Artists Residencies: Facilities Planning

Capital Campaigns: Residency Director’s Perspectives
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Renovating Space: An Architect’s Perspective
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**Artist Residencies: Facilities Planning**

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**ABOUT THE ALLIANCE OF ARTISTS COMMUNITIES**

The Alliance of Artists Communities is an association of artist communities, artist colonies, and artist residency programs – representing a field of 500 organizations in the US and more than 1,500 worldwide that provide artists of any discipline with dedicated time and space to create new work. Believing that the cultivation of new art and ideas is essential to human progress, the mission of the Alliance is to advocate for and support artist communities, in order to advance the endeavors of artists.

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The following insights were shared by Ann Brady (Director of the Rauschenberg Residency and former Executive Director of Atlantic Center for the Arts) and Susan Page Tillett (Executive Director of The Mesa Refuge and former Executive Director of The Ragdale Foundation). Ann Brady led a capital campaign while at Atlantic Center that raised $3 million to create the Pabst Visitor Center & Gallery, a 5,000-square-foot space designed to serve ACA’s growing public through community exhibitions, workshops, lectures, and tours. Susan Tillett led two capital campaigns while at Ragdale. The first campaign of $4.5 million was for renovation of the Barn House, endowment, and three years of operating expenses, while the second campaign of $3.5 million was for the historic preservation and renovation of Howard Van Doren Shaw’s Ragdale House.

1. **Conduct a Feasibility Study (both internal and external):** Even though it feels like you have neither time nor money, it is critical to conduct a feasibility study. Hiring an outside consultant who works with the board and staff to articulate a case statement can make a compelling case for why the organization needs the project and how the money will be best spent. Internally, make sure your staff can handle the additional workload and whatever changes to the organizational culture will come about as a result of your goals (for example, are you building a fancy new building for a t-shirt and jeans staff?).

2. **Test your case and your goal with your community:** A consultant can take your case statement to the community and present it to prospective donors the organization has identified. Make it clear this is a “test case” and no one is actually being asked for money. Interviewees should be encouraged to provide frank feedback on the organization to the consultant. You may be surprised by the ideas brought to light and your campaign (and possibly your organization) will benefit from the insights.

3. **Include contingencies and building reserves in your budget:** Despite careful fiscal controls, building projects often exceed estimates, so be sure to increase your estimate to include contingencies. In addition, plan for building reserves and/or an endowment for maintenance and operations. (See The Kresge Foundation’s “A Guide to Building Reserves” for more information.)

4. **Create a committee to manage the campaign:** Board members are savvy and invested in the organization already, and they should be excited enough about the project to form a committee. The committee needs to be available to meet on a regular basis, weekly even. Communication and consensus throughout the project are essential. A few staff members should be included in the committee as well but not placed in charge (don’t appoint just one staff member to be involved as that person may leave his/her job before the project is finished).

5. **Recruit and train excellent volunteers:** A successful campaign depends upon effective volunteers willing to ask for money. Few people think of themselves as natural fundraisers; all need training and all thrive on positive reinforcement. Role playing, mentoring, pairing less experienced fundraisers with seasoned fundraisers, and frequent praise can be essential elements in keeping momentum going. This requires a great deal of time from the staff and board leadership but pays off in the end.

6. **Build the fundraising pyramid from top to bottom:** A major task of the Campaign Readiness phase is to determine “the shape of the pyramid” (the number of gifts at each level). For instance, if your goal is $5 million, you need to know the realistic number of gifts at $1 million, $500,000, $100,000, down to $1,000. This sensitive information is based on conversations with potential donors, researching donor prospects, and the willingness of volunteers to ask for funds. It is critical that 100 percent of the board pledge before anyone else is asked.
7. **Break the total goal into manageable pieces:** Any multimillion-dollar goal will seem daunting in the beginning, so consider breaking it into phases and mini-campaigns. Traditionally, major donors are asked to give first, as lead gifts can be used to jump-start the campaign and persuade others to give. Targeted goals for alumni, “family” and other subgroups can also be effective. Matching gift challenges often help with the final push, and a surprising number of early supporters will make additional gifts.

Capital campaigns offer an opportunity for naming; make naming something a big deal and only available for larger donations.

8. **Support your leadership through the challenges:** The biggest challenge might be maintaining the momentum in difficult financial times. Strong, positive leadership of both the board and staff is essential.

9. **Enjoy your success!** The good news is that it is easier to raise big money than small, and it truly energizes an organization to be successful. Volunteers rally, the board is fully committed, and great things are accomplished!
Planning New Space: An Architect’s Perspective

The following insights are thanks to a conversation with Harry Teague of Harry Teague Architects in Aspen, CO. He designed Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village, CO.

STUDIO AND GALLERY SPACE

1. **Let there be light:** Light and space are the most important elements when designing a studio space. Natural light is ideal, especially soft light coming from the north. Invest in good artificial lighting as well; it can be made to be flexible, which is important for artists. Good lighting in a gallery space is essential, too. LED lights are a good option; they have good color balance, are affordable, and last a long time.

2. **Turn things inside-out:** If possible, facilitate access to the outdoors. Doors that open up or outdoor working areas will connect artists to the outside and also allow access to natural light if desired.

3. **Make the most of space:** Most artists like tall spaces, even if they are working on a small scale. Consider how the space will be used, too, when planning how much space is needed. Certain types of studios like sculpture studios and dance spaces may need to be larger but other spatial needs vary. Larger spaces with moveable walls provide flexibility.

4. **Power up:** Make sure there are plenty of power outlets in your facility and anticipate WiFi capability throughout the facilities, whether or not you plan to make WiFi available. It will be much easier to accommodate future needs if you over-plan from the start.

5. **Breathe easy:** Make sure your studio spaces have proper ventilation. In a printshop, you can create direct venting because you know where the presses and baths are always going to be. On the other hand, it is harder to create proper ventilation within individual studios because you don’t know where people are going to set up equipment and materials, especially if you have moveable walls. Ideally there is fresh air cycling through. (See “Studio Policies” in The Ultimate Residency Resource Guide for more information.)

6. **Form follows function:** The overall design should be interesting but not oppressively so; spaces shouldn’t be so precious and pristine that artists feel like they can’t make a mess. Visual arts studios should be equipped with utility sinks with fool-proof paint traps. No matter the discipline, rugged/natural materials can be used so the space is allowed to be beat up a bit. Floors, ceilings, and walls should be well designed and attractive but made to be worked in – think malleable, approachable, and durable.

Walls in gallery spaces should be simple and not take away from the work on display. By building walls using a layer of plywood then drywall on top, screws and nails can go anywhere and then be easily patched up. It’s also ideal to create a recessed area at the base of the wall so it can be easily painted (rolled without taping off the floor).

SOCIAL SPACES

1. **Mix it up:** A central mixed-use space helps build community within the residency and can provide for interactions with the public. At Anderson Ranch, Harry Teague designed a mixed-use space to be circular and with good light, making it conducive for group activities, small receptions, drawing classes, casual interactions, and a variety of other uses.

2. **Break bread together:** Meals and eating experiences at residencies offer opportunities for community building. Each program and even each group of residents will develop their own food culture, and it is important to create spaces that accommodate casual interactions. For Anderson Ranch, Harry Teague designed a cafeteria with flexible indoor and outdoor seating where artists, staff, and the public come for an affordable and delicious meal.

3. **Strike a balance:** Create your own right mix of private and public or shared spaces. This allows for artists to have privacy and isolation when needed while also enabling connectivity with fellow residents and others. Place private studios in close proximity to common areas (such as a space with a coffee maker, sofas, shared tools, etc.) so interactions happen easily and organically, between stretches of solitude. Nudging people together naturally can make a big difference in building internal community.

The printshop at Anderson Ranch Arts Center
The following insights are from Mark Fishero of FMK Architects in Charlotte, NC. Mark was the architect for the McColl Center for Visual Art. Mark’s work with McColl Center turned a church that had suffered total interior destruction due to a fire into a state-of-the-art arts facility.

1. **Do your homework:** The first task Mark and the team he was working with tackled was interviewing as many artists from different media and disciplines as possible. The McColl Center was born from the tremendous vision of Hugh McColl, then Chairman and CEO of Bank of America. His initial idea included studios and housing for apprentice artists on-site, with a house for a master artist out back. Interviewing other stakeholders led to major changes in the team’s approach to designing the space, ultimately using the church for studios, workshops, exhibition space, and offices, and later acquiring housing off-site.

2. **Design for flexibility and comfortable studio spaces:** One of the things Mark learned was artists want flexibility and a studio space they can get messy without feeling guilty. The original plans called for hardwood floors in the studios which artists assured him would be problematic because they would not want to spill on them. He rethought the space and the new design called for concrete floors. He also made sure no interior studio walls had outlets or pipes running through them so they could be easily reconfigured.

3. **Plan for experimentation:** After speaking with many artists it was clear the studio spaces and workshops needed to accommodate a wide-range of artists working in different mediums. Many artists are multi-disciplinary and will use a wide-range of tools and equipment if it’s available. McColl Center offers shared spaces all the resident artists can access, separate from their private studios, that encourage experimentation with new techniques and exchange with other artists.

4. **Beware of toxins:** Originally artists were going to both live and work in the McColl Center’s facility, but there were concerns about toxicity from the studios in proximity to living spaces. The artists live in condos across the street from the Center; even when artists are living off-site, it’s imperative that studios are designed with proper ventilation.

5. **When it comes to communal space, take programmatic goals into consideration:** Since one of the program’s goals is that the artists have a presence in the community, there was not a huge focus on creating a communal space within the building when designing McColl Center. McColl’s artists live off-site and because there is no cafeteria, coffee shop, or library on-site, artists are more likely to venture out into downtown Charlotte and interact with the public. The organization is now considering how to develop a small communal space for artists in the Center that is conducive to informal interactions between the artists but will not keep them from engaging the public.

6. **Sometimes, function follows form:** Originally, the gallery space was designed to maximize the square footage of the space, but Mark really wanted to showcase the building’s architecture and show-off some of the church elements in an impressive way. By doing so, they lost some of the square footage but gained a beautiful entryway that reflects the history and soul of the building.

7. **Form close ties with building-related partners:** Get connected with the local Builders Association, Historical Landmark Commission, or any commissions or zoning board your organization will have to go through to approve building codes and meet historical preservation protocols. Renovations often require re-zoning, re-categorizing of property, or even just re-shaping the public’s impression of how a property should be used. Mark formed close ties with the Historical Landmark Commission in Charlotte which helped him streamline some of the coding and navigate the regulations required.

8. **Have a point person:** There are countless decisions being made for a major renovation project and many stakeholders. It’s essential to have one person or a small group who can communicate final consensus to the architect so s/he may do their job.

9. **Embrace your vision and stick with it!** There will always be things you wish you had done differently, but play to the strengths of the place you have created and celebrate its success.
Renovating Space: A Residency Director’s Perspective

The following insights are the result of a conversation with Susan Page Tillett. Tillett was involved with the renovation and preservation of two major facilities while she was Executive Director of Ragdale, from 2000 to 2012. The first was the renovation of Ragdale’s Barn House that they converted into an artists-in-residence house with an office for the Ragdale Foundation and a conference room. The space also needed a working kitchen and accessible studio space. The second was for the historic preservation and renovation of Howard Van Doren Shaw’s Ragdale House. While this was mostly a preservation project, there were some renovations that needed to be made to make bedrooms accessible and to update the kitchen.

1. Talk to your artists! When it comes to spatial needs, don’t assume you or your board know what is best for the artists who use the space. Especially during a renovation, your artists are your experts (particularly those artists who have already used the space). Ask them what works well and what changes would be beneficial.

2. Form a Building Committee: A standing Building Committee should include a few board members, some staff, and a few others in the community who are interested in the organization and have something to offer. (For instance, invite an architect, a preservation person, people who have done renovations, and others who understand the process).

3. Find the right architect: Find someone with real experience with the type of project you’re working on (new construction of an art space, historic preservation of an old home, urban development, etc.). Create a Request for Proposal and see what happens. Allow architects to visit the space, to talk to board members and artists; give them as much access and upfront information as they want. You want an architect who is passionate about the project and who understands what the project is all about. The RFP can be very enlightening. Ultimately, it is important to find a good fit.

4. Beware of politics: Inevitably, there will be some stakeholders with personal opinions about who the architect should be, and some will want to rely on personal connections rather than a more open process. Use your committee to narrow the pool down based on their proposals and true interest in the project. After interviewing the top candidates it will likely be clear who the best fit is.

5. Find the right contractor: The Building Committee and the architect should work together to find a contractor. Interview the best contractor there is, even if you know your organization can’t afford him or her. By doing so the Committee will get a feel for what the possibilities are for the space and an idea of what the best contractors can do. It will help inform interviews with other contractors. In Ragdale’s case, the best contractor fell in love with the project and was willing to reduce the price to get the job!

6. Educate: It’s important that the Building Committee is present during interviews with the architects and contractors. They should be educated and informed about what’s going on and who is involved. If everyone is on board, informed, and involved, the process will go a lot smoother.

7. Establish a point person: Realize that it’s a challenge for an architect to have an organization as a client. There is the potential for him/her to be confronted with your organization’s baggage and politics. Make sure there is someone who is the clear point person and the go-to for the architect. That person should have the responsibility to carry and convey the consensus of the group.

8. Get to know each other: The contractor, the architect, and the organization’s point person need to work together very well. The architect/contractor relationship is especially important. By the end of the project, everyone will know each others’ strengths and weaknesses because you will have spent A LOT of time together!

9. Expect the unexpected and budget accordingly: Especially when working with an historic building, you are bound to uncover some existing conditions you may not have been aware of. Even if you do a pre-project exploration there are always many more challenges than anticipated. Budget for the worst and hope for the best! Raise more money in the beginning so you’re not agonizing over it later. And be prepared for it to take longer than you expected.

10. Make the most of it: During this time of renovation, if you are able to continue your program, make sure artists and staff realize their experience may be different than the norm. Stress flexibility and be positive; you can still offer a transformative experience!