

STATE ARTS ADVOCACY AND BUSINESS: PARTNERING FOR A STRONGER COMMUNITY

Partnering with businesses is a necessity for all segments of the arts community, both private and public. In this tool-kit, learn how state arts advocacy organizations are partnering with the business community to lead events, community development initiatives, and programs that bridge the gap between arts and business goals.



THE STATE ARTS ACTION NETWORK (SAAN) IS A NETWORK OF STATEWIDE ARTS ADVOCACY AND SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS, AND CURRENTLY INCLUDES 53 MEMBERS FROM 42 STATES, INCLUDING THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

The network was formed in 2004 when the State Arts Advocacy League of America (SALAA) and the National Community Arts Network (NCAN) agreed to merge with Americans for the Arts. The SAAN grew further in 2009 when the members of the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network (KCAEEN) joined as individual organizational members.

The SAAN elects a leadership board composed of 15 individuals from the network who serve on standing committees and coordinate programming that allows SAAN members to come together to discuss policy challenges and best practices in their respective states. The SAAN covers topics from state arts agency funding to arts education to tax policy and cultural districts.

Phone interviews were conducted with SAAN members around the nation to collect and synthesize best practices when partnering with the private sector.

WHY DO STATE ARTS ACTION NETWORK MEMBERS PARTNER WITH BUSINESSES?

SAAN members do not work solely in the public sector—they are also advancing their advocacy and programming through mutually-beneficial partnerships with the private sector. Some reasons why SAAN members endorse partnering with business:

- Receiving financial support when co-hosting arts events with businesses
- Connecting lawyers or financial advisors to artists in SAAN members' networks
- Gaining access to lobbyists and business leaders who testify on behalf of the arts
- Increasing visibility to expand audiences for arts advocacy efforts
- Building capacity through co-hosting arts leadership development programming or receiving arts programming support



WHY DO BUSINESSES PARTNER WITH STATE ARTS ACTION NETWORK MEMBERS?

Any successful relationship is a two-way street. Businesses actively engage in partnerships with the arts when they have good reasons to do so. Several of these reasons include:

- Connecting with the community beyond their standard customer base
- Creating leadership opportunities for their employees and executives on arts and cultural boards
- Increasing visibility for branding, marketing, and recruitment efforts
- Building corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives

More benefits of arts and business partnerships can be found through the pARTnership Movement's [8 reasons to partner with the arts](#).

HOW TO GET STARTED

Initiating a private sector partnership may seem daunting, but starting one is easier than you might think. Many strong relationships were built off these early steps:

Do some research

Look for businesses that you believe would be open to partnerships. Try to gauge their capacity and resources for the partnership and see if their goals, values, and priorities align with yours. Half the battle of forming partnerships with the private sector is choosing the right business to work with.

SAAN MEMBERS ARE VERY STRATEGIC WHEN IT COMES TO WORKING WITH STATE LEGISLATORS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS. THEY NEED TO BE JUST AS SELECTIVE WHEN DEALING WITH BUSINESSES.

– Linda Woggon of [Ohio Citizens for the Arts](#) and former Ohio Chamber of Commerce executive



Look to your board

Whether it is a Board of Directors or a Board of Trustees, members of boards may have preexisting relationships with businesses that can lead to potential relationships. Reach out to your boards and ask about potential contacts that can help arrange a phone call or meeting.

Through developing a trustee's relationship, [Maryland Citizens for the Arts](#) was able to achieve a partnership with a construction firm which helped the organization renovate many arts spaces. Another strong partnership was established with [PNC Bank](#) by building on a board member's previous connection and the desire to help artists with good financial practices.

Recruit members of the business community

If you do not have board members with preexisting relationships, it is not too late to recruit new ones. Search for businesses that you are interested in and try to recruit them for leadership positions on your board. For instance, the [Hawai'i Arts Alliance](#) approached [Halekulani](#), a five star Oceanside resort, to host an awards event and recruited Halekulani's general manager to be a member of the alliance's board.

Be optimistic

Engaging businesses may seem daunting to arts groups, but having an optimistic attitude when approaching them can result in strong and rewarding partnerships. Understanding that relationships need to be mutually beneficial helps create a culture of trust and transparency.

BUSINESSES ARE NOT BAD! GET PAST THAT. THERE ARE GOING TO BE PLACES WHERE YOU ARE AT ODDS. ARTS GROUPS NEED TO FIGURE OUT OTHER CONNECTIONS AND CHANGE ATTITUDES.

– In a conversation with Linda Woggon of Ohio Citizens for the Arts



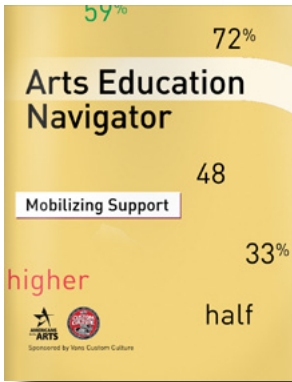
TIPS FOR ESTABLISHING SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Check your legal status

- Is your organization a 501(c)(3) or a 501(c)(4)? Corporations are wary of, or completely avoid, working with political advocacy groups. [Missouri Citizens for the Arts](#) started with this mindset, but creatively gained corporate support for advancing the arts by creating the [Missouri for the Arts Education Fund](#), which gained 501(c)(3) legal status. By focusing fundraising and partnership efforts on the education fund while still operating its 501(c)(4), Missouri Citizens for the Arts was able to gain a foothold in the private sector.
- [Californians for the Arts](#) had a similar experience:

OUR 501(c)(4) STATUS HAMSTRUNG THE ORGANIZATION BECAUSE IT COULDN'T RECEIVE GRANTS FROM FOUNDATIONS AND STATE ORGANIZATIONS. FIVE YEARS AGO, WE INCORPORATED A 501(c)(3).

– In an interview with Sofia Klatzker, Brad Erickson, and Rick Stein of Californians for the Arts



For more information on 501(c)3s and 501(c)4s, check out Americans for the Arts' [Arts Education Navigator: Mobilizing Support](#) e-book.

- It is important to note that there are many SAAN members who only have a 501(c)(4) status and also have exemplary partnerships with businesses.



Find a partner that is on the same page as you

The key to starting or developing a healthy relationship is aligning goals, priorities, and values so that a mutually beneficial partnership is possible. Transparency and being proactive about addressing failure is imperative.

IT'S NOT ANY DIFFERENT FROM ANOTHER RELATIONSHIP – SITTING DOWN TOGETHER, FINDING COMMON GROUND, WORKING ON HONESTY, TRANSPARENCY, ADMITTING WHEN THINGS DON'T GO RIGHT. LOOK AT WHAT DIDN'T WORK AND FIX IT...CONSTANT EVALUATION AND CONSTANT PLANNING.

– Anne Katz of [Arts Wisconsin](#)

Research initiatives and network projects are great ways to find partners

Starting projects that require the input of and provide information for various stakeholders in the business community are great ways to connect with potential partners.

For instance, the [Vermont Arts Council](#) is currently building the [Vermont Creative Network](#), composed of any individual involved in the creative economy from non-profits to for-profits to individuals. In this project, the Vermont Arts Council is working with the [Downtown Main Street Program](#), [Regional Development Corps](#), [Department of Libraries](#), [Champlain College](#), and the non-profit [Common Good Vermont](#). Another set of examples are [initiatives](#) started by [ArtPride NJ](#) in New Jersey.

Understand how businesses give money

If you are looking for financial support from businesses, it is important to understand how their giving programs work. You should be in active conversation with businesses you are interested in and should be familiar with what financial programs they offer as well as their limitations.

For instance, Maryland Citizens for the Arts understands the limitations of its partnership with PNC Bank. Their particular PNC partner covers Eastern and Central Maryland but does not reach the western region of the state, which is part of a separate PNC region that also includes Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Thus, Maryland Citizens for the Arts can face challenges when seeking funding for programs which go over its PNC partner's regional dividing line. Another related tip comes from the Vermont Arts Council, which advocates prioritizing the sharing of information over asking for cash.

“VERMONT HAS THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF NON-PROFITS PER CAPITA...WE HAVE LEARNED THAT IF YOU WANT MONEY, ASK FOR PEOPLE’S ADVICE.”

– Zon Eastes of Vermont Arts Council

Remember that there are benefits beyond money

Funding is not always the most advantageous path to a long-term relationship with businesses. Many model partnerships came from sparking interest and sharing existing resources.

Californians for the Arts' ongoing partnership with [Boeing](#) serves as a perfect example. The relationship started when a Boeing representative offered to help make an appointment with a congressman after learning about arts advocacy. Soon after, Boeing provided Californians for the Arts with their own consulting lobbyist at a reduced cost and then began to provide funding for receptions with legislators and arts groups. Exploring non-monetary relationships by utilizing existing infrastructure such as lobbyists or printing materials opens new doors for relationships.



“WE THOUGHT THERE ARE MAJOR BUSINESSES THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL IN GAINING ACCESS TO OFFICIALS AND HAVE POWER. WE OFTEN LOOK TO BUSINESSES FIRST FOR MONEY...OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH BOEING WAS INITIATED OVER INFLUENCE AND NOT MONEY.”

– In an interview with Sofia Klatzker, Brad Erickson, and Rick Stein of Californians for the Arts

Use your board strategically

Building a board that includes members of the business community is a well-established method of connecting with businesses and fostering relationships. Several SAAN members mentioned strategically recruiting for their boards.

Having a publishing house director on board, for instance, makes low-cost or pro bono printing of materials more of a possibility. Additionally, Hawai'i Arts Alliance believes in the importance of including leadership from other arts non-profits on its board. Having arts leaders from other arts groups or non-profits minimizes the challenges from competition when forming relationships with businesses.

Get in touch with chambers of commerce and the tourism industry

Chambers of commerce and members of the tourism industry are often great entities to form relationships with because both have an interest in economic development and destination marketing. In fact, in smaller towns, the chamber of commerce often functions as the tourism board. Organic relationships can form from this shared interest in the arts.



Start at the bottom

Often, arts organizations feel that forming relationships with businesses can only occur through discussions with directors and managers. This is not the case. It is very advantageous to build a relationship with a lower level ally in a company to help cultivate the connection from the bottom up. Reach out to anyone involved in a company's community outreach or development departments. The same bottom-up approach applies beyond forming contacts – not every program or initiative needs to start at the highest level.

“REMEMBER THINGS HAPPEN ON THE LOCAL LEVEL, WORKING FROM THE BOTTOM UP. ALWAYS WORKING TOP DOWN CAN BE A BIT TOO BIG.”

– Anne Marie Miller of ArtPride NJ

Practice consistent communication

Constant communication is difficult but necessary for the sustainability of any relationship. Whether it is a quick meeting or a phone call, staying in touch and staying up-to-date on one another's goals and programs is very important.

Use data to your advantage

Present businesses with the hard data on the economic impact of the arts and the advantages of tapping into the arts industry. Use national data from Americans for the Arts' [Arts and Economic Prosperity IV Report](#). Resources within your state or region may also be available. For instance, [ArtsFund](#) and the [Colorado Business Committee for the Arts](#) publish regular studies on the economic impact of the arts in the greater Seattle and Denver regions, respectively. If you are interested in pursuing the development of such research in your community, [Americans for the Arts offers customized survey services](#).



Keep on trying

Opportunities and opinions change quickly. If you are met with obstacles when trying to form a partnership with a business, remember that you may just need to wait for the right person or the right time. Trying again after denial is the best way to find that ideal situation for a relationship.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIONS

Business Awards

Hosting awards for businesses doing great work to support the arts not only properly honors progress and partnerships between the arts and business, but also increases general visibility for the arts, your arts organization, and the benefits of arts relationships. Arts Wisconsin hosts an annual [Arts in the Community Awards](#), which honors civic and business leaders, as well as individuals who have championed the arts as integral to economic, educational, and community vitality. Past winners have included chambers of commerce and newspapers. Each year Americans for the Arts holds the [BCA 10](#), a business awards gala that recognizes the top ten national businesses who have shown exemplary support of the arts.

Seminars and Conferences

Co-hosting seminars or conferences to spread good practices for the arts and business are popular methods of relationship building. Informational sessions help boost visibility and provide invaluable resources to arts groups and businesses alike. Maryland Citizens for the Arts recently co-hosted a [Mind Your Business](#) event in partnership with PNC Bank, [Maryland Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts](#), Maryland Citizens for the Arts, [St. Mary's County Arts Council](#), and the [Leonardtowntown Arts & Entertainment District](#) to help Maryland's arts groups better navigate budgets, cash flow, copyright, and insurance.



Networking Events

Co-hosting networking events is a great way to encourage relationships between arts and business. Many SAAN members take the opportunity to advance advocacy efforts through facilitating networking events. Missouri Citizens for the Arts recently started a [State of the Arts](#) initiative with businesses in which prominent arts groups and business members attend a happy hour networking event with legislators with the overall goal of sparking support for the arts and making the advocacy process less intimidating. The event has resulted in increased attendance at legislative advocacy days by arts and business members as well as legislators.

PARTNERSHIPS TO TAKE PRIDE IN: ARTPRIDE NJ

ArtPride NJ has started and continues to develop two unique programs that have unified the arts and business in New Jersey:

[Arts on the Road](#) – A program that consolidates information about tourism through the lens of the arts. It was designed to unify arts district assets by pulling together galleries, hotels, and restaurants on Long Beach Island. Business partners include the Southern Ocean County Regional Chamber of Commerce and downtown associations in Trenton.

[Art Matters](#) – A growing set of two to three minute-long videos of arts and business relationships told by business and government leaders. The videos help explain and encourage connections for arts groups and businesses with a focus on bringing different voices to the table.



Community Initiatives

Community initiatives can take many forms. Two particularly effective collaborations reported by SAAN members are tourism projects and research networks.

Because tourism can spark many organic programs involving the arts, highlighting the relationship between businesses and the arts creates an environment that is attractive to visitors. Advertising these interconnected communities draws tourists and supports local economies.

Research initiatives are also great starting points to form a wide array of relationships. Arts organizations can partner with the private sector to collect data for reports such as economic impact studies, or have business leaders testify on behalf of the positive impact of the arts for anecdotal support. Proactively engaging the community through the lens of research can add new branches to networks of arts and business professionals. [Minnesota Citizens for the Arts](#) is a lead partner in the [Creative Minnesota](#) report, which engages businesses and stakeholders across the state in an effort to bring different voices to the table and collect vital data.

“WE WERE HAVING THE SAME CONVERSATIONS WITH DIFFERENT PEOPLE ABOUT THE LACK OF DATA – IT WAS A PROBLEM FOR EVERYONE BECAUSE WE ALL NEEDED THE SAME DATA, THE SAME PRODUCT.”

– Sheila Smith, *Minnesota Citizens for the Arts*

Case Studies

Information for this tool-kit was synthesized via phone interviews with the leaders of State Arts Action Network members around the nation. Participants include: Linda Woggon of Ohio Citizens for the Arts (OH), Zon Eastes of Vermont Arts Council (VT), John Schratwieser of Maryland Citizens for the Arts (MD), Anne Katz of Arts Wisconsin (WI), Michelle Ochonicky of Missouri Citizens for the Arts (MO), Anne Marie Miller of ArtPride NJ (NJ), Marilyn Cristofori of Hawai'i Arts Alliance (HI), Sheila Smith of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts (MN), and Sofia Klatzker, Brad Erickson, and Rick Stein of Californians for the Arts (CA). Additional information was gathered from the websites of [ArtsFund](#) and the [Colorado Business Committee for the Arts](#).



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Americans for the Arts Resources

- [State Arts Action Network](#)
- [The pARTnership Movement News](#)
- [Chambers of Commerce ArtsBlog Post](#)
- [Arts & Economic Prosperity IV Report](#)
- [Building Partnerships on Your Own Tool-Kit](#)
- [Business Speak Tool-Kit](#)
- [Creative Industries Reports Tool-Kit](#)

External Resources

- [Creative Minnesota Study and Partners](#)
- [Michigan House Collaboration](#)
- [Creative Many Michigan Creative Industries Report](#)
- [ArtsFund Seattle 2014 Economic Impact Study](#)
- [Colorado Business Committee for the Arts 2016 Economic Activity Study](#)

Want more information about business support of the arts? Read the [BCA Survey of Business Support for the Arts](#). To learn more about private sector partnerships with the arts, visit the [pARTnership Movement](#), an initiative from [Americans for the Arts](#) designed to reach business leaders with the message that partnering with the arts can build their competitive advantage.

