

## **Culturally Responsive Evaluation**

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**National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA)**

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### **Case Study Design: Develop a Culturally Responsive Evaluation**

Overview of the Assignment: You and your team have been funded to design an evaluation of an arts program. Background information is provided below to give you a sense of the context in which you will be developing your Culturally Responsive Evaluation. Note: The case is loosely based on actual events.

#### Background:

**Arts Based Civic Transformation (ABCT)** - The primary components of the program are:

- 1) Life skills training (to help youth make good decisions about the kind of behaviors in which they will engage);
- 2) Education (about the physical and mental health issues that can result from drug and alcohol use); and
- 3) Opportunities for role play (youth practice how one might handle a situation in which drugs and alcohol are being used).

Program Background: Meditations Trilogy Part I is a performance that is part manifesto, part family history, and part spiritual evocation. Goddess - an actress - depicts the very human reality of mental illness in our culture by fusing monologue, movement, and music to tell the story of Lowquesha, a vibrant young woman, and her journey through the mental health system. The character of Lowquesha is at once present and real, but is also metaphor for the larger societal barriers that exist for those who live with mental illness, including family and caregivers. The journey leads audiences through the places she must encounter and through the chain of people she encounters. Goddess hopes the work will educate audiences, remove some of that stigma, spark dialogue around mental illness, and even shift attitudes towards people who live with mental illness and open eyes about hospital care.

The Hip Hop Mental Health Project (HHMHP), which Goddess co-founded with Dr. Peter Fraenkell grew out of touring LOW. The HHMHP's primary purpose is to engage the Hip Hop generation at large, offering culturally relevant and empowering techniques to break the silence about mental health and wellness and gain support and information. The project focuses on reaching young people of color in urban communities and those that provide support to them, as they are most affected by disparities in mental health.

At the end of the piece, Goddess breaks the fourth wall with a closing monologue that shifts the audience's attention from the story onstage to the world around them. In discussion groups that immediately follow the performance, she hopes to create a safe space for the audience right there in the theater to confront issues around mental health that might not happen in another context. By having professional counselors lead these discussions and researchers document and evaluate their effectiveness, Goddess also hopes to create greater collaboration among mental health professionals, artists, and eventually those who might want to replicate this effort in their own communities. Ultimately, HHMHP

aims to demonstrate the ways in which art can foster civic engagement—or in this instance to build community and common purpose around the issue of mental illness—through collaborative planning.

Conclusion: Art provides a visceral experience and can educate through emotional and kinesthetic connection. Art validates emotional engagement with an issue. Arts-based civic engagement can:

- Encourage public discourse about an issue or need, sometimes among specific groups of people.
- Educate people about a particular issue or condition in their own community or society at large and raise awareness, insight, and empathy.
- Lead people to both desire and envision responses and solutions to a societal problem.

In her vision for LOW and the conversations that surround it, Goddess has a clear concept of the ways in which art is an appropriate if not ideal channel for meeting her goals. First, art can make conversations safe by breaking the code of silence around a taboo subject like mental illness. Second, art provides a visceral experience and can educate on an emotional and kinesthetic level. Finally, art allows audience members to confront the subject matter on their own terms, allowing them to safely enter the dialogue and offer their range of opinions or feelings on the subject matter.

The Task at Hand: Given the information provided above concerning the program and the funders, design a Culturally Responsive Evaluation of the arts program. Consider the CRE framework in designing your evaluation, using the questions at each stage to help you define the kind of evaluation, the methods and measures you use, the participants in the evaluation, data analysis, dissemination, and possible utilization expected.

The following questions can also be used to stimulate your thinking in using CRE.

1. What dimensions of diversity and cultural competency are important to consider in this case? How would you go about trying to determine what they are?
2. How would you address issues of power in the evaluation?
3. How does the issue of cultural competency enter into this evaluation planning? What kind of evidence would you accept that people involved are exhibiting cultural competency? How would you raise such questions about this concept in the planning process?