



**Attendance**

*Board:* Taylor Ho Bynum, Byron Champlin, Andrew Cornell, Amy Zell Ellsworth, Jane James, Doug Keith, Barbara Murphy, Chip Newell, Julie Richard, Randy Rosenbaum, Larry Simpson, Ann Smith, Pam Tatge, Ted Wendell, Marco Werman, Lisa Wong, Carrie Zaslow

*Staff:* Cathy Edwards, Steven Fenton, Sara Nash, Adrienne Petrillo, Jane Preston, Dee Schneidman, Kim Szeto, Sharon Timmel, Ann Wicks

*Guests:* John Henry, Lynette Turner, Michele Walter

*Notetaker:* Steven Fenton

***Thursday, June 22***

***BOARD CHAIR LARRY SIMPSON CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 12:15 PM***

**Call to Order & Welcome**

Board chair Larry Simpson called the meeting to order. He welcomed the group to the Berkshires. Larry recognized board nominee John Henry and asked the group to introduce themselves.

**Executive Director's Report**

Executive Director Cathy Edwards thanked the board for taking the time to attend the retreat. Cathy reflected on the powerful impact NEFA's work can have on its constituents, exemplified at the Creative Communities Exchange (CCX) in New London earlier in the month. The event was a major success with 270 attendees from throughout New England who participated in 24 different workshops across two days. Also at the CCX, NEFA celebrated the release of the latest creative economy jobs report, "The Jobs in New England's Creative Economy and Why They Matter." Cathy thanked the board members who attended and asked everyone to consider participating in the next CCX in Vermont in 2019.

Cathy also thanked board members for their role in nominating candidates for the new Advisory Council, to be officially announced and launched at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary event at Jacob's Pillow. Cathy spoke briefly about the membership and structure of the Advisory Council.

Cathy reported on some of the challenges facing NEFA. Chief among them, the search for a new Director of Finance and Administration, but she was optimistic the search was nearing its end and the board would receive news of a hiring announcement soon. Cathy spoke about the threat to public funding for the arts in the United States. Although NEFA is fortunate to have committed funds from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for FY18, NEFA is listening to the ongoing conversation about federal support for the arts into FY19 and beyond and adding its voice and advocacy when appropriate.

**Board Meeting Business**

***Approval of Minutes from 3.1.17 Board Meeting***

Larry Simpson presented the minutes from the NEFA Board of Directors meeting on March 1, 2017. He asked for any questions or corrections, but none were offered. The chair entertained a motion to approve the minutes.

***Randy Rosenbaum made a motion to approve the March 1, 2017 board meeting minutes. Ted Wendell seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.***



*Approval of FY17 Executive Committee Minutes*

Larry Simpson presented the minutes from the FY17 NEFA Executive Committee meetings. He asked for any questions or corrections, but none were offered. The chair entertained a motion to approve the minutes.

***Randy Rosenbaum made a motion to approve the FY17 Executive Committee meeting minutes. Andrew Cornell seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.***

**Officer & Class Elections**

Trustees Committee Chair Randy Rosenbaum thanked his fellow committee members and commented on the impressive array of board candidates they spoke with throughout the year. He expressed his great excitement to have Christal Brown and John Henry join the board this year. Randy turned the board's attention to the election slate and asked for a vote to approve the listed appointments, including nominations to the board classes of 2018 and 2020, and officers of the executive committee.

***Andrew Cornell made a motion to approve the slate of board and officer nominations. Carrie Zaslow seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.***

**Corporate Officer Elections**

NEFA's bylaws require the officers of the corporation be affirmed and approved by board vote at the annual retreat. The Chair asked for a motion to appoint Cathy Edwards Chief Executive Officer and Jane Preston as Assistant Secretary of the New England Foundation for the Arts with signing privileges on behalf of the organization.

***Lisa Wong made a motion to appoint Cathy Edwards and Jane Preston Chief Executive Officer and Assistant Secretary and to authorize them to sign on behalf of NEFA. Ann Smith seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.***

**FY18 Interim Budget Approval**

As the incoming Board Treasurer, Doug Keith presented the board with the proposed interim budget for NEFA's FY18. Doug recounted the challenges NEFA faced throughout the spring with the financial team transition and the concern about NEA funding. The Finance & Audit Committee met to consider how to confront these issues while also creating a budget for the new fiscal year. They decided the best way to position the organization and the incoming finance team for success, in the face of a steep learning curve, would be to create an interim budget and push back the audit timeline.

Cathy Edwards added the committee discussed the need for greater transparency in NEFA's budget and financial presentations. She pointed out some aspects of the budget document the committee rearranged for greater clarity. The budget includes a new position in the finance department to build the capacity of the incoming team. In the interim, the organization is using funds from the board designated Strategic Opportunity and Risk Reserve to cover the cost of the team of consultants who are on site at NEFA until a permanent staff are in place. Cathy will work with the incoming Director of Finance & Administration and the Finance & Audit Committee to plan how to replenish those funds.

Doug Keith talked the board through some additional details and changes to the FY18 budget and answered questions about certain line items. Chair Larry Simpson thanked Cathy and Doug for their report and asked for a motion to approve the interim budget.

***Doug Keith made a motion to approve the FY18 Interim Budget. Randy Rosenbaum seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.***



### **Strategic Planning**

Larry Simpson pivoted the conversation to the ongoing strategic planning process. He thanked Amy Zell Ellsworth for stepping up as chair of the Strategic Planning Task Force and commented on the prescient timing of the process. Larry introduced Michele Walter and Lynette Turner from AMS Planning & Research, the consultants NEFA engaged to facilitate the process.

Michele and Lynette thanked the Strategic Planning Task Force for their work so far. They began working with NEFA at the end of March and met with the Task Force three times. Additionally, they conducted interviews with approximately half of the staff and board. They also spoke with about twenty individuals in the field to ask impressions of NEFA's work and the trends, opportunities, and challenges they are encountering in the field.

Michele presented the idea that a successful vision of NEFA involves an equal balance of providing public value, with the support and capacity needed to deliver it. As a Regional Arts Organization (RAO), NEFA is valued for "opening the door," or, its ability to provide deeper access to arts and cultural opportunity, build cultural equity, support artists and creative entrepreneurship, and advance arts policy and advocacy. NEFA is flexible in its work with constituents, and knows how to be efficient with limited resources. From their interviews, Michele and Lynette learned that NEFA is admired for its dedication and connectedness, but many commented on a lack of clarity of NEFA's vision and message.

Michele shared some of the industry trends she believes will impact NEFA and its strategic plan. The definition of people in the arts is expanding with the "Citizen Artist" and "Artist Citizen" connecting civic participation with creative self-expression. The idea of "place" is also broadening in scope, affecting the concept of "regions" defined strictly by geographic borders. Advocacy practices and tools reflect new and changing definitions of people and place, and cultural equity and "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion," or "EDI," have emerged as critical frameworks for decision-making.

In the future vision of NEFA, the organization's priorities should be expressed in program investments. Michele identified the key themes that resonate across NEFA's programs, which will form the guiding principles of the strategic plan:

- The balance and primacy of the artist and artistic process;
- Changing definitions of art forms and delivery systems;
- Leveraging knowledge and driving professional development;
- Playing a role in advocacy and policy leadership;
- and bringing increasing value to New England.

Building on these core concepts, Michele walked through a draft of a revised mission statement, which read: "NEFA supports artists and cultural organizations by investing in the arts, sharing knowledge and building partnerships, promoting cultural leadership and equitable access to opportunity, and enriching New England's communities." Michele felt this language offered a stronger statement of NEFA's leadership role.

For the remainder of the session, Michele asked the board to break into small groups to discuss the five organizational priorities identified in the mission statement. She asked them to consider both how NEFA is currently leading in each area, and how NEFA can lead in each area in the future. The meeting was adjourned for the day following the group work.



*Friday, June 23*

***BOARD CHAIR LARRY SIMPSON CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 9:00 AM***

Deputy Director Jane Preston introduced Dee Schneidman, NEFA's Program Director for Research and the Creative Economy, and asked her to speak about the findings in the just published report, "The Jobs in New England's Creative Economy and Why They Matter."

Dee reviewed the history of creative economy research at NEFA. This report builds on NEFA's history of investigating the economic impact of nonprofits in New England. In 2000, the research expanded to look at the employment of the entire creative sector in New England. Following NEFA's lead, other arts service organizations have developed arts nonprofit impact reports, and NEFA continued its focus on assessing all creative economy workers and employers with the goal of quantifying and spotlighting the strength of the full creative economy. For this third iteration, the report builds on previous employment studies, looking at creative industries and occupations, and adds local and longitudinal data. The report explores how the sector, and its employment, has performed post-recession.

NEFA has led the field in quantifying the creative sector, and this report positions NEFA as a leader in gathering specific information directly from New England artists. Dee wanted to supplement the federal artist data, which only includes one job per artist, and only if that artist earns more than 50% of their income through their art. A major component of the report was the Creatives Count survey sent to artists and independent creative workers, which asked about income, employment, job type, spending, and space and other needs. There was sufficient response to analyze the data, not just on employment, but also about the resources that the philanthropic and arts service sectors are challenged to help provide to artists.

Creative economy jobs represent 3.8% of New England's total employment, making the creative economy larger in New England than the national average. Breaking down the sector by industry group – 75% of the roughly 239,000 creative payroll jobs in New England are in media, retail, and publishing, and architecture and design, and the nearly 71,000 creative nonemployers (self-employed) are primarily in the visual arts, music and other performing arts. According to federal data, creative workers have higher median income than non-creative occupations, but because the national census only counts creative workers earning more than 50% of their income through their work, the Creatives Count direct survey revealed otherwise. Respondents reported less earning and yet spending an amount equal to rent or mortgage on materials for their work.

Dee briefed the board on how the sector has fared pre- and post-recession. Since 2007, creative employment has declined by 15%, largely due to changing technology and consumer habits. New England saw job growth only in motion picture production, visual arts, and culture and preservation. There was notable change in the balance of employment type, with "payroll" jobs and work declining and self-employed work rising, which is a segment that can be more vulnerable to shifts in the industry.

Dee expressed how crucial it is to understand that creative jobs are real jobs embedded within the whole economy. By drawing out the linkages between industries, occupations, and economic behavior, she hopes different stakeholders will use these data to educate their policy makers and to decide where to focus their own investments.



### **Strategic Planning Continued**

Michele Walter thanked the board for their efforts during the breakout sessions thinking about NEFA's value in the field. Next, she wanted the board to consider the questions of NEFA's capacity and its support, which create constraints on opportunity, no matter how big, robust, and wealthy an organization may be. Such constraints dictate hard choices. Making the difficult decision about where to invest your time and resources requires focusing in on the core of NEFA's identity.

Michele explained the best way to grapple with these questions, and to clarify NEFA's primary focus and identity, is through scenario planning. This exercise considers multiple futures that NEFA has no control over, and asks how to create a successful NEFA in different future environments. Michele described this process as examining what NEFA is good at, by thinking about what existing work can and should be continued and what can be replicated to apply to other models. What NEFA invests in should be grounded in what it can accomplish.

During their earlier group sessions, the board discussed NEFA's strongest value, its material engagement with constituencies, and identified additional specific examples of value NEFA offers to the field including: innovative program designs, resourceful and substantive data aggregation and dissemination, connections and partnerships. Groups also identified the concepts and practices NEFA values, including: knowledge sharing and professional development, and regional access and equity. The residual benefits of these two areas of value include NEFA's: leadership role among the RAOs, relationships with entities outside of the sector, regional influence in advocacy, and ability to assist in leadership development.

Michele presented four scenarios that weighed the potential for changing priorities of the philanthropic sector against the risk of dwindling or total loss of federal support for the arts. In an ideal world, philanthropic priorities stay the same and NEA funding is increased. In the worst-case scenario, the NEA is eliminated and NEFA's philanthropic partners shift their focus away from the arts. Michele asked the board to break into four groups to think critically about NEFA's capacity and support, consider how the environmental shifts in these scenarios would affect NEFA, and generate ideas about how NEFA would respond to or evolve in these circumstances.

When the board returned from their group conversations, they reported on their discussions. All groups raised the notion of community. Attention to and investment in "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion" was also a consistent priority. Regardless of what happened to the NEA in any scenario, no group suggested changing the mission or pivoting the organization into different directions that would map onto new funding priorities. Serving New England was a core priority for all groups, which Michele pointed out is the aspect of NEFA's work most at risk when the NEA is threatened. She concluded that thinking through how NEFA continues to serve New England, in a rapidly changing cultural and philanthropic landscape, is going to be an important part of the scenario planning in strategic plan.

The next steps of the process are to synthesize the ideas generated in these discussions and reflect the information back to the Strategic Planning Task Force. They will agree on the components of the scenarios for the plan. The work of developing goals, objectives, and strategies will be developed in large part by the NEFA staff, with input and participation from the task force.

Larry Simpson thanked Michele Walter and Lynette Turner for their work on the plan and looked forward to digging in further with the task force. He thanked Cathy Edwards and the board for a productive and engaging meeting.

**BOARD CHAIR LARRY SIMPSON ADJOURNED THE MEETING AT 2:40 PM**

### **Next Steps:**

- ***Submit the minutes from this meeting for board approval on October 27, 2017***