

This report summarizes the themes that emerged from 81 interviews of state arts agency (SAA) executive directors and council chairs conducted by the NASAA Nominating Committee in June and July 2023. The Nominating Committee used a structured interview protocol to ensure consistent coverage of key topics with every member. Apart from informing nominations for the NASAA board of directors, each interview contained questions specifically designed to invite feedback about NASAA and to guide our member services and action planning. The questions included:

- ▶ What NASAA services are most useful or important to you?
- ▶ How satisfied are you with NASAA? Why? Or why not?
- ▶ What do state arts agencies need most from NASAA in the year ahead?
- ▶ Are there any ways NASAA could help your state level advocacy efforts?
- ▶ How is your state doing with diversity, equity and inclusion work? Is there anything NASAA can do—or not do—to help?
- ▶ Do you have any other suggestions or questions about NASAA that you'd want to pass along?

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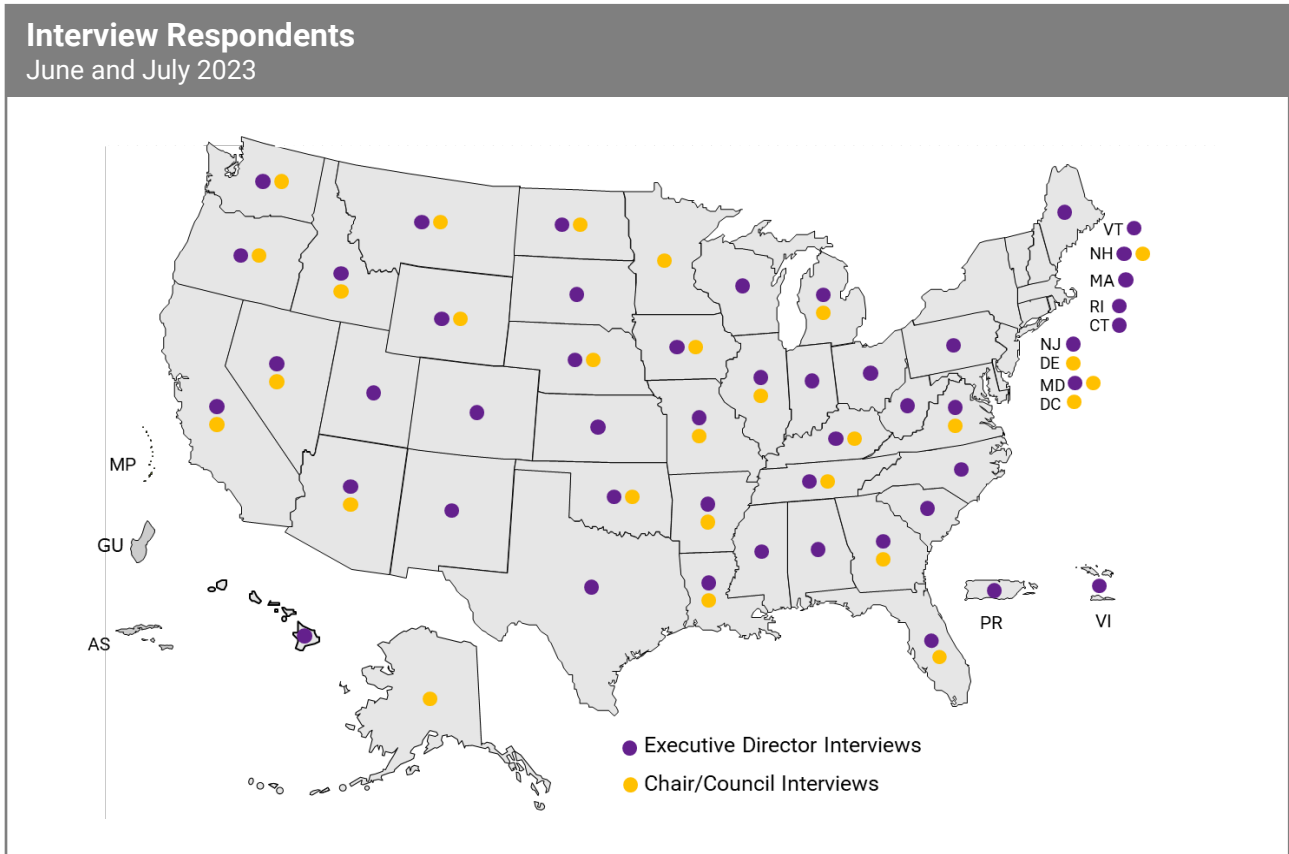
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This report synthesizes the results of a qualitative analysis of all interviews. As much as possible, we've let member voices speak for themselves. Except where noted [in brackets], all quotations are verbatim responses drawn from Nominating Committee members' interview transcripts.

Top-line findings are presented here for use by NASAA's Planning & Budget Committee as it develops NASAA's next action plan. Data tables containing all interview comments in an anonymous format have been supplied to the Planning & Budget Committee to guide its deliberations. The NASAA staff also received data for use in action plan implementation and ongoing performance improvement.

## Member Voices

81 state arts agency executive directors and council chairs from 52 state and jurisdictional arts agencies (SAAs) participated in interviews during summer 2023.



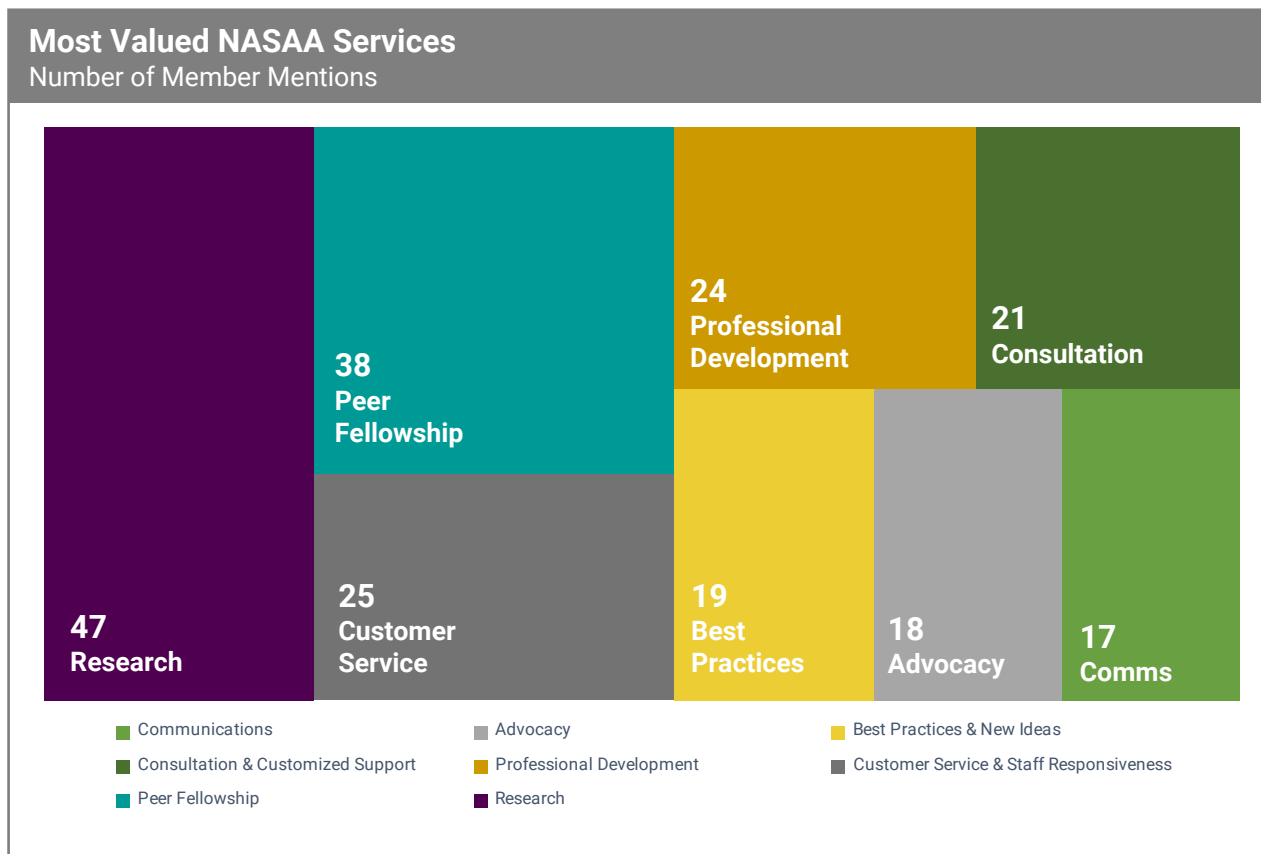
Responses included 42 executive directors, 23 council chairs and 16 NASAA board members (who are a mixture of executive directors and current or former council members). With the exception of the Pacific Islands, all regions of the nation were reached, as were states representing the full spectrum of state arts agency budget sizes and political contexts.

Many interviewees expressed appreciation for NASAA's outreach and praised the inclusive process that seeks input from all states and jurisdictions:

- ▶ *This outreach process is very thorough and appreciated. You're asking all the right questions.*
- ▶ *This is lovely. Good process, dialed in. Feels comprehensive and it seems to work.*
- ▶ *I love the member engagement, that there are so many people involved and that it's so widespread.*
- ▶ *I appreciate the input that I get to share and the ability to provide recommendations.*
- ▶ *This is a strong process, with good involvement with the members.*

## NASAA Services

Most individuals interviewed reported using some NASAA services in the past year, reflecting strong rates of member engagement. Members were asked to reflect on the NASAA services or products that they find most valuable. We examined the written records from each interview to conduct a thematic analysis of all responses. Each response received topical tags, which were then tallied to reveal recurring themes describing the NASAA services that states and jurisdictions perceive to be essential.



By a large margin, **research** was identified as NASAA's most important service. Members conveyed confidence in NASAA's data and expressed appreciation for accurate data that is useful for planning and advocacy. Information on appropriations and comparative information were praised by multiple members.

**Peer connections** were another item often cited as NASAA's most valuable member benefit. Numerous members underscored the important role NASAA plays as a convener and facilitator of peer conversations that help state arts agencies to learn from one another and grapple with challenging issues. Apart from the exchange of information, these peer connections create a strong sense of community for which members expressed gratitude. On a related note, NASAA's **professional development** offerings received high marks. Members were happy to reconvene in person in Kansas City, Missouri, for NASAA Assembly 2022, but they also view NASAA's virtual learning sessions as important resources. Comments indicated that members think NASAA's learning events are relevant and well organized.

NASAA serves as a hub of information on **emerging issues and best practices** for state arts agencies. Members value this role, noting a number of different issues and topics—including programmatic trends, equity, planning and rural development—where NASAA resources have been especially useful. NASAA's **advocacy** services received a similar number of mentions. Federal advocacy is seen as essential, and NASAA also is viewed as a resource for state advocacy, especially in the realm of effective messaging. Interviewees also applauded NASAA's **communications**. Email bulletins, the peer group listservs and the website were among the communications vehicles cited by members as helpful to their work.

Finally, numerous members flagged **customized consultations** and **responsive customer service** as the things they value most about NASAA. These comments took multiple forms, including examples of information tailored to agency level needs, stories of moral support received from NASAA during difficult situations, and expressions of thanks for fast replies to questions.

Member comments about services perceived to be most important include the following.

## Research

- ▶ *We have great trust in the data and research.*
- ▶ *The ability to receive factual information is the biggest service. It's very valuable to have all the information you need.*
- ▶ *The research that NASAA does is incredible, there hasn't been a question that I've asked that hasn't been answered by NASAA. They have a wealth of knowledge and research to answer all of our questions.*
- ▶ *I like seeing where we are in terms of other states in terms of funding.*
- ▶ *Research is tops, having all the data on state appropriations and how states can compare trends and conditions.*
- ▶ *The research is number one, that's something we couldn't do on our own. The dashboard information is critical to planning.*
- ▶ *The research and data relating to the arts is probably one of the most valuable assets to SAAs and arts and cultural workers that NASAA provides.*
- ▶ *Data, data, data. All of the research and data is important. Data about other SAAs is especially important.*

## Peer Fellowship

- ▶ *When you're the only one in your state that has this certain role, it's great to meet others across the country to share ideas, experiences, support - it builds a little hope and excitement.*
- ▶ *I participated in the affinity group. It was a great group and one of the things that interested me about NASAA. The discussions and ability to communicate in fellowship with everyone is greatly appreciated.*
- ▶ *Peer networks are the best. These give new staff a quick way to plug in.*
- ▶ *The group list serve and peer zoom meetings are extremely helpful.*
- ▶ *The peer groups have really become important to people on our staff, and for me as well.*
- ▶ *The gatherings are probably the most important things they offer - a chance to get together with our colleagues and talk about our work.*

- ▶ *The sense of community is key. SAAs operate singularly within states, so knowing I can reach out to a different state for ideas and advice is great. NASAA's staff facilitates this process beautifully.*
- ▶ *I really enjoy the discussions among EDs. I like it when NASAA pulls us together on certain topics.*
- ▶ *The ED listserv is one of the best services in our field. The connections, the ability to have a safe place for problem solving and questions.*

## **Professional Development**

- ▶ *The convenings are exceptional. They are very well planned and have relevant topical sessions that provide ideas that help us discover new ways to do our work.*
- ▶ *The zoom learning sessions have been the most valuable since [the COVID-19 pandemic]. They have been outstanding.*
- ▶ *I was at the KC Gathering, and found it really good.*
- ▶ *I certainly had a taste of NASAA at the conference in Kansas City. I went along and sat in on several sessions, learned about challenges in other states. I thought the event was really good and the other things are well organized.*
- ▶ *In-person gatherings are incredibly important, and I greatly regret having had to miss Kansas City and I look forward to [the NASAA 2023 Executive Forum in] New Mexico this December.*
- ▶ *The national convention in Kansas City was well managed... It was a good experience, good content and the network was good.*
- ▶ *Whether it is the Assembly, Executive Forum, or occasional online sessions, this gives us insight on sector-wide issues, specific training, and networking with our peers.*

## **Consultation and Customized Support**

- ▶ *NASAA has been creating maps for us of where our grantees are in the state so that we can see where we are not funding. This drives conversation and identifies gaps, which is great.*
- ▶ *I appreciate the ability to have the NASAA team to discuss concerns and to give confidential advice.*
- ▶ *We benefit from the tailored support from NASAA.*
- ▶ *She appreciates the customized approach that the staff takes.*
- ▶ *I am having problems with my Council, so it has been good to have NASAA as a resource. NASAA helped with the strategic plan and we saved a lot of money.*
- ▶ *Various individual folks at NASAA have served as sounding boards, cheerleaders, mentors, experts, and therapists on so many occasions when I needed support.*
- ▶ *When I had a recurring problem flare up again this week, I called NASAA. And this is entirely true: a day that started with dark thoughts about current state politics interfering with our mission and grant-making was turned around by [staff], who listened to me wholly before offering a few ideas I hadn't even thought of, let alone her wisdom about how and why to survive these types of things.*

## **Best Practices and New Ideas**

- ▶ *NASAA provides leadership on key issues.*
- ▶ *Sharing of better practices/new ideas is great.*
- ▶ *Most [valued] is the idea of showcasing SAAs and highlighting what they are doing...then states can learn from each other. Providing cross-sector opportunities...reaching across bridges on how we can help each other.*
- ▶ *Bringing up the trends and topics we need to be aware of is helpful.*

- ▶ *The research and work they've done on [diversity, equity and inclusion] has been really helpful to me. Like NASAA's Choice Points tool. We used it in our own agency to make improvements. Using real-life examples was very helpful as we tried to improve ourselves.*
- ▶ *The action guides are good. The rural prosperity report was particularly helpful.*
- ▶ *The upcoming Circle of Advisors to help build relationships between Native communities and SAAs/states is very intriguing to me. I know it will have a positive impact.*

## Advocacy

- ▶ *NASAA's advocacy materials are top drawer.*
- ▶ *I know the national advocacy efforts are very important.*
- ▶ *We use NASAA messaging for our advocacy day.*
- ▶ *The document about marketing language to use when talking about the value of the arts is great.*
- ▶ *The language for elected officials to help advocate about the arts is excellent.*
- ▶ *One of the very first things I did on the state arts board, with the state legislature, was to bring out a chart to show where our state ranks in arts funding as opposed to other SEC states. Anytime our state is below our competitors, there is a problem! Ha! It was very interesting [to see] the reaction to the chart when they saw where we were ranked. I learned this from NASAA. Basketball is a religion here. So when you speak in sports terms, people listen. When we want to know what's happening as far as arts dollars or other data points legislatures understand, we go to NASAA.*

## Communications

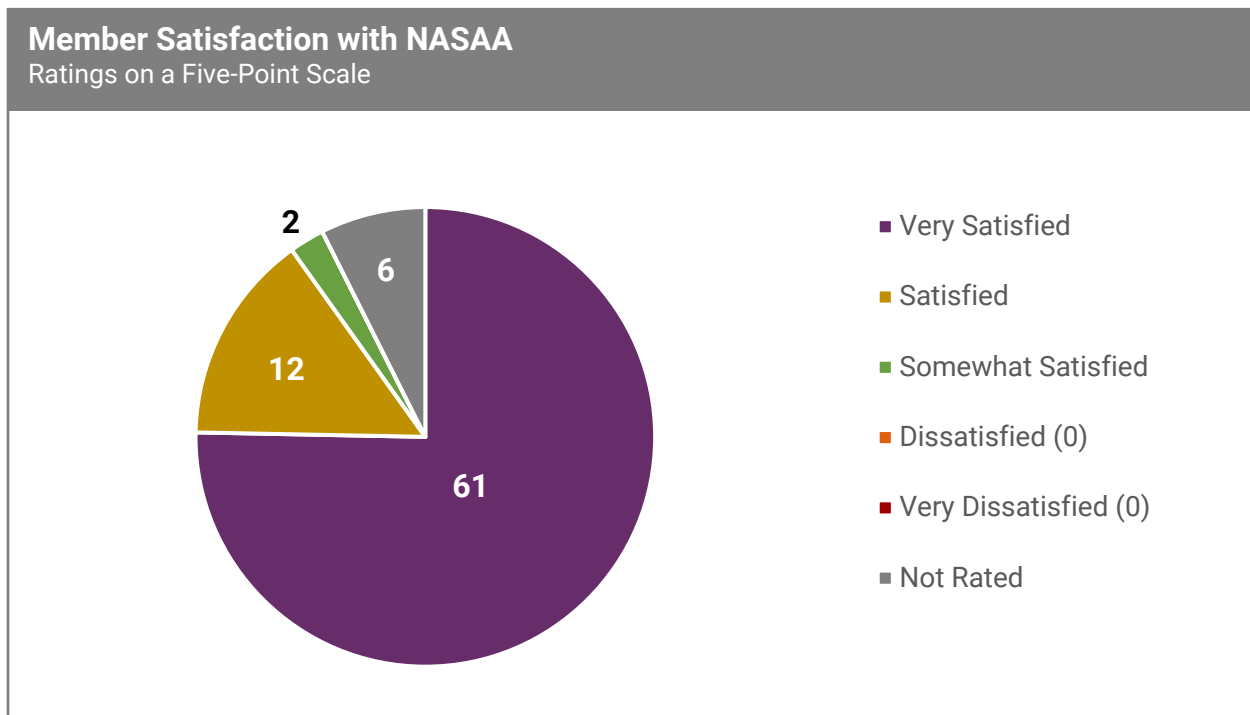
- ▶ *I enjoy reading the digital newsletter/updates and the cohort email group messages.*
- ▶ *I really like all the emails from NASAA, find them useful, and engage with them by clicking on topics to learn more. I like to read about what's happening in other states, in particular in the arts.*
- ▶ *I like Reports to Councils to keep our board informed and am always interested in projects I hear/learn about, like the Equity GAP projects in OH and IL.*
- ▶ *I hit up the website all the time for tools and data to support advocacy and visibility. Not to mention how super helpful the complete and always current SAA directory on the website is.*
- ▶ *NASAA is a well operating machine, they are well organized especially with the reports and documentation on the website. I was interested in advocating for the arts in my area and I did a web search and I found NASAA. They had a whole toolkit of talking points for lawmakers. NASAA is amazing and they helped tremendously, especially me being from a rural community.*

## Customer Service and Staff Responsiveness

- ▶ *The "one on one," over-the-top customer service is by far the most important to me. Whenever I call NASAA, I am guaranteed a friendly and professional consultation with any of the staff.*
- ▶ *If you call, they're there for you, period. They've gotten me through the weeds many times.*
- ▶ *This year, Kelly and Ryan and Declan were able to provide reports and data I needed. That was amazing. It replaced days of digging in our files.*
- ▶ *It is wonderful to come up with a question and shoot an email to NASAA and be able to get an answer right away, so I would have to say that the experienced staff is important to me.*
- ▶ *She is relatively new as interim ED, but right off the bat NASAA staff was extremely helpful in reaching out and connecting her with myriad resources.*
- ▶ *The accessibility of NASAA and its responsiveness to concerns or problems is excellent.*

## Member Satisfaction and Areas for Improvement

Interviewers asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with NASAA on a structured five-point scale. Both executive directors and council chairs reported high levels of satisfaction with NASAA services and support. **Among all respondents who offered a satisfaction assessment, 90% were either satisfied or very satisfied with NASAA.** Six individuals—newcomers to the field or chairs unfamiliar with NASAA's work—did not comment on their degree of satisfaction.



In addition to offering a numeric satisfaction rating, members were asked to elaborate, describing in their own words why they are or are not satisfied with the services they receive. General comments included:

- ▶ *I'm a businessman at heart, so when I became Chair, I began looking at our membership contribution. I went to my first convening and was very satisfied with where our contribution was going and with the professionalism of the NASAA staff.*
- ▶ *Super satisfied. NASAA has been my "go to" for learning how things work. Very happy with such a great group of nice people!*
- ▶ *I never question the value of my dues to NASAA.*
- ▶ *It's membership dollars more than well spent. They listen. And they are responsive, not reactive.*
- ▶ *Yes, very satisfied. NASAA does an outstanding job bringing SAAs together. NASAA is very efficient. They are good at being apolitical.*
- ▶ *I am satisfied because they are by and for the SAAs. Their main constituents are the SAAs.*
- ▶ *Responds thoughtfully to questions and issues. Comfortable in acknowledging when a topic is unresolved or unsatisfactory. No judgements, values member input. Accepts that sometimes two things can be true at the same time, openminded.*

- ▶ *I think NASAA has the best understanding of what SAAs are facing as a whole. They also own up to their mistakes; they've adjusted their position on the recent "culture wars" debate when things started to get moving and heated.*
- ▶ *Extremely satisfied. Appreciate its focus on SAAs.*
- ▶ *NASAA is a valued partner in increasingly complex and challenging times.*
- ▶ *All of the staff are so responsive and I've felt very supported in a personally challenging situation.*
- ▶ *I love how helpful NASAA is, how included NASAA makes me feel, and the inclusiveness NASAA exhibits. NASAA is very thoughtful and purposeful in what they have done and what they are doing.*
- ▶ *It checks off all of the boxes. The organization is cognizant, relevant and current.*

No interviewees in 2023 expressed outright **dissatisfaction** with NASAA. However, when asked to explain their satisfaction rating, some members did express a sense of **disconnection** or voiced **concerns about specific issues**:

- ▶ *The satisfaction question is hard to answer. I feel too displaced, I feel I miss out on services. I rate it a four.*
- ▶ *I've been a bit disconnected with some of the recent conversations.*
- ▶ *Sometimes he's not really aware of the federal advocacy work. Is there a way to be more in the loop?*
- ▶ *This satisfaction ranking is very close to a 5, but in any organization there is always work to be done. I sense a hesitation in terms of DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] work. Navigating the discussion is difficult, trying to convey the message to those who may feel judged. Also, with the geographic inclusion, there needs to be work done.*
- ▶ *She is very satisfied and supportive of NASAA and its services. She rated it a 5. Everything about NASAA has been a very positive experience. She appreciates everyone and how responsive they are when she has reached out. Any criticism she has is the heavy focus on the culture wars. In her state they are constrained by the opposite effect, the challenges of being in a liberal state.*
- ▶ *I trust the staff very much, but I don't have a handle on how the board operates.*
- ▶ *The good work of NASAA hasn't trickled down to some of the council members.*
- ▶ *I think they're overly humble. They should just take pride in the work they do, because they do it well, and it's OK to take pride in it.*

Other members who characterized themselves as satisfied with NASAA still offered **constructive criticism** or **additional ideas** for NASAA's consideration. Although these views were not expressed by multiple people—and some of them contradict each other—we still take note of such comments to give us insight into member views and needs and to inform continual improvement.

- ▶ *Wants to see NASAA "up it" in terms of boldness...don't play it too safe, be a bold leader.*
- ▶ *Remember that all info sent to SAAs is public record.*
- ▶ *The conference was good, but some topics were very [politically] specific and don't impact all states. I want more conversations and guidance on basic issues. We are concerned about things like the size of staff and how to run panels and how to distribute dollars across the state. These are issues that we are all facing. I would rather focus on these issues that are universal to all SAAs.*
- ▶ *There's no organization that does what NASAA does for us. That said, I struggle with whether or not NASAA fully understands the challenges of being a cultural institution in the middle of the culture war. I think Pam understands this, but it may be a process to get some staff to better understand that as one of the main cultural organizations in the state, we will get sucked into a culture war-and*

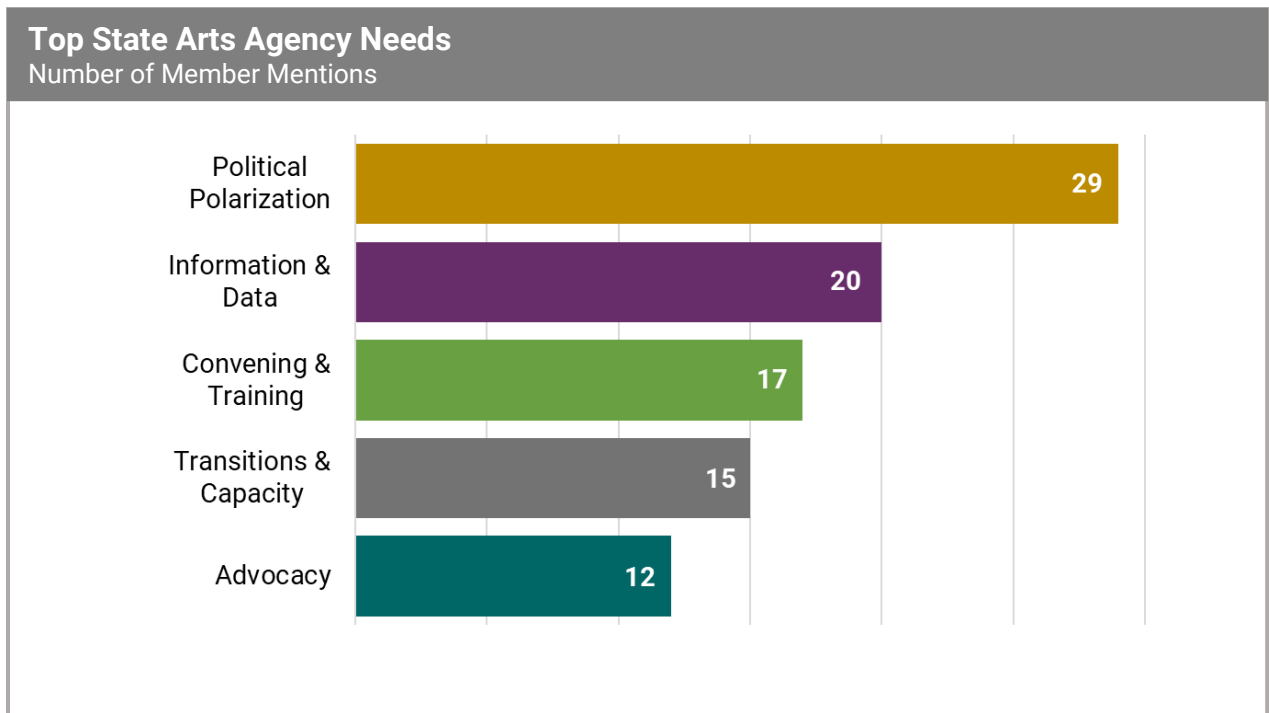


that despite our own personal opinions, it is often best for our agency to try and stay out of controversies.

- ▶ I would love to see NASAA do more. I would like to see NASAA address systemic changes in the field. The centrist ideology has often carried the nonprofit sector and I don't think we can be centrists anymore.... Legislatures are passing harmful laws (LGBTQ, student loans, Roe v Wade). Just because it's not the arts doesn't mean it doesn't affect those in the arts.
- ▶ As national service organizations are working to clarify/redefine their role, NASAA needs to stay focused on strengthening state arts agencies.
- ▶ The heartland of the country is not represented on NASAA's board, which is a weakness.
- ▶ The grants heat map is not as useful as we would like it to be.
- ▶ Regarding economic impact data, what is out there now is disconnected from the work that SAAs do. Creative industries numbers include film and tv stations, which SAAs don't support. It looks like we're trying to inflate the numbers. Can NASAA get more accurate stats on non-profit arts orgs, artists, grant making, etc. that more closely aligns to what SAAs do? Our grantees are repeating this available info without digging into what it includes, which may be problematic.
- ▶ I think there should be a stand alone advocacy and public policy committee.

## Top Needs for 2024

NASAA members were encouraged to comment about their agency's significant needs in the coming year. Given that each state is unique and that a wide variety of state needs and situations are present among members, there was naturally less convergence in this data. However, a handful of recurring themes did surface.



More than a third of state arts agencies indicated that the most urgent issue facing state arts agencies today is **political polarization**. State arts agencies want NASAA's help in navigating divisive politics, controversies and restrictions from governors and legislatures, especially in relation to equity work. Members want NASAA's **advocacy** help to position state arts agencies for success in this climate. Advocacy for federal resources was mentioned by several respondents. Other members are anticipating state budget contractions and want NASAA's help to craft effective advocacy arguments.

There were numerous calls for NASAA to continue its role as a purveyor of **data and information**. Members expressed the need for data that can help with advocacy as well as comparative statistics and information on best practices. This desire to keep abreast of state arts agency trends also arose in comments about NASAA's **convening and professional development** role. Members want NASAA to continue to support networking and learning, in person and online.

The importance of training and orientation is especially urgent for new executive directors. As of this writing, 20 SAAs have recently had or are in the midst of leadership transitions, with more turnover likely in the near future. So it's not surprising that a substantial number of agencies said that **transition support** is a pressing need. Several states also mentioned concerns relating to **staff capacity**, burnout and related issues.

## Political Polarization

- ▶ *I want guidance as the politics of the country becomes more acrimonious and disruptive.*
- ▶ *We need support and resources on navigating culture wars attacks.*
- ▶ *NASAA anticipated the state level culture war issues we've seen with the attacks on drag shows, trans rights, etc. That anticipation showed strong political instincts. What to do about it is a more complicated question.*
- ▶ *SAAs need help understanding the broad political climate and acknowledging that everyone is vulnerable.*
- ▶ *Going into 2024 we can't separate ourselves from culture war issues. Being smart and prepared is essential.*
- ▶ *I think states need help continuing to navigate the extreme political polarization without NASAA becoming political themselves.*
- ▶ *There are two things that are running concurrently, in red states like ours... There are various groups by and for people of color, wanting to know who got the awards. The speaker of the Assembly is saying, eliminate your diversity offices. Their rationale is that those offices are breeding hate. We talk about the values, but not using DEI language.*
- ▶ *I think SAAs need a way to advocate for the arts during these very politicized times. I don't know if we've ever been this divided politically and how it's getting into every part of our lives. How do we navigate these waters? Because we've got to be able to advocate on both sides of the aisle. Sometimes these lines are drawn because of funding, but I think what's happening now is ideological. How do we navigate this?*
- ▶ *I think we need to start looking for tools that define our relevance regardless of a constituents' political affiliation.*
- ▶ *We have Divisive Concepts Laws here and we have to be very careful. Complaints have been lodged against programs that we have funded, and we're concerned this will continue.*
- ▶ *Navigating these incredibly polarized political waters - we need all the help we can get. Ultra-conservative ideology - very discriminatory if not hateful and illegal - is making grantmaking and*

supporting the arts a difficult chore. I know NASAA is/will be helping brainstorm solutions to specific problems while offering sage advice on how to better get along with both sides of the aisle and increase chances of being able to weather a tough few years while being able to continue to support good work.

- ▶ *Bridging the political divide in support of the arts and making sure that NASAA can help SAAs to reach underrepresented communities (both geographically and socio-economically).*
- ▶ *They are being increasingly divided within the state, between the have/have nots. Increased isolation in some parts while increased access in others. Income divide is growing and changing the way the state looks, it is causing a lot of unrest in all different groups.*

## **Advocacy**

- ▶ *Continue to advocate for NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] \$.*
- ▶ *We need the research and advocacy tools because our number one issue is the budget, there hasn't been an increase in 20 years from the state. So we need tools to educate our elected officials about SAAs.*
- ▶ *We need a strategy to prepare for the end of state surpluses due to ARP [American Rescue Plan Act] funding.*
- ▶ *A continuation of providing advocacy tips, not only legislation and funding, but also talking points that are effective in all states.*
- ▶ *We need more advocacy efforts and more planning for our state advocacy groups. Help us build the tools for organizations to make stronger cases to legislators.*
- ▶ *Since some SAA can't speak on certain issues, it is important for state advocacy organizations to get together and to benefit from the knowledge NASAA can share. Some of us need a "voice" without offending our authorizers.*
- ▶ *[SAAs need help] getting budget support across the country.*
- ▶ *As I have been journeying through this role, I have begun to think that the biggest impediment to most SAAs receiving more grant funding is typically not a flat out unwillingness of legislatures to support SAAs, but a lack of visibility and understanding of the impact SAAs have. SAAs need some tools, guidance, and leadership in how to increase perceived relevance by those who are not directly served by the work we do.*
- ▶ *The advocacy work is really important, and the appropriations for the NEA. I have some concerns about what may be reductions and how those reductions affect grant making abilities.*
- ▶ *Commissioners don't see themselves as advocates.*

## **Transitions and Capacity**

- ▶ *Staffing is critical at this time. holding on to staff is the issue. There is no place to move up. How can SAAs set up tiers for upward mobility? How do SAAs advocate for better salaries? How do we make it possible for staff to want to stay for the long haul?*
- ▶ *The trend is that there is going to be more new EDs - more than half in the west in the next 6 months. We need to get in touch with the new EDs to help them know how to work in government. There is so much to learn, that even when you go to your first NASAA meeting it is like 'deer in the headlights.' It takes years.*
- ▶ *Our team is very small. It's hard to serve the entire state. We need capacity building, professional development, planning help.*

- ▶ *Some new EDs are like deer in the headlights. We need on-boarding for turnover in leadership. Bring in more seasoned directors from red states to help provide professional development to new EDs. Many seasoned leaders are dealing with burn-out.*
- ▶ *On Thursday, we'll be conducting the final round of interviews to hire a new ED. I will encourage that person to take NASAA up on all their benefits for new EDs, want to make sure they are plugged in.*
- ▶ *[State] is in a period of big leadership change. We've been quietly struggling for several years. Some of that is creating a vulnerability as we try to pick up the pieces. Our agency is so small and overworked. Quiet support and encouragement is the biggest thing we need in the coming year.*
- ▶ *In terms of leadership, we are all facing uncertain times.*
- ▶ *There is great turnover in the field. She finds strength in the variety of areas that we come from as EDs. This might be leveraged in what seems to be a very inconsistent level of experiences. She's looking forward to the Boot Camp for new EDs.*
- ▶ *At the WESTAF conference, of the 20 EDs there 4 were interim and two were about to leave. Aging out/turnover of EDs is major. Workforce models across all sectors have been disrupted, pay attention to what this means.*

## Information

- ▶ *Identifying trends at the national level, and providing speaking points on the importance of arts funding in this moment post-COVID. We don't need "warm fuzzies" about why the arts are important, we need data that can arm the EDs.*
- ▶ *Data, all of the data. It seems that more conservative leaders and lawmakers really respond to fiscal data and numbers, so the continued narrative and supporting data that highlights the arts sector as a significant economic driver is vital. Also, data and research supporting the integration of arts & healing (from the military down to community settings) will be essential.*
- ▶ *Continuing to look at what value SAAs and arts expenditures bring to their states. Basically continuing the research and data points that Ryan and his team bring to us. I try and launder the arts through an economic message, and NASAA's info really helps make that argument.*
- ▶ *Assisting us to tell our story through economic impact and programmatic ideas around arts plus (like veterans, agriculture, transportation, quality of life, aging populations, etc.). Those of us in red states need to begin to communicate the value of the arts that people will have a hard time disputing and not get caught up in the "culture wars" conversations.*
- ▶ *We need additional information on funding issues and legislative impacts, especially arts & education - how are states dealing w/negative impacts from legislation.*
- ▶ *She liked the transportation paper and will share that with elected officials. She would like to see more of these types of resources that are very helpful, especially case studies of how other states are working on issues. Maybe these exist but she just hasn't seen them yet?*
- ▶ *Any kind of national data that we can arm ourselves with would be appreciated. Their state's per capita spending on the arts is around 46 which is surprising to him. Emotional arguments fall on deaf ears, but data speaks.*
- ▶ *He'd like a study on the creative sector (similar to one commissioned by Netflix and conducted by Deloit.) In addition to BEA #'s, something that looks at US vs other countries. Could NASAA help coordinate with others' investments?*
- ▶ *Continued updated research. Some of the research is a couple years old, perhaps getting together a think tank to determine what research would be most helpful moving forward.*

## Convening and Training

- ▶ *SAs need assistance to be able to engage with one another. A leadership Institute for ED only is brilliant...particularly for sticky wicket topics.*
- ▶ *Networking opportunities with other states and peers are important.*
- ▶ *Convening is so important, whether online small group, in-person big group, webinars, it doesn't matter – their [NASAA's] ability to bring us together is critical.*
- ▶ *We need some trainings on "hot topics."*
- ▶ *DEAI trainings, contextualizing that in the context of SAs and the shifting prioritization of funding away from the arts. How do we make change in that area? A national perspective would be great. Board engagement and development--though many of our boards, council, commissions are so different so there would have to be different tracks.*
- ▶ *Continued networking opportunities and sharing best practices (agency work, DEI work, hearing what's going on in other states, things we can borrow and use in our organization).*
- ▶ *I value the virtual convenings. They can be skipped but add value when possible. When I have the chance to be present with others, I would do that.*

## Varied Programmatic and Policy Interests

Each state has its own distinctive portfolio of programs and services, so there was little convergence among comments about these needs. But it's useful to note the variety of issues that SAs are considering, so that NASAA can be on the lookout for opportunities to address them through information sharing, peer group discussions or other means.

- ▶ *Not a priority, but I am thinking a lot about young leadership and getting new people into the field. How do we build the bench of young leaders in the field, as young leaders are choosing public service less and less? Maybe fellowships or mentorships to get people into the field?*
- ▶ *How do I prioritize other sectors? Who to build relationships with to do this type of cross sector work?*
- ▶ *We need help asserting our relevancy, reevaluating grant making.*
- ▶ *We need federal and state level work arounds for tackling long-standing laws, rules, and procedures that hinder equitable grantmaking.*
- ▶ *We could really benefit from an increased DEI focus. Our agency is so small and overworked, we've been struggling to integrate it into our work, and we need strategies to incorporate DEI values into our grantmaking. Trying to integrate these values into the work of our appointed council has been challenging.*
- ▶ *I would love to see some best practices for equitable grant making that take into account some of the limitations we have as government entities.*
- ▶ *Now that much of the nation is acknowledging the universal lack of support for mental health, and the right has identified it as a call to action, the arts have a critical role to play in the way the country adapts its understanding and acceptance of various methods of therapies and healing practices.*
- ▶ *We need help with strategy to fulfill the promise of our cultural districts program. I also saw you are doing a webinar on rural strategies coming up and I think that's great and I'm really looking forward to it.*
- ▶ *I think [about] small "startup" grants. Getting a Creative Aging grant for \$23,000 a couple of years ago was instrumental in us kicking off annual grants for this type of programming. I would love to see NASAA do more of these types of small grants to kick start programs for small arts agencies.*

- ▶ *One area that I think many are not prepared for is NEA audits. This could include shared resources on compliant policies and practices.*
- ▶ *The programming like Creative Aging is excellent, any programs that help with the underserved.*
- ▶ *NASAA might also be able to help with succession among our constituents. I've got a few that really need some attention in terms of how to transition out.*
- ▶ *I think there's going to be an organization crisis of some sort coming post-pandemic. Living wage comes into play and affordable housing is a huge problem, so people can't find places for their employees to live. Post pandemic and in a nonprofit arts field, a vacuum in leadership is going to happen, also with aging leadership and attrition. I think NASAA can help states help their nonprofit sectors to be stronger.*
- ▶ *We need to grapple with what it means to be a cultural workforce. A national plan or direction. How do we integrate cultural workers and tradition bearers into the national fabric. Help artists to be seen as valued workers.*
- ▶ *Help with professional development to our organizations. We need to teach them how to fish. Appreciate the continued advocacy for federal money, but money alone is not enough for many of these groups.*

## State Advocacy Needs

Members were asked about their state level advocacy efforts and how NASAA could help. People surfaced concerns related to funding, case making, state arts advocacy groups, and navigating polarization and divisive concepts legislation.

Even though state arts appropriations reached an all-time high this year (FY2023), not every state is feeling secure in its **resources outlook**. Several state arts agencies commented that they are anticipating budget contractions in the near future. Others are struggling to match the recent increase in funding from the NEA. To address these funding concerns, members want NASAA to continue providing **data** and **framing messages** to support their case making, as well as strategies to help them **navigate contentious political environments**.

The need to **strengthen state arts advocacy groups** remains a concern, with some members wanting to see improved effectiveness and coordination. Members also noted the need for **training and best practices** to share examples of advocacy partnerships and successes. As in recent years, some states see a limited role for NASAA in state level advocacy.

## Budget Issues/Funding Concerns

- ▶ *A probable return to more lean times and strategies to ensure arts funding remains a priority.*
- ▶ *Our legislature made their budget choices based on good tax revenues, but going forward we are facing budget shortages.*
- ▶ *Our state level of funding is under budget and under resourced. Would love \$2 per capita. If NASAA can help in making that case, it would be great.*
- ▶ *Continued lobbying to protect the NEA and increase our state match. We were able to do a lot for organizations during COVID, but unfortunately for some it wasn't enough, and without the federal support, even more would have gone out of business.*
- ▶ *We haven't seen a budget increase in 16 years. Also had challenges with capital projects, and we got a much smaller % of recovery money than requested. We need to start preparing for the next session and find a way to make it more successful. We have an arts & Culture caucus that was just created*

and need to think about ways to engage them at a higher level. Having NASAA meet with us and strategize with us will be really helpful.

- ▶ Funding is always at the top of the mind. Also we need the standing capacity to deliver all of our services. The state legislature gave us a well-intentioned capital grant, which provided for a new position but the way the political sphere works, they would not let us hire one so we had to re-position a current staff member to administer this new program.
- ▶ The general fund match from the state legislature is at the top, in consideration with the increase from NEA. Continue the DEI work, I can see push back in the process in doing this work.
- ▶ Our state funding has not increased to match the recent increase in NEA allocations. [Our state] got a special allocation to match the NEA grant, so hopefully that will become permanent.
- ▶ I don't know if there's anything NASAA can do right now. We need more funds - a large creative economy here. As we're redesigning our programs, we realize there just isn't enough money. So we're trying to do a better job of advocacy and working with our legislators and leaders to tell the stories of our creative economy and arts and culture sector.

## Case Making for the Arts

- ▶ 1) We currently are in a fantastically arts supportive administration with two years left. How do we maximize the governor's legacy and safeguard the SAA from the transition? 2) Budget line items -- how to deal with them and the undermining effect that they have on the SAA. 3) Cultivating advocacy when times are good and advocates become complacent.
- ▶ [Our state] is in a boom economic cycle at the moment. What kinds of language works well to convince conservative legislators to increase appropriations in such times?
- ▶ It's a big election cycle, so sometimes the arts take a backseat, so continuing messaging to ensure the arts stay relevant.
- ▶ The awareness of our legislators in understanding how the arts are a part of everything and not just a nice thing on the side. This is a constant point of conversation and NASAA has helped with language before, but I'm interested in continuing and refining that work.
- ▶ All politics is local. High-level messaging is helpful, but not directly relevant.
- ▶ We are currently pushing for funding for a statewide arts district program and would love to hear how to make an economic argument for creating this program. We also have an ongoing challenge, which NASAA has been a part of, is our on the ground work in the most rural and economically distressed region of our state. Our work here is very grass roots. NASAA coming in with a national perspective could really be of benefit to this project.
- ▶ We are focused on workforce development policy. How do we get artists stable salaries, benefits, retirement? Also education policy to add A[rts] to STEM and to add core requirements in the arts for graduation. Artist work/live space, etc.
- ▶ I'd like to see more economic development information, especially for rural communities, showing how support for culture can help with revitalization. We have added bonus points to our Community Development Block Grants to applicants that add a cultural component to their proposal, and it's a program that could be spread to other states.
- ▶ It would be helpful for NASAA to be for looking to broader, national policy opportunities and connections, not just always focusing on funding from NEA.

## State Arts Advocacy Groups

- ▶ *Though our funding is excellent, there seems to be a lack of understanding about the true meaning and benefits of the arts. NASAA can help by convening the state advocacy groups and/or attending a pre-planning meeting to their Arts Day.*
- ▶ *Continued assistance with ideas for creating/improving citizens advocacy organizations.*
- ▶ *We have a strong advocacy organization. We talk every week. He's great at using NASAA's data to compare us to other states. We also have an arts integrated school program that we are working to get funding for, and continued NASAA data is critical.*
- ▶ *[We need help with] culture wars and strengthening advocacy. The rift with AFTA continues and the advocacy organizations have major capacity issues. The new cohort is unorganized and causing problems. In red states, it causes stress. Can NASAA be a resource for that group, or at least stabilize it?*
- ▶ *The state advocacy group is not helpful and not focused on public funding for the arts statewide, instead, they are in it for personal gain. There has to be a balance. We must all be present in the same room.*
- ▶ *How to start a healthy advocacy group for our State. NASAA has already helped with that some.*
- ▶ *We are having some challenges with our advocacy group, which will get worked out. It is helpful to have general advocacy talking points, but it is different for every person you meet in the legislature.*
- ▶ *We have had no state advocacy organization for the last 8 years. There is a lot of tension in the advocacy space and between some advocacy organizations and SAAs. Perhaps NASAA could help bring some stability to that space and broker some honest conversations between these groups. Need to figure out what this tension and conflict means. Maybe [the problem] could have been AFTA at one time, but not now. NASAA seems like the right organization to tackle this.*
- ▶ *I know this isn't exactly an issue for NASAA, but I could use guidance on how to get an advocacy organization started in the state when I can't be the one issuing the call to action. Of course, anything that helps us make the case for increased funding is always helpful.*
- ▶ *We have a fledgling advocacy group. We have a new chair that I think will begin to push this organization to be more robust and to have an impact. I think any sort of board development, 101 trainings would be great.*

## Advocacy Training

- ▶ *I am not sure if there is anything NASAA can do to help, but it is a challenge to get arts people to develop relationships with legislators. It is a challenge for the sector to understand that legislators are there to work for you, but they need to know what arts organizations need.*
- ▶ *Our advocates could use content created that can speak directly to policy makers and elected officials that is coming from people outside of arts community. For example, a former director of the space flight center in [city] made a statement about the value of STEAM. The fact that someone from NASA said that makes people listen rather than those who are in the arts field. Are there national figures that could make these statements outside of the arts field?*
- ▶ *The biggest task is that my board needs to establish stronger relationships prior to the next session. So I need guidance on how to get the board to do what they hate the most: talk to legislators.*
- ▶ *Maybe some help with how council members can advocate with legislators. Personally I'm comfortable with that, but many board members are recruited because of their passion for the arts and they may not have training in or fully understand an advocacy role.*



## Polarization and Divisive Concepts Legislation

- ▶ *Arts Advocacy is very specific to each state. The challenges we face will be relevant to some other states, but not all. Therefore I think it's a challenge to craft sessions/workshops that are geared to us all. Workshops focused on advocacy in "red states or blue states" would help us get to crucial ideas.*
- ▶ *This is a tricky area, each state has its own legislative quirks, and messaging is personal. Still, communications on how other states are addressing the culture wars might help all states, even those that are less conflicted.*
- ▶ *Many of us are facing bills that have to do with cultural issues. Anti LGBTQ, we had anti trans health care. Drag storytelling bills didn't make it out of committee, but will next year.*
- ▶ *The culture wars information. Have NASAA stay on top of that, across the country, so we can be prepared when social issues cross state lines. Keep us informed of current trends and talking points. Learning how people are navigating that.*
- ▶ *Culture war issues will likely return in 2024. These manifest in multiple states. If NASAA can track these it would help us at the state level.*
- ▶ *How to navigate the political environment we exist in today.*
- ▶ *Everything is good. Now is not the time to change NASAA's strategy. Continue the proactive ways to reach the detractors, there is so much polarization. I hope the country grows out of this reaction. I am a registered Republican and I know Republicans can support the arts too.*
- ▶ *Red state strategy/messaging. We stay away from partisan politics but need to be prepared if an issue arises. I haven't missed AFTA since they've gone "quiet." They were doing more harm than good in red states. Their report cards were negative, damaged our relationships with legislators who got "bad" grades.*
- ▶ *Top advocacy concerns are culture wars, book bans, censorship, rewriting of history, fully funding arts and culture programming especially those that connect with non-traditional audiences and marginalized communities.*
- ▶ *Keep offering any help we can receive about how to calm the political waters - it troubles me greatly, this "us or them" situation, and I don't think it benefits either side. Anything they can share with us to keep people talking would be very appreciated.*
- ▶ *How do we navigate these culture wars? How do we support work in communities being targeted by ultra-conservative legislators/legislatures/executive governance? Because we can't discriminate, but we also can't ignore executive demands.*
- ▶ *Our ED seems to be a favorite of the Governor and First Lady, and therefore the agency is receiving support directly from the Governor's mansion (as far as recognition, celebrations, status amongst state agencies). This has put us in a position of obtaining a significant funding increase, which hopefully will continue throughout the tenure of the current governor. Of concern will be organizations working in the DEI/IDEA [inclusion, diversity, equity and access] sphere, and making sure that they're not penalized for uplifting equity and justice, and making sure that there is still diverse representation in all of the arts in the commonwealth.*

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Members were asked how their agency's diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work is going and what, if anything, NASAA can do to help. Responses were wide-ranging. While acknowledging that there is always a need for improvement, a majority of states are excited about the work they're doing to advance DEI and feel that they have made positive headway on the issue. Others are doing

the work, but are not able to talk openly about it or want to be doing more. Still others are experiencing overt obstacles or setbacks.

One of the most frequently cited challenges was around DEI as a **politically divisive** issue. Many members point to the challenges of **communication**—with governors, legislators and staff—and are seeking **alternative ways of framing** their DEI work. States appreciate NASAA's efforts to "strike a balance" and offer different perspectives in helping them advance DEI in their unique environments. Some also cautioned NASAA to be sensitive and help states protect themselves. Members noted the need to **maintain and share updated resources and strategies** that are relevant to various environments and stages of readiness (no "one size fits all" approaches); **continued training and support** that meets states where they are; and **help communicating** about DEI with stakeholders—both the case for it and different ways to talk about it—to help them be most effective in their environments.

## Doing Well with DEI

- ▶ *DEI work is going really well. There is a state mandate to do DEI work and it is work the SAA has been doing. There is a cabinet agency called the Office of Equity. NASAA should keep eye on our DEI work as it could be a model for other states.*
- ▶ *I think we're doing fairly well. Data helps. We're working with our staff and board, and NASAA's leadership has been helpful.*
- ▶ *Our state is doing well. It would be helpful to develop comprehensive approaches to doing DEI work for different regions.*
- ▶ *DEI work is going very well with new funding received. Never get complacent. We could be doing better. Sometimes inequities exist that we never think about. [My state] has thought about the granting process. The panel process...can it be perfected? Bias is there. Maybe have a session on a better way to do the granting process...maybe the panel process is not the way to go. How does it serve SAAs?*
- ▶ *We are doing great. We have diversified fellowships, touring artists, teaching artists, and we are getting good stories out about GOS grantees [those awarded funds for general operating support] reaching new audiences. It is helpful to hear about different ways that we can diversify. For instance, how do we reach lower socio-economic status communities? How can we celebrate diversity in various ways? How do we measure our effectiveness at reaching different audiences? The NEA checkboxes don't measure all types of diversity.*
- ▶ *Ours is for the most part a progressive state that in general embraces DEI work. The state has its own plan, the arts commission has its own very specific DEI plan. We could use some help in rural areas.*
- ▶ *We are doing well, our inclusion and access strategies are hitting the mark. In our projects and organizations, we have had 25% more organizations funded that are small and serve rural communities or people of color. But this needs to be solidified with continuing education. NASAA could provide resources for DEI work for staff, it is a challenge to bring in a DEI person to facilitate.*
- ▶ *We will be appointing someone to take over the accessibility coordinator role, and we will look to NASAA for training. We are doing well, we just adopted a new DEI policy.*
- ▶ *I'm going to say that our agency is doing great. We have a committee in place. We've gone through a training. We're looking at our website and all our application materials. We're working on outreach. We're designing new grant programs based on BIPOC, disabilities, and immigrants. It's a bit cumbersome, but I think we're doing a great job.*
- ▶ *GREAT! In one year we exceeded the measurable goals and trends above the state's diversity averages, working on plans for accessibility around disabilities.*

- ▶ *Just totally overhauled our GOS grantmaking after a full on equity audit. Just went through first funding cycle with that in place. It has roiled the field, but they're working through it. Don't need anything from NASAA now, but will probably want to take advantage of NASAA's data crunching skills at some point.*
- ▶ *I think we're on track. There's now a movement within our state government to really have people in every department be involved in a DEI workgroup. My SAA team got to be the "Guinea pigs" for this, and my staff really embraced it. But it's still a very white state, and there's plenty of explicit and implicit racism and all the other isms there are. So there's still plenty of conversation to go.*
- ▶ *We are working to partner with organizations that will take up the DEIA. The mission of [agency name] is to provide EQUITABLE ACCESS to the arts and to promote the cultivation of creativity. We focus on Equitable Access as it relates to a variety of things. We include race, gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, sexual identity, age, immigration, etc.*
- ▶ *The administration is supportive. NASAA's tools are already helpful.*
- ▶ *What NASAA is doing in diversity and public policy is critical. We are moving in the right direction.*

## Want to Do More

- ▶ *I think our state does DEI more at the checkbox level. If there are strategies to help leaders understand why it is important, and not just that it is important, I think that's helpful. But it has to be something they can buy into, and not framed as they aren't doing enough.*
- ▶ *We are doing very small things currently to reduce barriers to participation where we can. Our new strategic plan (which is finally being released in the next few weeks) centers equity work and I look forward to engaging with NASAA, WESTAF, and other outside consultants to help us identify where we can do better. I think the Equity GAP project in OH was amazing, and I'd LOVE it if something like that were available as modules or something so those of us without deep pockets could do it.*
- ▶ *As an agency there is always a lot to be done but we are working on more. We have addressed DEIA by expanding the 504 [section of Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibiting discrimination based on disability] coordinator. We work with basic support grant applicants to develop DEI statements.*
- ▶ *We're not necessarily national leaders, but we hold our own when it comes to accessibility, so that helps. There is a lot we've been doing already, but NASAA analysis is helping us to look at other avenues of progress.*
- ▶ *I think there needs to be more outreach in some areas of the state (Native, eastern, rural) to show them what opportunities there are. On the SAA board, I'm still uncertain if I fit. The atmosphere feels different or not fun. I'm one of two Natives on the board, so it has been different.*
- ▶ *In the thick of it, committed. Worked hard over the last 4-5 years in diversifying staff with some success. Surprised about how difficult it is to manage a diverse staff and a host of new people who are really smart with lots of opinions. It feels like I missed the part of the conversation about what it means to be a leader in a time of diversification -- change management as a leader in this space.*
- ▶ *We will be completely overhauling our grants process. This is a streamlining, not specifically focused on DEI. But we hope making our programs simpler will also help with DEI.*

## Doing DEI Work under the Radar

- ▶ *We are doing just fine, flying under the radar. Governor and legislators have no issue with this. Finding ways to serve all but not ruffle political feathers.*
- ▶ *We were building up a really good head of steam on this: staff and Council trainings, specific work on capacity building for orgs, including our own regarding supporting BIPOC artists and cultural orgs, etc. We won't back away from the work, but we're now trying to do it "under the radar."*

- ▶ *I feel like what we are doing is going well. The challenge is in not being to communicate it. We have to be under the radar. How to communicate with red state legislators? How to help my staff team understand that translation process, what we choose to draw attention to, and what we don't.*
- ▶ *We try to do the work quietly and not jeopardize things blowing up. We have not launched a big diversity plan, but we are doing the work without drawing attention to it.*
- ▶ *A lot of work is being done but we don't get to say [it aloud]. We have used the words "accountability" and "visibility" in place of DEI. Have had to change and/or scrubbed actual language.*
- ▶ *We are doing it in the background and have to do it without saying we are doing it.*
- ▶ *We don't feel like we can say the words because some state funded organizations are being investigated to determine the amount of funding that is going towards DEI work.*
- ▶ *We're doing OK. The key here is not to use the terminology our field often uses (it has become politicized). Instead, we use language of the conservative-authorizer/listener. Here, inclusion has as much to do with rural isolation and socio-economic barriers.*
- ▶ *It's a challenge. We speak euphemistically about it. People will support inclusion but there are some buzzwords that get politicians here upset. I don't like it, but sometimes I have to avoid using certain words. NASAA seems to understand how to strike the right balance and how make DEI work in red states, and that we want to do things, but not necessarily talk about them in certain terms.*
- ▶ *We are doing the work, although we are not calling it out. In everything that we do, we are addressing all types of barriers. We have increased staff diversity, and we are now 40% African American and 60% white. Our new staff member is in charge of reaching underserved audiences.*
- ▶ *I believe we are doing well, even though we don't call it DEI, we know why we are making substantial changes (people, policy, programs) designed to support those areas. It is about equity for all, in all areas (including rural), and designed to make the arts accessible.*

## **Struggling to Do DEI Work/Navigating Challenging Environments**

- ▶ *Fair at best. We are actually failing miserably. Allyship and collaboration is always important. We are thankful for any voice that can be lend to bad policies. But I understand that can be difficult as a non partisan organization.*
- ▶ *We all have a lot of work to do. As [state] is such a White state, it's really difficult for us to hit those thresholds. It's a process.*
- ▶ *We have to navigate DEI carefully. Having a dialogue about challenges and opportunities is helpful.*
- ▶ *Our state has basically eliminated this [DEI], quietly and behind closed doors. Our agency has been violating its own policies and procedures regarding commission structure, purview, and duties. The IDEA committee was eliminated without proper commission vote and approval. It is impacting the structure of the grant making programs, and walking back years of progress in this arena.*
- ▶ *We are becoming whiter and whiter. Native populations feel as if they're slowly being erased. The NEA's 25% [reporting] rule makes it seem like everything is whiter than it is, because no audiences can hit 25% Native people at any single event. Legislation makes it difficult to do deep equity work.*
- ▶ *The Governor has mandated DEI and anti-bias training. The SAA is delighted but there are some crazy bills out there (bathroom bills, state board of education) that might affect our work. We have some very conservative legislators.*
- ▶ *I don't think there is anything NASAA can do. Originally the Governor was supportive of DEI and now that is changing prior to an election. We do the work without discussing it publicly.*
- ▶ *[State] has a history of protecting civil rights, but it has some of the deepest racial disparities. It's difficult to focus on this due to state politics.*

- ▶ *Fortunately we've not been in controversies now, but waiting to see how the governor will address some of this. He appears to be moderate but not heard from his office on this work. We as an SAA can't be on the cutting edge of this work. We need support in how to handle and manage when the day comes when we need support. Let's look at SAAs and the creative ways other SAAs are addressing the DEIA work. How do we support our staff when we can't do the meaningful work in this arena? Case study examples are helpful.*
- ▶ *Read the papers, watch the news....you all know what is going on in [this state]. I'm an optimist...so my feeling is that "this too will pass".... the question is when?*

## **Cautions for NASAA/NASAA's Role**

- ▶ *I support NASAA's DEI initiatives, but I do fear there is an over emphasis on this issue, especially for Mountain states where things are more complicated politically. Constant reminders of White privilege may not be helpful.*
- ▶ *We are not allowed to do DEIA work, per legislation. NASAA should be sensitive to this as state lawmakers are looking into places where dues are paid. This could hinder their ability to pay dues to NASAA if it was discovered as a primary emphasis of work.*
- ▶ *It's clear the gaps between people [SAAs] are very wide--some folks are way ahead and others have barely begun and there doesn't seem to be any middle ground.*
- ▶ *NASAA should continue to provide resources that are relevant to states while acknowledging that there is no "one size fits all" for all states.*
- ▶ *NASAA needs to equip the states that are struggling with this to assist them to continue to be effective in DEI areas and still feel protected.*
- ▶ *I think NASAA should continue to update or put out a new DEI document with points and successful strategies from other states.*
- ▶ *They must be forward thinking and focused on ways to make the state better, and not about how people haven't done enough and now it needs to be fixed.*
- ▶ *As of right now, I can't think of anything that NASAA can assist with.*
- ▶ *I'm not sure what NASAA can do to help at this time, other than maintaining a portfolio of best practices and a willingness to support change if/when a new regime is in place.*

## **Additional Comments**

Interviews ended with an invitation for members to give any other feedback to NASAA staff or the Planning & Budget Committee. Suggestions relating to specific topic areas are incorporated in other sections of this report; this is a representative sample of general comments offered as interviews came to a close:

- ▶ *Proud to be associated with NASAA. Keeps eye on the prize and that prize is the SAAs.*
- ▶ *I'm very happy with the leadership at this time. That includes both the board and NASAA staff. Keep up the amazing work!*
- ▶ *Working with the staff, the board and people across the states has been wonderful.*
- ▶ *Just a note of THANKS for all you do!!!*
- ▶ *At this point I still feel like I need to learn more. But I'm very appreciative, and I hope they continue to do this qualitative and quantitative work.*
- ▶ *I think it's interesting that you spend the time to get this information. It's impressive that you want to know. Thank you for this input process.*

- ▶ *I'm very happy. If something comes up, I reach out and I hear back very quickly. I'm a big fan.*
- ▶ *It is a privilege to work in this field and with NASAA. I don't think NASAA has ever been stronger.*
- ▶ *I'm a happy camper.*