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Art on the run

**By Patrick Baker, Director,
South Dakota Arts Council**



The arts and travel go together like guitars and strings—from pop-up art galleries to hard-core troubadours (thanks for coining the latter, Steve Earle). Around here, maybe even more so: the South Dakota Arts Council's (SDAC) Touring Artists and Artists In Schools & Communities programs, the First Peoples Fund's Rolling Rez Arts, the Governor's Biennial Art Exhibition, the Sioux Falls Jazz and Blues' Jazz Diversity Project and all the many artists who tour independently just get the conversation started for our large and diverse state.

It's in that same spirit of celebrating the wonder of wandering that SDAC and Arts South Dakota (ASD) have been on tour together for nearly a year now. The "Arts Road Trip" that started with ASD Director Jim Speirs and I visiting communities last summer and fall has expanded to our full teams, plus a facilitator, traversing the state this spring to hear from citizens on their own turf.

South Dakota's state arts agency has teamed up with the statewide grassroots advocacy and service organization to meet people where they make art, support it, consume it, appreciate it and administer it. We scheduled nine regional arts meetings over two weeks of travel. In April we visited Pierre, Eagle Butte, Pine Ridge, Rapid City, and Spearfish. The second week in May we made stops in Aberdeen, Watertown, Yankton and Sioux Falls.

One might ask (and some already have), why all the travel? It's not for frequent flier miles, since we're highway-bound, or the glamour of life on the road—just ask Jim, who had his dog to look after in April so spent nights in parking lots in his camping vehicle. It's because we want to hear from you about the state of the arts in South Dakota without the tinny filter of voicemail or the soulless glow of an email screen.

I'm sure my colleagues are tired of hearing me kick off meetings by saying, "We're here to witness an organic conversation about the arts." And while "organic" may seem like just a fancy word for natural, it's true that we want to hear ideas and concerns from the people who are influenced by the varied neighbors, plants, animals and ground surrounding and supporting them in these different areas.

That diversity was apparent across the first leg of our trip, where each group we met with was distinct: the search for synergy across organizations in Pierre; the youth-driven interests in Eagle Butte; the small but sincere and thought-provoking group in Pine Ridge; the enthusiastic masses in Rapid City, and the spectrum of Spearfish, spanning veteran artists to city and economic development officials. There have also been some trends seemingly emerging across communities like a theatrical through line. When the dust settles on this tour, we'll organize all of this public input—including the findings from the statewide arts survey we issued earlier in the year—and put the report back out into the public sphere.

All of this information will form the foundation of our respective strategic planning for years to come, which is really where the rubber meets the road, if you'll forgive the pun. And if we missed you in May, don't worry—the tour will continue, and the #SDArtsRoadTrip will eventually make a stop at a venue near you.