Case Studies in Volunteer Management:
Approaches from Three Ohio Arts Organizations

THESIS

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Cristina Benedetti
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Master's Examination Committee:
Wayne Lawson, Advisor
Margaret Jane Wyszomirski
Abstract

This thesis uses the case study method to investigate volunteering in three Ohio arts organizations. Focusing on organizations that are highly volunteer-reliant, it asks two central questions: first, how might the use of extensive volunteer inputs relate to overall organizational stability; and second, in organizations that successfully use extensive volunteer inputs, can we detect common structures, practices, and attitudes, either on the part of the organization and/or its volunteers? The review of the literature on arts volunteering reveals some gaps in theorizing the potential role of volunteering in organizational stability. In interviews conducted with arts managers and volunteers, it is revealed that volunteering is indeed a vital part of these organizations, but that volunteering works in conjunction with other organizational assets (such as broad community support and good organizational leadership) to contribute to overall stability. This study additionally synthesizes several frameworks from different fields of study in order to consider degrees of formality and informality within arts organizations, and also puts forth a new framework for thinking about volunteers as assets versus liabilities.
This thesis is dedicated to the arts administrators and volunteers that so graciously agreed to take part in this project: Dione Parker Bennett, Laura Buschle, Maria Hawryluk Gordon, Allen Joos, Brian Koscho, Jennifer McMullen, Tim Peacock, Lou Ross, Helara Shaw, and Sarah Warda.
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Vita

June 1998 .................................................. Upper Arlington High School

June 2003 .................................................. B.A. English and Italian, The Ohio State University

June 2007 .................................................. M.A. Italian, The Ohio State University

2010 to present ........................................... Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of Art Education, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Arts Policy and Administration

Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization: Folklore
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In my first quarter of study in Arts Policy and Administration at The Ohio State University, I was asked to complete an overview of the Columbus arts and cultural sector for our Organizational and Management Theory class, led by Dr. Betty Jane Cataldi. As a longtime resident of Columbus and an observer, consumer, and participant in the city’s art scene, I was especially attuned to the particular difficulties that certain arts organizations had undergone in the decade or so previous to my enrollment in the APA program in 2010. For this class project, I gathered information on the histories of various local organizations, such as The Columbus Symphony Orchestra, BalletMet, Opera Columbus, The King Arts Complex, CATCO, CAPA, and others, and noted patterns of success, struggle and rebuilding.

For this project we were instructed to search as broadly as possible – to consider organizations large and small, from flagship institutions to community groups to commercial enterprises. As I scanned the Columbus cultural landscape, and came upon a large, but “atypical” cultural organization – the festival called ComFest (which stands for “Community Festival”). ComFest celebrated its 40th year in the summer of 2012, and in the same cultural environment where typical arts organizations must constantly strategize to increase interest and attendance, ComFest instead attracts so many attendees to their June festival, that organizers often worry about it having become “too big.” It was
becoming aware of this seeming disjuncture – the struggles of certain “typical” organizations and the prosperity of certain “atypical” organizations – that served as a starting point for the questions asked in this thesis.

Another key finding that I encountered in that same class fed my interest in studying informal arts and culture. It was from the 2006 Urban Institute Study “Cultural Vitality in Communities: Interpretation and Indicators” by Maria Rosario Jackson. According to this study, Columbus, Ohio is the number one city in the country (per capita) for nonprofit festivals, fairs, parades and community events (p.85). This finding indicated that the success I observed in ComFest could be part of a larger trend in consumption preferences for arts and culture in this geographic area.

There are many factors that one could investigate to attempt to understand the success of festivals in this geographic region, but the one that interested me the most was the “volunteer culture” that I observed in many of these organizations. Though volunteering is a part of most nonprofit organizations, it is certainly more important to some than others. Festivals like ComFest, The Nelsonville Music Festival, the Lancaster Festival, and the Chicago organization The Old Town School of Folk Music, have all created what I consider to be a “volunteer culture” – a set of rules and expectations about volunteer work and reciprocity that have become a crucial part of each organization’s operational practices. Additionally, these organizations’ extensive use of volunteers has become a part of their organizational image; it is “known” to outside observers that volunteering is a piece of their organizational puzzle. And finally, in these organizations, there appeared (to me) the possibility that significant volunteer inputs might be connected
to their and success or stability. This is the central relationship that I will be investigating in this study. Thus, as my project developed, the focus of my inquiry shifted away from festivals per se, and towards arts and cultural volunteers. For my case studies, I have selected three organizations that rely heavily on volunteer inputs to run parts (or most) of their organizations. I have also picked organizations that I believe to be relatively stable, in order to investigate possible correlations between volunteering and stability.

I have not left behind the festivals, however. One of my cases will be the Lancaster Festival, which exists solely to put on their summer festival every year. Another case will be Stuart’s Opera House, a brick-and-mortar theater which has year-round programming, but which puts on the Nelsonville Music Festival every spring. My third case will be Opera Project Columbus, which in some ways looks like a more “typical” arts organization, but which – by virtue of both its locally-driven mission and its stage of organizational development – is currently a mostly-volunteer organization.

By analyzing volunteering practices in these three organizations, and considering them in comparison with each other, I hope to bring to light attitudes and approaches towards volunteering that have been successful and sustainable – and other that have not – in these three Ohio organizations.

My study will ask two central questions:

1. How might the use of extensive volunteer inputs relate to overall organizational stability?
2. In organizations that successfully use extensive volunteer inputs, can we detect common structures, practices, and attitudes, either on the part of the organization and/or its volunteers?

My primary method of inquiry will be face-to-face interviews with staff of these organizations – executive directors, artistic directors, volunteer managers, and volunteers themselves. To accompany the information gathered in the interviews, prior research on each of the organizations will be done in order to appropriately contextualize my findings. My literature review will consist of scholarly articles, books, policy reports and “gray literature” in the areas of arts volunteering, arts engagement, the informal arts, organizational structures, and organizational stability.

My methodology is essentially ethnographic. Having already attended, observed, and been involved with events put on by each of these organizations before conducting any interviews, I had already engaged in informal participant observation before beginning this project. Going into this study, I also had a working knowledge of the missions and histories of each of these organizations, as can be gleaned from their websites and other publicity materials. I knew that volunteering was a key part of each of their organizational strategies – what I did not know was what their specific attitudes and approaches were, how those developed, and how they conceive of this stance as fitting into their organization’s mission and public purpose.

I conducted interviews with specific questions and topics in mind, but I also allowed the conversations to proceed dialogically. I had no intention of publishing any information that these organizations might consider private or harmful, and I tried to
create a relationship of trust and intellectual reciprocity with my collaborators. My hope is that this project will not only be a chance for them to share the knowledge that they have accumulated with me and with my readers, but also to consider their own approaches against those of the other organizations that I am studying.

I have interpreted the data that I have gathered against current literature in the areas mentioned above. And because my methods were ethnographic, and hence “ground-up” in nature, I also returned to the literature to look for support for unanticipated findings, and where such support was not found, offered my own interpretations.

As does any researcher, I approach my object of study with certain predispositions and biases. I am a staff member of Opera Project Columbus, a patron of Stuart’s Opera House and the Nelsonville Music Festival, and I am connected to the Lancaster Festival through a friend who has performed in its orchestra. I have thus selected organizations that I feel I “know” already in some ways, with the hope that this familiarity will lead to greater understanding of my cases in the limited time that I have to undertake this research. It must be acknowledged, though, that I am, in one way or another, positively disposed towards each of these organizations – a position which might color my analysis.

Additionally, I write this thesis not only as a student of arts policy and administration, but also as a folklorist. Folklore has sometimes been described as the study of “residuals:” genres, practices, and people that do not fit the expectations of modern or dominant societies, or that live on the margins of these societies. And in many
ways, my study is engaging with various categories of “outsiders:” rural arts organizations, festivals or other informal arts events, a small, Midwestern opera company – and of course, volunteers, who occupy an indeterminate organizational space somewhere between audience and staff. So although this is not a piece of folklore scholarship, my training in the field has likely influenced my choice of topic, and will undoubtedly be present as I interpret my data.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study asks the question, “to what extent might an organization’s reliance on volunteers contribute to its overall stability?” My hypothesis, based initially on informal observations, is that for certain organizations it appears that stability is positively correlated with extensive use of volunteer inputs, beyond what is typical for arts organizations. Scientifically testing this hypothesis is beyond the scope of this study; what I will do, instead, is gather information about three Ohio arts organizations that rely heavily on volunteers and present them as case studies. My hope is that this project will provide an improved understanding of how some organizational managers and volunteers work together to create stable organizations, and perhaps serve as grounds for future research in arts management.

The act of individual volunteering is at the heart of my study. But for this act to make sense, or for it to be even possible, there must be an appropriate available context for its enactment. For this project, I will place my focus on organizations as creators and sustainers of these contexts. I will suggest that some organizations foster a volunteer culture, which is manifested in (1) shared perspectives about volunteering among organizational managers, (2) structures and practices that grow out of this orientation, and (3) the continued engagement of a large number of volunteers with the organization.
This literature review will examine previous research in four areas relevant to my question: nonprofit and arts volunteering, arts and organizational engagement, the social framework of an organization, and organizational stability.

2.1 How do we normally think about volunteering?

The current literature on nonprofit volunteering tends to focus on areas such as how organizations can best manage volunteers, and the personal benefits of volunteering. What my study will examine, instead, is whether using extensive volunteer inputs can be beneficial to organizations in ways beyond how it is normally considered. This study considers a new way to think about arts volunteering – namely, as an input for organizational stability.

Many, if not most nonprofit arts organizations use volunteers in their operations, though the ways that volunteers are employed varies considerably depending on the size and type of organization. Small arts organizations may be run entirely by volunteers, who take on the roles that would normally be performed by paid staff in larger organizations (Chang, 2010). In larger organizations, especially those housed in brick-and-mortar structures like symphonies, operas, ballets, and museums, volunteers often provide event-specific support, and interact directly with patrons as ushers, docents, or selling concessions. In these large organizations, organizational staff, on the other hand, may interact very little with the public. In general, a fairly strict division of labor is maintained, and also a fairly distinct hierarchy, with volunteers typically at the bottom. Noreen Orr (2006), for example, characterizes volunteers as occupying a “marginal
status” in the museum world, which leads to some ambiguity about their actual value in
the museum profession (p. 195).

At the top of an organization, however, is another, highly-valued stratum of
volunteers – the board of trustees. The voluntary nature of board membership is tied with
the moral charge of holding an organization in the public’s trust. Serving on a nonprofit
organization’s board is generally thought of as an act of civic goodwill, and in arts
organizations, it is typically “motivated by [the board members’] desire to support
worthwhile artistic endeavors and, perhaps, as a counterpoint to their everyday
responsibilities in their own professions” (Channick, 2005, p. 69). Board members are
held to duties of loyalty, care, and obedience beyond what is required by law, and hold
the organization accountable for the public, from whom it receives benefits and funds.
However, the board’s main responsibility to the organization is fiduciary, and usually
involves contributions of time, expertise, and considerable funds (sometimes referred to
as “time, talent, and treasure”). Board members may be chosen for their expertise in
areas important to the running of an organization, such as business or law, but the ability
to contribute financially, and to oversee big-picture organizational stability, is often seen
as their primary charge. In both Francie Ostrower’s profile of elite boards (2002), and in
a recent study on nonprofit boards conducted by IMPACTS (Dilenschneider, 2013), it
seems that in organizations like large museums or opera companies, financial or tangible
asset contributions (such as art collections) are the most prized inputs of these
individuals, even beyond oversight and expertise.
In our common perceptions about arts organizations, board members and organizational volunteers might be thought of as existing on opposite ends of an organizational social spectrum. Board members are sought out for having an excess of personal (or social) capital that translates into funds for an organization, whereas volunteers are sought essentially for their labor, which may or may not involve some level of expertise. In typical organizations, one does really not imagine the possibility of these two groups intersecting in memberships, thus reinforcing a fairly distinct social hierarchy between elite and non-elite. For this study, I will focus largely on what I am calling organizational volunteers, or non-board volunteers.

Between these two strata of volunteers is the paid staff of the organization. They are generally charged (by the board) with executing the mission and vision of the organization through programming, and performing the organization’s work that requires professional credentials, artistic expertise, and/or full-time staffing. The “separation of powers” between staff and board that is built into nonprofit structures is designed to protect the public interest in these tax-subsidized organizations (Channick, p.76).

Though it is not often thought of this way, I will suggest that the support provided by volunteers might also be interpreted as a type of public “check” on an organization. For if an organization could not feasibly pay fair market wages to its volunteers (which is almost always the case), then its survival often depends in part on the willingness of citizens to assume responsibility – without pay – for executing certain crucial organizational tasks. Evidence of this volunteer input is often asked for in grant applications, possibly as an indicator of public support, and volunteer hours are often
tracked by organizations for such purposes. And volunteer hours are valuable, monetarily – they are worth much more than the current minimum wage. In Ohio in 2011, for example, volunteer time was valued at $19.23 an hour for the purpose of in-kind calculations, which is a few dollars below the national average of $22.14 an hour, and well above the current Ohio minimum wage of $7.80 an hour. (Independent Sector, 2013; MinimumWage.com, 2013).

This idea of a public “check” on an organization finds support in the research presented in the Ohio Arts Council’s (OAC) document *New Frameworks for Revealing the Public Value of the Arts* (Farnbauch, Lakin-Hayes & Yoshitomi, 2004). This study drew on recent research in participation and public value to propose a new framework that more accurately describes the dynamics of arts participation within the Ohio arts sector. The traditional framework is a *transactional* one – imagined as a back-and-forth between organizations and funders, where funders give money, and organizations provide arts experiences to the public and report information back to the funders. This paper, instead, advocates for shifting to a *transformations* framework to better describe how a successful arts sector functions. This framework was adapted from research done by Mark Moore on mayoral politics in La Paz, Bolivia. Moore showed that the mayor in his study, who succeeded in his promises of cleaning up corruption in the public markets, did not manage to get reelected because he failed to communicate his successes in terms that voters appreciated. Thus, by not taking his authorizing public into account, his good work went essentially unnoticed, and he failed in his reelection efforts.
In light of this study, Moore proposes a new framework, with three nodes instead of just two. It is reproduced below:

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1. Model illustrating public value in a mayoral election in La Paz, Bolivia (2004)

The third node is the “public value” that the authorizing environment associates with the entity at hand – be it a mayor, an arts organization, or an entire arts sector. As the authors of the OAC study adapted this model for the arts, “public value” is further elaborated upon to include the personal, social, and community value that people associate with this entity.

This, as I see it, is the public “check” on an organization – and in my organizations, I am proposing that this sense of value is strong enough that it motivates
many individuals to give not only money to the group, but their time and expertise as well, in the form of volunteering. My organizations facilitate this type of public buy-in in many ways, one of which, I will argue, is by creating a welcoming environment for large numbers of volunteers.

What my project shares with this Ohio Arts Council study is the proposal that an area of the arts sector is not receiving the recognition that it warrants, and that increasing understanding about this area may benefit the sector as a whole. As I see it, the value of volunteers to the arts sector is under recognized and not fully understood. Of course, for organizations with few volunteers, this type of input may not actually comprise a large part of a group’s capital. But for groups that rely heavily on volunteers, such as those I am examining for this study, having an unclear picture of the various ways that volunteer inputs contribute to overall organizational health creates a skewed picture of the actual capital (social as well as monetary) that an organization has access to.

**Volunteer motivation**

What motivates arts volunteers to take on (sometimes great) responsibilities without monetary compensation? In my findings, I will provide some individual explanations from the volunteers in my case study organizations; however, the literature on arts volunteering already offers us some answers.

Among those who identify specifically as “arts volunteers,” there appears to be a strong social element driving their practice. This finding is supported by both a quantitative analysis of data from the National Endowment for the Arts’ (NEA) Survey of
Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), and by several case studies on organizational volunteering.

NEA Research Note #95, *Volunteers with Arts or Cultural Organizations: A 2005 Profile* (Nichols, 2007), provides data on contemporary trends in arts volunteering. It was reported that in 2005 about 65.4 million people age 16 or older volunteered in the U.S. Of these, only 1 million, or 1.6 percent, volunteered primarily with arts organizations. Another 640,560 people reported arts or cultural organizations as the secondary groups with which they volunteer, which brings the percentage of primary or secondary arts volunteers up to 2.5 percent of all volunteers – still a fairly low number.

Though their numbers are small, arts volunteers show higher-than-normal dedication to their cause. They apparently spend more time volunteering than nearly all other categories of volunteers – only public safety volunteers spent more time on the job (Nichols, p. 7). Additionally, the author finds that, “[c]ompared with all volunteers, a considerably higher percentage of arts volunteers are asked to help by a relative, friend, or coworker – suggesting an element of social networking among arts volunteers” (p. 1).

UK researchers Helen Bussell and Deborah Forbes used the case study method to analyze volunteering through a marketing framework, seeking to understand varying volunteer motivations and how organizations can best respond to them (Bussell & Forbes, 2007). My methodology is strongly influenced by Bussell and Forbes’ work in their article “Volunteer Management in Arts Organizations: A Case Study and Managerial Implications,” which looks at a rural theater that uses volunteers to run the front of house operations at all of its performances. In Bussell and Forbes’ framework,
volunteers are considered an “internal public” of the organization, (Kotler & Andreasson, 1996), which align them with paid staff, management and trustees. Their positions, however, may be more fluid than these more permanent organizational positions, and as such, the authors suggest that marketing strategies – such as those employed to attract audiences – may be appropriate for encouraging and maintaining this type of opt-in, voluntary support. Bussell and Forbes even refer to volunteers as “customers” at one point (p.19). For organizations like this rural theater, then, it becomes important to cultivate strong, hopefully long-term relationships with this special type of organizational customer, which also happens to fulfill an important human resource role in the organization.

The authors found, however, that the theatre did not employ traditional marketing tools to recruit volunteers, and that there appeared to always be a steady stream of interested people approaching the organization who were willing to contribute their time and skills. The lack of formal marketing on the part of the organization suggested to the researchers that “the triggering factor is more likely to be internal [to the volunteer] than to come from the organization or from a volunteer bureau” (p. 24). The organization, in turn, expected a great deal of time and professionalism from their volunteers, requiring them to work six hours a week, and instituting highly formalized training procedures. As such, one volunteer reported that she was treated as an equal by staff in the organization, which she valued. The relationship between volunteer and organization seemed paramount, and was cemented by the volunteers’ friendly relationships with the front-of-house manager. The manager remarked that, “part of my role in managing is to sit and
chat” (p. 23). It appears that charismatic leadership on the part of volunteer managers can do important work in maintaining this relationship between volunteer and organization.

Also important, however, was the opportunity to work with other volunteers, who tended to be like-minded. Volunteer cohorts formed around different nights of the week; as such, the “Friday night people” did not necessarily even know the members of the “Wednesday group” (p. 24). The authors also found that the positive recognition of good work from outside sources seemed highly important to volunteers: they noted that “several interviewees proudly declared that their theatre has been runner up for the Most Welcoming Theater in Britain” (Ibid.). Ultimately, Bussell and Forbes’ work affirms the findings of Bhattacharya, Hayagreeva and Glynn (1995) and Wymer and Brudney (2000) that “social identification is the motivating factor in arts volunteering” (Bussell & Forbes, 2007, p. 24). This social identification seems to encompass both a relationship with fellow organizational volunteers and with the organization itself and what it represents.

Noreen Orr examines volunteering as a leisure activity in her article “Museum Volunteering: Heritage as ‘Serious Leisure’” (2006). She cites extensive literature that sees volunteers as being “as much an audience as a resource” (p. 195), and characterizes UK heritage museum volunteers as cultural consumers who are seeking greater access to organizations that represent their unique interests (p. 197). This volunteer-as-audience view is supported by the statistic that while the number of day visitors to these museums has declined, the number of heritage volunteers has increased (Ibid.). This perhaps
indicates that volunteering may be a more attractive way for some people to engage with organizations than simply visiting or attending.

Orr suggests that heritage volunteers are in the unique position of being both consumers and producers of their own leisure activities. She found that these heritage volunteers often find their way to museums through individual interests and hobbies, but that in volunteering, they instead are “practicing their leisure through collective action” (p. 203). Additionally, as was the case in Bussell and Forbes’ study, volunteering for an organization becomes an important part of a person’s identity. As Orr sees it, these volunteers are “using the museum space to make their own culture and contribute to the construction of their own identities” (Ibid.). All of this reinforces the view of organizational volunteering as a complex social activity that provides considerable psychological benefits to its participants. In Orr’s innovative framework, providing rewarding volunteer opportunities becomes almost a service that organizations offer to a small, interested public – to the extent that it leads her to question whether museums really should assume the responsibility for financing their volunteers’ self-generated leisure, especially as numbers of paid visitors decrease (p. 206).

Finally, Orr points to the potential tensions that can be created in an organization as a result of extensive use of volunteers. She cites a British Association of Friends of Museums study that reported the presence of “a latent or actual ‘us and them’ attitude” between volunteers and professional staff (p. 204). As volunteers seek to contribute more of their time and professional expertise to an organization, professional staff may fear becoming redundant in the face of free labor. As such, it is not uncommon to see
volunteer tasks constrained to a limited number of “peripheral activities that the professionals care to delegate,” (p. 205, Stebbins 1992, p. 33). I will suggest that an organization’s attitude towards the roles of professionals versus volunteers is a crucial part of its volunteer culture, and I predict that organizations that use extensive volunteer inputs would have fewer concerns about reinforcing strict delineations between professionals and amateurs. However, because my study does not include a control, “typical” arts organization, I am unable to actually test this claim in the space of this project.

Volunteer demographics, trends, and activities

These UK case studies plus the NEA’s study based in the US, show the prominence of older volunteers in the arts and cultural sector. NEA Research Note #95 shows that the median age of arts volunteers in the US is 51, which is older than volunteers for all other types of organizations. Additionally, 23 percent of cultural or arts volunteers are ages 65 or older, which makes them the largest age group among arts volunteers (Nichols, 2007, p. 4). The implications of this reality for arts volunteering are varied: in the theater case study, it was noted that even though they generally have an abundance of volunteers, the organization is concerned about its long-term needs as older volunteers become less able to contribute (Bussell & Forbes, 2007, p. 24). The NEA research note suggests, however, that arts organizations may see an influx of volunteers as baby-boomers retire and age (Nichols, 2007, p. 4). Both of the UK case studies suggest that volunteering can become a sort of alternate “career” for many older adults.
that are no longer in the work force, who can now devote their time to projects of their choosing. And Bussell and Forbes write of volunteers that continue to work well into their eighties, sometimes to the fear of their managers (2007, p. 24).

Another noteworthy trend in arts volunteering emerges when we shift our sights away from designated “arts organizations” and look at arts volunteers in places like churches or schools. The NEA research note shows that 7.1 million Americans volunteer in this capacity (11 percent of all volunteers), and that this group is generally younger and less educated than more typical “arts volunteers” (who are almost overwhelmingly older and have a bachelor’s degree or higher) (Nichols 2007, p. 1). The lower barriers to entry – or increased attractiveness – of these activities and settings will be examined in a later discussion of the informal arts.

Finally, the NEA study gives us a breakdown of what kinds of activities arts volunteers are performing for their organizations. The most common activity is providing free artistic services, which was done by 37 percent of arts or cultural volunteers. Closely following is fundraising, which is performed by 35 percent of arts volunteers. Other common activities center around helping to run the organization: 28 percent offer managerial assistance, 21 percent offer general labor, and another 21 percent perform office services. Serving as an usher or greeter, which is one of the most visible volunteer roles in the arts, is performed by only 17 percent of arts volunteers (p. 8).

This data shows that arts volunteering encompasses a wide spectrum of activities, from providing programming to securing funds to helping run the organization itself.
Since organizational size is not taken into account in this study, these numbers capture an important picture of arts participation that spans the boundaries of small versus large arts nonprofits. Though volunteers are probably not helping to manage large flagship organizations – or performing on their stages – a great number of them appear to be doing managerial and artistic work in the many small arts organizations that populate the cultural ecosystem (Chang, 2010).

After examining these studies, it is still unclear whether volunteers are best considered a special segment of an organization’s audience or a member of an organization’s human resources team. Likely, this varies depending on the type of volunteer, and the type of volunteering that an organization encourages. To return to Bussell and Forbes, the idea of volunteer “marketing” seems to be less about targeted recruitment efforts, and more about creating a “volunteer culture” that becomes part of the organization’s identity. This, I suggest, could be a large part of what encourages interested volunteers to approach an organization in the first place, and what keeps current volunteers contributing. Compared to board volunteering, organizational volunteering has significantly lower economic and social barriers to entry; however, strong age and educational trends in organizational volunteering suggest a considerable level of social segmentation among organizational volunteers (Nichols, 2007). Still, for an average citizen looking to contribute to a valued organization, a significant donation of time may be more manageable – and more enjoyable – than a comparable donation of funds.
2.2 How do we normally think about arts engagement and engagement with organizations?

In the previous section it was shown that dedicated volunteers often consider working for specific organizations to be an important part of their own identities. The literature on arts engagement, however, typically looks at how everyday citizens consume or produce art via a wide spectrum of organizations (or totally apart from organizations, as personal hobbies or in informal groups). Additionally, literature that focuses on organizational relationship-building is usually written with ticket sales in mind, with the long-term hope of laddering-up these patrons to becoming donors. Volunteers are usually not included as a part of this picture. What I would like to suggest is that organizational volunteers give us a good way to think about organizational engagement that goes beyond monetary transactions, but that still plays an important part in an overall picture of organizational stability.

Arts engagement and participation

The field of arts policy and administration has produced an incredible amount of research on arts participation in the United States. The concentrated interest on engagement and participation is one of the latest in a long line of paradigms through which arts researchers try to make sense the state of the arts in this country. Bill Ivey and Steven J. Tepper’s book-length collection of research entitled Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of America’s Cultural Life (2008), looks at “the question of participation” – specifically, “how to better understand the changing landscape of cultural
participation” (p. 2). Trained as a folklorist, co-editor Ivey is an avid proponent of American popular cultural forms like rock and country music. He appears deeply interested in broadening our conception of “the arts,” and in finding ways that the government and nonprofit arts system in the US can help Americans lead more fulfilling, creative lives.

Ivey is particularly concerned about the dichotomy between making and consuming art that appears to have been strengthened in the last century. He reminds us that in the 19th and early 20th centuries, personal art making was a part of everyday life for many Americans. He cites the figure that between 1820 and 1860 nearly 150,000 drawing manuals were published, and that in 1909, almost 365,000 pianos were manufactured and sold in the US, whose population at the time was less than 100 million. Piano sales would never reach that level again – they declined gradually in the next decade, and then sharply in the wake of the Great Depression (aided by the emergence of new mass technologies such as the phonograph and the radio). Whereas the piano had served as the cultural hearth in the middle-class American home in the 19th century, the radio-phonograph quickly took its place in the early decades of the 20th century. (p. 3-4)

Ivey attributes great significance to this shift, suggesting that it fundamentally “reconfigur[ed] our definition of participation in art and culture” (italics in original) (p. 4). Domestic art and music making were largely replaced by cultural consumption, fed by rapidly growing technologies and industries. Art education adapted to this trend, says Ivey, by moving away from teaching young people how to make art and music, and “toward an alternative that could be best described as the intelligent enjoyment of music
– that is, what came to be known as music (or art for that matter) appreciation” (Ibid.) He continues,

Henceforth, the requirement to draw, sing, act, recite, play, or otherwise perform in the arts would be replaced by some form of consumption – consumption that might be as casual as the purchase of a new jazz record or the twist of a radio dial or as schooled as a guided museum tour or narrated young peoples’ concert. If we think of our expressive life as divided between culture we create and culture we take in, the commoditization of art pumped up consumption – the taking-in of art – while simultaneously undermining art making. (p. 5)

In the nonprofit arts sector, this move from production to consumption was manifested in the form of public attendance at events put on by cultural institutions like symphonies, opera houses, theaters, and museums. As such, the thrust of most mid-century national-level arts policy interventions (such as the creation of the NEA and the development of the system of state arts agencies) was to increase access to the benchmark arts (ballet, classical music, opera, theater, museums, literary fiction, and jazz [Tepper & Gao, 2008, p. 17]) in the form of audience attendance, especially in areas of the country that had little programming in these art forms (Ivey, 2008, p. 5).

The distinction that Ivey highlights between artistic production and consumption is certainly compelling, and well supported by the historic record. However, I would like to take this opportunity to critically consider his invitation to “think of our expressive life as divided between culture we create and culture we take in.” Performance theory calls our attention to the fact that all aesthetic production is co-production between a “performer” and an “audience,” and that the role of the audience (or non-performer) is not to be underestimated (Bauman & Babcock, 184). As such, we should take care in assuming that consumption is inherently passive and that production is inherently active,
and instead seek to understand the unique interactions between the multiple and various acts of production and consumption that construct any given creative context. This is the approach favored by Howard S. Becker in his book *Art Worlds* (1982), which encourages us to consider each of the individuals in an artistic context (or “world”) as an essential co-producer of an artistic product or event.

It is with this in mind that I will suggest that in the act of artistic or cultural volunteering, we might witness a compelling synthesis of producing and consuming – a “making happen” or “making possible” for consumption that is not about being the author of the art at hand, but which is still far from passive. In these contexts, volunteers become active producers or sustainers of artistic environments, even while simultaneously thinking of themselves as part of a cultural “audience.”

One could safely argue that philanthropy similarly sustains art worlds, and in the benchmark arts, certainly to a greater degree than volunteering. However, I believe that the embodied practice of volunteering – which often brings the volunteer in some sort of proxemic relationship with the organization and its members, and often around specific cultural events – shares more with the “personal practice” aspect of artmaking (highlighted by Tepper & Gao, 2008, p. 36) than monetary giving does, and thus warrants more consideration in discussions of “participation” in the arts than it currently receives.

My study joins scores of others that originated with concern over the health of nonprofit arts organizations. Inspired by the research of scholars like Ivey and Tepper, I have sought case study organizations that have found ways to successfully harness the power of artistic participation and translate it into long-term organizational health. I find
these cases to be quite compelling, since their approaches have appeared to produce organizations that are economically and socially viable, some over many years.

There is a great deal of literature on arts participation that focuses on social barriers and inequality in arts participation. In their chapter in *Engaging Art, “Engaging Art: What Counts?”* (2008) Tepper and Gao write,

> Based on the literature, inequality in arts participation occurs along five major dimensions: (1) race (in general, blacks are less likely to participate than whites); (2) education (those with no college experience are less likely to participate than those who have attended college); (3) income (people with lower incomes participate less than higher-income individuals); (4) place of residency (living outside a central city decreases the chances of participating); and (5) arts education (citizens who have never taken art lessons are significantly less likely to participate than those who have had some arts training). (p. 36)

They then pose the question, “Are these five factors more or less important for determining personal practice versus attendance?” By analyzing data from the SPPA, they determined that “with the exception of jazz, socioeconomic inequality (i.e., education and income) is greater for attending the arts than for personal practice” (p. 37). To put it another way, there appear to be lower barriers for a greater number of individuals for practicing art and music than for attending art and music events. This statement is perhaps supported by the data from the NEA report quoted earlier that found greater numbers of young, less-educated arts volunteers in the area of performance (what generally gets thought of as “personal practice”) than engage with more “typical” arts organizations, where attendance is the most common form of engagement.

Can we consider organizational volunteering to be a type of creative, artistic practice? I will suggest that it depends on the type of volunteering that an organization
encourages. When volunteers are significantly constrained in the type of tasks that they are invited to perform, it is difficult to think of their work as highly creative. However, if an organization gives volunteers considerable autonomy, and they end up executing a large number of the organization’s tasks – especially those that require some sort of learned expertise – then I would argue that their work can be considered quite creative and productive.

I will suggest that this type of creative, engaged volunteering is going on in my case study organizations. Two of my organizations, Stuart’s Opera House and the Lancaster Festival, are situated in rural and semi-rural southeastern Ohio in communities originally built around farming and manufacturing, where one might not expect to find thriving arts organizations (according to some of Tepper and Gao’s barriers). In these organizations, it could be that volunteering may have more in common with personal practice than other types of higher-barrier organizational engagement, such as attending performances or becoming a donor.

The literature on rural arts and the informal arts additionally offer helpful perspectives on how arts participation and engagement can look different depending on (1) what type of art you look at, and (2) where, geographically, you look. The NEA’s one-hundredth research note, *Come as You Are: Informal Arts Participation in Urban and Rural Communities* (Iyengar, 2010) analyzes results from the 2008 SPPA for trends in urban versus rural arts engagement, and in informal arts participation. They found that, unsurprisingly, arts organizations tend to cluster in urban areas, which tends to skew statistics on urban vs. rural arts participation (making it seem that urban people

26
participate more) (p. 4). However, when informal arts are brought into the picture, it turns out that urban and rural people are equally likely to participate (p. 3) – suggesting that higher urban rates of arts attendance can be largely attributable to simply the presence of more organizations to frequent. The report classifies the “informal arts” as creative and performance practices by non-professionals, plus attendance at fairs, festivals and school- or church-based performances (p. 2), and it appears that for many of these activities, urban and rural people participate at almost the exactly the same rates. Some activities that share rates of participation for urban and rural Americans, with percentages provided, are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visiting a historical park or neighborhood</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to an outdoor performing arts festival</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending a music, theater or dance performance at a place of worship</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing musical instruments</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating paintings, drawings or sculpture</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing dance</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Arts activities performed equally in rural and urban areas (from Iyengar, 2010)

The above NEA study focuses largely on informal arts in rural areas, yet informal arts are also prevalent in urban settings. The Research Study of the Informal Arts conducted by the Chicago Center for Arts Policy (CCAP) has collected extensive ethnographic data on various informal arts groups in Chicago in order to study the social benefits to citizens that participate.

In their 2010 article, “More than a Hobby: Adult Participation in the Informal Arts,” based around just three of the project’s case studies, the authors state that “[t]he
informal arts are characterized and distinguished by their overall accessibility as vehicles for artistic expression, by the self-determining nature of individuals’ participation, and by the generally noncommercial nature of the activities” (Wali, Marcheschi, Severson & Longoni, p. 216). This idea of accessibility, as the authors present it, is as much about participants’ attitudes as it is about more material concerns (like geographic proximity or cost to participate). They refer to this as the “metaphorical space of informality,” and they explain that, “the very concept that this is an ‘informal’ activity helps participants recruit others and brings people together” (p. 224). This notion lends further credence to the importance of “culture” when looking at issues of accessibility and community participation. In the Chicago case studies, this culture is manifested in practice – in welcoming attitudes and in abundant, low-risk opportunities for adults to learn and make art. Space also helps foster this sense of accessibility: most informal arts activities take place in locations that are not art institutions, which “seems to increase people’s comfort about participating.” The authors continue, “[w]e observed that people quickly appropriate the space, giving it a meaning or value that creates a zone of safely in which they can take risks with creative expression. Repeatedly, we have heard from people at these sites that they felt ‘safe,’ that the felt ‘comfortable’” (p. 221). This indicates that negative attitudinal barriers may be just as detrimental to arts participation as material or geographic barriers.

The informal arts discussed in the CCAP study focus on amateur art making, but I believe that meaningful connections can be found between their practices and those of the organizational volunteers in my study. Both amateur art makers and arts volunteers work
outside of professionalized contexts to bring an artistic event or vision to fruition. Both are likely driven by intersecting creative and social drives to work with others towards an aesthetic goal. And both want to participate in the arts beyond the practice of attendance, but often without pursuing the art at hand professionally. As such, organizational volunteers in the arts (especially in organizations that present the benchmark arts) might be bridging an interesting gap between the informal (or amateur) and formal (or professional) arts worlds.

Finally, one particular type of arts venue seems to be eclipsing all others in terms garnering widespread and diverse participation, and that is the festival. NEA took note of this, and produced the study “Live from Your Neighborhood: A National Study of Outdoor Arts Festivals.” (2010) Festival attendance is framed as “informal arts attendance” in the introduction by Chairman Rocco Landesman (p. 1), and in the preface, authors Sunil Iyengar and Mario Garcia Durham state that the SPPA has repeatedly shown that (1) “[i]n sheer numbers, attendance rates for festivals far exceed those for many single types of arts activities – classical music concerts, for example, or theater, ballet, or opera,” and (2) “[f]estival audiences, on average, are more diverse than those for may other types of live arts events” and tend to “more closely resemble the general population than do other groups of art-goers.” (p. 2). Their survey of over 1,400 outdoor arts festivals found that 59 percent of festivals are free for all events, and of those that do charge an admission fee, 56 percent charge less than $15 per ticket, and 68 percent charge less than $20 per ticket (p. 7). Festivals are also often family-friendly, and allow attendees to choose from a variety of acts and move about freely – all traits that appear to
be valued among these large numbers of festival-goers. Additionally, 77 percent festivals take place in towns with fewer than 250,000 residents, and of those, 39 percent take place in towns with fewer than 10,000 residents (p. 8). And finally, 59 percent of outdoor festivals have occurred in the same community for more than a decade (Ibid.). These statistics paint the picture of a cultural form that is inviting, inexpensive, both rural and urban, and which appears to support relative longevity. These facts are significant for my study, because one of my organizations is built entirely around the festival form (the Lancaster Festival) and another puts on a large festival as part of its yearly programming (Stuart’s Opera House). Thus, since festivals seem predisposed to wide-scale community engagement, it could be that using this genre of arts presenting is contributing to these organizations’ stability and longevity.

Organizational engagement

Literature on organizational engagement in the arts tends to use marketing frameworks to look at how organizations can draw patrons in and keep them coming back, generally with the goal of increasing earned income in the form of ticket sales, admission fees, or purchase of other services. In this framework, organizational engagement leads to economic stability via monetary transactions from patron to organization. For my project, I too am examining connections between organizational engagement and economic stability, but I am focusing instead on volunteer inputs as crucial sustaining resources for an organization. Though earned revenue is still an important part of the economic picture of each of these organizations, extensive volunteer
inputs seem to also be an important part of the picture – perhaps because it allows them to do more with less.

A framework of transactions and relationships can be used to think about organization-driven arts participation. In her chapter “Building Arts Participation through Transactions, Relationships, or Both,” in *Entering cultural communities: diversity and change in the nonprofit arts* (Grams & Farrell, 2008), Diane Grams uses organizational case studies to show how three groups effectively harnessed these two approaches to create organizational stability. The Old Town School of Folk Music epitomized the transactions approach by cornering the Chicago market on music and dance instruction to generate significant revenue for the organization. Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis, instead, used the relationship model to serve the city’s diverse cultures and encourage social harmony – fashioning an organization whose stability was instead based on broad community support and collaborations with artists, schools, and other community groups. Finally, the San Francisco Symphony used the integrated database Tessitura to create a relationship “feel” in the space of their monetary transactions. This innovation was adopted in response to declining symphony subscriptions, which served as a source of organizational stability in the past. With Tessitura, customer service representatives could use previously-collected patron information to make conversation when that patron called to buy tickets, and ticket buyers were always asked if they wanted to make a donation at the time of purchase (which netted $1.3 million in contributions in 2004 [p. 36]). For the Symphony, the strategic use of technology
enabled them to create a personal, small-organization feel in a large institution, which appears to have helped increase organizational revenues (p. 33).

The transactions versus relationships model is also useful in considering an organization’s volunteer approaches. Though not mentioned in Grams’ article, the Old Town School of Folk Music uses a transactional approach in its volunteer management system as well. Organizational volunteers earn either concert tickets or lesson hours in direct exchange for their volunteer hours (Old Town School of Folk Music Volunteer Handbook). This transactional approach to volunteering is also present to varying degrees in my case study organizations, and represents an important variable to consider in volunteer motivations. Some volunteers return year after year with no compensation offered, while others appear to be driven by the specific exchange value of their work. For organizations, I suspect that the decision of what or how much to offer volunteers becomes an important part of their volunteer management strategy.

Findings over several studies show that, as with volunteers, dedicated arts patrons show strong social motivations in their participation. A study of recent trends in arts consumption in France, (Pulh, Marteaux & Mencarelli, 2008) it was found that many arts consumers may be seeking social experiences even over aesthetic ones when they take in the arts. They found that some organizations are experimenting with relaxing rules against eating, drinking and even chatting during performances to create a more convivial atmosphere, which has yielded positive results among some audiences. Other organizations are experimenting with increasing contact between visitors, staff and
artists, apparently to encourage more “personal” relationships between organizations and patrons. (p. 5)

In the US context, this apparent desire for positive social experiences in an arts environment is supported by the findings in Ostrower’s chapter “Multiple Motives, Multiple Experiences: The Diversity of Cultural Participation” in Engaging Art (2008). Using the results from an 2004 Urban Institute study, she found that for performing and informal arts patrons (i.e. dance, arts and crafts fair or festival, music or plays), their major motivator was to “socialize.” The second highest motivator for each of these forms was to have an “emotionally rewarding,” experience. For the purposes of my study, it is also important to note that festivals and fairs had the highest percentage of respondents saying that they were motivated out of a desire to “support a community organization” (p. 90-91). Again, since my two largest organizations put on festivals, it could be that they are garnering increased support simply by virtue of the type of cultural product they produce.

These findings point to the strong social motivations that drive attendance and participation at many, if not most, cultural events – formal or informal. It may be the case, however, that our current ideas about cultural consumption – especially in the benchmark arts – do not sufficiently take into account this strong social motivation. I would assert that most organizations attempt to highlight things like “knowledge gain” and “high quality art” in their self-presentation, and additionally position themselves essentially as arts service providers for individual consumers. Ostrower’s analysis of these Urban Institute findings suggests that, instead, taking into account the social desires
of audiences may get organizations closer to providing the experiences that their patrons are really looking for – experiences that will keep them coming back. Ostrower’s findings also showed that patrons are generally experiencing lower social rewards than they were seeking, but higher quality than they were looking for. The implications for arts organizations here are considerable – if arts organizations continue to struggle in this climate of high excellence but low social rewards, then shifting resources to insure inviting social experiences for patrons may lead to positive results.

Finally, Scott R. Swanson and J. Charlene Davis examine arts patronage through a social identity framework in their 2006 article “Arts Patronage: A Social Identity Perspective.” They find that patrons that feel “oneness with or connectedness with” an organization, and experience its successes and failures as their own, tend to have (1) stronger feeling of satisfaction with the organization, (2) a stronger input commitment (i.e. higher attendance and membership), (3) more years of attendance, and (4) stronger attitudinal commitment to the organizations. Additionally, strongly-identifying patrons ranked the “employee quality” of an organization (representing their interaction with staff) as the most important component of their experience – even over aesthetic or logistical factors. Once again, strong social identification with an organization and its staff is shown to be correlated with increased patron support in areas like attendance and advocacy.

In discussing the managerial implications of their findings, Swanson and Davis suggest that groups might “work on making the organization a more central source of self-definition for the patrons.” Additionally, they suggest that “[t]he greater the overlap
a patron perceives between the organizational image and him- or herself, the more commitment-type behaviors are likely to be exhibited.” They say that identification can be strengthened by “providing opportunities for contact” with the organization, and they suggest that “developing associations beyond the market transaction may help the organization to establish stronger relationships with customers” (p. 136). Interestingly, increasing organizational volunteering opportunities is mentioned nowhere in their suggestions, even though it fits almost perfectly the authors’ framework of the ideal patron-organization relationship. Devoted organizational volunteers, as was shown in the previous section, often feel great satisfaction when they perceive organizational successes as their own, and are drawn by the opportunity to interact closely with both staff and other like-minded volunteers.

Arts volunteers and arts patrons appear to be looking for similar things – social interaction and personal identification with a valued institution. Many arts organizations continue to struggle, however, with maintaining a strong pool of return patrons. Prepaid memberships and subscriptions – ways that patrons traditionally expressed their commitment to an organization – have fallen off, causing organizations to use business marketing strategies to draw in segmented audiences in a piecemeal fashion. This strategy does little, however, to foster the social identification and social experiences that patrons appear to be seeking.

In light of this changing landscape of organizational engagement, my study considers the possibility of using significant volunteer inputs to increase organizational stability via increased organizational engagement. By opening their doors to greater
numbers of volunteers, organizations lower barriers to strong organizational identification and involvement, which is otherwise usually dominated by market transactions or significant monetary donations. By creating more volunteer opportunities, organizations are also widening the pool of individuals that have a personal stake in the success of the organization. Finally, if organizations are able to rely on significant volunteer inputs to run their organizations, they can perhaps do more with the money they have, and offer more at a lower cost to their patrons.

2.3 The social framework of an organization

The literature on arts engagement, addressed in the previous section, tends to focus on the patron or participant, even when discussing arts organizations. In this part of my literature review, I will expand the discussion started in the previous section to look at some management strategies that organizations have used to create cultures of public collaboration and engagement. For organizations that rely heavily on volunteer inputs, significant areas of organizational operations often get turned over to expert volunteers. Though this may not be common practice in what we think of as “typical” arts or nonprofit organizations, it occurs enough in strategic management for scholars to have developed theoretical frameworks around these practices.

The literature already reviewed has addressed, in various ways, the idea of “user co-production,” in which individuals that are usually considered to be patrons, audience, or recipients of services actually work with an organization to help produce services. This is essentially what is at work in organizational volunteering. The idea of co-
production is investigated in Tony Bovaird and Elke Loeffler’s article “From Engagement to Co-production: The Contribution of Users and Communities to Outcomes and Public Value” (2012). The authors investigate alternative forms of service provision in the UK, and although their research does not focus on arts organizations, their findings are still applicable to my study, since many arts groups find themselves situated in the same nonprofit, public/private hybrid structure as Bovaird and Loeffler’s cases.

The authors trace a shift beginning in the 1980s in the UK from “‘public services FOR the public’ towards ‘public services BY the public’ within the framework of the public sector,” (p. 1121). This move, they say, has been driven by both ideological concerns (about public value and the limits of the state) and material realities (such as budgetary cutbacks). Bovaird and Loeffler define user and community co-production of public services as “[t]he public sector and citizens making better use of each other’s assets and resources to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency” (Ibid.). Increased co-production of services is driven by “a vision of service users and the communities in which they live which is different from the traditional view of the public as ‘passive’” (Ibid.). This approach may be particularly relevant for the arts sector, since research on arts engagement is showing that interest in “passive” consumption appears to be waning, while more social, creative, and “active” pursuits are gaining popularity.

The authors cite Richard Normann’s work (1984) on “relieving” vs. “enabling” logics in service delivery – “relievers” would be service providers like physicians, who perform a service for a customer, while “enablers” make resources or structures available for customers to use themselves (which makes it co-productive, according to the authors)
“Enabling” logic is at work in volunteer-heavy organizations that delegate work and responsibilities, but still maintain a central structure to regulate and oversee activities. With this organizational approach, the organization serves as the stable structure around and within which citizens can focus their attentions and efforts towards desired outcomes. Bovaird and Loeffler are careful to point out that even when there is significant user co-production of services, public support is often still necessary. Thus, even if there is widespread community self-management in spaces or projects, important enabling funds and structures are often paid for out of the public purse and coordinated by the organization (Ibid.)

The authors then outline different ways that projects, policies or services can be partially co-produced. They call this type of parsing “unbundling,” and it allows services to be broken down and understood for each of their constituent activities (p. 1125). Some types of co-production that the authors have observed are:

- Co-planning of policy
- Co-design of services
- Co-prioritization of services
- Co-financing of services
- Co-managing of services
- Co-delivery of services
- Co-assessment of services

I expect that this will be a useful framework through which to view my own cases, to (1) single out what kinds of volunteer/amateur co-production are being used, and (2) if any types of co-production tend to be more common than others. The authors note that “[w]hile some of these co-produced activities may be less likely than others (e.g. only specialists amongst users are likely to be capable of co-design of much of service...
technology), they are all plausible in certain circumstances” (p. 1125). Each of my organizations uses only some co-production in their workings, so it will be necessary to indicate just what is being co-produced in each organizational context.

Finally, Bovaird and Loeffler helpfully examine some of the cultural and systematic barriers to co-production in the UK, which likely hold true in the US context as well. They are, briefly summarized:

- **Funding and commissioning barriers** – funders and commissioners often have a narrow view of objectives, performance indicators and anticipated activities, while co-production often “encompasses a broad range of activities to deliver outcomes.”

- **Difficulties in generating evidence of value for people, professionals, funders and auditors** – costs and benefits may not be directly tied or traceable, and their effects may be complex and long-term.

- **Need to develop the professional skills to mainstream co-production** – utilizing greater degrees of co-production requires new skills, outlooks, and evaluation methods, which are likely different from current best practices.

- **Risk aversion** – co-production is perceived as risky by many public managers, politicians and professionals, and is may not be well-understood. The authors note, though, that existing service delivery strategies also carry substantial risk, which invites reevaluation of perceived increased risk in using more co-production.

- **Political and professional reluctance to lose status and “control”** – if public managers and politicians perceive increasing co-production as ceding prized status and control, then not just retraining, but also a culture shift may be necessary to introduce and implement more co-production. (p. 1129-30)

Any or all of these barriers, it seems, could easily exist in an arts organization. Using Bovaird and Loeffler’s language to describe my cases, however, I believe that I have
located organizations that are utilizing user co-production to a greater degree than “typical” arts organizations do (through their use of extensive volunteer inputs).

Bovaird and Leoffler conclude with a couple of important findings from their cases. First, that,

there appears to be a huge latent willingness of citizens to become more involved, but only if they feel they can play a worthwhile role. Citizens are only willing to co-produce in a relatively narrow range of activities that are genuinely important to them . . . (p. 1136).

Thus, it is important to note that this type of voluntary co-production only works when co-producers themselves are strongly invested in the projects at hand.

Second, the authors point out that,

while user and community co-production can achieve major improvements in outcomes and service quality and can produce major cost savings, it is not resource free. Initiating such approaches can involve substantial setup costs and supporting them effectively will usually involve a flow of public sector resources. Co-production may be ‘value for money’, but it usually cannot produce value without money” (p. 1136-7).

As such, increased co-production does not eliminate the need for public or private funding, nor does it eliminate the need for organizations to exist that coordinate service provision. Co-productive strategies often still require stable public infrastructures that provide secure spaces for service creation and provision.

A second helpful theoretical framework for looking at organizational structures is the one used extensively by Katherine K. Chen in her work on Burning Man. In her book *Enabling creative chaos: the organization behind the Burning Man event* (2009), she frames Burning Man as existing at the nexus of bureaucratic and collectivist practices –
functioning in a delicate balance between over- and under-organizing as the group works to sustain itself and its mission over its nearly 30-year history.

As a brief overview, Burning Man is a highly participatory alternative arts festival that takes place around Labor Day every summer in Nevada’s Black Rock desert. A temporary “city” is plotted and created, then filled with art installations, pop-up clubs and dance parties, lectures and workshops, stations for amenities like bathrooms, ice and coffee, and safety infrastructures for fire and medical emergencies. Aside from the ticket purchase, money is only to be exchanged for ice and coffee – all other exchanges are meant to take place amongst attendees in the form of sharing or bartering. According to Chen, “Burning Man tenets prohibit vending, commercialism, and spectating (i.e., gawking)” (p. 2). Actively discouraging spectating and promoting continuous engagement can be taken as an indication that the event is positioning itself in opposition to practices of “passive” artistic consumption, and instead aligning itself with more immersive, ritualistic forms of aesthetic expression.

Burning Man is a particularly useful comparison case for my study because it epitomizes what I have been referring to as a “volunteer culture.” Burning Man is not a “typical” arts organization in many ways, even while it clearly has visual and performance art at its core. The organization’s efforts center around one event, although it is planned for year-round. Though this is not the typical structure of an arts organization, it does mirror that of one of my case studies, the Lancaster Festival. Legally, Burning Man is not a nonprofit organization – the group was incorporated into an LLC in 1996 after the organizers realized that the scale of the event had grown to such
a size that they could not take on the accompanying increased liability (p. 46).

Additionally, lead organizers said that the LLC form offered them more freedom and flexibility, such as allowing the founder and head organizer to have more direct control over the organization, rather than “conceding oversight to a separate board” (Ibid.). Although they are technically a business, they have voluntarily adopted transparency and non-distribution practices from the nonprofit legal structure. One organizer, Stuart Mangrum, summed up this hybrid approach, and its perhaps competing internal values: “Burning Man is in fact a business, but it’s a poorly-run one and probably the better for it” (53). This statement echoes comments often made by economists about the inherent inefficiencies of the nonprofit structure. (Gray & Heilbrun, 2001, p. 204)

Chen adapts a table from Rothschild and Whitt (1986) to illustrate the “ideal types” of bureaucratic organizational practices vs. collectivist organizational practices. Her table is reproduced below (p. 6).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bureaucratic Practices</th>
<th>Collectivist Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allocation of tasks</td>
<td>Fixed division of labor</td>
<td>Rotating system of tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of decision making</td>
<td>Hierarchy of offices</td>
<td>By consensus, democratic decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of guidelines</td>
<td>Set of general rules</td>
<td>Flexible rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation of organizational property</td>
<td>Separation of personal from collective property and rights</td>
<td>Melded personal and collective property, personal stake in ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment of responsibilities</td>
<td>Positions and promotion based on technical expertise, skills, and experience</td>
<td>By interest, members can learn and teach skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection of members with organization</td>
<td>Employment as a career</td>
<td>Belief in the ethos or mission of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of organizational authority</td>
<td>Legal-rational authority, or authority vested in position</td>
<td>Value-rational authority, or authority vested in collective beliefs and mission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Bureaucratic versus Collectivist practices (from Chen, 2009)

Bureaucratic practices are generally thought of as “best practices” in modern organizations. Chen addresses the prevalence and dominantly-accepted value of bureaucratic practices:

Most researchers categorize the majority of modern, complex, and large organizations as bureaucracies [footnote omitted]. According to German sociologist and economist Max Weber ([1946] 1958), the bureaucratic form first spread because of its superior efficiency over other organizational forms. Researchers attribute the contemporary proliferation of bureaucratic practices to two related factors: the institutionalization of bureaucracy as a widely accepted, legitimate form, and organizations’ tendencies to reproduce accepted and successful forms (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Zucker 1983). In other words, bureaucratic practices are so ingrained that they are viewed as the way to organize, and people have difficulties imagining alternative organizing practices. If people introduce alternative practices, other institutions, including governmental agencies and organizations that provide resources, will pressure them to adopt standard bureaucratic practices (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Pfeffer and SAllencik 1978). (p. 7-8)
Instead, collectivist practices focus on “increasing organizational responsiveness to constituents and cultivating democratic principles of participation,” rather than prioritizing expediency and efficiency. In pure collectivist practices, members are motivated not by monetary incentives or career advancement; instead, their actions are guided by normative control – namely, adherence to the group’s shared mission and goals, or what Weber ([1922] 1978) called “value-rationality” (Chen, 2009, p. 8-9). Chen states that an organization’s use of bureaucratic or collectivist practices often depends on its goal orientations and legal formation; however, she also shows that these lines are becoming increasingly blurred, as both for profit and nonprofit entities experiment with balancing these types of approaches to achieve better outcomes (p. 10-11).

Much like Bovaird and Loeffler’s breakdown of different modes of co-production, Chen’s bureaucratic versus collectivist framework will provide a useful lens through which to analyze my case study organizations in their use of volunteer inputs. Additionally, I hope to test Chen’s assertions regarding organizational isomorphism, to see if my cases have indeed experienced this sort of “push back” against alternative practices.

These two studies tend to cast collaborative, less-professionalized structures in a generally positive light – they are, however, proposing their frameworks in an environment that does not always share this view. As a counterpoint, I offer the UK study presented in the article “The dilemma of judging unpaid workers” by Samantha Lynch and Karen Smith, which appeared in Personnel Review in 2010. Like Orr’s study, this piece focuses on heritage site volunteering at historic homes of literary figures.
Lynch and Smith consider volunteers through a human-resources lens, referring to them throughout as both “volunteers” and “unpaid workers.” By interviewing and distributing surveys to volunteer managers, they determined that, compared to professional best-practices, the process of taking on new volunteers tends to be relatively *ad hoc* and lacking in formal elements like official interviews or rejection letters (pp. 87, 90).

Is this a problem? Apparently not for volunteers, who, according to previous research are generally not looking for more formalization in their roles (p. 83). The authors do, however, cast this as a potential problem for the managers in their study, who reportedly (1) had a difficult time fulfilling necessary volunteer quotas (p. 92), and (2) had few favorable options when it came to rejecting potential volunteers (p. 88). Avoidance was the most frequently used tactic, and in general, decisions about who to bring on and who not to bring on were made through personal judgments on the part of managers, which the authors question as being entirely fair. To them, more formalized, bureaucratic selection practices, along with continuous, active volunteer recruitment (not just taking whoever walks in the door) might benefit these organizations.

Other findings from this study are worth mentioning in light of my project. The authors found, for example, that both rural and urban organizations had trouble recruiting enough volunteers, but for different reasons: urban groups faced more competition for volunteers’ time, while rural groups had smaller volunteer pools and public transportation issues. Among the two, the authors concluded, the rural groups appeared to have the greatest difficulty. Additionally, larger, better-known sites had fewer difficulties attracting volunteers, likely because of the prestige of working for them (p. 87). And like
in previous studies, most of the organizational volunteers were older retirees, and three-fourths of the respondents to the survey were women (p. 86). Finally, most volunteers had been recruited through personal contact with family and friends (p. 84), which supports the findings of the NEA study cited earlier. Thus, it is clear that a spectrum of opinions exist about the proper level of formalization for organizations that use volunteer or community inputs, and also that a range of research supporting these varied opinions exists.

2.4 How do we normally think about stability?

Invariably, organizational stability is framed in temporal and economic terms – how long has an organization been around, and has it managed to secure necessary resources in order to provide programming in relatively consistent manner? Since nonprofit arts organizations are generally seen as existing in a state of “market failure” (Gray & Heilbrun, 2001, p. 204), some form of additional resource infusion beyond market exchange is always necessary for their survival. Monetary inputs – from earned income, donations, and public and private funding – carry the distinct advantage of liquidity over inputs like in kind donations and volunteer inputs. With money, an organization can ostensibly buy and contract the best inputs and services that it can afford. With donated resources and help, it is perhaps limited by the quality of the offered good or service.

This constitutes the business-oriented approach that many nonprofit arts organizations use, or at least aspire to. It falls in line with the bureaucratic organizational
model presented in the previous section. And yet large cash infusions cannot entirely account for long-term stability. Organizations with large budgets appear to be just as likely to suffer ups and downs, and may be forced to drastically restructure or even fold in the face of changing environments. Measures of stability must then also include considerations of how organizations can make themselves less susceptible to long-term threats like shifting tastes, economic recessions, and changing political values – all of which have threatened arts groups in recent decades. Here, again, public value as defined in the OAC study (2004) becomes a vital part of an organization’s success.

As was shown in the previous section, using extensive volunteer inputs does not rule out the need for significant public or private subsidy. This finding is supported by my case study organizations, all of which still rely heavily on monetary donations and earned income to continue providing their services. Although an organization may have a separate development department, traditionally, nonprofit boards are tasked with the responsibility of making sure that an organization has the resources it needs to fulfill its mission (Burdett, 2007, p. 140).

Board members are expected to lead by example by contributing significantly monetarily. However, a study conducted by IMPACTS showed a significant disjuncture in management and board views of what a board’s greatest responsibility is (Dilenschneider, 2013). Perhaps unsurprisingly, management thought that raising and contributing funds was the board’s most important responsibility – more important than their donations of time or expertise. Board members, on the other hand, saw their expertise a their most important contribution, and numerous statements from managers
indicated that board members seemed reluctant to make the steady financial contributions that are generally expected of them. Common criticisms from managers included board members using their positions to expand their social networks rather than focusing on the organization at hand, and throwing ineffectual fundraisers that, again, created prestige and social benefits for them, but did less to actually stabilize the organization.

Again, it is perhaps unsurprising that management and board members would possess these differing views of the board’s role. Since managers are entrenched in running the day-to-day operations of the organization, the importance of liquid assets are real and present to them. They were also likely hired for having administrative training or experience, which would account for a more business-oriented approach towards organizational resources. What I find extremely interesting about this study, however, is the seemingly similar social motivations of board volunteers and organizational volunteers. Many board volunteers appear to believe that their unique talents (and not their money) are the most worthwhile contributions that they can make to an organization. They, like volunteers, seem to prefer practicing this sort of personal, embodied giving over simply writing a check to their organization. Though this attitude appears to be detrimental for management (and the organization overall), it nonetheless speaks to a seemingly pervasive desire – from the top and the bottom of the organizational hierarchy – to become a part of an organization in a personally meaningful way.

It has been shown that arts organizations simply cannot survive without cash infusions beyond what the market provides in admissions and ticket sales. But even
significant cash contributions cannot save an organization that becomes unmoored from its public. Even for less civic-minded donors, if an organization ceases to be a site of social interest or prestige among the wider public, philanthropists may receive less status value for their contributions. Thus, like the OAC study, I will argue that fostering considerably broad public support for an organization remains necessary for long-term stability, even beyond the dollar amount it generates in ticket sales. It is often said that public funding leverages private giving – I will suggest that broad citizen support, or substantial buy-in by “everyday people” in the form of ticket sales or volunteering, leverages stability by spreading the responsibility for sustaining the organization over a wide base. Strong flows of social capital between organization and patrons mean greater consequences for organizational collapse, which patrons and donors will (hopefully) be more likely to work to prevent. Thus, for organizations that are successfully responding to their communities’ social needs and interests, I suggest that organizational stability essentially becomes a byproduct of the strategic management of varied modes of engagement – volunteering being one of these modes.
Chapter 3: Methodology

It is beyond the scope of this study to definitively test the hypothesis that arts organizations can increase their stability through the use of significant volunteer inputs. What this study offers instead are three case studies of organizations that rely heavily on volunteers. Two of these organizations have operated this way for many years; the third is a new arts organization that relies on volunteer help by virtue of its relative youth.

The case study method is defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in its natural setting when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clear, using multiple sources of evidence” (Yin 1994, p. 13). This lack of clarity about the relationship between an organizational phenomenon (stability) and an aspect of its context (volunteering) describes my outlook as I embark upon this study.

Through observations of the arts and cultural “scene” of central and southeastern Ohio, it came to my attention that there were several mid-to-large-scale organizations that (1) used extensive volunteer inputs, and (2) appeared to be relatively stable. By comparing a few of these organizations, I will try to determine if there are any common organizational structures, practices, or attitudes that appear in these diverse organizations. If this is the case, it might indicate some generalizable phenomenon, or relationship, between stability and volunteering in arts organizations.
My data will largely come from informal interviews with the executive directors, volunteer managers, and volunteers in the organizations I have chosen. According to Carol H. Weiss in her book *Evaluation*, “[t]he most basic assumption of [qualitative] approaches is that the researcher seeks to understand experience from the perspectives of participants in the action. Experiences may be different for different actors, and differing cultural and occupational groups will have their unique take on events” (1998, p. 262). For this study, in-person, informal interviews will be used to uncover the specific practices and attitudes surrounding organizational volunteering among those fulfilling these diverse roles in each organization.

Additional data will be collected by analyzing discourse around volunteering in my case study organizations that appears in documents or on the internet, which are available to the general public. The website Guidestar will also be consulted to gather public data, made available on 990 tax forms, about the financials of my case study organizations. Finally, some assertions made in the interviews may need to be confirmed or quantified by consulting data that the organization itself has gathered (on number of volunteers, official organizational policy, etc.), and I will incorporate this data into my study as the organizations see fit to publish.

This type of multi-pronged, holistic methodology is advocated in the 2002 article “The Methodological and Ethical Issues of Conducting Management Research in the Voluntary Sector” (Beattie, Hay, Munro, & Livingstone). Additionally, this study answers the call made by Constance DeVereaux in “Practice versus a Discourse of Practice in Cultural Management” (2009), who advocates for grounded, critical research.
in arts management. She believes that this approach will improve understanding of the field by elevating discussion above mere description to a more thorough consideration of the “ethical and epistemological foundations” of specific practices (p.65). By analyzing the attitudes and stances of managers and volunteers towards volunteering, I hope to reach some understanding of unique personal and organizational values that may be at play in volunteer-reliant organizations.

3.1 Conceptual and Analytical Frameworks

As was stated in my introduction and literature review, his study will investigate arts volunteering by addressing two central questions:

1. **How might the use of extensive volunteer inputs relate to overall organizational stability?**

2. **In organizations that successfully use extensive volunteer inputs, can we detect common structures, practices, and attitudes, either on the part of the organization and/or its volunteers?**

The first question will be addressed (if not definitively answered) by asking staff in volunteer-reliant organizations how they think the extensive use of volunteer inputs may or may not contribute to their stability. The perspective of the executive director in this situation is important and reliable, I believe, since he or she holds the position requiring the broadest-possible understanding of the way the organization functions, and also serves as the primary liaison between the volunteer board and the rest of the organizational staff. However, this question will also be posed to other organizational
staff, in order to determine how perspectives on volunteering are either similar or different, depending on a person’s role in the organization. Similarities in perspective will help point to the presence of a “volunteer culture” – an idea that will be expanded upon below. Additionally, in my analysis chapter I will use the Ohio Arts Council’s framework for revealing the public value of the arts to investigate how volunteering, public value, and organizational stability might be interacting in my case studies.

The second question will be addressed by gathering information about how the people involved in my case study organizations think about volunteering. These perspectives will come from various sources: from directors, managers, and volunteers, who I will interview, and from public sources like websites, program booklets, and onstage announcements – spaces where an organization works to shape its image for its audience and for a wider public.

Investigating this second question will lead me to the concept of a volunteer culture that an organization may or may not possess. A volunteer culture, as I am defining it, is the synthesis of several different aspects of the “big picture” of any given organization. They can be distilled, however, into three areas of indicators:

a. Shared perspectives about volunteering among organizational managers, or how organizational staff and board think about an organization’s volunteer resources, and how they communicate those attitudes both to themselves and to their wider public.

b. The presence of structures and practices that grow out of this perspective, or how the above attitudes have translated into organizational policy and infrastructure.
c. The continued engagement of a large number of volunteers with the organization, or evidence of success in maintaining positive relationships with volunteers.

In addition to looking for evidence of these indicators, their presence (or absence) can also be contextualized in light of the existing research presented in my literature review. This research served as a jumping-off point for “how we normally think about” conceptual areas around the arts and volunteering, and also investigated new frameworks that are gaining traction in cultural research. My literature review included studies in several different fields of scholarship; however, a number intersecting conceptual frameworks emerged that will be used in my analysis. Some frameworks are focused on organizations and management, while others center on audiences and participation. I have grouped studies according to their overriding concepts, and have broken them out into four frameworks, described below:

Bureaucratic versus Collectivist approaches: Transactions and Relationships

The bureaucratic-collectivist framework is employed by Katherine K. Chen in her scholarly research on the Burning Man event. Chen investigates the ways that this “alternative” organization employs both bureaucratic and collectivist organizational strategies to help ensure stability and success over its constantly-changing organizational lifecycle. Chen outlines these two approaches in a table reproduced on page 43 of my literature review. Her framework focuses on big-picture organizational attitudes and how they manifest in practice. Chen shows that even an organization like Burning Man –
which self-identifies as highly collectivist – in fact uses both bureaucratic and collectivist approaches to achieve its goals.

Chen’s framework will be useful in analyzing the practices of the organizations that I am studying, which exist in the bureaucratized world of nonprofit arts organizations, but which have adopted some communitarian strategies and rhetoric, apparently to some success. It will also allow me to identify common or divergent practices among my three organizations when it comes to using bureaucratic versus collectivist approaches.

Diane Grams’ transactions versus relationships framework, illustrated by her case studies (2008), can also be incorporated into this framework, with transactions aligning with bureaucratic practices and relationships aligning with collectivist practices. The similarities between Chen’s and Grams’ approaches are illustrated in the figure below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chen (2009)</th>
<th>Bureaucratic</th>
<th>Collectivist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Burning Man)</td>
<td><em>Fixed division of labor</em></td>
<td><em>Rotating tasks</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Set rules</em></td>
<td><em>Flexible rules</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Employment as career</em></td>
<td><em>Volunteering</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Old Town School of Folk Music)</td>
<td><em>Payment for services</em></td>
<td><em>Free programming</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Consumer-driven</em></td>
<td><em>Mission-driven</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Direct volunteer compensation</em></td>
<td><em>Unclear volunteer compensation</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Bureaucratic/Transactions versus Collectivist/Relationships frameworks.
As with Chen’s framework, I believe that regardless of the overall ethos of any of my case study organizations, both transactions and relationships will be observable in their practices. Transactions will manifest in tit-for-tat, predictable exchanges facilitated by an organized, rule-based system. Relationships, instead, will be characterized by more fluid types of exchanges, and by being driven by value-rationality rather than formal or informal contract-style obligations.

This framework will be useful for looking at both volunteer-organizational relationships and wider patron-organizational relationships. Though I will be focusing on an organization’s approach to volunteering, evidence of wider collectivist or relational practices may support judgments about an organization’s level of community integration and involvement.

*Professional Service Delivery versus User Co-Production*

Tony Bovaird and Elke Loeffler’s study on user co-production in the UK public sector examines cases in which citizens are both providers and recipients of services. This approach differs from how we normally think of public service delivery – in Bovaird and Loeffler’s words, they were considered “activities which professionals did to, or for, members of the public to achieve results ‘in the public interest’” (2012, p. 1120). Bovaird and Loeffler’s concepts of user co-production echo observations made in Noreen Orr’s study of heritage volunteers, where she too identifies volunteers as both consumers and producers of services (Orr 2006, p. 203). Again, this approach goes against our common conceptions of service delivery (which is applicable to the professional arts...
world as well), in which artistic or management professionals are officially employed to provide services, and lay-people consume these services, which they either pay for or receive in a subsidized manner. Orr’s volunteers, instead, perform service work as part of their heritage leisure activities.

Bovaird and Loeffler identified various ways that services can be co-produced by users, and for my case studies, I will use this framework to evaluate what aspects of an organization are run with citizen co-production, and which are handled by “professionals,” or those officially employed to provide a specific service. I will also investigate gray zones or transitions between co-production and professional delivery. For example, an organization may decide that certain tasks need to switch from being co-produced to being professionally done. Or an organization may officially hire a particularly valuable volunteer, moving that person out of the co-productive realm and into the professional realm.

Additionally, I will investigate co-production as a form of giving – related to, but essentially different from monetary donations. Volunteering (as co-production) is a form of embodied giving – whether a volunteer offers time, expertise, or other forms of capital, the gift is minimally liquid and highly particular to the individual. Monetary giving, on the other hand, transfers highly liquid, unconstrained capital to the organization, which the group can use to purchase professional services or other forms of capital. In this way, the volunteering versus donations giving framework fits in with the co-production versus professional service delivery framework, since donations are often meant to fund
professionally-provided services. The relationship between these three frameworks are illustrated in the figure below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bovaird &amp; Loeffler (2012)</th>
<th>Professional service delivery</th>
<th>User co-production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orr (2006)</td>
<td>Patrons consuming heritage experiences (as visitors)</td>
<td>Patrons consuming and producing heritage experiences (as volunteers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Giving” framework</td>
<td>Monetary donations to purchase professional services</td>
<td>Voluntary donations of embodied capital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Professional/Consuming/Monetary versus Co-production/Producing/Volunteering frameworks

*Professional versus Amateur (Informal) Art Worlds*

The previous framework considered professionalism from the organization’s point of view; this next framework looks at *professionalism versus amateurism* from the individual’s point of view. I suggested in my literature review that organizational volunteering might be seen as bridging a gap between informal (or non-professional) and formal (or professional) art worlds. Much literature on non-professional artistic activities focuses on benefits, to the individual and to society, of amateur performance and art
making. Arts volunteering is thought of as distinct from these types of activities – a position that I would like to investigate and possibly challenge. Additionally, taking a page from the CCAP study on informal arts practices in Chicago (2001), I will try to ascertain whether arts volunteers are sensing or responding to something like an organization’s “volunteer culture” – an atmosphere that encourages participation, much like the “metaphorical space of informality” that participants sensed in their informal arts spaces (p. 216). It will also be important to determine if other aspects of the organization are contributing to lower barriers to participation – such as its size, geographic location, or types of genres presented.

Volunteers: Assets versus Liabilities

For this final framework, I will return to considering organizational points-of-view, and look at how managers are thinking about volunteers – largely as assets, or as potential liabilities. This will be determined through both interviews with managers and analyses of organizational literature and social media for observable stances or attitudes around volunteering for a particular organization.

The assets versus liabilities framework intersects with the bureaucratic versus collectivist and professional service delivery versus co-production frameworks, in that management literature that expresses concern regarding the use of volunteer input is often grounded in a pro-bureaucratic, professional stance (Lynch & Smith, 2010). Bovaird and Loeffler additionally highlight several barriers to user co-production, which tend to align with perceived liabilities associated with non-professionals. In my case studies, I will
investigate the ways in which volunteer-reliant organizations navigate concerns about amateurism and inefficiency with regards to volunteering. The connections between these frameworks (indicated by the authors that discuss these concepts), and some indicators that I will look for, are illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteers are an...</th>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Liability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers have...</td>
<td>specialized knowledge</td>
<td>limited professional experience (Edgington)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers have...</td>
<td>varied skills</td>
<td>unpredictable skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers are...</td>
<td>highly engaged patrons</td>
<td>non-paying patrons (Orr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers are...</td>
<td>easy to take on</td>
<td>hard to fire (Lynch &amp; Smith)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike employees,...</td>
<td>chose to participate</td>
<td>can chose not participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike employees,...</td>
<td>don’t require payment</td>
<td>do free work that undermines professionals (Orr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike employees,...</td>
<td>can be brought in as needed</td>
<td>may require unique management (Bovaird &amp; Loeffler)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike donors,...</td>
<td>give time or expertise</td>
<td>don’t give money (IMPACT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike donors,...</td>
<td>can contribute without money</td>
<td>contribute ephemeral, non-liquid assets (IMPACT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Volunteers as Assets versus Liabilities.

These four intersecting frameworks will guide my analysis of how organizations are thinking about volunteering – how they are understanding it, framing it, and attributing positive and negative values to their practices in light of other, possibly contrary, cultural frameworks.

Finally, I will shift my focus to the volunteers themselves, and examine their motivations in light of the research presented in my literature review; namely, Francie Ostrower’s research on audience motivation and experience, and Scott R. Swanson and J. Charlene Davis’ work in their article “Arts Patronage: A Social Identity Perspective.” I will investigate to what extent volunteer and audience populations overlap, which will
have important implications for the applicability of audience-centered research findings on predicting volunteer motivations and behavior. Additionally, I will seek to discover what makes volunteers want to continue giving their time and expertise to an organization – namely, what are the motivating rewards (tangible or intangible) that keep this relationship going?

3.2 Sample

My sample will include three organizations, with at least two people interviewed from each (the executive director and the volunteer manager, and up to two volunteers). These organizations are Stuart’s Opera House in Nelsonville, Ohio, the Lancaster Festival in Lancaster, Ohio, and Opera Project Columbus in Columbus, Ohio. I have chosen these organizations because each is highly volunteer-reliant, and some of them appear to have a distinct “volunteer culture.” I will interview more than one person from each organization in order to have multiple internal perspectives on their practices, which will support, contradict, or illuminate each other. I have purposely chosen organizations that present different programming from each other (Stuart’s presents rock, folk, soul, alternative country, world music, and community arts events; the Lancaster Festival presents classical, country, popular, and family-oriented music and arts events, and Opera Project Columbus presents modern and traditional opera). These organizations are also situated in different cities or towns within a 70-mile radius of each other in central and southeastern Ohio. I believe that the variety present in my cases will allow my study to
encompass a wider range of “types” than if I had chosen similar organizations, and will make commonalities that transcend genre or type of organization come to the fore.

3.3 Study procedures

Each of these three case organizations will be researched to give an accurate sense of the environment in which it operates – its history, its collaborators and competitors, the demographics of its audience and the general public in which it operates, its budget and funding patterns, and its organizational infrastructure.

Data on my cases that can be collected via internet research and observation will be sought before and after the participant interviews, as appropriate. Written and recorded online and print discourse will be analyzed to assess how volunteering is presented as a part of the organization’s operations to the public – both to recruit volunteers and to create and reinforce the organization’s public image. Word choice and consistency of message will be monitored to evaluate the construction and maintenance of “volunteer culture” in the public sphere.

In-person interviews will be conducted on site, and should take one to two hours each. Common questions will be asked to each participant, though interviews will be conversational in nature in order to allow information and meaning to emerge as the interviewees see fit. I will guard against risk by providing a consent form to my participants, and by being forthright about the nature of my study. I have expressed to them that I have no interest in publishing information against their will that would cast their organizations in a poor light, and I am confident that they will not feel pressured to
provide more information to me than they choose. I will also offer them the opportunity to retract statements at any point during my writing process. I will not offer confidentiality since (1) each of my cases are public organizations that are easily identifiable, (2) the organizers have not expressed concern about risk when I have brought it up to them, (3) my findings will be more useful to other organizations if they are able to know exactly which organizations I am writing about.

3.4 Concerns about validity

Internal Validity

In order fairly compare my three organizations, I will use quantitative measures such as years in operation, organizational budgets, and numbers of employees vs. volunteers as comparable indicators of stability and volunteer involvement. In my interviews, I will ask the similar questions across organizations so that the narrative data that they present me will be in response to essentially the same prompts across all cases. Though I expect that my interviews will vary significantly due to their informal, conversational nature, I will guide conversations to address similar issues across all of my cases, which will create topical consistency across all interviews. My interviews will be recorded in order to support the validity of my findings.

External Validity

Since my sample size is small and somewhat particular, I will not claim that my findings will be widely generalizable to all arts organizations. To increase the chance of
presenting useful information or replicable results for some organizations, I plan to provide as much contextual information about each organization as possible, so that readers of my study can determine whether such approaches might be feasible for their organizations.
Chapter 4: Findings

In this section, I will present my three case studies: Stuart’s Opera House, The Lancaster Festival, and Opera Project Columbus. For each organization, I will provide a brief history and other relevant contextual information, and then discuss my findings regarding each organization’s approaches towards volunteering, and how that may be connected to its overall stability.
Each organization is located in a different Ohio city, and as such, some similarities and differences between them bear mentioning at the outset. All three, for example, exist within a 70-mile range of each other along State Route 33. As nonprofit arts organizations, they all fall under the jurisdiction of the Ohio Arts Council, and being situated in Ohio, they perhaps face similar regional attitudes towards arts and culture – which might be expected to differ from attitudes on the coasts or in larger metro areas.

Stuart’s Opera House and the Lancaster Festival both have rural or semi-rural communities as their core audiences, and both are the largest arts organizations in their communities. Their budgets are similarly sized, and they have about the same number of volunteers, as will be shown in my case studies. And, after over a decade of being run by volunteers, both organizations hired paid executive directors for the first time in the early 2000s – individuals who are still filling those roles today.

Opera Project Columbus, on the other hand, is one of many arts organizations in the city of Columbus, Ohio, and a relatively new player in the field. It also presents a very narrow type of programming – only opera – and puts on just three shows a year. Its budget is less than a tenth of the other two organizations, and its volunteer ranks are much smaller as well.

As will be clear in my analysis, Stuart’s Opera House and the Lancaster Festival are much more comparable organizations than Opera Project Columbus, which instead offers an alternative view of organizational volunteering in light of these other two arts groups.
Stuart’s Opera House

Stuart’s Opera House is a performing arts center that serves the city of Nelsonville in Southeastern Ohio. Nelsonville is located on Route 33 about an hour and ten minutes outside of Columbus, and is home to about 5,400 residents (Census 2010). The town was incorporated and settled in the mid-19th century, and boomed after the Civil War thanks to the local extractive industries of coal, clay, and salt, which were supported by the arrival of the railroad to the region to carry goods and raw materials to nearby cities and the industrialized north. In 1870, around the start of this boom, George Stuart, a showboat owner whose boat had sunk a few years earlier in the nearby Hocking River, finished construction on Stuart’s Opera House. The theater would serve not only as an entertainment venue, but also as a community hub, hosting local benefits, graduations, and even Sunday school classes. Located on Nelsonville’s public square, it was – and is – often referred to as the “cornerstone” of the community (“History,” Stuart’s Opera House: Nelsonville, Ohio, 2013).

The theater remained in use until 1924, when its closure was brought about by both the end of the coal boom and its audience’s growing preference for film over live performance. Their doors remained closed until the 1970s, when the Hocking Valley

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1 Unless otherwise noted, information presented comes from L. Buschle, personal communication July 31, 2013; B. Koscho, personal communication, April 25, 2013; T. Peacock, personal communication, April 25, 2013; or S. Warda, personal communication, July 30, 2013.
Museum of Theatrical History bought the building with plans to renovate it. (Ibid.) The theater opened in 1979, but suffered a major setback when the building caught fire in 1980. Plans went forward, however, and the theater finally reopened in 1997 after much work on the part of the community ("Stuart’s Opera House: Our Story," 2008).

Stuart’s Opera House is now held up as a success story by the Ohio Arts Council: in one of the poorest counties in Ohio, the theater and its organization has become a stable presence, and has even managed steady growth in the last few years. As in its 19th century heyday, Stuart’s serves various functions: in addition to showcasing local and touring musical acts in rock, folk, country, and international music genres, it is also used by local theater and dance troupes, community organizations, and serves as a gallery space. Additionally, since 2005 the organization has hosted the annual Nelsonville Music Festival, which has grown into a 4-day event showcasing over 50 bands and artists for about 5,000 attendees (Nelsonville Music Festival, 2013). In 2011, the organization had a budget of $850,000, with 83 percent of its support coming from public or private funding over the last five years (GuideStar, 2013).

Stuart’s Opera House has a full-time staff of five and one part-time employee. The in-house, full-time staff are the executive director, the development director, the marketing director, and the managing director, while the box-office manager works part-time. The facility and technical director is also a full-time position, but his work is not always on site. The executive director, Tim Peacock, also serves as the artistic director, selecting all programming and acts that come through the theater. Brian Koscho, the marketing director, additionally serves as the volunteer coordinator for the Opera House.
Peacock identified a strong volunteer base as one of several key components of the organization’s workings. “There are many pieces of this juggling act that we wouldn’t exist if one of them fell out, and volunteers are one of them,” he said. Volunteers have always been a large part of the organization, but in ways that have shifted as the organization has grown. When Peacock was brought on as executive director in the early 2000s, he was the only full-time employee, assisted by a part-time bookkeeper. Most other tasks were handled by the Stuart’s Opera House Guild, a group that formed decades ago to help support the theater upon its renovation and reopening. The Stuart’s Opera House Guild took the form of a traditional arts support organization. Its members – typically older, a majority women – collected dues, planned small-scale fundraisers, provided front-of-house staffing for shows, and funded projects for the organization.

The board hired Peacock with the idea of taking the organization in a younger, edgier direction – Peacock had much experience as a touring musician and concert promoter, but none as a typical arts manager. As the organization’s programming began to change, so did its volunteer pool. More shows meant a greater need for volunteers, and Stuart’s new programming brought in younger audiences (and younger volunteers). Additionally, as the organization grew financially, the need (and the opportunity) to hire more staff meant that day-to-day tasks like office work were taken up, for the most part, by paid staff.

Today, Stuart’s Opera House volunteers predominantly work as the front-of-house staff at organizational events. They take tickets, pass out programs, usher, sell merchandise and concessions, and do set-up and clean-up before and after performances.
Koscho, the volunteer manager, said that he has a mailing list of about 100 volunteers, 30 to 40 of which he considers “active.” On a busy show night, the theater uses 15-18 volunteers in the roles listed above. The organization’s paid staff members can step in when needed, but more often than not, Peacock said, they have enough volunteers to staff all their events.

Sometimes help is needed for smaller, random tasks (like folding programs or helping to prepare food for an event) and Koscho says that he rarely has trouble finding volunteers to help in these situations as well. Both Koscho and Peacock expressed the idea that despite not having a highly-organized system of managing and rewarding volunteers, that for the time being there seems to be no shortage of dedicated, enthusiastic individuals who are willing to help – either regularly or sporadically. Peacock shared the fact that his mother volunteers for larger theater in Toledo, Ohio, which is considerably more regimented in its volunteer scheduling, asking volunteers to submit requests for shows at the beginning of the season, and assigning volunteer shifts accordingly. Stuart’s, instead is, “pretty non-traditional and pretty laid back,” he said. “But somehow we make it work.”

Even if they classify the atmosphere as “laid back,” there is an identifiable hierarchy of volunteers that is a crucial part of the organization’s infrastructure. These “tiers” of volunteers, and Koscho calls them, are in place for both the theater and the festival, and they seem to enable volunteer units to work somewhat independently of the paid staff.
In the case of the theater, long-time volunteers – some of whom have been involved with the organization since its reopening – take on leadership roles and help train new volunteers on site. According to Peacock, “the ones who stick around tend to take more ownership, tend to sort of become like the motherly or fatherly figure in the organization. To newer volunteers . . . they’re very quick to help show someone how to sell merch or how the beer tap works.” Peacock says that these individuals fill a sort of hybrid volunteer-staff role: “Some of them we’ve really come to rely on, as they become trusted, almost like employees. . . . We give the keys to the place, we trust them with the organization.”

In the case of the festival, these supervisory roles are more concretized. A group of about a dozen experienced and trusted volunteers are paid small stipends to take on the role of supervisor for various areas of the festival, such as admissions, merchandise, beer, camping, vendor coordination, kids’ activities, artist hospitality, and cleanup. These individuals not only supervise the festival’s 500 volunteers, but also work with the staff in planning their areas in the months leading up to the festival.

This decentralized organizational structure is made possible by the specialized expertise of these supervising volunteers. Koscho said,

I’ve worked here for six years, but at this point, the person that’s running the beer garden knows way more about the beer garden; the person’s that’s working the campground knows way more about that. Not that we don’t all meet with those people and discuss those things, but that’s their world, you know? They’re going to be in it for four days, running that campground.

So although the paid staff has the final say in each of these areas, a large amount of planning appears to be done by the volunteers themselves.
The next tier down from the festival supervisors are the shift managers, who also have a few years’ experience working in their specific areas. Again, expertise is sought in filling these positions: Koscho said that, for example, the supervisor in the beer area usually gives the shift-manager position to people that have had several years of bartending experience. Similarly, volunteer positions like greenroom hospitality are not open to the public, but instead are drawn from a pool of trusted individuals who have worked those shifts in the past.

Both Koscho and Peacock likened this structure to large-business models in which supervisors oversee less experienced, less specialized workers to create an efficient work environment. Koscho said, “the thought always is that with that structure in place, and those people that are really comfortable [i.e., supervisors and shift managers], that you could put almost anybody else in there, and it would work out.” And Peacock said,

It’s a pretty awesome thing to watch, how these seven or twelve people that we work with year-round, when the time comes, they take over those areas. It works just like a factory: this person reports to this person, all the way down to the stoned kid who just wants his damn Wilco ticket...He wants his ticket, but he can’t afford it: “I’m gonna volunteer and I’m gonna do as little as possible, but I’m gonna get my ticket!” But it works, you know? It works.

Peacock’s comment brings up another set of distinctions among the organization’s volunteers: that of varying volunteer motivations. Motivations can be examined through the lens of incentives or rewards that volunteers receive in exchange for their time. These rewards can be tangible and transactional or more social or psychological. And certainly, for some volunteers, both types of rewards influence their decisions to volunteer.
Koscho’s statements echoed Peacock’s with regards to the more transactional nature of the bulk of the festival volunteering (versus theater volunteering):

For the festival...and this isn’t even in a negative way either – I think it’s a lot more personal benefit. Volunteers at the festival are getting a weekend pass for volunteering, so, “Here you go, you want to come see Wilco this year, you don’t have a lot of money, or you want to save some money, you can come work for twelve hours.”

However, Koscho still observes the sort of organizational buy-in that characterizes theater volunteers among many festival volunteers:

And that’s not to say that I think that that’s purely motivated by wanting, because it’s a cool sort of thing, like “Oh, I get a free ticket, and I can help out too.” And just like Stuart’s...they might come down for the first time, they’ve never been here before, want to come see Wilco – want to come see the Flaming Lips a couple of years ago – and volunteer, and then all of the sudden they go, “wait a minute, that was really cool!” And those are the people then that keep getting brought into the fold, and come back year after year.

In contrast to the festival, the theater operates year-round. And whereas the festival audience draws heavily from outside towns and cities, the Stuart’s Opera House audience tends to be more local. Similarly, festival volunteers tend to come from both within and outside of the Nelsonville area, while theater volunteers tend to be part of the Nelsonville community. Koscho said,

There are people that have been volunteering here at the Opera House much longer than I’ve been here – some of them maybe even longer than Tim’s been here – that have just always been involved. Some of those people had connections to it when it first started reopening. Or some of those people had connections to it because they grew up here, because they saw this place when it wasn’t here, and when it opened again and started doing programming, that was something that they really wanted to be a part of.
Additionally, Peacock sees theater volunteers working as stewards of this valuable organization for future generations of Nelsonville residents:

There’s the people that just want to make sure something culturally is happening in their community, and they want to be part of that. . . . It’s the bigger picture of “I want my kids to grow up and be able to see shows.” You know, if Stuart’s Opera House wasn’t here in Nelsonville, there would be no theater in Nelsonville.

Other volunteers are newer to the organization, but still take on substantial support roles. During our interview at the theater, volunteer Sarah Warda kept coming in and out of the office common space. Koscho explained:

Then you have people that are our friends. Sarah, who walked in here, is a good friend of ours, and she comes in and helps out all the time – almost at every show. And she will do anything that she can to help out, and it’s great, because you know that she’ll do something on her own without you realizing that it even needed to be done. So there is that social connection, with friends of ours, with people that like being here and being a part of it. It might not even necessarily be a close personal friendship thing, but they have the connection where they love coming to Stuart’s for a few hours while there’s a show going on and pitching in.

Warda has volunteered for the organization for two years, and says she plans to continue volunteering as long as she lives in nearby Athens. She volunteers for both the theater and the festival, though her roles in each arm of the organization are different. Though she mostly does cleanup at the theater, or “whatever needs done,” for the festival she has become more involved in organizing onsite aesthetics and art projects, “in an effort to improve the festival experience for attendees.” Additionally, Warda has been working with the staff to explore new ideas for events and fundraisers, which she finds fun and rewarding.

Warda explained why she volunteers for Stuart’s:
It hardly feels like work – it's fun! The staff at Stuart’s are some of my dearest friends and they take amazing pride in the work that they do. I love being a part of an organization that has a staff that is so dedicated and hardworking. I’ve also enjoyed meeting and working with other longtime Stuarts volunteers – it’s a great little family of folks. Everyone is so friendly, which makes the work fun. It's a pretty well-oiled machine, everyone helps everyone out. And of course, I enjoy getting to see amazing shows and musical talent while helping out a great organization.

Additionally Warda has made helpful professional connections through working with the organization, leading to freelance work in photography and design. The relationship between Warda and Stuart’s is thus one of reciprocal benefit on multiple levels, including organizational advocacy on her part: “It's really rewarding to be a part of a successful event knowing that a group of people all worked their butts off together to make it happen,” she said. “I always recommend Stuart's when friends are looking for places to volunteer for and donate money to.”

Another not-so-long-term volunteer, Laurel Buschle, was with the organization for three years until she recently moved away from Nelsonville. Buschle returned, however, to volunteer with the festival this year, and will do the same next year, in addition to planning another trip to volunteer at a Stuart’s fundraiser in September. Buschle said she discovered the theater two days after moving to Nelsonville for school, attending one of the many free outdoor concerts Stuart’s puts on in the summer:

I struck up a conversation with Dan Prince [the organization’s managing director], asking about how often they do these shows, what’s the deal with the Opera House, because I’m very interested in history. He told me the basic run down of what Stuart’s does, and said they are always looking for volunteers. He then directed me to Brian Koscho; I spoke with Brian that night and got it all set up to volunteer for the next event.
Like Warda, Buschle also helped predominantly with cleanup, while performing other tasks occasionally, and taking on more managerial roles during the festival:

I mostly did cleanup after the shows. . . . Occasionally I would take tickets or tend bar. I also helped sell merchandise before the shows and during intermission, both for the Opera House and the artists. For outdoor shows I would help with set up, sometimes beer sales, and always clean-up. As the Music Fest approached each year, I would go down to the Opera House as often as I could to help with whatever they needed: laminating things, putting together volunteer packets, etc. During the Fest I was a shift manager for the camping area for the first three years, and this past Fest I did massages, free of charge, for the artists and crew members performing there. Oh, also, when they have students from surrounding schools come to watch performers or plays, I would usually help herd the kids up to their seats and then back to their busses after the shows.

Buschle explained why she volunteers for Stuart’s, and what she likes about it:

The staff at Stuart’s Opera House are some of the greatest people I have ever met. They are always kind, funny, and there with a listening ear if I needed someone to talk with. They always bring in quality musicians and make the work environment very fun.

Finally, there are the volunteers that are drawn from the organization’s broader audience pool. These volunteers are less “active” than the dedicated theater volunteers, but they still make up a necessary part of the volunteer base. Koscho said, “There’s also people that love music, and they might be in my volunteer list and they might come once or twice a year when it’s someone that they want to see. And it’s a kind of selfish act – we have no problem with that!”

Koscho and Peacock also mentioned that the organization’s proximity to Ohio University in Athens brings in younger volunteers that may only live in the area for a few years. And even volunteers that aren’t college students often cycle through phases of participation. Peacock observed:
You see certain volunteers come and be very present at many shows for a year or two, and then they sort of drift away, and you don’t see them very often, or sometimes never again. Sometimes you see people for a while and then you don’t see them, then all of the sudden they start coming back and helping again. So there are waves of participation that I don’t know how to explain. But I think people get burned out sometimes, or have other things they’re focused on, that they’re volunteering for.

Ultimately, for Koscho, this spectrum of volunteers is a given, and even a necessity for an organization like Stuart’s:

I’ve always been one of those believers that you have bank on all of those different areas: the people that are doing it because they love volunteering for a nonprofit, the people that are doing it because they love the specific thing you’re doing, and friends of yours that you’re begging when you really need someone to come do something.

To both Koscho and Peacock I proposed my hypothesis that having something like a “volunteer culture” might contribute to long-term organizational stability. Both thought that this statement was true for their organization, and expanded upon its implications. “We wouldn’t exist without our volunteers,” said Peacock. He acknowledges, though, that they are just one part of the puzzle of organizational stability, and that indispensable support also comes from donors, audiences, and the community. For Peacock, organizational stability springs from a large base of people that like what the organization is doing, and want to see it continue. If that were to change, he said, he predicts all these types of support would fall off as well. “We have been fortunate enough to have success that makes our volunteers and our donors and our funders support us. If that started to change, I think you’d see that change in our volunteers, and in our sponsors, so our stability would change drastically.”
Koscho, as the organization’s volunteer coordinator, placed a bit more emphasis on how the organization’s “volunteer culture” might impact its overall stability:

I think it’s something weaves itself in a lot of ways in a lot of things we do here. . . There’s this involvement that is more than just coming and helping out at an event; there’s development that happens where people feel a part of what you’re doing, and that’s the goal. At least that’s my opinion, and I think you’re right – that culture that develops helps everything. It helps your standing in the community, they way you’re seen, the impact of what you’re doing. It helps when you need people to staff an event, it helps when you’re trying to get people to come to an event, when you’re trying to get people to donate to your organization. It goes into all of those areas.

And for us it’s always just been about making people comfortable here. Like our volunteers, we have a good time, we try to have fun when they’re here, and I think also we want them to see the value – I think they do, I think that once they get to that point where they’re coming here and literally putting in time to help out at something, I hope at least that it is because they believe in what we’re doing and they want to be a part of it. So I think that that then spreads itself in all of those areas, beyond just the volunteering. And I think that that’s important anywhere, and I think it’s especially important given our setting. I mean, we’re in a county of 60,000 people, we’re in a town of 5,500 people, even Athens is 25,000, and 15,000 of them are probably students. And so we have to make sure that the good people we draw in like what we do, feel involved in it, and stay, and believe in it.
Lancaster Festival

The Lancaster Festival has taken over the city of Lancaster, Ohio for 10 days every July since 1985. In various venues around the city – from churches to cafes to schools to a large outdoor concert venue – an eclectic mix of musical, theatrical, and visual arts genres are on display for this community of just under 40,000 (Census, 2010). A majority of the events are free, and ticketed performances are economically priced at $20-$35. In 2011, the organization had a budget of $1,020,000, with 66% of its revenues coming from public and private funding in the last five years (GuideStar, 2013).

The festival was the brainchild of co-founders Eleanor Hood and Barbara Hunzicker. Both doctors’ wives, Hood and Hunzicker had a vision of bringing the arts to Lancaster in ways that were affordable and accessible to the city’s residents. A farming and manufacturing city located about 40 miles southeast of Columbus on Route 33, the co-founders saw a community that was cut-off in many ways from the arts opportunities that big-city residents enjoyed. Additionally, the festival was founded at a “down time” for Lancaster, according to Hunzicker. Anchor Glass Container’s corporate offices, which had contributed substantially to the city’s economy, had recently closed its doors, and the cofounders saw the summer as a time that could be filled with something celebratory and up-lifting (“The Beginning,” Lancaster Festival, 2013).

2 Unless otherwise noted, information comes from A. Joos, personal communication, April 30, 2013; or L. Ross, personal communication, April 30, 2013.
Hood and Hunzicker had already been bringing chamber music to town through their organization called Cameo Concerts, but in 1984, an arrangement was made that brought the Columbus Symphony Orchestra to Lancaster for an evening of symphonic music. Thousands attended, and organizers in both Lancaster and Columbus saw the potential for a summer arts festival similar to Spoleto Festival of The Two Worlds – “A Spoleto of the North,” as they envisioned it. Although the orchestra was to become the centerpiece of the festival, this new event, like Spoleto, would showcase many genres of art and performance in various venues over its 10-day run.

The Columbus Symphony Orchestra continued its partnership with the organization for three years; in 1987, however, the partnership dissolved, and the Columbus Symphony started its own summer concert series, Picnic with the Pops. The festival organizers started investigating other symphonies in the region to replace the Columbus Symphony, but ultimately decided to pursue the proposal of conductor Gary Sheldon, who became (and remains) the festival’s artistic director. Sheldon explained to the organizers that many classical musicians have breaks in the summer after the typical orchestra season ends, so he suggested that the Lancaster Festival hold national auditions and assemble its own orchestra. The organizers agreed to move forward with his idea, and since then, the Lancaster Festival Orchestra has been made up of musicians from around the country that travel to the city every summer and stay over the course of the festival.

For the first 19 years of its existence, the Lancaster Festival had no paid employees. The organization’s all-volunteer membership either did any necessary work
themselves, or contracted individuals or companies with professional expertise to perform specialized tasks. When its cofounders Hood and Hunzicker decided in 2003 that they no longer wanted to run the organization, they began their search for an executive director, and found him in recent Lancaster transplant, Lou Ross. Ten years later, Ross remains the only year-round, full-time employee of the organization, with two other part-time paid staffers that help run the festival office. One of these staffers, Ann Chess, was a long-time volunteer that the organization eventually insisted on paying for the work she had done for years in orchestra administration for the group.

Ross oversees about fifty volunteer groups and outside organizations that work to put on the festival – 500-600 volunteers in total. Groups that could be considered internal to the organization include marketing and public relations, hospitality, orchestra housing, transportation, site and safety, poster and brochure distribution, ticket office, travel arrangements, tables at the concert site, and concert site ticket gates. Other groups, like the churches that host concerts, the local children’s museum, The Fairfield County Fairgrounds, and The Decorative Arts Center of Ohio, have their own festival committees, and often recruit and supply their own volunteers. As such, even though they are their own organizational entities, they are still considered part of the festival organization, and are listed as such in the organization’s program.

Ross said that when he joined as the organization’s executive director, the organization’s structure of decentralized, relatively autonomous volunteer groups took him a while to understand: “There’s definitely a volunteer culture. And it blew me away. That’s what I tried to grapple with in the beginning – my first year – was trying to get
some more organization to it. . . . I just found out that, really, they function well the way they’re doing it.” Ross said that in recent years, the organization again attempted to create a “volunteer manager” position, but that after the festival, that individual told Ross that, “my job is useless. Besides calling these people and saying ‘hello,’ they don’t need me.”

Ross credits Hood and Hunzicker with laying the groundwork in their 19 years of running the festival for this special type of organizational structure: “They’d been doing their job so well, I didn’t have to step in and try to teach people how to do volunteer jobs. You know, they do them. And they’re showing me some nuances, you know?” Ross sees this overall structure as no accident, but rather as a real-world manifestation of the ideals that the organization was founded on: “They always were doing it for the whole community, and understood what their community was about. They weren’t doing it just for them, they were doing it for everybody.” Long-time volunteer Allen Joos, who oversees the operations of the large outdoor concert site, echoed Ross’ sentiments about the ethos of the organization as he explained how he came to work in his current position:

I think really that was one of the strengths of the festival. Eleanor Hood and Barbara Hunzicker – the two directors – the festival was never theirs, per se. I mean, they were the directors, but they gave everyone a sense of ownership. So [as a volunteer] you just kind of progressed, you know? And the longer you were there, and the more you know what was going on, it all just kind of fell into place.

Joos said his first experience volunteering with the organization was as a member of his Knights of Columbus Council for one of the festival’s events, “I didn’t really know what the festival was all about. And I thought, ‘Okay, this is nice – volunteer for a couple hours, go see a concert,’ you know?” Joos worked the ticket gates for a few years,
but then a neighbor, who was running golf carts, spotted him and asked him if he’d like to do something a little more interesting. Joos then joined what would come to be the Transport Group, which he largely helped develop. He has since handed off some of Transport Group responsibilities in order to oversee the concert site at Ohio University Lancaster, where the festivals’ two large Saturday night pops concerts are held.

As was mentioned earlier, not all of the work at the Lancaster Festival is undertaken by volunteers. Ross said that as the organization grew, certain tasks required professional expertise that wasn’t present in the volunteer pool.

Years ago all the stages were run by volunteers, but as we got bigger and bigger, there were technical needs and professionalism in some respects that were necessary. And [the organizers] sort of took the next step – they started paying some people to come back every year, so we had consistency. And then eventually we started trying to find people in the stage managing positions with experience. We’re dealing with a lot of equipment, a lot of things, and so we need to do that. Our sound and lights are done by contractors; we had volunteers dealing with it years ago, and that was okay, but then it just got to be – for efficiency and also for professionalism – I think we had to upgrade.

Ross also said that when a long-time, expert volunteers leaves the organization, it is often difficult to replace them with another volunteer – usually that person’s job will require two or three new people to replace that one veteran. Or, Ross said, the organization might have to hire a professional with the available time and expertise to complete those tasks.

To help curb the loss of valuable volunteer knowledge, Ross said that for several crucial volunteers, succession plans are in the works. Some top volunteers have “number twos” that share their knowledge, and Joos is currently training a volunteer in her 30s to possibly take over his role when he has to leave the organization someday. Though his
departure will at some point be inevitable, several stories that Ross told highlighted the
dogged dedication of many of the group’s elderly volunteers.

For example, Ross said that he stopped inviting some older volunteers to the
festival’s first set-up event at the concert site – the raising of the orchestra band shell.
The task is completed by both the paid stage crew and volunteers, and Ross said that it
serves as a bonding experience, as the crew and volunteers begin to transform the field
into a concert venue. Ross said:

> We have some guys in their 80s out there, and I stopped inviting them to come out because I was so worried about them. But they come anyway because they know we do it right after 4th of July – they know it. And the honest truth is they would rather die doing that than stay home. If they dropped out there that’d be the happiest day of their life, you know, they won’t care. They’re just out there, trying everything they can to be there. It’s like, “Oh, sit down, take a break in the shade!” And they’re just like “Leave me alone! Stop worrying!”

Another indispensable volunteer, Ross said, is an 80 year-old woman that creates
and distributes all of the access badges for the festival, as well as putting together all the
cashboxes for the gates at the large Saturday-night concerts. Because of family issues,
she has started turning over some of her work to a few other volunteers, who are learning
these tasks from her. Ross named at least three other long-time, essential volunteers that
are well into their 70s, and as such, it is not surprising to hear that much thought – and
some concern – has gone into what the organization will look like once its first
generation of volunteers are no longer with them.

Ross commented that the Festival board is actually ahead of the volunteer pool
when it comes to replacing itself with younger members, and that the board is “skewing young” compared to the bulk of the organization’s donors and core audience. This
generational difference was highlighted for Ross when he heard the board discussing whether the organization should continue to devote large funds to bringing a full orchestra to town for 10 days. For Ross, the festival without the orchestra seems unimaginable, but he conceded that “it’s a discussion that has to be had.” The orchestra costs the organization over a quarter of its performance budget, and Ross said that some younger board members seem to be seriously considering the tradeoff between spending that money on an orchestra and spending it on big-ticket, high-priced headliners for the Saturday night concert. And while such a shift would be disappointing to Ross and most of the original festival organizers, he points out that the original organizers created the festival that their 40-year-old selves wanted to see, and that now it might be the next generation’s turn to create a festival in their image.

When I asked Ross about his thoughts on my hypothesis regarding volunteer culture and organizational stability, he agreed that the community’s eagerness to pitch in in various ways – through volunteering, donating, and attending – puts the organization on the solid footing it enjoys. Ross said that the economic downturn of 2008 was felt by the organization, but not to the extent that they expected:

We really thought that advertising and donations were just going to tank, and they didn’t. They dropped, a little bit, but not a lot. We just couldn’t believe it. We had no explanation for it. We saw a little effect those couple years . . . some of the people not buying as much, not spending as much. But yet, you know, other people stepped up. It was amazing. We almost replaced anything that dropped out with somebody else. . . . I mean, we hurt mostly in our grants - the grants trailed off [from the Ohio Arts Council] because there was a dip in what they were funded.
A look at the Lancaster Festival’s program booklet gives a sense of the vast support that the organization receives from the community: the list of donors spreads across two 8.5 x 11 inch pages in small print. Additionally, the festival’s support organization, the Cameo League, boasts around 250 dues-paying members, couples, and affiliated organizations. Ross said that the Cameo League contributes about $40,000 for the organization each year, which it raises through events like an annual casino night and private home parties.

Support also comes in the form of in-kind donations. For example, one of Joos’ most difficult undertakings each year is lining up vehicles for the free shuttle service for elderly and disabled patrons, which the festival provides for its large Saturday night concerts. All the shuttle vans are donated by different churches, schools, or local businesses, and it is Joos’ job to get them reserved – and then reshuffle or make do if anyone cancels. The owners of the vans are given the option of driving their own vehicles, contributing to the volunteer pool that way as well.

Another crucial category of volunteers are the individuals that host orchestra members in their homes. Ross said that this tradition began in conjunction with the formation of the Lancaster Festival Orchestra, since putting the orchestra members in hotels would be cost prohibitive; and, Ross said, there might not have even been enough hotel space in the city at the time to house a 65-piece orchestra. To help with this task, the organization also has two expert volunteers that work to match orchestra members to appropriate households, depending on their needs and preferences. Finally, about six volunteers transport visiting musicians and artists to and from Port Columbus.
International Airport as needed. Ross says these hospitality volunteers are some of the organization’s best ambassadors: “They say by the time [the musicians] get from the airport to Lancaster, they’re in love with us, because [the volunteers] spend time talking to them, and tell them all about us. Everybody that plays here basically wants to come back, and it’s amazing to have that kind of rapport with the artists.”

For Ross, a key component of the organization’s success is its ability to instill pride in the Lancaster community. The festival is an impressive undertaking in so many ways: in its scale, its stability, its artistic quality and its accessibility, all in a small city that outsiders wouldn’t ever think of as a cultural hub. And a sort of incredulous awe weaves its way into many peoples’ accounts of the festival. Joos tells the story of encountering an elderly woman one night outside the concert site:

One thing that’s stuck in my mind: years ago I was out in the parking lot, going from point A to point B and I saw this little old lady coming down this little slope slightly uneven, and she just looked kind of bewildered. So I went up to her, I thought something was wrong, and I said “are you okay?” And she said, “How do you do it?” “How do you do what?” “This – how do you do this?” You know, and I thought, “no one ever told us we couldn’t do it.” Ignorance is bliss!

And the Lancaster Festival is, for the most part, locally sustained – Ross and Joos said that relatively few attendees or volunteers come from outside the Lancaster area. The impressiveness of the organization continues to amaze Ross, who after 10 years of working for the festival still gets emotional when talking about the compassion and dedication of its volunteers. And the various ways that the festival gets thought of as “impressive” also seems to help fuel the broad-ranging community support that it enjoys. It appears to be at least part of what motivates Joos, who explained what he gets in return for his months of planning and work:
But the payoff to me, and it always has been, I guess, is that at the end of the night, when those fireworks are going off, it’s a beautiful sight . . . with the canopy and the line of trees – fireworks come up from behind that. So you have silhouetted backdrop there of the trees, and the fireworks coming up behind it – you know, it’s beautiful. In fact I think it’s probably better than watching them on the Fourth of July. My payoff is standing at the top of my little hill where my tent and command center is and watching those fireworks go off. And it’s been a good day, people are enjoying themselves – you go “Yeah, this is good, this is good.”
Opera Project Columbus

Opera Project Columbus is a fledgling arts organization in Columbus, Ohio, a Midwest city of almost 800,000 (2010 Census), with a metro area population of over 2 million. It has completed two seasons of programming, and it finds itself in the exciting and uncertain position of being a young organization on the rise. Each new production presents heretofore unknown challenges, but also rising levels of artistic achievement. Opera Project Columbus has staged three productions each of its two years – some with orchestra, and others simply with piano accompaniment. All singers are central Ohioans, which fits into the organization’s mission: to give performance opportunities to emerging area singers and to present locally-produced opera to Columbus audiences. Its 2011-12 budget was $85,000, which dropped drastically its second season to about $35,000. The group is planning on a $63,000 budget for its 2013-14 season.

Opera Project Columbus was founded by two women who met while performing in Capriccio! Vocal Ensemble, a large, semi-professional choir. Heather Spence was a dramatic soprano who, after a series of family complications, had taken a hiatus from pursuing an operatic career. Dr. Julie Castrop was a pediatrician approaching retirement age, and an opera lover. Through performing in the choir together, Castrop came to

3 Unless otherwise noted, information comes from D. Bennett, personal communication July 24, 2013; M. Gordon, personal communication, July 31 2013, J. McMulllen, personal communication, August 16, 2013; or H. Shaw, personal communication, August 6, 2013.
realize how powerful Spence’s voice was, and that it was being underutilized singing in community and church choirs. She and Spence began discussing Spence’s career, and through those talks came up with the idea for Opera Project Columbus. Castrop’s focus was on creating performance opportunities to re-launch Spence’s career. Spence was on board for this, but also brought to the table the idea of creating a mentoring organization that gave talented local singers a chance to perform – whether they were in a similar situation as herself, devoting time to teaching rather than pursuing a performing career, or attempting to launch a career after graduation.

However, Opera Project Columbus was not the only opera game in town. The city already had a flagship opera company, Opera Columbus, which was founded in 1981. Opera Columbus has experienced considerable ups and downs as an organization, and has recently scaled back and is currently rebuilding. Even in its more successful days, however, Opera Columbus’ priority was not showcasing local talent, but rather presenting traditional, large-scale grand opera. Principal roles were performed by professional singers, usually flown in for productions, while local singers performed in choruses and comprimario roles.

Opera Project’s current board president, Maria Hawryluk Gordon, is an opera fan and an all-around arts supporter, but she remembers having concerns about the other opera company in town:

I was really put out that all the programs for Opera Columbus had these teeny-weeny little photos of the performers with almost no information about them, and yet they had three full pages devoted to the board president, to the music director, and the artistic director, with their photos way bigger, all saying essentially the same thing. I wrote to them. I wrote to the Executive Director and I said, “I don’t really think it’s appropriate that all this should be focused on you, whereas the
singers – who are what makes an opera company – are just sort of thrown a bone in the back of the program, and we end up knowing very little about them.

Knowing of Gordon’s love of opera, her experience in arts volunteering, and of her pro-singer stance, Castrop invited her to be on the board of her new venture. Gordon was hesitant at first, thinking that Castrop and Spence were moving ahead too quickly, but Castrop believed that between the funds she was willing to contribute, and the support of her circle of friends, the project should move ahead for the fall of 2011. Gordon agreed to join the board, and for the first year, she oversaw publicity for the organization, an area in which she had previous experience with other groups.

After the close of its first season, however, the organization changed drastically. Castrop retired, resigned abruptly, and moved to Maryland, unwilling to spend anymore of her personal funds supporting the organization; Spence moved with her to be closer to East Coast singing opportunities. It was left to the board (which included Gordon, myself, and three others) to decide whether or not to continue the organization on their own. The decision was made to proceed, and Spence proposed company soprano Dione Parker Bennett as the organization’s new artistic director. The board agreed that Bennett was a fine candidate to succeed Spence, and so the organization began its second season with almost no money, but with an enthusiastic new director and the charge to refashion the organization into a viable, sustainable entity.

Bennett said that since she was young she dreamed of running a lively, innovative opera company. So when the opportunity to take the artistic helm of Opera Project Columbus came to her, it was something of a surreal experience, and an chance that she
felt that she had to take. Still, for Bennett and for the other members of the organization who are professional performers, the decision to work for free can be a fraught one, even if it seems at the moment unavoidable.

For as is often the case with new and/or small arts organizations, Opera Project Columbus is by necessity volunteer-run. The board of directors, which consisted of seven people during the 2012-13 season, also serves as the operations staff, undertaking planning, bookkeeping, marketing, orchestra management, grant-writing, costume making, and technology needs, among other things. Other volunteers close to the organization have taken on in fundraising, web design, graphic design, stage managing, and lighting, all free of charge—about another seven individuals. Bennett only just received her first small stipend as artistic director at the end of the second season, as did the organization’s music director, Alessandro Siciliani. Additionally, the end of the second season marked the first time that the organization was able to pay its singers—an important precedent that they intend to follow indefinitely.

The board-staff hybrid are both the decision makers and largely the “do-ers” of the organization, and their contributions to the organization come mostly in the form of time and expertise—not direct funding. In fact, the only strictly monetary outlay that the board has given was a “startup” donation of $100 each at the beginning of the second season, when the organization learned that Castrop would be contributing no more funds to the group. Board members do, however, personally assume some organizational costs, in the form of “picking up the tab” for things like program printing, concessions buying, costuming costs, or presenting flowers to performers at the end of shows.
As was suggested above, the act of volunteering in Opera Project Columbus is a complicated one. Although most of those close to the organization are volunteers (as in, voluntary contributors for no pay), they hold a spectrum of feelings about what it means to volunteer for this organization, and how they see the organization evolving when it comes to paid versus volunteer staff.

Bennett explained the common thought process of the professional singer that must decide whether or not to work for free:

Singers traditionally have gotten the brunt of that idea that, “Oh, you were born with that, so just sing.” In church, they expect you just to sing, and not get paid. If you’re building a company, that’s not going be the model you want to follow. But singers will – because they’re hungry to sing – they will at times agree to sing for free. But they’ve got to be getting something out of it. So, the draw with us is we have the Maestro. Everybody wants to work with him. Also, there is the possibility for singers to work with an orchestra. So in that, they will compromise. There is also the possibility for having a recording. So a singer, if they can see that they’re going to get something out of it, they may agree to sing for free. And another thing, they can try out new roles – but that gets old pretty quickly.

Bennett acknowledged that there are at least two types of voluntary singers that are performing with the company – those that are pursuing music as a profession and those for whom music is a hobby:

Those that are more willing to volunteer are those that don’t necessarily get opportunities to sing, and so they are looking for the opportunity. They may not be solo, lead material. . . . they will sing just for the love of the music. Those that are not so willing to perform for free are those that are actually pursuing a career in music. So they’re working right now in music, whether they’re teaching, whether they’re auditioning, and whatever. They have bills that are generated because they’re trying to prepare to go out there.
Still, despite the reluctance of some singers to work for free, and the organization’s (until recently) inability to pay its performers, the group has managed to put on two seasons of work without the promise of pay for singers (for the latest production, in which singers were paid, they were not aware of that fact going in). And while this model is not desirable (or likely sustainable) for the organization in the future, the group has still managed to grow – logistically, financially, and artistically – in this volunteer environment.

Among the volunteer hybrid board/staff of the organization, there is little interest in being paid for time put in. However, adequately getting the organization’s work done is still an unsolved puzzle, one that Gordon imagines resolving by hiring someone to run the operations of the organization, at least part-time:

If the executive director could be paid, then you could rely on someone being, maybe not full-time, but certainly at least half-time devoted exclusively to this organization, so that we could have more timeliness in what we do. Because we have wonderful ideas, and we have great hopes, and then the people who we have to do these things have other lives, and they can’t prioritize what we have to do, or they can’t get it done in time. So we need to work that part of it out.

Bennett feels similarly about hiring an executive director, and has also commented on the benefits of paying singers versus relying on volunteer help: when singers are paid, she says, they are less likely to miss rehearsals or request special scheduling, which creates a more efficient and artistically beneficial practice environment.

Just as Bennett observes multiple motivations among the organization’s singers, Gordon sees several different reasons that board members are contributing their time and expertise as the organization’s staff. Two board members are musical performers – one a
singer and one an instrumentalist – and Gordon sees them as participating because they both believe in the organization and enjoy performing with it, and thus want to see it keep going. Gordon and the rest of the board members (except for myself) do have personal histories with various vocal music performance groups, but contribute to this organization as staff only, not as performers. The board members’ personal interest in opera is varied as well: Gordon is a longtime fan, I grew up listening to opera as a child, and the treasurer’s mother was an opera singer. The board secretary, however, is not particularly interested in the art form – and in fact, she is resigning from the organization to devote more time to helping Capriccio!, the vocal ensemble that originally brought all of them together. Perhaps brought on by this, Gordon said that as the board grows, she would like to bring on more individuals that have a passion for opera, “because that gives them a different kind of fire.”

This brand of dedication of which she speaks – to both the organization and the art form – is evident in individuals that straddle the line in Opera Project Columbus between performer and organizational volunteer. The two board members were already mentioned; but additionally, a number of the singers that have performed with the organization have come back to help with tasks like poster distribution, advertising sales, hosting fundraisers, and providing front-of-house staffing for performances. One such singer is Jennie McMullen, who first performed with the organization in the chorus of its second production, Amahl and the Night Visitors. She has since sung with the group in a show comprised of opera scenes, and in a staged contemporary opera Too Many Sopranos, singing challenging repertoire. Additionally, McMullen has sung at a number
of fundraisers for the group, and has helped arrange at least two of them with her family and friends. Apart from singing, McMullen has done extensive flyering for productions, and also helped recruit new singers into the group.

McMullen gave many reasons for why she has chosen to devote time to Opera Project Columbus. In the area of performing, she sees her participation as experience-building, and since she has performed in just one show each season, she has found the time commitment manageable. She acknowledged, however, that she is a young singer, and that others might not share her feelings about working without pay to gain experience. McMullen said that she does both paid and unpaid singing work – she worked for Opera Columbus, which was paid, and she said that gigs with her church and elsewhere also often pay. But she does unpaid work along side that for both our organization and her church because, she said, “as a Christian, I believe that serving people is a call; that God calls us, so that’s a motivation too.” Mullen characterized her motives as not entirely pure or unselfish, since working with the organization helps her meet people in the business and gain experience; however, from my perspective within the organization, I see her contributions of time and energy as among the most generous of all the singers.

She in turn is motivated by the contributions of others to the group: I’m just struck by how generous people have been for this cause of the arts. That’s I guess the biggest thing that strikes me about Opera Project is that people are giving so much time because they want to see local singers get to sing and be out there. And it’s exciting, how far it’s come in just a short time.

McMullen added that the organization is doing work that she believes in: supporting local singers while making “awesome music” that she just wants people to hear. When asked
if there was anything she would change about the group’s volunteer management practices, she said that communication has been an issue (but she included herself in her critique), and that she understands the limitations of an organization run in peoples’ spare time.

Opera Project Columbus has one key operations volunteer, Helara Shaw, who is neither a performer nor a board member. A longtime friend of the board treasurer, Shaw also was not really fan of opera before joining the group, but has become much more interested in the art form since she started volunteering a year ago. Shaw started off in the organization by researching things like advertising rates that other organizations charged, and costs for various venues around town. She has also helped organize a silent auction for the group, sold advertisements, provided and set-up props, and taken tickets at shows.

Shaw is retired, and said that she is seeking volunteer opportunities to fill her time with something fun and interesting. When asked how long she plans to volunteer with Opera Project, she said “as long as they’ll have me,” and that she really enjoys her work for the organization. Shaw frames herself not as an expert in any of her particular tasks, but as a versatile worker, who is happy to do whatever needs done – with the caveat that she feels more suited to certain tasks than others. “I have gone and asked for advertising, you know at stores. I don’t really know how to do that.” Shaw suggested that the group needs to broaden its volunteer pool to increase the number of skills that the organization has at its disposal:

I think we need more volunteers. . . . We need somebody that’s more in tune with how to ask for ads, how to sell ads, we need that kind of person. If we could get
somebody that does that regularly, and just maybe volunteers for us – or anything that we need, we get an actual person that is a professional in that field. Because otherwise, it’s like “Okay, you do this.” “Well, I don’t know, I might do that...” It’s kind of hit and miss. It just needs more structure.

Still, despite the occasional mismatch in task and interest level, Shaw is enjoying both volunteering and learning more about opera. “This is really kind of exciting” she said, I’m getting to know more about it, and liking them.” Shaw said since working with the organization, she has started attending the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts at local movie theaters, and has really enjoyed productions she’s seen.

Conversely, for board president Gordon, the decision to volunteer has always been driven first by an interest in the subject at hand:

I do what I do is because I have a passion for it. Even something like the garden tour [which she organized for three years] – one of the things I do to relax is garden. It’s something I’ve learned late in life, but I love it, and so the garden tours to me were just a natural extension of that. It was a tremendous amount of work, but I really loved it . . .But music to me has always been paramount. I started playing the piano when I was six, and it’s always been part of my life. So anything musical I gravitate toward. Choirs, the vocal groups that I’ve been involved in, the school choirs, the choir I sing in, it’s always music. Music is number one.

Gordon has lent her organizing and public relation expertise to many organizations throughout the years; however, she has not always been taken up on her offers of help. I asked her if she had ever volunteered for Opera Columbus, and she told the story of her experience with the group:

I actually offered to do stuff. You know I’ve always gone to the Irma Cooper [Vocal Competition] and I’ve always felt very strongly about it because I think it’s a wonderful showcase for young talent, and it’s a wonderful showcase for the city of Columbus – and nobody knows about it. Nobody cares about it, even
worse – including the members of Opera Columbus, especially the subscribers, because they do not come.

One time they had the competition, and I looked at the program, and it was riddled with typos and all sorts of computer glitches, the way things printed on the page. It was embarrassingly poor. And I wrote to them, and I said, “I applaud the fact that you have this, it’s wonderful. But this is really not good because it reflects badly on the quality and the professionalism of the organization.” And I said, “I can do this for you, I will do this for you for free.” And instead, the person who had been in charge got offended. “Oh, I’m busy, I’ve got too many other things I’ve got to do.” I said, “It’s not a reflection on your capabilities, it’s just that I have this strength that I could offer you, and I can do it for free.” But they wouldn’t take me up on that.

Thus, for Gordon, not only working within an art form that she loves, but also being able to contribute her unique skills to make an organization better appears to be a driving motivation in her decision to take on this kind of work voluntarily.

Finally, when it comes to the organization’s event-specific volunteers that are not performers with the group – like those performing the front- and back-of-house duties – most individuals are friends or loved-ones of those already involved. Gordon said that she doesn’t know of anyone reaching out to the organization unsolicited about volunteering, but acknowledges that “I don’t think we’ve given them that option yet.” In fact, there is no place on the organization’s website to sign up to volunteer, and although calls for volunteers have been put out on the group’s Facebook feed, respondents are usually already connected with the organization. Things may change soon, though: Gordon suggested that we discuss this, among many other things, at our organization’s upcoming retreat.
Chapter 5: Analysis

In this section, I will analyze the findings presented in my three case studies in light of the frameworks that were laid out in my methodology chapter. I will summarize these frameworks briefly below.

The questions being investigated are:

1. **How might extensive volunteer inputs relate to overall organizational stability?** This was investigated through interviews with organizational managers, and will be interpreted using The Ohio Arts Council’s Public Value framework.

2. **Are there identifiable common attitudes or practices in successfully volunteer-reliant organizations?** This was investigated by observing each organization as a whole, and will be analyzed using both my indicators of “volunteer culture” and the analytical frameworks distilled from my literature review.

Finally, the question of volunteer motivation was addressed by interviewing volunteers, whose responses will be analyzed in light of previous research on both volunteer and audience motivations.

5.1 Volunteering and Organizational Stability

For the two larger organizations, my aim was to investigate how heavy use of volunteers may or may not relate to overall organizational stability. Because I chose
organizations that I thought to be both relatively stable and volunteer reliant – assumptions that were proven true in my findings – it is clear that at least a correlation exists for them in these organizations. As my findings illustrated, the ways that volunteering relates to stability is multifaceted, and relies on other, larger factors, such as how the community feels about its programming, and what the organization represents to the community overall.

To understand this wider picture of public value and how it relates to stability on the part of the organization, it will be helpful to bring back Moore’s three-point model presented in the Ohio Arts Council’s study “New Frameworks for Revealing the Public Value of the Arts (2004). Moore’s model, as it relates to arts organizations, is reproduced below:

Figure 5. Ohio Arts Council model illustrating public value in the arts (2004)
As the OAC paper frames it, a well-functioning arts organization (in its *operating environment*) is not simply engaging in a back and forth between itself and its *authorizing environment*. Instead, the perceived *personal, social, and community value* generated by the organization “triangulates” its worth in its cultural environment. In a thriving, successful organization, this value is genuinely felt by the authorizing environment, which in turn motivates those within the authorizing environment to support the organization in various ways – by buying tickets, donating funds or services, choosing to work with the organization, or by volunteering. As the model shows, for the authorizing environment to give resources to an organization, it must see the group as a worthy steward of its aspirations – be they aesthetically or community based.

For Stuart’s Opera House and the Lancaster Festival, the two larger, more stable organizations in my study, the testimony of the two executive directors on their organization’s stability fits well within this model. Peacock located the motivation for the organization’s present support in the fact that the community seems to like what he is bringing to them as the leader of the organization. Moore’s “public value triangle” was well-illustrated in Warda’s comment that seeing the good work that goes on within the organization makes her in turn want to advocate for them, as she often recommends Stuart’s to individuals looking to make charitable donations. This fact, combined with ample opportunities to “take ownership” of the organization, and constant outreach efforts on the part of the staff, has created the necessary synergy to keep the organization growing steadily in the last decade. Both Koscho and Peacock explained that controlled,
conservative growth has been a key to their success— one of the draws of the organization, they said, is its intimate, comfortable feel, which they don’t want to disrupt by attempting to grow too quickly. This overall strategy has kept them in the black for several years, including during the recession of the late 2000s. The Lancaster Festival, similarly, felt the recession much less deeply than it expected—as was mentioned, private funding managed to keep pace with previous years, with public funding representing their greatest lost. For Ross, like Peacock, the impressiveness and the quality of the organization, which he takes much care to sustain, is what keeps the community supporting it year after year.

The Lancaster Festival, too, offers many different ways for individuals to support and take ownership of it. Ross said that co-founder Hunzicker warned him early on:

“You can’t buy a head of lettuce or pump gas without somebody asking you about the Lancaster Festival.” And it’s really true. . . . They come up to me, and it’s like, “you probably get tired of hearing this, but I’m really wondering, have you ever looked at this act?” And the thing is, we love that. You know, they only tell you because they care.

As Ross’ quote indicates, there appear to be relatively low barriers for the public to interact with the organization— they know its executive director by face and name, and feel comfortable approaching him with suggestions. To return to the OAC study, that report was generated out of a concern that “we have not been successful in fully revealing the personal and public value of [arts] experiences” (Farnbauch, Lakin-Hayes & Yoshitomi 2004, p. 1). What my case studies of these two successful arts organizations suggest is that it may be necessary to think about the pathways by which this value can be revealed. How can everyday people express their ideas about an organization in ways
that will be truly heard by staff, and is an organizational culture in place that allows and encourages them to do so? As the OAC study cited earlier suggests, it is vitally important that arts organizations have a keen understanding of their authorizing environment; what my study suggests is that organizations can gain a greater understanding of their environments by finding more ways to “let the public in” to their organizations.

5.2 Examining Volunteer Culture

In seeking to understand what allows organizations to function successfully with large volunteer inputs, I landed upon the idea of “volunteer culture.” Originally, what I envisioned with this term was the idea that for some organizations, the fact that they have large volunteer contingents or unique volunteer programs becomes part of their image, or what the public generally knows about them. As I continued my research, it became clear that for this to happen, those internal to the organization must to some degree share ideas about how the organization works with volunteers, and also that practices and structures within the organization must be present to allow such widespread volunteer contributions. It is with this in mind that I created my three “indicators” of volunteer culture, which are elaborated upon below for my three case study organizations.

Shared Perspectives

“Shared perspectives about volunteering” can be determined by comparing statements about volunteering made by various members of the organization, as well as
rhetoric about volunteering found in the organization’s web materials, print materials, and public statements.

For Stuart’s Opera House, executive director Peacock and marketing/volunteer manager Koscho both agreed that volunteers were crucial to the success and stability of the organization, although they varied in the ways that they saw volunteers contributing to the organization’s health. More telling, perhaps, is the testimony of the organization’s volunteers, who gave remarkably similar accounts of what they like about working for the organization. This suggests that organizational perspectives on volunteering are not only shared by staff, but by volunteers as well, and are effectively communicated back and forth between these two groups. On the web, the organization’s site actually posts the names of the volunteers working shifts at different shows. I asked Koscho about this, and he said they do this because “[the volunteers] love it.” It was a practice that started with the Stuart’s Opera House Guild that Koscho kept in place, even though the Guild organization itself was essentially absorbed by the theater organization. Including the volunteers’ names on the website places them in a space of public importance, and communicates to the organization’s wider audience how Stuart’s values them. Finally, at announcements before performances – both at the theater and at the festival – volunteers are usually among the first to be thanked, and much emphasis is placed on how necessary their presence is to the organization.

For the Lancaster Festival, both executive director Ross and key operations volunteer Joos similarly made reference the founding ethos of the festival – that it was always meant to be everybody’s festival, inviting involvement across class lines to
include community members of all socioeconomic levels. Such statements are also made by volunteers in the organization’s promotional videos on its website, and it seems to be a common, sustaining narrative told by this community to itself and to others.

Additionally, in his pre-show announcements, Ross always offers hearty thanks to the festival volunteers, and stresses their vital importance to the organization.

For Opera Project Columbus, there appears to not be a perceptible “volunteer culture,” even though most of its members are, in fact, volunteers. This might be because essentially all contributors to the organization are unpaid, and there are not very many of them, so the sort of self-reflexive distinction between staff and volunteer that exists in the two larger organizations has not emerged. Board president Gordon and artistic director Bennett were united in their opinion that in the next few years the organization should hire at the very least an executive director to oversee operations; presumably because the current volunteer-only structure is leaving something to be desired. As far as engagement with the community on the topic of volunteering, as of now, most volunteers are friends and family of those already involved. As Gordon stated, the website does not offer the opportunity to volunteer, and although the organization has posted calls for volunteers on its Facebook page, it usually receives minimal response.

There is, however, some evidence that something like a volunteer culture is developing within Opera Project Columbus, somewhat organically. I have heard Bennett say a few times that at OPC, if you speak your wishes, they will often somehow come to fruition – because, presumably, the people that want to make those wishes become a reality step up to make that happen. McMullen, too, said that she marvels at how much
the group has been able to accomplish in such a short time with so few resources – most of it done by volunteers who have figured out how to work together to make ideas become reality.

Structures and Practices

“Structures and practices” that grow out of an organization’s orientation towards volunteering can be observed in the ways that volunteers play into the organization’s overall infrastructure, and also in the presence of practices and traditions around volunteer management.

At Stuart’s Opera House, the tiered hierarchy of volunteers described by Koscho and Peacock indicates that volunteers are an essential part of the workforce of this organization, which has developed efficient, if somewhat “loose” practices that insure the steady completion of necessary tasks. Built into this structure are the efforts of staff and managers to make working with the organization enjoyable for volunteers. Warda and Buschle both highlighted how much they like working with the organization, and when they were asked if there was anything they would change about the organization’s volunteer management practices, both said no, and used the opportunity to state how well the system worked that the staff had put in place. For the festival, which brings hundreds of volunteers of varying interests and abilities together, the supervisor-shift manager-worker structure has evolved to include the largest number of volunteers in as efficient a manner as possible. Additionally, volunteer sign-up for the festival is a publicly announced event, and requires volunteers to give their credit card numbers, which will be
charged for admission if they do not complete their twelve hours of service. This is a rule-based, transactional structure that helps ensure a predictable, motivated workforce for this large-scale event. The use of a transaction-based incentive system for the festival, but less-so for the theater, shows that Stuart’s adapts its practices to accommodate different staffing needs for different arms of the organization. And finally, Buschle’s story of how she came to volunteer for Stuarts suggests an efficient volunteer management system that can act quickly to welcome interested volunteers into the organization.

At the Lancaster Festival, the development of relatively autonomous, decentralized volunteer units is evidence of the organization’s long-term reliance on volunteers to do the bulk of its work. Additionally, Ross’ accounts of trying to manage volunteers in ways more typical to nonprofits – then realizing that the organization was essentially functioning fine on its own – speaks to (1) the true embeddedness of the organization’s volunteer practices (and presumably the volunteer culture that helps sustain it), and (2) more generally, the importance for managers to understand the “best practices” of a functioning organization in light of perhaps conflicting “best practices” in the wider field.

For Opera Project Columbus, the current structure of the organization represents perhaps the bare necessities of an emerging organization, which is functioning but which has not yet achieved its ideal structure. Individuals on the board make organizational decisions and accomplish tasks according to their unique skills – and what they have time to do. Decisions are sometimes made collectively, during board meetings or using e-mail
threads, or *ad hoc*, in the course of operations. Several of those interviewed indicated that more structure and organization would be ideal, implying that this has not had time to fully develop yet.

*Engagement with Volunteers*

“The continued engagement with a large number of volunteers” is the most easily measured of these three aspects, although the perspectives offered by the interviewees lend important nuance to these numbers.

At Stuart’s Opera House, Koscho highlighted the necessity of being able to engage with and maximize the utility of various types of volunteers – from long-time contributors, to shorter-term, but dedicated helpers, to occasional drop-ins and the large festival workforce. Stuart’s has managed to bring in the 500 necessary festival volunteers and to maintain a varied pool of about 100 individuals that help staff the theater year-round, which indicates success in this area. Both Koscho and Peacock said that, along with luck, their success among the community is attributable to their constant outreach efforts to audiences, donors and volunteers.

At the Lancaster Festival, the organization’s long-standing volunteer-run structure and integration into the community has lead to a steady stream of long-term volunteers, now totaling 500-600 every year. Joos said, for instance, that he saw very little turn-over in his Transportation Group, which had a core membership of almost 60. The relative “permanence” of these volunteers has both benefits and drawbacks, Ross said. Their embedded knowledge and years of expertise have allowed the festival to run smoothly for
many years, but there are also concerns about what it will mean for the festival as these individuals age out of the organization in the coming decades.

At Opera Project Columbus, the relatively small group has experienced some significant turn-over in its short life, with the co-founders leaving at the end of the first season, and two board members resigning at the end of the second. The organization has seen consistency, however, in the rest of the board members and in many of the singers, who have been with the organization since its first production in fall of 2011. Though the organization is working to phase singers out of their volunteers status, their willingness to give of themselves in various ways has been a key to the organization’s success, and can perhaps be seen as a recognition of the public value that they associate with the organization.

5.3 Analytical Frameworks based on the Literature Review

In my Methodology section, I outlined four analytical frameworks extrapolated from my literature review that illustrate different, but possibly related ways that volunteering is thought about within the arts sector, and in the public sector in general. I will suggest that we can draw all four of these frameworks together by placing them on a larger, looser continuum of Formal versus Informal approaches, for lack of better poles. My selection of these two terms has more to do with perceptions about these different approaches than what actually happens within them. For example, even in organizations that see their methods as “informal” compared to best practices or the perceived status quo, hierarchical distinctions are still usually observable, suggesting some sort of
“formal” structure. I provide this continuum below, and will then elaborate on the four frameworks and my organizations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORMAL</th>
<th>INFORMAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Bureaucratic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Collectivist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactions (Chen 2009)</td>
<td>Relationships (Grams 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Professional Service Delivery</strong></td>
<td><strong>User Co-Production</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consuming experiences (Bovaird &amp; Loeffler 2012)</td>
<td>Producing and consuming experiences (Orr 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Professional art worlds</strong></td>
<td><strong>Informal art worlds</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban art worlds (CCAP Study)</td>
<td>Rural art worlds (NEA Study #100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Volunteers as liabilities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Volunteers as assets</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lynch &amp; Smith 2010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Figure 6. Synthesis of frameworks on a continuum of Formal versus Informal approaches.

Bureaucratic versus Collectivist approaches: Transactions and Relationships

For this section, I will analyze my cases in light of both Katherine K. Chen’s bureaucratic versus collectivist framework and Diane Grams’ transactions versus relationships framework.

It will be helpful at this point to reproduce Chen’s table from her book Enabling Creative Chaos, which offers some defining characteristics of these divergent organizational practices. Chen argues that for her subject, the Burning Man Event, both types of practices are used, even though the organization would most closely identify as “collectivist.”
As explained in the methodology section, I am also aligning Diane Grams’ *transactions versus relationships* framework with Chen’s. To Grams’ framework, I have added my own take on her model as it relates to organizations compensating their volunteers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Audiences (Grams)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Transactions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Relationships</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Market-driven interactions</td>
<td>Mission-driven, often free programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Volunteers (Benedetti)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Transactions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Relationships</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct compensation for hours worked</td>
<td>Indirect or intangible compensation for hours worked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Transactions versus Relationships, as applied to volunteer management.
Even though each of my organizations has some unorthodox volunteer management practices, bureaucratic practices are certainly in place as well, such as somewhat fixed division of labor, hierarchies, rules, and authority of position. These practices often come into play when efficiency is called for and as the scale of the operation increases. However, this is done not for the typical business-model reason of simply maximizing earnings, but rather in order to do more with the always-limited cash resources that they have as arts nonprofits.

Each of these organizations has key volunteers with unique expertise working in important areas: Stuart’s uses veteran volunteers to train new ones at the theater, and supervisor and shift-manager volunteers that are known to be successful. Peacock and Koscho both referred to this structure as somewhat business-like, which also aligns it with bureaucratic practices. The Lancaster Festival likewise has several long-time volunteers in areas like operations, ticketing, and hospitality. And at Opera Project Columbus, the board/staff have taken positions that correspond with their professions: the treasurer is a CPA, the ticket and volunteer coordinator worked for many years in retail and corporate buying, the board president writes grant proposals for a research institute by day, and I, the board vice president and publicity coordinator, am completing a degree in arts policy and administration. These positions appear to be relatively fixed, even if none of these people were officially hired or contracted to do their work. Additionally, in the case of Stuart’s and the Lancaster Festival, the presence of strictly delineated, relatively autonomous volunteer units – headed by the afore-mentioned expert volunteers – also suggests a bureaucratic structure. Finally, the move from being all-volunteer to
hiring at least some staff could be seen as a shift towards the bureaucratic end of the spectrum, a move which two of these organization have made in the last decade, and that the other is aspiring to. When Shaw said that she thought that OPC needed more volunteers with more skill sets, she equated this with increased structure in the organization – suggesting that the organization would benefit from adopting a more bureaucratic structure than it has now. And McMullen’s call for better communication among the group could also be understood as a desire for more efficient practices, which often align with bureaucratic methods.

Grams’ transactions align with Chen’s bureaucratic practices, and they are present in the volunteer practices of each of these organizations to varying degrees. For example, all of my organizations offer volunteers the chance to see the event they are working for free. At The Nelsonville Music Festival, volunteers this year were required to work no less than 12 hours (three four-hour shifts) to earn free entry to the festival and free camping for the weekend. At the Lancaster Festival, volunteers at the Ohio University Lancaster concert site receive vouchers for food, to be redeemed on site. Ross mentioned that they have been considering upping the value of the voucher recently, as some volunteers have said that the $5 that the organization was giving them wasn’t really covering their meal costs. This might suggest that some volunteers are looking for a more transactional relationship between themselves and the organization in that area, or that they are sensing a discrepancy between their work and their reward.

However, for the most part, the interactions that each of these organizations have with their volunteers is largely relationship-based, especially among dedicated or long-
term volunteers. In fact, both at both Stuart’s and at the Lancaster Festival, the interviewees remarked with some surprise that they have plenty of volunteers that don’t even watch the shows that they work, or attend other organizational events. This indicates that even the most basic transaction of seeing a show for free is not motivating a large number of organizational volunteers – for them, their intangible reward appears to be more related to being a part of a successful team and enabling the show to happen for others.

Gram’s relationships align with Chen’s collectivist practices, and these too are present in these organizations. Though none of them follow particularly democratic decision-making models, the interests and opinions of organization members and the community are constantly being sought in order to ensure that the group works well and stays relevant to its audience. As for volunteers, the close working relationships between volunteers and staff mean much opportunity for input on the part of volunteers, even if staff has the final say. But as both Koscho and Ross indicated, often the experienced volunteers know best, and they are usually trusted to make their own decisions in their specialized areas. Koscho mentioned that trusted volunteers are allowed to try out different jobs, especially when it is known that they can pick up things quickly; for these individuals, their experiences may fall more on the collectivist end of the spectrum than for others. And of course, the work of volunteers is usually driven by their belief in the organization – they are not employed by the organization, so their continued connection to it is by choice. This, again, aligns with Chen’s collectivist practices.
As was mentioned in the literature review, Chen suggested that bureaucratic practices tend to be favored in organizations because they align with our notions of “best practices.” I asked Peacock if he had ever felt any pushback from grantors about the organization’s sometimes loose or unorthodox structure, and he said they had not. Similarly the Lancaster Festival has been held up as an example by the Ohio Arts Council, which granted them the Governor’s Award for the Arts in Community Development and participation in 2011. Additionally, despite not having any paid staff, Opera Project Columbus was recently awarded two grants from the Columbus Foundation and the Ohio Arts Council. This suggests that while grantors can promote professional “best practices” through their grant applications, at least for the Ohio Arts Council and other local grantors, a more holistic, contingent view of organizational success appears to be taken into consideration when giving their “seal of approval” to a group – especially young groups like OPC.

**Professional Service Delivery versus User Co-Production**

In this section I will use Tony Bovaird and Elke Loeffler’s framework of user co-production to analyze just what areas of an organization are “co-produced” by volunteers. Their framework fits well with Noreen Orr’s analysis of heritage volunteers, who she asserts are simultaneously producers and consumers of their own leisure activities. Finally, I add to this framework the idea of “organizational giving” – I align monetary donations with the professional service delivery model, and the volunteer’s gift of time and expertise with the user co-production model.
Bovaird and Loeffler’s modes of co-production are reproduced below:

- Co-planning of policy
- Co-design of services
- Co-prioritization of services
- Co-financing of services
- Co-management of services
- Co-delivery of services
- Co-assessment of services

Since Bovaird and Loeffler are looking at non-arts service provision, some of their categories may seem ill-fitted to arts organization management; however, I believe they can be usefully interpreted or transposed into an arts context. For this section, I will mostly focus on Stuart’s Opera House and the Lancaster Festival, since for Opera Project Columbus, essentially all of these modes are present, because no staff member is professionally employed by the organization.

Co-planning of policy translates to allowing volunteers to help decide how an organization runs, taking part in decisions that determine how things are done. For Stuart’s, both Peacock and Koscho expressed that a lot of trial and error has gone into the development of their current practices, suggesting an environment in which new ideas are constantly tried, then kept or discarded. Additionally, the autonomy given to supervisor volunteers at the festival indicates that they are instrumental in developing “policy” for their given areas. Likewise, Ross’s discussion of the autonomy of the Lancaster Festival’s volunteer groups indicates that they too are creating their own policies, though ultimately with the approval of the executive director.

Co-design, managing, and delivery, and assessment of services translates to volunteers planning, executing, and evaluating specific services on behalf of the
organization. For Stuart’s, we see this in volunteer Warda’s work on the aesthetics of the festival and its art activities, in Buschle providing massages for the artists and crew, and in the general planning and execution work of all of the festival’s volunteer supervisors. For the Lancaster Festival, again, the distinct units of volunteers tend to provide their own services, and are often driven by personal interests and unique talents. Ross spoke of, for example, the small group of transportation volunteers that pick up and drop off visiting musicians from the airport, who take it upon themselves to be “ambassadors” for the festival. He told another story of a couple that makes and freezes cookies year-round to bring to the musicians during rehearsals, as an acknowledgement that they likely had to give up parts of their childhoods to become the artists that they are today. Ross was visibly moved speaking about these volunteers, and tells the story as another example of the ways he is amazed by the thoughtfulness of the organization’s volunteers, and the ownership that they take in the festival. However, these types of contributions are made possible because the organization appears to be operating under the type of “enabling logic” mentioned in Bovaird and Loeffler’s article – the organization provides a space for contributors to create their own “services” for the betterment of the festival. Finally, on the assessment end, volunteer Joos stated that he does a yearly “autopsy” after the festival to evaluate what went well and what didn’t, and meets with Ross to discuss this. Ross said that he has similar meetings with the heads of the other volunteer groups throughout the year.

As both my literature review and an episode in my findings suggest, however, there can be significant barriers within organizations that discourage user co-production.
In her piece on heritage volunteers, Orr mentions the “us versus them attitude” present between staff and volunteers in some organizations, which can be generated by worries of volunteer unprofessionalism or, conversely, that volunteers might pose a threat to paid staff in certain circumstances, in their willingness to provide unpaid time and expertise. Bovaird and Loeffler expanded upon this idea in their article, and listed potential barriers that organizations might have when it comes to user co-production. These are elaborated upon in my literature review on page 39, but I will simply list them here:

- Funding and commissioning barriers
- Difficulties in generating evidence of value for people, professionals, funders and auditors
- Need to develop the professional skills to mainstream co-production
- Risk aversion
- Political and professional reluctance to lose status and “control”

Gordon’s story about Opera Columbus declining her offer to assist them with program layout and copyediting suggests that at least the last three of these barriers might have been in place for them. Perhaps this staffer felt that the organization did not have the capacities or the skills to take on and manage this volunteer. Perhaps he or she was not willing to take a risk on inviting Gordon to take on such a role in the organization. Or perhaps the staffer was reluctant to cede some of his or her professional status to a volunteer who had noticed a mistake. Since I did not do a case study of Opera Columbus, I can only speculate on these motives internal to the organization – I present this anecdote only to suggest that Bovaird and Loeffler are likely correct in their assertion that differences in organizational culture can affect the likelihood of user co-production working in an organization.
I hypothesized in my literature review that in organizations that used extensive volunteer inputs, one would observe more relaxed attitudes about reinforcing strict delineations between staff and volunteers. My findings suggest that this is true for some cases, but not all. For both Stuart’s and the Lancaster Festival, dedicated volunteers are indeed treated almost like staff, and it appears that they are empowered to give a great deal of input on how the organization is run. However, they must earn these positions by showing their commitment and skill. Staff and board always have the final say – but still, a culture of relative openness seems to be in place in both of these organizations. Opera Project Columbus, on the other hand, also uses virtually all volunteer inputs, but concerns about establishing the organization’s professional reputation means that group members are careful to distinguish themselves as professionals in their respective areas, even if they are all, technically, volunteers.

It should be noted that co-financing of services on the part of volunteers is not present at Stuart’s or at the Lancaster Festival, and that these organizations give nominal stipends to a few key organizational volunteers. It seems that the decision to pay these individuals originated with the organization, and not at the request of the volunteers, which indicates that these organizations are sensitive to the fact that extensive volunteer work can represent a substantial opportunity cost for an individual. Even if the stipend is more symbolic than transactional, it shows a marked interest on the part of the group to not ask heavily-involved volunteers to assume all of the costs tied to their gift. For Opera Project Columbus, on the other hand, co-financing of services by the volunteer staff is common, and has become a way that these individuals work to keep costs down. By not
requesting reimbursement for things like printing, piano tuning, or costuming costs, volunteer staff are effectively making small as-needed cash donations to the organization.

Orr’s work on volunteers as producers and consumers of leisure also resonates with my findings on these organizations. As was mentioned earlier, at both Stuart’s and at the Lancaster Festival, staffers have noticed that volunteers don’t always appear to be interested in “redeeming” their reward of watching the show that they work. Peacock said they seem to mostly be coming out to work (“they treat it like a job”) and to hang out with the other volunteers. This corresponds with Orr’s observation that volunteers are simultaneously consuming an experience – made possible by the organization – and helping to produce services for the organization. As such, it is understandable that Koscho, the organization’s marketing and volunteer manager, sees a fair amount of overlap between his two organizational roles. Sustaining a comfortable, inviting, and rewarding social environment for both volunteers and audiences, and constantly seeking ways to draw in and retain both, is at the core of Koscho’s work for the organization – and the contributions of both are necessary for the organization to sustain itself.

Despite the reliance of all of these organizations on volunteers, each also pays for professional service delivery when needed. Ross explained a rationale for shifting from volunteer to professional service delivery earlier – for the sake of safety and/or efficiency, it benefits the organization and its public to have certain tasks completed by contracted professionals. At Opera Project Columbus, the organization has paid for things like printing, piano tuning, lighting design, and photography, while things like costumes, supertitles, and marketing have all been undertaken by volunteer staff. Certain
things, like videography and graphic design, have shifted from volunteer generated to paid-for services, and vice versa, depending on what the organization was willing (or not willing) to pay for, and what volunteers were willing (or not willing) to provide free of charge. As such, at least for Opera Project Columbus, the category of “professional service delivery” can be fuzzy – in some cases, it is defined more by whether or not an invoice is generated, and less by the actual quality of the service provided. The organization has been able to accomplish its work thus far with minimal public and private monetary subsidy because scores of individuals with professional credentials are donating their services. This model, however, appears to be putting a strain on the organization. Their sights are now set on shifting more energy to fundraising – effectively seeking a different balance between gifts of money and gifts of time or expertise. In doing this, they hope to generate enough liquid, monetary capital to adequately compensate and retain the professionals they already has working for them, and attract new ones in the future.

*Professional versus Amateur (Informal) Art Worlds*

In my literature review, I addressed rural and the informal art worlds, both of which are often imagined in contrast to professional art worlds that tend to cluster in big cities. NEA Report #100 found that in certain arts and cultural genres – mostly those that don’t get produced by flagship cultural institutions – rural and urban people attend in equal percentages. These findings challenge commonly-held perceptions about cultural consumption in rural versus urban areas – namely, that urban Americans are more
artistically-engaged than rural Americans. I will suggest that the cases of both Stuart’s Opera House and the Lancaster Festival further work to dispute this perception, since both of these rural organizations are enthusiastically supported and sustained by their communities. My suggestion in the literature review – that higher arts attendance in urban areas can be attributed to a higher presence of arts organizations – is lent support by the fact that in these rural communities, where arts organizations do exist, they are well-supported and highly-attended.

I would like to return to one finding in Francie Ostrower’s study on arts experiences that is particularly relevant for my two larger organizations: that festivals and fairs had the highest percentage of respondents saying that they were motivated to attend out of a desire to “support a community organization” (p. 90-91). Read another way, one might suggest that festivals and fairs are good for offering a wide number of people the chance to support an event or a group in a way that is inexpensive, comfortably familiar, and socially rewarding – as was explored in the NEA’s study on outdoor arts festivals. For both of these groups, who enjoy a great deal of community support, the festival form represents either the entirety of the organization (the Lancaster Festival) or plays a large part in its yearly programming (The Nelsonville Festival for Stuart’s Opera House). The perceived “informality” of this genre may be doing important work in making communities feel comfortable exploring different art forms, even fine-art genres like classical music and dance, which are heavily featured at the Lancaster Festival.

It should also be noted that both of these groups are by far the largest arts organizations in each of their communities, at such a scale to almost consider them
cultural monopolies. This fact should not be overlooked when considering their success, especially in relation to arts organizations in more competitive markets, such as Opera Project Columbus.

Literature on the informal arts generally centers on non-professional groups or practitioners; however, I suggested in my literature review that arts volunteering can rightly be seen as a similar aesthetically-based activity that is undertaken non-professionally. My findings indicate that this is a fair connection to make. In the article cited in my literature review based on findings from the CCAP’s study of the informal arts in Chicago, the authors write of a “metaphorical space of informality” that is welcoming and comfortable for participants. This is a similar sense of comfort and welcoming that Koscho says that they try to create for its volunteers and guests at Stuart’s, and that volunteers Warda and Buschle reported as the primary reason they became dedicated volunteers. Similarly, Joos description of his experiences moving through the volunteer ranks of the Lancaster Festival also suggest an environment that is highly open to the creative contributions of its volunteers – as does Ross’ story of the volunteers that bake cookies for the orchestra members.

As such, I see a valid connection between the characteristics of informal art worlds and those that make up what I have identified as a “volunteer culture,” at least in two of my case study organizations. And just as individuals usually participate in the informal arts for some sort of personal or psychological benefit, so too do arts volunteers appear to be participating, for the most part, for the emotional and aesthetic rewards that they receive.
For Stuart’s Opera House and the Lancaster Festival, both organizations are aware that they are somewhat “non-typical,” but are still stable and well-functioning. Additionally, as was mentioned earlier, they have learned to tell their stories in ways that put grantors at ease with – or even cause them to applaud – their unique practices. Opera Project Columbus, on the other hand, feels itself to be in a somewhat more precarious position when it comes to its professional image. Because the group is working to establish itself in the highly-professionalized world of opera, much organizational rhetoric focuses on the high quality of the singers. This is done, I believe, to counter the facts that (1) their singers are largely unknown to the general public, (2) the organization itself is generally unknown to the general public, and (3) until recently, all singers were volunteer, which might suggest a lower level of artistic quality, even if that is not actually the case. As has been discussed, the members of Opera Project Columbus have felt some uneasiness about the volunteer versus professional aspects of the company, and also with overcoming being seen as amateur – especially given the presence of a long-standing professional opera company in the same city. So while the organization strives to market itself as a fresh, innovative new opera company, concerns still linger about being perceived as less-than-professional.

Along those same lines, it should be noted that the Lancaster Festival organizers and staff also place highly professionalized musicianship at the heart of its organization. Broad community support allows the organization to assemble a world-class symphony every summer, the quality of which, says Ross, in turn makes the festival such a point of pride in the city. Thus, the festival manages to tack back and forth between highly
professionalized art and essentially “amateur” contributions on the part of the festival volunteers to create a unique synergy that keeps the festival feeling vibrant year after year.

Still, for my two organizations with strong volunteer cultures, they seem to have embraced a level of informality and worked to create comfortable arts experiences with their wider communities – not just “typical” arts goers – in mind. There is a seeming lack of anxiety about measuring up to other professional arts organizations, possibly because each of these are essentially the biggest game in town. This appears to have given these organizations the freedom to develop their own best practices, which involve a functional combination of professional expertise and widespread community inputs.

Volunteers: Assets versus Liabilities

Chen’s work, referenced earlier, shows how most organizations – despite their philosophical leanings – utilize both bureaucratic and collectivist practices to achieve their goals. Similarly, each of my organizations place certain aspects of volunteering on a value-based spectrum, as some form of asset and/or some form of liability. In my methodology section, I created a table of how various aspects of an organization that relate to volunteering can be cast in a positive or negative light; it is reproduced below:
Volunteers occupy an observable place of value in the organization’s rhetoric, and were more often spoken of in terms of what they bring to the organization than what they cost them. Still, as was mentioned earlier, both organizations have experienced the limitations of volunteer labor, and when a job performed by a volunteer becomes a liability, that role is either (1) given a contracted professional, or (2) transformed into a paid position, moving that person into a more hybrid volunteer-staff position.

The third, smaller organization has a more ambivalent view on volunteers at this point in its life cycle, though that may change in the future. This may be attributable to its somewhat precarious position as a new arts organization, while the other two organizations have managed to achieve organizational stability over their decades in operation. So while it is understood that the organization could not continue without great volunteer inputs, volunteering is, at this point, framed almost as often as a liability – or at least as something that must be remedied – as they are an asset.

Table 6. Volunteers as Assets versus Liabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteers are an...</th>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Liability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers have...</td>
<td>specialized knowledge</td>
<td>limited professional experience (Edgington)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers have...</td>
<td>varied skills</td>
<td>unpredictable skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers are...</td>
<td>highly engaged patrons</td>
<td>non-paying patrons (Orr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers are...</td>
<td>easy to take on</td>
<td>hard to fire (Lynch &amp; Smith)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike employees, volunteers...</td>
<td>chose to participate</td>
<td>can chose not participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike employees, volunteers...</td>
<td>don’t require payment</td>
<td>do free work that undermines professionals (Orr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike employees, volunteers...</td>
<td>can be brought in as needed</td>
<td>may require unique management (Bovaird &amp; Loeffler)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike donors, volunteers...</td>
<td>give time or expertise</td>
<td>don’t give money (IMPACT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike donors, volunteers...</td>
<td>can contribute without money</td>
<td>contribute ephemeral, non-liquid assets        (IMPACT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the whole, the two large organizations that I have chosen cast their volunteers in a highly positive light, even if they are performing somewhat mundane tasks.
I asked individuals in each of my case study organizations if they thought there was any overlap between their donor pools and their volunteer pools. All three said for the most part, no – that donors and volunteers seemed to be two different groups of people. One exception was a generous anonymous donor at Stuart’s Opera House, who Peacock said is actually one of their most dedicated volunteers as well. Additionally, Ross said that Lancaster Festival co-founders Hood and Hunzicker always bought tickets to festival events, and never took a complimentary ticket despite all of the time and funds they had already put into the organization. But in my interviews with staff from these two organizations, volunteers were never framed as lesser-than donors; their hands-on contributions to the organization and unique expertise were spoken of as vitally necessary, just as cash donations are. For Opera Project Columbus, which finds itself in less comfortable economic circumstances, much energy and concern is being focused on cultivating new donors and moving individuals out of the “volunteer” slot and into “paid professional,” and as such, the gift of cash donation to be appears more prized and more sought after right now than gifts of donated labor.

Ultimately, for both Stuart’s Opera House and the Lancaster Festival, volunteers are seen as crucial enabling agents that allow the organization to fulfill its mission to the greatest extent possible, reserving liquid assets to pay for necessary professional services and artistic acts. My study also considers the idea that this positive and open stance towards its various publics, put into practice, can also translate to greater organizational stability, as it allows more individuals to contribute meaningfully and “buy into” the organization. Koscho suggested that this stance does important work in improving the
organization’s standing in the light of its community – its volunteers, donors, audiences, and I might add, its grantors. Ross expressed similar sentiments about the ethos of the Lancaster Festival as its founders established it. My case studies indicate that these two relatively large, stable organizations have found a good working ballance between professional and volunteer inputs. They employ both, and have come to understand that each have their benefits and drawbacks, and that they can be combined meaningfully – and even strategically – to achieve long-term organizational success.

5.4 Volunteers, Audiences, and Organizational Identification

For this final section of my analysis, I will shift my focus to the volunteers themselves, to examine what it is about their work for these organizations that keeps them engaged and coming back. In my literature review, I suggested that previous research on audience motivation and organizational identification might also be applicable to volunteer populations, so in my interviews, I tried to get a sense of both the overlaps and the differences between volunteers and audience members. I also asked both managers and volunteers themselves what they saw as the motivating drive(s) in their organizational volunteering.

Both Ostrower’s research on audience motivation and experience, and Scott R. Swanson and J. Charlene Davis’ work in their article “Arts Patronage: A Social Identity Perspective” illuminate the importance of the social in people’s experiences with arts organization. Ostrower showed that most patrons are seeking social experiences even over “purely” aesthetic ones when attending arts events, and Swanson and Davis showed
that for dedicated patrons, their positive social interactions with organizational staff were more motivating than the quality of the work being presented – although in both of these cases, aesthetic rewards did still factor heavily into a person’s motivation to attend (Ostrower) and their decision to continue their patronage (Swanson and Davis). Ultimately, these studies underscore the fact – which is becoming better and better understood by the arts community – that the social aspects of an arts encounter must not be ignored or discounted when organizations think about what they hope to create with their programming and events. This suggests that resources (monetary or human) devoted to creating an inviting social atmosphere may be resources well invested.

For the purposes of my study, it was important to discover what kept dedicated volunteers – perhaps those most valuable to an organization – engaged and involved. Volunteers were asked both why they volunteered and what they liked about volunteering, which often elicited similar, overlapping responses. And though my sample size was not large (n=5), it is perhaps significant that across the three organizations, all non-staff volunteers reported both positive social motivations and aesthetic or knowledge-gaining motivations, with social motivations most often mentioned first.

Additionally, looking at responses from both managers and volunteers, one overwhelming motivation stood out: for those who contribute, volunteering for these organizations is fun. It may involve significant work or time commitments, but ultimately, the experience is an enjoyable one for these people. A sample of responses below illustrates this:
Allen Joos (Lancaster Festival volunteer): I think a lot of it again is that they enjoy what they’re doing, and a lot of it is chemistry. I think that’s got to be key in most, you know? And you don’t have to have the most outgoing people, but someone that enjoys being there, enjoys doing something for someone else.

Helara Shaw (Opera Project Columbus volunteer): I like it, I love it! It’s a lot of fun. . . . It gets me to meet other people, and find out a lot more about the organization that I’m volunteering for, I think that’s really cool. . . . I think it’s a great organization, and I hope it goes on.

Jennie McMullen (Opera Project Columbus performer and volunteer): It’s just fun working with everyone. Seeing the passion of people volunteering their time so opera gets heard in Columbus and local singers are heard – that’s definitely a cause I care about.

Sarah Warda (Stuart’s Opera House volunteer): It hardly feels like work – it’s fun! The staff at Stuarts are some of my dearest friends and they take amazing pride in the work that they do. I love being a part of an organization that has a staff that is so dedicated and hardworking. I’ve also enjoyed meeting and working with other longtime Stuart’s volunteers – it’s a great little family of folks.

Laura Buschle (Stuart’s Opera House volunteer): I love the staff, being able to see wonderful musicians in an intimate, beautiful environment, and helping with the preservation of a fantastic historic site! They do wonderful things at Stuart’s and I feel very fortunate to be able to be a part of it.

Peacock offered some additional ideas about why Stuart’s is able to attract and retain so many volunteers:

I think the success comes from people wanting to be involved in something that’s a winning team, and cheer for the winners. And we have been fortunate enough to have successes: shows, the festival. And we’re pretty neutral, you know, it’s pretty feel-good. It’s easy to volunteer for us, it’s not super emotional. You’re

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4 It is noteworthy that both McMullen and Warda mentioned being motivated by the hard work that they see going on within their respective organizations. Ross, too, spoke of how inspiring the dedication of his volunteers is to him as a director. This phenomenon was not addressed in my literature review, and I believe it deserves further investigation in future research on volunteer motivation.
not volunteering at a homeless shelter, which I think narrows your pool of volunteers when you get into something that is maybe a little heavier, emotionally, you know? We get people who like performing arts to volunteer for us, who like concerts, or like the arts and support that, so, you know, you get like-minded people, and then there’s camaraderie amongst the volunteers, and friendships made, and feeling part of a team that keeps going, that builds up your spirit – and all of that stuff that I know you know – but I mean, it’s true. It’s visibly true, it’s easy to see it.

Peacock’s statement speaks to several ideas brought up in my literature review. First, there is Bovaird and Loeffler’s suggestion that “Citizens are only willing to co-produce in a relatively narrow range of activities that are genuinely important to them . . .” (p. 1136). What is “important” to a volunteer can be any range of things: having fun meeting like-minded people, seeing enjoyable performances, taking part in a long-running successful endeavor, doing something for the good of the community, and/or helping individuals in distress. For these arts volunteers, however, rewards of personal satisfaction and social connection seem to be the most motivating, and perhaps the most “important” in their decisions to spend their leisure time with this organization.

Second, Peacock’s statement lends further support to Orr’s suggestion that volunteers are co-producers of their own leisure, and thus, share important characteristics with audiences. They volunteer because it is a fun activity to do in their spare time – trading personal time for a social and aesthetic experience, much as attending audiences trade money for the same things. Peacock’s comment in the Findings section – that Stuart’s sees a fair amount of volunteer turnover – suggests that for many, the opt-in nature of the activity means that it is also fairly easy to opt out, which also aligns them with audiences.
Still, among dedicated volunteers, a greater sense of obligation appears to be present, even if contributing is still, on the whole, enjoyable. In my Findings section, Peacock mentioned the individuals that contribute because they want to be stewards for a future generation of arts audiences in Nelsonville. One gets a similar sense about the decades-long volunteers at the Lancaster Festival, who take on hundreds of hours of work to see their festival continue year after year. And speaking as a volunteer staff member within the Opera Project Columbus organization, though I find my experience highly rewarding, it usually feels more like “work” than like “leisure,” even if it is something that I do unpaid in my time away from my current primary activity of pursuing an academic degree.

When I asked Peacock whether Stuart’s volunteers come from their audience base, he said generally yes, and elaborated in a statement that I will use to close this section; I think it represents a good guess as to how many of us progress from consumer to producer – from audience member to volunteer, and even to professional:

**Benedetti:** So would you say that your volunteers – as far as the year-round volunteers – mostly come from your audience members?

**Peacock:** I think so, for the most part – so many of them now come and work the shows, and they might go up and watch a little bit, but it’s more like they’re coming to hang out with the other volunteers, help out, and they treat it like a job, you know? And some of them come to show outside of nights when they volunteer, but really a lot of them don’t. A lot of them just come and help out. . . . I think they started because they loved coming to shows, so they wanted to help out, and then – it’s kind of like me, like, I’m a musician and I loved going to shows, but rarely do I get to watch a show. One, because I have too much other stuff to do, or you, you’re just like wrapped up in the behind the scenes thing that the show becomes something different, you know? The actual event is something different. You’re *putting on* the show, you’re the wedding planner.
Obviously, it is not the desire of every audience member to become a volunteer for the organizations they patronize: for many, the more transactional relationship between paid audience member and organization is optimal given their interests, income level, and time constraints. And most nonprofit arts organizations – even those that use extensive volunteer inputs – rely on these types of transactions as part of their economic framework. This study does not mean to suggest otherwise, or to undervalue the vital role of the paid ticket-holder or the cash donor in an organization’s success. But as this analysis has shown, the types of individual buy-in that organizations are seeking in their authorizing environment are exhibited strongly in arts volunteers, and as such, I believe it behooves the arts sector to value them, understand their motivations, and create environments for their contributions; for as my case studies have demonstrated, doing so has been shown to contribute to organizational success and long-term stability in complex, but nonetheless real ways.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

One of the tasks that I set for myself early on in this project was to discover whether any “generalizable phenomena” existed in organizations that relied heavily on volunteer inputs. As I have mentioned, my sample size is too small to make any global claims to this effect; what have emerged, however, are observable correlations that bear reiterating, and that could perhaps serve as grounds for future research in organizational stability and volunteering.

First, a trait that all of my case study organizations share is that they all started out as entirely volunteer-run. The two larger organizations, Stuart’s Opera House and the Lancaster Festival, were volunteer-run for over a decade before hiring an executive director, and Opera Project Columbus predicts that it will be volunteer-run for at least another two or three years. This fact is probably true for many if not most arts organization; but not for all, I imagine. I could envision another study in which one took a longitudinal view of several organizations’ histories with volunteer and paid staffing. This could provide additional useful insights into the potential stabilizing power of volunteers – especially the benefits of building a core of dedicated volunteers that carry an organization forward in its early years, who then hand over the organization to an executive director as it grows (while often staying on as active or honorary board members). This phenomenon could be assessed quantitatively by gathering information
on tens or hundreds of organizations, looking at years of operation as a volunteer entity before the hand-over, years of operation since, and organizational budgets, surpluses and deficits over its entire existence.

Second, my two larger organizations are often held up as exemplary arts groups, which seem all the more impressive because they are located in places that one wouldn’t usually think to find a thriving arts scene: in small rural cities. Both of their cases, however, show that a remarkable amount of community support (which takes the form of attendance, volunteering, donating, and corporate funding) is present for these organizations. This type of support must be constantly cultivated and maintained by organizational leadership. However, I think it is worth considering the possible monopolistic advantage that these organizations have in their communities, as at least one factor in their success. Being the largest arts game in town, their organizations are effective focal points for their communities, and as such, become an obvious site of prestige and appreciation for advertisers, donors, volunteers and audiences. This may also have been true of the rural UK theatre case study that Bussell and Forbes undertook on volunteer management, which has so influenced my own. Further research on this topic could look at other, similar rural arts organizations to see if trends of widespread community support held. If that were the case, I think the field could reconsider how it thinks about the “rural” or “small-town” arts. Coastal and/or big-city bias in arts research tends to frame these communities as operating in states of artistic or monetary deficit, so organizational “success” in these places (be it aesthetic, economic, or both) is framed as surprising. Perhaps, however, this type of success is more common than we think – and
not so difficult to explain – as people in small communities rally together around artistic spaces and events to create something beautiful for themselves. Only more research would tell.

Another task that I set out for myself was to discover possible connections between arts volunteers and other arts-world participants, like “informal artists.” Arts volunteering is not generally thought of as a creative endeavor, and arts volunteers themselves may not see their practice as particularly creative. The volunteers presented in my case studies held a spectrum of positions on this point. However, I believe that my study does show that engaged arts volunteering – the kind that is happening in my case study organizations – does in fact share many aspects with “informal arts” participation. To repeat a quote from my literature review, Wali, Marcheschi, Severson, and Longoni wrote that “[t]he informal arts are characterized and distinguished by their overall accessibility as vehicles for artistic expression, by the self-determining nature of individuals’ participation, and by the generally noncommercial nature of the activities” (2010, p. 216).” Other than “artistic expression,” (which might be replaced with “artistic appreciation”) this definition applies well to arts volunteering too. And even if arts volunteering doesn’t feel creative, it certainly gets framed as productive – volunteers reported deriving satisfaction from working hard with others to see a project come to fruition and sustained. They may also feel that their personal involvement makes the organization better – and they may very well be right. And they may know that if they didn’t contribute the way that they do, that the organization might not exist. In the video “Our Story” on the Stuart’s Opera House website, it is stated, “[n]one of the events in the
recent history of Stuart’s Opera House was inevitable. Stuart’s might easily be nothing more than a memory, a history, and a parking lot” (2008) – implying that only through the hard work, vision, and decision-making undertaken by active and engaged community members was the theater reopened, rebuilt, and re-imagined for new generations. Though it may not have been an “artistic” endeavor, it was certainly a form of collective creation.

Because arts volunteering shares traits with informal arts participation – but is not limited to genres that we think of as the “informal arts – I suggested that arts volunteers might be bridging an interesting gap between the informal (or amateur) and formal (or professional) arts worlds. I see this “bridging” at play in both of the large organizations in my study. At the Lancaster Festival, programming is a mix of fine, popular and folk arts, and similarly, boundaries between professional artists and every-day people are blurred as well. Orchestra members live with Lancaster residents over the course of the festival, and executive director Ross is an approachable and well-known public figure year-round. The festival presents a high-quality orchestra, but in comfortable spaces like local churches and a familiar outdoor concert site. And expert, but “non-professional” volunteers make the whole thing run, year after year. The familiar and the extraordinary are both at play, and the dynamic tension between the two seems to fuel the organization’s continued success. Similarly, at Stuart’s Opera House, the grand historic theater and the impressiveness of the artists that Peacock is able to bring to town makes the organization seem like a “jewel” in Nelsonville – a thing of value and beauty, but one that seemingly anyone can partake in and contribute to. For Opera Project Columbus, a
similar sort of bridging is being attempted. By staging operatic performances by local singers in smaller venues, and by creating and selecting programming that is engaging and approachable, the group is trying to carve out a space for locally-sustained opera in the 21st century. Only time will tell whether it succeeds in this endeavor.

This careful balancing of “formal” and “informal” elements in both programming and management strategies seems to have been successful in my organizations, and studies from my literature review suggest that this has been the case elsewhere. From relaxing rules around eating and socializing during performances, to cultivating friendly relationships between staff and audiences, to the widespread prevalence of festivals in this country, it seems safe to say that many contemporary Western audiences seems to be looking for some degree of informality or comfort in their cultural experiences, while still seeking out compelling artistry.

To return to my main object of study – volunteers – this study has ultimately shown (through both a review of the literature and the data that I have collected) that arts volunteering is a highly social phenomena that takes place in a fairly specific context – around arts organizations. As such, it is my belief that the study of volunteers cannot be fairly undertaken without taking into account the organizations that they work within. Organizations are not people, but they are created, led, and sustained by people, who cannot help but fashion a social world through their interactions. In organizations like mine, which rely heavily on the embodied giving of volunteers, the line between who is and who isn’t “in” the organization appears to be more permeable than in organizations that have larger paid staffs and a narrow range of volunteer activities. And for these
organizations, this type of structure seems to have helped make possible their success over time.

My study has also brought up some questions for which there are not easy answers. For example, if substantial volunteer inputs and informal, comfortable atmospheres are correlated with stronger organizations, how might flagship organizations built on professionalism and formality move forward? Public funding is, of course, in place to support arts nonprofits, which are inherently non-viable in the commercial market. However, if an organization’s practices are resulting in severe market failure, public funders may not be willing or able to save them. Drastic change or even collapse may be the result, which is often seen as tragic. But if an organization has become unmoored from its public, or if its public has dwindled to unviable levels, organizational demise may be inevitable.

A second uneasy question relates to the temporality of the people that make up organizations – namely, what happens to organizations when the generation of people that founded and originally supported it pass on? Of course, organizations are constantly changing in response to altering cultural landscapes, but how many organizations will be truly sustainable over multiple generations?

For many groups, it is too early to tell – all of mine, for example, are still run in part by their founders, or individuals in the generation of their founders. And it could be that investing in human capital, like volunteer inputs, creates generationally-sustainable organizations, but leaves organizations at risk beyond that. Perhaps in order to survive two, three, or more generations, some degree of “institution-building” may be necessary,
which simultaneously fixes the idea of the organization in the minds of its community, and allows it change in response to altering landscapes. Again, longitudinal studies on long-lived organizations could give more insight into what components contribute to an arts group’s long-term success.

This brings us back to the question of organization-driven sustainability. What responsibilities do organizations have for creating and cultural environments that make their practices viable? The suggestion that has run through this project is that, by building a volunteer culture into an organization, an arts group can help itself stay relevant and accountable to its publics. When organizational success relies not just upon the engaged input of donors, sponsors, grantors, and ticket-buyers, but also volunteers (who might not be any of those things), the pool of organizational sustainers is widened and diversified, which aids organizational stability.

In the conclusion of Engaging Art, co-editor Tepper suggests that the dogged pursuit of professionalism, genius, and excellence in the arts field has had the harmful effect of shutting everyday people out of artistic processes. He advocates for organizations to instead find ways to invite audiences into their workings – “to witness, in the words of sociologist Erving Goffman (1959), the backstage interactions and behavior that lie behind every great performance or exhibition” (Tepper 2008, p. 381). He suggests that there is a growing interest in these backstage worlds, citing television shows like Project Runway, which allow audiences to witness the creative process. In this cultural climate, he says, “policy must help audiences get backstage to see the inner workings of creative pursuits.” (Ibid.).
Tepper, like other scholars in my literature review, does not offer arts volunteering as a “solution” to this problem, even though (as the volunteers in my study have shown) volunteering for an organization not only brings individuals in close proximity with its workings, but often allows them to become a vital part of an organization. I very much agree with Tepper that organizations should find more ways to “invite audiences in” – this study has examined the possibility that a good way to do this might be for organizations to develop more robust volunteer programs, and for arts policy makers to encourage their efforts.
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