



CultureWork

A Periodic Broadside* for Arts
and Culture Workers

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Institute for Community Arts Studies

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In this issue:

The Arts Management Employment Interview

by Deborah Snider

When an interview is offered to a prospective arts manager, it is the ultimate forum in which to determine whether the organization and individual are well matched. If only we had thought to ask the key questions, perhaps we would not have accepted the position. Perhaps information could also have been uncovered that makes the position even more desirable to the interviewee.

Having directed three community art centers in three different states, with three completely diverse sets of circumstances, I have developed this list of questions below as a catalyst for thought when considering an arts management position.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AS YOU CONSIDER AN ARTS MANAGEMENT POSITION:

THE BOARD:

How large is the Board of the organization? Too large? Too small?

What is the diversity of ethnicity, age, skill, professional background?

Is there gender equity?

What is the commitment level of Board members, i.e. their level of passion?

Do Board members sign contracts when they begin, acknowledging their responsibilities? Are there problem Board members? How is the Board President handling the situation?

Does the Board have a proven fundraising track record? Ask for details.

Is there stability on the Board? Do members complete their terms?

Is the Board independent and responsible for its own activities, rather than relying on staff to do all of the work?

Is the Board politically savvy, and is it doing its own part for advocacy and outreach?

Is Board development an ongoing activity, with a aggressive nominating committee? Does the Board have a "Give, Get, or Get Off" mentality?

THE STAFF:

Are there enough Staff members to adequately and effectively run the organization in all of its mission areas?

Are the Staff members professional and autonomous by department?

How much hand-holding do Staff require from the Executive Director?

Is there a history of Staff supporting or undermining the Executive Director?

Do the Staff positions make sense to the overall organizational structure?

Is there fair compensation for Staff? Can they be compensated for enough hours to do their job without feeling exploited?

THE VOLUNTEERS:

How many Volunteers give time to the organization?

Are Volunteers recognized and honored on a regular basis?

How loyal are the Volunteers?

Is there diversity in age and skills?

Is there a formal organization of Volunteers?

Do local educational institutions use the organization as a learning lab for interns?

FINANCIAL RESOURCES:

Is there an endowment for the organization? How long has it been in effect, and what are the total assets?

What are the primary income streams? How large is the budget?

Has the organization history been managed well? Is it mission-driven?

What percentage of the budget is generated by each line item?

Is the income to the organization soft or reliable?

Is the organization too reliant on one soft area of funding?

Is this a membership organization? How many members, and what percentage of the local population is represented? Is there an organized annual campaign?

Does the organization have the trust of, and is it credible in the eyes of the community?

Where is the town's wealth, and are there many wealthy patrons on the Board or in the membership?

Is the organization grant-dependent? Do private foundations also support it?

Are there undeveloped streams for funding that will build local support?

POLITICAL CLIMATE:

What support does the organization have from the City? County? State?

Is the organization involved in public/private partnerships?

Does the organization have individual support from local politicians?

LOCAL SUPPORT/FLAVOR OF THE COMMUNITY:

Are the arts valued?

Do artists from disciplines within the mission of the organization support the organization?

Do the media support the organization?

Does the neighborhood support the organization?

Are cultural diversities in the community celebrated?

Is growth, both physical and programmatic, of the organization possible?

Does the county arts umbrella agency provide advocacy for constituent groups, and is it respected and strong?

If there is an arts district, is the organization included in it, or is it outside?

What is the direct competition to the organization?

Is the flavor of the arts community one of collaboration or competition?

What are the possibilities for networking and public relations in the community?

How whimsical can you be with your programming?

What unique niches are there to fill with the organization?

HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION:

Can you build on historical precedent while forging progressively ahead?

PHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION:

Is the building safe, structurally sound?

Are the divisions of space logical for the organization's programs?

Can areas of the building be separately closed off for security?

Are the spaces adequate in size and amenities to comfortably house the programs?

Is there access for people with disabilities to all of the spaces?

If there is a visual arts collection, is there security and climate control?

Is the building accessible to the public at times when they can attend?

Is the exterior of the building inviting; Do people feel welcome to come in?

Is there signage on prominent highways directing the public to the organization?

Are the physical components of the organization all logical, and do they reflect positively on the organization?

WHAT PROBLEMS ARE THERE FOR THE ORGANIZATION?

Are there individuals or groups that wish to undermine or undo the organization?

Legal problems? Harassment problems?

Are there organizational secrets? Have background checks been run on Staff?

Is internal information freely given when requested, i.e. budget, bylaws, etc.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS:

Does the Board refrain from micromanaging the organization?

Can you meet the Board's expectations without exhausting yourself?

How much creative latitude will you be given to reprogram, restructure, reorganize?

Can you manage the facility plus major fundraising activities?

PERSONAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS:

If partnered, make sure that your partner fully understands and supports the commitment you are considering.

Make sure that a position in arts management fulfills all of your personal goals.

Will you allow yourself a life outside of your job? The job can demand all of you!

Do you have friends and family who support your work in this field?

Make sure that you have a physical activity program for yourself.

Know how you can best handle stress, burnout, and frustration.

Look at the total package of the organization. Ask questions. If there are elements that do not feel right, ask for clarification. Follow your intuition.

REALITIES OF THE FIELD:

Philanthropy, as we have known it in this country, is changing.

Volunteerism is changing; more people are having to work and have less time to volunteer (even seniors).

Financial resources are drying up; governmental sources are almost non-existent;

do not be grant-dependent!

Business sponsorship of non-profits is growing, but there are strings attached for merchandising and benefits to the business that are new.

Are you willing and able to make a long-term commitment to the organization?

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Back Issues:

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Douglas Blandy, Ph.D.

CultureWork accepts links to announcements of conferences, seminars, workshops, programs and exhibitions in community culture. *CultureWork* also seeks submissions (500-1500 words), topic ideas, and constructive criticism. Graphics that express the spirit of Community Arts are especially welcome, to be published with attribution. Send to Maria Finison at mfinison@darkwing.uoregon.edu or via snailmail: care of Arts & Administration Program, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon, Eugene Oregon 97403.

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