



Chair and Council Member Peer Session Notes October 13, 2017

Approximately 40 state arts agency chairs and council members attended the peer session ([roster](#)), which was facilitated by Alaska State Council on the Arts Chair Ben Brown and former Oregon Arts Commission Chair Julie Vigeland. The [agenda](#) included a federal update from NASAA Legislative Counsel Isaac Brown and a discussion of council members' roles in advocating nationally for public funding for the arts. NASAA Chief Advancement Officer [Laura Smith](#) staffed the session.

Welcome and Introductions

Ben and Julie called the session to order and acknowledged conference hosts from the Oregon Arts Commission as well as National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Senior Advisor to the Senior Deputy Chairman Tom Simplot. All attendees were asked to introduce themselves and name an advocacy challenge they face in their states. These challenges guided the subsequent open discussion.

Federal Advocacy Update/Q&A

Isaac provided an update on the latest happenings in Congress and discussed federal arts advocacy. He recapped that the NEA received an appropriation of **\$149.8 million** for fiscal year 2017, a \$2 million increase from FY2016. The House of Representatives approved legislation for a \$5M reduction for the rest of FY2018 (NASAA expected a more drastic cut given the President's proposal to eliminate the NEA). Our first advocacy goal is to have Congress raise the NEA funding to \$155 million, and the second is to make sure Congress doesn't further reduce the proposed budget of \$145 million. Congress's major legislative movements this year include the FY2018 budget, tax reform and the 2018 midterm elections.

Isaac asked attendees to contact him if they know a representative on the Senate Appropriations Committee, or if they know someone who may have a relationship with a representative. Isaac will continue to monitor major legislative movements and keep council members up to date through NASAA's Legislative Updates and Reports to Councils. He invited questions from the group:

Is there an arts caucus in Congress?

Yes, the House and Senate have an arts or cultural caucus, and both have done a great job educating other members about the arts.

Do representatives and senators who support the arts genuinely like the arts, or do they not want to make a stake in the issue?

There is a genuine respect in Congress for the arts and what they are doing. Many members especially like the federal- state partnership between the NEA and the state arts agencies.

How do we stay informed ourselves?

Be sure to read all of NASAA's [federal updates](#). For a more general update on what Congress is doing, Politico has a good resource called [Huddle](#), which is posted daily.

Would the Senate ever change the levels of the federal-state partnership, as it did in the 1990s?

This didn't come up this year. NASAA will continue to monitor this moving forward.

Conversations about Advocacy

Facilitated by Julie and Ben, attendees discussed two of the challenges and opportunities many face in their states as advocates for government arts support.

Statewide Advocacy: Many people have issues with arts advocacy, either challenges with their statewide groups and/or with strategic statewide efforts. Some states don't have an advocacy organization at all, some have advocacy groups that are in disarray, some advocacy groups don't act in alignment with their state arts agency and some have ineffective ways of communicating. Julie invited examples of problems that different states have faced and whether/how they've solved them:

- The **Pennsylvania Council on the Arts** brought all its grantees to the capital to bring art to legislators for a one-day event. As a more long-term solution, they've developed an arts caucus within the legislature.
- The **West Virginia Commission on the Arts** holds an annual Arts Day to help people interact with delegates and senators. While they're able to raise awareness, they regularly miss the opportunity to convey that these artists and organizations rely on the delegates to fund them.
- The **Ohio Arts Council** has a strong advocacy group because we can't advocate. However, that doesn't mean we as council members have to give up our first amendment rights. We can still call our representatives!
- The **Missouri Arts Council** requires all grantees to send letters to their representatives as part of their grant. We have a long-standing advocacy organization and work together to negotiate a budget number from the state legislature. Often, the advocacy group and the arts council play good cop/bad cop to negotiate.
- The **Montana Arts Council** requires grantees to meet with representatives.
- The **Rhode Island State Council on the Arts** had a nonprofit Citizens for the Arts group, but over time interest in it waned. It was also really hard to get funding. How are advocacy groups structured in other states?
 - The state arts agency partially funds the advocacy group. (Pennsylvania)
 - The advocacy group is a membership organization and members pay dues. (Tennessee)
 - All grantees provide a percentage to the state advocacy group to help fund it. (Maryland)
 - Our advocacy group is a 501(c)(3) that funds arts organizations and has two lobbyists. The advocacy group receives funding from the state's large arts organization since they help lobby for them. (Minnesota)

Tom Simplot asked people to tell the NEA when they have a local leader who may become influential in a larger way. The NEA wants to help council members educate and communicate with that leader right from the start.

Outreach and Communication: Many people noted challenges with outreach and communication efforts to raise awareness of their agencies. Many issues are related to capacity, in that budgets are small or limited, staff turnover is high, and there are few or no staff positions to support communications, marketing and advocacy training. Julie invited people to speak to both their problems and solutions related to outreach and communication:

- **Rhode Island** gives a \$500 marketing stipend/award for municipalities to market the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts.
- **Montana** hosts listening sessions where we meet with legislators when they're not in session and try to start building a relationship. We don't start by asking them about their arts support. Rather, we try to learn more about them, why they ran for public office and to find connections. This helps us talk to them later about the arts.
- **New Hampshire** in the 1980s created a program called Arts 1000—asking people to write a letter, make a phone call, and move the White Mountains (because people can do two out of three of those things). Today, people do house parties for governors and senate candidates to help them raise money. We also hold round table discussions with arts groups.
- **Colorado** has a program called Creativity Labs where staff travel the state and educate people about the arts agency. The program was very successful in reaching out to rural areas. Another program called Change Leaders takes people from rural communities and provides leadership development to support them as upcoming arts leaders and advocates in their areas.
- **Maryland** has local arts councils in every county that are funded by the state arts agency, which helps reach all areas of the state. We also go to meetings that are already established in the county—for example, Chamber After Hours meetings through county chambers of commerce—and educate them on the arts and the Maryland State Arts Council.
- After attending one of the Leadership Institute's learning expeditions to the community media station yesterday, **Michigan** wondered whether and how any other SAAs use their public media stations to communicate and market their agencies?

Resources

Check out the newest edition of [Why Should Government Support the Arts?](#) as well as the special area of NASAA's website called [For Council Members](#). This page organizes resources that are mostly helpful to chairs and council members, including Reports to Councils, all editions of the Practical Advocate, and Legislative Alerts. Take a look and let [Laura](#) know your feedback—NASAA wants this page to be as useful as possible!