



Small Local Arts Service Nonprofit Benefits from a National Nonprofit

Arts are often seen as a luxury for a select few with time and money to spare. Felicia Rosenfeld is well aware of this common sentiment, but she also knows art is vital for all communities.

Most of Rosenfeld's career has been dedicated to providing consultation and support to multiple arts organizations so that they can keep creating in their local communities. She was the co-director of Pentacle, a nonprofit that offers services to companies and artists in dance and theater.

Although Pentacle has a national reach, their offices are based in New York. Because of her husband's work, Rosenfeld moved to Los Angeles in 2006 and the organization offered her the opportunity to launch Pentacle programming in Los Angeles. She grew the L.A. Pentacle presence to house a staff of three.

Along the way, she met Shayna Keller, the executive director of the Dance Resource Center (DRC), a small service organization for the L.A. dance community. Allied in mission and programming, the two organizations discussed how they might collaborate with each other to solve a common challenge of small nonprofits — lack of resources. Pentacle bumped into a funding barrier. The nonprofit registered to do business in California, but wasn't a California corporation, making it ineligible to apply for certain institutional funding. DRC had only one part-time employee, relying on a volunteer board to do a lot of the work with a small budget. Both DRC and Pentacle's L.A. operations suffered from lack of bandwidth required to deliver their programs and services at the highest level.

In spring of 2014, DRC and Pentacle entered into an agreement to collaborate on certain elements of their infrastructure. Pentacle took over DRC's fiscal administration, including banking and bookkeeping. They collaborated on programming and conducting workshops. Once a week the staff worked together in Pentacle's offices. When Keller left DRC to pursue her education, Alexandra Matthews became executive director and had the support of Rosenfeld and other Pentacle staff in administering DRC.

Staff and board members from both organizations attended a Nonprofit Sustainability Initiative (NSI) conference, where they learned about resources that help leaders explore restructuring using the expertise of consulting firms. The NSI is a funding collaborative that provides grants to help organizations form strategic partnerships to be more sustainable.

“We were kind of muddling our way through organizational collaboration already, but we didn’t have guidance and we didn’t know what we were doing,” says Rosenfeld. “It is very unusual for small organizations to even have the opportunity to get funding to work on this kind of thing.”

DRC and Pentacle received the NSI negotiation grant and hired Green Management Consulting, a business-consulting firm with expertise in working with nonprofits, though not with arts organizations. Most of their clients are healthcare service organizations. Although Pentacle and DRC’s sector is art, neither organization makes art. Rather, they support dance organizations and independent dance professionals through services such as marketing, administration, staffing, finance, technical assistance, and other resources needed to make and present their work.

Consultant Sonja Dominguez, says, “We took them through an in depth interview and then brought the group together and talked about all the shared themes that we heard. Then, developed criteria for describing what success would be for the whole group at the end. It worked really well because they basically grew up together with the organization.”

Through the consulting process, it became apparent that the Pentacle board wasn’t interested in being bicoastal. The recommendation was to close the L.A. Pentacle office and have DRC inherit some Pentacle programming and staff.

“If I wasn’t involved, Pentacle wouldn’t have been interested in continuing to have an L.A. office. It became clear that it wasn’t that they were interested so much in being in California so much as they wanted to continue working with me. That is not healthy for an organization or a person,” says Rosenfeld.

Even though Rosenfeld had worked with Pentacle for 16 years, everyone agreed shutting the L.A. office down was for the best and she was ready to move forward. Rosenfeld became executive director of DRC. Matthews was most interested in programming and became the director of programming. By absorbing Pentacle’s individual donor base and fees associated with the absorbed programming, DRC more than tripled its budget in the first year. Now, the DRC is eligible to apply for more foundation grants. It received its first National Endowment for the Arts grant in 2016. The board grew from four to 16, and DRC’s reputation in the dance community changed for the better.

“Without the NSI support, our alliance might still have happened, but it would have taken a lot longer, and it wouldn’t have happened in such a business-like, aspirational, and best practices kind of way,” says Rosenfeld.

The main challenge for both parties was carving out extra time apart from their usual tasks to discuss and integrate all these changes. DRC is still completing the integration from a volunteer-run organization, to a fully professionalized service organization.

“Among the different types of grant opportunities that are available, [the NSI grant] is one of the most amazingly supportive, yet flexible structures of work because there are no preset assumptions about a specific outcome, specific metrics or timeframe,” says Dominguez.