

Current Perspectives on **Arts Advocacy** & How to Better Support it in the Bay Area

*An analysis of interviews conducted with
arts advocates, culture sector leaders and
government officials*

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Preface

In December 2018 and January 2019, I spoke with a dozen arts community leaders from around the Bay Area, and around the country, about their experiences engaging in advocacy work. This report reflects the perspectives of individuals speaking with deep knowledge about advocacy efforts in geographies they know well. However, the interview subjects are speaking for themselves and do not purport to represent other members of the local communities of which they are a part. In sum, this report is a synthesis of the perspectives shared on what is meant by 'arts advocacy,' successful advocacy strategies, advocacy bright spots and challenges in the Bay Area as well as suggestions for how to productively support advocacy work in the future.

– Marc Vogl

Interviews

This report is based on interviews conducted in December 2018-January 2019 with:

- Kimberly Aceves-Iñiguez, Co-founder and Executive Director at RYSE Center
- Tamara Alvarado, Executive Director at the Leo M. Shortino Family Foundation and Vice Chair Western States Art Federation
- Tom DeCaigny, Director of Cultural Affairs at the City and County of San Francisco
- Berniz House, Community Engagement Manager at Western Stage at Hartnell College and Former Community Engagement Manager at Arts Council for Monterey County
- John Killacky, Member, Vermont House of Representatives
- Kristen Madsen, Director at Creative Sonoma
- Maria X. Martinez, Director of Whole Person Care at San Francisco Department of Public Health
- Nancy Ng, Executive Director of Creativity and Policy at Luna Dance Institute
- Leslie Medine, Co-founder and Senior Fellow at On The Move
- Stan Rosenberg, Former Massachusetts State Senator
- Nina Simon, Executive Director at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History
- Nina Ozlu Tunceli, Chief Counsel of Government and Public Affairs & Executive Director at Americans for the Arts Action Fund

I. Definitions

Advocate (n) – one who pleads the cause of another

Advocate (v) – to support or argue for a cause or policy

- Merriam Webster Dictionary

Anodyne dictionary definitions of “advocacy” are straightforward. Understood in a vacuum, the term applies to the act of arguing for a cause or policy, or the person or organization, that is making the case.

But as San Francisco Cultural Affairs Director Tom DeCaigny observes, “Our field speaks about advocacy in different ways and there lies the challenge.”

Professional advocates subscribe to a comprehensive, and clinical, interpretation of advocacy as the “umbrella” that encompasses doing the research for justifying a position, educating the public and policymakers on a policy’s benefits, convincing a broad constituency of voters to support the fight and lobbying a narrow set of officials to make the right choice. Advocacy, to Nina Ozlu Tunceli, Director at the Americans for the Arts Action Fund, is “the full range of activities promoting a particular point of view.”

In reality, however, advocacy is not value-neutral. For arts advocates in the Bay Area, it’s intrinsically about change, progress and solidarity.

Long-time arts education advocate and Executive Director of Creativity and Policy at Luna Dance Institute Nancy Ng considers advocacy the practice of “asking to shift something in your community.” And when Berniz House, an artist and activist in Salinas, considers the slippery term’s essential meaning, she says simply: “Advocacy is providing a voice to the groups that don’t have one.”

For Kimberly Aceves-Iñiquez, Executive Director at RYSE Center and a community organizer in Richmond, advocacy is a method for explicitly advancing the cause of justice and social uplift. “Advocacy is a tool to shift policy and perception to address inequity and to ensure our community is adequately serving those most impacted by historical and structural racism,” she says.

Arts advocates are aware that at different times arrows in the advocacy quiver get aimed at different targets.

“In one context, advocacy is about influencing policymaking and the funding landscape for greater value being placed on the arts,” says Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History Director Nina Simon. “However, I always ask—‘arts advocacy,’ toward what end? More creative expression? More access? For me, it’s about empowering organizations to open up to new communities.”

Advocacy, in the arts arena, appears to be a ‘both-and’ proposition.

It is, as Kristen Madsen, Director at Creative Sonoma says, “about making the ongoing case that we as individuals and as a community have to pay for the arts as a ‘good.’” And it is also about linking the arts to issues and struggles that matter to more than just artists and arts organizations. Or as former arts organization programmer, funder, executive director and current Vermont State Representative John Killacky sums it up: “Every arts leader has to be a cultural citizen.”

II. What Makes A Good Arts Advocate?

Given that advocacy is a basket of activities and not a single task, and that the arts sector does not exist in isolation and therefore advocates must engage beyond the field, what does a successful arts advocate have to do?

The group I spoke with said arts advocates must:

- Connect the Arts to Something Bigger
- Build Coalitions Inside the Sector
- Know Their Stuff (and Practice Using It)
- Have a Plan (and Be Ready to Go)
- Get Involved in Government

Connect the Arts to Something Bigger

A good arts advocate is not necessarily the one who beats the drum for the arts most loudly, or most incessantly. While its valuable to maintain a consistent presence in the minds of policymakers, Stan Rosenberg, a 30-year Massachusetts State Senator and former chair at the Senate's Arts Caucus, observes, "Success in politics is not enhanced by being a one issue candidate."

Nina Simon, who has engaged in advocacy efforts in Santa Cruz on behalf of the arts but has also been involved in combating homelessness and encouraging civic participation, puts it this way: "Sometimes arts advocacy is less important than strengthening our community overall."

Fortunately, veteran arts leaders and policymakers see building bridges between the arts and a constellation of community improvement causes as a doable and winning strategy.

Maria X. Martinez has been on the advocacy and the decision making side of the public policy table as a former San Francisco Arts Commissioner and as a top administrator at the San Francisco Department of Public Health, and she is emphatic: "If you are going to get public money, your duty is to move forward solutions for your community... [and arts advocates] should make the argument that art is a powerful vehicle for improving the quality of our collective, family and individual life, including our health, educational and economic experience."

Sophisticated advocates do not make instrumental arguments for the arts that are transparently self-serving and don't stand apart from partners working to improve community from different vantage points. Arts advocates need to be credible in their rationales and also need to apply their energies and political capital to support the work of allies engaged in improving health, educational and economic outcomes in a shared community.

During his seven-year tenure as Executive Director, John Killacky built great public sector support for Flynn Center for the Performing Arts in Burlington, Vermont, and he built up personal credibility that served him well when he mounted a successful run for elected office and forged cross-sector relationships that are assets now that he is a legislator. The key, says Killacky, was to think holistically about the panoply of resources a community needs and be present in the fights to get them.

“We need to build broader coalitions around the nonprofit sector,” reflects Killacky. “Over the years, I often found myself in Montpelier testifying before House and Senate committees advocating not only for the arts but also for shelters, food banks, affordable housing, hospitals, schools, churches, libraries and other social service agencies. Because what’s most important is that communities come together and be a part of the solution altogether.”

Build Coalitions Inside the Arts Sector Too

Policy makers from foundations to public officials are more likely to meet with arts advocates and favor their proposals if they speak for a unified constituency. But, says San Francisco Cultural Affairs Director Tom DeCaigny, “Working toward a unified arts community is challenging as people tend to self-direct. There are certain pockets of arts advocacy where the aligned goals are more clear, but the coalescing of focus is an ongoing challenge.”

As victories like the 2018 Prop E campaign to increase and secure dedicated hotel tax funding for artists and arts organizations across San Francisco illustrate, there can be big rewards for advocacy groups who build coalitions and motivate all the actors in an arts community to play well together.

Coalition building is nuanced, case-specific work, but generally, arts advocates are well served if they can pursue strategies and messages that focus on what unifies a community rather than what divides it: building support around expanding the resource pie rather than merely slicing it up differently and underscoring that with new resources, more people can be better supported.

Leslie Medine, Co-founder and Senior Fellow at On the Move and a youth development advocate in Napa, cautions that there are no shortcuts to building successful coalitions. “If you don’t have real time then collaboration is not going to work,” she says, from experience. “Partnership on advocacy work can’t be transactional and accomplished in one-off meetings. You have to deeply understand the constraints your partner is under from their unions, membership or funders, and that’s only going to happen if you have real time to get to deep understanding and work out compromises.”

Know Your Stuff (and Practice Using It)

Tamara Alvarado, Vice Chair of the Western States Arts Federation, says it is imperative that advocates be well-versed in policy history and get opportunities to practice deploying their arguments in real-world arenas. Arts advocates must be fluent in relaying the research, stories and data that paint a compelling picture of what positive policy change will achieve and know what’s been tried before so they don’t settle for too little. For example, Alvarado believes it’s crucial that arts advocates in California properly understand the history of the California Arts Council’s (CAC) near elimination in 2003, and even as there have been recent advances in state arts funding, not let up on the pressure to return to previous funding levels and surpass them.

Alvarado, who came to advocacy work as director of an arts organization, says that her effectiveness as an advocate is not just a product of the time she spent studying up. “I’ve been to Washington D.C. six

times to meet with members of Congress,”¹ she said. “And that experience has been critical.” Nancy Ng, an arts education advocate and Director of Creativity and Policy at Luna Dance Institute, also affirms that good advocates need training and practice “telling their stories and making their asks.” The experiences – positive and negative – of putting oneself on the line for a cause contributes to what Ng describes as “building up the resilience necessary to stick with long struggles.”

Have a Plan (and Be Ready To Go)

Because it’s impossible to know when windows of political opportunity will arise, Nina Ozlu Tunceli, Executive Director at the Americans for the Arts Action Fund, says it’s essential that arts advocates never be flat footed and should always have and a policy ‘wishlist’ at the ready.

“You always have to have a policy agenda, research and the stories and individual players in place to move legislation,” Ozlu Tunceli advises. But that’s not all; advocates also “have to be ready to go with a communications plan [and communication tools] to educate the public and decision makers.”

While Ozlu Tunceli says that advocates had some lead-time before President Obama took office to prepare a list of ‘shovel ready’ art sector projects that could be incorporated as a \$50 million jobs bill into the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus bill, which the National Endowment for the Arts ultimately administered, she says that sometimes advocates must be ready to deploy at a moment’s notice.

“After the Parkland shooting there were a lot of arts therapists going in to help counsel the kids,” she says. “When the public can quickly see the effectiveness of your program in an acute and timely situation, it’s easier to make the case for a broader policy change to support arts therapy year-round and across the country. It’s especially important to have national research findings in hand about the effectiveness of these programs, so policy pitches can happen in real time during related current events.”

Kristen Madsen, Director of Creative Sonoma, affirms that in the wake of the fires that struck Santa Rosa in 2017, teaching artists served a critical role helping traumatized school children cope with the devastation; and thanks to the storytelling efforts of her agency, they gained recognition for it too. Out of the tragedy came an enhanced public perception of the value artists have in Sonoma, and that positive perception is gold to an arts advocate.

Get Involved in Government

While effective advocates need to cultivate public support to win at the ballot box, or to help a politician see what position their constituents want them to take, Berniz House, former Community Engagement Manager at the Arts Council for Monterey County, reveals a profound truth when she says, “it is the civil servants who really make the policies.” If arts advocates want to see that public policies actually

¹ Although some of the work of Hewlett Foundation grantees described in this report may reflect the passage of legislation, the Hewlett Foundation does not lobby or earmark its funds for prohibited lobbying activities, as defined in federal tax laws. The foundation’s funding for policy work is limited to permissible forms of support only, such as general operating support grants that grantees can allocate at their discretion and project support grants for non-lobbying activities (e.g. public education and nonpartisan research).

translate into meaningful results, they must not shy away from building relationships with government workers (and not just in arts agencies) and engage with the bureaucracy.

“Elected folks come and go every few years,” House continues. “And it’s the city manager who commissions the strategic plans that guide the city. In Salinas, we recently saw an opportunity to insert a public art element in the Public Works planning as well as the creation of the new Public Art Commission.” House’s experience in Salinas is echoed by advocates who worked to incorporate arts elements into the San Francisco Master Plan and by advocates now working in local government around the Bay Area too.

The more advocates understand how government works (which levers affect real change, which officials really control which budgets), the more effective they can be. John Kreidler is held up as a legend for being an arts champion who applied insights gained as an analyst at the U.S. Department of Labor to his job at the San Francisco Arts Commission in the early 1970s, where he unlocked hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal funding to pay artists. More recently, Nina Simon in Santa Cruz has introduced the concept to staffers in the Santa Cruz Department of Economic Development that they could apply Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs) for projects that include arts components.

Good arts advocates are well served by showing up at planning meetings and community forums, by listening to the proceedings at city council and school board hearings, and by taking the time and making the (repeated) effort to cultivate relationships with politicians.

III. What’s Working (and What’s Not) in Bay Area Arts Advocacy

What’s Working

- Arts Community Coalition Building to Pass Prop E in San Francisco
- Relationship Building with Local Officials in San Jose
- Bringing People Together on Statewide and Local Arts Education Issues

When it comes to bright spots in Bay Area arts advocacy, local experts cited numerous examples of policy wins and legislative victories.

Several recent developments were called out as examples of successful advocacy efforts in seizing political opportunities, coalition building within a diverse arts community and relationship building with local officials.

Arts Community Coalition Building to Pass Prop E² in San Francisco

In 2018, 75% of San Francisco voters approved Prop E, a ballot initiative securing arts funding for decades to come. Just two years earlier, a similar measure had failed to get the approval required. Arts

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advocates from around the country hailed the victory as inspirational. In part, locals who championed the measure say the fall of 2018 was an auspicious moment when a progressive electorate was galvanized to turn out and vote. And, says San Francisco Arts Commission Director Tom DeCaigny, “Timing is everything! We’re in a really healthy economy and San Francisco is on a roll. Needless to say, it’s easier to allocate resources when there are resources to be had.”

But the Prop E win is also attributable to the collaboration amongst the city’s large and small budget arts organizations. Many individual artists and representatives from small budget arts nonprofits rallied with leadership from Arts for a Better Bay Area (ABBA), an arts advocacy group that arose in 2015. Large budget organizations, who’ve had a long-time association called the San Francisco Arts Alliance, coordinated efforts to raise funds and mount a professionally run and technologically savvy get-out-the-vote campaign. Deborah Cullinan, who co-founded ArtsForum SF to galvanize arts community engagement in local politics in 2003, and a current ABBA and San Francisco Arts Alliance member in her capacity as Chief Executive Officer at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, describes the significance of a unified campaign for Prop E this way: “The effort brought together a broad and diverse coalition of arts and culture leaders to not only win a ballot measure but to raise awareness about the role of arts and culture in the city and to build political momentum. A newly aligned arts community has emerged that together emphasized equitable funding.”

Relationship Building with Local Officials in San Jose

In San Jose, Tamara Alvarado, Executive Director of the Shortino Family Foundation, credits strong City Hall support for the San Jose Cultural Affairs Program to the approachability of local politicians. “It’s not hard to be high-touch in San Jose,” Alvarado says. “We’re dealing with elected officials who are products of San Jose; they have deep local ties and our advocacy activity has really been about one-to-one personal engagement with them.” While San Jose is actually the largest city in the region, Alvarado believes the city’s small-town sense of itself works to the advantage of community-based advocates. “San Jose is still catching up to itself,” she says. “It’s not San Francisco or Oakland, the council person in my district will take my call!”

Bringing People Together on Statewide and Local Arts Education Issues

Reflecting on the progress the arts education advocacy community has made regionally, Nancy Ng, Executive Director of Creativity and Policy at the Luna Dance Institute, says, “For years, I sat in arts education meetings wondering what my place was. But Hewlett has done a beautiful job bringing different people together in the same room, and now there are a lot of strong relationships between individuals and institutions that cross sectors and include community-based groups, direct service providers, government folks and major advocacy organizations.” For Ng, this has paid dividends for the statewide arts education advocacy efforts of which she’s been a part.

The investment in bringing people together is also gaining traction in Sonoma. Creative Sonoma’s Executive Director Kristen Madsen says that “with a Hewlett grant we are working with local arts-education leaders on shaping a campaign and building awareness to increase arts education in every K-12 school.” The support to convene a group and facilitate a collaborative effort is essential, as Madsen attests, “Providing a little bit of infrastructure really helps.”

What's Not Working

- Overall – Not Enough Time to Do Advocacy Work
- San Jose – Complacency and Arts Community Division
- Sonoma – Funders Signaling Arts Don't Matter
- Napa – Misperception that Nonprofits Don't Need Help
- Santa Cruz – Too Few Public Sector Contacts: *"Who Would I even call?"*
- Region Wide Advocacy is Harder Than it Would Seem

Overall - Not Enough Time

Arts leaders across the region say the number one barrier they face in their advocacy work is the lack of time to do it.

Luna Dance Institute's Nancy Ng laments what many of the experts interviewed also expressed. "We believe it is our role to be advocates, and it's not ok to just delegate advocacy to AFTA or the [California Arts Education] Alliance," she says. But the issue is we don't get money for advocacy! For organizations with under \$1 million budgets, doing advocacy work is very hard to balance with our program and fundraising work."

Nina Simon of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History articulates the equity challenges and deeper damage that a default reliance on unsubsidized advocacy efforts can do. "When it comes to advocacy, we need voices front-and-center that are from organizations that are incredibly under-resourced, she says. *"How can someone who runs an all-volunteer org spend any time on advocacy?!"*

From region to region, there are specific challenges to successful arts advocacy.

- In **San Jose**, Tamara Alvarado believes that, paradoxically, general confidence in the level of arts funding means that arts advocates struggle to generate any sense of urgency within the local arts community. "I wouldn't say San Jose has a strong arts advocacy base because the funding here is pretty robust and people don't see it as a problem," she says. Alvarado, who led Santa Clara county arts organizations during previous economic downturns, warns that complacency is dangerous: "It's harder for people to see a need for coalition building when there is *not* a problem... but we need to do this now because the recession will hit, and I remember when the CAC was cut down to \$1 million."

Alvarado also believes that to address current income inequality and equity issues, the arts leaders and advocates in the arts community needs to be more united. "What's missing is that most arts leaders are not connecting the big issues and crises affecting our communities," she says. "Organizations that are not led by people of color (POC) and not primarily serving communities of color are not engaging with issues such as gentrification and the economic crisis. POC-led and -serving arts organizations are left to deal with the "people of color" issues. This perspective has to shift, and it can." Again, Alvarado warns of trouble: "We need to build more alliances across the community now because that is what's going to serve us when the trouble hits."

- In **Napa**, Leslie Medine contends that the county suffers from the misperception that the arts are much better supported by public and private philanthropy than they actually are and that the North Bay, in general, is much more affluent than it actually is. “We have almost no arts funding here in Napa,” says Medine. “The Arts Council is forever trying to stay alive. No foundations up here give to the arts. And there is no government money for the arts either.”

Medine continues, “The perception is that there is no problem up here in wine country when the reality is that [almost] 50% of our community is Latino, and many are undocumented and in poverty. At the core of the advocacy struggle in the smallest of the Bay Area’s 11 counties, Medine says, “is the challenge to get people to take notice of what’s going on here in Napa.”

- The decision by major regional and state-wide funders not to fund the arts is cited by Creative Sonoma Director Kristen Madsen as evidence that arts advocates failed in the past and in so doing has made building support for the arts much harder in the North Bay. “Watching the Marin, San Francisco and Irvine Foundations walk away from arts funding is a huge blow,” Madsen says. “It leaves not only big financial holes for arts organizations in **Sonoma**, but it signals a devaluing of the arts that government and the public see. And when they walk away and leave [the arts] out in the cold, it indicates that our work as arts advocates was not effective.”
- In **Santa Cruz**, arts advocates don’t have partners in government with whom to collaborate. “The city of Santa Cruz has only one person for the arts within the Economic Development office,” says Nina Simon.

Ostensibly, it’s the role of government-appointed arts commissions to open doors and foster partnerships between local government and the local arts community, but that’s not happening effectively in Santa Cruz either.

The County Arts Commission is run through the Parks Department and is unstaffed. Created only a few years ago, this agency’s mandate is also unclear. Determined arts advocates like Simon have succeeded in bringing visionary private-public projects (like Abbot Square) to life despite the absence of consistent, informed government partners, but experience tells Simon that it shouldn’t have to be so hard. “Compared to nonprofit leaders in the health and human services sector who have counterparts in government, we don’t have obvious public sector staff contacts,” says Simon. When she has her next big arts and economic development or arts and public safety idea, Simon wonders, “Who would I even call?”

Region Wide Advocacy Is Harder Than It Seems

For the most part, formal advocacy organizations operating in the Bay Area are either working to influence state or national policy makers (like Californians for the Arts, or the California Alliance for Arts Education or Americans for the Arts) or limit their activities to a single jurisdiction (like the Berkeley Cultural Trust or Creative Sonoma). In practice, artists live in one jurisdiction and work in another; arts organizations are based in one legislative district and attract audiences and donors from another. These border crossings may have many creative and economic upsides, but they create thorny obstacles to regional advocacy and organizing.

For example, effective outreach has to be precisely targeted and calls to action have to be time-sensitive and frequently hyper-local. To do this, constituent engagement and mobilization requires a great database, sophisticated communications technology and consistent accurate execution, all of which can be expensive. Arts for a Better Bay Area (ABBA) was founded by San Francisco leaders with the intent of building a region-wide membership and has, with a small budget and part-time staff, ranged into East Bay advocacy, but as one longtime member complained, they have at times undermined their own efforts by emailing San Francisco residents to show up and testify at Oakland City Council budget hearings.

And yet, it's not clear that the answer is to have dozens of parallel organizations creating duplicative advocacy tools and systems and fragmenting their power, especially since there are major region-wide issues (like affordable housing) affecting artists and arts workers across city and county lines.

"Sometimes we [in the Bay Area] shoot ourselves in the foot as we aim to be pluralistic (and yet, still want our own group)," observes Tom DeCaigny. "That fragmentation can get in the way of building clear, real coalitions. We have many advocacy groups – Arts for a Better Bay Area, The Arts Alliance, Arts Education Alliance for the Bay Area, neighborhood arts coalitions, etc. We would benefit by looking to other models such as ARTS for LA, which seems like a dreamy model; it's coherent and has helped arts interests in LA coalesce around a single advocacy model."

IV. Recommendations to Support Arts Advocacy

In the summer of 2000, the Performing Arts Program of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation held a national advisory meeting and considered supporting the development of a national research and policy agenda for culture. According to notes from the meeting: "The most vocal advisors cautioned: 'Don't!'"

Nearly 20 years later, the consensus among the dozen experts interviewed for this report would seem on the one hand to reach the same conclusion: *No one suggested that investing significantly in academic research to advance a specific set of arts policy goals nationally (or even locally) would be a good idea.*

However, there was agreement amongst those interviewed that foundations (like Hewlett) can (and should) make investments in building advocacy capacity and encouraging advocacy work amongst arts sector leaders so they can pursue a tapestry of policy goals and lead the fight for better arts policy in each corner of the Bay Area and beyond.

Specifically, interviews with regional arts leaders and advocacy experts identified the following strategies and types of support as most likely to advance arts interests in public policy:

1. Do *Not* Advocate for Artists as a Special Class
2. Encourage Arts Leaders to Get Involved in Policy Issues Beyond the Arts
3. Invest in Advocacy Training Opportunities
4. Give Arts Nonprofits the Green Light to Engage in Advocacy (and take the fear out of doing it)
5. Support Advocacy Groups Pushing for More California Arts Council Funding Now

Do Not Advocate for Artists as a Special Class

Communities from Santa Cruz to San Jose to Santa Rosa are all contending with an affordable housing crisis that is displacing many poor people and middle-income families, including artists. However, arts advocates in each of these cities (and colleagues in San Francisco and Oakland) do not think the solution is to push artists to the front of the affordable housing line.

For some, advocating for a housing-for-artists initiative is flawed for moral reasons. “Get in line and help those in the back of the line who bear the biggest burden,” begins former San Francisco Arts Commissioner and Public Health official Maria X. Martinez. “Most of the artists I know would agree that we should not lose sight of getting housing for poor people. I have been asked to [promote artists], but I am not interested in promoting an artist just because they are an artist over a homeless parent working three jobs.”

Others caution that previous instances of artist-only housing have proven divisive and actually undercut public support for artists. “There is a real sense [in Santa Cruz] that the Tannery engenders some confusion,” says Nina Simon. “To be sure, Santa Cruz prides itself on attracting and supporting a creative community, but locals also ask, ‘Why do those artists deserve housing and nurses and teachers don’t? Why is this privileged group getting the handout?’”

In Sonoma, advocates invited renowned nonprofit artist housing developer Artspace to propose solutions to a growing artist-displacement challenge in Santa Rosa. But they quickly realized that homelessness was a far higher concern for the stakeholders whose support they’d need for major housing construction projects and that artist-only solutions were not going to work.

Instead, advocates agreed, the answer is to recognize that housing, much like health care or income-inequality, is an issue that impacts many different identity groups and therefore a strategy of coalition building and partnership makes more sense than going it alone.

“We need to figure out a way to get affordable housing that includes artists but is not exclusive to artists,” says Tamara Alvarado. And, rather than making artist specific housing Tom DeCaigny, argues, “We need to look at the arts in land-use policy and make the arts a part of the overall affordable housing pipeline.”

Encourage Arts Leaders to Get Involved in Policy Issues Beyond the Arts

Jumping into land-use policy discussions is one avenue that arts advocates might pursue to address the need for artists to find affordable housing, and in that vein, arts advocates who’ve served in government encourage arts leaders to get involved in a range of policy debates that transcend the arts sector.

“Certainly arts advocates need to have a laser focus on arts funding issues,” says long-time arts executive and newly elected Vermont State Representative John Killacky. “But I am finding it is more important to be in the legislature’s Nonprofit Caucus than the Arts Caucus because this is where we address issues of tax policy that affect the arts and where we can link the arts to the overall wellbeing of the community.”

Educating arts community members on economic, healthcare, environmental, education, land-use and labor policies is seen as valuable situationally in building bridges between the arts and advocates in other sectors, and as some interviewees advised, in equipping arts community members to potentially go into public service themselves.

Stan Rosenberg, a founder and director of an arts education nonprofit who went on to serve in the Massachusetts State Senate, believes that “every major arts convening should have an element that connects the arts to our responsibility as citizens.” These could be delivered in workshops and in coordination with mentorship programs that prepare arts workers to seek elected office.

Invest in Advocacy Training Opportunities

Overwhelmingly, advocacy experts opined on the opportunity to provide more, better advocacy training, and not just to arts workers but to boards of trustees and foundation leaders too.

Veteran arts education advocate Nancy Ng of Luna Dance Institute, says that “the current political climate has gut-punched people to become advocates.” Teaching artists are meeting in Berkeley and Oakland, says Ng, because they’ve reached the conclusion that “I can’t just survive as an artist or arts educator – I need to do more!” This moment has created a desire among artists to get engaged in advocacy and presented an opportunity to teach them how to be effective advocates. For Ng, teachers and artists need technical training in how to navigate political processes and make their asks at the right time and in the most effective way, but they also need dedicated time and space to support collaboration and trust-building.

The types of training that advocates feel are most needed range from communications training to community organizing.

Nina Ozlu Tunceli of Americans for the Arts recommends that arts organization leaders receive professional media training and coaching to be informed, vocal spokespeople for the arts.

Kristen Madsen, Director of Creative Sonoma, believes that arts advocates in her agency need to learn how to be good community organizers. “We are very aware that demographics are changing and that [Creative Sonoma] is pretty white,” she says. “We want to improve our strategies, action and communication around equity. We have a really great opportunity to work across the region and engage the right people and embrace everyone... and community organizing is what makes this work at the ground level. Then we can leverage that community support to advance the arts.”

Kimberly Aceves-Iñiguez of RYSE Center in Richmond puts a finer point on the value of community organizing training in this context and the specific expertise it requires. “Arts advocacy demands a different type of staff member,” she says. “[Advocates need] not just artistic knowledge but... training in non-violent communication and how to do trauma-informed work.”

For longtime arts advocate John Killacky, the content and format arts advocacy training takes is secondary to the reinforcement throughout the field that advocacy cannot be outsourced or delegated. “Funders and service organizations can work together on what kinds of training are needed,” says Killacky. “What matters is that people [working in the arts] understand that advocacy is part of your job!”

This holds true for funders and boards of directors at arts nonprofits too. “Ninety percent of advocacy is fundable by a foundation,” says Nina Ozlu Tunceli, who is also Chief Counsel for Americans for the Arts. And yet, she explains, “I still have to educate nonprofit leaders that 501c3s *can* lobby and it’s a very narrow definition and represents the smallest piece of the advocacy pie. There are a lot advocacy related activities you can do as a nonprofit.”

A practical remedy to this large gap in understanding, recommended by Ozlu Tunceli and others, is to support board education trainings with lawyers from the Alliance for Justice on the real rules governing nonprofit advocacy and lobbying.

Trainings can go a long way to teaching arts workers and organizations how to be effective advocates for their specific communities and relevant causes; convincing them that they should is a deeper issue.

Give Arts Nonprofits a Green Light to Engage in Advocacy

Foundations can legitimize advocacy as something grantees are supposed to be doing and take the fear out of it.

“Funders don’t give grantees a lot of space to put themselves out there,” says Kimberly Aceves-Iñiguez, reflecting on the hard, multi-year work of building arts organization support for the Richmond Kids First campaign. “One of our biggest challenges was getting arts groups to stand up because of restrictions from funders about what they can do in terms of advocacy, she says. “*People should be encouraged to advocate!* We had to explain that these funders will not pull your money.”

Berniz House observes that institutions and local nonprofit organizations are cautious about losing financial support. This has caused leaders to shy away from taking potentially controversial advocacy stands and backing projects that addressed issues of social justice and waded into the immigration debate.

To Killacky, there is a big leadership opportunity for funders to signal that sticking your neck out once in a while is OK. “*Permission is a big issue,*” he says. “People feel beholden to their boards and donors and don’t want to piss them off. It’s so critical to learn by example – and see that donors won’t mind. Instead, they’ll back it!”

Encouraging cross-sector advocacy, supporting a variety of advocacy trainings and promoting advocacy as a legitimate activity for an arts organization are all timeless investments a funder can make.

Support Advocacy Groups Pushing for More California Arts Council Funding Now

Several regional advocacy experts also expressed a conviction that in 2019, there is an opportunity to increase and secure funding at the California Arts Council. Tom DeCaigny believes that “the new governor is very pro-arts and there is an opportunity to legislate a baseline or a designated source [for the CAC]. California has yo-yoed up and down from last in the country in per capita arts spending to a moderate level of investment. We need to stabilize the state’s investment for the long term.

Tamara Alvarado, Vice-Chair of the Western States Arts Federation, is specific about her target and advocacy strategy: “I think we could get to \$50 million in California Arts Council funding, and we could do it by investing further in Californians for the Arts and in lobbying efforts in Sacramento.”³

V. Conclusion

The Bay Area is home to nearly 8 million people, hundreds of arts organizations, and thousands of artists and arts educators. Cultural communities in each corner of the region face unique challenges and opportunities, and arts advocates respond in different ways. A common denominator, however, is the conviction that building advocacy capacity is worthwhile. Economic cycles and political winds will influence whether the odds are in favor of or against pro-arts community policies succeeding (just as elected officials who are sympathetic to artist concerns will come and go), but advocates believe that the time is always right to build coalitions and personal relationships within and across the arts and social sectors.

The community organizer and sociologist Marshall Ganz describes the virtue of building ‘strategic capacity’ in terms that can apply equally to the merits of building ‘advocacy capacity’ when he writes, “Over the long haul, greater strategic capacity is likely to yield better strategy, and better strategy is likely to yield better outcomes.” Greater support for advocacy capacity in the arts sector would seem, then, to be a compelling investment for individuals and institutions interested in better outcomes for artists, arts organizations, arts educators and for everyone whose life is impacted by the arts.

³ Although some of the work of Hewlett Foundation grantees described in this report may reflect the passage of legislation, the Hewlett Foundation does not lobby or earmark its funds for prohibited lobbying activities, as defined in federal tax laws. The foundation’s funding for policy work is limited to permissible forms of support only, such as general operating support grants that grantees can allocate at their discretion and project support grants for non-lobbying activities (e.g. public education and nonpartisan research.