



NASAA Learning Series Session – July 2026
Redefining and Reimagining Professional Development
Brief Notes & Resources

Reframing Professional Development

Presenters encouraged participants to move away from narrow ideas of "professionalism" and certifications.

Instead, professional development should be viewed as:

- continual learning
- strengthening skills
- building capacity
- supporting artists throughout an entire career
- investing in people so they can better serve their communities

One participant noted that the term *professional development* itself can unintentionally reinforce exclusionary ideas about who is considered "professional," suggesting alternatives like continued learning or strengthening skills.

Mid Atlantic Arts Research

Mid Atlantic Arts conducted:

- 49+ hours of stakeholder interviews
- conversations across all 10 Mid-Atlantic jurisdictions
- interviews with artists
- presenters
- service organizations

- grant makers
- arts administrators

The research sought to redesign professional development programming around constituent needs rather than assumptions.

Primary Barriers Identified

Participants consistently identified these barriers:

1. Time

The largest obstacle.

Including:

- lack of time to attend
- lack of time to research opportunities
- application burden
- competing work responsibilities

2. Cost

Including:

- registration
- travel
- lodging
- lack of employer PD funding

3. Caregiving / Job Coverage

Participants cited difficulty leaving:

- work duties
- childcare
- elder care
- organizational responsibilities

4. Information Overload

People struggle to determine:

- which opportunities are worthwhile
- where to find quality offerings

5. Confidence

Some artists simply do not apply because they lack confidence or prior exposure to professional development.

What Participants Want from Professional Development

Personal & Community Care

Participants valued:

- authentic peer relationships
- mentorship
- collaboration
- reflection
- lifelong learning
- support during career transitions
- opportunities for "healthy stillness" rather than constant productivity

Technical & Professional Skills

Participants also sought:

- early-career guidance
- business skills
- grant writing
- financial management
- marketing

- technology skills
- practical tools they can immediately use

Poll & Discussion Highlights

Approximately 90% of participants indicated their organization already provides some form of professional development, leading into discussion about:

- what works well
- gaps in current offerings
- future opportunities

Breakout Discussion Themes

1. Train the Trainers

A particularly interesting discussion centered on helping SAA staff become stronger educators.

Participants wanted training on:

- how to teach grant writing
- facilitation skills
- instructional methods
- adult learning techniques

rather than only receiving content expertise.

2. Language Accessibility

A lengthy conversation explored multilingual access.

Ideas included:

- translated grant guidelines
- multilingual websites
- bilingual staff

- translated applications
- interpreter services
- balancing translated applications with English legal documents

Participants emphasized that language accessibility is becoming an increasingly important component of professional development and public service.

3. More Peer Learning

Participants expressed a strong desire for additional opportunities to exchange practical solutions with colleagues.

Examples included:

- grantmaking best practices
- accessibility
- technology tools
- language access
- operational lessons learned

Notable Professional Development Programs Shared in Chat

Participants highlighted numerous existing programs.

Arts Idaho

- Business Skills Development Course for Artists
- Arts Idaho "ALL" learning platform

Rhode Island (RISCA)

- Lifetime Arts / Creative Aging
- Assets for Artists partnership

New Jersey State Council on the Arts

- Making It Public
- Business of Being an Artist

Montana Arts Council

- Professional Development Grants
- Artists Thrive Conference
- Nonprofit Association partnership

North Carolina Arts Council

- ArtsCore Executive Director cohort with Triangle ArtWorks

Michigan Arts & Culture Council

- Lifetime Arts programming
- Organizational PD grants

Mid-America Arts Alliance

- Artist INC
- Future Pathways organizational initiative

Creative West**Offers:**

- funding
- peer networks
- convenings
- webinars for artists, organizations, and SAA staff

Additional Needs Identified

Participants suggested future emphasis on:

- more funding
- succession planning
- better coordination with private funders
- executive leadership development
- webinar series

- stronger peer communities
- rural artist support
- cross-sector collaboration
- accessibility resources

Resources Shared in Chat

Participants shared a number of useful resources for follow-up:

ArtsWA

- [Change Leader Institute](#)
- [Creative Aging](#)
- [Cultural Access Washington](#)

Arizona Commission on the Arts

- [Virtual Mini Lessons](#)
- [Empowering Rural Communities](#)

Books & Publications

- [The Art of Gathering — Priya Parker](#)
- [Joan Mitchell Foundation — Creating a Living Legacy](#)

Texas Commission on the Arts

- [Webinar archive](#)
- [Tools for Results nonprofit toolkit](#)

Other Resources

- [Mountain BizWorks](#)
- [Nonprofit Learning Center](#)
- [RISCA Arts & Health Artist-in-Residence Framework](#)

Key Takeaways

- Professional development should be viewed as continuous capacity building, not isolated training events.
- Time, cost, caregiving responsibilities, and information overload remain the largest participation barriers.
- Participants highly value peer learning, mentorship, and community-building alongside technical skill development.
- There is growing interest in training SAA staff as educators and facilitators, not just subject matter experts.
- Language accessibility and multilingual service delivery are emerging priorities across agencies.
- Participants expressed strong interest in continued sharing of tools, models, and best practices across the national SAA/RAO network.