



Number 7

*Join Us in Our Continuing Series
of Roundtable Discussions*

How can nonprofits based in
center cities retain their existing
constituents while attracting
suburban or regional users?

How can nonprofits in new
or outlying communities work
with one another and with their
urban counterparts? Share your
opinion with us and with your
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Working Paper

Home is Where?

Regionalism, Hometowns, and Culture

Marc Goldring

Vice President, Wolf, Keens & Company

Our understanding of and relationship to where we live is among the many aspects of our lives that have changed dramatically over the past few decades. Indeed, the phrase “home town” now has a certain nostalgic ring to it. Our lives seem to require not one but several, perhaps many, “home towns” for a variety of purposes. And the circles in which our lives require us to travel – for work, for shopping, to educate our children, entertain our family and friends, get healthcare – now encompass an increasingly large region.

Moreover, the relatively static model of the central city as “hub” with suburbs surrounding it no longer reflects the emerging interdependent reality of urban, suburban, exurban, rural, and edge society living for an increasingly large number of people. More and more of the communities that had been solely bedrooms are now looking to build their own community service infrastructure in order to provide residents with a range of amenities they had, in the past, looked to major urban centers to provide.

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This is a result of the growth of these areas, the concomitant problems of traffic, and other social and economic considerations.

This shift in how and where people live in relation to the services that they use has affected the nonprofit institutions that serve them. This shift has meant that nonprofits must rethink their long-held, traditional understandings of service areas and, with that, consider a wider range of services to address the needs of this broader slice of the market as well as identifying and redefining who is their competition. An opportunity? Yes, but a difficult one to take advantage of without new strategic thinking.

In effect, we travel in regional patterns rather than the older, more circumscribed local patterns. However, the situation is, in reality, even more dynamic than this configuration would suggest. It is often the case that the definition of what the region is varies depending on the specific initiative under consideration. A hospital may define the region to include areas that a performing arts center would not; and individuals in traditionally suburban regions may choose to retain the central city model rather than use local satellite operations

of urban service providers. Thus complexity builds on complexity and we are taxed to see the trees and the forest.

There is a range of issues raised by this transition. Among the questions that might be addressed are:

- How can nonprofits based in center cities retain their existing core constituents while attracting suburban or regional users?
- How can nonprofits in maturing outlying areas and newly growing communities define distinct roles and work cooperatively with one another as well as with “competitors” in older, urban cores?
- What are the implications – for funders and for nonprofits – when organizations increasingly provide services outside major funders’ traditional granting areas?
- How can service provision be rationalized within a region, often with multiple jurisdictions, so that redundancy is avoided and synergy is encouraged?

We have asked four prominent leaders to address this issue and their comments follow.

Michael Spring

Executive Director

Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs

Regional cultural development is a fact of life in Miami-Dade and South Florida and it has been for close to two decades. Our larger performing arts organizations have developed audiences, boards, and venues in Broward, Palm Beach, and Miami-Dade counties because they saw that no one community could provide the audience and funding base for the level of artistic excellence to which they aspired.

The South Florida Cultural Consortium – five arts councils from contiguous counties – grew out of the recognition, fifteen years ago, of the regional trends in our area. Audiences don’t honor political boundaries and so our thinking has had to expand. Interestingly, we’ve found that this has often helped with fund raising.

For instance, when Broward County jumped ahead in public support, we were able to use that fact here to great effect. Now all of us look more broadly at each other’s funding patterns – and strategically plan with the benefit of the larger picture.

In truth there are two divergent trends here – regionalism is one but, as a result of the shortage of time and traffic problems, there is also an increased desire to have a variety of amenities closer to home. So we are seeing more neighborhoods focusing on their unique characteristics, adding identities and flavors to what might have been undifferentiated bedroom communities in the past.

These trends interact – and contradict – one another. But that’s the nature of our business. Regional cultural development isn’t neat and orderly. Rather than superimposing assumptions, ideas, and policies, you must look and listen carefully to lead wisely.

Chris Jarvi

*Director of Community Services Department
City of Anaheim, California*

Continued lifestyle changes among those we serve will undoubtedly cause nonprofit institutions to rethink how they deliver service. One means of addressing the impact of these changes on nonprofit organizations might be to redefine the traditional concept of “community” as defined in the concept paper. The new paradigm would define “community” as a group of like-minded individuals irrespective of their geographic origin.

Many nonprofit organizations are designed to focus on addressing a specific “cause” within a specified service area. This concept of service area may create an artificial barrier to potential growth. An organization’s success should be measured by the degree to which their contributors believe the mission is being achieved. The key to an organization’s future success will be

determined by its ability to define and articulate its mission to potential contributors or “community” of supporters.

With the advent of the Internet, geography is becoming increasingly less important in determining an organization’s success. Organizations that succeed are those that develop a strong organizational vision in the context of the “community” of interest they serve. They use tools such as strategic planning and marketing to define and articulate their vision. Their success will also be determined by the degree to which they can lead or participate in collaborations within their defined “communities” of interest. Contributors are more likely to support organizations that will achieve the greatest “bang for their buck.”

Organizations who think in terms of a “community” of interests, whether geographically based or not, have a greater chance of success in today’s ever-changing environment.

Thomas Schorgl

*President & CEO
Cleveland Community Partnership for Arts & Culture*

Northeast Ohio’s seven-county region, with Cleveland at its center, embarked on its first regional cultural planning process three years ago. Developing such a plan is complicated. One must understand the nuances and the similarities that exist among urban, suburban, exurban, and rural communities. We learned that in some instances the best strategies were systemic or region wide in nature and application, such as arts and cultural education. However, some, such as the development of public sector cultural support, need to be cultivated locally.

An Industrial Analogy. Most of the “manufacturers” of arts and culture are located in Cleveland and Akron. The cost of replicating that existing “production infrastructure” of museums and performance groups

elsewhere in the region suggests they will stay where they are. However, out-migration trends from the urban cores and new residents who are moving to the region are increasingly locating in second ring suburbs.

Our research shows a strong desire for multi-purpose cultural centers, in effect “distribution centers” for the products of the producing groups from the cities. For example, Apollo’s Fire, a baroque chamber orchestra, has had success in producing its concerts in a variety of churches strategically located regionally. Their portable yet high quality musical performances reach a broader cross section of the regional population.

This kind of synergy builds on the best each party brings to the table. It focuses on residents’ needs and cultural organizations’ capacities. And while the urban core and first ring suburbs still have the greatest density of arts and cultural audiences, outlying zip codes have significant numbers of residents with similar demographics yet lower rates of consumer penetration.

Nancy Glaze

Director of Arts Programs

David and Lucile Packard Foundation

The changed patterns described in this Working Paper have had a definite impact on grantmakers. At the Packard Foundation, we have always considered ourselves in large measure a “local” funder, concerned with the quality of life in our communities. But our definition of “local communities” has shifted. It is not that the overall boundaries of our local funding area have changed substantially. But within these boundaries there is a whole new set of realities.

We used to look at our local cities as “suppliers” for the surrounding suburbs and we concentrated our funding there. If you lived in a suburban community, you described it as “a suburb of X city.” Now this is much less the case. Suburban communities themselves are becoming more autonomous and more independent.

As a consequence, we are funding many more institutions in those communities than we used to.

Further, the suburban communities are forming themselves into informal constellations or clusters that have distinct identities and consumer patterns. Though not quite cities, these clusters bear many of the same characteristics, allowing individuals who live within them to be much more self-reliant without having to go to the city for services. Suburban residents still relate to cities. But they often relate to more than one – going to City X for certain things and City Y for other things.

There is another pattern that has emerged. Because city-based grantees no longer hold the exclusive franchise as purveyors of services, we are placing more requirements on them than ever before. We look to these groups to set a standard of quality for their field; and we have a greater expectation for diverse programming. Essentially, we have raised the bar.