

## THE RISE OF ARTS INSTITUTIONS

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Thank you for inviting me. I feel very fortunate to be here for this symposium honoring the legacy of Robert E. Gard and the beginnings of the community arts development movement.

I'm pinch hitting for Patrice Walker to talk about the rise of institutions. Patrice and I had a wonderful conversation last week about this gathering and thoughts she had hoped to share. I'm sorry Patrice could not be here, yet, I could not be more grateful to be part of this gathering.

Preparing for today, having the chance to step back and look at the evolution of our cultural development and the breadth of it all has been wonderful and also very overwhelming. In the process of reviewing the past I could not help but second guess what we might have differently in order to have created better pathways. Looking ahead, I hope we will do better to encourage, enable and empower all communities in cultural development in ways that maintain authenticity yet welcome, embrace and make way for the new...

It seemed the best way to talk about the rise of institutions was to look at the key elements of the system that created them. This single system created in 1965 served as a platform for the creation of more than 100,000 arts and cultural nonprofits. What were the key elements of the NEA? How were they designed? How did they work? What did they yield? More relevant to this gathering, how could these elements inform and guide the future?

**First, let's look at the very creation of the NEA- the symbolic stake in the ground declaring the responsibility of a great nation to support the arts. It was the clarion call for a compelling vision that stirred the nation: and put forward the idea of shared responsibility for the support of the arts from the public and private sectors**

Roger Stevens, in his first annual report published in 1967, wrote:

We believe that the time has come for our society to give not merely ceremonial honor to the arts, but genuine attention and substantive support. We should provide equal opportunity for the actor as well as the physicist, for the poet as well as the biochemist, for the sculptor as well as the mathematician. He went on to say that it was in the national interest that arts and the humanities be given equal consideration. There is a deep desire for the experience of the arts, for the facilities to house the arts, and for increased means to finance the arts on every level. Roger Stevens said, "We must not only support our artistic institutions, both national and local, but we must also make the arts part of our daily life so that they become an essential aspect of our existence."

I was struck by the resonance between Roger Stevens' words and Robert Gard's words in the preface to his *Arts in the Small Community: A National Plan*:

"In terms of American democracy, the arts are for everyone. They are not reserved for the wealthy, or for the well-endowed museum, the gallery, or the ever-subsidized regional professional theatre. As America emerges into a different understanding of her strength, it becomes clear that her strength is in the people and in the places where the people live. The people, if shown the way, can create art in and of themselves.

The springs of the American spirit are at the grass roots. Opportunities must exist in places where they never have existed before. A consciousness of the people, a knowledge of their power to generate and nourish art, and a provision of ways in which they may do so are essential for our time.

If we are seeking in America, let it be a seeking for the reality of democracy in art. Let art begin at home, and let it spread through the children and their parents, and through the schools, the institutions, and through government.

And let us start by acceptance, not negation--acceptance that the arts are important everywhere, and that they can exist and flourish in small places as well as in large; with money, or without, according to the will of the people. Let us put firmly and permanently aside as a cliché of an expired moment in time that art is a frill. Let us accept the goodness of art where we are now, and expand its worth in the places where people live."

In its first year, the NEA grants showed the country what could be done with public support. Grants were distributed everywhere, to organizations and artists. In addition to the University of Wisconsin's "Wisconsin Idea," the first and only grant to support a small rural community arts program, was a palette of extraordinary opportunities:

*Rural and Small Community Arts Program*----- \$58,000

In fiscal 1966, the Council recommended favorably on a proposal of the University of Wisconsin's Wisconsin Idea Theatre for an experimental project in five communities with populations ranging from 1,500 to 10,000 persons. This pilot project is exploring methods of increasing public receptivity to cultural programs and offering new opportunities to these isolated and neglected communities. Case studies and detailed evaluations will be written on the various developments. This grant was made in fiscal 1966, as noted; the project was detailed, but the financing not reflected in the Endowment's previous annual report.

VISUAL ARTS

- NEA Grants to teaching artists in higher ed for sabbaticals to refresh and hone their craft
- Grants to architecture students to work with city planners.
- Grants to poets, writers, composers, choreographers, to hone their skills
- Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines assisted writers and literary magazines, especially the small and financially hard pressed, in which many young writers had first work published.
- The Academy of American Poets sent poets into hundreds of New York, Detroit, and Pittsburgh public school classrooms
- Educational programs of the New York Shakespeare Festival reached thousands of students in in hundreds of schools across NYC.
- Support to educational television specifically to utilize and showcase local arts groups in many parts of the country.
- Touring grants to The Martha Graham Dance Company and The American Ballet Theater reaching 47 cities,

- Grants supported international conferences held in the United States by American P.E.N. (Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, and Novelists), the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Mich., and the International Theater Institute. More than 800 writers, 800 musicians, and 125 directors, professors, playwrights, and actors from abroad participated in these international arts events, which were hosted for the first time by American organizations.

Exciting – compelling activity.

**Another factor was NEA founders not only introducing the notion of shared responsibility to fund the arts, but creating mechanisms to do so.**

At the time the NEA was created, 800 million dollars was annually contributed by business for charitable causes. Less than 3% was going to the arts.

C. Douglas Dillon, the new chairman of the Business Committee for the Arts, a national organization formed to encourage increased support for the arts from private industry, said recently that “the time has arrived for businessmen to organize an effective means of substantially increased corporate support for both the visual and performing arts . . . the arts, like education, are not and cannot be a paying proposition. They need constant help.”

One of the reasons this committee of businessmen was formed is that, as yet, the arts have not received the broad support from the business community that they urgently need. For ex

In 1967, of the then 23,000 foundations in the US, only 1000 (4%) were interested in the arts. As Maryo mentioned last night -- Foundation leaders like David Rockefeller stepped forward with others to do more.

**Another element in how the NEA was designed that catapulted the growth of institutions in geometric proportion was the creation of state agencies to support the arts. And the creation of state arts agencies soon led to the creation of local arts agencies, arts councils, and united arts funds.**

Though a few states, such as Utah and New York established state arts agencies before the NEA was created, most state arts agencies were created as a result of it. As part of the enabling legislation Congress required the NEA to apportion funds to any state that established a state arts agency. This nationwide system, I was reminded in doing this research for today, was conceived by NEA founders to appease those who feared the NEA would be a dominating European style ministry of culture. NEA Founders believed federal support directly to the states would ensure support of more community and local arts. By 1967 all of the States, except one, had established official state arts agencies by legislative act. All but three or four were under the direction of full-time administrators under State civil service.

I should mention that was the time - late 1960s - when regional arts organizations emerged. Mid-America Arts Alliance was the 1<sup>st</sup>, formed by civic leaders in response to a need for greater access to performing arts touring in areas isolated from major cultural centers. The development of regional organizations was encouraged in the NEA’s 1973 reauthorization. The rationale?

Regional approaches would allow the full utilization of the resources of several states to be brought to bear where special needs existed. And regionals were also seen as another way to tap NEA support for artists and local communities.

Several state arts agencies decentralized, either on their own initiative or because of legislative mandates. Decentralization was a way of setting aside funds to be regranted through networks of local agencies. Between 1975 and the early 1980s, decentralization programs were adopted in Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Virginia, California, and Michigan.

In 1977 NYS Senator Tarky Lombardi saw Decentralization as a way to leverage more state funds for upstate New York rather than the City's institutions. What began as a modest program administered by 13 arts councils rapidly grew over the next 10 years to an enormous regrant program line itemed by the state legislature in the NYS Council on the Arts' state budget. The Dutchess County Arts Council in the Hudson Valley, the organization I was running in the early 1980s was one of those 13. These grants of up to \$5,000 administered by local arts councils reached communities in all of NY's 62 counties. A number of these arts councils started for the sole purpose of administering this program. By the late 1980s my state arts council's budget was the highest in its history (a level, by the way, it has never reached since). There were 6000+ nonprofit arts agencies in NYS of every size, discipline, and ethnicity in every corner of the state: regional orchestras, museums, arts centers, dance companies, community theaters, community choruses, visual art organizations, performing arts facilities, venues of all shapes and sizes for all kinds of presentations, art making, and creative opportunities.

Though scale may have varied, this kind of growth was happening in states all across the country. When I left NY in 1990, the Alliance of NYS Arts Councils was an umbrella service organization with a membership that was 92 arts service organizations strong. In addition to 70 arts council – at least one in every county - the mix also included the Chinese American Arts Council, the Association of Hispanic Arts, Meet the Composer, Poets and Writers, Empire State Crafts Alliance, Gallery Association of NYS, Affiliate Artists, International Art of Jazz, NYS Assoc of Museums, the NYS Writers Coalition, the NYS Media Alliance – the list goes on.

**Back to those key elements of the NEA that impacted the rise of institutions was the grant making mechanism itself.** Those at the endowment then worked hard to see that the grant making mechanism was a responsible one:

- Purposeful arts grant making intended to affect positive change with criteria, peer review, evaluation, and accountability;
- Some of us had open panel meetings, not just for transparency to foster better understanding of how and why grants were awarded, but to learn from the observations of constituents how the process could be better;
- Grant making at this point in time was pretty straight forward. Groups had to be a charitable 501 c3 organization or have charities registration from their respective states. It kept the system safe.

This grant making mechanism served as stewardship model for others to follow and they did. State arts agencies cloned it and so did local arts councils for their decentralization programs and even united arts funds. It was a system so well respected that the imprimatur of a federal or state or local grant - was a badge that attracted other funding – more funding to support the rise of institutions.

Another aspect that the NEA that was modeled and followed by others was to be agile in grant making. Not only to keep pace with but anticipate where a discipline was headed and provide support for it. Examples of this at the NEA included Chairman's Initiatives, the Office of Special Constituencies, Inter-Arts Program, Challenge and Advancement, the Arts Education Program and the Locals Program.

The Locals Test Program established in 1983 as an initiative did not become a full-fledged program until the late 1980s. The impetus for the program was for local arts agencies to serve as a catalyst for increased support for the arts by local governments. The goals of the program included promoting and increasing sustained public funding for the arts at the state and local levels; to encourage joint planning among state and local arts agencies, artists, arts organizations, and sources of support; and to elicit a variety of imaginative proposals that might serve as models for others. By the late 80s the program was \$2.2 million. The match with local public dollars was at least 2:1. At the start of the program grants were \$150 to 250,000 dollar grants with a 2:1 match. The Locals Program was an example of the NEA's willingness to make changes to advance a field. At the Endowment in the early 1990s we changed the Locals Program guidelines from funding only the country's major arts council to all its arts councils, regardless of their size. if they were doing good work in their communities. We also created grant categories within the Locals Program to support the work of statewide alliances of arts agencies. And during this time, we also changed the relationship of national services organizations with the NEA. Groups like NALAA and NASAA no longer had to compete for funds side by side with their constituents – but rather had partnership contracts with the NEA.

By 1990 there were more than 2000 local arts agencies and arts service organization in communities all across the country supporting local cultural development.

**It brings me to the final element and how the NEA evolved a massive eco-system of service organization that supported the rise of institutions: Regionals, national associations for every arts discipline, artists, statewide service organizations. and advocacy organizations.**

Our flagship service organization was NALAA/Americans for the Arts.

Arts councils and arts service organizations were the mules of the cultural sector. And Americans for the Arts was the National Mule. All of us did whatever we could to help advance community cultural development, broker relations, serve as translators, and help people connect. Americans for the Arts and the Locals Program were implementers of community development initiatives for the NEA: Writer's Corps, AmeriCorps, our American Canvas conversations around the country. It was the local arts service organizations who stepped in and rolled up sleeves to help and administer whatever needed to be done.

Thank you.