

To: **Christine Kehoe** (Dem-39), Joint Committee on the Arts
Curren D Price Jr. (Dem-26), Chair, Joint Committee on the Arts
Mike Davis (Dem-48), Chair, Committee on Arts, Entertainment, Sports,
Tourism, and Internet Media
Jim Silva (Rep-67), Vice Chair, Committee on Arts, Entertainment,
Sports, Tourism, and Internet Media

Good comes from Good – Arts Bridging California Communities

Issue

Inequitable access to cultural resources in rural communities in California compared to metropolitan areas.

Executive Summary

Art in every medium is a powerful form of expression that examines the human experience, promotes civic dialogue, and serves as an educational and creative resource for humanity at large. Yet the arts are not a priority in California, illustrated by a ranking of last place in the nation on state per capita spending on the arts. California is a state that actively embraces and supports a diverse population. It is also characterized by its citizen's strong civic pride. With California's background, it does not make sense that the state does not also have policy in support of the arts. The state's lack of arts support is most apparent in rural communities, with little to no access to metropolitan areas, where the bulk of California's cultural resources exist. Through subsidies for the arts in California, individuals, communities, cities and the state of California will

form identities, promote civic pride, and create businesses and jobs that will stimulate the economy.

Context and Importance of the Problem

The California Arts Council spends only three pennies on arts and culture for every California resident, according to data collected from Americans for the Arts. Yet, In contrast, Guam spends \$1.55 per capita. Puerto Rico spends \$6.45 per capita. Mississippi, one of the poorest states in the nation, spends 21 times what California spends per capita on arts funding. In 2001, California stripped the California Arts Council budget to a mere \$1.1 million, the minimum required in order to receive a matching grant of \$1 million from the National Endowment for the Arts. Historically, arts funding has been a regular cut from the state budget. Legislators have failed to recognize the arts are actually a solid investment, especially during times of economic hardship. “From large urban cities to small rural towns, this research shows that the nonprofit arts are an economically sound investment. They attract audiences, spur business development, support jobs, and generate government revenue. Locally, as well as nationally, the arts mean business,” *Economic Impact of the Nonprofit Arts Industry* report, Americans for the Arts.

California’s economy is currently bleak. With 36,756,666 people living in the golden state, California is the most densely populated state in the nation. Also one of the most geographically and culturally diverse states, funding decisions

are complex, as they need to be made with the unique needs of the state population in mind.

California has approximately 98,949 arts related businesses, institutions, and organizations, but these are not enough to serve the disparate needs of the state. Due to the newness of the state, there is a lack of history dictating cultural trends. Arts and culture organizations come in many shapes and sizes, as there is not much mandating what culture is and how it should be executed. A great majority of these businesses are in metropolitan areas of California such as San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco. As a result, there is an overabundance of supply in these metropolitan areas, and a lack of both supply and demand in rural areas.

Populations in most rural communities in California are not economically equipped to travel to metropolitan areas for cultural resources, nor are they equipped to bring these resources to their own communities. This lack of regular access to cultural supply is the reason why sustained demand for cultural products has not been established in these communities. Leadership in the form of funding for cultural initiatives in rural areas is necessary in order to address this issue, as the lack of cultural resources in rural communities is a problem of the greater good that can only be adequately addressed by California's state and municipal governments.

Consequences of not addressing the issue of inadequate cultural resources in rural communities include a reduced quality of life and none of the economic benefits that traditionally come from the arts, such as business development, jobs, and government revenue. These communities also suffer from a fewer opportunities to establish their local identity and a sense of civic pride that often comes from a rich cultural presence in a community.

Policy Recommendations

The populations and demographics of each of California's 58 counties are wildly different. Therefore, progress toward ensuring access to cultural resources is equal throughout the state can only come with a cooperative effort between state and municipal governments. Through subsidies for cultural activity in rural areas of the state, the California Arts Council will provide the leadership necessary to unite and encourage art and culture in California. As a result of increased cultural resources, rural communities will benefit from better quality of life, established sense of identity, relationships with surrounding communities, and an improved economy.

A grant program earmarked for rural communities and administered by the California Arts Council will provide funds for rural communities to create art, bring in outside artists, and build arts education programs. According to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, "[state arts councils] encourage civic engagement, catalyze collaboration within and across sectors, ensure equitable

access to funding opportunities, and comprehensively address the long-term needs of each state and jurisdiction in America.” In this respect, the California Arts Council’s role of administering the grant program is crucial to its success, as the CAC has the ability to identify communities that are in need of subsidies and work between metropolitan and rural communities to create partnerships and maximize resources. The responsibility for accessing these grants will be on municipal governments. Municipal governments have the ability to act as the “middleman” between the state government and the local arts infrastructure, if any, to define their community’s unique needs and how these needs should be addressed.

Partnerships between metropolitan communities, such as San Diego, and surrounding rural communities like the Imperial County are mutually beneficial. Abundant supply of the arts in San Diego may lead to economic problems such as out of work artists and arts organizations operating in deficit. Additional revenue streams from working in communities in driving distance will economically benefit the San Diego arts community, and also help bring the level of supply to a point where it meets demand more appropriately. Rural communities will benefit from a jumpstart in their cultural supply and the knowledge from experienced arts practitioners. Through this arts partnership, the communities of San Diego County and the Imperial County will be bridged, and other partnerships benefiting the greater good will likely come out of this partnership. This will assist legislators at the state level, as they can draw from

these relationships and a more defined sense of communities in California other than their own. This effect, multiplied between communities across California, can have far reaching effects as legislators can more easily “reach across the aisle” in legislative decisions.

Success Stories

Identity

The unique experience of being a Californian can only be captured and promoted accurately through the arts, and the lack of recognition for the arts in legislative decision-making negatively affects California’s ability to understand and communicate its identity. California is known for its multiculturalism, and individual communities within California struggle to create their own identities related to their unique cultural heritage and where they call home. The Imperial County in Southern California is an example of a community that would benefit tremendously from an exploration of its unique identity through the arts. This rural community has the highest unemployment and illiteracy rates in the state. It is mainly an agricultural community dominated by established farmers as well as new Mexican immigrants. These two demographics seem to share little in common, but are united by place and time. Through visual arts presentations such as photography and painting, and cultural festivals of American and Mexican folk music, these demographics can be brought together to celebrate their common identity as citizens of the Imperial County. Unfortunately, the Imperial Arts Council closed its doors in 2007 as a result of the lack of funding

from the California Arts Council due to budget cuts. The county's relative isolation from major metropolitan arts resources combined with its financial challenges makes it a prime candidate for rural arts support.

Quality of Life

Communities in other areas of the country serve as examples of success stories. The community of Ben Wheeler, Texas is a prime example of the quality of life benefits that are initiated by strong cultural resources. Ben Wheeler has not only been transformed by the arts, but is also acting as a cultural bridge to nearby Texas communities. Just a few years ago, the citizens of Ben Wheeler barely knew their neighbors. But with the help of an investor who prioritizes the arts, the city is being revitalized through clean-up and real estate improvement efforts. Arts entrepreneurs are being lured to these newly revitalized structures with subsidized rent. There are now enough artists habituating these spaces for the community to be considered an arts village. Emptiness and dilapidation have been replaced by beauty and activity. Economic benefits of increased job opportunities and outside support of their businesses have come from arts tourism, as Ben Wheeler is now a destination for cultural tourists on their way to the arts festival at the nearby town of Edom. These two small communities, who recently had little in common other than their location on the map, are now partners in encouraging cultural tourism in their area of the state. This is just one of the many examples of large distances between communities being bridged by artistic collaborations. Meanwhile, the lives of the citizens of Ben Wheeler have

been virtually turned around due to the economic benefits, as well as the less quantifiable consequences of the strong cultural presence. Community members enjoy increased opportunities for self-expression, and are brought together several times weekly as they enjoy performance and visual arts presentations.

Economic

A community outside of St. Louis, Missouri, was suffering from suburban sprawl. The neighborhood's once popular mall, Crestwood Court, was suffering from reduced foot traffic and the retailers were struggling to stay afloat. Mall management utilized the economic benefits of the arts to solve the problem. By partnering with the community's Regional Arts Commission they created a program called ArtSpace. Local artists were given major discounts on rent in vacant retail space in the mall. The mall now boasts more than 100 artists that regularly perform and display work in their spaces. The mall has been transformed – it is now a destination for locals to enjoy art and support mall retailers during their visit.

Strategy

The California Arts Council subsidizes increased access to arts and culture in rural communities.

Proposed Course of Action

In each of the proposed courses of action, the California Arts Council reaches out to rural communities in order to alert them to the availability and benefits of the program. Municipalities of rural communities are to work with local arts leaders to prepare statements of need and plans for utilizing funds, which will be reviewed by the CAC and funds will be dispersed appropriately.

Action 1: The California Arts Council offers a grant to rural communities subsidizing presenting by artists from California metropolitan areas.

Benefits:

- This course of action will build momentum for engagement in the arts more quickly than simply relying on locally produced art to be developed.
- The artistic products offered by outside artists may be known on a national or regional level, so basic demand will be higher.
- Rural communities will benefit from the experience and knowledge offered by experienced art practitioners from larger communities.
- Sharing artists between communities will help even the supply of art in the state as a whole, by moving artists in areas with large amounts of supply to areas with minimal supply.
- Artists moving between communities will act as cultural diplomats, and municipalities sharing artists will be bridged and the potential for other collaborations is strong.

Counterpoints:

- Limiting outside artists to those coming from elsewhere in California significantly narrows the pool of artists to choose from.

- Work by outside artists is not specifically related to the community presenting their work, therefore the people of the community might not easily relate to the work.
- Grants offered by the California Arts Council may not be significant enough to allow communities to build a regular presenting season, sustain demand for these cultural projects, and enjoy and all the benefits that come from the relationships with outside artists.

Action 2: The California Arts Council offers a grant to rural communities for the purpose of funding locally produced art.

Benefits:

- Communities will build their own sustainable supply of arts for the long term preservation of cultural resources in their community.
- Communities will have the ability to create their own unique artistic products related to the shared values of the rural community. These products will be more relatable and therefore more marketable to the local community.
- Local arts activity leads to economic advantages including arts jobs and business development.

Counterpoints:

- Funding from a grant may not be a sufficient enough resource to make up for the lack of experienced artists, art spaces, and art managers in rural communities.
- Locally produced art may not be well promoted or well executed enough to build a local audience and instigate demand.
- Local arts activity may not be significant enough to trigger major economic benefits.

Action 3: The California Arts Council offers a grant to rural communities for the development and support of arts education programs promoting the learning different visual and performing arts.

Benefits:

- Personal engagement in learning through the arts is one of the most successful methods of building new audiences for the arts.
- Development of new audiences builds sustained demand for the arts, which will support increased supply in rural communities.
- Arts education leads to self-expression, which has a myriad of benefits. These benefits include empathy, personal and community identity development, and health benefits resulting from reduced stress.

Counterpoints:

- Funding from a grant may not be a sufficient enough resource to make up for the lack of experienced artists and administrators to manage such an education program in rural communities.

Sources Consulted or Recommended

Jerome Weeks, *Transforming a Dying Texas Town – Into an Arts Colony*, Art and Seek, August 31, 2009.

<http://www.kera.org/artandseek/content/2009/08/31/transforming-a-dying-texas-town-into-an-arts-colony/>

Wikipedia, *California*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California>

Americans for the Arts, *Economic Impact of the Nonprofit Arts Industry*, http://www.artsusa.org/pdf/get_involved/advocacy/research/2009/economicimpact09.pdf

Alma Robinson, *Renaissance in Arts Funding Needed*, Art Project Foundation, <http://artprojectfoundation.com/Stateofheart.htm>

Sue Struve, *State Arts Funding Decreases in FY 2009*, February 9, 2009, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

Judith Newmark, *Artspace*, December 26, 2009, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, <http://www.istockanalyst.com/article/viewiStockNews/articleid/2908902>

Mike Boehm, *California is last in arts funding — as usual*, February 12, 2009, Los Angeles Times <http://www.latimes.com>

California Arts Advocates, *Advocacy Toolkit – Arts Advocacy Day 2008*, <http://www.californiaartsadvocates.org>