



## Accessibility Coordinator Peer Session Notes

Contact Katie Lyles Levy ([Levyk@arts.gov](mailto:Levyk@arts.gov)), Accessibility Specialist, NEA Office of Accessibility, for peer session PowerPoint presentations.

*Wednesday, October 13*

### NEA Updates

The National Endowment for the Arts's (NEA's) new accessibility director, [Beth Bienvenu](#), presented an overview and update of the Office of Accessibility's leadership initiatives, including Creativity and Aging: Lifelong Learning the Arts, Artist-in-Residence Programs at Federal Correctional Institutions, and the [2010 National Accessibility Leadership Award](#) to the North Carolina Arts Council. She also invited the states and regions to join the NEA in exploring new ways to provide technical assistance and training on accessibility. Beth shared information on general disability employment resources, the [Job Accommodation Network](#) (JAN), the [Employer Assistance and Resource Network](#) (EARN), the [Workforce Recruitment Program](#) (WRP), and the [Campaign for Disability Employment](#).

### July 2009 [National Summit on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities](#) and How the Summit Recommendations May Assist Your Agency's Planning Process

The NEA worked in partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Social Security Administration, and other public and private organizations to convene a national gathering of more than 130 people from the arts, education, government, and disability fields. The focus of the conference was to address barriers and advance training and career opportunities in the arts for individuals with disabilities. The Summit agenda included panel discussions on arts careers, breakthroughs and accomplishments, new research, Social Security and work incentives, workplace support and related issues, and two performances by artists with disabilities. During the Summit, attendees formed five working groups: creative writing, design, media, performing arts and visual arts. The working groups met twice and discussed current best practices, policies and standards that would enable people with disabilities to gain increased access to higher education, arts training and employment opportunities in those fields.

Peer session presenters described segments of the Summit and corresponding working group recommendations for consideration among the session participants. These recommendations—such as recommendations to implement universal design in the development of curricula and to make disability access a key component of program funding—can be found in the newly released Summit [final report](#).

Chair: **Katie Lyles Levy**, Accessibility Specialist, NEA

- Media & Performing Arts: **Lawrence Carter-Long**, Founding Director, disTHIS Film Series & Disabilities.
- Visual Arts: **Celia Hughes**, Executive Director, VSA Texas

- Design: **Sherry Snipes**, Director, Diversity & Inclusion, The American Institute of Architects

## **2009 National Accessibility Leadership Award Recipient**

Executive Director **Lewis Ricci** and Accessibility Coordinator **Kristina Davis** of the Indiana Arts Commission (IAC), and visual artist **Wug Laku**, discussed ArtsWORK Indiana, an informal, statewide group of people interested in improving arts-related professional opportunities and careers for people with disabilities. ArtsWORK is jointly supported by IAC, VSA arts of Indiana, and the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University. A key aspect of ArtsWORK is its [website](#), where visitors can find information on employment and disability issues, artistic opportunities, accessible accommodations at arts venues, a directory of Indiana artists and art administrators, and an on-line catalogue where artists may exhibit their work by uploading images and artist statements.

The Commission received the Arts Endowment's [2009 National Accessibility Leadership Award](#), which IAC used to add an "artist access" category to their Individual Artists Program Grant that provides funding for artistic and career development. Fourteen artists were awarded Individual Artists Program Grants under this new category. ArtsWORK, in order to maintain the momentum and interest resulting from the individual grants, identified two to three satellite locations and partners around the state to establish creative networks. Each satellite location employs an artist to aid in the facilitation of meetings, membership recruitment, development of local resources and administration of monthly professional development presentations. Next steps for ArtsWORK Indiana include developing an organization structure, building capacity, supporting career development, updating the ArtsWORK Web site, and building and maintaining partnerships.

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

Twenty-seven states continue to convene statewide forums and conduct follow-up projects that address training and jobs for artists with disabilities. **Olivia Raynor**, director of the National Arts and Disability Center (NADC) at UCLA, chaired this segment, providing [background on the statewide forums](#), review of NADC's role, types of forum activities, examples of successful partnerships, and sustainable follow-up project samples. The proposed future directions for the statewide forums and follow-up activities include making the business case to arts employers for hiring artists with disabilities and giving prominence to the youth voice and perspective.

**Encarnación Teruel**, director of Visual Arts, Media Arts, & Multi-Disciplinary Programs and accessibility coordinator at the Illinois Arts Council (IAC), discussed the Illinois "[Universal Arts Illinois](#)" statewide forum. IAC partnered with the Illinois Department of Human Services, Access Living of Metro Chicago, the Springfield Arts Council, and the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living to plan and conduct forums in the northern (Chicago) and central (Springfield) part of the state in May 2009. Responses from a call for information survey made available with the publicity and preregistration materials allowed IAC to tailor each forum to the specific needs and interests of the respondents and their locations. Both forums included presentations on state resources and services, professional development, discussion roundtables, and artist showcases.

**An-Ming Truxes**, Arts Division director of Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism (CCT), reviewed Connecticut's statewide forum and follow-up projects. CCT convened a statewide forum in November 2008 in partnership with Young Audiences Arts for Learning

Connecticut (YAC), the state's VSA arts affiliate. Truxes recommended that a successful forum includes diversity in the statewide advisory committee, involvement of providers and agencies that serve people with disabilities, involvement of education institutions, and planning time. Challenges recognized in carrying out the Connecticut forum included the identification of artists with disabilities, transportation and technical difficulties experienced at the facility. With 2010 statewide forum follow-up funding, CCT and YAC are collaborating on a series of three juried exhibitions of artwork by artists with disabilities in 2010 and 2011. The exhibitions, entitled [CHANGE](#), include 56 artworks representing 39 artists from 18 cities and towns in Connecticut.

**Thursday, October 14**

### **The Arts and Military Families**

**Laura Scanlan**, the Arts Endowment's state and regional director, addressed the NEA's efforts to increase the participation of military personnel and their families in arts programs throughout the country. Since 2004, [Operation Homecoming](#) has preserved the stories of U.S. military members and their families through a writing-the-wartime-experience project. Through writing workshops and an open call for writing submissions, the NEA received more than 10,000 pages of writing. Almost 100 of the uncensored personal writings were published in an anthology, *Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families*. All of the 1,200 writing submissions will be preserved in both the U.S. National Archives and the Library of Congress's Veterans History Project. In 2008, the NEA initiated a partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct writing workshops with veterans as well as active duty troops. In May 2010, the NEA launched the [Blue Star Museum](#) initiative, a partnership with Blue Star Families and more than 900 museums in all 50 states offering free admission to military personnel and their families from Memorial Day through Labor Day, 2010.

### **Universal Design Case Studies and Access to Design Professions**

**Valerie Fletcher**, executive director of the Institute for Human Centered Design, addressed the importance of universal design and presented the new NEA-funded, web-based, international collection of case studies on universal design in the built environment. Fletcher discussed how design powerfully and profoundly influences us and our sense of confidence, comfort and control, and that variation in ability is ordinary, not special, and affects most of us for at least part of our lives. She highlighted the [principles of universal design](#), changing demographics in terms of disability and the aging population, and the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

The Institute's evolving [Universal Design Case Studies](#) website illustrates with high-quality photographs, floor plans and detailed descriptions the difference between compliance with minimum access standards and good universal design that embraces human differences and diversity. An international jury of experts from eight nations reviews each case study submission for inclusion on the website. Each case study includes the project details, such as funding, and the project team, including consultants, architects and engineers. Categories of case studies include outdoor spaces, cultural spaces, housing, public buildings, historical preservation, transportation and education. Fletcher also briefly presented the [Access to Design Professions](#) project, which is an NEA-funded initiative to engage students with disabilities in design careers. Access to Design has established a network of designers with disabilities, provided e-mentoring to students, surveyed design schools and hosted small incentive projects in schools to explore universal design.

## Educating & Assisting Grantees

**Robert Booker**, executive director of the Arizona Commission on the Arts, presented the agency's efforts to assist arts groups in becoming fully accessible, including access language in funding guidelines and the Commission's requirements for grantee submissions of accessibility plans and reports. The Commission has established a [four-year process](#) to promote applicant and grantee development of [access statements](#) and plans. In the first and second years, preliminary planning and an accessibility checklist are completed by the organization. During the third year, the organization shows the plan to the Commission; in the fourth year the organization's access plan is included in the application as part of the panel review. The Commission has collected the names of arts organizations' designated accessibility coordinators throughout the state in order to establish a statewide network of accessibility coordinators. Further, to promote awareness, the Commission has conducted statewide community access workshops in conjunction with [ARTability](#), included accessibility consultants in its [Consultant Services Roster](#) and offered professional development grants for accessibility conferences.

## The Arts in Corrections

**Grady Hillman**, director of Community Arts at Texas State University, reviewed the history of arts and corrections, including the influence of prison songs on mainstream music, as well as his own journey working in the field. He highlighted some of the current trends, such as the economic downturn's effect on prisons, causing them to reduce the number of inmates and increase re-entry programming, which presents an opportunity for arts involvement. Hillman recently authored a "Snapshot" paper on the arts in criminal justice, commissioned by [Animating Democracy](#), a program of Americans for the Arts, as part of the Arts & Social Change Mapping Initiative. The Snapshot paper will be available in November 2010.

Poet and author **James Reese**, professor of English at Mount Marty College in South Dakota, discussed his writing program and the value of teaching poetry and creative writing to inmate students at the federal correctional facility in Yankton, South Dakota. Reese is one of five artists-in-residence throughout the country who are part of the Arts Endowment's interagency initiative with the Department of Justice's Federal Bureau of Prisons. Since 2008, Reese has worked with the inmate students to annually publish a collection of poems, prose, and illustrations in a book entitled *4 P.M. Count*. He read an excerpt of inmate's writing from the book as well as one of his own poems his recent book, *Ghost on 3<sup>rd</sup>*, which is inspired by the Yankton inmate students.

## Creativity and Aging

**Rosemary Catacalos**, poet and executive director of [Gemini Ink](#), a literary arts center based in San Antonio, Texas, presented [Life Letters](#), an innovative, intergenerational writing project conducted by professional writers. The project enhanced the writing, critical thinking, verbal and reading skills of high school juniors and older adults. Funded in part by the NEA, the project culminated in a free community performance and a softcover anthology of the participants' work. Gemini Ink, when partnering with area schools, requested that the project include both students who are strong academically and at-risk youth who may struggle in school. Twelve older adults and 14 high school juniors met at a senior center once a week for two-hour creative writing workshops over three months. Catacalos read a few of the letters by the participants, which portrayed the dynamic expression that reflected their different cultural, generational, and socioeconomic experiences.