

Information Sources for State-Level
Arts Policy: Current Resources
and Future Needs
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Working Paper

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Information Sources for State-Level Arts Policy: Current Resources and Future Needs

Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

-Daniel xii 4, Old Testament

It has been widely accepted that policy-making is best informed by analyses of complete and reliable information that enable policy makers to clarify their goals and foresee the consequences of their interventions. A paucity of such data on the arts has been lamented by many scholars, practitioners and policy-makers in the past.¹ In the last five years, however, numerous large-scale research initiatives have been launched to try and fill in the gaps in our general knowledge-base about the arts and to develop a platform of qualitative and quantitative information that can inform both cultural policy and institutional practice.²

But what is the current status of information on state-level arts policy, in particular? What data and resources are available, and what gaps are still apparent? In the process of exploring some answers to these questions, I hope to stimulate thinking about the development and coordination of data platforms that can foster informed state-level arts policy in the future.

Selection of Resources Reviewed

The balance of this briefing presents an annotated assortment of information resources pertinent to state-level cultural policy analysis. Selected databases (primarily those concentrating on arts funding or finances), policy libraries and bibliographic references are noted, along with some other potentially useful resources that are currently under development. The different information resources cited here all share some common denominators:

- They are information *systems* -- not individual studies or articles.
- They support analysis of information on a *state-by-state* basis (or, at the minimum, allow for specific state searches to be conducted). While many other excellent general arts research and cultural policy resources are available today, only those that support state-level analyses are included here.
- They are *readily available* to researchers and policy-makers or housed in organizations with information-sharing policies that encourage and support their use by both researchers and practitioners.

¹ See *A Final Report on a Feasibility Study for an Economic Data Program on the Condition of Arts and Cultural Organizations* by Dick Netzer, 1977; "The Performance of Performance Indicators in the Arts" by J. Mark Schuster, 1994; and *Data on Arts Organizations: A Review and Needs Assessment with Design Implications* by Deborah A. Kaple et al, 1996, Center for Arts and Cultural Policies, Princeton University.

² For a useful review of policy research initiatives funded by private foundations, see "Building an Arts Policy Community" Proceedings from the 1999 annual conference of Grantmakers in the Arts.

- They are *ongoing*, maintained and updated on a regular basis.
- They are *useful* in understanding state-level arts policy or its environment.

Admittedly, this is not a comprehensive inventory, nor is it intended to serve as a full literature review of scholarship on any single policy strategy.³ Instead, the aim was to collect a selection of examples that can inform some assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of state-level arts information systems. Ideally, such systems would help policy makers and policy analysts to:

- Set informed goals that respond to documented public needs,
- Understand the effects of policy decisions over time,
- Anticipate the effects of new programs,
- Increase awareness about important policy choices among policy-makers, system constituents and the public at large, and
- Foster innovation by supplying evidence to assess and identify successful models and then help those models be adapted and replicated.

Current Resources

- **Unified database of Arts Organizations.** Initiated jointly by the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) at the Urban Institute, NASAA and the National Endowment for the Arts in 1997, the Unified Database of Arts Organizations has grown to be a resource that consolidates financial and descriptive information on cultural organizations. Data is gleaned from annual IRS nonprofit incorporation records as well as from state arts agency communications and grant-making databases, arts service organization membership and recruitment lists, selected local arts directories and data extracts from other national research projects. To date, the Unified Database contains records of some 114,000 organizations that either have an arts/cultural primary mission or are known to have engaged in arts programming on an ongoing basis. Each record contains basic organization identifiers (name and address, the source of the record, etc.) as well codes for multiple classification systems (the National Standard for Arts Information Exchange, the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities and the North American Industrial Classification System). Ten years of longitudinal financial data are available for IRS Form 990-filing organizations. With the aid of these tools, users can conduct state-by-state analysis of the information extant in the database. Better yet, the database can be used as a frame for building representative samples targeting individual segments of the arts organization universe (by region, area characteristic, art form, and so on) from which information outside the scope of the Unified Database itself can be secured. The primary goals of this database are to encourage research on the arts sector and to provide a platform for policy analysis. Using this system, the effects of arts policies on specific populations of arts organizations may be monitored over time. (See <http://nccs.urban.org/UDAO.htm> for additional details.)

³ Substantial research has been conducted on individual policy mechanisms (such as statewide cultural endowments, the establishment of cultural districts, percent for art laws, tax mechanisms that yield funding to state arts agencies, etc.). But this briefing paper will emphasize ongoing resources that apply to multiple arts policy strategies at the state level.

State-Level Arts Policy Information Resources: Examples of Ongoing Systems

	Maintained by...	TYPE OF INFO....				SYSTEM SCOPE...				
		Data	Policy Language	Analysis	Bibliography	Size	Search by state?	All states included?	Periodicity	Available on-line or in data format?
Unified Database of Arts Organizations	National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS)	✓		☐		114,000 records, 10 years of financial data	✓	✓	Annual updates	✓
State legislative web sites	Individual state legislatures		✓			n/a	✓		Ongoing	✓
Arts education policy	Arts Education Partnership (AEP)		✓			8 policy areas per state	✓	✓	Ongoing	✓
Historic preservation legislation	National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)		✓			24 policy areas per state	✓		Ongoing	✓
SAA enabling legislation	NASAA		✓			50 documents	✓	✓	Ongoing	
SAA appropriations data	NASAA	✓		✓		1,792 records. 5 key variables since 1969	✓	✓	Annual updates	✓
SAA grant-making statistics	NASAA	✓		✓		Approx. 30,000 grant records per year since 1984	✓	✓	Annual updates	✓
Library of SAA plans	NASAA		✓	✓		56 documents	✓	✓	As published by SAAs	☐
SAA grant guidelines	Individual SAAs		✓			56 documents	✓		As published by SAAs	✓
Economic impact study library	NASAA			✓		37 documents			As published by SAAs	
Survey of Public Participation in the Arts	National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)	✓		✓		12,349 interviews in sample	✓		1982, 1985, 1992, 1997, 2002	
National Arts Policy Database	Americans for the Arts (AFTA)				✓	7,000 citations	✓		Ongoing	☐
Surveys of budgeting practices	National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO)	✓		✓		4 surveys track 50+ indicators	✓	✓	Annual updates	✓

☐ = partial data, or abstracts only on line

✓ = data available

- **State arts agency legislative appropriations data.** As a supplement to annual surveys of state arts agency budgets⁴, NASAA annually updates *the State Arts Agency Public Funding Sourcebook*, a data encyclopedia of state and federal arts funding statistics. State-by-state data is available from 1969 forward, and the resource includes state arts agency appropriations (including and excluding line items), National Endowment for the Arts appropriations, consumer price index multipliers for constant dollar adjustments, state population figures (for national rankings) and regional summaries. Using this resource, researchers can track one important indicator of any state's arts policy - legislative commitment to its state arts agency. Data is available in published or database formats.
- **State arts agency grant-making statistics.** NASAA also maintains longitudinal records of grants awarded by state, jurisdictional and regional arts organizations. Individual grant awards are the unit of analysis in this data set, which tracks 30 fields of information on approximately 30,000 grants per year, available from 1984 forward. Information is codified for analysis according to the National Standard for Arts Information Exchange, and a designation of funding source (legislative dollars vs. federal dollars regranting by state arts agencies, for instance) is included. Narrative and tabular summaries⁵ of key findings are available, as are micro-data sets in annual segments. This information can be used to track funding patterns by state, art form⁶ or type of grantee⁷, and paints a statistical portrait of the resource allocation policies of states and regions. The grants orientation of this data set is both a limitation and strength – a limitation in the sense that little about non-grantees can be learned from the information, but a strength in the sense that it can be used to pinpoint specific policy issues such as funding to arts education, changes in institutional support over time, the growth of state-funded arts programming in non-arts organizations, or the geographic distribution of government arts grant dollars.
- **State statutes.** Most states provide their constituents and elected officials with some means to research enacted state statutes. Many state legislatures also provide searchable databases of pending legislation. Although many of these search engines are organized by broad topic area (using headings such as “tax reform” or “K-12 Education”), culture is rarely designated as a cataloged subject area. Retrieval of information therefore depends on the availability of a full-text search capability that will support the entry of arts-specific keywords. In an unpublished inventory conducted by NASAA in 1999, information on current or pending state-level legislation was available via the Internet for 42 states, and full-text search tools capable of isolating arts keywords were available for 31 of those states. Given the rapid advancement of technology and the increasing public interest in the transparency of legislative activities, it's likely that the portion of states with fully searchable statute system nears 100 percent today. Although a free meta-search tool does not exist to date, a number of gateway indices to individual states' information are available. (See <http://www.llrx.com/columns/roundup8.htm> or <http://www.loc.gov/global/state/stategov.html> for various listings.)

⁴ For example, see *Legislative Appropriations Annual Survey: Fiscal Year 2001* by Nancy P. Young, February 2001, NASAA.

⁵ See *Highlights of State Arts Agency Funding and Grant-Making*, February 2001, NASAA.

⁶ Fifteen categories (such as dance, music, theatre, media arts, literature, etc.) are available.

⁷ Fifty-two categories (such as performing group, gallery, festival, art museum, etc.) are available.

- **Specialized libraries of enacted policy.** NASAA maintains several libraries of specific policy language: enabling legislation designating the roles and authorization of each state's arts agency, state percent for art legislation and special legislation authorizing state-level cultural endowments or trusts. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) offers on-line databases of arts policy legislation and historic preservation policies (including policies on tax incentives, downtown revitalization mechanisms, regulated use policies and heritage initiatives). See <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/arts/arts.htm> for a complete table of contents. NCSL's arts education information is dated circa 1998, and since that time the Arts Education Partnership has taken up the torch, updating and expanding the resource to include state-by-state summaries of teacher licensure policies, pre-service arts requirements, statewide arts curriculum standards, high school graduation requirements, etc. The public gateway to the Arts Education Partnership's policy clearinghouse can be found at <http://www.aep-arts.org/policysearch/searchengine/>.
- **State arts agency strategic plans.** State arts agency strategic plans are seminal documents for understanding state-level arts policy. These plans articulate the intent of state arts agencies' resource allocation strategies, the mechanisms they use in distributing funding and services and the principal policy relationships (with other branches of government as well as the private and independent sector) that shape the state's arts environment.⁸ Copies of all 56 state and jurisdictional plans are available in hardcopy format from NASAA, and a searchable database of the text of each state arts agency's goal areas will be released in the summer of 2001.
- **State arts agency funding allocation guidelines.** Companion pieces to each state's strategic plan, published funding guidelines detail state arts agency grant-making strategies and eligibility criteria in detail. These documents offer perhaps the clearest articulation of state-level arts policy in that they explicitly reveal the public purposes behind arts grant-making and outline the expected benefits and outcomes that particular funding distribution strategies aim to achieve. Most are available on line through <http://www.nasaa-arts.org/new/nasaa/aoa/saaweb.shtml>. Those that are not available electronically can be secured through the NASAA office.
- **Individual economic impact studies.** Most state arts agencies will periodically commission a statewide economic impact study. These studies vary widely in scope, method and utility (as well as validity, as many economists would argue). However, they provide a useful frame of reference for understanding the size and composition of each state's arts sector, and can be policy tools if designed with a particular policy focus in mind.⁹ The best of them contain helpful frameworks for understanding how cultural policy can intersect with economic development and workforce development policy at the state level. NASAA maintains a

⁸ *A State Arts Agency Strategic Planning Toolkit*, Morrie Warshawski, Kelly J. Barsdate and Jonathan Katz, May 2000, NASAA.

⁹ See *Economic Impact of the Arts: A Sourcebook*, edited by Anthony Radich, National Conference of State Legislatures, May 1987. Also "Impacts, Measurement, and Art Policy: Starting the Change Process" by Louise K. Stevens, *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*, Fall 1998.

bibliography of these resources, and several of them are cited in the National Arts Policy Database.

- **National Arts Policy Database.** Maintained by Americans for the Arts, this clearinghouse of nearly 7,000 items includes articles, books, unpublished papers, conference proceedings and other resources on the arts beginning in 1960. Specific policy topics include public support for the arts (with a designated state-level search category), private support for the arts, arts legislation (with descriptions of some county and municipal programs) and freedom of expression. (See <http://camt.artswire.org/clearinghouse/index.cfm>.)
- **Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA).** The National Endowment for the Arts sponsors an ongoing interval survey of Americans' personal participation in cultural activities. The 1997 SPPA surveyed 12,349 people and gathered data on several types of participation: adult attendance of live arts events or cultural institutions, participation in the arts through recorded or broadcast media and personal performance or creation of art. The 1997 SPPA survey sample supported state-level analysis of the ten largest states as well as nine U.S. census regions. One recent monograph, *Research Division Report #41: The Geography of Participation in the Arts and Culture* by J. Mark Schuster, reviews state and regional arts participation patterns in the 1997 data and contains useful observations on the strengths and limitations of the 1997 data for state-level policy and longitudinal trend analysis. For information, consult the executive summary of this document at <http://www.arts.gov/pub/Researchcharts/Summary41.html>. Plans to construct forthcoming SPPA samples to support state-level generalizations are under consideration, as well.
- **National Association of State Budget Officers.** NASBO is the professional membership association for state finance officers. State finance officers are the principal budget advisors to the nation's governors, and NASBO members and information resources connect to public policy discussions at the state level in many ways. NASBO, in conjunction with the National Governors' Association, produces the *Fiscal Survey of the States* each year – a report that identifies trends in tax legislation and tracks state-by-state spending in key policy areas (such as education, corrections, transportation, health care, etc.). Although NASBO does not directly track the arts, they do inventory state budgeting practices (such as spending caps, draw-downs from reserve funds, etc.) that affect the arts. (See, for instance, <http://www.nasbo.org/pubs/bupro99.pdf>). NASBO also encourages the adoption of performance measurement standards to maintain state government accountability and to assess the efficiency of state operations and document the effects they have on the public. Although to date NASAA has not observed significant arts policy changes stemming directly from the performance measurement movement, this trend has without a doubt influenced arts information-collection and research practices as well as the ways that the public benefits of the arts are articulated in policy dialogues.¹⁰

¹⁰ A *State Arts Agency Performance Measurement Toolkit*, Kelly J. Barsdate, 1994, NASAA.

Resources on the Horizon

Several other research works-in-progress merit mention here. These resources do not currently concentrate on state-level arts research, and none is mature enough to support a fair assessment of its value to state-level policy analysis. However, they all address relevant policy issues and possess the research frameworks and/or technology potential to inform state-level policy discussions at some point in the future.

- **Center for Arts and Culture.** The Center for Arts and Culture maintains a selected bibliography (<http://www.culturalpolicy.org/resources/index.htm>) of articles, books and presentations in the cultural policy field. Materials are limited to certain topics and materials released in the last five years only. The Center is also conducting a scan of current cultural policy research projects (<http://www.culturalpolicy.org/research/scan.htm>, including listings of works-in-progress of interest to the cultural policy community.
- **Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies.** Currently a resource for working papers and research publications/articles authored by its students and affiliated faculty, the Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies has recently received funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts to become an electronic archive for information on nonprofit cultural organizations, trends in public and private funding for culture, arts participation and other policy issues. Citations will include formal publications, unpublished research papers and publicly-available data sets. (See <http://www.princeton.edu/~artspol/index.html> and <http://www.princeton.edu:80/pr/news/01/q1/0305-pew.htm>).
- **National Neighborhood Indicators Project (NNIP).** An ongoing endeavor of the Urban Institute, the Annie E. Casey foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, the NNIP's goal is to develop and sustain neighborhood-based data systems that track living conditions, quality of life and social indicators in twelve communities and to demonstrate how these systems can directly inform policy-making. The NNIP project contains an Arts and Culture in Community Building component (<http://www.urban.org/niip/acip.html>) that is developing specific arts indicators for use in local planning, policymaking, and community building.
- **Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for US Artists.** The purpose of this study is to gather reliable and comprehensive information about the support structures and mechanisms that exist for funding creative works by individual artists. Among the goals of this brand-new research effort by the Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy is the development of a comprehensive national database that will list funding sources, levels of giving and type of artist work supported by locality, state or region.
- **The National and Local Profiles of Cultural Support:** Conducted by Americans for the Arts in collaboration with Ohio State University and the Pew Charitable Trusts, this project is a multi-year national study designed to map the distribution of the nation's nonprofit cultural organizations and benchmark their patterns and sources of support. The project provides a

national examination of the nonprofit arts industry as well as an in-depth study of the cultural activities in 10 communities.

- **The Arts Management Resource Clearinghouse (ARM).** Still in its early stages of development, the ARMC is an on-line data bank for use by students and academic faculty conducting research on arts policy and administration. Searchable directories of arts service organizations as well as some research reports, masters' theses and information on research methodology are available on-line. Through an interactive component, users will be able to contribute content and post their own comments and reviews of the material. (<http://amrc.uoregon.edu/data/index.html>)

Some Gaps in our Knowledge Base

1. Missing pieces in the arts funding ecology. Full understanding of the composition, ebb and flow of arts funding at the state level requires ongoing information collection of (at least) nine key components of the arts funding mix:

Components of the Arts Funding Ecology

	Comprehensive state-level data?	Notes
1. Federal dollars appropriated to the arts directly by the National Endowment for the Arts	✓	Direct grants tracked by NEA and NASAA. NEA funds re-granted by states & regions tracked by NASAA.
2. Federal dollars appropriated to the arts outside the National Endowment for the Arts		No. Some "snapshot" activity attempted in the past by independent researchers.
3. State dollars appropriated to the arts through state arts councils	✓	Tracked by NASAA since 1969.
4. State dollars appropriated to the arts outside of state arts councils		Experimental inventories attempted by NASAA in the past.
5. County and municipal dollars appropriated to the arts through local arts councils		Americans for the Arts provides national aggregate estimates. Sample cannot support state-by-state projections.
6. County and municipal dollars appropriated to the arts outside of local arts councils		Americans for the Arts provides national aggregate estimates. Sample cannot support state-by-state projections.
7. Foundation and corporate funding for the arts		Foundation Center monitors giving by a large sample of foundations, but sample does not support state-by-state analysis.
8. Levels of individual giving to the arts		Samples do not permit state-level analysis.
9. Earned income activities of cultural institutions	✓	NCCS tracks this through IRS 990 returns, but data limited to organizations w/gross receipts >\$25,000

At the present time, researchers have access to systematic, state-by-state information for a small portion of this list. Although national figures are released annually for local arts funding¹¹,

¹¹ See the annual updates of *Local Arts Agency Facts*, published by Americans for the Arts. All findings are based on 337 survey respondents (out of approximately 4000 existing local arts agencies).

foundation support¹² and private giving¹³, these are projections based on relatively narrow samples from which no reliable state-by-state estimates (let alone actuals) can be drawn.

Information on arts organizations' earned and contributed income has improved notably in recent years with the development of the Unified Database of Arts Organizations. This database aims to address many of the chronic data quality and data supply issues that have plagued arts researchers. Although it is the most comprehensive resource developed to date, the Unified Database does not contain complete financial data for small arts organizations (those with gross receipts falling under the IRS filing threshold of less than \$25,000), and the currency of data and IRS compliance rates are not uniform across all types of cultural organizations. Many organizations in less formally-institutionalized fields may be under-represented.

Of special concern for state-level arts policy development is a lack of data on state funding that flows outside of state arts agencies. Each state has a unique method for cataloging and categorizing its expenditures, making uniform comparisons difficult. Furthermore, each state structures its budget differently, providing varying levels of itemization on the expenditures of each of its government departments. Several national associations (such as the National Governors' Association, the National Association of State Budget Officers, and the Council of State Governments) monitor and compare state budgets, but none of them receives expenditure information in sufficient line-item detail to isolate arts spending.

This may represent a sizable blind spot. In 1997, NASAA conducted an experimental survey of state budget officers, asking them to itemize cultural spending in 14 categories, including education, travel/tourism, public safety, natural resources, social services and capital improvements. The survey asked respondents to isolate individual arts line items, which are often hidden throughout thousands of non-arts expense categories. Unsurprisingly, this survey suffered from a low response rate (only 20 states). Even so, the results were intriguing, suggesting that significant dollars (especially facilities dollars) are being invested in the arts through state departments of education, tourism, historic preservation and other departments. If these funds were included in an assessment of state-level arts funding, total appropriations for the arts may be eight or more times as large as state arts agency appropriations. However, no systematic tracking of this funding -- let alone its sources, purposes or ultimate results -- takes place.

2. Lack of geographic specificity. State-level policy deliberations are hampered by information that cannot be referenced on a state-by-state basis. Most of the growing discipline-specific data collected by the national arts service organizations, participation data and other national arts policy research projects are based on samples that cannot support state-level generalizations.

3. Financial emphasis. Many of the most comprehensive state-level data sources emphasize financial details to the exclusion of other important types of information. Additional data (on

¹² The Foundation Center publishes a series of annual reports describing the grant-making activities of 1,660 large and mid-size foundations. See the yearly editions of *Foundation Growth and Giving Estimates*, *Foundation Giving Trends* and *Foundation Growth and Estimates*.

¹³ See the Independent Sector's annual *Giving and Volunteering in the United States* survey as well as the *Giving USA* survey conducted by the American Association of Fund-Raising Counsel Trust for Philanthropy.

topics such as arts audiences, program beneficiaries, the characteristics of arts organizations or the management decisions made by cultural institutions) would add to our depth of knowledge and help more meaningful indicators of policy success to be developed in the future.

4. Incomplete understanding of the arts sector as a whole. Most extant data resources and research emphasize established nonprofit arts organizations. Substantially less is known about the smallest arts groups (those that are primarily volunteer-run or embedded within larger educational, religious or community institutions), which undoubtedly play a great role in public participation in the arts. Similarly, we know little on a state-by-state basis about the commercial arts, individual artists, less institutionalized art forms (such as the folk and traditional arts or literature) and other parts of the arts sector.

5. Input/output emphasis. The field's ability to define and track input and output indicators for the arts has improved at the state level. But systematic research on ultimate outcomes - public benefits connected to a documented change in knowledge, life situation, behavior, etc. - remains scarce. "Outcomes research" is expensive, it necessitates a long-term commitment to evaluation, and it requires specialized knowledge to responsibly conduct. Also, few of the results can be generalized to apply beyond the parameters of the specific program or population studied, and some bias may be introduced if data suppliers (grantee arts organizations, for instance) have an incentive to emphasize what they think their principal funders want to hear.¹⁴ Nevertheless, learning more about *what actually happened* as a result of a particular program or intervention could help policy-makers better understand and anticipate the effects of their decisions and can help resources be allocated in areas where the greatest good is accomplished.

6. Uneven to legislative monitoring. Legislative monitoring provides a rich resource for understanding the various policy mechanisms that affect the arts. The proliferation of particular policy solutions can be monitored, as can levels of legislative support for those solutions. Although several commercial firms offer legislative tracking and monitoring services, these services are expensive (beyond the means of the average arts practitioner) and the quality of the monitoring must be carefully evaluated. Even those organizations most concerned with state-level arts policy (for example, NASAA and NCSL) do not monitor pending arts legislation in a comprehensive or ongoing way across all 50 states. Instead, most organizations active in arts policy research tend to do focused inventories of special policy topics. A cost-effective multi-state legislative monitoring system would improve the field's analysis perspectives and its ability to quickly spot emerging policy trends.

7. Limited research capacity within cultural agencies. Only two state arts agencies have staff positions dedicated to evaluation and research – a fact which has not changed substantially over the last decade.¹⁵ State arts agency partnerships (with private funders, consultants, universities and others) are therefore essential to developing and implementing information systems that can meet demands of the future policy environment. As new resources are sought to advance particular policy goals, there is a need to build in the capacity to conduct research and designate funds especially for evaluation and assessment.

¹⁴ See Schuster, "The Performance of Performance Indicators in the Arts"

¹⁵ Unpublished data, FY 2000 state arts agency staff size and compensation survey, NASAA. Publication forthcoming.

8. Lack of independent research. State-level arts policy has received new attention among scholars in recent years. But the number of scholars and number of research projects concentrating on state-level policy is still limited. This lack of scholarship may in part be a result of the heterogeneous nature of state arts agencies (making comparisons difficult), the relative scarcity of state-level data and the popularity of federal cultural policy as a subject of study and commentary. Although the nation's major private, philanthropic funders of the arts have deepened their investments in research and state-level cultural policy recently, a cohesive state-level policy research agenda shared among public and private funders has yet to emerge.

Ideas for the Future

In order to systematically improve the information resources that currently exist -- as well as to foster the next generation of research and fill some of the gaps I've identified above -- it might be useful to visualize the characteristics of an "ideal" state-level arts policy information platform. For instance, an effective information platform for state arts policy could:

- Provide a **complete picture of arts funding at the state level**, identifying the sources and levels of public, private, contributed and earned income for the arts.
- Describe the **public purposes** behind that funding, using a **common syntax** that would allow policy makers and analysts to identify similarities and differences.
- Identify the principal **mechanisms used to distribute arts dollars** by state arts agencies as well as county/municipal arts funders and private/corporate foundations active at the state level.
- Supply **quality fundamental data** on the size, scope and activity of the sector.
- Structure the data and its analysis tools in such a way as to **support state-by-state comparisons** as well as regional and national aggregations of data.
- Provide **ready access** to the information.
- **Encourage collaboration** among the suppliers of the data, scholars, policy-makers and practitioners to ensure that the information is both useful and, in fact, used.
- **Adapt** to changing information needs over time, while maintaining a **longitudinal** perspective that can support long-term analysis of the effects of policy change.

A platform with these operational characteristics may be of great utility to policy-makers and researchers. It could enhance understanding of the current arts commitment and provide a baseline for assessing the effectiveness of current and future policy changes.

Other sectors (such as health-care, education and public safety) have successfully coordinated state-level and national information systems that support policy decision making in their fields, help them anticipate the effects of potential policy intervention, and facilitate the spread of good ideas.¹⁶ To help achieve this vision for the arts, some initial useful next steps to consider might include:

¹⁶ See Kaple, et al.

- *Cross-pollinating.* How have successful information systems to support state policy-making evolved in non-arts sectors or in other countries? Study of the systems developed in education and health care might be especially informative. Potentially transferable ideas or piggyback mechanisms might be identified.
- *Establish a state-level policy research agenda.* The development of this agenda and its priorities should be shaped by multiple stakeholders: those who make policy, those who implement it and those who are affected by it as well as those who study it.
- *Identify the unique and complementary roles* that might effectively be played by state arts agencies, other state-level cultural agents, private arts funders, NASAA, regional arts organizations, the National Endowment for the Arts, academic research institutes, schools of arts policy and arts administration, think tanks and independent scholars. While all of these players currently have commitments to research, additional clarification and coordination of complementary roles may help to direct research funding to priority issues and prevent the possibility of redundant efforts.
- *Examine new large-scale research initiatives* as they are conceived by public agencies, private foundations and centers of academic research. Consider how their scopes of work relate to the information resources that already exist and/or how they might contribute to the knowledge base needed to support state-level cultural policy in particular.

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