Arts Action Fund members came together in Philadelphia for the 2016 Democratic National Convention (DNC) July 25–28th. Here the Arts Action Fund hosted ArtsSpeak@DNC at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in partnership with The United States Conference of Mayors, The National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM), Americans for the Arts, and local partner the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. ArtsSpeak@DNC is a national nonpartisan policy forum to discuss the transformative power of the arts to impact 21st century learning, the economy, and healing, especially for wounded military veterans and their families. ArtsSpeak@DNC panelists included Americans for the Arts Artist Committee members Ben Folds and Ben Vereen, who also both performed; National Constitution Center President & CEO Jeffrey Rosen (moderator); Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper; MusiCorps Founder and Director Arthur Bloom; U.S. Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici of Oregon; Mayor of West Sacramento, California Christopher Cabaldan. The events brought the arts front and center at this largest Democratic political gathering in the country. Every day during the convention, the Arts Action Fund had a table at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, where many of the Democratic caucus meetings were taking place. Convention delegates were able to stop by and pick up information and materials. The Arts Action Fund welcomed over 1,000 new members as a result of the events over the two weeks during both political conventions! To learn more about ArtsSpeak@DNC and see photos and video clips from the panel discussions, visit www.ArtsActionFund.org/

At our ArtsSpeak@RNC event in Cleveland at the iconic Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, attendees heard Lt. Governor John Sanchez’s call to action, stating, “Invest in the arts and what they mean to the future of our communities.” Gov. Mike Huckabee moderated our ArtsSpeak@RNC panel composed of Oklahoma City Mayor and U.S. Conference of Mayors President Mick Cornett, New Mexico Lieutenant Governor John Sanchez, the CEO and Executive Director of Cuyahoga Arts & Culture Karen Gahl-Mills, artist Ben Folds, and arts advocates from the medical community Cleveland Clinic’s Arts & Medicine Institute Director Maria Jukic and Dr. Akram Boutros, the CEO of Cleveland MetroHealth. Attendees also got the chance to see Ben Folds perform at the end of the panel, which was livestreamed for the public on our website. You can watch a recording of the panel, view photos, media clips or purchase commemorative swag at www.ArtsActionFund.org/pages/2016-RNC.
Message from President & CEO
Robert Lynch

This July, I was honored to help deliver the Arts Action Fund’s message to both Republican and Democratic audiences through ArtsSpeak. ArtsSpeak is a national bipartisan policy forum held at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions to discuss the transformative power of the arts on people’s lives, schools, and communities, with the ultimate goal of electing candidates that support doubling arts funding. Our singular message is that the arts are important to America in all those ways, and for themselves—for their beauty and for the ways they bring joy and understanding to the American life.

The Arts Action Fund distributed commemorative memorabilia that promoted new study findings, including that Americans are more than twice as likely to vote in favor of a candidate who increases arts spending from 45 cents to $1 per capita, than to vote against them (Americans Speak Out About The Arts, Americans for the Arts, 2016).

We were able to secure historic arts venues to hold both our panels. Panelists included policymakers, private sector leaders, and Americans for the Arts Artist Committee members Ben Folds and Ben Vereen.

In both Cleveland and Philadelphia, I had the opportunity to bring together not only key arts leaders as panelists, but also elected officials who were in town for the Conventions at a series of Arts Dinners. At the RNC Dinner, I connected with several notable Republicans, including Congressman Ken Calvert of California. At the DNC Dinner, I was joined by New York Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, Chair of the Congressional Arts Caucus, and Senator Tom Udall of New Mexico, to name a few.

What Americans Believe About the Arts

In July, Americans for the Arts published the results of a new public opinion poll that shows that Americans are more broadly engaged in the arts than previously understood. The research study, entitled “What Americans Believe About The Arts” was conducted with Ipsos Public Affairs.

The poll contains a variety of valuable data points for arts advocates, including the finding that 63 percent of the population believes the arts “lift me up beyond everyday experiences”, and 73 percent say the arts are a “positive experience in a troubled world.” Nearly 7 in 10 adults (68 percent) attended an arts event in the past year.

The study also found that the American public overwhelmingly supports arts education. 88 percent agreed that the arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education, and 82 percent believe that the arts should also be taught outside of the classroom in the community.

Perhaps most exciting for Arts Action Fund members, the research shows that the public wants more funding for the arts. In fact, Americans are more than twice as likely to vote for a candidate who favors increasing arts spending from the current 45 cents to $1 per person than to vote against them.

Especially in an election year, elected officials are attuned to what their constituents are thinking and feeling. Americans of all demographics feel a strong connection to the arts, and they believe the arts should be more present in our communities.
Shaping Federal Arts Policy

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.

Potential NEA Funding Increase on Hold
Prior to recessing for the summer, the House passed the Interior Appropriations bill, which includes a nearly $2 million funding increase for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). If enacted, this would provide a total of $150 million to the agency for FY 2017 and meet the President’s request. The Senate is proposing a smaller increase of half a million. Both committees, however, went above “level” funding in proposing these increases. Final funding decisions are anticipated in December or March 2017.

ESSA Resources
With the new K-12 education bill in place, arts education advocates are working with their state education leaders to ensure that the arts are a part of their state’s education policies, including measured within state report cards, considered in accountability systems, and supported within well-rounded education. Under the U.S. Department of Education’s proposed regulation, the upcoming 2016–2017 school year would be a transition year for states to finalize their accountability systems to measure school performance. Advocates are using Americans for the Arts’ digital hub AmericansForTheArts.org/ESSA for resources and knowledge sharing.

Turnaround Arts Program Expands (Again!)
In May, Turnaround Arts schools nationwide gathered in Washington, DC to performed at the White House. Here, First Lady Michelle Obama announced that this new 5-year program would again expand to reach 68 schools in 15 states and DC. The program started with just eight schools in 2012! New artists joining as mentors include Whooji Goldberg, Dave Matthews, and Ledisi, who performed at Arts Advocacy Day this past March. Mrs. Obama also announced that in the next Administration, the program will join forces with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and continue to add schools in the coming years.

State and Local Update
Eleven governors are up for election on November 8th. In seven of the races, the incumbent (or current political party) is expected to retain the seat. It should be noted that Indiana Governor Mike Pence, now that he is Donald Trump’s Vice Presidential running running mate, is prohibited from seeking re-election. Current Lt. Governor Eric Holcomb, who oversees Indiana’s Tourism Department and has generally been supportive of the arts and culture, was selected to replace Gov. Pence on the ballot.

But, the four other races (MO, NH, NC and WV) are considered toss-ups and could prove decisive in that state’s support for the arts and culture. For example, in Missouri, term-limited Governor Jay Nixon (D), has resisted the state’s legislature’s efforts to cut the state arts council’s funding. Without the stewardship of Gov. Nixon, it is unclear the future level of support for the arts in the capitol. Additional Governors retiring are Jack Markell (DE), Jack Dalrymple (ND), Peter Shumlin (VT), and Early Ray Nixon (D), has resisted the state’s legislative efforts to cut the state arts council’s funding. Without the stewardship of Gov. Nixon, it is unclear the future level of support for the arts in the capitol. Additional Governors retiring are Jack Markell (DE), Jack Dalrymple (ND), Peter Shumlin (VT), and Early Ray Nixon (D), has resisted the state’s legislative efforts to cut the state arts council’s funding. Without the stewardship of Gov. Nixon, it is unclear the future level of support for the arts in the capitol. Additional Governors retiring are Jack Markell (DE), Jack Dalrymple (ND), Peter Shumlin (VT), and Early Ray Tomblin (WV).

The Arts Action Fund is also tracking ballot initiatives for the arts and culture in the upcoming November elections. In San Francisco, a new coalition of 40 arts and cultural organizations as well as nonprofit homeless organizations have come together in support of the “Allocation of Hotel Tax Funds” measure. The proposed ballot measure would restore money from the city’s Hotel Room Tax—which is a tax of 14 percent levied on hotel visits—to benefit cultural organizations and families experiencing homelessness. Since it would divert funding in an already existing tax, this would not be a new tax or increase voters’ current taxes. On July 19, the city’s Department of Elections officially approved the bond measure to be placed on the ballot. The coalition is now drafting its ballot question and will be launching a marketing campaign for voter education. The ballot question will need be approved by two thirds of voters.

Supporting Arts Advocacy in States and Cities

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On June 9th, the Arts Action Fund Political Action Committee (PAC) was the top host for an event held in support of the re-election campaign for Congressman David Cicilline. Over $8,000 was raised in support of the Rhode Island Democrat, who has been a longtime arts supporter dating back to his time as mayor of Providence when he supported giving tax breaks to local artists, craftspeople, and movie productions amidst a troubled economic climate. As a member of the Congressional Arts Caucus and the Congressional Creative Rights Caucus, Cicilline has consistently supported funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and has been a longtime friend of Americans for the Arts. The Congressman shared some inspiring remarks on the importance and transformative power of the arts and arts education, even naming championing for the arts as one of his biggest issues.

The Arts Action Fund also hosted its annual reception and fundraiser at the Americans for the Arts Convention in Boston on June 17th, where President and CEO Robert Lynch, Arts Action Fund Executive Director Nina Ozlu Tunceli, and Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance President Maud Lyon gave updates on #ArtsVote2016 and the grassroots work for the 2016 political conventions in Cleveland and Philadelphia. Members will next receive the Congressional Arts Report Card.