



VAN Receives Grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation

The Visual Artists Network (VAN) has been awarded \$150,000 from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, to continue its work over the next two years. The grant will support VAN Exhibition Residencies, the publication of the VAN Catalog, group exhibitions at NPN/VAN Annual Meetings and subsidized travel for artists and VAN Partners to NPN/VAN Annual and Mid-Year Meetings. Our thanks!

A Note from New NPN Chair

On July 1, four NPN/VAN board members take their leave, and Abe Rybeck of The Theater Offensive in Boston takes the helm as chair.

Read Abe's reflection upon stepping up into his new role.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 02

What is Cultural Policy...and what does it mean to NPN?

NPN begins a new ongoing series on cultural policy with an overview by NPN President and CEO MK Wegmann. The quarterly feature will focus on specific cultural policy issues, in tandem with strategic partnerships, that affect artists, cultural organizations and the arts field in general.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 03

New Services Available to the Field

For the last six years, EmcArts (www.emcart.org) has successfully designed and facilitated programs that support cultural organizations in tackling their most complex and pressing challenges. They are now offering five different programs:

1. a retreat on *Adaptive Thinking*
2. a workshop series of the *Roots of Innovation*
3. on-site coaching for *Preparing to Innovate*
4. *Incubating Innovation*
5. and *Adaptive Planning*

If you are interested in taking advantage of any of these new offerings, please contact Richard Evans (revans@emcart.org) before July 31st.

New Chair Looks Forward

by Abe Rybeck

← CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

Every two years the NPN/VAN board of directors elects new officers. This flow of new perspectives keeps our collective imagination sharp. At the same time, we keep an even keel by maintaining most of the executive committee, including a seat for the immediate past board chair. As of July 1, 2014 our colleague and leader Vicki Meek shifted into that role.

I thank Vicki for her wise and gutsy leadership of NPN/VAN and for the generous mentoring she provides me as I step into her fabulous shoes.

Please join me in thanking four terrific board members whose terms ended on June 30, 2014. Each remains seriously engaged in our ongoing work, but the end of their terms gives us a chance to thank them and wish them happiness in their other important ventures. Maria-Rosario Jackson's national leadership will continue to amplify our voice in cultural policy arenas, as she did so effectively as chair of the NPN/VAN board for two years. James Kass keeps us plugged in with the burgeoning national spoken word and hip-hop performance scenes. New Orleans' own Tom Reese has his finger on the pulse of cultural collaborations with academia. Performer Maurice Turner, one of several working artists on the board, helps keep our deepest values — and often a live tune! — in every discussion. We thank them and look forward to staying engaged!

NPN/VAN faces tough challenges as well as exciting opportunities. One of my top priorities for my term as NPN's board chair is to address the looming threats to the survival of many of our NPN/VAN Partners. Racism and other systemic barriers prevent many rural and culturally specific NPN/VAN Partners from thriving. As a network, we stand in solidarity. Through our critical policy efforts, we stand up for artistic vitality and cultural equity at local, regional, national and international levels. But we are doing even more. We are prioritizing the campaign to leverage our network, bringing in new resources and sharing among us the expertise we each hold. I look forward to the challenge.

Abe Rybeck is the founder and executive artistic director of The Theater Offensive in Boston, MA, an NPN Partner. ■

What is Cultural Policy? What does it mean to NPN? How does NPN engage?

by MK Wegmann, CEO & President, NPN/VAN

← CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

In 2004 the National Performance Network published a white paper by Roberto Bedoya, *U.S. Cultural Policy: Its Politics of Participation, Its Creative Potential*. He cites the above quote, and then opens his paper with a further explication of the importance of organizations such as NPN as active voices in the cultural policy arena:

Embracing Evan Alderson's definition of cultural policy as a "system of arrangements," I aim to shed light on who is participating in the discourse. I ask whether there are exclusionary practices within the field of cultural policy, and conclude that there is in fact a significant sector of the non-profit arts community—specifically artist-centered and ethnic specific arts service organizations—that has been marginalized or absent in cultural policy discussions.

The point of view that NPN/VAN can be a voice for a sector of the non-profit arts community often not represented or included in national cultural policy arenas has been a long-standing motivation for NPN. From the beginning of NPN's "reinvention" as an independent organization in 1999, we – board, staff and NPN/VAN Partners – have identified cultural policy as a formal program area; in our last strategic plan (FY14-FY16) we further structured it as a department.

NPN's vision and values statements are the basic points of reference for the positions we take. With that in mind, these are some of the strategies that shape our actions:

- NPN works in Partnership: we maintain close alliances and form different partnerships where we find mutual interests in goals and outcomes, including jointly fundraising for projects. Some examples include the Network of Ensemble Theaters, National Association of Latino Arts and Culture, Alternate ROOTS, South Arts and Fractured Atlas.
- We focus strongly on issues of cultural equity, racial equity and inclusion.
- We identify reciprocity as a way of working toward cultural equity.
- We identify as an artist-centered, or artist-focused, organization and try to promote the issues faced by artists in the current arts climate. We promote our program structures as striving to maintain this.
- We periodically survey the organizations and artists we support and maintain and publish data.

Accepting the construct of "systems of arrangement" — the rules that determine who has access to resources and who those resources benefit — means that we have to be vigilant about how we make rules and distribute the resources we have. Functioning as a network is different than functioning as a service organization. NPN/VAN is not

If cultural policy is defined as a system of arrangements which, whatever its other purposes, supports artistic production, then the artist has some reason for interest in it as an indicator of where support lies. – Evan Alderson

a simple pass-through mechanism to re-grant funds. Rather, we have organized ourselves to act with intention and to create an alternative system for working. In our mission statement we say that NPN is a "cultural organizer, working... to provide leadership." As we continue to build a strong network and organization and extend both the reach and visibility of our activities, our role and influence in policy has an important place.

With this perspective in mind, while cultural policy work often resides in my lap as president and CEO, it is not in the purview of only that position. All NPN staff are part of this effort. After we have been "out there" in the field, we come back and share our experiences with the rest of the staff. By attending conferences and meetings of other organizations, both in our sector and in the larger arts and culture arena, we speak up and represent the ideas on which we base our work. We also serve on boards and panels and freely share our knowledge when asked. We try to build alliances where we find them, whether that is with individuals in institutions that are our close allies or with those who might not share our exact point of view. Thus, we are visible outside of the "choir." Our active membership in the Performing Arts Alliance is an example. We work to be cooperative, as opposed to competitive, in both our internal structure and how we approach relationships in the field.

A final point to be made about NPN's cultural policy work is how we are informed about the issues that we promote. While our mission, vision and values are the underlying drivers, we have to be out there, present and in contact with the field we want to represent. We need to hear directly from artists and NPN/VAN Partners what is important for them. This means we have to go where they are. Having the national office in New Orleans does have the drawback that we are isolated from the volume of artistic activity that takes place in the dominant cultural centers in the US — we are not in daily contact with diverse practitioners as is possible in other cities. We have to travel to see certain artists' work, we have to register and propose topics at the conferences of other organizations, we have to visit NPN/VAN Partner sites to see and learn about their communities. We volunteer to serve on committees and task forces. We move NPN/VAN convenings around the country so we can meet artists in many different places. We speak up and speak out. ■



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