



## Update

# Greetings!

Welcome to the first 2016 **Advocacy Update**. The Vermont state legislature session opened on Tuesday, January 5.

This newsletter, distributed monthly during the session, is intended to bring you the latest news about federal and state issues related to the arts. Read this [blog](#) to learn about Vermont issues and some specific steps you can take to prepare for this year's advocacy work.

### **Federal update**

2015 was a banner year for arts issues at the national level! Below are three items from the list of strong advocacy successes.

1. President Obama recently signed the federal budget bill that includes increases of nearly \$2 million for both the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) (NEA) and the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) (NEH), breaking a five-year cycle of level funding. The uptick for the NEA means that the Vermont Arts Council can expect an increase in its federal appropriation.
2. A new education law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), replaces No Child Left Behind. This law, [signed by President Obama](#) in December, includes language that secures support for arts education programs in public schools.
3. The new [Assistance for Arts Education](#) program in ESSA ensures continued authorization of an arts education grant program, a victory after fighting against annual termination and consolidation efforts. Funding for the current program also increased by \$2 million.

## **State update**

The Arts Council has developed a three-point advocacy agenda for the 2016 legislative session:

1. an increase of \$35,000 in the appropriation to the Arts Council. Due to the increase for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Vermont will receive an increase that, by law, must be matched 1:1 by state legislative appropriation.
2. passage of a bill to establish the Vermont Creative Network. Drawing on the model of Vermont's Farm-to-Plate network, established in 2009, a proposed bill will formally acknowledge the Creative Network.
3. adoption of the National Core Arts Standards by the Agency of Education. While this issue is not a strictly legislative issue (adoption will be accomplished by the state board of education), it nonetheless is an important advocacy issue.

## **Other state advocacy issues**

The Council will draw attention to other important issues as well. These topics, part of our policy research agenda, will be explored with an eye for potential development, perhaps, as the next advocacy agenda item. The Arts Council will:

1. explore reinstatement of the Office of Creative Economy. This office, housed in the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), was essentially closed just prior to last year's legislative session, primarily due to budget constraints.
2. research possible creative sector business incentives. Potential opportunities include tax-free art purchase days, cultural district development, and tax incentives for entrepreneurial startups.
3. understand the benefits of placing an arts content specialist at the Agency of Education (AOE). This position is recognized as a high priority among Vermont arts education advocates and the Arts Council is already working with AOE to determine feasibility and timeline.
4. develop arts-appropriate language for inclusion into [Act 186](#), the [Results Based Accountability](#) (RBA) law. RBA has been embraced by the legislature as an effective planning and evaluation tool. There are numerous entry points for the arts and creativity in this bill.

## Upcoming advocacy events

- March 8-9, 2016 | [National Arts Advocacy Day](#), Washington, DC. Alex Aldrich and I will visit each of our national official's offices to thank them for their support of the arts and to advocate for continued support.
- March 29, 2016 | Arts Advocacy Day in Vermont, Montpelier, VT. Plans are still developing. We will keep you informed!

We look forward to being in touch with you this year.

**Please be certain: Every voice really does make a difference!**

All best--



**Zon Eastes**

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