Creating a Multi-Disciplinary Infrastructure

Facing internal divisions, a difficult economy and an increasingly competitive environment, thousands of artists from more than thirty national performing arts and arts service organizations came together during the summer of 2008 in Denver, Colorado, for a combined National Performing Arts Convention.

At the core of the Convention was AmericaSpeaks’ 21st Century Summit, a four-day event that focused on mobilizing the performing arts community as a whole, forging a common agenda and increasing the community’s capacity to take action.

National Performing Arts Convention organizers hoped to use the Convention to build a multi-disciplinary infrastructure, create an agenda that could be supported and implemented by artists and teach artists to become their own advocates. AmericaSpeaks designed the program to incorporate these priorities and to bring all voices and values into the process. The resulting agenda, which placed a strong emphasis on arts education, arts advocacy and diversity, reflected the priorities of over 1,500 participants.
Building a Community and Defining Shared Values

During the four-day Convention, participants built foundations for relationships and shared vocabulary with their colleagues that will support future collaboration. They explored key opportunities and challenges, weighed critical tradeoffs and deepened their connection and commitment to strengthening the performing arts community.

Taking Action Together built a sense of momentum, generated new ideas and produced action steps to move the thirty-plus organizations closer to their vision of a robust, sustainable and united community. The format provided performing artists around the country with the opportunity to learn about and from other disciplines, as well as develop national, local and individual or organizational take away strategies. Five task forces have finalized the recommendations that emerged from Taking Action Together into multi-disciplinary implementation strategies that are currently being implemented.

A Professional Performance
By Salima Barday

"I attended the National Performing Arts Convention just after completing my music degree at the Julliard School. Each day I was surrounded by new people, new ideas. This was my first chance to mix with colleagues as a professional. I met a diverse group of artists, many of whom I can now contact for connections with my current projects.

I facilitated different tables of arts professionals all four days. The composition of our small discussion groups was constantly changing, and each day we got a chance to be with new people, hear new ideas. This really built momentum at the table, in the room, and across the rooms!

I left these conversations with an understanding that, on every level, we need to be advocates for our work because we’re the artists."