Every state is home to Native peoples who are the original residents and stewards of North American lands. Every state also has a state arts agency (SAA) dedicated to supporting the arts. Not all SAAs, however, have developed relationships with Native communities or Tribal Nations.

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) wants to help SAAs deepen their connections with Native communities. Meaningful relationships, in turn, can serve as a foundation for developing services that meet the needs of Native organizations, Indigenous artists, culture bearers and community members. Recognizing that state governments have a blighted track record in the treatment of Native peoples, this project will promote respectful and responsive approaches that take the sovereignty of Tribal Nations into account.

This initiative is timely, given the numerous new leaders in the SAA field and the redoubled effort many SAAs are making to ensure equity in how their resources are deployed. This is a critical moment to educate our field and ensure that Indigenous needs and perspectives receive recognition—not only to raise awareness and grow understanding, but also to guide and catalyze action at the state level. This project has the potential to be very influential. If NASAA can help the government arts agencies of all 56 states and U.S. jurisdictions adopt better practices for serving Native communities, we can make a lasting impact across the nation.

Phase I Project Goals

In recent years, other national organizations have held convenings and released excellent resources on Indigenous arts and Native philanthropy. But those resources don’t address the specific challenges associated with doing this work within state government. NASAA’s project will attempt to address that gap, to be additive rather than duplicative. Our goals are to:

1. **Elevate the importance** of SAAs establishing intentional and respectful relationships with Native communities, Indigenous individuals, and Tribal Nations.

2. **Lift up hallmarks of positive practices** for learning about, interacting with and supporting Native communities.

3. **Recommend credible resources that SAAs can consult**, prioritizing resources originating from Native communities, themselves.
4. Describe **examples of SAA programs focusing on Native communities**, to serve as inspiration for other states.

5. **Identify further action steps NASAA can take** to help SAAs improve their services and support for Native/Indigenous communities and their consultations with Tribal Nations.

**NASAA's Approach**

- A core principle of the initiative is to **center Native voices in the work**. NASAA will convene a Circle of Advisors of Indigenous individuals. NASAA's primary role in this group will be to **listen** and learn, to synthesize what we hear, and seek feedback on how we've interpreted the guidance offered. NASAA also will conduct numerous interviews with Native institutions, artists, culture bearers, educators and Tribal leaders. Given that this project seeks to influence state government actions, we also will consult with state Tribal Relations offices.

- Because it is not possible to generalize across Native/Indigenous communities (each of which is unique in its culture, governance and goals), NASAA's goal will be to **exemplify approaches that are attuned to individual Native groups**.

- Our initial output will be a written set of **practice recommendations** for SAAs. We'll use this paper to communicate the importance of this issue and to lift up examples of positive practices. But this will not be NASAA's only end-product. Grounded in our learnings from the first phase of the project, we'll identify **additional long-term actions that NASAA can take** to advance equity for Native/Indigenous communities in the work of SAAs.

- To **avoid uncompensated labor** and signify our gratitude for the time and expertise contributed by Indigenous individuals involved in this initiative, NASAA will offer honoraria to project advisors.

- The proposed **project calendar** for the first phase of work is January-October of 2023. However, we recognize that equity work moves at the speed of trust. We'll take the time required to do the work thoughtfully.

**About NASAA**

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. In collaboration with the nation’s 56 state and jurisdictional arts councils, we promote the arts as a powerful path to economic prosperity, rural vitality, good health, education success, and strong communities in which everyone thrives. NASAA **serves** as a clearinghouse for data and research about public funding for the arts as well as best practices for state arts agencies. For more information about NASAA and the work of SAAs, visit [www.nasaa-arts.org](http://www.nasaa-arts.org).

**We Welcome Your Questions and Suggestions**

For additional information on NASAA’s Strengthening SAA Relationships with Native Communities initiative—or to offer ideas or advice—contact Kelly Barsdate at 202-347-6354 or [kelly.barsdate@nasaa-arts.org](mailto:kelly.barsdate@nasaa-arts.org).