



# TCG

THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

## CENTERPIECE

### FOCUS ON: EDUCATION

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## FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTS EDUCATION: SOME SUCCESS STORIES

BY DANIEL RENNER

Laurie Baskin, the director of Government and Education Programs at TCG, and I were on the phone a few months ago, talking about issues and people and the topic of Washington, D.C. came up with regards to funding. My staff and I had been busily working away filling out grant forms for the new NEA Arts Learning category as well as a Creative Communities grant — a process that gave new meaning to the term Federalist Papers. Laurie had been shuttling back and forth between New York City and Washington as an advocate for the arts and for education. We were both in a federal state of mind. So when we began tossing around ideas for this centerpiece, is it any wonder that we decided it was time to look at federal funding for arts education programs?

We wanted to take a look at how arts organizations are finding “non-traditional” sources administered in Washington, D.C. to support their education programming on a large scale through multi-year grants. Many education directors, participating in the TCG teleconferences have bemoaned the growing trend of funders to give only single-year grants. Some have mentioned being daunted by the prospect of paperwork or not even knowing where to start looking when dealing with federal agencies.

Here are four very different arts organizations — the Cleveland Public Theatre, Mill Street Loft, Deaf West Theatre and the Cleveland Museum of Art, all of which have taken the plunge and been successful in obtaining large grants. Each of the people contacted at the various organizations was happy to write about their experiences and was eager to share what they had learned. I think you will find the information very useful and their stories quite candid. My thanks to them for taking the time to be interviewed or to write for this centerpiece.

Education *Centerpiece* Curator: Daniel Renner, Director of Education, Denver Center Theatre Company  
Copyright © 2001 by Theatre Communications Group, Inc. All articles reproduced by permission of the authors. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher or author. Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 355 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, telephone (212) 697-5230, fax (212) 983-4847, website: [www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org). Ben Cameron, Executive Director; Joan Channick, Deputy Director; Christopher Shuff, Director of Management Programs, Laurie Baskin, Director of Government and Education Programs.

# CLEVELAND PUBLIC THEATRE, INTERVIEW WITH RANDY ROLLISON, PRODUCING DIRECTOR

The Cleveland Public Theatre (CPT) was awarded a 2001 National Endowment for the Arts Creative Communities grant of \$135,000. The grant supports the Brick City Theatre, a program that provides sequential arts instruction for children and youth residing in public housing developments of the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority. Randy Rollison, the Producing Director, answered our questions via email.

**Renner:** *How did you find out about the funding source? Did your development office find the grant? Did you help in the writing of it?*

**Rollison:** The NEA was aware of our education programs, particularly Brick City, from the previous year, and then sent us the application for Creative Communities. The grant was developed with our grant writer, interim education director and artistic director.

**Renner:** *Did the funding source allow you to create the program or was it already in place? The chicken or the egg?*

**Rollison:** The Brick City program was in place, so the chicken is the answer. Two years ago we made a commitment to the project without any funding in place. We felt strongly that we wanted to work with these kids, and the sites are close to the theatre, so we carved out some money in our budget and got in there to start the work. We then received funding from the Ohio Arts Council's Youth Reach program. Creative Links followed and when the NEA announced the Creative Communities initiative we were well situated to apply.

**Renner:** *Had you ever applied for federal funding for education programs before?*

**Rollison:** Yes. We received an NEA Creative Links grant last year for Brick City. We also receive federal money for our Student Theatre Enrichment Program (STEP), which is funded through the Workforce Investment Act. STEP is an after school program that pays teens an hourly wage as they learn theatre arts and make their own collaborative projects. The funding is federal, but the contract is through the city of Cleveland. The bureaucracy is a nightmare and the rules constantly change. Not only do we have to front all of the money for the program, but we have to fight for every reimbursement, which come months after we have invoiced the city. We just passed a three-day audit for the program with flying colors, so we can only advise keeping tight records of every detail, from checks to timesheets to every teeny, tiny receipt. The government also added a new level of work for the artist instructors who are now just this side of social workers. The STEP director has had to administer proficiency tests, keep up with their progress in math and reading, and visit the students in their homes to report on their living conditions. Every quarter we discuss dropping the contract and covering the program with other funds. We tried it recently, but they came back to us and are listening to our complaints. They now seem to be receptive to doing it our way. We feel the kids participating are getting a great deal out of the experience, so we are reluctant to let it go, especially since the federal dollars cover the lowest income kids.

**Renner:** *Could the program you received the grant for exist without this federal funding?*

**Rollison:** Absolutely. We are very committed to the work we do with these children. The program is effective and we witness it changing lives. If we failed to receive federal funding, we would have to find a way to make it work, probably through city money from ward allocation funds. We are aware that this Creative Communities grant is for a limited time and we will have to make the project self-sustaining, and we are confident we can do that.

**Renner:** *Has your federal grant made it easier to attract other funding sources for this program or others that you administer?*

**Rollison:** We had an established track record of program delivery, but receiving this large grant and the local notoriety attached from having the NEA hold the press conference at our site has definitely helped in our effort to raise other funding for the programs. It also helps to validate our mission and programming and instills a sense of pride within the education staff and the larger CPT staff and board. It certainly helps us strive to work harder.

**Renner:** *If your program is in collaboration with other groups, did another organization provide the access to the federal funds? How did you get involved with the other organization(s) and what did you have to do to nurture or become a part of that partnership? What obstacles did you face in writing, securing or administering the grant?*

**Rollison:** CPT created the program and approached the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority about the project with our own funding. It was difficult at first, because they didn't know how to work with us, and we had a lot of misunderstandings. It felt like they couldn't grasp the idea that someone was offering them something for free. Understandably, it added a little more work for some of the staff at the Housing Authority, and they have their hands full as it is. There was a tension for a while that seems to have abated now that the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is involved. They also now see it as a positive thing for their community and they are getting behind it more. The Creative Communities grant comes with attendant responsibilities, with a staff member having to travel to Washington for three days for the Creative Communities Training Institute. As for reporting, we are just learning about how all this works. Check in with us next summer.

**Renner:** *Are you applying for future federal grants?*

**Rollison:** We are looking into funding from the Justice Department for after school programs. But we look more toward securing contracts rather than grants to support the programs.

**Renner:** *Is there any advice you would give to other arts organizations about applying for a federal grant?*

**Rollison:** Think out of the box but don't create programs just to get the money. It takes you off mission and places a huge burden on your staff. Also, be prepared for the amount of paperwork and administrative hurdles you have to face dealing with federal agencies. Our education program has gotten quite large and we are learning that it needs its own administration and development staff. You should also anticipate the punishment your cash flow will take as you pay in advance for your large-scale programs.

# THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART PAPER

BY LEONARD STEINBACH, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

The Cleveland Museum of Art has embarked on an innovative approach for delivering high quality video-on-demand and live interactive cultural programming, along with web-based complementary material, to seniors in assisted living residence facilities, community-based centers and disabled persons in their homes. The project is made possible in part by a grant totaling more than \$500,000 from the Technology Opportunity Program (TOP), National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.

## BACKGROUND

To understand the genesis of the program it is important to understand its host's core values and experience. The Museum has strong relationships with the community and community groups through a range of

outreach programs and festivals as well its teacher and school services and adult continuing education programs. Most recently, in 1998, the Museum became a content provider and remote site for the Ohio SchoolNet Program. Ohio

SchoolNet provides live interactive distance learning programs for students in grades K-12 throughout the state ([www.osn.state.oh.us](http://www.osn.state.oh.us)). This is all no quirk of fate. The board of trustees had long established the Museum's strategic goal of

creating “rich and diverse educational and public programs that serve and engage many different audiences and communities in an innovative and dynamic fashion.”

Without a history of community involvement, strong educational programs and a dedication to the use of new and evolving technologies, it is unlikely that the Museum would ever have conceived of this project nor received the funding and other support needed to make it happen.

### **(TECHNOLOGY) OPPORTUNITY (PROGRAM) KNOCKS**

In the fall of 1999, the Museum became aware of the availability of funds for 2000 from the Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. Since 1994, this has been a highly competitive, merit-based federal grant program that was “especially interested in projects...using advanced network technologies...for example, broadband networks...to deliver immense amount of data quickly to the desktop.” With this scope defined, we proceeded to explore whether there was a program the Museum would want to develop which would further its goals. However, it is not our nature to contort our goals in order to “follow the money.”

### **LURCHING TOWARD THE BAIT**

As would be expected, there was significant brainstorming within the Museum, including staff and leaders from Information Technology, Development, Education, Curatorial and Community Outreach departments. We had

many answers and ideas, but finally realized that the truth lay not in ourselves but in our stars — our friends and colleagues in the community. We held a technology/program brainstorming party. Colleagues from SchoolNet, local schools and nearby cultural organizations converged. Representatives of community groups aggregated. Technology companies whose help might be needed in specification and installation were there to keep our feet nailed to the ground. (Luckily, we still could reach for the sky.) Curious curators convened. The public TV station was tuned in and got turned on. You could not have too many cooks in this kitchen. After two hours of guided discussion a general consensus seemed to evolve. We would provide both programming on demand and live interactive programs. It felt right and meshed with established Museum goals. However, more precise goals and next steps would have to be defined.

Before addressing those issues, it is important to note that this meeting, borne of prior excellent relationships within the community, generated more than a concept. Our guests informed our thought process and we made it clear that we were in this together. This setting of the stage would prove invaluable as the project moved forward.

At this point, we still had to answer several critical questions:

1. What did we hope to achieve?
2. Was there technology available which would let us demonstrate the conceived program at feasible cost and effort?

3. Would residential facilities and community-based organizations commit to participating in this program?
4. Where would we get the content, both live and archived, for this project?
5. How could the Museum inaugurate this level of technology without diverting resources or violating the precept of creatively using technologies without investing an inappropriate amount of time and effort in them?

### **PROOF OF CONCEPT/DEFINITION OF GOAL**

Intuitively, it seemed reasonable to expect that older and impaired persons might benefit from interaction with cultural activities, but we needed to confirm our hunch. With the assistance of Malvin Schechter, a noted journalist, gerontologist and consultant on issues of population and aging, important research findings were brought to our attention.

The Museum also had its own experience in this area. For example, the Museum has worked with Cuyahoga County Board of Mental Retardation and their constituents for about three years in a studio art program. Participants in this program are now showing their artworks in community exhibitions. One individual learned to climb stairs for the first time at the Museum, while another spoke his name for the first time in his life. We knew enough to know we were on the right track.

### **PROGRAM OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT:**

## **PARTNERS, PARTNERS, PARTNERS**

We also knew that there is more to lifelong learning and the arts than a single institution can provide. We needed to identify and enlist community facilities and residents who would be willing to join our experiment and work toward its success.

To achieve this level of distributed responsibility, participation and interest, three spheres of "Partners" have been convened, many of whom had been at our initial brainstorming meeting: *Content Partners*, *Community Partners* and *Technology Partners*.

*Content Partners* is a consortium comprised of the Museum and additional arts and cultural institutions, including the Cleveland Orchestra, the Crawford Auto-Aviation Museum of the Western Reserve Historical Society, a repository for artifacts and archives related to the history of Ohio, and, WVIZ/PBS, the area's public broadcasting station and active producer of educational television programs. The number of content partners may grow as the program matures. The combined resources of these organizations will provide a broad and varied menu of programs in the areas of local history, visual arts, jazz and classical music, theatre and the applied arts, as well as a range of thematic programs about general artistic, cultural and literary issues. These organizations receive no payment for their contribution. It is noteworthy that TOP grant conditions unequivocally stipulate that funds may not be used to "produce information content," although it will

support some "creation or conversion of content [in order] to utilize information infrastructure technologies to address real-world problems". For example, the program is funded to videotape an already planned lecture series, but cannot pay to create one. Content Partner contributions of time and any direct expenses incurred on the project's behalf are recorded and considered in-kind matches to the federal cash grant. The Museum's Education and Public Programs Division manages the Content Partners.

*Community Partner* organizations bring a diverse population to the program, including minorities and seniors, and those with varying levels of physical and mental abilities. Organizations include several assisted living community residential facilities, the Cuyahoga County Board of Mental Retardation's training center and a college-based special educational program for persons age fifty and over. The personal commitment of Community Partner staff is crucial to the success of the program. Community Partners have committed the time and talents of their on-site staff to facilitate the use of the technology, to integrate the project into their ongoing program activities and to create follow-up activities so that their clients can achieve the maximum benefit of this experiment. The partners also agreed to take part in the evaluations, complete surveys and interviews and send a representative to meet, at least quarterly, to discuss the program progress and recommend improvements. These organizations receive no payment for their contribution. Their contribution of staff time spent in activities, meetings or paperwork uniquely related to

the project and any direct expenses incurred on the project's behalf are considered in-kind matches to the federal cash grant.

*Technology Partners* APKnet, Inc., the major regional Internet service provider (ISP), will provide end-to-end network management and connectivity services and WVIZ/PBS, will remotely manage the Archive and Control servers, including video-on-demand sources and broadcast scheduling. The Cleveland office of Cisco Systems, Inc. has committed to a special technical support effort and has contributed training to assure that the project works. Museum Information Technology staff manage the implementation process and Keane, Inc. will help monitor and evaluate it. The vendor partners are participating on the basis of fee-for-service and/or contribution/discount of services. Contributed time and services from technology partners are accorded a value, which are considered in-kind matches to the federal cash grant.

## **PROJECT EVALUATION**

Intrinsic to any federally funded project, and vital regardless of auspice, is the ongoing and final formal evaluation of project process and outcome.

In order to assess our technology implementation, Keane, Inc. will identify and document all technical implementation, training and support issues, problems and resolutions. This should serve as an important source document for any organizations that would like to replicate in

whole or part the technical program we are modeling. Our Keane representative has been involved with the project from our initial investigations and has an exceptional understanding of what we are trying to achieve. However, since identifying the core technologies, Keane has not been involved in specification or implementation, thereby enabling an unbiased view of our process.

In order to assess program effectiveness, we were fortunate to have enlisted the Institute for Innovative Learning, Inc. Their formative and summative evaluations, based on integrated evaluation planning with all program partners, will encompass direct observations by evaluators, focussed and open-ended interviews, questionnaires for caregivers and case studies as appropriate. Interim and final reports will assess the efficacy of our approach and promote the sharing of our experience. Ongoing informal feedback will help us navigate the program. Their involvement began at the very onset of the program, even before our first formal *Partners* meetings were convened, and we believe that early involvement of evaluators is essential to the evaluation process.

## **BUDGET AND STAFFING**

The formal budget for this program is \$1.2 million over a two-year period. Of this, \$545,000 represents the Technology Opportunity Grant financial assistance award. The remainder is matched through the in-kind support of our Content, Community and Technology Partners, and the

Museum's dedication of time of existing management and staff and direct expenses for some equipment and supplies. The federal contribution is primarily used for hardware, software, initial network configuration and monthly telecommunications charges. Approximately ten percent is applied to evaluation. Federal dollars also directly fund 1.5 full-time equivalent positions at the Museum: a full-time project coordinator acts as a liaison between program and content providers and the Museum's project managers, evaluators and others, performing a variety of functions to assure that the program runs smoothly and effectively. A half-time education assistant works with all content and community partners, including Museum staff, to modify or enhance prospective content to better meet the needs of older or impaired participants. A variety of staff from both the Information Technology and Education and Public Program Divisions are involved with this project as needed. The Museum's Information Technology Division's Help Desk also serves as the project's help desk. The director of Education and Public Programs is responsible for program content and working relationships with our community partners. The chief information officer, who heads the Information Technology Division, and is project director, is responsible for all aspects of technical implementation, all budget management, reporting requirements and program evaluation.

## **CURRENT PROJECT STATUS**

The grant award was announced on October 1, 2000. As this

paper is prepared in mid-February 2001, following many planning meetings, much of the IP/TV (internet protocol, providing video over the Internet) equipment has arrived. Technical staffs at WVIZ/PBS and APKnet have been experimenting with demonstration units for several weeks. Museum technical staff received a briefing and started demonstrating IP/TV features to our Community and Content Partners. This proved a significant energizer for the group, who could finally see what they were getting, and know that it was for real.

Our Community Partners have already participated in the baseline stage of the program evaluation, which entailed the on-site collection of data about how the staff feels about the forthcoming program.

Content Partners have also been meeting to develop our program schedule, and the wealth of ideas is breathtaking. A special live marimba and organ concert has been put forward. Our Art of the World appreciation course for adults, videotaped and parsed into small morsels and archived for demand, complemented by a live follow-up conversation from the Museum. An historian showing neighborhoods of yesterday and today to stir memories, emotions and intellect is also on the boards. One challenge will be to develop the synergy of this program with the existing programs of the Content Partner institutions. Recalling that grant conditions unequivocally stipulate that funds may not be used for content development, it becomes all the more important to sense what existing programs may be most amenable to repurposing for this program audience and technology. Another challenge will be to

choose programs selectively and carefully, learning from those that have proven most and least effective and popular. Only one cloud hangs overhead — that is concern raised by some Content Partners that in their enthusiasm for our program goals, they may have underestimated the need for their institutions unreimbursed commitment of time and resources. This may result in our need to attract more Content Partners, or our Partners may find that their contributions are not so onerous after all.

As we continued to walk through and talk through this program, we recognized one more question to confront: Why should staff at our Community Partner facilities actually

believe this could be significantly beneficial to their residents? Staff attitude in fact might prove key to project success; to help establish insurance in this area, the Museum produced a day-long seminar, demonstration and pizza lunch for all of our Partners (Content, Community, Technology). A pre-kickoff rally. And it got rave reviews.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has tried to present the evolution of a notion as it becomes an innovation. It has tried to relate the importance of matching an institution's persona to an almost far-fetched goal. It tries to make a case for developing sound inter-

organizational relationships as a means of achieving projects that would otherwise be out of reach. And of course we are trying to demonstrate how advanced telecommunications may bring cultural organizations closer and with more profound impact, into many more lives, in the not too distant future. If the process described seemed too well thought out, too much an even keel, a piece of cake, then I may have abused my literary license. Guilty as charged on bypassing some of the bumps in the road; we are just too busy trying to catch sight of the potholes in the darkness ahead. But really, don't you just love it when a plan comes together!

## AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROLE WOLF, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MILL STREET LOFT, POUGHKEEPSIE, N.Y.

**Renner:** *The Mill Street Loft's Password Program works with at-risk girls 11 to 15 years of age, on gender-specific issues through the arts. The activities include photography, dance, visual arts and a rite of passage. You received a \$70,000 grant through the U.S. Department of Justice in 1999. How did you find out about the Department of Justice as a potential funding source for this project?*

**Wolf:** Well, we had had a prior grant with the Department for Criminal Justice Services, in which we actually were one of three agencies. So I was aware of them as a potential funding source. We've gotten several federal grants; the Password Program is only one of them. This particular grant is based on formula funds. You know, there are a lot of different funding streams through the state capital.

**Renner:** *For example?*

**Wolf:** Well, the formula funds mean that the grant was for a three-year period, but you need to reapply each year, and the third year, the funds are cut fifty percent. If everything is approved and you do the

program and you comply with all the regulations and you get your quarterly reports, in the third year the grant is cut fifty percent. And then the fourth year, which we are going to be entering in January, you get no funds at all. And they expect you to find one hundred percent of the funds yourself.

**Renner:** *They tell you this at the very beginning when you receive the grant?*

**Wolf:** Yes but they're very unrealistic because it depends on the organization. We're not a United Way-funded member organization. We are an arts organization. Yes, we write a lot of grants — we can match grants; we can go for challenge grants. But when you get into outreach programs, and you have to find one hundred percent of the funding for those programs, without having some federal money in a program such as Password, it makes it very difficult to become self-sustaining. These programs are really prevention programs, and I feel they need to be supported by some of this public money.

**Renner:** *Does having had federal support in the past become a cache for other funding sources?*

**Wolf:** Well I believe any funding is, because money attracts money. Right now I'm working with the school district, which is really the beneficiary of the Password program, although some kids are recommended from the courts and guidance counselors and social workers, but basically they're all coming from the city of Poughkeepsie school district. We're using the arts to address gender-specific issues for girls at risk of delinquency. So if the city wants to keep this program, they need to begin to invest in it as well. And we're trying to work with them on that.

The Division for Criminal Justice Services loves the program. They brought nine people here last summer to look at this as a model program. My contention is they should really now look in Albany for other funding streams that they could use to help us sustain this program if they want to see it continue and grow. It's a great program, but we really need to make choices about how many grants we can write. We don't have a development office here at Mill Street Loft. As the executive director, I do just about all the grant writing, and occasionally I'll contract someone to work with me on certain proposals. When a funding stream like that is gone, some organizations will say, "Well, forget the program." And that happens frequently. "It was a great program for three years, but, you know, the money isn't there and so we can't do it, and we'll move on."

**Renner:** *It sounds like a double-edged sword. Do you think you can continue the program without federal funding?*

**Wolf:** I'm trying to. I have a pledge from a foundation for \$25,000 for next year. I'm working on the school district to see how much of that they can match.

**Renner:** Did you create this program before you had the funding, or did it come about because of this funding?

**Wolf:** Oh, no. We had to create the program and then apply for the funding. We had been encouraged by people in Albany to go ahead and apply for it. We had to do a presentation to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and they approved it. But let me tell you, you have to jump through hoops to convince them that the arts have anything to do with prevention.

**Renner:** *What did they require to make that case?*

**Wolf:** We had to defend the proposal. But we had an advocate who had already been talking to people.

We have another program, which has received federal funds that is well known and has received national recognition. And that helps, too, to have a track record.

**Renner:** *What kind of advocate do you have at the Justice Department?*

**Wolf:** Well, the advocate was someone directly in the department who knew of the other program we have — the Project Able Job Skills Training and Prevention Program — and who had visited us and talked about the concept of developing a program just for girls. She felt that there really was nothing in New York State that was like the program we were proposing. So when I say we had an advocate, what I mean is that I was in touch with someone as I was writing this proposal. It gave me no guarantee, but she felt very strongly about it. Then it was a matter of presenting it to the entire committee. There must have been about forty different people there. And of course, we were the only arts organization there.

**Renner:** *Are there other federal agencies that you're looking at or other advocates that you could pursue with the kind of work that you're doing?*

**Wolf:** We just got a significant grant from the Workforce Investment Act. It's federal dollars, but you have to really make sure you dot every I and cross every T and do the program that really meets their goals.

I would not apply for money if it didn't fulfill the vision and mission that we have. I don't run after money just for money's sake. We had half a million dollars of tobacco prevention money here in Dutchess County recently and I didn't apply for any of it because what they wanted us to do wasn't what we do. So you have to be clear on what you're doing, and we're trying to build upon the programs we have and the successes we have and the places where we want to put our energies, where we feel we can make the biggest impact on our community through the arts and find the funding streams to help build those programs.

**Renner:** *So when you're talking about crossing the Ts and dotting the Is, what are some of the challenges or details in administering a federal grant?*

**Wolf:** There are a couple of them. First of all, you've got all these quarterly reports to do all the time, if you're the lead agency — which we are with Password. And you want to make sure you get your paperwork in on time.

The biggest challenge, though, is that you're awarded the grant, and then you can wait seven or eight months before you get the final contracts that you can voucher from. So you might be running a program seven, eight months into the year before you could voucher and get any of the funds out of that grant. It just takes so long for these contracts to come through.

That was my experience with the Criminal Justice Services. We were awarded the grant to start January of 1999, and it was sometime in August that we got the final contract signed, which we could then voucher from. But you need to borrow from Peter to pay for Paul. But if you don't have Peter to borrow from, or if you have several programs like that, it becomes very challenging because you could wind up really having a problem paying the bills.

**Renner:** *Did they give you a timetable for the payments or any indication how long it would take to receive the money?*

**Wolf:** Not that long. But I was smarter by the next year. I proposed an amendment extension to the first grant, so that instead of the grant ending December 31, 1999, we extended it to end March 31, 2000, so that I could continue vouchering. Each year there's a whole new contract and it has to go through the attorney general's office, and until you get all the papers notarized and signed and back, things just sit in Albany.

**Renner:** *You're learning to work the system.*

**Wolf:** Oh, I'm trying. One major thing, when you deal with federal dollars, you need to be aware of: you get a call out of the blue. "We're going to come in two weeks to do an audit for a program you did five years ago."

And you're sitting on the phone, saying, "What?"

And they expect you to have every receipt, every check, every payroll card, everything.

It could be three years ago. We just went through this. They called us and they wanted to audit the first year of the Password program — 1999. Now when you write a grant a year-and-a-half to two years before you even implement the program, and you have a budget, sometimes you want to shift some of the line items on the budget because the program has developed and grown. Maybe you need less contract personnel but you need another part-time program assistant, or maybe you need fewer supplies but you need something in a different

category. You can't do that unless you have a whole budget amendment, and that could take months to do.

So you've got to be careful that when you voucher federal dollars, you voucher exactly in the categories that your budget says and that you have documented proof so when they come to audit you, they have receipts; if it's supplies, they have contracts; if it's contracted artists, they have timesheets; if it's an employee who spends fifteen percent of her or his time on the program, you've got to be able to prove that, so that the hours spent are documented; or they will ask you for the money back. And it could be five years down the road. They can ask you for money back, and not allow certain costs.

**Renner:** *So you were able to document all this to them?*

**Wolf:** Well, we just passed the audit. Of course, they always have their recommendations, but they didn't ask us for any money back. But I have to be honest, it cost me about twenty two hours extra time for my bookkeeper to come in and dig out 1999 and get all the checks. It's a lot of extra work. You pay their price when you deal with federal dollars, because we have an audit every year — as I'm sure you know, most non-profits do — and we have a complete audit every year. But this is very particular. So my advice to anyone who gets federal dollars is to keep the books extremely accurate. Keep all the receipts. Keep all the contracts. Make sure anyone who's contracted personnel, who is paid for out of the federal dollars, has a contract. One of the agency's recommendations is that they want an invoice, as well, from the artist; which is something I'm going to start doing from now on. Some of our contract personnel do submit invoices, and they would like it to be consistent. It's probably a good policy for all programs.

But a lot of artists, they'll look at you and say, "An invoice?"

I may be the executive director here, but I'm a visual artist, so I understand. What we will do here at Mill Street Loft is to develop kind of a universal invoice form and pass them out to artists and ask them to please submit invoices for payment.

**Renner:** *You mentioned earlier about your being the lead agency. Is it a partnership?*

**Wolf:** Not for the Password program, but the first time I ever dealt with federal dollars, we were the

lead agency with two others in a program that received Title Five money.

**Renner:** *How did that partnership work? Was it successful?*

**Wolf:** Well, I didn't think so. I could've gotten the money again the next year, but I didn't want any part of it, because one of the other agencies had three executive director changes that year, and they eventually folded. We were the lead agency, so Mill Street Loft would submit its vouchers to the city of Poughkeepsie, and then money would be filtered from Washington through Albany, from Albany to the city, and from the city to Mill Street Loft, and it would take forever to get our checks. But the fact that these other two agencies did not keep their paperwork together as strongly as they could was difficult. It's different if you're the captain of your own ship, but these were two other strong agencies that were going through major changes.

**Renner:** *It sounds like you've been very successful in getting a lot of federal money.*

**Wolf:** We just got a very exciting NEA Challenge America Fast Track grant.

**Renner:** *Aside from the NEA money, it seems as though the other federal funds that you've received, most if not all of them, channel through the state capital.*

**Wolf:** Yes.

**Baskin:** *And it sounds like the relationships that you've built have been with people in the state capital, rather than having to deal with faceless agencies in Washington. Has that made it easier?*

**Wolf:** Well, there are faceless agencies in Albany. You've got to build relationships wherever you go. As an arts organization, we get money from the New State Council on the Arts and other arts-related funds. You don't want your budget to be too out of balance with too much federal money. They can pull the stream of federal dollars just by a vote in congress.

If there is a program that you really value and really want to see sustain itself and move forward, you need to develop either an arts-related business or you need to develop some earned-revenue sources. Otherwise, you're going to lose it. It's a lot of work but the programs are doing very well and they are important to us at Mill Street Loft.

**Renner:** *Thank you for taking the time to talk about your experience with federal funding. Is there any last piece of advice you'd like to share about pursuing federal grants?*

**Wolf:** Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

## DEAF WEST THEATRE, ED WATERSTREET, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Deaf West Theatre in Los Angeles received a three-year \$330,000 grant in 1998 from the U.S. Department of Education. The grant was for the support of two to three theatrical productions, children's workshops and training for adults with hearing loss. Ed Waterstreet, the Artistic Director, answered our questions via email.

**Renner:** *How did you find out about the funding source? Did your development office find the grant?*

**Waterstreet:** We applied for (and received) our first Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Grant in 1990. At that time, invitations to apply were disseminated to deaf organizations all over the country. Since then, we have applied for multi-year contracts,

as they became available. The notification procedure remained consistent through Department of Education staff. I believe all funding opportunities are currently listed online on the federal registry website.

**Renner:** *Did the funding source allow you to create the program or was it already in place?*

**Waterstreet:** We produced our first production on our own

(*The Gin Game*). We were housed and operating under the umbrella of the Fountain Theatre at that time. When the Department of Education funding came through, we were afforded the opportunity to expand our production season. We applied for a second grant for our children's theatre educational outreach program (for deaf and hard of hearing children), which allowed us to formally establish and institutionalize our children's

theatre initiative. We had, up until that grant came through, been conducting a limited number of workshops in schools throughout the Southern California area upon request.

**Renner:** *Could the program you received the grant for exist without this federal funding?*

**Waterstreet:** Yes, but not at this scope and magnitude. Due to the Department of Education multi-year awards, we have been able to budget confidently from year to year, knowing that we had secured funding. We still have had to, and continue, to fundraise voraciously, in an effort to fund general operating expenses, salaries and programs

outside the scope of our Department of Education (DOE) budget.

**Renner:** *Has your federal grant made it easier to attract other funding sources for this program or others that you administer?*

**Waterstreet:** Yes! Our cherished DOE funding is like a *Good Housekeeping* seal of approval. It lends instant credibility and assurances that our finances and management are immaculate.

**Renner:** *What obstacles did you face in writing, securing or administering the grant?*

**Waterstreet:** The applications were quite large and in-depth. We hired a professional grant

writer to ensure that our application accurately reflected the experience of the artists involved and the quality of our proposed programs.

**Renner:** *Are you applying for future federal grants?*

**Waterstreet:** Yes. We will continue to apply as opportunities arise.

**Renner:** *Is there any advice you would give to other arts organizations about applying for a federal grant?*

**Waterstreet:** Hire a professional grant writer. Have detailed conferences with them so that they understand your mission. Gather letters of support from all sectors. Be consistent and persistent.