

## A MESSAGE FROM NYSCA CHAIRMAN DANNY SIMMONS

Tuesday, December 7, 2010

### A Message from NYSCA Chairman Danny Simmons

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Dear Friends,

As chairman of the New York State Council on the Arts, I'm writing in response to recent emails sent to NYSCA constituents concerning our agency's reorganization of staff. At a time of shrinking resources when we need to rally together as an arts community, I am concerned by the misinformation in those messages, and I want to set the record straight.

#### 1. Extraordinary Challenges & Responsible Solutions

NYSCA's reorganization was carefully considered and planned by executive director Heather Hitchens and the agency's leadership in consultation with me, my fellow NYSCA Council members, and agency staff for one reason: to maintain and strategically advance our support of arts organizations across disciplines throughout New York State, while simultaneously responding to diminishing resources: the loss of 13 NYSCA staff through early retirement incentives and other impending statewide personnel actions.

Make no mistake, this 30% reduction in NYSCA staff, combined with the State's ongoing hiring freeze, presented extraordinary challenges that required responsible solutions. The reductions in staff jeopardized seven areas of support: Arts Education; Architecture, Planning & Design; Capital Projects; Decentralization; Individual Artists; State & Local Partnerships; and Visual Arts. The redeployment of personnel will not only allow us to preserve those discipline areas, but will also allow us to build cross-disciplinary expertise and creative collaboration within the agency. This will strengthen the agency by protecting it from further loss of expertise through the over-reliance of expertise coming from a handful of individuals.

#### 2. Preserving Our Core Values & Policies

There have been no sweeping changes to NYSCA's core values or major policies during this process. All applications will continue to be assigned to individual qualified staff. All proposals, including service organization proposals, will continue to be reviewed by discipline-specific panels. All disciplines will continue to receive our vital support and experienced oversight.

Furthermore, NYSCA's most core value of relying upon and respecting the expertise of the arts community throughout the State will be protected as greater emphasis will be placed on peer review. This, combined with the rating system that was implemented several years ago as a result of ongoing discussions with the Comptroller's office, will create more transparency, not less.

We will continue to recruit diverse members of New York's professional arts community as panelists. We will expand staff expertise across disciplines. And, we will encourage our staff, partners and constituents to think outside the box as we move forward, not backward, in supporting the arts in a tough economy.

#### 3. Championing the Arts Across NY State

The Council is an energetic body that takes pride in its role in championing the arts across the State. Like most State agencies we are faced with the challenges of diminished resources and greater need. We nonetheless remain committed to all the discipline areas that the Council has historically supported, and to searching for new and better ways to serve the field in good times and bad.

#### 4. Moving Forward

The Council is fully supportive of Ms. Hitchens and the NYSCA staff as they implement this plan, and with her, we will monitor its results. The goal of these changes, as always, will be two-fold. NYSCA will be managed to maximize its internal capacity and to leverage the positive impact of its funds as they are deployed across disciplines and throughout the State. We will soon be in touch about registration, guidelines, and upcoming Council meetings. In the interim, feel free to contact us directly at [public.affairs@nysca.org](mailto:public.affairs@nysca.org) with any questions or thoughts. We look forward to your continued partnership as we move forward.

Best,

Danny

Danny Simmons

Chairman, New York State Council on the Arts

To find out who to contact with questions about application guidelines and grants, please visit our website at [http://www.nysca.org/public/contact/staff\\_list.htm](http://www.nysca.org/public/contact/staff_list.htm).