

Association of
Performing Arts Presenters

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE FIELD



Neill Archer Roan

Joyce Jones

Wendy W. Roan





◆ Introduction

This report presents challenges and issues gleaned from field conversations conducted in September and October of 2006, and facilitated by The Roan Group for the Association of Performing Arts Presenters. These Conversations with the Field (Conversations) were convened as a part of Arts Presenters' Strategic Review Initiative: a comprehensive 15-month management and process review of Arts Presenters' array of strategies, programs, staffing, processes, priorities, plans, goals and objectives. This process is projected to conclude in April, 2007. (A process timeline is displayed on page 14.)

The purpose of this report is to 1) report on the issues and challenges currently facing the presenting and touring field; and 2) provide relevant contextual information that has emerged during the process. *The report does not present the Association's plans and strategies that have been developed or are being developed in order to advance the quality and effectiveness of its service to its membership and impact on the field.*

The Conversations were convened for two purposes: 1) to seek feedback on draft findings and strategies emerging from the strategic review process, and; 2) to identify, inventory, and discuss current challenges and opportunities facing the presenting and touring field.

These forums were convened in Long Beach, CA, San Francisco, CA, Little Rock, AR, New York, NY, Baltimore, MD, Chicago, IL, New Orleans, LA, and Portsmouth, NH. Participants consisted of: artists, representatives from presenting organizations, consultants, vendors, producers, artist managers, and agents. Some 200 plus people working in the presenting and performing arts fields gathered to voice their concerns, hopes and fears regarding the present and future of presenting. Those participating organizations included large, small and mid-sized companies from every region of the country.

Following a 35-minute presentation, participants were asked to reflect upon and discuss how marketplace, political, social, and economic shifts have affected the field's operating environment, and whether the Association's array of draft plans and strategies are likely to meet the field's operating needs and advance the field's sustainability and effectiveness. Some key questions included:

- What opportunities and challenges do you face?
- What do you need and want to work more effectively?
- What learning objectives should Arts Presenters champion?
- How could the mix of programs and services shift to create more lasting value for your time and money?
- How can we strengthen other networks and organizations that deliver value to you?
- How can Arts Presenters re-design its programs and services to deliver a year-round capacity building agenda for its members?

With those questions in mind, the discussion facilitator prompted participants to catalogue challenges and opportunities facing the field with an eye toward articulating and shaping the presenting field's future through open dialogue and deliberation.



A healthy diversity in opinion was captured, as well as some disagreement on how to address some tough challenges that the field is facing. While this report makes no attempt to capture the totality of the opinions expressed, it is intended to summarize the scope of the conversations and touch on several areas of discussion that came up repeatedly.

◆ **Environmental Factors: It's Tougher Than Ever to Succeed**

Like their producing counterparts, presenting organizations confront significant challenges in attracting, developing, and maintaining audiences. Both presenters and artist managers report an unstable and unpredictable environment where it is increasing difficult to accurately forecast attendance and ticket sales.

For almost all presenters, effectively meeting revenue-generation goals is a critical sustainability factor. Revenue shortfalls result in emergency fundraising appeals that may or may not be successful, or in financial deficits. Either result destabilizes those organizations that experience them.

There is no question that coping with the environment has stolen a great deal of focus from mission among many presenting members. It's hard to think about navigating from point A to point B when one's vessel has sprung a serious leak. For many organizations in the presenting field, the environment has forced a shift in focus from mission-delivery to survival.

Decline of Effectiveness of Traditional Media

Some audience challenges are the result of long-term trends such as a continuing decline nationally in the space and attention devoted to the performing arts in the print media, especially in the newspaper category – traditionally a medium noted for its public relations and marketing effectiveness. In an effort to boost readership and to protect advertising revenues, most newspapers have adjusted their readership development strategies and editorial focus to reflect popular culture, morphing tastes, and emerging media options. Concurrently, the ranks of feature writers, critics, and reviewers are shrinking, even among category leadership newspapers, like *The New York Times*.

As ink and attention dedicated to the live performing arts has diminished, not only is it more difficult to engage audiences with the prospective and exciting new-next-thing, informing audiences about artists and events in which they have typically shown interest is also challenging. Every event within a newspaper's circulation geography competes for space and attention. Reduced space translates to fewer stories and greater risk of low event awareness among audiences.

Radio, like newspaper, is also a far less effective news, informational, and advertising medium than it once was. Disruptive technologies like the iPod have transformed radio into one of many audio content providers. It is inconceivable to many younger audience members that anyone would allow some stranger to dictate a music playlist. Nor are they willing to tolerate commercial message interruptions of their music head-space. Radio's once-powerful channel to audiences trapped in traffic during drive time is not entirely a thing of the past, but its effectiveness is fast diminishing.



Accelerating Audience Adoption of Disruptive Technologies

Some challenges in attracting audiences are the result of disruptive technologies (increased broadband access is dynamically transforming internet use patterns), and new entrants into the leisure entertainment categories. Computer gaming, for example, generates more revenue annually than the combined sales of movies and music recordings.

While presenting organizations might be characterized as real-time engines of social aggregation, many younger audience members are meeting their needs to connect and communicate in virtual counterparts like MySpace. The internet is not only a channel for information and entertainment, it is an interactive forum within which participants are socialized and acculturated in addition to being informed and entertained. Many presenting organizations are novices at encouraging or facilitating these virtual networks to cross the chasm from the virtual to the real – to move from the electronic to the analog experience of the real, in real time – *and* together.

The Time Famine

For many presenters, competition for leisure dollars is not nearly as big a concern as is competition for leisure time. An aging population that is working longer days, then commuting both further and slower due to increasing traffic congestion, has made even the possibility of participation and attendance especially problematic – especially in larger urban and suburban markets. Many people don't make it home in time to turn around and head back to a venue for a performance.

While some former audience members' desire to attend live performance events has been significantly diminished by a time famine, vivid and high-quality experiences that are now available by means of technological innovation are making staying at home a lot more attractive. Luxurious home-theater environments – outfitted with surround sound, refrigerated armchairs, and large high-definition screens – fuel a preference among many people to just stay home, and get their arts and entertainment fix from various cable and satellite content providers.

The choice to stay put requires no drive-time to and from a live performance. The choice to lounge comfortably in casual clothes, or pajamas and slippers is tempting – especially after a long work day.

Judy Mitoma, Director of the UCLA Center for Intercultural Performance, and Professor of Dance in the Department of World Arts & Cultures, describes this problem as cultural isolationism:

"We are challenged with the forces of our society and its current state of the public hunkering down at home not wanting to leave their houses, being too tired from work and having no extra time. Isolationism. They may have extra income, but don't think about contributing to our live performing artists. We need to understand the nature of human psychology. Though we are isolated, we long for community. These issues, which are sociological, philosophical, economic and political, need to be brought forward. They shouldn't be feared, but acknowledged and fully understood. Then we can figure out how to turn things around and make productive change, so we can make the contribution that we believe the arts can make to society."



Increased Presenting Costs Are Driving Higher Prices and Higher Risk

A number of economic factors – e.g. higher transportation and fuel costs, skyrocketing health care & benefit costs, and burgeoning labor costs – have resulted in significantly higher fees for artists and attractions.

The presenter is encountering other increasing cost drivers, too: printing and paper costs are increasing; costs of mailing continue to rise; costs of media and advertising have increased significantly; and rental fees, user fees, crew costs, sound & light bills, and equipment rentals continue to rise as well. Aside from contributing to riskier presentation projects, higher artist fees and presenting overhead costs have driven higher ticket prices, increasing pressure to garner sponsorships and to fundraise in order to offset potential earned income shortfalls.

Higher ticket prices have made some events (often those with the most broadcast appeal due to the greatest name-recognition) significantly less accessible to those audience members who fall in the lower socio-economic strata. Some audience members have interest, but can't afford to participate.

Some long-time audience members are no longer able to attend because of infirmity brought on by aging, or because higher ticket prices are no longer affordable for people now living on a fixed income.

Significant Decline Among Traditional Presentation Genres Like Classical Music

Classical music audiences have been particularly hard hit by aging, infirmity, or death. Audience numbers have plummeted for some presenters. Those who present or represent classical music artists are alarmed.

Like many artist managers who work in the classical music field, Marianne Sciolino with Sciolino Artists Management is concerned about what's happening with classical music. Sciolino and many of her colleagues expect Arts Presenters to do something about the decline of classical music audiences – a problem fueled by sweeping changes in audience tastes, massive demographic shifts, and very long-term neglect on the part of the education sector in the United States. Sciolino explains:

"I represent classical artists, and everyone says 'isn't it horrible how classical music has declined over the past several years?' And I'm saying this is all I know so I don't know how good it was before. I guess that works to my advantage, because I don't know how good it was before. I've heard that Arts Presenters is paying less and less attention to what's going on with classical music - similar to what's happening in New York with Chinatown getting bigger and bigger, and Little Italy now only a few blocks. Is that what's happening with classical music at Arts Presenters? If not, what is Arts Presenters doing to encourage the growth of classical music?"

Increased Competition to Buy as Well as to Sell

Though many presenters top-of-mind concern focuses on competing for audiences, they are increasingly competing to buy artists and attractions, too. As cities like Kansas City, Omaha, Miami, and Madison



have opened large new performing arts mega-plexes, competition has significantly increased for those marquee attractions across categories that are deemed necessary to justify large public investments in arts-as-economic-development. Just because there are more presenters wanting to book Yo Yo Ma, *The Producers*, Natalie Cole, Wynton Marsalis, *et al*, doesn't mean that there are more performance dates available. Presenters that have traditionally occupied a slot in particular tour route must often pay more and commit earlier to defend their ability to get first crack at the events that their audiences expect and want.

These early commitments at higher fees sometimes preclude a presenter's ability to take risks later on the booking cycle, so some artists and companies who might have been booked for mission reasons don't find engagements nor audiences. This dynamic - driven by the intersecting need to maintain status with sellers in order to offer perceived premiere events to audiences - frustrates and saddens those presenters who feel a strong commitment to helping develop the careers of worthy emerging artists and companies.

◆ Fostering a Field Culture that Values Learning & Knowledge

It is generally agreed that the culture of the presenting field has not historically been one in which knowledge and systematic learning have been valued. It is not atypical in the presenting and touring field that the knowledge outputs (*e.g.* reports, books, discussion documents, *etc.*) from significant studies, research initiatives, task forces, and work groups have been largely unread, undiscussed, and undigested. As a result, the value that is created by these initiatives remains largely under-appreciated.

The field is a relatively young one in life-stage and ontology terms; there is an intense practice-orientation. Because the field learns primarily through doing, systems and mechanisms that distribute learning remain in their early stages of development. Further, a perceived time famine works against field professionals taking time for learning, reflection, and discussion. Consequently, the rich satisfaction that results from habitual sense-making, learning, and applying new knowledge and strategies occurs far too rarely. An undercurrent of discouragement and frustration was palpable in the tone of Conversation discussions about professional development and learning.

This dynamic tends to keep organizations stuck longer in their developmental stages because there are few accessible and cost-effective mechanisms in place to access knowledge and skills. This dynamic is especially problematic in organizations that are resource-challenged. Respondents consistently use language describing an environment of over-work and overwhelm, under-focused and under-appreciated. The current dynamic perpetuates a culture of working hard *versus* working smart.

Many participants voiced fears and frustration about their organizations' failure to: 1) effectively plan for succession, and; 2) institutionalize and capture organizational knowledge and expertise. Respondents perceive that unprecedented retirement levels of senior field leadership cannot help but hinder the productivity and effectiveness of organizations in the field.

Respondents perceive professional development as a robust solution: a necessary means for capturing and transmitting knowledge and skills to secure the health and sustainability of the arts for future generations. Additionally, they perceive professional development programs as a forum in which the field's emerging



leaders can be identified, groomed, and trained in order to build winning leadership succession for the future.

Lisa Phillips, formerly with Multi Arts Projects & Productions in New York, expresses the value in capturing institutional knowledge – as well as developing leadership succession – and believes a peer consulting network is greatly needed:

“We’re the big fish but not the only one. Professional development resonates very strongly with me. It’s important to look at feedback inter-generationally and provide professional development for both executive leaders and younger leaders with five to ten years experience. I’m interested in a peer consulting network.”

Phillips sees the Arts Presenters’ Emerging Leader Institute (ELI) as a strategy to identify prospective leaders and leverage the skill-set of a diverse field. Engaging a cross-generational mix of people also helps to reconcile a lack of opportunity and inclusion felt by some members in the field.

And while cultivating emerging leaders was top-of-mind for many participants, some participants wondered if any thought had been placed at the other end of the age spectrum. For older members, the end of their career path is fast approaching, so many are asking, “How do we help the field create a new mid-career path for older members in a new and creative way?”

Others believe that the field presents an overwhelming environment for any member – either junior or senior – to navigate. Participants concur that the size and complexity of the environment makes it very difficult to find mentorship.

Stephen Cummins, the new Director of the McAninch Arts Center in Glen Ellyn, Illinois sees a mentoring program for presenters as a solution to this problem:

“Arts Presenters needs to create an effective mentoring program for presenters so as the program grows, then it becomes more apparent how you better define what a presenter is....”

Still, some participants do not find that education offered in year-round programs is in alignment with the reality of today’s business environment. Those struggling with business issues such as accounting and finance, development and marketing, are looking elsewhere for skills enhancement programs that appear to be more relevant and useful within their professional lives. Participants indicate that a desirable design feature appears to be learning programs that are segmented by job type, e.g. Finance Director, Development Director.

One such place that members look for applicable business education is MUPs (Major University Presenters). Steven Cummins, has praised the import and currency of MUPs learning programs:

“On the learning side, one of the things MUPs does is create these talking groups. So all the marketing directors who are MUPs members are emailing questions back and forth to each other. When I attended a MUPs conference, there was a subgroup for me as well as the marketing people and finance directors. And



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the business managers went out to a special conference just for them. It was a really great exchange of information.”

And while members have found applicable workshops and seminars that address their business management needs, others see a compelling need for arts-discipline education within the field of presenting itself.

With regard to ignorance of some art disciplines – such as jazz and classical music – some agents, managers, and artists suspect that this ignorance has created an aversion to presenting these art forms. Some see this challenge as a dual-layered problem, because this ignorance exists between what both audiences and presenters know about these art forms. To tackle this challenge, Bryan Gould, founder of the San Francisco-based jazz band, Swing Fever, believes that symposiums, in which both artists and presenters could participate and address these issues in an open forum, are the first step to confronting this challenge.

◆ Information Sharing and Strengthening Networks

With an array of programs and services available to members of the field through not only Arts Presenters, but from many state and regional service organizations as well, participants have voiced their frustration with the silo-like way in which these organizations are perceived to do business. Participants believe that informational agendas are not integrated and synthesized and services are not coordinated.

As a result, members sometimes feel confused, directionless, and fail to seek out assistance. Joe Clifford with Dartmouth College shares this frustration:

“I need structure and clarity regarding who’s doing what and who wants to do what for whom. The support systems that are in place, no matter how admirable, do seem to be at odds with one another. I’m confused about who my nearest point of contact is for a particular range of performers. I don’t go out seeking help because I don’t know where to go.”

Many would like to see more collaboration and open conversation between Arts Presenters and the state and regional service organizations. Barbara Ally of Wesleyan University sees value in the coordination of strategic planning sessions with regards to a particular region, as does independent artist James Mallison Chicago, IL:

“I think that getting regional people talking together a little bit better could be extremely valuable. Working in the concert hall as I do now, one person doesn’t know what someone is doing 10 miles up the road. One person could be bringing in an artist that might have a gap in their tour schedule for a couple of days, and won’t realize that the guy 10 miles up the road could take care of the hotel, etc., because nobody’s talking to each other and knows what everybody else is up to. On the national level you can’t do that. But as long as you’re here in Chicago, we can know what all our Chicago peers are doing. It would make such a huge difference.”



Laurie Willets of T. Daniel Movement Theatre agrees:

"If a presenter has somebody they would really like to bring in, whether he's independent or not, it's not so much the block-booking concept, but they do need support to utilize the talents of the company or individual who's coming in as the performing artist. I really encourage that. We need to do it in Chicago and Chicago needs to help everybody else in Illinois. And Illinois needs to help everybody in Chicago and Northwest Indiana and Southwest Michigan and Southeast Wisconsin regional networking."

While many were in agreement that more effective regional networking is greatly needed, others called for organized networking opportunities broken down by job duties or responsibilities – regardless of region. In other words, finance directors would network with finance directors and marketing people would network with marketing people in an applied and organized system to capitalize on best practices in business performance.

However, Karen Hanan, Executive Director of Arts Northwest in Washington State, envisions regional service organizations acting more as an informational and service conduit between Arts Presenters and the memberships that those service organizations serve in terms of delivering knowledge, services and program from Arts Presenters.

Still, others want an Arts Presenters that functions as an information clearinghouse where they can access business data and statistics; search through a list of tours as they develop; explore professional development opportunities throughout the field; or find critical information to help make informed business decisions. For this, they look to Arts Presenters to serve as the info-mediary, connecting members to an array of information.

Paul Beard, Managing Director of Bass Performance Hall in Ft. Worth, Texas, envisions it in this way:

"Arts Presenters is the only clearinghouse for all presenters who could put together a reliable, accessible database of industry facts, like Pollstar, to make informed decisions. I think it would be extremely practical and beneficial to the membership. Make it accessible to members for a fee."

And while many acknowledge that a scarcity of resources creates a competitive dynamic among regional and national service organizations – creating a silo-like culture – MK Wegmann, President and CEO of the National Performance Network, asserted:

"These organizations need to overcome their bullshit and work together for the betterment of the field."

◆ Embracing New Technologies

Given that many see web communications as the most advantageous (elegant, customizable, and cost-effective) way of retrieving and receiving information, there is frustration that Arts Presenters appears to have not fully optimized this communication vehicle for the betterment of the field.



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Barbara Ally of Wesleyan University looks to Arts Presenters to provide leadership in this area as she attempts to reach new and younger audiences. She understands that embracing new technologies to reach these audiences will be crucial:

"I see Arts Presenters helping us in that kind of technology and helping itself to communicate to us in different ways."

Richard Reed, Director of Marketing for the NOCCA Institute in New Orleans, LA, envisions the Arts Presenters website as an online arts community:

"The Arts Presenters website should be used as a peer-to-peer network such as Friendster (an online community for arts professionals), so it becomes a portal and not just a place to go and check the conference schedule. The website is currently under-utilized and could provide much more ramp-up to the conference and more useful information concerning the showcases."

◆ Why Bigger is Not Always Better

The Annual Conference is the premiere gathering of performing arts professionals in the world with more than 4,000 participants from across North America and abroad that meet and network in New York City. In addition to a lively marketplace, some 1,200 plus showcase-performances complement the intensive four-day array of workshops and plenary sessions about the industry. But with more and more showcases being added to the conference each year, a significant number of members are feeling overwhelmed. They are forced to choose between performance showcases and professional development workshops. And the scale of the event causes first-time attenders to voice frustration with feeling completely displaced, overwhelmed, and invisible. As a result, many artists now feel like they participate on a fringe in smaller, self-organized subgroups.

Some members see showcases as having become completely self-serving where value is no longer being delivered to the field. Laurie Willets, wants to see a change:

"I think it's overwhelming to go to an arts conference and look at this [showcase] list and select. It's just too much. I think that also needs to be limited. I think it will bring relief to everybody. One pines when you look at sessions that are available at APAP and how you split yourself to decide what to do."

While many in the field believe something must to be done to reign in the size and scope of what the conference has become, there are those who strongly disagree. They see the conference as a free-market system that should not be encroached upon. Still, many find the current conference experience too large and unwieldy; networking with colleagues problematic; and attending professional development workshops impossible.

Some have argued that many of the performances – while great to see – would not translate back home in their own performance spaces. One member sees the solution in alternating the physical structure of



the conference. Cynthia Mei, Artistic Director and Board President of ADORNO Ensemble in San Francisco, CA, says:

“The physical structure of the conference has a lot to do with competition for attention. It’s a strange feeling in terms of layout. Maybe this is not the dynamic we want to cultivate. It should work on a different social level. Providing reasons for people to meet socially. Maybe the idea of an increase in showcase cubicles makes us re-orient the way the conference is being held. We ultimately need to focus people away from the showcasing so people aren’t fighting each other logistically.”

Some see the solution in the “If You Build It, They Will Come” scenario, calling for stronger and more performative-based professional development workshops and seminars that have more impact throughout the year. They believe if members see the value in these offerings, they will take the time to attend them, and won’t feel the need to choose a workshop or seminar over a showcase.

Networking remains the biggest challenge for many conference attendees. As one artist pointed out, “the size of the conference makes it problematic to engage in valuable relationship building.” Therefore, he looks to Arts Presenters to establish peer-to-peer networking, allowing colleagues to find each other, interface, and do business. He continues, “A real review needs to take place where the conference is concerned, because the business is changing rapidly but the conference is not.”

◆ Sustainability and Financial Stability

With producing and artists fees increasing exponentially, overhead costs rising rapidly, and competitive threat of gaming and sports industries looming, many presenting organizations are looking at new models and fresh approaches in the areas of funding, sponsorship, audience development and marketing. Brian Keigher with the Department of Cultural Affairs in Chicago, IL, sees a need for more opportunities for funding:

“Everything we do here at Cultural Affairs is free and open to the public, but events cost money. So there’s always a balance between fundraising and development. Our programmers take ownership of sponsorship themselves because they want to make sure our programs succeed. Therefore, we go out and find our own sponsors for all our programs. You’re always juggling and multi-tasking and trying to make sure the program can happen, and that you have the funds to do it and the resources to pay the bills afterwards. So I think more resources for funding and different opportunities for funding would be extremely helpful.”

Many participants express similar concerns with identifying alternate sources of funding. As art and culture events get harder and harder to present each year, funding that used to be available has all but vanished, and ticket sales and earned revenue have become increasingly important. As one presenter put it, “We may talk about being one big happy family of agents, managers and presenters, but there’s inherent competition there.” As a consequence, many in the field have seen their industry become more and more like a bottom-line business. With the constant challenge of having to compete for a small pool of



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resources, Amanda Moran, Company Manager of Project Bandaloop in Oakland, CA, has found a way to turn the threat of encroaching competition into an opportunity:

"We've leveraged the threat of competing entertainment interest to our advantage. We're lucky in that we have a product that's attractive to for-profits. But looking at new approaches to pulling in non-traditional sources of funding to the arts as a whole to greater off-set the organizational expenditures would be ideal."

As the responsibility for funding becomes more and more critical, boards have a much bigger role to play than ever before. Therefore, members believe it's incumbent on presenting organizations to select board members who have a connection to the arts and can comfortably move between the for-profit and non-profit worlds. Most agree that empowered boards are key in developing strategic partnerships, finding funding and securing corporate sponsorships, which strengthen board capacity and ensure organizational stability.

However, Neil Benson, National Booking Director at ICM Artists, Ltd., sees the role of presenter just as critical, and believes Arts Presenters can help to better articulate their role and responsibilities to help guide board members of presenting organizations:

"Arts Presenters needs a better definition of the responsibilities that presenters have to their field and specifically what an arts presenter is. Who's better qualified? How do you become one? Where do they come from? How do you find one when you're looking for one? How do you hire them? What should their skill sets be? A great arts presenter doesn't just look at the bottom line, but understands what it means to sustain a performing arts center that does performing arts from a multitude of disciplines. He/she understands the responsibilities of representing performing arts disciplines and be an effective advocate with their board if need be."

And while college and university arts centers might not have boards, they still need to effectively navigate their authorizing environments. Bob Smith with St. Joseph College would like to see the Creative Campus initiative take the lead:

If they [the Creative Campus initiative] can identify the campuses where art centers are models for working organizations in which there are adequate staffing levels and realistic expectations, and fiscal models on the use of college and university administrators as well as models of minimal staffing levels for efficient operations, that would be a tremendous value."

In addition, Martin Wollesen, of ArtPower! UC San Diego, sees the value in developing and sustaining conversations with university administrative levels:

"We need to help them [university administration] understand and be a part of the conversation about the arts and the importance of the arts in a university setting particularly in developing educational objectives at the university, and developing and answering some of the questions in a broad way about what the arts can



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do and be and mean in people's lives. Developing these conversations and connection is critical to sustaining organizations within a university context."

But for a majority of members in the field, the increase in audience levels coupled with dwindling revenue returns has become a frightening reality. John Townsend thinks the audience development models are not working well enough:

"My audiences have gone up significantly, my income has gone down. This is the world we live in. What we hear and where we need assistance is with developing audiences. The models we have are working, but they're not working well enough. Just as Arts Presenters is experiencing with membership, we're experiencing with audiences. How do we truly develop our audience without using the same old models and ideas that we've been using before?"

Patti Swofford of Miami University of Ohio looks to Arts Presenters for the solution:

"If Arts Presenters could not only compile the marketing information but educational information that help get people into our doors and build and sustain an audience for the future, this could jump-start us focusing on generating consumers, advocates and funders of the arts into the future."

And while many presenting organizations across the country face tough challenges, New Orleans may be the best model in which to learn. The rebuilding of the arts communities in Louisiana was, in essence, sped up by the Hurricane Katrina disaster. As a result, this has become an ideal place to look at and see how New Orleans restructures their non-profits and how non-profits restructure themselves. Jay Weigel, the Executive/Artistic Director of the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans sees the opportunity in this way:

"The opportunity is for Arts Presenters to engage the presenting community in the Gulf Coast to help bring people together with new ideas, asking questions regarding what worked and what didn't work, and then start to share that information within the larger presenting community. One idea might be compensating people to share their best practices with other organizations, such as the success stories of rebuilt presenting organizations out of New Orleans. This would also be a way to fund New Orleans and would serve a dual purpose."

◆ Making a Case for the Arts

For a majority of the members, much of Arts Presenters' advocacy work, such as securing visas for international artists, funding Federal agencies, and fighting for arts education are widely unknown to the field. But as, Paul Beard, Managing Director of Bass Performance Hall points out:

"The origin of Arts Presenters started out as an advocacy organization. This field of endeavor provided a voice and unity of purpose. That advocacy mission is still implicit in the organization, but what benefits do we want to derive from that?"



Gary Peterson, Executive Director of the James Sewell Ballet in Minneapolis, MN, called for Arts Presenters to forge a sharper arts education focus, as reduced arts education directly impacts every member in the field. He argues that arts education cuts happen because we don't stand up and advocate for it:

"The value of this organization is only as strong as the value that we attach as a culture and a society to the things that we do. Forty-two states have cut their arts budgets within the last several years because we allow this to happen. Advocacy needs to be encouraged within each other and within professional development. It's got to be something that gets high focus on a national level and regionally."

While others like James Mallinson see presenting in an international forum as a tremendous piece of diplomacy:

"I found presenting in an international forum can be a tremendous piece of diplomacy because when the Belarus Theatre came to the US, they were the very first to do so. They were performing in their own language and not the lingua franca of Russia. So from a Federal perspective, this can have a lot of clout with international community."

But most members see the value in Arts Presenters as building a small online infrastructure in which members in the field can be alerted - via email - to congressional news that directly impacts their industry. In addition, others have called for a stronger advocacy presence within the Annual Conference workshop structure and in year-round professional development seminars. Members want to be better connected to and more informed about those advocacy issues that Arts Presenters prosecutes nationally.

◆ The Value of Membership

When participants were asked how their membership could better serve them, a significant majority touched on incorporating basic online technology features. Numa Saisselin, CEO of Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank, NJ, feels Arts Presenters should keep it simple:

"Focus on simple concerns such as make a listserv that works. The organization needs to change to meet the relevancy of today's business needs."

This strongly reverberated across discussion forums, as members expressed their desire for Arts Presenters' to more effectively employ technology to connect members to one another. With some participants, the challenge is not limited to how process forums work; it is also substantive: the online information that is posted and distributed doesn't adequately address the challenges confronted in today's current business climate.

Therefore, many desire what they perceive to be relevant data, up-to-date news and useful statistics in their inbox. In essence, members are seeking tools that will afford more marketplace leverage and resources that will enhance their capacity to succeed in the earned and contributed income arenas.



However, when asked – in specific terms – what these improved tools and informational tools would look like, respondents were vague and impressionistic. They don't know exactly what they want, but they believe that what they're getting is not meeting their needs. This unease and discontent signals how the field feels that it is harder and harder to succeed in mission-delivery. The reported malaise and overwhelm is widely shared, but there is little sense of resignation, but plenty of determination to thrive and prosper.

◆ What Lies Ahead

How can Arts Presenters best serve the field as it confronts new and emerging challenges? While the field of presenting offered a range of approaches and means of participations, respondents all seem to agree that Arts Presenters must foster collaboration among networks, be brave, take more risks and seize opportunities.

Perhaps a glimmer of optimism can be found in the members' willingness and determination to successfully confront the many new challenges they are faced with on a daily basis. While the field conveyed some frustration with technological resources or relevant information addressing their needs in today's business climate – they remain focused and ready to face those challenges head-on. Matthew Glassman, artist and Managing Director of Double Edge Theater in Ashfield, Massachusetts sees this as a ideal opportunity for Arts Presenters:

"Arts Presenters has an opportunity to step into a leadership role of discussing how non-profit presenters are going to change the way they think about their operational expenses and meeting those expenses. Doing so might bring different types of people into our organizations."

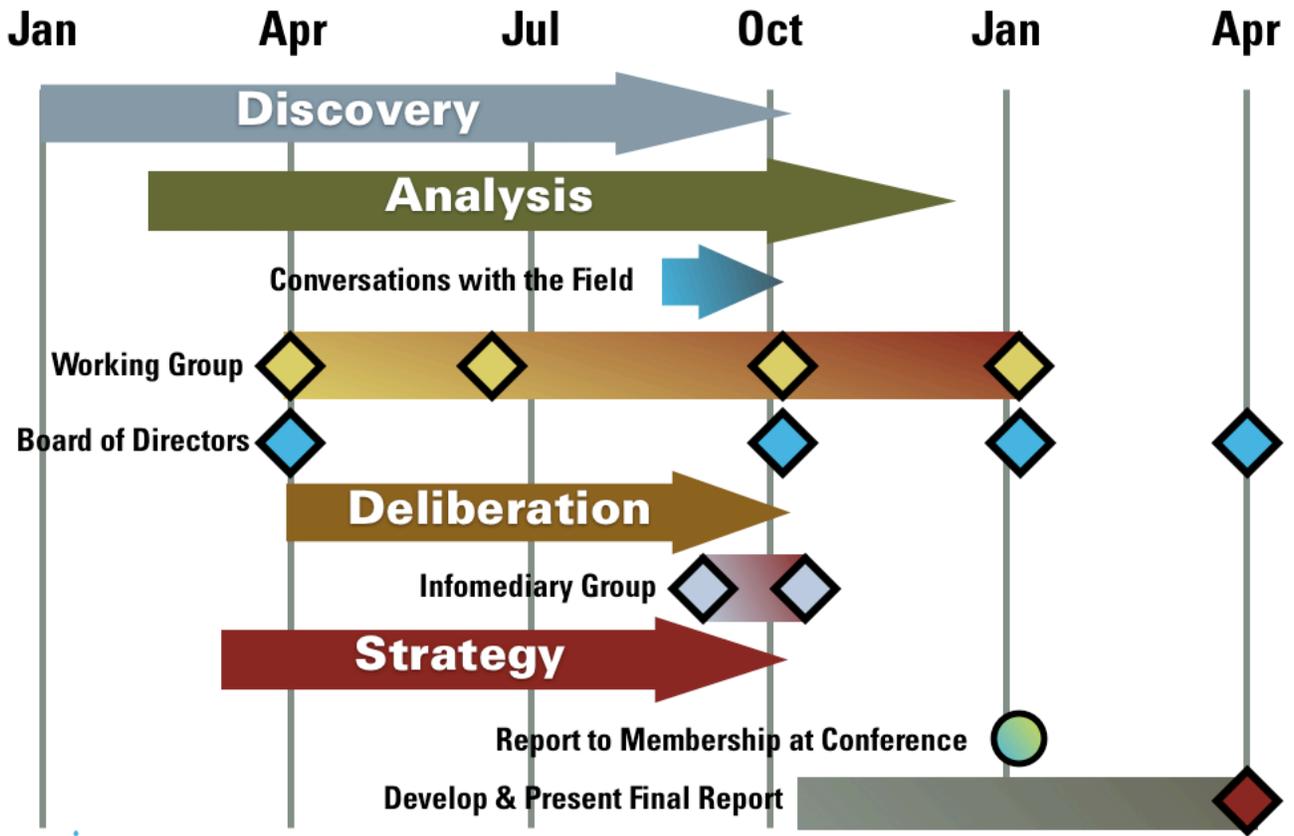
While Stanlyn Breve, National Programs Specialist with the National Performance Network in New Orleans, sees the opportunity within the membership, itself:

"Arts Presenters should look more closely at a way to leverage the skill-set of their diverse membership and use their knowledge as a resource. This could be extremely powerful."

Indeed, many successes can already be documented within the field such as the community building efforts that have taken place in hurricane-ravaged New Orleans. Many of these "success stories" or best practices have already taken place. It's just a matter of documenting these stories and sharing them among the membership.

However, despite today's challenges, members remain encouraged by the diverse pool of talent, knowledge and expertise that already exists within the field and understand that by turning challenges into opportunities, reinvention is possible. That may be precisely where the future lies.

♦ Strategic Review Timeline



Association of Performing Arts Presenters