



THE 98TH ARIZONA TOWN HALL: CAPITALIZING ON ARIZONA'S ARTS AND CULTURE

BLOG SERIES BY AUTHOR BARRY HESSENIUS

Table of Contents

<u>Blogging from Tucson on the Arizona Statewide Town Hall</u> Saturday, April 30, 2011	3
<u>Arizona Town Hall - Day 1</u> Monday, May 2, 2011	6
<u>Arizona Town Hall - Day 2</u> Tuesday, May 3, 2011	10
<u>Arizona Town Hall - Final Day</u> Wednesday, May 4, 2011	15
<u>Arizona Town Hall Wrap Up/Final Recommendations¹</u> Sunday, May 8, 2011	17
<u>Bonus from the Town Hall</u>	24



The Arizona Town Hall blog series is brought to you by the Arizona Commission on the Arts and the Western States Arts Federation.

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Blogging from Tucson on the Arizona Statewide Town Hall

Saturday, April 30, 2011

Good Morning.

"And the beat goes on....."

The crisis of funding for state arts agencies continues as legislatures work their way through their budget processes. While some states remain relatively unscathed with painful, but not draconian, cuts – many more have already seen yet another truly substantial blow to their budgets. Several, including Kansas, Washington and South Carolina are not yet free of the threat of elimination. Just this week I have gotten nearly a score of email alerts from Betty Plumb in South Carolina – a good friend and the savvy and experienced leader of one of the most active and dedicated of the state arts advocacy groups – urging her constituents to rally to the defense of the South Carolina state agency to beat back attempts by the Governor there to zero out the agency's funding.

Arizona has already suffered huge cuts in the past three years, including the legislature's zeroing out of the Arizona ArtShare Endowment – the state agency's once proud \$20 million dollar model flagship funding source.

As in many states across the country, Arizonans are assiduously trying to make the case for the value of the arts to Arizona's economy, education and civic life and fighting the uphill battle to get the decision makers to understand the incalculable benefits the arts bring to the state. Every year, an independent nonprofit convenes a statewide Town Hall meeting in Arizona. This year's will be the 98th such gathering, and this one focuses on Capitalizing on Arizona's Arts & Culture assets. The arts have previously been a smaller thread of one or two other Town Halls, but this is the first time it has ever centered entirely on the arts. It comes at a propitious time: the State of Arizona Budget – enacted last week – includes a \$0 state fund appropriation to the Arizona Commission on the Arts. In addition to the elimination of the state appropriation to the Arts Commission (\$665,000), the budget includes a re-capture of roughly 8% of the income the Commission receives from the Arizona ArtsTrust Fund, which is comprised of Corporation Commission filing fees (\$15 per application goes to ArtsTrust). This roughly equates to a loss of \$115,000. (The ArtsTrust Fund is not to be confused with the Arts Share Endowment referred to above, which was previously zeroed out).

Bob Booker, Executive Director of the Arizona Arts Commission invited me to attend the Town Hall as an observer and to blog daily on what happens there – the deliberations, the debates and the final outcomes. The purpose of my blogging is twofold: First, to try to capture some of the essence of the discussions and considerations germane to the obstacles and barriers to the provision of art to Arizona's citizenry – as put forth to the panels – so that those in the wider arts community all across Arizona might have a virtual seat at the table and be able to follow the proceedings; and Second, to allow a national audience to share in the process of those deliberations – as to what Arizona is going through, what is important and relevant there,

what challenges it faces, and what conclusions they reach – in the belief that what transpires there may very likely have relevancy and bearing on what is going on throughout the nation. There are other such discussions taking place in other states as well.

The Arizona annual Town Hall gathers leaders from across the state – and this one includes over 150 participants – not only from the arts, but from municipal government, academia, business, the media and including both artists and students. Alas, the participant list includes not a single state legislator or anyone from the Governor's office. Still the Town Hall has a long and rich history in the state, and carries some cachet that, frankly, the arts community may not have on its own.

The three plus day event breaks down into five panels, all of which consider the same fundamental questions as to what the arts mean to Arizona, what they need, and how support might best be realized – in four half day sessions. Sessions will zero in on:

1. What is unique to the Arizona arts sector, and how the state capitalizes on its diversity, as well as the role of the private sector, government, stakeholders and individual communities in interacting with and nurturing the arts ecosystem and infrastructure.
2. Where the arts intersect with the economy, education, health and the quality of life – and the extent the public understands those intersections.
3. The funding paradigm for the arts and the roles of business, philanthropy, and government – and how funding is used and maximized to generate value.

Specific recommendations from each panel for each of the above areas will be arrived at by consensus after exhaustive discussion and debate. On the final day, the entire group reconvenes and reconciles the recommendations of the five panels and arrives at a final set of recommendations.

Each participant has been provided [extensive background materials](#) on all aspects of arts and culture from experts throughout the state – including comprehensive histories of funding, arts education, past legislative actions, Arizona's place relative to the national situation, libraries, parks, multicultural constituencies, the humanities, rural communities and the relationship of arts & culture to the economy, jobs, tourism, and civic life. Also included is the Arizona Commission on the Arts recently completed Strategic Plan, and the exhaustive process the commission engaged in the preparation of that plan.

NEA Chair *Rocco Landesman*, and Senior Director of Cultural Initiatives at the Pew Foundation, *Marion Godfrey*, will both address the assemblage in plenary sessions. I hope to be able to briefly interview both and solicit their thinking on the situation in Arizona as emblematic of states across the country and of their ideas, thoughts and opinions as to how every state can better position itself and better make the case to decision makers as to why an investment in the arts is essential to a core strategy to leverage creativity to its advantage over the next ten to fifty years. I want to find out what they think the role of the NEA and the foundation community might be in helping state arts fields to stem the current tide of what is really an anti-arts 'roll back of funding' mind set. If we want to remain globally competitive over the next fifty years,

America desperately needs a national strategy to insure that it continues to be in the vanguard of fostering and nurturing creativity, ideas, and innovation, and it needs a comprehensive policy and strategic plan that will guide decision makers understanding of the role the arts play in that effort. We simply cannot any longer afford to let other nations gain a monopoly on thinking about creativity's role in the future.

The business sector recognizes the value and importance of innovation to their health and well-being, including their bottom line. Yet the link between creativity and innovation is not yet so firmly established. Moreover, the link between the arts and creativity and thus innovation is one step further removed from accepted dogma. It can be argued that government decision makers, grappling with crippling deficits, similarly are not yet convinced of the link between the arts as an investment and the return on that investment to the state. This Town Hall and events like it across the country is, I think, an earnest attempt to codify the arguments that make the case for the value of arts and culture as far in excess of the investment, to demonstrate the myopia of a failure to make that investment in lost jobs, revenue, tourism, civic pride and the preparedness of the next generation for the global marketplace, and to make specific recommendations as to how states can best capitalize on their creative assets and not squander the assets that have taken a long time to build.

I hope over the course of the next three or four days – Monday through Wednesday and a follow up thereafter – to accurately report as much of the proceedings of Arizona's Town Hall as I possibly can; to give those who might wish to follow along some sense of what is going on here on a daily review basis; and to share some observations and conclusions as I observe a stellar group of people who will be trying very hard to put all the various issues in context and make smart, well thought out suggestions for the benefit of Arizona's future.

Don't Quit!

Barry



Arizona Town Hall - Day 1

Monday, May 2, 2011

Good Morning.

"And the beat goes on....."

Note about the process: Two considerations to bear in mind about the Town Hall: First, the goal is to arrive at consensus. Not an easy task in any situation, the arts included, Second, the captivating part of the process is that as each panel considers each of the questions during two and a half to three and half hour sessions is that the recorder continually reads back what has been said by the participants in a summary and the panel then has the opportunity to correct, edit, and add to what has been said up to that point. The team of recorders then synthesizes the five panels discussions and prepares a draft summary. That process is repeated the second day. And then on Wednesday morning the whole Town Hall meets to do final revisions. The other thing about the process is that it is an arduous undertaking to consider all the complex issues raised by the questions and give those issues a fair hearing in a very limited period of time,

Note about this blog: First, as an observer I am not a participant, and thus not a contributor to the discussions. Not the easiest position for someone as opinionated as I am, The blog then is not meant to capture everything everyone said – exactly as they said it, but rather to provide a sense of the discussions and some impressions and opinions on what I heard, Not meant to be a criticism, but a commentary. I am a reporter here and bring my own prejudices, viewpoints and limited perspective, I am also somewhat the interloper as I am not from Arizona and thus do not have the insight or background many of the participants enjoy, Also, I can't be in two places at once, so I am moving from panel to panel to try to get a better sense of the whole of the Town Hall as it unfolds. Finally, neither the names nor titles of the participants are important in the process and so I will not be attributing anyone's remarks or thoughts to any specific person.

While the full Town Hall is top heavy with people from the Arts and Culture sector, the majority of them have their own perspectives and experiences of their own organizations, Few have the charge of a full state wide perspective, though they know something of the issues. I was privy to, and had the benefit of the first draft of the summary of the first day's two sessions, but there is still a huge amount of material to wade through. Though not my long suit, I shall try to be brief while still giving some sense of the conversations that went on.

Opening remarks:

Points were made as to the importance of arts and culture (and we are using that phrase in the widest sense to include fine arts, popular arts, heritage, parks, libraries, the humanities and everything else that might fit the category - including:

1. Arts and Culture (hereinafter AC) relate directly to the sustainability of livable communities.
2. An informed citizenry is essential for a healthy democracy and AC plays a critical role in arriving at that place,
3. The arts have a role to play in the physical health of Arizona citizens.
4. AC plays a direct role in fostering tolerance.
5. Funding sources for AC must be a priority and the message is that money put into AC will be paid back many times over.
6. It is essential to define AC broadly to create a Big Tent.
7. Undercapitalization remains a major problem for arts organizations of all sizes and disciplines.
8. People participate in AC in more ways today than in the past.
9. New access to the arts requires new connections,
10. Rural communities deserve great art every bit as much as urban areas.
11. Small towns can often move new ideas forward faster – they have great volunteers and are often better connected to each other,
12. The Arizona arts have lost \$20 million in available funds in the last few years. The current budget provides zero state support for AC and Arizona now ranks 50th of 50 states in per capita support.
13. Beyond public funding, corporate, foundation and earned income are all down double digits. Municipal agencies have had cuts to their support nearing 70%, and individual philanthropic support is down all across the U.S.
14. Yet Arizona has (according to Americans for the Arts studies) 11,600 arts businesses, employing 46000 people, with a \$500 million economic impact.

Session I: Refer to the materials on the Town Hall site via the link provided in the last blog for the exact wording of the questions for each session.

Q: This session dealt essentially with how A/C in Arizona impact the state and its citizens; the differing perspectives Arizona's diverse communities and populations bring to bear on A/C; and the role of the various stakeholder communities play in working together.

Discussion:

The principal thought centered on Arizona's diversity – from its Mexican American and Spanish heritage to its Native Americans and cowboy heritage, from its historical modern America Route 66 to the natural wonder of its landscape and geography. The contemporary art scene continues to be shaped by the tension between the modern urban sensibility and the history of the state's opens space mentality. While the arts provide a kind of "social" center for communities, the sprawl of space unlike the city centers of many other states make that centering problematic in some cases, and so for arts to act as community "hubs" issues of convenience are a consideration. And the state's diversity including age, gender, geography, occupation, education, heritage, multicultural ethnicity, requires a new model for all those groups that don't follow traditional trajectories of participation. Moreover, the arts include a broader range of creativity than ever – from high tech to culinary arts. Rural communities emphasize grassroots values and collaboration, while urban areas of differing neighborhoods may have their own issues of pocket isolation.

It was thought that the A/C sector needs to do more to promote its cultural and artistic diversity, now more than ever due to an unsupportive legislature, and that includes greater engagement of policy makers. It was suggested that organizational boards of directors need to better reflect that diversity. (Author's aside: while all the participants in this Town Hall were dedicated, passionate, intelligent and experienced professionals, the composition was light on people of color, and more than one noted that underserved ethnic communities are often left out at the decision making tables even within the sector). It was also noted that it will be essential, in the future, to focus more on the inclusion of youth in the A/C mix – which challenge will necessitate better appreciation and application of technology.

The most troubling discussion to me was on stakeholder. There was a consensus that everyone was a stakeholder, and that is, of course, true – but in the usual context of this topic – stakeholders are defined – correctly I think – as those constituencies that have a stake in our success. Thus parents, the PTA, teachers, and others in the education pantheon as well as those in the tourism industry – hotels, restaurants etc. as an example benefit from our success and make the best areas for us to target to try to co-opt to our cause.

Another area designated as in need of greater effort was that of collaboration and cooperation. It was noted that the A/C organizations can be territorial and turf wars are not uncommon. If we can't unite to work together, the resulting vivisectionist field will end up crippling our efforts.

Session II:

Q: The second session dealt with the intersections between A/C and the economy; education; health, well being and the general quality of life; and how well Arizonans understand the impact of A/C on these areas of life in the state.

Discussion:

There was general consensus that the arts provide jobs, generate substantial economic activity, generate far more tax revenues than the amount of government money invested in them, as well as complement the objectives of business by attracting talent, and are integral to the tourism industry. A/C also play an increasingly recognized role in health care and the film industry. Unfortunately, when the economy goes south, so too do government support dollars.

To combat that reality, it was suggested the A/C sector need to better integrate itself as a voice in the decision making apparatuses of other sectors; that it must do more to gain the support of the public by expanding its awareness of the value of A/C; and that it must become more politically savvy and involve itself in the election of candidates supportive of its goals and needs. It was thought that part of the challenge is to convince the business community to help lobby for greater arts education. Every arts supporter needs to ratchet up the discussion of the role of A/C in policy decisions, The A/C field needs a louder, more forceful unified voice, infiltrate the Chamber of Commerce (and might I suggest if every arts organization in Arizona would join and become active in their local Chamber, they could virtually take over the organization).

As to arts education, the A/C sector needs to drive home the lesson that arts education helps students perform at a higher level in math, reading and other subjects seen as more essential to prepare students to be competitive in the new global marketplace. Attention needs to be paid to the inequity of offerings in rural settings.

The role of A/C on the attraction to talent for business was noted, as was the correlation between early arts education and academic success. Unfortunately, the A/C sector has work to do in building more bridges to the business community, and the funding for the arts in Arizona's schools remains inadequate.

Also noted was the role of A/C in community building and in serving as a social hub connecting disparate parts of the state's diverse populations as well as the development of a sense of place.

It was thought much work is needed to more effectively market the assets the state's diversity afford to both residents and visitors alike.

There is growing evidence – though much more research is needed – that suggests that the arts can play a critical role in healthcare, particularly for children and seniors, and that A/C can have a demonstrable impact on clinical outcomes. Arts advocates should consider alliances with the health care industry.

Finally, while some Arizonans understand the impact of A/C on their lives, many more are completely unaware of the value we offer. Still, the general public seems to "get it" more than the legislature – which continues to perceive the arts as a luxury, a frill and a non-essential – and therein lies the major challenge for the sector. There is no knight in shining armor riding in to rescue A/C in Arizona. The sector itself must mount a comprehensive, sustained, targeted and well financed campaign to win widespread public support and become more political to get elected officials to support the needs of the field.

I will post another blog on tomorrow's sessions, then post the Town Halls's final recommendations on Thursday. On Friday I will post some comments on the addresses in Plenary Sessions by NEA Chair Rocco Landesman, and Senior Cultural Initiatives Officer at the Pew Charitable Trust – Marion Godfrey, along with a couple of brief Q & A sessions with some of the attendees and links to various resource sites.

Don't Quit!

Barry



Arizona Town Hall - Day 2

Tuesday, May 3, 2011

Good Morning.

"And the beat goes on....."

Day II gets to the meat of the matter with the morning session dealing with funding, and the afternoon session centering on action steps.

Session III:

Q: This session is broken down into four parts: the role of market forces and the private enterprise in funding A/C; the role of private philanthropy (foundations and individual donors) in funding; the role of government; and finally how can funding be better utilized.

Discussion Part I:

I am going to list the suggestions of the panel I sat in on without an attempt to organize the thinking into separate silos.

1. In-Kind donations are easier to get than cash.
2. Naming rights may be possible for major facilities.
3. Corporate funding from their marketing budgets demand some kind of quid pro quo in advancing their branding / marketing goals.
4. A/C must answer business' question of "What's in it for me?"
5. Business wants a certain degree of certainty in return for its "investment" – something quantifiable – e.g. 'X' number of print ad viewers etc.
6. Corporate funding is down in Phoenix somewhere in the neighborhood of 50% from three years ago,
7. Some corporate decisions re: funding are made at the home office, with little leeway to local or branch offices. Often times local office decisions are at the whim of the senior leadership without guidelines.
8. Younger executives may not yet be all that interested in dedicating their time and energy and money to nonprofit causes – at least not the arts.
9. One hotel in Milwaukee has engaged a local artist-in-residence. In exchange for room and board, the artist works in the lobby to the delight of hotel guests.
10. The A/C sector lacks the marketing budget to advance its brand.
11. Arizona is not a corporate HQ hub, but rather at the end of one of the spokes. Not that many potential major corporate funders.
12. Tax credits are a source of potential funding – particularly in buildings and capital improvements.

Part II: - Philanthropy

1. There is a lack of the culture of giving in Arizona that exists in other states. Fewer foundations.
2. The A/C sector lacks the personnel and skill sets to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. They need training and professional development to hone their skills.
3. Foundations often provide programming support but not operational support to run those programs.
4. Online sites like Donorfeed.org or Kickstarter.org can help raise funds for specific projects.
5. The newly retired are a potential group for the A/C sector to target for funds.
6. Volunteers can make up for budget shortfalls in the personnel area.
7. Individuals are the principal source of philanthropic funding for A/C in Arizona.
8. A percentage of wealthy people recently relocated to Arizona continue to donate funds to organizations in their former homes instead of Arizona.
9. It is increasingly difficult to justify funding to A/C in competition with what is perceived as more pressing social needs (e.g., the homeless).
10. Volunteers become donors.

Part III: Government

1. Develop relationships with elected official's staffs. They run the show.
2. Pursue legislation that encourage private philanthropy including tax incentives.
3. Call for the restoration of the cuts to the Arts Commission and previous voter approved funding.
4. The state seems to put all its effort into attracting business and none into growing what is here.
5. There exists hidden government support that A/C should acknowledge – including University programs to train artists and arts administrators, publicly owned facilities, etc.
6. There is a current debate in Washington at the Federal level to change the rules of donor giving and the tax deduction allowed. One plan is a tier system whereby donations to certain organizations will qualify for a full deduction (at one's tax bracket level), with a second tier that allows for a half deduction, and a third tier (supposedly the arts level) that would only allow a one-third deduction. Congress is also looking at the basic 501 (c) (3) earned income with an eye to perhaps declaring it taxable in certain circumstances. These changes could dramatically (and negatively) impact all nonprofit organizations including the arts.
7. Even at the local government level, the new reality is that cuts are going to impact the most basic of services.
8. Arizona's prior campaign to achieve a voter approved dedicated revenue stream via ballot initiative was postponed because of late negative polling indicating the timing wasn't right. But that effort had broad based voter approval, and should be resurrected perhaps for the 2013 /14 period.
9. The arts should become more politically active – including efforts to elect new office holders who are arts supportive.
10. This Town Hall document should be basically a Lobbying tool.
11. The arts should start and fund their own Political Action Committee (PAC).

12. It will be easier for A/C in Arizona to mount a successful dedicated revenue stream campaign if it frames the issue with some kind of "big carrot" and includes a wider array of beneficiaries in the mix (open space, parks, libraries etc.).
13. The A/C sector needs to run its own people for public office and provide those candidates with resource support as new candidates.

Part IV - Maximizing the use of funds:

1. Build more networks within the arts and between the arts and other sectors.
2. Sell the idea within the arts that "all boats will rise with the high tide."
3. The A/C sector should attend future Town Halls to insure its interests are represented at the table.
4. Though historically territorial, the arts in Arizona are sharing proprietary lists in efforts to benefit the whole sector.
5. Sharing expertise, forming new partnerships and consolidating – where possible – back office functions can help make the available resources go farther.

Session IV

Q: What are the action steps needed, how should they be prioritized, how should they be funded and what is the role and responsibility of individuals and entities – public and private – nonprofit included (in and outside the sector):

Ah, the devil is in the details.

1. There should be an A/C / Humanities Summit meeting.
2. The A/C sector must work to elect supportive candidates.
3. The arts must be recognized as a core academic subject in all respects.
4. The sector must work more closely with the Tourism industry as a partner in its programs and campaigns.
5. The arts should employ candidate forums and submit questions as to their positions on A/C / Humanities issues and widely publicize the responses.
6. The basic STEM education priority – Science Technology English and Math – should be changed to STEAM – inserting the ARTS into the mix.
7. Arts education offerings need to be academically rigorous and taught by qualified teachers in order to attract student interest.
8. The sector should insist on adherence to existing standards in place.
9. Attention should be paid to the vocabulary being used to expand a too narrow perception of the meaning of 'art'.
10. A greater emphasis should be on educating the public as to the health benefits of the arts.
11. Arts / Humanities organizations should join their local chambers of commerce.

Those were the take-aways from the two sessions I attended yesterday. Here is the first draft of the combined panel report findings, and once again I am very grateful to the Town Hall recorders and staff for sharing with me their preliminary draft of the first of yesterday's sessions:

1. "As government and philanthropic support has eroded, A/C organizations have had to become increasingly self-sufficient. They must now bolster their sustainability" by actively taking calculated risks in program offering and pursuing collaborative partnerships with the private sector – bearing in mind such collaborations must be win-win for all the players – from development of special arts districts, to sharing of facilities and even consolidation of back office functions where practical.
2. The A/C will have to aggressively pursue small individual donors to take up the slack of less government and major philanthropic support, as well as expand volunteerism.
3. Government support is essential, and the sector must convince voters to 'challenge the notion that there is no funding available.' It should fight to re-instate recent cuts to the Arizona Commission on the Arts, proactively identify and support candidates for elected office who will champion arts and culture and work to secure additional support.
4. A ballot initiative to establish a stable and designated funding source for the entire A/C / Humanities sector should be again on the agenda for the 2013/14 target date, and these sectors must figure out how to unite for the mutual gain of everyone. (I would recommend consideration of a wider coalition of parks, open space advocates, libraries, and others so that such an initiative has the broadest possible range and depth of potential support).
5. Elected officials and the private sector should be lobbied to help create public / private collaborations to support A/C / Humanities funding – including incentives for the private sector.
6. All of this will require expanded and sophisticated networks working in concert.

While I admire and respect those who participated in this quite extraordinary process, there were some unrealistic ideas about how to proceed. It will be interesting to see how the final report and recommendations turns out, because while all of the proffered ideas were good ideas, do-able ideas, somebody – some human being – has to make them happen, has to accept responsibility for seeing them to conclusion. Some of these ideas will take a lot of time and money to fully realize. Who will do it? Where will the money come from? Those questions remain unanswered, and the problem is that virtually everyone already has a full time job and no time to take on more. Moreover, the recent draconian cuts have necessitated staffing cutbacks at the Arts Commission as well as other organizations. That is a problem,

This Town Hall was about what can be done for The Arts and Culture (including the Humanities) in Arizona. Not what can be done for any segment of that broad spectrum. The Arts Commission and the Arizona Citizens for the Arts are the statewide organizations that have the charge of the whole state perspective. They must be supported by the whole community and work together.

I have met some very talented, smart people here in the few days. Passionate, dedicated and experienced people. If the A/C sector here can put aside past differences and rally together, there is tremendous opportunity to leverage this Town Hall effort and build a solid foundation to make some significant moves in

preparation for the 2012 and the 2014 election cycle to press their demands. They will need to marshal their unified strength, and figure out how to co-opt the public as well as a score of potential collaborators and stakeholders to take up their cause. Judging by what I have seen and the side conversations I have had, it seems clear to me this can be done. It is a matter of will.

I would like to thank everyone involved in this effort for allowing me the honor of observing their deliberations, inserting my own opinions and commenting on their efforts.

Tomorrow I shall report on the Town Hall's Final Recommendations, and next week offer some personal thoughts that I hope might be useful to the Arts and Culture field in Arizona, and some observations on this process that might be beneficial to those in other states experiencing similar challenges.

Don't Quit!

Barry



Arizona Town Hall - Final Day

Wednesday, May 4, 2011

Good Morning.

"And the beat goes on....."

This is the day it all came together. The draft of the final Town Hall report was available to the delegates at 5:00 am. All five panels convened to review the draft and suggest their edits, changes and editions at 6:45 am. At 12:30 pm the entire Town Hall met in plenary session to consider each of the changes proposed by the participants in each of the five panels – section by section, one by one. If there wasn't apparent consensus to any given proposed change, a small group of people favoring and / or opposing the proposed change caucused together and came up with compromise language and re-submitted it to the whole group, and it was then accepted or rejected.

I went from panel to panel meeting before the plenary session and there was considerable discussion about what people wanted to change, delete or add. It went relatively quickly. Surprisingly, the plenary session flowed well and most of the proposed changes were easily accepted, including those compromises reached by the differing factions. Several were rejected. The final document reflects an extraordinary amount of time and work over three long and grueling days, and is a quite remarkable document delineating the status of arts and culture in Arizona, what the challenges and opportunities are, and sets forth a series of very specific action steps – some immediate, some longer term – that the sector will need to undertake to move it forward to a healthier and more sustainable future.

I congratulate every one who participated (as well as the organizers and Town Hall Board members, staff, and recorders) for some very clear thinking, for their willingness to engage in real collaboration, and for producing a blueprint that, if they can now do the hard part – the follow up and implementation – can be leveraged to galvanize the field in Arizona as perhaps never before, and allow them to build a foundation and apparatus that can put them in a much better position over the next eighteen months and then beyond to the 2014 election cycle.

Much of what they accomplished goes far beyond addressing the challenges of the current Arizona legislative debacle of gutting public funding. The document they produced deals with everything from gaining political clout and specific ways the sector can work on the local and state level beyond direct government funding to garner more public and private support, to data collection, to business alliances and partnerships, to arts education, to establishing collaborative efforts within the field. As are all of the Town Hall Reports this too is a clarion call for the state – for government at all levels, the private business community, and individual citizens to make the investment of time, money, resources, and involvement in arts, culture and the humanities that will allow Arizona to move from back in the pack to a national leadership position as a leader in leveraging creativity for the benefit of the whole state and all its interests.

Clearly, it will not be easy. It will take a lot of work, commitment, dedication and sacrifice. It will take – perhaps more than anything else – a great deal of trust by all the leaders in Arizona in each other. It will also take a change in past cultures of what can and cannot be done, and how things ought to be done. It will take true out-of-the-box thinking and a willingness to try new bold new avenues to make it a reality. But over just three days, some very good people made a real beginning. If they can share the workload, remain focused, build new bridges and repair old ones, they have a real chance to not only move the sector in Arizona where they want it to be, where it ought to go, but they have a chance to build a model for other states to replicate.

I should have a copy of the final document within a few days and will post at least the salient highlights, if not the entire final Town Hall Report. I will also add the remarks of some brief talks I had with several people who participated in the Town Hall, offer some of my own insights as an outsider, and provide some links that may be useful.

I don't want to list all of the specific action steps the final report adopted here now, because I don't want to use the draft language or try to paraphrase the final version on my own. I think that would be a disservice to all of these people who worked so diligently to get the wording right. Besides, I don't know about the rest of the participants, but I am pooped.

Again, it was a real pleasure to report from this Town Hall and to participate in a unique process with some very smart and very likable people who – like all of you out there – care so very much about arts and culture and who know what value it brings to our communities – large and small across America. I am grateful to Bob Booker and the Arizona Commission on the Arts and to WESTAF for enabling me to attend the event and to blog on it here.

Please either subscribe to the blog by entering your email on the right hand side – scroll down – or check back next week for the Final Report summary and – I hope – full document link.

Thank you Arizona. I salute you.

Don't Quit!

Barry



Arizona Town Hall Wrap Up/Final Recommendations

Sunday, May 8, 2011

Good Morning.

"And the beat goes on....."

The final report has been sent to the participants, and so I can now post a final wrap up.

Below are the final recommendations of the Town Hall on Arts and Culture. I have regrouped these priority action steps into broad categories in the hope that in doing so it may be easier for the reader to see all of the actions suggested and begin to determine what it will take to move them all forward. My own take is that the first step would logically be a convening / Summit meeting of the entire sector in Arizona to review the report and to arrive at a plan / strategy for the implementation of each recommendation, including:

1. Who (individual or organization) will be responsible for overseeing implementation of a given action.
2. What is the plan / strategy for such implementation.
3. What is the timeline for implementation.
4. What is the budget and where will the revenue come from.

There are two ways to organize such an effort: Either hold one big meeting (probably in Phoenix), or augment that meeting in Phoenix by holding subsequent smaller gatherings in four or five places around the state (so as to insure as wide an attendance and participation as possible and to account for those who may not, for reasons of time or finances, be able to attend such a Summit). Widespread buy-in will be crucial. Such an effort will, of course, take time to plan and organize, and require people to do that work. Time is likely of the essence.

Click [here](#) for a link to the full final Town Hall report. *(Note: The Town Hall organization will hold a series of gatherings around the state in October to disseminate the report as widely as possible.)*

While there are certainly demanding challenges facing the arts and culture sector in Arizona, the quality of its leadership – and their commitment and sense of the reality of their situation, coupled with their experience and high skills level, and most of all, their willingness to consider bold new approaches in response to their situation – give them, I think, a real opportunity to change their fortunes. As I said before, this is clearly a lot of work and will take time, energy, resources and cooperation and collaboration.

Arizona Town Hall Final Priority Recommendations (*broad subject areas indicated in parentheses and *indicates immediate or near term priorities*)

Convenings:

- A summit of the arts and cultural communities should be convened for the purpose of forming an overarching policy alliance.* (First step?)
- Convene a broad-sector coalition to develop a statewide quality of life ballot initiative to provide a dedicated funding source for arts and culture that cannot be diverted or reduced through legislative action.* (Government Action)
- Convene a consortium of the arts and cultural stakeholder communities to form an overarching collaboration alliance for purposes of statewide data policy, support, development and awareness. The state's primary arts-supporting foundations are a logical choice to facilitate this summit.* (Data)
- The arts and culture community should utilize their existing statewide arts and cultural advocacy groups such as Arizona Citizens in Action for the Arts to organize a political action committee which will receive contributions and make expenditures for the purpose of influencing elections at all levels and advancing the statewide arts and culture agenda.* (Advocacy – likely requires a convening)
- Identify and engage new and emerging leaders in arts and culture. (Big Tent – likely requires a convening)

All of the following actions require some sort of plan / strategy to implement:

Government (and Advocacy) actions called for:

- Restore appropriations and arts endowment to the Arizona Commission on the Arts and expand the role of the Commission to include cultural organization with additional appropriations.* (Government Action – Funding)
- We must identify, support and elect political leaders and candidates who will champion the cause of the arts and culture, from the legislature to the city councils to the school boards.* (Advocacy)
- The arts and culture community should utilize their existing statewide arts and cultural advocacy groups such as Arizona Citizens in Action for the Arts to organize a political action committee which will receive contributions and make expenditures for the purpose of influencing elections at all levels and advancing the statewide arts and culture agenda. (Advocacy)
- Arts and culture organizations and their allies should bolster existing lobbying efforts. (Advocacy)
- Arts and cultural organizations should work with regional planning organizations and the League of Arizona Cities and Towns to develop model ordinances and policy that support the arts. (Partnerships)
- Require public art as an element of government buildings and infrastructure. Local governments should enact land use codes that provide incentives for developments that include public art. (Government Action).

- The Arizona Commerce Authority must dedicate a seat for arts and culture. Urge statewide advocacy groups to establish a legislative priority to secure this seat by amending the existing statute. (Government Action)
- Individuals and arts and culture organizations should immediately implement a variety of grassroots efforts, including networking, enlisting the support of others, contacting public officials, attending Arizona Town Hall outreach sessions and advocating for implementation of this report. (Partnerships)
- Arts and cultural organizations should work with regional planning organizations and the League of Arizona Cities and Towns to develop model ordinances and policy that support the arts. (Partnerships – Government Action)
- We need to ensure that Arizona's arts and culture are represented in any celebration of the Arizona Centennial. (Government Action)

Arts Education actions called for:

- All schools must adhere to the existing state standards and policies that apply to arts curriculum. The Superintendent of Public Instruction must enforce this provision. To accomplish this goal we must advocate that local school officials place arts specialists in all schools and provide adequate funding to meet the standards.* (Government Action)
- Arts and culture organizations should work with education stakeholders to advocate for a statewide mandate for the recurring collection of arts education data from schools, using the model and best practices evident in the 2008/2009 voluntary arts education census. (Education)
- Arts and culture organizations should work with education stakeholders to advocate for a statewide mandate for the recurring collection of arts education data from schools, using the model and best practices evident in the 2008/2009 voluntary arts education census.* (Data)
- Parents must be involved in their children's art education so that they become engaged and invested in that education. Arts and cultural organizations should reach out to parents and encourage them to be involved in their children's arts education, taking an active role in assuring the enforcement of state standards and policies being implemented.* (Big Tent)
- Expand S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) to S.T.E.A.M. by adding arts into the core educational curriculum.

Arts and Business actions called for:

- The Arizona Commerce Authority must dedicate a seat for arts and culture. Urge statewide advocacy groups to establish a legislative priority to secure this seat by amending the existing statute.* (Government Action)
- The Arizona tourism industry and arts and cultural organizations should increase their partnerships and collaborations to raise the profile of Arizona's arts and culture sectors when marketing Arizona as a visitor destination. (Partnerships)

- Arts and culture organizations need to have a seat at the table with local chambers of commerce, business organizations and economic development organizations to build vitality and long-term relationships. (Partnerships)

Research / Data Collection actions called for:

- Arts organizations should sign up for and participate in the Cultural Data Project and the Arizona Community Database.*
- Arts and culture organizations should work with education stakeholders to advocate for a statewide mandate for the recurring collection of arts education data from schools, using the model and best practices evident in the 2008/2009 voluntary arts education census. (Arts education)
- Authorize and fund a study defining and measuring the total Arizona arts and culture economy, expanding to include traditional nonprofits, education K-G (kindergarten through graduate), and art and design-based business enterprises.* (Business)
- Convene a consortium of the arts and cultural stakeholder communities to form an overarching collaboration alliance for purposes of statewide data policy, support, development and awareness. The state's primary arts-supporting foundations are a logical choice to facilitate this summit.

Collaboration actions called for:

- Arts and cultural organizations and artists should collaborate and partner with other public groups such as hospitals, educational institutions, tourism boards, and religious and civic groups in order to expand the resource pie.
- Arts and cultural organizations should continue to collaborate and partner among themselves to share resources, such as marketing and audience development efforts.
- Collaborate with education, health and human services, and other groups threatened by cuts to enact true fiscal reform (including closure of tax loopholes) to ensure fair, adequate, and sustainable revenues to support all our state's needs including arts and culture.
- In order to provide more public and private support, grow philanthropy to support Arizona arts and culture. (Funding)

Expansion of the "big tent" actions called for:

- There should be increased statewide campaigns to raise awareness for the value of arts and culture and increased participation. These campaigns should be executed with sufficient resources to maximize their effectiveness and should be led by a marketing alliance of arts and culture groups. As participation precedes support, we must start now.* (Public Awareness)
- Identify and encourage diversity in arts and cultural organizations.* (Multicultural)
- Full and part-time residents need to become members of arts and cultural organizations and commissions, and actively support them, financially, by volunteering their time, and by attending their functions and events. (Public Awareness)

- Identify and engage new and emerging leaders in arts and culture. (Emerging Leaders)
- Create models to reach young and modest givers who may become long-term sources of sustainable financing for arts and culture. (Philanthropy)

Communication actions called for:

- There should be increased statewide campaigns to raise awareness for the value of arts and culture and increased participation. These campaigns should be executed with sufficient resources to maximize their effectiveness and should be led by a marketing alliance of arts and culture groups. As participation precedes support, we must start now.* (Awareness)
- Identify and utilize online interactive resources that would allow the various groups to share valuable information about resources and opportunities for alliances.* (Sector awareness)
- Arts and culture organizations will have a more impactful voice when their value message is unified and substantiated by reliable research.* (Public Awareness)

Some brief thoughts from some of the participants (*paraphrasing their remarks, not directly quoting*):

Steve Farley (*State Representative, Arizona State Legislature, District 28*)

Steve suggested that the continuing legislative redistricting process, while still likely to end up somewhat skewed towards conservative safe districts, may result in 10 to 12 of the 30 state districts becoming more competitive - and that there will likely be an opportunity to make moves to support candidates favoring the arts that might result in a changed legislative composition. That could be very significant he notes.

He also told me that he thought the current legislature has been so aggressive in attacking virtually every interest group in the state, that there is now a backlash and that all of those groups may now be galvanizing in opposition to those attacks.

In response to my questions about what he thought the arts and culture sector needed to do to improve its situation, he offered that we needed to stop talking and start acting. He recommended developing more political power by forming a political action committee and getting involved in the election of candidates for office that would be arts supportive – including organizing all the arts boards and even running candidates for office from the arts sector. He counseled that we needed to get out of our individual silos, put aside past differences and let go of whatever keeps us from unified collaborative efforts so the opposition cannot continue to divide and conquer the arts community.

He further thought that because of more competitive races for the legislature, that the sector should focus on the 2012 election. There is a one cent sales tax earmarked for education that apparently expires in 2013, and he thought that a wide coalition of interests might succeed in extension of that

tax – divided among a host of interests including education and the arts. He suggested that such a one cent tax yields approximately \$900 million in revenue.

Rusty Foley (*Executive Director, Arizona Citizens Action for the Arts*)

Rusty said that the states arts advocacy organization has about 81 of the state's 600 arts organizations as members and that some four to five thousand individuals on the mailing list have been responsive to requests to communicate with elected officials.

She suggested that a continuing challenge is that the Arizona arts community still doesn't think of themselves as 'political', and that low voter turnout harms the sector's efforts with the public.

But she thought the Town Hall may help to jumpstart new efforts to organize the field and was optimistic that a wider coalition of culture groups might now be developed – and that a legislative arts caucus might be a future possibility. She reminded me of the Rahm Emanuel remark that we should "never waste a crisis".

She also shared that she thought one of the biggest challenges facing the sector was to develop more intersections with the business community, but also thought that community might finally be moving towards more involvement and activity.

Finally, she told me she thought arts organizations in Arizona may not be as aggressive as those in other states in applying for NEA grants and that is a missed opportunity.

Jim Ballinger (*Director, Phoenix Arts Museum and Board member of the National Council on the Arts – the NEA oversight body*)

Jim told me he thought getting the arts sector treated equally with other sectors remains an uphill battle, and that one of the biggest challenges remains making a better case for the argument that the arts generate more than they cost.

He counseled that the sector needs to focus more on explaining the arts economy as a whole (including the pantheon of arts entities from teachers, junior colleges and universities to galleries, the design industry and beyond) – rather than continuing to just make the argument that the nonprofit arts have an economic impact – which to a degree falls on deaf ears.

He agreed with Steve that the arts sector needs to become more politically active in the involvement of electing arts supportive legislators.

Finally, [here](#) is a link to the Arts Commission's recently launched public awareness campaign.

Thank you again Arizona for your kind and gracious hospitality and allowing me to blog from this benchmark event. I shall continue to follow your progress to leverage the Town Hall to your advantage, and hope I might be able to help in some ways. I hope too that other states may borrow from your work as they grapple with ways to leverage their creative assets.

Have a great week.

Don't Quit!

Barry



Bonus from the Town Hall

Good Morning.

"And the beat goes on....."

One of the Arizona Town Hall participants, architect **Jeremy Jones**, forwards these outstanding drawings he made at various panel discussions during last week's Town Hall. I can testify to the uncanny accuracy of his renderings of the people who attended. I thought you might like to take a look.



THE 98TH ARIZONA TOWN HALL: CAPITALIZING ON ARIZONA'S ARTS AND CULTURE
BLOG SERIES BY AUTHOR BARRY HESSENIUS



Thanks Jeremy.

Have a nice weekend.

Don't Quit!

Barry

