NASAA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY of STATE ARTS AGENCIES

Knowledge ▲ Representation ▲ Community

Strengthening SAA Relationships with Native Communities
INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

Every state is home to Native peoples. Some may be descendants of the original Indigenous residents of and stewards of the land, others may have arrived through forced removal or modern migration. With their widely diverse histories and cultures, Native people are residents of all 56 states and U.S. jurisdictions. Every state and jurisdiction has a state arts agency (SAA)—a state government agency dedicated to arts education, creative development and cultural funding. Not all SAAs, however, are in dialogue with Native constituencies.

To begin to address this gap, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is seeking to help SAAs deepen their connections with Native communities. Thoughtful relationships can be built with Tribes, Native organizations, Indigenous artists, culture bearers and community members. These relationships, in turn, can serve as a foundation for developing collaborations, programs and services that meet the needs of Native constituencies. Recognizing that government has a blighted track record in its treatment of Native peoples, this project will promote respectful and responsive approaches that acknowledge cultural differences and take the sovereignty of Tribal Nations into account.

This initiative is timely, given the numerous new leaders in the SAA field and the redoubled effort many SAAs are making to strengthen services for historically underserved communities, especially those disproportionally hurt by the pandemic. Now is a key moment to educate SAAs about Indigenous needs and perspectives and catalyze action at the state level.

This project has the potential to expand understanding and become highly influential. If NASAA can help SAAs to adopt better practices for serving Native communities, we can make a lasting impact across the nation in the arts sector while also demonstrating positive practices for other branches of state government.

Project Goals

In recent years, other national organizations have held convenings and released excellent resources on Indigenous arts and Native philanthropy. Those resources, however, don't address the specific challenges associated with doing this work ***within state government*.** NASAA's project will attempt to fill that niche and seek to be additive rather than duplicative. Our goals are to:

1. **Elevate the importance** of establishing intentional and respectful SAA relationships with Native communities, including Native organizations, Indigenous individuals/artists, and Tribal Nations.
2. **Lift up hallmarks of positive SAA practices** for learning about, interacting with and supporting Native communities.

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3. **Recommend credible resources that SAAs can consult,** prioritizing resources originating from Native communities, themselves.
4. Share **examples of SAA programs focusing on Native communities**, to serve as inspiration for other states.
5. **Identify further action steps NASAA can take** to help SAAs improve their services and support for Native communities and their consultations with Tribes.

NASAA's Approach

- A core principle of the initiative is to **center Native voices in the work.** NASAA will convene a Circle of Advisors of Indigenous individuals. NASAA's primary role in this group will be to listen and learn, to synthesize what we hear, and seek feedback on how we've interpreted the guidance offered. NASAA also will conduct interviews with a wide array of Native institutions, artists, culture bearers, elders and educators across the country. Given that this project seeks to influence state government actions, we will consult extensively with state and federal agencies and Tribal liaisons.
- Although we will benefit greatly from dialogues with Native groups, NASAA also will **accept responsibility for our own learning** through research and self-education. This includes reviewing materials produced by Native arts, policy and philanthropy groups; completing courses in Tribal relations; and conducting site visits to Native events and institutions.
- Because it is not possible to generalize across Indigenous communities (each of which is unique in its culture, governance and goals), NASAA will seek to **exemplify approaches that are attuned to individual Native groups**. We will encourage SAAs to avoid stereotypes and learn about numerous facets of Native cultures.
- Our initial output will be a **written set of interview findings and recommendations** for SAAs. This paper will communicate the importance of this issue and elevate examples of positive practices.
- Grounded in our learnings from the first phase of the project, we'll identify **additional long-term actions that NASAA can take** to encourage implementation of our recommendations among SAAs and apply what we are learning.
- To **avoid uncompensated labor** and signify our gratitude for the time and expertise contributed by Indigenous individuals involved in this initiative, NASAA will offer honoraria to project advisors.

The anticipated **project timetable** for the first phase of work is January-December of 2023, with recommendations slated to be released early in calendar 2024. However, we recognize that equity work moves at the speed of trust. We'll take the time required to do the work thoughtfully.

NASAA is committed to learning as we go and co-creating this work with our advisors and members. In that spirit, this initiative description is marked as a draft, to signify our commitment to **continual listening and learning**.

About NASAA

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. In collaboration with the nation's 56 state and jurisdictional arts councils, we promote the arts as a powerful path to economic prosperity, rural vitality, good health, education success, and strong

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communities in which everyone thrives. NASAA serves as a clearinghouse for data and research about public funding for the arts as well as best practices for state arts agencies. For more information about NASAA and the work of SAAs, visit www.nasaa-arts.org.

We Welcome Your Questions and Suggestions

For additional information on NASAA's Strengthening SAA Relationships with Native Communities initiative—or to offer ideas or advice—contact Kelly Barsdate at 202-347-6354 or kelly.barsdate@nasaa-arts.org.

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