

## ACM LEADERSHIP CALL NOTES

### **Communicating the Value of Children's Museums through Advocacy Tuesday, February 9, 2010, 2:00 p.m. ET**

#### **I. Welcome and Introduction, Sheridan Turner**

Moderator Sheridan Turner, president & CEO, Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago; and ACM Board Member introduced the guest speakers:

- Jay Dick, Director of State & Local Government Affairs, Americans for the Arts
- Ember Farber, Federal Policy Representative & Grassroots Manager, American Association of Museums (AAM)
- Adele Robinson, Associate Executive Director, Policy & Public Affairs, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

#### **II. Increased State & Local Funding, Jay Dick**

Americans for the Arts works at all levels of government to advocates on behalf of the arts. Specifically, Dick works on the state level partnering with the members of the State Arts Action Network (state arts advocacy groups). These state groups have their own advocacy programs and many have their own lobbyists. Americans for the Arts' role is to bring these groups together. Dick encouraged children's museums to join the state arts advocacy group. In Chicago, for example, Sheridan Turner and Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago works with Ra Joy, the executive director of the Arts Alliance of Illinois.

Dick oversees the public partnership program at Americans for the Arts, which works with the various associations of elected officials, such as the National Governors Association, the National Association of Counties, the National Lieutenant Governors Association, etc. Americans for the Arts presents annual Public Leadership in the Arts Awards to elected officials at each level to recognize outstanding and consistent support for. Dick has individual relationships with policymakers in all 50 states and spreads the message of the economic case for investment in the arts. The public partnership program also provides speakers for elected officials' associations as well as field trip opportunities. Americans for the Arts' public partnership program is an important tool that has become a resource for elected officials and their staff.

Dick shared the following advice about speaking with legislators:

- Legislators care about how many jobs an industry creates. When beginning a conversation, start with the economic case for the arts, not with the inherent value of the arts (art is "good for the soul"). Relate number of museum employees to the number of voters. Talk about tax dollars and their relationship to the economy.
- Legislators want to know the bottom line. The arts are a \$166.2 billion industry that yields a 7:1 return on investment.
- Use economic impact numbers and put them in comparison to other employers in their district. For example, the largest employer in Louisville, Kentucky is the hospital system, with 8,000 employees, but the arts collectively employs 7,900 people.

### **III. Increased Federal Funding, Ember Farber**

AAM's advocacy is focused on federal funding and issues. AAM's mission is to enhance the value of museums to their communities through leadership, advocacy, and service. AAM represents all museums of all types and sizes — from art museums to zoos — and communicates directly with legislators on Capitol Hill. AAM also convenes Museum Advocacy Day. Visit [www.FSpeakUpForMuseums.org](http://www.FSpeakUpForMuseums.org) for research and advocacy resources.

#### **Maintaining Federal Funding For Museums**

Visit [www.SpeakUpForMuseums.org/alert\\_20100202.htm](http://www.SpeakUpForMuseums.org/alert_20100202.htm) for information about President Obama's recent budget request. Given economic crisis, it is shaping up to be an extremely tight appropriations process. AAM's goal is to at least maintain funding for museums while also advocating for an increase. There are several streams for museum funding — the overall FY2011 budget is \$3.83 trillion, which includes \$23 billion in reductions to 126 federal programs. Budget highlights:

- AAM is keeping a close eye on funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) Office of Museum Services.
- The budget for the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts is \$161 million (representing a \$6.2 million decrease for each agency).
- The Department of Education's Arts in Education program might see reductions as well, as the FY 2011 budget consolidates 38 programs within the category of "Effective Teaching and Learning for Well-Rounded Education" and allocates a lump sum for these programs.
- National Science Foundation (NSF) education programs received \$892 million, which is an overall increase. The figure includes \$64 million for the Informal Science Education Program, although this represents a decrease for this program.
- National Park Service's Historic Preservation Fund is funded at \$54.5 million, which represents a decrease, and includes a zeroing out of Saving America's Treasures and Preserve America.
- The National Capital Arts and Affairs program was cut by \$5 million.
- Farber explained that the federal budget proposal is just an opening overture and not nearly the final word on appropriations for FY2011. Final FY2011 funding will be determined by Congress through the annual appropriations process, which is very complex. Additionally, attention to approving a budget can be diverted by changing priorities, such as national disasters or international affairs. To date, there has not been a lot of money set aside for museums, and none through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act; for that bill there were serious efforts to block museums from being eligible for funding.

Farber agreed with Dick about the importance to advocate with one voice and to transform legislators' thinking that the museum and arts field is essential, not just a benefit, and to demonstrate that they provide jobs in tough economic times. Farber encouraged advocates to continue to be confident in their "asks" for museums.

### **IV. Update on Museums Advocacy Day 2010 (March 22-23), Ember Farber**

Museum Advocacy Day is the museum field's unique and key opportunity to come together in Washington, DC, and bring a message to Congress in a coordinated effort. There is a tentative schedule and list of issues for Advocacy Day 2010, and further details will become available on [SpeakUpForMuseums.org](http://SpeakUpForMuseums.org). On March 22 participants will meet at the National Building Museum for a full day of advocacy training by agency officials, and members of Congress will be invited. The training will talk about what makes a successful visit to the Hill and will include time for museums from the same state to coordinate. There will also be a keynote congressional speaker. Then on March 23 museum representatives will visit Capitol Hill for appointments arranged by AAM. A debrief session is planned for later that day. AAM is also trying to nail down a March 21 evening event for emerging museum professionals to network and become energized about being advocates for the museum field.

Farber listed the two key issues on the slate for Museums Advocacy Day 2010:

1. *Encourage the Reauthorization for IMLS*: This is a chance to tell legislators what IMLS should look like in the future. For example, there should be funding resources for new programs, and funding for small museums. Turner offered the idea that IMLS should consider funding traveling exhibitions, which would directly benefit children's museums. Farber confirmed that funding is part of the field-wide proposal.

2. *Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind*: It is important to make sure museums participate in the conversation. Members of Congress don't realize how closely museums, and especially children's museums, work with local schools.

For those who cannot attend Museum Advocacy Day, museum leaders and trustees can talk to or write representatives in their district, convey the same messages about the importance of funding museums. Visit [SpeakUpForMuseums.org](http://SpeakUpForMuseums.org) for resources to contact your legislators.

## **V. Advocating for Children and Families, Adele Robinson**

NAEYC encourages its members to be knowledgeable about federal authorizing and funding bills, and to make sure they are familiar with their members of Congress. The NAEYC Web site includes a function to find U.S. Senators and Representatives by entering a zip code. Search results include contact information and committee assignments. It is important to learn the vocabulary of the budget process — for example, budget resolution vs. appropriations and authorization vs. reauthorization of a program.

Robinson stressed the importance of reacting quickly to proposed changes and decisions. Many things are procedural issues and not just focused on content, so she advised learning about the basic process on [www.Senate.gov](http://www.Senate.gov). Critical data for museums to know are the number of children they serve and the number of jobs held by museum professionals. She also advised promoting the idea of how museums are helping to close the achievement gap and serve the entire community, not just the elite. Budget cuts are a constant threat, such as potential cuts for Head Start. In advocating for your institution, Robinson recommends stressing the return on investment. Be clear about what you know, and if you don't know something, say that you will find the answer and follow up. In addition to the NAEYC site, information on the national budget is available through the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities Web site, [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org), along with tips for how people can become more effective advocates.

## **VI. Discussion**

Turner described how participating in Arts Advocacy Day and Museum Advocacy Day has been a worthwhile investment. Participants learn a lot about the process and impact, both national and local, and receive information that can be brought home.

She encouraged ACM museum members to visit the FAQ page on the ACM Web site, [www.ChildrensMuseums.org/about/faq.htm](http://www.ChildrensMuseums.org/about/faq.htm) to find language adopted by the ACM Board of Directors so that when children's museum representatives are talking to legislators, they are all using similar language. You should be able to answer the question, "What are children's museums?" with the unified answer, "Children's museums are places where children learn through play and exploration in environments designed just for them." Turner stressed the importance of children's museums all having common language and be able to tell stories of their impact on our local community, including the educational system.

Turner asked Dick and Farber how an advocate should communicate and talk to representatives with given the tight budget year.

Dick provided an example of when he testified in front of the Virginia Joint committee in support of the arts. He first thanked them for their support and recognized that they were in the position of making tough budget decisions. He then discussed how the arts help the economy. He advised that you don't want to go in front of legislators and seem unsympathetic to what they are going through. They can't be making increases, but you can help to let them know that by maintaining support for the arts, they do a great job of stimulating the economy. Dick added that you should know what the budget situation in your state is. Don't ask your state representatives to do something that is not politically feasible.

Robinson agreed with this approach. On a recent Hill visit she acknowledged the tight climate, but also acknowledged that there will be spending and that priorities will be made, including a priority in investing in children and families. She pointed to the philosophy that if you invest in children's education today, you will not have higher costs later in terms of remedial education. She recommended presenting evidence on why you are a priority for education and the economy.

Farber said that at the federal level, it is important to recognize what the big picture is. Funding will go ahead, and legislators expect that people will believe enough in their cause to make a reasonable funding request. She talked briefly about the pending IMLS reauthorization. For the Office of Museum Services, AAM's funding request is the same for FY2011 as FY 2010: \$50 million. Because reauthorization will happen at the same time, that is not a large number to legislators and their staff. AAM's funding request will be coupled with the case for better funding for IMLS to support the increased strain on the nation's museums. She advised that an ask should be based on a solid needs statement. For example, one could make the case about how many additional services children's museums are being asked to provide in today's environment despite facing the same economic challenges as everyone else.

Robinson said that funding for museums is relatively small, compared to health care for instance. However, receiving flat funding prohibits the growth of new projects.

Turner agreed that it is even harder to get increases in funding. She asked the speakers that knowing the tight budgets of children's museums, how can we justify to our boards the investment needed to attend Advocacy Day? If in-person participation at Advocacy Day is not financially feasible, how else can we help?

Farber feels that you can justify the investment to your board in terms of the high return on investment. Museum Advocacy Day is a chance to be an advocate for your museum and the museum field as a whole, as well as an opportunity to form relationships that can continue back at home in your district. Museums from across a state can make connections with each other and then can work together back at home. Secondly, Farber said, during last year's Advocacy Day, legislators commented that visits they received from a coalition that included a children's museum, a historic house, an art museum and a facility with living collections helped them understand for the first time that these are all museums and that they are part of the cultural infrastructure of the country. That presence had a huge impact on the event.

Dick suggested that if you cannot go to DC, you should call your elected officials and invite them for special tour of your museum or to accept an award — anything that can show them what your museum does. Turner added that you should let your local representatives know whenever your museum receives a grant so that they have another story to tell about your museum's impact and success.

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