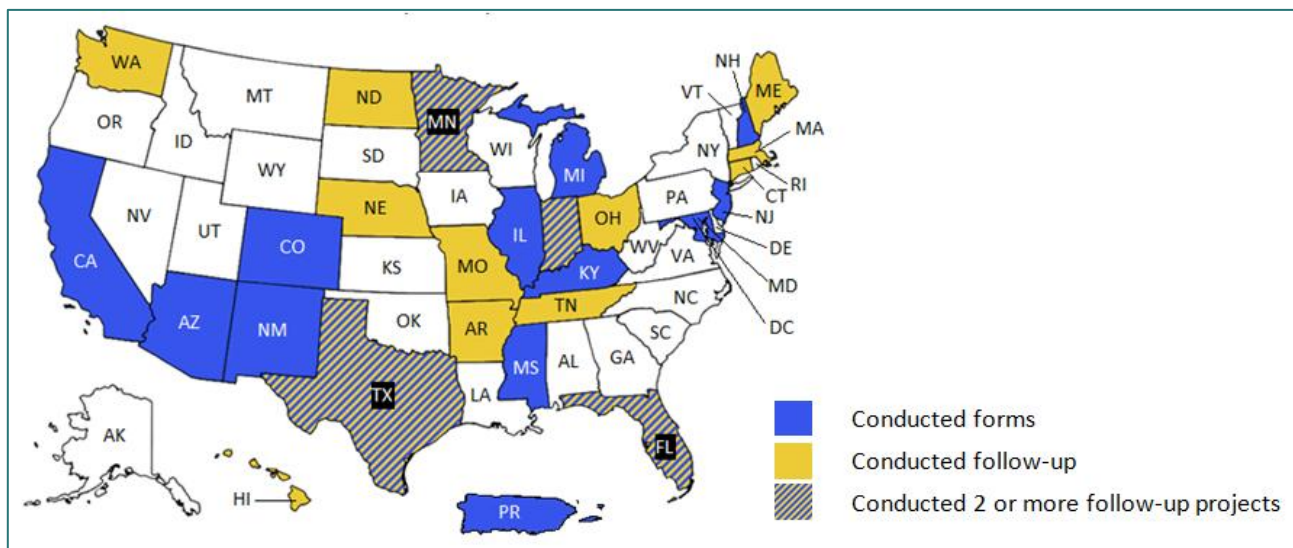


Cultivating Talent: Improving Access to Arts Careers for Artists with Disabilities

Executive Summary

In June 1998, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) convened the first-ever National Forum on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities (<http://arts.gov/accessibility/accessibility-resources/leadership-initiatives/careers-arts>) at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC. This event brought together key players from state and federal agencies, educators, state arts agencies, and others to: 1) assess the state of education and career opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and 2) identify strategies for overcoming obstacles. A key recommendation from the National Forum was for states to conduct their own Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities (“Statewide Forums”) to mirror a needs assessment and strategic planning to advance careers of artists with disabilities given the challenges and assets within each state. From 2002-2013, 27 unique states conducted Statewide Forums, and 15 of those received additional support to sustain their efforts through Follow-Up Projects. Over 9000 artists with and without disabilities, service providers, arts organization staff, educators, and others working with artists with disabilities participated in Statewide Forums or Follow-Up projects, and hundreds of partnerships were formed across arts and disability organizations.



The Statewide Forums served to build these partnerships, assess needs, develop a strategic plan, and identify priorities for serving artists with disabilities. Follow-Up Projects responded to artists' expressed needs for professional development particularly in marketing and promotion, networking with other artists and employers, and opportunities to showcase their art. Follow-Up Projects focused primarily on:

- Providing professional development workshops to artists with disabilities and those who work with them on topics such as self-employment and arts and disability resources.
- Developing websites or website content for artists with disabilities such as:
 - artsworkindiana.org
 - yacomm.org/ya-artists/
 - ndcpd.org/artequalswork
- Traveling exhibitions, and
- Forming artist networking groups.



Missouri's "Where We Can Read the Wind" Exhibition.

Impact

Through the Forums and Follow-Up Projects artists with disabilities:

- Increased their self-confidence,
- Increased their artistic skills and business/marketing skills,
- Increased their connections to other artists and arts employers, and
- Earned money through short term opportunities as artist speakers/facilitators, designing marketing materials (i.e. logos, brochures) and directly through sales from their artwork.

“At that forum I not only met other artists in a similar situation to mine but I also sold two of my drawings, which boosted my confidence. At the forum I learned a lot from the other artists and the sponsors I met. ... Most importantly was making connections with the people I met, just to know there are others out there who are like me.”

Through the Statewide Forums and Follow-Up Projects, state arts agencies:

- Built an infrastructure that incorporated accessibility into their programming. Engaging artists with disabilities became part of the organizational culture where there was increased commitment from staff, leadership, and Boards.
- Developed new partnerships amongst arts and disability communities. Core partners included the VSA affiliate, Department of Rehabilitation, University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs), regional arts councils, local arts organizations (museums, galleries, theaters), and local and state colleges.
- Identified artists with disabilities, including those that were already part of their networks, but had not previously disclosed a disability.
- Increased knowledge of professional development needs and priorities for artists with disabilities.
- Created opportunities for artists with disabilities through expanding eligibility of calls for art and/or providing grant opportunities for artists with disabilities.

Keys to Success and Sustainability

Several themes emerged as contributing to the success and sustainability of Statewide Forum activities including:



- **Be relevant.** Design activities that respond to an expressed need. It is important to continue to assess needs over time and develop or expand arts programs to meet the current need.
- **Develop a core partnership with a few organizations sharing the major roles and everyday responsibilities.** Expand your partnerships to assist in providing other resources such as promoting your events through their networks or providing space.
- **Treat artists with disabilities as artists first.** Artists with disabilities have similar training and education needs to other artists. They are also just as talented, and should be judged on the quality of their work and their work treated in a professional manner.
- **Document the process** to maintain continuity in times of staff transition and to make expectations of partners clear.
- **Be intentional in your outreach.** Show your willingness to work with artists with disabilities by including accessibility and availability of accommodations in all materials and promoting your programs among disability organizations.
- **Expand your ability to work with artists with disabilities.** Arts agency staff benefit from receiving training and technical assistance as well as interacting with peers doing similar work. Seek out and support staff in taking advantage of professional development opportunities.
- **Evaluate your efforts.** Throughout the planning and implementation of arts projects, it is important to know what is working, what is not, and collect stories of success.

[T]his is actually art and not necessarily just what people would consider therapy or craft movement.