



WHY DOES A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION HAVE A LOCAL PROGRAM?

NPN'S COMMUNITY-BASED WORK
IN NEW ORLEANS (2001 - 2019)

LOCAL PROGRAM HISTORY

The National Performance Network (NPN) was founded in 1985 under the umbrella of Dance Theater Workshop in New York City, and for nearly 15 years we were a project embedded within a producing and presenting organization. NPN became an independent nonprofit in 1999, with the opportunity to grow beyond project status to become a whole organization, evolve our programs, and determine how best to fulfill our mission over time.

Unbound by geography as we sought to redefine ourselves, NPN wanted its own operations to reflect the need for greater geographic parity in our field and better represent our Partners in communities around the U.S. We knew we benefited from a direct connection to artistic practice in Dance Theater Workshop's home community, and wanted to ensure we remained connected to community, wherever we might land. When NPN settled in New Orleans in 2001, we committed ourselves to developing a local program that would embody NPN's mission and values.

NPN's local program truly took root following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, in response to the community's enormous need for stabilization, recovery, and renewal. As a nationally-connected organization with a strong track-record in acting as an intermediary, NPN was able to use its position to distribute resources for New Orleans artists and small arts organizations and to provide some support and security at a critical time.

COMMUNITY PLACEKEEPING

The "progress" of urban renewal and new development has come into sharp focus in the last 15 years and New Orleans' landscape has changed dramatically. Gentrification and displacement are major concerns for New Orleans' working class, including artists, culture-bearers, and creatives trying to earn a living and hone their practices. The city's policymaking too often seeks to serve the newcomer or visitor, while local residents struggle with rising taxes, limited opportunities, and the ever-present threat of disaster. Cultural practitioners and artists whose practices can't be conveniently commodified as tourist attractions – especially those creating work at the intersection of social justice, human rights, and environmental action – are faced with diminishing opportunities, space, and support to sustain a livelihood.

NPN's local program is designed as "community placekeeping", wherein we envision New Orleans artists, culture-bearers, and creatives working toward social change can self-determine what it means to create and thrive here, and have the resources and opportunities to do so.



Big Queen of the Guardians of the Flame Mardi Gras Indians Cherice Harrison-Nelson works on her suit Feb. 25, 2014, at the Donald Harrison Sr. Museum. (Photo by Chris Granger)

As in all of NPN's work, our local program is guided by our mission: to contribute to a more just and equitable world by building artists' power; advancing racial and cultural justice in the arts; fostering reciprocity and relationship-building between individuals, institutions, and communities; and working toward systems change in arts and philanthropy. Our local program, in particular, includes the following guiding principles:

- We believe being reflective of and responsive to our local community is essential for social justice, regardless of the national scope of NPN.
- We commit to ongoing learning about our local communities and practice informed, place-based decision-making, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach adapted from national programs.
- We seek to integrate and share resources and learning between NPN's national and local activities when there are opportunities to amplify each other.
- We enter into our local landscape with humility, knowing NPN has greater access to resources, opportunities, and influence than most in our community.
- We aim to build, rather than compete for, New Orleans' limited philanthropic resources.

- We leverage the unique position granted us as a national organization to support greater power, opportunities, and resources for New Orleans artists and communities of color.
- We commit to operational practices that contribute to our local community, including investing in professional growth and employment opportunities for local leaders of color; using local POC-owned vendors for NPN's gatherings and events; and working with local financial, administrative, and legal services that support New Orleans.

“Our local program is one of the ways that we as an organization hold ourselves accountable to the work our national Partners do in their communities. It's a place for us to demonstrate and live out our values.”

Caitlin Strokosch, President & CEO, NPN

WHAT WE DO

NPN's local program includes four primary activities:

- **Fiscal Sponsorship** provides nonprofit status and financial and administrative services to artists and artist collectives. By managing sponsored projects, NPN offers artists the opportunity to gain experience with, and support through, formal granting systems and private giving, while providing financial and administrative stability so artists can continue to practice their art. While our fiscal sponsorship program is open to national artists and collectives as well, the majority of NPN's fiscally-sponsored projects are based in New Orleans, providing a much-needed resource in a community with few funding sources.
- **The Local Network** is an intentional learning community working with small, emerging arts organizations, independent artists, and artist collectives in peer-to-peer exchanges, built on a framework that encourages collaboration among the projects and other community partners. The Local Network offers technical assistance, educating artists and cultural workers about planning, financial management, and resource development. The Local Network's goals are to encourage participants to develop effective management and planning tools; become familiar and comfortable with standard fiscal controls; successfully seek grants and contributions; develop good governance structures; and be powerful advocates on their own behalf in local and state policy arenas.
- **Professional Development** initiatives support New Orleans' artists and small arts organizations more broadly. NPN regularly hosts workshops and themed discussions, tailored to meet the specific needs of New Orleans artists. Topics range from grantwriting for culture-bearers in the Black masking community, to emergency preparedness, to developing a performing arts tour. NPN also supports New Orleans artists' participation in our national conference, held in a different city each year, ensuring artists from our home community have opportunities to build networks and share their work with arts curators and presenters around the country.
- **NPN's Cultural Policy** work seeks to participate in and influence decision-making that impacts our local community. This ranges from advocating to the national arts philanthropic sector for greater resources for artists of color in the South, to taking leadership in emergency

preparedness and response initiatives, to getting involved with local efforts that address racial and economic injustice.

In addition to these direct programs, NPN leverages its position as a national arts leader to bring greater funding and opportunities into our community, and to amplify New Orleans' artists outside our community. For example, beginning in 2020, NPN will launch a regranting program in partnership with the Surdna Foundation to provide funding to artists of color living, working, and activating social change in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi.

For a list of current participants in NPN's Fiscal Sponsorship and Local Network programs, visit <https://npnweb.org/programs/local>