STRIVING TOWARD A VISION
A History of the Western States Arts Federation, 1974 to 2000

by Dinah Zeiger

PREFACE

In 1973, the Arts Council of the Federation of Rocky Mountains States made a region-wide impact with the Artrain project, impressing arts leaders in the region and across the country. The Arts Council was formed as an interest area of the Federation—which existed primarily as a forum for Western governors to address regional issues concerning water, land use, and mineral rights. Although the arts had always been on the agenda at Federation meetings, they were often one of many overlooked concerns. Robert Sheets, one of the founders of WESTAF, remembers agonizing about the decision of whether or not to split from the Federation: "They had been supportive since the beginning in the late 1960s. But we knew we had to control our own operations, keep our own bank account, to keep track of NEA money," he said. "We couldn't be tied to the Federation, where all the money we raised went into the general fund.

Terry Melton, one of the founders and later executive director of WESTAF, explained that a group he refers to as the “Young Turks” gathered and drafted articles of incorporation and bylaws to govern the organization that, in 1974, became the Western States Arts Foundation. "The question before us was, ‘can we do this better on behalf of the states or can the states do it better themselves?’," Melton said. The group was venturing into unexplored territory with no existing regional arts organizations to look to as models. "All we knew was that the West had to speak with a unified voice," said Sheets. "The goal was to create an efficient delivery system to get the product, the arts, to our public. We were committed to accomplishing this goal."

Twenty years later, WESTAF faced significant fiscal concerns. By late 1994, huge budget cuts at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) signaled a 40-percent loss in revenue for WESTAF. A cost-containment committee chaired by Tony Rampton struggled to craft a financial plan that would hold the organization together. Such scrutiny raised a host of questions: Was the board too big? Was the organization overstaffed? Was the Santa Fe location too expensive? "From the financial perspective, things were critical," Rampton said. "We simply had to find a way to pare the size of the operation and make it more resourceful. WESTAF was functioning in an inefficient manner."

“The truth was,” said board chair Larry Williams, "losing the NEA funding forced us to examine whether we even needed WESTAF." And so for two days in October 1995, the board wrestled with whether the organization would live or die. "I remember walking into that meeting with a real sense that the right decision might be to end the thing," said Len
Edgerly, one of WESTAF’s newest board members at the time. "I think the situation forced us to look at the fundamentals—why WESTAF was formed in the first place—and admit that those factors were still present."

### Introduction

The Western States Arts Federation’s (WESTAF) origins lie in the "Sagebrush Rebellion" of the 1960s. The organization grew out of the Federation of Rocky Mountain States, an organization established by the governors of seven Western states for the purpose of addressing common issues, particularly those in the areas of water, transportation, and federal land management. The Federation understood that creating a political alliance would yield advantages in Washington D.C. and give them more control over the resolution of Western-based political, economic, and social issues. The organization’s strength lay in bringing people together to solve problems collectively across state boundaries. WESTAF grew from these early efforts to solve regional problems in an area of the country that had a low population base and limited sources of private and public funding.

There were compelling reasons for the seven Rocky Mountain states to band together. For the West, key challenges were space and numbers. Despite comprising almost one-quarter of the nation’s landmass, the region boasted less than three percent of the total population at the time. Population can leverage power, and at the time, the West (except for California) had nearly an equal ratio of cattle to people.

From the beginning, WESTAF was an experiment in arts management. Eventually, as it grew to be a credible force, WESTAF became a model for other regional arts organizations. Because of a focus on the critical issues of the West, strong leadership and creative programming, and a commitment to the development of the arts in the region, WESTAF ultimately exceeded many of its founder's initial expectations.

### WESTAF'S Beginnings

Almost simultaneous with the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the organization that would become the Western States Arts Federation was developing. WESTAF's roots lie in the Federation of Rocky Mountain States and its Committee on the Arts and Humanities. The Federation was incorporated in 1966 by the governors of seven Western states—Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. The purpose of the organization was to ensure the West had a collective, unified voice on the national stage on issues of regional concern. According to the Federation's articles of incorporation, its purpose was to "promote the general welfare [and] initiate, encourage, and support civic, cultural, educational, business,
commercial, scientific, technological, and economic activity,\textsuperscript{1} and to function as an intermediary between the states, local communities, and the federal government.

The goal of the Federation was to influence federal decisions. A primary strategy was to develop—among federal-level decision makers—a better understanding of the unique composition of policy systems in the West and critical issues faced by persons living in the West. Although the original member-states encompassed nearly 25 percent of the landmass of the contiguous 48 states, at the time of its establishment, the Federation contained barely 3 percent of the country's population. "Where population was power, it (the Federation) was a way to have a bigger voice," said Nello McDaniel, WESTAF's first dance coordinator and its interim executive director in 1976.\textsuperscript{2} "As individual states, they had little power. Bringing them together brought incredible problem-solving capabilities and economies of scale."

The Federation nurtured an initial committee concerned with the arts and humanities. Members of the committee were the executive directors of each state's newly formed or then "under development" arts council. These state arts entities were established with the assistance of the NEA, which offered matching funds to states that would establish the organizations.

Robert Sheets, president of the Federation's Arts and Humanities Committee from 1967 to 1974, and one of the founding members of WESTAF, said the arts benefited regionally because, from the beginning, they were attached to every aspect of the Federation's efforts. "When the governors gathered for meetings, there was always a report on the state of the arts." He noted that the process "had a profound effect" bringing to the leaders' attention an important aspect of life in the West.\textsuperscript{3} Bringing new state arts agency directors together was another service of the Federation. Dave Nelson, executive director of the Montana Arts Council and a WESTAF board member until 1992, stated that one of the advantages of a convening organization like the Federation of Rocky Mountain States was just "getting together to tell war stories. We were all very green; arts management was a new field, and we had little or no experience in it. We learned from each other, from our mistakes as well as our successes,\textsuperscript{4}"

The Federation's Committee on Arts and Humanities was reconfigured in 1967 as the Arts Council. The Council's mission was to address regional arts challenges; in particular the difficulties posed by touring arts programs over long distances and into small towns that had with few or no resources to support the arts. If the problems of distance and money loomed large so did the issue of generating an audience. Non-traditional arts programs and programs in dance and jazz presented huge audience-development challenges in the West's more isolated communities. "How did you generate interest in contemporary art in people who have been inundated with Western art motifs? How do you market it?" asked Sheets. An equally pressing need was to keep Western artists--whether performers, writers, painters, etc.--in the region. "We wanted to make it possible for them to live and work here so they didn't have to go to New York or San Francisco for sales or exposure," Sheets said.
The seminal programmatic effort of the Federation's Arts Council was the Artrain, a project that originated in Michigan in the 1960s. Available to the West in 1972, according to Nelson, "The Artrain was a test of our ability to pull off a complex regional program." Consisting of an engine and several rail cars containing art works ranging from oil paintings to sculpture, the train traveled with a staff of two arts professionals. These staffers conducted workshops in towns where the train stopped. All that was required of local sponsors was a 500-foot rail siding where the train could park, and a local committee to organize the stay. The railroads furnished the engines. Each community's responsibility was to lodge the staff and pay for electrical costs and other expenses. In its Western tour year (1972-73), the Artrain visited 17 communities in four states. "The program was complex to set up and administer," said Nelson. Each community named a steering committee and appointed a chair, and the Federation's Arts Council organized workshops that not only trained volunteers but raised the visibility of the project and awakened expectations. "As one of the major innovative projects in tax-supported arts, the Artrain showed us how to get a good product into difficult-to-reach communities," stated Sheets.

The Artrain was also a catalyst for the future of the organization. "The NEA provided funds (for Artrain) through the Federation (via the Art Council) on behalf of the participating states," said Nelson. Of the total $184,000 cost, the Federation financed $104,000 from NEA funding. "The national support and positive reaction to the program was what pushed us finally to incorporate separately from the Federation of Rocky Mountain States as the Western States Arts Foundation (WSAF)," he said. "We had a bigger vision for the arts than did the Federation. We felt we needed a broader organization; that's what helped us decide to create a regional arts organization."

Nelson, Sheets and several other council members drew up articles of incorporation. The new organization was to be called the Western States Arts Foundation (WSAF), and it was to be organized as an entirely separate organization from the Federation of Rocky Mountain States. This was a sensitive issue, Nelson said, because the Federation "didn't want to let go." But from the arts professionals' point of view, the organization would function more effectively as a separate regional entity, with increased access to NEA funds for programs. In addition, a full-time staff and office space would allow for more active programming. Finally, the split was effected, and the Foundation was incorporated on Jan. 30, 1974. The original ten participating states included eight states from the Federation; Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, plus Oregon and Washington. The Foundation's 21-member board consisted of the governors of each state, the directors of each state's arts agency and one representative appointed by the president of the Federation of Rocky Mountain States. "We experienced a rocky start," said Ruth Draper, who joined WSAF's board in the summer of 1974. "When I came into WSAF, the agency was so new we were feeling our way along. I think the NEA viewed us as an experiment," she said.

With its declaration of independence, WSAF/WESTAF became one of the first two
regional arts organizations in the nation. Through the early 1980s the NEA supported regional arts organization by making monies available to the states to participate in their regional entities. Ed Dickey, the NEA's State and Regional Program director noted that. "Regionals stand at the intersection of federal and state agencies, allowing state arts organizations to leap state boundaries and do things collectively they couldn't do alone." Collectively, once the seven regional arts organizations were established in the 1970s, they became an effective national arts distribution and support network. The mandate of the regional art organizations (RAOs) was to deliver arts programming (especially touring and presenting-based programming) and services across state boundaries, and to help their participating states more efficiently address the cost of supplying art to regions of the country without ready access to quality arts programs. The RAOs were envisioned as essential elements in the country's cultural infrastructure.

WSAF'S Mission

Defining the mission of the organization. - who were the members and what was the purpose - was a critical issue for WSAF from the outset. In its 1974 articles of incorporation, WSAF defined itself as a regional alliance devoted to extending and strengthening the arts in the West. The purpose of the organization was to act collectively to increase opportunities for the public to enjoy the arts and for professionals to practice them. The 1982 statement of purpose outlined how the organization fulfilled this statement of purpose: "The Foundation fulfills this function by providing high quality programs, purposely focused to have high impact on a limited number of the region's most pressing cultural needs in ways that can be more effective than by the individual state agencies working alone."6 Thus, WESTAF's self-definition emphasized presenting and programming. That is not surprising given that most of the funding for the organization came from the NEA, which was distributing funds through the RAOs that were earmarked for specific touring and visual arts programs. The NEA was motivated to support the RAOs because underwriting regrant programs through them allowed the federal agency to claim support for a wider range of arts organizations and arts activities. This demonstrated that the national organization was fulfilling its mission of making the arts available to all the people.

WSAF was successful in attracting NEA funds, which not only underwrote a substantial portion of the organization’s programs, but also supplied monies to hire staff to carry them out. In its first full year of operation WSAF received a $340,000 block grant from the NEA and used it to generate almost $1 million in arts activity in the region. The 1975-76 block grant from the NEA totaled $500,000 and leveraged $1.5 million in arts activity. By 1989, the organization's block grant had grown to $761,000 and catalyzed $1.8 million in arts-related activities. The question that guided all of our actions was, ".. .can we (WSAF) do this better on behalf of the states, or can the states do it better by themselves?" said Melton. "This was one of the questions we used to test the validity and value of any program we were contemplating."
Funding: Public-Private

Initially, WSAF's small board and smaller staff was a "cozy club," said Draper. "We were just 10 state directors, a few with no arts administration experience, and we worked our hearts out designing programs to serve each state, and to understand how a regional arts organization could serve the field." But as NBA funding expanded and its programs became more ambitious, it was evident WSAF had to expand to keep pace. Professional staff and additional governing board members from corporate fields as well as the arts, were added.\(^7\)

In the 1980s, the organization added new programs and the staff to run them and moved to a new building it purchased in Santa Fe. As the impact of the stagnation in and changes to the priorities in the NEA's budget began to affect WSAF in the early 1980s. WSAF's board began actively to solicit funds from the private sector. In 1983, the board adopted the following mission statement: To "strive to bring together the most dynamic public and private resources in the region to encourage artistic excellence and support the integration of artistic values into our daily lives." (emphasis added)\(^8\) From the beginning, WESTAF had sought matching funds for programs from local sources, and some foundations had been early supporters of specific projects. For example, the Donner Foundation had contributed $82,000 in 1976 for professional training for board and staff members, and Philip Morris Co. was an early underwriter of visual arts programs.

But the environment in the 1980s was different. There was a growing perspective in Washington, D.C., that federal tax dollars should not be used to support the arts. One means of addressing this new challenge was for publicly funded arts agencies such as WSAF to bring on board individuals from the private sector. WSAF's member states, however, worried that if WSAF solicited monies from private foundations or corporate contributors on their turf, such solicitation would undermine fundraising efforts by arts organizations in their states. WSAF adopted policies to avert the situation, including requiring the approval of each state's arts agency chair and executive director prior to the solicitation of contributions in a state. In addition, the Board of Trustees decided that WSAF would not accept a grant that would supplant funds already committed to the support of state and local programs. Another development-related policy decision was that WSAF could only seek private-sector financial underwriting for specific projects that supported artists and arts organizations—not general administration.\(^9\)

Although WSAF understood that foundation and corporate participation was necessary to support its programs, it proceeded very cautiously in 1981, encouraging only "limited involvement [by the private sector] ... and waiting to see the results."\(^10\) By 1983, board membership expanded to include individuals who were not part of the state arts agency network. Their purpose was to help design and develop projects that would increase
WSAF's capital base and identify corporate support for regional programs." As a result, by 1989, WSAF's board grew to 33 from the original 21.

Expansion

The decision to expand the board beyond each state's arts agency subtly influenced the organization's goals and generated further discussions about WSAF's role. A survey of 100 arts professionals commissioned by WSAF in 1987 indicated a high level of confusion about the organization. Some thought that WSAF was a regional arts fundraiser; others viewed it as a presenter. Still others considered WSAF as a catalyst organization not directly involved in programming and presenting. Yet others believed the organization was primarily a clearing-house for the exchange of ideas. The problem, according to the conclusions of the survey, was that the board's own definition--"The Western States Arts Foundation is a regional organization"--was not specific enough. What did it mean? Was WSAF an organization that was regional in scope, or an organization of the region? If the latter, it implied a "union, alliance, association." that is, "a federation." According to the draft report:

On many occasions the name Western States Arts Foundation has caused confusion, particularly in the public expectation that foundations give grants, and in philanthropy, most foundations do not normally give to other foundations. Explaining that WSAF is an "operating" foundation, which carries out programs rather than making grants, has not been particularly effective since that hybrid organizational type is not easily understood by the general public or funding sources. For these reasons, the Planning Committee proposes to change the name of WSAF to "Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF)," and adopt the following definition: 'The Western States Arts Federation is a regional consortium led by state arts agencies on behalf of artists, arts agencies and organizations, and area audiences in the western United States of America.'

The organization's new purpose as a federation was "to provide leadership and support" by offering professional opportunities and programs, and to "advocate the arts to the public and private sectors." To accomplish this, an "Agenda for the Nineties" recommended additional board committees to oversee various internal and external functions. The Board of Trustees further proposed establishing the Western States Arts Fund, a non-profit, charitable organization that would build an endowment, raise funds, and suggest other ways in which WESTAF could raise its profile in the private sector. For example, the organization could align itself with existing organizations (which would then attach the WESTAF name to any joint program) or promote sponsorship arrangements. The draft also recommended that non-participating states be allowed to collaborate with WESTAF under contractual relationships as either associate or affiliate members, paying a fee for services and programs.

These changes were never fully realized. At a time when the NEA, through its block
grant and categorical grant programs, supported more than half of the WESTAF budget of approximately $2.5 million, the agency staff increased in size and dedicated most of its time to managing programs and grant projects. WESTAF expanded from seven employees in 1986 to 16 in 1989. The additional staff hired to administer the growing roster of programs exerted considerable influence on the organization's identity, philosophy, and programmatic direction.

The impetus for the expansion of the board to 33 members came in part from its desire to include a broader cross-section of the region's culturally and ethnically diverse population, but the primary motivation was to address the compelling need to raise funds. WESTAF increasingly attempted to become a private fund-raising organization, and it often found itself in competition with individual states for money, especially from the corporate sector. Much of the fundraising was directed toward specific new programs, not the "core programs" long supported (and policy-managed) by the NEA.

This was an unsettling period for many of WESTAF's members. The organization was growing very rapidly and was adding new programs at such a rapid pace that some found it difficult to keep up. "There was friction." said Nello McDaniel. "WESTAF was moving faster than its ability to assimilate. The growth was a kind of 'art shock'." McDaniel noted that "WESTAF was creating more work for communities and states, and there wasn't enough time to digest it internally." In some ways, McDaniel and others said, WESTAF was almost too good at its job. By bringing together states with similar issues and small populations, the agency had created a political bloc capable of attracting funds to help support the arts across the region. WESTAF's original purpose was to solve common problems and make things happen. "But then when the organization began to support major programming rather than projects, its activities became institutionalized, and it shifted direction," said McDaniel.

The NEA was driving many of the program initiatives, as it was driving the regional movement. "We got better analysis and information on regional issues and cultural specifics from organizations at that level," said Frank Hodsoll, NEA chair from 1982 to 1989. "Regional organizations gave the NEA a better sense of cultural differences, what would play in Peoria, so to speak," he said. In effect, the NEA decided all state arts agencies should belong to one of the seven regional arts organizations. "We were being nudged by the Endowment to cover Texas, California, Alaska, and Hawaii," said Nelson. "This was difficult." The WESTAF region already was immense, and adding more states meant covering an even larger expanse, not to mention the difficulties of dealing with highly diverse demographics and issues within each state. Texas eventually became a member of the Mid-America Arts Alliance, but not before flirting briefly with WESTAF.

Geographic expansion was not the major issue that concerned WESTAF. Rather, the potential effect of expansion on the distribution of funds and programming that might occur after the admission of states such as California and Texas, with their huge populations and existing arts infrastructure, was the concern. Originally, WSAF comprised only those states that were members of the Federation of Rocky Mountain
States in 1974: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. It immediately invited the state of Oregon and Washington to join. Then, as now, there was an extraordinary diversity among the participating states. In 1981, Idaho's governor was proposing a 100 percent increase in the state's arts budget, while Utah and Nevada had boosted state funding for the arts by 12 percent and 16 percent respectively. But Washington was facing a 25 percent cut in funds that year. Meanwhile, Wyoming, with its heavy concentration of ranching and farming, had difficulty building state support for the arts. Economic factors created uneven effects: A 1983 oil recession impacted Wyoming; a tax-check off program in Oregon produced limited returns.

Most of the participating states remained sparsely populated through the 1980s with a few urban pockets accounting for most of the region's population. WESTAF, working on behalf of all of its members, attracted significant support from the NEA for programs, which were distributed equitably among them. In 1985, California's Arts Council expressed an interest in joining WESTAF, and raised some delicate issues. The sheer size of the state in terms of population and budget would affect WESTAF operationally -increasing the workload and perhaps requiring additional staff- not to mention the impact of the state on the touring and presenting support programs. California had approached WESTAF as early as 1980 regarding participation in its Touring Conference. At the time, the state "was not interested in who belongs to what region, but is willing to share expenses and/or purchase services" from WESTAF. California became a member in 1986, recognizing "that caps on participation in certain programs might be appropriate." The biggest issue was "how to establish a relationship that was beneficial to both sides," said Terry Melton. It was the NEA's position that regional organizations should cover the entire country, and California needed an affiliation. WESTAF was the logical choice.

**Membership/Fees**

As an independent, non-profit arts service organization, WESTAF had the latitude to establish its own rules concerning membership, participation fee structure, and specific deliverables for each level of participation. Throughout the history of regional arts organizations, participating states had been encouraged to support the expansion of federal regional arts programming through the payment of participation fees. Those fees made it possible for regional arts organizations to match federal arts dollars and also helped leverage funds from the private sector.

The participation fees also made it possible for regional arts organizations to design and manage programs that allowed the region's states to enjoy the benefits of financial and programmatic efficiencies resulting from interstate collaborations. Over the years, WESTAF has worked with the states to make the fee formula most agreeable to most states and to provide each state with services that are critical to each. WESTAF has
initiated a variety of strategies to clarify its relationship with and offerings to state arts agencies, from revising membership categories to helping participating state arts agencies structure and argue for their state budget requests.

In September 1984, WESTAF signed Cooperative Agreements with Hawaii and Alaska, effectively expanding the region to the farthest reaches of the American West. Alaska and Hawaii had been members of the Consortium of Pacific Arts and Cultures organization, which existed in its first form from 1980 to 1983.\(^2\) When the Consortium was reconfigured and both Alaska and Hawaii sought an alternative means to support joint projects, including joining an existing regional organization. WESTAF was considered the best option for these states.\(^2\) Under the agreement, both state arts agencies were eligible to participate in all of WESTAF's programs, unless they specifically withdrew in advance. The agreement stipulated that each would have a representative on the board. Fees for services were based on the amount allocated by the NEA to each state for regional programming, plus a 20 percent match of the federal funds from state sources.\(^9\)

In 1987, WESTAF amended its bylaws to allow participation by "associate" members: "A state arts agency that could not be a voting participant was permitted to associate with the Federation, accessing any and all field activities for its states, by paying to the federation fees established by the board."\(^2\) Recognizing the fact that a state arts agency may need to revise its membership status in order to address concerns at the state level and to employ a strategy that keeps everyone in the fold by providing flexibility in services. WESTAF voted to allow Washington to change its status to an associate member in 1987. By 1990, Washington returned as full member.

**Board Composition**

Throughout the 1980's, WESTAF rolled out new programs and explored others, all the while balancing the funding uncertainties stemming from congressional attacks on the NEA budget. In an attempt to obtain the broadest representation from its constituencies, the board restructured again in 1990. Now the Board of Trustees included the executive director of each state arts agency plus a second representative from each state, and five at-large positions, which were filled by artists, arts professionals, advocates and corporate citizens. In addition, the number of committees proliferated; there were standing program and organizational committees, as well as ad-hoc project committees to oversee several program areas.

A success story that evolved from the work of the Board of Trustees' programming committee, composed of executive directors of state arts agencies and artists, was the founding of the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nevada. Through WESTAF funding folk arts at various state arts agencies, this infrastructure supported the Center in its initial year and enabled it to receive state, municipal, and foundation support in succeeding years. By 1993, WESTAF's board and staff were managing or overseeing 19 separate
programs, ranging from Visual Arts Fellowships and the Western States Book Awards to fee support for literature programs. And WESTAF was seeking private support for such projects as its Book Awards (which had received strong backing from the Xerox Corp. and B. Dalton Foundation since its inception), Folk Arts programs and a Visual Arts catalogue.

The entire structure of the agency and its programs finally became unmanageable and nearly impossible to fund, and, in 1995, the board began to consider a new organizational structure and identity. Funding played an enormous role in the board's decisions. Due to enormous budget reductions mandated by congress, the NEA allocation to WESTAF was cut nearly in half in a single year. WESTAF could no longer count on steadily increasing NEA grants, and had to put a massive readjustment plan in place. In addition, private foundations had informed regional arts organizations that they would not replace lost federal arts funds. At the same time, NEA funding of state arts agencies was substantially diminished. In the early 1990s the NEA provided 70 percent of WESTAF's operating funds through regional arts programming grants, and it also supported a number of categorical project with grant funds secured on a competitive basis. Participation fees from member states contributed roughly 12 percent of WESTAF's total budget, however, increasing the state fee to help offset the decline in NEA funds was not a popular option, even though WESTAF members paid a lower participation fee than did states in other regions.

Reorganization

By 1996, WESTAF's financial outlook was grim. Even after trimming programs and services by 20 percent, as recommended in 1995, the organization didn't have the resources to support anything more than caretaker-level staff. Moreover, there were no identifiable resources for new ventures, and the budget was about $200,000 short of current needs. Larry Williams, board chairman at the time, concluded that "the organization must either face up to being a public agency or make a total commitment to be something different than a public agency."

The board had already begun to grapple with the purpose and structure of the organization following the departure of Donald Meyer as executive director in 1995. WESTAF's very existence was questioned: Was there a compelling need for a regional organization, and if so, what should its structure and purpose be? A series of decisions by the organization's stakeholders resulted in agreement to endorse a stripped down WESTAF, with a small staff focused on coordination and research. The organization was to be based in a more easily accessible and cost effective location than Santa Fe and its purpose was to enact a strategic program that would support the state public arts agencies of the region. In addition, the success of the organization's initiatives was to be determined by their direct return on investment. The new WESTAF executive director was to assume the role of a chief executive officer with the authority to act in such manner. The board was reduced to 22 members from 29, and was to include one
trustee per state, five state arts agency executive directors elected by their peers, and up to five at-large members.

Historically, the Board of Trustees averaged 22 members with a high of 33 and a low of 15. Over the past 25 years, a number of changes have been made to the bylaws regarding various trustee classifications. One constant among these changes was that there had always been the mandate of one representative per state. That constant evolved from the original board structure, which designated one trustee per state, (usually the state arts agency executive director or an agency council board member), to a more detailed three-classification structure that was adopted in 1997. The classifications were as follows:

Classification 1. Five (5) voting trustees shall be executive directors of the federated state arts agencies to be elected by the executive directors of the arts agencies directors of all the federated states. A federated state arts agency is an agency which pays an unrestricted federation fee plus a participation fee to the federation to be calculated on a basis and at a rate to be determined by two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Board of Trustees.

Classification 2. Seven (7) voting trustees shall be elected at-large individuals elected by the WESTAF board/executive committee upon nomination by the board development committee. These seven members must be from the seven federated states not represented by an executive director.

Classification 3. Up to ten (10) private citizens shall be elected as voting at-large trustees by the executive committee for their leadership in the cultural development of the West, their business acumen, or for professional involvement in the practice, promotion, creation or presentation of the arts."

What emerged in 1996, after a year-long planning effort by the board, was an entrepreneurial organization—one designed to be an initiator of critically needed regional projects. The organization’s budget was to be increasingly supported by revenues based on fees for service. By 1997, the NEA's share of WESTAF's budget had shrunk to 60 percent. Moreover, NEA funding shifted from block grants combined with support for specific programs to straight block grants. Private contributions were a relatively small part of WESTAF's budget contributing only about $10,000. in 1996. Moreover, earned income, generated from WESTAF publications, research and other services, doubled from 12 percent of revenue prior to the mid 1990s, to 25 percent today.

The participation fee structure that had been in place since 1993 was reconfigured in 1996. During the severe NEA cutbacks of block grants to the states and regions, the board had allowed (on a temporary basis) member states to pay what they could afford rather than the agreed upon assessment. As a result six WESTAF states paid the fee in full and six paid half of the assessed fee. That action reduced WESTAF's revenues by $67,240 in fiscal 1996. JJ A new two-tier formula was adopted in 1997. Member states
could choose the assessed fee level, which, or they could opt for an adjusted fee, which was 75 percent of the amount. All members received a basic package of services, which included access to touring funds and monies for regional projects from private sources, while those paying the assessed amount received additional services. The two-tier structure was meant to be temporary, and at the beginning of fiscal year 2000 the fee structure reverted to a single fee with a "cafeteria plan" of services that allowed states to select programs in which they wished to participate.

WESTAF moved its operations back to Denver in 1996 under the leadership of the new executive director, Anthony Radich. Radich’s proposals for the new WESTAF were not without controversy. Many perceived a lack of support for the organization’s commitment to the arts and artists, but he saw WESTAF’s primary task over the next three years as ensuring "a financially healthy" organization, recognizing that some important arts activities might be temporarily or permanently curtailed. The goal was to create a stable organization as financially independent as possible from the NEA and increasingly served through earned-income projects. He projected that WESTAF would endeavor to serve state arts agencies outside the region on a fee-for-service basis and expand its efforts into arts advocacy and arts-policy development. Among WESTAF’s new initiatives are major research projects as well as an increased commitment to technology, including using the Internet to package and disseminate information and materials concerning the arts.

WESTAF had cut its coat to fit new cloth. As Dave Nelson said, "Despite all the political pressures, state art agencies have survived. Despite all the accusations made by Congress, the NEA has survived. And despite the turmoil. WESTAF has survived."

Performing/Touring Programs

Touring was the spark that ignited the Western States Arts Federation. The Federation’s founding members recognized that many performers regarded the mountain West as little more than a big empty space between the East and West coasts. Touring a region that covered nearly 25 percent of the landmass but held barely 3 percent of the population in the 1960s was expensive in both time and money. By banding together, cultural leaders in the Western states saw a way to make tours affordable for their far-flung communities, as well as attractive to artists who could book a succession of performance dates in a block. WESTAF became the mechanism that made it possible. Nevertheless, touring was challenging. The National Endowment for the Arts provided generous funding for touring, dance in particular, in the 1970s. When NEA money began to dry up in the 1980s, support for touring became problematic. Tensions also arose over how artists and companies were selected for tours, and how to balance the needs of large and small presenters and communities. There were also conflicts in the professional development arena, one of WESTAF’s key functions, which helped train presenters and artists as advocates for the arts in the West. Ironically, funds for touring
shrunk dramatically just as the West's population exploded.

In the beginning, the situation was reversed. Events were moving fast in 1973 as the Arts and Humanities Council prepared to split from the Federation of Rocky Mountain States and become the independent Western States Arts Foundation. At about the same time, the NEA announced funding for an eight-month dance-touring program in an attempt to decentralize dance tours, which were then largely confined to large cities on both coasts. The NEA wanted the states to administer the dance-touring program, and grants to support staff salaries were among the first awarded to states by the Endowment. WESTAF seized the opportunity. By pooling the grants, it was able in January 1974 to hire Nello McDaniel and Ann Merlo to coordinate the first Regional Dance Tour. Even before WESTAF broke from the Federation of Rocky Mountain States it had gotten its feet wet with touring, with the hugely successful Artrain, which toured seven Western states for a year beginning in 1973, supported by NEA funds. Artrain's impact was far-reaching, not only because it brought world-class art works and artists to small towns but because it depended upon local organizing committees to keep it rolling. Those committees were the genesis for local arts agencies all over the West.

**Dance Touring**

One of the lessons WESTAF learned from the Artrain was the critical need for organizing and training local arts presenters. Until the advent of the NEA, most states had no formally recognized arts agencies, and there were even fewer arts organizations at the local level. As Ruth Draper noted, in the early years most of the states were "just feeling our way along." What helped coalesce the state agencies into arts professionals were the WT-STAF board meetings where everyone came together to share their experiences, said Dave Nelson, executive director of the Montana Arts Council and a WESTAF board member until 1992, "The biggest benefit was being exposed to NEA professionals about how to put a tour together. Their support allowed us to travel to workshops and meetings," he said.

With Artrain under its belt, WESTAF was ready to tackle dance. McDaniel said his first four months as dance coordinator were hectic. He and Merlo divided the region in half, and between them, they visited every community of 10,000 or more, assessing what facilities were available and what local support was in place. Their job was twofold - to discover which communities could accommodate a dance tour and to try to develop the West's own dance resources. "There wasn't much structure or organization at the time," McDaniel said. "We knew the subject (both had dance backgrounds), so we had a level of expertise about what dance companies needed to perform." And the states needed help in professional development. About half of the communities had no local arts organization, according to McDaniel, so he and Merlo worked with them on audience development, marketing and raising funds. "It was real pioneering stuff [in 1974]," he said.
Built into all WESTAF's touring programs from the first was the requirement that communities provide a one-to-one match on funding. Finding financial support in communities with little experience in the arts required creative thinking. One initiative involved "underwriting against loss," getting a local bank or sponsor to make up any shortfall between other funding and box office receipts, McDaniel said. In return, the underwriter got free advertising as a sponsor, and in many cases, there was not a shortfall to make up.

Dance touring was risky in the West, but with tight scheduling and good local organization, it proved successful. Over time, the Dance Tour evolved into the Western States Performing Arts Tour. For the first few years, WESTAF staff was responsible for booking dates in each community, "to ensure that as many dates as possible [were] booked." Otherwise, WESTAF would have to assume a greater portion of the company fee if fewer dates were booked. From dance, the touring program expanded to include theater as well as music, spawning such programs as Jazz on Tour, Meet the Composer and Western States Presenter Incentive Project, and supporting tours by regional theater companies like the Seattle Repertory and the Guthrie in Minneapolis. "The growth between 1974 and 1978 was phenomenal." said McDaniel.

Presenting/Touring

WESTAF's role expanded as the program offerings increased. It published an annual Tour Book listing approved artists and groups available for tours. Board members and staff comprised the review panels that selected the performers. In 1976, it broadened its focus to include both booking and sponsor-development programs. The board also signaled another undertaking in its regional plan for 1977, artist development: Although the primary consideration for the establishment of the Touring Program was to assist the local sponsor and thereby, the audiences, an important side effect has occurred; arts groups of regional potential now have a central office to which they can turn for assistance in undertaking new services and expanding their area of service. For instance, A Contemporary Theatre, Seattle, wanted to tour into Oregon, Idaho and Nevada but had never had the staff undertake research as to local sponsors, financial support, and so forth. When we proposed to help them go on tour they reacted with an immediate "yes" and indicated they had both the capability and desire to tour, the only thing holding them up was the lack of contracts, experience for long-term tours and sources of financial assistance to make the fees enticing to smaller communities. This reaction has been repeated with several of our better, but smaller, regional arts resources.

Much of the growth in WESTAF's touring programs was driven by the NEA, which in the late 1970s established discipline programs in theater, opera and music - ranging from symphonies to chamber music, new music and jazz. States and regional arts
organization could apply for funding in each discipline area. NEA initiatives also shaped WESTAF's efforts on behalf of presenters. For example, the Community Artists Residency Training Program - designed to develop new sponsors in small communities - pushed into the western states in 1980. However, the program was funded for only three years, a situation that increasingly impacted decisions by WESTAF concerning its touring efforts. In 1980 WESTAF also received a $30,000 grant from the NEA's Inter-Arts Program to investigate setting up networks of presenters in subregions who would cooperate and collaborate on things like block-booking and sharing resources and administrative costs.

"The NEA was pushing across disciplines--adding theater and music--but the resources were different," said Jerry Yoshitomi, acting vice president for operations at WESTAF in 1979-81. In addition, the role of presenters was beginning to change. "I think at first presenters were seen as merely operators of facilities. Nevertheless, that has changed. Today, they're the ones in power," Yoshitomi said, commissioning new work and organizing tours.

Most of WESTAF's efforts in touring through the 1970s and 1980s were directed toward presenters, in the form of fee support, resource information, training and booking assistance. Most of the money for fee support came from NEA discipline programs, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s it was the only program funding available for regional organizations from the NEA." Funds were available only for groups approved by the NEA's discipline programs, and were in the range of $5,000. Another source of NEA fee support for touring came from the Basic Regional Operating Grant, which remained essentially flat beginning in 1980, putting serious pressure on it as a source of funding. Again, support was in the range of $5,000 for residency programs. State arts agencies also awarded grants to presenters, supplementing funds from WESTAF, but they did not allocate program funds for WESTAF to do so. States preferred in a direct manner to support local organizations rather than contributing funds to be passed through where they would not get the same kind of buy-in from those organizations.

**WAA/Booking Conferences**

Among WESTAF's most significant early efforts was the annual Touring Conference, begun in 1978, which brought artists and sponsors together to negotiate contracts. In conjunction with the conferences, WESTAF published a Tour Guide, containing information on selected companies available to tour the region, including repertoire, services provided and fees charged. It was a kind of "quality assurance" document for presenters booking tours, but it increasingly became a cause of disagreement. Most of those listed were large companies, and the guide was not seen as serving the needs of smaller or ethnic presenters. In addition, there were questions about who reviewed the qualitative merits, how companies were screened and on what basis they were chosen.
The booking conferences were an opportunity for WESTAF to extend its training mission to foster the growth and development of presenters. During the conferences, it conducted workshops addressing business skills, such as ticket campaigns, fundraising, contract negotiations, marketing and organizational development. In addition, WESTAF set aside funds for small communities just getting started to cover their travel and other expenses related to attending the conference. "In those days, WESTAF was very hands-on," said Shelly Cohn, executive director of the Arizona Commission on the Arts.47 "We were in the business of booking tours, as well as doing professional development and education. We partnered workshops, got people to the conferences to meet the artists, taught them about fund raising and marketing."

In 1981, WESTAF held its first joint booking conference with the Western Alliance of Arts Administrators (now the Western Arts Alliance), a loosely structured organization representing presenters and artists. WAA's and WESTAF's booking activities overlapped in many instances; where WESTAF diverged, however, was in professional development, presenting workshops and training for sponsors, and increasingly for artists hoping to become part of the touring roster. WESTAF and WAA pooled resources to sponsor a joint booking conference because of the high cost of mounting separate conferences.48 Initially, it was a balanced relationship, with WAA handling the booking and WESTAF doing professional development. Gradually, however, WAA moved into professional development as WESTAF struggled with the uncertainties of funding support from the NEA. The relationship has been marked by frustrations because they are two separate organizations essentially doing a job handled by a single organization in other regions, says Tim Wilson, executive director of WAA and a former director of the Alaska Arts Commission and WESTAF board member. Over the years, there has been a duplication of efforts.

By the mid 1980s, WESTAF's touring program included both a director of performing arts and a director of professional development. Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, hired in 1983 as director of performing arts, assumed the other position as well, juggling the responsibilities of both with the help of two assistants.49 The number of presenters exploded in the 1980s, and most states designated staff to coordinate performing arts, but skills were minimal. "Professional development was so important to our mission." she said. "There wasn't a lot of information, and people needed to know how to do basic things -- how to write grant applications, how to do a residency, how to work with local artists, how to get artists on WESTAF's touring roster."

What WESTAF could do for its members was provide training opportunities. For example, it developed a model residency program to teach presenters and state arts agency staff, as well as artists, how to do a successful artist-in-residence program specifically for western communities. WESTAF staff also worked closely with the boards of non-profit presenters to develop their skills - offering workshops on the role of boards in arts advocacy, marketing, and organizational structure. "It was important to attach a face to WESTAF, and that's what these professional development efforts did," said
Jennings-Roggensack. It worked on the state arts agency level as well, providing training and support, "so they didn't feel they were alone," she said.

**Presenter Incentive Project**

One effort in 1987 was the Western States Presenter Incentive Project, under which WESTAF provided fee support to presenters in the West to commission and present new works. It specifically targeted ethnic and underserved communities to support new and unknown artists, for longer residencies. "It was unique to the West, a new element," said Cohn. The Western States Presenter Initiative Program complemented Meet the Composer, which began as a pilot project in 1985 to support composer residencies and one performance. The Meet the Composer contract was renewable for up to three years and provided $15,000 annually, to be matched by $5,000 from WESTAF in the first year, the match to escalate thereafter. It became Meet the Composer/West in 1987, but was so narrowly focused that it did not continue as a funding priority.

That WESTAF's Performing/Touring structure was top-heavy and cumbersome to administer became clear in 1987. The NEA was fighting for its life, and WESTAF's budgeting decisions were increasingly affected by that uncertainty. At the same time, WESTAF had added staff as well as new programs, and its resources were stretched thin. As WESTAF laid plans in 1987 for the 1990s, it was clear just how important performing arts and touring was. It was acknowledged in a planning document, called *An Agenda for the Nineties*: "Performing Arts, the impetus for the creation of the original WESTAF, remains the organization's core concern as well as the field most widely and directly addressed through ongoing programs," the document stated. "There is little doubt that WESTAF should continue to address the Performing Arts though Field Committee and staff."

**Western States Performing Arts Tour**

However, in the same planning document WESTAF's Western States Performing Arts Tour (WSPAT) was put on notice. The tour "should continue with refinements now being added, such as the two-year roster. However, the performing arts committee will soon have to evaluate the program thoroughly, examining its purposes and future directions, and dealing with perceptions of bias as concerns urban/rural or large/mid/small." the document states. It also "suggests that WSPAT might eventually be administered by some other organization, but such a transfer would take considerable time in the planning." In 1990, the Performing Arts Tour was modified, and the dance component was spun off into a national program called Dance on Tour.
Despite the constant changes, WESTAF continued to mount an extensive and impressive touring program until the mid 1990s. In its 1993-95 season, for example, the Presenter Incentive Project received 48 applications from all 12 states in the region, and it awarded $48,716 to support presenters involved in this effort. In 1991, WESTAF launched a new program, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest National Jazz Network, which included a program called Jazz Chats that introduced the network to artists, educators, presenters and managers, as well as outreach through community visits. Meet the Composer/West also continued, and although a relatively small dollar amount was dedicated to it, "it impacts very positively on the region's composers and music presenters," according to a 1992 performing arts program report. A new category was added to it in 1993, Meet the Composer/Jazzwest, which was supplemented by a grant from Lila Wallace.

TourWest

Meet the Composer only survived one more year; WESTAF discontinued it in 1994 as the budget crunch hit and it redesigned its performing arts program/ The touring program and the Presenter Incentive Project were combined into one fee-support program with no review panels or roster of artists, and the number of large presenters it would support was capped, except when collaborating with smaller presenters. Out of these changes grew what is now TourWest, which essentially combines what were previously individually supported discipline programs in dance, theater, music, visual arts and literature into a single funding pool. A panel of eight decided which presenters would be funded, with a funding limit of $2,500. By late 1996, WESTAF had jettisoned many of its performing arts projects as part of its restructuring. The Jazz Project continued for another year, but it was a pass-through project funded by Lila Wallace and had little impact on WESTAF's budget.

Folk Arts

In addition, touring Folk Arts projects were put on hold and a variety of other programs were dismantled or downsized. Folk Arts as a separate program within WESTAF emerged in 1982 with a Folk Arts Forum showcasing projects and artists identified by state Folk Arts Coordinators. At the time, the NEA was funding coordinators in 42 states nationwide, who were attempting to stimulate activity in sparsely populated, rural areas.

By 1985, WESTAF had decided to pursue a folk arts initiative and provided funds in its budget for planning. At the time a touring exhibition and folk music tour were under consideration, as was a possible tie-in with a National Council for the Traditional Arts' regional folk festival."" By 1993, WESTAF was evaluating suggestions for 23 programs in
the folk-arts arena, all of which required outside funding. A Folk Arts Tour in partnership with the Western Folklife Center was mounted in late 1994. WESTAF also began to explore a new initiative, a folk arts radio program funded in part by a grant from the Ruth Mott Fund, which proved to be a success.  

WESTAF also provided technical assistance to performing and visual folk artists, offering skill development in self-promotion, presentation, and how to generate funds, audiences and venues for performances.  

Funding became very tight in 1996, as WESTAF worked to transform itself, but it was evident that if a folk arts program were to survive, WESTAF would have to identify alternative funding sources. In 1997 it convened a group of experts — including the Cultural Center for the New West, the Seattle Corporate Council on the Arts, the Western Folklife Center and the former director of the Ruth Mott Fund - to address the issue.  

And in 1998, WESTAF received $10,000 from the NEA to support further research on new models for funding folk arts programs.

Folk Arts, like other WESTAF touring programs, has had to remake itself creatively. As Cohn notes, WESTAF's mission has changed, in part due to budget constraints but also because of the increasing sophistication of local and state arts agencies and arts presenters. "A regional focus is really tough," she said. WESTAF no longer devotes staff to canvassing the region, "Often, a regional arts service agency is a bit further removed from what is happening at the local or community level," Cohn says.

**Visual Arts Programs**

"Artrain was the seminal early activity, even before there was a Western States Arts Federation," said Dave Nelson, former executive director of the Montana Arts Council and WESTAF board member until 1992. "It was a test of our ability to pull off a multi-state tour, and we knocked 'em dead." Artrain did, indeed, knock 'em dead, not only in the seven Western states it toured in 1973-74, but nationwide when CBS reporter Charles Kuralt took the nation on a TV tour of the train's stop in Kalispell, Montana. It has been WESTAF's goal from its inception to support art makers and promote both exposure for and critical recognition of artists working in the West. Its solutions have ranged from fellowships to individual artists to major touring exhibitions. The board also explored such ambitious projects as an international exchange with artists of the Pacific Rim and a project with Native American tribes whose ancestral roots in the Grand Canyon might be explored visually. Not everything succeeded, but in the process, WESTAF reached deep within its diverse communities, seeking artists whose works reflect aspects of American western culture.

Artrain (discussed in the chapter on Performing/Touring) had such a positive impact that the fledgling WESTAF mounted another traveling art exhibit in 1974 called Art Van, in cooperation with the Denver Art Museum. The Art Van, a semi-trailer truck, traveled to
four states and 40 communities in that year. What was learned from Artrain helped prepare the ground for a visit by the Art Van; community sponsors received technical assistance, and educational materials were prepared and sent to each locale to encourage participation.

It became increasingly clear in the late 1970s that national exposure and recognition for Western artists was not going to happen without a goad. "The problem was how to establish a forum for thoughtful artists to exhibit their works," said Terry Melton, former WSAF chairman and later executive director of WESTAF. That's when WESTAF began to think about touring an exhibition of art work produced in the region and exhibited at prestigious museums and galleries on the East and West coasts. "We were grasping for respect [for artists]." said Ruth Draper, former executive director of the Utah Arts Council and WESTAF board member. "Anything west of the Mississippi was ignored. We were desperate for recognition from the East that our artists were competent and talented."

**Western States Arts Exhibitions**

Jan Steinhauser, hired in 1976 as WESTAF's first visual arts director, devoted most of her time initially to developing a robust visual arts fellowship program. While traveling from state to state and meeting with artists and state arts agencies about the fellowships, it became clear to her that WESTAF needed to do something to garner recognition for artists working in the region. "It was from those meetings that the seeds emerged for a touring exhibition," which became the first Western States Biennial Exhibition in 1979-80, Steinhauser said.

Laying the groundwork for the touring exhibition was labor-intensive, for it involved not only selecting art works that would tour, but arranging venues for the exhibition as well. It took two years of planning, and Steinhauser cites three components that led to success. First, the Philip Morris Company stepped up with major funding, which was something of a fluke, she said. "I saw an ad from them in some magazine looking for proposals in the arts. I was naive enough to send one in, and they ended up giving us three or four times the amount I requested," Steinhauser said. "It was their money and their PR people who made the opening receptions such a success." In the end, Philip Morris contributed about $100,000, nearly three times the $35,000 Steinhauser asked for, and the first time WESTAF had received corporate funding to support visual arts, she said.

The second key to success was the way artists were selected. Each state arts agency connected with major museums and galleries within its borders to nominate artists for participation. "The states did the initial sifting," Steinhauser said. "Their involvement gave them confidence in their ability to control the selection and the quality." Artists, arts administrators and curators in 13 Western states (including California, Hawaii and
Alaska, which were non-members at the time) identified emerging artists in their states. Of more than 100 artists nominated, 28 were chosen by a panel of museum directors and artists to participate in the first Western States Biennial Exhibition.

The third component was the early support of the Denver Art Museum. "The museum helped us to connect to the 'art network' of other museums and curators nationwide. Through them we were able to build relationships and get to the right people." Steinhauser said.

The exhibition toured in 1979 and 1980, opening at the Denver Art Museum. Its first stop after Denver was the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C. (now the National Museum of American Art), where a reception was held at the home of Vice President Walter Mondale. Additional dates in the two-year tour included museums and galleries in Illinois, Hawaii, Newport Beach, CA and Santa Fe, ending at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

By every measure, the exhibition was a success for WESTAF. Not only did Philip Morris help pay for national advertising, it also bought pieces from the exhibition for its corporate collection. Reviews in the national press -- including The Wall Street Journal, Newsweek and the Washington Post, as well as art publications like Art in America and Art News - "praised the show." Moreover, many of the works exhibited were sold before the tour ended. "It was exciting," said Melton.

One way the exhibition-garnered attention was by including work by Georgia O'Keefe, who was widely recognized as one of the nation's leading artists. "We were worried that people wouldn't come, so we tagged big names, like O'Keefe, to help pull the crowds," said Draper. "It helped get people interested. They paid attention to the rest of the show because she was included." In addition, that first exhibition helped promote not only those artists whose work was exhibited but Western artists generally. It also encouraged cooperation among arts professionals within the region and enhanced contacts and visibility of WESTAF programs with regional and national foundations and corporations. Funding was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts' Museum Program, participating museums and the Dayton Hudson Foundation and Philip Morris, as well as $10,000 by WESTAF.

Hoping to sustain the momentum generated by the first, plans for a second Biennial were developed quickly. An evaluation of the first exhibition suggested a more extensive nomination and curatorial process. It was also recommended that a longer timeframe be adopted because planning a touring exhibition every two years was too ambitious. The Second Western States Art Exhibition opened at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1983 and ran through late 1984, with stops at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, the Santa Fe Museum of Fine Arts and the San Francisco Art Museum. This time, 35 artists participated, and again it helped generate interest in artists working in the West. A third exhibition opened in 1986 at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and closed at the Palm Springs Desert Museum in January 1988. One of its stops was the Chicago International Art
Expo, and again Philip Morris was a big supporter, hosting a special opening reception.\textsuperscript{70} But by then, it was apparent that national interest was waning. At the last minute the J.B. Speed Museum in Louisville, KY, withdrew, and WESTAF scrambled to find another venue.\textsuperscript{71}

In part, the demise of the Western States Art Exhibitions was because the novelty had worn off. However, as Draper said, they were also very hard to do, "and the attitude was uneven. We had some fine individual pieces, but they weren't cohesive exhibits." There were other considerations concerning the organization and structure of the exhibitions. Early on, it was determined that at least one artist from each state in the WESTAF region would be included in the survey exhibition, but when outside curators juried the works, it didn't always work out that way. WESTAF set a goal that the exhibitions feature "a minimum of 15 artists from participating states." In addition, hoping to insure continued national attention and recognition for its artists, WESTAF determined that "four or more major museums, at least one of which is on the East Coast" had to host the exhibitions.\textsuperscript{72} By the late 1980s, it was becoming difficult to assure venues for the large survey exhibit. "We couldn't find museums that wanted us," said Draper. "They wanted 'blockbusters' to bring in audiences and we were [bringing in] unknown [artists]." WESTAF did finally remove the clause requiring at least one artist from each state, but by then, it was too late.

However, two other avenues to promote and support the visual arts regionally began in the late '80s. The National Endowment for the Arts, which had been awarding national visual arts fellowships, inaugurated a program of regional fellowships, which WESTAF administered; and WESTAF began exploring a fourth biennial exhibition focusing on the arts of the Pacific Rim.\textsuperscript{73} The former proved to be a significant program, but the latter, after several years of effort and a large infusion of funds, was set aside.

**Regional Fellowships/Visual Arts**

The Regional Fellowships for Visual Artists began in 1988 with awards in printmaking and drawing. WESTAF had been granting fellowships to visual artists since its inception. In the mid-1970s, artists' fellowships were the organization's second-largest financial commitment after touring. WESTAF rotated the award categories to include the broadest number of artists and media. A component of these early fellowships was an exhibition that toured the region showing the work of the artists who had received grants. The exhibitions were intended to not only promote the award winners but also to provide an educational experience to audiences, exposing them to works by artists in the region. In addition, WESTAF set aside $5,000-$7,000 to promote, jury and administer these awards.\textsuperscript{74} The first two exhibitions - Visual Arts 1976 and Crafts 1977 - were toured by the Western Association of Art Museums. Crafts 1977 was funded through a grant from
the NEA's Crafts Program, and the third, Video/Filmmaking 1978, was financed by the NEA's Media Arts Program. Although the cost was low - $150 for a community - the video/film tour was not a huge hit.

Still, in 1976 WESTAF awarded 10 fellowships in painting and sculpture, funded through its basic regional operating grant at $5,000 each. In 1977, it awarded fellowships to eight craft artists, and in 1979, it made eight awards to film and video artists. By 1979, its grants to 10 printmakers were for $2,500 each because matching funds were not available from NEA. To make up for it WESTAF pushed hard to market and sell the works, printing a catalogue and sending the prints on tour in Arizona, Utah and Oregon.  

In 1978 WESTAF explored the possibility of increasing the amount of the fellowships to the $7,500-$ 10,000 range, which would rise to $20,000 within five years, but the sums were too ambitious and never materialized. By then 12 states in the region were awarding fellowships, and the NEA had embarked on its national fellowship awards program. The Regional Visual Arts Fellowships were "self-serving for the NEA." said Melton. "By the mid-'80s the NEA was receiving so many applications for national awards, they didn't have enough money to fund them or staff to administer them," he said.

The regional fellowships were a way to extend funding for artists closer into communities, and they could be administered by the existing regional arts organizations. The amounts awarded regionally were scaled down, with $5,000 to each artist. Regional media categories alternated with the NEA awards - for example, the regional awards would be for photography or crafts when the national grants were for painting or printmaking. One component of the regional program was that it provided stipends to arts institutions to mount shows of one to three fellowship winners. There was also an attempt to promote the winners through a Corporate Collectors program, but it was not successful. Additionally, WESTAF published a fellowship catalogue, featuring each artist and examples of his or her work.

It was a delicate balancing act for WESTAF to assure that the fellowships were spread throughout the region and that the same artists were not selected time after time. Past NEA winners or any artist previously receiving a regional fellowship were not eligible for WESTAF consideration for four years. In addition, support for the regional program entailed an additional assessment of $1,000 per state to help match the federal money. In 1990, WESTAF awarded 20 fellowships of $5,000 each. Award recipients were "encouraged" to present their work in under-served areas of the region, for which funds were set aside as Organizational Support.

The regional fellowships were "extremely helpful to the NEA," said Frank Hodsoll, former chairman of the NEA. "These artists weren't in New York or Los Angeles. They were closer to home. National [review] panels couldn't get into communities at that level, but a regional arts organization could identify those artists." "They were instrumental in helping stars into ascendancy," Melton said. "It was exposure for the artists more than the
money they received."

The regional fellowships were the core of WESTAF's visual arts program by the mid-1990s, but funding became precarious. The NEA's funding difficulties accelerated through the period, and WESTAF looked for additional sources of money to support the fellowships. By 1996, the Regional Visual Arts Fellowship Program had ended. With the 1996 publication of *Parallaxis*, WESTAF's ambitious catalogue of essays and works by fellowship awardees, WESTAF acknowledged the loss of federal support for the innovative visions of contemporary artists working within communities. WESTAF convened a symposium in 1997 focusing on support for individual artists.

**Contemporary Arts of the Pacific**

As the third Western States Arts Exhibition tour opened in 1986 WESTAF was thinking about the fourth - an exhibition involving Pacific Rim countries "as an opportunity for national and international visibility and national corporate support." By 1988, WESTAF was in serious talks with the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art to develop the concept, which would involve Japanese and Western artists in residencies and cultural exchanges. WESTAF and the museum sought a $25,000 planning grant from the NEA, and a three-pronged fundraising strategy was launched. They would seek support from the Japanese Business Association of Southern California and the Los Angeles Consul General. The Dentsu Advertising Agency would sell sponsorship packages to corporations. Finally, WESTAF would solicit funds from U.S. companies with Japanese partners. It was thought that with many American companies eager to make inroads into the Pacific Rim, sponsorships and support would be relatively easy to find. A curator was hired as consultant, who recommended that instead of a single group exhibition, there should be a series of solo exhibitions showcasing the work of both Western and Japanese artists, which would travel to Japan and throughout the WESTAF region. To help pay for the extensive planning required for a project of this magnitude, the New Otani Hotel chain in Tokyo offered an in-kind contribution of one year's free hotel expenses.

It was an ambitious agenda, and the board was concerned that the Western States Art Exhibition would sink out of sight. WESTAF’s concerns were that California might swallow most of the funding and venues, leaving the rest of the region begging, and that converting its successful format of survey exhibitions might be a mistake, undermining its credibility with Western artists. By early 1989, ideas were coming together. It was designated the Contemporary Arts Project, Japan & the Western States (changed finally to Contemporary Arts of the Pacific in 1990), and a conference was scheduled for 1990, which would be a kind of cultural exchange between artists, curators, critics and collectors from both countries. Among the ideas floated were a fellowship-residency program for curators and artists; touring exhibitions and presentations by U.S. artists to Japan; and a host of educational programs including bilingual publications, a lecture
series, art talks and a TV series.⁸

As the scope expanded, the project seemed to become less artist-driven, and the board worried that regional artists might lose out. It also became clear that research on cultural exchanges within WESTAF member-states was needed. In addition, there were concerns about the amount of staff time directed toward it.⁹ By 1990, staff had traveled to Japan to meet with arts professionals there. The project finally came unraveled in trying to draft specific written proposals in 1990. The Contemporary Arts of the Pacific program had become too expensive, too ambitious and too far from Western roots to make it viable.⁹⁰

**Grand Canyon Project**

Always embedded in WESTAF’s mission was the need to serve its diverse populations, among them Native American communities. At its first meeting as the Western States Arts Foundation, in February 1974, the board considered a project to assist Native American artists with information on and assistance in making applications for grants available through the NEA.⁹¹ By 1976, WESTAF had implemented an Indian Cultural Project to undertake research and disseminate information on professional development for Indian Cultural Coordinators in state arts agencies in the region.⁹² However, it ran into conflicts with similar projects nationally and was dropped as a full-fledged program in 1977.⁹³ In the meantime, Indian arts coordinators in WESTAF member-states met and formed Atlatl, an organization today run by and for Native American artists.⁹⁴ Throughout its history, WESTAF had searched for a project that would support the Native American arts community, and in the early 1990s, it found a program that matched its broader vision.

*The Grand Canyon: New Interpretations Project* started in 1992 with a simple idea: Bring together a group of Native American artists and communities with traditional ties to the Grand Canyon to create specific works of art interpreting the spiritual-cultural significance of the place for visitors. Originally, the works were to have been collected and reproduced as a book, which would be published by the Grand Canyon Association, a non-profit organization that supports a variety of money-making ventures to promote the canyon. The guiding hand behind the project was Krista Elrick, at the time visual arts director for the Arizona Commission on the Arts. When she took a similar position with WESTAF in 1993, she brought the project with her. Elrick, a photographer, had worked on a major collaborative project on the Navajo Reservation and brought with her both expertise and experience in such an undertaking. Atlatl, a Native American-run arts organization that promotes contemporary Indian art forms, was also drawn into the early planning.

It seemed a straightforward matter to draw up a list of artists, explain the project and set them to work. Initially, a call for artists to participate in the project was issued, but no one applied, Elrick said. ⁵ “This was the heart of the matter - how to get artists involved. It
was clear more groundwork was needed," she said. "But we were also driven by the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts, which initially funded the project] and its interest in a cooperative venture with other federal agencies." That raised a host of issues. Among the problems were defining whose project it was (the National Park Service's, the tribes', or WESTAF's); who would select the artists and how; what would be depicted; and who controlled the process. The eight tribes involved each had internal political issues to deal with, as well as some long-standing inter-tribal antagonisms. It became evident that dealing one-on-one with artists, without consulting the tribes, would lead to confusion and perhaps outright opposition to the project.

It was at this stage in the undertaking (1995) that Dave Warren came on board to help direct the project. Warren, of the Santa Clara Pueblo (Tewa Tribe), is a highly respected Native American scholar and educator. His background included stints with the Smithsonian, founding deputy director of the National Museum of the American Indian, and a 20-year career as a teacher and director of curriculum at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. He had just completed work on the *Glen Canyon Environmental Studies Archival Strategy Report* and suggested that because the Grand Canyon project shared similarities it might provide a model for how to proceed. "He brought something as a respected elder of a Pueblo with national political contacts [that] we were unable to tap." said Shelly Cohen, executive director of the Arizona Commission on the Arts. "He understood all sides - the government, the tribes, and artists. With his involvement, the project began to take shape. There were many voices speaking for the Native communities; he recommended focusing on the governance of the tribes involved in it, prior to focusing on the artists.*

So began the long process of meetings, both individually with each tribe and with the tribes collectively, trying to spell out the issues and construct a document that satisfied all parties. WESTAF's role was to be the convener and facilitator of the meetings; to establish a communication system to keep all parties informed about the process; and to raise funds for the planning and lay the groundwork for funding individual projects. The early meetings were to gauge the receptivity of the tribes to the concept and to working with the National Park Service. "It was our belief that the canyon was being interpreted by everyone but the tribes," said Jim Copenhaver, former executive director and board member of WESTAF. "We felt this project was a way to let them express their views and their understanding of the Grand Canyon through some artistic means, not restricted to visual interpretation. Over time, we began to understand that the tribes themselves should control how they wanted to do that and decide who in the tribe would make the artistic expression.

Because this project involved a federal agency - the NPS - a formal agreement approved by tribal governments was required. By law such agreements, or memoranda of understanding (MOU), have to be on a government-to-government basis, that is, between the government of the United States and the government of the specific tribe. A one-size-fits-all MOU simply would not work, which meant drafting an individual document for each tribe to meet its particular requirements. The process of drafting
MOUs proved to be extremely complex. Besides the politics involved - both inter and intra-tribal and with the NPS - there were religious and economic issues.

A major milestone in the project was a three-day meeting in 1995 at which representatives of WESTAF, the NPS and all eight tribes came together at the Grand Canyon to hammer out the broad outlines of a plan. Everyone agrees it was a seminal event - not least, because it was the first time the eight tribes had willingly come together. At one point in the proceedings, the tribes asked to meet in executive session to feel out each other's positions and talk over difficulties among themselves without the outside parties present. The outcome was a new layer of issues that were not identified previously, for example, money matters: Who would pay for the projects? What income deriving from them would revert to the tribe and the artists? Who would control the funds? The NPS was, at the time, renegotiating vendor contracts at the Grand Canyon, and some among the tribes felt it was appropriate that they be considered as concessionaires. The NFS expressed its willingness to open the concessionaire contracts to the tribes, but the issue is still being resolved.

All of this meeting and drafting took time, and the process began to fray as carefully nurtured relationships among key players unraveled. There were changes in management at the Grand Canyon. Gary Cummings, assistant superintendent of the park and an ardent supporter of the project from the beginning, was transferred to NFS' main interpretive center in Harper's Ferry, Md. Various representatives from the tribes left as the result of electoral decisions, and WESTAF itself underwent a major restructuring, hiring a new executive staff and moving its headquarters from Santa Fe to Denver. Several of WESTAF's key personnel chose not to make the move, and new people, unfamiliar with the project, joined the organization.

Another reason the project began to flounder may have been the failure of major foundations to understand just what they were being asked to fund. Was it a project or a process? At the outset, New Interpretations was envisioned as an artwork or series of works about a specific place. As it continued, the focus shifted: It became a vehicle for trying to expand the policies of agencies and funders to foster community-building through arts and culture. The project leaders saw it as a model for grassroots, community-based arts, where the makers (in this case the Indian tribes) had an equal voice in choosing what would be presented, where and how.

In 1998 WESTAF reconstituted the project as the Tribal Interpretive Arts Initiative, and the focus shifted to emphasize a commitment to developing community-based partnerships in which the tribes identified the artists as well as planned and implemented the particular art initiative from within their own communities. The goals envisioned both an interpretive model useful to other tribes and parks and the production of art works by tribal artists to educate and promote understanding in the public at large. Under the new initiative tribes would exercise direct control of the process, making them active generators rather than passive recipients in determining the final product. For example, each tribal community would draft fiscal management procedures, as well as its own
cooperative agreements, and develop a communications plan with the partners.

Three tribes - Zuni, Hualapai, and Kaibab Band of Paiute - signed MOUs under the Tribal Interpretive Arts Initiative. WESTAF, meanwhile, applied for planning and implementation grants in 1998 from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations to move this stage forward with the ultimate goal of producing a product by September of 2000. It requested $75,000-$84,000 in management and administrative fees for each participating tribe to support their continued involvement. However, both foundations declined to provide funds to continue the project. While they believed the project was important, it presented significant conceptual challenges. Without such support, WESTAF had to reassess its continued commitment, and at its May 1999 meeting, the organization's trustees voted to end the project. It was a difficult decision, but the board committed WESTAF to searching for other ways in which it might support Native American communities, a task that was expected to begin in the fall of 1999.

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The real problem, said Fox, wasn't lack of books, but lack of audience. It was a problem WESTAF had already confronted and devised several strategies to help build audience numbers with its performing and visual arts programs. WESTAF had tried to address the paucity of literature programs regionally in the late 1970s with a residency program for writers, but it ultimately failed because it duplicated state programs. Instead, Fraher recommended an awards program to promote books published by Western presses.

His plan was ambitious. Fifteen to twenty titles would be chosen and heavily promoted. Winning writers and presses would each receive $5,000, a remarkable sum when the Pulitzer Prize was only $3,500. The writers could use the money any way they chose, but the presses had to use it to promote the books selected. To gain credibility and attract media attention, Fraher suggested that WESTAF name as judges those authors with national and international reputations and hire a professional public relations consultant with publishing experience to promote the awards. Novelist Robert Penn Warren chaired the first Awards jury, and Alice Acheson, who had extensive contacts in publishing, publicized the project. "That was what made it take off," said Melton. "She was spectacular; [her efforts] sold a lot of books, even film rights. It was one of the best literature programs ever put together." Acheson managed to get reviews and feature stories in the *New York Times, USA Today*, and PBS's *McNeil-Lehrer Report*, among others, for the inaugural awards. Moreover, the care of the administrative success was due to the extraordinary staff work of Cheryl Jamison.

The WESTAF staff, working with Acheson, designed the Awards project, which was launched with an announcement of the winners at what was then known as the American Booksellers Association (ABA) annual convention, the most important book publishing and selling event in the U.S. This necessitated that the awards were given to manuscripts contracted for but not published. By specifying manuscripts, the publicist had time to work with the presses to develop marketing plans and publicity prior to the ABA convention.

The first Awards were announced in 1984 at a party on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, in
conjunction with the ABA convention. The program was a gamble, well researched and planned but unprecedented, and WESTAF's board had agreed to review the outcome before determining whether to make it a biennial project. It was thought that if sufficient corporate support could be found, the awards would become an annual undertaking. From that first Awards effort, sales of the four titles selected improved by 50 percent to 400 percent of earlier projections, and the board agreed to support the Western States Book Awards as a biennial project. The awards were given every other year until 1992, receiving favorable but slowly declining national recognition.

Concerned that the awards' prestige (and impact) was dwindling, WESTAF decided in 1993 to make it an annual event, which lasted until 1996. Western writers and presses favored the change, but it didn't do much toward capturing the national recognition that the Awards had received in earlier years. Nor did funding, which was increasingly dependent upon NEA grants, increase. WESTAF suspended the awards in 1997, partly because of its internal reorganization but also due to declining funding. The Awards had received both public and private support from the beginning, including grants from the NEA, Xerox Corp., Crane Duplicating, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, Lannan Foundation and the Witter-Bynner Foundation for Poetry. But by 1996, all but one had ceased funding the awards, either because the project was no longer relevant or because it no longer fit their guidelines, as was the case with the NEA, the Lannan and Lila Wallace funds.

That interest in the Awards declined didn't obscure the fact that they succeeded in raising national awareness of Western writers and writing; more writers found publishers in the East. Even so, says Fox, Fraher's hope that an extensive marketing campaign would raise awareness among local and national audiences was only moderately successful. "Presses, for instance, were given individual technical assistance in marketing which in some cases may have increased the efficiency of their operations, but the goal of increasing the Western audience for regional books was greatly downplayed. Regional booksellers lamented the fact that the WSBA (Western States Book Awards) was never able to achieve a high level of recognition among most of their customers, and was thus of only modest interest to them."

In part the lackluster interest in the Awards during the mid-1990s was predictable, Fox says. More attention had been paid to the supply side of the equation - writers - than to the demand side - readers. In 1998, Fox produced a survey of the publishing industry for WESTAF that concluded that the biggest problem facing presses and writers in the West in the late 1990s was no longer distance, "which grows smaller with each new link in the Internet." Rather, it was the inability of Western authors "to be heard as the sheer volume of cultural product increases." Likewise, the needs of publishers had changed: their marketing savvy was no longer parochial; wholesalers and chain bookstores now stock titles from many small presses in order to satisfy demand for new literature.

When WESTAF revived the Western States Book Awards in 1998, it was a different program. The reconfigured Awards retained the original three categories of winners:
fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry. However, WESTAF added a Translation category to the 1999 Book Awards. The original work may be written by anyone, anywhere in the world, but both the translator and the publisher must reside within the region.

The major change was in what was submitted for consideration. In the past the awards accepted only manuscripts submitted by publishers, which allowed the marketing-publicist to work with the publisher to promote a forthcoming award-winning book. The new program called for submissions of already published books to the jury. In part, it was dictated by the evolution of the ABA convention into Book Expo America, which focuses mainly on the sale of subsidiary rights; thus the marketing rationale of tying the Western States Book Awards to that event had changed. In addition, the submission date was changed to Dec. 31, thus making the Awards retroactive - in other words, the 1998 Awards were announced in 1999, the 1999 Awards will be announced in 2000.

The Awards retain the jurying process that empowers three highly respected jurors (fiction, nonfiction, and poetry) and a committee of judges for translations to review the submissions in a fair and efficient manner. Each judge selects up to three finalists in each category for a second reading. All judges then read all of the finalists. This generates a "short list" of runners' up. which are publicized with the winners, broadening the recognition across member states.

Grants from the Witter-Bynner Foundation for Poetry and Sue and John Talbot, as well as internal WESTAF funds, supported the 1998 Awards program. WESTAF awards $1,500 in a combination cash award and travel stipend to each of the winning authors and the translator. After 1998, the publishers no longer received any cash award: they were provided technical assistance in the form of publicity. Even with such steep reductions. Fox said WESTAF received more than 90 manuscripts when it announced the awards in 1998, the largest number ever submitted. "We heard over and over again [from publishers and writers] that the recognition was more important than the money, although the money was nice," Fox said.

**Tumblewords**

Recognizing that the Awards were only half of the literature equation, WESTAF in 1991 began exploring ways it could support audience development in its far-flung region. From brainstorming sessions with state arts agencies, writers, and publishers as well as private funders was born TumbleWords, a program designed to present literature to rural and underserved audiences. "When we started TumbleWords, only three states regionally - Utah, Idaho and Wyoming - had full-time professional staff dedicated to literature," said Robert Sheldon, who became WESTAF's literature program director in 1991. "We saw TumbleWords as a way to get programming into small rural communities, and we used those states as a pilot project to take literature to people." It
certainly worked: In 1998, TumbleWords hosted 110 events in 71 communities, a 29 percent increase from 1997. It also sponsored 85 writers, 10 percent more than the year before, and attracted more than 7,300 people, a whopping 75 percent increase over 1997.\textsuperscript{112}

Initial funding for TumbleWords came from the NEA - a two-year, $150,000 grant to develop a program for underserved communities. The goal was twofold: first, to build new audiences for literature; and, second, to give writers living in the state an opportunity to present their work. It was a way to let audiences and authors interact directly. Each state in the pilot program chose five or six communities and pulled together a roster of writers from which local presenters could select, a model that remains in use today.

What makes it work, says Sheldon, is that it's a bottom-up program - that is, the communities themselves organize the program and choose the writers. Nor does WESTAF select the writers or communities, the states do. "TumbleWords is lower to the ground [than the Book Awards]" says Fox. "It's community-driven; it brings writers at a certain stage in their careers to small communities for public readings." The whole idea is to put writers in the presence of people, to expose authors to their audiences and audiences to authors.

In 1993, with funding from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. Tumble Words expanded into five more states in the region - Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada and New Mexico. Venues included community centers, bookstores, coffeehouses, prisons, theaters, migrant worker camps and parks. "We've done programs in really remote places, [like] a virtual ghost-town in Wyoming." said Sheldon. Additional funding in 1998 from the Lannan Foundation allowed WESTAF to extend the program to Alaska, which formed the Alaska Literary Trail consortium as a vehicle to take literature into remote communities.\textsuperscript{118} By 1999-2000, Tumble Words had expanded to all 12 states in the WESTAF region. In addition, through Tour West - a competitive grant program that awards up to $2.500 in subsidies to arts and community organizations to present touring artists, including writers - WESTAF awarded five literature grants in 1999.

"The genius of the program is [community] partnerships and the investment by the states in the program," said Sheldon. "It wasn't something WESTAF could do. it could only encourage or support what they wanted to do. provide funds and tools to get it done." The "tools" are things like professional advice to community presenters, small subsidies for marketing and promotion, and "low-impact" administration. "We worked hard to de-institutionalize it," Sheldon said. "There are plenty of people who don't go to the library and won't set foot on a college campus because they feel intimidated. So we looked for other resources." Local partners can include a history museum or writers" group. In 1998, for example, Tumble Words events were presented in Aztec Ruins National Monument and Capulin Volcano Monument in New Mexico, Great Basin National Park in Nevada, and the Opera House in Eureka, NV, among a host of sites.

Community involvement is essential because what works in one place may not work in
another, and a writer who is popular in one may flop somewhere else. For example, who would guess that Sunday afternoon was the best time to hold a reading? But in small communities in Montana and Wyoming, it's often the key to drawing an audience of 30 or 40 people. "They come in to church, have lunch, and go to the reading before they head back out to the ranch," Sheldon said.

The process begins with a partnership between a community-based organization and its state arts agency, which applies to WESTAF for support funds, from which it pays authors and covers travel expenses as well as promotion and advertising. WESTAF, working with the state agencies, distributes a roster of writers and assists communities in planning and marketing the program. Each state compiles the list of authors in their state who meet the qualifications, which includes poets, novelists, storytellers, non-fiction writers and cowboy poets. In 1995, the University of Nevada Press published a Tumble Words anthology featuring work by writers and poets who had participated in the program.

Not every Tumble Words event is simply a reading - often it involves creative activities, like writing poems, or collaboration between a writer and musician or visual artist. Sometimes the events are on radio: In 1998, KVNH in Paonia, CO, aired hour-long programs with four poets, including interviews with the writers and readings of their work. After each show, listeners were invited to a reception to meet the author. And Tumble Words has burrowed deeper into underserved communities, such as prisons and at-risk youth. One effort in 1997-98 was a six-month workshop that brought together a poet and six girls incarcerated at the Wyoming Girls School in Sheridan in a writing and reading program.

In many ways Tumble Words is an idea whose time has come. Both independent and chain bookstores now sponsor readings by authors that are free and widely attended. Audiences are ready to turn out for authors, says Sheldon. It's a matter of getting writers into communities. "One criticism we heard was about the quality of the 'art', that what's popular is not necessarily the best or cutting-edge" he said. "I just wanted them to draw an audience. Get 'em hooked. You can't force poetry or any kind of writing on an unwilling audience. First you have to make them curious."

Services

Providing services to members is a cornerstone of WESTAF's mission. Over the years, those services have encompassed such things as supporting apprentices, providing skills development and training for emerging arts' council board members and staff, delivering new computer and Internet technologies to members and disseminating job listings in the arts profession. Taken together, these services define WESTAF's life-long goal of advancing and promoting the arts in the West. "You know that adage: Give a
man a fish and he will have a meal; teach a man to fish and he will feed a village? That was the basis of WESTAF's philosophy, to help communities solve problems so they could bring in programs," said Robert Sheets, president of the Federation of Rocky Mountain States Arts and Humanities Committee from 1967-74 and one of the founding members of WESTAF.

**Professional Development**

In 1974, the year WESTAF was incorporated, it launched a Skills Development Program, awarding professional development grants for fellowships, apprenticeships and staff training. Often, the amounts were small - in the range of $250-$500 - but the impact was great; recipients used the money to attend seminars or workshops or to do research for projects. Most of the support was for artists or companies, but WESTAF also was well positioned to recognize the need for skill development within the nascent arts' administration field. Local and state arts councils were a new phenomenon in the 1970s, and most of those appointed to commissions or hired for staffs lacked experience in the arts. "We were novices," says Dave Nelson, former director of the Montana State Arts Council and founding member of WESTAF. "I needed to have my state connected, to learn what professionals did. We were very green - it was a new field, and we learned from each other." In 1976, the William H. Donner Foundation awarded WESTAF $82,600 for an ambitious, 18-month program to develop professional skills among staff and board members of state arts commissions." The "Workshops in Problem-Solving for State Arts Agencies" program became something of a WESTAF model for a host of similar skill-building initiatives that continue.

Despite the growing professionalism of arts administrators, presenters and the artists themselves, the need for skills development never diminished. Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, hired by WESTAF in 1983 as director of performing arts, became its director of professional development when a colleague left. In the early 1980s, WESTAF's professional development focus had been on "job-alike" workshops for staffs of the state arts agencies. Job-alike extended from top to bottom - including state directors, chairs, council members and staff- and promoted the exchange of ideas and information among peers in member states. In the mid '80s, the emphasis shifted to learning specific skills, because many other arts organizations now promoted job-alike activities.

"There were several unhappy people [out in the field]," said Jennings-Roggensack. "There wasn't a lot of information and people had needs - like how to write grants, how to work with local artists, how to initiate a tour," she said. WESTAF stepped in with a roster of training workshops and seminars, including computer skills. Some of the programs targeted presenting organizations, teaching them how to do a residency program, for example, or working with their boards to develop advocacy skills. Others were structured for artists, offering help with marketing and promotion. Still others were devised for state
arts agency staff members to hone skills in such areas as grants writing. WESTAF also convened sub-regional seminars in fundraising, and, with the National Conference of State Legislatures, in 1986 jointly convened workshops on The State Arts Agency and the State Legislature. These were opportunities to come together to learn professional skills and trade ideas, Jennings-Roggensack said. WESTAF still provides training support as a membership benefit, today in the form of travel subsidies for up to six professional development workshops and networking opportunities for state arts agency staff members.

**Circuit Riders**

The content of WESTAF's skills development programs has changed over time to meet new needs, but what is different today is how they are delivered. Much of it now is done via computer or telephone on a one-to-one basis. In part, it is a response to the telecommunications revolution, which permits almost instantaneous contact. Nevertheless, it is also a response to shrinking staffs and budgets at the state arts agencies as well as the NEA and WESTAF's need to serve its members efficiently. Previously, an agency might have had one person managing its visual arts program, someone else engaged in marketing and another person whose job was grants writing. Today, one person may wear all those hats, and telecommunications technologies provide a cost-effective way to disseminate information and maintain contact on a daily basis if needed.

In 1995, WESTAF launched Circuit Riders, a telephone and online consultancy service to connect arts professionals with qualified consultants. Individuals as well as organizations within member states could use the service, which allowed clients three to eight hours of consulting time with a professional in a specific field, with WESTAF picking up the fee. In the first year, 144 contracts were completed. Most of the consulting requests were for assistance in marketing and funding, and visual arts queries were the most numerous.

But there were problems inherent in Circuit Riders: The biggest was the availability of free consulting services from local, state and regional arts organizations. WESTAF itself offered an array of technical assistance, from Art Job, which featured articles addressing management-administrative issues, to its Web site, where information and links to other resources were available. For WESTAF, Circuit Riders was seen as one of a series of tools available to arts professionals for technical assistance, a complement to programs available through state arts agencies. However, it overlapped existing programs and services, and it was often difficult to pin down the exact nature of the problem and match the client with the appropriate consultant in the initial stages of the consultation. In addition, the fee — $150 for three-eight hours - was too open ended. Some consultants thought it was too little for eight hours but enough for three. In addition, although WESTAF hired outside consultants, an appreciable amount of staff time was required to
administer it, which had not been budgeted. To make the program cost effective
WESTAF implemented a 900-number, which allowed it to provide service on demand but
also charged a fee to cover the cost of the service. Test results from the New Mexico
and Oregon markets indicated a lack of interest in the 900-number project, and Circuit
Riders was cancelled in 1998. 121

Computers/Internet

Telephone consultation was only one new route in program delivery. As early as 1979,
WESTAF began using computer technology to assist its members. One of its first efforts
was a federal program administered by the National Endowment for the Arts known as
the National Information Standards Project, or NISP. The idea behind NISP was to
standardize applications and reporting information about arts grants to make it easier to
analyze arts activity nationally by keeping track of programs at the state level. WESTAF
coordinated the implementation of the NISP project for its member states, eventually
expanding it into a Regional Grants Management System. It took 10 years to complete
the system, but by then the technology landscape had altered dramatically - with faster,
more sophisticated computers available at a fraction of earlier costs - and the program
was dropped in 1990. 122

The NISP initiative, however, was a catalyst for other information technology projects by
WESTAF. 121 Artsnet - a computer bulletin board that listed jobs as well as disseminating
information to member states - was launched in 1983. However, it was "slow on the
uptake, and many [felt] it was not useful. The trouble with Artsnet was that it was ahead
of its time. According to WESTAF "s assessment of the project, the "main problem in its
way is the limited use of this electronic system," meaning modem-linked computer
systems. 124 Artsnet was discontinued in 1987, placed in a "maintenance position until
such time as the field is able to make use of this electronic system."

Within a decade of Artsnet, the Internet and its icon-linked World Wide Web were nearly
ubiquitous, and e-mail had become the communication network of choice for many.
WESTAF's Web site, launched in 1997. has evolved into a useful search tool linking to a
host of arts-related sites - like visual arts, folk life, media and presenting and touring
-where in-depth information is available. The site will be redesigned in 2000 to provide
additional information, for example abstracts and key parts of WESTAF research
projects will be available online, and it will incorporate a searchable database of arts
legislation and grant applications.

Recognizing that computer hardware and software are costly and not always
state-of-the-art. WESTAF launched ArtsComputer in 1998. The idea was to put
computers and sophisticated software into the hands of arts administrators at low cost.
"It was enormously helpful in positioning [WESTAF] and in public relations." said
Radich. 126 It also generated revenue, although amounts were in the $80 to $180 range
for each computer and covered administrative costs.

*ArtsComputer* was discontinued in January 1999, mainly because the real need was for technical support for new users, which proved to be too costly to justify in terms of staff time, and because the retail computer market had shifted and hardware costs plummeted. "All the revenue was swallowed up in administrative costs," said Matthew Saunders, WESTAF's director of technology programs. Today WESTAF offers Internet consultation services as a member benefit through from Panorama Point in Santa Fe, whose Internet professionals consult on the design and implementation of Web sites for state arts agencies.

*ArtistsRegister.com* is one of WESTAF's newest Internet services, providing visual artists with low-cost access to the Web. It soon will be expanded to other states, but it grew out of a contract between WESTAF and the Colorado Council on the Arts to place its Colorado Artists Register, a slide-bank of 1,500 artists, online. It served as a pilot project to test the feasibility of offering the service to other state arts agencies as well as individuals, and to expand the model into other disciplines. The site includes a marketing and advertising component that generates traffic for individual artists and increases exposure for their work. Several other state arts agencies have signed on, and the register opens to individual artists in February 2000. Artists pay a fee, but the site is subsidized by state art agencies that choose to participate.

If *ArtistsRegister.com* is one of WESTAF's newest services, one of its oldest and most successful is *ArtJob*. WESTAF began publishing employment openings in 1974, the year of its incorporation, first as *Jobbank* in a newsletter called *Emphasis*. When the newsletter folded, *Jobbank* was expanded into *National Arts Jobbank* and finally became known as *ArtJob* in 1993. *ArtJob* is one of WESTAF's most popular services, combining job listings with articles on technical issues of interest within the arts community. *ArtJob* went online in April of 1999. "It's allowed us to improve the product by continuously updating it," said Denise Montgomery, WESTAF's director of marketing. The program is also a "high-visibility product, which is important for WESTAF," she said. *ArtJob* has made the transition from paper to ether - the last issue was printed in December 1999. Henceforth, it will exist only as *ArtJob Online*, at www.artjob.org.

**Research/Information**

Research always has been a component of WESTAF services, but it was not a primary concern until its reorganization in 1996. Initially, research was driven by the NEA, which determined what information it needed and funded the efforts. In 1974, WESTAF made a comprehensive study of the Artists-in-Schools program: a two-year, NEA-funded project that culminated in a short film based on the report. " And in 1991 WESTAF surveyed regional folk arts, again funded by the NEA, which led to the hiring of a coordinator to develop programs in that field.
Today, research is a significant part of WESTAF's mission. "I think it arose partly because of the "moment in history' of the arts in general." said Erin Trapp, deputy director of WESTAF. "We were coming out of a major contraction in arts funding in the '90s - and the first thing to go when budgets are cut are 'extraneous' things like research. There was no real data to support advocacy efforts." she said. Among the first research projects undertaken were economic impact statements for WESTAF members in response to their need for detailed, specific information. "They really needed it and we could make a big difference," Trapp said.

Research is one of the menu of benefits available to member states. WESTAF has produced research papers on a host of issues affecting its region, ranging from opportunities for collaborations between county fairs and the arts community, to information on cultural trust legislation. It has also generated salary surveys of state arts agency employees, as well as economic impact studies. Now WESTAF's research efforts are reaching further and deeper into policy development and regional issues. "We want to help shape the arts policy discussion in the West, to educate the national scene that arts and culture in the West are different from what happens in the rest of the country," Trapp said.

Each of the 11 regional arts organizations nationwide has undergone similar stresses and strains as WESTAF, and each has charted a new course to lead their constituents into the 21st Century. Some have continued along the traditional path of grants and funding support, others have branched out internationally. WESTAF has pursued technology. "Technology is having a huge impact on all the regionals," said Kimber Crane, communications manager for the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. "They're building a new cultural infrastructure, and these [new] technologies provide a new way to support the field, such things as marketing and Web support for their constituents."

That WESTAF is focused intently on technology as a bridge to the future is a reflection of its past. It has a lot to do with the nature of the West - vast distances and sparse populations still define much of the region. Distance and population still determine where the arts are available; but with the Internet, it becomes easier to bring people together to talk about issues and decide strategies that will take the arts into communities large and small. Moreover, that was WESTAF's mission from the beginning.

END

Notes

2 Telephone interview. Nello McDaniel. 27 September 1999.
3 Telephone interview. Robert Sheets. 30 August 1999.
4 Telephone interview. Dave Nelson. 4 October 1999.
Telephone interview. Ruth Draper. 24 September 1999.


WESTAF hired its first president. Richard Collins, who had been executive director of the Maine Arts Commission, in 1974. Richard Harcourt took over the position in 1977 and resigned in 1979. When the board hired Bill Jamison in 1980, it briefly instituted a three-person management committee to run operations, with Jamison as executive director. "It sounds okay," said Draper, "but three strong people in charge was a disaster." Terry Melton assumed the position as executive director in 1984 and ran WESTAF until 1990. Donald Meyer was hired in 1990 to replace Melton, and an interim executive director, Jim Copenhaver, was appointed while WESTAF conducted an extensive organizational restructuring, resulting in major changes in the way in which it conducted business. Anthony Radich was hired in 1996 as executive director of WESTAF.

"Attachment C." Board Meeting Minutes, Western States Arts Foundation. 6-8 Oct. 1983.

By 1986 WESTAF included 13 member states, so 26 of the trustees were state arts agency representatives, the chair and executive director of each.

"An Agenda for the Nineties: Organizational Plan" Part II. September 1987, p. 1

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In 1979, WESTAF considered the addition of Texas. It was decided that Texas needed to demonstrate greater cooperation within the region prior to submitting a request for membership. In addition, WESTAF created a planning committee and timeline to consider new members. See Board Meetings Minutes, 2-3 June 1980, p. 2-3.

In 1976, WESTAF accepted Alaska as a limited member for 10 months while WESTAF clarified the issue of admitting new members as affiliate and/or mil members. See Board Meeting Minutes. 18-19 Sept. 1976, p. 3.

By pooling funds, the regional organizations created economies of scale, putting more programs within the reach of the states than would have been possible on an individual basis. They were also crucial for attracting matching-grant funds from the private sector, and, along with federal block-grant dollars, provided a source of discretionary funds. Perhaps of even greater importance, participation fees today are a barometer of commitment by member states and an indicator of their strength. In the beginning, each WESTAF member state contributed $10,000 annually, "for the purpose of implementing administrative costs as well as program possibilities." In 1974 the money was used to lease office space in Denver and hire a full-time executive director. The NEA contributed the bulk of the funds for programs, which WESTAF’s new staff proved masterful in collecting. Participation fees remained constant for more than 10 years, but by the early 1980s it was apparent that, with travel and other costs rising, additional state contributions were needed. The Board adopted a formula in 1983 that levied dues based on an amount equal to the 20 percent match figure required for NEA funds. At the same time, states that benefited disproportionately from a project agreed to voluntarily pay additional costs for those projects. Finally, all member states would assess themselves...
additional amounts for special projects that had been agreed on by the Board. The dues question didn't get any easier as Congress continued to slash the NEA budget. Again, the Board sought ways to balance the books. In 1986, it considered, but did not adopt, a formula that would have set a base fee with an add-on of $1,000 per 500,000 population: but California, which by then was a WESTAF member, would have been unfairly penalized, so it was dropped. Also vetoed was the notion of a base fee with states paying for additional services, a formula that would later be adopted. Instead, the Board raised the state fee to $12,000 for fiscal 1987, with a $1,500 incremental increase in both fiscal 1988 and 1989, bringing the base up to $15,000 per member over three years. Board Meeting Minutes, 12-13 April 1996, p. 4.

WESTAF Bylaws to 14-16 Oct. 1999 Board Meeting Minutes, Attachment.

As early as 1970, the Federation of Rocky Mountain States Arts and Humanities Council supported visual and performing arts. It established an Apprentice Program, which granted awards to a variety of performing companies, like the Santa Fe Opera and Ballet West, to support the training of aspiring artists. In addition, in cooperation with Young Audiences Inc., it sponsored a 15-school concert tour of Utah and Idaho by the Utah String Quartet. It also supported a residency in Aspen that year for Ballet West; a western tour by the Utah and Denver symphonies; and a tour by the Basque Dancers. And it sent out three art exhibitions on tour of western states. "Federation of Rocky Mountain States Inc. Regional Audience Development and Touring Program in the Arts," 1970.

Meeting minutes, Arts and Humanities Council of the Federation of Rocky Mountain States, 5 March 1973, p. 3.

WESTAF staff selected artists and companies based on recommendations of the NEA and input from the state art agencies, which sometimes selected them based on peer review panels. But WESTAF's process was not based on peer review, and in 1981 some board members raised the issue of whether the touring guide could be compiled by peer review of artists. Dino DiConcini pointed out that WESTAF was the only region that allowed staff, rather than peers, to choose its roster of artists, and he asked for money to be budgeted to pay for such a process. It was denied. [Board Meeting Minutes, 14 Sept. 1981, p. 9-10.] The Board also wrestled with how artists were selected: Most decisions were based on reviews of audio and video tapes, rather than making site visits or showcases of their performances. [Board Meeting Minutes, 29 March 1985, p. 7.] The issue of who was recommended for the Tour Book continued throughout the 1980s. WESTAF had formulated goals for touring, including increasing the number of in-region artists-companies in the roster to 50 percent. It was dropped as a "goal" because members saw it as a mandate. The Board voted to eliminate that goal from the long-range plan, but agreed "that the spirit would go on." It passed on a vote of 16 to 3. [Board Meeting minutes, 16 Oct. 1985, p. 3.]

Telephone interview with Shelly Cohn, 9 Nov. 1999.

Telephone interview with Colleen Jennings-Roggensack. 12 Nov. 1999.


Fund to transfer *The Spirit of the Place* radio series onto CD, and a second radio program was in development. See Board Meeting Minutes of 17 Jan. 1998, p. 11.

According to WESTAF audits, $37,906 was earmarked for the project in fiscal 1989 and $18,717 in FY 1990.


Telephone interview with William Fox. 1 Nov. 1999.


Telephone interview with Terry Melton. 4 Oct. 1999.

William Fox. p. 6.


In 1983 WESTAF asked the NEA for $40,000, or 25 percent of the total project cost, to support the first year of the Awards, with another 25 percent coming from corporations. WESTAF provided the remaining $80,000. WESTAF committed to making up any shortfall in NEA or corporate funds from its own resources. See letter 24 Feb. 1983 to Frank Conroy, director of NEA Literature Program, from Bill Jamison, executive director of WESTAF.

Fox said the NEA continues to support the creation of literature through grants to writers in addition to supporting audience development. Fox interview 1 Nov. 1999.

Fox, p. 9.

Fox, p. 13.

Fox, p. 14. Fox notes that Barnes & Noble reports that 80 percent of its online sales are backlist titles, primarily from university and independent presses, not best sellers from commercial publishers.


Lannan Foundation. Literary Program Grant Application, October 1998.

The Alaska Literary Trail is a statewide program bringing writers to Alaska's underserved communities; production of Northern Letters, a weekly Public Radio program; and establishment of LitSite Alaska, an electronic network to promote new writers within the state and support and extend the work of the consortium.

Board Meeting Minutes, 24 Jan. 1975, p. 5.

Western States Arts Foundation History and Highlights. 1976, p. 2.

In addition to workshops and training programs, WESTAF also published technical assistance manuals and handbooks. In 1976, it brought out The Technical Assistance Handbook and Percent for Art: How a New Law Integrates Art and Public Architecture, and followed with The Technical Production Handbook, published in 1978, revised 1990. During the 1980s, WESTAF produced a handbook-and-catalogue, Architectural Crafts (1981), and Building for the Arts, (1982, revised 1989). And in 1991, it published On Board: Guiding Principles for Trustees of Not-for-Profit Organizations, " The fact that several of these publications were revised for second and subsequent printings indicates their popularity. As Ruth Draper, former executive director of the Utah Arts Council, noted, they were relatively inexpensive and contained detailed information that was useful to arts organizations.

Board Meeting Minutes, 1 Sept. 1984, p. 12.


Board Meeting Minutes, 14-15 April, 1982, p. 8.

An Agenda for the Nineties, Western States Arts Foundation, September 1987, p. 9.


Western States Arts Foundation History and Highlights, 1976.


