

# National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

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## Joint Advocacy Forum State Arts Agencies and the State Arts Action Network

November 15, 2014

NASAA's Assembly 2014 conference agenda included two hours for state arts agencies and representatives from the State Arts Action Network (SAAN) to gather. NASAA and Americans for the Arts collaborate to offer a joint advocacy forum at every NASAA Assembly convening. These meetings—and similar sessions held during Americans for the Arts conventions—are a useful occasion for state arts agency staff and council members to meet with their staff and board counterparts from statewide arts advocacy organizations. Together, the two groups learn from one another, share ideas and consider how to strengthen cultural advocacy practices at the state level.

The 2014 joint forum was held in New Orleans, Louisiana, and was comoderated by Ohio Arts Council Executive Director Donna Collins and Delaware Arts Alliance Executive Director Guillermina Gonzalez. The agenda included introductory remarks from Americans for the Arts and NASAA leadership, an exchange of advocacy success stories from around the nation, and roundtable discussions of advocacy goals for the future. Transcribed below are suggestions shared by the nine roundtable groups.

### Group 1

- Governors and legislators will always be important advocacy audiences, but let's concentrate more attention on state budget officers. That group wields enormous power over the allocation of state resources and needs to understand the arts more deeply.
- Let's "go full bore" on public will marketing: building widespread consciousness, momentum and buy-in for the arts as a necessity, not just a nicety.

### Group 2

- Rather than asking for incremental increases in federal arts funding, let's aim higher. We could request \$50 million more for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). This would increase total federal discretionary spending by a truly nominal amount—less than one hundredth of one percent.

### Group 3

- We should make more mayors the ambassadors for state arts funding. This group is influential with current governors and state legislators and is also part of the electoral pipeline for future legislators and governors.
- As Jane Chu said, we need more policy conversations about art "*and*." Art and safety, art and economic development, etc.
- Arts education is a powerful conversation opener for many stakeholders. We should use arts education as way to engage policymakers.

#### **Group 4**

- Enhancing marketing initiatives to promote public participation in the arts would have long-term advocacy effects.
- Fiscal solvency for arts organizations should be a policy priority.

#### **Group 5**

- Visual case-making: Do more mapping of grantees and their activities and use them in meetings with legislators. Show videos of arts activities and use creative means of presenting data to engage elected officials with the information.
- Use social media to talk about more than grantees and events. Emphasize the importance of the arts and their public benefits.
- Arts specialists should work with state departments of education to adopt arts standards.
- Create a broad cultural coalition (not just arts) to make a combined case for support.
- Consider a systematic "adopt an elected official" campaign in which artists and arts organizations commit to engaging new elected officials in activities.
- How do we elevate the arts in the 2016 presidential campaign? Example: Massachusetts did this during the governor's race.

#### **Group 6**

This group highlighted the importance of collaboration with multiple state agencies:

- Find staff in other agencies that are interested in working with the arts commission.
- Learn how getting buy-in to the arts from other state agencies requires different approaches for different agencies/situations.
- State arts agencies can provide consulting for other state agencies that have arts and culture related initiatives.

#### **Group 7**

- Arts education is so important—highlight it whenever possible.
- Develop regional (within a state) cooperatives of artists, advocates and allies. Coordination among different areas of a state can be helpful in lobbying legislators who have different regional interests.
- Make sure that we have a fine arts specialist in every state education department.

#### **Group 8**

- Synchronize efforts between a state arts agency and its advocacy group whenever possible. In some cases there could be more frequent communication, which would help strengthen advocacy efforts.
- State arts councils and advocacy groups should be in especially close touch about which legislators or stakeholder groups have been contacted, when and on what topic. Coordinated efforts spell success.

#### **Group 9**

- We would like to see more cultural trusts funded.
- We would like to establish increases in regional funding.
- We would like to see SAA staffing to increase to prerecession levels.

For additional resources and tips on effective advocacy in your state, contact [Jay Dick](#) (Americans for the Arts senior director of state and local government affairs) or [Kelly Barsdate](#) (NASAA interim CEO).