

<u>Name of Organization:</u>	Efforts of Grace, Inc.
<u>Tax Status:</u>	501(c)(3) public charity
<u>Purpose of Grant:</u>	To strengthen the organizational capacity of the Ashe Cultural Arts Center.
<u>Previous OSI Support:</u>	None
<u>Organization Budget:</u>	\$1,500,000
<u>Project Budget:</u>	\$452,679
<u>Source of Support:</u>	Ford Foundation \$200,000; Tides Foundation \$25,000
<u>Amount Requested:</u>	\$200,000
<u>Amount Recommended:</u>	\$200,000
<u>Term:</u>	November 1, 2008 – November 30, 2010; (2 years)

Description of Organization:

Efforts of Grace, Inc. is a New Orleans-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote, produce, create, and support programs, activities, and creative works that emphasize the positive contributions people of African descent make to their communities. Located in the heart of the historic Central City section of New Orleans, it began in 1993 as a response to the negative and stereotypical imagery of the African American community, which had become popular in white-controlled New Orleans contemporary art exhibits. Visual / graphic artist Douglas Redd and writer / producer Carol Bebelle were urged by the community to spearhead an installation named Efforts of Grace. The successful self-contained installations that followed provoked the creation of an organizational structure to support these activities and to weave together the connections between art, culture and advocacy.

The Ashe Cultural Arts Center emerged when Efforts of Grace, Inc. found its current space in Central City in 1998; the Center has served as a community hub of artistic collaboration, local advocacy and dialogue, economic development, and as an overall centralizing and stabilizing community force in post-Katrina upheaval, distress, and displacement. In addition to hosting community planning meetings, lectures and panels, art exhibits and film screenings the Center partners with churches and cultural and advocacy organizations in their programming. As an example, in the early months after Katrina Ashe was instrumental in the operation of a program called the Mardi Gras Service Corps which functioned for two years after the storm. This program was an innovative approach to encourage activism by coordinating the volunteer efforts of young people from the nation's colleges and universities with those of local residents in the New Orleans clean-up and recovery efforts. More recently, in April 2008 Ashe served as the local host for the V-10th, the tenth anniversary commemoration of award-winning playwright/performer Eve Ensler's V-Day, the global campaign to stop violence against women and girls. As part of that event, local artists and actors worked with nationally known cultural figures to produce an original performance work entitled: "Swimming Upstream" about women's experiences during and after Hurricane Katrina.

A prior Ashe production, "The 13 Lessons" was commissioned by the National Center for Community Literacy to highlight perspectives on adult literacy in the New Orleans area. And the Blue Moon Fund is supporting an Ashe project that uses theater, story telling and improvisation to address issues of race and racism. Through such partnerships Ashe is able to develop programming that encourages advocacy on pressing community problems through an approach that respects the dignity of its citizens while also

inspiring new and creative thinking about potential solutions. The significance of cultural institutions like Ashe is that they are able to connect artists of all stripes and organizations to individuals who might not be reached or persuaded by conventional civic engagement efforts or policy dissemination.

Carol Bebelles, the executive director of Ashe, is a highly respected community arts leader and currently plays prominent roles in the Central City Renaissance Alliance, the Central City Partnership and the Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard Merchants and Business Association. The Ashe Cultural Arts Center is a member of the New Orleans Cultural Coalition and the National Performance Network, a partnership of 55 cultural organizations in 36 cities across the country that provides support for established and emerging artists in dance, music, theater, performance art, puppetry and spoken word.

Description of Program for Which Funding Is Sought:

The Ashe Cultural Center seeks \$200,000 over two years to build organizational capacity. Ashe Cultural Center and its cultural programming drive community development and civic engagement, both of which are critical to the rebuilding of a poor, majority-black city.

The Center is recognized by leaders inside and outside of New Orleans as a critical voice for inspiring hope and activism through its cultural programming, and as a center that preserves the historic connections between culture and activism in New Orleans. It has become an even stronger symbol of cultural activism since the severe storm and flood damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. Ashe was one of the few meeting spaces that was left relatively untouched by the storm and was thus able to reopen in November 2005. As one of the few community-based meeting spaces the Center was quickly inundated with meeting requests, from neighborhood, city, state, and national delegations. The Center continues to host regular meetings for groups working on various aspects of the city's recovery. The organization has now grown considerably from a 2.5 person organization renting 6600 square feet, operating on an annual budget of under \$200,000, to a 7 full time and 12 part time staffed operation with the debt-free purchase of a 13,000 square foot Center and an annual operating budget of \$1,000,000. The new space gives Ashe multiple opportunities for expanded programming and income generating activities. With Carol Bebelles' stated intention to transition out of the directorship position in 5 years, this is an opportune time for Ashe to engage in an organizational and strategic planning process that will provide a roadmap for the years of growth and change ahead.

Ashe's current strategic plan ends in 2008. They would like to engage their previous planning consultant to work with board and staff as well as community stakeholders on a new 3-5 year organizational plan. Additionally, funds will be dedicated to investment in staff that can develop and manage new opportunities to increase revenue streams, especially as Ashe attracts and hosts more and higher profile productions and facilities rentals. A management structure, consistent with organizational functions and needs, has to be established.

Rationale for Recommendation:

The Strategic Opportunities Fund is investing in exploratory grants to innovative programs that use arts and culture to empower individuals and communities to advance social change. We hope to raise awareness of the power and potential for art as an activism tool to advance a broad spectrum of social justice concerns and issues of specific interest and relevance to U.S. Programs' priorities. In addition, SOF has identified New Orleans and the broader Gulf Region for a targeted, cross program and coordinated regional place-based initiative that builds on our past grantmaking in New Orleans and draws on lessons learned from the OSI-Baltimore office.

As the leading community-based organization in New Orleans that connects the city's most marginalized with its cultural and government leaders and activists, Ashe is likely to be a valuable partner and resource as we fashion other initiatives in New Orleans. Ashe's plans for expanded programming and staffing, lays the ground work for a leadership transition in the next several years, an OSI grant will provide vital capacity building resources to support Ashe so that it can grow into the expanded and robust organization it aspires to be. We therefore, recommend a \$200,000 grant over two years to support those efforts.