High Performance Summits

National Performing Arts Convention: Taking Action Together

Organizations in a diverse and competitive field found common ground and a shared commitment to action through a highly interactive and results-oriented convention. At the 2008 National Performing Arts Convention, called *Taking Action Together*, America*Speaks* helped unite and educate the arts community through a multi-day caucus process. A uniquely designed 21st Century Summit engaged 1,500 attendees in a series of discussions to define and select the issues that could be pursued collectively to advance the performing arts.

America*Speaks'* 21st Century Summit methodology transformed a traditional meeting into a democratic process that produced sustainable outcomes. *Taking Action Together* consisted of a number of iterative and deliberative elements:

- **Daily caucus sessions that focused on a single question and built on the previous day's work**
- **Small round table discussions, led by trained facilitators, ensured that each person had an equal voice**
- **Groupware and keypad technology to synthesize individual table discussions into concrete recommendations representative of the whole room**

On the final day, thousands of artists voted on – and committed to – strategies to advance performing arts at the national level.

Creating a Multi-Disciplinary Infrastructure

Facing internal divisions, a difficult economy and an increasingly competitive environment, thousands of artists from more than thirty national performing arts and arts service organizations came together during the summer of 2008 in Denver, Colorado, for a combined National Performing Arts Convention.

At the core of the Convention was America*Speaks'* 21st Century Summit, a four-day event that focused on mobilizing the performing arts community as a whole, forging a common agenda and increasing the community's capacity to take action.

National Performing Arts Convention organizers hoped to use the Convention to build a multi-disciplinary infrastructure, create an agenda that could be supported and implemented by artists and teach artists to become their own advocates. America*Speaks* designed the program to incorporate these priorities and to bring all voices and values into the process. The resulting agenda, which placed a strong emphasis on arts education, arts advocacy and diversity, reflected the priorities of over 1,500 participants.

Building a Community and Defining Shared Values

During the four-day Convention, participants built foundations for relationships and shared vocabulary with their colleagues that will support future collaboration. They explored key opportunities and challenges, weighed critical tradeoffs and deepened their connection and commitment to strengthening the performing arts community.

Taking Action Together built a sense of momentum, generated new ideas and produced action steps to move the thirty-plus organizations closer to their vision of a robust, sustainable and united community. The format provided performing artists around the country with the opportunity to learn about and from other disciplines, as well as develop national, local and individual or organizational take away strategies. Five task forces have finalized the recommendations that emerged from *Taking Action Together* into multi-disciplinary implementation strategies that are currently being implemented.

A Professional Performance

By Salima Barday

"I attended the National Performing Arts Convention just after completing my music degree at the Julliard School. Each day I was surrounded by new people, new ideas. This was my first chance to mix with colleagues as a professional. I met a diverse group of artists, many of whom I can now contact for connections with my current projects.

I facilitated different tables of arts professionals all four days. The composition of our small discussion groups was constantly changing, and each day we got a chance to be with new people, hear new ideas. This really built momentum at the table, in the room, and across the rooms!

I left these conversations with an understanding that, on every level, we need to be advocates for our work because *we're* the artists."

AMERICASPEAKS provides citizens a greater voice in local, regional, and national decision-making on the most challenging public issues of the day. More than 160,000 people have participated in America*Speaks'* meetings where participants wrestle with complex issues, uncover shared priorities and offer recommendations to shape next steps.

Our innovative deliberative tools, such as the internationally recognized 21st Century Town Meeting® that links citizens and decision makers, have been used in all 50 states and around the world.

America*Speaks* is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington DC. Learn more at:

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