

Deputy Director Peer Group Meeting Notes – May 21, 2025

Guests

NEA staff Michael Orlove and Lara Holman Garritano joined 32 directors on the call.

NEA Staffing and Transitions

NEA staff are going through a significant transition, with approximately 70 colleagues, including Mike Orlove, departing on May 30. After this date, they will no longer be reachable via their NEA email. The NEA is projected to reduce staff to 75. DOGE is still operating from both NEA and NEH offices. There is hope that their work will be completed soon.

Partnership Grants Update

Partnership Grants are approximately six weeks behind schedule. However, there is optimism that award letters will be issued within the next couple of weeks.

Partnership agreements have not been questioned by DOGE, which is seen as a positive sign.

Mike and Lara extended thanks to everyone who contributed information for the America 250 effort.

Questions

Will there be changes to the FY26 Partnership Guidelines?

No changes are anticipated. The guidelines are currently under review and are expected to be presented at the June Council meeting.

Will there be any new conditions in partnership requirements related to gender identity or DEI?

Many Executive Orders are in litigation. The NEA's general counsel is working on interpretations. For now, the situation remains uncertain.

Should we prepare for any changes in NEA focus, such as America 250 involvement?

No changes are expected in the general terms and conditions. Guidelines will likely remain stable, although this could change. A reduction in NEA funding is possible but won't know until the bill is final.

Mary Ann Carter greatly values the state and regional partnership, and is close touch with NASAA. There is hope DOGE will be finished with their work by July 1.

What is the status of Poetry Out Loud (POL)?

POL is intended to continue, though the format is uncertain. It is complex because of the NEA's relationship with the Poetry Foundation. Currently, it's included in all state partnership agreements.

Will the terms and conditions be released with the agreement letters?

The draft offer letter is not finalized. The terms and interpretations remain in flux and with the NEA's general counsel. SAA deputies discussed the reviews that will be necessary at their agencies. Mike and Lara will convey to their GC that states have distinct legal processes impacted by these decisions.

Any advice for agencies considering sub-granting America 250 funding to their defunded state humanities councils?

Mike suggested they send their narrative draft to Lara, who could route it through the NEA grants office for a response. He encouraged all NEA-related questions to be directed to Lara first, before reaching out to other NEA offices.

States Facing Challenges

Adele Sicilia (ED-NH): The NH legislature voted to fund the agency at just \$1. The agency is in crisis and receiving support from NASAA and the NEA. DDs shared their concern and support.

Encarnación Teruel (IL): Thanked Mike and Lara for their leadership. He asked whether other agencies are facing similar funding issues.

- Jonathan Johnson (HI) noted that their legislature is attempting to control fund allocation through specific appropriations.
- Kate Van Steenhuyse (KS) reported a \$500,000 funding cut after threats of full defunding and legislative back-and-forth. They now have \$1M in state funding.
- José Herrera (AZ) is in week 5 of his tenure. Their agency still has a budget.

Mike expressed thanks for the work of all DDs and wished everyone continued success. He will miss the group. His email is mikeorlove@gmail.com and he hopes to stay in touch. Deputies thanked Mike for his strong support of arts agencies and invited him to visit whenever he was in their areas. They also thanked Lara for staying at the NEA.

Group Discussion

State Humanities Councils

Karen Goeschko (WI) notes that in WI, the humanities council receives only federal and private funds—no state money. They may enter “hibernation.” She welcomed ideas for how others are helping their councils. She wants to continue the conversation around state humanities councils and listen to other states’ approaches.

Laura Wiegand (TX): They awarded a small grant to their humanities council to support art exhibition touring.

André Zhang Sonera (IN): Their humanities council receives no state funding, so they are helping them seek private support.

David Slatery (MA): Their agency provides approximately 3.75% of their appropriation to Mass Humanities under a longstanding agreement. Unfortunately, Mass Humanities recently lost NEH funding.

Kate recommended the audiobook *"Who is Government"* by Michael Lewis and his interview with Jon Stewart on *The Weekly Show* podcast.

Megan White (NY): Humanities NY is dropping from 10 staff to 4. About 80% of their budget was federal.

Other Concerns

Amy Cunningham (VT): Concerned about what the general terms and conditions will include.

Anne Romens (Arts Midwest): Confirmed that some RAO NEA coop agreements were terminated. [Arts Here](#), a national initiative led by South Arts, was cancelled. The [US Artists International](#) and [Performing Arts Global Exchange](#) programs run by Mid-Atlantic Arts were also cancelled. Arts Midwest’s Big Read and Shakespeare and American Communities programs are intact.

Sylvia offered to confirm that this was the full list of RAO cancellations. The NEA reported that the international [Performing Arts Discovery](#) program was discontinued as well.

Laura: They are surveying the field to measure the impact of NEA cancellations and terminations on current and future activities. **Are others doing this?**

- Karen has been checking in with direct NEA grant recipients. Responses have been mixed. Reports a wide variation among 27 direct NEA grant recipients—from no notice to full terminations. Regardless, grantees have appreciated the contact.
- Amy: Surveying nonprofits to also understand secondary effects (e.g., loss of USDA and AmeriCorps funding). They just launched the survey, which invites participants to respond more than once as circumstances change. She shared the [link to it](#) when asked.
- Deane Shellman (WA): They conducted a survey and wished they had partnered with another organization. There were multiple surveys happening at once.
- Kate: They are sharing and using the AFTA survey, as well as a survey by M-AAA. Trying to minimize survey fatigue. If there's a silver lining, it's the opportunity to educate grantees about the funding landscape and shared uncertainties.
- Anna Blyth (NM): It's been hard to identify which grantees were canceled; she's considering conducting a survey. They want to know the extent of the damage.
- NASAA has tried to obtain a comprehensive listing of this information, but has not been successful.
- Dan Katona (OH) agrees with Kate on the desire to use this moment to educate around funding sources. No new surveys in Ohio, but they are fielding many questions and hope for clarity soon. They are also preparing for the AFTA conference happening in Cincinnati in June.

Gloriela Garcia (CA) [shared a link](#) to the nonprofit Arts Analytics' tracking of NEA grant terminations.

Andre mentioned that all their communications must go through the Governor's office. **Are other states in the same situation?** No responses were noted.

Gloriela shared that, for now, operations are normal, but 20% of staff salaries are federally funded.

André would appreciate finance templates to streamline budgeting.

Amy noted that AFTA has offered support for humanities councils to attend the AFTA conference.

Karen asked: **Are people noticing a change in volunteerism in their states?**

In WI they've seen an increase, which is a positive sign. No responses were noted.

Wrap Up

Would the group like to meet again in June, ahead of the scheduled July call?

Participants agreed that it depends on whether the NEA releases new terms and conditions by that point. If so, then yes.