

# GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT

General operating support (GOS) grants are a mechanism for providing flexible, unrestricted funds to grantees. Rather than funding a particular project, these grants provide support to the organization as a whole and can be used for either programming or administration. State arts agencies (SAAs) are an important source of GOS, which is not available from the National Endowment for the Arts and which many foundations and corporate funders do not offer. State arts agencies play an important role in making flexible dollars accessible to many different kinds of organizations, including small, rural and community based groups.

General operating support is a popular form of support among grantees and offers a variety of advantages to both the grant maker and the recipient:

- GOS grants maintain the autonomy of grantees, allowing them to allocate the dollars to their most pressing needs.
- GOS awards tend to be more predictable over time, which helps organizations maintain continuity of services to their communities.
- Because GOS funds are flexible, grantees can use the funds in more opportune or entrepreneurial ways than project-restricted funds often allow.
- Grants for GOS come with stringent accountability and management requirements that incentivize and perpetuate good business practices among arts organizations.
- Because the grantee—not the grant maker—ultimately defines the activities for which GOS funds are used, this funding mechanism can reduce "mission drift" among grantees and can help to curtail the proliferation of programs designed solely to appeal to funders.
- GOS awards strengthen the nonprofit arts infrastructure within a state and deepen working relationships between funders and core grantees.

GOS dollars awarded:	\$120,460,595
Share of all SAA grant dollars:	39%
Median grant size:	\$10,983
Number of GOS grants awarded:	5,351
Share of all grants:	23%
Number of communities receiving a GOS grant:	1,671

**Grant funding:** State arts agencies invest more than \$120 million in organizations through operating support grants. As a portion of all state arts agency grants, these grants have held steady, making up about a quarter of all grants and close to half of total grant funds.

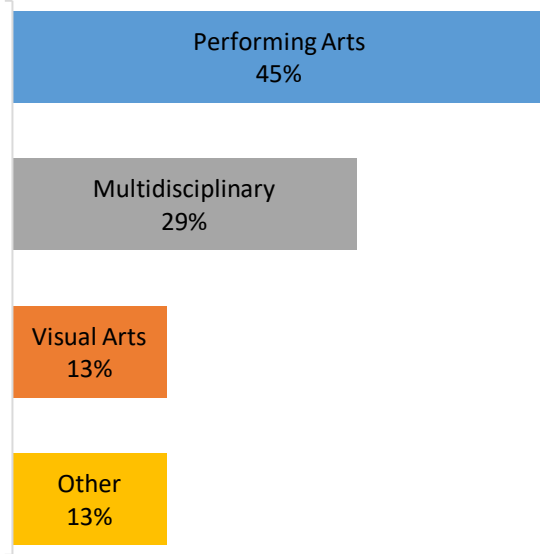
GOS grants tend to be larger in size than awards designed to support particular projects. In fiscal year 2019, the median size of state arts agency GOS awards was \$10,983. By comparison, the median size of other types of project oriented grants was \$3,500.

## State Arts Agency GOS Grants

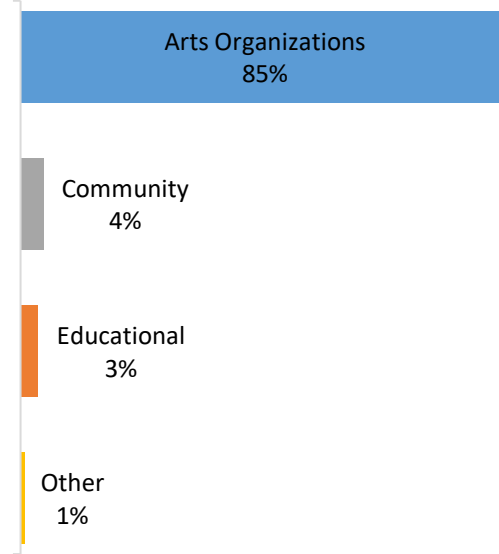
Fiscal Years 2010-2019

Fiscal Year	Number of Grants	Percent of SAA Grants	Grant Dollars	Percent of SAA Grant Dollars
2010	4,887	22%	\$85,383,290	37%
2011	4,990	23%	\$82,546,811	38%
2012	5,147	25%	\$83,218,390	39%
2013	4,711	23%	\$81,410,925	37%
2014	5,247	25%	\$103,459,898	42%
2015	5,529	27%	\$124,844,994	50%
2016	5,062	24%	\$115,379,566	47%
2017	5,806	25%	\$122,883,916	43%
2018	5,326	23%	\$110,260,105	36%
2019	5,351	23%	\$120,460,595	39%

**State Arts Agency GOS Grants  
FY2019**  
By Artistic Discipline



**State Arts Agency GOS Grants  
FY2019**  
By Recipient Type



Other artistic disciplines include media arts, interdisciplinary and design. Community recipients include media, parks and recreation, and social service organizations. Education recipients include arts programs within higher education institutions. Other recipients include non-arts museums, historical societies and humanities councils.

Figures represent data from fiscal year 2019 or the most recent information available. Statistics reflect only grants awarded; they do not reflect other state arts agency programs and services.

Many state arts agencies offer GOS funding on a multiyear basis. Funding organizations over a longer period of time provides a more stable source of income, streamlines grants administration for the state arts agency and reduces the reporting burden for grantees. To qualify for operating support, most state arts agencies require applicants to have a long funding history and very favorable panel reviews. For organizations seeking operating support for the first time, many state arts agencies offer entry points through separate programs geared to meet the needs of new applicants.

**Capacity building and technical assistance:** In addition to funding, state arts agencies offer a wide variety of services that strengthen the capacity of nonprofit arts organizations. Many state arts agencies offer targeted training and technical assistance for new, emerging and small arts organizations, addressing issues unique to these types of groups. State arts agencies offer consultation and training to address specific areas of concern, such as financial health, leadership development and long-range planning. Some state arts agencies also offer tools to help organizations self-assess their institutional strengths and weaknesses.

**Networking and peer learning:** State arts agencies convene constituents in a variety of ways to facilitate learning and collaboration. These convenings include statewide conferences, where the entire arts community gathers for networking and learning from peers and outside experts. State arts agencies offer smaller gatherings for groups of constituents focused on specific topics, as well as site visits where peers offer guidance and advice for a single organization. In recent years, state arts agencies have taken advantage of new technologies and held some convenings on-line, allowing for greater accessibility and a wider range of learning experiences.

**National Assembly of State Arts Agencies**

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) represents the nation's state and jurisdictional arts agencies and serves as a clearinghouse for data and research about public funding and the arts. This report draws on data from state arts agencies' Final Descriptive Reports of grant-making activity submitted annually to the National Endowment for the Arts and NASAA. NASAA's collection of grant-making statistics is supported in part through a cooperative agreement with the Arts Endowment. For more information on the work of state arts agencies, call 202-347-6352, e-mail [nasaa@nasaa-arts.org](mailto:nasaa@nasaa-arts.org) or visit [nasaa-arts.org](http://nasaa-arts.org).

National Assembly of  
State Arts Agencies  
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