



Deputy and Assistant Director Peer Session Notes

Thursday, October 14

Welcome, Introductions and Brief Agency Updates

Deputy and Assistant Director Peer Group Coordinators Jaime Dempsey and Jim Bob McMillan welcomed everyone to Austin.

Each participating deputy and assistant director provided a brief update about what has changed for his/her agency since the last assembly, and the challenges that lie ahead given each state's unique political atmosphere. Related to changes over the last two years, a handful of states seemed to be holding steady in terms of budget and agency size, the majority had experienced a low-to-moderate level of cuts to grant-making funds and staff, and a handful of states had withstood what they perceived to be severe fiscal and personnel reductions. Very few of the represented state arts agencies had seen increased resources. In terms of the immediate future, the percentage of agencies anticipating challenges was similar: a small percentage of states felt confident about their fiscal position and status within their state government structure, the majority anticipated low-to-moderate level reductions, and a small percentage anticipated considerable challenges to their very existence and future service.

Cassie Erickson Mason from New Hampshire delivered her update in a rhyming poem, as instructed. She was the only deputy or assistant director to take advantage of this creative opportunity.

There was some discussion about each state's fiscal position, as some states appear to be moving out of recession while others are just beginning to experience revenue shortfalls.

Common themes and challenges for deputy and assistant directors included:

- Managing and motivating staff amidst ongoing crises
- Dealing with burnout, in self and others
- Personnel difficulties related to state government employment (not being able to replace positions, not being able to terminate problem employees, freezes on cost of living increases, salary reductions and furlough, less labor support, etc.)
- Discovering and maintaining useful, accurate data to support ongoing efforts to build public value for the arts
- Developing fresh, compelling messages to advance cultural conversations within states
- Working within a culture of loss and setbacks for prolonged periods of time

Are You Feeling SAAD?

You might be experiencing state arts agency distress, often referred to as state arts agency difficulties or post-traumatic state arts agency disorder (PTSAAD). Though state arts agencies offer employees many wonderful benefits and rewards, the Great Recession and its

related, persistent challenges have made it increasingly difficult to maintain work/life balance and to cultivate positive, optimistic government workplaces. In a time when antigovernment rhetoric is all the rage and government employees—particularly those working for "nonessential" agencies—are publicly lambasted and collectively used as political pawns, state arts agency employees are struggling mightily. Budget cuts, ongoing layoffs, reduced salaries, increased workload and sweeping burnout. . . how can deputy and assistant directors provide useful leadership in their agencies amid such change and uncertainty? How can we keep staff lines of communication open while fighting against a tidal wave of fear and ennui?

In this facilitated discussion, deputy and assistant directors discussed best practices related to the personnel leadership* elements of their jobs: human resources, staff management, and the development of adaptive practices to encourage both creativity and productivity. And at least if we're SAAD we can be SAAD together.

**Though not all deputy and assistant directors directly supervise employees, all are considered leaders in their agencies and bear some burden for providing vision and direction to staff. Similarly, while not all state arts agencies are experiencing budget reductions, the majority has experienced or is expected to experience some level of budget-related challenges during the slow economic recovery.*

Facilitated by Dr. Terry Colley, Deputy Director of the Texas Historical Commission.

Dr. Terry Colley, present for the agency updates, facilitated a discussion aimed at discovering both small and large opportunities for improvement, as well as successes internal to the agency and successes for agency constituents. Participating deputy and assistant directors shared their challenges, then others offered counsel and ideas related to those challenges if they'd experienced similar situations in their states.

Colley recommended celebrating successes, continuing to take advantage of professional development, actively looking for efficiencies and opportunities to innovate, and taking care of each other as well as oneself during challenging times. Within the discussion, the idea that seemed to take the group aback was the reminder that during periods of stress—whether related to state fiscal challenges or excessive workloads—that it is important to take time to reward and nurture the creative and relaxed spirit in oneself.

Colley was a warm, thoughtful and skilled facilitator who was very well-received by the group. Plus he brought candy.

Be ArtsReady

Arts organizations and artists, and the state arts agencies that serve them, need to improve their readiness for any unexpected event, from fire or flood to information technology failure or loss of a leader. Resources and information to help the arts community "Be ArtsReady" are available for you to share with your constituents. This briefing from South Arts shared the "Be ArtsReady" website and public relations campaign and introduced a forthcoming on-line tool, ArtsReady v.1.0, which is designed to guide arts organizations in developing readiness plans. Your agency can be a partner in making ArtsReady V1.0 available to your state's arts community.

Led by Mollie Lakin-Hayes, deputy director of South Arts and longtime member of the Deputy and Assistant Director Peer Group

Lakin-Hayes presented an introduction to the ArtsReady program, outlining opportunities for related collaboration and systemization within state arts agencies, efforts which can potentially be led by deputy and assistant directors. The program website, ArtsReady.org, is a forthcoming, web-based tool designed to help arts organizations be more resilient following minor disruptions to business or major crises. Types of crises were discussed, and Lakin-Hayes invited group participants to join her for additional demonstrations and opportunities to learn more during the conference.

Saturday, October 16

Welcome, Introductions

Deputy and assistant directors introduced themselves once more, as some individuals were unable to be present for the Thursday session.

The Real Work: New Practices for a New Era in the Arts

Behind the ongoing staff and financial stresses felt by state arts agencies at a time of economic contraction lies a vast territory of change in the arts and culture sector that state arts agencies serve. A 50-year period of arts development—tied primarily to growth in the professional arts infrastructure as the measure of success—is giving way to a new phase, which will emphasize active participation in the arts, commingling of amateur and professional pursuits, and the integration of creative work with wider community interests. This will mean practitioners of all stripes unlearning a lot of things we have taken for granted, surfacing new assumptions to drive new thinking and doing things differently across the board.

Organizational innovation is challenging in a resource-strapped sector, but is now essential if funding agencies and field leaders are to successfully reorient themselves to this new era. For state arts agencies, this means putting more than just the most financially endangered programs and services on the table for fundamental reconsideration, refusing to "do more with less," and making the space for new and imaginative responses to the hunger for meaning through the arts—finding new pathways to relevance and sustainability.

Facilitated by Richard Evans, President of EmcArts Inc.

Evans introduced a discussion about systematizing innovative practices within funding and service agencies. Participating deputy and assistant directors shared their ideas about opportunities to innovate within their agencies, responding to the idea that innovation does not follow "incremental changes" to programs and services. Using the definition of innovation, Evans introduced in discussion "What Is Innovation in the Arts?" (available at http://emcart.org/site/emc_arts2/assets/pdf/EmcArts_-_What_is_Innovation_in_the_Arts.pdf), and the group brainstormed about innovative programs and relationships state arts agencies could pursue and shared thoughts about innovative successes within their states.

Evans sparked a productive conversation within the group when he suggested that general operating support grants—the most common type of support currently offered by public

funders—do little to incentivize and advance change; rather, general operating support funding promotes continuity and entrenchment. Group participants discussed some of the limitations of existing state arts agency grant-making systems related to panel processes and funding delivery, and shared discovered efficiencies.

Evans recommended considering the qualities of innovative leadership (available at http://emcart.org/site/emc_arts2/assets/pdf/EmcArts_-_Top_Behaviors_of_Highly_Innovative_Leaders.pdf) within our work, and suggested we challenge ourselves to develop additional innovative capacity and fluency within our agencies. He offered a rubric (available at http://www.emcart.org/site/emc_arts/assets/pdf/AIF_Innovation_Rubric_Overview.pdf) and additional resources to spark thoughtful discussion about leadership in advancing arts and culture. Myriad resources are available at the EmcArts website, at <http://emcart.org/index.cfm?pagepath=Resources&id=17420>.

Evans was a fascinating, generous speaker with vast knowledge about the challenges facing arts funders and the broader arts field. The group discussion was earnest and participants left with a wealth of resources to consider and explore.

Please contact the Deputy and Assistant Director Peer Group Coordinators with questions or feedback:

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