

# **BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES FOR ATTAINING A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN THE ARTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**



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With a special thanks to Dawn Olson, Linda Olsrud and the  
members of the ND Careers in the Arts Planning Committee.

This project is sponsored by The National Endowment for the Arts, the Social  
Security Administration, and the National Arts and Disability Center at the  
University of California Los Angeles.



## **INTRODUCTION**

Attaining a career in a desired field is the lifelong goal of many adults. When that goal is reached, people's lives are often changed forever. This is true for people in business, education, science, medicine and the arts. However, barriers often arise in the journey to a career goal. Knowing the barriers and then knowing the strategies to get around the barriers are important steps in the career journey. The purpose of this guide is to outline the actual and perceived barriers to attaining careers in the arts for people with disabilities, and to present strategies for addressing these barriers. It is our hope that this increased knowledge will increase the number of people with disabilities in arts careers.

## **BACKGROUND OF GRANT PROJECT**

Beginning in June 1998, the first National Forum on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities was convened at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts by the National Endowment for the Arts and three federal partners, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education and the Social Security Administration. Its purpose was to assess the state of education and career opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and to identify strategies for overcoming obstacles. Significant obstacles exist for individuals with disabilities who want to pursue careers in the arts such as:

- Lack of access to appropriate training and education in the arts;
- Limited exposure to information and resources pertaining to the range of career opportunities as artists, arts technicians or arts administrators;
- The arts not being perceived by rehabilitation professionals as a valid career path;
- Stereotyped rejection of disability content in the arts as innately sentimental or therapeutic and;
- Fear of loss of social security income and health benefits with movement into employment.

Subsequent to the Forum, three summits on arts education, arts administration and vocational rehabilitation were assembled to determine specific projects to advance education and career opportunities in the arts. A final summit meeting on November 30, 2000 held at the Kennedy Center prioritized the recommendations and strategies for implementing them. A key

recommendation was for individual states to convene Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities.

In response to this recommendation, the Statewide Forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities Initiative was established in 2001. To date, twenty states have convened forums. In 2002, a pilot program was carried out by Minnesota, Maryland, and New Mexico. These first Forums focused on providing workshops to advance career opportunities for individual artists with disabilities and cultural arts access.

Building on the lessons learned in this early work, the focus of the Forums was modified to emphasize systems change and the development of comprehensive strategies to remove barriers and establish strategic partnerships to advance careers in the arts for people with disabilities. With this “big picture” perspective, the 2003 and 2004 Forums served as a catalyst to establish and foster networks and partnerships that would set priorities for activities to be carried out on a long-term basis. The arts agencies and their partners continue to carry out efforts such as advancing policy and legislative change, establishing arts and disability networks, and conducting ongoing workshops, programs and services. Between 2003 and 2005 the following states convened forums: California, Washington, Hawaii, Mississippi, Puerto Rico, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, Indiana, Massachusetts, Arizona, Florida, Nebraska, New Hampshire, and Ohio. In 2006, Tennessee and Maine were selected to convene forums in their states.

Reports from the 1998 National Forum on Careers in the Arts and 2002, 2003 2004 and 2005 Statewide Forums are available under “Statewide Forums” at <http://nadc.ucla.edu/statewideforum.cfm>

### **NORTH DAKOTA’S PROJECT**

North Dakota would like to identify, and then assist individuals with disabilities who are pursuing, or who would like to pursue, careers in the arts. Presently, neither the arts field nor the disabilities field has any substantive information on who these individuals are; how their careers are progressing; what impedes their professional progress; and what resources or strategies are needed for them to be successful. The North Dakota Council on the Arts, together with Dakota West Arts Council (a VSA arts affiliate), and the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (a University Center of Excellence on Developmental Disabilities), developed a grant proposal to conduct a program to assess the education and career needs and barriers for

artists and arts administrators with disabilities; and develop and implement strategies to overcome the barriers and advance the careers of individuals with disabilities. This document is the culmination of four focus group sessions held around the state in which project staff spoke with artists with and without disabilities, arts administrators, family members and other interested persons about the barriers and strategies that people with disabilities might use to attain their goals of careers in the arts. The following section, titled *What We Learned*, gives brief bullet lists of barriers that were described to us, and to possible strategies to circumvent those barriers. People are encouraged to examine the strategies and review the resources to attain their personal career goals.

## **WHAT WE (ND) LEARNED (BARRIERS & STRATEGIES):**

### **Financial Barriers**

- Money for materials
- Delayed payments for residencies
- Getting paid for work
- Payment doesn't reflect materials, labor or skills
- Difficulty in writing and applying for grants
- Losing benefits if you sell art work

### **Financial Strategies**

- Obtain grant writing assistance
- Apply for grants for funding of materials and your time
- Learning how to treat your art career as a business
- Contact Disability Benefit Planners
- Turn your art and creativity into other business opportunities

### **Acquiring an Arts Career Barriers**

- Inexperience
- When does a hobby become a profession
- Where to go to get help as a new artist
- No support system for artists
- Getting your foot in the door

### **Acquiring an Arts Career Strategies**

- Networking with other artists – both with and without disabilities
- Find a mentor
- Join VSA Artist Registry and other art organizations
- Talk to your local arts agencies
- Visit web sites with job ads and other arts opportunities

### **Art as a Business Barriers**

- How to market yourself and your work
- Learning business procedures
- Managing health insurance and benefits
- Getting benefits for federal retirees
- How to negotiate fees and special accommodations
- How to handle rejection

### **Art as a Business Strategies**

- Joining free art web sites
- Take a class on running a small business or contact your local small business development center at <http://www.ndsbdc.org/>
- Use technology to manage your business
- Learn self-determination skills (stand up for yourself)
- Contact benefits planning experts

### **Focus on the Disability Rather than the Art Barriers**

- Not seen as an equal
- Resistance by the audience
- Feel a need to hide the disability
- Not feeling valued in part of the community
- Working around accommodations for the disability

### **Focus on the Disability Rather than the Art Strategies**

- Learn self-determination
- Use assistive technologies (talk to IPAT – Interagency Program for Assistive Technology for more information)
- Talk about your art first rather than your disability or need for accommodations
- Network with local artists and art agencies

### **Need for Support Resources Barriers**

- Who do we get help from
- Need for motivational workshops and/or networks
- Need resource materials

### **Need for Support Resources Strategies**

- Contact NDCA, VSA, NEA and other art agencies
- Read “Putting Creativity to Work” book
- See Resource List

## **RESOURCES AND REFERENCES:**

### **Program Sponsor and Project Participant Websites:**

VSA arts, <http://www.vsarts.org/>

National Arts and Disability Center/UCLA, <http://nadc.ucla.edu/>

National Endowment for the Arts, <http://www.arts.gov/>

Social Security Administration, <http://www.ssa.gov/>

ND Council on the Arts, <http://www.nd.gov/arts/>

ND Center for Persons with Disabilities, <http://www.ndcpd.org/>

Dakota West Arts Council, <http://www.dakotawest.org/>

### **Grant Opportunity Websites:**

United States Artists (USA),

<http://www.unitedstatesartists.org/Public/Home/index.cfm>

National Endowment for the Arts, <http://www.arts.gov/grants/index.html>

Bush Foundation,

[http://www.bushfoundation.org/fellowships/artists\\_overview.asp](http://www.bushfoundation.org/fellowships/artists_overview.asp)

North Dakota Council on the Arts,

[http://www.nd.gov/arts/grants/prof\\_dev\\_howtoapply.htm](http://www.nd.gov/arts/grants/prof_dev_howtoapply.htm)

### **Disabilities Access Websites:**

<http://www.vsarts.org/>

<http://www.ada.gov/>

Vocational Rehabilitation /ND Department of Human Services,

<http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/disabilities/>

Department of Labor, <http://www.nd.gov/labor/>

### **Websites to Promote Your Artwork:**

<http://www.artanddesignonline.com/>

<http://www.artbuzz.org/>

<http://www.art-exchange.com/>

<http://www.artpromote.com/resources.shtml>

<http://artistsregister.com/>

<http://www.licensart.com/>

<http://www.performingartsregister.com/>

### **Websites for Marketing your Artwork:**

<http://www.artmarketing.com/>

<http://www.artpromote.com/resources.shtml>

<http://www.artsmarketing.org/>



### **Art As Business Websites:**

Artist Help Network - is a free information service designed to help artists take control of their careers. The network helps artists locate information, resources, guidance, and advice on a comprehensive range of career related topics. The network focuses primarily on subjects of interest to fine artists. People working in the applied arts, arts administration, and arts-related fields will also find this site useful. <http://www.ArtistHelpNetwork.com>

Living the Artist's Life. Paul Dorrell's guidebook for artists, *Living the Artist's Life*, is now in its 2nd printing. Dorrell is a gallery owner and novelist known for his hard-won success and his compassion toward artists. His book has been endorsed by the RISD, the Penn Academy of Fine Art, and many other schools. For more, go to <http://www.livingtheartistslife.com/>.

The Art of the Start - Venture capitalist Guy Kawasaki shares his tips for "starting anything." This chapter is useful for strategic planning, program development, and assisting grantees. For more information, please visit: <http://www.guykawasaki.com/books/artprop.pdf>.

Self Employment in the Arts, <http://sea.noctrl.edu/index.php>

"Putting Creativity to Work: Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities, full text version available at <http://www.vsarts.org/x630.xml>

Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability 2008 Conference and Training is August 21-24, 2008 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. For more information visit <http://www.kennedy-center.org/accessibility/education/lead/conference.html>