Assembly 2007
Workshop Notes

STATE ARTS AGENCY ADVOCACY:
STRATEGIES FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Baltimore, Maryland
December 7 & 8, 2007

Facilitator: Thomas L. Birch, Legislative Counsel, NASAA

Workshop Goals:

- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of current SAA advocacy practices
- Identify factors that help or hinder SAA advocacy efforts
- Address SAA success strategies; harness SAA advocacy assets

NASAA Advocacy Checklist Responses:
Workshop participants reviewed the advocacy checklist to identify areas of strength and weakness in arts advocacy in their states.

Strengths
- Present arts in the capitol
- Advocacy on the agenda at every council meeting
- Advocacy in job descriptions of council members
- Engage legislative counsel/lobbyist
- Seek advice from legislators
- Grantees write thank you’s
- Good relationship with legislative caucus

Weaknesses
- Weak relationships with legislative staff
- Fail to keep legislature involved
- Neglectful in developing board as advocates
- No convening of advocates (or legislators) for setting agenda at start of legislative session
- No attention to recruit campaign contributors as arts advocates: i.e., those who are likely to combine a strong arts interest with access to elected officials

SAA Advocacy: A Shared Responsibility
Workshop participants reviewed factors which help or hinder their SAAs’ advocacy practices involving significant advocacy players and partners.
SAA Council Members as Advocates

- **What helps:**
  - Political/personal connections
  - Community ties
  - Diverse perspectives
  - Turnover brings fresh voices and connections
  - Provide balance of political voices

- **What hinders:**
  - Won’t use clout
  - Knowledge and skills vary
  - Overly enthusiastic
  - Reluctant to oppose governor
  - Turnover means losing the good ones

SAA Staff as Advocates

- **What helps:**
  - Highly knowledgeable; possess technical/programmatic information
  - Fluent on benefits of public arts support
  - Advocacy a priority of SAA

- **What hinders:**
  - Face statutory barriers to advocacy
  - Unable to oppose governor/Secretary of State
  - Mixed attitudes about staff time spent on advocacy

SAA Grantees as Advocates

- **What helps:**
  - Statewide network
  - Arts community tells the story
  - The experience of the benefit of producing art
  - Connect SAA support with political connection to legislators
  - Legislators announce SAA grants to constituents

- **What hinders:**
  - Grantees won’t take the time
  - Small dollar incentive for large groups to advocate for SAA

SAA Partners as Advocates

- **What helps:**
  - State advocacy groups mobilize, partner with SAA
  - Enlarges network
  - Stakeholders in education, tourism, etc. as advocates
  - Explain added value of arts to them—be at *their* table
  - E-advocacy eases communication

- **What hinders:**
State advocacy groups’ capacity varies; adversary to SAA
Arts interest not at top of partners’ advocacy list
Form letters lack impact; e-mail not enough, all types of communications are needed to engage legislature

SAA Advocacy Assets: Future Directions

How better to engage Council Members in advocacy
• Training for council members in advocacy
• Arrange meetings to build relationships with legislators
• Create role for council members in arts advocacy day
• Encourage membership in state arts advocacy organization

How better to engage Staff in advocacy
• Training/meeting with executive director on advocacy responsibilities
• Discuss and clarify what is possible as advocates for the SAA
• Education about all SAA programs – what do other staff members do?
• Present advocacy as an ongoing activity
• Help legislators write letters to editors and editorials

How better to engage Grantees in advocacy
• Workshop/training for grantees; discuss advocacy at all grantee meetings
• Engage grantee boards as advocates
• Encourage grantees to invite decision-makers to arts events: consider making it a policy in receiving the award
• Require grantee to give credit to SAA
• Join state arts advocacy group
• Require grantees to outline advocacy work on grant applications.

How better to engage Partners in advocacy
• Work with lobbyists of other advocacy groups
• Strengthen relations with other issue advocacy groups, such as tourism