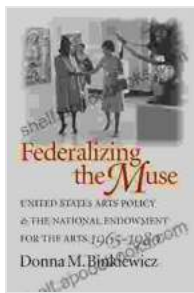


# United States Arts Policy and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1965-1980: A Pivotal Era in Cultural Funding

The mid-20th century marked a significant turning point in the relationship between the United States government and the arts sector. The establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965 ushered in an unprecedented era of public funding for the arts, transforming the cultural landscape of the nation. This article examines the formative years of the NEA, exploring the political, economic, and cultural factors that propelled its creation and shaped its early policies.



## Federalizing the Muse: United States Arts Policy and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1965-1980

by Donna M. Binkiewicz

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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## The Genesis of the NEA



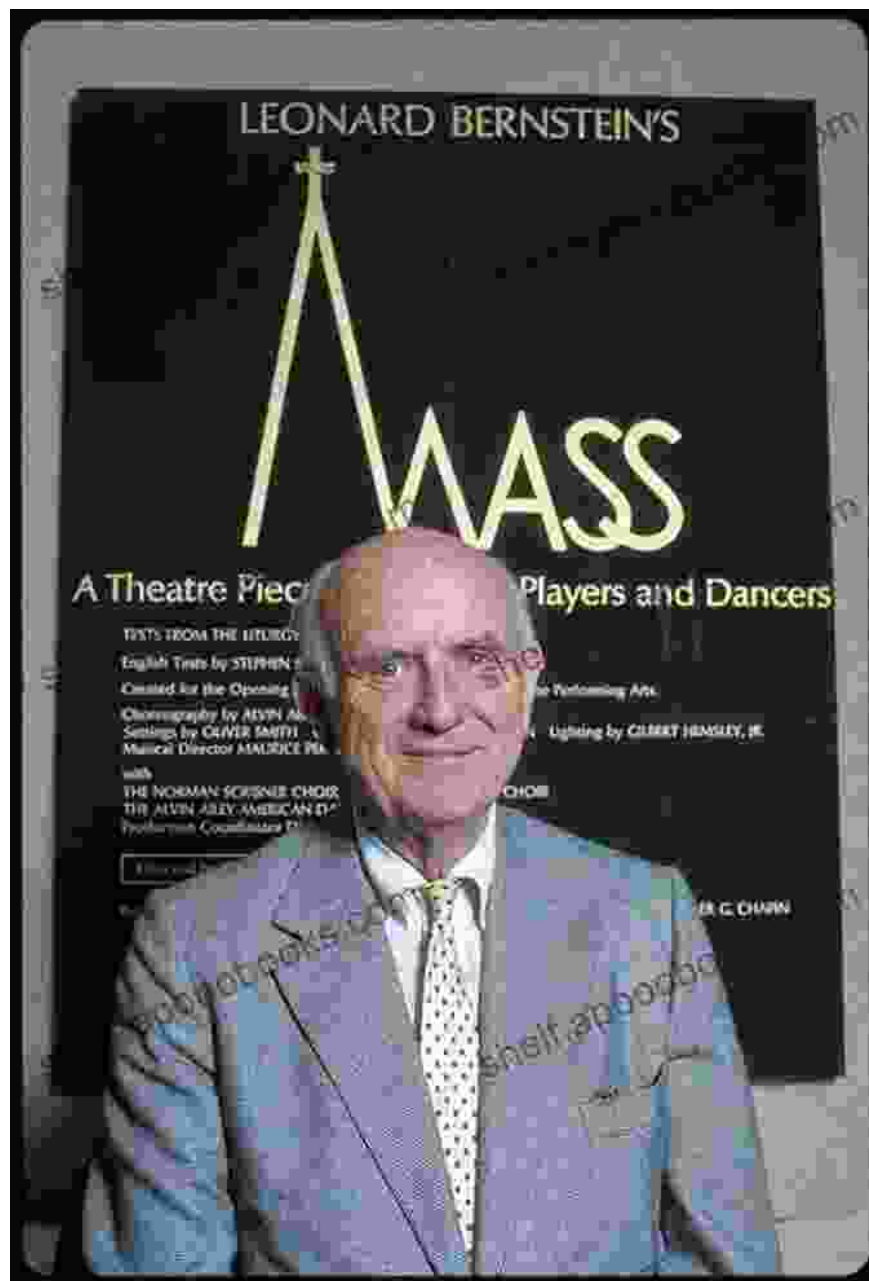
President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the NEA bill into law on September 29, 1965.

The genesis of the NEA can be traced back to the early 1950s, when a growing movement of artists, educators, and cultural leaders advocated for increased government support for the arts. Inspired by the success of the National Science Foundation, established in 1950, they argued that the arts were essential to the nation's cultural and economic well-being.

The passage of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 was the culmination of years of lobbying efforts. The legislation created both the NEA and the National Endowment for the Humanities

(NEH), recognizing the important role that the arts and humanities play in society.

## Roger Stevens and Nancy Hanks: The Architects of the NEA



Roger Stevens, the first chairman of the NEA



Nancy Hanks, the first director of the NEA

The appointment of Roger Stevens as the first chairman of the NEA and Nancy Hanks as its first director was instrumental in shaping the agency's early direction. Stevens, a Broadway producer and close associate of President Lyndon B. Johnson, brought a pragmatic approach to the position, emphasizing the need for the NEA to support a wide range of artistic disciplines and organizations.

Hanks, an art historian and former curator at the Museum of Modern Art, possessed a deep understanding of the challenges facing the arts in

America. She envisioned the NEA as a catalyst for artistic excellence, focusing on programs that would foster creativity, innovation, and access to the arts.

## The Early Years of the NEA: Challenges and Accomplishments

**GANNETT FOUNDATION Grant Application**

This is an interactive application that can be completed in Adobe Acrobat Reader. Complete application and fill online with your grant proposal to your local or state newspaper publisher. A blank application can be printed and completed offline if you prefer.

Legal Name of your Nonprofit Organization | \_\_\_\_\_

Address | \_\_\_\_\_

City / State / Zip | \_\_\_\_\_ Email | \_\_\_\_\_

Authorized Contact Person (Prefix, First Name, Last Name) | \_\_\_\_\_

Title Phone FAX | \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Organization | \_\_\_\_\_

Year Founded | \_\_\_\_\_ Total Current Operating Budget | \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Source of Funds | \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Gannett Foundation Funding? NO  YES  Amount/Year | \_\_\_\_\_

Is your organization Tax Exempt Under IRS 501(c)(3)?

NO  YES  If YES, please attach IRS Letter with Efil to this form | \_\_\_\_\_

Application is pending (if approved, grant cannot be paid until permanent ruling is received)

If you answered NO to the question above, is your organization part of a municipality? (i.e., part of city, state, town or county government. Examples are: Public school system, city recreation departments, county council on aging, mental health, etc.)

NO  YES  name of municipality | \_\_\_\_\_

Grant Amount Requested: \$ | \_\_\_\_\_

Internal use only:  
Local Gannett CEO Funding Recommendation \$ \_\_\_\_\_,00  
Local Gannett CEO Signature | \_\_\_\_\_

Total Project Cost \$ | \_\_\_\_\_ Number Served by Project | \_\_\_\_\_ Project Time Period | \_\_\_\_\_

Program Serves primarily women  YES  NO, and/or minorities  YES  NO

Geographic Area Served / Source of Other Funds to Support Project | \_\_\_\_\_

Use the space below to write a short summary of the project/grant request. (2-3 sentence maximum) | \_\_\_\_\_

An example of an early NEA grant application

The early years of the NEA were characterized by both challenges and accomplishments. The agency faced significant budget constraints, which limited its ability to meet the growing demand for funding from the arts community. Additionally, there were ongoing debates about the appropriate role of government in supporting the arts.

Despite these challenges, the NEA made significant strides in supporting artistic innovation and fostering access to the arts. The agency provided grants to a wide range of organizations, including theaters, museums, dance companies, and community arts centers. It also established programs focused on arts education, research, and international exchange.

### **The NEA and the Vietnam War**



A group of protesters gathered in front of an NEA-funded art exhibition that depicted scenes from the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War had a significant impact on the NEA's early years. The war sparked protests and social unrest, which led to increased scrutiny of government funding for the arts. Some critics argued that the NEA should not support art that was critical of the war or that promoted a counterculture agenda.

The NEA faced pressure from both Congress and the Nixon administration to censor or withdraw funding from controversial art projects. However, the agency resisted these pressures, maintaining its commitment to artistic freedom and the right of artists to express their views.

## **The NEA and the Culture Wars**



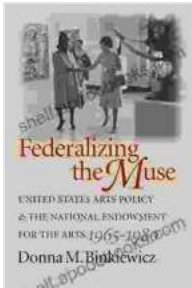
A group of people protesting against the NEA's funding of controversial art exhibitions in the late 1980s

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the rise of the "culture wars," a period of intense debate about the role of the arts in American society. Conservative groups launched attacks on the NEA, accusing the agency of funding obscene and blasphemous art that undermined traditional values.

The Reagan administration reduced funding for the NEA and appointed conservative activists to key positions at the agency. This led to a tightening of funding criteria and a greater emphasis on patriotic and traditional art forms. Despite these challenges, the NEA continued to support a diverse range of artistic expression.



The establishment and early years of the National Endowment for the Arts were a pivotal era in the development of arts policy in the United States. The NEA has played a transformative role in supporting artistic innovation, fostering access to the arts, and defending artistic freedom. Its history is a testament to the power of government to support the arts and to the enduring value that the arts hold in American society.

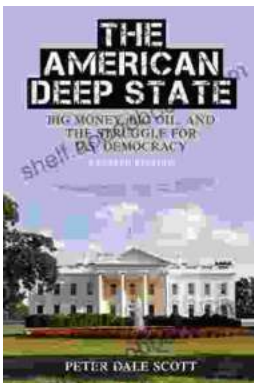


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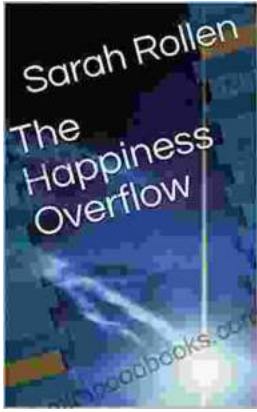
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