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# 4A Arts Announces New Leadership, $2 Million Gift to Expand State Arts Advocacy

*Amid pressure on federal arts grants, New York nonprofit is mobilizing theatergoers and museum visitors in four states, with expansion planned for 2027.*

**NEW YORK**, Oct. 19, 2026 — Today, 4A announced a new leadership team led by Luis R. Cancel, the first Latino to serve as its president and CEO, and a $2 million gift from a longtime patron to expand that work. Ruby Shang will serve as board chair and Elena K. Holy as executive director. The gift will deepen partnerships in Arizona, Florida, Missouri and South Dakota and support planned expansion into North Carolina, Kentucky and Maine in 2027.

With federal arts grants under pressure, 4A Arts is turning to people attending performances, visiting museums and participating in other cultural activities to build a stronger voice for the arts in statehouses. The New York-based nonprofit is organizing audiences into local advocacy networks that can make the case for public arts funding directly to state lawmakers.

Through Organizing for the Arts, its nonpartisan initiative launched in 2024, 4A works with state arts advocacy organizations to recruit supporters already connected to local cultural institutions. It helps partners use outreach campaigns, organizing techniques and data analytics to bring those supporters into networks that can mobilize around state budgets, legislation and local arts priorities.

“People who go to a performance or visit a museum already care about the arts. We want to give them a way to act on that support and stay involved after a single campaign ends,” said Luis R. Cancel, president and CEO of 4A Arts. “Our state partners know their communities. We can give them organizing help and data analytics tools they could not afford on their own, and learn which efforts move more people into advocacy. What works in one state can help another. Over time, that is how we build a broad base of people who will speak up for public arts funding, year after year.”

In Missouri, 4A has worked with arts organizations to invite audiences and board members to join Missouri Citizens for the Arts through emails, newsletters and QR codes in programs. Its marketing support for Arizona Citizens for the Arts has helped the group connect with potential advocates, with campaigns highlighting the economic contributions of local cultural institutions.

“John F. Kennedy said it better than I can: ‘I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist.’ I feel the same way. But we can’t just say the arts matter and assume someone else will protect them. The people who show up for a play, visit a museum or take their kids to an arts program have a stake in what happens next. 4A is helping them speak up when decisions about funding are made,” said Ruby Shang, board chair of 4A Arts.

That outreach goes beyond awareness campaigns. Across Arizona and Missouri, 4A conducted more than 150 advocacy outreach calls in 2026 and supported storytelling webinars and constituent outreach ahead of Arizona's Creative Economy Day and Missouri's Arts Day at the Capitol. These efforts connect arts supporters with opportunities to contact lawmakers and participate in state advocacy campaigns.

In Florida, 4A meets regularly with Florida Cultural Alliance to support their organizing strategy and digital engagement. With Arts South Dakota, it is working to help them reach their ambitious goal of 10k arts advocates email sign-ups. The tactics vary by state, but the goal is consistent: build on an existing arts community to create a lasting advocacy network.

The $2 million gift will support shared organizing, communications and data analytics resources that state partners can use to grow their networks and sustain advocacy beyond a single legislative session. It will also help 4A prepare to expand into North Carolina, Kentucky and Maine in 2027, where discussions with prospective partners are underway.

"I'm excited to bring my experience launching and leading ambitious new programs to my new role at 4A Arts. Our strategic expansion into marketing intelligence and data analytics leverages exciting new technologies in the service of strengthening human connections and deepening our state arts advocacy partners' understanding of how to engender a sense of ownership in the future of American arts, culture, design and craft among the many stakeholders," said Elena K. Holy, executive director of 4A Arts.

Cancel, who previously chaired 4A Arts' board, will oversee fundraising, strategic partnerships and the organization's overall direction. A Puerto Rican arts administrator and South Bronx native, he studied painting and printmaking at Pratt Institute, led the Bronx Museum of the Arts for 14 years, and headed cultural affairs for New York City and San Francisco. He also served on the National Museum of the American Latino Commission. His career has moved between making art, leading cultural institutions and working in government, with expanding access to the arts as a consistent focus.

Shang will work alongside Cancel to expand the board and broaden philanthropic support for 4A's work. A longtime member of 4A's board, she brings experience as a performer, teacher and nonprofit leader: she danced with the Paul Taylor Dance Company, taught at Juilliard and NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and chaired the New York State Council on the Arts' Dance Panel. At the Clinton Foundation, she helped establish health programs across Asia and worked with city governments on energy-efficiency and waste initiatives before leading the foundation's climate work in the region.

Holy will oversee 4A Arts' programs and operations, continuing as executive director after serving in the role on an interim basis. Best known as the award-winning creator and producer of the New York International Fringe Festival (FringeNYC), she spent more than 20 years running the major multi-arts festival with limited resources. In a typical year, the festival involved 5,000 volunteers, 2,500 participants, 1,000 performances, 800 applications, 60 adjudicators and a year-round paid staff of two. She later led SHADOWLAND STAGES, where she helped open a second stage, significantly increased funding, produced a world-premiere play by Tom Hanks, and helped the rural theater navigate the pandemic and return to full operations.

"Our organization was founded by Charlie Reinhart, a visionary leader and promoter of contemporary dance during his leadership of the American Dance Festival. Charlie inspired us to pursue his view that all arts consumers can become arts advocates and ensure that culture can thrive in every community," said Cancel.

**About 4A Arts**

4A Arts (American Alliance of Artists and Audiences, Inc.) is a national nonprofit working to build public support for arts, culture, design and craft. Through Organizing for the Arts, it partners with state arts advocacy organizations to help audiences become advocates in their communities. Learn more at 4aarts.org.

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