

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

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Governor's Arts Awards

Introduction

Most states have a governor's arts awards program to celebrate the best of their arts and humanities ecosystems. Governor's arts awards—which go by different names in various states—recognize individual artists, arts managers, arts educators, creative economy leaders, arts organizations and institutions, and stewards of folk traditions and cultural heritage.

This report considers active governor's arts awards programs, focusing on 42 initiatives managed solely or jointly by state arts agencies (SAAs). It considers SAA roles and highlights a number of policy and programmatic factors involved, such as nominee eligibility, awards categories, adjudication processes and presentation ceremonies. The paper is based on a sampling of governor's arts awards program guidelines, nomination forms, press releases, news reports and other materials available on-line. Complementing it is NASAA's one-page [Governor's Arts Awards bento box](#), which highlights components of individual programs from around the country.

State Arts Awards Programs by the Numbers

Management of Governor's Arts Awards Programs

- in 14 states by *only the state arts agency* (notwithstanding coordination with the governor's office)
- in 22 states by the *state arts agency in partnership* with the governor's office, the state humanities agency, another state agency, a statewide arts advocacy group and/or a nonprofit organization
- in 3 states by the *governor's office*, solely or in partnership with the state arts advocacy group
- in 3 states by the *statewide arts advocacy group*, solely or in partnership with a nonprofit organization

Frequency of Awards Ceremonies

- *annual awards ceremony* in 33 states
- *biennial awards ceremony* in 11 states
- *periodic awards ceremony* in 2 states

Season of Awards Ceremony

- *fall ceremony* in 12 states
- *winter ceremony* in 11 states
- *spring ceremony* in 18 states
- *summer ceremony* in 3 states

Governor's arts awards, like all SAA programs, evolve over time to reflect the changing needs of states. Please feel free to let NASAA know if there is an update to your state's program. You can share news by contacting NASAA Research Manager [Paul Pietsch](#).

Program Goals

Governor's arts awards lend a high level of visibility to the arts and culture as a public endeavor, an economic asset and a point of state pride. They engage the state's chief executive (and, in some cases, legislators or other high-ranking officials) in promoting the arts. And they are deeply meaningful to awardees, as they represent the highest honor a state can confer in the arts.

Across the country, governor's arts awards programs share similar goals. Collectively, these programs acknowledge and showcase the best of arts and cultural communities. They highlight awardees' statewide achievements—or, in some cases, national or even international successes—related to creativity and/or leadership. They recognize awardees' visions as well as the talent and hard work they bring to bear in realizing

them. Some of the programs focus on innovation and the evolution of artistic disciplines, while others celebrate cultural heritage and the tradition bearers who strengthen it. More specific goals of programs include fostering arts learning, collaborations, diversity, inclusiveness, volunteer service, and productive relationships between arts stakeholders and public servants.

Eligibility and Nomination Factors

Eligibility factors for governor's arts awards are also similar among states. For individuals, nomination generally requires legal state residency, a record of achievement, and/or an active practice of arts making, teaching, management, advocacy or support. Basic eligibility for nonprofits organizations, businesses, schools, government agencies and other institutions is often proof of location or work in the state. Ineligible in many states are previous award recipients and members of the adjudication panel as well as SAA staff, council members and their immediate family. In addition, posthumous nominations are not permitted for most programs.

Nomination processes and materials tend to be more state-specific than eligibility factors, though they are many commonalities from program to program. Nearly all programs require the submission of a completed nomination form as well as a statement supporting the nomination, addressing things such as the nominee's work, history and influence. Many states also request or suggest the inclusion of work samples, a brief biography and letters of recommendation. For nominations of individuals, additional requirements may include an artist statement and resume. Programs vary, however, on the necessity and extent of supplemental nomination materials. Examples of these supporting documents are critical reviews, news articles, promotional literature, books, and audio and video recordings. Regarding procedures, typical variables are whether to allow self-nominations, nominations of a single nominee to multiple categories in a single year and nominations of past nominees for awards not previously received.

Adjudication Methods

There are multiple ways to adjudicate nominations for governor's arts awards. Most commonly, SAAs convene an independent peer-review panel. These panels often include artists, arts managers, and other arts professionals and leaders. Panels in several states also include SAA council members, previous award recipients, educators, members of the business community, citizens at large, local government officials and/or representatives from the governor's office. Panelists' decisions often have to be ratified by the governor. For the sake of equity, inclusion and impartiality, SAAs typically seek demographic and geographic diversity when selecting panelists. Some also require panelists to hail from another state.

State Arts Agency Roles

Partner or coordinate with the governor's office, the state humanities agency or another state agency, the statewide arts advocacy group, and/or a nonprofit arts organization—including groups dedicated to supporting SAA programming—to realize the program.

Establish award categories, eligibility factors and adjudication criteria and update as necessary. (In some states, the adjudication panel has the discretion to bestow an award beyond the set categories.)

Solicit nominations for the awards program via websites, blog posts, newsletters, e-mail blasts and other media and methods.

Manage the adjudication process, which may include convening the selection committee, facilitating the panel-review process and coordinating the final decision with SAA council members and/or the governor's office.

Select the award design, if it is an original piece of art, which may require a separate panel review process.

Organize the awards ceremony, which may include coordinating with the governor's office and/or state legislators, inviting arts leaders to speak, contracting artists to perform, and hiring caterers and other event-support staff.

Arrange sponsorships and fundraise for the awards ceremony, which may include seeking donations from individuals, businesses and foundations as well as selling tickets to the event. (Revenues from a cultural endowment fund, when SAAs have one, may offset the need to fundraise.)

Document the awards ceremony through photography, video, social media and other media.

Promote—via videos, photographs, press releases and other means—the awardees and the roles of the governor, legislators and other state leaders in celebrating and fostering the state's arts and cultural community.

SAA councils and staff may be directly involved in the adjudication process. In some states, for example, SAA councils ratify the recommendations of independent review panels. In other states, SAA staff review nominations and recommend award recipients to council members, who in turn make the final decision or make their own recommendations to the governor. Finally, some councils are wholly responsible for the adjudication process, with a council committee undertaking the initial review before the entire council collectively chooses the awardee(s).

Adjudication criteria vary not only depending on the state but also on the award category and its eligibility factors. Review criteria for individual artists, for example, often include artistic excellence, contributions to the arts and culture, peer recognition and a significant record of accomplishments. For arts organizations, factors may include innovation, integrity, length of service and quality of community engagement.

Partnerships and Sponsorships

Nearly every SAA managing a governor's arts awards program coordinates to some degree with the governor's office, the state legislature, the state humanities office, another state agency, a statewide arts advocacy group and/or a nonprofit organization. SAAs that independently run a program generally still work with the governor's office to facilitate the governor's participation in the awards ceremony and/or to secure the governor's final approval of awardees. SAAs that manage their program in partnership with another entity may cooperate on setting program policies, soliciting nominations, facilitating the adjudication process and/or organizing the awards ceremony. Promoting award recipients, their work and the value of the state's arts and cultural community as a whole are additional points of collaboration.

Many awards programs are supported through contributions or corporate sponsorships. This fosters shared ownership of programs, mitigates the impact on SAA budgets and aligns with how governor's awards programs in other sectors (like education, health and

State Arts Awards Programs Chronology

1966	NY Governor's Arts Awards (inactive)
1966	WA Governor's Arts & Heritage Awards
1967	VT Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts
1968	AK Governor's Awards for the Arts and Humanities
1969	CO Governor's Creative Leadership Awards
1970	DE Governor's Arts Awards
1970	ID Governor's Awards in the Arts
1971	AL Celebration of the Arts Awards
1971	TN Governor's Arts Awards
1971	OH Governor's Awards for the Arts
1972	SC Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Governor's Awards for the Arts
1973	SD Governor's Awards in the Arts
1973	IN Governor's Arts Awards
1974	HI Awards for Literature (inactive)
1974	NM Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts
1975	KS Governor's Arts Awards (inactive)
1975	OK Governor's Arts Awards
1977	OR Governor's Arts Awards (inactive)
1977	ND Governor's Awards for the Arts
1977	KY Governor's Awards in the Arts
1978	CT Governor's Arts Awards
1979	VA Governor's Awards for the Arts
1979	NV Governor's Arts Awards (inactive)
1979	NE Governor's Arts Awards
1980	PA Governor's Awards for the Arts
1980	NH Governor's Arts Awards
1980	NJ Governor's Awards in Arts Education
1980	UT Governor's Leadership in the Arts Awards
1981	AZ Governor's Arts Awards
1981	MT Governor's Arts Awards
1982	HI Governor's Awards for Distinguished Achievement in Culture, Arts & Humanities (inactive)
1982	WY Governor's Arts Awards
1983	MO Arts Awards
1984	DC Larry Neal Writers' Awards
1985	MI Governor's Awards for Arts & Culture (inactive)
1986	DC Mayor's Arts Awards
1988	MS Governor's Arts Awards
1988	SC Jean Laney Harris Folk Heritage Awards
1989	NC Heritage Awards
1990	SD Living Indian Treasure Awards
1991	AR Governor's Arts Awards
1993	MA Commonwealth Awards
1994	HI School Arts Excellence Awards (inactive)
1997	UT Governor's Mansion Artist Awards
2002	AR Living Treasure Awards
2005	WV Governor's Arts Awards
2007	MD Traditions Heritage Awards
2008	HI History Day School Awards (inactive)
2008	LA Culture Awards
2012	GA Governor's Awards for the Arts and Humanities
2012	WI Governor's Tourism Awards for Arts, Culture and Heritage
2013	NE NebraskARTS Award
2014	CT Governor's Patron of the Arts Awards
2014	IA Governor's Arts Awards
2015	NH Arts Advocate of the Year Awards
2016	FL Diversity and Inclusion Awards

philanthropy) are commonly financed. On a practical level, private funding provides support for receptions, food and beverages, which frequently are unallowable uses of state dollars. Fundraising can be led by SAA council members (in their capacity as volunteer leaders), nonprofit partners or the state arts agency itself. Some programs involve formal sponsorship categories and seek sustaining gifts, while others approach fundraising more informally. Another way to support governor's arts awards is to sell tickets to the ceremony and advertising space in the event program. It is also possible to link outreach and fundraising—one SAA, for example, encourages state legislators to sponsor and accompany citizens attending the awards ceremony.

Awards Ceremonies

Presentation ceremonies, which are the most visible component of governor's arts awards programs, often take place in locations that demonstrate public support for the arts, such as the state capitol building, the governor's residence or an SAA-sponsored statewide arts conference. Likewise, many governors, spouses of governors and lieutenant governors preside over the awards ceremony, present the physical awards and/or speak about the importance of the state's arts and culture. In several states, for example, the ceremony is the forum for the governor's annual "state of the arts" speech.

Governor's arts awards ceremonies, which range from luncheons to formal evening affairs, are typically not only fetes for awardees but also opportunities to showcase the breadth and depth of the state's artistic community. As such, many SAAs arrange for artists to perform during the event and/or for arts leaders, such as an SAA council member or the state poet laureate, to give remarks. Similarly, in at least 10 states, the award itself is an original piece of art created by a state based artist. To increase the accessibility of the ceremonies, which are free in many but not all states, some programs record and share videos of them, and at least one SAA partners with public television to broadcast its event live.

Award Categories

Each governor's arts awards program is unique. Nonetheless, many programs have similar award categories. Here are some of the most common.

Arts advocacy awards recognize the individuals, organizations and institutions that cultivate opportunities for engaging the arts and raise awareness about the state's cultural community.

Arts education awards generally honor teachers but may also recognize schools, school boards and students.

Arts organization awards, which honor the work of arts service groups and arts institutions, are generally inclusive of various arts disciplines.

Business support for the arts awards go to corporate patrons and various types of businesses, including newspapers, TV stations and other media companies.

Community awards recognize exemplary arts based community development, service and placemaking.

Folk/Traditional arts/Heritage awards go to craftspeople, folk artists, arts educators and advocates fostering traditional art forms and cultural heritage.

Government support for the arts awards recognize state legislators, local agencies and other government employees or entities.

Individual artist awards may be discipline-specific or all-inclusive.

Leadership awards generally recognize arts managers and arts organizations that strengthen the state's arts community, reducing barriers to cultural participation and more.

Lifetime achievement awards may go to artists, arts managers, arts advocates and others who strengthen a state's culture through decades of service.

Patron/Philanthropy awards recognize individuals (especially volunteers and donors), corporations and other entities that financially support the arts.

Awards Program Details

State	Program	Program Manager(s)	Year Program Established	Frequency of Award Ceremony	Season of Award Ceremony	Award Categories
AL	Celebration of the Arts Awards	Alabama State Council on the Arts	1971	biennial	spring	Distinguished Artist Award, Folk Heritage Award, Governor's Arts Award, Special Council Award, Art Leadership Award, Jonnie Dee Little Lifetime Achievement Award
AK	Governor's Awards for the Arts and Humanities	Alaska State Council on the Arts, Alaska Arts and Culture Foundation, Alaska Humanities Forum, and Office of the Governor	1968	annual	winter	Alaska Studies Educator of the Year, Individual Artist, Distinguished Service to the Humanities, Arts Education, Alaska Native Arts, Business Leadership
AZ	Governor's Arts Awards	Arizona Citizens for the Arts and Governor's Office	1981	annual	spring	Artist, Arts in Education (Individual and Organization), Business (Large and Small), Community, Individual, Philanthropy, Shelley Award (for public policy)
AR	Governor's Arts Awards	Arkansas Arts Council	1991	annual	spring	Arts Community Development, Arts in Education, Corporate Sponsorship of the Arts, Individual Artist, Folklife, Patron, Lifetime Achievement
AR	Living Treasure Awards	Arkansas Arts Council	2002	annual	spring	Living Treasure
CO	Governor's Creative Leadership Awards	Colorado Creative Industries and Office of the Governor	1969	annual	spring	Arts and Creative Placemaking, Arts and Community Action, Arts and Social Change

State	Program	Program Manager(s)	Year Program Established	Frequency of Award Ceremony	Season of Award Ceremony	Award Categories
CT	Governor's Arts Awards	Connecticut Office of the Arts and Connecticut Arts Council	1978	annual	summer	Literary Arts, Visual Arts, Performing Arts
CT	Governor's Patron of the Arts Award	Connecticut Office of the Arts and Connecticut Arts Council	2014	annual	summer	Patron of the Arts
DE	Governor's Awards for the Arts	Delaware Division of the Arts and Governor's Office	1970	at the pleasure of the governor (usually once per term)	fall	Individual, Organization, Collaboration
DC	Mayor's Arts Awards	DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities	1986	annual	fall	Excellence in the Arts, Excellence in the Humanities, Excellence in Creative Industries, Outstanding Student Award, Excellence in Arts Teaching, Outstanding New Artist, Lifetime Achievement, Visionary Leadership, Distinguished Honor
DC	Larry Neal Writers' Awards	DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities	1984	annual	summer	Adult Fiction, Adult Poetry, Adult Dramatic Writing, Youth Poetry, Teen Poetry, Teen Fiction
FL	Diversity and Inclusion Awards	Florida Division of Cultural Affairs and Citizens for Florida Arts, Inc.	2016	annual	winter	Initiative with Minimal Resources, Sustained Investment, Extra Mile, Innovation, Collaboration

State	Program	Program Manager(s)	Year Program Established	Frequency of Award Ceremony	Season of Award Ceremony	Award Categories
GA	Governor's Awards for the Arts and Humanities	Office of the Governor, Georgia Council for the Arts, and Georgia Humanities	2012	annual	fall	Individual, Organization
ID	Governor's Awards in the Arts	Idaho Commission on the Arts and Office of the Governor	1970	biennial	fall	Excellence in the Arts, Excellence in Folk & Traditional Arts, Support of the Arts, Support of Arts Education, Excellence in Arts Administration
IN	Governor's Arts Awards	Indiana Arts Commission and Office of the Governor	1973	biennial	spring	Governor's Arts Award
IA	Governor's Arts Awards	Iowa Arts Council	2014	biennial	summer	Excellence and Innovation in the Arts, Collaboration and Partnership in the Arts, Impact and Accessibility in the Arts, Arts Learning Leadership
KY	Governor's Awards in the Arts	Kentucky Arts Council and Governor's Office	1977	annual	fall	Artist Award (lifetime achievement), Business Award, Community Arts Award, Education Award, Folk Heritage Award, Government Award, Media Award, National Award, Milner Award (for philanthropic or artistic contributions)

State	Program	Program Manager(s)	Year Program Established	Frequency of Award Ceremony	Season of Award Ceremony	Award Categories
LA	Louisiana Culture Awards	Office of Lt. Governor, Office of Cultural Development, Louisiana Division of the Arts, Archaeological Survey & Antiquities Commission, Folklife Commission, Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, and Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation	2008	annual	spring	Cultural District, Education, Folklife Heritage, Culinary Arts, Outstanding Arts Organization, Artist of the Year
MD	Maryland Traditions Heritage Awards	Maryland State Arts Council	2007	annual	fall	Person, Place, Tradition
MA	Commonwealth Awards	Massachusetts Cultural Council	1993	biennial	winter	Access, Achievement, Creative Community, Creative Youth Development, Cultural Philanthropy, Leadership, Media, STEM to STEAM
MS	Governor's Arts Awards	Mississippi Arts Commission and the Governor's Office	1988	annual	winter	Excellence in Visual Arts, Mississippi Heritage, Artist Achievement, Excellence in Acting, Lifetime Achievement
MO	Missouri Arts Awards	Missouri Arts Council	1983	annual	winter	Arts Education, Arts Organization, Creative Community, Individual Artist, Leadership in the Arts, and Philanthropy

State	Program	Program Manager(s)	Year Program Established	Frequency of Award Ceremony	Season of Award Ceremony	Award Categories
MT	Governor's Arts Awards	Montana Arts Council	1981	biennial	winter	Governor's Arts Awards
NE	Governor's Arts Awards	Nebraska Arts Council and Nebraskans for the Arts	1979	biennial	spring	Emerging Leader, Excellence in Arts Education, Heritage Arts, Organizational Achievement, Outstanding Artist, Leonard Thiessen Award, Thomas C. Woods III Partner in the Arts Award
NE	NebraskARTS Award	Nebraskans for the Arts	2013	annual	fall	NebraskARTS Award
NH	Governor's Arts Awards	New Hampshire State Council on the Arts and Governor's Office	1980	biennial	fall	Arts Education Award, Cultural Access Leadership Award, Community Spirit Award, Distinguished Arts Leadership Award, Folk Heritage Award, Individual Arts Patron Award, Lotte Jacobi Living Treasure Award
NH	Arts Advocate of the Year Awards	New Hampshire Citizens for the Arts	2015	annual	winter	Arts Advocate of the Year

State	Program	Program Manager(s)	Year Program Established	Frequency of Award Ceremony	Season of Award Ceremony	Award Categories
NJ	Governor's Awards in Arts Education	New Jersey Arts Education Partnership, the Department of Education, Art Pride New Jersey Foundation, the Department of State and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts	1980	annual	spring	Leadership in Arts Education, Student (numerous subcategories, many associated with a sponsor)
NM	Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts	New Mexico Arts Commission and Governor's Office	1974	annual	fall	Major Contributors to the Arts, Artist (based on discipline)
NC	North Carolina Heritage Awards	North Carolina Arts Council	1989	annual	spring	Heritage Award
ND	Governor's Awards for the Arts	North Dakota Council on the Arts, Arts North Dakota, and Governor's Office	1977	biennial	spring	Individual Achievement (artist, staff, or volunteer), Arts Organization, Arts in Education (educator, school, or administrator), Private Business
OH	Governor's Awards for the Arts	Ohio Arts Council and the Ohio Citizens for the Arts Foundation	1971	annual	spring	Arts Administration, Arts Education, Arts Patron, Business Support of the Arts (Large and Small), Community Development & Participation, Individual Artist, Irma Lazarus Award (for advocacy)
OK	Governor's Arts Awards	Oklahoma Arts Council	1975	annual	winter	The Governor's Award, Arts in Education, Business in the Arts, Community Service, Media in the Arts, George Nigh Public Service in the Arts

State	Program	Program Manager(s)	Year Program Established	Frequency of Award Ceremony	Season of Award Ceremony	Award Categories
PA	Governor's Awards for the Arts	Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and Governor's Office	1980	annual	fall	Artist of the Year Award, Arts Leadership & Service/Arts Innovation Award, Distinguished Arts Award, Patron Award
SC	Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Governor's Awards for the Arts	South Carolina Arts Commission	1972	annual	spring	Artist, Individual, Arts in Education, Foundation, Government, Organization, Special (awarded at SAA's discretion)
SC	Jean Laney Harris Folk Heritage Awards	South Carolina Arts Commission and the University of South Carolina's McKissick Museum	1988	annual	spring	Traditional Artist, Traditional Arts Organization, Traditional Arts Advocate
SD	Governor's Awards in the Arts	South Dakota Arts Council and Arts South Dakota	1973	biennial	winter	Distinction in Creative Achievement, Outstanding Service in Arts Education, Outstanding Support of the Arts by an Individual, Outstanding Support of the Arts by an Organization or Business
SD	Living Indian Treasure Awards	Arts South Dakota, Sinte Gleska University, Northern Plains Indian Art Market	1990	biennial	winter	Living Indian Treasure
TN	Governor's Arts Awards	Tennessee Arts Commission, Office of Governor, Office of First Lady	1971	annual	spring	Folklife Heritage Award, Arts Leadership Award, Distinguished Artist Award

State	Program	Program Manager(s)	Year Program Established	Frequency of Award Ceremony	Season of Award Ceremony	Award Categories
UT	Governor's Leadership in the Arts Awards	Utah Division of Arts & Museums and Governor's Office	1980	annual	spring	Organizational Leadership in the Arts, Education Leadership in the Arts, Local Arts Agency Leadership in the Arts, Individual Leadership in the Arts
UT	Governor's Mansion Artist Awards	Governor's Office	1997	annual	summer	Visual Artist, Performing Artist
VT	Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts	Vermont Arts Council and Governor's Office	1967	annual	fall	Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts, Walter Cerf Medal for Outstanding Achievement in the Arts, Ellen McCulloch-Lovell Award in Arts Education, Margaret L. Kannenstine Award for Arts Advocacy, Arthur Williams Award for Meritorious Service to the Arts
VA	Governor's Awards for the Arts	Virginia Commission for the Arts	1979	periodic		Governor's Award for the Arts
WA	Governor's Arts & Heritage Awards	Washington State Arts Commission	1966	annual	fall	<i>Arts Awards:</i> Individual Artist Award, Arts Organization Award, Arts Educator Award, Young Arts Leader Award <i>Heritage Awards:</i> Individual Award, Organization Award

State	Program	Program Manager(s)	Year Program Established	Frequency of Award Ceremony	Season of Award Ceremony	Award Categories
WV	Governor's Arts Awards	West Virginia Commission on the Arts and West Virginia Division of Culture and History (parent agency)	2005	annual	spring	Arts in Education, Distinguished Service to the Arts, Leadership in the Arts, Artist of the Year, Lifetime Achievement, Arts Patron, Legislative Leadership in the Arts
WI	Governor's Tourism Awards for Arts, Culture and Heritage	Wisconsin Governor's Council on Tourism	2012	annual	spring	The Arts, Culture and Heritage award is just one category of the Governor's Tourism Awards program. Other categories (not for the arts): Legacy Award, Rising Star Award, Stewardship Award, Service Excellence Award
WY	Governor's Arts Awards	Wyoming Arts Council	1982	annual	winter	Individual, Organization, Community

More Information

For information, contact NASAA Research Manager [Paul Pietsch](#).

This strategy sampler was authored in December 2016 by Paul Pietsch, with research assistance from Patricia Mullaney-Loss.

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is the nonpartisan membership organization that serves the nation's state and jurisdictional arts agencies. NASAA helps state arts agencies fulfill their many citizen service roles by providing knowledge services, representation and leadership programs that strengthen the state arts agency community. NASAA also serves as a clearinghouse for data and research about public funding and the arts. For more information on the work of state arts agencies, call 202-347-6352 or visit www.nasaa-arts.org.