Arts Advocates from 45 States Travel to Washington for Arts Advocacy Day

More than 500 arts advocates convened on Capitol Hill for Arts Advocacy Day, March 24–25, 2014 to advocate for increased federal funding and support of the arts and arts education. Cosponsored by more than 85 national arts organizations, Arts Advocacy Day is the largest gathering of its kind, bringing together a broad cross-section of America’s cultural and civic organizations. After advocates participated in a day of training, 1,500 other attendees joined us at the Kennedy Center for the 27th Annual Americans for the Arts Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts & Public Policy featuring acclaimed New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd. The next day began with the Congressional Arts Kick Off, where Emmy Award-winning TV, film, and stage actor and active arts advocate Alec Baldwin provided inspiring remarks.

Americans for the Arts and The United States Conference of Mayors presented Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rep. Jim Moran (D-VA) with the 2014 Congressional Arts Leadership Awards, given annually since 1997. Additionally, 10 more members of Congress attended the Kick Off, including Reps. Leonard Lance (R-NJ), Louise Slaughter (D-NY), Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), Betty McCollum (D-MN), Adam Schiff (D-CA), Jackie Speier (D-CA), Paul Tonko (D-NY), Tony Cárdenas (D-CA), and Scott Peters (D-CA). Grassroots advocates then met with hundreds more members of Congress and legislative staff throughout the day.

Maureen Dowd Delivers Nancy Hanks Lecture

“Before you experience life, how can you learn about life? The short answer to that is culture. You might say that it is life pre-lived,” said acclaimed New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd at the 27th Annual Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy presented by Americans for the Arts. Dowd delivered her remarks before a sold-out crowd of more than 1,500 at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

In her speech, Dowd displayed the wit and intelligence that won her the Pulitzer Prize, giving examples from her family and childhood of the important role the arts and culture played on the arc of her personal and professional life. She noted the fundamental role that art plays in teaching us about life, especially the lives of others. “Without the arts, people would have underdeveloped imaginations. With underdeveloped imaginations, they would not lead either meaningful lives or moral lives, because without the representations of otherness in art you cannot imagine the pain or the poverty that someone else is feeling. You can’t be a fully formed human being based only on your own experiences. We need to see other lives. Art is precisely such a long and deep and disquieting tutorial for the individual imagination.”
Springtime in Washington, DC is synonymous with cherry blossoms. But it is also known as the kick off for the federal appropriations process, which is why Americans for the Arts scheduled its annual Arts Advocacy Day fly-in conference on March 25.

The timing also coincides perfectly with the Arts Action Fund’s annual policy vote to support legislative positions to advance funding for the arts, arts education, and charitable tax deduction policies. The vote was once again approved overwhelmingly by our members this year.

As a result, hundreds of ArtsAction Fund advocates from across the country gathered together on March 25 to learn about the latest legislative news, arts policy proposals, and research findings to make the strongest possible case to their congressional members to support the arts in America. The next day, they put their training to work and filled the halls of Congress as well as the largest meeting room in the White House.

During this year’s White House Briefing on the Arts, the third in as many years, top domestic policy council officials agreed to review many of the supplemental ways they can support the arts throughout every agency of the federal government. The White House also announced that they would work with Americans for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts to produce a White House Conference on the Arts, Jobs, and Communities in the coming year.

Our hope is that the incoming chair of the National Endowment for the Arts can help ensure the White House Conference on the Arts is a national success. In February, President Obama nominated Jane Chu, executive director of the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, MO, to be the next NEA chairman. She is currently awaiting Senate confirmation, slated to happen sometime this summer.

Until then, we all have lots of work to do to capitalize on our momentum from Arts Advocacy Day! Thank you for all you do for the arts in America.

HEARD ON THE HILL
Celebrities and advocates alike spoke out during Arts Advocacy Day to not only defend funding for arts and arts education, but to inspire and educate others.

“So, it’s true my life would have been a desolate moonscape without the arts.”
Maureen Dowd, Acclaimed New York Times columnist and featured Nancy Hanks Lecture speaker

“Art is everywhere…everywhere we go, art has an obvious, and not so obvious, place in our lives. Government support of the arts is not something we do to hand to some eclectic group of people; we don’t do it for the artists, per say, although they are included in the equation, we do it for the audience.”
Alec Baldwin on Capitol Hill for Arts Advocacy Day to support the arts and arts education

“This year the NEA will make grants to every congressional district in the United States. We are the only industry that exists everywhere. We can only succeed when the entire arts ecology, at the federal level, at the state level, and especially at the local level, is working together.”
Joan Shigekawa, Acting Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

@RepCorrineBrown:
Happy Arts Advocacy Day
@Americans4Arts!
Meet with the Dean of @UFFineArts
Lucinda Lavelli and her group today! #AAD14

@SenJackReed:
Investing in the arts pays educational, cultural, & economic dividends. Thanks to all the arts advocates who are taking part in #AAD14!
The Arts Action Fund monitors arts policy at the federal level and helps bring citizens’ voices to the table when important arts issues are debated. For detailed legislative updates, please visit www.AmericansForTheArts.org/news-room/legislative-news.

NEA Grantee Testifies on Importance of Arts Funding

On April 10, 2014, the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies held a Public Witness hearing to receive testimony about programs under its jurisdiction. Americans for the Arts brought Pamela Hogan, Executive Director of the Fender® Center for the Performing Arts in Corona, CA—and constituent of Chairman Ken Calvert (R-CA)—to Washington to testify before members of Congress. She discussed the impact that her organization’s National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant has had on the community and the kids they serve through their Kids Rock Free® School of Music program. Currently, the NEA is funded at $146 million. While grants from the NEA reach every congressional district, most, including the one the Fender Center received, are no more than $10,000. Yet these small investments leverage non-federal dollars from other organizations and businesses on average $9 for every $1 of federal investment. The committee is currently reviewing the president’s FY 2015 budget request, which includes only level funding for the NEA, a decrease from the request last year by more than $8 million. Ms. Hogan’s testimony provides direct examples and data to help inform members of Congress about the impact of NEA funding while they consider future funding for the agency.

State & Local Arts Funding Rebounding Nationwide

State budget appropriations continue to rebound after the Great Recession. On average, state arts agency budgets increased by 10.5 percent for FY 2013–2014. The aggregate amount states spent on the arts, $306.6 million, translates to $0.96 per capita—up nine cents from the previous year.

Last November, Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick tripled the state’s investment in the Cultural Facilities Fund from $5 million to $15 million. Further, Massachusetts lawmakers increased the state’s investment in the creative communities by allocating an additional $1.6 million to the Massachusetts Cultural Counsel’s $12.5 million budget.

In Michigan, Gov. Rick Snyder’s proposed budget calls for a $2 million increase for the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, which would double its budget from its FY 2012 low of $2.56 million. This recommendation represents an increase of almost 25 percent over the current appropriations.

Even more dramatically, in Texas, the legislature increased the Texas Commission on the Arts’ budget by 71 percent—to $13.4 million—for its 2014-15 biennium.

In each of these states, a strong statewide arts advocacy organization works to educate the governor and state legislators about the positive impact of the arts and culture.

At the local level, Marty Walsh, the newly elected mayor of Boston, has fulfilled a campaign promise by creating a new cabinet position responsible for the promotion of arts and culture. Boston joins only a few major cities with an arts and culture cabinet level position.

In San Diego, the city council approved a half a million dollar increase to the San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture. In increasing the office’s budget, the mayor and city council mentioned Americans for the Arts’ Arts and Economic Prosperity report as justification for the increase, citing the amount of local economic activity the arts and culture produce in the San Diego area.
Help Elect a Pro-Arts Congress

On March 24, the Arts Action Fund hosted a PAC Fundraising Reception with Alec Baldwin on the eve of Arts Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill. “Art and design are everywhere,” stated Baldwin during his remarks at the reception where he shared the importance of the arts in his own life.

Raising funds for the Arts Action Fund PAC is particularly important this year. This year there are a record number of pro-arts leaders not seeking re-election. We are targeting numerous races to help elect a pro-arts majority in Congress. Recently, the Arts Action Fund presented a $2,500 PAC check to Rep. Louise Slaughter, co-chair of the Congressional Arts Caucus, to thank her for her continued leadership of arts policies.

The Arts Action Fund needs the help of their membership to build a strong enough war chest for the 2014 midterm elections. Please visit http://www.artsactionfund.org/pages/members-only/ to play your part in advancing the arts in America, or use the enclosed envelope to mail in a check.

Alec Baldwin was the headline speaker at the Arts Action Fund PAC fundraiser in Washington, DC on March 24, 2014.