

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

KNOWLEDGE ★ REPRESENTATION ★ COMMUNITY

2016 NOMINATING COMMITTEE INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Reflected below are themes that emerged from the **84 interviews** of state arts agency Executive Directors and Council Chairs, conducted by the NASAA Nominating Committee in May and June of 2016. The Nominating Committee used a structured interview protocol to ensure consistent coverage of key topics with every member. In addition to questions about NASAA board service, the planning questions asked were:

- Have you used any NASAA services or information in the last year? Were you satisfied with the help you received? How so or how not?
- In your opinion, what are the most valuable things NASAA does?
- Do you have any advice for this year's Planning and Budget Committee as it crafts NASAA's 2017 action plan?
- Thinking farther ahead, NASAA will begin a new strategic planning process next year. Do you have any initial suggestions about how NASAA can better serve state arts agencies over the long term?

We have developed a more detailed report than usual, to capture every response for future reference. This full version will be shared with the Planning and Budget Committee and staff for use as they develop NASAA's 2017 Action Plan and begin work on NASAA's next comprehensive Strategic Plan. Abbreviated highlights will be shared with the membership as part of the Nominating Committee Report at the business meeting in September.

USE AND VALUE OF NASAA SERVICES

Overall, members most value NASAA's **research** and **information services** (82 mentions); NASAA's **advocacy in Congress** on behalf of the NEA, as well as with the NEA on behalf of state arts agencies (55 mentions); and the opportunity to **convene** and **network** (73 mentions).

Knowledge

Every state interviewed reported using NASAA in some way in the past year, and members are highly satisfied with NASAA services and support. Executive directors used NASAA's **research services** extensively for help with trend information, policy advice and/or data comparing their own agency to other states. Top issues included state arts agency revenue sources (including dedicated funding); placement in state government; salary surveys; strategic planning; state-level advocacy; council education and orientation; and arts education. NASAA's **delivery of knowledge through various channels** (conferences and other professional development convenings, the web site, web seminars, one-on-one consultations, the listservs and the NOTES newsletter) were often cited, by both executive directors and chairs. Member comments about NASAA's knowledge services include:

- *We constantly use the national state funding comparisons for our legislature. Got a new \$10.8 million increase. Of course there were other reasons for the increase, but NASAA advocacy materials were important. I often tap into information from Ryan, for example, the arts and culture districts we are now implementing.*

- NASAA serves as a resource for SAAs, which includes research, strategic guidance, making connections between SAAs—matchmaking needs, experience, "Who is doing something like xyz?" and giving us data/speaking points.
- Primarily use policy documents, state reports. Great information. Benchmarks are very important.
- I use NASAA's research documents and legislative updates. Encourage staff and board members to read them as well. Very satisfied with NASAA information.
- Use NASAA a lot: research and studies, training via the conferences, anything to do with legislative issues. NASAA is my first point of resource. Very quick response.
- Discussion with Kelly helped us shape our conference, specifically to frame the topics and agenda. Got online grant management services advice from Ryan as we move to a digital format.
- The Leadership Institute in SLC and the ED retreat were wonderful in terms of networking and gaining experience. I have used the website for assistance, I appreciate the emails, utilize advocacy resources, and recently called Ryan Stubbs for assistance in assembling information that we previously assembled in-house. All those things are greatly appreciated.
- I had a good long talk with Pam, who called within first weeks of my new tenure. Sent me stuff around arts education and creative economy. Long talk with Kelly about Boot Camp. Delved into large topics. Talked about initiative on civic engagement.
- I use NASAA a good bit and appreciate the help! My Council members appreciate the updates - especially legislative.
- NASAA is new to me (as a new ED) and now I depend on them. Within first three months I had to come up with a white paper and totally relied on NASAA. We recommended two changes as a direct result of the research. Also, I was confused about other things, including my role in my agency, and NASAA was a lifesaver. I use NASAA more than any other resource.
- Strategic planning advice and research is what I use the most. Always helpful. Also the Boot Camp for new EDs was very useful in terms of education and also meeting new colleagues. The ED retreat this year was awesome.
- Brand new but has already used the piece on Why Government Should Support the Arts? So appreciate Pam and her outreach!! NASAA has been an incredible help.
- Had an urgent need for information re: states that do or do not have an advocacy organization. We were trying to get legislation for a support organization. NASAA responded quickly and provided exactly what we needed.
- Uses the research and other info he received in his welcome packet when he is out and about talking about arts issues.
- I use the comparable agency salaries; and the NASAA ED and Deputy Director listservs.
- Kelly Barsdate has been incredible. She really understands what is going on, is thoughtful, and able to troubleshoot. Data available on the website has been very important in educating legislative arts and culture group. NASAA provides great services.
- Kelly helped us gather data, then we worked with Henry on presenting the information. Very satisfied.
- Most timely is the info about SAA's placement within gov't divisions, related to a potential structural change in my state. NASAA gave a national perspective and overview. I am very happy with the information available.
- I consulted with staff (Kelly) on specific issues affecting my state. Helpful information from Ryan. Very satisfied with staff. Can talk to them about everything.
- My primary connection to NASAA is through the research department, for example, help with tax check-off information. They are top notch. Second to none. I have a number of new Council members. A new Governor is making his own appointments, and that has meant that within six months half the Council turned over. I needed support in getting these new Council members informed about serving on a state agency, i.e., the

difference being on a non-profit as opposed to a state agency. Fabulous information from Kelly Barsdate helped me to clarify this role. This should be part of a session for chairs at the conference.

- *I share the Legislative Appropriations report with council members. Staff and council attend both the Institute and Assembly. NASAA has provided references for speakers: we used the improv group for a very effective staff and council engagement session. I think very highly of NASAA services, staff, and research.*
- *I use comparison information for the states and networking for SAA directors.*
- *Kelly B was very helpful in the strategic planning process, provided examples.*
- *I asked NASAA about existing arts employment study information about what was available and what NASAA had access to. Also utilized the per capita stats to benchmark against that.*
- *I use NASAA all the time. Most importantly this year I received figures about other states that had dealt with consolidation (customized reports), and got advice from staff on defeating consolidation efforts in my state.*
- *The legislative appropriation surveys have been important and we regularly participate in and utilize them. The salary survey also is important. Highly satisfied with the content and outcomes of the research participated in and used to date--have particularly appreciated Kelly and Henry as points of contact for those needs.*
- *Used NASAA for a study of the largest grants made by SAAs. Very satisfied. Ask NASAA for info all the time.*
- *I'm just four months into the job, so interaction with NASAA thus far has been limited. Two interactions to date include an introductory call with Pam within first two weeks on the job. This was on top of context he was provided in hard copy when he started the job. Second interaction was outreach to Ryan Stubbs about nonprofit grant awards and how to verify grantee organizational status. Very satisfied with interactions thus far. Introductory call with Pam was just wonderful.*
- *When I am in a "pinch" and have an initiative or such I call staff. Being able to get quick and reliable information is hugely important.*
- *Being available and responsive. Convenings - particularly like the peer with like peer convenings. Great research. Strategic planning. Educational opportunities for EDs, and peer / job alike groups.*
- *Advocacy! Sharing of information. This is "what we've seen work" in other places...invaluable. Will even do research for us when we don't have the time!*
- *Nice to feel that I have a consultant on call. Knowledge base to tap.*
- *When scratching heads about something...go to NASAA. Reliable and credible about any subject.*
- *Contacted Pam and Kelly when we started having challenges with change of administration. They were great with recommendations about who to call and talk with about who's gone through similar situations.*
- *Most recently we requested information on Governor's Arts Awards in other states. Ours had been dropped a number of years ago and we are bringing it back for our 50th anniversary in 2017. The resources, assistance and guidance provided during our strategic planning process was extraordinary.*
- *Used NASAA for salary studies and other research.*
- *Data and research has been very good. We connect with NASAA data to find the right metrics to make the case for art in our state.*
- *NASAA is the key partner in delivering and compiling final report statistics.*
- *Learns a lot from NASAA's examples - strategic planning and admin processes - uses NASAA as example of best practices.*
- *I use NASAA of overview of national trends. We have the ability to call them up and say here's what we're dealing with -- is anything going on in the rest of the country? And they know.*

- *Personally it is hard to imagine having more assistance than has been provided to us in the recent past. We are where we are in large part is due to the resources and personal support that has been provided by NASAA.*

Representation

There is a high level of awareness of and regard for NASAA's **advocacy** on behalf of states, both with the **NEA** and in **Congress**. Many members said they regularly distribute legislative alerts and other information to their councils and constituents. Comments include:

- *NASAA does things we can't do for ourselves - represents the field nationally, with NEA and AFTA, and especially the NEA. So important that NASAA understands our needs and circumstances as an advocate.*
- *We used NASAA advocacy tools and information as we're developing an arts and culture caucus in our legislature*
- *I use legislative appropriations data regularly and also alerts and updates from Isaac.*
- *NASAA is a critical voice in advocacy for us all.*
- *Love Isaac's alerts and updates and use them all the time with board and in the community.*
- *Representing the SAAs in DC--Congress, NEA, advocacy partners, other federal agencies, etc.*
- *Advocacy is most valuable, as well as stewarding the relationship with the NEA.*
- *NASAA is the overriding advocacy group, helping SAAs with their advocacy, tracking trends and sharing those with the field, representing the field to Congress, defense of the 40%.*
- *Until you know how the funding works from the NEA, etc., you're not sure about any of it, and NASAA has been explicit in training and showing what is possible and what can be achieved by people working together.*
- *Most valuable about NASAA: Advocate at the NEA. Advocacy for Congress.*
- *NASAA has done a really good job of improving our relationship with the NEA. That is tremendous. We need to be vigilant about keeping that relationship.*
- *NASAA works with the NEA - not only protecting the 40% but protecting state's interests and consistently bring the work of SAAs to the forefront at the Endowment.*
- *Most important: representation/protection of the 40%, improved relationship with NEA.*
- *Advocacy is so valuable, as well as stewarding relationship with the NEA.*
- *Happy to see the strengthened relationship with the NEA.*
- *NASAA continues to be an important partner with Congress.*
- *First will always be their advocating to NEA and Congress. Their resources are primary!*
- *Congressional representation most valuable--great to be able to call Isaac and find out what's going on.*
- *Lobbying and advocating for the NEA and SAAs is very important.*
- *NASAA is unique in cultivating relationship with NEA and advocating for the states. We are at a pivotal time to evolve as an industry and NASAA's role in advancing the relationships at the federal level are crucial.*
- *NASAA is the voice of the states in federal policy. Very important! Right now during Jane Chu's administration, NASAA has been an equal colleague which is advantageous. This makes it easier to engage. New administration...we'll see. NASAA continues to be an important partner with Congress.*
- *Just having NASAA exist, and be a vehicle for one voice and one message is incredibly important for the states and at the national level.*

Community

Convening, networking, professional development and leadership training are interconnected for state arts agencies. People benefit immensely from having as many ways as possible to learn with and from each other. **Convening** in person is especially important, with many people saying this is the best way to know each other better and to cement relationships year-round. Members also value NASAA meetings because they let people step away from daily demands and explore new ideas, perspectives and people. Beyond the conferences, members also appreciate the **connector role** NASAA plays, which helps members link to each other for assistance, advice or solidarity. Maintaining and deepening a strong sense of community is of paramount importance to members. There are many **new leaders** in the field and everyone—new and seasoned—wants the chance to get to know each other better, and to know NASAA better, too.

In addition to annual conferences, members benefit from other gatherings such as the New Executive Directors Boot Camp and NASAA board meetings. Online resources and web seminars were also frequently mentioned as accessible, fast and reliable ways to get information and keep up to date on trends and issues. Members also mentioned the benefits of committee service, the listservs, and NOTES. Member comments include:

- *Providing a continual connection between each SAA is the most valuable thing. NASAA is always there when we need to reach out to them by calling Kelly, Laura or Pam. The annual gatherings are also immensely valuable. Throughout the rest of the year, the interconnectivity continues.*
- *I have found both the leadership and the larger gathering to be highly professional. There is time to learn and time to get to know our fellow chairs and others leaders.*
- *I've attended two Leadership Institutes. Excellent training and interaction.*
- *Attended NASAA in New Orleans with other commissioners and had a great experience. Very confirming--made us feel good about how our state is doing.*
- *I have found that attending the NASAA conference is a very valuable experience, especially networking with others and sharing ideas.*
- *I was at the NASAA conference in NOLA. Didn't know anything about NASAA at that point as I was so new. Fabulous gathering. Pam is awesome.*
- *Went to the New Orleans conference and found it useful as a new chair.*
- *Attended New Orleans Assembly. It was very helpful and well organized. Other conferences draw people who share interests. The tracks at assembly actually brought together people doing the same work. Very inspiring. Looking forward to Grand Rapids.*
- *Bringing us together, the convenings, are most valuable. The peer network has been of the most benefit to me.*
- *Have used webinars, came to the conference - that's a must-do – I always get something out of it. Always find the networking is great, my questions are answered, inspired by what other state are doing, and more.*
- *Conferences/Leadership Institutes have been great and most helpful!*
- *Certainly NASAA ties us all together as a field. Makes us aware of what others are doing. Convenings are key!*
- *Professional development through conferences and other gatherings extremely valuable assets to my work life.*
- *Bringing professionalism to the field through conferences and gatherings - key.*
- *The Assemblies and Institutes are great. And the next two conference sites are great. Continue to reinvent what's on the program. It's important to continue keeping things fresh.*
- *I value the annual assembly / leadership meeting, the listserv and the easy access to networking with peers.*

- *Boot Camp for E.D.'s was terrific!!! Well thought out and executed. Probably the most valuable two days since taking the job. When I went in 2012 there were at least a dozen other "newbies." Wasn't the usual sheets of paper on the walls. Having that served on a silver platter was just THE best.*
- *NASAA helps me to talk and network with other EDs, which makes for a more comfortable networking solution than cold-calling people I don't know.*
- *NASAA provides information on the sector and gathers the field for professional development.*
- *Convener role, bringing together the field is the most important - and the role that the staff plays in gathering information from the field and sharing that information across the country.*
- *NASAA creates a network of people with similar jobs and problems; only 56 of us in the country have this job. We can only discuss issues with colleagues, NASA provides a 'safe place.'*
- *The ED Retreat was so valuable. The ED jobs are so unique and there are not that many of us. These jobs are really hard.*
- *Being a convener and broker of information, so important.*
- *NASAA provides the SAA field with the information we need to be effective and provides opportunities to convene and share best practices.*
- *The convenings are well done, providing great information and an opportunity to meet peers from throughout the country.*
- *Been to two full assemblies, found sessions to be really helpful, especially those about what makes healthy organizations.*
- *One of the most valuable things that NASAA offers is the annual convening - the learning opportunities are so valuable. Convening and creating of multiple spaces (in-person, electronic) that connects people to peers is invaluable.*
- *I strongly support the helpful information contained in NASAA Notes and regularly point to information for my board to read.*
- *Newsletter is a good source of solid information. The "state of" State Arts Agencies - extremely helpful.*
- *Staff has participated in multiple webinars - these are very useful to the staff and our Commissioners also often participate.*
- *Go to website quite a bit. Found great information on mission statements that were helpful as the commission developed their first one.*
- *I have been to the web site and is finding it useful for data, etc. I also am using the web site as a bit of a model as I rebuild my state's website*
- *I go to the website constantly for national overviews.*
- *The website and the high quality research on the website is incredible.*

RESPONSIVENESS

Members are excited about Pam Breau, NASAA's new CEO, and with NASAA's overall professionalism, speed and responsiveness. Comments include:

- *It has been wonderful to see Pam in the role of CEO - she is doing great work building relationships and leading NASAA. She is great for NASAA.*
- *Having met Pam, I think she has a direction that is very positive for the organization and the field. Impressed by how she has attended to Kansas.*
- *The research and resources are the best. If ever I need something, NASAA's response is on target and quick. The staff is talented. I'm really excited about Pam...she's on the top of my list!*
- *I appreciate the one-on-one opportunities with high-level staff: Pam, Kelly, Laura. I feel free to call anybody anytime. I value the interaction.*

- *I appreciate Pam and her outreach.*
- *I use NASAA resources and staff members on a regular basis and am always pleased with what I receive. The most responsive group of people I've ever worked with.*
- *Staff's speedy responses and wide knowledge are important factors and they provide great services too.*
- *I appreciate the depth of knowledge of staff.*
- *My staff is so small and NASAA helps with things we can't do. They're like extra staff.*
- *NASAA staff are great, use them more than anything else. Very appreciative of the way they are willing to help.*
- *Love the staff. HUGE fan of the staff.*
- *I have called staff to answer questions about many topics. NASAA gives extreme service answering questions almost immediately. Love the service.*
- *I think the work of the staff is extraordinary. NASAA is a terrific organization.*
- *Any/all products he has used from NASAA have been outstanding. The staff is amazing!*
- *Spoken with Laura about questions. All contacts have been very positive. NASAA consistently goes beyond what's expected.*
- *Leaders of NASAA are impressive. The way they help us with such respect and admiration is so appreciated and makes us feel needed, wanted and appreciated. It's a real skill!*
- *NASAA can virtually answer any question anyone has and they do it with a smile and efficiently. I have really come to admire the amount of "we've got your back" capability they provide for us. That is just so useful! We don't operate in a vacuum because of them!*
- *NASAA serves as a really strong member association. Its attention to members and their needs, info that's important, and stepping in and helping members when they have challenges are the hallmarks of a good association.*

LOOKING AHEAD

Overall, state arts agencies regard NASAA highly and think the organization is **on track and heading in the right direction**. Responses along these lines included:

- *NASAA does a great job.*
- *Not anything new that is a major shift in direction. Continue to forge ahead. NASAA should realize that what they do is excellent and be realistic.*
- *Feels like we're headed in the right direction with the onset of the work NASAA is embarking on.*
- *I think that the organization is firmly grounded in its work with SAAs. I look forward to seeing where the strategic planning process takes NASAA and the new/innovative turns that lie ahead.*
- *Nothing different to suggest right now. I am looking forward to the strategic planning process.*
- *The organization is pretty attentive to its constituents and mission. It feels very strategic. I assume that all the needs will emerge as we go through the strategic planning process.*
- *It's a GREAT organization!!!! It stays focused on its mission...there's not all this mission creep you see elsewhere.*
- *Keep doing what you are doing and then look ahead to what can make you EVEN better!*

There is some unease about the upcoming presidential election and the polarized political environment, but for the most part members are excited about the future as NASAA embarks on a new strategic planning process. Members welcome the chance to provide their perspectives and input, and offered many suggestions to inform the planning process.

There's a strong sense of confidence in NASAA's board and staff, and a positive outlook on what's possible for the organization and for the field collectively.

Politics and Policy

In the near term, people have their eyes on the upcoming presidential election and are thinking about imminent transitions. Members want NASAA to help them deal with a polarized **political environment**, find ways to connect with transition teams, and be an immediate presence on Capitol Hill to engage with the new administration and new members of Congress.

- *We are heading for some really challenging times ahead. We are just so polarized as a country ... it is extremely troubling. I don't know how that's going to play out in the states, but we're going to need leadership from NASAA after the elections!*
- *Redouble knowledge efforts on the presidential election. Find connections and influence with transition teams.*
- *Be at the forefront as we look for a transition in Jan 2017. (Also be prepared to be afraid!) Be an immediate presence on Capitol Hill to engage with the new administration and members.*
- *Since we are obviously in an election year and we don't know what that will mean, I am concerned. Whatever the new administration, there needs to be a strategic approach.*
- *We've done a really good job of improving our relationship with the NEA. That is tremendous. We need to be vigilant about keeping that relationship. Jane Chu gets the importance of SAAs. It would be great to promote her as continuing her Chair role. Whatever happens, we should work to continue to keep this relationship as fine as possible.*
- *Plan to work with the new president and new leadership at NEA. Guarantee appropriate resources to carry the message forward. If possible, advocate for the continued leadership of Jane Chu. She is such a strong leader with clear and simple vision.*

Speaking to the **longer-term policy horizon**, some state arts agencies said they would welcome advocacy training and a clearer call to advocacy action. They also underscored the importance of NASAA maintaining and seeking key policy relationships.

- *Civic engagement. Voter registration, advocacy. Power of like-minded people. We need to be better prepared to deal with our political environment.*
- *NASAA needs less reactive congressional advocacy and more proactive advocacy. Take the initiative, and don't be so timid about being in lockstep with the NEA. The biggest issue for NASAA was when the SAAs didn't double down on congress when Rocco proposed circumventing the 40%.*
- *Would hope for a stronger, more articulated national strategy. Celebrating an increase of \$2 million for the NEA may have our sights set too low. Arts boards nationally should be a lot more aspirational on federal funding and the overall level of public funding from state and local governments, as well as arts education funding.*
- *The arts field is too reticent about advocating for big change based on our public value. Do more! Be visionary and forward thinking. Resist business as usual.*
- *Very important for NASAA to be bolder. Understanding the caution of membership organizations and being mindful of the needs of the weakest, bolder actions would only make them stronger.*
- *I think we should do some historical analysis and come up with a political risk assessment tool for states. The idea is to anticipate political crisis before it happens and develop some planning services to prepare states.*
- *Wish we could partner more with NCSL so we could be more of a regular thing in the minds of legislators. Finding the funds to partner with NCSL would be great.*

- *Looking back on historically important collaborations, the work NASAA did with the National Governors Association led to key changes. Look to further collaborations! Advance our centrality to every government conversation.*
- *Would like to explore further the relationship with AFTA at both the national and state level and to figure out how the SAAs could have an effective seat at the AFTA table.*
- *NASAA can take a role as we consider the role of advocacy organizations in the states, and how they function. Is it time for a new model, or a look at the best way to advocate and achieve results?*
- *We need more effective advocacy - more than happy stories. We need to be politically smart, more effective nationally and at the state level. NASAA could be bringing in additional resources (lobbyists from other industries or grassroots people) to consult with states.*
- *Some states are poorly equipped to be advocates.*
- *Advocacy help is always a big need.*

The Future of State Arts Agencies

Several members noted that they want NASAA to help them candidly assess their strengths and weaknesses and to help them envision the future of state arts agencies:

- *Keep supporting state arts agencies as we are but, to the extent possible, also be a mirror to let us see ourselves better. Show us where we need to improve. The ritual of gathering to celebrate strength is valuable. We need to also have a process or be the vehicle to see the challenges.*
- *It would help SAA's if NASAA would lead the way in figuring out how we should look in 20 or 50 years.*
- *What role NASAA can play in envisioning the state arts agency of the future. How do we help define the destiny of SAAs?*
- *Do an honest look at environment for SAAs: political, social, financial realities. How are we positioned? In the environment for public funding, what is different from 10 years ago, and how it will change in 10 years?*
- *The environment SAAs are working in is changing in new ways we couldn't have anticipated - example, Illinois, Kansas. How does NASAA embrace those changes and pivot its services accordingly?*
- *NASAA needs to keep advancing the conversations about SAA efficiency and collective impact.*

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Members see diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility as a key aspect of the relevancy of state arts agencies' work:

- *We need to think about and plan for a shift in demographics and the way in which people give and receive information and experience the arts and how we customize and use information now and will in the future.*
- *I am very concerned about audiences and perceptions of race and equity.*
- *Anything we can do to join the chorus at all levels looking at equity and access. For example: how to grow leaders of color? NASAA needs to establish itself as leader in this area.*
- *Assure funding for needed DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) studies and work. Where are graduates of color going? Are they employed? What is their level or position where they work? What are immigration trends? Cultural shifts - what does this look like currently?*
- *Keep a strong eye to diversity - not just paying it lip service, but creating action items. Help the field move forward in this area. Grant making in a more equitable fashion.*

- *Promoting the value of SAAs needs to be central. Equity and inclusion are at the forefront. AFTA's statement and the comments about it bring attention to the field's struggle. NASAA is great at taking the abstract and making it concrete. I would like to see a toolbox to address the issue and examples of programs that show how equity is being addressed by other funders. NASAA can make this real and practical.*

Communications & Connectivity

Members spoke often about NASAA's communication and outreach efforts. There's high regard for how NASAA keeps state arts agencies connected and informed, to national trends, issues and to each other. There were also constructive suggestions for what else people would like NASAA to do. Some members suggested that NASAA **update its website** and use multiple technology platforms to help engage, promote and magnify the work states are doing. People also encouraged NASAA to **raise its visibility and profile** within and beyond the membership:

- *Website is a little boring. Maybe more art, some redesign. Do more thinking about the organization's name. Maybe more social media. Maybe an app.*
- *The website needs to be updated. There are many other ways to put information on a website.*
- *I frequent the website for data, it's there and good but can be hard to find.*
- *Embrace social media. The newsletter has too much text. Needs a new web presence.*
- *I also think that we should work on NASAA's communications profile. When there is a national story about the arts, Pam should be one of the go-to talking heads. Not exactly sure how we make this happen, but we should be thinking about it.*
- *Work needs to be done on the larger value and work of SAA's to those outside our field. Philanthropy and arts organizations still struggle with what we [state arts agencies] do. We should have a much higher profile.*
- *Given the high amount of incoming email I get from constituents and stakeholders, I struggle with how to prioritize communications coming NASAA. Does something from Isaac with a legislative update take priority over a newsletter, over a survey, etc.? I worry that I have let things fall through the cracks because different NASAA staff are reaching out. Maybe communications should come from one person or one entity.*
- *NASAA could have an app for its research and resources online to increase awareness of what we're doing. The staff does a great job. We just need people to use what's there.*
- *Suggest use of Bluejeans, an on-line meeting platform, very easy to use, ability to share documents, forms strong relationships.*
- *It's important that NASAA be visible in the states. There are lots of moving parts in the environment, multiple trade organizations in the arts space. There might need to be more of a general understanding of what NASAA is and does.*
- *From a "brand" point of view, the only the people who know about NASAA are people who know about NASAA. I thought NASAA was NASA when I first heard about it.*
- *How should we market NASAA?*

Members continue to want proactive outreach and **individualized agency attention** from NASAA. Many members asked NASAA to do more to help make NASAA services more familiar to **new staff and council members**, and to help new executive directors, especially.

- *We need to continue to focus on outreach, both on the board and staff level. We're not doing anything wrong, but the staff has a lot to do. Maybe we could find a way for board members to help with that.*
- *Need to find a way to make NASAA services more familiar to new directors. There have been a number of long term directors who have retired. Newer directors don't have as*

much awareness.

- *A mentoring program for state ED's would be a great...someone for new EDs to call that has signed on to the task of mentorship so new people don't feel as though they're pestering veterans for advice.*
- *As a new ED in Salt Lake City, I felt that the old guard held sway a little too much, and the new voices were not recognized enough.*
- *If a new ED will be more than a year before attending a boot camp, have a NASAA staff member be in touch by phone to bring the ED up to speed, etc.*
- *I really want to see every state assigned to a staff member, a more client-based approach to member relations. More contact on a regular basis. We'd know members, they'd know NASAA much better.*
- *NASAA should attend regional gatherings of SAA directors. The directors could help identify potential funders in the region.*
- *Take a triage approach to attend to those states most at risk or in need of most help. Prioritize states based on need of NASAA services. A more deliberate approach to managing state relationships.*
- *Would love to see more of a deliberate approach to connecting to the individual arts commissions. Each NASAA staff member regardless of role would manage an 'account' of half a dozen states to regularly touch base with.*
- *I've been intrigued by feedback I've heard from others through this process about a more account-management style approach to state relationships. Are there ways to streamline how NASAA communicates with the states? Perhaps some sort of annual call with the agency? Are there ways we as the states can help NASAA prioritize which states need certain services?*
- *At times, there are people in states who have very little Council experience, so educating people about how to be state arts agency chairs would be really great. Board governance training is always a valuable asset. Webinars would be great.*
- *Would like to see a message from NASAA that was especially riveting to share with Council members.*
- *As a chair, it would be helpful to know what state arts agency goals are across the nation.*
- *More educational outreach to board members - not just the chairs.*
- *Chairs get to interact and receive a welcome packet - why not offer a welcome packet to EVERY board member? This could be distributed by NASAA or by the SAA itself.*

Council member engagement remains both a need and a hurdle. As in other years, feedback this year shows that appointed leaders' understanding and awareness of NASAA varies widely—some chairs are very familiar with NASAA and others not at all. Some chairs see NASAA as the service organization for their executive directors, not them. Many chairs wish that **information about NASAA** was part of their overall introduction to council service and would like NASAA to directly offer more **resources and orientation materials**. Many chairs mentioned that they use NASAA's website and read NASAA emails, but really understood their work better once they attend a conference. To that end, both chairs and executive directors would like NASAA to explore more ways to **get more council members to attend NASAA conferences**. Council members come from all walks of life, and this is both an asset and a challenge. They have many demands on their time and attention, and varying degrees of understanding about public service and/or the arts. Given the benefits of connecting this large and important group to NASAA—their deeper understanding of the public arts funding system, better advocacy, stronger leadership pipeline for board service, more robust philanthropic support—NASAA should prioritize efforts to **orient, educate and engage** them.

NASAA's Strategic Planning Process

While affirming the primacy of **member input** into strategic planning, interviewees advised NASAA to seek **ideas from beyond the membership**, too. There is an interest in seeing NASAA more actively engage sectors and organizations that could be allies in state arts agencies' work.

- *There needs to be plenty of opportunity for input from the state arts agency field. Find different ways for people to provide ideas.*
- *Engage individuals working in state arts agencies in the planning process. Engage EDs and chairs, but also program directors and deputy directors. Deputy directors and program directors often are a little closer to the ground and bring a diverse and younger opinion that maybe the EDs don't.*
- *Planning is tough. Needs a face-to-face element. Maybe get states together by regions, engage more individuals directly. Visit regional board meetings over the next year?*
- *Look at how aligned are the plans of each state with NASAA.*
- *The strategic planning process should involve multiple people outside of NASAA. Don't just plan from within the field. Reach outside the usual pool. Involve entities we as SAAs or as NASAA would hope to partner with. Use the plan to create bridges across priority sectors.*
- *Be aware of potential partnerships that would serve the states well. Those would include the Cultural Data Project and Grantmakers in the Arts, and the National Association of Creative Aging.*
- *Make sure the report is no longer than three pages! Make it short and sweet so people will actually read it.*

Amid many comments about how NASAA can help state arts agencies, a couple of members also made a point of noting that it's important for state arts agencies to help NASAA:

- *Our agencies need to help NASAA stay strong!*
- *Whatever the plan is, have definite, actionable items for the states and regions to develop more ownership of NASAA.*

NASAA Revenues

As with last year, members appreciate that NASAA is financially stable and also want NASAA to continue to **diversify and expand its revenue streams**. Some members see earned income as an area where NASAA could strengthen its portfolio greatly. NASAA should also continue to focus on fundraising and get more members more involved in the process. To help with that, NASAA needs to make a strong case for what philanthropic support helps accomplish beyond dues and support from the NEA. While support from the NEA is vital to NASAA, some members recognize that there may be problems if/when NASAA's advocacy agenda for the states is not compatible with the NEA and would like to see NASAA's financial dependence on the NEA decrease.

- *Make sure that new resources are available. Make sure there is funding for studies that create the statistics that will help me in my job.*
- *The board has discussed the possibility of earned income in the abstract. That will be on the agenda in the future, and we need to go there. This is an area where NASAA could strengthen its portfolio greatly.*
- *I like the direction NASAA is going in now. NASAA is looking beyond its membership for support and that is very important.*
- *Revenue diversification is vital. One of the weaknesses that we face is that NASAA is highly dependent on the NEA. Yet it also tries to move the agenda of the NEA! When there is a great relationship that is not problematic. When the NEA's agenda is not*

compatible with the states...that is awkward. As long as NASAA has dependence on NEA it will be awkward. Less dependence financially would be the ideal.

- No concerns regarding the budget, per se. I must admit that I was somewhat surprised initially to receive a "solicitation" from NASAA. Now I understand. I recommend that "newbies" (staff or council members) get a clear explanation as to why there needs to be solicitation beyond dues. There needs to be an explanation of not only why the additional funds are needed but where they go.*
- NASAA should be able to raise more money. Need to get members involved more in giving or getting. Dedicated effort needed.*
- Keep in mind that budgets remain very tight for many agencies. Any possibilities of more sponsorship / additional private funds to support the conference?*

Additional Comments

The below are observations from single individuals. Although these views did not emerge as shared themes, they are included in this report because they may contain useful perspectives:

- Meetings can be too long. I really liked the ED/chair meeting in Salt Lake City. Found the large meeting in New Orleans to be interesting but not as relevant. I didn't bring away specifics as in Salt Lake City.*
- Convenings are important but often too expensive to get to.*
- How about a NASAA symposium or road show that could travel to the different regions to engage the SAAs in policy and best practices discussions? Might be good to have more collaboration between NASAA and the regionals to offer region specific convenings and trainings that can bring us together more affordably.*
- Focus on speedier communications with the SAAs about what is happening in DC and in Congress. NASAA could help with more and better up-to-the minute info / alerts regarding legislative happenings that we should be reacting to.*
- DON'T raise our dues!*
- The dues action plan under consideration will provide a steady, growing revenue stream for NASAA.*
- There is an important role for NASAA to play in advancing a conversation with the NEA and among the states about the role of regionals. (Touring, dues, role in the national picture, etc.)*
- There is always a back and forth with the regionals and the SAAs. Is there any way that NASAA can help the regionals (those who need it) work with their state most productively?*
- One thing that must be a priority is to work out the role between NASAA and AFTA and as a result, AFTA and the states.*
- Help state arts councils balance their focus to include a focus on artists, arts organizations and also the consumer in equal measure. The latter is left out too much.*
- Continue to advance STEAM in our educational models...rather than allowing the educational model to be dominated by STEM considerations. I believe Congress has opened a window for STEAM-inclusive curricula and I, for one, would benefit from additional information and stories from other state settings.*
- I believe the integration of arts in military/veteran therapy and resettlement programs is quite important, but penetrating the Veterans Affairs bureaucracy is quite difficult for SAAs with small professional staffs. Guidance would be welcome.*
- Would like a focus on research that supports the case for the arts and local economies.*
- Our state's recent strategic planning priorities included public value and expressive lives. How can NASAA research help with those issues?*
- NASAA needs to keep looking at secondary data effect: how does the presence of a vibrant arts community translate into more creative people and thereby a better labor*

force and more creative business; how does it improve general business climate with the arts. Would like to know if public funding growing faster than private funding. Are we leveraging private funding as best we can?

- *Can NASAA provide grant writing workshops?*
- *NASAA could invest in other peer groups as is done for arts education and folk arts.*
- *Technology and lack thereof is a problem for many of us. Perhaps the idea of bulk buys of certain things that we all then share in? Think out of the box.*
- *Over the years the information and research has been good, but those resources aren't as well developed as NASAA's ability to connect and convene.*
- *Any suggestions for SAAs on PR ideas and strategy would be helpful.*

Finally, here is one quote that seems to sum up the top themes of this year's member feedback:

"NASAA is like connective tissue, a nexus that links me to other state arts agencies and peers within the field. NASAA is at the center of the SAA wheel."