

Bright Spots Leadership in the Pacific Northwest

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Project Questions

- Which cultural organizations are achieving exceptional results without exceptional resources?
- Do these organizations share characteristics or strategies that could be replicated by others?

Methodology

- Interviews with 43 cultural leaders in the Pacific Northwest
- Review of previous Bright Spots research (including 60 interviews)
- Review of resources on leadership and change
- 4 focus groups with cultural leaders and funders in the Pacific Northwest

“Bright spots” definition

- Observable exceptions to the norm
- Same resources as others
- Local practices
- Peer-selected

Five Bright Spot Principles

Animating purpose

Deeply engaged with community

Evaluation and analysis

Plasticity

Transparent leadership

Animating Purpose

- “Why should we exist now?”
- Clear, distinctive purpose and vision
- Review regularly
- Clear about desired impact and on whom
- High quality work
- Connect artists and audiences
- “Stop doing” list

Deeply Engaged with Community

- Exercise civic leadership
- See themselves as part of larger systems
- Invested in community goals
- Partner within and outside the arts
- Other arts organizations are partners, not competitors

Evaluation and Analysis

- Tell the truth to themselves
- Seek and use multiple perspectives
- Realistic
- Willing to make hard choices
- See opportunities, not obstacles
- See change as evolutionary
- Active agents in their future

Plasticity

- Nothing is too sacred to change
- Continual adjustment in response to changing circumstances
- Growth doesn't equal success
- Are comfortable with uncertainty

Transparent Leadership

- Not ego-driven
- Empower others
- Build trust internally and externally
- Define clear roles
- Transparent decision-making
- Willing to make unpopular decisions
- Share leadership among staff and board

Feedback to date

- Using this framework to explain positive results
- When is hierarchy useful?
- Coopetition vs. competition
- Missing examples from community-based groups and organizations of color
- Useful tool to spark conversation with staff and board
- Blueprint for “ethical organization”

Questions for Discussion

- Do these findings resonate with you?
- How are you / can you imagine using these principles?
- What other tools would make this framework more usable?

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