State Arts Agency Strategies for Addressing Artists' Needs

October 24, 2024

Join a panel of your state arts agency peers for a review of their current strategies for addressing artists' needs in their states. Come ready to share your own experiences and ideas as the panel shifts into an engaging discussion on how state arts agencies can continue adapting to the evolving landscape and provide the support artists need moving forward.

Facilitators
Lindsay Dandeo, Program Officer, New Jersey State Council on the Arts
Diane Felcyn, Program Officer, New Jersey State Council on the Arts
Monica Grable, Arts Education Director, Montana Arts Council
Deonté Griffin-Quick, Artist and Arts Advocate
Diane Scott, Director of Artist Services, Mid-America Arts Alliance
Ce Scott-Fitts, Deputy Director, South Carolina Arts Commission

Deonté Griffin-Quick introduced the session and led panel introductions.

Deonté asked the panel: What are some needs for artists?

- Need for access to physical space to create
- Need for understanding the business side – what does it mean to be an entrepreneur?
- Need for nonprofits to have business models
- Need professional development.
    - Montana: Robust arts programs in universities but they do not teach business skills. Hear all the time from artists that they have an MFA in a certain discipline, but don't necessarily know what steps to take next.
- Need / desire to be sustainable - environment and climate challenges
- Need for funding
    - Need to serve nonprofit organizations through unrestricted funding. There is less funding available and if SAAs provide unrestricted funding nonprofits can better and more easily serve cultural workers.

- Need for more information about licensing and patents
- After the pandemic, need for artists and cultural workers to get paid fairly
- Need for community – need to make sure that artists can create and sustain community, so they don't feel alone
- As SAAs we have to look at the whole artist – go beyond simply giving a grant and never doing any follow-up. South Carolina is intentional about working with artists beyond funding.
- In 2001, Chair Maria Rosario Jackson (before she became NEA Chair) published a report with the Urban Institute *Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists*. The report developed a framework along six major needs identified for artists: validation, demand/markets, material supports, training and professional development, community and networks, and information. What is striking is that many of those six needs are still the same today as when the report was published, or even more precarious.

Deonté encouraged attendees to look at resources by NASAA for information about individual artist funding and other data.

Panel presentations on state programs and initiatives for how they are support individual artists:

- Diane Scott, Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA).
    - They base their individual artists programming off the *Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists* report. M-AAA provides unrestricted grants to artists.
    - How can you provide professional development? Artists need space, money, administrative support, artist audience, research-based curriculum, trained facilitation.
    - Three Artist Services programs: Artist Inc., Artist Inc. Express and Catalyze.
    - Their core program is Artist Inc. It is an 8-week program—three hours per week with around 25 artists—developed to be replicable and now use to help multiple SAAs. They can work with you to help customize and put a package together for your state.
    - They also have Artist Inc. Express program that is easier and more accessible. It is a seminar delivered over the weekend virtually or in-person.
    - The Catalyze program is more advanced and therefore more expensive. Pairs an advanced curriculum and professional development with practice-based funding, year-long mentoring and small peer group meetings.

    - For more details on the guiding principles of M-AAA Artist Services Programming and where they have offered the programming see PowerPoint slides.

- Lindsay Dandeo and Diane Felcyn, New Jersey State Council on the Arts
    - ArtsPay NJ – A collaborative pay equity initiative supported by the New Jersdy State Council on the Arts
    - The project underscores the arts council's commitment to artists and the sector.
    - Artists are underpaid and after the pandemic they were emboldened to ask for more or better pay, however some couldn't get it, and they left the field.
    - In 2020, the NJ Arts Service Organizations Community of Practice formed to address the shared need around pay equity. The research they did revealed a lack of data. As a result, the organizations teamed together to do a study, which helped cultivate field wide trust. Since the study was done by service organization and not the New Jersey State Council on the Arts it didn't come across as government scrutiny.
    - A research firm was used to help carry out a study. The data revealed where there are pay inequities in the field.
    - None of the findings were surprising, in fact, many of the practices feel like an acceptable part of the culture, but they shouldn't be. However, the study is important because now the state, service organizations and artists have data they can point to.
    - For details on key findings within the report see PowerPoint slides or visit artspaynj.com to access the report and an interactive dashboard.
    - In response to needs identified in the report, the NJ Arts Service Organizations Community of Practice created an education program to help.
    - As government agencies there are a few things we can do: identify funding sources for individuals; use our role in government to go beyond just funding support; collaborate with organizations rather than repeat the work of others for their specific audience.

- Monica Grable, Montana Arts Council
    - Provided an overview of how Montana Arts Councils supports artists: Awards; Promotions of Artists' Work; Strategic Investment Grants; Teaching Artist Opportunities; and Montana Artrepreneur Program.
    - During COVID they were able to support artists in new ways with special funding, which demonstrated the need/want to find funding so they can continue to support artists in new ways.

    - Reviewed in more detail the Montana Artrepreneur Program, which is a cohort model, business program for artists. For details about the program see PowerPoint slides.
    - By traveling to a new city for each weekend workshop, artists can connect to institutions they may have never been introduced before. The Montana Arts Council can also use speakers that they may not have been able to due to travel costs.
    - They are currently improving the program to try to bring in fresh content to make it more current and increase relevancy. For example, social media was not incorporated that much into the curriculum originally and now they are updating that. They also want to workshop the 35 tools taught via the program in real time, rather than talking about them in class and then sending the artists home to do it. (See slides for more / other improvements.)
    - The program costs about $2,500 per artist. Montana asks the artists to pay $500 so they are investing in their business and then Montana grants them $2,000.

- Ce Scott-Fitts, South Carolina Arts Commission
    - South Carolina provides a few different ways they support artists, including:
    - Individual Artists Grants Fellowships: $10K no restrictions
        - It had been 40 years since SC expanded its artists programs. For example, a slam poet artist wasn't eligible for grants. Now they have expanded guidelines to include disciplines like design, spoken word, etc. Funding can be for a variety of needs—artists have purchased a vehicle.
    - Artists Business Initiative: This is an 18-month program to help artists build out their business. One of the biggest challenges is to get artists to recognize that they are a small business.
    - Emerging Artist Grant: 6-month grant, up to $2,000 in funding with a mentorship component. There are no matching requirements. This grant uses a cohort model with seven artists selected that meet as a group once a month and are also paired individually with a mentor.
    - Arts Project Support Grant: Funding up to $2,500. Artists can apply twice a year but can't exceed $2,500 and it can't be for the same project. Examples of how artists use the grants include: developing a website, hiring an editor or sound engineer, etc.
    - SC also offers a Folk & Traditional Arts Apprenticeship, which they plan on expanding to open it up to include other disciplines.
    - To help artists with career growth and sustainability, SC offers a 10-month Artists Entrepreneur Incubator program. It is free and helps artists market themselves as a business.

    - They also have an Arts Directory to help people inside and outside the state access and find artists. There's a landing page where artists can register and promote their website and information.
    - All of SC programs are designed to support artists continually so they can receive support at any stage in their career.
    - See PowerPoint slides for a map of their artists grants.

Questions and Answers:

- What are some of the challenges in developing these programs?
    - Montana: as much as they strive to include indigenous artists, the artists often don't feel comfortable in the spaces nor does the curriculum of the Montana Artrepreneur Program necessarily work for them. The places where they sell their work is different. The fee can also be a barrier. Montana is trying to design a curriculum specifically for indigenous artists. They are also trying to diversify the program to better serve more / all disciplines.
    - South Carolina: One of their biggest challenges is reaching rural areas. For each region, they are going to have a "hub coordinator" to try to reach more artists.
    - New Jersey: Their challenge was survey fatigue as well as exhaustion and instability within the sector after the pandemic. They also encountered trust issues. Survey participants were scared to take part out of concern their employers might see their responses. They had to have lots of private conversations to build relationships and trust.

- How does the South Carolina Arts Directory work? What does the artist have to do and how is the directory maintained?
    - The artists fill in form with basic contact information, info about their discipline and where they will work. South Carolina has a staff member that maintains the directory. They do background checks so that if the artists get hired by schools they can show that they have been vetted.

- Are artists compensated for their time for the Mid-America Arts Alliance cohort programs?
    - The artists that teach are compensated, but the participants are not.
    - South Carolina has paid participants for some of their cohort programs, but the only way they were able to do that was through partnerships.

Audience shared some of the services and programs they do for artists in their states:

- New Jersey also provides artists fellowships from $5,000 to $30,000. They have tripled the number of applications since they increased the award.

- Texas is partnering with TX Accountants and Lawyers for the Arts and are able to provide legal hotline four times a year to artists. They also collaborate with the group in other ways. Texas has also collaborated with Texas Christian University to publish collective poems from their poet laureates, it's celebratory and not competitive.

- Maine has an Assets for Artists program that offers a range of free, artist-tailored professional development workshops. They are able to offer the program in Maine by applying for funding from the USDA and received $30,000. Their artists helped write letters as part of their application.

- Illinois offers three grant programs for individual artists; a folk & traditional arts mentorship; and Creative Accelerator, which provides unrestricted support for practicing artists and does not require the artists to do their standard/normal grant reporting.

- Tremaine Foundation has been funding artists for 25 years. They have an aggregated hub of free webinars for artists that state arts agencies can add to with their state workshops and webinars.