Arts and culture and policy agendas in the West

ALAS 2021

FEBRUARY 2021

WESTAF
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“We are this incredibly diverse part of the country, with our connection to our coast and countries overseas and the immigration that happens there and along our borders. Equity is part of everything we do.” - Manny Cawaling

Panelists

Julie Baker, Executive Director, Californians for the Arts (California)

Manny Cawaling, Executive Director, Inspire Washington (Washington)

Lauren DeNinno, Senior Policy Advisor, Western Governors’ Association (Colorado)

Call to action

Learn out more regional advocacy and policy networks like the:

- Western Arts Advocacy Network, a nearly year old network of arts advocates across the region convened by WESTAF. The group consists of mainly state arts advocacy groups that share information and knowledge; agree to pursue common objectives like pursuit of state relief funding for arts and culture; and are beginning to become more visible in congressional engagement.

- Western Governors’ Association, the only active regional governors association that develops shared policy priorities led by governors in 22 states and three jurisdictions in the Pacific.

- National Association of Counties Western Interstate Region, affiliated with the National Association of Counties and dedicated to the promotion of Western interests within NACo. These interests include public land issues (use and conservation), community stability and economic development, and the promotion of the traditional Western way of life.

Arts policy integration

- This is a moment for the sector to really push “arts integration” — a great word we are borrowing from arts education— which in this case means that arts can play a role across a range of policy areas.

- We need to be looking at how we connect with broader policy discussions on workforce development, rural development, infrastructure, economic recovery, and climate.
● As an example, in developing a rural development policy agenda for the West, there are ways that the arts can intersect strongly with destinations marketing and tourism in rural areas throughout the region and in defining place through civic pride and vitality.

● We can also do more to lean into the intersection between arts and entertainment and therefore the commercial and nonprofit parts of our industry.

● As another example, there is currently a groundswell of support to support the creative workforce and this will involve engagements in wider policy discussions about workers protections and rights in a new era.

● Another example is in the context of economic recovery, infrastructure, and “building back better.” There will be many opportunities to influence legislation as we move ahead. We need to push for more local and state self-determination and less program rigidity within federal programs.

● We can also focus on all embracing and unifying messaging like the role of arts and culture in prosperity and quality of life. This messaging has been shown to be resonant across party lines.

Regional policy agendas

● There are opportunities for alignment across states, because of the influence of the Western bloc of states in Congress and the new Administration. We stand to benefit from pursuing regional advocacy strategies at the federal level.

● Our states share many common experiences and realities—as a vivid and challenging example—fires.

● Natural resources, rural development, tourism (and its connection to arts and cultural funding), and digital access (think broadband access) are just a few possible directions to explore.

● Conservation and preservation could be a theme around which to develop future linkages and affinities between those pursuing natural resource policy issues and those pursuing cultural access issues. These issues may affect some of our communities acutely, particularly indigenous communities in our Western states.

● As the West is one of the most demographically diverse regions in the country, equity remains a core policy issue across both urban centers and rural and remote communities across the region.