



Chairs and Council Members Peer Session

November 14, 2014

Notes

[Agenda](#)

As appointed leaders in their states, chairs and council members are champions for the arts and ambassadors for their agencies, serving a unique and influential role in the intersection of public service and support for the arts. Chair and Council Member Peer Group participants met and talked with new National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Jane Chu. They also had candid dialogue with lobbyists and former state representatives and congressional staffers to gain insight into effective advocacy and how to leverage support for the arts at the state and local levels. Small group discussions allowed people to discuss issues most important to them in their states and to brainstorm ideas and solutions.

See the [Chairs and Council Members Peer Group roster](#) for the full registration list.

Session Facilitators:

Roger Brooks, chair, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts
Ben Brown, chair, Alaska State Council on the Arts
Garbo Hearne, former chair, Arkansas Arts Council
Bill Mandicott, former chair, Maryland State Arts Council
Nola Ruth, chair, Missouri Arts Council

Challenges

Participants shared the biggest challenges they face in their states:

Advocacy, Outreach and Education

- The legislature is interested in our agency now (finally), so we need to work more with them.
- Legislature zeroes out our funding and then gets constituents to reinstate it. Stressful.
- More people need to learn what's going on in the state. Our agency was cut 53% and keeping people enthusiastic about the arts is a challenge.

- Our state is sparsely populated—it's a challenge to connect everyone.
- We need to continue to educate the governor and legislature about the importance of the arts and keep them engaged.
- Our governor was reelected and we need to get the budget where it needs to be.
- Justifying public dollars for the arts is hard.
- Governor doesn't know much about the arts.

New Governor/New Elected Officials

- We have a new governor and just found out that his wife is a professor with an arts university.
- We just completed a five-year year plan and it's a challenge to manage new expectations and keep the plan moving forward.
- We don't know what will happen with state budgets now that we have a new governor.
- There's a new governor and we don't know what to expect.
- Senate seat turnover is a big deal.
- We need to make sure the arts are on the radar of transition teams.
- Many new elected officials to educate on the importance of the arts.
- Change in governor and legislative arts advocates—we need to turn these losses into opportunities to create new arts advocates.
- Need to tell the story to a whole new Congress.
- Always a concern to get a new governor; it's about education and helping them see the merit of the financial investment in the arts.
- Need to work with the governor, who wants to cut the budget.

Arts Education/Integration

- We're trying to expand a pilot arts education program for kids.
- Integrating the arts into education and the economy.
- Arts education, arts integration, and making the case for these as essential parts of the curriculum.
- Creative education, and finding new models for cross-sector engagement
- Arts integration is so important.
- Changing STEM to STEAM and getting the arts back into schools where they've been taken away.

Capacity Issues

- Helping advocate for more staff is a challenge.
- Only five staff in our agency—we have limited capacity.
- Fight for a full-time executive director.
- Receiving poorly written grants at the council and need to help constituents do better.
- Need to build capacity of *both* the arts agency and the arts advocacy network.

State Budget Concerns

- Growing funding for the arts, especially in an environment where education is a priority.
- Increasing the budget is our top priority.
- Governor has cut the budget and we want to get those cuts reinstated and add funds to the overall budget, rather than asking every year for more money.
- Democratic governor and Republican legislature makes it hard to create a budget.
- Severe economic challenges in the state—how to make the best use of the limited state funds we have? Need to continue to show how the arts and artists are part of diversifying the state's economic base.
- We're required to have a balanced budget and the agency received a cut; this is a challenge for doing what we wanted to this year.
- Money! Our challenge is being around next week.
- Our governor is supportive, but the challenge is to maintain funding year to year.
- Budget cuts are always a challenge.

Working with Stakeholders

- Keeping different groups happy when priorities are different.
- Helping the business community understand the arts.
- Develop relationships with state chambers of commerce and help them understand the impact of the arts on businesses.
- Diversity of our state between urban and rural is a challenge, as is spreading dollars throughout the state.
- We need representation on the arts council from disadvantaged areas.
- Helping the tourism industry understand the arts.
- Our agency structure changed, so now we're also on the tourism commission. We have to push cultural tourism and get more of the dollars that go to the overall agency.
- How to increase awareness of the arts in education and work-force issues.
- The private sector needs to be more engaged in the arts.
- Looking at the role of private foundations in supporting the arts.

Arts Advocacy Organizations

- Finding statewide leadership and creating a sustainable advocacy organization.
- Our statewide advocacy board wants to develop a targeted agenda around arts education.
- Challenge is to build a statewide advocacy group to keep up with the elections.
- Keeping the advocacy coalition on point and not just listening to large organizations in the cities—looking at the big picture.
- Advocacy group is going off in a different direction, which is disconcerting; plus, our governor is weakened and this makes it difficult for us in the legislature.

Other

- Personal challenge as an entrepreneur and the learning curve of working within a state agency and the slow pace of change.
- We need to be more innovative about the way we talk about the arts.
- We need to market the arts council statewide.
- Just completed five-year strategic plan, which includes getting arts into every community; challenged by impact studies and measuring the impact of the arts.
- Raising money for the governor's arts awards and increasing audiences at arts events and the theaters

You Don't Get If You Don't Ask! An Open Conversation about Advocacy

A panel of experts offered their perspectives in a candid conversation about advocacy. Participants asked questions and shared their own advocacy successes and suggestions.

Panelists:

Isaac Brown, NASAA legislative counsel; public policy advisor, 38 North Solutions; former legislative assistant to Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, Illinois

Mike Charron, vice chair, Minnesota State Arts Board; 2nd vice president, NASAA; former representative, District 56A, Minnesota House of Representatives; former city council member, Woodbury, Minnesota

Stephanie Conner, vice chair, Tennessee Arts Commission; former assistant to Governor Donald Sundquist, Tennessee; board member, Tennesseans for the Arts

What's the difference between advocacy and lobbying?

Lobbying is about trying to influence the outcome of a specific piece of legislation. It's also about technical aspects of the legislative process. Advocacy is much broader and more general. Advocacy educates people by talking about the value of the arts. It helps elected officials understand what matters to us as constituents. Lobbying is "surgical" whereas advocacy is about garnering wide support. (For more on this subject, see [Advocacy and Lobbying: Speaking Up for the Arts.](#))

How do the arts fit into election platforms, or how can you get it into a platform?

In Tennessee, advocates make a big effort to ensure the arts are seen as nonpartisan. The state senate has an arts caucus that's a mix of parties. The arts are no longer seen as a party issue.

In every state, it is so important to keep the arts above the political fray. We can be much more effective when we connect the arts to our communities and our states. The arts are neither elitist nor a liberal issue. The arts are for everyone and benefit all communities.

What about arts advocacy organizations?

In Tennessee, the advocacy group and state arts agency are hand in hand—both are on the same message and don't go to the Hill without the other.

Communication is key. Tennesseans for the Arts (TFTA) and the Tennessee Arts Commission (TAC) are at each other's planning tables. People contact TFTA's arts consultant before they go to the Hill. Conversely, the senate arts caucus contacts TFTA if by chance an advocate goes rogue and comes to them separately.

In Minnesota, the state advocacy organization's mission is to get as much general operating support (GOS) for arts organizations as possible. One issue is that the larger metropolitan areas tend to get the most attention, so we need to be mindful to include everyone and spread the money around the state. Turnaround Arts: Minnesota brings the arts to some of the state's highest-need schools, which helps raise awareness.

How long did it take to build the arts caucus in Tennessee, and how do you fill that void when legislators leave?

Eight years ago we started with key members: we looked at the committees where arts issues would be relevant and then looked at the chairs of those committees. We started small and didn't put everyone on the arts caucus; members get to be on the arts caucus because they are committed to protecting our funding. Specifically, they pledge not to let anyone mess with the license plate formula [whereby a portion of proceeds supports the arts]. The sitting caucus members then help recruit colleagues. We don't ask them to do a lot. We make sure they're recognized for their commitment. Then when we do ask for something it's a big deal.

Minnesota does "big check" events [creates presentation and photo opportunities for legislators when the arts council makes a grant in their districts]. The state also does an Arts All-Star Award to showcase legislators' support. These are ways to make the arts a positive thing for legislators.

We're trying to build a network of influencers and are challenged to find people who have the weight to be arts champions. Any advice about identifying influencers?

Engaging former council members is one way we do it in Tennessee. And when you're recruiting board members, get creative in looking for diversity from different sectors. Go to local folks and ask them to help you find movers and shakers.

In Minnesota, we ask people involved in the arts, such as gallery owners, to think about serving on the Minnesota State Arts Board. Show up for lots of arts events so you can meet others who attend arts events. When we find and recruit people, we emphasize that they have the opportunity to make a difference.

Other comments:

People who benefit from the arts should be our biggest advocates with legislators. Sometimes the most effective voices for the arts are because they're not from within the arts.

Talking about children and children's issues in a legislator's district helps.

Talk about the economic benefits and how the arts attract talent to legislators' districts.

Technology companies are using arts museums and arts events as a way to recruit people to come to those communities.

Combine stories with facts. Talk about education and economic statistics. Go to the NASAA website and the numbers are right there [[Arts Education](#), [Creative Economic Development](#)]. You can also call [NASAA staff](#) for customized information to help with advocacy in your state.

Talk with NEA Chairman Jane Chu and NASAA CEO Jonathan Katz

Jonathan Katz introduced Jane Chu, who thanked chairs and council members for their work as state arts agency advocates and ambassadors. She noted that the partnership among the NEA, NASAA and the states is strong and that she wants all Americans to have the arts. Jonathan reviewed her bio, noting her accomplishments in creating the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, and proceeded to interview her.

JK: What was your biggest challenge in building the arts center?

JC: Creating the performing arts center was about creating an infrastructure—an ecology for the arts to thrive. The biggest challenge was being comfortable with different perspectives—both oboe players and construction workers. Not all people like the same arts programs, and being in ambiguous situations was a challenge.

JK: How did you build the center into a community organization?

JC: If you build it they won't come necessarily. The real part of engagement in the arts requires relationship building in the communities we're involved in—and I have seen that this has been successful for state leaders. Relationships are so important to help spread the word.

JK: At the Kauffman Center, how did you rely on your board?

JC: We learned that we needed to air our dirty laundry within the privacy of the board room and then go out together as one so that the message was united. It's so important to come out together on message. This worked well for us.

JK: What did you want to do in your first months as NEA chairman?

JC: Not sexy things. (laughing) It's important to focus on the culture of an organization. I love the NEA team and it's tempting for a new chairman to flip the organization. I wanted to make sure that the agency knows that what they're doing is important and is valued regardless of the chairman. How do we behave with each other? Emotional intelligence matters. I spent three months listening to every single staff member to get to know people and hear what excites them and what gets in their way. Here's what I learned about what energizes NEA staff: they passionately love the arts, they don't just see it as a job. I also learned that they love their team and that there is an opportunity to communicate across teams. How do you help teams appreciate each other? From there, fun projects will unfold. In the coming months we'll start vetting projects to roll out. The biggest piece is arts engagement and we'll do this together.

Audience questions:

What's been surprising to you traveling around the country?

JC: I've been to 13 or 14 states in 10 weeks. The arts are thriving; they're very robust. This is not surprising, but when you see how deep the benefits are, it's fabulous and it counters any arguments that participation is declining. Maybe the traditional ways are declining, but there are new ways of participating and the arts are everywhere. We have an opportunity to get this message out and show it through evidence. If everyone saw this, no one would suggest cutting the arts.

Are you planning to meet with leaders to work on increasing the NEA budget? What are the prospects?

JC: We appreciate that our budget is holding steady at \$146 million. I view this as a vote of confidence and have had many conversations on the Hill and will have many more. Using evidence, we can make the case and move the budget up.

Any interagency partnerships?

JC: Yes! An interagency task force meets regularly: Department of Defense, National Science Foundation, Health and Human Services, and more. We have a memo of understanding with the National Science Foundation and want to advance this so we have a product to show for these conversations. Look for this to come out soon. Also, the Bureau of Economic Analysis is looking at the contribution of culture to the GDP, and will soon have information at the state level, which will be very helpful to the states. The numbers are bigger than we thought and this is a story to tell. The arts and culture sector is formidable, but we need to deepen how we communicate this.

Can the NEA get corporate America to match the \$146 million?

JC: The NEA's grants already require a match, which significantly leverages the federal investment. Being able to spark more investment is important about public funding, and an important message to convey.

Topical Roundtable Discussion Reports

Table #1: Beyond Elected Officials: Developing Other Influential Voices for the Arts

Elected officials are not the only people arts advocates need to reach. As council members, we have contact with citizens and leaders in many different professional and civic circles. Who are other influential voices in our communities that should be advocating for the arts? What new relationships would be strategic? How can we carry that message?

We need to talk with:

- economic development professionals
- chambers of commerce
- downtown development districts (knowledge parks, etc.)
- local government, local issues
- municipal associations: connect to their interests.
- headhunters recruiting for jobs/industry in your area: make them messengers.
- realtors/residential development firms
- convention and visitors bureaus
- educators/after-school and out-of school alliances: think about how to build connections with discipline teachers, school boards and other education related groups.
- scouting, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.
- media—proactive messaging: go to the media with our stories, including economic impact data.
- faith communities: tap into camps, educational programming, etc.
- creative aging services
- health services
- military and veterans' services
- prisons
- Find what's locally relevant and how local priorities fit into state priorities.

Table #2: The Power of an Informal Conversation

Unlike formal, scheduled hearings and appointments with legislators, there are many opportunities for informal or chance meetings with potential allies and advocates—at arts events, school board meetings, chamber of commerce gatherings, other civic meetings, sporting events, board meetings and social gatherings. What are some useful guidelines for wearing our state arts agency "hats" everywhere we go? How can we talk authentically and respectfully about the arts in different settings?

- Develop an elevator speech for each thing your agency does and memorize it so you're ready at any time.

- Do your homework. Think about what matters to you about the arts and organize your thoughts. Develop messages about why the arts matter and practice them. Be ready for any conversation at any time.
- Listen to other peoples' interests and concerns. Don't just have an across-the-board speech. Be sensitive and relevant to unique situations.
- Prepare for arguments in advance. For example, what are some of the common objections when advocating for the move from STEM to STEAM?
- Practice the art of "incidentally...": look for ways to connect the arts to other issues without derailing conversations. For example, the arts have a role to play in education, rural development, job creation, health care, transportation and more.

Table #3: Show Me the Money!

This group discussed how to increase state arts agency budgets.

- Start at the top; get to know governors while they're campaigning; fundraise for top offices (state senate seats, county executive, etc.); host cocktail parties for candidates you think will win; campaign for arts supporters. Practice "retail politics."
- Let yourself be known as a constituent—speak up, voice your opinion, wishes and concerns. Participate in democracy!
- Consider the collective voting power of different groups. Show candidates your constituency. Fundraise for them to impact their races, then make them stick to their word. Start early and discuss economic impact.
- Look at other sources for revenue, for example, a "cigarette tax" (such as in northwestern Ohio) or a "license plate tax" (in Tennessee), a portion of which might go to the arts.
- Look to other voices who benefit from the arts and ask them to speak up. Build new, creative coalitions that will get decision makers' attention. In Ohio's Cuyahoga County, churches, temples, unions, arts organizations and other organizations built a unique coalition.

Table #4: Roles and Responsibilities for Public-Sector Boards

Every state has enabling legislation and statutes that determine how our arts agencies are constituted. Beyond these statutes, how do we as appointed leaders come to understand our everyday roles and obligations to our agencies? What are the differences between service on our state arts councils or commissions and nonprofit board service?

Differences between public sector and nonprofit boards and ideas for strengthening leadership:

- State arts agencies are guided by state/federal regulation.
- Our board service is by appointment (typically gubernatorial).
- Our primary role is policy governance, not running the agency.
- We have obligations to follow state statutes and represent citizens.

- Formal orientation programs can support new council members. We need to understand our role in the agency's mission. We also need to understand our agency's strategic plan and what's expected of us in fulfilling it.
- However, formal orientation programs often are not enough: serving on committees helps us learn more about our agencies.
- Service on grant panels is important to understanding public service.
- Establish a good relationship with your executive director—this is more than a training program and can really help.
- The chair needs to help develop collective engagement. Hands-on knowledge helps cultivate individual council members.
- Participate in NASAA: attend conferences, read newsletters and policy briefs, connect with NASAA's research and data—this can all really help.

Table #5: Arts Council Marketing Practices

One of our biggest challenges is getting the word out about the value of state arts agencies. What can we as council members do to spread the word about the good work of our agencies? How can we help to increase our brand awareness among our arts constituents? These roundtable participants shared their best marketing ideas—actual and aspirational.

- Cultivate word of mouth ambassadors to share success stories. Ask "product users" to spread the word about your agency. This is about word of mouth, not marketing. For example, some people use social media, others still want a product to hold. Be inclusive.
- From print to web to social media—think of these as both/and, not either/or.
- Create an ambassador program to help build relationships with outside groups. Who benefits from your work (besides grant recipients)? Train them to speak well to that.
- Hand out your business cards and identify yourself as a council member.
- Develop a list of events that council members and commissioners can attend throughout the state—important to give a voice and presence to your agency.
- Montana did a Tourism Treats on Tuesday program; on the treat they gave to each legislator there was a fact sheet about the arts (or tourism).
- Listening sessions: identify incoming legislators and assign council members to meet with them. Get to know them to find out why they ran for office. What do they love? What matters to them? What motivates them about public service? Learn about them, then connect their issues to the arts (there's always a connection). Make friends with your elected officials.
- Make gifts to NASAA in honor of an elected official or someone else you want to support the arts.
- Make contact with the also-rans, i.e., those who didn't win their election but who likely will still be involved in public service and are worth cultivating relationships with.

Session Wrap-Up

NASAA Chief Advancement Officer Laura Smith distributed a new report called [State Arts Agency Council Terms, Powers and Duties](#). NASAA compiled data on council terms, powers and duties from state statutes, administrative codes and council bylaws, then looked at the legislated powers and duties common to many state arts agency councils. Given the turnover and change among councils, appointed leaders need ongoing education about what it means to serve on a council, and providing foundational work like this is one role NASAA plays.

Other NASAA resources for chairs and council members include:

- [Why Should Government Support the Arts?](#) A policy brief and research compendium that helps you make the case for why the arts are an essential public investment
- [Report to Councils](#) Specifically designed for volunteer leaders, a periodic two-pager that offers highlights of NASAA activities on behalf of state arts agencies, and serves as a useful insert to council meeting materials
- [NASAA Notes](#) A monthly newsletter that shares current news and resource alerts useful to state arts agencies and their constituents
- [Creative Economic Development Resource Center](#) On-line cultural tourism resources, information on state cultural districts, and National Governors Association Issue Briefs on the arts and public policy
- [Legislative Alerts and Updates](#) Communications that keep you notified about congressional actions affecting state arts agencies and their constituents

State arts agencies meet **October 7-9, 2015**, in Salt Lake City, Utah, for NASAA's 2015 Leadership Institute. This is a smaller, executive leadership convening for chairs, council members, executive directors, deputy directors, and others with policy responsibilities. Mark your calendar!