



## Folk Arts Coordinator Peer Session Notes

Thirty-eight people assembled on October 11 for the professional development workshop organized by the 2010 NASAA Folk Arts Peer Session advisory committee. After brief introductory remarks and a round of introductions from all participants, the workshop **Marketing and Communicating Value in a Digital Age** commenced.

Marketing consultant Laura Scholz led the group in a discussion-based workshop outlining the key components in successful digital communication and marketing, focusing specifically on social media. Scholz outlined the variety of media available for use and led the group through brainstorming sessions focusing on our audiences, their needs and communication best practices.

We concluded at 5:00 p.m. and reassembled at Texas Folklife Resources, where Executive Director Nancy Bless, staff, and board members hosted a reception. We then dined at Guero's on South Congress.

Wednesday morning sessions began with remarks from Barry Bergey about the latest developments at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in general, and at the NEA's Folk Arts program in particular. Andi Mathis and Laura Scanlan from the NEA State and Regional office helped Barry to give updates and answered questions about changes in NEA policy and procedure. Barry delivered several printouts detailing NEA Folk Arts funding over the past five years.

State program representatives gave brief profiles of their programs. They represented four different kinds of folk arts programs: a state arts agency program with a permanent staff, a university-based program linked to other organizations in its state, a private nonprofit with a statewide folk arts program, and a state arts agency that employs a contracted folk arts consultant on an ongoing basis. Deb Boykin from Alabama, Emily Afanador from Oregon, Amy Skillman from Pennsylvania, and Andrea Graham from South Dakota summarized how each of these programs has adapted to very different funding environments and, in the case of the Oregon program, involved the renewal of a statewide program which had been discontinued by the state historical society.

Robert Baron facilitated discussion and breakout groups focusing on the most pressing issues of our field, especially in relationship to NEA support.

We were joined again by Laura Scanlan, Andi Mathis and Barry Bergey of the NEA to discuss these issues. As a prelude, Robert gave a PowerPoint presentation, Keys to a Successful State Folk and Traditional Arts Program. The presentation was prepared by Lynn Martin Graton, Amy Skillman and Pat Atkinson along with other members of the Folk Arts Peer Group planning committee. This presentation was designed to explain the nature of folk and traditional arts and to outline the components of successful programs, including field research, educational programming, collaborations with traditional communities, programming for community and general audiences, professional direction, intersections with other programs in the agency or organization as well as with other state and federal

agencies, and peer review panels. The presentation may be used by state folk arts coordinators to explain folk and traditional arts programs to colleagues within our own agencies and to other interested audiences.

The discussion with Laura Scanlan, Andi Mathis, and Barry Bergey of the NEA encompassed current issues of concern to our peer group, especially issues relating to NEA partnership support. These issues included multiyear funding, incentive support for field research and other special projects, and comparisons with arts-in-education partnership funding. We called for all regional arts consortia to support folk and traditional arts in their region, suggesting that their involvement with our discipline should be considered in the review of their partnership applications. The folk arts peer review group was pleased to hear from our NEA colleagues that partnership ("infrastructure") applications from both state arts agencies and nonprofit statewide programs would now be reviewed by the same panel. An extended question and answer session followed.

Pat Atkinson facilitated the day's wrap-up session, **The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: Challenges and Opportunities**, during which a number of issues and questions were discussed.

- What kind of NEA support for folk arts is most critical?
- Should Folk Arts Partnership grants go to multiyear funding based on a three-year plan?
- Should Folk Arts partnership grants focus on infrastructure or projects?
- Can a field research component be built into Folk Arts Partnership grants?
- Should the regional arts organizations be required to have a folklorist on staff?
- Why is there no funded folk arts liaison position at NASAA?
- Can regional and state agencies be held to a common standard percentage of funds for folk arts through the NEA?
- How can the folk arts programs achieve funding and representational parity with arts in education?
- Changing options for grant seeking
- Positive incentives for states to have strong folk arts programs
- Can the NEA offer planning grants for contingencies if state arts agencies are eliminated during budget crises?
- The need for strategic planning and regional planning as a field
- Using the arts-in-education mentoring model for new program coordinators in state folklife programs

Plans were made for continuing our group's discussions through conference calls and e-mail.

Because the American Folklore Society's annual conference was scheduled concurrently with NASAA, approximately 30 people left for Nashville Wednesday evening or Thursday morning.

A strong contingent of folk arts coordinators remained for the rest of the conference. Our final peer session. **Folk Arts Plus: Using Folk Arts to Support Public Art, Creative**

**Economies, Arts in Healthcare and More**, was held Thursday afternoon. Wayne Martin facilitated this session in which state folklorists and their colleagues at state arts agencies presented ways that folklorists are helping arts organizations achieve goals beyond folk arts. Presenters included:

- North Dakota Council on the Arts Executive Director Jan Webb and folklorist Troyd Geist, who discussed the development of *Arts for Life*, an arts-in-healthcare program;
- folklorist Riki Saltzman with the Iowa Arts Council, who presented ways that she uses ethnographic skills to conduct arts outreach and create arts programs for people with disabilities; and
- North Carolina Arts Council Deputy Director Nancy Trovillion and Senior Program Director Wayne Martin, who talked about the important roles played by folklorists in developing and sustaining the agency's Creative Economies program.

*Submitted by the 2010 NASAA Folk Arts Peer Session Planning Committee:*

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