IMPACT
Imagining Together: Platform for Arts, Culture and Conflict Transformation
Designing a university-based infrastructure for the field

An initiative of the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts at Brandeis University in collaboration with the Baker Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, Juniata College and Maseno University, Kisumu, Kenya

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PROJECT OVERVIEW
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The program in Peacebuilding and the Arts at Brandeis University is pleased to announce a new initiative to strengthen the field of arts, culture, and conflict transformation. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is supporting an 18-month planning process to design an infrastructure that will leverage university-based programs and cultural institutions to support practice, policymaking, research and teaching in the field.

Background: Over the last 15 years, numerous conferences, conversations, and reports have addressed the potential and the challenges of engaging art and culture in creating more just, more vibrant, and less violent communities. Governments and inter-governmental agencies, policy think tank, educational and cultural institutions, artists, and funders increasingly have become interested in the contributions of the arts and culture to social justice, mutual understanding, and the creative transformation of conflict. Today there is growing consensus about:

• The need for an infrastructure that will strengthen practice and inform policy in this arena, by, for instance, documenting excellent practice, offering training and education, facilitating exchanges, coordinating responses in case of artists at risk of human rights abuses, and addressing questions of evaluation and ethics

• The value of a network, consortium or organization of stable educational and cultural institutions that will serve as resource centers and as anchors for the more fluid network of individual, initiatives and organization working in communities on the ground
Unique Contributions of Arts and Culture to the transformation of conflict: Cultural heritage and the arts are resources for marshalling attention to urgent concerns, addressing conflicts, reconciliation, former enemies, resisting authoritarian regimes, memorializing the past, and imagining and giving substance to a better future. Excellent work at the nexus of arts, culture and conflict transformation – excellent in aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical terms – is being done world over by individual artists, ensembles, culture-bearers, small and large cultural institutions, and through collaborations among artists, cultural workers and other agents of change. This work includes artist-based productions of great virtuosity, community-based work that is participatory and inclusive, and public rituals and ceremonies animated by cultural traditions.

Planning Process: The planning process will be coordinated through the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts at Brandeis, working in collaboration with the Baker Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies at Juniata College (Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, USA) and Maseno University (Kisumu, Kenya). The planning process will address the questions such as:

• How can institutions of higher education link with cultural institutions to address critical needs of the field, including in the areas of education, training, ethics and evaluation?
• How can theories and practices that emerge from artistic and cultural initiatives working on the ground in zones of conflict and oppression be documented and shared across region?
• What would a sustainable infrastructure for the field look like, and what are the possible sources of support?
• What are initial priorities for the proposed infrastructure for the field?

The arts, culture and conflict transformation field is comprised of many players who operate in an interdependent ‘ecosystem’. Input and participation in the planning process will be sought from many stakeholders, including:

• scholar/practitioners and leaders of academic institutions;
• leaders of cultural institutions
• artists and cultural workers
• policy-makers from local, national, regional, and global organizations
• philanthropic professionals
• leaders of peacebuilding organizations and alliances

Expected Results

This initiative aims to benefit communities in conflict regions across the globe by designing a structure of support that will result in more creative and effective approaches to conflict transformation. The planning process will generate:

• Recommendations for approaches to strengthening coordination among university-based, cultural entities and others working at the nexus or arts, culture and conflict transformation
• Suggestions for priority activities of the proposed infrastructure for its initial 3-5 years
• On-line map or database of key players in the arts, culture and conflict transformation field
• Institutional and individual professional relationships among people working at the nexus of arts, culture and conflict transformation.