



New England Accessibility Institute, August 3 & 4 Portsmouth, NH

NEFA, in partnership with the NEA, hosted one of several regional Accessibility Institutes in the summer of 2004. More than 40 participants gathered in Portsmouth, New Hampshire for two days of discussion and planning around improving accessibility in the cultural community. Discussion focused on topics like creativity and aging, art in healthcare, universal design, strategic planning, and next steps for improving access among New England's state arts agencies. In the "next steps" discussion, the group prioritized where NEFA could be of most help in their efforts. The top three priorities identified for NEFA's attention were information exchange (marketing, use of language, technical support, model programs, speakers, training, and funding), convening meetings of the ADA coordinators plus one additional staff person from each state arts agency, and hosting staff training for the state arts agencies. As a follow-up to this meeting, NEFA plans to host a training for the ADA coordinators around web accessibility in the next few months. Below are the action-steps that each state arts agency defined for themselves and the ways in which NEFA could provide support for their goals.

State-by-state actions:

Massachusetts

1. Convene SAA ADA coordinators to provide support and combat isolation. Coordinators should each bring one other staff person to these meetings.
2. Facilitate coordinators sharing their work through listservs or e-newsletter.
3. Host VSA training for State Arts Agency staffs.
4. Use the upcoming VSA conference on November 9th in Massachusetts to improve Massachusetts' database of performers with disabilities.
5. Create an "artists in residence" program for schools.
6. Monitor organizations that both the MCC and VSA work with.

Connecticut

1. Develop ways to improve accessibility on the CT Commission on Culture and Tourism's website (to go above and beyond the minimum state standards).
2. Help prioritize access in the Governor's office
3. Share lists among the state arts agencies of artists with disabilities and vice versa.

Maine

1. Assemble an advisory board from the broader community – not only arts organizations. Include community members with disabilities. These community members should be involved in strategic planning with Maine Arts Commission (MAC).
2. Link the MAC with organized groups of older citizens.
3. Pilot a project linking arts and healthcare.
4. Organize training sessions for state arts agency staff (request for NEFA to facilitate this).

New Hampshire

1. Apply for NEA funding under the "careers for artists with disabilities" program.
2. Survey to locate artists with disabilities and determine what they need.
3. Update guidelines and include more detail about ADA requirements.

4. Offer funding for emerging artists with disabilities.
5. Specify ADA work in the strategic planning process.
6. Include a checklist on application forms for artists with disabilities to identify themselves.
7. Offer a workshop for artists on working with students with disabilities at the upcoming meeting of the New England Consortium of Artist Professionals (NECAP).
5. Organize training sessions for state arts agency staff or meetings for the ADA coordinators (request for NEFA to facilitate this).

Rhode Island

1. Report to staff on the Accessibility Institute (August 3rd - 4th, 2004).
2. Incorporate lessons learned from this institute into the strategic planning process.
3. Market artists with disabilities to schools.
4. Separate out the education roster and include information on different types of available training and workshops.

Vermont

1. Use the Axis Dance Company Tour of the region to get more presenters and teachers involved in the program.
2. Act as a distribution center for information on access.
3. Increase networking capacity.
4. Increase access to historical places.
5. Conduct a survey to identify artists with disabilities in Vermont.
6. Convene regional meetings to discuss accessibility (request for NEFA to facilitate this).

NEFA

1. Investigate opportunities for regional fundraising for Accessibility projects with corporations or foundations.
2. Model Ohio Arts Council or New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) for their available online resources.
3. Centralize efforts & pool resources.
4. Host meetings for touring coordinators with accessibility as a topic.
5. Distribute list of all Institute participants.
6. Incorporate a question in the New England Cultural Database (NECD) annual survey to collect information on artists with disabilities or organizations that work specifically with people with disabilities. For example: "do you have experience working with the deaf?"
7. Create section for access on the NEFA website with links and resources available on the NEA website.

Priorities for NEFA to facilitate

The top three areas where NEFA can be of most help to the state arts agencies (as determined by vote) are the following:

1. Information exchange – marketing, use of language, technical support, model programs, speakers, training, and funding.
2. Convening meetings of the ADA coordinators plus one additional staff person from each state arts agency.
3. Hosting staff training for the state arts agencies.

Next Steps:

NEFA is hosting a meeting of ADA coordinators and other SAA staff to discuss access and technology.