

STRATEGIC PLAN OUTREACH CROSS-SECTOR INTERVIEWS

National Assembly of
State Arts Agencies

In 2016 and 2017, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) undertook a comprehensive planning process to assess its strategic position; explore key opportunities and obstacles; and revisit how NASAA can best achieve its core mission of strengthening state arts agencies. An explicit goal of this multi-pronged process was to reach beyond the organization's usual membership sphere, seeking ideas, advice and opinions from sources outside of the state arts agency network. The over-arching goals of this outreach were to gain new insights, reality-check NASAA's perceptions, and add breadth and dimension to the advice being gleaned from other stakeholders.

In-person forums, field dialogue and interviews all were used to engage individuals with wide-ranging expertise: government, economic development, rural development, philanthropy, arts policy, health care, agriculture and education. By combining multiple outreach methods, NASAA secured robust multi-sector input that extended far across – and far beyond – the arts field.

This report summarizes two strands of that outreach effort:

- **Interviews conducted by consultants:** NASAA engaged Artistic Logistics to conduct 29 interviews. By engaging a third party, NASAA brought a fresh outside perspective to our findings. By offering informants anonymity we also were able to achieve a high degree of candor in the dialogues.
- **Interviews conducted by NASAA staff:** Members of NASAA's research, development and executive teams conducted an additional 22 interviews to supplement our consultants' findings. Conducting some interviews at the staff level allowed us to deepen NASAA's institutional relationships with current or prospective partners and allowed us to customize the conversations to explore specific programmatic or policy issues of mutual interest.

A list of [strategic planning contributors](#) and a description of our full [planning process](#) are available via the NASAA website.

Summary of Consultant Interviews
Conducted for the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
by Kathie deNobriga
January-March 2017

Introduction

In the winter of 2017, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) undertook a comprehensive planning process to assess its strategic position; explore key opportunities and obstacles; and revisit how NASAA can best achieve its core mission of strengthening state arts agencies. An explicit goal of this multi-pronged process was to reach beyond the organization's usual membership sphere, seeking ideas, advice and opinions from sources outside of the state arts agency network. The over-arching goals of this outreach were to gain new insights, reality-check NASAA's perceptions, and add breadth and dimension to the advice being gleaned from other stakeholders.

To this end, one strand of NASAA's planning involved inviting a group of 29 informants to participate in consultant-led telephone interviews between January and March of 2017. The informant pool was deliberately selected to provide diverse perspectives (culturally, geographically and professionally) as well as the highest-caliber of expertise. Invitees included:

- CEOs from arts service organizations: 5 informants
- State-level cultural advocates: 6 informants
- Individuals offering “fresh takes” from a variety of vantage points (including creative placemaking, community arts development, funders, and service providers): 14 informants
- Individuals from the rural/community development field: 4 informants¹

To ensure objectivity and candor, NASAA engaged an independent consultant (Kathie deNobriga of Artistic Logistics) to conduct the interviews. Twenty-eight of the invited informants agreed to participate. 30-40 minute phone interviews were conducted with each individual using a structured interview protocol (see the Appendix for the questions). Informants received the questions in advance and were assured anonymity.

¹ Note that this report addresses just one strand of NASAA's cross-sector planning process. Other strands (including in-person forums, additional phone interviews, statistical benchmarking and an online poll) harvested knowledge from a variety of sectors: government, economic development, rural development, philanthropy, health care, agriculture and education. By combining multiple outreach methods, NASAA was able to secure robust multi-sector input that extended far across – and far beyond – the arts field.

This report offers a top-line synthesis of the findings, followed by summaries of the interviews for each of the four categories bulleted above. Direct quotes are italicized.

Part I: Key Points of Synthesis

Value of Research and Information

The quality and usefulness of NASAA's extensive research was the single most frequent comment, across every category, as was the utility of publications, advocacy alerts and other information. There is desire to have even more access to "members' only" information. NASAA was praised for the clarity of its research and its ability to present it clearly. NASAA was also cautioned to avoid 'coded' language in its publications that might limit the usefulness. Interviewees also asked for additional research into arts education, social impacts and program comparisons across the states.

Relationships between State Arts Agencies (SAAs) and Advocacy Organizations

Nearly every advocacy interviewee expressed a desire to forge or strengthen relationships with SAAs. Specific strategies include more regular calls with advocacy groups facilitated by NASAA. Several noted that the advocacy organizations exist primarily to secure and protect state appropriations for the arts, and as such should work in concert. While some SAAs and advocacy organizations work extremely closely (i.e., frequent phone calls, input into each other's strategic plans, implementing projects), others do not.

Relationships **Between** Sectors

Nearly every interviewee, regardless of category, cited the urgent need for increased cross-sector (non-arts) relationships as a vital action needed for sustainability and increased impact. This pertained both at the federal and the state levels, where siloes were seen as perpetuating the perception of arts and culture as a marginal concern. The need to forge partnerships with other sectors moved beyond merely finding more financial resources, to increasing the impact of the arts on the quality of life.

Collaboration and Coalition-Building **Within** the Arts Sector

In this time of (yet another) crisis, most interviewees called for higher degree of collaboration and coalition among national groups. This included reaching beyond NASAA's primary constituency of SAAs and developing a more unified voice, particularly through more strategic cooperation with Americans for the Arts. One desired outcome is the framing of more compelling case statements and value propositions about the role of arts and culture in general and the need for public funding. Several cited the opportunity to promote peer learning within and among the state arts agencies, to lift up models and programs, including the development of dedicated revenue streams.

"I feel like we're entering a volatile, destabilizing period, and I'd encourage us to stay closely connected, engaged, with full transparency. No parochialism – stay at the table with everyone!" Another person saw this tighter coalition as *"the silver lining"* to the current crisis. Yet another interviewee reflected on the high level of intense discussion and meetings since the beginning of the new administration and urged, *"Use this momentum to continue – stay in touch like no other time. Keep NO information to yourself. Stay engaged!"*

Policy Watch

NASAA can play a vital and unique role by staying on top of (or ahead of) policy shifts: "payment in lieu of taxes," a proposed end to the charitable contributions deduction, etc.

Part II: Arts Service Organizations

As leaders of national organizations with broad perspectives, this small but articulate group of interviewees had strong opinions. NASAA was recognized for its intimate connections to and specific information on individual states -- a body of knowledge that no other entity can claim. *"One of their greatest assets is that they are so directly connected to the states – it's a great, great role; it's a unique and powerful network."* NASAA was also praised for the quality of its research: *"I find the data well laid-out, clear, understandable; it's very beneficial."* One interviewee confirmed that NASAA is *"very good at convening a learning community of practice; peer-to-peer networking is hugely important -- highest and best use of NASAA's time."*

Opportunities in Relation to the State Arts Agencies

Each state is unique in its funding priorities, political appointment processes, connection with rural areas, etc. This wide variety can make it difficult for NASAA to plan, but this group had ideas that transcended individual state differences:

- In the same way that NASAA has to navigate a diverse landscape, the states themselves have to do that as well. Are there tools that NASAA could model and share that would strengthen the states' capacity to navigate conflict and difference?
- Similarly, could NASAA help expand the states' capacity to understand the impact of state-level policies?
- One interviewee wondered how active NASAA was with shaping approaches to elected officials? *"What if they went with SAAs to their own home governments? Would it lend credence to the work that the state directors are doing, to bring national power and presence into a state conversation?"* Acknowledging the labor-intensive nature of this suggestion, the interviewee wondered about strategic or targeted interventions in states with severe challenges.

- *“NASAA is a great organization, advocating for the right things, but it stops short. What are they doing with the leaders of the state arts organizations to promote equity and inclusivity? I don’t see any evidence of that. NASAA could help SAAs track data about inclusiveness, and help them be more transparent about it. Use your position to get SAAs to be forthcoming – not to target anyone in a negative way. We just want the real story.”*
- When asked how NASAA could be more effective and influential, one respondent suggested that NASAA could help SAAs understand more about seeking support from the private sector: foundation, individual and corporate.
- A consistent theme throughout all the categories was that the most strategic work that NASAA could be doing is to help the SAAs *“move laterally within the states; cross the sectors in government and move outside the government.”* As one interviewee put it, *“states have a fabulous opportunity to model cross-sector problem-solving.”*

Opportunities in Relation to the Advocates

Although most of the interviewees understood that the state advocacy organizations were more a constituent of Americans for the Arts than of NASAA, there was some conflation of their needs. As more than one person noted, the state advocacy groups are integral to the ability of the SAAs to do their job, to the extent that they successfully (or not) get more money for the SAA. How could NASAA help build the capacity of the statewide advocacy organizations?

Staff capacity was widely acknowledged as a limiting factor; but one interviewee asked *“how do you replicate what you’re doing more closely on the ground, to help stakeholders help you do that work as ambassadors?”*

Policy Opportunities

At least three specific, immediate threats were cited: the end of the NEA, the repeal of the Johnson amendment (although this could be turned to an advantage), and ending of the charitable donation deduction. Although it’s important for NASAA itself to be prepared to respond to these scenarios, it’s also important how NASAA helps the states prepare. Another major looming issue lies in the changing demographics, and how that will be played out in philanthropy: *“the next generation doesn’t necessarily value our art forms.”*

A common response (in this category, as well as others) to the question about NASAA’s policies, politics and practices was, in effect: I don’t know enough about what they’re up to offer an opinion. In general, leaders in the field craved a closer connection; *“I’d love to attend an annual briefing hosted by NASAA.”* Across every category arose the advice to develop closer communication with non-members, and reach out to include other leaders. NASAA was encouraged several times to *“reach beyond your primary constituency.”*

Part III: State Advocacy Organizations

Recognizing the strategic importance (to both SAAs and NASAA) of state-level advocacy networks, the interviews engaged experienced advocates and asked them to share their views on best practices and advocacy strategies.

Most Useful Tools & Services: Current and Future

- *Every* single interviewee in this category (and also frequently in others) cited the value of the research that NASAA conducts (“*fantastic*”), particularly the relative rankings by state (a powerful advocacy tool), and the list of NEA grants in each Congressional district (as preparation for legislative visits). One interviewee particularly praised NASAA’s ability to “*respond to real world needs*” by fine-tuning data queries, to yield more specific information. One need often cited is the need for “*delving into arts and education research.*”
- Publications, especially “*the succinct advocacy guidelines*” and timely advocacy alerts. One advocate regularly shares these with her board. At the same time, the advocates wanted more access to “*members’ only*” information; specifically the piece on dedicated revenue sources. “*I asked Pam to include advocacy groups on internal information – it empowers all of us, keeps us focused and on same journey, without reinventing the wheel. Pam has followed through, and we’re getting communications now: great! Now if we could just have regular phone calls....*”
- Design ‘how-to’ trainings for Advocates to implement with their constituents. One interviewee says she has to re-invent the wheel every time.
- Convenings and joint conferences are extremely useful.

Impact and Value of SAAs

- Most of the Advocates cited access to grant funding, and its equitable distribution, as the most important role of SAAs, followed by leadership in arts education.
- Again echoing interviewees in other categories, the advocates cited the states’ ability to promote partnerships across sectors: tourism, agriculture, community development, education, housing, parks and recreation, etc.
- The SAAs help maintain high standards to ensure quality.

Effective Advocacy Efforts

- Many of the effective steps rely on good relationships with SAAs: ongoing strategic planning, frequent communication with agency leaders for information exchange, collaboration on projects and activities. NASAA was seen as having a role in strengthening the relationships between the SAA and their individual advocacy organizations.
- “*Monthly calls are the most important thing, and we’ve done them for years – over 180 people on the last one. They’re like “talking newsletters,” to handle information over-*

load. With a guest speaker every month, we focus on specific issues and actions that needs attention right now."

- *"We attend the League of Municipalities' annual state-wide conference, and had a booth about transforming vacant spaces into arts spaces, offering free consultations. We're advocating on local level with cities and building up through the state on a county level. We worked effectively with mayors, showing them how the arts make a difference in towns across the state – building public value."*
- One state convenes a Joint Hearing that is prepared by the advocacy group in cooperation with the SAA, focusing on a particular area: creative economy, work-force development, housing and work spaces, arts in correction, etc. These are framed not as advocacy, but as education.

Best Practices for Advocacy

- *"Develop new partners all the time, outside arts sectors. We're working with the Federal Reserve Bank and Housing Department to co-sponsor a webinar on pop-up and vacant spaces. Find resources that are not so apparent. We're relying a lot on anecdotal evidence; I wonder if there is a possibility of focused research on cross-sector collaborations?"*
- There was a wide divergence in approaches to working with legislatures, depending on the particular budget process state by state. One organization made a "conscious decision not to have an arts caucus, because the general assembly cannot add to the budget, only move around or decrease it. We focus on Commerce where the arts budget is housed." But another state cited their legislative arts caucus as "really important." Yet another state took the advice of its "cracker jack" lobbyist who said their strategy was "all wrong. We opted not to have one legislator to champion and sponsor a bill, but now instead focus all attention on key budget committee and sub-committees. That gives us a broader base of champions," and was instrumental in restoring funding levels. Deciding which strategy works best with which government structure requires a high level of analysis and political savvy.
- Maintain a bi-partisan board and keep a strong, consistent, focused message.
- Many states have statewide discipline-based organizations, nonprofit associations, after-school alliances or superintendents of education. These groups are tailor-made for framing advocacy messages. This is part of 'casting a wider net' for advocates.

Biggest Challenges

- Several cited the volatility of the legislatures ("*all our friendly legislators are gone due to term limits*"), and working with a different generation of elected leaders who have not been exposed to the transformative power of arts (due in part to the decrease in arts education). One organization uses "advocacy casting" – taking great care to match the message, the messenger and the audience.
- One interviewee cited the number of nonprofit board members across the state who "*don't understand the role of state funding – it's an unbelievable untapped-resource.*"

- Most cited institutional capacity issues, particularly staffing levels.
- *“We’re so focused on arts organizations, we leave the artist out of the equation. With artists getting more organized, with the rise of the citizen-artist, how do we get to them, and motivate them act on our behalf, when they may not benefit from us directly?”*

Opportunities for NASAA

- While many advocates report good relationships with their SAA, others do not. Are there ways to forge or strengthen these vital relationships? *“We need to integrate advocacy, have some serious conversations – how can we strengthen the independent voice of the advocates to increase appropriations? How can we replicate successful strategies, or learn from past mistakes? How do the SAA and the advocates best work together? for example, SAAs need to encourage their constituents to participate in advocacy. Several interviewees urged NASAA to bring state advocacy organizations to the table as equal partners with SAAs.*
- A more unified voice on a national arts leadership level, particularly more strategic cooperation with Americans for the Arts.
- Increased cross-sector (non-arts) relationship-building and information exchange. *“We need more holistic conversation across sectors: initiate strategic conversations, instead of being in a reaction mode.”*
- *“Utilize the State Arts Advocacy League of America, include us in your meetings, and find small travel stipends.”* Several advocacy leaders called for technical support of advocacy trainings, citing the frustration of having to *“reinvent the wheel every time we do one.”*

Part IV: “Fresh Takes”

With few exceptions these interviewees did not feel sufficiently connected with NASAA to offer many opinions on practices, policies or politics. Most connections were through personal relationships with senior staff. One commented that, while she considered herself a seasoned veteran in the field, *“I don’t see their presence in the field as much as I’d like to. It seems like a closed world, which is understandable, but I wish they’d have a stronger presence.”* This same informant also acknowledged that she *did* use NASAA as a source of information, research and field updates. Many others cited NASAA’s role of convener as a critical asset.

One interviewee who worked primarily in rural areas wondered if *“the way NASAA distributes information might not reach far beyond the people who already looking for it. I wonder if their vocabulary is accessible to local arts agencies? Do words like ‘creative place-making’ and ‘resiliency’ mean a lot to people? Vocabulary can isolate folks who would be great advocates outside the sector.”*

Another interviewee said she was frustrated by the *“little pieces of advocacy”* done by GrantMakers in the Arts, Performing Arts Alliance, Americans for the Arts and

NASAA. This was echoed by several folks calling for more unified advocacy goals: *"Agree on ONE thing: \$1 per capita? Arts education? What's the singular goal?"*

State Arts Agencies: Value and Impact

- A vast majority of SAAs are part of state government; *"having art and culture within the structure of government is hugely important because of legislation and budgeting. If art and culture is not visible, as part of the machinery, it doesn't show up."*
- SAAs guarantee more equal distribution of funds across the state than could be achieved through foundation, corporate or even individual funding, and *"the natural gravitational pull toward the urban"* can be balanced. This *"democratization"* of funding was cited by numerous interviewees as one of the most important impacts of SAAs.
- As the 'holder of the purse' strings, SAAs can shape the environment of their state arts profile. Several folks wondered if the attention to equity, arts education, evaluation, or accessibility would be so keen at the local level were it not for pressure from above.
- SAA were frequently credited as incubators, helping new organizations and initiatives *"get off the ground, especially in small communities,"* or taking good ideas to scale. *"The states can do the best job of making visible the 'hyper-local', which might never come to attention."*
- SAAs can also do things that the local arts agencies can't do for themselves: sponsor a state-wide tour of multicultural artists, identify a poet laureate, replicate model programs on a wider scale, or create initiatives, such as that around arts and veterans.
- Another frequently cited benefit was that of providing public validation, the awarding of public money being a powerful symbol of excellence and/or innovation. This was especially true for smaller organizations and for individual artists, for whom state-level recognition can often boost or kick-start a career.
- State agencies are especially valued for their convening and networking dimensions: *"The SAA can be important for knitting, weaving and integrating - who needs to know who, who needs to connect. Art ecologies thrive with a deeper density of relationships; this happens naturally, but [SAAs] can accelerate it."* A *"huge amount of arts and culture operates on the local level,"* and convenings can lift up local practices to a broader audience and challenge or inspire new approaches.
- SAAs also are perceived as *"raising the bar"* by demanding certain levels of both administrative and artistic excellence. Several interviewees mentioned the peer panel system and the subsequent feedback as important factors in promoting and advancing the over-all 'quality' of the arts on a local level.
- SAAs came in for their share of criticism: they too often *"keep their heads down, stay out of the way, stay out of the papers: it's a terrible long term strategy,"* or they're *"not standing on a firm foundation that doesn't shift with the winds."*

Unique Attributes of Government Support

- Validation is a key element. *“Government funding says to the community: what you’re doing is important, your work matters. [It can especially] make a big difference to small groups.”*
- Government support also nurtures *“democracy – especially through decentralized funds. They communicate and manifest the policy that everyone deserves access and participation. Government has an ability and responsibility to reach far and wide to engage people and make things happen that no one else can.”*
- Governments provide leadership, as mentioned above with the SAAs' emphases on equity, arts education, and evaluation. NEA’s support was cited for *“groundbreaking projects that are ahead of the curve, that don’t fit into a box, teach our field where we’re going.”*

Strategic Work for NASAA

- Interconnect between different levels of government --- federal, state, regional and local, *“figuring out the other pockets of support.”* One interviewee cited ArtPlace America as *“incredible in the kind of federal partnerships it’s engendered. But how do we look at sustaining these structures after ArtPlace goes away in another five years?”*
- Despite a common theme around development of financial resources for the states, one interviewee offered a provocative alternative, that the most strategic thing NASAA could do would be to ask, *“If you had no money to give away, how would you advance your mission? Knowledge, connections, convening capacity could be critical assets. Grant-making can become a ‘sleepy frame’ -- there’s output and tangible processes, and it’s what we gravitate toward. But how is NASAA helping the states to think about their impact beyond grant-making?”*
- Promote arts advocacy on a national level, with unlikely partners such as the National Council of State Legislators, the National Governor’s (and Lt. Governors) Conference. NASAA should be defining (or redefining) public value; one interviewee put it as *“building public will,”* and cited the Creating Connection research by Arts Midwest.
- Serve as a ‘trusted source’ -- *“They are our boots on the ground where we need someone who has ability to focus on critical issues, for us to leverage in our own states.”* Some of these critical issues include *“payments in lieu of taxes”* as the city level (instead of property taxes), and states removing the exclusion from property tax as a nonprofit benefit. NASAA could support SAA in making the case that in the long term, this is shortsighted.
- *“What can NASAA add that no one else can? It’s the power of bringing together all those SAAs, lifting up models, peer learning, connecting programs to each other. It’s more than reading a case study or toolkit, it’s being able to meet those people and develop deep peer learning.”* Like the Cooperative Extension Service model, there could be less focus on geography than on common issues, interests, or topics: *“people come together around a shared challenge.”*
- By far the most often-mentioned area of strategy work is to improve SAAs' ability and capacity to collaborate with other agencies within their own state.

While most often framed this as a strategy to find new sources of funds, it is also widely recognized as a way to build partnerships, through the sharing of knowledge and resources, which benefit all sectors of the state government. *“Many people still recognize that you can’t deal with issues in siloed ways. There is a recognition of connectivity: you can’t deal with jobs without dealing with health, housing, transportation, and there’s opportunity for arts to play a role. Public health professionals are talking about life styles as root causes of illness, and are recognizing that qualities of a place lead to health outcomes. It might not be manifest in federal policy, but this is a moment to take advantage of this kind of consciousness.”*

Major Challenges

- A frequently cited challenge was framing the value proposition of the arts and demonstrating relevance. *“Art has a role to play in almost every sector of work – we’re better served by being part of things, not off by ourselves. Art and culture is a fundamental human right – we should be infusing it across all our challenges and sectors.”*
- *“Our challenges are related to equity and unity; we are at risk of losing our ability to deeply connect, build relationships for change, show compassion. We have divides across divides. We can focus on using arts and culture as a mechanism to bring people together and build deep relationships. There’s great bridge work being done at the local level, with coalition building and advocacy at the national level.”*
- Generating revenues was also a common concern. As cited above, finding money is always going to be a challenge, but two separate interviewees proposed new ways to think about finding money for arts and culture. *“The challenge is for arts leadership to offer investment propositions to our business leaders; say ‘here are the public outcomes we want to achieve, here are the assets we bring, here’s what we need.’ When you’re asking for public resources, you have to show public outcomes, so pick those indicators that are broadly perceived as beneficial.”* Another interviewee talked about “social impact funding,” looking at social problems (recidivism, dropout rates) for which we collectively bear the costs. *“Prevention is socially better and cheaper; nonprofits could help solve the problem, and NASAA and SAAs could look for social impact investors.”*
- Leadership development and succession planning on a state-by-state basis was an area of common concern: *“what does the bench look like?”* Since SAA leaders are often appointed, the challenge lies in identifying the pools of future leaders, who might not necessarily be found in typical arts environments. Additionally, *“we are good at building leaders to run the organizations of ten years ago, not so good at building leaders for ten years from now. Urgency removes the chance to think, breathe, reflect, [so we need to] create space for arts leaders to think forward – fellowships, convening & think tanks.”* Another person called for a “better leadership pipeline.”

Role of Arts and Culture in the Current American Landscape

- Arts and culture strengthens democracy by bringing *“together a fragmented society and improving the health of civic dialogue,”* to promote equity and inclusion.

- *“Arts are vital to civil discourse in our society, being able to express and understand each other especially across boundaries. Arts and culture are incredible ways to build understanding and dialogue across the difference, to share our stories with each other.”* Several interviewees cited empathy as one of the most important functions of arts and culture. *“At a national level, the things that remind us of our common humanity are under attack. We need critical thought, connection and empathy.”*
- Arts and culture has role in *“creating more stable communities by building community attachments, social cohesion, identity, bridging across difference. It can move people beyond a fear of the unknown, to being curious or empathetic.....the arts move us toward empathy.”*
- Arts and culture bring creativity and innovation to the table – *“An essential element of people reaching their highest potential.”*
- *“Its role is essential to human development – in our society; most of the challenges we face are human emotional intelligence, capacity around ability to connect with each other on a human level. Art is THE way – empathy, create connections, and hear each other’s stories. Arts undergird everything – other sectors are starting to see this. It’s not just a tool, but also a process for human development.”*

Part V: Rural Development Organizations

For the most part, these interviewees little about NASAA, and even less about the SAA. One who was familiar said that his agency’s focus on low- and moderate-income communities were generally not priorities for the SAAs with which he was familiar. But another had a positive partnership with one SAA around the community development efforts of a Promise Zone.

These interviews reflected some of the challenges of art in rural areas: *“People are too busy putting food on the table: they dismiss high arts as what rich people do,”* citing both physical, class and economic barriers.

Arts Impact on Rural Development

- *“We need to get people aware of the range of resources, using local language.”* Another interviewee noted that she collaborated with the SAA on rural workshops to promote economic development, using arts and tourism as tools. *“Folks might not have known that they had access to an SAA – we helped connect them to that resource,”* and in turn the SAA connected her to artisans and storytellers. Another interviewee cited the NEA’s Partnership with the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Appalachian Gateway Communities Initiative program, which promotes community development (not always arts-centric) in towns adjacent to heritage assets and public lands.
- *“We feel many of rural towns are struggling against powerful forces: internal divisions, outmigration, job loss – towns are suffering. Until we can put those demons behind, kids are going to keep leaving. The arts create place, help to reimagine a place, bring out the*

spark. It adds to vibrancy of place – whatever is there, the arts can help bring it out – it's the beating heart of a community."

Opportunities for NASAA

- *"Make the case for arts and culture as an essential resource for labor force preparedness, upward mobility, diversity and equal opportunity in America's future."*
- *Working in the intersection of farmers, baby boomers (who move to rural areas for retirement) and millennials (who flock to rural areas for recreation), "use arts, culture and creativity to bring these factions together."*
- *"Make the case to [foundations] that the SAAs are on the frontline of their design, arts and culture investments."*
- *"Get to know each USDA state director, whether or not they have a Creative Place-making staff. [Tap into the] partnership between USDA, Rural Housing & Smart Growth America (local leadership development initiative in small towns). Learn about access to more resources: National Rural Assembly (Dee Davis), and Art of the Rural's Next Generation Initiative (Savannah Barrett)."*
- *"Look for the intersecting points between health indicators, public safety, economic development."*
- *Sharing information was another thread: "Some of the research you have to be a member of, or pay to get it --- we can't do that. Any analysis that can be free and accessible," would be very useful.*

Lagniappe

As each interview concluded, if there were time, interviewees were invited to offer final thoughts to "send up the pipeline: words of advice, warning, or encouragement." This is what was shared:

- ✓ *"Complicate your understanding: get uncomfortable and out of your realm."*
- ✓ *"Strategic plans are nice & pretty – but needs to be based in reality and a living document. Don't do navel-gazing. Talk to everyone --- you can't do it if you're only talking to yourself, or hearing the parts you like."*
- ✓ *"From where I sit, people are hungry for a bold national leader willing to take risks. Push the envelope, try some new things, and not just preserve what we have."*
- ✓ *"Be bold."*
- ✓ *"Definitely go strong or go home. It's not a time to play softly, or minimally. We have opportunities to truly redefine arts in society. What is NASAA's role in that?"*
- ✓ *"Break out the shell a little bit. For example, don't have a board that's mostly SAA people."*

Summary of Staff Interviews

To supplement the findings from our consultant interviews – and to deepen NASAA's relationships with current or prospective partners – staff conducted an additional 22 interviews. Most were conducted by phone, but selected interviews were conducted in person. This interview pool included:

- Six experts on arts policy research (interviews conducted by NASAA's Research Director)
- Five arts education experts (conducted by NASAA's Arts Education Manager)
- Five major donors conducted by NASAA's Chief Advancement Officer)
- Four government innovation leaders conducted by NASAA's Chief Program & Planning Officer)
- Two grant-making/ philanthropy innovators (conducted by NASAA's Chief Program & Planning Officer)

Interview protocols were tailored to each individual informant's unique area of expertise (see Appendix II). Interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were conducted between February and April of 2017.

Each interviewer kept detailed notes, which were shared with the internal planning team and informed the development of NASAA's strategic plan and subsequent annual action plans. Informants were assured that any public reporting based on their comments would remain confidential and anonymous. Summarized here are the top ten cross-cutting themes that emerged across all staff interviews.

1. There is a need for collective impact and **collaboration across sectors**.
2. We need to **grow the pie of total resources for arts and culture**, attracting resources from multiple pools. Traditional funders of the arts may not be willing or able to support the kinds of cross-sector policy and advocacy work that our field needs the most.
3. **Challenges of working with or for state agencies** often center on bureaucratic necessities and politics. There are more hoops to jump through in order to work collaboratively, and the wide variety of authorizing environments, political polarization and large differences in resources are challenging to navigate.
4. **Changing demographics** affect all aspects of work in the public sector. The public sector brings special strengths to diversity, equity and inclusion – but it also faces unique constraints (less hiring freedom, a geographic distribution imperative for grant-making, etc.).
5. **Elected officials** are ill-equipped to govern after they take office. (In fact, lack of policy experience is now viewed as an attractive "credential" when running for

public office.) Elected officials need education and information, but they have limited time and tolerance for that learning curve. Advocates and policy organizations need to shift their expectations about how policy gets made and find faster ways of bringing key decision-makers up to speed.

6. Elected officials (and foundations) are increasingly developing "**single-issue attachments.**" They will campaign on one issue, develop resources for one issue and invest their personal capitol on that topic. In order to survive the arts must demonstrate relevance across a broad array of single-issue platforms AND cultivate our own single-issue champions.
7. NASAA's role in accurately describing public funding and best practices is extremely helpful. Our **credibility** is an asset.
8. NASAA's research, communications and policy work could shift to a more **transformational** emphasis. Look beyond current conditions and consider whether those conditions can be altered. For instance, rather than merely documenting the current impact of the arts (although that is important), is there an impact we aspire to achieve? How can NASAA help state arts agencies design programs, grant-making and research to further that impact goal?
9. **Structural problems with state budgets** are going to continue into the foreseeable future. Population growth is putting inexorable pressure on state expenditures but lawmakers and the electorate are reducing revenues at every opportunity. There is no political will to address this gap because doing so makes it difficult to attract donors and get re-elected. Any growth in arts funding is likely going to need to be tied to opportunities to grow the economy. Arguments grounded in "sound fiscal stewardship" no longer resonate.
10. **Acculturating change** is the new work of professional associations. Among networks of grant-makers, the "peer trust" factor is the single biggest trigger for shifting practices. Grant-makers shift practices when they see their peers/competitors changing, not when their professional association tells them to change.

APPENDIX I: Consultant Interview Protocol

Questions for State Arts Advocacy Networks

- How familiar are you with NASAA? (1-5 scale, 5 very familiar)
- Why are State Arts Agencies (SAAs) important?
- What is the impact of State Arts Agencies?
- What is your relationship to your State Arts Agency?
- What is working in advocacy efforts in your state?
- What are your advocacy organization's biggest challenges?
- What are "best practices" in arts advocacy that you believe every state should adopt?
- Are there one or two things that would increase your own organization's advocacy effectiveness?
- What are the services – from NASAA, AFTA, your SAA or any other organization - that are most useful to you as an advocate?
- What are the most useful tools that NASAA provides to you now?
- How might NASAA help you in the future as an arts advocate?

Questions for Arts Colleagues (big 5 organizations Pam wanted individual conversations with)

- How familiar are you with NASAA? (1-5 scale, 5 very familiar)
- Why are State Arts Agencies (SAAs) important to your members?
- What is the impact of State Arts Agencies on your members? On the arts field as a whole?
- What are your members' perceptions of the state arts agencies?
- What issues is <Name of Organization> facing that NASAA might also be facing, now or in the future?
- What are the major challenges and opportunities you see facing the arts and culture field in the next 5-10 years?
- What is the most important message about the arts that you try to convey to policy makers?
- What is NASAA good at? Bad at?
- How can NASAA be most effective and influential?
- What is the most strategic work that NASAA should do now and into the future?

Questions for the “Fresh Takes” Individuals

- How familiar are you with NASAA? (1-5 scale, 5 very familiar)
- In what capacity have you worked with any state arts agencies?
- Why are State Arts Agencies (SAAs) important?
- What is the impact of State Arts Agencies?
- What do you see as the arts' role in the current American landscape ?

- What are the major challenges and opportunities you see facing the arts and culture field in the next 5-10 years?
- Are State Arts Agencies equipping the arts field to deal with those challenges and seize those opportunities? How or how not?
- What does government support for the arts accomplish that other kinds of support (foundations, earned, etc.) does not?
- How do you view the politics, policy positions and practice of NASAA?
- What is the most strategic work that NASAA should do now and into the future?

Questions for Rural/Neighborhood Development Informants

- How familiar are you with NASAA? (1-5 scale, 5 very familiar)
- Are you familiar with the work of State Arts Agencies?
- How have you or your constituents interacted with state arts agencies?
- What are your organization's top priorities or challenges right now? What do you care most about accomplishing in the next couple of years?
- Do you see the arts as being able to help with rural/community arts development? How so, or how not?
- What are your opinions about the arts as a sector?
- If NASAA wanted to help state arts agencies develop more relationships/resources to support rural/community development, what would your advice be? Who should we get to know? Where could we do the greatest good?

APPENDIX II: Staff Interview Protocols

Questions for Government Innovators

1. How do you perceive state government to be changing/evolving?
2. What policy priorities are top-of-mind for governors and state legislators?
3. What are the knowledge and skills that elected officials most need to do a good job?
4. How about career state servants (not elected)... do you see their needs changing?
5. How is your association trying to address the above shifts?
6. How might NASAA position the arts for optimum relevance in this environment?

Questions for Grant Makers

1. What big-picture grant making trends do you see emerging among foundations? (probe for issue areas or grant mechanisms that seem to be gaining more attention)
2. To what extent do you see funders shifting practices to address diversity, equity and inclusion? What progress has been made, what progress remains to be made?
3. Think of a time when you were trying to encourage grant makers to change a practice... or of a time when you observed a group of grant makers to shift their practices voluntarily. What were the key ingredients in catalyzing/supporting that change?
4. More private funders appear to be talking about advocacy, but how deep do you feel that commitment is?
5. What's the most important thing than an ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC SECTOR GRANT MAKERS should be focusing on in the next few years?
6. Do you see more willingness to engage in public/private partnerships? How or how not?

Questions for Policy Researchers

1. What is your level of familiarity with NASAA research?
2. What do you perceive to be the biggest challenges currently facing the arts field? How can research help to address those issues?
3. Which NASAA research products/services do you perceive to be most valuable? Least valuable? (Adapt to level of knowledge assessed through Question #1)
4. What other strategic contributions could NASAA be making to policy knowledge about the arts and culture?

Questions for Education Experts

1. What do you see as the biggest opportunities and challenges for arts education today? What excites you or worries you about arts education in the future?

2. Thinking about the unique position/roles of state arts agencies: How do you see SAAs contributing to arts education? Why are SAAs important?
3. What could state arts agencies be doing differently/better to advance arts education?
4. Is there something NASAA, in particular, could do to advance arts education in the years ahead?

Questions for Major Donors

1. What big-picture changes do you see the arts and culture field facing in the next 5-10 years?
2. Do you see the importance of state arts agencies growing or diminishing?
3. How can NASAA be most influential?
4. What can NASAA do to rally the enthusiasm of our contributors?