



# **The Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts**

***Supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation***

## **Request for Proposals (Round 3)**

***Deadline for responses: Thursday, May 7, 2009***

The Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts is designed and managed by EmcArts, with the generous support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The Lab is a nine- to twelve-month program that helps performing arts organizations incubate and test innovative strategies to address major challenges.

This document provides the necessary information for producing and presenting organizations in theater, dance and jazz (including college-based presenters) to consider applying to Round 3 of the Innovation Lab in 2009. Four organizations will be chosen to participate in Round 3. Because the Innovation Lab is an unusual program with many elements, we strongly encourage applicants to discuss draft proposals with EmcArts in advance of their final submission, as detailed at the end of this RFP.

### ***Why is the Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts needed?***

The Innovation Lab was established in response to demands from the performing arts field for deeper support for innovation over extended periods of time. We recognize that there is already widespread experimentation in the field. Rarely, however, do most organizations have the dedicated resources or time to test strategic ideas rigorously or to prioritize carefully among multiple potential strategies. As a result, achieving sufficient organizational consensus for the implementation of genuinely far-reaching strategic innovation is difficult, allowing only minor incremental change to prevail. Many field leaders continue to tell us, however, that the rapidly changing operating environment for American cultural institutions demands significant new adaptive capacities and strategies if performing arts organizations are to remain artistically vital, competitive and valued by their communities.

Supporting innovation is as vital to the health of performing arts organizations now, during a time of severe economic stress, as it is in more expansive times. Organizations able to respond innovatively to restructuring will be among those most capable of seizing future opportunities as the economy improves.

The Innovation Lab provides organizations (selected on a competitive basis) with space, time and resources to explore and accelerate the design and testing of new organizational change strategies for which they are both ready and committed, with the purpose of addressing specific challenges and providing a set of compelling “prototypes” for the future. Emerging strategies selected for inclusion will be in areas that offer substantial leverage for new, effective practice in the performing arts field; they will not necessarily be large in scope or in financial cost.



### ***How is the Lab defining innovation?***

Based on research into the literature of innovation, discussion with arts leaders, and reflections on our own work in the field, EmcArts has developed the following working definition of organizational innovations:

*Organizational innovations are instances of change that provide new pathways to fulfilling the mission, are discontinuous from previous practice and result from a shift in underlying organizational assumptions.*

While not all innovations meet all these criteria, we have found that this definition provides a useful orientation toward change efforts and new strategies that are more than just incremental revisions to business-as-usual. At the same time, the definition steers us away from new strategies that are only “novelties,” unrelated to achieving the organization’s mission. Above all, the definition draws attention to the foundation of innovation in an underlying shift in the organization’s assumptions – about its own processes and products, and/or about the external operating environment. Organizations applying to the Innovation Lab should bear this definition of innovation in mind as they prepare their proposals. Innovative approaches to necessary restructuring, or downsizing, are welcome alongside proposals for new or expanded activity.

### ***What are the aims of the Lab?***

The Innovation Lab has been created to advance and accelerate the development of new and innovative strategies by performing arts organizations in order to address well-defined opportunities or challenges. Participating organizations form a “laboratory” for testing new approaches to achieving artistically vital and organizationally healthy arts institutions. The aims of the Lab are to help shape, focus and propel strategies into implementation, and to establish a number of contemporary best practices in the performing arts field. The Lab provides a framework for innovation projects across all aspects of the organization and its relationship to its community. Examples of areas in which arts organizations are innovating include (but are not limited to):

- ◆ Engaging audiences, and the wider community, in new ways
- ◆ Rethinking program formats, venues and approaches
- ◆ Involving the public in co-creating arts activities
- ◆ Using technology and the Web to create and engage with artistic experiences
- ◆ Reconsidering the role of the creative artist in the organization
- ◆ Restructuring the organization for new demands and new ways of doing business
- ◆ Partnering or merging with other organizations for greater reach and impact

### ***What stages in the development of new initiatives are suited to participation in the Lab?***

The evolution of breakthrough strategies is often represented as having three stages:

1. The emergence of “big ideas” from a background of no ideas



2. Moving significant strategic ideas to the point of sufficient clarity and ownership within the organization that they have a chance of being implemented
3. Getting fully shaped and supported strategies actually implemented

The Innovation Lab is focused on accelerating the progress of performing arts organizations from the second to the third of these stages. It is not intended as an idea factory, nor purely as a strategic planning initiative around projects that are fully conceived. Participants are expected to begin their work having already identified a major challenge and with possible innovative strategic responses under consideration (we often call these “half-baked” ideas). An organizational culture supportive of innovation, and a track record of strategic innovations (both failed and successful) are therefore prerequisites. We find that innovations at the “half-baked” stage are well suited for the suite of services that the Lab provides. Proposals that are fully cooked and await funds for implementation, or those that are at the early stage of circling around a broad idea, with little sign of innovative thinking to date, tend to be less suitable for the Lab, and fare less well in selection.

### *What does the Lab provide?*

The Innovation Lab is a nine- to twelve-month program in which EmcArts facilitators work with teams of staff, artists and board leaders from participating organizations (“Innovation Teams”). The Lab includes individual coaching, group facilitation, an Intensive Retreat with specialized faculty, and a variety of extended support systems tailored to the needs of each organization.

Specifically, the Lab provides each organization with the following resources:

- ◆ Initial engagement by EmcArts facilitators with each organization’s leaders to explore and clarify the new strategy, strengthen the organization’s Innovation Team, and build momentum for the Intensive and subsequent strategy implementation.
- ◆ A five-day residential Intensive Retreat, shared by four organizations (attended by up to 10 people per organization) and co-designed with EmcArts, to catalyze implementation of the strategy (with accommodation and meals provided for all participants, and a contribution of up to \$400 per person made toward travel costs).
- ◆ Faculty at the Intensive, including experts in innovation, organizational learning and teamwork; one individual will be chosen in collaboration with each organization to meet specialized content needs (with up to \$3,000 per organization available for fees, plus travel and accommodation).
- ◆ Up to \$2,000 per organization to provide stipends for unsalaried artists on the Team who would otherwise have to forgo a week of paid work to attend the Intensive.
- ◆ Follow-up implementation coaching and facilitation by EmcArts to support prototyping of the innovation (tryout activities in low stakes environments).
- ◆ Post-Intensive Support Grants of \$25,000 to maintain organizational momentum toward implementation and to assist with critical follow-up activities (each organization will take responsibility for funding the full implementation of its new strategy).



### ***What will my organization's responsibilities be in participating?***

Participation in the Innovation Lab represents a serious commitment over nine to twelve months by each organization, in order to make the best possible use of the resources offered. If your organization is selected, please understand that it is a condition of receiving the award that your Innovation Team agrees to participate in all three Phases of the program, including the full five-day Intensive. Lab activities and responsibilities for participating organizations in Round 3 of the Lab consist of:

**May 7:** Your deadline to respond to the Round 3 RFP.

**Week of June 1:** Application review by independent Selection Panel, and notification of successful applicants to participate in Round 3 of the Lab.

**June-September:** Phase 1—your project's Innovation Team, and other stakeholders as appropriate, will work with EmcArts on- and off-site. Your responsibilities will include: finalizing your Team, exploring strategic options, compiling relevant data, and constructing a detailed Lab workplan that matches your needs. Participants and EmcArts facilitators will also co-design the content and style of the Intensive.

**October 2009:** Phase 2 (Intensive Retreat)—your Innovation Team, plus others as you decide, will take part in the five-day residential Intensive. The Intensive serves as an “accelerator” to fully develop and build out your intended innovation, ready for prototyping. *All Team members are expected to be in residence for the full duration of the Intensive.*

**Please note that the Round 3 Intensive is scheduled for the following period: Sunday, October 25, 2009 - Friday, October 30, 2009 at the Airlie Center in Warrenton, Virginia.**

**November 2009-March 2010:** Phase 3—your Team will work to prototype your developed strategy and to re-integrate it with your organization as a whole, supported by follow-up coaching and on-site facilitation by EmcArts. Prototyping consists of one or more limited trials of your strategy, followed by evaluation and strategy revision. You are also entitled to receive a Support Grant of \$25,000 toward your prototyping efforts (applications are simple and will be reviewed within four weeks).

**Ongoing:** Throughout your participation, you will work with EmcArts on documenting your innovation and how you developed and implemented it. You will also put in place an evaluation framework as your strategy is implemented, working with an external evaluator.

Four organizations will be chosen for Round 3 of the Innovation Lab.



### ***Who is being invited to apply to Round 3?***

Round 3 of the Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts is open to all American producing and presenting organizations in theater, dance and jazz, including college-based presenters. Partnership applications are also encouraged. Partnerships may include other organizations in or outside of the arts (including international partners), but an eligible organization must be the lead partner. Other organizations included in a partnership application may participate fully in the Lab's activities.

Candidates should also meet the following specific eligibility requirements:

1. Stable artistic and executive leadership for the last 18 months
2. Board composition that is managed in an orderly fashion and is not subject to seismic upheavals in membership
3. A staff complement (full- and part-time) equivalent, in the aggregate, to no fewer than 5 full-time staff members
4. Ability to commit time and resources to the Innovation Lab, even if in the midst of another extraordinary major institutional initiative (e.g., a building move or a capital campaign)

### ***What are the criteria for selecting participant organizations?***

The Lab's criteria for selecting organizations draw on established research regarding organizational change and innovation. Research indicates that the following qualities contribute to effective innovation. We do not expect applicants to exhibit all these characteristics, but selection will be based in part on specific evidence of the presence of these factors in the proposal.

- ◆ Institutional capacity for innovative change (adaptive and inclusive leadership, organizational self-awareness and capacity to learn, strong external relations, processes and resources for effective implementation)
- ◆ Cultural and structural support for innovation (evidence that independent thinking, idea generation, and challenging "business-as-usual" are valued by the organization and facilitated by its structures and systems)
- ◆ Commitment to developing substantive new strategies
- ◆ Clear goals and institutional momentum
- ◆ Likelihood of deriving sustainable organizational value from the innovation

### ***How will participants be selected?***

EmcArts staff will compile and review all the applications, and may then ask applicants to submit revisions, updates or additional information.

Application materials and additional information will be reviewed by an independent Selection Panel of experts in innovation, organizational change and the performing arts. The Panel will recommend organizations for participation in the Lab.



### *What is the deadline for applying?*

**The Round 3 Application deadline is Thursday, May 7, 2009.**

All applications must be received, electronically or by mail, at EmcArts on that date. If you are mailing all or part of your application, please send an e-mail to let us know when it has been mailed, in order to avoid missing the deadline through mishaps in delivery. All applications will be acknowledged by e-mail upon receipt. We will announce decisions for Round 3 approximately two weeks after the Selection Panel meets. (For a detailed timeline, see page 4.)

### *Can we get feedback on our draft application?*

Because the Lab is both complex and specific in its benefits, we encourage all applicants to consider seeking feedback on their ideas and draft applications. Members of the EmcArts Lab team will provide telephone counseling on initial proposal ideas **at any time up to Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup>**, if requested; we will also review draft applications, and provide up to 30 minutes of telephone feedback, for drafts received **no later than Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>**. Requests for initial counseling and/or draft application review should be e-mailed to Janis Auster (see contact information below), with the draft application attached, if appropriate. Only one application review can be conducted per applicant.

While EmcArts provides these coaching services to assist applicants in fully understanding the scope of the Lab, and better fitting their proposals to its design and resources, we offer no guarantee that a review will make any application more competitive with the Selection Panel. EmcArts does not intercede on behalf of any applicant during the selection process.

### *What should the application include?*

It is important to stress that we are not looking for traditional grant proposals. We recognize that it is natural for ambiguity and a degree of messiness to characterize applicants' work in progress—indeed, these qualities are typically central to achieving new ways of thinking and acting. Certainty of direction, clarity on the purpose of proposed new strategies, an understanding of what needs to be learned, and a high level of critical self-awareness are essential; but detailed, neatly packaged plans for implementation are not required, nor encouraged. The Lab's role, in part, is to assist in developing means for effective implementation, once deep institutional commitment to an innovative strategy is achieved. Applications should therefore provide a window into the conflicting ideas, creative tensions and hard choices that innovation always entails. We strongly recommend that applicants make use of the coaching services described above as they prepare their proposals.

The application should include three elements:

1. **A completed Application Cover Sheet** (see Application Format attached to this RFP)
2. **A Proposal Narrative of no more than 8 pages** (minimum 11-point type)
3. **Organizational Information**



The **Proposal Narrative** should include:

1. Statement of challenge, goal and rationale  
A clear, concise statement of the major challenge or opportunity that you are seeking to address, the goal that is driving your innovative thinking, and the rationale for your response. Why are existing organizational strategies inadequate or inappropriate?
2. Description of your proposed project  
What new strategic responses to your opportunity or challenge are you explicitly considering, and why? What organizational momentum does each of these enjoy? Is anything finalized?
3. Innovative nature of your project  
How does your project relate to the definition of innovation given on page 2 of this RFP? Could it provide a new pathway to achieving your mission? How would it be a distinct break from your past practice? What shift in underlying assumptions is propelling it?
4. Statement of intended impacts  
Why does this innovation matter to your organization? What is it likely to contribute to you and to your community? What broader field impact might this innovation have?
5. Learning from previous attempts at innovation  
Describe previous innovative strategies that you attempted to develop and implement, including at least one which failed at some point; and discuss what you learned from those experiences.
6. Assets and barriers in supporting innovation work  
Describe the capacities, approaches and structures in your organization that specifically foster innovation (such things as the attitude of leaders, board involvement, organizational culture, external relations, the ways you engage stakeholders, your capacity to implement innovative projects). What barriers exist that inhibit innovation in your organization? Where do your assets most need further strengthening?
7. Work to date  
A history of how your work on your proposed innovation has evolved to date, who has been involved, if and how potential strategies have been tested, and what obstacles have been overcome; and a description of the scope of institutional change that your likely innovation will require.
8. Resources you will allocate to the innovation  
Details of the human and financial resources that your organization will make available for strategy implementation (estimated where necessary), *and details of related reductions in other activities needed to free up these resources*. Please include a list of individuals (staff, artists, board and potential partners) that you anticipate will comprise the core of your Innovation Team; explain why each person was selected and what he or she will bring to the project.



9. Questions to address

A discussion of hard questions that have arisen around the early development of your innovation, and which remain unanswered for your organization.

10. Expectations of the Innovation Lab

A description of how you imagine the Innovation Lab helping your staff, project, and/or organization, given the description of services provided.

The **Organizational Information** should include:

- ◆ Eligibility statement: Confirmation that your organization meets the four criteria given above: stability of leadership, orderly management of board composition, number of aggregate full-time equivalent staff, and ability to commit time and resources to the Innovation Lab. If you are in the midst of another major organizational initiative, or anticipate beginning such an initiative within the next twelve months, please explain how you would insulate your innovation project from any potential draining of resources and attention (human and financial).
- ◆ Names of current artistic, executive and board leaders, with dates of taking up their positions; please explain board member and Officer terms and rotation policies
- ◆ Names and job titles of other senior staff (if you have a staff of 10 or more) and of all other staff (if below 10 in number); please indicate full-time or part-time (with hours per week)
- ◆ Brief organizational background and history
- ◆ Brief biographies for the key individuals on the Innovation Team you are initially proposing (EmcArts facilitators may suggest membership changes in the initial phase of the Lab)
- ◆ Operational budget for 08/09 and audited accounts or most recent financial statements for the 05/06, 06/07 and 07/08 fiscal years; you may provide an explanation of unusual recent features and trends if you wish.
- ◆ Any supplemental materials you feel are relevant to your proposal

The materials submitted should include the voices of all constituency leaders. We encourage the use of direct quotations to provide nuanced insights, alongside narrative and analysis.

Organizations considering partnership applications should contact EmcArts for more detailed guidance prior to submitting their proposals.

***Who should be involved in preparing and signing the application?***

We strongly recommend that the full set of organizational leaders who are likely to be responsible for strategy development be closely involved in compiling the application. While the nature of proposed strategies may involve one type of organizational constituent in particular (artists, staff, board), the engagement of leaders across all constituencies, including the Artistic Director and artistic staff, is seen as vital evidence that institutional will is



supportive of the strategic thinking, and that the necessary “permissions” have been given for the initiative to have a chance of being successfully implemented. The explicit commitment of any partners in the community is also important.

We are looking for a high degree of consensus, within the organization and with any partners, to be reflected in the signatories to the application.

***Where should applications be sent?***

Applications should be sent as e-mail attachments (in PDF format), or by mail, to Janis Auster, Innovation Programs Manager at EmcArts, at the address given below. Please submit one PDF file including the Cover Sheet, Proposal Narrative and all Organizational Information except audits/financial statements and marketing materials. Additional audit/financial statements and market materials may be sent as additional PDFs or in hard copy.

***Who can we contact for further guidance?***

We encourage applicants to discuss their innovation plans with EmcArts. For clarification about the Lab program as a whole, please contact Janis Auster ([JAuster@EmcArts.org](mailto:JAuster@EmcArts.org)), preferably by e-mail, and she will answer your questions. If you want to discuss a specific project, or explore in more detail whether an application would be appropriate and timely, Janis will schedule a time for you to talk with EmcArts leadership (see above).

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## Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts Round 3 Application Format

Your application should include three elements: a completed Application Cover Sheet, your Proposal Narrative, and your Organizational Information.

*Please submit one PDF file including the Cover Sheet, Proposal Narrative and all Organizational Information except audits/financial statements and marketing materials. Additional audit/financial statements and market materials may be sent as additional PDFs or in hard copy.*

### 1. Cover Sheet

Please send as your first page a Cover Sheet in the following format:

1. Official name of your organization (as it appears on your tax-exempt letter from the IRS) to which a grant would be paid
2. Common name of your organization (if different)
3. Date your organization was founded
4. Total operating income and expenses for your current fiscal year
5. Address of your organization, telephone and fax numbers, web address
6. Contact person for the Lab (name and job title, contact information)
7. Name of your Executive Director (if different from contact person)
8. Name of your innovation project
9. Summary of your innovation project, *in no more than 250 words*

Please include the purpose of the innovation, the likely scope of project activities, and the contribution you hope the project will make to your organization's vitality. Also indicate how the project relates to the definition of innovation given on page 2 of this RFP (new pathway to your mission – distinct break from past practices – shift in underlying assumptions).

### 2. Proposal Narrative

No more than 8 pages, with minimum 11-point type.

### 3. Organizational Information

Please send audits/financial statements separately.