



## **2024 Message to Members** **from NASAA President and CEO Pam Breaux**

October 26, 2024

Hello, everyone. As always, it feels so right to be in community with you. As always, it's also exhilarating to witness the Roll Call of States and Jurisdictions. Members assembled today really brought the pride and passion. You lifted up the cultures and beauty and creativity of our states and jurisdictions, and rightfully so, you've done so with passion, pride, good fun and collegiality. It's the perfect jump start to our Assembly.

As proud as we all are of the unique cultures and gifts our home states and jurisdictions bring to America, please know that I'm just as proud to be in your company—celebrating *your work* that contributes to America in a host of ways.

Your work each day is helping America's communities thrive through programs that promote community connection, shared creative experiences, the passing on of cherished traditions, and the fostering of resilient spirits. Your work is contributing to good health by advancing physical and psychological well-being, healthy aging, effective therapies, and of course today we see arts on prescription (Hello, Massachusetts!). Community connection and good health—your investments are certainly what America needs right now.

As state arts agencies invest 24% of your grant dollars in arts education, we know you're making essential contributions to education; you're setting young people up for success. That's over \$100 million annually invested to boost academic achievement and foster creativity, essential for school, work and life. And, of course, we know well the economic contributions you make through smart investments in the arts. You're stimulating commerce and offering opportunities for creative entrepreneurs and communities to prosper. It's all critical work.

What a year we've had. There's plenty that's positive and worth celebrating—especially your impact on communities. I'll also note that we were supposed to be assembling in Puerto Rico in 2020. At long last, 2024 brought us here! Our friends at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture have welcomed us with all their hearts, and we're mighty grateful to them.

This year wasn't without its share of difficulties too. Teams are stretched. We know that state arts agencies have fewer staff members than 20 years ago, and you're

administering the same level of programming (or more) to serve growing populations. We also know that budgets have tightened for some of our colleagues, as 18 state or jurisdictional arts agencies [SAAs] reported appropriations decreases this year. We know that our politically polarized environment gave way to far more divisive concepts laws and executive orders this year, and this significantly impacts how many of our colleagues can do business.

Yet SAAs still commit to advancing programming and innovations to benefit the people of your states. The strategies you employ demonstrate your strength and your resolve to provide the very best in public service. Your strategies are wise and numerous, and I'd like to lift up a few:

- Wisconsin: The Art of Tourism conference advances how the arts drive tourism and how tourism broadens audiences and encourages public art. Wisconsin continues to lead the way in the arts and tourism space.
- Wyoming, North Dakota, California: Gainful partnerships with state parks offices connect community, creativity and the great outdoors.
- Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, Hawai'i: Agencies and their delegations gathered in Hawai'i in partnership with all Pacific island nations to promote and preserve traditional and contemporary culture, culture bearers and artists at FestPAC [the Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture] this year. It was a mighty undertaking and a successful one.
- California, Delaware, Maine, Washington: Multiple SAAs have been selected to assist in leading strategic plans for their states' creative economies. Here SAAs play a leading role, as policymakers seek to capitalize on the value of the creative economy.
- Minnesota: The accessible arts program is building capacity in the arts sector to provide more accessible programming and opportunities for the public.
- Illinois: Grants policy shifts are facilitating more constituent access to the SAA's resources. They're transforming grant making to provide more services and connect more deeply to more people of the state.
- Georgia: To promote the creativity of the state's artists, the Georgia Council for the Arts mounted the State Art Collection Tour, a traveling exhibit featuring works from the state art collection. It's now available for communities of all sizes.

The work of all SAAs speaks volumes and proclaims the numerous ways you show up for and stand with your communities. I see it clearly, and I hope that you do, too. Assembling here this week offers an extraordinary opportunity to connect and lift ourselves up above the grind of our day-to-day work; there's plenty of grind, I know. But I'm hopeful we can take our moments here to do just that. As we connect and learn from and with each other, let's celebrate our own work as well as each other's innovations, accomplishments and impact. Collectively, this community is strategically

investing \$447 million each year across 30,000 grants, benefiting communities, arts organizations and artists. And, of course, these investments support communities in so many ways that dollars just can't count, like the community connections that are so critical right now.

Alongside your colleagues, nourish yourselves in this community; nourish yourselves in this community of care, the space where 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies come together with the people in this country who know the work of SAAs and know what you're going through. These are the folks you can turn to for ideas, inspiration and, when needed, a shoulder to lean on. That's what this community does. We take care of each other.

Those of you who read this month's edition of NASAA NOTES may already realize that Laura Smith will be departing NASAA on December 31, after 22 years of gracious and dutiful service on behalf of state arts agencies. Laura has substantially grown contributions to NASAA and is our agency's steward of one of our most critical connection points to members: summer nominating interviews! Just imagine being responsible for 135 hour-long conversations with SAA executive directors, deputy directors and council chairs. That's 135 hours of goodness, where members help NASAA understand their needs so we can attune our services to meet them. Creating the container for all that to happen seamlessly each summer is just one of many ways Laura serves members. I'll bet some of you tune in to NASAA Meditates, where Laura creates space for members to meditate each week. In fact, she is a certified meditation teacher and a certified workplace mindfulness facilitator. In her next chapter, Laura will provide mindfulness services to organizations and individuals. (Laura, we miss you already! Thank you for staying through the end of the year and for some additional transition time.) I know she has many friends in the audience today, many who'll want to express love and gratitude to her throughout the conference. How about we start now by giving Laura a warm round of applause for her service to NASAA?

Before I depart, I'd like to echo Chair [Donna] Collins's gratitude for our sponsors:

Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (such fine hosts), Puerto Rico Tourism Company (for their incredible generosity), Discover Puerto Rico, Artists Thrive—an initiative of the Tremaine Foundation, Creative West (formerly WESTAF) and, as always, our great colleagues from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Speaking of the Endowment, heads up, we're engaged in new cooperative work with our friends at the NEA that will result in new resources and services. Within the next couple of months, we look forward to publishing three new strategy samplers that showcase cross-sector initiatives in the areas of: arts, health and community well-being; arts engaging rural communities; and civic infrastructure and community cohesion. Please stay tuned for the launch! Also in the coming months, we'll launch new work to cultivate arts and health communities of practice—where learning and action are informed and inspired. Stay tuned for that as well!