

Deputy Director Peer Group Meeting Notes – September 17, 2025

Sylvia Prickett (NASAA) welcomed the group of 23 deputy directors.

Checking in

How are you doing, generally? How are you feeling?

Adam Wheeler (MI): Uneasy; still no budget for 2026. Possibly still won't have it by 10/1 meaning a potential government shutdown. Might at minimum receive match toward NEA award. He fielded additional questions about their situation.

Chandra Boyd (OK): Uncertain/overwhelmed but hopeful.

David Markey (DC): Trying to stay focused on the work and the people - and hoping we will have a budget that is not tethered to the feds moving into FY26.

Dan Katona (OH): Getting through it for now.

What is the mood like in your agencies?

Christy Costello (CO): Things are well; they are in the middle of their operating cycle. Ten people declined funds but they granted to about 140. Working on helping people to comply with current laws. Rick Duplissie (MO) asked why grantees declined their funds. Christy responded that they changed their process to ensure grantees understood what was required when accepting federal funds. The SAA used the declined funds to provide grants to others.

André Zhang Sonera (IN): How are you engaging with grantees and making sure they thoroughly read the grant terms?

Dave Slatery (MA): We've been sending out state form contracts over the years and people routinely return them in the same way. Grantees have been conditioned to sign whatever is sent.

David: We flag and emphasize what's new and notable, highlighting that there are some new terms and conditions.

Christy: We had an info session, explaining some key info and changes.

Natalie Petersen (UT): We also have the contracts go out and highlight some of the new information.

Dave: Have had one organization that works closely with the federal government decline federal money. We emphasize that terms and conditions have changed and should be read

carefully. Our attorney general and governor have said what grantees were doing before was and is still okay.

André: Our governor and the attorney general's office decided to use the same DEI language from the federal government and incorporated it in a state executive order.

There was a discussion of the current political environment, and the group was reminded to be mindful of what you post online.

How is your staff doing? Are you spending more or less time with them?

David: Brought DC Human Resources in and did an audit of all the current positions and it was very positively received by staff.

- Adjustments were made to grades. Many staff were bumped up and had their titles changed.
- Findings were presented to leadership. If positions were moved, for example from an 11 grade to a 12 grade, it was universal. Took a process that is subjective, and it made it as objective as possible.
- Staff received a notification and then there was a meeting hosted by DC HR to walk through it. They also can appeal the determinations
- Pay increases were determined by formula based on position grade.

Does anyone have questions for the group?

Natalie: **We're working on arts and wellness and want to do an assessment to find out what's happening and what's needed. Has anyone done one and how did you go about it? Any tips and shares?**

Chandra: They are also planning to do this.

Chad Buterbaugh (MD): We recruited Art Pharmacy and are using the federal dollars to have them help us. We gave them a list of organizations we know are doing the work and are having them do the assessment.

Dave: Received the \$75,000 level and did a grant program to help people integrate the idea of arts prescriptions into their practice. We'll probably have 3 grants of \$25,000.

André: We are building on work from 2022 and evaluating the results. We're providing toolkits and developing opportunities to further disseminate how individuals and arts organizations and artists can participate in creative aging. Doing a convening at the end of next year to bring arts leaders, arts organizations and aging service providers together to advance best practices.

Teri Abstein (FL): Have been partners with University of Florida Center for Arts and Medicine since the 80s. We awarded them \$5K to provide performers and artists to do performances in children's hospitals, which was the start of a longtime significant partnership using NEA funds. The Center gathers medical practitioners, insurance companies, artists, community service organizations and others – it's a huge thing, working to get the word out about social prescribing. This year the convening is being held in New Jersey. Jill Sonke will be there; she is with the Center and has done several studies on providers needs and how art can be integrated on that side of it as well. Highly recommend her work.

David (chat): We are planning to do [an assessment] for this upcoming application. Wonders if anyone is planning to attend the Art of Practice conference in DC this coming February (11th-13th).

Sylvia noted that Jill Sonke led a recent NASAA seminar; a link to that recording will be shared. There is another arts and health webinar being planned. The in-person convening is funded by a cooperative agreement with the NEA.

Anna (chat): We have issued a first phase of planning grants for organizations to start stepping into this space, with some virtual meetings with sector partners, and other touchpoints throughout the year.

Christy (chat): We are putting most of [the funds] toward our creative aging programs and contract with Lifetime Arts. We are most likely supporting a state-wide arts and health convening in partnership with the Denver Botanic Gardens.

Chandra (chat): We are planning a statewide Arts & Health conference with national and local speakers next May.

Megan White (NY) (chat): There is an arts in health fund in NYC developed by one of our former board members and the report they put out is very interesting: [The Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund's Arts in Health Initiative](#).

Laura Wiegand (TX) (chat): We are able to support this model organization that works between medical centers/hospitals and artists and arts organizations: [Periwinkle Arts In Medicine Program - The Periwinkle Foundation](#).

Kristin Burgoyne (MT) (chat): [We supported a] pilot project on diabetes and dance at a small rural hospital which was very successful. Next up is a series of projects with Michael Rohd.

Rick (chat): Missouri is helping fund dementia programming through the public library and Kansas City Ballet. Info at [Kansas City Public Library's Dementia-Friendly Programming](#) and [KC Studio](#).

Heather Doughty (PA) (chat): Pennsylvania partnered with the Hospital + Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania in June 2021 through May 2024. It was about creative arts therapists supporting the well-being and resiliency of health care workers. A little different and well received.

Succession Planning Presentation and Discussion

Natalie: The Utah Division of Arts & Museums has been working on succession planning for some time and this presentation shares information gathered from that work.

Three main areas for succession planning:

Assessment

- Look at your current structure. Identify priorities. Review roles, titles and job descriptions. Look at skill sets and experience that staff have.
- Give special attention to positions that have a significant impact on revenue and operations.

Evaluation

- Look at matching current skill sets with what you need in the different areas for your ideal structure and function. Find gaps. Look at staff. Can someone be developed?
- Think about the board's role in all of this. Their involvement depends on the agency. Consider what role they have in monitoring and hiring your ED.

Development

- Look at potential successors: Is there someone on staff or do you need to go outside? Start by mentoring and training if there is someone on the inside.
- This work goes along with knowledge transfer and cross-training for your staff on key competencies. Consider defining a standard operating procedure desk manual.

What is your approach for cross-training your staff?

José: We are putting together written procedures, step by step screenshots. He and other supervisors are being cross-trained as well.

David: We create standard operating procedures like a recipe.

Chad (chat): It kind of informally "flows up," where longer-serving staff advise newer staff on best practices, as the seniors tend to have worked among multiple programs over the years.

Anna (chat): We have really stepped up in the last few years to cross train in many of our positions. The grants program has a Grant Coordinator Handbook.

Breakout groups discussed:

- What are the biggest challenges your agency faces when considering succession planning?
- What strategies have you found successful (or unsuccessful) in previous leadership transitions?
- How can we best identify and prepare emerging leaders within our organizations?
- What essential knowledge or processes need to be documented for seamless transitions?
- How can boards actively support and drive effective succession planning?

Full group discussion: What was one surprising insight from your breakout?

Kristin: The idea of shadowing intentionally. Literally bringing someone in and having someone else watch while managing a process and tagging them in. “Let me show you what I’m doing and here’s what’s needed.”

Laura: We do some of the same things but also use Zoom to record and are slowly building a process library of mini tutorials.

Christy: Since there’s so few of us, we all get cross trained, and we make sure at least two people know how to do each task. We make sure new hires get onboarded with all office processes. We are required to have a transition plan for every role. We are part of a larger agency so have an organization that help with it. Biggest challenge is trying to find time for this. Also, being a smaller team it’s hard to have very specific disciplines.

Anna: Some folks are in very specific areas. They are all cross-trained with each other and then those in leadership are also aware. Directors are cross-trained across their discipline.

Dave: A challenge is never being sure when succession is going to happen. It’s always good to have some level of documentation so that people know where to start.

What resources or support would be most helpful for your agency in developing a robust succession plan?

Nora Johnson (PA): Need for overcommunication and attending to the way people retain information in different ways. Potential for equipping staff with better understanding of change management and resiliency skills.

André: Annual performance evaluations are a good opportunity for staff to review their actual job description and update. Also, our team has been working to get a repertoire of what is needed for an SOP process. Keeps a list of what each department is responsible for, where we are with tracking the creation of that SOP, and where it lives. Then, the information is shared.

Anna: In our group, Christy discussed how she created a succession plan document for new EDs. Another question that came up was how much board involvement is wanted. We discussed identifying what the agency is today versus 10 years ago and whether and how job descriptions are keeping up.

Sylvia: We've been tasked by our board to make the time craft a succession plan for the CEO. The hardest part is finding the time to do it.

Natalie: The principle of batching can be helpful here—Breaking up a big project into little pieces and tackling it. The board's involvement depends on their authority and responsibility. It's also important to ensure the board has the structure they need for their own successions.

Laura (chat): A general Delegation of Authority document can be useful.

Succession Planning Resources

Please send resources that might be useful to the group to NASAA staff. Natalie shared the following:

- [Emergency Succession Planning](#)
- [3 Phases of Succession Planning](#)
- [Succession Planning Toolkit](#)
- [Succession Planning Roadmap](#)
- [From Crisis to Clarity: Five Steps to Demystify Succession Planning](#)
- [Succession Planning Activities Checklist](#)

Wrap Up

José asks for any resources or suggestions to help him ensure he works well with staff who are also artists. Chandra, Natalie, Chad and David all volunteered to help.

Natalie thanked the group for the good discussion. Sylvia thanked everyone, and especially Natalie, for leading the succession planning session.

NASAA hopes to see everyone in-person at the Executive Forum in Omaha, Nebraska on November 11-13. This is where our next peer group meeting will take place. A schedule for the 2026 Zooms will be set soon.
