



# A Mission Forged in Collaboration



STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2030







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## ABSTRACT

This document, *A Mission Forged in Collaboration*, is a roadmap born from deep engagement with our stakeholders and a commitment to fostering a vibrant and equitable arts and culture ecosystem. The plan reflects not only NEFA's aspirations but also the collective wisdom and priorities of the artists, organizations, and communities we serve.

The plan period, 2025–2030, spans an historic milestone, NEFA's 50th anniversary since its founding in 1976, and will be launched in a time of great uncertainty for the arts and culture ecosystem as we collectively process and respond to shifts in the funding landscape, worsening social divisions, and political attacks on our sector and the constituencies we serve. As we learned about the impact of our work from stakeholders, reflected on our intersecting identities as an organization, and considered our role in and responsibility in building a sustainable and thriving arts and culture ecosystem, a new vision emerged: a world where the arts and culture ecosystem thrives, artists flourish, and the transformative power of the arts is valued as essential to a more vibrant and equitable society.

NEFA's Strategic Plan for 2025-2030 outlines the ways in which we aspire to make this vision a reality, by embracing our identity as a social impact organization that builds, sustains, and fights for arts and culture through grantmaking, partnerships, and advocacy in New England, the nation, and beyond.

# Dear reader,

It is a privilege to share NEFA's new five-year strategic plan, *A Mission Forged in Collaboration*.

This work is the outcome of a rigorous multi-year process, beginning with research, constituent and stakeholder surveys, board engagement, staff input, and scenario planning. The result is a natural evolution from the organization's prior plan while affirming NEFA's work as a social impact organization.

This plan focuses on fostering a vibrant and equitable arts culture ecosystem through grantmaking, collaboration, and advocacy. Our redefined mission, vision, and values guide how we approach our goals, and we recognize the need for adaptation and continuous learning throughout.

I am honored to acknowledge the deep dedication of NEFA's board of directors, our staff, the many constituents who provided feedback, as well as the Barr Foundation in support of this process.

As we approach NEFA's 50th anniversary in 2026 through the lens of social impact, this plan will enable NEFA to forge strong collaborations, amplify the transformative power of the arts, and build a stronger, more adaptable arts and culture ecosystem.

We invite you to join us.



Harold Steward  
Executive Director



## KEY TERMINOLOGY

The following planning and organizational terms are defined here to ensure clear understanding of the plan and process.

### ORGANIZATIONAL TERMINOLOGY

- » **Activity** – A component of a program, often an event, meeting, or operational function including evaluation.
- » **Advocacy** – public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy, but not for any individual candidate.
- » **Arts and Culture Ecosystem** – a/k/a “creative economy” - the interdependent subset of the overall economy that includes the “creative core” of artists, creatives, culture bearers, arts and culture nonprofits, and creative businesses that produce and distribute cultural goods, services, and intellectual property, “creative-related” entities that are not creative in business mission but distribute or otherwise support creative work and workers, and the community of consumers and collaborators that surround them.
- » **Constituent** – an individual or organization that is, or may be, eligible to participate in or benefit from NEFA’s work.
- » **Field** – a broad area of knowledge or expertise.
- » **Grant** – A financial award.
- » **Initiative** – A one-off program or activity that is not designed to continue in an ongoing way.
- » **Partnership** – a mutually-beneficial and collaborative relationship between two or more entities to produce work.
- » **Program** – An ongoing set of activities organized around a desired impact. A single team may run multiple programs, and programs may include multiple grants, activities, or services. NEFA runs programs that focus on grantmaking, provide services, and produce tours.
- » **Sector** – a segment of the economy.
- » **Service** – Some form of constituent stewardship, including cohort building and technical assistance.
- » **Stakeholder** – an individual or organization that has a practical and or material interest in the success of NEFA’s work.

### PLANNING TERMINOLOGY

- » **Goal** – Something we seek to accomplish in this plan period.
- » **Objective** – A desired outcome of working toward a goal.
- » **Strategy** – A broad approach we can take to reach our goal.
- » **Tactic** – A specific action taken to execute a strategy and achieve an objective.

# Strategic Plan 2025-2030

NEFA's Strategic Plan for 2025-2030, *A Mission Forged in Collaboration*, is a product of the generous input and feedback offered to us by hundreds of participants including our constituents, funders, board members, and staff. This plan directly incorporates that feedback and charts a course that builds upon NEFA's strengths while embracing evolution and responsiveness.

## **THE PLAN IS ANCHORED IN A COMMITMENT TO**

- » Forge connections with and among artists, organizations, and collaborators to foster a culture of mutual exchange and support throughout New England, the nation, and the world.
- » Elevate the inherent value of artistic expression and its potential to drive meaningful social change, highlighting the critical role of artists in shaping a more just and equitable world.
- » Invest in NEFA's capacity to serve as a resilient and responsive arts leader, with regional power, national influence, and international connections, building a stronger, more adaptable organization to support a thriving arts and culture ecosystem.

We recognize that achieving these ambitious goals requires a commitment to continuous learning, adaptation, and collaboration. This plan is not a static document but a living framework that will evolve in response to the changing needs of the field.



## MISSION

As a social impact organization, NEFA builds, sustains, and fights for arts and culture through grantmaking, partnerships, and advocacy in New England, the nation, and beyond.

## VISION

NEFA envisions a world where the arts and culture ecosystem thrives, artists flourish, and the transformative power of the arts is valued as essential to a more vibrant and equitable society.

## VALUES

### **Cultural Rights and Responsibilities**

The freedoms to create, access, express, and share arts and cultures are human rights and essential to a just society and thriving communities. We advocate for these freedoms and are dedicated to dismantling systemic inequities, barriers, and actions that limit self-determination, cultural traditions, and access to opportunities.

### **Reciprocity**

Building our collective future relies on teamwork, collaboration, and partnerships at the intersections of arts services, philanthropy, and social justice. We center each other's humanity through just and mutually beneficial relationships.

### **Adaptability**

Engaged dialogue guides the design, implementation, and flexibility of our work – informed by the dynamic needs of artists, colleagues, and organizations. Adapting to social and environmental change ensures the sustainability, resilience, and vitality of cultural communities.

## GOALS

### 1. Cultivate a Collaborative Arts and Culture Ecosystem

Strengthen relationships among artists, organizations, and collaborators to foster a culture of reciprocity in the arts and culture ecosystem within New England, across the nation, and around the world.

#### OBJECTIVES

- » An evolving portfolio of grants and services prioritizes and facilitates generative partnerships among artists, organizations, and collaborators
- » Artists, organizations, and collaborators partner with communities, embracing cultural traditions and centering humanity in their creative processes
- » Artists have opportunities to determine and invest in paths for their artistic growth and project development
- » Communities and audiences have access to artistic and cultural experiences that deepen appreciation, understanding, and empathy
- » New, evolving, and mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations extend and deepen NEFA's reach, efficacy, and impact

#### STRATEGIES

- » Sustain grants and activities at NEFA that reinforce the rights to practice, create, and access diverse artistic and cultural expressions that reflect the region and nation
- » Assess and articulate the social impact of NEFA's grants and initiatives to promote regional and cross-sector participation
- » Evaluate and consider tools and platforms to create spaces for artists and potential collaborators to exchange information and forge connections
- » Engage regional partners in planning that strengthens the infrastructure of the arts and culture ecosystem in New England
- » Initiate national conversation about risks facing arts and culture practitioners and opportunities to respond





## 2. Amplify the Power of the Arts

Elevate the inherent value of the arts, the impact of artists, and the power of the arts to advance system change and social progress.

### OBJECTIVES

- » Organizational storytelling communicates the impacts of diverse artistic and cultural experiences
- » Grants and services center artistic and cultural expression as essential to deepening understanding and empathy across communities, cultures, and borders
- » Artists are represented among decision-makers and policymakers within the organization
- » Communications and advocacy efforts amplify artists' voices in public discourse
- » The arts serve as a source of information and a lever for change across cultures and sectors
- » NEFA is recognized as an essential resource and advocate for public and cultural policy efforts that advance artists' rights and amplify the impact of the arts
- » NEFA is valued as an aggregator and steward of creative economy data that builds regional advocacy and contributes to national discourse

### STRATEGIES

- » Leverage data assets to support advocacy for the social and economic value of the arts in fostering vibrant communities
- » Cultivate robust organizational storytelling that elevates both qualitative and quantitative impacts of the arts in/with/for/by our communities
- » Enhance NEFA's capacity to follow, engage with, and influence conversations on public and cultural policy
- » Advocate for the importance of public investment in the arts and culture sector as vital to a just, healthy civic life and a robust democracy
- » Partner on programs and initiatives that leverage artistic and cultural expression to build international connections
- » Establish and bolster relationships with state, regional, and national advocacy partners that extend NEFA's reach and deepen our impact
- » Assess and bolster the role artists play in decision making processes across functional areas within the organization

### 3. Build Capacity and Strengthen Organizational Stability

Invest in and reinforce NEFA's ability to fulfill its unique role and responsibility as a regional arts organization, building a stronger and more adaptable arts and culture ecosystem.

#### OBJECTIVES

- » NEFA programs, practices, and structure center social impact and invest in the adaptability of the arts and culture ecosystem
- » Resource development and fiscal management strategies enable the organization to adapt to changes in the funding landscape
- » Management practices ensure organizational health and capacity to respond effectively to the evolving needs of constituents
- » NEFA staff are collectively and individually recognized as leaders in the sector and appreciated for their impactful work and deep relationships with constituents across the field

#### STRATEGIES

- » Adapt organizational structure and staffing to reinforce an impact-centered mission and develop human-centered policies that align with strategic goals and desired outcomes
- » Assess and align systems, tools, and digital products across the organization to maximize resource efficiency and to create more consistent and coherent entry points for constituents
- » Enhance NEFA's fundraising strategy to enable the organization to withstand change and to take and navigate risk
- » Align NEFA's resource management to ensure stability and regeneration in a changing arts and culture ecosystem
- » Integrate an organizational assessment framework across all functional areas that addresses and responds to the known and evolving needs of constituencies





# Planning Philosophy, Process, and Methods

NEFA believes successful and solution-oriented cultural evolution is driven by an assessment of organizational readiness, the development and implementation of quality plans, and continual engagement with stakeholders. This planning process was designed to anticipate and prepare for the inevitability of change, suggesting realistic, comprehensive, and adaptable strategies that support all functional areas of the organization. As proud members of the [Design Justice Network](#), we developed an iterative planning process that centered voices usually marginalized in design processes, specifically constituents and staff, utilizing creative, collaborative practices to address the deepest challenges facing the creative economy.

NEFA formally launched this planning process on October 26, 2023, at the organization's annual Board of Directors retreat held at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven, CT. As a key early decision, the board affirmed this planning process would be led by Executive Director Harold Steward as chief strategist. In lieu of a standing planning committee, a variety of collaborators were identified, including members of the staff and board as well as a selection of external consultants and facilitators, who helped manage and contribute to different aspects of the process.

Planning occurred in two phases, October 2023 through June 2024 and July 2024 through May 2025, and was conducted through four key components: research, stakeholder engagement, staff and board input, and financial scenario planning. Research work was frontloaded in the first phase of the process, while activities supporting all other components spanned the entire planning period.



## RESEARCH

- » NEFA engaged Sara Mokuria and Vicki Mokuria of The Mokuria Group to conduct a review of multi-sector academic, organizational, and social collateral, internal data and reports, and peer-reviewed articles, investigating similar programs, systems, and models. Findings were presented to NEFA staff and board.
- » Preliminary research findings were presented to NEFA staff at a full-day meeting on February 21, 2024. Staff responded to and offered feedback on the findings, identifying gaps and supplemental materials to provide.
- » A high-level summary of findings was presented to NEFA's Board of Directors at their meeting on March 6, 2024.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- » During the first year of the planning process, Executive Director Harold Steward participated in cultural tours in each of the six New England states. Planned in collaboration with NEFA board members, the executive directors and staff of New England's State Arts Agencies, and local hosts, Harold Steward engaged with 106 cultural organizations in 31 communities across the region. Tours included site visits, meetings, speaking engagements, panels, discussions, and community receptions, which served as opportunities for Harold to hear directly from regional constituents about their desires and needs, reflections on their work with NEFA, and their curiosities and hopes for the organization's strategic direction.
- » NEFA staff developed a field-wide survey which launched on [NEFA's blog](#), was distributed directly to subscribers through NEFA's newsletter and social media channels, and was publicly available on the NEFA website. In total, the survey garnered 312 unique responses. The survey was also adapted for NEFA's Board of Directors and Advisory Council members.
- » NEFA retained [Humanz Mediate](#) to conduct a staff listening tour, meeting with staff individually.
- » NEFA staff engaged the directors of New England's State Arts Agencies and current and prospective funders as well as other key partners in conversation about research findings and solicited input on initial thoughts on strategic direction.

## STAFF AND BOARD INPUT

- » Humanz Mediate facilitated an introspective conversation with the NEFA Board of Directors concerning governance structures, models, and systems, and their role in supporting and contributing to NEFA's future direction.
- » NEFA staff departments analyzed what in their portfolios they would like to see continue, what they would shift, and how they envision their work evolving.
- » [Congruence Cultural Strategies](#) facilitated a "Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Risks, and Results" (SOARR) Analysis discussion with the NEFA Board of Directors and staff leadership.
- » At the organization's annual board retreat in June 2024, NEFA's Board of Directors and staff engaged with the first draft of the strategic plan framework, offering critical input and feedback on content and direction.
- » NEFA staff organized a two-day retreat facilitated by [ISO Arts Consulting](#) focused specifically on examining NEFA's organizational values.
- » A rearticulated suite of mission, vision, and values were affirmed by staff and board. NEFA's Leadership Committee developed plan goals, objectives, and strategies in further consultation with staff and board.

## FINANCIAL SCENARIO PLANNING

- » NEFA staff projected budgets for the next three years to better understand and prepare for the short- and long-term risks associated with anticipated changes in revenue. Board and staff analyzed NEFA's revenues over the past 10 years, a three-year balance sheet, a revenue vs. expense outlook for the upcoming fiscal year, and discussion of strategic opportunities. Occurring in the wake of the 2024 election, discussion also considered potential threats to NEFA's federal funding streams.
- » In November 2024, NEFA contracted with [Prime Buchholz](#) as an Outsourced Chief Investment Officer (OCIO) to assume management of NEFA's investment portfolio. Working closely with staff and board leadership, Prime Buchholz is tasked with assessing and recommending investment strategies aligned with NEFA's values and the organization's Environment, Social, Governance (ESG)-based investment policy that support NEFA's long-term stability and amplify its impact.
- » With increased concern about federal funding and changes in private philanthropy on the rise, FY26 budget planning included a three-year forecast, scrutinizing cash flow relative to the timing of anticipated cash drawdowns on current federal grants, as well as the timing of three major multi-year grants. Coinciding with the final phase of strategic planning, this budgeting process contemplated initial strategy implementation including changes to staffing structure, reimagining program design, and building capacity for fundraising and advocacy efforts.

# What We Learned

## FROM THE FIELD

To ensure our planning process was deeply rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic forces shaping the art and culture sector, NEFA commissioned The Mokuria Group to conduct a thorough environmental scan in December of 2023. Their research analyzed over thirty strategic plans, reports, articles, presentations, and websites from a diverse range of arts service organizations.

The environmental scan served as the foundation of our planning process, grounding the project in the needs and aspirations of the field, and offering a roadmap to assess where NEFA's work is and is not addressing them. The environmental scan revealed several key observations:

- » **The Importance of Social Impact:** Art and culture play a transformative role in increasing public good, social mobility, and equity; supporting the creation of environments for communities to thrive; and positively impacting the public, the individual, and the systemic forces that shape social justice. The potential of art and culture programs to drive meaningful social change reinforces the need to invest in initiatives that address critical social issues.
- » **The Centrality of Equity:** Achieving equity requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond mere access, addressing the systemic conditions that perpetuate inequalities, dismantling oppressive systems, and redistributing resources.
- » **The Evolving Funding Landscape:** Significant transformations are occurring in the sector's funding ecosystem. Sustainability requires diversified income streams and greater collaboration across local, state, regional, and national levels.
- » **The Power of Advocacy:** The critical role of advocacy in fostering a thriving arts sector, reinforces the importance of safeguarding cultural diversity and human rights through policy and public engagement.
- » **The Intersection of Art, Culture, and Economic Impact:** Arts and culture are critical economic drivers of vibrant communities, an intersection first identified and defined by NEFA in 1978. Economic data is a tool that can be leveraged to demonstrate the tangible benefits of the arts to policymakers and the public.

In addition to these overarching themes, the scan provided invaluable insights into the operations and strategies of State Arts Agencies, Regional Arts Organizations, and Cultural Trusts, identifying strengths, opportunities for partnership and collaboration, and potential pathways for NEFA to address gaps in the field and maximize impact. The Mokuria Group highlighted some of those opportunities including:

- » A need for programs that redress severe racial and cultural inequality. Philanthropic organizations and grantmakers might consider investing in the capacity of arts and cultural resource organizations for and by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) that serve as anchors in their communities with a demonstrated history of trust.
- » A persistent opportunity gap exists for rural artists and cultural workers. There is increased demand on national arts service organizations to consider the context and challenges faced by artists without direct access and localized support from arts councils, service organizations, or urban wealth.
- » Mission-driven organizations must develop authentic partnerships with their constituents and ensure their voices and perspectives are directly influencing the direction and delivery of an organization's mission. Artists and cultural workers should be serving on boards and panels, participating in program design and evaluation, and consulting on future planning.

## FROM CONSTITUENTS

In January 2024, we launched a comprehensive survey designed to gather diverse perspectives on NEFA's current state, future direction, and areas for potential growth. The survey sought to understand stakeholder needs, identify strengths and opportunities for continual growth and development while building a shared vision for our collective future.

The survey received 312 unique responses, representing a wide range of voices from across the arts and culture field both regionally and nationally, including artists, administrators, presenters, producers, policy makers, donors, funders, board members, consultants, educators, and more.

A clear message emerged in the responses: NEFA's core strengths – its unwavering support for artists at all stages of their careers, its commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, its relational approach to grantmaking, and work in the creative economy and cultural policy – are highly valued and should be sustained.

When asked to identify pressing needs in their practice or community, participants mentioned:

- » Capacity building and professional development
- » Audience development and engagement
- » Financial sustainability and management
- » Advocacy and policy change

Constituents also expressed a strong desire to see NEFA evolve, to explore new funding models that prioritize trust, deepen engagement with communities, and provide unrestricted support. This included a call for:

- » Expanded and accessible grant opportunities
- » Streamlined, accessible, and equitable application processes
- » A stronger role in regional advocacy
- » Investments in building the regional arts infrastructure
- » Enhanced collaboration and partnerships
- » Convening networks and knowledge sharing

## FROM THE STAFF

Throughout the planning process, NEFA staff reinforced their commitment to the organization's values-driven work with artists, organizations, and partners, with and in communities, fostering an environment where the arts are healthier, stronger, and more prolific.

NEFA's work is complex and sprawling. Staff engaged deeply in the planning process with curiosity and a vested interest in clarifying NEFA's unique identity, role, and value in the broader arts and culture ecosystem. The question of breadth versus depth was raised in multiple channels as demand for NEFA's resources -- financial, programmatic, and human -- remains high. Staff felt that a deeper understanding of the needs of the constituencies NEFA serves would clarify where and how the organization could invest its resources most impactfully.

NEFA's last strategic plan cemented "Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility" as a core value of the organization. Later, the organization formally shifted the I in EDIA to uplift Intersectionality. Embedding these principles of justice across NEFA's work has been a driving force for staff since the publication of that plan in 2018. NEFA staff are passionate advocates and practitioners of social justice who continue to interrogate inequities and iterate ways of confronting, disrupting, and eradicating systems of oppression, both within the organization and externally, leveraging NEFA's resources and influence to advance social progress across the arts sector and broadly in civic society. Staff hoped to see the organization's internal and external commitments to justice evolve to reflect the more nuanced and sophisticated understanding developed since first stating this value. For staff, a more resolute commitment to justice includes a critical examination of NEFA's relationships with artists, organizations, and other stakeholders externally, and NEFA's own staff members internally, and ensuring we are building authentic, trusting, collaborative, and mutually beneficial relationships across all areas of our work.

Staff believe NEFA can advance real, meaningful, systemic change in the world, which can and should be modeled internally first. Staff see opportunities to grow NEFA's organizational capacity, to improve and increase transparency in decision making, to build productive feedback channels that promote positive change, and to communicate openly and authentically. As NEFA continues to shift its workplace culture and build equity within, those changes will be amplified and resonate across the field as NEFA's programmatic offerings continue to evolve. Staff expressed a strong desire to center artists' needs in program and process design, to build systems that are more accessible and responsive, to engage in reciprocal dialogue with constituents, and to stimulate connection, collaboration, and partnerships across the field.

This planning process spanned an 18-month period during which NEFA absorbed news from multiple funders about changes to their philanthropic priorities that would have significant impacts on NEFA's program portfolio, specifically the National Dance Project and National Theater Project, and the organization's revenue structure. This risk to NEFA's work was then compounded by the outcomes of the 2024 US federal elections and subsequent attacks on public funding for the arts. Forecasting significant revenue loss, staff were rightly concerned about NEFA's stability and how these changes would affect NEFA's ability to deliver its mission. These questions stimulated conversation about enhancing NEFA's communications and fundraising strategies to develop a more comprehensive, coherent, and compelling approach to telling the story of NEFA's impact as well as the arts and culture ecosystem more broadly.

## FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

When the planning process launched in October 2023, the NEFA Board of Directors was engaged in an ongoing conversation about governance models, asking critical questions about what the organization needed and wanted from its governing body. As part of the organization's overarching efforts to create more equitable systems and structures, the Board of Directors identified the strategic planning process as an ideal vector to continue exploring governance structures that would support and advance the organization's strategic direction.

The board's willingness to adapt is characteristic of NEFA's organizational commitment to asking critical questions about its work, considering new pathways, and testing ideas. In conversations throughout the process, members of the board praised and encouraged the fearlessness of the staff for their commitment to finding effective strategies to address issues affecting constituents and the field at large. The board sees NEFA as a leader in developing innovative programs that directly confront the challenges, threats, and inequities artists and arts organizations face today. They expressed a strong desire to instill their governing work with the same level of innovation and fearlessness.

As the organization approaches its 50th anniversary in 2026, NEFA's legacy of leadership was top of mind for board members. Looking at NEFA, they see an organization that has had a profound impact in New England, across the United States, and globally. NEFA's deeply knowledgeable, talented, and experienced staff are an asset to the organization, yes, but more so an asset to the field at large. Despite the breadth and depth of the organization's work, the board feels NEFA's impact often goes unrecognized. The organization's role in defining the creative economy, building regional infrastructure, and stimulating the creation, production, and presentation of art across the country sometimes becomes invisible due to the nature of NEFA's positioning as an intermediary. Over the next five years, the board hopes NEFA will be more visible at the forefront of the field, leading with confidence, owning and boldly telling the story of its impact.

NEFA's national work has been a hallmark of the organization's legacy, transforming the funding landscape for dance and theater artists through the National Dance Project and National Theater Projects, respectively. As the national funding landscape continues to shift, board members expressed a strong interest in seeing NEFA examine its programmatic impact within New England. Serving the arts and culture ecosystem in New England remains a core commitment of the organization, and board members see opportunities to strengthen the infrastructure of the region's arts and culture sector and a clear role for NEFA in that work. A strong coalition of service providers and funders will need to be activated to protect, promote, and enhance the work and impact of artists and arts organizations in the region. NEFA can leverage its strong relationships with the six New England State Arts Agencies to initiate region-wide planning efforts to build a more collaborative, self-sustaining ecosystem.

Board members are excited to support NEFA's deepening work in the region as they commit to recruiting and onboarding the next generation of board members. This planning process and the resulting plan will illuminate what expertise and experience the organization will require in its governance over the next five years. Recruitment of new members who reflect the communities NEFA serves and building a pipeline for the next generation of arts leadership are top priorities. As ambassadors, advisors, and advocates of the organization, board members were also interested in building models that would support continued stewardship of alumni board members who maintain a stake in NEFA's future success.

Looking forward, board members shared their collective aspirations for this planning process and desired outcomes of the work. Above all, the board hopes to significantly invest in building NEFA's ability to remain nimble and adaptable in a time of persistent change and to diversify its revenue with a capitalization strategy that supports long-term sustainability while navigating shifts in the funding landscape. NEFA is an essential part of the arts and culture ecosystem; ensuring NEFA's stability and long-term success is an investment in the success of the field at large. As NEFA deepens its work with artists, organizations, collaborators, and stakeholders across sectors, board members hope NEFA's critical work as a convener and connector is understood, recognized, and lauded by the field. The board wants to see a bolder NEFA that is not humble about its impact, encouraging the organization to build its capacity to tell a powerful and compelling story about its work. And finally, the board wants to see NEFA as a leader in articulating, promoting, and fighting for the importance and the transformative power of the arts and artists.



NEFA staff and board at the retreat where the board approved the plan, June 2025 | photo by Jeffrey Filiault

# NEFA as a Social Impact Organization

*"The condition of the condition is still the condition."* These words, uttered by National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Jazz Master Charles Lloyd, resonated deeply as we processed the outcomes of our research and the input of our stakeholders, as we contemplate NEFA's next chapter. NEFA is not merely an arts funder and arts and culture service provider; the organization has always been an agent of societal transformation. As we approach our 50th anniversary, a pivotal milestone, it is with deep introspection that NEFA reclaims and expands our identity as a social impact organization. As we delve into our current work through this renewed lens, we honor our history, address the present moment, and plan for an equitable future.

The arts are a human right, and NEFA plays a crucial role in protecting this right. By consciously embracing our identity as a social impact organization, we acknowledge and embrace the responsibility that comes with it. We commit to being accountable socially, politically, and economically.

The opportunity to reframe NEFA's work through the lens of social impact feels both authentic and strategic. It compels us to honor our history and to critically examine our practices to ensure they align with social impact goals. It clarifies our purpose, strengthens our identity, and deepens our commitment to equity, diversity, intersectionality, and accessibility, and our strides toward justice. Strategically, it allows us to leverage our expertise to address evolving societal challenges and further our organization's vision.

NEFA's commitment to socially engaged arts has been unwavering since our founding in 1976 and must be unwavering in today's similarly politically charged atmosphere. In times when federal actions and policies foster social destabilization and cultural discord, strategic adaptation and creative solutions become essential. It is through art and culture that we can intervene to address these conditions. Charles Lloyd's proclamation signifies that a status quo persists unless we enact change. At NEFA, we believe in the arts as a powerful tool for positive change.

In this realm where art and society intertwine, defining the impacts of the arts is an ongoing challenge. The [Continuum of Impact](#), a guide crafted by Animating Democracy and Americans for the Arts, and another critical resource informing our identification as a social impact organization, helped to deepen our understanding of how arts and culture can affect social and civic life. While organizational strategic plans are both inspirational and aspirational, the true power of this plan lies in our intentionality, and our ability to make the make our aspirations a reality. As we move beyond hoping for change, we will work more deeply with our partners to clarify goals, identify key indicators, create meaningful impact, and affect lasting change.

We recognize the profound insights shared by many key stakeholders who are shifting to align with cultural, racial, and economic justice. As a final call for action, it is important to ask the question, "What good do our actions do and for whom?" in addition to "for how long?" We at NEFA want to create a lasting impact while producing equitable outcomes and endeavoring to create a more sustainable world.

# ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY MATRIX

This planning process crystallized how many different, intersecting ways the creative economy understands, engages with, and experiences the outcomes of NEFA's work. NEFA has always been a complex organization; we have played a variety of roles within the field over our 50-year history. Part of the journey of claiming our identity as a social impact organization has involved learning more about the different identities we hold, how they manifest, and to whom they are accountable. Having clarified those pieces, we are galvanized by the intersectionality of our work.

This organizational identity matrix highlights NEFA's multifaceted role and emphasizes our commitment to social impact while addressing the diverse needs of the creative economy in New England, nationally and internationally. By clearly defining our identities, we can align our strategies with our mission and engage effectively with various stakeholders.

IDENTITY DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION	KEY COMPONENTS
<b>Social Impact Organization</b>	Leverages the arts to create positive social change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Community engagement</li> <li>» Equity and accessibility initiatives</li> <li>» Support for underserved populations</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Arts Organization</b>	Serves as a key player in fostering regional arts development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Regional partnerships</li> <li>» Collaborative initiatives</li> <li>» Promotion of New England's arts and culture</li> </ul>
<b>Funder</b>	Provides financial support to artists and arts organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Strategic investments in artists and arts initiatives</li> <li>» Capacity building for grantees</li> <li>» Grant management</li> </ul>
<b>Intermediary</b>	Acts as a bridge between artists, funders, and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Resource sharing and capacity building for the field</li> <li>» Connecting stakeholders within the arts and culture ecosystem</li> <li>» Field building</li> </ul>
<b>Arts and Culture Service Organization</b>	Provides support services to enhance arts and culture organizations and artists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Professional development</li> <li>» Technical assistance</li> <li>» Research, networking, and advocacy for the arts and culture sector</li> </ul>
<b>Non-profit Organization</b>	Operates as a not-for-profit entity dedicated to a social mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Fundraising and donor engagement</li> <li>» Governance and accountability</li> <li>» Community stewardship and transparency</li> </ul>

At the culmination of this planning process, as the sector faces upheaval and uncertainty about immediate and long-term effects of changes in the public and private funding landscapes, and having learned about the ways NEFA has had, and can have, an impact on the many constituencies we serve, we understand our critical role and responsibility to ensure the arts and culture ecosystem thrives.

NEFA will be seeking sustaining funds to support existing programs, planning funds to structure new initiatives and programs, and flexible funds to support our evolution as we lean into our identity as a social impact organization. General operating support and flexible funding will be particularly key to our ability to adapt to the shifting needs of our field.

As a social impact organization, we seek to affect positive change and have meaningful impact in the ecosystem across all aspects of our identities. It is with this grounding that we steer into the opportunities ahead. The plan that follows is a roadmap to empower NEFA to build bridges, amplify the transformative power of the arts, and foster a thriving arts and culture ecosystem for generations to come. We welcome conversations about how you can engage with NEFA during this time.



# Acknowledgments

NEFA extends its deepest gratitude to the Barr Foundation who generously supported our strategic planning process.

We also thank the hundreds of colleagues and constituents who contributed to this plan by participating in our public survey, helping organize or attending our regional cultural tours, and engaging in conversations throughout the planning process.

In addition to:

## **NEFA STAFF**

### *Our current staff:*

Jessica Wong Camhi, Program Manager, Public Art  
Steven Fenton, Chief Operating Officer  
Jeffrey Filiault, Senior Communications Manager  
Indira Goodwine-Josias, Senior Program Director, Dance  
Kristin Gregory, Program Manager, Dance  
Leslie Miller Jewett, Finance Coordinator  
Cheri Opperman, Senior Grants Manager, Dance  
Adrienne Petrillo, Interim Director of Program Strategy  
Leilani Ricardo, Program Manager, Theater  
Dee Schneidman, Senior Program Director, Creative Economy  
Audrey Seraphin, Program Manager, Regional Grants and Initiatives  
Abby Southwell, Technology & Data Director  
Kelsey Spitalny, Interim Manager of Program Strategy  
Harold Steward, Executive Director  
Quita Sullivan, Senior Program Director, Theater  
Joseph Sweeney, Director of Finance  
Kim Szeto, Senior Program Director, Public Art  
Natalya Tausanovitch, Program Manager, Creative Economy  
Sharon Timmel, Senior Development Director  
Elizabeth Timmerman, Senior Technology & Data Administrator  
Ann Wicks, Communications Director  
Saejin Yoo, Program Coordinator, Regional Initiatives

### *And our former colleagues:*

Jug Chokshi, Chief Operating Officer (through October 2024)  
Falyn Elhard, Program Coordinator, New England Presenting & Touring (through July 2025)  
Jane Preston, Deputy Director, Programs (through May 2025)  
Sarah Silva, Development Manager (through December 2024)  
Derek Schwartz, Program Officer, Theater (through May 2024)  
Annie Yang-Perez, Senior Executive Affairs & Special Projects Officer (through August 2025)

## NEFA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### *Our current board:*

Iván Espinoza-Madrigal  
Dawn Gibson-Brehon  
Amy Hausmann  
John Henry  
Erinn King  
Angie Lane  
Susan Evans McClure  
Frank Mitchell  
Chip Newell  
Chris Newell  
Liz Shapiro  
Adele Silicia  
Todd Trebour  
Carrie Zaslow

### *And our former board members:*

Michael Bobbitt (through November 2023)  
Min Jung Kim (through April 2024)  
Lynne McCormack (through June 2024)  
Pamela Tatge (through June 2024)

## NEFA ADVISORY COUNCIL\*

Rhonda Kay Alok Anderson  
Christal Brown  
Taylor Ho Bynum  
Shoshona Currier  
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Stephanie Fortunato  
Orlando Hernández  
David Howse, Co-Chair  
Elizabeth A. Jabar  
Liana Krupp  
Alyce Lee  
Jacob Padrón  
Melissa Richmond  
Madeline Sayet  
Larry Simpson  
Kerry Thompson

*\*The NEFA Advisory Council, which launched in 2018, was sunset in November 2024.*

## PLANNING PARTNERS

- » Brandon Black – Co-facilitation and Graphic Notetaking, October 2023 Board of Directors Retreat; February 2024 Staff Retreat
- » Congruence Cultural Strategies, Deidra Montgomery and Danya Sherman – Facilitation and Notetaking, June 2024 Board of Directors SOARR Analysis
- » Humanz Mediate, Elizabeth Franz and team at Humanz Mediate – Facilitation, Staff Listening Tour and January 2024 Board of Directors Engagement Planning Meeting
- » ISO Arts Consulting, Brea Heidelberg and Justin Burton – Design, facilitation, and notetaking, September 2024 Staff Retreat
- » The Mokuria Groups, Sara Mokuria and Vicki Mokuria – Research and Environmental Scan
- » Olu & Company, Amani Olu, Carrie Paveglio, and team at Olu & Company - Strategic Communications Planning
- » Prime Buchholz, Brian Matthews, Lisa Sebesta, and team – Investment Consulting and Scenario Planning
- » Unlock Creative, Ashley Walden Rumber, Mark Travis Rivera, and team – Phase One Project Management; co-facilitation, February 2024 Staff Retreat

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#### **PHOTO CREDITS**

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**page 6:** Adia Tamar Whitaker at Dance Brigade/Mission Theater, by Luke Abiol

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**page 8-9:** Bombyx Center for the Arts and Equity presents Orchestre Tout Puissant Marcel Duchamp, by Cedric Pilard at Story Eyed Media

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