

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE:
EXPLORING MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL COLLABORATIONS
BETWEEN LARGE AND SMALL THEATRES

Kevin Nelson

Major paper submitted to the faculty of Goucher College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

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Small and large theatre organizations face unique challenges relative to their size. Through collaboration, organizations of disparate budget size can find unique solutions to some of these challenges and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes in areas such as community impact, audience expansion, reduced production costs and organizational structure.

The best methods for successful collaboration and positive impact are recognized and assessed by examining the impetus for and the results of past successful collaborations. Small theatres can benefit from access to greater resources, visibility and organizational mentorship. Large theatres can benefit from exposure to unique audiences, reduced production costs and creative approaches to structure and operation.

Each collaboration discussed differed structurally and produced different outcomes, though some similarities existed. Flexibility, transparency, communication and setting reasonable expectations are, along with the inherently collaborative nature of theatre, proved to be the most important elements of success.

The positive outcomes from collaborations generally outweigh the complications and setbacks. Collaborations between theatres take many forms, but the opportunities to share resources and expertise can benefit organizations both large and small and strengthen the landscape of nonprofit theatre.

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To my fellow Gophers: you truly are Masters of the Universe.

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Introduction

Collaboration is a term broadly used in the performing arts and across other industries worldwide. It is far from a new concept and its definition varies depending on the context and the organizations involved. In a piece published by *The Philadelphia Social Innovations Journal*, John MacIntosh and Lois Savage recognize collaboration's mundane reputation "compared with 'exponential growth,' 'collective impact,' 'social enterprise,' 'social impact bonds,' or 'catalytic philanthropy.'" Collaboration, they continue, "...is an idea that has been around for a long time and hasn't yet 'gone viral' or 'broken out'" (MacIntosh and Savage). Because collaboration has been around for so long, it is often overlooked in favor of more exciting or fashionable practices.

Much of art, and especially theatre, is inherently collaborative, yet the majority of nonprofit organizations function as independent entities, sometimes even wary or suspicious of their competitors. Steppenwolf Theatre's Audience Engagement Creative Producer, Greta Honold, believes that, while theatres may compete for press and ticket sales, the reality is that most theatre companies have little reason to worry about someone stealing from the competition, "when looking at audience engagement or audience retention strategy, people tend to come when the work is good" (Honold). Small local theatres, such as the many storefront theatres that share Chicago with Steppenwolf, pose little threat to their larger regional neighbors. Those large theatres' resources, however,

are significantly greater than those of small theatres', especially in regards to marketing capabilities, press visibility and public awareness.

Smaller local theatres, unconfined by institutional and organizational limitations often present in larger regional theatres, may have more freedom to experiment with their productions and structures. By working together, collaborations between large regional theatres and small local theatre companies can be mutually beneficial and lead to lower production development costs, increased community impact, potential audience expansion and creative approaches to organizational structures.

Chapter I COLLABORATION: DEFINED

Large and Small Theatres

Because of the great variety of structures of theatre companies in the United States, the focus of this paper will be solely on nonprofit organizations whose main purpose is to create theatrical productions. Nonprofit theatres could be categorized by any number of factors, though for the purposes of this paper size will be defined by the best gauge of an organization's resources, its budget. An organization's budget may or may not reflect its audience size, its regional or community influence, the quality of its work, or its proportion of earned and donated income, and may be difficult to compare to others depending on a host of other considerations.

Even organizations of a similar budget size may have very different priorities and influential factors. For instance, American Conservatory Theatre (A.C.T.) and Goodman Theatre have similar budgets around nineteen million dollars ("Theatres by Budget Group"), but the economic differences between San Francisco and Chicago may have considerable impact on how their finances are budgeted, from setting rental prices to considering salary requirements. Additionally, although both theatres have a large sphere of influence in their communities, they have very different programming and priorities. A.C.T. operates two separate theatres and supports a major conservatory program ("General Information"). Goodman also has two performance spaces, but focuses

primarily on production and presenting. While Goodman does have education programming and workshops, it is not as primarily focused on training actors and artists. Despite these differences, nineteen million dollars is an inarguably large budget, especially compared to those of small local theatres.

Theatre Communications Group (TCG) categorizes member theatres by six budget groups. Groups one and two have budgets between fifty thousand and one million dollars, while groups five and six include organizations with budgets over five million dollars (“Theatres by Budget Group”). For the purposes of this paper, a small theatre will be defined as a nonprofit theatrical organization that falls in the first two groups, with an annual operating budget below one million dollars. A large theatre will be defined as a nonprofit theatrical organization that falls in the last two groups, with an annual operating budget of over five million dollars. Small budget theatres have spheres of influence that are predominantly local to their surrounding community. Larger budget theatres, many of which are members of League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and are often called regional theatres, generally have larger spheres of influence on national or international levels.

While TCG’s budget groups give a clear delineation of how to categorize organizations, it must be noted that this arbitrary system is not perfect. Some organizations discussed may not be a member of TCG and some small organizations discussed may edge just over a one million dollar budget. In some cases, budget sizes may also appear inflated from year to year depending on single or multiple year grants.

TCG has over five hundred, “professional, not-for-profit member theatres, representing every region of the country and ranging in staff size from 3 to 300 and in budget size from \$50,000 to over \$40 million” (“Theatre Membership – Eligibility”). Of

these members, approximately 291 have operating budgets under one million dollars (57%), and 71 have budgets over five million (14%) (“Theatres by Budget Group”). It must be noted that many small theatre companies have budget sizes far below \$50,000 and are therefore ineligible for TCG membership. Although most small theatre companies discussed in this paper are TCG members, some are not.

Collaboration

In a piece written for Theatre Communications Group, Cornerstone Theater Company’s Artistic Director Michael John Garcés identifies collaboration as “what happens when two or more people interact to create a shared understanding that none previously possessed or could have achieved on their own” (Garcés “Innovation/Collaboration”). Although not specifically referencing collaborations between organizations, the value of collaboration in the performing arts in particular cannot be ignored. Theatre especially relies on collaboration as a foundational ingredient:

A successful show effectively fuses the talents of a vast cast of characters, onstage and behind the scenes. And yet the writers, actors, musicians, designers, crew members and managers involved in a show often have competing interests, needs and opinions about how a production should come together. (Avampato).

Like the terms discussed earlier, collaboration has a subjective definition depending on each situation. In this paper, collaboration will be defined as a united effort on behalf of two or more organizations to produce a single or series of works. A distinction must also be made between how collaborations are defined in this paper and a

popular concept of collaborations. There are numerous regional theatres that offer what could be called presenting collaborations, where a smaller organization produces a work on its own, and the regional organization then presents this production on its stage. While these arrangements often have positive outcomes, the focus of this paper will be collaborations that require both organizations to work together on a deeper level throughout production.

Several examples included in this paper, including Steppenwolf Theatre's Garage Rep program and Goodman Theatre's relationship to Albany Park Theater Project, may resemble presenting collaborations, as the work is self-produced by the smaller theatre company. By closely examining the process between the organizations however, the collaborative elements run much deeper.

Founding artistic director and current head of theatre at Tennessee Wesleyan College, C. Austin Hill, believes that "great collaborations can happen between companies, and...this is the future of 'small theatre'" (Hill). Hill's direct collaborative experience came from his all-volunteer Solstice Theatre Company collaborating with another small company, but the basics of his belief hold true for organizations of any size: "theatre—at its best—is a collaborative art form...Let us all seek out those whose skills complement our own, and put each other to work" (Hill).

Financial Appeal of Collaboration

Like many nonprofits, theatres are often financially strained and collaboration may appear as a logical method to reduce expenditure by splitting the cost of production between two organizations. The sheer logistical nature of two very different organizations

cooperating can be a time-consuming endeavor and, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, in some situations production costs are not significantly mitigated.

Private and public sponsors and foundations sometimes offer collaboration-specific funding, as a way to reduce competition between applicants and as a way to make the limited funding opportunities affect a greater number of organizations. If funding organizations can continue to provide incentive for collaborative grants in meaningful ways, by working together, recipients could face less competition for the same limited opportunities.

The existence of such grants has led to a misconception that obtaining collaboration-specific funding is often the sole motivation for initiating a collaboration. However, it appears that either such an impression is no longer true or that such cases are rare. While not limited to arts organizations,

A recent survey from Grantmakers for Effective Organizations ...found 53% of funders never or rarely funded collaborations and only 2% made it a consistent practice. Funders find it difficult to support collaboration because of the nature of the grants – fast, small, process-oriented, confidential – are so different from the programmatic, capacity-building, and other grants they consider year-over-year. (MacIntosh and Savage).

Since 2009, SeaChange Capital Partners and The Lodestar Foundation have partnered to “increase the scope of collaborative activity,” across nonprofit organizations (MacIntosh and Savage). Although this initiative is inclusive of all types of nonprofits, Lodestar consistently funds a number of theatrical organizations. John MacIntosh of SeaChange and Lois Savage of Lodestar wrote an article on the “Myths and Realities of

Nonprofit Collaboration: Observations from Six Years in the Trenches,” examining trends and observations of nonprofit collaboration. Some of the motivations for exploring collaborations identified include:

1. Economies of scale (programmatic and financial)
2. Broader geographic and programmatic impact
3. An increase in access to potential funding from new donors
4. Potential creation of joint programs for more robust services to the community
5. Preservation and sustainability of financially unstable programs
6. Strengthening of organizational leadership, easing of leadership transitions and recruitment of high quality professional talent (MacIntosh and Savage).

MacIntosh and Savage specify that, “‘cost savings’ is not on the list, even though some collaborations ... offer the potential to meaningfully reduce costs over time. But nonprofits don’t see cost savings as an end in itself ...they see it as a means to grow or sustain programming” (MacIntosh and Savage). Although theatrical collaborations may not always significantly reduce overall production costs, and in some cases may actually increase them, there are certain cost elements that can be lessened or mitigated through collaboration. Rarely, however, is this the primary incentive to begin a collaboration.

There are a multitude of reasons that theatrical organizations of disparate sizes might seek out a collaborative partner, though the ones identified over the course of research for this paper align with MacIntosh and Savage’s first, second and fourth observations. These include: achieving a particular programming goal, such as engaging

a certain audience, or utilizing expertise that another organization may possess; supporting or fostering other organizations; and artistic leadership desires. Organizational and artistic leaders may admire other organizations' work or may forge relationships with other artists and staff members. In the examples that follow, reducing expenses or increasing revenue are rarely the highest motivations for initiating a collaboration, though they are certainly welcome outcomes when they do occur. More common resulting collaborative outcomes include increased community impact, potential audience expansion and creative approaches to organizational structures.

The next chapter looks at several examples of past and ongoing collaborations among large and small theatrical organizations. The first of these collaborations dates back to the early 1990s and involves an organization whose very mission is rooted in collaborative practice. The others include two well-known Chicago regional theatres, each of which approaches collaboration and partnership with smaller companies in different ways.

Chapter II

MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL COLLABORATIONS

Cornerstone and Arena Stage

Cornerstone Theater Company was founded on the principle of collaborations amongst its ensemble members and local communities. From its founding in 1986 until it found its permanent Los Angeles home in 1992, the company was “a traveling ensemble, which adapted classic works to tell the stories of both rural and urban communities” (“History”).

In 1993 Washington DC’s Arena Stage, including then managing director, Stephen Richard and then artistic director, Doug Wager, decided to produce a work that featured the local community as both actors and subject; a relatively unusual undertaking for a large regional theatre in the mid-1990s. In 1993, the LORT theatre with an annual operating budget of approximately eight million dollars (Swisher and Brown) approached Cornerstone and then artistic director, Bill Rauch, to collaborate on an adaptation of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* based in the Washington DC Anacostia neighborhood (Richard). Though it had the budget of a small local theatre at the time, Cornerstone Theater already had a national reputation for developing community-based work, which is why Arena Stage sought to collaborate on what became *A Community Carol*.

In a personal interview Stephen Richard, now the Managing Director of Center Stage in Baltimore, recalled that selecting Cornerstone as a collaborative partner was

borne out of “admiration of Cornerstone’s work and their methodology.” Arena Stage also hoped to create a new original Christmas production rooted in the surrounding DC community. The production featured a combination of nonprofessional locals from Anacostia, Cornerstone company members and professional actors.

As discussed in Sonja Kuflinec’s comprehensive book on Cornerstone Theater’s first ten years, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theater*, some of the main impetuses of the collaborative production were born out of Doug Wager’s enthusiasm for Cornerstone’s previous work, as well as a “personal and artistic affinity between Bill Rauch and Doug Wager” (Kuflinec 147). There was also a desire to engage and involve an underrepresented local community and to do something completely outside of a traditional Arena Stage production (Richard). The concept and execution of the production required both artistic and organizational cooperation from both companies.

A Community Carol

Stephen Richard remembers he and Rauch being happy with the production, but also disappointed that it did not have quite the financial success they expected. Although ticket sales were moderate, less revenue was generated due to the fact that, “Arena agreed to provide enough pay-what-you-can tickets to assure that the same number of community residents would be able to see the show as in a conventional Cornerstone coproduction, and to set aside a percentage of box office income for future community productions” (Kuflinec 147). As a result, a sold-out performance generated the equivalent of about one half to two thirds of a full house of a normal Arena Stage production

(Kuftinec, 178). Although by no means a financial failure, “it wasn’t successful enough to achieve” a restaging in subsequent years (Richard).

The collaboration did accomplish bringing new audiences to Arena Stage, however. “The production succeeded in drawing not only a large and receptive audience but a diverse community-based one as well” (Kuftinec 177). Many of these audience members were friends, family or acquaintances of the cast members, but the level of Anacostia community involvement, combined with the pay-what-you-can pricing structure, did entice patrons who would otherwise not have attended an Arena Stage show. It is unknown whether those new patrons returned for future Arena Stage productions, though due to *A Community Carol*’s uniqueness and specificity to the community, it is likely that most did not turn into regular Arena Stage patrons.

Although increasing and diversifying its patron base was not one of the Arena Stage’s main impetuses for the collaboration, it was a welcomed outcome. “Wager had hoped primarily to introduce Arena’s established subscription membership to Cornerstone’s work. Audience expansion developed as a potential, though not necessary, benefit in Wager’s eyes” (Kuftinec 180). Wager’s primary goal, however, was realized as more and more traditional Arena patrons were drawn to later performances. As the production received more press and positive reviews, Bill Rauch, on the other hand, professed “some disappointment that as the show became a critical success, audiences ‘got whiter and whiter’” (Kuftinec 177).

While it is positive that Arena Stage audiences were exposed to members of their surrounding community with whom they were unfamiliar, Cornerstone was likely discouraged that the diversity of audience did not match the diversity of the cast.

Although Cornerstone did collaborate with large regional theatres on several more occasions, the vast majority of its work since has been produced and presented inside of the communities it works with (“Commissioned Collaborations”).

The New York Times review of *A Community Carol* notes that Arena Stage “continues to be perceived as a white institution in a predominately black city...An impoverished area like Anacostia, relatively isolated from the rest of Washington by the Anacostia River, can seem light years away from the gleaming centers of power and affluence” (Richards). Highlighting the diversity and increasing the visibility of a nearby neighborhood unfamiliar to Arena Stage patrons was one production goal, as it would create an experience unusual to Arena Stage’s season offerings.

As part of its commitment to serving the community, Cornerstone had requested other stipulations in addition to the pay-what-you-can ticket policy. An East of River advisory board was created to strategize on how best to engage the community in the production process, as well as specifics such as policies for selling group packages within the pay-what-you-can ticket structure. Cornerstone also stipulated that, “a portion of the receipts helped to establish the East of the River Arts Coalition, which, while it did not establish a new community-based theater, did support existing arts organizations” (Kuftinec 180).

As this was the first collaboration between organizations of such disparate sizes in which either theatre company had participated, sharing resources was an appealing aspect of the production. For Cornerstone, coming into an organization with such extensive resources and staff, as well as a larger budget, was particularly exciting. Cornerstone designer Lynn Jeffries remembers thinking, “it was like dying and going to

heaven...There were fifteen extremely talented, dedicated, hard-working crafts people who were just there for me” (Kuftinec 159).

It was also an opportunity for Cornerstone actors to perform on a nationally recognized stage, and, as part of the agreement worked out with Actors’ Equity Association, Cornerstone performers were granted Equity membership. The Cornerstone actors were also exposed to the “luxury” of a different style of working, where emphasis was placed on the actors’ work instead of the traditional Cornerstone method of focusing primarily on engaging the community (Kuftinec, 161).

With each organization having such different operational methods, there were inevitably instances where conflicts arose in areas of the production. For instance, Arena Stage was challenged by, “marketing a show that fell outside the conventional parameters of seasonal planning” (Kuftinec 174). Arena Stage then consulted Cornerstone, which had considerable experience in marketing community-centric productions. However, different priorities for each organization led to struggles and disagreement. Arena Stage’s focus was to appeal to current patrons without alienating them, while Cornerstone was primarily interested in generating community interest and involvement.

An incident given particular attention in Kuftinec’s book involved the creation of a marketing poster. Drawn out debates and a lack of understanding of who should be responsible for decision making led to an inability to decide how best to incorporate the message of the show without offending or caricaturizing Anacostia residents and at the same time, still appealing to Arena Stage’s core audience as a Christmas show (Kuftinec 175). Neither organization was happy with the end result: a smiling Santa of unknown ethnicity in sunglasses on a metro car sleigh over Washington DC. The image lacked

reference to the community-developed aspect of the production as well as its basis on the classic Dickens story and simply clashed with the production itself. The structure of each marketing organization had difficulty working with one another and failed to communicate effectively, which led to a mediocre product and feelings of animosity.

Although *A Community Carol* succeeded as an experimental production between two organizations, it did not result in changes to either organization's organizational structure or approach to developing subsequent productions. Associate artistic director "Laurence Maslon accords that the structural preservation of the two different organizations remains beneficial for both, as Cornerstone and Arena serve different needs in a larger theatrical context" (Kuftinec 180). In other words, the production was largely a success and accomplished what it set out to do, but these two organizations each have very different missions and resources. What must be commended, however, is that two very different organizational structures committed to, and largely succeeded in, collaborating, despite the demanding and time consuming necessity of the process.

The Guthrie and *The Falls*

Cornerstone still continues to collaborate with local communities and other organizations, though its most recent collaboration with a large theatre was in 2006. When Michael John Garcés was selected as the new Artistic Director, Bill Rauch was in the middle of directing *The Falls*, Cornerstone's most recent collaboration with a large regional theatre. This production took place at The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis and was the first show in its new space. Garcés claims that his involvement in the production

was minimal; however he became unexpectedly more involved when Rauch had to leave the production for a family emergency (Garcés, Personal Interview).

Cornerstone's 990 tax forms show that by 2006, the company's budget exceeded one million dollars. Despite this growth, Cornerstone welcomed the resources of The Guthrie, whose 990 tax form for the year 2006 shows a budget of over thirty million dollars. "The resources that the Guthrie was able to put in play were really helpful, and not just money, but, you know, the artists at the Guthrie; the caliber of professional artists...alongside our Cornerstone guest artists, all of that was a really successful sharing of resources and artists" (Garcés, Personal Interview).

The Falls involved a cast of about thirty, comprised of approximately ten professional actors and twenty nonprofessionals. Positive impact on community members involved in the production was similar to that of the Arena Stage production "it was also exciting to have community members in this new Guthrie space...young Somalians, people from all walks of life were suddenly on stage at The Guthrie and that was really exciting" (Garcés, Personal Interview). Cornerstone artists were also paid at a slightly higher rate than they were used to, in order to more closely match what the professional Equity members were making.

In many ways, Garcés' observations about the production mirror much of Cornerstone's experience with Arena Stage. The Guthrie's impetus for the collaboration stemmed largely from wanting to open their new space with a community-centric production; something that had not been done at The Guthrie before (Garcés, Personal Interview).

I think there was this notion of: ‘we’re opening this new space, wouldn’t it be great to do a show that involved communities from our new environs?’ So they [The Guthrie] were very specific in choosing communities from around where the new Guthrie was going to be, and welcoming them into the space and making the space their own. (Garcés, Personal Interview).

Challenges faced at The Guthrie were similar to those encountered at Arena Stage, many of which stemmed from the disparity in organizational cultures due to the size of the organizations. The Guthrie’s “philosophy around and their mentality around community engagement and ours was pretty different” (Garcés, Personal Interview). This led to a lot of discussion surrounding certain community issues and “when you have a conversation at the Guthrie, people from a lot of departments show up. So the disparities really come into play” (Garcés, Personal Interview).

Although Garcés himself was still new to Cornerstone’s process, the company had an additional twelve years of experience since Arena Stage, and the positive outcomes of the collaboration outweighed the negative.

Guthrie was able to bring Cornerstone’s expertise to play in terms of community engagement and we were able to do a show in Minneapolis, which we wouldn’t otherwise have been able to do and we were able to do another show in our season that we might not otherwise have been able to do. (Garcés, Personal Interview).

At the same time, Garcés noted that, once again decreasing cost or increasing revenue did not factor into this collaboration; “no one particularly profits from it. We [Cornerstone] didn’t end that show any worse off, but we were certainly not any better off financially

than we would have been, and I'm sure that The Guthrie did not either" (Garcés, Personal Interview).

Cornerstone and Other Large Collaborations

What is important to note in both of these Cornerstone collaborations is the impetus and execution of each production, as well as the fact that following *A Community Carol*, Cornerstone and Bill Rauch felt their experience was positive enough to continue with subsequent large theatre collaborations throughout Rauch's tenure. These included collaborations with The Public Theatre, The George Street Playhouse, The Great Lakes Theater Festival and Long Wharf Theatre ("Cornerstone Theater"). Cornerstone also worked with other large regional theatres including the Mark Taper Forum and Pasadena Playhouse, though these productions were less intrinsically collaborative than the aforementioned (Wafer).

The Falls marked Cornerstone's last collaboration with a large regional theatre, which is also the year that Garcés stepped in as artistic director. Although a possible future collaboration with an unnamed regional theatre is in the works, Garcés reasons why Cornerstone has moved away from large-scale collaborations:

I wanted to focus on us not doing those kinds of collaborations because I didn't necessarily want to jump back into those kinds of negotiations and the concessions you do make. I wanted to get very rooted in Cornerstone practice before we did that again. (Garcés, Personal Interview).

Even if Cornerstone does collaborate with a larger regional theater in the future, it is no longer a small organization. As indicated on Cornerstone's 2013 990 tax form, the

company has a budget of nearly two million dollars, making it decidedly mid-sized. This budget fluctuates from year to year depending on grants Cornerstone receives, but is usually between one and a half million to two million dollars. Cornerstone still collaborates with smaller organizations and local communities, particularly in and around Los Angeles.

The Garage at Steppenwolf

Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company has a history of collaborations and working relationships with other theatre companies. In 1996 Steppenwolf instated its Visiting Companies Initiative, designed to, "help create relationships with visiting companies, enriching the artistic dialogue among [Steppenwolf's] artists and audiences" (Theatre in Chicago). Many of these visiting companies outgrew their small modest beginnings and have become large organizations themselves. Past Visiting Companies Initiative participants included Lookingglass Theatre, The Hypocrites and Redmoon Theatre ("The Garage – History").

Until 2009, many of these collaborations were the result of existing inter-company friendships or Steppenwolf leadership's desire to work with another organization. Steppenwolf's Audience Engagement Creative Producer Greta Honold explained in a personal interview that these one-off collaborations were sometimes financially successful, but were primarily organized for artistic fulfillment, while any further mutual benefits were secondary considerations. Once a collaborative production ended however, Steppenwolf often continued to foster informal collaborative relationships with these companies.

Former Steppenwolf Executive Director, David Hawkanson hosted “ensemble-theatre lunches,” and meetings with leadership from other theatre companies, such as Redmoon and Lookingglass, to share strategies and successes (Honold). Although informal, and primarily among only artistic and executive leadership, it is important to note that Steppenwolf continues to place value on relationships with its former visiting companies. These organizations were small at the time of their first collaborations with Steppenwolf, but have become mid-size and large organizations themselves (“Theatres by Budget Group”). As these companies matured, access to Steppenwolf’s experience and insight may have contributed to their successes.

Steppenwolf originated as a small ensemble theatre company and now has a sprawling theatre complex with three onsite spaces and a budget of fourteen million dollars (“Theatres by Budget Group”). Honold disclosed that the organization’s commitment to creating opportunities to collaborate with other organizations stems from former Artistic Director Martha Lavey’s philosophy. “Steppenwolf came out of the storefront scene, and as [Steppenwolf] got bigger it was really important [to] maintain artistic relationships with storefront companies” (Honold).

To further this commitment, Steppenwolf launched Garage Rep in 2009 to offer small, local, storefront theatre companies the opportunity to put their work on a widely recognized stage and take advantage of the benefits of working with a large theatrical institution. Three companies were selected annually to produce works to be staged in rotational repertory at Steppenwolf’s Garage Space.

Garage Rep participants were responsible for producing and financing their own work, while Steppenwolf provided little to no financial or artistic assistance with the

production itself. Honold, who began working for Steppenwolf during Garage Rep's inaugural season, detailed that, over a period of six years, Steppenwolf had experimented with "heavier and lighter hands with the art itself," from production to production. Results were varied though generally, "miscommunication around where [artistic] authority lies can quickly unravel relationships" (Honold).

Garage Rep offered participating companies a heavily subsidized space rental and access to Steppenwolf's resources including its equipment, lighting operator, marketing and public relations departments and any other general support requested. This opportunity to interact with and utilize the larger organization's substantial administrative resources ended up being one of the biggest incentives of the program for both Steppenwolf and participating companies.

Sideshow Theatre Company

Sideshow Theatre Company produced *Heddatron* for Garage Rep in 2011. Executive Director Megan Smith recalls the experience as mostly positive, though it was overwhelming for a small company to be thrown into an organization with such high "professional standards," where "we all wanted to be on our A-Game in terms of production" (Smith). This intimidation factor was mitigated by the degree of informal mentorship that Steppenwolf provided. When Steppenwolf approached Sideshow about its public relations strategy, Smith remembers having never even thought about public relations before; "it seems obvious now, but we were tiny" (Smith).

For Sideshow, Garage Rep was a worthwhile experience and was instrumental in allowing the company to expand from producing two shows per season to three (Smith).

The low cost of the space and association with the Steppenwolf name were major appeals for Sideshow. Administrative mentorship was also welcome and Smith appreciated that all three Garage Rep companies in residence were encouraged to work together to collaborate on marketing initiatives and strategies (Smith).

Repertory Structure

A common struggle for many storefront theatre companies is the necessity of structuring a season without knowing how well a production may perform (Honold). If a particular production is received well by critics and the public, a company rarely has the option to extend that production due to financial, scheduling and logistical restraints. It can also take several weeks for positive word of mouth to spread, by which point the production has already closed or may only have a few remaining performances. With a repertory structure, each production would be guaranteed to perform for three months, rather than just a few weeks, while still only facing the costs of one production (Honold).

Though Sideshow's experience was positive, Smith is not sure that, given the opportunity, Sideshow would participate in a similar program again. The repertory format, though designed to benefit the smaller companies, also presented its own issues. *Heddatron* stage manager, Chris Notestine, felt that, "too much time was spent coordinating with the other companies on the logistics of swapping out sets/electrics," and he wished that more time "could have been spent on the creative process" (Notestine). Furthermore, hosting three companies meant that, "Steppenwolf's resources and attention were divided between Sideshow, StrangeTree and Urban Theatre

Company,” rather than having all of Steppenwolf’s attention available for one organization (Notestine).

Other participants benefited greatly from Garage Rep. The Inconvenience’s 2012 production of new work, *Hit the Wall*, proved so successful among audiences and critics that it was produced off-Broadway the following year (Hetrick). A revival was also staged at another Chicago theatre only two years after its run at Garage Rep (Adler). In such cases, small companies received local and even national attention and benefited from increased awareness and audience interest.

Conversely, the success of one production could overshadow the other participants. Honold was aware of this issue, and when speaking about the success of The Inconvenience she noted, “it was great for The Inconvenience, but it felt like there was a winner of Garage Rep and sometimes the reviewers contributed to that problem by, basically, writing a review of the whole Rep...It was nice if you were crowned the winner, but sucked for everyone else” (Honold). While Steppenwolf discouraged reviewers from this practice, the problem plagued the program until its last formal Garage Rep season. The title of Hedy Weiss’ *Chicago Sun-Times* review from March of 2015 reads, “One Hit and Two Misses in Steppenwolf Garage Rep Showcase.”

Organizational Mentorship

Steppenwolf recognized other difficulties encountered within the first years of the program. Still in contact with other participants in Garage Rep, Smith recalled that Steppenwolf “played up the mentorship pieces after the third year” (Smith). Mentorship was, perhaps, the most collaborative element of Garage Rep and benefited not only the

participating companies, but Steppenwolf as well. “It was exciting to have new voices in the room, and younger voices,” recalls Honold, who in some ways looked at these smaller, nimble companies “with envy” (Honold). On one occasion, Steppenwolf went so far as to invite the participating company to take over its social media account, as the larger organization admired some of the creative work that had been done by the smaller theatre’s social media team.

Megan Smith also felt that there could have been more formal support for participating companies, especially in the early years of the program. There was “talk of joint fundraising initiatives” between Sideshow and other Garage Rep participants, but nothing arose because the “lack of infrastructure” made such an opportunity difficult (Smith). Steppenwolf also noticed that some companies stretched themselves “financially and emotionally,” sometimes exhausting their resources for the rest of their season (Honold). Of the twenty-one Garage Rep alumni companies, all but two still operate. Both of these companies produced at least one subsequent production, making it unlikely that participation in Garage Rep led directly to their decline.

In other years, the small companies worked together. Honold acknowledged the difficulty Steppenwolf had in translating practices from a large institution and applying those to a small company, no matter how open to questions or advice Steppenwolf was. “It was as much about getting these three companies in a room so they could share their practices, and tell each other what’s been working what hasn’t been working,” as it was about working with Steppenwolf (Honold).

In 2014, Garage Rep participants New Colony, Walkabout Theater Company and Prologue Theatre Company took advantage of this aspect of the program, going as far as

to establish weekly meetings to discuss cross marketing and public relations strategies, as well as what was working and what was not working within the program itself. Honold believes that this “big happy family” mentality was bolstered by the fact that revenue and critical reception for all three of the shows was fairly similar and that there was no clear “winner” (Honold).

All three of the shows received mixed reviews, but Justin Hayford’s *Chicago Reader* collective review pointed out that, “a better gauge of Garage Rep’s success is the willingness of participants to think big and fail. By that standard, this year’s lineup is a resounding success.” Hayford stipulates that the value of a spot in Garage Rep is not the possibility of critical and financial acclaim that productions such as *Hit the Wall* received, but to give small companies a chance to produce something bigger and different than anything they have before. Meanwhile, Steppenwolf has the opportunity to highlight the unique work of Chicago’s vibrant local theatre scene.

Garage Rep’s 2015 season was its sixth and its last. The biggest factor in the decision to discontinue the program was not that Garage Rep had outstayed its welcome but because Steppenwolf announced other major changes. A new adjacent building, which will include a restaurant, cafe and black box theatre, was scheduled to open in the spring of 2016 (Jones, “Steppenwolf Plans”). The Garage Space will likely become an onsite rehearsal facility and will no longer be a dedicated performance space (Honold).

Although specific long-term programming has not yet been announced, Steppenwolf plans to use its new black box space to showcase new work and small local organizations will be a part of that. Additionally, the new spaces will feature a cabaret style performance area for Steppenwolf artists, local ensembles and other performers in

part of an ongoing strategy to attract and sustain younger patrons and subscribers (Honold). It is clear that Steppenwolf's commitment to collaborating with small local companies will continue in some form as well. Though Garage Rep has ended, The Gift Theatre's *Richard III* opened in the Garage facility in March of 2016, and the new black box space will continue to host productions by local companies (Honold).

Albany Park Theater Project and Goodman Theatre

A few miles south of Steppenwolf is Chicago's Goodman Theatre, which has collaborated and coproduced with other organizations of many sizes since its founding in 1925 ("Companies"). The Goodman, which has an operating budget of over eighteen million dollars ("Theatres by Budget Group"), has developed relationships with a number of small theatres. One of the most notable recent collaborations has been its ongoing relationship with The Albany Park Theater Project (APTP), a small local youth performance and mentoring organization located on Chicago's Northwest side.

In 2008 and 2010, APTP performed at Goodman as part of the Latino Theatre Festival, alongside other local and international theatre companies. Impressed that APTP's "work was not only unusual in its creation, but was so good," Goodman producer Steve Scott recalls in a personal interview that the two organizations "got to talking about future collaborations and how the Goodman could benefit the work that Albany Park was doing, and how Albany Park could benefit [Goodman]." In 2013, APTP transferred its original production of *Home/Land* from APTP's home theatre to Goodman's Owen Theatre for a month-long run. The production was critically well received, with Kris

Vire's *Time Out* review noting, "there's striking sophistication on display at times, particularly in extraordinarily moving bits of choreography."

The partnership between the two organizations has continued on nearly an annual basis, though unlike Steppenwolf, Goodman does not have a set partnership or residency program with other theatres, but rather approaches other organizations where it sees a potential for a mutually beneficial relationship. Teatro Vista, a local company committed to Latino theatre and education was part of the same 2003 theatre festival in which APTP participated. Teatro Vista has also partnered with Goodman to varying degrees on a number of projects ever since, as have companies such as Congo Square, Silk Road Theatre Project and MPAACT (Scott).

Case-by-Case Collaborations

Goodman does not only look for organizations to produce work in its own space. On numerous occasions, Goodman has partnered with smaller theatres to produce or assist with work in their own home spaces. Often, "a lot of those collaborations are led by artists who are resident artists [at Goodman] but are working as guest artists in those companies" (Scott).

Silk Road Theatre Project, now known as Silk Road Rising, has been a collaborator on a number of projects with Goodman. In 2011, Silk Road delayed its production of David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face*, directed by Steve Scott, after it learned that Goodman would be producing a world premiere of Hwang's *Chinglish* that same season (Jacobs). The two organizations then collaborated on an informal, miniature, "'Hwang Festival,'" through which Silk Road was able to benefit from shared marketing,

fundraising, production and press campaigns (Scott). Although the two organizations were both producing work in their own spaces, their relationship allowed them to collaborate on press, marketing and certain production elements.

This case-by-case collaboration format also allows for varying levels of partnership depending on the needs of both the smaller organization and Goodman. In 2014, MPAACT, a company “grounded in the many cultures and traditions of the Afrikan continent and its Diaspora,” produced *Quark* at The Greenhouse Theater Center, in association with Steppenwolf Theatre (“About”). The script had been workshopped at Goodman and was directed by Goodman resident director, Chuck House (“Artists”). Goodman was able to provide artistic and production support, as well as assist with marketing and press initiatives.

Though the show was not received as well as hoped, *Quark* still received a great deal of visibility and support that would not have existed without Goodman. On other collaborations, including Silk Road and Congo Square, Goodman contributed financial support in order to hire Equity actors that would normally be outside of the smaller organizations’ budgets (Scott). When it comes to deciding to what degree Goodman will collaborate with another company, Scott relates that it “depends on particular project and what that particular project needs and how we can help them achieve what they need to achieve” (Scott).

The Goodman did experiment with a more formalized collaborative partner initiative, wherein three smaller companies were approached to produce a work at the Goodman for three consecutive years. While the initiative was reasonably successful, “it sometimes interfered with some of the stuff that we were doing ourselves because we’d

already planned to give the space to another company. So that meant we couldn't do something that we really wanted to do" (Scott). Instead, Goodman decided that, "a case by case was probably a better way of collaborating. When it looked like a project that we could both benefit from, that's what we would sign on for rather than formalizing it too strictly" (Scott).

Finance and Support

Much like each collaboration, the financial arrangement between Goodman and its collaborators varies from production to production. However, in most cases, the smaller organization covers the direct cost of production and pays a rental fee based on the cost of one of that theatre's usual season productions (Scott). The rental fee may decrease if ticket sales do not perform as well as expected, but the idea is that Goodman wants the smaller organization "to come out of this without losing money and hopefully, getting money" (Scott).

APTP's 2014 production of *God's Work* was a remount of an APTP original work from 2006, but was completely redesigned specifically for the much larger Owen Theatre at Goodman (Feiner, "The Making of God's Work"). With the organization's 2013 990 tax form listing a total program revenue of \$36,468, and its 2014 990 tax form listing a total program revenue of \$108,511, *God's Work* appears to have been a financial success. While it is unlikely that the entirety of this revenue increase was due to ticket sales (the production only ran for several weeks in a 450 seat theatre), the critical success of the show was assuredly a contributing factor. In 2015, APTP was able to produce two annual

productions for the first time, something that its \$700,000 budget did not allow in years prior.

In some ways, APTP's relationship with Goodman may appear to be a presenting arrangement, as APTP produces and designs its own work, but other elements of the two organizations' relationship are deeply collaborative. APTP is one of very few youth ensemble theatres in the country with a continuous annual calendar production with a major regional theatre. With APTP as a partner, Goodman was able to gain production support from foundations and corporations that would not have funded a standard Goodman production (Scott). Scott attributes much of this support to the fact that sponsors recognize the youth-centric work that APTP does in the community and not just its artistry.

Since, as previously mentioned, APTP develops and produces its own work, Goodman is able to host original productions that relate to local or contemporary themes, without the costly development cycle of producing its own new works in house. The fact that APTP produces such quality work that patrons are interested in has certainly led to the larger theatre's extended relationship with APTP.

In February of 2016, APTP received a MacArthur Foundation Award grant of \$400,000, which will be used to set up a reserve fund for the organization (Feiner, "APTP Receives MacArthur Award"). Without Goodman's influence it is possible that APTP would not have been visible enough to receive the award, and it reflects well on Goodman to have such a close relationship with a MacArthur Award recipient.

Youth, Education and Diversity

APTP Artistic Director and cofounder David Feiner described the relationship with Goodman as “transformative” and a press release for *God’s Work* details that the early work with Goodman “introduced more than 5,000 new audience members to APTP’s work, and propelled the company to increased renown as one of the nation’s preeminent youth theaters” (Albany Park Theater Project). In that same 2013 press release, APTP announced that it would continue its ever-growing partnership with Goodman.

God’s Work was met with much critical acclaim. Hedy Weiss’ *Chicago-Sun Times* review remarks, “harrowing is the essential word when describing *God’s Work*” and that, “remarkable is the follow up word for this work of intense spiritual exorcism being performed by actors ages 14 to 18 whose vocal, physical, dramatic and ensemble skills can easily compare to those of the professionals in such acclaimed international troupes as Kneehigh...and Complicite” (“Albany Park Theater Project Fearless”).

The young actors of both APTP and Goodman’s own educational programming have benefitted from the collaboration as well. Some of APTP’s work has influenced Goodman’s own education and engagement series, while APTP students have joined Goodman workshops and summer programs (Scott). Goodman students may also have an opportunity to join APTP’s work. In the summer of 2016, APTP is producing a site-specific piece titled *Learning Curve* in an abandoned high school on the city’s Northwest side. The ambitious production is slated for a much longer run than a typical APTP show and there will be a need to replace young actors who cannot commit to such a long engagement. David Feiner, who is a longtime friend of Goodman’s Director of Education

& Community Engagement, Willa Taylor, approached Goodman about training Goodman workshop participants to come in as replacements for *Learning Curve* when the need arises (Scott).

ATTP has also been exposed to a much larger audience base in comparison to its home 100-seat theatre in Albany Park. While this is a positive thing for ATTP, audience crossover was also one of the original impetuses for Goodman to engage with the neighborhood organization. Collaborations with non-downtown neighborhood organizations are part of a strategy to diversify and expand Goodman audiences. As Scott explains,

Sometimes the biggest challenge is to get neighborhood audiences, audiences that are accustomed to going to neighborhood theatres, to come downtown and go to a larger theatre. So if there is a way that we can bring them in while they are supporting their own company, that kind of demystifies the Goodman experience for them, it gets them through the doors so that they can come back through the doors again. (Scott).

To that extent, Goodman's collaborations with ATTP and with other organizations such as Teatro Vista, have been successful in bringing in new and repeat ticket buyers, often from new demographics.

ATTP in particular has received a great deal of local and national attention as one of the premier youth theatres in the country and also as one of the most innovative youth mentorship programs, which reflects very well on Goodman. ATTP's diverse ensemble and unique methods inject something "wonderful to be able to showcase and include...to increase the variety of things that are done in our building" (Scott). When

writing about *God's Work*, Feiner noted that the show's "multiethnic cast...will surely be one of the most diverse ensembles on any Chicago stage" ("The Making of *God's Work*").

Size Difference and Exposure

Like Steppenwolf's Garage Rep participants, APTP has also benefitted from Goodman's larger staff and administrative resources, especially in regards to marketing, fundraising and public relations opportunities. Also like Garage Rep participants, APTP and other Goodman collaborators have experienced some difficulty in working with a much larger organization. Decision making and planning processes at a larger theatre must start months, or sometimes years, in advance. This can be daunting, since, "smaller theatres don't tend to work that far in advance or don't have to because they don't have the kind of production machine," that Goodman has (Scott).

The sheer size of the space at Goodman can also be difficult for smaller companies to navigate. The Goodman's smaller Owen Theatre has only 450 seats, but is still often three to four times larger than what many small organizations are used to performing in. Small companies are then often forced to look outside their own ranks for designers or actors who are able to work on an expanded scale.

Steve Scott has learned that mitigating these obstacles must be done by going into each of "these partnerships very honestly" and thinking "about what these expectations are from both sides" (Scott). In doing so, Goodman strives for transparency and communication at the beginning of each collaboration, so that both sides understand exactly what the other needs and expects. Scott also believes that because of these large

differences in scale, it is often smoother for a collaboration to produce a work at the smaller theatre's space.

However, access to those larger resources also greatly increases the collaborating organizations' visibility, and greatly increases the volume and caliber of press and critical reviews. While the quality of APTP's work means that higher visibility reviews are generally positive, *God's Work* in particular sparked a high level of controversy. Uncomfortable with young actors depicting scenes of neglect and abuse, well known *Chicago Tribune* critic Chris Jones wrote that he found the production "almost unbearable to watch" ("Too Troubling"). Although Jones explicitly recognized the artistry and accomplishment of the work, the review and the show itself started a high profile controversy about how youth work should be reviewed and whether children should be participating in such subject matter.

APTP's original 2006 production of *God's Work* did not generate such controversy, likely because the production was not as visible as the 2014 remount at Goodman. Goodman, however, had experience in navigating negative press and controversy and was able to guide and encourage APTP members through that difficult trial. "We were actually able to help them through that... through kind of mentoring and through kind of defending that work through our connections" (Scott). Goodman's support in mitigating the controversy was all the more important when dealing with young actors, who are often less experienced and potentially more sensitive to public criticism.

Future Collaborations

Despite the successful relationships that have developed between Goodman and its collaborators, the larger organization is not keen to establish any formal programs or residencies and will continue their collaborations on a case by case basis. Some smaller organizations have expressed interest in a company in residence program, but Scott and Goodman feel that in such residencies, the smaller company can get somewhat absorbed into the larger company, stunting the smaller company's uniqueness.

In a place like Chicago, where there are a great number of unique "companies doing what they do well and providing a great deal of diversity and variety," Scott feels that it is important to maintain that landscape. "We just want those companies to be strong enough to stay around to do that. We don't want them to become a facet of the Goodman theatre, necessarily. Ultimately, I think that's what we're looking for philosophically" (Scott). Although APTP will not have a production at the Goodman in 2016, Goodman is assisting with portions of *Learning Curve* and there are plans for APTP to bring another production to Goodman in the summer of 2017 (Scott).

Chapter III

BEST COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES

Community Impact

In each of the discussed collaborations, there are benefits to both organizations, though those benefits differ from larger organization to smaller organization and from collaboration to collaboration. In regards to community impact, without Cornerstone's methodology and insistence on deep community involvement in the creation of the work itself, it is doubtful that either Arena Stage or The Guthrie could have created similarly successful productions on their own. As nonprofit institutions, regional theatres still have an obligation to function for the benefit of the public and it is commendable when large organizations decide to focus on representation and involvement of the community around them. Cornerstone's commitment to inclusiveness, though perhaps detrimental to the professional aesthetic of a large regional theatre work, was able to achieve the level of community involvement that both large organizations desired.

Steppenwolf's Garage Rep program was designed to highlight and involve a much different part of the local community, namely other theatre companies. Their approach may have been more mentorship than collaboration in terms of community impact, as once given the opportunity to present a work at Steppenwolf, the productions themselves were left to the discretion of the resident companies. What Steppenwolf did offer was access to resources otherwise beyond the typical means of smaller companies,

both structurally and technically, as well as opportunities for small companies to learn from Steppenwolf and their fellow resident companies.

Goodman Theatre's collaborative relationship with The Albany Park Theater Project started as a festival presenting arrangement, but turned into a unique, repeat, collaborative partnership. APTP itself exists as a community impact organization, with a methodology not so different from Cornerstone's. Like Garage Rep, the opportunity to perform at Goodman allows APTP and its young performers resources and facilities that it never would have had access to, in addition to a much larger platform of influence. Since APTP's work is deeply representative of its local Chicago community, it exposes Goodman patrons to perspectives, cultures and issues faced by those communities, while enticing neighborhood theatregoers to visit a large, downtown theatre.

Cost and Finance

While collaboration can indeed result in increased revenue, as The Inconvenience's runaway success of *Hit the Wall* at Garage Rep demonstrates, it is rare that a collaboration directly results in a significant increase. *Heddatron 2011* helped bolster Sideshow Theatre's finances to generate its highest grossing season and enable the organization to increase its productions per season, and APTP's work with Goodman certainly increased its audience base as well as its opportunities for funding from sponsors and other agencies.

For larger organizations, financial gain is less likely as the smaller organizations usually have a small audience base, so any new crossover patrons will rarely result in greatly increased patrons or revenue. There may be a concession to make the production

accessible and affordable to community members, as was the case with Cornerstone's insistence on a pay-what-you-can ticket policy for *A Community Carol*. Steppenwolf's and Goodman's strategy of using secondary spaces to host collaborations means that they are able to keep ticket prices low and accessible while still retaining the ability to generate maximum revenue through their unhindered main season productions. While this practice may not generate the same level of visibility or prestige as featuring a collaboration on a mainstage, second stages are often less daunting and more practical for companies used to smaller theatres. Furthermore, since Garage Rep participants and Goodman collaborators are usually responsible for their own production costs, the larger theatres may still see some moderate financial benefit from ticket sales shared between the larger and smaller organizations.

Rental fees may add to some increased revenue for the larger organization, but as a whole, the real expense savings come in the form of the actual cost of producing the work. Through collaborating with smaller theatres, especially ones with strong social or community missions, larger theatres like Goodman may also open themselves up to funding opportunities for which they would otherwise be ineligible.

On the rare occasions that reduced production costs are an outcome of a collaboration, it usually only benefits one member of the collaboration, as the other bears the direct costs of production. However, since cost savings is rarely the primary incentive for collaboration, the value of other outcomes, such as increased visibility, opportunity for community impact, organizational mentorship and audience diversification must be carefully weighed against the potential financial costs.

Audience Expansion

Much like financial impact, successful increases in audience base will vary greatly from collaboration to collaboration. Community members from Anacostia, from Minneapolis and from Albany Park may never have attended a production at a large theatre were it not for these productions which invested in their communities. Many patrons of Steppenwolf and Goodman would never have attended a show at Sideshow or Albany Park Theater Project were it not for the larger organizations' partnership. For an organization like Albany Park Theater Project, exposure to over ten thousand Goodman patrons since its first production at the regional theatre has certainly generated increased interest. Each of APTP's filed 990 tax forms filed over the last three years have shown consistent annual increases in contributed income.

Audience crossover works both ways as well. Goodman Theatre has seen Albany Park Theater Project attendees follow the company to Goodman and then "come to see other things at Goodman, so they converted, not necessarily into subscribers, but...semi-regular attendees" (Scott). This trend has been consistent with other collaborations and partnerships at Goodman as well, especially with companies such as Teatro Vista and Silk Road.

Shared Resources and Organizational Mentorship

Sharing resources is imperative in any collaboration. In all of the discussed collaborations, the larger organizations were able to offer greater resources, equipment and administrative capacity, as well as guidance on strategies for successful larger-scale productions. Steppenwolf's Garage Rep excelled on this last factor, perhaps because its

lack of involvement in the show's production allowed the larger organization to be less biased or invested in the overall outcome of the production. Instead, emphasis was placed on mentoring resident companies as they wished, instead of trying to impose their own methods and priorities on the work. Much of the conflict encountered in Cornerstone's collaborations came out of the difficulty in meshing two very different organizations' methodologies and production styles.

Steppenwolf acknowledged that they learned from their resident companies, whether it was through new and original social media strategies or through their more flexible attitudes and production methods. The resident companies also benefitted from observing and working with their Garage Rep peers to maximize their time with each other and with Steppenwolf.

Goodman too, experienced a learning curve about how to "shepherd one of these shows through the process here," and how to address "issues that smaller theatres deal with...especially in terms of man power and planning time" (Scott). This has helped APTP to think on a larger scale and understand "what it takes from their end to be able to expand to a two production season" (Scott). Goodman's adaptive approach to each of its collaborations helps to identify specific resources and advice that benefits each organization where they need them most.

A More Perfect Collaboration

While it is unlikely that a perfect collaboration exists, elements and lessons from these examples can be combined to hypothesize what an ideal collaboration might look like. Arena Stage and Guthrie approached Cornerstone with specific programming goals,

namely, to create a work with the inclusion of the local community. Selecting Cornerstone as a collaborator was borne out of a need for expertise in the area of community involvement. Even when the process became difficult, the larger organizations needed Cornerstone's expertise and methodology to create a successful production. Cornerstone's collaborations were also true collaborations on almost every level, from the initial idea, to the creation of the work, to the heated discussions and concessions both organizations made. These were productions that truly could not have been replicated by one organization without the other.

The Steppenwolf staff's openness and willingness to mentor and educate its resident companies is one of the most admirable and impactful aspects of Garage Rep's collaborative elements. A similar level of openness is also required by the resident organization in order to maximize the experience. In this regard, more structure, or at least more formalized opportunities for mentorship experiences may have been beneficial.

Financial responsibility, if not increased revenue or decreased cost, is also important. Some Garage Rep participants, who hoped to recoup costs of ambitious production expenses that exceeded their usual budget, found themselves in trouble when they no longer had enough funds to pay for their subsequent season productions. If both organizations expect neither a substantial increase in revenue nor a dramatic reduction of expense, then any ill effects can be mitigated. A modest reduction of expense or increase in revenue may occur, but cannot be expected.

Goodman Theatre's adaptive approach to each collaboration not only benefits its partner organization by meeting their specific needs, but also allows Goodman the

freedom to select partnerships that can be mutually beneficial. Selecting organizations in a variety of neighborhoods with missions and audiences different to its own, not only broadens the variety and reputation of the Goodman's productions, but also benefits the smaller organizations that are devoted to community impact.

Expectations of audience growth should be modest, but are nearly always a result of collaborations. That expanded audience may not translate into repeat patrons or increased subscriptions, but successfully enticing members of the community that would otherwise never set foot in a large theatre or see a production of a small theatre company, can be considered a huge accomplishment, if not a lucrative one. Even if an organization does not achieve its desired goal in audience expansion, any increase or involvement of new patrons can be considered a success.

Essential Elements of Successful Collaborations

Each of the collaborations discussed differ in their intention and execution and though none are exactly the same, there are inarguably positive elements to each. Certain common elements help to bolster a successful collaboration.

When initiating any collaboration, establishing lines of communication and expectations so that both organizations have the same understanding of operations is extremely important. Shay Wafer, former Managing Director for Cornerstone and current Executive Director of 651 Arts has learned that having “the foresight to set up agreements and establish transparency” will only make the collaboration run more smoothly (Wafer).

It is impossible to foresee every conflict or situation when two very different organizations work together for the first time. Part of the appeal of a collaboration is to produce something unexpected that neither organization would be able to produce on its own. Cornerstone's approach is rooted in specifically not expecting a particular outcome, "when I get into a room with people, I don't know what the outcome is going to be, if you know what your outcome is, you're not collaborating, you're just trying to get to a particular outcome, you just are" (Garcés, Personal Interview). However, that does not mean that there should be no planning whatsoever.

For Garcés and Cornerstone, that transparency is the key; "it's really about clarity for me. I try to be really clear about...the things that without which Cornerstone can't move forward" (Garcés, Personal Interview). The size discrepancy between two organizations can lead to a lot of misunderstanding and differing expectations about what a collaboration will look like. Because smaller organizations have fewer staff and artists, it may be easier for them to communicate and make consensual decisions more quickly. Because larger organizations are often "siloed" into departments, communication can become slower and more difficult (Wafer). If there are any conflicting ideas, discussing compromises and solutions can be long and arduous.

Collaboration requires a lot of time, requires a lot of commitment, and it also requires you to be equally devoted to getting the best possible outcome and to everybody feeling good about it, everybody feeling like they've had the amount of say they want. That takes an immense amount of time. (Garcés, Personal Interview).

What can minimize those discussion times and, in turn mitigate frustration and conflict, is developing verbal or written agreements at the beginning of a collaboration to ensure that all parties' expectations remain realistic and consistent. This includes financial expectations such as what each organization is responsible for, how to divide revenue, what sort of contracts will be utilized and how will actors be paid (Wafer). There are also practical expectations, such as whether a production is possible considering the available resources.

At Steppenwolf's Garage, expectations were outlined well before production started. Honold stated that Steppenwolf's philosophy was that, "whatever form these collaborations take, it is important for larger company to meet smaller where they are," as it can be difficult or overwhelming for a small organization to be thrown into the midst of a much larger one (Honold). Outlining exactly who has the ability to make authoritative decisions and how the infrastructure of both organizations will work in tandem can be challenging, but "miscommunications around where authority lies can quickly unravel relationships" (Honold).

Compromise

Debra Kim Sivigny, who has worked as a designer at a large number of regional theatres, hopes that despite the "implicit hierarchy in the field...as we move towards a greater emphasis on collaboration, we can begin building a new language that changes the power dynamics.... we have to put our goals for collaboration into action and support each other to avoid resentment and tension in our ranks" (Sivigny). Sivigny calls for organizations to be open and willing to meet one another wherever they are at.

Compromise is a huge component in collaboration and each organization must expect and prepare for that.

In her book on Cornerstone, Kuftinec writes that during *A Community Carol*, Arena Stage was willing to lower their concept of “professionalism” and allow amateur and non-actors on their main stage. Cornerstone was then willing to include a number of Arena Stage’s Equity actors in the ensemble. Arena Stage was also willing to initiate the pay-what-you-can ticket policy and donate a portion of the revenue to the community, since that community impact element was integral to Cornerstone’s mission (Kuftinec). Any “conflict in ideas,” must be resolved with “compromise and a give and take attitude,” otherwise tensions can flare and a collaboration can stall or fall apart (Wafer).

Expectations and Trust

Just as Garcés argues that true collaboration can only be achieved through leaving oneself open to an unexpected outcome, collaborators may benefit from entering these relationships without a predefined notion of success. Every collaborative production is an experiment, no matter how well thought out or executed. If a collaborative production were defined solely by an increase in ticket sales, or by critical review, or by increased subscribers, all of the collaborations discussed would have failed on one or more levels.

A production that receives mediocre reviews or poor ticket sales can still benefit each organization through learning experiences, audience development, and risk taking. Each of the Garage Rep participating companies took a huge risk in putting out the best work possible given their resources. None had the critical or financial success of 2012’s *Hit the Wall*, but they still succeeded in other ways. Each company’s visibility was

increased through association with Steppenwolf. Greta Honold specifically noted that those participants that worked together to develop mutually beneficial strategies took full advantage of Steppenwolf's advice and mentorship (Honold).

Alternately, even if a production performs well, a negative process can result in feelings of resentment in either collaborator, "any collaboration is going to be challenging, there's a lot of personalities at play, no matter how on the same page you feel you are, it's going to be challenging" (Garcés, Personal Interview). If organizations do not prepare for or leave themselves open to those challenges, it is unlikely that they will seek to collaborate in the future. Trust is essential to collaboration, especially when encountering conflicts or barriers such as, "inadequate budgets and short schedules," which "often drive each decision. It is difficult in your short time together to truly trust your collaborators" (Roznowski and Domer 23).

Mistakes and Foresight

However, even a difficult working collaboration presents an opportunity to learn from mistakes for the future and can highlight shortcomings within an organization. John Flax, the founding director of Lecoq-based ensemble Theater Grottesco, collaborated with a number of regional theatres in the 80s and 90s (Flax). In a piece written for TCG, Flax relates the struggle encountered in collaborating between a non-union ensemble and an Equity regional theatre,

The union has grown up around a regional model that makes moving from regional to regional much easier than crossing the murky line into the world of ensembles where artists wear many hats, work is often pushing

the boundaries of form and challenging to describe, and design and tech can be intricately unconventional. (Flax).

In 1999, Theater Grottesco collaborated with The New Victory Theater on a children's production entitled *The Angels' Cradle* (Van Gelder). Theater Grottesco encountered numerous design, marketing and organizational conflicts, the greatest of which stemmed from union workers being required to install the ensemble's intricate sets. "The union only agreed to let us install our very complicated set when it was clear that we weren't going to be ready to open on time with the Grottesco ensemble members directing from the lip of the stage and the poor union hands trying to figure out which end fit where and what piece had to go in first" (Flax).

Union regulations can cause issues, which is why it is important for collaborators to recognize and identify these potential issues before they become larger problems. Cornerstone and its regional collaborators were able to work out agreements with the union that would allow non-union performers to perform alongside union members. Steppenwolf and Goodman Theatres work out similar agreements, as some collaborators may require both Equity and non-Equity performers.

Despite the negative experience that Theater Grottesco encountered, Flax is still an advocate for collaborations between organizations of disparate sizes and acknowledges that, "it is almost guaranteed that conflicts in working styles will arise and that communication will be tested. But we are artists, we solve problems. We learn from our experiences. Unfamiliar territory becomes familiar and we can begin to anticipate the obstacles and either avoid them or move through them with grace" (Flax).

Chapter IV

A GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL FUTURE COLLABORATION

Collaborative Potential

With the lessons and outcomes of the aforementioned collaborations in mind, the potential for future collaborations is strong. Collaborations generally do not result in lower production costs for both organizations, though they may for one organization. At Goodman and Steppenwolf, the smaller organizations shouldered the brunt of production costs on their own. The larger organizations, in turn, offered resources that would be otherwise unattainable for those smaller organizations. The smaller organizations are, in turn, often more embedded in unique practices and community involvement and provide avenues for the larger organizations to access those communities. Audience expansion then occurs both through audience crossover and through broadened community interest. Identifying the specific goals that a collaboration aims to achieve, while remaining open to unexpected outcomes or possibilities, will strengthen the potential for future collaborations.

Potential challenges that occur when two organizations of very different sizes work together can also be mitigated by remaining open to different administrative and artistic processes. Whereas collaborations such as the ones between Arena Stage and Cornerstone did not result in any tangible changes to the way those organizations functioned, Garage Rep offered small companies mentorship opportunities. Both Cornerstone and Arena Stage already had strong, established methodologies and working

strategies and likely did not feel a need to change following the collaboration. Garage Rep participants, however, are often much younger organizations that could benefit from observing and experiencing how a large organization operates.

A stronger commitment to developing a structure for such a mentorship program would have welcome results for many struggling theatre companies. A blog post from Iron Age Theatre, self-proclaimed as “one of the smallest” theatres in Philadelphia, proposes that a mentorship between larger Philadelphia theatres and small theatres could be created in which the larger organization includes “the little theatre in its advertising, giving the small team substantial access to a broader community,” or that the “bigger theatre would fund the smaller,” so that one production could be eligible for Philadelphia’s Barrymore awards, or that “the theatre could share experience and resources” (“An Open Letter”). The proposal may be optimistic, or even naïve, but it does show that there is an interest in mentorship and collaboration among small theatre companies. While Iron Age’s primary motive is likely financial, the first and third proposals have already been demonstrated in some capacity by the collaborations discussed earlier. While collaborative practices exist in some communities, such as Chicago, and among some regional companies, such as Arena Stage and Guthrie, they are not as widespread or universal as they could be. “Think of what it would say about our community if the big successful institutions were concerned about developing the smaller companies. How would we look to the national and international theatre community?” (“An Open Letter”).

That is not to say that other collaborative mentorship and residency programs do not exist elsewhere. San Diego’s La Jolla Playhouse has offered a yearlong Resident

Theatre Program to smaller organizations since 2008 that “encourages the artistic development of up-and-coming companies” and provides “a temporary home each year to one of the many local troupes without a permanent venue” (DeMaggio). Additionally, the regional theatre provides technical and administrative support. There are also countless new play festivals and opportunities for organizations to have their work presented under large organization names. However, original and creative mentorship programs are still underdeveloped and are worth exploring to benefit both large and small organizations.

The Formula

There are many ways to plan for a successful collaboration, and after over twenty-two years of nonprofit experience, Philadelphia-based lawyer Laura Solomon, identified “The Formula for a Successful Nonprofit Collaboration” (Solomon). Although Solomon’s six-step formula was not necessarily designed with theatre or even arts organizations in mind, it can still serve as a valuable guide to planning and executing a successful collaboration.

The first is to “Agree on the Form,” meaning that each organization must understand and agree on what form the collaboration will take (Solomon). If the large organization is simply offering a presenting arrangement, while the small organization is expecting a more inclusive and involved collaborative production, there is bound to be conflict and disappointment.

Solomon’s second step is to “Execute A Letter of Intent.” This is simply an agreement that outlines what the proposed collaboration is and hopes to achieve in

addition to a timeline of events. Particularly relevant is Solomon's advice to "Remember the Mission: It may seem obvious but we often neglect to consider whether the collaboration is in furtherance of your nonprofit's mission. You should consider the mission at the outset and throughout the negotiations" (Solomon).

Step three is to "Assemble the Right Players," which not only would include artists and staff members, but also executive leadership and board members of both organizations. Solomon warns not to,

...forget to ask about the team assembled by the other nonprofit. If the other Executive Director is not sharing information with his or her Board, that should alert you that there is a problem. Bring it up and address it directly, and insist on Board involvement. If you do not, you could be negotiating a collaboration in earnest only to discover that you have wasted your time and the organization's resources because the other side's Board will ultimately reject it. (Solomon).

Solomon explicitly notes that it is important not to skip any steps, but for many theatrical collaborations, the fourth step, "Hire Your Own Qualified Counsel Early," may be outside the realm of possibility for small theatre organizations. However, when possible, legal consultation can always be beneficial, especially when negotiating contracts, union regulations and financial arrangements.

Solomon's fifth step is to "Set Realistic Expectations About Timing." Collaborations take time, both in execution and in planning. If one organization wants to rush through the process, Solomon believes that this should be taken as a warning,

“desperation in nonprofit collaborations – as in personal relationships – should give you pause” (Solomon).

Finally, Solomon’s last piece of advice is to “Get Everyone In One Room.” This may seem obvious, but if communication, whether within one organization or between organizations, fails to be established from the beginning, there is likely to be misunderstanding and misconstrued expectation. “Getting people to talk to each other directly...avoids months of email exchanges and drafts that could erode the goodwill of the parties and jeopardize the transaction” (Solomon).

Solomon’s formula, while simple, may be particularly helpful for small organizations or for any organization that is new to collaborative production. Having an established guideline, however basic, can help to minimize or avoid roadblocks and conflict.

Rules of Collaboration

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, arts organizations, and especially theatre companies, are already well versed in the art of collaboration. It takes many skilled people to create any kind of live production. As such, theatre organizations are at an advantage when it comes to nonprofit collaborations. In their book, *Collaboration in Theatre: A Practical Guide for Designers and Directors*, artist, playwright and educator Rob Roznowski and scenic designer and educator Kirk Domer, detail methods on collaboration techniques within a theatre organization. Their methods, however, can be directly applied to collaborating organizations as well,

Collaborating with theatre artists from different backgrounds should be a beautiful way to educate oneself, to adapt one's process to fit another's, or to expand one's technique. In practical application, however, distinct differences within a design team can lead to frustration, miscommunication, disrespect, and a theatre full of bruised egos. (Roznowski and Domer 4).

In the first section of their book, Roznowski and Domer detail seven rules to lead to a successful collaboration, many of which align with Solomon's recipe. The first is to "Do A Background Check." Most organizations that decide to collaborate do so because they are familiar with the other organization's work. Goodman developed a deeper collaborative relationship with Albany Park Theatre Project largely because of the quality of the work they had seen in earlier, less collaborative theater festivals. It is always important to understand a collaborator's history, their strengths and weaknesses and what the organizations have in common: "Find the common ground" as well as "successes and failures in productions that may be excellent talking points" (Roznowski and Domer 5).

Second and third are, "Adapt Your Vocabulary," and "Ask For Definitions" (Roznowski and Domer 6). These are similar to Solomon's "Agree on the Form," in that it is important to share an understanding of used terminology, as well as agree on what form the production will actually take. Steppenwolf, for instance, offered Garage Rep participants a three-month repertory rotation. If a participant was under the impression that they would be the sole production during that three-month run, there could have been conflict and disappointment.

Perhaps the most important advice is, “Only Proceed When In Agreement” (Roznowski and Domer 8). Disagreements are bound to happen, but unless agreements are resolved, collaboration will stall. Communication, respectful deliberation and compromise are integral to this step.

“Avoid Buzzwords,” is all the more important for organizations whose structures, size and operational capacities differ greatly (Roznowski and Domer 9). Roznowski and Domer define buzzwords as actual phrases and words, but organizations must also consider their collaborator’s philosophies and customs. Working with Equity actors and under Equity rules can be complicated and daunting for an organization with little union experience. Similarly, a young storefront theatre company may have difficulty understanding the function and operation of large-scale public relations. Both organizations must always keep these differences in mind and consider the other organization’s position.

Roznowski and Domer’s fifth and sixth rules, “Establish a Clear Chain of Command,” and “Respect And Consider Each Idea,” remind collaborators that, whatever the working arrangement, each organization must understand how decisions are to be made and must be respectful of each organization’s values and methods (Roznowski and Domer 11).

Conclusion

Theatres, more than perhaps any other arts nonprofits, are deeply rooted in collaborative work between artists and administrators. To overcome the sometimes competitive environment that theatres face, it may take “a visionary arts administrator to reach out and form alliances—to recognize that there is no such thing as competition in the theatre,” (Hill). Even though collaborations can be a risky, time-consuming endeavor, they can also be rewarding for both organizations involved.

Collaboration among large regional and small local theatrical organizations is far from a new concept; the cases examined in this paper span twenty years. Yet the need for collaborations and the possibilities of new collaborative models is as strong as ever. As of 2014, Theatre Communications Group estimates that there are approximately 1,770 nonprofit theatres operating in the United States that filed 990s with the IRS (“Theatre Facts 2014”). If it is assumed that most nonprofits that meet the fifty thousand dollar budget requirement for TCG membership join, and TCG has 550 members, then there are approximately 1,255 theatres with budgets under fifty thousand dollars (“Theatres by Budget Group”). The reality is that the vast majority of theatres in this country are small theatre companies that could benefit from collaborations with their larger counterparts.

Theatres engage in collaborations for any number of reasons, whether for artistic fulfillment, to meet programming goals, to gain visibility, to diversify the breadth of their work, or out of a desire to foster the success of other organizations. Whatever the impetus, it is the processes and outcomes of these collaborations that ultimately impact each organization. While it is unlikely that a theatre may greatly reduce production cost due to the enormous time commitment and effort required to collaborate successfully, the

cost must be weighed against the other positive outcomes. Furthermore, alternative sources of funding may become available for organizations that do collaborate.

If a small theatre company puts more resources into a particular collaboration, but is exposed to a wider audience and is given access to otherwise unattainable resources, the benefits may outweigh that extra cost. If that larger organization mentors the smaller on how to grow and sustain itself, while at the same time benefitting from and learning from that smaller organization's approach to community impact or education, then both organizations receive outcomes that may be more valuable than reduced costs or increased income.

The example collaborations discussed in this paper highlight what is possible when two organizations of disparate size work together to produce mutually positive outcomes. Collaborations may differ in size and scope, but must always be approached with openness and an understanding that the results cannot always be anticipated.

As nonprofits obligated to serve the greater social good, what is needed is a willingness to collaborate and to experiment with different collaborative models and relationships from theatrical organizations around the country. Theatres must remain open to the possibility that their organizational structure could benefit from more, or sometimes less, fluidity. Theatres must strive for deeper community impact, which can come from both audience crossover as well as a deepening of the relationship between organizations that serve different communities, both geographically and topically.

Every organization has different needs and goals, but through collaboration those goals can be achieved more meaningfully and more completely. By examining existing collaborative models and identifying what works best in those relationships, theatrical

organizations can support one another to create thriving partnerships that benefit both organizations and their communities, regardless of their size.

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