

## ARPA Fact Sheet: Leveraging the Arts

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), signed into law in 2021, provided \$350 billion in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to state, local, territorial and Tribal governments. Seizing an opportunity to fund innovative solutions to local challenges, local governments across the country are using SLFRF to rebuild the artistic sector and strengthen community economic development, public spaces, health, and wellbeing.

### Why the Arts?

The arts are a community resource to local government with an impact much deeper than their aesthetic value. Both artistic creations and the talents of community-based artists can help cities, towns, and villages recover from the social and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the arts sector, both for organizations and individual artists. According to Americans for the Arts, artists experienced some of the most severe levels of unemployment due to the pandemic – nearly 63% in 2020 – with 37% of artists unable to access food. Nonprofit arts organizations lost almost \$18 billion, and local businesses in food, retail, and lodging lost about \$17.6 billion in audience ancillary spending due to cancelled arts events. BIPOC artists and arts organizations were even more severely impacted by unemployment and financial loss.

**While the arts and culture sector has suffered due to COVID-19, it also has the potential to help local governments address some of the most urgent economic, health, and social challenges facing communities after the pandemic.** Funding arts events and programs leads to a stronger and more resilient local economy, improves employment, and creates greater social cohesion. Artists can help local governments improve community health outcomes through housing and public space design, and boost mental health through arts programs. Involving artists in government processes such as community engagement can also help increase the government's responsiveness and effectiveness.

**This fact sheet highlights how local governments can address their pressing challenges through the arts using ARPA SLFR funds, highlighted cases, and helpful resources.**

If you have general questions about the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, please email the U.S. Department of Treasury at [SLFRP@treasury.gov](mailto:SLFRP@treasury.gov) or call 844-529-9527.

The information contained here is not legal advice. It will be subject to change based on updates from the U.S. Department of the Treasury, and any recipients should confirm applicability to their specific situation.



## The Arts Achieve City Goals

Every policy area has the opportunity to leverage the arts to achieve its respective goals. In a range of policy areas, the arts promote vital partnerships with important community stakeholders who bring a creative vision into the decision-making process. **This presents an opportunity for cross-sector, cross-departmental, creative solutions.**

### Community Engagement

Arts-based community engagement strategies can help reach a wider and more diverse group of residents than traditional community engagement strategies alone and can be a powerful medium to talk about community values and beliefs. By incorporating artistic and creative strategies such as storytelling or visual art into traditional methods of community engagement (town halls, public hearings), community leaders can engage more deeply and with more residents who may be less comfortable interacting with local government in traditional contexts.

### Economic Development

Arts organizations serve as economic anchors for cities, as enduring organizations that attract business development and bring a cultural identity and sense of place into neighborhoods. While cities' business districts drive economic activity, innovation and cultural identity give cities the vibrancy that attracts economic development. Investment in arts and culture initiatives benefits cities by attracting new businesses to the area, increasing job opportunities, supporting the local arts economy, growing foot traffic in central business districts, and enabling more economically and culturally vibrant cities.

### Health and Well-being

Artists have been valuable partners to public health professionals in promoting vaccine confidence and uptake. Artists are rooted in the culture and places where they live and work and can create public health campaigns and processes that are culturally sensitive and tailored to specific populations. The CDC has developed [guides](#) to help public health professionals to develop arts and culture-based partnerships to create culturally responsive public health campaigns.

Access to the arts is also increasingly recognized as essential to health and well-being. Participating in artistic practices can lead to improved health outcomes and greater social cohesion. The idea of prescribing the arts is also a growing area of research in public health. [Read about NLC's related work.](#)

### Housing

Artists have long been at the center of advocacy and community engagement surrounding housing challenges from the affordable housing crisis to segregation and discrimination in the housing system. Arts-based strategies can be leveraged for community change by serving to communicate challenges and dynamics through art, strengthen community organizing, spur economic development in neighborhoods that lack access to capital, and much more.

### Public Space

Integrating art into public space has the immediate effect of creating more beautiful and interesting public spaces, but also has profound downstream value for communities. By integrating art into public spaces, a city fosters a stronger identity and sense of belonging in a community by creating a shared, community-specific asset. Local businesses also benefit from increased foot traffic, tourism, and

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community pride that public art attracts. Like well-paved sidewalks, good street lighting, or attractive storefronts, art serves to create more inviting public spaces.

### Transportation

The addition of art in public transit centers benefits public transit systems and their riders. Well-designed public transportation systems that feature art improve the experience of riders and ultimately encourage transit use by making transportation systems livelier, improving safety, and fostering a positive perception of public transit.

## Eligible Use Categories

The arts are interconnected with many city priorities, and an array of eligible use groups and subgroups may be applicable to arts-related projects aimed at helping communities recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to NLC's Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker, local government projects related to arts and culture have so far been categorized as below:

Group	Subgroup	Example
Revenue Replacement	Provision of Government Services	<b>Pittsburg, PA</b> is partnering with the Urban Redevelopment Authority to assist small businesses and artists
Negative Economic Impacts	Aid to Nonprofit Organizations	<b>Tulsa, OK</b> established the Arts Recovery Tulsa Fund to support the recovery of small arts nonprofits
	Aid to Other Impacted Industries	<b>Phoenix, AZ</b> implemented the Artists to Work program, employing artists to reactivate public spaces within neighborhoods, parks, trails, and gathering places
	Job Assistance Training	<b>Seattle, WA</b> created a technical assistance program for the arts and culture sector to ensure BIPOC artists are more sustainably employed and that anti-racist work practices are prioritized as the sector recovers
	Small Business Economic Assistance	<b>Boston, MA</b> created a Direct Support for Creative Workers fund, prioritizing communities hardest hit by the pandemic
	Aid to Tourism, Travel, or Hospitality	<b>Buffalo, NY</b> designated funds to support capital projects at cultural institutions including the zoo, the history museum, African American Heritage Corridor, and the proposed Hispanic Heritage Center
	Other Economic Support	<b>Raleigh, NC</b> established a downtown Raleigh activation grant process to enhance the city's overall cultural environment and economic prosperity
Public Health	Other Public Health Services	<b>Santa Ana, CA</b> allocated funds to create a public commemoration of local COVID-19 victims and public health care workers who combatted the pandemic, to create a public space for grief and encourage future public health measures

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Depending on the project focus, additional applicable categories may include **Infrastructure, Housing, or Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities**. For example, employing artists to lead a community engagement process for an infrastructure project, or funding an arts therapy program located at a public housing site may be projects captured in these categories. **The impact of the arts sits at the intersections of many city departments and sectors.**

**Collaborations:** Cities, towns, and villages may wish to partner with regional representatives on larger ARPA-funded arts initiatives. Counties and arts councils may partner with local governments by designating the local entity as a sub-recipient of SLFRF, and directly transferring funds.

## Case Studies

### The Arts Promote Vital Partnerships (Town of Strasburg, VA)

The Town of Strasburg, VA collaborated with the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment of the Arts to form the [Creative Communities Partnership Grant](#) (CCPG). The CCPG was created to encourage the town partnerships with arts-focused nonprofits with the mission to increase art accessibility, education, and diversity. Recipients would receive up to \$4,500 that could be matched by the commission. A CCPG recipient, Staufferstadt Arts, installed 10 murals throughout the town within four years from the grant program.

### The Arts Lead in Community Engagement Practices (City of Cuyahoga Falls, OH)

The Mayor of Cuyahoga Falls, Don Walters, partnered with three local Ohio organizations – ArtsNow, Collide: Cuyahoga Falls, and Curated Storefront – to [launch arts-centered community engagement events to garner input on residents' feelings, opinions, and thoughts on the Cuyahoga River](#), located in Downtown Cuyahoga. The city was awarded a \$50,000 grant from the National Endowment of the Arts and matched with \$65,000 from its general funds. The presently occurring multi-year public art project called “River in the City” involves two community engagement sessions, where the first session included two opportunities:



*Cuyahoga Falls Downtown Pavilion Engagement  
(Credit: Kathy Romito, Collide Cuyahoga Falls)*

1. Flowing with the Currents: An Exploration of Our Personal Experiences with the Cuyahoga River: Neema Bal and Katie Beck of Gum-Dip Theatre facilitated a series of theatrical vignettes inspired by the Cuyahoga River, focused on participants' experiences. Meditation, movement, storytelling, and writing exercises were leveraged to understand thoughts and feelings about the river. The culminating small performances were open to community members to watch downtown.
2. Local artist Alison Miltner Rich welcomed residents for interviews to hear their relationship with Cuyahoga River: how they feel about living near it, what it means to them, and why it is important to them. The stories, along with drawings, were collected from the residents; and the local artist would create three murals based on the responses. The final painting would be gifted to the city and displayed downtown.

### The Arts Foster Community Development (Town of Boone, NC)

The Town of Boone partnered with the Watauga Arts Council and several other local organizations to host [its first “Boonerang” Music & Arts Festival in Downtown Boone](#). The free weekend-long festival celebrated the culture and heritage of the area, hosting several local artists and musicians with roots in the High Country, offering 60+ local business owners and entrepreneurs the opportunity to showcase their products. The small town estimated over 6,000 attendees and considered a successful event to continue in future years.



*Boonerang Music & Arts Festival*

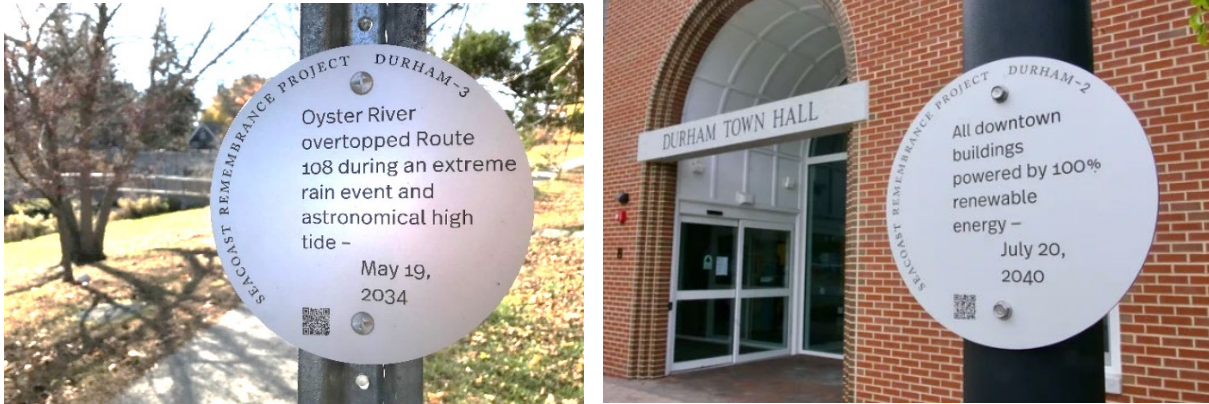
### The Arts Nurtures Health and Wellbeing (City of San Francisco, CA)

The city of San Francisco employed 60 performing artists as community health ambassadors (CHAs) to engage their neighborhoods and share key information about vaccination and pandemic safety through performing and visual arts. The City of San Francisco partnered with several local arts organizations, who recruited performers to serve as CHAs. The city then worked with these organizations to train CHAs, develop language for public health messaging, and identify sites for these installations.

### The Arts Advocate Climate Resiliency Action (Town of Durham, NH)

[“Seacoast Remembrance Project”](#) was launched through a partnership among the Town of Durham collaborated with the Strafford Regional Planning Commission, University of New Hampshire’s Cooperative Extension, and New Hampshire Sea Grant, and Northeastern University. The project aims to strengthen the public’s awareness of climate change and insight from the messages. The public art project installed markers throughout the town inscribed with messages about the future facts of the area that could be possible with or without climate action. For example, one sign wrote “All downtown buildings powered by 100% renewable energy. – July 20, 2040” and another wrote “Wagon Hill closed for summer due to health concerns related to outbreaks of ticks. – June 8, 2044” Each market sign included a QR code that linked to the project’s platform; it included additional climate information and action steps the town is taking to address climate change.

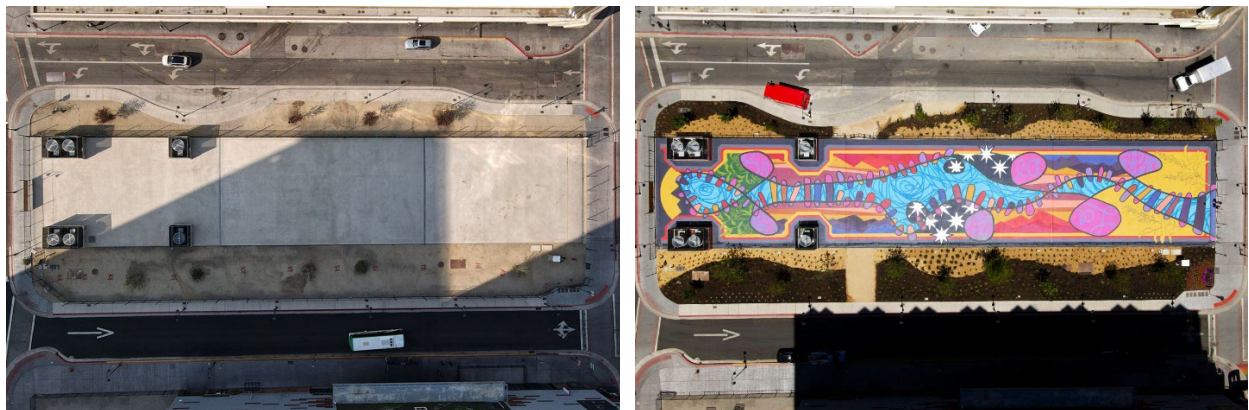
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Example Climate Message Markers (Credit: Strafford Regional Planning Commission & Thomas Starr)

### The Arts Fosters a Walkable City (City of Reno, NV)

The City of Reno sought to beautify its [Transportation Rail Access Corridor](#) (ReTRAC). The city planned to have it serve as a greenway space, but the project was halted when the Great Recession hit. However, local leaders and partners (including City of Reno Arts, Culture, and Events; Downtown Reno Partnership; Omega Landscaping; Stantec) collaborated to revitalize the project, hiring an artist to design a 18,000 square foot asphalt mural transformed into “Locomotion Plaza.” Residents could sign up for slots to paint parts of the mural; 300 residents volunteered over a one-week period. The design, labor, and supplies cost \$25,000.



Before and After Photos (Credit: ReTRAC)

## Tools and Resources

- **NLC Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker**  
The [NLC Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker](#) regularly compiles information from local governmental ARPA reporting to show how large cities and counties with a population of at least 250,000 are allocating their State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund dollars. Find arts-related project examples under spending subgroup “Arts and Culture”.
- **Art-Train: Springboard for the Arts**  
[Art-Train](#) is a national training and virtual technical assistance program housed at Springboard for the Arts for municipal agencies, community non-profits, arts councils, and artists. The program aims to help communities address their most pressing needs using ARPA funds by

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working collaboratively with artists to leverage their strengths to “use critical processes to reconnect, reimagine and rebuild in their own places.”

- **COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on the Arts: Americans for the Arts**  
The Americans for the Arts tracks research into the pandemic’s effects on the arts in their [COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on the Arts Research Update](#) series.
- **The Arts and Culture Sector’s Contributions to Economic Recovery and Resiliency in the United States**  
[This summary of key findings](#) from a report by Indiana University and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies details how the artistic sector fares during periods of large negative economic shock and shows that “the arts and cultural sector can improve – not merely reflect – the health of the broader economy.”
- **The Role of Creative Community in Infrastructure**  
Authored by leadership from the Kresge Foundation, [this blog highlights](#) how cities can involve artists in the planning and implementation of their infrastructure projects, why this approach is important, and cities who are leading the way.