

VIRGINIANS FOR THE ARTS

2011 Session “Home Advocacy” FAQs

What Are My Goals?

- To conduct an “at home,” face-to-face meeting with your area’s representatives in the General Assembly (with a special emphasis on members of the “money committees”) to request commitments (a) to protect arts funding from further cuts, and (b) as budget conditions permit, to support legislative amendments to the budget sufficient to achieve the legislative goal of \$1 per capita in VCA funding.
- To lay the groundwork for followup advocacy efforts during the fall, on and after Arts Advocacy Day.

What Has Happened to VCA Funding over the Past Several Years?

- Sadly, budget cuts have cut our per capita funding from nearly 80 cents per capita, in FY2006, to just 43 cents per capita in the current biennial budget. The current state general fund appropriation of \$3,362,374 in arts grant funding through the Virginia Commission for the Arts is \$2.6 million *less* than the FY2006 appropriation of just under \$6 million.
- This downward spiral stands in stark contrast to the stated goal of the General Assembly, as expressed in House Joint Resolution 543 (1997) and in every Appropriations Act for more than a decade, of achieving a funding level of \$1 per capita in funding for arts grants through the VCA.
- In order to achieve the \$1 per capita goal, an additional annual appropriation of \$4.5 million will be required.

What Exactly Do I Want from the Legislator?

- A commitment to (a) protect arts funding from suffering reductions that are disproportionate to those applied to other areas of state government, and (b) support the funding to reach \$1 per capita as soon as budget conditions permit.

How Do I Go About This?

- Call and make an appointment. Most legislators maintain district offices and are happy to meet with constituents. It is *much* easier for the legislator to make time for you at home than during the hectic General Assembly session.
- We encourage you to make the request in conjunction with several area arts and cultural institution representatives; there *is* weight in numbers! But a one-on-one meeting can be just as effective and you should not let the difficulties of coordinating multiple schedules stand in the way of seeing your legislator!

- Explain briefly what you seek, and leave with the legislator key advocacy materials (VFTA Legislative Position Statement, economic impact study brochure, education brochure, and *local arts clips* wherever possible! ***It is vitally important to make this a local issue.***)
- Try to get a commitment on the spot. These issues are well-known and uncomplicated (not least because every legislator will have received the VFTA Legislative Questionnaire during the last election cycle).
- Understand that time is precious and that you need to be prepared to get to your point *quickly*.
- Speaking with legislative aides is helpful but is not a substitute for talking to the legislator him- or herself. Unlike the federal Congress, aides in the Virginia General Assembly are few in number (one per member, typically), are essentially part-time employees and often play little role in policymaking decisions.

What Do I Say If . . . ?

- . . . the legislator says that we provide a lot of support to the arts through “line-item” or “nonstate agency” grants? *It is true that the legislature, in **some** years, has provided line-item support to **some** institutions. But the truth is that that line-item support:*
 - is presently at zero
 - historically has been incredibly erratic, ranging from nothing at all to millions, and thus not suitable as a source of reliable funding for operations
 - goes to a wide variety of recipients, many (and an increasing number) of which are not arts and cultural institutions
 - is concentrated in areas represented by influential legislators, and thus is not statewide in its reach
- . . . the legislator says that we have had to make cuts across state government, and arts need to share the pain? *It is true that, in the last two rounds of budget cuts, reductions for arts grants were comparable to those for other non-K-12 education programs, such as state museums and support of libraries. But the truth is that:*
 - More than 40% of all arts grant funding has been lost since 2005.
 - Separate and apart from these cuts, inflation has taken its toll. The dollar per capita goal we set more than a decade ago has now been eroded approximately 40% by inflation *alone*. The dollar we set as a goal now buys only about 60 cents’ worth of all the things that combine to create, and make available, artistic and cultural opportunities.
 - The need for stable and predictable support has never been greater, after a decade marked by external shocks (such as 9/11), dwindling corporate support, erratic state support, and resulting fiscal difficulties for virtually all nonprofits – a decade in which some arts and cultural institutions had to close their doors for good.

Follow-up is Essential!

- First things first: write the legislator as soon after your meeting as you possibly can, thanking him/her for the meeting and confirming (in detail) whatever commitment you received (or alternately asking for the commitment you did not get to ask for in person). This has the great advantage of reinforcing the point, and likely prompting a written response, which is always helpful.
- ***Remember: E-mail is not a substitute for writing a letter.***
- Second: Provide feedback to Trish Poupore (E-mail: vaforarts@aol.com) or Alan Albert (E-mail: alan.albert@leclairryan.com) about your meeting and about any requests for further information.
- Third: follow your visit with a letter-writing campaign from your Board members and arts supporters. Even a handful of letters – especially from these kinds of community leaders – can be a powerful motivating force.
- Fourth: Follow up again as the session draws near – ideally in person. Far and away the best lobbying takes place at home.