

Terry Melton

Executive Director of Oregon 1970-75

Interviewer: *Maryo Ewell*

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1) The Goal (Priority) of SAA

SAA's and eventually regional arts groups and of course the Endowment, which got cranked up in 68, was sort of a plea for a new kind of civility, and a creativeness rather than a tearing down-ness.

Staying alive. That's it primarily.

...we really laid ourselves out, without ego, we were a pretty large, wonderful group of people. We were all learning, and we were all believers. I just found it painful, the realization as to how fragile the public arts in this country really were and this meanness that has developed on the far right.

2) Administrative setup and procedure

*When I came in, the arts scene was limited[...]*I had the feeling after I came here and looked at what was going on with the programs, that it was very heavily weighted to theater, what there was here in Oregon, and major organizations like the symphony (which was then the Portland Symphony), the Portland opera, the larger institutions.**

I always felt that government agencies were either regulatory or remedial and the SA councils were neither. They were just a different critter...

...we had no money, \$25,000 appropriation from the state, and I ultimately wound up with 3 employees.

... in the early years, a lot of it was seat of the pants.

General tasks of Executive director at the beginning of a typical year

grant administration	25%
advocacy/lobbying with public	25%
field/constituency communication	25%
agency strategic planning	

program development 25%
fundraising
partnership building (with other government agencies,
with other types of nonprofits, with private sector,
with arts/cultural agencies at other levels of government)

3) Serendipity in getting the SAA ED position

I was running a museum in Montana [...] I had virtually no qualifications to be the director of the SA commission – but I can safely say, you’ll get that same statement from every early director in the business. There weren’t any qualifications; we were doing it by the seat of our pants.

I’d been in the business 8 years before I even heard the term “arts administration” - there wasn’t such a thing - so we were all actors, and players, and painters and so forth that began to run these agencies.

4) Political Climates (In-state)

State arts agencies were not an easy sell. In the early days when Roger Stevens came around to all the states, promising the legislatures that if they just created a commission or council then they would be eligible for public money - he went so far as to that it would never come to the legislature for money [...] it was based upon a magical lie.

Tom McCall was governor of the state of Oregon, and he’s the stuff that myths are made of here in Oregon. He was a liberal republican [...] there were those liberal leaning environmental livable kinds of things that were happening in this state...

... one of the major frustrations that you’ll hear from all the directors then and now the annual or biannual Mother-May-I routine of going before the legislature and being humiliated. And the humiliation was substantial. “What in the hell are you doing here now, you want more money, da da, da da – it was a humiliating process.

There were some good people, some goodness, some caringness, along with this regular process of humiliation by the majority of the legislators. The governor was not particularly a friend, but he was not particularly an enemy.

5) Cultivating constituency readiness and circuit riding (organizational, political, staffs, educators, and artists)

I was hoping to, as most of my peers were, in the business, hoping to create a healthy, productive climate for artists. We all felt that at that time if artists were well served, the public would be well served.

We felt that the guidelines should reflect an encouragement to be of help to artists.

There were occasional wild cards when it came down to the hearings process, and then the budget committee's recommendation, then the subcommittee's, and then there'd occasionally be a wide card, that sometimes would be a person, sometimes procedural [...] We had a few friends, and the few friends were key, particularly if they were powerful friends [...] a few frustrations, but a few friendships also...

Because there were so few of us, and our Commission was so small, I traveled a lot, I spent a lot of time on the road – of course, most of it in Portland, because that's where the population was. I don't know as there was a typical day.

6) Relations with other members of the Arts policy community/ system

i) NEA/ ACA (American Council for the Arts)

I think our experience; the experience of state arts agencies with the Endowment was one of loving mistrust.

It [ACA] wasn't particularly important to me except to be kind of a part of a larger national advocacy group.

I don't have a strong feeling one way or another except for the fact it [ACA] was a national advocacy organization with some very outstanding people on it.

...the ACA types, who came largely from the major symphonies, the major operas, the major power structures- it got their attention because they all like money! So I don't have a strong feeling one way or the other about ACA.

ii) State Peers (NASSA, LAAs, and etc.)

this group [WESTAF] was 6 Western states [...] this committee all of a sudden we had an interaction, a collegial interaction... that was the group that finally put itself together knowing that we wanted to do some things other than what the Rocky Mountain Federation was all about – which by the way was a boondoggle.

...ACA, NEA, NASAA, then the state agencies themselves – somehow they all kind of came together, and as the state agencies' appropriation cycles became healthier...

iii) Arts Service Organizations

NA