

# WHO PAYS FOR THE ARTS?

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The Future of Cultural Funding in New York City

National Arts  
Journalism Program **najp**

A L L I A N C E *f o r* T H E A R T S

**The conference transcribed herein was co-presented by the National Arts Journalism Program and the Alliance for the Arts on Feb. 15, 2002, at the Columbia University School of Journalism.**

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*ARTICLES*, THE ANNUAL JOURNAL OF THE NAJP

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The Economic Impact of the Arts on New York City and New York State (1997)  
Future Safe: Estate Planning for Artists in a Time of AIDS (1997)  
The Arts as an Industry: Their Economic Importance to the New York-New  
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Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and based at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, in association with Columbia's School of the Arts, the National Arts Journalism Program administers fellowships for mid-career and senior journalists in the fields of arts and culture. The NAJP also serves as a forum for discussion of challenging and timely issues at the crossroads of arts and culture, journalism and public policy, through publications, panels and conferences that bring together professionals from these fields.

The Alliance for the Arts is the leading arts advocacy organization and the authoritative source for cultural information in New York City. The Alliance serves New York's cultural community; government and civic leaders through economic impact studies; the general public and visitors to New York through guides and calendars; children, parents and educators through arts education initiatives; and artists, curators and historians through the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS.

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# INTRODUCTION

On Feb. 15, 2002 at the Columbia University School of Journalism, more than 250 cultural leaders, journalists, philanthropists, arts managers, researchers and city officials attended a public symposium at which participants strove to find an answer to the question, “Who Pays for the Arts?”

In organizing this symposium, the Alliance for the Arts and the National Arts Journalism Program were challenged, as were countless others, by the attack on the World Trade Center and its aftermath. Originally scheduled for Sept. 20, 2001, “Who Pays for the Arts?” had to be postponed at the eleventh hour.

By then, the report that had formed the basis of the symposium (“Who Pays for the Arts? Income for the Nonprofit Cultural Community in New York City”) had been completed. Its findings about cultural funding trends in the late '90s were provocative. Although a boom economy had generated unexpected prosperity for many nonprofit groups, the very largest of those groups received the lion's share of the increase in funding, while the smallest groups experienced substantial losses. The gap between the haves and the have-nots widened, even during these plush times.

By the time the symposium was convened on Feb. 15, the question of “Who Pays for the

Arts?” had become even more pressing. Sept. 11 had created a funding crisis that profoundly threatened the stability of arts and cultural groups. Our symposium drew attention to the need for long-neglected public discussion about policy and funding strategies that would ensure the long-term financial viability of cultural production in New York City. That need was underlined by cultural affairs commissioner Kate Levin, who—in her first public address in her new position—announced the incoming administration's intention to re-examine existing city funding policies.

One point of consensus emerged at the symposium: The arts are worth saving, but they cannot thrive on passion alone. The participants called for a renewed push toward arts advocacy, especially as it pertains to the needs of the small, the weak and the innovative arts organizations of the city.

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