

Advancing New England's Creative Assets

A Strategic Plan for

The New England Foundation for the Arts

2003 – 2008

Executive Summary

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Introduction

During a time of turmoil and change in our country and our region, the New England Foundation for the Arts and its partners have been looking toward the future. The creative sector in New England is a tremendous asset for people and communities. Even as we struggle with economic recession, budget cuts, and threats of war and terrorism, we must continue to invest resources, time, and energy in a creative community that enriches our lives, bridges differences, drives economic activity, and is an engine for learning and discovery.

Throughout 2002, we have worked together with our partners—the six New England state arts agencies, the National Endowment for the Arts, the region’s arts presenters and other arts organizations, community arts activists, and artists—to articulate a creative vision for the region and define the best, most strategic role for the New England Foundation for the Arts in achieving that vision. *Advancing New England’s Creative Assets*, our strategic plan for 2003 through 2008, is the result.

As we engage in the work of the plan, we can call upon these *strategic advantages*:

- An increasingly collaborative relationship with the six New England state arts agencies in a region with a strong identity and history of inter-state activity
- Strong partnerships with New England presenters
- Demonstrated capacity to manage complex artistic collaborations and conduct significant research projects
- The ability to link New England with international artists and projects and a nationally recognized leadership role in dance
- A record of attracting significant private sector support

NEFA has called upon these strategic and regional advantages to build an organization and program that combines its regional mission with complementary capacity and activity on the national and international levels. The combination of NEFA’s regional and national emphases produces a useful and attractive synergy, bringing new resources to New England while fulfilling highly valued national leadership functions. This synergy positions New England both as (1) an initiator of significant creative activity, (2) a laboratory for testing approaches to creative issues, and (3) a source for innovative analytical thinking about cultural questions. This plan affirms the importance of the strategic relationship among NEFA’s local, regional, national, and international roles, and the long-term commitment of the organization to carry out a variety of cultural initiatives at different levels.

Our Vision, Mission, and Principles

NEFA shares a VISION of the potential of the arts with the six state arts agency partners and many other organizations and individuals throughout New England:

We envision a New England region that is recognized nationally and internationally for its leadership, quality, diversity, and vitality in the arts. In this region, creative work within and across artistic disciplines plays a central role in people's lives, and in the economic, social, and educational fabric of communities.

To realize that vision, NEFA has identified a specific MISSION that we can uniquely and effectively advance:

We creatively support the movement of people, ideas, and resources in the arts within New England and beyond, make vital connections between artists and audiences, and build the strength, knowledge, and leadership of the region's creative sector.

In the work we support and the work we do, these PRINCIPLES apply:

- *We seek excellence*
- *We embrace inclusiveness and diversity—cultural, geographic, aesthetic*
- *We reinforce the centrality of the arts and the artist*
- *We encourage experimentation*
- *We exemplify public/private partnership*
- *We extend our impact and capacity through collaboration*
- *We build and share knowledge about the arts and their value*

Our Goals and Objectives

Goal 1. Artistic Creation and Distribution

Foster opportunity, excellence, and accessibility for New England artists, arts organizations, and audiences.

NEFA serves an essential role in creation and distribution of creative work. Goal One builds on that role to serve artists and arts organizations, develop markets for work, enhance the position of the arts in communities, and link New England with creative activity both nationally and internationally. The work under Goal One is organized under four objectives; the first two focus within the region on artists and presenters, the third extends NEFA's critical national and regional role in dance, and the fourth furthers NEFA's international work. Under Goal One, we will:

- Support the creation and presentation of work by New England artists in all disciplines
- Strengthen the capacity of the region's presenters—of all sizes and types—to collaborate with artists, build audiences, and serve communities
- Build and strengthen the creative infrastructure in dance and other selected disciplines for the benefit of both New England and the nation
- Develop international collaborations that link New England with different cultures and their traditional and contemporary art forms.

Goal 2. Research and Learning

Build the intellectual assets of the New England cultural community in order to inform cultural decision-making and program development and to develop public understanding of how the arts contribute to the vitality of communities.

Cultural research and analysis conceived and implemented on the regional level can bring a new dynamism and effectiveness to cultural program development and execution, policy formation, professional advancement, and advocacy. NEFA will gather information from a variety of sources, take a regional approach to cultural data collection and analysis, coordinate the strategic use of data and analysis to advance the cause of the arts, and connect regional economic, social, and demographic trends to needs and opportunities in the arts and culture. Goal Two features four objectives, the first focused on the development and use of data and research, the second developing further the region's practice of documentation and evaluation, the third facilitating learning and networking, and the fourth connecting with the region's ongoing Creative Economy Initiative. Under Goal Two, we will:

- Conduct research, aggregate and analyze data, and distribute information that enhances advocacy for the arts in the region, builds knowledge about New England's creative sector, and serves as the basis for effective program evaluation and development
- Enhance the capacity of the creative sector in New England to identify, document, and critically analyze best practice, reflect on the creative process, communicate better about work, and convey the value of the work to audiences, funders, and communities
- Provide forums and means for New England's cultural sector to consider research, information, and analysis; to collectively address issues, solve problems, and exchange information; and to build on each other's experience and create partnerships
- Working with the New England Council, state arts agencies, and other partners, support the objectives of the Creative Economy Initiative and develop joint initiatives that will advance the creative sector as an integral and significant aspect of the New England economy.

Goal 3. Governance and Organizational Structure

Refine governance and organizational structures and systems to support NEFA's programmatic goals and objectives.

The ambitious and demanding work outlined in the plan's first two goals implies an organization structured to operate collaboratively and effectively in carrying out multiple related projects and activities. Goal Three addresses organizational issues around NEFA's board, committees, staff, communications, and systems. Under Goal Three, we will:

- Develop the membership and effectiveness of the NEFA board
- Adapt NEFA's committee structure to provide effective oversight and guidance to programs and assistance with meeting organizational needs
- Reorganize NEFA staff to provide the most effective support and implementation of the goals and objectives articulated in this plan
- Enhance the capacity of NEFA communications to serve constituents and advance the goals and objectives of this plan
- Ensure that appropriate technology and systems are in place at NEFA to support effective implementation of plan goals and objectives.

Goal 4. Finances and Resource Development

Build a diversified base of support that will sustain NEFA as an organization and provide sufficient resources to carry out its programmatic goals and objectives.

NEFA and its partners will be challenged over the next five years to match aspirations with resources. Goal Four looks toward the future, articulating some fundamental principles that NEFA will follow in order to ensure its continued ability to develop the New England creative sector. Under Goal Four, we will:

- Develop a more diversified annual revenue stream
- Build NEFA's endowment, cash reserves, and other capital assets to create an increasingly sustainable organization over time
- Increase the Board's role in securing resources for the organization.

The New England Foundation for the Arts and the state arts agencies of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont invite the broad participation of people, organizations, and communities throughout the New England region and beyond in the important work outlined in this strategic plan. For further information and a complete copy of the plan, please contact NEFA....contact info....