
*REAFFIRMING
THE TRADITION
OF THE NEW*

**A Report on the
National Performance Network's
Regional Roundtables**



FALL 2001

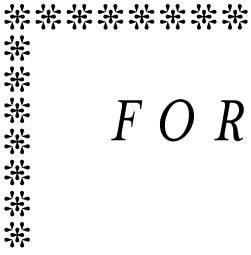
BY SUZANNE CALLAHAN



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On the cover: Eiko & Komo, *Thirst* Photograph by L. Greenfield
Left: Rennie Harris, *Puremovement*, 1998 Photograph by Bob Emmott



FOREWORD

MK Wegmann, President and CEO

NPN'S MISSION

The National Performance Network is a group of diverse cultural organizers, including artists, working to create meaningful partnerships and to provide leadership that enables the practice and public experience of the performing arts in the United States.

NPN

is a 17-year-old national organization made up of 55 members, called NPN Partners. NPN's programs and activities serve two important purposes:

- ✿ facilitating and supporting the national touring of contemporary performing artists and their work.
- ✿ convening NPN Partners with artists and others in the national arts arena to identify and respond to issues facing this field in order to influence and set standards for national cultural policy.

The membership of NPN is distinguished by its diversity and its commitment to challenging new work. NPN's members are actively engaged in their communities, working in partnerships with local organizations. They promote and support local artists while simultaneously presenting artists from elsewhere in the United States, allowing for a dynamic exchange of work, and national access for a range of artists not supported by any other network or system. NPN emphasizes independent artistic choices, and does not create a roster. It is built on the long-term relationships of Partners and artists.

NPN individuals and organizations are united in their desire to ensure that artists are “at the table”—active participants in the decisions that affect their work. Finding structures that make this desire a reality has been a challenge. A means of better directing resources to artists revealed itself during strategic planning: a gathering of artists, in conjunction with the Annual Meeting. This combined Meeting and Retreat was designed to help break down the barriers that exist between artists and organizations. We hope that artists will more clearly understand the ways in which organizations can be their allies, not obstacles; we hope that the organizations which try to support them will realize a deeper understanding of artists' needs, and a greater recognition of their leadership in our common field.

In the summer of 2000, National Performance Network (NPN) embarked on a long-range planning process to inform its future programs and governance. The timing was appropriate, as NPN was at a critical juncture. The organization, a project of Dance Theater Workshop with 14 years of standard-bearing programs led by founding director David White, existed in a very different arts environment from which it developed in 1984. NPN had just become, under the leadership of San San Wong, an independent 501(c)(3). Yet many of the issues that NPN was founded to address: the isolation of artists working outside of dominant cultural centers, the struggles of organizations and artists of color; those doing challenging work—were still conditions facing artists today.

Additionally, the restructuring of the National Endowment for the Arts created upheavals, renewals, distractions and destruction that rearranged the cultural landscape, and no sector has felt this more keenly than artists and the independent, artist-centered organizations that work from a community context. Not only was funding lost, but other benefits of an active NEA: points of intersection for the national arts community through site visits and the panel system. The re-direction of other national funding sources further worsened the situation.

By embarking on the planning process, NPN sought answers to the following key questions:

- ✱ What is, and should be, NPN's purpose?
- ✱ To what degree is NPN a viable and necessary network that supports the alternative performing arts field?
- ✱ What are NPN's most essential functions and core programs?
- ✱ What overall structure, in staffing, size, and governance, supports those functions and programs?
- ✱ How is membership defined? What are the benefits and expectations of membership?

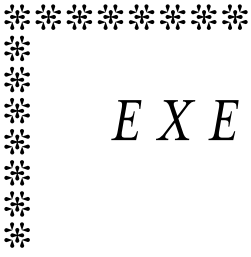
NPN is pleased to publish this report, which captures ideas from many people. There are two parts: one which tells stories from the field, filtered through the lens of NPN; the other suggests direction and a course of action for NPN, filtered through the lens of the field. In the course of these roundtables, many topics pertinent to the contemporary performing arts field were discussed. We struggled with language and definitions: what is an “emerging” artist? Who is “mid-career;” and are these arbitrary terms that only further divide the field? What do we mean by community-based and how is that defined for artists who are touring nationally? Are there words to better define those whom NPN serves, and how our programs and services are delivered?

The Pat Graney Company
Keeping the Faith Project, 1999

The ideas we gathered in the Regional Roundtables affirmed NPN's mission and values, and gave us a base from which to plan our future. The strategic plan we developed has set NPN onto its future path, with renewed support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, The Rockefeller Foundation, and renewed energy from NPN Partners.

MICHELLE ARSENAULT





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alternative Arts Field Convenes Around Regional Tables

**Playing a national leadership role is to affirm that there is
no one way to do things. Artists are not just the hired guns. It is about artists
having a role in how art is made, how art is supported, and how we are engaged,
to have a place at the table.**

An NPN Board member

As part of its long-range planning efforts, the National Performance Network's (NPN) Regional Roundtables that met in the summer of 2000 marked a rare opportunity for a substantial contingent of the alternative arts field to gather. The purpose of hosting the Regional Roundtables was to hear from those around the country about their current realities, and how a reshaped NPN might help to address common trends and concerns. At this critical juncture in making decisions about its own future directions, the NPN chose to question and hear from those in, and also outside, of the Network. In some ways, the Roundtables were designed to replicate the NPN's Annual Meeting; historically it was "at the NPN table" where partners as well as others in the field voiced their accomplishments, realities and struggles. By considering these informed opinions and valuable insights as it moved forward, it was believed that the NPN would remain vital and relevant to the creation and touring of alternative work. Additionally, in light of the near disappearance of NEA peer panels, which historically provided opportunities for dialogue about trends, these Roundtables served to fight the growing isolation that many cultural workers face.¹

The five Regional Roundtables took place in Cedar Rapids, IA, New Orleans, LA, Philadelphia, PA, Seattle, WA and San Francisco, CA between August 4 and September 14, 2000. Overall attendance was extremely high, especially given the relatively short notice and the requirement for many to travel to other cities in their region. Over half of the almost 60 Partners attended.² A total of 63 cultural workers, including artists and administrators from 23 cities also attended.³ A series of broad-based questions prompted the group discussions.⁴ Participants were charged to focus their discussion on the challenges and needs of organizations and artists, and leadership development, rather than to revisit the history of the NPN.⁵

AN ARRAY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES

The Regional Roundtables celebrated a variety of accomplishments. Some participants were happy to have completed capital campaigns and renovations of space. Some organizations such as Alternate ROOTS had obtained new national funding, while others secured local support including Pew’s Dance Advance, for example. Some had made successful hires that empowered their organizations to grow administratively. Some had instituted alternative approaches to leadership; one spoke of adopting a non-hierarchical structure that involves multiple artistic directors. And numerous talked about successful collaborations with artists such as Swamp Gravy, Rennie Harris, Ruby Nelda Perez, and others.

Yet, challenges abounded. As one Partner said, there is “A constant need to stabilize. It is hard to serve as a shelter for artists, to respond to their needs and match them with needs of the organization. Rents are high and rehearsal space is rare. It takes two jobs, now even three, to make it in New York.” Struggles around maintaining space were particularly complex: financing new or expanded facilities and dealing with the demand that increases in space warrant in budget and staffing. Administrative pressures place demands on an already overburdened staff: to accomplish so much given limited capacity; to retain staff who balance multiple job descriptions; to attract young people who are tempted by well-paying high-tech jobs; and to plan for succession of leadership, as founding directors in their 50’s consider ending their careers with meager or nonexistent retirement packages. Balancing artists’ needs with organizational needs, in a time of dwindling funding, is increasingly complex. The challenge of securing funding is always paramount. Prompted largely by dramatic shifts at the NEA, which hit hard the very constituents that NPN serves—Artists’ Organizations, independent artists and small arts groups—there is need for support for general operating as well as for long-term projects. The field struggles to support new and established artists in equitable ways, at a time when the very terms emerging and mid-career are being questioned and deemed outdated. The sheer isolation that comes from being a cultural worker affects day-to-day operations and knowledge about artists. Because NEA peer

**The gifts are the
artists and partnerships,
which are profound.
The ecosystem that we all
share is a greatness
and a blessing.
The challenge is holding
onto our grounding.**

A long-time presenter

1 Cultural worker is a term adopted by the NPN to describe those who facilitate cultural exchange—including creation, presentation and residencies—and is comprised of artists, administrators, technical staff, etc.

2 Partner is the term for a presenter or artist member of the NPN.

3 The list of attendees can be found in Appendix B. As acting Executive Director and Board chair, MK Wegmann attended all sessions. Suzanne Callahan served as facilitator and Carla Peterson was present to prepare to write NPN’s long-range plan.

4 The list of questions can be found in Appendix A.

5 Direct discussion about and evaluation of NPN varied among Roundtables. When the majority of the participants were Partners, evaluative references to NPN were more frequent.

panels and other networking opportunities occur less frequently, it has become difficult to hear about new artists and art forms, and to obtain valuable peer support.

ABOUT THE REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE REPORT

The following topics are addressed in an overview of the rich and frank commentary⁶ that took place, followed by suggestions for the field.⁷

Artists' Organizations and Spaces: A Vital Yet Undervalued Part of Arts Ecology considered this segment of the field that works hard to identify and support emerging and alternative artists. Artists' Organizations provide a place for art, and funding for the research and development that artists need.⁸ They develop a sense of loyalty with artists, many of whom prefer the intimacy that a smaller venue offers. For these organizations, space has become an enormous crisis as it is being "snatched back" by developers who close out leases and then reap hefty profits by selling. The boom economy taxes alternative arts organizations, prompting them to build or buy structures they don't have the capacity to sustain. While obtaining one's own building has historically been viewed as a measure of success, it instills great responsibility on those who need to finance, manage and maintain the space. Participants suggested sharing best practices in effectively managing facilities and being proactive in educating government and urban planners about the value of smaller organizations.

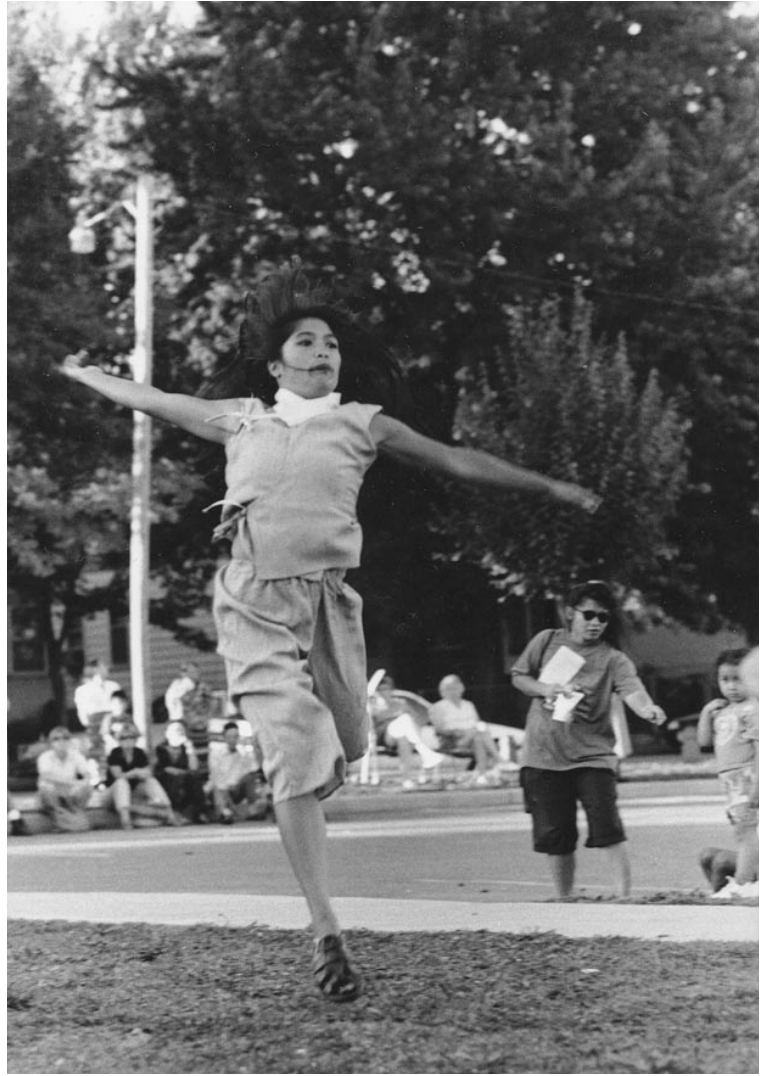
Administration: The Complexities of Being Cultural Workers generated perhaps the most discussion, as resilient administrators (many of whom were artists) persevere to find ways to create and present work. Visionary pioneers who founded organizations decades ago are part of the "old guard" who appear unwilling to let go of their vision, let alone to have it reinterpreted by younger leaders. This leads to a widespread lack of new administrators who can articulate the value and impact of art and Artists' Organizations. While several models of mentoring young people have been started, participants were quite concerned about the lack of mentorship opportunities and other kinds of professional development. The needs prevail as administrators move up the career ladder because there is also a clear lack of opportunities for midlevel management. Finally, the field is not working to provide for those who are retiring. Participants suggested that staff share workloads and set realistic goals; managers seek professional development; and that the field provide additional mentorship opportunities for developing administrators who encourage leadership and decrease attrition.

6 The quotes that appear in this document are paraphrased from meeting notes.

7 In keeping with the format of the Roundtables, suggestions are intended to be made for the field overall, except for the last section, which relates solely to the NPN.

8 The term Artists' Organizations is used throughout this report to refer to artist-centered or artist-driven organizations that work to support contemporary art. They are distinguished from other kinds of organizations because artists participate equitably in decision-making about programs, funds, and policies. They may be run by artists themselves, or by qualified administrators who provide skills and strengthen infrastructure. Yet the artists' interests, needs, and ways of working are always at the center of operations and serve as the departure point for programs.

9 Please refer to the discussion about this term that appears on page 26.



Pearl Ubungen, *Refugee* Frogtown, 1996

CHARISSA UEMURA

Emerging and Mid-Career Artists: Outdated Terms in an Evolving Landscape. At all Roundtables the interpretations of emerging and mid-career were seriously questioned, and said to be based on funding and touring structures that are no longer in place. They presume the structure of a “ladder” whereby artists can “graduate” to obtain ongoing support. There was widespread agreement that adhering to this terminology and the assumed structure from which it came does more harm than good. Yet despite its mixed interpretations nationally, the term emerging continues to have positive connotation for the NPN. There was consensus that the NPN should remain flexible in its definition of emerging as artists: who create vital work that is “searching,” regardless of their age; exude curiosity about the artistic process; established yet challenge themselves with something new; who create work with challenging political content; regionally based who are emerging on the national scene.

Artist-Presenter Relationships: Assessing Models and Values. All Regional Roundtables acknowledged the changing aesthetic landscape influenced by new ideas, cultural and sociopolitical issues, and technology. A distinction was made about community-based artists⁹ who the NPN has historically funded, and who choose to

It was suggested that we work to ensure funders more fully understand the role of Artists' Organizations and the value of their work in supporting the creative process, and that artists be present for meetings with foundation staff. Finally, the field should charge itself to find new ways to articulate value of its work to funders in order to counteract being evaluated by more traditional measures used in the social science or corporate fields.

A long-time presenter

work closely over a long period of time with a community, often on a specific issue. Participants suggested that presenters provide mentorship for artists in promotion, booking and touring, and ensure that the artist's voice is prominent in decisionmaking.

Technology: Reaping the Benefits, Keeping up with the Changes explores the impact of technology on art and management. The Internet provides valuable ways to communicate, which can fight isolation and simplify tasks such as contract negotiation. Yet technology brings an ever-increasing expectation for organizations to find resources to purchase new equipment and manage new and unfamiliar software, such as ticket-selling and accounting systems. The field should increase its use of technology to communicate more efficiently, fully support artists, and capitalize on technology's ability to manage information.

Funding: The Value of Providing a Range of Support. Roundtable participants voiced widespread concern that the substantial decrease in NEA funding, coupled with its restructuring and subsequent decrease in peer panels, has meant that there are fewer ways to access support and hear about artists and issues. Participants emphasized the importance of providing a range of funding choices that

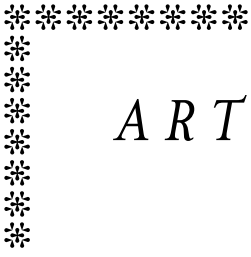
are designed to respond to the field's needs. Concern was registered that unrestricted support is increasingly hard to come by, given the growing emphasis on projects; and opportunities for younger artists are extremely rare. Considerable cynicism was expressed about the trend toward funding that prioritizes social impact over the art itself, as well as the growing emphasis on outreach activities more than the creative process and new work. Funders were urged to value community-based art and artists, rather than to support token "outreach" activities in the form of subsidized tickets or master classes. Stabilization programs that fund cash reserves and endowments are important, yet overlook Artists' Organizations' needs for general operating support. Many at the Roundtables have dealt with funders who question their worthiness, expecting them to provide outcome-based data that documents success. Yet artists working in partnership with these organizations have made great strides in helping populations who have not traditionally received such attention or support. It was suggested that we work to ensure funders more fully understand the role of Artists' Organizations and the value of their work in supporting the creative process, and that artists be present for meetings with foundation staff. Finally, the field should charge itself to find new ways to articulate the value of its work to funders in order to counteract being evaluated by more traditional measures used in the social science or corporate fields.

The Role of the NPN: A Shared Value System that Validates Artists and Builds Community. At all Roundtables, widespread evidence illustrated that the NPN has played

a vital role in validating and supporting the significant impact of alternative artists and organizations on the field. People spoke repeatedly and passionately about the role that NPN played in facilitating accomplishments and counteracting at least some of the challenges. The NPN has persevered as one of the few remaining support structures that fosters positive collaborations among presenters and artists and works to fight isolation. Its Partners and leadership work arduously to serve what one participant referred to as “the tradition of the new,” or the alternative arts field, by functioning as what others called a “search engine” for new artists, forms, and work. As a field-driven network it has exuded national leadership in numerous ways. It has played a powerful role in convening, through its Annual Meeting and other gatherings. It has facilitated partnerships by creating a “buzz,” or awareness about artists and their work coupled with the financial means to present and tour that work. Its equitable partnerships with artists guarantee a level of fee support that is respectful of artists’ needs, and serves as a model to developing artists. It ensures artists a place at the table where policy is discussed and decisions made, and provides a platform that connects local organizations and artists to national dialogue. It invests in the creation of art and supports the evolution of artists. It provides mentorship to developing organizations, and a system of peer support. It values diversity of artists and presenters and works to be aesthetically inclusive.

The Role of the NPN: Suggestions for Future Directions. In their recommendations, Roundtable participants urged the NPN to continue to encourage dialogue about, and national exposure for, art forms and artists. Historically, the NPN has connected artists to presenters, and it should continue to advocate for these relationships around a shared value system. The NPN has, and should continue, to play an important role in serving as a bridge among local organizations while also providing national presence. The NPN’s success over the years has supported many artists; yet a challenge remains to invest in and sustain existing Partners, while also allowing for new relationships. Perhaps some tiered level of participation and support could address this dual need. Participants strongly suggested that the NPN play a role in educating and enlightening funders on national and local levels to: understand artists’ impact on community and culture; remain aware of new work; develop a national perspective about artistic trends; appreciate the range of ways to stabilize arts organizations; and understand the impact of funding cuts on the arts field. While the NPN enables presenters to stretch beyond booking mainstream artists who generate larger audiences, the high costs of presenting alternative artists stretch some Partners’ abilities to obtain the matching funds. It was suggested that the fee subsidy might vary according to city. After considerable discussions about reallocating the money from subsidies to commissions, it was decided that a healthy mix of both was best for the field. Finally, it is critical that the NPN considers the possibilities of technology in crafting its new message and in going forth to funders in the larger public.

Conclusion: A Galvanizing Process that Generated Widespread Support. Despite some initial skepticism as the Roundtables commenced and the discussion unfolded, those present rallied around the issues and boldly committed to supporting a newer, more relevant NPN. As one long-time Partner commented at the end of a Roundtable, “I am happily amazed...this is really impressive...I feel good about the commitment here.”



ARTISTS' ORGANIZATIONS AND SPACES

A Vital Yet Undervalued Arts Ecology

Alternative spaces are the R & D arm.

**There needs to be something in the structure
to help us get paid.**

An NPN Partner

DESPITE the challenges of running them, the values of Artists' Organizations are many, as those present at all Regional Roundtables noted:

✿ **Artists' Organizations provide a place for art, and funding for the research and development that artists need.** Those at the Roundtables acknowledged the relationships that have developed between artists and spaces. First and foremost, artists need time, money, and space to create work, and this bottom-line reality was underscored in discussions.

✿ **Artists' Organizations help to develop a sense of loyalty with artists, many of whom prefer the intimacy that a smaller venue offers.** References were made to Tim Miller and the Wooster Group who still prefer to perform in alternative spaces because it is appropriate to their work and the kinds of relationships they desire with audiences. "Our audiences are overwhelmed by the intimacy," said a Partner in the Midwest. Even for non-NPN presenters, being close to the artist has value. The popularity of the Philadelphia Fringe Festival is due in part to the fact that people like to be close to the artists.

✿ **Artists' Organizations provide visibility for artists.** Wagon Train, in Lincoln, NE was the first to present Ruby Nelda Perez, who subsequently came to the attention of the Lied Center. Another was "the visibility that P.S. 122 provides for artists such as Blue Man Group, who then go on to have wildly successful careers," said one Partner. They also provide stopover engagements for international artists as they travel between bookings in larger venues.

Despite these numerous strengths, arts organizations continue to be undervalued by the larger community. Artists' Organizations must fight conventional perceptions about their art. Several from the Midwest commented on the remoteness of their location and lack of exposure on the part of their audiences: "People here don't recognize the role an alternative space plays in larger cities. They assume all art is alternative. Our boards and

staff members go to the *Cats* venues and not the alternative venues. We have to encourage them to see what role spaces such as DTW, P.S. 122, etc. play in their communities, and to see the relevance of how our organizations function.

SUSTAINING AND MANAGING SPACE

Although arts organizations have sparked revitalization in downtown areas as well as suburbs, they are not typically valued as a source of economic growth. This lack of recognition can complicate their struggles to secure space and sustain operations. Their presence and contributions should be considered within the context of overall community health, because physical facilities help to build a sense of community. Investing in community involves investing in real estate. For the arts field, retaining space has become an enormous crisis on the coasts, where it is being “snatched back,” according to one artist, by zealous investors who are happy to close out leases and then sell for hefty profits. In San Francisco “People are crashing and burning, not having space,” said one. Other west coast cities that struggle with space include San Diego and Seattle; and in the east, New York, and most urban centers.

The boom economy taxes alternative arts organizations, prompting them to build or buy structures that they may not have the capacity to sustain. “Everyone wants a building as if it is the answer to all prayers. But there is a downside: lots of responsibility,” said one Partner who owns her space. While obtaining one’s own building has historically been viewed as a measure of success, it also instills great responsibility on those who need to finance, manage, and maintain that space.

Those present who owned and/or managed facilities talked about the crises and costs associated with buildings. Many buildings were “stretched” because they had originally

The Pat Graney Company
Sleep, 1998



HARLEY SOLTES

been designed for other uses, but are now being used for arts related functions. (Renovating space brings up different yet related issues for presenters who expand.) Crises that must be dealt with are as large and serious as hurricanes, but also include day to day maintenance or, as one participant aptly put it, “Dealing with the glitter and vacuuming the glitter.” Tasks such as painting can seem as important as booking artists. One question repeatedly raised was: How can facilities stay alive while also supporting the art itself?

Equally important are the managerial issues that arise around staffing, training, and funding—developing shared knowledge and resources.¹⁰ “Now I need a full-time facilities staff, no matter what my arts directions are,” said one Partner present in New Orleans. Owning space demands yet another layer of planning: establishing a maintenance fund to deal with emergencies. In Durham, NC, the executive directors of several arts organizations were able to reach an agreement with the city government to provide a joint fund for maintenance or renovations, funded from the tourism tax.

Added to these demands is the responsibility that those who maintain their own space feel for the artists and organizations who lack space. In particular, independent artists who don’t have space for rehearsal and administration lack the human contact because they work in relative isolation. In positing one solution, a presenter coined the expression “organizational bigamy,” where organizations find ways to share their space. By sharing space, independent artists as well as others in the field could help to develop camaraderie to guard against isolation. As the Partner elaborated, “I’m considering how to partner with others so I’m not married to my space. I don’t want to be a bigamist, just have more lovers.” However, the downside to doing so is that those with space become a “landlord,” which changes the expectations of artists and arts organizations who are renting their space.

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ALTERNATIVE AND MAINSTREAM SPACES WITHIN CITIES

Those at all Regional Roundtables cited numerous strengths in collaborating with larger organizations. Artists’ Organizations successfully work with larger performance spaces to sponsor workshops, master classes, and other events for touring artists, bringing the added advantage of diverse audiences who may not frequent large spaces. This interaction has built relationships over time. As one Partner from the Midwest reported: “After ten years of doing what we are doing, we are finally having the directors from major institutions coming to us for our audiences, which are much more diverse than theirs. And they are sometimes coming with collaborations.”

¹⁰ There was mixed response about generating earned income by renting spaces out for other events such as weddings; while there is pressure on the part of funders to increase earned income, some dissenting voices felt it took precious time and resources away from artists.

INVESTING IN THIN AIR

David White Speaks about the Potential and Pitfalls of Owning Space

As a flagship presenter and service provider for the contemporary arts field over the past 35 years, Dance Theater Workshop recently struck a unique deal to rebuild its own space. The process has challenged its board and staff's assumptions, expanded their job descriptions, and generated an enormous set of responsibilities and expectations. But it has also guaranteed their future, as reflected by Executive Director David White.

In a complex and impressive arrangement, DTW sold the open air above the theater to an investor, who will then build ten floors of commercial and living space. Chelsea's real estate market recently heated up, prompting investors to make offers that, while risk-taking, were hard for DTW to refuse. In 1995 they had already bought their building and property on which it stands. After considering renovating the building themselves, White talked about their decision to partner with a developer: "We thought that maybe there was a way to think of this as a public/private opportunity. Public in the sense that we would have to raise money from private and public philanthropic sources. Private in the sense of doing something with the developer. The idea was, what if we took the air—the space above us—that could be developed without zoning variances?" Because DTW had the potential for 10 stories of space built above its two-story garage, they could use the space as they wished. White recounts: "That created opportunities for us to...create a real estate lot, a floor above our head in the air, and essentially sell that, making a deal with the developer—so that in order for him to get up [above] to that property to develop, he had to build us in beneath him. You can't move sideways in New York."

The campaign to raise the \$14 million in necessary funds for its expansion has challenged DTW's board and staff as never before. It started with the usual factions: "people who think you can, people who are scared you can't," as White said, "Our biggest challenge, even before we knew specifics of this project, was ramping up the stewardship of the organization, really getting the board into a position of ownership. We've always had a fairly functional, interested, responsible board, but this is not a board with deep pockets. DTW's Board is not a different mix from 20 years ago, but it has a peer culture of board members working with each other,



Dance Theater Workshop
New theater

rather than staff trying to get the board to try to do something.” DTW developed momentum with institutional gifts from a number of foundations. One funder offered \$? million if the board would match it 3 to 1, and “the board did it, to their own surprise.” He offers advice: “If your board does not have ownership and will not invest in ownership it is not going to succeed.”

Soliciting the major gifts for such a costly undertaking has been replete with successes and rejections. “The emotionally draining side is that you are making one-on-one arguments about the validity and integrity of what you do. And people can say no to you over and over, which feels very personal. It becomes a process of managing individual relationships since most of the money comes from individuals. At the worst end, people feel they need to dictate what happens if they put money in. At best end, you have people who are unified through their investment, in the idea of a greater good even if on a smaller scale.”

Though rewarding, the last year has also been particularly exhausting, given the layers of simultaneous tasks, demands for expertise, and the unavoidable—yet intimidating—reality of the endeavor: “You have to learn seven types of real estate law, design,



Dance Theater Workshop Former theater

construction, negotiation tactics, working with basically the same staff people. The reality is that you cannot avoid bricks and steel and mortar and concrete when you’re putting up a building. You cannot avoid going over certain steps to ensure there’s the right mix of people, the right mix of ideas, the right mix of informed commitment. You have to decide that whatever scares you about the investment of

money, the real issue is that this is an investment of time. We exist in a field where you barely think beyond the next year in terms of planning. There is a constant dialectic between understanding the future versus what you have to do to get there.”

The way that DTW does business is forever changed by making this commitment to ensuring its future. White concludes, “It’s not really about ownership, it’s about control and stability—how you develop some kind of long term perspective over the more complicated issue of space. The issue is how you look at the long-term stability and viability of what we do in this field. In our case, maybe we could have sold and looked for another building, but the reality is that we have looked for real estate for 20 years...We are doing this to ensure our longevity.”

Yet downsides can exist to such collaborations. At least in some instances, larger and presumably more mainstream spaces tend to expect free programming from the small spaces. Artists' Organizations arrange for their artists-in-residence to hold events at large spaces, which don't expect to have to pay for the artist's fee. As one said, "We are the ones who first take risks on engaging social issues, on new artists." Then, as artists become better known—and safer to present—the larger spaces become more comfortable in the visible role of co-presenting them.

This somewhat inequitable dynamic can divert funding. Although Artists' Organizations bring a bold and risk-taking attitude, relationships with a wide palette of challenging artists, a diverse audience and understanding of its cultural dynamics, and expertise in managing residencies, it is the large organization who can obtain the funding and thus hold the purse strings. This has led to a tendency that one participant referred to as "co-opting," where the larger organization benefits financially from the strengths of the Artist Organization. Funders are more familiar (and presumably feel secure) with the larger spaces as a known quantity. Therefore, Artists' Organizations and the vital ingredients they bring to collaborations may not make it onto the pages of funders' annual reports, and this perpetuates the lack of awareness about their presence and role. Instead, they tend to remain isolated by communities that view symphonies and opera companies as the models. Often lost in the background, their roles are under-valued. The tension around money is exacerbated by the fact that the staff at Artists' Organizations typically make low salaries with minimal benefits, while those working at large spaces draw higher pay with added perks; this can create feelings of exploitation. Artists' Organizations also face absorbing the needs generated by the loss of other small spaces. For example, in Chicago, Links Hall is trying to support the work that used to be presented by Randolph Street Gallery and NAME Gallery.

**There is a perverse kind of
success that comes from
our having significant impact
in our community.
But it comes from others
adopting our lead
and then taking
credit for it.**

An NPN Partner

FIELD-WIDE SUGGESTIONS

- ✿ Many spoke of the need to share information about best practices regarding facilities management. This issue should be put on the agenda at local and national meetings.
- ✿ The NPN's equitable partnership guidelines was cited as a useful tool for smaller and larger organizations working together.¹¹
- ✿ The field was urged to be proactive in educating their city governments, urban planners, and community funders about the work of smaller organizations—part of the strata that make up the arts field.
- ✿ One participant reminded others that the museum field has dealt with facilities issues for a long time; though we tend not to cross over disciplines to gain knowledge, we might learn from museums about running space and generating income from events.

¹¹ These guidelines were developed by the NPN in order to improve working relationships between artists and organizations, and are available through the national office in New Orleans.



ADMINISTRATION

The Complexities of Being Cultural Workers

We are a vision-rich and resource-poor community. Our organizations simultaneously become the community centers, the motherships. Plus, we must define our aesthetic, and articulate our programming. There is an implosion in wearing all these hats, especially in communities where there are few places to go for contemporary art. There is no system training the next set of people. Some of us are tired and getting up from the table. Where are the replacements?

An artist and presenter from the South

PERHAPS the issue that generated the most discussion was the complexities of administration, as resilient organizations and artists persevere to find ways to create and present work. What is rewarding is the sheer ability to facilitate creating new work, launching tours, supporting artists as they develop, and securing space.¹² What is challenging are the myriad human resource issues: sustaining leadership, managing staff and structure, developing job descriptions, and grappling with retention and succession. Administration appears to affect organizations of all sizes and staff of all ages.

ENCOURAGING LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS

Supporting leadership succession was foremost among the concerns. This involves supporting administrators as they enter, progress, and retire from the field. Visionary pioneers who founded organizations 25 years ago are now part of the “old guard,” said

¹² These rewards are outlined in greater detail in the section on NPN Roles on page 38.

¹³ CETA, or the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, was a federally funded program in the 1970s and 1980s that fought long-term unemployment by hiring staff to work in organizations, including arts organizations. After a variety of problems at the city level, it was discontinued.

one. A veteran in New Orleans alluded to the notion of sole/soul organization—whereby the sole individual who runs a space serves as the soul behind its operations. He elaborates, “You would follow the sole individual no matter where they go...and now the lights are going out. People are burning out waiting for a way to pass leadership on. I see it in NAAO and NPN. We know how to turn non-profits on but don’t know how to turn them off.” Arts leaders appear unwilling to let go of their vision, let alone to have that vision reinterpreted by younger leaders, who incorporate their value systems and choices. As one long-time Partner said:

There is a group of 40-50 year olds, holding on and not letting the younger ones come through. They formed their organizations 25 years ago, and are still there in many cases. The old guard is tired, but not willing to let go. They are alongside 20 year olds, who are artists or with masters degrees in art history. But there are no 30 year olds—they are all out in dot.coms. Where are those who are aspiring for our jobs? No one wants our jobs, no one is breathing down our necks.

All Regional Roundtables commented on the widespread need for new arts administrators who can articulate the value and impact of art and arts organizations. As one Partner said: “We are paying the price for not investing in the dreams and aspirations of young people.” Yet the arts field does not have mechanisms in place to develop its younger generation, such as programs like CETA¹³ once did. New workers are typically not being trained, and those who are trained are not staying in the field. Young people face legitimate financial pressures to pay back student loans, such that they are gravitating toward higher-paying jobs rather than remaining committed to working for arts organizations. A common scenario occurs when young people with technological expertise join an organization, create sophisticated databases and web sites, but then transition to other jobs, often at high paying dot.coms (one reported a young staff member moving on to a starting salary of \$70,000). This leaves the organization “high and dry about how to understand and manage the very technology that serves them,” said

**Everett Dance Theater
Body of Work**



KRIS CRAIG



PETER MUMFORD

Left: 33 Fainting Spells *Maria the Storm Cloud*

one. “We are hip, we attract the young, and then they move on to the real money world,” said another.¹⁴

While several models of mentoring young people have been started, those at Regional Roundtables were quite concerned about the relative lack of mentorship opportunities existing in the field. One advantage Artists’ Organizations can offer to young people is the chance for them to exhibit and develop leadership. One option that has helped is to provide professional development, allowing staff to build their skills and take on new, more interesting responsibilities that “provide the ability to have a job that is different than an administrative job but not being the director,” said one. Successes were cited such as the Young Tongues Festival, at Jump-Start in San Antonio, which presents artists in their twenties, and is run by young artists and administrators. Another new model is the NPN’s National Arts Administration Mentorship Program (NAAMP).¹⁵ Mentoring is important to long-time NPN Partners. One described, “The other day I met this exciting young musician couple, who we’re presenting, and they didn’t know how to create a press packet. I love bringing something to fruition with an artist who wasn’t at that level before.”¹⁶

The administrative issue does not appear to improve as staff matures; there is a clear lack of opportunities for midlevel management. As alternative arts organizations grow, paltry salaries and lack of training for midlevel staff deter them from staying in the field over the long haul. At one extreme, individuals in their twenties (those who don’t leave for higher pay) make extremely low salaries and seem to be content with value-added fancy job titles. At the other is a sole artistic director that is making the highest salary allowable for the organization [though likely far below the market/skill value for other industries]. Added to that gap are the notable differences in benefits offered by other kinds of organizations: “We are competing with Starbucks and universities...and Taco Bell and Barnes and Noble,” said several. This perpetuates the ongoing challenge to find, retain, train, and offer professional development to managers.

Finally, the arts field is not working to take care of its senior administrators who are retiring. Those aged over 40 typically lack benefit packages such as health insurance, retirement, etc. As one Partner noted, “Other social service non-profits have retirement packages, including medical and dental care, but many of us don’t have that. We have developed these institutions but have not taken care of artists and administrators, so it’s not just the youth who are affected, but the elders too.”

14 Since the convening of the Roundtables, the facilitator/writer has discussed this assumption with several artists in their 30s who are also talented administrators. They shunned the direct correlation between salary level and attrition, saying that their decision to leave organizations had more to do with the fatigue of working for leaders who could not relinquish control over programs and administration in order to integrate younger leadership. As one artist/administrator who works in New York said, “It was never about the money. I wanted something, a program I could call my own.”

15 In its pilot year NAAMP, a partnership with NAAO, the Arts Administration Program at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Diverseworks in Houston, has placed five fellows into five organizations around the country in mid-level staff positions, and augmented their learning with professional development. At the time of this writing, the NPN had just received its second NEA leadership initiative grant to continue NAAMP, and has also received support from the Andy Warhol Foundation and the List Foundation. Efforts are underway to evaluate its success.

16 The importance of mentoring Artists’ Organizations has always been a value of the NPN, and is discussed in the section “The Role of the NPN” on page 38.

ACKNOWLEDGING ADMINISTRATIVE REALITIES

Those in the arts field must also dispel incorrect perceptions about their jobs when compared to larger institutions and corporate models. For example, they differ in hours of operation, since staff often work until 12 or 1 in the morning. They also have multiple job descriptions and juggle multiple responsibilities: “Every staff has double titles,” said one. “We’re all part time, we all do everything, and we all do other things,” said another. “I am wearing three hats and getting tired of the struggle,” said an artist. Added responsibilities take their toll on what can be accomplished in a given day: “The number of people I have to communicate with every day...I can’t do my own work as a creative person. As I go for institutional stability, I’ve become institutionalized.”

Some present at the Roundtables worry about the ways in which staffing issues burden independent artists and small- to mid-sized organizations, and the implications for policy making. Such artists and organizations often rely on part time and/or freelance staff, thus there is no one in a senior position to represent them in local or national forums. Some fear that this substantial portion of the arts field is being left out when decisions are made. “There is no Dance/USA Council for artists who don’t have staff or who can’t afford to send themselves to such gatherings.” This means that our perspective on administration may be skewed toward those organizations with full-time staff, and may overlook the needs of smaller organizations.

Furthermore, some individuals, particularly those who are young, are drawn to organizations to because they are committed to working within some of the more disenfranchised parts the community, both to develop form and content for their art but to also bridge gaps in communication and understanding. However, this work is project driven, under-funded and can cause burnout. A presenter at the San Francisco Regional Roundtable cited an abundance of young talent for these positions, but assumes there will be a turnover: “I am blessed with talented people. I take it for granted that they will be here for an 18-24 month period. That’s the arc.”

FIELD-WIDE SUGGESTIONS

- ✿ If at all possible, it is desirable for staff to share workloads and decision making; this fights isolation with comradery and self-determination.
- ✿ Those present were urged to take a reality check, addressing what they can and can’t do in a given day or season.
- ✿ Professional development may be useful for those who run Artists’ Organizations who have never been trained as managers.
- ✿ It is critical to provide additional mentorship opportunities for young and mid-career administrators, which should help to develop leadership and decrease attrition.
- ✿ The alternative field should not overlook or undervalue those who work outside their organizations as potential resources and leaders, such as avocational artists who serve as board members.

THE ASSET OF ADMINISTRATION

John Killacky Speaks on Administrators who build Leadership and Talent

As a long time administrator in alternative organizations, and who now runs Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, a major institution in San Francisco, CA, John Killacky spoke of the challenges of leadership succession, personnel issues, and obtaining the expertise to handle the job.

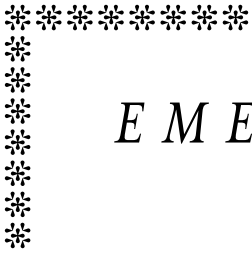
Among his most pressing concerns are the intricacies of dealing with human resources. "We were of the generation who grew up anti-authority...now that we are in positions of authority it is hard for us to assume it. It is not just about marketing and development but personnel, which is the hardest. How much time that takes!" Part of his job is to care for staff, by providing them the most he can in salary, benefits, and other added values. "Smaller organizations don't tend to think about that stuff but they should...As people plan to grow organizations, they need to understand the trajectory if they are running a big one."

Among the simplest, yet most valuable skills is knowing when—and who—to call for expertise. "Big businesses bring in consultants all the time, and know they can gain from them. Small ones try to get money to artists. But, as administrators we don't allow ourselves to grow as artists do." Among the hottest commodities to administrators are those individuals who have exhibited leadership and offer their time and information to others. When Killacky started his career, he came to rely upon such individuals. "I had Art Becofsky, Cora Cahan, and Bob Yesselman. Their generosity cannot be underestimated. They were investing in the next generation of artists and leaders." And, such generosity can go both ways—at one important point in his career, Killacky decided to share a list that, while may have been considered proprietary, was originally given to him by another administrator. About his decision, he says "In a time of scarcity, administrators can tend to view what is mine is mine and cannot be shared. Not true. We are building a field. You have to all work together." Even today, as he has moved up the ranks, he relies on the experience and advice of others: "I am not embarrassed to say what I do not know...there are people in our field that I feel I can call. The expertise exists, as does the benefit of generosity. We get so tunneled that we don't reach out for it."

"I wish that every time the leaders of small alternative organizations have an issue they had my HR director. They need access to the resources and brains, which NPN does not have. The NPN should maintain this within its peer network. Or, set up an exchange with consultants and people outside the network who have the appropriate skills to mentor people. If the NPN can formalize this sharing somehow it would be just great. It's better for all of us."



Top: Yerba Buena Theater for the Arts, San Francisco
Below: John Killacky



EMERGING AND MID-CAREER ARTISTS

Outdated Terms in an Evolving Landscape

**There are people who by nature of their work
are perpetually emerging from their sense of thought or place.
They work according to the construct of a sequence within their career...
to develop a body of work and tour...There are those who are
always against the mainstream, and NPN has always been a place of
safe harbour for this fragile incubator, this ecology.**

An artist and presenter

BACKGROUND: A MIXED ARRAY OF CONNOTATIONS

At

all Regional Roundtables the interpretations of “emerging” and “mid-career” were seriously questioned. Given shifts in the field’s funding and presenting opportunities, there appears to be a “logjam,” as one said, between emerging and mid-career artists that blurs the connotations between these two assumed groups. Such terms lead those who don’t personally know artists to resort to stereotyping them according to aesthetics, age, or touring and funding history.

Adhering to these terms presumes a structure of a “ladder,” where artists’ status can be distinguished by several factors that indicate their “rung” on the ladder. Mid-career artists are assumed to have NEA funding, a hired manager, and a company; moreover, they are assessed by the size of the venue in which they perform and the fee that they charge. Such a ladder assumes artists can “graduate” from emerging to mid-career, suggesting that they will reach a plateau of ongoing support—an assumption that simply is no longer true. As one Partner commented, “There may have been a moment in New York where you started at P.S.122 and then went on to The Kitchen and then to BAM. We need to acknowledge the falseness of this model. It does more harm than good. I am more interested in someone who says ‘I want to try something different,’ takes a risk, and is willing to go for the NPN fee.”

“Emerging” came out of discussion around NEA Choreographers’ Fellowships, which no longer exist. Assessing an artist as emerging was justification for awarding them \$7,000 rather than the \$20,000 for more proven artists. (In contrast, one presenter at the San Francisco Regional Roundtable who recently served on panels for two NEA Millennium projects reported that the term emerging was never used to discuss artists.) One present in New Orleans thought that an artist should only be allowed to emerge for one year; others thought that artists were perpetually emerging; and some thought that some kind of time sensitive definition should be developed. One at the Cedar Rapids Roundtable said that emerging implied to her audiences that “The art must not be good because it had not existed for a period of time.” Questions raised, but not answered, about the term “emerging” were:

- ✧ Does it mean only artists who are not commonly known, when even Merce Cunningham and Trisha Brown are not household names?
- ✧ Is it distinguished by an artist's age?
- ✧ Does it mean that an artist is doing challenging work that deals with marginalized issues, such as being gay, and communities, such as communities of color?
- ✧ Or, does it mean that the artist has not become nationally known, but is on their way to doing so?

One long-time presenter summed up the multiple meanings:

The terms emerging, mid-career and old are the same. Anna Halprin has to make a case why she should still be funded. An 80 year old and a 20 year old have the same problem. In this town, the Paul Dreschers have all dismantled their companies. There's no infrastructure support to keep companies going, since it is all project based. Guillermo Gomez Peña has as much problem raising money as the rest.

MAINTAINING OPENNESS AND SENSITIVITY TO ARTISTS' CAREER LEVELS

Despite the mixed impressions, the term ‘emerging’ continues to have positive connotations for the NPN. In its original incarnation, the term—and presence—of emerging artists was welcome and positive.¹⁷ Because many felt that emerging merely implied “growing,” even Laurie Anderson could be considered to be an emerging artist. Well established artists such as Bebe Miller and Jawole Zollar will continue to tour on the NPN knowing that the fees are lower because they value their relationships in communities. The structure of NPN allows them to sustain these relationships. One participant noted, “I brought Bebe in last year to create a dance on our company and it felt like a emerging activity. If it’s challenging

¹⁷ The NPN recognizes the added difficulties for artists to emerge in the middle of the country, where there is less infrastructure and funding, and fewer museums and theaters, when compared to cities on the east and west coasts. This disparity in opportunity is addressed in “The Role of the NPN” on page 38.

to the artist, okay.” Furthermore, one presenter suggested that “Every time you do a premiere with an artist it is an ‘emerging’ experience.” One Partner said,

It’s frustrating figuring out who’s emerging and who’s mid-career. My question is, how vital and searching is the work? It can come from a 54 year old or a 19 year old. That’s what I look for. As long as the artist is challenging him or herself, it fits into my program.

There seemed consensus that the NPN supports a mix of artists, both in the size of ensembles and style of the work, and the career level. This mix allows presenters to choose from a wide range of artists, as one participant said, “The brain trust—the statesmen of the arts field.”

FIELD-WIDE SUGGESTIONS

- ✧ There was widespread agreement that adhering to this terminology, and the assumed model from which it came, does far more harm than good. All artists, regardless of the group in which they are categorized, face similar problems.
- ✧ It was suggested to use the term artists, rather than to categorize by their age or assumed stature.
- ✧ There was consensus that the NPN should remain flexible to artists and cognizant of the false assumption that artists go from emerging to mid-career. Rather, it may be more appropriate to talk about the ways in which artists work, such as in solo form, in a small company, or in a large company. In the best sense of the term, whether young or old, emerging artists:

- ✧ Create vital work that is “searching” regardless of their age
- ✧ Exude curiosity about the artistic process
- ✧ Can be established but challenging themselves with something new
- ✧ Create work with challenging political content
- ✧ Can be regionally based but emerging on the national scene

Flamenco Latino



CAROL ROSEGG

“EMERGING” OR “MID-CAREER”: MARKERS OF GROWTH OR MARKET-DRIVEN LABELS?

Bebe Miller Speaks about the Ways in Which the Terms are Used

As a choreographer and artistic director since 1985, Bebe Miller spoke about the experience, and sometimes awkwardness, of shifting from being perceived as an emerging artist to a mid-career one.

Miller addressed the perception that an artist shifts from emerging to mid-career based on chronological age: “Maybe you turn forty and then you’re mid-career if you started in your 20’s. But on one level we’re all still approaching things with: ‘I have an idea, how do I make it happen? I don’t know exactly where it’s going to go.’”

Miller suggests that such a continuum designates a point when one progresses from being emerging to mid-career—when in reality there is no precise moment when an artist “shifts” from one to the other. Yet, she finds, such false distinctions are used to make and justify marketing decisions—even if they leave artists wondering about how they are perceived. “Once you’ve emerged in your hometown, there’s not much you can do there, so existence is about being on the road. When you’re on the five year cusp between emerging and mid-career you’re told things such as: ‘We have so many emerging people right now,’ or on the mid-career side you’re lauded for having gotten there but then you don’t have any bookings.” ‘Maybe in a few years,’ is the answer we’re getting a lot right now. There should be a sense of turnover and new people should be seen, and there are fewer opportunities, although that sounds so horribly mechanical.”

She also relates these terms to the funding cuts of the 1990s. The decrease in available resources may have impacted the shift of presenters’ interests from a long-term relationship with a particular company, to a more specific interest in a particular project—as well as their concern with where an artist fell in the emerging to mid-career continuum.” She adds: “I don’t have enough objectivity or knowledge as far as how the shift was affecting everyone else. But I had that feeling of being caught, between the atmosphere of establishing a supportive group and the reality of the success or failure of the piece.”

Despite the causes, artists and presenters seem to use these terms differently. Miller talked about finding a balance between the market-driven use of the terms and artist’s contemplative, process-oriented approach. “I want there to be some way of combining both the interior view and the view outside and neither one becomes perjorative. It depends on whether emerging and/or mid-career is a big seller or not, beyond the flavor-of-the-month stuff. The good thing about stereotyping the market, individually, is that you’re made to clarify what the piece is, what you are working on....The goal for us as artists is to further our work. The boldness it may take to move away from the market is an interesting paradox that might help us.”



Bebe Miller
Photograph by Virginia Liberatore



ARTIST-PRESENTER RELATIONSHIPS

Assessing Models and Values

GIVEN the aesthetic trends and their current realities, those at Roundtables discussed the ways in which presenters must balance the needs of artists and audiences.

AESTHETIC GROWTH: CHANGES IN FORM AND STRUCTURE

All Regional Roundtables acknowledged the flourishing aesthetic landscape influenced by new ideas, cultural and sociopolitical issues, and technology. Several talked of the dramatic increase in the spoken word tradition in local communities, as young people (particularly people of color) have developed this immediate and sustainable way to express themselves. New forms are also developing in visual and media arts, as technology continues to influence the way that many artists make work. Although young artists are developing without ever having funding structures (such as NEA fellowships), they are finding ways to make work.

A distinction was made about community-based artists, whom the NPN has historically funded and who choose to work intimately with a particular location, population and/or issue. Such artists recognize and value the power of art for its own sake in performance and

equally to invoke social change. This permeates their work's form and content, and also influences the more diverse audiences that they draw. Their work stems from their commitment to being part of a community, both artistically and socio-politically. They have created powerful art, and also helped to bridge gaps for communities such as gay/lesbian, Latinos, the incarcerated, and many others.

Their work stems from their commitment to being part of a community, both artistically and socio-politically. They have created powerful art, and also helped to bridge gaps for communities such as gay/lesbian, Latinos, the incarcerated, and many others.

An NPN Partner

Not only are the aesthetics shifting, but the structures that can support them are also providing alternative ways of working. One Partner talked about the role of community-based organizations who house apprentice artists (as distinguished from artists who work commercially in a variety of venues in order to generate additional income). For example, those who choose to work as apprentices in forms such as mariachi have the benefit of performing and studying with master artists who are supported over time by one nonprofit organization; this

AUDIENCE BUILDING AS COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

John Herbert Speaks about Building Audiences in Isolated Settings

As co-founder of Legion Arts in Cedar Rapids, IA, over the past ten years John Herbert has worked hard to build audiences. At times, audience building has charged Legion Arts to publicly address the sometimes controversial ideas around which the work is centered.

Though moderately sized cities may maintain an audience for challenging contemporary work that presents diverse viewpoints, smaller cities like Cedar Rapids have to constantly replenish that audience.

“There is a certain kind of art work that engages difficult questions that many of us are committed to supporting.” One of the positive aspects, Herbert reports, is that “you can think deliberately about who needs to see, or might see, the work, so you are forced to think about new ways to build audiences. In Legion Arts’ case, this meant creating an art audience out of a certain economic demographic or political persuasion, using nontraditional marketing approaches. In a part of the country where there simply were no avant-garde theaters, Legion Arts had no alternative but to approach churches, neighborhood associations, and gay/lesbian organizations and to “convince them there is resonance for our work.”



Legion Arts Gallery interior
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

When they began presenting performance and visual art, including the work of prominent artists like Tim Miller, Holly Hughes, and Craig Hickman, they began to approach nontraditional community partners. Once this groundwork was laid, gay and lesbian issues became part of an open forum for discussion in the community, and later some individuals formed a gay and lesbian resource center. While not directly correlated with people seeing these performances, “Legion introduced a new way of talking in the community.” And, five years later, Cedar Rapids became the third city in Iowa to add sexual orientation to its civil rights ordinance—a legislative landmark that Herbert relates to Legion Arts’ pushing the conversation: “Through arts and culture we have played a key role in



Legion Arts exterior

reorienting the dialogue that resulted in substantive changes in how the community thinks about such issues.” He notes that many of those in the community who organized around the ordinance were not gay or lesbian.

Yet the challenges of building audiences are exaggerated in such small communities because there is not a critical mass of support, and what audiences are built remain fragile. Small towns are “intrinsicly conservative, and only have room for so many kinds of cultural expression...When you are doing work that challenges hierarchies and ways of how they matter, often you are engaging power structures when you are not even realizing it. It is theoretical, but real.” The options for generating audiences is finite. “There is a set of limitations in what small towns can support... a tendency to both complain about isolation but also resist connections to things outside their community. There is a lot more support for high school kids putting together shows than for welcoming art from the outside...In New York, if something doesn’t work on the Upper West Side, you can take it down to the Village.”

Through arts and culture
we have played a key role
in reorienting the dialogue
that resulted in substantive
changes in how the
community thinks
about such issues.

John Herbert

Therefore, the NPN’s approach to audience-building is a welcome and needed change: “The residency model that NPN encourages and promotes is really important, developing a deeper relationship that happens over time rather than in a day. We would not be here if it were not

for NPN and NAAO, two organizations that were instrumental and inspiring in their unshakable commitment to artists and their work...It’s not just saying we should...but putting together the networks or financial arrangements to do so. And, tangible support came to us through attending the NPN and NAAO meetings and seeing how others dealt with such problems.”

provides younger artists with rare experiences for mentoring and professional development. It also builds loyalty to the art form, and ultimately the organization.

ONGOING CHALLENGES TO DEVELOP AND EDUCATE AUDIENCES

All roundtables discussed the never-ending need to develop audiences. In the Cedar Rapids Regional Roundtable, there was some sense that audiences are decreasing. Again, stereotyping emerged as a recurrent issue that Artists' Organizations face: several attributed this audience decrease in part to the fact that, as stated above, it is hard for Artists' Organizations to communicate their niche, and to be viewed as an asset in the community, rather than an entity that does legitimate but sometimes controversial work. "We're the ones that do the naked stuff," said one Partner in a rural setting. Several Artists' Organizations in the Midwest have opted to call artists' work "solo theater" which is perceived as "good" rather than "performance art," which is perceived as "bad." For some spaces, offering a wider variety of programming has helped—yet this raises the demands for staff to be conversant in many art forms. Also discussed was the challenge of developing crossover audiences to other art forms. One presenter on the west coast spoke of struggling to rebuild audiences after a three-year period of uncertainty, while another on the east coast sought to maintain visibility and connection while building a new space.

FIELD-WIDE SUGGESTIONS

✿ At all Regional Roundtables, participants spoke of the mandate to provide tiered support to artists. Presenters must provide formats for working that meet artists' need to experiment while also building community connections, and ultimately audiences.

✿ Presenters should also provide mentorship for artists. For example, On the Boards in Seattle's programming mentors artists. After starting with the 12-Minute-Max program, artists can progress to a mainstage performance.¹⁸

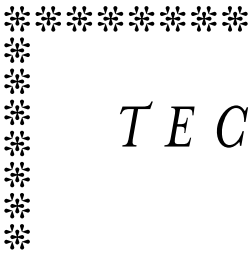
✿ Presenters must acknowledge their role in promoting artists. Because artists tend to be booked by word of mouth, decisions may come down to who is known, by presenters and other artists. Because there is still a reliance on presenters to know about and "sell" work, they play an important role in the booking process in other cities.

✿ The artists' voice should be prominent in making decisions about collaborations. One participant talked about a unique situation where artists were funded to convene to determine if they wanted to collaborate together. This program, called Inroads, occurred in San Antonio, and funded several artists from different countries to convene, see each other's work, and discuss collaboration possibilities.

✿ Arranging for tours to more than one site around the country can help artists to perform at more spaces. Artists who have managers were probably more effective at arranging these block-booking relationships, which can be time consuming, complex, and detail oriented.

✿ The value of touring residencies is clear, as is the value of residencies for artists who have ongoing relationships in communities. Swamp Gravy in Georgia and Hittite Empire in Durham, NC, are examples of such relationships.

¹⁸ However, there is a question about to where and how artists can tour and also deal with fluctuations in touring. Artists such as Pat Graney and 33 Fainting Spells will have successful years touring followed by a dry period, which creates anxiety and questions about their artistic future.



TECHNOLOGY

Reaping the Benefits, Keeping up with the Changes

We sell a lot of tickets on the Internet. But BAM is creating a work that is premiering on-line.

How do I work with artists who want to do that?

An NPN Partner

THE impact of technology on art and management arose during many of the discussions of many issues at the Roundtables. The pros that technology provides the arts community are many. Email has helped enormously to streamline communication and for some has alleviated the common feeling of isolation. The Internet is educating people about spaces (even from abroad), providing links to artists, simplifying the process of sending press packets, photos, etc., thus saving time and money. Maintaining information online such as contracts, photos, and email addresses eases the process of business. Because the Internet transcends time zones, it can be accessed at any time, and several noted that it has encouraged ticket sales at odd hours. Listserves have helped, as peers can sign on to talk about common issues.

Yet technological advances raise expectations about their usage. There is an ever increasing expectation for organizations to purchase new equipment and manage new and unfamiliar software. There is more pressure to obtain ticket software and computerized accounting systems as well as to develop the expertise to use them. The Internet and email are not a substitute for in-person, around-the-table discussions, but they have decreased personal conversations. One Partner said, "The Internet is increasingly good for dealing with specifics but we need face-to-face discussion." While web sites do increase visibility, the quality of a site affects perceptions of the organization/artist/funder. It is hard to ensure that funders and presenters actually visit sites. And technology raises expectations/needs related to the art itself: "We sell a lot of tickets on the Internet. But BAM is creating a work that is premiering on-line. How do I work with artists who want to do that?"

FIELD-WIDE SUGGESTIONS

- ✿ The field should increase its use of technology in order to more fully support artists and work against isolation.
- ✿ The field should capitalize on and invest in technology's ability to provide information quickly and efficiently. As one Partner said, "Develop a search engine to find artists. You could type the artist's name in, and locate information on where to find them."

KAMALA DOLPHIN-KINGSLEY



Degenerate Art Ensemble
Nymph



FUNDING

The Value of Providing a Range of Support

The biggest challenge for organizations is surviving the major shifts in the entire national arts funding.

When the NEA shifted, we lost a huge pot of money.

But more than that, we lost the intersections...to be a national arts community, to develop cultural policy...which is the greatest loss.

The loss of NEA was followed by shifts in foundations in funding policies. They became operator directed,

which for some organizations is a great benefit.

But these granting programs are no longer field selected.

They are strongly filtered through a program officer's point of view.

When we sat at the NEA, we rewrote guidelines to reflect the field's needs.

We did not say, "The Walker is in and the Carver is out."

An NPN Partner

THIS comment underscores the ways in which shifts in national funding have affected the alternative arts field. Over and over, Roundtable participants voiced the same concern: that the substantial decrease in NEA funding, coupled with its restructuring and subsequent decrease in peer panels has meant that there are fewer ways to access support and to hear about artists and issues. As one stated, "The restructuring of the NEA affected individual artists and our organizations, which is our constituency." Another stated, "In the culture wars, we are the most vulnerable."

In its discussion about funding, Roundtable participants emphasized the urgency of providing funding choices that are designed to respond to the range of needs in the field. Great concern was registered that unrestricted funding is increasingly hard to come by, given the growing emphasis on project support. While multi-year funding is needed to sustain large scale projects that may have meaningful impact, it too is difficult to secure.

Because artists are still suspect as worthy of funding, commissioning money appears to be drying up. Finally, there was a strong sense that funding is needed to commission young and new as well as more mature artists and concern for how the lack of fellowship support would hinder the next generation of artists.

Considerable cynicism was expressed about the trend toward funding art that exists to benefit social services rather than valuing and investing in the artist and their creative process. Added to that is a sometimes frustrating emphasis on arts in education. An important distinction was drawn between the more meaningful community-based art described earlier, and organizations who boast of their “outreach.” This can be as superficial as subsidizing tickets for a performance or teaching a class to an “at-risk” population in order to obtain grants and make funders feel good. Presenters can get money for anything that serves distinct populations of people through education. As one stated, “Joe Goode is expected to work with gay teens, and Margie Jenkins is always expected to go to senior homes.” This expectation on the part of already overworked artists is exacerbated because some of the nonprofits who secure the funding and retain the artists don’t have relationships with the very populations that they expect them to teach, leaving it up to the artist to forge the relationship. And there can be negative ramifications for the populations that are meant to be served; as one artist in San Francisco said: “Now I say no to working with kids because I saw kids going from loving me to being incredibly angry. They shut down, and cried at the end—I was just another person leaving them. It is strange being an artist/social activist.”

A MYOPIC VIEW OF ARTISTS’ ORGANIZATIONS

At all Roundtables, there appeared consensus that even funders can misunderstand and under-value the role and importance of Artists’ Organizations in the arts ecology. Some funders appear to co-opt the unique strengths of the small spaces, yet invest in the strong and fiscally secure organizations. Many of the newer funder-selected networks that provide multi-year support to a chosen few appear to have been shaped in part on the successful NPN residency model, yet they no longer fund the NPN itself. Despite its clear strengths in working with artists and conducting residencies, when compared to larger institutions, the NPN was presumed, “smaller and weaker. How do we turn that around and claim the territory that we own?”

Funders have designed “stabilization” programs that fund cash reserves and endowments, which is an important move. Yet, these resources remain as luxuries that Artists’ Organizations may never have. The real need is for general operating support. When supporting endowments, funders tend to give to financially stable organizations—yet the Catch-22 is that endowments are one of the very assets that provide stability. This approach by funding organizations was said to be “boiler-plate” and does not take into account the range of realities and needs that face arts organizations across the country, nor does it consider alternative ways to stabilize organizations. Such a formulaic approach does not integrate individualized assessments of

organizations' needs, capacity, environment, and realities—it rather suggests a one-size-fits-all solution to organizational development and stability.

VALUING THE SUCCESS THAT COMES WITH FAILURE

Several Roundtables acknowledge the notion—and value—of failure because it implies taking risks. One presenter at the San Francisco Roundtable posited that taking risks on artists is important—that not all work created is good: “I tell my staff that if we present six artists and all the work is good then we are doing something wrong because we are not taking risks.” Taking risks on artists who aren't fully successful should not be judged, but rather considered to be part of the process. One participant suggested that the only true failure is if arts organizations merely quit—that they don't need to be perfect. Yet numerous companies that were assumed to be well established have dismantled, due in large part to lack of funding opportunities. Yet as one presenter said, “Some companies should go out of business, the arts world is not about all organizations being sustained forever.” As one participant said, “No company that was in the Fortune 500 in the 60's is there now. Artists are still around because they can keep reinventing themselves.” How do we convey the value of artists' risks to funders, who place growing emphasis on proven success?

Yet, alternative arts organizations need to plan for success in their dealings with funders. Part of the reason the arts field stays poor is because of its “poverty mentality,” where “We envision ourselves poor, which partly ensures that we stay poor.” We believe we are incapable of raising money; we don't ask for it and we don't expect it. In addition to securing cash, there are alternative methods of allocating resources, and several present talked about the role of involving retirees in volunteering for organizations as part of the staff or maintenance crew. One organization in Georgia even has a rocket scientist who mows its lawn.

EVALUATION: SHUNNING THE DEMAND FOR LONG-TERM IMPACT FROM SHORT-TERM RESOURCES

Many present dealt with funders who question their “worthiness,” expecting them to provide outcome-based data that documents their success. Measuring success is exacerbated by a funding environment that values traditional indicators such as cost-benefit analysis and corporate benchmarks rather than impact evaluations, which come closer to providing the true measure of arts organization's success. In San Francisco, the



MUST ART AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM BE JUSTIFIED?

Rhodesa Jones speaks on the Mandate for Accountability for Art

As the founder and artistic director of the Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women, and an artist who has worked on stages and in community settings for many years, Rhodesa Jones spoke of the accomplishments and challenges of creating art with women in prisons—and the pressure to account for the ways in which art changes people:

Rhodesa Jones
Medea Project

“Coming from San Francisco, California, I am encouraged to participate in open intimacy. What better place than a jail to be face to face with somebody? I have to have a story and be willing to tell that story—that you’ve been around the block a few times. You have to love women, not just relate to them. My work is rooted in the autobiography, a way to examine life, to create mythology versus constantly engaging in pathology. It is an amazing opportunity...an incredible social experiment...and an incredible journey.

“Going into the jails, I realized I was attempting to create that place to stir up the molecules. I am not interested in art for art’s sake. If you get on stage you damn well better have something to say. Give me some pearls of truth, push the envelope, shake things up somewhat.

“I am blessed with a team: a social worker, midwife, and women who have been involved with the culture for a long time. We are there to catch women when they fall. And they do, so you have to be ready to hold them. The process is more extraordinary



Rhodessa Jones
Cultural Odyssey

than the product—to watch women come from being raggedy, depressed, angry, and bored to being centered, and flowering into amazing performers.

“The hardest thing is to find some sort of barometer that would satisfy funders about where the money goes. It’s about accessibility rather than pushing the paper, which is where we run into the problem of ‘What is your measure for success? How do you qualify the work? How many people are drug-free, jail-free, being productive in society?’ For example, a young woman, now 19 years old, was doing drugs at nine and became a prostitute at 12. How can I come in with a four to six month art program and be able to say to a funder, ‘This is what I’ve done, and this person is in tip top shape, ready to go?’ It is going to take a lot more than that to totally overhaul a human being. There are a lot of variables that have to be included on how art changes lives. I don’t think funders nor presenters are aware that it is not a quick fix. The number of those out of jail, or in school, are further down the road. We don’t have enough money to track them.

“God bless the funders I work with...who maintain an openness rather than saying ‘let’s put down some numbers.’ In presentations for funders and other artists, I show live footage from performance and process, read work and share observations, tears, and fears. It’s a human approach—an exchange between artists, funders and community at large. The Medea Project has engaged and interconnected those four things—funders, community, the work itself, and the presenter—a very important part of the equation.

“There’s never enough money. I’d love to see more funding based on a model that if they are going to give \$25,000, give it in a three-year package. I have an incredible library of tapes to archive and index it so somewhere there is a library of the work of community artists. I’d like to be given the time and financial support to keep on those actresses who act as dramaturgs, to be able to teach an Angela Wilson, who has been with me for three years and earned a full scholarship at American Conservatory Theater. She’s a former speed freak. She’s committed to art and stage acting. She has shown us the other side of what we must participate in, which is intense support, open phone lines, a kind of mentoring and mothering. She is an actress, and writer, and now learning to assist me. She will be all those things I have unconsciously dreamed.

“I know that I have changed the face of [community work for] audiences in San Francisco, and the quality of community work—which should be ‘state of the art.’ My work...has given me a place in the women’s community, and I wouldn’t trade that for anything. To have gotten into hearts of so many people who make up the kaleidoscope of the community...That touches many people, it touches everybody.

“It has to be about involvement, about all of us, not just the downtrodden women. It’s about the total human family in the Bay Area, and even nationally. It reminds us all that art should be part of our lives. It’s cathartic, very subliminal, and goes back to the Purist definition of the essence of art. It’s become a real part of my makeup as an artist, and as a social activist.”

group discussed the growing emphasis placed on evaluation. When tracking the long-term impact of projects, arts organizations are not given the resources to conduct these evaluations. One Partner asked, “How are we supposed to talk about how many fewer 7-11’s will get robbed because of the impact of our arts activities?” An artist conveyed her frustrations about the funder’s requirements for accountability:

In pushing for three year funding for a community engagement process this funder wants to know what the effect is. I told her to give me money to track that. She heard it, but said that everybody is saying that to her. Funders need to be educated. The church will talk about how many souls are being saved. We see therapeutic communities take our arts-related work over, and because we are “just theater,” we lose out in the funding competition. They want me to apply, but I never make the final cut because I do theater.

Yet, artists have made great strides in helping populations who have not traditionally received such attention or support. The San Francisco Roundtable talked about the importance of beginning to document the outcomes of arts related work, such as Rhodessa Jones’ long-term record of working with women in prisons. As an artist summed up, “Because we’re arts organizations, it is difficult to measure what we’ve done. There are too many variables. How do we talk about making the soul matter? It is a worthy struggle to find the language that describes how we give back to the planet.”

**Because we’re arts organizations,
it is difficult to measure what we’ve done. There are too many variables.
How do we talk about making the soul matter?
It is a worthy struggle to find the language that describes
how we give back to the planet.**

An NPN Artist

FIELD-WIDE SUGGESTIONS

- ✿ The field should work to ensure that funders more fully understand the role of Artists’ Organizations and artists in the cultural ecology.
- ✿ More emphasis should be placed on the value of artists and the creative process, and the true needs of artists.
- ✿ In an effort to raise visibility and increase understanding, artists should be invited with presenters to meet with foundation staff.
- ✿ There must be a more balanced emphasis on artists making work that involves the community in their process and develops long-term relationships, rather than serving as social workers.
- ✿ It is fortunate that the field is beginning to articulate its value and finding new language and data to talk about the impact of the arts, and we should continue to do so. Otherwise, the standards from the education and social science fields will continue to be inappropriately used to measure our worth.



THE ROLE OF THE NPN

A Shared Value System that Validates Artists and Builds Community

The NPN addresses the whole question
of supporting artists you love...one of the main essences of the NPN
was discovering the new, the next thing.

A long-time NPN Partner

At all Roundtables, widespread evidence illustrated that the NPN has played a vital role in validating and supporting alternative artists and organizations and their impact on the field. Although the NPN's importance was emphasized particularly by those who run Artists' Organizations located in more geographically remote areas, even those in urban centers also voiced unanimous appreciation. Its impact was cited in the following areas:

The NPN exudes national leadership by placing the artists at the forefront of its discussions and promoting the myriad ways to create art.¹⁹ By highlighting artists' integral role in creating work, the NPN increases understanding about how art is made. Because the NPN places artists at the table, it continues to communicate the inherent values of their art. As one Partner said, "It is a great heroic achievement in getting artists and arts administrators at the same table." Several reflected on the NPN's vital role in developing cultural workers, being deeply rooted in the community, and serving as a circuit that "connects the dots" about presenting and about contemporary art. One summed up the vitality emphasized at all of the Roundtables:

For presenting organizations that make up NPN Partners, from my vantage point, the strength has been in its power to convene. The NPN... taught other arts organizations how to look at art. The dialogue at NPN is always about the art. At other conferences, we talk about other issues. We are training people to look at and expand their palate for experimental work.

Perhaps most importantly, the NPN plays a vital, dual role in educating presenters and promoting artists by creating the "buzz" about art and providing the means to support engagements. One of the strongest points made in the Philadelphia Roundtable was the NPN's value in providing the "buzz" about local, regional, and national artists. By networking at the Annual Meeting, viewing videos and having ongoing conversations

throughout the year, presenters learn about artists more than they do through formal mechanisms.²⁰ The flexible NPN structure allows presenters to respond to this “buzz” in a timely fashion. The vital connection between the Annual Meeting and the subsidy program means that the NPN could provide money to allow for presenters and artists to form partnerships. Following the Annual Meeting, presenters could access residency fee subsidies to quickly fill empty slots in their season; and they could access monies through the Creation Fund in order to collaborate with other Partners to commission artists. Finally, by mandating support for artists across the country, the NPN prompted presenters to be more proactive and creative in curating, rather than making what were sometimes the easier or safer decisions about which artists to present. As several in Philadelphia said, “It serves as a search engine for new artists, allowing arts organizations to be inspired by the new work of great artists.” Two other Partners agreed, “Following the Annual Meeting you can book fairly quickly. The money comes through fast enough. The strength of the Annual Meeting is coupled with the financial resources to act on what you learned there.”

The NPN functions as a field-driven network in the best sense of the term—one that builds relationships between artists and presenters and works hard to fight isolation.

The NPN has forged positive connections in the field, fostering a true sense of network—one that is field-initiated, rather than funder driven. It has built confidence for those working “in the trenches” at Artists’ Organizations. Its role in providing practical information in areas such as contracts, personnel, and running spaces has been important. The NPN has provided ongoing support across the country. At one Roundtable, a participant spoke of her ambivalence about continuing to work for her organization, thinking in isolation that she might have been the only alternative presenter to think that way. However, after hearing from presenters at other Roundtables who grappled with the same ambivalence, she realized she was not alone. As a Partner from the Midwest noted, “The network is so important. There is a huge burden on us to try to play the role that we need to play... It is extremely hard to meet this challenge and it is only because of NAAO and NPN we can even attempt to do it. The NPN says, ‘Residencies are a good thing and here’s how to put them together.’”

The NPN values and nurtures relationships between artists and presenters. The NPN builds trust. NPN Partners promote other artists regularly, purposely shunning the image of the presenter who distances him/herself from artists. The NPN’s contract specifies the relationship between artist and the presenting organizations.

The NPN provides a national platform for discussion and engages local organizations in national dialogue that is locally connected. By convening local organizations around a national table, the NPN gives communities across the country access to a larger

19 Other organizations who exhibit national leadership were acknowledged and appreciated, and included NAAO, Alternate ROOTS, and Art in the Public Interest, among others.

20 Other ways that presenters hear about work are through festivals such as the New World Theater’s Intersection Festival, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters Annual Conference, the National Dance Project, and other festivals. (However, it was mentioned that to some degree that the NDP works off the NPN “buzz” and that the NDP “is an expensive buzz,” said one Partner, referencing the high cost of its projects).

dialogue; it gives local presenters an identity and national association. It provides ways for artists to be discovered. When some funders realize that NPN Partners in rural settings are affiliated with national touring projects, these organizations grow in value. The NPN Directory serves as a guide about artists and presenters and what kinds of work are being created. As several Partners agreed, “We constantly ask how can we help the artists in our community, and use our resources to get them out and to the next level. The NPN Directory was a major resource for my local artists.”

How is NPN distinguished from a standard presenter?

**What niche are we filling? It is the issue of our shared vocabularies—
if we say “emerging,” people understand.**

**We clearly say that we are doing things differently,
supporting renewal in a lot of different ways. We represent the edge of the art world.**

An NPN Board member

The NPN values and invests in the creation of art. In its constant support of ideas and inspirations around art, the NPN has and does support “artistic renewal,” as one said. “It is where the art happens...It serves as a laboratory,” added others. It serves as a “nurturing conduit for artists,” said one and “prepares artists to be entrepreneurs,” said another.

The NPN supports the evolution of artists over time. Because the NPN values its relationships and supports artists over the long haul, it builds relationships with artists who ultimately grow to care about the network, such as Bebe Miller and Rennie Harris. One poignant example was given about Rennie Harris’ piece, *Rome & Jewels*. Harris had developed a meaningful relationship with the Dance Place in Washington, DC over the years and obtained a Creation Fund grant to develop the piece. When the Dance Place was unable to afford the presentation fees, Harris was proactive about performing for a reduced rate because he was so committed to his established relationship with this presenter. Another example was the 30th anniversary of the Painted Bride, where their series called the Vintage Bride included presentations by artists who have performed there over the years, such as Meredith Monk, Bebe Miller, and Tim Miller.

The NPN values its diversity of artists and presenters, and works to be as aesthetically inclusive as possible. The NPN has historically placed a high value on supporting culturally specific art. It also has expanded its Partners’ notion of culturally specific work as well as new and challenging art forms. The NPN is non-curated and there is no roster of artists.²¹ The Partners’ venues are unique identities and attract specific audiences. The venues stay

²¹ Though some may perceive that there is a roster, this is not the case; since its founding, the NPN has supported dozens of artists through its various subsidies and many more through its meetings, these Roundtables and its fee structure.

²² These two subsidies were recently renamed to the Community Fund.

“on the edge of the arts world,” said one, by supporting alternative organizations. The NPN also remains inclusive of the variety of size of spaces, large and small.

The NPN values its role as a mentor to developing organizations. Since its inception, the organization has been intentionally structured to support Artists’ Organizations as they develop. This commonly occurs because the NPN may have more than one Partner in a given city. Partners who may range in their size, identity, background and capacity—each have equal say. One example cited was the Asian Arts Initiative, which was a project under the umbrella of the Painted Bride in Philadelphia, and, with the Bride’s support, grew to obtain its own nonprofit status and become an NPN Partner. Another is the presence in Houston of three Partners with different sizes and constituencies: Diverseworks, MECA, and Kuumba House.

The NPN fee structure is respectful to artists and incorporates their needs. It also makes possible scores of engagements that otherwise would be unaffordable. The NPN has provided critical money for research and development. Its contract guarantees direct fee support to artists, a simple but rare commodity in the arts field. The NPN’s pay scale gives artists a model for an appropriate fee level for presentations. The Roundtables have generated a greater understanding of the degree to which the fee structure changes the negotiation dynamic between artists and presenters in a positive way. Because the fee structure is set, contract negotiation can revolve around other aspects of the engagement, and is very positive for the artists’ relationship with the presenter. As one Partner said, “We scoff at the fees as a beginning formula, but they help young companies organize and figure out what is fair.” NPN’s funding models through the Community and Creation Funds²² have educated funders about community partnerships and raised the visibility for Artists’ Organizations as viable venues for new art. The fee subsidy plays an important role in facilitating residencies that otherwise would not be possible. One long-time partner who is bringing Pat Graney for an NPN residency commented, “Without NPN’s support it can’t happen. We have been trying to get Pat here for seven years but couldn’t do it because of distance and the fact that we have only 160 seats. You lose all your clothes that way.”

**The Pat Graney Company
Washington Correctional
Center for Women
*Keeping the Faith Project***



The NPN: Suggestions for Future Directions

**The NPN needs to reinvent itself—
to be the search engine for new artists. We need to prepare the new artists
to be more entrepreneurial and better able to manage themselves,
and we need to build strategic infrastructures.
Without the search engine, it is much harder to create new art.
Whether regionally or nationally, we can build
a whole new plan of action
so that new young people can come into this field
because they see we love it.**

A long-time NPN Partner

A

LL Roundtables concluded with a discussion about the NPN's past and made recommendations about its future.²³ Participants were then asked for their perspectives on the NPN: What should being a national network involve? How would we define terms such as "alliance" and "coalition" as they relate to the NPN? Recommendations are summarized below.

PROVIDING INFORMATION. The NPN has in the past, and should continue, to provide information about artists and resources. It should also consider providing manuals about management, personnel, and employee evaluation that may be appropriate for Artists' Organizations. The NPN should continue to encourage dialogue and national exposure about art forms and artists.²⁴ The NPN should continue to advocate for artists and form relationships between artists and presenters around its

²³ MK Wegmann provided a historical context about the NPN's development, and its recent transition from DTW to becoming an independent 501(c)3.

²⁴ It was recognized that, at the time of the Roundtables, there had been some fallout in the last several years in the degree to which the Network has been fulfilling this function.

²⁵ It was suggested that those present look into buying groups for local insurance policies. This has proved effective in New Orleans, as well as in Washington, DC. Reference was made to the Artists' Health Insurance Resource Center, run by the Actor's Fund, which provides free online information about health insurance on a state-by-state basis.



ALAN MAHON

Random Dance Company
Aeon

shared value system. For example, one area of information provision that the NPN might address is benefits such as health insurance.²⁵

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP. The NPN has, and should continue to play an important role in connecting local organizations and providing national presence.

Those present charged the organization to proactively address the need for dialogue, part of which has been lost due to the decrease of NEA panels. As one Partner said:

Over and over, it is about moving work around the country. There is a critical role for the NPN to play in convening. At an earlier time the NEA Peer panels served as a point of intersection. I sat at those panels and wrote guidelines. That point of intersection has been completely lost, and there is fragmentation.

PEER SUPPORT. NPN Partners should continue to assist each other with organizational transitions and crises. This includes providing the history and perspective of the field. At times when local crises occur, NPN's relationships among Partners has helped fight alienation. The NPN might look at ways in which it can assist its Partners during organizational crises. As a Partner said,

I think of mentoring as a bridge for when NPN organizations blow—and every organization does in the NPN. We can give each other a sense of history, a broader perspective of the whole, about issues such as turnover and big peaks and valleys. This relates to issues of national leadership. We can pick up the threads of what has been done and build on that. NPN provides that...a sense of what is happening in Omaha, when there is not a whole network in Omaha that can give that background.

The NPN should also face its challenge to allow for new relationships with presenters and artists. While the NPN's success over the years has supported many artists, it has also created "a glass ceiling," said several. It can no longer support both artists who currently tour on the network as well as new artists. Moreover, while it has helped to develop 60 Partners, "the umbrella is getting full," said one of them. Perhaps some tiered level of participation and support could address this dilemma by including new members in select activities or subsidy provision. As one Partner said, "How do we have sustainability for what has been? And how do we go beyond? If we are going to do more with more people at the table, we must find new ways of supporting it." There exists a considerable need for young, new and/or grassroots presenters across the country to understand better ways of presenting and networking, both among themselves and with artists.²⁶

FUNDING. It was strongly suggested that the NPN might play a role in educating and enlightening funders on national and local levels. Such areas to address might include:

- ✿ Understand artists' impact on community and culture.
- ✿ Be aware of new work.
- ✿ Develop a national perspective about artistic trends.
- ✿ Appreciate the range of ways to stabilize arts organizations.
- ✿ Understand the impact of funding cuts on the arts field.

FEE STRUCTURE. While the Roundtables generated a greater understanding of the degree to which the fee structure improves the negotiation between presenters and artists, the NPN was urged to consider several questions. While the NPN enables presenters to stretch beyond booking mainstream artists who may generate larger audiences (and thus ticket revenue), the high costs of presenting alternative artists stretch some Partners in obtaining the matching funds. Even costs such as hotels, which are substantial in cities such as San Francisco, can serve as barriers to being able to conduct residencies.

- ✿ Should matching funds be raised by each and every Partner?
- ✿ Might a different level of match be required for Partners, depending on their size and capacity?

²⁶ Several successful initiatives that are underway were cited, such as NAAMP's effort to mentor young administrators who may go on to become presenters.



ART AS COMMUNITY BUILDING

Alice Valdez Speaks about 25 years of Developing MECA—and the Role that NPN has Played in Expanding Their Artistic Vision

“Community cultural centers are not just about art. We have to provide support regarding social justice, social services, equity, and socio-economic issues.” As founder of Multi-Cultural Education and Counseling Through the Arts (MECA), Alice Valdez and those who lived in this Houston community were courageous—and determined—in their efforts to build a solid and grounded home for the people and causes that MECA served. MECA began as a CETA supported program in the 70’s. Based at St. Joseph’s Jesuit church (which already supported many social causes), MECA was founded when many organizations of color were getting their start. After investing substantially to create its space and art component, in 1991 MECA was forced to move to Dowe Elementary, the oldest independent school district building, amidst much controversy. Despite this imposed relocation, “our program grew by leaps and bounds because we no longer were constrained about how much space we had.” MECA addressed the urban blight that surrounded the school by converting the building into a community multicultural center that promotes the arts and houses a number of social causes; they are in the process of purchasing the building with the intention of restoring it.

With a history that dates back to 1880, the neighborhood in which MECA is based is home to one of the most diverse communities in Houston. But, recent gentrification has met with mixed results: while many of its community members now own homes, some long-time renters cannot afford to buy, and may leave the area. MECA has dealt



Multi-Cultural Education and Counseling Through the Arts (MECA) Performances

aggressively with the “negative behavior” that came with the territory: “We were involved in having young people come in and do positive stuff rather than break our windows every day, showing them different ways of behaving...some are still young adults who are in trouble, and you work with as many as you can.” Valdez reflects on the impact of cultural centers on those people who grew up in them—not only artists, but others. “MECA is the hub of the neighborhood, for city and neighborhood association meetings. Even though Latino community based cultural centers are not supported equitably by the public or private sector we are very important to the cultural life of this community, and made major transformations for individuals who come through here. While a lot of young people many have not become major performing artists, they have successful careers in architecture, education, science, medicine, Mexican American studies, and finance. For some, getting through high school was a major challenge.” Then there are the great stories: the three pianists who studied with resident artists and went on to Julliard, and the dancers who have gone on to Alvin Ailey and Dallas Black Dance.



Valdez is emphatic about the vital ingredients of leadership, perseverance, and creating a homestyle atmosphere so that the community-wide family can grow up together: “These organizations survive because they are led by unselfish and very dedicated, hard-working cultural workers. One of the reasons MECA survived is that we have several women committed to working here who are not being paid what they would be in the world. We are a child centered place, and there is always a baby around...my kids grew up here and are now in their 20s.” Finally, leadership and nurturing came from the outside sources, including the NPN; as Valdez emphasizes, “Michael Peranteau and Loris Bradley of Diverseworks invited us into the NPN family. They opened up a whole new artistic vision on a national level we never would have known or met, but that fit well with us...the performance art stepping stone opened up other possibilities that embraced the more traditional ethnic art forms, so our traditional artists can experience that other world.”

Multi-Cultural Education and Counseling
Through the Arts (MECA) Performance

✳ Can resources be considered as partial payment, including offering unencumbered space with no distractions, similar to an artist colony?²⁷

✳ Could the fee subsidy vary according to city, based on the cost of living in that city and the financial realities for the alternative space?

A HEIGHTENED ROLE FOR TECHNOLOGY. The NPN must address the widespread convergence of creativity, technology, and commercial ventures. One needs only to consider the degree to which the Internet involves both creativity and commercial presence to realize that the change underway is dramatic. It is critical that the NPN considers this in crafting its message and profile. A potential aid is the NPN web site, which is in development and should be expanded to include Listserves, online contracts, video streaming, etc. It was suggested that the NPN site be arranged for use by artists, Partners, the outside public. The NPN Partners need to learn more about technology's effects on the field both artistically, and in communication.²⁸

SUPPORT FOR RESIDENCY SUBSIDY AND COMMISSIONS. After considerable discussion about reallocating the money from subsidies to commissions it was decided that a healthy mix of both was best for the field. Although the commissioning funds are more substantial and provide for the creation of new work, the heart of NPN's mission is to move work around the country, which happens through residency subsidies. It was strongly suggested that the Creation Fund return to the original rules that require more than one Partner. In so doing, it would encourage that the new work tour to numerous sites.²⁹ It was also suggested that the NPN maintain the rule that residencies must last five days.

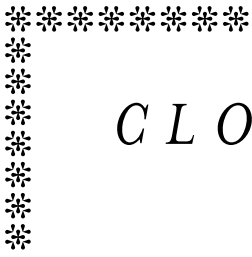
PARTICIPATION IN OTHER NETWORKS. The NPN might consider its role in other networks and caucuses. Several Roundtables spoke about international networks, such as La Red, a Latin American forum that addresses issues similar to the NPN (and was modeled after the NPN). While there exists substantial potential to develop more international collaborations, and a number of Partners and artists cited the importance of working on international exchanges to reduce cultural myopia and see where they fit into the larger picture, there seemed consensus that at this time it may be beyond the scope of the NPN to address. This issue was suggested for consideration at a later date.

Some who were familiar with the NPN Affinity Caucuses noted that they were problematic. While seen as useful initially as a means to identify specific identity-based issues, they were said to have diffused the connection between people, and "balkanized" many groups. As one said, "The caucuses pulled people away from engagement with each other, the magic of being in the room together. There are ways to understand issues of identity, but to surrender to the larger cause as well."

27 As one Partner in a smaller city said, "In the early days, it was a selling point for companies like Irene Hultman, Marlies Yearby, a lot of Movement Research artists could come for a week without distractions. Everyone took advantage of that." As another in a rural setting said, "My contribution was and is space and time. In exchange the artists didn't have to do a performance but they usually wanted to. The NPN artists get the value of it. If I knew more about artists who need cheap space at rates far lower than metropolitan centers I would offer it."

28 The Kitchen was cited as an example of an organization that supports artists, such as Cathy Weiss, who are using technology in their work.

29 Historically, artists who are funded through the Creation Fund could opt not to tour their new work at all. This makes the Creation Fund truly a research and development fund, wherein the creation period provides learning and new information to the artist to apply to future work.



CLOSING COMMENTS

A Galvanizing Process that Generated Widespread Support



SPEYER/CAPPARELL

At first, the effort to convene the Roundtables may have met with some questions and even skepticism. Given an unsure transition and its perceived instability, many questioned if the NPN could, or should, move forward. But, as the Roundtables commenced and the discussion unfolded, something far larger and more important happened: those present rallied around the issues and boldly committed to supporting a newer, more relevant NPN. Roundtable participants were impressed that the response on the part of Partners had been so strong, both in the number that attended and in their enthusiasm about the NPN moving forward. As one long-time Partner commented at the end of the Philadelphia Roundtable, “I am happily amazed...this is really impressive...I feel good about the commitment here.”

APPENDIX A.

Agenda/Questions Asked at Roundtables

MORNING SESSION

WELCOME MK Wegmann

FACILITATOR COMMENTS Suzanne Callahan

INTRODUCTIONS

GROUP DISCUSSION OF ISSUES FACING THE FIELD

Discuss the following questions, among others:

- ✿ What comes across your desk that you can help with, artistically, administratively, or both?
- ✿ What comes across your desk that you cannot address, artistically, administratively, or both?
- ✿ What accomplishments can you celebrate?
- ✿ What are the larger issues you face for the future?
- ✿ Where do you see the greatest needs in the field?
- ✿ Do you draw a distinction between local, versus regional, versus national needs? If so, in what ways?

AFTERNOON SESSION

GROUP DISCUSSION OF ARTISTS, ROLES AND LEADERSHIP

Among the questions to address are:

- ✿ Currently, how are we distinguishing between emerging and mid-career artists?
- ✿ What are the needs of each “group”?
- ✿ Are these definitions flexible, or, do we risk stereotyping artists in using them?
- ✿ Comment on the use of the term community-based artists. What does it imply about an artist’s work, and way of working?
- ✿ Comment on the role of national leadership in the field. What does, or could, exude leadership? In what ways?
- ✿ What about mentorship? How important is it? Is it currently happening in your organization or community? In what ways?

UNFINISHED BUSINESS, QUESTIONS, NEXT STEPS MK Wegmann

ADJOURN

Left: Idris Ackamoor/Cultural Odyssey

APPENDIX B.

Roundtable Participants

PRESENT AT ALL ROUNDTABLES

Suzanne Callahan, Facilitator
Carla Peterson, Writer for Long Range Plan
MK Wegmann, NPN Board Chair and Acting Executive Director

CEDAR RAPIDS, IA

NPN Partners and Artists in Attendance

Mel Andrienga, Legion Arts (Cedar Rapids, IA)
Asimina Chremos, Links Hall (Chicago, IL)
John Herbert, Legion Arts (Cedar Rapids, IA)
Amy Lamphere, Wagon Train Project (Lincoln, NE)
Amanda Long, Alverno College, Alverno Presents (Milwaukee, WI)

In Attendance from the Local Community

Jeff Byrd, Performance Artist and Teacher

NEW ORLEANS, LA

NPN Partners and Artists in Attendance

Ken Bartlett, Dancers Collective of Atlanta (Atlanta, GA)
Shelly Boles, Contemporary Arts Center (New Orleans, LA)
Paul Bonin-Rodriguez, Artist (San Antonio, TX)
Adora Dupree, Artist (Nashville, TN)
John Grimsley, Dog and Pony Theater (New Orleans, LA)
Karla Hartley, Off Center Theater (Tampa, FL)
Sterling Houston, Jump-Start Performance Company (San Antonio, TX)
Karl Lengel, Dog and Pony Theater (New Orleans, LA)
Dan Mayer, On the Boards (Seattle, WA)
John O'Neal, Junebug Productions, Inc. (New Orleans, LA)
V. Dianne Pledger, Hayti Heritage Center/St. Joseph's Historic Foundation (Durham, NC)
Leni Sloan, Contemporary Arts Center (New Orleans, LA)
Alice Valdez, Multi-Cultural Education and Counseling Through the Arts (Houston, TX)
Julie Voigt, Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, MN)
Gail Waden, Kuumba House (Houston, TX)
Therese Wegmann, Dog and Pony Theater (New Orleans, LA)

In Attendance from the Local Community

Troi Bechet, Arts Council of New Orleans (New Orleans, LA)
James Borders, Independent Arts Consultant
Lisa Mount, Independent Producer, Consultant and Touring Musician
Kathy Randels, Performance Artist/Presenter (New Orleans, LA)
Shirley Trusty Corey, Arts Council of New Orleans (New Orleans, LA)

PHILADELPHIA, PA

NPN Partners and Artists in Attendance

Kim Cook, Theater Artaud (San Francisco, CA)
Peter DiMuro, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange (Takoma Park, MD)
Cathy Edwards, Dance Theater Workshop (New York, NY)
Terry Fox, Painted Bride Art Center (Philadelphia, PA)
Arnie Malina, Flynn Theater for the Performing Arts (Burlington, VT)
Carla Perlo, Dance Place (Washington, DC)
Laurel Raczka, Painted Bride Art Center (Philadelphia, PA)
Mark Russell, Performance Space 122 (New York, NY)
Stephanie Starks, King Arts Complex (Columbus, OH)

In Attendance from the Local Community

Gerry Givnish, former Executive Director of the Painted Bride (Philadelphia, PA)
Leah Stein, Artist (Philadelphia, PA)
Nick Stuccio, Philadelphia Fringe Festival (Philadelphia, PA)
Vesna Todorovic, Consultant and Coordinator of NAAMP

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

NPN Partners and Artists in Attendance

Idris Ackamoor, Cultural Odyssey (San Francisco, CA)
Rhodessa Jones, Cultural Odyssey (San Francisco, CA)
Kim Cook, Theater Artaud (San Francisco, CA)
Gene Dugan, Out North (Anchorage, AK)
Dan Mayer, On the Boards (Seattle, WA)
Nancy Rodriguez, Centro Cultural de la Raza (San Diego, CA)
Sylvia Stewart, La Pena Cultural Center (Berkeley, CA)

In Attendance from the Local Community

John Killackey, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
(San Francisco, CA)
Deanna Cooper, NPN Staff

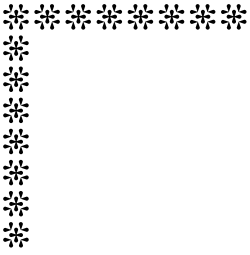
SEATTLE, WA

NPN Partners and Artists in Attendance

Loris Bradley, Diverseworks (Houston, TX)
Pat Graney, Pat Graney Company (Seattle, WA)
Ria Zazycki, Pat Graney Company (Seattle, WA)

In Attendance from the Local Community

Kristy Edmunds, Portland Institute for the
Contemporary Arts, PICA (Portland, OR)
Olga Garay, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
(New York, NY)
Liz Roth, Roth Arts, Inc. (New York, NY)
Blondell Cummings, Artist (New York, NY)
Beth Boone, Miami Light Project, (Miami, FL)



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