Arts Advocates Lobby Capitol Hill for Pro-Arts Policies

On March 7-9, over 500 arts advocates from 44 states gathered in Washington, DC for Arts Advocacy Day, part of the National Arts Action Summit. Presented by Americans for the Arts in partnership with 89 national arts organizations including the Arts Action Fund, this strong, unified coalition has been instrumental in helping to advance key legislative initiatives for over a quarter century. This year, advocates were joined by nine-time Grammy nominated R&B and jazz recording artist Ledisi, guitarist and composer Kaki King, and poets of Split This Rock, as well as guests speakers National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Jane Chu, National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Chairman Bro Adams, and President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities Executive Director Megan Beyer. Now marking its 26th year, the two-day event kicked off on Monday with a day of legislative training sessions about current arts issues on Capitol Hill and how to become effective advocates for increased support for the arts. The following morning at the Congressional Arts Kick Off in the Senate Kennedy Caucus Room, several members of Congress addressed the attendees before their Hill meetings, including Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI), Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD), and Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM), who shared with the crowd new legislation he introduced on Arts Advocacy Day to support artists and the creative economy, the CREATE Act. Check out event highlights and learn about ways to keep the advocacy momentum going throughout the year at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/AAD.

John Maeda Delivers the 2016 Nancy Hanks Lecture

“You were transported in a way that you didn’t have to understand or even want to understand, because that is what art does to us,” declared John Maeda as he began his lecture on the heels of a technological and musical performance at the 29th Annual Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy. The lecture is presented by Americans for the Arts Lecture on Arts and Public Policy. The lecture is presented by Americans for the Arts at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on March 7, 2016. After an introduction by Congressional STEAM Caucus co-chair, Representative Suzanne Bonamici of Oregon and a performance by groundbreaking multi-media composer and guitarist, Kaki King, Maeda explored the importance of STEM’s evolution to STEAM and his life’s work of making the justifiable case for creativity in all aspects of the economy and personal life. He further addressed the creative economy while closing his remarks, stating, “A large problem today is that we think that artists should starve, or that’s some kind of wonderful idea. I never believed in that. I believe that artists can be fruitful pieces of the economy.”
Hundres of arts advocates from across the country gathered together on March 7–9 for our Arts Advocacy Day summit to learn 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.

Americans for the Arts Action Fund members voted overwhelmingly for the arts policy positions put forward on Arts Advocacy Day to increase funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, ensure new, well-rounded arts provisions are fully implemented in K-12 education, and preserve charitable tax deductions for nonprofit arts organizations.

We had the honor of taking actress Elizabeth Banks to meet with key Congressional leaders like Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Chris Murphy (D-CT) to talk about arts education and the Turnaround Arts program.

We also presented U.S. Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) the Congressional Arts Leadership Award at the Nancy Hanks Lecture. The award, which recognizes distinguished service on behalf of the arts, is part of a series of Public Leadership in the Arts Awards given annually by Americans for the Arts and The United States Conference of Mayors. Bonamici’s amendment to the Every Student Succeeds Act will ensure increased opportunities for STEAM education.

We want to also commend The United States Conference of Mayors for the release of their top 16 points the next president should enact. Of the 16, two are arts-related. One point calls for the support of a better funded National Endowment for the Arts and the elevation of the arts and culture to a cabinet level position. The other priority point seeks the vigorous promotion of tourism. We thank our good friends, the nation’s mayors, for firmly supporting the arts and culture in their initiatives.

10 Questions to Ask Candidates

The Arts Action Fund created these 10 Questions to Ask Candidates to help advocates secure specific arts platform and policy positions from each candidate.

1. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the arts and culture sector represents a $704.2 billion industry in America, which accounts for 4.23 percent of the nation’s annual GDP and generates a $24 billion trade surplus to the United States. What policies would you pursue to support the dynamic growth of this economic sector?

2. The nation’s arts and culture sector employed 4.7 million wage and salary workers in 2013, earning $339 billion. What specific economic policies would you propose to grow this important segment of the American workforce?

3. Federal education law has been recently updated for the first time in over a decade. This incarnation, entitled Every Student Succeeds Act, lists the arts as a component of a “well-rounded education”, and maintains dedicated funding for Arts Education programs. How will you help ensure that ESSA is properly implemented so that children in all 50 states can receive the benefits of an Arts Education?

4. There is growing momentum to incorporate the Arts into Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education to become STEAM, so that every child receives a well-rounded education and the foundation to spark innovation in the future. In order to generate a more creative workforce, how would you encourage state and local education agencies to nurture the next generation of students to better compete in a creative global economy driven by innovation and technology?

5. The budget of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was cut in half during the 1990s and it is currently funded at $148 million, which represents a federal arts investment of just 46 cents per American. Would you consider increasing federal arts funding for the NEA to $1 per American so that nonprofit arts organizations in communities across the country can provide even more accessible arts programs for all Americans, including active military, veterans and their families.

6. The NEA Military Healing Arts Partnership with Walter Reed Hospital and Fort Belvoir has made groundbreaking progress in incorporating arts therapy into patient care for wounded veterans. How would you ensure that every veteran has access to the healing power of the arts?

7. The nonprofit arts & culture jobs industry generates $9.5 billion in income tax revenue back to the federal government, but these charitable organizations also rely on critical support from individuals for tax-deductible donations in order to operate their public programs. Would you continue to protect tax-deductible incentives for individuals to donate to nonprofit arts charities?

8. As you crisscross the country campaigning in both large and small and urban and rural communities, how have you observed the power of arts to make these communities unique?

9. How have the arts, including creative writing, had an impact on your life personally?

10. Where, when and what was the last arts and/or literary experience that you took part in or attended?
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.

**Federal Support for the Arts Off to A Good Start**

The President’s budget request released in February included a nearly $2 million increase for both NEA and NEH, bringing their budgets up to nearly $150 million each. On May 25, 2016, the House Subcommittee on the Interior Appropriations matched the President’s request.

Also included in the President’s request is $500 million to support a new block grant program, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants, of which at least 20 percent of the funds are directed to well-rounded education, which includes the arts.

In the Senate, Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) introduced a comprehensive creative economy bill, S.2648, CREATE Act to support artists and entrepreneurs alike, building on years of advocacy about the economic impact of the arts.

In the House, legislation now includes “art organizations” among groups that the Bureau of Prisons can partner with to reduce recidivism, as part of committee-passed legislation, H.R. 759, Recidivism Risk Reduction Act. The language was secured through Arts Caucus member and PAC recipient Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA), who is bringing the success of his work within California state prisons as a model for the rest of the country, as described in the photo above.

**State and Local Update**

Over the past year, the Arts Action Fund (AAF) has welcomed several, new state level partners to our arts advocacy family. Currently, 48 of the 50 states now have a statewide arts advocacy organization working to promote the arts and culture at the state level with their governor and state legislature. Joining the Arts Action Fund family are: Creative New Mexico, Arkansans for the Arts, and Kentuckians for the Arts.

The National Association of Counties (NACo), recently passed a new resolution on the arts and culture. This resolution, which focuses on the arts in rural counties, authorizes NACo staff to lobby on the arts and culture to the U.S. Congress and the President. Further, this resolution enables local county officials to more easily embrace the arts and culture and incorporate them into their county’s work and budget.

In Kentucky, arts advocates have already chalked up a victory. Concerned that newly elected Governor Matt Bevin—who was facing a large budget deficit—might target the arts for disproportionate cuts, Kentuckians for the Arts worked to inform the governor on how important the arts are to the state’s economy. The governor ended up preserving the majority of the funding for the Kentucky Arts Council. His administration has since commented on how important the arts and culture are and that they would never be unfairly targeted.
The Arts Action Fund hosted a PAC Fundraising Reception with nine time Grammy-nominated artist Ledisi, in conjunction with Arts Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill. Ledisi encouraged advocating for arts education in particular; she mentioned during her speech that a teacher inspiring her to pursue music changed her life. By putting her on the path to win scholarships, Ledisi was able to attend college to study voice.

“You are the voice for the little students out there waiting for someone to see something in them,” the R&B artist said. At the end of her speech, she sang “Like A Bridge Over Troubled Water,” saying, “my passion is to give little kids the opportunity to let their arts shine.”

The Arts Action Fund PAC was the top $5,000 host for Representative Louise Slaughter’s annual Finger Lakes Wine Reception in Washington, D.C. Rep. Slaughter has been the co-chair of the 172-member Congressional Arts Caucus for over 20 years and is an avid supporter of arts education and of the arts as a meaningful way to boost the economy. Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, a close friend of Congresswoman Slaughter and another leader for the arts, was in attendance, as well as Congressman Paul Tonko (D-NY). The Arts Action Fund PAC is proud to sponsor Rep. Slaughter, whose dedication to securing increased funding for the National Endowment for the Arts is unparalleled in Congress.