



## Board Meeting Minutes

July 9-10, 2014

Allbritton Center, Wesleyan University  
Middletown, CT

*Board Members Present* – Larry Simpson (Chair), Alex Aldrich, Byron Champlin, Andrew Cornell, Amy Ellsworth, Daniel Forrest, Jane James, Ted Landsmark, Julie Richard, Andrea Rogers, Randall Rosenbaum

*Staff Present* – Steven Fenton, Sarah Long Holland, Sara Nash, Laura Paul, Adrienne Petrillo, Jane Preston, Dee Schneidman, Quita Sullivan, Ann Wicks

*Guests*–Barbara Ally, Camille Brown, Chris Dwyer, Cassandra Mason, Pamela Tatge

*Notetaker* – Steven Fenton

***Prior to calling the meeting to order, Board Chair Larry Simpson asked Executive Director Search Committee Chair, Andrew Cornell, to introduce search consultant Sandi Haynes to the board for a conversation over lunch.***

**LARRY SIMPSON CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 1:46 PM**

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Chair Larry Simpson greeted the room and expressed how happy he was to see everyone. The meeting marks his first visit to Wesleyan University. Larry took a moment to welcome Cassie Mason, Chief Grants Officer for the New Hampshire State Council on Arts (NHSCA), who has been a great friend to NEFA.

### **Approval of the May 2014 Board Meeting Minutes**

Larry asked if there were any comments about the minutes from the previous meeting. No corrections were offered.

***Randy Rosenbaum made a motion to approve the May 1, 2014 board meeting minutes. Alex Aldrich seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.***

### **Search Committee Report**

In lieu of a report, Andrew Cornell asked the board for feedback on the informal conversation with Sandi's over lunch prior to the meeting. The board felt Sandi accurately conceptualized the challenges and opportunities for NEFA. Board members asked about how they may share input during the search process. Alex Aldrich welcomed board feedback, especially if it is specific and actionable. He reported there is still a window to circulate the position description. He estimated they will be accepting applications until the middle of August. Sandi's initial filter will guarantee candidates meet the basic qualifications for the position. She and the committee will review whether candidates reflect the input offered by the board and staff. The challenge comes in balancing NEFA's needs and desires with the skills, experiences, and ambitions of the individuals. Byron Champlin felt it is the job of the board to promote the position and assure it gets in front of qualified candidates.

Larry Simpson asked to take a few steps back to address this being the first meeting of the board since the passing of Rebecca Blunk. Larry commended the board and staff on responding to this tremendous loss in a magnificent way. Nobody wanted to be at this crossroads, searching for a new executive director, but there is a need for leadership and the process will bear fruit. Larry acknowledged the support of the board and staff in continuing to move forward with this work.

### **Trustees Report**

The trustees committee had a quiet year. Andrea Rogers noted a third of the board has been serving since 1996. As this group represents such a large portion of the board, members agreed to renewals for one to two years to stagger class assignments. The committee will work with the new executive director to fill out the vacant third of the board.

Andrea reviewed the roster for reelection: Mary Kelley, John Plukas and herself, nominated for one-year renewals; and Sandra Burton and Ted Landsmark, recommended for two-year renewals. The current slate



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of officers, Larry Simpson, Andrew Cornell, John Plukas and Byron Champlin are nominated to continue in their positions.

***Daniel Forrest made a motion to approve the nominations and officer elections as stated. Randy Rosenbaum seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.***

The bylaws make provision for 2 board members to serve as at-large members of the executive committee. Randy Rosenbaum and Andrea Rogers were nominated for these positions.

***Andrew Cornell made a motion to approve the nominations of executive committee members at-large. Byron Champlin seconded the motion. The motion was unanimous.***

There was discomfort with the difficulty of finding new board members. Larry Simpson predicted the board will not be having this same conversation in a year. A new executive director will bring new energy, new vision, new ideas, and especially, new thoughts about who to bring onto the board. Andrea felt the board needs to consider how to engage people and aim to do so early. New leadership will help inspire the direction of the trustees committee and how it engages people with philanthropic interests. Andrew Cornell mentioned it took him a few years to get past "NEFA theoretical." Attending NEFA sponsored events gave him a sense of NEFA's values and he felt it should be a requirement for membership.

### **Finance Report**

Before delving into the finance report, Laura Paul and Jane Preston thanked the board and staff for their tremendous support over the last year. The decision to meet four times in FY14 proved extremely valuable in a year of unexpected transition with Rebecca. The board book that was distributed prior to the meeting included the final projections for FY14. She mentioned the auditors had been on site all week and will conclude their work shortly. Part of the reasoning for this aggressive schedule is the funder reporting required in August.

A draft operating reserve policy had been prepared for the discussion, but since no representatives from the finance committee were present, it was agreed that the conversation should be tabled until December. Laura drew the board's attention to the FY14 spending summary and balance sheet. NEFA was able to spend a little more in 14 than budgeted due to additional funding carried over from the prior year. Administration costs are projected to be under budget, due to fluctuations in compensation costs, including a few positions which were temporarily frozen that have now been filled. That \$55k of underspending cannot go away; it is not a savings and is in fact critical to the base budget. FY14 was a good year in terms of fundraising & development with multi-year renewals of funding from Mellon and Duke.

Randy Rosenbaum inquired about the unaudited cash figure at the end of April, which is \$3.5m larger than previous years. He asked if NEFA is poised to spend that amount quickly. Laura explained the figure reflects grant payments received in April and that \$3.2m was moved into treasuries in May.

The proposed budget for FY15 represents robust baseline activity for New England Presenting and Touring (NEPT) programs, including an additional initiative supported by NEA Folk and Traditional Arts. More detail on this will follow in the conversation later in the day about New England programs planning. Public Art includes the Public Arts Discussion Series (PADS). The Native Arts budget covers planning activity and transition costs and will be discussed in greater depth during the New England programs planning process section of our agenda. Center Stage is in the culminating year of the multi-year program, with the bulk of the program expenses occurring around the ensemble tours which began in June and will continue through November. Creative Economy includes work on CreativeGround and networking and planning activity for the next Creative Communities Exchange (CCX) which will take place in June FY16. The Sponsored Projects line includes the ArtistLink program, a project of MCC.



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Compensation and benefits shows a 9% increase from the FY14 approved budget to this year. At first glance that seems like a high increase. The finance committee had a long conversation regarding the cause here. The factors are that the increases accrued. Positions were frozen at the start of FY14 that were filled over the year which caused a 3% increase for the year. This proposes baseline annual increase across staff of 2%, which didn't happen last year. The increase also includes adjustments for parity within ranges. NEFA is attempting to get salaries closer to market midpoint, particularly at the coordinator/associate level. This will eventually flow upward into manager salaries. There is room for a 2% increase plus some adjustments where there is room. This also accounts for a slight increase in benefits costs.

Andrea Rogers felt this was a very modest increase and argued that the adjustment piece is important and should be understood as a progressive approach. NEFA has had trouble keeping talented staff at the bottom tier because the salaries have not been competitive. Laura agreed with Andrea and assured the group this is something that she, Jane and Rebecca have been discussing for the past several years.

Continuing, Laura noted the General/Administration line is not materially different from FY14, and the communications and development budget is still very lean. Our plan given market rates is to renew our lease on current office space at 145 Tremont in early fall. Other items noted included the balance of costs for the executive director search which will fall in this year, and the fact that the proposed budget does not reflect any change in the executive director salary.

In terms of funding, just 20% of the FY15 revenue is projected. Not included is a pilot program which we will propose to the Barr Foundation at their invitation, later this summer. This program/proposal was discussed at the May 1 board meeting and will be for \$1.5m grant for a 3.5 year grant period. Randy Rosenbaum asked if there is a rule of thumb or policy related to figuring how to charge overhead.

Laura explained direct costs trigger the allocation of costs of overhead. The amount is calculated and tested with the funder.

Julie Richard asked if the \$21,533 figure in FY14 projected actual "earned & contributed income" is made up of contributions or if any of it is earned.

Laura responded that this year, all of it is earned largely due to CCX event registration fees. This budget is a spending summary which shows only income that is used to fund this year's activity, as opposed to the total, which is reflected on the Statement of Activity (income statement) of the audited financial statements.

***Byron Champlin made a motion to approve the FY15 Budget. Alex Aldrich seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.***

### **Development Report**

As of Monday, July 7th, forty-five donations had been made to the Rebecca Blunk fund. Jane James suggested if any board members receive queries about doing something in honor of Rebecca, they should be directed to the fund. Board members should contact Development Manager Sarah Long Holland for more specific information. Jane also encouraged members to attend more NEFA sponsored events.

Sarah Long Holland added the outpouring of support and engagement with the fund has been extremely meaningful to Rebecca's spouse. Before her passing, Sarah and others at NEFA spoke with Rebecca about how the fund should be focused and it was important to her it go toward artistic creation. Further details about the direction will be discussed.

Alex Aldrich suggested the Rebecca Blunk Fund could be an opportunity for recognition. Someone could be a recipient of the "Rebecca Blunk Fund" or "Award," for something reflecting Rebecca's personality or passions. It would draw attention to the fund and encourage continued support. Alex has previously felt



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unclear about his role as a NEFA board member at events and thought it would be helpful if staff prepared 3-4 bullet points to use in conversation. Sarah asked everyone to let her or others know when they may attend an event. The organization would welcome board members speaking on NEFA's behalf and bringing more visibility to the work. She offered to develop speaking points or tips for acting as a NEFA ambassador.

Randy asked whether the board reached 100% participation in the annual fund for FY14. The board is close, but has not hit 100%. Randy reiterated the critical importance of contributing to the fund.

Adrienne Petrillo gave the board a preview of the current Center Stage season, which presents many opportunities for board attendance. The first tour of the 2014 season kicked off in June with Poor Rich Boy, an indie rock band from Pakistan. Their tour began on June 3 in Tiverton, RI, before performing at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and the Lincoln Center in New York. The other six upcoming tours begin in September. They will start in D.C., and then come through New England. Adrienne encouraged board members to get in touch if they would like to attend any performances.

### Signing Authorizations

Larry reminded the board every year they are required to vote to authorize Laura Paul as Assistant Treasurer and Jane Preston as Assistant Secretary to sign checks on behalf of NEFA.

***Randy Rosenbaum made a motion to approve Laura Paul and Jane Preston to sign on behalf of NEFA. Julie Richard seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.***

### Guest Introduction

Larry asked Jane Preston to introduce Chris Dwyer. Chris's history with NEFA goes back a long way. She knows NEFA from many dimensions. In keeping with Sandi's observations, NEFA is taking what it has learned from the national programs to evaluate regional programs; Chris is helping lead that process, which she will be speaking about later in the meeting.

### Discussion on Regional/NEA Partnership

Larry asked Randy Rosenbaum to offer some perspectives from Rhode Island. Randy reported it has been an interesting year in Rhode Island. Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) has a \$30m cultural bond issue, which they are excited about. The state has exempted art sales from sales tax in an effort to brand Rhode Island as an arts buying marketplace. Randy's team is working with both regional tourism entities and the general assembly to attract the art buying public to the state. RISCA is also working with arts educators and healthcare organizations to get arts and artists involved in education and community engagement efforts.

Alex Aldrich reported the Block Island Compact group met on June 11<sup>th</sup>. All six state arts agency (SAA) executive directors and Laura Paul attended. It was a positive and productive meeting. Everyone spoke about what they are excited about and listened to and offered thoughtful comments about challenges and opportunities. The conversation reminded them how important these meetings are to the organizations, the states and the region. Collaborative work in New England needs time and space to cook. NEFA and the SAAs all have their annual agendas, initiatives, and strategic plans. Conversations around collaboration should take shape over the course of a year, so plans can be folded into budget for the coming year. Impediments highlight the important role NEFA plays in these conversations. He sees NEFA as a crucible in which collaborative ideas cook.

Alex voiced his concern over Anita Walker's resignation from the NEFA board. NEFA could, should, and does benefit by having the Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) represented on the board. Larry explained MCC is still technically on the board and NEFA continues to work with them collaboratively and cooperatively outside the board structure. The hope is MCC will eventually return to their seat. The MCC leadership has fundamental issues with NEFA and the structure of the RAO/SAA relationship. A new executive director may be able to address the relationship.



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Julie Richard reported the Maine Arts Commission (MAC) is in the midst of cultural and strategic planning. The community is responding positively to the organization working outside of Augusta. Their grants program has been overhauled, shifting all grants to a single deadline and opening up review meetings to the public in an effort to be more transparent. MAC is finally fully staffed and will be hosting the New England summit on arts education at the end of July. Maine, New Brunswick and Quebec will play host to the World Acadian Congress in August, a 3-week series of cultural events celebrating the traditions of Canadians with French ancestry.

Dan Forrest offered a brief update from Connecticut where they are still facing challenges following a departmental merger. He has witnessed a sea change in policy and his organization's relationship to the field. On the successful end, the arts are at the center of everything the agency does, and are more central to economic development. This change has resulted in a severe drop in grantmaking. Dan felt this has caused arts organizations and grantees to lose confidence in the agency. Many are pleased to see the arts integrated more widely across state programming, but the implementation and policies have been disruptive. The state has put a lot of support out through directed funds in an attempt to get funding directly to high impact, high profile projects to offer more measurable results. Alex wondered if there's a role NEFA could play here by facilitating a conversation with the NEA, AFTA, or NASAA about what is happening and why. Dan agreed something of that scale may be required to impact the current climate, but thought intervening has the potential to backfire.

Cassie Mason announced New Hampshire State Council on the Arts (NHSCA) had appointed Ginnie Lupi as the new executive director. She is wrapping up her work as the executive director of the ARTS Council of the Southern Finger Lakes and will assume her new role in August.

### **Program Updates**

Jane Preston explained the meeting's final hour would prepare the board to discuss establishing a strong ongoing framework for planning and assessing the New England programs. The goal is to identify means to evaluate and continue to refine the programs, taking into account their successes and their challenges. The process will articulate NEFA's core values with regard to program development and delivery and identify priorities that rise to the surface. The staff prepared specific program examples of NEFA's current work as context for the board discussion with Chris on day two of this meeting.

#### *New England Presenting and Touring-Adrienne Petrillo*

The New England States Touring (NEST) program supports New England artists touring across state lines in New England. The Arts Council of Tamworth, NH presented the Boston band Sugar Kings in their community for two days. The band spent time at an elementary school teaching children and offering workshops and performed twice for the school and a third time for the public. They worked with students from ages 5-80, giving lessons in traditional Cuban rhythms and salsa dancing. The program received a hugely positive response from this intergenerational community. The social dancing element struck such a chord in the town they are looking at other opportunities to bring in this type of work. It was a small scale project, in a rural community, with a \$5k budget, but it had a deep impact.

"Expeditions" is a larger scale program, where communities engage artists from outside of New England. One of this tours supported in the past year of "Who's Hungry" confronted issues of food insecurities through an interdisciplinary spectrum of puppets, movement, text, and projection. The Charlestown Working Theater was excited by the project and brought one of the artists, Dan Froot to NEFA's Idea Swap where they spoke to other presenters about creating a tour for his project. Dan visited and presented to communities, engaging deeply with community partners. The project inspired presenter Portland Ovations to create an advisory council which mobilized a piece of legislation to expand school meal options. There are similar stories in everywhere Dan visited.

#### *Fund for the Arts-Jane Preston*

The Fund for the Arts (FFA) awards grants for public art in greater Boston. Most recently, FFA funded a project set in the plaza outside Boston Center for the Arts (BCA) featuring three regulation size ping



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pong tables conjoined to create an oversized community ping pong court. The piece invites passers-by to play while a sound amplification/manipulation system engages bystanders. Even though FFA is provided for by an endowed fund with geographic limitations, the projects are often applicable as models to the region.

### *National Dance Project-Sara Nash*

The Regional Dance Development Initiative (RDDI) began in 2004 as a way to increase the scope and visibility of dance across the country. The program is a ten-day intensive for choreographers and dancemakers primarily focused on professional development and strategy for creating partnerships. In an effort to maintain contact with the participating artists, Sara capitalized on a NEST event in May 2013 to reconvene the 2007 New England RDDI cohort. Many had remained in close touch and continued to collaborate. They spoke about the lab's impact on how they make, talk and think about their work. Inspired to give them more support NDP awarded nine special project grants, from \$1,800-\$3k. One aspect of the grant asks artists to contribute blog posts to the NEFA website, so the community can hear from them directly. Sara pointed to Polly Motley, who used her grant to commission a writer to develop contextual materials as part of a retrospective of her work.

### *National Theater Project-Quita Sullivan*

Quita spoke about how New England is taking advantage of the resources of national programs at NEFA. She previewed an upcoming collaboration between two NTP grantees: a New Orleans group, Mondo Bizarro, which creates site-specific processional pieces about land loss; and Sandglass Theater, a puppetry performance group based in Putney, VT. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, Sandglass, partnering with Vermont Performance Lab, will present Mondo Bizarro in Vermont in a piece addressing the effects of hurricane Irene in 2011. The work is site-specific and the artists have incorporated issues shared between Vermont and Louisiana.

### *Creative Economy-Dee Schneidman*

NEFA is now six months post-launch of CreativeGround.org. The SAA staffs receive monthly updates on registration and usage broken down by state, which creates some healthy competition. Dee thanked the SAAs for helping with the cross promotion of the website which serves as a regional directory of arts and cultural assets. It presents a new way to quantify and highlight the professional creative sector. Dee has expanded the service to foster professional development for those who want to leverage the metrics of the creative economy. CreativeGround is demonstrating the rich cultural activity in New England and has encouraged people to hire and utilize artists and arts organizations for community development.

The New England Creative Economy Network met on June 4th in Providence. Two hundred and twenty spacemakers with different organizational models met to discuss space development. The network represents people from across New England in the arts, education, local government, urban planning, business and economic development among other industries. One urban planner from Peterborough, NH returned home to use what he learned through the network to influence cultural planning in his community.

### *New England Programs Planning Preview-Chris Dwyer*

Chris and the NEFA staff began working in June to identify the core values of the New England programs. From there, the group worked to project what outcomes might be expected from external stakeholders. The next phase in the process is to use these values and desired outcomes to assess how the programs do/can reach these aims. Chris offered some highlights from her conversations with staff:

- NEFA's long-term relationships in the region, built through current programs, provide opportunities for organizations to build ongoing support. However, there is a need to facilitate new relationships with artists and organizations who may not currently be aware of NEFA's regional grant programs.



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- Staff have developed a depth of knowledge, but have not had formal mechanisms to provide professional guidance as experts in the field. The programs should offer the means to leverage years of craft knowledge held by the staff.
- “Underserved community” is a concept addressed in many NEFA programs. Staff agreed the definition varies by activity and time. Staff would like to reconceive this notion by funding artists and organizations which represent the demographics of the region.

Chris asked the board to suggest further challenges or values they can identify. She reminded them the process is still developing and should be considered an assessment of the past to create a better platform for the future. The aim is to tweak or change the programs so they better serve the overall goals of the organization.

Larry thanked Chris introduced Pamela Tatge and Barbara Ally from Wesleyan’s Center for the Arts (CFA). Pam was delighted the board made the trip to Wesleyan. She feels CFA is the poster child for NEFA. She and Barbara offered their condolences on the passing of Rebecca Blunk, who was a fairy godmother to those in the arts in New England. Pam spoke about Rebecca’s leadership; the organizational climate she created, and the staff she gathered around her. Some of NEFA’s key programs changed the course of what CFA does. NEFA has brought ideas about the Creative Economy; provided new resources for funding for groundbreaking dance; and Expeditions enabled extraordinary artists to come to Wesleyan. She said, “NEFA has transformed the arts at Wesleyan.”

***Larry thanked Pam and Barbara for joining the board and hosting the meeting. He adjourned the meeting until the following morning.***

### Tour

Before reconvening, Pam Tatge and Barbara Ally led the board on a tour of CFA spaces.

### **LARRY SIMPSON CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 10:15 am**

#### **New England Planning Programs Discussion**

Before identifying the values of the programs, Chris Dwyer felt it important to generate ideas for the desired outcomes. She distributed outcomes determined by staff for artists/arts groups, arts organizations/presenters, and non-arts organizations (like municipalities, planning commissions, etc.). Chris and the staff looked collectively at the concerns, interests, and issues of those groups; the context of these ideas; and what NEFA can do to confront these concerns.

Measurable outcomes for artists and arts groups:

- an increased number of and more diverse artists understand how to access NEFA’s resources and services;
- more artists and more diverse artists have direct access to NEFA for funding and services, especially for the creation of work;
- artists view NEFA as a supportive gateway to other structures/sources for funding, presentation/touring opportunities, and promotion/recognition.

It seems there is a limited universe of artists making use of NEFA, which may be part of a bigger conversation about branding. Emerging artists may know the NEFA logo, but may not be aware they can take advantage of NEFA funding. Artists who have worked with NEFA understand how to talk to a presenter. Newer or less connected artists may not have the knowledge or access to begin these conversations. This may be an opportunity to empower artists to access NEFA’s resources directly without having to work through an intermediary.

Randy Rosenbaum suggested including a statement about NEFA’s efforts to reach all New England states. Chris agreed this was an important aspect to include. Many consider the New England programs as a gateway. They are using the regional programs for access to professional development and networking



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to improve their eligibility for national programs. State arts agencies would like to see deeper ties between New England artists and the national programs.

Alex Aldrich noted the conversation seemed focused on performing artists and wondered whether visual arts are being considered in the process. Chris pointed out they specifically did not use the word “performance” in an effort to be open to diverse work. Including New England services, like CreativeGround, in this conversation, is an example of how NEFA is trying to open itself to all arts.

Chris reminded the board the focus is to think about how the New England programs can be reshaped to meet regional and national needs; reflect progress in the field; and maintain momentum during this challenging time. The process will clarify the primary issues the programs should address, which will ultimately affect how limited funds are allocated. The board felt the process need not be limited by “what can we afford,” but should be more aspirational. Alex wondered how aspirational outcomes can be incorporated when using intermediate measurable outcomes to identify core values. Chris suggested it’s helpful to think about what outcomes are valuable to stakeholders and use those as a platform to generate news ideas to address what is missing from NEFA’s programs.

Measurable outcomes for arts organizations:

- increased and flexible resources to hire artists organizations desire to present, including information about and access to “vetted” artists they may not be familiar with, which allows them to bring in new audiences and/or increase audience numbers;
- new productive collaborations with peers and new connections, especially connections to other funders and cross-sector connections;
- relevant professional development that broadens knowledge about artists as well as operations;
- increased promotion of/visibility for their organizations;
- the perception the NEFA grant-making process is open, fair, flexible.

There was discussion about the “big picture.” Julie Richard wondered whether the conversation has to be contained by what NEFA can do, or can the process ask: “what could NEFA do?” Chris explained this is not being framed by what programs currently do, but within the realm of what the strategic plan laid out for NEFA as a regional organization; starting within the boundaries of NEFA’s mission and goals. Jane reminded the group the process must be grounded in the reality of funding sources.

Measurable outcomes for non-arts organizations:

- information from NEFA that is useful, relevant, easily accessible, and trusted information;
- specific and timely connections to arts resources, including people, information, model projects;
- increased leverage to promote/give visibility to arts.

The most obvious theme here is information. NEFA acts as a resource for trusted information for peer regional organizations from other sectors. NEFA can also provide non-arts organizations with connections to arts resources. It is a notion of brokerage as well as directly linking disparate groups. NEFA can help a non-arts organization leverage what they have in their community to give more visibility to or promote within their sector. Alex liked the idea of NEFA leveraging the network it has created. He suggested adding language about creating employment opportunities for artists. Chris felt Alex brought up a good point about building this out. Once the values and outcomes are determined and broken down by constituencies, you can identify the intersections where you can focus your energy. Hitting outcomes for several stakeholders at once multiplies the organization’s value.

Ted Landsmark suggested this process should be as expansive as possible. He requested they consider how non-arts organizations are thinking about using arts to leverage economic investments and to think about the specific kinds of quantifiable outcomes they are using with investors that NEFA may be able to leverage. Chris felt Ted’s idea made a case for determining sub-sections within each group, as they have different implications for where NEFA would go. Jane James felt if NEFA is developing a more aspirational program structure and need becomes evident; it is easier to acquire funding. The discussion



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should not be limited to thinking within the confines of the budget. It will be important to look beyond the traditional foundations and funders, and begin to look at big corporations or funders that may be one-time donors.

Larry asked about the strategy for resolving where the programs are and what is being discussed. Chris and the staff took the core values and looked at what changes could move the programs in those directions. They are now evaluating what small changes can be made, or how the programs can be used as incubators for new ideas. In addition to tweaking current programs, conversations arose about new programs, new funding, new ideas, and a new set of strategies. They will not attempt to make everything fit in one box.

Chris directed the conversation to the next stakeholder groups, the SAAs and the Board of Directors. The SAAs sit on the board with a different set of desired outcomes, due to their organizations' own mandates, issues, and missions. Chris divided the room into two groups, SAA representatives and other board members, and tasked them with identifying their respective outcomes.

Cassie Mason read the following desired outcomes from the perspective of the SAA stakeholders:

- broaden general public understanding about the importance of art and culture in new England life;
- continue to act as a convener for the six New England states;
- expand efforts to collaborate on multi-state, regional, staff-to-staff projects and programs;
- facilitate access to professional development opportunities regionally, nationally and internationally;
- offer a regional approach to data collection and dissemination that complements regional and national initiatives;
- serve as a respected agent for arts policy and advocacy;
- and ensure, in cooperation with SAAs, all NEFA programs are accessible to all people within the region and provide public value.

The SAAs are charged with focusing on public value and accessibility. They are responsible for quantifying return on investment for their states and must ensure this element is part of NEFA's equation. Programs in New England must have value to the peoples of New England.

Chris read the ideas the staff proposed for SAA outcomes:

- acknowledge and agree that NEFA's efforts provide clear value and are not duplicative of what states are doing, but complementary;
- acknowledge value of information on state advocacy;
- and believe NEFA is serving key constituents in each state..

Julie felt NEFA needs better visibility in all New England states. She has tried to advertise NEFA's services, but many are intimidated because they see the organization as a step before going to the NEA. She suggested offering more direct customer service to applicants in order to demonstrate interest.

The board's desired outcomes were:

- NEFA should be a generator of ideas that might be fundable for the board to increase resources(around strengthening New England programs)
- Create deeper, longer term relationships, with funders, by offering programs in New England which can be used to solicit additional resources
- Identify critical moments to engage the board around opportunities to bring in resources
- Leverage research and data collection to create points of investment for corporations or for-profit companies that many benefit from trusted information
- Create new methods for marketing across communities
- Evaluate cultural shifts in New England and identify NEFA's role within this new landscape
- Create strategic audiences that may produce new avenues for funding or resources



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Andrea suggested she would add “investing more in the strongest programs at NEFA” as a goal. Jane James added NEFA should work on generating ideas of national funders with a New England presence.

Ted Landsmark observed tremendous cultural diversity on Main Street in Middletown. Unlike other parts of the country where major private sectors invest in cultural activities, New England is made up of tiny towns no one invests in. New England is a culturally rich environment, with gateway cities. Could NEFA tap into its own data to understand what it would be like to invest in these places? This information could be funneled to resources to demonstrate the untapped capacity in these towns.

Chris shared the board outcomes the staff generated:

- Reach an increased and more diverse donor base by developing strategy around programs
- Increase prominence nationally, regionally, and internationally among its stakeholders.
- Be a model for strong organizational leadership and fiscal responsibility.
- Support arts organizations and work that will be well-known and respected in the field
- Redefine “New England culture”

Along the same lines Chris and the staff talked about whether there is a NEFA “aesthetic.” Specifically, NEFA should consider whether people perceive there is too narrow a perception of the type of program the organization might fund. Ted felt NEFA could be perceived to have brought arts of the other to a classically, white, “yankee” New England audience. There is more of an inclination bring “art of the other” into New England, than to recognize the existing culturally diverse art within the market. Byron agreed and sees NEFA as responsible for an inflow rather than an outflow of work. Julie felt it wouldn’t be unusual for NEFA to have an aesthetic. Arts organizations almost always have focus areas they are known for. Chris suggested the staff conversation generated questions more about whether there is a perception of a “NEFA preference.”

### **Camille Brown Visit**

Barbara Ally stopped by to introduce dancer and choreographer Camille Brown who was on campus for a residency. NDP is funding Camille’s new piece which she will preview as part of the residency. Camille feels audiences often only see the outcome of a project, but this residency presented an opportunity to show the process of developing work. Part of this process is about standing still and making sure she is not always walking in the same direction. The piece, tentatively called “Black Girl,” aims to show the full spectrum of the black woman’s experience; the moments that come between the extremes of “angry black woman” and “strong black woman.” Camille reflected on her career before beginning choreography when she didn’t know any black, female choreographers. It seemed only male choreographers were making work, which almost convinced her to take a male alias. She felt compelled to mitigate this experience for other black women. She has two young, black, female dancers with her because the reality of the work is important and she wants them to see how she negotiates staying strong.

### **New England Programs Planning**

Chris asked the board to offer ideas on how to incrementally move New England programs toward these aspirational ideals and what programs might be developed to meet outcomes. NEFA needs to make sure those who can benefit from programs know they are there. The staff discussed exploring the boundaries or the perception of boundaries, i.e. “what’s a presenter?” There is a desire to reshape limited or historic definitions. She felt it was also time to reconsider the goals of the programs and whether the touring structures the programs were founded on need to be rethought. Chris asked the board to think about how to make the programs more accessible and less burdensome to participate in; and how to go about making these changes.

There was interest in the idea of eliminating interstate requirements for touring grants. NEFA’s current model does not support touring within a single state, regardless of size. There was conversation about whether this dynamic creates friction between artists and NEFA. This was identified as one issue with the perception of accessibility to NEFA’s resources. If restrictions around touring were loosened, NEFA could



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become more visible as a funder. It could create greater demand and require a bigger budget, but it might allow new venues and artists to get involved.

There was an agreement to alter “align funded grants to SAA’s priority constituents,” to state “priorities” instead of “constituents,” as it originally read as favoritism.

There was support for expanding the concept of touring to include exhibitions. This change would open the door to broader priorities. A pilot project could test NEFA support for touring exhibitions in a defined area. to test smaller scale changes where NEFA could closely manage the expectations, and cultivate artists and applicants.

Chris asked the board what they thought about funding fewer, but larger grants to try to do some more iconic, more curated work. There was some discomfort with this idea especially if it resulted in larger organizations being funded while smaller presenters were left out. In practice, this might conflict with the goal of making programming more robust in the future. It was argued if certain projects create a watershed moment, funding can be found to serve it, without having to take away from smaller scale work.

Chris turned to Expeditions, a program where artists from anywhere tour to at least three communities in at least two different New England states. Presenters for the tour work together to apply for grants up to \$10k per presenter. It’s a much more competitive program than NEST, but needs to find ways to stimulate demand. NEFA is looking at ways for smaller presenters to engage in the program, with something like an “Expeditions Lite” and determine whether the application process can be less formidable. The community engagement requirement is often outside of the capacity of a smaller presenter, but if eliminated, you are left with artists on tour with no context.

The board discussed incorporating more facilitation in the application process. Previous versions of the program were directed by NEFA through packaged tours, which faced resistance. NEFA is not a presenter; the most direct involvement should be a panel evaluation that suggests how an applicant may get up to a more competitive level. Anything more hands-on would be a conflict.

The next step of the planning process is to start vetting these ideas to others in the field. Chris and the staff will retool and reframe these ideas to incorporate the board’s feedback. Then they will consider how to best present this information for comment in the fall. The board will then hear suggestions for short term changes to the programs.

### Closing Remarks

Larry Simpson thanked Chris, and voiced his appreciation for the work she’s done. He talked about the serious challenges in front of the organization and his hopes a new executive director with a different perspective will motivate the board to continue to have challenging conversations. The board agreed they were pleased to have had conversations dealing directly with challenges they do not typically discuss.

A conversation arose about the closing of the Native Arts program. There is discomfort with programming language moving from directly addressing native communities to “all underfunded populations.” Larry suggested putting this conversation on hold until the next board meeting to allow for preparation and more substantive discussion.

Alex Aldrich proposed creating a program committee to offer advice and feedback on the programs to address problems as they arise. It would be a way to involve board members in the program and services side of NEFA. Larry felt this would be work for the executive committee to discuss when they meet in the fall. He ended by sharing his optimism on coming together and having conversations that are not typically on the table. He appreciated the board’s thoughtful participation and commended the staff on their hard work.



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*Randy Rosenbaum made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:17 pm. Larry Simpson seconded. The motion was unanimous.*

### **Next Steps:**

- *Anita Walker will coordinate a meeting of the SAA/NEFA executive directors*
- *NEFA will present a spending policy for board review*
- *The Trustees Committee will present a list of board candidates for review*
- *Leadership will determine an appropriate time for discussion about Native Arts*
- *The Executive Committee will discuss the proposal of creating a Program Committee*
- *Submit the minutes from this meeting for board approval on December 4, 2014*