WESTAF Announces Partnership with Pacific Jurisdictions

New agreement creates pathway for Pacific jurisdictions to join western Regional Arts Organization

Denver, CO, July 5, 2022—To demonstrate its continued focus on equitable grantmaking and diverse arts ecosystems throughout the western region, the Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF) has partnered with the Pacific Jurisdiction (PJ) region through an unprecedented agreement. Historically, American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Guam (collectively, Pacific Jurisdictions/PJs) have been underrepresented as a region within the U.S. arts sector and in conversations surrounding arts advocacy. With this new partnership, WESTAF seeks to service this vast and previously underrepresented region of the United States. The PJs were recently welcomed into WESTAF’s annual Executive Director (ED) Forum, held in Spokane, Washington, where Pacific Jurisdiction EDs participated both in person and virtually through Zoom—marking the start of the three Pacific Jurisdictions officially joining the western region network. WESTAF looks forward to folding these partnerships into even more networks and services such as its Western Arts Advocacy Network (WAAN).

“The Guam Council on the Arts and Humanities Agency (CAHA) is excited to partner with WESTAF and its efforts to provide geographically distant Pacific communities equal access to resources and opportunities,” said Sandra Flores, CAHA Executive Director. “It is refreshing to work with an organization that recognizes the unique financial and logistical challenges our communities face, especially in light of the diverse indigenous arts and cultures of the islands that deserve attention and support.”

“The CNMI Commonwealth Council for Arts and Culture is very excited to be a new member of WESTAF. This partnership creates new opportunities and opens new doors to our artists and our community. This important network of amazing people and artists will strengthen our communities through promoting, perpetuating, and preserving our indigenous and diverse cultures” said Parker Yobei, Executive Director of the CNMI Commonwealth Council for Arts and Culture.

WESTAF will serve as the official intermediary between the PJs and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which has invested in these relationships for technical assistance and program support. “I am thrilled that Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are being welcomed into the network of Regional Arts Organizations by WESTAF,” said NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson. “The rich cultures that exist in all of the
outer jurisdictions deserve to be fully appreciated as part of our American tapestry. This partnership is a step in the right direction."

Much of the focus of the partnership will be on bridging a connection between rural island communities and diaspora groups on the mainland to traditional cultures, youth exchange programs, and enhancing local services.

“On behalf of Executive Director Fuata M. Tiumalu, the Advisory Board, and staff of the American Samoa Council on Arts, Culture, & Humanities, I am elated in expressing my sincerest gratitude to WESTAF for thinking of the remote U.S. Territory American Samoa and its unique arts,” said Tasi Sunia, program manager of the American Samoa Council on Arts, Culture, & Humanities. “There are numerous countries and territories around the world without any support in the arts, much less in general. All that WESTAF has to offer are considered opportunities—to drive the indigenous arts forward, to introduce or reintroduce and improve non-Samoan arts, and to further real impact in American Samoa.”

WESTAF seeks to expand networks to the artists and arts organizations of the Pacific territories and offer resources to some of the most remote communities in the United States, holistically developing programs with Pacific Jurisdictions to create a partnership that includes Pacific values, culture, and priorities.

National Assembly of State Art Agencies (NASAA) President and CEO Pam Breaux, who inspired the genesis of this partnership, remarked: “The Pacific jurisdictional arts agencies provide significant arts and cultural experiences for the communities they serve. I have seen first-hand their commitment to supporting contemporary and traditional artists, connecting them to community, marketplaces, and educational opportunities for young people. This new partnership with WESTAF is exciting and incredibly important because it provides a mechanism to strengthen and amplify the work of these agencies; it will connect them to important networks, resources, and national opportunities. I applaud WESTAF’s leadership in this endeavor and look forward to a fruitful partnership that provides greater access to the arts of the Pacific jurisdictions.”

“The arts reflect who we are as a people. They tell us where we have been and where we hope to go. On a deeper level, art has the power to revitalize and connect us. It’s been an honor to work with these arts agencies rooted in their Pacific communities to define and deliver more equitable access to arts and culture resources,” said WESTAF Senior Policy Analyst Moana Palalei HoChing. “I’m grateful to be part of an organization that continues to prioritize inclusion and centers community expertise.”

WESTAF is proud to lead the nation in these unprecedented efforts to address inequity among rural communities through investment of relationship building and services. Like many states in the West, the Pacific Jurisdictions have been devastated by the pandemic, with arts agencies facing unique and challenging circumstances. WESTAF sees it as an imperative to envelope the
PJ into the western region community and will invest in the future of this region to thrive, with a $225,000 investment over the next three years.

About WESTAF
WESTAF (Western States Arts Federation) is a regional nonprofit arts service organization dedicated to strengthening the financial, organizational, and policy infrastructure of the arts in the West. WESTAF assists state arts agencies, arts organizations, and artists in their quest to serve diverse audiences, enrich the lives of local communities, and provide access to the arts and arts education for all. Through innovative programming, advocacy, research, technology, and grantmaking, WESTAF encourages the creative advancement and preservation of the arts regionally and through a national network of customers and alliances.

Founded in 1974, WESTAF is located in Denver and governed by a 22-member board of trustees composed of arts leaders in the West. WESTAF serves the largest constituent territory of the six U.S. regional arts organizations and includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai‘i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming—with plans now in place to include American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Guam.

REF: MarComm x AAP June Plan | Official Release via eReleases
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