ADVOCACY FOR HUMANITIES & ARTS

A DISCUSSION WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

MONDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2018 AT MORVEN MUSEUM & GARDEN
INTERESTED IN CONNECTING WITH US?

- Questions? Comments? Interested in working more with NJCH?

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Definition of advocacy - the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal, the act or process of advocating for something

*Some questions to consider* –
- Is advocacy more important now than in the past?
- Is advocacy better when it’s more proactive or reactive? (ongoing and ever present vs. response to threat)
- With limited resources – funding and manpower – what is priority?
- Who is worthy enough to be a recipient of advocacy messages?
- What’s more important – advocacy from the organization or the constituency?
WHY NOW?

- Is advocacy more important now than in the past?

HECK NO!

- It’s always been around, but in recent years, urgency increased.
- What did threats about cutting the NEH, NEA, CPB, IMLS, and other agencies spark?

OPPORTUNITY!
DO YOU HAVE TO PICK ONE?

- Is advocacy better when it’s more proactive or reactive?
  Ah, that’s a trick question. Hopefully, there’s room for both.

But, it’s important to include planning whether it’s for “regular” advocacy efforts or advocacy efforts in response to direct or indirect threats.
  - Ongoing efforts get the benefit of more planning.
  - In-the-moment efforts get the benefit of heightened relevancy.
HOW DO YOU CHOOSE?

- With limited resources – funding and manpower – what is priority?

  It depends on advocacy goals.

Here’s the catch:
- If you don’t have advocacy goals, then you can’t make decisions about how to prioritize.
- Advocacy goals will help determine priorities, but will require institution-wide comprehension, buy-in, and commitment for success.
WHO MAKES THE CUT?

- Who is worthy enough to be a recipient of advocacy messages?
  Okay, okay, much of what you do could be a form of advocacy AND everyone is worthy, but it’s a cost vs. benefit consideration.

- For our purposes, we’re specifically looking at who gets special attention because their awareness helps further your mission.

- Typical recipients: elected officials, influencers, funders, potential partners and ambassadors, able-to-be converted supporters, and other individuals and entities that can or have the potential to advance your work.
** WHICH IS BETTER? **

- What’s more important – advocacy efforts from the organization or the constituency?

  Hopefully, there’s room for both (little echo-y, yes?).

- Organization
  - Assumption - that you’re already committed to advocate when the opportunity arises.
  - Possible shift – The org can seek out the opportunities.

- Audiences
  - Assumption - that they’re already interested in arts and culture.
  - Possible shift – The org can provide the opportunity for the advocacy.
IF I ONLY HAVE TIME FOR A TOP TEN LIST...

Internally Focused Strategies
1. Create an advocacy plan
   - It will likely be a collaborative effort – administration, programming, communications, development, board, etc., but the effort will need to have a champion or champion department.
   - To be most effective, everyone is aware, and potentially involved.

2. Talk about that plan
   - It may sound overly simplistic, but scheduling check-ins and keeping everyone informed is key.
   - Set advocacy goals for the ongoing activities.
IF I ONLY HAVE TIME FOR A TOP TEN LIST...

Internally Focused Strategies
3. Thoughtfully craft materials that consider varied audiences
   - Constituency
   - Community influencers
   - Elected officials
   - With careful consideration, media

4. Educate the staff and board
   - Start from the beginning.
   - Look for the ways that relate to the role.
IF I ONLY HAVE TIME FOR A TOP TEN LIST...

Internally Focused Strategies
5. Work to identify a group of advocates/ambassadors
   ▪ Use varied perspectives from the org to identify advocates.
   ▪ Formally invite them to participate as advocates.

Externally Focused Strategies
6. Brag
   ▪ But...plan for the braggery! Be strategic about choice and positioning.
   ▪ Use the most appropriate channels (website, printed materials, appeal letters, social media, etc.).
Externally Focused Strategies

7. Be specific about what you want core advocates to do
   - Pick one request/message.
   - Use the asks with care.

8. Offer examples or starting points to the constituency
   - Templates work, especially with customizable sections.
   - Make resources easily findable.
Externally Focused Strategies

9. Encourage general constituency to be genuine in their messaging
   ▪ Help advocates to share meaningful experiences.
   ▪ Convey importance of reaching diverse sets of ears.

10. Seize opportunities to connect via advocacy messages as they arise
    ▪ As those opps align with advocacy efforts, make decisions about positioning.
    ▪ Sometimes you and/or the team may decide to pass.
SOME CLOSING NUGGETS

- Engaging visuals pair well with text.
- “Different” (situationally-appropriate!) can work to your advantage.
- Including the topic of advocacy in your org’s work content conveys it is a priority.
- Membership, exclusive groups/circles/societies, legacy programs, etc. can all advance advocacy efforts.
- Advocacy varies widely – to inform, to persuade, to act or a combination of all three. Know what you want to accomplish.
- If there’s a reasonable ask – and you’ll know what’s reasonable if you’ve done your homework – clearly ask for it.
RESOURCES

- https://njhumanities.org/get-involved/advocate/
- http://njhumanities.org/resources/
- https://www.nhalliance.org/take_action
- http://www.statehumanities.org/advocacy/
- https://www.americansforthearts.org/advocate
- http://www.artpridenj.com/
- https://medium.com/@jasonrhody/to-protect-the-arts-and-humanities-go-local-3577df55e422
WRAPPING UP

- Questions? Shares? Comments?
- Follow-up is welcome.
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Thank you for your time and participation!