

# The Beauty of Internal Evaluation in the Arts



Using Metaphors and Symbols to Develop the Evaluation Capacity of the Board and  
Staff of an Arts Organization

# Presenter Information



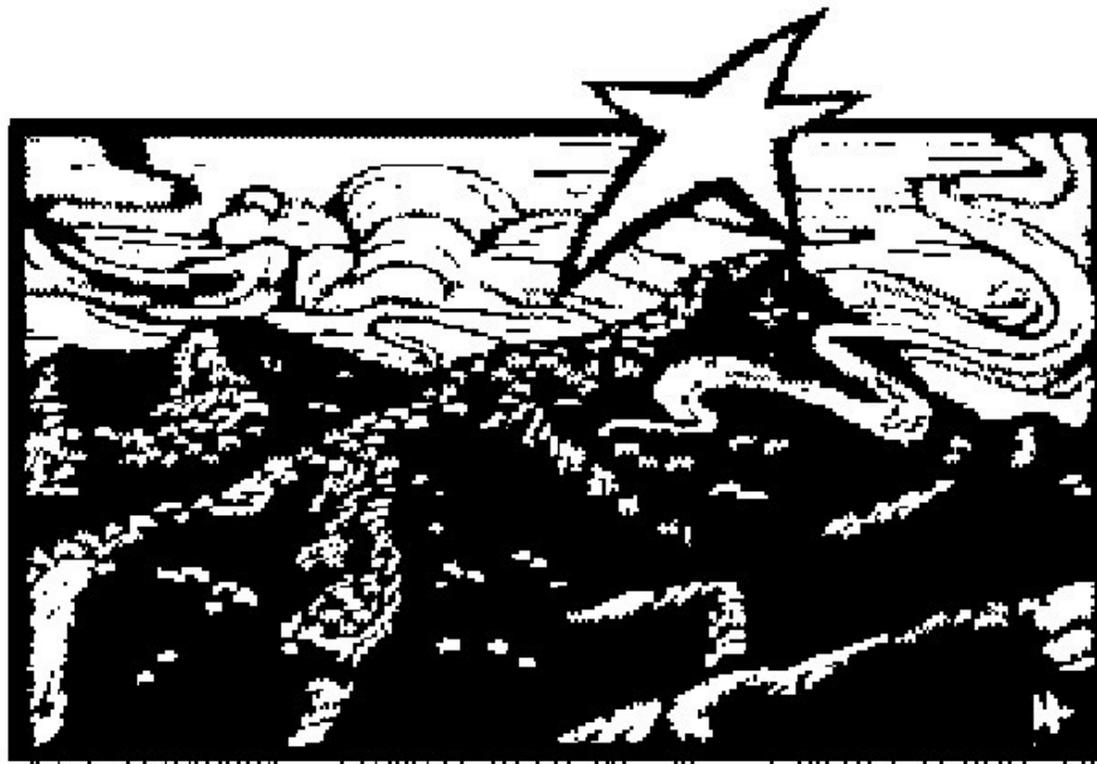
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==== *The* ====

**ARTS ALLIANCE**

==== *of* ====

**NORTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE**

# Context



- ☞ In 2006, the Director of the Arts Alliance came to me for assistance with evaluation. The organization was in need of some support for moving toward a sustainable future.
- ☞ Discussions took place, and it became apparent that only the Director knew everything about the Alliance. The individuals involved with the Alliance as staff members, volunteers, or Board members each had some understanding, but it was limited to the role they played.

# A Problem



- ☞ A primary issue was the lack of a conceptual framework for the AANNH as a whole organization, despite the existence of a “Results Framework” that had been developed in the initial effort to describe the desired outcomes of the Alliance’s work in Northern New Hampshire. The Director had hoped that the “Results Framework” would set the stage for Program Evaluation work, but it did not.

# Another Problem



- Because only the Director truly understood the Alliance as a whole, and the Board and staff members had not had experience with program evaluation, the Director found herself in the uncomfortable position of knowing that an evaluation system was needed and that the Board should become engaged in that system, even help develop it, but the work of the Alliance is so complex that this was proving to be an unlikely accomplishment.

# A Breakthrough



- ☞ As I asked for more detail about what the Alliance did, how it worked, with whom it worked, and how decisions were made, a metaphor came to mind.



<http://alstar.com/solar-system-images.php> Free images of planets and moons

# A Solar System



- ☞ The metaphor of a solar system was suggested as a way to understand the AANNH and its universe.
- ☞ This led to more discussion about how the AANNH actually functions.
- ☞ Was the AANNH the sun? Were some programs planets that were within its gravitational pull? Were some programs moons that rotated around other planets? Were some funders like distant, or shooting, stars? Or was some funder or other organization actually the sun? Were some programs like comets, just “one-shots,” or space junk still floating around?

# A Conceptual Framework



- ☞ The Director was able to go back to the Board with this framework, and begin to use the language of the metaphor to explain the relationships of programs to each other and to funding. The metaphor provided a concrete way of describing and explaining the AANNH, its roles, functions, and relationships, as well as the other “bodies” within and zooming through that system.

# Further Developments



- ❧ I was recruited onto the Board (and became an Internal Evaluator).
- ❧ The Board began to focus on the sustainability of the organization, and held a retreat for a deeper discussion about the AANNH and its future.
- ❧ This discussion began with the typical agenda of looking at the mission, vision and values of the organization.

# Mission



- ❧ The Board was asked, “What does the word ‘mission’ mean to you when you think of it? Sketch a picture.”
- ❧ The Board was given 5 minutes to think about and sketch their concept of mission.
- ❧ Then they paired up to share their sketches and thinking about Mission, Vision and Values and then each pair shared with the whole Board.

# Results



- ❧ Sketches included:
  - ❧ California Missions
  - ❧ Mission Impossible, “Should you decide to accept it...”
  - ❧ Being “on a mission,” going somewhere with determination
  - ❧ Bringing something to people who don’t have it
- ❧ Explanations and Discussion Followed

# Further Developments



- ❧ Board Members got to know each other better
- ❧ The various depictions and explanations opened people up to talking about the mission of the AANNH in new ways, not just as a statement but what the statement really means.
- ❧ “Our mission is to promote, support & sustain culture, heritage & the arts in Northern New Hampshire.”

# Evaluating AANNH Programs



- ❧ The Board was still looking for some way to make judgments about programs connected to AANNH, which is complicated by the overwhelming positive feedback collected for each program.
- ❧ The Board and Director continued to find it difficult, conceptually, to evaluate programs, but wanted to be able to make some distinction between programs.
- ❧ They needed something concrete and intuitive to begin the process of sorting programs.

# The Star System



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# How Many Stars?



- ❧ We had data on each program:
  - ❧ Cost to run it and funding source(s)
  - ❧ Time to set it up, manage it, and collect feedback
  - ❧ Feedback from audience surveys, partners
  - ❧ The connectivity of the program to the Results Framework and to the AANNH Mission
  
- ❧ So, all things considered, the basic question became, how many stars did this event get? Immediately, the Board and Director could grasp this concept. Five star programs were worth offering, no matter what.
  
- ❧ The Board and Director were able to see this as a starting point, a way to begin to sort the programs out, and begin to move forward toward the evaluation they were hoping to have.

# Significant Difference?



- ☞ The Board Members all serve on various committees, which have developed into working groups that meet between Board Meetings. These committees now include Development and Marketing.
- ☞ Additional Staff are in place, hired with the goal of managing the eventual transition when the current “Force of Nature” Director retires.
- ☞ The Programming Committee is now the Program Evaluation Committee and is beginning to develop a feasible system, beyond the stars, for evaluating all AANNH programs. In the meantime, the star system works.

# Final Thoughts



- ❧ Working with an arts organization that is as complex and vital as a solar system is exciting, inspiring and satisfying, and of course at times overwhelming.
- ❧ The work of the AANNH is inherently “messy” and being comfortable with the whole system makes things happen that more rational minds might not expect.
- ❧ Using metaphors and symbols with people who work in the arts is a natural way to engage them in evaluation processes that will support their efforts.

# Thank You



Comments, questions and feedback are welcome anytime!

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