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Cultural Policy 10/31/2015
Notable Quote Assignment #4

Mulcahy, Kevin. 2002. The State Arts Agencies: An Overview of Cultural Federalism in the United States. *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society*, 32 (1):67.

“States arts agencies may become increasingly responsible for the cultural programs that contribute to individual self-worth and community development. An unanticipated consequence of the demise of the NEA’s policymaking primacy may be a cultural federalism that is better able to realize the principles of a cultural democracy (Mulcahy, 2002, p. 79).”

The complexities inherent in trying to create and conduct federal level arts and culture policy have made put many limitations on the capacity of the NEA, especially when it comes to supporting diversity in arts and culture across a pluralistic society. Situated firmly within a politicized framework of federal government, there is too much potential for upset, debate and controversy when trying to create national standards around something that, by its very nature, is intrinsically diverse, dependent on aesthetics, and sensitive to the individual. It makes sense that within a federalized government, that decentralization would be a good tactic for arts policy, filling in where the NEA has trouble navigating, due to the constraints of the federal level political system. Increasingly decentralized cultural policy allows for there to be varying levels of purpose and influence, with each level having a different focus. This essentially equates to more broad-based policy, strategy and funding at the top and individualized artist and community-centric policy and programming at the bottom. Such structure helps to alleviate pressures to nationalize standards for arts and culture, while enabling diversity and individualism essential to cultural democracy.

Lowell, J. (2004). State Arts Agencies 1965-2003. *Whose Interests to Serve?* RAND Corporation. Santa Monica, CA. pp. 1-53.

“By the end of the decade, public outrage over perceived artistic excesses had faded from the headlines, and most SAAs once again saw their state legislative appropriations increase. But the events of the 1990s forced many SAA Managers to consider more radical solutions to their agencies’ weak position within state government. Well before the budgetary meltdown of the early 2000s, they were exploring ways to transform their agencies so as to raise the profile of the arts—and their agencies—with the citizens of their states (Lowell, 2004, p. 20).”

It seems that each decade brought a different set of challenges for SAAs to try to overcome. Due to the constant ebb and flow of the economy, there seemed to be regular periods of recession which put pressure on all levels of government to conserve funds, putting discretionary funding at particular risk and making the arts especially vulnerable.

Each decade saw a period of financial conservatism which then affected arts funding. Since their origination in the 1960s, SAAs became more resilient and adaptive, having to develop strategies to survive these periods of turmoil. These survival years were also a test of support for SAAs, revealing the weaknesses in their political “pillars” of support, and making SAAs realize the need for cultivating a stronger base of support that can provide greater resiliency during hard times. As SAAs developed and experienced the effects of more than one financial crises, they adapted strategies to build stronger foundations and a broader support base to increase sustainability and resilience, so that they might be better prepared for the next round of political attacks.