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National Endowment for the Arts: A New Look

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Our Mission

The National Endowment for the Arts is an independent agency of the U.S. Government created by Congress to support the arts and to provide education and access to the arts for all Americans. Our mission is:

- To foster the excellence, diversity and vitality of the arts in the United States, and
- To broaden public access to the arts.

We carry out that mission through grants, leadership initiatives, partnership agreements with state and regional organizations, partnerships with other Federal agencies and the private sector, research, arts education, access programs, and advocacy.

This booklet is designed to help individuals and organizations determine if they are eligible to receive support for a project in the arts and to broadly outline the work of the National Endowment for the Arts.

History

Established in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts has awarded over 110,000 grants to arts organizations and artists in all 50 states and the six special U.S. jurisdictions. This public investment in American culture has resulted in literally millions of new works reaching every corner of America.

Since 1965, the example at the Federal level has led to the establishment of public arts [agencies in every state](#) and the creation of [seven regional arts agencies](#). Public arts agencies in small towns and cities have grown to over 3,800. Through our partnerships, we have helped to increase the amount of private donations to the arts. For every dollar the Endowment awards, other sources contribute many more to make art happen in thousands of communities.

The number of arts organizations has grown as well:

- Nonprofit theaters have grown from 56 to over 425.
- Large orchestras have grown from about 100 to over 230.
- Opera companies have grown from about 27 to over 120.
- Dance companies have grown from 37 to over 400.

Along with this tremendous explosion in professional arts organizations, the public/private partnership have also made a demonstrable impact in arts education. Millions of children now receive formal arts education in local public school systems, helping to improve their overall performance.

Public participation in the arts has increased as well over the past 30 years. More people have had the opportunity to attend first-rate arts events in their communities than ever before, and attendance at the arts is greater than attendance at professional sports events.

To find out more about the history of the National Endowment for the Arts and the impact of Federal funding, please request a copy of our report [A Brief Chronology of Federal Involvement in the Arts 1965-1995](#) available through our Office of Communications.

Structure

The agency's chief executive officer, the Chairman, is appointed for a four-year term by the President of the United States

with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. [Jane Alexander](#) was named to this position by President Clinton and sworn in on October 8, 1993.

The [National Council on the Arts](#) advises the Chairman on policies, programs, grants and procedures. Pursuant to legislative changes enacted in 1997, the Council membership is in transition. The 18 sitting members were nominated by the President, and confirmed by the Senate, for staggered six-year terms. The 1997 legislation required the appointment of six members of Congress to the Council to serve in an ex officio, non-voting capacity, and limited the overall size of the Council to 20 members beginning in September 1998.

All of the Arts Endowment's applications are reviewed by rotating groups of arts experts including professional artists and arts administrators and knowledgeable laypersons.

The [staff](#) is comprised of a senior executive team, directors with expertise in the arts, and civil service employees. Staff receives and reviews all applications, provides technical assistance and information to constituents, processes all awards and rejections, keeps abreast of developments and trends in the arts, and works to bring the accomplishments of our grantees to the attention of the American public. Staff is grouped under four divisions responding to the funding categories, as well as administrative offices.

How the Endowment Works

Beginning in 1996, the Arts Endowment considers applications and proposals from eligible individuals and organizations in four ways: [Grants to Organizations](#), [Grants to Individuals](#), [Partnership Agreements](#), and [Leadership Initiatives](#). Each of these areas is introduced in this guide under separate headings.

In the most general terms, the National Endowment for the Arts supports exemplary projects in the arts, including dance, design, folk and traditional arts, literature, media arts (film, television, radio, audio art), music, musical theater, opera, theater, visual art (including painting, photography, sculpture, crafts, works on paper, other genres) and multidisciplinary works.

Artistic excellence and merit are the primary criteria in grantmaking. Also considered are the potential impact of the project and the applicant's ability to carry it out.

Nonprofit tax-exempt organizations of demonstrated artistic excellence may apply for one grant each fiscal year, which begins on October 1 for the Federal government. Applicants may be arts institutions, local arts agencies, arts service organizations, tribal communities and Indian tribes, official units of city government, and other organizations that can further the goals of the Arts Endowment as outlined in our mission statement.

Consortia of such organizations are also eligible, and state arts agencies and regional arts organizations may apply in accordance with the restrictions outlined in the guidelines. Individuals should refer to the Grants to Individuals section of this booklet. At this time, the only category to which individuals may apply is Literature Fellowships.

Those planning to apply for Endowment assistance can request guidelines and application forms through the Endowment's [Webmanager](#). The next round of applications will be available on the web site at the beginning of the calendar year (the next round begins in January 1998). The most recent, though expired, guidelines can be viewed on the website in the [Guidelines](#) section.

The Application Process

Every application is assessed for thoroughness and completeness by agency staff. Late or incomplete applications will be rejected.

Applications are first reviewed by outside experts according to the arts discipline most relevant to the project. Panel recommendations are then forwarded to the National Council. The Chairman makes the final decision on Council-recommended applications, and each applicant is notified with a grant award or rejection letter.

The process for applying for Grants for Individuals, Partnership Agreements, and Leadership Initiatives varies, so please read those sections for details.

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