

## CRN Virtual Study Group

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### Parallel Tracks: A comparison of cultural data platforms

Exploring two cultural data platforms and their relative merits / weaknesses:

- WESTAF's Cultural Vitality Index (CVI) and
- Americans for the Arts' National and Local Art Indices.

#### PRESENTERS:

**Anna Muessig** works with Gehl Studio, which specializes in urban planning and strategy, working with cities, nonprofits, developers and foundations. Her recent projects include the creative activation of development sites in transition, cultural masterplanning, and the urban design of manufacturing districts. She was lead author and researcher for a report on Minneapolis' creative economy commissioned by the City of Minneapolis where she developed a methodology for analyzing large data sets that described the scale and impact of that city's creative economy, in part using CVI data. [Read the report here.](#)

**Roland Kushner** is Associate Professor at Muhlenberg College teaching courses in arts administration, as well as nonprofit and small business management. He and co-author Randy Cohen of Americans for the Arts published "National Arts Index 2009: An Annual Measure of the Vitality of Arts and Culture in the United States." Followup National Arts Index reports were also published in 2011 and 2012. In 2011 and 2012, he collaborated with Americans for the Arts on the Local Arts Index project, which measures cultural activity at the local level. National and Local Arts index data are available at [www.artsindexusa.org](http://www.artsindexusa.org)

#### FACILITATOR:

**Kiley Arroyo** is an independent cultural research, evaluation, and management strategy consultant based in Sausalito, California. Over the past two decades she has been intimately involved with American, European, and Middle Eastern arts and culture, philanthropic, and government organizations. Arroyo is a founding member of the Cultural Research Network steering committee.

#### Anna Muessig

- The Cultural Vitality Index (CVI) is produced by WESTAF. It has existed for about ten years. A new version of the tool is coming out soon. CVI is designed to compare the cultural vitality of cities. It measures consumer spending, occupational employment, nonprofit revenues and the number of nonprofits within a given city. You can also compare it to the CVI of one, which is the national average.
- CVI was the kernel for our **Minneapolis Creative Index 2013** report, but we expanded beyond that to include other data sources. We dug a little deeper and did some custom work to get more history in the longitudinal analysis. Also developed qualitative data to complement the CVI and other quantitative data. We had an advisory team from local government and other arts stakeholders, which was an important part of making the project work.
- Arts spending includes store sales of arts, performing arts participation revenues and galleries, as well as 990 data for nonprofits from the National Center for Charitable Statistics. This nonprofit data

only includes orgs with budgets between \$25-250K. The nonprofit data was manipulated by Economic Modeling Specialists, a partner of WESTAF.

- On the qualitative side, we had to carefully define the bounds of what we're talking about. The City Coordinator's Office was very interested in this. What is creativity? How do you measure it? Fine arts are in the center, but there are many rings surrounding it. It includes arts education, festivals, cross-sector, philanthropic organizations, civic groups, etc. We wanted to think about all of them in the context of our report.
- We created a section called Beyond Economic Impacts where we reported on interviews with arts leaders about what it means to them to measure the arts and impact of the arts.
- The report was approved by the City Council, and they are using it in their work. For example, they used data from this report to change Minneapolis policies around allowing creative producers in the design industry to use homes for production. We discovered that Minneapolis has a high proportion of dancers but it's shrinking., We are using this data to talk about those issues.
- A tool like this to allows for data-driven planning, longitudinal analysis, and to compare ourselves to other jurisdictions. It allows us to talk about the competitive advantage of different geographies.
- Technical challenges to measurement in general. These issues are not specific to the CVI:
  - It's difficult to count small organizations,
  - It's also difficult to count occupations because so many artists are self-employed;
  - It's difficult to find data that matches local jurisdictions, especially with small geographies. Most of our stakeholders want to talk about local districts within a big city.
- Lessons we learned:
  - Using new data tools with cities and bureaucracies can be a challenge. If you introduce a new way to measure employment, it probably won't match the way the city has traditionally measured employment. You'll need to be ready to discuss and negotiate this.
  - It's important to explain your arts data in the context of other areas your stakeholders might be interested in, like sports. Put your data in context.
  - Important to use CVI as jumping off point, not the silver bullet.
  - The data that is relatively easy to get is sometimes in conflict with the data you really want.
  - CVI is great for benchmarking and annual updates
  - While we're in the data business, data isn't the holy grail. Our work is also about telling stories.
  - Some stakeholders want numbers; others want stories. You have to be prepared for both.
  - It's also important for us to share with other researchers like this

### **Roland Kushner**

- AFTA's National Arts Index began development in 2005, and was first published in 2010. It's a time-series measure designed to track 78 different measures over time. Right after we released the national report, people started asking for local data. This work was originally funded by Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Kresge Foundation.
- Based on the wide interest we were hearing, we set out to gather local data to drive decisions at a local level. We learned that several hundred places around the US have local indicator initiatives. We started with primary and secondary data in 2010-11. We had 75 local arts agencies partner with us. It turned out to be very hard to get consistent primary data across different cities, like the number of seats in local arts venues.
- The local arts index web site uses only secondary data. We work at county level, which has pros and cons. It's too big for some stakeholders, too small for others. Many people would like zip code level data. Others want it at the MSA level.
- County level data is available free of charge at [ArtsIndexUSA.org](http://ArtsIndexUSA.org)

- Our goal is to provide data to support arts advocacy, community development around the arts, and support business planning for entrepreneurs. We want to get past anecdote and case stories.
- The Local Arts Index includes spending and participation data, and we estimate total market size for arts entrepreneurs. We look not only at arts but also culture: preservation and other manifestations of broader culture
- This data is divided into four dimensions:
  - Arts Activity
  - Resources & Capacity
  - Competitiveness
  - Local Cultural Character
- We have identified 13 factors within those dimensions. Within these factors are a total of 77 indicators. We add data periodically in batches throughout the year We've been gathering this data since 2009 for the most part, though some of it is older. We update data several times a year.
- On the site users can easily compare themselves directly to other communities using drop-down menus. Available for display county by county, where you can compare several different counties at once. There are also summary index figures. Click on any indicator to get a description of it, as well as the national average and median for the US.
- The data comes from a wide range of sources, including private membership organizations, professional societies and trade groups, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Endowment for the Arts, Census, Internal Revenue Service, National Parks Services, National Center for Education Statistics, National Association of State Arts Agencies, National Center for Charitable Statistics, Claritas-Nielsen, Scarborough Research, and Dun & Bradstreet.
- We can gather multiple counties and prepare a population-weighted report on indicators for that geographic region, including CBSA/MSA or *ad hoc* local grouping in a region.
- The site does not display much historical data, but are working to increase that. We're also looking to add additional indicators in future. We also want to prepare mini-reports with subsets of the indicators for any county.

## Q&A

*Anna, did you integrate qualitative data into your quantitative data?*

- *Anna:* In Minneapolis we used the CVI score as they calculate it. We didn't have any way to alter it. We were thinking about how to measure social capital, which was a big part of the qualitative study, but didn't have the capacity for that.

*How do you measure participation?*

- *Roland:* AFTA uses data from Scarborough Research. They do 200,000+ interviews per year, including tracking attendance at popular live performing arts. The indicators we show refer to the extent to which people are participating in the arts, how they are using their time. Expenditure data comes from Claritas. Estimates of local arts and culture expenditures is for local residents. It's not a measure of money that is spent on arts and culture in the county, but the amount of money county residents spend on arts and culture.

*What have you not been able to measure that you wish you could*

- *Roland:* Tell me when to stop! We want to measure arts and culture broadcasting on local stations. Opportunities for youth to participate in festivals, fairs, etc. Coverage of the arts in local media. Diversity of programming in different venues and by different ethnic populations
- *Kiley:* Our challenge is that most of what we can measure is more transactional rather than about the experience of the art itself

- *Roland*: Among the data points we do track from year to year is the number of self-employed, non-employer artists per capita.
- *Anna*: I second a lot of what Roland says. In this report where I wanted to go but couldn't, is to look more at race and class and disparity of access to the arts. One very important indicator of cultural vitality is who's participating as a maker and a consumer.

*Thinking about public officials and how they use your data, do you ever worry that the limits of the data might limit their actions or how they think about the arts?*

- *Anna*: Never let the data control your vision. Use the data as a decision-making tool to decrease your uncertainty when making decisions, but never let it limit your imagination.