

Increasing support for the arts in Los Angeles County



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When Joel Shapiro and Justin Yoffe oversaw the installation of solar panels on the roof of the Electric Lodge in Venice, California, in 2001, they may not have realized they'd also made the first step in what would become a countywide movement to make the arts into green businesses.

"I asked myself, 'What is the purpose of a cultural organization in a community?'" Yoffe recalls. "I wanted to be part of setting the example."

Their initial review of LEED certification led them to an eighty-page document of regulations whose upgrades and changes would cost tens of thousands of dollars —worthwhile investments that they are, unfortunately, out of reach for many nonprofit businesses.

Yoffe said the movement started off very small and grassroots. A voluntary coalition of galleries, theatres, and dance studios came on board with an agreement to make small, incremental changes—adding recycle bins to their lobbies, changing some light bulbs for example.

"What we realized is that by adapting these green practices, more people wanted to be at the Electric Lodge. Suddenly, we had more demand for rentals, a larger audience, and people were more excited about what we were doing. And then our donor base started to expand."

From this modest beginning, the Arts:Earth Partnership grew. Yoffe and Shapiro connected with regional leaders, including LA Stage Alliance, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, and the City of Santa Monica to learn more about how to establish a special certification for arts businesses—cultural facilities, theaters, museums, dance studios, art galleries, performing arts companies, and individual artists—throughout the region. Each city has its own standards for the certification, which makes Los Angeles County—with its 88 unique municipalities—challenging, but not impossible.

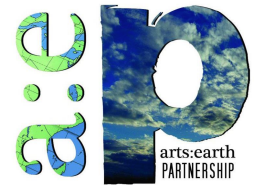
While Arts:Earth Partnership is a great step forward for Los Angeles County, it is also the very first recognized green business association for the arts in the United States. For arts organizations, the certification often carries with it savings in energy, water and waste expenses and access to rebates, and benefits that carry real impact on their ability to provide access to art, performances, and education for members of their community.

AEP's first big effort came from the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, who tasked them with evaluating the city-owned cultural facilities to determine how green their operations were. None of them could be immediately certified, Yoffe recalls, partly because the pre-approved products managers could buy for their facilities were not green. However, when the Department of Sanitation heard from AEP about how to make the small changes to extend access to greener materials, the department came online to support AEP's efforts. Because of this work, Yoffe stresses, all seven hundred city-owned facilities now have access to the same green products.

Now AEP provides, with support from Los Angeles's Department of Cultural Affairs, an inexpensive pathway to cultural organizations striving to become more green. As part of the consultation, which costs approximately \$300 over two years, AEP provides a list of upgrades necessary to achieve their green certification along with the costs and an implementation plan based on the organization's capacity. AEP can also provide a cost payback analysis to help the cultural organization understand the long term impact of its changes.

Adam Meltzer came on board in May 2011 as the programs director for A:EP to help oversee this work. "When we green a theater or a museum/gallery, you not only see a difference when you walk into the space, but you can quantify that difference into making the world a better place," Meltzer says. "Fewer toxins in the air, more recycled products, less waste, and reduced CO2 emissions released into the environment due to reduced energy use."

Seventeen businesses in Los Angeles County have received A:EP's green certification: Art-In-The-Park, Barnsdall Junior



Arts Center, Canoga Park Youth Arts Center, Craft & Folk Art Museum, Eagle Rock Community Cultural Center, Lankershim Arts Center, Madrid Theater, McGroarty Arts Center, Nate Holden Performing Arts Center, rediscover Center, Ruskin Group Theatre Co., Santa Monica Museum of Art, the Electric Lodge, the G2 Gallery, the Miles Memorial Playhouse, and William Reagh/LA Photo Center. These are only the beginning, though, as A:EP continues to consult with more and more creative businesses to help them achieve the certification. "The more people we have on board, the more powerful the message is," Meltzer says.

Yoffe believes this green movement is a way to establish the arts sector as truly innovative outside our own silo. "There's a meme in this country that states the arts are a dependent sector, a parasitic sector, that funding for the arts is objectionable. But we are the visionaries. We're the way out of contemporary problems." Meltzer agrees. "We had to find a way to get organizations to say yes to environmental sustainability instead of no, so we simplified the process of certification. Making it simple and cost effective is the way to do that." Arts:Earth Partnership's work, they believe, will help ensure the arts have a seat at the table when communities talk about sustainability.

"People have committed to changing their organizations into places they can create art in a non-toxic environment and feel good about working in partnership with the planet instead of taking a short term outlook," Meltzer says. "That's what keeps me going." After ten years of work, A:EP can now point to quantifiable results—not only for the organizations they serve, but for all the residents of Los Angeles County.

For more information on Arts:Earth Partnership, visit their website at <http://www.artsearthpartnership.org>.

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