

MISMATCHING: THE ROLE OF MATCHING FUNDS IN THE
NATIONAL ARTS LANDSCAPE

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NATIONAL ARTS LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT:

Economic theory holds that institutions are slow and resistant to change. While art is said to be reflective of its time and culture, arts institutions are subject to the same rigidity as other institutions. Accessibility to dance and the field of dance is largely affected by the structures of funding bodies. Institutions such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the Texas Commission on the Arts have immense influence in shaping the national and state landscape for the arts. These policies have given way to many unintended consequences and limit one of the NEA's original goals of increasing access to the arts. The research suggests that the most restrictive policy of such funding organizations is the matching requirement. Through matching, only organizations with prior access to funds can continue to receive support. Reconsidering matching requirements would be a step toward increasing equity in the field of dance.

Background

Economic theory holds that institutions are slow and resistant to change. While art is said to be reflective of its time and culture, arts institutions are subject to the same rigidity as other institutions. Accessibility to dance and the field of dance is largely affected by the structures of funding bodies. These funding bodies exist in both the private and public sectors and at the local, state, and national levels.

The largest funding institution for the arts in the United States is the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The NEA was founded in 1965 under Lydon B. Johnson's administration; it functioned to provide domestic support for American artists as well as to bolster America's global image in the face of the Cold War (Wilbur, 31). As early as 1851, American presidents had worked toward the establishment of a National Arts Council with no success. The hesitation associated with national funding for the arts had previously been cited as a protection of the First Amendment right of free speech; it was viewed as in the government's best interest to not allocate funding for works of artistic expression (Wilbur, 30). The founding of the NEA represented a new era for the arts in America. This new era would be marked by a newfound support for artists and their art. This support would eventually lead to what dance researcher and arts advocate Sarah Wilbur describes as a "dance boom" (29).

However, support from the National Endowment for the Arts has not always been equitably distributed. Historically, the NEA has focused their dance resources on large ballet and modern dance companies in urban, coastal hubs. These companies became the blueprint for many of the NEA's requirements and preferences. Through these funding requirements and preferences, the NEA continues to shape the landscape for art across the nation. Projects and companies similar to existing entities are likely to receive funding and subsequently succeed in

the field. The research suggests that the current policies of funding institutions perpetuate the existing dominant ideals and aesthetics. Within the dance field, these ideals cater towards Western concert dance, ensuring its representation while other dance forms are not always met with the same support. Additionally, access to art is largely dependent on geographic proximity to prominent artistic metroplexes.

This paper will argue that despite the intent to increase access and exposure to the arts, policies held by public sector funding agencies have a limiting effect on the arts landscape. The National Endowment for the Arts and Texas Commission on the Arts limit artistic institutions through their requirements of matching funds, incorporation, and grant evaluation. The most limiting aspect of current NEA and TCA policies is matching funds. By requiring matching funds, funding bodies continue to elevate certain styles of art and geographic areas over others.

This paper proceeds as follows: First, the current state of the arts nationally and in Texas will be discussed. Next, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Texas Commission on the Arts and their policies will be introduced. The history of the NEA is emphasized as it is the model for many of the TCA's policies. The outcomes of the policies held by the NEA and TCA will be outlined, including entrepreneurial responses and "workarounds" to policies. Then, the applications of these policies will be demonstrated in a comparison between the Houston Ballet and Ballet San Antonio and their respective schools. To conclude, the policy suggestion of removing the matching requirement will be discussed.

State of the Arts

The arts can be a very powerful tool. It can be argued that the creative sector's role in the economy is often overlooked. In fact, the arts and culture sector of the economy added \$1.0162 trillion dollars to U.S. gross domestic product in 2021 (Auclair). This figure represents a greater

contribution to GDP than that of the transportation and warehousing, outdoor recreation, mining, and agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting industries. The arts and cultural sector's contribution to GDP increased by 13.7% in 2021 while the total U.S. economy only grew by 5.9% (Auclair). These national trends have also been mirrored in Texas. According to the NEA's impact reports, arts and cultural production increased the Texas economy by \$56.7 billion in 2021 ("Texas").

The Texas arts and culture industry also produced \$6.1 billion in sales, generating over \$378 million in taxes in 2019 (Texas Cultural Trust, 22-23). This figure represents an upward trend through the previous four years of Texas arts generating increased income directly to the state. Not only does the creative sector generate income to the economy as a whole and to the state in the form of taxes, but those employed in the arts also enjoy higher wages on average. In Texas, the averages wages of those in the creative sector are considerably higher than those in a non-creative job. This wage difference represents a 77% wage premium for creative workers (*2021 State of the Arts Report*, 19).

Current Policies

National Endowment for the Arts

The founding of the National Endowment for the Arts represented the implementation of a widespread trend. Following World War II, many countries, particularly in Europe, began creating councils for arts and culture (Schuster, 254). The previous hesitation associated with protecting First Amendment rights began to subside throughout the 1940s, most notably due to the success of the Works Progress Administration. By the time that John F. Kennedy appointed Roger Stevens as the Presidential Advisor on the Arts in 1961, bipartisan support was raised for national backing toward an arts endowment. This laid the groundwork for the National

Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965 and subsequent founding of the National Endowment for the Arts (Wilbur, 30). The NEA provided federal funds to individual artists and companies, but also served to stimulate local economies and funders toward greater support for local artists.

A hallmark of NEA policy is matching or leveraging funds. Matching requires that every dollar the NEA grants to an organization be matched with funds from outside sources. All grants from the NEA, excepting COVID-relief grants in 2020 and 2021, require at least a one-to-one match (“Grants for Arts Projects”). Historically, the NEA could require up to a 4:1 match to be eligible to receive certain grants. The primary rationale for matching is that it stimulates the local economy toward supporting creative endeavors. Policy suggests governmental support should ease private investors’ worries about the risks of investing and incentivize them to mobilize their funds, since the government will also be taking on some of the initial risk in investing. It also gives arts institutions a greater incentive to seek out private support and develop relationships with private entities. As described in an interview with prominent modern dance choreographer Don Redlich, the purpose of requiring matching funds was to ensure that the NEA was not the only source of support for artistic institutions (*Dance On*). The goal was that after providing an initial grant, the NEA’s contribution would be absorbed by a local entity or private funding source.

NEA grant criteria also requires artists and companies to “incorporate” as 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. In this way, artistic institutions are encouraged to behave more like businesses (Wilbur, 61). During the post-World War II era, it became more commonly held that quantitative information would be the solution to implementing more rational policies. This thinking was made clearly evident when Frank Hodsoll was appointed as the NEA Chair in 1981.

Hodsoll was a lawyer by trade and had very little connection to the arts, but he was “a master of bureaucratic leveraging” and raised the standards for business practices within the NEA and the artists its funds supported (97-98). The work environment Hodsoll fostered created a need for NEA employees “to ‘be bilingual’ and behave like proper bureaucrats” (99). This led the way towards many improvements in areas such as data collection and economic efficiency within the Dance Program of the NEA. The NEA continued to ask more of its employees in prioritizing administrative tasks associated with grant-making.

In turn, similar business-driven pressures were placed on the artists and companies the NEA was funding. Choreographer Don Redlich recalls the endless forms and paperwork necessary for his company to keep their 501(c)(3) standing and continue to receive grants. It was necessary to hire separate accountants and grant writers to oversee these areas (*Dance On*). The companies that were able to keep up with such administrative demands were able to continue to secure funding. Dr. J. Mark Schuster, an expert on arts funding policies, refers to this as a “managerial mindset” within artistic institutions that is often introduced under pressures to secure funding. This mindset was also brought on by a push from the government to provide accountability for public funds (Schuster, 254). The administrative pressures faced by artistic institutions also changed the internal structures of ballet companies in particular. In “The Glass Slipper Ceiling,” a panel held at Richmond CenterStage in 2010, many female artistic directors of prominent ballet companies shared their experiences in the dance field. Many of these directors voiced the perspective that the increased administrative tasks associated with early NEA granting stifled creativity and gave way to increasingly predominant male leadership in an otherwise female populated field. The panel participants attribute the reinforcement of business practices as a catalyst for increased male leadership in ballet companies during the 1980s. Men

were seen as more capable of running the administrative side of ballet companies and as stronger company leaders. However, this exemplifies a corporate model and not an artistic one. This is just one way that funding requirements may have affected the internal structure of dance companies. As companies changed their leadership preferences, this would suggest that many other aspects of the company such as what shows were produced, who was hired, and how the company interacts with the community, would also be changed.

The NEA holds that grant applications are evaluated by their “artistic excellence and merit” (“Grants for Arts Projects”). This seemingly contradicts the stated goals of the NEA to provide quantitative data and increase transparency among the use of funds. The category of excellence is particularly subjective in the arts context, as art is a form of self-expression at its core. Ranking projects as “excellent” cannot be standardized across the panelists who gather at the NEA to make grant decisions. The subjective nature of these funding decisions also led to rising pressures within the organization. In Sarah Wilbur’s *Funding Bodies: Five Decades of Dance Making at the National Endowment for the Arts*, a former panelist recalls the pressures of “knowing that [they] would have to represent an entire ecosystem of artistic activity that is in no way standardizable” (139). Another panelist expressed that it was nearly impossible to come to a decision they could all confidently stand behind. They describe it as “the worst of all worlds in a sense,” as there were always deserving artists left off the final list (Wilbur, 148).

Deciding who will receive these scarce financial resources often becomes a highly emotional process for the panelists, as the companies and individual artists who do not receive these funds are likely not able to continue their work. Martin Cohen, former general manager of State Ballet of Missouri, explains that dance companies cannot rely on ticket sales alone and are rarely self-sufficient (*Dance On*). The outside funding the NEA provides is crucial to the

success and longevity of dance companies and other arts institutions. It can be inferred that this institutional support would be especially pertinent to new companies as they attempt to create infrastructure and build relationships with private donors.

Texas Commission on the Arts

Apart from the National Endowment for the Arts, many states have similar organizations who function within their respective states. In Texas, there is the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA), founded in 1965. The mission of the TCA is to “foster the development of a receptive climate for the arts that will culturally enrich and benefit state citizens” (State of Texas). Just as NEA requirements shape the artistic landscape of the nation, TCA requirements have a significant impact on Texas artistic production.

Like the NEA, the Texas Commission on the Arts requires that the funds they grant be matched at least one-to-one. However, these funds must be matched outside of the TCA, though they may not be matched by the NEA (“A Guide to Programs and Services”). It would seem self-evident that the TCA’s matching requirement limits artistic opportunities to Texans even more so than what is seen at the national level. To receive a TCA grant, the funds must be matched in one of two ways: from within the receiving institution or from private donors.

Unlike the NEA, grants from the TCA are decided by a quantitative point system. The scoring system weights artistic quality the highest, with a possibility of fifty points, while capability and impact are weighted equally with a possibility of twenty-five points in each category (“A Guide to Programs and Services”). While a point system seems to make the decision-making process of who will receive a grant more objective, the categories of artistic quality, capability, and impact are still incredibly broad and subjective and difficult to standardize.

Policy Implications

Schuster explains that implementing NEA and TCA policies may seem efficient, but he holds many objections to what arises in practice. The policies themselves are rooted in research, and seem fair, logical, and consistent on paper. However, when we observe the impact of these policies, the intended results are not always achieved. These unintended consequences are the outcomes of what Schuster calls “entrepreneurial responses” (257). When institutions are faced with guidelines and limitations in order to receive funding, it is only natural that loopholes and workarounds of sorts will be explored to make the most out of funding opportunities. This is most prevalent in response to the matching funds required by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Texas Commission for the Arts.

Two of the most common workarounds of these policies Schuster names as “donor swapping,” and “moving contributions over time” (257). Both of these scenarios arise in response to the matching component of grants. Donor swapping occurs when a grant requires the funds be matched with a “new contribution.” Rather than find a completely new private funding source, two arts institutions may trade their sponsors from one year to another. Since this sponsor would not have supported that particular institution in the year prior, it is considered a “new contribution” that can be used to match government grant funds. Though a “new contribution” has been generated, the private sector’s total expenditure toward the arts is the same, since an equivalent contribution has simply moved from one institution to another. When donor swapping is used, the contributions of the public sector in the form of the NEA or TCA begin to rise in proportion to the contributions of the private sector. However, this generates an outcome that opposes the NEA’s goal of requiring matching funds. The goal of the matching

funds is to encourage private sector support such that government grant contributions would eventually be absorbed by increasing private sector funds.

A similar phenomenon exists when contributions are moved over time. This occurs when an arts institution asks of a regular donor to increase their contribution in one year, and in return the donor will not be asked to contribute for the subsequent period (Schuster, 256). For example, if instead of contributing \$100 this year and \$100 next year, a donor contributes \$200 this year and nothing next year, it gives the artistic institution the opportunity to apply for a larger matching grant. Because the donor is giving a larger amount than they previously had, this can also be considered a “new contribution” that can be used toward a matching grant. However, this results in the possibility for a larger public sector grant when the private sector’s increased contribution is only as a result of redistribution. When contributions are moved over time, the matching requirement cannot fulfill its intended goal of increasing private sector relationships to support arts institutions.

Another challenge arts institutions face is that the need for quantitative data is often disconnected from the qualitative nature of the arts. Numerical data used to describe the arts are often not questioned, even when it is unclear what they truly reveal about the impact of arts and culture (Schuster, 254). The research suggests that focusing on gathering numerical data can also influence the artistic and administrative decisions made by arts institutions. The difficulty in representing the impact of dance quantitatively often arises from the fact that there is very little consistency among the data. Every institution may collect their data in slightly different ways, using slightly different definitions. Thus, comparing this data across the industry can be misleading. Furthermore, the information published may vary amongst institutions, which can make accurate comparisons and analysis nearly impossible. For example, Houston Ballet,

Pacific Northwest Ballet, and Miami City Ballet all have large community outreach programs with published information on how these programs function. Conversely, San Antonio Ballet has a community engagement program with a much smaller scope, about which very little information is published. Unsurprisingly, the time it takes to run these programs and gather data on them requires an entire team of administrators. San Antonio Ballet has much smaller administrative team than the aforementioned companies. Additionally, only Houston Ballet publishes a yearly impact report of their programs.

Applications in Dance

The policies set forth by the NEA and TCA create many barriers to entry. These policies encourage conformity within art as well within the administration of arts institutions. This affects not only how these institutions are run, but their artistic outcomes. The artistic outcomes of these institutions also affect who has access to arts in the forms of training and community outreach. As Dr. Don Ambrose, professor and researcher specializing in creative intelligence, describes in “Barriers to Aspiration Development and Self-Fulfillment: Interdisciplinary Insights for Talent Discovery,” the first step to expanding someone’s choice set is exposure. In his theory of aspiration development, Ambrose describes that socioeconomic and familial barriers can limit individuals from even realizing they are capable of high achievement outside of what they have observed in their own lives (284). Children in these limited circumstances can develop what Ambrose calls adaptive preferences, which occur when someone has directed their long-term goals and behaviors toward a lower set of aspirations than what may be truly possible for those individuals (285). By giving students the opportunity to interact with the arts firsthand, it can begin to reverse the effects of adaptive preferences and open their eyes to possibilities they may not have seen before.

Involving children in the arts can bring about a host of benefits including improved engagement and attendance, increased standardized test scores, and higher graduation rates (State of Texas, 10 – 11). These benefits are even more prevalent among students classified as low socioeconomic status. When considering the myriad of benefits of exposing children to the arts, it would seem logical that access to training opportunities and community outreach by arts institutions should be prioritized by funding organizations such as the NEA and TCA. Not only do the arts expand students' ability to make choices, but they can also promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. According to the National Dance Education Organization, the embodied and unspoken nature of dance can promote feelings of interconnectedness as well as create opportunities to address empathy and inclusion (5). Additionally, the Texas Cultural Trust's research shows that students who experienced art in high school were more likely to become engaged citizens in their communities (14).

As it stands now, dance is highly inaccessible. According to a survey done by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, only 0.1375% of surveyed children participate in some form of dance, step, and other choreographed exercises (*Statista*). While dance and art forms of all types can be made available to children through many different avenues, it can be argued that public funding institutions like the NEA and TCA can do more to support more widespread access. As expressed by Sara Schroerlucke, dancer and art activist, art reflects the ideals of a society (2). Art plays a large role in shaping the identity of a nation, and the NEA has immeasurable influence. However, the policies of the NEA and TCA have not shifted to allow the art they support to reflect the nation's identity. By continuing to require high proportions of matching funds and encouraging arts institutions to incorporate their business practices, the NEA continues to prioritize dance rooted in the Western forms of ballet and modern dance.

Many ballet companies have begun to widen their community outreach programs. While many community outreach programs are often a one-time experience, some companies have started to allocate funds that allow students to take part in extended training on scholarships. These scholarships recognize students with extraordinary potential and allow them to take part in year-round pre-professional training. Receiving such a scholarship is a mark of prestige and implies the possibility of a future career in dance. For example, Houston Ballet has a “Chance to Dance” program that includes the opportunity for year-round scholarships. This program begins with taking dance into public schools. Schools are given priority to participate in the program if they have not participated in the last three years and have 75% or more students that qualify as economically disadvantaged. The scope and impact of Houston Ballet’s programs is quite remarkable. In the 2021-2022 school year, Houston Ballet provided over 167,000 students with opportunities to interact with the arts first-hand through performances, demonstrations, and dance classes (“Education & Community Engagement”). Furthermore, Houston Ballet has demonstrated commitment to providing access to long-term training for economically disadvantaged students by awarding nearly \$200,000 in Chance to Dance scholarships.

Programs similar to Houston Ballet’s Chance to Dance also exist in Pacific Northwest Ballet’s DanceChance in Seattle and Miami City Ballet’s Ballet Bus. These three cities all have a well-established culture surrounding ballet as well as large contributions made for these programs from the NEA as well as from their respective state’s art councils. As discussed earlier, funding of this type must be matched from outside sources. The research suggests that the matching component of government-sponsored grants is the largest barrier to overcome, and as a result, cities without an established culture of ballet and private funding sources are at a disadvantage. Additionally, large metroplexes tend to receive a higher percentage of NEA funds.

Take for example the city of San Antonio. San Antonio has a ballet company and school, however on a much smaller scale than what exists in Houston, Seattle, or Miami. Population alone cannot explain the differences in size among these ballet companies as San Antonio's population is almost double the population of Seattle and over triple the population of Miami ("U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts"). Additionally, Houston Ballet and Ballet San Antonio have access to the same resources in the National Endowment for the Arts and Texas Commission on the Arts. While Ballet San Antonio has never received an NEA grant, both companies have received several grants from the Texas Commission on the Arts ("NEA Online Grant Search"). However, Houston Ballet's grants are typically much larger than Ballet San Antonio's. Houston Ballet's largest TCA grant in the last four years was for \$162,500 while Ballet San Antonio's largest was only \$5,550 ("All Awards"). It can be argued that this is due to the structures and culture that have allowed ballet to excel in Houston. While Houston and San Antonio share many demographic similarities in the areas of education, poverty and income levels, and home values, they differ in their private sector performance. For example, there are thirty-five Fortune 500 corporations providing jobs and stimulating the private sector in Houston while there are only five in San Antonio. Since government grants require matching from private sector funds, it is no surprise that Houston is able to secure more support and thus provide more widespread community access.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the current policies and practices of the National Endowment for the Arts and Texas Commission on the Arts. These institutions have immense influence in shaping the national and state landscape for the arts. These policies have given way to many unintended consequences and limit one of the NEA's original goals of increasing access to the

arts. The research suggests that the most restrictive policy of such funding organizations is the matching requirement. Through matching, only organizations with prior access to funds can continue to receive support. This funding practice means that marginalized artistic disciplines as well as geographic areas continue to be underrepresented. In examining the historical background, current policies, and practical outcomes of funding bodies such as the NEA and TCA, matching greatly restricts the artistic landscape as only institutions with access to private funds can receive public grants. Reconsidering matching requirements would be a step toward increasing equity in the field of dance. By removing the matching requirement, both the NEA and TCA could diversify the range and reach of artistic projects to more Americans.

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