

NASAA Deputy Directors Meeting - June 18, 2026

Prepared by NASAA's Amari Starks

Overview

Deputy Directors welcomed **Kelly Barsdate** (NASAA Executive Advisor) for a presentation on NASAA's recent commissioned poll on conservative voter's attitudes towards public funding for the arts. The presentation explored how state arts agencies can more effectively communicate the value of the arts to conservative audiences. Participants discussed advocacy strategies, relationship building, messaging around heritage and culture, and shared examples from their own states. The meeting concluded with several agency updates.

Strategic Messaging for Arts Advocacy

Kelly presented findings from NASAA's polling research, conducted in Fall 2025, on messages that resonate most effectively with voters.

Key findings:

- Messages emphasizing the arts' unique public value resonate more strongly than economic impact arguments alone.
- Successful messaging highlights:
 - Education and health benefits.
 - Preservation of local culture and heritage.
 - Veterans
 - America 250
- Economic impact remains important but should support not lead the conversation.
- Participants summarized the approach as "stories, not numbers," emphasizing that personal stories create an effective gateway to supporting data.
- Several participants noted the findings challenge years of advocacy centered primarily on economic impact and expressed excitement about adapting future messaging.

Relationship Building

Discussion reinforced that relationship building remains a strong advocacy tool.

Participants shared examples demonstrating that:

- Personal relationships with legislators often create opportunities for productive conversations.
- Authentic conversations and invitations can engage new supporters who may not initially identify as arts advocates.

- Stories and relationships frequently have greater influence than statistics alone.

Messaging Around Heritage and Culture

The group discussed the opportunities and challenges of using terms such as "heritage" and "culture" when communicating with policymakers.

Discussion included:

- Remaining grounded in agencies' mission to serve all residents while adapting examples for different audiences.
- Framing heritage as inclusive of all communities served by state arts agencies.
- Using specific examples, traditions, and art forms to illustrate local cultural impact.

NASAA Application

Kelly shared how NASAA is applying the poll research across its advocacy efforts, including:

- Presenting the findings to executive directors, deputy directors, council members, and public information officers.
- Incorporating the messaging framework into congressional testimony and federal advocacy.
- Working with national advocacy partners to expand adoption of the messaging approach.
- Encouraging agencies to adapt the framework to their own state contexts

Participants expressed interest in sharing successful messaging examples and communications strategies through the Deputy Directors network.

Kelly also shared NASAA's [Strategic Messaging Summary](#) as a resource for agencies.

State Updates

Deputy Directors shared updates from their agencies

Examples included:

- **Maryland**
 - Completed the annual Maryland Arts Summit featuring programming on arts education, creative placemaking, and cultural planning.
 - Responding to legislative questions regarding its equitable operating grant formula.
 - Assisted with artist participation in the Great American State Fair.
- **Idaho**

- Continuing America 250 celebrations through Cowgirl Congress exhibitions. Collaborating on Blackfoot Ranch Rodeo and Indian Relay Races.
- **Indiana**
 - Administering a \$65 million arts investment through the Lilly Endowment and in the process of making deliberations to present.
- **Texas**
 - Managing multiple concurrent audits, including internal, IT, Texas DOGE, and preparations for an upcoming Sunset Review.

Deputies also welcomed **Rachel Morgan** from the Nebraska Arts Council.

Federal Updates

The group briefly discussed the proposed revisions to the federal Uniform Guidance.

Discussion included:

- Agencies are monitoring the proposal while balancing current operational demands.
- Sylvia shared a [National Conference of State Legislatures summary](#) of the proposed changes.
- NASAA plans to provide top-line updates via email.

NASAA Assembly

Participants shared plans for the October NASAA Assembly, with many agencies anticipating strong participation from staff and council members.

Next Meeting

Thursday, August 20, 2026

10:00 a.m. PT | 11:00 a.m. MT | 12:00 p.m. CT | 1:00 p.m. ET