Today’s economic climate makes getting approval and support to attend conferences and conventions more challenging than ever. As a professional art educator, you provide students with critical 21st-century skills that are essential to student achievement and success. Staying on top of emerging research and practices within the ­field is more important than ever.

To secure support from your principal or supervisor, it’s important to show how your participation in the Arkansas Art Educators State Conference, and the NAEA National Convention relate directly to the objectives within your school learning community and contribute to your professional development.

Do more than ask for approval—consider submitting a more formal request that demonstrates how your participation directly relates to the strategies and objectives of your school. Articulate the value of your continued professional development that benefi­ts your students, your school, and your own professional growth. Download the Encouragement Letter from NAEA Executive Director, Deborah B. Reeve, Ed.D. to include with your request.

**Articulate the Need to Attend**

Below are several quick tips for articulating the need for continued professional development that benefi­ts your students and your entire school community:

* Write down 3-5 of the most important goals and strategies being addressed in your school today—what is the primary focus?
* Think about how you contribute to those goals and strategies. How does your work as a visual arts educator advance student learning and the mission of your school?
* Make a list of the contributions made to your school’s goals and strategies through the visual arts program.
* Review the Conference and Convention schedules to better understand how the theme, sessions, featured keynote speakers, artists, and workshops on emerging research, knowledge, and technologies will support your school and district goals. Identify the sessions you plan to attend and make note of the experts and others whom you would like to meet while there.
* Create a compelling case for how learning from researchers and scholars in the ­field will impact your teaching practice and benefi­t your students and school.
* Provide a summary of the funding you will need.

**Bring it Back to Your School**

What you can expect to gain and bring back to your school:

* Timely and proven practices for helping students achieve 21st-century goals of developing creativity and innovation
* Learning strategies and tools for developing 'imagination' skills
* Greater expertise in interdisciplinary learning—making connections between art curriculum goals and skills students need to succeed in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)
* Understanding of the latest scientifi­c research on how the arts inform the highest level of scienti­fic creativity
* Creative thinking strategies from the world of neuroscience
* Insight into the creative processes of contemporary artists
* Valuable resources, curriculum, and program ideas that will help you and your school meet the future collaboratively

**Prepare for Conference**

Once you have approval to attend, prepare properly so you can demonstrate that you received the benefits you ensured your administrator would be available.

* Review all Convention details and materials at www.arteducators.org.
* Register by January 30, 2012, to take advantage of “early bird” discount.
* Make your hotel reservation early to ensure you receive the lowest possible prices at the Headquarters Hotel (New York Hilton) and our overflow hotel (New York Sheraton).
* Check out the NAEA website to review the Convention schedule and begin making selections for the sessions you wish to attend and making time in your schedule for working your way through the Exhibit Hall. With discounts and giveaways you won’t find anywhere else, shopping in the exhibit halls can significantly stretch your budget and enhance your resources.
* Make a list of people you want to meet and why. Don’t be shy about introducing yourself to a presenter following a workshop. Contact other colleagues you know will be attending to set up a time to meet so you can ensure you have time in your schedule for networking.
* Utilize technology. “Like” NAEA on Facebook. Follow us on Twitter. Begin to interact with others online. Download the 2012 NAEA National Convention App (available Winter, 2011/12) and begin planning your experience.
* Meet and consult with other colleagues who will attend from your district and decide which sessions each will attend so the whole team can cover more educational opportunities and share the information when you return home.
* As the Convention draws closer, contact the people whom you want to meet and set specific times and places to ensure you connect during the dynamically organized chaos that is our vibrant NAEA community!

**Get the most out of your trip**

* Create a schedule of your “must do” sessions and stick to it as much as possible
* Keep a visual learning journal and take notes during sessions. You will learn so much in these four days that you will want to be able to easily reference all that you’ve seen and done and learned when you return home.
* Be sure to create space in your schedule for exploring the exhibit halls and for networking with more than 4,500 art educators from across the US and the world.

**Follow Up!**

* After the Convention, write a concise summary of the many learning opportunities that will benefit you and your students and how you will use the experience and the contacts you made to benefit your school/district. It’s important to write this one- or two-page summary soon after the Convention, while the experience is still fresh. Use the notes and images from your journal to help recall all that happened.
* Submit the summary to the person who approved your attendance.
* Thank them in writing for the opportunity to participate. Once your administrators understand the value, they will be more likely to approve your future participation.
* Meet with your colleagues and share what you learned from the sessions you attended and/or consider posting about your experience on a blog, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
* Apply what you learned in your classroom and enjoy a renewed approach to delivering quality art education to your students.

(Adapted from the NAEA Website)