



Creative Youth Development Toolkit

Landscape Analysis

Advocacy and Policy

by Ed Spitzberg

About Americans for the Arts and Our Commitment to Arts Education

Founded in 1960, Americans for the Arts is the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education. From offices in Washington, D.C. and New York City, we provide a rich array of programs that meet the needs of more than 150,000 members and stakeholders annually. We are dedicated to representing and serving local communities and to creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts.

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About this Paper

Americans for the Arts is proud to be one of the leaders of the **Creative Youth Development National Partnership**, which is working to advance the field of creative youth development (CYD), the intentional integration of arts learning and youth development principles. As part of this collective initiative, Americans for the Arts commissioned field experts to produce a set of seven landscape analyses about key topics within youth development. These papers identify trends in creative youth development, share recommendations for CYD practitioners, and suggest areas for future exploration. The areas of focus of these papers are:

- 1) Trends in CYD Programs
- 2) Advocacy and Policy
- 3) Working in Social Justice
- 4) Program Evaluation
- 5) Preparing Artists & Educators
- 6) Working with Youth
- 7) Funding, Sustainability, and Partnerships

These landscape analyses are one part of a larger project led by Americans for the Arts to create a new, first-of-its-kind **Creative Youth Development Toolkit** that will aggregate the most effective tools and resources from exemplary creative youth development programs throughout the country. The CYD Toolkit will build upon the success and longevity of the Youth Arts Toolkit (2003), a landmark study of arts programs serving at-risk youth that can be found at <http://youtharts.artsusa.org/>.

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INTRODUCTION

“Because of [the] peculiar features of politics, few if any best [advocacy] practices can be identified through the sophisticated methods that have been developed to evaluate the delivery of services. Advocacy evaluation should be seen, therefore, as a form of trained judgment—a craft requiring judgment and tacit knowledge—rather than as a scientific method.” – Steven Teles and Mark Schmitt

In reviewing literature for best advocacy practices in a variety of areas—directly, adjacently, and distantly related to Creative Youth Development (CYD)—I’ve identified factors that can help train the judgement and inform the tacit knowledge required that Teles and Schmitt describe above.

While advocacy is a complex system of strategies and tactics, networks and direct advocates, and grassroots and grasstops, there are practices that apply across topic areas. I surface them below, and then map them to a path forward for CYD advocacy efforts.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Advocacy and policy, perhaps more so than other areas in this toolkit, are areas for which best practices are transferable across the nonprofit and civic engagement fields. For this reason, I reviewed literature on advocacy practices not only in the arts education and youth development fields, but also in other advocacy areas. In doing so, I found that successful advocacy practices to lower alcohol consumption in developing countries, for instance, can be applied to creative youth development, as much as those that are used to increase arts education in California.

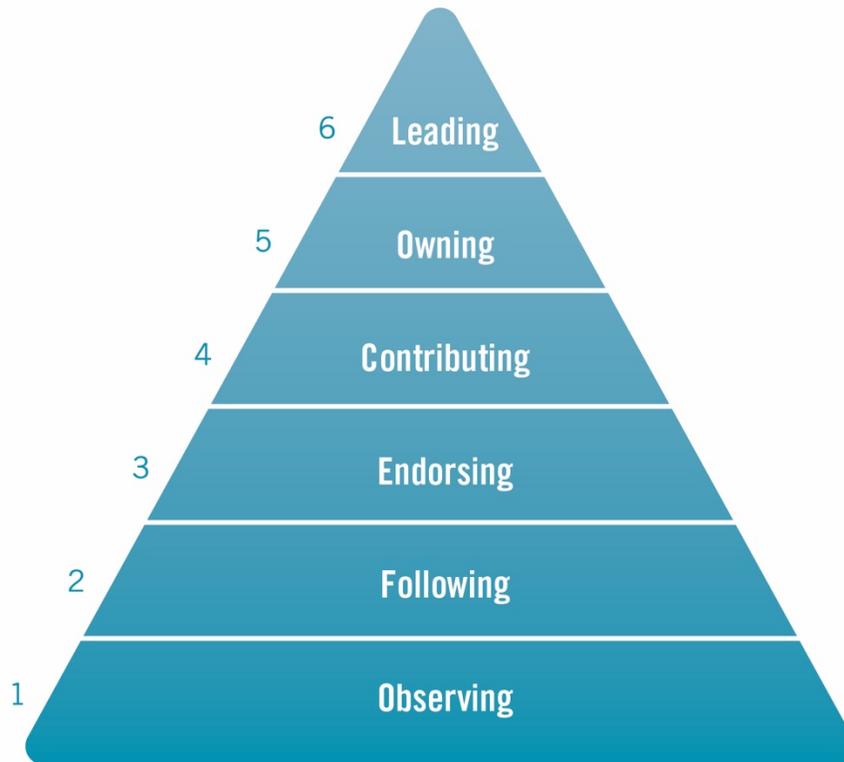
It is informative to look at literature by successful advocacy practitioners. The Afterschool Alliance and United Way identify a series of best practices, including:

- Using third party advocates.
- Strategically engaging both grassroots and grasstops.
- Providing opportunities for policymakers to see the field’s impact firsthand.
- Creating multi-pronged strategies.
- Making a case where evidence and anecdotes work together.

Other literature supports these practices. For example, in writing about the challenges of evaluating advocacy, Steven Teles and Mark Schmitt note that, “The key is not strategy so much as strategic capacity: the ability to read the shifting environment of politics for subtle signals of change, to understand the opposition, and to adapt deftly.” Yet it is still difficult to determine

which advocacy components are successful and which are not having the desired impact, given the delay in results. It is therefore vital to have a multi-pronged strategy, as noted above, and be flexible as to which lever to pull at any point.

The Afterschool Alliance and United Way frame their advocacy through Groundwire's Engagement Pyramid:



They suggest advocates start at the bottom of the engagement pyramid with low engagement strategies such as social media or petitions, work up to the middle through letters to the editors or joining advocacy committees, and then proceed to the top with high engagement strategies such as meeting with your members of Congress or testifying before a legislative committee.

Alternatively, the Metropolitan Group report, “Building Public Will for Arts + Culture” breaks down successful building of public will into five phases:

- 1) Framing and defining the problem or need.
- 2) Building awareness about the problem or need.
- 3) Becoming knowledgeable/transmitting information about where and how the problem can be impacted or changed.
- 4) Creating a personal conviction (among key audiences) that change needs to occur and issuing a call to action.
- 5) Evaluating while reinforcing.

They, in turn, recommend in their Appendix eight techniques to build public will, ranging from identifying the best pathways to change to integrating grassroots and media to continually evaluating and evolving a public will campaign, and the measures used to gauge effectiveness.

Jim Schultz identifies a similar, yet more concise, lens to break down advocacy strategies:

- 1) What do you want?
- 2) What does the political map look like?
- 3) What should you do?

Lili Allen, Monique Miles, and Adria Steinberg look specifically at advocacy (through the collective impact lens) on opportunity youth, and find the following aspects most important:

- Use data to determine areas of focus, track progress, and build public will.
- Braid funding across public systems.
- Leverage private investment.

It is also helpful to look at how experts evaluate advocacy and use those as bases for developing a successful advocacy plan. Ivan Barkhorn, Nathan Huttner, and Jason Blau posit nine research-based conditions for successful advocacy and use these conditions in their Advocacy Assessment Framework to plan and evaluate success. These conditions included the existing institutions, the policy window, feasible solutions, a flexible master plan, campaign leaders, the network, and the public.

Similarly, the Advocates for Justice have developed an advocacy checklist (ACT) that is a strong tool to identify gaps and opportunities for successful advocacy.

In addition, two large funders learned lessons from advocacy efforts they supported: The Hewlett Foundation and The World Bank.

The Hewlett Foundation, who funds arts education advocacy in California, identified the following success and challenges of their work:

SUCCESSSES

- Convening advocates.
- Use of data and research.
- Leveraging local advocacy into state and federal advocacy.

CHALLENGES

- Closing the equity gap has not been the focus it needs to be.
- There is a desire for arts ed by policy makers, but it doesn't always survive resource scarcity.
- There is an absence of data, but not always desire to acquire it.

The World Bank, who was looking at advocacy successes and challenges across a variety of global health efforts, found three main takeaways for advocates:

- 1) Think of networks (not campaigns) as vehicles for change.
- 2) The secret of effective advocacy networks is overcoming the trade-off between cohesive framing and broad-based coalition.
- 3) Look both at how advocates shape issues/environments and how issues/environments shape advocates.

KEY TRENDS

In reviewing the practices above, five key trends become apparent:

- 1) Advocacy is by nature complex and hard to measure, and therefore strategies must be multi-pronged, and advocates flexible as they actively reevaluate them as the environment changes.
- 2) Defining the network and creating bonds and communication mechanisms among the group members is key, through convening, strong networks, etc.
- 3) The framing is vital—for both effectiveness and impacting the group definition (as above).
- 4) There is both a need for strong data and difficulty getting it.
- 5) Equity can often become a tangential focus or lost altogether, when it needs to be at the center.

TREND #1: COMPLEX, FLEXIBLE ADVOCACY

Successful advocacy has many concurrent strategies and tactics, though it is often unclear which tactic or strategy is causing any effect, both at the time and down the road. Due to that lack of impact, clarity combined with a layered system (different levels of government, varying types of advocates, a range of types of campaigns), advocacy plans are by nature complicated at each point.

To address this, advocacy networks and individual organizations must be as flexible as possible. As Teles and Schmitt write, “Advocacy, even when carefully nonpartisan and based in research, is inherently political, and it’s the nature of politics that events evolve rapidly and in a nonlinear fashion, so an effort that doesn’t seem to be working might suddenly bear fruit, or one that seemed to be on track can suddenly lose momentum.”

TREND #2: NETWORK DEFINITION

Defining the network well can make the advocates powerful or lead them down a path to failure before they start. Single groups or organizations may create visible moments of change, but it is the web of advocacy actions that make lasting change. Identifying how organizations and intermediaries work together to make change is vital.

Afterschool Alliance does this particularly well. They are a national, non-member-based organization working with a collection of state afterschool networks, collectively funded by lead funders (notably the C.S. Mott Foundation). The state afterschool networks in turn work with individual afterschool programs as well as other issue advocates (around STEM, SEL, summer learning, nutrition, physical activity, etc.).

The Wallace Foundation also mobilized a network in its efforts to make systems change in out-of-school time in the early 2000s. They engaged intermediaries such as the National League of Cities, and in each city, mobilized city officials across agencies, partnerships with schools, business partnerships, and others. They found, “When a broad and diverse sector of the community ‘owns’ the out-of-school time issue, this priority will have greater staying power on the community agenda.”

Similarly, the Hewlett Foundation found that their grantees found great value in convening as a network, and “have developed a strong sense of collaboration and partnership over time.”

TREND #3: “GOLDILOCKS” FRAMING

The World Bank found that among advocacy campaigns with a cohesive network, only those with compelling framing of the issue had success, which intuitively makes sense. Yet the framing not only effects the success of the case, but also the makeup of the network itself. For example, a narrow frame will exclude many network participants, while a wider frame may allow for a larger network, yet possibly less effective.

Striking that balance—finding the “Goldilocks” framing—is key to success. One example is the NAMM Foundation, who works year-round on music education advocacy (among other issues of interest to its members). Because they are made up of “music merchants,” they have a particular interest in music education because their business is selling instruments. Therefore, they frame their issue specifically as music education (not “arts education”), and argue for its importance to young people, in and out of school, as vital to their development. They bring in a wider network of brain scientists, youth development advocates, and arts advocates, but avoid doing so in a way that dilutes their message.

TREND #4: GENERATING DATA

Data is simultaneously key to crafting an effective advocacy message while difficult, time-consuming, and expensive to generate. It takes a leader in the field—along with sophisticated funders—to spend the time and hire the researchers to gather the data necessary for a compelling case. Once data is acquired, it then needs to be widely and clearly communicated to be effective.

I return to the Afterschool Alliance, who is a leader in this area. Their quintennial national afterschool survey, America After 3PM, provides detailed data about the demand for afterschool programs which advocates across the country use consistently. By including state-by-state data, individual advocates can tailor their message to their state and local representatives, and by adding topical research each survey (e.g., STEM or physical fitness), they can also adjust their messages to other priorities policy makers may have.

It is also important to remind advocates as we discuss data, that data alone rarely makes an impact—it is data, combined with anecdotes, that leads to success.

TREND #5: EQUITY

Equity is often intended to be a key part of advocacy campaigns, yet Hewlett found that the intentions to maintain an equity focus were often lost in the end. Equity in the Center has developed ways to, as their name suggests, keep equity as central to advocacy work. In their model, organizations should:

- Expect staff to work with the community to co-create solutions to problems as a key way to meet the organization’s mission.
- Understand that only through continuous interaction with, and in, the community they serve will race equity be achieved at a systemic level.
- Be seen and valued as an ally by the community they work with and in.
- Invest financial resources to support race equity in their communities.
- Define criteria and processes for grant awards and partner selection using a race equity lens.
- Go beyond specific program areas to dedicate organizational time, resources, and influence to address underlying systemic issues that impact their communities.
- Ally with the community on race-related issues, even when they aren’t directly related to the organization’s mission.
- Measure improvement using baseline data to see if program solutions are having a positive impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD OF CYD

As mentioned above, the good thing about policy and advocacy is that best practices are universal—but the hard thing in implementing them is that in practice, policy and advocacy is complex, as much art as science, and hence requires constant real-time evaluation and flexibility.

Nevertheless, there are many straight lines between the best practices outlined above for the field of Creative Youth Development.

Luckily, the CYD National Action Blueprint was designed with advocacy in mind, as “this Blueprint and the Creative Youth Development National Partnership are vehicles for collective action. Working together and in a coordinated fashion, we can achieve more for young people.”

Looking at CYD in terms of the five trends in the previous section, I recommend the following for the field:

Multi-pronged, flexible advocacy. One challenge of advocacy in general is what can be done at the organizational level vs. what needs to be done by intermediaries or national organizations. CYD needs to advocate at all levels, with programs sharing their successes and making the case locally and nationally, with intermediaries organizing and making

the case on a more constant basis, looking at strategies overall and adjusting in response to changes in the political environment (2018 and 2020 elections), conclusions from research, and advances in the field.

Network development. Through the very process that has led to the CYD Blueprint, the field has already excelled at network development. There are a variety of intermediaries already involved, and convenings, such as the CYD pre-conference at the Americans for the Arts convention, to bring the field together. Nevertheless, CYD field leaders need to constantly look at “membership” and engagement, ensuring that the right people, programs, and intermediary organizations are informed and involved.

Goldilocks framing. CYD’s “Agenda for Progress” has already outlined a good set of advocacy priorities:

- Position creative youth development as the catalyst for dynamic cross-sector collaborations to ensure young people’s academic, professional, and personal success.
- Establish young people and their creative youth development programs as key leaders in discovering and developing opportunities to improve the livability and economic viability of their communities.
- Develop and deepen opportunities for young people to create a more just and equitable society.
- Document and boldly communicate the vital impact and experience of creative youth development.
- Support and advocate for a strong creative youth development sector with effective business models, new revenue sources, and partnerships that generate adequate funding and sustain the sector.

This is a good framing to start from—diverse in objectives and inclusive, yet clear enough to both mobilize the field and encourage receptiveness to policy makers and funders. As with all else, though—and as already described in the CYD Blueprint—this framing should be constantly reevaluated.

Research. There is consistent research in arts education and youth development and, increasingly, in CYD itself, but this is an area with room to do more (see recommendations below).

Equity. The CYD Blueprint and advocacy priorities rightfully call this out as central. The challenge will be to keep it so, at every level (organization, intermediary, field) and consistently.

To build on these connections above, I recommend the field:

- Actively bring in (or more deeply involve) additional intermediaries on a wider basis—additional arts councils following Massachusetts’ lead, large youth development organizations with arts programs such as Boys & Girls Clubs and

Afterschool All-Stars, and national out-of-school time advocates like the Afterschool Alliance.

- Hold convening events like the CYD preconference at 2018 Americans for the Arts annual conference at every applicable national arts education or out-of-school time conference—Arts Education Partnership, National Guild for Community Arts Education, Afterschool for All Challenge, NAMM Fly-in, National Afterschool Association Convention, Best Out-Of-School Time (BOOST) Conference, etc. The events will focus on uniting the advocacy field and training advocates on the message—as well as providing built-in inflection points to adjust message, strategies, and tactics.
- Hold a national Creative Youth Development Day that galvanizes the field and draws the spotlight—similar to Lights On Afterschool.
- Hold additional webinars on specific advocacy areas between in-person trainings (I know CYD is doing this currently). Again, I recommend Afterschool Alliance as a model.
- While the current framing above is likely to be effective, it is vital for it to be “actively flexible.” In other words, create mechanisms to look at it regularly, change it when needed, and communicate those needs widely (all of which can be done through the various convening methods above).
- Add research as an additional independent area for the toolkit, or otherwise dedicate portions of the field to it. Funding for research will help the field overall, so identify funders and stakeholders to make the ask, accept the funds, administer the project, and conduct the research. It is vital that part of the research includes baseline equity measurements to track progress in this central area. Then disseminate the research widely.
- Equity, more than anything else above, should be a focus at every level, including the organizational level. Each organization should develop processes to interact with their own diverse community using strategies that can be in the toolkit.

FURTHER INQUIRY

Selected topics for further inquiry include:

- Identify additional intermediaries to target as advocates.
- Understand and report on the political map in 2018 and 2020.
- Research whether the CYD field should be involved in census issues.
- Work with partners such as Equity in the Center to develop and communicate strategies for individual organizations and advocacy groups to stay equity focused.
- Identify and match research funders, intermediaries who manage research projects, and researchers to develop a large research plan to use for advocacy.
- Identify the most effective times/places/gatherings to hold regular convenings.

CONCLUSION

Advocacy requires many simultaneous moving parts, while not knowing until later—sometimes years or even decades later, if at all—which components caused the observed impact. It is therefore necessary to be as thoughtful as possible in choosing how to structure a campaign, who is part of it, its components, its message, and how to adjust both strategy and tactics frequently in response to changes in the political environment, the field, and its impact.

By intentionally and flexibly navigating a multi-pronged advocacy strategy, developing an advocacy network that is broad and effective, framing the issues in a “Goldilocks” way that makes the issue compelling and comports well with the network definition, ensuring the field has sufficient and the right research with which to advocate, and keeping equity in the center at each step, the CYD field—networks, intermediaries, and programs—will move awareness and policy along with it to best serve youth through CYD.

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