

# **Arts Huddle: Defining the Value of a Collective Arts Message for Advocacy Led by the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington**

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## **Background**

In response to the regional Arts Huddles hosted in October 2009, the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington convened a region-wide Advocacy Arts Huddle in February 2010 at the National Building Museum to further explore the viability of a collective arts message and advocacy strategy for the metropolitan Washington region. This report highlights several themes that emerged from the Arts Huddle.

## **Key Arts Messages**

All breakout groups touched on the importance of the following core messages regarding arts & culture:

- Economic Impact: tax revenues and job creation
- Social Development: serving at-risk populations
- Connections to Education: building better citizens

## **Aligning the Arts with Established Regional Priorities**

Regional organizations such as the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), Greater Washington Initiative (GWI) and the Greater Washington Board of Trade have established priorities for the region.

Representatives in each jurisdiction have their unique concerns and political platforms.

Making connections between existing “hot topics” and cultural programming will help the collective arts message be heard:

- Environmental Issues
- Commercial & Residential Real Estate
- Health Care & Human Services
- Education & Youth

### **Common Denominator**

The common denominator shared by arts and culture organizations is audience:

All breakout groups acknowledged that audiences know no geopolitical boundaries, a reality which must be leveraged in a collective arts message.

### **Access to Compelling Data**

With audience as the common denominator, collecting and sharing regional audience data is extremely important. All breakout groups emphasized the need for region-wide audience data. Other sources of useful data might include:

- Tapping Existing Regional Data
- Comparing Data to Other Metropolitan Areas
- Launching Cultural Data Project in DC and Virginia
- Rand Corporation Arts Education Studies

### **Challenges of Framing and Reframing a Regional Arts Message**

The regional arts message must be framed in a way that honors both the intrinsic and tangible benefits of arts and culture in the region: the former inspires arts

advocates to pursue a common vision, and the latter uses quantifiable facts to translate that vision to legislators, funders and the public-at-large.

Furthermore, the regional arts message must always be reframed to speak to the audience at hand. Elected officials are limited by their jurisdictions and must serve their constituents; residents have needs distinct from cultural tourists; and the public-at-large must be segmented.

### **Recommendations to the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington**

- CAGW is well positioned to identify common arts values and advance a collective arts message for the region. Arts councils operate at city, county and state levels, and Americans for the Arts leads the national arts agenda, but no other arts service organization serves the region across geopolitical boundaries.
- The collective arts message—although created out of need—should focus on assets, highlighting what arts and culture offers the region.
- The collective arts message must be expansive enough to encompass the region while offering a plethora of specific supporting data and stories to tailor the message to the audience at hand.
- Arts and culture organizations need an information clearinghouse to effectively gather and leverage data to support the collective arts message.
- Following the definition of a collective arts message, branding will be an important element for building momentum and visibility.
- Arts leaders across the region are ready to take action!