

**SAA Executive Directors Retreat
June 9-11, 2008
Denver, Colorado**

Discussion Notes
State Arts Agency Relevance, Influence and Change

What challenges do state arts agencies face which might threaten their continued relevance and influence?

* = challenges receiving multiple mentions during the group discussion

- A challenging political climate presents uncertainties for state arts agencies. *****
- Arts organizations (grantees) must cope with a harsh financial environment that seems to be getting harsher.
- When state dollars are small or declining, SAAs have less visibility and influence on grantees and the environment. It's harder to be relevant when your financial footprint is so small as a \$ amount or percentage of budget. *****
- Parochialism - when grantees advocate to protect their turf, rather than work toward common goals.
- Growing "conservatism" on not-for-profit arts organization boards.
- Challenges to the old 501(c)(3) norms. ** Including:
 - Emerging artists are not working through 501c3s... they are seeking new/different business models.
 - Tensions exist around how SAAs should relate to entities other than traditional not-for-profit grantees. Few SAAs are set up to deal with the commercial sector, which is where much arts innovation/employment now resides.
- Arts audiences:
 - Are we losing the arts audience?
 - Norms of arts participation are changing, especially among youth. It's increasingly difficult to engage young people using traditional methods. *
 - New forms of participation (virtual, experiential) are on the rise.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) - reduces the instructional hours/attention given to arts education.
- SAAs are sometimes not "at the table" for key policy decisions.*
- Coping with resource inequities and "haves" and "have-nots" across the state.
- Public mistrust of government – creates a climate where securing public dollars is difficult.
- SAA council appointments* - SAAs have relatively little influence on who is appointed to the council. Representation, expertise and advocacy engagement can vary.
- Information management – Securing accurate/meaningful data, managing it effectively and putting it to good use are ongoing challenges.

- Arts leadership. *
 - Loss of long-term leaders of arts organizations.
 - Few apparent successors.
 - Is there adequate diversity?
- Adapting to state priorities.
- SAA staff:
 - Staff attitudes, ethics; and,
 - How to keep morale high when resources are scarce and the to-do list keeps growing.
- Art-making is changing. How should SAAs connect?
- Advocacy*** - securing resources requires organized and effective advocacy, which is not entirely under the control of the SAA.
- Legislative term limits mean that constant (re)education is needed and continuity of support is not a given.
- How do we market the intrinsic value of the arts?
- Managing expectations – of staff, the legislature, the arts field – is a constant challenge.

**What changes are you considering in order to maximize
your agency's relevance and influence?**

- Be nimble.
- Leverage other peoples' money.
- Reclaim the SAA leadership role in arts advocacy.
- (Re)build advocacy organizations.
- Align SAA messages with state policy agenda
- Examine grant-making: *
 - look toward initiative-based funding, RFPs, etc.;
 - Provide fast-track grants that make it easier for applicants to get money;
 - Eliminate redundancy – allow only one grant per organization;
 - Provide grant support for salaries and benefits to boost grantee capacity and attract potential staffers to arts organizations.
- Pursue cultural pluralism for the 21st century.
- Focus on arts demand/consumption.
- Seek a “raid proof” dedicated funding mechanism.
- Increase career/business support for artists.
- Increase levels of technical assistance (TA) provided to grantees. **
- Build the SAA's internal capacity to provide TA and consulting to the field.
- Emphasize rural outreach strategies.
- Launch a statewide arts marketing/promotional initiative with input from the field. *
- Establish a community panel to advise the council.
- Streamline internal operations.

- Capitalize on new technology (YouTube, social networking sites, etc.) to promote the SAA.
- Create a new data/research position.
- Realign staff.
- Improve/upgrade the SAA website.
- Borrow/mooch staff from other state agencies (tap their time and expertise for specific projects or administrative/technical functions.)
- Organize a PAC – political action committee – to generate support for the arts at the state level.
- Invite strategic plan “hitch-hikers”... organizations and individuals who are using your process plan to their own advantage and end up augmenting/broadening support for your work.