

Every state and jurisdictional arts agency (SAA) has a governing body that provides citizen oversight of its programs. Known as councils, commissions or boards, these bodies are created by statute and their members are appointed by governors or legislative leadership. Council members are volunteers who possess a wide range of knowledge and skills, including arts expertise, knowledge of community needs, business acumen, policy experience and political connections.

Councils provide an important pathway for citizen participation in the work of a responsive government agency. Service on an SAA council is an exciting opportunity to be an ambassador for the arts and contribute to the growth and development of the creative sector.

Legal Status

In addition to being codified in state law, the presence of a council is a federal requirement. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) requires SAAs to have "an independent board, council, or commission whose members serve in an advisory or policy-making capacity" for the SAA to be eligible to receive NEA Partnership Agreement funding. This money provides critical resources for SAA grants and operations.

Public-Sector Structures

Many council members have past experience serving on nonprofit arts or philanthropic boards. While such civic leadership experience is highly valuable, many council members find that the roles and governance frameworks for an SAA council are distinctly different than those used by 501(c)(3) boards.

COMMON COUNCIL DUTIES

- ▶ Accept Partnership Agreement funds from the NEA
- ▶ Advise the governor and legislature on arts policy issues
- ▶ Encourage interest in and study of the state's cultural heritage
- ▶ Increase public participation in and appreciation of the arts
- ▶ Develop resources for the arts
- ▶ Advocate for state policies that support the arts
- ▶ Formulate the SAA's strategic plan
- ▶ Encourage the arts in economic development, education, tourism, community development, health and other realms
- ▶ Consider grant recommendations

Public boards and commissions fulfill roles determined by statute and must function within the state's operational and accountability structures. Because they use taxpayer dollars, public boards and commissions need to comply with special ethics laws, administrative code, procurement regulations, public meetings protocols and other transparency requirements. Fiduciary oversight typically is fulfilled by the executive branch, with the legislature having jurisdiction over agency authorization.

The authority held by councils varies among states. Many council roles are advisory in nature, but some councils hold certain policymaking authorities. In some states, councils oversee the SAA's chief staff officer. In others (often when the arts agency is embedded within a larger departmental structure in state government), the SAA executive director is appointed and supervised by a cabinet secretary or other executive branch official on behalf of the governor.

NONPROFIT BOARD	STATE ARTS AGENCY COUNCIL
Determines its own purpose and mission	Purpose defined by statute
May serve a specific geography	Required to serve the entire state
May focus on specific beneficiary populations	Required to serve all residents
Primarily funded through earned revenue and private contributions	Primarily funded through government appropriations (private funding comprises approximately 1% of total SAA revenue)
Answers to donors and community stakeholders	Answers to the governor and/or cabinet secretary, the state legislature and taxpayers
Leads fundraising efforts to secure contributions and gifts	Participates in advocacy efforts to secure a budget from the governor and state legislature
Governed by self-authored bylaws	Governed by statute, state administrative code and state ethics laws; may also adopt bylaws or parliamentary procedures
Sets personnel policies, determines benefits and defines performance review procedures	Personnel policies, benefits and review procedures defined by state personnel requirements
Provides the highest level of authority for organizational oversight and accountability	Highest level of agency oversight and accountability fall within the executive branch
Hires and oversees the executive director	Might not select or supervise the executive director

A Statewide Lens

Rather than representing any single community or arts constituency, SAA council members serve their state as a whole. This entails:

- ▶ inviting input from a broad array of stakeholders to inform SAA plans and policies,
- ▶ considering the potential impact of SAA decisions on large and small organizations, urban and rural communities, and the full array of artistic disciplines, and
- ▶ ensuring that SAA resources are accessible to all.

Council members serve as arts ambassadors, helping to communicate the importance of the arts and raise awareness about the services offered by state arts agencies. Council members also serve as conduits for feedback, listening to what local residents say about the arts and community needs and helping the agency spot important trends.



Members of the Illinois Arts Council—joined by agency staff—met with local arts leaders and visited the Noyes Cultural Center in Evanston during a statewide listening tour. Photo courtesy of Illinois Arts Council

Advocacy Roles

Like their nonprofit board counterparts, state arts agency councils play a role in resource development. However, resources for public agencies are largely developed through an annual or biennial legislative appropriations process. State arts agency and constituent input are essential parts of the appropriations process. Elected officials—especially those who sit on committees overseeing the arts or the state budget—need to know that the arts are important to constituents and that state arts funds have a positive impact.

Because procedures vary from state to state (and between governors' administrations), council members should ask about the steps required to develop and enact the state arts agency budget: Who initiates the process and when? What parameters get issued from the governor or the state budget office? Which legislative committees have oversight and who sits on those committees? What arguments will those specific legislators find persuasive?

Knowledge of the appropriations process can then equip council members to play important leadership roles, including:

- ▶ collaborating with the SAA staff to identify resource needs and priorities prior to each budget cycle
- ▶ communicating the SAA's accomplishments to the governor's office
- ▶ meeting with members of the legislature to encourage state investment in the arts and thank them for supporting the SAA
- ▶ sharing information about the state arts agency's work via social and professional networks
- ▶ participating in activities organized by citizen advocates

RELEVANT RESOURCES

- ▶ [Being an Arts Ambassador](#)
- ▶ [Advocacy vs. Lobbying: An Arts Primer For Council Members](#)
- ▶ [Arts and Creativity Strengthen our Nation: A Narrative and Message Guide](#)
- ▶ [NASAA Member Benefits](#)

It is useful for council members to stay current on policy developments and advocacy opportunities. Advocacy limitations are worth clarifying, as well. Council members are prohibited from lobbying in some states, but *all* are able to *educate*, helping the public and elected officials to understand the benefits of the arts and the SAA's achievements.

State arts agency council members are in a unique position to be champions for arts support. By elevating the importance of the arts, council members encourage public investments in creativity and culture—investments which ultimately help communities to thrive.



The ArtsWA Board of Commissioners meets at the Kirkland Arts Center, Kirkland, Washington.
Photo courtesy of ArtsWA