

AEP Strategic Mission

Introduction

The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) at Education Commission of the States is a national network of education, arts, business, cultural, government and philanthropic organizations dedicated to advancing arts in education. The Arts Education Partnership has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education since 1995 and is administered by Education Commission of the States.

Education Commission of the States believes in the power of learning from experience. Every day, it provides education leaders with unbiased information and opportunities for collaboration. Education Commission of the States does this because it knows that informed policymakers create better education policy.

AEP disseminates high-quality, unbiased information to arts and education leaders. Leaders share their expertise in arts education with AEP and have access to expertise on broader education issues through the work of Education Commission of the States.

This document proposes a revised Strategic Mission that outlines AEP's relationship to its partners and builds on the priorities identified in *The Arts Leading the Way to Student Success: A 2020 Action Agenda for Advancing the Arts in Education*. It outlines a vision for the future that strengthens AEP's ongoing efforts and more effectively leverages AEP's advantageous position within Education Commission of the States.

This document was originally prepared for consideration and discussion at the July 2019 quarterly meeting; quarterly meetings are regularly-scheduled opportunities for AEP to update, plan and strategize with Federal partners. Between that initial meeting and December 2019, DeliverEd — an independent consultant — convened focus groups, and Jamie Kasper conducted individual interviews with Advisory Council members as part of her onboarding process as the new AEP Director. Through these efforts, AEP gathered feedback and input from partner organizations around the identified priorities and potential AEP services.

AEP Strategic Mission

The Strategic Mission statement strengthens AEP's commitment to serving as the nation's hub for arts and education leaders and outlines alignment of AEP's and Education Commission of the States' services, research and resources.

AEP is the nation's hub for arts and education leaders, building their leadership capacity to support students, educators and learning environments. Through research, reports, convenings and counsel, leaders gain knowledge and insights to ensure that all learners receive an excellent arts education.

AEP Top Priority: Build Leadership Capacity and Knowledge

The AEP Strategic Mission is grounded in AEP's current five-year strategic plan, the *2020 Action Agenda*. In 2015, AEP released the *2020 Action Agenda* to serve as "a blueprint for system change and collective action." The agenda identified four state-level priority areas in which arts and education leaders could situate and advance their work:

- Raise Student Achievement and Success
- Support Effective Educators and School Leaders
- Transform the Teaching and Learning Environment
- Build Leadership Capacity and Knowledge

The four priority areas of the *2020 Action Agenda* will continue to serve as a framework to organize and advance the work of AEP and the partner organizations. However, the new Strategic Mission places greater emphasis on the Build Leadership Capacity and Knowledge priority area, and it increases focus on AEP projects and services. Enhancing work in this priority area enables AEP to better equip partner organizations to advance their work in the other three priority areas and allows AEP to better measure and track its services and outreach.

AEP Services

AEP helps build leadership capacity and knowledge for arts and education leaders via unbiased research, relevant policy reports and opportunities for convening and counsel. "Arts and education leaders" is defined broadly; this group includes policymakers, directors of arts and education organizations, school leaders, higher ed arts and education faculty, community leaders, funders and others who have leadership roles — in name and in practice — in arts and education spaces.

The AEP Strategic Mission proposes to further clarify and enhance those services in two ways:

1 | AEP will enhance its capacity to deliver services and projects as a result of strengthening its organizational alignment with Education Commission of the States. Housed at the nation's leading state education policy organization, AEP — and, by extension, AEP partner organizations — have access to Education Commission of the States' resources, services and expert staff. AEP and partner organizations can provide information and expert counsel to Education Commission of the States staff and stakeholders. Together, this coordinated and strengthened approach to services and projects will contribute to more comprehensive state-level efforts that include access to the arts as a part of an equitable, high-quality and well-rounded education for all students.

2 | AEP will adopt Education Commission of the States' Research, Report, Counsel and Convene (RRCC) organizational model to describe AEP's collaboration with partners. AEP will also adopt metrics used by Education Commission of the States to track results in these four areas and annually report on metrics.

RESEARCH | AEP gathers and compiles information that helps arts and education leaders improve practice, build effective partnerships and inform policy.

■ **ArtScan:** AEP and Education Commission of the States staff track and summarize arts education legislation in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. They annually update a 50-state comparison of 14 key policy areas, with results shared in a searchable clearinghouse of relevant state policies.

- **ArtsEdSearch:** Working with Education Commission of the States staff and an external review panel, AEP identifies and summarizes research studies that demonstrate the impact of arts education on student, teacher and school outcomes across arts disciplines. ArtsEdSearch currently includes over 260 study summaries.
- **Information Requests:** AEP and Education Commission of the States staff regularly respond to questions from constituents, and responses typically include information on enacted state policy and summaries of relevant research. When applicable, AEP also follows up with partners to supplement information with specific examples. Information requests are distinct from technical assistance services in that they typically do not include follow-up.

REPORT | AEP issues relevant and timely reports, providing concise, factual overviews and analysis on priority arts and education issues.

- **Policy Briefs:** Grounded in research and state examples, policy briefs focus on key arts and education policies at the federal and state level and make connections to the broader education policy landscape.
- **Publications:** Drawing on ArtsEdSearch research, publications provide a comprehensive overview of the best available information on a specific arts education topic.
- **ArtsEd Digest:** The ArtsEd Digest is AEP's bi-monthly newsletter and highlights news from AEP partner organizations and the field, including reports, events, research and job opportunities.
- **Blog Posts:** AEP staff and partners contribute to Education Commission of the States' *Ed Note* blog to share arts and education practices relevant to the state policymaking audience.
- **Success Stories:** Demonstrating the benefits of the arts across the education spectrum, these resources promote continued collaboration and learning for individuals and organizations working toward improved learning outcomes.

COUNSEL | AEP provides unbiased advice and consultation on arts and education policy and practice.

- **Presentations:** Presentations include information provided in-person or remotely, and AEP may collaborate with partners based on their expertise.
- **Partner and State Outreach:** Strategic outreach by AEP and Education Commission of the States staff engage arts partners and state leaders. Outreach may include visits focused on relationship building or providing national perspective on an arts education issue.
- **Technical Assistance:** Technical Assistance activities will be determined on a case-by-case basis and could include webinars, AEP or Education Commission of the States' travel for facilitated discussions, targeted meetings or trainings. It may also include travel to learn more about the implementation of policy or practices in a state.
- **Connecting and Collaborating:** AEP staff may defer to partners on an issue where the partner has specific expertise, or AEP may collaborate or co-author briefs and publications.

CONVENE | AEP brings arts and education leaders together locally, within their states and nationally to interact, collaborate and learn from each other.

- **AEP Annual Convening:** AEP's premier event provides opportunities to discuss and share innovative practices, emerging policies and new resources, as well as opportunities for networking to build strong connections across the arts and education community.

- **AEP Advisory Council:** The Advisory Council provides insight and expertise to AEP. Advisory Council meetings also provide an opportunity for members to strategize or discuss opportunities in their own organizations with one another.
- **Thinkers' Meetings:** These meetings convene experts from the field on a certain issue and allow for discussion around policy considerations. This insight may help inform a future AEP project or paper.
- **Policy Academies:** A form of technical assistance, policy academies — facilitated by AEP, Education Commission of the States or other national experts — bring state teams together to create short- and long-term policy plans for their state around a particular issue.
- **Working Groups:** Working groups provide partners with the opportunity to collaborate on a specific issue with relevance to their work. Partner organization staff lead the working groups with support from AEP.

Through the services offered through the Research, Report, Counsel and Convene framework, AEP will set annual goals, measure outreach and report on impact internally through quarterly meetings and externally in its Annual Report.

Conclusion

The AEP Strategic Mission serves as the foundation for AEP's work. Grounded in the priorities of the *2020 Action Agenda*, it emphasizes building leadership knowledge and capacity. The new Strategic Mission will strengthen AEP and Education Commission of the States' coordination and collaboration to meet needs of the partnership and ultimately ensure equitable access to excellent arts education for learners across the country.