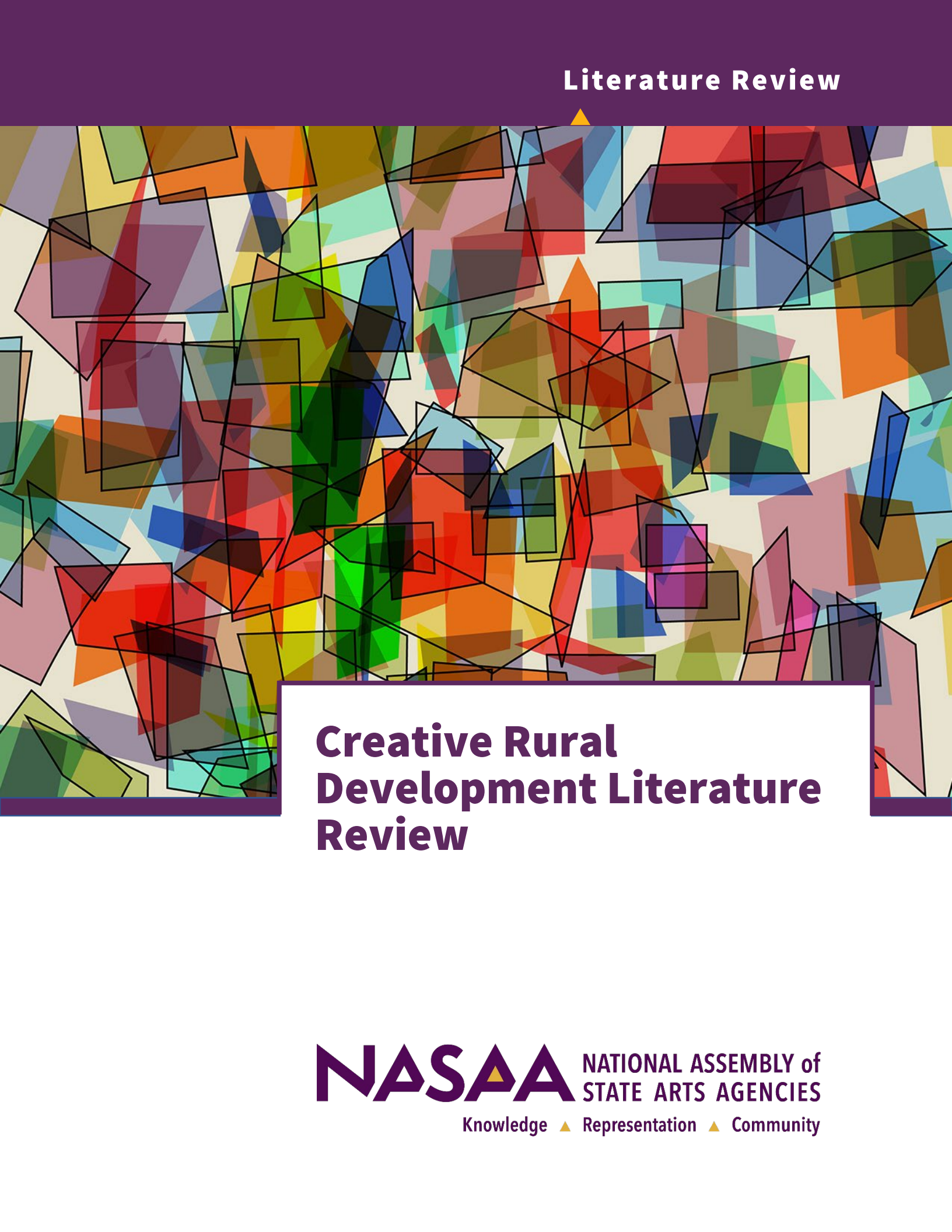




Literature Review

Creative Rural Development Literature Review

NASAA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY of
STATE ARTS AGENCIES
Knowledge ▲ Representation ▲ Community

Introduction

Rural communities contribute significantly to artistic and creative production, and it is well-documented that the value of the arts enables rural communities to thrive. However, shifting structural and economic trends have created challenging conditions for rural residents, including out-migration, economic instability, a lack of access to health care and other infrastructure, and social isolation. In the face of these challenges, mounting evidence from researchers and practitioners increasingly demonstrates that integrating arts solutions into rural development can help address these and other persistent problems.

To surface pertinent information for policymakers and practitioners, NASAA has developed this Creative Rural Development Literature Review, which takes stock of English-language literature—including research reports, white papers, policy briefs, action guides, academic studies and more—about how arts and culture contribute to rural economies and communities. It is a curated, alphabetized collection, focused on resources NASAA believes are particularly relevant, but does not reflect all the literature reviewed or the state of the field as a whole.

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 strategically. For specific initiatives exemplifying the benefits the arts have on rural development, see NASAA's [Creative Rural Development Strategy Sampler](#). For cross-sector Strategy Samplers and other resources, visit NASAA's [Cross-Sector Collaborations](#) web page.

Annotated Bibliography

[Are You Ready for the Country? Creative Placemaking in Rural America](#)

Paulette Beete, Rebecca Gross, Michael Gallant and Christy Crytzer Pierce
2011

This special issue of *NEA Arts Magazine* focuses on how rural communities have leveraged arts and culture to improve their communities "socially, aesthetically and economically." It includes articles documenting how a family foundation in Vermont is engaging artists in community planning efforts; how an Arizonan nonprofit is sparking economic growth in a small town in the Sonoran desert by creating artist housing; how creative placemaking strategies compare in two towns in rural Washington; how a health clinic on a Native American reservation in Minnesota is leveraging art to promote healing and local heritage; and how the Handmade in America program has contributed to the economy of North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains.

[Arts-Based Community Development: Rural Remote Realities and Challenges](#)

Peter A. Skippington and Diana F. Davis
2016

Based on interviews and a survey, this article looks at the perceptions within 12 rural Australian communities about leveraging the arts to support community development efforts. The results suggest that while the arts play an important role in communities, they are undervalued, underaccessed and underused. The results also suggest the need to work more proactively and

collaboratively with key community stakeholders to harness and integrate artistic skills and capabilities across a full spectrum of community interests.

[Breaking Down Rural-Urban Barriers](#)

Shawn Poynter

2016

This interview with Josh May of Appalshop and Savannah Barrett of Art of the Rural discusses the Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange, a creative placemaking project that draws on collaborations "between arts, agriculture, community health, and small business to build collective capacity and support homegrown leadership" around the state. In the interview, May notes, "Although creative placemaking is rooted in rural community arts and community cultural development practice, it has largely developed into an urban-centric economic development strategy and is largely based on site-specific projects."

[Collective Spirit and Rural Economic Development](#)

Ebony McKinney

2017

This is the first part of an interview with Lori Pourier, president of First People's Fund. The interview includes a discussion with Cheryal Hills of Region Five Development Commission about artists and artist entrepreneurs living on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. There is also a discussion about the Sprout Growers & Makers Marketplace, an indoor, year-round market in central Minnesota that connects local food and artwork to residents and tourists. The second part of the interview, [Can Arts and Culture Shift Economics?](#) focuses on alternate definitions of rural wealth, the ethics of mobilizing cultural assets and the value of culture bearers as coaches.

[Community Cultural Development: Exploring the Connections between Collective Art Making, Capacity Building and Sustainable Community-based Tourism](#)

Neda Moayerian, Nancy G. McGehee and Max O. Stephenson Jr.

2022

Using a mix of personal observation, archival data and interviews with a sample of individuals from a community cultural development organization in a single industry town in central Appalachia, this article explores the connections among community based cultural practices, individual and community capacity, and sustainable tourism. The authors suggest augmenting a community's sense of belonging, commitment and empathy—in all of which the arts play a crucial role. This augmentation can enhance community capacity and tourism by increasing residents' effective participation in decision-making activities, encouraging locals' partnership and engagement with tourism projects, and promoting a commitment to shared goals.

[Creating the Good Life? A Wellbeing Perspective on Cultural Value in Rural Development](#)

Karen Scott, Frances Rowe and Venda Pollock

2018

This paper presents an alternative framework on rural development and cultural value. Rather than promoting an instrumentalist approach to culture as a delivery mechanism for other policy agendas, the authors argue in favor of a capabilities approach, that is, shifting the focus to accessing culture as opposed to strictly the impact of culture. In doing so, intangible and underdiscussed aspects of culture can be more readily elevated.

[The Creative Fire: An Interactional Framework for Rural Arts-Based Development](#)

Bruce Balfour, Michael W-P Fortunato and Theodore R. Alter

2016

Based on a review of relevant research and literature, this article proposes "a conceptual framework for understanding the creative, entrepreneurial, and interactional conditions that facilitate community-embedded arts-based development in rural places." The framework's three contexts (creative, entrepreneurial and network/interactional) work together to "form a dynamic community ecosystem of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal ... relationships that can be supportive of arts-based development." The authors assert that arts-based development is sustainable when it focuses on "both near-term and long-term improvements in collaborative capacity, civic engagement, youth arts education, aesthetic connections to nature and inclusive perspectives that bridge class, ethnic, and power divisions in the community." The authors identify a typology of four cultural economy models, asserting that two—the cultural planning model, which focuses on arts facilities and other assets that facilitate capacity building, and the cultural occupations model, which focuses on individuals instead of creative industries—are most suitable for rural creative economic development.

[Cultural and Creative Work in Rural and Remote Areas: An Emerging International Conversation](#)

Nancy Duxbury

2020

This literature review tracks thematic trends in research over the past decade on cultural and creative work in rural and remote areas. The author finds that three main emphases emerge—on cultural vitality, on the rural creative class, and on rural creative economies and creative entrepreneurship. The author notes that since these themes are beginning to influence policy and planning documents, there is more opportunity for converging these discussions into a more comprehensive approach to fostering cultural and creative work in rural and remote areas.

[Design, Innovation, and Rural Creative Places: Are the Arts the Cherry on Top, or the Secret Sauce?](#)

Timothy R. Wojan and Bonnie Nichols

2018

This research examines the association between the presence of arts organizations and innovation in other businesses. The results suggest that as a local development strategy, promoting the arts is

likely to have a positive impact that extends beyond a direct economic impact—that arts promotion can affect the capacities of businesses reliant on design and innovation by attracting or enabling creative talent.

[The Economic Impact of MASS MoCA in 2017](#)

Stephen Sheppard
2017

This report evaluates the economic and employment impacts of MASS MoCA, a contemporary art museum in rural western Massachusetts. The report concludes that the museum has become "a cornerstone of the Berkshire County economy"; however, "the region continues to experience economic difficulties despite the widespread economic benefits of the museum."

[Extending Our Welcome: Trends and Strategies for Tourism in Appalachia](#)

Tim Ezzell, Stefanie Benjamin, Catherine Wilt, Bruce Decker, Rachel Chen and Emily Isaacs
2021

This report uses qualitative and quantitative research to assess the history of tourism in Appalachia and make recommendations for communities looking to employ it as an economic strategy. Especially pertinent is the profile of Berea, Kentucky, its Art Accelerator Program and its three arts districts.

[From Whitesburg, Kentucky, to Washington Court House, Ohio: An Academic Explores Economic Empowerment through Cultural Revitalization](#)

Sonia BasSheva Mañjon
2017

In this essay, Sonia BasSheva Mañjon—associate professor of Arts Administration, Education and Policy at The Ohio State University (OSU) and inaugural director of OSU's Center for Integrated Arts and Enterprise—recounts her experiences with a project to develop small Appalachian communities through arts and culture. She describes her work in engaging local communities and the benefits of convening with other rural economic development practitioners. Mañjon also covers the principles and strategies for rural creative placemaking and describes partnerships and resource opportunities stemming from the application of those principles.

[A Guide to Creatives in Rural California: An Analysis of Economic Activity in the Creative Sector in California's Rural ZIP Codes](#)

Nicole Stephan and Paul Nguyen
2016

This report surveys the rural creative economy in California. It includes information on measuring employment and earnings in the creative sector by considering the creative workers in all industries and all workers in the creative industries, as well as creative economy profiles of northern and southern California.

[Heartland, Heartwork: A Field Guide to Place and Possibility for Rural Leaders](#)

Michele Anderson

2024

Primarily designed for rural leaders in both formal and informal capacities, including community development staff, artists and policymakers, this field guide offers resources for those starting, managing or exploring a creative placemaking project in their community.

[Innovation in the Rural Nonfarm Economy: Its Effect on Job and Earnings Growth, 2010-2014](#)

Tim Wojan and Timothy Parker

2017

Drawing on data from the 2014 Economic Research Service Rural Establishment Innovation Survey, this report considers the "impetus, outcomes, and prevalence of rural innovation." The report defines innovation broadly as "the introduction of new goods, services, or ways of doing business that are valued by consumers" and focuses on rural manufacturing. It provides context for understanding the rural workforce and related conditions conducive to supporting a creative economy.

[An Investigation of Arts-Based Rural Creative Development](#) (working paper)

Gene L. Theodori, Cheryl L. Hudec and Charlotte Drumm

2015

This report summarizes a creative rural development research project supported by the National Endowment for the Arts. Using quantitative data collected from rural communities across Texas, the researchers tested eight hypotheses about arts participation and community satisfaction and attachment. Although they did not focus on economic development through the arts, the researchers did find connections between the arts, community satisfaction/attachment and economic growth. They found, for example, that the arts "may be a novel and exciting possibility for community revitalization" in rural communities "experiencing social and economic decline." Furthermore, they conclude that "an increased understanding of the factors related to arts participation and the effects of arts participation on community-oriented action is especially beneficial for community developers, public leaders and other practitioners (e.g., Cooperative Extension Service personnel) seeking an arts-based strategy to rural community and economic development processes/projects."

[Lessons from the Field: Reflections on Rural Placemaking](#)

Housing Assistance Council and Building Community Workshop

2017

This report offers reflections on the Housing Assistance Council/Building Community Workshop's yearlong initiative to better understand and implement creative placemaking in rural communities. Funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts Knowledge Building grant, the organization facilitated webinars, an internal working group, two pilot projects (in Kinston, North Carolina, and Thomas, West Virginia) and a peer-to-peer exchange. Key insights from the initiative include confirming that rural communities already have a rich history of creative placemaking, that modest

funding can go a long way, and that local context should strongly inform project approaches and methodologies.

[Leveraging Change: Increasing Access to Arts Education in Rural Areas](#)

Lisa Donovan and Maren Brown

2017

Based on research supported by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), this report includes a literature review and findings from phone interviews and a stakeholder convening. The report considers how to increase access to arts education in rural areas and the economic impact of creative placemaking. It also notes that rural artists are resources for business stimulation, youth engagement and community development. Finally, the authors argue that arts educators should be included in efforts to realize rural creative placemaking because they are experts in creativity and collaboration. The paper is summarized and contextualized by the NEA in a post on its blog, [Arts Education in Rural Communities: What's Working](#).

[The Rise of the Rural Creative Class](#)

Richard Florida

2018

This article examines the growing body of literature that investigates the relationship between the arts, innovation and microeconomic (firm-level) advantages. Florida finds that the arts are a direct force in rural innovation, not just an indirect factor that helps to attract and retain talent. He concludes the arts are critical to spurring the innovation that ultimately leads to economic development and rising living standards.

[Rural Arts, Design and Innovation in America: Research Findings from the Rural Establishment Innovation Survey](#)

Timothy Wojan and Bonnie Nichols

2017

This report is the result of a formal research collaboration between the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service. Drawing on data from the 2014 Rural Establishment Innovation Survey and the U.S. Census, the report compares rural and urban arts organizations relative to their location, innovative practices and customer service. It also looks at the proximity of rural arts organizations to design-oriented and/or innovative businesses and the economic outcomes associated with rural design-integrated businesses.

[Rural Design: Establishing the Research Foundation for a New Design Discipline](#)

Dewey Thorbeck

2010

This paper explains rural design and its differences from urban design and the research behind these differences. It details a rural design process that connects environmental, cultural and social

issues with educational, technological and organizational research to help create a healthy and prosperous rural future.

[Rural Prosperity Through the Arts & Creative Sector: A Rural Action Guide for Governors and States](#)

Sally Rood
2019

Written in collaboration by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, the National Endowment for the Arts and NASAA, this action guide synthesizes research and resources showing the benefits of arts based economic development in rural communities. Drawing on quantitative data, an extensive scan of field practices and insights from a national panel of rural development experts, the guide offers a five-point policy framework and 27 policy action steps, illustrated by 100 examples of how arts based strategies have worked in diverse geographic settings.

[Rural Wealth Creation: Concepts, Strategies, and Measures](#)

John Pender, Alexander Marré and Richard Reeder
2012

This report articulates a "conceptual framework for rural wealth creation." It discusses rural wealth not just in financial terms but also in terms of physical, human, intellectual, natural, social, political and cultural assets. A section on nontraditional approaches to economic development strategies and rural wealth creation covers the value of the arts and fostering a "creative class." The report's authors provide a synopsis of their work in an article, [Creating Rural Wealth: A New Lens for Rural Development Efforts](#), in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's *Amber Waves* magazine.

[Small Is Beautiful: Creative Placemaking in Rural Communities](#)

Anne Gadwa Nicodemus
2014

This article presents four case studies answering the question, How does creative placemaking unfold in rural contexts? While the article addresses the economic impact of creative placemaking, it focuses more on the motivation and community effects of placemaking by explaining that "efforts to preserve and enhance rural communities' living cultural legacies can pay dividends in terms of economic resilience, fellowship, cultural exchange, and physical revitalization." When making a comparison between rural communities and low-income urban communities, the author concludes: "Places don't just become forgotten; sets of actors working within political and economic systems deprive communities and ecologies of leadership and stewardship. Interestingly, both rural communities and low-income neighborhoods struggle with the stigma of deficiency-based narratives."

[Transforming Community Development through Arts and Culture](#)

Community Development Innovation Review

2019

This issue of the *Community Development Innovation Review* highlights the ways arts and culture can transform the practice of community development. Published in partnership with ArtPlace America and PolicyLink, the authors reflect on the Community Development Investments program and offer insights and implications for the broader community development field. Especially pertinent are the reflections on the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership, Pathfinder Services, the Granite Falls (Minnesota) artist residency program, and funding distributions in rural areas.

[The Validating Arts & Livability Indicators \(VALI\) Study: Results and Recommendations](#)

Elaine Morley and Mary K. Winkler

2014

Commissioned by Urban Institute, this report describes the methodology and findings used to validate the National Endowment for the Arts's (NEA) proposed Arts & Livability Indicators. The indicators use national, publicly accessible data to track outcomes of interest to communities engaged in creative placemaking activities. Part of the validation process included seeking feedback from representatives of the NEA's flagship Our Town sites. The respondents from both urban and rural areas expressed strong concerns about the relevance of data from large geographies—counties or ZIP codes—as indicators for smaller areas. However, some respondents and experts pointed out that data at larger geographic levels can still provide useful context or comparisons for the project area. The report includes a draft user's guide to the indicators, to help interpret the indicators and judge their value.

For More Information

For more information on creative rural development research and resources, contact NASAA Qualitative Research Manager [Shaun Harrison](#), who prepared this literature review in 2024. For information on cross-sector strategies for creative rural development, contact NASAA Research Director [Mohja Rhoads](#), who researched and wrote the Creative Rural Development 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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