THE BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF ARTIST-RUN ORGANIZATIONS IN COLUMBUS, OHIO

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Masters of Arts in the

Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Melissa Ann Keeley, B.A.

The Ohio State University

2008

Masters Examination Committee:

Dr. Wayne Lawson, Adviser

Dr. Margaret J. Wysomirski

Approved by:

____________________________________

Adviser

Graduate Program in Arts Policy & Administration
ABSTRACT

The creative sector of any community provides important economic and social benefits. Research has shown that supporting a thriving arts and culture sector provides not only monetary returns on public investment but also helps create a positive image of a city that is in turn attractive to new businesses and a talented workforce. Furthermore, researchers have found that the presence of artists within a city is a good judge of a community’s cultural vitality and that cities should look to attract and retain artists to create new and innovative arts experiences while enhancing and building the creative capital within the community.

However, attracting and retaining artists is not always easy. Artists are highly mobile and frequently leave “second tier” cities to move to the premier art cities of New York and Los Angeles. In order to attract and retain artists to a community like Columbus, Ohio the city needs to support organizations and groups that help develop a hospitable environment for artists. A hospitable environment includes access to studio space and equipment, peer support, ability to gain exposure and exhibit work, and also a high quality of life at a reasonable cost. Most cities, including Columbus, are not doing near enough to attract new artists and retain the young artists who are attending secondary educational institutions in the area. But one way Columbus can create a
hospitable environment for artists is to support the creation and management of artist-run organizations.

Artist-run organizations refer to artist collectives, artist cooperatives, artist-run arts spaces and other artist-run and managed groups. Artist-run organizations are groups that share the common goal of providing peer and career support, as well as access to resources through an organization created and managed by artists. These organizations in turn also provide new artistic experiences through the promotion of innovative art that is able to reach a broad audience within their community. As a result, artist-run organizations not only provide artists with a means for professional and personal development, but also help make a city attractive to both artists and arts patrons.

Although artist-run organizations create unique benefits for their members and the community, many are plagued by poor organizational structures and limited life spans. This thesis explores four artist-run organizations in Columbus and investigates the positive achievements of these groups as well as the problems they face as organizations. By taking a critical look at four artist-run organizations with varying levels of success this thesis is able to create a prescriptive analysis of artist-run organizations and what steps these groups can take to help strengthen their group and promote organizational longevity. This thesis also examines how the existing arts infrastructure can promote successful artist-run organizations and help struggling groups through instruction, promotion, and organizational support.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Wayne Lawson as well as Dr. Margaret Wyszomirski for the help and guidance they provided me while I worked on this thesis. Their input and direction was invaluable and helped me to approach my research with an open mind to new theories and implications for my work.

In addition, I would like to thank the all of the professors and staff in the Arts Policy and Administration program that aided and instructed me during my time as a student. I also want to extend my gratitude to my fellow students in the Arts Policy and Administration program as well as the students in the Public Policy program whose feedback, support, and encouragement has been immeasurable.

I also want to express my appreciation and thanks to the members of Couchfire Collective, BLD, Chop Chop, and Phoenix Rising Printmaking Cooperative who selflessly and eagerly met with me to discuss their artist-run organizations. I am so grateful for the time these individuals devoted to this project and the candor with which they spoke about their organizations. Huge thanks are also extended to Alicia Oddi and Susan dePasquale whose expertise and insights on Columbus’s creative sector was very useful to this thesis.

Most importantly I would like to thank my family, my parents John and Elaine and my sisters Nicole and Emily, for their unfailing support and encouragement. I also
want to acknowledge my husband Cory who has made me strive for more than I thought I could accomplish and who gave me the strength and confidence to achieve my goals.
VITA

October 28, 1980........Born—Ridgewood, New Jersey, USU

2003.......................BA, Studio Art and Political Science
                      Calvin College
                      Grand Rapids, MI

2004-2007..................Research Assistant, Social Psychology
                      The Ohio State University
                      Columbus, OH

2006-2007..................Artist in Residence, Greater Columbus Arts Council
                      Children of the Future
                      Columbus, OH

Summer 2007..............Intern, Education Department
                      Columbus Museum of Art
                      Columbus, OH

2007-2008..................Graduate Assistant Development
                      Wexner Center for the Arts
                      Columbus, OH

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Arts Policy & Administration
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. iv
Vita .......................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ........................................................................................................... x
Keywords Defined .................................................................................................... xi

Chapters:

1. **INTRODUCTION** ............................................................................................. 1
   - Overview ............................................................................................................. 1
   - Research Questions ........................................................................................... 2
   - Overview of Chapters ....................................................................................... 3
   - Importance and Relevance .............................................................................. 5

2. **LITERATURE REVIEW** .................................................................................... 7
   - The Case for Supporting the Arts ................................................................... 8
     - The Case for Supporting Individual Artists ............................................... 12
     - Attracting and Retaining Artists ................................................................. 13
   - Artist-Run Organizations ............................................................................. 16
     - The Role of Artist-Run Organizations .................................................... 20
     - Organizational Issues Facing Artist-Run Organizations ......................... 23
   - Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 27

3. **METHODOLOGY** ............................................................................................. 29
   - Qualitative Research ...................................................................................... 29
   - Interviewing Arts Administrators ................................................................ 31
   - Case Study Research ..................................................................................... 32
   - Location Selection .......................................................................................... 34
   - Case Study Selection ..................................................................................... 36
   - Limitations of Research ............................................................................... 39
4. ARTISTS AND ARTIST-RUN ORGANIZATIONS IN COLUMBUS, OHIO……..41

   Columbus, Ohio’s Creative Sector .........................................................41
   Individual Artists in Columbus, Ohio...................................................42
   Supporting Local Artists and Artist-Run Organizations..........................46
   Input from Columbus, Ohio Based Arts Administrators.......................48
      Motivation for Organization.............................................................49
      Organizational Structure...............................................................51
      Fiscal Organization........................................................................52
   The Role of Personality and Space......................................................53
   The Benefits and Shortcomings of Artist-Run Organizations.................54
   Conclusion.........................................................................................57

5. COUCHFIRE COLLECTIVE.................................................................59

   History and Description of the Organization........................................60
   Organizational and Fiscal Structures..................................................63
   Organizational Strategic Plan ...........................................................69
   The Role of Physical Space and Individual Personalities......................70
   Internal and External Benefits...........................................................74
   Organizational Threats and Pitfalls....................................................77
   Conclusion.........................................................................................79

6. BLD AND CHOP CHOP.................................................................81

   History and Description of the Organization-BLD...............................84
   History and Description of the Organization-Chop Chop.....................87
   Organizational and Fiscal Structures..................................................91
   Organizational Strategic Plan ...........................................................95
   The Role of Physical Space and Individual Personalities......................96
   Internal and External Benefits...........................................................100
   Organizational Threats and Pitfalls....................................................104
   Conclusion.........................................................................................106

7. PHOENIX RISING PRINTMAKING COOPERATIVE..........................108

   History and Description of the Organization........................................110
   Organizational and Fiscal Structures..................................................114
   Organizational Strategic Plan ...........................................................119
   The Role of Physical Space and Individual Personalities......................120
   Internal and External Benefits...........................................................124
   Organizational Threats and Pitfalls....................................................126
   Conclusion.........................................................................................128
8. CONCLUSION .....................................................................................................................130

Artist-Run Organizations in Columbus, Ohio .................................................................131
Case Studies.......................................................................................................................133
Comparing Case Studies.................................................................................................138
Conclusion.........................................................................................................................140

Appendices ........................................................................................................................141

Appendix A: Interview Questions: Questions for Arts Administrators ..........141
Appendix B: Interview Questions: Questions for Members of Artist Collectives or Cooperatives .................................143
Appendix C: Completion of CITI Training.................................................................145
Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Exemption ....................................................147

References .........................................................................................................................149
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure
4.1 National statistics on percentage of artists for 1990 and 2000…………………..43
4.2 Ohio statistics on percentage of artists for 1990 and 2000………………………44
4.3 Number of artists in major Ohio cities in 2000………………………………….44
4.4 Post secondary education institutions located in Columbus, Ohio that offer
Arts related degrees………………………………………………………………..45
4.5 Fellowship and grant opportunities for Columbus, Ohio residents……………47
FORWARD: KEYWORDS DEFINED

The following terms will be used as defined below unless otherwise noted by the researcher.

There are many different definitions of the term ‘artist’ and much could be written regarding the justifications for any one definition. However, for the purpose of this thesis the term will apply to all individuals who have received some training, whether formally or informally, and who create works of art for exhibition, performance, or sale. The artists in this research vary from individuals who make very little money from the sale of art, to those who are able to support themselves fulltime through their artwork. All of these individuals are considered practicing artists within the scope of this research. And, although this paper focuses on artist-run organizations that are primarily interested in the visual arts, this definition does not exclude any discipline or genre from the label ‘artist.’

The term ‘creative sector’ refers to all of the individuals and organizations, both for and non-profit, that make up the cultural and/or artistic experiences within a community. The ‘creative sector’ is a broad classification that includes everything from a one man exhibition in a non-profit gallery to a large production of a traveling Broadway show.
The ‘creative capital’ within a city refers to the assets available to aid the creative sector and the individual artists and organizations that produce examples of artistic excellence and to promote audiences for the arts (The Benefactors Counsel, LLC, n.d). ‘Creative capital’ often is thought of as large artistic institutions or state and regional arts councils that disperse funding. But ‘creative capital’ also includes individual artists, secondary education institutions that provide artistic training, as well as the artist-run organizations explored in this thesis.

An ‘artist cooperative’ refers to a group of artists that collectively manage and own resources (either equipment or a shared space) for the creation and/or exhibition of art. ‘Artist cooperatives’ generally have an open membership and rely on membership dues and/or volunteer work time to manage their shared space. Although there may be exceptions, ‘artist cooperatives’ are very space centric; the organization exists to provide artists with access to work space and equipment that may not be easily acquired individually. Beyond providing access to resources, ‘artist cooperatives’ also provide peer support and increased exposure for the individual artists who are members.

An ‘artist collective’ is a group that is collectively managed and which is bound by a similar mission or aesthetic quality. Unlike ‘artist cooperatives,’ ‘artist collectives’ generally have a closed membership and their group is based not on space but on the congregation of a specific group of people with similar interests. Although an ‘artist collective’ may utilize a shared studio space or provide access to artistic equipment that is not their primary purpose as a group. Instead, ‘artist collectives’ thrive on peer support, collaboration, and the prospect of greater exposure through group identity.
An ‘artist-run arts space’ is a broad term that refers to an artist-run organization that is primarily interested in providing studio space and exhibition space for individual artists. Like an ‘artist cooperative,’ ‘artist-run arts spaces’ are location centric and are concerned with creating unique arts spaces that are managed by and for artists. Artist-run arts spaces vary greatly in nature and there are varying levels of collaboration that occurs among tenants and group members. However, most artist-run art spaces thrive to create peer support and additional exposure through the potential of a group identity.

The term ‘artist-run organization’ will be used in this research to refer to ‘artist cooperatives,’ ‘artist collectives,’ ‘artist-run arts spaces’ and other groups that share the common goal of providing peer and career support through an organization run by artists. Because not all ‘artist-run organizations’ self identify as an ‘artist cooperative,’ ‘artist collective,’ or an ‘artist-run arts space’ this term is used to refer to all organizations that are run by artists for artists.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

A city’s creative sector provides large economic and social benefits for the entire community. McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, and Brooks (2004) write that the arts have both an instrumental and intrinsic benefit to a city. The instrumental benefits can be explored by looking at ways in which an art or cultural event creates direct and indirect revenue—measurements that have been examined and calculated in economic impact reports. Other instrumental benefits that are more difficult to measure include the benefit of creating a positive image of a community that attracts both new businesses and new residents. The intrinsic benefit of art, which is nearly impossible to quantify, comes from the personal and communal experiences that occur when the community interacts with a powerful and important work of art. However, these many benefits will not be successfully earned unless a city decides to actively support their creative sector by sustaining and nurturing their creative capital.

The Benefactors Counsel in their report for the Greater Columbus Arts Council (n.d.) writes that creative capital includes “the assets that are readily available to advance the missions of artistic and cultural organizations: to create new works of enduring significance, present extraordinary exhibitions, produce grand performances, and inspire
an ever-growing audience” (p. 3). While this definition clearly identifies the many assets that aid and enhance artistic and cultural institutions much of the research pertaining to creative capital is limited in scope. Research on enhancing a community’s creative capital often focuses on funding and establishing large flagship art institutions, such as concert halls or arts museums, which create large productions or exhibitions which generate revenue and tourism for a city. However, this focus on large institutions has resulted in very little research being conducted on the support of individual artists—the groups most important and instrumental in the creation of “new works of enduring significance” (Benefactors Counsel, LLC, p.3). The little research that exists notes that there is inadequate support for artists, especially if they are young or producing innovative work, despite the fact that they are a key component of a city’s creative sector (Jackson et. al., 2003).

Without sufficient support many artists leave an area for a city with better resources and greater access to peer support. However, artist-run organizations, such as artist collectives, cooperatives, and arts spaces, can retain artists within a community and incubate their talent. Artist-run organizations give artists access to resources (both through providing equipment and/or studio space), the opportunity to exhibit work, and an atmosphere conducive for the production of innovative work. They also are generally self-reliant and require little public support.

Research Questions

This thesis serves to explore the benefits and pitfalls of artist-run organizations, to establish the value they provide for individual artists, and to estimate how that, in turn, adds to the creative sector of a community. While artist-run organizations make up a
relatively small section of the creative sector they provide unique support for individual artists and offer a venue where collaboration and innovation can occur. Although these groups are often overlooked in research on the creative sector because they are relatively small in size and limited in impact, their potential benefit to the community is notable. Artist-run organizations not only provide artists with access to resources and exhibition opportunities, they also make a community a more hospitable environment for artists, and create new and unique cultural events with fewer barriers to participation.

By interviewing individuals from four separate artist groups this thesis explores what benefits exist for artists involved in these groups as well as for the larger community. Along with identifying the possible benefits of artist-run organizations this thesis also takes a critical look at the organizational structure of these groups and how internal and external threats can be addressed to improve and strengthen the group. This critical examination explores a variety of organizational issues, including the creation of organizational documents, the tax status of the organization, and how space and personality play a critical role in the success or failure of a group. And, lastly, this thesis explores how public agencies could provide support to these organizations, not through public funding, but by providing the instruction and guidance to strengthen the organizational structure of these groups as well as provide training in marketing and promotion skills.

Overview of Chapters

In the next chapter, I review the literature regarding the support of the creative sector and individual artists in order to provide a framework for investigating artist-run organizations. The chapter reviews arguments for supporting a strong creative sector and
the benefit of creating a hospitable environment for artists. This chapter also contains a review of research concerning artist centers, artist-run groups, and cooperative communities and how they have historically benefited individual artists. This is then followed by a brief examination of what research exists on the organizational issues facing these kinds of groups and the possible problems that may arise within artist-run organizations.

Chapter 3 explores the methodology used in this research and justifies the use of case studies to explore artist-run organizations in Columbus. Through examining the research methods used in this thesis, this chapter addresses the use of qualitative research and how first person interviews were an appropriate manner in which to examine this particular subject matter.

The fourth chapter focuses specifically on Columbus’s creative sector. This chapter looks at the city’s arts organizations, arts infrastructure (specifically the organizational, political, and financial support available to arts organizations), and the presence of individual artists within the community. By looking at the role of individual artists in the city this chapter highlights the limited opportunities and programs geared towards artists. In this chapter I also discuss the opinions of two local arts administrators and what role they feel artists-run organizations play within Columbus and the benefits they provide and problems facing them.

The following three chapters include case studies of four artist-run organizations which represent a cross-section of such groups in Columbus. These chapters investigate and critically examine artist collectives, artist cooperatives, and artist-run arts spaces by exploring organizational material and the information I obtained through first person
interviews. These groups are Couchfire Collective, BLD, Chop Chop, and Phoenix Rising Printmaking Cooperative. Although these groups differ in many ways, each is an artist-run organization which creates opportunities and benefits for individual artists through cooperation and shared resources. In each chapter, I look at the history and structure of each organization, how each one benefit the group’s members and the larger community, and what limitations and organizational problems exist for each group. I also develop a prescriptive analysis of how each group might strengthen their organizational structure and increase the benefits they provide to artists and the larger community.

The last chapter reviews these findings and contrasts the analyses of each case study and what can be learned by comparing the experience of these four unique groups. I also give an overall assessment of what role these groups play in Columbus’ creative sector and what steps the state and city arts councils can take to support artist-run organizations.

Importance and Relevance

By examining these four artist groups in Columbus I hope to shed light on artist-run organizations and demonstrate their capacity to enhance and add to the creative sector of a community. Artist-run organizations can attract artists to a community and create a hospitable environment for the creation of innovative work. However, artist-run organizations are limited by informal or weak organizational structures and this thesis hopes to demonstrate ways in which these groups can improve their organizations to increase the benefits to both their members and to the larger community. By couching this research in the existing literature on supporting the creative sector, this thesis hopes
to raise the profile of artist-run organizations within Columbus and encourage more
discussion and research on the role of artist-run groups.

While this research addresses the existing literature about the benefits of
supporting the creative sector as well as individual artists there is presently a lack of
research on artist-run organizations. This thesis begins to develop theories and research in
an area that requires significantly more attention and observations. By taking an in-depth
look at these four groups this research provides valuable insights and creates a thorough
and thoughtful analysis of artist-run organizations. However, much can be added to this
topic, and hopefully this thesis will spur others to examine the benefits and pitfalls of
artist-run groups.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has shown that there are many benefits to supporting the creative sector of a community. These benefits—measured both quantitatively and qualitatively—include the multiplier effect that funding arts organizations induce, creating an image of a city that appeals to businesses and new residents, generating community growth, and the intrinsic benefit one receives from engaging with a piece of art or participating in a cultural experience first hand (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, and Brooks, 2001). While there is an abundance of literature on the importance of supporting a strong creative sector and the creation of large arts institutions, there is little research on the role of individual artists and small community organizations like artist-run groups. In order to investigate the role of artist-run organizations it is necessary to understand the existing research on the creative sector. By doing so, I hope to construct a proper basis and framework by which to discuss these types of groups.

In this literature review I discuss many disparate areas of research, and each strain of literature aids in understanding the importance of researching artist-run organizations. This chapter first examines research regarding the support of arts and cultural institutions as well as attracting and retaining individual artists. By focusing on research that highlights the importance of a strong creative sector, this thesis uses literature to support
the belief that the existence of arts and cultural programming and experiences is beneficial to a community. The research examined in this chapter also discusses the necessity of broadening the definition of the creative sector to include community based arts programs which would include artist-run organizations. By demonstrating that community based arts and cultural experiences are beneficial and valuable this thesis creates an argument for the study of artist-run organizations. Furthermore, by exploring the role individual artists play in creating those art and cultural experiences this chapter also makes a case that artist-run organizations help make a community more hospitable for artists and the creation of new and significant artwork.

The second half of this chapter focuses on the literature regarding artist-run organizations. There is little research that analyzes current day artist-run organizations; however, there are historical accounts of artist-run groups in the 1950s and 1970s that provide valuable insight on these types of organizations. Furthermore, research on individual artists finds that there are specific needs these artists have and that historically artists have worked together and created organizations in order to fulfill those needs. By exploring this research we can begin to understand the important role that artist-run organizations hold in a community and the unique opportunities they create for artists. And finally, this chapter also briefly looks at problems facing these types of organizations and the possible threats that exist for small, artist-run groups.

The Case for Supporting the Arts

There are many ways to discuss the benefits of supporting the arts. For many years the most popular way to justify arts funding or organizational support has been through utilizing economic impact studies. Economic impact studies employ measures to
demonstrate the amount of economic activity that cultural organizations and their audiences produce. In 2007, Americans for the Arts created an economic impact study for the Greater Columbus Arts Council that looked at nonprofit arts and cultural organizations as well as the total amount of “event-related spending” that took place within the greater Columbus community. This study concluded that the arts in greater Columbus account for “$330.39 million in local economic activity” as well as thousands of full-time equivalent jobs, hundreds of millions of dollars in household incomes, and over thirty-six million dollars in government revenue (Americans for the Arts, 2007, p. 3).

While these numbers are impressive, this type of study can diminish the benefit of the arts to a form of monetary investment—susceptible to funding cuts when results are not immediately visible. More recently, researchers have moved away from using economic impact studies and have begun to show how support for the creative sector provides value by branding a place as a “cool city.” This can attract new businesses and what Richard Florida has termed the “creative class” (Florida, 2002). Strom (2002), explores this idea by looking at the role of arts institutions as a tool for community development in Philadelphia, Newark, and Seattle noting that “highly educated workers don’t want to be in a cultural wasteland” (p. 5). By investing in examples of good taste and excellence, Strom found that communities that invested in cultural improvements were also investing in community development.

Landry (2000) reiterates this sentiment when he notes that “cultural facilities and activities” help to entice talented workers and promotes a positive image of a city (p. 123). Friedland, Zimmerman, and Radich (1984) researched funding the arts in Colorado
and write that supporting the arts can increase real estate values and that the existence of arts and cultural opportunities can influence location decisions for many highly skilled workers. Penne and Shanahan (1987) find that a strong cultural sector creates an attractive representation of the city to businesses and provides a “favorable generable climate for investment” (p. 131).

However, this literature creates the same quandary produced by economic impact studies. They are still hampered by the idea of investment returns, as much of this research is focused on the role of large arts institutions and their ability to increase tourism and business revenue to the area. Furthermore, Lewis (1990) notes the limitations of this thinking and argues that an arts policy geared to attract members of the “creative class” is regressive and only provides the type of cultural experiences that appeal to high-income groups. Indeed, focusing on the arts as an economic investment undermines many of the benefits that cultural experiences provide communities as well as the individual enjoyment people experience by participating in the creation, exhibition, or performance of art.

Along this line, Wyszomirski (2007) argues that the idea of the creative sector needs to be expanded to include a larger array of arts organization:

Sometimes the term extends beyond just organizations dedicated to producing, presenting and preserving the arts to include art-specific non-profit groups and a much wider range of arts activities. The latter stretches from the highly professional to volunteer-run, informal amateur groups; from ethnic heritage activities and folk arts and crafts to programs that employ the arts instrumentally for educational, social or therapeutic purposes; from small businesses run by individual artists to large entertainment business firms (p. 2).
By broadening our perspective of the cultural sector in any community we can engage the benefits of supporting the arts in new ways, namely by looking at the benefit of the arts at the community level produced by non-traditional arts organizations. Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz (2006) write about the need to redirect the research being done to include the qualitative effects that the arts have on individual communities. They write, “cultural vitality is the evidence of creating, disseminating, validating, and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life in communities” (p. 16).

Transeuropehalles is a European group that represents many community-based alternative art spaces and promotes the role of the arts within individual neighborhoods. In Transeuropehalles’ 2001 book, they write that arts spaces encourage community involvement and promote emotional and intellectual exchanges (p. 5).

Because of these benefits, Jackson and Herranz (2002) call for additional research on the role of the indirect social effects of the arts and how arts organizations work with community-based organizations to help unify and create positive neighborhood identification. Unlike research on gentrification, which addresses how artists rejuvenate a city and are then displaced (Zukin 2001), this research would address ways communities engage the arts in non-traditional ways to promote community and cultural engagement in a manner that is positive for both artists and community members.

As non-traditional arts organizations, artist-run groups engage communities in unique ways. By hosting events and exhibitions that diminish barriers to participation these groups provide new ways for individuals to engage the arts. In this respect, artist-run organizations should be explored and researched as organizations that produce cultural vitality in a community and create positive neighborhood identification.
The Case for Supporting Individual Artists

As has been noted, a lot of literature on the importance of a strong creative sector is focused specifically on the role of large arts organizations and there is limited research on the role of community-based art centers. Another area that is under-researched is how individual artists can benefit a community. Few researchers have looked at individual artists and how they contribute to a city—and how communities can attract and retain artists. Jackson et. al (2003) write that there is limited research on the social impact of artists and what resources they rely on for support. Much of the research that has been done is spearheaded by Ann Markusen. In a 2002 article about the benefit artists provide a city, Markusen and King write that,

The productivity of earnings in a regional economy rise as the incidence of artists within its boundaries increases, because artists’ creativity and specialized skills enhance the design, production and marketing of products and services in other sectors—they also help firms recruit top-rate employees and generate income through direct exposures of artistic work out of the region (p. 3).

As Markusen (2002) notes, artists play an important role in many industries and are an asset to businesses. In addition to providing “creativity and specialized skills,” Markusen writes that artists help “reinforce the loyalty of current residents and business to the region” (p. 6). Rosenfeld (2004) reiterates this idea and notes that once an area becomes know for having a large group of creative individuals companies will want to develop there.

As this research shows, individual artists are an important segment of the creative sector and provide many valuable benefits to a city. The presence of individual artists promotes creativity and attracts industries that rely on the services that artist are able to
provide. Florida (2005) refers to this phenomenon as the bohemian index. According to Florida, individuals who are authors, designers, musicians and composers, actors and directors, craft-artists, painters, sculptures, art printmakers, photographers, dancers, artists, performers, and work other related fields are all included within the term bohemian. And Florida’s research finds that there is a “relationship between geographic concentrations of bohemians, talent, and high-technology industry concentration” (p. 114). Furthermore the number of artists within a given area is a strong indicator of the larger cultural vitality of the community and is indicative of the creative capital present in a given city.

Creative capital refers to the elements that exist within a city which help aid the creation, exhibition, and performance of artistic excellence. The Benefactors Council (n.d), in a report entitled Building Creative Capital, defined creative capital as “the assets that are readily available to advance the missions of artistic and cultural organizations: to create new works of enduring significance, present extraordinary exhibitions, produce grand performances, and inspire an ever-growing audience” (p. 1). A key part of this definition is the ability to create new works of enduring significance, an act that defines the creative and artistic process. Clearly, by this definition artists are a crucial element of any city’s creative capital and play a pivotal role in the development of any community’s creative sector. Yet, despite the importance of individual artists, many cities do not provide a hospitable environment for working artists.

Attracting and Retaining Artists

A major challenge for most cities trying to develop a community that is attractive to artists is in first retaining artists already in the region. Traditionally artists have moved
to New York City or Los Angeles because those areas are able to provide employment opportunities and access to peer support. However, artists are also a group of individuals with high levels of mobility, not willing to stay long in an area that either financially cannot support them or provide them with the resources they desire. Markusen, Schrock and, Cameron (2004) support this notion by noting that artists are generally footloose and able to move easily since they are self-employed and capable of exporting their goods and wares outside of a given region.

This idea is confirmed by evidence from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) as well as the migration research conducted by Ellis, Barff, and Renard. The NEA study on *Artists in the Workforce* (2008) found that individuals who make their livelihood as an artist are twice as likely as the average American to hold a college degree and are also more likely to be self-employed. In complimentary research, Ellis, Barff, and Renard (1993) state that individuals who have higher education levels and are considered professionals and are much more likely to move between states than within any given state. Cumulatively, this research supports the idea that an artist’s education and employment status makes them capable of major relocations and are statistically more likely to make an inter-state than an intra-state move.

With such great artist mobility, cities can attract artists away from the art centers of New York City and Los Angeles, if they provide the amenities that artist are looking for. In fact, Markusen and King (2003) argue that artists are attracted to “second tier” cities and can be highly committed to regional arts facilities if they can provide necessary resources. According to Markusen, Schrock, and Cameron (2004), the appeal of these
“second tier” cities include: “a combination of amenities, regional support for the arts, informal networks among artists and synergy with particular industries” (p. 1).

These amenities that Markusen, Schrock, and Cameron refer to include available artist studios and access to equipment and tools they need to practice their craft. Artists also look for an area that is supportive of the creative sector, and specifically artists. Regional support for artists comes through a concerted effort from the city, local businesses, and existing arts institutions to provide organizational and financial support for the creative sector. Markusen, Schrock, and Cameron also found that Informal networks are also vital to attracting and retaining artists. Networks, whether formal or informal, provide invaluable peer support and feedback, a necessary resource for artists. And, finally, to attract artists a community must also provide inroads for work and collaboration with local industries—a major benefit to business is having a large contingent of artists within the city.

In addition to these four areas, artists are also looking for areas with a higher quality of life. Markusen, Schrock and Cameron (2004) recognize that other factors can also make a city or region appealing to artists: “a lower cost of living, less congestion, recreational opportunities, alternative health care, and a diverse artistic culture are among the features that draw artists away from the super arts cities” (p. 20).

By creating a hospitable environment for artists, communities can retain young artists who are graduating from local colleges and universities. According to Markusen and King (2003), this enhances the pool of artists by “home-growing” artists from local post secondary education institutions. Markusen and Johnson (2006) write that appealing to artists who have recently graduated from college is particularly important, because
they no longer have access to the equipment, feedback, or a peer support system that they are accustomed to and will move away to areas where those resources are available to them. The Creative Columbus Policy Steering Committee (2007) recognizes the importance of retaining locally educated artists believes that retaining locally grown talent will also make the city more attractive to artists from other areas and communities (p. 35).

**Artist-Run Organizations**

The research and literature pertaining to individual artists provides evidence that the presence of artists in a city can have a large benefit for the whole community. By establishing the importance of the creative sector, and specifically the role of artists within that creative sector we begin to craft a basis for the study of artist-run organizations. By understanding not only the importance of individual artists to a community, but what resources draw them to an area we can begin to explore how artist-run organizations create opportunities and provide amenities that may help attract and retain artists to a city.

Research shows that there are many benefits to having active artists within a city. However, a city must make an effort to become a hospitable environment in order to retain artists graduating from local schools and to attract outside artists. Despite this fact, cities often provide limited resources for artists. Jackson et. al. (2003) write that “there’s been an inadequate set of support structures to help artists, especially younger, more marginal controversial ones, to realize their best work” (p. 1). It is partly out of this need for support that artists create their own support organizations.
By creating artist collectives, cooperatives, artist-run art spaces or other artist-run organizations artists create their own opportunities and access to resources. The idea of being one’s own gatekeeper to the world of art and to the world through art is a relatively new phenomenon that began in the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, Sharon (1979) recognizes the trend of artists running their own galleries, controlling their marketing through self-promotion, and creating a personal relationship with their audience and community as an important change within the art world. This change provides new opportunities and a more direct link between communities and the artists who work and live within them.

Many of these organizations were initially created because the founding members were not accepted by commercial galleries and were unable to show their work publicly—either because they were young, lacked experience, or were considered outsiders in the art world. These organizations fill a void within the marketplace, provide an outlet for artists, and exposure for those not represented through traditional commercial galleries (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Brooks, and Szanto, 2005). By working as a group or collective agency with a shared aesthetic, political stance, or social identity, artists have historically been able to create support systems, access to equipment, and opportunities for exposure.

Cooperative galleries and artist-run arts spaces, which are some of the earliest artist-run organizations, had their heydays in the 1950s and 1970s. Although a few of these groups existed before 1950, the first major collection of artist-run organizations sprung up in a New York City and were known by their location—Tenth Street. Tenth Street was the location of artist studios, cooperative galleries, meeting areas, and it
reflected a burgeoning community of artists making their own opportunities. Built through collective action and shared expenses, the cooperative galleries on Tenth Street were able to work outside of the establishment and become a model for future artist-run organizations (Jeffri, 1980).

The second major wave of artist-run organizations was during the 1970s. Many of these groups were based upon a specific social issue or were developed by a group of individuals that felt marginalized by the traditional art world. In particular, many artist-run groups began to be created by women in order to “improve the situation of women in the arts and to create spaces where they could exhibit their work” (Inglot, 2006, p. 7). These cooperative artist groups hoped to gain visibility for female artists, create a positive and supportive community, and establish exhibition spaces to show female artists. According to Inglot (2006), there were at least twelve major feminist cooperative galleries in the 1970s and they were instrumental venues for women artists who were being overlooked by the established art galleries.

The artist-run organizations of the 1950s and 1970s demonstrate that that these groups provided many benefits to their members. These organizations offered peer support, exposure, and access to resources. And although there is very limited research on artist-run organizations, these examples are certainly not isolated. These groups, as well as the resources they provided serve as models for today’s artist-run organizations. While artist cooperatives have historically provided outlets and resources for artists who do not fit within the established art institutions of the art world’s “super cities,” today’s artist-run organizations provide those same resources, but often for individuals living in regions
and cities that do not have a substantial commercial art scene that can support many artists.

Today’s artist-run organizations take on many shapes and sizes. Although many organizations do not fit into a concrete mold, many artist-run organizations identify as an artist cooperative, artist collective, or artist-run arts space. Like all artist-run organizations, artist collectives, artist cooperatives, and artist-run art spaces are peer organizations that establish a support system for artists, provide artists greater exposure, and create access to equipment and resources. While these three types of groups share many characteristics each differs in the organizational structure of the group.

For instance, artist cooperatives are generally space-centric and have an open membership. Craig (1993) defines a cooperative as, “any joint or collaborative behavior that is directed towards some goal and in which there is a common interest or hope of reward” (p. 11). A larger examination of artist cooperatives shows that, generally, these groups are based on cooperative management in order to share resources members could not obtain on their own. Artist cooperatives generally have open membership and rely on member dues and volunteer time to manage a space or collection of equipment.

Artist collectives differ in a few specific ways. Honingsberg, Kamoroff, and Beatty (1982) note that a collective, or a worker cooperative as it is sometimes termed, is often distinguished from a cooperative because they limit their membership. Furthermore, artist collectives are generally less space-centric, but are built because of a shared identify, aesthetic, or mission—as exemplified in the feminist artist collectives founded in the 1970’s.
Artist-run arts spaces is a broader category of artist-run organization and refers to any shared studio and gallery space that is interested in creating a space managed by artists for artists. Like many of the Tenth Street groups, artist-run arts spaces are unique venues where artists are able to create and exhibit work without the expense of a traditional studio or the limitations of a commercial gallery. By developing access to needed resources and opportunities artists take ownership of their careers and operate without the restrictions and pressures of the commercial art work.

_The Role of Artist-Run Organizations_

By developing artist-run organizations, artists create access to artistic resources in “second tier” cities that may be desirable for its quality of life and low cost of living. These artistic resources generally include a space to work and exhibit, peer support, chance for collaboration, opportunity for exhibition and greater exposure while providing additional access points for the community to engage in cultural experiences. Furthermore, by creating access to these resources, artist-run organizations help transform a city into a hospitable environment for artists by providing artists with access to the amenities they need to thrive in a city.

One of the major benefits that artist-run organizations provide artists is environmental support. Environmental support may include access to equipment, studio space, or a gallery to exhibit work. Access to a usable space is particularly important for artists. If a studio or exhibition space does not exist then artists cannot create and publicly present work. This limits their ability to positively impact the community through the creations of innovative and significant artwork (Friedland, Zimmermann, and Radich, 1984). Recent research has focused on the role of publicly funded live/work spaces and
how they will help artists gain invaluable access to studio space at an affordable rate. However, Jackson and Kabwasa-Green (2007) write that in reality cities have very little capacity to “bring artist space developments to fruition” (p. 22). In contrast, artist-run organizations generally provide access to affordable studio space without the limitations of a publicly funded artist live/work community. Artist-run organizations fill a gap for artists who are ineligible or unable to gain access to publicly funded live/work spaces.

In addition to providing environmental support, artist-run organizations also provide peer support and the ability to network with other artists. Rosenfeld (2004) identifies the importance of networking and the informal learning that occurs within peer groups. Markusen and Johnson (2006) also identify the importance of a support system and found they can provide critical feedback for emerging artists. This feedback and supportive network of peers can also encourage artists to take risks and to advance their craft. Byrne, Carroll, and Ward (2002) write that the “systematic critique” of each others work creates an environment where innovative work will be created (p. 10).

By working within such an open and supportive environment many artists are able to make advances in their craft and create innovative work that eventually may be attractive to the commercial market. Beyond creating an environment hospitable for innovation, artist-run organizations also create a space ripe for collaboration. The Transeuropehalles (2001) organization reports that the “gathering of frequently isolated artistic activities and disciplines is food for the imagination itself” (p. 17). Byrne, Carroll and Ward (2002) write that “as these artist-run organizations are collective in nature, there is a greater chance that artists will work collaboratively on their art from time to
time (p. 9). By collaborating, artists are able to share ideas and create work that is rich with ideas and perspectives.

In addition, artist-run organizations also provide artists the opportunity to exhibit the work they make individually and collaboratively. Many artist-run organizations have a gallery space which gives artists the capacity to exhibit work that would not be accepted by the established commercial galleries (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Brooks, and Szanto, 2005). Furthermore, as an artist-run organization gains notoriety many members will benefit from their association with the group and new exhibition opportunities will be presented to them.

In addition to the benefits associated with the creation and exhibition of artwork, artist-run organization also provide benefits to the artists as business owners. Although artists generally are twice as likely to have a college degree, be self-employed, and act as an entrepreneur (NEA, 2008) many artists struggle with the business end of making and selling art. Byrne, Carroll, and Ward (2002) note that artists generally do not receive business training with their art degree and that generally artists lack business skills. However, artist-run organizations can provide additional learning through peer support and instruction and also provide a way to pool knowledge and resources to perform certain business duties collectively. Specifically, many artist-run organizations benefit greatly through shared marketing initiatives. Torres’ (2001) study about craftsperson alliances in Ireland found that strategic alliances (like those created in artist-run organizations) allow groups to save on resources, create better marketing, and ultimately to have greater market power and efficiency. By creating better marketing, these artist-
run organization are creating new avenues for exposure and artists who are operating outside established art institutions are able to be seen by the public.

One result of the additional marketing power is appealing to new audiences and creating a new way for the community to engage and interact with art. Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz (2006), report similar findings in their exploration of cultural vitality,

Formal and informal cultural districts—including retail opportunities for arts consumption and spaces where professional artists and others gather to make their art work—are important dimensions of cities or communities that help stimulate a creative buzz and promote various forms of cultural engagement (p. 16).

In fact, individuals like to participate in the arts in various ways and small arts organization such as artist-run organizations, often strive to serve the community and appeal to new audiences (Moskin and Glaze, 2007). Artist-run organizations provide that new entry point for community members and establish another venue for cultural experiences.

Organizational Issues Facing Artist-Run Organizations

While the literature we have examined demonstrates that artist-run organizations provide valuable benefits for artists, help enhance the creative capital of a city, and present new opportunities for the community to participate in cultural experiences, many of these organizations also face organizational problems. By looking at research concerning the problems facing small arts organizations, and specifically artist-run organizations, we can identify threats to these types of groups which will later inform my prescriptive analysis of the four case studies in this thesis.

Many artist-run organizations are small, democratically managed, have short life spans, and face financial and managerial issues. Jackson et. al. (2003) recognize that
artist focused organizations are fragile and vulnerable to collapse. The success of these organizations relies on the continued access to space, the right combination of members who are able to manage cooperatively, and a strong organizational structure.

As noted previously, access to studio space and ability to publicly exhibit artwork is a key benefit of participating in an artist-run organization. In cases where the shared space is in jeopardy or being re-zoned many organizations are not strong enough to remain viable with no designated shared space. Displacement of artists is a real threat and occurs with regularity. Jackson et. al (2003) write, “artist-focused organizations are often uniquely threatened by redevelopment and the rising real estate costs typically associated with it” (p. 50). Although not all artist-run organizations are location specific many of the groups do not have an organizational structure that allows for smooth transition when experiencing major changes.

Another key ingredient that affects cooperative management is the personalities involved in the artist-run organization. Sharon’s (1979) research addresses the nature of cooperative galleries and the role that personalities play when trying to manage an organization democratically. In order to create an organization that can run properly there needs to be the right balance of personalities as well as a sense of commitment to the group. Just as losing the organization’s space may have a detrimental effect on the group, losing a key personality from the organization may signal the demise of the group. The State of the Arts Report (2001) for Ohio writes, “small arts organizations are driven by one person, and most will cease to exist if that person leaves the organization” (p. 9). Artist-run organizations are no different. Although artist-run organizations are generally collectively managed, it’s often one or two individuals who spearhead projects or who
have business expertise that keeps the group afloat. Having a key member leave the group may mean failure if the organization has not created a strong organizational structure and prepared for a shift in managerial duties.

The major issue facing artist-run organizations is creating an organizational structure that allows small artist-managed groups to remain nimble while establishing a strategic plan and the structure necessary to meet possible problems, changes, and growth. Frey and Pommerehne’s (1989) research on cooperative galleries can certainly be applied to visual art artist-run organizations. They write that in these types of organizations:

> The purely co-operative form is usually taken over by a more hierarchical setup in which one member takes a leading (managerial and artistic) role. When the initial enthusiasm slowly evaporates, the relationship between effort and income grows more tenuous (p. 34).

As Frey and Pommerehne’s work notes, as artist-run organizations grows and age they become less cooperative in nature and members start to experience burnout. As the group develops and expands it becomes important for the individual members to decide if they want the group to survive after the founding members have lost interest in the organization. If this is the case it is necessary to create a strong organizational structure with organizational documents that clearly define the mission and structure of the group. This kind of documentation will keep the group on track as old members leave and new members join.

However, some groups may not want to expand or grow as an organization. These groups serve the direct needs of the founding members and often become obsolete when those needs are met or those members leave. In these cases, the organization should
decide at what point the group has run its course and what steps they should take to
dissolve the group. Although an artist-run organization may not know what fate they will
face, creating an educated strategic plan and carefully defining member roles will go a
long way to ensure that the organization’s members will be prepared for any
circumstance.

In addition to a strategic plan artist-run organizations should also discuss and
create a financial plan. While arts organizations are often not for-profit, artist-run
organizations need not be constrained by a non-profit tax status. There are pros and cons
to applying for a non-profit status. For some groups being non-profit provides stability,
the requirement of educational programming fits their organizational mission, they desire
oversight from a board of directors, and they want the opportunity to apply for public
funds. However, this tax status also creates limitations for organizations and artist-run
groups should not feel obligated to become non-profit. Moskin and Glaze (2007) write
that there is only limited funding for research regarding the effectiveness and efficiency
of non-profit organizations and that research needs to be conducted on the benefits of a
for profit tax status. This type of research would be helpful since some groups find a for-
profit tax status is preferable. Remaining for-profit means these groups are not beholden
to public funds or required to produce a certain kind of programming. Furthermore, a for-
profit status group has greater organizational flexibility and do not have a board of
directors to content with. However, being successful as a for-profit still requires planning
and knowledge of how a financial status can affect the organization long term.
Conclusion

Although much of the literature in this chapter is incongruent, taken together it provides a basis for the study of artist-run organizations. By examining research pertaining to the importance of the creative sector we see that funding arts and cultural experiences provides many benefits to a community. Furthermore, while small community based organizations such as artist-organizations may not provide the same revenue as large arts organizations, they do promote community development and provide cultural experiences with fewer barriers to participation. The literature also shows that individual artists, not just arts organizations, play an important role in the creative sector by providing the creative capital necessary to produce new and significant artwork and enhancing the cultural vitality of a community.

However, the research explored in this chapter also shows that in order for a city to appeal to individual artists they must create a hospitable environment for artists. A city can become a hospitable environment by creating access to resources such as space and equipment, as well as a providing a network of artists for peer support. By looking at the literature on cooperative galleries and other artist-managed groups we see that artist-run organizations are capable of providing these resources to their members.

Taken together, the literature that examines the benefits of a strong cultural sector and the research that explores the qualities of artist-run organizations, demonstrates that supporting artist-run organizations can help attract and retain artists to a community and add to the creative capital of a city. While much of the literature explored in this chapter demonstrates the importance of artist-run organizations, I also included research that relates to problems and threats facing artist-run organizations. By looking at a broad
range of literature that identifies both the importance of artist-run organizations as well as their possible limitations I created a basis for analyzing the positive and negative aspects of artist-run groups. Collectively, this research helped to inform my prescriptive analysis of the four case studies included in this thesis and to inform the improvements I suggest each group make to their organization.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This thesis investigates the benefits and limitations of artist-run organizations. To get a better understanding of how these groups add to a community’s creative capital this thesis uses case studies to investigate four artist-run organizations currently operating in the Columbus area. Since artist-run organizations differ greatly both within a given community, as well as between communities, qualitative research was utilized to gain a richer understanding of each group and each organization’s problems and benefits. Furthermore, the selected organizations are from one city in the hope of diminishing the environmental variables affecting these groups. What resulted are rich narratives based upon first person interviews which give great insight into the operations of four unique artist-run organizations.

Qualitative Research

There is minimal research pertaining to artist-run organizations and no national database that identifies the location or nature of these types of groups. In fact, since there is little literature on this subject, artist-run organizations are rarely examined as a collection of organizations and are often classified by the other characteristics that these groups exhibit. Some of the ways that artist-run organizations are re-classified include live/work spaces, artist-run galleries, and community art centers. However, this research
hopes to examine a broad array of organizations that, while they may fall under different 
headings, all share the common goal of providing peer and career support through an 
organization run by artists for artists. Since this research addresses an under-researched 
and often misunderstood form of artist groups, a quantitative analysis based upon survey 
results from a national sample of artist-run organizations was not realistic or possible 
within the scope of this paper.

Instead I use qualitative research, which allows for the differences and similarities 
between groups to be examined and gives a deeper understanding of what an artist-run 
organization is. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research allows the researcher 
to understand the reality that is constructed by the individuals that are living it. In this 
respect, the use of qualitative research to investigate artist-run organizations will allows 
me to get a perspective of these organizations directly from the individuals who are 
intimately involved with these groups. Interviews with the artists who participate in and 
manage these groups provide an intimate understanding of why these groups are formed, 
what benefits they provide their members as well as the greater community, and what 
problems or pitfalls are present within the organizations. Furthermore, interviews with 
two arts administrators who are active in overseeing and providing funding for the 
creative sector in Columbus also offer invaluable insights on how artist-run organizations 
operate in comparison to other arts organizations and how they add to the creative capital 
of the community.

By utilizing interviews to construct case studies this research method provides for 
a large degree of flexibility when addressing the research topic (Merriam, 1998). This is 
particularly important in investigating artist-run organizations since research on this topic
is limited and no real theories on the subject exist. Adopting a flexible research style allowed for new questions to arise during the course of the research and new avenues to be exposed and explored. Specifically, during the course of this research the arts administrators played a key role in providing an introduction to artist-run organizations in Columbus and providing insight and direction regarding the focus of the artist interviews. Similarly, the members of artist-run organizations who were interviewed helped to identify additional organizations and/or individuals who would be beneficial to investigate in order to gain a better understanding of the many types of artist-run organizations that exist. The flexibility of qualitative analysis allowed for this type of input from the research participants and for information from the individuals actively involved in artist-run organizations to be utilized to better understand the research topic.

Interviewing Arts Administrators

As noted, interviews with arts administrators played a key role in directing and shaping this research. With limited literature on the subject of artist-run organizations, and much of it historical and not analytical in nature, arts administrators were an invaluable resource for determining the current role artist-run organizations play in Columbus’s creative sector and what key issues these groups are facing. As the state capital, Columbus is home to both the state arts council and a city arts council. Both of these organizations serve local artists and provide monetary support through fellowships, grants, and organizational support. Furthermore, staff from these two organizations interact with the various arts and cultural organizations in town as well as with the individual artists living in the area. They not only have a good knowledge of the artist-run
organizations within Columbus, but they also know how these groups relate to the larger creative sector.

An administrator from each arts organization was interviewed and was selected based upon their interest and involvement with artist-run organizations. From the Greater Columbus Arts Council I interviewed Alicia Oddi, the Grants and Services Director. In this position Oddi has extensive interaction with arts organizations in the city. Furthermore, Oddi determines eligibility for funding, oversees the implementation of those funds, and helps implement programs created to provide groups with organizational support. From the Ohio Arts Council I spoke with Susan dePasquale, a program coordinator. Susan dePasquale provides arts organizations with organizational support and has worked with artist-run organizations in the Northeast region of Ohio. Her tenure as an arts administrator also provides unique insight in strategic planning and the long term life of an organization. Both arts administrators provided a critical assessment of artist-run organizations and helped to identify the key issues facing these types of artist groups (to see the list of questions presented to these arts administrators see Appendix A). Their insights helped determine which artist-run organizations I selected and the issues I deemed important to address in this research.

Case Study Research

In order to investigate artist-run organizations I utilized the grouping of research subjects into case studies. Stake (2000) and Barzelay (2007) address the use of case studies as a way to organize research into bounded groups which serve as a means to investigate a set of research questions. By performing case study research I was able to identify four artist-run organizations within Columbus, Ohio and ask a series of pertinent
questions that were relevant to each group (for a copy of the questions asked to members of the artist-run organizations see Appendix B). I then classified each group as either an artist collective, and artist cooperative, or an artist-run arts space.

By grouping the research into cases, structured upon the type of artist-run organizations, I was able to interview several people from each organization and gain a deeper and more thorough understanding of each group, and each type of artist-run organization. Furthermore, I was able to address research questions that dealt with larger organization issues as well as elicit introspection regarding the relevance and role of the organization within Columbus’s creative sector. These research questions include: a general understanding of how artist-run organizations are formed and how they function; how the group’s organizational structure and organizational documents effected group management and success; an exploration of how physical space and member personalities have influenced the organization: analysis of how artist-run organizations benefit its members and the larger community specifically; if artist-run organizations are able to attract and retain artists to the city; and, finally, what are the threats and pitfalls facing these organizations and can the arts infrastructure in Columbus aid them in any way.

In order to investigate these research questions, I interviewed founding or key members of all four artist-run organizations. Their answers along with any organizational material the groups provided were utilized in each case study analysis. Each chapter or case study includes six sub-headings based upon the research questions articulated previously. These researched questions provide a better understanding of how each organization operates within Columbus’ creative sector and increases the creative capital of the city. In addition to addressing these research questions, each chapter also includes
a critical and prescriptive analysis of each group and what can be done internally by the group and externally by the city’s arts infrastructure to strengthen and enhance these groups.

Location Selection

As noted previously, there is limited research on the topic of artist-run organizations; there is no national organization that represents these groups or database that identifies the location of artist-run organizations. As a result, a national or regional sampling of artist-run organizations was not possible within the scopes of this research. Instead, I decided that focusing on organizations within one community would allow for a thorough investigation of artist-run organizations.

I carefully selected case studies to represent an appropriate cross section of all artist-run organizations in Columbus. Selecting a cross-section of organizations is particularly important because there is such a large variation between artist-run organizations. By focusing the attention of this study to four groups located in one city, I was able to thoroughly investigate the differences as well as the similarities between a range of artist-run organizations. Furthermore, selecting artist-run organizations from only one city eliminates environmental variables that would effect organizations differently in different cities.

Columbus, Ohio was specifically selected for this project for a variety of reasons. Columbus is unique in that the city is a state capital; it houses several post secondary education institutions; it is undergoing a significant city wide initiative to attract and retain young professionals; and it is the location of a plethora of artist-run organizations providing for a diverse sample. As the state capital, Columbus has a city arts council and
is also the location of the state arts council. These organizations provide the city with significant economic and organizational support for the creative sector. These organizations were also a valuable resource for this project by providing information regarding the current state of the arts in Columbus, but also through the personal insights of the arts administrators interviewed for this thesis.

In addition to being the state capital, Columbus is also the location of several post secondary education institutions, including a college for art and design. This means that Columbus is training new artists who will eventually be entering the creative sector and that those individuals must decide if Columbus is a hospitable city for them to live and work as an artist. As Markusen and Johnson (2006) note the best way to increase the number of artists within a community is to home grow artists or retain individuals who are at or have attended a college or university in the area. Artist-run organizations appeal to young artists who no longer have the peer support, exhibition opportunities, and access to the equipment that they had while in school.

Columbus is also currently undergoing a large push to attract and retain young professionals. As Florida (2002) writes, developing a strong creative sector helps to attract business to the area as well as young professionals who are members of the growing creative class. Columbus has undertaken several initiatives to investigate the current state of its creative sector (Creative Columbus Policy Steering Committee, 2007, Americans for the Arts, 2007) and has undertaken several studies to demonstrate how enhancing the existing creative capital within the community will enhance and benefit the larger city. This information provides valuable support pertaining to the role of artists as well as artist-run organizations within Columbus. Furthermore, these studies represent a
city that is open to new ideas relating to the development and enhancement of creative capital and may be receptive to research regarding artist-run organizations.

And finally, Columbus is the location of several artist-run organizations, providing many organizations as potential case studies. Because there are several artist-run organizations it was possible to select organizations that are focused specifically on the visual arts, eliminating any differences that might occur between organizations serving different artistic mediums. The organizations could also be carefully selected to represent a variety of organizational structures, organizational goals, and organizational success.

Case Study Selection

The four artist-run organizations that are included in this thesis represent a range of groups located in Columbus that focus primarily on the visual arts. In Columbus there are a variety of artist-run organizations, including groups that focus on the visual arts, performing arts, dance, and music performance. Each of these groups faces unique struggles and serves a specific niche in the creative sector. Similarly, the artists in each of these groups also face different struggles and require access to different resources and support. While the organizational structures of each of these groups have similarities there are clear difference between visual arts organizations and performing arts organizations. Specifically, these differences include the role of space and how resources used as we well as the manner in which collaboration occurs. Although there is much to be learned by comparing artist-run organizations in different mediums, for the purpose of this thesis only artist-run organizations primarily concerned with the visual arts will be
examined in order to focus down the research and decrease the variables affecting each group.

To determine which visual arts organizations to select it was necessary to look at a broad range of organizations. While all artist-run organizations share similar goals and motivations, there are notable differences between groups. Some groups are collectives, some are cooperatives, while others are artist spaces. Some groups are built around the need to share resources and are media specific; some groups have open membership while other are closed to outsiders. Certain groups want to function as a non-profit organization, while others want to work as an LLC within the for-profit sphere. I selected a broad range of groups in order to address these organizational differences and the reason why these groups exist and function as they do. In order to critically examine how artist-run organizations operate and why sometimes they do not operate successfully long term it is necessary to investigate several examples, including a case that has run its course as an organization.

The first artist-run organization selected is Couchfire Collective. As a collective, the group has a closed membership and new members join only through invitation. The group has a shared mission and, while their group is not based on the need for shared studio space or shared resources, they meet, exhibit, and hold events at a space dedicated to artist studios. As a for-profit group focused on community events, this organization is an interesting example of a group that is gaining substantial notoriety in the community. It has a strong strategic plan, but also relies on strong leadership from a few members.

The second group I examine was known as BLD. While this group may be classified in many ways, since the group was space centric with an informal
organizational structure this thesis classifies it as an artist-run arts space. This group is now defunct, but it was a unique artist group that provided an affordable work space and opportunities for artistic innovation by working in a very loose organizational structure with great flexibility. However, there are also lessons to be learned regarding their demise as an organization and why many artist-run organizations, like BLD, have a finite lifespan.

The third group is also an artist-run arts space and is named Chop Chop. This group a combination studio space, artist-run gallery, and commercial venture. Chop Chop, like BLD, has also struggled as an organization, but it represents the efforts of two exceptional artists and the unique ways that artists approach their careers. These artists use a shared arts space to promote collaboration, reduce expenses, and promote the image of Columbus as an art city.

The fourth group that I explore is Phoenix Rising Print Cooperative. Like Couchfire Collective, Phoenix Rising has a strong organizational structure and good fiscal and strategic plans. Phoenix has had a relatively long lifespan of ten years and is looking at the next phase of the organization by applying for 501(c)3 status. Phoenix Rising represents an organization that is undergoing substantial structural changes in order to create longevity, but possibly at the cost of flexibility and innovation.

These groups have a range of goals and organizational structures as well as levels of success. While notoriety does not make an organization good, I sought out groups that arts administrators and other artist-run organization recognized as being successful or influential in the community. I excluded several younger groups, because without a track record there was little information to demonstrate the benefit these groups provide.
Furthermore, many younger groups have not begun to tackle the task of creating an organizational structure so it would be difficult to analyze the organizational strengths and weaknesses of the group. Also, I did not include groups that were primarily life/work spaces. Although at times artist lived in the BLD building, none of the groups included in this thesis were built or established to be live/work spaces. Live/work spaces were excluded because there has been substantial research on the topic, but also because unique problems face live/work spaces which are beyond the scope of this thesis. All of the groups included are small groups of artists and are self managed. Other groups with a large membership base, paid staff, and have undergone professionalization as an organization provide an example of how these groups might morph and change long term, however, they do not fit within the scope of this research.

Limitations of Research

This investigation of artist-run organization provides valuable insights on the benefits of artist-run groups for the creative sector of a city, but there are limitations within the research. Because the cases were all selected from one city, there is limited ability to generalize the information to artist-run organizations in other areas of the country. Although certain characteristics are true of all artist-run organizations and certain analyses will be true for all artist-run groups, each city faces its own limitations and situations that will influence these groups in different ways. A large scale quantitative study of the characteristics shared nationally by all artist-run organization would be helpful and provide valuable insight into both the benefits and pitfalls of artist-run groups. An examination of a group over a long period of time would also be beneficial and record how organizational changes and internal and external variables
affect these organizations over time. By examining artist-run organization over a longer period of time, research could also be developed to explore how these groups provide long term economic and social benefits to a community.

There are numerous ways in which this research could be taken further. However, this thesis represents a cohesive look at artist-run organization dealing with visual arts in Columbus. It includes valuable research and a comprehensive look at these organizations and it marks the first steps in researching an understudied area of the creative sector.
ARTISTS AND ARTIST-RUN ORGANIZATIONS IN COLUMBUS, OHIO

Columbus Ohio’s Creative Sector

Columbus, Ohio’s creative sector is filled with an array of for and non-profit arts and cultural organizations. These organizations range in nature, size, and mission. In fact, the greater Columbus area is home to a remarkable 16 “anchor” arts organizations which are recognized for their significant operating budgets (generally $500,000 or more) and their role as leaders in Columbus’ arts community (CCLC, 2006). These groups together make up the Columbus Cultural Leadership Consortium (CCLC), which in a 2006 discussion paper wrote of Columbus: “the community will prosper as a result of arts and culture—as a hub for creative talent, a leader in education, and a unique and vibrant home for families, singles, and businesses” (p. 2). Although this report generally focused on large exhibitions and performances, they also do recognize the importance of Columbus being a “hub for creative talent.” The CCLC advocates for the cultivation of local arts and cultural experiences in lieu of importing external talent and programming from other locations.

The 2006 report on Arts and Culture in Columbus recognizes that locally created art cannot be replaced by arts programs such as traveling Broadway shows or by itinerant exhibitions. Instead, the report states that:
Our locally grown arts and culture will be diverse and prolific, stretching our community’s collective understanding and imagination across all mediums throughout each year. The by-products of our “uniquely Columbus” arts and culture scene include an influx of creative talent for the business sector, the growth and sustenance of characteristic neighborhoods, and state-of-the-art experiences and educational opportunities for learners of all ages (pg. 27).

The CCLC make a strong case for the benefit of locally developed arts and cultural experiences as the report highlights how the arts and cultural sector will enhance community development. However, the CCLC overlooks the role of local artists and does not address any policy for retaining and attracting artists to develop and create local art. Wyszomirksi (2007) writes that a broader view of Columbus’ creative sector needs to be taken, one that includes not only large organizations but also individual artists and the many smaller arts organizations and arts-based businesses that operate within the greater Columbus area (p. 7). Artists are a pivotal part of Columbus’ creative sector and provide a means for locally created arts and cultural experiences.

Individual Artists in Columbus, Ohio

Artists are a key indicator of cultural vibrancy in a community (Jackson, Kabwasa-Green and Herranz, 2006). As the number of artists within a community increases so does the productivity and earnings in the regional economy (Markusen and King, 2002). Furthermore, artists play a pivotal role in developing a community’s creative sector and provide creative capital, the resources needed to develop arts and cultural experiences. The 2007 report issued by the Creative Columbus Policy Steering Committee states that:

The creative workforce—or human capital—is perhaps the key component of the creative industries. Unlike many other industries the arts, culture and entertainment industries rely on a large core of flexible, freelance,
entrepreneurial artists who circulate between the for-profit, non-profit, applied, and community-based segments of the sector (p. 35).

While artists are a key part of Columbus’s creative sector and are recognized as such by the Creative Columbus Policy Steering Committee, little has been done to actually create an environment that is hospitable to artists. Wyszomirski (2007) writes that “clearly, Columbus could tap a wealth of creative capital from these young and emerging artists, if a concerted effort to recognize these assets, and help keep them in the region were part of a creative community development plan” (p. 11). However, little attention is paid to the large number of artists currently living in the area or studying at one of the local higher education institutions.

To get a sense of the artists currently living within the Columbus area we can look at the 2005 National Endowment for the Arts’ (NEA) study on *Artists in the Workforce*. The NEA looked at U.S. census data on individuals who stated that their primary occupation was in one of the following artistic areas: actors, announcers, architects, fine artists, art directors, animators, dancers, choreographers, designers, entertainers, performers, musicians, singers, photographers, producers, directors, writers and authors. This information is clearly limited because it focuses on individuals whose primary occupation is art and does not include the many individuals who work non-arts based jobs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Civilian Labor Force</strong></td>
<td>123,473,450</td>
<td>137,668,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Professionals</strong></td>
<td>21,616,119</td>
<td>26,836,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Arts</strong></td>
<td>1,727,527</td>
<td>1,927,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Artists in Labor Force</strong></td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1: National statistics on percentage of artists for 1990 and 2000 (NEA, 2005)
in order to acquire health benefits or supplementary pay, or who only qualify as a part-
Ohio and, specifically, Columbus. As shown in Figure 4.1 the NEA found there were
nearly 2 million artists in America, approximately 1.4% of the total civilian labor force.
In Figure 4.2, we see that in Ohio, there are 60,860 artists which make up only 1.07% of
the civilian work force, a smaller percentage than the national average. But as shown in
Figure 4.3, Columbus is above the Ohio average and has the highest percentage of artists
in relation to the civilian labor force. Artists make up 1.31% of the total work force with
a total of 10,775 people reporting that art is their primary occupation. Although 1.31% is
only a small portion of Columbus’ work force, it is staggering that over 10,000 report that
their primary occupation is as an artist. It is hard to imagine how many more individuals
are participating in the arts part time or who do not make enough money at their craft for
it to qualify as their primary occupation.

The NEA census data shows that there are many artists already residing within the
Columbus area, but more can be done to attract and retain artistic talent. Markusen, and
King (2003) note that “regional leaders can enhance the artistic pool by working to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>60,860</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
<td>59,218</td>
<td>1.12%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2: Ohio statistics on percentage of artists for 1990 and 2000 (NEA, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Civilian Labor Force</th>
<th>Total Artists</th>
<th>% of Civilian Labor Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
<td>825,501</td>
<td>10,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati, OH</td>
<td>840,817</td>
<td>11,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland/Lorain/Elyria, OH</td>
<td>1,117,237</td>
<td>13,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayton/Springfield, OH</td>
<td>476,216</td>
<td>4,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo, OH</td>
<td>314,862</td>
<td>3,190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.3: Number of artists in major Ohio cities in 2000 (NEA, 2005)
attract, retain and ‘home-grow’ artists as individuals” (p. 11). Furthermore, a city like Columbus that has multiple post secondary education institutions can attract recent graduates by creating an appealing environment for artists—a fact that is confirmed by the Creative Columbus Policy Steering Committee’s 2007 report. Wyszomirski (2007) also notes that Columbus benefits from being the home of several well-respected arts programs that are actively training high quality arts professionals and could add and enhance the city’s creative capital.

In fact, there are currently five colleges and universities located within Columbus that provide arts degrees. Figure 4.4 lists all of the post secondary education institutions located within Columbus’ city limits that provide degrees in art or arts related fields. Many of these schools excel in a particular discipline. There are also several reputable post secondary education institutions located nearby within Franklin County or elsewhere around the state—all with a supply of artists looking for “new peers and mentors, new spaces to convene with others and try out their work” (Markusen and Johnson, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colleges or Universities Located in Columbus, Ohio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College or University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Dominican University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio State Community College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4: Post secondary education institutions located in Columbus, Ohio that offer arts related degrees
For many artists, support comes in the form of access to public grants and fellowships. However, this is an area where Columbus has struggled. The Creative Columbus Policy Steering Committee found that “more can be done to retain this creative capital rather than see if move to other cities. There are few fellowships or grants for artists” (p. 35). Currently the Greater Columbus Arts Council (GCAC) and the Ohio Arts Council (OAC) provide grants to individual artists that are based upon artistic merit or for specific project support. Figure 4.5 identifies the various grants and fellowships that individuals are eligible to apply for from these two organizations. While grants and fellowships exist, the funding resources are limited and only a handful of awards are granted each year. Often very young artists who are early in their professional development are not qualified to receive these awards.

Supporting Local Artists and Artist-Run Organizations

As shown, despite being the location of several respected post secondary education institutions and providing some forms of individual artist support, Columbus is not doing enough to help attract and retain artists. But there is a lot that Columbus can do to make their community hospitable to artists. This is true for young artists who have recently graduated from a school in Columbus, artists who are living outside of Columbus and are considering moving to a “second tier” city, or artists who are already practicing within Columbus but are looking for more support, exposure, and opportunities to exhibit. Markusen, Schrock, and Cameron (2004) report that artists stay in “second tier” cities because of “a combination of amenities, regional support for artists, informal networks among artists and synergy with particular industries appear to explain their [artists] presence and persistence” (p. 1) A recent survey of individual artists conducted by the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Greater Columbus Arts Council (information from <a href="http://www.gcac.org">www.gcac.org</a>)</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPPArt (Opportunities for Artists)</strong></td>
<td>A newly created monthly series to promote artist networking and promotion. Includes professional development workshops, roundtable discussions, social events and more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artist Residency</strong></td>
<td>Finalists and winners of the Greater Columbus Arts Council’s visual art fellowship are eligible to apply for an artist residency in Dresden, Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Artists Fellowships</strong></td>
<td>$5,000 fellowships are granted yearly to artists residing in Franklin County for examples of artistic excellence in the visual arts. These awards are given to artists in the categories of two-dimensional art, three-dimensional art, photography and crafts. Creative writing fellowships are awarded biannually. Fellowships are periodically given in other disciplines, including playwriting, music composition, choreography/movement art and film/video. Since 1986, 125 fellowships have been granted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grants for Artists Projects</strong></td>
<td>Artists may apply for financial support for specific projects when a non-profit arts organization agrees to act as their fiscal agent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ohio Arts Council (information from <a href="http://www.oac.state.oh.us">www.oac.state.oh.us</a>)</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Excellence Awards</strong></td>
<td>$5,000 and $10,000 Individual Excellence Awards are awarded annually to artists who are residents of Ohio and show and demonstrate exceptional artistic talent. Fellowships are in a variety of disciplines including visual and performing arts as well as writing and criticism. Annual awards are available in eleven different areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program</strong></td>
<td>Master artists can apply to receive up to $2,500 to work with one or more apprentices to pass on artistic skills that have been primarily passed on from person to person being passed down through families or communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artists with Disabilities Access</strong></td>
<td>This grant is for up to $500 and is awarded to artists with disabilities to be used towards professional development. The award can go towards a conference, a mentorship with another artist, renting a studio or equipment, working with a consultant, or buying supplies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artist in Residence</strong></td>
<td>Artist may apply to join the Arts Learning Artist Directory. If accepted to the directory after rigorous interviews Artists may be placed in schools or other learning centers for short or long term residencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.5: Fellowship and grant opportunities for Columbus, Ohio residents
Greater Columbus Arts Council (2008) confirmed Markusen, Schrock, and Cameron’s findings. When individual artists were asked what three professional recourses interested them the most, 49.17% of respondents selected “arts advocacy efforts to strengthen the arts infrastructure and develop cultural economy” and 43.13% of respondents selected “opportunities to network with peers” (Greater Columbus Arts Council, 2007).

One way that Columbus and its existing arts infrastructure can help achieve these goals is by supporting and aiding the development of artist-run organizations. Artist-run organizations are artist cooperatives, artist collectives, artist-run arts spaces and other groups that share the common goal of providing peer and career support through an organization run by artists for artists. Byrne, Carroll, and Ward (2002) write:

these organizations [sic] are of great value to the artists in terms of helping them to establish themselves, building their income, providing studio space, building their management and business skills, reducing their isolation and providing the opportunity to develop their own creativity and innovation (p. 16).

In order to explore the benefits and limitations of artist-run organizations I investigate four groups located in Columbus that represent a cross-section of artist-run groups in the community. To gain a greater understanding of what benefits these organizations provide, what problems they face, and how they fit into Columbus’ larger creative sector two senior arts administrator from the GCAC and the OAC were interviewed to provide valuable insights on the role of artist-run organizations.

Input from Columbus, Ohio based Arts Administrators

Since there is limited research on artist-run organizations two arts administrators who have extensive experience in Columbus’s creative sector were enlisted to give their insights on artist-run organizations. Alicia Oddi is the Grants and Services Director at the
GCAC and her job includes determining eligibility for funding, overseeing the implementation of those funds, and aids in the execution of programs that provide arts groups with organizational support. Susan dePasquale is a Program Coordinator at the OAC and her job involves providing arts organizations with organizational support. dePasquale has worked with artist-run organizations specifically in the Northeast region of Ohio, and has extensive experience working with alternative arts spaces.

Both arts administrators have had contact with most of the artist-run organizations examined in this thesis and were willing to discuss the characteristics and issues facing artist-run groups in Columbus. Specifically, Oddi and dePasquale address what is the motivation behind the creation of artist-run organizations and their purpose, what kind of organizational and fiscal issues these groups face, what affect personality and physical space has on group strength, what community benefits they provide and, finally, what threats exist to their vitality and longevity.

Motivation for Organizing

The literature on artist-run organizations show they have historically been an opportunity for artists to work together and take control over their own career and not become beholden to commercial galleries or granting organizations. Oddi (2008) and dePasquale (2008) find that the organizations in Columbus are no different. Regarding the motivation for creating an artist-run organizations, Oddi (2008) states, “it’s about, you know, artists doing for themselves, it’s empowering, it’s an opportunity to create your destiny.” Oddi (2008) also noted that artist-run organizations are mini-democracies in an industry where you don’t always have a lot of control over your product. Creating your own opportunities puts the control back in the hands of the artists.
Furthermore, these arts administrators find artist-run organizations to be a product of need. For many artists, creating a collective organization is a means to resources such as studio space, peer support, and greater public exposure. dePasquale (2008) finds members of artist-run organizations share similar passions and develop a group “out of a direct need—something they needed wasn’t there.” dePasquale (2008) also specifically addresses the need young artists experience immediately after graduating from school. She states, “and I think that if you are an artists out of school and you can’t set up your own studio, some people can, the next thing you are going to try to do is find a collective or an informal group of artists who aren’t even calling themselves an organization or collective where you can go.” dePasquale (2008) believes that artists want to seek out people with similarities and ultimately find strength by being a part of an artist-run organization.

While most artist-run organizations are created to address a shared need or passion its members experience, how the group organizes varies greatly between groups. Both Oddi (2008) and de Pasquale (2008) identify some of these organizational differences, specifically the differences between the artist collectives and artist cooperatives. Oddi (2008) states “I think that with a co-op it may be less about personal interaction and support and more about getting your work done as an artist.” In contrast, Oddi (2008) sees Couchfire, which self-identifies as a collective, as being based on a shared value system. dePasquale (2008) explains the difference by noting that “collectives are about deepening an experience and not expanding it. Co-ops are about expansion, deepening and broadening.”
*Organizational Structure*

Whether an artist-run organization identifies itself as an artist collective, artist cooperatives, or artist-run arts space, both arts administrators emphasized the role that a strong organizational structure plays within the group. dePasquale (2008) finds that there are similarities between a well run arts organization and a well run business. She notes “the first symptom of an organization that is maybe not so healthy administratively is that they don’t have even an informal strategic plan, either short or long term. Or more to the point, they don’t involve any regular evaluation and planning strategy as part of their organization self-assessment.”

Furthermore, dePasquale (2008) recognizes the necessity of clearly identifying jobs within the artist-run organization to ensure people are not wasting their resources and that you are operating with the efficiency of a business. “So the first thing you need is structure, you should have a plan, you should have job descriptions, you should have a board description. If you are an LLC, you should certainly have a structure for administration and a flow chart—that’s what businesses have.” dePasquale (2008) believes that this type of organization allows you to operate at a much more efficient level and diminishes the day-to-day crises like low funds and lack of manpower that many artist-run organizations run into.

Extending the idea of operating as a business, dePasquale (2008) believes it is important to really pay attention to what she calls the “boring stuff.” While many artist-run organizations are built on shared passion, it’s important for these groups to have a strong organizational structure. dePasquale states that a group cannot survive if they have an “alternative space mentality straight to their business practices.” Members have to
return phone call and e-mails, be in the space when they say they will in order to
demonstrate that the organization is reliable and can function smoothly and predictably.

Fiscal Organization

Even before developing an organizational structure, many artist-run organizations
must deal with the issue of fiscal organization. Traditionally artist spaces have sought
non-profit status by filing as a 501c3. While becoming a non-profit organization allows
you to apply for many public and private grants, there are many responsibilities
associated with a 501c3 tax status and requirement demanded of organizations receiving
grants. Many artist-run organizations, including three examined in this thesis, have
decided to remain for-profit and not apply for any external grants or fellowships. Oddi
(2008) recognizes that even though being non-profit may be attractive because of the
funding opportunities there are a lot of obligations that come with being not for-profit.
She adds, “you know for me, the world of public funding and the arts is about making
sure that the community is served and what the market doesn’t support. So if the market
supports you, if you can support yourself, then why be a non-profit?”

However, Oddi (2008) also mentions that there can be an attitude difference
between for and non-profit organizations. Although one is not better than the other, non-
profits are required to work within existing systems and create work that benefits the
community. Non-profit organizations to maintain their 501(c)3 tax status and apply for
grants must provide educational opportunities and prove public value. While for-profit
organizations may also provide these types of programs they are not required to by law.
Also, for-profit organizations often use audience turnout and enthusiasm as a means of
measuring success and do not regularly use evaluations to assess the overall needs of a community.

dePasquale (2008) confirms Oddi’s statements and notes that there is often a naiveté about grant money and that although it may be easily obtained, “there is no surety in grants.” She also notes that groups who are non-profit feel “tied to the obvious and not so obvious mandates of people who fund you.” And lastly, dePasquale (2008) doesn’t believe audiences get an additional benefit if an organization is non-profit. In fact, she speculates audiences do not care or even realize if the organization is for or non-profit and so an engaging and appealing arts experience can be created by a for-profit or non-profit organization.

The Role of Personalities and Space

Regardless of their tax status, artist-run organizations are generally founded and managed by a few key individuals. And, although artist-run organizations are generally democratically controlled, often a few important and capable people with motivating personalities end up carrying the brunt of the work. As dePasquale (2008) notes, “there is clearly someone who takes the reins purposely or takes them because no one else will pick them up. So you know it is either by personality or sheer tidiness, someone has to do it.” However, this can cause a major organizational problem when those key individuals experience burn-out or simply choose to leave the group. dePasquale (2008) believes that planning and a strong organizational structure can help organizations exist apart from a single personality and survive even if they leave.

Oddi (2008) notes that key people leaving an artist-run organization is always a threat and that often group membership ebbs and flows. She states, “I think that with an
artist collective people aren’t going to stick around because of the collective itself. They are going to stay as long as it is beneficial to them.” Oddi (2008) also notes that she believes some organizations can survive even if key members leave, however it is important to note the circumstance by which they left. Key members leaving an organization may be a symptom of larger organizational issues and the end of a group’s lifespan.

Another key threat to artist-run organizations is the availability of space and, specifically, the stability of a group’s chosen location. Oddi (2008) notes that shortly after forming, Couchfire Collective thought there were going to lose their space and some of the members were then going to leave the group. She states, “so then in a way, that space tied them together.” However, Oddi (2008) does not know how space has influenced or affected the other artist-run organizations being investigated in this research. However, like a strong founding member, space is a unifying element to any group. And, in order to survive the loss of a group’s space, the organization must have a strong group identity and organizational structure providing the group direction when restructuring or change is necessary.

The Benefits and Shortcomings of Artist-run Organizations

Oddi (2008) and dePasquale (2008) also weighed in on the benefits and limitations associated with artist-run organizations. As noted previously, Oddi (2008) believes that artist-run organizations benefit individual artists by giving them control over their careers and exposure which is empowering. dePasquale (2008) sees artist-run organizations as filling a real need, whether that be for physical resources or the ability to play out a personal passion. dePasquale (2008) also believes artist-run organizations are
important for young artists who are looking for access to equipment after graduation—which she notes is particularly true in the fields of printmaking and glass blowing where you see a lot of cooperatives emerge. Oddi (2008) also notes that a successful artist-run organization give its members greater exposure, and opportunities for exhibition and potential for the sale of work. Furthermore, by working as a group these organizations are able to provide better marketing, which results in greater visibility for the artists and the group.

In addition to the benefits to the individual artists, Oddi (2008) and dePasquale (2008) also believe the organizations that host events and have a gallery space provide a benefit to the larger community by providing another access point for people to enjoy cultural experiences. Oddi (2008) states,

I think what you do see with the collectives is that they are reaching a non-traditional audience and even a traditional one which is good. I think there is a definite benefit to the participants and to the audience, that maybe is different, it’s not necessarily just about experiencing the artwork it is about who you are experiencing the artwork with and how.

dePasquale (2008) also notes that people seem receptive to these non-traditional events and locations and that OAC is very interested in cultivating partnerships with organizations that appeal to a audiences that may not normally visit traditional arts institutions. Oddi (2008) finds that artist-run organizations that are nimble can also respond to their audiences as well as market demands. However, the downside of the events that these types of groups hold is that their impact as an organization is often limited because they can only accommodate a small group of people at once or their outreach and promotion is restricted.
Despite the benefits associated with artist-run organizations, there are also limitations. Arts-run organizations face problems if they are not well organized and have not defined the mission of the organizations or the roles of its members. Artists-run organizations often deal with member burnout and the potential loss of key players in the group or even the lose of the group’s shared space. Oddi (2008) and dePasquale (2008) also note other less obvious problems or weaknesses. Oddi (2008) finds that, although it is fine for an arts organization to be non-profit, you are not going to see the same commitment to education or the same long term interaction with schools. She states, “you are not going to see those types of, basically those rich deep partnerships of educational opportunities.” Also, Oddi (2008) warns that artist-run organizations cannot be a substitute for the non-profit organizations that are serving these vital roles. Furthermore, for-profit artist-run organizations should not turn their back on the existing arts infrastructure and other funding agencies, because these groups are part of the larger creative sector.

While for-profit artist-run organizations are nimble because of their tax status this does not absolve them of planning or budgeting. Public organizations like the GCAC, the OAC, and private corporations, want to work with alternative artists groups. However, they are almost always going to require a certain level of long term planning and organization. Funders want to see a strong organizational structure and certain materials, such as a budget and strategic plans for any event or program for which they might fund. dePasquale (2008) reiterates before funding an organization, OAC looks to see if “everyone has acceptable and demonstrated organizational management structures.”
Maybe because of the lack of long term planning combined with the many threats facing artist-run organizations most artist-run groups don’t have a long life span. However, neither Oddi (2008) nor dePasquale (2008) see this as a major detraction from the benefits of artist-run organizations. dePasquale (2008) finds that organizations built on a shared idea or value may disband because “that goal is either accomplished or is no longer necessary.” Oddi (2008) notes, many non-profits exist past their viability as an organization and so the lack of longevity in artist-run organizations is not necessarily a bad thing. Furthermore, Oddi (2008) says she would like to see more artist collectives and more spaces available to artist in Columbus.

Conclusion

Columbus has an active creative sector, but the city and the existing arts infrastructure can do more to appeal to individual artists. With over 10,000 individuals in Columbus who state that art is their primary occupation, more can be done to keep them in the area and appeal to new artist, particularly those graduating from the many post secondary education institutions in the area. Arts administrators have found that while artist-run organizations are not the only answer to making a city into a more hospitable environment for artists, they definitely serve individual artists in a unique way and create many benefits for the larger community.

However, as Oddi (2008) and dePasquale (2008) note, many artist-run organizations face critical threats to the stability of their group. The loss of the group’s location, the departure of key members, and a loose organizational structure can also become insurmountable hurdles for an artist-run organization. But by addressing the problems articulated by Oddi (2008) and dePasquale (2008) artist-run groups can become
stronger organizations with longer life spans—or at least operate more professionally
during whatever length of time they operate for. By developing a thoughtful and strategic
organizational structure and fiscal plan artist-run organizations can avoid crises and strive
to new and bigger goals.

The information and input that Oddi (2008) and dePasquale (2008) provided creates a framework for the four case studies included in the next three chapters. Their insights on the way a strong organizational structure helps manage group transition and organization crises informed how I approached and analyzed each case study. Based upon the information Oddi (2008) and dePasquale (2008) shared I broke the case studies up into six areas to gain a better and deeper understanding of each organization. These areas include: a description and history of the organization, an exploration of the organizational and fiscal structure, a look at the organization’s strategic plan or long term goals, a discussion on the role of physical space and the individual members of the group, an exploration of the internal and external benefits the group provides, and lastly, an analysis that addresses the pitfalls and threats facing the organization. These areas of investigation helped to provide a thorough and thoughtful exploration of the four artist-run organizations explored in this thesis.
CHAPTER 5

COUCHFIRE COLLECTIVE

Couchfire Collective is a collection of artists working together to create opportunities for individual artists and to raise the profile of the creative sector in Columbus. As a collective, Couchfire is cooperatively managed and as a group is primarily bound by a similar mission and vision. Although many of the members of Couchfire Collective have studio space in the Junctionview Studio building, this group is not bound by its space. They have a desire to collectively enhance their careers as individual artists and to provide opportunities and cultural events for the larger community. By establishing a roster of arts and cultural programming Couchfire Collective has garnered a positive reputation in the community and a moderate level of notoriety. Part of Couchfire’s success can certainly be attributed to their keen business sense, extensive organization, and ability to promote and market their events. By exploring the organizational structure, fiscal configuration, and the role that space and personality have on this group we can gain a better understanding of what does and does not work within this artist-run organization. We can also make an assessment of how beneficial the group is to its individual members as well as the community. Furthermore, we will critically analyze how the organization can become less vulnerable to both internal and external organizational threats.
To explore the organizational structure of Couchfire Collective and its role in Columbus’ creative sector three members of the group were individually interviewed. The three members include Adam Brouillette, Jen Adrion, and Mike Reed. Brouillette is a painter and co-owns a design company with Adrion. As a founding member and the group’s current president, he gave helpful insight about the group and their organizational history. Adrion is also a painter and graphic designer who is currently serving as the group’s treasurer. Although Adrion was not a founding member, her organization of the group’s finances allowed her to share pertinent information regarding the group’s fiscal structure. And lastly I spoke with Reed, who is a painter and computer programmer. Reed is also a founding member and the former vice president of the collective. His experience speaking to local arts groups about the mission and organization of Couchfire Collective made him an ideal interviewee.

History and Description of the Organization

Started in 2006, Couchfire Collective began as a group of friends and acquaintances who decided to rent a cluster of studios in the Junctionview Studio building. Adam Brouillette (2008), who along with Mike Reed became managers of the Junctionview Studio building, remembers that Reed first showed him the building. When he walked into the space he noticed a group of studios separated by an orange door. Brouillette immediately thought that he and his friends could together rent this group of studios and create an organization of artists. Reed (2008) states, “I think, if I recall correctly, it was a question of yeah, I think we’re maybe going to throw in together and form some sort of collective...And then we just sat down and started kind of brainstorming names.” According to Brouillette (2008), the group’s initial identity was
loose and really just based on the fact that they shared studio space. However, the group started to realize that they had unique skills in marketing, advertising, and computers. Brouillette (2008) states “we started realizing how we had all these individual skills that we could kind of band together to make a website that is really functional and use our individual networking connections to kind of partner. And that took about a year before it really jelled up.” Jen Adrion (2008) remembers the early configuration of the Couchfire, and she notes that initially the mission of the group was much more internally focused: “it was about helping the people within the group to progress as individual artists and with their own work.”

However, things changed dramatically for the organization when they decided to utilize the common space in the Junctionview Studio building and host an exhibition of work by occupants of the buildings they called Agora. According to Brouillette (2008), the first Agora had fifty artists participate in it and a staggering seven hundred guests arrived. When Couchfire Collective decided to have a second Agora, they included two hundred artists and about two thousand people were in attendance. Brouillette (2008) says the group was a little “freaked out.” Adrion (2008) attributes the amazing success of these shows as really shaping the group. She states, “I think Agora was our accidental way of figuring out that we enjoyed kind of involving the community in that as well and that people were actually interested in coming to see what artists were doing in their own spaces.” The second Agora also encouraged the group to take steps to become a formal organization.

Working with a lawyer who had offered his services as in-kind support, the group began researching different ways the group could be organized, what tax filling would be
most beneficial, and how to secure appropriate insurance. Brouillette (2008) says at this
time some people left the group who did not feel they could carry their share of the work
and new people joined. According to their website (www.thecouchfire.org) this included
individuals who were not renting space in Junctionview studios. The group decided to
establish themselves as a multi-member LLC because many of group’s members were
familiar with this tax status because they already owned their own businesses. Although,
Adrion (2008) remembers that some members were initially apprehensive because “they
thought that would create some big structure and then we wouldn’t be able to be
flexible.” According to Brouillette (2008), the LLC filing was ultimately chosen because
it gave them the protection they needed, it allowed all members of the group to have
equal ownership, and it allowed the organization to be profitable. Yet, while the group is
legally allowed to earn a profit, the members decided that no individual would be
awarded a financial benefit and all moneys would go back into the organization—a point
that is clearly stated in their organization operating agreement (Couchfire Collective,
Operating Agreement).

The operating agreement also establishes the organizational structure and the by-
laws of the organization. Brouillette (2008) states that while the organization has
established itself as an LLC and works with a lawyer everything they do is evolutionary
and that “we have a business structure but nothing is written in stone, we purposely leave
it so that we have the capability of changing that business structure if we want.” In fact,
the group is currently undergoing a dramatic change in their fiscal structure to establish a
fiscal core which will allow filing taxes easier on the group.
The group chooses to have a loose organization structure so that they can evolve organically, as it has in the past, and to allow the organization to remain flexible and nimble. This allows for possible changes in membership as well as mission. Currently the group’s mission as posted on their website (www.thecouchfire.org) states:

The Couchfire Collective is a group of sixteen members who share a common drive to progress as individual artists, develop as a collective, and to raise the profile of Columbus' creative community. Our mission is to provide artists and art patrons with diverse opportunities to make connections and become active participants in the local arts scene. We advocate collaboration and communication between individuals, groups, and professional organizations who have a mutual interest in the arts. By positioning ourselves as enthusiastic innovators, we work to promote awareness of the artistic community as an essential component of civic development.

In order to fulfill this mission these sixteen artists, who vary in age from mid 20s to early 30s and with various forms and levels of art training, worked together to create different programs, events, and services that range in scope and nature. The Agora event, which continues to be the group’s largest endeavor, is an exhibition that is open to all artists in the community and has historically attracted a large group of patrons. The group also hosts smaller events throughout the year. These include classes, juried exhibitions, individual or group shows, as well as less traditional events such as a fashion show or a music event. The group also works with local businesses and organizations to collaborate on projects whenever possible.

Organizational and Fiscal Structures

In order to fulfill its mission statement and serve its members and the larger community in the best possible manner, Couchfire Collective established a strong organizational structure. As noted, this structure involves the creation of a multi-member
LLC. By establishing itself as an LLC, Couchfire Collective is not required to have board of trustees or any other form of external oversight. Instead, the members of the group must establish their own organizational structure and abide by the rules established by the operating agreement. Brouillette (2008) notes, one way that the group has created internal oversight is by appointing officers. As stated in the by-laws, these four offices, the president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary, make up the board of directors and must be voted into office by 75% of the group’s members. The organization’s extensive by-laws establish all the operating rules and practices, including that there will be monthly meetings, decisions must be passed by a 75% vote, new members can only join through a vote of 100%, and that the group will accept votes via phone or internet. While the by-laws go into great detail regarding the organizational structure of the group, Adrion (2008) notes that on a day-to-day basis these operate as unspoken rules. Ultimately the rules for the group boil down to “do what you say you’re going to do, don’t over commit and become absent, just be honest and open about what you can and can’t do and how you feel about the different decisions and everything will just work out.”

Although the officer positions are the only official roles articulated by either the operating agreement or by-laws, Brouillette (2008) says that the other members chip in based upon their individual talents. “The rest of the talents and stuff like that is more like when somebody is brought to the group we know what they’re good at and they’re saying I’m really good at this and I like doing this, we’ll do this for the group.” Brouillette (2008) also notes that committees are created for individual events. And for Agora, which the group created as its own LLC for added protection of Couchfire’s assets, they have
numerous jobs including “a promotions coordination and a sponsors coordinator and an artists coordinator and a music coordinator.” Of course, Brouillette (2008) acknowledges that not everything goes smoothly, and there are certainly ebbs in flows in individual’s commitment to the group. “And there have been ups and downs with that too, people saying hey I can do that and then they don’t. But the good thing is when one person trips and falls and doesn’t do what their supposed to do there are two other people there to say hey I can get sponsorship this time. It’s a learning process for sure.” However, the groups strong organizational structure seems to have created an atmosphere where roles are clearly defined and individual members are clearly aware of what is expected of them as a member.

The organizational structure of Couchfire Collective is also inextricably tied to their fiscal structure as a for-profit organization. When creating their fiscal structure, Couchfire decided that they wanted to be self sustaining as a group and not apply for public grants. Reed (2008) states “I think the sentiment is shared among members of the group, you know we can raise money, we can make our own money, we don’t need a grant.” This idea is echoed by Adrion (2008) who says they considered having the Ohio Arts League, a local membership-based organization for artists, act as their fiscal officer but decided it was more trouble than it was worth. She notes,

All of our events are self sustaining at this point; we have enough sponsors and contributions that come in from private donors. And just from the event itself, admission fees and other tiny amounts of money that we gather, they are profitable on their own. So we don’t really see the need to dip into any other types of funding.

And, although the group is technically for-profit, the operating agreement does clearly state that no individual may profit from the group and that all proceeds will be put back
into the group. If the group is ever disbanded, any money that is left will be given to the Ohio Arts League to create an award given out at either their fall or spring juried shows.

One way in which the group is able to keep their organization operating in a self-sustaining manner is through keeping expenses low, by budgeting based upon existing funds, and acquiring in-kind support or contributions to cover event costs. Most of the members do have studio space in Junctionview Studios, but each member is required to cover their own rent in the building. And, according to Adrion (2008), up until this point there have been no major capital expenses and their few expenses have generally included usable materials such as paint for the building’s walls and ink and paper. Other expenses they must cover include paying for the group’s insurance policy as well as the computer server that the group keeps to host the collective’s website.

All other expenses the group incurs are event related and are generally offset either by the event itself or through the external support they are able to secure. The group hosts many events and plans many programs throughout the year, but their primary event is Agora, an exhibition that any artist may enter that also includes bands, performance arts, and food. According to Brouillette (2008), “the funding comes from what type of show it is: how does that show make money? And what is a reasonable percentage for the group to put into that show? What are our expenses?” Agora requires renting a tent and a PA system, so they ask artist for a $5 entry fee. Last Agora they had 300 artists, providing them with $1,500. The group then asked a $2 admission fee at the door and, with 3,000 people in attendance, they made $6,000. Some of this money went towards their costs, but other income is kept to help fund other less profitable shows. This
In addition to artist fees and admission costs, the group also secured support from local businesses. According to Adrion (2008), these gifts are secured by a sponsorship or contributions team. She notes, “it’s actually more like selling ad space in a program or selling marketing rights at the event. So we work out different arrangements with different private companies and individuals. That is where we get the majority of our kind of start-up funds for each event.” Couchfire has also had several local companies provide in-kind support by offering food and other services to be used during Agora. Adrion (2008) would like to refine this process in the future so that they do not have to continuously approach the same people and businesses for support. She is working on creating a “system where people can sign up at different levels and then buy add ons.” This change will coincide with Couchfire completing what Adrion (2008) calls their first “full schedule of events,” which they hope to replicate on an annual basis.

Couchfire also acquires some revenue through membership dues—an income source that will certainly change in the near future. Brouillette (2008) says when the group decided to establish a business structure they took the money they had made as a group and split it up so everyone got $50. Then they decided “you can give this $50 back and be in the group or you can keep the $50 and go home and have a nice day.” This established the membership dues as a one time $50 fee for new members. However, the group is undergoing a significant change in their structure that may dramatically change the role of members and member’s dues. Adrion (2008) states that the group decided to alter the organizational and fiscal structures because of difficulties the group was
experiencing at tax time. She notes that after completing the operating agreement there were already members listed in that document who had left the organization and new members who had joined. “It made tax time awful because I had to track all these people down and make sure that they still reported correctly; it was a nightmare.” Furthermore, Couchfire’s operational agreement states that individuals will be reimbursed through the group’s bank account for whatever taxes are paid. However, Adrion (2008) says it was very difficult for people to figure out what percentage or amount of their paid taxes were because of Couchfire. What ultimately happened is that some people were reimbursed while others paid the taxes themselves. The group also had to ask members to leave who were not U.S. citizens, because they were unable to be listed on the LLC because they did not pay U.S. taxes.

To address all these issues the group has decided to create what they are calling a fiscal core. According to Adrion (2008), this will mean that only four or five members, who choose to be, will be listed as the owners of the LLC. This means that “the four or give of us in the core will accept all the liability if legal action were ever taken, and financially for taxes.” The other members in the group will purchase memberships that are similar in nature to a health club membership and be allowed voting rights. Brouillette (2008) recognizes that this core group will remain very small because “the benefits of being a financial member are really very few compared to just being a regular member.” The group believes this new system will allow them to broaden their membership and allow members who move out of the Columbus area to remain active in the group. However, one major change that will occur will be in budgeting and allocation of money. Since only the core members are liable, they will be responsible for
determining how much can be spent on an event or program and then the group together will vote on how to delegate those funds.

While Adrion (2008) believes this is a great way to allow the international members to rejoin the group and streamline the tax process, Reed (2008) warns that there may be unforeseen ramifications. He notes that “the burden of liability, tax liability, personal liability, becomes increased with every person who leaves the core group. And really if all those people leave and everyone else just hasn’t stepped into that role than there is no business. And then what happens?” This new organizational structure will certainly have an affect on the group, how they grow and change in the future, and the individual roles members adopt. However, it is too early to really determine how this new financial core will look when their planning is complete.

Organizational Strategic Plan

One way an organization helps to guide their group through these types of transitions is by developing a strategic plan. Despite having a mission statement, an operational agreement, and by-laws, Couchfire Collective has not written a formal strategic plan. Brouillette (2008) says this decision was intentional. Instead of a creating a strategic plan the group focuses on reaching certain goals. He states, “it’s really hard to pin down a standard strategic plan. We do have goals…The goals that we set are achievable, sometimes ridiculous, sometimes achievable.” These goals include being written up in a national magazine or having a show that includes artists outside of Columbus. However, the group’s primary focus is on accomplishing their organizational mission and raising Columbus’ profile as an arts city. Adrion (2008) believes that the new fiscal core structure will allow the group to go global, and, as she says, “almost
bringing the message of Columbus as a legitimate arts city to kind of the international community.” Brouillette (2008) echoes this sentiment and says he hopes that if someone from New York City came to Columbus and attended an Agora event he or she would leave feeling like they had experienced something awesome. Brouillette (2008) states that he would like them to leave and think “Columbus is a really cool place to be.”

Brouillette (2008) however does not have any plans for how Agora may look in the future, what the group may do, or how it will benefit the community. Instead, Brouillette (2008) seems focused on producing high quality events. He notes, “there are only so many things you can control. We can’t control the participation we can only control the quality of whatever we handle.” Brouillette (2008) also hopes that more events like Agora occur in Columbus, that Couchfire can be a fire starter for other collectives in the area. He hopes Couchfire can help provide input and aide whenever possible for new groups to emerge and successfully organize in Columbus.

The Role of Physical Space and Individual Personalities

While a strong organizational structure and a thoughtful strategic plan help give an organization stability, it is important to identify potential hurdles facing the group. Just like other artist-run organizations, physical space and individual personalities play a large role in influencing the group dynamic and will have a large affect on the group’s future. Clearly, because it played such an instrumental role in inspiring the creation of Couchfire Collective, space is an important element affecting this organization. Reed (2008) thinks that “the single most important thing for creative people is to have a physical space in which to do their work.” And, specifically, the Junctionview Studios created a positive space for collaboration because “it helps to have a common space to use where ideas are
at a confluence.” However, early on, the Junctionview Studios, where most of the Couchfire members have studios, was purchased by the Nationwide Realty Investors (NRI) and Brouillette (2008) thought that the group was “dead in the water.” If the group would have lost the space early on, before they had established themselves as an organization it would have been unlikely that they would have continued as a group.

However, the group was able to approach NRI and convince them that the building was viable as artist studios and that Reed and Brouillette could help manage the space and keep it at full occupancy. According to Reed (2008), people thought they should protest when the building was sold. Instead he said,

> Maybe we just go talk with them and tell them that there’s $10,000 a month coming through here and we can get it running pretty reasonably and we can keep the studios full because we have a waitlist and that we are pretty professional about the whole matter and see where we can go from that. And they were down with it.

While it is hard to speculate what influence the Couchfire Collective had on NRI’s decision to keep the building artist studios, it is reasonable to assume that Couchfire’s reputation and success as an organization helped persuade NRI that their appeal was legitimate. Since then Reed and Brouillette have negotiated with NRI to construct artist friendly leases while taking on the role of building managers.

Despite the early reliance on space to unite the group, the collective has since accepted new members who are not renting space in Junctionview Studios. Brouillette (2008) finds that the space is no longer as integral to the group. He states,

> We’re almost outgrowing the space. The space has become sort of a weird anomaly like we are not necessarily tied to the space the way our business is set up. Many of our members are not in the studio, originally it was, it was about sharing a studio. Now we have expanded outside of that.
By creating a strong organization system, Couchfire has created a group identity and group bond outside of the physical space. This is an important safe-guard if the building is latter sold or repurposed. In fact, Adrion (2008) says that she and Brouillette would like to pursue building a new facility that is specifically designed for artists and built with green technology in the future.

While the physical space a group occupies can have a tremendous effect on an organization, so too can the personalities of individuals involved in the group. Personality and individual talents helped create a unique group in Couchfire Collective. The member’s experiences as small business owners and in marketing have equipped the group with the skills necessary to create a successful organizational structure and a buzz in the community about their events. Another key element is that the group sees benefits in hiring professionals when they feel they have the appropriate skills to handle an organizational issue. Reed (2008) notes that as a group “you either have a larger pool of people that might have those expertise or you got a larger pool of people from which to generate income to pay an accountant or to pay…we have an attorney.” Although not all organizations may decide to hire a professional accountant or attorney, clearly that decision had aided Couchfire.

Couchfire’s organizational documents help define the role of the group’s members and specifically the responsibilities of the officers. This, as Reed (2008) notes, has created a hierarchy within the group and requires certain individuals to take on additional responsibilities. Adrion (2008) confirms this finding and says that “the people who are in those officer roles end up doing most of that work and picking up that slack. Partially because they’re the most comfortable with it.” As a result, Brouillette, the
president of Couchfire, and the other officers have taken on a large amount of work. A burden that Adrion (2008) recognizes is a huge personal sacrifice. The added responsibilities placed on the officers might pose a threat to Couchfire’s longevity as an organization. While the benefits might currently outweigh the costs, Couchfire must be aware of the potential for member burnout and how losing an active leader in the group could affect the organization. Reed (2008) hopes that no one in the group creates a situation where, if he or she leaves, the group would not survive. He sees this as “a real disservice.”

Brouillette (2008) believes the group would probably continue even if key individuals left the organization, however, it would most certainly effect the overall dynamic of the group. Like most artist-run organizations, Couchfire Collective is successful because of the personalities and skills that exist in the group. Any change in that dynamic could have a huge effect on the larger group. Along with the loss of key members, Brouillette (2008) is also considering how new members who join the group have high energy and big ideas will affect older members who are starting to burn out from so much activity and are less motivated to try new ideas. In describing this dynamic, Brouillette (2008) states “we have our pessimists and our optimists. We have our grunt workers and our thinkers. It’s a fine line, it’s a fragile balance. Do I think that personalities rule the group? Definitely. Do I think the group would implode if certain personalities left? Not necessarily.”

Another way that the group can help aid in the transition between older members and newer members is by carefully selecting who they ask to join the group. As a collective, Couchfire has a closed membership and rarely invites new members to join the
group—a practice that might change after the new fiscal core structure is implemented. Brouillette (2008) says currently when someone asks to join the collective he does not tell them no. Instead, they encourage them to come and help out at our events and show at the shows. This is because, “the issue isn’t having too many, it’s having too many that aren’t willing. The hardest part of being a member of Couchfire Collective, the hardest part is really just maintaining the level of activity. We have meetings once a month. We have events all the time.” Adrion (2008) notes that, by the time someone becomes a member, they feel like a member already because they were asked to join they were very active with the group and volunteered often. It is unclear if this practice will continue or if the membership will be opened up to when the fiscal core is established. Certainly, their creation of a clear organizational plan will help the organization transition into whatever changes or circumstances it encounters. The group may also benefit from a succession plan if more active members decide to leave the group.

Internal and External Benefits

As a successful artist-run organization that has garnered significant exposure in Columbus’ creative sector Couchfire Collective has provided its members and the larger Columbus community with significant benefits. As noted previously, the notoriety of the group may have helped secure Junctionview Studios as an artist studio space and aid members and non-members of Couchfire by maintaining their work space. By retaining access to a building with a large common space, Couchfire secured a location capable of handling large crowds and the big events they host. The group also provides a forum for its members to network with fellow artists and provides a source for peer support. The group has empowers its members by creating an organization that Brouillette (2008)
classifies as “for artists by artists,” giving the group negotiating power and the ability to
pool resources to acquire necessities like insurance and legal representation. Furthermore,
the group provides its members with unique experiences through group events and, more
importantly, their group identity.

Reed (2008) notes that being a member of Couchfire has definitely opened doors
for him and provided new opportunities, including the chance to exhibit work and
exposure that comes from having Couchfire known and respected in the arts community.
Adrion (2008) agrees with Reed (2008) and finds that the being a member of Couchfire
has afforded her a lot of opportunities. She states,

People are going to my exhibition now because they know I’m a member
of this group and members of this group have a great reputation for
making good work and kind of being culturally relevant and having open
arms to the community. I mean, I couldn’t ask for more. That’s something
I couldn’t achieve alone making paintings.

Adrion (2008) also notes being satisfied that the media has taken an interest in the
organization and that city council members have approached the group about their
opinions on Columbus’ creative sector.

Brouillette (2008) also recognizes the benefits he has received from being a
member of Couchfire Collective and acknowledges that pooling resources as a group has
made it easier to promote and market himself as an individual artist. But Brouillette
(2008) also tempers his statements by noting it only works because everyone in the group
was hard working to begin with. Brouillette (2008) states,

Does it make it easier for me to be an artist by being in a collective? Yes,
but only because I was doing things in the first place. Just joining the
collective doesn’t do anything for you—the whole group was originally
found on the idea of let’s all work together and do rather than doing it on
our own or as a small group of people doing for everyone else.
By focusing on creating a committed and organized group, Couchfire provides many benefits to its members and creates a strong organization that will continue to succeed as long as the group is able to balance its membership and organizational needs.

While the group has provided its members with significant benefits, the collective has also benefited the creative sector and the larger community. Adrion (2008) states community is a major part of their mission as an organization; they are very concerned with how they can serve others. “We’ve really grown into and we strive to create opportunities for not only artists but people who want to go out and have something fun to do. Really everything we do now we think about how our guests are going to react to it and how the people who are participating in it are going to benefit from it.” Brouillette (2008) feels that creating attractive events that gain exposure and large audiences will also help establish an image of Columbus as an arts city, providing benefits for the entire creative sector and the larger community.

Brouillette (2008) believes they achieve these benefits by being a unique organization, one that adds to the creative sector in Columbus, works with established organizations, and does not duplicate efforts. Couchfire Collective differs from other organizations by being aware of the community and their connections to many groups and organizations in the town. Brouillette (2008) states, “there is a certain grassroots level to it that allows us to be on the ground running rather than…I feel very connected. I think the group is very connected. I think we’re well aware of what’s happening.” This awareness allows the organization to also reach out and aid newer collectives or artist-run organizations that are forming in the Columbus area. Brouillette would love to help out
new organizations and provide mailing lists and let them know about their pitfalls as an organization so new groups can avoid them.

In addition to supporting other artist groups, Adrion (2008) and Reed (2008) both believe the group provides a positive example of artists who are succeeding within their craft. Adrion (2008) notes “I think that we also provide an example, just as individuals, that you can make a living doing what you love and if you structure your life accordingly that you can have art be a very large component of what you do just on a daily basis.” This example shows that Couchfire may aid in the retention of young artists to the area and enhance Columbus’ reputation as a city hospitable to artists. Brouillette (2008) believes Couchfire has definitely kept people in the area and that the people have notified the collective that they decided to stay in Columbus after they attended an Agora event—a point that is corroborated by both Adrion (2008) and Reed (2008).

Organizational Threats and Pitfalls

While Couchfire Collective seems to be operating in a successful manner with a strong organizational structure and clearly defined expectations, there will also be certain threats or pitfalls that may affect the group. As has already been noted, the loss of the group’s physical space may have a significant and potentially damaging effect on the group. If NRI decides to repurpose or sell the space, the collective may have trouble organizing its members and agreeing on what new space to occupy. However, it does appear that Couchfire is not space centric and that they have created a strong enough organizational structure that the group does not need to be tied to the space. Furthermore, Adrion and Brouillette have already begun taking steps to establish a new space that may be a feasible option for the group in the future.
A larger threat facing Couchfire Collective appears to be the role of individual members and, specifically, the loss of older members and the introduction of new members. While the new fiscal core may make tax time easier, the group needs to address and plan for the affect that this change might have on the group. The group needs to determine what extra authority the fiscal core will have over key financial and organizational decisions and if that extra responsibility comes with compensation. Also, the group needs to take steps to ensure that the new fiscal core will not alienate older members who have chosen not to take on the added liability associated with being in the fiscal core. Older members may have difficulty with new members who are joining in the new format and feel as if they are being replaced or made obsolete by newer more energetic members. Along with the introduction of new members the group needs to take careful steps if any key members decide to leave the group. As Brouillette (2008) notes the dynamic would certainly change in the group if any active and vocal member left the group and, if this member had specific responsibilities, the group needs to establish a succession plan before that individual leaves.

Couchfire Collective also needs to give more thought to working with other arts organizations and corporations within the community. Although the collective chooses to be for-profit, it would behoove them to establish a working relationship with the Greater Columbus Arts Council and the Ohio Arts Council. A relationship with these organizations would help establish themselves within the creative sector and provide a support system that could help the organization if threats arise or the group experiences lean years. Working with these organizations and accepting any public funds would require the group to do more fiscal planning, create detailed event budgets, and secure
sponsors that would be willing to provide matching grants. The process of establishing event budgets would also bode well with potential corporate sponsors.

Eventually the group may want to establish surveys or evaluations to measure community response to their events. Although the group may feel that they have an ear to the community, many organizations or corporations want to see an assessment of how their contributions affect the community with specific examples. While Couchfire Collective may have no desire to apply for these types of grants or funds at this point, it is something for the group to consider if they hope to grow and expand as an organization. Furthermore, while the group wants to grow organically, if the new fiscal core equates to a larger membership the organization should consider creating a strategic plan. A large group is hard to manage and establishing a strong path as an organization can help diminish internal conflict.

Finally, the group must also be aware of member burnout. Currently the group is highly successful, in large part due to the tireless work of its members. However, it is easy for members to feel burnout, especially when they are not being compensated for their actions. There is no easy solution to avoid burnout, but the organization might want to brainstorm on possible methods to better share the work load. Some possible suggestions include term limits for the officers, outsourcing more administrative work to an accountant or other professional, or even establishing an internship program to provide additional administrative support.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Couchfire Collective seems to have established an artist-run organization that has been professionally and personally profitable for its members and
the larger community. Although Couchfire will certainly experience growing pains, their diligence in creating organizational documents and legitimizing their organization has given them a clear purpose and strengthened the group. Creating an open mind to collaborations with existing arts organizations will allow the group to solidify its role as an important and successful group within the larger creative sector. Furthermore, future diligence will help to give this group a long and fruitful existence.

The Greater Columbus Arts Council (GCAC) and the Ohio Arts Council (OAC) can also help Couchfire by providing additional support in developing critical business skills. As Couchfire grows and changes as an organization, these two arts organizations can help Couchfire see the importance of a strong budget and event plan in order to help the organization secure larger corporate donations or even possibly public funding. By giving the group one on one support and direction these two organizations can help strengthen and aid Couchfire Collective. Also, as the group grows the OAC and the GCAC can work directly with Couchfire’s members to deal with any expansion issues and members turnover that occurs.
CHAPTER 6

BLD AND CHOP CHOP

The last chapter established that Couchfire Collective is a successful artist-run organization that has a strong organizational structure and a positive presence in the community. In this chapter I explore two artist-run organizations: BLD and Chop Chop who, unlike Couchfire, have been less successful. Although BLD disbanded as an organization and Chop Chop struggles to find active and invested artists to join their group, both are interesting case studies of the benefits and limitations of artist-run organizations. By investigating these organizations we see many of the obstacles artist-run organizations face and are able to make a critical analysis of how struggling artist-run organizations can improve.

While Couchfire organized their group as a collective with a shared vision but closed membership, the two organizations explored in this chapter can be classified as artist-run arts spaces. Both organizations share characteristics with collectives and cooperatives. However, their loose organizational structure, varying levels of group identification, and emphasis on access to studio space qualify these two groups as art spaces. Artist-run art spaces are location centric and are concerned with creating unique arts spaces that are managed by and for artists. However, there is a wide spectrum of artist-run arts spaces, and they vary greatly in how the group or individuals are organized.
and how much collaboration occurs among tenants and group members. However, like other artist-run organizations, artist-run art spaces thrive to create opportunities for artist by artists, provide a location for networking and peer support, and hope to provide individuals with additional exposure through identification with the group or location.

BLD and Chop Chop are both interesting examples of artist-run arts spaces and have had arguably had less successful careers as organizations. Although BLD existed for nearly nine years and created a unique community of artists living and working in one space, their benefit to the community and their ability to increase exposure for its members was limited, because they were illegally occupying a building zoned for manufacturing. The members were evicted from their space because of zoning and health code violations and, although the spirit of the space lives on, the actual group does not. While the group was working outside the arts infrastructure the space still provides important lessons regarding the benefit artist-run organizations provide individual artists and the interesting dynamics that keeps these groups in operation—in this case for nearly a decade.

In contrast, Chop Chop gallery is a three year old space that continues to grow and change. Chop Chop was formed by two artists working together to develop a unique space that could aid their own careers and help other artists in the Columbus area. However, the space has struggled to find the right mix of individuals who are committed to the project and are interested in creating collaborative relationships with the other tenants. Despite their difficulties, Chop Chop still provides a professional venue for young artists to exhibit work, and they hope to increase their impact on the larger community. As a young organization committed to a long life in the Columbus area Chop
Chop is a good example of an organization that has struggled but also has a lot of potential and the energy of two passionate artists behind it. By looking at their organizational structure and their goals as an organization Chop Chop provides valuable insight into an artist-run organization that is semi-successful but has potential for great accomplishments.

To better understand the ways in which these two organizations succeed and where they fail I explore the organizational structure of both groups, the benefits they produce as organizations, and the pitfalls they face. Together these two groups provide invaluable information on artist-run organizations. As most groups are not as successful or well known as Couchfire, BLD and Chop Chop’s informal organizational structures and various problems are characteristic of many small and relatively unknown artist-run organizations. By exploring less formal or successful organizations, this chapter shows that all artist-run organizations provide some benefit. Also, I give a critical and prescriptive analysis of how groups like BLD and Chop Chop can avoid many of the organizational threats they face.

To gain a better understanding of both of these two organization key members were interviewed from BLD and Chop Chop. Charles Schiavone, who was the founder of BLD, talked extensively about his role in developing the group and how BLD affected its members. Chad Shepard from BLD was also interviewed. Shepard took over many of the responsibilities of group leader when Schiavone left the group and provided insight into the later days of BLD and the eventual fate of the organization. Ashley Puckett and Craig Dransfield, who are the major forces behind Chop Chop, were interviewed about their
artist space. As two members of this growing group Puckett and Dransfield were able to
detail the ins and outs of the organization as well as their hopes for the future.

History and Description of the Organization-BLD

According to Schiavone (2008), BLD was born in a moment of epiphany after he
had a motorcycle accident. In a hope to create direction in his life, Schiavone (2008)
decided after the accident to approach some acquaintances, who he describes as “really
creative, interesting people,” and convince them to get together and to find a building.
Upon seeing the eventual location of BLD on East 2nd Avenue in Columbus—a former
brick factory—Schiavone (2008) signed the lease immediately. BLD, which was named
after the initials imprinted on the bricks produced in the factory, had a slow start and
there were initially very few occupants in the space. He notes, “for the first maybe two
and a half years it took every penny to keep that place going, thousands of dollars,
because we didn’t have complete occupancy.”

Schiavone (2008) describes the people who did join the group as “naïve artists.”
Some had formal training in the arts but most were professionals in others areas. Later
on, the individuals who occupied the space were less professionals and “much more the
vagabond arts set” according to Schiavone (2008). Schiavone (2008) states he was
ultimately looking for a certain kind of person to join his space. He remarks, “those were
the people I was looking for: the mid thirty somethings who really had a lot of dynamic
energy who were dissatisfied with whatever it was they were doing. And we kind of
figured out a way to focus our energy and pull off some of the big shows we did.”
Shepard (2008), who joined the group in its later years, expands on this sentiment, “I
think it was just, you know, one of those kind of change things where people come
together and they find they have like minded things and they just want to be around each other and do things.” Shepard (2008) also found that, after the building was more established, they did not need to advertise to find new tenants because people always wanted to have a studio there. The building “just had an energy, you wanted to be there.”

The space which was an abandoned warehouse which Schiavone (2008) says had a major influence on who he allowed in the group. He developed a “strict set of criteria” in order for new people to join the group. “I had to like them, and I also had to appreciate their work—some more than others. And there was a specific skill set that I was looking for, because the building at its core, I mean at its core it was a warehouse.” Schiavone (2008) also notes that individuals who decided to rent studio were individuals who “could make stuff happen for themselves,” because he did not have the time to construct studio spaces for the occupants. In addition to renting studio space, many of the artists also lived in the building. Shepard (2008) remembers that the living space was rustic but finding a live/work space with minimal rent allowed him to devote most of his time to developing his craft.

In order to manage this unique combination of live/work space, Schiavone was initially in charge of the space and all decisions were made by him. However, that changed when Schiavone (2008) became involved in the activist community. He recalls, “I brought that activism back to BLD with me and told them, I’m no longer in charge, I can’t make these decisions on my own anymore. And we started having weekly meetings and we started making decisions collectively.” He remembers that in 2000 or 2001 they began holding compulsory group meetings. Schiavone (2008) calls these gatherings where the group would discuss everything from the building, interpersonal relationships,
potential events, as well as individual projects and people’s recent artwork house
meetings.

Although Shepard (2008) recalls that the group met bi-monthly and sometimes
weekly, he notes that the group remained informal. There were never any organizational
documents and the group never filed for a particular tax status. The space was essentially
non-profit in nature because it was never the goal for the group to make money. When
asked about a mission statement, Schiavone (2008) remembers that the group did spend
time discussing their mission as an organization. He remarks, “I don’t remember what the
statement was about. You know, creative living space, it was just kind of what we were
about and it was based on the anarchist ideal of self rule and mutual aid—self
responsibility.” In addition to providing a living space and studio space, BLD as a group
also hosted events and exhibitions within the space.

These events included annual parties which highlighted the resident’s creativity
and skills. These parties became a way for residents to alter the space through creations,
like a roller coaster that made its way through the building or an entryway maze.
Schiavone (2008) remembers the parties as “a showcase for some really unique and just
gritty play.” In addition to parties, BLD also hosted art exhibitions. Some exhibitions
were sponsored and organized by the group like the Hit and Run Show, but they also
rented out the space to young artists to produce their own exhibitions. The space was also
rented out for concerts and acted as a versatile venue for many events.

However, the group’s and the building’s publicity from these events also brought
on its demise. According to Shepard (2008), there were “too many shows, too many
people living there.” Eventually the city became aware that people were living and
occupying a space that was not zoned properly or up to code, so the tenants were evicted. Shepard (2008) says that even after the physical space closed there was still some cohesion in the group. The people who were still interested in retaining an artist-run organization began hosting shows and exhibitions in their homes and operated under the name BLDVV. Currently there is no longer any group that identifies itself as BLD or BLDVV, although several former members remain active with two artist-run organizations in Columbus named Shelf and Skylab. Schiavone (2008) sees these groups as a natural reincarnation of BLD and a way for some former members to continue to explore unique opportunities through an artist-run group.

History and Description of the Organization-Chop Chop

Like BLD, Chop Chop grew out of the aspiration to take ownership of one’s career and life. Chop Chop is the brainchild of Ashley Puckett and Craig Dransfield and was formed out of their desire to have a studio space be an important part of their lives. According to Puckett (2008), who is dating Dransfield, “when I met [Dransfield] we both had similar frustrations of being part of a studio but wanted, being, like committed to making studio part of our lifestyle. Art’s not really a hobby as much as I wanted this to be part of my everyday routine.” After Dransfield began renting a garage in the building, where Chop Chop is now located, the landlord gave them the opportunity to rent the rest of the building. Puckett (2008) remembers, “[Dransfield] had the garage and he shared it with one other person. And then we had the opportunity to share the rest of the space. And we were like we should do this,”…”We just wanted to bring our ideas of studios together.”
So initially Puckett, Dransfield, and a third artist decided to work together and develop the idea that they would do screen printing out of the space, rent out studios, and also develop a gallery and a retail space in the front of the building. But Puckett (2008) remembers that when they began construction on the space the third artists decided it was more of a commitment than he wanted. She states, “I wouldn’t have necessarily jumped into it because then it’s just the two of us. And I’m like ‘oh great,’ there’s not this third person to like change and make it professional. It’s just, you know, two people doing something, and it was a lot more stress.” However, Puckett (2008) notes that this also made them develop the space quicker, because they needed to begin renting out the space to cover their rent and utilities. It took about six months of 12 hour days to prepare the space and develop the many elements that make up Chop Chop.

Although the space was not conceptualized as a collective or cooperative, Puckett (2008) says she definitely wanted to create a space that promoted the sharing of ideas and collaboration. She wanted to attract a wide group of people and hoped that they could teach each other skill sets and together show and sell their work in the space. Puckett (2008) remembers, “I had a friend who was really into sewing and I really wanted her to be a part of the space, because I thought she’s really into sewing and I could learn from her, and she could sell her stuff in the front. And, you know, it was that same thing with five or six different people who happened to be wanting to start little businesses.”

However, the space did not develop as Puckett and Dransfield had initially planned. Although they were able to rent out the space to a large number of artists, and even bartered rent for labor with a few tenants, Puckett (2008) says that she and Dransfield were burdened with the majority of the work. Puckett (2008) notes,
Initially we were interested in having other people be part of the gallery and part of the retail space; because I thought our original crew were people who expressed interest in having gallery shows and selling stuff in the retail space. And then, it’s like, no one really wanted to actually spend time painting the walls or building the walls in the gallery space or the retail, and that’s kind of what it involved for me.

Early on Chop Chop also met with other complications. During the first year they had problems with the building and were faced with a poorly working electrical system which ate into the organization’s revenue. Also, Puckett and Dransfield custom built many of the studios. However, since there was not a lot of long term commitment to the space, people often left after only a few months of arriving. This kind of turnover burdened Puckett and Dransfield with additional work and left them frustrated. In that first year Puckett (2008) tried to instigate meetings to promote a stronger community of artists, but she remembers “there was some interaction, but not really. Nothing organized or planned.” There was also a communal space that they ended up being removed because no one was taking responsibility and cleaning it.

Puckett (2008) thinks these early failures in creating a cohesive and collaborative group can be attributed to several factors. One potential downfall is the space had a lot of equipment, it could have been over-stimulating for a lot of artists. This also caused a problem because they wanted to share the equipment, like a screen printing press, that was in the space but it required a lot of work to train the other tenants. Other times, instead of learning, people would ask them to do it for them taking up their time and resources. Puckett (2008) also thinks tenants were perhaps not as invested in the group, because they did not share in the risk of running the space. She notes, “people can be associated with Chop Chop when it’s cool, but when it’s not cool then it can be like ‘I
just rent a space there.’” Puckett (2008) also acknowledges that a lot came down to money. She and Dransfield needed to constantly ask tenants to pay their share of the utilities or ask them to chip in. Needing to get the space operational and rented quickly may have made it difficult to find a group of people with the same expectations and goals. Puckett (2008) notes, “I think it would have been super hard to get a group of seven people together and have us all be”…”it just comes as far as you want to move. It’s hard enough with two people moving at the same speed.”

While Chop Chop has not given up on the idea of creating a collaborative space, they have started to appeal to different tenants who will provide more stability to the space. To do this, Puckett and Dransfield have raised the rent and look for artists and artisans who are looking for longer terms of commitments. Puckett (2008) says their current tenants are more active in the DIY movement and are all small business owners. Dransfield (2008) says their relationship with their current tenants is more like a neighborly relationship. Everyone in the building has such different interests, like soap making or bicycle frame building, that they don’t really share ideas or critique each other’s work. However, he still finds, “we’re always excited to see what people are doing. It’s like the more people who are in the space we always get more excited because it’s like there’s a buzz going on in there.”

Puckett (2008) and Dransfield (2008) see the space as ever evolving and hope to see it grow organically. Although they have no formal organizational structure, as small business owners they have filed the space as an LLC. And, although they have no formal mission statement, Puckett (2008) sees the mission of the art space as “creating an environment and also attracting other interesting, talented people and being able to show
my ideas. You know, like being able to have a space that reflects like me, but can also reflect like whoever comes in.” Puckett (2008) says that, after working for three years on the space, they hope to focus less on the space and finally begin working again on their artwork and developing their businesses. However, Puckett and Dransfield will continue to rent out the gallery, sell wares in the retail space, as well as completing screen-printing and design jobs out of the space while developing their own personal art.

Organizational and Fiscal Structures

As previously noted both BLD and Chop Chop have informal organizational structures and have limited organizational documents. BLD specifically, strived to keep the group informal and to adhere to anarchist principles. When asked about the organizational structure and member responsibilities Shepard (2008) comments, “Charles [Schiavone] collected rent. If something needed work on, whoever was motivated to do it would do it. There wasn’t any…it was anarchy. I mean, that doesn’t mean there wasn’t structure, it doesn’t mean chaos—I mean there’s still structure. So yeah, Charles did mostly everything though.” Even after Schiavone (2008) relinquished his leadership position, in order to promote collective management of the space, he still kept the organization in line. He notes, “I was always the brakes, I was always telling people don’t do this don’t do that, turn that down, don’t talk to the newspaper, don’t advertise, and no bands.” When Schiavone left the group he then put Shepard in that position.

Schiavone (2008) notes that other members of BLD stepped up and took on some of the group responsibilities. He assigned someone to do the book keeping whenever possible, because he was bad at it. Other people would step into roles when planning and setting up for various events. He remembers, “it had a lot to do with skill set: who can do
what; who can hand lights for this show; who can get food for the show; we need to get art for the show.” When the building began renting out the gallery space for exhibitions the group also enlisted a member to act as gallery coordinator. According to Shepard (2008) this was started “so then you have someone be there when the people come, to answer questions, help them fix the walls, all that kind of stuff—gallery stuff. So they needed someone to do it—a gallery coordinator.” Schiavone (2008) remembers that the gallery coordinator position was shared and that its main responsibilities included answering the phone and scheduling shows, along with making sure the renter brought their “toilet paper and light bulbs.”

Although BLD rented out the gallery for a nominal rate, they had very few ways to create revenue as an organization. Schiavone (2008) remembered that “we barely covered the bills. We just barely covered the bills. And sometimes it was a big stretch.” Their expenses included rent and utilities, which were high because of the size and nature of the building, purchasing bottled water for the residents, phone, and high speed internet. Schiavone (2008) notes it took a lot to keep the space going:

Like whatever we had, whatever little bit of money, because we really didn’t have an income until the gallery started charging. There was no way to make money. I certainly wasn’t covering the rent with studio rent, because I really had absolutely no idea what I was doing. And I basically just botched the job.

In this respect, although the organization never filed with a specific tax status, they never operated in a manner to make a profit.

Schiavone (2008) also notes that they did not take money from any art sales made in the space. That the entrance fees collected at events went to cover the expenses associated with those events. A few capital purchases were made, like a vacuum, and, on
those occasions a special collection would be taken from the members to cover the cost. The group also never applied for any public or private funds. Schiavone (2008) made this decision in order to protect the group from possibly being evicted from the space. He recalls not wanting the exposure associated with grants. “I don’t want grants because I don’t want them looking in here. You know if the individual wants to get a grant, go ahead. But I didn’t want that, I would love to have the money, but it just wasn’t worth it.” With little revenue, the group kept expenses minimal. Schiavone (2008) says the group utilized a local organization name Re-Art to gain access to donated equipment and supplies, and the individual members used their personal connections to secure resources whenever possible.

Like BLD, Chop Chop has no formal organizational structure. However, they have filed as an LLC, operate in a properly zoned and inspected building, and have constructed a business plan. Puckett (2008) says the business plan was created for the landlord. When asked what it included she notes,

I think we just divided up the space and said we’re going to have a retail space, we’re going to have a gallery. And then we’re going to have separate studios and we’re going to be doing arts shows. And we’re going to be making t-shirts and we’re going to be silk screening t-shirts. It really wasn’t that interesting.

However, Puckett (2008) acknowledges that the plan wasn’t too detailed, because they didn’t want to provide their landlord with too much information. Puckett (2008) also notes that, because the group is currently just her and Dransfield, they are able to operate without many organizational documents. But she understands that “if there were more people, I’m sure it would be different.”
Because the group is primarily the responsibility of two artists, defining relationships and member roles is not as critical as in a larger organization. Dransfield (2008) states, “I think we’ve pretty much, we each have our own responsibilities as far as like the things that we do, and it’s just kind of been organic and what those ended up being. Like, mine ended up being the more hands on labor stuff and Ashley’s ended up being more the PR, and, you know, paying the bills and handling the artists.” Currently, Puckett and Dransfield’s relationship with the tenants is one of a landlord. They no longer require their tenants to participate in group activities or require any commitment to collaborate. Puckett (2008) notes that this was certainly a goal with the tenants they had during the first year but now they are looking for tenants who value the space and are willing to pay a higher rent to occupy a studio. Although Dransfield (2008) acts as a landlord to the other tenants he tries to keep the relationship informal. He says, “I think they know they can come to me if they need stuff.”

Because Chop Chop is an artist-run arts space with little group identity or collaboration, their expenses are generally tied to the building and relate to general upkeep and improvement. Puckett (2008) says their goal as an arts space was never to make money off of their tenants, but “our plan was definitely to be able to break even by renting out to our tenants.” Any profit they would make comes through their personal businesses and the gallery space. However, they have not always been able to cover the building’s rent with what they receive from tenants. Puckett (2008) states, “except for the first year we’ve never broken even. We’ve always been at about half. Like, we’d cover half the rent and the tenants would cover half.” Puckett (2008) says that other revenue
sources include their silk-screening and fees for gallery shows. However, many times they rely on “non-art stuff” in order to raise the funds necessary to cover expenses.

Although Chop Chop operates as a for-profit organization, they have received a grant from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council. The grant was for $7,000 and was to cover the expenses of two exhibitions. Puckett (2008) recalls that it was not a great experience and that “they ended up being super rigid about what we can do, which they probably said from the beginning, but we just didn’t read the fine print.” In the end Puckett (2008) felt one show was successful but the second show “just didn’t work because we felt too confined to what they wanted us to do.” She also said they would not be interested in working with that type of public agency again; but would consider applying for an arts grant.

Organizational Strategic Plan

As two organizations with limited organizational structures and organizational documents, neither BLD nor Chop Chop has ever created a strategic plan. To a certain extent, BLD was limited in their capacity to grow as an organization because they wanted to remain at their location and operate under the radar. However, Chop Chop, while they have no strategic plan, certainly has goals for their future as an organization. Puckett (2008) says their goal for the next year is to focus less on attracting new people and spend more time working on their own artwork. Puckett (2008) states, “our intention isn’t necessarily the space and making the space great but, it’s like, we’re working and were making. Like let’s say we get really into making art and we just start doing shows other places. I think it will be reflected in the space.” Dransfield (2008) sees this next year as a chance to potentially spend less time working on the space and more time working in the
space. The hope is that taking some time away from building the arts space will help rejuvenate the pair and bring them back stronger to the organization. In the long term, the pair would like to see the space and the organization develop organically and for the right people to join them in building it into a strong artist-run organization that can include collaboration.

The Role of Physical Space and Individual Personalities

Given the lack of organizational structure, organizational documents, and strategic plans both BLD and Chop Chop are especially susceptible to internal and external threats. Two of the major influences on artist-run organizations, both positively and negatively, are physical space and the personalities of group members. Clearly in the case of BLD, the physical space that the group occupied played an important role in the development of the group and their eventual demise. Schiavone (2008) says that the building was a very special place. When he looked for people to join the group he always considered their ability to help maintain the space. He states, there “was this give and take with the building itself. Because it’s a very old building, there’s a lot of sweat and blood dripped into that floor by the men who lived and died in that building. And I demanded that people respect that and respond to that.” The space was also very versatile; its size and ability to be transformed led it to be used in a variety of ways. It was able to be used as a venue for concerts, for parties, as well as exhibitions. Shepard (2008) says that it truly was an experience to have a show there, because it was not a pristine exhibition space but a “big barn” with character. Schiavone (2008) remembers the gallery space as having a unique energy that was created through the “dynamic mix of individuals we brought to the gallery and the funky space.”
While the physical space is what initially bonded this group and gave them energy, it was also ultimately their downfall. The group’s biggest problem was that they were illegally residing in a building zoned for manufacturing. Shepard (2008) notes “some people were living there, some people weren’t. It wasn’t zoned for residential. It’s actually zoned, it’s still zoned, manufacturing. So it’s not even a commercial space, you can’t even have a business.” For Schiavone (2008) this meant that BLD always needed to keep a low profile and attract as little attention as possible. He states that “up to a point we had been flying under the radar because it wasn’t a public [endeavor].” However, when Schiavone left the group in 2003, he put Shepard in charge of the building and the dynamic of the group and their goals started to change. Many of the older group members wanted to keep things quiet because they didn’t want to lose the space, but the new members wanted to reach out more to the community. Shepard (2008) says the sentiment with the new members was, “hey we want to do shows and blow this place up in the sense of hey look at the awesome things that are going on here.” Ultimately, what Schiavone (2008) felt happened was that “folks understood that participation was down, attendance was down, so they felt, against my wishes and against my explicit instruction, that advertising on CBE and in the paper would help bring their attendance back up.”

It is believed that an employee of the city attended one of the publicized shows and found out that there were people living in the space and notified the appropriate city agencies. Shepard (2008) says, “basically there were twelve people from the city that came—it was the city. They came through in mass from, like four or five different departments. Like building code and plumbing and—it was horrible.” After the city came through, the group had only a few days to completely vacate the premises. After the
eviction BLD took on different manifestations and a few members tried to keep the spirit of BLD alive. While some members continue to work with other artist-run organizations, the loss of the building on East 2nd Avenue essentially marked the end of BLD as it existed.

While the role of physical space plays a critical role in BLD’s story, individual personalities certainly influenced BLD’s nine year life as an organization. Clearly, Schiavone as the founder of BLD played a tremendous role, not only in developing the group but also in keeping it afloat. By acting as the “brakes,” as the rent collector, and as the access point for new many members, Schiavone helped maintain balance and continuity in what may have become a chaotic space. While it is hard to determine if Schiavone’s leaving helped lead to the group being kicked out of the building, certainly his caution in not becoming too vocal or visible as an organization allowed the group to survive for so long.

While Schiavone played an important leadership role, it is also worth noting that a lot of BLD’s tenure can be attributed to a unique dynamic of personalities. It is remarkable that an organization operating under the radar could have existed with no real organizational structure for nine years. A lot of that success is possibly best attributed to a dynamic environment and a good balance of individuals.

For Chop Chop, space also plays an important role. With less of an emphasis on group identity, Chop Chop’s major function is as a studio space and gallery for hire. Puckett (2008), who had a studio in the BLD building, notes that this space is different than BLD, because they want to take every step necessary to operate legitimately so they do not lose the space. She notes, “I think we’re kind of opposite on the spectrum because
we like the idea of the ongoing like bigger project. Because we don’t want to risk not
doing something and then getting in a lot of trouble and losing the whole building. We
like the idea of being here at least…we have a five year lease.” Dransfield (2008) says he
would like to be able to build on the steps they have already taken and eventually create a
space that is self sustaining.

Puckett (2008) also feels that there is something unique and appealing about the
space that they have created. She states, “I love the gallery and the little store front and
the potential it has to be a really interesting space. But it needs, we need, three or four
other people to help us out and be into it too.” As this statement exemplifies, while
physical space is at the core of what this organization offers, the role of individual
personalities has and will have a tremendous effect on the long term success and
achievements of this group.

Chop Chop will exist as an organization as long as Puckett and Dransfield are
committed to the arts space. But in order for the space to grow and to develop as a
collaborative environment they must attract people who are able to help carry the work
load and bring passion and excitement to the project. Puckett (2008) remarks that she
believes they will eventually be able to find four or five people who are able to help them
develop the space. But she notes if they can’t “we just, you know, decide this is too big of
a space and move out.” Puckett (2008) says the process of finding the right people is a
difficult one. The individuals who are proactive generally already have projects in the
works and are not interested in joining their space. Chop Chop does not want people who
are merely followers. Puckett (2008) notes that, “we just have to find the right kind of
person who’s open to…because I think collaboration is really important. When we were starting the space I was really interested in collaborating ideas.”

The real challenge for Chop Chop is balancing input and control. As business owners, Puckett and Dransfield have significant investment in the many arms of Chop Chop, some of which are important revenue streams for them. They have to find a way to allow new members acquire some of the risk that they have taken on and determine what control over their business they are willing to share. If Puckett and Dransfield find they are unable to share that risk because their personal businesses are too intertwined with the Chop Chop arts space, then they may be unable to attract individuals who will approach the space with the same enthusiasm and dedication.

Internal and External Benefits

Despite their organizational pitfalls and limitations, both BLD and Chop Chop have provided benefits to their members and to the larger community. As artist-run studio spaces both organizations either developed or are in the process of developing environments where artists can gain access to a physical location to practice and create art in the vicinity of other artists. These two groups have also created formal and informal networks, allowing artists to develop peer support systems and opportunities to share and communicate ideas with other artists. For BLD this was a major benefit of the creation of this unique space. Having a shared studio space definitely enhanced the work being accomplished. In Schiavone’s (2008) opinion, “one plus one equals three. The word they use in the business world is synergy I guess. The dynamic energy created of two or more gathered in His name you know. You got more done because we had that positive

100
creative force.” Schiavone (2008) thinks this group dynamic also allowed them to create impressive shows and unique events.

For Shepard (2008), a lot of the benefit of the BLD space came from being able to live and work in a very affordable location. Limited expenses allowed him to focus the majority of his time on creating new art work. In terms of additional exposure and exhibition experience, Shepard (2008) felt that this was limited. He notes, “I had shows there now and then. I think that people might know your character more if you say I’m at BLD. Like oh, ‘okay, I know where you’re coming from, you guys do stuff all the time, you’re proactive.’ That was probably the closest benefit to being part of the name or whatever.” But Schiavone (2008) feels that the space provided both members and non-members with opportunities for exposure, but acknowledges that at exhibitions it was not always easy to tell whose work belonged to BLD members such that being a member did not necessarily provide additional benefit.

As for the larger community, Schiavone (2008) believes BLD created benefit through opportunities to exhibit in shows—renting out the gallery for student exhibitions—and through their distinctive events. Schiavone (2008) saw opening up the gallery to young artists as a way to provide opportunities that he did not have. He remarks, “so I wanted to help myself. You know, retroactively help myself, because I had always wanted to have a show and was never able to. I know a lot of my friends always wanted to have shows but were never able to.” However, BLD’s ability to attract and retain young artists to the Columbus area seems minimal. Many members of BLD stayed in the area because they were active in the group, however, most of the early members eventually ended up moving out of the Columbus area.
While BLD benefited the community, their impact was clearly very limited because of the nature of the group. An organization promoting illegal residence in an improperly zoned building could not create relationships with other arts organizations or take an active and public role in the larger creative sector. By working under the radar, BLD also refused to work with the existing arts infrastructure and develop public programming that could have enhanced the larger community.

While BLD had a large membership but limited community involvement, Chop Chop has limited members but works hard to create a space that is known and appreciated in the community. Like BLD, Chop Chop provides its members and tenants with a unique studio space. Because of the dedication and passion of Puckett and Dransfield, Chop Chop studios are custom spaces that are developed to suit the needs of the individual artists who rent there. Through the use of these custom studios, Puckett (2008) says that a lot of early tenants of Chop Chop were able to develop and build their businesses by being in the space. Puckett (2008) recalls that early on she and Dransfield spent so much time managing the overhead of the space and giving advice to new business owners that they “kind of became an arts incubator.”

While others have benefited from the studio space Puckett (2008) and Dransfield (2008) feel like their ability to take advantage of those benefits has been limited. Although the space provides them a location to run their multiple businesses, the maintenance and work associated with the space has often kept them from enjoying its rewards. According to Dransfield (2008), “We basically helped them get up and going, and then we’re like, oh we haven’t done any of our own work. So it’s really hard to quantify how it’s really helped us, because we really haven’t been able to utilize our own
space.” However, Puckett (2008) feels that the experience has taught her a lot of valuable skills about running and developing an artist-run arts space that will give her more skills and confidence in the future.

Although Puckett and Dransfield have not been able to work on their personal art as much as they like since founding Chop Chop, Puckett (2008) feels being associated with the organization will provide them more legitimacy in the future. She finds a lot of people know about the space and that operating in a professional manner has also given legitimacy to the Chop Chop Gallery. This development of the gallery is a significant way in which Chop Chop provides benefit to the larger community. By supporting local artists and creating a space for young artist exhibitions and bands performances, Chop Chop creates opportunities that expand beyond the organization. One way in which the gallery specifically appeals to emerging artists is by providing a venue in which developing artists can exhibit work. Puckett (2008) remembers her experience as a young artist and notes, “I would have these ideas and I would look up galleries like Roy G Biv and Mahan [Gallery] and they all required proposals and submissions and it was like a six month thing. And ours is immediate like, if you have an idea for a show, you can pretty much come in and do it next week if you wanted to. And I think that’s super important.”

Another benefit to the community comes from Chop Chop’s commitment to Columbus and developing the city as a place known for good arts and cultural experiences. Dransfield (2008) says that Chop Chop has started to gain national recognition because of the legitimate way in which they operate their space. “There’s a lot of arts spaces,” he states, “but as far as ones that are kind of working at the level we’re working at there’s only like a handful that have like credibility”…”So you know we get
our national recognition if we need it.” This national recognition also allows Chop Chop to create partnerships with other arts spaces and bring artists to Columbus for collaboration. This kind of national exchange enhances Columbus’s creative sector and improves Columbus’s image as an arts city.

Although there is no evidence that Chop Chop’s programs and services have retained or attracted any artists to the area, they are clearly focused on providing resources to artists within the community. By creating a space and exhibition opportunities for artists Chop Chop is helping to make Columbus a more hospitable environment for emerging and established artists. Also, developing relationship with arts spaces outside Columbus, Chop Chop raises the city’s profile and that may potentially attract new artists from other locations.

Organizational Threats and Pitfalls

Despite the benefits these two organizations have provided (and in the case of Chop Chop, continue to provide) it is impossible not to delve into the many threats and pitfalls that faced BLD and still face Chop Chop. In retrospect, it is easy to notice the problems that faced BLD and what factors led to the organization’s demise. By operating in a space zoned for manufacturing, BLD was limiting their ability to operate in that space for the long term. Furthermore, without a strong organizational structure and clearly defined group roles, it was unlikely BLD would have survived the loss of their physical space and a potential move to a new location. Their necessary secrecy severely limited their ability to impact the larger community. By working outside of the arts infrastructure BLD was able to create unique events, but their ability to enhance Columbus’ creative sector was restricted.
While it was ultimately the loss of a physical space that lead to its collapse there were many other threats to BLD that could have caused its demise. Without organizational documents and clearly defined roles, it is remarkable that BLD was able to survive as an organization for nearly a decade. What ultimately ended BLD’s successful run as an organization was reaching out to the larger community. Yet, if BLD had taken steps to operate in a legitimate manner they would have been able to have a larger impact, work with public arts organizations, and potentially have survived longer as an organization.

For Chop Chop the threats to the organization are still very present and steps can be taken to address potential problems that may affect this artist-run arts space. First, while Chop Chop currently has only two members, if it hopes to grow as an artist-run organization, it must develop a stronger organizational structure and organizational documents. By creating a formal mission statement, by-laws, and a strategic plan, Chop Chop increases its legitimacy as an organization and opens the door to greater collaboration with local arts organizations and corporations. Developing clear expectations and defining member roles will also aid in creating relationships with new members that are productive and fulfilling.

Beyond creating clear expectations, Chop Chop also needs to look at their current organizational structure. By combining personal businesses with the larger artist-run arts space it limits new member’s ability to feel risk and investment in the organization. Chop Chop may decide they do not want to separate the businesses for financial reasons, but they should note the potential barriers it posses to creating more collaborative and cooperative relationships. If Chop Chop does not want to introduce new members, they...
face the threat of burnout and also substantially limit their ability to develop as an organization. Puckett and Dransfield have already experienced fatigue. Introducing new members and distributing the risk will also distribute the responsibilities and work load.

By their own admission, Chop Chop has not widely marketed or promoted their space. “We’re not self promoters,” Dransfield (2008) states. “The way things happen in Columbus is that the people who are out there tooting their own horn are obviously going to get the most attention. And we, I guess like I said, we don’t have the time to toot our own horn.” Unfortunately, if Chop Chop does not do some marketing and promotion of their space other artists and the larger community will not know about the wonderful opportunities and experiences that they have created. By not reaching out to the larger community, Chop Chop limits their impact on the greater Columbus community and limits the number of people who know and may support their organization. In order to share their energy and passion Chop Chop needs to advertise their organizations more which in turn will help attract like minded individuals.

Conclusion

BLD and Chop Chop are interesting examples of artist-run organization and, provide invaluable insight on the problems and limitations many artist-run groups face. As examples of organizations that have had limited success, both demonstrate the potential weaknesses of artist-run organizations, but more importantly, highlight areas within artist-run organizations that can be improved or strengthened. As a defunct organization BLD is a fascinating case study of how an informal organization can have a long life, but also what problems can ultimately lead to a group’s demise. In contrast, Chop Chop is an organization that is experiencing difficulty during their developing
years. As an artist-run arts space they have struggled to find individuals who support their mission and want to help build the group. However, while both organizations may not be deemed successes by traditional measures, both groups have still provided many benefits to its members and the community. Furthermore, these groups exemplify the amazing accomplishments artists can make when they take control of their careers and work to make their own opportunities.

Much has already been noted concerning how BLD could have, and Chop Chop can take steps to improve the strength of their organization, but both groups could also be aided by the Greater Columbus Arts Council (GCAC) and the Ohio Arts League (OAC). While BLD would not have qualified for public funding and Chop Chop’s informal organizational structure may limit their opportunities to receive grants there are ways in which GCAC and OAC could have and still can provide organizational guidance. By providing a consultant or programs to help artist-run organizations develop stronger organizational structures, write organizational documents, work with the city to change a building’s zoning or find an appropriate location, and produce effective marketing strategies, these two organizations can provide non-monetary support to artist-run organizations. While much of the burden relies on the artist-run organizations to pursue support and instruction from public agencies such as GCAC and OAC, programming that provides business and management skills and not direct-funding may be more appealing to artist-run organizations like BLD or Chop Chop. This kind of instruction would help strengthen struggling artist-run organizations and help them avoid unnecessary pitfalls and problems.
CHAPTER 7

PHOENIX RISING PRINTMAKING COOPERATIVE

In the last chapter I explored the artist-run arts spaces, BLD and Chop Chop. Although these two organizations have not experienced the same success as Couchfire Collective, both groups are interesting studies on the limitations and benefits of artist-run organizations. In this chapter I examine Phoenix Rising Printmaking Cooperative. As an artist-run organization in the Columbus area for the last ten years, the group has experienced relative success. However, although they have continued as an organization for a remarkable amount of time they have struggled to meet their financial obligations and have recently decided to apply for 501(c)3 status. As a non-profit arts organization that has sought out public funding Phoenix Rising serves as an interesting foil to the previous three organizations investigated in this thesis.

While Couchfire is an artist collective and both BLD and Chop Chop are artist-run arts spaces, Phoenix Rising Printmaking Cooperative is an artist cooperative. An artist cooperative is a group of artists that collectively manages and owns resources to promote the creation and exhibition of artwork. Like many artist cooperatives, Phoenix Rising has an open membership and relies on member dues and volunteer work to operate and manage its shared facility. Phoenix Rising, like other artist cooperatives, is very space-centric and based on the need printmakers have to access large and expensive
equipment that they are unable to obtain as individual artists. In addition to providing access to space and equipment, Phoenix Rising also provides a network of artists that promote peer support and increase opportunities for exhibition and exposure. Phoenix Rising has been serving Columbus printmakers in this capacity since 1998. As the only printmaking facility in the Columbus area located outside of a university or college Phoenix Rising provides vital resources to many Columbus artists. Although the group’s impact has been limited to the medium of printmaking, their contributions to artists working within that genre has been significant. Entering its tenth year, Phoenix has begun taking the steps necessary to become a 501(c)3 to help give the group a stronger organizational structure, access to much needed public grants, provide greater potential for growth, and create a stability that will promote group longevity. By focusing on an artist-run organization this chapter explores the benefits and pitfalls associated with acquiring a 501(c)3 status.

In order to learn more about this group two members were interviewed who have had a long history with it. Anne Cushman was one of the two founding members of the cooperative and has consistently provided strong leadership and direction for the group. Given her history and role in the organization Cushman was able to give keen insight on the history of the organization as well as the impact of the decision to apply for 501(c)3 status. Cindy Davis has also had a long history with the organization. As a reliable and long-term member Davis is also well acquainted with the inner workings of the cooperative. She has been very instrumental in the application for grants and provides valuable perspective on the group’s relationship with other local arts organizations.
Together, these two women provided helpful information and insights on an organization that has struggled, but survived, for ten years within Columbus’ creative sector.

History and Description of the Organization

Phoenix Rising Printmaking Cooperative was started in 1998 when Cushman (2008) arrived in Columbus and realized that there was no access to printmaking equipment in the area for non-students. She recalls,

I moved here from another city in which I would have had a choice of about 6 different places I could have printed, because there were printmaking workshops all around the metropolitan area. I moved to Columbus and there was nothing—nothing, nothing, nothing. And so, along with another woman who was a former teacher we formed Phoenix Rising out of need.

While Cushman (2008) acknowledges that there were printmaking facilities at several local colleges and universities, she notes that as an older professional artist she had no desire to re-matriculate in a school in order to gain access to necessary equipment.

However, while there was a need for a printmaking studio in Columbus, Cushman (2008) found that opening the cooperative was very time consuming and difficult. Together with her co-founder she initially applied for public funds to get the space going. However, because the organization was not yet operational Phoenix Rising was ineligible for an operating grant. Without funding, Cushman (2008) states that it took about three years of renovation before they were able to move into the space. The two women worked with the landlord to secure a grant from the city to work on the exterior of the building and used their own funds to acquire equipment. According to Cushman (2008), “[the landlord] got a grant from some agency in the city to fix up the outside of the building, the storefront part, to comply with the neighborhood”… “And so she and I and
the owner of the building worked together to get the place established. We put our own personal funds into buying the equipment in order to get started.” Cushman (2008) says that the equipment they secured were mostly cast-offs from some of the local colleges and universities, and others were cheaply bought at auction. However, despite the grant and the used equipment, the co-op was unable to make ends meet its first year. Cushman (2008) states, “it became apparent at the end of the first year that we weren’t going to get enough people. We were basically renting out the space for people to use on an hourly basis or a weekly basis to come and do printmaking projects. But we could not sustain ourselves enough to pay the bills operating that way.” It was at this time that they determined exactly how much money Phoenix Rising would require to stay open on a yearly basis and decided to create a system of core members that would cover the costs through membership dues.

In order to cover the costs associated with keeping the print studio open, Phoenix Rising developed a two-tier membership system. The core members sign up for a year commitment and pay on a monthly basis. Cushman (2008) notes they try to have at least ten core members at any time because that would cover the yearly expenses for the group. She states, “we would welcome more if we could but it’s very difficult for us to just even keep ten constant members. A core member pays $75 a month and that gives them unlimited time to work here in the studio and gives them a key, so the place is available to them 24 hours a day.” As well as being responsible for membership dues, core members are also required to attend monthly meetings, take turns as the shop steward, and to help raise revenue and provide community benefit through teaching workshops.
In addition to core members, the group also has associate members. Cushman (2008) says that associate members only pay $75 for the year and they get a limited amount of hours to print in the studio. “And then after that they pay a reduced rate to rent the space.” As noted on Phoenix Rising’s website (www.phoenixrisingprintmaking.com) the co-op will also rent out the studio on a daily or hourly basis, but are dependent on the availability of a shop monitor. Along with the two forms of membership, Phoenix Rising also created a student membership. Cushman (2008) states that

> We made what’s called a summer three month student scholarship, and that way someone who’s just graduate, or is in the process of looking for a job, or preparing their thesis work they can come here for three months and not make the year commitment. They pay $150 for the three month membership.

In addition to the student membership the co-op also works with local colleges and universities to provide an internship opportunity for local printmaking students.

Although Phoenix Rising has made an attempt to appeal to younger printmakers through their student membership and internship, the group is decidedly older. They have some members in their thirties, but many of the longer term members are older. Cushman (2008) notes that they have three members who are currently between the ages of 50 and 70. She states, “the three, myself included, who are in that top range aren’t going to be here forever so we really want the place to continue and so we’re hoping to draw in more.” In addition to a broad age rage that is weighted towards older members, the group is also predominately women. Cushman (2008) also states that the members of the group generally have had some formal training in printmaking and are all considered professional artists. Most members are very experienced in their craft and make a portion of their income as an artist.
Cushman (2008) believes it is this mix of professional artists that allows Phoenix Rising to survive as a printmaking cooperative. Because professional printmakers require access to equipment a printmaking cooperative can always keep a membership base. Cushman (2008) notes,

Printmaking in general as a medium is very tedious, very time consuming, and requires equipment. And a lot of artists whether you’re professional or not don’t have that kind of equipment in their own studio. And some choose to not have it because they can’t afford it. Others choose to not have it because it takes up too much space and they have to have too large of a studio.

By serving a group of artists that require specific tools, Phoenix Rising is assured a group of artists will always demand their services. This idea of providing resources and serving the printmaking community is articulated in their mission statement. As posted on their website (www.phoenixrisingprintmaking.com), their mission statement says, “Phoenix Rising Printmaking Cooperative is dedicated to promoting the art of printmaking by providing a well-equipped studio and an environment of mutual support, camaraderie and inspiration for artists and students.” As this statement notes, in addition to supplying tools, Phoenix Rising provides members with a community of artists that offer peer support. This peer community is at the very heart of Phoenix’s cooperative structure.

By combining resources and collectively managing the space, Phoenix Rising has created a printmaking studio that fulfills the needs of its member in a way that could not be accomplished individually. Cindy Davis (2008) finds that having a vital need for equipment helps promote a cooperative environment where people are able to work together. She states, “I think it works as a cooperative when you have resources that you do need to have in common and it’s not just a space, it’s a press”…“We function as a
group more closely it seems, both financially and as an entity to get something accomplished.”

It is as a group that Phoenix Rising is entering their next phase as an organization. In order to create longevity and greater organizational stability Phoenix Rising has decided to apply for 501(c)3 status. Phoenix Rising has considered applying for a non-profit tax status twice before, but they had always decided that it was more work than they wanted to undertake. Now, in their tenth year, the artist-run organization has decided to become non-profit in order to help their organization grow. This tax status will allow them to apply for more grants, to expand their mission, and to increase their capacity as a group. The group also hopes that becoming non-profit and setting up a governing board will also give the group longevity and allow the group to survive expansion and the eventual loss of key members.

Organizational and Fiscal Structures

As a cooperative organization, Phoenix Rising is collectively owned and managed. Phoenix Rising created organizational documents such as a mission statement and by-laws when they were created, but they have not been revisited during the group’s tenure. Instead, Davis (2008) finds that the group and its cooperative nature has developed organically and requires little explanation to new members. Instead, individual members tacitly agree to work as a group when they join the cooperative and commit to the requirements of membership. Davis (2008) sees this natural group dynamic as a testament to the need for a printmaking cooperative fills. She states, “I think that that in itself speaks to the need for it in the community of printmakers, and also the ease of its facility. It didn’t need to be explained or spelled out. There’s never really been a question about
it.” The natural understanding that occurs between Phoenix Rising’s members has also helped the organization function for ten years with no tax status and minimal organizational structure.

Cushman (2008) states that initially the organization applied for 501(c)3 status when they first formed but were turned down because they had no track record of service to prove their qualifications for non-profit status. Instead of filing as a LLC the organization continued to operate and pay income taxes with no formal tax status. At the end of five years the group considered filing for non-profit status again. Cushman (2008) remembers, “actually, at the end of five years we got another grant and a business consultant and went through the whole retreat stuff, trying to decide if we wanted to do that. And at that time the group said no, we’re not willing to jump through all the hoops that she presented us with.” At that time, the organization believed that the work of filing for non-profit status was greater than the benefit to the organization. However, now in their tenth year, the group has decided that filing for 501(c)3 is crucial for the long term survival and growth of the organization. Cushman (2008) notes, “we want to expand and we can’t expand without more money and the only way we can get more money is to get more people and to apply for grants. It just seemed like this was the thing we had to do.”

With the new tax status filing also comes significant changes in the group’s organizational structure and formalization of member responsibilities.

Before applying for 501(c)3 status Phoenix Rising’s members had responsibilities but they were not formally defined and structured. Core members, who pay monthly dues and receive unlimited access to the facility, made up the governing or managing portion of the membership and cooperatively ran the space. These members meet monthly to talk
about co-op business, including their progress on any grants they are applying for and any programming ideas that the group would like to participate in or conduct. During these meetings the group also shares information on their personal work, encourages each other, and announces any potential exhibition opportunities. Before filing for non-profit status there were no officers in the group, although Davis (2008) notes that Cushman, as the founder of the group, has always taken a leadership role in the organization. Also, Cushman along with Davis coordinates responsibilities in the space. Cushman (2008) states, “the only other thing that she and I do is coordinate”…”So she and I kind of share the duties of making sure the mail is all opened and figuring out the taxes and making sure our taxes are paid on time.” The group also has a bookkeeper, who in return for her accounting skills receives free membership to the organization. Other members also took on other jobs, such as marketing and publicity, writing grants, and creating programs as the needs arose. And lastly the members took turns as the shop steward. Cushman (2008) defines this role, “our shop steward basically keeps the place clean for a month and orders any supplies that we may need.” While this role is currently being filled by the co-op’s intern, these responsibilities will continue to be shared among members.

Now that the group has filed for 501(c)3 status, changes are occurring to their organizational structure and member roles are becoming more formal and clearly defined. In order to make the transition to non-profit status, Phoenix Rising applied for a grant to hire a consultant to help with the necessary paperwork and organizational changes. According to Cushman (2008), “we got a capacity building grant from the Ohio Arts Council last fall in which we hired a business consultant to help us focus our thought and ideas and with an end result of developing a plan.” After meeting with the consultant the
group is focused on revisiting and strengthening their organizational documents. These documents will reflect the changes to the organizational structure, notably the creation of a board of directors and their role in overseeing the cooperative. The board currently consists of all of the core members of Phoenix Rising, because, as Cushman (2008) notes, it would be impossible to go immediately from no board to a full oversight board. In addition to the seven current core members the group invited a local lawyer and arts administrator to also serve as board members. However, Cushman (2008) states, “the end goal is there will probably only be three core members on the board at any one particular time and they will rotate.” Cushman currently serves as the president of the board with other core members elected to the other officer positions. The consultant also helped the group create committees to better delegate responsibilities and attract new volunteers. Cushman (2008) notes,

> We have set up committees; she helped us divide our tasks into three separate committees: fundraising, programming, and marketing and publicity. And so we have also invited outside people to join those committees, hoping that they will become interested enough in Phoenix Rising that we could eventually have them become board members.

The creation of the board and committees will help give the group more structure and provide clearer roles for its members, which will reduce duplication of efforts and potentially stave off burnout.

Applying for non-profit status will also provide the group more financial stability and open up new streams of potential financing. Currently the group has limited expenses but still struggles to meet their financial responsibilities. Davis (2008) states that their current yearly operating budget is around $10,000 and that their expenses include rent, utilities, supplies, and insurance. In addition to these regular expenses Cushman (2008)
says time to time equipment is donated to the group they must come up with funds to move the piece or sometimes to fix the donated equipment. She notes, “we had a beautiful press down there donated to us. But it took us a year to earn the money to pay for the press to be moved here. Because they’re so incredibly heavy, we had to hire somebody to move it here and partially take it apart. We have no cushion for things like that, so we have to devise ways to earn money when something like that occurs.”

The current bulk of the group’s money comes from the membership fees paid by both core and associate members. However, the group often drops below the ten core members and is unable to raise the money necessary to keep the doors open through membership dues alone. To also generate funds, Davis (2008) says they annually sell a pack of cards which are printed by the core members. According to Cushman (2008), they have decided to increase the number of packs they create this year to increase the revenue potential from their sale. The group hopes to create additional fundraising opportunities in the future to gain more revenue. In addition to the card packs and membership dues, the group also charges for the workshops and classes that they offer. However, Cushman (2008) notes, “they generate very little income because by the time we pay for supplies we make very little money from them—our classes are small.”

While the group has not been filed as a 501(c)3, they have been operating as a non-profit organization throughout their history and asked the Ohio Designer Craftsman to be their fiscal agent so that they could apply for public grants. Presently, Phoenix Rising has received four grants for operational and programming support. The group received two capacity building grants from the Ohio Arts Council to work with the consultant who helped them determine if they wanted to apply for 501(c)3. Phoenix
Rising also received two separate grants from OAC to help support programming. The first was to help defray the costs of hosting guest artists and having each present a workshop in the Phoenix Rising’s studio space. The second was a group grant with several other arts spaces around the state to sponsor an exchange program with Korea and an exhibition of work in four cities in Ohio. While the group has had significant support from the OAC, Cushman (2008) notes that they would like to begin applying for more grants, specifically from the Columbus Foundation and the Franklin County Neighborhood.

The potential for additional grants comes at a critical point in Phoenix Rising’s organizational history. As Davis (2008) notes, the group is facing a bit of a crisis. They need to expand the group in order to increase revenue but the space is becoming overcrowded and they need additional space to accommodate their members. Davis (2008) states, “it’s sort of a chicken and egg thing. If we get too many more members in our space now, we won’t’ be able to work. And to generate the funds we need the move, it’s hard, we need maybe more funding than members is what I’m thinking.” The group hopes that grants will allow them to expand the space and allow for membership growth without exhausting the group’s current resources.

Organizational Strategic Plan

While the application for 501(c)3 status shows that Phoenix Rising is thinking long term about their organization it is unclear if the group ever developed a formal strategic plan. Even without the formal strategic plan the group has regularly articulated specific goals that they wanted to achieve as an organization. Cushman (2008) notes, “we mostly met, like the goals that we have set. Even though we decided five years ago when
we applied for that grant and decided not to go the not for-profit route we did set goals for ourselves, and we have met almost every single one of those goals.’’ Cushman (2008) finds that meeting these goals is a good indicator that they should move forward with new goals and take the organization to the next stage. Clearly, a major aspect of moving the organization forward is filing for 501(c)3 status. By becoming an official non-profit organization Phoenix Rising hopes to utilize grants to expand the organization and to conduct more community outreach.

When asked how they thought the organization would develop in the next five years both Davis (2008) and Cushman (2008) saw expansion, both in membership and in physical space, as a major goal for the group. Cushman (2008) states, “In five years I definitely would like to say we have a silk screen studio here. I would like to say we have at least three to five more core members and a whole lot more associate members. In ten years, even within five years, I would like to expand into the space next door.” Davis (2008) reiterates this sentiment and would like to see the space double or triple in size in the next five years. But Davis (2008) cautions, “I think these changes will probably happen slowly and we may just burst at the seams before we get a new facility.” Although she sees the expansion posing problems Davis (2008) does not think the group will outlast its welcome. She believes there enough young members settling in the area to maintain a strong presence in Columbus’s creative sector for the foreseeable future.

The Role of Physical Space and Individual Personalities

Phoenix Rising’s organizational structure and their tenure as an organization have been based on cooperative management. By definition a cooperative is space centric. It is based upon the shared need for specific resources, such as a studio or a certain piece of
equipment. Clearly Phoenix Rising’s space and, more importantly, the group’s equipment play an integral role in uniting the group. Without the equipment and an adequate sized studio in which to use it, the group would no longer exist. As has been noted previously, Phoenix Rising formed out of a need for specific equipment and a certain kind of space; that is what attracts new members and keep printmakers involved in the group. The group is hoping to further expand their resources and create a silk screening component to the studio in order to fulfill a need that some of its members have identified. Davis (2008) notes, “I guess that person got together with another interested person in the group, and did some research before we said yeah let’s do it. But it’s a small space, but once it was shown that it was even possible we were all for it.” Davis (2008) adds that this was possible in large part because of the democratic set up of the organization and the way in which new ideas and goals are initiated and how they are able to adapt as a group. By accommodating members’ needs, the group can help retain its members and ensure that needs continue to be met by the organization.

While the studio space is secondary to the importance of printmaking equipment, finding a proper studio that could be continually maintained and rented was certainly important for the success of the group. The location of Phoenix Rising was chosen for its affordability. However, the group’s relationship with the landlord has proven to be very beneficial for the group. The group was initially unable to obtain grants or public funding, but they were able to work with the landlord to secure a grant from the city in order to rehab the front of the building and work with him to set up the physical space for the group. Davis (2008) thinks that if it is financially possible, the group would like to continue to work with the landlord and find a tax write-off so they could potentially rent
the space next door and expand the studio. However, this goal for expansion also
highlights the limitations of the current space. Both Davis (2008) and Cushman (2008)
believe the current facility is too small to get additional equipment and to accommodate
more members. As a result, the current space provides both benefits and restrictions for
the group. It is hard to speculate how another space might change the dynamic of the
group. Also, it is hard to determine how the group would fair if they were to loose the
space. Given their strong organizational structure, it is very likely that the group could
move to a new location without substantial decline to membership. A greater issue may
be their ability to retain space that is within their budget and whether they can afford any
potential moving expenses.

While the role of the physical space plays an important role in any artist-run
organization, so does the dynamic of individual personalities. Any artist-run organization
that is democratically managed and collectively organized requires a well balanced group
of personalities. Davis (2008) notes, “I think artists kind of come with personality—flaws
that need to be dealt with gently—and as long as everyone has that in mind it can work
out really well, because they have a lot to give too.” For Phoenix Rising, acknowledging
the potential pitfalls of collective management while also embracing its benefits has
given the group a significant lifespan as an artist-run organization. It is remarkable that
the group has survived and served the printmaking community for ten years. Although
the group’s organizational structure was a bit informal it appears that people tacitly
understood their role within the organization. And the clear, if not narrow, mission
allowed the group to operate without much confusion or difficulty.
Davis (2008) also acknowledges that Cushman and the leadership role that she took in the organization also provided significant guidance for the group. As the founding member who has been with the group throughout its ten year history Cushman has played a critical role in the structure of Phoenix Rising. Davis (2008) notes that in many organizations predominantly made up of women there is a queen bee, and Cushman has certainly fulfilled that role at Phoenix Rising. While organizations benefit from a member who takes a leadership position and can keep the group focused and moving forward, often groups become reliant on that member for its survival. Davis (2008) was in large part motivated to apply for 501(c)3 to help create structure and external oversight so that the group can continue even if Cushman leaves. When asked what would happen to the group if Cushman left, Davis (2008) notes, “I now think it would continue, but it might change. Anne [Cushman] has even hinted that she’ll be leaving, her husband is going to retire and they won’t have any reason to stay in Columbus.” While Davis (2008) believes the dynamic will most certainly change if Cushman leaves, she also believes the group can still survive.

In addition to the potential loss of a key member, the group must also consider how new members and the creation of a new oversight board will impact the group. Cushman (2008) hopes to see a lot of new members joining the group as the space and the resources expand. However, adding new members, especially if you are appealing to younger artists, can be a difficult transition. The group will have to rely on their newly updated organizational documents and their stronger organizational structure to clearly denote expectations and member roles. The board of directors will certainly play an important role in creating this structure and oversight, but the group may face difficulty
relinquishing certain responsibilities over to the board. When asked about the transition to having a board, Davis (2008) states, “I think it will be slow because we are used to just working with ourselves. And there’s a gender difference. The two board members are guys.” Davis’ statement reflects the potential problems that might initially arise with the new board and the difficulty the group may have allowing an external board to take on certain responsibilities. However, while the transition may be difficult, having a board of directors will take some of the burden off of the individual members and protect against member burnout.

Internal and External Benefits

As an artist-run organization that has had a presence in Columbus’ creative sector for a decade Phoenix Rising has provided both its members and the larger community with many benefits. It serves a specific segment of artists and provides them access to equipment and work space that they may not have been able to acquire as an individual artist. By providing a space where equipment is collectively owned and managed, it allows its members to work as professional artists with minimal overhead cost or equipment expenses. In addition to providing access to equipment, Phoenix Rising also is a network of artists that offers peer support. Davis (2008) identifies the benefit of a peer support group and notes, “the emotional support that artists need, you can’t overestimate that.” Cushman (2008) concurs with this idea and states, “as a group we are extremely supportive of each other and we offer an opportunity to share idea about our work, share new printmaking methods, share critiques within our group, and encourage exhibitions and sharing your art with the outside world.”
As this statement demonstrates, being a member of the group not only provides peer support but allows members to share information on potential exhibition opportunities. In addition to individual exhibition opportunities, the group has also participated in several group shows together. Davis (2008) states, “we’re a group so we can fill a gallery so there’s an advantage to having a group like that.” Through exhibitions associated with the cooperative, several people have secured gallery representation and have been able to increase their exhibition opportunities and their exposure within the creative sector. Cushman (2008) also finds that being associated with Phoenix Rising has given many artists a sense of legitimacy and has “given them an opportunity to be considered professional.” Furthermore, since the organization is a member of the Mid-American Print Council, Phoenix Rising’s members are associated with a professional trade organization and a connection to a larger pool of artists.

While Phoenix Rising provides its members with individual benefits, it also strives to benefit the larger community. Currently Phoenix Rising is located in a lower class area of Columbus and they have found their impact to be limited. Since the space is not open to the public and they are not a retail space Cushman (2008) finds their interaction with their neighbors to be restricted. However, she states, “we’re in a really crummy neighborhood and we offer stability in this neighborhood because we’ve been here for ten years.” The group also hopes to initiate a program for at-risk kids which would include nearly everyone in their immediate surroundings.

Most of Phoenix Rising’s community involvement is geared at the larger Columbus area and involves the hosting of workshops and demonstrations. Davis (2008) finds, “we can do workshops for students in our facility and we can come and do
workshops in universities. Yeah, as a group of working printmakers it’s a resource, and we represent a wide variety of talents and abilities.” As the only printmaking facility in the Columbus area outside of a college or university, Phoenix Rising seeks to inform people about the art of printmaking and provide educational opportunities in a variety of printmaking practices. Through their workshops and demonstrations Phoenix Rising has also created relationships with several arts organization and post secondary education institutions in the Columbus area. By working with other groups Phoenix Rising has become a resource for other organizations and has created a broader audience for their work.

Despite the fact that Phoenix Rising is the only public printmaking facility in Columbus Cushman (2008) and Davis (2008) do not feel that the group has been successful in attracting and retaining artists to the area. Davis (2008) states that as an organization they would really like to motivate printmakers to stay in the Columbus area, but she notes, “I don’t think it’s really happened yet.” As far as attracting and retaining young artists who are recent graduates from local colleges and university, Cushman (2008) finds that their impact is limited. She states, “Usually they come in, they’re gung ho and they find out that they can’t pay. And that’s why we really want to be able to offer this [student] scholarship to someone who’s really serious.” However, Cushman (2008) also acknowledges that it is important for the group to develop ways to appeal to younger artists as older members begin to leave the group.

Organizational Threats and Pitfalls

Despite the benefits that Phoenix Rising has provided its members and the larger community during their remarkable ten year life as an artist-run organization, there are
still many threats to the organizational stability of the group and several areas where the organization is limited. For all artist-run organizations, changes to the physical space or the personalities involved in the organization can have a tremendous effect on the group’s stability. As has already been noted, Phoenix Rising is a very space-centric organization and maintaining a space with printmaking equipment is pivotal to its survival as a group. While Phoenix Rising is taking many steps to strengthen its organizational structure to provide stability in times of transition or crisis, they also need to be cautious as they expand their current space. A larger space will increase member responsibilities and increase the group’s financial burden. While increasing the space will allow Phoenix Rising to better serve its members and the larger community, unmanaged growth may create an unnecessary burden on the organization and put the group in a critical position.

The group is also facing potential changes to its member pool and creating a board of directors. Phoenix Rising may experience growing pains as they introduce younger artists into the space and increase their number of members. Creating a board to provide external oversight and clearly defining the role of the group’s members should provide the group with the structure and continuity needed to keep the organization strong while the personalities in the group shift. However, while the creation of a board establishes organizational oversight, the group must still contend with how much control they will permit the board to exercise. Many members may find it difficult to relinquish their individual responsibilities and may be wary of a board that does not have the same level of vested interest that they have. For the board to provide benefit to the organization its role must be clearly articulated and Phoenix Rising’s members must allow the board to make necessary changes to the organization.

127
The organizational changes that Phoenix Rising are experiencing are a direct result of their decision to apply for 501(c)3 status. While becoming a non-profit organization is a good decision for Phoenix Rising at this point in the organization’s life, the group must be aware of potential pitfalls associated with this tax filing. Many groups who successfully receive public funding become too dependent on grants to maintain their organization. While grants may provide Phoenix Rising with the capital necessary to expand their organization, if the group is not financially self-sufficient, then the group will not be able to survive in the long term. Phoenix Rising must be able to raise its own operating expenses and not rely on intermittent grants in order to survive and thrive as an organization.

As an established printmaking cooperative Phoenix Rising has an important role in Columbus’ creative sector. However, being a media specific artist-run organization limits Phoenix Risings impact. Furthermore, Phoenix Rising is not known as an innovative organization and Davis (2008) notes that there is very limited collaboration that occurs between members. While it may not behoove Phoenix Rising to expand their focus or create innovative work, they must consider new ways to serve the printmaking community and appeal to the larger Columbus area. By expanding their promotions and allowing people to visit a gallery located in their facility, Phoenix Rising might promote a stronger relationship with community members and not just other arts organizations.

Conclusion

Phoenix Rising is a wonderful organization that has had a significant history as a Columbus-based artist-run organization, and they have a hopeful future ahead of them. Phoenix Rising serves a real need within the creative community for a printmaking
facility. Furthermore, its application for 501(c)3 status Phoenix Rising should create an organizational structure that will allow for expansion and growth. Their organizational history and practices will help other artist-run organizations that would like to apply for 501(c)3 status and apply for public funding.

Phoenix Rising has utilized the resources provided by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC) and the Greater Columbus Arts Council (GCAC), but these two organizations can provide additional guidance to Phoenix Rising as the organization ages. OAC and GCAC can help provide mentoring for the transitioning organization and help ensure that they do not become too grant dependent and, instead, find additional fundraising and revenue opportunities. Also, OAC and GCAC can help Phoenix Rising better promote itself as an organization and appeal to younger artists who may have recently graduated from local post secondary education institutions. And lastly, if they no longer fulfill their mission as an organization or no longer meet a specific need within Columbus’ creative sector OAC and GCAC can help Phoenix Rising to gracefully end as an organization.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Artist-run organizations, which include artist collectives, artist cooperatives, and artist-run arts spaces, provide unique benefits for the community and for the individual artists who participate in them. By providing needed resources, a peer support group, opportunities for exhibition and additional exposure, artist-run organizations help to make a community appealing to individual artists. Artist-run organizations also create new chances and venues for the community to experience high quality and innovative cultural experiences. However, many artist-run organizations have limited impact or limited life spans due to weak organizational structures.

This thesis has explored four artist-run organizations in Columbus, Ohio. It examined not only their benefits, but also how they have and may succeed or fail as organizations. The first chapter, the Introduction, clearly laid out the research questions addressed in this thesis and explores the importance and relevance of studying artist-run organizations. To create a framework by which to research this topic, the second chapter of this thesis investigated literature concerning the benefits associated with supporting a community’s creative sector and specifically the benefits and limitations of artist-run organizations. The third chapter addressed the research methods utilized in this thesis and justified the use of case studies as a means to understand artist-run organizations. The
fourth chapter of this thesis examined Columbus’s creative sector and identified programs and opportunities currently available to individual artists in the city. This chapter also included input from experienced arts administrators working in Columbus on the role of artist-run organizations in the city’s creative sector. Then, in chapters five through eight this thesis explored four artist-run organizations in the Columbus area and described their organizational history, organizational and fiscal structures, strategic plan, the role of space and personalities on the group, the benefits the group provides members and the community, and also the threats and pitfalls these groups face.

In these three chapters, I explored different aspects of artist-run organizations. I identified both the benefits and limitations of these groups. Based upon these case studies I found that artist-run organizations are beneficial both to their members and to the larger community. My research finds that these groups, which are often very nimble in nature and have fewer barriers to participation than larger arts institutions, can create strong bonds with the community and reflect the changing needs and interests of both the group’s members and their audience. However, these case studies also expose the threats and pitfalls facing these types of groups. In this thesis I also provide a prescriptive analysis of how artist-run groups can become stronger, increase their longevity, and expand their impact as organizations.

Artist-Run Organizations in Columbus, Ohio

Despite widespread interest in the economic and social benefits of supporting the creative sector, little research has been done examining artist-run organizations. However, these organizations act as important venues for artists to network with other artists, access needed equipment and studio space, increase exhibition opportunities and
exposure, and become engaged with the larger creative sector. Artist-run organizations vary greatly in structure and purpose and this research looked at four artist-run groups in Columbus in order to come to a better understanding of their organizational makeup and group contributions.

Columbus is a good example of a city that could utilize artist-run organizations to enhance the creative capital of a city and develop and enhance the creative sector. As the location of several post secondary education institutions and just over 10,000 individuals who classify art as their primary occupation, more can be done to attract and retain artists to Columbus. Wyszomirski (2007) writes that, although there have been strong efforts in Columbus to enhance the creative sector of this city not much has been done to tap into the young talent coming out of the universities and colleges in the area. “Clearly, Columbus could tap a wealth of creative capital from these young and emerging artists, if a concerted effort to recognize these assets, and help keep them in the region were part of the creative community development plan” (p. 11). The report on the Creative Economy (2007) produced for the City Council expands on this idea:

More can be done to retain this creative capital rather than see it move to other cities. There are few fellowships or grants for artists. Without a public art program, arts commissions are few and far between. There is no dedicated arts incubator for small businesses or freelance artists. While talent incubation is part of the activities of a number of arts and educational organizations, many of these are modest and have low visibility and priority (p. 35).

Columbus could ultimately do more to attract artist, particularly young artists and supporting artist-run organizations is an easy and beneficial way to create a hospitable city for them.
By supporting artist-run organizations Columbus can benefit both artists and the community. Artist-run organizations are symbolic of creative vitality and help label an area as a “cool city.” Artist-run organizations also provide artists with the resources necessary for them to produce and exhibit their work in a supportive atmosphere that encourages innovation. Supporting artist-run organizations expands a city’s creative capital and creates an atmosphere ripe for the development of artistic excellence and excellent artistic experiences for a new and expanding audience.

While Columbus can benefit from artist-run organizations, Alicia Oddi and Susan de Pasquale, two Columbus based arts administrators, found that there are several pitfalls facing these groups. While both administrators note the benefit of artist-run organizations, they also find many of these groups have weak organizational structures and can collapse if they lose their physical space, key members, or important financing. Their input helped to shape this thesis’s critical analysis of four artist-run organizations located in Columbus.

Case Studies

I have discussed four artist-run organizations of varying types: an artist-collective, two artist-run arts spaces, and an artist cooperative. All of these groups are artist-run and share certain qualities, but they have many differences and represent the wide range of artist-run organizations that exist. By exploring these four groups we were able to see the many ways in which artist-run organizations benefit their members and the larger community. This cross section of artist-run organizations also represents the different practices of these types of groups and helps demonstrate which practices are successful and which either limit the organization’s success or longevity.
As a collective organization, Couchfire has closed membership and is rooted in a shared vision and mindset. While Couchfire began as a loose organization that was internally focused, it has since taken steps to formalize their organizational structure and adopt a more community oriented mission. This group’s events generally attract large crowds and have garnered high praise and significant publicity. A lot of Couchfire’s success may be attributed to the unique talents of the group’s members. The group includes several small business owners with extensive experience in marketing and promotion. This has allowed the group to reach a very large audience and create a buzz around their events. The group also worked extensively with a lawyer to create organizational documents and an organizational structure that allows flexibility but also clearly defines the goals of the organization and the roles of its members. By clearly identifying expectations, the group has created stability and structure that will help it withstand many organizational pitfalls.

However, as a successful organization that has the potential for large growth Couchfire must also be cautious when the group changes and expands. With the introduction of a new fiscal core and the potential changes to membership, the organization may experience growing pains. The increased structure and planning will strengthen the organization; it may also make the group more rigid and turn off some of the original members. The group must also think about additional ways with which they are able to work with existing arts agencies and corporations to increase their funding options. By professionalizing their planning process and creating clearer budgets, events plans, and conducting post event evaluations, the group will open itself up to a larger pool of funding without needing to become a non-profit organization. Both the Ohio Arts
Council (OAC) and the Greater Columbus Arts Council (GCAC) may want to consider contacting Couchfire and working with them to develop these critical business skills.

Two artist-run arts spaces, BLD and Chop Chop, were also examined. As artist-run arts spaces these two groups are location centric and are concerned with creating unique arts spaces that are managed by and for artists. While both of these spaces sought to create positive working environments for artists, they have operated in very different ways and with varying levels of success. BLD, which is now defunct, had a very informal organizational structure and operated for nine years with the anarchist ideals of self rule and mutual aid. As a loose organization of artists working in an old warehouse, BLD provided artist studios as well as a living space for individual artists. Although the group hosted events and exhibitions and was a venue and gallery for hire, their impact as a group was limited because they were illegally occupying a space zoned for manufacturing. Despite providing peer support and a location for collaboration, BLD was unable to take a greater role in Columbus’ creative sector because they were located in the building illegally. In fact, it was when the group created more outreach to the community and gained more attention that their situation was highlighted and the city shut the space down. While OAC and GCAC’s ability to work with the group was very limited because they would not qualify or want public support, these organizations may have aided the group in transitioning to a more appropriate venue if given the proper time and notice.

Chop Chop is also an artist-space devoted to creating a unique environment where artists can collaborate. But this organization has taken great pains to ensure they are operating within the law. Led by two artists, this space was created as a location to serve
artists and small business owners who needed a studio space to create artwork. Despite their best attempts Chop Chop has struggled to excel as an arts space. Although they tried to promote the space as a collaboration environment to early tenants they struggled because they had no clear member expectations or definition of member roles. Many individuals also overused or abused the space’s resources and did not feel vested in the space or work towards improving it.

Chop Chop has not yet succeeded in creating a collaborative community of artists but it continues to successfully operate as a venue where artists can rent studio and gallery space. By continuing to operate their businesses out of Chop Chop, Puckett and Dransfield have been able to promote their own art and design ventures while also supporting a venue where young artists can exhibit their work. Chop Chop has also become connected with a national community of arts spaces and has promoted collaboration with these other locations and the artists who associate with them. In their third year of operation, Chop Chop is at a critical point and must make decisions regarding the long term goals of the organization. If they wish to continue to pursue the creation of a collaborative arts space, they must find ways to allow new members to become more invested in the space and share in both the responsibilities and risks associated with the organization. Chop Chop would benefit from working with either OAC or GCAC in formally articulating their goals, creating an organizational structure, and a long term plan for the group.

Finally, Phoenix Rising is an artist cooperative that is based on the shared need for printmaking resources, has an open membership, and relies on membership dues and/or volunteer work time to manage a shared space. Phoenix Rising was built to
address the equipment needs that printmakers experience. While the organization has struggled to meet their financial responsibilities, it has successfully operated as an artist-run organization for ten years and is currently in the process of filing for 501(c)3 status. Throughout their history Phoenix Rising has provided its members with vital access to resources, peer support, and opportunities for exhibitions. In addition to these member benefits, the group has also led workshops and seminars on printmaking and worked closely with several post secondary education institutions in the Columbus area. Although the group is just now applying for 501(c)3 status, they have always operated as a non-profit organization, worked with a fiscal agent, and have been awarded various grants.

Phoenix Rising has a strong track record, but the group is undergoing a transition and must be prepared for substantial changes. With their application for 501(c)3 status the group has updated and strengthened their organizational documents, formalized member roles, and initiated the creation of a board of directors. While these steps will provide the group with more structure, the introduction of a board of directors and the resulting shift in responsibilities to board members may be difficult for older members to adjust to. In addition, the group hopes to expand their studio space as well as increase their number of members. Like Couchfire, Phoenix Rising might experience growing pains. Members who have borne the brunt of the work and responsibility may find it hard to relinquish those tasks to the board or new members. Although OAC has a long history with Phoenix Rising and has provided support through two capacity building grants, they, along with GCAC, might also consider working with the group to help them transition as an organization and address any personal or organizational issues that arise.
Comparing Case Studies

When taken together, these four case studies provide interesting insights on both the benefits and limitations of artist-run organizations. These groups have various levels of stability and success, but each provides some benefit to its individual members or the larger community. Although very different in nature, both Couchfire Collective and Phoenix Rising Printmaking have been fairly successful as organizations that were created by artists for artists and are collectively managed. Couchfire operates as an LLC and demonstrates how an arts organization can successfully operate with no public funding. Their for-profit status allows them to be more nimble as an organization and to operate in a manner that is responsive to community needs and wants. Many arts-organizations benefit from applying for 501(c)3 status because it forces them to create a strong organizational structure and create organizational documents. However, Couchfire proves that with organization and a savvy business sense an arts group can accomplish these objectives and operate more nimbly as an LLC. While Couchfire is providing unique cultural experiences for the Columbus community, they do not have the same relationship with local schools and other education institutions that a non-profit organization is required to have. In this respect, although Phoenix Rising benefits a smaller group of artists and provides less cultural events for Columbus residents, they do create educational opportunities that reach a subset of the community who may not normally attend cultural events. Furthermore, these educational programs help advocate for the support and continued practice of printmaking and promotion of the arts in general.
Both BLD and Chop Chop did not nor do not have the same formal structure or level of success in publicity and notoriety that Couchfire has, but they still have an important role within Columbus’ creative sector. Both of these grassroots organizations have a certain dynamic and exhibit certain entrepreneurialism; they show what impact artists can have on their own careers when they create their own opportunities. By creating an arts space where artists can work and develop their craft, these two groups created opportunities that may not have otherwise been available to local artists. And, while BLD was forced to operate under the radar and Chop Chop is still up and coming as an artist-run organization, both groups helped or help to make Columbus a hospitable city for artists and a city known as a place where interesting cultural events and artwork in happening.

A telling fact about these groups is that three out of the four have no desire to become 501(c)3 or to apply for public funding. The paperwork and responsibility of becoming non-profit is more than they want to undertake as organizations. Furthermore, in their current state it is unlikely that any of these groups would qualify for public grants or direct financial support from either OAC or GCAC. However, these groups clearly provide a benefit to artists in the city and provide the city with important creative capital. In order to support these organizations OAC and GCAC might want to enhance and expand their programming to help incubate artists-run organizations. According to Gerl (1997), “providing individual artists and arts organizations with the expertise, networks, and tools they need to make their ventures successful is at the heart of arts incubation programs.” Instead of funding artist-run organizations that are at the beginning stages as a group or that would prefer not to be limited by the restrictions associated with public
funding, OAC and GCAC should consider working with these organizations as an arts incubator. By adopting the role of an arts incubator, these two arts councils can provide guidance and the business skills necessary to create a successful and strong artist-run organization. Providing this kind of personalized attention and guidance will also increase their benefit to the larger community, increase their presence in Columbus creative sector, promote organization longevity, and potentially attract and retain more artists to the Columbus area.

Conclusion

This thesis established the community benefits of artist-run organizations as well as explored what threats or problems may cause artist-run groups to collapse or limit their impact on the community. These four artist-run organizations in Columbus provide novel examples of the role and larger importance of groups organized by and for artists. As unique groups operating within the creative sector, artist-run organizations deserve further exploration and analysis and this paper only begins to investigate them. Much more could be done to examine the role of social capital in artist-run organizations, explore the role of networking and why artists are motivated to begin artist-run organizations, and to dissect generational differences among the participants of artist-run organizations. Much could be learned about artist-run organizations by conducting a large scale quantitative survey of artist-run organizations across the country to help identify the range of groups that exists and what similarities all of them share. This thesis will hopefully promote additional research in this area and spark a greater interest in the role of artist-run organizations.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: QUESTIONS FOR ARTS ADMINISTRATORS
Interview Questions

Questions for Arts Administrators:

- What are the requirements for individual artists who are applying for grants from the OAC/GCAC?
- What has been the education level and age of past winners of individual artist grants?
- Is it rare for young artists who have not received their MFA to receive an individual artist grant?
- Does the OAC/GCAC have any grants or fund programs that are specifically geared towards artist development for individual artists who are no longer in school, but may not have very much exhibition experience?
- How does the OAC/GCAC outreach to young and emerging artists?
- Do you think that there are organizations or institutions in Columbus or Ohio that specifically appeal or cater to young and emerging artists?
- What grants would you encourage an artist collective, artist community, or artist co-opto apply for?
- What are the requirements for artist groups that are applying for grants from the OAC/GCAC?
- Must an organization have a 501c3 tax status to apply for an organizational grant?
- Has an artist collective or cooperative received grant funding from the OAC/GCAC?
- If artist collectives and cooperatives haven’t received funding, or have received only limited funding, can you explain why? Are there specific criteria that these groups usually do not meet?
- If an artist collective or cooperative was applying for a grant what things would you be looking for in their application? What wouldn’t you want to see in an application?
- Do you think artist collectives or cooperatives currently play a role in the Columbus cultural scene?
- What is your general impression of collective and cooperatives that have or currently exist in Columbus?
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: QUESTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF
ARTIST-RUN ORGANIZATIONS
Interview Questions

Questions for Members of Artist Collectives or Cooperatives:

- What is the demographic of members of the artist collective or cooperative?
- Where did members attend school and what is the highest degree most received?
- How was the artist collective or cooperative formed?
- What was the impetus for forming the organization?
- What is the mission of the organization and are there by-laws? Is there a long term strategic plan? Is there a board of directors?
- How long has the artist collective or cooperative operated for?
- What is the organizational system, are any managers appointed, any people considered paid staff?
- What is the role of each member in the artist collective or cooperative?
- Is the group open to new members and if so how to they join?
- What is the tax status of the artist collective or cooperative? Is there any intention to amend this status in the future?
- Has the artist collective or cooperative applied for any private grants or public funding?
- How does the collective/cooperative get funds?
  - What kinds of activities or resources cost the group money?
    - Does the artist collective or cooperative rent or own a facility or any equipment?
  - What kind of events or fundraisers does the group have that brings in money?
    - What public events does the artist collective or cooperative have?
    - Would you consider the artist collective or cooperative to provide public value?
  - Are there member dues?
- How has the artist collective or cooperative benefited its members? How do you think it has benefited the community?
- What do you think your artist collectives or cooperatives role in Columbus is?
- How do you think your organization differs from other in the area? How are you similar to any other organization in Columbus, OH.
- Where do you foresee the collective in five years? How about in ten years?
APPENDIX C

COMPLETION OF CITI TRAINING
To whom it may concern:

On 11/3/2005, Melissa Keeley (username=keeley.8) completed all CITI Program requirements for the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative.

**Learner Institution:** Ohio State University

**Learner Group:** Group 2.

**Learner Group Description:** Social and Behavioral Research Investigators and Staff.

**Contact Information:**
- **Department:** Psychology
- **Phone:** 688-4611
- **Email:** keeley.8@osu.edu

### The Required Modules for Group 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Date completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Ethical Principles - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Regulations and The Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Risk in Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy and Confidentiality - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research with Prisoners - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research with Children - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Research - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Research - SBR</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HiPAA and Human Subjects Research</td>
<td>10/12/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio State University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator
APPENDIX D

INSITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD EXEMPTION
TITLE PAGE - APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION
FROM REVIEW BY THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
The Ohio State University, Columbus OH 43210

► Principal Investigator
Name: Margaret Wyszomirski
Phone: (614) 292-5757
E-mail: wyszomirski.1@osu.edu
Department or College: College of the Arts
Campus Address (room, building, street address): 258 C Hopkins Hall
128 North Oval Mail
Signature: Margaret Wyszomirski 6/17/08

► Co-Investigator
Name: Melissa Keeley
Phone: (614) 298-1850
E-mail: keeley.8@osu.edu
Campus Address (room, building, street address) or Mailing Address: 1000 Harrison Avenue
Columbus, OH 43201
Signature: 6/17/08

► Co-Investigator
Name: 
Phone: 
Campus Address (room, building, street address) or Mailing Address:
Signature: 

► Protocol Title
The Role of Collectives and Cooperatives in Columbus, Ohio's Creative Economy

► Source of Funding
None

For Office Use Only
☐ Approved. ☒ Research has been determined to be exempt under these categories: Research may begin as of the date of determination listed below.
☐ Disapproved. ☐ The proposed research does not fall within the categories of exemption. Submit an application to the appropriate Institutional Review Board for review.
Date of determination: 6/23/08 Signature: CLB

Office of Research and Resource Practices

LIST OF REFERENCES


Benefactors Council, LLC (n.d.). *Building Creative Capital: Reflections on the Assets Available to Sustain Robust Arts and Culture in Columbus*. Columbus: Benefactors Council, LLC.


Couchfire Collective (n.d). “By-Laws of Couchfire Collective, LLC.” Columbus, OH.

Couchfire Collective (n.d). “Operating Agreement of Couchfire Collective, LLC.” Columbus, OH.

Creative Columbus Policy Steering Committee (2007). *The Creative Economy: Leveraging the Arts, Culture and Creative Community for a Stronger Columbus*. Columbus: Creative Columbus Policy Steering Committee.


**Interviews**


Brouillette Adam. [Interview Transcript July 2, 2008]. Unpublished Raw Data.


de Pasquale, Susan. [Interview Transcript August 6, 2008]. Unpublished Raw Data.

Dransfield, Craig. [Interview Transcript August 8, 2008]. Unpublished Raw Data.


Pucket, Ashley. [Interview Transcript August 8, 2008]. Unpublished Raw Data.

Reed, Mike. [Interview Transcript July 7, 2008]. Unpublished Raw Data.


Shepard, Chad. [Interview Transcript of July 6, 2008]. Unpublished Raw Data.