

Fieldwork Facilitator Training & Manual



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Fieldwork Facilitator Training & Manual
CONTENTS

THE FIELD TODAY

FIELDWORK VALUES

Practice
Openness
Seeing More
Diversity
Authorship

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS FOR FACILITATORS

Creating a Community Contract
Feedback on Feedback
Different Fieldwork Models
Upping the Ante
About Suggestions

THE FIELD NETWORK

THE FACILITATOR'S MANUAL

THE FIELD TODAY

The Field endeavors to remain critically engaged and responsive to the needs and issues affecting 21st century artists. Under the leadership of Executive Director, Jennifer Wright-Cook, and Deputy Director, Shawn René Graham, The Field and the Field Network are currently in a period of reflection and action to ensure Field programs are truly inclusive and actively grapple with unconscious bias. In 2017, the Field participated in The Racial Equity in the Arts Innovation Lab in which they worked with 60 other New York City-based arts and culture institutions to develop skills and strategies for interrupting racial inequity within their organizations, and positively affecting their audiences, stakeholders, constituencies -- as well as staff and team members of color. In March 2018, The Field revisited the Fieldwork Guide to better reflect its commitment to providing a safe, inclusive space for artists of all racial, cultural, and social backgrounds. This is an ongoing process and your input is welcome.

As The Field has grown over the past 30 years, it has remained true to its grassroots origin and artist-centered mission to strategically serve the myriad artistic and administrative needs of independent performing artists and companies who work in the fields of dance, theater, music, text, performance art, and multi-disciplinary art forms. Continuing, the commitment to non-curation and inclusivity, all Field Programs are open/non-juried. Ultimately, the goal is to create a vibrant cultural community that *authentically* and *intentionally* includes resilient and self-determined artists and makers of all identities.

Poised at the intersection between knowledge and practice, Field programs can be divided into Artistic and Management services. Artistic services help artists create more effective, communicative art. These initiatives include: Fieldwork peer-oriented feedback groups and performance festivals. Management programs support artists and companies from the most emerging to mid-career. Programs include: skill-building workshops on fundraising, touring, etc; fiscal sponsorship to enable artists to receive grants and contributions; and Member News a listing of grant deadlines and opportunities, to name a few.

Fieldwork is a core program and a foundation on which many other Field programs are based. The organization's current focus on equity and diversity is a natural extension of the policy of non-curation, which was a direct response to the art-making climate of the 1980s and 1990s. Reflecting this same responsiveness, The Field's recent pivot to focus on equity and inclusion is a direct response to the art-making climate of the 2000's.

Part of the Race Forward work involved taking a deep look at The Field materials and language for examples of white supremacy. This addendum is a result of the interrogation and revision of Field language, however, it is not a replacement for the original Fieldwork Facilitator's Guide. In fact, we stand by that Guide in a profound and deep way. Ultimately, we may merge the two documents, but for today the idea is that they enhance one another. Inevitably there may be a little repetition between the two we hope is that the combination of a very slightly revised Guide and this new addendum will provide a full understanding of the origins of The Field's unique process of feedback and the radical potential that the method still holds today.

FIELDWORK VALUES

Practice Openness Seeing More Diversity Authorship

Practice

Fieldwork is a practice. No one is perfect at it ever. It is a place to practice looking at and talking about art. The skills we practice in Fieldwork are more important than ever in our present culture: to listen harder, look deeper, perceive more, and engage with another's point of view.

Openness

Fieldwork offers the opportunity to work towards expanding your art-viewing aperture (or aesthetic range) to take in a wider palette of work and reflect back informative, honest and useful feedback. Part of the rigor required here is to enter into a variety of different works with equal generosity. Accept the premise of the piece- its world, aesthetic, racial, cultural or social perspective - and then give feedback from within that place.

In giving your feedback to the artist, it is important for viewers to consider how their own race, gender, and cultural background might affect their understanding of the work. If the work annoys or bothers you, dig around in your own experience to see why. We often tend to be pulled towards work that shares our own aesthetic, and pushed away from work, which challenges our aesthetic. If you find yourself disliking an aspect of the work, focus your attention on what was happening in the piece, rather than on your opinion. Comments like, "I checked out for long periods of time when I was watching the second section..." may be exactly what the artist needs to hear or what they intended. Be honest and rigorous about your own reactions. Investigate your perceptions, particularly if you have an impulse to direct or fix an aspect of the work. Often underneath that impulse is an

observation that would be much more informative for that artist to hear.

What if you are struggling to find something to say, or you find the work challenging or you just didn't "like" it? In Fieldwork, you will definitely encounter unformed, raw, nascent ideas that are not fully fleshed out, boring sections, work that is difficult emotionally, politically, or personally, as well as work which is not your cup of tea. This is good; this is the goal. People come to Fieldwork to share that work so that with your comments it can *become* fully fleshed out, clear, strong, and powerful, even if it never becomes *your* cup of tea aesthetically.

Seeing More

Part of why we don't clap in Fieldwork is so that we can stay in the open, receiving place longer. Applause instantly shifts us into an audience praising a performance, whereas we want to stay in the lab, analyzing or decoding an experiment. See if you can interrupt that judgment process of the brain and before deciding whether or not you "liked" the piece, or thought that it was "good," stay with what you saw in the work, investigate what and how it communicated.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the Fieldwork Guidelines (and definitely the hardest to stick with!) is not making suggestions or directorial comments. It is natural for viewers to quickly jump from what they saw to recommendations for improving the work. By not allowing these suggestions, viewers have to stay with the work that was actually shown; this allows them to dig deeper into its strengths and weaknesses and find more to reflect back to the artist.

Diversity

One of the most valuable things about Fieldwork is that it brings people together who have very different ways of seeing themselves, art, and the world. The more diverse the group is in terms of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, education, discipline, style and experience, the bigger the range of information the artists will receive about how their work is communicating to a broad audience.

Fieldwork is a strong and nimble form that has worked in a wide range of situations: creative workshops, residencies, arts therapy programs, in schools and in prisons. The container of Fieldwork is strong and can hold a wide range of work in every conceivable genre, from those making their first works, to those making their 50th, those with only the slenderest glimmer of an idea shared in under a minute, to those who want feedback on a polished hour long piece. Fieldwork offers a unique

and valuable opportunity to practice equity and inclusion within an arts context.

Authorship

Every artist is in charge of her/his/their own work. One of the most important tenets of Fieldwork is prioritizing each artist's authorship. Artists are both in control of their artistic vision and responsible for achieving it. Because the viewers do not know the goals of the piece, it's not their place to tell the artist how they want them to make their piece. But most importantly, much more information will be conveyed if they ask themselves why they wanted to make a suggestion and explain that to the artist.

Viewers will not agree in their feedback, but Fieldwork is not about consensus, in fact the opposite is true - all of the voices and perspectives are valid and valuable and it is up to the artist to decide in which direction to take their work.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS FOR THE FACILITATOR

Facilitators are not teachers, but peer artists who have had specific training and experience in the Fieldwork process. Most facilitators have participated in several groups, possibly co-facilitated a group and then received further training from The Field. Because of the integral role of the facilitator, The Field administrator's choice of whom should fill this position is important. These additional thoughts are meant to help administrators, Network site leaders and potential facilitators ascertain whether or not the candidate is a good fit. Facilitators should have:

- A commitment to equity and inclusion with a proven ability to create a space that engages people across difference.
- The ability to facilitate cultural framing and address cultural bias as needed.
- The ability to intervene in micro- and macro-aggressions within the group when/if it is needed.

Facilitators should use a gentle touch and should be prepared to actively intervene on any and all aggressions towards participants from historically marginalized groups. At any point, if an artist feels like the feedback is biased by race, gender, culture, they should definitely speak up and the facilitator should intervene to ensure that the viewer has an opportunity to re-state their comments so that the artist's work and vision is addressed respectfully. For example, a facilitator could say something like "That comment is sitting a little funny with me, could you please re-phrase so I am clear on what you are saying?" Since artists are encouraged not to respond to feedback they receive in the moment, this does not mean they are *silenced*; they are free to

ask clarifying questions, to ask about an aspect of the work not addressed in feedback, and to respond themselves or with the facilitator's support to any comments that don't feel right.

Facilitators are supported by the administration of The Field in NYC, and if in other cities, by the Network Manager. They are also peer artists who are managing their own identity, needs, and artistic practice. The facilitator - particularly a facilitator of color - is not expected to hold the emotional labor of the workshop or feedback that negatively impacts them. The facilitator can and should contact the Network Manager or to other facilitators as need be for any support, issue or concern.

Consider Creating a Community Contract

It is important for each participant to consider how their own race, gender, cultural background etc. might help or hinder their understanding of the work and their participation in the group. It is **strongly** recommended that the group create a community contract at the beginning of the session and refer to it as needed throughout the sessions to support **racial and cultural equity for all participants**. Participants may refer to the agreed contract as they see issues arise. This community contract may include the following considerations and any additions the group agrees to add:

- Speak from your experience
- Listen for understanding
- WAIT (why am I talking) - be mindful of the time and space you occupy
- Brave Space (recognizing the humanity in everyone and the right to be respected, and bravely step up if that's not happening)
- Discomfort may not necessarily mean wrong. Remain curious about where quick reactions and thoughts are coming from.

Facilitators can also consider the community agreements from the Center for Equity and Inclusion, based in Portland, Oregon: stay engaged, speak your truth responsibly, listen to understand, be willing to do things differently and experience discomfort, expect and accept non-disclosure, and maintain confidentiality.

Alternately, another way to think about the Fieldwork process is that the participants are creating a micro-community by committing to a covenant of presence, attention and confidentiality.

Feedback on Feedback

If time allows, usually in groups that run for at least six sessions, it is a great idea to have a mid-session conversation in which the group can check-in on the workshop's progression and feedback; this is sometimes called "feedback on feedback." This can be a great time to encourage viewers to improve and deepen their viewing and feedback skills and to gently remind folks about any guidelines that are not being followed. The facilitator can make general comments about the type of feedback that has been given and possibly give some examples of ways to improve feedback, for example showing how to re-phrase a suggestion into an observation. In the context of this open discussion about feedback, the facilitator can make some points without calling out any individuals or putting anyone on the spot, which can be humiliating. This feedback on feedback is also a time to check in on the group in terms of micro-aggressions to ensure that the group feels respectful and equitable.

Different Fieldwork Models

While the classic Fieldwork workshop is 10 sessions with an informal performance at the end, there are many different formats in operation such as introductory free sessions, fishbowls (in which the Fieldwork group does their thing with a larger circle of observers around them), and any number of sessions with or without performances. Some Fieldwork groups are folded into residencies, such as at Earthdance where it is practiced daily for 10 days, or the NEW program in Portland, which has four sessions over a six-month choreography residency. Another group of artists in NYC used Fieldwork to present a significant portion of their entire body of work, at one time, on video and received feedback on the whole of it.

Since Fieldwork is practiced across the country, many groups have come up with their own unique adaptations and idiosyncrasies. Some groups are always in a time crunch with many artists showing and little time for feedback. For example, if 10 people each showed five minutes of material in a two hour group that will only leave seven minutes of feedback for each person, hardly enough for all of the nine artists to give their feedback. So several groups have adopted time saving techniques such as knocking on the floor or snapping fingers while someone is giving feedback to indicate that you agree with that comment. Some artists find this a valuable technique, allowing them to get more information in a short amount of time. Others worry that it puts pressure on the artist by creating consensus about feedback. Groups can decide together, with the facilitator, what works best for their group.

UPPING THE ANTE - ideas to improve & deepen feedback in Fieldwork

Give all of the work shown your undivided attention.
 Look for the strongest moment.
 Share what you perceive to be the artist's intent behind the work.
 Ask yourself: "What was original about the work?"
 Consider how the work is affecting you.
 Challenge your language to meet your experience of the piece.
 Accept the premise of the piece- its world, its aesthetic - and then give feedback from within that model.
 Be as generous as possible in your feedback.
 Reveal more about the piece than yourself through your comments.
 Give feedback that an artist can take back to the studio and use to work deeper/move forward.
 Vary the lens through which you view the work.
 Ask yourself, what did this work mean to me?
 Specifically target the moments where you "fell out," were confused, lost the character, motivation or intention of the work.
 Specifically target the moments that felt crystallized, satisfying, took you forward in the work, created more knowledge of the artist's intention.
 Notice what kind of feedback is useful to you in your process. Give that kind of feedback to others.

About Suggestions

They creep into our language all the time even when we are making a conscious effort to keep them at bay. It is pretty common in Fieldwork groups to hear "I wanted to see" as part of the feedback; this is a gentle type of suggestion, which can mean different things. Here are some examples of suggestions and ways to rephrase the language to be more precise, to give more information to the artist, and to avoid directing their work.

A direct suggestion: "You should cut the last part with the chair." → "The last part with the chair felt long and I didn't get what it added that wasn't already said earlier in the work."

Another direct suggestion: "I think you should be more emotive in your performance." → "I realize that I expected the work to get to a certain level of emotional tension, which it approached every time you held the prop, but it never did and each time that happened, I felt disappointment."

A sneaky suggestion: "I could watch that section with the fabric for longer." → "I was so engaged for the fabric section; I was caught off guard when it ended."

A suggestion followed by a back pedal: “I think you could strengthen the piece by increasing the contrast between those two sections, but you do you, that is just me, I love juxtaposition.” -> “The two sections are similar.”
 or “I think it is stronger without the text, but it’s your choice obviously.” -> “The movement is so strong that the text feels unnecessary.”

THE FIELD NETWORK

The Field Network was established in 1993, in response to requests by individual artists across the United States for Field programs, most notably Fieldwork. The Network has grown each year, either by word of mouth, or through artists familiar with Field programs who relocate and do not find the artistic infrastructure and support systems in their new locales that sustain them as artists. This growth of The Field Network is a natural development based on the organic flow of artists who live, visit or study in New York City and then settle in other parts of the country. Currently the Network consists of 10 sites across the United States, with locations in both urban and rural areas, administered by both individual artists and arts organizations.

Each Network site is free to adapt the Field’s programs to fit the unique geography and culture of their city. Many sites partner with local non-profit organizations, producing venues, state arts councils as well as colleges and universities. One of the qualities of Fieldwork that makes it work so well in a wide range of communities is its flexibility. Across the country, Fieldwork sessions are offered in single, weekly or monthly sessions and as part of residencies and performance opportunities. At the core of every site are the artists, sharing and developing their work and gaining support through peer feedback.

Setting up a new site begins with an interested potential facilitator getting trained in the Field’s feedback method. This can happen in several different ways; the potential facilitator can travel to New York City to train with Field staff, or a Field staff member, facilitator or Network Manager can travel to the potential new site’s location to train one or more new facilitators (if funding allows). These new sites are supported by both The Field in NYC and the Field Network Manager, whose role is to facilitate communication and strengthen connections between existing and new sites, as well as offer support and share best practices. Field Network sites are required to pay nominal dues to The Field in NYC, fill out report forms on their activities and participate in capacity building conference calls. In return, they have the opportunity to travel to the Field Network Conference, which is sponsored by The Field and held in different cities every other year. Historically, there

have been Network sites in dozens of cities across the US and in Europe. In 2019 there are active sites in Atlanta, Boulder, Chicago, Houston, Miami, Milwaukee, Salt Lake City, Portland and Washington DC.

The Field Network Manager is currently Jen Mitas, based in Portland, OR and she/they can be reached at networkmanager@thefield.org.

Fieldwork Comments from recent participants:

“I got so much out of my Fieldwork sessions. Not only do you get the chance to deepen your impact as a maker by learning how your work is affecting people, but you learn so much about yourself and your aesthetic preferences by being a witness. The arrangement of how feedback is given and received supports this, because ultimately you are learning to watch your own attention and reactions rather than sculpting subjective judgements about art, your own or others.”

“I could not have made my work without the support and structure of FW. For the most part FW forces me to try things out. It’s like checking spaghetti. Throw it on the wall and see if it sticks. But it is a lot scarier with art. “

“This has been a wonderful container for providing safe and constructive feedback. I appreciate that conversations don’t loop due to the “talking stick” approach. Sometimes it feels as if the “you should do this” comments get cloaked in semantics.”

“It has been great to have deadlines and perform in front of others along the way. We would have like the opportunity to ask for specific feedback.”

“Fieldwork has been fabulous. It has:

- kept an intrinsic sense of time and accountability in the process
- has invited me to continually consider why I am making the choices I am making
- developed and demanded a level of trust and honesty with a peer group that was not of my choosing. SO valuable....
- given me language other than my own to consider the work
- kept it real
- brought me into community in the midst of a solo process”