



Update

Greetings!

Welcome to the February 2016 **Advocacy Update**, delivering 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 become a stronger advocate.

Federal update

Earlier this week, President Obama delivered his proposed FY2017 budget to Congress. It includes an increase of \$2M (to a total of \$150M) for both the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) (NEA) and the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) (NEH). According to Robert L. Lynch, president and CEO of [Americans for the Arts](#), "The Administration's proposed \$2 million increase for the NEA in the FY 2017 budget request continues efforts to strengthen the agency. Although still falling short, it helps turn the corner on some sharp cuts made in previous years, and comes on the heels of an important funding increase made by Congress last year—impacting state and local arts agencies in every community."

The budget request includes numerous education proposals as well, including funds to implement the new [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) that the President signed into law in December, and \$500 million for a new block grant program which, "can support expanding STEM opportunities **and the arts...**" through its focus on providing a well-rounded education.

State update

News on the Arts Council's three-point advocacy agenda:

1. State appropriation (increase by \$35K to match the coming federal increase). In the final moments before presentation last month, Governor Shumlin included the requested \$35,000 increase into his proposed budget. The Arts Council's appropriation comes under first review by the House appropriations committee (Council hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, February 16), then that committee will submit its proposed appropriation. The review process then moves to the Senate for recommendation.

2. Bill to establish the Vermont Creative Network. Reps. Bill Botzow of Pownal, Alison Clarkson of Woodstock, and Mollie Burke of Brattleboro have introduced a bill to establish the Vermont Creative Network. [H. 820](#) has been assigned to the commerce and economic development committee, chaired by Rep. Botzow. The bill will undergo initial review on Friday, February 12. Based on that review, the committee will determine whether or not to take up the bill.

NOTE: If you live in the district of any of the following committee members, you can help ensure that the bill is indeed taken up. And, even if you don't live in a committee member's district, you can connect with your own representative(s) to reach out to committee members.

Two possible ways to connect with committee members:

A. The linked names below will lead you to each committee member's webpage. You will find links to email addresses there. Write your own message encouraging the representative to take up the bill in committee.

B. Use the Council's [Action Center](#) to send a pre-written letter about passage of the bill. Look in the upper left hand box for Action Items. Follow the links to write to your representative.

Commerce and Economic Development Committee

Rep. [William Botzow II](#), Chair, Bennington-1

Rep. [Michael Marcotte](#), Vice Chair, Orleans-2

Rep. [Warren F. Kitzmiller](#), Ranking Member, Washington -4

Rep. [Fred Baser](#), Addison-4

Rep. [Stephen Carr](#), Rutland-6

Rep. [Maureen Dakin](#), Chittenden-9-2

Rep. [Jean O'Sullivan](#), Chittenden-6-2

Rep. [Corey Parent](#), Franklin-3-1

Rep. [Heidi E. Scheuermann](#), Lamoille-1

Rep. [Laura Sibilgia](#), Windham-Bennington

Rep. [Valerie A. Stuart](#), Brattleboro-2-1 3. Adoption of the National Core

Arts Standards (NCAS) by the Agency of Education. A survey of Vermont's education field lends very strong support to the NCAS advocacy work of the Agency of Education and the Arts Council. The State Board of Education will hear a presentation on Tuesday, February 16. A vote is expected that same day.

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. No action this month.

2. research possible creative sector business incentives. An active conversation is currently taking place among legislators about definitions of employee and independent contractor and about current law. The Arts Council has testified on the topic. We will keep you posted about developments from the ongoing discussions.

3. understand the benefits of placing an arts content specialist at the Agency of Education (AOE). Depending upon the outcome of the National Core Arts Standards vote on Feb. 16, the Council may be in a position to immediately advocate for placement of an arts specialist at the Agency.

4. develop arts-appropriate language for inclusion into [Act 186](#), the [Results Based Accountability \(RBA\) law](#). Arts Council staff recently responded to a request for arts-specific language to include in an amendment to the bill. Inclusion of this initial language will help the arts gain appropriate entrance to the ongoing conversation.

Neatest trick of the month...

For those of you not yet aware of this web tool, visit the new [Vermont General Assembly](#) webpage. From this site, you can locate elected officials, track specific legislation, and find committee rolls and actions.

Upcoming advocacy events

- **March 7-8, 2016** | [National Arts Advocacy Day](#), Washington, DC. Arts Council staff will visit the offices of Sen. Leahy, Sen. Sanders, and Rep. Welch to thank them for their support of the arts and to advocate for support of the President's budget proposal.
- **March 29, 2016** | Arts Advocacy Day in Vermont, Montpelier, VT. We are planning a day of maximum impact. You will hear from us next week about how you can affect decision-making at the state house on Arts Advocacy Day.

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

All best--



Zon Eastes

Director of Outreach and Advancement

Vermont Arts Council

136 State Street

Montpelier, VT 05633-6001

802.828.5423 (voice and relay calls welcome)
