

ALLIANCE FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

History and Activities

The Alliance for Cultural Democracy began as the Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee (NAPNOC) in 1976 with a national meeting of key neighborhood arts activists. CETA was then emerging as the largest single support source for neighborhood arts work, and NAPNOC's main activity was a Department of Labor - funded research project on CETA and neighborhood arts job development. The organization maintained regional offices in Knoxville and San Francisco in addition to its Washington, D.C. headquarters.

In May 1979, NAPNOC's membership met to consider the future following the end of the CETA project. Everyone agreed that while the CETA research had been valuable, it had deflected NAPNOC from its main purpose of organizing a national network. The members decided to build a new program of organizing, information and services. After this reorganization, NAPNOC's program pursued three goals: First, to help community artists in their local work by providing information and technical assistance tailored to meet their needs; second, to help cultural democracy advocates to take a role in shaping American cultural development; and third, to educate the public about community arts work and cultural development.

After a hiatus for reorganizing, NAPNOC reopened in January 1980. Initial grant support came from the Ford Foundation, the New World Foundation and the C.S. Mott Foundation. Further grant support came from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation. The publication of NAPNOC notes (later renamed Cultural Democracy) was begun in June; it has since been the main outlet for information and analysis, along with special member mailings dealing with urgent issues.

NAPNOC also provided consultation services, mainly focusing on two areas; work with public agencies seeking to develop policy and programs for community cultural development (e.g., the South Dakota Arts Council, April-August 1982); and consultation with community arts groups seeking to solve internal problems or plan future work and support strategies (e.g., Chicago Mural Group, fall 1981).

We have also carried on continuing research in cultural development and policy, both here and abroad, frequently providing scholars and policymakers with information and materials otherwise unavailable in the U.S. This expertise has been utilized to create articles on the cultural democracy movement and related topics that we have placed in such publications as Art in America, Social Policy, The Progressive, In These Times, Journal of Community Action, FUSE, and numerous others.

Finally, NAPNOC acted as convener for meetings in all regions and participates in those convened by others, helping to build the movement by circulating information where individual artists and groups would be unable to do so. Besides our own annual conferences, some important events of this type were The Gathering of August, 1981; the bi-annual conferences of Alternate ROOTS; the Artists' Response to the Nuclear Arms Race, September, 1982; and many others. A related activity was our "national brainstorms," in which concerned people across the U.S. turned their attention to the same thorny questions (e.g., financial support for socially-conscious artwork) and the results were compiled to form a kind of round-robin debate.

After the 6th Annual Members' Meeting in 1982, NAPNOC's Board undertook a new reorganization. NAPNOC's original objectives had been accomplished: the network still needed expansion, but it had been well-established and sound. There was a strong consensus for decentralizing NAPNOC's basic work among members, at the same time broadening and diversifying the range of our projects. To signal this new era in our organization's work, NAPNOC's members voted to change its name to the "ALLIANCE FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY."