

STATE AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Something that many people don't realize is that the NEA doesn't subsidize anyone or any organization. Everything the Arts Endowment does is done in partnership. Its most enduring partnerships exist with 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies and six regional arts organizations. In fact, 40 percent of this agency's grantmaking funds are distributed through these partnerships. It's another avenue by which NEA provides federal support for projects that are born in and benefit local communities.

For nearly 40 years, the Endowment's support for state arts agencies (SAAs) has helped to leverage state funding from other sources, which for most agencies now exceeds federal support. The SAAs play an extensive role in furthering the NEA's reach and impact by filtering national resources to arts organizations at the state and local level. The NEA works in cooperation with SAAs through partnership agreements to carry out a national plan reflecting common goals. These goals include the following components: arts education, arts in underserved communities, and Challenge America.

An example of these partnerships at work is *Challenge America: Writing Towards a Better Life in Utah*, an anthology of collected poems written by adolescents often overlooked by traditional arts programs, including those in hospitals, homeless shelters, detention centers, and alternative education facilities. With funds from the NEA's Challenge America program, the Utah Arts Council supported six separate creative writing workshops around Salt Lake Valley, serving more than 100 young people in that area.

The North Carolina Arts Council used its partnership grant to create two new music initiatives for the North Carolina Public Schools: the North Carolina Curriculum, Music and Community project (CMC) and the Junior Appalachian Musicians (JAM) program. Out of a statewide desire to preserve Appalachian musical culture, the CMC project uses local musicians and their musical traditions as a basis for teaching the state-mandated educational curriculum. As a complement to CMC, the JAM program

Young fiddler Clay Sutton plays at Bluff Mountain Festival, Madison County, North Carolina, as part of the North Carolina Arts Council's new music initiatives.

Photo by Cedric N. Chatterley



pairs children of varying musical talents with local musicians for after-school instruction in fiddle, guitar, banjo, mandolin, bass, or dulcimer.

Regional arts organizations (RAOs) were created by state arts leaders, in partnership with the Arts Endowment and the private sector, to transcend state boundaries and give the public access to a greater and richer variety of arts experiences. A critical role of the RAOs is to make excellent dance, theater, musical theater, opera, and literature presentations available in underserved communities. RAOs also assist the Arts Endowment and other funders in providing programs nationally.

One of these programs is the NEA Shakespeare in American Communities initiative, the largest tour of Shakespeare in American history. In partnership with regional arts organization Arts Midwest and private funder The Sallie Mae Fund, Shakespeare in American Communities is bringing professional Shakespeare productions and related educational activities to more than 200 communities across all 50 states (see more about the initiative in the National Initiatives section).

The National Endowment for the Arts also supports the NEA Regional Touring program, which helps bring high-quality performing artists and companies to communities across the country with the help of federal, state, and private funds. Offered in partnership with the six regional arts organizations, the program provides assistance for interstate touring and gives priority to underserved communities.

Such touring efforts have included performances by the Seattle-based Geoffrey Castle Band, whose lead violinist is a self-proclaimed “crazy death-defying stunt man with an electric violin.” With support from the Eastern Oregon Regional Arts Council—a member of the regional arts organization Western States Arts Federation—and the NEA Regional Touring program, the Geoffrey Castle Band made a stop in LaGrande, Oregon, a sparsely populated area of eastern Oregon. The residents of this small town embraced the eclectic band, dancing in the aisles during the performance.

The next day, Geoffrey Castle visited the Hilgard Youth Facility, a lockdown correctional facility for young men aged 14-18. There he received an equally warm reception and taught the young men how to perceive music as a form of language. “I think I gave them something, but they gave me so much more,” said Castle. “This was one of the highlights of the many tours I’ve done. I had more fun playing for them than anywhere else.”