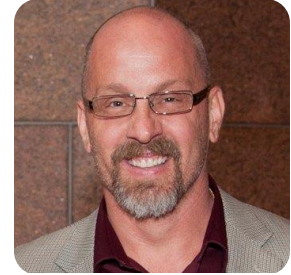


GEO Member Story



Richard Graber
Director of Programs
and Services, Houston
Arts Alliance

Houston Arts Alliance is on a mission, taking creative approaches to ensure its grantees have the internal strength and capacity to persist in offering valuable services to Houston.

Ask Richard Graber, director of programs and services at Houston Arts Alliance, and he'll let you know he's particularly excited to begin working with another round of HAA's Resident Incubator Program.

The five arts organizations that will be graduating in September have been participating in the program for three years, during which HAA has helped to provide in-depth training, diagnostics, planning and resources. The program seeks to help grantee participants address the following competencies:

- Clarity about mission
- Effective leadership
- Financial viability
- Organizational continuity and flexibility
- Sensitivity to constituencies and markets
- Realistic and achievable goals

Each organization participating in the Resident Incubator Program is typically a small or emerging organization (with program budgets anywhere between \$50,000 and \$200,000). In addition to having a full-time staff member dedicated to working directly with the incubators, HAA provides financial support during the three-year program of \$15,000 per year — with \$10,000 going directly toward administrative expenses and \$5,000 applied to technology costs. Graber shared that organizations entering the program are required to have been the recipient of general operating support from HAA in the past.

“When our panelists review applying organizations, they are looking less at the artistic integrity and more at whether the critical infrastructure is in place at the organization to effectively take advantage of this high-touch, high-level consultancy work,” Graber said.

The Resident Incubator Program is one component of HAA's four-pronged approach to capacity building. HAA has a younger, related Pre-Incubator Program as well. As HAA describes the Pre-Incubator Program, it “develops organizations from idea to start-up by strengthening critical infrastructure from the very beginning of an organization's lifecycle.” This program lasts only 12 months, compared to the Resident Incubator Program's 36 months, during which participants are “virtual” residents and receive related support.

Organizations participating in the Pre-Incubator Program undergo a performance review, after which organizations who demonstrate the strongest program participation receive an unrestricted grant award between \$5,000 and \$7,500. Graber shared that while most of HAA's funding comes from Houston's

hotel occupancy tax, the pre-incubator program is instead largely funded by private foundations that want to support smaller arts organizations that don't yet have track records. Through the Pre-Incubator and Resident Incubator Programs, HAA helps to develop small, emerging organizations into viable organizations.

HAA's Capacity Building Initiative is a four-legged stool, with the Pre-Incubator and Resident Incubator Programs being two of the legs, and the additional two legs being HAA's Accelerator and Sustainability Programs. These two programs focus on providing support for the creation of a strategic plan (phase one) and the implementation of something gleaned from that plan (phase two).

Graber shared that the main difference between the Accelerator and Sustainability Programs is the size of the organizations they are designed to support, with the Accelerator Program benefiting organizations with total revenues between \$100,000 and \$750,000, and the Sustainability Program benefiting organizations with total revenues in excess of \$750,000.

HAA has recognized the benefits and importance of providing general operating support to grantees for years, and in the 1990's also realized that in addition to providing general operating support, they could strengthen grantees by also establishing programs that were strategically built to support organizations in the development of their capacity and sustainability.

The fact that HAA has been able to identify opportunities like the programs in its Capacity Building Initiative is a testimony to what Graber says is "a culture of learning" at the organization. He said HAA makes sure to use grantee feedback to help the organization learn new ways to support grantees. HAA also holds sessions where grantees can convene and share lessons learned, such as a lesson from an Accelerator Program grant.

"Connection is the operative word," Graber said, referring to HAA's ability to connect arts organizations with potential collaborators. "It's what we're looking to be."

HAA's Capacity Building Initiative also has an overarching synergy with some of the [other programs and services that the organization offers to grantees](#), including The Houston Arts Database Management Program, the national Cultural Data Project, Business Volunteers for the Arts®, power2give.org, PatronManager® CRM and more opportunities.

Make sure to visit [Houston Arts Alliance's website](#) to find out more about the important role they are playing with the arts in Houston. We're grateful to have them as part of the GEO member community!

GEO resources that relate to the topics covered in this member spotlight:

[*Pathways to Grow Impact*](#)



[*On the Money*](#)



[*Investing in Leadership Vol. 2*](#)

