

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

KNOWLEDGE ★ REPRESENTATION ★ COMMUNITY

Arts and Creativity Strengthen Our Nation

A NARRATIVE AND MESSAGE GUIDE FOR ADVOCATES
TO BROADEN AND DEEPEN SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC FUNDING

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Cover:
Painting by Sonja M. Frey

Introduction

This guide articulates a core narrative and provides a message framework for communicating about public funding for arts and creativity in ways that broaden and deepen policymaker support across the political spectrum. Specifically, the framework has been designed and tested to authentically resonate with conservative, centrist and progressive policymakers alike.

The message framework in this guide is the result of an iterative, research-based development and testing process consisting of the following.

Formative Research: The first research phase entailed a two-pronged approach that investigated:

- core values and their relationship to public funding for arts and creativity, and
- the values, messages, messengers and pivot points that drove increased and diversified support for public funding in other sectors.

The findings of this initial phase informed the development of a draft message framework to increase public funding for arts and creativity.

Testing: The second research phase entailed message testing with policymakers, influencers and advocates across the political spectrum, and an iterative process to adapt and refine the message framework based upon their feedback. (*See Appendix B for research background and key findings.*)

This guide uses the term **narrative** to describe the overarching way we see the field of arts and creativity based on deeply held values that frame our perceptions and shape what we think, believe and do in all aspects of life (not just the arts). It uses the term **messaging** to describe ways of articulating and advancing this narrative idea and that serve as a strategic foundation for storytelling. In short, messages are grounded in and advance narrative, and stories carry messages.

This guide is a tool for creating a powerful shift in the overarching narrative about arts and creativity. It moves arts and creativity to be framed and understood as core necessities for strengthening all of America, rather than as niceties that are enjoyed by some and that play an optional role in our lives.

For a more detailed exploration of how narrative and message framing impacts perceptions and is constructed, see [this brief article](#) by Metropolitan Group.

Communicating with Policymakers

Focus on Public Funding

The framework on the following pages is designed for communicating specifically with policymakers, their staff and influencers to increase support for public funding of the arts. It is not intended to guide arts-related marketing or advocacy for all audiences. If you are looking for a guide for framing communication with the general public, community members, and other stakeholders and audiences, see Arts Midwest and Metropolitan Group's [Creating Connection](#) message framework.

Know your Audience

When communicating with policymakers—or anyone else—it is vital to know your audience. What do they believe and care about? What positions have they taken on public funding for arts and creativity, and what is their rationale for those positions? What are their political and personal priorities? What motivates them? Who do they listen to? What examples are relevant in their state, district or community? The answers to these questions are key in choosing the right message and customizing it to invoke the right values. They can also be crucial in choosing the right messenger and recognizing who can deliver which messages effectively. Though this guide does not explore audience segmentation or strategy in depth, it provides illustrative examples to inform and inspire advocacy efforts. (For effective advocacy-related tools and insights, see NASAA's [The Practical Advocate](#) series.)



Courtesy of Art for All, Minnesota Citizens for the Arts.

A Research-Based Mix of Old and New

In addition to several new ideas presented in this guide, arts advocates will find some familiar concepts accompanied by recommendations for important adjustment and nuance. It is important to note that many policymakers respond to arts messaging with agreement about the value of the arts and their personal support for them, yet believe that the arts should be funded through private sector and philanthropic organizations and through earned income and sales. This guide focuses specifically on ideas and **messages that have been proven to motivate support for public funding** for arts and creativity.

What's New

TWO ESSENTIAL SHIFTS

1. Arts and creativity strengthen the nation.
2. Public funding for arts and creativity benefits every community, including rural areas and small towns, not just big cities.

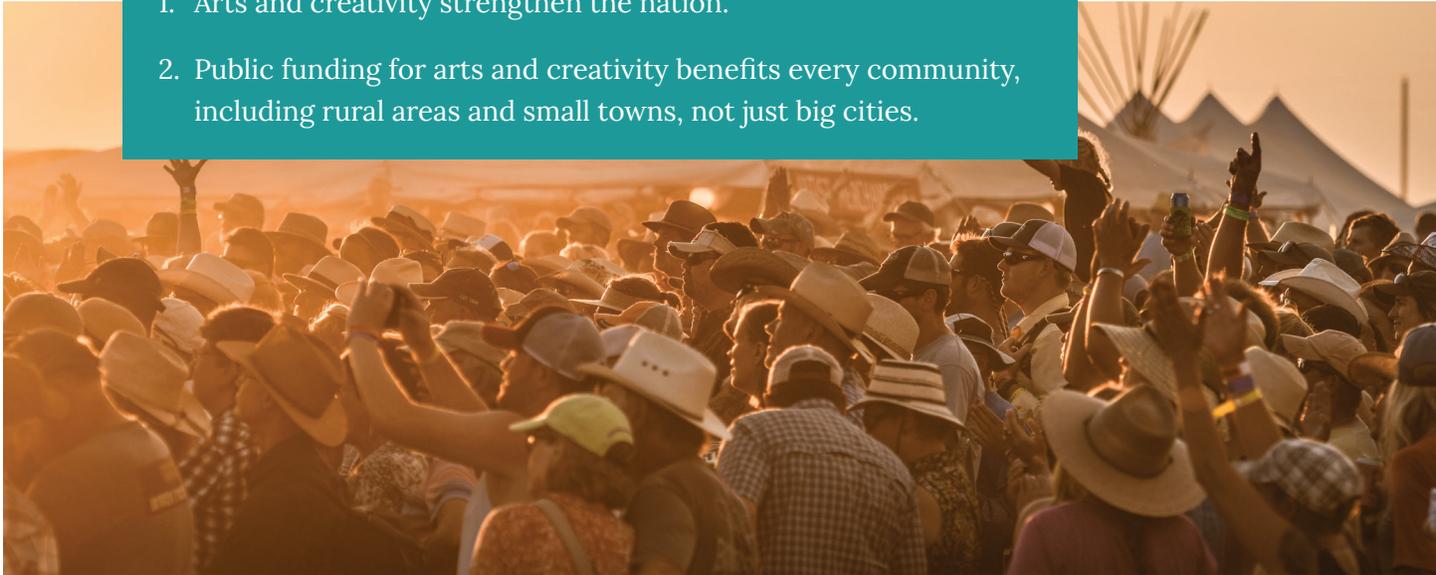


Photo by Erik Peterson. Red Arts Pants Festival.

Strength

Throughout this guide, the idea of **strength** plays a central role. This is a direct outcome of the research that underpins this guide, especially our analyses of themes pulled from lawmakers' own arguments in favor of public funding, both for arts and creativity and in other sectors. These analyses made it clear that **strength, economic and otherwise—of individuals, families, communities, states and nation—is a core priority for policymakers**, especially conservatives.

Discussion of this idea and related data, with interviewees as well as members of NASAA's staff and advisory committee, highlighted another key fact: **Most arts advocates do not typically think of the arts and public arts funding in terms of strength**. Based on analysis of current approaches to and narratives about arts funding, this guide recommends owning strength—both in how arts and creativity organizations and advocates see themselves and the field, and in how they frame communication with policymakers. **This shift in stance helps transform perception from arts and creativity as a nicety to a necessity**. See the Overarching Narrative section to learn more.

Why Public Funding

When making the case for public funding, it is essential to speak to how public funding ensures the benefits of arts and creativity accrue **in every community, including rural areas and small towns, and not in big cities alone**. During testing, numerous policymakers not only agreed with this statement but also defined and expanded upon it, frequently highlighting as a rationale for public funding that not all communities have large foundations, corporate headquarters and large donors. Arts advocates commonly make the case for public funding by describing how arts investments represent government done right (e.g., leveraging \$9 in additional resources for every federal dollar invested); this is an important part of making the case but needs to be secondary to the critical role that public funding alone plays. See the Why Public Funding section to learn more.

Using this Guide

This guide provides a core set of ideas and baseline language you can use to inform communication with policymakers.

- You can use the messages as source material—and combine them with your knowledge of the specific policymaker you are addressing—to craft your own version that carries this set of ideas with stories that are specific and relevant for you and the policymaker/influencer. The more your messages—and the stories that carry them—are customized to a specific policymaker, the more effective they will be.
- You can select from among the benefit messages, choosing those that will be most relevant to the policymaker/influencer with whom you are engaging.
- You can also use the sample messages in the guide as direct messages when you do not have the opportunity to customize.

Message Framework At-a-Glance

The framework depicted here includes an overarching narrative (the big idea/core story we want to convey), the core message (the central “elevator pitch” ideas that should be a takeaway from all messaging), a selection of benefits messages that serve as proof points and are effective with policymakers, the case for public funding, and the frame for customized calls to action. For examples of more specific messages and recommendations on how to customize them, please refer to the detailed message sections that follow.

OVERARCHING NARRATIVE

Arts and creativity strengthen our nation.

CORE MESSAGE

Arts and creativity make us stronger—as individuals, families, communities, states and as a country. They are a backbone of innovation, prosperity, and thriving people and places. Public funding for arts and creativity is a high-return investment that benefits every American in every city, town and rural community nationwide.

MESSAGES ON THE BENEFITS OF PUBLIC FUNDING FOR ARTS AND CREATIVITY

Economy

Arts and creativity are an American economic engine. They provide people with the foundation for creativity, equipping an innovative workforce, generating new ideas in every field, and keeping our nation globally competitive. Arts and creativity strengthen economic health by creating jobs in multiple industries, driving tourism, and providing opportunities for young people.

Health and Well-Being

Arts and creativity improve Americans’ health and well-being. They are one of the most effective treatments for trauma, depression and anxiety, including among our nation’s veterans. Arts and creativity reduce our susceptibility to stress-related diseases. And art therapies help to forestall Alzheimer’s and promote lifelong brain health, while helping us address the nation’s opioid crisis.

Communities

From rural towns to big cities, arts and creativity strengthen the fabric of America's communities. They celebrate local culture—both cherished and new traditions—telling stories of people and places. Arts and creativity promote connection and cohesion, foster the entrepreneurial spirit communities need to thrive, and create the kinds of communities where young people want to build families.

Education

Arts and creativity strengthen education. They set young people up for success, close the achievement gap and improve test scores. Arts and creativity spark human potential, promoting cognitive development and readiness to learn at every age. And they develop an innovative, globally competitive workforce by adding the key ingredient of creativity to STEAM education.

Beauty and Grace

Arts and creativity inspire us, and bring grace and beauty into our lives. They give us opportunities to share our creative gifts, and experience the creativity of others.

WHY PUBLIC FUNDING

Public funding for arts and creativity is a high-return investment in every town and rural community nationwide, not only in the biggest cities. It improves the lives of all Americans, equips an innovative workforce, and keeps us competitive globally. It is a great example of government done right that fuels public-private partnerships, leverages \$9 in additional funds for every federal dollar invested, and puts tax dollars and decision-making authority into state and local hands.

CALL-TO-ACTION FRAME

Arts and creativity strengthen our [nation/state/community]. We must increase our public investment so that all communities in [state/district/community] and nationwide have access to the many benefits they provide. I urge you to support [insert specific ask here].



Photo by Jeremy Mundth. Cribs by Brenda Baker, Farm Art DTour, Sauk Couty, 2012.

Overarching Narrative

When policymakers make the case for public funding for arts and creativity, the reasons they give nearly always speak to ways they strengthen us as individuals, communities, states and as a nation. Message testing validated the resonance of a strength-based frame across the political spectrum. Policymakers believe this statement to be true, they connect this idea to tangible benefits messages without prompting, and see the message as helping shift the narrative from arts as a “nicety” to arts as a “necessity.”

The frame of strength is seen as an important shift not only in messaging but also in advocacy posture. It shifts the emphasis away from making a case to prevent further budget cuts toward a powerful stance that owns the important benefits that arts and creativity deliver. In other words, it positions advocates to speak to what the arts offer, not just what they need (which is an important shift, given the many other needs that compete for public support). Other fields, such as clean energy and the social sciences, have overcome political opposition to grow their budgets meaningfully and with bipartisan support when they adopted advocacy messages rooted in concepts of strength.

THE OVERARCHING NARRATIVE THAT ADVOCATES SHOULD CONNECT TO AND REINFORCE THROUGH ALL MESSAGES, STORIES, IMAGERY AND SUPPORTING EVIDENCE IS:

Arts and creativity strengthen our nation.



Photo by Susie Kaldis Lowe. Street mural in Paonia, Colorado, involving more than 200 community members.

Core Message

A core message is the main distillation of the key ideas that need to be conveyed in all communication and engagement with policymakers, their staff and influencers. It is the basic elevator pitch. If you only have a few moments to make your case, this is the message you turn to. And if you have more time, you can expand on this thinking through stories and illustrative examples specific to the state, district or community a policymaker represents.

**THE NEW CORE MESSAGE FOR ADVOCACY FOR
PUBLIC FUNDING FOR ARTS AND CREATIVITY IS:**

Arts and creativity make us stronger—as individuals, families, communities, states and as a country. They are a backbone of innovation, prosperity, and thriving people and places. Public funding for arts and creativity is a high-return investment that benefits every American in every city, town and rural community nationwide.

While you will often put this into your own words, and provide relevant context for the policymaker you are engaging, it is important to touch on the five themes outlined below.

Linking all arts—not just “the arts”—with “creativity” has tested well across the political spectrum as has shifting away from “arts and culture.”

Strength, economic and otherwise—of individuals, families, communities, states and nation—is a core priority for policymakers, especially conservatives.

Arts and creativity make us **stronger**—as individuals, families, **communities**, states and as a country.

They are a backbone of **innovation**, **prosperity**, and thriving people and places. Public funding for arts and creativity is a **high-return investment** that benefits **every American in every city, town and rural community nationwide**.

Innovation, prosperity, and community—along with strength—emerged as key values in motivating policymaker support for public funding across sectors.

Focusing on the dividends paid to all of America, including rural communities, is crucial in making an effective case for public funding, and is a message that resonates across the political spectrum.

Framing public funding as a smart, effective, highly leveraged investment is key in lawmakers’ own arguments and performs well in message testing.



Courtesy of Grand Rapids Art Museum. "Concourse", Mark Sheinkman (American, b. 1963), Concourse, 2007; oil, alkyd and graphite on linen, 96 x 174-1/2 in., Grand Rapids Art Museum, museum purchase 2008.19

Benefits Messages

KEY FINDING

The level of priority and the motivation each benefit provides for public funding does not adhere to party lines or to where policymakers fall on the political spectrum. Select benefits to emphasize based upon the individual policymaker and their priorities—not their party affiliation.

Four tangible benefits of arts and creativity rose to the top during message testing as being the most effective in motivating policymakers to invest public funding. These priority benefits are **economy, health and well-being, communities** and **education**. These benefits are deeply interconnected; examples often illustrate more than one benefit in demonstrating the ways arts and creativity strengthen us.

Across the political spectrum, the most potent of these benefits are **economic strength** (national and local) and global competitiveness. While arts advocates already use this message, many lawmakers need arts advocates to more clearly connect the dots between creativity and innovation, and the ways they bolster economic growth and global competitiveness. This narrative guide (under Economy) is designed to help strengthen this case.

The benefits of **health and well-being**, **communities** and **education** are also motivating for many policymakers when making the case for public funding. The order of priority depends on the legislator. One key finding of the testing is that the level of priority and the motivation each benefit provides for public funding does not adhere to party lines or to where policymakers fall on the political spectrum. When customizing messages for a particular policymaker, it is important to select and customize benefits that are most important according to their other legislative priorities, their own messaging, and their background, personal convictions and deeply held values.

A fifth benefit—**beauty and grace**—does not generally motivate policymakers to invest public funding. It does resonate with some policymakers as an important part of what arts and creativity provide, in addition to the more tangible benefits above. Some policymakers report that they experience arts advocates as leading with messages about the intrinsic value and beauty of art and creativity. Our research indicates that it is important not to lead with this benefit but rather to position it as a distinctive supplement to the benefits of economy, health and well-being, education and community. Many industries offer economic, educational, civic or health benefits, but only the arts offer all of these while simultaneously nourishing our hearts and spirits.

On the following pages, this guide builds out core and supporting messages for each of these benefits. These statements are supported with a mix of sample data and stories—representing diverse states and congressional districts—to illustrate the benefit. The evidence and stories provided here are meant to serve as examples and inspiration that will spark your thinking and can be replaced with examples that will resonate most with the policymakers you engage and reflect the areas they represent.

PUTTING THIS GUIDE INTO PRACTICE

Before meeting with your legislator, research which benefits will make the most compelling case. If they serve on a committee or co-sponsor legislation for fields that benefit from arts and creativity (like the economy, education or public health), tailor your messages to dovetail those priorities.

SAMPLE STORIES AND EVIDENCE

When sharing benefit messages, you will want to include supporting evidence and illustrative stories relevant to your policymaker and the communities they represent. This guide includes a mix of examples of each to inspire selecting illustrative examples of your own.



Photo by Robin Dryer. Blacksmith at the Penland School of Crafts.

Economy

Benefits messages focused on economic success resonate with elected officials across the political spectrum. For many it is the leading benefits message and should generally be the first benefit message used when engaging policymakers. Though “innovation,” “jobs” and other economic benefits are already core to arts advocacy, many elected officials need more context for—and evidence of—how public funding for arts leads to these outcomes. In advocacy messaging, it is important to convey that building creative skills benefits all fields, is a critical ingredient in sparking innovation, and offers a core competitive advantage that makes companies, communities and our nation strong.

“Arts and arts education make our country stronger. They make us a country of innovators. No matter what their chosen field—whether it’s a trade, whether it’s a profession, whether it’s service, whether it’s manufacturing—young people who engage in the arts will rise to the top because of the creative skills they have developed, nurtured and harnessed.”

—Rep. Glenn “GT” Thompson (R-PA)

“The arts and culture industry contributes \$877 billion to our economy every year—and the Endowments are uniquely positioned to help smaller, rural areas access that energy in a way that private capital can’t or won’t.”

—Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME)

CORE ECONOMIC
BENEFIT MESSAGE**Arts and creativity are an American economic engine.**

They provide people with the foundation for creativity, equipping an innovative workforce, generating new ideas in every field, and keeping our nation globally competitive. Arts and creativity strengthen economic health by creating jobs in multiple industries, driving tourism, and providing opportunities for young people.

Economic Benefits Sub-Messages:

Select the sub-messages and customize with examples that will be the most relevant to the policymaker/influencer you are engaging.

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity provide people with the foundation for creative skills, equipping an innovative workforce and keeping America globally competitive. Engagement with the arts at all stages of life fosters people's creativity, enabling them to find innovative solutions to problems and generate new ideas in every field. By providing Americans with the foundation for creativity and innovation, arts and creativity ensure we are the innovators and inventors creating the ideas and technologies that others follow, helping us compete in a more connected world.

EXAMPLE

LinkedIn's 2020 Workplace Learning Report—grounded in research among managers and learning and development leaders globally—identified “creativity” as the number one soft skill companies most need and seek (LinkedIn Learning, 2020). (Creativity also topped LinkedIn's soft skills charts in 2019.) This is driven in part by the dissatisfaction many executives have—as many as 94%, according to one McKinsey survey (Harvard Business Review, 2019)—with the innovative performance of their workforce.

EXAMPLE

The World Economic Forum's 2018 Future of Jobs Report predicted that creativity, innovation and ideation—alongside analytical thinking and problem solving—will be essential skills for the workforce of the future (World Economic Forum, 2018).

EXAMPLE

As Kohler Company SVP Laura Kohler noted in a Congressional briefing in 2018, “A creative work force, particularly within a design-centric organization such as Kohler, is the backbone to drive product innovation and sustained business success. ... Today, Kohler Company is the number-one plumbing brand in the United States and China, and the number-one international brand in India. In order to lead and continue growing and gaining market share, we need dynamic and diverse teams of individuals who are right-brain and left-brain.” She added: “The arts also play a vital role in sustaining and growing successful businesses, by inspiring creative problem solving and successful innovation for consumers,” and that we need to “recognize and appreciate what the arts and creative industries offer in terms of elevating the American economy, as well as fostering exploration and innovation that lead to better solutions” (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2018).

EXAMPLE

When General Motors hired Robert A. Lutz to overhaul product development, he described his approach this way: “It’s more right brain. It’s more creative. I see us as being in the art business: art, entertainment and mobile sculpture, which, coincidentally, also happens to provide transportation” (Rae-Dupree, 2008).

EXAMPLE

Since a 2008 study by researchers at Michigan State University, we also understand that Nobel laureates in the sciences are significantly more likely than scientists in general to be involved in arts, crafts and performance (Root-Bernstein et al, 2008).

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity improve the economic health of communities. By creating jobs in every congressional district—in the arts and many other industries, from hospitality and food service to retail and manufacturing—arts drive economic revitalization, increase property values, and reverse “brain drain” by providing opportunities for young people.

EXAMPLE

In 2017, arts and cultural economic activity represented an \$877.8 Billion industry providing 5.1 million jobs and adding \$404.9 billion in wages (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2017).

EXAMPLE

In North Carolina and Tennessee, states with the largest rural arts economies, the value added exceeded \$13 billion in each of those states. In North Carolina alone, arts and cultural production provided 118,000 jobs. In South Carolina, Alabama, Kentucky, Oklahoma and Iowa, the value added to their economies ranged from \$4 billion to 5 billion, and resulted in 40,000 to 50,000 jobs in each state (National Endowment for the Arts, 2018).

EXAMPLE

Research dating back to 2002 shows a clear positive association between the prevalence of artists in a workforce and economic dynamism, including increases in high-tech employment and new businesses (Florida, 2002).



Courtesy of Marsha Evans. Coalition at Crown Royal's Big Muddy.

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity drive tourism in rural communities and cities alike.

Arts and creativity play key roles in tourism economies across the country, drawing people to events and experiences and powering small business, including lodging and dining.

EXAMPLE

The Clay Trail, Fiber Arts Trail and other arts trails crisscross New Mexico, promoting the state's diverse cultural traditions and demonstrating the power of creative entrepreneurs to spark rural economic development. Across the state, arts and culture account for \$5.6 billion in annual economic activity and one of every 10 jobs (Pattison, 2019).

EXAMPLE

In 2018, the Red Ants Pants Music Festival—founded just seven years earlier—drew 18,000 tourists to White Sulphur Springs, Montana, a town of about 950 people in what was once the poorest county in the nation (Paige, 2018). The event generates nearly \$3 million in direct economic activity each year and event proceeds support rural communities and family farms and ranches. The town's revitalized Main Street now boasts a brewery and bakery, among other new businesses (Wiltz, 2016). Of the 116 million American adults who traveled more than 50 miles one way in 2012, nearly 30 percent extended their trip to participate in an arts or cultural heritage activity or event. Of those who did so, 40 percent extended their trip by at least one night.



Photo by Andy Larsson. Concert at the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge.

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity help communities rebuild economically in the aftermath of disaster and trauma. Arts organizations help attract design-driven businesses (from apparel to automobiles), including to rural communities, and research shows that design-driven businesses fare better during economic recoveries.

EXAMPLE

Once home to the world's largest tannery, the small town of Prattsville, New York, was already struggling when Hurricane Irene hit in 2011, destroying 40 percent of homes and devastating local businesses. In the following weeks, residents met to lay out a recovery plan, including the creation of the Prattsville Art Center as an anchor for developing a Main Street cultural district, strengthening connections between urban and rural populations, and bringing creativity and new ideas to this historic American town. Designed to help the community “build back better than before,” the center was up and running within months of the disaster (Barton, 2014).

EXAMPLE

Arts and creativity spur economic growth for rural communities during periods of recovery and growth. We see evidence of this in how wages increase faster in more creative communities and industries. An analysis of the Rural Establishment Innovation Survey and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data demonstrated that rural areas that are home to design-integrated businesses benefited from faster growth in average weekly earnings during the economic recovery period of 2010–2014. The annual wage premium for workers in design-oriented communities and industries is estimated to be \$2,600 over that of workers in rural communities that did not have a design-integrated business (National Endowment for the Arts, 2017; Wojan and Nichols, 2018). Communities with design-integrated businesses also typically have one or more arts organizations (Wojan and Nichols, 2018) given the importance of artistic communities in attracting those industries.



Courtesy of UF Health Shands Arts in Medicine Program. Arts and the Opioid Epidemic.

Health and Well-Being

For many members of Congress, public health and people’s well-being are public policy priorities—particularly where those policies also address other priorities, like putting spiraling health care costs in check and doing right by our nation’s active military and veterans. The tangible benefits of arts and creativity for our health and well-being are seen by many policymakers as effective arguments when making the case for public funding.

Priorities that surfaced during message testing include: Supporting trauma recovery and treating brain injuries among active military and veterans; helping address the nation’s opioid crisis; and abating Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia.

*“It’s so important to have that expression as we are working with our wounded warriors ... people recovering from stroke, or a child who has a speech challenge, or someone who has just lost someone very special in their life ... **it is the arts, through song and music and dance and other forms of expression, that allow us to heal, to recover, to grow, and then to become more resilient.**”*

—Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN)

*“We have examples of very effective uses of the arts to foster healing in the district. One of the key aspects of River Hospital’s program is art therapy. **I’ve had an opportunity to visit with soldiers who participated, and they said it saved their lives often talking about the arts as an important part of the program.**”*

—Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY)

CORE HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING
BENEFIT MESSAGE

Arts and creativity improve Americans' health and well-being. They are one of the most effective treatments for trauma, depression and anxiety, including among our nation's veterans. Arts and creativity reduce our susceptibility to stress-related diseases. And art therapies help to forestall Alzheimer's and promote lifelong brain health, while helping us address the nation's opioid crisis.

Health and Well-Being Benefit Sub-Messages:

Select the sub-messages and customize with examples that will be the most relevant to the policymaker/influencer you are engaging.

SUB MESSAGE

Art and art therapies are one of the most effective treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and depression. These therapies help service members, veterans and others who have experienced trauma to express themselves, to make sense of their past, and to see themselves as creators of their future.

EXAMPLE

Art therapies are an increasingly valued and cost-effective treatment. The National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE) at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center has found that integrated art therapy is one of the most effective techniques for treating PTSD, traumatic brain injury and psychological health conditions like depression (Lesser, 2017). Since the U.S. Department of Defense, Veterans Affairs and the National Endowment for the Arts launched The Healing Art Center at Walter Reed, art therapy has become a mainstay offering. Building on this success, this partnership has expanded through the Creative Forces program, which is extending art therapy to more than a dozen clinical sites and telehealth services nationwide (National Endowment for the Arts, n.d.; U.S. Department of Defense, n.d.).

EXAMPLE

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) impacts the lives of many of our nation's active military, wounded warriors and other veterans. About 11–20% of veterans from Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom alone have PTSD in a given year (Department of Defense, 2020).

EXAMPLE

Rusty Noesner of Harrisonberg, Virginia, was introduced to the Creative Forces program after returning from Kandahar, Afghanistan, where he served with Navy Seal Team 10 from 2010–11, to treat traumatic brain injury. He said of the experience, “Throughout that creative process, it’s not always easy—that self-discovery is essential in healing” (Lyle, 2016). He has gone on to found War Paints, a nonprofit that promotes art therapies for veterans.

NOTE: A benefit of particular priority for elected officials across the political spectrum is the role of art therapy in supporting trauma recovery and treating brain injuries among active military and veterans. It is important, however, not to overstate the role of veterans programs in proportion to overall arts programs. Wherever possible, be specific about the programs and impacts on the lives of veterans in the district of the member you engage.



Soldier Painting

SUB MESSAGE

Art and creativity keep people healthy, mitigate pain, promote healing and reduce people's susceptibility to stress-related diseases, like heart disease and hypertension.

EXAMPLE

Several studies show the positive impact of arts and creativity on pain mitigation and patients' anxiety while promoting healing—all of which helps to reduce the use of sedatives and anesthesia while shortening hospital stays (State of the Field Committee, 2009). These findings are validated by numerous studies in different contexts and across the lifespan. Examples include pain reduction for those experiencing chronic pain (Koebner et al., 2019), limiting infants' pain during blood collection (Bergomi et al., 2014) and palliative care and pain reduction for those in hospice care (Hollis, 2010). (See Hanna, Rollins and Lewis, 2017 for additional examples.)

EXAMPLE

A meta-analysis of 31 peer-reviewed studies revealed an “overwhelmingly positive cognitive/affective/quality-of-life outcomes for various participatory art forms” (Noice, Noice and Kramer, 2014). Health benefits associated with studies in the review include: Improved attention control; improved resting heart rates; higher physical function scores; improved cognitive, tactile and motor skills; decreased levels of stress and anxiety; improved general health, and much more.



Photo by Jim Walker. Big Car.

SUB MESSAGE

Art and creativity enhance memory retention and lifelong brain health, forestalling Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia and memory loss.

EXAMPLE

About 5.4 million people in the U.S. manage dementia. Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia and their associated disabilities result in high dependence on caregivers, and have an outsized impact on the health care system (Wang and Li, 2016). Cost-effective treatments are essential for managing dementia at scale.

EXAMPLE

For these patients, art therapy is seen as a “vital intervention” for delaying further deterioration of cognitive abilities. For patients who already have impaired language abilities, art techniques offer the comfort of being able to express themselves through lines and color when words are no longer accessible (Wang and Li, 2016). Patients also report improved quality of life and satisfaction from the self-expression that these therapies enable (Stewart, 2004).

EXAMPLE

Engagement in artistic activities are also linked with healthy brain function that supports memory processes, serotonin production and positive emotional states, and spatial-temporal processing (Kruk et al., 2004). Artistic activities and the multi-sensory experiences they provide have been shown to support memory retention and brain health at every stage of life.



Courtesy of State Foundation on Culture and the Arts. Young Artists of Hawai'i exhibits 2019.

SUB MESSAGE

Art therapy increases the efficacy of addiction treatment and recovery, giving policymakers a powerful tool in the arsenal needed to fight our nation's opioid crisis.

EXAMPLE

Every day, about 130 people die overdosing on opioids (NIH, 2018). The National Institute on Drug Abuse refers to this as a national crisis for public health and social and economic welfare.

EXAMPLE

Art therapy is a powerful tool for overcoming denial and shame related to addiction, and motivates patients to make changes in their lives that lead to positive health outcomes (Aletraris et. al, 2014). The American Addiction Center and others tout the particular benefits of music therapy. These techniques help people to deal with the underlying disorders that increase an individual's propensity for addiction, increase readiness and motivation for substance abuse disorder treatment, while also abating cravings and improving outcomes relative to withdrawals and relapse (National Endowment for the Arts, 2020).

EXAMPLE

The Appalachian Artisan Center is partnering with the Hickory Hill Recovery Center and Knott County Drug Court to supplement addiction treatments and offer sober environments for recreation and community building. As one participant said, "I needed friends. Sober friends. Pottery really, really did save me. ... Look at me now. Thank God [the Appalachian Artisan Center] was here." Participants recently folded 1,000 origami cranes, which they strung together into garlands to offer hope and healing to COVID-19 patients and health care professionals throughout their region in Kentucky.



Photo by Cameron Davidson, Crooked Road.

Communities

The present and future strength, pride, cohesion and economic success of communities is of key importance to policymakers across the political spectrum, and spanning those who represent our most rural areas to our largest cities. Grounded in local priorities, stories and opportunities, effective messaging illustrates the core benefits of public funding for arts and creativity, which invests in communities of all sizes in every congressional district in the nation.

*“These organizations are **making significant contributions to our communities through promoting access to and participation in the arts and reaching out to young people.** They are leaders in helping promote a public good.”*

—Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)

*“The arts are essential to West Virginia; they **play a major role in our communities and how we tell our stories.**”*

—Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV)

CORE
COMMUNITY
BENEFIT MESSAGE

From rural towns to big cities, arts and creativity strengthen the fabric of America's communities.

They celebrate local culture—both cherished and new traditions—telling stories of people and places. Arts and creativity promote connection and cohesion, foster the entrepreneurial spirit communities need to thrive, and create the kinds of communities where young people want to build families.

Community Benefit Sub-Messages:

Select the sub-messages and customize with examples that will be the most relevant to the policymaker/influencer you are engaging.

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity celebrate local culture, telling stories of people and places. Arts and creativity of all kinds—from storytelling, filmmaking and theater to music, painting and traditional folk arts—build, express and honor local culture, heritage and stories, which are essential to the strength, pride and vitality of communities in every corner of our nation.

EXAMPLE

Founded in 1969, the nonprofit Appalshop has become an anchor for the community of Whitesburg, Kentucky. Fusing technology and art, Appalshop tells the stories, celebrates the culture and voices the concerns of people living in Appalachia while providing jobs, helping retain young people, and pumping more than \$1.5 million into the local economy each year (Kittridge, 2017).

EXAMPLE

In the aftermath of the wildfires that devastated Tennessee in late 2016, an oral history and visual illustration project—supported by an Our Town grant from the National Endowment for the Arts—preserved memories of the event for future generations and helped the region heal and move forward (Sutton, 2020).

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity promote connection and cohesion within and between communities. Projects rooted in arts and creativity are powerful vehicles for strengthening relationships and building new connections across communities. Involvement in arts and creativity also creates opportunities for community participation and increases civic engagement and volunteerism.

EXAMPLE

Arts involvement has been shown to increase understanding, empathy, acceptance and connection across race, class, heritage and immigration status—helping to both bond and bridge communities (Rabkin, 2017).

EXAMPLE

Engagement with arts and creativity increases participation in wider social and civic behaviors, like voting, volunteering and attending community meetings. Research conducted in the United States and United Kingdom indicates that high school students who participate in the arts are twice as likely to volunteer than those who don't and 20% more likely to vote as young adults (Mowlah et al, 2014; Tsegaye et al, 2016).

EXAMPLE

Art at Work brings poetry and theater projects to the Portland, Maine Police Department. The multi-year program gives voice to the lived experiences of both police officers and community members, resulting in deeper mutual understanding and respect (Thin Blue Lines, n.d.).

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity foster the entrepreneurial spirit communities need to survive and thrive. Many small businesses are based on the arts, and many others rely upon the creative skills honed by arts and creativity. The existence of organizations focused on arts and creativity is a key indicator of business innovation potential in rural communities.

EXAMPLE

The southwest Virginia artisan network 'Round the Mountain, Southwest Virginia's artisan network, turns artisans into entrepreneurs through workshops, coaching and marketing assistance. The allied heritage music trail, Crooked Road, had an estimated economic impact of \$9.2 million in 2015, creating more than 130 jobs across 19 counties (National Governors Association, 2019).

EXAMPLE

The probability that a business will be a substantive innovator rises from 60% in rural counties that host no performing arts organization to 85% in the rural counties that host four or more organizations (National Endowment for the Arts, 2017).



Photo by Andy Greenman for the Wyoming Business Council. Lander Live.

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity create the kinds of communities where young people choose to stay and build families. By offering entertainment, family enrichment and opportunities for creative engagement—and by contributing to strong and resilient local economies—arts and creativity play a key role in attracting and retaining young families and helping communities counter the “brain drain.”

EXAMPLE

The USDA’s Rural Establishment Innovation Survey has shown that rural counties with performing arts organizations experience population growth three times higher than those without, provide residents with higher incomes, and recover more quickly from recession (National Endowment for the Arts, 2017).



Photo by Sara Frank. Pottery Demonstration.



Education

Courtesy of State Foundation on Culture and the Arts.
Hawaii Teaching Artists Fellowship.

Providing our nation's children with a high-quality education and preparing them to succeed in life and contribute to a strong, globally competitive economy are core priorities for many policymakers across the political spectrum. Arts and creativity are an essential element of quality education.

*“When creative arts, such as painting, poetry, dance and music are incorporated into a school’s curriculum, **children actually excel in other disciplines and are more successful in the long term.** ... Arts education prepares American workers to compete in the global marketplace and what some are calling the new ‘economy of ideas.’”*

— Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS)

*“When I talk to business leaders, I never hear anybody say they are looking for a rote learner. They tell me **they need people who are creative, who can come up with good ideas, solve problems, come up with new products and new designs.**”*

—Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

CORE EDUCATION
BENEFIT MESSAGE

Arts and creativity strengthen education. They set young people up for success, close the achievement gap and improve test scores. Arts and creativity spark human potential, promoting cognitive development and readiness to learn at every age. And they develop an innovative, globally competitive workforce by adding the key ingredient of creativity to STEAM education.

Education Benefit Sub-Messages:

Select the sub-messages and customize with examples that will be the most relevant to the policymaker/influencer you are engaging.

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity set young people up for success. By improving academic achievement and test scores and keeping kids in school, arts strengthen education and play a key role in providing every child with the opportunity for success in life. As a field that promotes hard work and discipline, young people learn the value of practice, patience and persistence.

EXAMPLE

In a randomized controlled trial study of the Houston Arts Access Initiative— involving 42 schools and more than 10,000 3rd- through 8th-grade students— the Brookings Institute found that a substantial increase in arts educational experiences reduced discipline problems, improved writing scores, and increased students' empathy, academic engagement and college aspirations (Kisida and Bowen, 2019).

EXAMPLE

Arts-rich educational experiences are associated with improved academic outcomes, stronger test scores in science and writing, and higher graduation rates from both high school and college, especially among teenagers and young adults of lower socioeconomic status (Catterall, Dumais and Hampden-Thompson, 2012). Adults who had studied music, theater or the visual arts also scored higher on standardized vocabulary tests than non-arts peers (Elpus, 2013).

EXAMPLE

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that children who studied a science curriculum that included arts-based education remembered more of what they had learned than children whose curriculum lacked an arts component (Hardiman et al, 2019; Klass, 2019).

EXAMPLE

Longitudinal research tracked 22,000 students for 12 years, and found that students with arts-rich experiences in high school perform better academically than students who lacked those experiences (Catterall et al., 2012). This same research showed that high school students with high levels of arts engagement were (when compared with those with low arts engagement) five times more likely to graduate high school and were three times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree.

EXAMPLE

Diverse studies demonstrate that arts education reduces drop-out rates. (See Brown, 2017 for a review.) This is valuable in terms of both an individual's opportunities and public benefits. As one analysis found: "Compared to a high school dropout, a single high school graduate yields a public benefit of over \$200,000 more in lower government spending and higher tax revenues. If the number of dropouts were cut in half, the government would likely see a total of \$45 billion in savings and additional revenue" (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).



Photo by George Long. Bravo Youth Orchestra.

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity close the achievement gap. When integrated into education curricula, arts and creativity help level the playing field by improving language and reasoning skills for students from communities impacted by disparities.

EXAMPLE

Four longitudinal studies by James Catterall concluded that “Teenagers and young adults of low-socioeconomic status (SES) who have a history of in-depth arts involvement show better academic outcomes than do low-SES youth who have less arts involvement. They earn better grades and demonstrate higher rates of college enrollment and attainment” (Catterall et al., 2012). Students with arts intensive experiences are also more likely to earn “mostly A’s” in college.

EXAMPLE

The Settlement Music School in Philadelphia incorporated an arts enrichment program into its curriculum for 3- to 5-year-olds. Achievement levels increased and, after one year, students showed advances three times higher in receptive vocabulary (a key predictor of academic success) than students at a comparison preschool (Brown, Benedett and Armistead, 2010).

EXAMPLE

Research on arts education in early childhood education programs has shown that students who participate in music activities demonstrate improved focus, tolerance and cognitive abilities. These effects are two to three times higher for children in rural areas and from lower-income households (Gazzaniga, Asbury and Rich, 2008; Menzer, 2015; Tsegaye et al, 2016).

EXAMPLE

Students at Public Middle School 223 in the Bronx, serving the lowest-income district in all of New York, participated in a four-year arts integration program that resulted in lower absenteeism and improved scores in both language arts and math (Lynch, 2016).

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity spark human potential. Involvement in artistic and creative activities promotes cognitive development and readiness to learn at every age, making people more creative and improving their capacity for lifelong learning.

EXAMPLE

As Scholastic notes, creativity promotes divergent thinking, which they define as: Making new connections, enlarging the limits of knowledge, and making space for new ideas (Honig, n.d.). This divergent thinking helps people (particularly young people) develop complex and creative thinking skills—enabling them to better deal with ambiguity—and fosters a passion for in-depth learning (ibid.) that can continue throughout one’s life.

EXAMPLE

Research also indicates that arts-rich education increases students’ ability to think flexibly and adaptively. Sustained engagement in arts and creativity have been shown to significantly improve children’s self-efficacy or sense of control of their surroundings (Catterall and Peppler, 2007; Luftig, 2000).

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity develop an innovative, globally competitive workforce. Adding the crucial ingredient of creativity to STEAM education, arts-rich educational approaches help prepare a workforce ready to take on challenges and seize opportunities.

EXAMPLE

In a study conducted by IBM—involving face-to-face interviews with more than 1,500 chief executives worldwide—CEOs identified “creativity” as the single most important leadership attribute necessary for future successful business enterprises (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2010).



Photo by Stacey McRae. Art by Cappy Thompson.

Beauty and Grace

The fifth benefit category is “beauty” and “grace.” This category includes elements of the intrinsic value of art that are at times front-and-center in arts advocacy. For most legislators, however, this category is not a compelling rationale for public funding. As one appropriations staffer noted during message testing, “Beauty is the icing on the cake, and what everyone wants to fund is bread.”

Beauty and grace nevertheless have salience for some policymakers, conservatives and progressives alike, when framed as an added benefit. That is: In addition to the tangible ways arts and creativity strengthen our economy, health and well-being, communities and education, they also offer intangible benefits that enrich our lives, fill us with wonder, and enable us to express our talents.

“The arts elevate us, they speak to our souls, they connect us to each other. The arts transcend racial, ethnic, gender and class boundaries.”

—Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM)

“Folks do not have to look far to see Wyoming’s creative side because art comes from all corners of our state. ... These artists help make our beautiful state even more beautiful.”

—Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY)

**CORE BEAUTY
AND GRACE
BENEFIT MESSAGE**

Arts and creativity inspire us, and bring grace and beauty into our lives. They give all of us opportunities to share our creative gifts, and experience the creativity of others.

SUB MESSAGE

Arts and creativity bring out the strengths and talents in each of us. They help us express those talents in ways others can experience and be inspired by, and enable us to experience others' gifts.

Our lives are enriched, our communities more vibrant, and our ideas more vital when imbued with the beauty and grace arts and creativity provide.

The beauty we experience through the ideas and creativity of people in every community is part of what strengthens our nation. The public art and local music festivals, the museums and theaters, the handcrafts and church choirs and many other forms of expression help us find inspiration, meaning, connection and joy.



Courtesy of Art Prize Michigan.



Courtesy of California Arts Council. Suite J-Town.

Why Public Funding

The benefits of arts and creativity are evident for many elected officials. But valuing art and creativity and their role in society is not enough to motivate investments of taxpayer dollars. For this, arts advocates need to make the case that public funding is essential.

CORE MESSAGE FOR "WHY PUBLIC FUNDING"

Public funding for arts and creativity is a high-return investment in every town and rural community nationwide, not only in the biggest cities. It improves the lives of all Americans, equips an innovative workforce, and keeps us competitive globally. It is a great example of government done right that fuels public-private partnerships, leverages \$9 in additional funds for every federal dollar invested, and puts tax dollars and decision-making authority into state and local hands.

This case has four critical components. It is strongest when it includes all of these arguments and in this order.

1

Makes the case that public funding does what no other source can—ensures benefits in every community and not just those with large foundations, corporate headquarters and donors.

2

Makes the case for strength and benefits delivered to people, communities and the economy.

Public funding for arts and creativity is a high-return investment in **every town and rural community**

- **nationwide, not only in the biggest cities.** It **improves the lives of all Americans, equips an innovative workforce, and keeps us competitive** globally. It is a great example of government done right **that fuels public-private**
- **partnerships, leverages \$9 in additional funds for every federal dollar invested,** and **puts tax dollars and decision-making authority into state and local hands.**

3

Makes the case for leverage—that public dollars unlock others.

4

Local control triggers the belief that funding will better meet local needs while bringing resources back to the district/state.



Photo by George Long, NASAA. Antoine Hunter.

Calls-to-Action

No advocacy conversation is complete without the call to action or “ask.” This is the moment your conversation is building toward. Message testing indicates that calls to action are stronger when they articulate how outcomes will benefit the people and communities that the policymaker you are engaging represents, as well as broader communities and the nation as a whole.

BASIC CALL-TO-ACTION FRAME

Arts and creativity strengthen our nation. We must increase our public investment in the many benefits they provide to people in [our state/district/community/] and nationwide.

I urge you to support [insert specific ask here].

Example Calls-to-Action:

Below are a couple of example calls to action. This message framework is, however, designed to be applicable for motivating public funding for arts and creativity in diverse contexts, extending far beyond those listed here. We recommend using this guide to tee up conversations for the full range of arts advocacy, and to customize your ask in the way that is most relevant to those you need to influence.

SAMPLE ASK

National Endowment for the Arts grant funding

I urge you to support increasing National Endowment for the Arts grant funding to extend the tangible benefits of arts and creativity to every community in this nation **[Insert local example here]**, fuel public-private partnerships, and put tax dollars and decision-making authority into state and local hands.

LOCAL EXAMPLE

I urge you to support legislation that will **triple** NEA grant funding to further extend the tangible benefits of arts and creativity to every community in **Oregon and across the** nation. We need you to put tax dollars and decision-making authority into local hands—**from Warrenton to Drain, and Portland to Prineville—where they will generate the economic and health benefits we have discussed today.**

SAMPLE ASK

State arts funding

I urge you to support legislation increasing state arts funding to extend the tangible benefits of arts and creativity to every community in this state, fuel public-private partnerships, and put tax dollars and decision-making authority into local hands. **[Insert local example here.]**

LOCAL EXAMPLE

I urge you to support legislation that will **double Texas's** arts funding, to fuel public-private partnerships and put tax dollars and decision-making authority into local hands. **This will help to diversify local economies, generate revenue, attract investment and extend the tangible benefits for people's health and community cohesion that we have discussed today, from Abilene to Yorktown and every Texan town and city in between.**

SAMPLE ASK

COVID-19 recovery packages

In the midst of COVID-19, artists, musicians and arts organizations have adapted their programming and held communities together while helping people cope and heal. **[Insert local example here.]** But arts organizations and creative industries are second only to travel and hospitality industries in the scale of economic losses they have sustained due to COVID-19. Arts organizations are ready to help put America back to work in towns, cities and rural communities nationwide as we recover and rebuild in the aftermath of COVID-19. I urge you to include funding for arts organizations among the diverse employment programs that will be part of the next recovery package.

LOCAL EXAMPLE

In the midst of COVID-19, artists, musicians and arts organizations have held communities together while helping people cope and heal. **Here in Lexington, the Lyric Theatre shifted to virtual programming to engage the community in their shared history; and Cosmic Charlie's established COVIDcasts featuring central Kentucky musicians to connect people even while they cannot safely gather.** But arts organizations and creative industries are second only to travel and hospitality industries in the scale of economic losses they have sustained due to COVID-19. Arts organizations are ready to help put America back to work in towns, cities and rural communities nationwide as we recover and rebuild in the aftermath of COVID-19. I urge you to include funding for arts organizations among the diverse employment programs that will be part of the next recovery package.



Courtesy of the Texas Commission on the Arts. Elisio Garcia.

Appendices

Appendix A: Art and Creativity Strengthen America Message Worksheet

This worksheet is a tool to help you prepare your messaging in advance of meetings or other engagement with policymakers or influencers and for testimony in support of public funding for arts and creativity. Use this worksheet to customize the message framework to enhance how your advocacy will resonate with the policymaker’s/policy influencer’s priorities and the needs of the communities they serve.

Worksheet in preparation for meeting with:

Key topics or reason for meeting:

Date/time:

Location/contact number/link:

Key Questions

GOAL

What is your central goal for this engagement or communication?
What do you want them to do?

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TIMING

What is the most impactful window of time to make contact? *(Determine when key decisions are likely to be made and determine the best calendar for making contact.)*

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BENEFITS MESSAGES

Which benefits will be most relevant and motivating to the policymaker you engage?

(Remember: You do not need to use all of the benefits. Pick those that will be most compelling for this policymaker.)

What is the right order of priority for discussing them?

What data and/or stories would help to illustrate each benefit message you select in the district/state/community that the policymaker represents?

Economy

Arts and creativity are an American economic engine. They provide people with the foundation for creativity, equipping an innovative workforce, generating new ideas in every field, and keeping our nation globally competitive. Arts and creativity strengthen economic health by creating jobs in multiple industries, driving tourism, and providing opportunities for young people.

YOUR TAILORED MESSAGES, STORIES AND/OR EVIDENCE INSPIRED BY THE BENEFIT MESSAGE AT LEFT

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Health and Well-Being

Arts and creativity improve Americans' health and well-being. They are one of the most effective treatments for trauma, depression and anxiety, including among our nation's veterans. Arts and creativity reduce our susceptibility to stress-related diseases. And art therapies help to forestall Alzheimer's and promote lifelong brain health, while helping us address the nation's opioid crisis.

YOUR TAILORED MESSAGES, STORIES AND/OR EVIDENCE INSPIRED BY THE BENEFIT MESSAGE AT LEFT

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Communities

From rural towns to big cities, arts and creativity strengthen the fabric of America’s communities. They celebrate local culture—both cherished and new traditions—telling stories of people and places. Arts and creativity promote connection and cohesion, foster the entrepreneurial spirit communities need to thrive, and create the kinds of communities where young people want to build families.

YOUR TAILORED MESSAGES, STORIES AND/OR EVIDENCE INSPIRED BY THE BENEFIT MESSAGE AT LEFT

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Education

Arts and creativity strengthen education. They set young people up for success, close the achievement gap and improve test scores. Arts and creativity spark human potential, promoting cognitive development and readiness to learn at every age. And they develop an innovative, globally competitive workforce by adding the key ingredient of creativity to STEAM education.

YOUR TAILORED MESSAGES, STORIES AND/OR EVIDENCE INSPIRED BY THE BENEFIT MESSAGE AT LEFT

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Beauty and Grace

Arts and creativity inspire us, and bring grace and beauty into our lives. They give us opportunities to share our creative gifts, and experience the creativity of others.

YOUR TAILORED MESSAGES, STORIES AND/OR EVIDENCE INSPIRED BY THE BENEFIT MESSAGE AT LEFT

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WHY PUBLIC FUNDING

Which communities and towns in this policymaker’s district/state should you mention when discussing the benefits for “every town, not just big cities”?

What data and stories would help to illustrate this message specific to the policymaker’s district/state/community?

Public funding for arts and creativity is a high-return investment in every town and rural community nationwide, not only in the biggest cities. It improves the lives of all Americans, equips an innovative workforce, and keeps us competitive globally. It is a great example of government done right that fuels public-private partnerships, leverages \$9 in additional funds for every federal dollar invested, and puts tax dollars and decision-making authority into state and local hands.

YOUR PUBLIC FUNDING MESSAGE

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CALLS-TO-ACTION

What is your specific ask? *(Remember: Calls to action are most effective when they are for a specific policy change or budget amount and in a specific timeframe.)*

What else does this policymaker need to hear to move them to a “Yes?” *(E.g., Will opportunities for leverage be lost if this does not move forward now? Does it help to mention other policymakers who are on board? Are there opportunities for this policymaker to demonstrate leadership or to help advance key messages with the public or media?)*

Arts and creativity strengthen our [community/state/nation]. We must increase our public investment in the many benefits they provide to people in [our state/district/community/] and nationwide. I urge you to support [insert specific ask here].

YOUR CALL(S)-TO-ACTION

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Appendix B: Research Background and Key Findings

The metanarrative and supporting message framework outlined in this guide is the result of both **formative research** (that informed crafting of the draft narrative and message frameworks) and **message testing** (used to refine the narrative and message frameworks).

1. Formative research

The formative research phase consisted of two components:

- **Literature review and discourse analysis** with an emphasis on research related to values-drivers and priorities of diverse policymakers, their influencers and constituents. Sources included academic research about conservative values, public polling (such as NASAA’s 2017 GOP registered voter survey), reports by independent think tanks, existing arts advocacy materials, articles both for and against public funding for arts, culture and creativity, among others. The analysis also included statements by policymakers, both arguments in favor of and opposed to arts funding.
- **Research into other fields and movements** that have established political will among diverse policymakers and increased public funding. This included desk research and executive interviews with industry leaders, congressional staff, advocates and others associated with the following fields:
 - Clean energy
 - Land and Water Conservation Fund
 - National Science Foundation

This research uncovered several key findings, which included:

- Conservative arguments for public funding for arts and creativity are typically rooted in concepts of “**strength**,” ranging across the ways they strengthen individuals, families, communities, states and the nation.
- Two of three sectors we studied have diversified political will and increased public funding by connecting their work to concepts of **innovation** and **global competitiveness**.

- There are four values that resonate with policymakers across the political spectrum and motivate public funding for arts and creativity:
 - **Strength**
 - **Innovation**
 - **Prosperity**
 - **Community**
- Policymaker champions of public funding for arts and creativity **span the political spectrum**. They include Tea Party conservatives, rank-and-file Republicans, moderates and progressives, and they represent rural regions and metropolitan areas alike.
- When these champions speak of arts and creativity, their arguments for public funding typically focus on the tangible benefits they provide, such as for the economy, health and well-being, communities and/or education.

For more information from the formative research phase, contact Ryan Stubbs at ryan.stubbs@nasaa-arts.org.

2. Message testing

Informed by this research and the prototype message framework developed at NASAA's 2018 Policy Think Tank, Metropolitan Group developed a draft meta-narrative and message framework which it refined through iterative message testing protocols. This research included:

- Two Advisory Group meetings, among an ad hoc advisory group of national and state arts advocacy leaders with diverse political and geographic backgrounds recruited specifically to guide this work
- 27 message testing interviews with an over-sample of conservative perspectives:
 - 13 elected officials (current and former, n = 6) and/or their staff
 - Nine Republicans (three Senate, five House, one mayor)
 - Four Democrats (two Senate, two House)
 - 10 arts advocates
 - Two appropriations staffers (one Senate, one House)
 - One National Endowment for the Arts executive
 - One lobbyist

Key findings from the message testing phase included:

- **The message frame we tested resonates** with policymakers across the political spectrum. Testing also validated that the values at the core of the message framework do motivate public funding.
- **Strength** is experienced as new and additive to arts advocacy, and in ways that shift the narrative from arts being a “nicety” to their being a “necessity.” Interviewees believed this frame to be true, and independently connected it to benefits messages even before they were presented with benefits messages. Strength is also experienced as a powerful new advocacy stance. One that shifts from stances that defend current or prior funding and position art and creativity as an enhancement, toward a stance that owns the importance of art and creativity for our society and makes the case for significant funding increases.
- The frame “**arts and creativity**” expands stakeholders’ perception of who the field serves and of its full value, which is consistent with findings of the Creating Connection initiative. It is a frame that more effectively opens the door for engagement than leading with frames like “arts and culture” or “the arts.” Note: The finding is not to never use “arts and culture,” but not to lead with it as the description of the field.
- Some policymakers need advocates to connect the dots to demonstrate **how “creativity” leads to “innovation”** and therefore economic strength and global competitiveness.
- To make the case for public funding, a key point (that is often missing or secondary in current advocacy) is that **public funding ensures the benefits of arts and creativity happen in “every community,”** including rural and small towns—and not just the biggest cities. This is a compelling rationale for public funding across the political spectrum. The framing “and not just the biggest cities” mitigates the “if people want art they should donate, get corporate sponsors and sell tickets” argument. After hearing this frame, policymakers often complete the thought on their own that many places which need arts and culture do not have the local resources that the biggest cities do.
- Among the **tangible benefits** of arts and creativity, four are most commonly motivating for public funding:
 - **Economic success** and **global competitiveness.** This was consistently selected as the most motivating set of benefits for motivating public funding for arts and creativity.
 - **Health and well-being.**
 - **Communities.**
 - **Education.**

- A fifth benefit, **beauty and grace, is not motivating** as a stand alone benefit for public funding, but is valued as an additional benefit for some policymakers. In the discourse analysis and message testing, some conservative policymakers refer to the power and importance of the God-given gifts expressed through arts and creativity. Message testing and the formative policymaker discourse analysis indicated that it is important not to lead with this benefit, but rather to position it as in addition to the benefits of economy, health and well-being, education and community. The **selection, priority order and emphasis** of these benefits must be customized for each elected official.

Note: The level of priority associated with these benefits does not follow neat party lines. It is important to look at each policymaker's record and priorities to determine which benefits will be most motivating for them, and in what priority order.

- Some tried-and-true arts advocacy messages are very effective (e.g., public-private partnerships, each federal dollar being matched by \$9 dollars of additional funding), and they are stronger when preceded by the case that **public funding ensures arts and creativity benefit “every community.”**

For access to the NASAA annual meeting presentation on October 14, 2020, where Metropolitan Group presented these findings and engaged with NASAA members around key questions, go to: <https://nasaa-arts.org/shifting-policy-practice/#shifting>.

Appendix C: Resources

The following are key resources for advocates' reference when sourcing supporting evidence and stories that will be most resonant for the policymakers they engage.

Americans for the Arts, "Arts and Economic Prosperity 5."

https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/aep5/PDF_Files/ARTS_Brochure_Mockup.pdf

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (2017). "Better Together: Public and Private Funding for the Arts.

<https://mellon.org/shared-experiences-blog/better-together-public-and-private-funding-arts>

Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account, U.S. and States. Bureau of Economic Analysis (2020).

<https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/arts-and-culture>.

Arts Council England (2014). "The Value of Arts and Culture to People & Society: an evidence review."

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Value_arts_culture_evidence_review.pdf

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. Arts and Health Care.

https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/arts-and-health-care/

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. Creative Economy State Profiles.

https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-economy-state-profiles/

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. "NASAA is a champion for arts and state arts agencies. Advocate."

https://nasaa-arts.org/advocacy/#advocacy_tools_container

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (2017). "Why Should Government Support the Arts?" State Policy Briefs. (New edition coming soon—are waiting to release it to align it with this research.)

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