



Arts Advocacy Tactics and Strategies That Work for 2025 and Beyond

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Cofacilitators

Jeff Bell, Executive Director, North Carolina Arts Council

Nate McGaha, Executive Director, Arts North Carolina

Creative-sector advocates and state arts leaders are navigating a highly dynamic policy environment. As COVID-19 pandemic relief funds sunset, state budgets are under renewed stress, which can adversely impact arts funding. Simultaneously, 5,793 state legislative seats were up for election in November 2024. Legions of new lawmakers must now be educated about the important impacts of the creative sector. This interactive session between state arts agencies and state advocates explored how to position arts and creativity as an essential public investment and cultivate new champions across the political spectrum.

This document offers a brief synopsis of discussion highlights. To learn more about best practices for state advocacy, consult NASAA's [advocacy tools](#) or join the Creative States Coalition.

Key Advocacy Relationships

The session facilitators introduced the [Creative States Coalition](#): a network of state level cultural advocates that supports and strengthens policy work on behalf of the arts sector. The coalition fosters collaboration, education, capacity building and public policy development. Its goal is for every state to have an arts advocacy organization.

State arts agencies and state arts advocacy organizations each have distinct roles and constraints. To advocate effectively, arts leaders must understand the strengths and limitations for each organization. When state arts agencies and advocacy groups align their efforts, it helps to support positive policy outcomes.

As an example, the North Carolina Arts Council and Arts North Carolina intentionally cultivate a strong and consultative partnership. During the pandemic, Jeff and Nate started meeting every week. It became a standing meeting that has helped both organizations to accurately assess the political situation, clarify priorities and develop

collaborative advocacy strategies. The meetings also involve Arts North Carolina's lobbyist. (See the accompanying presentation for more details about the roles each organization plays.) They actively coordinate with each other to ensure complementary asks and aligned strategies.

Two days after Hurricane Helene hit, Arts North Carolina and the North Carolina Arts Council met; conceived of and branded a recovery project; and within weeks raised \$500,000 for arts relief. They are coordinating multiple benefit activities together. Having an established relationship between the state arts agency and arts advocacy organization was vital to their reaction to the crisis and their ability to quickly respond to an emergency or unforeseen situation, natural or political.

Does your lobbyist follow your priorities or lobby using their own agenda? The lobbyist follows the policy priorities jointly set by Arts North Carolina and the state arts agency. Arts North Carolina reports all costs of the lobbyist and a portion of the executive director's time as lobbying expenses.

Does the North Carolina Arts Council fund Arts North Carolina? Yes, but not for lobbying. Arts North Carolina is a 501(c)(3) and receives arts council funding for professional development and other activities that support the arts field. They articulate very clear lines for where the funding goes and can show that it is not being used to influence advocacy efforts.

How involved is Arts North Carolina at the local level? Arts North Carolina educates and encourages advocates at the local level. They put together info on questionnaires, provide talking points, and facilitate candidate events.

Participants were asked to work in groups to discuss ideas for: (1) making the case for arts investments, (2) educating new and returning legislators and (3) enlisting legislative champions.

Making the Case for Arts Investments

- Gather and use economic data to make the case. Get as detailed as possible, down to the county level. Try to "put a face" on the data and connect it to a community impact story.
- Show the value of the arts—not just economic but also educational.
- Customize return-on-investment reports that succinctly convey the impact of the arts.
- Show how the arts intersect with other policy priorities, like veterans, health, education, etc. Explain how arts and culture can provide a first step to finding solutions to societal issues.
- Position public investments in the arts as a necessity, not just a nicety.

- Speak with one unified voice. Equip nonprofits with toolkits and talking points to help them stay on message.
- Make clear asks. Don't overwhelm legislators.
- Make your storytelling persuasive.

Educating Legislators

- Share lists of grantees in each legislative district.
- Create a 30-year notebook for each legislator charting three decades of investment in their county.
- Have in person meetings—go see them in their home districts. "Getting them out of the capitol is key."
- Provide creative/captivating presentations.
- Send emails to and let elected officials know about grants and happenings in their districts.
- Use exhibits of artworks from kids to spark interest.

Enlisting Legislative Champions

- Applaud arts "heroes" who lead policy wins.
- Establish and activate an [arts caucus](#).
- Arrange field trips that can give legislators positive arts experiences. Then link those experiences to state investments and state policy.
- Host lunches/meals for elected officials. Food is a powerful connector.
- Use candidate surveys to find out more about individuals running for office and how they relate to the arts.
- Lead with issues/topics they care about and address how the arts are relevant to those priorities.
- Involve celebrities with ties to your state.
- Don't forget to find and engage citizens, too!

Other Ideas

- Youth arts advocacy training can help develop a future pipeline of arts leaders.
- Equip state arts agency boards to be ambassadors and advocates. Recommend individuals with advocacy experience for appointments/service.

- Arts audience surveys are a good vehicle for collecting spending data and stories about why audiences appreciate the arts.
- Attend legislative committee meetings. Show up and be recognized as a constituent presence.
- Embed advocacy training into leadership development programs for artists and arts administrators.