Equity & Access Priorities at the National Arts Action Summit

POLICY SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This is a summary of the 18 federal Issue Briefs that compose the 2021 National Arts Action Summit (Summit) legislative portfolio and the equity and access focus that is integrated into each topic. The briefs are assembled each year by the Summit’s Legislative Planning Committee that collaborates over the course of four months to craft proposals and case-making content. The “asks” of Congress and the current Administration are arrived at through a consensus-based approach, ensuring that the stakeholders have timely input into the process.

All organizations and advocates are welcome to use the Issue Briefs in pursuit of pro-arts policy change.

Language use is a key element of access, equity, and inclusion work, and can help or hinder efforts in this area. We have used the term Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) to describe individuals from prioritized communities. We recognize that this term is not universally used but felt it was specific for the purpose of these Issue Briefs and consistent with the language being used by the Biden-Harris Administration. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with language that your community members use to describe themselves.

ACTION NEEDED

We urge Congress to (by topic area):

- **COVID-19 Recovery:** Invest in the creative and cultural recovery through federal funds distribution and guidelines, matching grants, forgivable loans, and other mechanisms; and support arts education, arts-integrated teaching, place-based cultural practice, intergenerational education, oral history, and the preservation of folk traditions with a focus on organizations that are led by members of/based in Black, Indigenous, and communities of color and have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, the economic crisis, and historical inequities.

- **Disaster Response:** Improve the support for creative workers after disasters by making permanent reforms enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic affecting self-employed workers, single-person (nonemployer) businesses, and low employer businesses. Data shows that a third of all nonemployer businesses have Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) owners; BIPOC-owned nonemployer businesses are growing at four times the national rate; and 40% of all nonemployer businesses are owned by women.

- **Creative Economy:** Congress should invest in the country’s creative economy and promote economic inclusion to recognize artists, entrepreneurs, and nonprofit arts organizations as contributors to the small business community and to improve and revitalize rural, remote, and underserved areas by supporting the CREATE Act and the PLACE Act and support the establishment of a performance right for sound recordings broadcast by terrestrial (AM/FM) radio. Individual artists are 3.5 times more likely to be self-employed than other U.S. workers, and include above average percentages of women and BIPOC entrepreneurs.

- **Education:** The White House and Congress should affirm arts education as a right for all children and encourage state and local education authorities to use federal funding to provide arts education. As Education Secretary Arne Duncan stated in 2012 about arts education, “This is absolutely an equity issue.
and a civil rights issue.” Access to arts education drastically decreases in schools where 75% or more of the students can access free lunch, in schools that are in rural settings, and in schools eligible for Title I funding, most of which are majority-BIPOC. We also urge Congress to strengthen access to and affordability of higher education in the arts by funding federal financial aid in a way that encourages students to pursue disciplines where they have the most interest and talent and supports the federal government’s efforts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion within higher education. BIPOC youth are significantly less likely to both attend and complete college-level study, including because of the cost of doing so.

- **Federal Cultural Agencies:** Ensure, through increased funding, the National Endowment for the Arts’ reach to millions of people in thousands of communities through grant awards such as 40% direct to 56 states and territories, and regional arts agencies; that the majority of grants go to small and medium-sized organizations (budgets less than $2 million), which tend to support projects that benefit audiences that otherwise might not have access to arts programming; that at least 40% of NEA grants take place in high-poverty neighborhoods; and 35% of grants reach low-income audiences of under-resourced populations such as people with disabilities, people in institutions, and Veterans. Similarly increase grantmaking for museums and public broadcasting.

- **Juvenile Justice:** Instruct U.S. Department of Justice to engage arts organizations that focus on racial justice and equity, and have demonstrated experience working with youth who have been, or are at risk of, exposure to the juvenile justice system/trauma. Almost 70% of all incarcerated youth are BIPOC.

- **Veterans:** Support increased funding through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to expand the number of creative arts therapists employed in the VA providing clinical treatment in medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs), and in virtual and telehealth services that reach a large number of rural and isolated Veterans.

- **Transportation:** Ensure local control is returned to transportation projects by removing the prohibition on the U.S. Department of Transportation from supporting the expenditure of funds for public art in local transit projects. This would enable local artists and design teams to integrate artistic elements into transit-related projects that reflect the cultural preferences of the community, improve feelings of safety and community pride, and reduce incidences of graffiti and vandalism.

- **Tax Policy for Individual Artists:** Support the Artist-Museum Partnership Act, update the Qualified Performing Artist Tax Deduction, and pass the Help Independent Tracks Succeed (HITS) Act to harmonize the tax treatment of music production, in order to address fairness and equity in tax treatment for individual artists. Over 40% of all creative workers are independent workers, and overall, creative workers average $40,000 in income each year, although that number is lower for BIPOC creative workers ($37,000).

- **Tax Policy for Nonprofit Sector:** Expand and extend the universal charitable deduction that encourages all taxpayers to give more during these challenging times and as the nation recovers and rebuilds. The nonprofit arts sector relies on charitable gifts from donors across the economic spectrum that add up to an essential investment that enables nonprofit arts organizations to respond to public needs and form community partnerships through education, artistry, economic development, and social service programs.