

Name of Organization: National Performance Network, Inc.

Tax Status: 501(c)(3) public charity

Purpose of Grant: To support Transforma Projects in New Orleans.

Previous OSI Support: None

Organization Budget: \$2,795,264

Project Budget: \$230,000

Source of Support: Andy Warhol Foundation \$150,000; Ford Foundation \$40,000; Annenberg Foundation \$10,000; Joan Mitchell Foundation \$5,000.

Amount Requested: \$25,000

Amount Recommended: \$25,000

Term: July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010 (1 year)

Description of Organization:

Founded in 1985 as a project of Dance Theater Workshop in New York, the National Performance Network (NPN) is a group of diverse cultural organizers, including artists, working to create meaningful partnerships and to provide leadership that enables the practice and public experience of the performing arts in the United States. NPN accomplishes this through residencies, commissions, community engagement projects, annual and regional meetings, intermediary partnerships, fiscal sponsorships, and other artistic activities.

Since 1998 NPN has been an independent 501(c) 3 organization and is now based in New Orleans. The organization continues to build subsidy programs which provide a unique structure to support the creation, touring, visibility, and relevance of new work in the contemporary performing arts. By providing a centralized source of national funding, NPN works to address issues such as artistic isolation and economic constraints that have historically hampered the sharing of creative ideas within and among communities.

Transforma Projects (intermediary partner of NPN, which provides fiscal sponsorship) is a collective of artists and creative professionals formed after Hurricane Katrina as a means of supporting, nurturing, and celebrating creative practices that impact the social and physical environment of the city of New Orleans. The initiative explores how art-making can intersect with other sectors such as education, health, environment, and community development. Transforma supports the notion of placing greater emphasis on the role that artists, and arts and culture communities, can have on the social and political issues confronting our society. To this end, Transforma seeks to expand opportunities for artists to use their creativity in rebuilding communities, rethinking the application of science and technology in the environment, and addressing emerging concerns.

Transforma Projects was founded by and continues to be guided by a national resource team comprised of individuals that bring expertise from a diversity of fields and perspectives. The team is headed by: Rick Lowe, Executive Director of Project Row Houses; Jessica Cusick, Director of Cultural Affairs for the City of Santa Monica; Sam Durant, artist and professor at California Institute of the Arts; Robert Ruelo, artist; and Ron Bechet, artist and professor at Xavier University. These individuals came together in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to consider how their experience, resources, and networks could supplement

and enhance the social and physical recovery of New Orleans. The initiative, which was founded in the summer of 2006 and will continue through the summer of 2010, consists of these program areas:

- *Project Support*: including Pilot Projects and the Creative Recovery Mini-Grant Program;
- *Resource Development*: including the National Resource Team, Staff, the Website, and Social Networking;
- *Documentation & Knowledge Transfer*: including Convenings, Documentation, Assessment & Model Distillation, and Knowledge dissemination.

Transforma frames itself as an initiative that is dynamic, alive, and highly responsive to the specific conditions of the post-Katrina New Orleans community. While the National Resource Team and staff engage in regular planning sessions to set and review project priorities, the initiative maintains its ability to adapt and respond to the needs expressed by artists, activists, and citizens within the city of New Orleans on an ongoing and evolving basis. The one-person staff and a set of volunteer resource teams – as well as the intermediary partnership with NPN – keep overhead and operational costs to a minimum, allowing much of the budget to be directed towards project support and other public programming. Key projects to date include:

- *Home, New Orleans*, a community-based, arts-focused network of organizations, universities, artists, and neighbors that was created in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to bring communities together around the work of recovery and social change. Transforma's role in this collaborative effort has been to provide financial support, to facilitate communication between a steering committee and other partners, and to provide administrative support for specific neighborhood-based projects in Central City, Lakeview, and the Seventh and Ninth Wards.
- *Fundred/Paydirt*, a project facilitated in post-Katrina New Orleans by conceptual artist Mel Chin who was invited by Transforma to contribute to rebuilding the social, cultural, and physical infrastructure of the city. Chin's research led him to hone in on the issue of lead contamination, as New Orleans is the second most contaminated city in the United States. This project is a collaborative, multi-tiered effort whose partners range from scientists researching new protocols to school children living in affected neighborhoods. Transforma has served a key networking function through direct collaboration with Mel Chin and his team and by connecting these folks to key partners – including the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC), the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA), the Crescent City Peace Alliance, the Jericho Road Housing Initiative, and the Tulane/Xavier Center for Bio-Environmental Research – and by supporting project management and implementation on an ongoing basis.
- *Plessy Park*, a project initiated by community activist Reggie Lawson of the Crescent City Peace Alliance, artist Ron Bechet, and other community members to acknowledge the New Orleans site on which Homer Plessy was arrested on June 7, 1892. In conversation with Transforma, Lawson decided that organizing an event-based project would be more effective and the simple act of bringing individuals and communities together on the site would be an effective step in continuing the development of a memorial space. Transforma and Lawson invited Suzanne Lacy and the MFA Public Practice candidates from Otis College of Art and Design in California to participate and help develop the events for Plessy Day 2008. Transforma worked directly with Lawson during the development and implementation of the event and continues to do so.

In addition to these core pilot projects, Transforma has conducted three rounds of the Creative Recovery Mini-Grant Program to support work that exists at the intersection of art, social, justice, and recovery in New Orleans. Since July 2008, 25 grants – ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 – have been made to creative community-based projects addressing recovery issues, from a pool of more than 200 applications.

Description of Program for Which Funding Is Sought:

Transforma Projects seeks funding to support knowledge documentation, assessment, distillation, and dissemination through the development of two critical papers by independent researchers who will address program activities that have been developed in the past three years.

Transforma's commitment to publishing a critical analysis of its work is a means of supporting process-based, community-engaged projects that are often overlooked by art critics and rarely considered by the other fields with which they engage. For many of the arts and culture projects supported by Transforma in New Orleans, there is no product created but rather a series of processes and events initiated by artists or groups of artists. The purpose of the documentation project is to share information and lessons learned about the Transforma initiative on a national scale with members of the arts communities and key stakeholder in the sectors of community development and urban planning.

Transforma is intent on making its work and lessons learned from it accessible to a diverse audience. Thus, a framework has been outlined in which two people research, investigate, and participate in the writing of documents for dissemination. The audience will be larger than just the national arts community and will include individuals involved in policy-making, funding, education, and orchestration of other civic sectors. Transforma will distribute the product (consisting of two 5,000-8,000 word papers) through its existing networks as well as through presentations at conferences, to funders, and online through social networking streams. The researchers who have been engaged in this work are: Aimee Chang, Manager of Public Programs at the Blanton Museum in Austin, Texas; and Maria Rosario Jackson, Ph.D., a senior research associate and Director of the Culture, Creativity, and Communities Program at the Urban Institute.

Rationale for Recommendation:

The Strategic Opportunities Fund continues to invest 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 intersectional relevance to the priorities of US Programs. 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.

Transforma Projects supports programs functioning on multiple scales, within a range of time frames, and across numerous fields within the greater New Orleans recovery community. The assortment of its programmatic activity allows the initiative to reach communities that are diverse in age, race, gender, education, expertise, and location.

As an initiative, Transforma has played the role of facilitator and network-connector dynamically in the years following Hurricane Katrina. Given that Transforma was envisioned and launched as a project rather than an organization, the staff and national resource team are intently focused on how to capture lessons learned and project models to share with organizations, networks, and communities in other regions. In the next year, Transforma will continue to support its pilot projects (outlined above) and mini-grant program but will focus its core energy on the process of documentation, assessment, and knowledge transfer. Through sharing this distilled information, Transforma will encourage others to consider how to effectively collaborate across multiple sectors and how to include artists and creative professionals in decision-making processes that advance advocacy and contribute to social change.

As a strongly positioned, nimble, and effective agent working at the intersection of arts and culture and advocacy work in New Orleans, Transforma Projects has been relevant as a grantee/partner in OSI's work within the region. We therefore recommend a \$25,000 grant to support its efforts.