



## **TechsmARTs Meeting Report**

On October 25, 2010, C4 Atlanta held the first in a series of informal conversations about technology for arts organizations. The meeting was held at Harlequin Hall in the Center for Puppetry Arts. Ten people attended the meeting, including three staff members from C4 Atlanta.

Joe Winter welcomed participants to the meeting. He asked participants to introduce themselves and to include a problem they are struggling to tackle. "The problem could be a technology problem, or it could be a problem you are trying to solve using technology," he said. Participants identified a considerable range of challenges among their respective companies. These challenges included:

- Software used by an organization is fairly complex, and the staff has not been able to learn how to use it.
- Staffers are aware that there is a lot of potential behind tapping into social media, but they spend very little time to communicate with one another and learn how to take advantage of that potential.
- Two organizations have a website that is maintained by a volunteer, who has very little time to update the site's content. Therefore, some updates may take two or more weeks.
- Several databases within one organization need to be merged into a single database and integrated with web-based services such as MailChimp.
- Should an organization move forward on developing its own location-based, mobile apps? If so, how can they involve patrons in the process?
- All the available hardware within an organization is terribly out-of-date, which means staffers need to bring in their personal laptops to accomplish tasks.
- There is very little expertise among staffers to fix technology problems when they arise.
- One organization's website crashed on the day of an opening, which meant that patrons were unable to purchase tickets online.
- Staffers at an organization struggle to stay in-touch with donors because there is no donor relationship management system.

Joe then reviewed a list of goals that TechsmARTs is working to accomplish. Although the goals are broadly defined, there is still a lot of flexibility which direction TechsmARTs may go, depending on those areas that are identified as having the greatest impact. The first goal of TechsmARTs is education. While there are no specific topics of education, beyond technology for arts organizations, there are specific groups to target: administrators, funders and individual artists. Joe asked the participants if there were other groups who should be targeted. Patrons were also identified as a target group -- and this group may be one where the education

may have the most potential to become a "two-way street." For example, TechsmARTs may become a venue where patrons learn more about the technology needs among arts organizations, even as arts organizations learn more about technology from their patrons.

Another goal of TechsmARTs is to establish community-level dialogue about technology for arts organizations. This could be accomplished in two ways. First, participants could spend some time at each TechsmARTs meeting to share stories with one another. Second, some community-level initiatives could develop out of the conversations that take place at the meetings. Participants were asked if there were other goals that TechsmARTs should adopt. An idea was mentioned that participants mentioned has come up in other meetings: to pool multiple organizations together to hire an IT staff as a cooperative effort. The first challenge associated with such a cooperative effort would be to find the right number of organizations able to participate at the right price point.

Joe then asked participants for some feedback on some "housekeeping items" for TechsmARTs. First, Joe asked, who should participate or be invited to participate? While there was a consensus that "IT people" should participate, the question also inspired a discussion over whether vendors should be pre-screened. One participant encouraged a policy where any vendors who make a presentation should have resources available that do not need to be purchased. Another participant agreed and pointed out that presenting vendors should have a common mission with TechsmARTs. Several participants took note of the frustration they feel when they attend multiple meetings where a vendor may give the same presentation -- that if a topic has been discussed before, a similar discussion at TechsmARTs should build off the previous discussion.

Other "housekeeping items" included the time and frequency of meetings, and where the next meeting should be held. While there was a strong consensus that it seemed appropriate that meetings should be monthly, there was very little consensus over the time of day. One participant pointed out that it was a lucky coincidence that he was able to attend a lunch-time meeting. His work schedule normally wouldn't allow for him to attend a meeting during the day time. It appeared the best consensus was to alternate daytime vs. evening meetings. Claire Christie from PushPush Theater volunteered to host the next TechsmARTs meeting.

For the final "housekeeping item," participants were asked what they would like to get out of TechsmARTs. "Something caught your attention in the invitation you received that compelled you to come to the meeting. What was it?" Joe asked. For one participant, the wide audience focus caught her attention. (The invitation email explicitly included "Managing Directors, Funders, Box Office Managers, Marketing Directors, Development Directors, and anyone else in your organization who either manages technology or uses it to accomplish day-to-day tasks.") Another participant thought this was a good opportunity to become more involved with the rest of the arts community. Another participant wanted to know what certain words meant -- that perhaps a jargon cheat sheet could help TechsmARTs participants not only work through challenges, but also keep up with conversations that may take place at the meetings.

For the final part of the meeting, Joe made a brief presentation on three initiatives that were initiated by the Mellon Foundation: Arts Ready, Project Audience, and

Athena. Each of these three initiatives, while separately governed, are staying in touch with one another to coordinate their efforts where there is overlap.

Arts Ready is an initiative to help arts organizations prepare for disasters of all kinds -- from devastating events such as natural disasters to those that carry a lower impact such as simple burglaries. Part of Arts Ready involves the development of an online tool to help organizations develop plans for readiness, response and recovery. Another part involves the development of downloadable guides to educate arts organizations on preparing for disasters. This initiative is being managed now by South Arts. More information about Arts Ready can be found at <http://www.artsready.org>.

Project Audience is an initiative to develop the next generation technology for community-level audience development. The initiative was developed with a focus on community-level organizations that are hosting arts portal websites, but with no specific end goal in mind. Many ideas were discussed in 2009, at a conference in Chicago, which Joe was invited to attend. These ideas included the development of a recommendation engine (as inspired by services like Pandora or Amazon), data standards for show listing information, and many others. Since that conference, a governing board was formed, which then worked on developing a model for an information service for regional arts portals. More information about Project Audience can be found at <http://www.projectaudience.org>.

Athena is an initiative to build an open source software platform for the cultural sector. In other words, the platform would act as a foundation upon which modules can be developed and interact with one another. The first module under development is Athena Tix, an open source ticketing and donor management system. This initiative is being managed by Fractured Atlas. In the long-term, future Athena-based modules will enable a more integrated approach to developing software for many other initiatives, possibly including Arts Ready and Project Audience. Other modules currently on the table include cultural asset mapping and venue management software. More information about Athena can be found at <http://fracturedatlas.org>.

At the conclusion of the presentation, with the remaining time left, Joe asked if there were any ideas for topics for the next TechsmARTs meeting. Daniel Summers and Jenna Knight both offered to give a 5-10 minute presentation at the next meeting. Some of the topic ideas shared by participants included:

- What is currently in the works in social media space?
- How can we be more effective at cross-promotions with other arts organizations?
- How can we track success of social media initiatives?
- What tools are available to make it easier to monitor social media activity?

In addition to the above ideas, participants felt it would be good to have an online TechsmARTs forum where ideas and resources can be shared among participants. In addition to ideas and resources, the forum could act as a place to house meeting reports and the jargon cheat sheet proposed earlier in the meeting.