

INTRODUCTION

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

During the last half century, local arts agencies have flourished in the United States—growing in number from 400 to 4,500. They provide programs, services, and funding to strengthen their local arts industries 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. Local arts agencies (LAAs) make the arts relevant to the community that they serve. It is because of this vital presence that tracking the health, operations, and community impact of LAAs is a matter of pressing concern.

In 2018 Americans for the Arts began a new study to accomplish just this: *The Profile of Local Arts Agencies*. The Profile is an annual survey designed to collect a core set of LAA indicators—budget trends, sources of revenues, partnerships, community impact programs, policies and programs—and supplement it with rotating modules that enable us to dig deeper into specific aspects of their work. This year’s two modules focus on (1) equitable grantmaking and investment in the arts, and (2) salaries and compensation of LAA staff. Each module has its own detailed report available on our website: www.AmericansForTheArts.org/LAA.

I conducted my first survey of LAAs back in 1991. It was all paper back then and we didn’t even ask for fax numbers! I am continually amazed how the local arts agency movement has evolved. In those early days, for example, less than a quarter of LAAs were using the arts to address community development issues. Today, that figure is more than 90 percent. There has always been about one-third of LAAs that have worked on cultural planning within the previous five years—and those that do have always seen greater rates of budget growth than those that don’t. An exciting evolution over the past decade, however, is an increase in broader community-wide plans that now include the arts among all of the civic priorities. 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 LAA leadership—with less than 10 percent of CEOs being a person of color.

There are multiple ways to use the findings in this report. For those who care about how the arts are strengthening their communities socially, educationally, and economically, tracking LAA programs and services is a great place to begin. Or, perhaps you are looking to justify a partnership with your Chamber of Commerce. Your board will be delighted to know that more than half of LAAs are already doing so. Or, quite simply, how does my LAA stack-up statistically against similar LAAs from across the country? For that, you can jump to the LAA Dashboard—our new online interactive tool! Give it a try and let us know how it works for you.

I would like to express my gratitude to 537 local arts agencies that completed our first Profile survey as well as the 1,117 individuals who completed the LAA Salary and Compensation

Survey. We thank each and every one of you, as this report would not be possible without you. We would like to express our appreciation for the Ford Foundation's generous support of the 2018 Supplemental Module on Grantmaking and Equitable Investment. A study of this magnitude is a total organizational effort; appreciation is extended to the entire board and staff of Americans for the Arts. The Research Department staff responsible for producing this survey and report are Ben Davidson and Graciela Kahn. Special thanks also to Clayton Lord and Ruby Lopez Harper in our Local Arts Advancement Department for their project development and writing work.

Thank you for everything you do to advance the arts in America.