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# Cultivating Demand for the Arts

*Arts Learning,  
Arts Engagement, and  
State Arts Policy*

Laura Zakaras  
Julia F. Lowell

Commissioned by



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## Summary

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Despite decades of effort to make high-quality works of art accessible to all Americans, demand for the arts has not kept pace with supply. Those who participate in the arts remain overwhelmingly white, educated, and affluent. Moreover, audiences for the arts are growing older: Each year, fewer young Americans visit art museums, listen to classical music, or attend jazz concerts or ballet performances.

Optimism about the future of the arts was widespread in the 1960s and 1970s, when the number of artists and arts organizations expanded rapidly, and demand surged with increases in supply. Museums, performing arts centers, symphonies, opera companies, theaters, and dance companies proliferated and spread outside the major cities where they had been concentrated. Public funding through the newly created National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and state arts agencies (SAAs), coupled with financial support from major foundations and individual contributors, helped accelerate and sustain the growth of arts-producing organizations.

Support for arts education saw no similar increase, however. While artists and arts organizations benefited from an influx of funds, public funding for arts education stagnated and even declined. In the 1970s and, again, in the early 1990s, school districts across the country reduced their education spending, often by cutting arts specialist positions. Many of these positions have never been restored. In more recent years, general education reforms have shifted class time toward reading and mathematics, which are subject to high-stakes testing, further eroding arts education.

These trends raise questions about public policy on the arts. To put it simply: Will the current priorities and practices of policymakers and major funders meet the challenges created by the diminishing demand? If not, what kinds of adjustments might reverse the decline? The findings in this report are intended to shed light on what it means to cultivate demand for the arts, why it is necessary and important to cultivate this demand, and what SAAs and other arts and education policymakers can do to help.

## Study Purpose and Approach

The research we describe here is part of a multiyear study of the evolution of SAAs—their missions, budgets, and funding priorities. Two previous reports produced by this study focused on SAAs' responses to changes in their economic and political environments. The focus here is on the role SAAs have played—and can still play—in increasing demand for the arts.

The research considered only the benchmark arts central to public policy: ballet, classical music, jazz, musical theater, opera, theater, and the visual arts. It specifically addressed four questions:

1. What role does demand play in the creation of a vibrant nonprofit cultural sector?
2. What role does arts learning play in the cultivation of demand?
3. What does the current support infrastructure for demand look like, and does it develop in individuals the skills needed to stimulate their engagement with the arts?
4. How and to what extent have SAAs supported demand in the past, and how can they improve their effectiveness in this role?

To address these issues, we reviewed the relevant literature, analyzed national data on SAA grantmaking over the past 20 years, and conducted interviews and roundtable discussions with arts education experts and arts policymakers at the state and federal levels. Our analysis produced evidence that national and state policies relating to the arts are out of balance: They support the creation and display/performance (supply) of a wealth of artworks but pay scant attention to developing adults who can understand and appreciate artworks (demand). At the same time, education policymakers leave little room in the public school curriculum for the study of the arts. It is our view that the best way to bring large numbers of Americans to lifelong involvement in the arts is to offer more arts education, to encourage the comprehensive approach to teaching called for in the arts standards, and for SAAs to become more active in advocating for such steps and building bridges among policy communities to work toward that goal.

## Framework for Understanding Supply and Demand

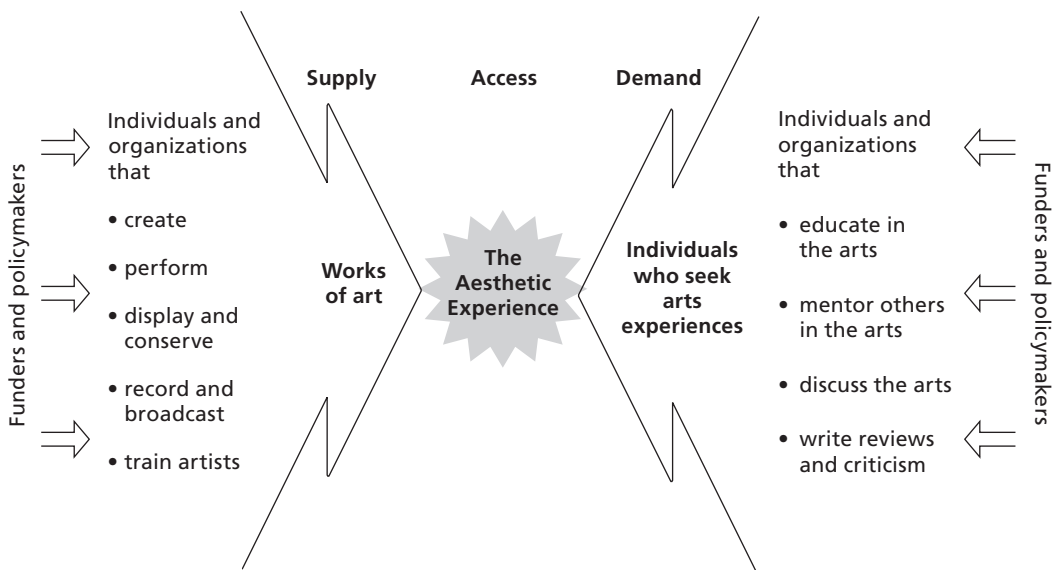
Our understanding of the role of supply and demand in the arts is based on the concept that works of art are instruments of potential communication. Much has been written about the ways in which the communication that can occur between the artist and the people who encounter the artist's work enhances those people's lives, fosters personal growth, and contributes positively to the public sphere. These benefits depend for their existence on a particular kind of experience, which we call the *aesthetic*

*experience*, that actively involves the spectator’s senses, emotions, and intellect. For an aesthetic experience to take place, three components are necessary: a work of art (supply), an opportunity to encounter it (access), and an individual with the capacity to have such a response to it (demand).

Figure S.1 illustrates the relationship between supply, access, and demand as they relate to the arts. At the center of the diagram is the individual experience of a work of art, which is made possible by the institutions and individuals that contribute to supply on the one hand and demand on the other. Supporting the supply of art is a vast infrastructure of artists, universities that train them, performing groups, presenters, record companies, libraries, publishers, and many others that contribute to the creation, conservation, display, and dissemination of artworks. Supporting demand, on the other hand, are the individuals and institutions that help draw people into engagement with the arts and teach them what to notice and value in the encounter. The main actors here are teachers in the kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) school system, private instructors and teaching artists, journalists and critics, and the parents, relatives, and friends who serve as mentors in the arts they love. With this framework, “cultivating demand” is not primarily about marketing campaigns and public outreach; it is about giving people the skills and knowledge they need to have encounters with works of art that are rich enough to keep them coming back for more.

Many agents that operate primarily on one side of the framework also play some role on the other (for example, many artists also teach the arts; many teachers also

**Figure S.1**  
**Concept of Supply, Access, and Demand in the Arts**



create art). And agents on both sides of the framework promote opportunities for broader access to the arts. Finally, as the figure shows, all parts of the system are influenced by funders and policymakers.

It follows, then, that public organizations dedicated to the country's cultural well-being should consider three objectives in pursuing their missions: expand supply by increasing the production of high-quality works of art, expand access by creating more opportunities for people to encounter such works, and expand demand by cultivating the capacity of individuals to have aesthetic experiences with works of arts. The third of these, which has received the least attention from arts policymakers, was the focus of our research.

## Cultivating Demand

We explored the research literature to discover whether arts education is associated with the capacity for aesthetic experiences that lead to future involvement and, if so, whether the type of arts instruction matters. On the first issue, empirical studies show that level of education in general, and arts education in particular, is strongly associated with adult involvement in the arts. On the second issue, a rich body of conceptual research examines the kind of arts learning most likely to enable that involvement. Many arts education scholars writing in the last half of the 20th century have identified skills and knowledge that enable learners to enter into such experiences. We synthesize such learning into four types:

1. the capacity for aesthetic perception, or the ability to see, hear, and feel what works of art have to offer
2. the ability to create artistically in an art form
3. historical and cultural knowledge that enriches the understanding of works of art
4. the ability to interpret works of art, discern what is valuable in them, and draw meaning from them through reflection and discussion with others.

These skills and knowledge are the content of what we call *comprehensive arts education*, through which individuals learn not only to create, but also to appreciate and understand works of art. This approach is closely aligned with principles articulated more recently in the national and state arts content standards. Although there are still many schools of thought about how the arts should be taught, the standards represent broad consensus among practitioners and policymakers and define common ground between supporters of arts-based instruction (which focuses on studio art or performance) and supporters of humanities-based instruction (which focuses on apprecia-



tion). These standards were forged from a long tradition of theory and practice in arts education that confirms the value of a broad-based approach to teaching the arts.

## **Institutional Support for Arts Learning**

To what extent are Americans given the opportunity for what we refer to as comprehensive arts education? Although the data on arts learning in any setting are limited, rendering any portrait of this landscape largely incomplete, we reviewed what is known about all forms of arts instruction, both formal and informal, for people of all ages. What the evidence shows is that institutional support for any type of arts education is weak. The young are not provided enough instructional time to develop the skills and knowledge associated with long-term arts engagement, college students have many more opportunities to do so, and adults seldom participate in arts learning opportunities of any kind.

For school-age Americans, four components make up the arts learning infrastructure:

1. *The K–12 public school system*, which is the primary source of arts learning for the young. No other system has so much access to the young, the resources with which to teach them, and the responsibility for ensuring they have equal opportunity to become knowledgeable about the arts. Recent surveys suggest, however, that a significant proportion of schools around the country offer minimal arts education.
2. *Higher education*, which plays several critical supporting roles in the delivery of arts learning to the young, the most important of which is training and offering ongoing professional development to classroom teachers and arts specialists who work in the K–12 system. Many colleges and universities also house museums, performing arts centers, and community schools of the arts, all of which offer educational programs. Some also host or contribute to after-school programs in the arts.
3. *Public after-school programs*, which are a source of arts learning that draws on a multitude of arts providers in the communities around schools. Most of these teach casual art-making or emphasize child-development outcomes.
4. *Arts learning in the community*, which is offered to school-age children by arts organizations, community service organizations, and community schools of the arts both after school and on weekends. Most of these programs focus on art-making and performance.

Arts learning for adults consists of three components:

1. *Higher education institutions*, which are by far the most important sources of broad-based arts education for adults. This is in addition to their primary focus on preparing professional artists, arts specialists, general classroom teachers, and scholars.
2. *Arts learning in the community*, which is offered to adults through arts organizations and, to a lesser extent, community schools of the arts and community service organizations. Museums are seriously committed to their education mission, the goal of which is to enrich people's experiences of works of art in their collections. Performing arts organizations are offering considerably more educational programming than they did even ten years ago, but programs for adult audiences of arts organizations are still limited in scope and reach.
3. *Arts journalism*, which has played a critical role in developing informed audiences for the arts but has been losing ground in newspapers across the country. Experienced journalists, including film, theater, dance, and visual arts critics, are being squeezed out. Unless such discourse fully migrates to the Internet, and this medium can support career development and stability for arts critics, the breakdown in the traditional transmission of arts news and criticism is likely to weaken demand for the arts.

## State Funding of the Arts

Has arts policy supported the kind of comprehensive arts learning that best cultivates demand? To answer this question, we analyzed 20 years of data on grants awarded by SAAs to assess the relative proportion of funding devoted to the three policy objectives introduced earlier: expanding the quantity of high-quality artworks, creating more opportunities for people to encounter such works, and cultivating individuals' capacity to have aesthetic experiences.

We found that between 60 and 70 percent of the value of grants awarded from 1987 to 2004 went to institutional support, mostly for arts organizations, and to the creation, exhibition, and preservation of art. Less than 10 percent was specifically devoted to arts learning. And although roughly one-quarter of the value of SAA grants went in part to support activities that grantees considered educational, the little we know about those activities suggests that many if not most of them are designed to expand access rather than to develop the skills and knowledge associated with long-term arts engagement.

Recently, however, a number of SAAs moved beyond grantmaking to work with state education departments, arts educators, and arts organizations to improve arts education policy at the state level. Two of these SAAs, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, have had particular success leveraging their position at the nexus of state government and the arts com-

munity to strengthen youth arts education. By promoting collaborations among arts educators, arts advocates, arts policymakers, and artists and arts organizations, they have achieved far more than they could have by relying exclusively on their own limited grantmaking budgets. Specifically, they have helped arts educators develop state arts content standards and curricular frameworks for K–12 education, determine the amount and reach of arts education around their states, raise the visibility of arts education with both the public and elected officials, and develop tools for assessing student proficiency in the arts.

## Policy Implications

Our analysis implies that in line with their mandate to support and encourage public interest in the arts, SAAs should consider giving more priority to cultivating demand for the arts. This does not necessarily mean they should replace grants designed to expand supply and access with grants designed to cultivate demand; there may be other tools available that will serve. In fact, some SAAs have already demonstrated that the use of such tools as convening and advocacy can be very effective in promoting arts education in the public schools and the broader arts community—perhaps more effective than grants. Nevertheless, placing greater emphasis on demand will require SAAs to reallocate some resources from individuals and organizations operating on the supply and access portions of the arts infrastructure to those operating on the demand side.

To evaluate their options, SAAs should consider several questions:

- *What is the status of youth arts learning in the state?* Before an SAA can begin to help remediate problems in youth arts learning, it must have a good understanding of the overall environment. A handful of states, with the help of their SAAs, have conducted assessments, and state policymakers are using the survey data to identify gaps and inequities and to develop strategies for addressing them.
- *What can an SAA do to raise public awareness of the need for comprehensive arts learning within and beyond the schools?* Time and money will not be made available for arts education unless state residents and their political leaders are convinced that arts education should be a basic part of K–12 education. SAAs are uniquely positioned within state government to advocate for the benefits of aesthetic engagement and the necessity of promoting such engagement through education.
- *How can an SAA best contribute to policy changes that will strengthen arts education in the public school system?* No single group of stakeholders has the resources or clout essential for bringing about change in general education policy at the state level. SAAs are likely to be more effective in this area as influencers and conve-

ners of the disparate stakeholders in support of standards-based arts education in schools.

- *How can an SAA best contribute to policy changes that will strengthen arts learning in the community?* An SAA can focus its education grantmaking on organizations that contribute to comprehensive arts learning. If SAAs look at the arts learning infrastructure as a whole, they may also be able to advise artists, arts organizations, and other arts learning providers on where the gaps are—and fund individuals and institutions that can fill those gaps.
- *How can an SAA identify and promote programs likely to lead to adult involvement in the arts?* SAAs can work with other organizations to bring recognition to exemplary programs in their states—educational programs, professional development programs, teacher preparation programs, and local collaborative networks in support of arts learning. In this way, they can influence practitioners to offer standards-based arts instruction and develop public support for such programs at the same time.

For other policymakers and funders, the key implication of our work is that greater attention should be directed to drawing more Americans into lifelong involvement in the arts. Of the many potentially effective strategies for achieving this objective, we make three recommendations:

- *Support research to inform policy.* More research is needed to illuminate the relationship between comprehensive arts learning and long-term arts participation. For example, studies are needed to test what the conceptual literature (and personal observation) supports: that developing the skills of aesthetic perception and interpretation, for example, can increase the satisfaction people get from their encounters with the arts, and the higher their satisfaction, the more they demand such experiences.
- *Support collaborative programs that increase the amount and breadth of arts learning.* We have offered a broad view of the support infrastructure for arts learning so that policymakers can determine where and how they might have the most leverage in spurring improvements. For the young, for example, we have highlighted critical gaps in arts learning opportunities. Many of these can only be addressed by changes in state education policy. But policymakers should identify and support promising programs offered by arts organizations, higher education institutions, and local collaborative networks to strengthen school-based arts education.
- *Advocate for change in state education policy to bring arts education to all students.* Increased time for arts instruction is needed at all grade levels in the public schools, a need that cannot be met without significant changes in state education policy. Arts content standards now exist in nearly every state, but K–12 children will not be provided with more and better arts education until states follow through with

an accountability system and ask districts to report on arts instruction provided and learning achieved. Unless state boards of education require such results, their arts standards and mandates will be ignored.

To bring about reform in state education policy, however, communities that have often worked at cross-purposes will have to reach out to one another and forge a common agenda. Those that will play the key roles are the arts policy community (which includes the NEA and SAAs), leaders in the arts community (such as directors of major arts organizations and the business leaders on their boards), and the professional associations that represent the thousands of arts educators across the country. Only by working together can these communities persuade the general education community—and the public—of the importance of arts learning in drawing more Americans into engagement with the culture around them.