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# arts LINK



Americans for the Arts

SPRING 2019

THE SOURCE FOR ARTS PROFESSIONALS IN THE KNOW

Aptitudes

Practices

Skills

Commitments

# 12

## CORE COMPETENCIES OF AN ARTS EDUCATION LEADER

by Jeff M. Poulin

**F**or many years, Americans for the Arts has strategically focused on building local leadership to empower individuals and organizations to create equitable systems and strong policies for increased access to arts education. In 2015, it doubled down on this strategy and began to ask, “What qualities make an arts education leader?”

Local and state-level leadership has been critical in realizing the vision of equitable access to arts education in every school and community across the nation. Research from major policy institutions, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, have found that in order to achieve equitable implementation of government policies, along with equitable distribution

of resources, a community must have a diversity of voices at the table. In our opinion, the arts must pull up a chair.

So, Americans for the Arts embarked on a four-year journey, culminating in February 2019, to engage the arts education field in a series of research initiatives to determine how to ensure an expanded, well-resourced, and less-barriered pipeline to leadership in the field of arts education.

### THE PROCESS

We designed a series of research inputs to guide the process to illuminate contributions from the field to design the framework for the next generation. This was a nonlinear process, which utilized a design thinking model.

First, we explored the literature to determine what knowledge was published. Unsurprisingly, there is little in the nexus of leadership development and arts education. What we did find provided us with the undergirding concepts that 1) anyone can be a leader in this field and 2) leadership traits can be learned over time.

Second, the Research and Policy Department designed and engaged in original research. Over 2016–2017, we asked 81 groups of individuals representing myriad facets of the field what qualities make an effective arts education leader. This process generated 7,614 authentic responses, which we broke down thematically through ideation and then used to create a prototype framework of nine core competencies.

Third, we tested this prototype against existing leadership development models in the arts education field from peer and benchmark organizations. We analyzed commonalities and differences of the competencies so that we could propose models understood and accepted by the arts education field.

► **Students in Carnegie Mellon University's Masters in Arts Management Program participate in a training about arts education advocacy in Pittsburgh, PA, in April 2016.**



## QUICK LOOK

# State Policy Pilot Program

► The Americans for the Arts State Policy Pilot Program (SP3) was launched in 2014 as a three-year initiative focused on a three-pronged approach of utilizing data, networking and knowledge sharing, and working with states. It sought to enable the development of state-level leadership of policy makers, advocates, researchers, and grantmakers, with the goal of developing achievable policy pursuits and sustainable advocacy infrastructures. Through SP3, Americans for the Arts hoped to foster a nationwide culture of policy literacy and advocacy empowerment for arts and education leaders. 12 Core Competencies of an Arts Education Leader was informed by the final SP3 program evaluation. Find out more at [AmericansForTheArts.org/SP3](http://AmericansForTheArts.org/SP3).

Fourth, we incorporated the findings from the State Policy Pilot Program, an evaluation focused on statewide policy change. This led to our final product (or so we thought), which we began to test in the field. We immediately received feedback from emerging arts education leaders that the prototype and our initial findings lacked a comprehensive approach toward systemic barriers in the arts education field for marginalized groups of leaders. So, we went back to the drawing board.

Our fifth step was to explore the paths by which leadership is created and nurtured in the arts education field, as well as illuminate major barriers and the solutions to tackle them. Our research—grounded in critical race theory and underpinned by concepts of intergenerational dialogue (in both its design and

QUICK LOOK

# Leadership Pipeline

■ In 2017, Americans for the Arts conducted research to illuminate effective practices of arts education leaders. Emerging leaders, supported by mid-career and veteran staff, gathered perspectives and generated discussion through simultaneous storytelling and data gathering with participants. A series of interviews and overarching findings were revealed and discussed in March 2018 at the Emerging Arts Leaders Symposium.

Throughout 2018, researchers in the field of arts education reviewed the research and findings to examine common trends and themes and also scanned existing leadership development models. They produced a series of tools for emerging and veteran leaders to cultivate cyclical mentorship and intergenerational dialogue in their communities, with the goal of producing meaningful conversations around broadening and diversifying the leadership pipeline for the field of arts education. The resulting toolkit on Emerging Arts Education Leadership can be found at [AmericansForTheArts.org/EAEL](http://AmericansForTheArts.org/EAEL).

administration)—revealed the missing components, which led to the final development of the 12 Core Competencies.

Sixth and finally, we field-tested our approach at five gatherings across the US in 2018, before publishing the framework for the field in February 2019.

## THE FINDINGS

The research resulted in four themes—aptitudes, skills, practices, and commitments—that served as the guideposts for the long arc

of our work. We also found that a self-predication of mastery usually underpinned leadership competency: one must feel that they already have mastered their individual role within the arts education field on their path to leadership, whether that is being a master teaching artist, program designer, or djembe drum teacher. Our synthesis of the core competencies led to vocabulary you can access to reflect on your professional growth as well as foster dialogue and critical assessment of your development.

Ultimately, we sought a conceptual framework through which individuals and organizations could explore facets of leadership in arts education around arts, cultural, and educational policy.





➔ **Above: Attendees present their arts education advocacy plans during a training in New York City in July 2018. Photo by Jeff Poulin.**

**Right: Arts Education Speakers Bureau gathering in Washington, DC at Americans for the Arts, January 2019. Photo by Jeff Poulin.**

**APTITUDES—the inherent ways in which we approach our work**

- Collaboration
- Criticality
- Creativity

**PRACTICES—the ongoing processes that sustain our work**

- Mentoring
- Networking
- Learning

**SKILLS—the developed approaches to interconnect our work**

- Policy literacy
- Evidence use
- Storytelling
- Advocacy strategy

**COMMITMENTS—the obligations that run through our work**

- A love for and joy of working with learners and in the arts
- A commitment to social action, cultural equity, and racial justice

**THE FUTURE**

Since the publication of 12 Core Competencies of an Arts Education Leader, Americans for the Arts wants to know how this framework might be utilized.

Constituents already report that arts schools are incorporating the concepts into their hiring practices, statewide professional development programs are using it to design their curriculum, and universities teach this resource as part of their foundational coursework. At Americans for the Arts, the 12 Core Competencies of an Arts Education Leader inform our own professional development and the development of curriculum for in-the-field trainings. Tell Americans for the Arts how you use the framework. We will catalogue the programs to help inspire others to action.

▶ Discover the framework at [AmericansForTheArts.org/ArtsEdLeadershipFramework](https://AmericansForTheArts.org/ArtsEdLeadershipFramework).



**QUICK LOOK**

**Arts Education Speakers Bureau**

▶ The Arts Education Speakers Bureau, launched in 2018, cultivates the expertise of 15 facilitators from the field. Combining their strengths with the policy and advocacy expertise of Americans for the Arts' staff, they have developed professional development curricula for arts education supporters, practitioners, and leaders. Curriculum is available in Arts Education Leadership, Arts Education Ecosystem, and Arts Education Policy & Advocacy. To learn more, visit [AmericansForTheArts.org/ArtsEdSpeakers](https://AmericansForTheArts.org/ArtsEdSpeakers).