

National program aims to boost lakeshore arts and culture nonprofits

The two-year program focuses on revenue development, audience building and leadership.

By **Abby Poirier** - October 10, 2022



Arts and cultural nonprofit leaders in Holland gather for workshops under the tutelage of DeVos Institute of Arts Management. Courtesy RdV Corp.

A two-year strategic planning program for Holland-area nonprofits called "Capacity Building: Michigan Lakeshore," will support 15 lakeshore cultural organizations toward long-term sustainability, growth and successful leadership.

The University of Maryland-based Devos Institute of Arts Management (DVIAM) is offering this national program to Holland to strengthen West Michigan arts and cultural institutions.

Funded by the Dick and Betsy Devos Family Foundation, "Capacity Building: Michigan Lakeshore" will engage area organizations through in-person events and consultations for over 70 hours of learning and development over the next 24 months.

"The program has four components," said DVIAM President Brett Egan. "It offers six group intensives focused on key art management topics such as strategic planning, fundraising, marketing and board development. Secondly, it will consist of four economic development roundtables in partnership with local convention, tourism and economic development leadership. It will consist thirdly (of) small group meetings with the emerging leaders who will also take part in all program activities. And fourthly, it consists of providing each of the 15 organizations with a long-term strategic plan."

Egan will lead the lakeshore program alongside DVIAM chairman Michael M. Kaiser, with whom he co-authored "The Cycle: A Practical Approach to Managing Arts Organizations" in 2013. This book will form the basis of the "Capacity Building" program.

"Arts and culture leaders often find themselves in their work without formal training," he said. "So, unlike many of the professions, our sector is led by entrepreneurial individuals who do not have regular access to professional development and technical assistance.

"Our group was formed to fill that gap. And the need for that, in our view, has heightened in a post-pandemic environment where the environment has radically changed over the course of the last three years."

According to Egan, this program is an iteration of a program that has been offered in nearly 30 American cities over the course of the last 15 years, helping boost the capacity of community leaders.

DVIAM has advised over 2,000 individuals, organizations and foundations globally, including capacity building programs in Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Los Angeles, Louisville, Miami, New Orleans, New York City, Portland, Orlando, Puerto Rico, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, San Francisco, San Jose, and Washington, D.C., as well as international organizations in Croatia, Ireland, Vietnam, Trinidad and Tobago, and England.

Having successful, sustainable arts and cultural organizations is a key component in building strong communities, Egan said.

"Arts and culture organizations are small businesses that employ people and produce a multiplier effect for the economy," he said. "The average multiplier effect is about \$4 for every dollar spent when you look at economic return on investment. We believe that arts and cultural organizations are, in their own respect, valuable for communities in terms of producing social cohesion. But we also believe that they are critical drivers for local economies, including job creation and retention."

According to the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs' 2021 annual report, Holland's arts and cultural organizations welcomed 143,153 visitors to the area, had 1,766 people volunteer or serve on their boards, and employed and/or contracted with 235 people. The same report listed those organizations' annual expenses at \$5,773,536 and its total annual revenue at \$6,429,716.

"Capacity Building: Michigan Lakeshore" participants include:

- Culture Works Transformative Art + Design Academy
- Evergreen Commons
- Holland Area Arts Council
- Holland Community Chorale
- Holland Museum
- Holland Symphony Orchestra
- Knickerbocker Theatre (Hope College)
- Hope Repertory Theatre
- Latin Americans United for Progress
- Michigan Maritime Museum Inc.
- Ox-Bow School of Art
- Park Theatre Foundation
- Saugatuck-Douglas History Center
- Tri-Cities Historical Museum
- Zeeland Historical Society

These organizations, which responded to the DVIAM application, were chosen of disciplines and geography in the Holland area, which had been identified by Devos Foundation as an area of interest.

According to Egan, the 15 nonprofits taking part in the program can expect to see improvements in their fundraising abilities, as well as revenue development operations, audience building, leadership and ability to attract volunteer leadership to support them.

"There's benefit to the organizations themselves, but in terms of the broader community, we really do believe that arts and cultural organizations are generators of jobs," he said. "They're generators of social cohesion and understanding. So, there are hard and softer benefits to the community that we believe follow from strong cultural nonprofits, and we would expect those outcomes to be increasingly legible because of the good work of these organizations in Holland."

The program, which kicked off last month, will continue through August 2024.