

soundSCAPE: Competitive Advantage in Diversity

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the inner-workings of an international arts festival.
- Articulate the advantages of incorporation.
- Identify an arts organization's competitive advantage.
- Recommend mission-positive diversity initiatives for an organization.

Topics For Discussion

Organizational Evolution

The soundSCAPE festival began nearly by chance, when Nathanael May responded to a call for fine arts workshop proposals in 2004 in connection with Toscana Americana, which was seeking to add cultural opportunities for tourists in the Tuscan town of Cortona. Wanting to bequeath the formative experiences he had as a young musician, May developed his idea into a summer festival that has since become an international destination for aspiring composers and instrumentalists. Its infancy, however, faced many challenges that demanded change over time.

- While the original proposal represented a perfect meeting of inspiration and opportunity for the pianist, many entrepreneurs would not have been so lucky to have May's circumstances. Yet, music festivals often have a group of people invested in the concept from the outset. May's idea began single-handedly with some core artistic support from the ensemble Duo46. What are some other ways May could have launched the soundSCAPE festival? How could a different centralized core have changed the trajectory of soundSCAPE's organization and development?
- The case outlines how dependent the soundSCAPE festival was on the sacrifices of both its founder and the faculty. Any of the faculty recruited by May could have earned more substantial income working at a different summer festival. What kinds of generosity did those involved with the festival show to ensure its early success? What benefits did the soundSCAPE festival offer faculty members?
- The emergence of the soundSCAPE festival must be understood amid the landscape of contemporary summer music events. What competitive advantages did it achieve as a festival? What was the attraction for faculty? What was appealing to prospective students, who only recently began receiving tuition assistance?

- The location of the soundSCAPE festival has been both a source of pride and frustration for Nathanael May and his colleagues. The site of this summer event has determined the nature and quality of facilities, resources, equipment needs, accessibility, and even audience. As detailed in the case, the soundSCAPE festival has moved its home four times in 14 years. May admits that soundSCAPE may be destined to be an itinerant operation, as long as it is subject to the venues and facilities a host can offer.
- ♦ What setbacks did soundSCAPE experience in its various locations?
- ♦ How do students think that the festival maintained its allure through its relocations? How has relocation hurt the festival or has it bolstered the organization?
- ♦ Should soundSCAPE investigate a permanent location? Poll the students for their positions on this question and ask them to list reasons for and against the proposition.

Incorporation

As outlined in the case, the soundSCAPE festival's early years were in part characterized by a lack of formal incorporation as a business entity in either the United States or Italy. After avoiding a near takeover of the enterprise by their host in Pavia, Nathanael May and Brian Hulse took steps to incorporate soundSCAPE as an S-Corporation en route to nonprofit status in the United States based in the state of Virginia. Invite students to explain the distinction between these corporate entities. What are the tax implications?

- What are some of the reasons it took as long as it did to incorporate, and what were the potential consequences of the delay? What were the risks of not incorporating?
- What actions did soundSCAPE have to take to incorporate?
- Not uncommon in small organizations, May and Hulse served dual roles for soundSCAPE as board members and festival directors. What are some problems or conflicts that may arise when board members are themselves executive administrators in an organization? Review the role of a board of directors with students.
- As outlined in the case, along with the nonprofit designation came the need to grow the board of directors and expand the role they play in the organization. What changes occurred at the board level at soundSCAPE and how were the changes designed to help the organization? Refer to **Appendix 1**.

Collaboration and Diversity

Since its inception, soundSCAPE has fostered a culture rooted in collaboration and inclusivity. Collaboration is seen in the close working relationships between student composers and performers, a feature seldom seen at similar contemporary music festivals. The festival has also achieved an environment that radiates inclusivity. Amateurs and professionals intermingle surprisingly well, and both make contributions to the festival. Further, Artistic Director May has tried to ensure diversity of faculty and students, while performing music from an array of composers from underrepresented groups

(women, LGBTQ+) each year. In the minds of the directors and board of soundSCAPE, the ideals of collaboration and inclusivity have become a competitive advantage for the festival amid several dozen festivals of contemporary music.

- Survey the students to discover if collaboration and inclusivity are “ownable” areas of strength for soundSCAPE. What are some other ways soundSCAPE could bolster its competitive advantage? What other advantages have the festival directors overlooked?
- As described in the case, soundSCAPE’s board of directors appointed a new diversity coordinator, who will assist the board president with development of a diversity plan for the organization. Divide the students into groups to tackle the questions about diversity raised at the conclusion of the case.
 - ♦ Diversity is a broad term that encompasses race, gender, religion, politics, etc. Probe the students’ ideas about how diversity should be understood in the context of a contemporary music festival. What initiatives can be taken? How can the various parts of soundSCAPE—from board to faculty—participate in diversity initiatives?
 - ♦ What are reasonable goals for diversity over the next three to five seasons of the festival?
 - ♦ The soundSCAPE festival may invite a “headliner” for its 2019 season. Festival programming and workshops would incorporate this individual or group, as May has conceived of it. How could the proposed headliner call attention to the importance of diversity for soundSCAPE?