

INTRODUCTION

By Randy Cohen, Vice President of Research, Americans for the Arts

During the last half century, the local arts agency (LAA) movement in the United States has flourished—with the number of LAAs growing from 400 to 4,500. They provide programs, services, and funding to strengthen their communities and make the arts accessible to all. It is no surprise then that Americans are now more engaged in the arts than ever before, with nearly three-quarters of the adult population attending the arts and nearly half personally involved as arts makers. LAAs make the arts relevant to the community that they serve. It is because of this vital presence that tracking the health, operations, and impact of LAAs is a matter of pressing concern.

This report focuses on the fiscal year 2019 findings from our *Profile of Local Arts Agencies*. The Profile is an annual survey of a core set of LAA indicators—budget trends including sources of revenues and categories of expenditure, partnerships, community development, programs and services, diversity and equity policies/initiatives—that we supplement with rotating modules, enabling us to dig deeper into specific aspects of LAA work. The inaugural 2018 Profile included modules focused on (1) equitable grantmaking and investment in the arts and (2) LAA staff salaries and benefits. The 2019 Profile included modules on (1) partnerships with non-arts organizations and (2) local and state option taxes used to fund the arts. Each module has its own separate analysis available on our website at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/LAAProfile.

I conducted my first LAA survey for Americans for the Arts in 1991 (so long ago, we didn't even ask for fax number). The one constant over the years is my ongoing appreciation of how LAAs evolve to keep pace with how their community evolves.

- Back in those days, less than a quarter of LAAs used the arts to address community development issues. Today, that figure is 95%. Nearly every LAA provides not just cultural benefits to their community, but also social, educational, and economic ones.
- We also see LAAs pushing themselves and their communities on the issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Half of LAAs have diversity policies related to board, staff, or grantmaking. Yet, the data also reveal the challenges of the diversity of leadership—with less than 10% of CEOs being a person of color.
- An LAA planning evolution over the past decade is an increase in communities integrating the arts into their broader community-wide master plans—including the arts among all civic priorities.
- A data point that remains steady is that there are always about one-third of LAAs that have completed a cultural planning effort within the previous five years before completing the survey—and those that do have consistently seen greater rates of budget growth than those that don't. This report is no exception (see Pages 35-37).

There are multiple ways to use the findings in this report. Perhaps you are looking to justify a partnership with your Chamber of Commerce. Your board will be delighted to know that about

half of LAAs are already doing so. Or maybe you just want to know how your LAA budgets and programs stack-up statistically against similar LAAs from across the country. For that, you can jump to the [LAA Dashboard](#)—our online interactive tool! Give it a try and let us know how it works for you.

Because the data used for this report was collected from May through August in 2019, we need to acknowledge that the landscape has changed radically due to the COVID-19 virus in early 2020. It has already resulted in the cancelation of thousands of arts and cultural events across the country and resulted in billions of dollars of damage to our arts ecosystem. Communities that rely on a portion of hotel-motel tax funds to support the arts are already feeling the pinch and are likely to see the impact stretch well into 2021. Given this jolt, some of the findings in this report (e.g., budget forecasts, cash reserves, and community priorities) likely no longer reflect what the LAA field is currently experiencing.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to 633 local arts agencies that completed the 2019 Profile survey—an increase of almost 100 respondents from the 537 that completed the 2018 survey! We thank each one of you, as this report would not be possible without you. We would like to express our appreciation to the National Endowment for the Arts for their generous support of the 2019 Profile of Local Arts Agencies, the LAA Dashboard, and field education opportunities. A study of this magnitude is a total organizational effort, and I extend my appreciation to the amazing board and staff of Americans for the Arts. The research staff responsible for producing this survey and report are Ben Davidson and Isaac Fitzsimons. Special thanks also to Ruby Lopez Harper, Clayton Lord, Jessica Stern, Narric Rome, and Peter Gordon for their project development and writing work.

Thank YOU for everything you do to advance the arts in America!