

2003 Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

Submitted To:

National Endowment for the Arts

VSA arts

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April 5, 2004

2003 Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

"Every time I perform, either 'Tail Tell Tale' or 'Belle's on Wheels' – it's always interesting to me to hear from people who are surprised to see me getting into and out of my wheelchair, moving around on the floor, and moving my legs even a little bit. So many non-disabled people assume that being disabled means you cannot move your body at all, and that creative physical movement is just not something that we do! It is so important to focus on a person's abilities and not the disability for which we are probably not qualified to judge."

Jaehn Clare, Performer at Mississippi Forum for Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

The 2003 Statewide Forums were an opportunity for 5 five state arts agencies and VSA arts affiliates from Hawaii, California, Washington, Mississippi, and Puerto Rico to hold focused meetings on careers in the arts for people with disabilities. These forums were intended to assess career barriers and opportunities as well as the impact of disability and employment related policies, services, and supports on artists and administrators with disabilities in their

respective states. Forum participants reflected on the importance of education, training and community supports to sustain employment; on the day-to-day life in arts-related workplaces for employees with disabilities, and ways to educate and engage arts employers. Each state was expected to generate and implement strategies to advance arts careers for people with disabilities and develop a plan for follow-up activities subsequent to their forums.

Now in its second year, the 2003 Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities initiative was overseen by the National Arts and Disability Center [NADC] at UCLA. The sponsoring partners for 2003 were the National Endowment for the Arts, VSA arts, the Social Security Administration and the NADC.

Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts

The following presents a summary of each of the forums. For each state forum, the participants, forum activities, barriers identified, outcome and future activities are summarized. In those instances when states did not summarize barriers under common themes [i.e. financial, attitudes, etc.], the authors reviewed and organized them accordingly. The summary descriptions from Hawaii and Puerto Rico also include information they provided about solutions generated through their forum activities.

Washington

Forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

- Spokane on September 24, 2003
- Seattle on September 25, 2003
- Vancouver on September 26, 2003

Participants: One hundred and sixteen individuals attended the forums and one person participated via the Web site. This included artists with disabilities, state agency representatives, arts organization representatives, administrators, educators, and others such as parents, advocates, access coordinator, fundraiser, and ARC representative.

Forum Activities: Each forum was guided by the use of Open Space Technology, a discussion method used in meetings where participants create and manage their own agenda of working sessions around a theme of central importance. The Washington Forums were shaped by a predefined question, "*What can we best do to advance careers in the arts for people with disabilities?*" Each meeting began with a keynote presentation by David Roche, a motivational speaker, humorist and performer with a disability, about his own career. The participants then listed all the issues relevant to the central question and selected the issue they wanted to discuss in a smaller group. After the issues were discussed, group members rejoined, shared their discussions with the larger group, and set priorities.

Participants also had the opportunity to choose a workshop to attend: one or two given by artists with disabilities and one given by the Social Security Administration. A choice of workshops was available in each location, although in two locations (Spokane and Vancouver) only one artist with a disability was able to present. The Social Security Administration presented at each location. An online Web site was available for input and commentary, although only one person participated in this way.

Barriers Identified: Participants indicated several barriers to working in the arts on their evaluation forms. These include:

Job Seeking Skills

- Don't know where to look for a job
- Not realizing that there are organizations that encourage individuals
- Need more schooling
- Can't find appropriate jobs
- Getting started making connections with galleries
- Lack confidence
- Gaining exposure

Financial Support

- Fear of losing benefits
- Make little money from art

Attitude toward People with Disabilities

- Stigma toward people with disabilities limits possibilities
- The art community does not take artists with a disability seriously

Attitude toward Art

- Lack of value for art and the need for it in our lives and communities.

Transportation

- Lack of transportation

Outcomes/Future Activities: Throughout the duration of the project, the responses to the question *"What can we best do to advance careers in the arts for individuals with disabilities in Washington State?"* were recorded and made available on the Washington Arts Commission Web site. The input received was collected and formatted into a publication, "Forward Focus" that is currently in the design phase. In addition, the Planning Committee distilled a large number of needs from the discussions at the forums. These are detailed in "Forward Focus."

The Planning Committee identified eleven possible next steps that any arts, education, disability organization or interested individual could adopt. These included:

1. Go to the WSAC Web site and join the conversation around the question "What can we best do to advance careers in the arts for people with disabilities?"
2. Add issues of access to your discussion of EVERY program and project you promote or present
3. Educate yourself and your board with training about the ADA and access
4. Provide potential board members and volunteers with advance training that is inclusive of people with disabilities
5. Include people with disabilities on your board and on other decision-making bodies
6. Make sure your vision, mission, goals and bylaws have inclusive language
7. Check all your communications to make them as accessible as possible
8. Revamp your Web site so that it is "Bobby" approved
9. Invite the VSA arts of Washington site survey team to assess your facility and programs
10. Become a 'groupie' for one artist with a disability: buy their work, attend

their performances, promote their work to your friends

11. Check out the Web site of the International Guild of Disabled

Artists and Performers at www.igodap.org <<http://www.igodap.org>>

One thousand copies of the "Forward Focus" publication will be printed and distributed in the near future. The Planning Committee also recommended that the Web site continue to be open for discussion; the Seattle-area agency meetings continue to explore issues and activities in a collaborative way; workshops be scheduled at the Cultural Congress and the Northwest Booking Conference; include policies regarding access in all grant guidelines and publications; and explore additional projects which showcase the talents of artists with disabilities and professional development opportunities for artists with disabilities.

Mississippi

Mississippi Forum for Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

- Jackson on September 26, 2003

Participants: Approximately 70 individuals attended the forum. Participants were predominantly those involved in the planning of the forums. The planning committee had diverse representation from representatives from arts organizations, disability organizations, and artists with disabilities. While Mississippi had a diverse group of individuals involved in the planning of the forums, they had difficulty in gaining attendance beyond their existing planning committee.

Forum Activities: The forum started with a performance by Jaehn Clare, a professional theater artist and a woman with a disability, entitled "Tail Tell Tale." Participants then had the opportunity to select a presentation to take part of on topics such as "how to become more inclusive of artists with disabilities"; "practical steps for artists in preparing to launch a career", or a consultation session on how to apply to the Mississippi Arts Commission's roster for either touring artist, arts education demonstration, or fellowship program. The keynote address was given by Greg Smith, the founder of "On A Roll," the first and only live weekly syndicated commercial radio talk show on life and disability. The forum day's events concluded with a discussion of benefits from Social Security Administration representative and a wrap up session with a panel of the forum's presenters.

Barriers Identified: Mississippi did not discuss in detail the barriers identified at the forum. However, different themes did emerge from comments from participants including: attitudinal barriers toward people with disabilities, the need for arts organizations to be proactive in working with artists with disabilities, and an overall lack of awareness of opportunities for artists with disabilities.

The primary conclusion drawn by the forum conveners were that this event presented an opportunity to address the issue of careers in the arts for people with disabilities, an area that is largely unrecognized and unfamiliar to all groups. From the forum, Mississippi realized there is much that needs to be done to encourage the work of artists with disabilities and for organizations to become more physically and programmatically accessible. Mississippi is planning to host an annual forum, and to create a resource list for individuals and organizations.

Outcomes/Future Activities: The Mississippi Arts Commission and VSA arts of Mississippi plan to continue developing resources and making connections throughout the state with future activities such as: hosting three community ADA meetings throughout the state of Mississippi; create a directory of artists and organizations that work with artists with disabilities, as well as a consultancy list of professional artists; develop a database of

504/ADA presenters; connect professional artists with VSA arts and in turn direct them to the grant opportunities and application process offered by the Mississippi Arts Commission; and the ADA Advisory Task Force will be given specific tasks such as presenting, planning and implementing. Mississippi is in the midst of planning regional meetings throughout the state.

Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico Forum on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

- San Juan on August 28, 2003
- Carolina/Humacao on September 25, 2003
- Arecibo on October 23, 2003
- Ponce on November 20, 2003

[Note the summary below was taken from the the 2 progress reports as the final report had not yet been submitted.]

Participants: A total of 158 artists with disabilities and government representatives participated in the focus groups. Specifically, 40 individuals participated in San Juan, 41 in Carolina/Humacao, 43 in Arecibo, and 34 in Ponce.

Forum Activities: The four regional forums represented four focus/discussion groups that centered on the themes of needs and obstacles, policies, available services and resources, educational programs, funding, career development opportunities, employment, communication tools, and future strategic actions to impact careers development and employment.

Barriers Identified: In each of the four focus groups, participants expressed their own experiences in developing their artistic careers including the following barriers:

Advocacy and Collaboration

- Lack of empowerment and advocacy efforts among them
- The group acknowledged the need to join forces to be heard and to provide each other with support
- There is a need to unite in some form of association to advocate for their rights and request more support in their development as artists with disabilities
- The need to form some kind of group to advocate more in favor of artists with disabilities from their region

Accessibility and Discrimination

- Lack of transportation
- Lack of accessibility to public places, especially those that could potentially subcontract with artists to perform activities, which limits employment opportunities for artists with disabilities
- Government art related agencies do not comply with ADA requirements
- Discrimination on the basis of disabilities.

Attitudes toward the Arts and Artists with Disabilities

- Attitudinal barriers which question the quality of work performed by artists with disabilities
- Government staff lack sensitivity and knowledge regarding disability related issues and the arts

- Department of Education does not promote art as a career
- Lack of invitations to activities and events where they can sell their arts and where they could continue their growth as artists

Financial Support

- Lack of support from public and private entities
- Lack of financial support to help artists develop their art

Potential Solutions: In addition to identifying barriers and difficulties in developing an arts career, participants suggested multiple strategies for addressing these issues. These included:

Network

- Create an association of artists with disabilities to perform leadership and develop more advocacy skills
- Create an association of artists with disabilities to develop fund raising activities, advocate for their rights, join forces to get included among the artistic segment of our society and to support each other
- Identify leaders to form a support committee that will develop advocacy activities in favor of artists with disabilities
- Support Committee will collaborate with ICP for this purpose

Training and Education

- Art related schools must provide the necessary support to artists who are deaf and people with disabilities in general to ensure quality educational services for the development of careers in the arts
- Develop marketing strategies to promote the abilities of people with disabilities
- Provide training on grant proposals, and educate communities of artists with disabilities about available technical assistance
- Educate professionals on how to work with people with disabilities and available assistive programs

Create and Support Opportunities for Artists with Disabilities

- Provide public and private agencies with incentives to help people with disabilities find employment opportunities
- Create folk art fairs and invite artists with disabilities to sell their art

Advocacy

- Public Demonstrations

Outcomes/Future Activities: As a result of the regional forum/discussion groups Puerto Rico developed a *Directory of Artists with Disabilities and Resources*, issued a call for the creation of the Puerto Rican Artists with Disabilities Association, and developed the Puerto Rican State Advisory Council on Artists with Disabilities. To ensure the continuity of the achievements attained through the forums, the Puerto Rican State Advisory Council on Artists with Disabilities will develop a Three Year Strategic Plan with the future actions to carry out.

California

"Hire Value" Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

- Oakland on December 1, 2003
- Los Angeles on December 8, 2003.

Participants: Approximately two hundred individuals participated in the northern and southern California forums. Participants included artists with disabilities, representatives from arts organizations, disability organizations and state agencies, educators, administrators, and others who participated as a parent of an individual with a disability and as psychologists.

Forum Activities: In preparation for the statewide forums, five regional focus meetings were held throughout the state (San Diego, Los Angeles, Merced, San Francisco and Sacramento) to dialogue arts and disability issues and giving the public an opportunity to give input towards the development of the forums.

The northern and southern California forums each opened with a performance by an artist or artists with disabilities followed by a keynote address. Barry Hessenius, the Director of the California Arts Council, presented the keynote address in Oakland. In Los Angeles, Wayne Cook discussed the current financial climate in California. After the keynote address, an interactive dialogue was used to discuss the career journey of an artist with a disability. In the afternoon, participants had a choice to attend breakout sessions focusing on the business of the arts, navigating social services, resources for artists, education K-12 and university, training, and advocacy and social justice. The forums concluded with a wrap up session and creating a plan to build an arts infrastructure.

Barriers Identified: Artists with disabilities expressed numerous obstacles to building their career in the arts. The major obstacles frequently expressed by artists in both forums include:

Attitude towards an Arts Career

- Art is not seen as a viable career by family, friends, Vocational Rehabilitation, etc.

Financial Support

- Funding for the arts is low in general
- Artists not often compensated for their work
- Few opportunities with benefits (health care)
- Expense of receiving more training, going back to school
- The current economy-no jobs in community
- Time to do art

Need for marketing skills

- Finding places to exhibit art
- Finding an agent
- Knowledge of the business
- No mentors

Disability

- Attitudes about disability and assumptions of what one can do
- Discrimination, lack of access
- One's disability can make it difficult to do art
- Knowing when or whether to disclose a non-visible disability
- People look at art through a disability lens, not sure if work is of real quality

Outcomes/Future Activities: Participants expressed a commitment to building an arts network/infrastructure through stating their next steps after the forum. The most common response was that participants planned to network with those they had met at the forums and to outreach to other organizations and individuals to tell them about the forums. This included participants offering to use their talents for the infrastructure, attend future meetings, look for others working in the field, set up local networks by discipline, provide information about network on their Web sites, and outreach to artists with disabilities. Advocacy was another major action participants intended to take. Participants intended to organize attacks against the repeal of the Lanterman Act, investigate ways to become more independent, contact current legislators about disabilities and the arts, press art galleries and art supporters to put their money where their mouth is.

The California Arts Council is currently working to build an arts and disability infrastructure, similar to the support given to 14 other arts networks in the state. Through continued collaboration with the National Arts and Disability Center, an administrative coordinator with a disability has been hired part-time to facilitate the development of the network. Two meetings, one in southern and one in northern California, are being planned for April and May 2004 to bring network members together and develop a set of core beliefs to lay the foundation for continued work. The resources of the Arts Marketing Initiative of the California Arts Council are being contributed towards the advancement of the network.

Hawaii

"Artists Mean Business in Hawaii" Public Discussion on Creating Career Opportunities for Artists with Disabilities"

- Hawaii on May 30, 2003;
- Kauai on November 1, 2003
- Oahu November 7, 2003
- Lanai –November 14, 2003
- Maui November 21, 2003

Participants: There were 128 total participants of the forums. This may be an under representation because at times, the number of participants were reported, other times the number of surveys. In Oahu, 11 attended the "Artists Mean Business in Hawaii, Public Discussion on Creating Career Opportunities for Artists with Disabilities." Approximately 50 attended the forum in Hawaii. In Kauai, 18 individuals completed an information sheet. In Lanai, 24 students and 10 adults participated in interviews. Fifteen individuals participated in a roundtable discussion in Maui, including artists with disabilities and individuals that support artists with disabilities.

Forum Activities: While not all events held on the various islands of Hawaii were the same, they each brought together individuals to help identify strengths in promoting access and career opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities, as well as weaknesses in the creative industries that are obstacles and limit access. Each of the Forums were held on a University of Hawaii community college campus and was co-sponsored by the office of the mayor of each island with participation and interest from the local departments of economic development.

On the islands of Hawaii and Oahu, public discussions were held. Kauai's forum "Promoting the Creative Power in People with Disabilities, Artists Mean Business" included exhibiting artists, entertainment by musicians and hula dancers with disabilities, a keynote speaker by an author/illustrator with disabilities, and a panel discussion with artists and their allies addressing the question "What can we best do, island by island, to advance careers in the arts for individuals with disabilities in Hawaii?" Follow-up interviews were conducted with ten

participants. The interview focused on three main issues: (1) strategies for success; (2) barriers and concerns; (3) and recommendations for making arts opportunities accessible for people with disabilities.

In Lanai interviews with students at Lanai High School and adults involved with arts and disabilities took place. Students discussed their dreams, possible barriers to achieving those dreams and recommendations about ways to achieve them. Adults in Lanai were also interviewed about the strengths of the Lanai community, in particular, and the state of Hawaii in general, in promoting access to the arts and career opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities. Individuals were asked to also discuss weaknesses in the creative industries that are obstacles and limit access and opportunities for people with disabilities. Finally, the participants were asked to make recommendations and suggestions for policy, procedural and or personal changes needed to overcome system and attitudinal barriers.

A roundtable discussion on Maui was held with 15 participants, including artists with disabilities and individuals that support artists with disabilities. Participants discussed successful strategies for artists with disabilities, and aspects of life on Maui that facilitated access to jobs in the arts for artists with disabilities.

Barriers Identified: Forum participants island wide discussed barriers and obstacles for individuals with disabilities pursuing a career in the arts in Hawaii. They included the following:

Financial Support

- Lack of adequate and inconsistent funding was mentioned by participants at every forum island wide
- Artists need funding for supplies, improved programs, supports, resources, and assistive technology
- Most participants were not aware of scholarships, grants, and other funding opportunities
- Fear of losing critical federal and state assistance and benefits if employed

Geographical Isolation/Transportation

- Because of the sparse population and geographical separation of the islands artists often find it difficult to network island wide
- Transportation throughout the islands is expensive and even transportation on their island of residence can be a challenge

Service Systems

- Many forum participants indicated that the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Security Administration, and Developmental Disability Division Services were a formidable barrier to their access to a career in the arts because of a fear of losing benefits

Education and Training

- Inadequate and unqualified teachers and mentors on Lanai were also mentioned as a barrier to achieving student dreams
- Participants indicated they needed education and training in how to market their work

Potential Strategies/Solutions: Forum participants also provided recommendations that would make careers in the arts more accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Mentoring

One of the most frequently suggested recommendations was the establishment of relationships to provide qualified mentors for artists with disabilities interested in pursuing a career in the arts. Adequate training needs to be provided for artists, with and without disabilities, so they can effectively assist an artist with a disability in career development.

Networking of Artists Island Wide

Many forum participants indicated a need to network with other artists on neighbor islands. It is important to learn from other artists the process of becoming successful, including marketing, technique, and accessible venues. Participants suggested that artists collaborate to make a video to distribute to vendors and meet on a quarterly or biannual basis to share ideas and accomplishments.

Collaboration of Arts and Disabilities Organizations

Many forum participants island wide indicated a need for collaboration between arts and disabilities organizations. Participants suggested that arts and disabilities organizations should be more creative about collaborating with other agencies or groups because there are a plethora of organizations that are interested in people with disabilities and arts.

Support Artists on Policies and Processes of Small Business

Forum participants also indicated that artists with disabilities need to be educated about policies of DVR, SSI, and DD division services and small businesses. Classes, workshops, and forums on procedures to educate artists with disabilities that are interested in self-employment are needed. Individuals also need resources to understand and assist in the coordination of small business efforts. Specifically, individuals need to be educated about opportunities for funding for the start-up of small businesses.

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Use Existing Resources and Natural Supports

Throughout the islands forum participants discussed strengths of Hawaii that could provide individuals with disabilities access to career opportunities in the arts. These included the natural supports of family, friends, and teachers, the cultural diversity that provides for various artistic expressions, and the great opportunities that exist because of the large tourism industry in Hawaii.

Outcomes/Future Activities: Hawaii is continuing its work in making arts and employment a priority through two major activities: 1) opening a center for artists with disabilities and 2) convening a legislative summit around the issue of employment and the arts. Hawaii has secured a building that used to be a state institution, and is converting it into an inclusive community center aimed at promoting access to creative business opportunities and career development for people with developmental and other disabilities. The center called Hawaii Artspace (HAPA) officially opened March 19-20, 2004 for an open house. The Hawaii Artspace is an arts-focused, creative industries vocational school intended to be a creative professional development and business center for students, and artists in training with developmental and other disabilities. The center is a transitional zone from school to work for 12th graders in public school, and artists in training with developmental and other disabilities who meet the entrance criteria. The culminating activity of the "Artists Mean Business in

Hawaii statewide forum series was a legislative summit at the State Capitol held March 30, 2004 to address the changes needed to bring people with disabilities out of the social and economic margins of Hawaiian island communities, by providing them with employment and self-employment options in the arts and arts-related fields. Recommendations for systems change needed to advance arts access and career opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities in Hawaii were provided.

The Future

The participating 2003 state arts agencies and VSA arts affiliates have decided to continue meeting monthly via teleconference calls to discuss their ongoing activities related to careers in the arts for people with disabilities. These meetings have also been made available to the 3 three states that convened forums in 2002- Maryland, Minnesota and New Mexico. All three of these states are interested and have started participating in the teleconferences. Both New Mexico and Minnesota have ongoing activities that resulted from their forums.

The commitment to continue this work is strong as evidenced by the ongoing efforts being made by all of the 2003 and most 2002 states. However, limited staff resources and lack of long term sustainable funding are issues that ultimately may constrain these agencies and organizations ability to move forward with their efforts.

