

2002 Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts Report and Recommendations

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Abstract

Three Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities were convened in Maryland, New Mexico, and Minnesota in 2002. A total of three hundred and thirty two artists with disabilities, arts administrators, rehabilitation specialists, educators and policy makers participated. The forums consisted of keynote presentations, panel discussions, and prioritizing and planning sessions that addressed career opportunities and the elimination of barriers for artists with disabilities. The recommendations generated from these forums to advance career opportunities are discussed.

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Main Entry: ¹ca·reer
Pronunciation: k&-'rir
Function: *noun*

a field for or pursuit of consecutive progressive
achievement especially in public, professional,
or business life

4 : a profession for which one trains and which

is undertaken as a permanent calling^[i]

Advancing careers for people with disabilities in general, and in the arts in particular, requires the commitment and engagement of a wide range of stakeholders at the federal, state and local level. In 1998, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in partnership with three federal agencies: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education and the Social Security Administration convened the National Forum on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC. Present at this groundbreaking event were 300 artists with disabilities, arts administrators, leaders of the arts, educators, rehabilitation professionals, and policy makers. Its purpose was to assess the state of education and career opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and to identify strategies to reduce and overcome obstacles. Subsequently, three follow-up summits focusing on arts education, arts administration and vocational rehabilitation were assembled to determine specific projects to advance education and career opportunities in the arts. A final meeting on November 30, 2000 prioritized all of the recommendations and strategies that had been generated.^[ii] Three initiatives resulted on the basis of these recommendations, the Careers in the Arts Mentoring Project^[iii], ArtsBridge^[iv] and the Statewide Forums for Careers in the Arts. This report will discuss the Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts program.

The Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities program was established by the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, VSA arts and the National Arts and Disability Center at UCLA. It was developed in order to bring a local voice to the national deliberation around careers in the arts for people with disabilities. Three statewide forums were convened in Minnesota, New Mexico and Maryland in 2002. The following report is organized into five sections. The first two sections give the context for the statewide forums through an overview of careers in the arts and the barriers identified for artists with disabilities. This is followed by a summary of each of the forums, recommendations to advance the careers of individual artists with disabilities, and future work.

Careers in the Arts

“What is a career in the arts? What is a professional –Let’s just say what it means--is you make money at your art. But that’s what we’re talking about. The ability to get your craft to a level where you can make money at it” (Victoria

Lewis, Co-Director, Other Voices Project, Mark Taper Forum).^[v]

Occupations

Unlike other occupations (i.e., lawyer, doctor, teacher), there is no agreed upon definition of who should be considered an artist or what constitutes the work of an artist. While the common perception of an “artist” is a painter, dancer, actor, writer or musician; do architects, newspaper photographers, also qualify as artists? How one defines an artist will affect how one identifies the range of careers. In this paper careers in the arts is defined from a broad perspective, incorporating

the work of the traditional artist^[vi] as well as the range of occupations related to literary, performing, visual, and media arts. This definition of careers in the arts also includes technical and administrative work in the arts field. There are literally hundreds of traditional arts occupations and arts-related jobs.^[vii] Table 1 presents examples of traditional and arts related occupations.^[viii]

Table 1. Examples of Occupations for Artist Employment

FIELD	OCCUPATIONS	
Literary Arts	Author	Critic
	Playwright	Web text developer
	Copy editor	Greeting card writer
Performing Arts	Dancer	Choreographer
	Costume designer	Set decorator
	Music educator	Recording engineer
Visual Arts	Painter	Framer
	Graphic artist	Jewelry designer
	Fashion designer	Photographer
	Architect	
Media Arts	Journalist	Telecommunications specialist
	Advertising media buyer	Voice-over artist
	Sound design	Website designer
Arts Administration	Arts administrator	Production executive
	Executive director	Public relations specialist
		Art events planner

Education and Training

Arts careers vary in respect to their requirements in education, training and work experience. Artists also may have a range of possible employers and work settings in the private or public sector.

Preparation typically involves a comprehensive course of study and/or technical training in a particular discipline, craft or field as well as practical experience. Many fields require a college degree, although in some areas of work one can acquire necessary skills through apprenticeship, vocational training or on- the-job work experience. Academic study along with training allows the artist to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to produce or perform works of art. It also permits them to exercise creativity; analyze, interpret and evaluate works of art; and acquire necessary business skills.

Work Context and Earnings

For most of my employment history, I've worked in some sort of non-profit arts organization, although I was employed by a "for-profit" company once – I did an 18-month stint as a television commercial producer at a local TV station in Macon, Georgia a few years ago. To date my record for holding a job – one job continuously - is almost two years (Jaehn Clare, VSA arts Georgia). [\[ix\]](#)

Artists work in the for-profit, not for profit and self-employment categories of artist employment, with many artists traversing in and out of these various sectors throughout their careers.

Career opportunities exist within *commercial enterprises* such as publishing, design, music, and theater, and also in *nonprofit organizations* such as museums, dance companies, concert halls, and folk life centers, and schools and universities. As reported by Galligan, artists represented 1.47% of the workforce in 1998 and are growing faster than the US labor force as a whole. [\[x\]](#)

Much of the growth in arts careers is occurring within commercial parts of the arts sector. The shift in the United States economy from manufacturing to information and services has resulted in more "creative" jobs from the arts and cultural sectors. The US Department of Labor predicts that the employment of artists and arts-related workers will grow as fast as the average of all occupations through the year 2010, with some professional positions such as designers, actors, producers, directors, and writers expected to grow faster than average. Two of the fastest growing arts-related occupations predicted through 2010 are desktop publishing and computer software applications. [\[xi\]](#)

There is tremendous variation in annual earnings of artists. Depending on the art form and occupation, an artist may earn either less than minimum wage or above average to a substantial income. Not surprisingly, greater earnings are found in the for-profit or commercial sectors. Careers in the arts, particularly for the traditional artist, differ from most other careers. According to the US Department of Labor, more than half the artists employed in 2000 reported that they were self- employed. Many artists work as freelance, independent contractors. The circumstances for employment in some arts fields are complicated by the sporadic nature of the work. Furthermore, artists may need to secure alternative "day jobs" to meet their financial obligations. Despite the increase of employment opportunities in arts-related industries, individual artists still struggle to keep pace with similarly educated professionals. Individual artists' earnings were found to be 71%-89% of mean professional salaries. Artists employed in the non- profit arts sector, generally do so with low [\[xii\]](#)

wages, no health or retirement benefits and discontinuity in paid employment.^[xiii] Nonetheless, despite potentially challenging employment circumstances, there has been a steady increase in the number of individuals who identify themselves as artists. Arts careers may offer personal satisfaction and lifestyle choices that go beyond monetary rewards offered by other careers.

Barriers to Careers

Every artist faces challenges and barriers to advance their careers. Pamela Walker, an artist with a disability, contends *all artists* require a multi-layered array of opportunities to develop their careers that includes: money, training and education, showcase opportunities, work experience, peer support and networking opportunities.^[xiv] To date, there has been little formal study of the specific barriers that confront people with disabilities who want a career in the arts or their actual employment in the arts. The first significant undertaking to identify barriers was carried out at the 1998 National Forum on Careers in the Arts for People and the subsequent summits and meetings. The findings of these meetings produced many similar themes regarding the obstacles faced by artists pursuing a career in the arts. These have been detailed in a series of reports.^[xv] The identified barriers fell into four broad categories:

Lack of Access to the Arts Community. For artists with disabilities the fundamental barrier is access to the arts community. Whereas access more commonly refers to the availability of a service or program, **access to the disability community is about civil rights**, and specifically about meeting the legal requirements of the Americans with

Disabilities Act (1990) as well as the spirit of the law.^[xvi] **Architectural and programmatic barriers to participate in the arts** remain a significant barrier to participation in the arts. There is a lack of access to performance space, exhibit halls and other physical environments where artists would be involved or perform their work. Full access requires the arts community to view disabled artists, arts administrators or co-workers as participants, rather than as a population to be served. By ensuring access, the arts community would demonstrate full inclusion.

Limited access to training and education. Some of these barriers are attributed to **stereotypes and low expectations** of people with disabilities by education and arts professionals. People with disabilities are frequently not perceived as creative innovators and/or as capable of fulfilling the requirements of a professional arts curriculum within the education and arts communities. To not have **access to arts training in a range of settings** such as primary and secondary school, summer institutes, community-based classes; summer institutes may preclude students with disabilities from developing the necessary skills to qualify for admission into advanced training or postsecondary education.

Financial disincentives. Financial disincentives and fear of loss of health care and other needed services may face any person with a disability using benefits and seeking employment. However, there are specific barriers to employment for artists with disabilities related to public benefits. Barriers for artists include **restrictions on benefits** because of irregular or infrequent compensation for their work. Some artists experienced **severe financial consequences** for receiving commissions, fellowships, grants or other monetary awards.^[xvii]

Arts careers are discouraged. The arts are not perceived as a valid career path by rehabilitation programs. Vocational counselors often steer individuals into careers they perceive without risks or meet more narrowly defined vocational outcomes. People with disabilities are frequently not informed about or encouraged to pursue arts-related occupations.

Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts

The statewide forums were a first-time effort by three individual states to specifically bring attention and support careers in the arts for people with disabilities. Modeled after the success of the National Forum on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities, the statewide forums brought together artists and administrators with disabilities, advocates, rehabilitation personnel, and others to convey information and discuss statewide needs. After a rigorous application process, **three state arts agencies and their VSA arts affiliate from New Mexico, Maryland and Minnesota** were selected to conduct their respective forums. Forum leaders were charged to evaluate the unique aspects of employment and the arts for people with disabilities in the states and address the following:

- Provide an opportunity for people with disabilities to be engaged in decision-making roles in policies and programs that affect their lives;
- Empower artists and administrators with disabilities to pursue their careers in the arts;
- Encourage partnerships with individuals, state and community agencies, and organizations to expand resources and enable solutions to identified problems;
- Form a network of artists with disabilities and collaborators; and
- Educate policymakers.

What follows is a summary of each of the forums and contains a description of the participants, key partners, forum activities and future activities planned as a result of the forum. Each state convened a planning committee that consisted of artists and arts administrators with disabilities, staff and council/board representatives from the state arts agency, and VSA arts affiliate.

Minnesota

The Art of Employment: Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

March 25 & 26, 2002 (one and a half days)

October 5, 2002 (half day)

McNamara Alumni Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

Partners: Minnesota State Arts Board, VSA arts, Disability Services Office at the University of Minnesota, Guthrie Theatre, American Express

Participants: Eighty-five people participated in the March forum and 41 attended the follow-up meeting in October. Of the 85 participants in the March Forum, 51 were artists followed by arts administrators, vocational rehabilitation professionals and others. In the October forum, 33 of the 41 participants were artists.

Forum Activities: The March forum consisted of a keynote address, facilitated discussion groups, and panel presentations that addressed the visual arts, writers, performers, organizational Issues,

and career planning. The forum was designed to provide current and practical information to individuals with disabilities seeking employment in the arts. It also provided an opportunity for individuals with disabilities to network with others having similar interests and career goals. Almost all participants chose to create a 6-month work plan delineating one or more goals and specific steps to achieve that goal. Participants at the October gathering reviewed individual work plans; goals achieved, and identified future needs.

Future Activities: VSA arts Minnesota, the Minnesota State Arts Board and Springboard for the Arts have committed to hosting four gatherings for forum attendees in Minneapolis and St. Paul through July 2003. The participants, predominantly artists with disabilities, will set the agenda and create the priorities for future work. A desire to create or produce a grass-root, community performance or exhibit opportunity for artists with disabilities is one area of focus under discussion.

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New Mexico

Careers By Design: People with Disabilities Achieving in the Arts

September 13 & 14, 2002

Albuquerque Convention Center, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Partners: New Mexico Arts, VSA arts New Mexico

Participants: One hundred and twenty-two people attended the statewide forum. Eighty-nine registered as artists (particularly visual artists), with other participants identifying themselves as arts advocates, vocational rehabilitation professionals and "other". Forty-three percent of the participants indicated their career goal was to become a full-time self-employed artist. Half of the participants (59) came from Albuquerque, the remainder traveled from other parts of the state.

Forum Activities: Sessions included resource and information sharing by visual and performing arts presenters, artists, and representatives from the Social Security Administration and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. There were also panel presentations that addressed grant writing and publicity/public-relations. For each presentation there were two to five co-presenters/panelists who were carefully selected for their knowledge and expertise. There also was an open art studio room and resource tables to meet during breaks and to network. A closing session was used to identify future needs and establish priorities. Artists with disabilities provided evening entertainment.

Future Activities: New Mexico Arts is using the outcomes of the evaluation to identify effective means to further this effort. They are examining several options that include: 1) working with the annual New Mexico Statewide Disability Conference to insert an artistic component each year that will enable artists with disabilities to meet on an annual basis, and 2) offering forum attendees the NMA quarterly newsletter which lists many opportunities for artists. VSA New Mexico follow-up has already begun with the establishment of a statewide outreach and support network for artists. In consultation with artists around the state, VSA New Mexico will support a redesigned website with up-to-date information on art events, online samples of work by artists with disabilities, and career opportunities. They will also offer a schedule of classes to develop skills and techniques for visual artists with disabilities.

Maryland

Maryland Forum on Careers

September 23, 20002

Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland

Partners: Maryland State Arts Council, VSA arts Maryland, Governor's Advisory Committee on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities, Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities; Maryland Office on Special Projects, and Maryland's State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services

Participants: One hundred and twenty-five artists with disabilities, educators, employers and state and local policy makers attended from across the state. The majority of the participants were professionals from vocational rehabilitation, education and arts administration.

Forum Activities: The event consisted of keynote addresses, panel discussions, prioritizing and planning sessions, and performances. Sessions were organized by artistic discipline (dance, literary, music, theater, visual arts) and by theme - education, access and resources for artist. Artists with disabilities provided evening entertainment.

The panels presented by employers or representatives of arts institutions discussed qualities in an artist that are indicative of artistic ability, as well as some of the career opportunities available in arts administration and behind the scenes. Educators delineated the requirements for professional training and shared experiences of students with disabilities in their programs. Existing resources, services and supports for artists, employers and arts institutions were identified. Successful artists with disabilities discussed how they were able to gain appropriate training and to create a career in the art for themselves. Small groups prioritized and identified action items needed to support careers in the arts. Participants established follow-up goals, activities and a timeline.

Future Plans: The conference conveners developed specific goals, objectives, and a timeline for implementation through June of 2003. Their goals address three target groups: the disability community; arts producing organizations, programs and institutions; and artists with disabilities. They aim to share information with the disability community about the arts community and resources available. They will disseminate information tailored to arts producing organizations and institutions about artists with disabilities and accessibility to the arts. They plan to identify and integrate professional artists with disabilities into existing arts committees and programs at the state and local level. Additional funding will be sought in order to develop a database of artists with disabilities and provide training.

Recommendations

Forum participants were asked to make recommendations about what is needed to advance their careers and eliminate barriers. Participants either responded to open-ended questions on their forum evaluation forms or during problem/solution generating sessions held as part of the forum activities. As previously reported, each of the states has designed future activities that address some of the recommendations made by their forum participants. The recommendations made were grouped into

the following five areas:

- 1. Arts organizations should ensure full accessibility for artists and arts administrators with disabilities.**

It is essential that the arts community make their programs and institutions accessible. An increase in the participation and presence of artists with disabilities in state and local level arts committees, activities and programs would be one way to demonstrate access and for the arts community to become informed about disability issues.

- 2. Support the development of an alliance or statewide network of artists with disabilities.**

There is a need for ongoing statewide networking of artists with disabilities. The forums established new relationships and diminished the isolation that artists with disabilities experience. Artists with disabilities want to share with others their stories, successes, trials and tribulations in open and honest gatherings in order to learn and inform their own work. Participants found by sharing with others it gave them motivation, self-confidence, and a better understanding of their individual goals. Although outside barriers (such as Supplemental Security Income limits, employment settings, general community access, etc.) were mentioned, getting past personal and internal barriers was most salient to the forum attendees. Participants identified the desire to continue meeting and communicating with one another, to go to each other's events, get involved, be present and contribute. A creation of a statewide artist directory would assist in both the identification of artists with disabilities and as a marketing tool to advance their work.

- 3. Establish a mentorship program for emerging artists with disabilities.**

Artists spoke of the need for mentors for advice and coaching. Some of the panel presentations at the forum had established artists with disabilities describe their career paths, how they navigated some of the obstacles they encountered, and provided specific guidance on how to develop a career. These artists and performers with disabilities both humored and inspired their fellow artists with their knowledge, perseverance and success stories. Many of these presenters identified key individuals who served as "guides" or "mentors" during critical times in their own professional development. Formalizing a mentorship program within states and local communities to provide guidance and coaching would provide another necessary support towards advancing careers.

- 4. Support education and training programs that enable artists with disabilities to develop their artistic skills as well as business, marketing and other forms of self-promotion.**

A significant number of artists were unable to afford the cost of the conference and were subsidized by the conference conveners. Training and education must be affordable, accessible and geographically dispersed within states. Educators and vocational counselors also want materials, information, and instructional methods on how to work and provide accommodations to emerging/established artists with varying disabilities.

- 5. Establish partnerships and communication linkages between arts organizations and the disability community to ensure equal opportunity for people with disabilities to**

participate, both as creators and audiences.

There is a need for stronger partnerships and communication between artists with disabilities and local arts organizations and programs. It is critical to undertake and develop public awareness activities for the entire arts community about the rights, contributions and unmet needs of artists with disabilities. Even the modest accomplishment of inclusion of artists with disabilities in artists' directories, and gaining access to information and referral information may dramatically affect the ability of an individual artist to more fully participate in their profession. Artists with disabilities want specific information about which services and organizations will assist them, as well as how to work with agencies and service providers to reach their employment goal.

The Future

The Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts Program is continuing in 2003 under a partnership between the NEA, VSA arts, and the National Arts and Disability Center at UCLA. Based on the experiences from the first year of this program, modifications were made to the 2003 program. A more extended planning committee was recommended to bring additional partners into the development of the forums. The aim is to bring into the planning and implementation of the forums representatives from entities that support people with disabilities such as education, vocational rehabilitation and the Social Security Administration. Greater flexibility was allowed in the design of activities for the forums to enable states to convene smaller gatherings to address more local issues. It is anticipated that the recommendations that are produced from these gatherings will address the needs of the individual artists with disabilities as well as how to strengthen the infrastructure of services and supports that impacts their careers in the arts.

Notes

[i] Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2003) Retrieved February 1, 2003 at <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary> accesses 2-01-03.

[ii] Attendees were a cross-section of participants from the previous 3 meetings and forum.

[iii] The Careers in the Arts Mentoring project administered by the John. F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts provides funding for arts organizations to offer individuals and students with disabilities, who are interested in exploring or advancing their careers in the arts, the opportunity to work in a professional arts or arts service environment and be mentored by a working arts professional.

[iv] Arts Bridge brings together national arts and arts service organizations and institutions with national disability service organizations to bridge a communications and services gap. Retrieved from <http://www.quest4arts.org/artsbridge/index.htm> February 3, 2003.

[v] Careers in the Arts, ATA Coalition Partners Conference, Los Angeles, CA May 1999.

[vi] Traditional arts occupations as defined by the NEA typically refer to actors and directors; dancers; musicians and composers; announcers; architects; designers; painters, sculptors and craft –artists; photographers, authors; collage art, drama, and music teachers; and artists, performers, etc. not elsewhere classified

[vii] Arts related occupations are a more expansive definition of the arts workforce that includes jobs in fields such as publishing, software, video, and advertising.

[viii] See VSA arts, Your Career Options in the Arts in *Putting Creativity to Work* (2000) for a review of arts careers with case examples of artists with disabilities. Available online at <http://www.vsarts.org/resources/publications/careerguide/introcontents.pdf>

[ix] From Ms. Clare's keynote speech, "A Career as an Artist Ain't An Easy Row to Hoe," The Art of Employment: Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2002

[x] Ann Galligan, Creativity, Culture, Education and the Workforce [Electronic Version], 2001, issue paper published by the Center for Arts and Culture and available at <http://www.culturalpolicy.org/pdf/education.pdf>.

[xi] Table 3b. Fastest growing occupations 2000-2010 Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.t06.htm> December 25, 2002.

[xii] Artists as defined by the Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook, Artists and Related Workers retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos092.htm> December 25, 2002 included art directors, fine artists, illustrators, sketch artists, sculptors, printmakers, painting restorers, multimedia artists and animators.

[xiii] Reported by Galligan (see 9) based on background papers prepared for her report by John Kreidler, Ted Berger, and Roberto Bedoya who all indicated that there is a problem retaining veteran workers and attracting new recruits to the nonprofit arts sector.

[xiv] From an unpublished report on the National Summit on Arts Administration Summit, John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, December 11, 1999

[xv] Anne Finger, National Forum on Careers in the Arts Final Report, 1999 available at; Policy Education Meeting, on Supplemental Security Income Issues for People with Disabilities who have Careers in the Arts, December 7, 1999 available at <http://nadc.ucla.edu/KennedyCenterSummitReport.htm> ; Executive Report on the National Summits on Vocational Rehabilitation Education and Arts Administration (n.d.) unpublished report summarizing meetings convened November 30, December 2 and December 11 1999; Summit Implementation Meeting: Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities, November 30, 2000 available at <http://nadc.ucla.edu/KennedyCenterSummitReport.htm>.

[xvi] A quote by Jim Modrick in Allison Brugg Bawden, Access and the Cultural Infrastructure [Electronic Version], p. 17, 2002 available at <http://www.culturalpolicy.org/pdf/access.pdf>.

[xvii] Policy Education Meeting on Supplemental Security Income Issues for People with Disabilities who have Careers in the Arts Report and Recommendation, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (See 16). This report summarizes the panel presentations and proposed recommendations made by federal agency representatives, individual artists with disabilities, and disability organization or agency representatives. It includes the personal experiences of artists, issues related to navigating SSI and resources provisions, employment trends and means for overcoming barriers to employment.

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For more information about the Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts see <http://nadc.ucla.edu>.