

## Deputy Director Peer Group Meeting Notes – February 5, 2026

Sylvia Prickett (NASAA) welcomed the group of 23 deputy directors.

Sylvia passed on a warm hello from Rick Duplissi who recently resigned. He can be reached at [rduplissie@gmail.com](mailto:rduplissie@gmail.com).

### Checking in

#### What's the main focus of your agency right now?

Andre Zhang Sonera (IN): Wrapping up evaluations for America 250. With the foundation grant for creative aging, putting together a creative aging summit in March with the University of Indianapolis. Going to do a statewide convening to bring aging service providers, artists and health services organizations to produce and roll out a toolkit of how to implement creative aging programming in Indiana.

Jocelyn Robertson (ID): They are in the process of reimagining their grants programs as a whole staff, with weekly meetings, and conducting asset mapping and SWOT analysis of all grant programs. Also, will be looking towards what others are doing with the goal of having a new grants program by EOY.

#### Sylvia: **How do you plan to look out to the state arts agency world and gather input?**

Jocelyn: They were going to start by sending an email to NASAA for advice, looking towards agencies that are similar in size, demographics, political situation, and budget. Open to a lot of different ways of interfacing with other grant programs and onboarding ideas others have put in place.

Encarnación Teruel (IL): The Council in Illinois also recently worked with NASAA when we revised our grant programs about 3 years ago. Will send over the report to Jocelyn as reference.

Illinois is in the midst of 250 awards and grants. They split the state up into 6 regions to ensure there were projects throughout the entire state creating public art sculptures.

Nora Johnson (PA): Working on implementing strategic planning which they have been working on for the past year and a half. The new strategic framework focuses on asset development, workforce development, community development, and visibility and policy.

Workforce development has involved shifting programs that were for traditional teaching artist residencies in K-12 classrooms to funding support for labor and industry and the Pennsylvania Dept. of Education. They are also doubling investment in community development and have shifted their general operating support model to doing everything in-house.

José Herrera (AZ): In the implementation stage of their strategic plan. They have some focus groups in the next two weeks and have received input from staff. The legislative session started in January, and they are meeting with legislators. In addition, they are launching programs for the season, and ensuring staff who seem a little stressed feel supported.

Kate Van Steenhuyse (KS): Had their Governor's Arts awards this week which brought a lot of people out and was overall great. Dept. of Commerce has transitioned to Salesforce for grants management, and so she is working on a lot of technical platform things. Also sending out invites for a new pilot program.

- Pilot details: Music development in rural places. It is a statewide cohort that helps communities connect, and build actions plans and become more strategic with their nighttime economy, etc. (<https://www.soundmusiccities.com/kansas-music-cities-together>)

Dan Katona (OH): Tons of America 250 work. New staff and board members are coming on and had another staff posting that closed yesterday. Governor's Arts Awards now alternate with the statewide conference. This year the conference is in May, so they're currently conference planning. They are also transitioning out of using DataArts. Figuring out what that looks like and interested in tips and what others are doing/using especially if using SmartSimple.

Jen Lawless (MA): They are SmartSimple users who also moved out of CDP and she is happy to connect on transitioning out of DataArts. In Massachusetts they are looking for a new ED and are in the early stages with their board on that. Midway through FY26 programmatically, but have opened a couple of programs for FY27. They are down to the last three programs that were being redesigned with Cultural Districts and Youth Reach Opening soon, with the Universal Participation Program left. Also working with state partners on Stem to Steam initiatives and work with higher ed.

Amy Cunningham (VT): It's legislative season and next week is Creative Sector Day. Will be testifying with the primary ask this session being around steady funding and working on ticketing legislation to get a handle on predatory ticketing. Most excited to work on disaster resilience work and they are halfway through a cohort called Resilient Cultural Organizations. They are helping 11 arts organizations to create their own organizational emergency plans

using DPLAN, from South Arts and New England Document Conservation Center. Also about to launch creating aging work and will spend next year building out relationships with rural senior centers.

Chandra Boyd (OK): Also received the creative aging grant and looking forward to work in creative aging. Getting ready to open partnership grants. They are using Arts and Health funds from the NEA to coordinate a summit in May with the nearby health science complex, and are refreshing their strategic plan as well. As for America250, they are folding funding into the Route 66 Centennial and are also preparing for 2028 Olympics with initial conversations around cultural Olympic programming.

Kate (chat): Trying to organize people to come down for the summit. Their Arts in Medicine folks are all hoping to go. Social Prescribing pilots are simmering, so trying to get those folks to attend as well.

Chad Buterbaugh (MD): First round of application for their big operating grant program are being reviewed. Currently in legislative session with advocacy day being next Thursday.

Kristin Burgoyne (MT) (chat): They are working on 508 compliance for their website and it's very satisfying.

Christy Costello (CO): Building out work with the Creative Aging grant from NASAA and doing more capacity building and training in rural areas. Also are contracting with Lifetime Arts and embarking on a creative economy data project. Hoping to build a dashboard similar to the Otis College of Art and Design creative economy report and dashboard CA has and are talking to the same vendor. They are conducting an evaluation project for all their community development programs, as well as partnering with state advocacy organization to develop an advocacy guidebook that surveys all local funding initiative funding arts and culture. They are also merging with their film office. Any advice on that would be helpful.

- Here is the vendor they are talking with about the creative economy dashboard: <https://westwoodecon.com/patrick-adler-bio> and the Otis creative economy dashboard for the state of California in case you aren't familiar: <https://www.otis.edu/about/initiatives/creative-economy/dashboard.html>

Andre: May also be following suit with merging with film office, so will follow up with Christy.

Chad (chat): Maryland just officially "unmerged" w/ film; happy to be part of conversations as needed.

Amy (chat): Also meant to share, just FYI, for our 250 funds, we are distributing it via Vermont Humanities and their Project grant program: <https://www.vermonthumanities.org/grants/for-applicants/project-grants>

Kate (chat): They did a similar thing in Kansas.

David Markey (DC): Working on strategic planning and creative aging. There's also some city concern about the federal government tethering the district government to it. The community is also concerned about the closing of the Kennedy Center for two years and figuring out where folks are landing. Washington National Opera looks like it will stay in DC, performing out of the Lisner Auditorium at George Washington University. The National Symphony is still being determined. Also, will be cohosting the Assembly with NASAA. Unsure of what local political landscape will look like next year with mayor not running for re-election and non-voting member of Congress retiring.

**Encarnación: Any news on what's happening with LEED that's based at the Kennedy Center?**

David has not heard anything yet, but will reach out to Betty to touch bases and will share if he hears anything.

Liora Sponko (OR): They have a new director, Amy Lewin, and will also welcome new communications staff soon. Currently looking at grant programs, roles, etc. and how they can improve process and efficiency. They are in the middle of the short session and starting to prepare for the long session by establishing legislative priorities. Looking at how to make the case to increase funding and doing a lot of strategy and having conversations with partners on how to expand work, funding, and capacity. Their tax credit sunsets every six years so it will be a priority for the '27-'29 session to increase that credit limit.

Anna Blyth (NM): Got funding for arts and health and being newer to that space, they are slowly rolling it out. Are in phase of two moving forward with organizations to do collaborative planning grants and will report back when they learn how it went. There's a governor election coming up in November and there's a lot of conversation on what transition will look like for a new governor. Legislative sessions alternate yearly; this year is a 30-day session and there isn't anything they're watching with concern. As for America 250 work, they have partnered with a museum resources division to do an exhibit on democracy that travels the state. Also working with a commission doing some projects and supporting efforts to fund some sponsorships and activities around America 250.

Anina Moore (TX): Currently they are undergoing audits by the state. They are also getting ready to celebrate the 13th class of Young Masters made up of teen artists. Through this

program youth apply for two years' worth of grants totaling \$10,000 to go to summer programs before graduating. That group will be announced in March. The deadline for their two-year artist roster is on Monday. They are also in the middle of a bunch of different grant cycles for different grant programs. Lastly, the first roster set of their rural tour initiatives, where five selected artists are given grants to do at least five free performances in rural counties will be from March through May.

Sylvia Prickett welcomed Lara Garritano (NEA) to the call.

### **Lara Garritano provides NEA updates and answers questions from participants.**

#### **NEA Updates**

NEA application deadlines:

- Grants for Arts project deadline is February 16<sup>th</sup>: Principal grants category is project-based funding for organizations. Typically, two deadlines in a year, February and July.
- U.S Military Bands deadline is February 23<sup>rd</sup>: The funding is for non-matching grants with amounts of \$10,000 to \$20,000. SAAs and RAOs can't apply but could be good for constituents.

NEA updated current logo to reflect the Freedom 250 network and it has also been updated for NEA grant recipients. Changing things retroactively is not needed, but please use in the future. Logos are available to download in the Manage Award section of their website.

US Conference of Mayors has partnered with the NEA on launching the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary City Art Poster Project. Cities are invited to collaborate with artists. They are looking for posters that celebrate history and inspire hope for the future and guidelines are online. Please share with city leaders.

NEA is looking to recruit new voices to serve as panelists for their application review processes.

Lara put the corresponding links in the chat:

- Grants for Arts Projects Deadline Feb 16: <https://www.arts.gov/grants/grants-for-arts-projects>
- Military Bands Deadline Feb 23rd: <https://www.arts.gov/grants/military-bands>
- Freedom 250/NEA Logo Page: <https://www.arts.gov/grants/manage-your-award/nea-logo>

- City Art Poster Project: [Guidelines](#) [Examples and Specs](#)
- NEA Call for Panelists: [arts.gov/Panelist-Signup](https://arts.gov/Panelist-Signup)

## Questions

Amy: **This year's award letter and report documents reference an annual progress report and an annual FFR in addition to final FFR. Is there more information I should know about those reports?**

Lara : There's a new requirement for a progress report. Believes it's only if your period is longer than a year, then you'd need to file a progress report at the midpoint. There is a grant officers peer session happening and they might be discussing that.

Sylvia offered to check in with the research team to see if we can invite DDs who might be interested in joining.

Jocelyn: **Do you have an anticipated date for when we'll be getting the annual award letters this year? Do you anticipate changes to terms and conditions?**

Lara: We are not anticipating delays. We have a budget already and think timing will be related to when they can have a council meeting. As soon as we have confirmation of the date, we will share that out. It's possible it might be slightly later than it is typically but not a delay like last year.

Grant offices are not planning to revise general terms and conditions, but there will be a special term that will be part of the FY26 awards with new language about what is and isn't allowable in terms of subgrants for individuals. When you receive your award, you can look at all your documents in REACH and you'll see that one of the documents is going to be a specific term with language talking about the requirements. When there's a specific term that differs from the general terms and conditions, the specific term supersedes the general terms and conditions.

André: **Are there any anticipated addendums to America 250 funding with additional funds with the 2025 award?**

Lara: Has not heard anything about additional money for America 250.

André: **Any additional focus on veteran services for FY27?**

Lara: We are just starting to have conversations about what priorities are going to be, so no word yet on FY27, but they're typically posted in the summer.

Sylvia: **Any early news about where Poetry Out Loud will go?**

Lara: Unofficially booked Lisner Auditorium for next year's Nationals. A number of literary arts staff were able to come back, so there is now a team working on Poetry Out Loud. There's work starting to get permission for copyrighted poems. Hope and expectation that there will be an anthology of poems that weren't able to be included this year. There's an understanding to try to work towards an earlier timeline, as folks have expressed it needs to come out on schedule so schools can get started. There is also an interest in general in getting things back to what it has been previously.

Sylvia: **How about an alternative partnership to take over from the Poetry Foundation?**

Lara: I don't have any news on that.

Anina: **Thinking about our constituents who overlap, folks who previously felt confident about receiving NEA funding got cancellations. Is there anything we can pass along to let them know of anything more stabilizing in terms of funding decisions, application reviews, etc?**

Lara: Our review process is the same as it has been, with a panel review process with panelists all over the country. As for the application, people will want to take a look at the guidelines and agency priorities and think about how their programming relates to them.

Sylvia: **Is there anything more you can talk to us about how the NEA is restructuring? How is the partnership office working with specialty areas and such?**

Lara: Lots of folks have been able to return to the partnership team. Lara and Eleanor Billington were both able to stay, and then Michael Orlove returned, as well as Christina Ribbons, who is the Assistant Grants Management Specialist.

As for other folks at the agency, Michelle Hoffman and Bridget Zangueneh have returned. Their roles are a bit different than they were in the past as there is a lot more fluidity between staff working on the various artistic disciplines.

Encarnación: **Is there any movement around accessibility staffing?**

Lara: We don't currently have staff like we did. There are funding opportunities around that, and the priority remains because it can be funded across all of our programs, but we don't currently have staff.

**Wrap Up**

With no other questions or thoughts, Sylvia closed meeting by thanking Lara for joining.  
NASAA will set up further Zoom meetings.

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