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The Arts and the Military Briefing Session

October 18, 2013

Moderator: Margaret Hunt, Director, Colorado Creative Industries

Presenters: Marete Wester, Director of Arts Policy, Americans for the Arts
Lynn Martin Graton, Acting Director, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts
Robert Booker, Executive Director, Arizona Commission on the Arts

See the [moderator and presenter bios](#) under Friday Morning Briefings.

[Arts therapy video](#)

[Seeing Isn't Believing audio](#)

[Yo-Yo Ma and Musicorps video](#)

[The Arts and the Military in New Hampshire presentation](#)

The goal of this briefing was to talk about how best to position the arts to support military veterans and their families and about the roles state arts agencies can play in facilitating those connections.

Moderator Margaret Hunt underscored not only the policy importance of this topic, but also the degree to which it affects many lives and families across America. Having a close personal relationship with a wounded warrior has created in Hunt a deep conviction that the arts have something important to offer to service members and can aid in their recovery from physical, mental and emotional wounds.

Although it can be hard to begin the conversation, opportunities for dialogue and real impact at the state level do exist. For instance, Colorado has seven Department of Veterans Affairs Vet Centers located across the state.

Hunt concluded her opening remarks by reviewing some germane statistics. Since 2011, more than two million service members have deployed to combat zones. Unemployment for veterans is twice the national average. And one-third of veterans are homeless.

Presentation

Marete Wester, Director of Arts Policy, Americans for the Arts

Marete Wester summarized her work for Americans for the Arts (AFTA) on arts and the military by sharing her operating principle: "Proceed until apprehended." She learned this phrase from service members.

Wester shared two videos and an audio clip:

- video of a U.S. Marine recounting how [arts therapy](#) helped him cope with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and provided a community of support
- audio recording of a service member reading his essay, [Seeing Isn't Believing](#), investigating PTSD as a "hidden" wound
- video of Yo-Yo Ma performing with veterans who participate in [Musicorps](#), a program that helps wounded veterans learn instruments and play and produce music

Wester said that today's veterans' issues are overwhelming the military and the Department of Veterans Affairs. There has been a sharp increase in the number of veterans in the last decade. In addition, the nature of the deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan is new to the military. While the durations of deployments have decreased, the frequency has increased: many service members have deployed to Iraq and/or Afghanistan multiple times. Meanwhile, there has been a greater reliance on the National Guard and the reserve components of other military branches, meaning that more noncareer soldiers are serving in combat zones without the subsequent peer support that career soldiers find upon returning to their U.S. bases.

AFTA's work on arts and the military evolved when it launched, in 2012, the [National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military](#) in partnership with the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and a committee representing federal agencies, the military, and the nonprofit and private sectors. Through the initiative there are new strategic partners, including the U.S. Surgeon General, the Veterans Health Administration, Defense Centers of Excellence (which work with psychological health and traumatic brain injuries), the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.

This year, AFTA published a white paper summarizing the initiative's work to date and establishing a national action plan for integrating arts and the military. [Arts, Health and Well-Being across the Military Continuum](#) outlines the research as well as the practice and policy recommendations that came out of the initiative's two national convenings. Wester said that the goal of the paper is to communicate to policymakers, practitioners (e.g., artists, health professionals, creative arts therapists and the community at large) and beneficiaries (veterans, their families and their caregivers) that the arts can be very effective in healing.

Wester identified obstacles to be overcome, including the lack of awareness and understanding of the issues; limited and siloed funding; the absence of strategy coordination; no central information source; and a profound need for the training of military, health and arts professionals. At the same time, she noted, there is quite an opportunity to be found in partnerships between the military and civilian agencies.

Presentation

Lynn Martin Graton, Acting Director, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts

Lynn Martin Graton shared a presentation that established the context for [the arts and military in New Hampshire](#). There are 130,000 veterans in New Hampshire, a state with a population of 1.3 million. This means that veterans are 10% of New Hampshire's population. In addition, there is the issue that part-time service members—reservists and members of the National Guard—don't have the same level of support that career service members find on their home base.

The New Hampshire State Council on the Arts (NHSCA) began a strategic planning process last year that includes determining what more it can do for veterans and active-duty service members. The council wants to build off the arts and military projects it already has completed, including a percent for art project and an arts-engagement project at a veterans' retirement home. Another cornerstone for future work is the fact that 36 museums in the state participate in the [Blue Star Museums](#) program.

To lay the groundwork in this effort, NHSCA convened a strategic planning focus group to learn how it can serve veterans and service members. Participants included the Easter Seals Veterans Count Program, the Currier Museum in Manchester and an artist. Since then, NHSCA has engaged the New Hampshire Office of Veterans Services and the New Hampshire National Guard. In addition, NHSCA is exploring a collaboration with the [Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program](#), a U.S. Department of Defense effort to promote the well-being of service members and their families throughout the deployment cycle. NHSCA met with the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Foods to explore wider promotion of Military Appreciation Days at farm stands. Finally, the state Department of Corrections and the Office of Veterans Services may add arts engagement to their Diversion/Alternative Sentencing program for veterans.

Presentation

Robert Booker, Executive Director, Arizona Commission on the Arts

Bob Booker shared two guiding principles for working on the arts and military. First, he thinks of the arts as a sense of place, a passion to live, the manifestation of joy, and a way to connect to other people. Second, there is a collective American

obligation to serve veterans and active-duty service members and their families; the arts are primed to do just this.

The Arizona Commission on the Arts awards [Honoring Our Servicemembers Grants](#) to help organizations provide participatory arts and cultural experiences to active-duty service members, reservists, veterans and family members. The grants (\$750-\$7,500) support arts therapy projects or participatory projects in any arts discipline taking place in a variety of settings and formats. The program is not meant to simply subsidize tours, entry fees or ticket prices.

In addition, the commission is working to learn how it can further leverage the arts in service of military personnel and veterans. A focus group comprising state legislators, veterans and their families, and advocates for veterans demonstrated that the agency needs to work with everyone to make headway on the issue. Arts organizations already serving veterans say that the military is in denial of the emotional damage of combat. A poll shows that female veterans are four times more likely than male veterans to be homeless.

Despite the commission's success working at the state level, national level efforts are important. Booker said that national projects set the tone for states.

Questions

What are the best practices for creating arts opportunities for veterans?

Graton suggested asking case workers from state agencies and nonprofits to relay information about arts opportunities when interacting with veterans.

Have there been many attempts to engage conservatives in connecting the arts and the military?

Booker said that the Arizona Commission on the Arts successfully worked with a conservative state senator. Wester said that AFTA will soon test this proposition: it will be sending its white paper (Arts, Health and Well-Being across the Military Continuum) to every member of Congress, to congressional staffers working on military issues and to its State Arts Action Network. Furthermore, AFTA is holding a congressional briefing in November. It will share details with any state arts agency that is interested.

A session participant described the War Comes Home project in California, which is a traveling exhibit of art by veterans and related programs. Booker, in response, described a show of work by and about veterans to which the military community was invited.