2019 Conference for Community Arts Education Planning Meeting Notes

To prepare for the 2019 Conference for Community Arts Education in Austin (Oct. 30 – Nov.2), this February and March, the Guild held town hall-style meetings of arts education leaders and stakeholders in four Texas cities: Austin, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. These regional meetings were co-hosted with the Texas Commission on the Arts, Texans for the Arts, and Texas Cultural Trust at community sites including the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center (Austin), the Latino Cultural Center (Dallas), SAY Sí (San Antonio), and Art League Houston. The planning and production of these meetings was also supported by members of this year's state-wide host committee. More than 100 leaders representing nonprofit organizations, government agencies and foundations, as well as independent teaching artists, participated in dialogue that identified a host of issues affecting the field.

The following document shares the combined notes on central themes that surfaced during the four planning meetings. For notes specific to each city, contact Drew Malmuth, Assistant Director of Learning, at drewmalmuth@nationalguild.org.

Key issues identified by meeting participants included:

Impact of Gentrification on Arts Learning
- Gentrification has created significant challenges in affordability and mobility which necessitate collaboration among organizations and artists to leverage and use resources (space, staffing, materials) in new ways. It demands that organizations rethink/revise their business models and work differently with community stakeholders.
- Displacement caused by gentrification compromises teaching artistry as a profession as many teaching artists struggle to realize a livable wage and affordable housing; this is also negatively impacting racial diversity among the teaching artist workforce in the city.

- As teaching artists are getting pushed further from city centers due to rising housing costs—and as traffic worsens—the prospect of providing programs in different schools and partners sites across a city or region is becoming increasingly challenging.
- Gentrification can uproot the cultural foundations that serve to drive artistry and creativity at the community level, disconnecting artists and community members from their shared cultural history.

Making the Case for Arts Education (Documenting and Communicating Impact)

What strategies work to shift the culture of a community to support a thriving arts learning ecosystem? What policy changes at the local and state level could greatly influence arts education and what strategies and tools are most effective for arts education leaders and community stakeholders to use when advocating to public officials? How can we better engage the participation of non-arts stakeholders?

Documenting impact
- Finding new ways to communicate the value of arts learning is critical and demands that we understand evaluation differently. We need to be able to identify and measure common outcomes that align with public priorities (e.g., community health) and map those areas of alignment clearly and boldly. Need to reexamine who our storytellers are and identify new champions (e.g., allied sector leaders, youth, parents, principals, non-arts funders who support the work, etc.)
- How can we support arts education providers in developing clear and concise organizational frameworks that demonstrate, to multiple external stakeholders and staff/teaching artists/board, what that organization does, how they do it, and what impact it has?
- There are opportunities for more collective outcome measuring. How are evaluation tools being shared across organizations? For example, many arts education organizations are working intentionally at intentionally incorporating SEL learning outcomes into their programs. But there are still issues with effective measurement and comparing outcomes across different programs. How can we learn about and turn to validated tools for evaluation to measure things like SEL and other shared outcomes?

Communicating Impact
- What are ways to elevate stories of successful collective action, that demonstrate both the process (often messy and sustained) and positive impact, to get a better sense of an arts learning ecosystem and what these partnerships take? We need more opportunities to hear from multiple stakeholders involved—students, parents, administrators, teachers, funders—to get a sense of the 360-degree impact.

- There may be a role for the Guild to play in reaching out to city and state legislators, discussing the upcoming Conference, and highlighting the case for arts education support.
- How can we more clearly map the alignment between arts learning and goals of allied sectors, such as health and well-being, college and career readiness, etc., and draw on current champions in those sectors—including businesses, funders—to be ambassadors and help us make in-roads to potential new strategic alliances?
- There are, across the board, difficulties with communications/marketing. How do organizations tell their stories effectively and rise above "the noise"?

Diversity/Equity/Inclusion
- How can we work collectively to build pathways to more equitable funding in arts education that supports and makes visible the work of small, community-based organizations?
- Organizations are at different points in addressing racial equity and applying a racial equity framework to their work/operations. How can the national conference provide two levels of training and engagement: 1) training for organizations new to this work; and 2) opportunities for organizations who are further along in this work to connect with each other and share what they are doing?
- Examining potentially inequitable organizational structures and policies is a core need for the field. How is it conducted in a comprehensive way that can be sustained beyond the passion or desire of a small group of individuals?
- How can we ensure access to people with special needs and how does this shift how we train and support teaching artists?
- How do we ensure that multiple voices, experiences and perspectives are represented on nonprofit arts education boards to ensure that our organizations are able to support equity work now and into the future?
- How can our arts spaces be dismantled and decolonized to become truly inclusive?
- How are arts education organizations designing programming in partnership with the community rather than in a silo?
- How might this Conference both address the racist history of the South and call attention to work that is happening to confront this history, heal, and grow? How might the conference be a platform for amplifying the great work of community-based institutions that isn't always made visible nationally?
- There is a will to update programming and spaces to support students with special needs, but the funding is not there.

- Any thinking about arts and healing should also consider how a reconnection with the land is a part of a community healing process.

Developing Sustainable and Effective Institutional Partnerships
- What are the best strategies for aligning goals and building trust with non-arts partners (e.g., juvenile justice, mental health, etc.) to create real and sustainable impact? How can arts education organizations enter conversations with potential partners with an orientation towards the needs of the partner first (rather than leading with what they think the arts need or do)? We need to realize that partnerships are not "one size fits all" and be willing to be flexible/adaptive.
- Opportunities needed for arts education leaders to unpack case examples of successful institutional partnerships in detail and with transparency, hearing from multiple stakeholders involved.
- Youth are increasingly collaborative and value collaboration. They are demanding that institutions work together to holistically meet the needs of their communities.
- While there are great opportunities for partnership, arts education partnerships demand a power analysis to ensure equity, especially when arts education organizations and artists partner with school districts, much larger institutions, the tech sector, and others.
- Partnerships are vital, but the tendency to constantly partner as an arts organization can quickly pull an organization in ten different directions. How can we be open to community partnership while maintaining a sense of internal continuity?

Creative Youth Development/Youth-Led Activism
- How do we best support youth-driven arts learning and self-promotion/entrepreneurship?
- How can we use the arts to reinvent practices like in-school suspension or detention to promote SEL skills, healing, and different ways of learning?
- How do we tie the creative skill-building in our programs into real, concrete job opportunities for youth? In turn, how might the Guild's Conference help the field more clearly define the narrative around artistic expression and career readiness. We know that those with artistic skills bring unique, invaluable assets to the professional world. How do we tell that story in a more effective way?
- How can creative youth development practice in numerous OST spaces be better integrated into school partnerships and across all disciplines?
- How can arts education providers and the Guild's national conference catalyze and support youth-led activism and in turn be informed and shaped by young people's artivism?

- How is artivism playing out in different communities around the country? How is it being harnessed?

Teaching Artist Development
- Numerous attendees discussed the opportunity for the Conference to support local organizations in effectively training teaching artists. It was noted that there are number of recently recruited teaching artists that are enthusiastic about the work but are not necessarily prepared to lead a classroom, develop curriculum, etc.

Sustainability and Advancement of the Field
- What are the mechanisms by which community arts education remains robust and sustainable over time? Looking at the big picture, what are the institutions, structures, and funding sources that are going to reverse the diminishment of arts learning that we have seen over time?
- How do we develop employment models that provide a living wage? How is the overwork and need for multiple jobs in our sector contributing to mental health and substance abuse issues? Where is the support with these types of issues and how can we change this reality?
- How can we address barriers that prevent arts education organizations from collaborating (competition for resources and visibility; separation between cities and surrounding areas; elitism; inequity) to holistically serve communities, advocate, leverage shared resources, etc.?
- What are effective practices for developing local or regional peer learning networks to foster information sharing, advice, collaboration, and collective action?
- The community needs better support for grant writing/funding, with feedback on the process throughout.
- How can the arts community educate and better partner with the local business community and encourage their support of smaller organizations and the field generally?
- The future of arts education in many cities requires keeping artistic talent in the city—making being an artist a viable future. What role does arts education play in that process?
- How can we create a culture of more long-term funding relationships, particularly for general operating versus project-based?
- Funders should be more actively involved in these types of conversations around need. What is a model for doing that in a more active way?
- How do we measure the priorities between government, corporation, individual and foundation funding?

- Need support for local stakeholders to be advocates; how can teacher associations and arts education organizations be a part of the policy making process?

Impact of Technology/Social Media on Arts Learning
- Youth are facing increasing rates of depression and anxiety which many studies have linked to overuse of social media and other technologies. Arts learning can help young people tap into what is "real" and "not real" (critical thinking), help them focus on the present and mindfulness, and better negotiate this space and heal (SEL skills).

Working with K-12 partners
- The complexities and redundancies of the distinct school districts—particularly in San Antonio and Houston—make it very difficult to do city-wide work with the schools. Each district requires a different approach and a new bout of red tape.
- Navigating bureaucracy is a fundamental problem in this work. How do other cities effectively bridge that gap between convoluted education policy and community arts providers?
- What are the funding models? How are districts held accountable for providing funding support for arts partnerships?
- There is significant turnover of arts teachers in schools; districts have been emphasizing that community arts can be a replacement for arts education in schools, but, in reality, community arts programs should be supplemental to arts education in schools.
- How can districts become a stronger partner in the shared endeavor of maximizing the creative potential of our communities?
- There is an opportunity for more local advocacy around Title 1 and 4 funds to support arts partnerships.

Creating Future Sustainability While Remaining True to Cultural Foundations
- How does an arts education community—one that needs to bring in new sources of participation and funding for arts education—expand and flourish while remaining authentically rooted in the city's cultural background?
- The local and state governments can provide more support in this area. Advocacy is needed on the ground to push for more city-funded arts programs. For arts organizations to continue to do the work in a way that they know is culturally authentic, there is a need for public support that is not dependent on the whims of institutional funders.