



Access, Equity, and Quality in Arts Learning Conference
“Exploring an Interactive Arts Learning Network”
Small Group Discussion Summary
July 8, 2009

The Wallace Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Grable Foundation and The Heinz Endowments, with the cooperation of Americans for the Arts and The Arts Education Partnership, organized the *Access, Equity and Quality in Arts Learning Conference* in Seattle on June 18-20. The final conference session focused on exploring ideas for an Interactive Arts Learning Network that would unite the work of the various initiatives represented in the Conference. The session included a brief introduction, followed by interactive small-group discussions. Cyrus Driver of the Ford Foundation and Michael Sikes of AEP led the networking session and facilitated the subsequent discussion of the groups' ideas. This report summarizes results of these discussions.

To provide a framework for their brainstorming, the groups used a Sustainable Network Planning Worksheet, developed specifically for this session. This worksheet contained four questions:

- *What problems do you encounter in your work, for which a national network might be useful?*
- *How would you use a national network to address these problems?*
- *What characteristics would a network have in order to facilitate these uses?*
- *What resources (e.g., staffing, funding, materials) would your organization need to provide in order to participate in the network?*

At the conclusion of their deliberations, the groups reported out many of their ideas, which were recorded by note takers. In addition, the thirteen worksheets used by the groups were turned in at the end of the session. These notes and worksheets provided the raw data for this report. These qualitative data yielded four key findings and indicate a shared belief that a national network is the natural outgrowth of the work of these arts education organizations. This report is organized around these findings.

Finding 1: Needs

What problems do you encounter in your work, for which a national network might be useful?

The data indicate that the various organizations that had gathered at the AEQ Conference have extensive and varied needs. The range of responses also suggest that the worksheets encouraged respondents to think in divergent ways about these needs. Responses included:

- **Knowledge.** There was a dominant interest in the need to build a sense of community and through this, the sharing of knowledge:
 - “What are other districts, states, etc. doing successfully? What are their challenges, etc? How can we all support each other and learn from each other in this work?”
 - “Different community organizing models and strategies - for diverse communities”
 - “Ability to share knowledge - peer network for problem solving”
- **Communications/Messaging.** Several comments mentioned concepts and strategies that they believe would help further their work regarding public will (a communication approach for long term social change):
 - “Public will building across the country”
 - “A communications conduit - national advocacy/lobbyist”
 - “Shared messaging/language”
 - “Moving outside the choir”
- **Resources.** Through diverse responses, the worksheets showed that the participants uniformly believed there is a great need for resources that could be used in various ways:
 - “Professional development and employment”
 - “Being up to date on Federal (and other) funding/opportunities in the arts, such as Title 1”
 - “New sources and strategies for funding.”

Finding 2: The Functions of a Network

- *How would you use a national network to address these problems?*

Participants found it much easier to explain and comment on their needs than on how they envisioned using the network. The worksheets and notes document a number of ideas about the function of the network and the characteristics that a network needs in order to effectively function. In fact, there were overlapping responses between these two questions regarding network structure and function. The night before the meeting, a panel discussion of superintendents was followed by a “job-alike” dinner for the attendees. It was here that we saw the real thirst for networking, as participants conversed and shared ideas and strategies from one site to another, and this need was also reflected in the worksheet responses the next day. Responses included:

- **Convenings.** There was a unanimous desire for more convenings, face to face time for organizations to learn from one another and work together:
 - “Convenings- small, job alike and large (National convenings and assisting in local convenings), with time for reflection”
 - “Connecting our constituents to other work of the AEQ organizations- ideas, vision, goals - how are they a part of this? Opening doors for partners”
- **A moderator or organizer.** Respondents voiced that they felt there needed to be an overall facilitator of the network for organizing convenings, for other organizational needs, and for maintaining a structure:
 - “Centralized convenor and facilitator for face-to-face, not just an online space”
 - “Could we pay dues to keep the network going? So that someone could facilitate the work”
 - “Needs to be staffed and moderated”/ “Moderated and organized”
 - “Network needs a centralized convener”
 - “Mentorship”
- **Professional learning.** Convenings and other gatherings have the potential to stimulate professional learning, challenging participants to overcome obstacles and share ideas regarding resources:
 - “Choice, self- directed learning”
 - “Inquiry based”/ “Convene around specific questions”
 - “I would like to see more opportunities for self-directed learning and sharing, choice among grantees in terms of what they want to focus on.”¹
 - “Professional learning/ advocacy to effect national policy/alliances”

Finding 3: Structure

- *What characteristics would a network have in order to facilitate these uses?*
- *What resources (e.g., staffing, funding, materials) would your organization need to provide in order to participate in the network?*

The structure of the network proved to be difficult to articulate this early in the brainstorming process. The characteristics that would define the network included personal obstacles and larger communications and resource needs. Respondents said that it would be beneficial to look at other examples of networks to gain a clearer understanding of core characteristics. Responses included:

- **Relational.** We heard the desire for a community, with a common language, a common set of goals, and a safe place for people to “come out of isolation.” One characteristic of this network would be to create a community of thinkers:
 - “Homogenous and relevant enough to speak to individual needs”
 - “Be able to join affinity groups (researchers, parents, funders, etc.)”
 - “Convene around specific questions”

¹ This comments comes from a respondent to the post-conference survey of participants.

- **Inclusiveness.** While there was a clear consensus for the need for a network, a minority reporter stated that networks already exist in the field of arts education. Other participants responded to the overall concept of creating a national sustainable network with the idea of joining or including existing network structures. This new network could address both the desire for a new network as well as the use of organization and information that exists in current networks:
 - “Branching out to other networks- larger ones such as Americans for the Arts or the Department of Education”
 - “Large throughline that would draw constituents and stake holders from many realms”
 - “Aggregators/access to know what other groups are using”
 - “Coming out of isolation”
- **Commitment.** Each organization would need to make a commitment to be a part of this national network, a commitment that would involve convenings, web based conversations, sharing and membership. Some participants expressed the need for resources to fund another staff member in order to fulfill the requirements and demands of being a part of a network, including specific resources to support travel, if that were involved:
 - “Willingness to work and meet virtually and in person, periodically and systematically”
 - “Commitment – trust, time and resources”

Next Steps

The worksheets were intended to be a framework for small-group discussion and not to force participants into narrow or linear responses. In fact, it seems a strength of the process that responses to the worksheet apparently address multiple categories and questions.

It is clear from these data that there is a common will and commitment that are associated with forming a network, and that there is a desire for more knowledge and convenings. There proved to be fewer ideas as to what the network might look like, what form it would take, whom it would serve, and what outcomes would be desired. So a useful next step would be to foster a broader dissemination of these findings in order to further this conversation.

These data indicate that overall respondents saw value in creating a network and that there is a need for continuing research into the development of a network. The organizations that convened and participated in AEQ should proactively encourage and engage in such research.

Analysis prepared June 8, 2009, by Sarah Scott with Michael Sikes, Arts Education Partnership. Please direct questions or requests for further information to sarahs@ccsso.org.

Appendix: Full Text of Breakout Session Worksheets

What problems do you encounter in your work, for which a national network might be useful?

- Being up to date on Federal (and other) funding/ opportunities in the arts such as Title I
- Isolation and time limits
- Better connection to other K-12 (non arts) stakeholders
- CA funding crisis can narrow the vision of what is possible; we can be informed and inspired by other models
- Using effective language
- Truth is too interpretable or unknown
- Professional development and employment
- Facilitate the work of others
- Still undefined “vision” for our work and the key arts ed issue is on region; need to define leadership
- Defining common language
- Professional development
- Coherence
- Duplicative efforts
- Messaging/communication
- Systems thinking
- Community of courageous thinkers
- Connecting between national, state, local, county and local efforts
- Cultural literacies
- Public will building across the country
- Shift thinking about the arts at district leadership
- Knowing how similar districts try to solve similar systems problems
- Seeing how districts a few years ahead have solved problems
- Case making
- Inspiring others to act
- Moving outside the choir
- Cultural relativity – social justice
- Ability to share knowledge- peer network for problem solving
- Practical tools for programs
- Bringing a national framework/context to our local community
- Battling with shifts and changes in public education
- National advocacy
- Communication conduit- department of education- lobbyist
- Access to knowledge
- Shared sense of quality
- Shared messaging/language
- Money- new sources/strategies for funding

- Understand rationale for processes/decisions
- Build a movement/public will
- How to shift from work to facilitate work of others
- Higher ed- work as a community
- Art helps to establish a new teacher view
- Part of a larger group- critical mass share, best practices in a way that is useful
- Learning lessons in an interactive way
- CR(A)E is so new and noteworthy; what are other districts, states, etc. doing successfully; what are their challenges, etc? How can we all support each other and learn from each other in this work?
- Needs
- Gaps in knowledge, access to technical assistance
- More self directed- gain knowledge from different levels (higher ed, high school, teaching artists, arts organizations)
- Blog where superintendents participate; who leads the blog to engage?
- How do we get to superintendent's meetings? What already exists that we can support or be a part of?
- What are the bigger questions that we fit under?
- Issues driven- for a discussion. What would make them (the administration) want to come to this network?
- Participants work in a wide area and come back to share
- What about the achievement gap can the arts address? Where do the arts help to understand the achievement gap and close it?
- Discussion about arts as embedding in work that isn't an add on
- Low respect and value for teacher education within academia and particularly arts education, resulting in limited allocation of resources
- Lack of national advocacy
- Limited knowledge
- Teachers- keep them in the loop
- Access to knowledge
- Sources to funding
- Build a movement
- Think about reframing conversations and linking them to others
- Thinking about systems- sharing
- Redefine network
- Help with messaging- "arts ed" vs. helping kids learn
- Networking= about change
- Successful arts learning
- Opportunities to network
- National need for advocacy
- Building alliances
- Building professional learning groups
- Higher ed? How do they fit in? Convenings- able to share vs. isolation within communities

- Digging deeper- why is arts ed important?
- Public education network for college and career readiness
- Superintendent meetings and others
- Too many networks- too many newsletters and websites
- How do we connect these existing networks?
- Data exchange- we are flooded with this
- On the ground deeper communication
- Issues of power (advocacy and network)
- Unify!
- What do we want to know?
- Best practices to be replicated vs. reinvented
- Models to adapt
- Different community organizing models and strategies- for diverse communities
- National strategies we can align with
- Info about funding opportunities and possible collaborations
- How to measure our success
- Get out of our limited perspective
- Share expertise- leverage capacity
- Expand our ability to imagine a better scenario

How would you use a national network to address these problems?

- Systems building/systems change
- How can we broaden this conversation to include the children and families on whose behalf we are doing this?
- Coming out of isolation
- Contact information
- Willingness to work and meet virtually and in person, periodically and systematically
- Culture change- redefine community
- To address: the longing for a personal community- there is too much data sharing, how to find this niche?
- Build a coalition and momentum to expand pockets of change and capacity
- Feedback
- Mentorship
- Examples of successful infrastructure
- Practical tool- for sharing
- What is it the arts can do to help us understand and eliminate the achievement gap?
- AEP- maybe work with the existing network that already exists- in this room and outside of this room and track the larger network online
- Are there not existing network structures in which we can participate?
- Opportunities to go deeper into major strands/focus areas of our work
- Index/ topic convener
- Messaging- public will effort on national scale- that has commonalities and piece for coherent messaging and strategic for implementation

- National data
- Technical assistance or models and case building
- Problem solve collectively
- Sortable issues addressed
- Framing- with national experts to assist in framing to add legitimacy to local efforts/reviewing efforts
- Connecting our constituents to other work of the AEQ organizations- ideas, vision, goals- how are they a part of this? Opening doors for partners
- Use the network as a national sounding board for reviewing efforts and making recommendations
- National experts to assist in framing issues so it adds a legitimacy to local work
- Rumor control
- Develop common language across the nation
- Community organization- share the protocol
- Conversations across the network to share student work- online
- Online forms to share work- teachers and students
- Purpose, prosperity and possibility
- Arts, if not visible, get lost
- It's too big? It's too messy? Must be right.
- Reauthorizing NCLB as a next step
- Building communities of deeper understanding
- More than online- needs to be face to face
- Customization of networks
- Branching out to other networks- larger ones such as AFTA
- What is the national agenda? To provide focus
- Extend to other groups such as the DOE
- Expand our capacity

What characteristics would a network have in order to facilitate these uses?

- Homogeneous and relevant enough to speak to individual needs
- Allow in- depth sharing, not just skimming
- Webinars are effective
- Choice
- Inquiry based
- Shared aspirational values
- Commitment- time and resources
- Must have easy access
- Convenings- small, job alike and large (National convenings and assisting in local convenings)
- Mobilize large numbers of people
- Relational
- Inclusive- broad based
- Flexibility/customization

- Inclusiveness
- Moderated and organized
- Opportunities to dig deep, implement research- facilitation to help do this
- Crafted with relevance and accountability
- Flexibility for involvement, particularly with technologies, allowing fluidity
- Mobilize beyond just urban work
- Aggregators/ access to know what other groups are using
- Contact information
- Willingness to work and meet virtually and in person, periodically and systematically
- Commitment- trust
- Easy access
- Convening opportunities- with time for reflection
- Model for expansion
- Choice, self- directed learning
- Inquiry based
- Relationship mapping
- Being organized so you can find your high- existence and high need “self”
- Give comments
- E-mail/ auto announcements
- It wouldn't duplicate networks (national ones) that already exist
- Local/state/national “cells”- levels of connection
- Job postings
- Blogging section- Q and A section
- Flashing updates
- Media access to upload content
- Centralized organization
- Resources
- Messaging
- Large throughline that would draw constituents and stake holders from many realms
- Re envisioning public education (purpose, prosperity and possibility)
- Who should be involved- more exchange with parents and teachers
- Centralized convenor/facilitator for face to face- not just an online space
- Look towards other communities (small communities) for this movement- both national and local convenings
- Mentor/to carry on throughout
- Ability to mobilize beyond the choir
- Convene around specific questions
- Relational- community thinkers
- Each member can customize the info they want (topic- funding, legislation; timing; format)
- Needs to be staffed/moderated
- Be able to join affinity groups (researchers, parents, funders, etc.)
- Have a face to face component (not just online)- unstructured time is essential
- Ability to expand to include other interested groups as we encounter them

- Network needs a centralized convenor
- Regular conevenings
- Regular news about progress- Keep Arts In Schools
- Find a way to include KIDS into the conversation
- Listserves
- National/regional conversations

What resources (e.g. staffing, funding, materials) would your organization need to provide in order to participate in the network?

- Face- to – face
- Technology
- Resources to support participation (Human and Financial)
- Everyone contributes but possibly in different ways
- Dedicating all or part of a staff position is essential if we are all to be accountable to a larger network; as opposed to passively receiving information
- Organization could pay member dues
- Info on best practices
- Info on questions and obstacles
- Ideas for implementing systemic change
- A person
- Updated software and operating system
- Funding for expertise
- Policy for permission to participate
- Network aggregation
- People
- Technology
- Fundraising expertise
- Training
- Someone who collects “hot topics”
- Staff capacity
- Time to codify learning and the money to do this
- Could we pay dues to keep the network going? So someone could facilitate the work.
- National network → national agenda
- Conevenings
- Partner resources to contribute
- Transparency
- Staff
- Permission
- Infrastructure
- Definition of common language
- Funding (if travel is involved)
- Communications coaching
- Possible network fee to support site and staff

- Designate a liaison and designated participants who is the gatekeeper from our organization to coordinate questions and share information

General thoughts on a network:

- Have ability to be multi- lingual
- Create parameters for members- be broad enough to include experts and depth of conversation- without losing focus on “quality education that includes the arts”
- Non random/ purposeful collaboration and sharing
- Indicators of best practice to begin to shape expertise- distribution/sharing
- We are a “network”- how do we make this more powerful?
- Define network- more about change, and less about problem solving
- Professional learning/advocacy to effect national policy/alliances
- Network- stronger numbers (national alliances)
- Building allies
- National advocacy that effects policy and addresses resources