



NATIONAL PERFORMING ARTS CONVENTION TAKING ACTION TOGETHER DENVER 2008

June 23, 2009

Dear NPAC 2008 attendees and supporters:

June 14 marked the one year anniversary of the National Performing Arts Convention in Denver, 2008. Much has happened since then, including weddings, funerals, chaos in the global economy, the election of a new President, the proliferation of social networking, and of course: ***art continues to be made and enjoyed everywhere***. You may recall that a number of strategies for collective action were agreed upon as part of the America Speaks process in Denver. Even as the world and the arts environment have changed, a great deal of work has been done to forward those goals. We want to give you an update on progress since the convention to follow-up on the recommendations and energy generated in 2008.

Individual Strategies and Task Forces:

From the cross disciplinary roundtable discussions and America Speaks Town Hall Meeting at the convention, three primary priority action areas were identified as crucial for the future of the performing arts: **advocacy**, **arts education** and **diversity**. NPAC organizers added two additional priorities: **artists** and **technology**.

To strategize the most effective ways to take action together, task forces were formed for each priority area, comprised of diverse groups of artists and arts practitioners from across the country. (See the current list, attached.) From February until June, the task forces worked to review NPAC findings, articulate a vision for each priority, and craft a series of short and long term actions to achieve the NPAC goals. While that work continues, here's a look at what has been accomplished to date and how work is moving forward:

Task force leadership and conclusions to date:

It quickly became apparent that there is crossover among the priority areas. For instance, artists would like to be better mobilized as advocates—and all task forces see the need for a centralized base of information in each priority area.

1). SHARED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Each of the five task forces chose to define their priority area broadly and to develop strategies and action plans designed to be meaningful and accessible to the widest range of individuals and organizations.**
- **Each task force identified gathering and sharing information and resources as an immediate goal.**

- Each task force recommended creating a centralized online resource as the most effective way to maximize information sharing and connectivity.
- The Technology task force proposed creating just such a centralized, user-friendly, interactive portal that would serve each task force and the field at large.
- Creating meeting opportunities, both physical and virtual, was another immediate goal.
- Each task force created a range of proposals to affect change in both the short and long term and on the personal, organizational, local and national levels.

2). DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS BY TASK FORCE:

Each task force identified a vision of the future if our efforts succeed:

Advocacy

- The performing arts' contribution to the public good would be deeply understood and widely acknowledged among the general public, policy makers and others who shape civic priorities.
- Arts advocates would engage in civic dialogues to establish the public value of the performing arts in the context of changing community needs.
- Authentic and compelling messages and facts would make the case for the performing arts as a public good.
- Effective infrastructure would be in place for timely communication with policymakers at all levels
- All constituents of arts organizations - artists, audiences, administrators, and volunteers would be
 - informed about issues
 - activating the channels for advocacy,
 - participating frequently in advocacy work
 - able to effectively communicate the value of the arts experience
- Advocates would collaborate efficiently and mobilize the widest range of potential allies to maximize their advocacy impact
- Every performance would be seen as an advocacy opportunity.
- The arts would be prominently integrated into the civic dialogue at the national regional and local level

Artists

- Artists would have more opportunities to do what they do (create new work, as well as connect with audiences, teach, etc.)
- Artists would have connections for sharing of information and mutual growth
- Artists would have a seat at the table and an active role in thinking and acting along with institutions within their own disciplines and in the broader field

- Artists would be activated as a powerful resource for advocacy for the performing arts generally and for specific areas of emphasis (e.g., diversity: working artists are probably the segment of the performing arts closest to mirroring the diversity of society in all dimensions)

Diversity

- Cultural arts would truly reflect their communities and the nation, in the content of the artistic product and in the people who make and watch and participate in it in all ways
- The performing arts would include fair representation of all groups in the diversity definition
- Resources would be equitably distributed
- Diversity would be increased across all sectors of the US; the arts can't do it without changes in the broader culture
- Institutions engaged in the performing arts would reflect the diversity of the world around them
- A strong pool of artists, administrators, board of directors members, and other leaders from diverse communities would be available to both culturally specific and non-culturally specific organizations

Education

- A person, whether six or sixty-six, would have a clear sense of where to go to be involved in the arts in a fruitful way, in schools, in arts schools, in programs run by arts organizations, and as audience members.
- Teaching artistry would be fully professional and recognized as such
- Arts Education providers would have strong relationships with community partners
- Social, academic or pure arts benefits would strongly support educational work in the arts
- There would be an environment of robust support for arts education
- Arts education would be in the core curriculum of educational programming
- The arts community and education community would unite in fully valuing arts education

Technology

- A web platform and architecture would be available to facilitate the national performing arts community's communication with and within itself through the internet.
- This platform would allow access to and understanding of emerging technologies that could benefit the performing arts and would provide a widely applicable centralized information resource which would offer the means to share new methods for building audiences, foster institutional and organizational collaboration, and most urgently, share strategies for survival.

3).STRATEGY AND ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS:

Strategies are still being developed for each priority area. **The first step is the establishment of a user-friendly, inter-active web-based resource center to include research, links, information, best practices, lessons learned, and networking options for all the**

performing arts in each priority area. This action is in process, spearheaded by the technology task force.

Human connections and person-to-person information sharing are critical. **To this end, the NPAC follow-up task force is developing strategies to promote multi-disciplinary dialogue, whether face-to-face or electronically, nationally or regionally, or in conjunction with existing convenings or other association partners.**

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS UNDER DISCUSSION

Following is a sampling of the actions recommended from the task forces.

Activate Artists

- Charge participating service organizations to engage artists in their fields by giving them seats at the table in all important conversations.

Augment and maximize the training, learning and mentorship opportunities to support greater inclusion in the performing arts.

- In addition to assessing what is already available for training, efforts must be made to ensure that the necessary training opportunities are widely offered, including training administrators and artists from diverse backgrounds to be effective arts workers and leaders; building sensitivity to multi-cultural issues

Create “leadership cadres” around the country

- Define places of trust in various communities to articulate, identify, and speak clearly to the highest and best purposes of linking learning and performing arts—throughout life.

Create an online, freely-available resource

- This resource will collect information on technology in the performing arts, centralizes and organizes that knowledge, and pushes it back out to the online community at large. This resource would ideally serve to engender a national and multilateral dialogue, where topics and content can emerge organically from users, alongside curated content provided by experts in the field. Information, definitions, case studies and ancillary content geared for beginning-, intermediate-, and advanced-users would be organized by topic, and easily searched by terms and metadata to facilitate cross-disciplinary learning. Content could vary widely, and include user-generated comments, wiki-style community compositions on particular subjects, content "certified" by a panel of editorial advisers, and commissioned, authoritative knowledge on particular subjects. This platform could also serve as an index of arts and technology, linking to and re-syndicating content from around the internet.

In addition, it could function as a shared distance learning and professional development infrastructure, delivering specialized content across the performing arts community, and working to further unify the advocacy / arts services sector

- This platform would offer information on technology itself, designed to make technologies understandable, accessible and usable for the performing arts.

- The platform would also be available for the other NPAC task force priority areas and for other NPAC purposes and constituents as a centralized tool for resource sharing and communications for the performing arts community.

NEXT STEPS:

We feel that the task forces have made great progress and we are grateful for their generosity and commitment to building the performing arts future we all seek. The task force groups will meet over the summer to refine their recommendations for action. In the fall you will hear from us again about the online resource center, future meeting plans and other specific action steps. In the meantime, we invite your feedback and conversation at info@performingartsconvention.org.

Sincerely,

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