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## Mission Accomplished

Advance, empower, encourage, enhance, ensure, create, value, participate, serve, broaden, foster, cultivate, develop, support, promote, improve, contribute, increase, secure, distribute, fund, strengthen, help, stimulate, expand, assist, preserve, meet and grow.

All of these great verbs! If you work in the public arts or education sector, chances are that you can—and do—use three, four and even five of these in one sentence. How about in that grant application? Or when you are explaining what you do to principals and school board members? And don't forget about planning. I bet, as a Teaching Artist, you are intimate with plans. This, in fact, leads me to what this particular set of words has in common. They all appear in mission statements of state arts agencies. It was interesting to see how little verb duplication there is among them even when one state arts agency (that shall remain nameless) works 10 – count 'em – 10 into two sentences. What does appear in most of the statements is the word “all,” as in “all the people of the state” or “for the benefit of all.” This is, of course, not that surprising since state arts agencies, as stewards of taxpayer dollars, serve and represent the public.

I know something about state arts agencies and the environment in which they operate having worked for 20 years at the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. I'm fluent in verbs, grant-speak and lobbying-lingo. I can make you think that it was your idea to drop that really heinous idea. I can move large numbers of cranky people in and out meetings without breaking a sweat. I can turn on a dime every hour of the day, from answering a member's question (usually from a guy) about what to wear at a meeting to representing the breadth and depth of state arts agencies' arts education programs at a national forum. My responsibilities were as diverse as the members that I served.

We all multi-task, and are overwhelmed, underappreciated, tired and stressed. (Though I sometimes think we say we're stressed so that we appear more important. Or maybe this is just in Washington, DC) But the superstars of multi-tasking are the state arts agency staff members. Think about it. In the current language of public value, they are at the center of a *Strategic Triangle\**, working simultaneously in three interconnecting areas:

Task Environment	What state arts agencies do—in other words, the plan with its mission and values statements, and carefully articulated goals.
Operating Environment	How state arts agencies carry out the tasks. Yes, we're talking about staff and money; but this is also one place where artists and organizations (and Teaching Artists) fit into

the triangle. Grantees and those receiving technical assistance are a means to an end, which is serving the public.

**Authorizing Environment** Grantees also fit into the triangle here, along with the public at large, funders, donors, media, elected officials, and anyone interested in, benefiting from or controlling public funding for the arts.

Whoa! What does this mean? Well, for one thing, it means that state arts agency staff members are overwhelmed, underappreciated, tired and stressed. Seriously. Using authorizing environment as an example, a state arts agency leader has to justify his/her existence to multiple audiences. It is not enough to have the support of a governor: a public manager has to have the knowledge, vocabulary and diplomacy to connect the arts with the interests of a state legislator; to convince board members of grantees to advocate for arts-related legislation; and to ask a power broker to make a call on behalf of the state arts agency's budget. And, oh yeah, to run an agency enmeshed in a state government bureaucracy, which means state budget analysts, civil service systems, hiring freezes, old computers, cramped offices with antiquated systems, etc.... I know of one state arts agency formerly located in an old mansion that had bats, and another that went for about six weeks—in the south and in the summer—without air-conditioning.

Most everyone involved professionally in the non-profit arts comes in contact with a state arts agency. You may be on the roster, work for a grantee organization or have directly received a grant or fellowship. The work you do in the schools is likely funded by the state arts agency. Or, at a more basic level, the fact that you are in the school at all is because of a program, initiative or partnership created by the state arts agency. It is in your best interest, therefore, to be supportive of state arts agencies. Here is what I recommend:

- (1) Show up. Not that this needs elaboration, but attend council and panel meetings, planning sessions, statewide conferences, grants workshops, advocacy days, etc....

State arts agencies set their programmatic priorities based in large part on the needs and interests of the public. If you have an idea for a great new initiative or think an existing program would benefit from a few tweaks, you need to speak up at a planning session. Every state arts agency has some mechanism for public input. Check the agency Web site regularly to find out how, when and where you can be part of the action. A community-based institution or organization usually hosts in-person meetings, and you probably already know the key players. Give them a call with any questions.

- (2) Serve as a panelist. State arts agencies are always looking for knowledgeable and dedicated people to review applications. This is a terrific way to learn about agency priorities and nuances that will help you be a

successful applicant. Many have Web-based panelist profile forms that you fill out and submit; others will e-mail or snail mail one to you if asked.

- (3) Lobby your local, state and federal elected officials. Look for cues on the state arts agency or state arts advocacy organization Web site. If there is a hot issue or an appropriate time for action, they'll tell you. Even if there is nothing brewing, don't pass up an opportunity to let your elected officials know how you and your community benefit from the arts, and why public support for the arts is a good value. And always, always thank them if they have done anything the slightest bit commendable. Keep an eye out for them at the grocery store and dry cleaners, and at sports events. Don't forget to invite them to school performances. You'll get the most mileage if you ask them to say a few words.

Teaching artists have a distinct advantage in advocacy because education is a top public policy priority. The role of the arts in learning is of tremendous interest to parents, educators, legislators, civic leaders and business owners.

- (4) Understand that state arts agencies are bureaucratic entities within state government. There are lots of paper and process, rules and regulations. It is difficult for them to be as flexible as they would like. While many have fast- or quick-track grants with short applications, advance planning is the way to go. Suggestions for improving the process are always welcome particularly from colleagues who show up. See #1.
- (5) Appreciate that state arts agencies have a limited ability to appoint council members. Sure, they can make recommendations to the appropriate person in the governor's office, but these appointments are political. Yes, of course, there should be a practicing artist on every council, and a person with a disability, and a teacher, and...the list goes on. Council members should reflect all facets of the public in the state that they serve. Sometimes—too many times—they don't. While intervening in the appointment process might be a less than positive experience, feel free to recommend qualified individuals to the state arts agency. Drop an e-mail or make a call to your contact. The greatest "churn" on councils occurs with a new governor of a different party.
- (6) Partner, collaborate and network. Let state arts agency staff members know what's going on. Chances are you know the arts education manager. This should be your go-to person to share knowledge, ideas, challenges, successes and opportunities. Together, come up with a preferred method of communication.
- (7) Provide the state arts agency with documentation—evaluation results, photos, anecdotes of your work that staff can use for public relations and advocacy. Are the arts making a measurable difference to students? Help tell the story.

High quality photos of kids doing art are hot commodities. It is amazing how few state arts agencies have good photos. Talk to either the arts education or communications/public information manager about when and how best to send in materials.

One of the goals of this journal, as stated in the first issue, is to “establish Teaching Artists as major contributors to the future of the arts and to the future of education.” What is the future of the arts? Most state arts agency leaders would say that it is part of their mission to shape that future; there is no future without public participation in the arts; and nothing can be achieved in isolation. Trite, but true, it is all about working together. In turn, working together is about respect, thoughtfulness and mutual support. As I read various descriptions of what Teaching Artists know and do, I am confident that your ability to negotiate the worlds of arts and education and work with all ages and temperaments (while patting your head and rubbing your tummy) is just what is needed to make the future a reality. The definition of success may be a moving target, but I think we can exclaim, “Mission Accomplished” when we’re able to change those verbs in the first paragraph from present to past tense.

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