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Americans for the Arts Talks Creativity

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San Diego played host to the [2011 Annual Convention of Americans for the Arts \(AFTA\)](#) last week, June 16-18, and the link between the arts and creativity and innovation was clearly in evidence.

Increasingly, many states are talking about our "jobless recovery" and the vital role the arts can play in preparing the 21st century workforce. Indeed, the [California Alliance for Arts Education](#) and [The California Arts Council](#) are in agreement: "creativity and innovation... must be a core part of every child's education". Both are [supporting](#) legislation to insure California kids have the new thinking skills the workplace demands in the "global economy."

Not surprisingly, the opening keynote, Bobby Shriver, former Mayor of Santa Monica, California echoed the state's interests.

Shriver, who together with Bono founded DATA, ONE.ORG, and RED -- great examples of creative efforts involving business types and artists -- said what is happening to arts education in the United States, and in California, is "outrageous." People need to get "angry " and, paraphrasing the last line of the Declaration of Independence, said all of us need to "pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor" that the cuts to art education cannot be tolerated.

Candor requires acknowledgement, however, that there were two definitions of the "creative economy", depending on the session and the

various presenters. For example, in a session called "Building the Creative Economy Agenda" all the talk centered on the so-called creative industries (film, television, graphic design, publishing, etc.). This ignores the fact that most businesses -- at least as The Conference Board and IBM (who also did a major study on the subject) -- define it broadly. To them, the creative economy includes all businesses not just those that are directly associated with the arts.

Likewise, in a session called "Cultural Affairs to Creativity Affairs," there was an acknowledgment that talking about creativity, not just the arts, was huge a step forward. But all the folks bearing witness to the emergence of a "creative economy," used the more limited definition. They, too, wanted to talk about the growth of creative industries -- one of the few promising sectors of the larger U.S. economy and not to be given short shrift.

But the creative economy has become much larger, even more important than arts-based enterprises, and it is a missed opportunity not to mention the vital role of the arts and importantly, arts integration as the most important vehicle for the future of the country.

Conversely, in a session called "Heating Up STEM to STEAM," those who **wanted the "A" put into STEM** (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) were obviously delighted. The conference featured Senator Stan Rosenberg of Massachusetts who introduced a bill signed by the Governor of Massachusetts intended to get creativity into all K-12 schools in the state. Also participating was Harvey White, former co-founder and President of QUALCOMM, who has been an **outspoken advocate** of arts training. James Herr of Boeing appeared on another panel and talked about art/business partnerships. He also "gets it"; and Boeing is one of those companies that sees "integrated arts education" as vital to the workplace.

"Making the Case for the Arts" with Randy Cohen, VP of research and policy for AFTA, was an equally important discussion focusing on what communities -- business, government, as well as the non-profits -- need to be doing to change public perceptions about the arts. The seminal research report of The Conference Board's report, **"Ready to Innovate,"** that linked economic prowess with arts education, was also discussed.

Admittedly, AFTA does have a membership of artists and art administrators and policymakers to satisfy, not all of who were as interested in the nexus between art and culture, creativity and innovation. And toward that end, AFTA organized over thirty excellent sessions -- including those mentioned -- covering grant-writing, digital fundraising,

public art, and cultural diplomacy; and workshops with practical tools needed for stronger local arts agencies including advocacy and media criticism.

In the wake of the Obama administration's **announcement** at the annual meeting of the Art in Education Partnership (AEP) meeting earlier this May and the nation-wide concern over the future direction of America, AFTA used its unique platform to its advantage to discuss the national implications of arts training. And Bob Lynch, President of AFTA, and Randy Cohen and the leadership of AFTA must continue the discussion. As **Harvey White** of Qualcomm has said, this an "economic issue...that will shape the future we leave for our children and grandchildren."