

# AMERICAN ARTSCAPE

A MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

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This Land of

# Arts

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# This issue

Welcome to the new National Endowment for the Arts magazine! We have taken on a new name, *American Artscape*, that better captures the national scope of the agency's grants, programs, and investments in making the arts available for all Americans. We aim to give every American in the nation—regardless of geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability—the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. As part of our commitment to reach all areas of the country, Arts Endowment staff visited all 50 states and several territories in 2019 for site visits, grant workshops, conferences, convenings, and events.

To better leverage our resources and ensure we're making as powerful an impact as possible, we frequently invest in partnerships and collaborations. These can range from fellow federal agencies, such as the Department of Defense and the National Institutes of Health, to nonprofit organizations like the American Theatre Wing and Poetry Foundation.

But among our most important and consistent partnerships are those we have with the state art agencies (SAAs) and regional arts organizations (RAOs). Every year, the Arts Endowment awards 40 percent of our grantmaking budget to these agencies, which represent either an individual state or a particular region of the country. They are our "boots on the ground," so to speak, and tailor their programs and grant opportunities to the particular needs and populations of their jurisdictions.

What this means is that the National Endowment for the Arts, on behalf of the people of the United States, offers arts opportunities at the national, regional, state, and local levels, creating a rich and diverse ecosystem where the arts—and the people who enjoy them—can thrive. What better way to inaugurate our new magazine title than with an issue showing the American artscape at every level of public funding. In the following pages, I'll share the national view I have as head of the Arts Endowment, RAO executive directors discuss the important work they do in their regions, and the leader of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies shows how the SAAs are great examples of why the arts are a wonderful public sector investment.

Altogether, this collaborative system has helped shape a nation where every American—in every state, in every region, across the entire nation—can celebrate and benefit from the arts.

Mary Anne Carter  
Chairman

# AMERICAN ARTSCAPE

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About the cover: A 2019 performance of *The Taming of The Shrew* by the Great Lakes Theater in Cleveland, Ohio, produced as part of Shakespeare in American Communities, a National Endowment for the Arts initiative in partnership with Arts Midwest. Photo by Roger Mastrianni, courtesy of Great Lakes Theater

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT for the ARTS

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# THE BIG PICTURE



A Look at the

## National Endowment for the Arts

BY MARY ANNE CARTER

**T**he National Endowment for the Arts is an independent federal agency responsible for funding and promoting arts activities in American communities so that all Americans have access to the arts. But, people often ask me, what exactly does the Arts Endowment *do*?

As it turns out, a great deal.

The National Endowment for the Arts is the only funder, public or private, that provides access to the arts in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories, as well as in all 435 Congressional districts. We take great pride in that because it shows our commitment to achieving one of our major goals: providing access to the arts, particularly in areas of the country where arts programs might not be readily available. A recent review of arts funding of the top 1,000 private and community foundations found that they don't reach 65 percent of the counties in the country. In contrast, the Arts Endowment funds projects that reach 779 more counties than private foundations—that's a

quarter of the counties in the United States! That's the kind of reach the National Endowment for the Arts has.

The major way we provide access is through our funding of nonprofit arts organizations and individual creative writing and translation fellowships, as well as our honorary awards in jazz and the folk arts. The majority of Arts Endowment grants go to small and medium-sized organizations, and a significant percentage of grants fund projects in high-poverty communities and reach underserved populations, including veterans, people with disabilities, and people in institutions. Close to a quarter of the agency's grants go to smaller towns and cities across the United States. This is all part of the Arts Endowment's efforts to contribute to the vitality of our neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and culture.

We work closely with the nation's state art agencies (SAAs) and regional arts organizations (RAOs), as 40 percent of our funding goes directly to them. They help the Arts Endowment

▲ National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Mary Anne Carter (far left) and Folk & Traditional Arts Director Cliff Murphy (far right) with the 2019 National Heritage Fellows during the events at the Library of Congress. Photo by Tom Pich



▲ Chairman Mary Anne Carter. Photo courtesy of National Endowment for the Arts

reach even more communities than we could on our own. The SAAs and RAOs offer direct grants that support lifelong learning in schools and communities; community economic development through creative districts; underserved communities; and arts participation through artist tours, festivals, readings, and exhibits.

The SAAs and RAOs also work with the agency on our national initiatives. Programs such as Poetry Out Loud™, which relies on SAAs to carry out statewide poetry recitation contests for high-schoolers, and Shakespeare for American Communities, in which the RAO Arts Midwest administers the program to theater companies throughout the country, would not succeed without our partners' support. Their assistance allows us to reach more Americans than ever.

▼ National Endowment for the Arts Director Ayanna Hudson speaking at the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities Conference in 2019. NEA File Photo



We rely on other partners, including other federal agencies and private nonprofit organizations, to reach additional populations, such as the military. We partner with the Department of Defense on two programs that serve military populations throughout the country: Blue Star Museums and Creative Forces®. Blue Star Museums, a partnership that includes Blue Star Families and more than 2,000 museums nationwide, provides free summer admission to active-duty military personnel and their families. Creative Forces—whose collaborators include the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense in addition to the state arts agencies—provides creative arts therapies to improve the health, wellness, and quality of life for military and veteran populations exposed to trauma, as well as for their families and caregivers. We continue to grow this program to reach as many as need this therapy—including expanding a telehealth component that makes the program available in rural and remote areas.

The arts' importance to health and well-being is a major focus at the agency. In addition to Creative Forces, the Arts Endowment has collaborated with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on the Sound Health Initiative, which was launched in 2017 to explore the brain's relationship with music. The Arts Endowment has been involved in supporting research on music, neuroscience, and health through several projects nationwide, and contributed to the \$20 million funding that was recently announced by NIH. Over the next five years, this funding will support research projects that explore the potential of music for treating a wide range of conditions resulting from neurological and other disorders.

In addition, our Office of Research & Analysis (ORA) is funding studies to provide sound data to support the need for more arts therapy. ORA has been supporting research through the Creative Forces initiative, but also through the Research Labs initiative. For example, a recent grant was awarded to Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee, in partnership with the Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders, Nashville Symphony Orchestra, Nashville Opera, and Borderless Arts Tennessee, to study the social and emotional effects of music on children with autism and their parents. Studies like this will help us better understand how to use the arts to

benefit those with health issues and make their lives better and more fulfilling.

A key way to reach other populations who might not have access to the arts is through outreach—because organizations aren’t going to apply for grants and programs they don’t know about. For example, one of the agency’s priorities has been to attract more applications from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). In the previous year, we had awarded one grant to an HBCU—because only one applied! Working with the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (WHI-HBCU), the Arts Endowment has expanded our outreach to HBCUs over the last two years. As part of this, we make sure that whenever agency personnel are traveling near an HBCU, they stop by to present information about the agency and the funding opportunities they could apply for. To date, we’ve had staff engage directly with 28 HBCUs. We also changed our grant guidelines to specifically encourage HBCU applications, and hosted three HBCU interns, who helped us catalogue the interests and needs of each HBCU so that we can better target our outreach. The agency also participated in the

WHI-HBCU conference for the second year, providing a day-and-a-half overview of federal cultural opportunities for HBCUs along with the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The impact of all this? We increased our applications from HBCUs and their partners from 1 to 41 in fiscal year 2020. We will continue this strong outreach over the next year.

So what does the National Endowment for the Arts do? We do everything we can to make the arts available for all Americans in every community in the nation because, as the agency’s founding legislation states, “The arts and humanities belong to all the people of the United States.”

*Mary Anne Carter is chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.*

▼ One of the Creative Forces Community Connections projects led by the Virginia Commission for the Arts included ukelele workshops at the Hylton Performing Arts Center at George Mason University. Photo by Dr. Niyati Dhokai





# CONNECTING ARTISTS TO OPPORTUNITY AND TO EACH OTHER

Cathy Edwards/  
New England Foundation for the Arts

INTERVIEW BY PAULETTE BEETE

she grew to believe “that the work that NEFA did on the regional level was a key strategy to support artists and creative workers.”

Today, Edwards and her colleagues at NEFA work to ensure that the organization stays true to that mission by connecting artists to opportunities and to each other, by linking New England’s creative workers to the funding and professional development support they need to flourish, and, most of all, by making sure that all New Englanders—wherever they may be in the six-state region (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont)—have the opportunity to engage creatively in telling their own stories. We recently spoke with Edwards about the work NEFA is doing for its region.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

I love the fact that as a regional arts organization we are unique. The National Endowment for the Arts values partnership in a very practical way, to ensure that opportunities are spread fairly throughout the country. We work in ways that are aligned and on a continuum to achieve some of the same goals. It’s so important to have the Arts Endowment as a national thought leader in the arts, with its commitment to advancing core arts disciplines. It’s also really important to recognize that every region of the country has a distinct set of cultural traditions, a unique set of places and cultural assets, and communities who have been, in some cases, rooted here for hundreds of years, and in other cases, [who are] new to our places. We all have something unique to say about the American experience. At NEFA, we see art and culture as important tools to promote belonging in our communities. What I realized when I spent eight years working in New Haven is that artists, creative endeavors, and cultural assets exist everywhere in our country, but for too long resources and opportunities have been concentrated in some parts of the country and not widely distributed enough. If the regionals weren’t here to address that gap in resources and opportunities, and to work in partnership with the Arts Endowment and the state arts agencies, there would be huge sections of the country that would not be connected to resources and peers and professional development in the way that they deserve.

◀ With support from NEFA’s National Dance Project, *Descent* is the first touring production created by the disability art ensemble Kinetic Light. Photo by Robbie Sweeny

Having grown up with a father who worked in cultural affairs for the U.S. State Department and a mother who was an accomplished amateur performing artist, Cathy Edwards has long understood the power of the arts. “I’m a believer that the arts are an important part of becoming engaged in our communities and places and telling our personal stories,” she said.

Edwards has been executive director of the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) since 2015, though it’s fair to say her relationship with NEFA really started when she moved to Connecticut eight years earlier to become director of programming for the International Festival of Arts and Ideas. During her tenure at the festival, as a NEFA constituent,



► Cathy Edwards, executive director of the New England Foundation for the Arts. Photo by Jeffrey Filiault

## A SKETCH OF THE CREATIVE SECTOR IN NEW ENGLAND

In 2017, NEFA published a major report called *The Jobs in New England's Creative Economy and Why They Matter*. In that report, we learned that the creative economy in New England employs nearly 310,000 people, which puts it squarely in the middle of all sectors supporting jobs in our region. We also learned that the share of creative employment and creative establishments is higher in New England than it is nationally. At NEFA, we think it's important for us to reinforce the asset that the creative sector is to our communities. In New England, a quarter of all creative workers and a third of all artists are self-employed, whereas only ten percent of New England's overall workforce is self-employed. So we also see that there's a strong need for small business-type services for people who work in the creative economy.

## MAKING AN IMPACT ON THE REGIONAL LEVEL

Large portions of New England are rural communities with small populations, and artists can be isolated or feel invisible. But artists and

arts and creativity are life-giving sources to communities, so they need to be supported and they need to be more visible. One of the things that we did six years ago was launch an online directory of New England's creative people and resources, which we call Creative Ground. We have 30,000 profiles on our Creative Ground website of creative people, places, and nonprofits in the New England region. Through Creative Ground and other NEFA programs, we help connect artists in New England to one another and also to transformational opportunities that we hope will support their careers, whether it's learning about another artist they want to collaborate with, or whether it's a venue or a presenter identifying an artist who they didn't know about. The Creative Ground website is like a matchmaking service for artists and potential collaborators or employers in the creative sector.

We also have a very strong commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in our programs. It's one of our core values, and one of the major pillars of our strategic plan to have an impact in New England. We know that in many of our communities, there are creative endeavors, brilliant makers, and artists whose stories have not been lifted up and who have not had fair access to the resources they need to thrive. So we work through our programs to be a partner in telling a fuller, more accurate story of creativity in our region. We have a long-standing commitment to supporting Native and indigenous artists. As committed allies, we acknowledge that we are working on traditional land. In Boston, we are on the traditional land of the Massachuset, Wampanoag, and Nipmuc people. We honor their ancestors and recognize their continued contributions to our society. We are intentional in our commitment to support women artists, artists of color, and artists with disabilities. We also work to make sure that immigrant communities and new Americans are part of the fabric of our creative ecosystem. We do this in part through our grantmaking, and in part through supporting trainings and professional development learning opportunities. We place value on the many aesthetics, cultural histories, change-makers, and citizen-artists in our region of the country.

We're proud of the work that we do to make grants directly to artists and to artistic companies. Artists and the creative process are central to our work. What we hear from artists repeatedly are things like, "This grant has provided huge change in my life," or, "This grant has been a

true turning point for me.” I think of an artist like [dancer and choreographer] Sara Juli, who is based in Portland, Maine. She’s received support from a number of NEFA’s small opportunity funds to document or video her work, and we’ve supported her to tour New England with her work. She just received this past summer one of our major National Dance Project grants, which means that—in addition to being supported to live and make work in Portland, Maine, and to get to know cultural centers around the region through our regional touring support—she’ll also be making a major new work and will be able to tour that all over the United States.

**HOW NEFA MAKES AN IMPACT ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL**

We administer a couple of unique flagship national programs, [including] the National Dance Project (NDP) and the National Theater Project (NTP). We developed NDP over 20 years ago with major startup funding from the National

Endowment for the Arts. The NEA was a catalytic partner, and the NDP is now funded by private philanthropy, including the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Over the 23 years that we’ve been administering the National Dance Project, we have made significant investments in both the creation of new dance works and in the ability of dance companies to tour those new works around the country. We’re so proud of our robust and sustained support for dance in America. In the past 23 years, NDP has made over \$38.5 million in grants to support creation and touring of 452 new works that have reached over three million audience members! We enable both established and emerging artists to create significant work, and we support presenters to bring that work to new audiences.

*Paulette Beete is the social media manager in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts.*

▼ The Theater Offensive, based in Boston, Massachusetts, received a National Theater Project grant to create *Legends*, a work centered on intergenerational coming-of-age stories of LGBTQ people of color in the U.S. Photo by Dom Wise





# A Journey through the Arts

## Theresa Colvin/Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation

INTERVIEW BY JARRYD J. DELANEY

▲ A performance by jazz drummer Allison Miller, an artist who has received support from Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation's Jazz Touring Network. Photo by Susan Alzner

**F**rom the time she was a child, Theresa Colvin has loved the arts and has known there was something special about them beyond the joy of creation or the wonder of watching a performance unfold—even if she did not quite know what that was just yet. She said that the arts “made me feel connected to other people. It also connected me to something outside of myself; to something that’s universal.” Now, as executive director of the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation (MAAF), she strives to bring this same sense of connection to the region served

by the organization, which includes Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Virginia, and West Virginia.

MAAF supports the rich cultural life in the region through programs that are designed to bring the best in touring arts to presenters large and small; provide infrastructure and support in the jazz and folk and traditional arts fields; and give creative artists the time and space they need to create new work.

At the same time, MAAF has expanded the geographic reach of its impact through a

number of national and international initiatives. For instance, the organization manages USArtists International (USAI), which supports engagements of U.S. performing artists at significant international festivals and arts markets, and the Performing Arts Global Exchange (a new iteration of the Southern Exposure program), which funds tours of international artists in the United States, with both programs receiving support from the Arts Endowment. MAAF also administers the National Finals of Poetry Out Loud, a national poetry recitation contest for high school students, in partnership with the Arts Endowment and the Poetry Foundation. In her own words, Colvin told us about the unique role played by MAAF and the impact it makes on those it touches.

### LEADING MID ATLANTIC ARTS IN NEW DIRECTIONS

I've been entrusted to make the world a better place than what I found it—to make experiences and feelings of connectedness. To hopefully give individuals a sense of acceptance, a belief in themselves, and a belief in connectivity with other human beings. Collectively, we can achieve more together than we can by ourselves.

We run international exchange programs where we provide support for U.S. artists to travel abroad to different festivals and marketplaces. A number of years ago, an artist, who was going to Africa, said the most meaningful thing to her was engaging with the community of her ancestors. The impact of connecting her to her heritage allowed for creativity and even a new piece of work. It was an incredible experience.

If you talk to Allison Miller, a musician who's toured through our Jazz Touring Network, you learn just how much of a rewarding and creative experience the regional tour was for her personally. This year, we received some funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation that allowed us to provide commissioning support for a new work from Allison in partnership with several members of the Jazz Touring Network. *In Our Veins: Rivers and Social Change* is a historical reimagining of social movements and rivers through music, dance, and video. The work had its premiere through the Network and will continue to tour through the region this spring. So not only are you assisting an artist in

the creative process, you're helping presenters present that art form and connecting that to their audience and their community. Hopefully, it will be very meaningful for them.

### EQUITY THROUGH THE ARTS

We're about to announce the roster of artists from Canada and Mexico that we will be supporting through the inaugural Performing Arts Global Exchange, or PAGE, program. This is a very specific way we ensure diverse cultures are brought into the United States. We require presenters to provide outreach around these tours so that in addition to a top-notch performance, audience members are learning about the cultures and art forms they are being exposed to through hands-on community-based activities. We, like many in the arts sector, are focused on equity, diversity, inclusion, and access.

For USAI, we are working hard to ensure all eligible grantees know of our program and are supported in the application process. We are interested in artists traveling to countries and regions that haven't necessarily participated in our programs before, such as South Africa and the Middle East. And we've seen an increase in grant applications from a broader geographic region and of broader creative scope.



◀ Mid Atlantic Arts Alliance Executive Director Theresa Colvin. Photo by James Kegley

► Singer-songwriter Somi performs at Italy's Umbria Jazz Festival in 2018, with support from USArtists International. Photo by Matteo Marzella



The challenges we are facing, even down to the individual neighborhoods and communities, are vastly different across the mid-Atlantic. As a regional organization, we try to identify gaps and fill them in as best we can. What we're looking at now are rural and remote areas, and making sure they too are given opportunities to connect to meaningful art experiences.

## THE ONLY WAY FORWARD IS TOGETHER

One of the best ways to do this is through partnerships and collaborations. It's partnering with our state arts agencies, local arts agencies, and with the Arts Endowment. If we can bring communities of learning together, where they can learn from each other, that is something we've found to be very effective. It's all about relationships. Working together, the regional arts organizations are able to reach every part of the country, which is one of our strengths. Working with the Arts Endowment certainly is incredibly important and valued.

The Arts Endowment has played a historic role in the development of the arts ecosystem in this country. The leadership role is as important as the funding, because it demonstrates that our federal government endorses the fact that

arts should be a part of every American's life. That goes a long way when you're working at the state level, the regional level, or the local level to make the case for public support of the arts. Were it not for the Arts Endowment and partnerships with the regional arts organizations, access to the arts would not be what it is today. Yes, we have a long way to go, but that's why these relationships are so important. To ensure every community, every individual *in* that community, has as much of a chance to participate in the arts as possible. Whether it's as an artist or an audience member, a supporter, a donor, or whatever role they'd like to take on.

*Jarryd J. Delaney was an intern in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts in fall 2019.*



# Making a Difference through the Arts

## Susie Surkamer/South Arts

INTERVIEW BY REBECCA SUTTON

In the 1970s, Susie Surkamer had her first taste of how the arts can benefit communities when she served as a dancer-in-residence in South Carolina schools, as a way to bridge social divides following desegregation. She has remained a public servant of the arts ever since, working at the South Carolina Arts Commission in a variety of roles—including executive director—before joining South Arts in 2012 as executive director.

Established in 1975, South Arts is the regional arts organization that serves Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The organization is known for a number of high-profile programs, including an emergency preparedness

program for arts organizations called ArtsReady; Folklorists in the South Convening; the Southern Circuit Tour of independent media artists; and the Southern Prize, which awards nine visual artists from the region a total of \$80,000. South Arts also leads the newly formed Jazz Road, a collaboration among the nation's six regional arts organizations that awards grants to jazz musicians so that they might tour their music across the country and especially to rural and non-traditional venues.

We recently spoke with Surkamer by phone about South Arts, and how the organization is helping artists and arts organizations across the region have better access to a diverse range of resources and opportunities.

▲ Pianist Lucian Ban and saxophonist Alex Harding perform with support from Jazz Road, a program led by South Arts in collaboration with other regional arts organizations that offers touring grants to jazz musicians. Photo by Jim Brock



▲ South Arts Executive Director Susie Surkamer. Photo courtesy of South Arts

## UPHOLDING AND ADVANCING A RICH ARTISTIC HERITAGE

To me, the South is a very special place to live and to work. It is exciting to try and further art forms that are very, very strong, and many of them based in the South. We're the lead organization on

Jazz Road because jazz started in the South. We also do a fair amount of work in folk and traditional arts, and that's because the South is so rich in that area. The literary history here is so strong. It's a responsibility [to work with the South's artistic legacy], and it's an exciting responsibility.

But it's a challenge to balance that [history] with all of the things that are going on in the arts today. You've got the digital arts, etc. That's all happening here, too. So we want to make sure that we choose the things that we work on carefully to address the things that we feel we'll be able to make an impact in.

## CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

We have a few communities that are extremely large and urban, like Atlanta, Charlotte, Miami. But then you move into communities that are around 100,000. So you're talking Columbia, South Carolina, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Jackson, Mississippi. When you go below that, then it's predominately around 25,000. Then there are many, many communities that are significantly less than 25,000. Being able to assist people in those communities with networking and with partnering with each other is important, because they don't have the opportunity to really meet face-to-face with some of their counterparts, or even to get to know many of their counterparts. We have stepped up to provide more opportunities for Southern artists and Southern arts organizations to connect with each other and to collaborate and to partner and to get more visibility, as well as to try and assist with bringing more resources into the South for them.

One of the challenges here in the South is there are a limited number of significant funders of the arts. We mostly have family foundations and community foundations. There are not a lot of corporate foundations that are working multistate in our region, and some national, private funders—I would say their geographic spread frequently in the past has been limited.

What that has meant is that organizations and artists in the South are extremely creative about how they get their work done. Can they trade resources? In other words, "I'll give you space in my building if you could do such and such for me." That has worked very well, but it sometimes limits the scale of what some of the organizations can accomplish, and limits visibility. That's why we feel like assisting and bringing resources in as well as trying to provide more opportunities for visibility are extremely important.

## MAKING AN IMPACT REGIONALLY AND NATIONALLY

One of the impacts that we are having [nationally] is assisting arts organizations to be ready for a crisis, whether it's man-made or a natural crisis. South Arts started being concerned about this issue after Katrina. Around 2011-2012, we came out with an online product called ArtsReady to assist arts organizations to become ready or have a business continuity plan. Years ago, when I was in a rapid transit out in the Bay Area, there was a sign in my car there that said, "Thirty percent of businesses that undergo a crisis do not survive after one or two years." And I said, "Wow! Thirty percent. Can you imagine the percent for arts organizations?" We now require a readiness plan for our larger grant categories.

We've also had an impact with creative placemaking. We jointly do a conference for the past two or three years, the National Consortium for Creative Placemaking. We knew that some of our states were doing work in placemaking, but nobody was really connecting people from North Carolina to Tennessee or to Kentucky. Every state has borders, but our work does not end at borders. We had hoped for 150 to 200 attendees [at our first conference] and we had to cut it off at 350 people. It was mayors and economic development people and arts people and artists. And I thought, "This is how work gets done. People need to know each other. They need to connect. They need to have people

that they can call and collaborate with.” We’re playing a good, significant role in helping those connections take place. That’s why I get up and go to work every day.

### WHY THE ARTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

When I see reports from the recipients of our fellowships and Southern Prize program and they talk about what that opportunity provided them, and how it has made such a significant difference in their career, then you say, “Oh, yes. This is so critically important.” I went into a bank one time when I was maybe 35, 40 years old. I was making a deposit or something, and the teller said to me, “You came to my school and gave a performance and you wore such-and-such colored tights. I remember that day.” That was one 45-minute performance. You just never know the impressions that you’re going to leave, and how it is going to affect the person.

*Rebecca Sutton is the editor of American Artscape.*

▼ South Arts’ 2019 Alabama State Fellow Jamey Grimes shows his installation *Roil* at the opening of the Southern Prize and State Fellowships exhibition in Columbus, Georgia. Photo courtesy of South Arts





# AMPLIFYING THE ARTS

Todd Stein/Mid-America Arts Alliance

INTERVIEW BY TIMMY SUTTON



Middle America has too often existed as the middle child of American arts discourse, forgotten in broader discussions surrounding culture, the arts, and access. Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) has worked since its founding in 1972 to combat this narrative. The first regional arts organization, it has been providing arts access in the region through the support of artists, cultural institutions, and communities for almost 50 years.

On average, M-AAA serves over one million children and adults across its region and the nation each year through arts programming, grantmaking, and professional development. The agency's work strives to provide access to culture and the arts in historically underserved, largely rural areas throughout middle America, funding exhibits, performances, and arts training all across the six states M-AAA represents (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas).

Todd Stein, president and chief executive officer of Mid-America Arts Alliance, spoke with us recently about the work of M-AAA, and how it supports access to arts and culture all across the Mid-America region.

### IMPACTING CULTURE IN MIDDLE AMERICA

Like the rest of the United States, our region is evolving. One of the reasons we were formed as a regional arts organization is to try to provide arts and cultural experiences for rural residents, rural constituents of the region.

In our last fiscal year, we awarded \$1.2 million in grant funds to artists and arts and cultural organizations. We reached 155 communities in 34 states across the United States through the exhibitions we tour through ExhibitsUSA and NEH on the Road [a National Endowment for the Humanities-funded traveling exhibition program], through the grantmaking that takes place through our organization, and through convenings that we held across the region.

### REGIONAL ARTS FUNDING

The regionals play a really unique role in partnerships with federal funding agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts and the state arts agencies. We can work in between the governmental agencies to seek funding from private foundations, individuals, and corporations, and amplify the work that's being done on the federal and state level. We can also identify specific needs within a region, like trying to reach rural areas of the Western High Plains, for example, or underserved communities, and our lens as a regional helps with those collaborative partnerships.

The partnerships that we have with our state arts agencies are crucial. We collaborate with each of the state arts agencies in different ways to help support the programming that they have,

◀ In 2017, the Mid America Arts Alliance exhibited *Water Bank Boogie IV* by Nebraska-based artist Susan Knight, as part of its First Friday exhibition series. Photo courtesy of Mid-America Arts Alliance



▲ Mid-America Arts Alliance Todd Stein. Photo courtesy of Mid-America Arts Alliance

objectives they'd like to reach, and to work in tandem with them to reach the most rural areas of their states. Another role of a regional is to bring together the state arts agencies from within our region and say, "Okay, something's working great in Texas. How can we expand that concept to Oklahoma, Nebraska, Kansas, Arkansas, and Missouri?"

The partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts is critical. The Arts Endowment supports the ExhibitsUSA program, Artistic Innovations, the Regional Touring Program, and

Artist INC—the list goes on and on. It brings to light the importance of federal funding, the partnership with regionals, and how we can work collaboratively with the states to amplify the work.

**ENDURING PROGRAMMING**

I have such a love for each of our programs. The ExhibitsUSA program stands apart as one that achieves our goal to reach into rural areas of not just our region but the country as a whole. These exhibitions go to tiny towns all across the nation where the constituents in that community

may not have access to large museums. We have 38 exhibitions on the road at the moment through ExhibitsUSA. It's an opportunity to provide a variety of different exhibition experiences that range from craft to fine art and everything in between.

The Artist INC program is growing across our region and reaching artists in new communities. We have 1,500 artists that are fellows of the Artist INC program, in ten communities across the region. We plan to expand that program to new communities, not just within our region, but perhaps in future years across the nation. The program provides business and entrepreneurial training for individual artists and the longitudinal evaluative data we have shows this training is durable, and that the effects of the Artist INC program last for years after the program has ended.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL WORK**

One of our core values is that we believe the freedom of cultural and creative expression is fundamental to humanity. When you think about our programming and the feedback that we receive from the grants we provide to artists and to cultural organizations, the evaluative data and feedback we receive from children who have had an educational experience through one of the exhibitions we tour, artists who've shared how the Artist INC program has changed their life, it brings home the importance of what we're trying to accomplish. When I'm in Waco, Texas, at the dedication of a community mural that we've funded, or in a small town in Arkansas that has benefited from a grant, it reaffirms that the work we do matters. Sometimes you get lost in the administration and the paperwork and the guidelines and the criteria, the rules. But when you're out in the field and you can really see the impact, that's where you can see first-hand how the work we do matters. We've accomplished so much over the last 50 years, and I can see Mid-America Arts Alliance still playing a prominent role in the arts 50 years from now.

*Timmy Sutton was an intern in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts in fall 2019.*

◀ A young girl at the Delta Cultural Center in Arkansas decorates an apron as part of *Apron Strings: Ties to the Past*, an exhibit made possible through ExhibitsUSA. ExhibitsUSA is a touring exhibition program managed by the Mid-America Arts Alliance. Photo courtesy of Mid-America Arts Alliance



Samba Sam, of Paulo Pahila e Bando, conducts a workshop at Woonsocket High School in Woonsocket, South Dakota, as part of Arts Midwest's World Fest. Photo by Eric Young Smith



# Building Community and Inspiring Creativity

Torrie Allen/Arts Midwest

INTERVIEW BY REBECCA SUTTON

► Arts Midwest Executive Director Torrie Allen. Photo courtesy of Torrie Allen



**A**s the new president and CEO of Arts Midwest, Torrie Allen brings his experience with Americans for the Arts, National Arts Strategies, Anchorage Opera, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival—not to mention his artistic career as an opera singer—to the organization’s nine-state region, which includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Among the organization’s many programs include Arts Midwest World Fest, which sponsors weeklong residencies for international artists in smaller Midwestern communities; ArtsLab, which coordinates arts leaders to train their peers in their area of expertise; and Creating Connection, an initiative that seeks to advance the position of arts and creativity across the nation. Arts Midwest also partners with the National Endowment for the Arts on two national

initiatives: the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read, which brings communities together through the joy of sharing a good book, and Shakespeare in American Communities, which uses Shakespeare to empower high school students and youth in juvenile justice facilities.

We recently spoke with Allen about his hopes for his time at Arts Midwest, and why he thinks creativity is exactly the balm we need.

## THE MIDWEST

I think there’s the false notion that the Midwest is flyover territory, and that it’s somehow less significant than the coasts. Having been here, there’s nothing more untrue. There’s a cultural vibrancy here in the Midwest that I can’t believe hasn’t penetrated the mainstream psyche. For instance, Minnesota is known for being one of the places with the most immigrants in the U.S. and has a welcoming spirit that’s unlike most other places in this country. When folks talk about rural America, there is some beautiful morphing that is happening here that is just so powerful, so inspiring. There are so many passionate stories, and I would love to be able to shine a spotlight on how America is changing, and how the Midwest is part of that change. A lot of folks just aren’t aware of it yet.

## PROGRAMS THAT PACK A PUNCH

In 2019 alone, our programs reached more than 9,300 communities across the country. We also trained more than 1,000 leaders in the arts, impacted the lives of more than 750,000 people through our programs, and granted about \$2.3 million in awards to folks across America. That’s a substantial impact on the infrastructure in the Midwest and the nation.

Beyond that data, how do you really quantify [impact]? For instance, David Fraher, my predecessor, created World Fest nearly 20 years ago. From its earliest days, World Fest has been one of the engines that brings people from all over the world into the Midwest and introduces these folks to the community. I believe that one of the reasons there has been this acceptance of people from all over the world into the Midwest is because of this touring. Artists have been going into these communities and having extended artist residencies. They go beyond just giving a performance. They connect with the Chamber of Commerce, they connect with the school districts, with the libraries, with after-school

► National Endowment for the Arts Big Read author David Tomas Martinez, center, poses with coordinators of the Miami Police Athletic League’s first Big Read program, which centered on Martinez’s collection of poetry, *Hustle*. Arts Midwest administers the Big Read initiative. Photo by the Miami Police Athletic League



programs. I think the cumulative impact of all those decades of work has been part of the reason that the Midwest is a welcoming place for people from all over the world.

One of the programs that we've been piloting is We the Many. It's training leaders to think about contextualizing their presence in communities. You have the vehicle of the arts as your main engine, but your presence is more important than just the arts. You're a partner with the police chief, you're a partner with the fire chief, you're a partner with the mayor, you're a partner with travel and tourism folks, you're a partner with everybody in that community who cares about the quality of life. Giving folks that knowledge and that awareness and imbuing them with that level of responsibility is having a huge impact.

Through the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read program, there are numerous examples [of why our work is so important]. The Miami Police Department partnered with the Big Read. Just the image of the police officers in Miami agreeing to read a book and have discussions about it with the community—that's so powerful. Maybe we can inspire police departments all over the country to adopt the Big Read the way that Miami folks have done. Can you imagine how beautiful that would be?

**BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH CREATIVITY**

The most important lesson that I've learned so far about the arts is it's about building community and it's about inspiring creativity. I think [Arts Midwest] is the perfect place to begin to do more of that work, to experiment with what that means, to go into communities and try to work with other folks from other sectors to explore that. What does it mean to inspire creativity and to build community?

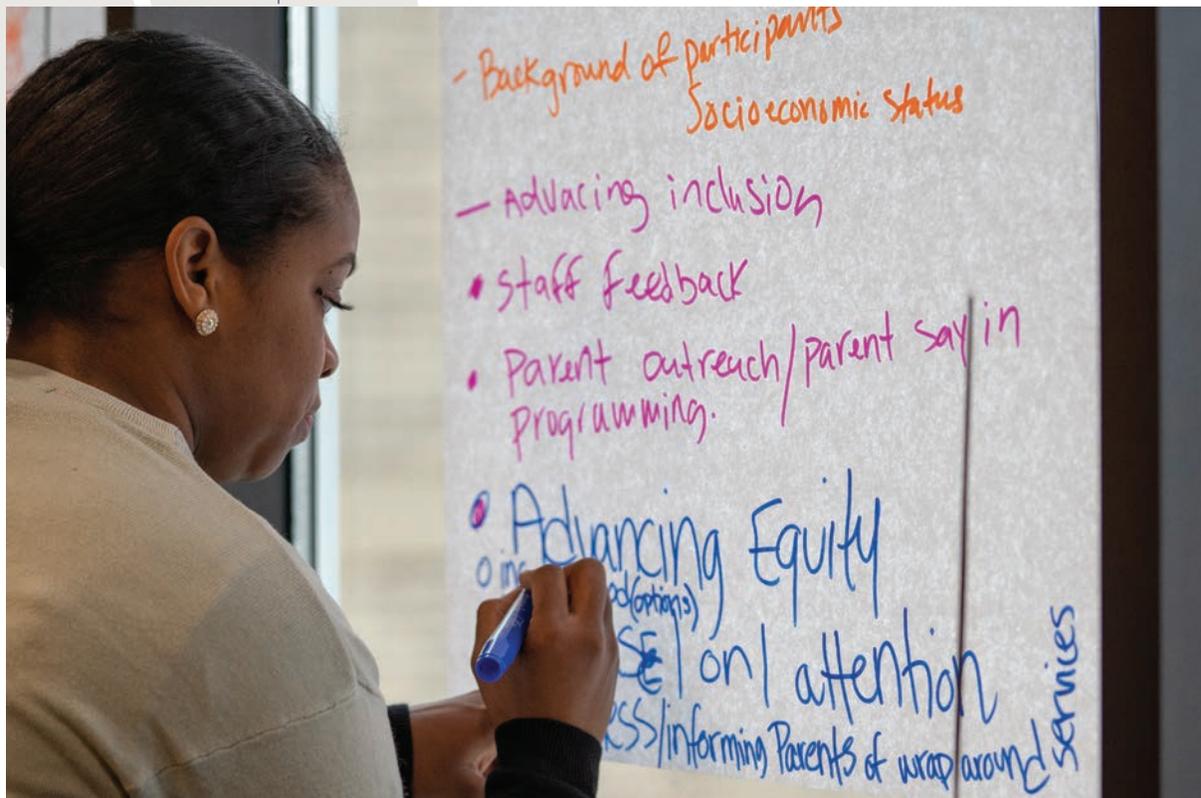
You need folks on the ground. This is a big, beautiful country, and you need folks in different parts of the

region activating this philosophy, and I think we're one of the agents of that activation. Of all of the work that we do, I believe the single most important thing is human contact. By having these regionals, you can ramp up the human contact, going out into these communities and visiting folks. One of the things I learned during my Alaska experience is that there's no substitute for human contact. If you want to go out to a community and blow past things like xenophobia and anger and fear, you've got to figure out a way to connect with people directly, and you've got to hear their stories and you've got to share your stories, and that's face to face. I'm not too sure that digital has gotten to the level where it can replace that one-to-one contact. So I think what the regionals can do is invest much more time, much more creativity in one-on-one contact, the on-the-ground, in-the-field contact with folks.

I want to figure out how to help more people in this country, in the Midwest specifically, appreciate their own inner creativity, and I want to figure out how to use the creativity of the arts to build community so that when people encounter things that are different, the first response is curiosity rather than fear.

*Rebecca Sutton is the editor of American Artscape.*

▼ An arts leader works on organizational strategy at an ArtsLab retreat. Photo by Joshua Feist





# The Arts of Technology

Christian Gaines/Western States Arts Federation

INTERVIEW BY PAULETTE BEETE

▲ Former WESTAF Chair Erin Graham, current WESTAF Chair Tamara Alvarado and WESTAF Executive Director Christian Gaines at WESTAF's October 2019 Board of Trustees Meeting in Denver, Colorado. Photo by Blake Jackson

While working with film festivals in the U.S. and in Europe, Christian Gaines developed a professional interest in, as he put it, “the connection between art and artists and audiences, and how to make the most of those connections.” A stint at Amazon’s Internet Movie Database roused his interest in the intersection of art and artists and technology. Although he didn’t know it at the time, he was

building the perfect resume to become, in early 2019, the executive director of Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF), which serves as the regional arts organization for Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai’i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

WESTAF not only supports arts and culture in the 13-state western region of the United States, but also develops technology solutions for use

in arts and culture work across the country. As Gaines told us, he was excited to join WESTAF and have the chance “to be involved programmatically in terms of advocacy, alliances, public policy, equity, and a lot of programmatic aspects that can make the world a better place as well as the art world.” Here’s Gaines on what makes both his region and his regional arts organization unique—from being leaders at the intersection of arts and technology, to serving communities from Hawai’i to Colorado and all points in between.

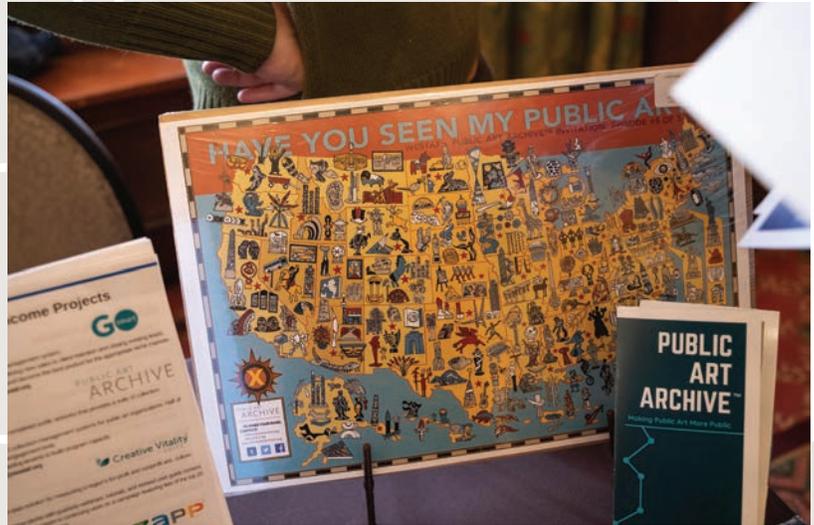
**ON THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL ARTS ORGANIZATIONS**

I think it’s important to have a regional strata in the ecosystem of arts support and arts funding in the U.S. because each individual region is unique, just as every single state is unique. In the West alone, we’re working with everything from the smallest population of any state in the country—Wyoming—and then the world’s fifth-largest economy in California. So there’s a huge sweep of need, of situation, and approach. I think it’s really important for an organization to be able to bring a region together, to be able to learn from each individual state, and to be able to understand and identify current best practices. One of the big things that WESTAF does, for example, is convene the state arts agencies of our participating states—not just the leadership—but people at all levels of the organization so that they can really meet each other, they can work together where it makes sense, and they can learn best practices from each other.

**HOW WESTAF SERVES THE WEST**

There are huge swaths of many states in the West where it’s largely rural; artists and arts organizations working in rural areas have very, very different priorities than artists and arts organizations working in urban areas. There’s also often a higher concentration of underserved and marginalized communities in rural areas. There’s an opportunity and a challenge there for us to address those needs.

WESTAF is also involved in advocacy at a state level as well as at a federal level in a variety of ways. We help individual states not just advocate for more money through their state legislature, but also better understand what kind of programs are out there. We philosophize that a thriving arts ecosystem includes an arts agency as well as an advocacy organization that are working well



together and that are advancing specific aims. That could be securing, or hopefully increasing, legislative appropriation, but it can also mean developing creative districts and creative neighborhoods or developing a “percent for the arts” program. It can also mean meeting with one’s congressional delegation in Washington, DC, and making sure that [it is] aware of the good work that that state is doing.

Another area that we have been working in is arts leadership, especially around people and communities of color, and developing equity programs and leadership programs in the arts. With our Emerging Leaders of Color program, state by state, we have really been able to find, nurture, prepare, and, very importantly, network artists of color and arts leaders of color to be able to move us forward. Our Emerging Leaders of Color program has an impact nationally because the hundred or so alumni that have gone through that program are spreading out across the United States.

**MAKING A NATIONAL IMPACT AT THE INTERSECTION OF ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY**

We began working in technology a long time ago, making select, prudent investments in different kinds of technology and really listening to the field and seeing what artists as well as arts organizations were looking for. We’ve ended up with five technology platforms that we actively run and operate. I would describe CallforEntry: CaFÉ™ and Zapplication® as opportunity engines. CaFÉ connects artists with any kind of call for entry that exists in the United States. It could be a public art call from a municipality; it

▲ Marketing materials for the Public Art Archive, one of WESTAF’s five technology platforms. Photo by Blake Jackson

could be a museum or a gallery looking for an artist, a medium, or a certain kind of a work. Zapplication is essentially the same thing but specifically connecting artists with art fairs and festivals around the United States.

The third utility we have is GO Smart™, which is an online grants system. Anyone who is administering an arts grant can utilize that system to manage [their process]. [We also have] a program called Creative Vitality™ Suite, which is a web-based platform that allows any person who is interested in a creative economy—that could be a municipal agency, an arts agency, it could be a downtown development association, it could be a visitor and convention bureau, anyone who's a community investor—to analyze the creative industries [in that economy] and the various categories within those creative industries down to the zip code. Another emerging platform that we have is Public Art Archive™, which on the back end is a collections management tool. On the front end, [the user] can publish that collection in a public-facing manner, which has all kinds of possibilities for curators, researchers, and cultural tourism.

## ON THE ARTS ECOSYSTEM IN THE U.S.

I feel that among the Arts Endowment, the regionals, and the individual states that the regionals serve, there is sort of a good tension that exists in making sure that every available constituent is being reached and served. I think each one of those partners provides checks and balances on granting and sub-granting through that system. It's a great way to make sure that every corner of the United States is able to make a case for arts funding through a variety of different ways, whether it's individual grants to nonprofit performing arts organizations, through the TourWest program that [WESTAF] runs, or in other ways, such as individual state funding for the arts that's matched by the Arts Endowment.

*Paulette Beete is the social media manager in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts.*

▼ WESTAF Leaders of Color Program alumni, faculty, and staff, 2019. Photo by Shawn King





Pam Breaux meets with staff from the Commonwealth Council for Arts and Culture, the arts agency for the Northern Mariana Islands. Photo courtesy the Commonwealth Council for Arts and Culture, Northern Mariana Islands

# ACHIEVING MORE TOGETHER

Pam Breaux/National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

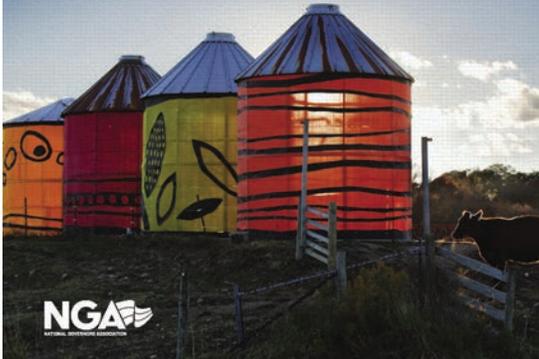
## INTERVIEW BY REBECCA SUTTON

For 14 years, Pam Breaux served as a culture, recreation, and tourism leadership team member within Louisiana's state government, including an appointment as the executive director of the Louisiana Division of the Arts. She was connected to the agency during what she described as the state arts agency's "greatest hours of need": in the early 1990s, when there was an attempt to eliminate the

agency, and in 2005, following the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Through it all, she said one thing remained consistent: the agency's ability to depend on the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA). "Whether times in state service were high or low, good or bad, we were always able to count on NASAA to help us advance our work on behalf of the people of the state," she said.

**RURAL PROSPERITY THROUGH THE ARTS & CREATIVE SECTOR**

A Rural Action Guide for Governors and States



NGA

▲ *Rural Prosperity through the Arts & Creative Sector*, an action guide on harnessing the power of the arts to drive rural success, was a collaborative project among the National Governors Association, National Endowment for the Arts, and NASAA.

Today, Breaux is the president and CEO of NASAA itself, the professional organization that represents the country's network of state arts agencies. Through research, advocacy, and connecting the state arts agencies with one another, NASAA empowers all 56 state arts agencies—one for each state and jurisdiction—both individually and as a collective, strengthening each one to best

serve its particular constituency. We recently spoke with Breaux about her work at NASAA, and why she considers it to be a critical piece of the nation's cultural ecosystem.

**STRONGER TOGETHER**

Through NASAA, state arts agencies achieve more together than they can achieve alone. NASAA convenes and connects state arts agencies and creates a community of the state arts agency field that helps to energize their work. It unites them around common goals. It builds shared vision for the future and it helps them benefit by learning from each other. So NASAA empowers the work of state arts agencies and strengthens state arts agencies by representing them collectively, and by providing knowledge and research and professional development services for them. They can always count on timely, relevant, customized, and responsive services that meet the needs of the individual states and the entire collective, and they can also count on our research being highly credible, accurate, and nonpartisan.

As we strengthen and empower [state arts agencies], they are better able to provide services all across their states. States are investing over \$400 million in state arts agencies. NASAA's work helps ensure that those investments are deployed in the smartest ways. Millions of

Americans would be left out of public funding opportunities if it weren't for the state arts agencies' commitment to making the arts available everywhere—across all their counties and legislative districts and communities.

State arts agencies are also contributing to really distinctive state identities. They're able to do that because of their proximity to their stakeholders all across their states. That proximity enables them to deeply engage the public in decision-making about the arts. I think that's a hallmark of state arts public service that too often goes unnoticed. It's good government at its finest because state arts agencies are in relationships with and in collaboration with the people they serve. They hear from those constituents as they draw up new strategic plans and craft new programs and services. Not every government agency works as deeply with the people they serve as state arts agencies do, and the resulting programs and services are able to resonate well with the public.

**CHAMPIONING THE VALUE OF STATE ARTS AGENCIES**

Part of what NASAA does is represent state arts agencies. We are their proud champion, as we advocate for them at the federal level and across sectors. We are leaders in asserting the importance and value of the arts to government and within government.

Arts advocacy is important 365 days per year and every year. Elected officials and appointed officials arrive in their government positions concurrent with their terms of office. So educating policymakers on the appropriateness, importance, and benefits of government support of the arts is an evergreen need. Our research portfolio and our advocacy work go a long way to help NASAA and state arts agencies articulate why government should support the arts. We work to help deliver the message of why the arts are a solid and effective public sector investment, why—when governments have so many serious issues to address—the arts can be a part of helping them address those issues, and why cutting arts funding doesn't particularly help balance government budgets. On the contrary, investments in the arts are good for a host of policy issues, including economic development, education, and wellness.

All 56 states and jurisdictions enjoy state-level support for the arts. Alaska recently called that question to bear quite publicly when arts support

was challenged. The state arts agency and Alaska's arts advocates made the case, answered tough questions about why the arts are a good public sector investment, and turned the challenge around. As a result, the agency's funding was fully restored. And it's NASAA's job to ensure all state arts agencies have the tools they need to successfully make the case.

**THOUGHT LEADERSHIP**

NASAA steps up to provide thought leadership for state arts agencies because we're committed to helping them advance their practices in important ways. One way we are doing that is through our focus on advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. This is collaborative work, and necessarily so. As we crafted this policy, we reached out to the 1,400 estimated people affiliated with state arts agencies and asked them to weigh in on it, and a large number of folks took us up on the opportunity. Then we created the space to elevate the issue area for NASAA members. We created the space by incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion in everything we

do; for example, we began offering professional development opportunities to help members navigate advancing this work within their own practices. We've also created the space for state arts agencies to connect to each other on this topic. This year, we'll develop and publish state arts agency case studies in this work. As NASAA continues this focus, what we're seeing is state arts agencies stepping up to advance their own practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion. The work we're seeing is monumental and far more advanced than what we were seeing five years ago. Part of the reason we're seeing this shift is that NASAA has assumed the position of a thought leader in encouraging and inspiring and equipping states to do more to advance this work. Regardless of the topic, initiatives that begin at NASAA have the potential to inspire, inform, and advance activity state by state; and, collectively when states move an important issue forward, there's great potential for the arts community to reap significant benefits nationally.

*Rebecca Sutton is the editor of American Artscape.*

▼ Pam Breaux speaks at the 2017 Poetry Out Loud National Finals. Photo courtesy of the National Endowment for the Arts



▼ The regional arts organization leaders at a meeting at the National Endowment for the Arts offices in Washington, DC. From l-r: WESTAF Executive Director Christian Gaines; South Arts Executive Director Susie Surkamer; NEFA Executive Director Cathy Edwards; Arts Midwest Executive Director Torrie Allen; Mid-America Arts Alliance CEO Todd Stein; and Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation Executive Director Theresa Colvin. Photo by Rebecca Sutton



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