



The Opportunity Agenda's Creative Change (2009–2013)

**A Retreat at the Intersection of
Arts, Activism, and Social Justice**



The **Opportunity**Agenda

“For me, social justice and art [are] completely intertwined. At my first retreat, I saw activists and artists figuring out their common ground, and as an outside media executive it was so clear that you can’t have one without the other. It’s so important that at the retreat they continue to expand the narrow definition of creativity. It takes as much creativity to be an activist as it does to be an artist.”

—Geraldine Laybourne, Media Executive and Founder, Oxygen Media

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Letter from the Director

Creative Change was an experiment. Six years ago, when The Opportunity Agenda first brought together artists, entertainers, advocates, and philanthropists committed to social justice at a retreat in Telluride, Colorado, we didn't know what would happen—though the phrase “crash and burn” was in the back of many of our minds. We thought it was worth trying, though, based on our beliefs about how transformative change happens in our society.

We believed that arts and culture have the power to move hearts and minds in ways that advocacy and information alone often cannot. We believed that creative works can transcend present realities and literally paint a picture of a better world that others can embrace and act upon. And we knew that artists and cultural visionaries are among our nation's greatest social justice leaders, not merely supporters of causes or movements. Indeed, every successful social movement of the last century has included art and artists, often at the vanguard of activism.

The effort did not crash and burn—though, at times, sparks did fly. In fact, we were overwhelmed by the excitement it generated, and by the calls to continue and expand the initiative. Six

years later, The Opportunity Agenda's Creative Change activities have spawned ideas, relationships, and cultural activism that are helping to move our nation toward its highest values of opportunity, inclusion, and human rights.

In 2012, after four remarkable Creative Change retreats and activities touching thousands of social change leaders, we commissioned a two-year external evaluation of our work. We wanted to see if our theory of change held up, to measure the impact we've had, and to learn how we could improve our efforts in the future. We were fortunate to work with a remarkable team of independent evaluators with far reaching experience and deep insight: Diane Espaldon and Rinku Sen. Together they produced a rigorous evaluation and a series of case studies that help to illuminate their findings and illustrate our work, highlights of which follow.

In sharing this summary, we hope that our lessons learned can also aid others working at the intersection of art, culture, and social change. While that nexus is age-old, the emergence of a field and community of practice around it is relatively recent, and studies of its impact are still fairly rare. We are pleased to have contributed to the development of this nascent field, and share the evaluation in the spirit of open source learning and transparency.

The evaluation and case studies confirm our belief that connecting creative change-makers yields powerful new collaborations, amplifying the reach and impact of each individual's contribution. In fact, a major conclusion is that the network of diverse Creative Change alums—now over 300—is among the most valuable outcomes of our work. At the same time, the evaluation identifies areas for improvement, such as engagement with

artists collaborating at the regional level, and better articulating the role of Creative Change in The Opportunity Agenda's overall work.

Many people have played a part in making our Creative Change work what it is, and what it will be. Connie Heller and Michelle Coffey, for example, helped to develop the original idea for the first retreat. Jason Drucker, The Opportunity Agenda's former Director of Development, ran with the idea, crafting and curating a highly successful event and a nascent network. Gibrán Rivera, who has skillfully facilitated most of the retreats, helped to establish the inclusive tone and generative culture of the events. Our Senior Creative Fellow, Betsy Richards, steered the programmatic growth of the retreat and is expertly leading the evolution of our creative work in response to this evaluation. And this rewarding experiment could not have happened without the support (and patience) of our funders over the years: Booth Ferris Foundation, The Chorus Foundation, Compton Foundation, Embrey Family Foundation, Ford Foundation, The JPB Foundation, Lambent Foundation, The Libra Foundation, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Time Warner Foundation and Unbound Philanthropy. Most of all, thanks are due to the brilliant, dynamic, and committed retreat participants who've made our work so much more than the sum of its parts.

Best regards,



Alan Jenkins, Executive Director, The Opportunity Agenda

Introduction



Evaluation Purpose And Methodology

EVALUATION PURPOSE

The purpose of the evaluation is to:

- 1) Provide lessons learned and recommendations for future program planning:
 - Assessment of short- and medium-term impact of Creative Change, as well as areas of potential growth and/or focus to assist The Opportunity Agenda in its broader program planning;
 - Utilize participant feedback to improve the design and implementation of future programming.
- 2) Contribute to the developing field of arts and social justice:
 - Share learning and highlight exemplary practices, organizations, and practitioners;
 - Contribute to the ongoing development of evaluative concepts, measures, and vocabulary in the field of arts and social justice;
 - Articulate the role of Creative Change in the broader field of arts and social justice.

WHAT THIS EVALUATION DOES NOT COVER

It is important to note up front that this evaluation does not attempt to measure the external social justice impact of specific arts and culture projects and strategies that emerged from or were influenced by Creative Change, even though the strategies implemented out in the real world are where the practical effect on social justice causes would occur. Measuring the impact of those strategies is beyond the scope of this evaluation for several reasons:

- 1) This evaluation must necessarily focus on the goals of the Creative Change initiative itself and specifically the annual retreat, which is its primary program.
- 2) There is still a general lack of evaluation practice in the arts and social justice intersection, and where evaluation does take place, quality varies widely. In other words, there is not that much data on impact yet available.
- 3) In many cases, not enough time has passed for projects to be able to report on impact. That said, the case studies and profiles included as part of this evaluation begin to capture the impact of arts and cultural strategies on social justice issues that Creative Change participants have accomplished through their work.

EVALUATION TEAM

The evaluation team is comprised of consultants with deep expertise in both the arts and social justice fields. The Opportunity Agenda engaged strategy consultant Diane Espaldon and her associate Jordan Sharon-Maslyn to provide an evaluation of Creative Change’s retreat strategy. Rinku Sen and Julia Sebastian of Applied Research Center (ARC) completed 4 case studies of projects and 10 profiles of individual Creative Change participants to highlight successes and/or innovative practices by Creative Change participants and the impact Creative Change has had on them. The evaluation team worked closely with The Opportunity Agenda to ensure that it represents a cross-sector perspective about the impact of Creative Change to date and the future potential of this intersection of arts and social justice.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Evaluation methods include:

- 1) Articulation of the Creative Change theory of change through multiple meetings between The Opportunity Agenda staff and the evaluation team, with additional insight from The Opportunity Agenda steering committee member and artist organizer Favianna Rodriguez;
- 2) Alumni survey in December 2012 completed by 107 out of 207 Creative Change retreat participants, for a 52% response rate;
- 3) 29 phone interviews with Creative Change retreat participants and key staff of The Opportunity Agenda;
- 4) Creation of 4 case studies and 10 profiles of Creative Change participants;
- 5) Observation of the 2012 and 2013 Creative Change retreats in Sundance, UT;
- 6) Observation of one-day Creative Change convening of immigrant rights movement leaders and artist organizers in March 2013 in Los Angeles, CA;
- 7) Review of Creative Change documents including annual retreat surveys and program agendas, 2009–2013;
- 8) Ongoing meetings between the evaluation team and The Opportunity Agenda staff.

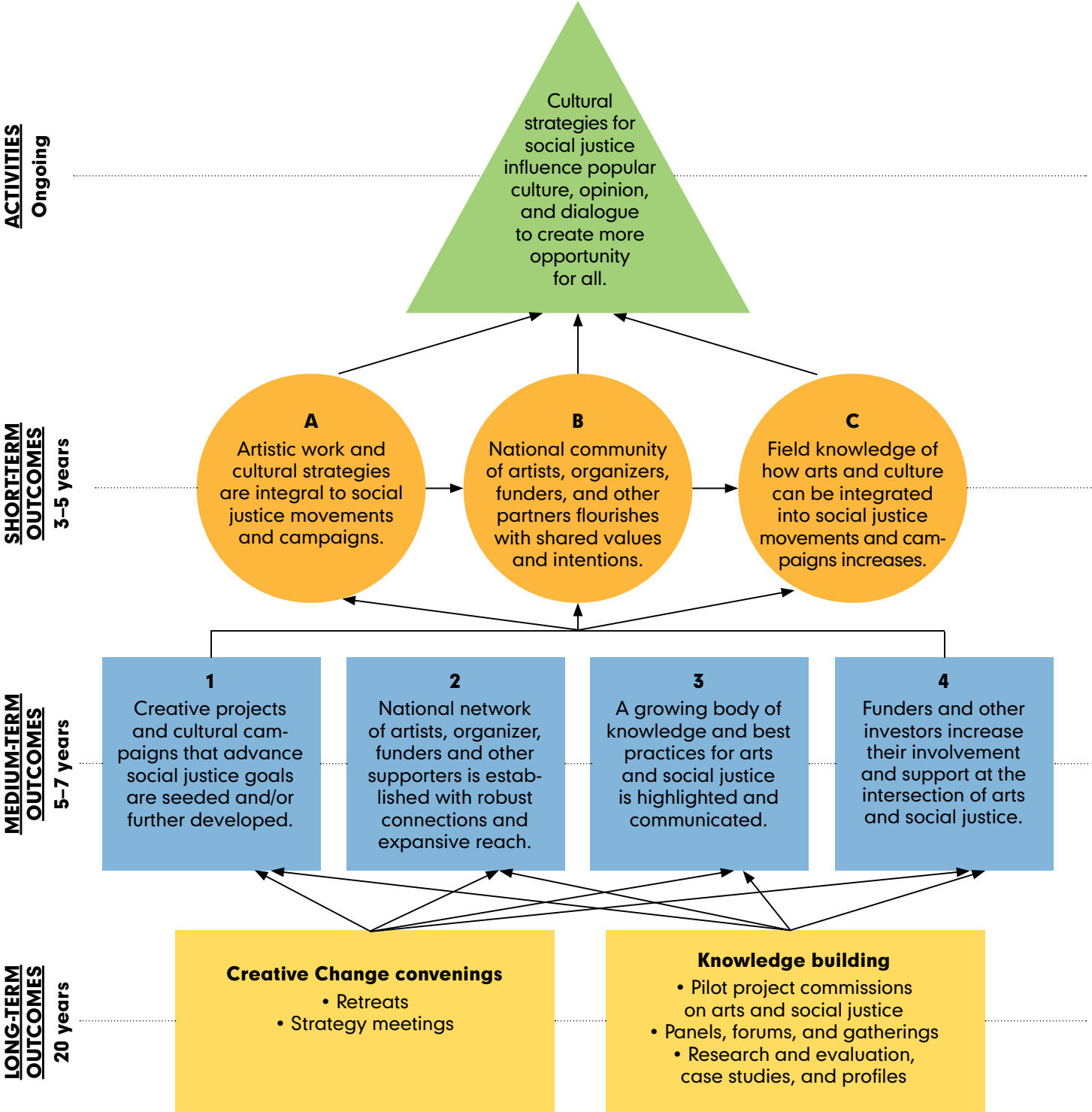
Since its founding, The Opportunity Agenda has believed that culture is a powerful force for moving hearts, minds, and policies toward greater and more equal opportunity in America. Progressive social movements must engage large numbers of people to unite and take action in order to drive the attitudinal, behavioral, political, structural, and normative changes that result in social transformation. Cultural strategies can play critical roles to advance progressive social causes, such as:

- Changing the discourse and the way public debate is framed on a particular issue;
- Strengthening a movement’s constituency by sustaining its spirit, bolstering internal cohesions, expanding knowledge, building its skills and taking up public space;
- Broadening the base of supporters;
- Applying creative tactics to effectively pressure targeted decision-makers.
- To support this, since 2009 The Opportunity Agenda has pursued an evolving cultural strategy – its Creative Change Initiative. The initiative has included reports,

commissioned art, and forums, but the hallmark has been an annual Creative Change retreat focused on the intersection of arts and social justice. Through the retreat, Creative Change has brought together artists, social justice organizers, media makers, and funders to strengthen relationships, discuss shared interests and best practices, and generate ideas for cultural strategies and artistic projects in support of social justice causes and progressive social movements. With the Creative Change retreat completing its fifth year in 2013, The Opportunity Agenda commissioned an evaluation of the initiative to date, with a focus on the annual retreat. This report summarizes the findings and recommendations from the evaluation.



Theory of Change



Findings



“The networks and organizations that are represented at Creative Change have national reach. These groups will help you get your core audience mobilized. And it works in a concentric circle.”

—Negin Farsad, comedian and filmmaker



In general to date, this evaluation has found that Creative Change is a highly valued convening and catalyst space that has contributed to the field intersection between arts and social justice. In the alumni survey, 97% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that Creative Change was a rewarding experience that has benefited their work beyond the retreat. Comments indicated that this occurred on both professional and personal levels. As a new initiative, Creative Change intentionally began in the spirit of experimentation, using a broad social justice lens and facilitating conversations with no specified outcomes. By all accounts, The

Opportunity Agenda designed the first year's retreat primarily to encourage introductions and relationship-building among participants. Responsiveness to participant feedback each year has now resulted in an annual retreat that has greater focus on specific issue areas (which may change depending on external opportunities, funding, and, to a certain extent, alignment with The Opportunity Agenda's work at any given time), a collaborative space for the cultivation and incubation of new work, and a shift from largely theoretical discussions to more of a balance between theoretical and practical sessions.



Creative Change now uses an Advisory Team comprised of past attendees from the social justice advocacy, philanthropy, and arts fields to plan each retreat. This sensitivity to field opportunity and participant feedback has allowed Creative Change to both lead and respond to the nascent field of arts and social justice, keeping the retreat relevant to the most current discussions, ideas, and influential players. When describing Creative Change’s role in the field, many interviewees used the words “catalyst” and “convener.” Those who commented on Creative Change’s convening role either said it is the only convening like this in the field or that it is the best convening like this in the field.

To date, this evaluation has found that Creative Change has played a critical role in helping to build the field at the intersection of arts and social justice in five primary ways:

1 Relationship and network-building among artists, organizers, funders.

The field representing the intersection of arts and social justice is still in its formative stages, with relationships and networks developing, initial discussions and research on potential field-wide definitions, standards, and measures of impact and success, and early stage cross-fertilization between what is still a small group of artists, organizers, media makers, and funders. As one interviewee remarked, “The practice and activity of arts and culture for social

justice has a long history and has been happening at a lot of levels. The ‘it’ is broad and deep. However, the intention to tie it explicitly to movements, policy organizations, and change organizations is what’s newer.”

Attendees are invited to Creative Change because of their experience working in the arts and/or social justice sectors; deep knowledge and perspectives as leading practitioners, thinkers, and funders; and the strength of their own connections to other networks and communities. The Opportunity Agenda believes that bringing such individuals together in a relaxed, open, creative environment will catalyze cross-sector relationships and, ultimately, transformative cultural ideas and solutions to advance social justice. The foundation for this is being laid through relationship- and network-building among participants.

Almost all Creative Change participants surveyed met new colleagues at the retreat (99%), with 83% still in contact with them. In addition, almost 70% of survey respondents said they deepened their relationships with colleagues they already knew. Almost half of survey respondents (49%) said they began working with colleagues on projects, collaborations, or funding after meeting or deepening relationships with them at Creative Change. In fact, as a group, Creative Change alumni ranked new and deepened individual relationships

as the benefit they value most from their participation in Creative Change (68.2%), followed closely by being part of a growing network/community (65.4%). Interviewees who considered themselves already quite connected and knowledgeable about the field generally expressed appreciation and surprise at the opportunities for them to meet new people too. Referencing the “usual suspects” nature of most field convenings, one interviewee favorably said Creative Change attendees were the “unusual suspects.”

Although participants expressed appreciation at expanding their own individual networks, the collective Creative Change network appears to be highly informal and dependent on attendees’ personal follow-up skills rather than on any structure or effort of The Opportunity Agenda. There is a sense among Creative Change alumni that they comprise a significant but underutilized asset for The Opportunity Agenda and the field at large, and a number of survey respondents and interviewees encouraged The Opportunity Agenda to take a more active and intentional role in building out the network. There is a desire among alumni to stay connected, feel part of, and contribute to a Creative Change community.

2 Knowledge building for the field.

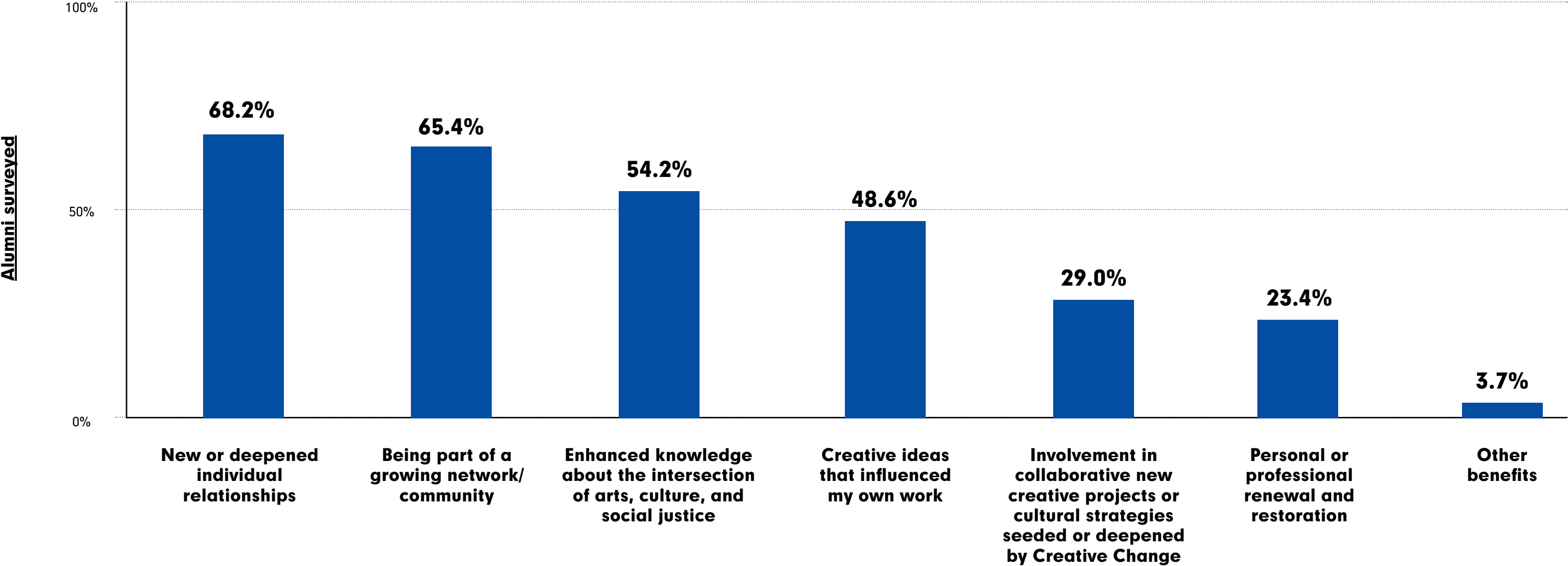
Almost all survey respondents (94%) said Creative Change was good or

excellent at enhancing their understanding of the intersection of arts, culture, and social justice. Although many participants said they work at the intersection of arts and social justice so there was not much that was brand new to them, “to get re-rooted in the potential of this work and to develop new relationships was valuable.” In addition, there is strong support for Creative Change’s “ecosystem” approach to defining the field, recognizing the importance of the diversity of players, roles, and approaches to the work. For many participants, this has enhanced their understanding of the broader context of their own work and allowed them to contribute to and benefit from being part of a growing field of knowledge. There is genuine appreciation of Creative Change’s effort to “connect the dots” early, acknowledging that change needs to be pushed at numerous levels and by different kinds of players because of the enormity and complexity of “moving hearts and minds” favorably on social justice issues.

Creative Change has contributed to cross-sector knowledge; 79% of participants surveyed said that Creative Change has enhanced their knowledge about the integration of arts and culture into social justice work, and 70% said it has enhanced their knowledge about social justice issues, movements, and organizing. Artists, organizers, media makers and funders who attended

Benefits Participants Valued Most

Creative Change alumni survey, December 2012



“The retreat was an epiphany; it opened my eyes that you need to reach different people’s hearts through different means. There are a vast variety of approaches represented at the conference, enough to show you that what you thought was the limit was not even close... Creative Change opened up the door to infinite possibilities.”

—David Lubell, Executive Director, Welcoming America



Creative Change have started to develop more integrated and cross-fertilized concepts about this nascent field, although comments from evaluation respondents also indicated that progress must continue in this area.

3 New creative projects and cultural strategies that advance social justice goals. Participants surveyed gave many specific examples of new projects and collaborations seeded or deepened at Creative Change, some of which are detailed in the profiles and case studies excerpted in this executive summary of interim evaluation findings. More than half of survey respondents

said Creative Change enabled them to deepen or enhance their creative work (52%), and more than a third said they became involved in new creative work because of Creative Change (34%). Furthermore, 75% of survey respondents said they increased their knowledge of outlets, collaborations, and opportunities for their creative work. It is important to point out that artists, organizers, media makers, and funders gave examples of new creative projects and cultural strategies, highlighting the value of creativity within and across different players doing this work. It is also notable that some of the creative projects and cultural strategies





Huddled during downtime at the awe-inspiring Georgia O’Keeffe ranch, a group of seven retreat participants, all of whom would converge to co-found The Culture Group only months following, descended upon actionable solutions. “So here we were at Creative Change and it all came out, everyone started making plans, having intensive discussions about the work we wanted to do. Everyone’s work shifted after that.”

—Jeff Chang (from Case Study on The Culture Group)



that have come out of Creative Change themselves constitute part of an emerging field infrastructure. This includes informal alliances and networks like the Culture Group, Transformers, and Culture Strike, as well as the new grass-roots funding mechanism Art is My Occupation (AMO).

4 Expanding leadership capacity of artists and organizers to work at the intersection of arts and social justice. Although the Creative Change retreat is not designed as a leadership development program, one of its assumptions is that supporting the creative ideas and relationships of leaders

who work for social change contributes to the sustainability of their direct work on the ground. This evaluation shows that Creative Change has expanded participants’ ability to do their work through new and deepened relationships within and across sectors; expanded networks; increased resources such as mentors, collaborators, funding; and provided time and space for personal and professional renewal. The case studies and profiles that accompany this evaluation vividly illustrate the dynamic ways these various factors have interacted to support the leadership capacity of artists and organizers at the intersection of arts and social justice.

Creative Change organizers invited Kantayya to attend the annual retreat and present clips from her newest film “Solarize This.” Kantayya believes the relationships she sustained through the Creative Change retreat have greatly expanded her access to mentorship, film development, publicity, and financial support in addition to her sense of emotional support as an artist.

—Profile of artist-activist Shalani Kantayya

5 Financial investment in the field.

Creative Change is helping to increase financial investment in the field. Both funders and grantees reported numerous new or deepened funding relationships that developed because of Creative Change. Funders described the impact that Creative Change has had on their grantmaking, including design of grant programs, meeting people who would become new grantees, deepening relationships with current grantees, and having the opportunity for informal strategic

conversations with fellow funders. Of all survey respondents, 40% said they increased their knowledge of funding approaches, strategies, and opportunities for arts and social justice work. That said, several funders also observed that in order to increase funding overall for the field of arts and social justice, there will need to be more education and advocacy toward the philanthropic sector about the work, starting with targeting the broader arts funding and social justice funding communities themselves.



Recommendations for the Future



“Last year we launched an initiative at the Creative Time summit to create spaces for deeper discussion with small groups of attendees led by presenters and moderators. This grew directly out of my experiences at Creative Change, particularly understanding the importance of effective moderation.”

—Laura Raicovich, Director of Global Initiatives, Creative Time

At Creative Change my “vision around cultural work (and popular culture) was really affirmed by people outside of the LGBT community...In pop culture, you can leverage the vulnerability of corporate actors in entertainment and force them to do the right thing.”

—Rashad Robinson, Executive Director, Color of Change

Recommendations for the Future

While the evaluation findings are quite positive, there is room for both improvement and growth for Creative Change. The following recommendations lay out directions for The Opportunity Agenda and its supporters and colleagues in the field, and are consistent with advancing the medium-- and long--term outcomes of Creative Change’s own theory of change.

1 Continue Creative Change’s convening and catalyst role for at least several more years, evolving it to catalyze real-life action, widen and diversify the eco-system supporting cultural

strategies for social justice, and develop a sustainable leave-behind for the field. Among survey participants, the top future priority for Creative Change is to continue to serve as a convener (97% agreed or strongly agreed), utilizing a retreat approach (90% agreed or strongly agreed). While acknowledging the significant contribution Creative Change has made to helping shape the nascent field of arts and social justice, there is also a sense among Creative Change participants that more can be done to keep pushing the “edges,” whether through widening the definition of the ecosystem by continuing to push the diversity of attendees, providing opportunities to learn from and connect

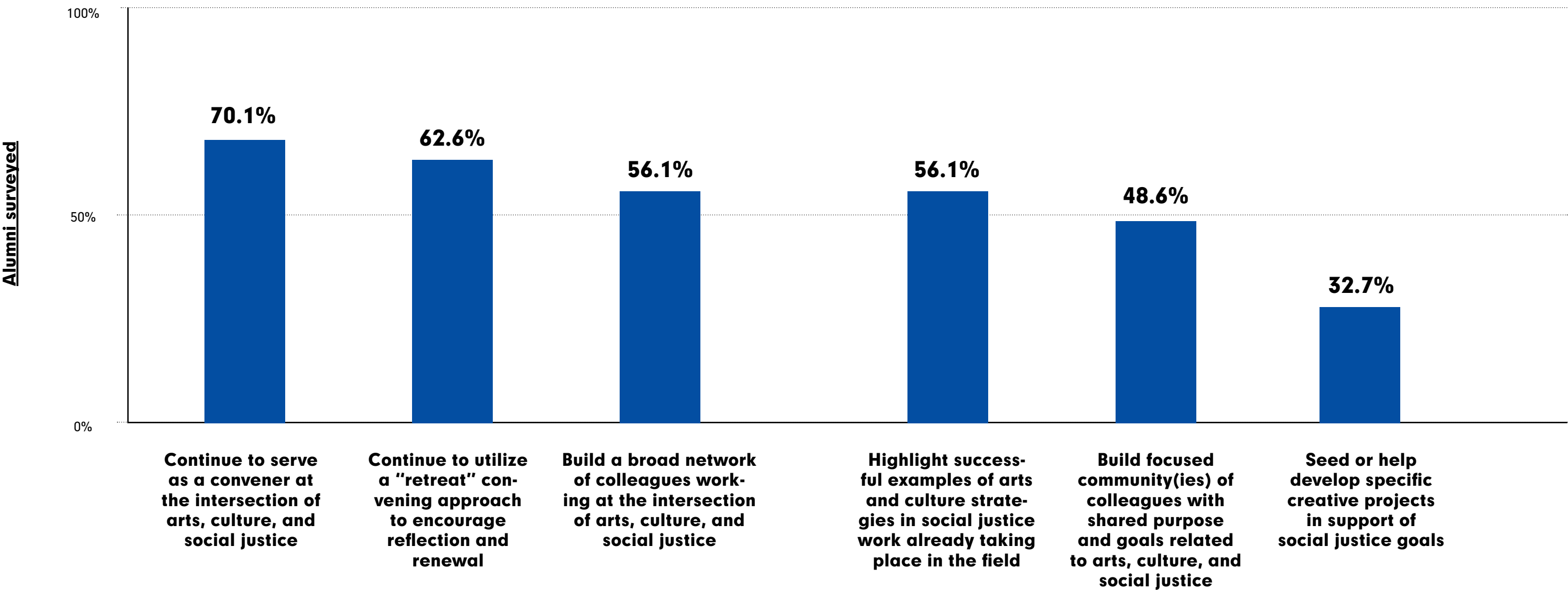
with “real life” solutions, or contributing to field infrastructure around the considerable assets of the Creative Change alumni group. The Opportunity Agenda may also want to evolve the retreat in a way that intentionally creates broad agendas that participants could choose to engage in at the retreat and afterward, and/or partnerships with funders or other networks for the explicit purpose of building sustainable field infrastructure.

2 Develop the Creative Change alumni network more intentionally beyond the annual retreat in order to leverage the ideas and relationships from the retreat into action-oriented

agendas and practical solutions. There is a strong sense that Creative Change alumni comprise a significant but underutilized asset for The Opportunity Agenda and the field at large, and alumni have a desire to stay connected, feel part of, and contribute to a Creative Change community. Examples given of ways to encourage this include more robust network communication mechanisms, small working groups based on geography and/or area of interest, and more active sharing of innovative and successful practices. Participants felt this would deepen relationships, stimulate idea and information exchange, and help activate cultural strategies for specific social justice movements and

Future Areas to Prioritize

Creative Change alumni survey, December 2012 (107 responses)





issues. A built-out network could also include ways for the broader field and public to benefit from and participate in the knowledge-building that occurs at the retreat, as well as ways for the broader field to access Creative Change alumni and their expertise.

3 Increase engagement with practical, “real-life” projects, examples, and opportunities at the retreat. More recent Creative Change retreats have begun to build in opportunities for engaging with “real-world” work. This includes small group work, experimental design teams for cultural interventions (collaborative efforts to seed creative actions, campaigns, or projects that have potential for life beyond the retreat), and greater focus on specific issue areas such as immigration or economic justice. The March 2013 small convening on immigrant rights linked artists to immigrant rights movement leaders, providing a facilitated opportunity for them to discuss cultural strategies. That said, now that Creative Change has brokered introductions and relationship-building within and between the arts and social justice sectors, helped shape field conversations, and seeded active creative projects and collaborations

with social justice goals, the next phase according to Creative Change participants is to utilize the retreat to focus on learning from real life examples and to help generate solutions to real-life problems. Both interviewees and survey respondents liked presentations based on actual projects and enjoyed hearing about each other’s work, and some expressed a strong preference for utilizing real life projects instead of hypothetical projects in the small group sessions.

4 Clarify the connection of Creative Change to The Opportunity Agenda and utilize The Opportunity Agenda’s profile and relationships to strengthen the impact of Creative Change. Some Creative Change alumni questioned how Creative Change is related to The Opportunity Agenda’s own mission, long-term strategy, and working agenda. While this was brought up in relation to the longer-term sustainability and impact of Creative Change, there was even more interest in the active role The Opportunity Agenda could play in connecting arts and culture makers to social justice movements, leaders, and funders moving forward, leveraging its prominence and influence in the social justice field.

Conclusion





Creative Change is a valued convening and catalyst space that has played a significant role in its first five years to help build the field intersection of arts and social justice. It has done this by:

- Investing in the knowledge, personal and professional capacity, and individual networks of a highly diverse mix of leaders from the arts, social justice, media, and philanthropic fields;
- Creating new and deepened relationships within and across sectors, amounting to an informal network of networks and contributing to early field infrastructure;
- Building knowledge about the ecosystem of players, practices, and approaches;
- Seeding and expanding creative work and cultural strategies that have social justice goals;
- Increasing funding to artists and organizers pursuing cross-sector cultural strategies.

Overall, the evaluation is positive from the perspective of the participant experience, the benefits and contributions to the emerging field intersection of arts and social justice, and the achievement

of the short-term outcomes of Creative Change's theory of change. That said, there are areas of improvement needed, such as continued refinement of how to help participants connect ideas and projects to the real world of funding and social justice campaigns and movements. There are also ways for The Opportunity Agenda to build on the assets that have emerged from Creative Change to date, such as relationships, projects, and knowledge, and to invite and encourage funders and colleagues in the field to participate or take leadership in partnership with The Opportunity Agenda. Perhaps the greatest lever The Opportunity Agenda has to build on the early achievements of Creative Change is to tap into Creative Change's powerful alumni and its own social justice network to develop cultural strategy for specific social justice movements and causes and to strengthen the capacity and infrastructure of the field. This will support the multi-pronged approaches necessary to change our broader culture, moving hearts and minds in order to nurture a fertile environment for progressive social transformation.



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CREDITS

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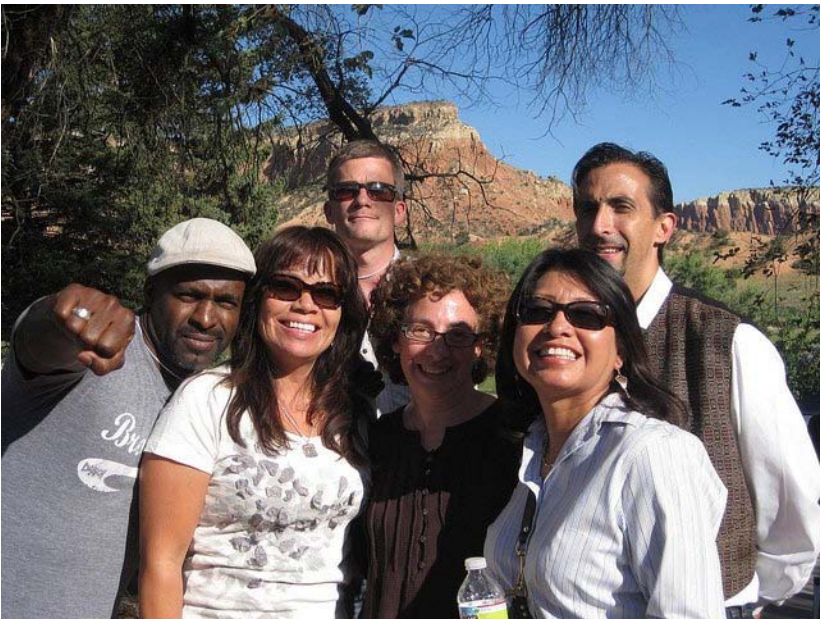
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