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# New arts organization Elevator will lift up individual local artists

By [LISA HORNING](#) | January 3, 2019 5:45 am



Elevator is a new organization created to help independent artists in Louisville. | Courtesy of Elevator

When an artist tries to strike out on their own as a full-time, self-employed artist, navigating the business and networking landscape can be terrifying.

But one new organization, [Elevator](#), is working to fill that gap and help lift up those artists who need a little help, guidance and support.

Elevator was formed by Alison Huff after working on the steering committee for [Imagine Greater Louisville 2020](#). As a board member of the [Arts & Culture Alliance](#), she represented the organization to Imagine Greater Louisville.

One of the gaps the committee noticed was that while there are several large organizations that support artists, there were none that specifically helped individual artists.



Alison Huff, founder of Elevator |  
Courtesy of Elevator

“So looking around, I was like, ‘OK, who’s going to do this?’ I was like, ‘Oh, OK, well, I guess I’ll do this,’” says Huff.

The name Elevator was meant to evoke movement.

“There was a group of five or six of us trying to brainstorm a name,” Huff explains. “Elevator came to the forefront. It’s about going up and coming back down. It’s about that cycle, and going in as a group and coming out as a group, and it’s a constantly moving, changing community experience.”

Though Huff is the managing director of [Commonwealth Theatre Center](#), she is not a practicing artist.

“I’m an arts administrator,” Huff says. “So I’m not in the business of telling artists how to do their art. I really view my role as the founding board chair as a facilitator. I know how to navigate the environment, I know how to connect people and connect those resources and opportunities and use that knowledge to really lift up artists and their work.”

When it came time to really get the organization started, she knew there would need to be a full-time staffer to run the day-to-day work, and she decided not to do that herself because she and the board wanted it to be an organization run by artists, for artists.

Elevator had its launch party on Nov. 28 at Gravelly Brewing Co., and instead of begging for donations, the organization offered on-the-spot micro-grant applications — and nearly 300 people showed up.



“We had been hoping about 60 artists would show up, and we ended up having 120 micro-grant applications,” says board member Eli

Eli Keel, board member | Courtesy of Elevator

Keel, who also freelances for Insider Louisville. “We were a little blown away. Working all year, doing all these meetings, then you look up and, ‘Oh my god, we have a line out the door of artists who are coming here to meet us!’ We shot past happy and into get-stuff-done mode.”

The grant applications were read by four artists who were independent of the organization, and by the end of the night, four \$500 grants and two \$1,000 grants were given to independent artists to help fund their projects.

Elevator got some initial seed funding through a grant from Imagine Greater Louisville and Metro Louisville. That money helped start the organization and pays for a full-time director, Ehren Reed, who joined in July.

In the past year, the Elevator board has been sending out a stakeholder survey to artists in the area to try to find how the organization can best help the artistic community, Keel says. Some of the ideas that have come out of the survey include classes to help the artists take their businesses to the next level.

“People don’t get into art because they’re good at filling out paperwork,” he says. “But a grant application can be a really daunting thing for someone who hasn’t filled one out before. One of our trainings in January is a grant application training, and possibly how to become an LLC (limited liability company).”

Other potential classes could be how to navigate tax laws,

Ehren Reed, director | Courtesy of

where to get funding and more. The schedule of classes hasn't been announced yet, but it will be available on the group's [Facebook page](#) soon.

Another initiative is an artists' directory in which local artists will be searchable online for those looking to hire.

"We'll populate the database with artists throughout all disciplines so that people who are in search of some kind of creative service — whether you need a comedian to emcee your event or a musician to perform or you need an artist for your mural," says Reed. "That's an essential element of what we're trying to do — connect artists with reliable, paid opportunities, to connect artists and help them get out there and start getting paid."

Another unique aspect of Elevator is that it's only exclusive to artists, not specific disciplines, Keel adds.

"We don't want to limit the arts by saying, 'Painting is art but tattooing is not,' or excluding other types of craftspeople like leather workers or stained-glass workers or comedians, drag queens or other people that might traditionally not be invited into the space," he says.

Courtesy  
of  
Elevator

The board of directors is made up of a diverse group of artists in several disciplines, and a mentorship program may also be implemented in the future to help younger artists connect with those with more experience.

The party in November also reflected this diversity, Huff says.

"With our launch event, we put together the pieces of the event we hoped would reflect our core values and just kind of put it out into the world," she explains. "All the things we hoped for came to fruition that night. The recipients of the grant awards were so diverse in terms of arts disciplines and the personal and artistic experiences of those awardees — their ages, what parts of town they come from. It was like, 'Yes, we're doing

this the right way!’ We can’t wait to do more lifting up of exactly those voices.”

## **LISA HORNUNG**

Lisa Hornung a native of Louisville and has worked in local media for more than 15 years as a writer and editor. Before that she worked as a writer, editor and photographer for community newspapers in Kansas, Ohio and Kentucky. She has a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Georgia, and after a 20-year career in journalism, she obtained a master’s degree in history from Eastern Kentucky University in 2016.



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