

# The Ford Foundation and Trans-Atlantic Cultural Exchange in the 1950s

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In January 1953 the Foundation concluded a two-year study of its previous programs and the future need and direction of grants related to the exchange of persons.<sup>1</sup> Entitled “Report on Exchange of Persons Activities of the Ford Foundation,” the report mainly focuses on the relationship of the Foundation with the Institute of International Education (IIE) and the State Department in relation to the exchange of persons for a wide variety of primarily educational and professional programs. While the majority of the report focuses on the Foundation’s relationship with IIE as a supported institution and a resource, it does develop an important suggestion regarding the Foundation’s future funding of the exchange of persons. The report suggests that the Foundation can contribute in an area that is ripe for support, but that the U.S. government cannot fund. It states, “The Foundation can make an important contribution to the exchange field, and to the increase of international understanding and good-will, by identifying, and giving limited support to non-academic exchanges in subject areas that can contribute to the development of leadership, understanding and sound public opinion in tension countries, but which are inadequately covered by existing programs.”<sup>2</sup> These aims of developing leadership and public opinion through non-academic exchanges, primarily artistic exchanges, would increasingly become a focus and motivation of Foundation supported exchange programs throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In the following pages, “artists” is used as the Foundation generally used it in the relevant documents to refer to a wide range of artistic pursuits including painting, sculpture, performing arts, music, and literary activities. The report will focus on the International Affairs

Program and the Humanities and Arts Program, both established in approximately 1957. These two programs were jointly responsible for the Foundation's funding of artistic projects throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. The rationales for the two programs establish that the Foundation believed they could bolster U.S. interests and influence public discourse through the support and development of artistic leaders.

In 1956 and 1957 the Foundation built on the suggestion from 1953 Exchange of Persons report and established central programs to support trans-Atlantic artistic and cultural exchange: the European Program and the Humanities and Arts Program. These programs both had a key focus on supporting artistic endeavors and cultural exchange programs that led to a natural overlap between them and allowed and required coordinated efforts. On December 7, 1956 at the annual meeting of the Board of Trustees, the newly organized program for Europe was accepted and began. President H. Rowan Gaither introduced the proposal into the meeting and welcomed Shepard Stone, part of the International Affairs Program, for the discussion. The program was accepted as it was introduced for at least five years of funding at \$5,000,000 a year. The minutes of the meeting state that the program would promote "objective understanding and scientific and educational advancement" and would be directed towards three main "objectives: to strengthen the ties of the European-Atlantic Community, to support the strengthening of democratic institutions in Europe, and to support the development of East-West relations on a democratic basis."<sup>3</sup> The proposal suggests that this new organization of the Foundation's efforts in Europe would

help it meet the diverse needs of Europe, while also avoiding inappropriate activities and keeping the budget at about the same level.

The program docket used at the meeting to propose the project expands on the rationale, aims, and hopes of the program. The proposal first reviews the situation in Europe in order to establish the rationale for the program. The report draws a picture of a dire situation on the continent and maintains that Europe is weak, lacking confidence, and stagnant, while a strong Soviet Union is keen to develop and wield power based on cultural promotion, ties, and influence. The need to win hearts and minds, as it were, and work towards European unity, economic reform, and strong trans-Atlantic ties is necessary. The investment is needed in Europe, the proposal argues, because trans-Atlantic ties are key to the security and wellbeing of the United States. In order to achieve this, the pressure of the U.S.S.R on Eastern Europe needs to be countered by American action. Fortunately, the proposal offers, there is a growing role for private philanthropy that is also welcomed by the U.S. government.<sup>4</sup> Further the Foundation, as opposed to the government, has the advantage of being able to focus on medium and long-range plans. The paper also advises that the Foundation focus on “the intellectual, scientific, and educational area; and...experimental ventures,”<sup>5</sup> but be careful to avoid taking part in propaganda or being accused of propaganda. It suggests it can avoid this if it focuses on and helps “to lay the ground work of objective understanding and scientific advancement, and if it always endeavors to encourage the acceptance of responsibility by European leaders and institutions, rather than playing an isolated or independent role.”<sup>6</sup> The document strongly

supports cooperative efforts aimed at involving Europeans and leaving them primarily in charge of the efforts and suggests that such an expansion of Foundation activities would be accepted in Europe.<sup>7</sup> The paper further expresses the hope that by setting an example in Europe, European leaders and funds will be influenced to carry on such work themselves. It advises that the International Affairs group should focus on major opportunities, which will be measured by a program's ability to have an "impact on European leaders and on European public opinion and their contribution to the interests of the United States....should be developed in a creative and cooperative spirit as a common enterprise of Europeans and Americans."<sup>8</sup> While the programs should not force the United States' way of life on Europeans, it should strongly influence them in a desired direction, albeit cooperatively. Ultimately, however, all activities undertaken with this cooperation should support projects and institutions that are contributing to the Atlantic community and on positively influencing Eastern Europe towards the West. Finally, it also argues that "The United States must make renewed efforts to develop understanding abroad of the true nature of American life and objectives."<sup>9</sup> This idea is developed later in the report explaining that many Europeans have a narrow and negative view of the United States. A widened view of the United States and a better understanding of its democratic processes, innovativeness, and spirit, it is argued, can help unleash Europe and keep it away from communist tendencies.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, the proposal lays out an approach for a concentrated Foundation role in Europe that would complement the efforts of the U.S. government in supporting

the needs of the United States in its global aims and security by focusing on the development of leadership and strong institutions supportive of Western ideals and the north trans-Atlantic relationship. This new European program does not necessarily represent an expansion of the Foundation's work in Europe, but it reorganizes the efforts and includes a new focus on artistic investments. The report makes a strong case for intellectual and cultural investments in order to revitalize Europe and encourage it to renew and strengthen its belief in its own history, culture, and tradition. It argues that, "During the next decade European-wide cultural and intellectual developments are possible which may have profound and positive implications for the position of the free nations."<sup>11</sup> The need to support the Europeans in general and foster ties between East and West Europeans is strong. Outside of these requirements the range of types or subject matter for grants was to be left quite widely open to allow for a variety of efforts that could contribute to these goals including grants to individuals and institutions for a variety of efforts from building projects to research and exchange. The main factor is that they should contribute to the overall political objectives, rather than technical contributions or innovations or the development of any particular field. This main aim is key in distinguishing the European Program's funding of artistic work from the main goals of the Humanities and Arts funding of artistic work.

Around the same time of the creation of the European Program was the creation of the newly independent Humanities and Arts Program. Prior to 1957 the Foundation had a Humanities Program housed within the Education Program.

This early Humanities Program mainly supported scholarly publications in the Humanities and Social Sciences and The American Council of Learned Societies. In December of 1956 the Foundation made its first grant to a US based arts institution, the Lincoln Square Development.<sup>12</sup> The report outlines that the Foundation had received a high amount of unsolicited requests for funding in the Humanities and Arts fields and suggests that this was caused by an increase in general costs in which even many of the largest cultural institutions were struggling to keep their doors open. It argues that “The very size of the Ford Foundation causes it to appear as the one private institution in the nation that could, if it chose, adopt a Maecenas role” and suggests there will always be a high demand for artistic and cultural support.<sup>13</sup> It warns, however, that the Foundation will need a clear policy on funding general support proposals, as many requests will be of this nature. In response to this established demand for humanistic and artistic funding, under the direction of Henry Heald, a new division focused solely on the Humanities and Arts was created. W. McNeil Lowry took charge of the new Humanities and Arts Program buoyed by the large increase of funds the Foundation enjoyed from the mid-1950s.<sup>14</sup>

Upon its approval in 1957, the accepted funding distribution of the Humanities and Arts Program appears to have been in four main areas: grants to individual scholars and artists at “strategic stages in their development,” grants for studies to improve and strengthen arts and humanities fields or education, grants to high quality projects in humanistic scholarship involving multiple scholars, “for which no ACLS or Rockefeller programs exist,” and also an internal intensive study on

“the economic and social position of the arts and of the artistic institutions” in order that the Foundation can “know a great deal more about the position of the arts in developing its policies and plans.”<sup>15</sup> In relation to supporting individual artists, the report argues that humanities funding is extremely limited, outside of clear political motivations, and artistic funding is limited outside of entertainment industry needs. This has “generally tended not to sharpen individual creativity, but steadily to level it and vulgarize it.”<sup>16</sup> It outlines that the current foundation-based programs, Guggenheim and Rockefeller, are restricted to a few fields and are small.<sup>17</sup> The general need, however, is not the reason the Foundation should fund such an effort. Rather, they should fund individual artists in order, “with relatively modest funds, to cultivate in the arts a degree of growth and excellence more befitting America’s place in the world.”<sup>18</sup> This statement is crucial for understanding the funding choices and rationale of the Foundation in general and their hopes and intentions in the program. It also dovetails with the overall aims of the International Affairs Program’s efforts to support artistic projects. Both avenues of support, while different at this stage in their general focus on domestic and international activities, seek to build up, support, and project United States interests.

The creation of the European Program and the Humanities & Arts Program around the same time did lead to questions of overlap in their activities, particularly in relation to cultural exchange. On January 24, 1958 Shepard Stone wrote to Don K. Price concerning the International Affairs Program’s cultural activities, arguing for the importance of these activities for the Program, and



defending them against incursion by the new Humanities and Arts Program. In the memo Stone reminds Price that one of the main pitches that led the trustees to allow the establishment of the European branch of the Program was the proposed grants towards cultural activities. Stone defines cultural exchange as including “the fields of literature, music and the visual and performing arts.”<sup>19</sup> Stone claims, “International cultural exchange has been one of the most effective instruments available to carry out the objectives of the IA program.”<sup>20</sup> After outlining a number of recent grants in the cultural field, Stone states that the distinction between the International Affairs Program’s efforts and the Humanities and Arts Program’s efforts is that “IA’s grants in this area should be directed towards international relations objectives rather than toward the support of the arts for their own sake.”<sup>21</sup> The main difference, Stone suggests, between the work of the two programs is the aim of the funding, as opposed to what is funded. The main International Affairs goals in Europe at this time were to develop the Atlantic community, promote European integration, and encourage East-West contacts, while also improving the American understanding of world affairs.<sup>22</sup> Stone states the International Affairs Program’s interest in supporting cultural activities stem from the obvious facts that “Cultural and intellectual leaders, particularly in Europe and elsewhere abroad, play a large role in forming public opinion in both national and international affairs. Furthermore, the arts historically have been one of the most powerful and durable unifying influences among Western countries, and one of the most important avenues of contact between civilizations.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, supporting cultural and artistic programs is essential to achieving the larger goals of the

International Affairs program. Stone emphasizes that in contrast, “No effort will be made, for example, to improve or develop an entire artistic field abroad, nor to strengthen a category of foreign cultural institutions.”<sup>24</sup> The focus for the International Affairs team therefore is the larger influence on political developments and societal opinion, as opposed to the development of or any contribution to the arts in and for itself.

The result suggested by Stone is that the Humanities and Arts Program will not operate overseas, but will advise the International Affairs Program in their international cultural exchanges. The International Affairs Program would further consult the Overseas Development Program for any projects related to or involving under-developed countries. Stone then outlines guidelines to be followed by the International Affairs Program for the coming year, 1958, which are to focus on the exchange of persons, giving preference to projects “which give travel opportunities to persons with the greatest longrange [sic] potential for influencing international attitudes in cultural circles. Lower priority will be given to international exchanges which involve support for research, archaeological excavations, or adult educational activity in the fine arts.”<sup>25</sup> Stone’s and the International Affairs Program’s repeated emphasis on supporting and influencing future cultural leaders highlights the desire of the Foundation and its affiliates to create a long-term network favorable to the Foundation’s and the U.S. government’s goals.

On February 24, 1958 Don K. Price, head of the International Affairs Program, took up Stone's concerns and arguments and wrote to William McPeak, head of the Education Program and earlier supervisor of the Humanities and Arts programs. He outlined the proposed guidelines and delineations between the International Affairs Program and the newly formed Humanities and Arts Program on working in the cultural field. In the memo, to which was attached Stone's proposal for International Affairs activities, Price suggests that keeping a clear view of the purposes of each program and establishing a cooperative working relationship can clarify the issue. In his memo he outlines three overarching guidelines that could be used: International Affairs programs would only undertake projects that meet "the test of contributing to the purposes assigned to the IA programs," which is not the development of the arts or artistic talent; any project which involves Humanities and Arts clientele, including American artists and cultural institutions, should be closely coordinated with the Humanities and Arts Program and discussed internally before any external discussions take place; however, "the IA exchange project should not be opposed solely because it involves personnel or institutions who are a part of the normal H&A clientele, or because the project involved doing things in Europe which would not be a part of the H&A program in the U.S."<sup>26</sup> It appears from these documents that this arrangement and working relationship are what was accepted and utilized to coordinate the cultural and artistic endeavors of the two programs. Further research is needed to firmly establish this fact and investigate how the working relationship developed and contributed to the Foundation's several cultural and artistic projects of the early 1960s.

The above overview of the establishment of the Foundation's European Program and the Humanities and Arts Program provides key insights into its motivations and aims for supporting artistic programs and projects in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While there are several smaller goals, both programs ultimately seek to support the United States' interests through the strengthening of the Western alliance and improvement of the perception of the United States as a cultural and artistic leader. Further research is needed to firmly establish these claims and look into competing and varied interests within each program's development. Nevertheless, the founding documents of the programs clearly establish the general outlook and aims of the programs as they were created and shed light on the decisions to support specific projects. They also serve as a basis for the further development of the programs in the late 1960s under the leadership of McGeorge Bundy. This is only a modest beginning in researching this topic. There are several avenues to be explored in relation to the artistic projects the Foundation supported throughout the trans-Atlantic, involving a range of global partners in the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Supported by a generous stipend from the Rockefeller Archive Center, I undertook research for my developing dissertation on intellectual and artistic networks during the Cold War. The week I was able to spend in the archive proved fruitful in establishing the institutional context for my project, focusing my scope, and laying the groundwork for further research. During my visit I consulted a wide range of Ford Foundation records that dealt with general organizational history and a series of programs and projects in the late 1950s and early 1960s focused on the funding and exchange of artists in Europe and the United States. A thorough review of the wide range and large number of documents I consulted is not possible here. Instead, I will sketch out the development of the Ford Foundation's policy and aims of supporting artists in the late 1950s as far as I am able within the documents I currently have.

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- <sup>2</sup> “Report on Exchange of Persons Activities of The Ford Foundation,” January 1953, p. 71, Folder: Folder: 1201-001566 v.1, Box 61, FA 739, Ford Foundation – Unpublished Reports, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.
- <sup>3</sup> “Minutes of the December 7, 1956 Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees,” p. 14 as numbered in report, Folder 12, Box 61, VI: History Project Regional Files, FA 568, Francis X. Sutton, International Division, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.
- <sup>4</sup> Program Docket – Program for Europe, p. 1 as numbered, Folder 13, Box 61, VI: History Project Regional Files, FA 568, Francis X. Sutton, International Division, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 10 as numbered.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 10 as numbered.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 10 as numbered.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 11-12 as numbered.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 4 as numbered.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 9 as numbered.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 8 as numbered.
- <sup>12</sup> “Humanities and Arts Program,” p. 1 of discussion summary, Folder: Programs – Cultural Affairs 1957-1962 (2 of 2), Box 3, Series 1: Administrative Papers, FA 748, International Affairs, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Rosenfield, Patricia and Rachel Wimpee, “The Ford Foundation: Themes, 1936-2001,” p. 10-12, Rockefeller Archive Center, 2015.
- <sup>15</sup> Humanities and Arts Program,” p. 1 of discussion summary, Folder: Programs – Cultural Affairs 1957-1962 (2 of 2), Box 3, Series 1: Administrative Papers, FA 748, International Affairs, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.
- Note: These are further discussed in the extended report that follows.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 4, as numbered in the report.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 5, as numbered in the report.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 5, as numbered in the report.
- <sup>19</sup> Stone to Price, January 24, 1958. “International Cultural Activities.” Folder: Programs – Cultural Affairs 1957-1962 (2 of 2), Box 3, Series 1: Administrative Papers, FA 748, International Affairs, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 1.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 2.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 3.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 4.
- <sup>26</sup> Letter Price to McPeak February 24, 1958, Folder: Programs Cultural Affairs 1957-1962 (2 of 2), Box 3, Series 1: Administrative Papers, FA 748, International Affairs, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.
- <sup>27</sup> I would like to thank the archival and support team at the Rockefeller Archive Center, particularly Tom Rosenbaum, for their warm welcome and support while I conducted my research.