

**Preconference Summary**  
**Cultural Citizens: The Emerging Arts Leadership**  
**June 5 and 6, 2003**  
**Portland, Oregon**

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**June 5**

1:00 p.m. – 1:05 p.m.

*Welcome*

Benjii Bittle, Preconference Planning Committee Member and Tacoma Arts Commission Administrator, City of Tacoma Culture and Tourism Division, Tacoma, WA

Benjii welcomed participants to the first ever Emerging Leaders preconference. The Emerging Leaders Task Force had a goal of 30 participants when the preconference was initiated in the fall of 2002. This goal was far surpassed—upwards of 80 participants registered for the preconference.

1:05 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

*Who's in the Audience?*

Laura Roberts, Cultural Management Consultant, Cambridge, MA

Laura helped facilitate a discussion concerning both the make-up of the audience and the Americans for the Arts definition of an emerging leader.

The Emerging Leaders Task Force, with guidance from Americans for the Arts, has defined an emerging leader in the arts as an arts employee/volunteer with five or less years in the field. This definition speaks more to experience in the arts field, rather than age. Most of the preconference participants were emerging leaders, though there were some established leaders as well.

Emerging Leaders Task Force members who were present included: Jennifer Armstrong, Benjii Bittle, Graham Dunstan, Greg Esser, Claudia Haydon, Leslie Ito, Dave Lawrence, Marialaura Leslie, and Mara Walker.

Steve Spiess, Chair of the Board of Directors for Americans for the Arts, was a registrant for the Emerging Leaders preconference as well. He took a few minutes to say that supporting emerging leaders was one of his primary goals as Chair of Americans for the Arts. He was also pleased that the Arts and Science Council of Charlotte/Mecklenberg County, Inc. (under the direction of Harriet Sanford) had supported scholarships to the preconference and that Americans for the Arts had supported emerging leaders scholarships and discounts to the convention. Steve ended by announcing that Emerging Leader Task Force member Leslie Ito had been appointed to the Board of Americans for the Arts.

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

*The History and Future of the Arts in America*

Robert Lynch, president and CEO, Americans for the Arts, Washington, DC

Bob spoke to the changing nature of the arts in America, while briefly summarizing his own personal history in the field. He mentioned former and current programs to sponsor art making, from the Works Progress Administration to Artscoop.

Several key points included:

- Many of us come to the arts as a profession by accident. It is our passion for the arts that keeps us working in the field. Keep that passion.
- Though the arts have a long history in our country, the nonprofit arts movement is still relatively young in the United States. Many of the oldest 501c3s have had little leadership and/or structural change.
- The denizens of the arts administration field should be referred to as “the guardians of thought.”
- There is a need for the public perception of the value of art to change, but overall arts consumption is increasing dramatically.
- Garnering new leadership for the arts is crucial, but the process is not easy and it means tackling some of the fears of established arts leaders.
- Americans for the Arts is dedicated to cultivating new arts leaders, but that it takes commitment from the field and from seasoned and emerging leaders to make a systemic change.

3:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

*An Intergenerational Dialogue About Leadership Development in the Arts*

Amanda Ault, Program Assistant, The Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH and Leslie Ito, Director of Program Development, Visual Communications, Los Angeles, CA

Leslie and Amanda led the group through a “fish bowl” exercise. The room was set up in two circles of chairs—one circle inside another. Established leaders sat on the outside of the circle first, while emerging leaders sat on the inside of the circle.

The rules of the “fish bowl” exercise were simple: session leaders would ask questions and only the group inside the circle could answer. The group on the outside of the circle would listen for 15 minutes and then would have time to give their impression of the comments. The circles changed a few times, allowing both emerging and established leaders to speak and listen twice.

Though there was a lack of established leaders (the ratio was at least 4:1), the exercise was still very enlightening.

Key points included:

- Both emerging leaders and seasoned leaders are in the field for the same reason: a dedication to art and a passion for the creative process.
- Emerging leaders spoke to a lack of professional development opportunities, a withholding of information, and a perceived lack of faith in their capabilities. They also felt many projects were delegated to them without specific support and/or without the leverage or true responsibility to complete the project.
- Established leaders questioned the professional quality of some emerging leaders. They felt emerging leaders should not wait for a place at the table, but step up and make one. Established leaders also said they felt overworked and afraid of their organizations' survival during tough funding times.
- The group came to a consensus that some organizations just do not encourage the growth of emerging leaders. If an emerging leader finds himself/herself in a similar situation, he/she needs to consider his/her employment options.

The power of the exercise came from the realization of both parties that their needs, desires, fears, and wishes were primarily the same. Both groups of leaders wanted to succeed and to be challenged, and both groups feel overworked. The exercise also highlighted a dysfunctional communication structure between some emerging leaders and established leaders in their own organizations.

Participants agreed that further intergenerational dialogue was needed. Other issues that were addressed included: technology in arts organizations, arts administration degrees and mentoring programs.

## **June 6**

8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

*Breakfast Roundtables by Leadership Issues*

Emerging Leaders Task Force

Specific notes for these roundtables can be found on this website and/or the Americans for the Arts Emerging Leaders listserve. Some topics addressed include: cohesion in local arts communities; mentoring programs; intergenerational dialogues; professional development; funding; and board development.

10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

*Mentorships: Two Case Studies*

Michelle Hunter, Cultural Affairs Coordinator, and Eileen Baker, Director, City of Savannah Cultural Affairs Department, Savannah, GA; Benjii Bittle, Tacoma Arts Commission Administrator, City of Tacoma Culture & Tourism Division, Tacoma, WA, and Diane Mataraza, Consultant, Cocoa, FL

Michelle and Eileen led the session with a thoughtful presentation concerning Michelle's professional development at the City of Savannah Cultural Affairs Department. Eileen hired Michelle from another County department though Michelle had little or no arts background or experience. Michelle has grown into one of the leaders of the organization through careful supervision and guidance by Eileen.

Key points:

- Eileen provided Michelle with both the support and freedom that she needed. Letting Michelle control a project, but getting frequent progress reports on the project proved useful.
- Eileen has an open door policy with her staff which afforded Michelle the opportunity to better communicate with Eileen.
- There was no official mentoring process, but more of a supervisory relationship between the two with frequent and clear opportunities for feedback.

Benjii and Diane discussed their mentorship which took place over a long distance. They met when Diane helped Benjii with a project for arts groups in the Tacoma, WA area.

Key points:

- Many established leaders still have mentors.
- Mentors do not have to be (and probably should not be) a formal mentoring relationship. Several people suggested that it is best not to call someone and say: "Will you be my mentor?" The best mentorships are usually more organic than that.
- Benjii noted that a mentor outside the office and/or outside of the arts field can oftentimes be beneficial.
- Benjii described what he called the "sneaky" mentor method: zipping an e-mail or calling someone who you would want to be a mentor. Ask them a quick question. If they respond, follow up and start a relationship from there. Suddenly, after a few months and a few interactions, you have tricked them into being a mentor.
- Different mentors can model different aspects of your professional life, which is why having more than one mentor is a good idea.
- Mentoring relationships can run their course, and that is natural.
- Mentoring should center on professional (not personal) life and issues.

The group discussed the dynamics of mentoring and whether or not gender seemed to play a role in relationships. As well, participants discussed ways of

finding mentors and the crucial aspect they can play in professional development.

11:45 a.m. – 1:45 p.m.

*Knowing Your Strengths*

Harriet Sanford, president and CEO, Arts and Science Council of Charlotte/Mecklenberg County, Inc., Charlotte, NC

Harriet's keynote address was inspirational and spoke to her commitment to changing her supervisory skills mid-career. Harriet said she was an "I'll do it myself, because I do it best" kind of manager for years. Anyone who got in her way was in for a rude awakening.

It took a five-star general becoming County Manager to teach Harriet that perhaps she didn't have all the answers. Perhaps she was working too hard and if she helped equip her staff with some of the answers, and support them better, she could delegate. The five-star general also reminded Harriet that if she did not encourage ideas from her staff, the only ideas she was going to get were her own.

Harriet talked about how difficult it can be for a manager to relinquish control over project and over certain aspects of an organization, but the great freedom that can come when you do so. She recommended the book: *Leadership is an Art* by Max DePree. The general recommended the book to her and she hopes emerging leaders and seasoned leaders find wisdom in it, too.

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

*Balance of Personal and Professional Life*

John McCann, Co-Director, Institute for Cultural Policy and Practice, School of the Arts, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA

John's discussion centered on priorities in our lives and how many of our own priorities and our actions are skewed, or do not mesh. He began his presentation by asking participants to rank 20 values in order in three minutes. It was a difficult task to determine the order of topics such as: family, person freedom, physical health, and job satisfaction.

At the end of his presentation, participants had to rank 20 ways in which they spend their time and work toward their values. To speak to John's point, many people's time rankings came nowhere near matching their initial rankings of values. The message was loud and clear: prioritize what is important to you and make time for it and make hard decisions about what you value.

John talked about core values being: 1) freely chosen and often in competition with one another 2) publicly declared, and 3) with real consequences. One's own core values should be held up against an organization to see if they're actually a good fit.

Another key point John addressed is whether emerging leaders can be arts professionals and artists at the same time. He suggested that a balance is hard to find for some people and they end up having to choose between art and art administration.

Key points:

- John recommended journaling and mentoring as ways to develop a better professional life.
- There should be a marked difference between a confidant and a mentor. A confidant can give feedback on core values in addition to tasks/actions.
- Work on taking risks.
- Find a way to take no less than three weeks of vacation every year.

3:15 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

*Creating a Vision and Value Statement for the Arts in America for the Year 2010*  
Gerald Yoshitomi, Independent Cultural Facilitator, Los Angeles, CA

Gerry's discussion was a culminating exercise for the preconference. Participants had been asked the day before to come up with answers to five questions:

- What will I do to progress emerging leaders (or myself as an emerging leader)?
- What should established leaders do...?
- What should emerging leaders do...?
- What should the service organizations (such as Americans for the Arts) do...?
- What goals should we meet in the next year?

Gerry is working on bringing the cards and the topics together with the help of the Emerging Leaders Task Force. This information should be on the website soon.

3:15 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

*Closing Statements*

Claudia Haydon, Program Coordinator for Artists, Massachusetts Cultural Council, Boston, MA

Claudia (the newly appointed Chair of the Emerging Leaders Task Force) closed the conference by thanking the staff of Americans for the Arts and Chair Steve Spiess for recognizing the importance of cultivating emerging leaders and

showing a true commitment to the issue. It was also announced that Jennifer Armstrong was appointed Vice-Chair of the Task Force.

Claudia and other members of the Task Force encouraged participants to take part in the Americans for the Arts Emerging Leaders listserv and explained how to register. They also asked that anyone who is interested in joining the Task Force or in participating in some other way should contact any member of the Task Force or Mara Walker at Americans for the Arts.

### **Preconference summary thoughts**

It has been nearly two weeks since the conference and my mind is still buzzing with new ideas and my email account is growing larger and larger with e-mails from emerging leaders across the country. It is heartening to know that through the support of Americans for the Arts and our local arts agencies that the issue of intergenerational dialogue and emerging leaders is coming to the forefront.

This preconference was organized in a little over six months, which is an incredible feat. Again, we were hoping to garner 30 participants and we had more than 80. The previous summary is meant to give a brief glimpse of some of the important topics we covered: mentoring, time management, diversity, professional development, and taking professional risks. It is not meant to be an all-inclusive “play by play” of the preconference.

If you were able to attend the Emerging Leaders preconference, we hope you were inspired and that you came away with some knowledge and practical steps to affect change in your own community. If you were unable to attend, we hope you take a moment to join the listserv and to let us know how we can best work together to make sure the field properly nurtures the next generation of arts leaders.

--Graham Dunstan