

NEA STRATEGIC PLAN: FY 2012-2016

Summary of Goals

Goal 1: To Create Art that Meets the Highest Standards of Excellence

American artists enrich the cultural, civic, and economic life of our Nation by producing original works in such fields as music and dance, drama and literature, architecture and design, and visual, media, and craft arts. By awarding organizational grants in the category of art-making, the NEA will harness the ingenuity of American artists and become a Federal leader in creativity and innovation. Through the production of artworks in particular, the Agency contributes to a dynamic portfolio that can be enjoyed by present and future generations.

The NEA conducts an independent review of all grant proposals based on strict standards of artistic excellence and merit. Consequently, the artworks that result from these projects will replenish and rejuvenate America's enduring cultural legacy.

With this goal, the Arts Endowment is amplifying a core component of its legislative mandate, "to help create and sustain not only a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry but also the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent."

Principal Strategy: Fund grants to organizations to support the creation of artwork across a diverse spectrum of artistic disciplines and geographic locations.

External Factors: The Agency has no control over how many grant applications it receives each year, and in which funding category. The NEA will be funding the creation of artwork as a new area of focus in its grant-making. The Agency cannot anticipate, therefore, the volume or variety of proposals in this area that will require processing in FY 2012.¹ Further, the rise of new technologies and methods for art-making, as well as the rapidly blurring lines between many art forms and/or genres, will require careful and responsive management of the grants review process.

Goal 2: To Engage the Public with Diverse and Excellent Art

Artworks and audiences come together to create an experience that is unique, memorable, and life-affirming. Americans connect with art by attending music, dance, and theater performances; by touring architectural sites and art exhibits; by reading works of literature; and by enjoying

¹ From 2009 to 2010, however, roughly 8-9% of all grant proposals received by the NEA under the existing application guidelines had listed their "project activity type" as "Artwork Creation."

artworks through electronic and digital media. The NEA will provide new opportunities for Americans to have a profound and meaningful arts experience.

Americans also participate in the arts through a variety of learning experiences. NEA research has identified arts education as the single best predictor of a person's arts participation patterns throughout life.² By helping to foster public appreciation and understanding of various art forms, genres, and artistic traditions, the NEA will build public capacity for creativity and innovation, and for lifelong participation in the arts.

Art makes an impact on individual lives, but also on whole neighborhoods, towns, and cities. Artists, arts workers, and arts industries play a critical role in shaping the life of a community.³ They can improve its aesthetic appeal and the civic pride of its residents. They can spur job creation, productivity, and economic growth. And they can provide spaces and opportunities for community members of different backgrounds to converge on a shared arts experience, one that summons their collective creativity and allows them to re-imagine their surroundings. In recognition of these benefits, the NEA will support grants that integrate the arts with strategies to improve the livability of communities.

Principal Strategy: Fund grants to organizations to provide the following services across a diverse spectrum of artistic disciplines and geographic areas: engage the public with excellent art; offer Americans lifelong learning in the arts; and strengthen communities through the arts.

External Factors: NEA research has shown a decline in levels of public participation in many types of live arts events (e.g. classical music, jazz, theater, ballet, and opera). Concurrently, young Americans report less exposure to arts education than measured by prior NEA surveys.⁴

The ability to engage people successfully with art is beset by a number of complicating variables, not least of which is: what does success look like? (To help address this question, the NEA will conduct post-award reviews of a subset of grants to determine if they employed innovative methods to engage audiences. The Agency also will conduct audience surveys to learn how art-goers responded to the NEA-supported artworks being performed and displayed.)

Similarly, the ability to strengthen communities through the arts can depend on a variety of social, economic, and demographic factors unique to each location. To meet these challenges, the

² For example, see NEA Research Report #36, *Effects of Arts Education on Participation in the Arts* (1996). A more up-to-date analysis of this relationship is forthcoming in a NEA research report being prepared by Nick Rabkin of the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center.

³ Empirical data underlying this assertion has been reported by, among others, Mark Stern and Susan Seifert of the University of Pennsylvania's Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP); see www.sp2.upenn.edu/SIAP/. Other data have been presented by researchers Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, notably in a forthcoming NEA white paper on the arts and creative placemaking.

⁴ For information about declines in the national rates of arts participation and arts learning from 2002 to 2008, see NEA Research Report #49, *2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (2009).

NEA will revise final report forms for grantees seeking to strengthen communities. The new data collection forms will require quantitative and qualitative reporting of the steps taken to improve livability. This additional data will include information on the types of partnerships that were fostered within communities. A robust evaluation of the impacts achieved by these types of grants, however, will require longer-term studies.

Goal 3: To Promote Public Knowledge and Understanding about the Contributions of the Arts

As Federal, State, and local policymakers assess the place of arts and culture in their programs and budgets, they seek authoritative details about the arts' contributions to social, civic, and economic outcomes. The NEA remains the premier Federal source for national data and analyses about the U.S. arts sector. Increasingly, the Agency has aimed not only to explore the factors and conditions affecting arts participation and art-making, but also to document the impact of the arts on American lives and communities.

More sophisticated and credible information about the value and impact of the arts will enable the NEA, in turn, to pursue its overall mission more effectively. Some of that knowledge will bear directly on the Agency's work in supporting arts creation, arts participation, lifelong learning in the arts, and arts integration with community life. Other research findings will influence national and community-level indicators of creative and cultural vitality, allowing policy-makers to become better informed about the distinctive contributions the arts make to society.

In particular, the Arts Endowment will communicate knowledge about the value and impact of the arts to other Federal agencies and departments to complement their efforts to serve the American people. Internationally, the NEA will raise awareness among other countries and cultures about the exemplary offerings of American artists; conversely, the Agency will expose American audiences to new and exciting works being created abroad. Such exchanges—whether across government or across national boundaries—can significantly extend the reach and impact of the arts.

Principal Strategy: Create a Research Agenda outlining short- (1-2 years) and medium-term (3-5 years) plans and priorities for the NEA Office of Research & Analysis, and vet with internal and external stakeholders; identify strategic Federal and international partners and cultivate relationships with those entities.

External Factors: As with much social impact research, studies of arts participation and arts education continue to show correlative, but not conclusively causal, linkages between those activities and outcomes in other areas. Also, economic impact studies have struggled to isolate

the impact of arts and culture from other local factors. Impact analyses in the arts will require creative research methods, more robust data collection involving Federal, academic, and commercial partners, regular convenings with the Nation's cultural research experts, and smarter metrics.

Goal 4: To Enable the NEA Mission through Organizational Excellence

Success in meeting this goal is a prerequisite for success in the NEA's ability to serve its overall mission. The Arts Endowment must ensure that it is a high-performing and publicly accountable organization committed to 1) supporting arts creation and innovation; 2) engaging Americans with diverse and excellent art; and 3) promoting knowledge and understanding about the contributions of the arts. To succeed in these aims, the NEA must possess a productive, creative, and motivated workforce; ensure that its operations are transparent to the public; and be a vigilant steward of public funds and resources.

Principal Strategy: Design and allocate positions appropriately; hire the right people; give them the resources to succeed including relevant training; and reward employees based on performance. All other management strategies and accomplishments flow from this principal human resource strategy.

External Factors: People make decisions about where to work based on several criteria, among them organization mission, working environment, salary, and benefits. As with all Federal agencies, the NEA cannot control all these factors, so it is imperative that government hiring and compensation policies help the Agency to find and hire the best people.

Program Evaluation Plans

With the FY 2012-2016 strategic plan, the NEA is undertaking three comprehensive efforts to validate the assumptions that drive its program planning.

- *Independent, Post-Award Reviews*. The Agency will institute post-award, independent expert reviews of NEA grants to determine the degree to which objectives were achieved. Grants awarded for the creation of artworks will be evaluated to determine the degree to which NEA-supported projects demonstrate excellence.

For NEA Consortium grants—those involving multiple partners as a single applicant—the post-award review will determine the degree to which innovative methods were employed in the making of art and the delivery of art to audiences.

Audience Surveys. For a random subset of grants that involve the presentation of art performances or exhibits, the NEA will require grantees to conduct surveys of their audience members to gauge the nature and extent of the audience's response to these art experiences. In addition, the surveys will ask about audience members' prior exposure to similar events and activities. The survey results will give the Agency a snapshot of attitudinal and/or motivational changes that occurred as a result of NEA grants supporting the engagement of Americans with diverse and excellent art. As a service to grantees, the NEA will use the survey data not only to inform its own performance assessment; it also will provide grantees with analyses of results from their individual surveys.

- *Grant Applicant Surveys.* NEA grant applicants will be surveyed anonymously upon completion of their application submissions so that the Agency can learn about applicants' experience using NEA systems and interacting with Agency personnel. Where appropriate, this information will be used to refine the grant application process.

In addition to these periodic assessments, the Agency is contemplating two program evaluations in 2011 and 2012:

- *Our Town.* Contingent on funding to support an *Our Town* initiative, as proposed in the President's FY 2011 budget request, the NEA likely will conduct an evaluation of grants supported by the program. The evaluation will include quantitative and qualitative research approaches to measure the impact of NEA funding on *Our Town* communities; it also will collect baseline social and economic data so that the Agency can follow up with special studies over the mid- (3-5 years) to long- (8-10 years) term, as warranted.
- *Arts Education.* A second program evaluation would focus on reviewing the NEA's arts education initiatives to identify future priorities for the Agency's work in support of lifelong learning in the arts. The review also would yield a conceptual framework for understanding and leveraging the Agency's relationships with its various strategic partners in support of arts education.