Advocacy Strategies for Arts Ed: The Good, Bad, and Innovative: Q&A (5 of 5)

Q: Let's chat shall we. So I have invited my other panelists, I have some questions for each speaker but of course if you questions for each other, this is a dialog and I just think it makes a more fun conversation and in my opinion, I'm not biased, it's a very fun topic about advocacy. So I'm sure you've noticed that hmm, on this panel there's a funder and there's a Department of Ed staff, so let's address the elephant in the room, why advocacy, why are you engaged with advocacy, how can we kind of take away that fear with other funders and other Departments of Ed and engaging more with advocacy? And then Andrew, if you want to put in a why advocacy for you, that would be great as well. Whoever wants to go first.

Lana: As a state employee, advocacy is a really sort of area that we have to tiptoe around, it's true, but as you said, when you think about everything in terms of the student, what's good for the student, that makes advocacy I think a little easier to swallow for the people that I work with because that's our mantra at the Department of Ed is, "It's all about the student."

Wendy: Yeah, and in terms of foundation work, I'm sure everyone realizes we're very nervous around that word, and so why am I on this panel? I think it's more about, I think we approach it more as educating the public and we are not advocating, we are funding organizations that advance the ideas around the power of arts education and we are trying to impact systems, I mean so many foundations are trying to impact systems so it's totally within our guidelines and quite frankly, most nonprofits and foundations have a lot of room, more room than they are actually taking in that advocacy world. So I don't see messaging or education as something that we can't be involved in.

Andrew: And well, the reason I'm in this room is because my buddy, Narric and I worked on Howard Dean's Presidential Campaign way back in 2003 and 2004, so I was a young, idealistic progressive wanting to change the world and now I'm a little bit of an older idealistic progressive...

Q: Okay, good.

Andrew: ...trying to change the world a little bit. And so it took a while but I found a job in polling that pays me to sort of work on this and try to affect change in areas that matter to me, so it worked out.

Q: That's wonderful, I love how you all touched on the advocacy as a spectrum, I love that. And Andrew, not to put you on the spot again, I think you briefly mentioned it but I find with public opinion polling when you go talk to both sides of the aisle with an elected official, they say, "Who were you polling exactly, where are these numbers coming from, how can we be sure that this is nonpartisan or bipartisan?" whatever language you prefer using?

Andrew: And so we do all kind of research but the research we usually take to elected officials, we survey voters, either registered voters or generally voters that are likely to vote in the next election that matters to them. And so this is a little technical but the way we do that is there are voter files that probably all you know, so it's very easy to use that to sort of project who's going to vote. But what's really important I think, you brought this up is credibility, it's very easy to write a poll and to get the results that you want but the public leaders and advocates are very, they understand, I'm losing the word, they
Advocacy Strategies for Arts Ed: The Good, Bad, and Innovative: Q&A (5 of 5)

see through that really quickly if you do that, so it's really important to craft a poll that uses the language the other side uses, that doesn't use biased questioning, et cetera. And I'm a democratic pollster so certainly if we're talking to a bipartisan group, we almost always get a republican partner so that we at that together because we wouldn't really get through the door without that.

Q: That's a really good point. This question's for Lana, and she touched on this a little bit but Arkansas with its SP3 plan at first had two very distinct goals, one with the professional development workshops and then the other creating our Arkansans for the Arts, when did you find that they started to merge and become one?

Lana: That's a really good question because I spent a lot of time and thinking space at the beginning of this project trying to figure out how those two things synched. As a matter of fact, those of you who have been coming to SP3 meetings know that from the beginning my colleague Craig and I would actually dual reports because he was working on the Arkansans for the Arts Project and I was working on the Goals Implementation Project and it was really a struggle, it really was and I think it was finally, when we finally got to those regional meetings, the agenda for the day included two panels and one panel was basically about arts education and the other panel was basically a broader base, people interested in the economy and business people and whatnot. And we really worked to make it all one meeting and not two separate meetings in those panels and I think that was when it finally came together at those regional meetings. And I think I mentioned this yesterday, when I was working on my notes, it was so hard for me at the beginning and yet when I made these notes for this presentation today, it was difficult for me to tease them apart now that it's all worked together.

Q: That's wonderful. I did want to pause, do you any of you have a question for each other before I keep plugging away?

Andrew: Keep going.

Q: Keep going, okay. So in my opinion, you just have more-- it's very successful when there is a broad cross sector coalition so in terms of establishing your own coalitions, one, can you talk about how you brought on a new partner or two, who's a dream partner that you would love to add onto your coalition with your ongoing work in arts education advocacy?

Wendy: I'm not sure if I'm going to answer this exactly head on but I do think that as you bring on partners, it goes beyond an invitation, we always forget to find ways to get people to buy in to what we believe in, right, we always just invite them and think that that's enough and then we tell them all the great things about what we do instead of finding ways that they can be a part of the design of the plan, they can be part of figuring out what do the standards look like because those who do the work, do the learning. And I think that you have to design for mechanisms to do those kinds of things where you build something together. And I think for us, one of the dream partners, although they don't necessarily show up to our meetings has been the New Jersey DOE, the commissioner, making sure that we have the commissioner on board, that we honor-- we've honored commissioners at our Governors Awards because they actually have made a commitment. And then I say the other person at the DOE that's been really invaluable to us
Advocacy Strategies for Arts Ed: The Good, Bad, and Innovative: Q&A (5 of 5)

besides our arts representative there has been our data person and our leaders have got their buy-in, we didn't ask permission but they were part of the design, so we got to the place where it was their idea to include it in the report card, those were valuable things. And I think that's the nuance that you have to--the different way to ride that wave.

Q: Awesome. Andrew, do you have any…

Andrew: I don't think this is really my area of expertise, so…

Q: Okay, it's fine.

Lana: My answer might be indirect as well. I think the perfect partner is sometimes different in different situations. I've been really pleased with, again, I'm going to go back to the regional roundtable discussions that we've had, the fact that Arkansans for the Arts, the whole concept was to work regionally and so the first roundtable was in Southeast Arkansas, that's the Delta, there are no arts organizations, I mean I had to look hard to find an arts council to talk to. So the theme of the meeting was "Meet the Resources" and we brought in speakers from the Delta Regional Authority and grant makers and so forth. then we went to Fayetteville, Northwest Arkansas where there's crystal bridges and University of Arkansas and there's a gallery on every corner and their needs were how to take the wonderful resources that everywhere and protect them, preserve them. And I'm really excited because our next one coming up after the first of the year is going to be in Central Arkansas in Little Rock and Little Rock is experiencing a sort of a problem with crime right now, I mean it's a little bit scary. And so the theme of that meeting is really going to be how to use the arts and arts education to unify the city, how to work through the arts to bring some unity to the city. So that's going to take a completely different kind of partner, I mean we're looking at talking to the police department and so forth as participants in that conversation and network. So I think the issue of the day may determine who the perfect partner is.

Wendy: Can I add another thing, because I looked across the room and realized, for us on our team, we had a couple of people, we had the representation from the Education Law Center whose primary mission is equity for every New Jersey student and they really don't think often, they have an event around arts education interestingly but they don't talk about it in any of the briefings, et cetera. So we brought them on board on our committee which I think was really smart because now they are sort of thinking more deeply about what that looks like and how arts can be an equalizer and they're also really good with the data that we need. And then the other person is I think we brought on Mary Reece who was with the Foundation for Educational Administration not only because she's a brilliant woman but that kind of relationship has been really helpful to us because Mary is the person and her team are the people, they're the ones training principals, administrators and superintendents, they're the ones who if they hold a conference and then have a section about the arts, people will attend it and believe in it. So that has been a real lynchpin for our movement and when the Arts Education Partnership, now Arts Ed New Jersey got their own 501(c)(3) just two years ago now, it's very new, we didn't start there which was I think helpful but Mary and Maria are some of the first board members, so they have a long history with it and they have a sensibility of how to take it to the next stage of its lifecycle.
Q: That's wonderful. I just wanted to pivot, Andrew, I wanted to go back to talking, when you speak with voters, being at their level, could you give us an example because I think vocabulary is such a key thing with reaching across different audiences, could you give us an example of just the type of vocabulary or a different word can mean a different thing to a voter than what you are thinking it means?

Andrew: Yeah, and that's I think something that happens a lot with wonky folks, which I am also and who I work with a lot particularly at the sort of congressional legislative level, you hear people talking a lot about, well particularly in, like I say, a political campaign, you might hear somebody trying to sort of tout themselves to voters and so they want to write an ad that says, "Well when this bad bill got boarded, I voted for the motion to reconsider," they use just very technical wonky terms about what happened up on The Hill and it's just like, "No, you opposed it, you voted to stop it." And that can go towards any sort of advocacy level education, I know if we were trying to pass something that's very complicated or even not that complicated in terms of a program or whatnot, you don't want to dumb it down, voters are not idiots, they're smart but they're not rocket scientists and the amount of time they have to think about your issue in a day is very, very small. So you have to simplify it, make it easy to understand and make it short, that's the other thing, you can't spend three paragraphs explaining why your program or your bill or whatever is good, it's got to be two sentences and it's got to be straight to the point.

Q: Wonderful. And I wanted to now talk about just kind of the logistics, the nitty-gritty of working in a coalition and for Andrew, when you're working with a republican firm, who's on first, who takes ownership for what part of the portfolio and how do you all kind of-- how do you make sure that all of the players in the coalition are on the same page, if you could just talk a couple of points about how you stay organized as a coalition for your greater good?

Andrew: Oh sure, and I mean a better example actually is I can tell you a little bit about a poll I'm working on right now here in the state for a bunch of environmental groups, I think there are about 14 different groups at the table between state groups and national groups. It's a challenge because, and I'm sure this is something that you guys faced when you were building your own coalitions but they all sort of have the same end goal, they've all got their tangential goals and their other things that they think and this and that and it requires huge organization. I mean we're working right now on drafting a survey so I think we've gone through six different drafts now and it just requires us to sort of keep this very updated document and we get 15 different emails from 15 different people every day with different edits to it making sure that we know this person wants this and that person wants this and so in the end we have to sort of be the arbiter and decision maker and say, "We're going with this because we think that's going to be the strongest message," kind of thing. But it just takes a lot of organization and a lot of patience to deal with that. When it comes to working with a republican firm, that's actually usually pretty simple, generally either we'll take the lead or they'll take the lead, we'll draft the survey and they'll review it and then when we go to The Hill, we just sort of tag team, they talk to the republicans, we talk to the democrats kind of thing.

Q: Sure. Wendy or Lana?

Lana: Nothing to add.
Advocacy Strategies for Arts Ed: The Good, Bad, and Innovative: Q&A (5 of 5)

Q: About how you guys keep your coalition in line, who takes lead on which projects, how you stay organized as a coalition?

Wendy: So are you speaking to the SP3 coalition or just our partnership?

Q: I was thinking of SP3 but honestly if you want to use another example, I think sometimes that's a question at Americans for the Arts we get is how do you keep so many players, all the cooks in the kitchen towards the same goal to make the same recipe?

Wendy: Yeah, I think for us it's been helpful to have the campaign but we've noticed that, so for example there are all kinds of partners in this work that don't always get to be part of the conversation or in the umbrella, so we have need to think about, for example, a teaching artist, they are the actual people who are working with our children often and sometimes we forget to have them included in this conversation. So that is for example one thing that we've been working on. And I'd also say that when there are ideas that are trying to be advanced, I don't know about you but in our state we often have the conversation around arts for art's sake, arts skill base versus serving all the other masters right, it's a constant conversation and I think it's fabulous because if you don't have that conversation front and center, it's sort of people's fears get fed and fueled. A big example for us in New Jersey has been our work around arts integration. Now that is a real trigger word for a lot of people because that immediate tension comes up and so the way we did this was we actually brought people together to have conversations around what it meant, we collectively did the research, what other people across the country have been doing, came up with a shared definition and shared ideas around how to achieve it and if you were going to call it arts integration versus arts enhancement or whatever, we're all talking on the same page and that's again where we brought in the teaching arts because we realized we got all the administrators, not all the administrators or a lot of them but we got people involved in that conversation and they were getting it, the light bulbs were going off but the people again who were in schools delivering it, we had forgotten to have that conversation with them. And, you know, and again give ourselves a break, we were just figuring it out, so the next phase was that. And so we've done long processes where we use observation, instead of telling them what it is, we sent them out into the field to start observing and examples to say, "What is the best practice?" and they're going to decide what it is, not us. And I think again, I think we're going to have a much stronger alliance and coalition for it, it's crazy making, I wasn't gray before but it's fun, we also did the same thing with our collective impact survey tools, we did not decide what we were going to measure, we let the people who are on the ground decide and I'm sure we have an-- the next problem, challenge becomes is that it's not the 10,000 teaching artists we have in our state, it was a handful but now we have to sort of keep teaching over and over again, they keep expanding that circle, so that's the fun work is expanding the circle and creating perhaps master teachers who will be the voice and they will share it with their satellites.

Q: Great. I have one more question for all of our panelists who've been wonderful today and again, this is just featuring two teams specifically, there's eight more teams that have so much advice to share that have done wonderful work and they're in this room, so I invite you to chat with them over lunch which will be starting right at noon. But last question because now the SP3 portion sort to speak is now coming to an end with the ten states and now the next stage is sharing it out with the rest of the country. So we're
Advocacy Strategies for Arts Ed: The Good, Bad, and Innovative: Q&A (5 of 5)

going to have some folks in other states that this is going to be-- they're about to embark on something completely new, a new arts education initiative and they'll be coming to you and say, “What's your one piece of advice that you can give me as I embark on this project?” And then for Andrew, just any advice that you have for just the greater being involved with political space polling. Lana, is okay if I put you on the spot first?

**Lana:** I really like those adulate responsive words to be open to opportunity and aware of what's going on around you and open to opportunity and responding to it when you can.

**Andrew:** I guess one thing Wendy that I was thinking when you were just talking about the coalitions and the arts integration efforts is something I've run into a lot with a lot of my progressive clients in various spaces is especially where there's big coalitions is especially some folks that are sort of further on the left which I am myself, sometimes they prefer to lose a fight their way than to win and as someone that gets hired to try to help some people win their fights, that frustrates me. So an example of this and Erica and I were talking about this the other day, I do a lot of work in the voting rights space and as a progressive that cares about this, I know that voter fraud is not a big deal, I know that voter suppression is and I want to change those things, but voters don't think that way, they think that voter fraud is a problem and when you start talking about voter suppression, they think you have a political agenda then they turn you out. So if you want to pass voting rights enhancements, you need to meet them on their terms, you need to talk about how your enhancement is actually going to improve security of elections or it's going to do this or that. But we have members of the coalition that don't want to talk about that, they think that gets into the other side's frames, or we need to be talking about how there's overt suppression of minority groups which is all true. But again, when you bring it back to that suburban mom, she's not going to vote because minority groups get suppressed, which is sad. So I think that that's my last point of advice is if you're working hard to get something passed, to get something implemented, fight the fight to win, don't lose the fight that you want to fight.

**Wendy:** Well that's a good reminder, don't worry about being right versus effective.

**Andrew:** Sadly, yes.

**Wendy:** Right. So I guess for me, you triggered a couple of things, both of you did, one is just to embrace the naysayers, bring them onto the coalition versus just trying to figure out ways to deal with them but if they're with you you'll figure-- it'll improve the work. I would also-- I started with it really, I think it's about getting data and then getting the coalition of the willing, et cetera. But for me it's really, like you just got to start because if you think about what the work ahead, you're not going to do it, it's, I mean it's a lot, so just start somewhere and there will be other people who will pick up other balls for you and with you, so just do it.

**Q:** That's so great. can you join me in thanking our wonderful panel today?

<applause>

#### End of SP3_V10.mp4