



## PROJECT SYNOPSIS

### DRIVING RURAL PROSPERITY THROUGH THE ARTS AND CREATIVE SECTOR

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) Economic Opportunity Division is helping states to capitalize on the arts and culture to strengthen rural America. This partnership between the NGA, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) will introduce new research and highlight opportunities to leverage the creative sector as vital parts of a governor's agenda for rural prosperity.

**The Challenge:** While U.S. economy, overall, has rebounded from the most recent recession, rural areas have recovered more slowly than metropolitan areas. There are unique cultures and success stories to celebrate in rural America, but many rural areas are contending with the loss of industry; outmigration of skilled workers; rising poverty rates; health barriers; educational attainment gaps; and physical and digital infrastructure needs. These serious long-term trends are motivating state policy makers to reevaluate their strategies for sparking rural economic development.

**Creative Solutions:** By leveraging the creative industries, governors can tap into proven strategies for bringing economic vibrancy back to rural communities. An extensive body of economic research points to the advantages of the arts and culture as economic development drivers, and the evidence is building that the creative sector is an especially potent asset in rural places. For instance, recent research by the NEA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, using Rural Establishment Innovation Survey data, finds that:

- ✓ Rural counties home to performing arts organizations experienced **population growth** three times faster than did rural counties lacking performing arts institutions.

- ✓ Rural counties housing performing arts organizations provide residents with **higher household incomes** (up to \$6,000 higher) than are reported in rural counties lacking performing arts organizations.
- ✓ Rural counties with design-driven businesses **recovered more quickly from the recession**, showing more growth in weekly earnings over a four year period (2010-2014).
- ✓ Two out of three rural businesses report that arts and entertainment are important to **attracting and retaining workers**.

Given these positive contributions, the NGA Center is helping governors to capitalize on the arts as an economic and quality-of-life driver particularly in rural areas. This NGA Center project will:

- **Promote Promising Practices:** The NGA Center, in partnership with NASAA, conducted a national research scan and literature review to identify how rural communities are harnessing the arts to support economic development. Successful examples were showcased at NGA convenings in 2017 and 2018.
- **Engage National Experts:** In the spring of 2018, the NGA Center convened policy experts, economists and cultural practitioners to brainstorm roles and strategies for governors.
- **Develop a Governors Guide:** To disseminate lessons learned, the NGA Center is developing a Governors Guide containing specific strategy recommendations for states. The guide includes examples that illustrate ways to build livable, sustainable rural communities through the arts and creative industries. The guide is slated for release in December 2018.

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