

Arts Day Speech Notes 4/6/23

Welcome

Slide 1 – intro slide

- I stepped into this job 9 months ago to become the North Carolina Arts Council's third director in 45 years. As many of you know, I had two very hard acts to follow – Wayne Martin and Mary Regan, who are both here with us today as is longtime Deputy Director, Nancy Trovillion, will the three of you please stand up and let us thank you for all you have done for the arts in North Carolina.
- I'm also happy to recognize the NC Arts Council Board. We intentionally aligned our spring board meeting to line up with Arts Day. Board members do remarkable work on behalf of the arts in their own communities, and they help the Arts Council, to be sure we meet our goal of providing arts for all in North Carolina.
- As we all know too well, staff and leadership turnover has been one of the hardest impacts of the pandemic, and the Arts Council was no exception. Within the last 4 years, almost all of the veteran program directors and managers have retired or left for other opportunities. When I started work at the Arts Council, many of my new colleagues had been on the job less than a year. But regardless of whether they are long serving or brand new this is an amazingly dedicated group of people.

Slide 2 – amount since pandemic

- They've taken heroic measures to make sure every available resource was used to help arts organizations and artists survive and recover from the pandemic. They were charged with distributing the most money in their history, under duress, with an urgent timeline, and little access to the office. They streamlined application processes and converted project grant categories into operating support grants. They reached out to organizations that had never received state funding. We've distributed more than \$48.75 million in state, federal, and private dollars since the beginning of the pandemic, which has had a tremendous impact on the survival and sustainability of the state's arts sector. Some early projections estimated that we might lose as many as ¼ of our arts organizations. Well, we have fared much better than that, but we know that we aren't out of the woods just yet.

- And this is the first time I've had a chance to thank the arts council staff publicly. Will you all join with me in recognizing those in attendance, and give them a round of applause. You may know our incredible program directors and Leadership staff but it's important that we all acknowledge the fantastic staff we have behind the scenes who make it all possible to the things we do.

- Over these past 9 months I've learned what an exceptional advocacy organization we have in Arts NC. Working with Nate McGaha and the Arts NC staff has been a pleasure and it has been wonderful to get to know everyone on the Arts NC Board. Nate is so well regarded both in and out of North Carolina. We are lucky to have him working on behalf of the arts. Arts NC has been an essential partner throughout the pandemic, helping us secure millions of dollars of federal relief funding from the legislature, as well as helping constituents navigate direct

sources of federal funds. Not to mention securing one million new dollars in state funds for the Grassroots Arts Program, the largest recurring increase for the program. And our prospects for getting a historic recurring increase in our grants have never better thanks to the work of Arts NC and all of you here today!

Slide 3 – grassroots partners

- And speaking of the Grassroots Arts Program, we are indebted to our amazing local arts council network which helped us dispense \$9.4 million in federal relief funds to more than 675 arts organizations and individual artists. Many urban arts councils also successfully lobbied their city and county governments for additional arts funding. The North Carolina Arts Council is regarded nationally for having a strong local arts council network. That network wouldn't exist without the incredible local arts councils we have all across the state.

Slide 4 - DNCR

- We're also extraordinarily grateful to the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources which houses the NC Arts Council along with the NC Museum of Art, NC Symphony, Division of Libraries, State Parks, and many historic sites and museums. During the current administration and throughout the pandemic, we've received additional resources, including staff positions and funding, and I'm particularly grateful to Secretary Reid Wilson and Chief Deputy Secretary Staci Meyer for their support, patience and assistance these past few months.

- I hope that you are keeping up to date with South Arts, our regional arts organization partner. They continue to evolve the ways they are supporting the arts in the South with expanded grants and programs, and you will see even more opportunities announced soon.

Slide 5 – NC Arts Foundation

- In 2013 we launched the NC Arts Foundation, and it has raised almost \$4 million from foundations, businesses, and individuals to support the Arts Council's programs and operations. We're very fortunate that Wayne Martin agreed to become the Foundation's Executive Director after he left the Arts Council, and he has done a tremendous job in securing ongoing support for A + Schools and developing "Keys for Kids" with musician and NC native Ben Folds, which is providing free and affordable piano and keyboard instruction for low-wealth students. I'm really glad that we all will be able to hear from Ben in just a little while.

- Arts Education is something I'm passionate about as an artist whose early art teachers changed my life. The NC Arts Council is an education champion, advocating a comprehensive arts education for all students in and out of the classroom. The arts create opportunities for success in many areas of learning and life for all students. The arts also offer teachers new strategies for engaging students in creative learning, and it gives kids the chance to practice creativity, problem-solving and collaboration.

Slide 6 – Arts in Education

- Through our Arts in Education grant programs, we invest and support schools and nonprofit organizations to strengthen the use of the arts in K–12 settings. In partnership with the Department of Public Instruction and other education and cultural leaders we encourage citizen consensus about the benefits of the arts in the state's education system.

• We know that the arts are key contributors to student success. NCAC's grants have provided \$10 million for arts in education over the last decade and our A+ Schools Program, which helps schools teach all subjects through the arts, is a national model and gaining much support from our legislators this session.

I want all of you to see this five-minute video. We can all take pride in what A+ has done for education in our state.

Slide 7 – A+ video

• A+ Schools is working with the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at NC State University to explore the impact of A+ on teachers and schools during times of crisis. Through surveys, focus groups and three school case studies, the researchers at Friday Institute will be exploring the question:

Does A+ impact teacher satisfaction, resiliency, and retention, especially in times of challenge, and if so, how?

We hope that through this study, we will obtain encouraging results that will both support and advocate for our work as well provide some potential recommendations for future work.

- With the events of the summer of 2020 and the forceful call for equity in the arts, and in response to the state's increased racially and ethnically diverse population, we have strengthened and deepened our commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. To that end, we have recruited and hired the most diverse staff by race, culture, and age in the agency's history.

- Understanding the landscape of North Carolina is vital to our work. It's difficult to make general observations about how North Carolina's arts recovery is evolving, but there are a few things that have stood out to me.

- 1) The gap between urban and rural has widened. We all know that North Carolina is one of the fastest growing states in the nation. Our population is increasing very quickly. At the same time, 51 of our counties are losing population. I believe the arts can help them to stabilize. The value of the arts and culture is increasingly valuable to luring new businesses and to recruiting and retaining employees.

Slide 8 – collaboration

2) Partnerships and collaborations, which have always been important, are now essential to the way we do our work. The pandemic brought us together and brought us closer, and partnerships have become more meaningful and more mutually beneficial than they've ever been. In my previous role as the Executive Director of the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park in Wilson we worked really closely with partners across our community. I believe we have representation from Wilson County here today including my friends from Wilson Arts. There is a real spirit of collaboration in Wilson and the results of those collaborations meant that our programs and ultimately each of our individual organizations were stronger. I believe there is so much we can do through partnerships, whether they be in our community or region or even across the state.

3) I'd like to come back to something I mentioned in the beginning and that is job turnover. The North Carolina Arts Council isn't alone in dealing with replacing recruiting and training staff. So many local arts councils and arts organizations have had to replace leadership and staff and changes on their boards. Nearly 1/4 of our local arts councils have had leadership changes.

- So how do we continue to understand and respond to the needs of the field? First, we wanted to consider staff capacity. In thinking about the expanded grants portfolio that we now hold, we have decided to add a new grants manager position, which will handle final reports and help us with research, data collection and marketing opportunities related to our constituents. And, in order to be sure we

are doing even more engagement with our local arts council network, including helping them with staff and leadership changes, we have added a new Regional Arts in Communities director position. The addition of this new position will allow us to plan for the next Local Arts Council Executive Directors Retreat and to increase opportunities for regional meeting.

Slide 9 – Fellowship Program

We also want to think about the support we are providing to artists. I feel strongly about the importance of the NCAC Artist Fellowship program which recognizes the importance of our state's impressive artists. We put this on hold during the pandemic but will bring it back next year, with guidelines and an application date to be posted this fall.

Slide 10 – Heritage Awards

- The North Carolina Heritage Awards was also put on pause. After a four year hiatus, I'm really pleased to announce that, we're presenting the North Carolina Heritage Awards on May 31 in AJ Fletcher Theatre in Raleigh as part of PineCone's Down Home Series.

This award honors the masters of the artistic and cultural traditions our state holds dear, and this year we're honoring 6 artists including a Cherokee basket maker, a Mexican American muralist, and an old-time fiddler. We hope you'll join us for this wonderful celebration.

- This fall, we will begin our planning process for developing our next strategic plan. I'm particularly looking forward to being able to spend more time in the field, travelling and visiting many of you and attending events. We plan to hold regional public meetings and focus groups to gain information about the condition and needs of our arts community. Please stay tuned for more details. Our strategic plan and vision for the future is dependent on your knowledge and input.

Slide 11 – AEP6

- I want to remind everyone here that we're participating in Americans for the Arts' Arts and Economic Impact Study. This is a national study that compiles statistics on the nonprofit arts and culture industry's impact on the economy. As part of this project, we've commissioned a customized state study for North Carolina, and we're subsidizing customized local studies for 31 counties. As of March 2023, we've collected 8,832 audience surveys, with 2,370 of those being from events that were presented, produced, or hosted by an organization that primarily serves a community of color. The information gained from this study is vital to advocacy efforts. The last study results were released in 2015 and found that the arts in North Carolina were a \$2.12 billion industry supporting nearly 72,000 jobs. We are eager to see current numbers when the AEP6 report is released in late 2023. Audience surveying will continue through the end of May. If you attend an art event and are approached to take a survey, I urge you to participate.

Slide 12 – Advocacy

- One thing that has really stuck with me this year is having many legislators tell me that when they hear from the state's arts community it's positive – we thank them, we invite them to our events, we recognize them – and that's not the response they hear from many of their constituents. I've always known that North Carolina was rich in its arts resources – its artists and arts organizations - but this year I've come to have a better understanding of the quality and value of all the work that you produce. It's quite simply amazing and from the bottom of my heart I just want to say Thank You!

Slide 13 - Final