

## Deputy Director Peer Group Meeting Notes – July 16, 2025

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### Guests

Jessica Riehl and Jake McIntire from the Union Creative Agency and Eric Giles (NASAA) joined 21 deputy directors on the call.

Sylvia Prickett (NASAA) introduced Jessica and Jake, who are working with the NASAA team to design the Executive Forum. They're leading the meeting to understand what is wanted out of the forum and to get a better sense of where everyone is.

### Questions

Deputy directors were asked to discuss questions in breakout rooms and post their answers on a shared Google document.

### **Facilitators: What are your biggest concerns right now?**

- Waiting on budget (Michigan) with a possibility for agency elimination.
- Acceptance of federal NEA grants and supporting subrecipients in understanding and complying with terms and conditions.
- Supporting grantees through the implementation of the new terms and conditions requirements.
- Feeling worn out with operating under uncertainty.
- Thinking about what “underserved” still means in this landscape.
- Capturing good data about what has occurred in terms of federal funds rescinded and impact on the field.
- DC budget tied to the Federal budget and the “Big, Beautiful Bill.” City still looking for about \$3M to save in the next three months.
- OK compliance review of grant applications tied to state and federal laws, executive orders, etc.; challenged by sector that we have built up for the past 5 years with strong DEI focus (without the time to retrain everyone on the new laws).
- OK's FY26 budget still pending (Council approved, but not submitted to the state), anxious to make payroll...
- Waiting for NEA Contract. Worried about the future within this fiscal year; one Presidential order can change everything.
- We are okay, NOW. What is going to happen in the future with budget cuts on both state and federal levels?
- Other precedents, i.e., New Hampshire. Is that going to be a familiar occurrence?

**What big organizational questions do you need to understand by the end of this year?**

- Impacts of federal cuts for NEA26 (SAA & NASAA FY27).
- How to navigate complexities and challenges of state and federal laws, executive orders, NEA guidelines to monitor grantee compliance?
- How to continue to build trust (and trust-based philanthropic practices) when it seems we are dialing back commitment to DEI, adding additional scrutiny?
- DOGE: where is that for our state? Is it going to happen at the state level?

During the follow-up full group discussion,

David Markey (DC) shared that their group talked about this year's NEA award being a huge focus, along with trying to navigate both the language and what they can and cannot do.

Dan Katona (OH) noted that they accepted the NEA award and that instead of distributing it to nonprofit organizations, have decided to route those funds into the hands of schools, while finding other ways to support their nonprofit grantees by moving funds around.

**Facilitators: Have any other states gotten creative with how they're thinking about acceptance, or how they're using NEA funds?**

Sara Leornard (RI): They have similarly moved strategically by reviewing their recipient list and thinking through who is in position to handle an audit when directing the NEA awards. Essentially, being thoughtful of who they're exposing to what. Also looking at language in project titles and organization names, though some grantees have done that work already. Also, putting as much into administration as possible to free up state non-matched dollars.

**Anna Blyth (NM): With some Executive Orders, is it enough to use a different funding stream or do we have to consider everything that our agency does?**

Sara: RI is looking at the language. For example, you can't do any DEI *that violates federal anti-discrimination law*. They have made some changes to remain in compliance.

David Slatery (MA): Technically have not accepted their NEA grant, as they've been granted an extension. But anticipate advice from their governor's office that will take a position consistent with other state agencies in the Commonwealth. If things done

previously were in compliance with civil rights law, they still are. Mass Cultural Council will continue to use words such as diversity, equity and inclusion.

**Facilitators (chat): In this moment of navigating complexity, what is something you are quietly proud of?**

David (Markey): DC is looking to the arts to fill office space and they have started meeting with developers, other local agencies, arts organizations etc., to help fill those spaces.

Chandra Boyd (OK): Our agency is quietly celebrating flat funding (with slight increases) at the state and federal level.

Deane Shellman (WA): We have a state law that keeps us in super-compliance – it's limiting, but is keeping us on the straight and narrow. My breakout was interested in this law. Here's an overview: [Initiative 200 – Wikipedia](#).

The topic of the conversation transitioned to the upcoming executive forum. The facilitators asked the following questions, which participants answered using a Mentimeter Poll:

**What do you want to talk about in your peer groups at the forum, with only deputies?**

**What do you want to talk about in the larger sessions (with executive directors)?**

See the [Mentimeter Results, Round 1](#).

Deputy directors were the asked to discuss these answers more fully in breakout rooms and post their answers on a shared Google document.

**Facilitators: For each category, pick your top 1-3 things you would like to discuss at the forum.** [What do you want to talk about in your peer groups at the forum, with only deputies?]

- What are other SAA revenue funding streams?
- How to develop a revenue generating arm that is not a 501(c)(3)?
- What are other innovative ways that SAA can support grantees besides grants?
- Culture is still a key concern - static pay/no COLAs, dialing back hybrid work schedules, world pressing in on us, refilling our cups, so we can in turn fill others.
- Items of broad applicability – things that relate to all states rather than just some – are preferred.

- Have the staff morale/workplace culture discussion here? Ways to address capacity issues? What tips and tricks have folks found successful?
- Succession planning: what happens as EDs prepare to retire? Anything we can do collectively preserve processes, resources, etc., even during trying political times so they can be brought back in the future?

[What do you want to talk about in the larger sessions (with executive directors)?]

- Cultivating board engagement as agents of advocacy.
- How are boards and state level legislators engaging to leverage greater agency support.
- Being in a shared space where DDs bear witness to EDs discussing future planning.
- Better understand EDs vision(s) – to be a fly on the wall of their conversation.
- Have EDs better understand DDs work.
- Ways SAAs can support the field during turbulent budget times other than grant awards. What else can we be providing in these challenging moments to advance the sector?
- Communications strategies, both internal and external – how do we avoid leaving people in the dark?
- Advocacy issues.

Highlights of the breakout discussions were shared to the full group.

Adam Wheeler (MI): Group 1 discussed wanting to see how other states might be generating other funding streams. Can we develop a separate 501(c)(3) to get additional revenue? Improve board engagement?

Sara: Group 2 had a similar conversation around what the structural funding future could look like in the long term both intra-government and external.

David (Markey): Group 3 discussed culture. How do you maintain positive status with staff? How do we fill our cups to maintain and give support? Better understand executive director's vision?

Anika Tené (Creative West): Clarified wanting to better understand ED's vision for the future, future planning and strategy.

Encarnacion Teruel (IL): Group 5 discussed moving forward with budgets and how they will be impacted by potential cuts and restrictions.

Kristin Burgoyne (MT): Federal funding is 46% of their budget and we could need to cut a significant portion of their grant programs and/or staff. How do we talk about

our programs and tell our story without grant funding? And how do you pick your favorite child?

Dan: Group 6 asked what SAAs can do during these turbulent budget times other than grant awards to help support the sector. What do you do to preserve what exists now? How do we keep the resources alive for the future? Topics for the DD-only session(s): staff morale, workplace culture, capacity.

**Facilitators: How do you all think differently about your DD group and the time you are with your EDs? How do you want to see us frame the blended time versus the DD time?**

Dan (via chat): DD time feels more nuts-and-bolts and the combined ED time feels broader.

Kristin: Need a cone of silence for DD conversation so there's space to find camaraderie.

David (Markey): How do we better prioritize the work and focus of the agency as the funds are getting tighter? Help focus conversations we are having at the agencies? Can we work in a more creative way to engage other parts of the community to help support arts organizations? What can we do collectively?

The facilitators then asked some structural questions about session formats.

**How do you like to learn?**

**What types of activities do you prefer the most?**

Christy Costello (CO): Suggested via chat that incorporating something fun at the executive forum like an art/creative activity would help balance the current challenging issues. She offered to help with ideas.

**Participants were also asked to rate the relevance of the topics deputy directors had raised up at the 2023 executive forum.**

See the [Mentimeter Results, Round 2](#).

**Facilitators: As you went through these topics, are there any you feel are missing?**

Laura Wiegand (TX): Highlighted the importance of collecting good, comprehensive data to accurately benchmark the impact of the federal cuts.

Jake: How do we collect data and storytelling around the impact of the work?

David (Markey): There is still a culture of urgency – and with everything happening now it feels even more intense.

Encarnacion agreed with David's comment, and noted that deputy directors are juggling several different agendas, some of them opposing.

The sentiment was discussed further via Chat, with comments including:

- Our culture of urgency just gets worse.
- Urgency x Complexity x Uncertainty = Tsunami
- Exponential change
- Compounded by the need to be comfortable with ambiguity
- Existential Risk (again)
- We don't know when or how we can expect the uncertainty to resolve

**Jessica: Does this uncertainty feel more challenging than in 2023?**

General nods of agreement.

Sara added that there is a heaviness to it.

Laura asked via chat if AI had been discussed, noting that it's part of the equation of complexity and ambiguity.

Sara is interested in what policies SAAs have developed around AI. Including the internal efficiency question, but also AI and art making. How do we navigate that?

Dave (Slatery) is curious to hear what useful applications colleagues have used.

**Wrap Up**

Eric confirmed that information from the session would be shared and used to develop the Omaha executive forum session. He also reminded the group of NASAA's upcoming Learning Series session. [AI in the Workplace: Federal and State Landscape](#) will be held September 10<sup>th</sup> from 3:00 – 4:00pm Eastern time.

Sylvia thanked participants for the good discussion, and Eric, Jake and Jessica for the opportunity to help develop the agenda for the executive forum. The next DD Zoom will be held Wednesday, September 17<sup>th</sup>.