



Deputy/Assistant Directors Peer Session
October 8, 2015

Open Session Notes

Following a facilitated group discussion lead by a certified Change Leader instructor, the deputy directors broke up into three groups to discuss three topics of interest: Building Advocacy, Effects of Funding Cuts and Doing More with Less. During the final 30 minutes of the session, groups reported out to the larger group.

Building Advocacy/Fundraising/Partnering

Marty Skomal (Nebraska) served as facilitator. Marian Boyd (Arkansas) created the question & discussion outline but could not attend the Leadership Institute.

- 1) How many states currently partner with a statewide advocacy group?
 - a. In our group of six, four states have advocacy organizations.

Of those that answer yes, how many have successful partnerships?

 - a. Nebraskans for the Arts hires a lobbyist when necessary and finds it useful to have lobbyists that can be effective with both political parties. Good relationship overall.
 - b. North Carolina was effective in helping restore funding cuts to the state arts agency (SAA). Also, the association of local arts agencies was helpful in maintaining contact and communication with legislators.
 - c. Wyoming uses its advocacy group to do other things such as hosting block booking conference. It also has proved effective in getting the word out to community leaders outside of the arts community.
- 2) Of those that are successful, what makes them successful?
 - a. Funding from the SAA to the advocacy groups can be an effective way to maintain good relationships when possible. This is the case in Wyoming, where the advocacy organization, as a nonprofit, can be used to accomplish things not always possible by the SAA.
- 3) Of those that are successful, what are the roles, responsibilities and expectations of each group? What are the most important things that the state does for the advocacy group and what are the most important things that the advocacy group does for the state?

- a. (From Marian Boyd in Arkansas, who could not attend) One example: In Arkansas we have the newly formed Arkansans for the Arts. We are partnering with them on our annual conference, and have agreed to do a large share of the work and pay most of the expenses, while they will do a small amount of work, make their pitch during a session, and receive the proceeds from registration to grow their organization. As they grow, we plan to take a smaller role in the conference, until we are doing little work on the conference.
 - b. In Nebraska, our advocacy organization hosts and organizes the regional Poetry Out loud (POL) events. This is a good fit since the Nebraska Alliance for Arts Education merged with SAAN (the State Arts Action Network, run by Americans for the Arts) and became its education committee. They have a buy-in to POL and have been partners with us for the past five-plus years of POL. Also, our advocacy group hosts an annual legislative breakfast, and delivers small boxes of breakfast pastries to each legislator's office with a list of SAA-funded grants in their districts.
 - c. The SAAN in North Carolina hosts a legislative arts day at the state capitol.
- 4) If any states have partnerships that they do not consider effective, what's wrong, and what can we learn from them?
- a. The relationship between the SAA and SAAN is not always an easy alliance.
 - b. Success and effectiveness of the partnership is due in large part to the relationships of the people involved.
- 5) In considering *partnering* with others to *build advocacy* and *raise funds*, how do you as the state partner work with your constituents? What are the most important things that you do for them, and what do you expect from them?
- a. In Nebraska, we require each final report from a grant to include examples of how the grantee has reached out to their elected officials to both make them aware and thank them for their support.
 - b. It is a continual effort to educate grantees about the importance of direct communication with their elected officials.
 - c. It is hard to say specifically if the SAAN helps "raise funds" per se for the state arts agency beyond the work of advocacy. We found no examples in our group where this occurred.
- 6) Aside from providing basic advocacy information, how do you as a state organization help your constituency work with your legislators and other government officials to advocate for the arts?
- a. Some of our SAAN colleagues provide advocacy training in advance of the legislative advocacy events, such as helping constituents better tell their stories.

- b. Example from Marian Boyd in Arkansas: Each year, a meeting is held during legislative session. The meeting includes basic advocacy information along with advice on working with legislators. It also includes free time for people to go to the capital and call on their representatives to develop relationships or strengthen existing ones.
- 7) As a deputy director, do you have a significant and specific role in advocacy beyond support of your director and agency?
- a. No. In Nebraska, the deputy director also serves ex-officio on the board of SAAN.
- 8) If yes, what is that role? If no, what might deputy directors take on to make an impact in developing strong advocacy for the arts?
- a. We all agreed that it was important to offer our SAAN counterparts moral support and to attend and be active in the planning of all events. A few of us purchased individual membership in SAAN.

Note: NASAA's [Arts Advocacy Checklist: A Self-Evaluation Tool for State Arts Agencies](#) is a good resource to use to assess your state's advocacy efforts.

Effects of Funding Cuts

The impacts of funding cuts on an arts agency can be dramatic, painful and difficult to navigate—not unlike natural disasters or man-made emergencies. As organizational leaders, we have been trained to plan for emergencies. Is there value in thinking of budget cuts in the same way? Could an emergency-preparedness model help us be better prepared for the next inevitable economic downturn by thinking of the 3 Rs: Readiness, Response and Recovery?

- 1) Readiness: Preparing for what may or may not happen
- a. Small agencies (like state arts agencies) are disproportionately affected by statewide budget cuts. It is important to think ahead and think strategically about how to manage cuts, even when times are good.
 - b. Personnel: consider voluntary furloughs; no loss of staff or FTEs, helps protect morale if everyone shares that pain, creates a sense of teamwork. Make sure RIF and furlough policies are up to date and communicated with staff. Be aware of employee status, lengths of service.
 - c. Budget: try to create/maintain/increase a reserve in the budget to help lessen impacts of cuts. Anticipate costs of leave payouts if RIF is necessary.
 - d. Programs: be strategic about targeted cuts vs. across-the-board. Plan ahead to identify what could be suspended and what needs to be protected. Work with staff and stakeholders to establish an institutional understanding of priorities linked to mission. Give staff and other stakeholders opportunities to

participate in assessing programs, evaluating impacts and costs, and recommending efficiencies and reductions.

2) Response: When it gets real

- a. Clear communication with staff, stakeholders, authorizers and the public is key. Present information about the agency that is grounded in truth and reality. Remain open to input and feedback. Follow protocols for communicating.
- b. Work to maintain value for the agency. Assess and adapt processes to maximize efficiency while striving to maintain consistency and stability in key mission-driven areas. Use this time to solidify and strengthen relationships that can help now and later.
- c. Consider ways to provide more service to the state, even if money/grants are decreased. Is it possible to provide more training or technical assistance to the field? If so, figure out ways to measure and document the value of this service.

3) Recovery: Bouncing back

- a. Try to maintain staff and capacity in order to be positioned to come back strong. Allow yourself, staff and stakeholders to dream and visualize better times. Look for opportunities to make organizational changes that can help the agency come back quickly and decisively. Be ready to tell the stories of what you did to successfully navigate the crisis and what lessons were learned, and move confidently into a period of financial recovery.

Doing More with Less

How can your agency meet its mission and maintain its impact when financial resources become scarce? Examples from the states around the table fell into five categories.

- 1) **Low-cost, high-impact programs.** Two examples in particular spurred conversation about programs that reduce the application burden and identify opportunities where a small amount of money would have a great impact. Oregon is [piloting a program for small organizations](#) (less than \$150,000 in expenses) that automatically provides a \$1,000 grant to organizations that meet the criteria. The application is simple and designed so that a volunteer who has been involved with an organization for two years should be able to complete it in an hour. SAA staff specifically sought out small rural arts organizations to encourage them to apply. The Massachusetts Cultural Council started a grant program for festivals: grantees only need to fill out a one-page application for a \$500 grant toward an arts or cultural festival.

A parallel topic was simplification of the grant application process. In addition to the Oregon example above, Massachusetts shared that it eliminated peer review for general operating support grants, and instead pulls Cultural Data Project data for Final Descriptive Reports. Michigan has made it possible to apply for both its school

bus grant and arts equipment and supply grant concurrently to reduce the amount of time an arts educator needs to devote to the application process.

- 2) **Partnerships.** There are often other state agencies with more resources that have overlapping missions. One agency commonly identified was tourism. New Hampshire was able to [get brochures about contra dancing](#) produced and distributed; Michigan gets its [MI Art Tours](#) app promoted (although sporadically) by Pure Michigan; and Alabama was able to get its tourism department to designate both arts and music in their "Year of _____" promotion in the past. Alabama makes a staff member available to run a program called [Journey Proud](#) on the state public television network that features folk traditions throughout the state. The agency provides the programming expertise, with the network covering the production costs.
- 3) **Staff outreach.** When financial assistance diminishes, it can help to make staff more available, or use the connections of the agency to convene and connect grantees. One participant noted that the importance of one-to-one relationships with stakeholders cannot be understated. Montana now provides staff to lead organizational consulting for nonprofits as opposed to giving grants to hire consultants. New Hampshire organizes quarterly roundtables around different arts topics throughout the state. Massachusetts connects expertise within the nonprofit sector. Kentucky noted that arts organizations appreciate having SAA staff experience and monitor their programs, even when no money is involved.
- 4) **Leverage other types of government influence and power.** Many SAAs recognize that they have power beyond providing grants. A common refrain was that a grant from a state arts agency is viewed as a seal of approval that organizations can use to approach other donors and funders. When state finances were tight, a bill was passed allowing the Massachusetts Cultural Council to designate [cultural districts](#) without providing grants or tax incentives. In Arizona, arts and culture are required to be included in community planning processes. Legislators in many states issue proclamations about the value of the arts.
- 5) **Extending the reach of grants.** Many states ask grantees to include a public element to their work or advocate for the arts. Montana requires grantees to engage the public with their work to create value not just for the artist or organization, but for the larger community as well. Massachusetts requires general operating support grantees to [host two arts advocacy events per year](#). Michigan asks grantees to write a letter to their legislator thanking them for the public support of their work.

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