NASAA ASSEMBLY 2022

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
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Deputy/Assistant Directors Peer Session
September 23, 2022

Notes

The peer session coordinators welcomed the attendees and kicked off a brief round of introductions. Natalie Petersen then facilitated a get-to-know-each-other activity during which directors split into groups of two to find 10 things they had in common with one another. Repeating the exercise with a different colleague three times was a lively way to start!

The session continued with three agency stories.

Montana: Kristin Han Burgoyne highlighted their Strategic Investment Grants program, which provides $1,000 grants for professional development, market expansion, and art events expenses. The program enables artists and teachers to advance their professional careers and supports nonprofit organizations in the advancement of arts related programs. Developed as a way to distribute American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding widely and designed to reduce barriers, applications are accepted monthly and do not require matching funds.

Alabama: Andrew Henley discussed the many aspects of change that their agency has experienced before, during and after COVID-19. Staff has gone from all remote to a staggered schedule to all back in the office. There's been significant turnover in the past couple of years: 8 of their 17 staff members have started in the past three years, replacing retired employees who had a collective experience of about 235 years. The grants management platform was changed during that personnel transition and the return to in-person office work. Currently, they're rethinking roles and responsibilities, have added an administrative services position, and have designed new office space with an eye toward collaboration. There's a staffwide effort to archive and organize the rich collection of artist work samples, photographs, and video and audio materials. New staff has brought in new ideas, and the new grants management system invited a change to all their forms and processes. There's still more work to do, such as developing written policies and procedures (including work-from-home rules), updating onboarding materials, and establishing archival methodology for both storage and public access.

Massachusetts: David Slatery summarized his agency's efforts to make grants easier to obtain and administer. Adopting an "applicant centric model" can help to advance diversity and equity goals by increasing accessibility and promoting inclusion.

Mass Cultural Council received more than $50 million in pandemic recovery funds for distribution in fiscal year 2023. Mass Cultural Council's (MCC) aim was to get these funds out as quickly, easily and equitably as possible. It developed two broad programs, the Cultural Sector Recovery Grants for Organizations and Cultural Sector

Recovery Grants for Individuals. The organizations program ($36 million) will provide unrestricted grants between $5,000-$75,000 and require organizations to provide some basic tax information to determine size. The individual program ($15 million) will provide unrestricted grants of $5,000 to 3,000 independent artists and other cultural workers. As requested, Dave provided a detailed rundown of the agency's thinking and processes via NASAA's Deputy Director Listserv and welcomes any questions or further discussion.

The **Revamping Grant Guidelines** breakout session, moderated by Dave, continued this conversation and discussion of MCC's efforts. Participants discussed principles to make the grant process easy, welcoming and applicant centric, including:

- providing unrestricted grants
- expanding eligibility
- simplifying applications and rules
- employing outreach coordinators
- marketing programs widely
- increasing minimum grant size
- focusing evaluation criteria on program mission
- eliminating board list requirement
- using clear grant names

The **Moving on from COVID** breakout session, moderated by Natalie, focused on how participants' agencies are reopening their programs, managing remote/hybrid work and intergenerational expectations, maintaining organizational cohesion, and changing procedures coming out of the pandemic.

Attendees discussed documentation and staff training and how to change and improve those processes. The learning platform Spekit and Salesforce are robust and require significant staff investment for onboarding and integration. Googles docs and Wiki are straightforward, but also require training, time and staff capacity. Follow-through is the trick. Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Stability and ARP funding have helped simplify grant requirements.

Participants shared what has worked for team building and improving staff cohesion: consistent management processes and expectations, one-on-one meetings, and clear evaluations processes. Other suggestions included regular shout-outs, highlighting staff to council members and using staff channels (e.g., Teams and Slack). It was agreed that adequate staff for deputy directors is key. The group discussed efforts to be more intentional in marketing and with university partnerships including using historically Black colleges and universities as a pipeline. Participants weighed the pros and cons of direct versus outsourcing work and tapping professional development opportunities from other organizations.

Dr. Tamara Holmes Brothers led the **Truth-Telling & Code Switching in the Arts** panel discussion with Amy Cunningham (VT) and Paige Sharpe (IN). They explored how grant makers navigate various situations through the following series of questions.

The Importance of Truth-Telling: Speaking Truth to Power

Q: In this moment of unrest and resistance in our country, the phrase "speaking truth to power" (courageously confronting an authority, calling out injustices and demanding change) has taken on a new urgency. Talk to us about where you think there is **a need for**

truth-telling in your organization's work and how you are bringing these efforts and transparency to fruition.

A: In Vermont, there's a dichotomy of perception and reality, with many of the 680,000 residents believing that the state is equitable. We're using the same approach / inroad for racial justice as was used for accessibility some 25 years ago.

A: The topic needs to be addressed carefully in a conservative state like Indiana. We focus on an asset based rather than a deficit based approach. We started by getting accurate data, and now use that data to guide requests, approaches and changes. Implementation is by 10-pound weights rather than 100-pound weights. Staff is having the difficult conversations internally and has open communication lines with grantees about their process. Transparency is key.

Q: When choices about how to distribute resources seem to matter more than ever, the arts field's system for knowledge development, allocation and expending is under great strain. Share with us your mission and how it resonates with **access and equity in arts grant making.**

The panelists responded that their equity work is tied to their strategic plans. This has led to asking questions such as, how do we determine what's missing in our programs? How do we make grant making and service delivery more equitable and accessible?

Answers include removing barriers, changing grant and application language, increasing grant funding and using special consideration designations. Providing "extra points" for underserved groups allows for some prioritization of diverse categories. It was noted that it's important to build your networks before implementing programs. Regular communication is key. When things aren't working, integrate feedback to inform changes in practices and policies.

Q: We saw several murals and performance artists' works **ignited voices for change.** As an advocate for the arts, tell us what you felt when you saw how the power of the arts continues living during the pandemic.

A: In Vermont, the Clemmons Family Farm supports artists of color throughout the state. Across the country, Black Lives Matter created an urgency and a platform. The cultural shift has enabled broader changes, by showing how people can hold institutions accountable. State arts agencies can ramp this up by continuing to redirect funds from larger to smaller organizations.

Tamara recounted the North Carolina Arts Council's experience of having its arts community petition them for change. Transparency and accountability are necessary to keep momentum in equity work. The Indiana Arts Commission found that publishing its equity statement built a platform for weaving diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility into all of its work.

Tactics for leveraging change include widening networks, actively listening and responding, and having conversations at appropriate levels to break the dams and change systemic barriers. Self-reflection is also key.

Q: As we have **shifted grant-making practices** during the pandemic and re-engaging new constituents to broaden our missions encouraging access and equity in the arts, do you

think that this "shift" will remain? How do you think this will continue to motivate people as we continue to advocate policy reform to reflect the communities we serve?

A: Continuous conversations are needed to keep the importance of the work and the work itself at the forefront. Success rests in the hands of staff leadership; councils are slowly changing via staff recommendations and constant work. Ongoing efforts are needed to address access to rural and all underserved areas. Continued engagement is needed to determine how best to work with executives (e.g., governors) on equity.

Code-switching in the Arts: Strategic Planning & Policy Reform
Tamara noted that policy requires action to reach implementation and permeate down into our communities and arts programs—at both the grassroots and the executive levels.

Q: The arts are a powerful conduit for **bridging and healing deep divisions.** How have and are you navigating through the challenges?

A: Moving between micro and macro levels is critical—and part of the deputy director role. Equity is in the details, so attention must be paid to those details. Try to create more incentive to be inclusive, and deepen, deepen, deepen community engagement. In Vermont, they tap into a nonprofit people of color network. Keep looking for opportunities for cross-sector engagement. Engage equity consultants strategically for outside perspective.

Q: As you've observed the need to bridge the gap between arts organizations and your agency, share how you are **building/rebuilding trust.**

A: The panelists offered multiple actions and thoughts:

- Keep stressing and communicating issues and priorities; be a broken record in conversations with all partners and in all dimensions.
- Listen closely, acknowledge, and respond.
- Acknowledge the power systems and dismantle them.
- Recognize that change moves at the speed of trust.
- Review funding guidelines, criteria and definitions of merit.
- Celebrate both incremental and big efforts and changes.
- Share success stories to amplify your efforts.
- Apologize, and recognize that repair is needed after rupture.
- Acknowledge that trust building takes time.
- Have hard conversations.
- Embrace transparency, honesty and integrity.
- Lean into discomfort.

Tamara closed the conversation by noting that when taking steps toward stewarding those relationships, we must be mindful of perception in equity work. We cannot choose when we will be equitable. **True equity must be at the beginning of every plan; it has to be the standard.** It must be integrated into every level of work that we do and **become a personal and professional lifestyle.**

The California Arts Council's decision-making framework was highlighted as a way that full integration of equity into all work is being implemented. Other comments included that to reevaluate everything one must slow down, and that equity cannot be an afterthought. The group discussed the tension between millennial and Gen Z staff's sense of urgency and the need for being deliberative.

Having run past time, deputy directors agreed to continue the conversation as well as their agencies' important equity work.

Coordinators

Tamara Holmes Brothers, North Carolina Arts Council
Natalie Petersen, Utah Division of Arts & Museums
David Slatery, Massachusetts Cultural Council