

ARTS ADVOCACY OF WEST VIRGINIA

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FINAL REPORT --WEST VIRGINIA ARTS ASSEMBLY 2006

The Arts Assembly occurred in Charleston as scheduled on April 2-4 following the program outlined in the grant request. Both the Clay Center and the Cultural Center were generous in providing their space and staff to the Assembly as an in-kind donation. In addition, West Virginia State University provided a graduate student intern to handle all registration duties on an in-kind basis.

WHO ATTENDED?

The Arts Assembly was a success; 143 registrants from 26 different counties in every region of the state. Approximately 60% of the registrants identified themselves as artists connected equally with an organization or business; 23% identified themselves as organization representatives only; 17% as artist only. Using evaluations returned from working artist panels, we can determine that the average career time as artist is about 18 years. Scholarships were awarded to 66 individuals, many of them working artists who, based on their responses, would not have otherwise attended.

The number of registrants was fewer than expected. Postulated reasons include an inadequate state-generated mailing/contact list for notifying potential attendees. The development of a mailing list from Assembly attendees and an email list for the Arts Advocacy Website are beginning steps in rectifying this long term problem.

Attendees were very serious about learning. More than 300 evaluations were returned, full of information about what artists and arts administrators, many of whom are also artists, want in the way of training.

Two themes emerged. The arts community is ready for training and what they want is nuts and bolts information preferably presented by people who have actually done the task -- and done it well. They wanted more in-depth training in virtually every topic presented.

TRAINING IN WHAT?

There were approximately a dozen different times when the evaluations asked about what more was wanted. As stated above, in general respondents wanted more -- longer sessions, more detail, more nuts and bolts.

Marketing headed the topic list in response to a variety of questions. There were specific areas of information sought including how to target a market as well as details like visual postcards and presentation tips. Internet presence is part of marketing for most artists and organizations and they really want training in how to develop and maintain their own sites as well as new techniques including flash.

Funding almost equaled marketing in mentions and was cited both by individual artists for their own needs and by organizations. Individual artists were concerned about personal support issues ranging from health care benefits to bridge loans for show or exhibit preparations. Organizations wanted new ideas and donor-related information including how to target and nurture. Operating funds were specifically mentioned. Organizations wanted to know how to do fundraising plans.

Another area of perceived need for training was **audience development, membership and developing support in the community.**

There was a stated need for various types of **information** and specific informational products including lists of shops that buy West Virginia art, of arts councils in the state and directories of artists and presenters. Attendees wanted to know how to use a data base, They wanted an online clearinghouse with easy to access information about organizations that can help artists and schedules for shows and exhibits. Finally, they wanted to know about copyrights and gallery operations.

Artistic skill training wanted was mostly nuts and bolts about topics in theater, curating and media production as well as teaching artists to work in schools. In the area of **business skills for individual artists,** topics desired ranged from business plans and how to seek and deal with management to pricing strategies and apprenticeships. There were calls for consortiums in visual and performing arts. Organizations wanted business training in financial management and audits, collaborations and community arts plans.

Attendees seemed to realize the lack of emphasis on **arts in education** was a conscious choice (AAWV chose not to overlap with the Appalachian Education Initiative conference in May) so their comments about missing these topics were minimal although the need for more arts in schools was repeated several times. Instead they spoke specifically about lifelong learning and connecting older adults with the arts both as audience and second career. There was also mention of teaching arts appreciation and a need to explore long distance learning.

The need for **statewide planning and policy** for the arts and arts funding was mentioned several times as what attendees wanted. There were some miscellaneous comments including wanting to know how to get more artists to relocate and how the arts can be used to help problems in the state.

Finally, there were comments directed specifically at the form and content of **future assemblies**. Attendees suggested discipline specific sessions; more involvement by tourism and use of best practice models including from out of state. They repeatedly stated the topics were fine but they wanted more time on and information about them. Respondents wanted opportunities for networking and “sharing commonalities.” There were numerous comments about learning that other artists and organizations share the same problems and this could provide a means for learning,. A clear call was made by a few respondents to have a performing showcase at the Assembly.

WHAT WAS LEARNED?

Evaluations asked for each workshop and activity what was learned/what was important/what would be implemented -- and 239 different ideas, skills or action items were reported, almost two for every respondent. A lot was learned and repeatedly people stated they planned to put what they learned into action in their businesses or organizations.

WORKSHOP/DAY EVALUATIONS.

1. INTERNET. 25 responses.

Two workshop sessions/both crowded. Approximately 80 attendees total. Proportionally more artists attended the sessions than organizational folks. Use of the Internet for marketing was also discussed in other sessions. It was THE topic of the Assembly. Attendees reported they used the Websites they had primarily for promotion and some for sales and calendar. They all wanted their Web presence and skills to be better; many wanted to develop and maintain their own sites. A majority had no training and some of those wanted it but did not know where to find it. They reported learning a long list of helpful items and were particularly impressed with design points and flash technology.

COMMENT: *Excellent info session. I'm not a designer but now I know what to ask of a designer.*

2. CURATING. 12 responses.

Largest group: artists who had been in shows and were also businesses or organizations. A couple people just organization/businesses. One art educator. They want more nuts and bolts information about everything from liability and contracts to how to hang and light a show.

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3. ARTIST MARKETING 23 responses

Nearly 70% were experienced artists who do their own marketing; most had been working more than 10 years. The rest were artists, business owner, organization staff and teacher.

The top three successful marketing activities reported were in order: shows and exhibitions; postcard/mailings; friends/referrals. The top two things they want to add in the next year were in order: improve or add Website, explore galleries and shops. The Web tied with money as what respondents most needed to better market their art and with referral marketing as what people wanted to continue exploring. Other topics wanted: galleries, museums and DVDs.

Best answer to having marketing training? *“I’ve been married three times to smart marketing wives.”*

4. ECONOMIC IMPACT . 15 responses

Most respondents were connected with an organization. Almost all believed their community might conduct a study. They understood the many uses for this information especially: fundraising, affect decision-makers and planning. Wanted: teach a simple process.

More than a dozen types of data were recommended for collection.

demographics and dollars spent:

- local consumers
- visitor consumers including where they are from
- market
- audience
- community
- dollars spent with both profits and non
- direct benefit to individual
- education related
- dollar multiplier
- what’s out there
- net economic impact
- jobs created
- sales tax

5. FUNDRAISING . 20 responses

All respondents indicated they were connected with an organization. The four main reasons for fundraising in order are: project and events; capital projects; operating and growth.

Several key points were highlighted by attendees in order:

- relationship building;

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- believe in mission;

- takes time
- have clear vision
- attitude -- giving opportunity not begging.

About half the attendees were interested in more training. Even those not interested had things they wanted help with and as with other workshops, they wanted more specifics -- in order:

- how to develop a plan or feasibility study;
- targeting donors;
- smaller scale fundraising.

When asked to give their own favorite tip, in order: ask; persist; know your mission and donors.

6. TOOLBOX FOR PRESENTERS. 16 responses

All but two of the respondents indicated they were representing an organization. These organizations present visual and performing arts. The organizations present an average of two events a month. Virtually all indicated the programs were supported by a combination of grants, admissions and donations; none claimed support by admissions alone.

Virtually all claimed that what they learned in the workshop would improve the artistic quality of their presentation; better earnings was the next category followed by bigger audience. They learned, in order: funding, how to get more artists from the various rosters, and how PAN can help. They want to learn more about: funding, marketing, audience development. WV showcase and how to use PAN.

7. ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR ORGANIZATIONS. 31 responses

Virtually all respondents were connected with an organization; a few with their own businesses. A third of the respondents considered their community or organization financially successful. There was a long list of items learned with the top ones in order: definition of social entrepreneurship, certified arts community opportunity, elevator pitch, consistent story and voice, Berkeley Springs model.

When asked what they planned to implement, the list was similar led by getting community certified, tighten elevator speech and more/better partnerships. Anticipating impact, respondents listed both recognition and different ideas as top. No one disagreed that more entrepreneurial thinking provides better art and listed many reasons why. As with most of the other panels, people wanted more and more specific especially strategies and successful models. The two biggest obstacles to success cited were time and attitude of board or community.

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8. ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR ARTISTS. 31 responses

Respondents were working artists from all media from pastels to theater. Average length of time working was 20 years. Most thought they were entrepreneurs and had no doubt that improving their entrepreneurial skills would create more sales. The most important things they learned in order were: Website, business plan and identifying customers. They planned to use what they learned about Websites and business plans. They wanted more details and concrete information -- and they wanted more opportunity to share experiences with other artists. The primary training they seek is marketing. Their main obstacles are time and money.

This was virtually the only panel where the panelists received critical comments. Attendees wanted more detail than the panel could give.

9. SUNDAY ACTIVITIES. 47 responses

Respondents were equally divided between working artists and artists or individuals connected with an organization. Registration was rated smooth by all; there were no complaints. Virtually all attended the assembly session and found it interesting. About half reported they learned something. The three top topics learned were in order: there are other artists and organizations in the same boat as me; putting faces to name; and ideas for art outreach and marketing. Almost everyone had an idea for future assemblies to cover with the top ideas in order being: marketing, funding, development of audience and community support, arts in education

Addressing the business slant of the workshops, more than half said that is what drew them to the Assembly and most felt the line-up of workshops covered the topics that interested them. Reported missing were topics about marketing as well as legal/financial details including contracts, audits and intellectual property issues.

When respondents were asked about organizations they knew that addressed the economic aspects of the arts, they responded with Tamarack and Mountainmade, both primarily sales operations. Other answers including “anyone who hires me” and “all presenting arts organizations” indicate that respondents were being practical not philosophical. Virtually every responder thought there should be more such organizations.

Attendees liked the jam session: “it is who we are,” commented several.

MONDAY ACTIVITIES 53 responses

Of the respondents, 60% identified themselves as artists connected with an organization or business -- about 50/50 organization and business; 23% as organization representatives only; and 17% artist only

The First Lady’s speech was moderately well received with opinion divided in three areas: appreciation for her interest; rave reviews; and concern about how commonplace

her lack of in depth knowledge is. Respondents really valued -- 4.2 out of 5 -- the time to meet individually with staff from the National Endowment, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation and WV Arts Section staff. Asked about the most beneficial workshops of the day, responses were in order: Internet, fundraising, individual artist marketing, arts entrepreneurs and presenters. People believed the price was right for the Assembly.

ADVOCACY DAY. 33 responses

Tuesday was devoted to advocacy and attendance was disproportionately individuals and artists connected with organizations. Many indicated they had advocated for the arts in the past year, not surprisingly most on the local then state then national level. Advocacy has a broad meaning to respondents. Some consider voting and selling art to be acts of advocacy. On the national level, most reported their membership in a national arts organization as an act of advocacy. They were clearest about advocacy on the state level where a significant number reported contact with legislators and the governor. The main three things they learned were related to presentation: get people to tell their stories, be positive and know what you bring to the table. More than a third thought the role of the arts in their community was extremely important for social, cultural and economic reasons.

The panel of mayors was a big hit and every response listed a good idea gleaned from them. The two most popular ideas were that arts and culture can help save a “drowning city” and that collaboration is important.

About half the respondents had little or no information about Arts Advocacy of West Virginia. Those who did know about the group cited two main things they knew AAWV did: have the Assembly and awareness that artists are here. Mostly they wanted AAWV to continue reaching out.

“This day was the most beneficial. I needed to be inspired.”

SPECIFIC INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Many of the 13 specific outcomes outlined in the grant proposal will require follow-up. Methods of undertaking this task will be planned at the AAWV retreat and review in August. Some were accomplished immediately.

- Increased membership in AAWV. By including a year’s membership to AAWV (\$10/year) in the registration fee, all 143 attendees are now members virtually tripling existing paid memberships. It will be an effort of AAWV’s over the next year to sustain and increase this number.

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- Increased visits to AAWV’s Website. The Website has been up less than a year and the Arts Assembly was its first big promotional effort. Approximately half of the scholarship recipients applied online as well as a significant number of other registrants. Evaluation

results have been posted on the Website and an email list developed to directly email the results to approximately 100 individuals and organizations at this time. Plans for the enhancement of AAWV Website to include business-related information links, maintained calendar and email list serve for distributing notices of arts/business opportunities is a main topic for the AAWV retreat.

The following indicators cannot be known for at least the next year. They will be tracked by AAWV.

- increased contact between local arts organizations and their legislators;
- improved financial health for both individual artists and organizations;
- improved programming by local arts organizations;
- increased state funding for arts activities due to enhanced advocacy;
- increased individual artist applications for professional development grants from WVCA.
- more use of tourism assets including membership in local and regional convention and visitors bureaus, calendars, news outlets and advertising grants by arts organizations;
- accelerated development of a tourism-generated arts map of the state;
- new initiatives within the Economic Development Office for arts incubator projects;
- more outreach to artists for entrepreneurial skills training by Small Business Centers throughout the state;
- development of at least one major, statewide arts marketing project.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These are preliminary and will be reviewed and expanded by the Arts Advocacy of West Virginia board at a two-day documentation and planning retreat to be held before the end of June.

ASSEMBLY. It is clear the arts community considers Arts Advocacy of West Virginia to be the preferred convener of the assembly. AAWV proposes an Arts Assembly every 18 months at locations around the state. The Assembly should not function as in depth training but as an overview as well as a setting for networking and connecting among the arts community.

BUSINESS-RELATED TRAINING . This is a complicated issue that requires coordinated effort by several parts of the arts community to determine training topics, location, source of training and who pays among other questions.

Recommendations.

- Expand Peer Advisor Network in Arts Section with additional PAN members. PAN practitioners meet the apparent requirement that trainers have hands-on

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experience with the nuts and bolts.

- Add a new process to PAN that would allow access to the free consultations to any group of three or more working artists rather than only organizations.

- Topics for artists would be those outlined in the evaluations including marketing and Web training.
- Keep training local and regional to limit travel costs.
- Develop standards for trainers and training including size of classes in which certain topics can be taught. Web training seems to be most effective in small, seminar-like classes.
- Focus for first two years on marketing and Internet training.
- Develop tiered training for beginners and intermediates.
- Establish funding sources to allow training to be affordable.

Role of various existing groups.

Obviously AAWV has no mandate for directing other organizations but the Assembly evaluations and activities suggest some directions. There were several calls for being certain that existing groups collaborate. Currently there is overlap of individual membership among the various major players which encourages communication and collaboration. As a general guideline, the following tasks seem appropriate based on the evaluations and needs indicated at the Assembly.

- West Virginia Commission on the Arts and Division of Culture and History Arts Section are created by legislation with specific responsibilities. Focus of these groups should be on funding training and managing and developing further the Peer Assistance Network.
- Industry of Culture group which operates with C&H as fiscal agent should focus on continuing to collect data on working artists and arts organizations. In addition, they are best positioned to liaison with two other essential, non-arts, players: Tourism on the state level; and Small Business Development Centers as training providers. IOC should also undertake at least one major, statewide marketing effort each year perhaps beginning with development of a catalog/Website to market artists creating commissioned product for new, upscale homes throughout the state.
- Arts Advocacy of West Virginia can operate in arenas neither of the above groups can because of its independent structure. It is the grass roots organization seen by the artists and arts organizations as “representing” them. AAWV should provide grass roots input into state arts agendas, educate decision-makers, and continue sponsoring Arts Assemblies. It can also be used as the “think tank” for the arts in West Virginia, able to blaze new paths.
- Organizations that are primarily sales related -- Tamarack and Mountainmade were mentioned by respondents -- have clear economic development missions to which training adds value. They should be part of developing training curriculum and

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helping to establish and conduct them on a regional basis.

New organizations? Other than developing arts-based organizations and businesses on local and regional levels, there was no need indicated for creating new groups in this arena.

BUDGET REPORT

Attached is a financial report as of late April. Further costs will be accrued through September as the evaluation information is used to set a plan for action and to develop an online version of it.

The \$10,000 grant from Benedum was expended as outlined below. Without the grant funding, the cost of the Assembly would have been \$250/person. Such a price would have prevented many working artists from attending.

- 66 artists and employees of small arts organizations were awarded scholarships of \$100. Travel awards were also granted to many of these individuals using funds that will eventually come from Challenge America. **Total -- \$6600.**
- Remaining funds were used to pay for lunch for attendees on Monday and Tuesday contributing to the ability of AAWV to fix cost of attendance at a low \$100. **Total: \$3400**