

Funding the Arts

Should government support artistic and cultural expression?

The Trump administration wants to end federal funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and other cultural agencies. While those agencies receive only a fraction of the federal budget, the administration says other needs are more pressing and that government arts spending represents a wealth transfer from poorer to richer citizens. The proposal has revived an argument that raged during the “culture wars” of the 1980s and ’90s, when conservatives and liberals sparred over whether the government has a role in supporting the arts and whether federal money should help pay for art that some deem offensive. Funding advocates say exposure to the arts helps students perform better in school and that theaters, symphonies and museums help bolster local economies. The arts continue to have powerful supporters, including local politicians and civic leaders who serve on arts boards in nearly every congressional district. Nonetheless, some cash-strapped state and local governments are cutting school and public arts programs.



A supporter of artistic and cultural activities in New York City protests on April 3, 2017, against a Trump administration proposal to eliminate federal funding for cultural agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which helps fund NPR.

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Funding the Arts

BY ALAN GREENBLATT

THE ISSUES

The Public Theater has been presenting free Shakespeare plays in New York's Central Park for 60 years, but its latest production, this summer, may be its most controversial. ¹ A staging of *Julius Caesar* recasts the dictator to resemble President Trump, complete with golden hair and a red tie. There's even an added reference to killing people on Fifth Avenue, as Trump once said he could do without losing popularity. ²

Some conservatives complained that because Caesar is killed in the play, the production could be seen as fomenting violence against Trump. Dan Bongino, a former Secret Service agent, warned that the play conceivably could lead someone who is mentally ill to try to kill the president. ³

Liberals scoffed, noting that a 2012 production that toured nationally and featured a Caesar modeled after President Barack Obama prompted no such outcry. ⁴

"If you read the play, Shakespeare's against assassination," says Michael Bronski, a media studies professor at Harvard University. "To have a kneejerk reaction that this is defaming the president or it can lead to violence against the president seems to me to be too much."

Nevertheless, amid the controversy, Delta Air Lines and Bank of America announced they were pulling their financial support from the production. On June 11, the president's son, Donald Trump Jr., tweeted, "I wonder how much of this 'art' is funded by taxpayers?" ⁵ The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the lead federal agency providing support for arts organizations throughout the nation, rushed out a state-



Getty Images/Spencer Platt

Critics of federal arts funding say it is not government's role to subsidize the arts, especially controversial artworks like sculptor Tony Matelli's "Sleepwalker," displayed along Manhattan's High Line, a popular pedestrian space. The Trump administration insists the federal government can no longer afford to fund arts programs, but arts backers say federal funding amounts to a tiny fraction of 1 percent of the federal government's annual budget.

ment the same day — and posted a pop-up notice on its Web page — making clear that "no taxpayer dollars" paid for the production. ⁶

The NEA might have been feeling skittish because the president's proposed 2018 budget calls for eliminating funding for the NEA and other cultural agencies, including the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), arguing that they represent an unnecessary expense. ⁷

Although some lawmakers have said that much of Trump's budget is dead on arrival on Capitol Hill, arts agencies and their supporters worry that his proposal to eliminate arts funding could

revive battles fought in the 1980s and '90s over government support for the arts. At the time, critics sought to strip federal arts agencies of their funding, saying it was not the government's role to subsidize art and that some agencies were funding artworks of dubious value. Although those efforts largely failed, the NEA has changed some of its policies to address critics' concerns. Federal arts agencies again find their existence under attack, however, and some cash-strapped state and local governments are cutting school and public arts programs.

The administration insists the federal government can no longer afford to fund arts programs, which it sees as a so-called wealth transfer from poorer to wealthier citizens.

"I put myself in the shoes of that steelworker in Ohio, the coal-mining family in West Virginia, the mother of two in Detroit," Budget Director Mick Mulvaney said at a White

House news conference in March, when asked about the proposed cuts. "Can I really go to those folks, look them in the eye and say: 'Look, I want to take money from you, and I want to give it to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting?' That is a really hard sell, and in fact, it's something we don't think we can defend anymore." ⁸

Arts advocates say federal spending for the NEA amounts to only 45 cents per capita annually. Theaters, symphonies and museums help bolster local economies, and student exposure to the arts improves academic performance, they say. According to Americans for the Arts, a Washington-based arts advocacy group, local, state and federal governments spend a total of

Those were not huge increases, but they signaled continuing support in Congress for the arts, with arts programs seen as benefiting communities both in terms of individual enrichment and as a tool for driving economic development.

What's more, arts funding is not a huge part of the overall federal budget. Funding for the NEA, NEH and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which subsidizes National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), amounts to less than \$750 million per year, or a fraction of 1 percent of the budget, arts advocates point out. ¹⁶ (See graph, right.)

But the agencies' funding fight for fiscal 2018 will be more intense than it was in fiscal 2017, they believe. Negotiations over next year's budget are expected to stretch at least into the fall. "We remain very, very wary and cautious about the prospects for the fiscal year 2018 budget," says Robert Lynch, president of Americans for the Arts, an advocacy group for arts organizations.

In the meantime, arts organizations — museums, theater companies, symphony orchestras — are urging subscribers and patrons to contact their members of Congress and encourage them to maintain arts and culture funding.

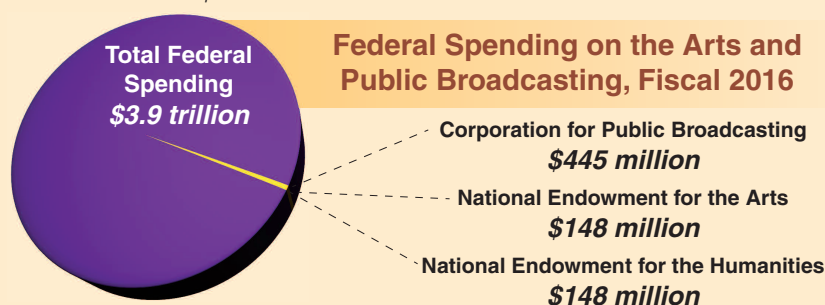
The Trump administration believes that "if NEA funding gets cut, that [money] will be made up by the private sector," says Susan Baley, executive director of the Swope Art Museum in Terre Haute, Ind. But "it's hard to see that happening."

Arts advocates say federal funding is crucial because arts organizations often tout those grants as a way to attract other donors. "Eliminating these agencies is not going to make a difference to the [federal] deficit, but it makes a tremendous difference to these organizations that rely on them," Baley says.

To make the case for continuing support, advocates attribute a variety of benefits to the arts, from improving educational outcomes to drawing people to cities with vibrant arts scenes

Arts Funding a Sliver of Federal Budget

The arts and public broadcasting received a razor-thin slice of the fiscal 2016 federal budget — \$741 million, or less than 1 percent of the total \$3.9 trillion outlay. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which helps to fund National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Service, received \$445 million. The National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities each received \$148 million.



Sources: "CPB's Past Appropriations," Corporation for Public Broadcasting, undated, <http://tinyurl.com/yaf2fobz>; "National Endowment for the Arts Appropriations History," National Endowment for the Arts, undated, <http://tinyurl.com/jreutxx>; "Appropriations Request For Fiscal Year 2016," National Endowment for the Humanities, undated, <http://tinyurl.com/yawyky3l8>; "Budget," Congressional Budget Office, undated, <http://tinyurl.com/zvsl2eh>

and promoting economic development in specific neighborhoods in those cities. "To make a city, you can't just have housing," says Todd Schliemann, a New York-based architect who designs science museums. "You have to have a mixed-use component that includes cultural things such as museums and performing arts."

As the arts funding debate plays out in Washington, here are some of the questions policymakers are asking:

Should the government subsidize the arts?

Terell Stafford, a prominent jazz trumpet player, runs the Jazz Orchestra of Philadelphia, a big band that features local musicians and presents concerts celebrating musicians with ties to the city. The nonprofit orchestra relies on government grants to cover some of its costs.

"Music is not an easy thing to make a living by, and we need all the support

possible," Stafford says. "The only way we can survive is through arts funding."

Artists such as Stafford have been making the case to their audiences that governments should continue supporting the arts. "As our elected officials in Washington work on the federal budget . . . the survival of funding for the arts hangs in the balance," the San Francisco Symphony wrote in an email to audience members in April, providing them with the phone numbers of members of the Bay area congressional delegation. "We need your help to advocate for the arts TODAY!" ¹⁷

Supporters say arts organizations boost local economies by providing jobs, bringing in tourists and attracting local visitors who spend money on things like meals and parking. "The economic footprint of the arts is so much bigger than anyone actually realizes," says Lynch, the Americans for the Arts president.

FUNDING THE ARTS

The NEA provides funds to support those local and regional arts organizations. But federal funds account for only a portion of the amount contributed by local and state arts agencies as a whole. And it accounts for a smaller share than individual donations — or even the amount raised through crowdfunding sites such as Kickstarter, according to a study by Ramana Nanda,

are “generally enjoyed by people of higher-income levels, making them a wealth transfer from poorer to wealthier citizens.”²⁰

But supporters of the arts say people at all income levels, including those who cannot afford to attend live performances, enjoy the arts through public radio and television programs. “I grew up loving musicals,” said Lin-Manuel

new audiences, but to create a product that pleases those who dole out the free cash,” wrote David Marcus, director of a New York theater company that does not receive government subsidies. “The [arts] industry receives more free money than it did a decade ago, and has fewer attendees.”²²

Too much of the money dispensed by NEA or NEH is still being sent to organizations concentrated in coastal states such as New York and California, the cultural critic and editor Roger Kimball complained, including money devoted to large institutions capable of massive private fundraising, such as the Metropolitan Museum. “Doubtless many initiatives could be worthy, but a lot of the funded projects are inane, repellent or both,” he wrote.²³

However, these days few arts nonprofits rely heavily on federal funds for ongoing expenses but use grants to fund specific projects, such as museum exhibitions. “The number of arts organizations that count on NEA dollars for regular maintenance of their programming is declining,” says Roland Kushner, who teaches arts administration at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania. “It’s more likely to be connected with issues such as access and education.”

While both sides agree arts and culture spending makes up a microscopic portion of the federal budget, supporters and critics disagree over whether that is an argument for keeping or killing agencies such as the NEA and NEH. Those who favor abolishing them say if Congress cannot eliminate such relatively small programs, it will never get serious about cutting spending. Arts supporters maintain that spending on arts and culture offers needed support, not only for arts organizations but for state and regional arts councils and commissions.

For example, say NEA supporters, the agencies’ support often serves as a seal of approval on projects, helping to attract other donors. Last year, every \$1 of NEA funding was matched by up



Getty Images/FilmMagic/Bruce Gilkas

Lin-Manuel Miranda, center, creator and star of the popular musical *Hamilton*, said that when he was growing up, his family rarely had money to see Broadway shows. “But because of PBS’ ‘Great Performances,’ I saw *Into the Woods*.

And it changed my life,” he said. Critics say arts funding largely benefits wealthy Americans who are most likely to patronize the arts, but supporters say people at all income levels can enjoy the arts through free museums and public radio and television programs.

a Harvard professor of business administration. “Crowdfunding has enabled a democratization of access” to the arts, Nanda said.¹⁸ In 2016, while the federal government devoted less than \$1 billion to arts agencies, individual Americans gave \$18 billion to arts and culture nonprofits.¹⁹

“This seems like the quintessential thing the private sector should do, and certainly does to a far greater degree,” says Cato’s Tanner.

In 2013, when the House Budget Committee unsuccessfully proposed eliminating funding for arts and cultural agencies, the panel said such activities

Miranda, creator of the hit Broadway musical *Hamilton*, but he added that because his family rarely “had money to go see Broadway shows. I think I saw three, maybe, before I was an adult. But because of PBS’ ‘Great Performances,’ I saw *Into the Woods*. And it changed my life.”²¹

Some conservatives argue that government-subsidized art does not have to respond to market demands, giving recipients of those funds an unfair edge over their unsubsidized competitors. “This means that the real way to succeed as an arts organization is not to create a product that attracts

to \$9 in support from other entities, according to Aaron Knochel, an art education professor at Penn State University.²⁴

"It's an incentives system," Lynch says about NEA funding. "It should be a conservative's delight. It's something they should hold up as a model."

But Tanner says the federal government should not be acting as a sort of venture capital fund, offering seed money that helps attract other support. "I don't think government should be picking and choosing winners when it comes to art," he says.

Should arts education be restored?

The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Ark., was founded and has been richly supported by Alice Walton, an heir to the Walmart fortune. As part of its educational mission, the museum sponsors free field trips for school groups — not just waiving admission fees but reimbursing schools for transportation and teachers' time.

Despite the free ride, some Arkansas schools — particularly schools that serve lower-income students — have stopped taking trips to the museum, says Jay P. Greene, an education professor at the University of Arkansas. "The museum analyzed its own data and found that the more wealthy the school kids are, the more likely they are to take them up on free field trips," Greene says. "It's a cruel irony, because poor and rural kids were the most enriched from those trips," gaining not just subject knowledge but skills such as the ability to draw inferences.

In addition, the amount of classroom time and other resources devoted to arts education have been declining for years, especially during lean times such as the 2007-09 recession. A 2012 study by the Department of Education found that although math and visual arts programs were still widely offered, the percentage of elementary schools offering dance or theater instruction had declined from 20 percent at the start of the 21st century to 3 or 4 percent,

respectively, by 2009. And more than 40 percent of secondary schools no longer required courses in the arts for graduation, according to the Education Department study.²⁵ (See graph, p. 588.)

While schools are cutting arts education, Greene's research and other scholarly studies suggest that art education programs, including field trips to museum or theaters or in-class work

a membership organization for visual arts instructors. "It's not like chemistry. Art has multiple answers."

Some academic researchers are skeptical of such studies. Most studies that show arts education leading to improved performance in other areas measure correlation, not causation, they say. In other words, the researchers say, the type of students who partic-



Getty Images/Kansas City Star/Keith Myers

The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Ark., founded by Alice Walton, an heir to the Walmart fortune, sponsors free field trips for school groups as part of its educational mission. Although scholarly studies suggest that arts education offers many benefits to students, some schools have stopped taking advantage of such free museum visits and are cutting arts programs to focus on core subjects such as reading and math.

on painting or music, offer many benefits to students.²⁶

"There is some evidence that music education, for instance, can actually boost IQ," says Steven Holochwost, a research scientist at the Science of Learning Institute at Johns Hopkins University. "The arts yield benefits in terms of improvement in academic education and also executive function."

Holochwost and other education scholars say the arts offer a wealth of skills that transfer to other subjects, such as mastering self-directed learning (when working on individual projects) and collaboration (when students play in bands or are parts of other groups).²⁷

Art "inspires critical thinking," says Kim Huyler Defibaugh, president of the National Art Education Association,

ipate in arts programs may be those who are going to succeed anyway, thanks to their own initiative, parental involvement or the overall quality of the schools they attend.

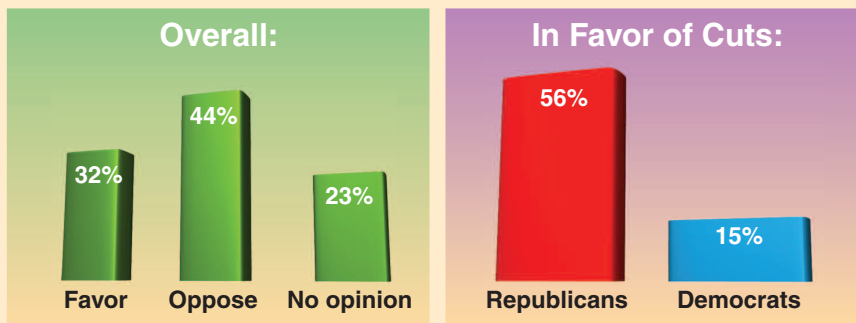
"There's plenty of correlational evidence — smart kids take piano lessons, for example," says Ellen Winner, a psychologist at Boston College who studies the effects of the arts on development. "Kids who take lots of art in high school have higher SAT scores than those who don't, but that is not causal."

However, a widely cited 2009 study by James Catterall, a University of California, Los Angeles education professor, found that lower-income students who attended schools with rich arts programming tended to perform better in terms of grades in school and future college attendance.²⁸

More Americans Oppose Cutting Arts Spending

More American adults — 44 percent — oppose reducing federal support for the arts and public broadcasting than favor such cuts (32 percent), according to a March poll. A majority of Republicans (56 percent) favor such cuts, compared with only 15 percent of Democrats.

Percentage Who Favor or Oppose Cutting Federal Support for the Arts and Public Broadcasting



Sources: “The March 2017 AP-NORC Center Poll,” <http://tinyurl.com/y95dn9t7>, and “Taxes and the Budget,” <http://tinyurl.com/y7fx9kvd>, The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, April 2017

Many districts have continued to cut back on fine arts education even after the economy began to recover from the recession. Prompted by an \$18 million budget shortfall, the school district in Charleston County, S.C., last year overhauled its arts curriculum, laid off teachers and eliminated drama and dance programs.²⁹ It simply wasn’t possible to keep a full slate of full-time arts teachers, according to district administrators. “When a principal has to decide between courses for core content and electives such as world languages or fine arts, principals tend to fund core content-area teachers first,” says Kathleen Magliacane, the district’s human resources director.

Such decisions are common. “Due to budget constraints, things need to be prioritized,” says Steven Geis, president of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, explaining the rationale behind such cuts. “Approximately 85 percent of a district’s budget is (salaries for) teachers. What are you going to cut, a [regular] classroom teacher or one of the specialist classes?”

In addition to budget constraints, arts programming often is cut due to classroom time pressures. Given federal and state mandates for annual testing in core academic subjects such as reading and math, other subjects often are as lower priorities. “Many schools have responded to those pressures by narrowing their efforts significantly and cutting the amount of time devoted to non-tested subjects,” Greene says.

In addition, according to the Education Department study, an “equity gap” now exists in arts education, with schools serving lower-income students less likely to offer substantial arts programming than more affluent schools.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act — a 2002 federal law that mandated annual testing in math and language skills between grades 3 and 8 — “the poorest schools were the hardest pressed,” says Dennie Palmer Wolf, a principal researcher at WolfBrown, an arts research and consulting firm in Cambridge, Mass. “To the extent principals had discretionary money, they

often used it for things like extra tutoring. They did not spend it on arts education or debate or chess.”

Although this dynamic is frequently decried by arts education advocates, Winner says it makes sense. “Maybe they recognize that if your aim is to improve performance in math and reading and writing, the best route is a direct one: more time on these subjects, rather than the claimed indirect route through the arts,” she says.

But Greene, the Arkansas professor, notes that arts instruction remains popular with parents, particularly in upper middle class communities. Schools may have cut back, but most still offer art classes of one form or other

“The pendulum has got about as far as it can go squeezing the arts,” Greene says. “These programs are inherently popular. Parents want their kids to play in bands, they want their kids to learn the arts.”

Do the arts promote economic growth?

In recent years, a majority of states have enacted tax incentives to attract film and television productions. Georgia, for instance, offers film producers tax rebates worth 20 percent of their costs.³⁰ Republican Gov. Nathan Deal says the incentives helped bring 245 productions to the state in 2016 with spending totaling \$2 billion.³¹

In May, Georgia doubled down on its investments in the arts as an economic development strategy, enacting new tax credits for the music industry. Sponsors claim the credits, which will apply to recordings made in Georgia and to large-scale tours that rehearse and start in Georgia, will create 10,000 jobs.³²

However, a study last year from the University of Southern California found that such incentive credits for film and TV companies had no measurable effect on job growth in 26 states that had implemented them.³³ And a recent report from the Pew Charitable Trusts lists Georgia among 23 states that do

not evaluate whether their investment is paying off.

“Despite the significance of the program, Georgia lacks a process for evaluating the film tax credit and other incentives,” according to the report. “Evaluations could help lawmakers determine how well these policies are working for the state’s budget and economy and for businesses too.”³⁴

“The research on this . . . is not particularly favorable to the states that are putting out benefits,” says Douglas Noonan, an economist at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. “They’re boondoggles for large producers that have mobile productions. It’s hard [for states] to recoup the positive side of things.”

There is no question that the arts contribute to the economy. In 2014, arts and cultural production amounted to \$729.6 billion worth of economic activity according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, or 4.2 percent of overall GDP.³⁵ “There’s a lot of great research showing that arts provide not only a great cultural asset, but support 4.6 million jobs,” says Randy Cohen, vice president of research and policy for Americans for the Arts.

His organization’s surveys have found that the average patron spends \$31.47 on top of any admission price when attending a cultural event.³⁶ “It’s a huge economic force,” says Phil Dunlap, director of education for Jazz St. Louis, a nonprofit performing arts presenter. “If arts and culture events went away, tens of thousands of jobs would be lost.”

Many arts organizations such as Dunlap’s tell stories about how their presence helped turn around struggling communities. What were once nearly abandoned neighborhoods or small downtowns are now thriving, with patrons coming in and spending money, followed by other businesses drawn to such areas.

“We’re finding that arts and culture are an important part of any economic

development strategy,” says Jennifer Henaghan, deputy research director for the American Planning Association. “It’s becoming more and more important to get those elements for communities of all sizes.”

Indeed, a federal arts grant helped to trigger an economic comeback in Whitesburg, Ky., devastated by downturns in coal mining. “We have 18 full-time employees and five part-time employees,” said Ada Smith, a program director and fundraiser for a film workshop that has received NEA funding. “We have over a million-dollar payroll annually.”³⁷

But for every popular venue that helps revitalize an area, how many arts organizations fail to boost the local economy or go out of business? No one seems to know, says Stephen Sheppard, an urban economist at Williams College in Williamstown, Mass.

“You hear about the success stories, but the problem is you never hear about the failure stories,” he says. “When a nonprofit museum goes out of existence, its records are completely lost. No one is collecting that data.”

Noonan says it is difficult to know whether arts organizations help attract investment, or whether a rising economic tide in an area naturally lead to more support for such nonprofit entities. It is unclear whether arts- and culture-driven investments are going to “have a bigger bang” than bringing in auto dealerships or any other type of investment, Noonan says.

“The arts can be a useful part of the mix, but they are not going to save your town, if you think that’s the one thing you need to do,” says Michael Rushton, a professor of arts administration at Indiana University at Bloomington, citing other factors such as schools, public safety and infrastructure.

However, arts organizations, more than other types of businesses, can increase the quality of life in an area, helping to attract highly mobile knowledge workers in sectors such as tech-

nology and finance, says Kushner, of Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania. “The arts make tremendous contributions to community development,” he says. “Some of those benefits are economic. In Bethlehem, former steel companies have been repurposed as arts spaces. It’s played a significant role in the revitalization of Bethlehem from its industrial past. And Bethlehem is not alone.”

Since undergoing a \$5.5 million renovation 20 years ago, the Newberry Opera House in South Carolina has hosted performances by such name acts as Willie Nelson and Olivia Newton-John. Such performances may attract an older crowd to Newberry, but they’ve also helped increase occupancy rates in nearby housing developments and drawn companies such as M.M. Technics, a German metal supply company, and ThermaFlo Engineering Co., a water heater manufacturer, according to Molly Fortune, the opera house’s executive director. “When companies are looking to move to the Upstate (region), state or county officials point out there’s a huge quality of life here for your workers,” she says.

Positive effects may occur within some localities, Noonan says, but he’s not convinced the same strategy can work everywhere. And, while some places may draw a crowd for a time, fashions inevitably change and an initial boost from a cultural organization may not sustain itself for more than a few years. “There’s a lot of good anecdotal evidence about the success stories, but when you start averaging things out, it becomes a very diluted story,” he says.

However, Sheppard, the Williams economist, examined the effects of cultural nonprofits in 300 metropolitan areas.³⁸ Overall, he says, they had a net positive impact on income “that doesn’t fade away over time. That’s a positive message to support the assertion that there should be some policy to support these organizations,” he says. ■

BACKGROUND

Arts Ambivalence

Americans have had ambivalent feelings about the arts nearly since the arrival of the first European settlers. During colonial times and the early years of the republic, preachers and politicians worried that the arts could serve as a distraction from more practical endeavors.

America, the French observer Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that Americans “habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful, and they will require the beautiful should be useful.”⁴²

In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, the federal Works Progress Administration, which put jobless Americans to work building roads, bridges and dams, also employed thousands of writers and artists. Four federal arts projects encompassed theater, music, the visual arts and writing.⁴³ Among the celebrated federally subsidized theatrical productions was the 1935

Symphony Orchestra League released a poll of its members showing that 91 percent opposed federal subsidies.⁴⁶

But during the Cold War the U.S. government became a major funder of the arts after they began to be viewed as a weapon in the U.S.-Soviet competition for influence around the globe. The arts could be used to promote democratic values such as openness and tolerance. The State Department sponsored overseas tours featuring symphony orchestras and jazz musicians, while the CIA underwrote performers, artists and writers, often through foundations.

“I remember the enormous joy I got when the Boston Symphony Orchestra won more acclaim for the U.S. in Paris than [Secretary of State] John Foster Dulles or Dwight D. Eisenhower could have bought with a hundred speeches,” one CIA operative recalled.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, interest in the arts was growing rapidly at home. Sales in musical instruments increased fivefold between 1940 and 1960.⁴⁸ Thanks in part to the so-called GI bill, which provided college scholarships to military veterans, university attendance also skyrocketed, including a huge increase in students majoring in the arts.

Universities, which built museums on campus and began presenting major performances, were becoming “the new Medicis,” as an American Council for the Arts in Education report called them, referring to the art patrons of Renaissance Florence, in Italy.⁴⁹

Birth of the NEA

President John F. Kennedy, who made the arts a symbol of his administration, had praised their value during his 1960 campaign, saying “the encouragement of art in the broadest sense is indeed a function of government.”⁵⁰ Kennedy invited 155 prominent artists and scientists to his inauguration, which featured a reading by

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Getty Images/Archive Photos/Rose Hartman

Controversy over sexually explicit photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, who had received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, prompted the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington to cancel a planned exhibit of his works in 1989. In protest, other artists projected Mapplethorpe’s images onto the Corcoran’s façade, and several galleries showed the photographs, attracting large crowds.

“Until the 20th century, the United States government possessed no official arts policy,” wrote historian Donna Binkiewicz.³⁹ Congress was reluctant to discuss arts funding or policy, and even avoided discussions about installing art works in the Capitol.⁴⁰

In 1835, when James Smithson, an English chemist, offered to donate roughly the equivalent of \$15.5 million today to create what eventually would become the Smithsonian Institution, several senators denounced the idea as unconstitutional, and it took Congress 10 years to accept the gift.⁴¹ In his influential 1835 study *Democracy in*

“voodoo” *Macbeth*, set in Haiti and directed by a 20-year-old Orson Welles, who went on to direct *Citizen Kane* and other classic films.⁴⁴ The play was a critical and popular success and was performed before 150,000 people around the country.⁴⁵

Congressional efforts to create a permanent federal arts agency never got far during the first half of the 20th century. That was due partly to opposition from fiscal conservatives, but also to concerns by some in the artistic community that they could lose artistic freedom by producing works under the shackle of bureaucratic regulation. In 1953, the American

Chronology

1940s-1950s

State Department and CIA fund the arts as a diplomatic tool.

1943

With unemployment below 2 percent, Congress kills the Works Progress Administration, which included the first major government effort to put artists to work.

1948

Smith-Mundt Act authorizes use of culture as Cold War propaganda tool.

1959

Philadelphia establishes the first local percent-for-art program to fund public art.

1960s-1970s

First federal agencies devoted to the arts are established.

1963

President John F. Kennedy creates the President's Advisory Council on the Arts.

1965

Congress establishes the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

1974

President Richard M. Nixon increases NEA funding to \$64 million, eight times the amount when he took office in 1969.

1976

Some 10,000 artists are working under the auspices of a federal program known as the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act.

1980s-1990s

Controversial grants spark increased opposition to NEA.

1985

President Ronald Reagan begins annual granting of the National Medal of Arts to outstanding artists.

1986

NEA creates an arts-in-education program for elementary and secondary schools.

1989

Exhibitions involving controversial photographs by Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe stir nationwide debate over arts funding. . . .

1990

An amendment to abolish the NEA fails in the House. . . . Congress bars federal funding for art deemed obscene.

1992

NEA funding peaks at \$176 million.

1994

GOP's Contract With America calls for abolishing the NEA.

1996

NEA funding drops below \$100 million for the first time since 1977.

1997

Congress eliminates NEA grants to individual artists.

1998

Supreme Court rules that the NEA decision to deny funds to artists for failing to maintain standards of values and decency is constitutional.

1999

Offended by an exhibit featuring a portrait of the Virgin Mary deco-

rated with dung, New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani attempts to evict the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

2000s-Present

NEA budget again grows.

2000

NEA receives \$105 million in funding, its first increase in eight years.

2007

Congress approves largest percentage increase in NEA funding in 28 years.

2009

Federal stimulus law includes \$50 million for NEA to distribute to preserve nonprofit arts jobs threatened by recession.

2011

House votes to strip federal funding from National Public Radio, but the Senate doesn't act on the proposal.

2013

House proposal would eliminate NEA funding, but it fails to pass.

2015

The Every Student Succeeds Act urges states to offer arts education as part of a "well-rounded" education.

2017

An appropriations bill to fund the government through September increases NEA funding slightly (May 5). . . . President Trump's budget calls for eliminating funding for the NEA and other cultural agencies (May 22). . . . Delta Air Lines and Bank of America pull funding from a controversial Public Theater production of *Julius Caesar* that some saw as a portrayal of Trump (June 11).

Agencies Seek Community Input for Public Art

Collaboration is key to preventing controversy.

The controversy dragged on for eight years. The federal General Services Administration (GSA) paid \$175,000 for a sculpture by Richard Serra, a 120-foot-long, 12-foot-high metal wall called “Tilted Arc,” which was placed in a Manhattan plaza. Hundreds of local workers, many of whom used the plaza as a lunch spot, signed petitions to get rid of the installation. When the GSA agreed, Serra sued, saying it had been constructed for that specific site and should not be moved. He eventually lost, and the by-then rusted piece was put in storage.¹

That was back in the 1980s when such battles were common. Monumental sculptures drew complaints in dozens of communities.² Huge, abstract works dropped into public plazas were derided as “plop art.”

“You almost never hear members of the public saying, ‘Hey, let’s all voluntarily chip in and pay a sculptor \$100,000 to fill this public space with what appears to be the rusted remnants of a helicopter crash!’” columnist Dave Barry wrote as Serra’s case was coming to a close. “It takes concerted government action to erect one of those babies.”³

A lot has changed since then. In response to criticism, arts

agencies began incorporating artists’ input in the landscape-design process for public spaces, in an effort to reach broad agreement from the start on how works of art could best fit within a particular site.

“Artists started to sit down with planners and architects to figure out how really to create an artwork that is specific to that building,” says Patricia Walsh, manager of public art programs for Americans for the Arts, an advocacy group in Washington. “That became the norm, particularly for a lot of major cities.”

Consultation has become a mantra in public art circles, in part to avoid the mistakes of the past. It’s common to see close coordination between public works departments, publicly owned utilities, developers and a city’s arts program. “What we’re seeing is that there is a high demand from private developers, city agencies and social services to work with artists,” says Jennifer Cole, executive director of the Metro Nashville Arts Commission.

Many cities are trying to make sure not only that artists are talking with design professionals but that the public is heard

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the celebrated poet Robert Frost. Early in his term, Kennedy hosted cellist Pablo Casals for a well-received recital at the White House.⁵¹

John Crosby, a columnist for the *New York Herald Tribune*, gushed, “President Kennedy is the best friend culture . . . has had in the White House since Jefferson.”⁵²

In 1963, Kennedy created the President’s Advisory Council on the Arts. “For the first time, the arts will have some formal government body which will be specifically concerned with all aspects of the arts,” the president’s statement declared.⁵³ Following Kennedy’s assassination that year, his successor, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, promoted arts policy as part of Kennedy’s legacy.

Arts organizations, which had once been skeptical about federal involvement in the field, by then largely had decided they could use a champion in Washington. And Johnson’s landslide re-election in 1964 helped sweep out members of Congress who had long opposed creation

of a federal arts agency. In his 1965 State of the Union address, Johnson called for a national foundation for the arts.

Rep. Harold Gross, an Iowa Republican, mocked the idea, offering an amendment to expand the definition of artistic pursuits to include belly dancing, baseball, football, golf, tennis, squash, pinochle and poker.⁵⁴ He also complained that taxpayers’ pockets were being picked, sending the president a telegram requesting that he veto the bill.

“Let’s . . . balance the budget before subsidizing the longhairs and the little twinkletoes,” Gross wrote.⁵⁵

Such arguments had prevailed in Congress for nearly 20 years, but in 1965, Johnson signed the bill creating the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.⁵⁶

Growth and Criticism

Private foundations remained the primary patrons of the arts. In

1966, the Ford Foundation, the nation’s biggest arts funder, was planning to give 61 orchestras \$80 million dollars. A foundation executive reached out to the NEA to make sure this wouldn’t duplicate any of the new agency’s plans. But since the NEA had only \$2.5 million to distribute during its first nine months across all the arts, Roger Stevens, the agency’s first chair, assured Ford it could go ahead.⁵⁷

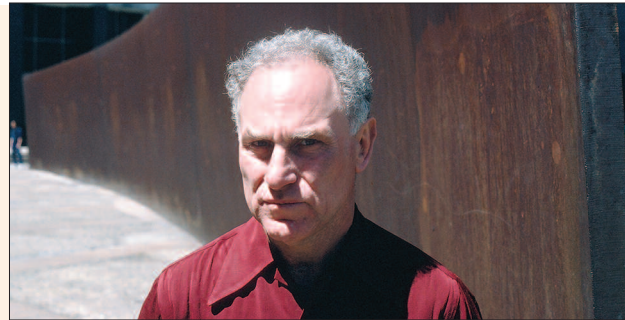
The NEA would soon receive a significant boost. President Richard M. Nixon, who had been elected in 1968, decided significant arts funding would improve his image among the sort of Eastern elites who were active on arts organization boards. “Support for the arts is, increasingly, good politics,” presidential aide Leonard Garment informed Nixon. “You will gain support from groups who have hitherto not been favorable to this administration.”⁵⁸ Over the course of his presidency Nixon boosted the NEA’s budget nearly eightfold — from \$8.5 million in 1969 to \$64 million in 1974.⁵⁹

in the process, through open meetings or neighborhood outreach. In San Francisco, the Municipal Transportation Agency asked the public to vote this spring via the Web on poetry and visual art pieces that would adorn a hundred of its buses over the summer.

As its name suggests, the point of public art is to connect the public with art — making institutional settings more pleasant and welcoming, as well as providing members of the public with more exposure to art. “Having a gallery experience on a bus democratizes the experience of the gallery,” says Darcy Brown, executive director of SF Beautiful, a nonprofit that works with the transportation agency on its art program.

That doesn’t mean everyone ends up happy with the final result. Maybe it’s the nature of public art that it will inevitably be contentious, because no piece is going to satisfy everyone’s taste. And even when people don’t find a work offensive or ugly, some still complain that the government has wasted money on what they consider frills.

“There’s a lot of pushback, of course,” Kristen Ramirez, public



Getty Images/Robert R. McElroy

Sculptor Richard Serra sued the General Services Administration (GSA) in the 1980s when it decided to remove his installation, “Tilted Arc,” from Federal Plaza in New York City. He lost his suit, and the GSA removed the controversial work, which it had purchased.

art manager for the city of Seattle, says. “Not everybody is excited about spending public money for art.”

— Alan Greenblatt

¹ Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Art Lessons: Learning From the Rise and Fall of Public Arts Funding* (1995), p. 197.

² *Ibid.*, p. 198.

³ Dave Barry, “The Naked Truth,” *The Washington Post*, Dec. 19, 1990, <http://tinyurl.com/y9e6mtno>.

Nancy Hanks, Nixon’s first NEA chair, proved to be an effective lobbyist for the organization, building coalitions with groups such as the 4-H and the Boy Scouts, which helped show that arts are part of the wider community.⁶⁰ Only a few states had their own arts councils or commissions when the NEA was founded. However, the agency gave grants to promote state groups, which helped build support for the arts beyond New York City, which had received a disproportionate share of early NEA funding.

In lean budget times, such as during and after the recession that ended in 2009, states have cut back support for arts agencies. In 2011, Republican Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback eliminated the Kansas Arts Commission, costing the state \$800,000 in matching NEA grants.⁶¹ But the following year he created a new commission, and the state is receiving federal arts dollars again.⁶²

“Kansas tried to abolish its arts agency, throwing away federal matching dollars, but still failed because con-

stituents were able to push back,” says Noonan, of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. “At the state level, the arts are incredibly resilient.”

During the Jimmy Carter administration of the late 1970s, Joan Mondale, Vice President Walter Mondale’s wife, became such a strong advocate for federal art support that the press dubbed her “Joan of Art.”⁶³ She helped persuade Congress to increase the percentage of federal construction funds devoted to public art from 0.375 percent to 0.5 percent.⁶⁴ Vice President Mondale called up the White House budget director to reverse a \$5 million cut to the NEA’s budget, saying “my wife would divorce me” if it went through.⁶⁵

But the NEA was becoming hard to manage. Grants were extended to artists and organizations based on the recommendations of panels of experts and artists, but each discipline had become its own fiefdom, with little overarching strategic vision. Myriad conflicts of interests emerged, as panel members found ways to reward their friends.⁶⁶

During the Carter administration, a majority of visual arts grants went to abstract artists, something Republicans began to criticize.⁶⁷ Works of dubious merit frequently drew congressional criticism, such as a 1977 project by an “anti-object” artist named Le Ann Wilchusky, who tossed crepe paper streamers from a small plane as an exercise in “sculpting in space.” The project had cost taxpayers \$6,000.⁶⁸

A 1978 study commissioned by the NEA found that arts consumers remained disproportionately well-educated, with teachers and other professionals making up the bulk of audiences. “We could find no evidence that audiences were becoming more democratic,” the study concluded.⁶⁹ And Ronald Berman, a former NEA chair under Nixon, complained in 1979 that the NEA had yet to fund a single work of art worth remembering, despite having spent almost \$1 billion.⁷⁰

When Republican Ronald Reagan became president in 1981, he sought to cut the endowment’s funding by

Arts Requirements Draw Controversy

“While the goals are admirable, the costs are unreasonable.”

More than 50 years ago, Philadelphia adopted an ordinance setting aside a small percentage of the cost of government capital projects for art — the nation’s first such requirement. Now, hundreds of cities and counties, and about half the states, have followed suit, even including Guam, a tiny U.S. territory in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Most so-called percent-for-art programs apply only to government-funded projects. The idea is that having a small percentage of construction funds — typically ranging from 0.5 percent to 2 percent — set aside for art will help spruce up highways, bridges and the like and make them more inviting.

“Why do we have parks all over the place? Why do we care about our environment?” says Erika Lindsay, communications manager for the Office of Arts and Culture in Seattle, which has one of the nation’s oldest percent-for-art programs. “We want places where we feel comfortable, where we enjoy ourselves.”

The federal government has had percent-for-art programs, off and on, since the 1930s.¹ For the last four decades, the General Services Administration has set aside half of a percent of the projected cost of each new federal building to commission works from artists.² The requirement also is increasingly common on college campuses.

Supporters of the percent-for-art concept say it makes public spaces more beautiful and welcoming. Since the terrorist attacks of 2001, airports, which have large capital budgets, have invested heavily in public art in hopes of brightening up terminals to please frazzled travelers.³ “Public art is very popular for airports,” says Robert Lynch, president of Americans for the Arts, an

advocacy group in Washington. “You almost have to have public art in airports to be competitive.”

Even 1 percent of a multibillion project such as an airport expansion can add up to a lot of money. Some places cap the overall amount that can be collected while others limit the size of projects covered by the requirement, such as not requiring the set-aside if a project costs less than \$5 million.

In February, Democratic New York Mayor Bill de Blasio signed legislation increasing the scope of that city’s percent-for-art program for the first time since it was created in 1982. Rather than applying only to the first \$20 million of a project, the law now applies to the first \$50 million.⁴ It also stipulated that more funds should be directed toward local artists.

“Public art plays a crucial role in capturing the extraordinary energy and diversity of this city,” de Blasio said.

But some taxpayer groups argue percent-for-art requirements subsidize a lot of bad art and divert money that could be better spent on roads and sewers. In 2011, Wisconsin suspended its three-decade old percent-for-art program, as part of a large cut to its overall budget for arts spending. When the city council in Madison considered creating its own percent-for-art requirement this spring, Christian Britschgi, an assistant editor at the libertarian-leaning *Reason* magazine, complained: “Madison, Wis., might become the next town to subsidize godawful sculptures.”⁵

And in 2015, Massachusetts Republican Gov. Charlie Baker vetoed percent-for-art legislation, saying, “While the goals of this program are admirable, the costs and structure are unrea-

more than half, from \$175 million to \$85 million.⁷¹ He appointed a task force to come up with ways to justify the cut, but the effort did not pay off, with appointees — including Reagan’s friend from Hollywood, actor Charlton Heston — defending the agency.⁷²

Rising Controversy

If Nixon found the arts a useful bridge to elite opinion makers, the NEA became a useful target for conservatives under Reagan’s successor, Republican George H.W. Bush.

“It was a way for social conservatives within the Republican Party who didn’t

like Bush . . . to embarrass the president,” say Paul DiMaggio, a New York University sociologist who has studied arts policy.

A pair of controversies in 1989 thrust the NEA into the national spotlight. The NEA had given financial support to the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, N.C., which hosted a traveling exhibit of works by photographer Andres Serrano.⁷³ One image, entitled “Piss Christ,” showed a crucifix submerged in urine. North Carolina GOP Sen. Jesse Helms complained, “He is not an artist. He is a jerk. And he is taunting the American people, and I resent it.”⁷⁴ Sen. Al D’Amato, a Republican from New York, tore up a copy of the photo on the Senate floor.⁷⁵

That summer, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington decided to cancel its plans to show a traveling solo exhibit of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, who had received NEA funds prior to his death earlier in the year. Some of the photographs were sexually explicit, including portrayals of sadomasochism. As a protest, other artists projected Mapplethorpe’s images onto the Corcoran’s facade. The Washington Project for the Arts displayed the show in its galleries, attracting large crowds.⁷⁶ The next year, as soon as the show opened at the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, the museum and its director were cited on obscenity charges — the first and only time in U.S. history such charges had been brought against an

sonable in light of the many legitimate demands and constraints on the Commonwealth's capital investment plan.”⁶

But support remains firm for percent-for-art programs in most communities that have had them for a long time. And other communities that feel they cannot afford to devote 1 percent of their capital funding to art have been exploring alternative ways to promote public art. Last year, for instance, Indianapolis began requiring that developers who receive tax incentives from the city devote 1 percent of their project budgets to art.⁷

Other communities are seeking ways to support public art, short of redirecting a set percentage of their capital budgets. Greensboro, N.C., for example, has created a Public Art Endowment to pay for permanent installations. In Buffalo, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery runs a public art initiative in collaboration with the city and Erie County to commission works of art to place around the area.⁸

“Certainly not every community, and probably most communities, don't have \$100,000 to drop on a big name artist's piece,” says Jennifer Henaghan, deputy research director for the American Planning Association, a city planners' trade association. “But art can involve a range of skills and a range of costs. Doing a community mural, you're still getting that sense of local identity, without a big price tag.”

— Alan Greenblatt

¹ Alan J. Stein, “Seattle's 1 Percent for Art Program,” HistoryLink.org, Oct. 18, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/yaapub63>.



Getty Images/Andy Cross

The mural Children of the World Dream Peace is part of an installation at the Denver International Airport. Communities fund public art in a variety of ways, including by requiring developers to spend a percentage of their capital budget on art.

² “Art in Architecture Program,” General Services Administration, <http://tinyurl.com/y8rjz7yf>.

³ Scott McCartney, “Airport for Art Lovers,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 18, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/ybopb8oo>.

⁴ Lauren Lloyd, “NYC increases Percent for Art program funding for the first time in 35 years,” *The Architect's Newspaper*, Feb. 20, 2017, <http://tinyurl.com/ycx46s76>.

⁵ Christian Britschgi, “Wisconsin Ordinance Would Waste Tax Dollars on Public Art,” *Reason*, May 31, 2017, <http://tinyurl.com/y9alfgqu>.

⁶ Shira Schoenberg, “Gov. Charlie Baker vetoes ‘percent for art’ program,” *Springfield Republican*, Nov. 6, 2015, <http://tinyurl.com/y7h5nwfs>.

⁷ Brian Eason, “Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett signs ‘percent for art’ into law,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 9, 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/ybp3vmfk>.

⁸ “The Public Art Endowment, Community Foundation of Greensboro,” <http://tinyurl.com/ydafs8mv>. “About the Public Art Initiative, Albright-Knox Art Gallery,” <http://http://tinyurl.com/ydfclsmg>.

art gallery.⁷⁷ A jury found them not guilty on all charges.⁷⁸

Socially conservative groups such as the American Family Association focused their ire on the NEA, complaining that it supported works that debased values. Congressional Republicans also took up the cause, with Rep. Dick Armey, R-Texas, complaining that the agency sponsored “artists whose forte is ridiculing the values of Americans who are paying for it.”⁷⁹

The NEA reacted by imposing stricter standards on artists, denying funding to artists who smeared chocolate on their bodies or urinated onstage.⁸⁰ But that wasn't enough to satisfy congressional critics. In 1989 and 1990, Helms succeeded in passing amend-

ments barring the NEA from funding works deemed as obscene and mandating that the agency uphold “general standards of decency and respect.”⁸¹

A group of avant-garde artists who became known as the NEA Four (Holly Hughes, Karen Finley, John Fleck and Tim Miller) sued the agency, arguing it had violated their constitutional right to free expression by denying them grant money.⁸² But the Supreme Court ruled in 1998 that the NEA's denial of funds had not amounted to censorship.⁸³

During the 1990s, Congress was unable to abolish the NEA, but it clipped the agency's wings by blocking it from dispensing grants to individuals and requiring that 40 percent of its funds be sent to state and regional

arts agencies.⁸⁴ (The 1965 law creating the agency had required that at least 20 percent be passed through to such agencies.)⁸⁵ In 1996, Congress cut NEA funding from \$162 million to \$99 million.

Although an amendment to abolish the NEA in 1990 had been defeated on a lopsided 64-361 vote, conservative groups continued to call for the NEA's abolition. But congressional leaders realized they could not overcome NEA support among movers and shakers who served on arts organization boards and who hailed from every state.⁸⁶

“After Republicans couldn't eliminate it in 1996, they just gave up,” DiMaggio says. “The flow of anti-NEA press releases basically just stopped in the 1990s.”

There were occasional arts controversies involving public officials, including Republican New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's threat in 1999 to evict the Brooklyn Museum of Art over an exhibit that contained a work he considered sacrilegious.⁸⁷ And House Republicans occasionally pushed the idea of defunding the NEA during the presidency of Barack Obama, but the idea never got very far.

The debate about art and arts funding seemed to have died down. The NEA now devotes much of its attention to audience development, with more policies in place designed to filter out potentially controversial grants. It also has lost relative importance as a patron, with its funding dwarfed

by the amount given by individual donors and state arts commissions and councils.⁸⁸

by the amount given by individual donors and state arts commissions and councils.⁸⁸

“So we coasted,” Mark Swed, classical music critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote earlier this year, arguing that Obama had appointed “caretakers” to run the agency. “The president had to pick his

fighters, and the NEA, it turned out, was never to be one of them.”⁸⁹

CURRENT SITUATION

Strong Support

President Trump's call to eliminate funding for the National Endowment for the Arts has made the agency a front-burner issue for the first time in more than 20 years. When Kevin Kline received the Tony Award for best

leading actor in a Broadway play (“Present Laughter”) on June 11, he thanked “a couple of organizations without whom half the people in this room wouldn't be here — and that would be the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.”⁹⁰

Earlier that day, Delta Airlines and Bank of America had withdrawn their support from of the controversial Julius Caesar production, with Fox News calling it a “disgusting New York City play [that depicts] the president brutally assassinated.”⁹¹

But even critics of the NEA and NEH do not expect Trump to succeed in eliminating the agencies this year, especially since the short-term appropriations bill enacted in May provided them with a slight increase. However, it is unclear how the debate over future spending levels will play out. Even if they remain intact, the agencies could suffer some cutbacks. Still, even if the NEA and NEH were eliminated, that wouldn't get the federal government out of the business of supporting arts and culture. Arts money is sprinkled throughout numerous agencies.

For instance, cultural institutions in Washington such as the Kennedy Center, the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian receive direct federal support. The Indian Arts and Crafts Board, run by the Interior Department, operates three regional museums and offers assistance to federally recognized tribes.⁹² The Forest Service supports folk arts and craft demonstrations and artists' residency programs.⁹³ The Department of Defense spends more than \$400 million annually supporting military bands.⁹⁴ In fact, NEA supporters have long pointed out that the agency receives far less financial support than military bands.

Most states are still in the process of drafting education plans to meet the latest federal requirements. “They're game, but they really don't know what it will look like,” Lynn Tuttle, director of arts education policy and professional development for the Arizona Department of Education. “You have state boards and state educational leadership that for 15 years have had only one version of accountability. If you're

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Getty Images/WireImage/Tim Mosenfelder

Marc Broussard, right, performs at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival on April 29, 2017. Arts supporters say art and culture are good for business. Arts programs generate \$27.5 billion in tax revenue annually and support \$166.3 billion in economic activity per year, according to Americans for the Arts, a Washington-based arts advocacy group.

At Issue:

Should the National Endowment for the Arts be abolished?



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WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, JULY 2017

Eliminating the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is not going to help balance the federal budget. We are talking about a minuscule amount of money by Washington standards — a paltry \$150 million. Yet, by the same logic, eliminating the NEA is hardly going to mean the end of art in America.

After all, private philanthropy contributes more than \$17 billion annually to the arts. Ticket and merchandise sales bring in another \$12.7 billion. In fact, government sources at all levels contribute less than 4 percent of arts funding.

Art would continue to do just fine without a dime of government money.

But doesn't government funding provide an imprimatur of approval that can be leveraged for additional support? Perhaps. But that's exactly why the government should not be in the art-funding business. The government shouldn't be approving or disapproving any type of expression.

It is true that the NEA's ability to withhold funding based on content has been limited since the Supreme Court's 1998 decision in *NEA v. Finley*. But that doesn't mean the NEA doesn't pick and choose guided by prejudices and preconceived notions.

Even when its decisions don't reflect politics or a particular worldview, its funding can be determined by the artistic vogue of the day — abstract or avant-garde art, performance, minimalist, you name it, rather than figurative art or realism in general — as has been the trend over the last few decades. Like other viewers and consumers, I have my own preferences and biases about the types of art I like. The government shouldn't signal its own likes and dislikes.

Nor should we count on the NEA to nourish new artists or those trying to challenge the art establishment. Following a series of embarrassments in the 1990s, the NEA stopped funding individual artists. Today, its money goes to arts organizations and educational programs that have their own built-in rigidities. In many ways, the NEA simply rubber-stamps the artistic status quo. That is ultimately bad for the arts and artists.

The fight to defund the NEA shouldn't be about money. The NEA is little more than a drop in an ocean of red ink. It is hardly the most egregious use of taxpayer money. But it is a prime example of how government intrudes into areas where it does not belong. If we truly care about art, we should want the government to keep its hands off.



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Conservatives have long advocated the elimination of the half-century-old National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), whose budget of \$150 million is only a minuscule fraction of government spending. This, in a nation where the ever-growing contribution of the arts to gross domestic product (GDP) is now above 4 percent of GDP.

The Trump administration proposes totally eliminating funds shared by 19 different art forms (opera, dance, music, museums, and others). Small grants from the agency — most of which are under \$20,000 — are used primarily to educate Americans in all aspects of their culture.

What is the fundamental objection to the NEA? Opponents argue it is an elitist, non-market organization that taxes all to support the interests of the wealthy few. That view is simply incorrect.

First, the NEA is not allowed to subsidize individual artists, so it spreads around small grants to various projects. NEA grants are imprimaturs of quality for projects originating in every congressional district in the United States. A quarter of its grants go to rural areas. As such, the NEA is a goad to private enterprise, employment and GDP in the most underserved areas.

By my calculation, matching grants to museums alone (\$4.25 million for 125 grants in 2016) produced an estimated \$17 million to \$20 million in private funds. By comparison, the Small Business Administration (SBA), with a budget of \$719 million in 2017, performs similar functions by helping business projects. It would make just as much sense to eliminate the SBA!

Elitism is a charge without merit. Put aside the fact that most NEA grants focus on neglected arts and supporting ongoing cultural projects. Consider, instead, evidence that arts attendance is countercyclical: In periods of high unemployment, arts participation rises, and vice versa.

This means that it is the poorer, younger and minority segments of society, not the wealthy, who benefit most from programs supported by the NEA both in ordinary times and in economic downturns.

Finally, opposition to the NEA is misplaced. The Marine Band, the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian all receive government support and, I dare say, will continue to receive it.

American culture promulgated by the NEA is for all Americans, because culture and education change lives, and our country, for the better.

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used to doing it one way, it's hard to do it another way.”

Local Projects

Most cities of any size run a public art program, commissioning works to augment or decorate schools and roadsides. (See sidebar, p. 592.) Many mayors are convinced the arts are a key part of economic development strategies. Some cities are looking for innovative

campus in the city's Tremé neighborhood that will provide a place for musicians and artists to live and work.⁹⁵

In December, 36 people were killed in a fire at an Oakland warehouse that had been turned into an artists' collective known as the Ghost Ship.⁹⁶

In response, California launched a pilot program to identify communities for designation as culture districts, where housing and workspaces could be provided for artists. The state is considering subsidizing loans to renovate such live-work spaces.⁹⁷

deputy research director for the American Planning Association. “Someone who produces pottery doesn't have to be relegated to an industrial district. They can be downtown, or downtown-adjacent.”

Most major cities have a variety of programs in place to encourage or directly support the arts, including artist-in-residence programs in municipal agencies or commissions for works of art to adorn public spaces.

Lately, even one of the most traditional kinds of public art — statues of war heroes sitting on horses — have become highly controversial. Cities including New Orleans, St. Louis and Richmond and Charlottesville, Va., have held contentious debates this year over the question of removing Confederate monuments, which some view as important recognitions of history but others see as endorsements of the racist history of slavery.

Nationwide, dozens of Confederate symbols have been removed from public spaces, an effort prompted by the shooting of nine African-Americans by a white supremacist at a Charleston, S.C., church in 2015.⁹⁹ The effort has gathered renewed momentum this year, thanks in part to a widely replayed and reprinted speech by Landrieu on May 19, in which he laid out his reasons for removing four statues that celebrated the Confederacy.

“The movement which became known as The Cult of the Lost Cause . . . had one goal — through monuments and through other means — to rewrite history to hide the truth, which is that the Confederacy was on the wrong side of humanity,” Landrieu said.¹⁰⁰

The decisions to remove Confederate monuments have sparked protests. Alabama passed a state law in May barring local governments from removing historical monuments or markers that have been in place for 40 years or more.¹⁰¹

“When you look at history, every region of the country has different stories to tell about the formation of the



AFP/Getty Images/Timothy A. Clary

A poster advertises The Public Theater's production of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, which recasts the dictator to resemble President Trump. When the president's son, Donald Trump Jr., tweeted, "I wonder how much of this 'art' is funded by taxpayers?" the NEA rushed out a statement saying it had not funded the controversial production.

ways to support and retain local artists.

Cities that rely heavily on the arts such as Austin, Texas, Nashville, Tenn., and New York have plans to subsidize housing for artists. Mitch Landrieu, the Democratic mayor of culture-rich New Orleans, announced a five-year housing plan last year to provide housing support for “artists and culture bearers.” Construction is underway on a \$37 million

With the growth of the so-called makers movement, with people making crafts in small batches by hand, development agencies in cities such as Baltimore and Indianapolis are sponsoring large workspaces as incubators for artists' and handicraft businesses.⁹⁸

“Cities are changing zoning rules for some types of artisan-focused manufacturing uses,” says Jennifer Henaghan,

state and what took place,” says Republican state Sen. Gerald Allen, who sponsored the prohibition. “When you start removing monuments and statues and portraits or buildings, then in a sense you lose history.” ■

OUTLOOK

Unending Debate

Advocates for the arts say they not only help boost today’s economy but can help young people prepare for jobs in the future. With jobs increasingly being automated, especially those that do not require much analysis or thinking, Kai-Fu Lee, a former Google and Microsoft executive, says perhaps more people should focus on careers in the arts.

“Art and beauty [are] very hard to replicate with AI (artificial intelligence),” Lee said.¹⁰²

While millions more people may not be able to earn living wages at art, the kind of skills used in the arts, such as creativity, are exactly “what business is looking for,” National Art Education Association president Defibaugh says. “They want people who can think creatively and critically for jobs that don’t even exist yet.”

People who lobby for government arts funding have learned that they often can be most effective by highlighting the practical benefits of promoting the arts or arts education. “We realized a long time ago that we needed to show not only that the arts are good for the soul, but that they have an economic impact,” says Lynch, president of Americans for the Arts.

Of course, people also make the “soul” argument. Arts lovers say art can raise the spirits and help society grapple with its deepest concerns. “The

arts community . . . adds immeasurably to the stability, cohesion, intelligence, beauty and resilience of the nation,” Philip Kennicott, art and architecture critic for *The Washington Post*, wrote in March.¹⁰³

Advocates say that since the combined NEA and NEH budgets cost less than \$1 per person per year, and given how states, cities and nonprofit arts organizations leverage their dollars, the country should be able to afford to keep the arts alive.¹⁰⁴

“There’s a philosophical question, whether you care about society producing art, which is how most people judge societies,” says Holochwost, the Johns Hopkins researcher. “Do we want to be the most affluent society in history that also produced no art?”

But given the practical nature of the American psyche, many people consider art a luxury, and even if they value it, they don’t think the government should pay for it. “Art is really important to who we are — as important in some ways as education and religion in forming character,” says Tanner, the Cato Institute fellow. “But it’s not what government should do. It’s something propaganda societies do, like the Soviets and the Nazis.”

This debate appears unending. If art is good for society, then the government should help support it, arts advocates contend. But if the government is picking up the tab, it might make the art so sanitized or safe that it hardly pleases anybody.

That debate preceded the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts, helped fuel the so-called culture wars of the 1980s and ’90s and has returned with President Trump’s proposal to eliminate funding.

It is an argument that seems destined to recur periodically. “I don’t anticipate the argument about support for the arts to go away,” Lynch says. “We have an almost 400-year history of taking steps forward, and then taking steps backward.” ■

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Fractured Atlas, 248 W. 35th St., 10th Floor, New York, NY 10001; 888-692-7878; www.fracturedatlas.org. Nonprofit that provides logistical services to artists and arts organizations.

Heritage Foundation, 214 Massachusetts Ave., N.E., Washington, DC 20002; 202-546-4400; www.heritage.org. Conservative think tank that helped shape the Trump administration's budget; opposes public arts programs as a waste tax dollars.

National Art Education Association, 901 Prince St., Alexandria, VA 22314; 703-860-8000; www.arteducators.org. Research and advocacy organization representing visual arts instructors.

National Assembly of State Art Agencies, 1200 18th St., N.W., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20036; 202-347-6352; nasaa-arts.org. Professional association of state and territorial arts agencies that promotes public support for the arts.

National Center for Arts Research, Southern Methodist University, PO Box 750356, Dallas, TX 75275; 214-768-4498; <http://mcs.smu.edu/artsresearch2014/>. Collects and disseminates data and research that help arts and cultural organizations assess challenges and increase their impact.

National Endowment for the Arts, 400 7th St., S.W., Washington, DC 20506; 202-682-5400; www.arts.gov. Independent agency that is the primary federal funder of the arts.

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Public, private and charter schools in Philadelphia are integrating components of the STEAM education movement into their classrooms and curricula, which blends the arts into science, technology, engineering and math education.

Diehl, Phil, “Oceanside looks for ways to boost arts spending,” *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, July 1, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/y9lo8cg5>.

The City Council and Arts Commission of Oceanside, Calif., near San Diego, recently began a series of community meetings and studies to devise an arts master plan for the city over the next year.

Murphy, T. Michelle, “Supporting and Mentoring the Next Generation of Musicians and Performers with Mentor-Linc,” *Playbill*, June 29, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/yaxssr8q>.

Lincoln Center Education has begun Mentor-Linc, a program to support high school students who have graduated from the Middle Schools Arts Audition Boot Camp, launched by the New York City department of education in 2014.

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