

Jazz St. Louis

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Identify prospects for programming growth and physical expansion in a musical arts organization.
- Examine the challenges and opportunities afforded by an institutional expansion.
- Weigh the preservation of an arts organization's identity against its need for fiscal sustainability.

Topics For Discussion

Identifying Opportunities for Expansion

The case details the recent renovation and expansion of Jazz St. Louis, a not-for-profit arts organization whose mission is to “lead [the St. Louis] community in advancing the uniquely American art form of jazz through live performance, education, and community engagement.” To solicit financial support in its \$10 million capital campaign, the organization argued that it could effectively satisfy unmet needs in the St. Louis community by broadening operations in all three areas of its mission.

- Before the renovation, Jazz St. Louis's live shows regularly sold out on weekends, which was a key factor in motivating the expansions in space and quantity of programming at the renovated Ferring Jazz Bistro. Ask students to identify other kinds of data that might suggest an opportunity for expansion in a live concert venue. How can a venue ensure that the scope of its planned expansion is proportional to future demand for tickets?
- While it has a positive, demonstrable effect on the St. Louis community, Jazz St. Louis's education and engagement programming does not generate significant earned revenue for the organization. How does this programming benefit Jazz St. Louis, and how can these benefits be measured? How might data be organized to inform decisions about how to expand programming?
- Jazz St. Louis's expansion necessitated the hiring of additional staff members: new development staff help raise money to offset increased expenses, while other new personnel devoted to community engagement and general operations help administer the organization's programming. Ask students to develop a rationale for assessing staffing needs at an expanding arts organization. How should an organization prioritize which kinds of staff members to add, and in what order? Students may wish to consult the data in **Appendix 1**, evaluating both the distribution of expenses across the budget and the ratios of expenses to revenue.

Institutional Growth: Challenges and Opportunities

- Ask students to appraise the expansion in Jazz St. Louis's programming. Is this expansion equally distributed across the three facets of the organization's mission? Prompt students to list the strategic benefits and financial costs associated with each area of growth. In what ways might benefits in one area offset costs in another?
 - ♦ Based on Jazz St. Louis's distribution of programming and allocation of resources, ask the students to rank the institutional priority of the three aspects of Jazz St. Louis's mission, from their understanding of the case. What are the ramifications of this ranking for the institution's ability to generate both earned and contributed revenue?
- Jazz St. Louis has deployed several strategies to generate additional revenue from live performances in the Ferring Jazz Bistro. These strategies include broadening the quantity and subgenre scope of its bookings, introducing new concert series aimed at audiences in broader age demographics, making its marketing materials more educational, and introducing a livestreaming program to boost the venue's regional and national visibility. In spite of these efforts, the total revenue generated by live performances continues to fall short of the costs associated with these performances.
 - ♦ Ask students to evaluate these various strategies. What metrics might Jazz St. Louis use to determine whether these approaches are effective? Are there additional strategies the institution should consider?
 - ♦ The case asks students to propose the area(s) of Jazz St. Louis's operations in which a one-time infusion of grant funding would best ensure the institution's long-term viability. Invite students to evaluate whether a grant proposal should be explicitly targeted at ameliorating the revenue imbalance associated with live shows. If so, how? Should the organization hire additional development staff tasked with increasing private or corporate concert sponsorships? Or should they seek to grow ticket sales, perhaps via additional targeted audience development or broader marketing efforts? How might the institution evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches?

Balancing Institutional Identity with Sustainable Growth

- As noted in the case study, artists who mix jazz with other popular genres are often among the best-selling bookings at the Ferring Jazz Bistro. The dissolution of genre boundaries represented by these bookings is becoming more common in modern jazz. But many jazz lovers remain skeptical of this stylistic eclecticism, including several private donors and foundations that provide financial support to Jazz St. Louis.
 - ♦ Should Jazz St. Louis further embrace popular genres in future seasons, at the expense of straight-ahead jazz shows? Structure an in-class debate, developing arguments for and against this strategy and considering their implications for the institution's financial viability and its artistic identity. What role should Jazz St. Louis's institutional history play in such a debate?
 - ♦ As detailed in **Appendices 2a** and **2b**, Jazz St. Louis's marketing materials categorize live shows according to jazz subgenre. These categorizations are intended as information for ticket buyers—presently, the organization does not track ticket sales by subgenre. Invite students to probe possible correlations between subgenre and ticket sales in **Appendix 2b**. If Jazz St. Louis began regularly tracking ticket sales according to subgenre, how could it use the resulting data? What are some drawbacks of such tracking?

- Students may consult the websites and online marketing materials of Jazz at Lincoln Center and SFJAZZ to compare the programming at these institutions with Jazz St. Louis. What ideas from these organizations provide a helpful model for Jazz St. Louis as it seeks to sustain its growth while preserving its institutional identity? Why should Jazz St. Louis remain cautious of relying on such models?