

Americans

and the

ARTS

*Highlights from a Nationwide Survey of the Attitudes of the American
People Toward the Arts*

*Prepared for the American Council for the Arts
The National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies
June 1996*

Conducted by Louis Harris

Printed by Scholastic Inc.

Table of Contents

	Page
<i>About ACA and NALAA</i>	2
<i>A WORD ABOUT THIS STUDY</i>	3
<i>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</i>	
The Proper Federal Role in the Arts	5
Participation in the Arts Remains High	7
Public Attendance at Arts Events	8
The Public Assesses the Impact of Arts in Education	9
<i>ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS</i>	
Participation in the Arts	12
Public Attendance at Arts Events	16
What the Arts Do for People	19
The Public Assesses the Impact of Arts in Education	21
The Role of Government in the Arts	22
<i>APPENDIX: TREND RESULTS AND QUESTIONNAIRE</i>	25

ABOUT ACA AND NALAA

The American Council for the Arts (ACA) is a national organization whose purpose is to define issues and promote public policies that advance the contributions of the arts and the artist to American life. ACA conducts research, sponsors conferences and public forums, publishes books, reports, and periodicals, as well as advocates for legislation that benefits the arts before Congress.

The National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (NALAA) is the professional association of local arts agencies, the nation's community arts councils, and city arts commissions. Based in Washington, D.C., it specializes in training, information dissemination, peer networking, and maintaining a collective national voice for local arts agencies and the arts on a community level. NALAA serves over 3,800 local arts agencies across the United States.

A WORD ABOUT THIS STUDY

This study is the seventh survey of "Americans and the Arts," the landmark series of studies under the auspices of the American Council for the Arts (ACA) which have documented the levels of interest and involvement in the arts among the American people, as well as how they feel about key issues such as the arts and education and the pivotal issue of support and funding of the National Endowment for the Arts. This study has been prepared for ACA and NALAA (the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies). While the previous studies were funded with generous grants to ACA from Philip Morris Companies, this survey was made possible through generous grants from the John and James L. Knight Foundation and the AT&T Foundation. Louis Harris, who designed and executed each of the previous Americans and the Arts studies also contributed in kind professional services in lieu of fees paid him.

This current survey is significant because, contrary to widespread claims, its results demonstrate that the climate of public opinion is conducive to continued support for the arts. In the past, these studies have had a major impact on the appropriations levels which Congress has made available to the arts and humanities, on what has been assumed by political leaders and the media about the arts, and on how those vested with the responsibility of managing the arts view themselves and their prospects for growth and satisfying the arts needs of the American people.

Over the past few years, the arts have been beset with what those opposed to government funding of the arts have called a sea change in public attitudes. Their claim is that backing for public funding of the arts has collapsed, disappeared, mainly in a public outcry over the policies of the NEA in making grants to individuals who have produced works of art that were proclaimed by their critics to be obscenities. The arts have also been labeled as a form of elitism, a waste of taxpayer money. While these are not new charges, the current Congress has voted legislation which puts into jeopardy the very existence of a government presence in the arts. Indeed, the legislation which was passed earlier this year called for an end of the National Endowment for the Arts after a two year period. Funding has been reduced to below \$100 million for the first time since the late 1970s.

Thus, the stakes in this study are high, indeed. If, as critics maintain, the arts have declined in the number of Americans who participate in them or attend events sponsored by arts institutions, then this survey will reflect that fact. If the public has soured on the federal role in the arts, then the survey is designed to find that out, too. A key acid test is contained in the trend questions which test how much the American people are prepared to increase the taxes they pay in order to support the arts with financial assistance at the federal level. Not only was the survey conducted around tax filing time, but almost all of the dialogue about taxes has been how to relieve tax burdens on taxpayers, let alone ask for any increases for any purposes.

All but two of the questions in this study were asked in Americans and the Arts studies.

The two new questions center on the pivotal issue of the importance and role of local, state, and federal arts councils. One question probes the extent to which the public perceives grants given by local, state, and national arts councils are providing an important stimulus to giving by the private sector, especially the business community. The other question, asked for the first time, probes how important the American people feel it is to have governmental arts councils as such exist at the local, state, and federal levels.

The questionnaire used in this latest survey parallels closely the basic structure and order used in previous studies. A copy of the 1996 Americans and the Arts study questionnaire with the overall nationwide results is attached to this report. It began by asking if people participate individually in 10 different disciplines of the arts. Then in eight areas of the arts — the movies, the theater, pop music concerts, live opera or musical theater, ballet or modern dance, art museums, and historical, science, or natural history museums — people were asked about their having attended such arts events in the past 12 months. The survey then asked people if they experience a positive feeling from the arts, as expressed in four common reactions people have had in relating to the arts. Then, the entire area of attitudes toward the arts and education was explored, and how people feel about supporting the arts in the educational curriculum of the schools. Then, the cross-section was asked its understanding of the needs of museums, on the one hand, and performing groups, on the other, to obtain funds from other sources, besides earned income, from box office receipts. Each person surveyed was asked how important he or she feels it is to have governmental arts councils, and how much grants from such councils stimulate much greater giving from the private sector, especially business. Then, the cross-section was asked straight out if it thought several sources — individuals, state government, local government, the federal government, business and corporations, and foundations — should provide financial assistance to arts organizations. Finally, each person surveyed was asked how much he or she was willing to be taxed more to support the arts at the federal level.

The sample of 1,600 adult Americans has a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases. By the way it was drawn, every American adult had an equal chance of being drawn into the sample. The sample and the conduct of the study represent the highest standards in the practice of the polling profession.

Louis Harris takes full responsibility for the design, questionnaire, and analysis of this study. The actual survey management was in the hands of Peter Harris, CEO of the Peter Harris Research Group. Interviewing took place on this study over an extended period from November 1995 to April 1996, with half conducted at the end of 1995 and the other half in 1996. No significant shifts took place in the two sampling periods. Mr. Harris, ACA, and NALAA acknowledge the pivotal and generous role of the Knight Foundation and the AT&T Foundation in providing funds for this study that made it possible to conduct in the professional manner required. Neither foundation was involved in the substantive input in the design or execution of the study, and had no role in the conclusions drawn from it.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Proper Federal Role in the Arts

At a time when it is widely claimed that public support has dwindled for federal assistance to the arts, and, indeed, for governmental underwriting of the arts at the state and local levels, this study indicates that no such collapse has taken place in the public's support for government funding of arts programs. To the contrary, support for the arts remains solid and strong.

- By a decisive 79% to 19% margin, a better than 3 to 1 majority of the American people are convinced that it is important that "there should be federal, state, and local councils for the arts to develop new programs, research, and provide financial assistance to worthy arts organizations." The clear understanding is not that government will take over the financing of the arts, but that arts councils provide seed money to specific arts organizations and institutions that "stimulates many times more money by corporations and the private sector."
- When asked specifically about each type of arts council, a 67% to 29% majority support local government arts councils giving financial aid to the arts. This is up seven points from 1992 levels and up four points from the level recorded in 1987.
- When asked about state government arts councils funding for the arts, a 63% to 33% majority believes that state government should fund the arts, identical to the number who favored such giving in 1992, but down four points from 1987.
- By 57% to 39%, a clear majority of the American people favor the federal government funding the arts, down only marginally from 60% in 1992 and also down from 59% in 1987.

In many ways, of course, the acid test is not what people want government to do, but what they themselves are willing to pay in added taxes to see the government support the arts:

- A 56% to 39% majority of Americans say they would be willing to be taxed \$10 more to have the federal government support the arts. While a solid majority, nonetheless, back in 1992, a higher 64% to 34% majority was willing to be taxed.
- A substantial 61% to 37% would be willing to be taxed \$5 more in order to pay for federal financial support for the arts. This is eight points down from 1992, when a comparable 69% to 30% majority favored paying an added tax for this purpose.
- When asked about a \$15 added tax on them personally to support federal assistance to the arts, 49% of the public nationwide said they would be willing, but an equal 49% said they would not. Four years ago, a 56% to 43% majority would have been willing then to have such a federal tax increase put on them.
- Finally, when asked if they would be willing to be taxed \$25 more to finance Federal assistance to the arts, 40% of the American people said they would be willing, although 57% say they would not. In 1992, a somewhat higher 50% said they would accept such an added tax, though 49% said they would not.

Willingness of American People to Be Taxed to Support Federal Assistance to the Arts

INCREASE TAXES BY:	1987		1992		1996	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
\$25	54%	44%	50%	49%	40%	57%
\$15	60%	37%	56%	43%	49%	49%
\$10	69%	29%	64%	34%	54%	41%
\$5	74%	25%	69%	30%	61%	37%

Observation: The most significant finding from this series of questions is that while people are willing to pay somewhat less in higher taxes for the arts than in past surveys, nonetheless a solid 13 point majority of the American people is willing to be taxed \$10 more to fund federal help to the arts. An even higher 24 point majority is willing to be taxed an additional \$5 to fund federal efforts in the arts. Far more important than the specific dollar amount they are willing to be taxed more to support the arts, it is clear from these results that the public simply will not tolerate an ending of federal financial backing for the arts, nor the dismantling of the NEA, nor ending a federal presence in the arts.

Participation in the Arts Remains High

When asked about 10 disciplines in the arts, the number of people who report participating in the arts has by and large remained at the same levels, or slightly below those found in recent Americans and the Arts surveys. Those participating in photography is 44%, down from 48% reported in 1992. Those who weave, do needlepoint, or other handwork come to 36% of all adults, down from 41% four years ago. The number who participate in painting, drawing, or in computer art has risen from 26% four years ago to 33% today. The number participating in dance, ballet, aerobics, or jazz dancing is 30%, down from 38% four years ago. The number who play a musical instrument is 28%, one point above 1992. Those who write poetry or stories is 25%, two points above the 23% who said the same four years ago. The number who sing in choir or choral group is 18%, down from 21% in 1992. The 11% who make pottery or ceramics is three points less than the 14% reported in 1992. The 7% who sculpt with clay is identical to what it was four years ago. The 5% who work with a local theater group is the same as it was four years ago. The sharpest declines have taken place among those who participate in dance, down by eight points. By contrast, painting and drawing, playing of musical instruments, and writing poetry and stories are all up from four years ago.

However, when the total number of adults who participate in one of the specific arts disciplines asked about is added up, in the aggregate, a substantial 86% of the American people are involved in some form of expression and output in the arts. Women participate more than men, young people more than older citizens, the college educated more than those with a high school education, the more affluent more than the less affluent. Ethnic and minority group people participate in the arts fully as much as the white majority. But these differences pale before the fact that no fewer than 79% of every key group broken out participates in the arts each year.

These results put to rest decisively any claim that the arts are the province of the affluent and elite. Indeed, they are deep-rooted in the lives of the vast majority of the American people themselves. Significantly, 33% more of the American people participate in the arts than turn out to vote in a presidential election.

Public Attendance at Arts Events

Much as with participation in the arts, levels of attendance at arts events show only minor variations at best compared with past levels:

REPORTED ATTENDANCE AT THE ARTS

Attended in Past Year:

	1987	1992	1996
Movies	72%	72%	70%
Live performances of plays, pantomime, or other kinds of theater	62%	59%	50%
Music performances by pop singers, bands, or rock groups	57%	55%	49%
Visited science, natural history, or history museum	46%	49%	47%
Art museums or art galleries that exhibit paintings, drawings, sculpture, or other works of art	51%	53%	44%
Live performances of classical or symphonic music by orchestras chamber groups, soloists, or other classical musical events	27%	23%	30%
Live performance of opera or musical theater	23%	24%	23%
Live performances of ballet or modern dance, folk or ethnic dance, or jazz dance	30%	22%	21%

Clearly, among the public, the appetite for live arts performances and museums remains at relatively high levels, despite some falloffs. The drop-offs in attendance are more evident than are the increases.

The four areas of most significant declines in attendance since 1987 have been attendance at live dance performances, off 9 points; live performances of the theater, off 12 points; visits to museums, off 7 points; and pop concerts by singers and rock groups, off 8 points. However, attendance at live performances of classical or symphonic music by orchestras and chamber groups is up 3 points over the same period. What is more, most of the declines took place between 1987 and 1992 than from that year to the present.

However, as in the case of participation, when all those adults who have attended one or more arts events are added up, they come to 86% of the population, identical to the number who participate in the arts. More young people than older people go to arts events. There are not significant differences by race or region. Telling is the fact that among those groups who attend the arts least, sizable numbers from those groups attend the arts: 74% of those 65 and older, 81% of those with only a high school education or less, 80% of those with incomes of \$25,000 or under. These are overwhelming numbers by any measure. More people attended arts events last year than attended sports events that charge admissions, a fact which has not changed in over two decades.

The Public Assesses the Impact of Arts in Education

As in previous years in Americans and the Arts studies, overwhelming numbers of Americans endorse the benefits that they believe accrue to children when they are exposed to the arts in the regular, required curriculum of the schools. Over 9 in 10 expressed the view that when children get involved in the arts in school, they become more creative and imaginative,” “develop skills that make them feel more accomplished,” and “learn to communicate well (develop speaking and writing skills).” Similar levels believe studying art in schools “makes learning in school more exciting and interesting than when they have no exposure to the arts,” and “make young people more tolerant of other cultures.” Over 8 in 10 Americans also feel that exposure to the arts “helps young people develop discipline and perseverance” and helps them “to learn skills that can be useful in a job.” It is ironic that there is near unanimity over the value of teaching the arts in the schools at a time when the cutbacks in such arts courses have been draconian in magnitude.

What the Arts Do for People

With 86% of the public exposed to either participation in or attendance at the arts, it is no surprise that sizable majorities of the American people express graphically what the arts do for them:

- By 71% to 25%, most Americans say, “The arts are a positive experience in a troubled world.”
- By 68% to 30%, most Americans add that “the arts give you an uplift from everyday experiences.”
- By 68% to 30%, another big majority say, “The arts give you pure pleasure to experience or to participate in.”
- By 63% to 32%, a majority feel “the arts allow you to find a source of creative expression, give you a rare experience.”
- Thus, when it comes down to it, a solid 62% to 30% say that “if there were no arts available here in this community, I would miss them.” Majorities in all regions of the country, all sizes of place, men and women, the least and the best educated, people of all races and ethnic backgrounds, and all age groups find a common bond in their conviction that they would sorely miss the arts.

Clearly, the importance of the arts to the American people is as great as it has been over the past decade. In a more stressful world, the arts provide an important emotional uplift — a respite, an emotional safety valve, a way to express creativity and at the same time feel refreshed to face the ardors of daily living.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The Arts Touch the Lives of an Overwhelming Majority of Americans

A substantial 86% of the adult population of the United States participates in at least one of the 10 disciplines of the arts asked about in this survey. The following table indicates that patterns of participation vary significantly by age, education, and income. However, even among those groups who participate the least, the levels are also high by any measure:

PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS

Participate in One or More Arts Disciplines

	Do	Do Not
Total Nation	86%	14%
By Sex		
Men	82	18
Women	87	13
By Age		
18-29	91	9
30-49	85	15
50-64	83	17
65 and over	80	20
By Income		
Under \$25,000	79	21
\$25,000-34,999	88	12
\$35,000-49,999	88	12
\$50,000-74,999	84	16
\$75,000 and over	89	11
By Education		
High school or less	79	21
Some college	88	12
Four year college graduate	87	13
Postgraduate degree	94	6
By Race		
White	85	15
Latino	84	16
Black	83	17
By Region		
East	83	17
Midwest	84	16
South	85	15
West	88	12

Clear-cut patterns emerge, with women, young people, those who achieved higher educations, and those in higher income brackets participating more than any other groups. However, it is important to point out that the levels of participation by those groups who show the least overall participation also is very high, indeed. For example, 82% of men participate in one or more arts activities, as do 80% of those 65 and over, 71% of those whose education never went beyond high school, and 83% of those with household incomes of \$25,000 or less a year.

Observation: It is apparent that by the 1990s in America, the arts had a part in the lives of close to 9 in 10 families. Certainly to claim that the arts are mainly the interest of or involve the affluent and elite of the nation is proven by these results to be false. The arts have a mass base. They do not belong exclusively to big cultural centers of the affluent. This fact explains to a large extent why the mandate for supporting public programs in the arts is so widespread and so deep. Few areas in the public or private sector — outside of the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter — affect so many people.

Here Are the Trends of Specific Participation in the Arts:

TREND OF PARTICIPATION IN SPECIFIC ARTS DISCIPLINES

Participated in During Past Year	1987	1992	1996
Photography	49%	48%	44%
Needlepoint, weaving, or other handwork	38%	41%	36%
Paint, draw, or engage in computer art	32%	26%	33%
Dance, ballet, modern dance, aerobics, jazz dancing	36%	38%	30%
Play a musical instrument	28%	27%	28%
Write poetry or stories	25%	23%	25%
Sing in a choir or other choral group	17%	21%	18%
Make pottery or ceramics	12%	14%	11%
Make sculpture or work with clay	7%	7%	7%
Work with a local theater group	5%	5%	5%

Participation in specific disciplines in the arts is revealing, for it demonstrates that the arts are diverse and broad enough to encompass the tastes and interests of just about every segment of the population:

- 44% report they participate in photography, off four points from the 48% who reported this activity in 1992. Most into photography are baby boomers, the better educated, men, whites, those with higher incomes, and people who live on the West Coast.
- 36% report they do needlepoint, weaving, or other handwork, down five points from 1992. Most into this activity are older women, whites and Latinos, those with a high school education, and people in the South and East.
- 33% of the adult public participates in painting, drawing, or computer art, up from 26% in 1992. Young people under 30, those 30 to 49, those with either a four-year or postgraduate education, people with incomes of \$35,000 and over, men, and those living in the East and South are more active in painting.
- 30% report participating in dance, ballet, modern dance, aerobics, or jazz dancing, down eight points from 1992. Women, blacks, Latinos, young people, those in the middle to upper income brackets, and those who live in the Midwest are most active in dance.
- 28% report playing a musical instrument, up from 27% in 1992. More likely to play an instrument are young people under 30, blacks, men, those who are better educated, and those who live in the Midwest.
- 25% report writing stories or poems, up two points from 23% in 1992. Blacks, Latinos, young people under 30, and those with postgraduate degrees are more likely than others to write poetry and stories. Fully 30% of black women report writing poetry, higher than any other group in the population.
- 18% say they sing in a choir or other choral group, down three points from 1992. Women 50 and over, blacks, those with incomes under \$35,000, and those who live in the South and Midwest are most likely to sing in choirs and choral groups.

- 11% report making pottery or ceramics, down three points from 1992. Women, young people, those in the middle income brackets, people who live in the East and South, blacks and Latinos, and those whose education did not go beyond high school are more likely to participate in making pottery or ceramics.
- 7% sculpt or work with clay, identical to what was found in the prior two studies. Young people under 30, those with a higher education, people in the middle income range, and those who live in the East are more into sculpture.
- Finally, 5% report working with a local theater group, identical to the 1992 level. Most involved with the theater are those 50 to 64, men, people with postgraduate degrees, and those in higher income brackets.

Public Attendance at Arts Events

When the number of adult Americans who attend one or more arts events in the past year are added up, a substantial 86% report having attended the arts. The following table illustrates the penetration of the arts at every level of society:

BREADTH OF ATTENDANCE AT THE ARTS

Attended One or More Arts Events in Past Year	Don't Attend	Attend
Total Nation	86%	14%
By Region		
East	85%	15%
Midwest	88%	12%
South	83%	17%
West	89%	11%
By Sex		
Men	87%	13%
Women	86%	14%
By Age		
18 to 29	93%	7%
30 to 49	90%	10%
50 to 64	77%	23%
65 and over	74%	26%
By Education		
High school or less	80%	20%
Some college	94%	6%
Four year college graduate	95%	5%
Postgraduate degree	97%	3%
By Income		
Under \$25,000	80%	20%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	89%	11%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	96%	4%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	91%	9%
\$75,000 and over	96%	4%
By Race		
White	86%	14%
Black	84%	16%
Latino	86%	14%

As might be expected, there are sharply different patterns of attendance by different arts events and disciplines. The following table indicates the trend on specific attendance in different disciplines of the arts:

TRENDS ON ATTENDANCE AT SPECIFIC ARTS EVENTS

Attended in the Past Year	1987	1992	1996
Went to the movies	72%	72%	70%
Attended live performances of a play, musicals, pantomime, or other kind of theater	62%	59%	50%
Music performances by pop singers, bands, or rock groups	57%	55%	49%
Went to a science, natural history, or history museum	46%	49%	47%
Went to art museums or art galleries that exhibit paintings, drawings, sculpture, etc.	51%	53%	44%
Attended live performances or classical or symphonic music by orchestras, chamber groups, or other classical music events	27%	23%	30%
Attended live performances of opera or musical theater	23%	24%	23%
Attended live performances of ballet, modern dance, folk or ethnic dance, or jazz dance	30%	22%	21%

Attendance at Specific Arts Events Reveals the Following:

- 70% say they have attended the movies in the past 12 months, down two points from 1992. Young people attend movies more often than older people, as do those with a better education and the most affluent people in America. Attendance is highest on the West Coast.
- 50% say they have attended a live performance of a play, musical, pantomime, or other kind of theater in the past year, down nine points from 59% in 1992. Most likely to have gone to such performances in the past year are those with a four year or postgraduate degree, women, whites, baby boomers, higher income people, and those who live in the West or Midwest.
- 49% say they attended a musical performance by popular singers, bands, or rock groups in the past year, down six points from 55% in 1992. Young people under 30, those 30 to 49, Latinos, higher income people, men, and those who live in the Midwest or West are more likely to have attended pop music concerts.
- 47% say they have gone to a science, natural history, or history museum in the past year, down two points from 1992. Most likely to attend are men, baby boomers, and those with a four year college education.
- 44% report having attended art museums or art galleries that exhibit paintings, drawings, sculpture, and other works of art, down nine points from 53% in 1992. Most likely to attend are baby boomers, those in the upper income brackets, those with a full college degree or better, and those who live in the West.
- 30% report having attended a live performance of classical or symphonic music by orchestras, chamber groups, soloists, or other classical music events. This is up seven points from 1992. Most likely to attend classical music events are older people, those with a postgraduate degree, those in the higher income brackets, and those who live in the Midwest and West.
- 23% report they attended a live performance of opera or musical theater, down a point from 1992. People 65 and over, those with a postgraduate degree, those in the higher income brackets, and those who live in the East or Midwest are likely to be more frequent attendees at the opera.
- 21% say they attended live performances of ballet, modern dance, folk or ethnic dance, or jazz dance in the past year, down a point from 1992. Baby boomers, blacks, those with a postgraduate degree, and those who live on the East and West coasts are the most frequent attendees.

Observation: Despite widespread attendance at arts events among a broad spectrum of the American people, there have been some marked declines in attendance in specific disciplines. Compared with 1987, four disciplines have had sharp declines in attendance: ballet and modern dance — 30%; plays and theater — 19%; art museums — 14%; and pop music concerts — 14%. Compared with 1992, art museums have had a 17% decline; plays and theater — 15%; and pop concerts — 11%. However, ballet and dance have fallen only 4%. By contrast, opera and musical theater have experienced almost no erosion. And classical or symphonic music by orchestras, chamber groups, and other ensembles have risen 11% on a nine year basis since 1987 and another 30% since 1992. The movies and science and history museums have remained relatively the same in attendance levels.

Certainly the dwindling funding of the arts by the public sector, which in turn has discouraged private giving, must account at least in part for declines in attendance at art museums, the theater, and dance.

What the Arts Do for People

With 86% of the adult public participating in or attending the arts, it might well have been expected that sizable majorities of the American people would express their appreciation of what the arts do for them. This is precisely what happened when the survey asked the cross-section, "What do the arts do for you?"

TREND OF WHAT THE ARTS DO FOR PEOPLE

	Arts Do	Arts Do Not	Not Sure
The Arts			
Are a positive experience in a troubled world			
1987	69%	26%	5%
1992	71%	25%	4%
1996	71%	25%	4%
Just give you pure pleasure to experience or to participate in			
1987	72%	25%	3%
1992	70%	28%	2%
1996	68%	30%	2%
Give you an uplift from everyday experiences			
1987	67%	30%	3%
1992	70%	29%	1%
1996	68%	30%	2%
Allow you to find a source of creative expression, give you a rare experience			
1987	65%	32%	3%
1992	61%	35%	4%
1996	63%	35%	2%

The Results Point Up These Strong and Positive Reactions to the Arts:

- By 71% to 25%, a sizable majority reports that they find the arts “a positive experience in a troubled world,” unchanged from 1992. Feeling most strongly this way are baby boomers, those with the best education, women, those in the higher income brackets, and those who live in the West.
- By 68% to 30%, another big majority believes that the arts “just give you pure pleasure to experience or to participate in,” down two points from a 70% to 28% majority in 1992. Higher income and better-educated people, as well as those in the baby boom generation, blacks, women, and those in the highest income brackets feel this way.
- By 68% to 30%, a majority feels that “the arts give you an uplift from everyday experiences,” compared with a slightly higher 70% who felt this way three years ago. Higher numbers of women, better educated people, and baby boomers feel this way than other groups.
- By 63% to 35%, a strong majority believes art “allows you to find a source of creative expression, gives you a rare experience,” up two points since 1992. Young people under 30 and better-educated and higher income people share this reaction, along with blacks and Latinos.

Perhaps the feelings of the American people can best be reflected by yet another question: “If there were no arts available here in this community, would you personally miss them very much, only somewhat, or hardly at all?” In 1992, when this was asked for the first time, a solid 68% to 30% majority said they would “miss the arts.” In this survey, an almost identical 67% to 30% majority felt the same. While the better educated, women, blacks and Latinos, higher income people, and those who live on the East and West coasts say they would miss the arts most, nonetheless 54% of the elderly, 58% of those with only a high school education, 64% of men, 67% of whites, 51% of those in the lower income brackets, and 70% in the South and the Midwest say they would miss the arts, if they were not available where they live.

Observation: The importance of the arts to people is as great or greater than ever before. In a more stressful world, art provides an important emotional uplift. Clearly, the arts are a respite, an emotional safety valve, a way to express creativity and at the same time to feel refreshed to face the ardors of daily living. The importance of this feeling on the part of sizable majorities of the American people is reinforced by the fact that fully 86% of all American adults are indeed exposed to the arts in the course of a year, either through participation in the arts or as audiences for the arts. And, two out of three people add that they would sorely miss the arts if they were not there for them to partake in in their own home community.

The Public Assesses the Impact of Arts in Education

As in previous Americans and the Arts studies, the cross-section was asked a series of questions about the perceived impact on young people when they are exposed to courses on the arts as part of the regular school curriculum. The struggle to keep the arts in the elementary and secondary school curriculum across the country has been difficult. In a time of budget crunches, in most states, school administrators give the arts a lower priority and, very often, the arts are simply eliminated from the curriculum.

Given this disposition of schools to cut arts education when cutting the budget, the results in this survey are rather startling, to say the least:

- 96% feel that when young people learn the arts, they “become more creative and imaginative,” down a point from 1992.
- 95% of the public believes that when students learn the arts in school, it “makes learning in school more exciting and interesting,” up two points from 1992.
- 94% feel that exposure to the arts in school allows young people “to develop skills that make them feel more accomplished,” identical to 1992.
- 89% feel that when young people learn about the arts, they “learn to communicate well (develop speaking and writing skills),” down two points from 1992.
- 89% feel that exposure to the arts in education makes young people “more tolerant of other cultures,” down a point from 1992.
- 84% believe that when young people learn about the arts, they are likely to “develop discipline and perseverance,” down a point from 1992.
- 83% believe that learning about the arts in school gives young people the chance to “learn skills that can be useful in a job,” up three points from 1992.

Observation: By any measure, public belief that exposure to the arts in school benefits young people is deep and abiding. The irony is that at a time when educators report that they have trouble getting the attention and enthusiasm of students for learning, the arts are widely perceived as being a trigger mechanism in education for young people to get excited about learning, to appreciate the educational process, to learn skills which they can be proud of, can teach them real discipline, and can help them later on when they get to a work situation or move on to college. In a word, the arts obviously are viewed as an important area for children to learn about in their own right. But the arts also represent one of the few areas where children show immediate interest, and when they learn about the arts, it is likely to stimulate them as students, in many cases, for the first time.

The Role of Government in the Arts

Undoubtedly the most important area covered in the Americans and the Arts series of surveys since 1974, in terms of their impact on the nation, has been the positive response of members of Congress and occupants in the White House to documentation that the arts matter a great deal to the American people. However, in the past few years, perhaps in the absence of new data, the establishment in Washington and a number of state capitals has made a basic assumption that the arts are “a frill,” “an indulgence for government in a time of stringent budget crises,” “are far too elitist,” “are dangerously radical,” or “perpetrate obscenity at the taxpayers’ expense.” Remarkably, those who have criticized the arts in these ways have carried the day without real outbursts of protest from the people themselves. While arts organizations and institutions have raised some hue and cry against cuts in federal and state spending levels for the arts, by and large, a widespread perception among the media and establishment leadership is that the arts simply do not have a powerful nor widely-based constituency. At best, it is believed, the arts are peripheral to the mainstream of life, and certainly cannot command any priority on a governmental agenda. Therefore, to once again test just what the people feel about the arts can be an important exercise, not only for the arts, but, more importantly, for the political and media leadership.

Two new questions led off the series in this area:

- A substantial 79% of Americans believe that it is important for government arts councils to give seed money grants to worthy arts organizations which they feel have outstanding records, because business and private foundation giving to the arts is stimulated by these government arts council grants.
- By a decisive 79% to 19% margin, a better than 3 to 1 majority of the American people are convinced that it is important that “there should be federal, state, and local councils for the arts to develop new programs, research, and provide financial assistance to worthy arts organizations.” Obviously, this is a clear mandate for both governmental participation in arts funding and also for arts councils to provide seed money to give the private sector a frame of reference for further financial backing.

The cross-section was then asked if arts organizations — such as art museums, dance, theater groups, opera, and symphony orchestras — need financial assistance to make it, then did people think six specific private and public groups should provide such funding:

- By 82% to 14%, a sizable majority of the public believes that foundations should provide such financial assistance to the arts, identical to 1992. Higher numbers of baby boomers, the best educated, men, those in the \$35,000 to \$49,999 income bracket, and those who live in the East support foundation giving.
- By 80% to 15%, another decisive majority believes that business and corporations should provide financial help for the arts, up two points from 1992. The best educated, those 50 to 64 years of age, blacks, those earning \$50,000 to \$74,999, and residents of the East support most business giving to the arts.
- By 74% to 20%, another big majority believes that individuals should give financial assistance to the arts, down four points from 1992. Baby boomers, the best educated and most affluent, blacks, and those on the West Coast support individual giving the most.
- By 67% to 29%, a sizable majority is convinced that local government should give financial help to the arts, up eight points from 1992. Young people, women, and Latinos, and those who live in the South feel most keenly about local government sponsorship for the arts.
- By 63% to 33%, another clear majority believes that state government should help fund the arts, identical to the number who felt the same in 1992. Young people under 30, blacks, Latinos, and those in the lowest and highest income brackets, as well as residents on the East Coast feel most strongly about state government participation.
- By 57% to 39%, another clear majority favors the federal government providing financial assistance for the arts, down marginally from 60% in 1992 and 59% in 1987. The strongest advocates of federal financial backing for the arts are women, those who are the best educated, blacks, Latinos, and those in the lower and middle income brackets, and residents of the East.

Observation: Backing for federal funding of the arts was at a relatively high level back in 1987 and in 1992. It was at an even higher level for state and local funding of the arts. State and local government support has held steady and even risen since 1992. While there has been a decline in this sentiment at the federal level, the losses have been no more than three points, and a clear-cut 16 point majority favors continuing federal grants to the arts. Given the somewhat widespread assumption by the political and media establishment that the public does not support giving tax dollars to the arts, these results are both powerful and significant, for they point up that the American people are committed to governmental funding of the arts, contrary to the conclusions reached by the current Congress.

Of course, it might be said that it is easy for people in a survey to advocate general use of federal, state, and local government tax dollars to give financial assistance to the arts. But, it might be asked, are people prepared to pay higher taxes to the federal government to finance the arts? That proposition lays it right on the line:

- When asked if they would be willing to be taxed \$10 more to give the federal government the wherewithal to finance the arts, by 56% to 43%, a majority of the American people say they would. This is down from a comparable 64% to 34% majority who shared this view in 1992 and a higher 69% to 29% majority who felt this way in 1987, but it is nonetheless a clear-cut 13 point majority.
- When the cross-section was asked about being taxed \$5 more to help finance federal financial assistance to the arts, a higher 61% to 37% majority clearly would be willing, although this is down from a comparable 69% to 30% majority in 1992 and a 74% to 25% majority in 1987.
- When asked about being taxed \$15 more, so that the federal government could give financial help to the arts, 49% say they would be willing, while an equal 49% say they would not. In 1992, a 56% to 43% majority said they would be willing to be taxed \$15 more to finance grants to the arts, while in 1987, a more substantial 60% to 37% majority felt this way.
- When asked if they would be willing to be taxed \$25 more to finance federal financial assistance to the arts, 40% of the American people say they would be willing, although 57% say they would not. In 1992, a 50% to 49% plurality gave the same answer, down from a 54% to 44% majority in 1987 who were willing to be taxed \$25 more to finance the arts.

Observation: These results clearly show that there has been some decline in public support for having the federal government tax them more personally in order to fund financial assistance to the arts. However, it must be pointed out that the public mood portrayed by the media and most politicians would have you believe that the American people not only want to cut federal appropriations for the arts, but, indeed, want to end all federal funding entirely. These results clearly demonstrate that support for the arts is strong and runs deep. Claims that backing for federal assistance to the arts has sharply eroded are simply not born out by the facts. It is significant that support for federal tax increases at the five dollar and ten dollar levels is widespread among all groups, including not only the most affluent and highest income people, but also middle class taxpayers in the \$25,000 to \$34,999 income bracket, women, racial minorities, and a majority of all adults in each of the four regions of the country. These results are incisive and decisive.

Clearly, the importance of the arts to the American people is as great today as it has been over the past decade. In a more stressful world, the arts provide an important emotional uplift — a respite, an emotional safety valve, a way to express creativity and at the same time feel refreshed to face the ardors of daily living.

APPENDIX

Trends

Americans and the Arts VII

1987-1996

We are conducting a survey for the national poll-taker Louis Harris, and we want to ask you some questions, if you don't mind. I want to ask you some questions about the arts in this country. By the arts, we mean things like books, movies, art and historical museums, pop concerts, symphony concerts, recorded music, plays, ballet, or modern dance.

Q1. Let me read you some activities that some people do at least every once in a while. Please tell me whether you yourself do any of these activities at least once in a while or not.

ROTATE — START AT "X"	1987	1992	1996
1. Paint, draw, or engage in computer art			
Do	32%	26%	33%
Don't do	68	74	67
Not sure	—	—	—
2. Make pottery or ceramics			
Do	12%	14%	11%
Don't do	88	86	89
Not sure	—	—	—
3. Sing in a choir or other choral group			
Do	17%	21%	18%
Don't do	83	79	82
Not sure	—	—	—
4. Do needlepoint, weaving, or other handwork			
Do	38%	41%	36%
Don't do	62	59	64
Not sure	—	—	—
5. Make sculpture or work with clay			
Do	7%	7%	7%
Don't do	93	93	93
Not sure	—	—	—
6. Write stories or poems			
Do	25%	23%	25%
Don't do	75	77	75
Not sure	—	—	—
7. Play a musical instrument			
Do	28%	27%	28%
Don't do	72	73	72
Not sure	—	—	—

	1987	1992	1996
8. Work with a local theater group			
Do	5%	5%	5%
Don't do	95	95	95
Not sure	—	—	—
9. Participate in photography			
Do	49%	48%	44%
Don't do	51	52	56
Not sure	—	—	—
10. Dance, ballet, modern dance, aerobics, jazz dancing			
Do	36%	38%	30%
Don't do	64	62	70
Not sure	—	—	—
Q2. In the past 12 months, have you gone to (ASK EACH ITEM) often, once in a while, or not at all?	1987	1992	1996
1. Went to the movies	72%	72%	70%
Often	—	—	19
Once in a while	—	—	51
Not at all	28	—	30
Not sure	—	—	—
2. Attended live performances of a play, musicals, pantomime, or other kind of theater	62%	59%	50%
Often	—	—	8
Once in a while	—	—	42
Not at all	—	—	50
Not sure	—	—	—
3. Attended live popular music performances by popular singers, bands, and rock groups	57%	55%	49%
Often	—	—	10
Once in a while	—	—	39
Not at all	43	45	51
Not sure	—	—	—
4. Attended live performances of classical or symphonic music by orchestras, chamber groups, soloists, or other classical musical events	27%	23%	30%
Often	—	—	5
Once in a while	—	—	25
Not at all	77	77	70
Not sure	—	—	—
5. Attended live performances of opera or musical theater	23%	24%	23%
Often	—	—	4
Once in a while	—	—	19
Not at all	77	76	73
Not sure	—	—	—

	1987	1992	1996
6. Attended live performances of ballet or modern dance, folk or ethnic dance, or jazz dance	30%	22%	21%
Often	—	—	3
Once in a while	—	—	18
Not at all	70	78	79
Not sure	—	—	—
7. Went to art museums or art galleries that exhibit paintings, drawings, sculpture, etc.	51%	53%	44%
Often	—	—	10
Once in a while	—	—	34
Not at all	49	47	56
Not sure	—	—	—
8. Went to a science, natural history, or history museum	46%	49%	49%
Often	—	—	3
Once in a while	—	—	46
Not at all	54	51	51
Not sure	—	—	—

Q3a. Different people get different things out of the arts. As far as you are concerned, do you ever find the arts (READ EACH ITEM), or not?

ROTATE — START AT "X"	1987	1992	1996
1. Give you an uplift from everyday experience			
Arts do	67%	70%	68%
Arts do not	30	29	30
Not sure	3	1	2
2. Are a positive experience in a troubled world			
Arts do	69%	71%	71%
Arts do not	26	25	25
Not sure	5	4	4
3. Allow you to find a source of creative expression, give you a rare experience			
Arts do	65%	61%	63%
Arts do not	32	35	35
Not sure	3	4	2
4. Just give you pure pleasure to experience or to participate in			
Arts do	72%	70%	68%
Arts do not	25	28	30
Not sure	3	2	2

Q3b. If there were no arts available in your community, would you personally miss them very much, only somewhat, or hardly at all?

Very much	28%	26%	31%
Only somewhat	42	42	36
Hardly at all	30	30	30
Not sure	—	2	3

Q4a. Government arts councils give grants to arts organizations which they feel have an outstanding record. This is considered seed money for worthy arts organizations. Business and private foundation giving to the arts is stimulated by these government arts council grants. Do you feel this role served by government arts councils is highly important in getting others to contribute to the arts, somewhat important, or not very important at all?

	1996
Highly important	33%
Somewhat important	46
Not very important at all	19
Not sure	2

Q4b. How important do you feel it is that there should be federal, state, and local councils for the arts to develop new programs, research, and provide financial assistance to worthy arts organizations — very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?

	1996
Very important	35%
Somewhat important	44
Not very important	10
Not important at all	10
Not sure	1

Q4c. If arts organizations — such as art museums, dance, opera, theater groups, and symphony orchestras — need financial assistance to make it, do you feel that (READ EACH ITEM) should provide assistance or not?

	1987	1992	1996
Individuals			
Should provide	78%	79%	74%
Should not	19	18	20
Not sure	3	3	6
State Government			
Should provide	67%	63%	63%
Should not	29	35	33
Not sure	4	2	1
Federal Government			
Should provide	59%	60%	57%
Should not	36	37	39
Not sure	5	3	4

Local Government			
Should provide	64%	60%	68%
Should not	32	38	29
Not sure	4	2	3
Business and Corporations			
Should provide	80%	78%	80%
Should not	17	19	15
Not sure	3	3	5
Foundations			
Should provide	80%	82%	82%
Should not	14	15	14
Not sure	6	3	4

Q4d. The federal government now pays out over \$1,000 per capita for defense, \$180 for education, and no more than 70 cents for the arts. Would you be willing to pay (READ EACH ITEM) for the arts, or would you not be willing to do that? (KEEP ASKING LOWER PRICE LEVELS UNTIL RESPONDENT SAYS "WILLING TO DO" TO A LEVEL; THEN SKIP TO F1) DO NOT ROTATE.

	1987	1992	1996
1. \$25 in taxes a year			
Willing to do	54%	49%	40%
Not willing	44	50	57
Not sure	2	1	3
2. \$15 more in taxes a year			
Willing to do	60%	56%	49%
Not willing	37	43	49
Not sure	3	1	2
3. \$10 more in taxes a year			
Willing to do	69%	64%	56%
Not willing	29	34	43
Not sure	2	2	1
4. \$5 more in taxes a year			
Willing to do	74%	69%	61%
Not willing	25	30	37
Not sure	1	1	2

FACTUAL INFORMATION

F1. SEX (By Observation)	1992	1996
Male	48%	48%
Female	52	52

F2. Is the main wage earner in this household male or female?

Male	67%	62%
Female	24	25
Male and female both equal (vol.)	7	12
Not sure	2	1

F3. How old are you?

18 to 29	24%	24%
30 to 49	41	41
50 to 64	18	17
65 and over	16	17
Refused	1	1

F4. What is the last grade of school you completed?

	1992	1996
High school graduate or less	56%	57%
Some college	25	25
College graduate	10	10
Postgraduate	8	8
Not sure/refused	1	*

F5. Which of the following income categories best describes your total 1994 household income? Was it (READ LIST)?

\$15,000 or less	20%	18%
\$15,001 to \$25,000	17	16
\$25,001 to \$35,000	16	15
\$35,001 to \$50,000	20	17
\$50,000 and over	18	20
Not sure	9	14

F6. Is the head of this household presently married, divorced, separated, widowed, or never married?

Married	69%	63%
Divorced	10	11
Separated	2	2
Widowed	9	10
Never married	1	13
Not sure/refused	1	1

F7. Are you of Latino origin or descent, or not?

Yes, of Latino origin	8%	8%
No, not of Latino origin	91	91
Not sure	1	1

F8. Do you consider yourself white, black, Asian, or some other race or ethnic group?

White	80%	80%
Black, African American	12	12
Oriental, Asian, or Pacific Islander	1	1
American Indian, Native American, or Alaskan Native	1	1
Other	4	5
Refused	2	1

This completes the interview. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

