



TACA

Performing for the arts.



OUR STEPS TOWARDS RACIAL EQUITY

CASE STUDY INFORMATION

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DATE

December 1, 2015

CONTACT PERSON

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TITLE

Executive Assistant to the President and Office Manager

ORGANIZATION

TACA (The Arts Community Alliance)

ORGANIZATION URL

www.taca-arts.org

ORGANIZATION INFORMATION ON CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Has a representative from your organization participated in a Racial Justice Leadership Institute Training sponsored by Dallas Faces Race? **Director of Community Programs Maura Sheffler and Executive Director Rebecca Young**
2. Did a representative from your organization attend the 2014 Facing Race Conference in Dallas? **Maura Sheffler, Rebecca Young**
3. What is your organization's area of focus? **Funding and Services for the Performing Arts in Dallas County**
4. How many Dallas-area individuals are affiliated with your organization? **Approximately \$1.7 million**
5. Organization's constituents are... **Performing arts organizations, educators, arts leaders, artists, philanthropists, and community volunteers**
6. What geographic area does your organization serve? **Dallas County is eligible for General Operating and Project Grant Funding, and membership in the North Texas Cultural Co-op is open to all of North Texas**

THE CHALLENGE

1. The Challenge your Case Study addresses is creating a more diverse panel of reviewers to adjudicate our General Operating and Project Grants
2. What racial justice issue does your Case Study address?
To more equitably represent the City of Dallas when making funding decisions regarding our General Operating and Project Grant applicants. In doing so, we hope to see a wider range of organizations that receive a portion of the \$1.3 million TACA distributes annually. We also hope to better publicize the way TACA has grown from a funding organization to one which offers services to the performing arts.
3. Please describe the racial justice challenge you decided to address and why:
At the beginning of each year, TACA recruits roughly forty volunteers (donors, Board members, former and current artists, and community volunteers) to observe and ultimately decide whether to fund TACA's General Operating and Project Grant applicants. There are three panels, divided based on operating budget size, and each panel is chaired by a TACA volunteer. These panelists play a major role in stewarding the funds we raise, and making decisions which will impact the performing arts community. We want to better represent the community we serve.



APPROACH

Please describe what your organization did to advance racial justice. What solution did you create and implement to address the Challenge?

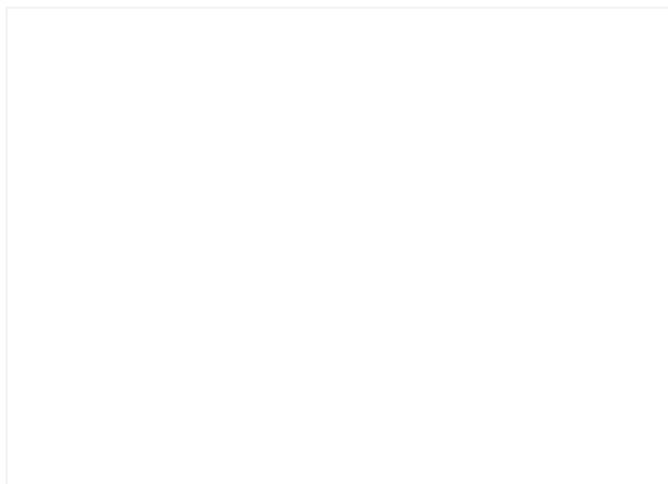
Each year, TACA distributes over \$1.3 million in General Operating and Project Grants. Though the TACA staff administrates this process, we leave the funding decisions up to our grants panelists and Board of Directors. Both of these groups are primarily white, wealthy, and over forty. Though we ultimately want to add ethnic diversity to our Board of Directors, we began where we could make the most immediate impact: our panelists. Before we began recruiting, we set a goal of 1/3 White panelists, 1/3 African-American panelists, and 1/3 Asian/Hispanic panelists.



RESOURCES & STRATEGY

1. What organization resources did you use to create your solution? Experience from participation in Dallas Face Race, as well as support and guidance from funders such as the Embrey Family Foundation

2. Please describe how you used organization assets to create and implement the solution. (i.e. activities, tactics, timeline) We realized in discussing the need for greater ethnic diversity that it would not happen organically, and that we needed to take the lead on this initiative as a staff. We decided to move forward with confidence in a transparent way, and to commit to a more diverse makeup of our General Operating and Project Grants panels. We announced to our grants leadership in late 2014 that we planned to alter the ethnic makeup of our grants panels beginning in February of 2015, and would recruit all year for 2016. We asked for everyone's support, but deliberately did not put our Board in the position of being able to give approval.



CASE STUDY INFORMATION : TIMELINE

Share your journey by listing any programs, trainings or activities that your organization (including a partner representative) has participated in to advance racial equity.

2014	Dance Exchange Summer Institute in D.C.
December 2014	Discuss need/set goal for Grants Panel Makeup
February 2015	Complete panel recruitment for 2015, and begin for 2016, including creating a method for tracking interest, age,
March-November 2015	Created Subcommittee for Diversity as a priority in TACA's next Strategic Plan
June 2015	State of Diversity in the Legal Profession Seminar
July 2015	Diversity Webinar

LIMITATIONS

What challenges did you face in creating and implementing the solution? In the past, panel recruitment has been highly informed by the immediate relationships of our white, wealthy panel members. Leaders on our grants committee often had a personal connection to our panel chairs, and all panel chairs have been white until 2015. Our leaders were somewhat supportive, but subtly skeptical of our ability to increase our ethnic diversity on our panels, which further illuminated the insular nature of our panels.

Though no one asked directly, we received pointed questions about finding “qualified” panel members, and more specifically—doubt that nonwhite panel members could afford to observe performances. The same level of scrutiny was not applied to white prospective panelists. Relatedly, we wanted to avoid the “soft bigotry of low expectations”, by casting an unqualified panelist in a role solely because of skin color. We insisted that panelists must be connected to and/or interested in the arts, able to make our final meeting in December, and willing to review applications and observe performances.

TACA is also working to shed its former reputation as an organization that only supplies funding, rather than both funding and services.

Please describe how you overcame limitations to create and implement the solution. **We found it helpful to set a specific goal for our panel makeup, and to ask our panel chairs to help us achieve the goal. We also extended the recruiting efforts to staff and sponsors of Dallas Faces Race, and we began our 2016 search in early 2015. We also accepted that Asian, Black, and Hispanic panel members may feel like “spokespeople” for their ethnicities at this stage in TACA’s development, and made ticket reimbursement available to all panelists this year. This both eliminated the discussion about ticket affordability, which we found to be a racist assumption, and addressed an economic reality for younger panelists. Finally, we created an information/interest form for all panelists to fill out, to better standardize our new recruitment process.**

We have increased our marketing efforts around our services to the community, in order to challenge the misconception that TACA is solely a fundraising organization. We also recognize that our three signatures are often thought of as events for white and wealthy socialites, and plan to update these events (and the marketing surrounding them) to better represent our mission and the community we serve.

One way we hope to highlight this cultural shift is at our grant awards ceremony in 2016. This event has traditionally included a dinner for funders off-site, immediately following the event. This year, we will invite everyone—donors, Board members, and beneficiaries—onstage to celebrate together. There will be no private dinner at Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek, but rather a group celebration where everyone is welcome. We have also convened a committee to change the way our annual Silver Cup Award Winners are nominated, so that the award is open to a wider range of individuals. Our new system will be implemented in 2016, and will be more inclusive.

BEST PRACTICES

Please share any best practices from your work that can be shared. (i.e. What worked?) We found it helpful to be explicit and transparent about our plan to diversify our panels, and not to acknowledge the subtle racism we perceived either in reticence to accept our plan, or comments about why it wouldn't work. We simply moved forward.

When setting financial and programmatic goals for the next three years at TACA, our Strategic Planning Committee (which met from March to November) decided to add diversity a subcategory, and to develop a TACA diversity statement. As we explored diversity as a subcategory, we realized that it couldn't be limited to a subcategory or a statement in a document, but rather an essential part of who we are as a staff and Board. We have learned that truly bringing a wide range of voices to the table will take time, and cannot be done by merely asking nonwhite friends and colleagues to quickly come up with a list of names to "check a box".

This year, we chose the theme, "Social and cultural barriers to entry" for our annual symposium, TACA Perform, which will also inform our future planning on diversity and inclusion. We accepted that with a genuine effort to challenge what has traditionally been TACA's norm, we would receive pushback as we worked to change the cultural habits of our organization. We consider diversity a "long distance race", and intend to continue deliberately expanding our world as an organization, and spending time eliminating real and perceived "barriers to entry."



LEARNED PRACTICES

Have you learned any valuable lessons or experienced any big challenges that can be shared with others? (i.e. I wish I'd known X before I started this) **When we made the commitment to focus on diversity within our grants panels, we realized that we must focus on diversity in all areas of our business at all times; it must permeate our culture as an organization. We have committed to making this a priority in all areas going forward: our Board of directors, donors, beneficiaries, staff, committees, event leadership, keynote speakers, sponsors, table hosts at our annual symposium, presenters at our annual grant awards, Silver Cup Award recipients, vendors, grants panelists, and national jurors for our Artist Excellence Funds.**



Patricia McGregor, Director, Writer, and Producer of New Works speaking at our Grant Awards Ceremony

NEXT STEPS

What are your organizations highest priorities for racial justice capacity building? Please rank them with #1 being your highest priority. **1. Staff development opportunities related racial justice, inclusion, and white privilege**

2. Board development opportunities related to racial justice, inclusion, and white privilege



NEEDED RESOURCES

What racial justice resources does your organization need? **Information on/funding for seminars, events, and trainings related to diversity, inclusion, and white privilege for our entire staff and Board leadership**



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