



Chairs and Council Members Peer Session
September 23, 2022

Notes

Approximately 35 state arts agency (SAA) chairs and council members attended the peer session (see [roster](#)), which was facilitated by LaVon Bracy Davis, council member with the Florida Division of Arts and Culture, and Abigail Gómez, former chair of the Virginia Commission for the Arts. 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 around four 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. These notes were gathered from each table and are summarized here.

What's Next?

While cultural activities are resuming nationwide, the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy, political polarization and more continues to reverberate throughout the arts sector. Arts organizations and artists must continue to adapt their practices, find ways to reengage communities and remain flexible as new ways of being emerge. How is your agency helping your state's creative sector meet such challenges and navigate these transitions? What's working? What more needs to be done? What other big challenges do we see coming?

Funding Challenges

- In recent years Kansas experienced total defunding, which was a huge challenge, but it forced us to rebuild, renew and redevelop programs.
 - We ask organizations to show how they will stay sustainable, so they won't rely on arts agency funding.
 - The sustainability of grantee organizations also appeals to the legislature.
 - We see ourselves as venture capitalists—the agency invests in projects that will bring economic benefits.
- Arts appeal to economic growth and job creation—a good advocacy message for funding.
- Colorado looked for opportunities where the arts could rise up and meet needs like community housing.

- License plate funding from the state has helped Tennessee and California.
- A lot of arts organizations' budgets were decimated because they had no general funds and too many capital needs.
- SAAs are rethinking grant structures. What does responsible grant making look like? Do we go back to pre-COVID practices, which put more constraints on grantees? Do we keep the flexibility that we introduced during COVID, which helped remove some barriers to funding? Or do we do some sort of hybrid?
- SAAs are more attuned to their constituents now than before the pandemic.
- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money was a blessing and a curse. It provided relief and resources, but also generated a lot more work for SAA staff.
- Vermont administered grants from its ARPA funds to nonprofits and for-profits to try to make more connections, create synergy and build constituency.
- Rural communities faced many challenges during COVID and need more resources.
 - In Alaska, since tourism stopped, small communities that are spread out across the state turned to e-commerce. Now they're reaching so many more people.
 - Alaska also developed ways to get funding to artists more quickly. The grants process became more streamlined. The agency provided access and help to apply for grants. It did surveys to help document artists' needs and show the legislature how important the arts are to communities and economic recovery.
 - Alaska has now partially privatized funding sources—it gets funding from the state and private foundations.
- Arkansas is under the Department of Heritage, which does have a foundation, but also has other departments, which creates competition among all the departments.
- Arts organizations and SAAs need readiness plans. Georgia is partnering with the Center for Nonprofits to provide consultants to grantees to help with resources.

Staffing Challenges

- SAAs are experiencing a revolving door in leadership, and for some, at all staff levels.
- Could leadership development programs help with staffing shortages?
- Trying to use new and different platforms to find and hire new staff.
- Working from home has pros and cons for employees. It can help or hinder equity. It provides more flexibility, but there can be generational differences/concerns/needs.

Arts Recovery Challenges

- For some communities "What's Next" isn't the question—it's still about survival.
- After COVID some organizations are gone, some are adapting, some are thriving.
- Many organizations have had to pivot; flexibility is key to recovery.
- The "on demand" appeal of virtual programming compared to more rigid performance schedules is hard to reset. It's a hybrid life right now between live art and virtual art.
- The value-add for attending live art needs to be messaged more. Advertising and marketing haven't changed and maybe they should. We need to advertise to show the impact of hands-on art, of live experiences. Keep offering hybrid opportunities and market that seats are empty.

- For some age groups, the virtual world was the world they lived in already, and the rest of us were pushed into it.
 - Do venues need to remodel and redefine themselves?
 - Are there too many venues? Too many places to see art?
 - How can we integrate new tech like virtual reality that would put the arts in the hands of new audiences?
- Outdoor venues are seeing increases in ticket sales, while indoor venues are seeing decreases.
- There are learning curves to redesigning arts programs.
- Devil's advocate: If you want audiences to return then stop offering virtual options.
- The arts sector needs to catch up on tech.
- Should SAAs provide more funding for tech support, including ASL interpreters? Can they support access to the Internet?
- For some areas, tourism has returned but ticket sales are down. What's the disconnect? For other areas, such as larger, urban areas serving tourists, performing arts organizations are doing better now, but those that serve local audiences are still struggling, or gone.
 - World events also impact attendance.
 - Seasonal sales are much lower, showing that COVID lingers and people don't want to commit to something six months in advance.
 - There are generational differences, too. Older generations are more likely to subscribe, while younger generations don't want to commit.
- People's comfort levels with COVID and state restrictions vary. Performing arts organizations are experiencing additional costs from managing various COVID protocols.
- Financially, are the worst days yet to come? There's no more relief money and audience members still haven't come back.
- Arts organizations became real innovators during COVID. The most uplifting things that happened during COVID were the arts or spawned from the arts:
 - Wyoming created an award for innovation to showcase the remarkable solutions the arts addressed, and the winner created a platform to experience art around the world.
 - Nevada is thinking about arts programs to promote health.
 - How do we capitalize on the innovations, partnerships and feel-good experiences that came from the arts during COVID?
 - Challenge: where's the line between monetizing art versus art as expression?
 - How can we remind folks to go back and experience the feeling you get when you see live art?

Political Polarization Challenges

- Need to be aware and ready.
- Diverse opinions are good.
- Each side brings qualities to the table.
- Compromise is needed.
- No one should be afraid to voice their opinion.
- What's the answer??

Check out information and resources available in the [Grant Making](#) section of NASAA's website. Read [Arts and Economic Recovery Research](#), [Facts & Figures on America's](#)

[Creative Economy](#); and NASAA's [Arts and Creativity Strengthen Our Nation](#) messaging guide. You can also explore topics covered in NASAA's [2022 Learning Series](#).

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access

The public sector holds a special responsibility to ensure that the arts enable well-being and prosperity for everyone in the United States. Since their inception, state arts agencies have worked to democratize access to the arts. But there's more work to do before we achieve true funding equity for people and places with historically limited resources—especially people of color, rural communities, older adults, LGBTQIA+ populations and individuals with disabilities. This conversation explores what state arts agencies are doing—and what barriers they face—as they advance diversity, equity, inclusion and access (DEIA) in their states.

- Reword grants for understanding—DEIA goes beyond race.
 - Should we ask the same or different questions for different programs, populations, monthly grants, annual grants, etc.?
 - Answering too many questions around DEIA makes applications longer and creates more barriers.
 - Why are small and large organizations required to fill out the same applications/held to the same standard?
- Staff reach out for feedback when organizations don't apply or suddenly score low.
- Direct grants and/or line item funding in state budgets for arts organizations = inequity.
- Tailor grant opportunities for individual/unique populations. Avoid trying to be like other groups (rural versus urban).
- Education is needed by everyone.
- Tools and resources are necessary, along with arts funding.
- How do we engage counties/communities that don't apply for grants?
 - partnerships
 - regional representatives
 - allow in-kind matches for small communities
- Major/minimum population shifts.
- Focus on youth.
- Meet communities where they are.
- Host meetings in different areas of the state.
- Have a standing committee of the board for equity and/or DEIA.
- Who's at the table? There can be multiple tables—council, panels, committees, etc.
- Stronger statements/training for panelists.
 - Establish nationwide standards for grant review?
 - DEIA efforts can break down or even stop with panelists.
- Not enough education for boards/councils.
- Requiring board giving can be a barrier.
- Lack of diverse board representation work falls disproportionately on BIPOC folks—they can't afford to miss a meeting.
- There are some cultural structures bigger than grants or funding tables that exceeds framework.
 - boards
 - NGO structures
- We are limited by Western ideas of culture.
- Rhode Island provided extra funding for organizations that checked DEIA boxes.

- SAAs can partner with other state agencies (veterans administrations, libraries, tourism) to expand their reach to vulnerable/underserved populations.
- Aspects of DEIA: geographical, social, socioeconomic status, veterans.
- Politicized versus *humanized*
- Politicization of DEIA terms misleads the work and impact.
- How do we take politics out of the arts and out of council appointments?
- A big barrier is governor appointments, legislative appointments and/or term limits (too long or too short).
- Addressing historical trauma, systemic racism is multifaceted; arts funding doesn't solve issues.
- Inequities within equity movements: performative versus authentic efforts.
- States need to be cognizant of the makeup of their boards and of the advice they're giving.
- For Indigenous communities, DEIA is not viewed the same way. (Another reason more education is needed.)
- JEDAI (justice, equity, diversity, access, inclusion): there is hesitation/unwillingness to consider justice.
- There's a focus on "folk arts" versus understanding that diversity/inclusion extends beyond race/equity. Artistic work that is culturally specific isn't necessarily folk and/or traditional.
- Focus on grant funding earmarked for small/rural communities if no arts organizations in communities/counties engage with the SAA.
- SAAs can use creative districts as leverage for inclusion.

Explore the many resources available in the [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) section of the NASAA website, including [Equity Choice Points](#), [State Arts Agency Equity Strategies](#) and [Anti-Bias Training for State Arts Agencies](#).

Arts and Health

Many health issues affect American communities, including widespread mental health crises, burnout, substance abuse, gun violence, teen suicide, aging and care for our veterans. What role can our agencies play in helping to address health and wellness concerns that affect our communities?

- Kansas has worked with mental health agencies.
- Wyoming involved rural, underserved communities through arts and health work.
- Arts and military programs show power of art and healing.
- Missouri does story-telling programs in prisons.
- How can we inform other agencies/groups that the arts are more than just performances?
- People do not understand "the arts"; often seen as elitist.
- Hard to measure! Legislatures want measurements.
 - There are studies, but too few.
 - We need to help create studies.
- Hard to reach every group/community/issue—that in itself is informative!
- Lack of vocabulary around this topic!
- Funding is an issue. Mental health and arts are both underfunded.
- Michigan has an art in prisons program. Art therapy now covered under mental health insurance—just signed by governor.
- Creative aging, but what happens when there's no more funding?

- Try establishing an arts/health task force.
- Rely on nonprofit programs that apply for grants. "Well formed ideas" do not get funding.
- Need to look at professionalism of those who apply for grants in these areas.
- Legislatures aren't ready to solve these problems with funding.
- Where does funding for teen suicide come from? How can we partner?
- Go to nontraditional funders—arts as an entry to health and wellness.
- How to think outside the box? What is it we can provide that is NOT funding? How can we create partnerships?
- Idea: Be a convener! Tell other departments: we can help you, but we won't bring dollars!
- "Information clearinghouse" symposiums?
- Create relationships and partner with psychology departments, health agencies, other governmental departments.
- No one is asking arts leaders about their mental status. We need to start there.
- In Georgia there are "self-care cafés" where people can talk about what's bothering them.
- Arts take us out of the daily grind, we're entertained, they provide different perspectives. Take people to arts performances to expose them. Arts can build the bridges.
- Executive directors can contact the pertinent agency and deliver webinars.
- Dept. of health came to Wisconsin arts commission meeting. Have the discussion!
- Art itself has healing properties and can be used to help heal. Example: patient had stroke and played piano as rehab = art as healer.
- Georgia partnered with the attorney general, governor and first lady to commission a play about human trafficking that went to high schools across the state.
- Refugee story quilts—funded a touring display.
- Work at local boys and girls groups: sports often stressed but should be exposed to arts. Example: glass blowing/forging
- Work with humanities organizations.
- We need more emphasis on burnout! States should address burnout as a serious issue.
- With limited funding and very small staff, how can council members help?
- Arts people "care" but governor and other officials are more concerned with being elected again (career, not service) so no help from other government levels.
- Lack of people and funding for arts and arts leaders: a real brain drain.
- Heavy lift for state agencies: it's hard to add to what we already do.
- Art therapies to veterans and homes for the elderly—potential for expansion.
- Health/wellness: arts organizations need expanded funding. Ex: work with Alzheimer's patients
- Acknowledge that some of this work is happening. How to get the word out? Ex: community arts organizations act as advisors.
- In Alaska, culture/arts are tied closely to wellness. They provide funding to schools to bring arts/culture to the classroom.
- Sharing of data is key.
- In Pennsylvania, work in prisons leads to reduced recidivism.
- In Louisiana, they make sure that prisons pay for the work rather than arts. The prison pays a small amount for arts groups to come in. This has a positive effect, but it's no panacea.

- Look realistically at what programs could be possible, and partner with other organizations. Have conversation with organizations to find out what they need.
- Agencies should be given/ask for data regarding wellness issues etc.
 - If you have the information, then look to what you can do.
- Commissioner convened monthly gatherings of other department commissioners.
- How can we help with all the time teens spend on social media → leading to depression?
- Arts-infused schools led to more engaged citizens (there's a longitudinal study).
- Include questions on grant application regarding health and wellness.
- Need to have a designee in the dept. of health.
- In Alaska there are programs for veterans—small amounts, but easy to access.
 - Songwriting program
- Idaho partners with other communities, artist writes grant.
- Art and criminal justice partnerships are needed.
- Getting young people employed: how can we help? Ex: mural programs
- Maryland has an arts and wellness series addressing historical and generational trauma.
- Outsized teen suicides—maybe try to tie to funds.
- How can we tie the arts to counseling services?
- Art gives you words you don't have.
- Alzheimer's has lots of attention, perhaps a pocket of money there?
- Needs to be more awareness of arts/wellness:
 - How can the arts help with school shootings?
 - How can we tap into funds so we can help?

Learn more about NASAA's [creative aging](#) partnership with E.A. Michelson Philanthropies; check out the [Leveraging Partnerships in the Arts to Strengthen Public Health](#) webinar; and explore [The Arts Strengthen Public Health and Community Well-being](#) sections of the NASAA website.

Advocacy

One of our most important roles as council members is educating elected officials: about the impact of the art, and about how the arts help improve other policy priorities, like education, health care and economic development. Beyond this kind of advocacy, what other ambassadorial roles do we play? What can we do to connect with other agencies, nonprofits and businesses in our communities to have more influence throughout the state? This conversation explores the many ways we can use our unique roles to increase the number of voices speaking for the arts and build support for our agencies' missions.

- What others do:
 - Advocate for Indigenous populations and issues
 - Conversations with mayor: cultivate personal relationships
 - More intentional relationship cultivation—new elected officials—showing impact of distribution of grant funding. ED organizes, manages and connects relationships.
 - Need to connect what's happening locally to statewide attention
 - Facility with multipliers
 - Storytelling @ quality of life issues
 - Arts as placemaking—asset for state retention of talent

- Being a representative of communities where I live and work; bringing perspectives to the SAA table; at agency meetings everyone gives reports.
- Rural inclusion
 - economic impact data and county level data to help rural officials understand impact
 - Coordinate messages with statewide advocacy group.
- Cultural Data Project [now SMU DataArts] helps state representatives see economic impact of arts across the state. Showing funding impact is so important, e.g., jobs, tourism, etc.
- Council member role includes educator, presenter, ambassador, funder, listener, representative—bring community perspectives to the SAA table.
 - Actions as a citizen → volunteer grass roots versus paid staff
 - Actions as a group under state constitution → funder, host, ambassador, advocate, educator, producer
- SAA council members join state arts advocacy group (SAAG)!
 - Coordinate arts advocacy days.
- Confusion between SAA & SAAG: name change created clarity, but SAAG advocates without constituent input and without considering SAA interests.
- Ask grantees to write letters to their representatives and invite legislators to arts events.
- Coordinated statewide advocacy efforts = work with statewide groups
- Always support the work of the governor, always.
- Educate stakeholders, i.e., big needs creative community to draw employees.
- Our agency is in the governor's office; we can't advocate or lobby, but we can educate.
 - Cultivate a good relationship with governor's office.
- Work with authorizers within "uber" agency to carry budget requests.
- Give a grant to SAAG to lobby.
- How to deal with "rogue" advocacy groups?
- Politics as a means to an end = play politics (means) to support the arts (end).
- Grassroots support: people on the ground are on point to talk with local representatives = thanks! = and info on impact
- Tension between urban/rural interests = need to advocate to ALL stakeholders.
- Support constituent relationships = increase buy-in by streamlining application and reporting requirements.
- Influence does not equal lobbying.
- Tell your story, talk with your friends, be a person.
- We have a new statewide advocacy group. Learning to coordinate between SAA & SAAG.
 - In Arkansas, council members attend meetings and events of SAAG.
- Coordinate stories and messages between SAA staff and council members.
 - Identify needs, coordinate advocacy messages and relationships and actions—advocacy actions are agenda topics.
- Talk with councils about defining/redefining advocacy:
 - ambassador
 - advocacy versus lobbying
 - nominating council members
 - members of executive committee
 - house parties for candidates
 - encourage arts advocates to run for local office

- Important for chair to talk with governor, so let council leadership reflect that.
- Tell YOUR story.
- Artists = entrepreneurs, educators, job creators, etc.
- Focus on grassroots relationships—cities and counties—take relationships to state reps.
 - Work relationships and processes from both the bottom up and top down.
- Arts and entertainment districts create good scaffolding for statewide advocacy—a structure that makes sense to legislators.
 - Story of economic impact supports tourism.
- In some states, grantees must prove contact with state legislators before remaining money is granted.
- Build truthful/authentic relationships with those who appoint you. TRUST is so important.
- Use language/messages relevant to person(s) you're talking with.
- Be intentional about good relationships with advocacy groups.
- Coordinate statewide advocacy by coordinating local arts agencies.
- SAA staff = provide one page for each representative on funding into their districts.
- Tensions between history and presenting.
- Trouble finding a unified voice between SAA and other statewide interests.
- Build on everyday relationships, especially in smaller communities.
- Know who you're talking to—no talking down, be real about circumstances.
- Disconnect between council appointees and political relationships (people on councils without relationship and/or no interest).
- Turnover: great council members leave when new governors come in.
- Need to untangle advocacy when issues get cross-threaded: In Alaska, the nationwide ban on ivory impacts Indigenous use of ivory; advocacy needs to educate citizens about nuances of rights.
- Invite people to events in THEIR communities.
- "Sense of Place": talk about place based work.
- Our board chair is very politically connected = coordinates council member actions.
- Use your voice to promote arts in whatever community you're in; occupy voice/seat as a council member.
- Need to get arts organizations/grantees to support advocacy; educate them on what to do and when.
- What's the difference between advocacy and lobbying?

The [Advocate](#) section of NASAA's website is full of tools and resources, including [Why Should Government Support the Arts?](#), [Advocacy versus Lobbying: An Arts Primer](#); and [Fact versus Fiction: Government Arts Funding](#).

Coordinators

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