Executive Directors Peer Session
October 8, 2015

Open Session Notes

I. Debrief on Change Leadership Session

Following the previous Leading Change & Meeting Resistance session, executive directors shared the following reflections:

- I learned useful tools to cope with resistance.
- Outcomes are uncertain during the change, so there can be multiple periods of resistance to implementation of new ideas. Lots of work/education is necessary to get through the resistance as an ongoing process.
- This can help me manage staff meetings.
- It was useful to me to talk and listen to the relational aspects of managing change. Staff and personnel issues can be very challenging, so it was good to find a way to discuss them productively.
- The session focused on individual change, but what about *systems* change, across state government or the cultural sector writ large? It seems like different principles and structures would need to apply to that kind of higher-order change leadership.
- The previous session seemed focused on nonprofit change management, but public sector leaders operate under very different constraints, especially in the personnel realm (where we don't have the kind of freedom the nonprofit or private sectors enjoy) and the legislative realm (where the challenges are more often about compliance and damage control).
- I struggle with how change management gets framed. Looking at change in isolation (without also looking at areas of continuity or sustained effort) can too easily tip into "change for the sake of change."
- I can't generalize about this topic. It needs to be specific, because the nature of any given change substantially affects how I'd lead that situation forward.
- Much doesn't change in our work. For example, arts education and investment in communities are ongoing priorities. The need for these things is not going away.
- Often change is thrust upon us without the consideration of our agencies or our constituents.
- Change is inherent in our work. Artists are driving change and offering new perspectives. Institutionalization of support of artists is challenging and artists are always evolving.
- One big policy issue for our field is term limits. That creates too much change, too much turnover, a constant need for education. We have limited time in which to build a

relationship, so we're always starting at ground zero. This feels like "change" but in fact it's not—it's just constant retreading.

- There is not a consensus about what changes are desirable for our field. We are coping with a tide of antigovernment sentiment, and it's hard to tell what success means. (For example, would elimination of the state arts agency be a success? By whose measure?) It brings to mind the quote, "If you are not sure where you are going, any road will get you there."
- When do you need a third party to help effect change? Under what circumstances would it be wise to secure an outside perspective or consultant to do something different?
- State legislators come from local government. We need to maintain relationships with legislators and fight for increased spending in order to foster the kind of changes we want to see over the long term.
- I want my constituents to have a stake in the process of change.

II. Lightning Round: Ideas Worth Stealing

Participants shared, in two minutes or less, recent victories and creative approaches from individual states. Highlights included:

- **Maine** is rolling out a new strategic plan and has retooled its Creative Communities = Economic Development (CCED) program. It has added a component to support community cultural planning, including awards of $10,000.
- With Tremaine Foundation assistance, **Arizona** has initiated a Latino artist program. The program brings international artists into communities to work with nonacademic artists on community arts initiatives. A "floating fence" and an international art crawl will be program components.
- **Montana** made several adjustments to the requirements for Public Value Partnerships grantees (the council's operating support program). Grantees must conduct a personal meeting with an elected official to engage them in a discussion about the value of the arts and the award they received. Twenty-five percent of an applicant's score is now based on whether or not they had that meeting. Another 10% of the score is about ADA compliance, based on a formal checklist. Some longtime grantee organizations lost funding, but the changes have led to more accessible organizations.
- **Alaska** is seeing results from its strategic cultivation of the Alaska Travel Industry network. The first step was to connect to the travel association through its convenings via a keynote on the arts and tourism. Next, the arts council introduced a cultural tourism policy resolution at the tourism summit. Now, it is collaborating on the creation of a designated cultural tourism chapter within the network.
- **Texas** has established a partnership with the Texas Association of Business (the state's equivalent of the chamber of commerce), which not only has a lot of support from the business community but also possesses some of the state's most influential lobbyists. The association has adopted an arts agenda, filed testimony on behalf of the arts agency's appropriation increase and established a board committee on creative industries.
- To improve access to the arts for low-income populations, **New York** is establishing a program to make Supplemental Nutrition Allowance Program (SNAP) recipients eligible for free and reduced admissions to cultural activities. It's a strategy that is addressing

inequities in cultural participation and also helping arts organizations connect with segments of their community that they may not have been engaging before.

- 2015 was the Year of the Arts in **Vermont** per a legislative resolution, which was a great PR and advocacy opportunity. 2016 will be the Year of the Arts (again!) per a governor's proclamation. The arts agency has created an arts calendar that is a popular tool for promoting cultural events.
- **New Mexico**, faced with a high degree of staff turnover, brought creativity to staff meetings and deliberately structured sharing activities to help staff get to know each other. This is improving group cohesion and building a more productive, more connected office culture.
- **Maryland** collected significant folk and traditional arts materials from across the state and created a Maryland Traditions archive, which makes 40 years of photos, interviews, recordings and fieldwork documentation accessible to the public. The archive is hosted by the University of Maryland Baltimore County. The state is beginning work on the creation of a new Folklife Center.
- In response to two natural disasters (a mudslide and forest fires), **Washington** created the Art with a Heart on-line hub for community expressions of solace and support. The governor responded very favorably to the site and promoted it as part of the state's emergency response efforts.
- **Kentucky** is seeing positive results following the release of its new Creative Industry research report, which has helped it gain more legislative recognition. The state arts agency has been invited to participate in new business development and tourism conversations at the local and state levels.
- State restrictions on staff travel have been in place in **Ohio** for several years and have adversely affected the agency's engagement with constituents as well as staff morale. The agency has instituted a new 80-10-10 formula: staff spends 80% of its time in the office, 10% of its time in the field, and 10% of its time on professional development. This formula is changing attitudes internally and externally.
- In 2013, after **Rhode Island** enacted an exemption on sales of certain artworks, the state arts agency worked closely with the state Division of Taxation to secure data on the effects. The results are now available and tell a terrific story: sales of both exempt and nonexempt products are up, and 126,000 pieces of art were sold worth $18 million. And the arts council has a great new relationship with the Division of Taxation.
- In addition to recent appropriations boosts and a highly successful Arts-in-Corrections program, **California** has a new pilot program called Cultural Pathways. This program provides two years of operating support and technical assistance to small and emerging organizations rooted in communities of color, recent immigrant and refugee communities and tribal groups.
- **Oregon** is participating in the Arts Midwest Building Public Will for the Arts project. Through this research, the arts commission is securing data and feedback about what the public (including underserved communities) values most about the arts. The initiative will use that information and to build a toolkit to guide communications about arts and culture and to engage citizens.
- **Connecticut** recently passed a $10 million bond issue providing funding for arts and culture organizations. The office of the arts has tapped into a portion of these funds to create a Good to Great pilot program. The program targets small and medium-sized organizations for capital investments that link art, history and tourism in ways that enable cultural and historical sites to offer more compelling resident/visitor experiences.

- **Tennessee** completed an intensive review of all grant programs. The agency established an internal "SWOT" team to review strengths, gaps and opportunities. Who isn't applying? Why not? How can we get them to apply? An outgrowth of this process is a new grant category: a Creative Placemaking category making 10-12 grant awards, totaling $75,000, for strategic projects that can jump-start local creative economy efforts. Also, Tennessee has launched a new "Gift-a-Tag" voucher system to promote gift purchases of specialty license plates, the sales of which support the arts commission budget.
- **Pennsylvania** has had good success with facilitating local cultural planning efforts. Its approach explicitly avoids mentioning the word *art* or framing those convenings from a cultural perspective. Instead, the state arts agency has brought together many local stakeholders by asking community-oriented questions such as, What do you like in your community? What would make it better? What can you do to make it better?

III. Dialogue with NASAA CEO

NASAA CEO Pam Breaux thanked executive directors for their support and input. Early in her tenure, Breaux made outreach calls to every state arts agency director and received useful feedback that staff and board will take to heart in planning for NASAA's future. Some recurring themes included the need to broaden the sphere of state arts agency influence; the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion; the need support state arts agencies' change ambitions; and questions regarding professional development peer group paradigms. Some of NASAA's top goals for the year ahead include expanding NASAA's federal relationships, becoming more intentional about growing new leaders in/for our field, and making the most of NASAA's governance function—especially the advisory seats that can connect us to other networks and sectors. Keep the great ideas and suggestions coming!

The group had an extended discussion about the future of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Recognizing political swings of the pendulum and changes in how different NEA chairs occupy their roles, state arts agencies would like to see stronger state and congressional leadership to put the federal agency on a track toward significant budget growth. Remarks made recently by Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID) were cited as an opportunity to make headway on this agenda. Breaux and NASAA President Gary Gibbs noted that the current situation in Congress make immediate legislative action unlikely, but NASAA leadership is working proactively with Simpson's office to capitalize on this interest and to lay the groundwork for future appropriations increases. Executive directors expressed a desire to be kept apprised of this progress and noted that broad involvement from the NASAA board and the membership at large would be essential to long-term success in growing the NEA's budget.

NEA State & Regional Director Laura Scanlan assured executive directors that current NEA leadership is highly supportive of the federal-state partnership and recognizes what state arts agencies offer. Executive directors applauded Scanlan for her service. Participants noted that they would like to see the Partnership Agreements application reflect more than a grantee/grantor relationship. How can the process and the applications that the NEA collects be strategic for everyone? Scanlan indicated that the State & Regional office shares the goal of having the application be of mutual value. She invited further input from states.