

ARTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

At the heart of advocacy is the simple act of telling your story. Arts advocates can make a difference by sharing with decision makers what matters to you and the work you do in the arts. Your elected leaders want to hear from the people they represent and how the arts add value to your life and community.

YOU are an advocate - you care about the arts and what the arts can do in communities across the state. Advocacy is supporting a cause and working with decision makers to push forward a point of view or working to persuade policymakers to take legislative action. Advocating for the arts can take many forms from talking directly to your State Legislators and United States Congressmen and Senators to inviting your Mayor and other municipal leaders to your events.

Why Advocacy?

Elected public officials owe their jobs to voting citizens, and the law promotes lobbying by nonprofits. Lawmakers want to hear from voters, and they expect “regular people” to lobby, not political or technical experts. Remember, your voice is important - Elected leaders want to hear from their constituents about things happening in their districts. Those in the arts are some of the best advocates because artists know how to tell a story!

Ways to Advocate

- Write letters to e-mail your local, state and congressional representative about current legislative issues.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper.
- Remind your member local, state and congressional representative about the impact creative industries have in your district. Make sure your representative is aware of the presence of these creative organizations and the jobs they support.
- Meet with your local, state and congressional representative or their staff in person. Invite your local, state and congressional representative to learn more about your organization and develop a connection with their office.
- If you are a recipient of a grant, let your representative know what a difference you're the grant made for you and your community.

Making a case for government support of the arts

The arts are an important community builder and prosperity generator for states.

- The arts create jobs and produce tax revenue.
- The arts cultivate young imaginations and facilitate success in school, enhancing students' academic achievement in multiple subject areas. They provide the critical-thinking, communications and innovation skills essential to a productive 21st-century work force.
- The arts foster physical, mental and emotional health, aiding recovery processes and contributing to well-being.
- The arts create a welcoming sense of place and a desirable quality of life.
- The arts preserve culture and heritage, passing along a state's unique character and traditions to future generations of citizens

Lawmakers recognize other value-added advantages to making the arts a part of public policy.

- **Incorporating the arts improves the impact of other state policies and services.** Numerous states have incorporated the arts into economic revitalization, education, literacy, work-force development, tourism, community sustainability, social service and veterans-care plans.
- **The arts are a dynamic contributor to the small-business sector.** The creative industries are composed of many talented workers who are self-employed, freelancers or employed by microenterprises. According to National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) analysis of U.S. Census occupational data, artists are nearly 3.5 times more likely than the total U.S. work force to be self-employed (33.6% vs. 9.8%).
- **The arts make communities vibrant, welcoming and desirable.** Cultural places and events are magnetic, attracting not only artists but also families, travelers and businesses.
- **The arts are a hallmark of state innovation.** The arts are part of a state's creative capacity, spurring innovation and generating unique products and services.
- **Public funding of the arts is an investment with high yields.** This starts from the top with federal funds: each \$1 in federal arts funds leverages another \$9 from other public and private sources, resulting in \$500 million in matching support.

Making a case for the need of government support

- **The private sector won't fill gaps left by public investment declines.**
- **Government investments in the arts are citizen-driven and beholden to the *public* interest.**

"Why do we, as a free people, honor the arts? Well, the answer is both simple and profound. The arts and the humanities teach us who we are and what we can be.... We honor the arts not because we want monuments to our own civilization but because we are a free people. The arts are among our nation's finest creations and the reflection of freedom's light."

President Ronald Reagan

Attendance can't be the only revenue generator. Admissions and earned income already comprise the lion's share of arts revenues. But the arts are a public good—not merely a consumer product—because everyone benefits from the arts, not just those who choose to attend. A thriving creative sector creates a positive ripple effect throughout a community. We all benefit when neighborhoods are more livable, when kids do better in school, when our economy is more productive and when diverse populations come together—all of which result from inclusive access to arts activities and experiences.

Making the case for the importance of the arts.

The arts help America resolve some of our most serious public policy problems

- **Economic growth:** The value of arts and cultural production in America is \$763.6 billion (4.2% of our gross domestic product), which is more than four times greater than the amount that the agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting sector contributes to GDP.
- There are 4.92 million workers in the arts and cultural sector, whose efforts helped create a \$20 billion trade surplus in arts and cultural products for the United States.
- **Effective education:** The arts help realize the goals of a 21st-century education. Arts education raises academic achievement because it encourages creative thinking, analytical reasoning, effective communication and collaborative work—all competencies important for career and life success.
- **Supporting our troops:** Likewise, the arts are a cost-effective way to help wounded warriors and combat veterans recover from physical and emotional trauma. There is growing recognition among military leaders, arts therapists and doctors that the arts can be especially effective in helping patients suffering from traumatic brain injury and/or post-traumatic stress.
- **Projecting America's strength:** As President George H.W. Bush said in 1990, the arts and humanities "distinguish America as a world leader rather than merely a world power."
- **The arts help states bounce back from adversity.** Economic downturns require public officials to make the most of every asset and to adopt policies that maximize a state's recovery. The arts are a proven part of that mix. The creative industries diversify a state's economic base, which is especially valuable for states hit hard by declines in manufacturing or natural-resource extraction. The creative sector can mitigate economic problems by creating jobs and enhancing

property values. Creative communities further help to stabilize a state's tax base by preventing the flight of skilled workers and families seeking good quality of life.

Making a case for the importance of Arts Education

- **The arts transform the learning environment.** When the arts become central to the learning environment, schools and other settings become places of discovery; school culture is changed and learning is improved.
- **The arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached.** Young people who are disengaged from schools and other community institutions are at the greatest risk of failure or harm. The arts provide a reason, and sometimes the only reason, for a student to engage with school or other organizations.
- **The arts connect students to themselves and each other.** Creating an artwork is a personal experience. The student draws upon his or her personal resources to generate the result. By engaging his or her whole person, the student feels invested in ways that are deeper than “knowing the answer.” Experiences such as this enable young people to grow and connect with one another in new ways.
- **The arts provide new challenges for those students already considered successful.** Boredom and complacency are barriers to success. For those young people who outgrow their established learning environments, the arts can offer a chance for unlimited challenge.
- **Voters are committed to arts education.** The American public, by an overwhelming margin, believes the arts are vital to a well-rounded education.

Facts about the Impact of Arts Education

- Low-income students who are highly engaged in the arts are more than twice as likely to graduate college as their peers with no arts education
- Students who are involved in the arts are:
 - 4 times more likely to participate in a math and science fair
 - 3 times more likely to win an award for school attendance
 - 4 times more like to be recognized for academic achievement
 - 3 times more like to be elected to class office
- 72% of business leaders say that creativity is the number one skill they are seeking when hiring

Gathering Data and Research



www.arts.ms.gov/resources/advocacy/

www.arts.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/FY-2022-Annual-Report.pdf



www.msartseducation.org/category/advocacy/



www.americansforthearts.org/advocate

www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/arts-education-network/tools-resources/getting-started



www.nasaa-arts.org/advocacy/

Know your representatives and find out about your target

- Finding by Address or Location

https://openstates.org/find_your_legislator

- State Legislators

www.ballotpedia.org/Mississippi_state_legislative_districts#House

www.legislature.ms.gov/contact/

- Congressional

www.msfb.org/national-policy/congressional-delegation/

www.govtrack.us/congress/members/MS#senators

Set up a meeting:

Send an email or make a phone call asking for a meeting with your representative. Let them know you want to talk to them about the impact of the arts in their district. (If applicable), let them know that you/your organization received a grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission and how much that grant meant to you.

What to say?

- First, put together a list of key impact in your area.
 - Write a letter (or email) listing the impact of the arts and arts funding in your area.
 - Before the meeting:
 - Decide who in your group will speak and what each person will say
 - Get to know your representative, what they care about and any connection to the arts
 - Be sure to email any documents you will reference beforehand and be sure to follow up after your meeting.
- * TIP: Also, be sure to invite them to in person events or activities in your district!

Create your own story

- Collect your data using attendance information and assessment tools.
 - Creative surveys; create attendance reports
- Use evaluations as a tool.
 - Use anecdotal information that identifies specific constituencies.
- Use specific data depending on who you are targeting.
 - Numbers work for some targets; quotes work for others.
- Letter writing is a continuing form of advocacy and useful for grant reporting.
 - It should be developed as a habit.

Types of Letters included in samples

- Thank you for support
- As an ask for support
- Advocating for a particular issue or bill