

Contending with Economic Uncertainty *Advocacy Talking Points for State Arts Agencies* January 2008

Advocacy can make a difference. Elected officials support the arts – even during difficult economic times – when they understand the tangible benefits that accrue to communities through the arts and perceive the arts as an influential constituency. These talking points can help both council members and constituents communicate the value of the arts with legislators and other decision makers.

- **Show how the arts and state arts agencies are “part of the recovery solution.”** Economics, education and health care will be priority areas for public policy in the upcoming legislative session. Position your agency as a contributor to state progress in these areas and underscore how your constituents contribute to economic productivity, educational success and community well-being. Points to address – and illustrate with local examples – might include:
 - The arts contribute to economic competitiveness through the generation of jobs, tax revenue and consumer spending.
 - Arts activities draw new dollars into state economies through tourism and the export of unique cultural goods.
 - Businesses, in order to thrive, require the imagination, problem-solving and communications skills that arts education cultivates.
 - Arts education contributes to overall student success in school, enhancing academic achievement and educational attainment as well as school climate and student self esteem.
 - City planners, property developers and economists are increasingly recognizing the arts as an effective anchor for development and revitalization.
 - A thriving arts sector creates a high quality of life, which is beneficial in attracting and retaining businesses and workers and ensuring a healthy tax base for the state over the long term.
 - Citizens support the arts, and voters expect it to be an ongoing area of state investment.
- **Promote the arts as prudent public policy during difficult times.** Although always a wise course, the arts are a timely investment for a state facing hard economic conditions because:
 - Now more than ever, states need the economic, educational and civic benefits of the arts.
 - The arts contribute to community resiliency, and help communities to find creative solutions to complex problems and to heal from traumatic events.
 - Underserved communities are at particular risk during economic downturns, and the arts are a proven strategy for addressing their needs. Rural, inner city and historically poor areas need the arts advantage during times of economic turmoil.
- **Clearly articulate not just the benefits of the arts, but also the benefits of *government support* for the arts.** Help elected officials understand the unique role that public dollars play in leveraging additional funds, providing equitable access to resources, fostering good business practices and ensuring accountability.
 - **Leverage additional dollars for the arts.** Government funding provides an influential stamp of approval that helps to catalyze investments from other public and private sources.

- **Provide equitable access to resources.** State arts agencies play a key role in ensuring that funding and participation opportunities are available to all regions of the state – rural, urban and suburban – as well as to all populations, regardless of income, age, ethnicity or ability.
 - **Foster good business practices.** Recipients of state arts agency grants are required to demonstrate exemplary management and planning practices, which promote the sustainable growth of arts enterprises.
 - **Ensure accountability.** State arts agencies ensure arts investments are made in accordance with the public interest, as well as with transparency and accountability for results.
 - **Provide strategic leadership.** By investing in the arts through state arts agencies, elected officials ensure that a strategic, long-term vision guides cultural development in their state over time. State government is also in a unique position to provide leadership that encourages cross-sector collaborations and collaborative problem-solving.
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- **Measure both the return on the current investment and the consequences of cuts.** Combine statistical and anecdotal evidence to show how the arts contribute to community life, generate positive economic outcomes and engage citizens in every corner of the state. When facing the prospect of cuts, make sure you are able to quantify the effects that those cuts will have on citizens, communities and cultural organizations. Don't neglect to document the scope and impact of your services, as well as your grants. Customize your information to show policy makers the impact of your programs in their individual districts.
 - **Show how your agency is a judicious steward of public dollars.** Eager to cut costs, elected officials and budget officers are placing ever more emphasis on efficiency and downsizing. Visibly identify the measures you are adopting to conserve resources and streamline systems.
 - **Make every event an arts advocacy occasion** by prominently acknowledging state funding and providing opportunities for elected officials to be publicly thanked for the state's investment.
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