

Business Volunteers for the Arts®

[LexArts](#)

Tell us a little bit about your organization.

Business Volunteers for the Arts® (BVA) is an exciting initiative LexArts launched to support the growth of arts organizations and the thriving arts scene in Lexington, KY, a metropolitan area of approximately 300,000 people. LexArts promotes high quality arts experiences for the benefit of all the people of central Kentucky through funding, advocacy, technical assistance, communications, and programming initiatives.

When did your BVA start and can you give us a brief history of it?

LexArts' BVA initiative was born out of a need for specialized assistance from arts groups who had applied for Community Arts Development grants. During the grant application and review process, LexArts' Grants Committee noted many groups that were in need of support beyond funding to build capacity toward more effective mission fulfillment.

In 2011, Gloria Rie, board member and BVA chair, along with LexArts staff, began exploring the feasibility of a LexArts BVA program. With assistance from Americans for the Arts, an exploratory committee spent approximately six months studying and interviewing both long-established BVAs and newly formed ones nationwide. These included programs in Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Fort Worth, Portland, and Chicago. These BVAs generously answered numerous questions and provided critical information for planning.

Important questions the exploratory committee wrestled with internally included: What are the expectations in our roles as board members and project leaders? Do we hire a consultant or do we staff internally, given an already stretched staff? How do we attract arts organizations and volunteers? How do we evaluate outcomes? How do we create an early success? Is this really the right model for our community?

In July 2013, the BVA team made a presentation to the LexArts board to garner support for this initiative. The board unanimously approved the BVA platform, along with the goals and benefits outlined. In the fall of 2015 BVA was made a standing committee of the LexArts Board. The bylaws were also amended to include the Chair of BVA as part of the Executive Committee, emphasizing the importance the board placed on this new initiative.

The team spent the next six months developing a process flow encompassing administrative, marketing, funding, volunteer, and evaluative structures. The conversation also involved how a BVA program would complement and connect with other components of LexArts, including how arts entities would apply for funding and engage BVA services. Americans for the Arts provided critical supportive material.

How active is your BVA?

In 2014, the BVA team carefully recruited two organizations to participate in pilot projects and paired them with volunteer experts. It was paramount that the organizations represented both the diversity of the arts and the people of the community—and had leadership poised to successfully engage a professional volunteer. It was equally important that the volunteer was a good fit personally and professionally for the arts organization. BVA team members met with leaders from the arts organizations on numerous occasions to hone in on specific project goals, timelines, and objectives before personally recruiting volunteers.

In this first year, the Foundation for Latin American and Latin@ Culture and Arts (FLACA) sought to improve its brand and public awareness beyond an annual Latino Festival. FLACA now has a new logo and a marketing plan for rollout of the new brand. The Bluegrass Printmakers Cooperative (BPC), facing strategic planning and structural issues, began work to structure BPC as a true cooperative and took steps to develop bylaws and apply for charitable status. They have just received their tax exempt letter from the IRS. In both cases, the volunteers are continuing their relationships with the organizations.

How is it structured/operated?

LexArts' BVA is now led by a working volunteer team and staffed by the LexArts Community Arts Director, who dedicates about one fifth of his time to BVA. The seven-to-twelve person team includes three board members, other well-connected community professionals, and two attorneys who also serve on the board of [Kentucky Lawyers for the Arts](#). BVA projects are distinct assignments with specific measurable outcomes, and are short-term, an estimated six to nine months.

How do you find and work with volunteers?

Thus far, volunteers have been identified through the professional and personal affiliations of BVA team members, in particular those representing Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky, Kentucky Lawyers for the Arts, and the Lexington Chamber of Commerce. With the chamber's Director of Leadership Development serving on the BVA team, participants in the chamber's leadership programs have the opportunity to connect with arts organizations through BVA.

How do you find and work with arts organizations?

Arts organizations are primarily identified for need of BVA assistance by the Community Arts Director. He promotes BVA to the arts community, pinpointing opportunities and talking with arts organizations to gauge their desire for BVA assistance, including through the LexArts grants application process.

In conjunction with this work, the BVA team also approaches arts organizations through their relationships with arts leaders. One or two team members might meet personally in a more casual context to discuss the application and better define the project before pairing the organization with a volunteer.

What feedback have you gotten from any of those partners, or do you have a positive anecdote you can share?

BVA's success is evident in the positive feedback from both the volunteers and the arts organizations.

"While this project may open doors for me, the biggest reward is in learning how to give back in new ways using my talents and skills," said Leigh Roach, whose company, IDEAist Designs, assisted FLACA with logo development.

And for volunteer Alyse Garrard, working with Bluegrass Printmakers' Cooperative to revamp their organizational structure gave her the opportunity to apply and expand her professional skills and also to gain new perspectives that would benefit her professionally. "Alyse's involvement has brought tremendous worth to the co-op," noted BPC's Stephen Wiggins. "She quickly realized the value within our organization, motivating us to think bigger and queuing us up for success. This will help the BPC in the future to create a legacy and elevate the level of community printmaking in Lexington."

A great strength of the LexArts BVA program is that it is appropriately structured for Lexington. A well-designed process is in place, but its application is less formal and somewhat organic, grounded in deep personal networks and knowledge of the community. At the same time, the process is not static.

What does the future hold for your BVA?

As LexArts receives feedback from those who participate in each project, BVA will improve. In the next year, BVA plans to pair four more arts organizations with community volunteers and to proceed at a deliberate pace to ensure success.

The goal is to keep learning, tweaking and growing the LexArts BVA process. And as word of successful projects emerges, the hope is that more arts organizations and volunteers will seek out BVA on their own—building community relationships and making Lexington an even more attractive center for business and culture.