

Advocating for *our* arts: CDSS and the North American Conversation on Participatory Arts

What does it mean to advocate for the participatory arts?

In the simplest of terms, to advocate means to state your support for something to someone else. This can happen within a community, town, state, or national sphere. The key point is that it's making a case of support for something to an audience that has the power or ability to affect change. When CDSS talks about advocating for participatory arts, we are talking about helping others understand how traditional dance, music and song can enrich the lives of individuals and nurture community. As an organization that spans two nations, our focus is on the national level.

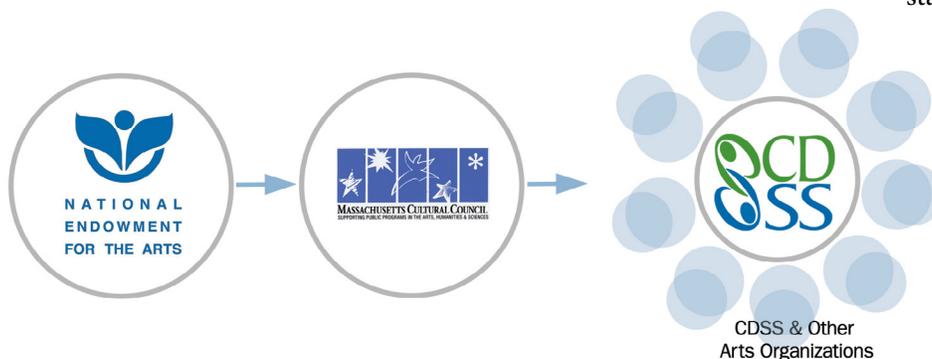


Why is this work important for CDSS?

There are very practical reasons for CDSS to advocate for participatory arts on a national level. In the US, for example, NEA funding gets distributed among the states, and each state then grants those funds out to arts organizations and individual

artists. CDSS is a recipient of one such state grant, as are many musicians and organizers in our broader community.

Likewise in Canada, we hope that sharing the results of our Survey of Canadian Organizers in Traditional Dance, Music and Song will raise awareness among policy-makers and build the case for more funding for those communities.



More importantly, CDSS believes that our participatory arts—the traditional dance, music, and song that have brought joy and community to your life and the lives of so many others over the years—have a unique power to make the world a better place. Dancing, singing, and playing music together builds the kind of human connections our world needs, and we need to do what we can to help more people discover what our larger community has to offer.

CDSS at Arts Advocacy Day in Washington, DC

One important way we advocate is to reach out to the policy makers who decide funding for the arts. A great example of this is how CDSS participates in ARTS ADVOCACY DAY here in the US. By joining with other art organizations and telling the story of what our sector brings to the world, CDSS is stepping up as a leader in the North American conversation about the value and importance of community-based participatory arts.

Director of Development Robin Hayden has been leading this effort. This year on March 12-13, nearly 650 grassroots arts advocates from all 50 US states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico gathered in Washington for Americans for the Arts' annual Arts Advocacy Day. For the 2nd year in a row, Robin and Fund Development Committee Chair

*"Our big takeaway was, **we're not counted here**. CDSS needs to drive the North American conversation about the value of participatory arts."*



Robin and David at Arts Advocacy Day 2018

David Shewmaker were there to represent CDSS and advocate for our sector of the arts.

Robin reports, "The folks at Americans for the Arts have produced impressive, compelling economic and social impact studies and reports, legislative briefs, and many other tools grassroots advocates can use to make the case for public support of the arts. Poring over these studies on our first visit in 2017, David and I learned a lot about arts and the economy, the societal benefits of arts and education, and the implications of proposed tax reform for artists, arts presenters, educators, and nonprofits arts organizations like CDSS.

"But our big takeaway was, **we're not counted here**. Our sector—community-based participatory arts—has not been included in these studies. And they should be! We know the benefits to society—to personal health, to families, to cognition, agility, and emotional well-being—all the ways in which our participatory arts create strong communities and contribute to a healthy society.

"David and I brought back to our colleagues on the staff and Board of CDSS our strong conviction that if we want participatory arts to show up in these studies, CDSS needs to start making that happen."

Advocacy Makes a Difference!

It's hard to believe in this day and age, but it's true. By joining forces with other arts advocates and lobbying our US Senators and Congressmen, Robin and David had a deeply powerful experience and the payoff was almost immediate! Just ten days after Arts Advocacy Day, Congress approved the 2018 budget with full funding of the NEA, the NEH, and other cultural institutions that provide the basis of public support for arts and culture across the US. Furthermore, the 2019 Congressional budget recently proposed by the bipartisan US House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee includes increased funding for the NEA and NEH, at \$155M—the increase we asked for—not elimination of the programs, as proposed in the Administration's budget package.

Arts Advocacy Day participants received warmest thanks and congratulations from Americans for the Arts for their role in putting these issues directly before their representatives and making the case for preserving public support of life-affirming arts in the US. CDSS is proud to be an active participant in that ever-important work.

Four easy ways YOU can advocate for the arts

- 1** Write a letter to the Editor of a local newspaper describing the benefit to your community of your community-based dance, music, and song activities
- 2** Invite your local, state, and US elected officials to a local event
- 3** Find out who your state arts advocacy group is; get in touch, and stay in touch
- 4** Respond to CDSS calls to action!