



Board Meeting Minutes

May 1, 2014
NEFA, 8th Floor
Boston, MA

Board Members Present – Larry Simpson (Chair), Alex Aldrich, Sandra Burton, Andrew Cornell, Amy Ellsworth, Lynn Martin Graton, Geoff Hargadon, Jane James, Mary Kelley, Ted Landsmark, Peter Nessen, John Plukas, Betsy Richards, Andrea Rogers, Randall Rosenbaum

Board Members Absent – David Bury, Byron Champlin, Daniel Forrest, Jeremy Liu, Julie Richard, Anita Walker

Staff Present – Steven Fenton, Sarah Long Holland, Laura Paul, Jane Preston

Guest-Rebecca Blunk

Notetaker – Steven Fenton

LARRY SIMPSON CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 2:10 PM

Welcome & Introductions

Chair Larry Simpson welcomed all board members and lamented the weather. He asked Laura Paul to introduce Steven Fenton who joined the NEFA staff as Executive Assistant on April 28th. The board welcomed him.

Larry outlined the day and suggested the board plan to wrap conversation by 3:30 p.m. to welcome Rebecca Blunk to speak for a few minutes prior to adjourning at 3:45p.m. for a community reception in her honor.

Approval of the January 2014 Board Meeting Minutes

Larry called for a motion to approve the minutes from the board meeting on January 30, 2014. Lynn Martin Graton asked for a clarification on page 2, second paragraph. The notes suggest Lynn, “asked if the Native Arts’ programmatic funds could be reallocated in order to gradually reduce the service.” Lynn would like the minutes to reflect that she asked, “whether there are unrestricted funds that can be allocated in order to reduce services gradually.” There were no other corrections.

Peter Nessen made a motion to approve the January 30, 2014 board meeting minutes with this correction. Betsy Richards seconded the motion. The motion was unanimous.

Discussion on State/Regional/NEA Partnership

Jane Preston and Laura Paul met with Anita Walker and Dave Slatery from Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) on April 3rd to discuss how the collaboration between MCC and NEFA will be structured moving forward. Both organizations have renewed their commitment to work together. NEFA and MCC will meet again in June after each has had a chance to finalize their FY15 budgets. The NEA was reassured by the progress made in these conversations, which encouraged them to move ahead with this year’s funding for both. There will be no effect on NEFA’s NEA funding for the coming year since all six state agencies have agreed to the current structure of their relationship with NEFA.

Alex Aldrich reported he has tried to schedule a meeting of the state arts agency and NEFA executive directors in May with no success. He will continue attempts to arrange a meeting prior to the July board retreat.

Jane Preston was happy to be invited to a meeting of the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts in mid-April to present the new Creative Ground website and provide an overview of the impact of NEFA’s partnership with the agency to its council members. Jane told the board she would be open and happy to receive invitations from the councils in all six New England states.

Finance & Audit Committee Report

The finance committee met earlier in the week to review the budget-to-actuals and projections for year-end. John Plukas provided a brief summary of investment performance for the year through March and reported that everything is going along well with NEFA's investment accounts.

Laura Paul explained that program spending will see a cyclical and substantial uptick in April since many programs have grant making activity then. There was discussion about projections for additional spending in some programs where additional funding was available due to

carry over, cancelled or deferred activity for grantees, or newly secured funding. In administration, we are projecting some underspending, primarily due to depreciation which budgeted for the deployment of two tech projects. One of those, Creative Ground was delayed, so its depreciation will begin later.

The finance committee has discussed the cost of the executive search consultant and anticipates that all or part of this can be covered by reserves if necessary.

This year's audit process will begin on May 15th. After ten years with Carla McCall, NEFA has requested a partner rotation for this year's audit. Alexander, Aronson, Finning will match NEFA with a partner who has significant experience working with non-profit/cultural organizations. Andrew Cornell allowed this transition adds additional work in establishing new relationships, but confirmed it is considered a best practice within the industry.

The finance committee will review a draft budget for FY15 when it meets in June, and will propose a final draft to the entire board at the July meeting.

To close, Laura Paul addressed the question about spending policies that arose in the previous board meeting. The finance committee will work on a draft policy or statement for the board's review in July.

Randy Rosenbaum asked whether in general, grants are paid out in full or partial amounts and at what stage of the project. Jane Preston explained that this differs by program; for the touring programs, presenters receive grant payments after a presentation takes place, upon submission of a project evaluation and budget. Creation grants in dance and theater are paid in two installments, with the final payment held in reserve and paid upon a project's completion and submission of a final evaluation and budget.

Authorizing Officials Update

Laura Paul addressed the need to update the assistant officers for the organization, given Rebecca's resignation, who are authorized by the board to sign checks, contracts, and other legal documents on behalf of the board. A motion from the board is required to take the outgoing executive director's name off the list and a resolution must follow to confirm Jane and Laura as the only current authorized signers. The board requested Laura read the full language for the motion.

John Plukas made a motion to remove Rebecca Blunk as signatory for NEFA. Andrea Rogers seconded the motion. The motion was unanimous.

John Plukas made a second motion to confirm Jane Preston and Laura Paul as signatories on behalf of NEFA. Andrea Rogers seconded. The motion was unanimous.

Trustees Committee Report

Andrea Rogers explained the trustees committee's work had been somewhat quiet in light of the leadership transition. However, the committee continues its work to grow the board by electing new members with demonstrated philanthropic interest and capacity. The committee has some

names under consideration and will pursue these candidates with the aim of bringing new members on board in the fall, instead of in July, once a new ED is in place. One candidate, Michael Weinberger has committed to membership and is expected to attend the July meeting. Andrea asked her colleagues on the board to assist the committee in this mission by recommending any fellows or contacts who may be interesting candidates for the board.

The trustees committee is sensitive to continuity. A number of long term members would normally be rotating off the board in July this year. There was provision last year that those members may be asked to stay on for one to three years after this term in order to assure a smooth transition. The membership terms and rotation schedules adopted in July 2013 will resume following those extensions. The trustees committee will be contacting those expiring members to discuss their new term end dates, with the exception of Mary Kelley who has announced that she will accept the end of her term and that this (May 1, 2014) will be her last meeting with the board.

Larry Simpson took a moment to recognize Mary as a long term contributor, leader, worker and incredible support to Rebecca Blunk and the NEFA staff. Larry thanked her for her service to the board. He explained that NEFA would not be what it is without Mary's support. The board joined Larry in a round of applause.

Andrea reminded everyone the trustees committee can be successful only with their help. Board members may be called upon to meet with or interview candidates. The leadership transition has forced the committee to pull back on engaging new prospects individually. Initial contacts are an important aspect of future engagement, whether those individuals become board members or not.

Alex Aldrich mentioned that one aspect of his job at the Vermont Arts Council is to cultivate donors and support. It is becoming more difficult to find candidates with the time and capacity to commit to an organization and attendance is a challenge. He struggles to encourage people to cross the state to attend his meetings and NEFA asks people to come from all over New England, which requires even more effort. He urged members to scour their own networks and communities. It is the full time job and primary responsibility of the board.

Development Committee Report

Jane James reported that NEFA secured over \$10 million in institutional funding in FY14, and that the spring event with Wendy Whelan had to be canceled due to the artist's need for hip surgery. A fall event may be planned around the announcement of a new executive director.

NEFA development staff distributed a list of upcoming events and programs in all six New England states, plus New York and California. Jane encouraged board members to attend events as it is a great way to familiarize yourself with NEFA's work and how the organization is supporting the arts. Staff members are happy to assist board members in making arrangements to attend any of the advertised programs.

Jane explained that a fund has been established in Rebecca's honor. The fund will support special projects and initiatives which foster connections between artists and the community. Many on the board have already made pledges to the fund. Jane suggested those interested in making a gift or pledge should speak with Sarah Long Holland to discuss details. Anyone outside of the board who may want to contribute to the Rebecca Blunk Fund should be directed to speak with Jane James or Andrew Cornell.

Executive Director Search

Larry Simpson announced that NEFA has signed a contract with executive search consultant Sandi Haynes to conduct the search for a new executive director, and directed board members to the information about Sandi and her process in their materials. Larry described Sandi as a consummate professional with a proven track record working with arts and cultural agencies for

high level positions. Larry was most impressed with her thoroughness and the insightfulness of her questions. She has already started getting to know NEFA.

The search committee includes Alex Aldrich, Amy Ellsworth, Sandra Burton, Larry Simpson and Andrew Cornell as chair, and the group will work with Sandi to inform the development of a position description, and to conduct interviews toward their selection of an outstanding candidate.

Andrew Cornell offered some comments on the process of interviewing for a search consultant. After reviewing three proposals, the committee was most impressed by Sandi's knowledge of NEFA, and her interest and experience in the arts, community and philanthropy sectors. Andrew felt it will be revealing and rewarding to work with her. Sandi will be reaching out to speak with board members in the coming weeks. The search committee was brought together to offer a balance of experience with philanthropy and programming. The goal is to identify a handful of candidates that would all be perfect for the position and then choose the best from them.

Andrew paused to recognize Mary Kelley following her announcement. Mary recruited Andrew to NEFA. He felt she has been a great advocate and made the board feel like family. To her, he said, "I owe you a lot of gratitude and will miss you."

Andrew turned back to the search and suggested this is an opportunity to examine NEFA, to look at it with fresh eyes. Under the circumstances of Rebecca's departure, it is difficult to think of this positively, but the board owes it to the organization to use this as an opportunity for growth.

Mary Kelley asked about the profile for the position. She believes the biggest challenge is to know who you are looking for.

Andrew reflected on the current sea change across the country. There is a generational shift among state and regional organizations as the old guard begin to retire from long held positions. This presents a hurdle for NEFA as there is a lot of competition from other organizations, all looking for the perfect person.

Laura gave the board a brief overview of the search timeline. The committee will meet with Sandi three times between May and the end of July. The first phase will involve gathering information from the board, staff and external stakeholders to draft the position description. In the second stage Sandi will gather candidate ideas and test them with the search committee. She expects to have a short list of candidates and interviews just after Labor Day, and to make an offer by the end of September or early October.

Mary Kelley inquired if the search has been made public yet. Laura explained that general information will be posted on the NEFA website by Monday. It will announce the search and offer direction to those who may be interested or have recommendations. Recommendations have already come in from people in the field. Moving forward, everything will pass through Sandi as the filter. As soon as the position description is ready, it will be added to the website information, and distributed by Sandi.

Discussion-New England Planning Programs Process

Jane Preston noted that an assessment of NEFA's New England programs was a priority next step identified in the strategic plan and adopted in 2013. It is timely to explore what is successful in these programs and to identify gaps in New England grants and services.

The two overall program goals of the strategic plan are to:

1. Design and deliver an adaptive, leading portfolio of programs to support the creation and presentation of high quality art which
 - honors traditions and breaks new ground;
 - encourages the development of multiple generations of artists and participants with diverse origins and perspectives; and
 - stimulates community engagement and cultural understanding.
2. Strengthen New England's and, by extension, the nation's cultural industry

New England programs should work toward developing opportunities for artists to create new works and connections to resources and assure funded arts activities reach underserved communities. Increasing grant recipients who reflect New England demographics will prove an important part of this process.

The Native Arts Program provided NEFA with insight into how to engage communities that are not typically visible to granting bodies. Jane explained it is important to work deeply in finding and connecting with communities where NEFA can be of service. This includes continuing to work with Native communities. Investing in diversity provides opportunities for connections and knowledge exchange. NEFA is trying to better articulate and communicate the findings and lessons of these working with underserved constituents.

Another goal for New England programs is to foster longer term relationships and deeper engagements in between artists and communities.

At this moment, Jane paused for questions from the board. They commented on the broadness of the goals, but agreed with their mission.

Andrea Rogers wondered how NEFA envisions these goals will play out over time.

Jane described the process, following the plan's adoption, of convening program staff to discuss how programs and services are or are not serving each of these goals. Those conversations made it clear the goals needed further clarification at the program staff and board levels.

Going into July, NEFA will reconvene staff to discuss the values and priorities around these program goals in preparation for further conversation with the board. Researcher and former board member Chris Dwyer, who has worked with NEFA on the National Theater and Dance Projects, will conduct work with staff, board and constituents to assess programs specifically serving the New England region. She has an understanding of NEFA's program design and is well positioned to assess strengths and weaknesses.

Andrea voiced her concern that these expectations may prove burdensome on a set of programs with limited resources. She hoped this review would target areas for improvement, rather than impose unrealistic aims across all current programs to reflect the ethnography of New England if that is not their intended scope.

Jane Preston indicated that the assessment will evaluate funding allocations needed to reach the goals. NEFA will assess practices beyond grant making, including staffing needs, convenings and other services.

Randy Rosenbaum suggested NEFA might consider engaging with State Arts Agencies to align goals and mission to combine resources.

Jane agreed and stressed that the SAA's will be part of this discussion. The meeting of SAA and NEFA directors and the July board meeting should include opportunities that input. National programs are well-served by having advisors, and we may consider assembling a regional advisory group for the New England programs. The SAA's can provide perspective for New England specific efforts and the vehicles to reach constituents.

The Barr foundation has funded NEFA for a research study toward a potential program initiative tentatively called New Art in New Places, which looks at how artists are making new work and installing it in unexpected places. Debra Cash has facilitated the study and report findings as they relate to Boston are focus groups and national models. This has the potential cross over with Creative Economy, commissioning, and potentially with touring. Traditionally NEFA has placed emphasis on the presenter (the space owner), but this would focus on artists generating new work, with a broader definition of who are presenters. Rebecca Blunk was instrumental in initiating this study with San San Wong at the Barr Foundation. San San sees NEFA as an entity that facilitates serving artists. NEFA has been invited by Barr to submit a \$1 million grant request over three years to pilot a program in Boston, Cambridge and Somerville, where Barr focuses. The program has strong potential as a pilot for a more comprehensive regional or national model and for touring work in New England. Jane hopes to circulate the research report after some final work.

Alex Aldrich wondered if there may be a difference between NEFA's agenda for the arts in New England and what the arts in the region may actually need. Meaning, those who serve the arts at the state level have the capacity to serve at all times, in all ways. Aldrich believes it would be ideal to know that someone is taking a look at the biggest possible picture. NEFA should consider where arts in the region are going and what they need to get there. Alex described Vermont Farm to Plate, a growing network of providers and resources which has developed into a "localvore network." Each individual or organization understands the role they play within this greater ecosystem. Alex asked what equivalent arts and culture network can establish a standard for anyone in the field to work toward.

Jane Preston asked the state arts agency representatives if those assessments are being done at their local level. Aggregating that knowledge from New England states would make sense.

Randy Rosenbaum thought this needs assessment. It takes measure of not what's practical, but aspirational.

Mary Kelly recommended everyone read "Culture Track '14," a recent study from LaPlaca Cohen for the NEA, which addresses the "behaviors of cultural consumers, including trends in attendance and motivators and barriers to participation" (www.laplacacohen.com/culturetrack/). It relates to this conversation and is worth reviewing.

Betsy Richards also recommended the board and NEFA staff look at a new report from the Institute for Alternative Futures, "The Art of the Possible: Envisioning a New Cultural Moment" (<http://www.culturaldata.org/wp-content/uploads/the-art-of-the-possible-report-3-24-15final.pdf>)

Lynn Graton agreed with Alex Aldrich's point about creating a network to facilitate establishing a direction for regional arts. Based on previous work with Chris Dwyer, Lynn believes she is well-suited to survey this landscape. She asked if Dwyer will be paid by NEFA for this work.

Jane Preston explained it would be contracted work. Laura Paul added that self-assessment and evaluation are aspects of the program model from Mellon and Duke. There is funding earmarked for such costs.

Lynn asked whether there was a plan to have a broader conversation about what is envisioned for Native Arts.

Jane Preston expressed it is a priority to communicate NEFA's commitment to sustain support for Native artists, and will make this a priority in program development that encompasses service to other communities that have had little access to grant support as well.

Lynn asked if the press release the board received about the program had been released to the public.

Laura Paul explained final grants from the program had been made and the press release distributed.

Andrea Rogers reminded the room of the press release, which announced the final round of grantmaking for the Native Arts Program. Five grants were awarded to native led organizations that have been participants over the life of the program. These groups are exploring the idea of establishing a consortium for them to continue conversations and practices begun through the Native Arts program. The consortium would address how they are currently serving the communities and how to optimize those initiatives; and how to best position a Native led organization to attract funding.

Dawn Spears, Program Manager for Native Arts, Laura explained, is concerned how the loss of services may affect stability of the network fostered by the program. Dawn and NEFA are exploring alternative resources for future funding. The group of artists that came together following the opening of the exhibit at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum spoke about the value of the program and their ability to reach a broader community. Dawn heard those comments and hopes to find a way to continue supporting these convenings. The Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance asked what they could do to maintain these services and conversations, which marked the genesis of the consortium idea. NEFA wants to support the effort to test the waters and continue working with Dawn.

Lynn Graton, speaking on behalf of New Hampshire, would appreciate the support of NEFA staff. She also inquired if Dawn Spears would continue to work through these issues as a private contractor.

Laura Paul explained Dawn will receive grant money to facilitate the process.

Lynn hoped one of the organizations involved in the consortium would be fully incorporated in New Hampshire. There is an organization in New Hampshire that has gone through considerable vetting and has a native person as board chair, but they were deemed inappropriate for these initial grants. Lynn urged that consultation be made with New Hampshire Commission on Native American Affairs throughout this process. She explained that New Hampshire has a particularly difficult situation as there is no state recognition of Native tribes. She would like some regional parity for New Hampshire.

Betsy Richards felt like this is an important moment to unpack the objectives of this transition. Throughout the discussion she was hearing two sets of language. She heard "sunset," which feels final, but also hears a desire to continue supporting the relationship. In interpreting the language, it struck her that there is a diversity and inclusion model at play. NEFA is saying that Native people are included in everything that it does. Betsy felt there must be a clear distinction if you are going to use that model. Through the process of serving Native New England through the Native Arts Program, people became savvier about supporting Native peoples specifically. The umbrella model of diversity comes with significant implications. Betsy recommended that NEFA make sure the

language around this issue and future services is very clear. NEFA must be careful not to blanket communities as it would erase some of the cultural capital NEFA has built in Native communities.

Jane Preston added the Barr Foundation research study identified infrastructure that would be needed in addition to a grants program if an initiative will have deep impact on multiple communities. There is an important process of trust building.

Betsy maintained it will take a long time to decide the appropriate course. The consortium may develop a new organization, which would be her recommendation. Whatever comes out of these conversations might not be enough. Betsy suggested the heart of the issue is framing and messaging, so NEFA does not fall backwards. The organization is in a moment of evolution, which is different from just explaining there will be no more grantmaking. It will be essential to separate out how NEFA will continue to work with Native communities.

Lynn agreed there must be continued commitment and recommended including a strong New Hampshire representative in early discussions.

Alex Aldrich, not able to think of a Vermont arts organization working primarily with Native peoples, asked if there was something specific New Hampshire would bring to the table in this conversation.

Lynn responded, suggesting her point was about the importance of having voices from distinctive tribal identities. Native peoples have tremendous ties of place. For a comprehensive conversation about these issues, you cannot have one Native group at the table, because they cannot represent the voices of all groups affected by the decision.

Betsy Richards intervened and wondered if "state recognition" is what Lynn is advocating for. Betsy would consider looking at landscape through a different lens. She recommended looking at where Native peoples are and working with them in situ. The boundaries that are drawn federally, might not speak to Native peoples. The way we recognize state borders is not how they live their life. The conversation ought to take into consideration where Native groups are, how they live and the routes they travel.

Larry Simpson pointed out that this conversation began as one about planning process, but they had moved into discussing a subsidy issue. With respect to time, this should be addressed further at a later time, specifically Lynn's request relating to New Hampshire. The board has heard and agrees. They will address the issue and this reframing in terms of language.

Larry called to adjourn the meeting. Randy Rosenbaum made a motion to adjourn; Peter seconded. The motion was unanimous. The board meeting adjourned at 3:28 pm.

Next Steps:

- ***Revise and finalize the minutes from the board meeting on January 30, 2014***
- ***Alex Aldrich will coordinate a meeting of the State Arts Agencies directors***
- ***Finance Committee will review the FY15 budget and present to board for approval***
- ***NEFA will draft a spending policy for board review***
- ***Trustee Committee will contact expiring members to discuss term extensions***
- ***Address Native Arts future planning and external communications***
- ***Submit the minutes from this meeting for board approval on July 9, 2014***

Following adjournment, Outgoing Executive Director Rebecca Blunk joined the board to offer informal remarks.

Rebecca was glad to attend the meeting to make a few remarks and thoughts to offer some closure, which sounds so final. She regrets the circumstances, through which she had to unplug from NEFA, but is doing great. Her treatments are working and she has a new full time job: recovery.

It is not Rebecca's intention to just disappear. She hopes to stay gently affiliated with NEFA. She spent 29 years of her life with NEFA, and it will always remain in her bones, circulatory system and every pore. She hopes to be a resource for institutional memory and contacts.

Rebecca feels at peace with the idea that NEFA can benefit from new leadership. Fresh leadership, different ideas, new approaches will be great for NEFA's next era.

The arts, in this country, are still marginalized. Organizations and advocates have not gotten through to the right people at the right time, which is a disappointment. President Kennedy once said, "we have to get to the moon," and they did it in two years.

Rebecca asked, "what's our moon mission? How do we encapsulate what it is we are after?"

Looking forward for NEFA, Rebecca sees a continued focus on creative, contemporary artists, supporting them and providing resources so they fully realize their goals to connect and engage with communities. The arts are so important and it is among individual artists where change is germinated. NEFA has a reputation for finding and supporting these folks.

She would love to see a continued advocacy for the value of the live art performance. There is nothing more powerful than being together with your community, with all five senses engaged.

Rebecca also hopes NEFA leadership continues to think about building infrastructure. She is aware of conversation where there is a false value placed on efficiencies. She advised having talented staff, successful programs, and supportive networks take money, time, leadership and brilliance. "Make sure NEFA continues to attend to that."

For her successor, Rebecca recommended someone who can be savvier with the media to allow NEFA to become more visible; someone who can attract attention to all aspects of the foundation and create a reputation beyond NEFA's partners.

Larry Simpson thanked Rebecca and felt her reflections are timely, on point, and remarked on the changing culture of the industry. To Rebecca, he hoped her successor is half as good.