

**ASSOCIATION OF PERFORMING ARTS PRESENTERS**  
**INTEGRATED STRATEGIC PLAN**  
**2002**

**INTRODUCTION**

Up until the development of this document, much of the strategic planning process undertaken by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (“Arts Presenters”) has occurred as separate, distinct pieces. One of the goals of SPG & Associates (“SPG”) consulting firm was to bring together all of the components of the planning process to create a comprehensive and integrated blueprint for action to help Arts Presenters achieve the full promise of its mission and values.

This Integrated Strategic Plan consolidates the various pieces of the planning process. It also provides a proactive approach to assess what the organization must do differently now and in the future to bring about desired results.

The next step will be to implement recommendations contained in this document and to ensure that the implementation plan is coordinated and sequenced to achieve optimum results. The importance of properly sequencing and integrating the implementation phase must be underscored. Whatever action is taken in one area of Arts Presenters will have profound implications for other areas. For example, if Art Presenters expands its membership categories, it will also have to make sure that it is offering valuable services and programs that meet the needs of those new and existing members. How Arts Presenters positions itself will depend on the kind of services it offers and its expanded membership base.

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**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Integrated Strategic Plan is the culmination of an 18-month effort to examine the changing dynamics of performing arts presenting and to identify the role that the Association of Performing Arts Presenters can and should play in advancing the field. With increased competition from regional arts organizations and the sting of budget cuts within their own organizations, Arts Presenters' members are today scrutinizing their membership and the value they derive from it. The association recognizes that it must change in order to continue to play a critical role in facilitating professional development and growth opportunities for the field both domestically and internationally.

In mid-2001, the Board of Directors initiated a strategic planning process which consisted of several steps:

- An in-depth survey and analysis of the performing arts field conducted by the Urban Institute that identified four stages of evolution of performing arts organizations leading to the creation of a major position paper on cultural interdependence
- A Communications Audit and Membership Study both completed in the Spring of 2002 that examined member attitudes about the field and the quality of services and programs provided by Arts Presenters
- A Board of Directors retreat to kick off the planning process in April 2002 and a retreat in June 2002 that outlined a broad strategic direction
- A series of staff retreats and analyses of programs and services.

SPG & Associates were retained in August 2002 to bring together the various pieces of the strategic planning process to create an integrated blueprint for action. The result is the following planning document.

This strategic planning document begins with the board's overall vision for the organization. To respond to the dramatic shifts occurring in the field of performing arts presenting today and lead the field in optimizing opportunities to connect artists and audiences, the board identified the following four overarching goals for Arts Presenters at its June 2002 retreat. These goals, which are more fully defined in the body of the plan, are:

- ▶ Advance the Field of Presenting
- ▶ Expand Knowledge/Shape Thinking About and Increase Participation in the Performing Arts
- ▶ Ensure Sustainability of Performing Arts
- ▶ Promote Global Cultural Exchange through the Performing Arts

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To successfully achieve these goals, SPG has identified three areas of focus for Arts Presenters in the next two to three years: (1) Financial Growth and Sustainability; (2) Integrated Communications; and (3) Increase the Capacity of Programs and Services. Within each area of focus, SPG recommends a variety of actions. The recommendations for action can be summarized as follows:

**Financial Growth and Sustainability**

SPG recommends a three-prong approach to achieve financial growth and sustainability of the organization consisting of Membership, Fundraising/Development and Affinity Partnerships/Alternative Sources of Revenue.

While it will be important to develop membership, development and alternative sources of revenue as distinct areas contributing to long-term financial health, Arts Presenters should focus initially on establishing an aggressive membership expansion program and building a development capacity to increase contributed income. As these areas become stabilized, the association will be in a better position to pursue affinity partnerships/alternative sources of revenue.

Arts Presenters efforts to raise funding in the near-term should be focused more on obtaining general operating monies rather than program specific funding. Building long-term financial stability for Arts Presenters is critical to enable it to create programs and services that address the needs of the field.

**Integrated Communications**

Arts Presenters must strengthen its ability to communicate with members and the public by creating a strong brand/image at the national level; build communications capacity within the association and develop strategic alliances and channels for communications. Arts Presenters must be perceived as the “go-to” organization for anything related to bringing together audiences and artists.

**Increasing the Capacity of Programs and Services**

The development of strong programs is critical to achieve financial sustainability and improve visibility for the association. Members derive their sense of value from the kinds of programs and services the association offers them. Arts Presenters must become a laboratory -- analyzing information, trends and data collected from the field. The association should develop a research and development capacity to gather information across the field as well as to develop the capacity to translate those findings into programs and services that help presenting organizations increase their own capacity and effectiveness within their own communities. In addition, these programs and services must respond to the increasing diversity within the field.

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II. BACKGROUND

Throughout its 45-year history, Arts Presenters has adapted and responded to the evolving field of arts presenting in the United States. The Association initially was formed as a membership organization for the managers of performing arts centers, auditoriums and stages at Universities and Colleges across the country. Over time, as the presenting field grew, the associations' membership base expanded beyond those involved in college and university venues to include other presenters, managers, artists and agents all interested in achieving the common goal of advancing the field of live performing arts presenting.

Arts Presenters has kept pace with its expansion by providing greater emphasis on the business side of presenting through the development of educational workshops and publications that encourage members to take a more active role in community life. In addition, the association has renamed and rebranded itself several times since its founding to reflect its broadening membership base.

Today, Arts Presenters is best known for its Annual Conference, a vibrant arts marketplace bringing together managers, agents, presenters, producers, supporters and increasingly artists who are also managers or their own agents. The Annual Conference is the place where the field gathers to do business, see work, book new tours and make contacts. In the April 2002 Communications Audit, members overwhelmingly indicated that the Annual Conference is by far the most valuable membership benefit and many noted that being able to attend the conference played a large role in their decision to join Arts Presenters.

However, as philosophies and strategies in the presenting field evolve, many organizations are now thinking and acting more progressively and effectively. The changes occurring in the field suggest that Arts Presenters must also think and act differently. For the Arts Presenters to survive and thrive now and in the future, it must be perceived by its members as having high value above and beyond the Annual Conference and as an indispensable source and guide to its members on how they should be growing and changing their own organizations.

The position paper titled, "Toward Cultural Interdependence, the Fourth Phase of the Performing Arts," released in January 2002, outlined the phases of evolution for arts presenting in the United States. The paper described presenting organizations as moving through the following three stages: 1.) a marketing ("butts in seats") outlook; 2.) program-based audience development strategies; and finally 3.) the cultural participation paradigm. As organizations embrace current best practice outlooks, they do not abandon the strengths of the previous stage(s). Rather, they add another level of capability.

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The paper also highlighted a fourth, emerging stage, cultural interdependence and issued a call to action for the field to strive to achieve this stage. In the cultural interdependence model, traditional distinctions among people and organizations in the creative arena dissolve. New relationships emerge and roles are flexible and changing. All parties – artists, presenters, managers, educators, audiences – become proactive and are meaningfully involved in every aspect of creativity in community. Institutions don't always lead, but at times respond to the lead of audiences and communities.

The challenge for Arts Presenters as a national service organization is to help all its constituents as they move through the stages of capacity-building.

With increased competition from regional arts organizations and the sting of budget cuts within their own organizations, Arts Presenters' members are today scrutinizing their membership and the value they derive from it. The association recognizes that it must change in order to continue to play a critical role in facilitating professional development and growth opportunities for the field both domestically and internationally. This is why in mid-2001, the Board of Directors for the Association of Performing Arts Presenters began a strategic planning process.

As part of this process, the Association retained the Urban Institute to conduct the in-depth survey and analysis of the performing arts field that formed the basis for the cultural interdependence position paper. In addition, Arts Presenters organized 12 issues forums across the country to explore critical changes in the areas of leadership, diversity, globalism, technology, sustainability and audience development (June – December 2001); examined member attitudes and communications issues -- reported in the Communications Audit (April 2002) -- and undertook a Membership Study (May 2002). These reports were reviewed and discussed extensively by both the board and the staff. At its June 2002 retreat, the Board of Directors put forward a strategic direction that included both short and long-term goals.

In August 2002, SPG was retained to integrate the various aspects of the planning process and to create a blueprint for action with recommendations on how Arts Presenters should move forward to achieve goals. The result is this Integrated Strategic Plan and the corresponding Implementation Plan.

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### III. ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

The old paradigm of buyer and seller that has dominated the field since the inception of the organization is being replaced with that of the artist and the audience. Arts Presenters' position paper, *Toward Cultural Interdependence, the Fourth Phase of the Performing Arts* speaks to the spirit of interconnectivity that underlies the way individuals and organizations work to bring artists and audiences together and addresses a world view in which diverse and different cultures are connected through the performing arts experience.

To respond to these dramatic shifts occurring in the field of performing arts presenting, the board identified four overarching goals at its June 2002 retreat. The articulation of these goals below reflects the intent of the board's discussion at the retreat in June 2002. The bullets underneath each seek to further define what those goals mean to Arts Presenters and are included by SPG based on a review of board retreat documents, staff Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis and other materials.

- ▶ Advance the Field of Presenting
  - Facilitate productive networking among all participants in the presenting field;
  - Provide high value opportunities for learning and partnerships;
  - Promote and encourage innovative practices in presenting;
  - Promote the highest standards of performing arts presenting.
  
- ▶ Expand Knowledge/Shape Thinking About and Increase Participation In the Performing Arts
  - Increase public awareness for the broad spectrum of performing arts that exist;
  - Expand awareness of the importance of performing arts in our communities and as a force for change;
  - Assist presenters in finding ways to encourage and nurture audience growth and development;
  - Promote the value of diversity, both in the variety of performing arts media and the types of people who participate in the field.
  
- ▶ Ensure Sustainability of Performing Arts
  - Increase financial support and audience participation for the performing arts;
  - Facilitate greater networking and business opportunities to create a more fluid environment for bringing artists and audiences together.

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- ▶ Promote Global Cultural Exchange through the Performing Arts
  - Eliminate barriers that limit the exchange of performing arts and artists across borders;
  - Encourage the growth and development of performing arts presentations that reflect the rich cultural diversity in America today; and
  - Introduce Americans to other cultures to which they have not yet been exposed.

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IV. THREE AREAS OF FOCUS

After thorough review of key strategic documents (1), SPG concluded that there are three areas of focus for the Arts Presenters over the next three to five years. These three focus areas are inextricably tied to one another and must be addressed together in order to fulfill the organization's strategic direction. The focus areas are:

- Financial Sustainability and Growth
- Integrated Communications
- Improved Programs and Services

The statement of these three goals reflects the intent of the board's five goals outlined in the Draft Strategic Plan that emerged from the June 2002 Board retreat.

A. Financial Sustainability and Growth

To provide leadership to the field, the organization must fundamentally expand its functions and change the way it operates. Such expansion and change requires an infusion of unrestricted funding. Arts Presenters, therefore, needs to develop a three-prong growth strategy based on Membership Expansion, Fundraising/Development and Affinity Partnerships/Alternative Sources of Revenue.

Prong 1: Membership Expansion

Stakeholders within the Arts Presenters community agree that expanding the membership is a critical strategy to attain future goals. The key question to be resolved is not whether to grow, but rather how to grow. Two directions have been discussed— expansion by penetrating more deeply into existing categories to more fully represent the spectrum of organizations in the field today or expansion through opening membership to individuals. The association has not yet made a decision on which direction to pursue as additional analysis regarding the financial and programmatic implications of each alternative has yet to be done.

The membership component of the strategic plan will explore the financial dynamics of the current membership structure, and systematically apply those findings and best practices in association membership to establish a comprehensive plan for expanding current and future markets. By developing a series of financial scenarios that illustrate the potential return of each possible market (ROI analysis), and creating an integrated acquisition and retention strategy, Arts Presenters will have the necessary knowledge to make well-informed decisions regarding membership categories and dues. Of course,

(1) Draft Board Strategic Plan, Communications Audit, Membership Study, Staff SWOT Analysis, Cultural Interdependence Position Paper

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this process will be closely linked to expanding the programs, products and services that Arts Presenters will offer to its various membership categories. The goal is to have a Final Membership Report complete with proposed structure, dues and benefits completed for approval by membership at the 2003 Annual Conference.

Prong 2: Fundraising/Development

While Arts Presenters has been successful in receiving grants from major funders, the organization has not had a focused development effort. According to David Bury & Associates (Bury), a consulting firm that the association has retained to explore development opportunities, there is an identified universe of 75 major foundation and corporate funders of the arts in addition to government funders. Arts Presenters currently has strong relationships with six to seven of those funders, including Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The association has the opportunity to reach out to a broader group of funders to increase the amount of contributed income both for General Operating Support and Program Support. A realistic goal for the development effort would be to develop ongoing relationships with 25 major arts funders over the next five years. Bury has been charged with creating a strategic development plan that incorporates both short- and long-term goals.

Prong 3: Alternative Sources of Revenue

The third leg of creating financial growth and sustainability for the association lies in the development of new sources for revenue outside of membership and development. Increasingly, national service organizations such as Arts Presenters have established affinity relationships with corporate partners such as credit card companies, airlines, hotels, etc. which not only offer member discounts but provide a stream of revenue to the organization. This is an area that Arts Presenters should pursue, given the membership's needs and the untapped potential for additional unrestricted funds.

Recently Arts Presenters established a relationship with StreamingCulture.com, a streaming video firm to offer services such as to members at favorable rates through Arts Presenters' web site. A pilot program testing the value and viability of this service to members will be unveiled at the January 2003 conference. Such a partnership offers the potential for incremental unrestricted revenue.

**B. Integrated Communications**

In tandem with financial stability and growth is the need for an integrated communications program for Arts Presenters. While the association has undertaken some marketing and communications initiatives in the past, these efforts have been fragmented and narrowly focused on the Annual Conference. The organization lacks a structured

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communications function, which has made it difficult to send clear, consistent messages on a regular basis to key constituencies including members, funders, and the general public.

At a time of decreasing funding for the arts and increased competition from regional and other arts organizations, it is imperative that Arts Presenters is able to articulate a clear vision for the field and its leadership.

The board has clearly recognized the importance of building a strong communications function. A communications plan is currently being developed which lays out strategies regarding developing capacity at Arts Presenters to implement the recommendations contained in the Communications Audit proposed earlier in 2002. This plan will be completed by November 1, 2002.

Achieving an integrated communications effort for Arts Presenters will require:

Creating a Strong Image/Brand

Through the communications effort, the Art Presenters should be perceived as the “go-to” organization by any one interested in how live performing artists and audiences connect. As noted in the Communications Audit, building a strong brand for the association is essential to achieving this goal. Such a brand can be built through a combination of a compelling graphic identity; clear messages; streamlined and consistent communications outreach activities; and improvement/investment in the development of key communications vehicles.

Building Communications Capacity with Arts Presenters

To make the brand mean something to target audiences, the association needs to develop a communications capability to manage media relations, advertising and marketing. This function must cut across all departments and programs of the organization to ensure that all communications emanating from Arts Presenters are clear and consistent. Efforts are underway to hire a Vice President of Communications and build a department that would oversee all communications and marketing efforts of the organization. The communications plan will define specific positions and areas of responsibility.

Develop Strategic Alliances and Other Channels for Communications

The association must define clearly who it needs to reach and the best ways to reach those audiences. Achieving this objective involves looking at current relationships and developing strategies on how to build new ones. Some of the new channels include building affiliations with embassies, other arts groups and coalitions, the media and others. Arts Presenters also needs to examine its Government Affairs program and how it can enhance its reach to Congress, key Federal agencies such as the INS and NEA as well as local and state government and regional arts coalitions.

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C. Increasing the Capacity of Programs and Services

The Strategic Plan adopted by the Board in June 2002 calls for improving and expanding programs and services the organization offers. Without strong programs, it will be almost impossible to achieve financial sustainability and improve visibility. Members derive their sense of value from the kinds of programs and services the association offers. The media, the general public and members will believe that Arts Presenters is the “go-to” organization when they realize that Arts Presenters has the information and connections they need to be a part of the exciting dynamic of connecting audiences and live performing artists.

Based on the Urban Institute research, cultural interdependence position paper, the RAND study on the future of the performing arts, staff interviews, SWOT Analysis, reports from the Forums, and other materials, it is clear that Arts Presenters needs to increase its capacity to understand the needs and trends in the field to take a leadership role. In doing so, two major goals are achievable: 1) to lead and challenge the field to move forward in its practices; and 2) to enable Arts Presenters to respond more effectively to the increasing diversity within the field. To achieve these goals, Arts Presenters must develop the following areas:

Knowledge Management and Dissemination

Through the Performing Arts Research Coalition (PARC), the American Arts Alliance as well as its own independent research, Arts Presenters has amassed a strong body of information related to the field of performing arts presenting. Last year’s Urban Institute Study provides a compelling picture of the changing nature of the field and the significance of this change to live performing arts in America. But the majority of this information remains internal to the organization and has not been packaged in a way that would be useful to the field itself as well as external audiences such as Congress, the media and the general public.

Arts Presenters must become an information repository and laboratory, which analyzes information, trends and data collected from the field. The association should develop a research and development capacity to gather information across the field as well as the capacity to translate those findings into programs and services that help presenting organizations increase knowledge, capacity and effectiveness within their communities. Arts Presenters should also identify, collect and disseminate new, proven and best practices, segmenting services for a more customized approach to meeting member needs.

Professional and Leadership Development & Networking

The heart of arts presenting is building lasting relationships among and between all of the parties who bring artists and audiences together. Currently, the strongest program that Arts Presenters has is its Annual Conference, which is often the main reason new members join. However, by creating the R & D capacity discussed above, Arts Presenters

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would be in a position to better understand the value of current programs and develop new programs that address the emerging needs of the field. Professional and leadership development and networking services under this scenario might include reconceived national and regional conferences, seminars and peer networks, consultations, coaching, web-based data and information, distance learning and print publications.

Promoting Effective Practices

People come into the field of arts presenting from a variety of backgrounds. Many members have identified the need for hands-on information on how to be more effective. Arts Presenters is committed to raising standards of practice and encouraging the building of new practices to achieve the cultural interdependence ideal.

Several organizations have developed best practices that should be shared more broadly with the field. The Arts Partners grant program has been effective in identifying some of these best practices. With the sunseting of this program supported by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Arts Presenters has a new opportunity to develop new relationships with funders to provide expanded grant making programs offering the field financial incentives and technical assistance, including the tools and knowledge to expand the programs in their communities.

Kim Chan, Vice President of Programs will be developing a plan on how to expand programs and services within the framework of cultural interdependence that is emerging in the field today. This plan will be closely linked with the new membership plan and membership structure that will be developed.

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VI. NEXT STEPS

Based on the strategic plan, SPG offers the following action recommendations for the next two years:

- 1) While it will be important to develop membership, development and alternative sources of revenue as distinct areas contributing to long-term financial health, Arts Presenters should focus initially on developing an aggressive membership expansion program and building a development capacity to increase contributed income. As these areas become stabilized, the association will be in a better position to pursue affinity partnerships/alternative sources of revenue.
- 2) Arts Presenters efforts to raise funding in the near-term should be focused more on obtaining general operating monies rather than program specific funding.
- 3) Arts Presenters must strengthen its ability to communicate with members and the public by creating a strong brand/image at the national level; build communications capacity within the association and develop strategic alliances and channels for communications.
- 4) Arts Presenters must become a laboratory that analyzes information, trends and data collected from the field. It must then use this data to challenge the field to move forward as well as develop programs and services that address the increasing diversity within the field.

Attached to this document is a high-level implementation plan offering concrete steps and actions to achieve the steps outlined above. Included in the implementation plan are immediate actions as well as long-term activities.

Arts Presenters is at a very important crossroads. It has expended careful and thoughtful effort to analyze where it is, where it wants to go and who it wants to be. With this understanding, it must be equally thoughtful in taking the next steps to implement its vision and to lead the association and the field of live performing arts presenting to an exciting future.