

Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation

CHICAGO, IL

THE STATS

OPERATIONAL SINCE 1952

ANNUAL GRANTMAKING: \$6 MILLION

APPLICANTS SERVED: OVER 160 CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS ANNUALLY

PARTICIPATING DATA ARTS GRANTMAKER SINCE 2008

What They Do

The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation (GDDF) supports land conservation, artistic vitality, and regional collections for the people of the Chicago region and the Lowcountry of South Carolina. GDDF supports over 160 small, professional arts organizations of all disciplines in Chicago by providing general operations grants and an array of other kinds of support to help its arts partners sustain their artistry and strengthen their operations. (GDDF uses the Cultural Data Profile as part of its grant application for its Chicago arts funding.)

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High Concept Labs, Chicago, IL. Photo Credit: Michael Sullivan

The Challenge

As part of its ongoing grantmaking, GDDF uses data to understand how small arts organizations are faring year-to-year. Ellen Placey Wadey, GDDF Program Officer says, “Annually we look at the pool of GDDF grantees to see whether the past year was easier or harder than the year before based on the median surplus or deficit. We also look at whether groups produced more or fewer shows than the year before. Did their ticket prices go up or down?” said Ellen Wadey. This snapshot view comes from applicants’ CDP submissions which power the DataArts Trend and Comparison reports that Wadey uses in her review process. “We want to use good data in our practice, which is a principle we preach to our grantees.”

“DataArts reports affirmed that our Gen Ops Plus grantees were doing well in comparison to the total pool of Chicago’s small arts groups.” Wadey also used these insights to compare similar organizations in other cities. “We want to know what is happening, what is changing, and what is informing those changes, so we can assess whether these changes have relevance to our grantmaking.”



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Ellen Placey Wadey

Program Officer, The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation.

How DataArts Strengthens Grantmaking

DataArts customized GDDF's Funder Report at Wadey's request to include a calculation of three months of operating costs for each organization so that they could easily see how much of a safety net applicants had. They found that the amount of readily accessible cash was thin for many organizations, which ultimately contributed to GDDF's decision to launch a cash reserve challenge grant program. "Data from the CDP allows us to better understand the impact of our grantmaking and helps us make decisions about new grant programs that best serve our grantees."

DataArts, in a word

"Fundamental. When arts nonprofits are financially sound and have a solid understanding of their financial position, they can better withstand economic challenges. GDDF believes that arts organizations with strong management capacity have the confidence to make the best artistic choices, and our hope is to help our grantees use the CDP to become stronger so that they can make the best art possible."

About DataArts

DataArts' mission is to empower the nonprofit arts and cultural sector with high-quality data and resources in order to strengthen its vitality, performance, and public impact. The Cultural Data Profile (CDP), is DataArts' flagship service, which is used by thousands of cultural nonprofits' annually to report standardized financial and programmatic information. DataArts serves as an important catalyst for data-driven decision-making, resulting in stronger management for arts and cultural organizations, better-informed funding policy for grantmakers, and a rich information resource for advocates and researchers.

For more information, visit us at www.culturaldata.org.



Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, Chicago, IL.



Harris Theatre, Chicago IL. Photo Credit: David Cortes