

## **PROJECT PURPOSE**

New England is home to thousands of working artists and cultural organizations. These individuals and enterprises form the core of a creative industry that is central to the health of our regional economy. So much so, in fact, that a 2000 study by the New England Council's *Creative Economy Initiative*, found the "creative cluster" in New England supports more than 245,000 jobs. That's about 3.5% of the region's total job base – more than the software and medical technology industries.

This creative economy is composed of many different marketplaces – forums where goods and services are exchanged. Some of these marketplaces work smoothly and efficiently. Some don't. The focus of this application is strengthening the marketplace for performing artists and for presenters – the organizations that hire and provide spaces for artists to perform.

## **The Problem**

Existing systems to link performing artists and presenters are insufficient. And while artists and presenters have a common goal—finding audiences—they need to find each other first. When surveyed, artists and presenters repeatedly report feeling as if they operate in isolation, unaware of resources the other has to offer. Furthermore, many artists and presenters—including *formal* presenters such as theaters, as well as *informal* presenters such as community centers, libraries, churches, schools, festivals and coffeehouses—don't even know how to enter into this marketplace. They lack the contacts and the familiarity with business norms and field standards; so they stay on the sidelines. State arts agencies and regional arts organizations have worked for years to broker connections between artists and presenters, but it's increasingly clear that existing structures—such as the New England States Touring roster—do little to increase performing artists' visibility or facilitate business transactions.

## **ARTISTS**

Performing artists consistently report that their greatest challenges include finding and securing opportunities to perform. According to a report from the National Endowment for the Arts, artists experience a harsher labor market than other professionals, have unemployment rates roughly twice those of other professionals, and earn 77% to 88% of what others earn. Most artists do not have booking agents or managers, and rely on self-marketing (for which they may have little training) or informal referrals. Artists turn to the Internet for increased visibility, but even those with web sites struggle to drive traffic to their site, and can't provide comprehensive content there. Most artists lack affordable, high-quality digital audio and video clips of their work. As a result, most full-time performing artists live a hand-to-mouth existence, one engagement at a time, if they get booked at all.

## **PRESENTERS**

There are thousands of formal and informal presenters in New England. But only the largest have experienced staff members dedicated to this work. Smaller presenters have limited capacity, limited knowledge about the range of artists available, and limited experience in the business. Most presenters operate as non-profit organizations, and depend on grants and contributions to supplement ticket sales.

As well, most presenters recognize the need to make cultural programming more diverse, to appeal to new and changing audiences. This might mean finding artists who appeal to growing immigrant populations, seeking art forms that never have been presented in their town, or introducing school programs that address current social issues. Larger presenters travel to "artist showcases" in New York and elsewhere, but these showcases are generally inaccessible to New England artists who could offer high-quality, tailor-made, multi-day programming in the region. Presenters of all sizes need help finding New England artists.

## *NEFA AND THE STATE ARTS AGENCIES*

State arts agencies and regional arts organizations have worked for years to broker connections between artists and presenters. But the programs and practices that have been adopted—in New England and nationwide—don't work very well.

The existing New England model, comprising New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) and the state arts agencies of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island, has tried to link artists and presenters through a New England touring roster. The roster, printed in book form and distributed by mail, lists over 900 individual artists and groups available for hire throughout the region. To get on the roster, an artist must go through a complex review or “jurying” process by their state arts agency. The roster is made available to presenters, in the hope that it will generate bookings for listed artists. Parallel models are in place nationwide, through similar partnerships between the 44 other state arts agencies and five other regional arts organizations outside New England.

Over the years, many problems with this model have become apparent, but as a field, here and nationally, we have been slow to adapt. Some of the major problems:

- The value of printed rosters is limited. Since the advent of the web, most states and regions have put rosters online – but the majority of these sites remain static. A few searchable rosters barely scratch the surface of the web's power for multimedia, interactivity, transactions and community building.
- Only 27% of New England presenters say they use the current New England States Touring Roster to identify and hire artists. They indicate that the roster lacks artistic variety and doesn't provide sufficient information to determine artists' quality and appropriateness. Furthermore, when asked what information they need to make decisions about booking artists, just 17% indicate that jurying by a state agency was important. It's clear that presenters are telling us they want to define quality on their own. They need us to connect them to artists and other presenters, and get out of the way.
- New England artists concurred that few of their bookings came as a result of being on the roster. In a recent survey of over 200 roster artists, almost half reported they had never received a booking from the roster. Of those that had, over 70% received less than five bookings.

### **The Solution**

The New England Foundation for the Arts, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and the five other state arts agencies in New England will develop the nation's first comprehensive online booking service for performing artists and presenters: Online Cultural Marketplace. This transaction-oriented, web-based business management tool will allow New England artists to market their work and interact directly with a wider variety of presenters than ever before. Presenters will be able to locate appropriate artists, access streaming video and audio clips, and schedule, promote and track bookings. If they so choose, they will be able to draw up contracts online, using templates the Marketplace will provide. What's more, presenters will interact with other presenters, and artists with other artists—sharing referrals and touring schedules, soliciting program suggestions, and collaborating. Much more than an online roster, this will be a 24-hour online venue where buyers and sellers can meet, negotiate, and close deals.

### **Measurable Outcomes**

If it is successful the Online Cultural Marketplace will help artists and presenters find each other and, as a result, find new and expanded audiences. This success will be measured by an increase in the number of presenters that hire New England artists, as well as by an increase in the number of bookings for these artists. We also hope that, by giving presenters access to more programming options than ever before, the Marketplace will improve the quality and variety of cultural programs available to communities in

the region. Through surveys and interviews conducted at the outset of this project, we will establish a baseline against which we will measure our success. (See Appendix for sample evaluation questions.)

**A Scenario:** Here's how the Marketplace could link a small Cambodian dance company in Lowell, Massachusetts with a Pan-Asian summer festival in Hartford, Connecticut.

- The dance company contacts the Massachusetts Cultural Council and submits a video sample of their work. While the video is being digitized and posted to the web by our technology partner Streaming Culture, the dance company completes a web form for bios, photos, fees, and technical requirements. The completed video is then linked to their new Marketplace listing.
- The Pan-Asian festival searches the Marketplace, seeking a Southeast Asian dance troupe with limited sound and lighting requirements to perform on a small stage. The festival previews the company's work samples, as well as any referrals posted by other presenters.
- Before contacting the company to negotiate availability and fees, they check to see if the company is performing elsewhere in Connecticut near the same date. If so, they consider sharing costs with the other presenter. Through an automatic e-mail form, they contact the dance company directly.
- After reaching agreement on the terms, the presenter completes booking forms that are transmitted directly to the artist for final approval. That transaction automatically updates both of their customized booking calendars, and generates a listing for distribution to several online calendars.

## **INNOVATION**

Nothing exactly like this project has ever been done in the United States. Most states and regions have taken steps to put artist rosters online, and a few of these include streaming audio and video. But none have created a service as comprehensive, accessible and affordable as this one. Some of the innovation in this Marketplace is technical. For example, in constructing the site we will assemble a menu of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools to ensure that each user's experience of the site is tailored to them and their interests. A number of these tools are already in use on commercial sites, such as Amazon.com, but have not yet been used in the non-profit arts field. But the bigger innovation here is conceptual: that the best thing we can do for artists and presenters is to leave traditional "juried" rosters behind and instead provide the technology to help them connect.

- *We'll provide artists with access to high-quality, affordable streaming of their audio/video clips, and the tools to monitor traffic to those clips.* By partnering with StreamingCulture, a nonprofit organization that provides high-quality, low-cost audio and video to web sites of artists and cultural organizations, we will make digital file creation possible for hundreds of New England artists. Each audio/video clip will be encoded for three formats (RealPlayer, Windows Media Player, and MP3 Stream) and for four bandwidth speeds. This approach to encoding ensures the most number of presenters possible will be able to access these clips, regardless of their software or connection speed. Artists will be able to track interest in these clips by utilizing an individual "web traffic report" through which they can see how often their clips have been viewed. (We'll also provide a series of workshops with StreamingCulture for artists to learn how to document their work.)
- *We'll provide tools for artists and presenters to create a customized web experience.* A "myMarketplace" feature will let users define what content they want and how others see their content through the Marketplace. Users can design their own "Welcome" screen and "opt-in" to receive e-mail updates when a particular type of content of interest to them is added to the site (e.g. new grant opportunities, new artists in a particular discipline). Through this feature, artists could update their portfolio, see how many people have viewed their clips, bid on a community art project, or learn how to document their work better. Presenters could export a mailing list, respond to a block booking inquiry from a colleague, look at tips for writing a contract, and post an artist referral.

- *We'll actively encourage community-contributed content (such as references for artists and evaluations of presenters) that feeds back into the site's tools.* This feedback loop will provide artists and presenters with online references as well as support the creation of a relational recommendation feature. Just as Amazon.com offers recommendations (e.g. "If you bought *This Book*, you'll love *That Book*"), so too will the Marketplace. Artists can see which artists a particular presenter has hired, and presenters can see other presenters a particular artist has worked with.
- *We'll provide an online resource center to complement the Marketplace's booking service.* Because our surveys indicate that artists and presenters also seek access to grant opportunities and technical assistance, the Marketplace will also include fresh and relevant content that is continually added by NEFA and the six state arts agencies. With seven different staffs contributing this content, the regional approach deletes duplicate tasks at the state level (e.g. posting federal grant deadlines online), and creates a comprehensive, centralized technical assistance tool for the region.

In building this new service, we're mindful of the work that's been done previously to broker connections between artists and presenters. Within the cultural sector, for example, a number of state art agency sites, such as the Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour's site, contain a searchable list of roster artists with audio/video clips. In the for-profit cultural arena, a discipline-specific site like iMusicWorks.com allows studios seeking musicians to post projects online for bidding. While the Technology Opportunities Program has funded projects that support job training and employment, there is yet to be a model for employing and engaging artists directly via network technology.

By maximizing existing CRM technologies and bringing them to the non-profit cultural sector, we will create a holistic approach to serving artists and presenters. (See Appendix for "before" and "after" diagrams.) The Marketplace will be a model that any state or regional arts agency could replicate. Once this artist/presenter version of the Marketplace is active and has been evaluated, we will explore its expansion to help artists reach schools, and to help visual artists reach both formal and informal presenters.

## **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

### **NEFA and the Six New England State Arts Agencies**

The New England Foundation for the Arts and the six New England state arts agencies have a history of partnering on region-wide issues, and have been working in close collaboration on the Online Cultural Marketplace for months. (See Appendix for letters of support.) The Marketplace collaboration began in 2002, when independent consultant Romalyn Tilghman conducted an evaluation of NEFA's New England States Touring program and roster. The evaluation recommended that NEFA and the states pursue joint development of a web resource for artists and presenters. (See Appendix for Romalyn Tilghman evaluation summary.)

In September 2002 NEFA and the six state arts agencies began to discuss implementation of such a resource. Ten meetings were held across the region, at which existing state-based online rosters were reviewed, initial specifications for a combined approach were agreed upon, and individual agency roles were determined. This collaboration will continue through the duration of the TOP grant and beyond.

### **Artists and Presenters as Development Partners**

We have included artists and presenters since the early planning stages of this project, and will incorporate them into the development and implementation stages as well.

To assess their opinions and readiness for this project, we surveyed 346 artists and 223 presenters across New England. (See Appendix for survey summary.) Among artists, we found many are already increasingly turning to the Internet to promote themselves—72% already have their own web sites. But 84% reported they would like to make better use of the Internet to promote their work; 70% specifically mentioned the need to get information about presenting opportunities. Among presenters we found that 88% would use an online booking resource that provided extensive features, and saved them time and money. When asked which features were most important, presenters most often mentioned the ability to view artist work, a calendar showing artist availability, links to artists' education materials and tools for shared booking arrangements. Opportunities to connect with other presenters was a high priority; 76% felt access to online recommendations or peer reviews would influence their decision to pursue a particular artist.

Recognizing that such a tool must be designed based on user needs, we have enlisted 10 artists and 10 presenters to be partners in development of a beta version of the project. This pilot group consists of a geographically and artistically diverse contingency including individual artists, artist groups, large theaters, community art centers, libraries and festivals. (See Appendix for a complete listing of the pilot group and select letters of support.) The pilot group will provide input on system specifications, test the artist and presenter tools and interfaces, and compile test portfolios for posting to the site.

### **Technology Partners**

We have two technology partners working in close coordination on this project: BigBad, Inc. and StreamingCulture. (See Appendix for company profiles.) BigBad, a Boston web development firm, will handle all aspects of web site design and implementation. The firm specializes in front-end and back-end web-based business solutions. For the Massachusetts Cultural Council, BigBad previously developed an Online Office for its 335-member Local Cultural Councils network, an ambitious and successful project that launched last year.

As previously mentioned, StreamingCulture is a New York-based non-profit whose mission is to provide high-quality, low-cost video and audio to the web sites of artists and cultural organizations. For this project we will contract with StreamingCulture to encode and host audio and video clips for all artists that choose to participate. The first 300 artists will receive this service free, as a service of the grant, and to ensure excellent early content. Additional artists will receive the same service for a nominal fee – in the range of \$150 for encoding and one year of hosting for a video clip, \$50 per year for the same services for an audio clip. This is a fraction (25% to 35%) of the price structure for equivalent services from commercial providers. Finally, we will contract with StreamingCulture to provide workshops for artists on techniques for developing high-quality, web-ready digital content.

### **Support for End Users**

The artists and presenters we surveyed report they are comfortable using Internet technology. In fact, 72% of artists maintain their own web site and 74% of presenters say they use email and the web in their work. Therefore, because we are designing this site with a familiar and friendly user interface, we believe minimal end-user start-up training will be necessary. However, the concept of this Marketplace project is new to most of our constituents and our plan for user introduction, and ongoing user support will ensure a smooth introduction and transition.

Users will be recruited through brochures, e-mailings, links on all partner websites, press releases, conference and meeting presentations, and word-of-mouth. With the help of our artist and presenter partners, we will create a thorough plan to promote the benefits of the Marketplace in each state.

- By starting with the pilot group of 20 artists and presenters, we will have a good working knowledge of the new user hiccups that might occur when the site is launched more broadly. We hope this working/advising group will help identify the areas of user training that need the most attention.
- Once launched, NEFA and the state arts agencies will present introductory training sessions across the region for artists and presenters to learn about the features of the site. Artists also will have access to workshops about marketing and documenting their work; presenters will receive training on how to enhance their program offerings through the Marketplace.
- Staff members at NEFA and each state arts agency will serve as “help desk” workers to answer questions about the Marketplace and guide users through the process of harnessing the site’s power.

## **EVALUATION AND DISSEMINATION**

Cultural Marketplace evaluation will be conducted by The Conservation Company (TCC), a 23-year old firm that provides management consulting services to non-profit organizations, as well as to private and corporate philanthropic organizations. The firm has significant experience working with a broad range of arts and cultural organizations locally and nationally. (See Appendix for team qualifications.)

TCC’s plan includes creation of a Logic Model to visually represent the inputs and strategies that will be necessary to achieve the intended outcomes and impacts. The first step in this process is to identify stakeholders’ (artists, presenters, NEFA and the state agencies) perceptions and expectations around outputs, outcomes and impacts. TCC will then design specific evaluation questions that will be used to guide the evaluation. (See Appendix for sample evaluation questions.)

Next, TCC will design protocols for key stakeholder interviews, conduct a literature review and develop survey instruments. Data will then be collected to create baseline data, which will provide NEFA with an understanding of the field prior to the development and implementation of the Marketplace. This will include assessment of the context, nature and status of the artists’ and presenters’ access to each other, their interactions with each other and the results of these interactions.

Once development is underway, data will be collected to help determine which tools function satisfactorily, how the mechanism can be more effective, useful, etc. This will include pilot tests of the system. After the Marketplace has cleared the beta test and is launched to the field, data will be collected to fine-tune it further and to support its promotion and “scale-up.” The goal will be to develop a better understanding of the outputs (e.g. numbers and characteristics of users and use) and outcomes (e.g. how the use of this tool has changed how artists and presenters interact and how it has affected the nature of their work.) This will include interviews, focus groups and a re-administration of the baseline survey.

Ultimately, TCC will analyze all of the data using content analysis and descriptive and inferential statistics to assess the extent to which the Online Cultural Marketplace is of high quality, with optimal functionality and utility, and the extent to which it is effectively achieving the desired outcomes.

### **Dissemination**

This project presents an example of how to improve efficiencies in government services that cross state borders. Because state governments are interested in promoting best practices for replication among their agencies, a project report will be disseminated to the Information Systems Departments in each of the six partner states, as well as to key business and government leaders throughout New England.

To expand the scope of the project’s reach beyond our region, we will promote it through our trade associations. The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), through its web site, publications and annual conferences, regularly shares the success stories of its member agencies. Since

most states are grappling with similar challenges in linking artists with presenters, they will be interested in learning about the Online Cultural Marketplace's efficiencies and improved services. We have secured a commitment to lead a session at NASAA's 2004 annual conference. (See Appendix for letter of support.)

NEFA is a member of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, a member association representing presenters from across the country, and we will propose a session for their January 2005 conference.

## **PROJECT FEASIBILITY**

### **Technical Approach**

The Marketplace derives its unique advantages from the way it brings together a critical mass of users in a collaborative environment. The technologies, architectures, and processes that we will employ in the Marketplace have been selected because we believe they are the most efficient, flexible, and sustainable.

Due to the project's phased approach, the initial plan for hardware begins with a modest deployment of a dedicated single-server solution at a third party Internet Service Provider to support the initial pilot process. We have identified a dedicated server environment based on a desire for flexibility as the site evolves (including future integration opportunities). In addition, the software to run the service will support a future multi-server deployment (including load-balanced clustering and automated failover), should the need arise from increased usage. The hardware, including the web/application server (initially with local database), and basic firewall configuration will be leased from the chosen Internet Service Provider to allow for maximum upgrade flexibility.

The project's centralized infrastructure ensures that upgrades and enhancements to hardware and software can be dealt with quickly and easily. This is essential, as the site will have staged releases. For ongoing maintenance of the site, we expect to release new features and enhancements periodically, based on user feedback and evaluation. To simplify the site administration, all tools for participation, content development, and administration of the Marketplace will be developed for access via the web.

To be successful, the service must provide easy-to-use, customized tools that are effective for artists and presenters like. Thus, much of the software for the service must be custom-written to achieve the desired functionality and usability. However, all software components will rely on widely available and supported technologies. Core products for implementation are Microsoft Windows 2000 and Microsoft SQL Server 2000. In addition, the site also will employ the emerging ".NET Framework" for any new applications developed, to take advantage of that framework's advancements in productivity and maintainability. While based on the technologies of a single vendor, these tools and technologies have proven flexible, cost-effective, and widely supported by thousands of vendors and service providers.

### **Project Implementation and Completion**

We will contract for 14 months with an executive producer to manage planning and development efforts among the partners. A two-month overlap is planned with a separate contract project coordinator who will launch, promote and oversee the training and evaluation. While the majority of site development will take place during the first 12 months of the grant period, the second 12 months will focus on evaluation, dissemination, training, and marketing.

Due to an extended planning process that began in October 2002, our beta version will launch July 2004 with real content from our pilot group participants. Following the beta launch and evaluation, we will open the Marketplace in November 2004 to all New England State Touring roster artists. We plan to

market the site to all New England performing artists and presenters by May 2005. (See Appendix for a detailed project timeline.)

### **Applicant Qualifications**

NEFA is the lead applicant for this proposal, but the project will be developed and implemented in close coordination with the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the five other New England state arts agencies. NEFA and the states have a history of fruitful collaboration on state and regional touring programs, conferences, and other projects such as cultural tourism and the Creative Economy Initiative.

The most important qualification for this project is that we know the presenting field very well, and we know the artists and presenters within it. Touring and presenting have been central to NEFA's mission since its inception. All six New England states have full or partial staff positions dedicated to the promotion of touring and presenting in their states. Our collective network is wide and deep.

We also have a growing body of technical expertise for this kind of web project. Last year, MCC launched an extranet project ([www.mass-culture.org](http://www.mass-culture.org)) that provides virtual offices, individual websites, and streamlined work activities for its 335 Local Cultural Councils. The extranet was a six-figure, multi-year, multi-phase project that succeeded in large part due to the early inclusion of the site's intended users throughout the development process. In 2001, the MCC created [www.hireCulture.org](http://www.hireCulture.org), a SQL server database-enabled employment site averaging 1,700 unique visitors a week. The MCC has also dedicated a full-time staff position (Technology Project Manager) to the future development of service delivery through technology.

### **Privacy and Security**

Measures we'll employ within the Online Cultural Marketplace to ensure privacy and security:

- Usernames/passwords will be required for entry into select portions of the site (updating data, submitting referrals, etc.). Varying permission levels will be assigned to users.
- We will have daily tape back up by our ISP. Tapes will be available for 30 days afterwards.
- The site will reside on a secure server and have a Verisign key (SSL)

We will also develop a security policy for the site and train staff accordingly. Privacy and acceptable use policies will be created for artists, presenters and project partners, so they understand how our users, other third parties, and we will use the data. We'll also explore with our vendors the possibility of including audit trails in the site so user movements can be tracked (should a breach occur). We will do everything possible to ensure data transmissions are secure. We will continue to educate staff and users to security requirements and issues.

### **Sustainability**

We know that one of the worst miscalculations that can be made in a project like this is to fail to fully account for the cash and staff time costs of maintaining and operating the site. We estimate that the annual operating cost of the site—*not* including NEFA staff resources and the six state arts agencies—will be approximately \$100,000 per year. This includes hosting for the site on a dedicated server, and a separate hosting fee for the StreamingCulture audio and video clips. These expenses will be covered through annual contributions from NEFA and the states, as well as from modest user fees. We will also explore the possibility of corporate sponsorships to enhance revenue and keep costs low.

NEFA and the six states also will devote staff resources to marketing, end user support and further site development. At the center of this network will be a full-time NEFA staff person, working in close coordination with coordinators from each state. The MCC's Technology Project Manager will also have an active role in the project after it is complete.