

San Francisco Arts Commission WritersCorps Transition Recommendations Report

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January 25, 2016

Overview of Process

- *Late 2014-Early 2015*: Merger with SF Library explored
- *June-August 2015*: Melanie Beene internal report
- *September-October 2015*: Explored AIR model; Lit review
- *October 2015*: Stakeholder meeting with Director of Cultural Affairs—Values & decision-making process
- *November 2015*: Stakeholder meeting to provide feedback on options
- *December 2015*: Synthesized results into recommendation



Origins

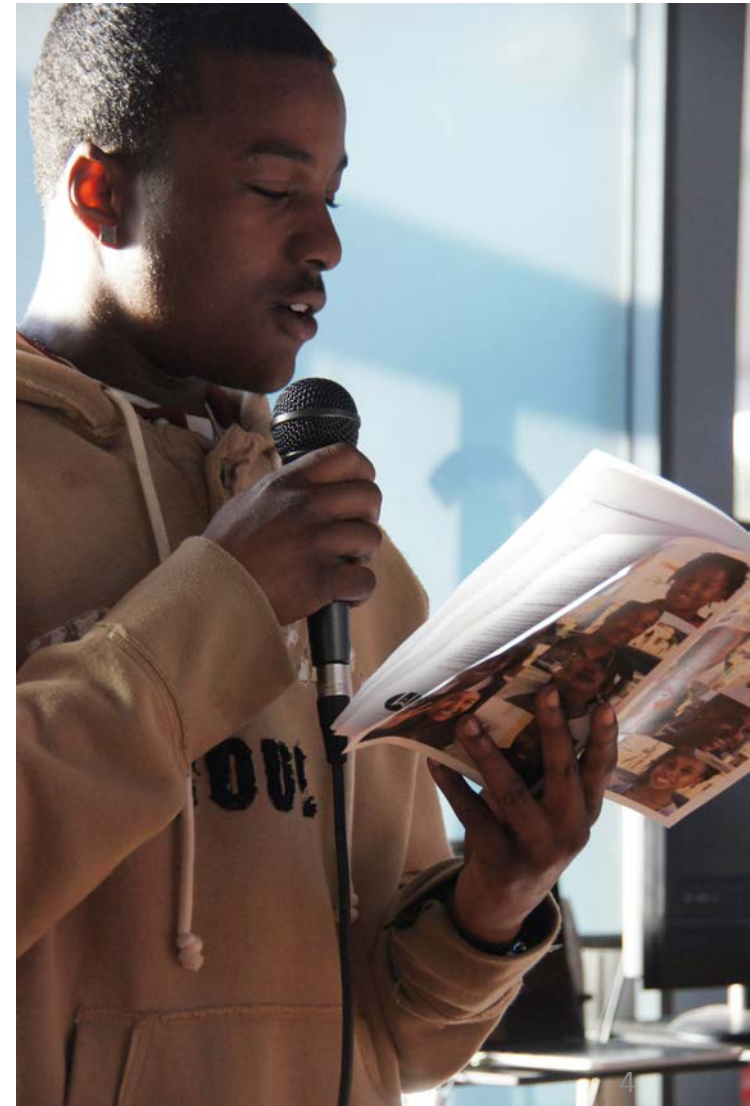
- Founded in 1994
- Federal pilot program in 3 cities as part of AmeriCorps and NEA
- Began with 25 teachers
- After 3 years became part of the City





Since 1994

- Over 21,000 young people served.
- 89 professional writers and teaching artists have been in residence at 68 in-school, after-school, and Department of Juvenile Probation sites in San Francisco.
- 86% of WritersCorps youth demonstrate improvements in writing after participating in our programs.
- In 2010, WritersCorps received the National Arts & Humanities Youth Program Award from First Lady Michelle Obama.



How do we best preserve and honor the legacy of WritersCorps?

- What does the literature say about the potentials and pitfalls of a merger with a nonprofit?
- What might an artist in residency grants program look like?
- What do program-level stakeholders
 - Value about WritersCorps?
 - Identify as the core programmatic aspects that ensure quality programming for SF youth?
- What is the transition recommendation?



Mission High School

What does the literature say about the potentials and pitfalls of a merger with a nonprofit?

- Since WritersCorps is a program and not an organization, the “merger” is actually a block grant to an existing organization.
- No staff-level leadership & oversight to ensure fidelity to the model, mission, and culture of WritersCorps.
- Major “stumbling blocks” to successful mergers:
 - Limited timeline, overlapping funding, lacking strong and consistent leadership, and differing cultures and programmatic visions.

What might an artist-in-residency grants program look like?

- The teaching artist would be an independent grantee working in collaboration with San Francisco community sites to offer free, long-term, in-depth literacy-focused arts workshops.
- The teaching artist would be responsible for administrative duties (such as DCYF data collection) and fostering and cultivating partner relationships.
- In alignment with current grant-making strategies, the artist-in-residency model would prioritize:
 - The grantee with a community-focused approach,
 - Cohort learning and peer mentoring opportunities,
 - Learning institutes,
 - Ongoing support and feedback from SFAC staff.

Stakeholder Meetings

Program-level stakeholders who provided feedback included current and former teaching artists (7), current and former trainers (2), current and former site representatives (6), and former students (2).



What do program-level stakeholders, including former and current teaching artists and partners, value about WritersCorps?

- Youth literacy, voice, engagement, leadership, and emotional/social impacts
- Reaching youth who might not otherwise pursue writing through deep relationships and mentoring
- Young people build community and learn skills to be active participants in their local communities
- High quality and visible youth voices



International Studies Academy



WritersCorps nurtures the artist and teacher to nurture the artist and teacher in young people.

- Programming that is student- & site-centered; long-term and in-depth; interdisciplinary
- Generous funding to support work, develop craft, strengthen teaching, and provide health insurance stipends
- Training and support
- Diversity of staff and teaching artists is prioritized to support the diverse young people of SF



Sanchez Elementary School

What do program-level stakeholders identify as concerns and priorities with the two transition options?

- After discussing concerns and possibilities for WritersCorps “merging” with nonprofit, the stakeholders felt strongly that the artist-in-residency model is the most visible, and sustainable of the two options.
- There was strong concern that under the nonprofit merger model WritersCorps would “peter out” after the committed funding cycle ends.

Stakeholder Concerns with Nonprofit Merger Model

- Timeline,
- Importance of fit & unknowns,
- Retaining institutional/cultural identity,
- Retaining the culture of prioritizing teaching artists,
- Sustaining funding,
- Staff turnover,
- And the risk of competition versus collaboration.

Stakeholder Concerns with Artist-in-Residency Grant Model

- Retaining the model of offering essential funding, support, and training to teaching artists to deliver quality programming to SF youth
- Making explicit the focus on emergent versus established teaching artists
- “Matchmaking” between grantees and sites
- Prioritizing community-based teaching artists versus those most skilled as grant writers



Stakeholders Prioritized Within an Artist-in-Residency Grants Model

- Staff support;
- Funding for living wage at current level with funds for contractors to comply with grant guidelines;
- Cohort professional development;
- A commitment to pedagogical independence;
- And prioritizing teaching artists with a proven track record working with the proposed population.

Stakeholder Meeting 2



Downtown High School



Oasis For Girls

Transition Recommendations

- The artist-in-residency model offers the greatest potential to sustain the vision and legacy of WritersCorps.
- Aligns well with current grant-making focus on cohort learning, community-centered approaches, and learning institutes.
- Opportunity for SFAC to be a leader in the field.

TA Residency Model Proposal

- Teaching artist is an independent grantee working with San Francisco community sites to offer free, long-term, in-depth literacy-focused arts workshops.
- Teaching artist is responsible for fostering and cultivating partner relationships and administrative duties.
- Residency includes emphasis on and funding for artist practice and professional development.
- In alignment with current grant-making strategies, the artist-in-residency model would prioritize:
 - The grantee with a community-focused approach,
 - Provide cohort learning and peer mentoring opportunities,
 - Offer learning institutes,
 - And provide ongoing support and feedback from SFAC staff.

TA Residency Model Proposal (cont'd)

- SFAC will provide:
 - Vision for deliverables and model;
 - Cohort professional development and periodic check-ins;
 - Technical assistance in data collection and site match;
 - Funding for pay, healthcare, program materials, artist/professional development stipend, and consultant fees.
- *DCYF, SFAC & SFPL Partnership*: Applicants would provide vision for partnership with at least one public community-based organization (consistent with current site and population priorities), and complimentary programming with one library site.

Visioning into the Future

- SFAC as leader in arts education policy field for teaching artists.
- While short-term priorities might focus on a modest cohort of established teaching artists, long-term goals might include:
 - Creating tiered mentorship opportunities/obligations based on different level of expertise,
 - Creating linkages between the artist-in-residency program and organizations to provide teaching artist community-wide professional development,
 - And establishing and expanding different cohorts based on discipline.



College Track