Introduction

The nation's 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies (SAAs) all share a common public service mission: to extend the civic, educational, economic and health benefits of the arts to all state residents. To this end, SAAs routinely take steps to connect with the communities they serve. SAAs actively seek partnerships, conduct public forums, involve citizens in planning decisions, hold open adjudication panels, and adopt many other practices designed to cultivate transparency and public engagement.

Despite these efforts, SAAs recognize that systems used to fund the arts still can present daunting obstacles. The procedural requirements common to government agencies pose multiple bureaucratic impediments and capacity barriers for people seeking support. Differences in geography, cultural norms and technology access, along with unconscious bias, also can prevent SAA resources from reaching communities in need.

Many SAAs are challenging themselves to overcome these hurdles by asking: What communities has our agency not reached, and why? How can we dismantle barriers to our programs? How can we improve our services and funding structures to become more responsive to varying community conditions?

To explore these questions, SAAs are cultivating deeper relationships with constituents whom they have not engaged in the past. Meaningful relationships, in turn, can drive SAA program improvements and operational changes to address community needs.

This report offers guidance on how SAAs can pursue this important relationship-building work, moving toward the ultimate goal of serving the public through more inclusive and equitable support for the arts.
Methods

This research project was conducted in summer 2021 by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) in collaboration with the Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA). To inform its strategic planning process, ArtsWA sought to learn how other state arts agencies are adapting their grants and services to achieve greater equity. To supply that information, NASAA reviewed existing SAA documentation, facilitated roundtable focus groups, and conducted in-depth interviews to gain insights into policy and practice changes under way among SAAs.

A roundtable dedicated to the topic of this report—deepening relationships with diverse communities—engaged SAA staff members representing seven different states from the western, central, midwestern and southern regions of the United States. The participants included individuals with varied professional roles (executive leadership, community development, grants management and equity/accessibility portfolios) as well as diverse demographic characteristics including younger and older professionals as well as female, male and nonbinary individuals. A majority were people of color. Questions explored by the roundtable included:

- What communities does your agency have the greatest difficulty reaching?
- What SAA systems or norms present obstacles to building relationships?
- What strategies does your agency currently use to build trust and develop relationships with populations who are historically underrepresented in public funding systems?
- What future strategies might make a meaningful difference in reaching those communities?

Separately, NASAA also conducted an informal canvass of SAAs and regional arts organizations (RAOs). We invited directors, community development coordinators, folk arts managers and grants officers to describe via e-mail the strategies they use to recruit new grantees. Twenty-three SAAs and four RAOs offered notes answering:

- How does your agency identify prospective grantees who have not previously received support?
- Are there approaches that have been especially fruitful for initiating relationships with people of color and rural/remote communities?
- Are there particular networks (formal or informal) that have been good avenues for outreach?

Together, the roundtable and e-mail responses offered a robust range of ideas and perspectives to serve as the basis for this report. To ensure a candid conversation, informants were promised confidentiality in NASAA’s reports of the research findings. All quotes in this document therefore are anonymous.
This report on community connections is one of three reports that summarizes the findings of NASAA’s equity research with ArtsWA. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in State Arts Agency Public Art Programs: A Roundtable Report explores strategies SAAs can use to increase equity within percent for art programs and public art activities. In Pursuit of Equity: Four Case Studies of State Arts Agencies profiles the efforts of SAAs to adopt intentional equity strategies across multiple program and policy realms.

NASAA recognizes that language about identity is constantly evolving and that words—especially when wielded by government entities—hold the power to harm as well as to help. This research project considers the effects that inequity has on distinct populations in the United States. All three reports in this series necessarily refer to particular populations, and we acknowledge that the language used is imperfect and may not adequately reflect the preferences, complexity or lived experiences of every group. Given those caveats, the following general terminology is used in these reports: Asian American and Pacific Islander; Black; Latinx; LGBTQA+; Native American; Alaska Native; people with disabilities; people experiencing homelessness; people experiencing incarceration; remote, rural and urban communities; and White. We use people of color when describing practices and policies that affect multiple communities that are non-White, non-Hispanic. We also use the terms historically marginalized, historically under-represented and underserved, since those terms are regularly invoked in state and federal government policies that attempt to correct past inequities. For more guidance on language choice as a vehicle to advance equity work, see NASAA’s Inclusive Language Guide.

Underserved Populations

Numerous state arts agencies that participated in NASAA’s research emphasized that data analysis is an important early step in diagnosing and addressing service gaps.

Every state has a unique demographic profile and geopolitical context. A granular understanding of the state’s population dynamics—including racial diversity, cultural and linguistic diversity, age, migration and economic patterns—often serves as a basis for SAA planning, evaluation and relationship building. Even though traditional census methods undercount many groups, population studies—especially when combined

"Collecting data from people is hard, especially as a state agency asking the questions. But if you’re not in the data, you are invisible. So our agency is trying to fill gaps in our knowledge and quantify who we are not reaching and what barriers exist. That will help us make a stronger case for more inclusive programs.”
with community dialogues—can serve as useful reference points for discerning the constituencies that an SAA needs to serve.

Using state demographic information as a comparative baseline, SAAs can measure their success in reaching all residents. This can be achieved by analyzing:

- the geography and demographics of SAA applicant pools versus awardees versus groups not applying for funds;
- the diversity of artist rosters and other SAA credential programs;
- the characteristics of participants in networking, professional development or other SAA technical assistance programs;
- the attributes of participants in SAA town halls, listening sessions and planning forums; and
- the diversity of SAA panelists, staff and appointed council leaders.

Examining composition of grantees' staff and board (not just audiences) helps to ensure that the organizations being funded are rooted in the communities being served.

Many of the SAAs participating in this NASAA research project are actively engaged in formal or informal assessments of constituent and grantee populations. Among SAAs that have conducted such data reviews, the most frequently mentioned groups reflecting equity gaps were:

- **Rural communities**: SAAs noted the difficulties of serving rural and remote areas, which may lack broadband Internet access and which often lag behind metropolitan areas in measures of health and economic well-being.

- **People of color**: SAAs are seeking ways to provide services and achieve funding equity for Black, Latinx, Asian American and Native American communities, which represent almost all of America's population growth during the last decade but which still face persistent disparities in access to education, wages, health and housing—and in arts funding.

- **Individuals with disabilities**: Numerous SAAs noted that venue accessibility requirements alone don't automatically result in meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities, representing more than one in four U.S. adults and 4.3% of children.

Additional underserved groups mentioned by SAAs (in descending order of frequency) included the LGBTQ+ community, older adults, veterans, immigrant populations, individuals whose primary language is not English, people living in institutions, people experiencing incarceration and individuals experiencing homelessness.

"If we're not intentional about our strategies for reaching these groups, they're not going to have access to our programming."
Community Complexity

The state arts agencies participating in NASAA’s roundtable underscored that it is difficult to compartmentalize population characteristics. Broad demographic categories contain many variations and intersections that affect community needs and, by extension, affect what SAA strategies will be successful for reaching residents.

Consider, for instance, the rich diversity encompassed by rural America. Some rural workers rely on agriculture, recreation or manufacturing jobs for their incomes, but an increasing number draw their livelihoods from energy, health care, education or other service occupations. Despite popular narratives about rural communities being predominantly White, there are more than 2,000 rural and small-town census tracts where Black, Latinx, Native American, Alaska Native or Asian American groups comprise the majority of the population. Fifteen percent of rural residents have disabilities, 19% are over age 65 and about 25% of military veterans live in rural communities. All of these residents are rural, but their daily lives—and how they understand and relate to the arts—will vary.

"It is very crucial for state arts agencies to realize that not all Native Americans are homogenous, not all Black people are homogeneous."
Multi-faceted identities are present not only within geographic regions, but within racial
groups, genders, age cohorts, countries of origin and economic strata as well. Statistics
alone are not able to adequately capture this kind of information.

**Consultation with diverse individuals and organizations therefore is critical to**
**helping SAAs understand the distinct experiences, needs, assets and opportunities**
**present in any given community.** Such relationships can help to make state arts agency
policies, grants and services more inclusive and equitable. Establishing a two-way dialogue
also helps to engender trust and illuminate the relevance of the SAA to individuals or
communities that have not previously envisioned how an SAA may be of assistance.

**Common Challenges**

When state arts agencies were invited to reflect on factors that impede the development of
relationships and their agencies' abilities to deliver resources, recurring themes emerged:

**Bureaucratic obstacles:** Roundtable participants and e-mail respondents alike noted
that government regulations—technical and administrative—can prevent many groups from
seeking SAA support. Examples included application requirements (such as audits,
lengthy applications and government certifications), reporting requirements (both state
and federal), technology requirements (for online application systems) and complex
contracting rules. Such systems require considerable administrative capacity and do not
send a signal that everyone is welcome to apply. Especially given the small dollar size of
typical SAA grants, applying may not be worthwhile for already undercapitalized
organizations. State regulatory constraints also may limit how quickly SAAs can change
requirements or launch new programs. Some state arts agencies have more administrative
flexibility than do others to alter their policies, programs or procedures. Tenacity and
administrative creativity are needed to overcome these barriers.

**Grant-making paradigms:** A majority of state arts agency dollars and staff time are devoted
to grants. When most SAAs were created in the 1960s, they replicated a federal model of the
National Endowment for the Arts (which itself was based on the Ford Foundation).
Roundtable participants noted that this emphasis on granting accentuates power

"Minimizing bureaucratic barriers is key to getting new grantees into the system."

"The thought that SAAs function primarily as funders gets in the way. That idea
that we only work when we transfer over money, I think it limits our ability to serve."
imbalances, can create a values dissonance in some cultures that discourage asking for recognition, and can constrict the resources available for other forms of SAA support (such as networking, technical assistance, convening, marketing, etc.).

**Entrance criteria:** It is common practice for public sector grant makers to limit applications on the basis of organizations' programming histories, budget sizes, 501(c)(3) status or other factors. Such eligibility policies often are put in place to comply with state and federal accountability laws. But they restrict access for emerging, unincorporated or for-profit organizations working for the public benefit. Roundtable participants repeatedly emphasized the obstacles presented by 501(c)(3) requirements.

**Mistrust of government:** From forced relocation to segregation to redlining and police brutality, government institutions in America have a blighted track record. SAAs actively work to model inclusive practices, but mistrust of government nevertheless affects them. It is particularly pronounced among Black and Latinx populations and young people.

**Lack of SAA diversity:** Roundtable participants noted that constituents may not readily see themselves or their communities represented in SAA leadership. Demographic data on SAA staffing and governance support this assertion: about 25% of SAA employees and roughly 19% of board/council members identify as people of color, who comprise 40% of the total U.S. population.

**Limited SAA capacity:** E-mail respondents and roundtable informants both noted that building good relationships is, by nature, a labor-intensive endeavor. It takes time to identify prospects, make contact, spend time listening to feedback, follow up and create a pathway for ongoing dialogue. Given the long-term decline in SAA staff sizes (which never recovered after the Great Recession), it can be challenging to organize and implement these efforts.

**Politics:** SAAs exist in an authorizing environment that reflects our society's deep polarization around issues of race, geography and the role of government in an increasingly diverse democracy. Some SAAs enjoy wide latitude in how they navigate these divides, while others face strict constraints. These challenges need not deter SAAs from pursuing equity, but they do shape how SAA strategies must be formulated and framed.

Roundtable participants noted that the cumulative effects of these challenges require SAAs to be proactive in building relationships and lowering barriers. Redesigning programs and policies to be more inclusive is necessary, but is not sufficient unless communities perceive the SAA as a trusted and relevant resource.

"The 'build it and they will come' effect only happens when a community knows us and has faith in our honorable intent."
To surmount these challenges, SAAs are seeking effective ways to connect with groups that have been historically underserved. Through these relationships, SAAs are deepening their knowledge of diverse constituencies, giving more stakeholders a voice in SAA decisions, and improving access to SAA programs and funding. The following pages synthesize examples and advice gleaned from the roundtable as well as from the 27 SAAs and RAOs that submitted information to NASAA via e-mail.

**Starting the Conversation**

- **Do your homework before reaching out.** It is helpful for SAA representatives to familiarize themselves with current events, cultural norms and legacies of harm in communities with whom they are seeking contact. While being mindful that information and narratives often are shaped by groups that hold the most power, SAAs can gain basic working knowledge of a community through local news outlets, community bulletins, social media and public records. Some SAAs noted that their state folklorists and community development staff are useful resources.

- **Recognize community strengths, not deficits.** Several SAAs marked the importance of taking an asset based approach to community development work. One roundtable participant put it succinctly: "Just because an organization is new to our agency does
not mean it is new in its community or new to cultural leadership. We must recognize the deep expertise that already exists."

- **Cultivate one-on-one connections.** SAAs see personal relationship building as the single most important strategy for gaining trust. Although SAAs extensively used phone, video and e-mail to communicate while the COVID-19 pandemic restricted gatherings and travel, several SAAs noted they were looking forward to resuming in-person meetings as the most effective pathway for establishing new relationships.

- **Show up.** SAAs attend many events of community significance, ranging from festivals to powwows to craft or food markets. Such occasions are important learning and rapport-building opportunities. SAAs noted that they try to participate with humility, to listen carefully and avoid making assumptions or requests.

- **Follow up.** This can take many forms: sending thank-you notes, forwarding relevant resources, requesting subsequent meetings, etc. Following up with communities conveys a sense of thoughtful, intentional commitment.

**Expanding Networks**

- **Connect with culture bearers.** Community culture bearers and individuals leading grassroots and informal arts activities can offer guidance and facilitate new relationships. Arts organization leaders are helpful, but some of the most important mavens will not self-identify as arts administrators. They may be individual artists or artisans, neighborhood festival organizers, small business owners, community elders, or civic volunteers.

- **Contact community organizations.** Non-arts organizations are essential connectors, especially in places where formal arts institutions do not exist. Examples of networks SAAs have tapped include local libraries, Main Street organizations, community

"We build relationships by meeting with artists, educators, tribal leaders, juvenile facilities, boys/girls clubs and social service workers. We attend powwows, Cinco de Mayo celebrations, Juneteenth events, Polynesian dance festivals, etc. We go without an agenda, with only the intent of meeting people and enjoying whatever they are offering. Over time, this has helped us recruit BIPOC artists to what was, before, an all-White teaching artist roster. It also has helped us establish links to programs and venues that are culturally meaningful to the community."
development groups, ethnic heritage associations, businesses owned by people of color, resettlement organizations and places of worship.

- **Consult with local arts agencies.** Where present, local arts agencies will likely be familiar with smaller organizations or artists that have not yet tapped into state support.

- **Reach out to educators and schools.** This may encompass K-12 schools, historically black colleges and universities (and their alumni networks), community colleges and more. Educators who lead art programs or community engagement programs are a good place to begin.

- **Confer with other state agencies.** Many SAAs work in partnership with other state agencies to broaden their circle of contacts, grantees and stakeholders. State councils on Indian affairs, African American heritage commissions, state departments of aging and rural development offices are some examples of partners cited by SAAs.

### Making Grants More Accessible

- **Construct grant policies, procedures and application systems to reduce barriers.** SAAs observed that outreach and relationship building will not achieve their intended outcomes if grant systems themselves remain onerous. Strategic changes undertaken by SAAs can include broadening grant eligibility, simplifying applications, reducing match requirements, accepting applications in alternative formats (audio or video), and creating special funding categories adapted to the needs of specific groups. NASAA's [Equity Choice Points](http://www.nasaaarts.org/equitychoicepoints) toolkit serves as a resource for SAAs reassessing their grant-making approaches.

- **Provide one-on-one technical assistance to help new applicants.** To supplement grant workshops, many SAAs offer application draft reviews and provide individualized coaching to help people apply for the first time.

- **Consider the options for fiscal agency.** Although SAAs cannot use their National Endowment for the Arts grants (or related matching dollars) for this purpose, fiscal sponsorships are a vehicle that many SAAs use to deploy other state funds. This mechanism allows an established 501(c)(3) nonprofit to serve as a conduit for funding and reporting as well as mentorship and collaboration with unincorporated

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**Listening Sessions**

Several state arts agencies have conducted town halls or public forums tailored to specific constituencies. One recent example of this strategy can be seen in the Massachusetts Cultural Council's [Racial Equity Listening Series](http://www.mass.gov/cc/arts/). The agency convened four sessions in 2020 to invite Massachusetts communities to help the agency envision a more just and equitable future for the arts in the state. Participants identified numerous action steps for arts organizations as well as the SAA.
organizations. See examples of related programs and policies for Kansas (mentorship), New York (sponsorship), Washington (sponsorship) and Ohio (fiscal agency and nonprofit intent).

- **Engage knowledgeable advisors and facilitators.** SAAs seeking to serve specific communities can engage experts rooted in those communities to provide counsel on how best to design programming. For instance, California, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Wyoming all have engaged Native American advisors when developing new programs for tribal communities. Such advisors should be compensated for their time. Several SAAs also reported that they have hired consultants to provide objective assessments of their grant programs or to facilitate public feedback forums.

- **Train panelists to avoid bias.** Most SAA grants are adjudicated by citizen panels. To ensure a full and fair review of funding requests, panelists can be trained to see the ways that unconscious bias can affect the review of applications. RE-Tool: Racial Equity in the Panel Process can help.

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**Targeted Grant Strategies**

Numerous SAAs have revised grant programs to better reach constituencies that have been historically underrepresented in public funding for the arts. Examples include:

- **Pennsylvania's Arts Organizations and Arts Programs grants:** Provides increased investments for rural organizations and people of color via new funding structures. [guidelines]

- **North Carolina's Arts Equity Project Grants:** Delivers flexible funding for organizations grounded in communities of color, disability communities, rural communities, or other traditionally underserved populations. [guidelines]

- **Nebraska's Arts Accessibility grants:** Provides funds for language translation, captioning, interpretation services and other activities to reduce barriers to arts participation for individuals with disabilities. [guidelines]

- **Washington's Creative Start initiative:** Supports creative, academic, and social emotional learning to close the opportunity gap for Washington's youngest learners. [guidelines]

- **Tennessee's Targeted Arts Development Initiative:** Reaches rural counties that have been underrepresented in Commission investments. [guidelines]

- **Wisconsin's Woodland Indian Arts Initiative:** Develops a foundation of cultural and economic support for traditional and contemporary Native American arts. [guidelines]

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"We help panelists to use applications as a window into seeing real things happening on the ground. We're not the council on grammar and punctuation or the pithy turn of phrase. Do you understand what the applicant is trying to accomplish? Is it responsive to the community? Is it effective? If it is, then score it accordingly."
Beyond Grant Making

These strategies may be especially valuable for connecting with groups that fall outside the 501(c)(3) nonprofit model:

- **Build relationships through nongrant initiatives.** SAAs shared a variety of collaborative initiatives that have successfully built linkages to communities with whom the SAA had not previously worked. Examples included creative aging programs, projects focusing on veterans, creative youth development efforts, poet laureate activities, special exhibitions, music programs and public art projects.

- **Design strategic networking opportunities.** Many SAAs have created networks or communities of practice to facilitate connections between individuals and organizations with shared interests. Examples include the New Hampshire Makerspace Network as well as Connecticut's Bridge Builders Initiative, an equity-focused relationship-building effort coordinated through eight designated regional arts service organizations. In addition to providing valuable constituent services, these networks can introduce the SAA to new stakeholders.

- **Leverage the SAA's purchasing power.** Two roundtable participants noted that it is possible for SAAs to pay for services (recording, videography, printing, translation, transportation, etc.) that assist with the delivery of arts programs to the public. When anchored in a transparent strategy and appropriate accountability, this strategy may allow more nimble and efficient support than is offered through traditional grant mechanisms.

Shared Decision Making

- **Diversify panels.** SAAs report deliberate efforts to include rural, BIPOC, lower-income, disabled, nonbinary and LGBTQ+ panelists, thus giving historically underrepresented communities a direct voice in deciding how public funds are distributed. Using community partners, local arts agencies and past grantees to promote panel opportunities can be helpful, as can eliminating formal nomination requirements. Diversifying panels can pay dividends beyond adjudication. Many SAAs view panelists as important bridge builders with communities they represent. Panels can help SAAs improve guidelines and adjudication criteria, can assist with future applicant recruitment, and can help to spread the word about future grant opportunities. Compensating panelists ensures that all have an equitable opportunity to serve regardless of income or job status.

- **Provide multiple ways to participate in strategic planning.** Strategic planning is a great opportunity to involve constituents in agency decisions, but individuals with limited exposure to an SAA are unlikely to attend council meetings, respond to surveys, or volunteer to speak at government hearings. One-on-one interviews, small-group
conversations or topical convenings may be better for securing their input. Likewise, state and local partners can help to meaningfully engage groups that have never before interacted with an SAA.

- **Consider crowdsourcing.** A few state arts agencies have turned over grant-making decisions to the public through crowdsourcing or open processes. One such example can be found in Indiana's InstaGrant initiative in 2019. Maryland's Public Editing Process (described in *In Pursuit of Equity*) offers an example of consulting with the public to make policy changes.

### Agency Communications

- **Ask existing grantees and partners to circulate funding announcements and event information.** This is a common way to extend the reach of SAA communications. Grantees and partners may have more inclusive networks that can reach a broader audience than can an SAA.

- **Don't rely on websites alone.** Organizations and individuals unfamiliar with the SAA will not necessarily know how to locate or navigate a state website. Utilizing social media to contact organizations and circulate funding notices can be an effective way to reach smaller organizations that do not have a formal online presence.

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**Empowering Community Creativity**

The South Carolina Arts Council (SCAC) *Art of Community: Rural SC* initiative promotes rural community development through arts and creative placemaking in 15 low-income counties with significant Black and Native American populations.

Teams in each county reimagine their communities, drawing on local assets and relationships and a statewide learning community facilitated by SCAC. Local teams lead demonstration projects that grapple with a current issue such as workforce development, health care, youth engagement, public safety or housing. Teams are recruited by “mavens,” residents who have been selected by SCAC for their broad connections and passion for their communities.

This approach demonstrates how an SAA can invest in rural and tribal communities in new ways: by placing relationships at the heart of the program, by empowering local communities to define their own needs and opportunities, and by putting residents in charge of directing how state resources should be used.

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"We have developed a mailing list of churches, community centers, libraries, post offices and other locally focused gathering spaces. We have found that physically mailing posters and flyers to these hubs has been helpful in reaching areas with limited digital access."
- **Use multiple communications channels.** Virtual events and technology have made SAA events more accessible to some, but not all constituents benefit from this change due to the digital divide. Traditional vehicles (such as radio, physical notices or local newspapers) can still be useful, especially in regions with limited broadband.

- **Provide translation and interpretation.** Captioning, American Sign Language interpretation, language translation services and applications available in multiple languages all are important accessibility tools. However, when providing translations, especially for grant applications, there must be systems in place to ensure that the SAA can follow through when receiving applications in languages other than English.

- **Make underserved communities more visible.** Vehicles cited by SAAs range from social media posts and newsletters to websites, strategic plans and grant guidelines. This can be done conscientiously, to give voice to diverse constituencies and to help all state populations see themselves reflected in an SAA's scope of work.

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**Equity Communications Strategies**

The North Carolina Arts Council (NCAC) has adopted a variety of strategies that showcase the important contributions of artists of color to the state while making the agency’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion transparent to the public. Efforts include:

- Initiatives that celebrate and promote diversity, such as [Come Hear North Carolina](#), the [African American Music Trails](#) and the [Cherokee Heritage Trails](#)
- [Snapshot reports](#) and [interviews](#) featuring the work of culturally diverse artists and arts organizations
- [Public forums](#) convened to discuss equity strategies
- Time lines of the agency’s racial equity work in its [general programs](#) and in [arts education](#)
- Public announcements about [needed improvements](#) and new [strategies](#)

Learn more at [#ncartsequity](#).
Staff Commitments

- **Formalize outreach as a staff responsibility.** Some SAAs reported that relationship building is an expectation of all program staff. Other SAAs noted that their agency has created staff positions for which relationship building, community outreach or equity work is a primary function. Still others combine both approaches. Whatever staffing solution a state is able to adopt, developing meaningful and productive community relationships necessitates a substantial commitment of personnel time.

- **Build agency knowledge.** SAAs have conducted implicit bias and equity trainings with staff, grant panelists and council appointees. While building awareness of impediments to equity, such training also can create a shared vocabulary that helps the agency to align its efforts internally and conduct respectful external interactions.

- **Adapt schedules to community needs.** Multiple states noted the importance of offering assistance outside of standard office hours. This customer service accommodation is appreciated by constituents who are unable to take time off work or pay for dependent care. It also helps to make provisions for SAA staff to be available for significant community events occurring in the evenings or on weekends.

- **Get out of town.** Some SAAs vary the locations of their council/board meetings to take place away from the state capitol. Especially when combined with invitations for the public to attend or opportunities for informal social events, this strategy can make SAA governance proceedings more approachable. To make staff more accessible, some SAAs have adopted "offices on wheels" or opened branch offices to provide technical assistance services. Alternative

"The organizations we need to reach are not located in the state capital. And equity work does not happen only from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. How do we, as a state agency, begin to navigate these space and time issues?"

Vermont Art Exchange's Mission in Motion traveling art studio
working arrangements such as remote work—which was mandatory during the COVID-19 pandemic—offer ways for SAAs to expand their geographic reach and might help SAAs to diversify their staff over the long haul.

- **Be patient.** States acknowledge that this work takes time and moves "at the speed of trust." SAAs commented that there are no fast shortcuts to the continual practice of nourishing connections—and establishing trust—so that new relationships can take root over the course of many years. The work may be nonlinear and flow in unexpected directions, to which SAAs must adapt. In the words of one roundtable participant, "We must be patient in how we listen to new voices and create programs to support those voices, just as those voices have been forced to be patient with the system as it currently is."

"Our agency’s philosophy has been to develop deep relationships with members of the cultural communities we serve, one person at a time. The goal is not only to meet the highly visible gatekeeper (which is often important), but also to dive deeper into the fabric of the community and to meet as many people in cultural organizations as possible. This is a slow and time-consuming process, but well worth it because of the relationships and networks created."

DAYS AND DAYS (2015) by artist Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos of Oregon) is a reference to the unbroken reality of Indigenous living culture on this continent.
Hope for the Future

The roundtable that NASAA convened reflected on daunting systemic gaps in how the arts are supported in America. Participants were blunt about the shortcomings of SAA systems that present barriers to entry into the public funding system. But they also expressed optimism about the potential of SAAs to build new community relationships and usher the arts into a more just, equitable and inclusive future.

"For me there is no magical formula. It's how you treat people. Talk to people, reduce their fears, build the trust. Take the time, don't give them some standard bureaucratic answer. That's everyone's responsibility at our agency. It's the value of our arts commission."

"The path to equity can be bulldozed and rebuilt. Trust will happen when we build a system that equitably allows people access to resources. I don't think that it's the role of a state agency to evaluate art. Art is about communication, aspirations, about belonging. We can be looking at how to facilitate the free movement of culture through how we fund and develop opportunities and organizations across the state."

"State arts agencies aren't just about crossing the t's, dotting the i's or making money go in this or that direction. We're about community relationships and the places people call home. This agency will last longer than us, and we can build a bipartisan commitment to the communities of this state."

"We are figuring out how power sharing with our council, our staff and our communities can work differently. I feel like there's a beautiful structure just waiting to emerge."
Applause

NASAA is grateful to the 34 state arts agencies and regional arts organizations that provided thoughtful, candid and creative input for this research project. We are especially grateful to the Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA) for its fruitful collaboration on this report, as well as its two companion volumes: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in State Arts Agency Public Art Programs: A Roundtable Report and In Pursuit of Equity: Four Case Studies of State Arts Agencies.

Image Credits

Cover: Detail from Beatrice Stenta’s "500,000 and Rising" (originally entitled "350,000 and Rising"), 2020. This collage was featured in the 2021 New Jersey Arts Annual: ReVision and Respond exhibit, a project of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and The Newark Museum of Art. Photo courtesy of the artist

Page 6: Considered one of the premier arts and disabilities organizations in the United States, Dancing Wheels is a professional, physically integrated dance company uniting the talents of dancers both with and without disabilities. Photo credit: Al Fuchs, courtesy of the Ohio Arts Council

Page 9: Jude Desmond and Julio Desmont lead the "Art that Binds: Community Co-Creation Haitian-American Painting" workshop at the Clemmons Family Farm, one of the largest
African American–owned family farms in Vermont. Photo credit: Brett Simison, courtesy of the Vermont Arts Council

**Page 15:** Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción empowers and engages individuals and families to improve their lives through high-quality affordable housing, education and arts programs. Photo credit: Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción, courtesy of the Massachusetts Cultural Council

**Page 16:** The Vermont Arts Exchange (VAE) transformed a run-down factory into a creative center that contributes to the commercial, social and cultural life of area residents. The Art Bus is VAE’s Mission in Motion traveling art studio that brings the arts to the people. Pictured is a scene from the Stay in Your Car Parade. Photo credit: Caroline Bonnivier Snyder, courtesy of the Vermont Arts Council

**Page 17:** Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos of Oregon) notes of her DAYS AND DAYS (2015) work, "I display this work to celebrate and show our sovereignty, exercised through the continued practice of our traditional relationship with the natural world and cultural lifeways that we have enjoyed since time immemorial." This work is located at Kamiak Elementary, in Pullman, Washington and is part of Washington's State Art Collection. Photo courtesy of the artist

**Page 19:** Maurice Habimfura is a member of Ikirenga Cy’Intore, a Rwandan drum and dance group that educates and preserves native Rwandan dance culture, which is not traditionally written down and is becoming lost due to genocide, diaspora and modern cultural shifts. Photo courtesy of Kyle Dubay and the Maine Arts Commission

**About NASAA**

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is the nonpartisan membership organization representing the state and jurisdictional arts councils of the United States. NASAA is a clearinghouse for research about government support for arts and culture in America, providing statistical data, policy analysis and information on exemplary practices. The work of NASAA and state arts agencies is supported in part through funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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