

Telling Our Stories, Making Our Case

NASAA Annual Conference

Boise, Idaho

What do we say when we go visit a legislator? How can we tell our stories in a way that conveys our value to decision makers? As arts leaders and advocates, we need to empower our communications with decision makers and opinion leaders—people who don't have time for long presentations—in order to make a concise and compelling case for support. In this skill-building session on the art and science of effective messaging, participants will learn the key tenants of effective communications to create for themselves an authentic, inspiring and credible case-making narrative. In finding their own voices, people will learn to successfully tell a powerful story of what public funding for the arts accomplishes in their state.

Facilitators: **Cinda Holt**, Business Development Specialist, Montana Arts Council
 Gregg Dodd, Public Information Director, Ohio Arts Council

Presenters: **Betti Hill**, Montana Arts Council member
 Rick Halmes, Montana Arts Council member
 Tog Newman, Chair, Southern Arts Federation and Chair Emeritus, North Carolina Arts Council
 Tom Birch, NASAA Legislative Counsel

Session Goals

To develop strategies and tools for concise and compelling storytelling. The workshop was designed around two basic premises:

- Use the skills you already possess
- Base your communications on solid information

Session Format and Overview

The facilitators addressed storytelling through many lenses:

- Sharing best practices
- Offering specific tips, strategies and tools
- Focusing on three fascinating case studies of communicating attitudes about state funding for the arts that may differ from your own
- Doing some spontaneous work on currently relevant topics
- Sharing work with the rest of the group
- Telling some stories!

Nuts-and-Bolts of Effective Communication

Keys to Success

See Listening Tour Questionnaire (at www.nasaa-arts.org/nasaanews/session_materials_05.shtml) for an example of how to get to know political leaders.

- ✓ Background and homework
- ✓ Listen and learn
- ✓ Remember the value of one-step-at-a-time—break your process down into attainable steps

Communications Best Practices

See Effective Communications handouts (at www.nasaa-arts.org/nasaanews/session_materials_05.shtml).

- ✓ Keep it concise
- ✓ Follow the tenets of good communication practices
- ✓ Know your facts

Three Case Studies

Rick Halmes introduced himself with bio and addressed three key issues:

- How he arrived at the personal conviction of not supporting state funding for the arts
- Changing his mind, and why
- How he brings forth his personal experience to persuade others

Betti Hill introduced herself with bio and addressed three key issues:

- Her personal conviction of why state funding should support the arts
- Responding to colleagues and spouse who have the personal conviction of not supporting state funding for the arts
- How she brings forth her personal experience to persuade others

Tog Newman introduced herself with bio and addressed three key issues:

- Persuading decision makers to support state funding for the arts
- Example of a successful advocacy exchange
- What's different today about "the message" as compared to 10-20 years ago

Turning Information Into Action

See Personal Strengths Worksheet (at www.nasaa-arts.org/nasaanews/session_materials_05.shtml).

Wrap-Up

As a former congressional aide and current arts lobbyist, **Tom Birch** ended the session with an expert on-the-spot assessment and response to the session stories and discussion.

Session Materials

Materials used in the workshop, along with suggestions for further reading, are posted on the NASAA Web site at www.nasaa-arts.org/nasaanews/session_materials_05.shtml. In addition, the session used two publications that are available in hardcopy only:

Montana, The Land of Creativity: Thirty Stories Return on Investment the Western Way Building Arts Participation in Rural America, The Montana Story: Year One, Learning to Increase Participation and the Return on Investment

To order these publications please contact:

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Further Reading

Denning, Stephen, *Squirrel Inc.: A Fable of Leadership Through Storytelling* (Jossey-Bass, 2004)

Stephen Denning, *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations* (Boston, London, Butterworth Heinemann, October 2000)

Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Cornell, 2001)

Kees Van Der Heijden, *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation* (Wily, 1996)

Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories* (Harvard, 2002)

Yannis Gabriel, *Storytelling in Organizations Facts, Fictions, and Fantasies* (Oxford 2001)

Robert Fulford: *The Triumph of Narrative: Storytelling in the Age of Mass Culture* (Broadway, 2001)

Peg C. Neuhauser, *Corporate Legends and Lore: The Power of Storytelling as a Management Tool* (McGraw-Hill, 1993)

Doug Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond the Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work or Play* (American Storytelling)