

Executive Directors Peer Session
November 14, 2014

Notes

I. NASAA Update

NASAA President Pam Breaux briefed the group on current news from the NASAA board. When formulating the job description for NASAA's next CEO, the board took a broad look at the cultural landscape, NASAA's needs and the future of state arts agencies (SAAs)'. A national search is under way. Meanwhile, priorities for the year ahead—in addition to CEO onboarding—will include work with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and a new Congress, revenue diversification, maintaining strong core services and considering the best use of the NASAA board's advisory seats. Jonathan Katz, in his final remarks to the Executive Directors Peer Group, offered a review of strategic relationships that will be important to state arts agencies in the year ahead. Key relationships include those with the NEA, Grantmakers in the Arts and Americans for the Arts.

II. High-Impact Investments and Strategies

Executive directors discussed various grants, services, policies and partnerships that are proving effective at generating good results, momentum and support at the state level. Examples included:

- Alaska: The agency is working in a targeted way to build support and visibility for cultural tourism within the tourism industry itself. The SAA recently sponsored a cultural tourism keynote and successfully embedded an arts-related resolution in the state's tourism policy agenda.

- Michigan: The arts council and staff conducted a "gap analysis" examining areas (issue areas and geographic areas) where neither public nor private support was being offered. The SAA then selected several areas where its funds could make a meaningful difference. This process resulted in new SAA funds being devoted to art supplies and capital grants.

- Vermont: The arts council's upcoming 50th anniversary is a great catalytic occasion for outreach to constituents and partners. The SAA is planning a statewide celebration of what public support has achieved. Activities including launching a new arts calendar, public recognition events, cultivating a new network and considering common goals/agendas with a variety of partners.

- Massachusetts: The agency launched a new cultural district program two years ago. Although it received no appropriations from the legislature, the program established 27 districts in a short time and is reporting significant increases in tourism, partnerships and connections with policymakers. The program is garnering enthusiasm from local elected officials, which is great for the arts advocacy pipeline. State legislators now are considering an investment in the program.

- Maine: The agency is concluding a process of restructuring and simplifying its grant programs. They are launching a new general operating support category and have a memorandum of understanding with New Brunswick, Canada, to invest in partnership activities and prove the potential of international collaborations. A statewide cultural planning process is laying the foundation for a significantly increased budget request.

- Minnesota: The agency is nurturing a private 501(c)(3) to provide leadership and coordination for creative aging work. Cultivating this organization is bringing nimble flexibility to the work in a way that the SAA alone would be hard-pressed to achieve.

- Alabama: A partnership with the superintendent of education grew out of the state's participation in the Education Leaders Institute sponsored by the NEA. The SAA capitalized on that experience to expand the leadership team for arts education to include corporate leaders as well as educators. The state superintendent recently added $5 million to the budget request for arts education. (They received only $1 million, but the SAA is heartened by the request for more.) Next steps include developing a comprehensive statewide plan for arts education that makes corporate support for the plan highly visible.

- California: The SAA is part of a statewide coalition, in alliance with the department of education, to significantly increase the state commitment to arts education over the long term. There are 10 Turnaround Schools sites, designated by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, in the state. "Creativity at the Core" propagates best practices for integrating the arts into Common Core curriculum standards. The governor doubled the SAA's general fund appropriation for fiscal year 2015.

- Rhode Island: A collaboration with the Rhode Island Teaching Artist Center is proving fruitful, and arts in health is one focus of that partnership. The partners initiated dialogue with the state's department of health and insurance providers to develop an artist health care program that insurance providers will be willing to support.

- Florida: The SAA is rethinking its strategic planning paradigm and reconsidering its grant categories. The agency also is leading a convening series concentrating on key issues of broad interest to the public and potential arts stakeholders. The first focused on arts and environmental conservation and involved scientists, artists and legislators.

- Nevada: The agency used its strategic planning process as a way to remind communities of the SAA as a resource, partner and collaborator. They received 25 invitations to host and cosponsor SAA workshops and planning forums. This demand is a useful indicator of the SAA's perceived value to communities because there are only 19 designated cities in all of Nevada.

- North Dakota: Oil revenues are truly massive, but they are extremely tightly held by the state and aren't being distributed through the general budget process. The SAA is shaping a legislative request for a $10 million contribution to the state's cultural endowment. To build momentum for the idea and increase legislative support, the SAA is mapping grants by legislative districts, conducting site visits and producing short videos, in collaboration with the state's public broadcasting network.

III. SAA Leadership Challenges & Opportunities

Small groups held roundtable conversations focusing on key leadership issues:

- **Failing Arts Organizations:** What arts organizations seem especially vulnerable to collapse? Is this problematic, or the natural course of evolution? What is the SAA's role?
- **Breaking through the Bureaucracy:** How can SAA executive directors effect change and exert creative leadership within a system that's engineered for continuity?
- **Beyond the 501(c)(3):** Support for nonprofits has long been the mainstay—often per statute—of SAA grant programs. But fewer groups are seeking IRS incorporation, and important creative work is occurring outside of traditionally incorporated models. Should SAAs support such efforts? How?
- **SAAs Turn 50:** Many SAAs and the NEA will celebrate their 50th anniversaries soon. As we approach this milestone, it's a "golden" opportunity to take stock

and ask what we want to do with our *next* 50 years. Where have you been, and where do you want to go?

- **Diversity:** What policies or practices is your agency advancing to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in your own agency and/or among grantees?

These were informal—and highly candid—discussions. Notes were not recorded.

IV. National Endowment for the Arts

Pam Breaux moderated a dialogue with recently confirmed NEA Chairman Jane Chu. Chu praised the work of state arts agencies and noted that states are valued partners in bringing the arts to all American communities. She noted that too often the arts are positioned in competition with other areas of public or philanthropic investment. A goal of hers, as NEA chairman, is to dismantle that false dichotomy and build recognition and acceptance of how the arts benefit all communities and all issue areas. Chu cited the economic value of the arts as well as the arts as a pathway to innovation and well-being, exemplified in the NEA's work with veterans and Walter Reed hospital.

When asked whether the NEA would be launching any new programs, Chu indicated that they agency is testing several ideas to determine what is and is not feasible for the agency to do. She said state arts agency ideas would be sought at the earliest possible juncture. Chu indicated that her near-term focus is on disseminating a unified message about the benefits of the arts and examining the NEA's internal organizational values, to draw on the expertise of the staff to help the agency succeed. Quotable moments from Chu during the session include:

"When you've seen one community, you've seen *one* community."

"It's not about either/or—it's about both/and. It's possible to blend perspectives, tastes and genre. Let's not get caught in a zero-sum argument."

"Communities are recognized for being distinctive and the arts are at the heart of that."

"It takes a long time for something to happen suddenly."

2014 Executive Directors Peer Group Coordinators:

Alex Aldrich, Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council
Shannon Daut, Executive Director, Alaska State Council on the Arts
Al Head, Executive Director, Alabama State Council on the Arts
Kelly Barsdate, NASAA Chief Program & Planning Officer / Staff liaison