

May 13, 2025

The Honorable Christopher M. Ward
Chairman, Committee on Arts, Entertainment, Sports, & Tourism

The Honorable Benjamin Allen
Chairman, Joint Committee on the Arts

1021 O Street, Room 6610
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Allen and Assembly Member Ward:

Thank you for your leadership in convening a hearing to consider federal policy actions affecting California's creative sector. I'm writing on behalf of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA)—representing all of America's 56 state and jurisdictional arts councils—to offer a national perspective on recent events.

Public funding for the arts plays a critical role in America's arts infrastructure, and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is a keystone in that system of support. Federal investment in the arts ensures access to the arts for all residents:

- ▲ **The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) supports community arts activities in all 435 U.S. congressional districts.** Programs receiving NEA support reach more than 24 million people each year. Through its 2,400+ direct grants and an additional 8,171 state and regional awards that regrant federal funds, the NEA achieves broad national reach—especially in rural and low-income areas. The impact of the NEA in California is illustrated in [Attachment A](#), which shows the locations of federal and state arts awards.
- ▲ **Congress has directed that 40% of the NEA's grant funds must be allocated to state arts agencies.** Through this exemplary [federal-state partnership](#), state arts agencies direct how funds are deployed, in accordance with local needs. This partnership leverages additional public and private investments and results in over 30,000 grant awards made each year by state arts agencies and regional arts organizations. This gives every community a stake in sustaining the NEA.
- ▲ **A healthy arts sector requires a [mixture](#) of public, private and earned funds.** NEA grants reach 678 more counties than private foundations, and public dollars provide community access that other funds do not.

Recent federal actions threaten to destabilize this system of support. [Terminations](#) of grants by the NEA are affecting thousands of arts programs in California and across the nation. Many community-based arts programs have been canceled, adversely affecting public access to the arts. Over the longer term, the White House has recommended [eliminating](#) the NEA and the other federal cultural agencies. **These federal actions undermining the arts reflect a false economy that weakens an important American industry and hurts every state and jurisdiction—especially California.**

According to [data](#) from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, California has the largest arts sector of any state, adding \$289 billion in value to the state's economy. The NEA and the California Arts Council catalyze cultural production and grow the talent pool for this important American industry, which creates one in ten jobs in California. **Because of the importance of the creative industries in California, the state has a lot to lose in this time of uncertainty—and a lot to gain by strengthening public investment in the arts.**

California's creative sector produces tangible benefits for the state. Many sectors create jobs, but only the arts provide a [five-fold return on investment](#) that:

- ▲ strengthens California's economy,
- ▲ improves education outcomes for California students,
- ▲ fosters community cohesion,
- ▲ facilitates good health, and
- ▲ preserves cherished cultural traditions for future generations.

The arts also offer a net gain for government. California's fine and performing arts groups, alone, return more than [\\$9 billion](#) in state and local tax revenues, which helps the state's bottom line.

Given rollbacks in federal arts funding, state investments in the arts are more important than ever. The California Arts Council is the only entity that makes arts funding accessible to all 58 California counties. Its grants and services are pivotal to the state's arts ecosystem.

By themselves, private philanthropy and the marketplace do not deliver the advantages of the arts to all communities. **[Only the public sector ensures equitable access to the arts, especially for rural and low-income regions and populations that have historically faced resource barriers.](#)** [Data analysis](#) from NASAA shows that the California Arts Council funds hundreds of underserved organizations that other arts funders have left behind.

Additional investment in the California Arts Council can help the state meet this moment. Despite having the nation's largest creative economy, California currently [ranks #32 in the nation](#) in state arts agency legislative appropriations. The state of California

spends just \$0.82 per capita on its state arts agency. By comparison, the state of New York spends \$4.39 per capita.

When local businesses prosper, everyone benefits. When kids receive a creative education, everyone benefits. When people are healthier, less isolated and more civically engaged, everyone benefits. The California Arts Council ensures that all California populations—not just those that are urban or affluent—have such opportunities to thrive through the arts. To this end, I respectfully urge the California General Assembly to strengthen its investment in the California Arts Council, which will help all of your communities to flourish.

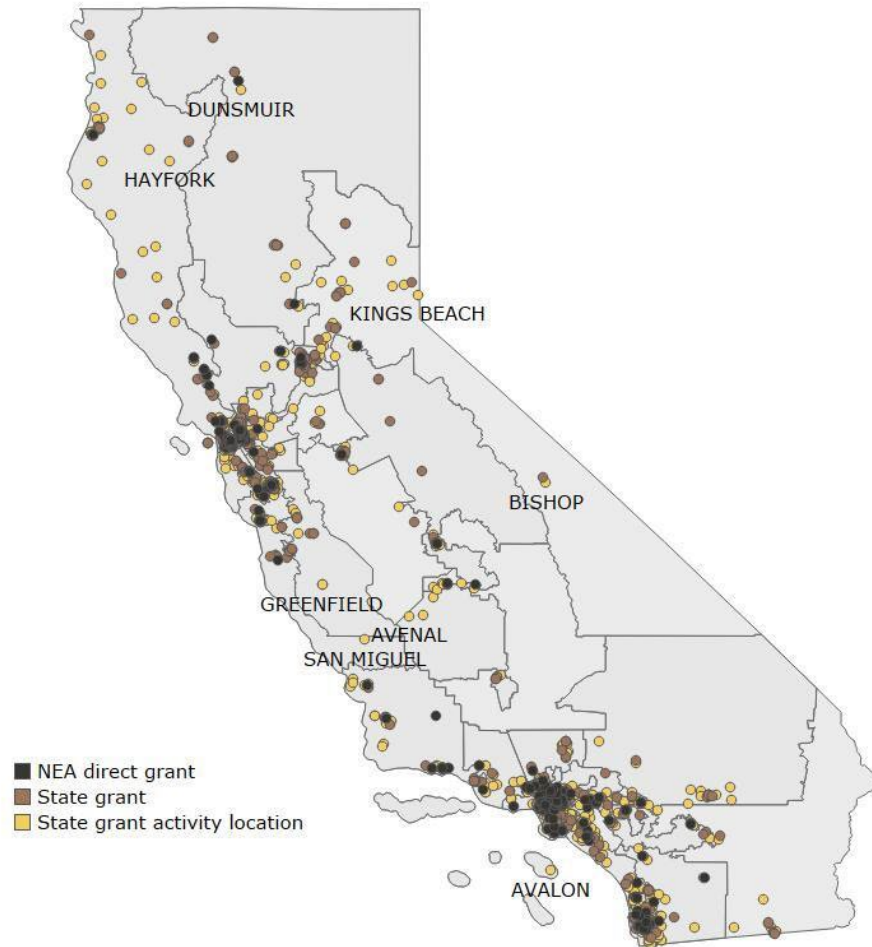
With sincere thanks for your public service,



Pamela A. Breaux
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

Attachment A

National Endowment for the Arts / California Arts Council Grant Locations by U.S. Congressional District



Symbols indicate at least one grant award recipient for FY2023. In densely populated areas, one symbol may indicate multiple awards. Grant location data are drawn from final descriptive reports submitted to the National Endowment for the Arts. Geographic boundaries represent U.S. congressional districts for the 118th Congress.