



**Business Volunteers
for the Arts**

A Program of **Americans for the Arts**

Business Volunteers for the Arts® Feasibility Study

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Determining Feasibility

This feasibility workbook is a companion piece to the Business Volunteers for the Arts® (BVA) Operations Manual and covers the next step in determining if you wish to go forward with establishing a BVA program in your area. This phase covers:

- A step-by-step process and questionnaire for determining sponsor feasibility in undertaking establishment of a BVA and for defining the service area for the program.
- Continuing phone consultation with Americans for the Arts staff to answer questions on the feasibility questionnaire or to give advice on how to proceed. This may include an analysis of the results of the feasibility study and recommendations on next steps.
- Sample letters and questionnaire to determine business and arts interest in establishment of BVA in your area.
- An optional two-day site visit at your expense by Americans for the Arts staff, if needed, to help implement next steps once it is determined that there is local commitment to implementing the BVA program locally.

We strongly recommend that you undertake this feasibility stage as our experience has shown that the success of BVA depends on building broad community support and commitment. Both the arts and business communities need to be aware of BVA in the planning stages and asked to "buy in" early on.

Using the Feasibility Questionnaire

CAN BVA WORK IN YOUR AREA?

As already discussed, the first steps regarding establishment of the BVA program are to:

- Determine if BVA can work for your area and, if so,
- What a logical and manageable service area is.

The following factors are meant to generate strategic thinking behind starting a BVA program, and the feasibility study on Page 11 will help you examine these factors on paper:

Adequate Market—Is there an adequate market for this program? Are there a sufficient number of nonprofit arts groups that will use BVA to sustain the program?

- First, determine the number of nonprofit organizations within the city, the immediate area, the county, and the region.
- Obtain a comprehensive mailing list of arts groups in the region (state and local arts councils are good sources).
- Once you have a ballpark number and feel there are sufficient groups that will use BVA, we recommend that you convene an informational meeting to let groups know that you are considering BVA and to tell them how the program works and can benefit them. This can also be accomplished through a mailing and a suggested letter is included in this document.
- Conduct a written survey, either by passing out the questionnaire (available below) at the meeting or by mail.

Need—Do the arts organizations want the program?

- This can be determined either from the community meeting or the questionnaire (available below). We find that when groups understand the program and see how it can help, it eliminates any skepticism.

Competition—What types of technical assistance services are already available?

- It is very important to know what else exists and if these services are meeting the needs. Also consider how BVA is different and how it might interface with and not duplicate existing programs. This is important since potential funders and other resources might question the need for BVA if programs already exist in the community. You need to be able to show how BVA

operates differently and fills different types of needs, such as gaining access to business resources.

Business Access—Do the arts groups need improved access to the business community?

- One of the primary benefits of BVA is that it improves access to the business community and the resources of business for the arts, especially for smaller and mid-size groups. Is this a strong need in your area or is it being met in some other way? If so, how? Can BVA augment and enhance this effort?
- Is there an arts committee within the local chamber of commerce or other leading business association? Are there business/arts committees within any of the arts service organizations? What do they do and how can BVA relate?

Business Leadership—Is there potential leadership for BVA?

- BVA requires the involvement of visible and respected business leaders who are committed to bringing business and the arts closer together. They assist with the establishment of BVA and act in an on-going capacity to promote BVA to the community and their peers, assist with organization, and assist with fundraising. You need to analyze who these people are and if you have the ability to get them involved.

Business Interest—Is there a sufficient pool of business expertise to draw upon to meet the requests for assistance?

- The service industries (banks, accounting firms, financial institutions) have traditionally been the greatest source of BVA volunteerism though support can come from smaller offices like tech start-ups. You need to look at how strong their presence is in the community and the overall potential base of volunteers.
- You also need to analyze if these companies will encourage their employees to volunteer and if there are contacts within the companies to help you recruit. A cover letter and questionnaire are included in this document to help you conduct a mail questionnaire if deemed needed and feasible. Another approach is to meet with key public affairs officials, volunteer coordinators, or even the head of the business either by inviting them to a meeting or one-on-one to explain the program and determine interest. The board of directors of the organization seeking to start the BVA program is another great place to start, the business community is often represented by a few directors.

Sponsor—Is there a strong, broad-based organization to umbrella the program?

- As mentioned in the Operations Manual, this can be a chamber of commerce or other business association, an arts council, a coalition, or an independent organization. Experience has shown that it is easier to establish BVA within an existing organization as a program, at least initially. This enables lower start-up costs and affiliation with an established organization to help with credibility. Since there is such strong interaction with the business community, which usually

provides the major financial support for BVA, it is recommended that the sponsor be well connected to business. Also, the sponsor is usually a private, nonprofit agency or has access to such an agency in order to accept tax-exempt contributions on behalf of BVA.

- The selected organization should be able to assist BVA with connections, mailing lists, publicity, space and office equipment, fundraising, and in-kind services.
- It is essential that the sponsor make a commitment to give the BVA staff person sufficient time and resources to run an effective program on a long-term basis. BVA has had to leave sponsors or even has been disbanded when the staff person has been given too many other responsibilities to the detriment of the BVA program.

Financial Resources—Are there financial resources in the community to sustain BVA long-term?

- You need to analyze the tradition of giving in the community, particularly from the business community. If there is no tradition, is there potential? BVA is often able to gain business support because of the direct involvement of employees and the fact that businesses see the program as an employee benefit.
- Another success factor is the availability of in-kind services for BVA such as printing, graphics, hosting receptions, and accounting services.

Commitment to BVA Model—Is there a commitment to develop and sustain the program within the parameters developed by the Americans for the Arts and BVA?

- In order to use the name and materials, receive assistance in all start-up phases, and become a BVA program partner, a letter of agreement is developed that delineates parameters within which programs are expected to operate to maintain the integrity of the program. The sponsoring agency must sign this agreement with Americans for the Arts.
- As stated earlier, there is a \$1000.00 fee payable to the Americans for the Arts for use of the registered name and materials, and an annual membership in Americans for the Arts is required.
- In addition, Americans for the Arts staff will ask for an annual report of activity and periodically check-in to ensure your success.

Staff—Is there a commitment to hiring a qualified administrator to direct the BVA program?

- It is essential that a highly skilled and experienced administrator be hired/supported to run BVA. This person must understand the issues of arts management and be able to work effectively and sensitively with the arts groups and volunteers.

DETERMINING THE SERVICE AREA

There is also a need to contain the program within an area manageable by a small team that makes sense in not only geographic terms, but in social, political, and economic terms. It is very important that BVA staff is able to interact with these elements in order to understand and react to trends and circumstances that will affect the health and vitality of the arts groups assisted. A BVA director needs to know the key players in all of these areas to position the program effectively. The development of strong networks and information systems are major keys to the success of BVA.

Of course, the sphere of influence of the sponsoring or co-sponsoring organization will have a great deal to do with determining the service area. However, in some instances, a sponsoring organization with primary dealings in one community may feel it is in the best interest of the program to form coalitions with neighboring communities or areas. It may be that these areas could not possibly sustain a BVA program on their own. We often find that volunteers work in an urban core, but live in surrounding suburban areas. These volunteers may prefer to work with groups where they live. Conversely, volunteers may prefer to work with groups where they work and not where they live.

Another common consideration is the fact that one area may have a great many arts groups, but few businesses. A nearby area may have the reverse. It may make sense that a program covers both areas.

Feasibility Study for a Potential BVA Program Site

GENERAL DATA

Name of Organization Preparing Questionnaire: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Contact Person: _____

Other Persons Involved in Completing Questionnaire:

Name	Title	Affiliation
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COMMUNITY REVIEW

Number of nonprofit arts groups in:

- Major city _____
- Immediate area _____ (define)
- County _____
- Region _____ (define)
- Analysis of level of development in each area and potential for use of BVA services:
- Do these groups want the program?
- Have meetings been held with key arts leaders to ascertain need?
- Has there been any type of survey of arts groups to see if they want management consulting? If so, describe:
- If not, is a survey planned?

- Is it possible to access a comprehensive mailing list? Describe:
- What technical assistance services are currently available?
- Would BVA overlap or augment these programs?
- Is there a need for closer relationships between business and the arts? Describe:
- Are there any active business/arts committees or programs in the area? If so, describe:
- What do you envision as BVA's relationship to these existing alliances?
- Does business contribute to the arts? Describe level of contribution and typical recipients:
- Do business people sit on arts boards or provide other types of volunteer assistance? If so, describe:
- How could a BVA assist in improving business/arts relationships?
- Have key business leaders been identified? If so, describe:
- Have they been approached and made a commitment to BVA? If so, describe:
- Has the leadership of the arts community "bought in" to the program?
If not, what steps are planned to gain their support?
- Describe major types of business in the area:
- What is the estimated number of local businesses that might be expected to participate?
- Do local businesses have a track record of community involvement, particularly as volunteers?
If so, describe:
- Are there people within public affairs or other areas of local businesses who will help you establish contacts and recruit volunteers? If so, describe:
- Is there a strong organization to umbrella BVA?
- Describe the options:
- What can each organization offer to BVA in terms of resources, connections, publicity, fundraising, and in-kind services?
- Where could the financial resources come from to support BVA and in what amounts?

- What kinds of in-kind services are anticipated?
- Is there a commitment from the potential sponsor and leadership to:
 - Develop BVA within the basic program format:
 - Meet the financial obligations:
 - Hire experienced professional staff and to give BVA staff sufficient time and resources to run the program:

SERVICE AREA REVIEW

- What is the most logical service area?
- Does this service area adhere to the recommendations described earlier? If not, describe the differences and why it was determined that this was the most logical area:
- If beyond the service area of the proposed sponsoring agency or agencies, please describe the coalitions that will be developed in the outside area:
- Please complete this questionnaire and return to the Americans for the Arts for review and analysis.

Community Informational Meetings

INFORMATIONAL MEETING FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

As stated earlier, it is recommended that an informational meeting or set of meetings be held to acquaint the arts community with the fact that a BVA program is being considered as early in the process as possible. From past experience, we have found that there is resentment if BVA is simply announced as a *fait accompli*. It cannot be assumed that the arts groups will welcome BVA with open arms unless they are given good, positive information before the program is implemented.

We have experienced several types of resistance:

- Concern about business people being sensitive to their needs.
- Reluctance to have "outsiders" involved in internal affairs.
- Concern about yet another program competing for available funds.
- Concern about quality consulting from volunteers.

When BVA's track record is explained, all of these concerns can be eliminated. As for competing funds, when it is explained that the direct value of services and resources generated for the arts is far in excess of the cost and getting business people directly involved can often lead to new sources of support, this fear is usually allayed. Also, BVA has sometimes been funded from other areas of the business such as human resources budgets.

Meeting Format

Whether you hold one or several meetings, make sure that every arts group you can find is invited. You don't want anyone feeling left out. A mailed invitation listing the members of the organizing committee or several prominent names of individuals and organizations that are involved should be sent at least two weeks ahead. It is recommended that the following information is covered in meeting(s) with community arts leaders:

1. INTRODUCTION

To open the meeting, introduce the presenters, and any members of the organizing committee present, and then have those attending introduce themselves. It is also important to have everyone sign an attendance sheet with name, title, organization, address, phone, and fax. You may want to have a few positive words about what you are trying to accomplish from a board member or business leader in the community.

2. BVA OVERVIEW

This overview can be given by Americans for the Arts staff, if available; by a BVA director currently

involved in BVA if one is within easy travel distance, or by a leader from the committee who is coached by Americans for the Arts. If an arts group or volunteer that have been involved with BVA are available to give a direct testimonial, this is great.

The point here is to discuss how BVA can help the arts. Following are key points to cover:

- BVA provides free management consulting assistance that most arts groups could not otherwise afford.
- BVA works on a project basis and the volunteers are there until the project is completed, not just until the money runs out.
- Each BVA project is custom-designed based on an in-depth assessment with each arts group by BVA staff. There are no template models, although volunteers are given various case study publications to show how others have solved particular problems.
- BVAs are recruited for their management expertise and experience, and commitment to helping the arts. They must attend a special orientation program to sensitize them to the arts environment and the realities and challenges of arts management and support. They are carefully placed based on their skills and compatibility of interests and personality.
- BVA is managed by staff coached by the Americans for the Arts to impart all that has been learned in 40 years of running the program.
- BVA opens doors to new business contacts.
- More and more companies are basing contributions on employee engagement; BVA can help gain access to those funds by providing opportunities to engage employees through the arts (although this is not guaranteed in any way and should not be expected).
- Our experience is that volunteers often bring additional resources, such as other types of consulting or hands-on assistance, in-kind donations from their contacts, and new audience members through their own circle of friends and colleagues.
- Some BVAs join the boards of directors of arts groups they have assisted.
- BVA leads to informed advocates within the business community on behalf of the arts.
- BVAs have the opportunity to experience firsthand how arts groups work—the hard work, the dedication, the lack of resources, the talent and commitment—and help dispel myths about artists and arts organizations in the broader community.
- Once the volunteer consulting program is established, many partners go on to create other programs that serve to bring business and the arts together and to generate more resources for the arts from business.

3. HOW BVA WORKS

- Arts groups requesting help from BVA receive a simple application form. They are asked to send the form along with the types of information requested for a typical grant application to the BVA office.
- Once the application is received, BVA staff conducts an assessment at the arts organization of the request and the overall needs of the arts organization. At this meeting, one or more projects are identified that both the arts organization and BVA feel are feasible and doable within the

parameters of the BVA program.

- If the project requires immediate, in-depth work, BVA often cannot assist since volunteers usually are fully employed. Projects last as long as needed to solve the need. If BVA cannot help, the arts group will be referred to other resources such as paid consultants.
- Once a volunteer is identified, he or she is sent a packet of information about the arts group and the project. If there is interest, a meeting is held between all parties, including the BVA staff member, to set up the consultancy.
- Once the consultancy is agreed upon, a simple letter of agreement is developed and signed by all parties outlining the project, setting time lines, and listing any special conditions.
- The volunteer then works with the group on a schedule mutually agreed upon. BVA staff periodically monitors progress and is always available for further assistance.
- Each arts group helped by BVA is asked to submit a written evaluation of the project or projects once a year or at the end of each project.

4. QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

5. DISTRIBUTION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

A brief explanation should be given.

6. ADJOURNMENT, THANK EVERYONE FOR COMING

INFORMATIONAL MEETING FOR BUSINESSES

Part of the feasibility study is determining if there is an interest on the part of the business community in BVA, both as volunteers and potential supporters. Following are some tips on how to get business involved.

- **Involve in Planning/Leadership**—From the start, enlist one or more major business leaders to serve on the planning committee who are truly enthusiastic about BVA. Find someone who is willing to be a public spokesperson and to enlist his or her peers. Getting your local chamber of commerce or other business organization to endorse the concept and join the planning committee are other good strategies. A number of BVAs have started as a result of chamber of commerce activity, including the BVA at the Arts & Business Council of Greater Philadelphia.
- **Promote BVA to Businesses**—Get on the agenda for a chamber board or committee meeting. Go to other leading business organizations as well. Place a story in their newsletters about BVA once it is assured that it will start in your area. This will raise visibility, add credibility, and often generate volunteers.
- **Make Direct Calls**—Preferably with a business member of the planning committee, make direct calls on key people in the business community that you feel need to buy in to the BVA program. Take them to lunch or visit them in their offices. Take written materials and present the case for BVA from the perspective of how it can involve and benefit the company's employees and help large numbers of arts groups improve their management practices. These people can range from

the CEO to the managing partner or bank branch manager to public affairs directors or contributions officers. See the highest level person you need to bring the company on board.

Tell them how they can help—provide a representative from the company for the planning/steering committee, send out a memo or authorize an article in the company newsletter to help recruit employees, and/or financially.

- **Enlist BVA Help**—Through the national office, contacts can be made by companies active with other affiliates that have local offices. Often hearing from a peer who is familiar with BVA from within the company makes a major difference.
- **Host a Group Meeting**—A small breakfast or luncheon meeting hosted by a major business leader for a select group of people you want to become supportive can also serve as an excellent way to introduce BVA. You can show one of the videos and, if possible, even have someone experienced with the program share their experience.

As with the arts meeting, these activities should take place before disseminating the questionnaire so the questionnaire is not a "cold call." If you have to mail the questionnaire without any prior contact, be sure the cover letter is signed by someone they know if at all possible.

Community Survey Tools

SAMPLE COVER LETTER TO ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

A group of business leaders and arts organizations is considering the possibility of establishing a Business Volunteers for the Arts® (BVA) program in (area). This skills-based volunteerism program has proven to be a very effective way to involve more business people directly with nonprofit arts organizations and to provide free, one-on-one, ongoing management consulting advice in such areas as finance, marketing, public relations, and strategic planning.

BVA was created in New York City in 1975 and is overseen by the staff of Americans for the Arts, and organization whose mission is to serve, advance, and lead the network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain, and support the arts in America. The staff of Private Sector Initiatives department oversees BVA, as well as the network of program partners who operate locally a wide range of programs that aim to develop mutually beneficial relationships between business and the arts.

The BVA program has a number of unique components that have contributed to a strong track record:

- Professional management.
- Training for program directors by Americans for the Arts.
- Manuals, case studies, interviewing and assessment materials, and management tools are made available to licensed affiliates.
- Established volunteer recruitment procedures and publicity materials.
- Careful interviewing and screening of prospective volunteers.
- Eight-to-ten hour volunteer orientation program that prepares them to work in the nonprofit arts environment.
- Thorough assessment process for arts group requests for assistance to ensure projects that will move organizations forward.
- Matching process that considers arts needs, volunteer skills and interests, and compatibility of personalities.
- Ongoing staff monitoring, assistance, and evaluation.

Enclosed is a questionnaire to determine interest in the program by (area) nonprofit arts organizations. We would appreciate your filling it out and returning it by (date) at (address).

Thank you very much. If you have questions, please call (name and number).

SAMPLE ARTS ORGANIZATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of Organization: _____

2. Address: _____

3. City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

4. Phone: _____ Fax: _____

5. Type of Cultural Organization (check all that apply):

- Theatre
- Visual Arts/Museums
- Music
- Arts Council/Service Organization
- Dance
- Heritage Sites
- Multi-Disciplinary
- Arts Education
- Literature
- Film/Video/Broadcasting
- Science/History Museums
- Religious/Non-Arts Community Centers
- Opera
- Zoological/Horticultural
- Libraries/Archives
- Historic Preservation
- Other (list):

6. Name and title of person filling out questionnaire:

7. Do you currently use volunteers in your organization (beyond your board of directors)?

- Yes
- No

If so, please describe:

8. Do you currently receive business support?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how would you define that business support?

- Volunteers
- Funding
- In-kind Help
- Other (list)

9. Do you have business representatives on your board?

- Yes
- No

10. Have you ever sought management assistance from experts outside your board?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please describe:

11. Would you utilize the Business Volunteers for the Arts® program if it were available?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please check the areas of expertise you might utilize. Please rank the top three of most interest, with "1" as the most needed:

____ DATABASE DEVELOPMENT

- Market research/vendor search
- System implementation
- Data and asset transfer
- Staff training and adoption
- Database customization
- Other (list) _____

____ FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

- Develop budget and accounting systems
- Cash flow planning/money management/investments
- Insurance issues
- Other (list) _____

____ FUNDRAISING

- Plan fundraising campaign strategy
- Proposal review and assistance
- Assist in planning income-producing activities such as benefits
- Other (list) _____

____ GRAPHIC DESIGN

- Logo/branding design
- Website design
- App/mobile interface design
- Printed materials design
- Other (list) _____

____ IT (GENERAL TECH)

- Computer/management information systems
- Product/vendor search
- New systems implementation
- Staff training and adoption
- Other (list) _____

____ LEGAL

- Nonprofit status documentation

- Copyright/trademark issues
- Work/vendor contracts
- Other (list) _____

____ MARKETING, BRANDING, AND PR

- Market research, including audience survey development
- Marketing/audience development campaigns
- Advertising
- Media campaign
- Branding/logo development
- Other (list) _____

____ PROGRAMMING

- Market research and strategizing
- Secure venues
- Performance/exhibit/etc. installation assistance
- Other (list) _____

____ SOCIAL MEDIA

- Social media plan for Twitter/Facebook/etc.
- Implementation of new social media platform
- Staff training and adoption
- Other (list) _____

____ SPECIAL EVENTS

- Securing vendors
- Securing sponsors
- Logistics (location rental, catering, etc.)
- Marketing and promotion
- Other (list) _____

____ STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Development of mission statement, goals, and objectives
- Development of business operating plan
- Development of long-range plan
- Program evaluation/new program development
- Other (list) _____

____ HUMAN RESOURCES

- Development of job descriptions
- Volunteer program evaluation and/or development
- General personnel procedures/recruitment/training/compensation and benefit planning
- Other (list) _____

SAMPLE COVER LETTER TO BUSINESSES

A group of business leaders and arts organizations is considering the possibility of establishing a Business Volunteers for the Arts® (BVA) program in (area). This skills-based volunteerism program has proven to be a very effective way to involve more business people directly with nonprofit arts organizations and to provide free, one-on-one, ongoing management consulting advice in such areas as finance, marketing, public relations, and strategic planning.

A group of business leaders and arts organizations is considering the possibility of establishing a Business Volunteers for the Arts® (BVA) program in the (area). BVA has proven to be an effective and cost-efficient way to involve business people with nonprofit arts organizations in volunteer activities that utilize their business skills and expertise and build their leadership potential. Basically, the volunteers donate several hours a week to provide one-on-one management consulting advice on a project basis in such areas as finance, marketing, public relations, and strategic planning. There is no cost for the program to the arts community.

BVA was created in New York City in 1975 and is overseen by the staff of Americans for the Arts, and organization whose mission is to serve, advance, and lead the network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain, and support the arts in America. The staff of Private Sector Initiatives department oversees BVA, as well as works with the business community to help foster arts and business partnerships through programs like the [pARTnership Movement](#). Each year Americans for the Arts honors 10 businesses for their exemplary support of the arts through the [BCA 10](#).

The program has a number of special components that have contributed to its strong track record of effectiveness, including:

- Professional management trained by Americans for the Arts.
- Manuals, case studies, interviewing and assessment materials, record-keeping systems, and management tools are made available by the national office to affiliates.
- Established publicity and recruitment materials and processes.
- Careful interviewing and screening of prospective volunteers.
- A volunteer orientation program that prepares participants to work effectively with nonprofit arts organizations.
- Thorough assessment process for arts groups requesting assistance to ensure project need and effectiveness.
- Matching process that considers arts needs, volunteer skills and interests and compatibility of personalities.
- Ongoing staff monitoring, assistance, and evaluation.

Companies in BVA locations have found the program to be an excellent way to engage their employees in the community and to help a wide variety of arts organizations through financial support of BVA.

Before proceeding, we are conducting surveys of both the arts and business communities to determine need, interest, and possible support. We would appreciate your filling out the enclosed questionnaire and returning it to us by (date) at (address).

SAMPLE BUSINESS INTEREST QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of Business: _____

2. Address: _____

3. City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

4. Phone: _____ Fax: _____

5. Name and title of person filling out questionnaire:

6. Does your company encourage employee volunteerism?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe program:

7. Would your company be interested in having employees involved in a Business Volunteers for the Arts® Program (Note: employees usually participate in their free time)?

Yes

Perhaps

No

8. What areas of expertise could your employees bring?

Database Development

Finance and Administration

Fundraising

Graphic Design

IT (General Tech)

Legal

Marketing, Branding, and PR

Programming

Social Media

Special Events

Strategic Planning

Other (list) _____

9. Would you consider financially supporting a Business Volunteers for the Arts® program?

Yes

Perhaps

No

10. Would you like further information?

Yes

No