

Member Interview Findings

This report summarizes the themes that emerged from 117 interviews of state and jurisdictional arts agency (SAA) executive directors, deputy directors, and council chairs conducted by the Nominating Committee in spring 2025. A structured interview protocol was used 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, to hear from members about pressing issues affecting them and to guide NASAA service delivery to respond to state needs.

The questions included:

- What NASAA services are most helpful or important to you?
- How satisfied are you with NASAA? Why?
- What are the challenges facing your agency? What are your biggest concerns at this time?
- How is NASAA doing with federal advocacy work? Are there things that NASAA should do—or avoid doing—in this area?
- How about state advocacy? Are there things NASAA should do—or avoid doing—to help you with state level case making?
- Is there anything NASAA could do to better help you in the year ahead?

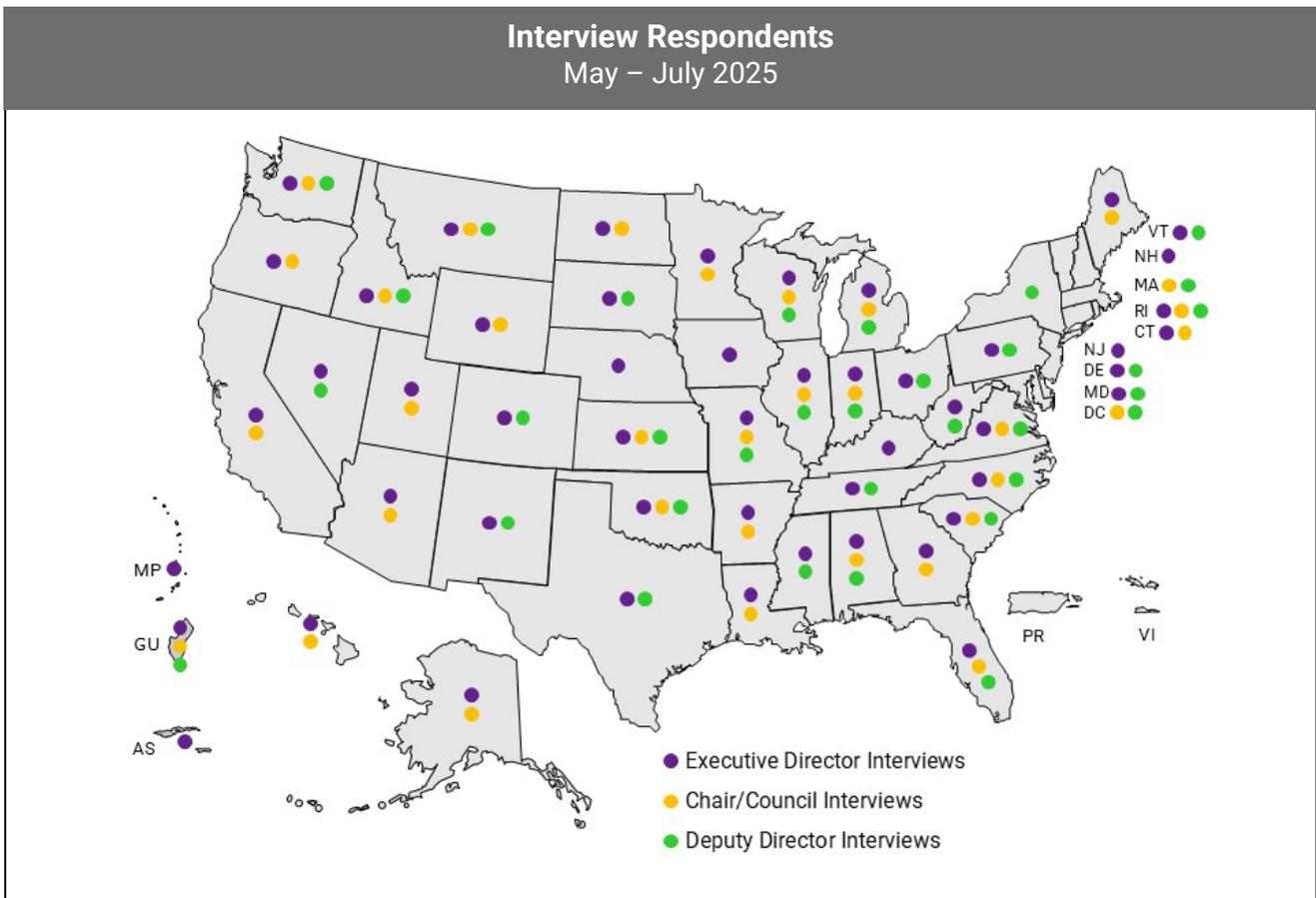
This report synthesizes the results of a qualitative analysis of all interviews. Top-line findings are presented here for use by NASAA's board and committees, to align NASAA's work with the needs of our membership. The NASAA staff also makes extensive use of the data to inform action plan implementation, service delivery and ongoing performance improvement.

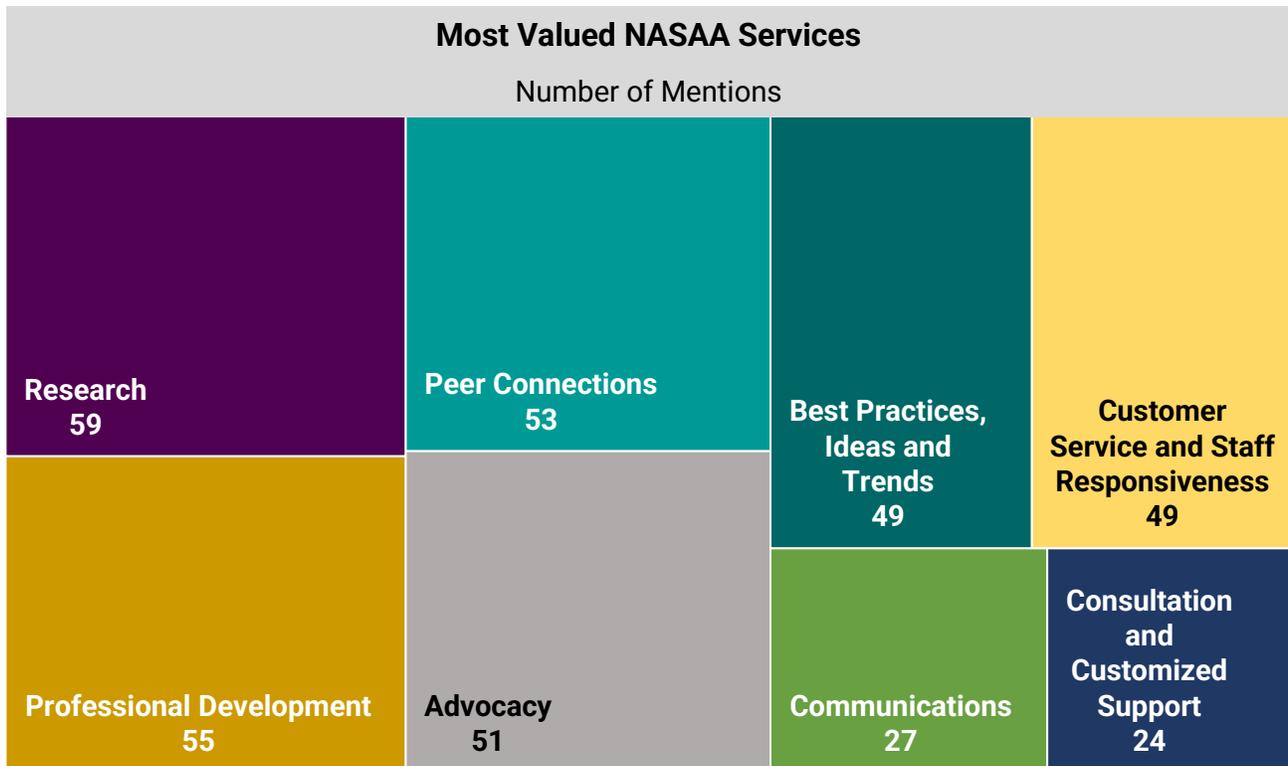
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Member Voices

117 executive directors, deputy directors and council chairs from **54** state and jurisdictional arts agencies participated in interviews. 50 executive directors, 33 deputy directors and 34 chairs/council members took part (the only council members interviewed were those on the NASAA board.) All geographic regions of the nation were reached, as were states representing the full spectrum of state arts agency budget sizes and political contexts. Except where noted [in brackets], all quotations are verbatim responses drawn from Nominating Committee members' interview transcripts.





NASAA Services

Members were asked to reflect on the NASAA services or products that they find most valuable.

NASAA's **research** is highly regarded as critical, digestible and trustworthy. Members especially appreciate data on comparisons across states, per capita spending and economic impact. This information is a vital tool in their advocacy, policy development and planning. NASAA's **professional development services** are also highly praised. In-person events are seen as meaningful opportunities for connection and learning. Participants also appreciate virtual learning sessions as touchpoints for ongoing learning and navigating complex topics, especially in the shifting cultural and political landscape.

The **peer connections** facilitated by NASAA are deeply valued for fostering community, shared problem solving, and emotional support across agencies and roles. Many noted these spaces as "lifelines" and emphasized the importance of connecting with like-situated professionals, especially when navigating stress, change management and political challenges.

NASAA's **advocacy services** are perceived as foundational. Members deeply value NASAA's strong relationship with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Congress and other cultural organizations. NASAA's ability to coordinate shared priorities and deliver a unified voice for SAAs is regarded as a core strength. SAAs rely on NASAA to provide nonpartisan, steady and strategic

communications related to advocacy.

Members highly value NASAA's role in sharing **best practices, ideas and trends**. NASAA's insights help members save time and effort, improve their programs and advocacy, and stay connected to the field.

Members consistently praised NASAA staff for their **customer service and responsiveness**. Staff were described as calm, thoughtful advisors who provide both emotional reassurance and technical guidance during challenging times. The culture of personalized attention and professionalism stands out as one of NASAA's assets.

NASAA's **communications**—particularly email updates, listservs and reports—were appreciated for being measured, clear and timely. The nonpartisan tone and steady rhythm of communications help agencies stay focused and well-informed.

Customized consultations are seen as valuable touchpoints for addressing state arts agency challenges. Members emphasized the ability to call NASAA staff directly for strategic advice, scenario planning or data needs. The high level of responsiveness, contextual understanding and partnership in these interactions fosters strong trust.

Below is a sampling of member comments about services they perceived to be most important.

Research [59 mentions]

- The data! NASAA is incomparable in their ability to provide data, keep it up to date, and elevate the most relevant and important data points. It was very helpful in making clear in our state what the state was doing wrong and right.
- Providing us with important data that we can present to our full council. Powerful messaging within that. The arts council couldn't have done that without NASAA's help. We don't have that expertise on all that ourselves.
- The reports they provide mean the most—the per capita investments particularly.
- Data is a huge piece; as many states' awards fluctuate, being able to keep up with changes makes a big difference to us. Benchmarking us against trends and keeping our council informed is key.
- Access to digestible information, reporting, communications and data across our sector

- The research and reports. The data comparisons and reports on current trends is highly useful when talking with constituents and elected representatives.

Professional Development [55 mentions]

- The webinars they give are timely and informative.
- In-person convenings are incredibly valuable.
- Conferences have been very good... They are strengthening.
- Access to professional opportunities and resources. Most importantly NASAA creates and provides holistic access to the state arts councils and RAOs [regional arts organizations] communities.
- I participate in webinars, go to the conferences. They are important. The ED/DD conference are the most beneficial. I like being able to work more with my peers, we're able to dig in a little bit more on the topics. Being able to meet people face to face is important.
- She was in PR and it was fantastic. Learned about other Arts Councils. She's grateful for the opportunity.

Peer Connections [53 mentions]

- Convenings. I appreciate being with my peers. It's a source of inspiration and comforting to know that you're not alone.
- She appreciates the peer group and notes that many staff utilize their peer groups; she sees great value in the gatherings (assemblies and leadership forums).
- Being a convener & connector amongst all the agencies. Getting us (especially within our affinity groups) talking and supporting one another & collaborating.
- The peer groups and listservs have been great to keep us looped in but also to have the conversations that we need to have.
- Peer convenings. There's nobody like your peers who understand what you're doing and can share challenges and opportunities. NASAA's ability to evolve those convenings has been wonderful and helpful.

Advocacy [51 mentions]

- Advocacy and communication about the federal situation has been stellar. NASAA's bi-partisan approach has been key.
- [NASAA is] our only reliable source of information about what's happening at the NEA, with funding, with congressional and White House action, and so many other things that deeply impact our work.
- Your deep relationships and strategic approach to federal advocacy.
- Working with NEA so closely during these days, critical to keeping them alive.
- The advocacy is most appreciated, the coalition building and strategizing for SAA. I've appreciated the nimbleness of NASAA dealing with US250 and such.
- Right now: Advocacy & their relationship with the NEA, with regionals, with other cultural entities & agencies (Humanities, IMLS [Institute of Museum and Library Services], advocacy network, etc.)

Best Practices, Ideas and Trends [49 mentions]

- NASAA is great in bringing together the best and the brightest from other states.... NASAA is great at providing opportunities for programmatic sharing, federal information and operations.
- The access to "best practices" that we get through the assemblies, group calls, emails, etc.
- Great tools for new board members.
- Reporting and connecting. Data and reports at her fingertips; knowing there are humans there as a resource for information. Connecting SAAs as a resource (listserv, meet ups, etc.), strengthen our network (this is really huge).
- Connections and networks. Our colleagues show us models, programs. National standards are important. Knowing we are part of a larger ecosystem.

Customer Service and Staff Responsiveness [49 mentions]

- Feeling heard and responded to and staff that deliver what they promise.

- The staff have been VERY responsive.
- The accessible staff are amazing—Pam and Kelly and so many others are always responsive to questions.
- When we need to tell the economic impact story, NASAA has provided information. Just being able to reach out to staff with questions, especially Kelly. She is so knowledgeable.
- Incredibly thoughtful and wise staff.

Communications [27 mentions]

- The most important: sharing information on trainings, grants, and emailing or communicating to see what helps. NASAA has been very helpful in disseminating information.
- Information and how NASAA tracks it nationwide to identify trends. The council then tries to pivot anytime they can, looking at state spotlight to see what other states are doing. NASAA Notes [newsletter] and websites, update for council [Report to Councils].
- I appreciate all the communication lately on how to proceed during uncertain time.
- Appreciate NASAA's consistent, clear communication, especially re: changes at NEA. Valuable that the information is nonpartisan.

Consultation and Customized Support [24 mentions]

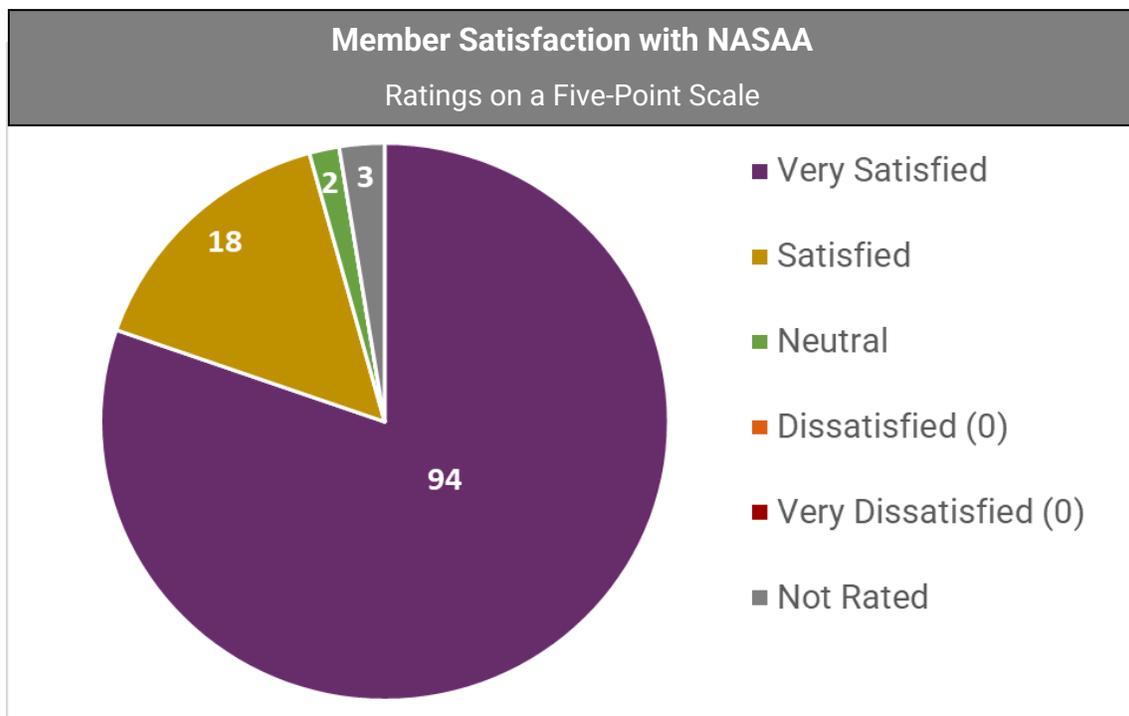
- The access to Kelly and Pam and other staff to discuss, scenario play, share insight, and equip our teams/constituents is tremendous. A 1:1 call provides a safe space to work through intense conflicting situations. An ED [peer group] call feels like a kumbaya moment around a campfire with the best camp counselors who are training us to walk through the woods with blindfolds, listening intently for danger.
- NASAA as a resource when you are having a challenge—there isn't anything they haven't seen. They are so reliable when you need them.
- I talk to Kelly every other week! It's been enormously helpful. We had a threat to our funding early in the session and NASAA was in touch immediately. I always know we can rely on

them as trusted partners.

- Pam and Kelly are deeply wise, calm, thoughtful, and bring a broad perspective to the work on all levels. They enjoyed terrific support from Ryan Stubbs and the research staff, from Katie Hughes who spoke to our Council, and from Marisa and the advocacy team.
- Strong mentorship from Pam, Kelly, and the team for our new ED.

Member Satisfaction and Areas for Improvement

Members were asked to rate their satisfaction with NASAA using a five-point scale. Responses indicate an exceptionally high level of satisfaction with NASAA's services and support. Among respondents who provided a satisfaction assessment, 98% were either very satisfied or satisfied. Two respondents were neutral and no respondents expressed dissatisfaction. Three individuals did not rate their satisfaction.



Along with giving a numeric satisfaction rating, members were asked to share their reasons for being satisfied or dissatisfied with the services they receive. Their feedback included:

- All the information I need, or whenever I need assistance, there's always someone who responds.

- NASAA is committed in serving SAAs through sector reports, data reports, convenings, focus groups, research and advocacy work.
- NASAA is really responsive; self-aware of their role as a resource and connector and proactive about fulfilling those roles as best they can. They understand how and what they do for us, very effective.
- Sensitivity to nuance on the part of the organization and staff. One size fits all doesn't work—NASAA understands this and works hard to customize their offerings.
- They have the ability to shift, to be responsive to state arts agencies and what matters in the moment. So many situations since I've been ED (almost 10 years). I don't think any year has been the same. [NASAA has] been able to respond rapidly and thoughtfully, and realistically, providing comfort, & such support that we just don't get anywhere else.

Some members who described themselves as satisfied with NASAA still offered **constructive criticism** or **additional suggestions**. Although some of these comments are outliers and represent the opinion of just one person, NASAA values all of this feedback because it helps us to better understand our members' perspectives and needs.

Professional Development and Peer Connections

- The conferences are also great but suggested more "advanced" breakout sessions along with the overview sessions. i.e. there is a lot of grantmaking 101 and would like to see some grantmaking 102 (201?) level sessions.
- More of the learning series; more professional development and peer sessions.
- He would love to see voices from outside of the field incorporated in conversations, worries about us being in an echo chamber.
- Opportunities to offset cost of conference attendance. Expensive for small states.

Member Satisfaction By Interviewee Position		
Chairs/Council Members		
Neutral	2	6%
Satisfied	9	26%
Very Satisfied	22	65%
Deputy Directors		
Satisfied	5	15%
Very Satisfied	26	79%
Executive Directors		
Satisfied	4	8%
Very Satisfied	46	92%

- I would be interested to see if NASAA could facilitate a peer group among SAA's who are interested in talking about creative sector policy, at a more systemic level than grants and funding, but bringing in workforce, IP, Cultural Districts, etc.
- Would like to see more cohorts (i.e. subgroups) so that all staff (not just education, folk, etc...) could participate—4 of 9 staff members belong to a cohort—the other 5 don't—this is an uneven approach to professional development opportunities. Suggest groups for "new to state arts agencies" or young people generally or specific disciplines (music, theater, dance etc...), cultural districts.
- For the next NASAA Assembly, the peer sessions are too short—need more time with peers (all staff have shared this).
- Agencies are so different, that it might be helpful to align SAAs by similar type agencies versus roles. Even [within our region], there is a lot of variability. Our region is just one of the things we are.
- Two suggestions: 1. One page chart on website with various peer group sessions. 2. Building in plenty of time at conferences for getting settled at conferences—maybe a half day. Those who attended in PR found things disjointed at the beginning.
- The listserv system is useful, although it may be time to consider a non-email based way to communicate (if privacy concerns could be dealt with) that could allow for threaded messages, a way to return to helpful feedback months or years later, etc. Emails are so transient, bulky, and over-formatted. A streamlined "reddit"-like format that would allow for folks to more easily compare and share opinions or viewpoints or approaches on a given topic would be interesting to pursue. I don't have a platform suggestion but maybe there are places out there that might work.

Communication

- There has been really good communication to the EDs of SAAs and then they send that along to the board members. I haven't seen direct communication from NASAA to the boards—and maybe that's just the policy. Some broad communication from NASAA to the boards might be appreciated.
- Can NASAA do something to connect more with commissioners?
- If you're new to working with [NASAA], it takes some time to dig and find relevant information in NASAA's research materials. It might be helpful to have a finding aid or other

organizing element that would allow quicker access to specific information for new users.

- The services that NASAA offers—I wish they could be a little more succinctly communicated to the SAAs. We know there is lots that they can offer. But the structure isn't as clear as it could be.
- NASAA is less understood by the general population of NASAA...councils and middle managers. The EDs know. Is there a way to be able to make NASAA's connectedness even clearer?
- [NASAA shows an] understanding [of] the nature of the political environment we find ourselves in. [He] understands its difficult and frankly it's not as satisfying to staff as a "Call to Arms" might be. Maybe NASAA should explain that and help to deal with the frustration of people and staff who are looking for more direct action. The measured statements and links to data are a little flat-looking to do things above and beyond that.

Research

- NASAA could have coordinated organized data collection around NEA grant terminations/cancellations... Would hope NASAA would take on a bigger role in this exercise nationally.
- It would be helpful for NASAA to provide more detail in the legislative appropriations report.

Evaluation

- Curious: evaluation, and self evaluation of accomplishments when they look at their next plan? How do they see the current plan? How will the new plan be evaluated?
- I wish NASAA did more to measure outcomes—is it truly strengthening state arts agencies?

Top Needs for 2026

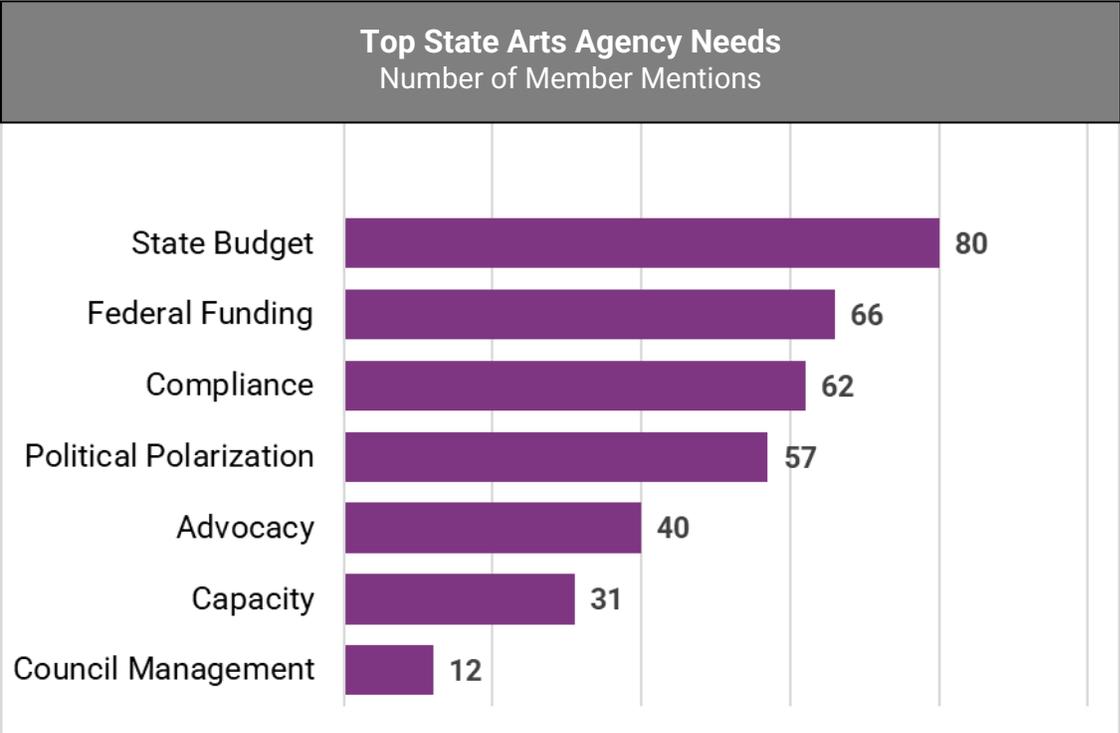
Members were invited to share their agencies' significant needs for the upcoming year and reflect on actions NASAA could take that might be potentially helpful or harmful. Several recurring themes emerged from the data.

State budget uncertainty was a prominent concern. Many members referenced how increasingly **acrimonious political divides** have reduced bipartisan support for the arts in state legislatures,

leading to increased feelings of agency vulnerability. Members are under pressure to justify their work to lawmakers and navigate growing scrutiny of agency activities. Concerns over **federal funding** were also dominant, particularly the uncertainty of NEA funding and its impact at the state level. In addition to seeking NASAA's **advocacy** support to secure federal resources, members also seek NASAA's help in **framing messages** that will resonate across their state's political spectrum.

Concerns about the shifting **legal and compliance landscape** were prevalent. Among them, members noted worries over meeting NEA matching requirements, new federal rules, NEA Partnership Agreement terms and conditions, and the impact of executive orders and court cases. At the state level, increased legislative oversight of agency operations was noted.

Less frequently cited but still notable were **capacity concerns**, including turnover, stress, the potential loss of staff from budget cuts, and not enough staff to meet constituent needs. In addition, several challenges related to **state arts council/commission management** were noted.



State Budget [80 mentions]

- We have legislators that do not recognize the value of art or believe it has no place in government. With those attitudes money is always a concern.
- Our own current legislative body wants to do to the state budget what DOGE has done to the federal budget. We are worried SAA might be drastically reduced.
- Funding—everyone needs more money.
- In addition to budget cuts, believes there's an open hostility to using state or local dollars to fund the arts. Publicly calling into question funding the arts.
- Concerned to maintain arts funding in their state and the legal mandates which protect [our legislative appropriation]. They are stable now but there have been political attacks and probably will be more.
- Stability in funding both federal and state. We are barely able to meet the federal match. We have state leaders who don't see the value of art and government.
- Federal funding and our own state's budget situation. We're in a budget crisis and we've sustained a cut.

Federal Funding [66 mentions]

- Number one is what is happening at the federal level? Not just funding, but what kind of leadership will be allowed? The uncertainty is really challenging.
- Federal Funding. Our state is one of (approximately 27, I think) SAAs with a budget of \$3 million or less. This means the 1:1 match is very slim. This also means any reductions in NEA funding will be a large percentage of our agency budget. So we are asking a lot of hard questions and considering the answers.
- Funding from NEA!
- Funding challenges, national political landscape
- Uncertainty with federal funding and knowing it will be as chaotic for the next three years.
- Funding cuts—hearing from lots of orgs and individuals losing grants, through [the] NEA.

Preparing contingencies has become a priority. With uncertainty in state funding, they are hoping that [federal] funding can stay level.

- Level of funding affects the impact they can have in the state; looking at what's happening at the national level, think of this as an existential threat to the board's funding; hoping for republican support for an increase to state funding; thinking now if state or NEA funding goes away, what's the impact?

Legal and Compliance Landscape

- Waiting for the [NEA] general terms and conditions! We may need NASAA to play a key role here to help us navigate this so we avoid doing anything that would endanger the partnership agreements or our grantees. We are thinking about the ways (for ex. things we are asking about in the final report) that we can take a protective stance with our grantees. There are some grantees that are doing work that would run afoul of the executive orders—how can we protect them?
- One gap for us: our constituents are a little confused regarding the shifting landscape of the NEA's restrictions in this area for grantees—whether or not they should accept these funds based on their programming, what terms mean, etc. We're struggling with this ourselves—perhaps it's an area NASAA could provide guidance or clarity on? Or even who to contact at whatever agency who can clarify, a reference we could share.
- Possible inability to access NEA funds due to unacceptable conditions which may be attached.
- Each year increasingly more difficult to do our grant making without executive interference. And we're far from alone in that.
- Continued legal advice on how to navigate all these federal orders & what it means. Especially for those of us with smaller resources.
- Would like attention paid to recent court rulings (i.e. Supreme Court on reverse discrimination) and how that might affect our operations. Thinks Kelly's session on this matter in San Juan should be repeated and updated.

Political Polarization [57 mentions]

- Political Extremism—especially when looking at what's happening in other states (there are some similar tendencies in their state)—glad they are protected by special tax law.

- Funding insecurity. Ongoing concerns about this. It's every year, and the political climate is intimidating.
- Political climate and funding concerns.
- Primary concern is funding. Challenge of a really conservative state legislature.
- Legislature has become more active in the operations of the agency; they were more hands off in the past. Everything is more political.
- No surprises at the federal level—so many challenges! But at the state level, the way we're housed in government, we have one elected official who is really attacking the agency of late, and the agencies with which we're associated present an ongoing challenge. It's been hard going this budget season.
- Very difficult state legislative session... The extremism has heightened each session and this was the worst. There was a threat about our funding, mostly focused on who the grants went to, but we were able to resolve it.

Advocacy [40 mentions]

- Biggest concerns are probably advocacy and navigating uncertainty at the federal level (we are in good shape at the state level, not a lot has changed).
- Fluctuating legislative issues are a challenge. Their state isn't easy to navigate, you have to be responsive to a constantly moving target as far as the legislature goes.
- Funding—recurring concerns with general support. We have an advocacy group which is starting to increase but we need to strengthen that relationship.
- Obviously if anything were to happen to the NEA, state arts agencies in about half the country would have a difficult time convincing some people in their states to continue funding a state arts agency. The 40% of NEA funds that go to states is incredibly important. (Hats off to Mary Ann Carter for protecting those.) State-level wanna-be mini-DOGE efforts are also detrimental. Very difficult to counter. We have to all be proactive and really need to find allies that might not normally be allies.
- We have a new Lt Governor and we are building that relationship, but he is not as familiar with us (and vice versa) as the old Lt Gov (now Governor). We've been fortunate to have funding...

but we do need to continue to advocate and grow our agency.

Capacity [31 mentions]

- We're small (6 employees bound by code) and we can't do everything, we have to be very specific with what we do. NASAA provides resources that we don't have the ability to do ourselves.
- Capacity is another concern with a small team. Uncertainty keeps them from hiring. Hard to know if they can build new staff members into the strategic plan.
- Staff retention, maintaining competitive salaries, staff growth over time. Issues around serving our constituents related to that come up as well.
- The turnover in our executive directors over the last decade has created challenges.
- Always there is a need for greater professional development—especially with new staff—not a large pool of state arts agency veterans out there to hire from and certainly not in state. Most staff come from arts orgs and NPs and have to learn government.
- Staff Burnout. The result of the funding uncertainties and lack of council support and necessity of planning, replanning, overplanning, and composing the ultimate doomsday scenario (feels a little like covid times to me?) has left the staff tired and lacking clear goals, plans and direction.

Council Management [12 mentions]

- The current governor has made no appointments to commissions, so there are many vacancies now, and they are barely able to get a quorum; currently, they can't report a budget because of NEA.
- Almost all the board member terms have expired—hoping the new Gov will pay attention.
- We are having some issues getting new board members approved.
- Chair and vice-chair serve only one year. Makes it difficult. They can be re-appointed but that doesn't make for smooth leadership. The Council can only suggest people but the Governor appoints. It's not always who they need. She would prefer to be able to select the right person to fill in the gaps.

State Advocacy Needs

Members greatly value NASAA's state level advocacy services, particularly the **data, research and reports** that bolster their case making. There is a desire for NASAA to continue providing **state-specific counsel and support**, as well as tips for **framing strategic messaging**. Additionally, relationships with and the effectiveness of **state advocacy groups** are lacking in some areas, prompting requests for support to enhance these efforts. In contrast, quite a few members (more than in previous years) perceived a **limited role for NASAA** in state level advocacy or expressed cautions about NASAA's involvement in state policy work.

Information and Data

- He knows NASAA is there if needed and regularly uses NASAA research for state advocacy—and it is very valuable.
- Keep providing good information and we decide what use to make of it.
- Some of the reporting definitely helps here. Our authorizers appreciate seeing how our ranking falls out, finding out where we sit nationally, helping explain our work and providing context.
- Resources are useful and it's helpful to hear about the political winds elsewhere. Would like more direct state updates to be front and center—want to hear about similar states (and what they are doing to defend themselves). More info about this prominently displayed would be helpful. This is a real issue they are dealing with right now.
- Definitely helpful in providing tools for advocacy support. But in red states like theirs we're lucky we have an advocacy group that we have a good relationship with. So I share NASAA tools with them. We have to be careful with advocacy ourselves—risk of putting ourselves at odds with governor's office. It's a minefield out there right now. [NASAA is] deftly walking it from my perspective.

State Arts Advocacy Groups

- We have a lack of a strong advocacy group. The groups currently are not aligned and weak ... On different pages.
- Helpful that NASAA has been able to share facts and data to keep state arts advocacy agencies on message. Is there an opportunity to help shape their presence at the Assembly? That could be helpful. (It also helps that Pam is building a relationship with AFTA.)

- NASAA could possibly play a role in helping to build relationships between SAAs and their state advocacy orgs.
- We have a state arts advocacy organization. Suggestion—working with these groups to share information between them. Sharing tips and best practices for them.
- NASAA's partnership with state advocacy groups could perhaps be more carefully thought through; it's sticky sometimes! Hopes that AFTA (under Erin Harkey's leadership) shifting towards more federal advocacy frees up NASAA to focus more on SAA's, less on the arts sector as a whole.
- I'd like to see NASAA build stronger relationships (or more heavily communicated to the states) so it feels as coordinated as possible, and as nuanced as it needs to be. I think that would help state advocacy to connect those layers a little more. We've kind of lacked long-term strategic thinking in advocacy. It's a different skillset for artists/constituents.
- It would be great if NASAA could help us put together an advocacy seminar or webinar for small organizations/communities who don't have huge capacity or understanding how to do it well.... Focus on and uplift rural areas. Important to help red-state agencies (or all agencies whose legislatures are coming after them) to address specific challenges from legislatures and from congress.

State-Specific Counsel and Support

- Just had a joint hearing on the arts. NASAA provided written testimony which was fantastic. All are copy-cattng one another so want information shared. Create a community of practice.
- I think we are still figuring out was advocacy looks like in our state. The hardest part is finding the right group and leader to take that work and run with it. It is a very difficult thing to navigate. I have appreciated NASAA's support for me as I absorb and lead on that front in my position as the outside advocacy work is figured out.
- I would love more one on one support, not sure how but assistance in ways to strengthen partnerships with our advocacy groups, to increase support for our budget.
- I would love some help and coaching to develop a strategy for our state: who to talk with, how to engage the state advocacy organization. I've had some conversations with Pam and Kelly but could use more help.

Message Framing

- There is a need for solid messaging that can be used across states. Feels that a cohesive piece is missing and that she is siloed when it comes to messaging around advocacy.
- Conservative (not necessarily Republican) voices are needed to help inform NASAA strategy going forward. Mentioned the value of Mary Anne Carter's perspective as an example—a conservative who is passionate about the arts. Having those voices in the mix could help inform support for states. Example of something that could be helpful: examples that quotes about the importance of the arts from conservative leaders would be helpful to have at the ready.
- We have no state advocacy organization. For us in red states, for those of us who have governors that adhere [to] the president's lead, it is very important to help us with the messaging.
- Big thing on our mind that I have been thinking a lot about...beyond "why the arts matter" (which has been successful—great research and casemaking)... how to really hone in and have shared messaging about why PUBLIC SUPPORT for the arts matter. I hope NASAA will really double down on this.
- We are living in a time of profound uncertainty; divisive animus. Negative views of the arts are growing. It is a need and opportunity to be a voice. Need to be careful—operate quietly or be loud?

Limited Role for NASAA

- NASAA should avoid getting in front of us but provide info requested. Working in a red state has special circumstances.
- Advocacy is desperately needed, and it has to be an "inside job." Outside influences and information are met with scrutiny and closed doors. We need to figure out this work at the state level.
- He wouldn't want NASAA to come to the state to lead or participate in advocacy unless called. That kind of intervention from an organization based in DC would not be productive.
- NASAA is respectful about checking in before jumping in at the state level. Haven't called on them to do much at the state level, but know that we could if wanted to or needed them to.

They would check with us before diving in, which feels respectful and supportive.

- NASAA probably understands that as a national organization, it has to wait to be asked in to help on specific state issues.
- Nuances of state financing may not be something a national org can always effectively weigh in on. Basically happy with the current arrangement, but thinks there is only so much a national organization can do on myriad local and state issues.
- NASAA should stay out of my state case making.
- Nothing NASAA can do in my state.

Federal Advocacy Needs

Members overwhelmingly trust NASAA's federal advocacy strategy, praising its **nonpartisan** approach and strong **relationship with the NEA**. Many cited **calm and thoughtful communication** as supportive in navigating a complex political climate. The value of federal briefings, political analysis and messaging support is widely recognized. Seventeen percent of respondents felt unaware or unclear about the specifics of NASAA's work in this area. Of those who expressed this, six were executive directors and nine were deputy directors (chairs were not asked directly about federal and state advocacy). Members seemed more familiar with NASAA's federal policy work with the NEA than our activities with Congress. Some interviewees expressed a desire for NASAA's federal advocacy work to be made more visible to members.

Communications

- The public statements that Pam has put out and the internal messaging from Kelly have been so skillful—"tactful" is too understated. It's been a master class.
- To me, they are doing great as far as federal advocacy. Very open, very straight in telling us what's happening, what to anticipate, what to plan for. Giving out information is so important.
- NASAA's measured, calm and strategic communication and efforts during this tumultuous time has been crucial. A different tack as compared to some other cultural advocacy groups; I really value all the NASAA communications...Pam's thoughtful responses are always just so spot on.
- They are doing good job, especially with the behind the scenes dynamics of it. It's easy to

build good advocacy when you have good relationships. Isaac is great...in particular having him long term! He's a trusted messenger too. You can repeat something that NASAA has told you with great confidence...allowing the states to also be seen as trusted messengers. Long term it will be important to rebuild the partnership with AFTA as they are rebuilding so that everyone is on the same page.

- I think NASAA's really good at communicating with SAA EDs... [but] my staff doesn't always know what they're doing. That would build some comfort at less politically engaged levels of the sector. It would increase respect for what NASAA does.
- It's less understood by the general population of NASAA...councils and middle managers. The EDs know. Is there a way to be able to make NASAA's connectedness even clearer without "giving away the store." How does NASAA continue to build to trust...not because it doesn't have it, but just making sure to keep it and grow it.
- I'm still trying to understand what NASAA does on federal advocacy. They are providing clear, consistent info on how they are interacting with NEA and this year's partnership agreements. That has been helpful.

Nonpartisan Stance

- It's been super important that NASAA has bipartisan language and advocacy approach that includes the red states and understands rural conservative constituents as well as the leftie artsy folks. I so appreciate your not approaching advocacy like a fight or a battle or something to win, but like a puzzle and a process and an opportunity for deeper engagement. Calm, inviting approach is so important.
- I really appreciate the balanced, bi-partisan, approach that NASAA has taken in this area. Advocacy is most effective when it's non-partisan.
- The work is strong, and they've continued to make adjustments. It's very important to us that our membership in NASAA is not politically controversial, especially now that we are under the Lt Gov's office. It's a tightrope act!
- They have been good at maintaining neutrality to convey federal information without bias during administration shifts. Cognizant of all those factors.
- Emphasize again to avoid leaning too far left. If that happens that can be harmful to us.

NEA Relationship

- The foresight, wisdom, and calm effectiveness shown by NASAA during the NEA/DOGE crisis is a case study for effective advocacy.
- Glad that you have a good relationship with the new administration. That will be important.
- Appreciates NASAA's focus on being in partnership with the NEA and partners, thinks it will work in the long run.
- Values the depth and positivity of NASAA's relationship with NEA. Guidance provided on what types of advocacy are fruitful. Insights appreciated. They are thoughtful and committed to values and ideology that mean a lot to me but balanced by the pragmatism of the moment.
- Appreciates NASAA's direct work with MaryAnn Carter and the NEA; speaking at the federal level on behalf of state agencies and field as a whole.

Additional Comments

Interviews ended with an invitation for members to give any other feedback to NASAA. 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:

- Just keep supporting the NEA. "Eat your Wheaties."
- Super appreciative!
- Keep up the good hard work in this national environment. Your work and encouragement is important.
- Has been deeply impressed with NASAA's service to its members and the nation at large this past year.
- Just excited about seeing everyone [at the NASAA 2025 Executive Forum] in Omaha.
- Keep up the good work! Don't lose the faith! We appreciate you. Thanks for listening, and for working so hard. This too shall pass.