, our analysis surfaced how taxing this can be on pillars of the artistic community, particularly for artists from under-represented communities. However, mentorship can be supported through fellowships or grant programs.

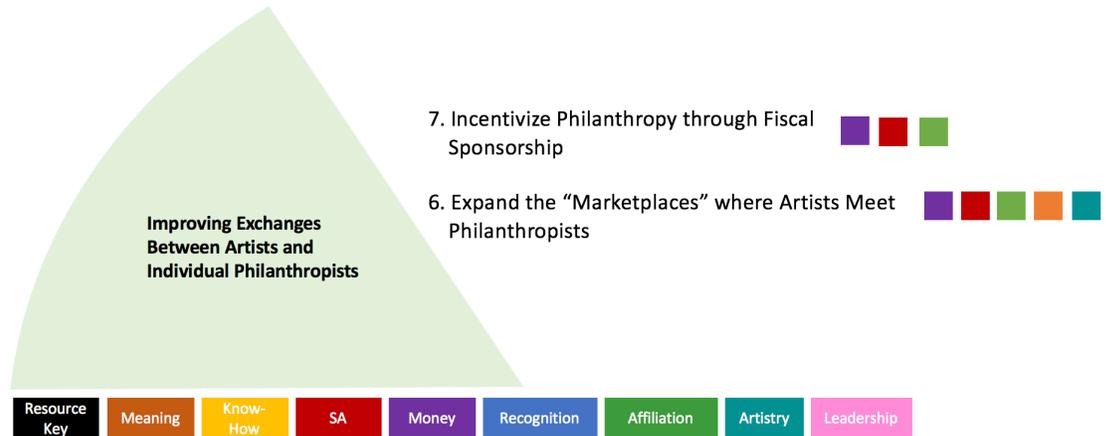
Margaret Jenkins Dance Company's CHIME program is an example of a funded mentorship program that leverages know-how between artists. Our conversations with artists highlighted that a key element of investments in mentorship is making sure the pool of mentors available represents the cultural competencies that the pool of mentees needs.

Ecosystem Objective: The artist ecosystem is a fragmented one. Many young artists struggle to gain knowledge of the complex web of artist support and services that would meet their particular needs. In interviews, artists expressed a need for support in navigating this web and for guidance in developing their career. The important role that exchanges of know-how and artistry play in strengthening the artist species was clear in our analysis and an increase in mentorship opportunities would help to facilitate these exchanges. This is also an opportunity to support under-represented artists.

Exchange Supported: This investment intervenes in exchanges of know-how between artists.



Improving Exchanges between Artists and Individual Philanthropists



While Investment Area 2 focuses on improving artists’ access to foundation grants, there are also opportunities for foundations to play a role in improving exchanges between artists and individual philanthropists. The simplest form of exchanges between individual philanthropists and artists involve philanthropists giving money to artists in exchange for philanthropists’ feelings of self-actualization. However, as Figure 4 illustrates,



Figure 5: Exchanges with Individual Philanthropists

intermediaries such as fiscal sponsors sometimes intervene in this exchange, placing themselves between individual philanthropists and artists. Fiscal sponsors may also offer services to artists such as fundraising workshops. In these situations, artists receive know-how which may increase their ability to access individual philanthropy while the fiscal sponsor receives self-actualization. The investment opportunities in this section focus on the role that intermediaries can play in widening the pool of artists who are able to access individual philanthropy and introducing individual philanthropists to artists they have not yet encountered.

7. Offer Incentives to Encourage Individual Philanthropy through Fiscal Sponsors

Investment: Offer financial incentives to fiscal sponsors to “match” individual gifts, so as to incentivize individual philanthropy through fiscal sponsors. For example, a dollar given to an artist through a fiscal sponsor might be eligible for a 10% or 15% match, yielding a “bonus” in gross income. Or, foundations could underwrite the fees charged by fiscal sponsors, so that 100% of funds raised for artists’ projects would flow



through to the project. Both of these investments could be made in tandem to benefit artists even further.

Ecosystem Objective: This investment would serve the dual purposes of catalyzing individual philanthropy (e.g., motivating artists to raise funds from individuals) whilst simultaneously strengthening the value proposition of fiscal sponsors and creating a disincentive for artists to exit fiscal sponsorship programs. This can benefit both fiscal sponsors and artists. Artists who are not incorporated as a 501c3 organization often don't have the same ability to leverage the loyalty of their audiences for money, but associating with a fiscal sponsor can help to mitigate this challenge. In addition to incentivizing individual philanthropy, if fiscal sponsor organizations play a role in connecting artists with wider pools of individual philanthropists, they can also work to mitigate inequities in the levels of individual funding received by artists from under-represented groups. If the economic incentives have the desired effects, this intervention would ultimately increase the level of support individual philanthropist provide to artists, thus increasing the availability of the resource of money in the ecosystem.

Exchange Supported: This investment supports exchanges between artists and individual philanthropists.

8. Expand the “Marketplace” in which Artists Meet Individual Philanthropists

Investment: Support one or more intermediaries in creating new “marketplaces” where artists and individual philanthropists encounter one another and exchange resources. These marketplaces could be organized as curated events, where artists might present short samples of works in development, in the hopes of attracting individual support for the further development of these works.

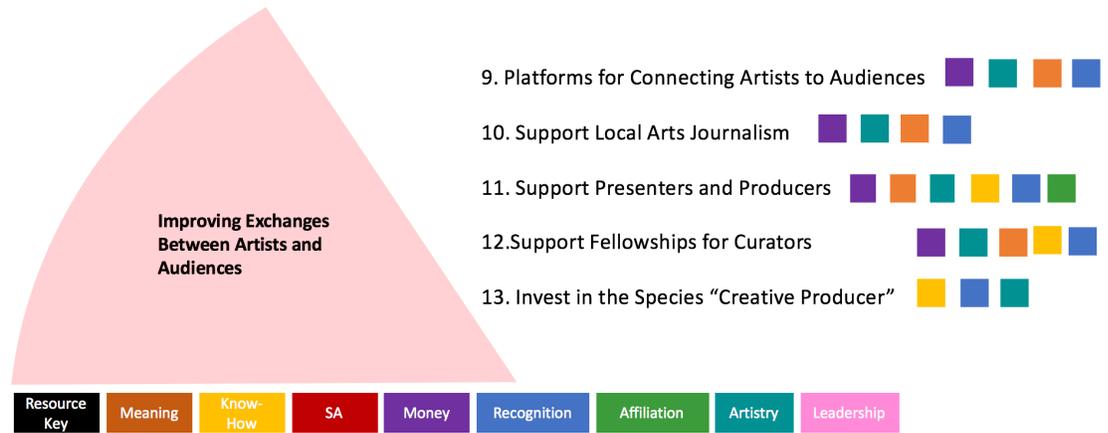
Ecosystem Objective: By “aggregating” individual philanthropists for the benefit of artists and producing showcase events and/or online crowdfunding campaigns, intermediaries can facilitate efficient exchanges between the two species. By introducing individual philanthropists to a curated program of artistic work, intermediaries have the opportunity to connect philanthropists to artists that reflect the diversity of the work occurring in the San Francisco Bay Area and to introduce them to artists they might not otherwise have encountered. In this way, the investment can work to address inequities in the levels of individual funding received by artists from under-represented groups. This intervention is also potentially high-leverage because the relationships that spin out of this marketplace could be lasting and transformative for artists, ultimately reducing dependence on foundation funding.



Exchange Supported: This investment supports exchanges between artists and individual philanthropists.



Improving Exchanges between Artists and Audiences



The final subsystem in Investment Area 1 is improving exchanges between artists and audiences. This exchange can be quite simple, as when an artist presents a work to an audience. The artist receives recognition when audiences direct their attention to them and, sometimes, money.

Those in the audience receive the experience of meaning. This simple exchange is illustrated in Figure 5. In situations where audiences follow the work of an artist over a period of time, the recognition benefits can take the form of loyalty which can be leveraged into money.

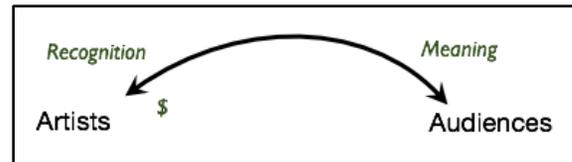


Figure 6: Exchanges Between Artists and Audiences

What is not apparent from this simple diagram is the complexity of the exchange. In order for artists to directly exchange with audiences they need extensive know-how beyond their artistic skills. They need to know where to reach audiences, how to communicate with them, where to perform and much more. When an artist is not self-producing these questions are addressed by intermediating species in the ecosystem, from presenters to agents.

The recommendations in this section focus on reducing some of the burden on artists who are self-producing and making it easier for exchanges between artists and audiences to take place.

9. Strengthen Platforms for Connecting Artists to Audiences

Investment: Support one or more intermediary organizations in aggregating audiences on behalf of individual artists. While organizations like Theatre Bay Area maintain aggregated audience lists on behalf of organizations, our analysis found less effective systems supporting

individual artists in accessing existing or potential audiences. Improving artists' capacities to forge and sustain supportive relationships with audience members could be a highly-leveraged investment, if artists gain access to new audience members and, at the same time, are freed of the time required to maintain and update mailing lists, email lists, and social media feeds. The "aggregator" would also actively prospect on behalf of artists, encouraging the public to sign up for email lists or join social media feeds corresponding to specific artists or specific aesthetic forms or "taste communities." Artists would then be able to access their audiences on-demand for marketing and crowdfunding purposes.

Ecosystem Objective: This investment would fundamentally address a structural weakness in the ecosystem – artist and audiences who never meet each other because of inefficiencies in the flow of information. While there are many "information aggregators" (e.g., online event calendars) in the Bay Area ecosystem, many artists we spoke to feel that audiences have trouble navigating the sea of information and never discover artists whose work they might love. This investment would allow artists to build and diversify their audience base, thereby providing increased access to money and recognition.

Exchange Supported: This intervention would expand exchanges between artists and audiences.

10. Support Local Arts Journalism

Investment: Provide support to diversely qualified arts writers and critics, so as to elevate the level of public discourse on the full spectrum of Bay Area artists. Our analysis identified "qualified" writers and critics as an important but endangered species in the ecosystem.

This investment could be made in a number of ways, from providing fellowships for arts writers (such as the Young Critics Program at Front Porch Arts Collective in Boston) to supporting the salaries of critics at nonprofit journalism organizations. In making this investment it will be key to consider the role that mainstream criticism has played in perpetuating inequities by overlooking artists working in non-western or non-traditional art forms and to uplift a diverse set of critics and writers who can speak to the full array of artistic work happening in the Bay Area.

Ecosystem Objective: Arts writers/critics play a number of roles in the ecosystem: 1) They can function as gatekeepers between artist and audiences, determining what is "good" art. This role has historically been problematic due to a lack of diversity among critics; 2) They can act as trusted recommenders, guiding audiences towards new work and artists that they'd otherwise not choose for themselves; and 3) They can provide context that improves audiences' experience of new and experimental



work or help audiences experiencing a style of work for the first time to have a meaningful experience. Each of these roles works to advance dialogue around the arts and thus are important to the strengthening of the ecosystem as a whole.

Exchange Supported: This investment preserves an endangered species that, in turn, supports exchanges between artists and audiences.

11. Support Presenters and Producers in Introducing Audiences to More Work by Local Artists

Investment: Provide financial incentives to presenters and producers to introduce audiences to more work by local artists. This could take the form of a competitive grant program to award funds to presenters and producers who are interested in doing this work in a range of formats and venues. Or, this might be framed as a “post-production” investment strategy to support local “tours” of artistic work that already exists. This investment could also include a participatory community selection process to help the arts community nominate exceptional work for a local tour.

Ecosystem Objective: Many venues, even nonprofit venues, are profit-driven by necessity. This can prevent producers from presenting work by local artists if they are likely to make more in ticket revenue by bringing in national or international artists. This works to limit the opportunities available for local artists to be presented in their own region’s venues. Foundations could invest in grant programs that would make it more financially viable for venues to present local artists in festival and other formats. Our analysis found that get “stuck” self-producing in the same venues for years or even decades. Opportunities to take the next step and have their work presented or co-presented by a mainstream presenter may help them to move past this sticking point and potentially grow their career to the point where they are able to book engagements in other cities opening up new markets.

Exchange Supported: This investment supports presenters and producers in intermediating between local artists and audiences. It also reduces the need [for presenters] to generate profit (money) through the exchange of art work with audiences.

12. Support a Fellowship Program for Performing Arts Curators

Investment: Provide funds for a fellowship program for performing arts curators, to cultivate local talent, develop artistic initiatives, encourage diversity, and build an appreciation for the role of curators in a healthy ecosystem. This investment could include grants for a guest curator to partner with a presenter to present a groundbreaking work, for example, or to curate a thematic festival on a topic of relevance to the community.



This would also serve to mitigate the financial risk that prevents presenters from doing this kind of work. An example of supporting curators can be found in US Artists new Berresford Prize which provides funding for cultural practitioners such as curators.

Ecosystem Objective: Curators play a pivotal role in intermediating between audiences and artists. By “curators” we mean artistic visionaries who select, organize, produce, collaborate and interpret artistic work to create meaning and value for their community. In our definition, the act of “curating” goes well beyond just choosing which artists will appear on a season schedule.

To an extent, our research suggests, the role of “curator” has been marginalized as an unnecessary middleman in the exchange between artists and audiences. Artists who self-produce, for example, must consolidate the roles of artist, producer, and curator into one individual.

There are benefits to the ecosystem, we contend, in maintaining the species called “curators.” The value they can bring to an ecosystem is especially apparent in thematic or topic-driven programs or festivals that illuminate issues or ideas of relevance to a community, creating deeply meaningful experiences for both artists and community members. When curators play this role they can introduce audiences to new artists they might not have found on their own, which, in turn, can forge lasting relationships between artists and audiences.

Exchange Supported: This investment supports exchanges between presenters and audiences by leveraging the role of curators, an endangered species in the ecosystem.

13. Invest in the Species “Creative Producer”

Investment: Invest in a new (or revitalized) species of “creative producer” – an amalgamation of several roles historically played by producers, mentors, artist managers and booking agents. This hybrid species would allow for artists to have long-term relationships with someone who plays the “career coach” and confidante role, helping them produce artistic projects, sift through opportunities, prevent financial ruin, and chart new artistic pathways. Our research found that the role of “creative producer” is increasingly common in cities like New York, but more research is needed to identify how this emerging species is supporting itself and how funders could invest in them.

Ecosystem Objective: Artists who self-produce struggle to act simultaneously in a plethora of roles – creative director, producer, booking agent, financial manager, PR agent, etc. In interviews, artists shared a need for professional help in developing their career and identifying and securing new opportunities for growth. Because they



must act in so many roles when self-producing their own work, artists often lack the countervailing voice of a producer or agent who can say “yes” or “no” to an artistic enhancement that might jeopardize the production budget. They might benefit from a relationship with someone who knows where to find technical expertise quickly, or knows who might be interested in presenting a second or third performance of the work. Investing in the species “creative producer” would strengthen the ecosystem by improving the quality of work being produced and viewed by audiences, developing artists’ audiences, and connecting artists to higher levels of resources such as money and validation.

Exchange Supported: This investment supports the creation of a hybrid species that, in turn, can catalyze exchanges between local artists and audiences.



Investment Area 2: Improving Artists' Access to Foundation Grants

This second section of the framework expands upon the list of systemic investments above by outlining investments foundations can make in their role as grantmakers to artists and arts organizations. These investment strategies focus on effectively supporting artists with an eye towards disrupting definitions of “fitness” grounded in historical inequities.

14. Support Artists Working in Community Contexts

Investment: Our analysis identified a need for more resources to be available for artists working in community contexts, who often require significant time and resources to build trust and forge community connections. These resources might be distributed by intermediaries with knowledge of the various communities in which the work is occurring. Such funding might take the form of longer-term fellowships or residencies, to allow community-based artists sufficient time to forge the relationships they need to accomplish their goals. This funding also might be community-directed instead of funder-directed.

Objective: We observe that many artists don't work inside the “supply chain” of performance-based work, instead working in community contexts where the impact of the work lies in the process itself, not a public performance. Due to the nature of their work, many of these artists don't have access to philanthropic resources or support structures that prioritize artists doing performance based work.

15. Offer Grants in Tiers Corresponding to Stages of Production

Investment: Artists work on many different timelines and need different types of funding at different stages in their creative process. An interesting analogy came up in our research – how funding is made available to filmmakers according to the three stages of film production: 1) “pre-production” or developmental grants that support artists in conceptualizing artistic projects, forging collaborations, prototyping work; 2) production support for artists to produce work for public consumption; and 3) “post-production” or touring support for existing artistic work that could be leveraged to a larger audience – which might involve supporting a network of Bay Area presenters.

Objective: Our analysis surfaced the challenges artists face receiving developmental and post-production funding. Creating clearer paths to accessing funding for each stage of the creative process will allow artists' work to develop more naturally and avoid the pressure to conform their work to a funder's guidelines and time cycle. This would allow artists to continue to iterate and present new works post-premiere, but also to ideate



and develop work without incurring the full expense of production. In sum, this investment opportunity works to better align funding opportunities to the creative process.

16. Fund Naturally Emerging Practices

Investment: Foundations, both themselves and through intermediaries, should continuously scan the ecosystem for emerging practices or “green shoots,” and then find ways to support them. This might be done by adjusting the eligibility criteria of existing grant programs to ensure that criteria are inclusive of new and emerging practices, or it might be done by creating new grant initiatives to make sure that the appropriate financial support is available to these practices.

Objective: This practice of scanning and reacting to changes in the ecosystem will help to ensure that funders remain relevant and avoid missing important changes in the environment in which they operate, like the rising number of artists who define their practice as multi-disciplinary. This investment is designed to prevent new gaps from emerging in the network of supports available to artists.

17. Use Influence to Direct Long-term Capital to Artists’ Needs

Investment: Foundation funders could leverage their influence and privileged place in the ecosystem to define and establish long-term capital funds to serve the financial needs of artists as a species. Here we are not thinking so much in terms of foundation funders actually funding these long-term needs, but rather using their leverage in the philanthropic community to cause these capital funds to be created and funded by individual philanthropists. For example, a consortium of funders could cause to be created, and, perhaps, invest seed money in, a 50-year “Bay Area Endowment for Artists.” Wealthy individuals would be recruited to contribute to the endowment, either through focused capital campaigns or planned giving programs, ultimately drawing new capital into the ecosystem. In a way, this might be seen as a diversion of philanthropy away from the ecosystem of large institutions that hold sway over wealthy donors towards the historically under-capitalized ecosystem of artists. At such time as when the endowment corpus reaches a certain threshold it would start paying out funds to artists.

This strategy could be used to address artists’ needs that are too large to be addressed by any one funder or individual organization such as: 1) universal base compensation for a select group of artists; 2) contributions to health insurance premiums; or 3) contributions to artists’ retirement accounts.

Objective: By leveraging their power to create long-term capital funds that address long-term financial needs, funders can help to catalyze sustainable



sources of funding for vulnerable artists, particularly artists from under-represented groups.



Critical Reflections and Next Steps

There is much to consider as we step back from the work. We wonder how the Investment Framework might be helpful to funders, and whether the ecosystem approach to analysis will be useful, ultimately. Keeping the equity perspective in the forefront of our thinking led us to some important insights. In hindsight we're amused at our naïveté in promising to dissect such a complex ecosystem in a few short months.

Regarding the ecosystem lens itself, readers of this report will be the ultimate arbiters of its value as an analytical tool. As researchers, we've found it useful and promising. As the essay in Section 3.1 suggests, it did succeed in making many familiar aspects of the artists ecosystem strange, at least for a moment, offering up new clarity on precisely what is being exchanged, who is doing the exchanging, and how these exchanges might be strengthened.

It also allowed us to understand artists in a new way, especially in the way that they form self-managing, essential communities of practice, communities that foundations cannot engineer, but may be able to support. The ecosystem lens led to new insights into the different ways foundations interact with artists and when these interactions are truly systemic and when they are not.

And, finally, the ecosystem lens helped us to explain how foundations operating in a paradigm of competitive grantmaking are working to use their power to take steps to disrupt the super-system forces that bias the artists system against certain kinds of artists and organizations, and move towards a more equitable distribution of resources, and how foundations, by being financially independent from the system they seek to improve, can take stewardship positions that no other species in the artists ecosystem can take.

Reflections on Equity

We structured and staffed this inquiry to ensure that issues of equity would be at the forefront of our thinking. We are deeply indebted to our equity advisor, Shalini Agrawal, and to our artist-researchers, Beatrice Thomas and Lily Kharrazi, for helping us see inequities that we otherwise wouldn't see, and for bringing focus to structural aspects of the ecosystem that marginalize artists working in non-western traditions, under-represented cultural forms, emerging aesthetic forms, and artists working in community-based contexts. Through this lens we were able to distinguish between "starved exchanges," where resources are missing or under-abundant, and exchanges with biased structures that privilege - and marginalize - certain kinds of artists.

Further, their willingness to embrace the ecosystem approach and exercise it against their insight into equity improved the ecosystem approach in an enduring way. They have made our theory better.



From an equity perspective, our takeaway observations of the artists ecosystem were¹⁹:

- *Addressing Systemic Inequities Requires Systemic Action* - While it is important to fund traditionally marginalized artists and art forms, doing so does not address the underlying systemic factors that perpetuate their historic marginality. To change a system, one must first understand the structural dynamics that perpetuate that system, and doing so requires an understanding of how systems behave. In our field, and others, there is a tendency to reference “systemic inequities” using ideas that are sadly less than systemic.
- *Continued Presence of a Western or European Bias* – There is a lack of awareness of institutionalized and systemic racism and how policies of the past persist in informing how decisions are made today and perpetuate unconscious and/or western or European bias. One example of this is the way in which “professionalism” is defined and used as a determinant of access to resources.
- *Influence of Capitalism/Individualism* – In many aspects of the artists ecosystem, competition is more highly valued than cooperation. An example of this is the winner-takes-all culture of valuing individual success over collective well-being that persists within many granting structures. This dynamic is magnified by a “success to the successful” dynamic, where artists and organizations who have “won” funding once tend to win it again, and those who have failed continue to fail.
- *Valuing Product Over Process* – With institutions focused on quantification, measurable outputs are valued more highly than essential elements of artists’ lives that are more difficult to measure, like research and personal development. We see an example of this in the focus on grants to artists that support the development of new work that *must* result in a tangible art “product.”
- *Inequitable Access to Capital* – Some funders hold all nonprofits accountable for the same metrics of financial health, despite the fact that structural elements privilege certain art forms over others. Nonprofits representing non-white cultural traditions don’t have access to the traditional white, wealthy philanthropic base, and their balance sheets, by necessity, look different from organizations that do. Another example is an application process that is heavily dependent on the written word and thus privileges certain types of educational training.

¹⁹ The reflections on equity shared in this report are shaped by Okun, Tema. “White Supremacy Culture.” 2001.



- *Uneven Distribution of Access to Power & Information* – A lack of transparency about resources within the ecosystem creates barriers to information and thus power. This lack of transparency is also a barrier to establishing trust.

We highlight these structures not to emphasize the difficulty of making change, but to support thinking about how these inequities might be mitigated through more leveraged investments.

An Evolution in Thinking about Intermediaries

Our thinking about intermediaries evolved substantially as the research unfolded. We began our study thinking of intermediaries primarily as service organizations providing support to artists, but this gave way to a much more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the many ways that organizations and individuals “intermediate” in the essential exchanges of resources between artists and other species.

The deep dive we did to better understand the landscape of intermediaries in the Bay Area left us with the general sense that intermediators, and intermediation, is not very well understood, and with additional questions:

- How well are artists able to navigate the web of existing intermediaries and find the resources they need?
- Are there types of artists who are overlooked or underserved by the network of intermediaries in their community? Are new intermediaries needed to support them?
- Are there existing intermediaries that might be supported at a higher level (or provided with a different kind of capital) in order to expand or sustain their level of service to specific groups of artists?
- Does the ecosystem have any of the much-needed “niche intermediaries” that specialize in facilitating certain exchanges?
- Are there opportunities to “hybridize” certain members of a species in order to extend their assets and capacities to more artists?

Through their investments in intermediaries, foundation funders are able to access a diverse range of artists, leverage intermediaries’ contextual knowledge of the communities they serve, and achieve scale of impact. This is a powerful argument for supporting intermediaries.

Applications of the Framework

We are aware of the challenges foundations face in coordinating their investments with other funders, and do not presume that the Investment Framework will quickly lead to actions among funders who support artists. Funders regularly re-shape their funding programs, however, and in those moments we hope that the ecosystem analysis provides helpful context on how to address the overwhelming need for capital in the artists ecosystem.



Arts funders, including the Rainin Foundation, are already implementing a number of the systemic investments described in the framework. In this sense, the communities of funders who support artists in many cities have a running start on the framework. A helpful first step for funders outside of the Bay Area would be to take stock of the existing landscape of intermediaries in their community and map existing funding programs onto the framework to identify strengths and weaknesses.

Then, the framework might be used as a facilitation tool for discussing gaps and inequities in the artist support system and long-term opportunities for coordinating resources.

Our greatest hope is that foundation funders will see opportunities to leverage their collective power and influence in the larger arts ecosystem to define the long-term capitalization needs of artists in their communities and focus philanthropic resources beyond their own grant programs to address these needs.



Part 3.

Selected Essays on the Artists Ecosystem



3.1 Making the Familiar Strange: A Primer on Ecosystem Thinking

This section offers a bit of theoretical background on ecosystem thinking, for those with an appetite for theory.

Learning from Metaphor

The notion that the arts are an ecosystem is having its mainstream moment. The late, much admired Createquity think tank summarized its work in reference to the arts ecosystem:

“We’ve invested quite a bit of time reflecting on what a healthy arts ecosystem looks like. This conception, and the gaps between that healthy arts ecosystem and the status quo, underlie all of our research and advocacy work.”²⁰

James Holden’s recent paper for Great Britain’s Arts and Humanities Research Council, “The Ecology of Culture,”²¹ speaks to the power of seeing culture as an ecology instead of an economy.

A Google search on the term “arts ecosystem” returns over 60 million references. Four years ago, when we began this line of reflection, it was 30 million.

Of course, the arts are not *really* an ecosystem. Used in this context, the term “ecosystem” is a metaphor, from the Greek meaning *to carry over or transfer*. To use a metaphor is to assert that what we know about one thing, like a rain forest or a coral reef, can be carried over to another thing, like the arts and cultural sector, even though the second thing is obviously not the first.

William J.J. Gordon famously wrote that the purpose of metaphor was to “make the familiar strange and make the strange familiar.”²² He asserted that thinking in metaphors can creatively disturb our accepted understanding of something which we know well.

²⁰ “A Healthy Arts Ecosystem.” Retrieved 5 February 2016, from <http://createquity.com/about/a-healthy-arts-ecosystem/>

²¹ Holden, John. “The Ecology of Culture.” *A Report commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Cultural Value Project. Art’s & Humanities Research Council* (2015).

²² Gordon, William JJ. *The metaphorical way of learning & knowing*. Porpoise Books, 1973.



But the arts as a field has yet to take full advantage of this disruptive creativity. To do this we must be faithful enough to the metaphor to ask how systems actually work and maintain themselves, and then carry that knowledge into the field which we are so familiar with in the interest of making that field seem strange, so to learn something new or disturb something we had assumed was obviously true.

We have been helping clients look at areas of the cultural sector through a lens shaped by the actual dynamics of real ecosystems, asking what we might learn if we could use the ecosystem metaphor to make what we know about our sector strange to us. Our knowledge of ecosystems is grounded in John Shibley's 25 years of experience working to apply the findings of System Dynamics to the challenges faced by leaders and managers.

This primer reflects our ideas in two particular areas.

In the first part we share some of what is known about how systems behave and consider what it means for a field intent on both sustainability and growth. In the second we extend the idea of mutually beneficial exchanges of resources, central to ecosystems, to the arts and culture field. And true to the promise of metaphoric learning, doing so has occasionally made the familiar seem strange to us.

We are writing not because we believe these ideas complete and definitive, but because we know that they are not. We hope that this analysis provokes a conversation that helps to refine our thinking. We also hope it may, for a moment, reveal to you a glimpse of something usefully strange about the milieu in which we all work.

Ecosystems and System Dynamics

As the name suggests, ecosystems are specialized kinds of systems,²³ and so our ideas are rooted in System Dynamics, the field developed by Jay Forrester at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the 1950s, and made popular in Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*.²⁴

System Dynamic research shows that all systems – ecosystems included – are characterized by two different kinds of arrangements which result in two very different kinds of systemic behavior. System Dynamics calls the first kind of arrangement “reinforcing structures” – typically fueled by what the field calls

²³ For the purpose of this paper we use the Merriam-Webster definition that a system is “a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole.”

²⁴ Senge, Peter M. *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. Broadway Business, 2006.



“positive feedback.” These are the kind of arrangements that lead to growth or decline, often explosive growth or decline.

Figure 1, below, illustrates Twitter’s growth in user accounts over a 27-month period starting in December 2008. See the dramatic spike at the end? That kind of explosive growth is the signature of a reinforcing structure.

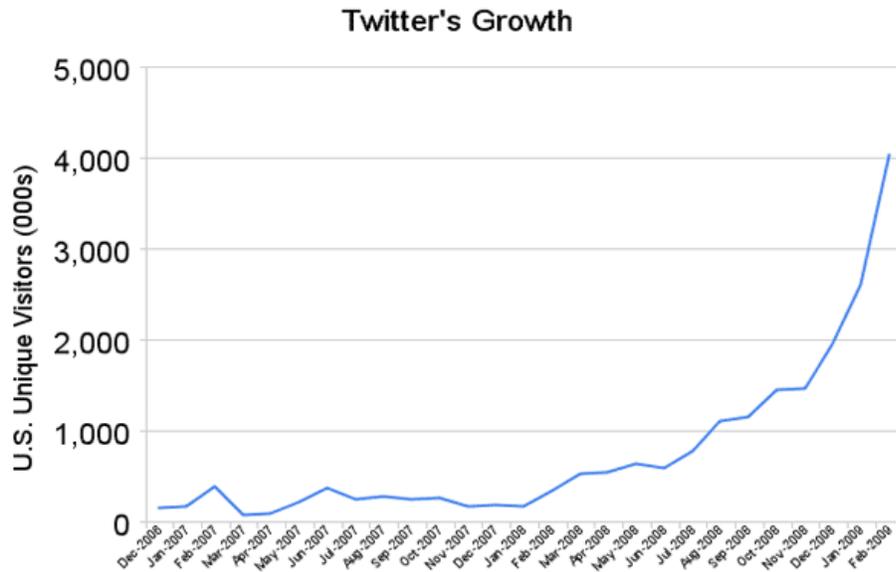


Figure 1: Twitter Accounts from December 2008 to February 2010.²⁵

We can speculate about what was happening here: as more people used Twitter, Twitter became a hot story in the media, leading to more people knowing about it and registering with Twitter, leading to a snowballing of users and media buzz. This is the kind of trend so many arts organizations want for aspects of their business model. They would love to see ticket sales, attendance, positive news coverage, and development dollars all accelerate the way that the number of Twitters users did.

Not all reinforcing structures snowball in ways we like, however. Systems can also decline in dramatic ways. To use an example from a real ecosystem, consider the following graphic illustration of the Pacific Sardine population over a 10-year period from 2005 to 2015 (Figure 2, below).

Unfortunately, this pattern has been repeated with different species of fish globally. What happens? At some point, more fish are taken than the remaining stocks can replace, and, when that happens, the decline is precipitous. It’s the Twitter chart

²⁵ “Twitter's Early Growth Dwarfed By YouTube's.” *Business Insider*. Retrieved 27 January 2016 from <http://www.businessinsider.com/chart-of-the-day-comparing-the-first-three-years-of-growth-2009-4>



upside down, but the underlying systemic structure is the same – a reinforcing structured leading to dramatic growth or, in this case, decline.

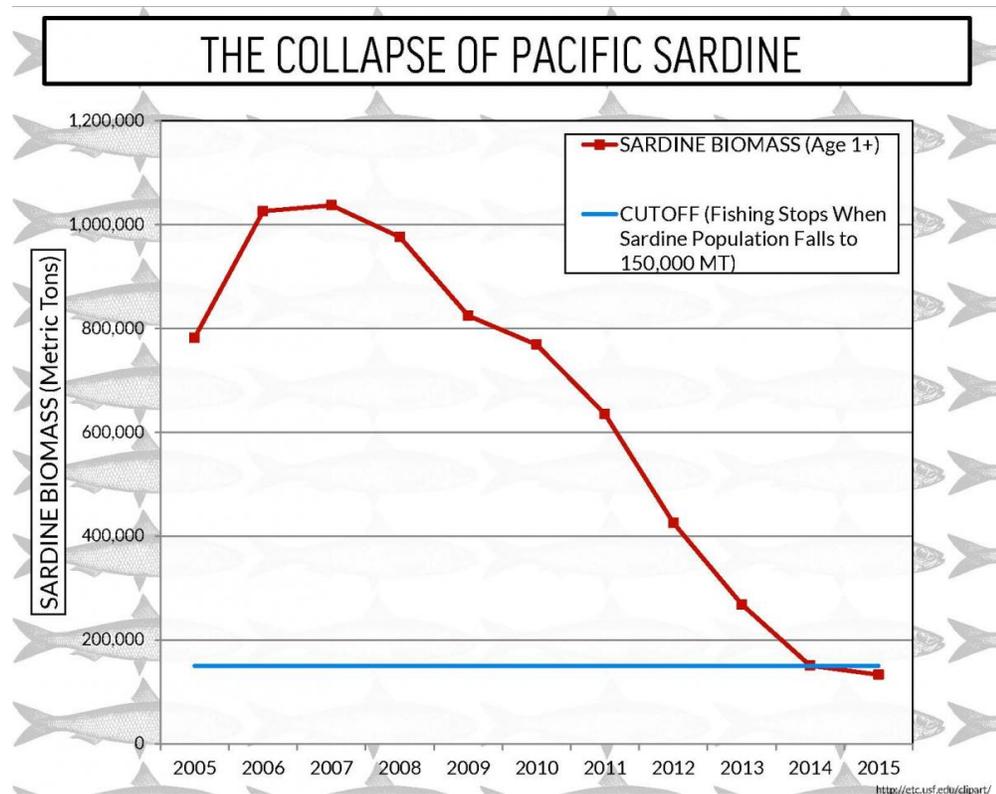


Figure 2: Collapse of the Pacific Sardine²⁶

Most of the world doesn't behave this way very often, and a good thing too, or else we'd be engulfed in constant, chaotic growth and decline. That's because most systems are not reinforcing structures, and don't exhibit reinforcing behavior. Instead, most systems are moderated by what System Dynamics calls "balancing structures," or negative feedback.

Balancing structures maintain equilibrium over time. Though elements in the system might oscillate in the short term, if you look at the long-term trend you'll find that the system sustains itself by keeping elements in balance. Balancing structures are reliable, almost boring, and because things *don't* change dramatically, we often don't take notice of them. Think of your own breathing. It is a balancing structure

²⁶ "The Modern Day Pacific Sardine Collapse: How to Prevent a Future Crisis." Retrieved 12 Feb 2016 from <http://usa.oceana.org/predators-prey/modern-day-pacific-sardine-collapse-how-stop-overfishing-and-prevent-future-crisis>



designed to maintain a sustainable level of oxygen in your blood, but most of the time you hardly notice that you are breathing at all.

A good example of how sustainable structures oscillate over time is from the natural world, in the ecosystem relationship between predator and prey. Consider the following illustration, in a grainy and historic chart from the Hudson Bay Company, showing how arctic hares and the lynx that prey on them maintain a sustainable equilibrium that is nonetheless dynamic.

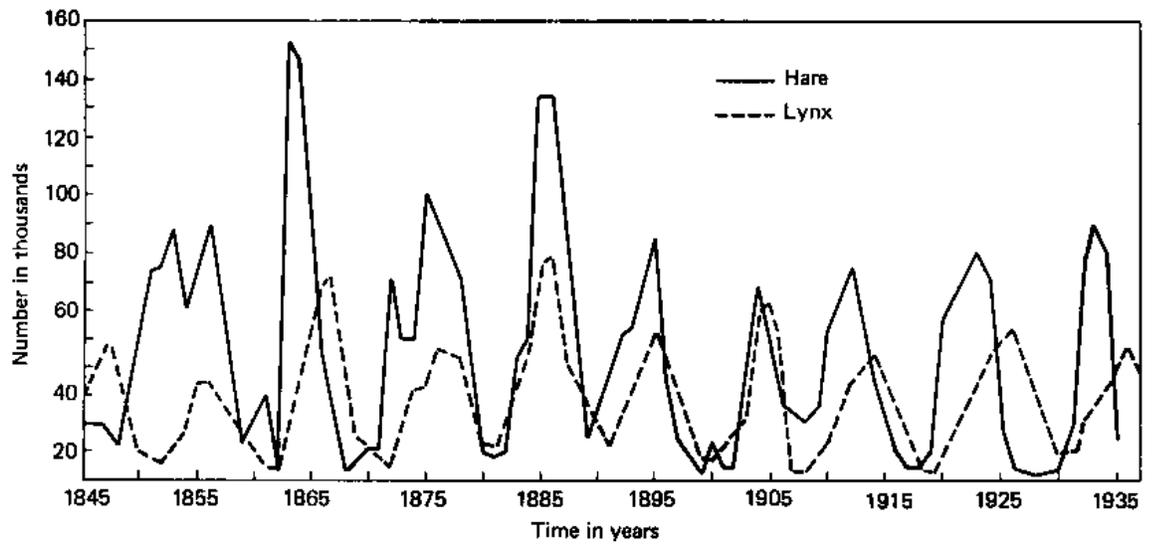


Figure 3: Changes in the abundance of the lynx and the snowshoe hare, as indicated by the number of pelts received by the Hudson's Bay Company. This is a classic case of cyclic oscillation in population density. (Redrawn from MacLulich 1937)²⁷

Each population varies from year to year, with a rise in the number of lynx pelts rising a few years after a rise in the number of hare pelts. But rise or fall, these oscillating populations could maintain themselves in equilibrium indefinitely, barring dramatic outside interference.

Sustainability = Equilibrium

It's tempting to anthropomorphize systems, to say that they "want" to be in equilibrium, but dynamic systems are not entities with intentions and desires like people. Systems build what they are intended to build, virtuous or otherwise. They don't really *want* anything, but they do behave over time as if they have a strong preference for balance, the sort of balance in which no single entity within the system grows or diminishes very dramatically over time.

²⁷"Predator-prey model". Retrieved 13 February 2016 from <http://www.azimuthproject.org/azimuth/show/Blog+-+week+309>.

In the real world of systems, eco- and otherwise, to be sustainable means to have all elements in the system in this kind of dynamic equilibrium. One does not grow one element of the ecosystem to achieve sustainability. In fact, growth of this kind is the exact opposite of sustainability, because growth is an unsustainable state for any system. What is sustainable is not growth, but equilibrium.

The only way that ecosystems “grow” is by taking over another ecosystem. For example, a grassy field left uncultivated, will, over time, revert to meadow, then scrub, and finally forest. The forest ecosystem will grow, and that forest will reflect the same sustainable ratio of trees, brush, squirrels, crows, and bobcats as the older forest. If we want more of any one thing in the ecosystem, we need more of everything in that ecosystem.

Here is our first encounter with something familiar suddenly seeming strange. As arts organizations attempt to become sustainable, most of them plan to do so by growing something – ticket sales, visitors, foundation support, individual philanthropy, audience engagement. And yet, everything we know about how systems behave – arts ecosystems included – suggests that a short-term increase in any element in a system will generate systemic pressure to return the system to the way it was before the temporary increase. More hares lead to more lynx, which leads to fewer hares. From a systems point of view, one does not grow into sustainability, and yet, many arts organizations attempt to do exactly this.

Species Persist; Individuals do Not

An arts ecosystem supports many different species of organizations (theatres, dance companies, venues, foundations, service organizations) and individuals (actors, dancers, producers, philanthropists, consultants). From an ecosystem point of view, the survival of each species matters a great deal, but the demise of any individual in a species, while eliciting sadness on the part of others in the system, has little impact on the fundamental sustainability of the ecosystem as a whole.

This is hard to swallow, partly because we live in a culture that celebrates the individual. We prefer the trees for the forest. But think about your own backyard, or a park you frequent, and you’ll see that systems rise and fall on the presence of *species*. Individual oak trees come and go, but the species “oak tree” is a constant. Remove one oak tree, and nothing much happens - wait 10 years and you’ll notice new trees springing up in the open space left by the old tree. But remove all the oak trees, and keep them away, and eventually a very different ecosystem will take over. We observed examples of this in the artists ecosystem – as in the drastically reduced population of artist managers and booking agents, or the nearly complete disappearance of professional critics in many cities.

To make the familiar strange again, consider how we mourn the loss of any individual orchestra, theater, dancer, actor, or gallery. To do so is human, and



familiar. But if the arts ecosystem truly behaves like a system, the loss of an individual won't matter much to the health of the system, and, if it does, it was not a very sustainable system to begin with. In an ecosystem, individual members of a species disappear all the time. Our metaphoric inquiry has led us to wonder if our attachment to specific trees in the arts ecosystem may have blinded us to the forest.

Ecosystems are Patterns of Resource Exchanges

Real ecosystems persist because the species in those ecosystems all benefit from, and contribute to, that ecosystem's sustainability. A web of resource exchanges keeps things going. Everything in the system contributes, and everything in the system benefits.

Here's a simple illustration of the way that feed, ducks, plants, insects, and people live in a web of resource exchanges that benefit all.

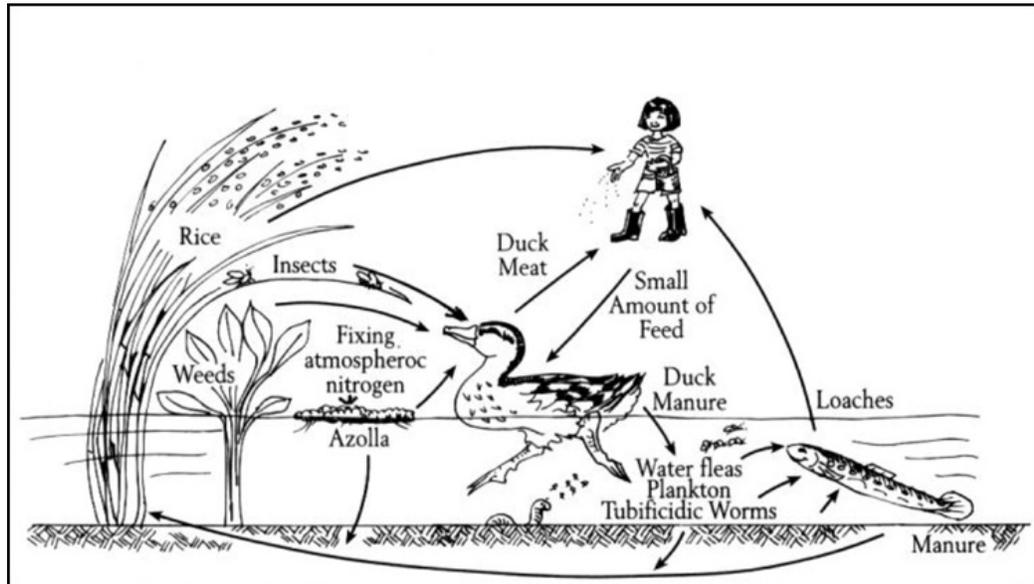


Figure 4. Material cycles of azolla + loaches + ducks + rice. The system produces rice, duck meat, duck eggs, and fish will for a small input of feed.²⁸

We know that the arts ecosystem doesn't depend on water fleas, weeds, and duck meat for its sustainability. To be true to our metaphoric task, we have to ask, what are the resources that are exchanged in the arts ecosystem? We explore this question in the next section.

²⁸ North, Carl. "Visioning County Food Production Part Six: Rural Agriculture." Retrieved 13 February 2016 from <http://tlocal.org/2010/07/>.



3.2 The species, resources, and assets that comprise the artists ecosystem

After some years of research, thought and reflection, we have a set of working hypotheses about the core elements within the artists ecosystem, a system that we postulate is sustained by the exchange of resources between species, and which depends on certain assets to facilitate those exchanges.

Species that Co-exist in the Artists Ecosystem

Types of Artists

Artists are a many-splendored species, in that there are many sub-species based on the resources they exchange with other artists and other species.

- Teachers (who convey artistry and technical knowledge)
- Generative artists who create work, but do not participate in its performance (e.g., sculptors, playwrights, production designers, film/media artists)
- Self-producing generative artists (e.g., choreographers, directors who conceive and mount their own work)
- Artists-for-hire who are engaged to bring other artists' work to fruition (e.g., actors, dancers)
- Community-based artists, who use their artistry to make a positive social change in their community
- Culture-Bearers – artists who carry and diffuse cultural values, traditions and traits between societies
- Artistic directors and curators – who select and create artistic programs, drawing from scholarship and/or a personal vision

A further discussion of artists as a species may be found in Part 3.3, below.

Other Species that Interact with Artists

- Producing organizations (e.g., companies, collectives)
- Presenters and galleries (organizations who hire and present artists to the public)
- Space/venue owners
- Training/teaching organizations (schools, university programs)
- Audiences
- Community members (besides Audiences) whom artists aim to serve



- Foundation funders
- Individual philanthropists– those who donate to artistic projects (often also Audiences)
- Volunteers (e.g., board members, docents)
- Service and support organizations (“intermediaries”)
- Technicians and designers who collaborate with artists
- Critics and media organizations
- Coaches, agents, managers
- Administrators
- Unions
- Consultants

Resources exchanged between species in the artists ecosystem

In the artists ecosystem, species exchange a wide range of both monetary and non-monetary resources.

Financial Resources

Let’s start with *money*. It’s obvious that money moves around the ecosystem and plays a critical role in sustaining it. Money pays for performers, venues, instruction, technical support, programming, and more, though in some cases some of those things are provided without money.

In many ways, the field talks as if money is the *primary* resource that sustains the artists ecosystem. In casual conversation, to speak of “resources” is to speak of money, and when we began our work, it was the first resource we identified.

But money does not help to explain all the activity in the arts ecosystem where money plays no apparent role. For example, how can we explain the work of artists who provide volunteer labor to other artists, or the legitimacy that foundations convey to artists when they make a grant? In fact, exchanges of non-monetary resources are a critically important feature of the artists ecosystem, and contribute a great deal to its stability and persistence.

Beyond monetary resources, we have identified seven other resources or “currencies” that seem significant in sustaining the arts ecosystem.

Resources in Practice: Artistry, Technical Know-how, and Leadership

Certain kinds of non-monetary resources are gained, and exchanged, through one’s practice as a member of a species. *Artistry*, *technical know-how*, and *leadership* are abundantly exchanged and highly sought-after resources.



Artistry refers to the aesthetic potency of an artist's work, both as a creator and a teacher. Our current understanding of artistry is a combination of three things: 1) a person's natural talent; 2) the degree to which they have cultivated and developed that talent through training or scholarship; and 3) the amount of cultural, aesthetic, and technical knowledge they have about their chosen field of artistic practice.

Technical know-how encompasses knowledge of the non-artistic aspects of an artists practice, such as marketing, fundraising, technical production, and managing a non-profit organization. Artists who are granted funds to self-produce a performance piece, for example, must have a great deal of technical know-how in addition to their artistry.

Leadership is the capacity to catalyze and coordinate the system in the interest of the art form, or, in the language of ecosystems, to arrange for the exchange of resources, monetary or otherwise, that enables the system to sustain itself. For example, when a producer brings together financial resources, performers, and an audience to create a performance event, this is an exercise of leadership. Many people besides those in paid leadership roles do this, including volunteer board members. Like artistry, leadership involves both natural and cultivated attributes, such as knowledge of management and financial principles.

Individual Fulfillment Benefits

Individual benefits are the most private of the resources people derive from participating in the ecosystem, and are about an individual's personal experience of fulfillment.

We believe there are two primary kinds individual fulfillment. The first is the unique impact of the artistic work as experienced by the individual. We call this *the experience of meaning*. We've all experienced this when witnessing a performance, or being drawn into contemplation of an artistic object, whether a photograph, painting, sculpture or building. Emily Dickenson characterized the intrinsic impact of poetry this way: "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry."

If someone says, "Hearing the music, or singing the music, lifts me up and makes me feel good inside," they are referring to an experience of meaning. When an audience member buys a ticket, they usually do so, in part, in the hope of exchanging the resource *money* to have this type of experience.

The second type of fulfillment comes when the person is able to be what they most aspire to be; when an actor gets to act, or when a philanthropist financially supports an artist she loves, or when someone in a leadership role gets to effectively exercise leadership. We call this *the experience of self-actualization* (with a grateful nod to



Abraham Maslow)²⁹ and it happens when there is a congruence between the role someone aspires to play in the ecosystem, and the role they actually play.

An aspiring costume designer says to herself, “I always wanted to design costumes and see actors wear them on stage, and now I do,” they are referring to this experience of self-actualization. Similarly, an individual philanthropist experiences self-actualization when she supports a project by an artist whose work she admires.

Basically, the experience of self-actualization confirms that someone is who they want and hope to be. We suspect many people who perform without compensation do so because they seek this experience of self-actualization, and that having their identity as an artist confirmed is more sustaining for them than withholding their artistry in lieu of payment.

Social Benefits

Unlike individual fulfillment, social benefits are a consequence of people acting together – a social phenomenon. We see two kinds of social benefits being exchanged within the artists ecosystem.

The first benefit accrues to individuals but comes from a group: individual recognition, status, and reputation. We call these *recognition benefits*. These are prized resources, especially in artistic fields that focus on individuals, like theater or visual arts.

For example, the number of people following an artist through social media is one way to measure the degree to which this artist experiences recognition benefits. If someone says, “I love it when we get reviewed positively by the local papers,” or appreciates receiving special treatment because of their fame, they are enjoying this recognition benefit.

Some social benefits accrue to individuals because of their feeling of belonging to a group. We call these *affiliation benefits*. These are the feelings of affection and affiliation that develop between and amongst members of a group – the feeling of belonging to something – or being accepted as a member – along with other people. If someone says, “The orchestra is like my second family,” they’re referring to this affiliation benefit.

We speculate that the desire for affiliation benefits is another reason why people participate in the artists ecosystem as performers without compensation, especially in situations where participation in the arts deepens an affiliation they already feel, as when members of a church commit to being in the choir, or when performing

²⁹ Maslow, Abraham Harold. "A theory of human motivation." *Psychological review* 50.4 (1943): 370.



voluntarily with a peer artist generates another valued resource such as the experience of self-actualization.

Assets in the Artists Ecosystem

Having identified the resources above, it became obvious to us that there are critical elements of the artists ecosystem without which the ecosystem cannot function, but which are not exchanged like other resources such as money or recognition. These elements are called assets. Unlike resources, assets are stepping stones used to facilitate exchanges between different species.

Physical Assets, such as venues, equipment, and software are one important class of assets. Tessitura, the ticketing system so critical to facilitating the exchange of money for individual fulfillment, does not itself provide either. Carnegie Hall contributes nothing to the ecosystem when it is dark. It is only when it is animated by artistry that it becomes an active element in sustaining the ecosystem. Without sufficient physical assets, an ecosystem can be severely diminished, but will still survive in some form.

Finally, *Artistic Assets* capture and preserve artistic knowledge, but remain inert elements of the ecosystem until they are brought to life. Consider the score of a concerto or a script, or a choreography. Like venues, they contribute nothing to the sustainability of the ecosystem until they become a way to facilitate a vital exchange between species in the ecosystem. Many artists aspire to create enduring artistic assets. In reality, we've discovered, the artists ecosystem tends to produce a large volume of short-lived artistic assets.

Ecosystem Thinking in Application

It's important to remember that the artists sector is *not* an ecosystem: the ecosystem idea is a metaphor, and our point is to use the metaphor the way one might use a pair of glasses designed to heighten or reduce certain colors. It does not show the world as it is, but it does reveal things about that world that are not obvious otherwise, and which are useful to see. The point is to see what the metaphor enables us to see, but then step outside the metaphor – take the glasses off – to assess what we've discovered and let it shape the actions we take.

The payoff of ecosystem thinking is the ability to identify “leverage points.” In the study and practice of systems analysis, leverage points are “points of power” – places where a small amount of resource can produce a disproportionately large benefit or change to the system – more bang for the buck, so to speak. Points of leverage are sought after due to the spillover benefits to a wider spectrum of players (both intended and unintended), as well as the potential to strengthen adjacent sub-systems.



Examples of leverage in the artists ecosystem include:

- Matching funds that stimulate additional philanthropy from individuals
- Mentorships that leverage the artistry and know-how of late-career artists to ensure that their knowledge and experience continues to enrich the ecosystem
- Teacher training that has spillover benefits to students for years to come
- A touring network that extends the reach of many artists' work

In reality, leverage is often difficult to find and nearly impossible to quantify. But many funders have an intuitive sense of leverage and a strong instinct to find it, in order to make the most of their precious resources.

In sum, we think the ecosystem metaphor may be useful in helping the field gain a deeper understanding of how artists make work and thrive in the Bay Area. Its value lies in its potential to make the familiar strange. As we go deeper into the analysis, we are also likely to discover some of the ways that the metaphor is deficient in describing the system.



3.3 Artists: Chameleons in a Shifting Landscape

Looking at artists through the ecosystem lens, we see a highly-varied species notable for its ability to adapt to changing conditions. In reality, it's a stretch to think of "artists" as a unified species at all, given their extraordinary diversity in terms of the aesthetic forms, backgrounds, nationalities, cultural traditions, community contexts, and creative impulses that shape their artistic practice. Artists also differ in terms of their level of formal training and experience, and vary according to their aspirations for earning a living as an artist.

Nonetheless, at a fundamental level all artists are united in their quest to exercise their unique creative voice to elevate and share their artistry in exchange for other resources.

During the course of the study we met with numerous artists and have come to think of them in terms of the resources they exchange with other artists and other species in the ecosystem. For example:

- Artists who teach exchange artistry and know-how with other artists for money and self-actualization
- "Generative" artists create new work, thereby providing artistry (i.e., a creative work) to producing organizations in exchange for money and self-actualization
- "Self-producing generative artists" create new work and produce it themselves; in producing their own work they might engage in numerous exchanges at once (e.g., exchanging artistry for foundation funding, exchanging money with fiscal sponsors, exchanging money for space, exchanging artistry with other artists in exchange for self-actualization or money, if they are paid)
- Community-based artists exchange their artistry and know-how for individual fulfillment, self-actualization, and sometimes money, to make a positive social change in their community
- Culture-Bearers exchange artistry, know-how, and cultural memory to other artists and communities, in exchange for individual fulfillment, self-actualization, and perhaps money or recognition benefits

There are many other variants of artists. In fact, the research suggests that a critical feature of the ecosystem is the ability of artists, as a species, to adapt to the challenging conditions in which they find themselves.



We observed artists stepping into formal and informal mentoring roles, artists serving as conduits to technical expertise for other artists, artists pooling their resources through shared services models, artists creatively sharing spaces, artists who opportunistically step into curatorial roles, artists who provide child care for other artists so they can work, and myriad other adaptations.

Because many artists cannot find regular employment, they often lack the kinds of institutional affiliations that other species enjoy. This gives rise to another form of adaptation in terms of the skill and facility with which artists forge affiliations – affiliations with other artists and members of other species (i.e., “networks”), affiliations with cultural hubs, artist spaces, unions, etc. For their artistic practice to survive and flourish, most artists must continuously weave together myriad relationships. The availability and suitability of these relationships, which, for the most part, involve exchanges of non-monetary resources, are crucial sources of resilience in the ecosystem.

The larger picture we see here is a species characterized by a high degree of fungibility with respect to the resources they harbor. When motivated, they can quickly convert one resource into another resource, as when an artist converts artistry into volunteer labor for another artist. This is one example of a breakdown in our biological metaphor. Unlike most species in real bio-systems, artists exchange resources with themselves. This is not without precedent in the natural world (e.g., animals that hunt in packs), but nevertheless serves to remind us of the limitations of our metaphor.

Another example of adaptation is when artists act as audience members for other artists, a common occurrence and one that our research suggests is highly leveraged in terms of the potential gain for both parties. In attending each other’s programs they exchange a complex web of non-monetary resources – recognition benefits are exchanged for artistry and know-how, etc.

It is tempting to make biological analogies. In the biosphere, for example, there are animal species that can lose a limb and fully recover. There are species that hibernate for long periods when resources are scarce. There are species that can avoid danger by rapidly changing the color of their skin. There are fish that can crawl out of the water and breathe air. There are birds that can swim. Metaphorically-speaking, artists do all of this, and more.

While individual members of some species (e.g., service organizations, foundation funders) must fix definitions of “artist” in order to rule in, or rule out, who they serve, or who is eligible for a grant, from an ecosystem perspective there is little use in fixing a definition of “artist.” In fact, it would be counterproductive. We cannot reach a higher understanding of the artists ecosystem by limiting our view to certain kinds of artists doing certain types of work in certain types of conditions.

This is not to diminish the exclusionary effects of definitional filters on who is an “artist,” or to diminish the importance of professional artists, who were the focus of our research.



The ecosystem itself does not privilege one kind of artist over another – it is merely the machinery of exchanges between species, neither bad nor good. But different species in the ecosystem – audiences, critics, producers and presenters, individual philanthropists, space owners, training programs, and foundation funders – behave in ways that advantage certain artists over others. These behaviors, Systems Dynamics tells us, are shaped by reinforcing structures that can serve to perpetuate inequities. The result is that some artists are excluded from opportunities that others can access.

Some of this exclusion is a necessary part of the competitive workings of an ecosystem in which resources are limited. Not everyone can “win.” But some of this exclusion is also the result of structural bias. Over many years, these biases have become codified, normalized and institutionalized to the point that they are very difficult to see, even for some of those who are deeply familiar with the ecosystem. Nevertheless they persist, and many of the artists we interviewed are on the receiving end of these biases, and are intimately familiar with them.

Addressing structural inequities is important because diversity is a source of resilience in the artists ecosystem. Reducing structural biases that prevent certain kinds of artists from accessing resources will help to ensure a more diverse pool of practicing artists.

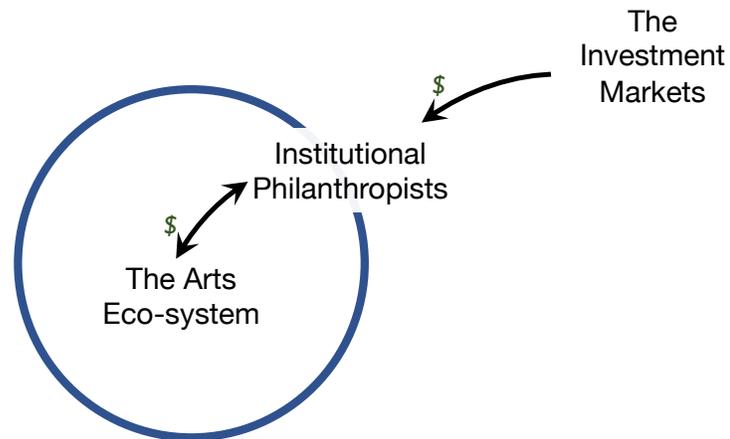
Our investment framework intentionally holds open the definition of “artist,” and specifically aims to countervail sources of structural bias in the ecosystem.



3.4 The Dual Roles of Philanthropic Foundations

The Investment Framework in Part 2 outlined a subset of funding opportunities that strengthen the ecosystem as a whole and a subset that directly support artists as a species through grantmaking. This distinction was driven by our analysis of the foundation species' unique qualities. The section that follows uses the lens of resource exchange to explain the structural roots that allow foundations play these two pivotal roles within the ecosystem.

What sets foundations apart from other species in the arts ecosystem is that foundations do not depend on the arts ecosystem itself for one important resource, money. Other species in the ecosystem need to exchange for money from within the system. Foundations do not. Their money comes from outside the arts ecosystem, usually from investments and their founders. Because of this, the flow of the resource “money” to foundations is very unlikely to be affected by anything that happens within the arts ecosystem itself.



So, while foundations certainly need to be concerned about money, unlike other species in the arts ecosystem, they do not need to be concerned that anything they do within the arts ecosystem will have an adverse financial effect on them. This financial autonomy frees foundations from the competition for money that characterizes other species in the arts ecosystem. This financial autonomy also means that there is a limited feedback loop between foundations and the rest of the ecosystem. Because foundations' resources won't be adversely affected by their actions in the ecosystem, foundations may not know when their actions are harmful to the ecosystem. This is a position of both great power and great responsibility.

This autonomy, and the power that comes with it, also gives foundations the opportunity to balance their self-interest as a species with a more altruistic concern for the long-term health of the arts ecosystem as a whole. Foundations still need to function consistently with their mission to obtain self-actualization, and foundations strive for recognition like all species. However, their unique financial situation means

that foundations can also effectively act “selflessly” as stewards for the whole arts ecosystem.

As a consequence, two different strategies can, and often simultaneously do, shape foundations’ participation in the arts ecosystem. The first is acting as a steward for the entire ecosystem and the second is grantmaking to artists and arts organizations (i.e., individual members of species). Increasingly, funders make grants to artists in ways that disrupt problematic ideas about “fitness for funding”, thus defining new criteria for fitness. Definitions of “fitness for funding” that foundations communicate by defining the criteria for who is eligible to receive or apply for funding may ripple throughout the ecosystem and be adapted by other species as indicators of artists’ value. This underscores the need to consider both the intended and unintended consequences of this position.

Stewarding the Ecosystem as a Whole

There are both risks and rewards for foundations who act on their unique ability to steward the ecosystem as a whole. Actions rooted in a systemic point of view can seem nonsensical or even cruel without an understanding of the context that informs those actions, a concern for public-minded organizations like foundations.

A systemic analysis of the arts ecosystem leads one to naturally ask, with neither mercy nor malice, if all examples of a particular species are worth preserving, particularly when individuals in that species prove repeatedly that they cannot survive without extraordinary interventions. Even voicing that question opens a funder up to the possibility of grave criticism. This risk is highlighted by the fact that one of the main resources foundations receive from the arts ecosystem is recognition. Funding high profile artists or organizations, or areas that are enjoying popularity at any given moment, is a surer, safer road to that recognition.

Despite these risks, we see tremendous opportunity to create a stronger, more equitable, and more resilient ecosystem when we consider what it would look like for institutional philanthropy to take *collective responsibility* for their unique stewardship role, to plan and act like a species instead of a collection of autonomous entities.

If foundations coordinated funding strategies across institutions to consider the entire ecosystem it would mitigate the risk that foundations’ independent funding strategies could allow one species or work process in the ecosystem to become under-resourced in comparison to the rest. By working to collectively steward the ecosystem foundations could work to address under abundant resources or inefficiencies in the ways that resources are exchanged at a level that no one funder could accomplish alone.

We can also consider the value that could be derived by foundations collectively funding research into the system. While foundations routinely fund research based on their own interests. The scope of these efforts is limited by the resources



available in each institution. One wonders if there are things that institutional philanthropy as a species needs to know to successfully steward the ecosystem, but which cannot be learned with projects limited by the research funds from one foundation.

Our analysis of the ways in which foundations can steward the ecosystem as a whole surfaced four approaches. These approaches are discussed in detail in the section that follows.

Four Approaches to Stewarding the Entire System

As we have discussed, foundations' economic autonomy from the arts ecosystem enables them to steward the entire system in a way no other species can afford to do. But what can foundations do to steward the health of the entire ecosystem?

1. **Focus on exchanges.** The arts ecosystem is sustained through the strength of its exchanges, not through the strengths of its species. Grant programs usually focus on funding the species that do the exchanging, with grants to artists or those who bring artists' work to the public.

How could foundations use the resources they offer the ecosystem – money and recognition – to change the space *between* species and make that space more conducive to exchanges?

This approach is exemplified by several of the investment opportunities shared in Part 2. Supporting artist to artist interactions to strengthen networks and communities of practice improves exchanges of know-how and artistry. Similarly, supporting platforms for connecting artists to audiences allows them to more easily and more regularly exchange money, validation, and the experience of meaning.

2. **Focus on the process of bringing work to the public.** To borrow an idea from manufacturing, every performance or presentation is a result of a supply chain that begins with a work of art that an artist and/or the community creates, and ends, usually, in a performance or presentation of that art. Resources are exchanged at each point in the chain, and the general movement is from what the artist creates to a product featuring that art that an audience can experience in anticipation of the experience of meaning.



Figure 1: A simple arts ecosystem supply chain, where artists offer work to a producing organization, who in turn adds value to that work to create an audience offering.

For example, a playwright finishes a script. They shop it and find a producing organization to produce it as a play. The producing organization coordinates the contributions of lighting artists, actors, directors, set designers, carpenters, marketing professionals, each of whom add value to the script, exchanging their artistry for money and/or other resources. The finished product is then offered to audiences.

Funds that support the supply chain, and the series of exchanges that make that supply chain viable, strengthen the arts ecosystem by facilitating the final audience/performance exchange of money for the experience of meaning, and by creating value for all of the species that touched the work along its way there.

It's obvious that different types of artistic work require different work processes and sets of exchanges to develop that work to the point where it is ready to exchange with an audience. The example of a play, above, may be different from the work process for piece of choreography that is self-produced.

From this point of view, funding the arts ecosystem strategically would require two things.

- First, a foundation would need to understand the work process associated with an art form, the way the raw artwork becomes something of potential interest to an audience.
- Second, they would need to determine where the leverage lay in that work process – the point in the process where funding will have the greatest impact for good for the entire arts ecosystem.

Whatever the art form, it's important that a funding approach fits its unique production process. The framework in Part 2 outlines several investments that are leveraged by supporting species who play critical roles in supply chains. For example, funding creative producers who can guide artists through the supply chain more efficiently and funding curators who deepen and multiply exchanges between artists and audiences.

3. **Develop hybrid species.** In the investment framework, we discussed CAST as an example of a nonprofit real estate holding company. With CAST, the Rainin Foundation's funding essentially created a new hybrid species in the arts ecosystem – a landlord driven by providing access as well as generating profit. This is a powerful example of how institutional funding, strategically applied, can engineer enduring changes to the arts ecosystem.

In addition, the development of hybrid species represents an important step in the pursuit of an arts ecosystem that can more powerfully advocate for social justice. Artists explicitly pursuing justice resemble, at times, political



activists and community organizers, species that could belong in other ecosystems entirely. It makes sense to us that producers, presenters, and philanthropists more attuned to traditional “make and show” artists would find it a challenge to design mutually beneficial exchanges with these “hybrid” artists. Nurturing equally hybrid partners for them, such as community organizations that can provide needed supports such as space and know-how to artists, is one way that foundations can leverage their unique role as stewards of their entire ecosystem.

4. **Recognize emerging or under represented species that add unique value.** Occasionally new species or sub-species develop, and a foundation’s award of money and recognition can function to raise the visibility of this species to others in the artists ecosystem. In other instances, a species that plays an important role in the ecosystem might be moving towards extinction and a foundation could make investments to increase the population.

Critics and arts writers, discussed in the investment framework in Part 2, are a good example of a species that is becoming extinct in part due to factors outside the ecosystem like challenges in the field of journalist as a whole. Recognizing the important role that critics have in connecting artists to audiences, but also to resources like validation, a foundation could invest in supporting writers and critics to prevent their extinction.

These approaches are not at odds with grants that fund artists and organizations directly. It’s simply that, from an ecosystem point of view, that approach is less systemic than funding that touches multiple species and nourishes multiple exchanges. As the following section discusses, we believe that most foundations will continue funding efforts that target individual species, like artists, as they have always done. The point here is to complement species-specific funding with funding that considers the entire ecosystem *as a system*.

At the same time, funders need to be sensitive to the phenomena system dynamists call sub-optimization. A system can only perform as well as its least-developed element. Sub-optimization is a risk when funding develops one species of the system without considering the whole. The system of bringing art to the public will only be as robust as its weakest species. All else being equal, improving the weakest, necessary parts of the system represents the low hanging fruit.

Finally, we believe that sustained, permanent social justice in the arts can only be achieved through a systemic approach, such as the ones suggested here. Most activists speak of the goal of eradicating *systemic* racism, not individual bias. It is hard to imagine making a systemic change without first understanding the systemic dynamics that keep the current reality in place. The ecosystem lens gives us one way of understanding how the arts ecosystem actually functions as a system, a necessary pre-condition to crafting a system response to any truly systemic challenge.

The power of this position is clear and while there is great opportunity to work to mitigate injustice, there are also risks. When foundations act in their role as stewards



of the ecosystem in ways that overlook or misidentify weaknesses in the ecosystem, the risk to the ecosystem is great.

Grantmaking to Artists and Organizations

The second important role that foundations can, and do, play is to make grants to artists and organizations that disrupt problematic ideas about “fitness for funding” in competitive landscapes. The competitive dynamics of the arts ecosystem differ from most natural systems in a very important way. Where survival of the fittest in natural systems predominantly leads to the selection of one species over another, in the arts ecosystem significant selection also occurs within species.

Unlike crocodiles, crows or cows, individual human beings differ from one another so much that one individual may fit the ecosystem far less successfully than another. Some artists thrive while others struggle and some others simply drop away. Foundations select artists and organizations to reward with money based on the perceived quality of their work and on the regard in which this work is held. In doing so, foundations unavoidably participate in a competitive process of selection. In a way, foundation funders act much like curators in that their funding decisions shine a light on certain artists and organizations they feel most deserve to be sustained.

However, when the ecosystem itself is skewed to prefer one type of individual over another, we see patterns where some kinds of individuals are at perpetual risk. This is especially important for the arts ecosystem, because it is embedded in a greater one that is biased toward and against individual members of species in ways that have nothing to do with the intrinsic value of the work they produce, but instead are rooted in their ethnicity or class, or in the basic assumptions that inform interpretations of their work.

In response, many foundations now dedicate some or all of their funding to compensate for these prejudices which may limit artists’ access to individual philanthropy, foundation funding, and ticket revenue. Foundations intervene into the arts ecosystem to fund art, artists, and projects that the unjustly biased system would otherwise doom. In doing so they develop an alternative definition of “fitness for funding” by creating criteria to recognize artists without conventional professional credentials or those working from a community or social justice perspective, into the pool of artists receiving funding.

This focus does not suspend the competitive dynamic of the arts ecosystem. Instead, it subverts that dynamic in the interest of social, racial or economic justice. The arts ecosystem, as a *system*, is not immoral - it is amoral. Like the natural world, it simply does not have a conscience. With their unique financial autonomy foundations can



actualize a concern for justice in an ecosystem that, lacks it.³⁰ Of course, this power to define or redefine “fitness for funding” is a tremendous responsibility and has the potential to perpetuate or even increase inequity. It is important to acknowledge the power dynamics at play in a situation where one species’ access to external resources allows it to define or redefine “fitness for funding” and thus impact changes for survival for another species.

All decisions are shaped by a variety of factors, and funding decisions are no exception. We believe that most foundations will take a hybrid approach in developing programs consistent with both roles described in this chapter: they will select individuals and organizations for recognition and financial support while simultaneously developing inventive funding strategies to strengthen the arts ecosystem as a whole. This will require foundations to embrace and tolerate seemingly contradictory value systems – a competitive value system that rewards the “fittest for funding,” and another that seeks to reduce those same dynamics.

³⁰ However, we believe that Foundations miss the mark when they design grant programs to compensate for an injustice in the arts ecosystem and then define grantee success as their ability to be able to continue to do what the grant enabled them to do after funding ends, and to do so in a financially sustainably way. Racial and social injustices in the arts ecosystem result from deep, historical beliefs and biases that influence that system but are influenced very little **by** that system. These beliefs and biases are unlikely to be significantly changed over the period of a grant. We believe it's more accurate to understand grants that address historical injustices in the arts ecosystem as acts of conciliation on a much longer road to reconciliation, undertaken in acknowledgement of inequities stemming from historical bias.



Part 4:

Deep Dives into Sub-systems of Interest



Identifying Sub-systems of Interest

In analyzing systems it is important to keep in mind that systems consist of sub-systems, and are, in turn, a part of larger super-systems. Researchers must focus on a single sub-system, or group of sub-systems as the object of their analysis, but those systems don't exist in a vacuum. They interact with other systems above, below, and alongside them, which fall outside of the analysis.

In order to undertake a deep understanding of the artists ecosystem, we needed to identify which sub-systems to prioritize for analysis. We began this process by asking the Rainin Foundation's arts team, "What are we curious about?" This led to a rich discussion and a list of questions of interest emerged. These questions clustered around sub-systems. In the sections that follow you will see the questions that led us to focus our investigation on four sub-systems:

- Exchanges among artists
- Exchanges between artists and individual philanthropists
- Exchanges between artists and spaces
- Exchanges between artists and audiences

These sub-systems also provide some of the structure for the investment opportunities that emerged out of this work.

It is important to acknowledge that the complexity level of the artists ecosystem is very high. There are scores of sub-systems within the artists ecosystem and many of them were beyond the scope of this research. For example, future research could examine sub-systems, such as:

- The sub-system in which artists find ideas and inspiration for their work
- The sub-system that describes how artists receive training and professional development
- How external ecosystems (e.g., universities, affordable housing, commercial entertainment) interact with the artists' ecosystem
- Where new resources enter the ecosystem



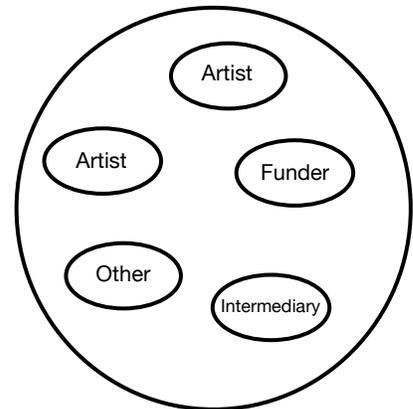
4.1 Supporting Exchanges Between Artists

With each of the sub-systems we explored, our analysis was shaped by a series of questions developed through conversations with the Rainin Foundation's arts team. Regarding the exchanges between artists, we wondered:

- What networks of support allow artists to be the makers/creative thinkers/cultural agents they aspire to be?
- What resources do artists need in order to think creatively about their work? From which species do they get these resources and what do they offer in exchange?
- What resources do artists need in order to make their work? From which species do they get these resources, and what do they offer in exchange?
- What are the unique needs of each sub-species of artists? Do sub-species meet their needs in different ways?

These questions led us to an exploration of artists' social networks. While some artists work in relative isolation, other artists build, and benefit from, social networks. We know from other research that artists with supportive social networks are more likely to be able to access the resources they need to fulfill their creative aspirations (Urban Institute, 2004).

We tend to think of individuals within the ecosystem as members of a particular species, and that most individuals identify most closely with other members of their own species. However, our conversations with artists led us to identify two kinds of natural affiliations that take place within *and* across species: artists' professional networks and Communities of Practice. These two naturally occurring features of the ecosystem have a subtle but important distinction. Affiliations based on trust, shared values, and an interest in similar artistic practices are what Margaret Wheatley called "Communities of Practice,³¹" (CoP). A dance artist's CoP, for example, might consist of other dancers, choreographers, a venue owner, a costume designer, a funder, etc. Throughout history, artists' CoPs have been highly influential (e.g., Beat Generation). Artists'



³¹" Wheatley, Margaret. "Using Emergence to Take Social Innovations to Scale"

professional networks may also include members of other species within the ecosystem such as funders or members of species outside the arts ecosystem such as AI experts or commercial fabricators. Artists exchange resources within networks as well, but these exchanges are more transactional. An artist may turn to their network for a recommendation for a musician or lighting designer. While the value of COPs comes from a small number of deep ties, networks offer the combined value of many weaker ties. An artist's COP may include only a few individuals while their network could include hundreds.

Most critical for understanding CoPs is that they are self-organizing and voluntary. Membership is determined through a selection/self-selection process, where individuals freely choose to affiliate with other individuals. Members within a CoP share information about employment opportunities, know-how, and sometimes exchange "sweat equity" or free labor. Often, they derive strong affiliation benefits and, we imagine, self-actualization benefits. They share these resources freely and confidently once the high levels of trust needed for membership are met.

Using the ecosystem language, members of CoPs will extend resources to other CoP members before they do so to non-members. In other words, members of a CoP are one degree of separation away from all the resources known to any other member of the CoP. As the number of members of a CoP expands, the group's access to resources increases arithmetically.

Examples of resource exchanges between artists include:

- An artist trades artistry (i.e., dancing in a friend's newly commissioned work for free) for affiliation benefits or the promise of future work
- An actress learns about an opportunity to be cast in a new production from a playwright in her network (here, information is exchanged for affiliation benefits)
- A lighting designer explains a new technology to a choreographer in his CoP (know-how is exchanged for unspecified benefits)

From an ecosystem standpoint, what's happening here is remarkable, in that artists take on a range of different roles in the ecosystem, sometimes acting as teachers, dancers, funders, audience members, or even babysitters for each other. This chameleon-like behavior is, perhaps, one of the greatest sources of resilience in the ecosystem.

However, as the investments in Part 2 explain, a key source of power within networks and CoPs is the fact that they are self-organizing, and the boundary that determines membership is developed collectively and implicitly. A funder cannot create a CoP. A grant cohort is not a CoP, and funders cannot make members of a cohort become a CoP. For this reason, the Investment Framework lays out opportunities for funders to identify and support existing naturally occurring networks and CoPs.



4.2 Exchanges between Artists and Spaces

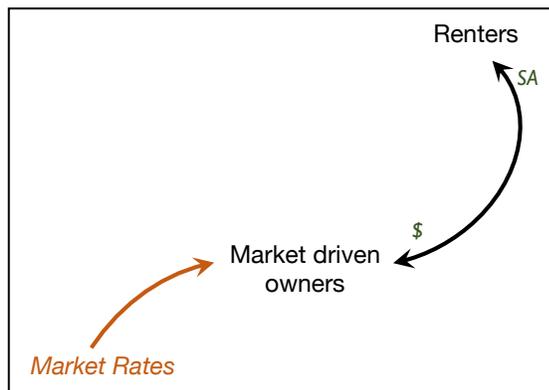
Early conversations with the Rainin Foundation’s arts team identified space as a particularly important resource in the Bay Area arts ecosystem where the cost of real-estate is high and rising. As we considered the impact that restricted access to physical space might have to artists’ abilities to make and show work, we asked:

- What impacts the availability of space (formal and informal, nonprofit and for profit) for artists to conceive/make/share/test/produce work?
- What physical assets are needed in spaces where artists conceive of, develop and produce work? How do they differ depending on the kind of art the artist makes?
- How does the ecosystem “distribute” access to space? What resources do artists exchange to secure space, and how do they learn that space is available?

The extent to which the availability of space is impacted by market dynamics in the larger super-system in which the artist ecosystem is imbedded leads us to a discussion of two types of space: space controlled by access-driven owners and space controlled by market-driven owners.

Market- and Access-driven Space Owners

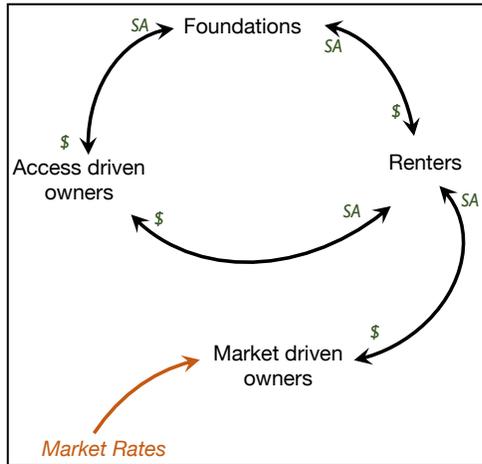
Market-driven space owners are driven by market rates and an economic motivation to maximize revenue. Access-driven owners are driven by a social motivation to maximize use of their space for artistic development purposes. In reality many venue owners are a hybrid of these two types of space owners, and constantly try to manage this tension.



In a typical exchange, renters (who will later become artists or producing organizations) exchange money with market-driven owners of development or performance space for an opportunity to receive self-actualization, and potentially money as well, but not until after a delay. In this scenario, access to space is constrained by several factors, including: 1) knowledge of the space itself, or how to book it; 2) the cost of rental; and 3) availability of suitable dates.

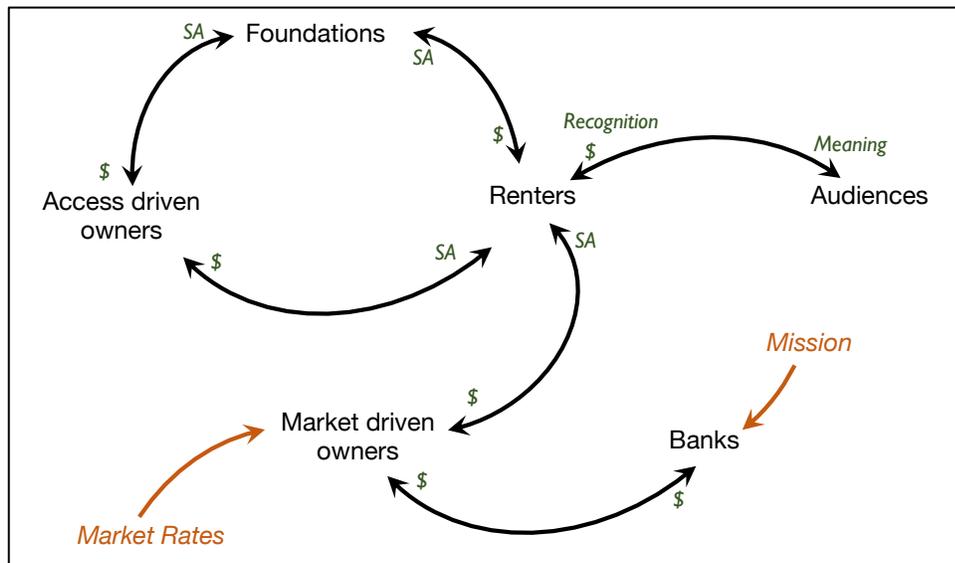
A second system has developed, and it is illustrated by the Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST). As briefly touched upon in the Investment Framework in Part 2, CAST purchases buildings vulnerable to private sale that house community arts organizations. This secures the space and effectively freezes its price. The organization can then stay in their space, renting from CAST without being subject to rapidly rising real estate prices. During this rental period, CAST works the arts

organization to build their financial and organizational capacity and prepare them to eventually purchase the space from CAST. This allows organizations in neighborhoods vulnerable to the rapidly rising costs of real estate to remain anchors of their community, and eventually supports them in the transition from renter to a new access owner. In this second system, foundations, in exchange for mission reinforcing self-actualization, fund access-driven owners of development and performance space. These owners then rent space for money and mission



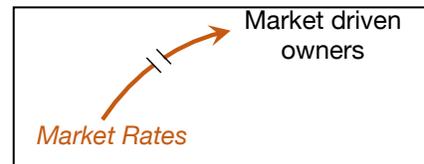
reinforcing self-actualization to the same renters identified in the market-driven system above.

These renters may also receive money from foundations, who fund them to actualize their collective mission(s). We also need to acknowledge the renter's motivations to reach audiences, with whom they exchange an anticipated experience of meaning in exchange for money in the form of ticket sales, and recognition of their identities as artists.



This final diagram also acknowledges the role that banks play in lending money to enable market-driven owners. In our conversations, we discussed entities such as community lenders. Questions remain about whether community lenders support market-driven owners or whether they would more accurately be represented on the diagram as an alternative funder of access-driven owners.

This ecosystem analysis of the space sub-system takes CAST, an access-driven owner, as its central example. CAST broke the link between market rates and the amount of money renters need to have. This is an interesting notion – that one way to intervene into the arts ecosystem is to break the influence of something external to the system, over which the system has little influence, but to confine the impact of the intervention only to part of that super-system that directly impacts the arts ecosystem, rather than trying to intervene in that super-system in a more global way. So, funders tried to respond to a negative consequence of high market rates on artists, and declared the impact of high market rates on working class arborists, for example, out of scope. They boiled a puddle, not the ocean.



It's also interesting that sometimes exchanges end up with foundations giving money to both the access-driven owners and the renters who rent from them. They fund that exchange, with the long-term goal being the establishment of a permanent access-driven facility. This actually funds a structural change, the creation of a permanent species of access-driven owners.

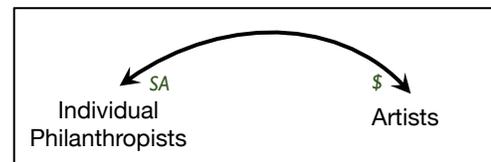
4.3 Exchanges between Artists and Individual Philanthropists

While our analysis of the sub-system of artists' networks and communities of practice highlighted the frequency with which non-monetary resources are exchanged in the artists ecosystem, money remains an important resource. Several questions drove our investigation of how artists gain access to the resource of money:

- How do artists piece together resources to financially support themselves as whole people?
- From what species in the ecosystem do artists receive this resource, money, and what do they offer in exchange?
- How frequently do artists need to reach outside the arts ecosystem to obtain sufficient financial resources? What are the consequences, if any, to the arts ecosystem, or society at large, of them doing this?
- Do different sub-species of artists require different levels of money to sustain their creative practice? Do sub-species of artists access money from different species within the ecosystem?

Because the ways that foundation funders provide the resource money to artists is discussed in detail in Part 3, this section focuses on how the entire ecosystem could benefit if exchanges between artists and individual philanthropists (i.e., “donors”) could be sustainably and equitably strengthened.

The simplest form of exchanges between individual philanthropists and artists involve philanthropists giving money to artists in exchange for philanthropists' feelings of self-actualization. (In a similar but commercial exchange, investors give

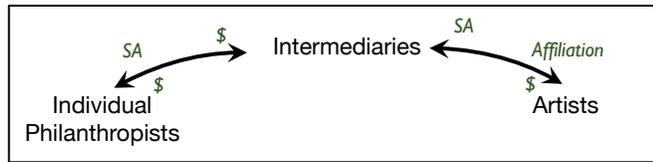


money to Broadway producers in exchange for a chance to make a profit.) Note that there is only one species involved on each side of this exchange, and only a single resource from each species in play. Historically, the fortunes of artists rose and fell with the whims of their patrons (e.g., the Medici's), illustrating how artists can be vulnerable to over-reliance on one source of financial support. A more apt analogy might be the role that artists' spouses or families play in providing financial support, which, in this case, represents an influx of resources from outside the ecosystem.

While the path between individual philanthropists and artists is the most direct, there are still inefficiencies. Most prominent among them is the difficulty that individual philanthropists and artists may have finding one another.

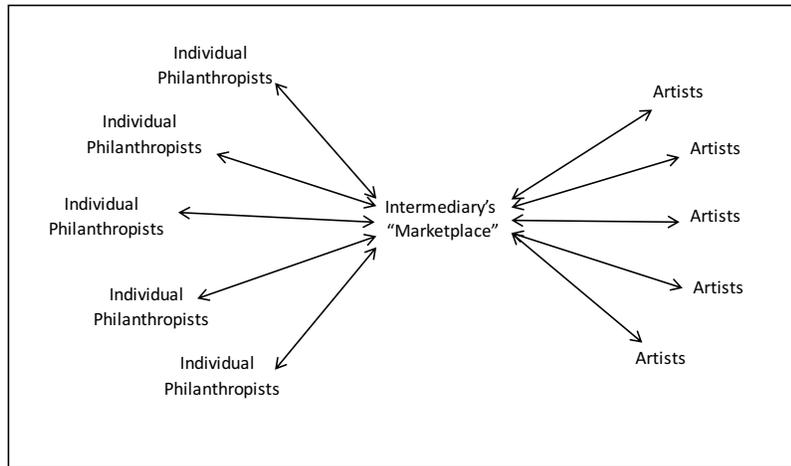


Intermediaries (i.e., fiscal sponsors) intervene into this exchange, placing themselves between individual philanthropists



and artists. In the most limited form of exchanges between the fiscal sponsor and the artist, the artist receives funding, minus the percentage the intermediary retains. The fundamental dynamic of exchanges remains the same, with intermediaries receiving the money from individual philanthropists that would have gone directly to artists, and individual philanthropists receiving the same experience of self-actualization as they did before, with an additional monetary resource resulting from the exchange in the form of a tax deduction. While this creates an economic incentive for donors, it does not solve the inefficiency problem. Fiscal sponsors have a series of unilateral relationships with artists, and artists are still responsible for finding their own donors, most typically through letter-writing and crowdfunding campaigns.

In reality, some fiscal sponsors offer other services to artists such as marketing assistance or fundraising workshops. In these situations, artists receive know-how and/or free labor while the fiscal sponsor receives self-actualization. Beyond this, some intermediaries work to create a larger marketplace in which individual philanthropists or agents/producers can meet artists whom they might wish to support (e.g., the so-called “pitch sessions” at the Creative Capital Artist Retreat).



When successful, this mitigates one of the inefficiencies of the direct exchange – the difficulty of matching philanthropists to artists who need support. Now, the fiscal sponsor brokers multi-lateral

relationships between individual philanthropists and artists. In other words, individual philanthropists might support multiple artists instead of just one, and an artist might receive funds from multiple philanthropists whom they do not know.

Intermediaries have a financial incentive to scan the environment for matches between individual philanthropists and artists whose work may interest those philanthropists, because intermediaries receive money when they arrange these matches. For intermediaries, finding matches is a primary concern, where it is less so for either individual philanthropists or for artists.



The Investment Framework in Part 2 presents investment opportunities that emerged from our inquiry into ways that foundations can support and enrich this dynamic by intervening in the exchanges between individual philanthropists and artists.



4.4 Exchanges between Artists and Audiences

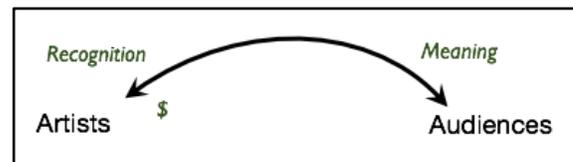
The final sub-system that our investigation dove deeply into was exchanges between artists and audiences. This sub-system was driven by a series of questions about artists, audiences, and the species that work to connect them:

- How do artists find audiences for their work?
- Are there dynamics in the ecosystem that make it easier for certain artists to build audiences? If so, what are the consequences, if any, to the arts ecosystem, or society at large?
- What role do presenters/curators play in helping artists find audiences? Would the ecosystem benefit from having more presenters/curators?
- What role do critics and arts writers play in helping audiences find artists and contextualizing artistic work?
- Do artists have enough opportunities to present their work to audiences? If not, what are the consequences to the ecosystem?

Artists and audiences have been exchanging resources for millennia. In the simplest exchange, an artist presents a work to an audience. If no other species is involved, then the artist receives recognition and, sometimes, money. Those in the audience receive the experience of meaning. Artists also receive something more from audiences – in the form of

recognition. The act of directing your attention to an artist is an act of recognition. When volunteer choruses perform free concerts, for example, they are exchanging their

artistry for recognition benefits. When audience members pay an admission price, then artists receive another kind of resource, but the level of meaning experienced by audience members doesn't necessarily increase just because they are paying. In situations where audiences follow the work of an artist over a period of time, or attend the artist's works repeatedly, the recognition benefits can take the form of loyalty, which might be considered an enhanced form of recognition or even affiliation. When the artist is an organization, this loyalty can be leveraged into money. When the artist is not an organization, it may be more difficult to convert loyalty into money (see Section 4.3 on exchanges between artists and individual philanthropists). This might help to explain why artists are driven to incorporate.

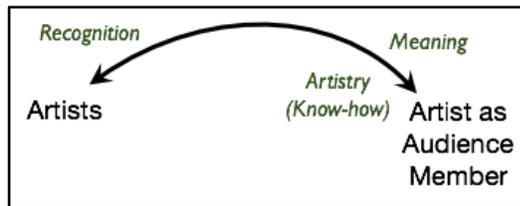


What is not apparent from this simple diagram is the complexity of the exchange. To bring work directly to audiences, artists need to be masters of many domains. They need to have extensive know-how above and beyond their artistic skills. For example, they need to know where to find a space to show their work. If the space doesn't provide front of house services, they need to provide them. They need to

know technical details of production, or where to find people with those skills. They may need to rent specialized equipment. They need to know how to market their show to the public, which usually involves using some sort of ticketing software, how to use social media and other forms of digital marketing, how to access online calendars, how to message effectively about their program, etc. Without assistance, artists are left to leverage their personal contacts for audiences. Of course, many artists have become adept at self-producing, and there are signs that other species are evolving to make these exchanges less painful and more successful for artists (e.g., Joe Goode Annex’s co-producing program).

When funders make project grants to artists with the expectation of producing work for the public, they are not just funding artists, they are funding artist-producers, a hybrid species. We wonder if this is a conscious trade-off. What kinds of artists have producing skills? What about the artists who don’t have producing skills? What is the effect on the ecosystem of funding work that intentionally bypasses the supply chain that has historically allowed artists to focus exclusively on their artist work, instead of having to worry about producing and marketing?

Consider several variations to the artist-audience exchange. For example, when an artist is in the audience to witness the work of another artist, additional resources are exchanged between the “witnessing artist” and the “presenting artist.” The presenting artist still gains recognition, although the kind of recognition one receives



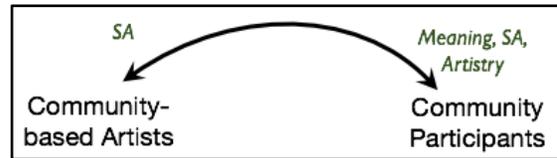
from fellow artists may be a little different from the kind of recognition one receives from a regular audience member. The witnessing artist receives not only the experience of meaning, but also possibly artistry (in the form of know-how). Assuming the witnessing

artist doesn’t pay to get in, this is a cash-less exchange, and one which we suppose is a powerful engine of creativity in the artist ecosystem as a whole. We know from years of research that artists are influenced by other artists. Showing up for other people’s work is also one way that artists build the types of valuable communities discussed in Section 4.1. If this is a central exchange in the ecosystem, then foundations might reflect on what they can do with their resources, both monetary and non-monetary, to encourage this exchange. What obstacles can be lowered, or, what incentives can be put in place, to encourage artists to witness each other’s work?

When artists work in community contexts, “audience members” are community participants. Especially when artists co-create work with community members, different resources are exchanged. What do community participants get out of this exchange? They may experience meaning, as all audiences do to some extent. But they may also experience self-actualization (e.g., empowerment, increased confidence, optimism about the future, or increased resolve to live one’s life a better way). Depending on the nature of the collaboration, they may also receive artistry (esp. know-how, or an opportunity to cultivate their talent).



What do community-based artists get out of this exchange? In this case, artists receive self-actualization, a form of fulfillment stemming from congruence between the role someone takes within the ecosystem, and the role they want and hope to play. Artists might also receive recognition, but, in many cases, we imagine that self-actualization eclipses recognition as a non-monetary resource. An interesting side note here is that artists in this



exchange are probably receiving money from another source (e.g., most likely from a producing organization or a presenter), which, in turn, is probably getting money from individual philanthropists or philanthropic foundations to do the work that the artist is doing. We are curious what would happen if the same resources were given directly to artists to do similar community work.

When the exchange between artist and audience is intermediated by a presenter

We begin our dive into the audiences sub-system with conventional, if simplistic, assumptions about the way that supply and demand are self-regulating: if demand grows, then supply grows to meet it. Given that, one would have to assume that when the demand for an artist's work is strong enough, the invisible hand of the marketplace would lead a presenter to realize the opportunity to profitably present that artist, and do so. From an ecosystem point of view, on principle, no artist deserves to be presented unless there is sufficient market interest, though in the non-profit sector we identify the ability to attract individual and/or institutional support as a form of market interest. This allows presenters to engage artists who might not attract large enough audiences.

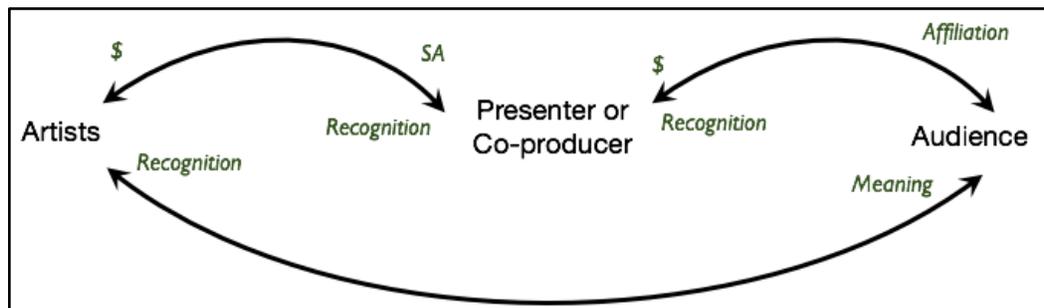
This opens up the possibility that funders could play an expanded role in subsidizing presenters to present work that may not be seen as viable from an economic perspective, thus creating more opportunities for artists to present their work by disrupting the equation of supply and demand. Many of the artists we spoke to throughout our research self-produce their work. Self-producing requires the artist to take on substantial financial risk and creates inequities in who is able to show their work.

Finally our analysis led us to consider the value of curators in the ecosystem and whether the exchanges between artists and audiences suffer due to the lack of the aesthetic, social and intellectual filters that curators provide. Does the lack of sufficient curators diminish the ecosystem? With so many artists forced to self-produce work without the support of presenters (as mentioned above) or curators (who act as gatekeepers), we wondered if audiences miss out on seeing important work because it is buried in a sea of mediocre work. While we often think of the role of gatekeeper as something that can perpetuate inequity, is there a role for curators to play in mitigating inequity?



These questions led us to explore several different species that act to intermediate in relationships between artists and audiences. These include presenters (who hire artists for a fee and take on financial risk), co-producers (who nurture or collaborate with artists and provide them with a basket of support services), service organizations (who act as fiscal sponsors and provide wrap-around services to their sponsees), venues (who offer renters access to ticketing software or marketing databases), and curators (who serve as gatekeepers but who also connect audiences to artists). In fact, this initial list may not capture the full extent of the numerous and varied audience/artist intermediators in the Bay Area.

A typical three-way exchange with a presenter or co-producer is diagrammed below.



In this series of exchanges, audience members pay money to the presenter in exchange for the experience of meaning, which comes via the artist. They may also get affiliation benefits from the presenter, especially if they are a frequent attendee. In turn, the presenter captures recognition benefits from the audience, which they very much hope to turn into loyalty and then convert into philanthropic contributions. In other words, presenters are able to convert a small proportion of audience members into individual philanthropists and thereby generate additional monetary resources. Artist-led companies can do this, but individual artists generally can't.

Artists receive money (a fee, typically), and also get some recognition, both from audiences, but also from the presenter (i.e., the legitimacy that stems from being selected, presumably from a competitive field of artists). Presenters receive self-actualization from performing their role in the ecosystem, and, in some cases, also receive recognition benefits from artists, as when they present distinguished artists that boost their brand and fuel fundraising.

Presenters as curators and aggregators of audiences

Presenters fulfill several unique roles in the ecosystem, as intermediators between artists and audiences. First, they act as content filters in that they select or “curate” which artists are to be seen by the public. This offers a great service to audiences, who do not need to keep track of every artist in the ecosystem, but rather can focus



their attention on artists selected by the presenter (and other intermediators). As adjudicators of taste, they act in a similar fashion as professional critics used to act – providing helpful, and sometimes conflicted and controversial – guidance to audiences as to what to see.

When presenters are acting as curators, only artists who are “curated” gain reciprocal benefits (money, recognition). Thus, when presenters act in their natural state of self-interest, they generally don’t curate artists who are unlikely to attract either sufficient audiences, sufficient critical attention, or sufficient philanthropy. This is one of the most highly selective exchanges in the ecosystem. Moreover, some of the larger presenters tend to focus on artists with national and international reputations, thereby bypassing the local ecosystem almost entirely. Ideas for how funders can break the chain of natural selection by funding presenters to curate festivals or other programs that feature Bay Area artists who’d not otherwise be selected by self-interested presenters are outlined in the Investment Framework in Part 2.

Secondly, presenters (and producers) act as aggregators of audiences. In other words, they maintain a database of ticket buyers, and, with each passing presentation or production, continually seek to expand their database. The audience database is their life blood and a source of power over other species, which they leverage into additional ticket sales and contributions. In the past decade, individual artists have been able to aggregate audiences via social media, and thus have gained leverage over presenters and subverted the traditional exchange between artists and presenters.

For artists who are lucky enough to be curated, audience aggregators provide a helpful service in that they can fill seats that the artists themselves could never fill if they had to market their own programs. But this does not benefit many artists. And, in reality, presenters typically block artists from accessing lists of ticket buyers who attended their program, thereby preventing artists from gaining more than fees and intangible recognition benefits. Consider, for example, the role of theatres as intermediators in the exchange between audiences and playwrights, and why more theatres don’t foster relationships between audience members and playwrights. It is not their moral obligation to do so if they don’t see a reciprocal benefit. If they did foster such relationships, however, many audience members might forge lasting relationships with playwrights that would result in reciprocal benefits for both.

Because of these issues, we surmise, more artists feel pressure to start their own companies and become self-producers and audience aggregators themselves. But artists who present work to the public once or twice a year are not well situated to maintain audience databases, which require constant upkeep. Opportunities for funders to support aggregation of and access to audiences are presented in the Investment Framework in Part 2.



An argument for intermediators

Finally, we circle back to the question of presenters, and the shrinking role they play in an ecosystem that increasingly rewards artists for self-producing. The trend towards self-producing has both benefits and drawbacks for artists. On the one hand, artists are motivated to expand their skill sets and become creative entrepreneurs. They learn how to circumvent barriers and forge mutually beneficial relationships with other artists in order to access resources at low/no cost. On the other hand, they are being required to perform work that takes them away from their core artistic practice, which likely impedes their advancement as artists.

We see two potential problems at the ecosystem level that foundations with an ecosystem viewpoint might address: 1) the problem that audience members are not discovering artists that they'd appreciate because of structural barriers in the exchange between artists and audience; and 2) that artists are unable to forge deeper and more productive relationships with audience members (and, by extension, donors) because of structural limitations and obstacles in the exchange between artists and audience. Addressing either or both of these problems is likely to lead foundations towards supporting organizations that intermediate in the exchange in specific ways.



Appendix: Glossary of Key Terms

Assets: Critical elements of the artists ecosystem without which the ecosystem cannot function, but which are not exchanged resources. Assets include: venues, equipment, software, a script or a piece of choreography

Balancing Structures or Negative Feedback: This kind of arrangement maintains equilibrium over time. Though elements in the system might oscillate in the short term, if you look at the long-term trend you'll find that the system sustains itself by keeping elements in balance.

Community of Practice: Networks of affiliation based on trust, shared values, and an interest in similar artistic practices.

Exchanges: Exchanges describe the nature of relationships between species by articulating the resources transferred. In a system, the quality of the relationships between elements is more important than the quality of the elements themselves.

Leverage: Leverage points are “points of power” places where a small amount of resource can produce a disproportionately large benefit or change to the system— more bang for the buck, so to speak. Points of leverage are sought after due to the spillover benefits to a wider spectrum of players in the ecosystem.

Reinforcing Structures or Positive Feedback: This kind of arrangement leads to growth or decline, often explosive growth or decline.

Resources: Elements exchanged between species. In the artists ecosystem these include: money, individual benefits such as the experience of meaning and self-actualization, social benefits such as recognition and affiliation, artistry, technical know-how, and leadership.

Species: Different elements or stakeholders in an ecosystem. In the artists ecosystem these include: artists (there are many “sub-species” of artists from generative artists to artists for hire to culture bearers), producing organizations, presenters and galleries, space/venue owners, training/teaching organizations, audiences, community members whom artists aim to serve, foundation funders, individual philanthropists, volunteers, service and support organizations, technicians and designers, critics and media organizations, coaches, agents, managers, administrators, unions, and consultants.

System: A system is a set of elements related to one another so that a change in the performance in one causes a change in all. Systems can not function without all elements functioning.

