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EMBRACING CYCLICAL MENTORSHIP AND OUR COMMITMENT TO ARTS EDUCATION



[\(/users/727\)](#) Submitted by [Mr. Jeff M. Poulin \(/users/727\)](#) on Mon, 2018-09-10 10:00

This post is part of our [“Broadening and Diversifying the Leadership Pipeline” blog salon](#) (<https://blog.americansforthearts.org/categories/blog-salon-category/broadening-and-diversifying-the-leadership-pipeline-for-arts-education>) for National Arts in Education Week 2018.

Over the past two summers, I have had the unique privilege to work with three incredible mentees through the internship program here at Americans for the Arts. With all three of these individuals, I worked hard to impart much of my knowledge about arts education, the nonprofit arts sector, the inner working of Washington, D.C.’s advocacy infrastructure, and much more. However, it was through these unique relationships that I also learned from them (read Jacqueline’s blog later today!) and grew as a person; we were engaging a process of **cyclical mentorship**—a term which came into my vocabulary during the [2017 Americans for the Arts Annual Convention session](#) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OT0xrybLEu4&list=PL58UAdq7rpl_vBWpz2oVxs5BkPKddAK7z&index=8) on the topic of arts education leadership.

Often, we approach the leadership pipeline in the field as a departing of knowledge from the older generation to the younger. This process, though utilized effectively in the cultural sphere (and even in the world of tap dance!), leaves much to be desired. It was at this session, I kept referring to “youth” as “we,” until I was called out by a young person in the session who said, “You may think you are one of us, but you’ve got gray hair!”

Though this made me laugh, it also made me realize where I am in my own adventure; I have emerged into a mid-career professional in the field of arts education. This, to be honest, makes me feel stuck, or in-between, or operating in a gray space (like a few of my hairs!).

As we work together in the field, we must be aware of our own advancement in the pipeline and how we are interacting in relation to other operating alongside us. In this morning’s [post by Americans for the Arts’ President & CEO, \(https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2018/09/10/advancing-diversity-by-empowering-the-arts-in-our-nation%E2%80%99s-education-decision-making\)](https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2018/09/10/advancing-diversity-by-empowering-the-arts-in-our-nation%E2%80%99s-education-decision-making) you have read about our commitment to broadening and diversifying the leadership pipeline. It is our belief that this is an absolutely essential criterion in order to achieve our policy objectives and fulfill our mission to ensure equitable access for arts education for America’s learners.

That is why in 2017, Americans for the Arts conducted research to illuminate effective practices of emerging and seasoned leaders in the field of arts education. The research was intended to inform the development of programming to assist in cyclical mentorship, intergenerational dialogue, and to support the broadening and diversifying of the pool of new leaders in the arts education field.

Research was led by emerging leaders (you can read Jordan’s blog later today!) and supported by mid-career and veteran staff and was deployed in a community-based, participatory manner. Researchers used a form of simultaneous storytelling and data-gathering with participants to gather perspectives and generate authentic discussion. [A series of interviews and overarching findings \(https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/arts-education-network/tools-resources/emerging-arts-education-leadership\)](https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/arts-education-network/tools-resources/emerging-arts-education-leadership) were revealed and discussed in a Town Hall in March 2018 at the [Emerging Arts Leaders Symposium \(https://www.ealsatau.org/\)](https://www.ealsatau.org/) in Washington, D.C.—the nation’s largest gathering of emerging leaders in the field of arts and culture.

Throughout 2018, critical analysis reviews were conducted by emerging researchers (you can read Jermaine’s blog later today, also!) in the field of arts education to examine common trends and themes in this original research, as well as existing leadership development models from the field, with an aim to produce a series of tools for emerging and veteran leaders to cultivate cyclical mentorship and intergenerational dialogue in their communities.

Overwhelmingly, the biggest driver for successful mentorship and dialogue are Creative Conversations. A Creative Conversation gathers community leaders to discuss issues facing the local arts, culture, education, and related fields to generate relationships and increased energy around the grassroots movement to elevate the discussion at hand. In this case, the topic can be arts education, and more specifically the broadening and diversifying of the leadership pipeline for the field of arts education. These conversations can happen in myriad ways:

- [Virtually through a Twitter Chat \(https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2012/10/17/the-creative-workforce-in-the-post-recession-economy-a-creative-conversation-twitter-chat\)](https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2012/10/17/the-creative-workforce-in-the-post-recession-economy-a-creative-conversation-twitter-chat)
- [Hosting a Community Dialogue \(https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2011/11/01/activating-community-dialogue-and-connections-through-creative-conversations\)](https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2011/11/01/activating-community-dialogue-and-connections-through-creative-conversations)
- [Coordinating a Panel Discussion \(https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2016/09/30/the-art-of-creative-conversations\)](https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2016/09/30/the-art-of-creative-conversations)
- [Engaging on Facebook Live Events \(https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2016/11/02/national-creative-conversation-on-facebook\)](https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2016/11/02/national-creative-conversation-on-facebook)
- [Gathering for Informal or Social Conversation \(https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2011/10/28/continuing-the-conversation\)](https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2011/10/28/continuing-the-conversation)

According to our research, there were five strategies that emerged as effective starting points for emerging, mid-career, or veteran leaders to employ to foster this dialogue:

- Create Your Coalition: Intentional Relationship Building
- Develop A Facilitator's Role: Interrogation of the Student-Educator Dynamic
- Broaden and Diversify the Leadership Pipeline: Addressing Systemic Barriers
- Inspire Others to Action: Sharing Anecdotes of Growth and Change
- Embrace the Cycle of Mentorship: Enabling Cycles of Multigenerational Dialogue

This week, during [National Arts in Education Week \(http://www.nationalartsineducationweek.org/\)](http://www.nationalartsineducationweek.org/), Americans for the Arts will release a series of tools which will enhance one's understanding of each of these strategies through a [blog salon \(https://blog.americansforthearts.org/categories/blog-salon-category/broadening-and-diversifying-the-leadership-pipeline-for-arts-education\)](https://blog.americansforthearts.org/categories/blog-salon-category/broadening-and-diversifying-the-leadership-pipeline-for-arts-education), by compiling existing tools and resources in the field, and by hosting [new webinars and Twitter Chats \(https://artsu.americansforthearts.org/products/arts-in-education-week-2018\)](https://artsu.americansforthearts.org/products/arts-in-education-week-2018) to engage the field in sharing their own extant knowledge.

I invite you to read, learn, and join the conversation, no matter what stage you are in your career, or how much gray hair you may have.

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Americans for the Arts serves, advances, and leads the network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain, and support the arts in America. Founded in 1960, Americans for the Arts is the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education.

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