



NEW ENGLAND FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

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Notes from NEFA's Public Art Discussion Series Topic: Crowdfunding Public Art 10.23.12

Session 1: Discussion with Big Red & Shiny and the Awesome Foundation

[Big Red & Shiny](#) and the [Awesome Foundation](#) led the first session. Big Red & Shiny is an online journal about contemporary art and journalism based in Boston. They recently led a successful Kickstarter campaign for the re-launch of their magazine: [the Big Red Shindig](#). The Awesome Foundation, founded in Boston, distributes a series of monthly \$1,000 grants to projects and their creators. The Awesome Foundation presented two micro-granted project: [Union Square Public Benches](#) and a [Caleb Neelon mural for Tobin School](#). You can find others on the [Awesome Foundation website](#).

Take-Aways

- Young artists and professionals are leaving Boston. The City is faced with a challenge: how to keep young talent?
- Big Red & Shiny talked about the importance of using social media to get the word out about their launch. Don't forget the power of [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)!
- A raise of hands showed that less than a quarter of the room worked on permanent public art compared to those that worked in temporary public art.
- Artists believe that crowdfunding is not just for temporary projects. Rallying support, effective messaging, gathering volunteers, and fundraising are all necessary for permanent public art projects as well.

Other Funders:

- [Indiegogo](#) is a funding platform that boasts a unique algorithm-gogofactor. Use their social media tools when you launch your funding campaign to start sharing, tweeting, and encouraging people to "like" your campaign to boost your gogofactor.
- [Feast Mass](#) is a recurring dinner party in Boston in which attendees vote on proposals presented earlier in the evening. The winner receives a grant funded entirely from the night's ticket sales.
- [Providence Provision](#) is a mealtime gathering of community members that provides a chance to democratically fund emerging projects in Rhode Island.

Session 2: Kickstarter Panel

Stephanie Pereira, Kickstarter Arts Director, led a panel about using Kickstarter. Five local artists discussed how they produced a Kickstarter campaign. Here is a list of the panelists and their projects:

- Jean Nicolazza, painter: [Six Paintings About Water in Sixty Days](#)
- Roberta Paul and Beth Kantrowitz, artist & curator: [Move Me Public Art Project](#)
- Sandrine Schaefer, performance artist: [Adventures of Being \(in Mexico\)](#)
- Jennifer Wadell, portrait photographer: [People and their Prized Possessions](#)

I. WHAT IS KICKSTARTER?

Kickstarter is a funding platform for creative projects - everything from films, games, and music to art, design, and technology. Since its launch on April 28, 2009, over \$350 million has been pledged by more than 2.5 million people, funding more than 30,000 creative projects. To date, 44% of projects have reached their funding goals. Over 70% of projects have a goal of \$1,000 - \$10,000; Stephanie asserts that this is the "true ecosystem of Kickstarter."

How does it work? Each project is independently created and crafted by the person behind it. Every project creator sets the project's funding goal and deadline. If people like the project, they can pledge money to make it happen. If the project succeeds in reaching its funding goal, all backers' credit cards are charged when time expires. If the project falls short, no one is charged.

Why all-or-nothing? Kickstarter's [FAQ page](#) says: "It's less risk for everyone; it motivates; it works." For example, once the project hits 60% of giving then there is a 98% success rate. This exemplifies the power of momentum; people are more likely to give to something that they think is going to succeed.

Nitty gritty detail - Fees. If a project is successfully funded, Kickstarter applies a 5% fee to the funds collected. Pledges are processed by Amazon Payments. These processing fees work out to roughly 3-5% so prepare to spend 8-10% of your funds.

Like stats? For more numbers check out [Kickstarter's Stats page](#).

II. LOGISTICS OF A CAMPAIGN

Storytelling

- Kickstarter is a powerful way to tell your story. It is more than just a fundraising scheme, it's also a PR platform to get people excited and take ownership.

Videos

- The video is how you present yourself to the world. The purpose of the video is to tell people what they will get from supporting your project.
- Projects with videos succeed at a much higher rate than those without (50% vs. 30%).
- Tips: Be yourself; be energetic; don't be afraid to be quirky; remember to have good lighting and good sound.

Backers

- Don't undervalue the Kickstarter community. 25% of pledges come from them!
- The \$25 and \$100 pledges are important. \$25 is an ideal contribution because collectively, it spurs momentum. \$100 contributes to budget significantly, but it provides less buzz.
- Tips: People who pledge are automatically subscribed to your list. Send out emails updating them on your project; give them personal updates and share info.

Rewards

- Make sure you provide an equal exchange of value. Offer a reward of substance that resonates with the philosophy of your project.
- Stephanie said that a reward is a cross between the Museum Shop and the Gallery; it is both a token/memento, and can be a piece of art.
- Most Kickstarter campaigns provide a copy of the "thing." This is a challenge for public art. Think about prints, participation in a live event/activity, paint the contributors into your work, invite people into the creative experience. Let them be a part of the process and work. People are excited to be involved!
- Tips: Stephanie suggests 5-7 different kinds of rewards and make sure to let the \$5-10 contributors have an opportunity to receive something!

III. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PANEL

1. Most people are afraid to make a video.

Jean Nicolazza's stumbling block in the process turned out to be the video; "it's as amateur as it gets," she told the group. "But, the only way to make a successful campaign was to tell my story and be myself." Jean wrote the script and then filmed the video three times.

2. If you partner with a nonprofit, you can offer tax-deductible donations.

Roberta Paul and Beth Kantrowitz partnered with the Cambridge Arts Council (CAC), a 501 3(c). The CAC helped with the financial logistics of the campaign. Roberta and Beth were able to offer a perk to their backers – tax deductible donations!

3. How do you set your budget goal?

Sandrine Schaefer's (\$1,000) and Roberta and Beth's (\$24,725) budgets are on opposite ends of the spectrum. Sandrine did not want to tax her network. She launched 4 campaigns in a short time so she lowered her goal to make sure that she could reach it. Beth and Roberta on the other hand said that knowing the time and energy that is needed to go into the campaign - "if we're going to do this, we need to do it big."

4. Think creatively about rewards.

Sandrine let her backers be part of the process. She made a new work from their contributions. The following is an example of her reward: For \$338 or more, "Choose Your Own Adventure!" – You choose a space on route in Mexico for Sandrine to attempt to fit into. You will also receive exclusive documentation of this adventure.

5. Rewards require time and resources.

You not only have to think about how much it will cost to produce your rewards, you also have to think about the cost, time and logistics of sending out the rewards. Roberta and Beth suggest you organize the list in excel, remember to buy the boxes and envelopes, and stay on top of sending out the rewards as the responses come in. Roberta and Beth gave out magnets, t-shirts, postcards, posters, and \$1000 backers received a lunch in Roberta's studio. They cited that the posters were the biggest pain; they produced too many.

6. Don't worry if you "sell out" your rewards.

If you sell out of your rewards, you can come up with new rewards in the middle of the process.

7. Sometimes people don't want rewards.

22% of Roberta and Beth's backers didn't want rewards.

8. Who is going to be your crew?

You can hire help, ask friends, or partner with collaborators.

9. How did you spread the word?

- Jen Wadell used Facebook primarily. "I have 470 friends; 10 people posted it, and then it go re-posted." Jean also used Facebook; a friend of a friend of a friend worked at NPR, saw the post, and posted the project on the NPR Facebook page. Don't underestimate the Facebook network!
- Jean stresses that it is important to ask for support - "Don't just put the campaign out there and expect the Kickstarter page to do all of the work." Jean hosted an event at her studio. "There are people out there that want you to succeed," Jean says.

10. Who is your backer?

Jean's project landed on the homepage of Kickstarter, and \$1,000 came in from that spotlight. She did not know half of her backers, and her campaign even had international reach.

11. Kickstarter builds communities.

Jean offered a panel of one of her paintings as a reward. She gave away 20 panels. Three people in Philadelphia came together because of their panels.

12. Consider the timing of your campaign.

Sandrine thought about the other artists in her community doing Kickstarter campaigns and tried not to overlap with them. She ended up running the campaign around her birthday.

13. Campaign Timeframe

Roberta and Beth's project took two years because it included an exhibition and book; essentially 5 projects in one. Sandrine's project took six months. She prepared a month and a half before her trip; she went to Mexico; then made the rewards when she returned. Jean spent five months on her project. She prepped for two months; launched a thirty-day campaign; and painted for sixty days.

14. What were unexpected outcomes?

- Sandrine: Never underestimate the power of putting yourself out there. For example: a radio show at a college in New Jersey interviewed Sandrine and a new set of backers came from the interview.
- Jean: There is a residual effect. She is still getting referrals and comments from the Kickstarter community.
- Jen: Mass appeal sells.
- Beth and Roberta: It is an opportunity to connect with new and old people (they had backers from their fifth grade class). Roberta explained that there is a magnet on practically every car in her neighborhood. "No one would have felt as included if this project was grant funded. Our thank you was not to a foundation, but to everyone," says Roberta.

Take-aways from the conversation after the panel.

- This process is not for the faint of heart!
- Pay your taxes and get an accountant. Your project is considered an income. Prove that it is not a hobby.
- Don't use the word donation. "Kickstarter is about patronage and about commerce. Commerce is what is driving Kickstarter," says Stephanie.

Inspired to crowdfund your next project? Check out the [Kickstarter School](#) webpage to learn how to start your Kickstarter campaign. Or check out other crowdfunders like the [Awesome Foundation](#), [Indiegogo](#), [Feast MASS](#) and [Providence Provision](#). Know of other crowdfunding resources? Send them to [Elysian](#), public art coordinator, and she will share them on the blog!