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LEAD and NASAA Summary Report, 2022 Accessibility Coordinator Peer Sessions

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Background

In 2022, for the first time since 2019, the LEAD Conference and NASAA Assembly were both conducted in-person. Each peer session included opportunities to learn from State Arts Agency (SAA) and Regional Arts Organization (RAO) Accessibility Coordinator peers, to address barriers and share success stories and presentations that illustrated arts and accessibility partnerships in practice. At both LEAD and NASAA, Accessibility Coordinators engaged in a process of identifying “burning issues” or key concerns and promising strategies to address them. Participants identified their top issues and discussed the barriers and solutions through rotating roundtable discussions. At both peer sessions these conversations provided an opportunity for participants to interact and learn from each other about their work around accessibility.

LEAD

The Accessibility Coordinator peer session at LEAD took place on August 2, 2022 in Raleigh, North Carolina. It was a full day preconference session featuring a welcome from the North Carolina Arts Council’s Deputy Director, Dr. Tamara Holmes Brothers and Program Administrator/ Accessibility Coordinator, Kathleen Collier. There were four presentations throughout the day including:

- Arts and accessibility partnership example by Kathleen Collier, North Carolina Arts Council and Eileen Bagnall, [Arts Access, Inc](#), an organization dedicated to full participation in the arts by people with disabilities.
- An ADA refresher presented by Robin Jones, [Great Lakes ADA Center](#)
- Access Advisory Committees by Sarah Lewitus, Mid Atlantic Arts
- Accessibility and the grants process by Beth Bienvenu, NEA

NASAA

At the NASAA Assembly in Kansas City, Missouri, our peer session took place over two days, the afternoon of September 21 and morning of September 22. There were two presentations over the two days including:

- Summary of “burning issues” identified at LEAD by Katharine Hayward, NEA

- Arts and accessibility partnership discussion by Ginny Sanders, Missouri Arts Council and Zetta Hammersley, Arts KC, about the Accessible Arts Kansas City Round Table.

In addition to the “burning issues” discussions we also provided time at the NASAA peer session to discuss current or best practices that states were excited to share with one another. This was in response to feedback we received after LEAD that Accessibility Coordinators wanted time to check in with each other on current programs.

Participation by State Arts Agencies (SAAs) and Regional Arts Organizations (RAOs) at LEAD and NASAA, 2022

At the LEAD conference we had a total of 26 participants, representing 20 SAAs and 4 RAOs. At the [NASAA Assembly 2022](#) we had a total of 29 participants across the two days, representing 22 SAAs and 4 RAOs. Across both conferences we had representation from 33 SAAs and 5 RAOs. The following is a list of the state arts agency and regional arts organization representation:

- Alabama State Council on the Arts
- Arizona Commission on the Arts
- Arkansas Arts Council
- Arts Midwest
- Colorado Creative Industries
- Connecticut Office of the Arts
- Delaware Division of the Arts
- Florida Division of Arts and Culture
- Idaho Arts Commission
- Illinois Arts Council Agency
- Indiana Arts Commission
- Iowa Arts Council
- Louisiana Division of the Arts
- Massachusetts Cultural Council
- Michigan Arts and Culture Council

- Mid-America Arts Alliance
- Mid Atlantic Arts
- Minnesota State Arts Board
- Mississippi Arts Commission
- Missouri Arts Council
- Montana Arts Council
- New England Foundation for the Arts
- New Hampshire State Council on the Arts
- New Jersey State Council on the Arts
- North Carolina Arts Council
- North Dakota Council on the Arts
- Ohio Arts Council
- Oklahoma Arts Council
- Oregon Arts Commission
- Rhode Island State Council on the Arts
- Tennessee Arts Commission
- Texas Commission on the Arts
- Vermont Arts Council
- Virgin Islands Council on the Arts
- Washington State Arts Commission
- Western States Arts Federation
- Wisconsin Arts Board
- Wyoming Arts Council

Summary of “Burning Issues” Roundtable Discussions

As part of the State Arts Agency & Regional Arts Organization Accessibility Peer Sessions at the 2022 LEAD and NASAA conferences, we asked participants to identify 2-5 of their biggest challenges or questions around accessibility. After sharing this list with other members at their table, each table put forward up to three of the top issues

they wanted to further discuss during the roundtable discussions. Notes were taken during each round and NEA staff typed up and compiled the notes from the discussions.

Although the roundtable discussions may have each had a different focus, there were similarities across the rounds and at each conference. The major topics of discussion across both peer sessions included:

1. Building partnerships to sustain the work
2. Supporting disabled artists and organizational accessibility
3. Leadership/Internal buy-in
4. Accountability/Accessibility in operations
5. Resources and outreach for remote/rural organizations
6. Grantmaking/Application accessibility (as a presentation at LEAD and roundtable discussion at NASAA)
7. Keeping the “A” in DEIA (unique to NASAA)

Barriers and Strategies across Topics

Topic 1: Building Partnerships to Sustain the Work

Barriers

- How do we identify partners or who to reach out to?

Strategies

- Identify partners who are tapped into the disability community and have work in common (former VSA organizations, [independent living centers](#), [Governors' Committees](#) (askjan.org) on people with disabilities)
- Utilize existing networks to identify partners (your Board or Council, Access Advisory Committees, grantees)
- Communicate clear, upfront expectations with your partners
- Compensate partners for their work
- Sustain the work by incorporating ideas into strategic planning/other policies

Topic 2: Supporting Disabled Artists and Organizational Accessibility

Barriers

- Disabled artists are afraid to accept monetary awards for fear of losing disability and health insurance benefits
- Unsure how to reach/find artists with disabilities
- Programs for artists with disabilities often require that artists disclose their disability
- Inaccessible application processes
- Inconsistent funding/lack of state funding for SAA/RAOs to support disabled artists and organizational accessibility
- Need for capital improvements/inability to fund capital improvements
- Need for capacity building

Strategies

- Identify resources and alternate ways for disabled artists to receive monetary awards (through resources such as Volunteer Lawyers and Accountants for the Arts and flexible disbursement mechanisms)
- Flexibility in payment
- Promote grant opportunities to/ partner with arts and non-arts organizations that work with individuals with disabilities (former VSAs, Centers for Independent Living, Governors' Committees on People with Disabilities)
- Attend exhibitions of work by people with disabilities
- Welcome artists with disabilities to apply, offer applications in different formats, use disability symbols in marketing
- Include people with disabilities on grant panels, as speakers at conferences, etc.
- Budget for disabled artist accommodations/organizational accessibility
- Address staff capacity

Topic 3: Leadership/Internal Buy-in (around importance of accessibility)

Barriers

- Resistance to change because they (leadership): do not believe they need to do more, feel overwhelmed by the requirements, or do not see the connection to agency/organization values
- The Accessibility Coordinator role is often not full-time and there is a lack of awareness about the time and energy that needs to be devoted to it

Strategies

- Make the issue of disability and accessibility relatable (connect to real people or communities and their stories, use data to support argument)
- Identify allies
- Embed disability and accessibility within budget conversations and strategic plans
- Designate the Accessibility Coordinator position as full-time or build capacity across staff positions/embed within organization

Topic 4: Accountability/Accessibility in Operations

Barriers

- Lack of knowledge about what has been done, what the next steps should be, what should be part of an access policy
- Staff capacity to monitor accessibility
- Knowledge and staffing gaps when an Accessibility Coordinator leaves or only one staff member is knowledgeable about accessibility requirements
- Need ongoing training, policy for organizations

Strategies

- Use the 504 workbook or similar assessment to find out what areas to work on with accessibility
- Determine short- and long-term goals as part of an access plan
- Partner with a disability organization to provide training, such as [Regional ADA TA Centers](#)

- Work with consultants or companies around specific accessibility issues, e.g. web accessibility. Resources identified: [WebAIM: Web Accessibility In Mind](#), [UserWay | The Leading AI-Powered Web Accessibility Solution](#)
- Create an accessibility working group to develop an accessibility succession plan
- Build capacity among other staff with virtual office hours or lunch-and-learn opportunities

Topic 5: Resources and Outreach for Remote/Rural Organizations

Barriers

- Lack of internet access due to the expense and available infrastructure in rural areas
- Many volunteer organizations don't have capacity to do things like apply for grants
- State arts agencies are perceived as intimidating, unhelpful, or not interested, so people in rural areas are even less likely to reach out

Strategies

- Simplify the application process (when/where possible)
- Do outreach and partner with organizations located in rural/remote areas (e.g. libraries, community colleges, existing programming) to make aware of opportunities and create awareness of SAA programming
- Offer small grants, which can be less intimidating, to help introduce small organizations to the process of applying

Topic 6: Grantmaking/Application Accessibility

Barriers/Questions to consider

- Do you accept alternate formats for grant applications, such as video submissions? How do you ensure that it is evaluated fairly and what are the costs associated with, for example, transcribing video submissions?
- How accessible is your applicant portal? Have you tested your system?

- What are your policies for responding to accommodation requests in the grant application process? These may include deadline extensions, alternate formats, etc., but what other accommodations might you provide? What is the best timeline for accepting an accommodation request, how flexible do you need to be, and how do you fairly apply your policies?
- How accessible is your grants management system? Have you tested it?
- How do you recruit panelists with disabilities?

Strategies

- Access advisory committees can help identify problems, offer recommendations on process and application portals, and serve as user testers (particularly testers who use screen reading software)
- Budget/price accommodations ahead of time
- Decide which alternative formats you can offer and have them ready ahead of time
- Learn and share about what others are doing to improve the accessibility of their grantmaking process

Topic 7: Keeping the “A” in DEIA

Barriers/Questions to consider

- What is meant by accessibility vs. access to the arts more broadly?
- Should accessibility fit into the category of access or should it be considered throughout DEI?

Strategies

- Clarify that accessibility is about ensuring people with disabilities can participate fully in activities and programs, including the corresponding locations, and needs to be addressed throughout programming.

Summary and Next Steps

The seven roundtable discussion topics yielded several common strategies to address barriers:

1. Build partnerships across arts and disability communities
2. Create/expand organizational buy-in for accessibility
3. Develop staff capacity for accessibility (beyond the Accessibility Coordinator)
4. Consider alternative processes and outreach to support engagement of underserved communities (disabled artists, rural/remote regions), and
5. Budget for accessibility

The NEA Office of Accessibility will use the themes identified through the roundtable discussions to guide the development of resources and presentations for SAA/RAO Accessibility Coordinators in the following year.