



NAEA's Guide For Community Action in a Visual Age

Introduction

At the same time that CEOs, political leaders and futurists are looking to the arts to provide America with an ongoing competitive edge in the global economy, the place of the arts in K-12 education is shrinking. Should we be heartened by a new president elected with a strong arts platform, or wary that financial pressures on districts, states and the federal government may erode the presence of the arts in schools even further?

As an organization, NAEA is in the middle of these kinds of cross-currents, supporting members facing hard times while also encouraging everyone in the field to seize unprecedented opportunities. Amid the sometimes-dizzying array of threats and possibilities, shrinking fields and emerging frontiers, two things are clear. There is no turning back for our children and because of that, the education world needs the visual arts more than ever.

The ubiquity of images in young people's lives already has transformed the way they learn and perceive the world. As they watch and play, young people construct, deconstruct and reconstruct images. They think about what they see and try to make sense of it. They explore and create in ways that are seldom possible in most of their classrooms.

They live in a world that puts a premium on the types of abilities that visual arts educators develop: visual-spatial abilities, reflection and experimentation. This growing reality suggests that schools and their community partners need to strengthen visual arts education and integrate the arts into other areas of learning. To move us toward this preferred future, NAEA's goal is to expand upon the rich conversations we have been having in the last year, like the one the association hosted in Aspen.

To realize this goal, we are encouraging people like you to host conversations in your community about the future of learning in a visual age. (To learn more about other ways you can engage in the association's discussions about learning in a visual age, go to the Learning section on our new website, and click on "*Learning in a Visual Age*".)

Why Community Conversations?

When people, especially creative people, talk openly about things they care about deeply, new realities and innovative solutions often unfold. It's not about the physical act of talking, but rather the process of minds connecting, ideas bouncing off one another and people in a concrete way asserting their belief in their collective problem-solving capabilities.

Audience for This Guide

This guide is designed to support political leaders, state association presidents, university professors, art students in college and everyone else with a strong interest in preparing the visual arts field to meet the challenges of the early 21st century; the visual age.

We are looking to leaders in the arts in local communities who are ready to bring fellow artists, scholars and friends of art education together as a group for an intense conversation to appreciate differences, value common ideas, find common language and develop action plans to promote the arts.

NAEA has had great success in the last year in reaching beyond the people who traditionally sit at our tables to discuss strategy and tactics. In the last year, we have reached out to democratic and republican leaders, representatives of the music community, educators and other prominent people in the community. We find that the broader the cross-section of people at the table, the richer and more thought-provoking the conversation. We urge you to gather together a cross-section of people in your community in conversation, build an action agenda, and then share the notes of your conversation with NAEA Executive Director Deborah Reeve.

Building Background Knowledge

When possible, encourage conversation participants to read NAEA's new white paper *Learning in a Visual Age*. Participants also should watch highlight videos from NAEA's Aspen Summit. If group members are interested in seeing a model for their own small group discussion, we recommend watching (again) the small group discussion at Aspen on *Why Do We Want More Visual Arts*. Pay special attention to how the moderator works to:

- Encourage participation
- Keep the Conversation Moving Forward
- Document What's Being Said
- Funnel the thinking from small group discussions back to the larger group

All of these materials are available on the NAEA website within the Learning in a Visual Age section, in the Learning section (www.arteducators.org/learning).

For a series of additional tools to support a moderator, see the Appendices A-D in this document where you will find tip sheets, ways to overcome common problems and more.

The Actual Forum

Setting the Stage: Welcoming Participants (5 Minutes)

Sample Approach: To get started I want to tell you a little about why we are here. We are here today to talk about the future of the visual arts. We see a powerful and disturbing disconnect. Our young people are growing up in a visual age, spending hours in front of screens and being bombarded by imagery almost everywhere they go. At the same time, America's schools often are reducing, rather than expanding, the training in the visual arts that our young people receive.

As some of the nation's leading advocates for the visual arts (and I now include everyone in this room in this category), we believe that with reflective dialog that we grow stronger. NAEA has been engaging people in many ways over the last year in this conversation as you may have seen in the Aspen Summit Highlight Video.

This next phase will allow members of local arts communities to express their aspirations for students, the field and the future of arts education. Participants also will be able to share their successes with integrating the arts, providing excellent teaching, recognizing and promoting the intrinsic and extrinsic values of the arts and much more.

The reports from these conversations will be reviewed directly by NAEA's Executive Director Deborah Reeve and will help to inform not only her monthly *NAEA News* column (watch her monthly column to see how your input is making a difference) but also her overall approach to association leadership.

Building a Solid Foundation for a Successful Conversation (2 Minutes)

ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES

To have a productive conversation you need ground rules. You need to establish these ground rules in several ways. Pass out a handout of rules, read the ground rules aloud and post a wall chart on which you printed the rules in advance. You want this posting to be highly visible so you can refer to it if there is any rule-breaking behavior.

Suggested Rules to Share with the Group for the Conversation

- We are having an informal and comfortable conversation. Everyone participates; no one dominates.
- There are no "right" answers. Draw on your own experiences, views and beliefs—you do not need to be an expert.
- Keep an open mind. Listen carefully and try hard to understand the views of those who disagree with you.
- Help keep the discussion on track. Stick to the questions: try not to ramble.
- It is okay to disagree, but don't be disagreeable. Respond to others how you want to be responded to.
- Have fun!

To build group consensus behind this approach, ask, "Would anyone like to add anything to the ground rules? Is everyone okay with these?" This also is a good time to ask people to turn off their cell phones.

Launching the Discussion (10 Minutes)

Ask your group members to take a minute to share their personal stakes in the visual arts with the group.

Possible follow-up questions if necessary:

- Why is that important?
- What would that look like?
- If someone from outside the field were to ask you “How are things going with the visual arts,” what would you say?

Delving Into Critical Topics (30 Minutes Minimum Per Topic)

Let people know that in your time together that you will try to address one, two or three topics of critical interest to the future of the visual arts. Expect to take roughly half an hour for each topic you will tackle. If the group wants to tackle more topics, you always can agree to re-convene at a later date. It will be interesting for us to see which topics garner the most attention over time, and how many groups are enthusiastic about meeting more than once.

There’s no right answer about which topics to choose to address. Picking your topics is meant to be part of the fun. However, if your group cannot reach a consensus about what you want to do, as the moderator you should have a reason ready to justify jumping into a particular area to get started.

1. APPRECIATING THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF THE ARTS

How can the field balance its interest in recognizing the richness that art in its many forms brings to our individual lives while also being as concrete as possible about the role the arts play in the overall betterment of our nation?

How are people in your community succeeding in creating an appreciation for the intrinsic and extrinsic values of the arts?

When we argue as a field for the importance of the intrinsic value of the arts, which arguments resonate most strongly with people with power? With the general public? How is it the same argument? How is it different?

Many people at the summit believed that David Perkins’ ideas about the symbolic presence of the visual arts provide an interesting way to speak about the strengths of the field? How do you react to his statements?

In the Aspen Summit conversation, education reformer Terry Peterson insisted that if the arts community isn’t seen as speaking to people’s need for good jobs that it risks being isolated. What about this view that the only way to be assured a role in American education to be seen as a force for helping people secure good jobs—what do you see in your life to support such a view? What do you see that does not support such a view? Are there powerful alternatives working in your community that you can share?

2. APPRECIATING THE EXTRINSIC VALUES OF THE ARTS

Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne recently suggested that the challenges America faces in the 21st century only truly became clear in the last few months with the global economic slump. As the United States seeks to retool for a better economic future, how essential a role do you think the arts can play?

At the Aspen Summit, former NAEA president Mary Ann Stankiewicz cautioned that the association's leadership needed to stay closely aligned with membership so that it doesn't promise things that the field could not deliver. Also at the Aspen Summit, former Bush education department official Susan Sclafani said, "Business leaders believe that success in America depends on children getting what they need from things like the arts. The business community understands that the current education system is not creating young graduates with the expertise in the various subjects, creative spirit, entrepreneurial spirit to connect ideas in interesting ways."

Can the arts deliver on the kinds of expectations that Sclafani talked about in her interview? How are the visual arts delivering on such promises in your community?

How should the association balance its desire to be as aggressive an advocate for the arts as possible while not "going too far?" At the Aspen Summit, David Perkins outlined the hard work and effective instruction necessary to help children realize their creative talents. Who in your community is helping children to be creative? How are they doing it? Why is it working? What should others learn from it?

3. INTEGRATING ARTS THROUGH OUT THE CURRICULUM

When we survey NAEA members, we hear a great deal of interest in how education in the arts can be integrated with education in other fields.

What kinds of efforts do you see to integrate education in the arts with education in other fields? What's necessary to respect the values of the field as we integrate? What do we know to date about what it takes to integrate work in the arts successfully with other subject areas?

What kinds of integration do we have to consider capturing the imagination of the next generation?

At NAEA's Aspen Summit, Susan Sclafani noted her concern that integration takes more, rather than less, expertise and that sometimes educators simply don't have the expertise they need to integrate effectively. Who in your community is rising to the challenge of integrating arts instruction across the curriculum? And, how are they doing it? What can the field learn from their example? What are your greatest hopes and worst fears given what you see of efforts to integrate the arts across the curriculum?

4. TEACHING THE WHOLE CHILD

As a field, we express a strong interest in educating the “whole child” about the arts. How do you envision the next generation learning about the visual arts in particular and the arts in general? Describe the characteristics of future visual art instructors.

How do we build a justifiable case for creativity in our world?

What kinds of expertise will teachers need to have? What kinds of content knowledge? What kinds of pedagogical strengths? How do we balance the need for certified art instructors with the demands and realities of the workplace?

In reporting back about her group’s deliberations at the Aspen Summit, Constance Gee said that people concluded that it was very important for teachers to be taught the way that we want them to teach. How should we want people to teach?

Where will this education of the future take place? In traditional classrooms? In other settings? What about the changing educational landscape excites you? Challenges you? Worries you? Who in your community is rising to the challenge of educating children in the visual age and how are they doing it? Why is it working? What should the field learn from their example?

5. PROMOTING THE ARTS

How do we tell our own story as effectively as possible? How do we build a justifiable case for creativity in our world? What do you see people doing in your community or in other communities that is working effectively to promote learning in a visual age?

At the Aspen Summit, music association leader John Mahlmann spoke about the importance of being able to be very specific about what we want. What should we want?

Because of the Aspen work, many of us now talk about living life in the visual age, rather than the digital age. Some members are talking more about a future where every classroom is a studio, every school a canvas, every community a museum and every child a work of art. How do you respond to these messages? What messages do you deliver to people in your daily advocacy that you find to be effective?

Using Resources from NAEA to Enrich the Discussion

As you delve into the more specific questions outlined above, these general follow-up questions may help participants to clarify their thinking:

- What do you want for students?
- Why is that important?
- What difference will that make?
- What do you want NAEA to know as it makes decisions about how promote education in the arts? Who would you say is most important in your community to include in the discussions?

Reflections: (10 minutes)

How meetings close is as important as how they start. Here is one approach we recommend for synthesizing what the group has been saying and sending people home upbeat and ready for more.

As we conclude our forum, let's take our last ten minutes together to reflect briefly on a few points to bring a little more clarity about our conversation.

- What comments or points made during our forum stand out in your mind as the most memorable?
- Where there any surprises in our conversation?
- Did you learn anything new about the role of the arts in America today?
- Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction from our conversations here?
- What are the three most important insights that the group developed from its discussions?
- In just one minute, what, if anything, as a result of our conversation, are you going to do individually or as part of a larger group?

Effective Note-taking

A strong note-taker is an important part of an effective dialog. Using flip charts, participants can see and validate their comments and have a visual record for group reflection during the closing of the forum. The notes from a meeting also create a group memory, and inform people who miss the meeting.

While we believe it is always good to have a formal record of what happened, note-taking can also be seen as a challenging dynamic process where someone tries to capture thinking that is fluid all of the time. We do challenge note-takers to do his or her job in a way that:

- Represents the diverse perspectives that people bring to the issue in a fair and respectful manner
- Describes shifts in people's thinking as they talk with one another
- Examines what people think should be done about the issue as they consciously recognize the difficulties and trade-offs in all approaches
- Summarizes any shared sense of direction, as well as areas of disagreement

There are fancy new mind-mapping techniques that we do not attempt to address here. We are talking here about a more basic approach. Use flip charts. Use two categories on the flip charts to record positive and negative thoughts about an idea, the basics.

Reporting Back to NAEA

WHEN YOU HOST A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION,
WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU:

- Briefly describing the audience of your forum including city and state, diversity, age of participants, number of participants
- What elements of this issue seemed most difficult to the participants?
- What common concerns were most apparent?
- Were there trade-offs most participants would accept? Describe.
- Was there trade-off most participants would not accept? Describe.
- Did the group identify shared directions for action?

SEND YOUR RESPONSES AND OTHER NOTES TO:

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Appendix

Appendix A

Tools for an Effective and Enjoyable Meeting

1. SUPPLIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING GENERALLY INCLUDE:

- Chart Markers
- Chart Paper
- Sign-in Sheet

2. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CONVERSATION LEADER INCLUDE:

- Prepare for each conversation by reviewing materials and being organized.
- Arrive early to set up and arrange materials.
- Lead the conversation following the conversation guide to achieve the goals of the discussion.
- Complete the report after the conversation to capture what you heard. Submit this report, all charts and a sign-in sheet to NAEA days after the conversation. Please label this set of materials with the date/time/location of the conversation for our record-keeping.

Appendix B

Moderator Hints and Tips

To succeed, these kinds of conversations generally need a moderator who listens deeply.

As you lead the conversations, look and listen for these key concepts to help you better understand what participants are saying. The goal is to not just hear what participants are saying, but to understand why they are saying that (as well as what they might not be saying). Be sure to capture comments and perspectives that illustrate these concepts when reporting on conversations.

LOOK AND LISTEN FOR:

Starting points: What are participants' initial thoughts and perspectives? How do their starting points differ from where they end the discussion? What words do participants use? How is their language distinctive?

Body language: Are participants engaged or do they hang back? What feelings do participants bring to the table? How strongly do participants feel these emotions? What emotions prevail in the discussion?

Common ground: Where do folks agree? How strong are these areas of agreement? Where do participants disagree? What is at issue for them? On what issues are participants torn and why? Are participants saying something different from what they said earlier? If so, why? How do they reconcile these differences?

Obstacles: What emotional, factual, and perceptual barriers are preventing participants from moving forward? How intractable are these barriers? What issues do participants seem to link together?

Depth of view: How deeply do participants hold their views and beliefs? What are participants not saying? What is going on beneath the surface that drives what people are saying?

Turning points: Where were we able to break through in the conversation? What questions or issues triggered our ability to do so?

Appendix C

A Mental Checklist

Each Conversation Leader brings a different set of skills and experience leading group conversations. To make sure that we're all on the same page, here are some additional guidelines for how to lead these conversations and tips for dealing with difficult situations.

Do This	Don't Do This
Prepare and practice.	Wing it.
Draw people out. Dig deeper into what they say. Ask, "What do you mean by that?" and "Why do you think that?"	Cut people off after a few sentences or assume you know what they mean when they use common words or phrases.
Look out for contradictions and misperceptions. Play devil's advocate and push people to explain their views.	Settle for easy answers.
Be flexible and imaginative. Look for answers to questions throughout the discussion. Go with the flow of the conversation.	Follow the discussion guide word for word. Look for answers to questions only at "designated" times in the guide
Remove your personal views from the conversation.	Be overbearing. Lead people to give the answer or response that you are looking for. Tell people "good idea" or show your own biases in other ways. Finish sentences or thoughts for them.
Set the tone of the discussion. Show that you are interested by paying attention. Sit up and lean forward. Move around the room sometimes.	Look bored or overly relaxed. Be too concerned that people like you.

A Mental Checklist (continued)

Do This	Don't Do This
Make sure everyone says something early on. Keep asking people what they think about what others are saying. Always check-in before a decision point.	Let a few people dominate the conversation. Let one strong speech speak for the group. Base your observations on what a few people say.
Frequently ask people how what they say connects to what they (or others) said earlier. Set up opposing views and ask participants what they make of them.	Let the conversation wander, become too chatty, or be one-dimensional.
After you hear several different views, summarize them. This allows you to check that you heard participants correctly and to juxtapose opposing perspectives to see how participants really feel.	Close down the discussion too soon, before people can digest it and respond.
Help people stay focused. Repeat questions throughout the discussion. Remind participants what they are discussing. Take quick impromptu breaks if necessary.	Let the energy in the room run down. Let people get lost or confused in the conversation.
Ask for folks to share their experiences and those of others. Work to imagine what others who aren't in the room might say.	Create artificial scenarios or talk in hypothetical situations.

Appendix D Troubleshooting

IF THIS HAPPENS, TRY THIS:

A few participants dominate the conversation.

- Be indirect and say, “We seem to be hearing from the same participants. Are there any new voices on this issue?” or “Does anyone else want to jump in here?”
- Be direct. Call on someone by name immediately after asking a question. Do not let the same participants jump in.

A few quiet participants hardly ever talk.

- Offer general encouragement to the group like “We really want to know what each of you thinks—everybody’s ideas are important. Let’s all be sure to join in.”
- Make eye contact with quiet folks when posing a question.
- Call quiet folks by name and ask them if they have anything to say—but give them the option to pass.
- After the session, if you get a chance to speak to a quiet person in private, follow up with positive reinforcement.

The group gets off on a tangent.

- Say, “This is an interesting point, but we need to return to the question at hand, which is ____.”

Someone seems to have a personal grudge about an issue and keeps returning to talk about it.

- Remind the person where the group is trying to focus. Ask him/her to respond to the question on the table.
- Acknowledge him/her and move on. Say, “I can understand where you are coming from, but we need to move on.”
- Cut him/her off. Say, “We’re not talking about that right now.”

Participants argue.

- Do not let this bother you—it’s okay as long as it is not mean-spirited.
- Gently remind the group to talk one at a time. Ask those who are talking on the side to let whoever is speaking finish.
- Open up the discussion by asking others to respond to ideas on the table, rather than to specific people.
- Break the tension with humor.
- Stop to review the ground rules.
- Take a break. Consider holding a meeting to resolve the conflict.

Participants never disagree.

- Play devil’s advocate. Juxtapose competing ideas (even if one of them comes from your head) and see how participants respond.
- Check it out—tell the group you’ve noticed this and ask if everyone is in as much agreement as it appears.

An answer seems all over the board, or a person rambles on and on.

- Go back to the main question by asking, “So what does that lead you to think about____?”
- Ask the speaker, “Can you restate that in a few words?”
- Cut him off when possible and move to another person or question.