

Analysis of Advancing Well-Being in the Arts (AWA) Progress Reports

Toby Wu

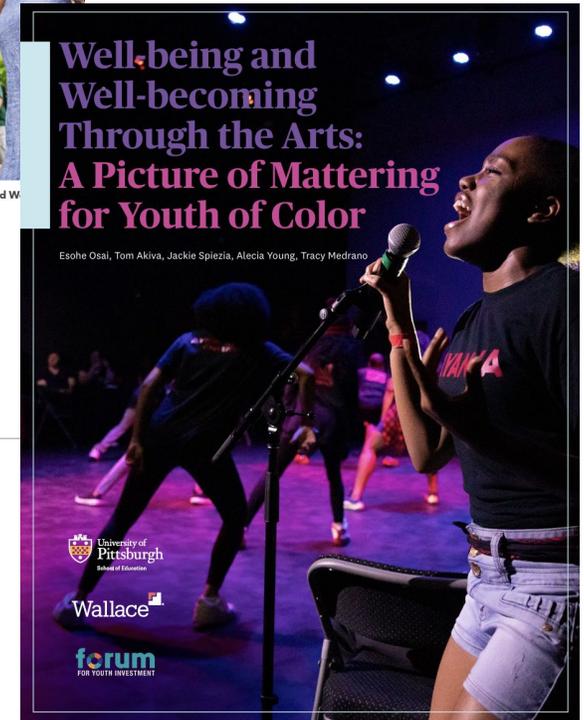
August 2025

Context of Research

RELEVANCE AND RESILIENCE AMONG ORGANIZATIONS

Motivations, Cautions:
for Future Research

Leah Reisman
November 2021



Research Questions for Analysis of Reports

- How are arts organizations *conceptualizing/defining* their well-being and that of their communities?
- What *actions* are they taking to advance their or their communities' well-being?
- What kinds of *structural, systemic, logistical and other barriers* must they navigate to achieve their goals?
- What *assets* do they leverage to achieve their goals?
- What kinds of *questions, needs, or supports* do they name or identify that could warrant future investments?

Data & Methods

- 13 progress reports and 1 project plan from most recent year (submitted March/June 2025)
- Initial cycle of coding using a predetermined and iterative scheme in Dedoose, followed by analytic memos on categories (root codes) and prevalence counts
- Developed codebook
- Met with Research Officer & VP of Research to refine coding scheme and discuss emergent themes
- My positionality (and how it may have affected what I found)

Coding Scheme

Code	Description
▼ 1. Project goals	
community-wellbeing	Community well-being
org-wellbeing	Organization well-being
▼ 2. Actions taken	
advance-comm-advocacy	Community advocacy & amplifying voices
advance-comm-collectivist	Collectivist action
advance-comm-engagement	Community engagement
advance-comm-heritage preservation	Cultural heritage preservation
▼ advance-comm-other	Other
wellness-support	
advance-comm-resource-redistrib	Resource redistribution
advance-org-facilities	Facilities
advance-org-networking-fundraising	Networking & fundraising
▼ advance-org-other	Other
benefits	
programming	
research	
▼ advance-org-planning	Planning & intentionality
external-tech-assistance	
internal-tech-assistance	
advance-org-routines-strategies	Routines & strategies
▼ advance-org-staffing	Staffing
advance-org-leadership-transition	Leadership & transition planning
culture	
advance-org-tools-infrastructure	Tools & infrastructure
▼ 3. Challenges	
audience-engagement	Audience engagement
▼ challenges-other	Other challenges

Data Limitations & Testament to Relationships

“While it is often *preferable to be able to say that we are doing great and thriving* to a funder, there have been *some real challenges* that the staff and board have been working through...”

“Our program officer has been very supportive and has *helped us manage some difficult moments* this past year – we feel like we can be *completely transparent* and that she reciprocates.”

Findings

1. Conceptualizing well-being
2. Actions taken to advance well-being
3. Challenges & barriers
4. Assets
5. Sustainability
6. Emerging needs

Finding: Conceptualizing Well-Being

Organizational & Community Well-Being as Linked Fate

- Organizational well-being is a combination of strong systems of support and a culture of care for colleagues to contribute in their roles (10), being resourceful and well-positioned for longevity (6), and fair compensation (4).
- Community well-being is described as a robust community thriving beyond basic needs (7).
- Organizational and community well-being are intertwined and dialogic in nature (7).

Quotes: Conceptualizing Well-Being

- “A leadership staff that has successfully transitioned from the founder-led organization to a strong and effective team... A staff with *‘right-sized’ jobs, competitive compensation, health insurance coverage, and full benefits*. An organization that is able to provide for the well-being of its dance company members and staff.”
- “Organizational wellbeing is the creation and continued maintenance of a safe space for our colleagues to be *authentically themselves* while most impactfully advancing our mission in support of the community we serve.”
- “We also seek the well-being of the wider communities in which we live and work by (a) practicing *deep listening* and cultivating deep local connections at the grassroots level; (b) *collaboration with other agents* of positive social change across multiple sectors and identities; and (c) minding our role as *engine of community and economic development*.”

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Finding: Actions Taken to Advance Organizational Well-Being

- Leveraging technical assistance (13)
- Reorganizing staffing, prioritizing culture, and board planning & development (12)
- Improving financial standing and strategy (12)
- Optimizing workflows and uptake of tools (11)
- Strengthening partnerships and networks (9)
- Securing facilities and compliance (6)

Quotes: Advancing **Organizational** Well-Being

“Reorganizing our staffing structure and *focusing our programmatic ambition* on a more limited number of initiatives at a time has improved our sense of organizational well-being. Staff members feel a *clearer sense of direction and purpose and less anxiety* about trying to meet unrealistic expectations of the organization.”

“In lead up to this engagement with Tech Impact, the Operations Manager and Senior Director, Development & Operations, have outlined *Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)* for information management (e.g., Shared Google Drive, Dropbox) which will later inform the creation of the SOP for Salesforce and all matters related to data management practices.”

Finding: Actions Taken to Advance Community Well-Being

- Continuing or expanding community-centered programming (14)
- Limited actions in advocacy, resource redistribution, and heritage preservation (4)

Quotes: Advancing **Community** Well-Being

“We held the [Event Name] and this year *added an Artist Marketplace* where 10 local artists sold their products.”

“Public Programming staff are integral in building relationships and maintaining community relationships. They help to implement the findings from the Community Outreach Organizers focus group findings such as the creation of a *community choir, book clubs, youth advisory committee, and bilingual programming.*”

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Finding: Challenges

Linked Fate & Dimensions of Turnover

- Limitations in staff capacity and reduction in funding have led to adjusting programming or shifting priorities (12).
- Evolving sociopolitical climate creates tremendous uncertainty for both organization and community (8).
- Turnover and organization changes both affect the organization's internal capacity and require sensitivity in maintaining relationships with supporter bases and healing among staff (5).
- Adopting new tools requires a transitional period (3).
- Unexpected facilities challenges underscore a need for contingency plans or reserves (3).

Quotes: Challenges

“Recognizing the *impact of trauma and systemic inequities*, our increased emphasis on allocating resources for *mental wellness tools and strategies*, and advocating for more sustainable funding cycles that allow for reflection, is essential for both organizational and community healing.”

“The *volatility* of the fundraising landscape is a significant, persistent and increasing barrier. The *political landscape* that is targeting DEI and the arts is a barrier. The governmental *assault on our communities* especially BIPOC, immigrant and trans community members who are among [Org Name]’s primary constituencies is not only a barrier but an immediate threat to community well-being.”

Quotes: Challenges

“The increase in staffing during the Wallace term created a sense to some outside constituencies of an *impersonal organization*—while also not building in enough organizational headway for cost of living adjustments, further exacerbating *staff turnover and institutional knowledge loss*.”

“The transition of our Artistic Director revealed some *areas of care and communication* for both the staff and community of artists that were *previously lacking*. The board of directors had a number of seasoned members’ term limits come to an end while new leadership stepped up with *enthusiasm but no prior experience* on how to run a board.”

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Finding: Assets

Ecosystems of Partnerships

- Reliance on a wide range of local and regional partnerships (e.g., schools, universities, conferences, elected officials, aligned organizations) to advance their work and organizational well-being (8)
- Intentional incorporation of community voices in shaping the organization (5)
- Cross-pollination from WF cohort and gatherings (3)

Quotes: Assets

“Conducted new focus groups and patron data analysis in support of *recalibration of subsidized admissions strategy* (free/low-cost tickets).”

“In planning for the *artistic director search*, the organization had a number of *public and semi-public town hall events* to ensure that community members who were not staff, board or members voices were included in the search process.”

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Finding: Sustainability & Long-Term Orientation

- Narrow range of actions toward sustainability as outlined in the *Implementing for Sustainability Framework*, most commonly by refining strategic alignment between vision and goals and aligning institutional elements (13)
- Some grantees could benefit from proactive actions or support to communicate with clarity and intention as organization evolves (4)

Quotes: Sustainability

“We understand now that our mission had become *too elastic* and that our resources themselves were unclear due to *insufficient operational systems*. These days, through the processes of refocusing of our mission; making operational improvements; and adjusting staffing structure, our organization seems more appropriately staffed to its vision. While still in progress, these *efforts towards right alignment with our mission* and our future have already begun to show results as our paths to a healthier organization becomes more clear.”

Findings

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Finding: Emerging Needs

Organizational Development & Adaptive Capability

- Opportunities to explore multiple revenue streams, growing staff and board capacity, and deepening relationships with stakeholders (12)
- “Iterative” changes as a learning organization (7)
- Navigating collaborations and partnerships (6)

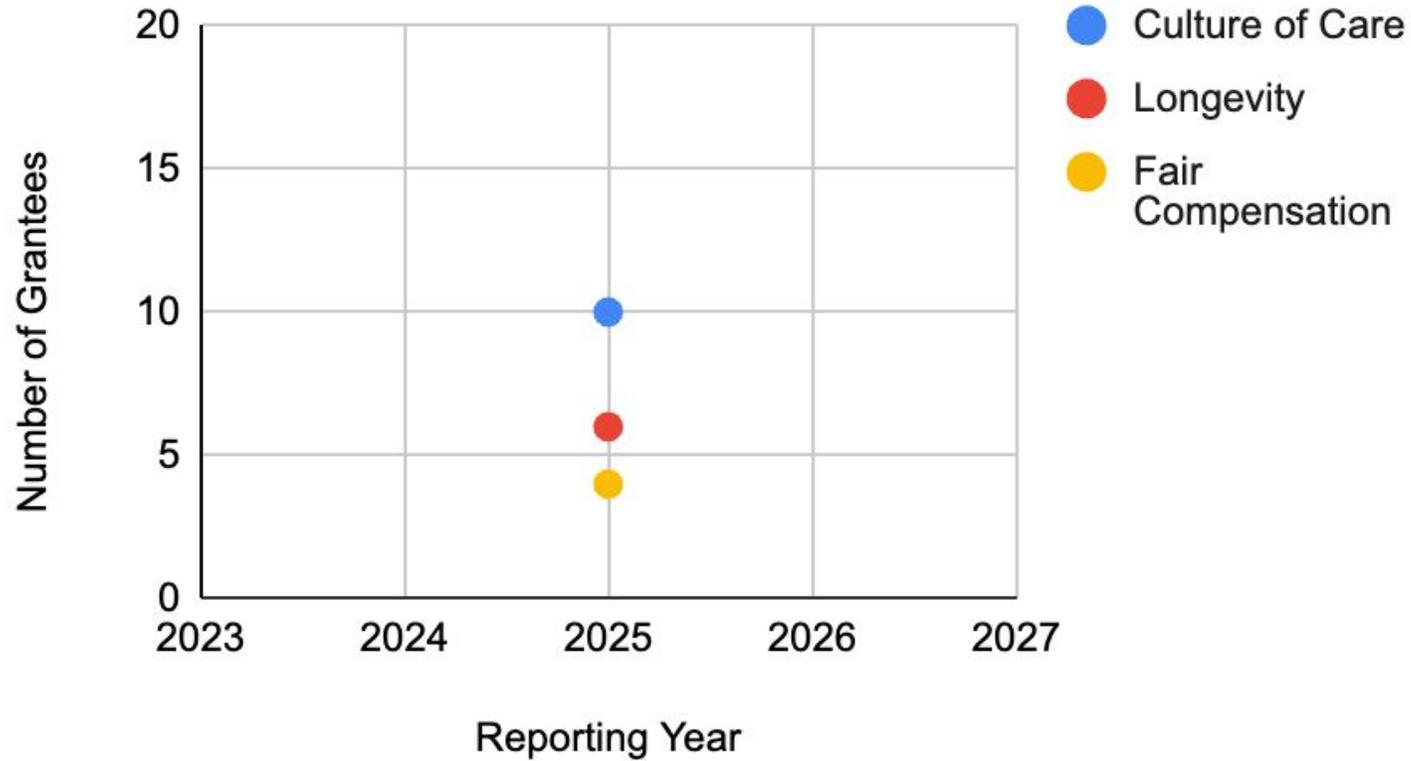
Quotes: Emerging Needs

“We also began exploring *collaborative models for organizational sustainability*, including developing shared fiscal and HR strategies and investigating cooperative structures to move beyond competition.”

“We are looking to *further monetize our studio-based activities* by seeking new corporate sponsorships and cultivating individual donors and board prospects... *National and international touring continues to lag behind the pre-pandemic period*, depressing some of our earned income. The studio-based performances and programs are helping, but they cannot fully replace this income.”

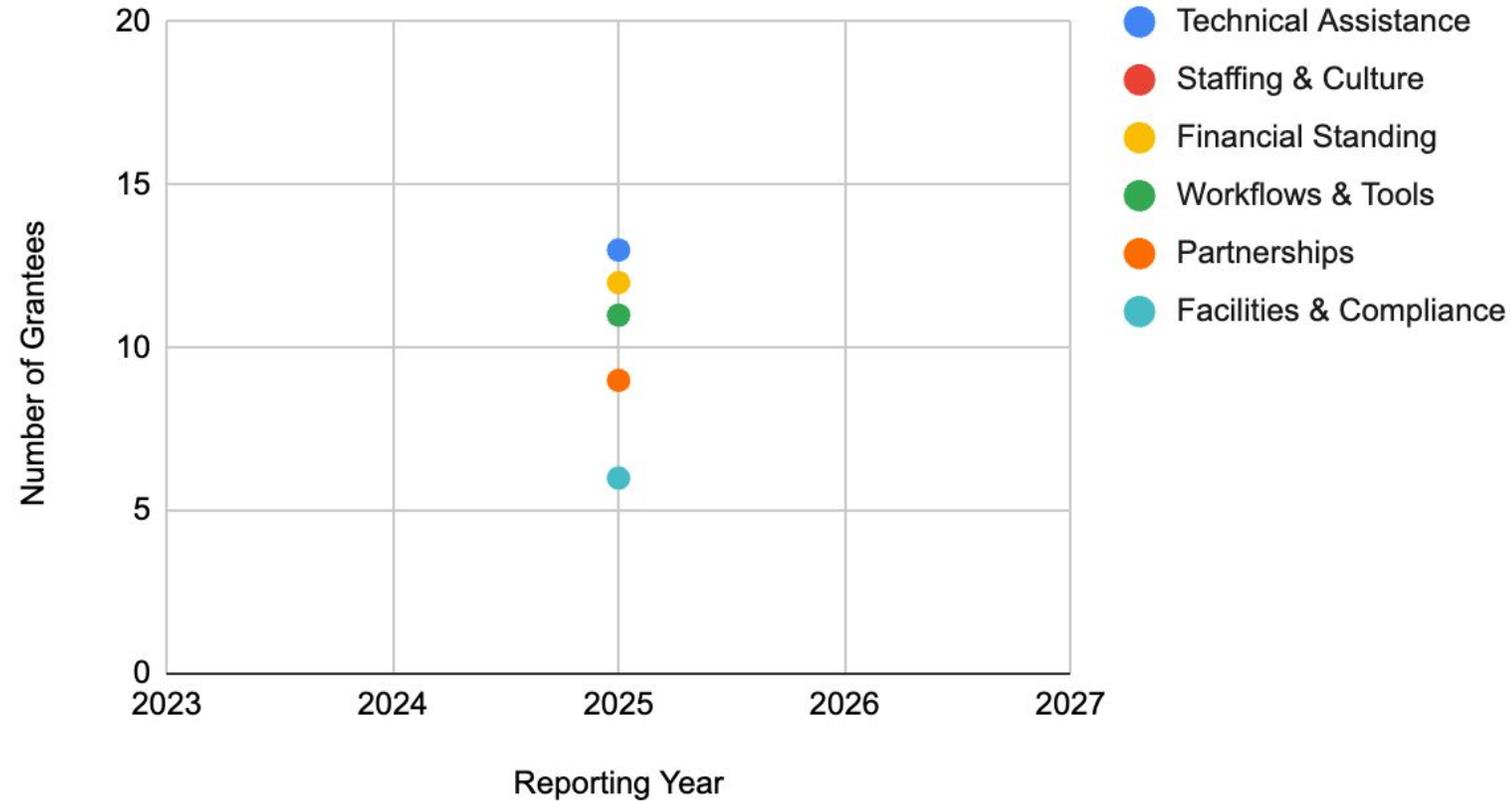
Plotting Change Over Time

Conceptualizing Org. Well-Being



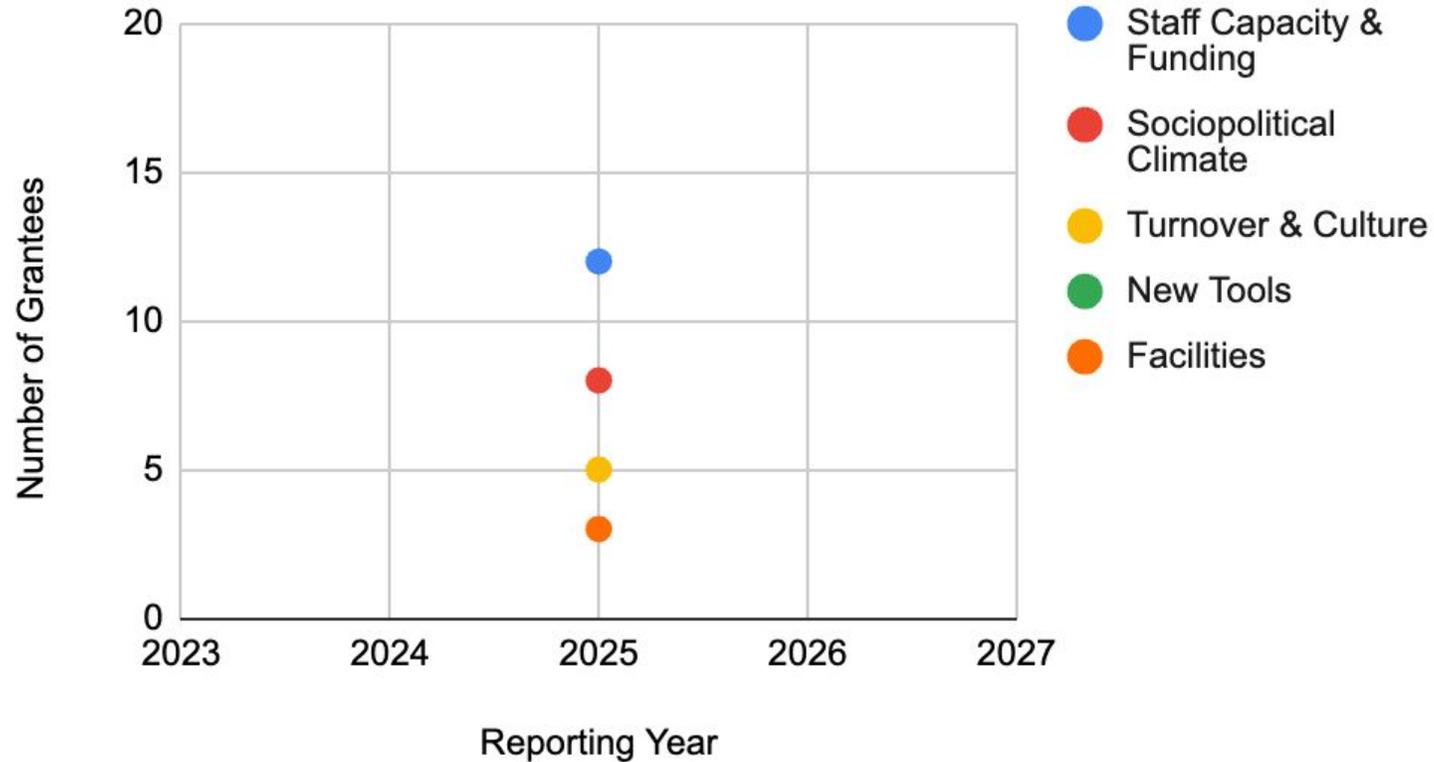
Plotting Change Over Time

Actions Toward Org. Well-Being



Plotting Change Over Time

Challenges



Opportunities & Next Steps

Alignment between the purpose and form of progress reports

Purpose of Progress Reports: Compliance and/or Curiosity?

- Template yielded incomplete or thin responses at times
- Missed opportunity to illuminate links between the organization and the broader ecosystem (“community well-being”)
- Create more opportunities for grantees to shine on their terms

Considerations for Future Progress Reports

- What does Wallace need from the progress reports? Who needs what?
- Could the questions be reimagined to prompt deeper reflections or storytelling?
 - *Centering adaptive capacity or evolution as learning organization*
- Could the phrasing of questions be expanded beyond the conventional language of grant reports?
 - *“Sustainability” vs. resilience, longevity, thriving, etc.*
- Could alternative methods invite richer responses?
 - *Incorporate photovoice methodology - a participatory research method combining photography and narrative storytelling, commonly used with communities of color*

“Storytelling and capturing the journey and engagement are crucial. It allows the community to understand and support our work, and properly positions us for future funding opportunities.”

Questions?
Comments?

Thank you!