

# THOMAS TRESSER

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**Producer, educator, activist and trainer with over 45 years experience in the creative and civic areas. Social entrepreneur who has founded or led fourteen non-profit enterprises in the arts, community development and civic engagement.**

## PROFESSIONAL HISTORY AND CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

### TEACHING\*

“Public Policy Analysis” – National Louis University College of Professional Studies – 2019 (online)

“Collaborative Policy Making & Civic Engagement” - Adler University Master’s Program in Public Administration - 2017

“Public Management & Leadership” – Adler University Master’s Program in Public Administration - 2017

“Nonprofit Organizations” - Adler University Master’s Program in Nonprofit Management – 2016-17 (online)

“Nonprofit Advocacy” – Adler University Master’s Program in Nonprofit Management – 2015-18 (online)

“Community Organizing” – Roosevelt University – 2015

“What Is A City For?” – Graham School of Continuing Studies – 2014

“Got Creativity? Strategies & Tools for the Next Economy” – IIT Stuart School of Business, 2011 - 2013

“Civics 101” – i c stars training program, 2013 - 2018

“Nonprofits & Social Change Advocacy,” “Nonprofits & Civic Engagement” – University of Illinois at Chicago, Great Cities Institute, Certificate of Nonprofit Management Program (online), 2012 - 2016

“Strategies & Tools for the Social Change Agent” – IIT Stuart School of Business, 2012

“Acting Up – Using Theater & Technology for Social Change” – DePaul Distance Learning Program, 2008 – 2012 (online)

“Nonprofit Management” – Loyola University School of Social Work (online), 2010 - 2013

“The Artist as Activist” – Loyola Theater Department, 2007; DePaul Art Department, 2010

“Tools & Techniques for Creative Leaders” – IIT Institute of Psychology, 2009

“The Art of Crossing the Street – The Artist as Citizen” – School of the Art Institute, 2007, 2008

“Who’s Lying To You Now?” (critical thinking & media literacy) – DePaul School for New Learning, 2006, 2008; IIT Institute of Psychology, 2010

“International Creativity Policy” – DePaul Graduate Program in Public Service, 2007

“Creative Tools for Social Change” – DePaul Program on Peace, Conflict Resolution and Social Justice, 2007, 2009

“The Politics of Creativity” - DePaul Political Science Department, 2007

“Arts and Public Policy” – Roosevelt University, 1991-1993

### TRAINING

Workshops: Over 130 public meetings on civic issues from 2008 through 2018, Curated over 80 workshops at the CivicLab, Delivered workshops there on “TIF 101,” “Privatization 101,” “Starting a Nonprofit” and “Civic Innovation; “Alliance of Artists Communities conference keynote 2008; National Performing Arts Convention 2008; Imagining America conference 2007; University of Chicago Graduate School of Business 2007; Loyola Theater Department 2006 Arts Rally; College for Creative Studies, Detroit; ArtPride New Jersey; Arts Midwest; ArtServe Michigan; Arts

Wisconsin; First National Performing Arts Convention, Pittsburgh.

Leadership training: Columbia College Leadership Week 2008 – 4 different workshops on the artist as leader and introduction to community organizing; The Creative America Project 2005 – three full day training sessions for artists on how to become a community organizer, campaign manager or candidate.

Executive Development: Created experiential learning programs for Fortune 500 company executives as a Program Director at Executive KnowledgeWorks.

## CIVIC EXPERIENCE

### **“Chicago Is Not Broke. Funding the City We Deserve” (3/16 to present)**

*Organizer, Editor*

Curated, crowdfunded published book of original essays on how to save and generate major revenues for Chicago. This book has triggered 65 public meetings since July 2016. See <http://www.wearenotbroke.org>

### **The CivicLab (1/12 to 6/15)**

*Founder, Chief Tool Builder*

Initiated and launched nonprofit store front where activists and educators collaborate to produce research, workshops and tools to accelerate civic engagement and community improvement initiatives. See <http://www.civiclab.us>

### **The TIF Illumination Project (1/13 to present)**

*Lead Organizer*

Organized team of volunteers to investigate and explain Tax Increment Finance districts on a ward-by-ward basis using data mining, graphic arts and community organizing. This work has spawned 75 community meetings in front of 6,300 people. See <http://www.tifreports.com>

### **No Games Chicago (12/08 to 12/09)**

*Lead Organizer, Spokesperson, Webmaster*

Helped organize and direct grassroots coalition to oppose Chicago's bid for the 2016 Olympics. Responsible for strategy, messaging, emails, web site and organizing delegations to go to IOC headquarters in Switzerland and Olympic conference where decision was made in Copenhagen, Denmark. Successful campaign despite being vastly out spent and receiving no support from the media, civic organizations, academia or political leaders. See <http://www.nogameschicago.com>

### **Protect Our Parks (11/07 to 12/08)**

*Co-founder, Organizer*

Led organization of grassroots citizens organization to protest the privatization of Lincoln Park, successfully sued the Chicago Park District, the City of Chicago and the Latin School to halt construction of a private soccer field on public land, raised \$30,000 and helped recruit dozens of volunteers, maintained the web site and email communications.

### **Creative America Project, Chicago (1/04 to 12/07)**

*President and Lead Organizer*

Organized national nonpartisan, nonprofit effort to inspire and train creative professionals to lead in the public sector. Developed national board and advisory council of distinguished experts in cultural policy and deliberative democracy, created brand for organization with website and have developed and presented educational and civic training programs in eight states.

### **Mayor Daley's Digital Divide Working Group (6/00 to 12/02)**

*Committee member*

Joined this committee when Community Affairs Manager at OurHouse.com. Authored a proposal for creating a network of neighborhood technology centers called The Accelerator Project that has been funded by a \$3 million grant and that has been put into operation by Lumity (formerly, the Information Technology Resource Center).

### **United Power for Action and Justice (1/96 to 12/00)**

*Citizen-Leader*

Volunteer organizer for this metropolitan-wide organizing effort initiated by Cardinal Bernadin and other major religious and union leaders and coordinated by the Industrial Areas Foundation. Instrumental in bringing the Jewish community into this effort and spoke at the Founding Convention at UIC Pavilion in October 1997 before 10,000 people. Organized and helped design the organization's website, [www.united-power.org](http://www.united-power.org).

### **Greater Chicago Citizens for the Arts, Chicago (6/90 to 12/94)**

*Founding President*

Founded and led this political membership organization that raised money for candidates for public office who were pro arts and pro freedom of expression. Organization recruited 60 artists who were deputy registrars and who registered over 1,300 people to vote, trained artists to run for local school council, endorsed candidates for local and federal office

and created arts policy statements for candidates for Alderman, State Representative, U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate. Directed artist volunteers to our candidates, produced arts-and-politics events at galleries and theaters and raised over \$30,000 for our slate.

**Center for Cultural Policy and Advocacy (9/90 to 12/91)**

*Founder*

Organized this center inside the Institute for Metropolitan Affairs at Roosevelt University. Received grant from MacArthur Foundation to visit eight cities to research how the arts are supported and how artists support themselves. Created research and event agenda for the Center and was worked with senior program officers at the MacArthur Foundation for support. Taught "Arts & Public Policy" at Roosevelt for two years.

**ARTS RELATED EMPLOYMENT**

**Creativity Champions, Chicago, IL (4/96 to present)**

*Chief Creative Officer*

Principal of consulting service offering strategic marketing, special events production, community affairs and loyalty-building programming initiatives.

***Major engagements include:***

**Shirley Mordine & Company (9/08 to 12/09)**

*Consulting Managing Director*

Part-time position for this premiere contemporary dance company, as they celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary season in 2009. Responsibilities include board development, marketing, program and audience expansion.

**Collaboraction Theater, Chicago, IL (8/06 to 9/07)**

*Marketing and Audience Development Consultant*

Providing branding, fund raising, and product development services for this innovative theater company. Received ArtsWork grant of \$10,000 for this work. Created Human Capital Campaign to raise \$50,000 during 2007; leading branding and marketing initiative.

**Saskatchewan Provincial Government Dramatic Diversity, Chicago, IL (2007)**

*Consultant & Trainer*

Designed and delivered workshop on culture and economic development for international conference on local economic development. Designed and facilitated an all day experiential workshop/tour of the city of Moosejaw, showing off its use of culture, special events, attractions and preservation as a successful development strategy.

**Chicago Park District, Chicago, IL (4/96 to 9/97)**

*Cultural Planning & Marketing Consultant*

Researched, planned and executed cultural development plan that transformed an underused major regional park, Douglas Park in West Lawndale, into a thriving community cultural center.

- Conducted and led over 100 community meetings, planning sessions and public forums to enlist community support and develop programming.
- Wrote grants, recruited teachers and artists, developed programs and instituted institutional alliances that led to over 20 classes, festivals and ongoing programs that served over 10,000 people annually.

Other clients: Columbia College, regional government of Saskatchewan, Canada, Solution People, Synectics, Center for High Performance, DePaul University, Jellyeye Action Drummers, Information Technology Resource Center (now Lumity)

**Peoples Housing, Chicago, IL (4/93 to 12/95)**

*Director of Cultural Development*

Responsible for innovative program development, fundraising and resource creation, talent and volunteer recruitment, marketing, publicity for community arts program at organization which resulted in it being recognized as one of Chicago's most innovative developer and manager of low-income housing.

- Raised \$250,000 and designed and managed extensive series of classes, special events, festivals and performances employing a staff of seven. Grew program from scratch over three years, reaching over 12,000 neighborhood residents annually.
- Pioneered the use of the arts and culture for community development and micro-enterprise creation. Awarded special grant and recognized by Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the nation's premiere enabler of low-income housing.
- Generated outstanding public relations response with over 30 stories in the local media, including press, radio and television.

**Pegasus Players, Chicago, IL (4/85 to 12/90)**

*Managing Director*

Responsible for all business and production aspects of a five-show subscription season house in the 250-seat theater

on the campus of Truman College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago.

- Increased budget from \$200,000 to \$500,000; subscriptions from 200 to 1,500.
- Productions awarded 20 Jeff Citations for theatrical excellence.
- Twice had three shows running at the same time.
- Created the Chicago Young Playwrights Festival in 1986, now in 30th season, over 12,000 one-acts plays written. The program was awarded a grant of \$340,000 from the Kellogg Foundation.

## EDUCATION

- University of Chicago, Graduate School of Business, Chicago, IL -- Certificate in Business Management
- Spertus College, Chicago, IL -- M.S., Urban Development
- Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL -- Certificate in Nonprofit Management
- Antioch College, Yellow Springs, OH -- B.A., Sociology

## PUBLICATIONS

“Chicago Is Not Broke. Funding the City We Deserve” – organizer & editor, 2016

“The TIF Illumination Project & Civic Imagination” in *Art Against the Law, Chicago Social Practice History Series*, School of the Art Institute, 2015,

“America Needs You! Why You Should Become A Creativity Champion” – self published 2008

“Dear Members of the International Olympic Committee – Emails From the No Games Chicago Campaign”

Contributor to the Chicago edition of the Huffington Post – 2008 - present

“Shifting the Burden – Tax Breaks for Big Industry Hurt Homeowners in Lake County,” *Conscious Choice*, October 2007.

“If You're Reading This: Run!” *Inside Arts*, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, May/June 2007.

“Run, Baby, Run,” op-ed piece in *American Theatre*, September 2004.

“A Call to Action for 2004 (and Beyond),” *Culture Work*, University of Oregon, March 2004. Vol. 8, No.3.

“The Artistic Side of Sustainable Communities,” *In Business*, March/April 1997.

“How Do the Arts Build Communities?” *Cultural Policy*, Vol. 3, No.1, 1996.

“25 Things We Can Do To Boost the Art Eco-System,” *One City*, Chicago Council on Urban Affairs, March/April 1991 (guest curated this issue on arts in the life of the city).

## AWARDS

Selected as “Best of Chicago 2015 – Public Advocate” by NewCity Magazine

Encore Foundation Purpose Prize Fellow - 2015

Protector of the Environment Award – Chicago Audubon Society – 2011

Edwin Astrin Special Service Award for arts and politics work, IVI-IPO, June 1993

MacArthur Foundation grant awarded to travel to six cities in 1990 to research innovative programs supporting the arts

Fellow, Leadership Greater Chicago, 1989-90

## ELECTIVE OFFICE/COMMUNITY SERVICE

Chicago Public Radio Community Advisory Council - 2012

Green Party candidate for President of the Cook County Board - 2010

Chicago Access Network (Chicago's public access network) – Board of Directors, 2006-2011

Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, Chicago – Local School Council Community Representative, 2004-2006