

**Assembly 2007**  
Baltimore, Maryland  
December 7, 2007

## ***Cultural Democracy Briefing Session***

Notes by Jennifer Armstrong and Mayumi Tsutakawa  
Presented by The Association of American Cultures (TAAC)

*This session explored the multiple ideas and values associated with cultural democracy and engaged participants in a discussion about action steps that could be taken by state arts agencies to:*

- *support diverse forms of cultural participation and expression*
- *encourage participation in community-oriented cultural activity, and*
- *and assure fair and equitable access to cultural resources.*

### **Introduction: Mayumi Tsutakawa**

There have been 11 “Open Dialogue” conferences sponsored by TAAC, a 23 year old independent organization. This past summer the 11<sup>th</sup> Open Dialogue theme was Cultural Democracy. We are sharing some of the information from that meeting with you today. Last week we lost our chairman Louis LeRoy, leader since 2001. We dedicate this session to him.

Rationale for this session: The civil rights activism of the 1960s-1980s led to many multicultural policies. With new demographics and intellectual resources, we have new opportunities for the arts. But immigration issues can lead to homeland security issues. The arts provide opportunity for sharing and voicing new expressions. TAAC intends to build capacity of new diverse leaders and organizations based in underserved communities.

### **Presentation: James Early**

- Begin with the idea that all persons have the right to express themselves.
- The 1960s centrism atomized the nation, rather than joining it together.
- Today, new demographics imply transnational identities and multiple identities. Cultures go back and forth. We need more international exchange. Culture carries continuing expressive capacity.
- Check Cultural Indicators Study by Maria Rosario Jackson at Urban Institute, for thoughtful commentary on what various communities value.

- There is not one single definition of “cultural democracy” - only indices or nodal points. It is no longer the black-white optic of the 60s-70s, it is now a multicultural debate.
- How do we get ahead of the curve on this? I would like to suggest the term of “citizen artist” i.e. Sean Penn – the artist as willing partner in social political debate. The arts are a subset of culture - paramount, but not defined.

## **Discussion Comments and Questions**

Detroit recently did some market research and found that people were more comfortable with the terms “art” and “imagine” than they were with “culture” and “creative.”

D.C. – in a recent meeting, an African American city council member looked directly at an African American citizen who serves on the arts commission and said “art is only the concern of you rich white people”

We need to think about what state arts agencies consider to be culturally relevant versus what our communities consider to be culturally relevant.

When we have conversations with our constituents, how are they staged? Who is in the room? Is there a real exchange, or are we just extracting information?

We must look beyond arts groups and look at others working with art – health workers, parks and recreation, etc. And we have to look beyond cultural diversity to a diversity of age, gender, class, etc. When it comes to who’s on board, we have to look beyond the rainbow. We have to build a participatory assembly.

It is frightening how our country now pairs immigration with security.

James Early referenced Diana Molina’s slide show at ODXI. It takes an artistic look at political border problems.

Kansas – German and Swedish immigrants have greatly influenced the community’s culture. They have large festivals and are supported by the state. There doesn’t seem to be the same level of comfort with the new communities moving in, like Latinos. There doesn’t seem to be the same model for support.

Policy issue – we need leaders to express the humanistic side.

Where do we live? What defines our culture? This discussion should help to shape policy.

We need to develop culturally fluent leaders.

We need to advocate for the intrinsic value of art – how they help stabilize communities – not just talk about the economic impact. Arts groups surrender too soon to the economic argument.

Cultural diplomacy by our country – “they” will control it versus “we” need to get out ahead of the conversation.

Our state arts agencies’ responsibility is to get out into underserved communities that don’t have resources or strong structures and support them.

### **Action Steps**

Participants were invited to:

- write down three things that they are doing to reflect the multiple communities they serve, and
- answer the question of how our agencies reflect our diverse communities.

The session coordinators collected all materials and will circle back to each state in six months to see what progress has been made. Below is an anonymous log of those ideas:

1. A) Strengthen and extend the state’s Traditions program to further create a network of networks for different cultural scenes to be recognized and thrive. B) Foster active research into cultural scenes to create connections.
2. Recruit a diverse class for the state’s 2008 “Community Scholars Institute”
3. Focus on assisting different community ties in sustaining their cultural expressions and in sharing them with others through presentation.
4. Research and understand the new immigrant and refugee communities.
5. Create more communication among the Native American artists living in the New England states and beyond, providing gathering space and listening to issues. Working to extend what we are learning to other, newer communities.
6. Actually doing: A) Planning cultural exchanges with Quebec (in the past, with Mexico) to reinvigorate cultural communities; B) encouraging community based cultures to express their cultural / artistic values through the passing among aesthetic skills to the younger generation through apprenticeships, they take place in their own cultural/community contexts. Planning to do: Make funding to large organizations dependent on their commitment to cultural community-based arts.
7. Look at infrastructure network to consider how well it is informed by local community artists. How can this inform our efforts to build the program/ add partners?
8. A) Continue to increase engaging representatives from diverse communities in planning, implementation and evaluation, not just tokens on a panel. B) Increase efforts to have the conversations about cultural democracy in arts education professional development with

- classroom teachers. C) Keep as long as possible my undocumented Hispanic intern in my agency's AE program.
9. Through community scholar training, expand fieldwork documentation across the state. This expands diverse presentations and participation across the state (i.e. at the state Folklife Festival). These "inside" fieldworkers represent economic, ethnic and national original diversity. We might seek to build a sense of global diversity through this program.
  10. A) Look at emigration, not just immigration's influence on the arts in US. B) Continue to think about our state's "international program," now with a view toward "transnational."
  11. A) Expand participation in Midwest Worldfest. B) Creating a Student – ages 17 to 23 - Arts Council. C) Continue and expand capital dollars for arts/cultural organizations (i.e., Arab American).
  12. Goal: Ensure that cultural fluency is a core skill and value emphasized as a part of academic and on the job training for all cultural workers. Strategies: A) focus on both the needs and valuable expertise of culturally grounded organizations as examples of cultural fluency at work. B) Invest in leadership infrastructure as a shift from focus on funding, facilities, etc. C) Explore opportunities to build research, visibility, advocacy and strategic alliances to support this work.
  13. Schedule a series of constituency listening sessions that will bring diverse voices from various community groups and individuals to our planning of the organizational activities for the coming years.
  14. A) Get international funding (current funders do not support transnational practice of traditional arts). B) Work with current funders (Irvine, Hewlett, Haas foundations) to advocate necessity and seek additional funding to focus on transnational artistic practice.
  15. A) Evaluate/change apprenticeship guidelines to reflect changing methods of cultural transference of traditional skills – transnational aspects, length of contact and medium of contact. B) Create new category to allow for realities not traditionally traditional, long term impact on guidelines other than folk art.
  16. How can I begin a conversation with 85 local arts agencies about how to describe/define local culture and how to serve a broader spectrum of artists?
  17. A) Develop an initiative with area refugee youth to gather their stories/experiences into a pilot program that builds awareness and respect among their classmates. B) Create a professional development program that trains culturally grounded artists to use their skills in conflict mediation and cultural awareness education initiatives/ opportunities.
  18. A) Infiltrate existing assemblies with deeper diversity, including my own advisors and panels. B) cultivate new projects with local groups, the ones that don't immediately look like our typical arts programs.
  19. Follow through/update on recommendations from Latino study (2002). B) Mine our own data to see if our programs are being hosted by culturally diverse groups. C) Work with strategic planning committee to develop and assure action plan to carryout mission/goal that speaks to serving "the diverse South."
  20. A) Work with rural Latino communities, ethnographic research. B) Somalian project – revealing the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest Somalian population in the country. C) Create a new profile of the state's diverse populations, including many new populations.

21. A) Diversify our board to reflect more closely our state. 2) Diversify participation in our local cultural council program, 329 local councils with 2300 volunteers.
22. A) Engage Hispanic community in dialogue about their cultural activities, initiatives and needs. B) Engage leaders in the Hispanic community more effectively in arts leadership roles and council representation.
23. In our state, there is very little inclusion of minorities in the decision and leadership side of the arts. We are experiencing a large growth of Hispanic population; some growth of white population and non-growth in our Black population. This is making some interesting dynamics in interaction between people. Beyond color, our state has always had a wide ethnic diversity and we should build on this to expand 21<sup>st</sup> Century cultural directions with communities of color, and German, Czech, Swedish and so on.
24. "New Populations" is a new audience development program for our state, targeting the immigrant and refugee communities. Our strategy is to document the tradition or art form and then initiate a dialogue and an informal assessment of their needs. The goal is to integrate them into our regular programs in about 5 years. This is ambitious and we are in year 3.
25. A) Mentor young refugee artists/culture bearers, to educate them/encourage them to join arts administration professions and help to transform them. B) Expand program guidelines to make them more flexible, less strict in requirements, etc. – in order to "open up" to new or emerging forms, or forms that cross disciplines or ethnicities, basically see what the communities need or are requesting. C) Jump start cross discipline partnerships that promote cultural activities e.g. libraries, social services and health care services, educators, arts administrators, members of communities, artists, etc., in organizing and implementing projects and services.
26. A) Promote cultural exchange through State Department. B) Promote cultural understanding through immigration policy discussions.

*Transcribed by M. Tsutakawa*

## **Session Participants**

50 attendees, from the following states:

DC	MI	LA
PA	MA	IL
SD	WA	FL
OH	ID	WY
CA	MN	KS
RI	IN	GA
DE	OR	NE
CO	UT	Puerto Rico
MO	KY	CT
MD	PA	Southern Arts
NC	AL	Federation