

Building Intentional Networks
NASAA Assembly 2014, New Orleans
November 15, 2014

NOTES

Clarity Questions

Q: What year was the Indigenous Cultural and History Hall of Fame at New Orleans founded?
A (Cherice Harrison-Nelson, Curator, Indigenous Culture and History Hall of Fame at New Orleans): 1999. The effort began as a response to her father becoming an ancestor. She created a living organization in his memory.

Q: Before the Indigenous Cultural and History Hall of Fame was established, how did women navigate the male dominated culture of Mardi Gras Indians?
A (Cherice): The Mardi Gras Indian tradition is male dominated. She sees her role as supporting it and not changing it. She recognizes that women and men have different roles in the tradition, but she thinks they are complementary.

Q: What is the source of funding for the National Performance Network (NPN) and the Visual Arts Network (VAN)?
A (Stanlyn Breve, Director of National Programs, NPN): The funding for NPN and VAN has many sources, including the NEA, national foundations, and local organizations. The biggest source of support, though, is from national funders. VAN and NPN are considered “intermediaries” (an GIA term), which means they act as a pass through, regranteeing money awarded by national organizations to local organizations that aren’t able to apply directly for it.

Q: Has the White House asked the Indigenous Culture and History Hall of Fame to participate in its annual recognition of Mardi Gras Indians?
A (Cherice): No. She doesn’t know much about the White House’s celebration of Mardi Gras Indians. In general, she never wants Native Americans to think that Mardi Gras Indians are mocking their culture. She thinks that the Mardi Gras Indian culture is a freedom movement for African Americans.

Discussion

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Steve Bailey (COO, NPN) discussed a program in San Antonio, TX, called CASA, as an example of a network model. One thing in common between members of the network was raising state public funding. In 5 years, it raised level of public funding from \$2 million to \$5 million. When working as a group, people are able to do things they cannot do separately.

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Person from Oregon Folklife Network said that group has a hard time receiving recognition as the statewide network. So while creating a network presents one set of challenges, there is another set encountered when trying to sustain the network.

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- After SouthArts was approached by presenters not in its network who wanted to be part of its block booking, it struggled with the question of how to engage people/groups not in its network but who want to participate in one aspect of it. How can you do this without diluting the value of the network?
- Steve Bailey said that adaptability is the key to that dilemma. Sometimes a network evolves and has to do things like provide services to groups not part of it because doing so would further its larger goals.

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Q: Who can share more about governance structures of networks?

A: NPN and VAN's board of directors consists of partners, colleagues and artists and have a mandate that 51% of board consist of partners.

A (Jayeeshia Dutta, Gulf Future Coordinator, Gulf Restoration Network): Gulf Restoration Network is still developing its governance structure, but the plan is that it will consist of people who engage the network in different ways.

A (Rebecca Mwase, Codirector, New Orleans Queer Youth Theater): For Alternate Roots, the executive committee consist of 12 people from the membership, but the board consist of all voting members of Alternate Roots (~ 180), who have fiduciary responsibility for the organization.

A (Cherice): For Indigenous Culture and History Hall of Fame, Cherice said she is "the main wrangler," but she doesn't like the title of "director." The group has a loose committee structure made up of partners, including men and women (who represent different parts of the tradition) and including people with PhDs as well as people who read at 4th grade level. It is inclusive.

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Q (Steve): Which states have strong advocacy network (SAA and advocacy group)?

A (MD): Maryland has a successful advocacy network because the SAA and advocacy group share a similar goal and because people from both offices like each other.

A (MA): In Massachusetts, the SAA and advocacy group work well together. They engage the public in broad way, all the way down to the individual.

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Q (Steve): What are the challenges of state advocacy?

A: Tennessee has a successful advocacy group. The challenge is that once the network is formalized, the network mechanics and trappings can overshadow the original purpose.

A: When an advocacy network consists of SAA grantees, it can hold the SAA hostage by focusing too much on grantmaking. This can impede the SAA's evolution.

A: In Washington State, the advocacy group's focus is on large arts institutions, which means that it can overlook emerging and non-mainstream arts organizations. State legislators appreciate broader representation of the arts.

A: Oregon has an effective advocacy coalition. The advocacy coalition has new leadership, which means that it may go in a new direction without consulting the SAA.

A (Steve): Who should determine the issue to focus on, those at the top or those at the bottom? Ideally, the decisions of a few people—or the turnover of a few positions—shouldn't change the general direction of a network.

A: In TX, a SAA staff person sits on advocacy group's board as a liaison and helps frame policy issues. In the future, the SAA and advocacy group will share board members.

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Q (Steve): What roles do SAAs play in networking building, sustaining and supporting...and what roles should they not play?

A: SAAs can play a convening role and not influence what happens during a convening.

A: Public entities depend on process. Letting everyone and anyone participate in a network can defeat the point of a network. An intentional network is by definition somewhat exclusive. The question then is how to ensure inclusivity without affecting ability to build relationships.

A (Stanlyn): NPN and VAN have a large network but are careful about who can be part of it. A network's values should be aligned with the network's operations. It is important to be intentional about "why" participant becomes part of network.

A (Steve): The Performing Arts Alliance is an example of a network that can be part of other networks. That is a good model for building clout without diluting purpose.

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Q (Steve): Have state advocacy groups from around the country ever got together?

A: Yes, SAAN is meeting at the end of NASAA Assembly 2014.

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Texas's block-booking network has grown beyond its initial purpose. Networks can provide a forum for immediate response to issues.

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Q: Regarding competition within a network, how often is it formalized and how often is it swept under the rug? What are strategies for making sure competition is constructive?

A (Rebecca): For Queer Youth Theatre, there is a special grant application period for first-time grantees so as to reduce competition new organizations face. The organization also provides assistance to grant applicants. It is important to level the playing field for access to funding and other resources.

A (Steve): Networks can be confused with service organizations. It is important to think about and recognized distinctions between the two.

A: VAN and NPN members automatically have access to some financial resources. There are additional resources, too, which are competitive. This model helps reduce competition for basic support while also providing additional support through a competitive process.