

Critical Exposure

Overview

Critical Exposure is a youth media-making organization that aims to help students and organizations advocate more effectively for school reform and social change through the power of documentary photography and youth voice. Although it is a relatively new organization, Critical Exposure has been able to establish important partnerships that have increased its visibility locally and nationally and enabled the organization to generate significant financial and in-kind support.

Getting Started

Established in 2004 in Washington, D.C., Critical Exposure provides hands-on training and innovative tools that empower young people to develop skills as advocates and documentary photographers. Training workshops give students the opportunity to learn documentary photography, discuss relevant policy issues, and create images that tell their stories. Students also learn to create captions, narratives, and poems to provide context for their photography. Through this training, students learn to document their experiences both at and outside school and to use their voices and images to impact decisions that affect their education and lives. Critical Exposure works with low-income, middle school-age and high school-age youth to display the good things that are happening in their schools while highlighting the resource gaps that may be hindering students' achievement.

Critical Exposure works in partnership with out-of-school time programs and youth organizations as well as with advocacy groups that are guiding campaigns to improve public education in their states or localities. In addition to the training,

Critical Exposure staff members help young people and program staff implement creative strategies that use student photography and voice to strengthen campaigns to improve public schools. Critical Exposure works to inform and engage the public by using students' photographs and writing to create traveling exhibits that can be shown in public spaces to increase awareness of conditions in public schools.

The organization began working with youth in the Baltimore, Md., and Washington, D.C., areas, but because of its record of accomplishment, Critical Exposure has been expanding its work outside the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. During the past two years, youth programs and organizations have expressed an interest in working with Critical Exposure. Current and previous projects include work in Albuquerque, N.M.; Philadelphia, Pa.; and Austin, Texas.

Operation/Organizational Structure

Critical Exposure is a small organization managed by its two founders. Other staff support is generated from summer interns and volunteers. In addition, depending on the assignment, staff may receive support from the program staff at the various organizations that hire Critical Exposure to work with young people.

Financing

Startup funding for Critical Exposure included a \$12,500 grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and small grants from the Melton Arts Foundation and Social Venture Capital Foundation. The organization's current budget, includ-

ing in-kind support, totals \$146,229. Critical Exposure’s funding comes from grants, earned income, and individual donations (see figure below). In-kind support includes donated office space, *pro bono* legal representation, technology

support for the organization’s website and program database, and numerous volunteers who assist with grant-writing and strategic planning.

Financing and Sustainability: Keys to Success

One of the keys to Critical Exposure’s success is the organization’s ability to diversify its funding base. Although it began operating with one primary foundation grant, Critical Exposure’s largest source of funding is now earned income from contracts with youth programs and advocacy groups that hire the organization to provide its program. Critical Exposure continues to secure limited foundation support for its work, including grants from the Fannie Mae, Crowell & Moring, and Leonsis Family Foundations, while generating revenue from fundraisers and individual donors. Board members make annual donations, and the organization sends out an annual “holiday letter” to solicit individual donations from friends and supporters. The organization also holds an annual exhibit and reception showcasing students’ artwork. In 2007, Critical Exposure was able to generate approximately \$18,900 in individual donations.

Another key to Critical Exposure’s success has been its ability to establish relationships and partnerships with various stakeholders at the local and national levels. For each project, the organization develops partnerships with youth programs that are interested in having training provided to their students and with local and state advocacy organizations that recognize the added strength Critical Exposure’s program can provide to their campaigns to improve public education.

Although the organization has spent no or little money on marketing, it has successfully expand-

Critical Exposure Fiscal 2007 Funding Sources

Foundations

Fannie Mae Foundation	\$10,000
Crowell & Moring Foundation ...	\$3,000
Leonsis Family Foundation	\$16,600
Subtotal Foundations.....	\$29,600

Individual Donations

Board Members	\$2,150
Unsolicited	\$245
Holiday Ask.....	\$6,689
ARTiculate Exhibit	\$9,873
Subtotal Individual Donations ...	\$18,958

Earned Income

Contracts.....	\$60,711
Honorarium for Speaking Engagement	\$300
Licensing Fees	\$2,000
Subtotal Earned Income	\$63,011

In-Kind Donations

Rent	\$6,000
Legal Representation	\$18,000
Web Design and Support	\$10,650
Subtotal In-Kind Donations ..	\$34,650

TOTAL INCOME..... \$146,229

ed the number of contracts it has by identifying champions at national education and advocacy groups, including such organizations as the Public Education Network (PEN) and the National Access Network at Columbia University's Teacher's College. These relationships have increased Critical Exposure's portfolio. For example, the National Access Network has listed Critical Exposure on its website as a resource for youth organizations and invited the organization's leaders to exhibit at its annual conference. This publicity led to Critical Exposure's work in Philadelphia and other cities in Pennsylvania. Similarly, the organization's relationship with PEN led to a project in Austin, Texas.

Next Steps and Future Challenges

Moving forward, Critical Exposure hopes to increase its revenue from all three types of its

funding sources (individual donations, foundation grants, and earned income), while adding a corporate fundraising stream. The added support will enable the organization to increase its staff capacity to meet the growing demand for its program, both locally and across the nation.

The organization's leaders recognize the importance of demonstrating the effects of its program. Yet a lack of funding has limited efforts to evaluate and measure the success of Critical Exposure. The organization has begun working with two graduate students to develop evaluation measures and start collecting data on the impact of its work on youth, the public, and elected officials.

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