

## Artists' Communities:

# Consulting Reference Guide

A reference guide to finding and using consultants for artists' communities, colonies, and residencies, including peer recommendations and advice for making the most of consultants.

This guide is part of the Alliance of Artists Communities' **Capacity Building Project**, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.



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# Artists' Communities: Consulting Reference Guide

## Introduction

The Alliance of Artists Communities has created this resource on consulting in order to assist its members—established and emerging alike—in identifying and planning for consultants. The use of consultants has become standard practice in the nonprofit sector, recognizing that organizations don't always have the expertise, human resources, or objectivity in-house to do what they want to do.

Consultants can help move organizations forward in times of change and facilitate significant projects. All organizations experience change as part of the natural lifecycle, and consultants are often hired to assist the organization navigate through this process. Some issues are external—changes in funding, trends within the field, etc.; while others are internal—staff or board leadership transitions, board engagement, changes in mission or programming. Consultants can help organizations assess themselves, work through transitions, and prepare for the future.

You may choose to hire a consultant when:

- you aren't in a position to hire staff
- the organization's needs are short-term or project-specific (such as special event planning or public relations for a campaign)
- you don't have the expertise in-house (such as technology assistance)
- the organization is facing a crisis or time of significant change
- the organization needs another point of view to move forward

**Most projects are not unique to artists' residencies, and many not even to the arts in general.** When looking for a consultant, consider those who have worked on similar projects who indicate a willingness to get to know your organization. A consultant who has experience with projects and organizations of a similar size and style may be a better match than a consultant who has worked with another residency program that is very different from yours.

There are a number of resources for nonprofit consultants, so rather than duplicate what you'll find elsewhere, we've compiled a list of more general resources as well as some anecdotes and information specific to artists' residencies. Thanks to all the residency programs who contributed their consulting experiences and recommendations for this guide.

## Artists' Communities Consulting Questionnaire

The following represents responses to the Alliance of Artists Communities' questionnaire on consultant use distributed to more than 100 artists' communities and residency programs in Spring 2007.

### 1. What kinds of projects have you hired a consultant or consulting group for?

- a) Strategic planning 70%
- b) Board development 50%
- c) Fundraising 55%
- d) Capital campaign 30%
- e) Succession planning 10%
- f) Other: technology, marketing, facilities planning and development, capacity building, endowment campaigns, by-laws review, feasibility studies

### 2. What was the duration of the project?

- a) 1- or 2-day retreat 40%
- b) Several months 30%
- c) Year or more 80%

### 3. What did hiring a consultant cost?

- a) 1- or 2-day retreats \$2,000 on average
- b) Ongoing consulting \$100-\$250/hr on average
- c) Flat-fee projects \$500-\$150,000 according to scope of project

### 4. How has a consultant informed your project, in ways that the organization would not have been able to do on its own?

- a) Objectivity
  - While there was in most cases experience and expertise among the staff and board, the consultant seems to bring OBJECTIVITY to assessing and making recommendations on programs, projects and problems. The better consultants not only bring objectivity but have researched the group enough to also bring models, options, suggestions and critical judgment to the process. That objectivity and expertise is definitely worth the expense.
  - In strategic planning and board development, the consultant was able to bring in fresh ideas because they do not have a bias toward the historical method of doing things.
  - The consultant acted like a therapist, in many ways divorcing the proceedings from what appeared to us as the dominant situation to address, unmasking hidden feelings, presuppositions, etc.

- The consultant provided information board members can hear from an outsider that they cannot hear from each other.
- They bring outside perspective and question our internal assumptions about our thinking.
- The consultant provided an external voice that could sometimes say things staff could not, and helped structure and clarify change process and facilitate discussions.
- The consultant looked at the project with a fresh eye, and a more objective look at things.
- The consultant took us out of our comfort zone, brought up difficult questions and required us to make tough choices. But in the end, it was what we needed and we wouldn't have arrived there on our own.

### b) Specific expertise and experience

- Consultants in the areas of graphic design, grant writing, computer/website technician, and artwork curator bring in skills and experience that our small staff does not have.
- A world of expertise and experience at sharing that with boards.
- The consulting project organized aspects of our fundraising plan with all the details required to get us started.
- The consultant offered experience, understanding of required work and scope of project, and great resources involving potential underwriters.
- The consultant gave specific expertise beyond staff, and made and leveraged connections to key people and institutions.
- Fundraising help has been invaluable. To have someone working with us on an ongoing basis, knowing the donors and staff, understanding the needs and capacity of the organization, has been very, very helpful.
- Facilitation enabled us to hone our mission and establish long-term goals in an early developmental stage.

- c) Best-practices and broader context
  - View from beyond one's nonprofit organization is good. Ideas are informed by experience elsewhere, and the consultant has a sense of 'best practices' that brings new perspective to the organization.
  - In terms of fundraising, the consultant offered a national trends perspective.
  - They bring new ideas about different models and processes.

5. *In what ways have a consultant made the process more difficult?*

- a) Expense
  - As an emerging nonprofit, allocating funds for a consultant is always a challenge. We have been fortunate in the past to obtain technical assistance funding to make hiring a consultant possible.
  - The greatest possible downside is that we have tied up money in a project that may become a lesser priority based on recent emergent capital requirements.
- b) Time and staff capacity
  - Start-up with a new person always takes time. Orienting him/her to the organization is very important, but so time-consuming.
  - It is like managing another staff person really—you give them a bunch of work, and they bring back more for you to respond to!
  - Adds an enormous layer of work to staff, though more attention to detail means more knowledge of the situation.
- c) Disconnect between consultant and organization
  - Consultants are notorious for over-inflating their value. A lot of what some provide is canned off the shelf stuff recycled for your situation. It's important to look for someone who has an affinity for the work you do, who has enough experience with your type of organization to know what has and hasn't worked in similar situations.
  - It is a challenge always trying to fit their working style into our organization's culture; however, over time this became less of an obstacle.
  - The consultant can not really know the organization or its audiences.
  - A match between the consultant/team and the staff/board is critical. If the consultant has not researched the group, program, etc. thoroughly and is prepared OR if the board/staff are not willing to change, nor engage with the consultant, even though they may have elected to use a consultant, the process fails.
  - At times, the sessions seemed to wander off into irrelevant territory, or at least on a circuitous route towards the resolution of our issue.

- d) Implementation and follow-up
  - When we have hired people on a short-term basis, the advice can be useful, but has a less lasting result.
  - Juggling with intention became a skill that was challenging, but important to hone.
  - The consultant focused the work and asked staff to put that in the mix of the daily job requirements with specific timelines. It was a necessary difficulty.
  - It has been inconvenient to turn to consultants without a retainer for post-retreat questions and support. This needs to be built into contracts.
- e) Disagreement with recommendations
  - Sometimes we have had too many consultants giving us advice and that has been confusing.
  - It seems like some consultants have the attitude that their view is correct and are not too willing to change the direction of a project based on the organization's view.
  - The consultant sometimes suggested inappropriate directions.

6. *Did you experience any resistance to working with a consultant? From whom? How was this overcome?*

- a) Lack of consensus on need for consulting
  - Initially we had resistance from some Board members since they failed to understand the complexity involved in developing an effective capital campaign and the need to properly plan, and even more importantly, determine the potential effectiveness of such a campaign once underway.
  - Long ago we had one board member who thought that the consultant fees were high for a strategic plan, and that the staff could do the same work for less. Fortunately other board members did not see it that way. But it's important to remember that staff is usually already operating at full capacity and so consultants are there to help take the board's and staff's ideas and put them into some kind of end product that answers the questions they were brought in to focus on.
  - A couple of board members initially resisted the expense associated with a consultant and/or the fear of bringing in an outsider. The executive director met with them one on one to discuss their concerns and tried to explain how utilizing a consultant was the best way to move the organization forward in this particular area.

- Orienting consultants means we have to look hard at our routines—this is hard, but necessary. Staff has to face shortcomings, and this can create resistance.
- We experience resistance from some staff members who felt they had the expertise, but they didn't. We engaged them in the process and utilized their concepts whenever feasible. Results always bring people around.
- Initially our leadership group was apprehensive to working with an 'outsider.' Some members of our board were also hesitant initially but I believe saw value in the result.
- While the organization gave lip service to wanting to move forward and made plans to do so, the board actually refused to come to consensus and support decisions made as a group. Lobbying outside meetings and after the fact undermined anything that a consultant could do. Lack of leadership on the board also complicated the situation. The board membership finally shifted and new members brought objectivity and determination to move forward.

b) Personal style challenges

- Coming from a collective mentality, some of our staff members at first seemed resistant to exercises that could be misconstrued as of the corporate world. However, by the end of the day everyone seemed to recognize the value of these processes.
- There is some resistance on our board to working with the fundraising consultant, but that seems personal/personality based. We solved that by keeping the consultant more in touch with the staff and less directly relating to the board. That works better for us.

7. *What else would you like others to know before hiring a consultant?*

a) Choosing the right consultant

- Check references!
- Check references and talk with other organizations they have worked with before committing to them.
- Interview several consultants to determine with whom you would like to work.
- Look for and demand the best (since it will be expensive).

- Personality is really important—you want the key people who will be working most with the consultants to have a mutual good feeling and enthusiasm for the consultants and you want the consultant to feel the same way about the project. So be sure to interview the people in person!
- Interview them; don't just take someone else's word on a consultant being a good fit. They do become part of your team for a period of time.
- Hire someone you like!! It's hard to work with outsiders anyway, and we were cautioned to hire who we really liked. That was good advice.
- Do background research and make sure it is a good fit.
- Really shop for a good match.
- You may want to wait to commit to a retained or long-term contract until you have your first meeting to ensure they understand the organization and are the right match.
- Check references; find someone who has worked for organizations that are similar to yours.
- Find consultants who are passionate about their work and can be likewise passionate about your residency and programs and focused on the task.

b) Determining scope, expectations, and process

- Be very clear as to process, expectations, contact points, and deliverables. Be extra clear and cautious about pro bono arrangements.
- Be very clear about goals and if there is to be a final product (report, training plan).
- Don't be afraid to end the relationship (nicely and amicably) if it isn't achieving what you want.
- Clarify goals and expectations before hiring.
- Be very clear with them about your budget, what you can commit to financially, and what your deliverables are.
- Be clear about what you want.
- Have a clear contract that addresses expectations and responsibilities of the consultant, outcomes of the project, date of completion, estimated expense, and provisions if the work is not acceptable or not finished in a timely manner.
- Demand accountability for work being billed. Deadlines, contracts, work records...all should be clear to both parties.

c) Utilizing the consultant

- Orienting the consultant to the organization is very important.
- Be careful to use a consultant only when you do not have the talent and internal resources on your own. Sometimes, the effort it takes (and expense) to bring a consultant 'up to speed' is not very cost effective when it could have been accomplished more efficiently in-house. No one knows your product better than you do.
- Be sure you budget the time so that you can take full advantage of the service.
- Take a look at their fee schedule, and plan to work closely as they develop their strategies.
- Be open to the process. Engage all parties in the process of providing information and ideas. Take the time to review and discuss the recommendations of the consultant. Think of this hire as a working partnership.
- Organizations need to look at consultants more as partners than as service providers (unless they are being hired for specific professional services). You should not expect the consultant to do your thinking for you, whether it is in defining a new project or writing a grant. You have to develop the internal assessment capability to know whether or not you are 'ready' for what might be proposed.

## Resource List: Finding and Working with Consultants

### *Alliance for Nonprofit Management*

The Alliance for Nonprofit Management is a professional association of individuals and organizations devoted to improving the management and governance capacity of nonprofits. The Alliance Provider Search is a searchable directory of nonprofit consultants, management support organizations and other nonprofit capacity builders devoted to helping nonprofit organizations increase their effectiveness and impact.

[www.allianceonline.org/Provider\\_Search](http://www.allianceonline.org/Provider_Search)

### *Association of Fundraising Professionals*

The AFP has an online directory of consultants and resource partners for fundraising.

[www.afpnet.org/ConsultantDirectory/Search.cfm?folder\\_id=940](http://www.afpnet.org/ConsultantDirectory/Search.cfm?folder_id=940)

### *Foundation Center*

The Foundation Center has a number of resources for nonprofits, including “Working with a Consultant or Technical Assistance Provider: A Resource List.”

<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/topical/consult.html>

### *Idealist*

Idealist includes a database of nearly 1,000 nonprofit consultants, and allows you to narrow your search by area of consulting and location. (From [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org), click “find” then “consultant” to search.) The site also has the guide “Working with Consultants.”

[www.idealists.org/is\\_cons/helpcons.html](http://www.idealists.org/is_cons/helpcons.html)

### *New York Foundation for the Arts*

NYFA has a national database of consultants and resources for nonprofit arts organizations. The database is divided into “Technology Resources” and “Management and Fundraising Resources” within the “For Organizations” section of their site.

[www.nyfa.org](http://www.nyfa.org)

### *Nonprofit Resource Center*

The nonprofit resource center includes a directory of independent consultants and consulting firms who specialize in nonprofit management consulting.

[www.not-for-profit.org](http://www.not-for-profit.org)

### *Southern New England Nonprofit Consultant Directory*

In addition to a database of consultants specific to Southern New England, the site also includes a guide on selecting, hiring and managing consultants; sample contracts; and an explanation of consulting fees.

[www.sneconsultant.org/resources.asp](http://www.sneconsultant.org/resources.asp)

## Resource List: Consulting Groups

The following organizations are nationally-recognized consulting firms for nonprofits.

### *BoardSource*

BoardSource addresses challenging governance issues, collaboratively working with organizations and their leadership to find the best path forward and serving as a change agent to affect positive outcomes. They are a national organization with independently contracted consultants around the country.

Areas of expertise: All issues relevant to boards—board effectiveness, engagement, performance assessment, defining roles and responsibilities, review of mission and bylaws, conflict of interest, fundraising, community involvement and public support, board recruiting and retention, leadership transitions, strategic planning.

[www.boardsource.org](http://www.boardsource.org)

### *CompassPoint*

CompassPoint is dedicated to transforming communities through its work with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. They provide one-on-one consulting, large-scale initiatives, executive transitions and succession planning. Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, with local, regional, national and international clients.

Areas of expertise: Some familiarity with artists' residencies specifically. Executive transitions, nonprofit finance, fund development, strategic planning, governance, organizational development, leadership.

[www.compasspoint.org](http://www.compasspoint.org)

### *Fieldstone Alliance*

Fieldstone Alliance primarily works with intermediaries and networks—grantmakers, management support organizations, collaborations, associations, government partners, and multisector alliances. Their consultants have varied experience working in nonprofits, foundations, neighborhood organizations, multinational corporations, banking, international development, government policy, educational institutions, and start-up businesses.

Areas of consulting expertise: Capacity building, organizational assessment, organizational planning.

[www.fieldstonealliance.org](http://www.fieldstonealliance.org)

### *GuideStar*

GuideStar is the leader in providing comprehensive data on more than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations, connecting them with donors, foundations, businesses, and governing agencies in a nationwide community of giving. GuideStar believes information is the backbone of an effective, efficient and well-informed nonprofit sector.

Areas of consulting expertise: IRS Form 990; ePhilanthropy and online fundraising practices; grantseekers guide to private foundations; charity watchdogs, ratios, and your online reputation; implications of Sarbanes-Oxley; organizational transparency; donor expectations.

[www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)

### *LarsonAllen*

LarsonAllen's Public Service division for nonprofits provides a variety of financial (audit, accounting, and tax) and organizational consulting services. They provide individualized ongoing consulting, short-term consulting projects, training seminars, and publications for national clients. Training seminars focus on: Organizational capacity, smart money management, governance and personnel management, and business management.

Areas of consulting expertise: Accounting and tax advising, strategic and business planning, board development and consulting, merger and alliance facilitation, founder succession and other transition management, program evaluation and industry scans, employee benefit plan consulting and administration, organizational and financial assessment, operational and financial systems consulting, internal controls review and recommendations, information security services.

[www.larsonallen.com/publicservice/](http://www.larsonallen.com/publicservice/)

### *Nonprofit Finance Fund*

For over 25 years Nonprofit Finance Fund has helped nonprofits achieve financial strength and sustainability. They serve nonprofits in Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia, New York City, New Jersey, New England, the Greater Philadelphia area, Detroit, Chicago, and along the West Coast; and nationwide through partnership-based National Alliances. NFF makes loans for facility projects and other growth-related needs, they provide planning assistance through their Nonprofit Business Analysis and organizational workshops, and they help nonprofits attract equity-like growth capital through their Capital Partners.

Areas of consulting expertise: Financial analysis, business assessment, financial planning.

[www.nonprofitfinancefund.org](http://www.nonprofitfinancefund.org)

### *Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts*

VLA affiliates operate independently in about 30 U.S. states. They provide legal consulting, training, and advice to artists and arts organizations within their local communities and regions; services vary by local chapter.

Areas of consulting expertise: Nonprofit incorporation, intellectual property, contracts, state regulations, dispute resolution, first amendment issues, visas/international affairs.

Because each VLA group is organized independently, there is no single source online. Local bar associations and arts councils should be able to provide information on a group in your area. VLA of New York has listed a directory by state at:

[www.vlany.org/resources/vlDirectory.php](http://www.vlany.org/resources/vlDirectory.php)

## Resource List: Member-Recommended Consultants

The following consulting groups and independent consultants have worked with the Alliance and/or with Alliance members.

### *Alexander Haas Martin and Partners*

Areas of expertise: Fundraising

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

Recommended by: Alliance of Artists Communities, Penland School of Art and Craft

Contact: <http://ahmp.com/>

### *Shem Cohen / Coleman Raider International*

Areas of expertise: Organizational development, human and organizational systems, strategic planning, dialogue and innovation

Location: Albany, NY

Recommended by: Women's Studio Workshop

Contact: [www.colemanraider.com/consultants.html](http://www.colemanraider.com/consultants.html)

### *Jim Copenhaver / Key Results Management, Inc.*

Areas of expertise: Business continuity and disaster recovery

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

Recommended by: Montana Artists Refuge

Contact: [www.k-r-m.com](http://www.k-r-m.com)

### *CounterIntuity*

Areas of expertise: Brainstorming, business planning, executive coaching, focus groups, marketing consultations, organizational development, speechwriting and coaching, strategy, systems analysis, facilitation, and retreats and workshops

Location: Los Angeles, California

Recommended by: 18th Street Arts Center

Contact: [www.counterintuity.com](http://www.counterintuity.com)

### *Coxe Curry & Assoc.*

Areas of expertise: Fundraising

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

Recommended by: Hambidge Center for Creative Arts & Sciences

Contact: phone 404-525-4821

### *Kathie deNobriga*

Areas of expertise: Organizational assessment, grass-roots management, community outreach

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

Recommended by: Alliance of Artists Communities

Contact: email [kdenobriga@mindspring.com](mailto:kdenobriga@mindspring.com)

### *Craig Dreeszen*

Areas of expertise: strategic planning, program evaluation, training, organizational development, and meeting facilitation

Location: Florence, Massachusetts

Recommended by: Penland School of Art and Craft

Contact: [www.dreeszen.info](http://www.dreeszen.info)

### *Joan Flanagan*

Areas of expertise: Fundraising

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Recommended by: Alliance of Artists Communities

Contact: email [fundsjoan@aol.com](mailto:fundsjoan@aol.com)

### *Grenzebach Glier & Associates, Inc.*

Areas of expertise: Fundraising

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Recommended by: Virginia Center for the Creative Arts

Contact: [www.grenzebachglier.com](http://www.grenzebachglier.com)

### *The Kellogg Organization*

Areas of expertise: Fundraising

Location: Denver, Colorado

Recommended by: Virginia Center for the Creative Arts

Contact: [www.kelloggorganization.com](http://www.kelloggorganization.com)

### *Kim Konikow / artservices & company*

Areas of expertise: General nonprofit arts consulting, artists' residencies

Location: Springdale, Utah

Recommended by: Jentel Foundation

Contact: [www.artservicesandcompany.com](http://www.artservicesandcompany.com)

### *Kathleen Kurre*

Areas of expertise: Leadership development

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

Recommended by: Kentucky Foundation for Women

Contact: email [kathleen.kurre@mgt.gatech.edu](mailto:kathleen.kurre@mgt.gatech.edu)

*Meghan Johnston*

Areas of expertise: Board development, strategic planning, leadership coaching, collaboration and coalition development, staffing and organizational restructuring, governance roles and responsibilities

Location: Castleton, New York

Recommended by: Sculpture Space

Contact: email [mj1353@aol.com](mailto:mj1353@aol.com)

*Linda London*

Areas of expertise: Fundraising

Location: Albany, New York

Recommended by: Sculpture Space

Contact: email [linda.london@earthlink.net](mailto:linda.london@earthlink.net)

*Paula Manley*

Areas of expertise: Leadership development, succession planning, strategic planning, community development

Location: Portland, Oregon

Recommended by: Alliance of Artists Communities, Sitka Center for Art & Ecology

Contact: email [paulam@easystreet.com](mailto:paulam@easystreet.com)

*Karimah Nonyameko / ChangeWork*

Areas of expertise: Organizational development, community organizing, youth development, community building

Location: Jacksonville, Florida

Recommended by: Kentucky Foundation for Women

Contact: phone 904-241-1555

*Gail Perry*

Areas of expertise: Grantwriting, outcomes measurement, marketing, special project management

Location: Dallas, Texas

Recommended by: Penland School of Art and Craft

Contact: [www.theperryfirm.com](http://www.theperryfirm.com)

*David Plettner / Cultural+Planning Group*

Areas of expertise: Cultural and facilities planning, organizational development

Location: Los Angeles, California

Recommended by: 18th Street Arts Center

Contact: [www.culturalplanning.com](http://www.culturalplanning.com)

*Andy Robinson*

Areas of expertise: Community-based fundraising, major gifts, grantseeking, earned income and nonprofit business planning, board development, meeting and retreat facilitation, individual coaching, organizational trouble-shooting

Location: Plainfield, Vermont

Recommended by: Kentucky Foundation for Women

Contact: [www.andyrobinsononline.com](http://www.andyrobinsononline.com)

*Sklar Media*

Areas of expertise: Business strategy, organizational management, marketing and communications

Location: Brooklyn, New York

Recommended by: free103point9 wave farm

Contact: [www.sklarmedia.com](http://www.sklarmedia.com)

*Anna Upchurch*

Areas of expertise: Public relations

Location: Durham, North Carolina

Recommended by: Penland School of Art and Craft

Contact: [A.R.Upchurch@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:A.R.Upchurch@warwick.ac.uk)

*Sandy Wright / The Yuuma Group*

Areas of expertise: Strategic thinking, social entrepreneurship, creative economy strategies, fundraising, communications/marketing

Location: Eureka Springs, Arkansas

Recommended by: Writers' Colony of Dairy Hollow

Contact: email [sandy@yuuma.com](mailto:sandy@yuuma.com)

*Cheryl Yuen*

Areas of expertise: Board development/governance, organizational assessment and development, strategic planning/business planning

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Recommended by: Alliance of Artists Communities

Contact: email [clyuen52@sbcglobal.net](mailto:clyuen52@sbcglobal.net)

## MISSION

*The Alliance of Artists Communities contributes to America's cultural vitality by supporting our membership of diverse residency programs and advocating for creative environments that advance the endeavors of artists.*

The Alliance is the only national service organization supporting the field of artists' communities, colonies and residencies. Cultivating new art and ideas—which cross boundaries posed by discipline, religion, race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, and physical ability—is the fundamental work of artists' communities. Supporting artists' communities in this work, as well as acting as a collective voice for the field, is the work of the Alliance.

The Alliance is supported by dues from its members and contributions from the Patrons Council and other individuals. The Alliance is also supported by The Ford Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, The James Irvine Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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