

An Economic Analysis of INTAR's Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence Lab (HPRL)

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**The First Stage:**

*In order to understand the finances behind the Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residency Lab, I performed a thorough examination of the lab's structure and objectives, the influences of Maria Irene Fornés' leadership, and the participating playwrights and their works.*

Under the leadership of Maria Irene Fornés, a critically acclaimed playwright and director, the HPRL began in 1981 as part of INTAR's Developmental Theater Program. The labs lasted about six months each year, and provided participants with a stipend of about \$3,000. Each lab consisted of about seven to ten Latino playwrights, who were chosen from a nationwide application pool. The participants were asked to complete a play by the end of the lab, and as part of the educational purpose of the lab, the participants would often write in groups and in the presence of Maria Irene Fornés. Thus, each playwright received constant feedback on his or her writing. At the end of the lab, the completed plays received staged readings and (a) selected play(s) received a full production on INTAR's main stage. The following Statement of Principle synthesizes the objective behind the lab and its importance in culturally representing Hispanics in the United States:

“As the United States becomes progressively Hispanic, it is the responsibility of those among us who possess a creative gift to exercise that gift. This is our debt to the country we have adopted; to the history of thought; to the good that is art and to the dignity of an overwhelming number of Hispanics who anguish in confusion as they needlessly attempt to surrender their heritage. Only

by sharing our most intimate process of thought, our despair, our knowledge, our visions, can we strengthen our creation and offer an alternative to a race that faces the colonization of its spirit.”

-María Irene Fornés

The lab participants include award-winning playwrights such as Nilo Cruz, Caridad Svich, and Migdalia Cruz. Detailed artistic information on the plays produced each year and by each playwright is being completed for the Cuban Theater Archive. This information is available to the public.

### **The Economic Analysis of the HPRL:**

The HPRL began in 1981 with support from a four-year grant by the Ford Foundation, and public funds from *The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)*, and *The New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA)*. As the years passed and the lab gained popularity, more funding became available. By 1985, the *New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (NYCDCA)* also provided important funding. However, by 1985, the substantial Ford Foundation grant that had helped fund the HPRL in its early stages was no longer available. Throughout the HPRL’s trajectory, budget fluctuations were present, and in later years (as will be later explained), funding for the HPRL decreased significantly.

Although the HPRL began in 1981, detailed financial assistance to INTAR is only systematically available after 1984. While specific budgets of each workshop are missing except for one in 1989, there are other documents with relevant information that helped in the reconstruction of the 10-year span of the HPRL. Among these documents are the Auditor’s Reports including the names of supporting companies, foundations, and public agencies, and the amounts they contributed to INTAR. Thus, the funding that INTAR received as a whole was

sometimes used to conclude on the fluctuations in the funding of the HPRL. Information gathered on the finances of INTAR as a whole, demonstrate that INTAR faced persistent harsh economic conditions– with budget deficits present throughout the duration of the HPRL. This is important, since the budgets for the Developmental Theater Program (which include the HPRL) became increasingly smaller as the years passed (See Graph 1 for trends in INTAR’s finances). Moreover, information on certain companies, foundations, and public agencies with especially large financial support for the HPRL, was gathered from other documents (see Graph 2 for trends on support for the HPRL). From the information displayed on the two graphs, these trends are evident:

1. The developmental theater budget by 1993 had been almost completely eliminated.
2. **Total** public support and grants received by INTAR had not significantly decreased by 1992.
3. INTAR saw periodical reductions in the funding from the NEA, NYSCA, and NYCDCA.

Nonetheless, throughout the HPRL’s trajectory, INTAR still had funds that could have been allocated to the HPRL. To better understand the budget reduction in the developmental theater funds and how it related to the end of the HPRL program in 1992, other documents and data were explored. From the only detailed HPRL budget 1988-89 (See Graph 3 for details on the HPRL’s income for this year), it was surprising to see that by this year, the public support to the lab, which had always accounted for the majority of its funding, had been reduced to a small percentage; by 1988-89, INTAR relied heavily on private support to finance the HPRL. Other documents explain the reduction in public funding, as well as for the decreased budget that INTAR allocated for the HPRL. For example, in 1989 artistic director Max Ferra commented to the Lila Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund that the NEA funding is recorded as a liability until fund terms were met by 1992, when they expected it would become an asset. He also noted that

INTAR had embarked on an initiative to eliminate deficit by 1992, that the company planned to improve but not expand its existing programs, and that a recent contraction in funding for cultural and other non-profit activities had increased competition for the available funding.

The conditions in grants and in other financial support sources, generally ask the company to focus on reducing its deficit, and increasing its profits and public size. Thus, the public agencies, companies, and foundations that supported INTAR and specifically the HPRL, had for the most part a for-profit agenda that shaped the budget-allocation decisions INTAR. Since the HPRL was not a short-term profit yielding program, but a long-term investment in INTAR's cultural capital gains, INTAR decreased the lab's funding until it could no longer operate. The for-profit funding that INTAR had to rely on, is the perfect example of the battle between artistic creation and the financial limitations that artistic companies have when faced with the necessities of obtaining funds and surviving harsh economic times. This trend clearly demonstrates a flaw in the support of the arts, since many culturally important programs and companies are often seeking artistic and not economic gains. Ironically, in the long run, INTAR has become internationally known for being able to support and shape some of the best Latino playwrights of today. These kinds of cultural capital gains are left out of the funding models observed, but they are what truly define this company.

**Extensions:**

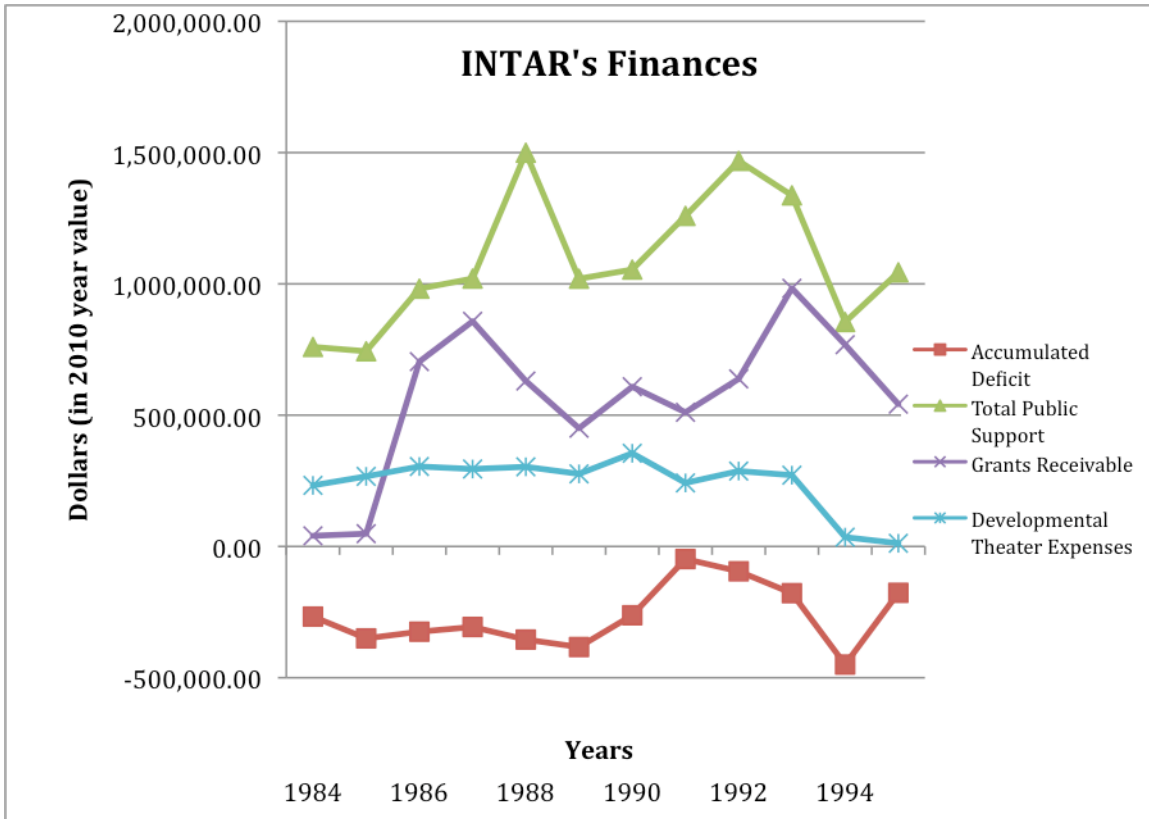
In order to better understand the national situation of Latino Theater companies during the time when the HPRL took place, information was searched on the financial situation of companies that focused on developmental theater programs. The particular financial situation of *La Mama Experimental Theater Club* in 1992, highlights the economic difficulties Latino theater

companies were experiencing during this time. A New York Times Article noted that "...La Mama had been hurt by cuts in grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. 'We've had a 60 percent cut in our NYSCA money and a 16 percent NEA cut. The Rockefeller Foundation continues to support us. We get a small grant from Philip Morris. The Ford Foundation gives us nothing. We can't even get an interview there. We've never got much money from corporate foundations. They simply don't fund places like us.'" Evidently, La Mama's financial support sources resembles that of the HPRL program. The article also states that "...unable to raise the \$150,000 [La Mama] needs to finish the season, which ends on June 30, [the founder] is contemplating closing the theater complex, possibly forever." The instability and limitations in funding jeopardized the existence of La Mama Theater and other similar artistic companies and programs, as it did for INTAR's HPRL.

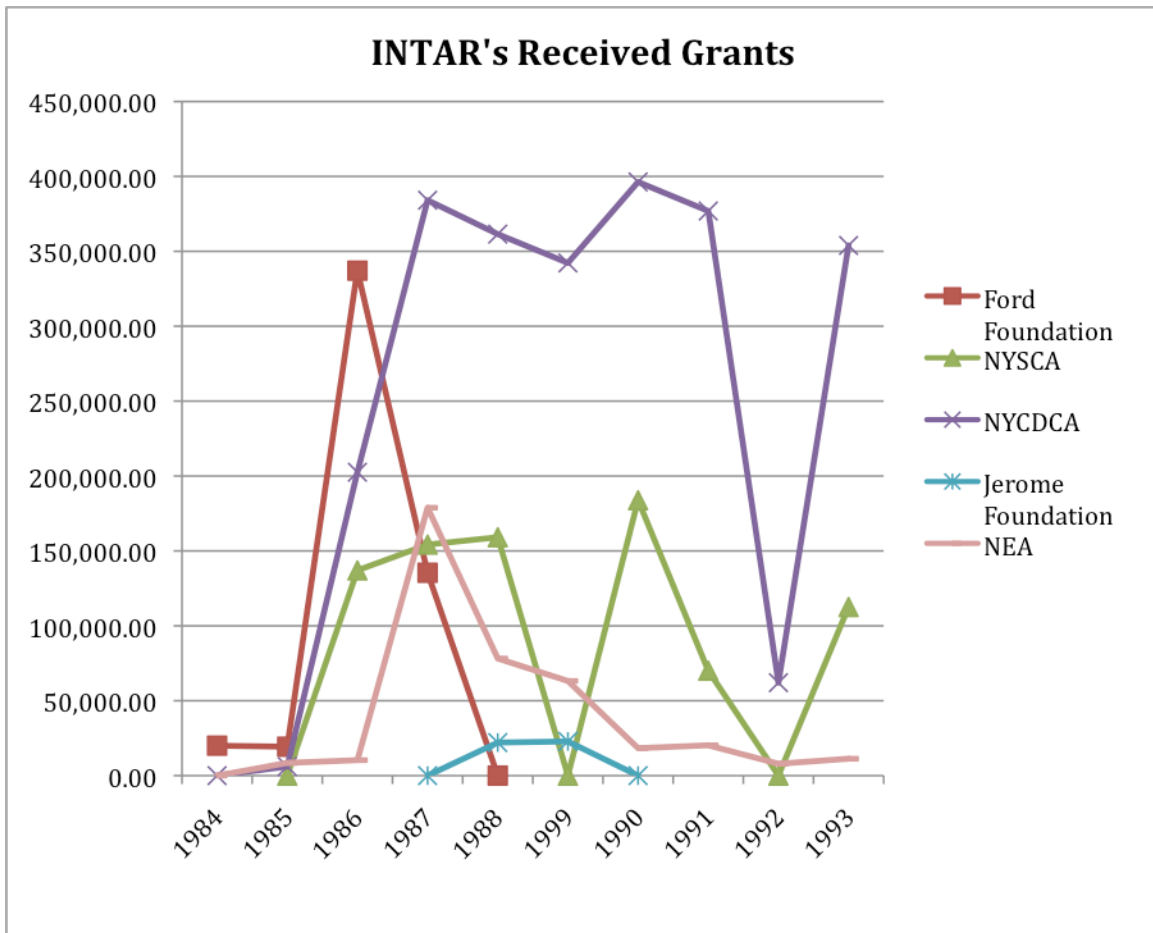
### Graphs for reference:

*For accuracy, all of the following amounts have been changed to 2010-dollar values*

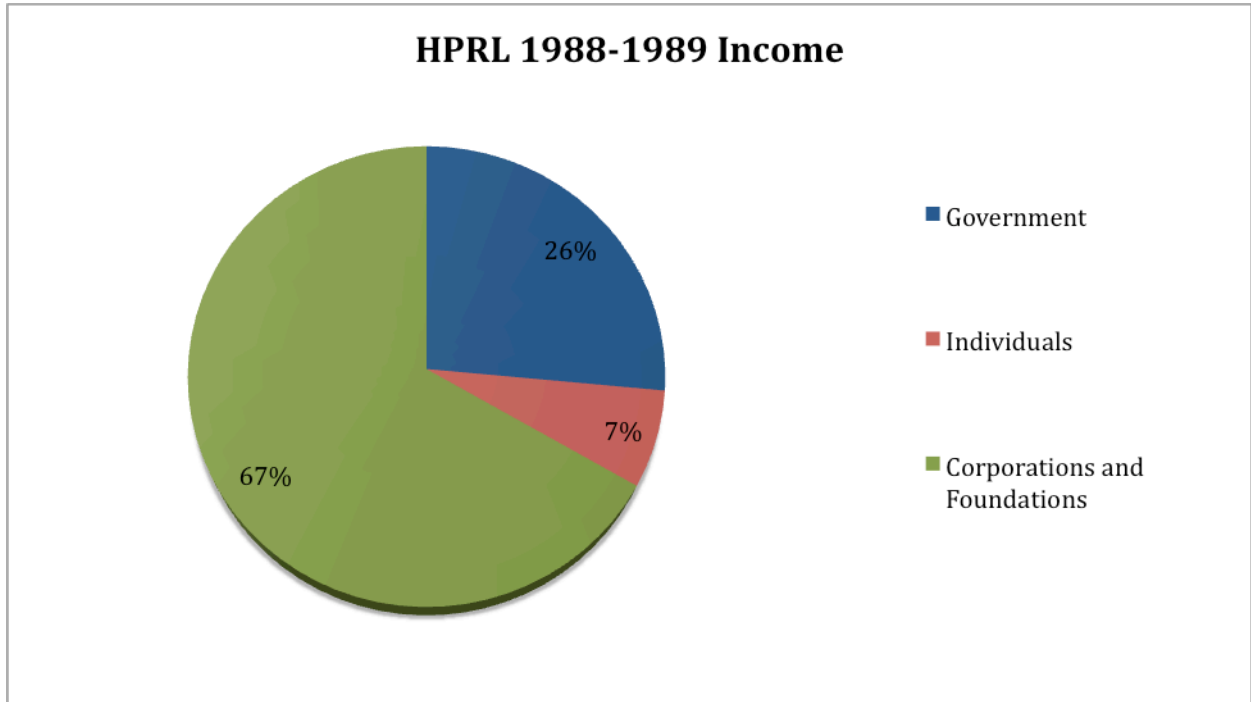
**Graph 1:**



**Graph 2:**



**Graph 3:**



**Government: \$71,333**

NEA: 32,837.81

NYSCA: 33,113.76

DCA: 5,380.99

**Individuals: \$18,397**

**Corporations, foundations: \$179,550**

**TOTAL: \$269,279.27**



Report's Bibliography

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4. Grants Received and Mission Statement. Cuban Heritage Collection, INTAR Theater Records (No: CHC5159, Box 85), Coral Gables, FL.
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7. Stairs, Stanley T., and Max Ferra. "INTAR Board of Directors." Letter to Ms. Jessica Chao. 17 Oct. 1989. MS. Cuban Heritage Collection, INTAR Theater Records (No: CHC5159, Box 85), Coral Gables, FL.