

ABOUT

Understanding Arts Service Organizations in a Changing Arts Ecosystem is a research study which aims to understand the role, impacts and ongoing evolution of arts service, intermediary, and regranteeing organizations in a post-pandemic world.

HYPOTHESIS & CONTEXT

Arts service, intermediary, and regranteeing organizations (ASOs) play a critical role in nourishing the United States arts ecosystem.

Primarily serving individual artists and artmaking entities, ASOs frequently provide the greatest benefits to the least resourced artists and groups through capacity building, networking, advocacy, grantmaking, arts education, and/or industry research.

The importance of this role became more pronounced during the pandemic, as ASOs became first responders to a crumbling arts economy and an avalanche of needs, the most pressing coming from individual arts workers who immediately lost work both inside and outside of the arts and were unable to pay for basic necessities. A better understanding of their story, typology framework, service roster, support structure and ongoing evolution is necessary as the field recovers and transforms.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

This research aims to better define and tell the story of ASOs as members of the larger arts ecosystem, and in the context of . Therefore, it is meant to first and foremost benefit ASOs and the stakeholders who impact their work and whom they serve. This includes but is not limited to:

- ASO workers — as the individuals tasked with carrying the work of ASOs forward
- Funders of ASO's (private and public) and policy makers — as the stakeholders whose decisions impact the resourcing of ASOs and their ability to remain operational
- Arts organizations and individual artists — as the intended beneficiaries of the work ASOs do and their *raison d'etre*.

Our hope is to more accurately tell the story of the importance of ASOs in the arts ecosystem, what makes them effective and/or ineffective, and what role they can play in better serving artists and their communities. Underlying this belief in ASO's is the acknowledgement that arts and culture are critical parts of healthy societies, and so it is vital to ensure the systems, resources, and relationships that exist properly nurture, sustain, and strengthen artists, creative workers, and their communities. As members of that ecosystem, ASO's play a role in this network of support and can either contribute to their wellbeing or play a role in exacerbating their conditions.

PROCESS AND ACTIVITIES

An iterative research approach that includes qualitative and quantitative data collection efforts will most effectively guide the research process, with activities organized into 9 components across four research phases, each with a corresponding reporting and dissemination process. Each phase of the research aims to address a series of key research questions, undertake a series of activities and provide a set of deliverables.

	PHASE 1 Foundational Work	PHASE 2 Internal Scan	PHASE 3 Field Scan	PHASE 4 Analysis & Reporting
When	May 2023-April 2024	May 2024-April 2025	May 2025 - April 2026	
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation & Background Research • Establishment of Advisory Cohort & Subject Typology • Development of Research Methodology, Tools & Study Universe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative & Qualitative Data Collection from ASOs • Research Subject Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative & Qualitative Data Collection from ASO stakeholders • Field Scan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Recommendations for future of ASOs • Dissemination of Report + Findings
Research ?s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the history of ASOs? How have they evolved over time in response to shifts in the arts ecosystem and the changing needs of individual arts workers and arts entities? • What is the ASO typology framework? • What information or data do we need to collect to understand ASOs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the defining characteristics of ASOs? • Is there a correlation between types of services offered and long-term sustainability and impact? How have systems of oppression impacted ASOs both within internal operations and external service delivery models? • What role do the public and/or private sectors play in supporting and/or working with ASOs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are ASOs effectively meeting the needs of their communities? • Does their intention meet impact? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What should ASOs be doing? • What is their future? • What do they need to provide for their constituencies, make meaningful change, and thrive?
Deliverables	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Articulate the historical context that led to ASOs existence 2. Definition & Typology of ASO 3. Define the Universe of ASOs 4. Data collection process & Methodology for Internal Scan 5. Quantitative data collection instruments for Internal Scan 6. White paper with overview of findings 7. Public convening 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop qualitative data collection instruments for internal scan 2. Engage in quantitative and qualitative data collection process 3. Develop data collection process & methodology for Field Scan 4. Develop data collection instruments for Field Scan 5. Write white paper with findings from Internal Scan 6. Public convening 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop qualitative data collection instruments for external scan 2. Engage in quantitative and qualitative data collection process 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analysis and synthesis of data across both scans 2. Development of recommendations 3. Stakeholder engagement 4. Writing of final report & findings 5. Report distribution & dissemination 6. Public convening for distribution of initial findings

VALUES

This study is anchored in ADC Consulting's [research values and principles](#). In practice, the application of these values across the research process includes:

- Establishment of a paid advisory cohort of members of the arts and cultural community that is diverse across lived experience, expertise, geography, and who actively engage in the work of ASOs in different capacities.
- Engaging in a three part-research process that considers multiple modalities, perspectives, and data collection processes that aim to amplify the work of individuals providing ASO-style services.
- Acknowledging the ongoing impact the pandemic has on both the research process, the individuals who are a part of the process, and the cultural sector.
- Acknowledging the ways in which white supremacy, war, economic precarity, and climate change are affecting the arts and culture sector and therefore the outcome of this study.
- Exhausting all possible resources to ensure a large cross-section of members of the community are able to contribute to the research process by sharing their stories, ideas and areas of expertise through interviews and focus groups, and through that process seeking their consent, compensating them for their time, and communicating transparently about the purpose and use of their information and/or contributions.
- Understanding that our research alone cannot solve all of the problems it aims to observe, explore or influence, including acknowledging our limitations as humans and researchers. This means working with others, institutions and individuals, to both spread the word of the work and to advocate for the application of its findings in ways that move collective goals of liberation and wellbeing for artists, creative workers, and their communities.

PEOPLE

Primary research activities will be led by Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, founder and principal of ADC Consulting LLC in collaboration with research consultant Carrie Blake and an Advisory Cohort of 14 arts workers.

Ms. Duque Cifuentes (she/her) is a nonprofit leader and advocate working to advance a more just, equitable, and inclusive arts and cultural ecology by developing measures that ensure arts workers, businesses, and organizations can thrive. Ms. Blake (she/her) is an independent researcher, planning consultant, writer, project manager and administrator dedicated to arts and culture. Founded in October 2022, ADC Consulting LLC is a Washington-based LLC and a fiscally sponsored project of IndieSpace, Inc. Funding for phase one of the Understanding Arts Service Organizations in a Changing Arts Ecosystem is made possible by the generous support of the Mellon Foundation. Visit www.consultingadc.com/asoresearch for more information.

Advisory Cohort members include:

- Caitlin Strokosch, National Performance Network
- Corinna Schulenburg, Theatre Communications Groups
- Daniel Singh, Metro Nashville Arts Commission
- David Blasher, MAP Fund
- Eliza Tudor, Nevada County Arts Council

- Joy Young, South Arts
- Melisa Gradel, Poets & Writers
- Natasha Moreland Spears, International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD)
- Quanice Floyd, National Guild for Community Arts Education
- Roberto Bedoya, City of Oakland Cultural Affairs Division
- Ryan Stubbs, National Association of State Arts Agencies
- Theresa Hubbard, Fractured Atlas
- Victoria Holt Takamine, Pa'i Foundation
- Wendy Levy, The Alliance for Media Arts + Culture