MOBILIZING ARTS AND CULTURAL ASSETS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

This brief is intended for governor's offices and state agencies including public health, education, mental health, community and economic development, aging, human, social and family services, and disability services.

Immediate action is needed to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to address the pandemic's short and long-term economic, health, and social impacts. State arts and cultural resources are among the most powerful and readily available resources for addressing critical problems faced by states, including social isolation among senior citizens, communication with hard to reach populations, meeting the education and developmental needs of children, and crafting plans for safe and equitable recovery and rebuilding.

This unprecedented situation requires new and creative responses at the state level. The arts are one of the most powerful means at our disposal today for enabling communication, direct health benefits, and social and economic recovery.

COMMUNICATION

Artists are adept at translating information across language, cultures, and sectors.[1] They communicate in ways that are emotionally engaging, memorable, and personally and culturally relevant—rendering health information more likely to stimulate behavior changes. Artists and arts organizations provide trusted platforms for urgent messages, and can reach larger and different audiences than health departments and government agencies. Their partnership and assistance in health communication is vital.

Examples: In response to Ohio governor Mike DeWine's request for messages that would engage Ohio youth, Proctor & Gamble hired Tik Tok influencer Charli D'Amelio to create a #DistanceDance that urged young people to #StayHome. It has been viewed over eight billion times. At the national level, the CDC is modeling arts-based health communications with its *Watching Hands: Artists Respond to Keeping Well* initiative.

TAKE ACTION:

* Employ artists to make state public health messaging more memorable and actionable through performances, artworks, and activities delivered online and in socially distanced formats.

* Employ artists to help ensure that COVID-19 information is relevant and available across diverse communities, cultural differences, and social norms.

* If you are not sure how to find artist-partners, engage your state arts agency to make connections.

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DIRECT HEALTH BENEFITS

Arts and cultural assets, which are prevalent in communities across each state, offer immediate opportunities for mitigating the serious mental and physical health consequences associated with physical distancing. For example, artists and arts organizations are reducing loneliness and isolation through programs delivered online and in safe-distance formats. And, research has shown that engaging in the arts—even for short periods of time—reduces stress, enhances coping and emotional regulation, and increases wellbeing.[2]

Examples. Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo hired renowned street artist Shepard Fairey to create a new work to bring Rhode Islanders together, and she urged citizens to create and share their own artwork on a new website designed as a platform for well-being and connection. In Kentucky, Governor Andy Beshear has urged Kentuckians to make encouraging sidewalk art and hang art in their windows to cultivate connection. And, at daily press briefings, he featured examples of citizens' art to highlight compassion and togetherness. Boulder County in Colorado created a new website for engaging people in the arts to improve mental health.

TAKE ACTION:

* Educate state and local health professionals about the demonstrable health benefits associated with arts participation, so that these benefits can be integrated into response plans and offerings.

* Collaborate with your state's cultural agencies to ensure that virtual arts offerings are available to populations that need them most, including seniors who are already prone to isolation, communities of color that are being disproportionately impacted by the virus, and children, who require creative outlets and social engagement for healthy development.

* Use the arts in state press activities or social media channels to convey positivity in the face of adversity—and to model safe yet meaningful community engagement practices.

* Collaborate across sectors—including public health, mental health, social services, community development and arts and culture—to generate trauma-informed initiatives that address community needs for connection and wellbeing.[3]

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The COVID-19 crisis presents opportunities for states to recognize and address social determinants of health, and to reimagine and reinvent systems that have left marginalized populations more vulnerable than others to poor health outcomes. Artists are critical agents of this change, as they are adept at imagining possibilities, holding space for difficult conversations, and driving social and cultural transformation.[4] In addition, the arts and culture sector represents a significant component of state economies.[5] There are clear economic benefits to investing in your state's creative workforce, and the resulting arts-health partnerships will advance critical objectives for both public health and community revitalization.

Examples. The state of Colorado, among others, has appointed arts agency representatives to serve on its task force for recovery and economic redevelopment. The City of Austin harnessed the power of the arts and artists to shape political transformations taking place as a result of newly drawn council districts.

TAKE ACTION:

* Include state arts agencies and other cultural sector representatives in governors' task forces designed to drive recovery and address the public health, educational, and economic effects of COVID-19.

* Engage and pay artists to help you think outside the box when imagining and rebuilding systems, infrastructures, and social fabrics.

* Partner with trusted arts organizations and/or hire artists to facilitate recovery discussions and planning sessions with community members.

* Use storytelling and public art works to convey your commitment to issues such as anti-racism, social justice, equity, and inclusion in the recovery process.

* Engage arts experts to develop industry-specific recommendations to guide the safe reopening of cultural venues and community-based arts and cultural activities.

* Advocate for continuity and expansion of funding for the arts in your state.

"PUTTING ARTISTS TO WORK IN SUPPORT OF THE CHALLENGES YOUR STATE IS FACING NOT ONLY PUTS FORWARD PROACTIVE SOLUTIONS, IT SUPPORTS CREATIVE INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS DURING A TIME OF HISTORIC HARDSHIP. HIRING AND CONTRACTING LOCAL ARTISTS WILL MAKE YOUR STATE CULTURALLY STRONGER AND STRENGTHEN YOUR CREATIVE ECONOMY OVER THE LONG TERM."

— FRANK WOODRUFF, NACEDA

RESOURCES:

✴ Find examples, collaborators, and resources in the Arts & COVID-19 Resource Repository

✴ Contact your state arts agency to find arts partners in your state

✴ Find and cite evidence using the Evidence-based Framework for Using the Arts in Public Health and the recent WHO report on arts in health

✴ Advise on community action using recommendations and examples in the Call for Collaboration: Mobilizing the Arts for Covid-19 Communication and Coping

✴ Learn more about how the arts can address collective trauma, mental health, and social isolation in the Creating Healthy Communities through Cross Sector Collaboration White Paper

✴ Generate arts-based communications using information from the CDC or the Ad Council's COVID-19 Toolkit

[1-5] Citations can be found here.

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