



Cross-Sector Strategies for Health and Community Well-Being

Introduction

Artists, arts organizations and government arts agencies all contribute toward strengthening multiple dimensions of place such as economic opportunity and community cohesion.

State and jurisdictional arts agencies (SAAs) strive to engage communities and to provide opportunities for arts participation by all residents—from densely populated cities to the most remote expanses within states. SAAs also provide unique value across sectors through their perspectives, connections, expertise and resources. They are well-equipped to address barriers to community building and engagement. As government agencies, state arts agencies are well-placed to collaborate with other departments to improve the work of state governments.

Increasingly, state arts agencies and regional arts organizations engage in working partnerships to realize the unique value of the arts and creativity across sectors. Arts agencies collaborate with agencies working in health and human services, transportation and community development—alongside extensive programming in education, the humanities and economic development.

This Strategy Sampler is [part of a series](#) that highlights state arts agency and regional arts organization initiatives to partner across sectors—and to leverage arts and creativity for solving community challenges.

In collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), NASAA has developed these tools to share emerging practices in cross-sector programs, policies and practices that invoke the arts. This knowledge is aimed at helping state arts agencies and regional arts organizations to proliferate positive and impactful programs and to refine ongoing work in these areas. For more cross-sector Strategy Samplers and other resources, visit NASAA's [Cross-Sector Collaborations](#) web page.

Arts, Health and Community Well-being

The arts hold significant potential for enhancing health and well-being across all life stages. Engaging with arts and creativity has the potential to improve physical function. Arts experiences have been shown to reduce stress, anxiety and depression while simultaneously improving mood and self-esteem. The arts also support rehabilitation and recovery processes by providing a safe space for coping with adverse physical or psychological conditions, including cognitive and motor skill disorders,

Contents

Arts, Health and Community Well-being 1

Examples of Arts and Health Partnerships.. 3

Tips for State and Regional Partnerships ... 20

Policy Rationale 20

Getting Started and Lessons Learned 21

Recommended Resources 22

Key Organization Resources in Arts and Health..... 24

References 24

mental health challenges, and traumatic events (Fancourt and Finn, 2019).

These individual benefits also connect with broader community well-being. From a societal perspective, the arts can reduce isolation and loneliness—factors highlighted by Surgeon General Vivek Murthy as critical to health outcomes (2023)—and promote preventive solutions. By strengthening social connections and belonging, arts based interventions address community challenges, support collective healing and help build resilient, cohesive societies, especially during crises. Arts based strategies can extend the benefits of public health to underserved populations, thereby promoting health equity and complementing traditional health care approaches—managing pain and potentially lowering health care costs.

More research is needed to better understand and optimize these and other positive relationships between the arts and well-being. Indeed, fuller integration of the arts across health practices, from community programs to clinical settings and public health initiatives, remains a work in progress (Golden, et al., 2024). State arts agencies can play a crucial role in addressing these challenges through cross-sector partnerships.

SAAAs develop arts-and-health initiatives to leverage the positive impacts of the arts on health and well-being. They form strategic partnerships with government entities and health related organizations to broaden accessibility, reduce health related stigma and extend benefits to all populations. These partnerships bridge the gap between the arts and health fields, combining arts expertise with health care knowledge to drive more comprehensive health outcomes.

At the federal level, cross-sector collaboration has also gained significant momentum. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are leading this charge, exemplified by their joint leadership of the newly formed Interagency Working Group on Arts, Health, and Civic Infrastructure in 2024. This federal commitment is further emphasized by the NEA's investments in promising arts and cultural approaches that are driving positive health outcomes for individuals, communities and the nation.

As the integration of the arts with healing and public health strategies continues to evolve, SAAAs are well-positioned to lead the way in creating more holistic, person-centered approaches to health care—options that recognize the interconnectedness of physical, mental and social well-being. These approaches also foster community well-being, creating resilient and cohesive societies equipped to face collective challenges. By harnessing the arts to strengthen social bonds, promote cultural awareness and address social determinants of health, SAAAs can significantly contribute to healthier communities.

This document aims to give a broader perspective on the integration of the arts with public health initiatives and community well-being programs throughout state government. It examines the critical role of state level governance and intervention in these initiatives. By focusing on the intersection of arts, health and public policy, it offers pragmatic insights for state arts agencies, policymakers and administrators working to implement and expand arts based health strategies. This perspective enhances the existing body of knowledge and represents tactical guidance for entities navigating the positive outcomes that can arise from arts-and-health collaborations.

Examples of Arts-and-Health Partnerships

Massachusetts

Massachusetts Cultural Council/CultureRx, Card to Culture

Social prescribing, originating in the United Kingdom in the 1980s, is a health care model by which providers refer patients with certain health conditions to community resources such as food support, physical and social activities, housing assistance, and creative arts programs (Lejac, 2021). This approach aims to address what are called "social determinants of health" by connecting patients with services that enhance overall well-being beyond traditional medical treatments. Some health practitioners, for example, prescribe participation in arts, cultural or nature based experiences to support patients' mental and physical health, social connections and well-being (Golden, et al., 2023).

In 2020, the [Massachusetts Cultural Council](#) launched [CultureRx: Social Prescription pilot](#), the first statewide arts on prescription program in the United States. The program illustrates the pivotal role that state arts agencies can play in implementing arts-and-health partnerships. It also shows that state policies can position the arts as an effective public health vehicle. The pioneering program integrates arts and culture with health care as a complementary approach to support healing and thriving for Massachusetts residents, especially families with limited economic means.

Mass Cultural Council's vision emerged from a stark reality in the state's celebrated yet costly health care system: only 20% of spending went to preventive measures. This imbalance presented an opportunity for early interventions to address not only the social determinants of health, but societal health disparities. Mass Cultural Council saw an opportunity to contribute to preventive health care through cultural programming that could potentially improve community health outcomes.

Mass Cultural Council's early pilot partnerships with [MACONY Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine](#) in Berkshire County and Caring Health Center in Springfield were instrumental in shaping the arts on prescription initiative, with MACONY Pediatric's existing [collaborative care model](#) with [Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School](#) providing a practical framework. The referral process began with educators or health care providers identifying children with behavioral and emotional health needs. Care coordinators from the pediatric office then collaborated with the family, educators, health care providers and community agencies to create a comprehensive care plan covering medical, educational and social services. They oversaw the entire referral process, addressing barriers to service access, and maintained communications to ensure effective support for children and families.

This model significantly improved referral outcomes. Building on this trajectory, Mass Cultural Council expanded the concept to include arts and cultural organizations, providing free "arts prescriptions" for families to experience one of five participating cultural organizations in Berkshire County, with initial reimbursements directly to these organizations. The achievement of this initiative, evidenced by more than 1,940 arts prescriptions issued ranging from single theater performances to museum memberships and summer camps across many communities,

underscores Mass Cultural Council's triumph in fostering innovative, cross-sector solutions to complex societal health challenges.

The MACONY partnership offered Mass Cultural Council crucial insights into the importance of strong relationships among health care providers, cultural organizations and communities. It highlighted the need for effective communication and coordination among all stakeholders, and the importance of adapting to community needs and resources. These lessons proved invaluable as Mass Cultural Council grew and refined its statewide CultureRx program. "The concept of social prescription is simple," noted Mass Cultural Council Program Manager Erik Holmgren, "but the actual work had everything to do with deep partnership [and] communication—all of the things that the cultural sector has done to address equitable service delivery."

Beyond Grant Making

Mass Cultural Council's approach goes beyond traditional grant making, creating a model whereby cultural services are compensated as health interventions and integrated into existing statewide health care systems. In 2024, Mass Cultural Council partnered and contracted with [Art Pharmacy](#) to implement, scale and lead this work in the state. Art Pharmacy specializes in arts prescription programs and focuses on developing relationships with insurance providers and health care systems to implement arts prescriptions within existing health care payment structures. This partnership aims to create a sustainable, insurance based funding structure, moving away from reliance on state arts agency grants and philanthropy, and potentially serving as a model for nationwide implementation. The model also has the potential to expand cultural participation and broaden the pool of stakeholders who support the arts in Massachusetts.

The partnership with Art Pharmacy also scales the CultureRx program's efforts to tackle persistent barriers to arts accessibility, such as transportation. By allowing prescriptions for groups or families, Art Pharmacy enables those with transportation to accompany prescription holders, effectively solving mobility issues for many. This approach removes physical obstacles and promotes inclusivity, ensuring that distance and costs do not prevent cultural engagement. In the pilot program, participating organizations have developed creative, locally tailored solutions, such as MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art) and its gas gift card initiative. The partnership with Art Pharmacy to broaden social prescription in Massachusetts further supports this effort, providing transportation assistance and allocating funds to overcome travel barriers.

The challenge now lies in developing effective partnership mechanisms and processes, with a shifting focus from justifying the importance of arts in health (the *why*) to figuring out practical implementation strategies (the *how*). Mass Cultural Council is working to change the narrative around the arts, positioning them as a vital social determinant of health and an effective preventive intervention. Among recent efforts is the creation of a free resource guide, "[Arts on Prescription: A Field Guide for US Communities](#)." (The guide's development was partly supported by an NEA Research Lab award to the University of Florida's Center for Arts in Medicine.)

"Our work in Massachusetts is focused on that how piece as much as the why now."

— Käthe Swaback, Program Officer, Mass Cultural Council

Mass Cultural Council Program Officer Käthe Swaback highlights this change in perspective: "What we don't do is talk as much to the other sectors where we have impacts and outcomes. Our strategic plan has a big agencywide focus on building relationships across sectors." She adds, "The question is, how do we partner? They get it"—in other words, other sectors understand the value of collaboration—but "they just need to know how to make these prescriptions and how that process can work."

Looking ahead, Mass Cultural Council envisions a future in which arts on prescription is fully integrated with the state's health care system, and cultural experiences are as readily available and reimbursable as gym memberships. The agency believes that the arts sector is on the cusp of a historic shift, with CultureRx serving as a catalyst for promoting health, equity and social connection.



Left: A member of the Southern Berkshire Collaborative Care Leadership Team enjoys artwork on display at Community Access to the Arts (CATA). Right: Tracey Thomas leads a Let's Get Moving group at Community Music School of Springfield. Images courtesy of CATA and Community Music School of Springfield

Increasing Arts Accessibility with Health Care Partners

In addition to the social prescriptions, Mass Cultural Council has been advancing another facet of the arts-and-health integration efforts through its [Card to Culture program](#). Launched in 2017, the program pioneers an effective cross-agency collaboration with subsidized health insurance while demonstrating the agency's commitment to broadening arts accessibility. It provides free or discounted admission to cultural organizations for individuals receiving subsidized health insurance, thus addressing socioeconomic barriers to arts participation.

By partnering with state health agencies such as the [Department of Transitional Assistance](#), the [Women, Infants, & Children \(WIC\) Nutrition Program](#), and the [Massachusetts Health Connector's ConnectorCare program](#), Card to Culture has facilitated more than one million arts access opportunities for individuals and families. This approach not only broadens arts engagement but also contributes to the overall well-being of participants, showcasing another way that Mass Cultural Council is working to embed arts and culture in public health strategies.

The model has inspired similar programs in other states, reflecting the growing desirability of arts/health partnerships to create more equitable and inclusive arts landscapes while positively impacting community well-being and public health.

Arts Access Programs in Other States

New Jersey State Council on the Arts

- [Families First Discovery Pass](#)
- Launched in 2019

Virginia Commission for the Arts

- [Passport Program](#)
- Introduced in 2022

Florida

Florida Division of Arts and Culture/Academic and Community Projects

The [Florida Division of Arts and Culture](#) (DAC) has long recognized the potential of the arts to promote healthy, vibrant and thriving communities. This commitment has led to a fruitful partnership with the [University of Florida's \(UF\) Center for Arts in Medicine](#), which began in 1990 with a modest \$5,000 grant to the center's clinical counterpart, [UF Health Shands Arts in Medicine](#), to explore the intersection of the arts and health care. A driving force behind this partnership is Dr. Jill Sonke, research director of the UF Center for Arts in Medicine, whose leadership extends to [national initiatives](#) such as [Creating Healthy Communities: Arts + Public Health in America](#), which serves as a nexus for arts and public health professionals fostering cross-sector partnerships and other collaborative endeavors.

Over the years, DAC and UF have maintained a robust, ongoing relationship. It has blossomed as the Center for Arts in Medicine has expanded its reach and impact through multiple research projects, with funding allocated through a competitive grant application process aligned with DAC's budgetary framework. This long-term collaboration has led to several groundbreaking projects that strengthen research at the intersection of the arts and public health.

Federal, State, and Institutional Collaborations

DAC's sustained support for academic, quantitative research in the arts and health is relatively uncommon among state arts agencies and helps address a gap in state level funding for this type of work in the arts sector, positioning Florida at the forefront of evidence based arts-and-health practices. A key component of DAC's current strategic plan is the innovative 2017 [Florida Arts & Wellbeing Indicators model](#), developed with the UF Center and funded by the NEA. The model

measures the correlation between arts participation and well-being across Florida's communities, showing that arts participants report better mental and physical health and overall well-being. These insights will help shape DAC's work in the coming years, as it continues to promote the arts as a vital component of healthy, thriving communities throughout Florida.

The DAC-UF Center collaboration and its resulting research have contributed to growing awareness and interest in arts based approaches in health care settings, while providing DAC insights and evidence to engage meaningfully with health care institutions. Consequently, DAC has been able to connect with some health care providers on arts related initiatives across the state, including Orlando Health and, in Daytona Beach, Halifax Health—providers that continue offering music and art therapy programs and workshops at their sites.

"DAC ventured with us into the health arena when arts and health were seen as unlikely partners. Together, we've proven the arts are essential to healthcare and public health."

—Jill Sonke, Director of Research Initiatives, UF Center for Arts in Medicine

The partnership's influence extends beyond major urban centers, with efforts to reach smaller hospitals and rural areas, thus broadening the scope of the arts in health care across the state. Although the full extent of this influence is still emerging, the partnership's work has helped create opportunities for exploring arts based interventions in different health care contexts across the state.

The collaboration between DAC and UF Center is not based on a formal agreement or memorandum of understanding, but on an annual grant application process. This flexible mechanism allows DAC to adapt its support based on current needs and priorities. The agency meets regularly with Dr. Sonke and her team to discuss ongoing projects and future directions, ensuring that the partnership remains responsive to emerging needs in the field of arts and health.

DAC leadership views this area of work as an ongoing part of its strategic planning, potentially contributing to various community well-being initiatives across the state.

Examples of UF Center for Arts in Medicine Initiatives

- [Florida Arts & Wellbeing Indicators Project](#) (FY2017) developed a set of indicators that measure associations between arts participation and well-being at the community level.
- Sounds of Service, Florida Veterans and Military Arts Initiative (FY2018) explored the impact of arts engagement on veterans' well-being.
- Gainesville Creative Forces Virtual Arts Engagement and Telehealth Summit (2020) was held in partnership with [Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network](#);

DAC; Center for Arts in Medicine - University of Florida/College of the Arts; Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System; and Americans for the Arts. And the [Creating Healthy Communities Convening](#) (2022) fostered knowledge exchanges among practitioners and researchers.

- Veterans Community Arts Referral Program (FY2021)
- [EpiArts Lab](#) (FY2021), an NEA Research Lab, applies epidemiological research to explore the impacts of arts engagement on population health outcomes and develops key outcomes for social prescribing research in the United States.
- Ongoing [arts and social prescribing initiative](#) (FY2024) continues to push the boundaries of arts-and-health research.



Community Healing Begins with Self Care is a public art campaign created through a partnership between Amplifier and the CDC Foundation in 2022. Photo by UF Center for Arts in Medicine Communications Specialist Natalie Rella, courtesy of the UF Center for Arts in Medicine

Rhode Island

Rhode Island State Council on the Arts/Department of Health

The [Rhode Island State Council on the Arts](#) (RISCA) and the [Rhode Island Department of Health](#) (RIDOH) discovered in 2016 that their physical adjacency could foster more than mere neighborly relations. Rhode Island's concentrated geography and close-knit communities create a unique environment for collaboration. Together, these agencies developed innovative strategies for supporting and amplifying arts interventions to address health issues that traditional medical approaches alone could not achieve.

Driven by the growing number of teaching artists working in health spaces and a shared interest in improving community well-being, RISCA approached RIDOH to elevate the relationship, marking the first comprehensive alliance between a state arts agency and a state department of health in the United States—and setting a new standard for cross-sector collaboration in public health policy.

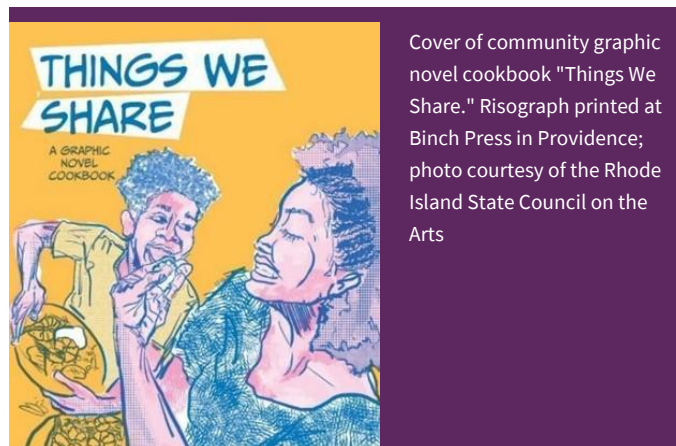
At the heart of this partnership lies the [Rhode Island State Arts and Health Plan](#), a first-of-its-kind, strategic roadmap for integrating the arts and arts based interventions into public, clinical and behavioral health systems. An advisory group comprised of artists, researchers, medical professionals and university representatives was formed with cochairs from the two agencies. The group developed the current plan, which functions as an overarching framework guiding both agencies' independent actions and partnership efforts in the arts-and-health sphere.

A notable collaboration was the artist-in-residence program that the two agencies launched in 2019. This innovative program embedded an artist within the state health department to drive creative arts based practices addressing health equity and social determinants of health. An example of this program's impact is the "Things We Share" project, a graphic novel cookbook created by the first artist-in-residence, Jazzmen Lee-Johnson, in partnership with the RIDOH Refugee Health Program. This intergenerational storytelling project combines recipes, cultural narratives and urban farming experiences from refugee and immigrant youth communities, thus fostering relationships between RIDOH and these communities while emphasizing the importance of traditional foods for health and well-being. The artist residency also encompassed other public health projects that showed how creative practice may help build trust and improve community engagement and health communications.

Although currently paused due to funding constraints, this artist-in-residence program represents a unique approach to integrating the arts with public health policy. In addition, RISCA manages its [Arts and Health Grant](#) program, providing funds for nonprofit organizations to partner with artists for arts based experiences with individual or public health benefits. The agencies maintain their relationship by continuing to share resources and to support a network of practitioners and artists working at the intersection of creativity and health in Rhode Island and beyond.

Challenges and Program Evolution

Funding remains a challenge. While RISCA grants some funding for programs, the partnership relies largely on in-kind contributions of staff time and expertise. Despite challenges such as limited funding, staff changes and the COVID-19 pandemic, the partnership has shown resilience. "There were challenges posed by COVID, but the commitment remained consistent at RISCA," notes RISCA



Cover of community graphic novel cookbook "Things We Share." Risograph printed at Binch Press in Providence; photo courtesy of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts

Grants Program Manager/Arts and Health Anisa Raoof, "and Steven Boudreau, a key advocate at the Department of Health, and I continued to convene and collaborate with thought leaders locally and nationally."

During the pandemic, RIDOH pivoted to create a vaccine awareness program, engaging arts organizations to create public health messaging, and RISCA revamped its grant program. As a more holistic strategy to support health and well-being, funds were no longer limited to traditional health care settings. Instead, nonprofits, including hospitals, social service agencies, and arts and cultural organizations, now can request funds for nonclinical art interventions that provide a health benefit. In its most recent cycle, the program received almost \$200,000 in requests but had only \$50,000 to distribute—a fact that argues for the high demand and critical need for greater resources within Rhode Island's arts-and-health sector.

"We ultimately need more funding and capacity to move all this work forward, but these collaborations provide a strong foundation for growth and validate the importance of integrating arts and health."

— Anisa Raoof, Grants Program Manager/Arts and Health, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts

Coming out of the pandemic, RISCA and RIDOH continue sharing best practices and building the arts-and-health community. Together they host [Arts and Health Conversations](#) (in person and on Zoom) featuring artists, researchers and health practitioners to share their work, as well as arrange more informal Arts and Health Mix and Mingle meetups. Coming out of the pandemic isolation, these convenings have provided welcome opportunities to share ideas and to connect, helping participants to belong to a larger creative community.

Navigating the postpandemic landscape, RISCA emphasizes the importance of reflection, adaptation, and an ongoing quest for increased funding and capacity—essential elements for providing foundational seeds to grow and nurture this work. Recognizing the critical role of shared knowledge and collective growth, RISCA and RIDOH have developed a [Framework for Public Health Artist in Residence Programs](#) to document their work in arts and health. This project serves as both a placeholder for future Rhode Island initiatives and a nationwide resource to educate and promote how the arts can be integrated for overall health and well-being. Moving forward, RISCA continues to cultivate a supportive network for practitioners and artists to share insights and collaboratively develop innovative solutions that foster the integration of arts and health.



The RISCA Arts and Health Grant: Intergenerational Arts Program at Hattie Ide Chaffee Home offers experiential movement and a theatrical workshop for seniors, staff, families, community members, and Brown University undergraduate, graduate and medical students. Artist Rachel Balaban leads seniors through a dance warm-up. Photo courtesy of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts

Washington

Washington State Arts Commission/Department of Veterans Affairs

The Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA) has been at the forefront of serving military and veteran communities through the arts with its Wellness, Arts and the Military (WAM) initiative. Evolving from work done by ArtsWA with the Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network, the WAM initiative enhances health, wellness and well-being for military-connected populations and their families through arts engagement projects. The initiative has continuously evolved, expanding ArtsWA's network, range of services and impacts, and reached a significant milestone in 2022 when the state legislature fully funded the initiative with a \$2 million appropriation.

Creative Forces

- [Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network](#) is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs that seeks to improve the health, well-being and quality of life for military and veteran populations exposed to trauma, as well as their families and caregivers. The program places creative arts therapies at the core of patient-centered care at clinical sites throughout the country, including telehealth services, and increases access to community arts activities. Creative Forces is managed in partnership with Civic Arts, the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine and [Mid-America Arts Alliance](#) (M-AAA).
- Beginning in 2017, Creative Forces convened military and arts communities in areas near Creative Forces clinical program sites in partnership with SAAs including the

Florida Division of Arts and Culture and ArtsWA. From 2018 to 2020, in coordination with partnered SAAs, Creative Forces funded 10 pilot Community Connection Projects near the clinical program sites.

- In 2022, Creative Forces launched a grant program, Creative Forces Community Engagement Grants, in partnership with M-AAA, further expanding its reach. This program annually awards about 40 grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000 to eligible organizations. These community based projects address the distinct experiences, challenges and strengths of military-connected individuals through the experiences of art or art making while helping organizations enhance their capacity to serve military-connected individuals.

WAM's success is based on a robust partnership between ArtsWA and the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA). This collaboration, renewed in 2023 with a \$150,000 allocation for arts programming at State Veterans Homes and the Transitional Housing Program, demonstrates both agencies' commitment to serve broader communities. Their joint efforts extend WAM's reach beyond urban centers, leveraging WDVA's [Vet Corps](#)—AmeriCorps members serving in rural areas—to ensure equitable access to creative arts engagement for rural veterans. ArtsWA's specialized Vet Corps Rural Service Project Grant (2024) further strengthens this partnership, enabling Vet Corps members to implement arts based service projects with rural organizations.



Musicians participate in a MusicWorks4Veterans jam session at the Lacey Veterans Services Hub. Photo by MW4V Team Member Karen McClain, courtesy of ArtsWA

Another standout feature of WAM is the [Self-directed Art Practice \(SAP\)](#) grant, the first of its kind nationally. The program is for eligible military-connected individuals, active-duty service members, guardsmen, reservists or veterans and their family members and pays for costs associated with the pursuit of an artistic practice for professional and personal development. These grant awards eliminate barriers and empower participants to focus on their healing and growth through the arts. Positive feedback from grant recipients has highlighted the profound impact of this support on

their lives and well-being. "This unique grant allows us to fund individuals directly, empowering them to pursue their passion projects and bring their visions to life," recalled WAM Program Manager of Arts Bryan Bales. "It's one of a kind, and we're proud to be trailblazers at ArtsWA."

Expanding Outreach and Programming

ArtsWA also participates in WDVA's annual "Serving Those Who Served" conference, marking a strategic expansion of its outreach and programming. Partnering with WDVA and the Employment Security Department, ArtsWA cohosted the seventh annual conference in Spokane. This event brought together over 400 veterans, service providers and organizations across the state to learn about key veterans issues. For the first time in the history of the conference, an art based track of presentations, curated by ArtsWA, was introduced. This track offered attendees the opportunity to learn about how the arts are helping military-connected families and individuals, and it highlighted the role of the arts in veteran care and engagement.

Through these efforts, the conference showcases various aspects of arts engagement, including pathways into the creative economy and the benefits of community arts participation for veterans. By continually evaluating and adapting the program, fostering strong partnerships, and demonstrating the social and economic impact of the arts, the agency aims to secure ongoing support from funders and the state legislature. The program's evaluation has also been influenced by its current manager, a Marine Corps veteran, whose expertise has shaped WAM to better serve its target population.

As ArtsWA continues to refine and expand WAM, this initiative stands as a model for innovative, arts based interventions in veteran care and public health. Its impact promises to resonate not only within Washington but also as an exemplar for similar programs nationwide, thus promoting the power of the arts in addressing social and health challenges for military members and their families.

New Hampshire

New Hampshire State Council on the Arts/Grant making and Local Infrastructure

Grant making stands at the core of state arts agencies' functions, fostering cultural development and community engagement. The [New Hampshire State Council on the Arts \(NHSCA\) Arts in Health \(AIH\) Project Grant](#) program exemplifies how agencies can leverage this tool for innovative cross-sector partnerships. "Our approach has been finding what's going on at the grass roots and at the community level, figuring out how we can uplift it, and then bringing partnerships in," explains NHSCA Grants Coordinator for Creative Community Development Lisa Burk-McCoy about the Council's Arts and Health program. "It is an inverse process but it's what works in our state."

This responsive, grassroots approach to the arts and health aligns with the state's localized governance structure, favoring community-driven solutions. Acting as both funder and connector, NHSCA builds relationships from the ground up, catalyzing collaborations among artists, health care providers and community organizations. This approach serves as an accessible model for other

agencies, revealing how to bridge the arts and health sectors through strategic partnerships and funding initiatives that identify and support existing community efforts.

Arts in Health Project Grant Program

The strength of NHSCA's approach lies in its responsiveness and multifaceted structure. One way this capacity is demonstrated is through the Council's AIH grant program, established in 2006 to support vulnerable populations experiencing health challenges. In 2020, the program restructured into two distinct tracks: a Health & Healing Track, which supports nonclinical arts engagement for individual healing, and a Public Health Track, which supports arts activities addressing a range of public health priorities. The latter includes collective trauma, racism, behavioral health, social isolation, chronic disease, housing disparities, income instability, homelessness and the climate's impact on public health. Separate grant making tracks allow NHSCA to cater to both individual and community health needs, thus ensuring a comprehensive contribution to public health through the arts.

In addition to its responsibility as funder, NHSCA acts as a facilitator of partnerships. The arts council maintains a roster of 33 vetted artists trained to work in health care settings, providing a valuable resource for health care institutions seeking to implement arts based interventions. Moreover, NHSCA actively connects arts organizations with health care entities to create innovative projects.

One early partnership example is with [Concord Hospital](#), which has had a long-standing relationship with NHSCA since the AIH program's inception. The hospital recently received its 17th Arts in Health Grant, funding the hospital's Therapeutic Arts and Holistic Services program, which provide live music performed by certified music practitioners who are trained to work in a clinical setting to support the mental health of the hospital's patients—including those experiencing delirium, dementia, and mental and behavioral health difficulties. This partnership also led to a joint Arts in Healthcare Partnership Conference in 2013 and an Arts-in-Healthcare Survey to evaluate the arts-and-health field in the state.

Another example of NHSCA's connective role is the partnership it facilitated between Peace of Mind Medicaid and New Hampshire Theatre Project (NHTP). Recognizing potential in Peace of Mind Medicaid's unsuccessful grant application, NHSCA linked the organization with NHTP's [Elephant-in-the-Room Series](#)[®]. This collaboration resulted in a project to create a script addressing elder care issues, to be shared through live play readings and an original film. The script was developed through countless hours of interviews with elders and caregivers. Bridging a health care organization and an applied theatre company, NHSCA fostered an innovative approach to address community health issues through the arts.

Professional Development and Networking Opportunities

NHSCA offers robust professional development and networking opportunities as part of its Arts in Health program by hosting periodic conferences and trainings to support professional growth in the arts in health field. The events bring together educators, professionals and artists to explore these cross-sector efforts.

Additionally, the Council maintains a statewide [Arts in Health Network listserv](#), free and open to anyone working in this field. It serves as a platform for connecting, convening and informing stakeholders with an interest in fostering a vibrant community of practice. With these initiatives, NHSCA goes beyond simply providing grants and maintaining a roster; it actively contributes to the growth and development of both the arts and health fields.

Funding for the AIH program comes primarily from the state arts agency budget, with increased legislative appropriations reflecting its growing importance. This support has enabled the program to expand its reach and impact, even amid major challenges such as the pandemic. NHSCA has showcased AIH's versatility through various events: the 2019 Culturally Responsive Leadership: Race, Equity, and the Arts in Education and Community conference, which addressed adverse childhood experiences and trauma in educational settings; the 2021-22 Embodied Healing pop-up events, which leveraged AIH strategies to help artists and arts administrators heal from pandemic stress, isolation and grief; and the 2023 WOVEN: Gathering at the Intersections conference, which featured AIH as part of a fully integrated arts approach. These initiatives demonstrate NHSCA's ability to adapt AIH strategies to meet diverse community needs, from health care partnerships to broader societal challenges.

Looking ahead, NHSCA remains committed to growing the AIH initiative by continually seeking new partnerships and responding to emergent local concerns and demands. For other state arts agencies considering similar initiatives, NHSCA emphasizes the importance of responding to community needs and tailoring strategies to fit the unique political and social environment of the state. As the AIH program evolves, it serves as a model for how state arts agencies can effectively integrate arts into health initiatives by utilizing local connections and by adapting to community-specific concerns. NHSCA's approach exemplifies the power of responsive, community-oriented strategies in creating impactful arts-and-health programs.



New Hampshire Theatre Project's Elephant in the Room Series® tackles public health topics that are rarely discussed. Each play reading is followed by a facilitated audience conversation focusing on societal attitudes and ethical issues. In collaboration with social service organizations, NHTP provides resources and support to further education and assistance. Photo courtesy of the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Council on the Arts/Arts Therapy for Health Care Workers

Chronically high rates of burnout and turnover have increased in the health care field in recent years, due to higher caseloads, acute workforce shortages and residual stress from the COVID-19 pandemic. The arts can offer meaningful support in [promoting well-being and resilience for health care workers](#) as they navigate their ongoing challenges and strive to maintain the ability to deliver quality care.

In 2021, the [Pennsylvania Council on the Arts](#) (PCA) responded to the pandemic's impact on frontline health care workers by launching a statewide partnership with [The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania](#) (HAP). This [three-year initiative](#) represents one of the first such endeavors nationwide, focusing on using creative arts therapies to support the well-being of frontline health workers.

The formation of this partnership was both strategic and deliberate. After securing approval to repurpose \$500,000 in frozen grant funds, PCA issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Statewide Services Resiliency Through the Arts for Critical Front-Line Health Care Workers project. HAP's network and knowledge was crucial to the program's success. "We could not have done this [without HAP]," says PCA Chief of Finance & Administration Amy Gabriele. "Any state needs a HAP

to make this work. They have all the connections with the hospitals and health care providers and know the necessary legal requirements and clearances."

HAP's statewide network, representing nearly 240 health care providers across Pennsylvania, was essential for implementing the program on a truly statewide scale, ensuring that support reached all regions. The partnership combined HAP's health care expertise with PCA's arts programming knowledge, leading to creation of the [Music Therapy Collaborative](#), which customizes music therapy programs to enhance workforce resilience.

The approach taken by the collaborative involves the structured use of music to help reduce stress and anxiety, release tension, improve mood, enhance confidence, and address other physical, emotional and psychological concerns. Through the programs, board-certified music therapists tailor their services to the specific needs of the health care employees who work at each site.

Implementation

Between 2021 and 2024, PCA provided funding and administered grants, while HAP adjudicated the awards, recruited music therapists and promoted the initiative to hospitals. The collaborative was implemented in 10 hospitals statewide, engaging 10,950 staff members in music therapy sessions. These sessions led to reported improvements in morale, stress reduction, resilience, well-being and reduced burnout. All these outcomes positively impacted patient care. The program's success earned an award from the mid-Atlantic region of the American Music Therapy Association in 2022.

"Instead of pitching for the arts, we approached it as, 'We see your need, and we have something that might help—can we discuss that?'"

— Jamie Dunlap, Chief of Creative Catalysts & Lifelong Learning, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

PCA's targeted approach, addressing specific partner needs rather than exclusively promoting the arts, was key to the collaboration's success and allowed PCA to align its arts based solutions directly with HAP's goal of mitigating burnout and stresses for health care workers. Partnering with a statewide organization like HAP also was crucial in implementing a program built on an established infrastructure and ready for larger-scale implementation.

A key component of this initiative was comprehensive data collection and evaluation. As part of the initiative, HAP was responsible for gathering data on the program's impact and effectiveness, using research conducted by Nichole Hahna, a board-certified music therapist and associate professor in the Music Department at Slippery Rock University. The [executive summary of the HAP Music Therapy Collaborative](#) provides valuable insights into the benefits of arts based interventions in health care settings. The data will be crucial in future discussions with potential partners, including other state agencies and private organizations, and will help secure ongoing support for expanding arts interventions in health care across Pennsylvania and beyond.



Health care workers participate in the Music Therapy Collaborative program at Pottstown Hospital – Tower Health. Photo courtesy of The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania

South Carolina

South Carolina Arts Commission/MUSC Arts in Healing

[Arts Grow SC](#) began in 2021 as a three-year partnership between the South Carolina Department of Education and the [South Carolina Arts Commission](#) (SCAC) to help public schools use proven arts based learning initiatives to cope with pandemic related learning loss. It has since become a permanent fixture within the South Carolina arts education landscape. Arts Grow SC has grown into a network that is stronger than either entity alone. The [Medical University of South Carolina](#) (MUSC) joined the Arts Grow SC collective in 2021. Joining this collective helped MUSC to support its [Creative Arts Therapy](#) initiative, a program within its [Arts in Healing](#) Department, aiming to enhance health and well-being through the therapeutic power of the arts for students in K-12 education.

The partnership originated when SCAC's leadership expressed interest in supporting arts therapy initiatives. SCAC Arts & Education Accessibility Director Amanda Noyes, who joined in 2021 with a background in arts therapy, played a central role in establishing the connection with Katie Hinson Sullivan, director of MUSC's Arts and Healing Department. Launched in 2018, the Arts in Healing Department provides both clinical and nonclinical services through creative arts therapies led by credentialed art, music and dance movement therapists.

When SCAC approached MUSC, the Arts in Healing Department had just received a grant from a donor and partnered with MUSC Boeing Center for Children's Wellness to launch a school based Creative Arts Therapy Initiative (CATI) in the Charleston County School District. CATI involves art therapists and dance movement therapists leading weekly closed-group therapy sessions with students. Each treatment cycle lasts about 10 weeks, with two cycles per year.

SCAC's partnership with MUSC expanded the CATI program beyond Charleston County, leveraging the school system as an effective platform to reach students in need. The program's ability to offer services within the existing structure of schools is a key strength, ensuring that students can access mental health support without facing additional barriers such as transportation issues or scheduling conflicts.

"Art therapy is a powerful tool to offer students; it's really exciting to expand access to schools across the state!"

— Amanda Noyes, Arts & Education
Accessibility Director, South Carolina
Arts Commission

CATI has served over 900 students across 57 schools, with more than 90% of participants reporting improved emotional expression and coping skills, and has extended services to foster care group homes, addressing anxiety and trauma.

Now in its third year, CATI is funded in part by state funds through an SCAC partnership grant. The most recent grant allowed MUSC to hire two full-time creative arts therapists, addressing the challenge of finding qualified part-time creative arts therapists. These full-time positions are expected to expand the program's reach and sustainability.

School Based Mental Health Support

With this program, the state of South Carolina is pursuing an innovative approach to youth mental health. It is a timely goal, as experts in pediatric medicine and psychiatry have [declared a national emergency in children's mental health](#), calling for expanded access to community and school based systems of care that can connect families to health resources. This cross-sector collaboration also helps both agencies translate the value of creative arts therapy into educational terms that resonate with school administrators and align with educational priorities. SCAC's Noyes describes the Commission's role: "[SCAC] helps MUSC speak to the value of their services within the K-12 world and supports them through navigating the educational landscape of South Carolina." By partnering with multitiered systems of support teams—a framework that offers varying levels of support based on individual student needs—creative arts therapy is positioned as an intervention within existing school frameworks, supporting students' academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs.

Looking ahead, SCAC envisions a sustainable future for the CATI initiative. The agency has committed to at least two more years of financial support as the program continues to grow. Both SCAC and MUSC are actively seeking additional funding sources to ensure the program's longevity beyond the initial commitment. The partners are dedicated to expanding the program's reach, with the ultimate goal of having at least one creative arts therapist dedicated to each of the six arts hub regions SCAC has defined, providing comprehensive statewide access to creative arts therapy services and solidifying the program's role in South Carolina's health and education systems.



MUSC Arts in Healing's art therapists partner with students and key school supports to ensure the most equitable and impactful services are provided. Photo courtesy of the Medical University of South Carolina

Tips for State and Regional Partnerships

Policy Rationale

- Arts-and-health programs have the potential to positively impact the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals and communities.
- Arts-and-health programs can serve as a catalyst for building social connections, reducing isolation and fostering a sense of belonging within communities.
- Arts based interventions can provide a nonmedical/nonpharmacological approach to manage pain, reduce stress and anxiety, and promote healing for participants, ultimately improving their overall care experiences and outcomes.
- The arts have the potential to improve direct and indirect health outcomes, reduce health care costs, and enhance overall well-being for constituents.
- Arts-and-health programs often prioritize reaching underserved and marginalized populations, ensuring that the benefits of the arts are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status, age or health condition.
- By partnering with health care organizations and leveraging existing infrastructure, arts-and-health initiatives can effectively engage and serve individuals and communities that may otherwise face barriers to accessing arts experiences.
- Cross-sector partnerships can lead to the development of new, creative solutions to complex health challenges and inspire a more holistic, integrated, human-centered approach to promoting individual and community well-being.

- By showcasing the tangible benefits of the arts in promoting health and well-being, arts-and-health programs can help shift public perceptions and elevate the arts as a vital community asset worthy of investment and support.

Getting Started and Lessons Learned

Identify shared goals and values.

1. Look for organizations or entities that have a vested interest in improving community health (social and community well-being) outcomes, promoting health equity or exploring innovative approaches to health care.
2. Investigate potential partners with aligned missions, goals and values.
3. Research the organizational structure or existing programs of potential partner entities to identify the key individuals who can champion your initiative and help navigate bureaucratic channels.

Leverage existing relationships and networks.

1. Tap into existing networks within the arts, health and government sectors to identify potential partners and champions.
2. Engage board members, staff or key stakeholders who may have connections or insights into potential partnership opportunities.
3. Organize/Participate in conferences, local coalitions, task forces or meetings to meet and learn from potential partners, professionals and communities, and to share knowledge and explore collaborative opportunities.

Start with small and achievable pilot projects.

1. Begin by proposing small-scale, manageable pilot projects that allow you to test the waters and demonstrate the feasibility and impact of your initiative.
2. Use these pilots as proof of concept to gather data, refine your approach, and build trust before scaling up to larger and more complex partnerships.

Communicate the partnership's value proposition clearly.

1. Highlight the unique strengths, expertise, and resources that your agency brings to the table and how these can complement and enhance a prospective partner's existing efforts.
2. Articulate a clear, compelling, evidence based case for why partnering with your agency on an arts-and-health initiative would be beneficial for the potential partner and the communities they serve.
3. To ensure clarity and accountability, develop agreements or detailed proposals outlining each partner's roles and expected outcomes and benefits of the initiative to ensure clarity and accountability.

Share experiences, best practices and lessons learned.

1. Be open to learning from your partners' experiences and expertise and be willing to adapt your approach based on their input and feedback.
2. Maintain open lines of communication with your partners and communities and be persistent in your efforts to move the initiative forward, even in the face of obstacles or resistance.
3. Share your experiences, best practices and lessons learned with other agencies and stakeholders in the field, thus contributing to the growing body of knowledge and support for arts-and-health initiatives.
4. Learn from successful arts-and-health programs in other states/communities.
5. Note that building effective partnerships is an ongoing, iterative process that requires flexibility, transparency, and a commitment to shared learning and growth.
6. Participate in the growing learning network among peers (by learning from other SAAs how to provide valuable insights and help avoid potential pitfalls).

Recommended Resources

[Arts and Health: The Role of the Arts Sector in Promoting Resilience and Well-Being](#)

This issue of the NEA's *American Artscape* magazine examines the crucial role of the arts in public health, especially post-COVID-19. It provides valuable insights into the intersection of arts and health, highlighting real-world examples of how artistic practices and programs enhance individual and community wellness.

[Arts Strategies for Addressing the Opioid Crisis: Examining the Evidence](#)

Prompted by the nation's opioid crisis, this NEA research report reviews and analyzes 20 years of evidence on the use of the arts in pain management and substance abuse disorder treatment, highlighting effective arts based strategies in these fields.

[Creating Healthy Communities through Cross-Sector Collaboration](#)

This white paper from the University of Florida's Center for Arts in Medicine presents a case for integrating arts and culture into public health strategies, offering concrete examples and recommendations for cross-sector collaborations that address critical health issues such as collective trauma, racism, social isolation, mental health and chronic disease.

[Creative Forces Glossary](#)

This glossary is provided by the NEA's Creative Forces initiative and offers concise definitions for terms related to creative arts therapies, health care and research methods. For those interested in connections between the arts and health, it also serves as a valuable reference for facilitating better communication and understanding.

Federal Plan for Equitable Long-Term Recovery and Resilience for Social, Behavioral, and Community Health

This comprehensive strategy, developed by 28 federal departments and agencies including the NEA, recognizes the role of the arts in fostering well-being, civic engagement and equitable recovery post-COVID-19. Recommendations include integrating arts programs across agencies, increasing arts based interventions in health care and education, expanding arts access in underserved areas, and using NEA research to inform policy.

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community

A public health statement that highlights the importance of social bonds for individual and community health and offers recommendations to address the epidemic of loneliness and isolation.

The National Endowment for the Arts Guide to Community-Engaged Research in the Arts and Health

This guide promotes collaboration between arts professionals and health researchers, outlining study methodologies, advantages of partnerships and actionable measures for establishing arts-and-health studies. It underscores community engagement as well as the unique insights arts practitioners contribute to the research process.

The Impact of Arts and Cultural Engagement on Population Health: Findings from Major Cohort Studies in the UK and USA, 2017-2022

This summary report from University College London presents evidence on the long-term health benefits of arts and culture engagement, revealing positive correlations between arts participation and health outcomes across different life stages. Key findings include improved health behaviors among youth, better mental health in adults, and reduced risks of depression and dementia in older adults.

Culture for Health: Implications and Opportunities for Cultural Districts

This report, developed in partnership with University College London, explores how cultural districts can promote public health through arts engagement. It examines research findings linking culture and well-being and it discusses challenges in implementation. The report also proposes strategies for cultural leaders, policymakers and researchers to enhance community health outcomes and ensure equitable access to cultural experiences.

Key Organization Resources in Arts and Health

[University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine](#)

[National Organization for Arts in Health](#)

[The International Arts + Mind Lab Center for Applied Neuroaesthetics](#)

[University of California San Francisco Sound Health Network](#)

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National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

For more information on cross-sector strategies for health and community well-being, contact NASAA Research Associate Nakyung Rhee, who researched and wrote this strategy sampler in 2024.

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. In collaboration with the nation's 56 state and jurisdictional arts councils, we advance the arts as a powerful path to economic prosperity, rural resilience, good health, education success and strong communities in which everyone thrives. NASAA serves as a clearinghouse for data and research about public funding for the arts as well as the policies and programs of state arts agencies. For more information about NASAA and the work of state arts agencies, visit www.nasaa-arts.org.



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Cover image: Artwork created by students participating in the Creative Arts Therapy Initiative of the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) Arts in Healing Department, a partner of the South Carolina Arts Commission. Photo courtesy of MUSC

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