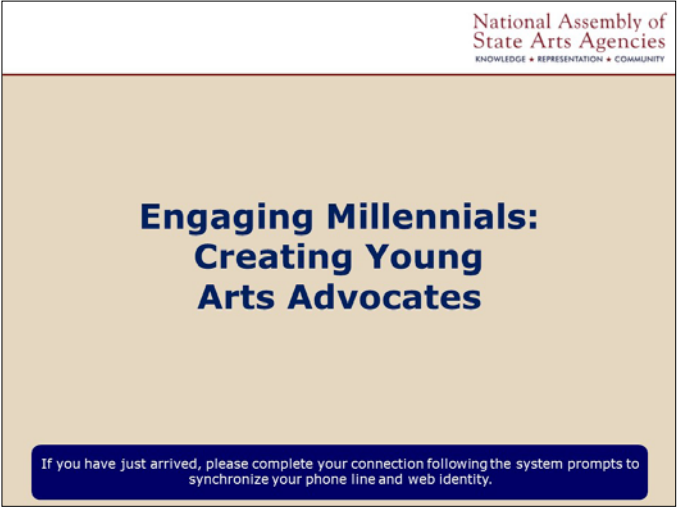


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Engaging Millennials: Creating Young Arts Advocates

Wednesday, August 19, 2015  
Web Seminar  
Abridged Transcript



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## Introduction

**Pam Breaux:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to NASAA's Web Seminar on Creating Young Arts Advocates. I am Pam Breaux, NASAA's new CEO, and I am delighted you have joined us here today.

An important part of maintaining the vibrancy of our field is meaningfully engaging young adults, not just through arts education and cultural activities, but also in arts advocacy activities. There has been a great deal of research about millennials. NASAA's own research director, Ryan Stubbs, will touch on that shortly.

But a key question is, how do you take that research and implement it to build a successful engagement strategy? We'll hear from three experts who have successfully employed both strategies and programs to attract and empower young arts participants as arts advocates. You will find their methods differ, but all tap into some of the trends found in the research on millennials.


Now to begin the session, I'm going to turn things over to Ryan Stubbs.

## Who Are Millennials? (Overview)

**Ryan Stubbs:** Thank you, Pam. I'm very happy to be on-line with our NASAA staff, our presenters, and everyone joining in today, and excited to learn more about this fascinating and relevant topic.

Our agenda for today is pretty simple. I'll start us off with some basic contextual framing on who millennials are and why they are important. I will then introduce our three speakers from Maryland, Massachusetts and Michigan—all states beginning with the letter M as in *millennials*. We'll then have a group conversation with some specific questions for the presenters, followed by audience Q&A before we wrap up.

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**Pam Breaux**  
Chief Executive Officer  
NASAA

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## Agenda

- I. Contextual Framing**
- II. Presentations**
- III. Group Discussion**
- IV. Audience Q&A**
- V. Wrap-Up**

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## Who Are Millennials?



I'm going to start us off by touching on key research about millennials, both in a larger social context and in an arts participation context. This will hopefully serve as a very brief setup for our speakers.

So who are millennials? When we say the word *millennial*, we often conjure an image such as this one: a group of young, diverse, tech-savvy individuals. While this may be a little stereotypical, it also holds some truth. Millennials are young. Generational cutoff dates sometimes differ at the margins, but millennials are most often categorized as being born after 1980 and are currently around 18 to 35 years old. For comparison's sake, Generation X is now 36 to 51. They're the generation preceding or immediately preceding millennials, and baby boomers, the generation before them, are age 52 to 70.

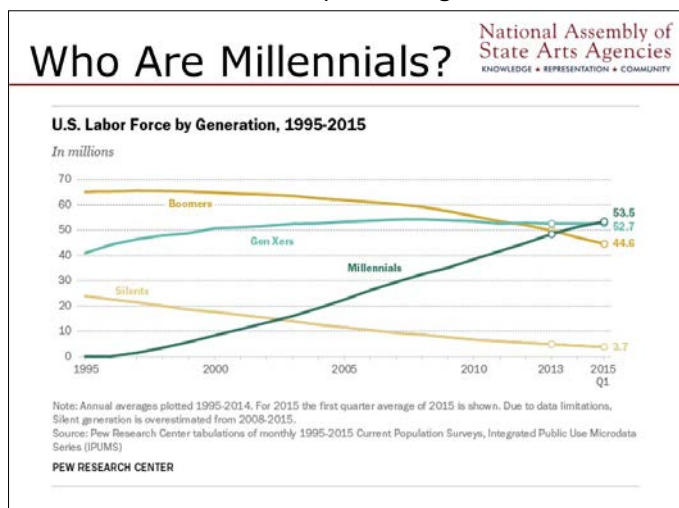
Millennials make up about 27% of the total adult population, which is about the same level as Generation X and a little smaller than the baby boomers, who are at 32% of the adult population. But an important trend is that millennials now make up the largest share of the work force.

I'm primarily relying on data from Pew to describe millennials, and this chart, which was published this past May, shows that in the first quarter of 2015, millennials surpassed Generation X as the largest portion of the work force. And you can see there are over 53.5 million millennials in the work force now, and outside of our work, I think many of us notice this trend as we see more advertising aimed at millennials, which we can take as further evidence of the power of millennials in the marketplace.

## Key Characteristics

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- The most racially diverse generation in American history
- Many entered the work force in a tough economy
- Fewer ties to institutions and more politically independent
- Digital natives—more connected through social networks



I want to discuss a few key characteristics about millennials that are important to keep in mind. First, millennials are the most racially diverse generation in American history. Fifty-seven percent identify as non-Hispanic white, and this isn't a huge difference from Generation X, but the baby boomer generation is 72% non-Hispanic white. So that's a pretty big difference over two generations.

Next, economic challenges. Many millennials entered the work force after 2007 with high levels of student debt and poor job market for a number of years. Also, millennials are less tied to institutions and more politically independent. Fifty percent of millennials identify their party affiliation as Independent, which is much more than Generation X and baby boomers; they identify around 38% independent.

Then in 2008 and 2012, we saw that President Obama was able to capture large portions of politically independent millennials, but that doesn't mean that they will consistently vote or turn out for Democrats in the future.

Also another important point is that millennials are digital natives. Some evidence that we see speaking to their digital connectedness is that millennials have more Facebook friends, more Twitter followers, and do indeed take more selfies.

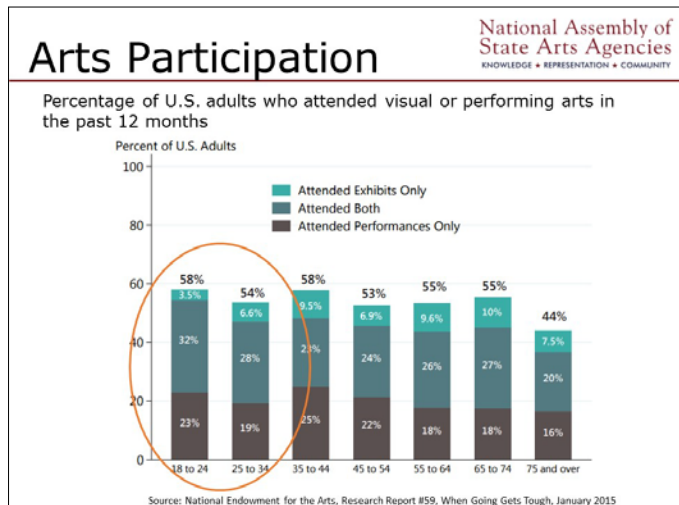
So one thing we would like to know is how generational trends affect arts participation—and this is a difficult question that could be a research webinar in itself—but I want to try and touch on a couple of key points. First, when looking at attendance at

performances and exhibitions, research shows that younger generations are participating at a similar or greater rate than older generations. This comes from a recent NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] research report which examines motivations and barriers for arts participation.

One thing that this research speaks to is that some of the major motivations and barriers to participating in the arts bridge demographic categorization. So for example, the social aspect of participation with friends and family is a large motivator across these groups, and restrictions on time due to life circumstances are a barrier for both younger and older adults.

So from this, I think it's safe to say that motivation for participation in the arts goes beyond age; however, the size and influence of the millennial generation, especially at this point in time, make them an extremely important social and economic force. Understanding how to engage the millennial generation is ultimately up to practitioners, and this includes organizations, institutions and entrepreneurs alike.

I hope that serves as a brilliant segue to hand things over to our presents who are actually doing the great work to engage younger adults. With us today



### Arts Participation

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- Motivations and implications for arts participation goes beyond age.
- Understanding how to engage the millennial generation is ultimately up to practitioners.

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**John Schratwieser**  
Executive Director  
Maryland Citizens  
for the Arts



**Tracie Konopinski**  
Senior Campaign Organizer  
MASSCreative



**W. Omari Rush**  
Curator of Public Programs  
Ann Arbor Art Center

we have John Schratwieser, executive director for Maryland Citizens for the Arts; Tracie Konopinski, senior campaign organizer for MASSCreative; and Omari Rush, curator for Public Programs for the Ann Arbor Arts Center and a member of the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs.

And with that, I am going to hand things over to our first presenter.

## Maryland Citizens for the Arts Presentation

**John Schratwieser:** Thank you very much, and good afternoon, everyone. It's really a pleasure to be with folks from NASAA and all of you that are participating for this discussion about millennials.

This is really interesting stuff, and I'm learning a few things myself in looking at the data that was just presented by Ryan. The biggest number that stood out to me was that, wow, at best, 58% of any age group or any generation is participating in arts programming, so maybe we have some overall work to do to get more butts in seats.



But I really want to talk about what we are doing in the context of "Okay, sure, 58% of young people are engaging in the arts. What's the percentage of those people that are actually engaging in arts advocacy?" That's something that Maryland Citizens for the Arts really began to address slightly before I started, so about six years ago.

We have a program called the Emerging Arts Advocates, and essentially, we were looking to address this millennial group—we extended it a little bit further to 40 (which I've long left)—but to basically think about who is the next generation of arts advocate. In fact, this really came out of conversation amongst my board members: they looked around the table at a board meeting and realized that, primarily, people sitting around the table were 60 years or older. And they've all been doing this great work in Maryland for a long time, and they're going to want to retire and step down at some point. So how do we build that next generation of people who really understand the intricacies of arts advocacy and its purpose and its effect?

So the group has been formed and has been operating now for about 5 full years. It is a very diverse group of people from all parts of the state, both urban and rural, certainly everything from executive directors to emerging organizations to development staff, volunteers, artists themselves and even people that are working in non-arts professions who have a connection to the arts.

The Steering Committee of the Emerging Arts Advocates developed a set of initiatives that we work on annually, and the goal there, as you see in point 2, is to experiment with and innovate new models of organizing arts advocacy for the 21st century.



Just a little bit about MCA: we've been around for almost 40 years. We are a statewide advocacy group. We're a 501(c)(3), And we advocate for public funding for the arts at the state, local, and federal levels.

So the first of the three initiatives that were created by our Emerging Arts Advocates and perhaps the most creative was sort of a little bit of going back to basics. It covers 500 Art-Full Letters, and it's an ongoing community project where we and our arts advocates are present at events throughout the state at various arts venues with a box, a sort of steamer trunk box full of art-making material—paper, pens, markers, stickers, you name it. And the goal is to first engage participants in whatever event they happen to be present at, whether it's an arts fair or an opening night of a show or something like that, to engage them in a really creative format of reaching out to lawmakers.



The heart of arts advocacy at the moment, the process, anyway, is very, very electronic. We're all doing Moto Voice. We're all doing e-mails. We're all doing text messages and even some social media. But it's all done in that sort of very anonymous way that you're clicking a button for speed to get to the lawmaker as quickly as possible, but you're generating a standard letter that you might have the opportunity to tweak here or there and put your own little piece on it. But essentially, it's just you click the button, it goes to the lawmaker, and we all know the lawmakers and their staff—well, their staff, anyway, sit in the office, and they will count the number of e-mails that come in. And if they get 500 e-mails on an arts favorable bill, they will start paying attention to it because they know that their constituents are interested in this.

So how do we go beyond that? I mean, how do we really get their attention and really help them understand the impact? So this Art-Full Letter program has been really exciting, and we've generated several hundred letters. We haven't quite gotten it by yet, but in two years that we've been doing this program, several hundred letters have gone to Maryland state lawmakers, Maryland's representatives in Congress, and also just governors, mayors and city council people. It allows a person to put a very personal and a very creative touch on a piece of mail that will actually arrive on the desk of the lawmaker that the lawmaker has to open and will recognize it as something other than just a form letter. So that's been a really fun project.

We just had an arts letter-making booth at Artscape, which happens here in Baltimore every year. It's the largest free arts festival in the country, and we operate it out of the lobby at Symphony



Hall, home of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, a really exciting day.

Curate Maryland came out of a need that we sort of discovered here at MCA, that everybody talks about being siloed; and perhaps museums are all talking to museum people, and theaters are all talking to theater people. But beyond that, there also are a lot of city people talking to city people, and country people are talking to country people. Maryland is a diverse geographic state. We have a very, very rural state. We have a huge city right dead smack in the center in Baltimore, and we are outside of the District of Columbia, the nation's capital. We have a lot of urban and a lot of rural.

There are amazing arts programs happening in all parts of our state, and Curate Maryland was an opportunity for us at MCA to work with our Emerging Arts Advocates to engage citizens in getting out of their jurisdiction and moving somewhere else for a day, an afternoon to experience what's happening outside of their regular work. We're all so busy; it's hard for us to get out. We basically plan a couple hours on a Saturday afternoon. Then we'll go to one city or one town in Maryland, and we'll highlight six or seven different arts organizations that have something going on. We're doing walking tours, bus tours, whatever it may be to help people expand their understanding of the depth and breadth of arts happening in Maryland.

Why do we want to do that? Because the more people understand what's happening across the state, the more effective they are going to be when meeting with their own lawmakers about the importance of the arts, because they can honestly and realistically speak about processes that are happening in one part of the state versus another part of the state versus another, and hopefully tie connections. We've even spurred a couple of collaborations between city and rural organizations through this program.

Arts in My Neighborhood is a great way to take an opportunity, take advantage of existing programming in the state. Our Emerging Arts Advocates live all over the state, and they really want to highlight the work that's happening in their communities. So unlike a Curate Maryland, which is a one-day event where we're walking all around the city and checking out five, six, seven, eight different organizations, this event highlights one particular organization; but more than highlighting any organization or the event, it's an opportunity to interact with audience members or participants.



So if you're in a gallery opening or a performance in a theater or a dance, you're at a poetry meeting or an exhibit opening, we have Emerging Arts Advocates who will stay in the lobby coordinating with that particular organization. They'll stay in the lobby in the period of time before show time or curtain or the art talk, artist talk or anything like that, and simply engage with the people that are participating in the event, those people who are in fact the attendees, and engaging them in the process of advocacy. Our Emerging Arts Advocates talk to them about the work of Maryland Citizens for the Arts, the work we do in Annapolis at our statehouse, the amount of money that Maryland commits every year to public funding for the arts, and the great work that that money is doing through the work of our

Maryland Citizens for the Arts council, and how many people it's reaching, how many organizations it reaches, and how many different parts of the state that funding reaches. So it's a great opportunity for our Emerging Arts Advocates to show off their own neighborhood, to show off their favorite arts organization, and to interact with an entirely new group of people at each event because the audience has obviously changed over and over.

In the end, I think what we are really trying to do is just look at how do we step beyond the basics of art advocacy. I think the conversation is really changing. We have had great support in Maryland over the course of the last 40 years. Last year, the appropriation [to the Maryland State Arts Council] was the largest in Maryland's history. It places us as fifth in the nation in per capita funding for the arts.

Our Emerging Arts Advocates are really playing a direct part in that. They're coordinating with our board, interacting with our board. They are participating in board committees with MCA, and we are really working hard to train them to get to that point where they're ready to take over that next level when people like me and my current trustees are ready to step down.

**Ryan:** All right. Thanks so much, John. Next up is Tracie.

### **MASSCreative Presentation**

**Tracie Konopinski:** Hi, everyone. For folks who aren't familiar with us as a state arts advocacy organization, MASSCreative works with artists and arts leaders and young people to bring more resources and support to the creative community. So we're an advocacy organization.

In our work, there's what we call the tripod, how we attack any of our campaigns. So the first piece is that it's public education. When we first got started as an organization, we realized that we're not that great at telling our story as artists and art leaders. We tell them within our own circle, but don't always project them to legislators or to other industries or even to other genres outside of our own. That's the first piece.

The second piece is advocacy. Rather than asking for what we think we can get in terms of arts funding or arts education or even just getting support from legislators, we are going to ask for what we need, so being a little bit bolder in what we're asking for and not rolling over when we get a cut to our funding, for example.



**MASSCreative** empowers creative organizations, arts educators, creative entrepreneurs, individual artists, and the public with a powerful voice to advocate for the attention and resources necessary to build vibrant and connected communities.



- **Public Education:** Telling Our Story
- **Advocacy:** Asking for What We Need
- **Organizing:** Building Our Political Power



And then the last piece is organizing. This is the idea that we're all stronger when there's more voices—working with organizations and artists and other sectors to build our political power to get what we need.

I want to talk about two of the campaigns with millennials. One is our campaign to increase the state arts budget, and the other is our Create the Vote campaign around elections. And I do want to mention that our work with millennials is on the younger end of millennials, so we do a lot of work with folks in their last couple of years of high school before they either enter the work force or before they enter college. It's been really interesting to get folks early, especially when they're right in the middle of their arts education, because we all know that when we talk to people about the arts, everyone has a story, and they'll often say, "Oh, yeah, I remember my art class when I was in high school," or, "I remember my art class when I was in elementary school," so it's great to get them involved with especially having that experience and can talk about it in real time.

So the first part about our state arts budget: we worked this year to increase the [budget for the] Massachusetts Cultural Council. They're our state arts agency here in the state. We worked to increase their budget by \$2 million. Right from the beginning we partner with a lot of youth arts organizations that get funding from the state in this way, and so we wanted to include them throughout the whole process.

One event that we did is called the Youth Arts Action Retreat, where we focused on storytelling, so there's just such great use involved in all of these organizations, but they often don't know how to articulate their own personal story or their organizational story. So we took a page from the organizing book of Marshall Ganz, who is a professor at Harvard and worked with the United Farmworkers movement. He has this model where he talks about the three stories that you need to tell when you're asking for anything. One is the story itself, your individual story; the second is the story of us, so the collective story; and the last is the story of now, why do we need to take action now.



We worked with these young people to develop their personal story, their personal narrative, talked more about the organizations that they directly work with, and then helped to present it. A lot of the youth created a skit or created a commercial and even created content for the organization to use on their website.

The launching out of this event was right at the time when the governor was releasing his state budget, including the line item for arts and culture, and so we brought a bunch of youth with us to the statehouse to deliver the petitions to the administration, incorporating them right into the advocacy that we were doing at the time.

The second piece that we did with young people around the state arts budget was the Youth Arts Matter Advocacy Day. Like many advocacy organizations and state agencies, we hold a lobby day every year, but we decided this year to add a youth component. So while young people were invited to come during the day, we actually separated a piece out in the afternoon, and then we used this event to really build off as the next step coming out of the Youth Arts Action Retreat. They practiced telling their stories at the retreat, and then they could actually tell their stories to legislators at the event. So the pictures that you are seeing are the group gathering with a couple of legislators, and then practicing their spoken word. A lot of folks actually danced or performed or did poetry when they met with their legislator. It's great to use that as a second step to the retreat but also just to get them in front of legislators, get them in the statehouse and say, "This is your house. You have a voice." It was a great experience for a lot of people to say, "Oh, these legislators are just regular people," and, "Yeah, the statehouse is a place I can go into and ask for what I need in terms of arts education, experiences for young people."

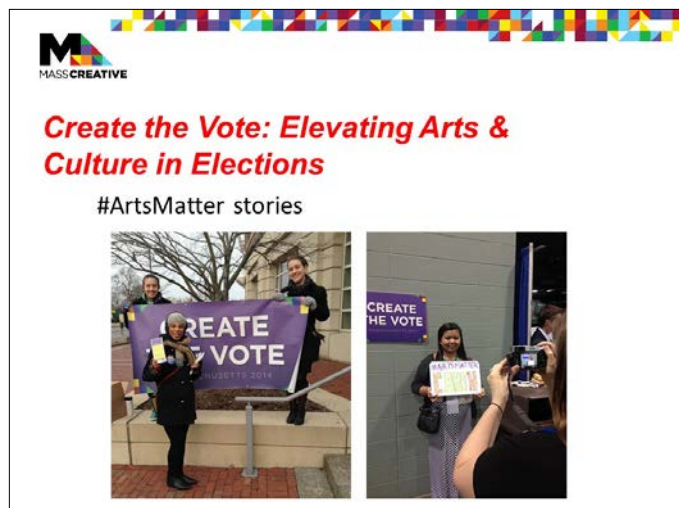


The second campaign that we did a lot of work with young people was our Create the Vote campaign, which is something that we created around elections, all under the idea that elections are a great time to talk about vision and next steps for cities and towns in the state. Lots of issues are talked about, but arts and culture are rarely talked about, so this is our campaign to enter arts and culture into the conversation.

One of the major tactics that we used was on social media, and also at events: we used the #ArtsMatter that we

borrowed from L.A. in gathering stories from folks all across the state. We invited young people to come with us to both the Democratic and the Republican conventions during the gubernatorial election, where they had whiteboards and cameras, where they gathered stories from folks and asking them why arts matter to them, which was really unique in a place like a convention where people are just thinking about politics. These are very different issues than from what most people see in that venue.

And then we also did this at forums and at public events throughout the summer, like festivals. It was great because the young people were sharing it, so it got a lot of buzz. It got trending on Twitter and in social media.



The other portion of the Create the Vote campaign that we did is when we first launched the Create the Vote campaign, we focused on Boston and the mayoral election and then did other work in other cities and throughout the state on the statewide level, but now that we are almost two years with a new mayor in Boston, we're still continuing to engage in the process.

One of the big commitments that came out of our engagement around the mayoral election was that the mayor hired a cabinet-level position for arts and culture, and then one of her big tasks is to do a citywide planning process around arts and culture. So there's this process called Boston Creates, and they're doing surveys, and they're doing lots of community meetings as the city. But what we noticed is not a lot of young people were involved and not a lot of creative tactics were being used. So we held our own community group meeting, with several youth arts organizations in the Greater Boston Area where they moderated the entire thing by themselves, so they could get questions to ask. They ran the group, and it was a great way to get young people there and young people leading it, so we made sure it was their voices, and then also having some creative tactics. So after the conversation, the young people did poetry or a skit or some other presentation that helped capture that creativity.

**Ryan:** All right. Thanks so much, Tracie. Let's move on to Omari.

## **Ann Arbor Art Center/Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs**

**W. Omari Rush:** Thanks so much. Good afternoon, everyone. Today I'd like to share a few ideas with you on millennial engagement in particular from my perspective as an arts fellow on the edge of being a millennial and also as a person who struggles with how to spell *millennial*. It's really tricky for me. There are too many, like, repeated consonants and stuff. Anyway, I'm happy to share a few thoughts—and my slides, just as an FYI, feature some of my favorite bits of public art too, and so enjoy those.

First, I'll start with mentorship as related to engagement and advocacy. The first and most obvious point and suggestion relates to this, that being mentorship. Make sure you're taking time to share with people generally your educational background, career trajectory, current job. It's also about work-life balance. This is data that millennials are really hungry for and data that prepares them for their own career. And making these kinds of connections with millennials should be





standard practice done by putting yourself in situations where you're likely to be surrounded by them or encounter them regularly. College campuses are really wonderful for this.

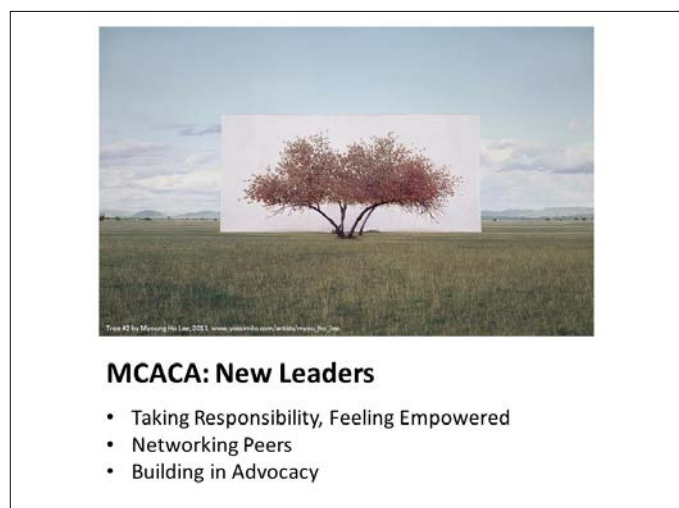
Also thinking about making introductions of millennials to your colleagues in the field; for them these intros are much better than their cold calls. This demographic is in the ladder-climbing and impact-climbing stages of their lives, and a great lead-in from you can go a long way in getting them into the right situation where they're able to strategically advocate from the inside of an agency, organization or office.

Similar to mentorship is the idea of ride-alongs and bringing members of this demographic with you to things. Job shadowing is always great and insightful; that is, inviting them to site visits or inviting them to join you for those fancy grantee events you get invited to. Show them how you work with the people and how advocacy can happen across a board table, over a handshake or during cocktails. In particular, take them to meetings with elected officials, even if they sit like a lump on a log while you meet with, you know, a senior senator or the most junior staffer. This is about building in millennials a long-term comfort and familiarity with those kinds of situations. Bringing them into standard partner meetings is also great. Through these, they can make valuable professional contacts, and certainly, this is all about these experiences being mutually beneficial for you and them and the state. And these partner meetings model the interconnectivity of the field and emulate the way business actually gets done.



These first two points about mentorship and shadowing seem obvious, but I'm always amazed at how little it actually happens in the process related to its power to kind of move things forward.

Our Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs actually has a New Leaders Arts Council comprised of millennials from throughout the state. After existing for about seven years, the group has been given a grant-making budget and the power to design a grant program that speaks to the sector and that supports and highlights their peers. After tweaking the guidelines each year—and they certainly have their strong opinions—they presented vibrant and dynamic proposal submissions, and in fiscal year 2015 gave out just over \$120,000 in grants, so pretty real and legit impact. Our Arts Education Program manager, Chad Badgero, has been immensely effective in moving this committee's work forward.





Similar to what Tracie said about numbers, there is certainly strength in numbers, and this New Leaders group is growing in our state, the perception that there exists and that one can access a network of like-minded and supportive peer professionals. There are fewer and fewer individuals, fewer and fewer millennials in Michigan who feel like islands, which is just a really great feeling.

Related to other groups, I'd just briefly say that these kind of millennial organizations, similar to the New Leaders Group, are likely popping up throughout your community. You just might not know about it. I am in Ann Arbor right now, and in our area, there's a robust group organized of millennials to support a nonprofit teen center. Another is leading large on conferences, focus on pushing for the community with some visioning, and yet another is acting at a networking club of millennials, folks who are really hungry for inspiration from anyone who can offer it.



### **Other Millennial Groups**

- Examples Inside and Outside of the Arts

I say this just to remind folks that this demographic is just waiting to be harnessed and pointed in the right direction, and where they're not organizing themselves, some guidance from others goes a long way.

Thinking about expectations for this work, lifestyles and resources are very different for the seasoned, longtime agency staff member and millennials. So if you want to engage millennials, it's really important to adapt your way of thinking, adapt your way of working and doing business, and not treat them like executives who can make unilateral decisions or are in complete control of their time. This might involve changing meeting times, maybe more frequently using digital meeting mediums, helping millennials manage relationships with their supervisors in order to work with you on advocacy, or changing the ways you make grants and the size of those grant awards.

And finally, it's important to just be clear on what you want successful engagement of millennials to look like. It can take a while, a long time, to position millennials to have the confidence and knowledge to feel like impactful sector advocates, and for a while, it might not look like anything that's actually happening in particular, given that in their stage of life there's naturally lots of transitions and changes and starts and stops. However, you know, in what I've seen and just kind of what I believe, success will certainly come together with a committed focus and a clear vision.



### **Setting Expectations**

- Understanding Lifestyle and Resource Differences
- Clarify Desired Outcome

## Roundtable Discussion

**Ryan:** All right. Thanks so much, Omari, and thanks to all of our presenters for those excellent presentations. We will now be moving on to a moderated Q&A session of the webinar.

The first question that we have is related to what you talked about in your presentation, but I wonder if you could unpack a little bit the ways in which you changed your strategies in order to engage millennials. So how did strategies change from how you might have been engaging audiences of all age groups compared to what you ended up doing with millennials? Anyone want to start?

**John:** Sure, I can jump on that. I think the easiest way to answer that question is simply by creating a program called Emerging Arts Advocates. We really felt like now was the time to essentially start giving voice to that next generation. I think the sort of advocacy strategy has been the same for a while now and probably since the early '90s, '94-'95 area, when arts advocacy strategies really galvanized and solidified. I think it's time now to start looking at new ways and new opportunities, and certainly working with younger people, as Omari said, there are definitely a lot of opinions. And people, young people, millennials, feel very strongly about the way they want to move something forward, and I think it's wise to at least listen to those things and see how they can work. Someone was saying—and I can't recall who—once said that the worst possible thing that anyone could ever say in any organization is, "Well, we can't because we always do it this way," and I think millennials and our Emerging Arts Advocates certainly have given us an opportunity to look at that, "Well, is this way still the right way?" and in many cases, it's not.

**Ryan:** Great. Thanks for that. Tracie or Omari, anything to add to this question?

**Tracie:** I think the biggest lesson that we learned is that it should always be integrated into your campaign planning. So I think in the beginning, we were sectioning out millennials and young people and saying, "What is this other tactic that we can use to engage them?" but when we started really integrated it into our plans, it was more—you know, it became more integral to the campaign rather than an afterthought. So that just helped us to be more creative in all of our campaign tactics.

So I think when we were first thinking about engaging young people, we said, "Oh, we need to do these separate events, and we need to make them really fun. And we need to make them really creative," but really, that's what we should be doing with all of our campaigns and all of the different sectors that we engage.

**Ryan:** Right. So that sounds like there's a point that making it an actual item on the agenda and with the plan is important. Omari, anything to add here?

**Omari:** Yes. I would say that every time there's been a really important giant step forward, it's usually come around leadership, and that's committed leadership. You know, it's a group



of folks that feels like half the times, and having someone who dedicates—for instance, a staff person who dedicates committed time to working with folks, supporting folks, being ready to be flexible is really important. But also, you know, I don't get the sense that the demographic is just wanting to be led, and so that's the strong millennial leadership in that these folks are taking ownership of the process themselves, I think also had been really important to successful strategies.

And it even just takes one, you know, one person to kind of push these things forward, which maybe is not so dissimilar from what happens in lots of other life situations, but I think it's just really important to remember that leadership has been really key.

**Ryan:** Right. So some push and some letting them lead, letting them be leaders. Great. So moving on to our next question, we're wondering if there were any tactics or strategies that you found while doing this work that didn't quite work out how you thought it would. Anyone want to jump in for this question?

**Tracie:** Well, to jump off of what Omari just said about trying to take the lead too much, I think that's absolutely right. It's like young people and millennials are very self-assured and so want to take the lead or at least think they want to take the lead. So when we first did events with young people, it was largely driven by steering committees, and then we realized that really, like, they should be running the retreat. They should be running the focus groups. That was a mistake.



And then I think the other piece is not—well, just learning to always have fun and to be really creative and then to always be thinking about the next step because once you bring a group of people together and there's a ton of energy, you lose so much momentum when there isn't a very clear next step for them to take, so that was another pitfall.

**John:** I would jump on that and say that one of the things we found was we have to acknowledge that millennials, as Ryan points out with some of the data earlier, they're sort of the most digitally connected group of people these days, and in that same sense, they're perhaps the ultimate multitaskers, and in that same sense, I will add that perhaps not.

So we started out with really just trying to let it be a millennial-guided—you know, a self-guided process, and we found that we needed to stay a little bit more connected to their process, certainly to be carrying across the messages that were the messages we needed to be getting out to lawmakers and things like that, but also like just making sure that the next step in all of the process happened.

As everyone knows, when you're planning anything big, whether it's advocacy or anything like that, there's often a lot of people who want to contribute really great ideas to how to do the program, and there's very few people who actually want to get down in the trenches and do the program.

And, you know, when I was a millennial—obviously, that's not an accurate phrase, but when I was in my 20s, yes, I wanted to learn, and I wanted to move forward. But I also recognized that I needed to put in the time and do the work that helps you sort of convince folks that the ideas you have are great ideas that actually do work. It's much more effective if they're in there doing the work as opposed to just putting forward ideas. So we had to really sort of gather our folks together on a more regular basis to make sure that we weren't just putting forward great ideas but actually carrying out the action.

**Omari:** And I would say that resources in support of carrying out those actions is very important, and not planning for those early enough is something that leads to strategies not working and people just spinning their wheels and going in too many different directions and just not having the capacity, again, because they're either multitasking professionally or don't have deep enough skill or competency in any one area to just kind of make it happen on their own without resources, financial or human resources to give them that structure. And without planning for that early on, it's easy for engagement to just spin and not really go anywhere.

**Ryan:** Great. Thanks so much. Moving on to our last question that we have in the can before moving to audience Q&A, we're just curious. Do you have any anecdotes or stories about what surprised you about the work that you do with millennials? Who wants to start?

**John:** I'll jump right in. We had a session when we were working with American City Arts in Washington on National Arts Advocacy Day, and we had some recent college graduates with us as part of our group going to visit with our representatives in Congress. And I had a wonderful example of a young woman who absolutely blew me away, who happened to be meeting with a lawmaker from Maryland who was not in support of NEA funding but who also happens to be a physician in prior life before becoming a Member of Congress. And this young lady unabashedly told a phenomenal story about a colleague of hers in her dance school who, long story short, overcame a childhood arthritis problem simply because of engaging in dance lessons that were recommended by her therapist and was able to point out to this Member of Congress that this particular child, thanks to dance, was able to cut the cost of health care, which is something that was really, really important to this particular lawmaker. And, you know, that is not something that I ever would have connected. She had done her homework. She knew he was a doctor. She knew that he was against NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] funding, and she really just blew me away in the grace and eloquence in which she used this story to make a point that absolutely got his attention.

Has he changed his stance? No, he hasn't, but I believe it made him think that day, and that is really what advocacy is about.

**Ryan:** That's great. Tracie or Omari?

**Tracie:** To jump off of that, I do think that millennials and young people relate to the storytelling. They're kind of like the podcast generation, and so they just own their





presence, and they own their art in a lot of ways. So at our Youth Arts Advocacy Day when we were gathered in a circle with a couple of legislators and young people were going around and introducing themselves, so many of them were saying, "I am a dancer," "I am an artist," or "I do spoken word." And they just—they used I-statements that really captured what they were doing. So it was just impressive that they're just so self-assured, and that that's something that we always try to capitalize on with them, is that they are just in the moment. And they're great storytellers, and I think that especially in situations with legislators, they're just so raw and they speak from the heart, and so they can often make a larger impact. And they give us so many stories to share in lots of different parts of our work.

**Omari:** Yeah. Speaking from the heart bit, you know, on the one hand, lots of passion, lots of idea—but as it relates to the kind of surprise of it all, I find that I have to just kind of dial it back occasionally and realize that sometimes you just kind of have to start at level one because people don't always know like what tax deductible means or like what a budget is, or they've not ever been to the state capitol, or they've not voted, or if they have voted, they don't know, like, what ward or what district they're in in their city. I mean, there are all these things that they just don't know.

This idea of just making sure to start from square one and—because all of this access, digital engagement and all these things, all this openness to ideas and culture, there's still just kind of basic education that's important to take place.

## Audience Q&A

**Ryan:** Great. Thanks so much. Excellent comments from everyone, and I'm sure will help to answer some of the questions that we have from the audience. But we do have a number of questions coming in, so we'll go ahead and move on to audience questions. But first, Tracie, I saw that you had a question for John. Do you want to go ahead and ask him that?

**Tracie:** Sure. So, John, it just seems like five years ago, you created this whole new program of these Emerging Arts Advocates, so I'm always thinking about how do you start new programs, how do you recruit people into them, and then how do you cultivate and repeat then. Can you speak to that?

**John:** Sure. The initial recruiting process might not have been the best process, and you'll hear why. Essentially, what we did was our board members went to executive directors of existing organizations or board members of existing organizations and said, "Do you have any young people that you think might want to get engaged in this?" So it was almost—it was less of a self-nomination than it was another nomination, but of course, in the end, it ended up being great because the people who did respond sent in a core group of 12 to 15 young people who were really excited about getting engaged in the process.



Since then, the EAAs, Emerging Arts Advocates, have really just created the continued sort of desire of the young people to join this group and to join in the process. We try and keep them engaged. Annually, we do a retreat for our Emerging Arts Advocates and come together and sort of reevaluate the plan from last year: what worked, what didn't work, what new things are you thinking about, what new ways would you like to use to engage other people in this process. Those retreats are always really good because, again, you're giving voice to the participants.

And we're always hearing things that sort of surprise us, and we're like, "Oh, yeah. Well, we didn't think of that," or "No, we've never done it that way, so let's try this," and really just being open to trying the things that they're talking about. So it's sort of self-sustaining at that point.

You know, the other thing about millennials at this point, I think, is that they're essentially in nonprofit sectors. They're changing jobs a lot because they're trying to find that ladder within arts administration, perhaps, and we know that the jobs themselves, once you get into an organization, especially the smaller one, it's really hard to move up because the people who have been in the higher positions for a long period of time in a small organization, there's not as much upward mobility.

So as we've had people move to other organizations or even other states at this point, there's been sort of this natural falloff of sort of peeling back of the folks who had been on our committee longer and new folks coming in. It's really regenerating itself.

**Ryan:** Great, thanks. Excellent point, and I'm glad that you brought up the tenure of millennials in the work force. Definitely an interesting point.

One question from the audience for Omari: Can you clarify the relationship between the Michigan Youth Leadership Council and the Michigan Council for the Arts, and is there a link between the two?

**Omari:** Yes. That New Leaders Arts Council of Michigan is considered a committee of the larger council. There are two members of the New Leaders group on the council, and so they represent that group's voice directly within the council context. And the council takes the funding recommendations from the New Leaders and votes on them as it relates to funding, which are funding recommendations.

So that's the relationship. There is a staff member that provides dedicated support to the New Leaders group, and in general, all of the staff are very engaged with this work.

**Ryan:** Great, thanks. This question is for Tracie. During your arts advocacy day in Massachusetts, do the legislators respond differently to the youth advocates than they do to adult advocates?

**Tracie:** I definitely think so. I think it's refreshing. I'm sure anyone who has done a lobby day, it's like the statehouse is chaos. There's like a million people, and it just seems like aides and staffers treat you like you're part of the herd. But it's really refreshing to have young people in there, especially if they're presenting their work or say in spoken word. It just cuts through the usual landscape of the statehouse and even just to see young people there, and so I do think that they're just a little bit more open-minded.

I think youth arts and arts education really hits close to home for a lot of people who say that they don't care about the arts. So I wish that we would always have a young person with us whenever we would advocate the legislators.

**Ryan:** Great. The next question is for John. The questioner says that maybe this is a stereotype, but they've read that most millennials are more excited by causes than by institutions. And I think that does fit with some of the information we presented earlier. How are you positioning the arts as a cause that's relevant to this age group?

**John:** Yeah, that's a fantastic question, and I think it is one of the things that all advocacy groups are going to need, are really looking at because, historically, the bulk of the funding that we advocate for is general operating grants for arts organizations. The state arts council here funds nearly 300 arts organizations, and if in fact the Pew data is correct, which we assume that it is, that millennials are not engaging with organizations but rather causes, then we need to be creating that message of the arts, and this is a huge initiative of Americans for the Arts, and it's talking about the value of arts in relation to all the other things that are happening in day-to-day life, whether it's arts and education, arts and healing, arts and industry, arts and government, sort of that whole idea of advocating for a voice of the artist at the table, regardless of what the conversation is.

At the national level, this was probably really made popular by Rocco Landesman [former chairman] of the NEA when he engaged the National Endowment for the Arts with things like the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing—or HUD, Housing and Urban Development, and really showed all of us that the role of the arts is much bigger than a performance on a stage or a piece of art on a wall in a museum, that we in fact as artists and arts organizations, especially those that are publicly funded, not just have roles, but have responsibilities to the communities that we serve.

We're in the process of preparing for our annual conference here in Maryland called Arts Lab. It's a capacity-building conference, and in fact, the title of the conference is Community Engagement: Roles and Responsibilities of Publicly Funded Arts Organizations. The way we are connecting millennials is to help them understand that, yes, we keep the arts organizations funded and we keep them going at whatever level we can, but that there, the opportunity for them is to engage in whatever their cause is through publicly funded arts organizations and back out into their community.

So we're in fact trying to drive their engagement not just into the institutions themselves, because many of them might not even sort of be their place there, but reflect back what the role of that institution is in the community and how that supports a particular cause that a millennial might be interested in.

**Ryan:** Great. Thanks so much, John, and thanks so much to our panel. This was a really excellent discussion. I think it could go on for quite a bit more time, and we do have some more questions. But unfortunately, we are at the end of our hour. So once again, thank you to everyone who joined us and presented, and I hope you all have a great day.

