



Chairs and Council Members Peer Session September 19, 2019

Notes

Approximately 45 state arts agency chairs and council members attended the peer session (see [roster](#)), which was facilitated by Rhode Island State Arts Council members Kara Milner and Lorén Spears. The [agenda](#) featured topical discussions using the World Café format.

Notes from the World Café Conversations

The World Café format allowed arts leaders to have focused and substantive conversations about questions that matter to them, building on each other's thoughts and ideas as they moved among topics. Participants rotated among three tables, each featuring a different topic. Issues were discussed for a set period of time and notes were taken directly by participants and with the help of a scribe. The notes were gathered from each table, and are summarized here.

Council Appointments and Orientation

How do appointments to our councils really work? Can we influence those appointments to better align with the needs of our agencies and reflect the diversity of our states? How can appointees be most effectively oriented and engaged?

- Councils are appointed or selected in various ways. State arts agencies' placement within state government can determine how appointments are made. Some councils are appointed by their governor (AL, CA, CO, ID, LA, OH, RI, SC, WY), lieutenant governor, secretary, speaker, the state legislature or a combination of these positions. In some states, candidates may apply for a position on their council (AR).
- Different states have different requirements, which also determines how members are selected to serve on councils. For example, some councils are required or choose to represent every district in the state (VA, LA). This can help bolster diversity, especially geographic diversity, but doesn't always result in a council that's racially or economically diverse.
- The number of council members and length of terms also varies from state to state and can have different effects on appointments and council structure.
- Influencing appointments can be hard to navigate depending on the state and the politics surrounding appointments. It can be particularly difficult to represent the diversity of the state when councils don't have power over who is appointed.
- Council members can try to build stronger relationships and improve communication with their governor or person who appoints members by:
 - helping find people to recommend to your governor
 - seeking recommendations from local arts organizations or encouraging appointments of people involved in the arts
 - working to reject/suggest members to balance composition

- creating a diversity subcommittee to make recommendations to help with diversity (ID)

Read NASAA's [State Arts Agency Council Terms, Powers and Duties](#) report for more information on how councils are structured, appointed, governed, and more.

Advocacy

One of our most important roles as council members is educating elected officials: about the impact of the arts, and about how the arts can help improve other policy priorities, like education, economic development and health care. Beyond this kind of advocacy, what other ambassadorial roles do we play? Can we do more to connect with other agencies, nonprofits and businesses in our communities to have more influence throughout the state?

- Understand how your state appropriates funds, then develop relationships and provide information well in advance to the right people. Build strong connections through ongoing conversations, updates and sharing information. Montana does this by using a set of standard questions and talking points when contacting members of the legislature.
- Citizens, independent artists, community organizers, churches and grantees can all be advocates. Ask them to write letters, tell their stories and meet with legislators. Develop strategic partnerships and find synergies with other organizations, businesses and universities. See how the arts can be included and supported through partnerships. If your SAA falls under other government sectors such as Departments of Education, Health, Transportation or Tourism, leverage that for advocacy.
- Highlight the economic impact the arts play on jobs, taxes and commerce—use data from your state, NASAA and other resources and put it together in a professional report. Ask businesses to step up and be involved in advocacy.
- Various states have had success by developing an arts caucus, committee or group. These members of the legislature are well informed, understand the impact and educate their peers. It can also help introduce new bills and priorities.
- Don't just advocate, lobby as well. Minnesota uses a good, well-connected lobbyist and some states can get lobbyists to offer their assistance with no compensation. Don't forget that council members can lobby as individuals.
- Many states have found success in holding an annual arts advocacy day. Invite the public, individuals and businesses to help educate the legislature about the impact of the arts in your state. Tie the day in with governor arts awards or other public relations opportunities to make it special and draw attention.
- State arts advocacy groups can make or break your advocacy efforts, making the relationship with your advocacy organization so important.
- Some advocacy challenges facing SAAs include the distance/size of the state; resources; availability and time of volunteers; and competing issues for appropriations such as arts education.
- Get creative in ways to highlight the arts and show your impact: let the legislature present the checks to grantees; create dedicated funding streams, such as Tennessee's [specialty license plate](#) program; develop creative districts and/or host an annual conference for creative districts in a rural area of your state each year; provide user friendly tools and websites to teach citizens and grantees about advocacy (SC); create a "Fund Every County" program to appeal to legislators (OH).
- Show the value of cultural traditions and contemporary expressions from communities of color in your advocacy. Share any diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies and grant equity policies.

- Can advocacy help SAAs gain more influence and power over their own council appointments? How can SAA councils receive advocacy training so that they can better represent the communities they serve?

Explore the [Advocate](#) section of NASAA's website for a wide variety of resources to help you with state level case making and advocacy, including [Three Simple Ways to Advocate for the Arts](#); [The Arts & America's Bottom Line](#); and [Why Should Government Support the Arts?](#)

Big Challenges

What are the biggest challenges facing your agency today? Maybe it's helping your grantees prepare for storms, flooding, tornadoes or fires. Perhaps your board and staff composition doesn't reflect your demographics and the consequences are stacking up. It could be that policy or grant-making changes you want to make aren't going over well and now you've got a public relations problem. What's most pressing and how are you responding?

- Spreading the word about the agency, impact and grants, in particular to rural areas and Native American communities, and finding an effective distribution channel for messaging (emails get lost and ignored)
- Education for:
 - grantees and arts organizations on business skills and training to help improve grant applications
 - council members on the impact and strategic goals of the agency to be more effective and influential in their roles
 - executive and legislative branches on the value and impact of the agency
- Funding and resources! We have a large number of grant applications and not enough funding to go around; small staffs spread thin; unknown appropriations make it hard to plan for the future; having to find ways to do more with less.
 - Some suggestions to help include strengthening advocacy, building partnerships with other government sectors and organizations, and influencing corporations and foundations to play a role or bigger role.
- New leadership and SAA staff transitions: having succession plans in place and making sure to keep continuity of programming while evolving to better reach constituents (GU, SC)
- Many SAAs reported challenges as they develop and enact DEI policies:
 - Representation matters, and state demographics are not represented on SAA councils, especially ones appointed by governors or other elected officials (MT and others).
 - Maryland changed the formula on how they fund grantees to be more equitable, which caused pushback from some of the larger grantees. They've done outreach to all their constituents to try to help them understand the changes and why they are important.
 - Finding and putting resources toward equity in grant making and programs: Whom do we serve? Is it inclusive? Arts sector leans white; reaching diverse and rural organizations is difficult and requires more resources and on-the-ground grass-roots help. How do we reach rural communities? How do we balance big organizations taking/getting all the funding rather than spreading it out appropriately?
- Natural Disasters
 - Come up with disaster preparedness plan; coordinate/communicate with first responders; can artists be considered first responders?
 - Create an emergency response network for artists
 - Help artists develop their own plans to be prepared and protected
 - Provide art therapy to help release stress

- Travel to shelters and perform/provide art activities. The Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña developed Cultura Rodante, an initiative that brought arts and artists to emergency shelters, eldercare centers and public plazas after hurricanes Irma and María.

To learn more about harnessing the power of the arts to drive rural prosperity and what SAAs are doing to reach rural constituents, visit NASAA's [Rural Prosperity](#) page.

See these NASAA resources to learn more about diversity, equity and inclusion:

- [State Policies & Programs Addressing Diversity](#) is a curated catalogue of programs and policies that state arts agencies use to foster inclusion and equity in the arts.
- NASAA can help members better understand how their agencies serve all populations through our [Visualizing Equity in Grant Making](#) dashboards. Members may request interactive dashboards overlaying grants data with state demographics.
- [Race Equity](#) is an examination of where state arts agency grants are allocated in relation to American demographics.
- [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Activities](#) is a review of work NASAA has undertaken since 2015 to address DEI issues, as an organization and for the field.

Check out the [ArtsReady](#) website for more information and resources on arts preparedness.