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**AMERICANS AND THE**

*Arts* VI

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM A  
NATIONWIDE SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION

Prepared for the American Council for the Arts

Conducted by LH Research  
Directed by Louis Harris

The Americans and the Arts 1992 Survey is sponsored by **Philip Morris Companies Inc.**

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## ABOUT THE AMERICAN COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

Founded in 1960, the American Council for the Arts (ACA) is a national organization whose purpose is to define issues and promote public policies that advance the contributions of the arts and the artist to American life. To accomplish its mission, ACA conducts research, sponsors conferences and public forums, publishes books, reports, and periodicals, advocates for legislation that benefits the arts before Congress, and maintains a 15,000-volume specialized library. ACA is a primary source of legislative news affecting all of the arts and serves as a leading advisor to arts administrators, individual artists, educators, elected officials, arts patrons, and the general public.

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## THE PUBLIC BELIEVES IN THE ARTS

Art belongs.

That is the message of the findings of this year's *Americans and the Arts VI* survey, the sixth Louis Harris poll on cultural issues. By overwhelming margins, Americans want the federal government to support the arts - and they are even willing to pay higher taxes to make it possible. Americans also said that art is an important part of their children's education, with significant practical benefits.

These findings are remarkable, particularly during a recession, but they tally with our own experience at Philip Morris. Over the course of nearly 35 years of supporting the arts, we have found that the arts encourage creativity and open-mindedness in our employees and communities. Indeed, the arts have become an essential part of our nation's infrastructure. It makes sense, then, that so many Americans agree that the government has a vital role in creating a rich and vibrant cultural environment.

We invite you to examine the results of this survey, and to use them to help build better communities for all of us, artists and audiences alike.



Stephanie French  
Vice President, Corporate Contributions  
and Cultural Affairs  
Philip Morris Companies Inc.

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## STATEMENT ON THE SURVEY

*Americans and the Arts VI* presents a very positive picture - despite the attacks on government support and the deep concern people feel about the nation's economy. In the face of increasing challenges to federal funding for the arts, public support for such government funding has increased, not diminished.

A clear majority are willing to pay an additional \$15 per year in their own taxes to support federal funding of the arts - ten times the current amount given to the arts. Three in every four people believe government can be helpful to artists in funding their work and in helping them gain recognition, but government should not dictate to artists what they should create.

Nine in ten parents feel the arts are sorely needed in the classroom, as full credit courses. The arts are viewed as giving children a sense of accomplishment other school subjects do not. The arts in schools can make all of learning infinitely more exciting. Majorities feel that courses in the arts are as important as math and science, history and geography, and such basics as learning to read and write well.

The survey also points to the direction which can generate even more support, and one which can tie the arts to one of the major currents of American thinking - that is the role of the arts in schools. Here is a direction which should be pursued - for the sake of the arts, and also for the sake of America's future.

Louis Harris

Louis Harris  
Chairman, LH Research Inc.

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## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SURVEY

### Government Support of the Arts: **Americans say a resounding "yes."**

60% of Americans support federal arts funding.

Federal support of the arts, an American institution, has come under increased scrutiny in recent years. But despite the controversy surrounding government support of art, this survey shows that the American people strongly support continuing—and even increasing—government support of the arts. What's more, 75% of Americans surveyed believe that government should not dictate what the artist creates.

- An overwhelming majority believes that "in order for the arts to come forth with their best and most creative efforts, the arts need to operate freely, and with a minimum of government control."
- 75% of those surveyed believe that "government can be helpful to artists in funding their work and in helping them gain recognition, but government must not dictate to the artist what the artist should create."
- 69% of Americans are willing to pay an additional \$5 in taxes to support the arts; 64% would pay an additional \$10; 56% would pay an additional \$15.
- By region, the East is the most supportive of federal financial assistance to the arts, showing majority support of 64%; followed by the South at 61%; and the Midwest at 57%.
- By education, high school graduates favor funding by 58%; four-year college graduates by 56%; two-year college graduates by 65%; and those with post-graduate degrees by 69%.

- Women support federal funding (62%-35%) more strongly than men do (58%-40%).
- African-Americans support federal funding by a large majority of 81%; Hispanics support funding by 80%; whites by 55%.
- The biggest differences were found when funding support was examined by age group: 78% of those aged 18-29 support federal arts funding; 64% of those aged 30-49 support it. But among those Americans aged 50 and over, 54% oppose federal government funding for arts institutions.
- 89% of Americans believe that "what people appreciate in the arts depends on the taste of each individual, so a wide diversity of artistic expression is desirable."
- 84% of Americans agree that "in the end, good art is a reflection of the life and times of a nation and a culture, including expressions which support as well as criticize existing values."

Harris observes: Since 72% of Americans surveyed say they are now experiencing some financial distress, the fact that 56% are willing to have a \$15 tax increase for the arts can be viewed as somewhat remarkable.

Despite some voices of opposition, public opinion solidly backs federal funding for the arts, not exclusively, but in partnership with the private sector. Past studies have proven that private funding increases when federal funding and guidance are strong.

Finally, while Americans favor governmental support for the arts, they are convinced that such grants must not and cannot be taken as a signal that the government then can censor or dictate what the artists should produce. This commitment to diversity and lack of governmental control obviously is basic not only to the arts, but to human existence in our society.

The Arts in Education:  
**MAJORITY SAYS THE ARTS ARE AS IMPORTANT AS MATH.**

91% of Americans support arts in schools.

School arts programs are being cut back all across the country. But an overwhelming majority of Americans believe that the arts play an essential role in educating the nation's children. There are many reasons to believe that the arts help children build self-esteem and develop useful skills for the future.

- Learning about art is as important as all other subjects, from 67% who believe the arts are as important as history and geography, to 53% who believe the arts are as important as reading and writing well.
- 97% believe that learning about the arts helps "children become more creative and imaginative."
- 80% think that when children in school learn about and participate in the arts, they "learn skills that can be useful in a job."
- Nine out of ten people surveyed think that including the arts in education is important for children and allows them to "become more tolerant of other cultures."
- 89% of parents surveyed would like their children to be able to enjoy and benefit from the arts and from cultural experiences at school that were not available to the parents when they were in school.
- A 76% majority believes that art courses should be paid for by the school system as part of the regular school budget.
- If they had to choose, 69% favor cutting some administrative expenses in the school system in order to have the arts as part of the regular curriculum.

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Given these statistics, the clear public mandate is to incorporate the arts into American education, making art an inherent part of every curriculum.

Harris observes: Americans are deeply disturbed that the arts are being systematically eliminated from school budgets and from the school experience itself. Overwhelming majorities, of close to 10 to 1, are convinced that the arts provide an enhanced educational experience that not only helps build self-confidence in children, but also makes the educational process much more exciting and interesting. Majorities also feel that the arts give children skills that will be useful in later life.

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Support for Individual Artists:  
**MAJORITY SOLIDLY SUPPORTS AID TO ARTISTS.**

70% want to see public-private efforts  
to help artists financially.

A large majority of Americans support financial assistance to individual artists. They believe in the importance of contributions made by developing artists to the future of the arts. This significant finding reconfirms the importance of diversity in arts sponsorship and of support for individual artists.

- A 70% majority would like to see public-private funding programs, that exist in other countries, to encourage and support individual artists. These initiatives offer operating support, as well as provide funds to purchase works by emerging artists and to establish schools and training programs.
- 82% agree with the view that individual artists "are often overlooked for long periods of time, even though they have real creative talents."
- Nine out of ten Americans believe that individual artists "have to be deeply dedicated and determined people to survive as artists."
- Since the last survey, more people – 71% – believe that artists "work very hard for very little money."
- There has been a turn around in favor of public support for individual artists. The present results show a 52-45% majority of the public now favors giving financial aid to individual artists, a 51-46% majority opposed that five years ago.
- By a majority of more than 2 to 1, Americans would like to see a program established to provide medical and health care benefits for individual artists.

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Harris observes: Given the controversy over NEA grants to individual artists, it is interesting that the only category where public support has risen since 1987 for government assistance to individual artists is at the federal government level.

It is evident that backing for and understanding of individual artists have increased over the past five years. Perhaps sensitivities that have been developed during a recession period have increased public empathy for the plight of the artist. But a sense of appreciation for what artists do—and their potential—clearly runs deep in American society.

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Arts Attendance and Participation:  
**REMAIN AT LEVELS SIMILAR TO 1987.**

68% would miss the arts if the arts were no longer available in their communities.

Attendance and participation in the arts have remained at levels similar to those five years ago when the last survey was taken. These steady results come as a pleasant surprise, considering the impact of the economic recession on spending. However, the arts were not left untouched by the effects of the recession, as the reason most frequently stated for not attending performances was that "ticket prices are too high."

- Arts attendance increased for museums and opera.
- Attendance decreased at plays and dance and orchestral music concerts.
- 72% of those surveyed attend movies—the same level as in 1987.
- Concerts of live popular music attendance was at 55%.
- Participation increased in photography, playing a musical instrument, painting, drawing, creating computer art, and writing stories and poetry.
- Participation decreased in handicrafts, dance, choral singing, and theater.
- Participation in sculpture remained at the same level as five years ago.
- The number of people reporting buying compact discs, tapes, records or recordings of classical music has risen from 20% to 28%. This may reflect music collection conversions to CDs and an increase in the market for these recordings.
- 70% of those surveyed say the arts "give you an uplift from everyday experiences."



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Harris observes: Taken together, the levels of participation in the arts and commitment to the arts reinforce previous findings. To link those who participate and those who attend is a significant issue for the future. There is an enormous potential here in terms of involvement, but even more important in terms of building a constituency. How to bring the two together is a fundamental challenge to the arts community.

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The VCR Explosion:  
**VCR OWNERS WANT MORE PERFORMING ARTS.**

82% of Americans now own VCRs.

Because they are relatively low-cost and adapt to any schedule, video cassette recorders have enormous potential. Not only have they given Americans a wide range of new entertainment options, but they also have great—though still untapped—potential to increase accessibility to the arts.

- VCR ownership has jumped dramatically in the past five years, from 54% in 1987 to 82% today.
- The percentages of the population owning VCRs are highest in the East and West; among those aged 30-49; the well educated; higher-income households; and those who regularly attend arts events.
- The median number of movie rentals is down.
- Those who own VCRs are increasingly watching movies and recorded performances rather than regularly scheduled television programs.
- The number of households who subscribe to cable TV has risen from 52% to 62% since 1987.

Harris observes: The United States has undergone a radical shift in its entertainment capacity. The vast majority of Americans now have the option of looking at TV programs on cable or on their VCR. The proliferation of options in the entertainment market is likely to continue apace as pay TV and other offerings increase. Some 56% of the owners of VCRs say they would like to buy or rent cassettes of top-flight concerts or other performing arts. The potential for the arts on these media still has not really been tapped.

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Books—Reading and Buying:  
**DESPITE VIDEO GROWTH, MAJORITY STILL READS  
BOOKS.**

59% read books frequently; 40% buy books often.

For the first time in the history of *Americans and the Arts*, patterns of book buying and reading were measured. The results demonstrate that despite the expansion of TV and video, many Americans still appreciate the benefits of reading.

- 59% of the adult population of the United States reads books frequently.
- 40% of Americans buy books often.
- Americans who read and buy books most frequently are residents of the East and West coasts, city dwellers, adults aged 30-49, the well educated, women, African-Americans, and those in the highest-income brackets.
- Nine out of ten people surveyed state that reading "lets you learn about other people's lives."
- 79% say that reading books "lets you get away from your problems."

Harris observes: Not only does book reading permeate a major segment of the American people, but the perceived benefits are almost universally agreed upon—escape, learning about the way others live, and uplift from everyday experiences. Book reading ranks as a major leisure-time activity compared to any other form of entertainment.

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Patterns of Giving:  
**PER CAPITA DONATIONS DECREASE SLIGHTLY.**

Number of Americans contributing to arts shrinks  
from 30% to 24%.

Since 72% of those surveyed say they are in some financial distress, it's not surprising that individual giving to the arts has declined since 1987. The decline has been attributed to the recession.

- The distribution of contributed dollars to each type of arts organization did not change significantly.
- The median amount given was \$60.50, down from \$61.60, the figure from five years ago.
- Slight increases were shown in contributions to museums, symphony orchestras, choral groups, and most of all school arts funds.
- Declines were apparent in contributions to dance companies, theater companies, united arts funds, and opera companies.

Harris observes: Given the perceived severity of the current recession, the decline in individual giving to the arts is not unexpected. The real problem, however, can be observed among those who are heavy attenders of the arts. This is the hard-core group of contributors for many institutions, and their attitudes indicate the impact of hard times.

Certainly there continues to be a broad level of public support for government aid to the arts. There also is significant specific support for the involvement of the arts with schools. A key challenge, at least in the short run, is to find ways to translate these two real dimensions of support into additional financial assistance that can make up the losses produced by the recession.

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*A note on the survey:* This sixth survey of *Americans and the Arts* was conducted among a cross-section of 1,500 men and women aged 18 and over, constituting a national sample. They were interviewed by telephone from February 7, 1992 through February 26, 1992.

This study was conducted personally by Louis Harris, who conducted the previous five studies. Mr. Harris is chairman of LH Research, a new research entity, which is not affiliated with his former firm, Louis Harris and Associates.



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