



Strengthening America through Arts and Creativity: A Federal Policy Agenda

February 2021

National Assembly of
State Arts Agencies

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Arts and creativity make America stronger—as individuals, families, communities, states and as a nation. The creative sector is a cornerstone of American innovation and prosperity, helping people and places to thrive.

Our nation faces acute challenges at this moment in our history, as we cope with the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an economy in crisis and a legacy of racial inequities. As America rises to meet this moment, the arts are a key catalyst for recovery. Through the arts, communities will heal, reconnect and rebuild.

The federal government has an essential role to play in making this happen. Public funding for the arts is a high-return investment that ensures that the economic, health and educational benefits of the arts accrue to *every* town and rural community nationwide, not only the biggest cities. Investing in the arts improves the lives of all Americans, strengthens our workforce and keeps us globally competitive. Federal support for the arts enables public-private partnerships, leverages local matching funds and empowers states to direct resources where they are most needed.

The White House, Congress and federal agencies have the opportunity to take timely action to bolster the arts for the greater good of communities across America. To this end, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) encourages the following federal policy actions. As the association representing the government arts agencies of the 56 states and U.S. jurisdictions, NASAA carries a unique authority and responsibility to offer these recommendations to the White House and Congress.



Revive America's Economy through the Arts

[New empirical research](#) shows that the arts can improve—not merely reflect—broader economic conditions following periods of economic distress. Helping the arts sector rebound from [staggering losses](#) incurred due to the pandemic will help the broader U.S. economy recover by spurring jobs growth, increasing economic diversification, stimulating commerce and attracting tourism.

- **Include the arts in broad-spectrum economic relief and recovery policy.** Arts organizations and creative enterprises should continue to be eligible for new loans, grants, incentives and tax breaks designed to help small businesses. Creative entities (nonprofit, for-profit and sole proprietors) should be explicitly included in guidelines, rules and regulations to ensure that the creative sector is eligible to fully participate.

- **Mobilize the creative workforce for economic growth, infrastructure repair and community revitalization.** Artists and other creatives can be a productive and innovative workforce for federal, state and local government initiatives. [Put Creative Workers to Work](#) outlines many possible avenues for activating the creative workforce through both existing and new policy vehicles.

Grow Resources for the National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts provides crucial leadership and funding for the arts sector. Growing the capacity of the Arts Endowment will help, [per statute](#), to encourage innovative "thought, imagination, and inquiry but also the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent."

- **Increase appropriations for the National Endowment for the Arts.** The Arts Endowment has earned bipartisan support in Congress and yields a winning return on investment: each \$1 in Arts Endowment direct grant funds leverages another \$9 from other public and private sources. Apart from its direct grant-making role, the Arts Endowment has pioneered [life-saving programs for healing wounded veterans](#), leads influential [interagency partnerships](#) and conducts groundbreaking research on important topics like [preventing opioid abuse](#) and the [economic impact](#) of the creative industries.
- **Nominate and confirm a new Arts Endowment chairman.** State arts agencies and NASAA stand ready to welcome and assist new agency leadership. We encourage timely nomination and confirmation of a new chairman given the urgency of the challenges facing the arts field at this time.

Partner with States

Federal collaboration with states empowers local decision making. It ensures that federal policies are implemented inclusively and equitably across all 56 states and jurisdictions and helps federal resources reach areas where they can have the greatest impact.

- **Continue to designate 40% of the National Endowment for the Arts grants budget for states and regions.** At the direction of Congress, the Arts Endowment distributes 40% of its programmatic funds to state and regional arts agencies each year. This highly effective partnership leverages additional public and private investments, attunes resources to complementary state/federal priorities and serves far more constituents than federal funds alone could reach. States and regions use their share of Arts Endowment funds, combined with funds from state legislatures, to support more than 23,000 [grants](#) to arts organizations, civic organizations, schools and artists, with a particular emphasis on rural communities, underserved populations and arts education. The 40% set-aside must be continued, along with state and regional flexibility in how those funds are deployed.
- **Enact further federal aid to states and localities.** State and local governments lead the way in supporting health care, public safety, education, infrastructure, social services and other functions that form the building blocks of America's economy and our quality of life.

Healthy state budgets will be an engine of recovery that can help to put our nation back on track. To attain this goal and help states recover from the unprecedented shortfalls caused by COVID-19, NASAA joins with the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures and many other state policy leaders in [calling for large-scale federal funding relief for states and jurisdictions](#).

Harness Creativity across the Federal Government

The challenges currently facing America are highly complex, and meeting them requires ingenuity, determination, empathy and cross-cultural understanding. The arts excel in these capacities. The federal government can elevate the arts and take greater advantage of the arts to benefit all Americans and solve some of America's most pressing problems. Opportunities to do this are not limited to the National Endowment for the Arts but also exist within and across other federal agencies.

- **Appoint arts-sector representatives to policy task forces and advisory councils that address significant national issues.** Creative professionals have unique and valuable expertise to contribute to policy formulation across many domains: racial equity, community development, education, health/rehabilitation, commerce, rural development, food/agriculture and international diplomacy, to name just a few.
- **Promote federal interagency collaborations that include the arts.** Past interagency efforts around human development and disaster recovery have achieved phenomenal success. This model could be replicated for racial equity, rural development, aging, workforce development, mental health and other urgent and interdisciplinary issues. The Arts Endowment has proven itself to be an able leader of and partner in these efforts.
- **Integrate the arts into new infrastructure initiatives.** Transportation and infrastructure efforts can include percent for art incentives and also can utilize artists with skills in civic practice to ensure that development plans respond to community needs.
- **Increase the utilization of healing arts therapies for military populations.** Clinical studies show numerous [positive outcomes](#) when the arts are incorporated into treatment, rehabilitation and support programs for active-duty service members and veterans as well as their families and caregivers. More funding can be allocated through the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to enable arts based therapies and community based cultural programming. Increasing appropriations for the National Endowment for the Arts likewise can increase the reach and impact of [its programs that promote healing for members of the military](#).
- **Grow resources for arts education within the Department of Education.** The arts are an important part of a well-rounded education, equipping students to succeed in school, in the [future workforce](#) and in life. These effects are [especially pronounced for low-income populations](#), helping to close persistent equity and achievement gaps.

Help America Heal

Families across our country have lost lives and livelihoods due to the pandemic. The impact of this distress—compounded by the injuries stemming from isolation, polarization and the enduring effects of structural racism—necessitate a national commitment to trauma-informed healing and community rebuilding. The arts and artists can be powerful allies in government's efforts to [promote equitable policy making](#), build [social capital](#), and engender [physical](#), [mental](#) and [civic](#) health.

- **Facilitate community healing, especially for populations disproportionately hurt by COVID-19.** Federal assistance must reach Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and other communities of color; older adults; rural communities; low-income areas and individuals with disabilities. Artists and organizations with expertise in community development, crisis recovery and bridging cultural divides can be co-architects as well as implementers of such efforts.
- **Draw on arts examples in federal efforts to assess and address equity disparities.** State arts agencies offer useful [models](#) of how public funding for the arts, in particular, can be equitably distributed. They have extensive experience informing policy through consultation with underserved communities, meeting requirements outlined in recent [executive orders](#).
- **Seek arts expertise in the formulation of federal policies and initiatives designed to advance racial equity and civic cohesion.** Consultation with arts-sector leaders can empower the work of congressional committees, the Domestic Policy Council and other policy teams.



All together, the policy directions highlighted in this platform can strengthen America by helping to rebuild our economy, repair the fabric of our communities and restore Americans' faith in each other and in government. The arts and state arts agencies are ready and willing allies in this important national work.

About NASAA

NASAA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan service organization representing America's 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies. We provide objective research, policy representation and membership services for state arts agencies. For more information about NASAA and the work of state arts agencies, visit www.nasaa-arts.org.

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