



Grantmakers in the Arts  
Proceedings from the  
1999 Conference

**Strengthening the Arts  
Through Policy, Performance and Practice**

November 14-17, 1999 San Francisco

**Address by Bill Ivey  
Chairman,  
National Endowment for the Arts**

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*Strengthening the Arts through  
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In 1999 Grantmakers in the Arts celebrated its fifteenth anniversary and, as organizations periodically do, we took this opportunity to stand back, take stock of our work as grantmakers, and look to the future. As part of this process, we surveyed our membership and also asked a number of you to tell us what you were working on, how you were doing, and what was keeping you awake at night.

In fact, we found very few surprises. You talked about the need to sustain arts organizations and leaders, increase public participation, and support individual artists and their work. You also talked about your desire for more informed arts policy, better evaluation, and new linkages to the for-profit sector. These ideas formed the content of the 1999 conference.

But the spirit of the conference came from another place, another vision, that is equally a part of the essential GIA. John Gardner, the founder of Independent Sector, gave a speech in Oakland in 1998, in which he spoke of the immense promise and possibility of the work of philanthropy and the nonprofit sector. He said of our work:

*We are allowed to pursue truth, even if we are going in the wrong direction – allowed to experiment even if we're bound to fail, to map unknown territory even if we get lost. We are committed to alleviate misery and redress grievances, to give reign to the mind's curiosity and the soul's longing, to seek beauty where we can and defend truth where we must, to honor the worthy and smite the rascals with everyone free to define worthiness and rascality, to find cures and to console the incurable, to deal with the ancient impulse to hate and fear the tribe in the next valley, to prepare for tomorrow's crisis and preserve yesterday's wisdom, and to pursue the questions that others won't because they are too busy or too lazy or fearful or jaded. It is a sector for seed planting and path finding, for lost causes and causes that yet may win. This is the vision.*

Although he wasn't speaking of our work specifically, I have not encountered a more eloquent expression of what it means to be a grantmaker in the arts. The 1999 conference began with its content firmly in hand and with this vision offered as a guide. Hopefully along the way, we explored each other's best funding efforts, shared lessons from our failures, and drew courage from our commitment to artists, art forms, and community.

**Cora Mirikitani**

1999 GIA Conference Chair

It's great to be here in San Francisco with arts funders from across the nation.

I want to thank Cora Mirikitani, your conference chair this year, and all those who helped to plan and arrange the conference.

Your conference theme – *Strengthening the Arts through Policy, Performance and Practice* – is very timely. It's a topic many of us in this room are concerned with as we plan for a new century that is sure to hold new challenges for the arts and for those of us who support them.

### **Budget: The Unanswered Question**

Let me begin with the most recent news on NEA's budget. In fact, we're right at the end of the appropriations cycle. We've been fighting hard.

Our budget, as you know, is folded into the Interior Appropriations bill, which also considers support for our national parks, as well as energy concerns, such as federal oil and gas leases.

The President requested a \$50 million increase for us. During the summer, the House approved flat funding for the Endowment at \$98 million. The Senate voted us a \$5 million increase.

After weeks of give and take, the House instructed its conferees to support the Senate's increase. Twenty conservatives in the House dug in, along with the leadership. But, as time dwindled and the \$15 billion Interior bill was being held up by whether to give NEA between \$2-5 million, the Senate receded and voted the bill out, NEA funded at the same \$98 million level.

Since then, the President indicated he would veto the first bill and returned it to Congress. And, now a second bill is being hammered out in some conference room on Capitol Hill. It's likely that we will know the outcome soon.

Over the past year, we've made enormous progress. We met with and talked to more than 150 Members of the House and Senate. Democrats and Republicans. Supporters and those who are deadset against – and philosophically opposed – to federal funding for the arts.

We have strong bi-partisan support in Congress. Senators Gorton, Bennett, Reed, Specter and Kennedy, and Congressional representatives Slaughter, Dix, and Regula have been very supportive.

We have had strong, steady support from our state arts agencies, our National Council, national service organizations, and private funders, like yourselves.

So, whatever the outcome, we are all energized by the remarkable vision of a congressional debate about an NEA budget increase. We will either receive an increase, or we've succeeded in establishing a strong foundation on which to build our 2001 budget.

### **Establishing Value**

"Now, Bill," you might say, "Why are you telling us your problems?"

Well, I think there's a connection. We always talk about microcosms. I think we're a macrocosm of your issues. We have Congress and the Administration. You have boards, corporate parents, and community leadership.

And, it's really all about establishing value. The establishment of value for the arts within global context of charitable priorities and political commitment affects us all. Not "values," but value in the sense of "importance," "significance," "centrality."

As a nation, we do not yet possess a national understanding of the value of creativity and cultural heritage. Unlike our investments in the quality of education or our physical environment, we continue to face complex philosophical and practical challenges around the engagement of American tax dollars with culture and creativity.

New buildings and bigger budgets aren't enough. All too often, the arts remain undervalued and on the fringes of community concerns.

As you know, our colleagues at PEW have undertaken an ambitious arts policy program, which generated a healthy mix of editorial and op-ed comment in newspapers across the country.

But, before we address the establishment of a national arts policy – or, in the formulation I prefer, the placement of art *in* public policy – we must create and sustain a commitment to the importance of creativity and cultural heritage to community and family life.

We're mighty thin on art in public policy right now.

I recently attended an international cultural meeting in Oaxaca in September (right before the earthquake, I might add), and I witnessed firsthand how thin America's connection is to culture.

We really don't possess a cultural policy in international relations. We have only a weak, extended version of a trade policy in cultural material. But, commitment and value must precede policies.

We will never have true arts policy until we establish value for the work of artists and value of the outcomes that music, theater, painting, dance, design, and the folk arts can produce for American lives and for our nation.

But, how do we establish value? How do we elevate the significance of our work to match that of other realms of life, like healthcare or the care of our physical environment, where public policies and private philanthropy have established enviable track records?

A good message and meaningful work.

First, we need a solid intellectual foundation for our conversation with citizens, business leaders, and government officials. What Marc Collins called "a theory of change that undergirds our work."

As a society, we have not come to grips with the creative character of our nation. The centrality of creativity and the key role of American art making as a metaphor for our democratic process.

We have not linked diversity, creativity and art with our nation's political and economic strength.

We have not fully established the centrality of expressive life to the American experience.

We have not yet made the case that an artistic vision is central to the creation and implementation of public policy.

We have not completely established art as central to community and family well-being.

Now, my training is in folklore, and that theoretical framework – which *does* assert the centrality of expressive life to community and family – that framework is useful to me.

Every culture possesses art, music, stories, crafts. Art is made at the intersection of tradition, contemporary context, and individual creativity. So, heritage, contemporary values, individual genius are all bundled up in painting, music, dance.

And, art is also a safe place, a guilt-free zone, for communication and exchange. So, for me, art is central.

And, when someone in our Administration or Congress suggests that more money for the NEA is less important than money for defense or the environment. Well, I say: no, we're *more* important. We're internal defense. We're cultural environment.

So, we need a strong philosophical argument.

And second, through research and evaluation, we must demonstrate – not just assert – the indisputable link between engagement in the arts and the well-being of communities, families and young citizens.

Now, as I've sat in various sessions at this conference, I've heard more about evaluation than any other topic.

Economic impact is great, but we must move beyond quantitative analysis – How many came? How did the money flow? – to qualitative assessment – How were lives changed? What behavior resulted? How were communities transformed?

Some evidence is in. Much more *must* be assembled.

An example: A few years back, we supported pilot after-school arts programs in partnership with the Department of Justice, three local arts agencies, and Americans for the Arts.

YouthARTS, involved arts programs in three cities, and Justice brought in an independent firm to evaluate the effect of arts programming on the lives of troubled young people. Calibre and Associates found that kids with arts did better, in ways that could be measured – fewer new contacts with the juvenile justice system, better communication skills – measurable outcomes.

And this small project, because of the quality of its independent assessment, has been extraordinarily important in our arguments advancing the value of the role of the arts in after-school programs.

And, third, we must invest in strategies that really connect art with community. For us, this strategy is partnering.

We must find ways that artists and arts professionals can build partnerships that engage the agendas of communities, governments, and organizations with artistic vision, heritage, and culture.

The NEA's new strategic plan and our special new initiative Challenge America will be implemented through partnerships and by sharing agendas.

The first phase of Challenge America emphasized community, children and families by targeting our grants to programs that support arts education, after-school arts programming for young people-at-risk, insuring access to the arts in rural areas and under-served urban populations, and preserving our living cultural heritage. And, we use partnerships to place arts in public policy.

When we work with the Department of Labor and Job Corps to infuse arts training into work training programs for young people, we've placed art in national labor policy.

When we work with the Department of Justice to place arts training into programs that deal with teenagers who have become part of the juvenile justice system, art becomes a part of crime prevention policy.

We partner with the Bureau of Surface Mining to design parks and recreational areas on land that has been strip mined and polluted by acid

runoff. And, art becomes an active part of federal mining policy.

We've joined hands with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that hospitals, hospices, and senior care centers apply universal design principles to building design, and that art is placed in national health policy.

And recently, we joined with the Department of Transportation and the White House Millennium Council on a project that will place exciting interpretive art projects on 50 trails throughout the United States. Art now has a place in the policy governing our national highway policy.

And, next year, we're going to go back to each of these agency partners to develop a cultural policy position for each agency – for Labor, Justice, Health and Human Services, Transportation, and the ever-popular, Bureau of Surface Mining.

These are only a few examples of the kinds of opportunities available to us, *if* we see the possibilities, and *if* take the initiative. But, we've got to connect. Roll up our sleeves. Solve other people's problems, not just our own.

Now, few foundations fund the arts exclusively. You, too, compete with other funding priorities. Just as the Endowment must formulate a convincing argument to sway Congress, the Administration, and our National Council, you must convince your boards and trustees that artistic and creative endeavors are of growing value even in the face of competing demands.

And ultimately, the value of all of our work is judged in the court of public opinion. So, *how well* we state our case, *how well* we document our achievements, and *how effectively* we partner have a real impact on *how well* we're able to do our job.

### Arts Structure Changing

Now, I firmly believe we've arrived at an auspicious time in our history. A time when there is a great convergence of circumstances that provide unique opportunities to expand the understanding of the value of art and

culture – an occasion to grow our investment in creativity and cultural heritage.

The arts structure that stood for years is delaminating: About a month ago, in *The New Yorker*, John Seabrook presented a long essay documenting the uncoupling of “taste” and class – Michael Graves dishes in Target; Martha Stewart with K-Mart; construction workers and Lattes; and the re-evaluation of Norman Rockwell. The St. Louis Symphony now provides most music education in the city through its own music school. Detroit, with a charter school, is trying to follow. We’ve moved from “entitlement” to community service.

Young artists are emerging in an environment steeped in “sampling,” bits of culture plucked from here and there to create a new “original.” And, young artists are less committed to institutions.

And, our society is extraordinarily committed to the well being, education, and advancement of young citizens. A commitment that is accompanied by important evidence that music, dance, sculpture can be at the very center of our engagement with young people.

And, there will be a change in arts leadership. Many of us came early and are staying late. But new leadership will come. So, there’s a looming occasion to re-think the very real challenges facing arts organizations.

And, there exists an explosion of wealth, and an accompanying transfer of growing resources into the world of charitable organizations.

Together, these events have created a great wave of opportunity that is swiftly moving toward shore. And, we can either ride that wave and carry the arts to a new level. Or we can let the waters crash around us and be left standing on the shore, watching the tide recede, wondering what happened.

I believe a place to begin is to, collectively, commit to establishing value as a prelude to placing art in policy.

Second, we can take on some things together, not necessarily through formal alliance, but through shared information and agendas. Many of you attended a meeting of funders during

the summer of 1998. Some shared concerns emerged: evaluation; stabilization of arts organizations, community cultural development; and international cultural exchange.

Let’s find areas in which we can really work together, where we can really establish value. This won’t be easy, but right now, the clay is soft, we can shape things before they harden again. But, we must be fully engaged, if we’re going to establish value.

In the past, arts have been like someone who says “I’ll meet you half way,” when they think they’ve already taken three steps in your direction.

### Conclusion

My dear grandmother used to tell me, “Billy, you can’t be first and last.” I had heard that phrase all my life, but it didn’t have real meaning to me until I grew older. What my grandmother was telling me was something quite profound, actually. She was saying, “You can’t have it both ways. You can’t possess the wisdom of age, and the vigor of youth. You must accept the burdens of your situation, if you’re going to enjoy the benefits.”

For artists and arts organizations, you can’t be loved, and remain distant. We can’t be rewarded, and pursue our own agendas. We can’t be popular, and speak to the social elite. We can’t be first and last.

But, if we think beyond our internal agendas; aim toward citizen service; and engage the needs of communities and families, we can – and will – establish value. And we will place the arts – creativity and cultural heritage – at the very center of American life. Thank you.

**THIS IS ONE OF A SERIES OF PROCEEDINGS FROM THE GIA 1999 CONFERENCE,  
STRENGTHENING THE ARTS THROUGH POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND PRACTICE**

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