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Executive Directors of State Arts Agencies:
Who are they?

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Most state and jurisdictional arts agencies were established after the founding of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965. Although the earliest state arts agency was established in Utah in 1899 and several more were created prior to the establishment of the NEA, the birth of the national arts agency served as an impetus to the remaining states as well as some jurisdictions to create their own agencies. Encouragement for their creation came from the Congress and the NEA through planning grants to the states for this purpose. By 1970, every state had a state arts agency and by 1980, six jurisdictions had an arts agency. Although state and jurisdictional arts agencies have been in existence for quite a few years, there is a paucity of literature on the educational and career backgrounds of the executive directors of these agencies. These are the individuals who are entrusted to provide policy and administrative leadership for their agencies and play a pivotal role in navigating the political and artistic waters in which the agencies operate. Insights into their backgrounds can give us knowledge about the preparation needed for assuming these roles and help identify education and training needs for arts management.

As part of a larger study we conducted on state arts agencies, biographical backgrounds of executive directors were requested starting in August 2000. All 56 arts agencies were requested to provide the information. For those agencies that did not reply to the initial written request, follow up mailings and telephone calls were made to the agencies for the information. Web sites also were used to collect the information. By early 2001, biographical information was obtained on 68% of the executive directors.

In 1974, the National Endowment for the Arts commissioned the National Research Center of the Arts, Inc., a part of Louis Harris and Associates Inc., to conduct a comprehensive study of state arts agencies. The data collected for the report were for the most part from Fiscal Year 1974 and were published in 1976 (National Research Center of the Arts Inc., 1976). All state and jurisdictional directors (with the exception of one) participated and all were interviewed in person (with the exception of 2 directors of jurisdictional agencies whose agencies responded by mail) in generally two 3-hour sessions. In addition, agencies were requested to provide information in writing. Although a number of insightful articles on state arts agencies have appeared since the publication of this report, it remains the most comprehensive published study of state arts agencies. One section of the report contains data on the educational and professional backgrounds of the executive directors and this data served as a comparative basis for the data we collected. We were interested in making this comparison to determine commonalities and changes that have occurred in the backgrounds of directors over a period of 27 years. It is important to note that most state and jurisdictional arts agencies were in their infancies in 1974 and probably had not passed their initial survival threshold (Downs, 1967). The recent budgetary struggles and threats to the existence of a number of state arts agencies illuminates the challenges of demonstrating the public value of government funding of the arts in difficult budget cycles, a long-standing challenge

(Mankin, 1980; Mulchahy; 1995; Wyszomirski, 1995; Wyszomirski, 2000). A different set of backgrounds, experience, skills, and attitudes may be needed at the start of an agency's existence than at a more mature stage. Similarly agency success under varying political and/or economic conditions may call for executive directors with different backgrounds and skill sets.

Although the response rate for the current study does not match the 100% response rate of the earlier study, it is the best available data for a comparative description and analysis. Previous analyses of the database indicated that the approximately one-third of the state directors who did not respond did not represent a systematic pattern that might constitute bias in selection (Mankin et al., 2001). That is, nonrespondents came from large and small states, agencies with large and small budgets, and from across the seven regions (See appendix for explanation of regions.). Of course a higher response rate would have been desirable, but given this cautionary note, we turn to a discussion of the findings of our study.

Table 1 provides data on the highest level of education attainment of the executive directors. The executive directors in both years under consideration attained high levels

Table 1: Directors education 1976 & 2001

Educational Level	1976 number (%)*	2001 number (%)
High School	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Bachelors degree	17 (31.0%)	7 (20.6%)
Some graduate school	10 (19.0%)	6 (17.6%)
Masters degree	23 (42.0%)	15 (44.1%)
Doctorate	3 (6.0%)	6 (17.6%)

- National Research Center of The Arts, Table 157, page 272

of education with more than half the directors in both studies having graduate training. A greater percentage of those in the 2001 study had post baccalaureate education; nearly two thirds of them held earned graduate degrees compared with less than half of the 1974 executive directors. Furthermore, the proportion of doctorates among the executive directors doubled in the 2001 study. Overall graduate degrees have become a significant characteristic of the executive directors and may have become an expectation in the selection process.

Table 2 below displays how degrees among the executive directors are distributed by region (see appendix). Because the numbers are small when the 34 directors are spread over seven regions, we have listed only frequency counts (percentages would be potentially misleading). For most of the regions, directors are taken from across the different levels of degrees.

Table 2: Education by region and highest earned degree

	Mid-West	Mid-America	Mid-Atlantic	New England	South	West	Pacific	Total Degrees
Bachelors	1	2	3	1	3	2	1	13
Masters	3	2	2	1	3	4	0	15
Doctorate	1	0	1	1	1	2	0	6
Total Directors	5	4	6	3	7	8	1	34

The Mid-Western and Western states heavily favor having executive directors with graduate degrees. The Southern and New England states also show a slightly weaker preference for graduate degrees.

The study conducted by the National Research Center of the Arts, Inc. reported in general about the major areas of study of the executive directors. Their conclusions were:

Undergraduate degrees were earned in a wide variety of fields, including such subjects as political science, history, education, psychology and business administration, as well as arts-oriented subjects as architecture, music and theater. Master's degrees, however, were more likely to be arts-oriented, especially in the areas of literature, arts administration, visual arts and music. (National Research Center of the Arts Inc., 1976)

We are able to provide more specific information about areas of study by major for most executive directors in 2001 and table 3 below displays the highest level of degree earned by executive directors by discipline. Again, because cell frequencies are small, we have reserved percentages for the totals within each major area of study.

Table 3: 2001 Directors area of training by level of degree and major.

	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate	Total
Art history	2	1	0	3 (10.0%)
Management/Administration	0	7	0	7 (23.3%)
Performing arts	4	3	0	7 (23.3%)
English	1	1	3	5 (16.7%)
Humanities not English	1	2	0	3 (10.0%)
Social Science	3	1	0	4 (13.3%)
Law	0	0	1	1 (3.3%)

As with the 1976 study, a variety of disciplines are represented but none of the executive directors had a degree in the visual arts or architecture. If we consider degrees in the performing arts (including performing arts education such as music education, dance education etc), English (including English education), and art history as degrees that provide a background in the arts, we find that 4 or 36.4 percent of the executive directors whose highest earned degree is a bachelor's degree do not have a formal educational background in the arts. Similarly, a consideration of executive directors whose highest earned degree is a master's degree in a non-arts background field reveals that 4 of them do not have a bachelor's degree in an arts field. For the executive director with a law degree, information regarding a major for another earned degree was not available. Thus approximately 27 percent of the executive directors for which information was available did not have a formal educational background in the arts.

A closer examination of the 7 master's degrees in management/administration in the 2001 study reveals that 5 of them are in arts administration and thus, two thirds of all master's degrees were earned in areas outside of arts administration/ arts management. The 1976 study reported that 4 of the executive directors held degrees in arts administration, which began as a formal field of study in the mid-1960s (The Association of Arts Administration Educators, 2002). Although the percentage of those with master's degrees in arts administration/management is approximately twice the size of those represented among the 1974 directors, it is interesting to note that only 15 percent of all the executive directors have degrees in this field of study. With approximately 25 master degree programs in arts administration/ management and approximately 10 bachelor degree programs in the field there appears to be an opportunity to market more broadly to individuals who have a career interest in public sector arts administration/management (and this would include work in non profit organizations often designated by a government to provide the leadership and services in the arts in their community). If the programs do not address such interests, these programs could be developed to include them, including consideration of what makes a good employee for a public arts agency. Clearly there are other educational opportunities such as certificate programs, workshops, seminars and degrees in related fields of studies available to those who have an interest in developing a career in public sector arts administration and arts administration educators would have to determine whether these are viable and sufficient ways to provide the

educational background needed for careers in public sector arts administration/management before deciding to expand their profile in this field of study.

In summary, when we look at directors across the three degrees, we find that the largest proportions (23.3% each) majored in administration/management or Performing arts when they were pursuing their terminal degree. This is followed by slightly more than sixteen percent in English and approximately thirteen percent in a social science. Art history and humanities (not English) each account for ten percent of the total and law is last with a single director.

Work experience has complimented education on the path to executive directorships of state arts agencies. Table 4 below sheds light on the type of experience that has been acquired on that path comparatively between 1976 and 2001. As a group the 2001

Table 4: management/arts management experience

	1976 number (%)*	2001 number (%)*
Specific arts management experience	36 (67.0%)	29 (85.3%)
Specific non-arts management experience	35 (65.0%)	31 (91.1%)

executive directors have a more broad based management experience than their predecessors. Thus, we found a statistically significant difference in the proportion of executive directors with specific arts management experience which rose from 67.0% in 1976 to 85.3% in 2001 (Z for difference of proportions = 2.18, $p < .05$). The growth in state and local arts agencies as well as the large increase in arts companies since the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts provided a greater opportunity for the 2001 executive directors to have specific arts management experience prior to their directorships. Similarly, the proportion with non-arts management experience rose from 65.0% in 1976 to 91.1% in 2001 (Z for difference of proportions=3.24, $p < .05$).

By looking at the type of experience that the executive directors acquired in their careers, we have some more insights into the skills and knowledge they brought to their positions. The 1976 report provides us with general information about the management experience of the 1974 executive directors prior to their directorships. This was summarized as:

The previous arts management experience was primarily as a manager or director of an arts organization, with agency directors also reporting that they had been active in arts education, gallery work and as a council member. Non-arts management experience centered on education, municipal, social and recreational agencies, communications and non-profit organizations. (National Research Center of the Arts Inc., 1976, p. 273)

For the 2001 executive directors, we were able to obtain greater detail about the type of experience that they brought with them to their positions and this is shown in table 5 below.

Table 5: detailed experience for 2001 director data

Location of experience	Number (%)*	Mean years** in job (sd)	Median Years
Private sector management	9 (26.4%)	1.8 (.98)	2.0
Govt agency management	29 (80.6%)	7.1 (5.4)	5.0
Manage gallery/performance Group	15 (44.1%)	4.7 (4.3)	3.0
Fundraising/grant administration***	29 (80.6%)	3.8 (3.3)	2.0
Performer/critic/writer	14 (41.1%)	9.7 (10.3)	5.0
Lobbyist/advocate	16 (47.0%)	3.4 (2.4)	2.5
Nonprofit experience	10 (29.4%)	6.5 (9.5)	2.5
Elected office holder	2 (5.8%)	1.5 (.71)	1.5
Arts education/teaching	18 (52.9%)	6.1 (5.4)	4.5

*The number of directors studied is 36; percentages are of total number of directors who answered the experience question.

**some directors reported having experience but did not report the number of years; those not reporting were treated as missing data rather than being assigned 0 years of experience.

***This experience was listed as part of job description work; none of the executive directors listed a job title of fundraiser or grant administrator in their job histories.

There is some similarity in the experience of the 1974 and 2001 executive directors notably in the areas of arts education, gallery work, and non-profit organizations. Most of the 2001 executive directors did not have private sector (this category excludes commercial work in the arts) experience and for those that did, an examination of their mean and median years of experience reveal that they spent little time in the private sector. With the exception of the private sector, we find that for all the other categories of experience there is a fairly large disparity in the years of experience that the directors had within each of those categories as indicated by the mean's standard deviation. Therefore, we may get a better sense of the amount of experience of the executive directors by considering the median years of experience in each category. By doing this, executive directors have the longest experience in the categories of performer/critic/ writer, arts education/teaching and government agency management. The experience as a lobbyist/ advocate and in fundraising/ grant administration appears to be thin. In the latter case, these activities were exclusively performed as part of a larger job, and not as primary

employment. This would suggest that given the significance of these functions for state agencies, much of the experience that executive directors will acquire in these areas would be on the job. Either this experience will be gained by overseeing staff who have these responsibilities and/or by spending time in performing these functions with the assistance of staff.

A breakdown of experience by region as reflected in table 6 below provides a more detailed look at the diversity of experience as it is distributed across the nation. Again, because the numbers within cells are small, we have presented frequencies without listing percentages.

Table 6: Directors reports of Experience by Region (same director may have reported experience in more than one area of experience, e.g. gov't and private sector)

	Mid-West	Mid-America	Mid-Atlantic	New England	South	West	Pacific
Private sector	1	2	1	0	1	3	1
Government	3	3	6	3	6	8	0
Manager of Gallery or performers	2	3	4	2	2	2	0
Fundraising, grants	5	2	5	3	6	8	0
Performer, artist	2	1	2	0	4	5	0
Lobbyist, Advocate	2	1	3	1	3	6	0
Non-profit	0	1	3	2	1	3	0
Elected office	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Arts education	3	0	5	2	5	3	0

Private sector experience is lacking across the nation with a little over a third of the directors in the West having the most experience in this area. Backgrounds in arts education are well represented in the Mid-Atlantic, Mid-Western, Southern, and New England states. Performance experience is greatest in the Western and Southern states with more than 50 percent of the executive directors with this background. Experience in gallery or performance management is strongest in the Mid-American, Mid-Atlantic and New England states.

The longevity of the executive directors in their current positions for the 1974 and 2001 executive directors is provided in table 7 below.

Table 7: years in current position by year of study

Years in current position	1976 data*	2001 data**
1 year or less	20 (36.0%)	4 (10.0%)
2 years	7 (13.0%)	4 (10.0%)
3-4 years	9 (17.0%)	13 (32.5%)
5-6 years	7 (13.0%)	6 (15.0%)
7-8 years	5 (10.0%)	2 (5.0%)
9 years or more	6 (11.0%)	11 (27.5%)

*median years 2.5; table 160, page 274

**median years 4.0 (mean= 6.9; standard deviation = 6.4).

As the 1976 report noted, there was a considerable turnover in positions with 36 percent of the 1974 executive directors having served one year or less (National Research Center of the Arts Inc., 1976, p. 275). Most of the state and jurisdictional arts agencies were in their initial years of operation at that time and start up operations are often chaotic and entrepreneurial. Furthermore, many states were quite limited in providing appropriations for programs thus creating additional challenges for the incumbents of these positions (Svenson, 1980). At the same time, even given these factors, it is notable that more than a third of the executive directors had served 5 years or more in their positions. With state and jurisdictional arts agencies having greater roots in 2001, and operations becoming more routinized over the years, greater stability in the leadership resulted. There was considerably less turnover in positions and approximately 50 percent of the executive directors had served more than 5 years in their positions.

Type of degree does not seem to have a bearing on longevity in the executive director's position as table 8 below reveals.

Table 8. years in current position by degree level

	Number	Mean years (sd)	Median	Smallest # years experience	Largest # years experience
Bachelors	13	6.25 (6.07)	3.5	1	24
Masters	15	8.17 (5.90)	5.5	1	20
Doctorate	6	7.81 (7.40)	4.0	1	21

The standard deviation of the mean indicates a wide disparity of length of service in the current position and as indicated for each degree level, the range of experience is very wide. By using the median we see that the longest serving directors are those holding master's degrees but a statistical relationship does not exist between level of degree and longevity of service in the current position.

Similarly, there does not appear to be a relationship between the major of the highest earned degree and longevity in the current position as shown by table 8 below.

Table 8. Years in current position by degree area

	Number	Mean years (sd)
Art history	3 (10.0%)	6.5 (5.3)
Management, administration	7 (23.3%)	4.5 (1.4)
Performing arts	7 (23.3%)	6.6 (2.4)
English	5 (16.7%)	3.4 (1.3)
Humanities not English	3 (10.0%)	7.6 (7.5)
Social science	4 (13.3%)	9.0 (9.3)
Law	1 (3.3%)	6.0 (0.0)

Those with terminal degrees in non-arts areas, the social sciences and humanities, appear to have the longest mean years of service in their current position; however, the standard deviations are very large for these areas indicating a great disparity in years of service among the executive directors in these categories. A closer look at those who have terminal degrees in the social sciences, however, reveals that two of the executive directors have 17 years of experience and two of them 1 year of experience. For those holding terminal degrees in the humanities, one executive director has 15 years of experience and the other two have four years of experience.

Finally, we found that the executive directors were a mobile group with a little less than half of them having positions in another state prior to assuming their current position. When we considered the mobility of the executive directors by their highest earned degree, we found that there was not a relationship between these two variables as shown in table 9 below.

Table 9: degree by location of previous job

Previous job in Same state	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate	Total
No	7	7	3	17
Yes	6	8	3	17

Approximately half of those who fell into each of the education categories moved to their current positions from out of state.

Summary and A Suggestion for Further Research

Our search to obtain a better understanding of backgrounds of the executive directors of state and jurisdictional arts agencies provides additional benchmark information to the 1976 study. We found that the executive directors in 2001 were highly educated, possessed an educational background in the arts but little formal education in arts administration/ management, had a wide span of experience but little experience in the private sector, grants administration, and lobbying. They also were willing to relocate to

other states to assume an executive directorship and for appointed positions, had considerable stability in their jobs. Although there may be an expectation that executive directors have an advanced degree, there does not seem to be an expectation about a particular major for that degree. We suggested that there might be an opportunity for arts administration/ management programs to reach out to individuals who wish to pursue careers in public sector arts administration/management as much of the administration/management knowledge that is acquired by the executive directors is through on the job experience and workshops and seminars.

As major or level of degree do not appear to be related to the stability of employment of executive directors and with some executive directors serving through several gubernatorial administrations of different political parties and working with different membership compositions of their commissions, people skills and political skills suggest themselves as future areas of research about the incumbents in these positions. It also may be that as arts agencies have become more visible, they also have become more subject to political forces. Thus, selection of agency directors may be more political than in the past. This is another issue calling for future research.

Case studies that explored how constituencies are built to provide support to the executive directors and the agencies they lead would be useful. This would entail examining relationships with the various arts communities, state legislators and arts commissioners, the press, members of the executive branch, and the general public. It has been some time since case studies have appeared in this area and they can give us additional insights into the skills needed to be successful in leading arts agencies. Additionally, given the current economic and political environment in which state and jurisdictional arts agencies find themselves, such case studies can be particularly telling about the essential skills needed to navigate the roughest of waters.

Appendix

States represented in the study are presented in the regions as categorized by the National Endowment for the Arts.

West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Washington

Mid-West: Iowa, Indiana, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota

South: Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia

New England: Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

Mid-Atlantic: Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania

Mid-America: Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Texas, Wisconsin

Pacific: Guam

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