



## Why the Arts and Nonprofit Leadership are Critical to Our Community

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Bonfils-Stanton Foundation

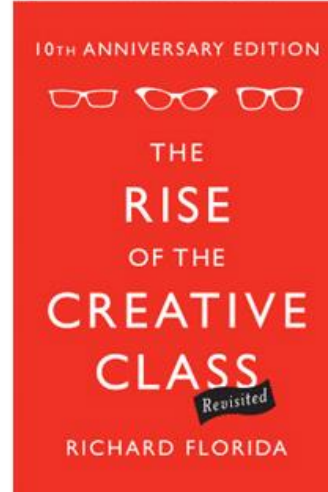
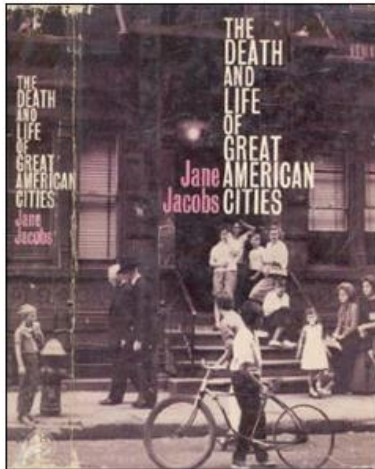


My thanks to The Mile Club and Carol Whitley for this opportunity to speak with you this evening. It is a great honor.

So before I get into the heart of my talk, a bit about the Foundation. The Bonfils-Stanton Foundation was established by Charles Edwin Stanton in honor of his late wife, May Bonfils, the daughter of Frederick Bonfils, co-founder of The Denver Post. It was incorporated in 1962, but really did not start significant grantmaking until the mid-80s. And to clear up a couple of common misconceptions: 1) we are not the blood people – the Bonfils Blood Center is named for May's mother Belle, as a result of a gift from May's sister Helen. 2) Which brings me to the second confusion – there are many other programs and facilities around town – including the Bonfils Theatre Complex of the Denver Center for the Performing Arts – that

are named for Helen Bonfils, May's sister who took over operation of the Post after their father passed away. For much of their adult lives the sisters were not on speaking terms. I could spend much of the time with you telling stories of the Bonfils family – instead I refer you to the history section of our web site where we have recently added lots of rich historical information and photos. It is quite a Colorado story.

Today we have assets of about \$80 million and each year grant about \$3 million. After supporting a wide array of causes and organizations since its inception, about four years ago the Foundation decided to focus 100% of its grantmaking on arts and culture. We did this because we realized as a small foundation we needed to be focused and strategic to maximize our impact, and as we looked at our community we observed a few things: 1) the arts were becoming increasingly important to our quality of life and our economic vitality; 2) many other foundations were eliminating or reducing their arts support, especially in the post-recession era where they found other areas of perceived greater need; 3) a number of new foundations had been created focused on health and wellness, with assets vastly larger than ours, making our grantmaking in those areas especially shallow in terms of impact; 4) we believed by narrowing our focus to the arts we could play a leadership role, going beyond even the scope of our grantmaking, as a convener, advocate and ally in advancing the importance of the arts to our community – and its critical connection to other social issues, like healthcare, education, neighborhood vibrancy, economic health, etc.



So let's start by talking about the concept of Creative Placemaking, which has become a very popular strategy for engaging the arts and artists in creating more vibrant communities. Where did the idea come from? Well, it really has evolved from several earlier trends and movements. There was the early "City Beautiful" movement of Charles Mumford Robinson in the early 1900's, that actually helped shape the design of Denver. Then there was the work of William Whyte and Jane Jacobs and others in the 1960's that looked at what made a great, livable City and neighborhood.

The other extremely influential development was Richard Florida's 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, which got Mayors, urban planners and City

officials thinking about the critical importance of the creative workforce, and how to attract and keep it. Florida began speaking widely and consulting with cities around the world – including Denver - and a global competition for these creative workers ensued.

## OUR TOWN



**Community Mural Project - Dave Lowenstein Artist, Sioux Falls Arts Council**

A few years ago the National Endowment for the Arts launched a creative placemaking grant program called “Our Town”. Jason Schupbach, who runs the creative placemaking work of the NEA, has said, “The science of how to do the technical parts of community development is well understood – how to build water infrastructure, housing units, transportation systems – but we as community development officials have forgotten about the ‘people’ part of the equation. How

do we build places where people will actually want to live their lives? How do we build strong social ties? The secret lies partly in the arts.”

## WHAT CREATIVE PLACEMAKING CAN DO

| Strengthening Economic Development        | Seeding Civic Engagement              | Building Resiliency           | Contributing to Quality of Life |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Drive economic development                | Connect community                     | Help re-establish normalcy    | Create new amenities            |
| Drive new investments                     | Create stewards of place              | Generate new community assets | Increase access                 |
| Create new access points to participation | Shared sense of the future of a place | Provide psycho-social relief  | Increase attachment to place    |

So here you see the articulation of “What Creative Placemaking Can Do” that is used by Our Town. It can strengthen economic development, seed civic engagement, build resiliency, and contribute to quality of life. It is important to note here that much of the early attention on creative placemaking focused on its potential to generate economic outcomes – jobs, tax revenue, tourism, rising real estate values. But as you see, there are many outcomes that are not immediately economic but social.

## HOW CREATIVE PLACEMAKING CAN DO IT

| Anchoring                                       | Activating  | "Fixing"  | Planning                                |
|---|---|---|---|
| Acting as the key institution in a neighborhood | Bring the arts (visual and performing) to public spaces | Re-imagine use of spaces                        | Engage community stakeholders           |
| Provide community identity                      | Make public spaces more attractive, exciting, and safe  | Beautify vacant and blighted spaces             | Solicit community input and suggestions |
| Generate area foot traffic and business         |   | Connect people to opportunities and one another | Rapid prototyping and iterative design  |

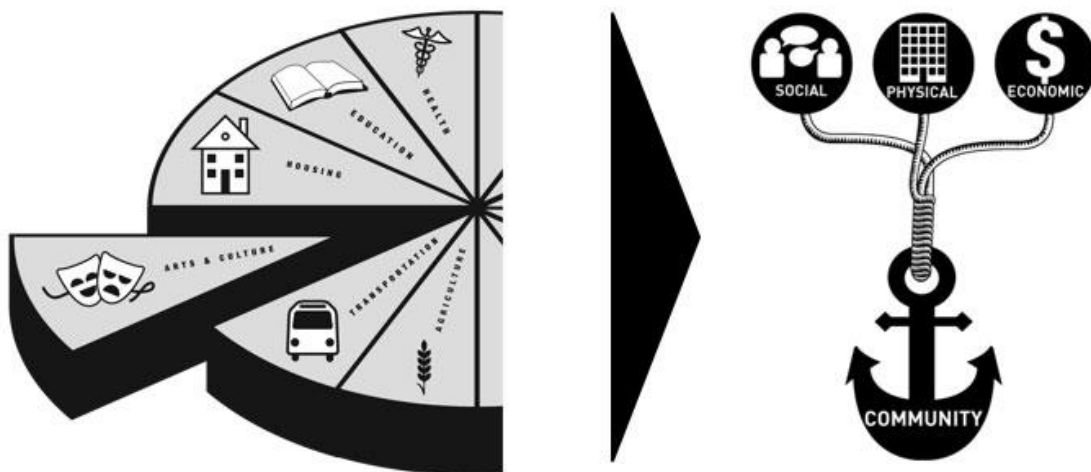
This is how the National Endowment for the Arts looks at the “how” of creative placemaking. Culture can be a critical anchor in a community, which can generate many positive place-based outcomes. It can activate the space, making a place more exciting and attractive. It can “fix” a space – take a blighted or underutilized space and give it beauty and activity. And finally, the arts can be a crucial component of planning.



## About ArtPlace

10-year collaboration

15 foundations + 8 federal agencies + 6 financial institutions



So the other big national Creative Placemaking effort is ArtPlace America, which is a collaboration between fifteen foundations, 6 financial institutions, and eight federal agencies. Some of the major foundations involved include Ford, Kresge, Knight, and Bloomberg. It is a ten-year initiative designed to not just support worthy creative placemaking projects but to develop a diverse, representative library of case studies that can help illuminate different types of creative placemaking approaches. Kresge has, in its own cultural philanthropy, shifted to a full embrace of creative placemaking as the backbone of their strategy. As their President, Rip Rapson, puts it “Arts and cultural activity is central to defining community life. We believe the arts not only enhance human development, but also can help shape the social, physical, cultural and economic identity of a

community, spurring economic development, creating stronger social cohesion and revitalizing disinvested communities.”

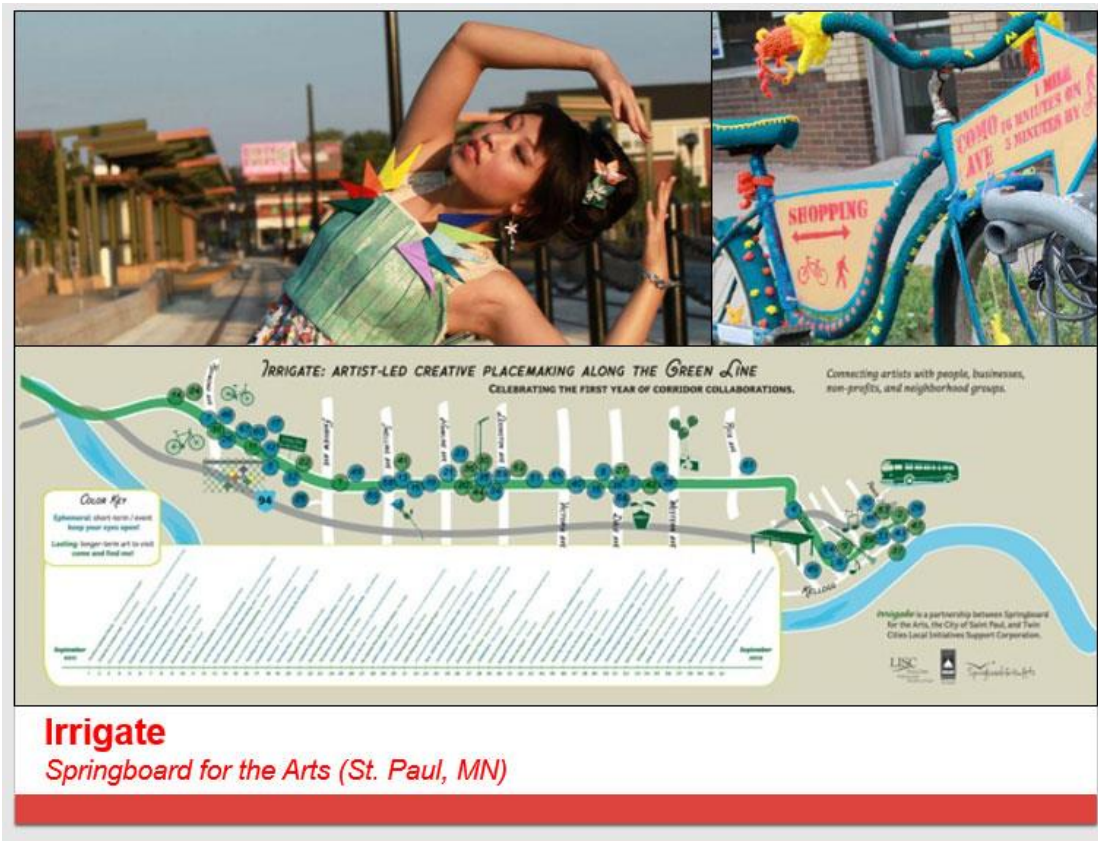
## Four Questions

1. What is the geographic community?
2. What is the desired community change?
3. How will the arts help achieve that change?
4. How will you know that change is happening?

ArtPlace asks these four key questions of all their applicants. 1) What is your geographic community? If you cannot literally draw a circle around it on a map, then it is not place-based. 2) What is the desired community change? The project needs to be about a community objective you are trying to achieve, not about an arts objective. 3) How will the arts help achieve that change? If you can't show that the arts will be a key factor in achieving the community change, then it is not effective creative placemaking. And finally, 4) How will you know that change is happening? This issue of measuring outcomes is a huge one, and frankly something the entire field is still grappling with.



So now that I have talked philosophically about what Creative Placemaking is, it is time to look at some specific examples that hopefully will help illustrate the phenomenon better than any charts or text.



Irrigate is an initiative of Springboard for the Arts in St. Paul Minnesota. The construction of a new light rail line was going to tear up a major St. Paul avenue for several years, with a severely negative impact on local merchants. So artists were engaged to figure out how to create artistic interventions along the construction path, drawing positive media attention that counteracted the negative stories about difficulty getting to and around the affected neighborhoods. The result: the businesses experienced much better business than they otherwise would have during construction, and in fact the art-driven focus on these communities had a lasting positive impact even after the construction was completed. As Springboard's Executive Director Laura Zabel has put it: "Artists can see the

opportunity in a challenge; they can see the beauty in the chaos, the opportunities in the construction mess. And they have very practical skills too – nuts and bolts skills that can draw people, attention and dollars to a place.”

## **ArtsQuest SteelStacks, Bethlehem, PA** **Tank Center for Sonic Arts, Rangely, CO**



Bethlehem Pennsylvania is a classic “rustbelt” town, totally reliant on the declining steel industry. SteelStacks is an extraordinary cultural organization literally created in the heart of the historic Bethlehem Steel plant. Its ten acres have been repurposed as a community gathering place. Throughout the year, SteelStacks offers hundreds of cultural events and programs. This center has become a national model and has almost singlehandedly changed the narrative and economic fortunes of this depressed industrial city. I should add that a central feature of Steelstacks is a Levitt Pavillion outdoor performance venue, and that this national program is

now coming to Denver, with a Levitt Pavillion under construction at Ruby Hill Park. At a much earlier stage, and closer to home, the Tank Center for Sonic Arts is a formerly abandoned empty grain silo in rural Rangely, CO that turns out to have incredible acoustics and now attracts musicians and sound artists from all over the world.

## The Meal – 70x7 – Philadelphia PA



A great creative placemaking project by the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia is something called The Meal, or 70x7, by the artists Jorge and Lucy Orta. This project was designed to bring the regional community together with a focus on local healthy food, particularly the loss of diversity in our food supply brought about by industrial farming. For this project the artists creating a communal dining experience for 1,000 people, designing limited edition plates and table runners, and



Mural Arts worked with everyone from poor neighborhoods with little access to healthy fresh food, to Amish and organic farmers in the surrounding countryside. The result created bonds between rich and poor, urban and rural and was a wonderful communal experience. Here in Denver, Redline Arts Center was just funded to hold a series of outdoor public meals at artist designed tables to foster dialogue with their surrounding Five Points and Curtis Park neighborhood. And the Montbello community is also launching a program that connects the arts, community and food.



The Porch  
30<sup>th</sup> St. Station  
Philadelphia,  
PA



Since we have just seen in Denver the impact of the transformation of Union Station and the surrounding LoDo area, thought I would share this similar project, also from Philadelphia. 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station – the major train station in Philadelphia

– is grand both inside and out, but the area surrounding the station had become in recent years a bleak expanse of concrete and asphalt. The local business improvement district was able to get the station to move the surface parking areas and take that space and transform it into a dynamic, programmed, public space that serves the surrounding community – creating a central hub where none had existed, and also to serve the thousands of commuters who pass through the station every day, but had never lingered in the neighborhood. A learning here, that maybe can influence Union Station, the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall and other transit-oriented developments, is the value of simple cheap temporary interventions that can keep things fresh and allow you to continually experiment with new ideas.



**Wonderbound Dance  
Denver, CO**

I am going to close this “creative placemaking case study” section with a couple more examples from Denver. Wonderbound – another ArtPlace grantee, was a traditional ballet company known as Ballet Nouveau. But they wanted to invent a new type of dance company that would be truly embedded in a community. They created a new home in a former auto repair shop at Arapahoe and Park, that is at the heart of Denver’s homeless population. Their studio space has large roll-up garage doors and in good weather they are kept up and anyone who wants – including the homeless - can come in and watch rehearsals for free; they invite the entire community to be a part of the creative process. They are also dedicated to collaborating with other local artists – musicians, visual artists, magicians and even chefs – adding to their commitment to place.

## RedLine Denver Denver, CO





Redline, a nonprofit gallery space located right near Wonderbound, houses artist studio space for emerging artists, exhibition space, but also space for an innovative arts education program for the homeless. They also have embraced this connection to the community and social change as part of their mission. For example, each year they produce “48 Hours of Socially Engaged Art.”

## Some Creative Placemaking Challenges

- Are Artists and Arts Orgs Genuinely Committed to Community Change?
- Is Creative Placemaking Accelerating Gentrification?
- Should Creative Placemaking change to Creative PlaceKEEPING?

So far I have been telling a pretty rosy story. But there are some challenges with Creative Placemaking, which has in a relatively short time grown to become a major focus in the arts, urban planning and philanthropy. I will mention just a couple of the challenges.

- For creative placemaking to work, it must be successful by community development metrics. This is NOT ultimately about making great art if the

commitment to community change is not authentic. A great example of this is the Wing Luke Museum in Seattle's Chinatown. They were so committed to being a part of the fabric of life in their neighborhood that they built a new \$23 million museum with no restaurant or café to FORCE their audiences to explore the neighborhood and find places to eat.

- And there is the very big issue of the connection between creative placemaking and gentrification. It has become a stereotype that an influx of artists transform a neighborhood into a hipster heaven of cafes, galleries, music clubs and restaurants, only to later be pushed out by rising real estate values. But what about the people that already lived there, who are also now priced out of their community? Locally we see this happening in Five Points and RiNo. Many have raised the concern that we need to recognize that in many of the places we are looking to make better through these creative interventions, people are already living there. There are cultures, history, and community. And these interventions need to respect, and even celebrate those qualities and assets. Maybe we should be talking about Creative Place **keeping** instead.

I want to emphasize that for me what is so attractive about the framework of Creative Placemaking is that I think it encompasses in one concept all the things that make the arts great and so important to society. Creative placemaking would not work if the art was not moving us, inspiring us, delighting us. It drives us to appreciate and celebrate the authenticity of a place, its unique assets, people and history. If we do creative placemaking right we are building better neighborhoods, cities, regions, nations.

## why arts?



### Intrinsic Value

- Inspiration
- Solace
- Beauty

### Instrumental Value

- Economy
- Education
- Placemaking
- Health/Wellness
- Human Services

But creative placemaking is not the only reason to care about the arts. We tend to divide the value of the arts into two categories, intrinsic and instrumental. I am talking a lot about instrumental values – the things the arts DO to individuals and communities that help achieve another social goal – such things as better K-12 education outcomes, reducing the severity of PTSD among veterans, attracting tourists and spending that help the economy. But let us not forget the intrinsic value – the impact the arts can have on us that move us to tears, make us laugh, help us understand the world better, bring us together with friends and family and even strangers, sooth us in times of sorrow or trouble. This is where it all starts. All the “instrumental” impacts of the arts would not work if it did not have this intrinsic human impact.

Recognizing that given we had made this shift to the arts in our funding, we realized we had never answered the question “Why Arts?” on our website, so we did a lot of work trying to succinctly answer that question, both from a local and national perspective.

## True Prosperity

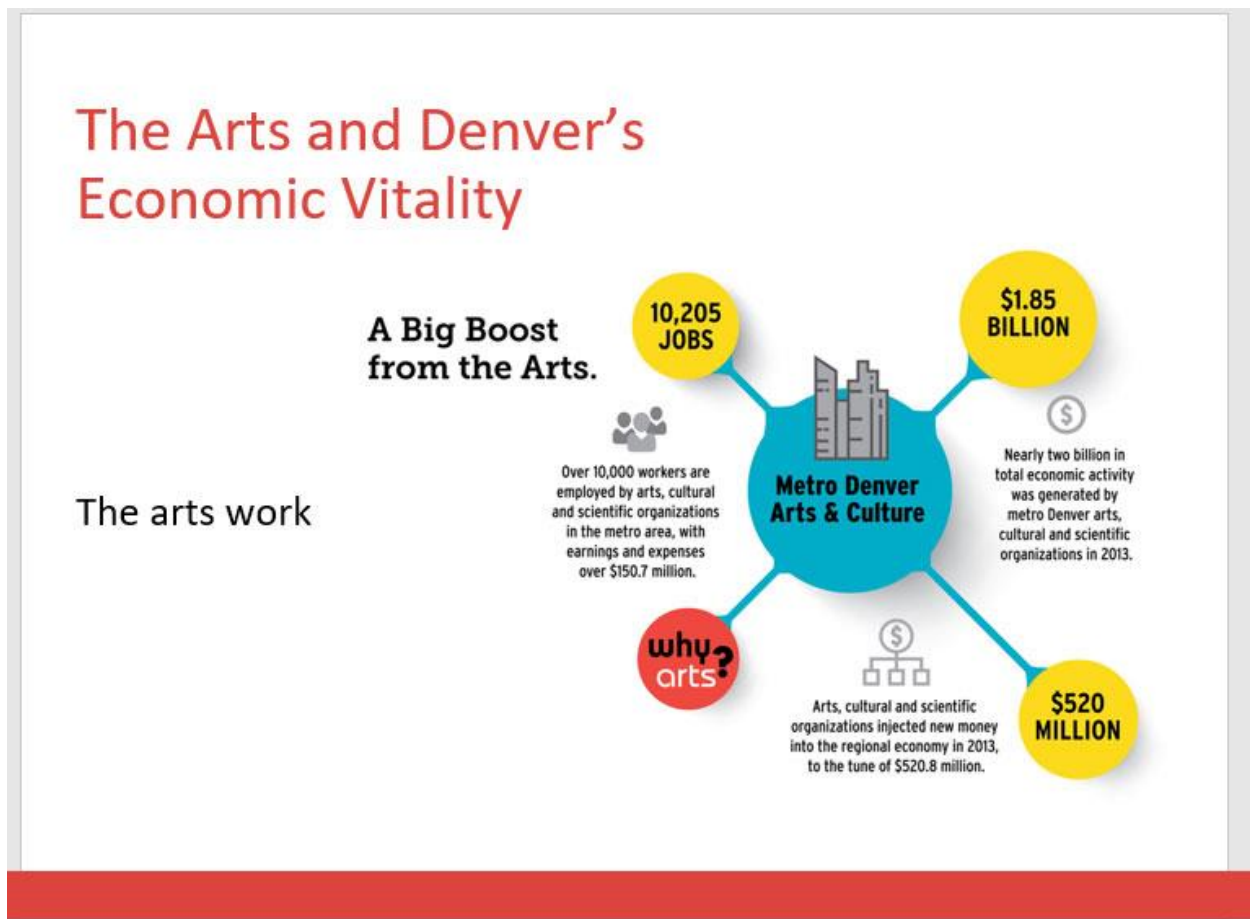
- 4.2% of US Gross Domestic Product
- \$704 billion in industry expenditures
- Larger than tourism, agriculture and transportation
- Cultural Tourism
  - Spend 38% more/day
  - Stay 22% longer

Source: Americans for the Arts. [The arts and economic growth](#). 2013.

Americans for the Arts, a national arts advocacy and policy organization, has said that “Arts promote true prosperity. The Arts are fundamental to our humanity. They ennoble and inspire us – fostering creativity, goodness, and beauty. The arts help us express our values, build bridges between cultures, and bring us together regardless of ethnicity, religion, or age.”

The arts are a major contributor to economic activity both locally and nationally, generating jobs and tax revenue. Nationally, arts and culture represent 4.2% of the

U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a sum of \$704 billion in industry expenditures. This is larger than travel and tourism, agriculture, and transportation industries. A dynamic cultural sector contributes to the attraction and retention of workers and businesses. Cultural tourism attracts visitors from the region and beyond. Attendees at arts events spend on meals at our local restaurants, and pay for parking and babysitters. Cultural tourists also spend more and stay longer than other tourists. All of this adds up to significant spending that ripples through the economy.



So what is the local impact of the arts? According to Colorado Business Committee for the Arts the arts have a nearly \$2 billion regional economic impact

and employ over 10,000 workers. And this does not even include the for-profit creative sector like the music business and commercial art galleries and dealers.



Colorado also ranks #1 of all states in the country in public participation in the arts. Each year our residents engage in more cultural activities – as audience members and as participants – than any other state. I believe one reason we rank so high in arts participation is SCFD, which both helps sustain very high quality cultural assets, as well as great affordable access.



## The Arts and Education

The arts inspire

**Students who study music and the arts have higher grades and test scores, better attendance records and are more active in the community than other students.**



**Low-income students who are involved in the arts are more than twice as likely as their peers to earn a college degree.**

The arts are also a critical component of a complete education. Many of you may have heard the term “STEM” to mean Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. But many in education now prefer to refer to STEAM, adding the A for Arts. The arts have a powerful impact both directly in terms of test scores and likelihood of finishing college, and in other indirect measures of life success. The Conference Board found that arts education in the background of potential employees was one of the highest predictors of success in the workplace. And a UCLA researcher found that children with strong arts education in their schooling are more likely to be employed and happy fifteen years after graduating high school, with higher rates of voting and voluntarism.

## Livingston Fellowship

- Five leaders selected each year
- Operating for 12 years
- 65 Fellows to date
- Grants of \$25,000 each
- Significant impact on the leaders of our community



Finally, just a bit on nonprofit leadership. In addition to its commitment to the arts, the foundation believes that nonprofit leadership is critical to our community. Nationally, nonprofit leadership is an area of serious underinvestment. But here in Colorado, in 2005 the Foundation created the Livingston Fellowship Program, named in honor of the late Johnston R. Livingston, long-time Trustee and former Chairman Emeritus of the foundation. Each year the program gives five extraordinary nonprofit leaders – usually CEOs – the gift of two years and \$25,000 to create and execute their own personal plan to advance their leadership. Since 2005 this program has provided this leadership development opportunity to 65 nonprofit leaders in our state, the vast majority of whom remain in the state and continue to contribute to improving the lives our people and communities.

It goes without saying that we live in extraordinarily challenging times. Our nonprofit sector – human services, education, health and wellness, arts and culture – plays an increasingly important role in ensuring that our communities and people thrive and live with dignity, opportunity, health, hope, joy and inspiration. The capacity of our nonprofit organizations to deliver on their promise is not just dependent on funding – equally or even more important is leadership.

David Simms of the Bridgespan Group wrote in the Harvard Business Review – “Leadership is the most important of the three legs nonprofit organizations stand on (the other two being strategy and capital). Nonprofits can develop sound strategies and attract sufficient capital, but without strong leaders at the helm, they’re unlikely to deliver outstanding results.”

## Meet our 2017 Fellows



Perhaps the best way to introduce you to this program, and why nonprofit leadership is so important, is to let you [meet our 2017 Livingston Fellows](#).



I truly hope I have been able to share with you a bit of my passion for the arts, and for leadership. I know that all of you are leaders in your own spheres of influence, and I have been honored to spend this time with you.