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Refugees and Cultural Humility at Buffalo String Works



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Buffalo String Works is an organization that provides group lessons on string instruments primarily to students from immigrant and refugee communities. The mission of Buffalo String Works is to “foster vibrant, inclusive communities through the transformative power of music.” The case reveals a strategic plan that focuses organizational priorities in the short and medium term. Among the priorities is the idea of onboarding, encouraging the teaching staff to embrace the spirit of inclusivity at Buffalo String Works. An experience with students from Somalia prompts the executive director of Buffalo String Works to schedule workshops with a local professor of social work, who focuses the teachers on the concept of cultural humility. The case concludes with the executive director considering next steps for the organization in the wake of the cultural humility training.



This case study was prepared by Michael Alan Anderson, Associate Professor of Musicology at the Eastman School of Music. *The Eastman Case Studies* are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements or sources of primary data nor are they to serve as illustrations of effective or ineffective leadership or decision making.

On the Run

Persecution, conflict, and violence sadly take place on small and large stages every day around the world. In extreme cases, hostility causes displacement of individuals from their homes. As of 2018, over 70 million people worldwide have been forcibly relocated. While most people fleeing under persecution were “internally displaced” (on the run within their own countries), a staggering amount of individuals—over 25 million globally—escaped their homelands on account of violence, war, or suffering. Annual refugee counts are at the highest levels they have ever been; the United Nations now estimates that someone around the world is displaced from the home every two seconds.¹

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees is charged with finding new homes for those fleeing their countries. This agency identifies the most vulnerable refugees—ranging from survivors of violence and at-risk women and children to the elderly and others in need of medical attention—and prioritizes them for resettlement. Refugees cannot simply select the country in which they would like to live; rather, the agency recommends countries for their relocation. Since the 1970s, the United States has led the world in helping refugees resettle in all fifty states, where they forge lives as new Americans.

International School 45 is an elementary school in Buffalo, New York and known for its diverse student body: over 70 countries and 40 languages are represented at this single school. A large number of students from refugee families are among the 1,100 students at International School 45. In 2014, violinist Yuki Numata Resnick, violist Virginia Barron, and three other professional musicians gave a short concert for students of Elise Alaimo, the school’s music teacher. After playing a movement from Johannes Brahms’s *Piano Quartet in C Minor*, the players asked the students how this piece of late nineteenth-century music chamber music made them feel and what it meant to

them. One little boy emerged from underneath a desk and exclaimed, “I think it means, ‘I love you so much’.” His unfiltered response was uplifting, and other students gathered around the players with a host of questions. Many wanted to try out the stringed instruments, asking when they could play.

“I think it means, ‘I love you so much’.”

– Student at Buffalo’s International School 45, prompting the idea to open Buffalo String Works

Yuki, Virginia, and Elise took the experience to heart. Six months after that inspiring in-school performance at International School 45, they opened Buffalo String Works. According to its mission, Buffalo String Works “strives to foster vibrant, inclusive communities through the transformative power of music.” In practice, it is an outlet for group lessons on string instruments. Building on the encouraging response at the international school and setting up shop on the city’s racially diverse West Side community, Buffalo String Works primarily services students from immigrant and refugee communities.

Other circumstances in Buffalo drove the founding of Buffalo String Works. On the West Side, schools are lucky to have a general music class during the day. Certainly, private study of an instrument is non-existent. As a new professor of violin and viola at the University of Buffalo, Yuki also had a number of students who desired to become music educators and were in need of training in local schools. Because music was not offered widely in school curricula, Buffalo String Works could act as a site for student teachers.

But students from vulnerable backgrounds were the primary concern of this specialized academy. Reintegration into society and a sense of belonging are crucial for refugees. When they founded Buffalo String Works, Yuki, Virginia, and Elise believed that music could be a vehicle to soothe the anxieties

¹ <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>. Accessed July 26, 2019.

of immigration and play a role in the process of acculturation, in addition to providing enrichment for their students. Curious and confident music students could in turn become poised citizens who contribute positively to their new society. By making a visible gesture to these fragile communities, the founders hoped that the enterprise would sow greater compassion across Buffalo and bring awareness to the presence of these new Americans in the city.

Modeling El Sistema

The first class at Buffalo String Works featured 17 violin students and had a volunteer faculty of four teachers and three teaching assistants. Within five years, the organization could boast five times that number of students, ranging from kindergarten through high school and from nearly two dozen public, private, and charter schools across Buffalo. Students receive high-quality instrumental instruction on violin, viola, cello, and bass and are enrolled in up to six hours of programming each week.

Given that the costs associated with high-quality music programs are the primary barrier to access for families, classes at Buffalo String Works are provided at no cost to all students. The organization does ask families for a \$1 contribution per class if they are able, but this donation is by no means required. Students

Classes at Buffalo String Works are provided at no cost to all students.

contribute a nominal \$10 deposit for an instrument to take home for the year, a deposit which is paid back when the instrument is returned in good condition. With essentially no revenue coming from student tuition, Buffalo String Works is funded entirely on the

generosity of foundations, institutions, and individual donors.

Two types of instructors—teaching artists and teaching assistants—are provided for the students at Buffalo

String Works. Teaching artists are compensated for their time, as they develop lesson plans outside of class meetings and also attend faculty meetings. Teaching assistants, on the other hand, are volunteers for Buffalo String Works. They represent a mix of high school and college students (and sometimes professionals), who are strong performers and usually looking to give back to the community with their talent. Some are dedicated interns from the University at Buffalo, which has an arrangement with the organization to supply teaching assistants on an ongoing basis. It has not been uncommon for teaching assistants to return to Buffalo String Works as teaching artists, following their own achievements as musicians and fondness for the mission of this nonprofit organization.

The mission of Buffalo String Works to cultivate the spirit of inclusivity through music is reflective of the El Sistema philosophy of utilizing music as an agent of social transformation. El Sistema music education programs for social change, which began in Venezuela in 1975, have expanded into some 60 countries with 400 *núcleos*, or program centers for learning. Some 400,000 children in vulnerable communities are now involved in El Sistema programs globally. El Sistema-inspired curricula aim to serve children “with the fewest resources and the greatest need.”

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In its curriculum, Buffalo String Works exhibits inclusivity in its approach, a core value of the organization. With grant support from El Sistema USA and PlayUSA Carnegie Hall, Buffalo String Works offers a curriculum that focuses on cultivating student voice and allows for self-directed learning. Not only is access to the lessons maximized with the removal of cost barriers, but also course content is designed

to be welcoming for students. Repertoire selected for students includes pieces from the Suzuki method in conjunction with Burmese, Nepali, and Somali folk songs, reflective of the traditions of most of its students. New music written in the last 50 years may also be introduced.

Performances are an essential part of the experience of Buffalo String Works students. Students will perform recitals in groups, and professional artists may also be imported for enriching performances. In development is a world premiere of a piece by composer Mary Kouyoumdjian, which will juxtapose stories of the journeys of Buffalo String Works families with live music performed by the students and professional musicians from the Buffalo Chamber Players. The Buffalo String Works enterprise reinforces this kind of collaboration and personal responsibility in music-making, while opening a path for students to become empowered and for the city of Buffalo to become transformed.

Onboarding

The rapid growth of Buffalo String Works has been invigorating for its board members and staff. Expansion has, however, exposed the need for a strategic planning document to guide the organization through the short and medium term, distilling its mission and vision into actionable goals in the years ahead. With help from

The strategic planning team identified three core areas that demanded attention in the next three years: strategic growth, revenue diversity, and leadership shifts.

a management consulting company, the board of Buffalo String Works developed and approved a strategic plan in early 2019 (**Appendix 1**), following surveys of stakeholders and business analyses from a macro and micro level in and around the organization. The strategic planning team identified three core areas that demanded attention in the next three years:

strategic growth, revenue diversity, and leadership shifts.

From one point of view, part of the growth of Buffalo String Works would require a rethinking of its primary place of business. The current facility is situated on the West Side of Buffalo, but that location has reached its full capacity. The board will look to the administration to propose a second location for lessons or an entirely new space for operations. Diversification of revenue streams constitutes another major area to address in the medium term. Grant writing has dominated the contributions that Buffalo String Works receives; however, overreliance on grants presents an inherent risk for the organization. Not only do grants exhaust administrative resources, but the prospects of receiving grants vary from year to year, thereby making planning and projections potentially erratic. Further, grants have tended to be project based, which prevents funds to be put toward pure administrative or infrastructure needs. The lack of a salaried executive director for Buffalo String Works is one such administrative need articulated in the plan. The hire of Yuki Numata Resnick as a full-time executive director was a major commitment from the board and would ensure a steady and experienced hand at the helm from one of its co-founders.

Leadership more generally was a third theme of the strategic planning document under which a number of action steps were communicated. Because Buffalo String Works was founded by professional musicians, its instructional credentials have never been in question. But these musicians were ill-equipped to deal with both day-to-day and long-term management issues arising at the nonprofit they had created. With salaried administrators at the head of Buffalo String Works, leadership of the organization and its staff could be more formalized, and, with luck, a unified culture at the academy could begin to emerge.

Among the action steps expressed in the strategic plan under the category of leadership was an explicit focus

on “onboarding.” For Buffalo String Works, onboarding indicates the process of establishing a mission-driven organizational culture that current and new staff may embrace. One cannot flip a switch to transform the culture of a business, but steps could be taken toward this end. Providing regular staff training on key issues was a commitment that the administration could take to achieve its goal of creating a “safe, effective, and encouraging team culture.”

Seven points enumerated in “Activity 4” under the action area of “onboarding” in the strategic document describe steps toward offering quality staff training and are in the process of implementation. Organizational culture and guiding statements (1) were suggested by board members at Buffalo String Works to emphasize formally what is expected in the organization at all levels. Funding from El Sistema USA also points toward integration of teaching methodologies from the parent model (2), including best practices in group instruction and in the social aspects of learning.

Two recommendations concern legal training for staff. Because the music teachers at Buffalo String Works are not social workers, they can easily be overwhelmed when reacting to students who may have learning difficulties or behavior issues. In the gravest of circumstances, referrals may be necessary for at-risk children enrolled in the program (3), and administration is considering ways to help staff recognize when to call for help. Similarly, there are laws for notifying authorities (4) when children report abuse or a distressing situation. Since Buffalo String Works faculty are almost always working with students from low income and high stress backgrounds, they will tend to be vulnerable in many ways, which teachers may not always notice or be certain when to take action.

Understanding child development (5) is another goal of staff training. It is not uncommon in Buffalo String Works for students of the same musical ability to be wide ranging in age. Classes often mix ages, but

ways of teaching third grade students, for instance, will contrast greatly with those for seventh graders next to them in the same group lesson. The administration has in mind drawing on best classroom practices when ages and abilities may diverge.

While age and ability are generic parameters in some ways, the population of refugees and immigrants in the Buffalo String Works studios seems to require a specialized understanding of circumstances and could present more difficulty to address through training. Language (6) is a major barrier standing between teachers and students, and each immigrant family further brings an extraordinary background to the organization. Most students at Buffalo String Works come from Myanmar (formerly Burma) in Southeast Asia and speak the Karen language. While it would be an unreasonable expense to train teachers in Karen, management could facilitate sessions to help understand better ways of using English (the language of the academy) with these students. More specific to the refugee backgrounds of the students, Buffalo String Works hopes to provide its instructors training in understanding the traumatic experiences (7) that many of its students have faced. Some have been in refugee camps themselves or have parents that still speak of life on the run. Teachers who are sensitive to these unspoken commonalities among their students may be better equipped to interact in the private or group setting for lessons.

In her new role as executive director, Yuki was intent on delivering some professional development resources for the instructors of Buffalo String Works. Providing assistance with the help of outside consultants could be a way to show institutional commitment and support teachers’ improvement with the vulnerable

The population of refugees and immigrants in the Buffalo String Works studios seems to require a specialized understanding of circumstances.

population of students served in the program. Within the onboarding goal, Yuki thought any of the ideas in the plan could improve the environment for instructors and students. But given finite time and resources to offer professional development, Yuki was left wondering which recommendations should receive priority.

Faculty Diversity and Cultural Understanding

As the co-founder of Buffalo String Works, Yuki cared deeply about the communities that it served. But she was also aware of the cultural imbalances that manifested in lessons. At present, the majority of teaching artists at Buffalo String Works (14 of 17) are females, and all except Yuki are white. (Yuki is Japanese-Chinese-Canadian.) Students from these refugee communities are not all girls, and, as mentioned, largely come from Myanmar in Southeast Asia. Teachers were sometimes concerned about how to interact with students and how to interpret their expression—or lack thereof—in the classroom. A one-size-fits-all approach to teaching did not seem right. How could the classroom be not only productive but fun and inclusive for students from such different backgrounds than their instructors?

While the majority of students came from families that fled Myanmar, several families from the East African country of Somalia enrolled children in Buffalo String Works in the fall of 2018 once they had settled in their new city. The enrollment of eight Somali students in the relatively small program changed the composition of group violin lessons in particular. After just a few months, six of the eight students abruptly dropped out of Buffalo String Works. It was unclear whether the students or their parents were uncomfortable with the educational environment, but the fact that these students left unexpectedly and *en masse* was worrisome to Yuki and her staff. Two Somali boys remained in the program and evidently had positive experiences.

Two of the boys who left Buffalo String Works as part of the group of six students are of particular note. Their behavior deteriorated with each passing week in the group lessons. One of them, “Aung,” had multiple episodes of “acting out” in apparent anger toward the instructors. The boys’ pugnacious behavior was hard for teachers and administration to understand. Although it was possible that the Somali families had different reasons for withdrawing their families from the program, Yuki suspected that tacit cultural barriers were to blame, not the children or their families. “Teachers were not familiar with these families from Somalia,” she reasoned. “How would you like to be the lone Somali in a room full of Asian students?” At the same time, Yuki was unsure of what steps could be taken to improve the environment.

Cultural Sensitivity Training

The experience with the Somali children weighed on Yuki, and she felt action was needed quickly to prevent something similar. What began as a medium-term aspiration in the area of onboarding and professional development would move up in the organizational queue. A colleague of Yuki’s from the University at Buffalo agreed to provide some workshops for the instructors at Buffalo String Works. Professor Isok Kim specializes in cultural sensitivity and cultural humility in the field of social work and was called to lead the studio teachers through training designed to illuminate social contexts that may not be readily apparent in music lessons.

One Friday morning, when there were no lessons scheduled, ten teachers and seven teaching assistants gathered at Buffalo String Works for the first of three

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sessions with Prof. Kim. He began by distributing an “identity wheel” for the attendees to complete (**Appendix 2**). The identity wheel helps individuals plot various social characteristics that make them who they are: gender; marital status; native or immigrant; race; parent; profession; etc. The teachers were instructed to complete the exercise by revealing awareness of that social group membership by the size of a “slice.” They also were asked to determine which of those individualizing features would be considered “advantaged” social norms and which appear to be “targeted” or cast out in society. Kim suggested that people may feel that some of these identifiers are private and encouraged them to share only whatever social markers make them comfortable.

After charting these characteristics and noting commonalities and differences among the attendees, he asked the teachers to assemble into small groups to consider two questions: (1) which of these identifiers they themselves think about every day and, conversely, (2) what identifiers others readily see when they encounter that person. In groups of three or four, the string instructors discussed these self-reflections and perceptions. When the full group reconvened, the professor solicited their learnings and tried to extract insights gained among the participants. Prof. Kim used this low-stakes exercise to build up trust among the teachers. Even though they knew each other as colleagues, the self-examination and disclosures made in this session were not easy for everyone.

So as not to lose momentum from the initial session, Yuki scheduled another session with Prof. Kim a week later. The teachers gathered again, but now Kim wanted to take the insights and trust they had established from their first meeting and explore some of the specific cultural differences that they were witnessing with students at Buffalo String Works. He presented a short history of refugees from Myanmar and the specific ethnic groups resettled in Buffalo. He also shared insights from community-based participatory research he completed on health and

psychiatric concerns from refugee groups in Buffalo.

The forum continued in small groups in which the teachers collected observations of their students in the studios and compared notes. On one hand, the session was illuminating for the instructors to pull together the practical experiences, but it was also isolating in some ways to expose the substantial cultural barriers, both explicit and heretofore unstated, which existed between students and teachers in the studios. The obstacle of language was just the tip of the iceberg.

One goal of the third and final session with Prof. Kim was to introduce the teachers to some theoretical ideas in order to rationalize some of the practical observations that infused the previous meeting. He presented the concept of social identity development to further unlock the barriers. In this model, there are “agents” and “targets,” the former social group determining what is “normal” in reality (“advantaged” in the identity wheel) and the latter in a state of oppression based on divergences from the dominant group. Both groups are born into their circumstances (age, religion, gender, race, etc.), then become aware of them, and may grow to resist them and redefine themselves because of their resistance (**Appendix 3**). Ultimately, one finds humility in the realization (1) that people express identities that are valuable and (2) that no culture or social group should be superior to another. Many teachers felt these observations represented a breakthrough in the training.

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The other objective of the teachers’ final session was to apply this theory to their students and classrooms. Prof. Kim emphasized that it will be impossible to make

complete transformations of the learning environment after some basic training in cultural humility. Some bridging of gaps would come from the new skills gained, while experience in the classroom over time could also help teachers grow in cultural competency by recognizing patterns of refugee behavior. Above all, he underscored that, despite the stark differences one could identify at Buffalo String Works, the environment had one very positive thing going for it—namely, the shared interest in music-making among teachers, students, and families. Were there other commonalities?

Yuki was eager to see the training pay off. Teachers reported how enlightened they were by the sessions with Prof. Kim, and no doubt would take some of the learning into the classroom. But how exactly would the results of the sessions manifest? Yuki wanted to show

ongoing institutional support for teaching faculty who identified possible cultural barriers with students, but was not sure how to formalize the support for their studios of refugee and immigrant students. How could this training become central to the long-term professional development plan for Buffalo String Works? How would training for new teachers take place now that current instructors had completed these workshops? She further wondered if there were other resources for teachers at Buffalo String Works that could address cultural humility in the classroom. How could cultural competency training build from year to year? At the same time, how could the administration engage parents and family members in these conversations about cultural barriers and integration strategies not only in Buffalo String Works but in the community more broadly?

APPENDIX I

Buffalo String Works Strategic Plan (2018)

Executive Summary

Buffalo String Works is a growing organization, utilizing music instruction to help build the character, skills, and support network of refugee children. Since their founding five years ago, the program has grown from 17 students to welcoming over 92 students in the fall of 2018. With such expansive growth, and with an advanced notice that a co-founder would shift her role to board service during the 2019 program year, strategic planning was indicated.

Utilizing stakeholder surveys, a PESTLE analysis, and a SWOT analysis, the organization launched into deep learning about its current state and the influencers that could touch its future. During these dialogues, a mix of board leadership and executive staff came together to share a vision for the organization's future, to brainstorm solutions to current concerns, and to identify core challenges to address in the next three years. Among those core priorities, strategic growth, revenue diversity, and leadership shifts were the critical pieces identified by the planning team.

In order to continue to grow, Buffalo String Works must right-size its infrastructure and administration. The organization utilizes a centralized West Side location as its primary practice space. At present, this space has reached 100% capacity, and further growth would require either expansion to a second site or moving to a new home. This carries with it strategic challenges regarding service delivery, recruitment, and retention.

To date, a vast majority of the organization's funding has been achieved through grant writing. This funding can be strategically useful, but it is time-consuming to seek and inherently less stable than other forms of nonprofit revenue. It is also prohibitive in funding certain organizational needs. Leaning almost exclusively on grants has caused an inability to fund administration and infrastructure. As a result, key team members are underpaid or not paid at all, and some key roles are filled by people serving outside their primary strength areas.

Founded and led at the ground level by professional orchestral musicians, Buffalo String Works benefits from the strong knowledge base of its leadership. These skills enrich the experience of students and their social and educational outcomes. However, a lack of knowledge in nonprofit administration and leadership has caused the organization some challenges in need of addressing.

Because of the high level of professionalism among the Buffalo String Works' leadership, the consultant has faith in the organization's internal capacity to address the issues it faces. The leadership team--both staff and board members--are fully committed to the students served and fully embrace the methodology of the organization. This commitment drives a desire to grow in organizational maturity. In the next three years, Buffalo String Works will grow in its ability to create strengths-based assignments, to meaningfully fund its administration and infrastructure, and will enhance its leadership culture. Of this, the team at City of Light Consulting has no doubt.

Action Steps by Key Theme

Theme 1: Leadership

Rationale: Currently, Buffalo String Works is led by talented community members with a strong commitment to the organization's clients. Unfortunately, low resources and tight timelines have caused unsustainable salary practices and inefficient training and onboarding. Additionally, the all-hands-on-deck model for staff means that some staff members are taking on responsibilities for which they are not trained. It has also made it incredibly difficult to engage new volunteers, because of the high time-cost. Relieving this issue will require the strategic investment of time and money, in order to gain sustainability.

This is normal for small and young nonprofits, especially those that experience rapid growth as a result of community need. However, it is unsustainable in the long term. Addressing this issue now will promote consistency of service, foster participatory leadership, and chart the course for long-term sustainability.

Action Area: Guiding Statements for Visionary Leadership

Purpose: To foster an organizational culture with a strong sense of purpose and shared values.

Activity 1: Develop a mission statement, vision statement, and core values through a guided development meeting with City of Light Consulting. Vote to adopt as a board.

Key Contributors: Board of Directors, City of Light Consulting

Launch Date: January 1, 2019

Completion Date: March 31, 2019

Activity 2: Intentionally infuse organizational culture with these statements through intentional communication. Incorporate mission statement into the website, social media, and all printed materials. Incorporate vision statement and core values into all training materials for board members, staff, and volunteers.

Key Contributors: Marketing Team Members, Executive Committee

Launch Date: March 31, 2019

Completion Date: Ongoing

Action Area: Onboarding

Purpose: To create a safe, effective, and encouraging team culture in which individuals grow in their capacities and are appreciated for their contributions.

Activity 1: Develop a leadership manual for board members. This manual should include:

- Guiding statements;
- Board member expectation description;
- Copy of organizational bylaws;
- Current organizational contact list;
- Organizational chart;
- Budget;

- Committee descriptions; and,
- Annual meeting schedule.

Key Contributors: Amy, Yuki, Virginia, and City of Light Consulting

Launch Date: January 1, 2019

Completion Date: March 31, 2019

Activity 2: Enhance organizational culture by training teaching artists on guiding statements.

Key Contributors: Yuki, Virginia

Launch Date: March 31, 2019

Completion Date: April 30, 2019

Activity 3: To protect BSW students, begin organization-wide screening process for any individual that comes in contact with minors, including staff members and volunteers.

Key Contributors: Yuki (2019), Administrative Support Professional (2020)

Launch Date: Immediately

Completion Date: Ongoing

Activity 4: Develop and implement annual staff training, touching on key features such as:

- Organizational culture and guiding statements;
- Required skills for El Sistema teaching methodology;
- Trauma informed instruction methodology;
- Referral opportunities for at-risk children;
- Laws regarding mandatory reporting;
- Addressing language barriers; and,
- Relevant features of child development.

Key Contributors: Yuki, Virginia, Subject Matter Experts (as needed)

Launch Date: June 2019

Completion Date: September 2019

Activity 5: Begin strategic volunteer recruitment, onboarding, and training using results of power mapping in Theme Three and organizational needs as they occur.

Key Contributors: TBD

Launch Date: January 2020

Completion Date: Ongoing

Action Area: Sustainable Compensation

Purpose: To pay a competitive salary to our talented director and teaching artists, avoiding burn out and turn over, and living more fully into our core values.

Activity 1: To begin the process of regularly honoring executive team members for their contributions, starting January 2019, determine feasible monthly stipend based on current budget projections for Q1 and Q2 2019.

Key Contributors: Board Treasurer, Board Members.

Launch Date: January 1, 2019

Completion Date: Q3 2019

Activity 2: To pay our executive director a sustainable competitive wage, using current salary data from similarly positioned organizations, begin paying a competitive half-time wage in Q3 2019, raising this hourly rate until fully honoring the staff member's commitment by Q3 2020.

Key Contributors: Board Treasurer, Board Members, Administrative Support Professional.

Launch Date: January 1, 2019

Completion Date: Q3 2019

Action Area: Administrative Support

Purpose: To support strengths-based team culture, accuracy in reporting, and speedy follow-up through strong administration.

Activity 1: Further develop Assistant Director job description, utilizing current administrative activities and desired future activities.

Key Contributors: Yuki, Virginia

Launch Date: January 1, 2019

Completion Date: February 1, 2019

Activity 2: Begin training AD in additional duties, transferring responsibilities as capable.

Key Contributors: Yuki, Virginia

Launch Date: February 1, 2019

Completion Date: May 1, 2019

Activity 3: Train administrative support professional on current tools and processes, encouraging observation of classes and other programs to help with mission orientation.

Key Contributors: Yuki, Virginia

Launch Date: May 1, 2019

Completion Date: July 2019

Activity 4: Transfer relevant responsibilities to administrative support professional, under the supervision of the executive director.

Key Contributors: Virginia, Yuki

Launch Date: August 2019

Completion Date: On going

Action Area: Strengthen Board Membership

Purpose: To enhance the board's impact and productivity, by performing meaningful recruitment, screening, and initial onboarding.

Activity 1: Form a nominating committee of the board, which shall serve to review materials, screen candidates, and perform interviews. This team will recommend candidates for service.

Key Contributors: Board President, Board Members, Hand-Chosen Community Members.

Launch Date: March 1, 2019

Completion Date: August 30, 2019

Activity 2: Secure training platforms to support board members who are new to board service, as well as those that are new to this style of governance, and in order to provide team cohesion and support communication, considering:

- Charity Strong;
- Policy-Governance; and,
- DISC assessment and training.

Key Contributors: Board President, Executive Director

Launch Date: November 1, 2019

Completion Date: On-going, at least annually

Activity 3: Expand board recruitment, using online tools and personal networks. Using a board matrix, identify skills and education gaps. In addition to strong network-based recruitment efforts, utilize online platforms including:

- LinkedIn;
- Charity Strong;
- Local United Way websites; and,
- Volunteer Match.

Use online and telephone communication to keep candidates who are interested.

Key Contributors: Nominating Committee

Launch Date: January 2020

Completion Date: Ongoing

Theme 2: Growth and Expansion

Rationale: To date, Buffalo String Works has largely been funded through grants. Selective grant writing to highly motivated funders has led to an atypically successful grants processes. Unfortunately, grant funding on its own can be limiting. It restricts administrative function while emphasizing programmatic growth. It is also inherently unstable, with low renewal rates. Additionally, the organization has somewhat limited its grant prospects to small grants, because of a lack of data accumulation. To address this issue, a diverse development plan and calendar will be created, utilizing support as needed, while the committee builds its internal skill set.

Action Area: Fundraising Strategy

Purpose: To design and implement a more balanced development plan, and grow the development knowledge base on the organization's board and staff, encouraging consistent and mission-focused fundraising, which will sustain the organization and allow for growth.

Activity 1: Define a development committee consisting of board members, staff members, and community members.

Key Contributors: Board President, Executive Director

Launch Date: March 1, 2019

Completion Date: April 30, 2019, Activities ongoing

Activity 2: Support strong development culture through board and staff training.

Short-term goal: Beginning to strengthen the team's knowledge base in development best practices, the development committee, including the executive director, will prioritize growth with the following commitments:

- The Executive director will attend at least one AFP event per quarter;
- The Executive director will attend at least one WNY Planned Giving Consortium Meeting per year; and,
- The development committee will read at least one development planning book per year as a team. (See appendix for a reading list.)

Additional opportunities include:

- AFP online trainings;
- Coursera courses;
- NFG webinars; and,
- Foundation Center webinars and seminars.

Long-term goal: Building on the groundwork laid above by attending a guided training by professional fundraisers. Examples include:

- Joining LRay development training cohort;
- Grantspace in-person training sessions; and,
- Reputable online courses or certifications, through credentialed universities.

Key Contributors: Development Committee, Executive Director

Launch Date: March 31, 2019

Completion Date: On-going

Activity 3: Design and implement a development calendar that focuses on all levels of the engagement funnel, to avoid donor decrease year to year and to support continued growth. Build sustainability by achieving 30% funding through individual donors and corporate sponsors in 2019, 40% in 2020, and 50% by 2021.

Key Contributors: Development Committee, Executive Director

Launch Date: June 1, 2019, Revision June 1, 2020, and June 1, 2021

Completion Date: Ongoing

Activity 4: Develop a grants calendar building upon current grant successes, utilizing databases to research opportunities, including:

- Foundation Center;
- Instrumentl; and,
- Grant Station.

Key Contributors: Executive Director, Grant Writer.

Launch Date: January 1, 2020

Completion Date: Ongoing

Action Area: Space Needs

Purpose: To provide a safe, comfortable, and healthy space for our students and teachers.

Activity 1: Launch search for larger, affordable space for the organization, prioritizing 14213. Utilize the support of organizations like Westside Business and Tax Payers, politicians like Sean Ryan and David Rivera, and realtors who often know communities best.

Key Contributors: Administrative Staff

Launch Date: March 31, 2019

Completion Date: August 30, 2019

Action Area: Enrollment

Purpose: To ensure the organization's sustainable growth.

Activity 1: Buffalo String Works will pause enrollment growth until Action Areas regarding salary and administration have been fully addressed.

Key Contributors: Board, Executive Director

Launch Date: Immediately

Activity 2: In order to ensure that Buffalo String Works enrolls a diverse group of students from the refugee community, the organization will compare current enrollment numbers to West Side population data. Following this gap analysis, the organization will identify community marketing spaces like faith communities and community centers, as well as other nonprofit organizations, in order to promote the program equitably across ethnolinguistic groups.

Key Contributors: Executive Staff, City of Light Consulting

Launch Date: June 2020

Completion Date: Ongoing, Annually

Theme 3: Progress

Rationale: In order to ensure that the organization's outcomes are captured and accurately reported to both grantors and to prospects and that appropriate data exists to ensure programming aligns with strategic objectives, Buffalo String Works will require metric tracking support.

Action Area: Metrics Tracking

Purpose: To demonstrate the effect of the Buffalo String Works program, helping to address issues in strategy, as well as to demonstrate the value of the program to grantors

Phase One: Preliminary Data Capturing

Activity 1: Create a student intake form to be completed by all new and currently attending students. This form will identify the age, country of origin, language group, refugee/immigration status, income level, and educational level of each student, in order to begin providing provisional data on grants.

Key Contributors: Yuki, City of Light Consulting

Launch Date: January 1, 2019

Completion Date: January 31, 2019

Activity 2: Distribute forms to all teachers, with a deadline to return them completed by students and instructors by within two weeks.

Key Contributors: Yuki, Teaching Artists

Launch Date: February 1, 2019

Completion Date: February 14, 2019

Activity 3: Enter data into a centralized cloud-based spreadsheet or database, to be updated as regularly as data is received for access as grant submissions are made.

Key Contributors: Yuki, Administrative Staff

Launch Date: February 15, 2019

Completion Date: Ongoing

Activity 3: Begin attendance and retention tracking on a centralized database in cloud-storage.

Key Contributors: Yuki, Teaching Artists

Launch Date: February 1, 2019

Completion Date: February 14, 2019

Phase Two: Data Capturing With Expert Support

Activity 1: Identify local or regional evaluation expert to support meaningful data tracking and measurement. Resources may include:

- Researchers from local universities;
- Via Evaluations; and,
- Community Connections of New York, Inc.

Key Contributors: Executive Director, Administrative Staff

Launch Date: March 1, 2019

Completion Date: Ongoing

Action Area: Community Relationship Building

Purpose: To expand Buffalo String Works' community network, providing access to champions, advocates, donors, volunteers, and students.

Activity 1: A modified version of a power mapping session will help the organization to identify potential supporters. This modeling will help the organization to identify community leaders, politicians, educators, social workers, faith leaders, local philanthropists, business owners, etc., who can become allies and advocates. Prior to each meeting, be prepared to research using LinkedIn and other sites to determine potential asks, including giving, bridge building, program support, volunteerism, etc.

Key Contributors: Nikki, Board, Teaching Artists, Executive Staff

Launch Date: April 1, 2019

Completion Date: Ongoing

Activity 2: Utilizing contacts found in power mapping as a foundation, begin regular meetings with community members with a goal of 25 one-on-ones in 2019, 35 in 2020, and 50 in 2021. Presentations to faith groups, voluntary associations, etc., should begin at least 5 per year in 2019, 10 in 2020, and 20 in 2021.

Key Contributors: Executive staff

Launch Date: May 1, 2019

Completion Date: Ongoing

Conclusion

Buffalo String Works has made amazing progress in its short journey. Moving from 17 students in 2014 to 92 students at the start of 2018, the organization has continually strove to meet community demand. For the most part, grant funding has helped to address the organization's needs as it proceeded along this path. However, several organizational needs remain unaddressed. Chief among them is a need for administrative support and enhanced infrastructure.

Like most nonprofits, Buffalo String Works was founded without a skilled nonprofit administrator or executive on the team. As a result, some key features of board engagement, volunteer management, and donor relationship building may be missing from their current organizational structure and culture. However, the team founding Buffalo String Works is uniquely professional and prepared to become engaged at a higher level of skillfulness.

Team learning, including board, executive, and teacher training, is indicated. The organization is prepared to adopt best practices and to, in time, begin to refine those practices for use in other similar organizations. The board commits to learning on policy governance, development, and communication styles. The executive staff will engage in focused learning on development. And the teaching team will begin to gain skills in trauma-informed instruction and referral opportunities as needed in this particular at-risk population.

Enhanced development activities, including strategic one-on-one meetings and the launch of a development calendar based on a marketing matrix, will support growth beyond grants. Solid grant research will assist in accessing those stones which lay unturned.

Supporting all of these activities is the development of strong guiding statements, including a mission statement, vision statement, and core values. Allowing these core statements to form the culture of the organization as it grows will prevent against mission drift and other maladies faced by nonprofits in their adolescence.

The team at City of Light has been continually impressed by Buffalo String Works' drive of commitment. We look forward to seeing their progress and growth as they proceed in their journey. We look forward to supporting their work as they blossom.

APPENDIX 2

Identity Wheel

Race

Sex

Gender

Religion

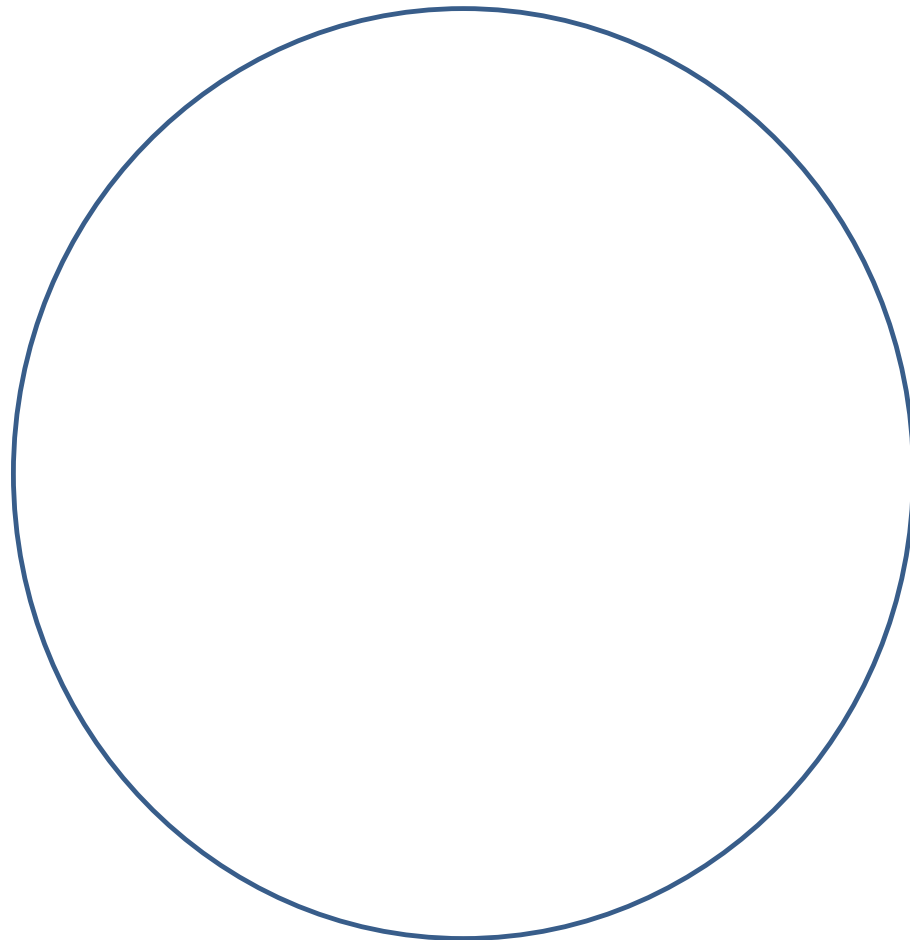
Class

Ability

Sexual
Orientation

Age

Other

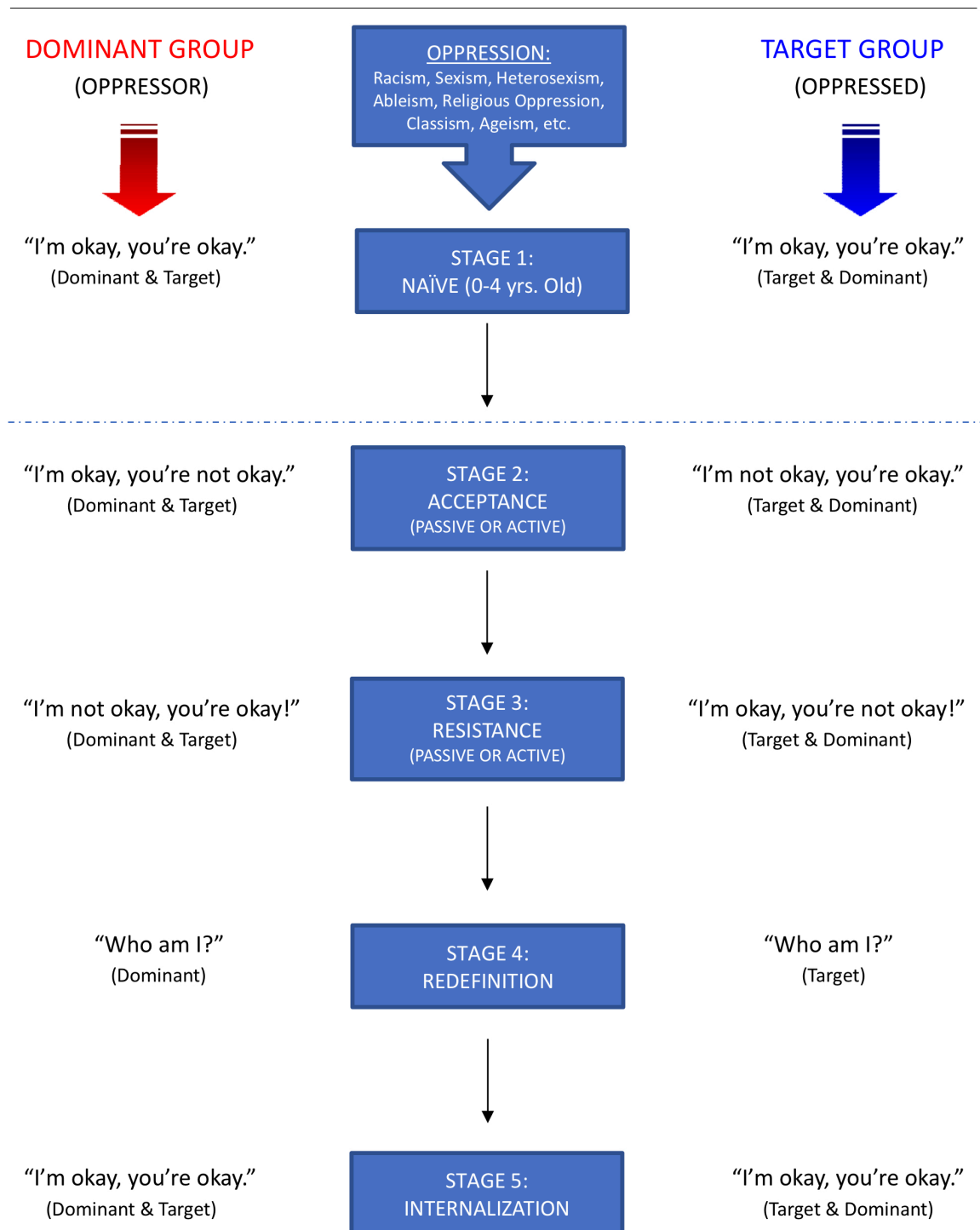


Advantaged=A
Targeted=T

Create your identity wheel by indicating your targeted and advantaged social group memberships. Make the identity “slice” a size that reflects your awareness of that social group membership. Memberships that you are more aware of will be a bigger slice than those you are less aware of.

APPENDIX 3

Social Identity Development Model



Source: Rita Hardiman and Bailey W. Jackson, "Conceptual Foundations for Social Justice Courses." In *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin. London, 1997, 16-29.

STAGES OF SOCIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

NAÏVE STAGE: Describes our condition when we are born into the world. It is from this perspective that we are taught our social group memberships and our social status as members of the dominant and target groups.

ACCEPTANCE STAGE: Largely describes an individual's compliance and involvement with the dominant ideologies, values, etc. An individual in this stage would go along (either passively or actively) with the dominant group's values and beliefs. A person in the *active acceptance* stage would do so intentionally or consciously, while a person in the *passive acceptance* stage may do things unintentionally or unconsciously. In either case, the end result would be maintaining the status quo and giving unearned privileges to the dominant group. Folks at this stage may blame or scapegoat target group members for their own oppression and view the dominant group as being superior or "better than". People at this stage may also be in denial that oppression exists and may believe in the stereotypes of the target group.

RESISTANCE STAGE: Describes one's defiance of the dominant group's values, beliefs, and ideologies. Using race as an example, folks in this stage would be rejecting and (actively or passively) working against racist systems and beliefs. A person in the *active resistance* stage may openly question individual and institutional policies that are oppressive. Whereas, a person in the *passive resistance* stage might challenge and question oppressive practices and behaviors in safe situations where there is little risk to one's social and professional position. Many times, folks in this stage who are in the oppressed group will have mixed feelings of emotions and will surround themselves with people from their own social group for support. Folks in the oppressor group are usually experiencing feelings of shame and guilt for being a part of the oppression, and will avoid and actively reject the privileges gained from an oppressive system.

REDEFINITION STAGE: Occurs when individuals seek to find their own identity outside of their relationship to the dominant ideology. Person tries to figure out who one is by exploring new ways to define one's social group membership. Continuing with the example of race, an individual would seek to establish a sense of self not in agreement with or in opposition to the dominant ideology but rather instead of that ideology.

INTERNALIZATION: the individual has acquired a strong sense of self and seeks to build coalition with other groups to deconstruct dominant, limiting ideologies. Concluding our example, at this stage white students and students of color would work in coalition to end racism and the systems that perpetuate it. Students of color would also fight against other forms of oppression.

Source: Rita Hardiman and Bailey W. Jackson, "Conceptual Foundations for Social Justice Courses." In *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin. London, 1997, 16-29.



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