Communications / Public Information Officers Peer Session
November 14, 2014

Notes

Rebecca Moore, North Carolina Arts Council (cofacilitator)
Amy Schmidt, North Dakota Council on the Arts (cofacilitator)
Kira Bacon, Vermont Arts Council
Jackie Balbas, Guam Council on the Arts & Humanities Agency
Glenda Carino, ArtsWa
Turry Flucker, Mississippi Arts Commission
Dawn Heinen, Massachusetts Cultural Council
Carrie Kikel, Oregon Arts Commission
Suzanne Lynch, Tennessee Arts Commission
John McMahon, Idaho Commission on the Arts
Anina Moore, Texas Commission on the Arts
Emily Moses, Kentucky Arts Council
Caitlin Olsen, New Mexico Arts
Missy Ricksecker, Ohio Arts Council
Ivan Schustak, South Arts
Sue Struve, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
Katie West, Delaware Division of the Arts
Steve Wilcox, Arizona Commission on the Arts

NEA Strategic Communications Plan

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) State and Regional Director Laura Scanlan introduced NEA Director of Public Affairs Jessamyn Sarmiento, who presented the NEA's new strategic communications plan and reviewed its components. The plan aligns with the endowment's (and many state arts agencies') 50th anniversary in 2015. Between January 2015 and September 2016, the NEA plans to:

- launch a message-testing campaign resulting in a messaging manual and language dictionary;
- crowdsource "Arts Stories" about how the arts impact the public;
- launch a "50 States, 50 Stories" microsite of multimedia stories from the states;
- host a symposium focusing on the future.

Additional products include a hard-copy brochure about the NEA, infographics that tell the NEA story and a new "NEA Arts" e-pub and mobile app to replace the current hard copy. Primary outcomes are to increase awareness of the NEA's contribution and better coordinate its messaging among federal, state and local arts organizations.

State arts agencies' role will be to contribute multimedia content to the 50 States, 50 Stories microsite. Sarmiento said stories should demonstrate the NEA's key priorities, demonstrating how the arts foster of value, connection, creativity and innovation. The NEA will communicate more about this to state arts agencies in coming weeks.

Measuring and Managing a Social Media Presence

Beth Kanter, trainer and consultant and coauthor of *Measuring the Networked Nonprofit,* led a lively session on social media use at state arts agencies. She informed public information officers (PIOs) that the results of her recent survey of PIOs on the topic—along with her slide presentation and other helpful resources—can be found at http://bethkanter.wikispaces.com/nasaa-pio.

Kanter reviewed the stages of social media engagement—her "Crawl, Walk, Run, Fly" matrix—and asked PIOs to place themselves on the continuum. PIOs shared their successes and challenges with moving forward. Kanter went on to discuss development of a social media strategy using the POST framework:

- People: Know your audiences; determine who are influencers (journalists, policymakers, etc.) and monitor them; define personas (typical/desired followers and their characteristics) and gear content toward them.
- Objectives: Define both objectives and specific metrics for measuring their success. SMART objectives are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely.
- Strategy: Determine your strategy for each objective.
- Tools: Kanter focused on social media content as a key tool. She advised using an editorial calendar to track content posts, optimizing content for the social media channel and following content best practices.

Measuring your content's effectiveness should include desired results (e.g., engagement, action), metrics (e.g. views, sign-ups, shares), and how the content meets the objectives (e.g., Are your audiences consuming your content? Does your content mean enough to your audience for them to share it or engage with it?).

Among the tools Kanter listed to help automate social media content management were Hootsuite, SproutSocial, Zapier, Buffer and Post Planner.

Newsletters & General Discussion

Following the social media presentation there was a round-robin discussion about newsletters that started with comments regarding how many of the participants produced a newsletter and the frequency. Most in the group produced at least one newsletter and several had issues specifically for arts in education and special occasion issues, such as the statewide annual arts awards.

In terms of frequency, attendees reported biweekly and weekly e-newsletters, while one state reported getting the e-newsletter out when staff and time allowed.

Overall, the goal and primary objective of our newsletters is to create awareness about agency programs and about the public value of the arts to the state, such as economic impact, and to call attention to special events/activities.

There was discussion around available e-newsletter services, such as MailChimp, Constant Contact, iContact and Bronto, to name a few, and around formatting compatibility between e-newsletter platforms and browsers.

Discussion also centered around issues including:

- using analytics to track click-throughs, open rates, etc. and overall evaluation of success;
- engagement of readers, especially when content is geared to different audiences, such as grantees, advocates or the general public;
- content: several agencies reported that staff with content expertise in certain fields contributed content to newsletters and the process was guided by an editorial calendar. One state mentioned that they held a monthly brainstorming session with staff to determine content, while several states mentioned that they were the only generator of content, including the executive director column. A goal for content is to keep it relevant, useful and timely.
- There was some discussion about archiving e-newsletters on our websites as well as using the website for the prime call to action.

In other discussion, PIOs indicated a strong interest in NASAA assisting with more regular professional development for communications/marketing staff via webinars, as well as more frequent communication between PIOs via the NASAA PIO listserv or perhaps through Google Hangout. Sue will explore ideas with NASAA leadership.