

The ROCmusic Collaborative

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Understand the barriers to arts education for urban youth and communities of color.
- Investigate the successes and shortcomings of community arts organizations that target underserved populations.
- Evaluate an alliance that links local nonprofits with municipal entities.

Topics For Discussion

Obstacles to the Arts

Throughout the United States, there are a number of community music programs that aim to serve disadvantaged youth. Many students experience financial struggles, inflexibility of transportation, or a lack of information or connection to the arts. In 2012, Jamal Rossi, Dean of the Eastman School of Music, met with leaders of local musical arts organizations in the city of Rochester to create a program, ROCmusic, designed to break down barriers to high quality music education in Rochester. While individual institutions already had programs in place to help underserved students, they found that despite their best intentions, they were not serving the students with the greatest need. The alliance they developed, the ROCmusic Collaborative, endeavored to provide wide access to the arts.

- While many community music programs and especially El Sistema programs are offered free of cost, ROCmusic is one of the few programs in Rochester that is completely free. The mission statement, however, does not explicitly state the instruments and instruction will always be free. Discuss with students whether ROCmusic should consider charging a fee from students at some point in the future and how the fees might be structured.
- In ROCmusic's formative stages, Harmony Project in California emphasized to the Collaborative the importance of measuring outcomes. What kind of measurement would be necessary and possible in order to increase fundraising and publicity in the community? How might ROCmusic achieve this level of measurement? What is the value of the more aspirational measurements introduced in the case?
- ROCmusic aims to be a replicable program. Reflect on the ways that the ROCmusic Collaborative discovered

Rochester's obstacles to the arts. How can future programs inspired by ROCmusic evaluate their communities' unique obstacles to the arts?

- ROCmusic's student population closely mirrors the city of Rochester's demographics with relatively more African American students than in El Sistema USA's 2020 census. ROCmusic students' greatest exposure to racial diversity in the arts comes from Gateways Musical Festival, which joined the ROCmusic Collaborative in 2016. What were the limitations in partnering with the Gateways Musical Festival as a member of the ROCmusic Collaborative? How might the students and potential ROCmusic students be able to witness racial equity in the arts year-round?

Providing Music for Underserved Youth

ROCmusic is a free neighborhood-based, resident-informed music academy that leverages the resources of arts institutions and municipal entities in Rochester, NY to provide high-quality music education to students with the greatest need. In general, enrolled students can expect to receive an instrument (with minor repairs as needed), 4-5 hours of instruction each week, and access to special events. Under Artistic and Executive Director Armand Hall's leadership, the instruction at ROCmusic is not limited to music alone. Hall has insisted on offering courses that include leadership, responsibility, entrepreneurship, and life skills.

- Daniele Lyman-Torres, commissioner of Rochester's Department of Recreation and Human Services, has expressed a desire to see more popular genres offered at ROCmusic. Hall's job description also mentions offering new instrument groups and/or musical genres. Considering the city's larger financial influence over the ROCmusic Collaborative, the program's status as an El Sistema program, and the goal for all member organizations to have equal decision-making abilities, how should decisions be made regarding genre offerings at ROCmusic? Consider that the artistic and executive director has curriculum building powers, but is overseen by the city alone, yet, the ROCmusic Collaborative aims for equal voices among its members. How will the decision-making process affect the types of genres offered and how centered they are in the program?
- One of the difficulties that ECMS and the Hochstein School of Music encountered was in student transportation. Schools start and end at different times, parents may not allow their children to walk, and many families do not have time and energy for transportation. Looking at **Appendix 2** specifically, how has ROCmusic accommodated students' transportation challenges. What challenges still remain?

ROCmusic's Collaborative Alliance

Unlike many El Sistema USA programs, ROCmusic is neither self-governed, governed by an independent entity, nor connected to another 501(c)(3); rather, ROCmusic is a partnership among Rochester's musical and municipal institutions that operates under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The City of Rochester is the largest financial contributor as the employer of ROCmusic's artistic and executive director, as well as its provider of venues. However, the ROCmusic Collaborative generally intends to operate with each member organization having equal decision-making power.

- Do the City's generous financial contributions outweigh the principle of having equal decision-making power? Is there any way that the ROCmusic Collaborative can maintain this ideal while still giving the City exclusive power over the executive director?

- Currently, the organizations contribute cash, space, or resources as they can and are broadly obligated to do so as specified in a 2013 MOU. The contributions may vary widely year to year and are difficult to enforce under the current arrangement. However, this method leaves a great deal of work monitoring and requesting funds to Artistic and Executive Director Hall, whose job responsibilities are already extensive. What are some ways that ROCmusic could secure ample funds and in-kind donations from member organizations in a fair manner and who should monitor the contributions?
- Almost every leader in the ROCmusic Collaborative agrees that committing to the revised MOU of 2019 would be beneficial to the program. Using **Appendix 3**, how would the MOU help the capacity problem for the executive director and address challenges in communication, finance, and oversight? Invite students to compare this MOU to the original in **Appendix 1**.
- Both the 2013 and 2019 MOUs state that while unanimous agreement is necessary for the member organizations to dissolve the collaborative, one member could choose to leave with 60 days notice. Considering that losing a partner like the Hochstein School of Music or especially the City of Rochester could significantly incapacitate ROCmusic and potentially cause it to dissolve, how can the ROCmusic Collaborative ensure sustainability from its principal supporters?
- At the time of ROCmusic's inception, the leaders envisioned a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with the CEO of each member organization serving as a board member. Later, they were advised that this governing structure would overwhelm the executive director, potentially create competition among music schools, and generally garner less financial support from the community. Considering the pros and cons of ROCmusic's current governing structure and of becoming a 501(c)(3), what are some possible governing structures that ROCmusic might consider in the future? Why should ROCmusic consider other governing structures or why not?
- In the spirit of offering "neighborhood-based" programming informed by residents, Armand Hall has mentioned that it could be beneficial to have a resident representative on ROCmusic's board. What are the advantages and drawbacks of this decision? How might the artistic and executive director or the Collaborative obtain a resident representative on the board?
- Hall believes that the ROCmusic program, under the auspices of the Collaborative, could provide a template for afterschool and summer music education programs in other cities. Do most cities have the entities in place to form an alliance as was done in Rochester? What obstacles could emerge in forming a program with these partners?