Six Ideas Toward Culture Shift for Americans for the Arts

Nolen Bivens
President and CEO
Everything Americans for the Arts does starts with the premise that the arts make our communities healthier and stronger; that there can and should be something for everyone; and that the arts are everywhere.

The arts should be thought of as a national asset, supported, cultivated, and nurtured as such.
While a majority of the public believes this truth based on our public opinion polling and other research, it’s often not their default way of thinking about the arts. This makes it harder than it should be to ensure the public treats the arts as a shared responsibility and critical in both policymaking and the allocation of related resources.

It must be a priority for all of us to change public perception in a way that leads to action.
Community is where the arts make a difference

People can tell their own story about how the arts changed a street or neighborhood. The arts change the way we view places and how we feel about being there.

When people can tell their own story of how the arts contributed to their well-being we know that policy and funding can follow.
Focus on our place in a network of networks

Our organization’s place in a “network of networks” gives us the ability to connect with different partners across sectors. No single organization is at the center in this kind of successful structure; instead, the arts are at the center of our network.
Success depends on equitable and collaborative partnerships

Creating the environment for broad public support for the arts, and the policy and funding support that follows, requires that every possible partner plays their most powerful part, and that each partner recognizes other partners’ ability to contribute.
We must build trust and resiliency

We must build trust and resiliency. Trust and healing and change are all needed moving forward, each will help the other grow, and this can aid us in creating a staff and culture that is supportive and resilient.
Stay relevant, be prepared

Americans for the Arts must be relevant for this moment and into the future. We want people to turn to us for meaningful responses, whether it is a crisis or not. For this to happen, we must understand challenges before they unfold.
“You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.”
— Maya Angelou
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