Introduction

Recent articles in newspapers and online have started a new discussion of the validity of the arts as well as looking at art as a career. In the Commentary/News section of the Pittsburgh Post Gazette on February 18, 2009, journalist Mary Thomas wrote the following “The truth is I must have a change of some sort, or die,’ Abraham Lincoln said when criticized for attending opera while the Civil War raged. The quote, cited during a National Public Radio report on the 16th president's musical preferences, exemplifies the vital role the arts play to audiences across the human spectrum -- from presidents agonizing within impenetrable shadow to children dancing on sunlit lawns. The arts reflect upon and interpret the human condition, illuminating as they entertain,

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challenging as they soothe, commiserating while inspiring. Without much fanfare for their contributions in this area, the arts provide a significant social safety valve in our lives. It's an important realization to keep in mind as competitiveness for funding increases and conversations, whether heartfelt or disingenuous, pit food banks against theatrical productions."

Robin Bronk gives another aspect to the support of the arts for employment in her article “Stimulate the Arts and Keep America Strong” in the Huffington Post on February 6, 2009. (www.huffingtonpost.com/robin-bronk/stimulate-the-arts-and-ke_b_164731.html)² “When faced with a collapsing economy, President Franklin Roosevelt tried to put Americans in all lines of work back on the job. Instead of singling out artists as somehow frivolous and unimportant to our nation's economy, he instituted a host of programs designed to put federal funds into the arts, employing America's creative talent and leaving a cultural legacy that endures still today….Why is it so hard for some to realize that jobs in the arts support millions of Americans and are no less worthy than any other job that puts food on the table? Economic studies indicate that 2.98 million Americans are employed in the arts or in arts-centric businesses. Each dollar allocated to the arts not only supports those individuals; the benefits flow outward to their communities and to other businesses.”

The value and support of the arts is a dialogue that we continue to have in this country as the economy changes. This paper will illuminate the issues that specifically focus on support for people with disabilities in the arts.

Over a decade ago the first National Forum on Careers in the Arts was initiated and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts with other public and private groups. Artists with disabilities, arts administrators, and representatives of educational institutions, disability groups, foundations, and government agencies came together to identify barriers and propose solutions concerning careers in the arts for people with disabilities.

Unfortunately some barriers and issues identified at the 1998 Forum are still applicable as people with physical, mental, intellectual or developmental disabilities pursue the wide variety of careers as artists, administrators or designers in the visual, literary, media, design, and performing arts. The following are some of the findings that were determined by the concept paper entitled “The Professional Artist: Grants and Fellowships”\(^3\) that was presented at the first National Forum;

- Funding for the arts was lower overall than in other areas such as healthcare and education. People with disabilities pursuing a career in the arts were encouraged to ask for funds through other program areas, which reinforced the “medical

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"model". This trend eroded their opportunity to be taken seriously as artists since arts funds were not available for them.

- People with disabilities in the arts were often perceived as not having the same professionalism as people without disabilities and artists found difficulty receiving critical acclaim.
- People with disabilities were not encouraged to pursue arts careers and did not receive equal education when they choose to go into those careers.
- Access in the workplace was not readily achievable. Many people pursuing arts careers were forced to create their own opportunities in order to pursue their goals because many mainstream arts organizations were inaccessible.

Has attitude, policy, access, funding and education changed through the years? Has the overall climate improved for people with disabilities who pursue careers in the arts, has it decreased or has it remained the same?

These questions will be addressed in this paper with the understanding that the material presented is based on figures from 2006-2007 before the economic downturn of 2008 and 2009.
Premise #1:

The ADA and its rules and regulations is more established and accepted. Organizations have put ADA plans into place and their buildings, programs and employment policies have created greater access and jobs for people with disabilities pursuing an arts career.

Is this true or false? How do people with disabilities pursue and achieve a career in the arts in this economic and cultural environment? Are there a variety of job opportunities within the arts field, as artists, administrators and technicians available? Or has employment in the arts continued to be a greater struggle for people with disabilities than it is for people without disabilities who are pursuing arts careers?

Response:

There are examples of both true and false responses to this premise. In the last ten years there have been many theatres, museums and other arts organizations that have been built new facilities or have undergone a major renovation that has resulted in improved access for people with disabilities. New festivals featuring the work of artists with disabilities have taken place in Chicago and Philadelphia. Does this represent a trend or are these just isolated cases? The following are some of the best practices that include funding information. There are some shining examples of accessibility in theatres which involves not only the audience members with disabilities, but actors, technicians, writers and designers as well:
In 2003, The Marjorie Luke Theatre in Santa Barbara, California (www.luketheatre.org)\textsuperscript{4} was renovated to be totally accessible in all areas of the theatre from the sound and light booth to the stage. 465 individuals and the following foundations, businesses and government sources gave the leading donations for the renovation and accessibility: Santa Barbara School Districts Measure V School Bond, The Bryan Family, Hutton Foundation, The Santa Barbara Foundation, Ann Jackson Family Foundation, NS Ceramic, US Department Of Education, Orfalea Family Foundation and the Santa Barbara Bank and Trust.

People with disabilities may work as technicians, actors, administrators and designers. Their website information on accessibility is complete and detailed:

*The Marjorie Luke Theatre makes every effort to insure full accessibility for artists and audience members living with disabilities. Physical access to the Theatre from the street and parking areas, to ticket booths, auditorium, stage, dressing rooms, restrooms, scene shop and technical control booth will make this Theatre one of the most accessible performance venues on the west coast. We are proud to offer the following highlights of Accessibility: (please see the website at [www.luketheatre](http://www.luketheatre) for the complete list)*

- The technical control booth on the ground level of the auditorium is wheelchair accessible.

• The accessible entrances to the stage area are down the hallways on both sides of the auditorium. There is a wheelchair accessible dressing room and bathroom in the backstage area off the scene shop on the same level as the stage.

• A wheelchair lift is available in the house right portal for access to the stage from the auditorium

The Victory Gardens Theatre in Chicago, Illinois (www.victorygardens.org)\(^5\) is fully accessible and dedicated to providing its audiences with new plays by new playwrights. They not only provide access to audience members, but they have a program that encourages people with disabilities to write and perform. Victory Gardens recently renovated the historic Biograph theatre and create a model of access from the dressing rooms and stage to the entrance. Their access information is below:

**Victory Gardens Theatre: The Access Project**

*The Access Project is a model outreach effort, designed to involve people with disabilities in all aspects of theater, both on and off the stage. Programs include:*

• **Artist Development Workshops**, which teach the art of playwriting and performance to individuals with and without disabilities.

• **Play Development Opportunities** for original works dealing with disability issues or written by playwrights who have disabilities.

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\(^5\) Victory Gardens Theatre: Access-The Access Project www.victorygardens.org/content/about/access_project
• Assistive Services such as Sign Language interpreted, captioned and audio-described performances; large-print and Braille programs; Touch Tours; wheelchair seating; and TTY phone lines.

About the Access Project: *Our Word for Word Captioning was developed by Pat and Roy Graves of Caption First, Inc. Epson America is a major supporter of our captioning service.

Originally developed by Remains Theater with funding from the Lila Wallace Readers Digest Resident Theater Initiative, the program is proud to have the support of Kraft Foods, the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation, the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, the Harry S. Black & Allon Fuller Fund, Daniel Efner and the Ethel Louise Armstrong Foundation. The AudioLink Personal Listening System for main stage theater patrons is made possible by a generous grant from the Samuel A. Burstein Family Foundation.

In 2000, the Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disabilities (LEAD), (www.kennedy-center.org/accessibility/education/lead/conference.html)6 was begun in the Education Department at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. LEAD’s work focuses on:

• exploring practical methods for implementing accessibility in cultural environments;

• communicating information about arts and accessibility

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• sharing resources and knowledge among professionals in the field of accessibility.

LEAD accomplishes its objectives through an annual conference, an active communications network, and resources generated by the LEAD network that is maintained by the Kennedy Center. In the last 9 years, this network has enhanced access in performing arts centers, museums, theatres, galleries, schools, and other cultural institutions throughout the United States. This educational process has not only produced more accessible cultural venues but has created a greater understanding among the arts community about the talents and accomplishments in the arts by people with disabilities. The Kentucky Center for the Arts is one of the many active members of LEAD.

The Kentucky Center for the Arts in Louisville, Kentucky (www.kentuckycenter.org/)\(^7\) has won awards for its access program for patrons with disabilities. The Center also employs performing artists with disabilities. They scheduled a performance by AXIS Dance, an integrated company of dancers with and without disabilities from Oakland California to perform there and had a challenge raising the funds. According to Martha Newman, the Director of Access Services at the Kentucky Center (www.kentuckycenter.org/aboutus/accessibility.asp)\(^8\), staff members were so excited that AXIS dance was coming that they sought support from their personal contacts in Louisville to find funding for it. They received the funding in small increments from many

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\(^7\) The Kentucky Center for the Arts: www.kentuckycenter.org
\(^8\) The Kentucky Center for the Arts- Access Services: www.kentuckycenter.org/aboutus/accessibility.asp
diverse donors that supported a public performance. Ongoing funding for the access programs at the Kentucky Center is included in the general budget of the Center.

One of the most established integrated dance companies is Dancing Wheels in Cleveland, Ohio (www.dancingwheels.org)\(^9\) having been founded in 1980 by Mary Verdi Fletcher. Dancing Wheels Development Director, Jeanne Oliver, credits Mary with the Company’s fund raising success. Mary put a face on the organization from the beginning with her outgoing and tenacious attitude and good business acumen. She secured initial grants from Invacare and Metlife as well as connecting to government sources including the Ohio Arts Council and National Endowment for the Arts. The lasting success of this organization is a result of the professional product that is created, marketed and toured across the country and beyond. Of their annual budget, approximately 20% is from government sources, 30% from foundations, 6% from corporations, 8% from individual and 36% is earned income from ticket sales, school tuitions and touring fees.

VSA arts of Pennsylvania (http://mn.vsarts.org/x344.xml)\(^10\) and the Amaryllis Theatre Company (www.amaryllistheatre.org)\(^11\) produced Independence Starts Here: A Festival of Disability Arts and Culture (www.independencestartshere.org/home.html)\(^12\) in the fall of 2007. They joined with disability and arts organizations throughout Philadelphia to create this festival. Mimi Kenney Smith, artistic director of the Theatre and executive

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\(^9\) Dancing Wheels: www.dancingwheels.org
\(^10\) VSA arts of Pennsylvania: http://mn.vsarts.org/x344.xml
\(^11\) Amaryllis Theatre Co: www.amaryllistheatre.org
\(^12\) Independence Starts Here: A Festival of Disability Arts and Culture: www.independencestartshere.org/home.html
director of VSAArts PA, reflected on her experience working with artists with disabilities through the years as akin to working with people without disabilities. She said “There are many people who want to have a career in the arts who don’t have the talent for it or haven’t put the time into developing their work. They often fall back on blaming their disability for this rather than the fact that they are not prepared for the work that it takes to be in the arts. But for artists who have real talent and put those talents to work, there are a few more opportunities than there used to be. Especially for visual artists, there are many exhibits open to them that feature artists with disabilities as well as mainstream exhibits. It is more difficult for people in the performing arts since most producers don’t have experience with people with disabilities and audiences have a harder time accepting actors or dancers with disabilities in a mainstream company. Performing groups (such as DeafWest in Los Angeles and Theatre Breaking Through Barriers in New York City) have been accepted as a unique art form and have gained notoriety through the years. The physicality of a performance by deaf artists especially is brilliant in itself.” Funding streams in Philadelphia have opened up in recent years to disability arts groups. The fact that they are viewed as underserved has assisted in this process. *Independence Starts Here-the Festival of Disability Arts and Culture* in Philadelphia was supported by the William Penn Foundation  

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Samuel S. Fels Fund, The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation.
The Philadelphia Foundation, Philadelphia City Paper, and WXPN as well as through in-kind donations.

Judith Smith, Artistic Director, is celebrating the 21st anniversary of AXIS Dance in Oakland, California (www.axisdance.org)\textsuperscript{14}. She said, “At the beginning, funders were confused about whether our work was art or therapy. Over the years AXIS Dance has commissioned new dance work, showing us to be worthy of competing with mainstream arts organizations locally, regionally and nationally. At this point we are supported more by arts funders than disability funders and are rejected at the same rate as other arts organizations. We have a strong education and outreach program that has allowed us to grow and support the artistic programming. The days of “sympathy” funding are over.” AXIS is Funded by: The National Endowment for the Arts, The California Arts Council, Alameda County Arts Commission, City of Oakland Cultural Arts & Marketing Department, Cisco Systems Foundation, The Clorox Foundation, Cresent, Porter and Hale, Betty Faber Fund of the San Francisco Foundation, The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, The Walter & Elise Haas Fund, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Oakland Methodist Foundation, The Bernard Osher Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, Special People In Need, Morris Stulsaft Foundation, TARGET, True North Foundation, Van Löben Sels/Rembe Rock Foundation, The Phyllis C. Wattis Family Foundation, Zellerbach Family Fund and individual donors.

\textsuperscript{14} AXIS Dance Co: www.axisdance.org
Elizabeth Labbe Webbe, the Executive Director of VSA arts of Georgia (http://vsaartsga.org)\(^{15}\) has a different experience. “In recent times, artists with hidden disabilities are becoming more hesitant to self identify because much of the stigma has come back. Job competition has increased and people with disabilities are not being considered if the employer is not familiar with their type of disability. And if they are hired they are often expected to take a lower salary than their non-disabled peers. As funding streams dry up, I have begun to use terms such as social equality instead of professional development when talking to funders about the need for careers in the arts for people with disabilities.”

Premise #2

_Funders have learned to value the professionalism of people with disabilities in arts fields and have funded organizations and individuals within arts careers to a greater extent than 10 years ago._

In these uncertain economic times, has this premise become a reality? Do funders understand the talents and achievements of people with disabilities better than they did 10 years ago and are they able to translate that understanding into funding for careers in the arts? Or do they still carry the old attitudes about people with disabilities as medical models and prefer to fund them through “disability” funding sources? Do they take the careers of artists with disabilities seriously? Has funding increased or decreased for arts organizations that support people with disabilities? If it has decreased, is it in line with the percentage of reduction that all arts organizations face?

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\(^{15}\) VSA arts of Georgia; http://vsaartsga.org
Response:
Some of these questions have been answered in part by the experiences of the arts organizations based on their funding sources and the interviews that were conducted with them in the section about Premise #1. They do compete in the mainstream arts funding categories more so than they did a decade ago. And funding for artists with disabilities is in direct correlation to funding for artists without disabilities for the most part. As funding streams decrease, the competition becomes harder for all organizations that support the work of people in the arts.

The following statistics present the overall picture of arts funding that can then be related to funding for careers in the arts for people with disabilities.

According to the Foundation Center (http://foundationcenter.org)\(^\text{16}\) in their report concerning foundation giving trends of 1,263 of the largest US Foundations totaling $19.1 billion and representing more than half of total grant dollars awarded to organizations by all US independent, corporate, community and grant making operating foundations\(^\text{17}\):

- **Independent foundations allocated the largest shares of their grant dollars for Health, International Affairs, Science, and the Social Sciences**

- **Corporate foundations provided the biggest shares of giving for Education and Public Affairs/Society Benefit (including federated funds)**

- **Community foundations gave proportionately more to Human Services, Arts**

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\(^{16}\) Foundation Center: http://foundationcenter.org

\(^{17}\) The Foundation Center: Foundation Today Series-Foundation Giving Trends, 2008 PDF/Adobe Acrobat: foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/pdf/fgt08highlights.pdf
Giving trends for specific populations included:

- **The economically disadvantaged accounted for the largest share of grant dollars; children and youth captured the largest share of grants**

- **Funding for the economically disadvantaged rose to a record $4 billion**

- **Among beneficiary groups, people with AIDS, single parents, and the economically disadvantaged experienced the fastest growth in giving in the latest year**

In terms of funding for the arts, the Theatre Communications Group in New York City (www.tcg.org)\(^\text{18}\) put together these statistics in its Theatre Facts 2007\(^\text{19}\):

- **Average local funding dropped 35.4% in the past year, falling 54% short of inflation and representing 1.7% less of total expenses over the 5-year period**

- **Growth in corporate giving was 6.8% in the past year but it fell short of inflation by 3.8% for the 5-year period. Average corporate support was at its second highest level in 2007, and the average theatre went from receiving support from 31 corporations in 2003 to 34 in 2007. The average corporate gift fluctuated from a low of $7,150 in 2004 to a high of $10,600 in 2005, ending the five years at $8,998 in 2007.**

- **Average foundation support rose each year between 2003 and 2006. Despite**

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\(^{18}\) Theatre Communications Group: www.tcg.org

\(^{19}\) Theatre Communications Group: Tools and Research: Theatre Facts 2007 PDF: www.tcg.org/tools/facts/
a 3.2% decline in the past year, foundation support outpaced inflation by 14.7% over the 5-year period. The average number of foundation gifts per theatre rose steadily from 17 to 19 grants per year. The average foundation gift was at a 5-year low of $25,800 in 2004 and a high of $31,300 in 2006, ending the 5-year period at $30,700 in 2007.

- Higher average individual gifts were received from fewer donors. The average number of other individual donors increased steadily from 2003 to 2005 then decreased to a 5-year low of 1,584 in 2007.

- Fundraising event and guild income increased in proportion to expenses more than any other contributed income source from 2006 to 2007. It increased each year, surpassed inflation by 20.7% over 5 years, and provided 0.5% more support of expenses in 2007 than in 2003.

In their Arts & Economic Prosperity III: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences (www.artsusa.org/information_services/research/services/economic_impact/default.asp) 20, Americans for the Arts states that:

Nationally, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generates $166.2 billion in economic activity every year—$63.1 billion in spending by organizations and an additional $103.1 billion in event-related spending by their audiences. This represents the economic impact of the nonprofit arts and culture industry in 156 communities and regions (116

20 Americans for the Arts: their Arts & Economic Prosperity III: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences: www.artsusa.org/information_services/research/services/economic_impact/default.asp
cities and counties, 35 multicounty regions, and five states), in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The $166.2 billion in total economic activity has a significant national impact, generating the following:

- 5.7 million full-time equivalent jobs
- $104.2 billion in household income
- $7.9 billion in local government tax revenues
- $9.1 billion in state government tax revenues
- $12.6 billion in federal income tax revenues

Statistics from the Disability Funders Network (www.disabilityfunders.org)\(^{21}\) show that 7,369 grants totaling $555,397,308 were distributed to organizations that serve people with disabilities in 25 categories from Health to the Environment. Of those areas of interest listed, only 152 Arts and Culture grants were awarded for a total of $6,801,661 representing 2% of the overall funding given to programs that target people with disabilities.

All of this information indicates that arts funding is still lower than other areas of interest overall and disability funding in the arts maintains the same sort of funding average that other arts organizations receive.

\(^{21}\) Disability Funders Network; www.disabilityfunders.org
An organizational assessment survey conducted for this white paper created statistics specific to the subject of careers in the arts for people with disabilities by asking foundations, corporations and government arts funders across the United States about their support for artists and organizations.

The survey revealed that:

- These funders support a broad base of cultural institutions, art museums, theatres, dance and music organizations, and arts education programs locally, nationally and internationally.
- Their average annual arts funding budget is over $2,000,000 and they give over 800 grants worth an average of $8000 per grant with a few large grants totaling over $1,000,000 each.
- 100% of the funders gave program grants in 2008, 50% gave general support and 25% was given as scholarships or to individuals.
- There was not a specific funding stream for individual artists, technicians, designers and administrators with disabilities or organizations that supported the work of people with disabilities in the arts. Only 25% of the funders surveyed responded that they provide funding that is specific to any sort of disability issue but 75% of the funders responded that an artist with a disability had benefited by their arts funding.
While careers for arts in general receive only 30% of funding, 67% of funders who provide any arts support for people with disabilities have supported a person with a disability pertaining to their arts career.

Other funded disability programs that are funded are in the areas of Health (50%), Employment (50%), Equipment (50%), and Education (100%).

The National Endowment for the Arts, Regional Arts Agencies and State Arts Agencies Funding Opportunities

National Endowment for the Arts

For more than four decades, Arts Endowment has encouraged creativity through support of performances, exhibitions, festivals, artist residencies and other arts projects. It is an independent Federal agency, and the largest funder of the arts in the country. The NEA is dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, bringing the arts to all 50 states and six U.S. jurisdictions. The agency awards more than $100 million annually, including the disciplines of folk arts, dance, theater, literature, media, opera, and design. For more information, see The NEA Guide at: www.nea.gov/pub/Guide_08.pdf And other information, including grants at www.nea.gov/22

Regional Arts Organizations

Regional organizations are six non-profit entities created to encourage development of the arts and to support arts programs on a regional basis. Funded by the NEA, these organizations, which include Arts Midwest, Mid-America Arts Alliance, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, New England Foundation for the Arts, Southern Arts Federation, and Western States Arts Federation, provide technical assistance to their member state arts agencies, support and promote artists and arts organizations, and develop and manage arts initiatives on local, regional, national and international levels. See their website at: www.usregionalarts.org/

- In the last decade, regional arts organizations generated tours involving more than 4,000 artists, reaching more than 1,500 communities, developed and toured 150 visual arts exhibitions, awarded fellowships to hundreds of artists and supported artist residency programs.
- Regional arts organizations conduct ground-breaking research, develop training programs and materials, provide technical assistance to their member state arts agencies, experiment with media and new technologies to expand audiences for arts organizations and artists, publish books, design and implement programs for writers and publishers, develop the federal standards for computerized arts information and undertake national and international projects related to specific arts initiatives.
- The budget of regional arts organizations grew from $5.1 million in 1980 to $27.6 million in 2008.
- Budget growth has come from private sector contributions; state appropriated funds and earned income.

**State Arts Agencies**

Each of the 50 states and six special jurisdictions has an arts agency committed to a meaningful role for the arts and culture in the lives of individuals, families and communities. Special jurisdictions are American Samoa, District of Columbia, Guam, Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

To contact your state or regional arts agency, see the NEA website at:
www.nea.gov/partner/state/SAA_RAO_list.html

State arts agency programs and services

- broaden and deepen participation in and access to the arts
- improve student learning in the arts and other subjects
- increase the effectiveness of social services
- prepare a competitive workforce
- create jobs in the arts and related sectors
- leverage public and private investment in cultural activities and organizations
- preserve and promote our nation's diverse cultural heritage

These activities are supported and strengthened by the partnership between the state arts agencies and the National Endowment for the Arts.
The NEA is required by law to redistribute 40 percent of its budget to state arts agencies, which use these dollars to leverage state funds and to support grants and services.

State arts agencies combine leadership in planning, marketing and technical assistance, in concert with grant making, to ensure that the arts are a vital element of community life. Drawing on a mixture of state, federal and other funding sources state arts agencies integrate the arts in economic development, education and social service delivery.

Typical state arts agency activities include:

- funding performance tours, festivals, exhibits, concerts and poetry readings
- catalyzing partnerships between the arts and other sectors
- supporting in- and out-of-school arts activities for young people
- educating the public and decision makers about the essential role of the arts
- providing services to improve arts organization management and artists’ entrepreneurial skills
- advancing arts education through training, programs and residencies
- preserving and promoting state cultural and heritage resources
- recognizing and publicizing artistic achievement
In Conclusion:

Funding trends have been explored via anecdotal evidence of interviews with established arts organizations, through general statistics and a specific survey to determine how funders view people with disabilities in relation to arts careers. This paper began with some of the findings that were determined by the concept paper entitled “The Professional Artist: Grants and Fellowships” that was presented at the National Forum in 1998. Based on the information that has been explored in this paper, the following statements reflect the past and current trends in funding over the last ten years:

- Funding for the arts was lower than in other areas such as healthcare and education. People with disabilities pursuing a career in the arts were encouraged to ask for funds through other program areas, which reinforced the “medical model”. This trend eroded their opportunity to be taken seriously as artists since arts funds were not available for them.

10 years later funding for the arts is still lower than it is in healthcare and education. But at this juncture people with disabilities are competing for arts funds with mainstream arts organizations and receive a more equal consideration for these funds than they were 10 years ago.
- People with disabilities in the arts were often perceived as not having the same professionalism as people without disabilities and artists found difficulty receiving critical acclaim.

In some places people with disabilities in the arts are being regarded with the same professionalism as people without disabilities. However, in other places the old attitudes continue to reign supreme.

- People with disabilities were not encouraged to pursue arts careers and did not receive equal education when they choose to go into those careers.

Anecdotally people with disabilities are still not encouraged to pursue arts careers and do not receive equal education when they do.

- Access in the workplace was not readily achievable so many people pursuing careers in the arts were forced to create their own opportunities and organizations in order to pursue their goals while mainstream arts organizations continued to be inaccessible.

Access in the workplace has increased due to the work of many groups, including the National Arts and Disability Center at UCLA, organizations in the LEAD network, the Job Accommodation Network, The Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts, as well as government agencies, including the Access Board that produced the ADA and ABA
accessibility guidelines for new construction and renovations to old, and the National Endowment for the Arts. There are still organizations in the performing arts that are specific to artists with disabilities. However, as more and more artists are seen in the mainstream, they are more widely accepted and more critically acclaimed.

There is still much work to be done in this area, but strides have been made in the last ten years that are heartening for this field. Overall there are successful careers in the arts for individuals with disabilities, who pursue education aggressively, create a good product, sell themselves to the public, and convince funders of their worth. Established organizations have grown through the inevitable struggle of making art happen from year to year. People with disabilities have become part of the diverse landscape and new people are joining the workforce. It is not an easy career, but it is a worthwhile one for many.

The Nobel Prize Winner, Kinzeburo Oe, once commented “one does not know a culture until one knows the perspective of its disabled citizens. One cannot truly understand the moral or immoral leanings of a culture until one is exposed to the perspectives of those who occupy all parts of the human community”. Funding for arts careers is an important way to insure that all voices will be heard in our culture.
Acknowledgements for this White Paper should go to:


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