

## Accessibility Coordinators Peer Session Report Sept 10-11, 2008

NASAA Assembly 2008, September 11-13

### Summary Report and Resources



Accessibility Coordinators gather on day one of their peer session meetings.

Forty-two members participated in the very lively Accessibility Coordinators Peer Session, which covered a variety of issues and technical assistance work. Paula Terry opened the meeting with updates on the Arts Endowment's accessibility work.

The following is a brief summary of each segment of this two-day meeting, including links to related information and resources.

### July 22-24, 2009 National Summit on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is working in partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Social Security Administration, and other agencies to convene a national gathering that will bring together professionals from the arts, education, government, and disability fields to address barriers and advance training and career opportunities for individuals with disabilities who are pursuing arts careers. The National Summit on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities will include issue papers, deliberations, and recommendations for advancing arts careers. The issue papers will address technology, law, higher education, and funding. Materials will be sent to invitees in advance of the summit in preparation for this working meeting. The summit will also examine generational perspectives and diversity within career fields. This effort is a follow-up to the 1998 National Forum on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities. For additional information about the 1998 forum, visit <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/forum>.

**Katie Lyles, NEA**, presented an overview of the earlier National Forum held in 1998 and a presentation displaying the wide variety of initiatives that resulted from this event.

**Carmen Boston, NASAA**, discussed NASAA's involvement in planning the summit and communicating relevant information to the state arts agencies. Carmen will provide updates to key staff from these agencies and coordinate with their staff concerning their participation in the summit.

**Mary Verdi-Fletcher, Dancing Wheels Company and School**, discussed the 1998 National Forum and its outcomes. She related how the 2009 summit will build on the earlier forum and plan for the next decade in terms of careers, education, and remaining barriers.

Mary talked about her personal perspective and her experience seeking and promoting careers in the arts, both as an artist and as head of Professional Flair, an organization that trains artists and helps them locate jobs. Both Mary and Carmen are members of the summit's Executive Planning Committee.

## **Cultural Alliance Access Network**

**Don Ehman, New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and John McEwen, New Jersey Theatre Alliance**, discussed the development and administration of the highly successful Cultural Access Network of New Jersey (CAN), a co-sponsored project of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the New Jersey Theatre Alliance. Created in 1992 with the support of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, CAN assists arts groups of all disciplines in making their programs and facilities fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. The network includes members with specific knowledge and expertise relating to accessible programming and facilities. CAN reviews the New Jersey State Arts Council's ADA Plan Outline that is required for all its grantees, provides a searchable calendar of accessible arts events that specifies access accommodations, produces an on-line cultural access newsletter, and conducts sensitivity training, as well as technical assistance workshops, throughout the state. Arts groups may borrow the network's audio description equipment at no charge. Further, CAN implemented an open-captioned series with 38 theaters in New Jersey. Recently, the network held focus groups around the state, looking at barriers to cultural access for people with disabilities. The number-one issue cited by participants was transportation; the second noted that people with disabilities do not feel welcome at cultural events and venues. The same focus group found that information regarding accessible cultural venues is shared first through word of mouth, and second, via the Internet. Cultural Alliance Access Network: <http://culturalaccessnetwork.org>  
New Jersey State Arts Council: [http://www.njartscouncil.org/accessibility\\_tfa.cfm](http://www.njartscouncil.org/accessibility_tfa.cfm)

## **Working with an Access Advisory Committee**



Photo by Paula Terry

Diane Williams' presentation got session participants involved by spelling out "ART SCOPE."

**Diane Williams, Mississippi Arts Commission**, discussed how the commission organized and works with its advisory committees on access issues, reviewing guidelines, programs, meetings, and facilities to assure that the agency is inclusive. She addressed key items to keep in mind when working with an advisory committee, using "Art Scope" as a memory tool:

- A**dvisors at the table
- R**esources for one another
- T**ask driven
- S**ervices offered
- C**ollaborative
- O**riented and focused
- P**artners in action
- E**ngagement – constant and fluid

For planning and maintaining a successful advisory committee, Diane recommended:

- Evaluating field expertise and diversity;
- Establishing the mission and vision statement for the group;
- Determining the objective; defining the communities' needs;
- Valuing your group; and
- Understanding the challenges. Challenges may include logistics, organizing face-to-face meetings, and facilitating meetings that are purposeful.

**Katherine Eckstrand, Ohio Arts Council**, discussed the council's policy for inclusive panels and its efforts to re-establish accessibility as a visible priority. The Ohio Arts Council (OAC) requires that a person with a disability serve on each application review panel. The Arts Council is in the process of examining its internal practices, services to the public, and partnerships and networks. This involves establishing new goals and identifying key strategies, which Katherine shared with the group.

Current efforts to reevaluate and better incorporate accessibility into all the Ohio Arts Council's efforts include:

- Developing a staff training program;
- Meeting with people and organizations involved in past OAC accessibility efforts;
- Reviewing past files and information;
- Identifying and meeting with potential partners;
- Building access needs into the upcoming OAC budget; and
- Going forward with the artists with disabilities grant program.

Future steps will include the development of a formal job description for the OAC accessibility coordinator, the creation of an accessibility coordinator manual, and the publication of a written history of accessibility programs and services.

See sample accessibility coordinator job descriptions:

<http://www.nea.gov/resources/Accessibility/Planning/Step3.pdf>.

The conversation continued to detail ways accessibility can be ingrained as part of an agency's culture so that it is not dependent on just one individual's efforts.

Suggestions included:

- Training agency staff so that every staff person is able to address accessibility requests or questions;
- Getting board member support;
- Establishing an access advisory board;
- Requiring inclusive panels; and
- Addressing access issues in funding guidelines.

## **Section 504 Program Evaluation Workbook**

**Katie Lyles, NEA**, discussed the importance of using the Arts Endowment's Program Evaluation Workbook. The workbook is designed to assist grant recipients as they evaluate the accessibility of their programs and activities for people with disabilities and employees. The workbook is intended to assist organizations in their efforts to (a) comply with the NEA's regulations implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, including the preparation of a self-evaluation of all programs, activities, policies, and practices to determine areas of noncompliance; and (b) better understand the relationship between Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Once each organization

has completed its accessibility evaluation, the evaluation should be kept on file and re-evaluated periodically, as accessibility is a work in progress.

<http://www.arts.gov/about/504Workbook.html>

## **Taking the Arts into Health Care**

**Arts administrator Donna Glassford** presented an overview of how her program at **Vanderbilt University's Medical Center** has infused the arts into its health care system, where artists involve patients, their families, and health care professionals in a variety of arts programs. These programs include a traveling art cart used by artists working with patients at their bedside, musical performances, artist workshops with patients and staff, art exhibitions, and a growing public art collection. In addition, the medical center offers coursework for medical students who wish to study and practice art with patients. Donna also reviewed and provided input regarding facility architecture and design.

**Poet Kate Daniels**, an artist in residence at **Vanderbilt University's Medical Center**, highlighted various aspects of her work with patients, including a creative writing project at the diabetes clinic for children. She teaches poetry writing in clinic waiting rooms, where pediatric patients were encouraged to write about their experiences with diabetes. The resulting poetry ranged from expressing frustration to humor, and was assembled in a poetry book for the participants and others in the Center.

**Cassandra Erickson, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts**, discussed the Council's funding guidelines and artists' directory for its Arts in Health Care projects. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to show excerpts from the council's new DVD, *Prescribing the Arts*, which features programs throughout the state.

Vanderbilt University Medical Center Cultural Enrichment Program:

<http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/root/vumc.php?site=culturalenrichment&doc=8840>

New Hampshire State Council on the Arts – Arts in Health Care Artist Directory:

<http://www.nh.gov/nharts/artsandartists/aihcartistdirectory.html>

## **Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts**

Since 2002, 26 states have convened forums and many follow-up projects that address training and jobs for artists with disabilities. **Olivia Raynor, National Arts & Disability Center (NADC)/UCLA**, presented an overview of the technical assistance services provided by NADC, discussed the importance of advanced planning, and showed a map of states that have held forums.

**Lisa Hester, Tennessee Arts Council, and Lori Kissenger, VSArts Tennessee**, spoke of the 2006 statewide forum at Middle Tennessee State University, a centrally located and fully accessible site. The two-day forum was entitled "Arts Talk" and brought together participants from around the state, as well as students from Middle Tennessee State University. Highlights from the forum included the presentation of Daria Rae's award-winning film, *The Goal*; sessions on portfolio development; and a resource booklet that forum participants received to further assist them in their pursuit of careers in the arts. The "Arts Talk" logo for the forum was designed by an artist with a disability. As a result of the forum's exposure and positive feedback about the marketing materials, the logo's designer has since expanded her clientele.

**Amy Schmidt, North Dakota Arts Council**, discussed North Dakota's 2007 statewide forum, where the arts council first conducted a series of regional meetings that later that year culminated in a statewide conference in Bismarck. Information gathered from the regional gatherings—on issues such as barriers to career in the arts, educational needs, and successful communication methods—was featured in a resource book available at the statewide conference. The conference included sessions on Supplemental Security Income and business strategies, three performances by artists with disabilities, networking opportunities, a venue for all participants to display their art, a visit from the First Lady of North Dakota, Mikey Hoeven, and a detailed resource room.

NADC's site on Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts:  
<http://nadc.ucla.edu/statewideforum.cfm>

### **Web site Resources & Access**

**Jim Bob McMillan, Texas Commission on the Arts**, demonstrated how the commission made its Web site accessible and added new resources to assist grantees in making their buildings and activities fully accessible. Jim Bob gave a tour of the newly redesigned site, including the accessibility section. He demonstrated how the commission tested its Web site's accessibility with the on-line "Cynthia Says" technology, which evaluates each individual Web page and alerts the user where accessibility issues may exist.

Texas Arts Commission: <http://www.arts.state.tx.us/>  
Section 508 compliance: Cynthia Says <http://www.contentquality.com/>

### **Health Insurance for Artists and Arts Organizations**

**Jim Brown, The Actors Fund**, in New York City, demonstrated the on-line Artists Health Insurance Resource Center (AHRIC). The AHRIC database is available to artists and arts groups of all disciplines and provides a wealth of state-by-state information about affordable health care and health insurance coverage. It also includes a multitude of links to other health care Web site resources, including Web sites covering individual health care rights, community clinics, and insurance for children.

The AHRIC Web site identifies:

- Sliding scale or reduced-cost community clinics;
- Sources of emergency financial assistance for artists;
- Organizations that provide affordable health care or financial assistance to people with particular health issues or disabilities;
- Current clinical trials;
- Affordable mental health care and substance abuse treatment programs;
- Dental clinics, and
- Prescription drug discount programs.

Artists Health Insurance Resource Center: <http://www.ahirc.org>  
(A new Web site will be launched in October 2008.)

## **Creativity and Aging**

**Gay Hanna, National Center for Creative Aging**, addressed the critical need and growing opportunities for creativity and aging programming. With the burgeoning older population and changes in generational perspectives, senior centers, retirement communities, universities, and libraries are trying to incorporate more cultural programming and quality arts opportunities for their patrons. The National Center for Creative Aging is now under the umbrella of George Washington University in Washington, D.C. The center conducts training sessions, provides resources, and offers networking opportunities concerning arts programming for, by, and with older adults.

Gay presented the September 2008 issue of the *Americans for the Arts* monograph, "Creativity Matters: Arts and Aging in America," which includes information and resources. For developing lifelong learning arts programming, Gay recommended her organization's new "Creativity Matters: The Arts and Aging Toolkit," available on-line at: <http://artsandaging.org/>.

**Tim Carpenter, EngAGE**, discussed the transformative power of the arts on one older resident at the Burbank Senior Artist Colony in California. This resident had struggled with depression when she first moved to the Colony. Influenced by the Colony's creative community and opportunities, she began writing. In addition, a screenplay was produced by resident media artists, casting Colony residents as the leads. The film won an award at a prestigious Burbank film festival.

EngAGE provides lifelong learning coursework conducted by professional artists in 16 area retirement communities, including classes in visual arts, creative writing, filmmaking, music, dance, and theater. EngAGE's radio show, "Experience Talks," highlights the lives, experiences, and stories of older adults and reaches over 250,000 listeners each week.

EngAGE: <http://www.engagedaging.org/>

National Center for Creative Aging: <http://www.creativeaging.org>

## **The BIG READ, Accessibility, and Arts in Corrections**

**Molly Thomas-Hicks, NEA Literature Program**, presented the Arts Endowment's recent efforts making The Big Read accessible and bringing the program to older adults. These efforts included electronic versions of the educational materials, assured local access to audio books and books in Braille, an updated Web site, community events in retirement communities and senior centers, and partnerships with organizations providing programs for individuals with disabilities. Molly highlighted an extension of The Big Read pilot program—a program with the Children's Institute, Inc. in Los Angeles that is currently taking place in three juvenile correctional facilities. This program has adapted The Big Read for correctional facilities, and includes a 12-week study of three books. Male wards will read *The Call of the Wild*; *Bless Me, Ultima*; and *The Maltese Falcon*. Female wards will read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *The Joy Luck Club*.

**Paula Terry, NEA**, discussed the program with the juvenile correctional facility, as well as the NEA's partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice's Federal Bureau of Prisons, which trains and places artists-in-residence in federal correctional facilities. Participating artists include creative writing and graphic artists. In 2008, this partnership is supporting five arts residencies in federal correctional institutions. Paula also highlighted that John

Ostrout, NEA's Director of States and Regions, had reported that 80% of the state arts agencies are supporting arts programming in corrections.

The Big Read: <http://www.neabigread.org>