

**JUST HATCHED: DEVELOPING A THEORY OF CHANGE TO ADDRESS THE
CHALLENGES OF MEASURING ARTS INCUBATOR SUCCESS**
MA in Arts Management Capstone
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Arts incubators are meant to foster creativity, risk-taking, and entrepreneurship. If failure is an inevitable part of those activities, how might arts managers measure the success of arts incubators? Using their missions as guides, arts incubators should evaluate their programs to see if they are effectively “incubating” the arts. Arts incubators form unique relationships across the nonprofit, public, and private sectors. As cultural facilities, incubators are a valuable part of local and national efforts to bridge culture and communities. More communities are engaging in cultural planning efforts, which directly benefit artists and arts organizations, and also play a key role in addressing larger issues within the communities.¹ At a national level, the NEA’s recent focus on Creative Placemaking and “strengthening the creative capacity of our communities”² make the work of arts incubators relevant to current arts policy. For these reasons, proper evaluation is of paramount importance to the success of arts incubators.

Determining benchmarks for success and utilizing methods of evaluation are critical to understanding if organizations are achieving their stated missions, but this can be especially tricky for arts incubators for two reasons. First, the ambitions of many incubators, as Colorado-based Arts Incubator of the Rockies (AIR) puts it, are as “big as the Western sky.”³ Not only do arts incubators want to create a platform for artists and organizations to experiment and create, but they do so with the intention to spawn cultural movements, build local economies, and improve their communities. While these missions are admirable and worthwhile, they are

¹ Americans for the Arts, “Culture & Communities,” accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.americansforthearts.org/culture-communities>.

² National Endowment for the Arts, “About,” accessed April 13, 2015, <http://arts.gov/about-nea>.

³ Arts Incubator of the Rockies, “The Movement,” accessed February 23, 2015, <http://airartsincubator.org/about/the-movement>.

difficult to measure. Therefore, arts incubators that are currently measuring their success might not be measuring the right things – for example, recognizing an increase in demand for services might indeed be a success for the program, but does it actually create a cultural movement?

As this paper will show, the crux of the problem is that it is incredibly difficult to prove that arts incubators have a direct impact on the economy, community, or even creativity. There are many other factors that come into play when say, measuring economic impact, but it is safe to say that arts incubators have not presented a direct correlation between their work and economic growth or better communities. What they are trying to do is to get as close as possible, *suggesting* that positive programmatic achievements have their intended benefit.

Second, there are many different entities and activities that fall loosely under the *arts incubator* umbrella. Add to that the fact that the concept of *incubator* itself has changed in recent years, and you have a complex array of organizations calling themselves incubators that have different missions, stakeholders, and services.

Arts incubators must do a better job of establishing a framework for success in order to measure if they are achieving their missions. By examining current research and studying two arts incubators in the U.S. – Springboard for the Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Arts Incubator of the Rockies (AIR) in Loveland, Colorado – I highlight obstacles that incubators must overcome to effectively evaluate their own success. In closing, I will discuss why arts incubators should develop a Theory of Change to overcome those obstacles.

ARTS INCUBATORS: ORIGIN AND BACKGROUND

What associations does the word *incubator* spawn? For some, images of adorable, fluffy chicks hatching into the warm and welcoming world come to mind. Others envision premature

babies receiving around-the-clock, nurturing care. In both instances the environment is controlled in order to produce the most favorable outcomes. In the business world, incubators aid the development of new and fledgling companies by providing hands-on business support services.⁴

The startup phase is a tumultuous time for new enterprises. Indeed, many endeavors are likely to fail in the initial years due to lack of sufficient funding, which is needed to sustain operations. Furthermore, entrepreneurs tend to have expert knowledge in their chosen field, yet lack the general business acumen they need to avoid common management challenges.⁵ The National Business Incubation Association (NBIA), which "serves as a clearinghouse of information on incubator management" and business entrepreneurship, states that incubation is a process that not only nurtures growth, but speeds up development so a business can reach its maximum potential. A top priority of a business incubator is to "hatch" companies that are capable of being autonomous and financially sound.⁶

The first incubators were created to foster startups and established businesses that merged technology, industry and services. As time progressed, incubators were developed to respond to the needs of specific sectors.⁷ In his research on business incubators, Rudy Aernoudt categorizes five types of incubators according to their objectives and the specific gap they fulfill in the marketplace.⁸ Professor Linda Essig of Arizona State University's Pave Program in Arts Entrepreneurship adds another: *arts incubators*.⁹ Arts incubators fill a gap in the arts industry, allowing for risk-taking and innovation by shielding artists from the marketplace.

⁴ Rudy Aernoudt, "Incubators: Tool for Entrepreneurship," *Small Business Economics* 23 (2004): 127.

⁵ David N. Allen and Syedur Rahman, "Small Business Incubators: A Positive Environment for Entrepreneurship," *Journal of Small Business Management* 23.3 (1985): 18.

⁶ NBIA, "What is Business Incubation?" accessed February 21, 2015, http://www.nbia.org/resource_library/what_is/index.php.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Aernoudt, "Incubators: Tool for Entrepreneurship," 128.

⁹ Linda Essig, "Arts incubators: A typology," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 44.3 (2014): 171.

Arts incubators shield artists, programs, and organizations in the beginning phases of development by temporarily protecting them from the market. The underlying justification for arts incubators is an assumption that by creating a controlled environment, opportunities are abundant for entrepreneurship, artistic risk-taking, and creative development. According to David N. Allen and Syedur Rahman, an incubator "assists a firm directly through affordable rent and services, and indirectly by placing the entrepreneur in an environment of peers... It appears that the objective of improving the survival chances of small businesses can...yield positive benefits to an area's entrepreneurial climate."¹⁰

The concept of an arts incubator largely derived from the business incubator model. Arts incubators are intended to advance the current *artistic* climate through a provision of services, in the hope that this will lead to breakthroughs in established artistic practices. They allow a wider "margin for error" by recognizing that failure is a possibility. Incubators also promote risk-taking by removing the focus on the bottom-line. Without the threat of impending financial failure due to failure to secure sponsorships, for example, or weak ticket sales, artists and arts organizations have more time to focus on the "business" of making art. The idea is that this added financial security sets the stage for artists to create work that is innovative and ahead of the curve. Whether or not that actually happens is another question.¹¹

An Americans for the Arts Monograph, *Hatching Art: Creating a Vital Arts Presence in Your Community*, shares how Arlington Arts aligns with this way of thinking. A county-run incubator in Virginia, Arlington Arts was at the forefront of supporting budding arts organizations in the 1990s. The monograph outlines how Arlington Arts believes that removal from reliance on box office success is crucial to reaching full artistic potential. It allows

¹⁰ Allen and Rahman, "Small Business Incubators: A Positive Environment for Entrepreneurship," 21–22.

¹¹ Arlington Arts, "Arlington Arts Monograph," accessed February 3, 2015, <http://www.arlingtonarts.org/cultural-affairs/arts-incubator.aspx>, 8.

organizations to steer away from "safe bets," and leads them to take higher risks with greater returns.¹² By encouraging creativity and risk-taking, arts incubators encourage progress by introducing communities to different ways of thinking.¹³

OBSTACLE 1: LOFTY MISSIONS AND MURKY MEASURES FOR SUCCESS

What are arts incubators really incubating? What is it that arts incubators hope to achieve? Lofty missions themselves are not entirely problematic – they can articulate a vision, inspire others, and serve as a call to action around a cause. What becomes a problem is when a mission is so grand that organizations do not know how to hold themselves accountable, or when goals are so elevated that organizations are unable to clearly see the logical steps towards a desired outcome.¹⁴ Here are a few mission statements from arts incubators, beginning with Springboard and AIR, which will be discussed in more detail:

Springboard for the Arts (St. Paul, MN) *is an economic and community development organization for artists and by artists. Our work is about building stronger communities, neighborhoods, and economies, and we believe that artists are an important leverage point in that work. Springboard for the Arts' mission is to cultivate vibrant communities by connecting artists with the skills, information, and services they need to make a living and a life. Our work is about creating communities and artists that have a reciprocal relationship, where artists are key contributors to community issues and are visible and valued for the impact they create. We do this work by creating simple, practical solutions and systems to support artists. Those programs support our goal to help create a local culture movement.*¹⁵

AIR (Loveland, CO) *is an empowering ecosystem that provides artists, businesses and communities the tools, resources, and support to learn, connect, and ultimately succeed. AIR will merge the creativity of the arts with the innovation of business to raise the value of arts and creativity in all our communities...AIR is more than workshops, more than a website, more than a way business people and creative types share skills. It's a model for communities who want to build economic sustainability into their communities in a whole new way.*¹⁶

¹² "Monograph," 8.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Erin Harris, "An Introduction to Theory of Change," *The Evaluation Exchange* 11.2 (2005): 12.

¹⁵ Springboard for the Arts, "Who We Are," accessed February 23, 2015, <http://springboardforthearts.org/who-we-are/>.

¹⁶ Arts Incubator of the Rockies, "The Movement," accessed February 23, 2015, <http://airartsincubator.org/about/the-movement>.

NEW INC (New York, NY) *Creatives today are working in unique ways that are cross-disciplinary, collaborative, leveraging technology, and increasingly straddling the line between culture and commerce. Because they are exploring new modes of cultural production, the professional landscape in which they work is still undefined, and few resources and systems exist to support these enterprises, or to address the unique challenges they are encountering. NEW INC offers a lab-like environment and framework for the development of new ideas, practices, and models in the pursuit of innovation... The incubator's entrepreneurial spirit is an important cornerstone for the Bowery neighborhood and will help catalyze the local creative economy.*¹⁷

Flashpoint at CulturalDC (Washington, DC) *Flashpoint Gallery showcases bold, new work and cultivates emerging and mid-career artists working in a variety of media including site-specific installations, performance pieces, new media and other experimental forms. As a nonprofit gallery free from the constraints of commercial expectations, Flashpoint encourages artists and curators to take creative risks.*¹⁸ *CulturalDC creates opportunities for artistic innovation, connecting artists, arts organizations, developers and government agencies to facilitate economic and cultural vibrancy in the Washington DC area. We enable the arts as a driving force to grow and sustain vibrant communities throughout the Washington DC area. CulturalDC serves artists, arts organizations, arts consumers, residents, developers, property owners and government agencies in the Washington DC area.*¹⁹

Creative Capital (New York, NY) *Creative Capital supports innovative and adventurous artists across the country through funding, counsel and career development services. Our pioneering approach—inspired by venture-capital principles—helps artists working in all creative disciplines realize their visions and build sustainable practices. Over the past 15 years, Creative Capital has developed a four-part approach to supporting artists: support the project, support the individual, build community, and engage the public.*²⁰

So in addition to creativity, entrepreneurship, and risk-taking, arts incubators are putting forth some other tough-to-measure goals. How can they develop agreed upon indicators for success and measure their ability to “create a cultural movement,” or a “shift in the paradigm about the value of art, money, value, and community,” or if their programs really did “catalyze the local economy?” How will they show that the arts are actually the “driving force to grow and

¹⁷ NewInc, “About,” accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.newinc.org/about/>.

¹⁸ Cultural DC, “Flashpoint Gallery,” accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.culturaldc.org/visual-arts/flashpoint-gallery/>.

¹⁹ CulturalDC, “Mission and Scope,” accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.culturaldc.org/about/mission-scope/>.

²⁰ Creative Capital, “What We Do,” accessed March 27, 2015, <http://creative-capital.org/aboutus/whatwedo>.

sustain vibrant communities?” The pursuit of these goals is indeed commendable, but how can arts incubators prove that what they are offering is working, not only as a platform for artists to create and connect, but as a way to improve the communities and the economy? This then raises the question – are arts incubators really the best way to go about sustaining economic growth or making the community a better place? Good intentions are not enough. Arts managers must demonstrate a direct link between their mission and goals to the programs and services they offer.

Without a direct link between goals and programs, effective evaluation cannot take place. Furthermore, goals such as “increasing the value of the arts” and enabling risk-taking mean many different things to many different people. So what are arts incubators currently measuring and how?

SPRINGBOARD FOR THE ARTS

Springboard measures its incubator program’s success based on demand for services and feedback from clients. The incubator has the goal of being open to as many projects as possible to aid in their success. The incubator has sponsored over 235 artists and groups since its inception, adding 19 new sponsorships in FY2014.²¹ Springboard evaluates its incubator program through qualitative analysis, specifically through informal feedback offered by project participants. The staff has an open-door policy and invites feedback at all times during the incubation process. This includes communication in-person, via phone and email. At the end of each project’s term with Springboard, staff meets to close out all of the project’s accounts. During this time staff solicits feedback, asking why projects are leaving the organization, what

²¹ Springboard for the Arts, “Supplemental Financial Information,” accessed February 27, 2015, <http://springboardforthearts.org/who-we-are/financial-information/>.

worked and what did not work, and leaving the door open for additional comments past their time at Springboard.

Feedback also was solicited during a period of marked administrative changes. The Incubator program grew from 30-40 projects in the beginning to now more than 230 projects, and in 2012-2013 Springboard decided to restructure the program by only offering Model C sponsorship. Springboard previously offered both the Model A and the Model C forms of fiscal sponsorship. With Model A, or Comprehensive Fiscal Sponsorship, the project “becomes a program of the fiscal sponsor, and is a fully integrated part of the fiscal sponsor that maintains all legal and fiduciary responsibility of the sponsored project, including its employees and activities.”²² With Model C, projects remain their own distinct business entity. Projects are entirely self-managed, from balancing their own checking accounts to filing taxes; and they maintain 100% complete control over their artistic production. “The sponsor does not necessarily maintain ownership of any part of the results of the project’s work.”²³

While Springboard does evaluate its incubator program, it loses ground by not identifying indicators for success ahead of time. Instead, staff collects informal feedback at the conclusion of projects and after key decisions are made. Evaluation after the fact is better than no evaluation at all, but it makes it tricky to set clear goals and tangibly measure achievements against the mission. Additionally, the current method of evaluation does not link the success of the incubator program back to the mission of the organization. A demand for services and positive feedback from clients does not show that the incubator is contributing to Springboard’s mission to create a cultural movement and vibrant community.

²² National Network of Fiscal Sponsors, “Models of Fiscal Sponsorship,” accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.fiscalsponsors.org/pages/models-fiscal-sponsorships>.

²³ Ibid.

ARTS INCUBATOR OF THE ROCKIES

AIR's mission is to increase the value of arts and creativity. According to Executive Director Beth Flowers, AIR's goal is to help artists and organizations "do better" by increasing capacity, increasing revenues, and expanding the market in an unstable economy. The incubator fosters innovation by linking creative-minded people with the business world, and promotes thinking outside of the box to find solutions in areas like product development and marketing.

AIR measures its success as an incubator both quantitatively and qualitatively. AIR Staff and Colorado State University Ph.D. students have previously created educational assessments to evaluate programs, and in the future AIR will use longitudinal studies to observe if its programming has had any long-term benefit to participants. Surveys are distributed to participants at the end of a program and have been distributed up to six months following a program. While Flowers notes that it is easier to evaluate behavioral and attitudinal changes and harder to quantify success, the organization does share some numbers on their website in relation to the success of their programming.

AIR quantifies its success increasing the value of the arts within in the community using the following examples:

Economic Impact: \$1.8M in new revenues for local communities over 4 years²⁴

Success of programming: Evolve intensive workshop: 87% increase in revenues,²⁵ Shift workshop: 34% increase and diversify networks,²⁶ Internship Seminar: 14% of interns

²⁴ Arts Incubator of the Rockies, "Affiliates," accessed March 2, 2015. <http://www.airartsincubator.org/succeeding/Affiliates>.

²⁵ Arts Incubator of the Rockies, "Evolve Program," accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.airartsincubator.org/learning/air-evolve-program>.

²⁶ Arts Incubator of the Rockies, "Shift Workshop," accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.airartsincubator.org/learning/air-shift-workshop>.

secure paid jobs at host site²⁷

Ventures launched: Evolve intensive workshop: 20% start new businesses²⁸

Growth/Demand: 1,000 joined online portal, demand for curriculum in 23 states²⁹

Funding: \$100,000 NEA Our Town Grant³⁰

AIR measures success qualitatively by utilizing formal and informal methods of evaluation. As mentioned above, AIR tracks behavioral and attitudinal changes formally through participant surveys, though they are open to informal feedback at any point during or after the program. An example of such an attitudinal change can be found by reading Dulcie Willis's story on AIR's website. "I now have the confidence to say that I have gifts and talents that my community needs to me to share. The individual coaching has pushed me to a new level of self-awareness and encouraged me to a greater level of honoring myself and my work, thus encouraging me to reach out and make a difference with my work."³¹

In comparison to Springboard, AIR utilizes more methods of evaluation for their programming to imply that AIR raises "the value of the arts", but the indicators actually are measuring something else – the success of their programs. They are measuring an increase in revenues, demand for programs, and new ventures launched; and while these achievements may be worthwhile, it is the assumption that these indicators also raise the value of the arts in the community that is the problem.

²⁷ Arts Incubator of the Rockies, "Internship Seminar," accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.airartsincubator.org/learning/higher-education-internship-seminar>.

²⁸ "Evolve Program."

²⁹ "The Movement."

³⁰ Arts Incubator of the Rockies, "History," accessed February 23, 2015, <http://airartsincubator.org/about/background>.

³¹ Arts Incubator of the Rockies, "AIR has changed my life," accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.airartsincubator.org/blog/?p=801>.

OBSTACLE 2: APPLES AND ORANGES

The term *arts incubator* can mean many different things to different people, even those working within the same sector. The field lacks a clear, definitive answer to what an arts incubator is and what it is comprised of. Organizations that identify themselves as incubators offer a vast array of different services geared towards various constituencies. These complexities, and the varying configurations in which arts incubators exist, make it hard to measure the success of arts incubators as whole. Due to these variations, comparing incubators to one another might not be the best way to identify benchmarks for success. This paper doesn't try to find a universal definition for *arts incubator*, but rather highlights the differences that make comparison difficult.

To start, arts incubators have many different stakeholders. Clients of arts incubators may be artists, arts organizations, craftspeople, small-business owners, or student artists. Arts incubators can direct their services to one or any combination of the recipients listed above, but it is not necessarily only the direct recipient that benefits. The same list of recipients can also indirectly benefit from the incubator's success. For example, even though an incubator may only directly serve arts organizations, those organizations might in turn form partnerships with small business owners, or one organization might hire an independent graphic designer to create their promotional materials. Add to that the benefit to local economies, communities, and creative industry entrepreneurs, and you find a large ecosystem and numerous beneficiaries. Many times, the targeted beneficiaries of an incubator can be found in an organization's mission or vision statements. Other places to look would be the incubator's Form 990 (if they are a nonprofit organization), their website, or their marketing materials.

Each arts incubator has its own individual stated goals and objectives customized to meet the needs of the artists and communities it serves.³² Some exist to launch the careers of fledgling artists by introducing them to networks, the marketplace, and giving them the tools to be self-sufficient.³³ Community arts incubators work to initiate a dramatic change in the cultural fabric of a community, attracting artists and creative types and leading to a more unique sense of place.³⁴ NBIA determines that successfully hatched enterprises can boost the economy, produce jobs, and rejuvenate neighborhoods.³⁵ How do they propose to make those things happen?

Depending on their missions and the outcomes they wish to achieve, arts incubators provide access to accommodation, services and networks, funding and fiscal sponsorship in a variety of configurations to serve their clients.

Access to Accommodation and Services

Incubators offer accommodation, physical or virtual platforms for artists or organizations to exhibit, perform, and receive access to services. Early on, the focus of incubators was on the physical space, or the facility that enabled entrepreneurs to work with low overhead and access to office provisions. We can see this mentality reflected in Allen and Rahman's 1985 definition of incubators: "First, and perhaps most important, [incubators] provide a sheltered environment for young, growing firms. The incubator location assists the firm directly through affordable rent and services."³⁶

Though facilities are still a mainstay of many incubators, the shift has been from provision of facilities to provision of services, with some incubators forgoing the physical space altogether. Services include financial and business assistance, marketing guidance, legal advice,

³² "Culture & Communities."

³³ Essig, "Arts Incubators: A Typology", 169.

³⁴ Arlington Arts "Arlington Arts Incubator Handbook," accessed February 3, 2015. <http://www.arlingtonarts.org/cultural-affairs/arts-incubator.aspx>, 4.

³⁵ NBIA, "What is Business Incubation?" accessed February 21, 2015, http://www.nbia.org/resource_library/what_is/index.php.

³⁶ Allen and Rahman, "Small Business Incubators: A Positive Environment for Entrepreneurship," 21.

administrative assistance, or overall training in general business concepts. Services and early market entry also set incubators apart from residency programs or co-working spaces.

Access to Networks

Furthermore, providing entrepreneurs the access to “communities of practice” outside of their own can significantly benefit their social networks.³⁷ Business incubators, and to a lesser extent arts incubators, have been able to extend their clients’ reach through connections, including access to professional communities, the marketplace, mentors, and peers. Some argue that arts incubators need to do more of this. Examples of social connections would be linking past alumni of a program with each other, linking participants with the community, and connecting the current clients going through the incubation process together. It also means connecting startups to each other so they can compare best practices, or learn what is working and what is not working within their own cohort. Finally, industry mentors, who lend their time and expertise in support of a startup’s mission, can greatly enhance a startup’s network by promoting the startup to their acquaintances and colleagues.³⁸

Funding

While a majority of arts incubators are nonprofits, they can and do exist as for-profit businesses. Several are agents of the state, city, or county, and a few are university-run.³⁹ Some nonprofit arts incubators provide funding in the form of grants or loans, while a for-profit model may offer to provide funds through equity investment.⁴⁰ For example, 4731 Gallery and Studios in Detroit, Michigan, earns revenue for its Blue Collar Innovation Center in part through “equity

³⁷ Lois Peters, Mark Rice, and Malavika Sundararajan. “The Role of Incubators in the Entrepreneurial Process.” *The Journal of Technology Transfer* 29.1 (2004): 89.

³⁸ Devon Smith, “The Case for a New Arts Incubator Model,” accessed February 25, 2015, www.devonsmith.com/2011/09/the-case-for-a-new-arts-incubator-model/.

³⁹ Essig, “Arts Incubators: A Typology”, 178.

⁴⁰ Essig, “Arts Incubators: A Typology”, 177.

participation”, or aiding innovation by claiming a stake in a startup’s equity in exchange for services.⁴¹

Fiscal Sponsorship

Fiscal sponsorship is when a sponsoring organization or fiscal agent with tax-exempt status accepts charitable donations on behalf of a startup organization with a nonprofit mission. According to Minnesota-based Springboard for the Arts’ incubator program, fiscal sponsorship is a viable option for organizations or individuals who do not have IRS tax-exempt status. This is due to either lack of staff capacity (meaning those supporting the organization or project are not able to put in the time or resources to administer the process), or because they are working within a limited timeframe (gaining approval for tax-exempt status can be a lengthy process). Fiscal sponsorship can also be granted to organizations that have applied but are still awaiting 501(c)3 status.⁴²

With the above activities in mind, we can see that comparing incubators to one another might not be the best way to identify benchmarks for success due to the great variation in the activities they sponsor. To further illustrate this point, I look at Springboard and AIR. They are two arts incubators with similar missions – to build stronger communities and economies by linking artists to resources, businesses, and community members – but with considerably different approaches to fulfilling those missions.

SPRINGBOARD FOR THE ARTS

Springboard for the Arts is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)3 arts organization. Their mission is to create a cultural movement by building stronger communities and economies. By providing a system that supports artists with services and resources, Springboard’s aim is to

⁴¹ 4731 Gallery, “BCIC Business Model,” accessed February 25, 2015, <http://4731.com/about/slider-2/bcic-business-model/>.

⁴² Springboard for the Arts, “Incubators and Fiscal Sponsor FAQ,” accessed February 23, 2015. <http://springboardforthearts.org/incubator-program/incubator-fiscal-sponsorship-faq/>.

fulfill a need within the community. Encouraging collaboration between artists and the community through cross-sector partnerships creates value for the arts, helps artists make a living, and enhances economic growth.

For Operations Manager John Bell, Springboard is “everything for artists outside of the studio.” It offers professional development opportunities such as one-on-one career counseling and group workshops. Community development and creative placemaking programs exist, including placement for artists in community-minded organizations, and in neighborhoods and businesses for creative projects. Springboard has an online Resources and Referrals Center, connecting artists to legal advice, healthcare, and emergency disaster relief. Finally, Springboard has a stand-alone incubator program.

As an organization, Springboard does not define itself as an arts incubator, though some of its programmatic activities have similarities to the activities outlined earlier. However, Springboard does have a designated incubator program based on fiscal sponsorship. IRS rules and regulations for becoming fully incorporated as a charitable nonprofit require an involved process, a dedication of man-hours that some startups find difficult. Once an organization has filed for tax-exempt status, approval can take a period of months. This is where Springboard’s incubator steps in. Fiscal sponsorship allows those with finite projects that are nonprofit in nature and align with Springboard’s mission to raise funds under Springboard’s IRS tax-exempt status. Springboard accepts donations on behalf of their startups, which they call *projects*; their website has a Support an Incubator Project page linking donors to the Incubator Project Directory, where they can donate to the Minnesota-based projects of their choice.⁴³

⁴³ Springboard for the Arts, “Incubator Project Directory,” accessed February 27, 2015, <http://springboardforthearts.org/incubator-program/incubator-project-directory>.

Bell emphasizes that Springboard’s incubator does not incubate in the traditional sense of taking organizations under its wing as a “nonprofit university,” but they do provide participants with tools for success. This includes access to their Resources and Referrals Center, access to grantwriting workshops, and guidance as to where to find answers to their questions.

ARTS INCUBATOR OF THE ROCKIES

Arts Incubator of the Rockies (AIR) was formed in 2010 to create a sense of community between states in the region and raise the national perception of Western fine arts. AIR is based in Loveland, Colorado and serves ten states in the Intermountain West. The program was originally an initiative of Beet Street, the City of Fort Collins Cultural Services Department and Colorado State University’s Leadership, Arts Advocacy, and the Public program. In 2014, AIR incorporated and became a separate nonprofit entity with 501(c)3 tax status.

AIR’s purpose is to identify and respond to the challenges faced by the region’s creative community by using technology and business strategies.⁴⁴ Artists are spread out all over the geographical region in the Intermountain West, and when AIR was originated in 2010, the ecosystem did not readily support entrepreneurship or professional development in the arts. Additionally, facilities did not have the capacity to support cutting-edge programming or take artistic risks. AIR supports creativity and entrepreneurship by weaving the value of the arts into the fabric of the community. They teach artists how to integrate themselves into the business world and facilitate in the exchange of ideas and innovative ways of working. Beet Street’s 2013 IRS Form 990 (completed prior to the separation of organizations in 2014) reiterates that AIR’s

⁴⁴ “History.”

services are directed towards artists and community members “who want to shift the paradigm about art, money, value, and community.”⁴⁵

AIR serves its mission through professional development and educational curriculum. The AIR Shift Workshop is an in-person, three-day collaboration among people who value the arts. Facilitators guide participants to “shift” their preconceived notions about the role of the arts in communities, and the relationship between the creative and business industries. AIR believes that participants will be more successful in business planning once they discover the true value of the arts, which is to say the arts and creativity can benefit every sector of the community. Participants then build skills to succeed in their next venture by using innovative business practices, such as quick pitching ideas, prototyping, testing, as well as learning the practical aspects of planning like budgeting and marketing.⁴⁶

AIR Evolve is an extension of the Shift Workshop. It is a six-month, comprehensive program for creative entrepreneurs who are ready to begin a startup venture. Lastly, AIR offers a Higher Education Internship Seminar, using the same curriculum but modifying it to engage university students.⁴⁷

AIR has an extensive list of online tools and resources. Members can network and promote their work by creating a page in the Membership Directory, or they can request feedback on current project and problems through AIR Share. There is a calendar of regional events and activities, and an Opportunities board listing open calls, funding, jobs, and internships.

⁴⁵ Guidestar, “Beet Street IRS 990,” accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2013/261/456/2013-261456527-0acf98ba-9.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Arts Incubator of the Rockies, “Learning,” accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.airartsincubator.org/learning>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Finally, in 2015 AIR will pilot its Affiliate, or “train the trainer” program to national audiences. AIR will train and certify facilitators to present AIR’s curriculum in their own communities, either as a local affiliate or a higher education affiliate. That is, Affiliates will be licensed to present AIR’s Shift Workshop, Evolve Program, and Higher Education Internship Seminar to local audiences.⁴⁸

Looking at Springboard and AIR, we can see that two incubators with similar missions can vary vastly in the programs they offer. With this array of different features and services, a one-size-fits-all approach to measuring success will not work. Furthermore, how can Springboard and AIR tell if the activities and programs they offer are they the best way to achieve their mission and stated goals?

CONCLUSION: A THEORY OF CHANGE

What is lacking at Springboard and AIR is an underlying framework necessary to demonstrate a clear connection between the success of their programming and the success of their missions. Before arts incubators can evaluate, they must make the argument that their programs produce those changes central to their missions.

This is where Theory of Change comes into play. Used by grantmakers and organizations seeking social change, a Theory of Change (ToC) is a planning and evaluation tool that arts incubators can use to measure their effectiveness. Far more than just an evaluation tool, a ToC is a roadmap for the journey ahead. It brings clarity to long-term goals, predicts the effects of programming, and helps determine the what, when, and how of evaluation.⁴⁹ It is an overarching view of what is needed to produce social change, which is a desirable outcome for many arts

⁴⁸ “Affiliates.”

⁴⁹ Anne Mackinnon and Natasha Amott, GuideCraft, “Mapping Change: Using a Theory of Change To Guide Planning and Evaluation,” accessed April 5, 2015, http://www.grantercraft.org/assets/content/resources/theory_change.pdf, 1.

incubators. After a relationship is established between the programs and the desired outcomes, then arts incubators are better equipped to answer what activities need to be evaluated and how to do so.

What makes a ToC unique is that planners and stakeholders work backwards, looking at the big picture first to identify long-term changes (outcomes); then proposing the goals, strategies, and interventions (activities) necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. Paramount to a ToC is explaining the pathways of how one outcome influences the next. Along the way, planners must be diligent about managing and addressing assumptions, or the beliefs that underpin the theory. They must agree upon what they think will work, why they think it will work, and predict how it will resolve the issue at hand.⁵⁰

A ToC is usually represented as a flow chart. The dynamic nature of the flow chart helps planners visualize the relationships between the mission, assumptions, targeted groups, strategies and resources, and outcomes. Planners can then develop measures for success based on their theory. By using a ToC, arts incubators will be better equipped to make informed decisions about what is truly an indicator of progress based on what they have articulated in their theory.⁵¹

With their missions in mind, AIR and Springboard can begin with long-term changes and work backwards to their goals. Goals such as “raising the value of the arts” and “creating a cultural movement” also become much clearer when planners work through assumptions. For example, asking and achieving consensus to the questions “what does creating a cultural movement entail?” and “who would a cultural movement involve?” Only after assumptions are addressed should specific strategies be introduced to achieve the intended outcomes set forth.⁵²

⁵⁰ Mackinnon and Amott, “Mapping Change: Using a Theory of Change To Guide Planning and Evaluation,” 2.

⁵¹ Mackinnon and Amott “Mapping Change,” 7.

⁵² Mackinnon and Amott, “Mapping Change,” 8.

Through a ToC, incubators can ask if the diverse services they provide – access to accommodation, services and networks, funding and fiscal sponsorship – optimize the achievement of their goals. Do these services promote entrepreneurship and risk-taking? Furthermore, do they spawn social change, which is at the center of many arts incubators’ missions? Springboard must ask, “How does fiscal sponsorship encourage entrepreneurship, and how does artistic entrepreneurship help create a cultural movement?”

After arts incubators identify outcomes and indicators for success, arts managers should ask, “Is the intervention [or activity] meaningful? Is it plausible? Is it doable by this particular organization? And is it measurable?”⁵³ This is when quantitative measures such as AIR’s number of ventures launched and Springboard’s demand for programs should be tabulated. During evaluation, arts incubators should determine areas of interest where they can see the most direct link to their long-term outcomes and mission.⁵⁴

Arts managers must recognize the obstacles to measuring the success of arts incubators. Arts incubators have lofty missions and goals that are difficult to measure, and there are many different entities and activities clustered under the arts incubator term. This makes it harder for managers to develop methods of evaluation. A Theory of Change is individualized to suit the needs of arts incubators and the communities they serve, grounding ambitious goals by developing a logical framework to map outcomes and address assumptions. If arts incubators lay the groundwork by developing a Theory of Change, they will be better prepared to effectively evaluate their programs and measure their success.

⁵³ Mackinnon and Amott, “Mapping Change,” 9.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

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