

**An Arts Advocacy Analysis
in the
WESTAF Region**

by Dinah Zeiger
May 2002

WESTAF

SUMMARY

By Dinah Zeiger

Thank you all for being so accommodating with your schedules and making time to talk with me earlier this month regarding arts advocacy within your respective states. As I compiled the information, several themes emerged, which I'll outline briefly for you as a summary:

- Trust and communication between the leadership of the state arts agency and the advocacy group are essential. Positive working relationships are built and maintained when each party is sensitive to the constraints within which both operate. For example, attending each other's board meetings builds understanding, but sensitivity to time (and budget) issues involved when dealing with volunteer staff is necessary.
- Everyone in the arts community is an advocate, but it is especially true of board members of state arts agencies and arts advocacy groups. Boards that reflect all of the communities in a state – urban and rural – are most effective. Train board members to be advocates, rather than assuming they know how to do it. Take the board to the state, moving meeting venues to underserved communities.
- Distance is an issue, but technologies can help overcome it. Computers and Internet access improve efficiency. A database linking member organizations and individuals to their respective lawmakers speeds up the alert/notification process; delivering such messages by email rather than fax or phone calls saves time as well as money. Bring board members to meetings via conference calls, for example, if distances are great.
- Diversify the arts message. States that tie the arts to economic development and cultural-heritage tourism are beginning to see a shift in the attitude of lawmakers to their message. Such a message works in tandem with, not instead of, arts in education and as quality-of-life issues.
- Diversify the advocacy organization base. Many states nationwide have adopted a "cultural advocacy" position, embracing museums, libraries, state historical societies and heritage associations. It broadens the base of support and reaches into most communities, thus putting contact with lawmakers at the local level.
- The most successful advocacy organizations seem to be those with a paid director, whether full or part-time. This is a key position, insuring consistency and timeliness of messages, coordinating activities, building alliances, and representing the group on a continuing basis.

The following research was gathered in early May 2002 to inform attendees of the Executive Director/Arts Advocacy Forum on May 30-31 in Portland, OR.

ALASKA

Budget: None

Staffing: None

Lobbyist: None

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Alaska presently has no arts advocacy organization, although Alaskans Hot for the Arts (AHA!) formed about 1990 to lobby against major budget cuts. Once that crisis passed, the organization died. Charlotte Fox, executive director of the Alaska State Council on the Arts, says everything the council does is a form of advocating for the arts.

Barriers:

In terms of educating lawmakers about the arts, the most effective messages are economic. Alaska is building a statewide cultural center network among Native communities, and “we’ve been able to demonstrate the economic impact of our Native Arts Program, both as it empowers Native artists and strengthens small communities. That’s been an effective message,” Fox said. Another strategy involves the artists-in-schools program. “We encourage teachers to have their students write letters and send pictures about their experiences with these programs,” Fox said. “Lawmakers love it.”

Local arts councils also pitch in. Fox has quarterly teleconferences with the six state-funded local councils to encourage them to talk with their legislators about their projects and concerns. She also encourages them to host events or otherwise speak with their legislators about the state arts budget. “They are seen to be working together, and we’ve not had any budget cuts in a long time,” she said.

Future:

An economic impact of the arts study is underway and due for completion by Spring 2003, which will be used to educate lawmakers about the economic significance of arts and cultural activities statewide. In addition, Fox said, the council needs to capitalize on its cultural attractions by forging a relationship with the state tourism commission.

ARIZONA

Arizonans for Cultural Development

Budget: \$400,000; half from Governor's Awards Dinner; remainder individual/organization memberships; other events

Staffing: 3 FT

Lobbyist: None

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Much of Arizona's arts advocacy coalesces around Arizonans for Cultural Development, formed in 1981 as a 501 (c) 3. ACD organizes workshops and training for arts organizations, and works closely with the Arizona Arts Commission to produce the Arts Congress (arts day at the legislature) and co-host the Governor's Arts Award Dinner. "We advocate through education and training, and in a limited way by lobbying on behalf of the Arizona Arts Commission budget or for bills proposing new arts and cultural facilities," said Becky Gaspar, executive director of ACD. ACD's board is a strategic mix of business and civic leaders and elected officials, a structure that facilitates advocacy because it places the arts message in the heart of various communities.

Barriers:

Gaspar says ACD is undercapitalized for the size of the state. "Awareness of arts advocacy is low, in part because the state is so large. It's often a mileage issue." In addition, there's a very strong "decentralization ethic" in the West, the "eternal issue of large vs. small communities," she said. "There's the constant perception that Phoenix gobbles up all the grants, all the recognition, and everybody else feels they don't get their due." ACD recently began convening "regional arts caucuses," aimed at talking to arts advocates in their own communities and focusing on issues pertaining to their areas and facilities. The organization plans to convene three more caucuses in 2003. "We think it will help generate interest in advocacy at the local level, which could then be tapped at the state level," Gaspar said.

ACD also is re-thinking its governance model, which currently schedules monthly board meetings, requiring some of its members to travel long distances. "It might generate more interest and enthusiasm if we did this quarterly, instead," she said.

Future:

"There's a growing awareness that arts funding must be diversified," Gaspar said. ACD is looking at various models, such as the Scientific and Cultural Facilities Development tax in place in the six-county metro Denver area. Arizona taps a portion of its corporate filing fees for grants to the Arts Commission, and four years ago the state created an arts endowment. Gaspar said ACD also is looking at facilities issues. "We build buildings before we have an organization of the size and competence to handle programming for the. We need to think about how to prepare arts organizations for this task."

CALIFORNIA

California Arts Advocates

Budget: \$60,000. 100 percent funded by 300 member organizations/individuals

Staffing: None currently

Lobbyist: 1 PT, paid

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

California Arts Advocates represents 300 arts organizations and individuals statewide. Governed by a 16-member board comprising arts management professionals from arts organizations, it maintains a close relationship with the California Arts Council. That is due, in part, to its strong ties to the CAC director, who was a founding board member of California Arts Advocates, according to Alan Ziter, CAA board member. “He really keeps information flowing and understands the limits of his position, that he can’t lobby.”

Barriers:

Ziter cites the size of state – its large population and long distances – as major obstacles to advocacy. In addition, lack of staff impedes its efforts. The advocacy organization began as a volunteer organization, then hired a part-time and eventually a full-time manager. “The problem was the association manager raised only enough money to perpetuate his position,” Ziter said. California Arts Advocates is undertaking a governance-model review, which it expects to complete during the summer of 2002. “We need to figure out if we are a membership organization, an umbrella organization – that is, an “alliance of alliances”, or an issues organization,” he said.

Future:

The advocacy organization’s efforts have focused on the CAC budget, and Ziter said it needs to broaden its scope to other funding issues and resources. “Statewide ballot propositions are very important in this state, and the arts need to be part of that effort. We tried to get ballot language in the school bond issue to include arts programs. It didn’t happen, but we are encouraging arts organizations in communities to help get out the vote and to work with districts when the funding comes in,” he said.

The other challenge for California Arts Advocates is getting all of the state’s arts and cultural organizations to “speak with a unified advocacy voice.” The perception is that other “umbrella” organizations in the state are already advocating for the arts, Ziter said. “But many of them are small and don’t have the time or money to be advocates. Then there’s the issue of people’s willingness to pay for advocacy,” he said. “Still, I am optimistic about the potential for a united arts community in California that uses its collective clout to influence public policy.”

COLORADO

Arts for Colorado

Budget: \$21,000

Staffing: Volunteer

Lobbyist: 1 PT, paid

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Arts for Colorado is a recently incarnated advocacy organization structured as a 501 (c) 4, with initial leadership from the Business Committee for the Arts. It is intended to be a grassroots organization of individuals interested in the arts rather than a consortium of arts organizations. Fran Holden, executive director of the Colorado Council on the Arts, views the effort as well-intentioned but thus far ineffective. "They have put together a board and had some meetings statewide, but I don't think they understand how difficult advocacy is in this state."

Barriers:

Holden is required to register as a lobbyist in her position as executive director of the CCA. A statewide budget crisis this spring led to an attempt by lawmakers to eliminate funding for the arts agency, and Holden was instructed by the governor's office to desist lobbying because the administration did not support the funding. "We fended it off by getting local arts organizations to call, write and email the legislators. But it was through my efforts to get the information out to all of them in a timely fashion that it happened," she said. The arts community is limited in Colorado outside of the Front Range urban corridor, Holden says. Without closer communication and a coordinated effort with Arts for Colorado, "we could be operating at cross-purposes, sending mixed messages," she says.

Future:

Holden is not optimistic about the situation. "It is very difficult to create the kind of organization, with the kind of political clout to make a substantial difference. Most people hate politics and keep their distance from it. Lawmakers are elected by the minority who like politics. So, how do you create a lobbying mechanism for the arts from the grassroots if the general population is disaffected?" One answer may lie in recognizing that local control counts: people are interested in being activists for their communities.

IDAHO

Arts for Idaho

Budget: \$4,000/ 100 percent funded by membership

Staffing: None

Lobbyist: Paid; monthly retainer also does administrative work on behalf of Arts for Idaho

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Arts for Idaho advocates on behalf of more than 40 arts agencies statewide and works closely with the Idaho Commission on the Arts, supporting its budget requests and issues before the state legislature. "We have a very good relationship with Arts for Idaho," said Dan Harpole, executive director of the commission. "But I hope to develop an even closer relationship with them. Mutual education about what we both can and cannot do would benefit both our efforts."

Barriers:

The major challenge is funding: Arts for Idaho is a totally volunteer-based organization, except for a paid lobbyist. Dependence upon volunteer support and efforts tends to dilute the efficacy of the arts message, Harpole said. "We (the arts commission) can't use our funding to support advocacy, only for information and outreach, so we can't support them financially. We need some other funding mechanism for advocacy."

As with other Western states, an urban-rural split is evident. One-third of the state's 1.3 million population lives within a 25-mile radius of Boise, with a lot of rural, underdeveloped communities scattered over the rest of the state. "Our 40-plus local arts councils are active," Harpole said. "We recognize that they are key partners in grassroots arts advocacy efforts. One issue is how to better engage at the local level to valuable public support for the arts."

Future:

One party dominates the political scene in Idaho (80 percent Republican). Building arts awareness depends upon getting a consistent message to lawmakers, and Harpole believes one avenue to help unify the message may be the Internet. Idaho ranks in the top five states nationally in Internet use, and Harpole says the arts commission intends to increase the budget for its Web site as a vehicle for electronic communication.

And even with its conservative basis, Harpole says there are strong voices and leadership within the legislature on behalf of the arts. "They can see the value of the arts in community development, economic development and for such things as youth at risk. Overall I sense a growing support for the arts commission (among lawmakers) as a value-added agency. I feel optimistic about arts advocacy in Idaho."

MONTANA

Montana Cultural Advocacy

Budget: \$12,000-\$16,000/per legislative session; 100% funded private donations

Staffing: None

Lobbyist: Paid

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Montana Cultural Advocacy functions only during the biannual legislative sessions when a paid lobbyist advocates on behalf of the Montana Arts Council. Private individuals donate funds to support the lobbying effort, but between sessions, “there is no advocacy to speak of,” said Arlynn Fishbaugh, executive director of the council. “It’s difficult to keep an advocacy organization functioning in a state so huge and sparsely populated. We can’t seem to find enough money to put a viable organization together,” she said. The relationship between the advocacy organization and the arts council is close during the legislative session, with weekly strategy meetings and coordinated messages.

Barriers:

Reliance on private individuals is an impediment to advocacy. “We’ve been accused of having support that’s a mile wide and an inch deep,” said Fishbaugh. Arts funding gets into trouble, and the advocacy group frequently calls on the entire arts community for help. “It works a time or two, but it’s not a long-term solution to advocacy.” Arts advocates need to cultivate partnerships with business communities and state and local economic development agencies. “We’re not likely to get a paid, statewide advocacy organization,” she says. “Partnering with business is more realistic.” For example, the arts council partners with the Montana Ambassadors, a group representing the Economic Advisory Committee, to produce the Governor’s Arts Awards, and the relationship has led to the committee adopting the arts as a platform issue. “In the end, that’s the way we need to go,” Fishbaugh says. “We need the business community involved to help us make our case for the arts. The most persuasive cases are made by the business community, rather than by the arts community, per se.”

Future:

Fishbaugh sees a need to integrate the arts and culture in general into the state’s economic development strategies, although “the Arts Council wants to remain a separate agency rather than being wrapped into the Commerce Department,” she said. “I don’t know how else to get taken seriously.” One valuable development is the affiliation between National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and the National Governor’s Conference. “I could say the same things about arts and economic development, but when that message comes from the governor’s association and goes directly to our governor’s office, she pays attention,” she says. “I’d like to see other, similar partnerships, maybe between WESTAF and state chambers of commerce or the Western Governor’s Association.”

NEVADA

Nevada Arts Advocates

Budget: \$50,000/membership dues and events

Staffing: PT executive director

Lobbyist: Unpaid

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Nevada juggles two arts advocacy organizations: Nevada Arts Advocates, which began about 20 years ago, and Nevada Citizens for the Arts, new this spring. The situation reflects the challenge of developing resources and systems necessary to advocate on behalf of diverse communities and cultural constituencies in the fastest-growing state in the nation. In the recent past, unresolved issues led to an erosion of trust between the Nevada Arts Advocates, located in Las Vegas, and the arts organizations in rural and northern Nevada. After the 2001 legislative session, a consortium of arts organizations in Reno formally created the Nevada Citizens for the Arts.

Barriers:

“The challenges (of two advocacy organizations) are many,” said Susan Boskoff, executive director of the Nevada Arts Council. “If the two work together, and with us, we can craft a consistent and compelling message, placing the arts lobby in a powerful position. But if they produce conflicting messages, it will only confuse lawmakers and the general public. And that can have only a negative effect,” she said. Another issue is lack of basic advocacy skills. Boskoff sees a need for intensive and ongoing training to insure that Nevada’s advocacy leaders are at the forefront of building public understanding and legislative support for the arts.

Future:

Despite what could be a confusing situation, the Nevada chapters of the American Institute of Architects may provide a useful model of how to balance competing groups. The AIA chapters in the north and south parts of the state function independently, but they come together to craft a unified platform of state and national issues. “Each (arts advocacy) organization could work on a local level, but then would join with the Arts Council as a partner to create a statewide arts agenda,” Boskoff said.

NEW MEXICO

Budget: None

Staffing: None

Lobbyist: None

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

New Mexico has no statewide advocacy organization. The New Mexico Arts Commission formed an advocacy task force in 2001, comprising four commissioners, plus the Commission's executive director and multidisciplinary arts coordinator, to determine the level of interest statewide for advocacy and who might partner with them. The task force plans to approach state lawmakers in mid 2002 with a proposal for public funding of \$1 per capita, which would raise about \$500,000 a year for additional grants to arts organizations statewide.

Barriers:

Population and politics impede advocacy efforts. As with all Western states, the distances are great, and populations tend to be concentrated in one or a few urban corridors. Getting lawmakers interested is a matter of demonstrating that their constituents are getting something for their tax money, said Margaret Brommelsiek, executive director. To prepare the ground, the task force last fall sent packets to lawmakers that showed Commission grant funding in all 33 public arts programs in the state. "Lawmakers are very sensitive, we have to show them that their constituents are getting something for the money," she said. In addition, the Commission's local arts coordinator initiated a network of local arts councils, which the task force hopes will become the catalyst for a grassroots advocacy organization. The local arts council network is an important piece of the advocacy organization effort, Brommelsiek said. "Our job is to build (local arts councils') skills as advocates. We see ourselves as facilitators to get the advocacy effort rolling. It's the local councils that will make it happen."

Future:

The state budget is extremely tight, in part because of the effects of September 11, but also due to the 2000 fires that devastated parts of New Mexico and a continuing drought. The first affects tourism, a mainstay of the state's economy; the latter two have influenced corporate decisions about New Mexico as a business location. All affect the state's tax base. Even so, says Brommelsiek, there has been a change in attitude about the arts among lawmakers, and the climate may be right to continue the process.

OREGON

Cultural Advocacy Coalition - acts as a voice for heritage, humanities and the arts; no formal "Arts" advocacy organization

Budget: Ranged between \$15,000 - \$20,000 annually for last two legislative sessions

Staffing: None, contracted "cultural" lobbyist

Lobbyist: The firm of Dotten Cosgrove during 2001 legislative session and 2002 special session of Oregon legislature

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Oregon presently has no statewide arts advocacy organization. Until 1998, the Oregon Advocates for the Arts, a grassroots advocacy organization with contracted staff and a paid lobbyist, advocated on behalf of statewide arts issues and managed special projects and events such as the Governor's Arts Awards. Its overall ability to develop new funds for the arts was questioned which led to the development of a new 501(c)(4), known as the Cultural Advocacy Coalition, formed in the late 1990s, with pro bono legal support from the Portland-based Northwest Business for Culture and the Arts. Its focus was broader, encompassing a range of cultural, historical and heritage organizations including, but not limited to, the arts. During the 1999 and 2001 legislative sessions, the Cultural Advocacy Coalition retained part-time lobbyists to advance the Oregon Cultural Trust.

Those lobbying efforts resulted in the development of new funds for the Oregon Cultural Trust and preservation of the Trust funding during the two special sessions of the Oregon Legislature since January, 2002. The organization remains "dormant" currently, with no paid staff or lobbyist on contract.

A coalition of Oregon's regional arts councils have suggested the development of a new parallel organization with a focus on arts issues and increased funding for the Oregon Arts Commission.

UTAH

Utah Cultural Alliance

Budget: \$8,000/year from member organizations/individuals

Staffing: PT/ 20 hours/month

Lobbyist: None; relies on members' individual efforts. Alliance presents free forums during legislative sessions and provides advocacy training for its members.

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Utah Cultural Alliance advocates on behalf of the Utah Arts Council, as well as state museums, historical societies, libraries and heritage groups. The Alliance formed in 1993 to lobby for one-tenth of one percent funding for all cultural organizations statewide, which was approved in the mid 1990s. "It's a much broader concept than advocating only for the arts," said Victoria Bourns, director of the Alliance. That is simultaneously a plus and a minus: "It's a broader constituency, on behalf of the entire cultural community. But it's also difficult in that we don't have just one focus—like just on the arts. We find that it is difficult to separate our cultural community into smaller facets. The arts, museums or heritage organizations all contribute to a vibrant cultural community, and we want to advance the whole group."

Barriers:

Coordination presents the biggest challenge. The Alliance is funded through memberships, and the budget is insufficient to pay a full-time administrator. Lack of a centralized, computerized database of names, phone numbers and email addresses that links state legislative districts with the names of advocates would increase advocacy efficiency, but there is no staff to create or maintain one. Bourns also points out that people involved in arts and culture tend to be voters, but reaching those voters is difficult. Presently the Alliance is working on a candidate survey to discover who supports cultural efforts. It will be conducted by telephone and mail, and the results will be posted on its Web site, to help members rally votes for lawmakers favorable to support for arts and culture. "We are becoming more savvy, but it's a slow process. Continuity within organizations is sometimes a problem among smaller groups, which may be struggling to survive and don't necessarily see the connection between their votes and advocacy, Bourns said.

Future:

Utah's funding climate is changing, with more lawmakers willing to support arts and culture. "It's an economic issue right now, as it is with most states," Bourns said. "But I think lawmakers would fund more if they had it." State funding for public art projects was eliminated in 2001 but reinstated for 2002, in part because of behind-the-scenes efforts by the Utah Arts Council and the Cultural Alliance. The idea to cut funding originated with the legislature's fiscal analyst, so when the Utah American Institute of Architects hosted a panel discussion on public art, the Alliance invited the legislative appropriations subcommittee members as well as the fiscal analyst to attend. "It was a simple thing," said Bourns. "Bureaucrats have a lot of power. You can't just spend time with lawmakers."

WASHINGTON

Washington State Arts Alliance

Budget: \$120,000/100 percent contributed by 270 organization and individual members

Staffing: 1 FT; 1 PT

Lobbyist: 2, paid.

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Washington State Arts Alliance, the statewide arts advocacy organization, promotes public funding, legislation, and policy favorable to the arts. Gretchen Johnston, executive director of WSAA, works closely with the Washington State Arts Commission, attending its board meetings and coordinating lobbying efforts with its executive director. "We (WSAA) represent the spectrum of the arts community as a whole, from the Arts Commission to arts education," she said. Six years ago, the WSAA board split the state into four regions, with two representatives from each, plus four at-large positions. It uses the at-large positions in particular to balance urban-rural interests on its board and get a broader geographic distribution.

The board meets quarterly, and at least one meeting each year is convened in the rural eastern part of the state to insure visibility in all the communities represented. WSAA has a travel budget to pay expenses for board members attending meetings distant from their regions, and also invested in a sophisticated conference calling system to allow participation by members unable to attend meetings in person. "We decided we were going to make it happen, to make all of the organizations and individuals interested in the arts feel they were represented equally," Johnston said. In addition, WSAA distributes all of its materials – newsletters, updates, alerts – to all arts organizations and individuals, whether they are members or not. "My philosophy is that we have to treat everyone like they are a member, then we pitch them the way NPR does to become members. It's part of our education process, but it takes a real commitment to make it work" Johnston said.

Johnston credits WSAA's database, which links organizations/individuals/groups to congressional districts and to legislators' committee assignments, for its ability to mobilize support when needed. "It strategically pinpoints specific lawmakers and lets us tie them to local arts supporters," she said. WSAA also uses its Website as an effective communications tool. When action is required, alerts and information are posted on the site, and individuals and groups are notified by email that their help is needed. "Electronic communication makes a big difference," she said. "It saves time – we used to spend hours sending faxes and calling people. Now, it's much more efficient."

Barriers:

Johnston cites WSAA's decision six years ago to hire a full-time executive director as the catalyst for changing the urban-rural split that plagues most western states' efforts to make advocacy a statewide project. "We have worked hard to make people realize that advocacy is everybody's responsibility. It's a matter of educating individuals and

organizations, and as our education efforts have increased, people have become more willing to be involved,” she said.

Future:

The challenge is how to keep the advocacy network united and committed during a budget crunch. “The budget is tight, and it will get discouraging. We have to get the message out to our members that we are building for the future, and we have to be ready when economic conditions change,” Johnston said. She remains optimistic, in part because new Arts Commission board members understand that their job is advocacy, and they have a plan for what they should and could do. “I’m excited by the climate of change on the commission. I just hope the economic situation turns around. It will be a test of our membership to see how they prioritize their dues to the Arts Alliance. Overall, I think things look good for advocacy.”

WYOMING

Wyoming Arts Alliance

Budget: \$23,000

Staffing: PT executive director

Lobbyist: None

Advocacy organization/relationship to state arts agency:

Wyoming has no arts advocacy organization, although the articles of the Wyoming Arts Alliance permit lobbying and advocacy. The Alliance, whose primary focus is on block-booking to support arts programs statewide, maintains close ties to the Wyoming Arts Council, and they are discussing advocacy efforts, according to Marcia Dunsmore, executive director of the Wyoming Arts Alliance.

Barriers:

Funding is the biggest barrier. "Wyoming is an extremely conservative state, and people here pride themselves on self-sufficiency. The 'rugged individual' is very alive in Wyoming," which makes it difficult to lobby for arts funding, Dunsmore said. In addition, the local arts infrastructure is under-developed, which complicates a statewide lobbying effort. Wyoming's population is less than 500,000, spread over an enormous expanse, which affects everything from the tax base to the distance people have to travel to participate in the arts. "People in the arts are underpaid and overworked. It's hard to organize and add yet another thing to do," Dunsmore said.

Future:

There's a reluctance within the arts community to lobby state lawmakers, although there were efforts during the recent legislative session to carry the arts message to the legislature. "I think people are beginning to acknowledge the need for it (advocacy); the Alliance hiring me to help grow the organization is a step forward," Dunsmore said.