Lessons Learned
From the Sustain Arts Initiative
2012 - 2019

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Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
Introduction

In 2012, Harvard University’s Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations launched the Sustain Arts Initiative, a technology project to aggregate and present data on the nation’s arts sector.

In partnership with the Foundation Center (now Candid) and Fractured Atlas, Sustain Arts developed three regional online data platforms to serve arts stakeholders in Southeastern Michigan (launched 2014), the San Francisco Bay Area (launched 2015), and the Chicagoland region (launched 2016). Over the course of the project, 40 individual and institutional donors contributed over $3 million to create innovative technology, bring together an unprecedented array of data sets, and promote the use of data in decision-making and policy-setting among arts organizations, arts funders, and public arts agencies.

Eight years after the project’s inception, and having served the Chicago arts community for four years, the Sustain Arts Initiative will sunset on December 31, 2020. This report documents the project’s goals and aspirations, its major accomplishments and challenges, and offers insights to inform future efforts to gather, disseminate, and apply data on cultural activity. It reflects the views of a cross section of the project’s users, developers, administrators, and funders and is written by Marc Vogl, who consulted on the Sustain Arts project’s development and served as its Bay Area Field Director.

The Sustain Arts team and Vogl Consulting hope that by telling the Sustain Arts story, interested funders and stakeholders can improve the quality and application of cultural data in Chicago and across the country. We are grateful to the Chicago Community Trust and the MacArthur Foundation for making this report possible.

The Sustain Arts Chicagoland platform will remain available online at sustainarts.org/chicagoland until December 31, 2020.

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
Key Reflections and Lessons

Reflections Looking Back

Having Free, Relevant Data at Your Fingertips Really Does Save Time
For many administrators at small arts organizations who were used to gathering information in a scattershot or analog way, the data that Sustain Arts presented saved them time in their research and planning work. Frequent-users found the platform very valuable.

Don’t Try to Be All Things to All People
Collecting so much information on arts funding, organizational activity, and participation across many disciplines, budget sizes, and across the nonprofit and for-profit sectors created a “smorgasbord” of data that was not specifically relevant to any target user group. The concept of a broad all-in-one platform was appealing in theory, but in practice, many users wanted a customized tool.

Users Want Insight, Not Just Data
Many people in the arts sector do not have the time nor the experience working with data that is necessary to apply aggregated data to their circumstances. While the creators of Sustain Arts anticipated these customer constraints and made design and engineering decisions to make the platform user-friendly, the platform could not ‘make meaning’ for the users. Thus, many people simply didn’t know what to do with the data with which they were presented. A majority of the users wanted ‘insight’ not merely data.

Data Quality Is Make or Break
Many users lost confidence in the platform when they encountered any example of inaccurate data. Frequently, data that appeared to be inaccurate reflected inconsistencies in the way the field codes information. This sowed confusion and skepticism among a user-base that did not have deep experience recognizing data’s value even if it wasn’t perfect. While some stakeholders believed that flawed data was better than no data when considering options, data quality issues were barriers to platform usage.

A Stable Institutional Home is Important
Sustain Arts was incubated at Harvard University, but by design it had to leave the nest and find new homes in each region that it operated in. Finding local partners to ‘adopt’ the project was difficult, especially since the project’s research, technology, and fundraising responsibilities fell to different partners and coordination was complex. Also, without a major institutional home, some partners and funders perceived investing in the project’s long-term future as risky.

Building New Technology & Promoting Its Use In the Field Requires a Long-Time Horizon
The Sustain Arts team sought to both invent and deliver a new software product, and to attract and serve new marketplaces in multiple regions (as described above). The project would have been better served if funders had an understanding that this would require a 5-10 year runway of support.

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
Lessons Looking Forward

Data Is Critical to Informing Arts and Racial Equity Policy Conversations – *but we need to talk about what data is really meaningful*

Data is not going away and the arts sector can’t be left behind when it comes to collectively using data to engage in policy discussions and to make the case that what we do in the arts community has value. Collecting and applying data, especially as it relates to who is being served (or not) by cultural programmers and philanthropy, is vital to addressing core issues of racial equity.

We Need More Training On How To Use Data

Arts workers need more help knowing how to handle, analyze, and apply data in ways that are relevant to their circumstances. But technical training is not enough. Many in the field also need help developing an ability to ask the right questions and to determine which data would be useful in answering them.

The Arts Sector Needs to Change Its Culture Around Data’s Value

Currently, it is challenging to find staff (at an arts organization or at a foundation) that know how to use data well, and the arts sector generally does not reward using data effectively. Making data-dexterity a core competence, and establishing data-informed decision-making as an institutional norm, requires changing our culture around data’s value at both the organizational level and the field-wide level.

We Need Arts-Data Bridge Builders

So long as artists and arts administrators are primarily focused on making art, and data remains the province of researchers and analysts, the field may need to invest in more bridge-builders to bring data to bear in real-world decision-making at arts organizations. These may be evaluation specialists embedded at service organizations or independent consultants who are skilled in matching relevant data to critical questions and are sensitive to the capacity constraints, artistic ambitions, and value sets of cultural producers.

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
Part 1, Background

Project Goals

As an administrator at a Chicago nonprofit arts organization, Kamilah Rashied’s experience was typical.

Tasked with finding another organization with whom to partner or a new funder to support a project, or gathering information about her own program’s participants, Rashied recalls “looking up information on GuideStar, scanning Google Maps, reading other organization’s newsletters, and reverse engineering information about audience participation.” In short, she says, “I had an analog approach to collecting data, and it took a very long time. Then, the Sustain Arts platform came along.” A free website aggregating data about arts organizations, audience participation, and funding information that was a “huge time-saver for me in my research and planning.”

Stories like Rashied’s - when accessible and relevant data helped a busy arts administrator save time and work smarter - illustrate a successful outcome of Sustain Arts, however, they’re not representative of the project’s original objective.

The prototype of the digital platform that would eventually become Sustain Arts was the Bay Area Cultural Asset Map (BACAM), a decision-support-tool commissioned by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, to help their Arts Program staff apply landscape intelligence to funding decisions. The software development team at Fractured Atlas hired to design and build BACAM would go on create the Sustain Arts platform in partnership with Harvard University and Foundation Center (now Candid).

Claire Rice, former National Director of Sustain Arts, and current Executive Director of Arts Alliance Illinois, says the primary intent of the project at its 2012 inception was to “create a national cultural policy supported by transparent and widely available data.”

The project’s Research Director, Larry McGill, Senior Vice President for Research at Foundation Center, recollects that the project set out to create a platform that would “arm arts organizations, funders, and stakeholders with good information to bring into policy conversations.”

The initial goal of aggregating data and presenting it elegantly was to illuminate critical problems in the field, and bring funders and policy-makers together to talk about addressing them.
However, the focus changed.

The emphasis on informing cultural policy shifted as the Sustain Arts team grappled with the technical challenges of compiling diverse data sets and the fundraising challenges of attracting significant capital for an ambitious project. Instead, the goal became, according to Rice, to create a platform that would provide "transparent, beautiful, easy-to-use data that was valuable for the day-to-day professional lives" of a wide constellation of artists, arts organizations, funders, patrons, and policy-makers.

This goal was predicated on a conviction that such data would equip decision-makers at arts organizations, and in philanthropy, to make better decisions. Cate Fox, a Senior Program Officer at the MacArthur Foundation, says the aim was “to make better decisions based on specific quantifiable things, rather than just going with your gut (where most people usually go).” While the project’s original designers conceived of a tool for grantmakers and policy-makers, later-stage funders of the project were motivated to invest in a user-friendly tool that would be valuable to arts administrators, especially those working at small budget organizations with acute capacity constraints.

*Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative*
Project Differentiation

In 2012, Sustain Arts was neither the first nor the only initiative seeking to bring the arts sector to the data dance. There were contemporaneous efforts to standardize the metrics nonprofit arts organizations reported to their funders (like the Cultural Data Project, now DataArts), there were comprehensive digital cultural asset maps (like CultureBlocks in Philadelphia), annualized comparisons of cultural indicators in different regions (the Creative Vitality Index) and robust tools to help nonprofit arts organizations understand their own data (as developed at the National Center for Arts Research).

However, there were several features of the Sustain Arts approach that differentiated it from other data projects:

1. Economies of Scale to Sustain the Project Long-term
2. National Scope with Local Customization
3. Comprehensive Inclusion of Nonprofit, For-Profit, and Unincorporated Arts Activity
4. No Data-Entry or Reporting Burden for the Users
5. Beautiful User Experience (no training necessary)

1. Economies of Scale to Sustain the Project Long-term

The objective of creating a network of regional Sustain Arts data platforms with a consistent interface design, all driven by a common code-base and pulling from a common group of national data-sets, was motivated by both business and research reasons.

On the business side, there were to be economies of scale reached when a large enough number of regions, each with a collection of local funders, were online and contributing a fractional share of the project’s ongoing operational, technology maintenance and data-licensing costs. On the research side, using a common format and taxonomy, while pulling regionally specific data, would enable academics and policymakers to (finally) have an apples-to-apples comparison of arts activity in different parts of the country.

2. National Scope with Local Customization

When it came to collecting and presenting data on the arts sector, previous projects had either gone deep in a specific location (i.e. the UPenn/Social Impact of the Arts Philadelphia Cultural Asset Map) or had extrapolated based on small-samples of information collected around the whole country (i.e. the NEA’s Survey of Public Participation in the Arts). The national scope of the Sustain Arts model would be both broad and deep, aggregating data from 15 highly vetted providers (See Appendix 1 - Sustain Arts Chicagoland Data Sources).
While all regional platforms were to be owned and operated by local arts organizations, a national team would develop and launch new regions and coordinate technology and data upkeep and licensing. Moreover, an extensible open-source platform would allow for localized data to be layered over the core national data sets. MacArthur’s Cate Fox describes the appeal: “The theory was that the platform would be agnostic and we could build it with current data sets and plug in additional data sets that we (as Chicago arts funders) were interested in. It was like a brownie box and we could add our own ingredients.” (See Appendix 4 - Desired Sustain Arts Chicagoland Customizations).

3. Comprehensive Inclusion of Nonprofit, For-Profit, and Unincorporated Arts Activity

The Sustain Arts team recognized that only including information on the formal 501c3 arts sector would not support the initial goal of informing cultural policy. There was simply too much cultural activity going on in the for-profit sector and, increasingly by fiscally sponsored projects and artists creating project-based work without incorporated status. To capture this activity, Sustain Arts set out to include data sets that represented entrepreneurs working at the arts/entertainment intersection (through the InfoGroup USA Business Database) and artists supporting their work by crowd-funding (hence the inclusion of Kickstarter data in SE Michigan and the San Francisco Bay Area).

The project also sought to reflect that while institutional funding is a critical element of the arts sector economy (and so Foundation Center data on arts giving was crucial), the vast majority of arts philanthropy comes from individuals. And so anonymized data was sought from financial institutions managing donor advised funds such as Fidelity and Vanguard.

The goal here, as Sandra Aponte, Program Officer at the Chicago Community Trust, described it was “to present a holistic picture of the arts landscape because for-profits and individual donors are not normally captured in our stories.”

4. No Data-entry or Reporting Burden for the Users

The most appealing aspect of the Sustain Arts value proposition to arts administrators overwhelmed by demands on their time in general (and by demands on their time to upload data in particular), was that the Sustain Arts project did not ask users to provide any new data.

“We really valued something that did not ask a lot of small arts organizations,” says Aponte.

MacArthur’s Cate Fox agrees: “What was really compelling about Sustain Arts was that nonprofit organizations didn’t have to spend time updating their data.”
Relying only on third-party data sets, as opposed to thousands of individuals and organizations consistently and accurately submitting data was, from a technology integration standpoint, a compelling feature of the Sustain Arts approach as well. This approach enabled the platform to be regularly refreshed and, to a great extent, to outsource issues of quality control to the data providers.

5. Beautiful User Experience (no training necessary)

Finally, the watchword from the project’s conception was that while “data” had a bad rap as being boring when presented in endless spreadsheets, “data visualization” was the high-art of presenting numbers in intuitive graphics.

Sustain Arts intended to overcome biases in the arts sector against engaging data with striking visuals. The platform’s designers traded off the user’s ability to do anything they wanted with the data, for a limited set of toggles and buttons that would make navigating the data and drawing conclusions from it simple. This approach led the Sustain Arts team to contract with Stamen Design Studio to create new and visually arresting graphics-based data analysis tools like the arts funding map pictured below.

“What was really compelling about Sustain Arts was that nonprofit organizations didn’t have to spend time updating their data.”
Part 2, Achievements and Challenges

**Big Wins**

Sustain Arts brought together tens of thousands of records illuminating who was engaged in making art, how it was funded, and who was participating in it. Through workshops, launch events, online promotion, and personal outreach by the project’s staff, artists and cultural workers learned about the platform, explored the information it contained, and applied it to their daily work.

This resulted in many positive individual experiences and collectively it adds up to several major accomplishments including:

1. **Saving Arts Administrators Time and Helping them Work More Effectively**

   Nationally, over 11,000 users visited the Sustain Arts platforms.

   For frequent users, especially those working at small organizations without evaluation teams or budgets to access fee-based data, Sustain Arts tools helped them raise money, find arts organizations with whom to partner, and educate colleagues about the local arts ecosystem in a timely, cost-effective way.

   As Mark Geary of the Chicago comedy group Tight Five Productions attests: “For smaller organizations like ours that have no budget for grant writers, using Sustain Arts was our first dip into the world of grants and philanthropic giving. We have used it to identify several potential foundations that may support our work and have submitted grant requests.”

   Mark Hallet, a Grants and Evaluation manager at Illinois Humanities, says: “I’ve been using Sustain Arts to do searches for arts groups by zip code and then [filtering] by arts centers, and if there is a music angle, I look for that. It’s been enormously helpful.”

   In a sector where Boards of Directors are typically comprised of well-intentioned volunteers with relatively little formal training in nonprofit arts management, Sustain Arts has also been used to bring these critical internal champions and governors up to speed.

   As the former Managing Director of Chicago’s Natya Dance Theatre, Dana Horst Sullivan, says: “The most useful thing about the platform is all of the visualizations. I don’t need to put together graphics for my board meetings. I can just queue up the website! It helps people quickly understand data trends.”
11,000 users visited Sustain Arts online platforms

Over 11,000 users visited Sustain Arts online platforms. 66% SE Michigan platform (5 years of usage data available), 22% Bay Area platform (4 years of usage data available), and 12% Chicagoland platform (2 years of usage data available). The average bounce rate across platforms was 74% (the percent of users that left the site after visiting only one page), indicating that roughly 2,800 arts stakeholders interacted with Sustain Arts resources in a deeper, more meaningful way.

Users by Region

Sustain Arts South East Michigan Monthly Users, September 2014 – January 2019

Sustain Arts Bay Area Monthly Users, May 2015 – January 2019

Sustain Arts Chicagoland Monthly Users, April 2017 – January 2019

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
Chicagoland Platform Usage, 2017 -2019

**1,400 platform users**

*Historical Usage:* 1001 tracked users since April 2017 (due to a technical glitch, usage was not tracked for the first four launch months, January, 2017 – March, 2017).


**58 average users per month**

An average of 58 people used the Sustain Arts Chicagoland platform each month.

**85% new visitors**

85% of Sustain Arts Chicagoland users were new visitors and 15% were returning visitors, indicating successful outreach to new audiences and some retention of existing users.

**2 ¼ minutes average session duration**

**5 top Chicago area user locations**

1. Chicago  
2. Evanston  
3. Oak Park  
4. Downers Grove  
5. Elk Grove Village

**95 organizations represented at launch event**

(as reported by launch event attendees)

See Appendix 5 – Chicago User Organization
2. Advancing Dialogue on Cultural Data Equity and Transparency

A second major achievement for the Sustain Arts project was the unlocking of relevant data that had been walled off by economic or technological barriers for many in the arts field.

For example, prior to Sustain Arts negotiating with Kickstarter to share their data on crowdsourced money for unincorporated arts projects in SE Michigan, this increasingly significant category of arts funding had not been accessible.

![Chart from Sustain Arts Bay Area Key Findings Report showing money raised on the Kickstarter for arts and culture-related projects in the Bay Area in 2013.](image)

Many small and medium-sized arts organizations depend heavily on institutional and public grant support, and yet, fundraisers at these organizations were not generally accessing the best information about which funders support which organizations. They were either unaware of the Foundation Center’s grants database, not technically savvy enough to navigate it methodically, or it was simply too expensive. Sustain Arts, by collaborating with the Foundation Center, made tens of thousands of records on institutional arts funding available to users in each of the three regions and this was deeply valued by the userbase.

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
As Emily Reusswig, Executive Director of the Chicago Cultural Alliance, says: “Equitable access to cultural data promises a huge impact, as it democratizes information so you do not need an expensive subscription or a grant writer to know where to apply and be most successful.”

Users at the workshops conducted by the Sustain Arts team in each region found it revelatory to look at a peer organization’s profile and find out who was funding them. It was also eye-opening to review a family foundation’s profile and learn that they were giving grants in an area they hadn’t publicly advertised.

Some family foundations may prefer to keep their giving under the radar. But, on balance, the push to be more transparent about funding flows to which Sustain Arts contributed is important in the pursuit of more equitable support of artists and communities.

“Greater data transparency will help us better understand the arts ecosystem,” says cultural producer and multidisciplinary Chicago artist Asad Ali Jafri, and that will help “us work to alleviate discrepancies across disciplines and neighborhoods.”

**Barriers to Greater Usage**

While Sustain Arts succeeded in bringing together unique datasets to create an updatable, elegant, free platform in three regions, most users didn’t use the platform as frequently as its creators predicted they would. And overall, usage declined steeply within 6-12 months of the platform’s launch in each region.

There are several major explanations:

1. The Broad Platform Served Many Users Acceptably, But Few Brilliantly
2. Sustain Arts Provided Data, Users Wanted Insight
3. Data Gaps and Inaccuracies Limited User Confidence

**1. The Broad Platform Served Many Users Acceptably, But Few Brilliantly**

Product designers marvel at the Swiss Army knife. However, anyone who has ever needed to open a can or clip their nails with one complains about the experience. It’s a beautiful notion to think that you can design one tool to serve all of your needs well, but there is a reason why connoisseurs recommend specific tools for specific tasks.

To a significant extent Sustain Arts endeavored to be all things to all people. A practical tool for a marketer or fundraiser at a nonprofit arts organization, and a strategic planning resource for a funder. A directory for an artist to find collaborators in a new part of town, and a map for a government official to locate hot spots of arts activity.

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
Rice notes that “a lot of different people used it in different ways,” and the platform’s multiple lenses and comprehensive data sets supported “most folks to find a point of entry that made sense for them.”

However, the Foundation Center’s Larry McGill (the Sustain Arts Initiative’s lead researcher) recalls that early on “we got obsessed with finding all the data we could and bringing it into one place. That was a huge task and the time we had to think about how to make the platform relevant to multiple user groups was compromised.” He continues: “Once we made a decision to aggregate as much data as we could find and put it all in one platform, it couldn’t help being all things to all people – it was a smorgasbord.”

Instead, people wanted a tool that was as specific to their immediate needs as a GPS app is when you’re lost. And this wasn’t that. As MacArthur’s Cate Fox explains: “I experimented with some of the different filters but I wanted it to be immediately apparent how to use it. It wasn’t informing my grant-decision making.”

Erica Mott, a self-described “nomadic artist”, said that while the Chicagoland platform helped her “understand the [cultural] interests in different neighborhoods, find ways to market my interdisciplinary work, and think about future sites and possible venues,” she was not totally satisfied that it was the perfect tool for her needs. “Funding data in Sustain Arts is not as helpful to me as a fiscally-sponsored artist who works in partnership with communities or organizations that rely on individual donors.”
Roles Represented by Type at Sustain Arts Chicagoland Launch Event

When 225+ arts and cultural stakeholders registered to attend the Sustain Arts launch event in January 2017, Sustain Arts asked them to share information about what organizations they represented and their roles there. The following data provides insight into who used the Sustain Arts platform.

78% nonprofit workers

Organizations Type Breakdown

78% Nonprofit Arts
4% Foundation
3% Other
3% Individual Artist
3% Government
3% Arts Service Organization
2% Higher Education
2% For-Profit
2% Fiscally-Sponsored

28% multidisciplinary arts

Primary Artistic Discipline Breakdown

14% Visual
20% Theatre
11% Music
28% Multidisciplinary
4% Literary
5% Humanities
7% Film & Electronic
11% Dance

74 Executive Leaders
(Executive Directors, CEOs, Founders, Presidents, Associate Directors, General Managers)

70 Development Professionals
(Directors of Developments, Directors of Institutional Giving, Directors of Corporate Relations and Government Partnerships, Development Associates, Development Coordinators, Grants Managers)

19 Programming & Education Professionals
(Directors of Programs, Program Officers, Program Managers, Education Managers)

11 Creative Leaders and Artists
(Artistic Directors, Executive Producers, Artists)

10 Board Members
(Presidents, Vice Presidents, Members, Treasurers)

9 Communications & Engagement Professionals
(Communications and Engagement Director, Content Director, Publicity, Marketing Managers)

11 Other
(Volunteers, Policy & Research Directors, Directors of Data & Research, Employees Relations and Training Directors, Consultants, Advisors)

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
The desire for a Swiss army knife arts data platform was tantalizing, however, fulfilling the visions of the new approach (expressed above) and the heterogeneous needs of distinct user groups within the limits of the time, money, and personnel available proved hard to reconcile.

The design and development team aimed to build a tool that would be relevant to a diverse set of decision-makers, that could be easily and regularly updated over time, and that would not be too expensive. Striving for those three goals, according to some of the project’s creators, resulted in not achieving any of them as satisfactorily as was hoped.

Still, the project matured to address challenges as it moved to new regions.

“In Chicago,” says former National Director Rice, “we had learned what aspects of the platform worked and which didn’t from experiences in the Bay Area and Detroit. There is no doubt that Chicago was the best of the three platforms given our learning and tweaks over time.” Rice adds, “I still believe it has the most value to small and mid-sized organizations that do not have access to this data otherwise.”

2. Sustain Arts Provided Data, Users Wanted Insight

At the outset, the underlying premise of the Sustain Arts Initiative was sound: to inform policy discussions, it is helpful to have accurate, accessible, and relevant data! As the project’s goals shifted to serving the specific needs of arts administrators and artists (in addition to funders and policy-makers), the assumption about data’s utility was not updated. For many of the project’s designers, users, and funders, this accounts for why the project did not achieve the type of lift-off that may have justified its continuation and expansion.

As one of the project’s early architects said: “we thought high quality information would lead to action, but it doesn’t.”

In terms of product development, there was an assumption that arts organizations would use data to make better decisions, and moreover, that they wanted it. In retrospect, it appears that for all of the intended ‘customers’, market demand was simply not there.

For an in-the-trenches artist and arts administrator like Erica Mott, much of the field struggles to engage data (and therefore doesn’t perceive its value) because of underlying, systemic capacity issues. “Data falls low on the list of priorities when you are under resourced. Having someone dedicated to data, at least some of the time, is almost necessary. In the [small budget] organizations I work with, there is lots of turnover and there is some passed-down knowledge but mostly assumptions are made about consumers.”
Kamilah Rashied, who finds great value in applying data to her real-world challenges as an arts administrator, acknowledges that she is an outlier: “There is a misconception about what data is good for. Data is a tool! It’s not the answer.”

To Rashied, the misconception stems from a lack of training and experience: “I have the same conversations with people who run large and small organizations, [when it comes to analyzing options] they ask the same rudimentary questions. Nonprofit leaders are indoctrinated into systems where you don’t need business acumen, only information about the art you’re offering to people. Ignorance about the role data needs to play in decision-making is pervasive,” says Rashied.

Others suggest that the field has a bias against data because of the impact of the arts, and the very effectiveness of an arts organization, belies measurement. “For a lot of arts organizations, their theory of change is about shifting something inside a person, but how do you measure that?” asks MacArthur’s Fox.

Fox, and other funders, are quick to point out that it is not just arts practitioners who choose not to engage data in their work (or struggle to use it), philanthropy is behind the curve as well.

“Many funders don’t have evaluation teams,” observes the Chicago Community Trust’s Aponte, “funders always talk about ‘impact’ but we ourselves don’t always have the capacity to use data.”

“The tendency is to overestimate our abilities,” says Fox. “The reality is we [in philanthropy] ask for a lot of data and we don’t use it well - to the frustration of many grantees who are asked to report it.”

The question of what to do with the data once it’s presented emerged as a vexing one for the Sustain Arts project.

Considering the experiences Chicago artists and arts organizations have had with Sustain Arts, Aponte asks, “How do we make this tool easy enough to use? Especially in a community where we have a majority of small organizations who don’t have research and evaluation capacity?”

Aponte’s conclusion, shared by others who worked on and contributed to the initiative, is that people need a lot of assistance to make sense of data. “The challenge,” reflected Fox, “was that this [data project] could only be good as the support that comes with it.”

However, simply making the tool more user-friendly or providing more trainings would not, in all likelihood, have been enough.

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
According to the Foundation Center’s Larry McGill, who’s spent much of his career involved in gathering and analyzing data about the social sector (including the arts), “the big hurdle for Sustain Arts was making the data relevant!”

The Sustain Arts platform contained thousands of records and provided ingenious ways of scanning tremendous amounts of information. However, McGill points out: “Very few people are interested in a summary of everything we know about a certain sector (except funders who may value it as providing context). But at the arts organization level, you’re mostly focused on daily problem-solving. Seeing the big picture of field and ecosystem is lovely, but how does it help an organization tomorrow?”

So, if the field didn’t want disconnected data points, or big picture representations of them, what did they want? The answer is insight.

The analysis that illuminates how the data connects to a user is critical.

In the SE Michigan Platform, the site was launched with an Insight Report that not only demonstrated how the data embedded in the platform could be combined to reach conclusions, but it concretely showed (1) funding inequities in the region, (2) the significance of crowdfunding to the local arts ecosystem and that (3) cultural participation patterns were becoming more niche as cultural opportunities diversified and proliferated.

Ultimately, the Holy Grail is for users to be trained, well supported, and open-minded about finding and applying relevant data to create their own insights. (As MacArthur’s Fox opines: “We had to experiment and make meaning for ourselves.”) That the tool didn’t do that could be regarded as a design flaw, but perhaps the more important take away is that the field is not yet ready to do this work.”

3. Data Gaps and Inaccuracies Limited User Confidence in Tool

A key feature of the approach Sustain Arts took to collecting and presenting arts data was to aggregate it from multiple existing sources. There were advantages to this strategy, but there were also high-hurdles to clear in terms of merging it into a confidence-inspiring and comprehensive data set.

Each of the dozen-plus data sources used different taxonomies, collected and refreshed data on different time-lines using different methodologies, and most critically, each had different standards and protocols regarding quality control.

Former National Director Claire Rice and Chicago Director Darcy Addison conclude that this variance in data quality contributed to confusion and, most damagingly, suspicion on the part of many users.
“In hindsight, one of the biggest barrier to usage has been people questioning the validity of the data itself. The thing that turned people off the quickest was when they saw something wrong and thought the whole thing was inaccurate,” says Rice.

Addison concurs: “the tool is user friendly, but once people found a data point that was wrong, they lost all trust. Even if 99% was right, the 1% that was wrong compromised everything.”

In many cases, what appeared to users to be inaccurate data was actually data that reflects inconsistencies in the way the field codes the same information. For example, there is great disagreement about how to count even the most basic data an arts organization is expected to track.

“Even when we collect info on audience numbers,” laments the Chicago Community Trust’s Aponte, “there is no consistency about how organizations collect it.”

In some cases, confusion (and skepticism) arose because an organization would be colloquially known under one name, but as a legal matter (and for the purposes of tracking information from government databases like the IRS), the organization’s name was different. Or a user was confused by a multi-year grant (to be spent over several years) recorded in a single year.

And sometimes there were mistakes.

An experienced researcher, like the Foundation Center’s McGill, wishes that instead of users saying to themselves: “if I find one mistake then I am not going to look at it at all,” they would ask, “can this help me go from operating by the ‘seat of the pants’ to something better?” And to recognize that “some intelligence is better than to rely only on your own limited exposure.”

But, of course, users were not engaging with the Sustain Arts platform in a vacuum.

“People [we wanted to reach] had bad experiences with other cultural data platforms,” recounts Rice, “because the user interface was bad, or they didn’t understand the value of the data. And part of what we did was to uncover issues with data quality in different data sources.”

And Addison rightly observes, “we are an immature field and have not standardized how we count and track whose participating and what they’re doing (unlike administrators at health or education nonprofits) and that’s a problem for having confidence that data is accurate and a good basis for making a decision.”

Still, many users agree with McGill that flawed data is better than no data.

*Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative*
“If there is a hole in your knowledge, a ball park value is better than no knowledge at all,” says artist Erica Mott. “And to get the ball park number I could do 10-20 site visits to cultural organizations that becomes a 30 hour job, and still get something ballpark, or I could look at Sustain Arts for an hour or less and get the same information.”

Ultimately, data quality did negatively impact user experience. However, backers of the Sustain Arts project did conclude that it was valuable in illuminating where there were gaps in the data, in catalyzing conversations about what gets counted (and how it gets counted), and in increasing the sophistication of our understanding of the possibilities and limits of data.

Sandra Aponte of the Chicago Community Trust is emphatic: “of course the quality of the data is important, but it’s never going to be 100% (accurate). What’s important is that if there is an interest in improving it, then we have to support that.”

**Operating Model Challenges**

In addition to reflections on how the scope of the project, field readiness, and data quality issues created barriers to usage, the project leaders and key funders of the Sustain Arts Initiative also recognized flaws in the project’s operating model.

**Key Operational Challenges**

1. Lack of a National Home
2. Mismatch Between Technology Development Timeline and Field Building Realities
3. Broad Scope Created Challenging Project Management Complexity

1. **Lack of a National Home**

The project was incubated at Harvard University but by design it had to leave the nest and find new homes in each region. When the project transitioned from Harvard ownership to local ownership, Sustain Arts lost significant human and financial resources and its trajectory shifted from a national project covering many cities to a smaller project with only three regional platforms.

This, in retrospect, contributed to operational challenges. Former National Director Claire Rice says, “We put a lot of stake in many cities signing up and sharing licensing costs, but growth stopped after three cities. Unfortunately, this made the cost per region too high for local funders to bear.”

Without a major institutional home, a perception developed among partners and funders that investing in the project’s long-term future was risky. Rice concludes: “institutional stability is key. What would keep these types of initiatives useful to the field is a sense of ‘we are not going anywhere’.”

*Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative*
To realize the vision of national network of regional platforms with strong local usage and leadership would have required a stronger, better-resourced central office (ideally based in a stable institution) coordinating fundraising and technology efforts, providing guidance for point-people in each region, recruiting new partners, launching new regional platforms to expand the network, and advocating across the arts field for deeper engagement with data.

2. Mismatch Between Technology Development Timeline and Field Building Realities

As the scope of the project shifted, and the complexity of designing a one-size-fits-all interface while simultaneously fundraising all over the country became clear, timelines began to slip. That was not entirely unexpected and the project’s leadership team worked well to successfully launch the platform in multiple regions. The bigger time challenge was to establish confidence among prospective funders that the initiative would prove its worth.

As Rice asks: “If you’re building something entirely new and want to create proof of concept, what is a reasonable time horizon to prove value?”

Moreover, for the Sustain Arts team, the challenge was not only to invent and deliver a new software product, but also (as described above) to attract and serve a new marketplace.

Aponte, from the Chicago Community Trust, suggests that the 3-year runway for the Chicagoland platform was insufficient. She suggests that setting the expectation at the outset that the project would take “5-10 years” would have helped funders understand that it would take time to deliver a tool and training to different user groups. Aponte points to DataArts (founded in 2006) as an illustrative counter-example: “they’ve made so many improvements in their tool over the years and that’s taken a lot of resources.”

The longer time horizon would also have enabled the project’s many user groups to figure out what they really needed from the tool and, perhaps, from arts data generally.

As MacArthur’s Cate Fox says, once you have the data and the tools to manipulate it, then you need to also “give the field time and space to figure out what questions are worth asking.”

3. Broad Scope Created Challenging Project Management Complexity

The great scope of the project was a selling point, but in hindsight, some of the project’s architects wonder if a narrower focus might have led to a stronger product.
“If we had just come up with a really awesome asset mapping tool, would that have been better?” asks Rice. “If we’d really focused on funding flows, how might that have changed things?”

A more targeted focus on specific users could have mitigated some of the project’s complexity around data and avoided unsatisfying trade-offs around design. For example, had a tool been developed for a unique foundation, it could have been iterated and then adapted to meet the needs of other funders in the same region. From there, it could have been released to a wider audience all the while benefiting from a slow and stable funding stream from committed long-term users.

It is worth noting, however, that some of the ‘what if?’ scenarios described here were tried by other arts data projects.

CultureBlocks in Philadelphia, for example, is a robust cultural asset map but it too struggles to attract widespread use and it is expensive to maintain.

The strongest arts data initiative today is the combined Southern Methodist University/DataArts program, a result of a merger between the National Center for Arts Research (NCAR) and DataArts in 2018. NCAR has enjoyed the institutional stability that Rice describes as it’s headquartered at Southern Methodist University and led by the Chair of the University’s Arts Management program. And DataArts, with a staff of over twenty people, developed over a decade with a clear-eyed focus on serving the arts funders who backed it first in a handful of states, then gradually across most of the country.
Part 3, Lessons Learned for Future Cultural Data Efforts

Speaking with a cross section of Sustain Arts users, funders, researchers, designers, and project directors yielded a number of key lessons for the field to consider going forward:

1. Data Is Critical to Informing Arts and Racial Equity Policy Conversations
   – but we need to talk about what data is really meaningful
2. We Need More Training On How To Use Data
3. The Arts Sector Needs to Change Its Culture Around Data’s Value
4. We Need Arts - Data Bridge Builders

1. Data Is Critical to Informing Arts and Racial Equity Policy Conversations

Data is not going anywhere and regardless of one’s position in the cultural community, there are critical conversations to be had regarding what we do with arts data going forward.

Sandra Aponte does not want to see the arts sector left behind when it comes to collectively using data to engage in policy discussions and to make the case that what we do in the arts community has value. “Yes there are aspects of our work that are intangible,” Aponte says, “but at some point we have to come to some agreement about what indicators to select to be the basis for evaluating and advocating for the arts.”

Cate Fox agrees that this conversation is essential and believes funders have a special responsibility to reflect on the connection between the data they want to review and the missions they support. Fox says: “As funders, we need to ask: What are we as collecting? Why? Who is invisible? What do we imagine the world can be and how would we measure that?”

For community-based artists, there is urgency around applying data to real-time discussions about the role the arts can play in improving neighborhoods and a sense that many local government officials don’t have good information about culture’s impact. “There is little depth or awareness about arts [activity] already happening in those communities,” said one such artist. “Cultural production can help a community advocate across social, economic, and racial borders, but this work needs to be more informed and nuanced.” Sustain Arts data helped move this conversation forward, but there is much more work to be done.

Kamilah Rashied is more direct: “I want arts participation data to combat the racist beliefs that dominate our sector. I want to show that people of color show up!” she says. To her, a deeper investment in collecting and applying data – especially as it relates to who is being served (or not) by cultural programmers and philanthropy – is vital to addressing core issues of racial equity.
2. We Need More Training On How To Use Data

The acknowledgment that many people in the arts sector want insight rather than just data leads to the conclusion that the arts workers of the future need help to know what to do with data, both technically and philosophically.

Rashied believes that because so few arts sector leaders have had rigorous MBA-type classroom experiences with statistics, they need hands-on clinics on how to analyze data. But technical know-how is not enough.

MacArthur’s Cate Fox believes that across the board, “we need more help developing an ability to ask the right questions and to know what data would be useful in answering them.” This challenge not only confronts technologists and researchers at Sustain Arts (or DataArts for that matter), rather, “It’s bigger than that. There is an opportunity for the sector as a whole is to develop this skill set.”

3. The Arts Sector Needs to Change Its Culture Around Data’s Value

The odds that the sector will get better at engaging data go up if there are strong incentives to do so.

One takeaway from the Sustain Arts experience is that we underestimate how challenging it is to find staff (at an arts organization or at a foundation) that know how to use data well, and the arts sector generally does not reward using data effectively. Making data-dexterity a core competence, and establishing data-informed decision-making as an institutional norm, requires changing our culture around data’s value at both the organizational level and the field-wide level.

However, long-time players in the field also suggest that popular understanding of data’s importance will occur naturally as time goes by. “It’s almost a generational thing,” says McGill, “and changing attitudes about data may have to come by virtue of generational change [in the workforce].”

4. We Need Arts-Data Bridge Builders

Alternately, so long as artists and arts administrators are primarily focused on making art, and data remains the province of researchers and analysts, the field may need to invest in more bridge-builders to bring data to bear in real-world decision-making. These may be evaluation specialists embedded at service organizations or independent consultants who are skilled in matching relevant data to critical questions and sensitive to the capacity constraints, artistic ambitions, and value sets of cultural producers.

Whether trained in the field through thoughtful professional development programs or by third-parties, a conclusion has emerged that there is a need for more people to translate data into something that enables people in the arts sector to take action, or at least to see something familiar in a new way.
Conclusion

Those that developed and engaged with the Sustain Arts Initiative believe it is important for efforts like it to continue.

For an on-the-ground user like artist Erica Mott, the takeaway is that Sustain Arts is a “stepping stone” to the development of other data repositories that will speak to her needs as an individual artist. Veteran arts administrator Kamilah Rashied is passionate that “platforms like this must persist because nonprofits are businesses, and if we don’t apply data we won’t be effective.”

Addison, the project’s Chicago Director, has a conviction that using data wisely is a piece of the scaffolding that the cultural community needs. “For the arts to thrive,” she says, “we need to support the infrastructure of the sector – that’s policy, advocacy, research, and data - in addition to direct services or creation of new work.”

Twenty years ago, people working in the arts sector did not know how to use social media. (No one did, Facebook was founded in 2004). Today, culture makers need to be adept at using social media platforms to promote their work, engage their audiences, and understand how their practices are perceived. It can be frustrating that different social media platforms (and the billion dollar companies that make them) come and go, but the more that we use these platforms, the sharper our technical and strategic social media skills become.

The Sustain Arts Initiative will sunset in 2020, but the art sector’s quest to gather relevant information and know what to do with it will continue. The increasing availability of data, the exponential growth in computing power, and the sociological phenomenon of a rising digital generation that has grown up expecting an immediate answer to any question, anytime (for free!) means that being proficient in seeking and applying data will become a job expectation in the arts field and across the knowledge sector. And, like the field’s experience with social media, the more practice culture workers get using tools like the Sustain Arts platform, the more prepared they’ll be to meet that expectation.

The journey the Sustain Arts visionaries placed - to provide good information to smart people in ways they can use to foster richer dialog, provoke better thinking, and achieve more successful outcomes – will continue.
Appendix 1
Chicagoland Data Sources

Sustain Arts located and obtained data on four aspects of the arts and culture ecosystem:

- Data on arts organizations
- Capitalization data
- Demographic data
- Cultural preferences data

Sustain Arts examined dozens of data sets before selecting 15 to embed in the platform

To understand the scope and activities of arts and cultural organizations in Chicago, it relied on data from five main sources:

1. The primary source of information on for-profit creative enterprises was the InfoGroup USA Business Database
2. For nonprofit organizations, the primary source for historical data was the National Center for Charitable Statistics, which provided data from the IRS Business Master File, NCCS Core Files, and additional custom data from IRS Forms 990
3. Current data on nonprofit arts organizations was obtained from GuideStar
4. For unincorporated entities, it drew upon information from Fractured Atlas' database of fiscally-sponsoring organizations
5. Data on unincorporated entities from crowd-funding project databases for the Chicago metro area is in progress.

To assess capitalization patterns across the cultural sector, Sustain Arts relied on the following five sources:

1. Data on the revenue sources of nonprofit arts and cultural organizations was obtained from IRS Forms 990 provided to us by the National Center for Charitable Statistics
2. Data on federal support for arts organizations was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Data on state support for arts organizations was provided by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
3. Data on public support for arts organizations in Chicago was provided by the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events
4. Data on foundation support for the arts was provided by the Foundation Center

To document demographic trends, it obtained data from two main sources:

1. For national demographic data, it relied on the Census Bureau’s American FactFinder tool
2. Demographic data on Chicago (including future projections) was obtained from Applied Geographic Solutions, based on data from the U.S. Decennial Census and the American Community Survey

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
To understand cultural preferences and arts participation trends, it relied on three primary data sources:

1. For national data on arts participation, we pulled data from the three most recent waves of the National Endowment for the Arts’ Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts
2. Data on cultural programming attendance was pulled from a TRG Community Database
3. Data on the programmatic activities of nonprofit arts organizations was provided by the Cultural Data Project

There are specific limitations associated with each of these data sources. Some are partial, others are more complete. Some have only data from recent years, others have trend data. Some of the trend data goes back to 1990; in other cases, it only goes back to 2002. Some are based on national samples that cannot be analyzed at the regional or local level; others are strictly regional in focus. Comparisons across data sets are often problematic; questions asked in one survey are not identical to questions asked in other surveys.

It is particularly difficult to find good data on the giving of private individuals. The data we have on giving by private foundations is largely restricted to the giving of the largest 1,000 foundations in the country. Very little data exists on unincorporated entities, although what data we have suggests that they are rapidly growing in number.

The questions we would most like to answer are often those for which specific data do not exist. So, we must sometimes rely on proxies that get close to answering our questions.

In short, the field’s current “information infrastructure” only obliquely captures the breadth and diversity of arts activity today. Existing and emerging data collection strategies must co-evolve in step with the field if we are to have the intelligence we need to understand and leverage the forces that are driving change in the sector.

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
Appendix 2
Key Personnel

19 people worked on the Sustain Arts project
Over eight years, 19 people worked on the Sustain Arts project.

Core Team
• Darcy Addison, Chicago Director at Sustain Arts
• Aviva Argote, Senior Advisor at the Hauser Institute for Civil Society at Harvard University - Sustain Arts
• Kiley Arroyo, Senior Advisor at Foundation Center
• Jim Bildner, Founder at Sustain Arts and Senior Research Fellow, Hauser Institute for Civil Society at Harvard University
• David E. Bruin, Summer 2014 Research Assistant at Sustain Arts
• Eleanor Cleverly, Communications Specialist at Sustain Arts
• Alison Conard, Program Specialist-Archipelago at Fractured Atlas
• Adam Huttler, Executive Director at Fractured Atlas
• Lawrence T. McGill, Research Director at Sustain Arts and Vice President for Research at Foundation Center
• Ian David Moss, Technology Director at Sustain Arts and Research Director at Fractured Atlas
• Claire Rice, Deputy Director at Sustain Arts and Research Fellow at Hauser Institute for Civil Society at Harvard University
• Michael Sanders, 2013-14 Research Assistant at Sustain Arts
• Kelly Varian, Communications and Development Specialist at Sustain Arts
• Marc Vogl, Field Director-Bay Area at Sustain Arts and Principal at Vogl Consulting

Other Key Contributors
• Shawn Anderson, Chief Technology Officer at Fractured Atlas
• Chris Letts, Rita E. Hauser Senior Lecturer in the Practice of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership at Harvard University and faculty PI on the Sustain Arts project
• Sarah Reibstein, Resident Research Assistant at Foundation Center
• Grace Sato, Knowledge Services Manager at Foundation Center
• Christine Zagrobelny, Software Developer at Fractured Atlas

13 people worked for Sustain Arts in 2014
In 2014, Sustain Arts has it’s largest ever staff of 13 core team members

2 people worked for Sustain Arts in 2018
In 2018, Sustain Arts has it’s smallest ever staff of 2 part-time core team members
Appendix 3
Funders

$3.2M raised for Sustain Arts nationally
As of January 2019, the Sustain Arts project has raised over $3,200,000.

Sustain Arts National & Regional Funders

- Bank of America Charitable Foundation
- Driehaus Foundation
- Chauncey and Marion D. McCormick Family Foundation
- Chicago Community Trust
- Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE)
- Community Foundation of SE Michigan
- Fleishhacker Foundation
- Frankel Foundation for Art
- San Francisco Arts Commission
- Walter & Elise Haas Sr. Fund
- Hewlett Foundation
- John and Marcia Goldman Fund
- Joyce Foundation
- Kenneth Rainin Foundation
- Knight Foundation
- Kresge Foundation
- Lenfest Foundation
- Henry Luce Foundation
- MacArthur Foundation
- MASCO Corporation Foundation
- National Endowment for the Arts
- Newman’s Own Foundation
- Pert Foundation
- Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation
- Rita and Gus Hauser
- San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs
- The Boston Foundation
- and 14 individual donors

$1M raised specifically for Sustain Arts Chicagoland
Over one million dollars of the total funding was specifically for the Chicagoland Platform.

Sustain Arts Chicagoland Funders

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<th>Grants</th>
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<td>MacArthur Foundation</td>
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<td>Driehaus Foundation</td>
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<td>Individual Donors</td>
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Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
Appendix 4
Desired Chicagoland Customizations

The following list contains potential customizations and new functionalities for the Sustain Arts Chicagoland platform that were identified by a Chicagoland Leadership Committee comprised of local arts and cultural leaders. These potential features were not available in the baseline version of Sustain Arts and would have been unique to the Chicago platform. These customizations were never realized as they would have required additional investment.

Art Education Data (high priority)
- Ingenuity link to be embedded in organizational profiles to reveal arts education data
- Mapping adult, community-based, and life-long arts education providers

Chicago Cultural Workforce Data (high priority)
- Arts and culture industry employees; workers in arts and culture occupations; wages in artistic occupations; payroll in arts and culture industries
- Trends, requires additional analysis of above data sets

Specific Public Arts and Cultural Events Data
- Chicago festivals and performances
- Participation data from large free events, data estimates may be accessible via city forms

Accessibility (medium priority)
- Language translation, ADA compliance for Sustain Arts platform

Improved Data on Individual Artists and Underground or Small Budget Projects (medium priority)
- Self reporting/mapping of these projects and artists

Clarifying Identity and Types of Work for Artists and Organizations (High Priority)
- Identifying artists or organizations that engage various specific communities (place/geography-based, culturally-specific, language-specific, communities with disabilities, etc.)

Re-Granting or Pass-Through Grants Data
- Organizations that do not report to the Foundation Center. Propeller Fund, etc.

Map This! Feature
- Displays organizational search results visually/on a map (show me all nonprofit dance orgs in Cook County, etc.)
- Layer different searches on top of one another (and potentially include other sector data, crime, transportation, etc.)

Vitality Indicators Outside of Arts Organizations
- Data on Social Service Orgs that intersect with arts
- Other sector data that indicate community health

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
Appendix 5
Chicagoland User Organizations

95 organizations represented at launch event on January 26th 2017 at the Chicago Cultural Center
(as reported by launch event attendees)

- 3 Arts
- 6018North
- 826CHI
- Actors Gymnasion
- Alphawood Foundation
- Apollo Chorus of Chicago
- ArtReach Chicago
- Arts & Business Council of Chicago
- Arts Alliance Illinois
- Audience Architects
- Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University
- Barrel of Monkeys
- Beverly Arts Center
- Black Ensemble Theater
- Black Theatre Network
- BrightSeed Collaborative
- Chicago Artists Coalition
- Chicago Cultural Alliance
- Chicago Fringe Festivalz
- Chicago Humanities Festival
- Chicago Lights
- Chicago Park District
- Civic Consulting Alliance
- Community TV Network
- Concordia University Chicago Foundation
- Congo Square
- Corner Galley
- Creative Partners Arts
- Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events
- Divine Purpose Youth Performing Arts Center

- DuSable Museum of African American History
- Eighth blackbird
- ElevArte Community Studio
- Ensemble Dal Niente
- Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theater
- Erasing the Distance
- Evanston Symphony Orchestra
- Experimental Sound Studio
- Free Spirit Media
- Full Spectrum Features
- Gene Siskel Film Center
- Genesis Theatrical Productions
- Green Star Movement
- Hedwig Dance
- HMS Media
- Hyde Park Art Center
- Hyde Park School of Dance
- Illinois Arts Council Agency
- Illinois Humanities
- iNOMA
- IPaintMyMind
- Latinos Progresando
- Links Hall
- Lyric Opera of Chicago
- Marwen
- Maywood Fine Arts
- Media Burn Archive
- Melloe Drama, Inc
- MoCP
- MSCN Vision Enterprises Assoc.
- National Hellenic Museum
- National Veterans Art Museum
- Natya Dance Theatre
- NNWAC
- Northlight Theatre
- Northwestern Settlement
- Chicago Dancemakers Forum
- Opera-Matic
- Poetry Center of Chicago
- Project Onward
- Raven Theatre Company
- Ravinia Festival
- Read/Write Library
- Red Tape Theatre
- Richard H. Driehaus Foundation
- Rivendell Theatre Ensemble
- Sideshow Theatre Company
- Silk Road Rising
- Snow City Arts
- Step Up Chicago Playwrights
- The Arts of Life
- The Chicago Community Trust
- The Field Foundation
- The Joffrey Ballet
- The Neo-Futurists
- The People's Music School
- The Poetry Center of Chicago
- Tight Five Productions
- Trickster gallery
- TruVision Productions
- Victory Gardens Theater
- Voice of the City
- William G. Hill Center for the Arts
- Windy City Playhouse
- Youth Empowerment Performance Project Narr

Lessons Learned From the Sustain Arts Initiative
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