



Arts & Environment

Arts and Culture: Elemental Contributors to Social, Creative and Human Capital & Critical Champions for Natural Capital

Arts and Environment Summit

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Comments by Eric Friedenwald-Fishman

Thank you for participating in this Summit to explore the connections between Arts and the Environment and how the Arts can play a critical role in addressing our world's pressing environmental needs.

It is always such a charge to gather with the rest of the choir and enjoy our own music. This room is full of such creative and cultural energy and power for change that it energizes and inspires each of us to keep doing this work. Yet I worry that we are not collectively reaching as far beyond the choir as we must to unleash the potential impacts that the arts and culture have to offer our community and the world. For too long we have all allowed arts and culture to be treated as a nicety—the first budget cut, the last investment made, the tertiary quality-of-life mention of our elected leaders. In the last 30 years, we have seen our nation's public and private investment in the arts decline as we have scrambled to communicate relevancy through the frames of education, tourism and economic development—*all* of which are true—but also undersell the critical power of arts and culture.

I have had the opportunity to work nationally and internationally on issues including poverty alleviation, educational equity, environmental health, national arts funding and many others. Increasingly, I see that the solutions to our most critical problems cannot be solved through institutional hierarchy or traditional policy and enforcement models, but rather through collective action, dispersed innovation and shared responsibility. For example, about 35 years ago we had a water pollution problem, then we passed the Clean Water Act and enforced shutting down 100,000 pipes that dumped toxic waste into our rivers. Today MORE river miles are polluted—not from industrial polluters, but from non-point-source pollution—and the actions of every American end up impacting local watersheds.

There is no way to monitor and enforce policy so that every American is conserving water, making alternative transportation choices, etc. However, when people and communities are armed with **information, creativity and the ability to engage each other**, we can change public will and thus change our personal actions and impact. This is true for changing how our behavior impacts our drinking water and air quality and is critical to driving the collective action necessary to deal with global warming. The same argument is true beyond the environment, from preventing abuse and neglect to closing the educational achievement gap, and addressing the severe economic disparity that threatens our core American legacy: real *opportunity for all*. For the last century, **financial and institutional capital** have been the priority leverage points to address our society's challenges. I deeply believe that now **human, social and creative capital** will have the greatest impact.

And this is where **arts and culture** are the **necessity**.

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There is no discipline, sector or issue area that nurtures, protects and sparks the **creativity and innovation** we need every citizen to command more than arts and culture.

There is no approach that breaks barriers, connects across cultural and linguistic differences, and engages our shared, deeply held values more than arts and culture.

There is no investment that strengthens our core human asset—**the ability to connect with each other, to be moved to action and to make collective choices**—more than arts and culture.

All of us must be messengers and champions for increasing our community's value of and investment in our cultural capital—*not* to serve our institutions, our field or our careers, *but rather* to create the just, equitable, sustainable and *meaningful* society that is our shared desire and our grandchildren's birthright. As a community we must use our power to tell stories, communicate across cultures and to gather community to engage and empower all people to be change agents for a sustainable environment. I hope we will push each other and support each other in reframing the discourse and the debate in ways that harness arts and culture as a vector for a desperately needed conservation pandemic and will establish arts and culture as a core community priority and ultimately the legacy of this generation of champions.

Thank you.

Eric Friedenwald-Fishman is the creative director and president of Metropolitan Group, a leading social marketing firm with offices in Chicago; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco; and Washington, D.C. He has worked extensively with leading foundations, nonprofit organizations, public agencies and social enterprise businesses to promote sustainability, environmental health, arts, heritage and culture. He is the co-author of *Marketing That Matters* (Berrett-Koehler), which has been translated into six languages, and is that primary author of Metropolitan Group's *Public Will Framework: an approach for sustainable social change*. He is the 2008 recipient of Northwest Business for Culture and the Arts' (NW/BCA) Exemplary Business Volunteer for the Arts award. Other articles and presentations are available at www.metgroup.com.



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