

EMERGING Leaders

Jennifer Armstrong

Leslie A. Ito

They [the teachers] told us it would always be fatal to our arts to misuse the skills we had learned. The skills themselves were mere light shells, needing to be filled out with substance coming from our souls.

—Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*

With the growth and success of internship programs in arts organizations across the country, a new generation of arts and cultural workers is arising. These emerging leaders have built a solid “shell” of competency with their dedication, passion, and newly acquired skills. Current leaders in the arts and culture field can assist in filling these shells by sharing their own passion and knowledge, and by providing meaningful and substantive experiences for these emerging leaders. Current leaders should seize the opportunity to fuel this fervent group by further understanding its needs, enriching its development process, and bolstering its pursuit of a lifetime career in the arts.


Emerging leaders define themselves as such in different terms. Amount of professional training, years of experience, age, and other factors all contribute to our unique perspective as arts administrators. As seen in recent survey results, emerging leaders in the arts are largely female and college educated, and tend to be more ethnically diverse, more mobile, and more often reliant upon their salary as the sole household income than their respective executive directors. For the purposes of this paper, we will define emerging leaders as arts administrators under the age of 40 with ten or fewer years of experience.

RECOGNITION

It is clear that developing emerging leaders is and should remain a key issue for arts organizations in order to secure future prosperity. With the recognition and acknowledgment of many national organizations such as the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, the National Association of Artists’ Organizations, and the National Performance Network, a dialogue has begun about how to approach this complex and often sensitive issue.

Americans for the Arts has been one of the leaders in sustaining this dialogue around emerging leaders and leadership succession. Concerns of an impending leadership gap began to gain national attention at the Americans for the Arts annual conference in June 1999. At the Winston-Salem Arts Convocation in October 1999, participants—primarily esteemed local arts council leaders—again identified leadership development and succession as a key issue. To respond to this concern, a group of five emerging leaders formed an ad-hoc committee along with several established leaders who were willing to lend their support and insight. Working with Americans for the Arts, this committee has begun the process of gathering data, publishing online articles, making conference planning and participation more accessible, and developing further strategies to engage, empower, and enrich emerging leaders in the field.

Over the last two years, many strides have been made to create dialogue on leadership succession. As these conversations develop, the questions we continue to face as both current and emerging leaders are these: What defines an emerging leader—experience? age? recognition? What barriers do we face? How do current and emerging leaders differ? What do we share? What are the strengths realized from both? How does the current infrastructure of our



How do current and emerging leaders differ? What do we share? What are the strengths realized from both? How does the current infrastructure of our country’s arts community address the cultivation of emerging leaders? What kinds of opportunities can be created for emerging leaders to practice these leadership skills?

country's arts community address the cultivation of emerging leaders? What kinds of opportunities can be created for emerging leaders to practice these leadership skills? How can current leaders pass on their years of knowledge and expertise? What values, ideas, and best practices should be passed on? Many established leaders in the arts community have dedicated themselves to the field for ten, fifteen, twenty years. As this group of professionals prepares for retirement or the transition to volunteer status, how do arts organizations shift human resources to avoid a leadership vacuum? Who are the ones both prepared and qualified to assume executive positions? What are the roles of current and emerging leaders in this process of leadership succession?

CURRENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The field is hot on the tracks of emerging leaders, identifying and guiding them through mentorship programs and training institutes, and sparking dialogue through conference panels and networking opportunities across the nation. Several national conferences have featured panels on leadership succession and characteristics of the next generation. Discussions between established and emerging leaders have given both an opportunity to share their unique perspectives. The formation of this infrastructure is vital to begin attracting, training, and retaining these future leaders.

A few training programs that incorporate mentor relationships with current leaders have developed over the last five years. Emerging leaders receive leadership training and hone their arts administration skills through model programs like the National Arts Administration Mentorship Program (NAAMP)—a partnership between the National Performance Network, the Master of Arts in Art

Administration program of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, DiverseWorks Art Space, and the National Association of Artists' Organizations. A nationwide program, NAAMP places emerging leaders in small to mid-sized performing, visual, and multidisciplinary arts organizations. In 2001, five NAAMP fellows received formal training, mentorship, and professional development opportunities while working at their respective organizations full time for six months.

Additional field-specific leadership-training programs exist, following the same training, mentorship, and work experience model used by NAAMP. For example, the National Museum Fellows Program, started in 1994, is a successful program aimed at increasing the participation of emerging leaders of color in the museum field. Past fellows continue to work in the arts and gain leadership opportunities. Theatre Communications Group has started the New Generations Program as a training and mentoring program for emerging leaders in theater. The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts provides a comprehensive management training program through Vilar Institute for Arts Management fellowships, for individuals aspiring to manage performing arts institutions and arts service organizations in both the public and the private sectors. The National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture hosts a five-day Media Arts Leadership Institute to nurture future leaders. Interestingly, many of the participants in these programs are the only formally trained arts administrators in their organizations, especially in the case of small to mid-sized organizations.

Independent Sector, a coalition of leading nonprofits, foundations, and corporations strengthening not-for-profit initiatives, philanthropy, and citizen action, has taken great strides over the last eight years to build the leadership

capacity of future nonprofit leaders. It has built this program through a combination of publicly acknowledging the need for increased emerging leader support, connecting emerging and recognized leaders, forming a network of leaders who have emerged successfully from the program, and giving members a national opportunity to share their views on the sector and society.

In addition to formal training and mentoring, many emerging leaders are initiating their own peer-support networks. In May 2000, Arts for LA met for its annual meeting of arts leaders and policy makers to discuss the state of the arts and cultural policy in Los Angeles. Here, feeling the need for a venue to discuss issues facing their own peers, the new generation of arts leaders assembled an informal network, Emerging Arts Leaders (EAL). EAL now meets bimonthly to discuss issues specifically related to them, such as marketing to a new generation of audience members and donors. The group keeps a working file of EAL members' resumes to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and networking through a process of identifying the strengths and range of experiences of each.

SUCCESSSES AND SHORTCOMINGS OF CURRENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The field has taken many approaches to begin attracting, training, and retaining emerging leaders over the last few years, yet only part of the infrastructure for leadership development and succession has been built. We must now pay further attention to completing the process of leadership development by investing in the leaders that we have cultivated. As with any investment, we must take some calculated risks in order to advance this plan of leadership succession and work to protect and preserve new assets—intellectual capital—in our knowledge-based economy.


Emerging leaders today have a fresh perspective of the field and a new energy, but without the context of our field's history, we will be at a disadvantage and find ourselves encountering historic barriers already faced, re-creating systems already invented, or repeating miscalculations already made by the current leadership. Thus, more exchanges and collaborations need to be forged between current and emerging leaders in which both generations work together toward a common goal. Opportunities for cross-generational exchange will more organically lead to a greater transference of knowledge and best practices.

THE CALL TO ACTION

The leadership gap may not be a widespread crisis today. However, it is an impending problem that we may face in the next five to ten years unless we take action now with a greater sense of mutual respect, commitment, and collaboration. By making leadership succession a priority today, we can prevent a crisis tomorrow—both financial and structural.

There is not one quick and easy prevention method. We must shift our way of thinking and develop a culture in which values, character, synergy, and other leadership qualities become the cornerstone of our success. As Stephen R. Covey says, "Leadership is a choice, not a position." By recognizing that leaders reside in places both high and low, and that becoming a leader requires conscious and deliberate behavior, we will create personal and organizational transformations.

In the section that follows, we have identified a list of action steps for both current and emerging leaders to take in order to begin a process of self-awareness and awareness of each other, as well as how to move forward based on what is discovered.



The next generation of leaders has often invested time and resources in order to pursue arts administration as a career. For most, this investment is a deliberate and well-thought-out life choice, not just a means to pay rent or earn supplemental income. They have passion for the mission of community arts and want to leave a legacy just as much as you do.

CURRENT LEADERS

- **Grow your own leaders.** Statistics show that more than half the senior managers hired from outside an organization “usually fail” that organization within the first eighteen months (Center for Creative Leadership study, InterBusiness Issues, January 2000). By “growing your own” leaders from within your organization, you save time and money by eliminating lengthy searches and the resources needed for getting an outside hire up to speed on the history of your organization and hoping they become invested. Share your knowledge, experiences, passion, and assistance. Understand that emerging leaders are looking to you for guidance and support. You have the opportunity to instill some of your vision and values in future arts leaders. As a result, emerging leaders will be better prepared to assume an executive role and be more committed to the organization’s mission.
- **Research: Who is the next generation?** Examine your own organization and its future leadership. Find out who the emerging leaders are within your organization as well as in your community. Learn what their beliefs are, how they work, what work environment they thrive in, what barriers they face, and what they would like from you as a mentor. Don’t assume anything based solely on appearances or commonly held assumptions. The next generation of leaders has often invested time and resources in order to pursue arts administration as a career. For most, this investment is a deliberate and well-thought-out life choice, not just a means to pay rent or earn supplemental income. They have passion for the mission of community arts and want to leave a legacy just as much as you do. Remember, with new leaders comes new programming, audiences, donors, and volunteers. Gather with other arts organizations in your community to discuss your combined future and how to prepare for

a transition; they are your allies in this process as well as your competitors for emerging talent. Seek out local, state, and national models, studies, and assistance.

- **Lead and follow by example.** Take risks and allow emerging leaders to take risks. Invite them to the table. Send them to important meetings with the power to make decisions and the knowledge to make them sound ones. Welcome their attendance at board meetings. Attend workshops and training sessions together, setting up a collaborative learning environment. Learn new leadership skills together, not just administrative skills. Give them significant projects to manage. Sponsor them at major state and national conferences. Allow them to share in the evolution of your organization and the greater field. Beyond discussion and training is putting theory and knowledge to use. We also need to create more opportunities for emerging leaders to test out what they have learned so that they can see what works and what doesn’t.
- **Protect your investment.** Emerging leaders are eager and willing to go above and beyond but do not want to feel taken advantage of. Acknowledge them. Reward them. Encourage them. Ask their opinion. Find out what they think are the current issues and trends in the field. Know that if these new, highly mobile leaders are not satisfied with the environment in which they live and work, and are not empowered to change their circumstances, they will move on to another organization that seems to offer more opportunity.

EMERGING LEADERS

- **Maintain your confidence and always value your contributions to the field.** Remember that no matter what title you hold or salary you earn, you possess the potential to prevail as a leader. Lead and follow by example. There is no room for self-doubt. There is no time for trepidation.

Consider yourself a valuable contributing leader in the arts' evolution, and position yourself to be present in important decision-making arenas. Know what your commitments and priorities are and work toward them.

- **Think critically and ask questions.** Question yourself. Question paradigms and structures. Do not allow psychological barriers to become your reality.
- **Research.** Know the history of your organization, the community you serve, and what your contribution could mean. Develop your own ideas and opinions about the arts, their role in society, and how your organization fits into the greater scheme of things. Recognize that you are a part of something bigger than yourself.
- **Develop networks of support.** Seek out contemporaries as well as mentors with whom to network. Engage current leaders in conversation. Learn what their beliefs are, how they work, what work environments they thrive in, what barriers they face, and what they would like from you as a colleague.
- **Take risks and challenge yourself.** Stand up and share your voice. Don't wait to be asked. Don't wait to be invited to the table—invite yourself. Work to become not just an administrator but a catalyst for change. Find avenues to strengthen your leadership skills in breadth and depth both inside and outside your organization. Expand your knowledge base. Knowledge comes from many sources, so be present at diverse assemblies not directly affiliated with work. If you don't like the circumstances in which you work, change them. If you don't believe in the mission of your organization, move on. This work is too demanding of your mind and spirit to commit to something without a sense of reciprocity.

CONCLUSION

We shall continue trusting those among us in whom the spirit has not entirely lost remembrance of the way. We shall call to them. Some we will find whose intimations of remembrance will turn intenser, turn into conscious thought, turn from thought to action. That is our vocation.

—Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*

Together, we can remember our way. Together, we can reveal vast oceans of talent rising within us. Together, we can rediscover our past, recognize our present, and reach for our future. Together, we can build leaders with the essential passion and knowledge to forge new ground in the arts and the staunch commitment to instill these values in the next generation. The methods we have described are just the beginning. **We hope this paper acts as more than just a momentary consideration and impetus for discussion, but as motivation for swift and inspiring action.**



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Work to become not just an administrator but a catalyst for change.**

LIST OF REFERENCES

Americans for the Arts
1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 371-2830
www.artsusa.org

Emerging Arts Leaders
Renee Williams, Program Officer
Los Angeles County Arts Commission
Temple Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Independent Sector
1200 Eighteenth Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 467-6100
(202) 467-6101 fax
info@IndependentSector.org email
www.independentsector.org/programs/leadership/emerging_leaders_program.htm

Media Arts Leadership Institute
Paula Manley
National Association of Media Arts
and Culture
346 9th Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 431-1391
(415) 431-1392 fax
namac@namac.org
www.namac.org

National Arts Administration
Mentorship Program
Vesna Todorovic, Director
226 W. Rittenhouse Square, Suite 2107
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 735-6113
vtodorovic@aol.com

National Museum Fellows Program
Dr. Billie Gaines, Director
130 West Paces Ferry Road, NW
Atlanta, GA 30305-1366
(404) 814-4024
bgaines@atlhist.org

New Generations Program
Emilya Cachapero
Theatre Communications Group
355 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017
(212) 697-5230