Building What Comes Next:
Lead Times, Timelines, Through-Lines, and Deadlines

By Melissa Greenblatt, NATS Executive Director

The end of August invokes a melancholy feeling for me as the summer season comes to a close and K-12 schools begin to open their doors, at least here in Maryland where I live. Teachers gear up to welcome students. And parents breathe a sigh of relief as schedules get more predictable. I am now past that phase in my own life, but this time of the year still brings a bit of that melancholy, along with a strong sense of transition for me.



Melissa Greenblatt
NATS Executive Director

It is a transition for NATS as well. While the work of our association is year-round, the fall season kicks off the academic year with auditions, chapter and regional activity, professional development opportunities, and the membership renewal cycle. In many ways, this is our own "back-to-school" season.

As Executive Director, part of my responsibility is leading the organization's day-to-day operations, strengthening the infrastructure that supports our work, and ensuring the staff can effectively support the programs and services NATS provides to its members and the field at large.

And so, as I sit here writing this article for my second *Inter Nos* column, I am pondering lead times, timelines, through-lines, and deadlines. These are a few key concepts that help me organize the work that we do here in the proverbial national office, albeit one that is 100% virtual!

- **Lead times**..... By the time you read this article, it will be October. It takes a village to produce the *Inter Nos* newsletter and it is only offered twice a year, but requires all who contribute to it, to do so way in advance of the actual publish date so that there is time for developing themes, curating content, obtaining guest author articles, designing the layout, editing copy, selecting photos and advertisements, proofreading, and much more. For example, themes and content need to be considered at least 12 weeks in advance. **Each step in the process needs enough time to be done well, because the next step depends on the work that came before it. Truly, a team effort.**
- **Timelines**..... Something NATS must get better at in the months and years to comes is mapping out what has to happen (steps in a process or decision points along a continuum) and when things need to happen so that we can provide programs and services in a timely manner with good customer service. It is hard to rush something without appropriate research, vetting, analysis, and collective input. Timelines need someone to envision and build them, and technology to make them come alive. Timelines may be detailed, with many interim steps and due dates, or they may simply mark a few major milestones. **Either way, the important thing is that they are thoughtfully built, clearly communicated, and shared among everyone responsible for moving the work forward.**
- **Through-lines**..... I see them when reading survey results, long email chains, and board reports. I see them when reviewing files and folders of organization records. I hear them in virtual meetings and phone calls. I like to review different situations, data, and records to see what patterns and through-lines emerge. **Collectively, these help us see what is happening, why it matters, and where NATS may need to focus next.**
- **Deadlines**..... July 3 was a hard deadline – the official start of our National Student Auditions and National Conference in San Antonio, although some of us were already onsite by June 30! We had to be ready to put on the performance of a lifetime with over 1,000 folks expected to be in attendance.

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There were many moving parts and pieces, last-minute decisions, actions, and tasks.

But as I have learned, organizations reveal themselves when things don't go exactly according to plan. With July 3 looming on the horizon, the months of May and June had some surprises for us – the resignation of two staff members and a key volunteer just before our big debut. The workload before us was enormous as we absorbed the loss of institutional knowledge and people to do the work.

Before experiencing my first NATS National Student Auditions and National Conference, I understood intellectually that NATS had an incredibly strong volunteer ethos, but seeing it firsthand was a different matter – people responded by coming together quickly and with elevated levels of collaboration and camaraderie. I saw people step into conference logistics and selflessly volunteer their expertise, time, and energy. **When the deadline arrived, so did the village, and that may be one of NATS' greatest strengths.**

As I look ahead, I know there will always be another lead time, timeline, through-line, or deadline waiting for me and the organization. But with so much focus on what comes next at work, I am grateful that my two golden retrievers, Nash and Bode, keep me grounded in the here and now. Recently, Nash sat with me completely transfixed watching



the show *Sealook* on Netflix, apparently finding a group of animated seals incredibly compelling (me too!). It was such a simple moment, but also a good reminder that sometimes being present means enjoying something that has absolutely nothing to do with a deadline.

I look forward to building the systems, relationships, and shared commitment that will carry NATS toward what comes next. **Have a thought you want to share or a desire to donate to support the NATS organizational infrastructure as we move into what is next, please drop me a line at melissa@nats.org.**

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Members: Keeping your contact information up-to-date ensures that you won't miss any of our member benefits or upcoming events.

To make updates, log on to your Member Home Page (your email address for NATS correspondence is your Login). Then, click the "My Profile" link on the right.

You also can call the NATS National Office at 904-992-9101 for assistance.

