



New England Foundation for the Arts

Strategic Plan

February 2017
AMS Planning & Research Corp.



February 1, 2017

New England Foundation for the Arts
Strategic Planning Task Force
via email: strategicplanning@nefa.org

Dear Strategic Planning Task Force:

On behalf of AMS Planning & Research, it is my pleasure to submit the following proposal to support New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) in the development of a strategic plan. We understand from the RFP and our conversation with Cathy Edwards that NEFA looks to affirm its value, and consider programmatic development and deployment of resources to ensure relevancy in a changing environment. Given the uncertainties of the current funding environment for Regional Arts Organizations (RAOs), we imagine that this effort will result in agreed upon clarity of impact and intention, with a number of possible outcomes (or scenarios) for investment over the next three years – agility being the goal.

We believe that AMS is uniquely poised to assist you with this effort given our long and exclusive involvement in the field. We are currently engaged with several large-scale organizations as they consider ways to reinforce their value and relevance in a rapidly changing societal environment. We are helping the Guthrie Theater re-imagine a future with a dramatically increased emphasis on equity and inclusion after five decades as one of America's most important producing theater companies. In two separate engagements, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has retained AMS to assist with an evaluation of one of its longest 'legacy' programs in the arts, the New York Theater Program and to explore the role of anchor cultural institutions in their communities. And, we are in our sixth year of evaluation for the Department of State and Brooklyn Academy of Music's DanceMotion Program which seeks to further cultural diplomacy across the globe.

For the past several years, AMS has been at the forefront of thought concerning changing definitions of public value of the arts and success in the culture sector. For the Columbus Foundation and City of Providence we explored strategies to move the sector beyond sustainable and toward vital, testing assumptions from 'right-sizing' the sector to capitalization requirements and opportunities. For Theatre Communications Group's Audience (R)Evolution program, funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, we researched audience

engagement across the United States and developed both a shared vocabulary and case studies of effective models to help the field understand how/why the best ones work. In these and other opportunities we combine rigorous data analysis with provocative thought to reinforce new, progressive ideas and shared language around civic entanglement, public value and opportunity for growth and change.

Our knowledge and understanding of Regional Arts Organizations is enhanced through two rounds of strategic planning (2011 and 2016) with the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation. Many of the questions they sought to address resonated through our conversation and the RFP. Now, more than ever, RAOs need to affirm their role and value to the sector while adopting a framework for program deployment that allows for nimble response to change.

In the pages that follow, we outline our proposed approach. It is always our preference to work together with prospective clients to discuss, debate and refine our thoughts as we learn more about your organization. We would be pleased to review these details with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,
AMS Planning & Research Corp.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michele Walter".

Michele Walter
Managing Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven A. Wolff".

Steven A. Wolff
Principal

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Introduction

The arts and cultural sector continues to be under stress from rapid pace evolution in community priorities, changing consumer preferences, and social media and technological developments. The current political realities add a veil of economic uncertainty, and it remains to be seen how artists, arts organizations and supporters will respond to rising tensions. For the past several years, AMS has been working to reframe the conversation away from notions of efficiency and effectiveness, or long-held concepts of “sustainability,” to building vital organizations deeply entangled in their communities, creating public value and garnering increased support. This requires an environment of trust and experimentation, and the regional and national service organizations can be key to providing resources and thought leadership that help advance the field.

Based upon the RFP and our conversation, we see the following key questions as central to the planning effort:

1. What does success look like for NEFA as it helps to advance the sector? How does that inform the value proposition and grounding principles that will guide NEFA’s future?
2. With new professional leadership, what is the Foundation’s vision, and how might that inform priorities and desired results for the next two to three years?
3. What specific strategies might be leveraged or developed to grow the organization, diversify funding sources, and better engage artists and community? What resources are required?
4. How might the organization increase its reach? What specific strategies shall be deployed to integrate NEFA’s work to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion?
5. What are the implications of change for the NEFA business model?

It is our practice to serve as thought partners throughout the planning process, and we envision an approach that engages NEFA in robust inquiry and active thinking, supported by data and research.

Scope of Work

Stage I: Envisioning Success

I.1 Background Review & Internal Interviews

I.1.1 AMS would review relevant background information about NEFA, including recent program evaluations (New England Programs and creative economy portfolio (2015), National Dance Project and the National Theater Project (2016)); results from the survey of New England’s creative sector; available materials regarding equity, diversity and inclusion assessment and training; and the current strategic plan, recent Annual Reports, and other documents deemed relevant by NEFA and AMS.

I.1.2 Using a protocol reviewed and approved by NEFA, we would interview 15 to 20 NEFA leaders and key stakeholders -- a combination of staff members and invested trustees. Interviews would take place onsite and by phone. The purpose of these interviews is to understand perceptions regarding progress against the current plan, shifts in priorities, and potential new opportunities and/or challenges for the Foundation.

I.2 Workshop: Defining Success

During this initial visit, we would review analysis and findings to date and agree upon priorities to be tested in the next phase of planning. In a workshop setting with the Planning Task Force and/or NEFA

key leadership, we would begin to define the parameters of “success” for NEFA in the next three to five years.

1.3 Operational Analysis - Financial and Program Trends

A foundational understanding of NEFA’s operation is central to establish a baseline from which to plan, and facilitate analysis of impact of potential change. AMS would collect, with assistance from NEFA staff, relevant documents and undertake a five-year analysis regarding current operations to assess performance, capacity and results. This would likely include historical information and data regarding current programs, comparative financial statements and organizational materials documenting staff hierarchy and reporting, operating procedures and policies and departmental responsibilities. By area of analysis, the goals of this task would be:

- Programs - To document the range, extent and nature of current programs;
- Constituents – To understand the composition of NEFA’s constituency and evaluate their use of NEFA’s resources;
- Finances - To analyze the composition, distribution and variation of NEFA’s finances over time, measure the allocation of resources to various programs and initiatives and the impact on organizational vision and program goals;
- Organization - To understand the culture, structure and operations of NEFA and to provide a basis for understanding how to build on institutional strengths.

1.4 Workshop: NEFA – Considering Alternate Futures

AMS would meet with leadership and staff to review preliminary findings and consider key questions to be addressed in the next phase of work. Current conditions would be aligned against Success as earlier defined to conceptually assess impact on current lines of business.

This hands-on working session will consider a future vision for NEFA, which may likely include considering one or more alternate future scenarios. Specifically, we would seek to define how the future vision reflects the goals and priorities of new leadership, builds on outcomes from recent evaluation work, incorporates NEFA’s work toward more equity, diversity, and inclusion, and addresses the opportunities and risks present in the rapidly changing arts landscape.

1.5 Mission/Vision Review

Working with the leadership team, AMS would assess alignment of NEFA’s current mission, vision, and values with the alternate future scenarios to consider any likely revisions.

AMS would also work with leadership to define performance metrics, which will serve as a foundation for evaluation of implementation strategies as the planning work moves forward.

1.6 Stage I Deliverable: Future Visions for NEFA

The outcome from the workshop and Mission review would be a summary memo of up to three scenarios, with driving factors, for continued consideration and testing in planning.

Stage 2: Industry Context

2.1 Industry input

2.1.1 The team would undertake 20 (plus or minus) in-depth interviews with key external constituents and stakeholders to solicit input, seek observations about priorities and challenges in the sector, develop insights regarding the unique value proposition of NEFA and the other RAOs, and probe thoughts concerning potential strategic partnerships. The list of interviewees would be developed with you but would likely include leadership at other RAOs and national arts associations, key funders, and additional thought leaders.

2.1.2 These telephonic conversations would be supplemented by qualitative and quantitative research in order to form a more complete picture of trends and priorities among funders and sector leaders. A summary review of 'peer' institution strategic plans, an analysis of changes in arts funding over the past five years, and secondary research into the evolution of thought concerning priorities and challenges in the sector would be addressed. This research will involve analyzing recent studies by organizations such as the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Americans for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as primary research including analyzing state budget appropriations for the arts over the past five years. Shifts in funding priorities by national foundations would also be assessed. Findings would be summarized in a presentation format and reviewed with the team via webinar.

2.2 Workshop: Situation Analysis

Together with NEFA leadership and/or the Planning Task Force, AMS would review results of the inquiry to date and lead the group through a series of "Active Thinking" exercises to consider implications and set the stage for the June Board retreat.

At this juncture the emerging Scenarios would be reviewed and refined according to priorities and data that emerge from conversations and analysis of the field.

2.3 Board Retreat – Setting the Framework for Success

AMS would prepare a presentation of findings to date and lead the full board through a goals setting session to gain consensus on the framework for the strategic plan.

Success metrics, refinements to Vision, Mission and Values statements and emerging Scenarios would be supported by data and analysis from the Operations Analysis, interviews and other research. This Board presentation would be coupled with one or

two exercises to frame and then gain consensus on strategic goals to establish the framework for the plan.

Stage 3: Strategic Plan

3.1 Scenarios & Program Strategies Workshop

Informed by a definition of success and the goals framework established at the board retreat, AMS would facilitate a workshop to assess different scenarios and consider the optimal outcome(s) to be modeled.

Issues that might be addressed (as appropriate) would include implementing new programs, phasing out less effective programs, assessing staffing levels and positions, board committees and structure, leadership needs and resources, and strategic partnership opportunities.

3.2 Operating Goals & Strategy

AMS would work with leadership to articulate the operating goals for each scenario. Drawing on the research results in the prior work, AMS would make recommendations for operations, performance goals and financial measures. More specific goals and objectives would be drafted during a limited series of small planning sessions.

3.3 Strategic Plan

Following the planning workshops, AMS would partner with NEFA staff and prepare the draft strategic plan, which would be circulated for review and comment.

The strategic plan would be comprised of the following sections:

1. Situation Analysis
2. Future Success
 - a. Vision. Mission, Values
3. Strategic Framework – Key Initiatives

4. Operating Goals and Objectives
5. Implementation Scenarios
6. Institutional Impact
 - a. Programs & Services
 - b. Governance
 - c. Staffing
7. Implementation & Evaluation

3.3.1 AMS would review responses to the plan and make any necessary adjustments into a final version. The strategic plan would encompass both structural and process-oriented recommendations, as appropriate, relating to staff, board, funding, programs and services, and include measurable objectives with benchmarks, as appropriate.

3.3.2 A final workshop would be held to review the findings and build consensus around near-term action priorities and methodologies to assess and adjust within the stated vision and goals for the plan period.

Resumes of Key Personnel

Michele Walter, Managing Director



With over 20 years of experience in non-profit performing arts, Michele has a thorough understanding of the issues and opportunities facing today's organizations.

At AMS, Michele leads a mix of projects related to institutional development as well as facility construction. She recently completed a strategic plan update for Mid

Atlantic Arts Foundation and is assisting with strategic planning for The Guthrie Theater and Old Globe. Other planning support includes new performance venues in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana and at Auburn University; a facility expansion for ArtsBridge, the arts education arm of Cobb Energy Center in Atlanta; and a business plan for New Spire Arts, a community arts center in Frederick, Maryland.

Other recent projects include strategic plans for Arena Stage, an analysis of market growth potential for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and a cultural plan for the city of Ardmore, Oklahoma.

Prior to joining AMS in 2006, Michele served as Chief Operating Officer of the Virginia Performing Arts Foundation in Richmond, overseeing design and financial planning for a proposed multi-theatre arts complex. She was involved in operational planning of the venues, engagement of the arts and cultural community, financial management and planning, and development team coordination.

From 1995 to 2002, she served as Executive Director of the Richmond Symphony Orchestra, overseeing organizational growth

of 30% (including a successful endowment campaign), while developing several creative outreach and education programs.

A native of New Jersey, Michele earned her B.A. degree at the University of Michigan. She resides in Richmond, Virginia.

Lynette Turner, Senior Associate



Lynette Turner joined AMS in 1998 and has over 30 years of experience in the arts. She frequently calls on her past skills as Producing Director, performer, director and facilitator to understand the varied perspectives and points of view our clients and project participants represent.

At AMS, Lynette assists clients in the construction of strategic and business plans as they maneuver their organizations through the complexities of the 21st century. She is currently engaged with the Guthrie Theatre, as they embark on a long-range plan to maintain vitality within the Minneapolis community, as well as assisting San Diego's Old Globe as they align their mission to maximize their relationship with the City's residents and audience.

Lynette is particularly committed to incorporating the diverse voices and perspectives of our clients as an integral part of AMS's study process. For five seasons, she has managed the evaluation of the DanceMotion USA(sm) program for the Department of State, and Brooklyn Academy of Music. The program facilitates international cultural exchange while showcasing the best in contemporary American dance abroad.

Lynette has recently provided guidance to the Santa Clara Pueblo Tribe, in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico as they analyzed their

market and determined the feasibility of implementing a cultural arts museum. She has also been engaged in the work of The Yakama Nation, in Yakama, Washington, as they considered the vision and implications of re-imagining new spaces and renovating their existing Cultural Heritage Center. Her work with these important Nations enables the preservation of indigenous North American culture.

Other projects include a performing arts assessment and visioning study for Brown University in Providence, RI, a cultural plan for the County of Arlington, Virginia, Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources, Cultural Affairs Division, and a research project related to New Audience Engagement for the 21st Century American Theatre for Audience (R)Evolution, for Theatre Communications Group.

Lynette is well-known for her facilitation of workshops and residencies focusing on African culture. She holds a BFA in Theatre from the University of Utah. A recipient of the Governor's Award for Arts Advocacy in Alaska, she has been recognized by Theatre Communications Group, Alaska State Council on the Arts, and the Juneau Arts and Humanities Council. Lynette is also a Positivologist™ and author of *The 10 Be's of Positivity*, *10 Steps to A More Positive Way of Living*, as well as an ordained interfaith-interspiritual minister.



Steven A. Wolff, Principal

Steven A. Wolff, CMC is the founding Principal of AMS Planning & Research Corp. and AMS Analytics LLC. He works from the firm's Connecticut headquarters. For over 28 years, Steven has provided counsel to arts, culture and entertainment enterprises on strategic initiatives, the

planning and development of capital facilities, and arts industry research.

Steven has participated in the development of more than \$8 billion of new and renovated capital facilities for the arts. AMS has played an instrumental role in the planning and operation of many of the most significant arts center projects in North America and around the world. Among the most recent, the Eccles Theater (Salt Lake City), Vancouver Civic Theatres (Canada), AT&T Center for Performing Arts (Dallas), the Dr. Phillips Performing Arts Center (Orlando), as well as new homes for Theatre for a New Audience in New York City and Writers' Theatre in Chicago. Steven has guided projects through all stages, from needs assessment through project definition to site selection, financing and project implementation, operation, and re-imagination.

In the area of strategic planning and organizational development, Steven leads the firm in exploring “rethinking success in the 21st century” through a stronger focus on effectiveness and “entanglement”. He provides research and management counsel to explore innovative new business models, including change initiatives, governance and management evolution, strategic planning and program evaluation for diverse organizations including: the Denver Center for Performing Arts, the historic Apollo Theater, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (Brisbane, Australia), the Adrienne Arsht Center in Miami and universities from Brown University to Auburn University, as well as national foundations, leading producers, presenters and national service organizations.

AMS's research practice, AMS Analytics, is an acknowledged industry leader in benchmarking, operations analysis, and arts consumer and market information. Its clients include performing arts centers, symphony orchestras, commercial theatrical

producers, presenters, children's theater companies, ballet companies, museums and other arts agencies. Steven developed PAC StatsSM, introduced in 2002, for major performing arts centers, now used by more than 36 large performing arts centers across North America, the UK, and Australia.

Steven is on the faculty at the Yale School of Drama, where he received a Master of Fine Arts degree in theater administration, and teaches Decision Support. He is a frequent keynote speaker at universities and industry conferences.

He is a member of the Institute of Management Consultants and holds the designation Certified Management Consultant (CMC). Steven is the past chair of the Arts Committee and was a member of the Executive Committee of the Fairfield County Community Foundation (2009 – 2015). He served as an officer on the Board of the nationally-known Westport Country Playhouse (2001 – 2006) and is on the Board of both the Mount Snow Academy and NYCC Regatta Association.

Relevant Experience

Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation Strategic Plan



In the summer of 2010, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation (MAAF) engaged AMS Planning & Research to assist in the development of a strategic plan.

With authorizing legislation through the National Endowment for the Arts beginning in the early 1970s, regional arts organizations were formed at the initiative of the states to

administer support for programs handled most cost effectively on a multi-state basis. In the mid-1990s, tightened national funding caused most regional organizations to explore how they could use their established distribution model to assist private foundations with some of their emerging priorities. In a time of vivid political discourse and considerable financial stress in the arts and culture sector, MAAF sought to understand how it might best adjust its business model to respond to the needs of the field in the context of funding volatility and constraints in unrestricted funding support, which challenge the flexibility to respond.

AMS organized the work into two distinct stages. Stage I comprised an 'Environmental Analysis' to provide a shared understanding of the state of the arts in the Mid-Atlantic region, and frame priorities for future investment. AMS conducted research into the changes in arts funding in the Mid-Atlantic region over the past five years, and conducted interviews with board, staff and more than twenty industry leaders. A survey of MAAF constituents yielded more than 1,700 responses and allowed participants to comment on issues and

challenges in the field as well as their priorities for MAAF's future direction. Other inputs included an analysis of MAAF funding and program expense trends, an evaluation of current programs, and research into programs, practices and current priorities of the other Regional Arts Organizations.

Using data and feedback from this Environmental Analysis, the board updated the Vision and Mission, established a shared definition of success, and drafted four goals for the agency, with related objectives.

These were tested in a second set of depth interviews with funders and industry leaders as well as three electronic convenings of grantees and stakeholders. Additional engagement by board and State Arts Agency leaders ensured broad support and buy-in to the resulting plan.

AMS Planning & Research was subsequently engaged in 2015 by Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation (MAAF) to refresh its current strategic plan and chart a course for the next three years. While affirming the current plan's direction, as well as its usefulness in considering multiple future scenarios, MAAF desired to incorporate known past and future developments. The planning work helped MAAF to agree upon priorities in an ever-changing funding landscape; to determine clarity for defining MAAF's impact as it considers how to lead in the future, and to set the stage for leadership succession.

Arena Stage Strategic Plan



AMS Planning & Research was engaged by Arena Stage in July, 2012 to assist the company in business and strategic planning as it continued to adapt to operations at the Mead Center for American Theater. AMS's specific charge was two-fold: to assist the company in developing an "interim business plan" for fiscal 2014 and, subsequently, to guide the company in the preparation of a strategic plan for a "vital" future.

The first stage of our work was to conduct an expansive review of current operations, explore opportunities to shift the activity mix at the theater to generate additional net revenue, assess operating costs to identify opportunities for further cost reduction, and prepare an interim business plan for fiscal 2014. This work was conducted in partnership with Arena's Business Model Task Force (BMTF) and was presented in October, 2012.

With this short-term business model in place, AMS, along with Arena Stage leadership and a planning committee comprised of board and senior level staff, embarked on an assessment of the external landscape as well as internal governance; a review of institutional vision, mission, and values; robust discussions on how to define 'success' for Arena Stage; and an analysis of priorities and activity balance for the future in the context of a five-year financial plan.

Columbus Arts Market Sustainability Analysis



In March 2010, the Columbus Foundation retained AMS Planning & Research to conduct a sustainability analysis of the Columbus arts sector. The goal of this analysis was to explore the breadth and depth of the cultural ecosystem in Columbus and determine whether it was "right-sized," how the sector might be

appropriately capitalized, and what strategies might be implemented to achieve this level of capitalization.

In order to conduct the analysis, AMS first prepared an extensive overview of national and regional trends to provide critical context. Then, it conducted an extensive benchmarking analysis of Columbus against 14 other communities to understand the overall health of the sector compared to these other cities. Using both this analysis and best practice research, AMS developed 10 year goals for the sector to achieve an appropriate level of capitalization and recommended several strategies to reach these goals.

This study was extremely well received by the Columbus community, and the Columbus Foundation subsequently organized a task force of key stakeholders charged with implementing these strategies.

Brooklyn Academy of Music DanceMotion USA Evaluation



DanceMotion USASM is a cross-cultural exchange program that connects America's finest dance companies with international artists and communities. For a sixth year, AMS has been engaged to provide evaluation services for this program. Working in tandem with the programs producers, the

Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), as well as the funders of the program, the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (DOS), AMS documents and evaluates the wide array of program activities associated with the program.

Created as a means to share contemporary dance genres globally, this program is a major initiative, the likes of which has not been seen in over two decades. The program serves to connect stellar American companies with those who live in the communities the American residency dance companies visit. *DanceMotion USASM* aims to cultivate mutual understanding, augment cultural diplomacy by way of cultural exchanges, provide dance experience and exposure to the underserved, help facilitate relationships between American and foreign artists, and present professional American dance to those around the world.

The means of evaluation has been designed to encompass a wide range of information gathering technologies. Both quantitative and qualitative, this combination of efforts helps to ensure a comprehensive way to learn from, and engage the many program participants. Feedback on pre-residency and post-residency program expectations, as well as program successes and challenges from program participants are gathered by way of interviews and

questionnaires/surveys. Data tracking forms capture programming activity that takes place during the residencies. The assemblage of all of this information provides what is needed in order to conduct a thorough evaluation.

Project Budget

Direct expenses are billed in addition, at cost plus 5%, for travel, accommodations, courier service, telephone, per diem, duplication, and other standard direct costs.

Stage 1 – Envisioning Success
Stage 2 – Industry Context
Stage 3 – Strategic Plan

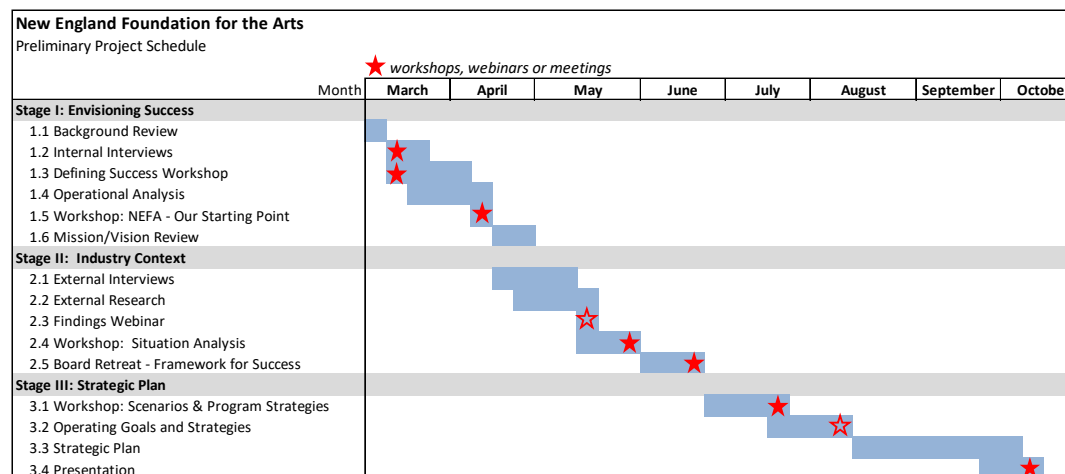
TOTAL

AMS Hourly Rates:

Principal	\$275.00
Director	\$225.00
Manager	\$185.00
Consultant	\$135.00

Project Schedule

The proposed schedule outlined below has been drafted to align with the key dates cited in the RFP:



References

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