

ELECTIONS 2010: CAMPAIGNING FOR PUBLIC ARTS SUPPORT

Ensuring a government committed to support for the arts means electing officials who believe the arts are an important public responsibility. Candidates running for office—whether for state, local or national positions—need to know that voters are serious about public support for the arts. Take advantage of the campaign season to let the candidates know who you are, why the arts are important to you and how the arts contribute to the life of your community.

Arts advocates should be visible during the campaigns, raising our issues, voicing our concerns, and urging support for our agenda. We should be at the candidate forums, town meetings and meet-and-greet parties in our neighborhoods as advocates for public funding of the arts to:

- confront the candidates on issues of public support for the arts;
- educate the candidates on the role the arts play in their communities and the life of the nation;
- ask the candidates to show where they stand on questions of public arts policy.

Then, after election day, our newly elected legislators and other public officials should be ready to work with us on an agenda in support of the arts.

NASAA offers the questions and talking points here to help arts advocates inject the issue of public support for the arts into the electoral process, to provide advocates with background information to educate potential officeholders, and to help define a candidate's position on the arts in public policy. You also should include questions for candidates on local issues that are timely and specific to your community.

Federal, state and local governments today confront serious challenges, with revenues falling short in the face of pressures to address education, economic competitiveness and health care. All areas of spending—including the arts—are under increased scrutiny. The history of public arts funding has proved that when policymakers hear how the arts benefit their constituents, they find a way to continue support, even during hard financial times.



public funding for the arts

Will you support public funding for the arts after you are elected?

Public spending helps to make the arts available to millions of Americans for projects in theatre, dance, music, visual arts, folk arts, arts education and other arts disciplines. Federal, state and local funding, along with private spending, support the arts infrastructure that is critical to the economic and cultural vitality of states and local communities.

The arts create jobs and produce tax revenue. A strong arts sector is an economic asset that stimulates business activity, attracts tourism revenue, and retains a high-quality work force. The arts have been shown to be a successful strategy for revitalizing rural areas and inner cities.

- The nonprofit arts industry generates \$166.2 billion annually in economic activity, supports 5.7 million jobs, and returns \$12.6 billion to the federal government in income taxes. By investing in the arts, government is fostering a skilled work force of creative occupations that contribute to economic productivity. (See Americans for the Arts, *Arts & Economic Prosperity III*.)
- Creativity is part of a state's competitive edge. As part of a state's creative capacity, the arts are assets to economic recovery that support jobs, stimulate commerce and stabilize property values. (See NASAA's *Creative Economic Development Resource Center*.)
- The arts attract tourism revenue. Cultural tourism is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry, comprised of some 118 million cultural travelers—people who include the arts and heritage in their trips each year. Cultural tourists stay longer and spend 36% more money at their destinations than other kinds of travelers. Public dollars support cultural activities and institutions such as museums, historic sites, theatres and festivals that draw visitors and residents alike. (See NASAA's *Cultural Tourism Resources*.)
- Public spending on the arts helps position the United States to compete globally. America's arts and entertainment are leading exports, with estimates of more than \$30 billion annually in overseas sales.
- The arts contribute to wellness and healthy aging. According to a national medical study, seniors who participate regularly in the arts report better health, fewer doctor visits, less medication usage, less dementia, better mental health and higher rates of social engagement. (See the American Society on Aging's *Research on Creativity and Aging*.)

A Note on Nonprofit Organizations and Political Campaigns

The Internal Revenue Code prevents tax-exempt 501 (c) (3) organizations from “participating or intervening” in a political campaign on behalf of a candidate for public office. Despite this prohibition, the federal tax law permits nonprofit groups to engage in a range of activities, including the following:

- **Taking Positions:** The law permits 501 (c) (3) organizations to inform candidates of the organization’s positions and to ask candidates to go on record in support of these positions.
- * **Questionnaires to Candidates:** Organizations with a broad range of policy interests can safely distribute questionnaires to candidates and disseminate the responses, provided there is no indication of bias or preference in respect to the views of any candidate for an office.
- * **Voting Records:** Organizations may inform their members how each legislator voted on issues of concern to the organization. This information may be disseminated during a campaign as long as it is in the same unbiased manner as at other times, with no editorial opinion and no approval or disapproval of individual voting records. However, a guide to voting records on a narrow range of issues is looked upon unfavorably by the Internal Revenue Service when distributed by an organization concerned with those same issues.
- **Invitations to Candidates:** An organization may invite candidates to attend its meetings and to speak on issues of interest to the organization. Copies of a candidate’s speeches or other remarks may be distributed if the organization regularly publishes a newsletter and circulation generally is limited to its own members.
- **Nonprofit Research:** Where research and studies prepared by a tax-exempt organization are made available to the general public, as well as to political candidates, the organization will not be determined as promoting the candidacy of an individual for public office.

* Arts organizations generally are not considered broad enough in scope or interest to satisfy this requirement.

Obviously, the law in no way prohibits individuals associated with a nonprofit organization from participating as private citizens in campaign activity.

support for the national endowment for the arts and state arts agency

Will you vote to increase funding for the National Endowment for the Arts/our state arts agency?

- Government support for the arts serves to widen citizen access to the arts, making the cultural, educational and economic benefits of the arts available to people from all economic backgrounds and all regions of the country.
- Incorporating the arts improves the ability of other public policies and services to address such issues as economic revitalization, education, work-force development, tourism and community sustainability.
- Funds from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) granted to state arts agencies ensure that federal funding has an even greater reach. With 40% of NEA grant-making dollars allocated to the states, state arts agencies combine federal and state dollars to award 10 times the number of grants awarded by the NEA.
- The NEA receives strong bipartisan support in Congress grounded on legislators' satisfaction with the arts endowment's efforts to ensure accountability and to broaden its distribution of granting funds.
- The 2010 NEA budget at \$167 million remains down from funding of \$176 million in 1992.

(See NASAA's policy brief, [Why Should Government Support the Arts?](#))

support for arts education

Will you support funding and legislation that make the arts part of the core curriculum?

- Quality arts education policy recognizes the arts as a core learning subject in the school curriculum, and supports after-school arts learning opportunities and arts education partnerships between schools and community arts and cultural organizations.
- Active participation and learning in the arts improve overall academic achievement, socialization and preparation for college and the work force. Students engaged in the arts perform better academically. Numerous longitudinal research studies have documented that students who receive arts education exhibit improvements in their performance in other subjects, including reading and math achievement, and on standardized test scores.

- The arts make a tremendous impact on the developmental growth of every child and have proved to level the “learning field” across socioeconomic boundaries.
- The arts help at-risk youth. Participation in arts programs decreases young people's involvement in delinquent behavior, increases academic outcomes for disadvantaged children, and improves students' attitudes about themselves and their future.
- The arts help children develop literacy skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing.

(See NASAA's [arts education resources](#) and [Fact Sheet: Support for Arts Education](#).)

Remember to vote on November 2. Your elected officials influence the funding and other measures that affect the issues in the arts important to you and your community.