



**CEO 2014 Report to the Membership  
November 15, 2014  
Jonathan Katz**

Thank you, Pam [Breaux, NASAA president]. I owe a lot to NASAA for the poetry in my life. I began my work in the NASAA family as an occasional poet in residence for the Kansas Arts Commission. I'll begin my report today with a poem.

How poor a language clears no path way  
to disheveled beauty, for the dank and tossed hair  
of intimacy lacks a phrase, begs a word  
for unadorned and unkempt faces glimpsed  
in waking blinks by lovers who have lain  
beside them quietly for not so many hours  
as they could properly call rest?  
Perhaps one word for that first sight  
in dawn, another in full sunlight,  
and a third in shadow overcast.

Shouldn't there be a word for lovers parting,  
for reluctance that recalls a pleasure  
so intense no measure of a time or distance  
has the meaning now it had before,  
for longing mixed with emptiness?

What if this fevered tongue had no vocabulary  
to express anticipation thorned with trepidation,  
fear of showing what I lack without you,  
how it all seems incomplete, and either  
you find that pathetic or repulsive,  
or esteem it sweet? That is why I crave the word  
that sets me up as more like brave  
than ravenous, and us more like fulfillment  
of an aspiration, of a destiny, than a plea.

Reader, you must add a preface to all dictionaries  
that reminds us what an inarticulate,  
sad and needy species we would be

if all we had were pages that confirmed agreement on the easy aspects of our history without a trope for freefall and the swoop up of the fledgling from the nest, without the image of a finger tracing longingly the last bird flying west, without a lexicon of poetry.

That poem is entitled, "Your Preface," and it will be the opener in the book of poems that I have finished and will soon have time to publish. I like it because it captures much of why I chose working for you as my career. One of the things that art does is enable people to connect the chaotic multitude of sensory experience to meaning. Art teaches us to do this through selection and portrayal of incidents as symbolic. Art doesn't just enable people to describe what *they* see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and otherwise experience; it also enables them to experience what *others* can describe. It teaches them vocabularies for exchanging experience beyond what can be denoted, delineated and quantified. Our sensory vocabularies enable us to speak in our individual voice, to share the songs and poems, the sights and dramas of our individual lives. That is why arts learning is as important as English and math, especially in a democracy. And, of course, equipped with literacy, and numeracy, and the sensory imagery we call "the arts," we can learn everything else.

I promised the board that before leaving I would draft a narrative framework of 30 or so events that shaped the state arts agency movement, our federal context, and NASAA's evolution. It took more than 60 events to do that, but that has been delivered.

When the story of the state arts agency movement is accurately told, it will include many important themes. One theme is that since our agencies were required to plan strategically over multiyear periods by both the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] and by state government, we shared that responsibility with many thousands of arts organizations annually, and we proliferated the practice of strategic planning in the not-for-profit arts world. Another theme will be the incorporation of arts education into our missions and job descriptions and funding, not because our agencies were created with that function in mind, but because our leaders perceived that, for all students to benefit from the skill sets of arts learning, additional leadership was needed to assist education agencies, school systems and the private sector. A third theme will tell how our community development coordinators convened, facilitated, organized, advised, networked and funded thousands of local arts agencies. Our story will include as a theme that as we convened and planned with public input, as state arts agencies added hundreds of millions of dollars annually to grant making for the arts, as we leveraged that support through the matching principle, and as we broadened citizen engagement through our councils and extended the reach of artists through our staff work, we did more than provide "access to the best." We helped broaden the kinds of art considered "the best" to recognize the nation's rich cultural diversity. We helped broaden the idea of a great arts experience to include the qualities of interaction and participation in addition to the quality of the artifact. As workers in the public

sector, we put special emphasis on engaging the otherwise underserved in artistic experience. We used our leadership capabilities and our grant making to strengthen and sometimes create at the state level what we now call "arts infrastructure"—networks of local arts agencies, of arts education professionals and advocates, of emerging leaders, of business leaders, of multicultural leaders, of folk arts and heritage professionals, of creative aging professionals and advocates—the list is long and growing. NASAA itself has adapted radically to profound changes in your environment in order to maintain its value as your most important affiliation. Its founders primarily wanted a collective voice in order to negotiate and partner effectively with the NEA, but over the decades, as state legislatures equaled then doubled and tripled the NEA contribution to state arts agencies, NASAA had to become a vehicle for a much broader range of professional, advocacy and leadership development. Now, as the digital revolution changes how people participate in the arts, as recessions and boom economies come and go, as new local and global trends impact our lives, as political philosophies swing back and forth in our various states and regions, NASAA is positioned, with your participation and support, to continually adapt the content, the communication and the methods of learning with which it serves you.

During my time as NASAA CEO, state arts agencies have managed about \$10 billion. Congress doubled our percentage of the NEA budget from 20% to 40%. The NEA, U.S. Department of Education, Council of Chief State School Officers and NASAA cofounded the Arts Education Partnership that has become the nation's primary forum for advancing arts education. During the culture wars of the 1990s, nine of our national groups banded together, called ourselves the National Cultural Alliance, conducted the first Ad Council campaign for the arts and humanities, and helped save the NEA and the NEH by raising \$1 million and sending a 100,000 thousand telegrams to Congress. NASAA and Americans for the Arts played key roles in the transition of that alliance to the Cultural Advocacy Group that for the past 20 years has fostered national agreement and coordinated efforts on behalf of the budget goals and the policies of the federal cultural agencies. NASAA and the NEA have worked closely together to maintain knowledgeable state networks of folk arts and heritage professionals, arts education professionals, accessibility professionals, and now, partnering with the National Center on Creative Aging, professionals in that field. The Wallace Funds invested \$12 million in state arts agencies and, with acknowledgment to Arts Midwest for its special role in that project, NASAA incorporated the language and methods of creating public value into all of our leadership development activities. The Poetry Out Loud partnership between state arts agencies, the NEA and The Poetry Foundation now engages at least 365,000 young people annually. Members of Congress may disagree on many things but the House Interior Appropriations Committee regularly complements the work of state arts agencies and encourages the NEA to work with states to advance arts education. Most recently, the NEA budget report bill encouraged us to work together to foster arts activity with the military. The dedication and generosity of NASAA's members have added a new dimension to our sense of community, meeting a \$50,000 challenge grant for individual gifts last year, and exceeding that target level by more than 20% this year. I want you to know that your donations make NASAA staff feel enormously proud, and we are tremendously grateful.

I want to ask NASAA's spectacular staff to stand for a round of applause. [lengthy applause] I am proud to say that all of the current staff have been hired during my tenure. I have to smile when I recall that my original Executive Committee emphasized that I should minimize staff turnover. Tom Birch was already setting the standard for effective arts advocacy on Capitol Hill and Johanna Boyer was already setting a high standard for member service. They both continued with NASAA for more than 20 years. NASAA was a pioneer in gathering data for policy analysis, but Kelly Barsdate's unique combination of research and communication skills, learning design, astute staff hires, and leadership development made knowledge services a primary membership benefit. Dennis Dewey as COO, CFO and now comptroller brought wisdom, team management and solid oversight that have us in sound financial shape, operating in the black and with an appropriate cash reserve even after two recessions. Both Kelly and Dennis have worked with me for more than 20 years and NASAA could not be in better hands than with Kelly Barsdate as interim CEO. I need to thank NASAA Chief Advancement Officer Laura Smith for her special skills in friend raising and fundraising. When I am more enlightened I am sure that I will thank her for her mindfulness as well. I have to thank our executive associate, Jessica Galvano, because she'll break my arms if I don't—and she really does keep things moving. Sharon Gee, please stand. As director of meetings and events, Sharon has saved NASAA a lot of money and served members well for over 14 years. She is moving on to other challenges and adventures, and I know many of you will want to keep in touch with her. Thank you, Sharon. I want to give a shout out here to our NEA friends and colleagues. We always did our best when we worked together as a team.

The fabric of my own life is interwoven with yours through NASAA. At this point in my life, my closest friends are among you and others I have met through work. You have enabled me to travel for NASAA to every state and to Guam, the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, always receiving a generous insider's tour of your cultures and history and natural beauty. You gave me the opportunity to serve on the U.S. Commission on UNESCO, appointed first by Colin Powell and then Condoleezza Rice, to advise foreign governments in Canada, Mexico, and Israel as well as in Asia, Africa and South America. I was in Kentucky for NASAA when my father called to tell me my mother had died. I was glad to have a NASAA friend to talk to. Terri and I were driving into work one bright September morning in 2001 when we saw the smoke rising from behind the Capitol and realized something had happened at the Pentagon. In the NASAA office, I watched the second plane crash into the Tower. I was here in New Orleans as a panelist for the first World Cultural Economic Forum when my sister called to tell me our dad had passed away. The reception that evening was such a big, happy party, I was grateful for all that life, and I went to Mulate's restaurant, joined the families there, soaked up the joy of their dancing to the Cajun and zydeco music. I was in Honolulu with Terri, doing some planning with the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, when we decided that was where we would get married. You will always be part of many of the most meaningful professional and personal moments of my life, and I will always be grateful for your friendship.

One year, I was invited, actually for the second time, to address a joint meeting of the Washington State Arts Board and the statewide arts alliance. It was in La Conner, which has huge fields of tulips that more than a million people travel annually from all over the world to see. The poem I wrote and read to them, called simply "Tulips," started off explaining that framed by the Skagit and Swinomish Rivers and the misty Cascades, these fields of tulips stand in mile-long rows like Roman legions and overcome your buzzing mind with "beauty in the symmetry of line and the plush texture/ that is the fabric of distance;/ beauty in the leaves like outstretched arms of dancers twirling" and so on. Then comes the following about why we were there:

Here is where we've come to choose a future  
full of all the beauty and behavior none of us could shape alone.  
Here, we realize, is the place for which the tulip  
growing inside each of us is yearning;  
through the vessel of our flesh and feeling  
we become to all who see us look ahead together  
transparent, transparent, transparent  
and appear like a field of tulips drinking in the sun,  
pushing toward a possible sky  
as if beauty had a purpose or a plan.

They didn't expect a poem. There was kind of a stunned silence and then a lot of applause. I like that poem because it gets at the communal role of art, the power of an artistic experience to help us transcend the limits of our individuality, the power of an artistic experience to create a community of those who share it. Beauty, in my world view, *does not have* a purpose or a plan. But *we* have the essential human capacity to *give* beauty a purpose and a plan. The NASAA family does that all the time. That is a unique value of your work, of your contribution to community life, of your public service. And, because it's always more than any one of us can see or do, it's always unfolding, always mysterious. For me, that visionary, and strategic, and community building aspect of our work never gets old.

I have to explain that I didn't decide to retire from NASAA and then plan an agenda. I developed an agenda that necessitated a big change in how I use my time. So my own reinvention will be through writing and consulting. After my first book of poems, my most immediate subjects for publication and presentation will be *Explaining America: Values and Consequences*, *Gain Theory: Why Movements Win and Lose*, *Problem-Solving in Professional and Personal Life*, and *The Seven Calculations of Winning Poker Players*. I'll be sending you my contact information and NASAA will automate that information for callers and e-mailers beginning next week. Right now, I'm testing for professional e-mails the address [JKvalueadded@gmail.com](mailto:JKvalueadded@gmail.com). I have hopes my writing will lead to new dimensions of speaking and consulting. I would love to continue, on a selective basis, keynote speaking and consulting on cultural trends and policies, strategic planning, and leadership development. I will be doing some work for Americans for the Arts and the Sarasota Arts Council. So please do put me on your consultant list and let me

know when you have something special I can help with. Nothing would please me more than to stay in touch with NASAA friends, both personally and professionally.

Before I wrap up, I want to thank the amazing NASAA presidents I have worked with—some of the finest people I have ever met—and thank all the members of NASAA's board, committees, task forces and advisory groups for your support of me and for your selfless dedication to your colleagues and your work. I am especially grateful to those who have made an individual donation to NASAA, and I am deeply touched by how many of you made special contributions in my honor during the past few weeks.

I have often shared with you my belief that public service is a high calling. I dedicate today's final poem to all of you, and to my soon-to-be-named successor, because this poem is about that particular calling that defines and unites the NASAA family.

### Cobblers

In Hungary, more than a hundred years ago  
my great grandfather was a shoemaker  
and he lived like a trapper in Idaho:  
months for making, months for traveling, selling.  
He must have dreamed of dwelling in one village  
year-round, people coming to his house  
to make their purchase. Which could never be.  
When would people ever value shoes that way?  
Would it take a special pain, a new level of duress?  
But what could be of more importance  
than imagining the shoe  
that's worth a voyage to possess?

Think about the pair he made himself  
to wear for half a year of pulling a cart  
over what a road was then. He must have loved  
every part that made his feet feel they could manage  
where he was and get him through it all,  
not wear out sole or heel, and walk him home.

Making each shoe individually  
with his own hands from the toughest hides,  
he must have felt the same  
about the shoes he made to sell.  
This was mine. Now it's yours. Use it well.

Where quality resides is difficult to say;  
materials, how pieces fit together,  
care for people we will never know  
have parts to play, but in the end

it's not that difficult to tell the way  
a work of art, a shoe, a city has been made.  
Sometimes with objects made from clay  
or leather, visions out of air, the great work  
is declaring they're not good enough:  
this product is not done; it's still in process;  
that one we thought was finished is still rough,  
move hell or heaven, its making might outlive us.

So, high among important tasks at hand  
for starting off today or any day  
is to remind ourselves we understand  
our city is a poem—and what poetry  
has to sell may not be new,  
but must be constantly invented anyway.  
Whatever life we cobble  
will have its story to tell.  
This was mine. Now it's yours. Use it well.

Thank you, NASAA. Thank you for everything!

Madame President, that completes my report.