



Deputy/Assistant Director Peer Session Notes

October 13, 2017

Deputy Director Peer Group Coordinators

- [Chandra Boyd](#), Deputy Director, Oklahoma Arts Council
- [Dan Katona](#), Deputy Director, Ohio Arts Council
- [Cassandra Mason](#), Chief Grants Officer, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts

Introductions

Chandra Boyd, Dan Katona and Cassandra Mason began the session with participant introductions. As part of the introductory exercise, each participant answered a personal question from another participant before asking a new question to someone else in the room.

Group Discussion: What Does It Mean to Be a Deputy Director?

Chandra, Dan and Cassandra began this group discussion by asking participants to talk about their responsibilities and how they see their role as a deputy director. Many roles and responsibilities were identified:

- Some deputies, who work with executive directors who travel frequently, act as their agency's "on-site director" when their director is not present.
- Other deputies travel and visit constituents more often than their executive director and, as a result, act as their agency's ambassador to the field.
- Several deputies manage their agency's human resources.
- A number of deputies manage specific grant programs and/or oversee the totality of their agency's grant programs.
- Deputies are commonly involved in monitoring the state legislative appropriation process and doing other work in relation to receiving state funding.
- Deputies are understudies, preparing to assume, if necessary, the executive director role. Similarly, when there is staff attrition, deputies often take on the tasks and responsibilities of employees who leave the agency. As a result, deputies have to know everything about their agency. Staff redundancy is insurance for sudden staff changes, but training staff how to do other people's jobs is time consuming.
- Many deputies have informal roles that facilitate the smooth operation of their agency. Participants said they are their agency's "go-to person," "gatekeeper," "firefighter" and "mom," among other things. These additional administrative and operational responsibilities—which range from replacing lightbulbs and fixing broken

coffee pots to mentoring young employees and dealing with an unhappy commission member—can be burdensome.

- Deputies do a lot and would appreciate higher salaries.

Group Discussion: Executive Director Transitions and Related Succession Planning

During the conversation about deputy director roles, participants began discussing the challenges of executive director transitions and related succession planning. They made the following points:

- Executive director transitions are especially difficult during a legislative session, as an agency that is unable to focus on the appropriations process is vulnerable to budget cuts.
- It is hard for a deputy to act as an interim executive director if their parent agency does not grant them the requisite authority to do the job.
- One way to ease transitions is to document responsibilities and procedures before the executive director leaves the agency.
- Administrative assistants working with executive directors might be good sources of important information about informal procedures and practices, which often are not documented.

Subsequently, Chandra, Dan and Cassandra asked participants to think of ways to successfully plan for and facilitate executive director transitions. Participants suggested the following:

- Make "cheat sheets" for everything you do in your role; encourage other staff to do the same.
- Create a master binder outlining all staff procedures and roles.
- Encourage staff to document official policies and procedures as well as informal workflow practices. Discourage them from storing this knowledge in their head. Knowledge of informal practices is important to agency operations. One good way to document it is to list tasks associated with each month of the year.
- Prepare in advance for executive director transitions.
- Remember that executive directors may be unavailable prior to transitioning out of their role. For example, directors taking their remaining sick and vacation days may be out of the office weeks before their official last day.
- Subscribe to other SAAs' newsletters and e-mail announcements, as they contain great ideas that you can adapt for your agency.

Final Thoughts

Chandra, Dan and Cassandra closed the session by asking if participants had any final thoughts. Participants shared the following:

- It would be helpful to have access to highlights of various SAA procedures and policies pertaining to personnel and other issues. This could be similar to NASAA's State to State newsletter column, except that it would focus on SAAs' internal management.
- The South Dakota Arts Council is involved in a year-long arts and health care initiative that the National Lieutenant Governors Association is undertaking.
- It would be great to have a database cataloging the details of the various grants-management software SAAs use. This could help SAAs make decisions about how they use and/or whether they should upgrade their software.



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NASAA 2017
Portland, Oregon

Deputy Directors Peer Session
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10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

The word(s) that best describe my ROLE as a Deputy Director...





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The word(s) that best describe the CHALLENGES I face as a Deputy Director...

