

Arts in the California Governor's Race

Report of Phase One Activity: August 11, 2010 through November 4, 2010

by Brad Erickson, Executive Director, California Arts Alliance and
Anthony Radich, Executive Director, WESTAF

Introduction

Last spring, arts advocates in California were considering the governor's race and how the arts would fare in the post-November gubernatorial election. Unfortunately, there was no organized effort being mounted to address the needs of the arts in that contest. In response to this lack of action, blogger and former California Arts Council director Barry Hessenius launched a series of informal communications with arts leaders in California. His message was two-fold: 1) The arts community in California will be sorry if it sits out the election and then tries to influence the winning candidate on behalf of the arts and 2) While California's arts community would need to make an impression on the candidates and the group should aim at making a significant impression, even a modest impact would benefit the arts with the winning candidate, and would have the added bonus of reinvigorating arts advocacy with the field, and the cooperation of the state's various advocacy factions. Through Hessenius' efforts, a broad-based steering committee was assembled and the project was launched.

The Coalition

The coalition that was assembled to guide the project included arts leaders from across California--representatives of municipal agencies, foundations, arts advocacy groups, arts education groups and certain arts discipline organizations, together with representatives from artist service providers and unions, and the state's convention and visitors bureaus. Time constraints inhibited efforts to secure adequate representation from the Inland Empire and the more rural regions of the state. Future work by the group will include a more aggressive effort to secure representation from those areas.

The members of the project steering committee were: Michael Alexander, executive director, Grand Performances, Los Angeles; Holly Austin, executive director, Del Norte Association for Cultural Awareness, Crescent City; Tomas Benitez, board member, Latino Arts Network, Los Angeles; Danielle Brazell, executive director, Arts for LA, Los Angeles; Deborah Cullinan, executive director, Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco; Bruce Davis, executive director, Arts Council Silicon Valley, San Jose; Brad Erickson, executive director, Theatre Bay Area, San Francisco; Adam Fong, Emerging Arts Professionals – SFBA, San Francisco; Victoria Hamilton, executive director, San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture, San Diego; Lisa Hasenbalg, director, Arts and Culture Marketing, San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau, San Francisco; Barry Hessenius, editor, *Barry's Blog*, Marin County; Michael McDowell, Senior Director, Cultural Tourism, LA INC. - The Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau, Los Angeles; Ebony McKinney, executive director, Emerging Arts Professionals – SFBA, San Francisco; Keith McNutt, Director, Western Region, The Actors Fund, Los Angeles; Cora Mirikitani, president and CEO, Center for Cultural Innovation, Los Angeles; Chike Nwoffiah, executive director, Oriki Theater, Mountain View; Nina Ozlu Tunceli, chief counsel, Americans

for the Arts, Washington DC; Frances Phillips, Writer, San Francisco; Laurie Schell, executive director, California Alliance for Arts Education, Pasadena; Mark Slavkin, vice president for education, Los Angeles Music Center, Los Angeles; and Dalouge Smith, president and CEO, San Diego Youth Symphony, San Diego.

The Project Vision Statement

A critical action of the project steering committee was the development of an inclusive and compelling vision statement. Steering committee member Mark Slavkin was instrumental in the crafting of the draft, and an in-person meeting of the steering committee convened in Los Angeles resulted in the development of the following statement:

Making California Great: An Agenda for California's Creative Future

For all our many challenges, California has two core assets that provide us an invaluable competitive advantage – our creative economy and our quality of life. Preserving, strengthening, and enhancing these assets are key to shaping a bright future.

Creative Economy

California is the creative capital of the world. The future is invented here. From Hollywood to Silicon Valley, California is home to industries defined by creativity, imagination, and innovation. Whether it is the latest 3-D movie, the iPad, or the latest advancement in scientific research, our state is fueled by creativity. At a time of intense competition from other states and other nations, California cannot take its creative economy for granted. We need to be proactive to leverage this amazing asset and prevent other states from passing us by.

Policy Priorities:

- **Creative students.** *From pre-school through high school, community colleges, and universities, we need a seamless educational system that fosters imagination and innovation, not simply “bubbling-in the one right answer.” Students need opportunities to cultivate their creativity and problem-solving skills through quality programs that include the arts, science, and technology.*
- **Creative Schools.** *World class K-12 schools that combine the basics with a truly well-rounded curriculum. We need a revised framework for school accountability that encourages and rewards schools for achievement in all core subjects, not only reading and math.*
- **Creative Workers.** *Job training programs that prepare workers of all ages for employment in the arts, entertainment, and all creative sectors. A highly skilled California workforce is essential to keeping jobs in the creative economy here. High schools, regional occupational centers, community colleges, and the private sector all have critical roles to play to give current and future workers the skills that will allow them to be successful in careers in our creative economy.*
- **Creative Economy.** *Economic policies that reward and encourage the creative industries, artists, and other creative entrepreneurs to stay in California. As we have seen with “runaway film production,” California does not have a monopoly on attracting the entertainment industry. We must be proactive in creating and sustaining a positive business climate for the creative industries to thrive.*

Quality of Life

Californians are blessed to live with the amazing weather and natural beauty of our state. We are also fortunate to be surrounded by arts and cultural landmarks and institutions that are truly world renown. These assets draw tourists from around the globe and define California as a special place to live and work.

- **Creative Tourism.** *We need to encourage and promote cultural tourism as a key economic driver for California. We cannot take for granted the many nonprofit arts and cultural organizations that contribute to*

making California a global attraction and cultivate healthy and dynamic local communities. We need a new framework that leverages public and private resources to support and sustain a vibrant arts sector.

- **Creative Communities.** *At the neighborhood level, arts and cultural opportunities help build stronger communities. From the church choir to the local art gallery to a major concert hall, the arts bring diverse people together to celebrate our common values and aspirations. From pre-schoolers to teens to seniors, everyone benefits when we come together to better understand and share our rich cultural diversity. After-school arts programs provide a safe and supervised environment to nurture the talents of our young people and provide a positive alternative to the pull of gangs and other forces that undermine our neighborhoods. We need real partnerships between the state and local governments, and the private sector that help promote healthy communities through positive engagement with the arts and cultural resources of California.*

Deploying a Field Activist

The project steering committee concluded that the project demanded a full-time field activist to implement the game plan, coordinate logistics and conduct outreach to the wider arts field. A request for proposals was distributed and Jacqueline Koppell was hired. Koppell is currently a resident of Los Angeles and is engaged in screen writing and comedy presentation endeavors. Her political experience comes largely from her being a politically active member of the campaigns of her father--New York City Councilman Oliver Koppell. She was selected for her knowledge of the political process and her ability to be both creative and politely persistent. Over the course of a three month tenure, Koppell worked daily with the steering committee members to realize the steps in the long-range plan.

The Technology Strategy

Contemporary technology tools were used to further the reach of the campaign. Key tools included: 1) An interactive Arts in the California Governor's Race Web site; 2) Use of Twitter messaging; 3) Use of Facebook for networking and messaging and 4) Email messaging to steering committee listservs via use of electronic advocacy tools to drive messages and letters to the candidates and their campaign staffs. The process generated 1,390 Facebook fans and 1,296 letters.

Press

A concerted effort was made to secure editorial and/or op-ed page support from the state's major daily newspapers in San Diego, Los Angeles, Fresno, San Jose, San Francisco, and Sacramento. Time constraints and the demands of other interest groups in the state resulted in no editorial and/or op-ed support--but valuable contacts with editorial boards at the above newspapers were re-established and should be invaluable in the future.

The most visible press coverage of the effort was an article penned by columnist Christopher Knight in the *Los Angeles Times*. The article announced the existence of the group and the effort. News of the project was also picked up and distributed by media outlets such as *E-Newswire* news service, *Non-Profit Quarterly*, and *LA Stage Times*. In addition, thanks to a generous contribution, the project was also featured in more than 100,000 copies of *Performances and Footlights* magazine.

Other Important Activities

With the assistance of Field Activist Jacqueline Koppell, the project had a number of other successes:

- Fund raising and project networking events in six communities from Eureka to San Diego, which not only raised funds but were instrumental in effecting local buy-in to the project and expansion of the grass roots interest in the effort and advocacy in general.
- Active and repeated contacts, intersections and communications with the senior staff of both the Brown and Whitman campaigns, which educated, informed and expanded the awareness of the candidates as to the issues facing the nonprofit arts sector .
- An active insider effort to place a question about the arts in the three debates. Though ultimately not successful, the efforts reached the debate moderator in one of the three debates and the debate committee level in another.
- Contact with approximately 10 key financial supporters of the candidates with successful requests that they approach the candidates and note the importance of the arts.
- Secured the services of public affairs consultant Joe Rodota of Forward Observer in Sacramento. Rodota helped direct the group's overall strategy, especially its timing of messaging with candidates and its strategy for influencing the candidates. Rodota provided the steering committee with valuable insights into the operations of the campaigns, especially the campaign of Republican nominee Meg Whitman. His participation elevated the level of sophistication of the campaign in the minds of the steering committee and helped to educate and inform the members of that committee as to the changing California political realities at play.
- Secured the endorsement of 85 cultural organizations for the project.
- The establishment of Arts in the California Governor's Race committees in five cities.
- Sponsorship of a committee that worked on a series of recommendations that the steering committee will bring to the attention of governor-elect Brown.

Next Steps

The next major step in the project is the scheduling of a meeting with Governor-elect Brown during which a delegation composed of people who are arts supportive and whom have a long history with the Governor-elect. He will be asked to: 1) establish a task force to explore ways to develop California's nonprofit arts and creative economy; 2) work with the arts community to broaden geographic, age and diversity representation on the California Arts Council via his power of appointment to fill vacancies on the council; and 3) Provide a preview of how and when the state's commitment to arts education and the arts might be once again funded at an adequate level and otherwise supported by the state.

Following the meeting with Brown, the project steering committee will work to broaden and deepen the coalition that worked in the effort so as to maintain open lines of communication and cooperation between the various extant advocacy and arts education groups within the state. WESTAF will continue to work with the group on a California issues-based symposium that will support the interests of the arts and creative economy community in California. Finally, the group is prepared to work with the new governor to structure and support the futures-oriented task force.

Thank You!

The Arts in the California Governor's Race project was supported by donors large and small. The online donation button on the project Web site generated a high number of individual donations, the events in the six cities provided more income for the effort, the members of the steering committee were generous as individuals in their financial support and their organizations were also generous contributors. Finally, Americans for the Arts and WESTAF supplied significant funds to underwrite the effort. Together, the project was completed with a slight positive balance in the treasury. Thanks to all who gave!

Contact Information

For additional information about this project, please contact:

Laurel Sherman at Laurel.Sherman@WESTAF.org / 303-629-1166 or
Brad Erickson, President, California Arts Advocates
at Brad@theatrebayarea.org / 415-430-1140

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