2026 OPERA CONFERENCE

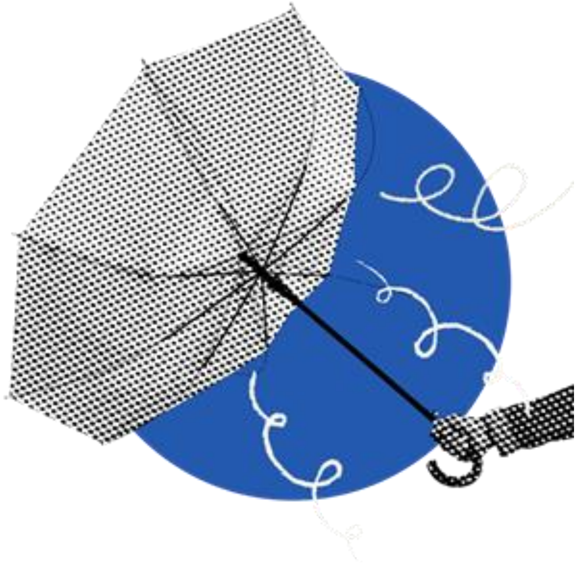
WILMINGTON, DE MAY 12–15

EARNED REVENUE DIVERSIFICATION

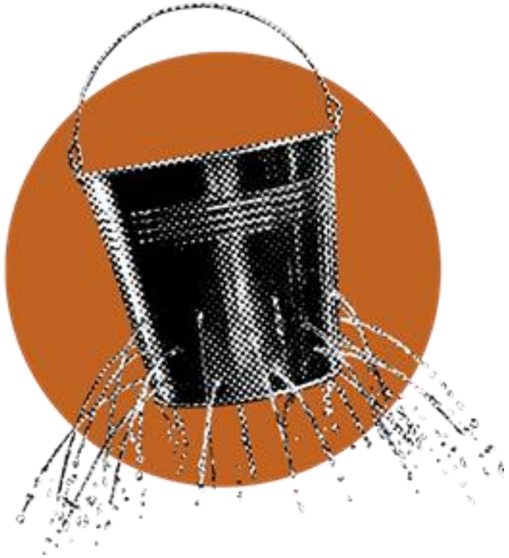
Justin Birdsong
Principal & Founder
Skeleton Key Strategies

May 2026

WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE



Sector-wide financial headwinds



Resources drying up

Leadership & workforce strain

Technology & AI inflection point

Unpredictable market and donor behavior

Attendance has not returned to post-pandemic levels

AS TRADITIONAL TENTPOLES OF SUPPORT DWINDLE,

ARE THERE UNTAPPED SOURCES OF REVENUE WE COULD EXPLORE?

Ticket sales

Contributed revenue

Government grants

YOU ALREADY HAVE MORE THAN WHAT YOU'RE SELLING

You have an opportunity to identify and activate the **assets, talents, and ideas** your organization already has as its disposal across these **3 asset categories:**

- Physical Assets
- Human Capital and Expertise
- Content and Intellectual Property

PHYSICAL ASSETS

Most relevant for companies that own or control space and/or production inventory

- **Venue rental**
- **Costume, set, and prop rental**
- **Score and archival licensing**
- **Stage equipment rental**
- ***What else?***

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HUMAN CAPITAL & EXPERTISE

The most universally accessible asset category

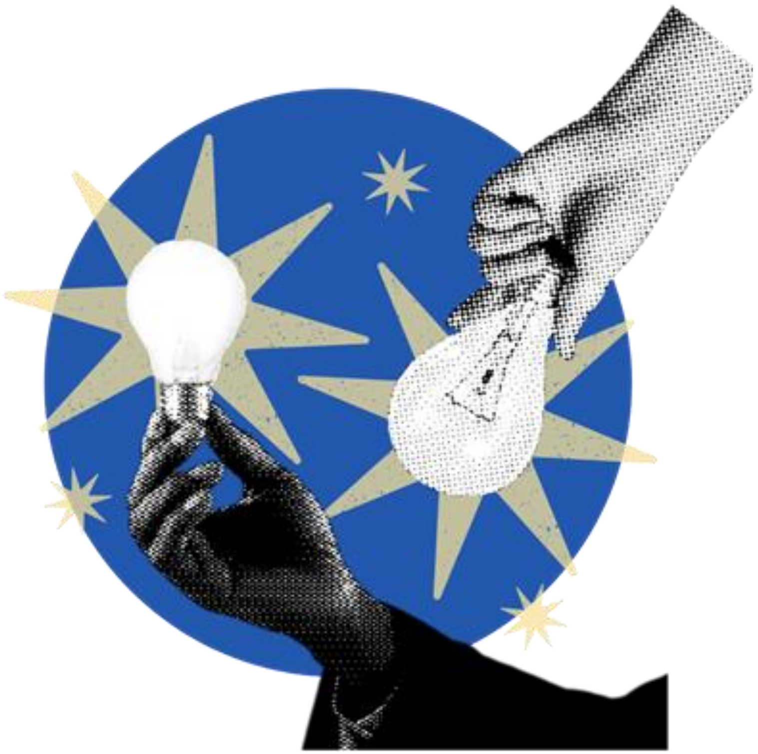
- **Corporate voice and presence coaching**
- **Private concerts and bespoke experiences**
- **Educational programming as a fee service**
- **Young artist program restructuring**
- **Production services consulting**
- ***What else?***

OPERA AMERICA

CONTENT & INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Longest horizon, highest long-term leverage

- **Streaming and digital licensing**
- **Branded educational content**
- **Podcast and audio content**
- ***What else?***



SPICE IT UP!

WHAT EARNED INCOME OPPORTUNITIES COULD YOU EXPERIMENT WITH IN YOUR REVENUE MIX?

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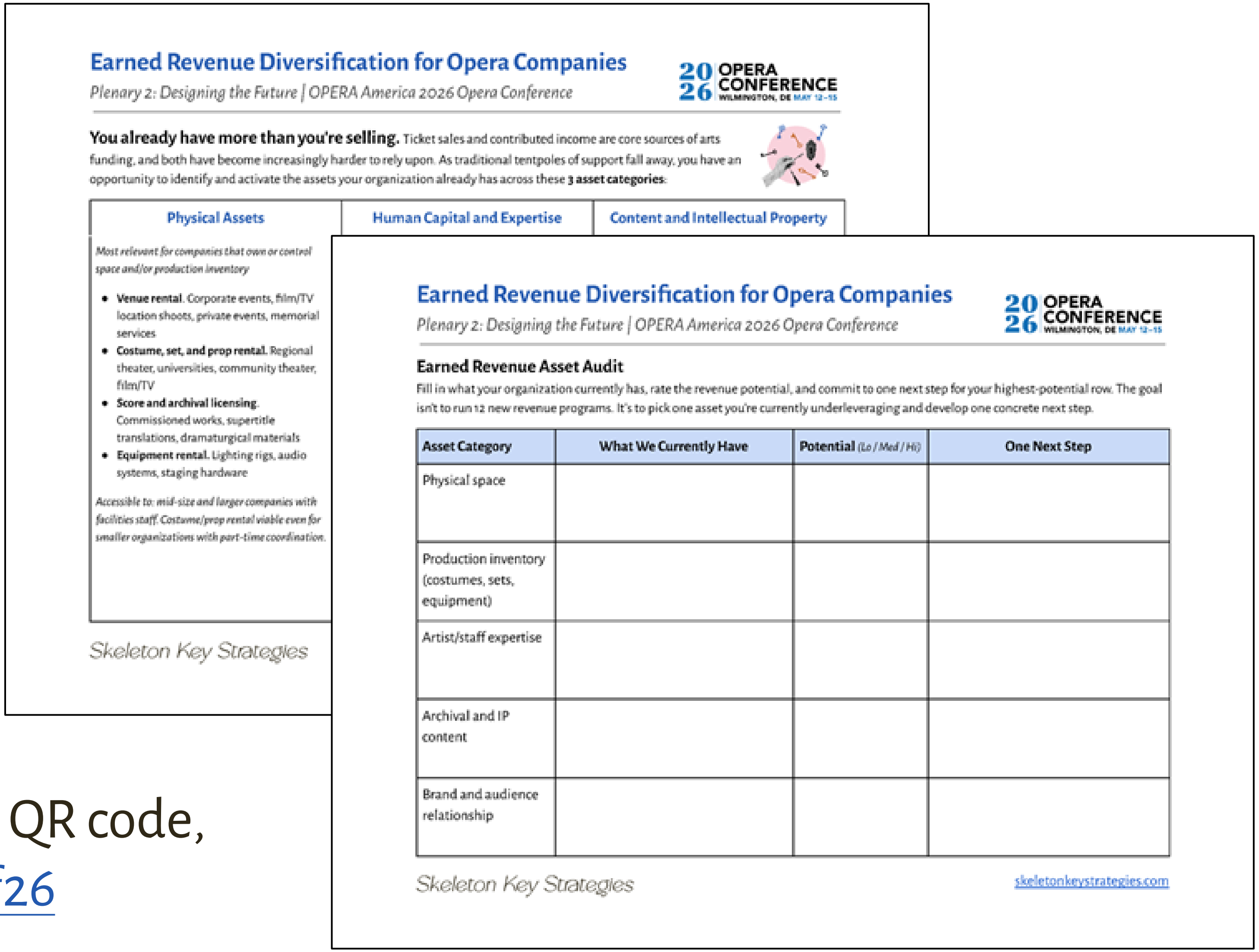
WORKSHEET

Play our game at home!


Earned Revenue Diversification for Opera Companies

Plenary 2: Designing the Future | OPERA America 2026 Opera Conference

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You already have more than you're selling. Ticket sales and contributed income are core sources of arts funding, and both have become increasingly harder to rely upon. As traditional tentpoles of support fall away, you have an opportunity to identify and activate the assets your organization already has across these **3 asset categories**:

Physical Assets	Human Capital and Expertise	Content and Intellectual Property
Most relevant for companies that own or control space and/or production inventory • **Venue rental.** Corporate events, film/TV location shoots, private events, memorial services • **Costume, set, and prop rental.** Regional theater, universities, community theater, film/TV • **Score and archival licensing.** Commissioned works, supertitle translations, dramaturgical materials • **Equipment rental.** Lighting rigs, audio systems, staging hardware *Accessible to: mid-size and larger companies with facilities staff. Costume/prop rental viable even for smaller organizations with part-time coordination.*		

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Earned Revenue Asset Audit

Fill in what your organization currently has, rate the revenue potential, and commit to one next step for your highest-potential row. The goal isn't to run 12 new revenue programs. It's to pick one asset you're currently underleveraging and develop one concrete next step.

Asset Category	What We Currently Have	Potential (Lo / Med / Hi)	One Next Step
Physical space			
Production inventory (costumes, sets, equipment)			
Artist/staff expertise			
Archival and IP content			
Brand and audience relationship			

Skeleton Key Strategies skeletonkeystrategies.com

See the conference app, scan the QR code, or visit tinyurl.com/sksoperaconf26

THANK YOU

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PARTNERSHIP MODELS FOR OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE

Deborah Abramson Kroll
Principal Consultant
Skeleton Key Strategies

May 2026

HOSTED BY OPERA AMERICA OPERA DELAWARE

"Artists are world builders. To honor those who have come before us and ensure an abundant future for those who will follow... let us build something new, now, together."

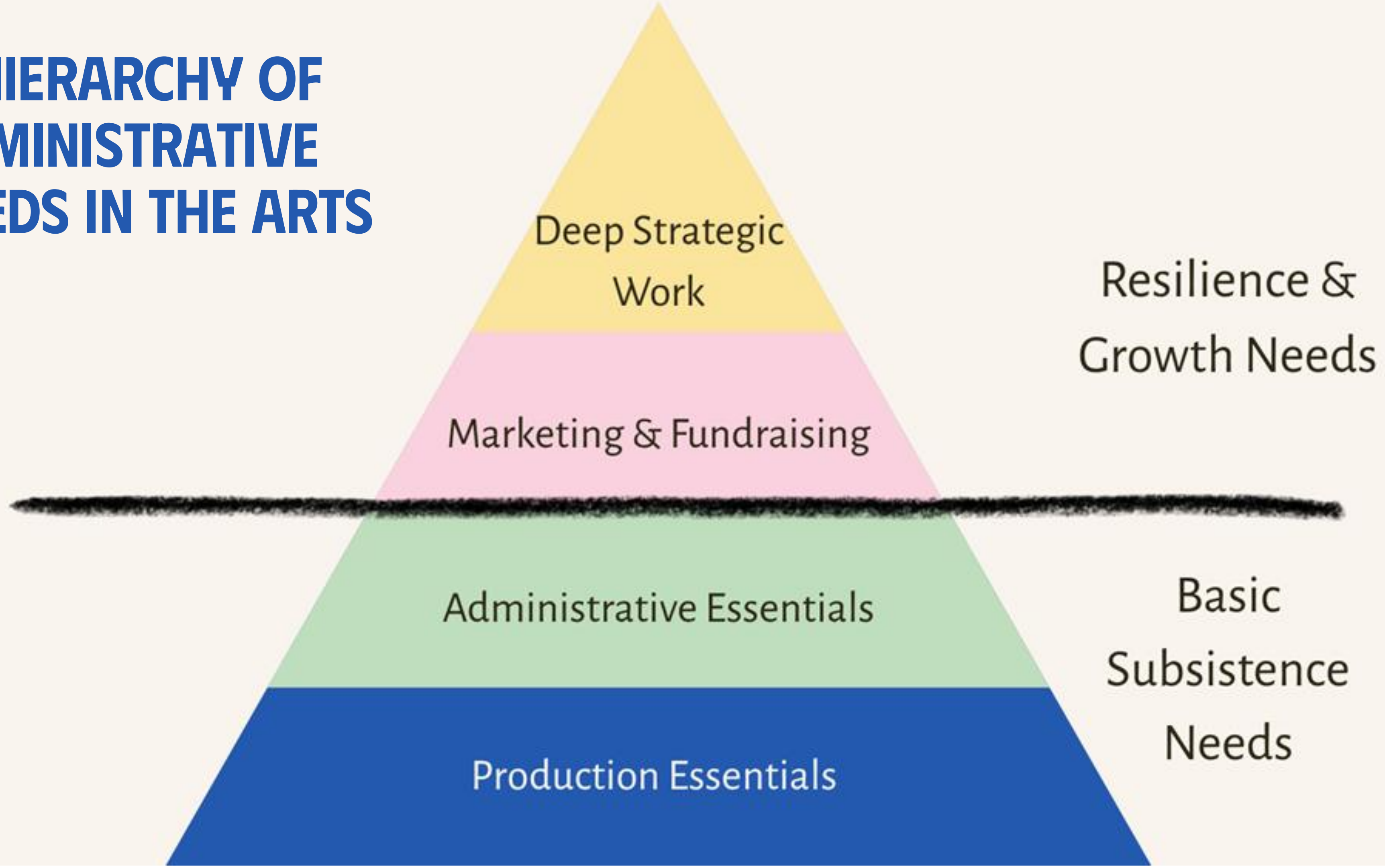
Health + Wealth (2025)

ART NEW YORK
ALLIANCE OF RESIDENT THEATRES

WHAT COULD RESILIENCE LOOK LIKE FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS?

Mendelssohn Chorus of Philadelphia

A HIERARCHY OF ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS IN THE ARTS



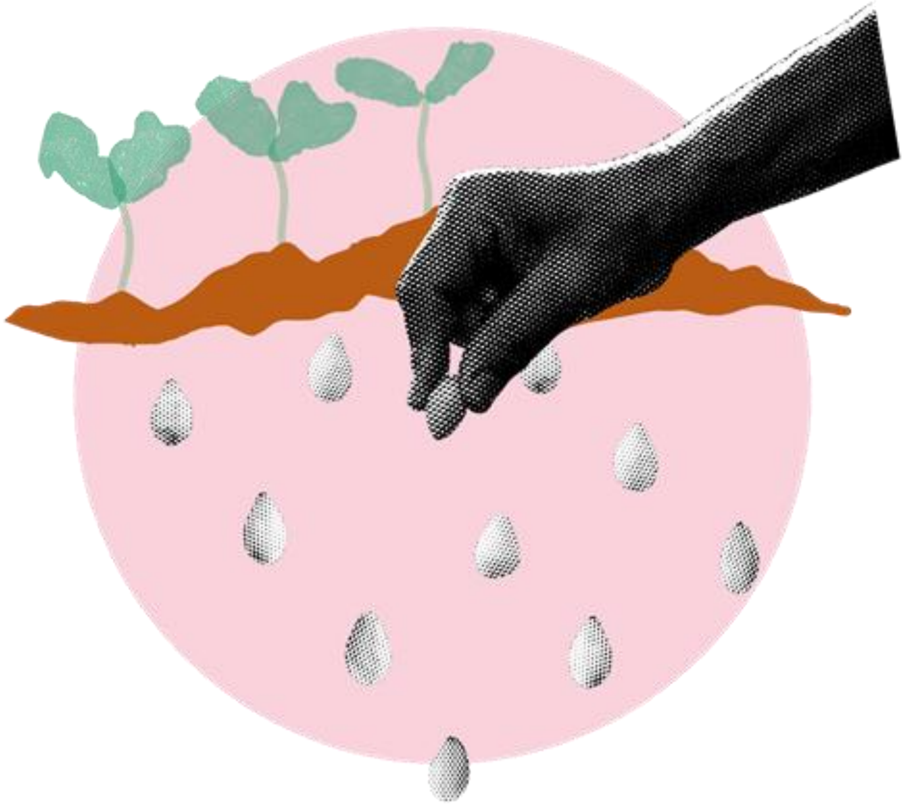
HOW ORGANIZATIONS BUILD CAPACITY, SHARE POWER, OR DISTRIBUTE RISK

- Joint programming/ventures
- Shared services organizations
- Shared functions
- Arts service organization
- Fiscal sponsorship / umbrella
- Consortium

- Collective / cooperative
- Platform / marketplace
- Community hub / incubator
- Mergers
- Worker self-directed nonprofit
- Consultants
- Outsourcing

What else?

WHAT ARE WE ACTUALLY SOWING?



3 FINDINGS

1) Shared, outsourced, and fractional services work for areas like finance, HR, IT. Be careful about outsourcing choices related to data and relationships with your audiences.
2) Shared services are often dependent on contributed revenue.
3) Thinking about a co-op? Let your strategy emerge from small steps.

PROVOCATIONS FOR OPERA COMPANIES

THANK YOU

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APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

SUGGESTED READING

- International Cooperative Alliance (2026)
- Rethinking nonprofit infrastructure for a new era (2025)
- Health + Wealth (2025)
- New Models to Achieve Your Mission: Strategic Restructuring for your CAA (2018)
- Collective Insourcing: A Systemic Approach to Nonprofit Arts Management (2011)
- PARTNERSHIP AS AN ART FORM: What Works and What Doesn't in Nonprofit Arts Partnerships (2002)

MODELS FOR BUILDING CAPACITY, SHARING POWER, AND DISTRIBUTING RISK

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Model	How it works	Example
Shared Services Organization	Central entity delivers common admin functions to multiple orgs - also can be considered "insourcing"	ArtsPool
Peer Partnership / Shared Functions	Two or more orgs share a specific role or an entire function	Cincinnati Symphony & May Festival
Arts / Nonprofit Service Organization	Freestanding org provides services and advocacy to the sector	Opera America
Fiscal Sponsorship / Umbrella	Established nonprofit provides legal & admin home to projects	Fractured Atlas
Consortium	Affiliation for information-sharing, programming, or purchasing; could be a 501(c)3 or looser affiliation	Greater Seattle Choral Consortium
Collective / Cooperative	Member-owned entity; shared stake, governance, pooled risk	SMART Cooperative
Worker Self-Directed Nonprofit	Nonprofit practicing distributed leadership & collective decision-making	Sustainable Economies Law Center
Platform / Marketplace	Digital infrastructure connecting supply and demand in an ecosystem	Ampled
Community Hub / Incubator	Physical or programmatic home that builds capacity and connectivity	Springboard for the Arts
Merger	Multiple organizations combine into one legal entity	Dayton Performing Arts Alliance
Joint programming/ventures	Organizations pool resources around specific programming goals without merging or creating a shared administrative structure.	Opera For All Voices: Stories of Our Time (OPERA America Innovation Grant)
Outsourcing	Transactional relationship with a vendor; vendor could be for-profit or non-profit	Radar Nonprofit Solutions