

RECOMMENDATIONS: What the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation Can Do

MAKE LEADERSHIP TRANSITION A MORE VISIBLE ISSUE

Funders, board members, consultants, educators, and staff all agree that transitions will continue to be a serious challenge for arts organizations until they are handled with more consistent adherence to principles and best practices that are frequently ignored. For this to happen, the topic must be given more importance so that boards will be motivated to do a better job and funders and other outsiders will begin to insist on improvements.

“It’s like going back twenty years in museums and talking about marketing. Back then, ‘marketing’ was a dirty word. Now, people in museums understand that they have to do marketing in order to be successful. It’s taken twenty years, but there has been a complete change in the organizational culture.” (individual interview)

To achieve this objective, the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation should use the publication of this research as an opportunity to create a buzz about the topic of leadership succession, bringing the issue to the attention of organizations and helping groups use leadership succession as an opportunity for growth and advancement. One way to do this might be to convene a group of organizational leaders and funders to work on development of best practices, or to identify the best available existing resources that organizations can use to guide their transition efforts.

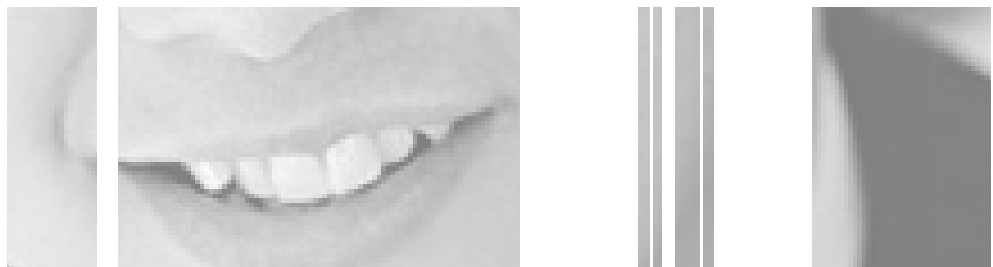
MAKE INFORMATION READILY AVAILABLE

Because leadership succession happens infrequently within any single organization, boards and others involved in the process tend to be inexperienced and unaware of where to turn for guidance and direction. Therefore, assistance has to be marketed to reach an organization when it needs help.

One point of contact might be through cooperation with the groups and individuals that organizations typically use to get the word out about job openings and searches. Publicity or advertisements in professional association publications or on Web sites that contain job listings would reach groups in search mode when they are most likely to be in need of assistance.

Establishing a Web site easily found through a search engine would also be useful. This site could include statements of best practices, how-to guidelines for specific aspects of the leadership succession process, sample job descriptions, worksheets for identifying the organization’s unique requirements, and links to other organizations such as the Donors Forum, BoardSource (formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Boards), and professional associations or arts service groups with expertise in specific fields.

While the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation could also publish manuals and books on various succession issues, these materials are less likely to be useful compared to simpler and easier-to-use aids such as process outlines, checklists of board responsibilities, and similar guides.



BECOME AN ADVOCATE FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Currently, most organizations rely on others to train staff, and do little to develop either their own future leaders or their current midlevel employees. To encourage systematic development of leadership in arts organizations, it may be necessary to enhance the culture of professional development in the field. Staff development options must be more available, accessible, and affordable, and organizational leadership must be convinced of the importance of training at all levels.

The Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation could provide guidance to organizations on the content and value of arts management degrees, and could work with degree-granting institutions to make sure these programs are relevant to the needs of real-world organizations.

Either by itself or in cooperation with other arts service groups, the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation could provide training sessions, workshops, and seminars on various leadership topics and skills. Some of the ideas suggested in these interviews include:

- *Management training for midlevel arts managers*
- *Finance, labor, and legal issues related to the arts*
- *Time management and stress management*
- *Staff recruitment, retention, and supervision*
- *Board member roles and responsibilities*
- *Approaches to strategic planning*
- *Best practices for mentoring or establishing mentoring relationships*
- *Incorporating the arts in recreational or tourism programs*
- *Writing for arts managers*

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSON-TO-PERSON ASSISTANCE

Participants in all three groups asked for a resource they could consult to find people—in their field or in other arts disciplines—who could provide guidance on specific topics. For example:

- *Board members who had been through replacement of their founder said it would have been extremely helpful at the time to talk with someone else on a confidential basis who had been through a similar transition.*
- *Executive directors find it difficult at times to discuss problems with others in their organizations, and difficult to find a peer they can both trust with confidential issues and rely on for sound advice.*
- *Emerging leaders said they sometimes wished for a more experienced coach to help them with particular problems or situations, but find it difficult to locate such help, either within their own organizations or elsewhere.*

A system for peer-to-peer referral in these situations would be a valued resource for arts professionals and would help improve professional development and dissemination of best practices throughout the field. Cross-disciplinary matching, when appropriate, would be especially useful, since people in different arts disciplines may not have other ways to meet, and might be more willing to share experiences with those in organizations outside their fields whom they would not look upon as competitors.

Another possibility would be to establish, or encourage establishment of, a job-swapping or advanced internship program for midlevel arts professionals, to provide them with exposure to aspects of arts management outside their particular specialties. This would help prepare emerging leaders for taking on broader responsibilities without hopping from job to job in order to gain the needed experience.

The Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation could also create a support group for organizations dealing with leadership transitions, convening small groups of leaders from organizations at similar stages of change on a regular basis to exchange ideas and share experiences. For example, there could be a group for board presidents faced with the imminent retirement of a founder or long-time executive director, and a separate group for the leader getting ready to leave. Once a transition was complete, individuals would drop out of the group, but new participants would be added as other organizations become faced with these same issues.