# National Discussion on Paths Forward for the American Arts and Culture Sector

## SESSION 3: HOW CAN WE ORGANIZE AND MOBILIZE THIS WORK?

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# GROUP 1

## Group 1 Transcript

**Speaker 1:** I have two thoughts. First, is to take advantage of and lean into structures that already exist that perhaps we don't take full advantage of. What I'm thinking is here we are in [Location] and there's some really good things being done at the county level by the [Organization]. We have these organizations that represent the entire county and they are not just the grantor through which the county funds get distributed, but they do a lot of advocacy and they can do a lot of organizing. I think that's one thing that some of us perhaps don't take enough advantage from and bring these types of ideas from the conversations such as this one today, to those forums. The other one is the opposite, which is something that we don't have that I've always felt the lack of in my professional career. I'm in a museum, always been in museums. I think for museum professionals, we have really good structures in place from [Organization] to [Organization] and so forth. We support each other and we have constructive conversations et cetera. What I see less of, and I think would be extraordinarily useful as we move towards this imagined common future, would be communities where we talk to other arts organizations. The fine arts talk to the performing arts, but even museums talk to smaller community organizations. We were talking in the previous breakout session about the notion of collaboration. I think collaboration can benefit extraordinarily from collaborating with non-like institutions, because we're all too focused in our little drawer. If we can expand and go out of it, different ideas will come, and then we can help each other.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** Do you mean within arts and culture? Or are you talking about museums talking to libraries and galleries? Or are you talking about outside of arts and culture altogether? Are you talking about museum talking museums talking to housing developers. I'm curious about when you say outside, what do you mean?
- **Speaker 1**: Primarily for this particular prompt, I was talking of the former, so within arts and culture, because if we're talking about organizing our field, but I think in terms of benchmarking and getting good ideas and thinking outside the box, which is all very necessary, I think going outside of industry should be something that we do regularly as well.

**Speaker 3:** In order to really accelerate this work, we will need leadership. That can be a collective Group, a collection of leaders who come together, or it can be one organization that volunteers to take the lead. If there's not an identified leadership something, then all the best intents of all of us who have real jobs or don't have real jobs that are just busy people is going to fall by the wayside.



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I think that it's critical to accelerate this work is to identify or look at who's willing to raise their hand and volunteer to provide to be that thing in this larger process. Because if you're the leader, you're also taking on the responsibilities of resourcing the effort or finding the resources to resource the effort.

**Speaker 4:** I'll start just by saying some of the networks that I find inspiration from, Creative States Coalition, Urban Arts Coalition, and the emerging partnership with the US regionals, AFTA and NASA, Grantmakers in the Arts, Springboard in the Arts, all different levels, different shapes of coalitions, but I think all at their core, pretty collaborative and advancing what feels like a pretty shared vision and agenda. I'm a big fan of collective impact models, like a formal collective impact model. We had one in [Location] when I was with the city, and we were able, through that model, to restore arts education to [Location] Public Schools over the span of 11 years. It took a lot of work, and a lot of organizing, and a lot of patience. The answer to the question that I think was just asked, a collective impact model has a backbone organization that is governed by a steering committee of related interests. You have a shared North Star, but autonomous independent partners who can advance things in different ways. Everyone doesn't have to be at every table, but everyone understands what's going on. And you're able to align, in our case, the interests of teachers, principals, unions, students, arts education partners, parents. You get them all rowing in the same direction toward the shared North Star, and you're able to access resources that are only available by having that representative and cross-cutting representation of voices. I would love, I would advocate for, a collective impact model, and I would love to see a backbone organization incubated. I've talked about that specifically with [Speaker] and the [Organization], because I think they're interestingly [positioned] to do something like that. I think the challenge, or what it would take to accelerate this, is trust. There's a lot of efforts going on. Some of them feel inclusive. Some of them feel exclusive. Some of them are fancy philanthropy gatherings. Some of them are high-minded academic exercises. All of them are well-intended, I believe. But it's when we get caught in the tension between the ecosystem and the ego system and who gets to do the thing and take credit for the thing, gets tricky. How might we approach an organizing model whereby we were leaning on collaboration and not on competition, and really trying to challenge the scarcity thinking that I think is pretty endemic in the nonprofit industrial complex, not just in the arts? If we can foster better collaboration, we might pursue a collective impact agenda, which would necessitate a backbone organization, which could be comprised of all those networks I mentioned and 50 that I probably don't know about. So that's my draft theory of change.

**Speaker 5:** I feel like we have a lot of crossover in what we think might be useful and helpful in this space. I'm inspired by Free DC, which is an organization in Washington, DC, that is trying to deny the city as a platform for authoritarianism. The organizing work that they are doing is deeply rooted



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in labor organizing. I, in 2025, had the distinct privilege of being a part of the organizing of the [Group]. I'm very inspired by that group of people as well. They are still fighting for their union at the [Organization]. At any rate, I take a lot of lessons from this book. It's called *No Shortcuts, Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age* by the late great Jane McAlevey. Her ideas enumerate this idea that you need a plan to win, and then you need to determine who is in your community of interest. As arts administrators, we have such a unique position similar to the way that teachers or nurses have a position where they are interacting with the public. So do we. Sometimes our community of interest is not just us, but it's also our neighbors, our audiences, our members, our donors, et cetera. So really determining who those people are developing a plan to reach them and organize them into your plan to win, and then structure testing through actions over time. I think the way that we really energize this is by setting aside the cynical idea that I can't do anything to fix or change this issue. I think that each person needs to really take stock of what they can contribute, because we can no longer be bystanders in the reframing of our own cultural sector and our own democracy.

**Speaker 6:** I'm currently serving as the [Title} for the [Organization], which is a state arts agency, [I've] been in the private sector, public sector, and really believe deeply in the civic and public "we." I think to answer [Speaker's] provocative question and to build upon a bit of what [Speaker] said, we do need to have a shared North Star. We need to know what we're trying to achieve, and we need to be able to build trust in that. For me, what I'm super interested and excited about is asking the question of what is the support infrastructure needed for human creativity to thrive in the United States? What parts of that old current system do we have that we want to keep reinforcing enforcing and what parts of that system needs to be dismantled and put into compost to fuel a new system. For me, we have to be able to know where we're going and really understand that that means we may need to organize out of self-interest and fully and totally in the public's interest. I think right now something that [Speaker] mentioned as well that I'll just pick up is that we talk about the arts ecosystem, but let's also be clear that we have to navigate the arts ecosystem deeply in this because we will shoot ourselves to keep power in many times because we're just human beings. We need to develop some sort of organizing system that recognizes that we may be organizing outside of our own self-interest, but really in the interest of the public and of democracy and of this country.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** Can I push a little more? You talked about thinking about self-interest, thinking about organizing in the public interest, not self-interest, thinking about things that we may want to put into the compost. If you feel comfortable, I'd love to hear a little bit more about what's an example.



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- **Speaker 6:** We have a federal system of money coming from the National Endowment for the Arts, supporting regional arts agencies, supporting state arts agencies. Maybe that's not the model we need. Maybe we don't need a funding system solely within a singular organization, but we need to distribute. If we're trying to understanding what's the support infrastructure that's needed for creativity to thrive, then we need to look at all federal, state, and local agencies and what the system of delivery is to support civil society, and then identify where cultures, and I'll say cultures in a plural frame, so that we can (move) our country forward with plurality, but also with creativity. And that maybe, again, we've just got to look at it in all of our systems of delivery and support for our species.

**Speaker 7:** In terms of just like what is the funding mechanism that potentially could be replacing where we do not be reliant on the NEA and for example, that funding. Then all the conversations that have been happening today in terms of acceleration, I just keep thinking about a catalyst moment. A catalyst event and while all this structure is being discussed about what we are and what's our connectivity? I do believe that two years from now with a date that should be picked, we need a collective impact moment where every organization across the United States and in the streets and in cafes and galleries is doing something where we can then communicate this new vision of our importance as a sector, as a humanity. It could be, I imagine with some key anchors that are publicizing and getting this on TV that we could probably in one event raise 10 times what we get from the NEA and begin to fund this new structure. That's how I've been thinking. We need to do something fast, and we need to do something big, and we need to wake up the world. Not like that it's against what's happening with Trump's name on the Kennedy Center, although, of course, that's the moment, but that's not the fight right now. This is just a collective awakening. That's how I'm seeing it.

**Speaker 8:** We are a small grassroots folk and traditional arts organization in [Location] with a focus on social justice. A few things come to mind with this question of "how do we organize and structure all of this?" I really agree with what [Speaker] shared about the idea of a collective impact model. I think that's a very good way to think about this. I also think we should be thinking about how to network between local and state level and national level organizing. A couple examples come to mind just to give something concrete So in [Location], we recently had a multi-year struggle over the prospect of the [Organization] building an arena in downtown [Location] adjacent to [Location]. [Organization], which is a longstanding community organization in [Location], along with a very broad coalition of advocates, culture workers, folks across the city, came together to really resist this, knowing that it would do to our [Location] what has been done to so many others across the country. It was a really successful organizing effort. We're part of some work right now to archive that process and to think about creating organizing toolkits out of it. And one of the things we



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keep coming back to is the fact that the movement structured itself through hives that were active, semi-autonomous working groups. For example, we had a research hive. We had an art hive that made all the props for the public protests. These were groups that were coming together periodically and had a very clear North Star set for them by the organizing agenda of [Organization], but were empowered to go off, recruit members, bring them into the struggle, and accomplish concrete tasks. We're just thinking about how something similar could be achieved here. Because I know from our perspective, in [Location], I think there's a citywide conversation about this also happening. And it would be great if that conversation could be plugged into this one in some way, and that that would somehow balance having a North Star, but also having, to some extent, a decentralized structure.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** So thinking about the intersection between local, state, and federal, thinking about ways that you can have collective impact, where maybe collective impact models, where there is some centralizing, there are some centralizing forces, but also the ability to have distributed roles or distributed kind of pieces within that, whether that's hives or whether that's existing agencies.

**Speaker 9:** A couple of thoughts, and a lot of this is responding to what things have said, so I apologize if it comes out a little awkwardly, but one thing that has struck me today is how many organizations I have never heard of before participating in this convening today. I don't mean that to minimize anything that anybody is bringing here today, but just to acknowledge the depth and the range of the organizations doing this work across our field in small communities, in counties, in states, in regions. I also think we have incredibly complex structures set up in our industries. But they're usually broken down by discipline, theater, music, dance, opera, visual art, museums, arts education, funders. They all have their own service organizations, conferences, and convenings. But it's so rare for us to get together across disciplines. I find it even more rare to get together across disciplines with practitioners. Or more get-togethers in the thought leadership academic space. But I still, when we get those folks together with practitioners, see a disconnect in things that are prioritized or things that are thought most important. I think trying to find some way to, A, bring us together across disciplines and functions a lot more often, but also maybe figuring out a way to really have a shared public voice that is not a top-down authority, but a single set of spokespeople, talking points, that we're all singing from the same hymnal, rather than all singing in the same musical style, but slightly different songs. That's not a bad analogy to end on.

**Speaker 10:** I am the [Title] of [Organization], which is our state humanities council in [Location], and also we're affiliate of [Organization]. We were deeply DOGE'd. We haven't seen funding from the federal government since April. None of the humanities councils have. We've been in this very



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different place than people who work and are funded through the [Organization]. I say that partly because it's a frame of mind for me at the moment as I'm thinking about how to move beyond this and how to really move out of what I call the pit of despair and into something that feels constructive and forward-looking and long reaching. It's been very inspirational to hear and talk from all of you today. But I also am in [Location], sitting in [Location], [Location] today. One of the things that I think we need in order to accelerate this work is a very different and more expansive understanding of what arts and culture is in this nation. To think about it very broadly and to basically cast a very wide net. I think that wouldn't solve a lot of problems in the sense of who's in this silo and who's out of this silo. I think it would also help us politically. I think it would help us in just a myriad of ways. I think also along with that is to cast an expansive net of where arts and culture happen in our nation and where it's valued and where it's worthy of funding and worthy of supporting and worthy of bringing into conversations like this. I think it's just really important to think about that and remember that there are pockets and holes. Part of my work as a grant maker is to help to fill those holes and to make sure that those people are brought to the table and that there's a broad understanding and a broad voice at place in moments. I love the work that's been done here as well. I think there's many voices here and many people I know, which is wonderful to see all these great faces again. I'll just say that I just feel that that's really critical in moving forward any agenda and any vision that we create together.

**Speaker 11:** Plus one to everything that's been said thus far, certainly. I do think we've really, just in my time, 25 years, stepping into this as a young maker and hearing about the culture wars of the 1980's, knowing that certain people didn't let go of that rope clearly because they came back very surgically and sometimes just with a sledgehammer. It's been a both/and from a strategy perspective to dismantle our problematic systems. I do think we need a national network. Some level of privately driven residents and citizens of this country's investments, while we're also supporting a narrative of "the both" and, that this isn't solely about professional artists or standing arts organizations in the nonprofit context. It's also about our libraries. It's about our schools. It's about church choirs and basket weavers and quilt makers. And including that in the conversation of the power of creativity and creating space for children who maybe may not all be inclined to play a sport, but would be apt to pick up a paintbrush or an instrument in a hyper-rural community in Appalachia, as an example. That the message, the campaign work, which would need to be accelerated by a massive initial investment to generate a nexus. I love the idea of a collective campaign two years out, leading into 2028. Really smart. Let's find that day that works for all of us. But let's also coalesce around some very big tent messages that are, I'm not going to say non-partisan, I'm going to say post-partisan.



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**Speaker 12 (Facilitator):** I can't let this moment go by without noting a link that I dropped in the chat, a project that [Speaker], together with a group of others, orchestrated over the course of the last three years. I'm sure I'm getting that wrong. Almost exactly, in a sense, what [Speaker] is talking about from a different perspective, a beautiful collective action initiative fought, I'm sure, but extremely potent. I just wanted to note that.

**Speaker 4:** When [Speaker] was talking, I was really struck and just wanted to respond and then everything people have said since then. [Speaker], I really appreciate what you said about being there for our whole community. And [Speaker], I think you talked about that also in the context of this big tech that's part of the collective impact organizing model is you have to get a critical mass of people. You have to find not just the people you agree with. My mentor, [Name], talks about the civic "we." Not just the people you agree with, not just the people that are your friends, but the "we," the thing that's going to benefit the most of us. What [Speaker] said that struck me was that this is going to have to be a networked moment, not a top-down moment. There's not going to be another consolidated Americans for the Arts singularity that's going to bring messaging down from the top to the grassroots. Partly, the last year of my life has been split, or the last several years have been split between national organizing and local organizing work. My fear about where we find ourselves federally beyond the obvious tragedy of things that are happening every minute of every day right now is I don't know how long it's going to take to rebuild an administrative state that's coherent at the federal level. My dream is 1% for culture across every city across every agency of the federal government. That's a "rest of my life" project. I don't know how we even begin. I know how we could begin, but that's going to take a very long time. I think for the next two to five years, everything is going to be local. I think it's about regionalism. I think it's about the intersection of localism and mutualism, whereby we can exchange ideas, policies, concepts, narratives, but we're in a coalition together that's not waiting for a singular decision-making entity. I also think that one of the two of the tenets of a collective impact model are continuous communications. You're not at every table, but you have to know what everyone else is doing so that we're not accidentally siloing or working at cross purposes and mutually reinforcing activities. There are things that a subset of folks could be doing together that maybe not everyone does, but they're all in service of the same goal at the end of the day. Just thinking about how to how to best connect interrelated efforts with shared values and shared outcomes in mind.

- **Speaker 12 (Facilitator):** Do you have any models for that type of work that inspire you? Do you see groups employing that thesis successfully or trying and failing, but moving in the right direction?
- **Speaker 4:** The best example I have is a local one, which is probably not applicable to a national organizing model. I think the early labor movement offers a lot of promising models



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for it, although I think there's some interest in climate organizing that's happened in that space. I don't know that it's defined itself as collective impact, but most of the collective impact that I'm familiar with are education and they're in Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Seattle, and New York. They have a coalition together, but they operate independently within their independently governed school ecosystems. I think that the idea is, could one be built? It could be a national and cultural focus.

**Speaker 13:** I just wanted to mention that in [Location], I have been part of a collective impact group for about 10 to 12 years. It's called [Organization]. That [Organization] has had two major initiatives. One was [Program]. It was a way of looking at workforce development and we came up with a model to develop an entity that would help with workforce development and that has been moving forward. The second initiative that I've been involved in has been for early childhood care and enrichment. We found that childcare providers, whether you're a grandmother or you're an early childhood care center or something in between, there wasn't anything that helped unite people around resources for early childcare. We found that out when we worked on the workforce development part, it was a real barrier for families being able to have both parents employed because there were early childhood, early childcare initiative issues. Both of those initiatives have gotten some teeth, and we are disparate across all sectors who've come together for that initiative. We, for lack of a better term, there was no money involved. Let me say it this way, but it seems to be the easiest way for me to say that we just sold the concept of the collective impact thinking to [College]. The college now is going to develop a collective impact institute where those of us who have been involved may still be involved to come together to talk about solving community issues based on the collective impact model that [Speaker] so well-articulated.

**Speaker 14:** To [Speaker's] point again, I can say that the collective impact model does take an immense amount of energy, time, patience, caring, because of the fact that you have so many disparate voices at the table, finding that collective issue that everyone can agree upon, and then finding ways to move forward on that issue that also everyone can agree upon is very gnarly. But at the end of the day, the results, everyone feels vested in the results. As a result, it can be very, very effective, which is why I think conceptually it was attractive to the college.

- **Speaker 12 (Facilitator):** What are the ingredients that go into one of those campaigns? Is there money that is being raised that is then deployed? What are the components of the campaigns?
- **Speaker 14:** There was some money that needed to be raised, and we got some of that from the county government. There were some of the interested parties who came to the table, private philanthropists who came to the table to help us hire someone who would be



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our glue and help keep us all together. There was a driver, a woman who saw the potential for collective impact and kept driving it. The private philanthropists saw her too and underwrote her position for a couple of years until we could get [Location] government to support it. But it really took being able to involve businesses.

## Group 1 Chat

1. What is the support infrastructure needed for human creativity to thrive in the US? What parts of the old system should be retained? How do we foster and build trust and in some instances organize out of self-interest and in the interest of the public and civic "we."
    a. "North Star + Decentralized Structure"

2. Look to the disability community's efforts in the 1970's to bring together disparate groups around a common cause for the immediate common good. Leveraging their short-term needs and long-term goals and finding alignment with partners and supporters, public and private.
    a. That's a fantastic idea! I was trying to think of examples from other sectors that could be helpful to this conversation.

3. I am inspired by Clyde: https://www.onenationoneproject.com/

4. Here's more on the research coming out… Winston-Salem, NC was so grateful to be part of this WPA inspired project: https://www.artsforeverybody.org/art-health-research

5. Another Philly example I've been learning about is the former Philadelphia Council of Neighborhood Organizations. A longstanding Chinatown activist mentioned it as a successful model for cohering progress, although they also mentioned that it was led by a charismatic founder and couldn't survive his retirement. https://scrcarchivesspace.temple.edu/agents/corporate_entities/1131

6. https://collectiveimpactforum.org/what-is-collective-impact/



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# GROUP 2

## Group 2 Transcript

Not available.

## Group 2 Chat

1. https://warmcookiesoftherevolution.org/what-we-do/
    a. I was part of a beautiful event with them at MATTER bookshop in Denver. Joy abundant.

2. To be clear… I believe it is specific is reach into the ancient past to inform the future as is putting new words/definitions on current practices.
    a. Here's an example of integrating ancient technologies with current practices. Mariana Moscoso's Ceiba Futures brings together Mayan cosmology and practices with convening, artist programs, etc. A lot of it is based in joy as a strategy (as has been mentioned) and allowing people to develop connections from which other things can grow. https://ceibafutures.com/journal/liberation-is-soft

3. I mentioned the basic income for artists program that Ireland piloted last year in the last session. They were able to do that because there is such broad acknowledgment of the centrality of the arts to public life in Ireland. Why Ireland is paying its artists to create

4. On Mayor Mamdani's vision and words about the role of arts across community:
    a. https://www.artsjournal.com/brightride/2025/12/27/dear-mayor-mamdani-heres-your-art-everywhere/
    b. https://www.artsjournal.com/brightride/2026/01/10/not-an-arts-impact-statement-but-really-great/

5. Framing science research about how to communicate to build broad understanding of and support for arts.https://topospartnership.com/portfolio-item/the-arts-as-a-public-good/

6. These comments remind me of N'Tanya Lee's concept of Principled Struggle. Principled Struggle (via N'Tanya Lee): "We struggle for the sake of deepening our collective understanding & getting to greater unity! Be honest and direct – while holding compassion. Take responsibility for your own feelings & actions. Seek deeper



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understanding (ASK, READ, 1ST). Consider that this may or may not be the container to hold what you need to bring. Side convos / one-on-ones – should help us get better understanding, NOT check out. test: could I bring the essence of this convo back to the…" We've used this consistently for the past 6-7 years in building an intersectional network across [State]. If you can determine a set of shared agreements and practice principled struggle, you can begin to move at the speed of trust.

7. So much of what keeps being named is the need for building an expansive vocabulary for the sector across creative practitioners/artists/industries.
8. The big organizing idea that came out of the research was a message that reached everyone - even people who don't think they use or go or benefit from the arts (but they do).
9. Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good by Adrienne Maree Brown is a good read related to this.
10. I am drawn to looking beyond our borders for models, both as a response to American exceptionalism and as an act of humility. The Majority World has much to teach us, particularly those who have already navigated political conditions similar to the ones we're experiencing here.



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# GROUP 3

## Group 3 Transcript

**Speaker 1:** After being in leadership for the arts for over 20 years, I decided to go to law school. It's been really amazing. There is no place I'd rather be as a former artist, art supporter, or mother than to be with the people doing this work for the next three and a half years. It's been really remarkable learning as an arts executive on legal counsel for so long and now being taught by people who have been doing on the groundwork in a different way for many years and how much they're really stressing that at this school. They're not here to teach doctrine, but these are real people with real lives. You better get it right and better get it together because you're of service to people. That really intersects so much with being either an artist or being someone that's supporting the arts in many ways. What I enjoy about it, and after receiving my law degree, I want to move back into policy change and arts reform and supporting artists is the strategy of how the law is approached. I don't want to get virtual popcorn thrown at me, but I found so often that working closely with artists and arts institutions, because we're so moved by the work being done, we were also moved by, I don't want to say just feelings, but there is something that I'm talking about here. That strategy was often put on the back burner. As I'm talking this through, it's also how quickly the arts feels like it needs to pivot because it's been under-resourced for so long, right? As an executive, having plans to want to go through and finish the strategy that we're working on, but needing to turn so quickly onto something else or have so many pockets or create new programs, trying to just attract the funding that was out there and how exhausting that was and how exhausting it still is. So, wanting to really take a step back and reflect and thinking about long-term strategy of how to help and support the arts operationally and with funding and with earned income. The collective action in our sector that could be strengthened, I think I've always really wanted to encourage cross-pollination and partnerships with not only other diversity in arts, so visual artists working with dance companies and ballet companies, working with musicians. I know that it happens in the concert hall, but figuring out how to have long-term partnerships and long-term funding partnerships, and to utilize how other sectors of the world are approaching funding, strategic planning, larger operational goals that don't have anything to do with the arts, and that there is a lot to learn from the way in which they've been working that then can be applied to the artists and arts organizations.

**Speaker 2:** I would love to see an air traffic control type infrastructure for this work. The volunteers who brought us together today to have this conversation, that feels reminiscent in the sense of we all are flying our different brands of planes, whether it's Southwest, Delta, Air Canada, we all got



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somewhere to go and get in and out. Got to keep the people safe. We got to know what the weather is, coordinate all the things. How do we continue this dialogue, this work, and formalize a structure that allows us to do what we need to do locally, but also at the regional and national level? My visual is some form of air traffic control.

**Speaker 3:** I am Dean of [Program] at [University]. In all the sessions today, I find myself really speaking from that place. I care deeply about students and the learning environment. The fact that students really are doing great work on our stages and in the ensembles, on the canvas, and they're excited. My vision is really to see them thrive as they go through universities and colleges and go back out into the world. So that's my hope is that there's a thriving, exciting, vibrant place they will go. So much of the conversation that's been happening all day is great because it just means that there's a group of people that are thinking about what the future looks like for our young artists. Whether they're coming from universities or elsewhere. For me, in order to really accelerate this work, I'll speak again from my role in academia. I would love to see more coalition building. I'm excited by what's happening. I'm in the [Collegiate Conference], so all the arts folks are coming together and they're talking to each other and that's wonderful. I imagine something is happening in the [Collegiate Conference] and in all the other conferences in the country. I would love to also see a coalition between academia and the community. I think that we will need strong coalitions between town and gown. I know that that's a played-out binary, but the binary still exists. We need to see that break down more and more.

**Speaker 4:** In order to really accelerate this work, we will need artist-led, tightly woven and distributed networks. I feel like that distributed part of it to where we're allowing for the centers to destabilize and for the distribution to take hold as a wider movement building mechanism that has infrastructural support behind it feels crucial. I love this air traffic control metaphor. I wonder if that can be the infrastructure alarm and that from that, these wider distributed networks of movement building can take hold.

- **Speaker 5 (Facilitator):** Can you just give us an example of what that might look like?
- **Speaker 4:** [Organization] has just started an annual campaign that runs May Day to Labor Day every year. We show up in different cities and towns across the country. One of the things we're hoping to do is to grant-make to organizations in those different places and support local conversations that are happening and then link them to a wider national network. I think that it'll have to go multiple layers beyond that kind of organizing, right? To where then the institution that maybe the [Organization] supported in a certain city has a network of different organizations that it is supporting. Maybe one of them is a university and they're actually connected to a national network of universities, right? So that it's not a



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linear line of local to national, but that there are multiple nodes and multiple links going in both local and national directions. That's what I'm thinking about.

- **Speaker 6 (Co-Facilitator):** To accelerate that work, would it be about cultivating or nourishing those kinds of networks and ensuring that they thrive?
- **Speaker 5 (Facilitator):** Making those dotted lines to all of the different interconnected, that it's not just its own, it's one thing. Exactly. It's satellites and networks.
- **Speaker 4:** I think the point that feels really important is that we're not necessarily trying to come to one centralized goal together, but that we're going to need an ecosystem building approach that will have a lot of different tiers, a lot of different approaches at a lot of different levels, and for that to be okay, but networked.

**Speaker 7:** In my first breakout room, I was called provocative when I envisioned sort of artist-driven performing arts organizations that are rooted in communities and more based around companies of artists and supported by an expanded and more robust amateur arts community performing arts organizations. Then in the second one, I started thinking about this and listening to what people were saying. I really do think if we're looking long range, that it's time to rethink the dominant nonprofit paradigm that everyone's been operating under, which is really a tax code issue. If there's a sector-wide thing we could do, start approaching some think tank kind of operations or panels of experts who might help us imagine a new status for performing arts organizations that isn't just the nonprofit one, because that has had an impact on everything from how we get funded to all the activities that are done. In fact, including how arts organizations justify their existence. I think one thing we could do to follow [Speaker's] prompt there is to mobilize this work, is to convene some expert groups that could think about this from a tax code point of view and see if we could come up and propose some alternative solutions on a national basis.

- **Speaker 5 (Facilitator):** There are some comments. I think [Speaker] is agreeing with you. There is already a new legal status being considered by Colorado and California, the work that [Person] is doing. [Speaker], do you feel comfortable talking a little bit about that?
- **Speaker 8:** It would be called an A Corp. It's like a B Corp and it's based off an LLC model, but different. In the initial proposals, it would have to be a state-by-state approval. It's currently being considered by Colorado and California right now. Sounds like there's some success, some early success. It would allow for individual artists to have their own legal designation, which would give them different kinds of IP protection. It would give them retirement savings opportunities. The five-year plan – though it is a two-stage approval process and the second part, which is the most important part, would come later and is riskier – but it would accomplish for individual artists to be able to accept both charitable and non-charitable donations. It would decidedly move us outside a 501c3 dependency.



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- **Speaker 5 (Facilitator):** I think there has been other conversations around this idea of think tank. We've been having conversations around the work that the NEA is doing, (they're) so strong around the research. They act as a think tank in many ways, even now. Where I think there's definitely a conversation about how we collectively have a centralized resource for these kinds of ideas, where we're gathering people like this on a regular basis.

**Speaker 9:** I wanted to build off of the conversation around foundations, corporations, major gifts, the what we're trying to do in our city right now is imagine a world where we're not, not groveling at the feet of where the money is, and how that apex animal of what that is changes every conversation. We're trying to think about systems that reinvert the paradigm, to think about it in a different way. We haven't gotten there yet, but we're posing that as a provocative idea. Because we're really trying to figure out ways to get money into hands of artists as quickly as possible. And the competitive grants process or national foundations, not necessarily with regional foundations, leveraging all of that in a different way that makes sense for each community. I know that's probably, those are questions that are being brought up by the [Organization] as well. I just pose that as a new frame for thinking. I also wanted to bring up that a lot of information around organizing and around advocacy and tools for that surfaced during COVID and post George Floyd murder. I see what America and theater, all of those documents, CAPA forming, lots of organizations were organizing in a really interesting way. I feel like that's all – like the chapter has closed or something hasn't evolved. So possibly looking back and what we learned during that period to see how we move forward into the next period might be a really interesting look back and to look forward at the same time. I also wanted to say about organizing. One of the things I'm inspired by in our city isn't necessarily what I see. The arts community, because I think in general, they haven't been forced to community organize to demand from city government or from power or from state for themselves. What I have been witness to is what the bike lobby does. I'm trying to learn from what other people are doing successfully. For example, the bike lobby wants a lane down the main street of a highway, all they do is press one button and 50,000 emails go out and that happens regardless if anybody wants it or not. Part of that is the idea that they want that everywhere and that they have an activist tool that gets them to where they need to go and they understand how the system works. Part of this is understanding how the system works. Maybe we need more systems education and understanding how those tools work and advocates acting more like activists might be a way of thinking about this as well.

- **Speaker 5 (Facilitator):** More systems education is key. It's already starting to happen in some of these conversations. We should be looking at how other sectors and other issues organize. I think it's connected to what you shared, [Speaker] and what you shared, [Speaker], about coming together and having a structure by which we are all moving maybe



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in different directions, but we're moving in similar systems or a similar way around organizing.

**Speaker 10:** I wanted to build on that thought and say really investing in that organizing infrastructure feels incredibly important, that political power is how we get systems change and that that doesn't happen overnight and it happens through long-term deep investment and relationship building and power building and allowing building across sectors over time. I think while a piece of it is organizing on behalf of artists and creative workers, I think a bigger piece of it is working to bridge across communities and sectors to build solidarity with other sectors, to build much broader based power, to drive the kind of systems change that we're going to need to build really that infrastructure of a safety net and economic security that enables creativity to thrive, even beyond those who self-identify as professional artists, but have a lot of creativity to share.

**Speaker 11:** I just wanted to let everybody know about a newish organization called 4A Arts, which is the American Alliances of Arts and Audiences. Many of you may have heard about it, but it's really a grassroots-level organizing to transform citizens from arts consumers to arts advocates. I really believe in the power of numbers. But as I hear people talk all today, and since [Name] started talking to me about this years ago, I'm also very concerned about what it does and how it does it, the work in partnership with it, what is already existing. Again, having too many things trying to accomplish the same thing, just the more that these people that are leading these organizations can connect with one another, I think is going to be incredibly powerful and important. It's dispersed in a way that's already seems to be what is happening, in my own opinion.

**Speaker 12:** I love, love, love the air traffic control analogy. I find myself, like all of you, busy with the core programs and things that you're stewarding in the world, and then maybe a part of these wonderful working groups where we really get to build solidarity and find common threads where we want to have impact in the field. I think who the controller is, is really important. Who is continuing to bring us to the table and keep us accountable? I think to [Speaker's] point, that happens with lots of different points of connection and is multi layered and not so linear. And it's a big undertaking. I just hope that we don't come away from this conversation and be like, "Oh, that was really nice." And then nothing happens. There's something beautiful about just sharing space, because that puts a spring in all of our steps to do what we want to do, but I'm eager to really plug in, to be able to keep the ongoing work happening and sustain that.

**Speaker 13:** I'm going to speak to more of the institutional side of how do we accelerate some things, less on the artist side. As a former teaching artist and conductor myself, I'm a firm believer of lifting up the artist and perhaps breaking apart some of the institutions that are barriers. I do think that we as a sector need to have some honest conversations with consolidation of institutions. I live in a city of roughly a million people and there's no reason that there are four HR directors,



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four CEOs, four CFOs for the opera, ballet, symphony, and a few others when they are all shared services and that model would be the difference of a livable wage for the artists on stage for consolidating and not. I think a lot of times what, as a CEO, I find is pride of authorship or legacy-based ego that is the preventative thing to force collaboration and consolidation, frankly, as we're talking about systems. The small margins add up very, very quickly over time. I do think that there has to be a hard discussion about where there's consolidation of teams, systems, and back of house, whether it's region-wide or state-wide. With technology, we've proved from working from home that we can do great things from afar. There's no reason that we can't invest the overhead in the art itself or telling the story of the art through marketing or getting people to come.

- **Speaker 5 (Facilitator):** How do you begin that conversation? Or where have you seen that conversation working or evolving?
- **Speaker 13**: I've seen it starting here through the CEOs, just getting together and saying, listen, do we need these things? But the goal is to do it before people are cash flowed out of business. Because there is a cliff of whether it's generation three of philanthropy, or we're through the planned giving cycle of the wealth transfer. I think we have to be proactive about it. I think it starts with perhaps some of the larger organizations. We are one of the larger organizations in town saying this needs to happen. Frankly, it may be a requirement. Has this been considered if there's grant funding in place by a foundation to say, has this been considered? Have you talked to people about back of house services? In the instances that I know of here, it's hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings in a year. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in the amount of fundraising that would take or the number of tickets. It makes something that feels unsustainable very sustainable. From food and beverage to ticket fees to even HR, everything should be on the table and that's how you have the conversation. You speak very plainly and say this may be the unpopular thing to say but...and then you probably start with the people that own real estate because they have an asset versus a set of programs. That's how you have the conversation and you just put it out there with a lot of hope that it doesn't come back politically to bite you because I do think that the funding community is looking for. They might not know how to say that they're looking for this, but we need to do this not for the funder's sake, but to invest in the art.
- **Speaker 5 (Facilitator):** I think you're also talking about something that is a larger conversation, which is how do we remove ego from this work where necessary? I sometimes think that that can get in the way from the progression of that conversation or other collaborative conversations. I'm not asking necessarily for a response. I think that that is also one of the questions that we have to grapple with.
- **Speaker 13:** I will say dealing with ego, specifically of my board and other things, a real grounder and adjustment to ego is the market. It's going to tell you what the tea leaves are



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coming, and I think there's an aggressiveness that needs to occur, or we're going to be replaced in some ways with other choices for people's time. It's becoming easy. The thin line here that I'm concerned about, actually through all three phases, is the lack of acknowledgement of where artificial intelligence is already passing us by. When we're dealing with IP and the human touch in AI, it's going to become – you can barely tell if somebody has written something anymore. This is going to accelerate faster than we're keeping up, and I think that's going to be another thing that's going to force us to have to deal with some realities and its cash flow. It's funding models and it's the end of a generation where the wealth transfer is not going to be there for a 55-year-old versus a 75-year-old in seven years or eight years or whatever the cliff is.

**Speaker 14:** I know here in [Location], we've had several efforts over the last 10 years to try and pull together shared services. I think they got stuck in many ways in the spaces of ego. Also, we're dealing with a larger community systems issue here right now because our arts calendar that was held by the local newspaper, the paper was bought out, they're getting rid of the calendar, and everyone in the arts community is losing their minds about it. Yet the data says the consumers who are using the calendar to buy and find arts offerings aren't using the calendar anymore, but everybody is zoomed in on the tactic. I think we have to think about that challenge, this idea of shared services would not only solve a cost effective, a cost efficiency issue, back of house, but also would organizations stop stepping on each other as much as they do in terms of programming and being able to provide a better picture for the audiences we're seeking to attract. I think part of it is not zooming out enough. To think about what is the larger objective? There's this focusing on the tactics, which feel so much more tangible in the moment, but these conversations have to start with, what is the end we're trying to achieve? I talk as a nonprofit private funder, we're not a government agency, we're not a foundation, which is good and bad, but we're a funder and we're a capacity builder. They're a professional development provider. We're thinking as a funder for this community and somebody who provides financial and non-financial resources, what is our role in shifting the systems thinking and forcing organizations to zoom out? We are tired of reading grant applications from everyone telling us they have no money and they have no people, but then they don't want to talk to each other. It gets exhausting, and it's because the zoom out to the bigger picture and the larger goals that would allow a restructuring of solutions and a re-envisioning of tactics is not happening. The organizations themselves, I mean, we primarily serve institutions, arts institutions, at this moment, for the most part, are incapable of putting themselves in that place because nobody feels like they can slow down speed up. We are taking on the role of trying to be this convener of systems-thinking, to try and get them to reframe and be partners in how we can find those efficiencies and ultimately achieve a better end for everyone.



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**Speaker 6 (Co-Facilitator):** I wanted to quickly see if what's been discussed by the last couple of people could be linked back in some way, in any useful way, to what I believe [Speaker] said about the traffic control metaphor, which sounded really good and made sense. Can we unpack that a little bit? [Speaker], do you mind? Are we just talking about keeping track? Are we talking about actively steering certain groups together? And is that the funder's role? Is that a cooperative role? Just to brainstorm, I'm just curious if you could elaborate on, or anybody wants to talk about that particular model.

**Speaker 2:** In thinking through an independent infrastructure that is still connected, I don't think that it can come from a funder per se. Because whoever owns it has to be as neutral as possible, but still connected within the ecosystem and for the purpose of up high, seeing what's going on and allowing people to get where they need to go. That's the whole point. We have got to land these planes, so people can get off and get in the cars and go where they need to go.

## Group 3 Chat

1. https://www.artistcorporations.com
2. In addition to NAPA, another org to check out for work with arts aligned fields with whom solidarity would positively impact arts communities is Center for Cultural Innovation. They're doing gig work solidarity organizing etc. https://www.cciarts.org/index.html
3. One example (grant funded) https://bpoc.org
4. https://humanityai.ai
5. One thought I'll add to the tremendous thinking here (thank you, by the way), I would just add that there are a number of informal and formal groups thinking through this very question. It would be great if this forum or others worked together to share data that's already been collected. On my end, I've supported an initial research project to understand the appetite for a Collaborative Fund for the Performing Arts and we've learned so much through 1:1 interviews and focus groups; happy to share those initial fundings, which have also started to unpack structure and ideate on a long-term solution.



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# GROUP 4

## Group 4 Transcript

**Speaker 1:** I'm inspired by the work being done by Take Three Presents out of the Bay Area. They have Room Service and Bloom and a couple of others, completely driven by users. There's another place in France called Feÿtopia that is also resident-driven experiential creatives, and there's this approach to co-facilitated, co-created experiences. Adjacent to that is a number of projects around the acquiring of land that's looking both at sustainability, permaculture, and climate change and creative practice and social practice. I think that's really interesting work. And then also in Switzerland at Interlaken, there's an old theme park that was some creepy futuristic something that's been purchased by three guys who are setting up DAO, a decentralized autonomous organization based on blockchain, and looking at testing new approaches to economies and creative practice. I don't have their name top of mind, but I could provide it after the fact. Those are some interesting models for collective action that maybe aren't some of our tried and true but maybe pointing forward. I think we will need to enroll ourselves, basically, and each other, just the way we've shown up today. I love that we've been assembled, and I look forward to more.

**Speaker 2:** I'm a little bit of an outsider in this conversation in that I'm a former lawyer for the [Organization] who, after a little bit of a detour, came back to working in the arts and cultural sector as a solo practitioner with my own law firm. I am a service provider for a lot of organizations and artists – all of you on this call. I am very deeply inspired by the work that is being done by all of you who are doing work on the ground, particularly, smaller organizations who are really staying true to their mission and avoiding the mission creep and reactivity based on what is happening at the federal, and in a lot of places, at the state and local level, depending on where you are and what you're doing. I think that is really where as a sector, we need to focus our strength is supporting those organizations and those artists who are not giving in to the regime and working together toward common goals, whether you're an organization of scope and magnitude, or if you're three people trying to put on a show in a little art space in Iowa, to the extent that we can maintain that we're making here and work together toward actually taking on and addressing at a governmental level a lot of what is happening because we are going to need people getting out there, getting in front of their senators, getting in front of their representatives, getting in front of their mayors and their local city councils to speak with one voice in the universal language of art about why this is so important and why we need it needs defending.



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- **Speaker 3 (Facilitator):** I'm curious if there are things in the invitation or things in the room that made you feel an outsider to it. Because as we're trying to grow the tent, we want to make sure that we're not centering one group over another.
- **Speaker 2:** I am an artist myself, but I have no pretension to ever being able to make a living at it. Instead, I go out and practice law and try to write and perform on the side. I do come at this from a lot of different perspectives, and I think one of the strengths that I can bring at this at this juncture is the fact that I'm not embedded within any one organization. I have clients who are [Organization] refugees, and I have clients who are totally different and totally independent. I have clients that are all across the board. I'm able to see this from a lot of different perspectives at once and that was what I was trying to acknowledge.

**Speaker 4:** I was inspired by – you guys may remember about year five or six of AAM's advocacy day, when we finally figured out what was going on and museums almost got lumped in with casinos? We managed to rile the cry and get out of that. I was fascinated by the 48-hour platform, which is about as much attention as anyone can get from a whole bunch of people. You get in there. You sit in this room. We're going to train you. We're going to give you the say. Here are your handouts. Here's your Group. You don't have to go alone. There you go. We have already made the appointments for you. There was something about that that I think was really effective, and also a bit confidence building. The other is the iconic Got Milk campaign. I'm now taking it all the way back to the 90s, but it's one of those few, viral campaigns where people remember what the campaign was for, right? Sometimes campaigns or mantras and moves become so good, you forget. You just want to see the commercial. You don't even know what it's actually for. But it actually did what it actually was supposed to do, which was to get Americans to think that every one of us needed to have a glass of milk every day, support the industry, cows are safe forever. I think it was just inspirational in the way it could do that. Collective action in our sector could be strengthened by audience segmentation. I think that one of our greatest superpowers is that we refuse to just go after one. When you ask museums, who is your audience? And we say, everybody, we actually mean it. I think that does mean some audience segmentation, because I think that individual responses to trauma and threat is ultimately selfish. We'll be compassionate about it, but whatever. That question is, what does this have to do with me and those that I care about? If I look at the recent government shutdown, if Thanksgiving hadn't been coming, we'd still be trying to figure out how we were going to get on a plane. That hit so many people across the country in so many ways. We figured out we fixed it. I was in [Location] during the time of the bankruptcy, and it didn't become anybody's problem other than [Location]'s problem until we threatened the [art pieces] in the collection of the [Organization]. That was a very dangerous move, but it worked because now all of a sudden [Location]'s problem was the entire state of [Location]'s problem. I think that understanding "what" will resonate. Three to four modestly universal appeals that appeal to the



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biggest segments is where we need to focus without devolving into the danger of a single story. You got to be a little careful, but folks think about that. Last but not least, to accelerate, how about one of those really good documentaries? No navel gazing, but we get to blame the boogeyman without blaming the boogeyman. I am truly inspired by the number of people HBO Max has convicted with their documentaries. I don't think it is perhaps as shallow as we think it is. It is simply now an information absorbing format that so many people use that is honestly a tried-and-true way to get people to sit and focus and listen to a single story. There may be something to thinking about that. I know it may seem a little kitschy or perhaps even a little too commercial for our space, but let's not forget our sector is among the greatest media creators in the world. If we decided to go in that space, I think we could lean into that genius for ourselves.

**Speaker 5:** I'm inspired by the work that social justice organizations do in community organizing. There's no secret, guys. It has been proven, if not for decades, for centuries. How do you get organized? I think it's fascinating to me how the sector has three main stakeholders: government; us, civil society; and philanthropy. Whenever we want to talk about systemic issues, we blame government, right? When the other two stakeholders are making most of the decisions of how the system works, right? Yes, there's public cultural policy that needs to change, but there's a lot of private cultural policy that could change by us coming together and coordinating. What could strengthen that mobilization recognizing our roles in the system and recognizing that while I continue to support a decentralized system for the presentation, production, and creation of work, the decentralization can create fragmentation, which is the very big systemic problem that we have now. I think if we're serious about this, we need to start investing in resources on this mobilization. People need to have a job that is waking up every morning thinking about how we solve the systemic problems of our sector. Invest in research, invest in data collection and stewardship, invest in regional, local, and national coordination. Again, we don't have to invent the wheel. Many other sectors do it all the time. We need to be serious about it.

**Speaker 6:** I'm a Professor of Management and HR Industrial Psych Consultant. I am thinking about the need for repair work in the field. I've been talking about this collective action can't really happen if we're asking people to sit next to and be in community with folks that have caused harm to them in the field. First is that honest apology and repair work so that we can come together. Part of that repair work would be having that conversation about what language we want to use collectively. People need to have offshoots of language and rhetorical structures whenever they don't feel they're a part of the collective. Making us come together to create that language and massage it is an important piece of this. When I say coming together, all the subsets of our field – the artists, the arts managers, the people in foundations, the educators, this broad service organizations, these broad cross intersections of folks that have some varying levels of skin in the game, but making sure that there's an atonement and a full-bodied, full-throated acknowledgment. I say same energy.



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Same energy with what the harm was done is the same energy with which the remedy needs to be applied.

- **Speaker 3 (Facilitator):** Would you give just an example of what a language you're thinking about?
- **Speaker 6:** I'm thinking of the evolution of how we talk about the arts as a quote/unquote, public good and the evolution of that from Baumol and Bowen in the early 60s, whenever the NEA was being created, categorizing the income gap and calling the arts a quasi-public good. Saying that over and over and over to the point where we really, one, were able to (make a) little questionable migration of a quasi-public good to just calling it a public good. I'm going to let us have that. But when you socialize people to the language of our field, you get to the point where you get the benefit of the presumption without having to say it over and over again.

**Speaker 7:** I'm thinking that when we talk about mobilization, it'll have to happen at multiple levels. It can't be top down or bottom up. I really appreciated what [Speaker] had to say in our last session about the arts at the local level, and I really think local arts agencies, I'm biased, I'm from a local arts agency, full disclosure, are really an underutilized resource. I know the NEA had been doing research around local arts agencies and all of that got tabled. But local arts agencies and [Location] have a really strong local arts agency network. We're being called on to do a lot more advocacy. We understand our communities really well, both the arts organizations, artists, and the community needs. But we sit at this nexus of where we speak to our local elected officials, our state elected officials, and our federal officials. There's a lot of mobilization that can happen working with those local arts council partners. When it comes to coalition building, right now it's really focused on urban arts councils and the city level. I think that's a real misstep. I think there's a lot that could be learned from local arts councils.

**Speaker 8:** One of the threads from the previous two breakouts I was in was about centering artists and breaking down this barrier between professional and non-professional creative participants. Another piece that's come up is what's the coming change in our structures? I've spent my career across some funding, some strategy, some public sector technology, and now I work innovation capital, which is this discipline of taking a lot of small things and figuring out which of them are going to be the right next big things. It really makes me think of the difference in felt stability between an individual working artist and any nearby arts organization. If you're an individual working artist, you're by yourself, you're alone, you're lacking in a lot of different things, and it feels that institution that's right next to you, that you might be trying to get work with, get funding from, get presented by, has all the stability in the world. Relative to you, that's probably true, but the real difference in stability is very, very small. Yet, that structural imbalance can make it hard for the



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organizations that most want to be driven by artists' innovations to actually let those innovations change them structurally, to help them grow and move forward. When I think about what we need to be able to mobilize, it's the willingness to surrender our structures to the artist, and figuring out how to do that, and how to fund that, and how to let things really change.

- **Speaker 3 (Facilitator):** When you're talking about felt stability, are you talking about the stability of our structure, we want to look (at) tomorrow (or) do we (focus on) today, or are you talking about the stability of, I know I'm going to exist tomorrow, or both?
- **Speaker 8:** Definitely both. On the one hand, it makes any conversation between I, the performer, and you, the presenter who might want to present me structurally really imbalanced, right? Because you control the stage, you control the audience, right? And it makes it hard for me to bring my full creativity to the structure of the work. The second one is that the artist is trying to do their thing, and the institution is trying to survive, because institutions have this, as we all know, structural self-preservation thing that just winds up happening when you've got to pay people's salaries, which is neither good nor bad, it's just a reality. That winds up throwing sand on the gears of the change we are hoping to create.

**Speaker 9:** I'm echoing this conversation about organizations' dialogue with artists, organizations and artists in dialogue with community members. I think we have a communications issue, persuasion, trust building. How do we really create the information and put it out in ways that are genuinely accessible? I think this connects with the idea of asset mapping, which was big in my previous breakout, but awareness, right? I often am in the receiving end of evidence I had known or understood, I would have contributed or participated more. I think we need to be thinking – maybe it's tools that we already have. Maybe it's working groups that feed into a central sector clearinghouse that has multiple entry points so that people can go at it with a lot of knowledge or with very little knowledge and find their way in. At the end of the day, I think it's communications and breaking down both actual and perceived silos.

**Speaker 10:** Something I wanted to add is just taking some of these big ideas into super bite-sized pieces. Something I'm interested in is how to take community-centric approaches and apply them when we're in national or regional institutions. While we're tackling the big 20-year vision and the big collective action, yes, keep doing that. But also, it could be as simple as meeting with three people we don't know from these calls and having one-on-one follow-ups to see where we could join forces, where we could share resources. [Speaker], I'm looking at you. We definitely need a follow-up. Just as we're in these spaces, we can hear who's doing similar work to us, where we might have easy synergy to align, whether on a program, a workshop, or a larger long-term effort. Because I'm a staff of one, I lean deep into radical collaboration. It's something I've been forced to do, but also something I really value and would just offer in this space too, seeing where there's



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already synergy with people among the groups who might be able to come together and start small. It could turn into something as drastic as mergers. It could be something as simple as a workshop or as big and long term as that.

**Speaker 3 (Facilitator):** You and I are both in a lot of conversations about how we need a big organized national thing and it needs to be informed by local work on the ground, local organizations are so important, it has to bubble up as much as it trickles down. But oftentimes, the national conversations end up flattening the local work and it turns into one person sitting somewhere telling everyone locally what to do. You all with the [Organization] are trying to do it in a different way, anything about how to support a lot of local folks to do what they're doing?

**Speaker 11:** I think part of what is very challenging about trying to do national organizing or national policy work in the arts is that people's experience of art and culture and artists is a local experience. It is connected to their local ecosystem and their local resources and the needs and the support systems for individual artists are almost entirely local. When we gather for a national something, it's usually about arts funding, which is not a very resonant issue for local people, the idea of national arts funding. Then we get trapped in this place where we talk about community organizing and mobilization, but local people, towards national arts funding. No matter how fun you make it look, I think there's just too many gaps between someone's lived experience and what that is, which is very different than mobilizing people around healthcare, for example, where the connection between national policy and their lived experience is very, very clear to most people. Most of the time. I think that is twofold. One is that we have to redirect our energy towards supporting what is happening locally and letting that be different from one another. Letting that be specific to the place and not expecting that there is a singular agenda for what that work needs to look like, but that it is important that it exists. Then I think at a national level, we have to mobilize people around things that aren't about arts funding. I think we have to be more creative about identifying the issues that actually impact creative and cultural infrastructure. At a state level, nationally, and those things are primarily outside of the arts. They are things like health insurance and health care. They are social safety net policies. They are policies around benefit protections and contract protections for contract workers. I think if we're going to try and roll up local community action into a shared national agenda, it has to be something that is for people's daily lives. I think we can find a lot of ways through the lens of economic security or the lens of local economy that we can do that. None of those are going to be like the NEA, which is important, but I don't think you can apply the same kinds of organizing and advocacy that other fields use to something that doesn't have that. It of course has local impact, but the steps you have to take before a person in a community are like, I really understand the impact of the National Endowment for the Arts in my community. I don't, that doesn't feel our highest and best use of our time right now.



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**Speaker 12:** I do want to respond to [Speaker's] challenge of national policy agendas. I also think it's resonating to me with [Speaker's] point that unless and until we address the divisions and harm within the sector, we won't be able to identify what those unifying threads are at a national level. It will feel we're too fragmented to agree on them or that other things are getting in the way. I believe that that's long-term work. To address healing and maybe the goal of having arts-specific agenda items that are resonant at the national level is one of those indicators that we have done that work well, that go beyond just money, because money is the boring thing that can be applied anywhere, right? The main thing I want to say is that I think also to [Speaker's] point about the local being how people experience the arts, I think there's a task for us in this big conversation to, in part, redefine how we think about leadership through that local lens that allows for a difference because it's always through those local leaders who know what it means to serve a place, right? But to also create mechanisms through which we can pool resources or mobilize resources in a de-risked fashion that would allow those local leaders some more room, some more flexibility, some experimentation, some cohorts, some learning opportunities. By resources, I of course mean money, but also the exchange of knowledge across place is one of the things that I think we have a lot of potential around, but we haven't quite figured out how to facilitate. I envision decentralized change, maybe to [Speaker's] point, but I do think we need portfolios that stretch across place that defy the borders as we know them, whether it's between states or countries or other kinds of social borders. The architecture of that only comes about through community organizing and relational work.

**Speaker 4:** I was just struck as we were talking about national and arts being local. I think one of the things I would like to see, and maybe this is more for a second session, is conversations that allow different folks at the table to highlight what is very different about the environment in their particular community, and perhaps ways we've moved to solve it. We tend to jump all the way up to what do we have in common, and how have you done that, as opposed to allowing folks to deep dive and perhaps wallow. Perhaps this is also one of the reasons to diversify the group at the table, because when I think about this, I actually think about it setting it up the dozens, where we try to put on the table, oh, you think you got it bad? Let me introduce you to my senator – and we're going back and forth. It's a laugh, a tear, a way to just really do that. Now that I've lived and worked in three different regions of the country, the cultural differences around money and art and culture – it's not even modestly different. It is radically different. If you have time to step back from it, it's somewhat fascinating. There may be some crossover solutions. I think making room for those deep dive conversations that allow us to individualize ourselves and our situations might actually reveal some solutions that we're not really thinking about.

**Speaker 7:** Making change at a national level can focus on the local level, affecting advocacy and change in our local communities and learning from each other and the policy and that's being pushed in different areas – it has to be tailored to the individual community. No two communities



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are alike. We don't have to reinvent the wheel every time either. I know there's a lot of policy work that's shared at the state level, but it doesn't trickle down into the individual communities that we could learn. We could make real change that bubbles up from that local level.

**Speaker 13:** I'm thinking about how in this campaign, making to make the local activities that people are doing on an individual or community-based more explicit to the world as a counterbalance, like that local creativity protects plurality and complexity. It builds our capacity to imagine alternatives. It makes hidden power visible. It strengthens community bonds. It preserves memory. It practices safe descent. It expands who is included in the people, power through process and not through product. We could be talking about those commonalities of individual local practice at a broader scale so that people can really be encouraged to work locally and to believe that they're having a national impact when they join a block party or weave with their grandma. Whatever that is, it is doing counter-resistance work. To be able to have somebody at the more national level, saying that, and bringing those little kernels together as a national activity that we are undertaking.

## Group 4 Chat

1. What is our vision for 2045? Recognizing current challenges and opportunities of the decentralized system in which we operate - one that shapes the creation, production, and presentation of culture and arts – while directly confronting the profound and pervasive fragmentation that undermines its effectiveness. By 2045, cultural governance is coordinated across the sector. Government, philanthropy, and civil society acknowledge their distinct roles and obligations within a shared ecosystem. They share a common agenda, enforce accountability mechanisms, and sustain civic participation through real decision-making power.

2. What strands of work do we need to do to realize these visions? We believe we need to focus on:
    a. Structuring a co-created, shared policy agenda, with buy-in from all stakeholders, so we can move forward systemically and in coordination, with clear shared objectives.
    b. Sustaining spaces for local, statewide, and national dialogue and coordination, so actors can recognize themselves and others, the work different actors are doing, and the needs different communities and constituencies face.
    c. We believe we need more investment in coordinated research (that is open and accessible to all), data creation, and collective data stewardship. This is important



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because it encourages evidence-based policymaking, informs and strengthens advocacy, and sheds light on our knowledge gaps.

d. We are inspired by…The work of Arts/Artists Service Organizations and Intermediaries because they understand how the policies and systems that govern our ecosystem impact all stakeholders.

3. "Time to think about this" as a job, not as just a carve out in the day occasionally. Yes...Language! Perhaps the way "community" has become a trigger word…because unintentional overuse has allowed the word to mean different things to different people and is now as weaponizable as the phrase "the American people".

4. Full ecosystem means multiple entry points and calls to action.

5. Recent work on a collaboration with Sabrina Motley and Sojin Kim at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival deeply impresses me with their commitment and actual reach across multiple geographies and communities (and I agree that community word is overused). https://festival.si.edu/

6. https://springboardforthearts.org/creative-change-coalition/

7. A sector visioning call to practicing artists will likely deliver very different inputs. The message has to stay plural.

8. Makes me think of Sam Miller's Leveraging Investment in Community initiative that did a lot of artist input conversations while it existed

9. Freedom is a lot of things… but "free" is not one of them. So, we do need to be funded and well-funded. BOLD IDEA: Where is/What if a collective fundraising group that is raising money on behalf of… application is BEFORE the money comes in, not after. Let's say a group/collective of fundraisers/fund-managers/donor-fund advisors decide their going to raise $500M to give to 250 museums/arts orgs. Period. No program application. No obligation for a particular exhibition or show. Just funding. And then…. They do it again for another 250 museums.

10. Also, this artist driven project https://www.artistsu.org/

11. Tell the "National" story of the value of our local actions: Creative practices at all scales:
    a. It protects plurality and complexity
    b. It builds people's capacity to imagine alternatives
    c. It makes hidden power visible
    d. It strengthens community bonds outside the state/market



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e. It preserves memory against erasure
f. It practices dissent safely and symbolically
g. It expands who counts as "the people"
h. It can democratize power through process, not just product

12. WILD IDEA: (using OPM, of course – Other People's Money) to commission Second City to do regional residency of 6 month in particular reasons and produced a new work (yes, with improv) that thoughtfully satirizes the state of AC funding/support/pressure, etc. in that region. Sparking laughter and deep thoughts… and perhaps some focused intentional engagement.



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# GROUP 5

## Group 5 Transcript

**Speaker 2**: I think that what I'm struck by is the word collective and figuring out how we can collect ourselves when we work by design, as [Speaker] laid out so eloquently in the opening, in such a disparate fashion. Really understanding – what are those tentpoles that folks can really cohere around and adhere to? Again, the strength is the disparate nature of it. But what are those collective points that we can all agree on and decide to advance together?

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** When you talk about the tentpoles, those collective points of agreement, are those the values? Are those shared ideas? Can you talk more about that?
- **Speaker 2:** I think the most salient example that I might give is there had been some conversation in the previous two groups that I'd been in around the value of the economic impact arguments that have been made for some time and how they've served and maybe have served point and is now the argument around a social impact covenant or an idea around social cohesion. Figuring out what arguments to privilege and forefront in a collective advocacy effort and fashion would be just a very specific example, again, of just some of the outgrowths of competition today.

**Speaker 3:** When you talked about collective action, but also: How do we move this work together? I'm really interested in the idea of us really radically sharing with each other constantly and iteratively, so that we understand how we work together in relationship with each other. I think that's a part of breaking silos and allowing us to lead, getting away from the mentality of scarcity. I think in my state, where I've found new leadership interested in that same space, we've found that we have more power together, which is something we all know. Just continuing to push for that.

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** Are there places in the art sector or in other sectors where you're inspired by that collective action?
- **Speaker 3:** I would say that I've seen a lot of it in a new generation of leadership in our arts institutions in [Location]. I hear stories of those that came before me and the relationships that they had with other key institutions and there being tension or grudges. It's so silly. Then I hear these new leaders saying, yes, it's silly. Then we have this much stronger collaboration and partnership and communication that has propelled our work, especially from an advocacy standpoint and awareness across the state, but especially



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elected officials. I've been inspired by the work that we've been able to do together as a body of new leaders in [Location].

**Speaker 4:** For collective action in our sector to be strengthened, I feel strongly that we need to spend time deconstructing the language and definitions we hold around very common words we use all the time in relation to our work, and really deconstruct those concepts to understand what has fashioned the lenses we're wearing as practitioners and in serving audiences. It's not resonating largely yet, and that's because we are, even if we're using the same words, we may have wildly different definitions built by our lived experiences and cultures and histories. All of this makes it so we're still talking past each other. I think that a really a Brute-seeking exercise, facilitated exercise, even within the field, to really dissect some of those things could be powerful. Then determining what collective action looks like, and then separately, in the previous session, somebody who I believe is in this one as well, was talking about the need to identify roles like warriors and defenders and I think that it's super important that in this ecosystem that we are really truthful and lean into the roles and capacities of different players in the field. If they're a warrior, if they're a defender, if there are limitations and privileges that a certain role has. If somebody at a local arts agency that's governmental has their hands tied on doing X, Y, Z, will that local arts agency still lift up the artists who are taking bigger risks and have more freedom to do certain things? That kind of collaborative action built on an understanding of the strengths and limitations.

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** Could I ask you to put your top three terms and phrases that you feel need to be examined and deconstructed? If you want to speak them out or if you want to put them into chat.
- **Speaker 4:** I can put it into chat, but an example of a national move towards that, an international move towards that, which is replacing the word “art” with “creativity” to try to meet people where they're at in a more resonant way. I'll add more thoughts in the chat.

**Speaker 5:** I think part of what I've been involved in, and we've had many conversations around of local collective action work and or even just regional work – I feel that this type of conversation, or at least a connected conversation around how we actually can. Who's actually collecting some of these learnings? How are we actually holding each other accountable across regions, across the nations? How can we actually do that type of investment so that we are continuing to learn with each other instead of allowing certain regions to fall behind in this space? How do we actually make sure that we are creating opportunities for these leaders, these networks, to be invested in and recognize that the movement is national and not just regional? How can we, again, make those touch points continue to build on that? So that somebody can actually speak back from a data point of view. This is what we're hearing. Is this what's actually resonant with you? Because I think



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part of the work of all of us generating so much is also really exhausting in terms of being able to be responsive to our communities. How can somebody help us be able to do that work and actually be able to demonstrate where some of those insights are.

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** Are there places where you are inspired by that collective work?
- **Speaker 5:** I was thinking about the Center for Cultural Power and really thinking about their next phase work. I just had a recent conversation with Eric Takeshita and the work that they're doing. Some of the group in Memphis, I forget the name in that space, but the way that the language has shifted into places of empowerment and actual power instead of it being, again, waiting for somebody else to save us.

**Speaker 6:** I think there's three specific areas. These all, in my opinion, should be non-governmental, private, they could be C3s or LLCs or whatever. One is a national arts bank that can do funding and financial services at a very large scale, so multi-billion dollars in terms of capitalization that operates nationally. Two is a similar type of organization that is directing advocacy. This is where something like Americans for the Arts is doing a great job, but someone that will tell us what we need to be doing rather than the bazillion of us telling, trying to get everything together. It just doesn't work. We're smart people, but we've got a lot of ideas. I would love to have someone that was working at an aggregate level saying these are the messages that need to go out. This is how you can frame what you're doing at a local level within these topics, that way we can leverage that at a larger scale. The third one being data. A national level organization that can collect, aggregate, and then regurgitate all the local data that is available and that's out there in a consistent way that can be meaningful across municipalities, statewide, regionally, and nationally. Those three areas, I think, would be the best way. But as we've seen in the past year, I think they need to live outside of federal or state government, because that can just change on a dime. Who are the institutions that could stand? I also think they might want to live outside of specific foundations that maybe have an arm for arts and culture. Again, that can shift within a major funding organization. I think they should be specific to arts, culture, and creativity.

**Speaker 7**: I was really brought forward by [Speaker 4] talking about truth-seeking. In one of the earlier groups, there was a conversation around the paradigm shift. It's my sense that we need to do a truth-seeking for our field. This comment or the question about collective action, I think about many of the national service organizations and other agencies, but in some ways service organizations and agencies are about holding ground. They have a constituency and they want to make certain that their constituency's needs are met. For a paradigm shift, we also have to really give release, freedom to that ground. We have to let the ground actually be more open and



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accessible to people. I think we need to deconstruct the field as it is organized before we can reconstruct the field and the support structure.

**Speaker 8**: To the inspiration question, I'm inspired by the First Amendment Committee and the work that Jane Fonda is doing as a legacy to her father. What I've really appreciated is the discussions about the First Amendment, because without it, we can't have these kinds of conversations to do the work, right? The First Amendment is very, very important for us, and particularly as it relates to creativity and artistry. Two things about collective action. Number one, we need a stronger relationship with the for-profit arts, entertainment, sports folks in the US. You know, Bill Ivey wrote about this in 1999. Michael Wilkerson wrote about this in 2012. I don't know why we haven't built a stronger relationship with the for-profit leg of what we do when they also benefit from what we do on the nonprofit end, which would also maybe have included more for-profit folks in these kinds of conversations. Returning power to the community and helping the community and the public understand that creativity is under attack, right? Human creativity is under attack. There's something about being human that I think is so special and so unique. I wouldn't say that it makes us supreme beings to other beings, but there is something to the essence of being human that affect, emotions, and feelings are worthy of interrogating that AI cannot figure out, right? That's what makes arts and culture powerful and may return us to a time where we really uplift and value what does it mean to be human, particularly in a time when machines can mimic our cognitive and intellectual essence.

**Speaker 9**: I'm really inspired by possibilities for mutual aid and peer learning. I think us all being here right now is a really great example of a grassroots-initiated peer learning network. I think that those exist in various ways. One of the ones that's been most meaningful for me, I work at [Organization], I run the [Department], and it has been at the [City] Arts and Education Roundtable, which is both a peer learning community, an advocacy organization, and also a field wide convener. There are other models like that, that can be quite nimble, because they are really field driven. They're driven by practitioners is what I need to say. There are more and more municipalities that are interested in investigating possibilities for civic engagement. I know that that's true right now in New York City. There's a new Civic Engagement Commission and Commissioner. Thinking about how we can partner with city government in terms of civic engagement and how that links to cultural strategies, I think it's a really promising practice.

**Speaker 10**: I was just thinking about the many conversations like this I've been in about not wanting to reinvent the wheel. We, while developing arts policy, there are cultural practices and national membership organizations, all kinds of different entities that we can be inspired by to reach out to and do this work with. For example, I was just thinking of the National League of Cities.



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National membership organizations already have networks that are smaller scale. In doing this work, we will need to recognize that there is no one size fits all solution. An urban arts policy model is not going to be the same as a rural arts policy model. Meeting people where they're at, essentially.

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** Are you seeing collective action in some of the sectors that you're working in or some of the communities that you're working in?
- **Speaker 10:** One thing that I immediately thought of is we did some work in [Location], which is a very small town in [State]. It happens to be an epicenter of modernist architecture. It's a very interesting place. It's a really nice walkable community where you have the business improvement district office right across the street from the arts council right across the street from the visitor center. I think of places like small towns that can really make use of their close connections and collaboration. My answer would be breaking down those social barriers to see you can work with whoever's next door to you, no matter what sector they work in.

**Speaker 11:** One of the reasons why I've been having challenges with thinking about collective action examples – and I don't profess to know what [Speaker] was struggling with – is that since the pandemic, we have had a real hard time seeing our collective value or our collective objectives being articulated in this sector. For a whole host of reasons, primarily financial. There have been certain sectors of the arts community that have pushed their issues and their agendas to the forefront, and other sectors have been ignored. The byproduct being the devaluing of the point of views, the perspectives, the way in which they create and look and work. That's tied into many of the assaults that we've seen nationally on inclusiveness throughout the last several years. For us to actually be able to do any kind of collective action, we first need to build some sense of trust amongst ourselves, because I don't think there's a strong sense of trust amongst the arts community. I've seen too many folks use their losses of audience or donors to articulate a need to funding sources in exclusion to other organizations, basically building what I perceive, if we don't do anything a smaller, wider, less diverse arts sector with less imagination and less creativity. Because it'll do what capitalism does, and it'll continue to eat away at the group until the biggest fish is the only one that's left.

**Speaker 12:** I'm the [Title] in [Location]. We are a city that is full of many narratives that are often competing unnecessarily. I think that trust really is so important and we're starting to see it in our sector, but it took many years. It took many years for many of us who were inside of organizations who were not running necessarily organizations, but who became colleagues across organizations in the sector, in the trenches, if you will, and are now perhaps sitting in places of leadership. We can look across and because we have that trust, as Adrienne Marie Brown talks about, progress moves



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at the speed of trust. There are a lot of things that we are starting to move quickly. It feels like we're moving through quicksand in some respects, and depending on who you're talking to, we're moving so fast, but it's based on trust. That is so important because otherwise the pendulum is swinging back forth and we focus on the thing that is the shiny object to the exclusion of everything else and everyone else. Is there a way, is there a world where we can join arms? Perhaps I am not necessarily impacted by someone else's loss, but I can champion for them that they've lost it. I don't necessarily have to try to get all the eggs that are out there, right? Like, how can we all move together? At the risk of sounding Pollyanna, I believe that there's space and room for all of us together. But because we have been pitted against each other, none of us are moving forward. Or to [Speaker 11's] point, eventually, the only people that will survive are these big institutions that may or may not represent all of us.

**Speaker 5**: I think part of the work, particularly what we've been experiencing in [Location] over the course of the past four years, is that there's a lot of suspicion about collective action movements. There's also this decision on who gets resources for collective action movements and who actually gets to claim victories and success at whose expense. I will say the work that we've been doing has been trying to build across geographies, across cultural histories. Success is actually happening because we're building it through experience and through shared knowledge and work. There's shared work that is coming together that is actually building pathways for redeveloping trust and redeveloping repair around what that looks like. It is both a suspension of some understanding of histories, but also not leaving some of those histories and not leaving those hurts, but also recognizing that they are still in the room with us and still being very present as we continue to choose to move forward. How do we choose to move forward to make sure that those histories, those hurts will not define us, but also can inform how we move forward?

**Speaker 4:** I really feel like we just can't have conversations and address any sustainable systems changes until we reconcile not just the hurts and the histories. There is no reconciling them in some cases. But how do we hold tension in that ambiguity? The context of this multicultural nation of so many histories and ways of knowing and doing and how do we come to shared language or agreements around how that is expressed in ways that speak more truth to a person's being and roots? I do feel strongly that so much of the language we use – I mean, sure, people can love the arts and think the arts are great and everything, but there's such that immediate categorization for a lot of folks where it's like, oh, I don't see myself there. I don't identify in that way. That's because that separation of that core beauty and creativity and the sewing with your grandmother and the tying flies for fishes, all of these things that are just life that Western society has so effectively damaged. How as a field do we do that work of being artists and holding space for ambiguity and tension to build new possibilities for language and conveying concepts and how we go about that



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work is a question I have. I'm excited about this conversation because I feel like this leads in that direction.

**Speaker 7:** I think the question that should be asked of each to each other is why should we trust you? What do you know? What have you gone through? What have you experienced? They may have experienced many of the same things that we have. Then we say, okay, I get it. I understand. You know? Again, we are this country of differences, but we have to make certain that we can trust each other. I think it's incumbent on each of us to try to explain why you should trust me. I think that's the beginning of any conversation. I feel in some ways that this entire conversation might have benefited from that at the beginning. To have that conversation to go forward, as opposed to, I'm John Doe, I live in California, that kind of thing. But to actually have some ground here, and we tend to introduce ourselves institutionally. I'm the director, I used to be that kind of thing, as opposed to, I learned knitting from my grandmother. That's why you should trust me. Right? Those kinds of things. I think this is a session that actually may need to go backwards a little bit before it goes forward.

**Speaker 13:** I'm trying to return to where do I see these things being practiced as a collation of all this. I, for some reason, immediately go in the Bay Area here to EB PREC and their Oakland work, which, if folks aren't familiar with that, there's this joining of the cosmic and the philosophical and the creative and the beautiful with this very real neighborhood, co-located, disciplinarity and it's not just about the arts, it's the barbershop and the hardware store. I'm not just speaking just about EB PREC in this case, but for me it always comes back to neighborhoods and daily existence and how you to [Speaker's] point about trust and understanding the land that people are tending and appreciative of and I think of EB PREC and a lot of places. I had the pleasure of working with the Center for Cultural Innovation for a while and that whole, maybe in this group folks would know that CCI is kind of mycelial network of socioeconomic geniuses. Black Wall Street, there's another good place doing some good work. There are a lot of good places out there.

**Speaker 14:** I just wanted to lift up an example here in Atlanta that I've seen over the last couple of years. The green space advocacy community here undertook about a two-year effort collectively to get a tax increase that had not been increased in 30 years. Tax increases are not easy to get done. A couple of lessons that I think were interesting, one, they did build a lot of trust among themselves through building on the conversation we've just been having. Two, they were very strategic about having a limited number of spokespeople. They were very disciplined about who would both externally and both incoming and outgoing communication would go through so that they didn't have a lot of side doors that information was flowing into the group. Then they were very organized within themselves about how they communicated. Then they very much focused on expansion.



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Their message was about how the funds could expand, not fill holes and not play defense, but it was a very much an expansion mindset and communication focus. They were able to get public support over those two years in a unanimous fashion from the local officials. I just wanted to highlight that work and how I think that it is an interesting template to try to pull from

**Speaker 6**: I just wanted to riff on the previous comment and say, where is it that we can trust each other, as opposed to where is it that we're maybe not aligned or maybe even directly misaligned? I run a [Organization], and we have strong history in the corporate community out here in [Location]. I'm at a lot of tables with [three major companies] and those types of people. Other sectors tend to find a unifying message around some central points. If it's for profit, it can be bottom line, or it can be legislation around a specific thing. That doesn't mean that they agree on everything. Usually, it doesn't because they're in competition by nature with each other in a for-profit industry. But for advocacy or for collective action, they have come together around a set of specific things. The example that I know some of you have heard me say before in this, it's like for the general Republican party for many decades, it's been guns, abortion and taxes – that's it. There's a whole lot of disagreement in that party around other things, but those have been unifying principles. In my experience, if we're looking for collective action on a larger scale, can we focus or can we have a leader in the space that focuses us on a small set of collective agreements while still acknowledging that there's a whole lot of disagreement and there always will be? I feel like outside of the sector, it's in the house and out of the house, right? What do you talk about in the house? Then how do you present yourself out of the house? How can we create an out-of-the-house persona that is unified while still understanding there's work to do in the house?

- **Speaker 11:** I'll just say those unifying principles that [Speaker] just identified in the Republican party had the same objective: they all were trying to sustain white supremacy. Let's just be honest about that. I guess if we could all get on the boat for white supremacy, we might be able to find a way of trusting one another.
- **Speaker 6:** No, no, no, man. I want to push back on that. That's an example of what they were doing. What are our principles that we can align around something else? I just use that as an example because it's negative, but it's been really frickin' effective, right? It's been effective to the extent that there's a large part of this country that don't believe in that, but it's still being effective. What are our things that we can – I'm not saying that we get around those things, not even close – but what are our positive things that we can coalesce around?
- **Speaker 11:** Yeah, effective and destructive, okay. Just want to remind us of that too.
- **Speaker 15:** I completely support what [Speaker] is saying about the Republican Party's goal is to undermine the arts because of its way of defying white supremacy. I think that there are ways that we can find a common ground without them realizing it to help the arts



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be sustained. I think there's covert actions and espionage, and we have to figure it out. We have to get creative.

## Group 5 Chat

1. More thoughts around rhetoric, language, concept, and the need for deconstruction to see which conceptual seeds will nourish and can be shared among more people: As an art history fan, I feel that arts advocates have been contending with consequences of a time that is often gloried= Elevation of arts & divorce of "fine art" from craft and cultural during the Renaissance (+ promoting link between Classical idea of "beauty" (western aesthetics) and "moral goodness." Colonization, oppression, and white supremacy has relied on robbing cultures of their languages and modes of cultural expression and forced assimilation + English is a wildly inadequate language to express the universe of ways of knowing, being, and doing, and it's by design. Language is key in shaping thoughts, and then influencing action. My question is HOW we deconstruct the field's language (around work, value, etc.) to bring our multiple histories, definitions, and concepts for new messaging and methods.
2. https://ebprec.org/
3. I started in my career complying heavily with expectations for 'professionalism' in order to be heard/respected as a young, female arts leader. As a slightly older and wiser version of myself, I believe "professionalism" in the western, capitalist context is an enemy of trust building. We need to be able to be human wherever we are - I don't see how we move forward in real, lasting ways if it doesn't become the working norm that we are always holding our histories, traumas, knowledge, skills, and community / cultural / family roles etc. that don't pertain to the titles on our business cards
4. Truly pluralistic trust is just downright FUN (I think they call it Coalition building? ;)
5. Those unifying principles were based on achieving the same outcome; white supremacy.
6. How do we build the safety and transparency within the field around the acknowledgment that we don't trust each other in some ways and that may not change for a long time, if at all? The arts hang out in nuance, ambiguity and the beauty of imperfect translations, so how do we hold the tension of that embrace that WHILE coming to some of those shared values, language, and principles?



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# GROUP 6

## Group 6 Transcript

**Speaker 1**: It's kind of hard not to be somewhat influenced by your current role. As someone leading a state art agency, I'm inspired by the work being done by my fellow state art agencies across the country, because they have varying budgets, varying ways they're interacting with their customers. I think that by strengthening our state art agencies, they will be able to ensure that they're able to support things in a particular way. It's kind of hard for me to step out of that role because we are (all) vital players in this. I'm inspired by the work being done and what state agencies can do to get things mobilized. In order to accelerate this work, all of our state-owned agencies will need stable funding, a dedicated tax source. How can we collaborate, work with each other, bolster the region? If we think of our regional art agencies, how can we coordinate to bolster our regions from an economic standpoint, but also how can we bolster support for our individual artists in a congruent fashion if the funding is just so all over the place? Most of the instability is fueled by a political lens, and the state art agencies are just kind of flailing, doing the best they can to support those that they can support.

**Speaker 2**: I would be remiss not to offer a sip of my own Kool-Aid in that I am very inspired by my field. Which is that of fiscal sponsorship and just offer a little bit of potential framing in case it's not clear to everybody. The arts world is very familiar with the re-granting model, Fractured Atlas, et cetera, of fiscal sponsorship. In fact, that's pretty much the only model I find the arts world is familiar with. There is another more dominant model that comes from health and human services, the environmental field, as well as a lot of movement building organizations – the comprehensive model. I'm seeing the comprehensive model is full charge nonprofit infrastructure. It's a permanent alternative to standalone nonprofit formation. I'm seeing these models largely in other fields, not in the arts, the only one I know is actually CultureWorks in Philadelphia that focuses on this approach. But I'm seeing these comprehensive models really being, across the country, tremendously powerful ways to organize solidarity and organize intentional communities of practice and identity, as well as share all of the infrastructure and support needs that are needed to do this work. I find that to be the most inspiring and also tangible way in which collective action is manifesting in the nonprofit sector. I would like to see more of that happening in the arts sector. In order to accelerate that, I'd say even more than capital and other investments, we need to divorce ourselves from the orthodoxy that independence of mission and vision requires the formation of a nonprofit and tax exemption and all the other nonsense that goes along with that. That is a false axiom. That has left us with the 1.9 million little organizations out there struggling on their own. It



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is one of the biggest factors for inhibiting greater collective action and collaboration. We need to put that assumption into the grave, in my opinion. So that's my salvo from our field.

**Speaker 4:** A permeating thread that we've had in each of the three sessions has been the inspiration of the arts and health, new research and conversation and advancement. That is a very inspiring progress for our sector. In order to have some collective action it's really important that we develop and co-create a national strategy, which I think is a spirit of today's work, but also that it can be customized at the state and the local levels, because local arts agencies, state art agencies are like snowflakes. They're similar, but each one is different. We all have to respond to our existing environments and what are those trends that we need to reinforce - something that can be customized and tailored to serve our constituencies. I would really like to see the creative economy strengthened in a through line in that strategy. I think that is an area that has been bubbled up, but there hasn't been a strong leadership organization that's really championed the creative economy, which I think is a missed opportunity for our sector. I would really appreciate the inclusion of something related to cultural diplomacy, because in our culture right now, there's a lot of divisiveness. I think there's the power of the arts to create empathy and cross-cultural understanding that can occur from person to person. As somebody that works in one of the most diverse cities in the United States, we take a lot of pride in that. I think that can be a real opportunity for this effort and this initiative.

**Speaker 5:** When we think about support to strengthen the sector, to help make visible at least a directional North Star, I think it's really important to think beyond money. Money, of course, is important, no question. But if we think about the platforms that we have available to us, the relationships that can be harnessed in support of what we want to do, I think, as I've been sitting here listening, it's really important to pay attention to the dollars but also understand that there are other kinds of resources that can push us to where we want to go. One of the things the NEA did during the previous administration was to merge all of the resources that were available from that perch in support of the arts and creativity. It wasn't just the money. It was influence. It was information. It was relationships. I just encourage us all to think expansively about what's available to us to do our work.

**Speaker 6**: I'm really inspired by what's been going on outside of the United States and particularly thought it was interesting in Ireland and how they were able to pass the guaranteed basic income for artists and to watch the campaign of how they've done that. Every year, they came up with a platform that they mobilized around. It was talking about space for artists, making space, making resources available, all the different ways, and as the previous speaker said, not just necessarily funding, but conditions for artists to thrive. We actually are trying to model that here in terms of working towards the next governor's race and trying to come up with a platform that we can put



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out there. What I thought, if you follow what they did in Ireland, it was interesting because one of the things that they talked about was framing it around not how it benefits artists. I think a lot of times, particularly when we look at who's in the room today, we are all talking to each other inside of our own sector. How do we benefit ourselves? Even though our conversation is around, "we are here to provide solutions for the greater humanity, collective good and public good", I think that there's something to be said about how we frame this. It inspires me to think about how we can build upon those concepts, and not just talk about how it benefits artists, because I think that can be very exclusionary to many people, but how we benefit community and everyone else.

**Speaker 7**: I've been thinking about this idea of consensus versus building coalitions based on shared stakes. I feel like the arts have tried to do this sort of thing about making sure that everybody feels like they're welcome. I think if I could place one group on one side and the other group on the other side, what the other group has done is really done a very good job of not really caring about what other people think. I'm not saying that we should shift our whole focus in that way, but I am saying that that I feel like there is something to organizing around concrete goals, funding protection, artistic independence, governance reform, and not abstractions to move with alignment to create a sturdier foundation. The other thing is what's come out in the last week with the events in Minneapolis is that the woman who was killed, Renee Good, was an artist. I was thinking about how do you support the artist in this moment? Is it legal defense pools? Is it care networks for artists facing censorship and retaliation? Is it political pressure? What do we need to be doing right now to make sure that the amplifiers of the current situation that we're in have what they need? How do we separate vision from messaging so that we're not so busy trying to convince the others, not working so hard to appease hostile audiences. Within our own communities, how do we have that interior conversation? Because I don't know if we're really having it. And then how do we organize through the work by actually just focusing on the work that we're doing as opposed to through rhetoric?

**Speaker 8:** I am inspired by the collective, structured, targeted legal efforts. I'm not making this political, but for me, sitting here in [Location], I would say it's like living on the moon. And trying to identify the levers that still exist or that are new. Because I think part of what's happening, at least in Washington, in terms of funding and legislation - and there are lots of folks on this call who have seen the ups, the downs, we know it all - but this is, for me at least in the last 25 years, unprecedented. I just think that being really clear about what levers still exist in terms of making change, be it be policy or funding or imagining a future, like where are the levers that create change. I had not thought about legal channels or this just wasn't part of my training. I'm trying to learn quickly. Then I think what's really resonated with me is keeping track of what's going away and what needs to be brought back, what maybe doesn't, and then what can be new. All the rules and what I thought I knew about how the levers of power worked, how to bring about change, have



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seismically shifted. We're still doing a lot of mapping and what I'm inspired by is just the connections – things like picking up the phone just to stay really connected in an increasingly unkind world.

**Speaker 9**: I'm inspired by the refusal of artists to perform at the Kennedy Center and the impact that's having around the country. I don't know if it's collective action, but it's calling attention to the value of the arts, and I think it's having an impact. That's a tough decision those people are making, but I think it's something that is relevant right now to this whole conversation about how we focus attention on the impact of the arts.

**Speaker 10 (Facilitator):** I do want to point out one of the questions is that what do we need to really accelerate the work? And I think we heard it's not just money, but what is it? More phone calls? It could be something that simple, right? More being in touch, but maybe a little bit of ideation. Again, we're ideating here about what would help us push some of this down the road?

**Speaker 11:** I definitely have some thoughts around this. I think about the collective thought power of today's four-hour session, and if we could replicate that at the regional and local levels with some strategy that can be conveyed, think about really building some momentum and acceleration around this. Californians for the Arts does this across the state of California, and it's a really good example of building grassroots momentum. I think that that's a really powerful tool. I feel like it's one that, unfortunately, we've missed over the past several years, pretty much since the pandemic. There hasn't been a "there, there" in terms of gatherings. I would really welcome that kind of movement to accelerate, some type of national initiative and strategy.

**Speaker 12:** What a pleasure to be here and what an extraordinary conversations but I don't know if that we're going to get answers. I am thinking a lot about what it would take to push the art sector to that next level. They have started an organization called Partnership for Miami and it's filled with all the business civic leaders from the private sector world. They are looking at the infrastructure and the things that are the challenges in it. They're looking at education, healthcare, transportation - the arts are nowhere. This city that everybody views as "the next cultural capital" in this group of 20 very intelligent, respected, wealthy civic leaders from all the businesses, the arts are not represented. I think that how do I create that or how do we create for the arts in [Location] a narrative that we are economic drivers, we contribute to health, we contribute to the social values, the values that the artists bring certainly to the city and see if there's a way of taking that to the national level. Because I think we have to do this collectively. I think we must do it as a group. To go back to the Kennedy Center, I think it's fabulous. It is the first time that the power of the arts has shown their face against government. If nothing else happens, I think it's a fantastic thing that is happening at Kennedy Center and it's showing the strength and the value that we in the national landscape have the power to change things.



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**Speaker 13:** I want to echo support for arriving at a multi-pronged strategy that came up in some of the earlier conversations today. One of the things that came up was a campaign to talk about the value of the arts, and certainly that would be an element of a strategy. I think in addition to the strategy itself, there have to be scouts that are looking for high leverage opportunities for impact. Who are the people who are constantly scanning the environment to see where some kind of intervention could advance the larger vision or the strategy? That has to be somebody's job, that that's what they do. Whether it is in communications and messaging, or it has to do with advancing important research, or advocacy from a policy perspective, or more practical direct support for artists and cultural organizations, to be able to have someone or a team of people at different scales, national, regional, local, even global, that are constantly looking for opportunities to push the envelope and advance the work, and can point people and help direct people to those opportunities. That feels important.

**Speaker 14:** In terms of practical advocacy steps, one thing that has always been a concern of mine is to bridge this divide between the arts and humanities, which is very artificial and I think been very bad for both arts and humanities. I would also add to that the fourth estate, journalism. Ultimately with the arts we're talking about legal encroachments, censorship, and First Amendment rights. We're seeing today the news of a journalist being investigated. So, I would love to see the arts community come into greater cooperation and solidarity with the journalistic and letters community, as well as the humanities community. Look at the assaults on the Smithsonian. There is certainly art in that mix, but a lot of that is about cultural heritage. And the efforts to erase Black history in Philadelphia by this administration. These are all common causes, and I think we need to break down these barriers, arts, humanities, heritage, history, and come together as a more unified front.

**Speaker 15**: A question that I have for the group really is around how this kind of work can happen, because it sounds like it's going to be very inherently scattered. The field itself is so siloed and divided across the different specialties, whether it's visual art, performing, etc. Then this kind of question of arts policy I think also becomes very transversal in a way that might not be helpful because we're talking about labor issues, economic issues, IP issues, and then also local, national. What kind of body is needed? The US doesn't, as we all know, have a Secretary of Culture. What is the body that could get everybody singing from the same hymn sheet?

**Speaker 16**: I don't have the answer. But I think this day is a way that we can really organize this work. I think we have to invest in organizing itself, not just in programs, but in the infrastructure that allows us to move together at scale. Doris Duke Foundation organized a national convening on Creative Labor, Creative Conditions, at Arena in September. It was clear that organizations across the country are working on the same issues, artists' pay, benefits, digital rights, and career pathways.



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But they're doing it in silos, often reinventing the wheel with limited resources. That tells me the problem isn't a lack of innovation. It's a lack of coordination and shared capacity. I think we need to fund coalition infrastructure so that groups can align strategies and act with a common voice. We need sustained policy advocacy so that we are present when budgets and labor productions are decided. We need durable cross-sector partnerships with education, labor, and health systems so that culture is embedded in the institutions that already shape public investment. That's how we move from inspiring fragile success stories that I know my organization likes to tell, to durable national systems, systems that give artists consistent opportunities, fair compensation, protections in a changing digital economy, and the ability to stay rooted in their communities while building long term careers. I'd love to see more of that.

**Speaker 17**: What happened at Arena with Doris Duke was a good session one, and this is a great session two, and before we leave, we need to know when session three is happening. I'm seeing in some of the rooms, we have state art agency representatives, but we have AFTA as well. So NASAA and AFTA, those are two groups that could help be great organizers in helping us do these types of things so that we're not trying to repeat the reinvent the wheel. I think leaving this today without knowing that there is a third conversation that can happen to help us coalesce, get our thoughts together and start. Maybe these breakout rooms and the next one are people who've already expressed interest around where their strengths are or where they can feel they can be most helpful. I think this is a great thing that we've done today and especially dedicating four hours to it, but I think that another meeting will be necessary.

**Speaker 18**: I really appreciate all the talk about organizing, bringing people together across the sector, but one thing that I'm really inspired by is in [State]. We've helped with getting an arts funders network active in the state, which is not something that we've had before. It just really surprised me how many funders don't know each other within the same state. I'm wondering how many other places that's the case. There's a lot they can learn from each other. They've started bringing in guest speakers so they can understand better what's happening. One idea that's floated is actually the idea of a private challenge to government to co-invest, at least in a local level, that would be really matched by a private funders collaborative. Another thing that I really appreciate about this group is that a lot of them showed up to the state arts day because previously philanthropy hadn't been showing up at the legislature, and I think that's important too. I really appreciate that this Group is starting to organize itself and show up at the legislature and talk about how they can collaborate and talk about how they can challenge the public sector as well.

**Speaker 19**: I'd be remiss if I did not say that Washington, DC, deserves to be a state. We all see what happens when we don't have voting power in Congress and our mayor does not have access



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or authority over the National Guard. And so, the artists, the citizens, we need your help in advocating that we do have that type of autonomy in Washington, DC.

## Group 6 Chat

1. Inspired by the ongoing discussions about how the arts can serve as a critical partner to other sectors.

2. https://www.socialimpactcommons.org/blog/zcb3xfwn6owcs4923mah40aqjnpqh9

3. To your thoughts about cultural diplomacy-as the faces of this country continue to change, diversify even more (despite the current administration's efforts) our acknowledgment and action towards a relationship-driven policy for cultural diplomacy will be incredibly important.

4. Yes, Europe is a north star when it comes to the importance of the creative industries/creative economy. There are several organizations advancing this work and research. One example: Unleashing the potential of the cultural and creative industries - EU Agenda
    a. Here is the platform from Ireland and this work did develop into the GBI passage https://ncfa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Pre-Budget-2025-FINAL11.09.24-Submission.pdf
    b. A seasoned couple of seasoned white papers but one worth a read given what we are talking about: https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/files/Culturalvalueweb.pdf
    c. https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/files/CapturingCulturalValue.pdf
    d. They create one every year. https://ncfa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Pre-Budget-2026-Submission_Sep25_-Draft-4.pdf?fbclid=PAZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAadr7EP1qRgvmgWFOaoYv8tRsmPgfhXXz5Bmqqt17WTBWUnxWkmaO8SFntOscg_aem_7HpNXO1qgiv_zqY4zjqHAg

5. Ghana - Artists are expanding cultural influence and driving community transformation. Contemporary art hubs like the Nubuke Foundation showcase Ghanaian artists and shape public conversation, turning art into a catalyst for community engagement, youth opportunity, and unity across local and diasporic audiences. Public murals and street art during election seasons have begun influencing civic dialogue and political perception. Ghana's art scene is evolving into a global hub—artists and entrepreneurs grow ecosystems that attract international attention



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while preserving cultural narratives. https://www.stirworld.com/think-opinions-artists-spur-on-ghanas-growth-as-an-international-art-hub?

Impact: Art in Ghana is moving from storytelling to shaping public culture and civic awareness. https://borgenproject.org/ghanas-cultural-influence/

6. Love the idea of scouts. Critical right now to be putting ourselves and our colleagues in rooms we aren't used to being in and not being afraid to show up uninvited.

7. Would love a shared international cultural policy database including sample legislation and case making.

8. I am working on a feature about the impact of creative economy reports on arts policy if anyone has info and wants to get in touch [Email].
    a. CA just introduced a creative economy strategic plan that we introduced as an idea to the legislature and lobbied to get $1m in the budget to implement it.

9. Not at all - I meant fund the organizing. These efforts and make sure folks are compensated to participate.
    a. …and philanthropy should fund it so everyone can afford to be at the table.

10. But can philanthropy fill the hole left by gov? Especially now that there is so much pressure on private philanthropy in the context of DOGE?
    a. It is also time to involve the private sector.
    b. Donor Advised Funds

11. Artists and Arts workers need to run for office!



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# GROUP 7

## Group 7 Transcript

**Speaker 1:** An organization that I work with called [Organization], which is a group of performing arts organizations that work together to pursue more transparent, more affordable, more equitable visa policy in the US. We're having a tough time right now, you might imagine. In terms of the think and the do, we have thought a lot about what kinds of changes could be made to the US Policy and tried to mold that to how whichever administration we're working under can respond. Right now, while we are pursuing very active strategies with some of the members, like how do venues prepare for ICE enforcement? How do you keep your audiences safe? This is the "do right now." We're also working on initial drafting of a project 2029. What are we looking for in immigration policy for the arts at that point when immigration reform happens, when it does appear from Congress, whether it's coming from the right or coming from the left? How can we make sure that the US doesn't become increasingly isolated to international performers? So doing with what we have to deal with right now, which is the crisis of the travel bans and the crisis of ICE enforcement, thinking at the same time, how do these experiences now inform, from a policy advocacy and lobbying standpoint, how do we build the right coalition so that we don't find ourselves here again?

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** Yes, that's the goal. We don't find ourselves here again because we have so much voting power that they wouldn't dare, right? The creativity happening around anti-cultural policy is off the chain. I'm very impressed from a creative perspective, but we have to be doubly creative, and we are, because we train all of our lives to create and think. Here's a chance to think about the actions and what infrastructure we need, both on a national scale, local scale, and in our organizations. How many arts organizations have advocacy as a core function of operating like you would finance and HR?

**Speaker 3:** Thanks for mentioning advocacy being at the core. How do we get people to show up? I like the idea of the think tanks, but the doing tanks we're missing. I have been to a number of state advocacy days where the organizational leaders, the board members, they're not at the state house. And they may feel like, oh, they're not going to listen to me anyway. But you really need to be in their house to talk to them. And how do we get more of us to show up in the places we're not expected and have conversations with people who don't fundamentally see the value of the arts like we do?

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** No one should be elected to public office without having an arts platform. We have to be as organized as trucking and manufacturing and guns and all these



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other sectors. If we don't do that, friends, if we don't change our behavior now, none of what we've dreamed about today will happen. We have to put so much voting pressure on them that they wouldn't dare.

- **Speaker 3:** Well, the language and the arguments we might use in [Location], where I sit, would potentially be different than the language we're using in [Location].
- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** Absolutely. We all have to organize in our own communities and think about the unique needs in our own communities. And we have to hold each other accountable so that when people don't show up, you're calling them and saying, "Where were you? We needed you there."

**Speaker 4:** I'll try to also yes and some of what's been said because it reminds me, you offered we should have advocacy more central to our arts organizations like finance and HR. My immediate thing was, and how many organizations also don't have a dedicated finance and HR department because of the vast spread in terms of organizational size and a lot of project-based artists? I feel very familiar with all of you. I do work with a lot of individual or independent artists. I am very inspired by my experience at Americans for the Arts and their pre-conference sessions, specifically this last year around advocacy, it was different. It really was looking to how we could embody the doing and not be responsive or reactive to what was coming down from the federal level, but working on more of a state-by-state level. I'm hopeful that we'll see more of that. There are some familiar faces in our group that I know were also there. Curious if you felt differently or want to underline anything. Then I also want to offer that, if anything, I feel that COVID, in terms of organization and mobilization, was our rehearsal. I'm thinking especially about the Creating New Futures cohort, which included independent artists, it included agents, managers, presenters. There were working groups that developed not only self-organized data and research intake, but then making suggestions. How could a more equitable contract be made for touring or otherwise? They had to organize not just having these conversations, but then the doing. There were some funders who stepped up and said, we'd love to support this work. Because while all of us on today's rich call have the privilege of being able to volunteer an afternoon, maybe we have a day job that we can make the case, this is a part of it. I know a lot of that work was done by independent folks who didn't have a regular paycheck and yet still were called to do something to make the world better, to make our operations better. Creating New Futures was a fiscally sponsored project underneath the National Performance Network. I don't know that that was as visible to everyone else. Not that far along after that, in the spirit of revised Chatham House rules, a lot of the people that I know worked on that during COVID are very burnt by it and disillusioned. They were disappointed about how it didn't come further, how larger organizations didn't step up and say, yeah, we're in this together. I wonder, what can we learn from that rehearsal, just like any good read through, sing



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through, and then you get notes so that we can do better as we look to organize and mobilize forward.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** What would happen in year 2024 the sector developed massive advocacy muscles because it is now an item on your job descriptions, it is in every single staff meeting agenda and board meeting agenda, and your whole staff had to onboard with some advocacy training and your board had to onboard with advocacy training. What would it look like? What would our relationship with government look like? The sectors that do the best in our country have the deepest relationships with government, despite lesser contribution to the GDP, that may be on us.

**Speaker 5:** I think one thing is that the emphasis on advocacy, I mean, that's a perspective that some people have, and I think a lot of people in the arts administrative side have. As an artist, I think I do a lot, and it's not with advocacy. I actually make art that changes minds and shapes how people think about the world. For those that don't know, I'm a visual artist. I also don't think the reason we're in the mess that we're in is that we didn't just lobby properly. I mean, I think that a pharmaceutical industry has better resources to lobby than a small arts organization. And I think we're deluding ourselves if we're thinking both that we have the resources, but also the spontaneity in government responding to capital the way that other sectors of society that are actually politically aligned with the direction that this society is in. I'm inspired by the work being done by people who are resisting and having the courage to resist. Specifically, when I saw Mark Ruffalo at the Golden Globes, that was inspiring. But also, Jane Fonda's recent First Amendment organization is really good at stepping up to the challenge right now. As somebody who helped to organize [Organization], I'm going to say I'm inspired by my colleagues that were with me on that. Collectively the action in our sector would be strengthened by having more people that would be willing to risk a lot to stand up to the fascists that are coming into power right now. I think that in some cases we will lose some organizations, we will lose funding, we will lose opportunity, but listening to artists and people who are being courageous and others that are standing up to that is essential for this sector. We are not going to get through this in a meaningful way, in a way that's actually healthy for, I think the direction that many of us want to go, if we are not having the courage to actually stand up and fight, including in some cases where we will lose. I said this in the last session, but the thing outside of the arts that's going on is our neighbors are being deported and kidnapped. People are being shot in the face and presidents of other countries are being kidnapped and we're talking about advocacy. I think that we actually need to talk about action. The people that are in the streets that are standing up and fighting, that is inspiring. What does that look like in the arts and how do artists and people in the cultural sector support that? So, throwing more funding at people that are standing up and actually identifying the problems both will help us in the immediate term, but also in the long run. For those of you that are channeling funding, I mean,



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it's like [Organization] is an organization that I work with and I'm advocating for, but not so much to say, hey, fund my organization because we're barely an organization. But the viewpoint that we have, the perspective that there are other artists and arts organizations that are actually saying that if we do not stand up to the fascism right now, if the people that actually are doing that work are not supported, including activists that are doing that work, that then we will not have the infrastructure and capacity of organizers and organization and think tanks and thinkers to actually go forward once we do get beyond this fascism. Throw a lot of money at people that are fighting right now fighting really hard, including those that are challenged with lawsuits and funding cuts and being hauled before Congress and having academic institutions crushed, that's where the support is needed.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** Art has always been at the center of social justice issues. I wonder how we can use that ability to change hearts and minds and the volume of bodies that we have, the voting power that we have, to do both – to advocate for the atrocities happening today, but also to in many ways put the oxygen mask on ourselves so that we can also advocate for what's happening to our sector. Again, it requires a lot of energy and effort, but I wonder how we can do both.

**Speaker 6**: I would like to talk about a model of something called the International Cities of Refuge Network, which both protects writers and artists who are endangered and also helps subsidize their artwork and their creativity. It's a membership organization and if you think of all the arts organizations in the United States, if we had a membership organization with a staff to complement it and we were collecting not maybe light dues based on organization size but imagine one cent per ticket for every ticket that is sold to a common fund to accomplish the purposes, whatever we want to define as the purposes that are these diverse purposes, to provide funding, but complementing that, the members are also doing things in their own premises. So, if there's a performance, there's a program there, there's a message in a video that's delivered before about what we do, why we do, why it should be protected. Our partners in places like the ACLU are speaking about the arts and what we do. So, all those, a way to organize that, but we're funding an organization that has that as the mission, the sustenance of this vision and we take control ourselves, instead of delegating it to others.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** So, incentivize through funding so that the infrastructure inspires people to participate because they are getting some sort of financial support.

**Speaker 7:** I'm coming from more of an advocacy and arts administrator background. I was on the board of [Organization], our statewide arts advocacy organization. I was [Title] there. I was really inspired in hearing you very clearly, [Speaker], and also from our previous breakout, that we really have both a short game and a long game, right? Many of us right now are in crisis mode and are



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having to respond to these threats to our livelihood, to our communities, and that is so vital and so important. And yet if we don't have the long view in mind of what kind of society and culture will give rise to this vibrant, healthy, creative, where art is a part of everything vision that we're talking about for 2045, if we're always in crisis mode, we're never going to get there. I think both, how can we think about these short and longer-term strategies? Because it's more my wheelhouse, I'll take the longer-term strategy, which is, I do think we need to mobilize both national, state, and regional coalition building around art and democracy, climate and technology and AI. I'll do technology slash AI, because I feel very strongly if we don't get those right, we will always be in crisis mode. To the extent that national organizations like Americans for the Arts and national funders can support this work and create task force that can really dive into these issues, because not one of us is an expert on everything, but convene the right people, I think that would be super useful. I would like to see the formation of a task force that looks at the way that arts and creative workers can really be leaders and build advocacy and lobbying capacity so that we're not just talking about the importance and value of the arts, but we're really saying we have something to say about democracy and civil society. We have something to say about AI and how that's co-operative. Displacing workers and really should be funding creativity and not extracting from it.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** AI-inspired tax so that the art sector gets funded if it's being used. And being able to do both the long game, because look at the wins that have happened based on the long game effort in guns and abortion and lower taxes, like 50 years of work and they made it happen, right? We also have to do the short-term work because the creativity that's coming out of federal government is off the chain every day, five new things happening. They are so creative. We have to be triple creative to do both, right? It'll take a lot of labor in the next couple of years, friends.

**Speaker 8:** I'm really thinking about blue sky vision on this. I guess that's what we're supposed to do and I get nervous when I start thinking really big. I'm going to just share what I'm thinking here. In order to accelerate this work, we need courageous collaboration, and to be clear, that is a blue-sky vision because it's hard. It requires setting aside ego, scarcity, and the habits that keep us in survival mode. A true partnership isn't quick, it isn't easy, it takes time, trust, and a massive shift in how we value the arts in society. That means real investment in people, in infrastructure, and in the space to build relationships and coalitions that last. It means funding collaboration like the essential work it is. We have to stop treating the arts as a luxury and start recognizing them as a core to public life, which we all know, and that can't happen by accident. It has to happen in real vital work that is very hard to do when we are all fighting for the same resources in many, many different ways. To me, it's a general just mind shift that we have to help our country to understand. So that's what my hope is. And I wanted to say, I love what [Speaker 4] said, COVID was a rehearsal. Because I remember at the very beginning of COVID thinking, oh my gosh, this is the thing that's going to



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make us all have to work together. About a week later, I saw people in my community turning on each other and I thought, oh, I'm such an optimist. Why can't I see the world for what it is? But I think that's one of the powerful things about being an artist is that we can look at things optimistically. I'm so happy to be here and hearing from all of you and I hope that we can use this as a launchpad to make 2045 a better world for arts.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** We did not use COVID to its fullest capacity and most of us went back to the business models that we created, and we can be a very parochial and self-siloed sector. Your anecdote of collaboration could be a really great tactic. And what happens if we collaborated with sectors that we have outcomes in? What happens if we reframe who we are as a critical health and human service or critical infrastructure like roads and parks and schools? Government pays for parks and playgrounds. It should pay for the arts, right? And if that collaboration happens, then when they start thinking about cutting us, then healthcare will step up and go, no, can't cut the arts because we need it, right? But that's going to require us to do business with the people we know, get away from our desks, make space for this kind of work, because this is going to be essential to our survival in the future.

**Speaker 9**: I'm very passionate about arts writing as both documentation and contact. I feel strongly that in 2045 there should be a really robust arts writing ecosystem. I've got lots of plans if anyone wants to ask. In [City], I'm inspired a lot by my colleagues at [Organization]. I work at the Department of Cultural Affairs and we worked very closely with them on a community based cultural asset mapping initiative in [City]. I'm raising that now because I think that asset mapping has come up in every conversation I've been in so far and I think it's important. I just put the link to the project we did. One of the lessons we learned is that it was mapping cultural treasures and some was bottom up, we were confronted with things that maybe we wouldn't have thought of as a cultural treasure, but the community did. I think if we're looking to redesign the operating system for arts and cultures across the country, then we need to do a map of assets, cultural resources, cultural institutions, both bricks and mortar and knowledge. I remember when the Creating New Futures happened in 2021, I was like, Oh, I wish they'd have asked me about the [Project] we did in 2014, I wish they'd have talked to [Name] about the [Project] that they did. There's this problem and it's systemic, which is about the erasure of knowledge. I think a systems mapping of the of the sector that included people, places, things, resources, knowledge, expertise, to think about, oh, hey, we don't know how to do this here in Tennessee, but we do know how to do it in Oregon, a distributed system. Like mapping out how those things are to allow if things to happen at scale, but also to move decision-making to a hyper local level where communities can actually have input over how resources are used in their communities and build these networks. I think to operationalize, to really transform the system and operationalize doing things differently, which I think if anyone who've ever tried to quit smoking and say, just trying to do one thing differently in your life is hard, it takes



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a lot of work. Just starting to look at where are the places that we can change? What have we already done? What changes have we made in the past 50 years that we're not giving ourselves credit for? And what would it look like? We have to be the holders of optimism and dreams and imagination. We have to, because they don't want us to have that anymore.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** Ibram X. Kendi says, if you don't have hope, you nail the lid on the coffin. Got to have hope. I put in the room yesterday, we were chatting, that I fear sometimes that more infrastructure doesn't change our devaluation of advocacy as a critical function. There is a behavior shift that we have to fix before our advocacy will have the kind of impact that we think it will have. There is a lack of infrastructure for it, but I worry that sometimes that technical fix people think will have an adaptive shift, but the adaptive shift requires people to change their beliefs and their values and thereby behave differently. We have to think very strategically about why we aren't as strong in advocacy as environmentalists and housing and manufacturing and utilities and trucking, and then start fixing that problem before we will have the kind of impact we want to have as arts advocates.

**Speaker 10:** Referencing what [Speaker] said about Americans for the Arts and the conference last year. [The conference spurred] a movement called The People vs. Project 2025 as a way to fight the Trump administration and Project 2025. The idea is to use the arts to make the demonstrations that are going on [more effective]. There's No King's Day rallies and things like that. A training [was held] in New York last weekend because it's the APAP conference. There were presenters and artists there from all over the country. [The goal] was to get them all in the same room. The Center for Artistic Activism, the Theater Communications Group and Indivisible from New York [ran] a training, which articulates how artists can get involved with these projects with these demonstrations all across the country and how they can work in community with different sectors to highlight the problems that those communities are facing and have them be part of these demonstrations and how can presenters work in tandem with the Indivisibles and the 50-51s across the country to make the whole production values much better and much higher. The idea is to be able to do this primarily in swing states in the run-up to the midterm elections and then also by extension in the run-up to the presidential elections in 2028. One of the things what we need to have, and this is where the advocates come in, is that we need to have a set of demands that we can ask our partners to agree with and that we want all elected officials to run on or to agree with as well. We need to have a good idea of what those things are. I can say whatever I want in terms of what I think the demand should be. Could it be that the National Endowment for the Arts is funded at the per capita level of the Canada Council for the Arts, which is $30 a head? We need advocates to tell us what this is, because they're the ones that need to go to the corridors of power and talk to the politicians about it. And just whilst I heard somebody else saying, though, the one penny per ticket, a friend of mine that was at the APAP conference, he's come up with an idea for how do we, rather than us being a



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sector of people who work in the sector, how do we make our audiences also advocate for us? He came up with this idea that if we were to have an option of adding a dollar per ticket to the price of a ticket, and that dollar made the audience a member of Americans for the Arts, so that if we had, rather than the arts sector just being artists and arts workers, it actually meant our audiences as well. That would be millions of people. Across the country, and they would all be members of Americans for the Arts, or whichever state arts organization you wanted to think about, or any other. But I think we really do need to make it so that we're not the ones speaking on behalf of ourselves, but that we have the public enrolled in memberships and speaking with us.

**Speaker 11**: This suggestion is certainly not for everyone, but I would offer, run for office. I was in a small town in [Location]. I got tired of protesting in front of the police station, so I ran for office and got in there and tried to do something during my term. If you can't run for office, show up at a city council meeting, show up at a school board meeting. If you can't do that, volunteer. We all need to be part of the fabric of the political system because it's the hyper-local governments that are actually getting things done. Where the larger national infrastructure is so dysfunctional, let's get involved and let's think the long game and work in local government.

**Speaker 12**: I love the idea of the short and the long term, the long game. I equate that also to local and national level policy and advocacy work that we can be doing. It struck me, and I love how you put it, [Speaker], about the corridors of power. I think we should have an office in the corridors of power. I know that there are these organizations that come together to train populations to diversify government on a local and state and federal level. Do we have one that trains artists and creatives to run for office? That I'm not aware of and can that be our next pilot collaborative funded project to put them in the corridors of power themselves? I've thought about it too, [Speaker]. I'm so glad you ran for office, thank you for that and for your service. Yeah, that's my plug. The short and the long term and the local and the national and let's be in it rather than tell people to do it.

**Speaker 13:** [Speaker], you said if presidential candidates don't have an arts policy, that's on us. I run the [Organization]. I'm putting together what I'm calling right now the [Project]. When the [State] primary happens, the national news is looking at [State] voters. They're judging us on how we talk to each other, how we can sit in a room and disagree with each other. They're talking to candidates and campaigns and issue advocacy groups. The arts have done an OK job in this space. I say that because I helped Americans for the Arts before my term in state government, and it was fun. We went around, we talked to all the candidates, we got our picture with them, we handed them data, and then we had social media content. That's not enough. We need to step up our game. We need to make space for people who are nervous about going to political events right now. And when you feel uncomfortable and not able to talk, don't turn to politicians for points of entry, you turn to storytellers, comics, musicians, artists. I want to fold in some kind of arts-led mechanism to create



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civic spaces that exist and will happen during the presidential primary to really ignite a feeling of ownership and public discourse safe places in front of the national news, while influencing the political discussions in front of us.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** That's right, the [State] arts budget was almost zeroed out. They left it at a dollar, so everyone in [State] gets to split a dollar if you're in the arts.
- **Speaker 13:** When you're knocked down this much, we can only go up, and we have to be optimistic and intentional. That's what our plan is here.
- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** Things I could have done in [Location] running [Organization], the extraordinary things we could have done if I had more of that voting body putting pressure on public officials. We left money on the table.

**Speaker 1:** When we're talking about advocacy in the cultural sector and our successes and our failures, it was COVID, it was a different time, but looking at what NEVA managed to do and their partners in terms of the Save Our Stages Act and managing to get not just the largest arts allocation of funds in American history, but bigger than all the other allocations together in American history. That was grassroots and it came together in a year. That should be a model, I think, to a certain extent of what we can do. Creating New Futures fizzled out. You're right. It was sad. When I was talking about it with friends in Europe, and I was trying to describe what they were trying to do, their reaction is like, where are the unions? They should just have already done this. Where is the government? Where is the data? You don't have cultural observatories to keep track of this stuff? What do you do over there? This is something I've been saying in all of these meetings. If you've been in a meeting with me before, please forgive me for being a one-trick pony on this. But there is so much good work done internationally. There are so many good models. Please don't reinvent wheels. Look at what UNESCO has done policy-wise. Look what other countries have done in terms of how do you fund, how do you think about the connection between the local and the international and the national? Don't reinvent wheels. There's a lot of good ideas out there. They don't all work here, but a lot of them can.

- **Speaker 2 (Facilitator):** If we organize around how much we try to get money from government on other things that government can do, the regulatory actions and the programmatic actions, I promise you we'd have more stability. That funding can just be a band-aid and sometimes it can enable bad behavior because people don't have to get their business affairs together because there will always be no strings attached. To me, it's about the regulatory actions and the programmatic actions.



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## Group 7 Chat

Not available.

# GROUP 8

## Group 8 Transcript

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** I think all three sessions are very difficult, but this might be the most difficult one as we're trying to talk about mobilization. We want folks to draw from the two earlier sessions and realize that we all have been in different sessions, but we want you to draw from things that you've heard or ideas that you've shared, and really talking about mobilization, tangible steps to actualizing vision, work that you believe is important and tangible, perhaps tangible steps to actualizing it, what work is already happening that you want to note, collective action in our sector that could be strengthened by, in order to advance this work, we will need to do X. What could we do better to organize in terms of getting to a point of actualizing or mobilizing some of these ideas? To give an example, in the two sessions that [Co-facilitator and I have] been in together, the role of arts and health and wellness has come up repeatedly. That's great to talk about it, right? But how do we mobilize that? [Co-facilitator] wrote that, in an ideal world, there would be a Walton School of Medicine campus in every state. That's pie in the sky, probably not possible, but it's good to start talking about tangible steps. I wrote down "new models of funding, getting rid of the 501(c)3 model" has come up over and over again in the first two sessions. It's easy [to] say that, but then what are those new models? We're going to try to get to tangible, actualized steps in this session.

**Speaker 2:** To really accelerate this work, we will need to fix the funding model for arts. It is a very unequal funding world we live in. We need to focus on how to get public support, not just at the federal level for the Smithsonians [of the arts ecosystem]. I would tell you a story, a brief story of failure, which leads to success. In Pierce County and King County, the adjacent counties for Tacoma and Seattle, [there was an effort] to get an art sales tax. So, one-tenth of 1% going to the arts. We looked at the Denver model. We looked at Kansas City. We looked at Minneapolis, and St. Louis, other cities, until we figured it out. After rethinking to separate King from Pierce County, the city of Tacoma in 2018 passed Tacoma Creates. And again, Tacoma, if you don't know it, is a city of 230,000 people. In 2024, that tiny segment of the arts sales tax raised $7.5 million, which gets renewed every seven years. It was unanimous. You have to have legislation in place at the state level that says jurisdictions can [impose a] tax for arts and culture. King County got there a little later. In 2023, it approved the King County Doors Open sales tax, again, a 0.1% tax. And in 2025, [this led to] 700 arts groups [receiving] 165 million dollars [in tax revenue]. Here's what I love. It's taxes. People pay



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taxes. So you have to make a statement that this is worth supporting. It involves arts education, it involves festivals, operating support. It has to be renewed. You have to make the case for it all the time. And it's widely dispersed, to large, small, up and coming institutions. Again, I think what could be helpful is to write the handbook on how to do this and interview people who've been successful. I can tell you some of the failures we made, and we finally got to some success there. I just put that forward as a very concrete thing to do, and you really get arts embedded on the local level, and then you can start building up state and federal

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** And there's obviously other examples like that in Minnesota and Cuyahoga County and Denver. But great, great examples to share.

**Speaker 3:** I continue to be inspired by the example of the National Independent Venues Association, better known as NIVA, which was created at the onset of COVID. I was super impressed by how rapidly that organization came together, literally out of nothing. I don't know as much as I would like to about how the initial leadership of NIVA crafted that. But I think there could be some lessons to see how that worked, because it was one of the best grassroots organizations I've ever experienced. I jumped on very early in the process. I was part of the setup of several different groups around different disciplines and different efforts. And there were captains of each of those groups who convened weekly or bi-weekly to sort of keep things segmented and not overwhelm anyone in a particular part of the process. For those who may not recall, the result of NIVA was the $16 billion SVOG allocation from the government back in, well, ultimately it came out, I guess, in 2022, it took about a year and a half of going through it. Incredibly successful, incredibly impactful. So, I would love to learn more about how they structured that and the grassroots work that made it possible. That's my inspiration for the moment. Part of what I'm learning from today is I'm not really sure what our industry needs to accelerate this work. I'm trying to find inspiration from different things. I love the sales tax concept. If we could broaden that understanding how minimally invasive it is in more communities, it would be a sea change of impact. I know that that particular issue has been very difficult to sell in lots of states and communities. I look forward to hearing other thoughts.

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** (NIVA) is truly one of the more remarkable pieces of legislation that came out of a group of venue owners around the country advocating for themselves. So that's a really great suggestion.

**Speaker 4:** I'd like to call out the work of New City, a publication out of Philadelphia, that focuses on sharing solutions for cities in particular. And particularly at a moment when we're losing arts journalism at a rapid clip, they have stepped forward to talk about the role of the arts in communities quite widely and do that in a way which is, although they're centered in Philadelphia, quite national. And offers a way of communicating and amplifying the successes where they happen.



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**Speaker 5:** I wanted to comment on legislation-based solutions which are incredibly powerful. Public media specifically has really benefited from them. As you probably know, in the last few months, it's also been public media's worst nightmare. There are many places in the country that value public media, and public media and the arts and humanities go hand in hand, which is why I'm representing it today. Just yesterday, the Wyoming Legislature passed an amendment to their budget that would completely cut all of public media's federal funding. That's not to say that this would happen with a small tax for every town or city, but it also creates an environment where somebody could take it away, right? Devastating if you set up legislation and then it goes away, but you also don't have a backup. My first comment is that a playbook needs to have a wide variety of levers that you can pull and not just legislation. I think to get to a second more broad point, we were talking about public trust in the arts and specifically in public media in my case. I've been reading a lot about audience data on PBS, public media. Lots of people love PBS. Like over 80% of people identify it as something that's valuable, right? But that 80% of public perception didn't turn into action when public media sees its funding ended. I think that's indicative of a lot of different industries, especially the arts and humanities. Another solution we need to be thinking about is expanding the way that we're communicating about the arts and humanities. Because for PBS, right, for example, everybody can watch Sesame Street or Mr. Rogers and have an emotional connection, right? They could think about why they think that's valuable. I feel like a lot of people have the same connection to different types of arts, but that didn't necessarily turn into action. So in terms of solutions-based thinking, a lot of the conversations that have been a part of both was connecting the arts and humanities, like the conversation we have about the value of the arts and humanities, and connecting it with the conversations about the value that we place in other industries, like agriculture, or even banking, or tech, stuff like that.

**Speaker 6:** [I wanted to raise the example of] Seattle KEXP, and their very intentional mission redefinition five or six years ago, away from just being a public radio or a non-commercial radio station, but to being a nonprofit that exists to connect artists with audiences using a variety of platforms, including a terrestrial radio station, but also global streams, in-person events, podcasting, being neutral as far as how do we understand where the marketplace is going and how we can leverage technology to solve the real mission, which again, is not to sustain a radio station, but to help with music discovery and build the arts ecosystem in Seattle. They've become a remarkable global force, and a real insight into the future of where these stations are going to go. Music Venue Trust is a UK-based charity that has worked to advocate on behalf of grassroots music venues. They were a direct inspiration for NIVA, and are really pushing forward with some amazing initiatives, including calling for a ticket levy on stadium and arena shows to take a pound or two off the top of those tickets, add some money to the ticket cost, and invest that money back into grassroots music ecosystem. It's a really successful model that we've seen here in the States, mostly through



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philanthropy over the years, but is something that they're institutionalizing across the country. The thing that inspires me the most is seeing what's happening with the kids that are coming out of educational institutions. The idea that we have generations now that have a fundamentally different relationship to technology, to creation, to access, to sharing, to participating in the cultural ecosystem. And these kids want so badly to be able to do this work. So the need for us to all be mindful of how are we building structures that allow the talented people that want to be thinking about the future of sustainable cultural ecosystems and the power of art and culture beyond being commodities, the talent is there and the passion is there. One example is Hans Larson, who's created a nonprofit called the Campfire Music Foundation that is working to build a more equitable streaming marketplace for music. To see what he's done in three years is absolutely mind-blowing. I just hope that we all have an opportunity and hopefully see an obligation to be really being mindful about the intergenerational aspect of this as we're thinking about what's yet to come moving forward.

**Speaker 7:** I'm in New York where the arts are a multibillion-dollar business which is itself a blessing and a curse. It's a curse because it's so hard to change and so entrenched. But on the one hand you all know we have a new mayor who built a campaign subway stop by subway stop, and collective action will be impossible unless we remember how Zohran Mamdani did that, by reaching out to people and by listening, above all, by listening to people and being able to channel their concerns. The absolute flip side of that is the power of these institutions, which do not come and go every four years. And I refer primarily to the real estate industry, which runs New York. So, as we think about these things, we know that in order to accomplish and create a more equitable and diverse, in every sense of those words, art environment, we have to work with movers and shakers. That's the Economic Development Council. It's the real estate industry. And somehow marrying those two things, artists and citizens, who are all, of course, affected by the arts, or most of them, by what we do, we're going to try to figure this out.

**Speaker 8**: So many of us are struggling right now. So many artists and arts organizations. That's why we're having this meeting, but we're not all struggling. I am lucky to run an organization that is booming, and I would love to see us as a sector. It can't just be me. I would love to see us identify the new business models and the community engagement strategies and the evaluation metrics that are really working right now and amplify those and share them with the field and figure out how we can riff on them and build on them to build sustainability from within as we are all going after new funding, but not to rely on that new funding.

Speaker 9: I guess one of the things that I've been thinking about during the conversation today is that to some extent, we create a lot of boundaries around the arts and even within the sector. I think that that's something that is often challenging. I guess in my work, or even just in life in



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general, I'll come across someone who works at a biotech company here and they will say, "oh, yeah, no, arts, that's not my thing. I work in biotech." And then in the conversation, I'll find out, oh, but he sings with his choir in his church or leads the band at the elementary school or something like that. I think so many people don't think of themselves as being part of the arts, in part because we kind of tell so many people that we are the experts and we decide what counts and doesn't count and how to create policy and things like that. Listening to a wider range of people and how new generations conceive of this, of the intersection between media and the arts and expanding that pool so that we're not just talking to ourselves and trying to solve this from the inside, but understand that the arts are a part of so many more people's lives, possibly everyone's, I would argue, and we just need to allow them to see how meaningful it is in their lives, because they don't necessarily even think of it in that way.

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator)**: If I could just ask real quick before we pass it on, there was a lot of head nodding, and I agree. Do you have an actual suggestion on how to move that forward?
- **Speaker 9**: Not concretely, but I think that creating an awareness and an openness in creating the infrastructures that we're building, I think perhaps even with NIFA, there was an expansion of who is creating policy, who is able to create policy, who is able to join a meeting like this. And I think just as we create whatever the networks (come to be), that we are more inclusive in reaching beyond the narrowly defined art sector.

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** I'm constantly drawn back to youth sports around the country and how the tent and the aperture is wide open for everybody to participate and everybody gets it. Whether you're a good soccer player or a bad soccer player or a mediocre soccer player, you get to play, you get to participate. That's what I think about – how do we get to be like youth sports where it's kind of a fixture in communities across the country?

**Speaker 10:** I do think the more people engage personally in the arts, we saw during the pandemic, 37% of the American population said they tried some kind of new arts, culture, creative, expressive form. Amazon was writing these articles about this mysterious spike in ukulele sales. I learned how to knit during the pandemic. Not very well. I make the world's longest scarves. But it gives, just participating and learning, it gives you this huge appreciation for the people who spend years and years and years and work on this day after day. I think it provides both the personal life enrichment benefit and gives greater appreciation to the people who make this their profession as well.

**Speaker 11:** Following in the research vein, lots of mobilization ideas. We've got some short-term horizon things, some longer-term horizon. We're talking about big issues. I hope we think long-term horizon. Things just don't change that much in three to five years. But I think we should try to collectively work on building a research panel that's representative nationally of arts and culture organizations and figuring out what that is and what that looks like, Is it non-profit? Is it informal



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and unincorporated or whatever that we can track over time? What are those however many thousands of organizations in the cohort? Because during the pandemic, we and many other organizations, we all did our surveys and here's what's happening. And things are good and things are bad. You know, it depends. Who you are and where you are. It enables us just to track these changes over time, what's effective, what's making a difference. Somebody mentioned evaluation along the way, I think we just need to pair great ideas, great innovations with some way to track change and impact. [So that we see] the before, during, and after.

**Speaker 12:** I'm going back to that through-line around, people love art, right? They love art, they love music, they love theater. The thing that we spend most of our time consuming is some sort of creative thing, maybe not art or culture with a capital 'A' or 'C,' but still we love creative expression. I am currently involved in a project where a brand new art center is opening up, and we're being tasked with 100% from the ground up, reconceptualizing visitor experience. We've talked to a lot of people who fit our ideal customer profile. We asked them about their attitude about arts and we heard it's true. People really like art. What they don't like is the spaces where we present the art. They don't like going to museums. They don't feel comfortable there. They get confused about tickets and security and what they can and cannot do in the gallery. They feel unwelcome. I dropped a link (in the chat) about the Gen Z generation applying for art school, showing that people are super excited about art. There are some of us in this, probably in this breakout, and certainly in this call who have who have done interesting and innovative things to welcome new audiences, not just to come, but return to join as members and subscribers and tell their friends about it and bring their friends in. I want to know what those things are, because I do feel like that is the barrier. It is not the creative work. It is the access or the way that we're welcoming people into the space. I will say one last thing, having working in the tech sector for a handful of years, we are obsessed with how do we grow the top of our funnel? How do we make sure that once people are coming, that they come again and again and again? When I look at things like customer segmentation and personalization, and how we do marketing, it just seems like there's a lot of opportunity for growth there as well. That feels really practical and actionable.

**Speaker 13:** I'm going to speak on behalf of [the model of] producing theater in people's homes and directly connecting with thousands and thousands of people literally in living rooms with amazing experiences. I had the opportunity to experience it when I lived in [City] and hosted incredible roundtable discussions. This is the definition of grassroots storytelling and community engagement. And on the opposite end of the spectrum, but with equal success, the opening of a brand new $90 million facility (in Milwaukee), fully paid for and gorgeous and sold out. I think the through-line between both models, one grassroots and what some of us would consider commercial, it's still non-profit, but it's that they connect with their people on a regular basis and do it with intention and with authenticity. I think that we have to be really careful when talking



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about national movements, that we don't forget the people that are next door to us and walking past our spaces every day. Spaces can matter, but (one is) in people's living rooms and (the other) in a sparkling new gorgeous facility, and they're both reaching thousands and thousands of people with national impact. I think we have to center the story of authentic connection with whoever is passing by our places and living down the road or living across town and not rely too much on what's everybody else doing? It's that we have people right here with us and we should be in community with them and success, whatever that means, will follow on wherever it needs to.

**Speaker 14 (Facilitator):** I'm just wondering, picking up on these comments, are there examples where people are finding they are achieving unexpected, perhaps, success, where tactics are working in this climate in terms of connecting with audiences, connecting with funders, unconventional partnerships that are yielding dividends for their organization. It might be interesting to spend the last couple of minutes surfacing what's working.

**Speaker 8:** What's working for us is bringing our programs into the community, into spaces where people are already gathered and where they feel comfortable. Those are homes, but there are also lots of other kinds of community spaces now too. All of our programs are collaborations with non-arts partners. On community issues of their choosing. That means that most of our income comes from business-to-business contracts with our partners or collaboration grants that were often not intended for the arts, which makes it so that we can have over our audiences not pay anything to attend our programs. Ticket sales are like 5% of our income, but we're of the largest theater companies in [City] now, which isn't saying much.

**Speaker 15:** There's a lot of segmentation in the arts, humanities, and public media between work that serves the same audiences. There's not a lot of data or knowledge sharing that happens sometimes because it is a competitive environment. I would say that in order to accelerate our work, saving the sector, making it better, that we should strive to be more open. We should be sharing our learnings more broadly instead of keeping them close, and our failures.

## Group 8 Chat

1. We've been working on this at [Organization] for a while, as all of you have been doing in your places. We're at workingclassartists.org.
2. The Denver partial-penny has been re-authorized every 12 years since 1987. It now raises $85m/year, which is distributed to over 300 organizations in the 7-county metro.
3. In order to really accelerate this work we will need to fix the arts funding model. I propose studying Tacoma Creates ($7.5M raised in a town of 230K to distribute to arts



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groups) and King County "Doors Open" Sales Tax (in 2024 raised $165M and distributed to 700 arts orgs). Both are 1/10th of 1% sales tax measures approved by referendum and reviewed after 7 years. I co-lead a multi-year failed dual county effort. It took us a year of studying other models to build our own. I recommend we building a handbook for how to stand up a sales tax to fund arts (sometimes including parks or science or festivals, etc.).

a. This strategy is about a public vote/referendum. Only need legislation to allow local jurisdiction to tax for arts support.
b. Some groups doing great work we can learn from….KEXP for their mission redefinition….Music Venue Trust for their advocacy in pursuing creative funding streams for grassroots music venues.

4. To [Speaker's] point and [Speaker's] about students at [College]: A fuel for the sector – our willingness to think about building pathways – who will come along to do the work and whether we make space for them.

5. What I heard [Speaker] saying makes me think about working within existing social / economic / civic structures ——> sustainability (not reinventing the wheel) ——> cross-sector.
   a. I am inspired by the work being done by artists and organizers who are already building real networks—sharing tools, showing up for each other, and moving resources to where the need is. Collective action in our sector could be strengthened by:
      i. Pick one shared goal
      ii. Form a small working group (6–10 people across roles: artists, admins, funders, culture bearers) with clear roles and a rotating facilitator.
      iii. Build a shared resource hub (templates, talking points, sample budgets, coalition list, mutual aid + grant leads) and say similar things
      iv. Create a monthly action rhythm (one call, one task, one public share-out)
      v. Track simple wins (who benefited, what changed, what we learned)
   b. In order to really accelerate this work we will need:
      i. Money for coordination
      ii. Agreements that protect people
      iii. A commitment to follow-through

6. Cross-sector collaboration is top of my list. And not just civic. But other cultural and social spaces as well.



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7. Professional Non-Profit Theatre Coalition is the body that began convening after the successful SVOG.
    a. And PAVA also formed post-covid to collect the actions of large performing arts venues: PAVA.

8. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2025/07/10/new-york-city-art-schools-see-surge-in-gen-z-applications

9. Think about Framingham Heart Study – what many factors lead to heart health – with stunning results and the role of relationships — so what is the national longitudinal study for arts engagement.

10. Another idea: A better mechanism to share best practices in the broader sector. Insights in the theater world may apply to the visual arts, etc.

11. Excerpts from my speech on what's working (to be given at [University]):

    At the heart of that leadership is a simple, demanding idea: to do this work well, we must fall deeply in love with the communities we serve.

    We must love our audiences, and our audiences must feel that love. When it is genuine, it builds trust. And trust allows a theater to become more than a place people visit; it becomes a place where they belong.

    Belonging is not accidental. It requires listening as much as speaking and responding as much as leading. When audiences feel seen and respected, they show up—not just as ticket buyers, but as partners in the life of the institution. And once that relationship is established, it shapes every choice we make.

12. Two other success stories: https://www.youthonrecord.org (Denver) and https://sonicguild.org (Austin, Seattle and Colorado)

13. Also Fan Alliance - https://thefanalliance.org



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# GROUP 9

## Group 9 Transcript

**Speaker 1:** What consistently stood out for me from the earlier conversations was the need to fully articulate and validate the arts as an integral part of every facet of our society and lives, rather than being separate and distinct, and that arts is really the thing that connects us to our American identity and our democracy. That was a thread for me. In terms of operationalizing, talking more about the arts and culture sectors as interconnected to our other systems. So healthcare, the economy, all the ways that there's cross-pollination and interdependency, then the sector itself is stronger and is also regarded as just part of what we do as America, not again, something separate or more of a luxury. So, the systems legal protections and defense systems funding, or the way that there are ecosystem views on how the arts operate. Even the principled stance of artists as creators, but also job creators and other ways that arts contribute to America. We need a de-siloing of sectors and how sectors are deeply dependent on the arts and the way that the arts have not fully flexed its own authority and power and contribution.

**Speaker 2:** I am currently working on a lot of projects, but trying to work under a banner of global, arts and culture. It seemed in the visioning session the word embedded came up over and over. And it's the idea that artists and the arts and culture of our country are embedded in everyday life, central to communities. And that was an important piece of a lot of the visioning that was being done. I will say that how artists have been supported and the infrastructures to support artists that have been developed are far from ideal. There was a lot of energy around trying to find operationally how we bring about a better life for artists in terms of compensation, healthcare, childcare, so that we can continue to do what we do. There is brilliant work that's coming from artists in all areas, geographically, demographically, even skills-wise. The other thing I think was so important is how ideally, we create a sense that creativity and artistry can be owned by anyone. I think that's so important too for young people because no matter where you come from, what your background, if you have access to exploring your personal creativity and expanding that, it's incredibly empowering. In that idea of operationalizing the things that we decide collectively that we really want to focus on, the sustaining of that focus is incredibly important because there will be so many distractions for us coming up already. We're living in a terribly frightening time. So how do we continue to identify the priorities and then continue to stay on them, even when other things seem more pressing. Not that we can't go and deal with those other pressing things, but we know that this is a long haul. We're being asked to think about 2045. That means setting up a system that allows us to do that consistently and pass it on.



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**Speaker 3:** I did have a thought, an immediate gut reaction to this comment, ensuring the sector makes it to 2045. I will likely not be retired by then so hopefully I'll still be here. In thinking about 2045, I think about the recent Emile Kang article that he published about the future, advice to young arts leaders. I want to encourage peers and colleagues to think more flexibly about the sector. I come from a classical music background but realize people don't do arts the same way in one thing all the time, their whole lives. It's not always going to be the nonprofit sector. Orchestral musicians may play in a nonprofit orchestra, and then they teach adjunct or as a faculty member at a private university. Just thinking that there are different ways to do things. I've been thinking a lot about the nonprofit and public or nonprofit and for-profit intersections of the reality of how I know my friends who are gig workers or artists, they aren't just taking gigs from nonprofits. They also go work somewhere else and they also have their own private practices. How can we, as admin people who do admin support work and infrastructural support work, catch up to that. Because it's already moved on. People who are artists have already moved on to making money in that way. Part of the challenge is the way that we're training our arts admin workforce. I remember when I started, I was a grant writer, and so I know that I have to go after X, Y, and Z grant. If this is a public grant, I have to present the right data. People need diverse skills because I'm not going to be a grant writer forever. I'm going to work in development. It's more well-rounded skills that reflect the fast-moving pace of the workforce.

**Speaker 4:** My personal background is in documentary films, artist support, specifically women and other artists from communities that are generally underfunded, recognized under supported. I think what I've been feeling as we've been talking about trying to address our specific issues and then the conversation today is so much need for more of what we're doing here, but even more on the ground collaboration. I don't think we're going to be able to solve this in our own little, small spaces. I'm thinking that there is a real need for collaboration and a real need for democratizing access to the funders and national/government organizations, making it so much more accessible and relatable so that it doesn't feel when it comes out of, whether it's our taxes or whether it's donations or whether it's some other funding, it doesn't feel you're funding something that has nothing to do with you, that everyone starts to see how relevant it is. I think some of that's advocacy and campaigns, sector-wide advocacy. Then there's the point raised about skills and the development of skills. I think our whole world has changed rapidly in the last couple of years with the introduction of AI. Our whole education needs to be so much more about how we think and how we work together and how we relate. And the national organizations have a lot to contribute to that.

**Speaker 5:** I run a small creative studio, and I'm an artist and practitioner, but also researcher. I have also done advocacy for 20 plus years in the nonprofit sector, as well as having a portfolio career as an artist. So, I'm going to try and come at this conversation in a continuum of some of the things I've been talking about all day, which is I would like to see support for artists and



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organizations. What are the ways that we show up in tables organizing around climate or organizing around the shifting labor economy? I equally think that we need more of these, but I feel we are missing vital conversations by not inviting experts into the room who are dealing with some of these bigger shifts that are taking place in society. I want us to have a room where we get to hear people who are actually working on the future of AI talk about the future of AI from their perspective. It'll be big. It'll be scary. I guarantee you it'll be radically different than the way that we talk about it. I feel the same way about people who are working on next generation cooperative economics or next generation deliberative democracy. To that end, I would to see more people's assemblies and more funding around trans-local organizing and more communities of practice tables. Because I feel while it is heartening to be in a room full of my peers on this day, what I'd like to see is many more of us traveling in a little club or group to some of these other things. Then being able to work in those ways that are translating where some of these shifts are happening back into our field in a much more intentional way.

**Speaker 6:** There are things I keep coming back to that people have talked about: We need more money. When I'm in other rooms where people are talking about keeping hospitals afloat when Medicaid's been cut, and support for mental health and addiction treatment being cut. I just feel we're just not allowed to say that it's magical thinking to not think cuts to these critical areas impact arts advocacy. How do we do the very best we possibly can in the short and long term without more money? That comes down to collaboration in all sorts of ways. It comes down to trying to organize at whatever the right level is, state, city, neighborhood, ourselves, to protect the stuff that if it's lost, it's lost forever. I just find it hard whenever I hear people talking about something that boils down to more money, to not jump up and down and say, you just can't have that thought in this moment because everybody in every room is having that thought. I'm passionate about the arts, but I know that if leaders have to choose between allocating money to keep hospitals from going dark and theater, the choice is clear. We should have a ground rule that says, nobody's allowed to talk about more money. Now, what do we do? I run a little nonprofit, and one of the great unexpected pleasures over the past 20 years is that we've been far more active in the arts than I expected, despite being professional infiltrators. We make grants to help groups explore and complete mergers and collaborations. We're also a lender and so much lending is driven by the Community Reinvestment Act; although it's possible in some cases to use CRA money for arts and culture, it takes work, and people are lazy, so they don't.

**Speaker 7:** What I am thinking about in terms of structure and mobilizing is the relationship between national and state advocacy and the structures within that. I hear from a lot of our constituents, "well, what's the national strategy just tell me what it is?" without a real understanding that it's an up and down thing, it's got to go up then it's got to come down. There's a lot of state level work that's happening across the country and those two are not always in dialogue with each



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other at national and state level. Actually, we have 50 tiny countries in America and they're all completely different and the funding structures are different and the personalities are different. I'm in a really small state. I live next to another small state. Our state governments are oil and water. I don't have an answer to that, but it's just a big question. How do we create a structure in which all things are happening at the same time, and they're also communicating and valuing with each other? There is no national advocacy. I know it sounds a little self-serving, but national advocacy and state advocacy are partnerships, not a hierarchy.

- **Speaker 8 (Facilitator):** I was on a panel for the NEA maybe 10 years ago, reviewing their partnerships with states and regional organizations across the country. It was the best civics lesson that I've had my entire life. I realized that we really are a union of 50 states, and these places are wildly different. I think you raise a good point when we start talking about organizing and mobilizing, that as a field do we need to grow capacity to organize, mobilize across that difference, infrastructure, values and cultural difference. This is totally a room where questions are equally as valid as insights that feed answers. So, we all celebrate that offering.

**Speaker 9:** I know we were warned not to ask for more money, but I'm thinking about the way money is moved and the way funding happens in our country. I'll just throw three groups I get inspiration from in the chat. There is a movement that has been really taking off in the last 10 years in this country, which is really more organized, , individuals coming together to think about where social impact, , what social impact they have as a collective. But some of these examples, like  and the last grant program that ArtPlace America did, were really about putting the money and the decision-making into the hands of the practitioners, the people who were in communities working in culture and community building, and setting up a loose structure that could be flexible. That was giving that power to the people who are on the ground doing the work. This is essentially trust-based philanthropy and I think those types of practices are funder collectives where funders are pooling money and they're just going to say, we're not going to attach any strings to this. We're going to invest in people, in ideas, in institutions, and it's going to be year after year, ideally decade after decade, not specific to a one-year grant program or that episodic funding where we're chasing the shiny new idea.. But I think that there is some appetite for that. And I think funders are leaning into that space a bit more now.

**Speaker 10:** In our last session we talked about the need for leadership in private philanthropy to invest in some of these things and a level of coordination that could be possible. And then I hate to say this, and I feel I can say this in this room, I think about AFTA, and the hope and promise of what it could have been, in the past. There were various leadership councils, the way in which there is a national entity that was organizing networks. I think this relates and dovetails with what



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someone else was saying about the state-federal relationship around advocacy. Certainly, it didn't shake out in its prior iteration the way that everyone hoped it would.

**Speaker 11:** I want to direct your attention to an organization founded by a visual artist, started in 2018. They took over an abandoned building and they're regenerating an entire neighborhood through this effort and through this building. But this program came about precisely because the artist did not feel prepared for the art world when they left their academic training. This is very specifically a bridge program to train very talented artists in the business world. They get a two-year hiatus to be a fellow at this organization. The program is largely focused on underserved artists, but it's been remarkable. They're doing tremendous work. There is also a gallery space, a cafe, and a black box theater, but the primary mission is to prepare very talented artists for the business world they're about to enter. I hope you will check us because we are a brand new cultural center that opened and we have a very unusual model wellness center, community center, student center, and arts and culture center. It is an on-site fellowship program, but it's also training these visual artists, many of whom are already very accomplished and have gallery representation, but to navigate the art world. So, to build business skills, having come more from a practice, arts practice.

## Group 9 Chat

1. Why?
    a. Commitment to the arts and well-being.
    b. I'm here to support arts and arts education programming and funding.
    c. I'm here to participate in a vision for the future of independent film and arts that makes it more accessible and connected to democracy.
    d. Interested in culture shaping big societal shifts.
    e. Belief in the power of public funding for the arts.
    f. Hope, future, friends!
    g. Here to learn and listen and be part of organizing.
    h. I am here to learn and listen and imagine a beautiful future.
    i. I am here because I am deeply invested in the idea of how to build the Arts and Cultural sector as an essential civic commodity.
    j. I come to this space and work to save our democracy and the independent thriving of our country's arts and culture civic infrastructure!
    k. A place of learning and curiosity on how people are feeling about the sector and landscape nationally.
    l. I want the arts to thrive, including creative workers
2. https://emilkang.substack.com/p/an-open-letter-to-arts-leaders-in



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3. I've heard Julie Baker, CA for the Arts use the word "infiltration" in reference to this concept.

4. Who are you seeing doing good work at organizing and mobilizing…arts or non-arts?
    a. Creatives Rebuild New York, ArtPlace America, Giving Circles
    b. https://www.art.coop/
    c. We Act for Environmental Justice based in NYC/Harlem is amazing: https://weact.org/
    d. University of North Carolina at Charlotte has started a Center for Community, Heritage and the Arts. They're doing some wonderful work creating resources to help understand the social impact of the arts on a hyperlocal level.
    e. https://projectsouth.org/
    f. https://designjustice.org/
    g. Let's Grow Kids- Vermont childcare advocacy network (they were singularly focused on one policy issue and set a sunset date for their work when they launched and they were extremely well funded) https://letsgrowkids.org/
    h. https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/future-art-ecosystems-5-art-x-creative-rd/
    i. www.weact.org
    j. NXTHVN: https://www.nxthvn.com/
    k. https://www.cciarts.org/

5. In response to [Speaker's] comments about AFTA's networks, https://www.publicartexchange.org/ - loose collective that picked up from AFTA Public Art Network.



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# GROUP 10

## Group 10 Transcript

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** We are going to spend this section, segment three, talking about mobilization and movement building. The prompts that are guiding us now are intended to help us think about how can we organize and mobilize this work: where is this work already happening, how collective action in our sector might be strengthened or begun, and what we really need to accelerate this work.

**Speaker 2:** There are lots of great networks that are organized or small communities of practice that are convening across the country, everything from the Urban Arts Coalition, Creative States Coalition, Goldenrod and the building of cohorts around civic imagination. One of the things I consistently see, for volunteer-led organization(s) that enable this work to have legs and some form of longevity, it's going to need infrastructure around organizing. We're all so good at stepping up and stepping into the spaces where we're needed to make sure the important work needs to happen, but it's often incredibly under-resourced. I just want to name that in regards to longevity and the well-being of the creative workforce in this space.

**Speaker 3:** In the first breakout session, there was a lot of sharing of existing policy documents and great writing, both from within the US and internationally. To this question, I would say I'm not inspired by, but I am working under the shadow of Project 2025. As I'm thinking about this as potentially Project 2045, I think there would be value in thinking about, what are existing policies, understandings, what are some broad things that we can all agree on so that A, we're not starting from scratch, and B, we're able to get to consensus and mobilize quickly. We just need to get to agreement, and that's what works with Project 2025. We need to take that lesson for ourselves.

**Speaker 4:** I am inspired by the work being done in hyperlocal sports advertising and the community that gets galvanized around the digital community that ends up meeting in real space in sports advertising. I am inspired by the science funders who support hard science and got together on a dime and pivoted their funding towards lobbying, which is not any of their expertise or interest, and saved that $50 billion in Congress, which was a triumph, and [illustrates how when] we can gather and kind of collectively focus, we can do big things. I'm inspired by models of organizations in the global South that are organized around impact and not permanence and that are organizationally defined success not through institutional permanence but through impact within community. The fourth I would say is I'm inspired by Yancey Strickler's A Corp work. I do not



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think it's a silver bullet, gold bullet, silver bullet, whatever it is. But I do think it's really poking on policy points and thinking about artists and labor in complex ways that expand dialogue. Collective action in our sector could be strengthened by cross-sector collaboration. My personal particular interests in that include athletics, sports, education, and health. In order to really accelerate this work, we will need sustained commitment and action.

**Speaker 5:** I would say I am inspired by philanthropy models that put artists at the center, not only as creators, but agents within civic life and a(s a) group that can really bring people together and bridge the red and blue divide. I also am inspired by philanthropy models that involve different sectors and that are based on trust and that help organizations and give them the freedom to invest in what's needed most for that organization to thrive and serve their community. I think collective action in our sector could be strengthened by a big cultural moment. Something that happens, whether that is a collective action, or a broadcast, or a national concert. But it's a big moment where we're telling a unifying story about the value of the arts, democracy, and the message that reaches across divides. To accelerate this work, I would agree investment in systems, but number one, investment in artists and cross-sector collaborations. In order to accelerate this work, we will need to invest in bringing communities together. Again, artists are going to be at the center of this work. Artists are a group that really knows how to connect communities. Increasingly, we've seen in different artistic sectors, how these communities are being fragmented more and more. Within the visual arts, before you would see a lot of integration between the curators and the museum directors and the artists. Now the system has separated those groups that there's less interaction between them. So, to accelerate this work, we need opportunities to build communities.

**Speaker 6:** I think about future action planning. I think about that we're not the first field that is facing this moment. Other fields are facing this moment right now and certainly have before. Despite the announcement this morning that $2 billion in SAMHSA, federal SAMHSA funding has been cut, grants eliminated, the mental health field, the climate field, the childcare field, all moved policy by reframing themselves as essential to everyday life and economic participation. They speak plainly about what they do and align themselves with systems that are already shaping people's lives. I think that that's what the arts need to be, among other things, mobilizing this work.

**Speaker 7:** I think we need to be honest that there is a difference between the movement, right, or the people that we are trying to coalesce, the vehicle of power that they [represent], and the organizations and institutions that serve them. That often, we are making decisions based on serving the institutions and not necessarily building the power and the agency of those who we need to be advocating for. Are we giving the people we serve the tools and resources they need to be their own best advocates? Or are we giving them the tools we need for them to advocate for



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our organizations and institutions? If we're honest about that, I think that we will see that there isn't anybody's job to build a large base of people who believe and share our values in advancing creativity in the arts as a central and key component to democracy and civil life.

**Speaker 8**: I think that is such a beautiful point and I am inspired in a negative way by what we've seen over the last four years and the work that happened around book banning. I think the people who were organizing book banning were very strategic and very clever in that they began that work at the local level, the school board level, the state level, and then the national level and moved legislation and campaigns to influence decision makers at all those different levels. We've seen that result in book bans across 45 states and almost every school district in the nation. I think we need that type of broad, sustained, and multifaceted thinking to build a campaign, an affirmative campaign for the arts. And I know we are all haunted by Project 2025 and I think one of the things that haunts me most is that we don't have an affirmative vision in the same way that Project 2025 is an affirmative vision of a future that I know I am not excited about. But I wish that we had a Project 2025 for the arts that take us to 2030, 2045, whatever it is, and that we were working in the same multifaceted strategic way that conservative groups have been working. I think that is what we will need to be able to sustain and create movement in more funding, more support and more energy around the arts.

**Speaker 9:** In terms of collective action, we're talking a lot about advocacy and building greater constituencies. But I think that there's a second part to it about building collective resources for infrastructure. I think part of where that comes in is recognizing that anchor institutions exist and do support at different levels of the field, but that some of that needs to be formalized. Specifically, a lot of what I would call anchor institutions, a major dance company supports the development of artists by commissioning or by residencies, but does not do much to build an infrastructure that that artist can then create their own organization. I think there's a lot of back-office, finance, and there's been movement on this as well, but a lot of back-office functions that could be shared instead of creating a proliferation of projects and 501c3s that aren't sustainable administratively, even if they create incredible work artistically. Those are the two thoughts that I have.

**Speaker 10:** I think it is very important to us that we have language that is common among us who are professionals and engaged in arts funding and policy. That is, we are the arts and the work that we do is the work that matters. I really think that if we take the leads that have been the roots that have been growing about the power of our informal network and influence, and [recognizing] we need to do the policy work, but we also just need to swing where we know we're good and trust that our content will win some hearts and minds. With that, I have to say, okay, here's the joke. Just call me Tipper Gore. I'm embarrassed by the cultural product of the United States right now. It's



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"dead women TV" and the spectacles that we produce are mostly (rooted in) gun violence. They're not entertaining or interesting at all. You can fill in the right words there, but we really just have to bat at the top, play at the top of our capacities and deal with the policy sector but take the power that we own as the creative sector.

**Speaker 11:** I just want to lift the network of State Humanities Councils, a really important one in states and territories. I am so inspired by our network that banded together last year to fundraise together and said collectively that we would let no one fall through the cracks and that we would be there to sustain one another. I bring up that network but also that spirit of our own networks and our own social capital and our own currency to make and create the movement on our own. And how I would look to your state council, because they've got the spirit of collaboration and cross sector work and cross discipline, that they are a valuable partner in this work.

**Speaker 12**: I'm not saying that I am inspired by this, but I think that something we can learn from the Right [is how they have] strategically invested philanthropic dollars, for the long term, for decades, into shaping culture, into shaping ideas and narratives. We can learn from that. I feel that the arts are always being treated as this side project and not part of the civic infrastructure. We need to match those investments with our values and include this as part of a long-term strategy.

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** I think someone brought this up yesterday in our meeting, talking about the focus on taxes, abortion, and guns, and this idea that you didn't have to fit into that long-term plan, you didn't have agree with all three. You just had to be doing one, and you were let into this larger tent. This person contrasted that with the idea of what the arts tends to do, which is have less simplistic, much more nuanced messaging, and has been requiring people to fit into [one or more issue groups to be accepted]. And so, I've been thinking a lot about that for the past day, thinking about what would be our three [priorities]? And maybe we couldn't come up with just three, even if it was five, right? What would be our five? And how would we be more inclusive?

**Speaker 13 (Co-Facilitator)**: I have to say that once those themes were identified, conservative donors, they funded media. They invest in leadership pipelines, cultural platforms, and I think that's something that we can learn from. It took decades, but you see the impact now.

**Speaker 14:** I think this goes in line with some of the recent conversations, but I'm particularly inspired by government-funded arts and corrections programs. They're programs that are inclusive of all forms of art, with a focus on traditional arts and how these kinds of programs help incarcerated populations, communities, find humanity, learn accountability, and even strengthen their identity. I bring this up in this space because economically, programs that are funded by the government at



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this level will get teaching artists regular work with benefits. I think that's a very important way of recognizing a lot of the artists' work, especially traditional artists who may not have that opportunity in other spaces. Socially, I think the traditional artists in these kinds of programs, they actively participate in the transformation of individuals and even, we like to call them, incarcerated communities. It's not just programming, it's like a public service. It's helping society at large. I think that what arts and corrections type programs, and it's not limited to that, there are others available that are to help society in different ways. I think that what they do is it shows what's possible when we have tradition and maybe community-based artists that are seen not only as performers or keepers of tradition or knowledge bearers, but how they can also participate in systems change. I think it's a great model for how traditional artists can also participate in the well-being of these and many other types of communities. Another thing that I'm really inspired by is participatory action research, and I didn't want to go there, but I think it's really important to think about how cultural practitioners and community members can also lead some of these conversations at the policy level, at the educational level. This kind of model can help recognize the people that are closest to the issues, the people that are closest to the communities. They are also the people that are closest to some of the solutions. What I love about it is that it values our lived knowledge as expertise. So, expertise is not based on whether there is like a degree, like an educational degree, or working with a specific nonprofit or organization, but the lived knowledge is recognized as expertise. When we can treat this research as a tool for change, then it's not just analysis. I really like that kind of work. I think to accelerate the arts and corrections type work, what we need is just more infrastructure and more funding. To accelerate the participatory action research type of work, I think it would entail funding for research that doesn't require academic credentials, that helps create platforms where findings can help shape policy and that artists are treated as researchers and not performers and not just storytellers.

**Speaker 15:** When you gave us that prompt of what are the three [major issues], I picked healthcare, AI, and tourism. And listening to you, it really helped me understand that fundamental lack of knowledge around food waste is a primary first line problem in healthcare. We have so many native and local foodways experts who are working in micro industry, who are transmitting ancient knowledge from land-based practices, even contributing to innovations based on ritual and tradition. Here we have this massive healthcare problem, when 50% Americans are a diabetic or pre-diabetic, it's a social problem. There may be some DNA there, but we're clearly eating wrong. What if we had workforce development, apprenticeship model type wraparounds to wonderful tradition-based, culture-based, land-based ways. I know that there is a latent desire in a whole cross-section of the American population to heal, to be better. We're such a pharmacological, allopathic medicine-based structure right in terms of healthcare. I'm not suggesting that Western medicine should go anywhere, except for maybe an hour longer. But this part of it, where we really



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come to bear with what we know and contribute to the humane side of society, I don't think we're punching at our weight. Sorry, I need a better nonviolent metaphor. But we are powerful leaders with powerful tools. And we're getting kind of locked up in some pretty obvious political BS that is lower than our game should be.

**Speaker 16:** I think that if you read the news every day and you look at political news, it's easy to get depressed. And when you look at the arts, the overwhelming number of stories in the past year about the hollowing out of the middle class and all of these mid-size arts organizations [that are] really struggling or clearly are no longer viable, that it's very easy to think that that's what's going on. However, every time I encounter new artists, I've been working with a lot of AI artists lately, it's just incredibly inspiring. The ways people are thinking about culture and integrating arts and culture into society and dealing with issues and ideas and whatever. It's just like, it's so inspiring. It's kind of almost overwhelming, right? Where's the disconnect in that? It's not that we're just focusing on the negative things or the bad things. I think that it's because we've become very much an algorithmic culture in the sense that the infrastructure that privileges the flow of things in this way or that way exist in thousands, hundreds of thousands of ways that divert your attention because we really have become an attention economy in the sense of so much vying for attention and it's a limited resource, that in fact what we've done is gone from a kind of culture where there's a consensus around a set of values or a set of ideas, good and bad, to something that's so richly fragmented and it's possible to dive into communities that have huge support for ideas and a culture. But if you're outside of that, you don't even know that it exists, and these people are famous within that community. What that suggests to me is that we don't have our cultural algorithms correct yet, that the structures in which we supported 20th century culture and institutions were very effective for a while, but haven't been so for a long time. The technology particularly has rewired the cultural infrastructure, and what gets noticed and what doesn't get noticed. Even the kinds of things that we all know from social media, right, the outrage gets a lot more attention than the very thoughtful thing. That's almost anti-art in a way, right? We want to impact people at a very visceral level, but that doesn't always happen immediately. And because it doesn't, it disappears. My concern is that in the coming AI world, that where AI kind of takes down the center of where culture becomes, that those truly authentic outside the box kind of ideas are just not going to be supportive, but they will be invisible to the culture because they exist outside of those algorithms. And so, I tend to think in a large system [context] and how this impacts the way that we wire values in society. And I think that we haven't spent nearly enough time thinking about what those things are that are directing our culture to make it what it is, and just importantly, what it isn't. I think that's a lot of what we've been talking about today, but we need a lot more work in that area.



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**Speaker 17:** I don't think I have any new ideas, but maybe just a plus one, a couple of things that have come up and maybe two buckets around this question of, "How can we organize and mobilize this work?" Just hearing a lot of threads throughout the day around communications infrastructure and policy infrastructure. Not that they're mutually exclusive, but I really thought what [Speaker] said, about the sports metaphor, and I brought this up in the last group, there's this wonderful commercial for Dick's Sporting Goods, a series of them that's [premised on the idea that] sports change lives. The idea that the youth sports movement is for everyone. Everyone is welcome here. You don't need to be the next Olympian or make a professional team. This is about community. It's about team building. It's about soft skills and hard skills and everyone being welcome to participate or to be a fan and have this kind of communal experience. The arts are the same way. We want to value artistic practice, but everyday arts are good for us, right? And how do we translate that? I took up guitar lessons over the summer and I'm not good, but it is fun. And could we have a similar response to or [draw] inspiration from some of the things that we're reacting negatively to, from a political standpoint, from a communication standpoint and from a policy standpoint. How can we inspire artists to have a civic practice? [How do we position] artists [to] be on our school boards and our city commissions, so we don't have to do that convincing? We are often talking about the value of the arts. And then another disparate but similar thread is that effortful convincing. Every time I have a conversation with someone, it's like, "Oh yeah, of course the arts are good for our health. How could I have forgotten?" [I remember sitting next to someone at a community event who] shared a story about his mother and her journey with dementia and her connection with music. And he was like, "I bet I'm on the opposite political spectrum from you." It's like, "OK, good guess." But I know exactly what you're talking about and I think it's real. I would vote for that kind of thing. Thinking about the threads that maybe everyone can agree on or everyone has a personal connection to in terms of like communication and policy and where the easier wins give us steppingstones to others. What are the toolkits that we need? Our CEO asked me, "Where is the Arts and Health podcast? Do we have influencers? Do we have folks who are talking about this work who are going to come across people's TikTok feeds as talking heads and give them an aha moment? Oh yeah, the arts are good for our health." In the same way people are talking about mindfulness or productivity or all these kinds of life hacks. Maybe we can use that machine for good. [I'd also like] to call out a program from One Nation One Project in Chicago to enable training of artists to be community health care workers, community health workers, and do social prescribing.



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## Group 10 Chat

1. Labor $ in this admin + creative workforce development + artist-designed apprenticeship programs in every state.
    a. ... and healthcare sector should be first focus for workforce pathways.
    b. Coordinated by ALEC

2. Win hearts & minds by delivering 1:1 value, not by perfecting good policy arguments and promo spin.

3. If you haven't seen the media matters report... it worked. https://www.mediamatters.org/google/right-dominates-online-media-ecosystem-seeping-sports-comedy-and-other-supposedly They win online in every category: society & culture, comedy, entertainment, gaming... everyone.

4. CA has a BRILLIANT track record on justice programs. Go, go, go!!

5. Latent cultural desires are around quiet, focus, and integrity in relationships. Trust will be found most offline and on the ground. It's all cyclical, big touch-grass marketplace and new civic squares to cultivate.

6. Very important not to steal the magic from folks' lived experience. Parts of our work are behind the curtain for a reason. Let's stop being 'the arts' in order to get closer to where creative practice is happening for folks.



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# GROUP 11

## Group 11 Transcript

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** This is where we move a bit more towards implementation. We've talked about vision. We've talked about specific ideas of things that need to be done. And this is now moving towards how do we do that work? Or is there somebody doing it already? How could it be strengthened? How could it be accelerated?

**Speaker 2:** I think that we have to be better organized, be bolder. I mean, I think I've heard that all day. I think we all probably have some part in our conversation, but we need to get clear about our power. We have the power, and we've got to stop acting like we don't. We act like we're a collection of small separate programs, and we need to have a coordinated civic force. I think I've heard that a lot today from different people. Maybe it's a shift from thinking about projects to be thinking about movements, to make sure the artists are at the top of any civic infrastructure work that we're able to participate in, cross-sector alliances, and use the tools and know how to use, but we still stay in our silos, whether we're state arts organizations, or we're advocacy organizations, or we're regional, or the national work gets lost a little bit because there's so much [work required] in getting to that place. So, I think we need to stop planning for stability and plan for adaptability.

**Speaker 3:** I feel like I've heard a lot [about a sense of] isolation and feeling beleaguered. Part of my experience in work that I've been doing is that people in government, academia, companies, they want to talk to artists, art makers, creatives, creative organizations. I feel like, I don't know, battering down the doors or at least assuming that we're welcome in conversations that we're not a part of is maybe an action step of taking the top issues in the geography or field, the top 10, and saying, "OK, who is working on this?" I am just going to cold call them and say, we're willing to collaborate. We need resources and funding to do it. This is what we feel we might be able to offer. We want to know what your needs are and what your vision is. Rather than waiting to be asked or feeling like we're being blessed or the subject of munificence when other parts of our society come and support us, I think we can just go and say, "we're here, we're rolling up our sleeves."

**Speaker 4:** We have several aggregators that I think have the potential to be very effective. I'm thinking about Americans for the Arts, Grantmakers in the Arts and HowlRound, which is one of the organizations I've taken the most inspiration from because it was artist-led. It was born in a theater. It is open to anyone. It is a communications tool. It is a document of record. It is a convener, aggregator, administrator, and built itself up by the bootstraps to become a very effective organization. I would love to see a HowlRound around the entire arts [sector].



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- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator): T**hat's a great thought. Okay, who wants to jump in next? Are we losing steam or is this just getting more difficult as we think about actual implementation as opposed to just ideas?

**Speaker 5 (Co-Facilitator):** There are obviously a lot of questions about funding and the sustainability of our sector, and fluctuations in corporate and individual giving. I think the network of UAFs as a potential infrastructure to invest in in the future as we're thinking about increasing both corporate and individual support, but as a local strategy.

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** Essentially, could one create a UAF-type entity at the national level.

**Speaker 6:** I get really excited about the idea of a national arts campaign. There used to be a lot more communities who did United Arts fundraising, but I think there are maybe 40-50 today. People have a lot of stereotypes around this idea because of how it came to be a long time ago. But there really is a future in the idea of asking community members to support what drives economic vibrancy and social connectivity in communities, whether they are passionate about any one art form. As AFTA has proven, the arts are the only one thing we agree on as a nation. That's an amazing thing that we might seize and try to build on. What's different about United Arts fundraising today is that it can be so closely tied to workforce development and retention. In that way, we completely differ from United Way. I know people have thoughts all over the map about United Way, but the arts have such a different value proposition for corporations and business that if we can link to creative thinking in the workplace and creating the kind of community, the kind of region that corporations will remain in and people will want to work in. I think that's only going to increase as we become even more divided. Then I'm also thinking about how technology could be used to affect a national effort. [I want to mention] the ArtsWave app. You can download it in the App Store or Google Store. It's a calendar platform built on Artsopolis, which some of you probably know. But it includes sports and commercial entertainment as well as arts. If you become a member of ArtsWave through the app, you can subscribe just like you subscribe to Spotify. And so, we're trying to make giving to the arts as habitual and connected to going to the arts because we're driving you to engage with something live, locally connected with artists and creatives, and cool people. It's an experiment in digital community, if you will, with the arts as a basis. Can we change behavior using a tool like this?

**Speaker 7:** I have two comments I want to make. First, avoiding the missed opportunities. I think federal organizations have done that quite often. When the emergency money was granted after COVID, what we learned was there was an opportunity after the small to midsize organizations received the help to follow them and to support their management and to be a resource for them. None of the agencies chose to do that. They sort of said, "well, we saved all these jobs, it's up to them." And in some cases, that didn't work at all. People found that once that money ran out, there



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was an unwillingness even for board members who had jumped in to match the funds to get involved. To me, that was a huge missed opportunity. The other thing is [public/ private partnerships around] really big projects. For example, Bank of America did some amazing things in conservation. They also initiated that free day at the museum, which they still have. With corporations, [it's about presenting] a case that shows they're going to benefit and they're going to look good. I do think that federal agencies, and there's some obvious challenges going on right now, but corporations and CEOs are still interested in the arts. Instead of making them enemies, let's bring them in. I always like to talk about working in a bipartisan way, and "bipartisan" doesn't necessarily mean you agree on everything. It means you come together on one thing that's important.

**Speaker 8:** I'm inspired by the work of Laura Zabel and her Springboard For The Arts team. The impactful and timely work that they're doing. I think it's hugely inspirational. I think collective action in our sector could be strengthened by remembering the words of Marie Kondo. First, holding things lightly and saying thank you for what you've done and then giving it away or letting it go, and then remembering the words, what gives us joy? Then think more broadly outside of the confines of what we think of as the arts and culture sector to more broadly creatives and the tech sector, and the things we share and the things we can value. I think moving more fluidly between human creativity and inspiration and arts on a larger scale, is what inspires me.

**Speaker 9:** The question that I want to raise is, who are we in this story? Because if it's getting resources to support professional artists and organizations, that's one way. A lot of the tactics and strategies that have been mentioned so far are in that category. If it's realizing cultural democracy in practice, if it's saving the common culture from white supremacist authoritarians, that's another "we." That's a much bigger "we." That's a much more urgent and dire "we," as far as I'm concerned. In these three groups I've been in, I'm sure not everyone would cast themselves into the same group in that binary. I think we're kind of split down the middle. I'm in the minority, but there's at least a third over there, I think. Because there's a big difference strategically between trying to get people to support your livelihood while theirs is precarious, which is the moment that we're in. That is tough, tough stuff. I wouldn't do it and I'm part of it. We have to recognize when we look at the past, that none of the advocacy that has been done since 1965 has actually worked, ultimately, to realize the scale of participation and investment that was needed to have a democratic cultural policy in this country. If we look at the NEA budget now, where people celebrate because they got a few more million, or they kept as many millions from being cut, we have to acknowledge that the spending power of the NEA appropriation at this moment is less than half of what it was in 1981 when Ronald Reagan came into office. So, all this work and all this saving is like triaging a patient who still has a broken arm and a broken leg and can't get around. We have to be honest about the circumstances under which we're working. For me, we need to go back to fundamentals. I think we



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need to address the infused snobbery of the so-called "sector." In other words, the degree to which people enter into some kind of institutional cultural event and notice just by walking in the door, whether this is for me or not, and go right out if it doesn't feel like it is, and that's endemic. We also need to look at whether it has been wise to create a funding apparatus and a funding sector that's so fundamentally based on intense competition, and especially the kind of competition that's rife in this sector that privileges people with more resources because they can get the reviews and they do the good videotapes, and they can do all the things to impress panels that are awarding grants. I haven't done an actual time management thing for arts funders, public and private, but I've observed and been close to a lot of them. I would say, and I defy anyone to refute this, that if you look at how the time is spent at arts funding agencies, you will see that much more time is invested in culling and rejecting rather than in supporting. So almost every foundation or public agency is rejecting 10, 20, 100 applications for every one that they fund. The effort that's gone into that for those people who are rejected is creating disappointment, discouragement, and sometimes enmity. That's just a bad system. We need to look at a way to advance cultural democracy, to provide the means of participation, to give opportunities to engage with each other, to equalize the playing field, and to recognize that saving a culture, an inclusive culture, and a culture that needs to be better at respecting everybody's differences, has to be our priority number one in this moment with the MAGA regime in charge. I'll just say one final sentence, which is I'm uncomfortable with what feels like tinkering with how we place the deck chairs on the Titanic.

**Speaker 10:** I want to say amen to everything that was just said. I think that is the fundamental question: who are the "we" that we talk about? The challenge, the snobbery, but I would also say there's a scarcity mentality in the arts, to compete for what little dollars there are. There was a big initiative to get a tax to support the arts in metro Detroit. It didn't happen, but partially because the large arts institutions said, "this is going to be for us." I think that for us to survive, for human creativity to thrive in the United States, which is what someone said, this must be grassroots. This must be wide, not tall. It has to include everyone from the grassroots. The community artists and the community organizations that are working in neighborhoods and things like that, they are doing some of the most impactful arts work. We can no longer be snobs. And so, I think the key thing is that everybody in, nobody out, that it has to be something that is for community arts, to small arts organizations, but also to people who love the arts and are not professionals. That it must be a grassroots thing that everybody feels strongly about, creativity and the arts, if you bring it to that width. I think every otherwise, it's the music people don't want to be part of the arts people, because they think the music people can do better on their own. Or, the smaller arts organizations don't want to be part with the larger arts organizations because they think we need to focus on our own things.



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**Speaker 11:** Marshall Gantz was talking about what worked when he was helping lead the Obama campaign effort and really talked about, people don't move systems because they agree to anything. They move systems because they're organized. That organization is directly connected to relationships. I don't think we're organized. I think there's organized facets of us all over the place. I have a hard time wrapping my head around this kind of United Way-style funding model for the arts, because that setup, that hierarchy, can sometimes inadvertently disempower the local, which is where the relationships are seated. The CEO at Knight Foundation has this saying that I really love, that "the power to create change is not lost, it's local." With that, as we think about collective action and the "we," I think that we have to be broad and intentional about who the "we" is and how we don't just episodically include them, but how we consistently include them and build a practice around that inclusion so that even the ones who disagree with us, mostly importantly, the ones who don't get it [are part of the process].

**Speaker 12**: I'm actually going to tag on what (Speaker) just said. [I'd like to speak to] the Artists Thrive initiative that some of you may know about. I think this speaks a little bit to that "collective could be strengthened" question, that we as a sector don't do that well and need to improve on how we acknowledge that everyone has value, influence, power, something they can play into it. Too frequently when we do convenings and conversations, we segment who's allowed to be part of those conversations. Artists Thrive has an annual summit and invites in the full ecosystem. Emerging folks, really established folks, folks from all across the country, from rural, from urban, but also artists, administrators, educators, funders, the whole universe that comes together. It's amazing in a small conference like that to watch how quickly the synergies come, the energy, the excitement, the shared ideas, the system change that starts to come out, whether it be from a session or from a bus ride. People are eager for this, but the opportunity to have those moments are few and far between. Even from the local side, it's hard for people to find that time to come together in a space where everyone is included and invited. I think that's where there's a change possibility. I'm so inspired by the work at Museums Moving Forward because it collectively bringing all these institutions together, and there's no museum on their own that can be doing the work that Museums Moving Forward is doing.

**Speaker 13:** In the last couple of years, [I've been inspired by] the younger generations, they're organizing and they're collaborating and they're aligning with each other in way less official, ways. They're not often invited into these rooms. I think they've absolutely reoriented our sector's attention toward longstanding inequities and, frankly, labor issues. Honestly, I think a lot of us had accepted to some degree or had lost sight of the importance [of those issues]. Their belief in technology as a tool, not as an assumed good, but as a tool that we really need to focus on to make the impact that we want to make. In terms of collective action, the type of bridging that I see in these younger generations [represents a lesson]. A lot of it is bridging across class [lines], which is



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a tricky one for our field. I've seen a lot of inspiring instances of worker solidarity, which is a great example. You see white collar workers expressing their solidarity with unions, or joining unions, or expressing solidarity if they're not eligible. The reason that's interesting to me, regardless of individual feelings about unions, is it really does demonstrate that there is this possible way to work together even when things feel distant. That could be across departments, but it could also be across museums, across the sector, across the country. I think to really accelerate this work, we need to embrace the idea that absolutely nothing in the arts and culture sector is possible if we are not able to pay living wages to workers. We can't have a steady workforce if people can't afford to work here. We have a lot of data about this.

**Speaker 14:** Right now, what our community is contending with is primarily their immigrant families. When we talk about youth, what they are most concerned about is walking from their home to our center, to explore and develop their artistic gifts. Then when we talk with the parents and the families at large, it's food insecurity. You know, for the first time, we ran a food pantry in our lobby, completely off mission, but it's what we were hearing. We're just seeing up close what is happening to people as a result of what's happening right now to our nation. I think moving forward in collaboration, of course, everything that's been brought up is essential, but I guess my question is, what is our role as a sector in being part of resistance?

**Speaker 15:** What's resonating for me is very much what you said in terms of that aspect of relationship building, that that is what this work is and that is its heart and core. We need to make sure we have time and capacity to do that. I find that so much of our work is time spent on trust building, relationship building, trying to create spaces for lessons learned across generations, because what we're finding is a lot of the work we're doing, these aren't new problems, unfortunately. They might be looking a little different, but the same things I'm advocating for now, I find my colleagues did in the 90s, in the 70s. What I think about with our broader community of artists and educators, is that time spent on cultural organizing is oftentimes unpaid, or it takes them away from paid opportunities. So how can there be capacity and infrastructure to be able to support that for them? I also think about how we are creating systems for activation. When I was growing up, if there was a snow day, there was a phone chain that families would call one another to let you know school wasn't happening. Where's the cultural organizing equivalent of that when there is a call to action? I think when I look at that question of how we are accelerating this work, for me, it's thinking about the idea of mobilizing and organizing as a muscle that needs to be exercised and invested in. Because all that I mentioned, and I think a lot of what was mentioned here, that just takes time and people power, which a lot of organizations and artists don't necessarily have available to them.



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**Speaker 16**: I want to say that despite artists being risk takers, I think the sector has a fear of failure. I think it's born of competitiveness. Who gets the commission? Who gets the seat in the orchestra? Who gets the part in the play? And we have no money for R&D. As we move forward with this collective action, and talk about [the metaphor of a] phone chain, I think these 300 people came together through phone change, which is great. We shouldn't be afraid of failure. We shouldn't pick one thing to try, but multiple. And some of them will succeed, others will fail. It's just like science, where there's R&D money.

## Group 11 Chat

1. But the largest arts story of the year has been about politicization and divisiveness. Hard to overcome the headlines…but we MUST.

2. Creativity thrives on freedom of expression, but organizations by their nature thrive on coordination. When you don't intentionally build the coordination, everyone ends up naturally rowing in different directions. This is the challenge and it will be difficult to solve even with such a massive existential threat.

3. It seems like we are saying we need a grassroots movement more than just a campaign. Maybe we should try to find expertise in "Movement Building." I think in the past we have looked to political lobbying and marketing. It seems that those are connected to the old model that isn't working – and frankly existed long before MAGA and COVID. Do we need to focus more on Movements and Community Organizing? That takes work and strategy.



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# GROUP 12

## Group 12 Transcript

**Speaker 1:** This one is interesting. Organizing and mobilizing. I think that from my own experience over the last years, the one thing is when people come together with a common ultimate purpose and then find the ways to use their related skills to add to that. If change needs to be made and the arts need to become more central to the way people think and it becomes a positive change agent, then how do the various organizations, institutions, and artists utilizing their specific or general skills to come together to form one large project that may have many little projects within it, touching different people with each one of those pulses? That way you inform education, you inform healthcare, you inform government, you inform all the other aspects of people's lives in very much the way some of the best films or theater did. I go back to the 1940s and a play that dealt with McCarthyism without ever mentioning McCarthy and talking about the witch trials. It still resonates today. How would something impact a community or the nation and move the arts into a central focus? Rather than everything being as divided as it is, which is somewhat intentional by the regime that's in place at this time.

**Speaker 2:** Yes, the second prompt, collective action in our sector could be strengthened by collaborating with the commercial sector. This is following something from my previous session. Strengthening, collaborating with the commercial sector and creating a shared vision for the arts across the country that was not just the nonprofit work.

**Speaker 3:** I'll build on that. I think a shared vision for the arts in the US is essential. I've been, in the last two years, working on a project that is in the space of trying to figure out if it would be possible to raise billions of dollars to endow the performing arts. We're just about to the end of our first phase and had talked, we talked to about 85 leaders across the performing arts. The thing that was most striking to me is the lack of agreement across the different verticals about what the issues are; what we're facing; what we're challenged by. If we were to imagine a future where there is a fund that is in the billions, what problem are we trying to solve? I just think as a field, we need to figure out what are we trying to solve? What is that unifying vision? [Speaker] said, it's evidence in these conversations as well, right? We're, yes, we're in a universe, but that universe has so many planets and constellations and, how do we actually come together around a singular vision?

**Speaker 4:** I think that to accelerate this work, we're going to need local and regional networks alongside national infrastructure. I know that not everyone is as lucky as [Location] in terms of a strong state arts board and state arts advocacy organization. We also are lucky enough to be part



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of [Organization]. I feel [Organization] as a regional arts organization would be well positioned to participate in one of these regional networks, and I'm curious from other folks in the room when we get to conversation later, if your regional arts organization or network might also be a good partner.

**Speaker 2:** Just very quickly following up on what [Speaker] said, I'd be interested in the name of the organization if there's anyone in [Location] participating. We have a collaborative here called [Organization] that goes across discipline, dance, multimedia, design, visual arts, and theater. There's a lot of agreement about the issues. We've really struggled on defining a shared vision for the arts in [Location]. I'm just wondering to y'all, all of you that have been seeking about regional versus, we're looking at an 11-county region, but regional versus national, if that's where you're finding stumbling block too. [Speaker], is there anyone in [Location] among your Group?

- **Speaker 3:** No, trying to think. Not on the steering committee. There probably is somebody that we interviewed. I'm curious, is it a collaborative fund that you're talking about? I think you said yes.

**Speaker 5:** Regional arts organizations would want to always be a part of this conversation and to continue to be a part of these spaces and to listen to all of this and to see how we can fit in and how we can help. We refer to it as building the next national arts infrastructure, which is something that we've just been imagining and thinking about. So that's one thing. When I think about mobilizing, the question at hand, I think about who the audience is and what would we really be, what are we setting out to create? A public policy platform? Are we setting out to create an arts blueprint for America that could get into the hands of a future president or presidential candidate? Or is it a document for us? Is it a document for our incredibly vast, diverse sector? Those are the things that I would really want to know ahead of time. I think that there'll be a lot of different ideas around that. So, who's the audience?

**Speaker 6**: I'm the Executive Director of [Organization], a collective impact initiative that supports the youth arts as opposed to doing programming for young people. The thing that I thought about first, and I think [Speaker] teed this up, the first thing I thought about with respect to mobilization is leaning on or utilizing advocacy groups, those groups that have been specifically coordinated to advocate for the arts that have a vision for that region, that particular region. I'm thinking about our prominent advocacy network in [Location] what their agenda or language is, and then how does that feed into the national agenda and language around advocacy? Because it's the cultural arts advocacy organizations that are both local and regional that have the ability to mobilize the grassroots organizations. They have that ability. Are they effective, is the question, right? Because I feel personally that we have in [Location] a very ineffective advocacy network. I think coordination around that first, and I also am a part of [Organization] region, a part of that Group as well. But if



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we could coordinate advocacy groups locally first that have its agenda for that area that then feed into the national agenda or shared language around what is the national conversation, or the national push toward, then we could all get behind supporting that. I'll give you a quick example. Our advocacy group indicated that because of the climate of what's happening in our country right now, that they were unable to mobilize people and get things moving for the arts sector. Whereas, the other sector, the youth development sector, not only preserved their budget, we were fighting for our budget, but they preserved their budget, but also increased it by $25 million. Something is happening, and somebody is advocating in a way that we aren't. The mobilization, I think, has to come from the coordination of grassroots organizations by advocacy groups.

**Speaker 7:** I'm at an advocacy group, a state advocacy group, so obviously I feel strongly about what was just said, but I also think even more than that, I think when you look at some of the movements that become movements in arenas that I think none of us here agree with. I think that what you're seeing is a vertical integration from a central, larger think tank entity that can go all the way down to mobilizing parents at school board meetings. I don't see that for the arts. I don't see that we're training all those different levels to cycle information and strategy back and forth. I don't see that we're actually tapping into all those different spaces and levels of power. This is one structure, this thinking, really just being super pragmatic about the spaces. Sometimes an advocacy day in the state capital, for example, that is effective for a specific goal, but that's not in and of itself a strategy, that's an action or a tactic. I think it's getting really clear about what levers exist and what we want to pull. I think that vertical integration piece, and just another example of that to be really tangible in the recent federal budget dialogue, this is six months ago or so, there was this moment of a proposed NEA budget level out of the house side that had an elevated, allocation for the state arts agencies. Then some states found that great, some didn't. But there was this overall dialogue of, well, since state arts agencies are required to get a matching contribution from their state, in addition to the federal, that won't work, because some of them can't match that. That was the end of the dialogue. Where's the mobilizing to pinpoint exactly those states that are doing a bare minimum match, if that is the bottleneck, where is the mobilizing to say, how do we support these six, seven, whatever states to do the state-level advocacy to increase their ability to match, which allows us to increase the overall spending? Because what that dialogue basically articulated is that we don't ever want to see a higher funding level for the arts because that would be based on this allocation formula, and would put those states at a disadvantage. I know that's super in the weeds, but I just want to give an example of how we've had these opportunities where we had a spotlight on a structural issue, but there was no step towards vertical integration of all of this movement along the lines of what we're saying. I think that there's super tangible examples in the now. One last thing I want to share. I think it would be a really interesting thought experiment. I know this is going to sound really strange, but rather than spending the time to, I think it's hard to



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articulate a shared vision for the arts. I think that doesn't necessarily exist and that's okay, but I would be interested. Again, I know this sounds really odd, but just a thought experiment. Imagine if we were a government that wanted to build a propaganda machine that would make every citizen feel entitled to an appealing and relevant art experience where they live. If we wanted to build propaganda, call it propaganda, to make every citizen feel entitled to that, what actions would we take? allowing them to veer into the outlandish and unethical, but just to really articulate if we were really serious, the way that some bad actors are very serious about what they're trying to do and changing the national psychology, what would we do? From that, there'll be some things that are not pragmatic, and there'll be a lot of things that I think are very pragmatic that we could start to think about.

**Speaker 8:** Just to follow up on what [Speaker] said, the think tank model, and in terms of vertical integration, I think, is a very good model. After our last session, where we were talking about making something national and funding and other things. I had a lobbyist going around in my head and that didn't quite work. How do you get it through all the layers to where it trickles up and it trickles down and then becomes actionable? Actionable at the hyper local as well as at the county as well as at the state, as well as at the national level. And it's the integration. It's somehow creating something that supports that integration and thinks about the various messages across the arts, plural, nationally. Because we're a big country and we have very interesting regional differences and cultures and audiences. To create vertical integration, I do think you need something along a think tank model with many voices.

**Speaker 9:** One of the things that I think a lot about is the different tiers of organizations that are oftentimes applying for similar funding opportunities in a certain geography and thinking about ways in which some of the grants may foster a collaborative fundraising moment where the larger funders have to have a built-in structure where they're holding space for two groups that maybe aren't of their same size. Maybe there's a situation where the large organizations that may have more fundraising capacity, more bodies in the building to apply for certain grants at a certain level. There could be a collaborative way where smaller organizations get a chance to be a part of some of those larger grants. Because a lot of times you have, especially in our geography, a lot of small organizations who have 2.5 people and everyone's taking turns doing the fundraising. But if that smaller organization or if a larger organization was applying for a fund, for a grant, but they had to have a smaller organization as a partner, that might maybe alleviate some of the internal bandwidth challenges that some of the small organizations have. Just more ways of thinking about ways in which there can be collaborative fundraising when the organizations that are doing some of that work don't have the same level of support to actually do that internally.



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**Speaker 10:** One thing that I'm often struck by in our space is the lack of voices from folks that I personally and professionally identify as being a part of the arts and culture sector, folks in nightlife, folks working in genres that don't often get named here. I don't know, here in [Location], R&B is massive. I don't know how many folks are in the collective that recognize that art form. I think in order for us to be ever more successful in our advocacy work, we really have to expand our definitions and awareness on what culture means. Piggybacking on what [Speaker 7] mentioned around propaganda, place-based propaganda. I'm all for it. I say often coming from [Location], it breaks my heart that there are young people that don't know the history of Motown, but know about other artists Bach and Beethoven, who I love. There just needs to be greater awareness, I think, overall and outside of some of our familiar spaces.

**Speaker 11:** I really wanted to add to what you just said, [Speaker]. I think there could be a lot of space for more working-class solidarity, labor movement solidarity. There was a fantastic creative study, that has a webinar series about solidarity economy that mentions that in a recent census, there are more people listed as artists than lawyers, doctors, and cops combined. Thinking about that working class solidarity, how many unions we have represented in the arts movement, and looking to the past organizing structures and methods of the labor movement is something I've been thinking a lot about.

**Speaker 5:** Just as I love the representation here today and how people are reminding us of the parts of the sector that are important, the kinds of people that are a part of the sector that need to be accounted for and included and lifted up. In that spirit, public workers, there are so many public workers in the arts in the United States at the state level, at the municipal level, at the federal level, that we have to make sure that we're advancing with that perspective, that stakeholder in mind as well, because the current federal cultural agency structure is in great turmoil right now. There's no surprise there. That also can create a lot of reverberations at the state and municipal level, as is obviously happening, and almost all of that work is stewarded by public workers, people who identify themselves as, and they're often highly skill-based, working for much less than they could in the private sector and are doing it because they believe in the work and they believe in what's achievable and what's possible. All of that is being threatened right now and who knows what the future looks, but we definitely need to make sure that public workers, especially in the creative economy, are also represented in this work.

**Speaker 4:** It's a response to what [Speaker] was talking about in terms of smaller organizations and larger organizations getting paid. I think yes, and to the idea of that happening in the grant and fundraising world, and then also what might be possible if there were shared resource networks that existed. One of the things that we've talked about within a small part of [Organization] is regional technology hubs or housing networks where we can figure out as artists are moving



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around regions or across the country, ways that we can provide housing for those folks. I think that that's a place where larger organizations can help build that local regional infrastructure to be able to combine forces, share resources with the smaller arts organizations in our states as well.

**Speaker 3:** The thing that that I'm a little in conflict with is what feels an over-reliance on government and advocacy, and that as such, a significant cornerstone of the answer to the fundamental question of the sustainability of the arts field and the importance of the arts in American society. I get why we go there, they have immense power, but they're not stable. Governments shift. Elections happen every two to four to six years, depending on where you are. The reality of what that could mean, as we have experienced in the last year, and the significance of regime change, if we can use that word, at the federal level, but it's true at the local level too, right? As people are elected, blah, blah, blah. All to say, I'm not suggesting that we move completely away. I'm just saying for the field, and if I think about that first prompt of 20 years from now, what do I hope, right? Part of that hope is for a sector that is valued at the same level as healthcare. [There's] been a lot of conversation today about how arts and healthcare are coming together, which I love because I feel that's moving outside of the reliance on government investment into a broader societal importance of our work. I don't know. I just feel I think we need to think bigger. I think this comes to my first point about how we need a vision that is beyond government advocacy, that is beyond who's elected right now, that is beyond where we are right now, that puts us into a different conversation, right? That puts us into a more significant conversation, which is why I love the conversation about raising billions of dollars for the arts, right? If you start talking about raising $100 billion for the arts, you get out of all of these conversations and into a much different future vision for where we are. I think I just want to challenge us to think bigger and think more boldly.

**Speaker 13:** Government funding is such a small part of the larger ecosystem. I think it's actually less than 3%, but it is an important framework in terms of how people have a general benchmark in terms of our priorities and where on ramps can be. I feel government is not so much the solution. It's just a critical part of infrastructure, just my opinion in terms of how others can play in. I'll use [Location] as an example. Someone mentioned how [do] we define culture. I think we have to be very realistic that cultural institutions are still just an aggregate of individuals, and so are states, and so is the country. It's an aggregate of the 50 states and territories. There's going to be natural differences and conflicts of ideas. There's not going to be a monolith in terms of how we define culture. In [Location] alone, one of the first things we did, we redefined what cultural institutions actually meant. It meant that people for the first time could apply, just a church could apply because culture happens in churches. A hospital could apply because culture happens on blocks. We redefined what culture meant and it meant that the bucket could be wider. Chair Rosario Jackson, I think to [Speaker's] point, we spent a lot of time when she was doing her tenure really thinking about what is the relationship between city and rural destinations in terms of how you share



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infrastructure? Whether that be digital infrastructure, whether that be fractional services in terms of what's our civic responsibility to each other given that there are limitations depending on where you are regionally. It's same thing for the city of [Location], this constant conflict of what is city-focused versus what is neighborhood-focused. I think there's a lot of examples of how people will wrestle with that. Someone mentioned in terms of expanding beyond culture, again, at least for me selling the city of [Location], the city of [Location]'s 50-year plan literally started with arts and culture. It's defined by art for art's sake, but also art as an effective tool against social determinants of health. For [Location], we have things like the [Organization] health pilot for creative workers that really put our medical office and our, with our eds and meds, if you will, integrated into arts. Chair Rosario Jackson, she did a similar thing with the National Endowment of Arts when they were doing military health aid. I think there's a lot of examples of what exists, but it's more, so it will be a both. I don't think it's going to be one thing.

**Speaker 14:** I was thinking about in the prior conversation, there's a lot of talk about becoming investable instead of being grantable. Can we shift the arts thinking from moving from being grantable to investable? How do we connect for-profit and non-profit models? If that is one of the goals or one of the opportunities, what would we need to mobilize to make that a reality? I don't know if you guys have any thoughts, but I'd love to hear some folks talk about that.

**Speaker 10:** I'll speak from my perspective here at [Organization]. With [Organization], we're a fiscal sponsor. What that means is instead of an organization or an individual going out and becoming or starting a nonprofit on their own, they come to us and they use our nonprofit status in order to raise charitable donations funds for the work that they do. We manage all of the back-end work to make that happen and to ensure that they're compliant. Everything is coming to bear as it must. There are some for-profit businesses that come to us seeking an opportunity to go for grants. For instance, there's a small bookstore, and so it's a brick and mortar, typical bookstore, but they see opportunity in artistic programming and other kinds of cultural programming, and have a fiscal sponsored entity that has been created through [Organization] that they use in order to raise funds and make that work happen. I see that, at least in my own perspective, working at a fiscal sponsor, we wanted to offer that up.

**Speaker 5:** I was struck by what [Speaker] was saying about grantable versus being more investable rather than grantable, and just a shifting of thinking, a shifting of vernacular in that space. It is true that, and we've been talking about this in other sessions today, but there is not just this massive wealth transfer, but also this real change in thinking from older generations to younger people around traditional philanthropy versus social impact investing and what and what that looks like, and with this new wealth from technology that comes with a lot of concern, wanting to solve problems on ultra-rich, high-net-worth individuals, people's own terms, rather than setting up a



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traditional philanthropic structure, is going to be a force that we're going to be having to deal with. How does creativity show up in that space? How do we meet that moment? There's so many different conversations ongoing for decades, of course, in our sector about different kinds of revenue streams and from earned revenue to philanthropy to government and so on. That conversation tends to just go round and around and around. There will be a time when we have to think about really what new investment looks beyond the traditional ways of thinking about it. That will include staking out some way of being able to serve as a great alternative to artificially generated content. And there should be a way to be able to monetize that in some future world.

## Group 12 Chat

1. If there was a public relations effort moving to a more unified citizenry, more humane, all the different art forms and cultural institutions could use their respective talents to forward that campaign.

2. Arts Capital | Atlanta is exploring hiring a lobbyist for the 11-county Atlanta region. https://www.artscapitalatlanta.org/
    a. Arts Alliance Illinois had great success hiring a lobbyist that wasn't an arts lobbyist. They were the most powerful lobbyists in IL at the time, and they were able to move conversations forward. It costs $$$ but was so worth it in terms of dollars that flowed to the field.

3. I think there is a very effective advocacy group our of Los Angeles.

4. We have some great state advocacy organizations in the Mid-Atlantic region.

5. Advocacy groups in states and cities that historically promote the arts are likely to be more successful than those in places that don't believe the arts are essential or deserve government support.

6. Here's some info on arts advocacy in the west: https://wearecreativewest.org/our-work/western-arts-advocacy-network/

7. Minnesota Citizens for the Arts is very effective & I think has some strategies that would work outside MN https://artsmn.org/

8. https://commonslibrary.org/the-power-cube/



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9. The language translates from "think tank speak" down to the community level where folks don't think, "I want to go do an art now," they think, "I need something to do with my kids this weekend that costs less than $20"

10. Or equitable apprenticeship models that place leaders from smaller organizations in the very committee rooms where larger organizations are strategizing major donor development, etc. There is no equitable way to distribute that knowledge and skillset in a real practical way.

11. Gaming is bigger than all the other sectors combined and it has a lot of financial resources. It uses many of the other art forms and tells stories that click with people.
    a. Gaming has also been de facto roped into a propaganda strategy to drive towards extremist ideologies – what would a gaming-integrated cultural vitality strategy look like?
    b. It could look like a lot of things...depending on how others get involved in the process. Arts have to recreate the funding stream, ancillary sources of income.

12. There are three power-building strategy baskets to put our eggs in I guess: government, philanthropy, populism.

13. We have a quasi-religious commitment to certain tenants of how our sector operates. We need a charitable purpose but invented at some point that we need a "mission"

14. How do we communicate that creativity is investable and key to positive social impact?



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# GROUP 13

## Group 13 Transcript

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** [The goal of this segment is to start] offering ideas about the strength that we already have, to really set some of that (vision) in motion. What collective work are we already doing that is moving us towards the vision or the visions that are represented here?

**Speaker 2 (Co-Facilitator):** [What work do you find inspiring, or how have you been inspired by,] what you've heard someone else articulate? What has been inspiring in your work outside of this space, and today?

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** I think the premise of this part of the conversation is heavily about, "we can't do anything in the future without one another." Especially when we're thinking about an improved place for what art does in the world, how do we already move collectively [in ways] that you find efficient, successful, effective, that we can look toward? Or, what are we not doing well that we need to strengthen to, again, mobilize and operationalize some of these new ways of working? I go back to the huge scale of people who practice art making because they love doing it. I'm really inspired by the power of that work and see that as a collective force that can help us mobilize the work of the future. I think we really must accelerate our attention to how do we harness that incredible scale and energy and love, and make it work for us so that it empowers all of what we do, not just what we think we're doing now, if that makes sense. Any other ideas with respect to collective action that are inspiring to you?

**Speaker 3:** I [recall] when there was a concerted effort on the part of foundations to create a cultural policy sector in the United States. Research centers were created at Columbia, the University of Chicago, Vanderbilt, and Princeton. There was money available for conferences. There were practitioners who were being groomed to be future cultural policymakers. The point of it was to be able to conduct a field-wide, fact-based discussion and advocacy around culture. The Ford Foundation was involved, along with Rockefeller, Pew, et cetera, and all of that went by the wayside. I think that collective action, part of it is an allocation issue about how the foundation sector, God bless the foundations that even give to the arts, but they typically provide subventions (subsidies) for artistic production, whether directly to artists in a few cases or usually to organizations. But there really needs to be some money devoted to this policy side of things so that we have data to make the case for the arts, understand the issues in the field, to have forums. Any kind of professional sector that wants to engage in collective action needs to be able to engage in collective reflection, as we are now. And that [capability] needs to be rebuilt. I think the foundation sector and the



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funding sector can assess whether it wants to move in this direction. Otherwise, we're left with rhetoric that is not very effective.

**Speaker 4**: I'd like to just share a relevant piece of work that I admire. The Institute for the Future worked with the California Arts Council to do a strategic plan for the creative economy in California. They worked for 18 months to create a plan that addresses everything from preparing workers for creative careers to helping creative businesses survive and balancing this challenge of cultural identity and arts work with economic growth. I will drop into the chat a link to the landing page for the report I just recommended as an interesting model of how this can be tackled at a state level.

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** I've long been a fan of Institute for the Future's work, and I know that having a scenario or a set of scenarios to work with is a practical model.

**Speaker 5:** What I have been desiring with our sector is almost a national marketing campaign that isn't necessarily rooted in advocacy, but more in excitement and brand awareness of arts and who and what arts in America looks like. Because I think sometimes, we are so siloed within the arts that we know the power, we know the need, we know the value, and we know what would happen if the arts were gone. But I don't necessarily think lay people do. I think they just expect it to be there, or they don't even realize it's there. I think we must be bolder and sexier and more in your face to combat all the other distractions and all of the other things that people's attention can go towards. I wonder if there is a way that we can collectively come together to figure out how we tell our story in that kind of a way so that it could potentially rival sports or NFL Super Bowls, or let's get a Super Bowl commercial, right? Like, what is this exciting thing that we can do to spark that excitement in the general public so that arts aren't just existing, but it's something that [audiences are] like, we can't exist without it?

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** I love the idea of what arts in America look like and in ways where everyday people see themselves as a part of it. What are areas that others would like to see more collective effort? What are the connections that you would like to make across the field with one another that would give you strength and give work of the future more grounding, I guess I would say? Anyone want to dream on that one?

**Speaker 6:** I listened to my elders talking about how the NEA used to bring people together for days in person to look at grants, and not only to look at grants, but also to set policy, and it feels unthinkable to me now. In addition to imagining the future, I think we must remember the past. Because nobody under the age of 40 has experienced that. I talked in one of the previous sessions about NEA Expansion Arts, the fact that for 30 years, there was a part of the NEA that was explicitly supporting community-based art in rural and low-income areas, led by people of color, poor people, working people. You look on the Internet; you can barely find any information about it. So, I think



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that any kind of thinking about how we can support each other and the sector and the people in it better (remember and document the past), because we are at risk of forgetting what has been, and therefore a big chunk of what could be.

- **Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** So, what I'm taking away from that, as well as remembering the past, it's [needing to] figure out a way to collectively organize ourselves in ways that include in-person meetings to rebuild and to find some kind of connection across the field.

**Speaker 7:** There are a lot of collectives that I'm aware of, but many of them are struggling right now. Immediately, I thought of one that I still long for, and I wish it were still around. I thought it was a beautiful model. And that was the learning labs model, where museums and libraries came together to create experiences for teens using the HOMAGO framework. The reason I wanted to bring it up is I think one of the things that was so special about that, someone recently asked me, what's been the worst thing about seeing IMLS funding kind of fall through the cracks? And I said, it's not about even the projects I was doing. It was what they did to bring us together across shared goals This was a group of individuals from almost 25 states, museums and libraries, trying to solve [for the challenge of] how to engage teens in creative thinking, and it was one of the most powerful experiences of my life. We all ended up creating our own labs. What happened is, of course, COVID, and much of that fell apart. We almost needed another reboot to get us back and reconnected. I bring it up just to say there have been so many great examples of what the power of thinking together can be, and especially when there's seed money, and it was the authority of that organization to say, "we're behind you, we're going to support you, we're going to see you through, [and] we're going help you make the connections, and then we're going to give you a platform to talk about the work," and in some ways that's what I'm longing for and I'm sorry I can't give an example of something as dynamic happening right now.

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** I think that's a good illustration of the impetus for a collective needing to be rooted in more than just, "let's get together." That sounded like it had a real focus, and it was tight, and it was about serving teens. I'm wondering if it would help the rest of us to think back to the visioning we did in the first session and the focus of those visions. What is the parallel? What is the museum and library collaboration that gets us to those visions? It might take a little reaching back just for your own self. You don't have to speak for anybody else, and you don't have to speak for your organization. But what could it be? And I'm trying to do that work myself while I'm thinking and talking, but I'm hoping that that helps kind of get us to a place in the discussion about collectivity.

**Speaker 8:** [In terms of a collective impact approach to arts education, I'll mention] MindPop out of Austin, who some of you might be familiar with. They work in the arts education sector, but collective impact work is their big thing. I'll just share while people are thinking about [Facilitator's]



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questions, the five pillars of successful collective impact work: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities [because there's an understanding that everyone participating brings a piece of the solution to the problem and can't solve the problem on their own], communication, and backbone support [so that there is an organization that is the coordinator]. This is an organization that is coordinating [the work] but not leading it. New Jersey did this with a program called Arts Ed Now. I don't know if this is just an arts ed movement. But one of the things that has been reinforced repeatedly over the past two days is that two of the critical pieces are establishing a common agenda, which means that everybody agrees on what it is. Everybody who's participating agrees on what it is that you are doing. And then no backpedaling. Because every time you go back and say, oh, maybe this wasn't the right idea, then you interrupt the flow of what you're doing. Understanding that there are different ways of achieving the goals that you've identified. The other thing about where it falls apart is this continuous communication piece. Because it's very hard unless you have this backbone support to ensure that everyone feels included all the time. It can be that you're working with a leadership team, but that leadership team will fail if they are not reporting back to all the other people who want to be included in the action of the collective. It strikes me that, I want to make a terrible analogy, it strikes me that it's kind of like communism, right? Like great in theory, except hard because human beings happen to be human. I think it's a very hard thing to do. But I do think that this is extremely important if we're thinking about what a collective impact [framework], a successful collective impact, could look like, and I will drop those pillars into the chat.

**Speaker 9:** Can I just say, we work in strategy and I think the question is being framed very broadly here. Overly broadly, because action depends "to what end?" So, if you say, we want to mobilize the whole sector, that's one thing. If we say we need a great data usage policy, that's another thing. Not to be too meta about it, but I think you almost must have a plan about how you would achieve different goals. I don't think it's one thing. The other thing is that we lament the loss of certain organizations that organized action in specific places. The late, great, what was it called, Art International, that was a touch point for all things having to do with international cultural exchanges. Maybe the field could be a little bit more intentional about, and this goes back to the infrastructure, what are the go-to organizations that could advance work in specific areas? This is why I think it's too bad that we don't have these [types of] institutes, because most cultural organizations are absolutely overwhelmed just trying to do what they do, putting on a show every night or running exhibitions. Taking on an AI strategy for the arts and culture is not something that a museum or a performing arts center is going to do on the side. I think we need to find those mechanisms or entities that could advance certain areas of work around certain goals.

**Speaker 10:** I'm reflecting on a collective action [structure] that has gone through the waning phase. The Sound Health Network used to be in existence with NEA support, structurally not anymore, but



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has regrouped outside of the NEA's context and gone through another redetermining process of how it will function and who will those leaders be, [aligned with] the pillars of collective action as founding principles for moving forward. It takes such patience to figure out what that grounding looks like, and you must invest that time. That's a part of the process I think we all wish we could skip because we'd rather get to the work. We are all so used to doing the work, but the collective grounding and shared understanding of what we're building from and towards is so important. Our organization, out of necessity, is going through an ideation and prototyping process right now internally with our staff. What strikes me, the lesson that I'm bringing into this space from that is the concept that we spend a lot of time in ideation and just like throwing out ideas of what is possible for us to work towards. Then the common themes emerged. I feel like after this session today, we might see that in the notes that are shared back out. What are the common themes that we're all sharing? And what struck us as an organization is it's not for us. We didn't want to just limit to a few ideas from that list of themes. All the themes that emerged felt important to us. It just became a question of when and how we were going to get at those themes. And so, part of this is just a prioritization, like, where do we as a collective want to start? Where do we want to move after that? Maybe part of this work for us is figuring out just where to start from the things that emerge after today.

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** I go back to the ideating or the question that we're thinking about in terms of, if you look at how work that you do that's collective in the networks you're in, how could that work be strengthened? Just draw from your own experience.

**Speaker 11**: I think our collective action in the sector can really be strengthened by, as some folks have already mentioned, utilizing these kinds of organizing tools and frameworks that already exist. There's a strong organizing tradition here in the [American] South. I'm thinking of things like Project South, like the movement assemblies. There are some extraordinary tools that already exist. I think we tend to think myopically often in the arts sector. There are folks who've already done this work to figure out how we move forward together. I think to really accelerate this work, one of the things I'm thinking about a lot is we need more precision and rigor around what it is to change material conditions that enable a liberatory future for everyone. I think we also often get stuck in, "how do we change hearts and minds?" If the end goal is that the actual material conditions change so that everyone has the future they deserve, a future that's rooted in humanity and dignity and opportunity, I think need to be more precise about what changes those material conditions for Black and Brown communities, for trans and queer communities, for rural communities, for people with disabilities, et cetera. I think we often miss the real through line and aren't doing that kind of systemic change work. I'm inspired by the work being done by Southerners on New Ground, which I want to uplift in this space as well. Just an extraordinary long-term goal of what it is for artists and organizers and cultural workers to come together within a particular political context and looking



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at it within a particular geography, but also with opportunities for that work to be kind of trans-local and transregional work. It's rooted in the South, but it doesn't need to stay in the South, the needs aren't just specific to here.

**Speaker 12:** Some of the conversations we had in the first two sessions were around a unified language about the importance of the arts and marketing the arts as not a luxury. Taking that message to a wider audience and making sure that we're not using language that distances us from the possibility of reaching more participants. We talked about how, for instance, the arts in New York City generate more revenue than all sports combined. And yet, sports fans are authorities on their teams and players and arts enthusiasts are often lost [in the public conversation]. Or can't speak to why [they participate in the arts sector]. I think it's because we've become so academic, and we're using language that distances us from potential audiences. Maybe it's more than language. It's structure. I love the idea of creating a language around the arts that's much plainer. And accessible.

- **Speaker 2 (Co-Facilitator):** We also go to sports events. We connect with sports teams and we go, but we don't know what we're going to see. We don't know if it's going to be a good game. We don't know if they're going to win. We don't know if our favorite player is even going to play. And we go anyway.
- **Speaker 12:** And we defend our teams. We hug strangers. We have a collective experience together. My father was a commercial fisherman, and he still has no idea what the hell I've been doing for 30 years. It's just that kind of division, socioeconomic division between what the arts is doing and for whom.
- **Speaker 13:** We think the subscription model's dead, but is it? Because I have my season tickets. (I mean) I don't have them. But I'd like to for a team or two.

**Speaker 14:** It's something similar to what [participant] wrote in the chat around the way in which we support sports. But I remember I was at a performance at Lincoln Center, and they had this artist series they do for young people to get more engaged in the ballet. The artist at the time was Chantal Martin, who I'm not sure if you folks are familiar with, but British-born, living in California. She came out and asked the audience, "who was an artist?" In this full theater, maybe 10 people raised their hand. She laughed and said, "it's really funny, because at some point, everyone in this room drew something and asked for their mom or dad or guardian to put it on the fridge, right?" So, all of us were artists. Then at some point, we decided we weren't. And she goes, "I'm going to tell you when that moment was. It was when you drew something, and you looked to your left or right, and someone next to you drew it way better. At that moment, you became self-conscious around you being an artist, or you didn't write a story as well, and so that was that." I agree with [Speaker's] comment that it is a bit of storytelling. Because to [Speaker's] point, at some point, if you were an



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athlete as a child, there was a better athlete, right? Even if you stop playing the sport entirely, you've still developed an affinity for a team of some kind. So, it allows you to still be a part of that journey, even though you yourself don't "do the thing" anymore. I do think sometimes within the creative sector, we lose that, right? We see arts institutions as daunting, right? I don't have the language to describe this fine art piece. I'm not sure about this thing. So, I don't really know how to engage because of fear [that I have]. I think that there's a bit of storytelling that's going to be pertinent for our next step. I also think that there's a bit of stigma breaking that's part of our next step, right? To inform people that you don't have to be super knowledgeable about something to enjoy it. You can just show up and see if you like it.

**Speaker 4:** Just a short anecdote building on the need to involve people early and encourage them. Every day when I go to work, I pass a daycare center. These are kids who are like three, four, and five years old. I noticed they have a big poster up on the wall saying, what is STEM? Science, technology, engineering, math. I'm thinking, I'm editing out the curse words from my head. Why are you talking to these three-year-olds about this? They should be doing art and developing their creativity, their physical adeptness. There has been such a strong national campaign that we have to start worrying from birth that kids are going to be able to get a paying job. I really feel that it's pressure all the way down the line to de-emphasize the arts because you can't make a career of it.

**Speaker 1 (Facilitator):** I was talking to (Co-Facilitator) before this session, apropos to the discussion about arts education, that we have in sports, we have all manner of ways for people to practice without being professional or aiming to be professional. That is a very strong collective action on the part of people in sports, youth sports, right? So that points to a collective effort that we might put our heads to, in my opinion, the collective force of all those kids in tap dance classes and those older people in pottery classes, and all the ways that we're collectively doing things that we haven't harnessed. So that's my little seed there.

**Speaker 15:** It feels a little bit to me, having been in some of these rooms, not just these zoom rooms, but some of these conversations over the last six, eight, months, that there does feel [like there's] a critical mass of understanding that we have to do this differently, which includes cross pollination of ideas and energies.

## Group 13 Chat

1. One piece of work I admire, responding to the current moment, is The National Council of Nonprofits "Nonprofits Get it Done" campaign, public advocacy in the face of current attacks https://nonprofitsgetitdone.org/
    a. https://www.iftf.org/projects/creative-economy-workgroup/



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2. The CT Office of the Arts is working on a statewide Collective Impact project on creating an equitable strategy for Arts Education in the state. The key success measures are agreeing on a Collective Impact Common Agenda, and ongoing clear communication. This work is being led by MindPop out of Austin TX. But buy-in from all is key.

3. I'm remembering a brilliant national media campaign, about ten years ago, I think from Americans for the Arts, dramatizing "a world without art." (I think this was different from the yearly AIDs-related Day without Art Campaign, but I may be wrong.)
   a. I was a big fan of AFTAs "Art Works". I loved that. It covers so much of the tapestry.

4. Collective work to fund Sustainability in ATL: https://www.artscapitalatlanta.org

5. 5 Pillars of Collective Impact (collectiveimpactforum.org) I think that's the website. 1. Common Agenda, 2. Shared measurements, 3. Mutually reinforcing activities, 4. Continuous Communication, 5. Back bone support, to coordinate but not lead, to be the facilitator of the work.

6. Southerners on New Ground (https://southernersonnewground.org/our-work/our-beliefs-strategies)

7. Sports are supported in schools and kids fall in love and stick with it for life - I think we need to support art in schools for the same reasons.
   a. In our last breakout, we talked about how Arts Education is foundationally import to our cause, and how that is a wonderful place to message in a way that would resonate.
   b. Arts education does not mean that we will have more artists. Maybe, but I would want to test that correlation! We will have better creative thinkers, problem solvers, etc.

8. Here are the notes I was jotting down that I shared, in case this is easier for note taking capturing:

   - I am inspired by the work being done by Southerners on New Ground – individuals and orgs working together to build a more liberatory future in the South through collective strategy and action (and that is applicable beyond the South as well)

   - Collective action in our sector could be strengthened by utilizing the organizing tools and frameworks that already exist, like Project South's Movement Assemblies (NPN



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collaborated with Project South to organize its first arts/culture-specific Movement Assembly this last fall)

- In order to really accelerate this work we need more precision and rigor around changing material conditions to enable a liberatory future for everyone – deeper through-lines are needed, and strategies that are rooted in systems change to transform material conditions for Black/Brown communities, trans and queer communities, immigrant, disabled, rural, etc.

9. It's the messaging. We are confusing creativity with art skill. We need to reframe creativity - our ability to have ideas.

10. Battelle Institute no longer refers to STEM as Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics - but as Strategies that Engage Minds - they invest now in Creativity.



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