



Candidate Forums on the Arts

A How-to Guide to help citizens discover where
decision makers stand on Public Funding for the Arts

Candidate
Forums
on the
Arts



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS



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What is a candidate forum on the arts?

A candidate forum on the arts is essentially a conversation between political candidates and members of the arts community that is facilitated by a moderator. Forums typically include questions posed to candidates by panelists or members of the audience, or sometimes, a combination of both.

Why conduct a forum?

To **educate** political candidates about the arts in Oklahoma and the importance and value of public funding for the arts and arts education.

To **determine** where political candidates stand on the issue of public funding for the arts and arts education (i.e. to ensure all candidates' positions are "on the record").

To **solidify** political candidates' level of support for the arts, arts education and public funding for the arts.

To **inform** the voting public about candidates' positions on the arts, arts education and public funding.

To **generate** public and media interest in the arts, arts education and public funding for the arts.

To **build** relationships with potential decision makers.

What kinds of forums?

A Candidate Forum for the Arts is appropriate for any official whose vote could potentially impact arts funding, arts education, programming and projects in your community.

the local candidate

- School Board
- Mayor and City Council
- County Commissioners

Local officials, such as mayors, city council members and county commissioners can be instrumental in establishing or improving arts programming in your community, including supporting projects and programs that increase cultural tourism to your local town or city.

School board members also serve as policymakers for local school districts, and are therefore instrumental in establishing or improving arts education in your town or city's public schools.

For example, the mayor of Okemah, Oklahoma is an active supporter of the annual Woody Guthrie Folk Festival, which celebrates the town's heritage and provides a significant economic impact.

the state candidate

- House of Representatives
- Senate

Candidate forums on the arts are especially important in state elections. State Representatives and State Senators vote on the Oklahoma Arts Council's budget appropriation every year. It is imperative for citizens, especially patrons and supporters of the arts, to know where state, elected officials stand on the issue of public funding for the arts. Many Senators and Representatives support the arts, but that doesn't mean they support PUBLIC FUNDING FOR THE ARTS.

Public funding for the arts is never automatic, and in the past, state arts agencies, like the one in Louisiana, have actually shut down because of lack of support of public funding for the arts on the part of state, elected officials.

the national candidate

- U.S. House of Representatives
- U.S. Senate

When it comes to national support of public funding for the arts, Oklahoma's delegation, including representatives and senators – has for the most part historically not supported the National Endowment for the Arts appropriation bill. This has an impact on Oklahoma, which receives funding from the Endowment, and benefits from a number of national initiatives that preserve the arts and cultural traditions in America.

How to get started

find appropriate host support

A good place to start is with a well-established arts organization with an outstanding reputation for delivering high-quality arts to local citizens. Local arts and humanities councils or museums and performing arts organizations with solid patron and funding bases work best. Local arts and music festival organizers or a coalition of community organizations are also excellent hosts. Arts organizations with reputations for providing or promoting politically contentious art should not serve as the lead organization for candidates' forum on the arts.

If there is not an established arts organization available, a local arts enthusiast, philanthropist or civic or community leader might be willing to coordinate the effort.

determine location for forum

Determine a location for the forum. The location of the forum should be accessible and should include a staging area, two podiums and two 6 to 12 foot tables/table sections with chairs, one for the candidates and one for the media.

In Heavener, Oklahoma, a minister and city manager co-led the effort to establish a multicultural festival in their town.

decide on a panel

Decide on a panel. The forum panel is comprised of three to five highly successful, widely recognized individuals representing either local arts organizations or local media. These individuals will ask thoughtful questions on a variety of subjects ranging in interest from arts education to public funding for the arts to economic development and the arts.

choose a moderator

Decide on a moderator. The moderator of the forum will keep/call time on candidates' responses, will introduce candidates and members of the media/arts panel, set the parameters of the forum and ensure the forum runs smoothly. The moderator will also manage the public Question and Answer session of the forum.

work with the candidates

You can't have a successful forum without the participation of all or nearly all the candidates. Ensure their participation at the onset of planning (before a date for the forum has been set.)

a. call them

Have the host organization or a person of influence place a call to the candidates or the candidates' campaign manager and extend a personal invitation to attend the forum.

b. the candidate cares to know

Do not assume a candidate knows or knows to care. Do assume a candidate cares to know. Do not assume the candidate has developed a solid position on public funding for the arts or has any idea of its economic and educational advantages. Many issues vie for candidates' attention, and sometimes, a candidate will assume a party line on issues such as public funding for the arts. It takes time to create a unique platform and decide that an issue is non-partisan. Instead of becoming experts on some things, candidates typically try to know a little about a lot.

c. help the candidates

You can help candidates become knowledgeable about arts in Oklahoma by providing them information about the arts in your community. Use the sample “State of the Arts” report on page 18 in this booklet as your guide. Personalize and re-invent this information for your forum.

d. follow up

Be sure to send formal letters of invitation, an agenda, invitation list, etc. to the candidates. Also, follow up with phone calls as reminders and confirmations. Remember, dealing with someone close to a candidate’s campaign, like a campaign manager, spouse or scheduler can actually be more efficient than dealing with the candidate personally.

Suggested timeline

step 1

- Designate host organization for the event
- Designate forum coordinators for the event
- Decide on date for event
- Coordinate date with candidates via preliminary phone calls, letters, etc.
- Send confirmation letter to candidates
- Reserve forum location

step 2

- Designate a moderator and suggested panelists
- Send letters of invitation to panelists
- Organize a mailing list of art “stakeholders”
- Write 1st news release
- Rally stakeholder participation in forum via phone calls, personal contacts, etc.

step 3

- Create event invitation and other publicity materials
- Distribute forum agenda to all formal participants
- Distribute news release to arts organizations for newsletter and Web
- Confirm panelists
- Set meeting for panelists
- Script event for moderator and panelists
- Request candidate, moderator and panelist photos for publicity purposes

step 4



- Scan photos for distribution
- Distribute 1st news release to electronic and print media
- Mail invitations, map, parking instructions, etc.
- Help panelists draft and finalize diverse questions for candidates
- Set dry run with moderator
- Create sample audience questions
- Contact media regarding pre-forum interviews
- Create candidates' information packet
- Order catering (coffee, light refreshments)
- Make staff assignments (greeters, distributors, refreshment tables, etc.)
- Secure/check sound system for event

step 5



- Create information sheet on the arts in your community for all forum attendees
- Create media packet for members of the media
- Confirm sound system, location, etc.
- Distribute information packet, including possible questions and issues to candidates.

step 6

- Send 2nd news release
- Mail media packet
- Make follow up phone calls to all participants
- Distribute pre-event publicity
- Check location
- Secure VIP parking for candidates
- Follow up phone calls to all candidates/staff
- After the event send a written thank you to the candidates

Sample letter to the candidates

Date

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Salutation:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Candidates' Forum on the Arts, date/time/location, which will feature candidates seeking the Office of _____. We look forward to your participation in this important event.

Enclosed you will find an information packet, which will help prepare you for the forum. In addition, we will contact you each (month/week) with new information about the forum. Please review these items and feel free to contact the forum (coordinator/moderator name) or me if you have any questions or comments, (your phone number here.)

Sincerely yours,

Host Organization Official

Sample forum agenda

Welcome
Moderator

Introduction of Candidates
Moderator

Introduction of Panelists
Moderator

Question Panelist #1
Candidates Respond (1-2 minutes each)

Question Panelist #2
Candidates Respond (1-2 minutes each)

Question Panelist #3
Candidates Respond (1-2 minutes each)

Question Panelist #4
Candidates Respond (1-2 minutes each)

Audience Question

Audience Question

Candidates' Closing Statements
(3-5 minutes each)

Candidate #1

Candidate #2

Candidate #3

Candidate #4

Candidate #5

Sample forum invitation list

local/regional

General Public via press releases and publicity materials

All local and county elected and appointed officials

City manager, clerk, treasurer, commissioners, mayor, school board members

Parent/Teacher groups and associations

Arts organizations

Art students

School principals and teachers

Local artists

Local media

Local Council of Government

state

State media for coverage area

Statewide arts organizations

Oklahoma Arts Council

Oklahoma Humanities Council

Oklahoma Historical Society

Oklahoma Association of Arts Educators

Oklahoma Municipal League

Oklahoma Department of Education

national

National Endowment for the Arts

Mid-America Arts Alliance

Americans for the Arts

National Association of State Arts Agencies

Sample forum invitation

You are cordially invited to attend

The Candidates' Forum on the Arts

featuring

Candidates for the Office of State Representative/State Senator/ School Board/Mayor/Etc.
District/Town/City, Oklahoma

Candidate 1

Candidate 2

Candidate 3

Time, Month, Date, Year

Location, Address, Phone

DISTINGUISHED PANELISTS

Panelist 1, TV Station

Panelist 2, Newspaper

Panelist 3, Arts Organization

Panelist 4, Radio Station

THE DISTINGUISHED MODERATOR

Civic Leader, Affiliation

Sample news release

NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Use
(Date)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
(Name)
(Organization)
(Phone)
(E-mail)

(INSERT HEADLINE FOR CANDIDATES' FORUM
ON THE ARTS)

(INSERT NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY), OK
--- Voters will have an opportunity to find out where
candidates for the office of (insert name of office) stand on
the issue of public funding for the arts and arts education
at a Special Candidates' Forum on the Arts.

The Forum is scheduled for (insert time and date) at
(insert location), (insert street address). The (insert
organization), the leading arts agency in (insert town/
region) will serve as host for the event. Longtime civic
leader and patron of the arts, (insert name) will moderate.

The forum includes (insert Candidate's name), (insert

Candidate's name) and (insert Candidate's name), who
have declared formal candidacy for the office of (insert
name of office).

A panel of media and representatives from local arts
organizations will pose questions to candidates. The
panel includes TV person (insert name), newspaper
person (insert name), radio person (insert name) and arts
organization representative (insert name). Candidates will
respond to each question and time permitting, questions
will also be taken from the audience. Each candidate will
be allowed an opportunity to make a closing statement.

"We want to know these candidates' positions on the arts
in Oklahoma," said (insert name of host organization
official.) "This Special Candidates' Forum on the Arts is
an opportunity for us to discuss the value of the arts and
its impact on the economic, educational, and cultural life
in our community. Our economic vitality and quality of
life will be directly impacted by future decisions made by
these candidates."

The Candidates' Forum on the Arts is open to the general
public. Seating is limited and available on a first come,
first serve basis. For more information, please call (insert
phone number) or e-mail at (insert e-mail address.)

Sample packets for candidates

Place the following items in a folder:

- Cover letter describing contents, contact information
- News release
- Forum agenda
- List of panelists and organization they represent
- Background info on host organization and moderator
- “State of the Arts” report about the arts in your community
- Important terms
- Issues to consider (Arts Education, Arts and Economic Development and the Oklahoma Arts Council)

Sample packets for media

Place the following items in a folder:

- News release
- Forum agenda
- List of candidates with bios
- List of panelists and organizations they represent
- Background info on host organization and moderator
- “State of the Arts” report about the arts in your community
- Important terms
- Issues to consider (Arts Education, Arts and Economic Development and the Oklahoma Arts Council)
- Contact for more information (usually a business card)

Sample “State of the Arts” Report

Use this worksheet to create a STATE OF THE ARTS report for your community. Be specific. This is your chance to tell how important the arts are to your community.

- List all Oklahoma Arts Council grants to your school district
- List all Oklahoma Arts Council grants to your libraries
- List all examples from the Oklahoma Arts Council’s Artist-in-Residence and Oklahoma Touring Rosters for both schools and libraries
- List all Oklahoma Arts Council Local Government Challenge grants to your community
- List all Oklahoma Arts Council grants to your organizations
- List all local art organizations and council, contacts and phone numbers
- List the number of full-time music teachers in public schools, K-12
- List the number of full-time art teachers in public schools, K-12
- Name any residents who have served as a master apprentice
- List examples of public art in your community
- Cite city ordinances regarding public art
- List all arts festivals in your community
- List examples of how public funding for the arts might have helped secure PRIVATE FUNDS, such as from a local business or industry
- Attach newspaper clippings

Important Terms

Arts Education

Arts Education is ongoing (more than one class), hands-on instruction provided by qualified, experienced staff or visiting artists that focuses on specific arts learning goals. It is also education that enables skill and knowledge development in a fine arts discipline such as visual arts, music, drama or dance. Learners may include pre-K to senior citizens in public or private schools, institutions of higher education and settings as diverse as community centers, social service agencies or medical settings.

Cultural Plan

A cultural plan is a community developed set of actions designed to increase the benefits of culture to individual growth, community identity, and the local economic strength of an area. It also encourages the celebration of cultural expression.

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is based on the mosaic of places, traditions, art forms, celebrations and experiences that portray this nation and its people, reflecting the diversity and character of the United States.

Perhaps Garrison Keillor said it best. While addressing the White House Conference on Travel & Tourism this is what he had to say: “We need to think about cultural tourism because really there is no other kind of tourism. It’s what tourism is...People don’t come to America for our airports, people don’t come to America for our hotels, or the recreation facilities.... They come for our culture: high culture, low culture, middle culture, right, left, real or imagined -- they come here to see America.”

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

The National Endowment for the Arts, which provides national recognition and support to significant projects of artistic excellence and works to preserve and enhance our nation’s diverse cultural heritage, distributes funding to state arts councils based on their state-awarded appropriation. In addition, the Endowment awards competitive grants to cultural and educational organizations in Oklahoma. The Endowment was created by Congress and established in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government.

Oklahoma Arts Council

The Oklahoma Arts Council is the official state agency for the support and development of the arts in Oklahoma. The agency competes annually for its appropriation from the Oklahoma Legislature and also receives funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, based on that appropriation. A 17-member staff manages day-to-day activities of the Council. The agency is governed by a Council consisting of 15 private citizens appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate to serve three-year terms. The Council makes all final funding decisions on competitive arts and arts education grants. See more about the Oklahoma Arts Council under “Issues to Consider” on page 21 in this guide.

Public Funding for the Arts

Public funding for the arts is generated by taxpayers’ dollars and is then appropriated by the Oklahoma Legislature. The Oklahoma Arts Council serves as a steward of these public funds – about \$4 million a year. Nearly 90 percent of these funds are returned to local communities, schools and arts organizations.

Public Arts Program

Art installed in public places and developed with funds provided by a state or local government is commonly referred to as “public art.” A percentage of current tax revenues can be used to support public art programs. The revenue can then be used to integrate art into the architecture of municipal structures as well as for the commission, execution, and installation of works of art in public buildings.

In 2004 the Oklahoma legislature passed the *Oklahoma Art in Public Places Act* that incorporates artwork in, on, or near new state buildings or those with major renovation projects. The law designates 1.5 % of the cost of construction or major renovation of state-owned public buildings is to be allocated for commissioning works of art in or near that building. The intention is to allow people from all walks of life the ability to view and feel the excitement that art can bring.

Issues to consider

Oklahoma Arts Council

ISSUE: Support of all elected officials, especially state senators and state representatives, is paramount to the ongoing success of the Oklahoma Arts Council and the continuance of the public funds it distributes to communities across Oklahoma for local arts programming.

- OAC is a state agency governed by a Council of 15 governor-appointedees and managed by a staff of 17.
- OAC’s mission is to make the arts accessible to ALL Oklahomans through grants and technical assistance to communities throughout the state.
- OAC’s vision is to improve the lives of ALL Oklahomans through the arts.
- OAC manages numerous grant programs that assist organizations and help offset the cost of bringing the arts—such as symphonies, ballets, operas, visual and performing arts, festivals and museums—to Oklahomans throughout our state.
- OAC fosters education through the arts and supports efforts to assure students all across the state, including at-risk students, receive quality arts instruction.
- OAC facilitates the opportunity for lifelong arts learning for every Oklahoman that is most appropriate to their current life circumstance and need.
- OAC provides cultural development and capacity building services to rural and underserved communities and developing arts organizations and works to ensure rural access to grant opportunities.
- OAC manages three galleries in the State Capitol featuring exhibitions of Oklahoma artists and assists in the commissioning of major public art in the Capitol.

Arts Education

ISSUE: Arts Education in Oklahoma is the law.

Arts Education is mandated through legislation and must be a part of your public school's core curriculum. Find out if it is. How much arts education is currently offered at your local schools?

List each school and whether or not they have a full or part-time art and music teacher. Remember - it's important to find out how much art and music students are getting.

ISSUE: Arts Education helps students.

- Enhance concentration
- Promote innovation and invention
- Strengthen analytical and complex thinking
- Instill perseverance and completion of tasks
- Develop problem solving skills
- Ensure academic achievement
- Promote teamwork
- Encourage attention to detail
- Refine observation skills
- Improve motivation and self-esteem
- Help them understand the world around them
- Students involved in the arts are more likely to complete their education and establish successful careers later in life

Arts and economic development

ISSUE: Are the Arts important to economic development?

- The arts are an enduring legacy of any great society. In terms of economics, Oklahoma needs the arts and the arts need Oklahoma. The non-profit arts industry in Oklahoma has an economic impact of \$227.9 million, according to a study by the Center for Economic and Business Development at Southwestern State University, Weatherford.
- The Oklahoma Arts Council strategically invests nearly 90 percent of its annual budget appropriation in Oklahoma's growing non-profit arts sector and supports opportunities for all Oklahomans to create, perform or attend arts activities.
- These opportunities in turn produce thriving cities, revitalize downtowns, and make communities better places to live. These opportunities are considered key location considerations by company decision makers looking to relocate businesses and industries.

ISSUE: How does the Oklahoma Arts Council impact the economy?

- Cultural attractions are the number one draw for tourists to Oklahoma – returning to the state \$16 for every \$1 invested. Nearly 5,000 jobs have been created by the non-profit arts industry. In addition to contributing to the professional development opportunities of Oklahoma artists, the Oklahoma Arts Council provides access to the arts for all Oklahomans and supports organizations that invest in, preserve and present Oklahoma's cultural traditions.

ISSUE: How does the Oklahoma Arts Council impact the arts industry?

- The Oklahoma Arts Council sustains Oklahoma's vibrant non-profit arts industry by awarding matching grants to cultural organizations, schools and local governments. Approximately \$4 million in grants are awarded in order to increase resources available to non-profit organizations producing community arts and arts education programs throughout Oklahoma.

A Note on Nonprofit Organizations and Political Campaigns

The Internal Revenue Code prohibits tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations from “participating or intervening” in a political campaign on behalf of a candidate for public office. However, federal tax law permits nonprofit groups to engage in a range of activities, including the following:

- **Taking Positions:** The law permits 501(c)(3) organizations to inform candidates of the organization’s positions and to ask candidates to go on record in support of these positions.
- **Questionnaires to Candidates:** Organizations with a broad range of interests can safely distribute questionnaires to candidates and disseminate the responses, provided there is no indication of bias or preference with respect to the views of any candidate.
- **Voting Records:** Organizations may inform their members about how each legislator voted on issues of concern to the organization. This information may be disseminated during a campaign provided that it is unbiased, and with no approval or disapproval of individual voting records. However,

a guide to voting records on a narrow range of issues is looked upon unfavorably by the IRS when distributed by an organization concerned with those same issues.

- **Invitations to Candidates:** An organization may invite candidates to attend its meetings and to speak on issues of interest to the organization. Copies of a candidate’s speeches or other remarks may be distributed if the organization regularly publishes a newsletter and circulation is generally limited to its own members.
- **Nonprofit Research:** As long as research and studies prepared by a tax-exempt organization are made available to the general public, as well as to political candidates, the organization will not be determined as promoting the candidacy of an individual for public office.

Obviously, the law in no way prohibits individuals associated with a nonprofit organization from participating as private citizens in campaign activity.

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