

Member Interview Findings

This report summarizes the themes that emerged from 135 interviews of state and jurisdictional arts agency (SAA) executive directors, deputy directors and council chairs conducted by the NASAA Nominating Committee in June and July 2024. 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, to hear from members about pressing issues affecting them at the state level and to guide NASAA service delivery to respond to state needs. The questions included:

- What NASAA services are most useful or important to you?
- How satisfied are you with NASAA? Why? Or why not?
- What are some of the biggest challenges facing your agency right now? Is there anything NASAA can do to help? Is there anything NASAA should avoid doing that might hurt?
- What state level advocacy or legislative challenges are top of mind for you? Is there anything NASAA can do to help? Is there anything NASAA should avoid doing that might hurt?
- How is your state doing with diversity, equity and inclusion work? Is there anything NASAA can do to help? Is there anything NASAA should avoid doing that might hurt?
- Do you have any other suggestions or questions about NASAA that you'd want to pass along?

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.

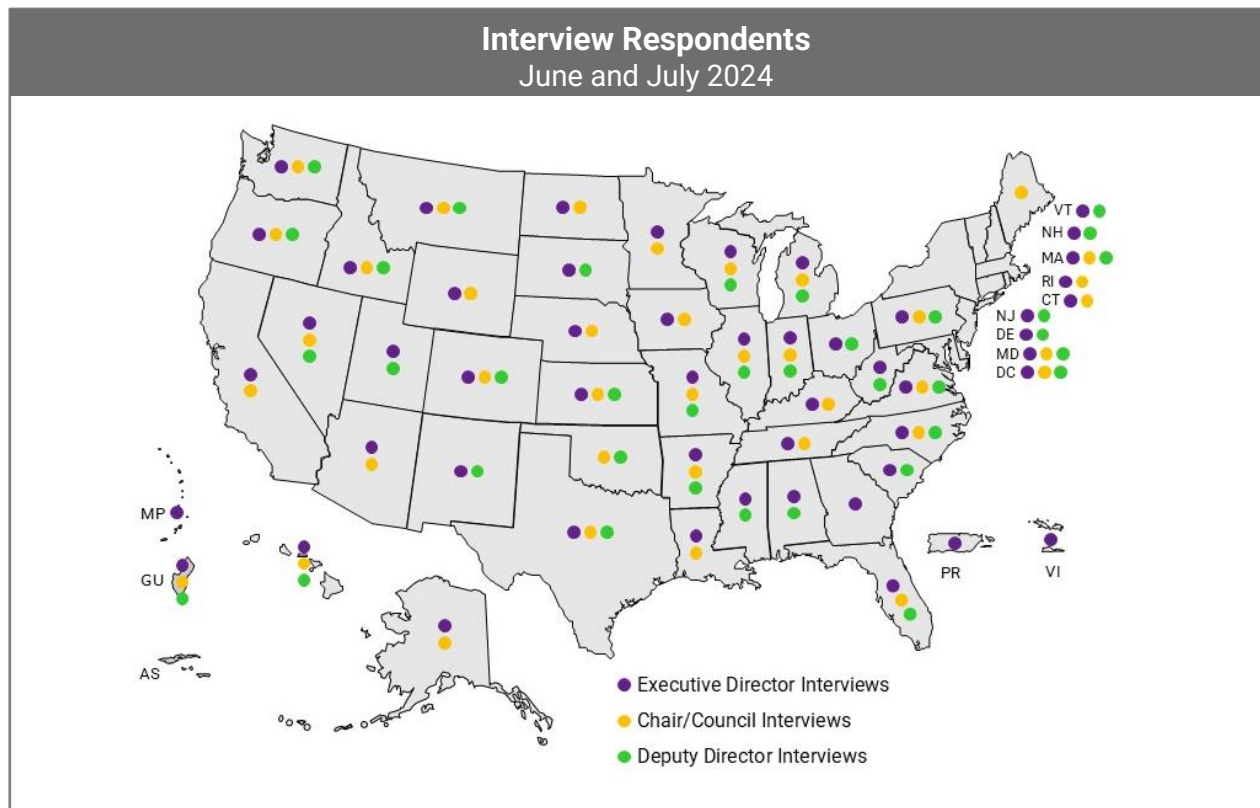
Top-line findings are presented here for use by NASAA's board and committees, to align NASAA's work with the needs of our membership. The NASAA staff also makes extensive use of the data to inform action plan implementation, service delivery and ongoing performance improvement.

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Member Voices

135 state arts agency executive directors, deputy directors and council chairs from 54 state and jurisdictional arts agencies participated in interviews during summer 2024.



Responses included 52 executive directors, 36 deputy directors and 38 council chairs. All geographic 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:

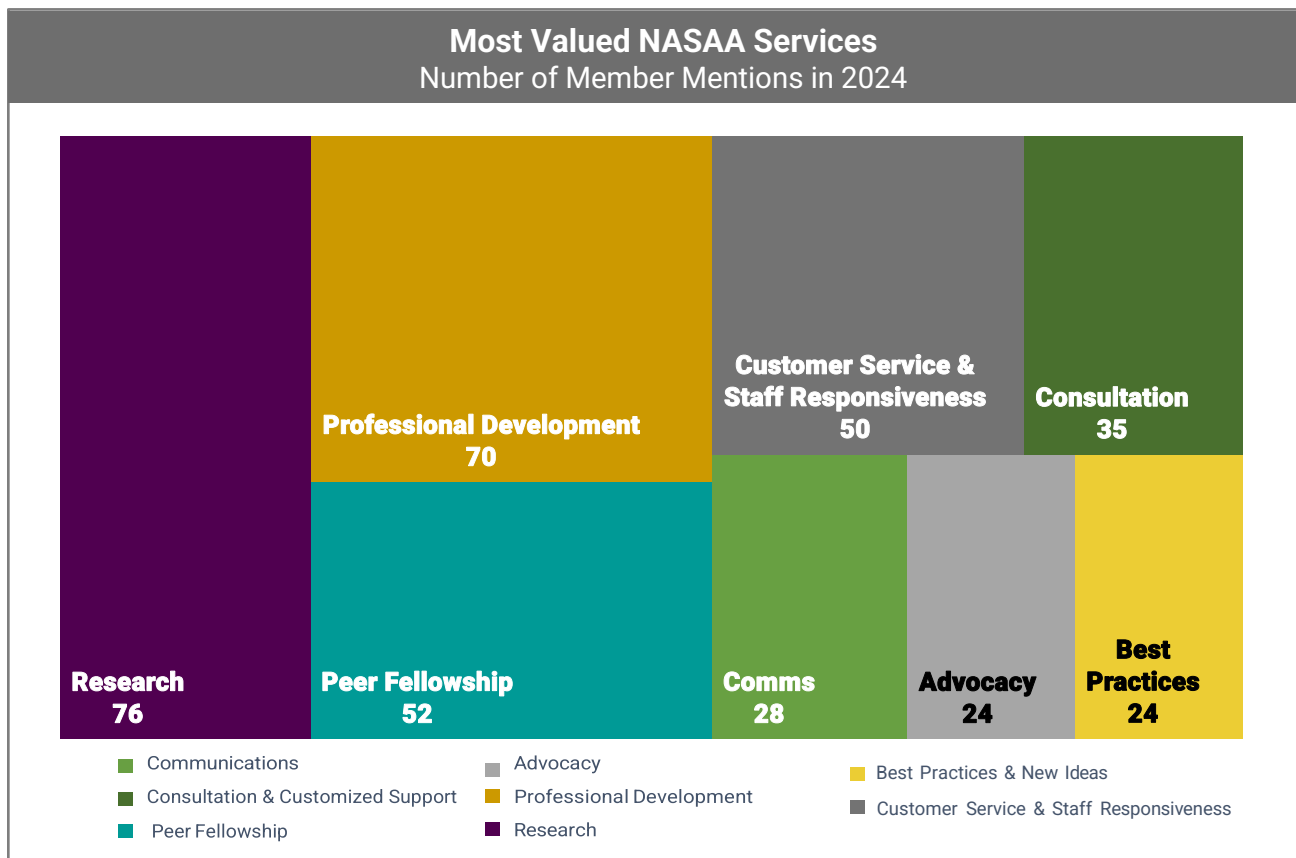
- This is an incredibly thorough process. It allows NASAA to serve its constituency incredibly well by knowing its customers. It's very sound.
- This process of reaching out personally is a lot, but it is sooo helpful. Pleased that NASAA has found a way to make it work. Voices matter!
- Very much appreciate this transparent process.
- This was a "super cool" process- A curiosity-driven inquiry of membership is a great idea.
- I think this process is good. I've never seen this before where board members call around and get recommendations.

- I am very interested and impressed by the depth of this interview process!

Multiple deputy directors and executive directors expressed gratitude for including deputies in the interviews. This group was a new addition in 2024, a change NASAA made to tap the institutional knowledge of deputy directors, who play a critical leadership role, especially in times of agency transition; invite feedback from dues decision-makers who use NASAA services extensively; and broaden the diversity of voices included in the interviewee pool. Comments on the inclusion of deputies included:

- Thanks for adding the deputy directors to the process.
- I am grateful the deputy directors are included in this now. I love NASAA.
- Kudos for including deputies' feedback - we often have a lot of experience and context to add.
- Thanks for adding the deputy directors to the process. They have a practical perspective to operations versus aspirations that is valuable to learn.

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.

NASAA's **research** is widely regarded as the most notable service. Members appreciate the reliable and relevant data provided, especially concerning economic impact information, appropriations data, and comparative analysis of grants and funding. This information not only is a critical tool for strategic planning but also is an essential resource for effective advocacy.

NASAA's **professional development** offerings are frequently highlighted as valuable member benefits. Members expressed gratitude for professional development services that foster innovation and enhance state arts agencies' ability to serve their communities. Interviewees noted that it is difficult to find professional development tailored to the needs of state arts agencies and praised NASAA for offering services with this focus. The opportunity to attend NASAA Assemblies in person was particularly appreciated for providing a crucial space for networking with other states. NASAA's virtual Learning Series sessions were often commended for their accessibility, relevance and high quality.

The **peer connections** facilitated by NASAA are also recognized as a critical function. Members emphasized the importance of these interactions for exchanging knowledge, addressing common challenges and building a supportive community. They value the chance to engage with their peers, finding these connections both professionally enriching and personally meaningful. Executive and deputy directors offered positive comments about the new Executive Forum convening model that NASAA initiated in 2023.

The personalized support offered by NASAA through **customized consultations** and **responsive customer service** received many mentions. Members expressed gratitude for the approachability, expertise and responsiveness of NASAA staff, and many shared stories of how NASAA's tailored information and technical assistance were instrumental in helping them surmount challenges. Whether providing strategic guidance or moral support during difficult times, NASAA's role in providing personalized service is recognized as a key benefit.

NASAA's **communications**—email updates, peer group listservs and the website—are viewed as significant resources. Members appreciate the clarity and timeliness of NASAA communications, saying they help them stay informed about national trends and state-specific developments. In particular, the peer group listservs were mentioned as a valuable platform for ongoing dialogue and idea sharing. Members also acknowledged NASAA's role in sharing **emerging issues and best practices**. Whether exploring new programmatic trends, advancing equity initiatives or navigating policy questions, interview comments indicate that NASAA provides valuable insights that help members adapt to a changing environment.

Advocacy is another critical area. Members recognized the importance of NASAA's federal advocacy efforts, which help to ensure that the arts remain a priority at the national level. Additionally, NASAA's guidance on state level advocacy strategies, particularly around messaging, was highlighted as a significant resource.

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

Research [76 mentions]

- The research that NASAA leads and shares is incredibly important to the advancement of the field.
- Data collection is vital. Numbers are key. NASAA serves as a beacon of information.
- The [NASAA] research and data is as good as it gets.
- The data collection showing the impact of the arts ties into advocacy in our state.
- We have had a tough budget year, so for NASAA to provide real-time data has been a great help.
- Impressed with NASAA info. Love all the data and have used it.
- I really appreciate the data and how [our state] compares to other states.
- Not a week goes by without someone from our agency accessing information, data, or another resource.
- I used NASAA when looking for new executive director. They gave me all the information I needed to start a search.
- The policy briefs - use them all the time. Also the state comparisons and creative sector impact data, and all of the other data that Ryan or Eric or Declan provide on request.
- Help with the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grant reporting. Also helpful on using data to help us tell our story.
- The creative economy profiles, the arts and satellite production report. Also the corresponding services that the research team provides. Research on other agencies on various topics.
- The research is very useful, particularly the topical papers (lately the council board article that we shared with the board and will be in future board orientations). Funding Choice Points (the update, thank you!), the data you collect on our funding distribution.

Professional Development [70 mentions]

- The conference and all the convenings are excellent and valuable.
- I totally appreciate the conferences, and I'm not even a big conference person.
- Love the Assembly and I'm excited to go to San Juan.
- The [Assembly] conference is great because it is so focused on the operations of state agencies and the work of staff.
- The professional development and support offered to state agencies is invaluable because it is hard to find [offerings] elsewhere that [are] specific to our work.
- We do attend the annual assembly, which is really important to us because it gives us the opportunity to meet so many people from across the country and other agencies.

- For our agency the most important are the Assemblies- that was my first experience with NASAA. Unfortunately, our state agency doesn't invest in professional development enough, so it can be a struggle to make that case. Lucky this year that we able to go to PR. That is so helpful!
- I attended my first NASAA Assembly and felt I was part of a family - the engagement was profound.
- I went to the NASAA assembly in Kansas City. It was super cool. I appreciated how there were sessions that helped break down silos and didn't presume that someone would have background info. Lots of opportunities for me to learn- a good orientation!
- Those regular meetings and the executive director pre-conference [New Executive Director Roundtable] are terrific. Deputy meetings are always valuable when I can attend. The biannual conference is also very great.
- Really enjoyed the format in Santa Fe and the convening opportunities for leadership.
- Last fall's NASAA convening of executive directors and deputy directors was very helpful.
- Most useful for me are the professional development opportunities and conferences that facilitate information sharing among staff. These are insightful opportunities to discuss with other members how they navigate their grants and problems or challenges they encounter. And some solutions they have found work for their art agency.
- I value the monthly webinars that anyone can join to get a sense of best practices – we watch them together and discuss afterwards. This helped newer staff members get a sense of what is happening in the field and opportunities for change.
- Learning Series sessions are fabulous and always relevant to our agency activities.
- Webinars - signing up for as many as I can. I find those valuable. The topics are what we are thinking about.
- I really appreciate the learning series that you all have been offering. Great range of topics, so useful! I really value them and I know our colleagues do too!

Peer Fellowship [52 mentions]

- SAAs need the convenings that NASAA puts together and need to be together to talk about their common issues.
- It has been really helpful over the years to network and I am very excited about Puerto Rico. It helps out knowing that we aren't out here alone on a desert island!
- NASAA is a "gathering space" that allows the opportunity to exchange knowledge and culture with leaders from across the nation.
- [I value] the connection with other agencies to be able to discuss issues or topics in a supported and safe way.
- It has been really helpful for our staff to be in peer group meetings and to be able to get a broader perspective on what is going on in other states.

- For me the most important service has been the convening. Coming together with peers from other states has been so valuable - having someone that completely understands.
- Always greatly value the convening NASAA does, especially in our hybrid modes. Very much needed for community and sharing resources.
- The convening of the cohorts [is] so valuable. Very grateful that Eric and NASAA stepped forward to support the Community Development cohort after the AFTA [Americans for the Arts] situation got bad.
- Deputy Director convening in Santa Fe was a revelation - eye opening about the executive director experience/perspective, in a super safe space. Great to connect with other smaller states whose budgets can't support larger initiatives with targeted populations; find solutions from others who have similar experiences.
- Convening of executive directors helped influenced my work, [it was a] great way to meet colleagues.
- Having the summits has been really helpful, as it's the only time one can speak with one's peers. Anytime we can gather our fellow executive directors, that's extremely helpful.
- The network is key. The network of executive directors is invaluable!
- Really appreciated the session for new chairs and council members.
- The annual meeting of deputy directors at the in-person conferences and every other month zoom call with the deputies.
- The affinity groups are helpful, glad that [NASAA] helps to facilitate them.

Customer Service and Staff Responsiveness [50 mentions]

- NASAA is very responsive.
- Extremely responsive. NASAA is paying attention to what their members need.
- It is refreshing to have access to such personable, open, and responsive staff.
- This is probably a boring answer, but what I like is having access to everyone on staff. They are all professional, access is easy in reaching out to people, feedback is great.
- The staff is so valuable and experienced. Every time I have reached out to them for help they have been great.
- Staff expertise is really useful. It's great to have the ability to call on NASAA for help.
- NASAA seems to be there exactly when we need them, which I think shows engagement and continued evolution.
- NASAA does a great job of listening to us in the field. They get our input and then bring back what we've talked about soon after. This is far and away is the most valuable service.
- NASAA's staff availability and willingness to help and be a resource is amazing.

- The team is incredibly responsive. When I ask them questions, even if they don't have it, they will find it.
- The NASAA staff are always receptive and eager to help. It's nice to know there's always someone to ask specific questions and who is willing to supply answers.
- Approachability and responsiveness. Collection of individuals with deep knowledge and experience. Very passionate and caring; dedicated to their work and it shows.

Consultation and Customized Support [35 mentions]

- I value being able to call NASAA to ask for advice on issues.
- [We count on] the institutional knowledge and collective wisdom of NASAA, especially when difficult issues arise.
- I have asked a lot of questions over the years and have been given a lot of useful information- sometimes it is customized, specific requests and they are always on top of it!
- The custom services that are offered by NASAA give us someone to call for help with a broader perspective.
- Over the last year, [our agency] partnered with NASAA to do data and qualitative research in the re-designing of our grant programs. We have nothing but high praise for the collaborative work with NASAA.
- [I value] the ability to reach out to staff member to get a question answered or have a thoughtful conversation. [NASAA has an] understanding of the human aspect of our jobs and provides a wrap-around support system.
- We launched a strategic plan guided and assisted by NASAA. There had been nothing like the strategic planning previously at [our agency] and the level of professionalism is reflective of the assistance from NASAA.
- Kelly Barsdate has been helpful in the past couple of years, her insight on how to handle things, be graceful under pressure through their changes. She was fantastic in saying things in a way that any group can understand when working with a difficult chair.
- Very helpful to get support from NASAA staff. Kelly and Ryan have been great at assisting and answering questions about things like restructuring, advocacy work, and cultural districts.
- Mentioned guidance from Pam on issues - especially in terms of disaster response. Pam's experience with Katrina was very helpful.
- I'm in my first year and appreciate all the amazing support that helps me to be good at my job. NASAA has helped us refine our funding goals and enhance our reporting design and [determine] how to best present this information graphically.
- NASAA is the support system it is intended to be.
- So appreciative of [NASAA] outreach as a new ED.

Communications [28 mentions]

- I read the information that comes by email, and I think it's important work.
- Reading up, getting NASAA's newsletter.
- The Newsletter is great and so important to see what other states are doing. All the research on the website is really helpful and covers so many topics of interest.
- The listservs always have valuable conversations. I like having the website and the newsletter because they are wonderful resources and keep us connected - NASAA provides an exchange of information and is a conduit between data and us.
- The ability to go online for info is key and so helpful.
- Marketing and communications very helpful - shout out to Sue.
- NASAA's website is a resource for new employees.
- I look at NASAA's website when I need information.
- The website has an incredible amount of interactive data and research that is very useable for us.
- Listservs and update newsletters are valuable to keep up to date on other ideas.
- The amount of information that is available on the website to review is useful.

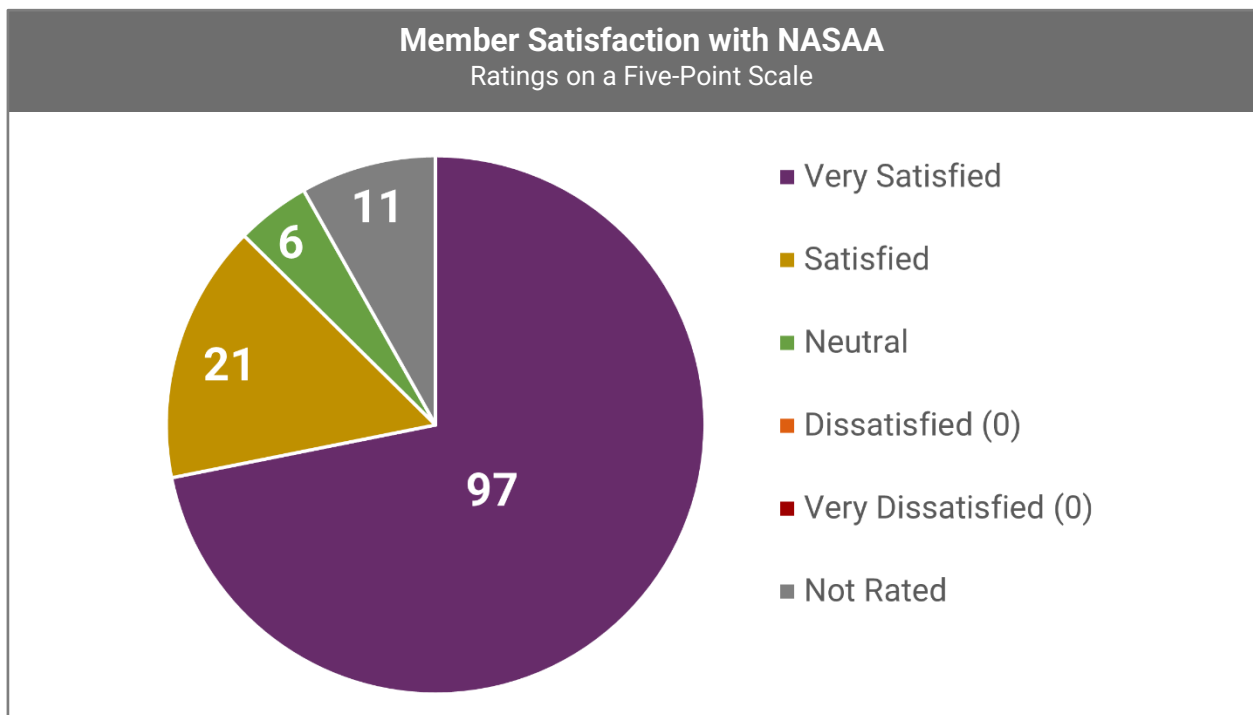
Best Practices and New Ideas [24 mentions]

- I can go to NASAA to learn what other states are doing in best practices - especially on DEI and advocacy issues.
- I get new ideas about programs and practices.
- I really enjoy understanding the work of other states.
- Learning from other agencies.
- NASAA is where I turn for information about surrounding states, workforce data and organizational development.
- We just had NASAA review our award letter to ensure it follows best practices. I've had other conversations with Kelly on where we are positioned in the government and how other states do it.
- Nearly every time I have a question about some issue facing my agency, there is some research or best practices already available through NASAA.

Advocacy [24 mentions]

- The advocacy is extremely important to me, especially being so far away from DC.
- I really appreciate NASAA's federal advocacy voice.
- Arts advocacy at the national level is very valuable.
- The public policy updates inform our commission & funding opportunities.
- Advocacy on behalf of the field is important to our continued support.
- Appreciate NASAA's steadfast advocacy for the arts field.
- The messaging guide has been helpful.
- NASAA is always a few clicks away if I have questions from a state legislator.
- We use them [NASAA] to make the case with legislators.
- I have total trust of the research info. I receive that I can share it with my legislators. Incredibly important!
- I use the framing of how we go about making the case.

Member Satisfaction and Areas for Improvement



Members were asked to rate their satisfaction with NASAA using a structured five-point scale. Council chairs, executive directors and deputy directors reported exceptionally high levels of satisfaction with NASAA's services and support. **Among respondents who provided a satisfaction assessment, 95%**

were either very satisfied or satisfied with NASAA. Six respondents were neutral, and no respondents expressed dissatisfaction. Eleven individuals did not rate their satisfaction (newcomers to the field or chairs who are not yet familiar with NASAA's work).

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 general feedback included:

- THE single organization that serves SAA's. Can't imagine my job without NASAA.
- I don't know if I could do my work without NASAA support.
- There is no other organization that can better serve us or understand our challenges.
- Extremely satisfied. NASAA is extremely accessible. Very responsive. Very knowledgeable. Sensitive to different state politics and situations. Been highly supportive.
- You get us. And as a result are able to provide for all the SAAs, no matter what our focus, political circumstances, or financial reality.
- NASAA is incredibly effective and high functioning, NASAA remains right sized, focused, and responsive, and provides tangible benefits for its members.
- NASAA has an excellent understanding of its essential place in the arts ecosystem and is a great practitioner of the art of the possible.
- What NASAA does feels relevant. Always one step ahead. People are just wonderful! Colleagues and allies.
- NASAA has their ear to the ground and are always trying to be a support mechanism for the field. To a field that has a wide range of needs.
- NASAA is a great model of a service organization that is able to serve its constituents in a holistic approach with an interconnectedness to issues and needs that face state government agencies.
- I have felt connected and supported by the staff and my colleagues.
- The willingness of every team member to provide services and be responsive is great.

Member Satisfaction with NASAA		
By Interviewee Position		
Position	Rating	
Chairs/Council Members		
Neutral	2	6%
Satisfied	7	19%
Very Satisfied	27	75%
Deputy Directors		
Neutral	2	5%
Satisfied	8	22%
Very Satisfied	27	73%
Executive Directors		
Neutral	2	4%
Satisfied	6	12%
Very Satisfied	43	83%

Percentages exclude 11 "Cannot Rate" responses from 10 Chairs and 1 Executive Director. Zero respondents provided a rating of "Dissatisfied" or "Very Dissatisfied."

- I believe NASAA serves an important role in supporting the state arts agencies throughout the country. I am very satisfied with NASAA's encouragement for knowledge sharing and advocacy of promoting the arts and culture. I think having an organization that unites these agencies in a common goal is crucial and important. For that I am satisfied with the work NASAA does.
- No moments of questioning NASAA. Always there when needed.
- I see the organization genuinely listening, responding to the field, acknowledging when mistakes are made, and consistently doing the work. The output and quality of what they share with the field are very high, especially compared to other organizations with larger budgets.
- Appreciate NASAA's steady, excellent, professional service, and steadfast advocacy for the arts field.
- Almost from 1st day on the job, I have felt like I had a hand-in-hand relationship with NASAA. I have understood NASAA's role with SAAs and defending NEA funding in congress.
- Incredibly impressed with NASAA with communications, advocacy and staff.
- The staff and response time when situations are urgent.

While no outright dissatisfaction was expressed, some members noted factors that could improve their experience with NASAA. These included **challenges in meeting diverse state needs**, and **insufficient engagement opportunities for some staff groups**.

- I understand it is tough serving an entire country. It can be difficult to be something to everyone. They tend to swing to hot topics that don't apply to everyone.
- They had commissioned some research, and it didn't turn out how they expected. It was a surprise that the quality of the work wasn't better than it was. It wasn't awful. The deliverables weren't 100% on the mark.
- There are other colleagues who don't have as many opportunities with NASAA. Public information officers and deputies are my groups, and I take advantage of the connections. Other staff don't have the same touch points and resources. I am satisfied but think there are other staff who could benefit more.
- Affinity groups are not available for all members of their staff, which creates an imbalance within their agency.

Some members who described themselves as satisfied with NASAA still offered **constructive criticism** and **additional suggestions**. Some members emphasized the need for political sensitivity or expressed feeling alienated by NASAA's diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work. A few members had tactical suggestions for services. NASAA values all of this feedback because it helps us to better understand and address our members' perspectives and needs.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

- NASAA's emphasis on DEI makes her feel isolated and ignored. She feels more than unsupported, she feels placed in jeopardy. It's disheartening.
- We're "waist deep in the water of DEI" with a rocky landscape. Without a clear understanding of the "why" behind NASAA's DEI work, there is concern.
- NASAA needs to be as careful as possible with the very necessary DEI work. It is a challenge.
- It's hard to do the [DEI] work in a state that constantly undermines that work/makes it illegal. This is not very often recognized by NASAA. It's hard to be affiliated with an organization that is advocating for us and using DEIA as regularly as they [NASAA] do. It would be helpful to have recognition of the work of red state SAAs. Would like to feel less like their state is not demonized. It would be helpful to support our work and validate it.
- Coming from a conservative state, we felt like NASAA was always focused on DEI, which made conservative states uncomfortable. But it has gotten better. We went to an event in Baltimore where people wanted us to sign something to acknowledge white privilege. This offended several people. But it has gotten much better.
- There needs to be a deep understanding of what some states, like mine, are experiencing. I understand the goals and logic of diversity on the board in all ways. But ultimately it [board composition] should be about what experiences they bring. Experienced leaders are valuable given all the knowledge they bring to the table.
- The biggest thing for NASAA is to stop using words that can't be used in states like hers. For NASAA internal work that's fine, but it doesn't jive with where they are as a state.

Political Sensitivity

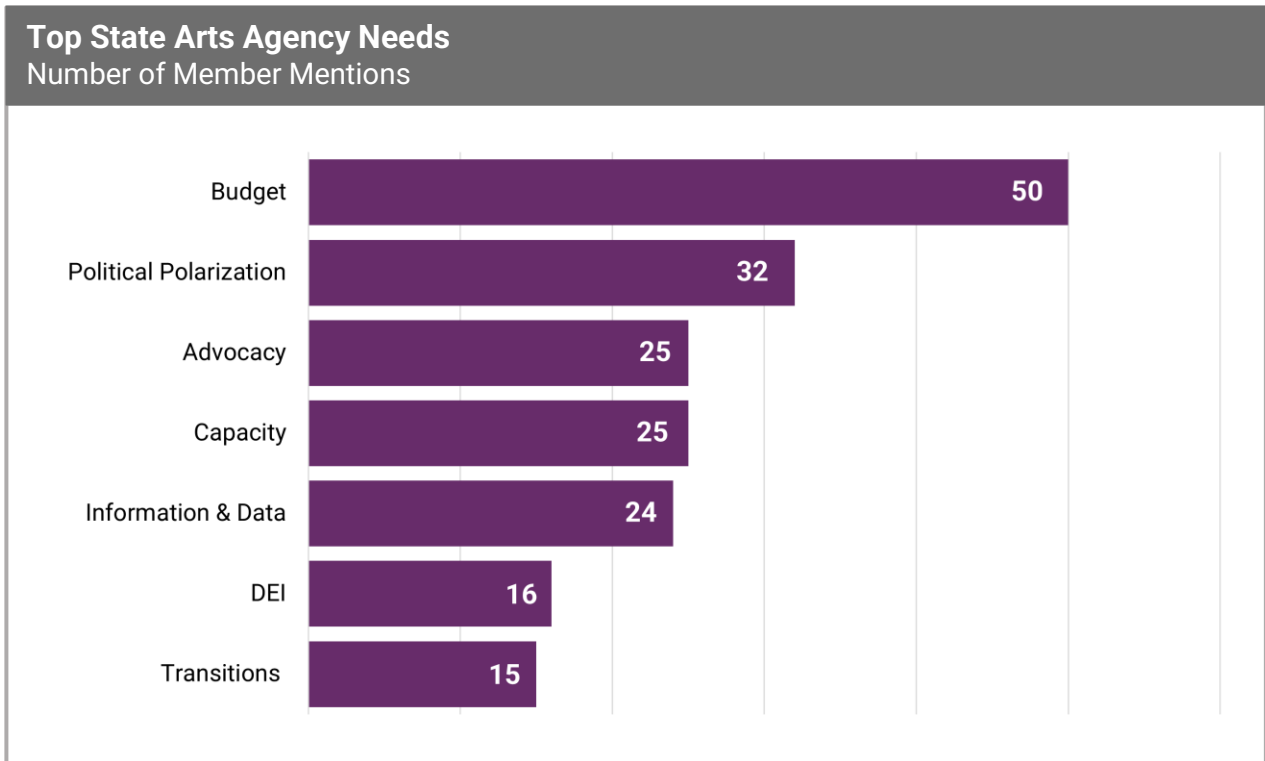
- All have to be respectful of opposing opinions - and that means NASAA, too. Divisiveness will pull members apart. Bottom line: There is a concern of "where" NASAA is related to my state and other "red" states.
- I attended one NASAA convening and was turned off by political divide/lack of representation of conservative views. Glad that finding more conservative voices is a priority recruitment category for NASAA.
- We can't piss off the governor, so we don't want NASAA to put anything out there publicly that would upset the governor's office.
- NASAA could ensure or prioritize states with a wide variety of political viewpoints.
- An awareness of the political environment in states is important for NASAA.
- It is best for NASAA to stay in the middle of the road and provide best practices.
- Need to acknowledge that different states have different challenges.

Other / Miscellaneous

- Why did NASAA pick Puerto Rico during hurricane season? It puts a big time and financial commitment and a lot of investment onto states.
- I'd like to see more community building between executive directors and dedicated professional development for executive directors.
- Executive directors need to get together more often. Maybe something outside the year conference and without the NEA on the call? Another time or two for executive directors to gather.
- The deputy meetings are not significantly useful. People talk about how they all have different jobs. Santa Fe was great, to mix and meet people who have similar roles. Deputies are all so different, maybe they aren't an affinity group all on their own. Breakout groups and/or more opportunities to have more topical conversations [might be more useful].
- It would be good to have cohorts for other disciplines. This helps new employees.
- Draw more people in through topical affinity groups and nurture the newer SAA employees.
- I love NASAA but need to justify my dues to others. A more itemized breakdown would be very helpful.
- Unfortunately, we live in an age where marketing is important. Spend more money on marketing NASAA.
- I'm not sure what capacity NASAA has. Can we request research subjects? Where do we go to get in line for that? Also, how visible is NASAA? The website looks humble - not super jazzy. This was said with a positive tone.
- Recorded conversations make it hard to speak candidly about problems.
- It is difficult to participate because of differences in the time zone.
- The only thing I could suggest is some sessions/trainings directed to new leaders at state arts agencies to ease transitions and orient them to NASAA and what it offers.
- The biggest challenge is to have the time to take full advantage of all the resources, data, and services that NASAA provides. Small staff does not allow for a lot of extra time beyond daily work.
- Would like a dictionary of jargon from the sector: creative placemaking, creative economy, creative community, arts and health.
- June-July is the busiest time of year, so another time would be best for scheduling this interview work.
- This is the busiest time of year, so a winter-early spring timeframe is easier to accommodate/schedule a process like this.

Top Needs for 2025

NASAA members were invited to share their agencies' significant needs for the upcoming year. They also were asked to reflect on actions NASAA could take that might be potentially helpful or harmful. The feedback provided an overview of the critical challenges anticipated for 2025, influenced by both persistent and evolving issues. Considering the diverse nature of each state and the variety of situations and needs among members, the responses varied widely. However, several recurring themes emerged from the data.



Budget constraints were the predominant concern for numerous state arts agencies. These financial challenges—ranging from matching National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funds to coping with the effects of flat funding or budget cuts—are intensified by a post-COVID-19 pandemic "fiscal hangover."

Political polarization continues to be an urgent issue facing state arts agencies. Members report grappling with a divisive political landscape that impacts their operations and strategic initiatives, particularly in relation to equity efforts. In addition to seeking NASAA's **advocacy** support to secure federal resources, members also seek NASAA's help in framing robust arguments that resonate in a politically divided atmosphere at the state level.

Many states have reported problems with **capacity** and turnover, facing challenges with overstretched or inadequate staff and lack of competitive compensation. Other agencies are facing **transitions** on the board or the executive team or with long-tenured staff. Members expressed the need for **information and data** that can help with advocacy as well as comparative statistics and information on best practices. **Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)** is a priority for some states and a peril for others. Members look to NASAA's guidance to frame and implement DEI initiatives in politically sensitive ways.

Budget [50 mentions]

- Increasing our budget is top of mind - the single biggest challenge.
- Trying to get more funding is our biggest challenge. Our agency has not had an increase in 20 years.
- They had lots of money during COVID years. Now it's not there and organizations ask, "Where's the money?" More cuts from the legislature just yesterday.
- Funding issues are critically important. They cut back on what the commission was receiving.
- The biggest issue is ensuring our NEA match.
- We continually get an increase in our money from NEA, but getting the match is often tenuous/uncertain. It's scary.
- One of the biggest challenges we are facing is providing resources to ensure the health and sustainability of the nonprofit arts sector. Post-pandemic and post relief funding, arts organizations are struggling financially.
- The post-COVID "fiscal hangover" is a real challenge for the arts sector.
- Flat funding for our general appropriation from the legislature limits our grant budget.
- [Our] parent agency is scooping some funding for overhead.
- When I joined the council twenty years ago, funding was over \$4 million. This year it's \$1.8, up from \$1.6, for 4 million people in [the state]. That is not enough.
- We are currently facing a funding challenge in the area of salary and personnel costs. We've had to adjust other program and grant funding so that more money can be allocated to cover the salary increases approved by our legislature. Funding is always a struggle and a juggling act that we are constantly dealing with.
- I think for us the biggest looming issue is the potential fiscal cliff for the upcoming biennium and the uncertainty of a new governor.
- [This state] is a great funding desert. Very little local funding.
- The current governor frontrunner has expressed desire to cut state government, so funding for the state arts agency is unknown and potentially in jeopardy.
- Had a rough legislative session and major cuts to the agency were in play (up to 90%). Would like NASAA ideas and guidance in navigating rough political weather.

Political Polarization [32 mentions]

- I have a difficult political climate in my state that colors all my decisions and concerns about future funding.
- Politics is one-sided.

- Red state issues. DEI is on the cutting block. [We need] sample talking points.
- The biggest challenge is the red/blue [political dynamic]. NASAA can help by finding a way to better understand the issues of red states.
- [Our biggest concern is] finding a champion who is aligned with the majority party.
- We are in a highly politicized environment and are always feeling like a crisis could happen anytime. We don't have a crisis communications plan. Currently have good legislative support but are aware that could change at any minute.
- The biggest challenge is political climate and the upcoming election.
- The political environment and emergence of the ultra-right, conservative caucus in the state brings the potential for us to be zero funded.
- The politics here are such that the governor's administration is interfering in our work in useless and arbitrary ways. Being able to navigate that has been really tricky.
- The biggest challenge is the political climate and the legislation that makes it a bit difficult to do our work and at the same time respect the law/new polices.
- The threat of being weaponized by polarizing political figures.
- The biggest challenges are dealing with a conservative legislature (likely to become more so), could have an impact on other work SAA does around equity if not budget.
- A brand new governor just came into office in the beginning of the year. So far they came out unscathed. They are not a line item in the budget, so that helps. [The governor] took over control of all boards and commissions, so that impacts them, but so far they've stayed under the radar.
- The culture war was framed as "us against them." So NASAA staying away from that kind of rhetoric is important.

Advocacy [25 mentions]

- NASAA provides useful information and arguments [on funding issues].
- We are working to find the best solutions by working with our advocacy organization to support our arts organizations at this critical time.
- NASAA's continued advocacy is appreciated.
- NASAA's continued advocacy at a national level is crucial, especially given what's possible with the next administration.
- NASAA should continue to testify before Congress as it relates to NEA funding and engaging in the national conversation around housing challenges.
- Crafting language for advocacy we can repurpose is really helpful. We use a lot of the federal advocacy case making info from NASAA and appreciate their help being available for strategy conversations.

- Our advocates need to do a better job of communicating the value of the process and the grants all the way up to the top at the governor's office.
- There is a lobbyist via our regional arts organization and a new arts advocacy group is getting established. Are there NASAA resources or support around how to address that?
- Biggest challenge is making a case with legislators. NASAA providing information is helpful. NASAA could be helpful in engaging our state Advocacy group.
- NASAA could provide more advocacy related to local government.
- We're always interested in seeing how other states manage their political process.

Capacity [25 mentions]

- We're such a large land mass with a small staff. It is a challenge.
- Low on staffing so we all are overworked.
- Our agency has struggled with capacity, since 2017. Our granting programs have grown but growth in staffing has been limited.
- Staff burnout is a real thing, and we are trying to manage that.
- Keep burnout alive as a topic, visible. Incorporate this as a topic and do more.
- We need growth in staff. They have been halved, size-wise, over the past ten years
- SAA salaries have not kept up. It's hard to staff the agency. Any help NASAA could provide on retention and recruitment (when extra \$\$ is not an option) would be appreciated.
- At this very minute, I'm facing two open staff positions due to non-competitive salaries.
- Still trying to figure out post pandemic work-life balance for employees.
- [We need] professional services for staff, to empower them and help them grow.

Information & Data [24 mentions]

- Having NASAA give comparables helps me make informed decisions.
- NASAA helps them innovate. Sharing best practices - much appreciated!
- NASAA can be looking at what is getting done across the country that is making real change and sharing that information about grant making.
- NASAA could help by providing data on the importance of supporting smaller organizations, community-level orgs helping with staff issues - anything that can be shared on these issues would be helpful.
- Sharing best practices for what some states are doing well in the areas of advocacy, new models of grantmaking, equitable grantmaking, and changing outdated ways of operating would be helpful.

- Helping our grantees around the state understand and collect data on their own programs, economic impact, etc. NASAA does a great job doing it national - we could use help providing a 'dashboard' to educate our state and make better decisions.
- The biggest needs that NASAA can help with are continuing to provide benchmarking and sharing learning knowledge from other states that we have credible and reliable information that we can use.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion [16 mentions]

- NASAA support of [equity] efforts is important.
- We need to avoid being connected to any national level DEI efforts.
- We need a language fix for DEI.
- Anything DEI would be bad for them. Focus on "access for all."
- DEI work is a focus for NASAA and that is not helpful.
- Language issues – we can't do DEIA.
- DEI statements would not go over well.
- We are continuing to navigate tricky situations especially in the DEI realm. NASAA can assist us by not using the DEI terminology as part of conferences, professional development opportunities, or grant opportunities. That would be a barrier to our participation.
- This year we barely escaped a bill that would have outlawed DEI including a grant program that funds organizations of color.
- As a blue state, there is a backlash against equity efforts.

Transitions [15 mentions]

- Staff turnover occurred after a long-time staff had been in place. Because of this, no systems were in place for onboarding new people.
- Staffing is an issue both in terms of available positions and salaries offered. We have lost seven positions in the last ten years through attrition and we as a state have failed to stay competitive with the private sector.
- Future substantial turnover (several staffers are eligible to retire). Succession planning is important. It's hard to motivate long-time employees.
- New board members bring different perspectives. I am a new executive director and [have to] make sure I have the [council] support I need to do my job. Perhaps NASAA can help educate council members.
- We are facing transition in the board. Most of the board was appointed by the prior governor and no new ones yet from the current governor. Both governors are from the same party but still there will be changes.

- New leadership is in place. We didn't have any onboarding – it was a pretty drastic transition on our own. A lot of fact finding, scrambling to get oriented.
- The past several years have been rough transitioning from a previous ED. They now have a new ED who is getting them on the strong path. The new chair was helpful to accomplish a few things, but then he resigned. Nervous about future appointments by the governor.
- Our agency is at a turning point in a lot of different areas. An upcoming gubernatorial shift will be interesting and I will likely need NASAA's support!

State Advocacy Needs

Members were asked about their state level advocacy efforts. Members highlighted resource growth and **budget related concerns** as central advocacy issues. Numerous states also are struggling with partisan opposition to the arts or **divisive concepts** legislation that make state arts agencies' work more difficult.

To navigate these complex financial and political challenges, members seek NASAA's continued support in providing relevant **data**, information on **best practices** and tips for **framing strategic messaging**. Additionally, relationships with and the effectiveness of **state advocacy groups** are lacking in some areas, prompting requests for strategic guidance to enhance these efforts. Consistent with previous years, some members perceived a **limited role for NASAA** in state level advocacy or expressed **cautions** about NASAA involvement in this realm.

Funding Concerns

- More budget cuts yesterday. They were ready to announce the grants and the cuts were a surprise.
- The governor vocally supports the arts but when it came to the budget - they were cut.
- We are sorely underfunded.
- It's always been a challenge to secure our match.
- [We have] budget challenges. We need help advocating for an increase.
- Money is the most important issue.
- The state is stressed for cash. The legislators support the arts, we just don't have more money to put towards it in the state.
- Their state arts agency is unable to meet NEA's match dollar for dollar, so increasing this line item in the budget is important to secure future NEA funding.

Information and Data

- NASAA is more vital now, especially now when arts councils are being attacked across the nation through budget cuts. NASAA can continue to help with statistical information to be

used by state agencies in advocating for budgets with state legislators.

- Economic impact data provided by NASAA is always a good resource.
- NASAA can always help with more data/examples on cross sector successes.
- Help might be data and tableau reports of the impact. NASAA is already doing this. How are other states using it? [Get] input from SAAs on what data would be useful to determine the content of those reports. Develop one-sheets of the overall impact.
- The state is generally supportive, but the agency is small and needs help from data.
- Social impacts on health indicators - NASAA can update that research. Makes it easier for us to chat with law makers.
- Any additional support around data points and talking points- especially state specific- is always very helpful. Messaging with the research/data to back it up.

Message Framing

- NASAA is good at casemaking.
- NASAA has their finger on the pulse of the political environment at the national level and spots trends. This information is helpful to us so we can prepare for what might happen in [the state].
- The economic impact argument is what we lead with, but it seems a little dated, and not working. We need a fresh perspective.
- NASAA is already doing the job on informing arguments & data to communicate to elected officials about funding arts & culture.
- The work that has been done in recent years on messaging has been helpful and doesn't need to be a priority to update. Work on social messaging and arts and health would be more helpful.
- I think the ideas shared at the NEA Arts Summit were really important, but how do we implement the ideas of how the arts are essential to so many aspects of our society at the state level? Would love to have further NASAA conversations on this topic.
- We need more about the importance of public funding for the arts. The doc NASAA has now ("Why Gov't Should Support the Arts") is from 2017. So something updated would be really helpful. It's tough to use pre-pandemic info to justify current [funding].

Advocacy Best Practices

- I want to know more about advocacy tools and advocacy efforts.
- Some guidance on appropriate advocacy training for new directors and advocacy orgs would be very helpful.
- NASAA could convene resources and [provide] education for council members to advocate

for SAAs.

- NASAA advocacy strategy and tools are helpful.
- NASAA could share best practices/strategies for advocacy and for working with state advocacy agencies and caucuses.
- NASAA could work with the boards of the advocacy organizations and provide legislative insights to both those groups and SAAs for how to work with legislators to advance our efforts.
- In terms of state level [advocacy], we have a delicate dance with our advocacy organizations. NASAA should develop guidance for coordinated advocacy.
- Could NASAA be of help with sharing more info on advocacy orgs across the country, how they were formed, who is running them, best models, etc.?
- We are struggling with our Council engagement [in advocacy]. I feel like we could be more engaged with them. Are there trainings or resources to help our board get more tapped in? Orientation materials about the whole national ecosystem maybe?
- How are the arts tangible and relevant to all community members, regardless of where they are on the political spectrum? How are SAAs adaptive to the current political climate?

State Arts Advocacy Groups

- The state advocacy group seems to not be in alignment with our state agency's priorities/needs. It seems that pursuing quick & easy wins (legislatively) is more important to them than long-term partnership with the state agency.
- We have an advocacy group, but they have not been focused on our needs and priorities and historically haven't consulted with us before doing their work with the legislators.
- The arts advocacy group should be about public funding for the arts, but that's not where they are focused.
- We do have [an advocacy group]. They have been mostly representatives from the big orgs and all they complain about is funding for themselves. Not highly engaged in making systemic change. Historically, they have been misaligned with us.
- There is probably not a great connection with our advocacy group because of so much leadership change.
- Our state advocacy organization is very small with limited capacity, and the executive director just resigned. Not having a lot of stability with this position and organization makes it challenging to sustain our efforts.
- The advocacy group is currently a little wobbly and had a leadership change. It needs to be reinvigorated.
- No advocacy group - that's a big challenge.

- NASAA could help with growing our state level advocacy group. The current group is young and newer. The biggest challenge is moving forward in a mindful way and promoting advocacy efforts.
- We don't have a strong advocacy group in [our state].
- There is no arts advocacy organization.
- We don't have a strong statewide arts advocacy organization.
- There is currently no official state arts advocacy group. Connecting that group to NASAA once formalized will be a huge help.

Polarization and Divisive Concepts Legislation

- How to stay out of the fray of negative and divisive issues?
- Our granting is a bit restricted, and they [political leaders] do present political pressure at times to influence our funding.
- The biggest issue we face now is conservative officials that question the role of public arts funding.
- Volatile, divisive politics. The legislature is looking at state agencies and their work. They [the state arts agency] have to be super cautious. "Indoctrination" issues. Very difficult terrain.
- The biggest challenge is my being new and the political shift happening in the state.
- Right now we're in sort of a war on the humanities, and art is included. Banning of books. The question of art being central to government is on the floor of the legislature. [We're contending with] censorship of the arts, whether funded [by the SAA] or not. It's happening. Individual representatives who support the arts are being targeted and ousted.
- Stellar and long-time funded arts organizations that are part of universities can no longer be funded by law. How these organizations will be funded in the future is problematic.

Cautions and NASAA Actions to Avoid

- I do appreciate that you are asking what to avoid doing that might hurt.
- NASAA can continue to provide data. But being from Washington, they would not be welcome as advocates.
- [NASAA should] continue to be politically nuanced, so that they don't attach our agency to a specific politics.
- Anyone from the outside coming in is not welcome.
- The agency appreciates home-grown ideas. Having anything "dictated" to them will

not work.

- I don't feel NASAA is doing anything wrong, but they should be careful of ever being too involved in individual state's budgets.
- I appreciate [NASAA's] work with advocacy groups, but be careful not to damage the arts agency. NASAA knows, but a reminder that is a priority.
- By offering NASAA research resources to provide answers to specific questions, that alone allows us to support advocacy and to provide information to our stakeholders without involving an out-of-state organization. Sometimes the messenger matters.
- Not really anything NASAA can do. We always ask for more money, but our elected officials don't support spending more money on the arts.
- They [NASAA] need to talk with a state before getting involved in state-level advocacy.
- Can NASAA help with state-level advocacy? No, not in [our state].
- I don't think there is anything NASAA can do to help or hurt.
- I don't think there is much NASAA can do at this time since this is a state legislative process.
- There is not much NASAA can do except to understand what is going on.
- CSC [Creative States Coalition] happenings and the AFTA [Americans for the Arts] work might need to tread lightly, as far as NASAA's [role] is concerned.
- Doesn't know what NASAA can do. How to narrate their story - maybe NASAA can help [with that]? But can't shine a light on ANY equity work. Again, doesn't see anything NASAA can do.

Notes on Federal Advocacy

- Could NASAA work with NEA for more equitable funding? Not per capita.
- How can we be more flexible and nimbler with funding to better address the needs of constituents? [Our agency is] fielding more and more inquiries from orgs that don't fit the traditional non-profit/government model. Could NASAA advocate to the NEA to relax some of the strict requirements around this issue?
- NASAA should advocate for a living wage for arts workers, there are few good paying jobs with benefits and healthcare.
- A letter from NASAA to our congressional representatives about how more programs can be executed with more staff might be useful.
- If they [NASAA] plan to release anything nationally, they need to work with the states on it. I don't have any concerns on how NASAA is doing its work.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

State arts agencies are dedicated to facilitating access to the arts for all communities, and NASAA is committed to helping them achieve that goal. There are many valid strategies for broadening access to the arts, and each state must chart a course that is attuned to its own geographic, demographic and political factors. Because this landscape is constantly shifting—and because state arts agencies must comply with policy directives that vary greatly from state to state—NASAA's interviews included specific questions about how states are approaching diversity, equity and inclusion and how NASAA can help. The wide range of responses that we received reflects the societal struggles that are occurring around this topic nationwide.

While recognizing the need for ongoing improvement, **many states are enthusiastic about their DEI efforts** and believe they have made significant progress. However, others are navigating **contentious political environments** where these efforts are highly politicized, restricted or disallowed altogether. Some agencies are **working under the radar** or have adapted by **reframing** DEI within the context of rural communities or by using alternative terms like "access for all" to avoid drawing negative attention.

Members deeply value NASAA's support, particularly in providing **resources and best practices** that align with their DEI goals. However, those in politically conservative states have emphasized the need for NASAA to understand the significant differences across states—what works in more progressive areas may not be feasible in more conservative regions. As a result, there is a call for NASAA to **maintain a neutral and supportive stance**, ensuring that its services are accessible to members in varying political climates across the country.

Doing Well with DEI

- We are doing ok with DEI. Stronger than I expected to be. With the support of the administration, we are able to be able to do a bit more DEI work than I thought. Appreciate NASAA's help and sensitivity on these issues.
- Our DEI work is really phenomenal. We have an equity council with a framework that aligns with our strategic plan, and we just hired a first equity data manager.
- We have been able to accomplish a lot. NASAA has good resources and should continue that.
- The governor created a statewide DEI office, definition of equity expanded to include elements of the rural economic development office and minority business office. We feel good in general about the work of DEI in the state, and are able to explore it openly and transparently.
- Doing very well with DEI now with the current governor. Required to have equity plans. But the future is more uncertain.
- We established a DEI unit within the agency and have greatly increased outreach and communication.
- We call it Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion. I'm proud of our work and think it's been

integrated through all our work: grants, roster artists, commissioners.

- DEI efforts are going very well. There's growth both in funding the work and doing the work. A dramatic increase in # of applications from grassroots organizations applying for the first time.
- We're doing very well as long as we don't use those words. I do not use those words.
- DEI has been top of mind here - our governor has packaged it differently than the NEA so we have different parameters in how to message about it. NASAA has done a good job in being sensitive around the messaging and how it is framed. I appreciate that NASAA recognizes that it is not "one size fits all" and understands that states are all operating in a wide range of environments.
- We've done a lot - changed a lot of systems, distributing funds equitably through all programs. Not sure how that has increased diversity. We are more focused on accessibility and individuals with disabilities (leaning into that space harder with administration changes). Focus on equity will be a trigger term, walking more cautiously while maintaining equitable distribution of funding. So far we sail through without a lot of attention. Still advancing and code switching. Not changing what we are doing. But we are talking about it differently - adapting.
- I think we're doing well. We launched a racial equity plan and completely changed our grantmaking, definitely influenced by NASAA. We're about to launch a native American and disability equity plan as well with influence from NASAA, and it's going well.
- Doing strong work on DEI. Lots more work to be done.

Want to Do More

- We're OK, but still have a long way to go.
- We aren't doing as much as we'd like but intend to work with our region on an equity assessment this fiscal year.
- Always more to do but moving in the right direction.
- Our strategic plan is still addressing our work through the lens of DEIA. We just surveyed our staff and are disappointed with the lack of response. We need to reassess to make sure we are doing what we can.
- We're doing okay, we can always do better.
- We are aware of the DEI work that needs to be done and are doing things incrementally, including such things as making applications more accessible and using an equity lens to look at everything we do.
- They are in fledgling status. They have done some analysis on how well diverse communities are being served by their grants. They have some strengths, but are anticipating bringing in a contractor to help them go to the next level.
- [We are] a very small state with a small population of people of color. We are having a hard

time reaching and building relationships in those communities. We do site visits, community meetings, and grant workshops, but if there were resources on how to better engage with BIPOC communities that would be great.

Research and Best Practices

- Training materials and case studies about DEI issues from NASAA have been helpful- keep them coming!
- NASAA's continued spotlight on these issues and sharing of nationwide initiatives is helpful.
- Knowing how other states are also dealing with similar situations would be helpful for us.
- Can NASAA provide any guidance on tracking best practices and leveraging demographic data in the government agency context?
- We do things to reach rural areas (many of those areas have large Native populations). DEI isn't a priority for state government. Legislators are anti-Indian. I like NASAA's DEI research, but want more of it - more study and more information is good. Would like to know more about methodologies.
- If there are other models we can tap into, that would be great. Example: the other SAAs that are doing the NASAA audits of equity work. Was that a pilot project? Can we get engaged in that? It would be really valuable!
- Help them find language and best practices to share with grantees with age diversity.
- I think NASAA could showcase our work to other agencies across the country. In my opinion, NASAA providing metrics on DEI work so that states know they are succeeding, or if they need more work. I know diversity can be different from state to state, but we should know where we need to improve.
- NASAA just did a huge assessment of grant making through equity lens that was helpful! Now it's about coming up with solutions for collecting demographic data. Would love help there.
- Could NASAA offer DEI comparisons across SAAs?
- If NASAA has resources on DEI work in SAAs that would be really helpful.
- If they [NASAA] have examples to share of other SAAs who have been successful in this area, that would be helpful.
- Continuing to offer research and networking opportunities focused on equity in grantmaking is enormously helpful to us.

Working Quietly or Reframing DEI

- We just don't say it out loud. The work will always continue [with] support within the board and staff.
- The words to use: Access and accessibility - all should have equal access for arts. DEI

happens differently here - just can't use the words!

- Doing good work but not using acronyms and buzzwords. We lead with values, use language that signals to the people who are doing the work, but not signal to the people who want to take us out. It's all about wanting to reach everyone. Rural is key for as diversity.
- Getting around the prohibitions with [language about] health and welfare, rural, "access for all."
- We are moving through it carefully. [Our state] has very "red" rural communities. We are treading those dynamics carefully while moving the work forward. Using culture and heritage to our advantage. It is delicate and complicated, but we are dedicated to doing the work.
- DEI is sort of a don't ask, don't tell, issue in our state. Most organizations have pursued DEI goals and have implemented DEI plans into their make-up, but most state agencies are loathe to call attention to steps such as designating a staff member to direct efforts to publish a public policy.
- We still want to serve everyone without using the DEI umbrella or specific terms. Our program descriptions/communications don't single out groups, but the message is that our services encompass everyone, all are welcome, and that something might be "accessible and open to all".
- You can't say DEI. Accessibility and access is their focus with a rural and remote lens.
- Trying to couch the DEIA work under the heading of accessibility activities.
- They have changed their guidelines to "access for all" and removed "diversity, equity, and inclusion" talking more about arts and healthcare, people with disabilities and how they can interact with the arts; changed the topic to access for all.
- Using "access for all" as opposed to representation etc.
- For our state, the best way to practice DEI is to do it and not talk about it.
- This administration has halted that work. We are still working on it quietly.

State Politics and Prohibitions

- Those words are not allowable!
- We are going backwards since the [legislative] session passed anti-DEI legislation.
- Any mention of it [DEI] is very hot button here. As an example: they have passed a law that state workers cannot use pronouns or request preferred pronouns. "Don't bring it up" is basically the environment in a state agency around DEI, which is horrifying. We are legislatively prohibited from specific DEI work.
- The legislature passed anti-DEI bill. There is a hotline that anyone can call and "report" violations. So they are learning to use new language. It's a huge adaptation.

- DEI is becoming weaponized. Their senator is sponsoring a federal bill weaponizing it. They are thinking about how to move forward prioritizing it in a way that doesn't harm their ability to do this work.
- DEI is majorly attacked as a topic or as an initiative.
- We are one of those states where they have tied funding for universities to elimination of diversity programs. Now [watchdog groups] are running through all the state agencies to see who is doing "diversity" work so they can "get 'em."
- We have to avoid saying DEI. We have been instructed to not use those words in our conservative state.
- If we did focus on DEI it would cause problems.
- Really not allowed to do DEI!! Trying to stay under the radar.
- We are focused on rural and underserved communities with an emphasis on veterans and older adults. We cannot support DEI work either in the field or at the agency.
- Our agency needs to proceed carefully with this type of work because DEI has been politicized by statewide elected officials and members of the legislature. We can continue to do the work that aligns with this, but we cannot use the national terms.
- It's horrific! DEI = bad words!
- Can't do it! Cannot use the words diversity, equity and inclusion. There's a whole new set of words that are "acceptable."
- Right now, we are in a very difficult position due to efforts of the governor against the LGBTQ community and work on its behalf. Experiencing the same problems in working with the BIPOC community. Looking to revise language. NASAA is helping with that effort and helping us wait out the bad times.
- We are challenged with how we do DEI work and how we talk about it.
- The agency can't use this language due to the political climate in the state.

Cautions and NASAA Actions to Avoid

- NASAA needs to be a neutral party. Internally a focus on DEI [is okay] but NASAA cannot be public about it.
- NASAA needs to understand that "flyover" country is very different than the big deep blue states on the coasts.
- NASAA lifts up work that we can't be a part of. Focus on something else that is more inclusive to us red states.
- They [NASAA] need to be politically nuanced. They need to avoid broad statements that may not work for all states.
- [NASAA should] not use DEI.

- NASAA can help in getting away from slogans that have popped up.
- Calling it DEIA isn't an effective strategy. I look forward to continuing conversations as thinking evolves.
- What NASAA needs to do is stop using those words externally. As long as they are referred to in materials, they will be unable to attend conferences.
- NASAA needs to understand that a top-down directive on DEI is not going to work in many states. Provide support if/when it is requested by a state.
- She would honestly worry about bringing a board member to a NASAA conference, given that they are Republicans. There could be outright rebellion.
- Our region goes full force on this and needs to be careful about the state's effort. I appreciate NASAA asking what to avoid doing. I ask [that NASAA should consider] things you present to the public and what you send to states where this is sensitive.
- The best thing NASAA can do is not talk about it out loud. It is deemed "Dangerous" to attend a meeting where DEI is referenced.
- It is noted that NASAA seems sensitive to that [DEI prohibitions] in the language used for the upcoming Assembly.
- [NASAA should] recognize states are at different places and be careful. There can be opportunities where states that can have more space - but some states have less space.
- Encourage NASAA to continue to be careful with their language - that is helpful.
- NASAA's awareness of this [DEI challenges faced by states] can manifest into sensitivity when naming initiatives, conferences, etc. that we would want to be or could be a part of.
- NASAA is currently not this, but it should avoid being prescriptive because SAAs are all different.
- NASAA can't do anything to hurt - they are too smart for that. Helping would be leaning into navigating contemporary political landscape. Having space for those conversations. Not sure what else they can do besides provide the platform for discussion. Take the long view. Cultivating the emerging leaders. Encourage an equity focus on rural and incorporate BIPOC but don't talk about it or put a "neon sign" on it.

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:

- Very impressed with NASAA and all they are trying to do.
- I am thankful NASAA exists to support us.
- One of the only professional development opportunities that SAA staff have, and it seems

super important to the board that the staff be able to go. It's a huge benefit to the SAAs.

- NASAA has many challenges ahead, but I have every confidence in the world that the staff and board will rise to those challenges.
- Big thanks and special thanks to the rock stars of NASAA.
- I just appreciate the commitment to my agency, my colleagues and my staff.
- I'm really loving that NASAA is on the forefront of new ways of thinking, and we're going to need some strong people. I'm grateful for NASAA.
- This is an organization that I am very proud to be a part of.
- Keep on doing what you're doing and THANK YOU for the incredible support.
- Keep on doing what you're doing. A ton of appreciation.
- Thank you as always for your thoughtfulness and dedication.