



**BUILDING**  
*public will*  
for ARTS + CULTURE



# CREATING CONNECTION



Research Findings and  
Proposed Message Framework to  
Build Public Will for Arts and Culture

April 2015



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Metropolitan Group

Cover photos (starting top left):

Fibonacci Series #8 (detail) by Caryl Bryer Fallert,  
Paducah, KY. Photo by Mike Jensen.

Community members look on while a Ragamala  
Dance Theatre member conducts a "You Can Dance"  
workshop as part of an engagement with University  
Musical Society in Ann Arbor, MI. Photo by Mark  
Gjukich, courtesy of University Musical Society.

Students learn magic from Kevin Spencer as part of an  
engagement with the Austin Area Commission for the  
Arts in Austin, MN. Photo courtesy of the Austin Area  
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Puppet making workshop. Photo by Lindajoy Fenley.

Exhibition opening. Photo by Tiffany Rodgers.

Drumming performance at a community workshop.  
Photo by Shawn McConnellog.

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# Introduction

On behalf of Arts Midwest and Metropolitan Group, we are pleased to present the following report which outlines our organizations' collaborative efforts to advance arts and culture in our nation.

One of six U.S. Regional Arts Organizations created to encourage development of the arts and to support arts programs, Arts Midwest has been at the forefront of researching and leading policy discussions on behalf of the arts across the Midwest and the nation. Historically, these efforts have broadened the base of support for public arts funding, fostered new cooperation among arts and cultural organizations, strengthened advocacy efforts, helped organizations articulate their public value, and demonstrated how international cultural exchange contributes to effective diplomacy.

Metropolitan Group is a social change agency that crafts and integrates creative and strategic services that empower public purpose organizations to build a just and sustainable world. The agency works on behalf of nonprofit organizations, public agencies, foundations, and socially responsible businesses to achieve lasting changes in attitudes, behaviors, cultural and community norms, systems, environments, and policies across a wide range of issues. Notable accomplishments include promoting improvements in public health, learning and literacy, environmental sustainability, and community and economic development, as well as advancing social justice and human rights.

Today, Arts Midwest and Metropolitan Group are joining together to pursue a new initiative on behalf of the arts and cultural sector. Our efforts are informed by our legacies of success, as well as our shared concern for declining engagement with arts and culture via participation, financial support, and political action. In the following report, we detail our initial work to launch a national research and communications initiative that aims to strengthen the value of, support for, and active engagement with arts and culture in our society.

While we have already achieved significant progress toward this ambitious goal, we recognize that there is considerable work on the horizon. And we hope that you will join our effort—by learning more about our project and by involving your organization or community in the next phase of our work. Lastly, we wish to thank the many individuals, organizations, and agencies that have invested their time and resources in our work; their commitment is both remarkable and humbling.

Sincerely,



David Fraher  
President & CEO  
Arts Midwest



Eric Friedenwald-Fishman  
Creative Director/Founder  
Metropolitan Group





# Executive summary

In 2012, leaders from Arts Midwest and Metropolitan Group set out on a multi-year social change effort to advance the position of arts and culture as a recognized, valued, and expected part of our everyday lives.

Our work is rooted in a growing concern about the state of the arts and cultural sector in our country. Namely, we believe—and numerous studies reinforce—that the arts are essential to strong communities, bright and enriching lives, deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, and competitive industries. Yet, despite these proven benefits, the arts are often considered a “nicety rather than a necessity,” repeatedly expected to prove relevancy during budget and policy negotiations, and often perceived as a low priority for busy lives or tight household budgets.

**The arts are often considered a nicety rather than a necessity**

In an effort to reverse this course, we are drawing on research, advocacy, and engagement initiatives to craft a strategy to build public will for arts and culture. This approach seeks to create new assumptions about what we expect from our communities, how we behave as a society, and why we should build support for lasting policy and systems change. It takes the long view, and requires both robust research efforts and careful framing of the issue at hand. Those activities have been the focus of our work over the last two years, and form the basis of this report.

We began with an extensive literature review, new quantitative and qualitative research, and a charge to explore questions that had not previously been answered relative to engagement with arts and culture. These questions centered on the core values that motivate public involvement in arts and culture, how the public defines arts and culture in their everyday lives, and the messages that help connect arts and culture to what people care most about.

Our initial research findings indicate that public will for arts and culture will be achieved most effectively by messages and strategies that:

- Demonstrate how creative expression in all its forms helps people connect with their friends and families, their communities, and themselves.
  - ▶ The desire for “connection” is a motivating, core value that the public holds deeply and believes is served by authentic engagement with arts and cultural activities and experiences.
  - ▶ We believe that beginning these conversations with the frame of “creative expression” will be more effective than the frame of “arts and culture,” at least initially, as the former seems to be more welcoming and have greater resonance with the broader public.
- Engage a broad and diverse set of audiences and stakeholders (including people of color, parents of younger children, people under 40, and women of all ages) in our effort.
  - ▶ Throughout our work, we will engage traditional arts audiences, enthusiasts, and those within the field, as they are essential components of our strategy. However, we also seek to reach beyond these core audiences, connecting with a wider segment of the American public and expanding the reach and impact of our initiative.

The findings from our research suggest that a public will building initiative that connects with the identified core values of our audiences and stakeholders, uses new messages focused on the benefits of connection through creative expression, and is reinforced and made tangible by continued evolution of arts and cultural programming and activities, will engage a broader and more diverse constituency in recognizing, valuing, and expecting arts in their everyday lives.

**We are concerned about the future of the arts and culture sector in our country. So we’re crafting a new strategy to build public will and advance our field.**

In the coming years, we will put these new insights into action across the country. And we invite and encourage others to use what we’ve learned and to share with us what they learn along the way.

# Our opportunity

We believe that arts and culture are essential to strong communities, bright and enriching lives, deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, and competitive industries. These core beliefs are reinforced by extensive field research around the impact of the arts and culture on our lives—studies that outline how arts in education has significant cognitive benefits for youth, that arts and cultural institutions generate massive economic return for their communities, that participating in arts and cultural activities has lasting positive impact on health and social bonds, and—perhaps the primary reason that most people engage with the arts and culture—that they offer captivating, fulfilling, and pleasurable experiences.

**Arts and culture offer significant cognitive, economic, and social benefits. They're also captivating, fulfilling, and pleasurable.**

Despite these proven benefits, the arts and culture sector often lives on the defensive, suffering from declining participation rates in “benchmark” arts experiences, repeatedly expected to prove relevancy during budget and policy negotiations, and often perceived as a low priority for busy lives or tight household budgets. This grim picture is only reconfirmed by discouraging data sets from national research initiatives.

## Shifting arts participation

A study released by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in January 2015 reported a disturbing trend:

“Since 2002, adult attendance rates have declined for a core set of arts activities tracked consistently by the NEA. Thirty-three percent of adults attended one of those selected activities in 2012, compared with 39 percent a decade earlier. The declines were steepest for non-Hispanic whites, adults from 35 to 54 years of age, and higher educated adults (those with at least ‘some’ college education).”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Decade of Arts Engagement: Findings from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, 2002-2012*. National Endowment for the Arts: January 2015. pg X.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *When Going Gets Tough: Barriers and Motivations Affecting Arts Attendance*. National Endowment for the Arts: January 2015. pg 10.

The report also found that attendance at so-called “benchmark” arts events and activities (e.g., musical and non-musical plays, visits to an art museum or gallery, opera or classical music concerts, etc.) was not “a comprehensive indicator of arts participation.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, the percentage of Americans involved in everyday activities that connect with arts and culture (e.g., using electronic media to watch or listen to art, or performing, editing, or remixing art) was generally much higher than the percentage of Americans engaged in “benchmark” activities and events.

A companion study released at the same time found that 73 percent of survey respondents identified the opportunity to “socialize with friends or family” as the top scoring motivator for attending arts events and activities.<sup>4</sup>

**According to the NEA, 33% of adults attended a ‘benchmark’ arts event (e.g., jazz, opera, visit to an art museum, etc.), but 71% of those surveyed used electronic media to watch or listen to art.<sup>3</sup>**

Such data reinforces what anecdotal evidence and observation had already been noting: first, the reality of engaging with arts and culture in our everyday lives is likely broader and more diverse than traditional definitions would suggest. And second, the drivers for engaging in benchmark activities are perhaps more closely related to what individuals prioritize in their everyday lives rather than a passion for the activities themselves.

## Public funding on the decline

An analysis of public funding for the arts uncovers stagnant growth at local, state, and federal levels. While we have seen an increase of 19 percent in public funding for the arts over the past 20 years, when adjusted for inflation such funding has actually gone down by 30 percent. So while our nation’s arts and cultural organizations have achieved great impact in their communities, they continue to be a low priority in times of both financial scarcity and recovery.

## Short-term victories vs. long-term sustainable change

Informing—and perhaps underlying—all of these challenges is one constant: arts and culture continue to be perceived by too many people as a luxury or “nicety rather than a necessity.” This perception has lingered in spite of the fact that a significant percentage of the American public expresses themselves through arts and culture, or engages in such activities on a regular basis, as validated most recently by the NEA reports.

### Previous advocacy efforts

The misperception of arts as a luxury also lingers in spite of considerable efforts by funders, advocates, organizations, and artists to shift expectations around arts and culture. We have witnessed many arts and culture initiatives over the years—some successful, others not—focused on specific, immediate objectives (e.g., approval of a budget, passage of a specific piece of legislation, promoting a certain policy choice or behavior). These campaigns have employed celebrity endorsements for the arts and high-cost marketing tactics focused on assuring the public that arts and culture are “good for them” and for society. In addition, legislative advocacy strategies have been based on arguments that the arts are essential to early childhood learning; a critical part of our nation’s heritage and identity; a driver of urban and rural development; and that they help us become better human beings, among others.

Each of these underlying arguments is true and some initiatives have achieved at least partial success in preserving the underlying principle of public investment in the arts, even at a significantly diminished level. Yet, even the successes tend not to last, or to translate into other victories.

We believe this failure is rooted in a focus on short-term wins, rather than long-term shifts in normative expectations around arts and culture; messages

**Despite concerted advocacy efforts, we have not achieved sustainable public support or value for arts and culture.**

that focus on delivering facts and data (which rarely influence attitude or behavior change on their own); and/or messages that reflect core values that resonate with arts and culture enthusiasts, but which fail to connect or motivate others. This “preaching to the choir” has generally energized the core audience while creating a deeper gulf between this core audience and others needed to broaden and diversify the arts and culture constituency.

## Our charge

Yet, we are not without hope. While these realities reinforce the central challenge arts and cultural advocates have long identified—a critical need to create long-term shifts in societal attitudes, behaviors, and expectations around arts and culture—we believe that we have a unique opportunity to initiate this change. To those ends, we are using a proven, social change and communications strategy to leverage that shift.

### We are building public will for arts and culture

We seek to build public will for arts and culture by researching the closely-held values of broad and diverse U.S. publics and reaching them with messages that resonate with what they value in their own lives. Through this effort, our vision is that arts and culture will be embraced as a recognized, valued, and expected part of everyday life.

**Our vision is that arts and culture will be embraced as a recognized, valued, and expected part of everyday life.**

Because it changes societal norms, public will is both a destination and a point of departure. That is, once we are successful, the realization of other objectives—broadening and diversifying participation in arts, cultural, and creative activities; strengthening exposure and access to such activities for everyone, including children both within and beyond the classroom; and increasing and diversifying sustainable financial support in all its forms—will not only be more likely but will also be more sustainable.

# Our theory of change

Recognizing the challenges we face—and the opportunities they present—we are using a proven public will building framework, developed by Metropolitan Group,<sup>5</sup> to shift public attitudes, understanding, and behaviors as they relate to arts and culture. Our effort draws on the important work done to date by arts advocates, agencies, organizations, educators, and artists, and will use strategies that enact sustainable changes in cultural and community norms, policies, systems, funding, and environments.

## Building public will

The public will building model posits that long-term change is accomplished by connecting an issue with the deeply-held values of the audiences and stakeholders a movement seeks to engage. The theory is rooted in the understanding that people generally make decisions about what to think and do based on their core values and their assumptions about how the world works. They accept facts and data that support their existing worldview and values, and they tend to reject facts and data that stand in contradiction. To create—and sustain—public will for any issue, a movement needs to find the optimal values alignment that connects their audiences to the issue.

## Focus on long-term change

Building public will for any issue is a long-term proposition (as opposed to a public opinion strategy, which generally seeks specific, short-term wins). It provides a platform for the kind of sustainable change in behaviors, policies, systems, and funding that lasts over time.

Therefore, the model relies much more heavily than a public opinion campaign on engaging audiences and stakeholders through trusted community-based organizations and individuals (grasstops and grassroots). Such messengers are in a much better position to communicate authentically and powerfully, connect with audience values, and motivate action. To create fertile ground among a broader public, the approach then uses mass media communication to introduce issues or solutions, set context, and reinforce the messages being shared through direct audience and stakeholder engagement.

<sup>5</sup> *Building Public Will: Five-Phase Communication Approach to Sustainable Change*. Metropolitan Group: 2009.  
<http://www.metgroup.com/assets/Public-Will.pdf>

## A legacy of success for other sectors

The public will building model has been used to advance other issues, including environmental sustainability, public health, human rights, the role of public libraries, and more. But to date, the model has not been applied to advance arts and culture in any broad, concerted, or sustained fashion.

Because of its track record in achieving long-term change at individual and community levels, we believe that this approach stands the best chance of promoting arts and culture as recognized, valued, and expected parts of our everyday lives.

### Building public will in action

Public will has been used effectively as a model for creating sustainable change in a variety of issue categories over the years, perhaps most notably in the smoking cessation/prevention movement.

For years, those seeking to reduce the incidence of smoking found themselves stymied. Facts and data about the harmful effects of smoking had motivated some to quit, but had failed to create fundamental change in social norms, systems, and policies. The facts were compelling, but they were overpowered by opponents who framed the issue in the context of individual freedom (i.e., “I have the right to smoke if I want to; I’m not hurting anybody.”).

Even the growing body of evidence around second-hand smoke had difficulty finding fertile ground until advocates realized they could reframe the same core argument to their own advantage (i.e., “I have the right to be protected from exposure to smoke.”). Co-opting the individual freedom value—backed by facts and data—allowed the sustainable changes in policies and systems that we experience today.

## Our initiative

Our work began in March 2012 when 15 arts leaders from across the United States gathered in Portland, Oregon to participate in a two-day workshop co-hosted by Arts Midwest and Metropolitan Group. Our discussion was robust, and it covered the challenges facing the arts and culture field; current and potential stakeholders and champions for our work; the value that the arts and culture provide to the public; the current marketing, funding, and perception landscape; and potential message frames for our work. It also helped identify a central goal for our project:

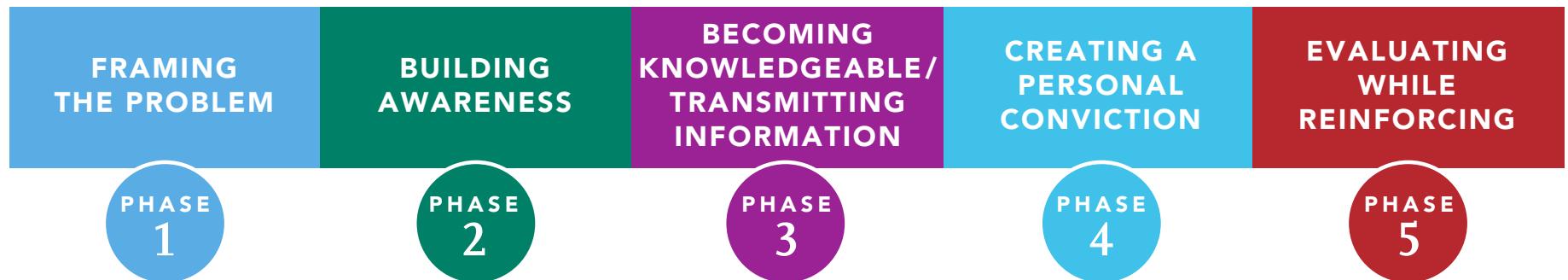
**arts and culture will be embraced as a recognized, valued, and expected part of our everyday lives.**

Following this retreat, Arts Midwest secured an investment from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation to launch initial project activity, and collaborated with Metropolitan Group to create a plan for the first phase of the initiative.

Our approach was guided by the five phases of public will building, as defined by Metropolitan Group (reflected in the illustration below). In this initial phase, we launched a national research project to inform our understanding of the problem. We also cultivated funding, conducted research, and created teams of advisors in four locations across the United States: California—San Jose region; Michigan; Oregon; and Minnesota.

These locations were chosen for their diverse socio-economic and demographic populations and their significant capacity to support all project activities. Their involvement in these early efforts was both productive and enlightening, and it allowed us to test our approach while gathering important insights for the project's work in the coming years, during which we plan to bring this initiative to a national scale.

A full overview of the activities envisioned in each phase, including additional detail summarizing our strategic approach, the organizational structure we adopted, and the initial phase of work, can be found in Appendix A.





# Our questions

There has been considerable research done to date around arts and culture. In the course of our work over many years in this field—and during the literature review we conducted as part of this project—we have benefited enormously from these efforts to advance arts and culture in our lives and society.

However, core to our project is developing a deep understanding of public values as they relate to arts and culture—a subject that has not received as much attention in previous research efforts. As such, we embarked on a multi-phase, national research project that would help us identify and understand these public values and craft messages that begin to change expectations around arts and culture.

**We sought more information about the definitions, values, and messaging around arts and culture.**

## **We began by asking three core questions:**

1. How do people define arts and culture experiences in their everyday lives, particularly without the lens of “arts and culture” applied to that question?
2. What core values drive arts and culture experiences? We wanted to probe beyond the reasons people give to explore how these experiences connect to what people really care about (e.g., their families, their health and well-being, their faith, etc.).
3. What messaging effectively connects arts and culture to what people really care about, and motivates them to want to do more of it?

## **Literature review**

Our research launched with a literature review of studies previously conducted on the subject of arts and culture. The review considered studies around arts education, arts participation and behaviors, the perceived benefits of the arts, public sentiments toward the arts and culture, and subjective wellbeing.



Photo by Joshua Feist.

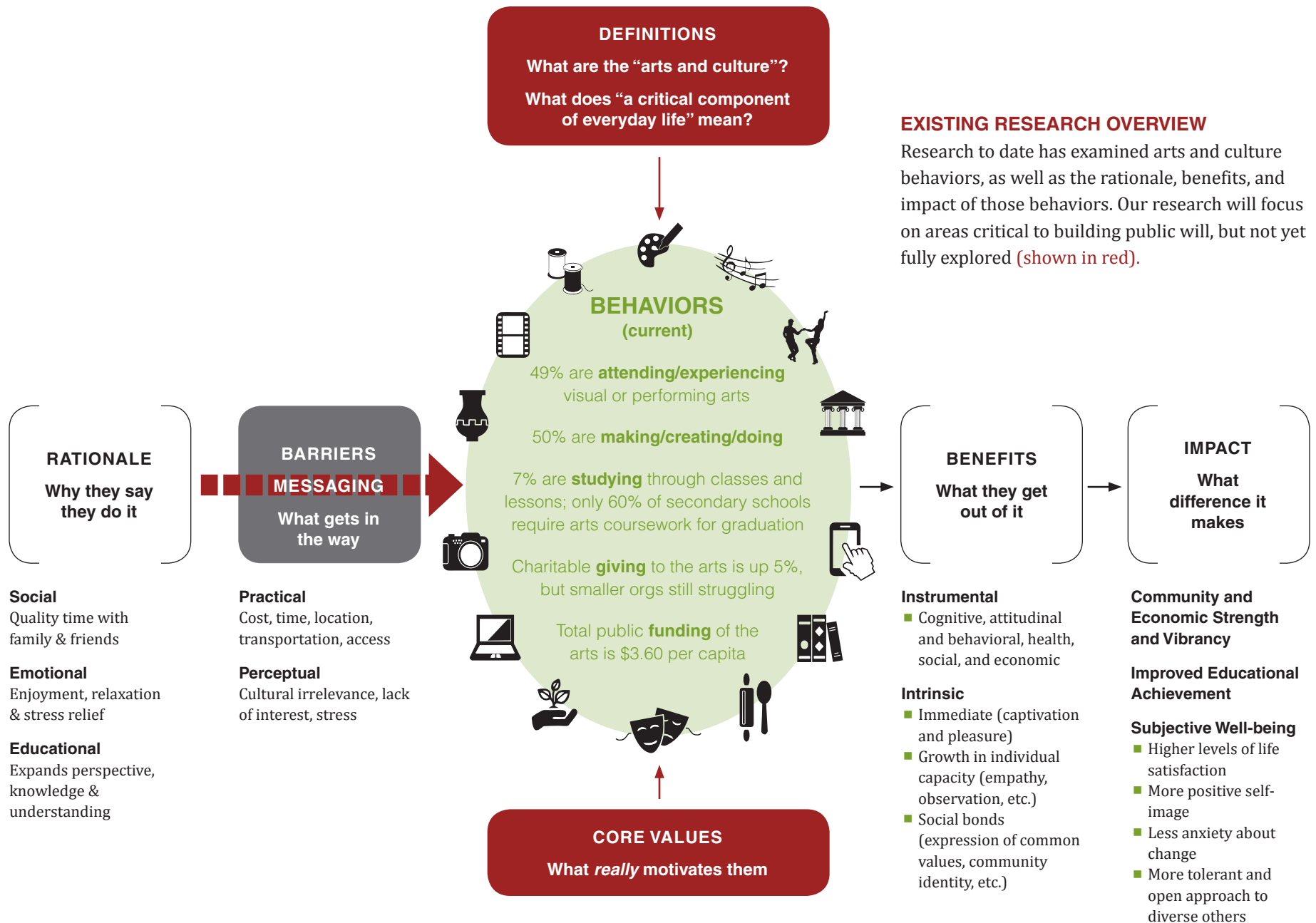
We reviewed documents and reports issued by public agencies (e.g., National Endowment for the Arts and various state arts agencies), arts service providers (e.g., Americans for the Arts), arts funders (e.g., The Wallace Foundation and the Knight Foundation), researchers (e.g., RAND and WolfBrown), and others.

## **What we found**

As illustrated on the following page, there are many questions that previous research initiatives have already addressed in some detail. For example, we know a great deal about the ways in which Americans say they engage in arts and culture, their reasons for doing so, the benefits they derive from that participation, and the barriers that get in their way of engaging more often. Research has also validated the impact of arts and culture experiences both on the individual and on their communities.

However, we did not find significant research on the three areas of concern to our project—the definition of arts and culture, the core values that drive arts and cultural experiences (i.e., what really motivates people to attend, experience, make, study, or donate to arts/culture); and the messages that connect arts and culture to those existing values.

For data around those questions, we turned to a series of new quantitative and qualitative research approaches.



## EXISTING RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Research to date has examined arts and culture behaviors, as well as the rationale, benefits, and impact of those behaviors. Our research will focus on areas critical to building public will, but not yet fully explored (shown in red).

## National survey

The quantitative research included a national survey, which we created in tandem with research and polling firm Lake Research. The survey instrument was reviewed by members of our advisory teams in San Jose, Oregon, and Michigan; their stakeholders; and our partners and funders.

The survey launched in late September 2014 and garnered responses from 2,586 adults nationwide, as well as oversamples of approximately 400 adults in California, San Jose, Michigan, Minnesota, and Oregon. In most cases, the data were weighted slightly by education, race, age, and party identification to reflect the attributes of the actual population.<sup>6</sup>

After the survey closed, Lake Research provided a summary of their topline results as well as full cross-tabulation worksheets for each site that allowed us to analyze the data in-depth and develop a set of preliminary findings.

## Focus and discussion groups

Results from this quantitative research were used to shape and refine our qualitative strategy, which included focus groups, informal discussions, and one-on-one interviews in Michigan; Oregon; San Jose, California; and

Minnesota. All qualitative research was facilitated by Metropolitan Group, and representatives from Arts Midwest and/or the pilot advisory group were often in attendance at the formal focus groups as observers behind mirrored glass.

We conducted formal focus groups in three locations: Michigan, Oregon, and San Jose, California. These sessions were held in focus group facilities, and participants were recruited using a screening tool developed by Metropolitan Group and Arts Midwest. The tool was designed to recruit the individuals that we hypothesized would be most receptive to our goal of making arts and culture a recognized, valued, and expected part of everyday life (which we based on segmentation data from our survey analysis).

### Participant profiles

Our recruitment skewed slightly toward women and parents of children under 18, and we increased the representation of people of color in all groups to include a greater proportion than would have been dictated by the local community's population. As a result, people of color composed 49 percent of the participants in the formal focus groups, far exceeding their representation in the test communities and the general national population.

The breakdown of focus groups is as follows:

Michigan	Oregon	San Jose, California
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Community leaders (Detroit)</li><li>■ Arts leaders (Detroit)</li><li>■ Adult arts occasional* (Detroit)</li><li>■ Adult arts occasional* (Traverse City)</li><li>■ Millennials (Traverse City)</li><li>■ Adult arts active** (Grand Rapids)</li><li>■ Millennials (Grand Rapids)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Adult arts active** (Portland)</li><li>■ Adult arts occasional* (Portland)</li><li>■ Arts leaders (Portland)</li><li>■ Community leaders (La Grande)</li><li>■ Community leaders (Bend)</li><li>■ Teens (Medford)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Adult arts active**</li><li>■ Adult arts occasional*</li><li>■ Millennials</li><li>■ Tech sector employees</li><li>■ Pilot advisory group (community and business leaders)</li></ul>

\* Respondents who answered "somewhat important" or "not very important" and "somewhat often" or "rarely" to both of the following questions: "How important is it to you to be creative, artistic, or to express your culture in your everyday life?" "How often do you participate in arts and cultural activities?"

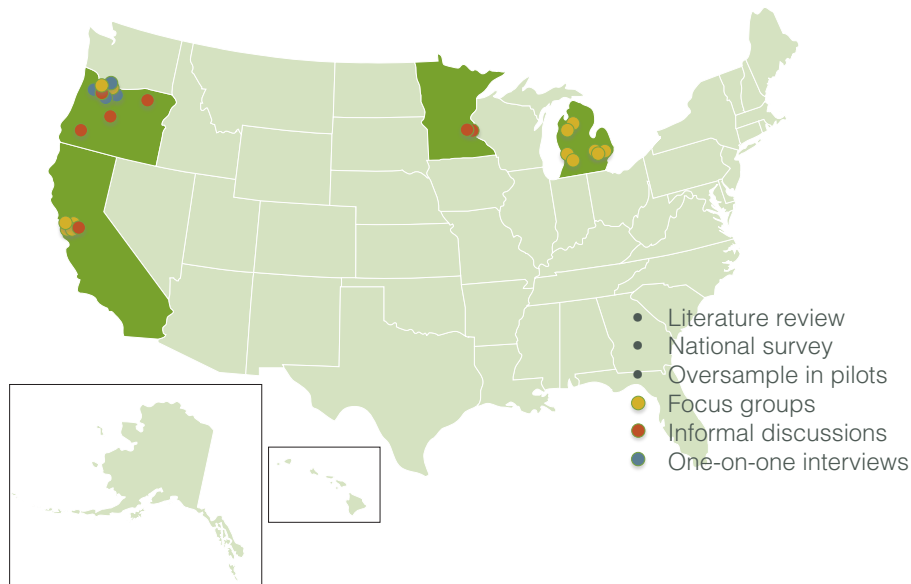
\*\* Respondents who answered "very important" or "somewhat important" and "very often" or "somewhat often" to both of the following questions: "How important is it to you to be creative, artistic, or to express your culture in your everyday life?" "How often do you participate in arts and cultural activities?"

<sup>6</sup> The margin of error for the national survey is +/- 1.9%. For the oversamples, the margin of error was +/- 4.9% for California, Michigan, Minnesota, and San Jose, and +/- 4.6% for Oregon. For the Oregon oversample, the data were weighted more significantly toward people of color than the actual population to ensure relevant sample sizes in the segmenting phase.

## Informal discussions

Informal discussions took place in Oregon and Minnesota. The Oregon participants were recruited through our advisors and community partners and/or by Metropolitan Group (using the same focus group screening tool), and these conversations were held in conventional public meeting spaces.

The discussions in Minneapolis, Minnesota, took place in early October and featured consumer and product marketing experts from Abide Idea Company, General Mills, Inc., and Zeus Jones. Here, the conversations focused on research methodology and messaging tactics, and reinforced our overarching effort to include diverse voices and sectors in our work (i.e., those individuals and organizations who may not have an immediate, vested interest in arts and culture).



## Executive interviews

To support our goals around engaging diverse voices in our research, we conducted 11 executive interviews with leaders of communities of color across Oregon. These conversations were conducted via telephone by Metropolitan Group.

Mike Alexander, *CEO, Urban League*

Vicki Chamberlain, *Executive Director, State Teachers Standards and Practices*

Karol Collymore, *Executive Director, Equity Foundation*

Roberta “Bobbie” Conner, *Director, Tamástslikt Cultural Institute*

José González, *Executive Director, Teatro Milagro*

Chisao Hata, *Portland Public Schools*

Pastor James W. Matt Hennessee, *Vancouver First Baptist Church*

Dion Jordan, *Independent consultant*

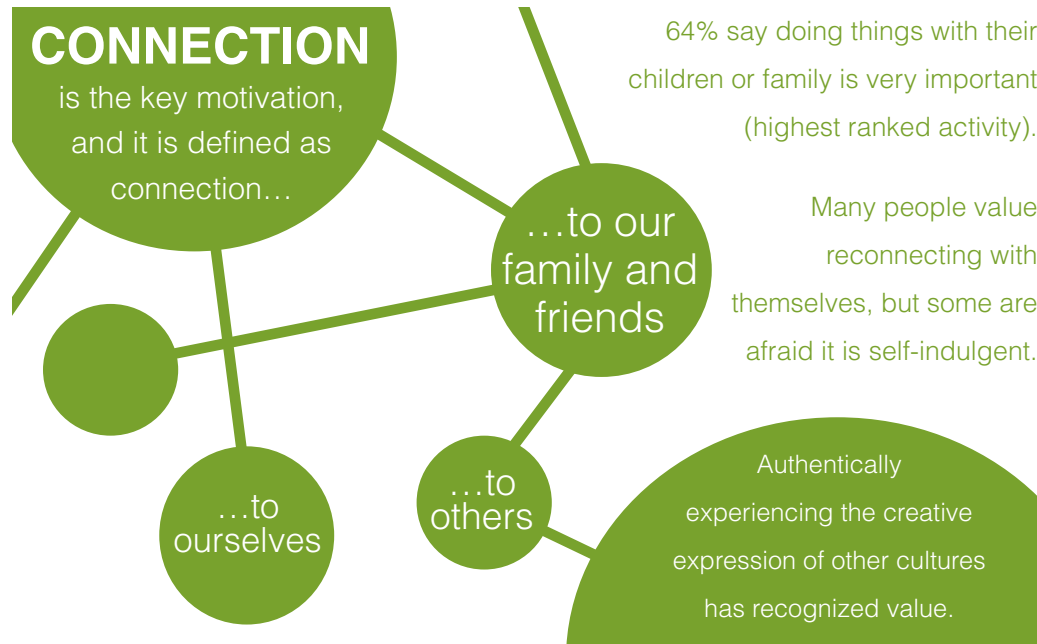
Phil Ortega, *LifeArt*

Shelli Romero, *Portland Bureau of Transportation*

Carmen Rubio *Executive Director, Latin Network*



# Findings summary



## CREATIVE EXPRESSION

...is a more engaging and powerful frame than “arts & culture” for most audiences. ...brings more people into a conversation about arts & culture.

“Just part of who I am.”



ART is a product of creativity, like a painting or piece of music.



CULTURE is art, but also part of lifestyle connected to heritage and tradition.



**CREATIVITY** is defined broadly to include everything from problem-solving to artistic inspiration and expression.



Benefits of arts & culture to children & youth are valued most highly.

## AUDIENCES

Younger people, women, parents of children under 18, and people of color are more likely to say that creative expression and creativity are important in their lives.



- People under 40 value arts & culture, creativity, and creative expression more than older people by about 10 points.
- Arts & culture community—and enthusiasts—are other important audiences.

## BARRIERS

ARTS ARE VIEWED AS A “NICETY” OR LUXURY.

People want to engage with arts & culture, but are still finding mostly opportunities to passively observe.



Some existing constituencies push back against defining arts & culture more broadly as “creative expression.”



Time & money are the biggest barriers to both formal and informal engagement.



# Our detailed findings

## KEY FINDING

Across our research, we found that **CONNECTION** is the driving motivator for people to embrace arts and culture as part of their everyday lives, and therefore offers the most effective platform to engage a broad and diverse constituency in this movement.

It was perhaps not surprising that the three most important values across our research were (in order): family; health and well-being; and faith. In our survey, 64 percent of respondents identified family as “extremely important” and more important than any other aspect of their lives. Health and well-being was identified as “extremely important” by 52 percent of our respondents, with 40 percent assigning this level of importance to their faith. The same three core values—in the same order—were identified in our focus groups.

### How important are each of the following to you personally?

(% saying “extremely important”)

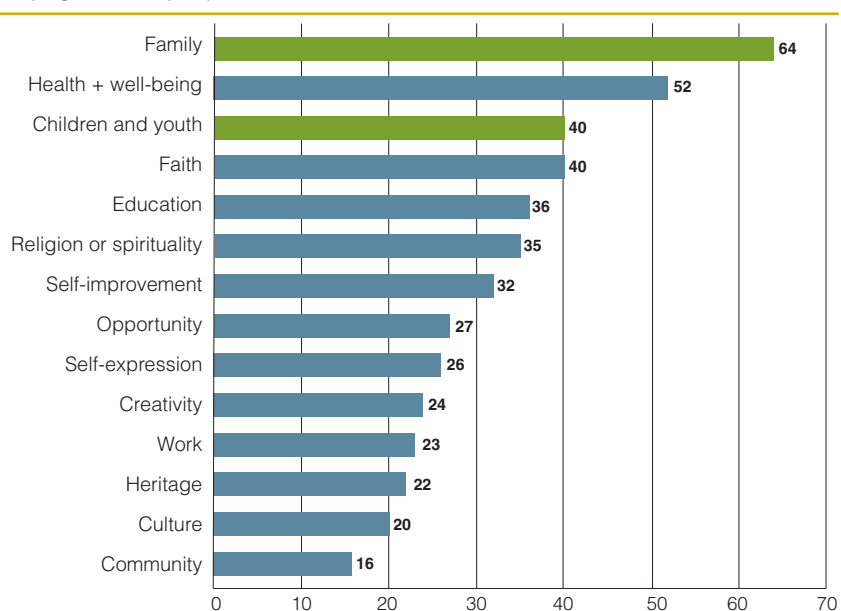


Photo by Eric Young Smith.

These values drive decision-making for people across a wide range of their behaviors and choices. To create a bridge between these values and our broader goal of making arts and culture a more recognized, valued, and expected part of our everyday lives, we identified the concept of **CONNECTION**. This word came up early and often in our focus groups when participants were asked to describe the reasons for—and benefits of—engaging in creative, artistic, or cultural activities or experiences.

Connection is defined in three contexts: connecting with people we care about like family and friends; connecting with other people around us; and connecting with ourselves.

### Connection to family and friends

**CONNECTION TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS** is the primary and most powerful bridge between arts and culture and what people care most about in their daily lives. For parents of young children, it gives them the opportunity to create lasting memories.

92% of focus group participants identified family as the most important aspect of their lives.

This finding aligns with the data reported in the 2015 NEA study, which suggested that socializing with family and friends was a motivator for participation in traditional “benchmark” arts and cultural activities. Similarly, the NEA study found that 50 percent of adults attend arts events and activities, and 68 percent of parents of children under six years of age go to socialize.

## Connection to others

The notion of **CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE AROUND US** is a theme that resonates across our research. We found that Americans acknowledge that *authentically* experiencing the creative expression of other cultures teaches them something they did not know, and helps them better understand and appreciate people different from themselves. In our survey, almost one in four respondents (24 percent) said “cultural diversity” was extremely important to them in thinking about their communities.

### Authenticity is essential

However, the word “diversity” can be problematic in describing the benefit or outcome of experiencing the creative expression of other people and cultures. Some resist the notion that our communities are becoming more diverse, and others are concerned with the “tokenism” associated with diversity that satisfies itself with quotas or counting or the most rudimentary of contact while failing to connect authentically with other people or cultures.

*“We’re sort of hard-wired to want to connect with others, whether it’s our family or our friends. People we just meet on a daily basis. It’s just in our DNA.”*  
—Detroit, Michigan participant

*“If there was a better understanding of other cultures, there would be less violence in the world. Just trying to understand and acknowledge other people’s differences. Everyone can connect through art.”*  
—Grand Rapids, Michigan participant



Photo by Lindajoy Fenley.

## Connection to ourselves

The third context for connection is associated with **CONNECTING WITH OURSELVES**, which our research shows is related to the core value of health and well-being (e.g., increased happiness, reduced stress, etc.). While the concept of connecting or reconnecting with ourselves had not yet been articulated in developing our survey, 32 percent of respondents said self-improvement was “extremely important” and 26 percent assigned the same degree of importance to “self-expression.”

A solid majority of participants in the qualitative research described positive and valued experiences of arts, culture, or creative expression helping them connect with themselves or better understand who they are and what is important to them.

There is an undercurrent of concern, however, that this kind of connection is self-indulgent, a concern expressed most vocally in our focus and discussion groups by the parents of young children.

## Connection as a primary message frame

The connection theme began to appear during our analysis of the survey research, and asserted itself noticeably in our earliest focus groups. Thus, we developed a potential message frame on this theme which we tested among our focus groups: *sharing creative experiences with our kids, friends, and family is a great way to connect, have fun together, and make lasting memories.*

*“It seems like more and more—even though we’re all so connected with our digital environment with the Internet—that we’re becoming more and more isolated. So experiencing arts and culture, especially in a community environment, can help bring people back together.”*  
—Portland, Oregon participant

This frame quickly rose to the top of messaging preferred overall and was most likely to motivate focus group participants to do more of the creative, artistic, and cultural things they enjoy. It achieved this status among all stakeholder and audience segments included in our focus groups, including both active arts and culture enthusiasts and those who do not consider themselves to be enthusiasts.

It is worth noting that a message frame about arts and culture as part of a child’s well-rounded education—which had performed very strongly in our survey—was also among the favorites identified by focus group participants. That said, in the final analysis it was not the message that most effectively motivated them to embrace creativity, arts, or culture in their own lives. Rather, the connection/bonding message was considered more effective.

*“These are all things I’d like to be doing more of. But it’s so hard to find the time. You’re working. You’re taking care of your family and your kids. It’s hard to carve out the ‘me-time.’ But I feel so much better when I do.”*  
—San Jose, California participant



#### KEY FINDING

**Our research suggests that CREATIVE EXPRESSION is a more effective message frame than “arts and culture” when seeking to build a broad coalition in support of our goal.**

Throughout our research, we sought to engage in an open conversation that was not initially framed in the prescribed context of “arts and culture.” We wanted our audiences and stakeholders to define the terms of the conversation themselves, and to connect the activities and experiences they enjoy to a broader context and definition, instead of defining the conversation and then asking them to find relevance for themselves within it. In so doing, we were able to allow the context for the conversation to manifest itself organically.

### The resonance of “creative expression”

While the context of that conversation included explicit references to arts and culture, **CREATIVE EXPRESSION EMERGED AS A MORE POWERFUL FRAME FOR THE CONVERSATION.** In our survey, 59 percent of our respondents strongly agreed that it is “important that everyone have the opportunity to express themselves creatively or to experience the creativity of others everyday” while only 49 percent of respondents strongly agreed that it is “important that everyone have the opportunity to express arts and culture in their everyday lives.”

Similarly, while creativity is seen as extremely important by only 24 percent of our survey respondents (and culture by 18 percent), a majority of people surveyed (57 percent) say they get the chance to be creative in their everyday lives, and 16 percent say they get this opportunity very often.

*“Creativity is an attitude. Maybe I’m not an artist in my profession. But I bring my creative spirit with me in everything I do.”*  
—Grand Rapids, Michigan participant



Photo by Angela Keeton.

### A broad definition of creativity

In part, the stronger receptivity to a conversation about creative expression is because **CREATIVITY IS MORE BROADLY DEFINED—** it can include everything from problem-solving at home or at work, to the inspiration that results in the creation of art, to experiencing the creative expression of others in forms that are traditionally defined as arts and culture. Conversely, “arts and culture” is perceived by the public as narrower in scope, encompassing “fine arts” and “high art,” but not as likely to include some of the everyday activities that would fit under a “creativity” umbrella (e.g., creating or sharing photography, videos, or music).

*“There are so many different kinds of art that aren’t recognized. A cook can be an artist. A carpenter. There are other things besides paintings and musicians.”*  
—La Grande, Oregon participant

*“It plays a big part in everyday life. Without creativity, my life would be plain, blank, vanilla-coated. It’s sensory. It’s expressive. I can’t imagine life without it.”*  
—San Jose, California participant

## Creativity as core to our identity

In addition, creativity is seen as something natural to everyone, at least initially. And while many people think we tend to lose our creative impulses as we age, others (especially people under 40 years of age, women of all ages, parents of younger children, and people of color) are more likely to say **CREATIVITY IS “JUST PART OF WHO I AM.”**

A conversation around arts and culture is less personal for people, if only because arts and culture is perceived as being about the expression of other people’s creativity, not their own. There is also an implied or explicit pursuit of excellence in the context of the arts (and the associated subjectivity and judgment) that tends to be off-putting for people who either do not wish to be held to those standards or who perceive themselves to be lacking in their own abilities.

*“The idea of ‘expressing myself,’ it makes me want to believe in who I am, and not try to be somebody I’m not.”*

—Medford, Oregon  
high school student



Photo by Mark Gjukich, courtesy of University Musical Society.

Further, **FOR SOME AUDIENCES, THE PHRASE “ARTS AND CULTURE” INHIBITS THEM FROM ENTERING INTO CONVERSATION.** They tend not to perceive that their existing behaviors and values are closely linked to traditional arts and cultural activities. However, when using the phrase “creative expression,” these audiences see alignment between their experiences and values and these same activities.

There is no question that some audiences (especially so-called arts and culture enthusiasts) participate in a conversation about arts and culture without reservation from the outset. It is also a helpful construct for a conversation about the benefits of arts and culture to our children as part of their well-rounded education.

But for most Americans, it is more effective to enter this discussion through the lens of “creative expression,” which is **PERCEIVED AS MORE PERSONALLY RELEVANT** and therefore has broader application. Both groups can end up in the same place—namely a conversation about the benefits of arts and culture in our lives and communities—but a “creative expression” lens expands the participation in that conversation.

**The phrase “arts and culture” resonates with existing audiences. But it’s less inviting for those who do not participate in or support “benchmark” arts activities.**

*“Arts and culture is someone else’s self-expression. You can experience it. I’m not saying I don’t enjoy it. But, it’s not mine.”*  
—San Jose, California participant

## KEY FINDING

The **BENEFITS** of engaging in or experiencing creative expression are very personal and real for people, and are centered around their quality of life and their connection to others.

Our survey, focus, and discussion groups highlighted that the benefits of engaging in creative, artistic, or cultural activities are closely related to **QUALITY OF LIFE**: happiness, reduced stress, improved health, and time spent with people they care about.

For example, when asked what would be different if we had more opportunity to express or experience culture in our lives, almost one in three survey respondents (30 percent) indicated “we would be healthier, happier, and less stressed.”

### Impact of doing more of the creative, artistic, and cultural activities people enjoy in their everyday lives (responses to open-ended questions)



Photo by Lindajoy Fenley.

Similarly, our focus group participants talked about the benefits of creative expression, both as an outlet for their creative energy or personal passion and as an experience they shared with others. These benefits were often described in very literal and often physical terms (e.g., “reduces stress,” “helps me unwind,” “makes me happy,” “gives me joy,” etc.).

### More engagement means more understanding

Benefits associated with connecting with other people are also resonant in our research. When asked what would be different if we had more opportunities to express or experience culture in our lives, 43 percent of our survey respondents selected “we would better appreciate cultural diversity” (tied for first place for most selected response) and 39 percent selected **“WE WOULD HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER”** (second place response).

*“By actually experiencing the arts and culture—or being creative in some way—it refreshes me. I lose myself in that activity and I come out refreshed.”*

—Grand Rapids, Michigan participant

*“I know that when I create something, in sewing or planting up a planter or something like that, I feel good when it's done; I look at it, and I feel good.”*

—Portland, Oregon participant



## Children and youth are a high priority

We also found evidence that the **BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH ARTS AND CULTURE TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH** are well understood and appreciated.

When asked to consider what would be different if children had more exposure to the arts and culture, building life skills ranks in the top tier of responses. And the message perceived to be strongest by our survey respondents was related to arts and culture as part of a child's well-rounded education.

*"I feel like if you're not exposing kids to the arts, then they're not going to be well-rounded."*

—*Traverse City, Michigan participant*

## It's not (just) about providing meaning in our lives or demonstrating tangible impact

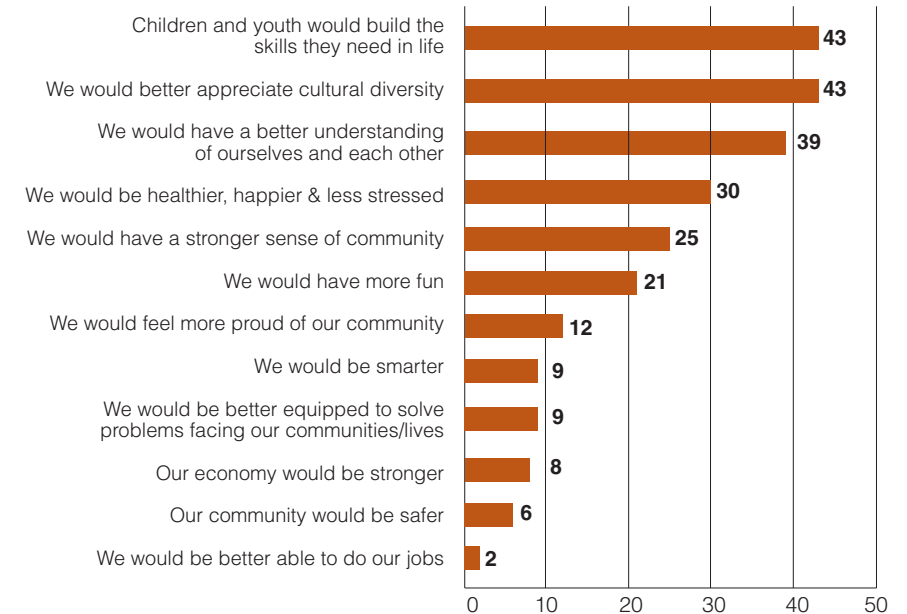
Messages that suggest arts and culture provide meaning in our lives were endorsed by a small segment of our audience, including artists, arts and culture leaders and educators, and enthusiasts. However, such messages failed to connect with most other audiences, including the core segments we've identified here (see page 22). While some audiences come to this understanding or acknowledgement on their own, it tends to be less effective when used as a lead-in to—or overt label for—the conversation.

Further, the more tangible outcomes of increased engagement in arts and culture (e.g., a stronger economy, safer communities, and increased ability to do our jobs) placed lowest in the ranking of benefits. This is a significant finding because so much of the messaging around arts and culture over the past few years has focused on articulating these benefits. Thus, while these messages might still resonate with policy makers and traditional arts and culture leaders, they are much less compelling or motivating for the broader public and for the audiences and stakeholders we are prioritizing in this effort.



Photo by Lindajoy Fenley.

## If we had more opportunity to express or experience culture, what would be different?





#### KEY FINDING

The **AUDIENCES** most likely to embrace arts and culture as recognized, valued, and expected parts of their everyday lives are: people under 40, women of all ages, parents of younger children, and people of color.

In identifying our priority audiences for building public will, it is important to remember that we were looking for the people most likely to be predisposed to valuing arts and culture as recognized, valued, and expected parts of their everyday lives. There are some audiences for whom that predisposition already exists. For example, other research has validated that the constituencies and audiences for more traditional benchmark arts and cultural activities tend to be older, white, better educated, and more affluent. We are not suggesting that this constituency is no longer important. Rather, our work set out to identify the audiences most likely to *join* this constituency in valuing arts and culture in their everyday lives by connecting arts and culture to their existing values and priorities.

### Primary audiences are already prioritizing creative expression

In support of this objective, we have identified people under 40 years of age, women of all ages, parents of younger children, and people of color as primary audiences for our efforts.

We set out to identify the audiences most likely to join traditional arts audiences in valuing arts and culture in their everyday lives.



Photo courtesy of Chamber Music Society of Detroit.

Our finding is based on data showing that these audiences are more likely to **ALREADY HOLD VALUES CONSISTENT WITH ARTS AND CULTURE BEING PART OF THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES**, even if they might not identify or initially describe themselves in this way. For example, as reflected in the table on page 21, while 48 percent of respondents to the national survey say it is very important to be able to express who you are, 66 percent of respondents under age 30 hold this sentiment, along with 54 percent of women, 60 percent of parents of children under 18, 69 percent of African Americans, and 61 percent of Latinos. Similarly, 29 percent of national survey respondents say it's very important to be creative, artistic, or to express their culture in their everyday lives. But 51 percent of those under 30 and 40 percent of those between 31 and 39 years of age say it's very important, along with 42 percent of parents of children under 18, 43 percent of Latinos, 38 percent of Asians, 33 percent of African Americans, and 36 percent of urban dwellers.

	“How important is it to you to be able to express who you are?”	“How important is it to you to be creative, artistic, or to express your culture in your everyday life?”
	% indicating “very important”	% indicating “very important”
<b>National sample</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>29%</b>
People under 30	66%	51%
People age 31-39	56%	40%
Women	54%	32%
African Americans	69%	33%
Latino	61%	43%
Multi-racial	50%	25%
Asian American	47%	38%
Parents of children under 18	60%	42%
Urban dwellers	55%	36%

## Primary audiences are already engaging in creative expression

In addition, our data suggest that people under 40, women, people of color, and parents of children under 18 are far more likely to **ENGAGE IN CREATIVE EXPRESSION ACTIVITIES**, which include some of the more traditional “benchmark” arts and cultural events.

For example, as reflected in the charts in Appendix E, our survey showed that:

- Respondents under 40 years of age are more likely by margins of as much as 34 points to say it’s important to make or create art.
- Women are more likely than men by 13 points to say that it is important to make or create art, and six points more likely than men to say it’s important to attend an art or music festival.

- Parents of children under 18 are more likely by 16 points to say that it’s important to make or create art in their lives, and more likely by 24 points to say that it’s important to study art or culture.
- People of color are more likely than white survey respondents (by margins up to 20 points) to say that it’s important to make or create art, and more likely by up to 30 points to say that it’s important to study arts and culture.

Our research suggests the audiences we’ve identified represent potential early and influential adopters for this movement. Success will hinge on our ability to engage and motivate these audiences, and to deliver on their expectations for what arts and cultural experiences and activities can add to their lives.

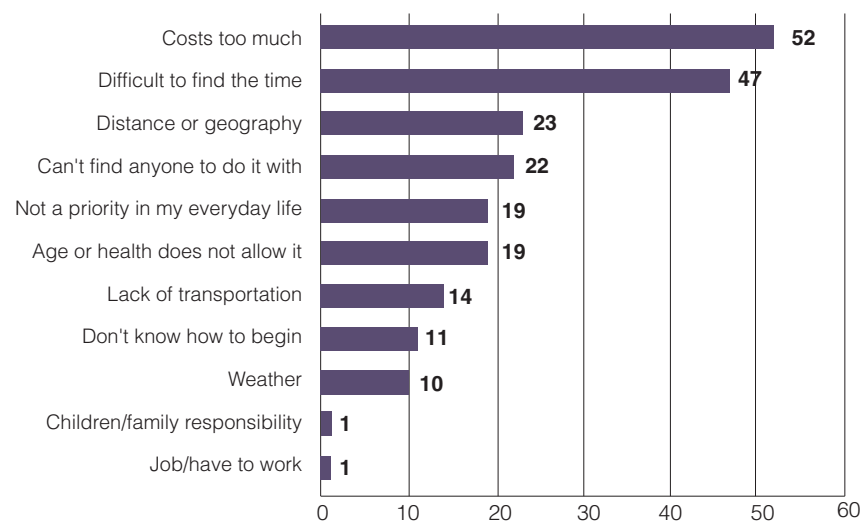
## KEY FINDING

**The BARRIERS to creative expression and arts and cultural activities are considerable, but not insurmountable.**

As noted earlier, the barriers to participation in traditional benchmark arts have been well documented: most notably, **TIME, MONEY, AND LACK OF COMPANIONSHIP.** Our research validated these barriers with regard to more informal engagement in everyday creative activities, with 52 percent of survey respondents indicating such activities cost too much, 47 percent saying it was difficult to find the time, and 22 percent saying they can't find anyone with whom to participate.<sup>7</sup>

*"Time and money are just too scarce. Particularly for something that's, let's face it, more of a luxury compared to the other stuff I have to do."*  
—Traverse City, Michigan participant

**To the extent you would like to do the activities you enjoy more often, what gets in your way?** (multiple responses)



<sup>7</sup> In the 2015 NEA Study, three of the top four identified barriers with regard to participation in benchmark arts activities were time (47 percent), cost (38 percent), and "no one to go with" (22 percent).



Photo by Shawn McConnellog.

These barriers would undoubtedly be identified in any survey that inquired about the reasons people do not engage in more of the activities they enjoy in their everyday lives. And in this particular case, when the public perceives arts and culture as a luxury (or "nicety"), it decreases their motivation to prioritize those activities. Thus, our challenge is to overcome these barriers by positioning creative expression as central to our lives and enhancing its position in the range of personal priority.

*"Sometimes in my daily life, I'm too busy to make or create stuff. Other than—yes, I make dinner—but my artistic creative side, I feel like I just sort of put it aside a lot of days, because I just have—I'm just too busy."*  
—Portland, Oregon participant

## Active engagement is key to long-term success

In addition to these barriers, our research revealed that many people still find their **EXPERIENCES ARE TOO PASSIVE FOR THEIR LIKING**. While there is no question that many people enjoy the opportunity to experience arts and culture from their seat in a theater or the bench in an art gallery, others are looking for more opportunities to engage actively in creating or experiencing art. Their inability to find or access these activities tends to reinforce the perception that arts and culture are not relevant in their own lives. Beyond shifting to a new message framework, overcoming this barrier will almost certainly require that arts and culture organizations continue to explore and offer opportunities to their audiences for more active and interactive engagement, thereby allowing them to achieve the experience and connection they value.

*"It's more about experiencing art. Experience is low on the hierarchy of learning; engagement is much higher."*  
—La Grande, Oregon  
community leader



Photo by Janine Calsbeek.

## It's about creative expression *and* arts and culture

Finally, our research found **A POTENTIAL FOR PUSH-BACK FROM EXISTING CONSTITUENCIES** for arts and culture (e.g., some arts leaders, working artists, arts educators, and arts and culture enthusiasts). Here, some respondents expressed concern that a focus on creative expression represents a dumbing down of the conversation about the value of arts and culture. Some artists, for example, chafe at the notion that “amateurs” and “hobbyists” might be lumped into the same category as those who have dedicated years of study, practice, and exploration to their art.

*"This is my profession, not my hobby. And now you just want to lump me in with everyone who's learning to play the violin on YouTube?"*  
—Grand Rapids, Michigan  
participant

We do not believe this barrier is insurmountable, in part because we are not recommending a wholesale abandonment of the phrase “arts and culture,” nor are we recommending that our messages undermine the work and commitment of professional artists. Rather, the question of framing the subject is not either “creative expression” or “arts and culture,” but both/and. To those ends, our research suggests that framing the discussion in terms of creative expression is an entry point through which more people are receptive, increasing and diversifying the audience for whom the conversation has relevance.



## Our message framework

Based upon our research findings, we have developed the message framework shown on the following page. It is grounded in the deeply held values identified as most relevant and resonant with our audiences, and it communicates a core message about **creative expression** as a vehicle **to connect** with the people we care about, and with ourselves. It also highlights the benefits seen as most important to our audiences.

The proposed message framework for the initiative is intended to serve as the strategic underpinning for messaging to advance our goal. It is not intended for use verbatim with external audiences, but rather is the foundation on which our external messages will be built.

Moving forward, we will use this framework to craft messages that reflect the identified values, articulate benefits to each specific audience, and communicate the core concept of connection.



Photo by Mike Jensen.

## CORE MESSAGE

The core message will serve as the foundation of our narrative and be incorporated into all aspects of our communication. If our audiences and stakeholders remember nothing else, they should be able to remember and relate to this core message. Thus, the key concepts of “connection” and “creative expression” will be explicitly articulated in all messaging.

## BENEFITS

These four categories reflect the benefits that our prioritized audiences and stakeholders value with regard to their creative, artistic, and cultural experiences and activities.

As such, they will be referenced either explicitly or implicitly when we engage and motivate our audiences and stakeholders to participate in or support creative, artistic, and cultural activities and experiences.

The question of which benefit categories should be prioritized in our messaging will be dictated by which benefits resonate most with each audience and stakeholder segment. This question will be resolved in the next phase of our work during which we create a more detailed message map that addresses the unique needs of key audience and stakeholder groups.

## VALUES

All of our messaging and communication will incorporate words, metaphors, and imagery that reflect these identified core values. Of these, the connection value is the most important to our audiences and will therefore be consistently articulated in our messaging.



# Our recommendations

## Make the message frame tangible

To create sustainable public will for arts and culture, we will add detail to the proposed message framework, develop a set of message application and storytelling tools, and encourage widespread adoption of the messages that link the benefits of creative expression to the shared value of connection.

## Drive values and frame adoption

Arts organizations, advocates, and existing frequent users are key audiences and we intend to engage them in adopting and sharing the message frame. In so doing, it is essential that the arts and culture field embrace the new frame so that the sector reinforces the message frame and avoids language that might undercut these efforts to broaden and diversify arts and culture champions.

Similarly, we will encourage the field to consider continued refinement or evolution of their offerings to align more closely with the active, participatory experiences the broader public is seeking.

## Build the coalition

The newly identified audiences most likely to embrace and help drive this public will building initiative are: people under 40 (including high-school age youth), women of all ages, parents of children under 18 years of age, and people of color. Therefore, it will be key for us to develop partnerships and engagement strategies with organizations and institutions trusted by these audiences, as well as prioritize media and social media platforms that resonate with these audiences.

## Identify pathways to our audiences

Although we will need to conduct additional exploration into the constituencies that can help us influence our primary audiences in the coming months and years, our research to date suggests that arts and culture organizations and providers, non-arts-focused community based organizations, parents of children under 18, and industry influentials (e.g., gaming, creative, or high-tech industries) can be important pathways to our audiences.

## Support the narrative shift

To ensure that our test communities are supported in implementing the proposed message frame, we will:

- Provide training and technical assistance on how to apply the frame and incorporate it into messaging, engagement, and programming in the field;
- Capture and share knowledge from this process and make refinements as necessary to the frame;
- Offer assistance in engaging new allies and champions outside the arts and culture arena, and develop hands-on strategies to shift the narrative through use of traditional and social media.

## Broaden the scope

To expand our understanding of regional differences and commonalities across the country, we intend to engage additional communities in research and testing. Here, our efforts will focus on the following regions: Northeast; Mid-Atlantic; Southeast; and Southwest.

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