

From the Top, Inc.
Collaborative Advocacy Grant Final Report
Hunt Alternatives Foundation

From the Top is grateful for the opportunity provided by the Hunt Alternatives Foundation to partner with the Conservatory Lab Charter School in an advocacy event promoting funding for arts education in MA. We are pleased to provide you a final report on our concert at the Massachusetts State House on November 8, 2011.

1. Comment on your advocacy activity, including:

a) A brief description of your advocacy activity:

On November 8, 2011 From the Top (FTT) and the Conservatory Lab Charter School (CLCS) co-presented a concert at the Massachusetts State House in support of arts education in MA. There were about 40 people total in attendance, including House and Senate members themselves and members of their staff, who attended to learn more about new education initiatives at both organizations—FTT’s Center for the Development of Arts Leadership (CDAL) and the CLCS’s El Sistema program. Parents and other supporters of FTT and CLCS were also among the attendees.

From the Top coordinated the event with Representative Alice Peisch, who provided an introduction to the event describing both FTT and CLCS’s work in the area of arts education and youth development. Following the opening remarks by both Representative Peisch and Head of School of the CLCS, Diana Lam, was an orchestra performance by CLCS students. The event concluded with remarks and musical performances by participants in From the Top’s CDAL program. The CDAL Mentor and Arts Leaders who spoke described the challenges and gratification of working to create positive change through music.

b) What inspired you to choose your selected activity:

As FTT and CLCS focus on music education and performance opportunities for young people, a concert was the most appropriate genre for this event. The event enabled the legislators and other audience members to view firsthand the power of music to enrich the lives of young people. It also gave participants of FTT’s CDAL program a chance to exercise the leadership skills they are developing as advocates for arts education funding.

c) Your experience working as a collaboration with other coalition members:

Working with the CLCS was easy and beneficial for FTT. It broadened the scope of what FTT was able to showcase at the State House and, since we already have a partnership with them, it was a natural extension of our work together. It allowed each organization an opportunity to educate their constituents about the their work and the partnership.

d) The activity’s connection to the work of your organization:

In 2011 FTT and the CLCS each launched transformational programs designed to effect social change through music. FTT instituted CDAL in January 2011 and, this past September, the CLCS became the first U.S. public school to incorporate El Sistema as a part of its school day. These programs operated in partnership during the past year, when CDAL participants designed and implemented a project to help bring the El Sistema program to all

CLCS students as part of an afterschool program. The two organizations decided to capitalize on their collaboration to show the potential impact of arts education through this event.

e) The activity's connection to increasing public resources for the youth arts sector: The existing partnership between the two organizations offered an excellent opportunity for us to work together as advocates for arts education in Massachusetts. As the budget crisis in Massachusetts continues and education funding faces continued cuts, both organizations sought to demonstrate at this event that this type of public investment delivers excellent returns in preparing young people as committed students and engaged citizens.

f) Youth, donor, board member and other supporter involvement: Both students from CLCS and FTT's CDAL participants had the opportunity to demonstrate the impact of music on their lives through their performances and in the short statements they made. CDAL participants also had the unique opportunity to serve as advocates for the arts to their local legislators.

2. What does success of your advocacy activity look like?

From the Top regards the following as measures of success of the advocacy event:

- Participation of CDAL team members and their increased understanding of how to implement such an event and how to present a case for education funding to lawmakers;
- Strengthening of the relationship between From the Top and the Conservatory Lab Charter School; and
- The production of an entertaining and informative concert and presentation at the State House for an audience of legislators and staffers that leads to increased awareness of and support for arts education among legislators.

3. What do you imagine will be the broader impact or ripple effect if you achieve your highest possibilities for your advocacy activity?

Through this event, we hope to have an impact on maintaining or even increasing arts education funding at the state level.

4. What surprised you most?

The only real "surprise" was the difficulty we experienced in arriving at a mutually agreed upon date between all involved parties.

5. What advice would you give a colleague based on your experience?

We would advise a colleague staging a similar event to ask as many legislators as possible to be involved to increase the number that have a stake in the event and/or attend the event.

6. What advice would you give Hunt Alternatives Fund for implementing future advocacy grants?

We would advise Hunt to keep the advocacy event a collaboration between organizations as the partnership proved very mutually beneficial in terms of planning and implementation of the event.