



Artists at Risk Hub Project—Summary

INTRODUCTION

The Artists at Risk Hub (ARH) is a pilot project intended to 1) enhance coordination and information-sharing among organizations and individuals working to assist artists at risk; 2) provide a point of entry and referral to artists in need of assistance; and 3) help strengthen the field as a whole by engaging new and existing stakeholders and increasing the visibility of this vital work. Over a 33-month period from July 2016–March 2019, the ‘hub’ will become a focal point for the creative community, fueling greater information-sharing, enhanced assistance to individual artists, and a stronger field serving threatened artists. Through close collaboration with organizations serving artists at risk, we hope to expand considerably the available services and level of support for artists at risk worldwide. The hub will work to transform the landscape of artists’ rights and protections, amplifying the impact of distinct organizations’ efforts, better protecting individual artists and creative expression, and elevating this small, under-resourced field so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

BACKGROUND AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Artists play a critical role in contemporary society: when able to freely express themselves, artists stimulate innovation, promote dialogue, bear witness to inhumanity, reinvent media, articulate cultural critiques, and work with communities to effect change. The influence of writers, painters, musicians, filmmakers, and other artists has today been heightened by platforms that allow access to vast global audiences. It is precisely because they wield this power that many artists around the world face threats as a result of their creative expression. These threats—encompassing intimidation, violence, censorship, legal harassment, and other forms of persecution by both governments and non-state actors—not only harm and constrain the individual artist, but also lead to self-censorship and inhibition among other members of the community. These threats rob artists of the opportunity for creative expression and impoverish those societies that go without their contributions, insights, and inspirations.

The risk of persecution and physical harm is widespread globally for creative people working in all forms. The PEN network currently addresses several hundred cases of authors, playwrights, poets, and other creative artists at risk. In 2015, Freemuse registered 469 cases of censorship and attacks on artistic freedom, ranging from killings to detentions, nearly double the number logged in 2014. Behind these statistics hundreds more are affected without being counted, and other ramifications from artistic expression denied or withheld in fear cannot be measured. Recent cases illustrate the varied forms these violations take. There were three reported cases of musicians murdered in 2015 because of their work, according to Freemuse—one in Mexico and two in Pakistan—and dozens of additional cases of serious physical threats or attacks. In Cuba, prominent artist Tania Bruguera was arrested in May 2015 for publicly reading a controversial text. In March, the Russian culture minister fired theater director Boris Mezdrich for including a controversial interpretation of the life of Jesus in an opera, purportedly offending the Orthodox Church. The hundreds of cases each year pose critical barriers to the creative expression that fosters open dialogue and moves society forward. While many artists rally in defiance and continue their work, others engage in self-censorship, or live in constant fear and trauma.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The hub will support, unite, and help advance the constellation of organizations working to assist artists at risk. For this 3-year pilot, we will work in partnership with other key groups, networks, and individuals in the field and define artists broadly to include writers, visual artists, musicians, cartoonists, as well as other individuals who produce creative output. Our goal is to maximize the collective resources available to assist at-risk artists by enhancing the capacity of and coordination among the organizations that serve them, leveraging each group's strengths and increasing their visibility and effectiveness.

The hub will connect and facilitate the work of its constituency of groups and experts working to meet the needs of artists under threat. As a coordination point, it will work in service of not only artists at risk but also those that help produce or curate their work, strengthening local and regional organizations and working through referrals where possible. The hub will seek to mobilize new institutions to become more active participants in the space, including law firms, artists' residencies, free expression and press freedom groups, and trauma services organizations. The hub also will seek opportunities to elevate the field, including mobilizing additional resources to ensure sustainability over time.

The hub will collaborate closely with the Artist Protection Fund at IIE, as well as other established networks such as the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) and Artsfex. Project staff will receive strategic advice from a 6-9 person **advisory committee** that will include key stakeholders and will seek to encompass a diverse membership. The committee will convene 3 times per year (twice via conference call and once in person) to offer input on key decisions. It will not have a formal governance role or fiduciary responsibility, but will serve as a sounding board, providing guidance and facilitating connections.

The hub will address the needs of at-risk artists and the organizations that serve them through:

Network building: The hub will carry out a two-pronged approach, identifying the needs of at-risk artists and groups active in the field and, in parallel, developing and cataloguing a wide network of organizations, service providers, and experts who can meet these needs. Information on the network's constituents will be maintained via a regularly updated internal database.

Clearinghouse: The hub will collate and maintain an online clearinghouse that will include resources such as emergency assistance services, residency opportunities, resettlement processes, legal assistance, visa guidance, employment resources, and trauma services. Hub staff will respond to requests from artists as well as organizations that need support in dealing with the situations of at-risk artists who approach them.

Communication and information sharing: The hub will proactively facilitate relevant and systematic communication among constituents, through 1) an email listserv that will share information of broad interest, such as additions to the clearinghouse or case studies, and 2) targeted, secure communications channels for use in sharing more sensitive information with smaller groups working on particular issues (e.g., vetting of cases, collaboration on meeting an artist's needs, requests for assistance/referrals, etc.).

Convening: The hub will convene 2 meetings over 3 years to provide opportunities for networking, sharing knowledge, building trust, assessing key trends in the field, and disseminating best practices among constituents.

Profile-raising: The hub will work to elevate the collective profile of organizations working in this field by communicating overall trends of artistic freedom to journalists, human rights monitors, policymakers, donors, and other stakeholders involved in the arts.