

Arts Advocacy 101

By LaMoine MacLaughlin

An arts advocacy handbook
for anyone interested
in the arts

OPENING DOORS
TO EXCELLENCE IN
ARTS EDUCATION

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Advocacy can be defined in many ways and for many purposes. For purposes here, advocacy means working to move the arts to a higher priority concern among social values. This basic framework or context believes that advocacy begins at home, with the individual, and expands outward. These questions do not pretend to be the only questions possible; they are offered simply as a starting point for discussion. Obviously different organizations, especially those in different sized communities, will respond to these questions in differing ways and with differing perspectives. However, I believe that all of the questions are relevant to every organization and to every community. This booklet is intended to function as a workbook to help develop a practical, no-nonsense arts advocacy perspective useful in daily work. Read it with a pencil in hand and make notes in the blank column to the right. List names, numbers, dates, comments, and any other information which may help you develop your own, individual, arts advocacy perspective.

A. Internal Considerations:

1. How well do **you** understand and support the vision, values and mission of your organization?
2. In your opinion, how effective are **you** as a spokesperson for your organization? How often did you function as spokesperson for your organization this past year? Did you send a thank you letter to all of your funding sources this past year?
3. In your opinion, how well does your **faculty/staff** understand and support the vision, values and mission of your organization?
4. Who among your **faculty/staff** best understands and supports the vision, values and mission of your organization?
5. Who among your **faculty/staff** could be an effective spokesperson for your organization?
6. How often do members of your **faculty/staff** function as spokespersons for your organization?

7. In your opinion, how well do your **students/program participants/parents** understand and support the vision, values and mission of your organization?
8. Who among your **students/program participants/parents** best understands and supports the vision, values and mission of your organization?
9. Who among your **students/program participants/parents** could be an effective spokesperson for your organization?
10. How often do your **students/program participants/parents** function as spokespersons for your organization?
11. In your opinion, how well does your **board of directors** in general understand and support the vision, values and mission of your organization? Annually, what percentage of your board contributes financially to your organization?
12. Who among your **board of directors** best understands and supports the vision, values and mission of your organization?
13. Who among your **board of directors** could be an effective spokesperson for your organization?
14. How often do members of your **board of directors** function as spokespersons for your organization?
15. Does your organization have a **vehicle** (newsletter, web site, etc.) for communicating arts advocacy/educational priority concerns to faculty/students/parents/Board of Directors/general public? How well does it work for your organization?

16. Does your organization have a **database** for communicating arts advocacy/educational priority concerns to faculty/students/parents/Board of Directors/general public?

17. Are your **materials organized** (Do you have a logo? A vision/values/mission statement? A case statement for public support? etc.) to provide effective communications of arts advocacy/educational priority concerns? Are you satisfied with them?

18. Is there some other element or aspect of **internal considerations** which should be included and involved in arts advocacy/educational priority concerns?

B. Immediate Community Considerations:

19. In your opinion, how well does your **community** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission?

20. Who in your **community** is publicly recognized as the strongest (vocally, financially, etc.) advocate/ champion in support of the arts?

21. In your opinion, how well does your **city council** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What has been its overall voting record on arts/educational priority issues? How much arts funding did it approve this past year?

22. Did you appear/speak before your **city council** this past year to discuss arts/educational priority issues?

23. What member of your **city council** is the strongest (vocally, financially, etc.) advocate/champion in support of the arts? What has been his/her overall voting record on arts/educational priority issues?

24. What members of your **city council** have been actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

25. What members of your **city council** have had spouses or children/grandchildren actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

26. In your opinion, how well does your **mayor** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What is your mayor's telephone number? Does he/she know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

27. How often (daily, weekly, monthly, annually, etc.) do you meet with your **mayor** to discuss arts/educational priority issues?

28. Has your **mayor** been actively involved (as a participant, as a student, as an audience member, etc.) in the arts during this past year?

29. Did your **mayor** visit your facility this past year? How many times?

30. Has your **mayor** had a spouse or children/grandchildren actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

31. Did your organization partner any programming with **departments of city government** (Social Services, Criminal Justice, Planning, etc.) this past year?

32. In your opinion, how well does your **public school board** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What has been its overall voting record on arts/educational priority issues? How much arts funding did it approve this past year?

33. Did you appear/speak before your **public school board** this past year to discuss arts/educational priority issues?

34. What member of your **public school board** is the strongest (vocally, financially, etc.) advocate/champion in support of the arts?

35. What members of your **public school board** have been actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

36. What members of your **public school board** have had spouses or children/grandchildren actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

37. In your opinion, how well does your **public school superintendent** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What is your public school superintendent's telephone number? Does he/she know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

38. How often (daily, weekly, monthly, annually, etc.) do you meet with your **public school superintendent** to discuss arts/educational priority issues?

39. Has your **public school superintendent** been actively involved (as a participant, as a student, as an audience member, etc.) in the arts during this past year?

40. Did your **public school superintendent** visit your facility this past year? How many times?

41. Has your **public school superintendent** had a spouse or children/grandchildren actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

42. Did your organization partner any programming with your **public school district** this past year?

43. Is there some **other local educational organization** (college/university, private school, etc.) which should know about your organization, but doesn't?

44. In your opinion, how well do your **community civic organizations** (Chamber of Commerce, Visitor's Bureau, Fraternal Organizations, etc.) in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What have been their overall official positions on arts/educational priority issues? How much arts funding did they approve this past year? Are you a member of any of them?

45. Did you appear/speak before your **community civic organizations** this past year to discuss arts/educational priority issues?

46. What member of your **community civic organizations** is the strongest (vocally, financially, etc.) advocate/champion in support of the arts?

47. What members of your **community civic organizations** have been actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

48. What members of your **community civic organizations** have had spouses or children/grandchildren actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

49. Did your organization partner any programming with **community civic organizations** this past year?

50. In your opinion, how well do your **community private funding organizations** (United way, Foundations, etc.) in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What have been their overall official positions on arts/educational priority issues? How much arts funding did they approve this past year?

51. Did you appear/speak before your **community private funding organizations** this past year to discuss arts/educational priority issues?

52. What member of your **community private funding organizations** is the strongest (vocally, financially, etc.) advocate/champion in support of the arts?

53. What members of your **community private funding organizations** have been actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

54. What members of your **community private funding organizations** have had spouses or children/grandchildren actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

55. Did your organization partner any programming with **community private funding organizations** this past year?

56. In your opinion, how well do your local **churches/synagogues** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission?

57. Did you appear/speak before your local **churches/synagogues** this past year to discuss arts/educational priority issues?

58. What member of your local **churches/synagogues** is the strongest (vocally, financially, etc.) advocate/champion in support of the arts?

59. What members of your local **churches/synagogues** have been actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

60. Did your organization partner any programming with local **churches/synagogues** this past year?

61. Is there some other organization, element or aspect of **immediate community considerations** which should be included and involved in arts advocacy/educational priority concerns?

C. Geographically Extended Considerations:

62. In your opinion, how well does your **county board of supervisors** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What has been its overall voting record on arts/educational priority issues? How much arts funding did it approve this past year?

63. Did you appear/speak before your **county board of supervisors** this past year to discuss arts/educational priority issues?

64. What member of your **county board of supervisors** is the strongest (vocally, financially, etc.) advocate/champion in support of the arts? What has been his/her overall voting record on arts/educational priority issues?

65. What members of your **county board of supervisors** have been actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

66. What members of your **county board of supervisors** have had spouses or children/grandchildren actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

67. In your opinion, how well does your **county executive** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What is your county executive's telephone number? Does he/she know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

68. How often (daily, weekly, monthly, annually, etc.) do you meet with your **county executive** to discuss arts/educational priority issues?

69. Has your **county executive** been actively involved (as a participant, as a student, as an audience member, etc.) in the arts during this past year?

70. Did your **county executive** visit your facility this past year? How many times? 71. Has your **county executive** had a spouse or children/grandchildren actively involved (as participants, as students, etc.) in the arts?

72. Did your organization partner any programming with **departments of county government** (Social Services, Criminal Justice, Planning, etc.) this past year?

73. In your opinion, how well does your **state assembly representative** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What is your state assembly representative's telephone number? Does he/she know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

74. Did your **state assembly representative** visit your organization this past year?

75. In your opinion, how well does your **state senate representative** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? What is your state senate representative's telephone number? Does he/she know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

76. Did your **state senate representative** visit your organization this past year?

77. Does your state have a **state arts advocacy organization**? If so, do you know the director of your state arts advocacy organization? Do you know the telephone number of the organization's director? Does he/she know you and your organization's telephone number? Did he/she visit your organization this past year?

78. Does your state have a **statewide assembly of local arts organizations**?

If so, do you know the director of your statewide assembly of local arts organizations? Do you know the telephone number of the organization's director? Does he/she know you and your organization's telephone number? Did he/she visit your organization this past year?

79. Does your **state arts agency** know about your organization? Did your state arts agency fund any of your organization's activities this past year?

80. Do you know the director of your **state arts agency**? Do you know his/her telephone number? Does he/she know your organization's telephone number? Did he/she visit your organization this past year?

81. Do you know the other staff of your **state arts agency**? Do you know the community development coordinator? Do you know who is responsible for arts education? Do they know you and your organization?

82. Did you contact your **state arts agency** for information or involvement (funding possibilities, panel participation, etc.) this past year? Did they contact you for information or involvement? Have you ever served on a funding review panel?

83. In your opinion, how well does your **state superintendent of public instruction**, in general, understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? Do you have contact with someone on his/her staff? What is your state superintendent of public instruction's office telephone number? Does his/her office know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

84. Did your **state superintendent of public instruction** (or someone representing him/her) visit your organization this past year?

85. In your opinion, how well does your **governor**, in general, understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? Do you have contact with someone on his/her staff? What is your governor's office telephone number? Does his/her office know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

86. Did your **governor** (or someone representing him/her) visit your organization this past year?

87. Does your **regional arts organization** (Arts Midwest, Mid-America Arts Alliance, etc.) know about your organization? Did your regional arts organization fund any of your activities this past year? Did you attend their annual conference?

88. Is there some other organization, element or aspect of **geographically extended considerations** which should be included and involved in arts advocacy/educational priority concerns?

D. National Considerations:

89. In your opinion, how well does your **congressman**, in general, understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? Do you have contact with someone on his/her staff? What is your congressman's office telephone number? Does his/her office know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another? Do you know how to contact his/her local office?

90. How did your **congressman** vote on arts/educational priority issues this past session?

91. Did your **congressman** visit your organization this past year?

92. In your opinion, how well do your **senators** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? Do you have contact with someone on their staffs? What are your senators' offices telephone numbers? Do their offices know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

93. How did your **senators** vote on arts/educational priority issues this past session?

94. Did your either of your **senators** visit your organization this past year?

95. In your opinion, how well does the **National Endowment for the Arts** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? Do you have contact with someone on their staff? What is their telephone number? Does their office know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

96. Did the **National Endowment for the Arts** fund any of your organization's activities this past year?

97. In your opinion, how well does **Americans for the Arts** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? Are you a member? Do you have contact with someone on their staff? What is their telephone number? Does their office know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

98. In your opinion, how well does **The National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts** in general understand and support your organization and its vision, values and mission? Are you a member? Do you have contact with someone on their staff? What is their telephone number? Does their office know your organization's telephone number? How often do you talk with one another?

99. During this past year did you participate in **important local, state, regional and national arts advocacy efforts**? Did you organize local arts showcases? Did you attend your state arts advocacy day? Did you attend the national arts advocacy day? Did you attend the national conference of Americans for the Arts? Did you attend the national conference of the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts?

100. Is there some other organization, element or aspect of **national considerations** which should be included and involved in arts advocacy/educational priority concerns?

101. Are there any **additional questions or considerations** not listed above which should be included in arts advocacy/educational priority concerns as they relate to your organization and to your community?

What happens in response to these questions will depend upon the organization, upon the community, and especially upon the individuals involved. There is no context or infrastructure where advocacy will happen without the involvement of individuals and without individual leadership. It is incumbent upon those who are involved in leadership positions in the arts and education to exercise their responsibility to work within their organizations to raise the arts as a priority within their local communities and ultimately within all of our society.

LaMoine MacLaughlin is co-founder and Executive Director of the Northern Lakes Center for the Arts and the Northern Lakes School of the Arts located in northwestern Wisconsin. The Center has been included in the book, *The 100 Best Small Arts Towns in America*, and described by the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Arts Board as “. . . One of Wisconsin’s most vibrant arts organizations.” An active musician, he is also Director of the Northern Lakes Chamber Orchestra and an instructor at the Northern Lakes School of the Arts. Mr. MacLaughlin has been President of the Wisconsin Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, national co-chair of the rural and small community interest area of Americans for the Arts, and a member of the Board of Trustees of the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts. In 1996, he and his wife, Mary Ellen, received the Wisconsin Governor’s Award in Support of the Arts, and in 1999, the Rural Genius Award from the Front Porch Institute.

The basic concept of these questions was suggested by a friend and colleague, Harv Thompson with the University of Wisconsin (thank you, Harv), but any short-comings are my own.