

NASAA STRATEGIC PLAN

Draft for Public Review | June 2022

This summer, NASAA is revising and refreshing the strategic plan that guides our work on behalf of state arts agencies. NASAA planning is driven by members, involving multiple opportunities for stakeholder input, including:

- **Board and committee work:** Representatives of 27 states and allied organizations are shaping NASAA’s plan through board and committee dialogues.
- **Interviews:** NASAA’s Nominating Committee conducts interviews with all 56 state and jurisdictional executive directors and chairs to solicit feedback on satisfaction with NASAA and emerging state arts agency needs. 2022 interviews currently are underway, to build on what was learned through last year’s outreach.
- **Open call for feedback:** NASAA is sharing the draft plan with 2,800 arts colleagues from across the nation. This includes all levels of state arts agency staff, volunteer councils, cultural advocates and individuals affiliated with national, regional and local arts organizations.

We welcome *your* comments! If you have remarks or suggestions to offer, please email them to NASAA Chief Program & Planning Officer Kelly Barsdate by July 15, 2022. Note that this is a text-only draft. Design elements are under construction.

FOREWARD

Our nation is contending with generation-defining events. The COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustices, natural disasters and human conflicts have reshaped our reality. Even as our country aches from acute political, geographic and economic divides, we are reaching for hope and healing. America is a work in progress, and this is a time of reckoning and—most importantly—of renewal.

In such times, the arts restore our connections to each other, spark our revival and galvanize our resolve. They strengthen our communities, our economy and our well-being. The arts also can be a vehicle for civic discourse about hard issues, helping us understand the past, grapple with the present and envision a new future.

State arts agencies facilitate these benefits, but they face formidable challenges. They must respond to crises with resilience and creativity. They must assert their value and demonstrate a robust return on investment. They must help the creative sector adapt to new norms of cultural production and participation. State arts agencies not only support the arts, they also shape public policy. State arts agencies can be government's better angels, finding new ways to assist communities and fulfill America's promise of government that serves *all* people.

Because each state and jurisdiction is different, every state arts agency will find unique solutions to these problems. NASAA takes pride in helping all state arts agencies to flourish, honoring their distinctiveness and their commonalities. This strategic plan reflects our renewed commitment to NASAA's core mission: *to strengthen state arts agencies*. With this framework as a guide for action, NASAA will equip state arts agencies to meet the challenges of today—and fortify them to thrive in the future.

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Arts and creativity make us stronger—as individuals, families, communities, states and as a country. The work of state arts agencies, supported by NASAA, empowers:

STRONG ECONOMIES. Arts and creativity are economic engines, putting people to work in many industries. They stimulate commerce and offer opportunities for young people, rural areas and creative entrepreneurs to prosper.

THRIVING COMMUNITIES. The arts promote connection by providing shared experiences, celebrating local culture and encouraging civic discourse. They tell our stories, helping us preserve and pass on cherished traditions and

empathize with others. The arts also enliven our communities, creating desirable places for people to live, work, play and raise their families.

GOOD HEALTH. The arts reduce isolation and contribute to physical and psychological well-being. They facilitate healthy aging and provide effective therapies for injured military

personnel, trauma survivors and people struggling with depression, anxiety or addiction.

ESSENTIAL EDUCATION. The arts boost achievement in academic fundamentals, setting young people up for success. Education that includes the arts teaches lateral thinking as well as the value of practice and persistence—essential skills for school, work and life.

INSPIRING INNOVATION. A creative workforce gives businesses a competitive edge by helping them engage customers, originate new ideas and find fresh solutions to problems. The arts exercise our creative muscles throughout our life span, igniting our imaginations when we're young and facilitating meaningful learning and community engagement as we grow older.

RESILIENT SPIRITS. Intrinsic to the arts is the power to uplift us and help us perceive things in new ways. In the face of hardship and adversity, the arts are a force for recovery, understanding and healing. Through the arts, we express who we are as a nation today, and who we aspire to become tomorrow.

THRIVING FOR ALL

Arts and creativity help people and places to thrive, strengthening the economic, educational and civic fabric of American communities. **State arts agencies ensure that all towns and rural regions—not only the largest cities or wealthiest areas—have access to these opportunities.**

MISSION

Strengthen state arts agencies.

NASAA empowers the work of state arts agencies through:

REPRESENTATION. NASAA is a champion and advocate for state arts agencies, asserting the importance of the arts to decision makers. We shape public

policy, foster multisector support for the arts and give state arts agencies a persuasive voice in influential national networks.

KNOWLEDGE. NASAA provides authoritative data to support evidence based case making and decision making. Our research and professional development services inform and inspire state arts agencies, sparking new ways of working, serving the public and developing the resilience of our field.

COMMUNITY. NASAA convenes and connects state arts agencies. Our professional community energizes the work of state arts agencies, unites our members around common goals and builds a shared vision for the future.

NASAA amplifies the expertise, influence, funding and vision that state arts agencies employ on behalf of every American. Through NASAA, state arts agencies achieve more together than they can alone.

VALUES

NASAA's work is guided by these enduring values:

ACCESS FOR ALL: We believe the public sector bears a special responsibility to help *all* communities thrive through the arts. To this end, NASAA strives to reduce barriers and dismantle bias based on race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, religion, geography, political affiliation or economic status.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY and INCLUSION

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are bedrock values as well as action commitments for NASAA. In alignment with NASAA's [DEI policy](#), our framework encompasses:

- **DIVERSITY:** Recognizing all dimensions of human identity and difference.
- **EQUITY:** Providing the means for all people to realize fair and just treatment, benefits and opportunities.
- **INCLUSION:** Engaging diverse individuals, communities and perspectives to ensure access, representation and belonging for all.

NASAA's action plans enumerate activities we pursue to propel DEI each year. Annual progress reports document what we've accomplished, keeping us accountable and transparent. See page 6 for more information on DEI in NASAA action plans.

SERVICE: NASAA programs are timely, relevant and responsive to the needs of members. Because every state and jurisdiction is unique, NASAA tailors our services to the needs of each member agency.

CREDIBILITY: NASAA earns trust by sharing factually accurate information and aligning our deeds with our words.

NONPARTISANSHIP: NASAA builds consensus around the arts and cultivates advocacy champions across the political spectrum.

EXCELLENCE: NASAA is recognized for the high caliber, creativity and professionalism of our services. We exemplify accountable stewardship of public resources and rigorous evaluation spurs continual improvement.

TRANSPARENCY: NASAA is a member-driven organization that communicates clearly, openly shares information with our stakeholders and welcomes feedback.

COLLABORATION: NASAA initiates partnerships—across multiple sectors as well as within the arts field—to broaden our impact and expand support for the work of state arts agencies.

GOALS

I. Advocate for state arts agencies

By developing policy resources and relationships that advance state arts agencies, NASAA ensures that the arts play a central role in American public life and that all communities have equitable access to the arts. We build consensus about the arts across the political spectrum and position the arts for sustained support despite swings of the political pendulum.

- A. Advocate for a robust and well-funded National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).
- B. Develop other federal resources and relationships beneficial to state arts agencies.
- C. Strengthen state level advocacy practices.
- D. Foster cross-sector support and strategic partnerships to benefit state arts agencies.

II. Hone the knowledge and skills of state arts agencies

State arts agencies need savvy and agile leaders capable of addressing immediate crises without losing sight of their long-term goals. NASAA's research and professional development services inform state arts agency practice and spur the continual development of our field.

- A. Supply authoritative facts about state arts agencies.
- B. Facilitate members' use of information for planning, decision-making and case-making.
- C. Catalyze state arts agency innovation, improvement and change.
- D. Deliver educational programs that boost members' knowledge, leadership skills and resilience.

III. Connect state arts agencies

Our Assembly is an inclusive, welcoming community where members learn from each other and find common purpose. Connecting through NASAA also bolsters policy: the state arts agency community empowers our decisions, increases our influence and defines NASAA's credibility as a representative policy voice.

- A. Keep state arts agencies informed through timely, relevant and accessible communications.
- B. Facilitate peer-to-peer networking.
- C. Promote the understanding and use of NASAA services.
- D. Engage members in the governance, planning and advocacy work of the Assembly.

IV. Build NASAA's capacity

To strengthen state arts agencies now and into the future, NASAA must develop the financial and operational capacity to meet our members' escalating demands for services. Fulfilling these objectives helps us attain all of NASAA's goals.

- A. Develop and diversify NASAA's revenues.
- B. Develop NASAA's human resources.
- C. Improve NASAA's operations and technology.
- D. Evaluate our work and learn from the results.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Advancing DEI requires more than good intentions. It necessitates concrete actions and continual learning. NASAA addresses this by:

- offering services that help state arts agencies pursue DEI in their policies, programs and funding practices, and
- adopting policies and practices that strengthen DEI within NASAA.

Part of how NASAA embodies our DEI values is by recognizing and respecting differences that exist among state arts agencies. Although the commitment to helping all communities thrive is universally shared, each state and jurisdiction needs the freedom to tailor its tactics to its own geography, demographics, authorizing environment and operating realities—no universal formula will succeed everywhere. NASAA therefore offers a range of methods for advancing DEI. Listening and learning are important elements of our DEI leadership approach, which blends long-term strategy with situational improvisation to propel our field forward.

NASAA enumerates our DEI action commitments in action plans, seeking member input to guide services and activities. **Specific DEI actions are interlaced within every goal in our action plan.** For transparency and accountability, NASAA regularly reports on our DEI activities and accomplishments to our board and membership. See:

[DEI Activities Report](#)

[Current Action Plan](#)

[DEI Resources Hub](#)

[NASAA Policy Statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#)

WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

State arts agencies are NASAA's primary stakeholders, volunteers, advisors and ambassadors. Most importantly, state arts agencies are the owners of this Assembly, its originators, leaders and investors. State arts agencies created NASAA in 1968, and still count on their Assembly today to expand their

knowledge and influence. Members share an equal stake in the goals of this plan—and share equal responsibility for building an association to achieve them. NASAA issues calls to action throughout the year and we urge state arts agencies' full engagement in that work.

Collaborations beyond the state arts agency field are integral to NASAA's success, and to the success of state arts agencies themselves. NASAA's annual action plan identifies specific collaborations that can help us attain our objectives in any given year. Some relationships, however, have perennial importance. These partners include:

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS: NASAA represents state arts agencies to the NEA and fosters program and policy collaborations between the NEA and its state partners.

ADVOCACY COALITIONS: NASAA intersects with national and regional advocacy coalitions, state arts advocacy organizations and other networks advocating for the arts, the humanities and the creative sector. NASAA's role in advocacy collaborations is guided by the needs and priorities of our member state arts agencies.

POLICY NETWORKS: NASAA connects with national organizations that shape the knowledge and actions of state policymakers. Through these groups, NASAA helps governors, legislators and other public officials understand the value of the arts and state arts agencies.

CROSS-SECTOR NETWORKS: Working with organizations in fields such as economic development, community development, education and health helps us broaden support for the arts and bring important insights back to the state arts agency field.

REGIONAL ARTS ORGANIZATIONS (RAOs): NASAA advocates for NEA funds that support the work of RAOs as well as NASAA and state arts agencies. We meet regularly with RAO leaders to identify shared interests and to synchronize efforts that benefit state arts agencies.

ARTS SERVICE NETWORKS: NASAA routinely collaborates and consults with leadership networks and organizations that focus on arts development and grant making.

State arts agencies also are strengthened by numerous state and local allies. NASAA serves as a resource to philanthropic partners, local arts organizations, government agencies, civic groups and others who work in concert with state arts agencies to advance the arts.

STAYING CURRENT

NASAA planning is evergreen—it is continually renewed and never stands still. We do this by combining **strategic plans** and **action plans**. Our strategic plan (this document) charts NASAA's overall course. It sets forth our purpose, our long-range goals and the principles that guide our work, without an expiration date. [Action plans](#) are time-bound. They itemize the near-term steps we take to achieve our long-term goals. This tandem approach ensures that NASAA's day-to-day priorities align with our strategic vision.

WHY AN EVERGREEN STRATEGIC PLAN?

NASAA conducts a miniature strategic planning process every year, through rigorous and member-driven action planning. This keeps us in step with rapidly changing conditions. We initiate a full strategic planning cycle when we anticipate significant environmental shifts. By conducting comprehensive planning judiciously, NASAA can devote more time and resources to serving members.

Action plans ensure the dynamic currency of NASAA's work, helping us address new realities, opportunities or constraints. We invite feedback and input from every state and jurisdiction through an annual interview process, and a membership vote is required to approve the action plan. The strategic plan is regularly assessed for relevance, too. The standard review interval is three years, but the board can initiate a planning cycle sooner or later as circumstances warrant. This plan, originated fo 2018, reflects revisions made to attune the plan to new realities in 2023 and beyond.

EVALUATING OUR IMPACT

In keeping with our evergreen approach, planning at NASAA does not end when planning documents are approved. Rigorous measurement practices—fully

transparent to members—continually refine our aim and improve our performance.

DIALOGUE: We talk with—and listen to—members every day. Our [annual nominating interviews](#) ask every executive director and council chair to rate their satisfaction with NASAA, weigh in on our services, identify unmet needs and offer suggestions for the future. Combined with parallel discussions among our standing committees and NASAA's board, these feedback channels form a human chain of qualitative data that keeps NASAA's planning evergreen.

PROGRESS REPORTING: [Action Plan Highlights](#) and [reports of DEI activities](#) itemize progress made toward our activity targets. These reports show what we've done to advance each goal and objective in our plan.

FIELD MONITORING: NASAA monitors a variety of indicators of state arts agency strength and capacity. These indicators help NASAA to track the stability and growth of our field.

PERFORMANCE METRICS: NASAA monitors a robust suite of operational performance metrics. The targets are informed by best practices among professional associations and monitored by the Planning & Budget Committee.

DATA MINING: We [analyze information requests](#), member engagement and an array of communications measures. This active data mining informs action planning and provides real-time intelligence that NASAA uses to adjust tactics to address member needs.

PROGRAM EVALUATION: NASAA conducts evaluations of individual programs, using the results to guide future activities.

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

This plan—initially adopted in 2018 and substantially revised for 2023—was formulated through an inclusive process designed to shape our long-range goals, reach out to new stakeholders and surface insights that will help NASAA be smart in our day-to-

The adoption of this strategic plan represents the beginning—not the end—of a process. Together, state arts agencies, NASAA and our partners will work to sustain the arts as an asset for individuals, families, communities and state governments across America. We invite you to join us.

day work. The participatory process was led by NASAA's Planning & Budget Committee. We used a mix of methods to invite candid, diverse opinions and make sure every voice was heard.

FUTURE FORECASTING: As a first step in planning, we engaged the full membership in a dialogue about the future of our field. Our board focused on changes affecting the success of state arts agencies. We also examined future forecasts for state government, the arts and professional associations.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Staff and board appraised strengths and weaknesses—and considered what needed to change—for both state arts agencies and NASAA.

MEMBER INPUT: Because state arts agencies are NASAA's primary stakeholders, member input was a keystone of our process. To develop the original plan for 2018 we conducted 84 member interviews, received 143 responses to our membership opinion poll, and engaged 29 board and committee members in developing plan drafts. Our 2023 revision included [XX] interviews with executive and council leaders. It also reflects contributions from 27 additional board and committee members, plus invitations for all state arts agency and regional arts organizations to comment on the draft. Interviews with the executive directors and board chairs of each state and jurisdiction continue as an annual process.

CROSS-SECTOR PERSPECTIVES: We cast a wide net, reaching far beyond our membership to engage 83 outside advisors in the original process for 2018. This included 51 interviews (a mix of phone and face-to-face) with people representing the fields of economic development, government innovation, creative placemaking, community development, education, health care, agriculture and philanthropy as well as the arts. In-person forums with associations serving state government, regional arts organizations and national arts service networks reinforced key relationships—and built new ties for the future.

DATA ANALYSIS: We analyzed 3,716 historical information requests and conducted a statistical benchmarking study comparing NASAA to 41 other associations serving state government or the arts. To inform fundraising and revenue diversification, we evaluated the success of NASAA's past annual fund campaigns and conducted in-depth prospect research to identify foundations that may be likely candidates for future support. Budget forecasting and

analysis of current [information requests](#), contributions and foundation prospects continue as part of our action planning cycle.

THIRD-PARTY OBJECTIVITY: To ensure an unbiased assessment (and to expedite the work for 2018), NASAA engaged a consulting team to lead portions of our planning process. Artistic Logistics conducted interviews, facilitated forums and reality-checked our conclusions.

DRAFT REVIEWS: Members, nonmember planning informants and independent consultants offered revisions to the plan in draft form.

TRANSPARENCY: NASAA established a publicly accessible strategic planning hub on our website to share our findings and invite ongoing input.

THANKS!

<Acknowledgements and design credits follow>