



A CENTURY OF STRENGTHENING CITIES

Creative Processes: Expanding Impact Through Arts & Culture

July 9, 2026





OUR MISSION

To relentlessly advocate for, and protect the interests of, cities, towns, and villages by influencing federal policy, strengthening local leadership, and driving innovative solutions.

NLC

PROVEN HEALTH IMPACT OF THE ARTS

Arts participation is associated with better mental health, lower risk of depression, enhanced health behaviors, reduced loneliness, reduced participation in adverse health behaviors, and promoting healthy aging equal to the protective effect of weekly exercise.¹

44%

*lower risk of
Dementia*

44%

*lower risk of
Disability*

25%

*reduced
Chronic pain*

48%

*lower risk of
Depression*



Data sourced by The Center for the Arts in Medicine / Image: Michael Zitel

Learn more at: <https://artsforeverybody.squarespace.com/>

NLC NATIONAL
LEAGUE
OF CITIES
CITIES STRONG TOGETHER

Creativity *and* **Collaboration** *for* **Healthier Cities**



Public Engagement

Coalition Building

Problem Solving

and more!



Credit: Scout Tufankjian – Arts for EveryBody

Speakers



Melissa Cirone

Grants and Programs Manager
Office of Arts and Culture
City of Sacramento, CA



**Mallory Rukhsana
Nezam**

Artist

Co-Founder of CAIR Lab

Founder
Justice + Joy

NLC



Michael Rohd

Artist

Director
Co-Lab for Civic Imagination
University of Montana

Co-Founder
Center for Performance &
Civic Practice

JUSTICE
& JOY

color LAB

Mallory Rukhsana Nezam (<https://www.mallorynezam.com/>)



ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT

Why?

The background is a solid medium purple color. It features several abstract, organic shapes in a lighter shade of purple. Some of these shapes are filled with a fine, light-colored dot pattern, creating a halftone effect. The shapes are scattered across the frame, with some appearing in the corners and others more centrally located.

*Civic challenges are **complex, cross sectoral in nature,** and often **persistent.***

*To solve these, we need **creative** solutions that get to the **root of problems**, offer **new approaches** and compel a deep sense of **transformation** to usher long term change.*

Strengthen Parks as Social Infrastructure →

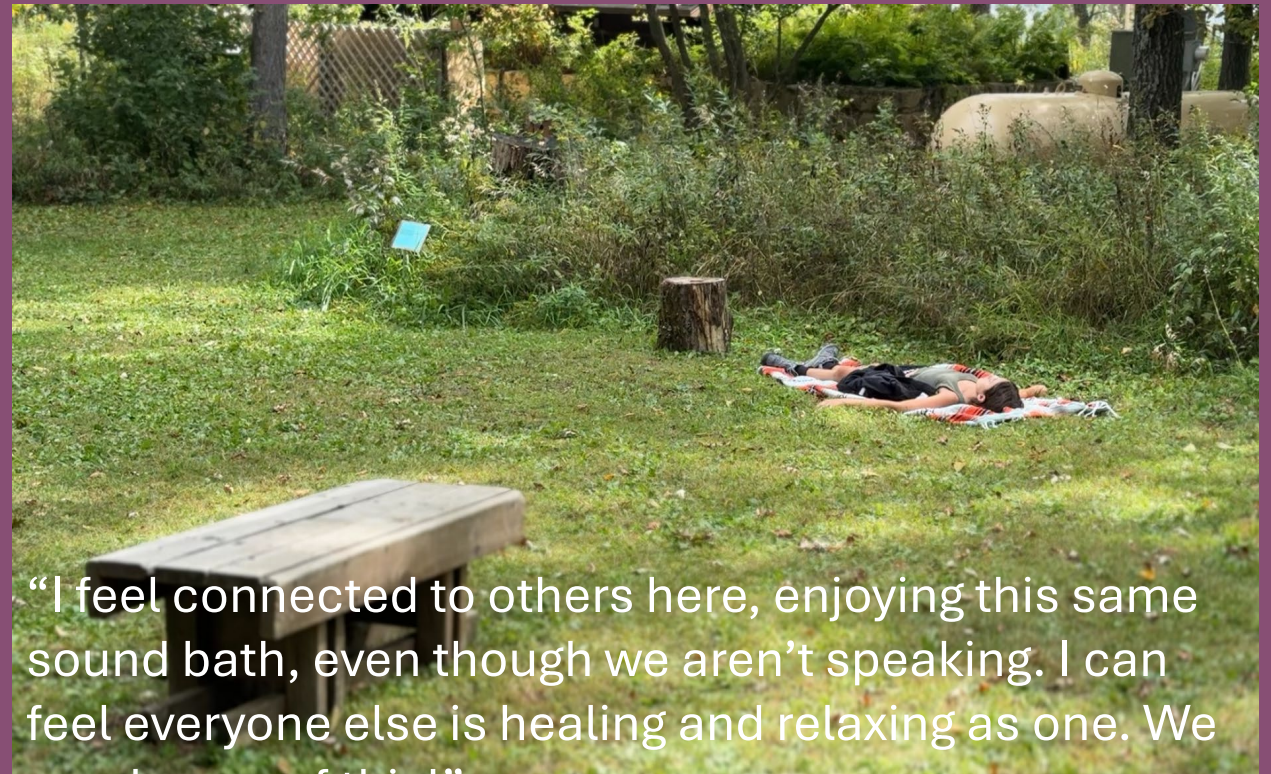
Minnesota Parks Artist in Residence Program



FORECAST



➤ Belonging



“I feel connected to others here, enjoying this same sound bath, even though we aren’t speaking. I can feel everyone else is healing and relaxing as one. We need more of this!”

PRAIRIE WORDS IN DAKOTA:

prairie - obdáye (oh-BDAH-yay)
grasshopper - psipsíčadan (psee-PSEE-chadan)
cricket - hehánkačhanteyašeža (hay-HAN-ka-shantaya-shay-zha)
mosquito - čhaphúnka (cha-POOnka)
dragonfly - susbécha (sus-BAY-cha)
butterfly - kimámna (kee-MA-mna)
spider - unktómi (oonk-To-mee)
good; "it's good" - wašté (wash-TAY)



Artists in residence in parks

representation

nervous system regulation

joy and play



BUDGET

\$40,000 stipend + additional \$14,000 materials

LENGTH

12 months

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC)
- The Metropolitan Council

FUNDING



Cohorts build a community of practice, providing sustained support & troubleshooting

Individual residencies are often the best way to get a pilot off the ground, but can be lonely



Thank you!



a Fall
workshop ✨

Thank you!

<https://bit.ly/creativeprobs>

Creative Collaborations to Solve Wicked Problems

3-part workshop series

Fall 2026

www.justicejoy.com

**JUSTICE
& JOY**



The background is a solid purple color. It is decorated with several abstract geometric shapes: a yellow triangle in the top right, a yellow circle in the top right corner, a blue brushstroke-like shape in the middle right, a yellow circle in the bottom right, and a yellow square in the bottom right corner.

City of Sacramento Office of Arts and Culture

CREATIVE PROCESSES:
Expanding Impact through
Arts & Culture

<https://www.cityofsacramento.gov/ccs/oac>

CREATIVITY GYM

- Facility focus is on “Creative Workouts”
- Promote Community Health & Wellness
- Activations and Partnerships rather than traditional rental structure
- Everyone welcome, including seniors, teens, adults, and local workforce



Creative Corps: Cultural Strategists

Temporary full-time positions in City Government

Approximately 12-month term

5 positions for artists with some experience in community building

Under the general guidance of Office of Arts & Culture

Embedded in a City department in partnership with staff

How to Center Artist Voice

Artists are involved at the beginning of the process

Artists as co-generators of the work

Facilitators > Push for deeper meaning in the conversation

Community Organizers > Reaching out through their networks

Storytellers > translating and receiving co-designed messages to communities

Climate & Sustainability

- “Make Your Mark” Program
- Community Collaboration
- Painting to represent rapid extreme heat rise in Sacramento
- Empower community to action
- Engage over 100 residents in 4 neighborhoods
- Take a complicated subject and translate it through art





Community Engagement

- Lessen the intimidation factor of City government
- Create a simple and engaging way to access the City
- Welcoming activities for residents at community events
- Invitation to take part in civic life



Planning

- Investigate the use of acronyms in government agencies
- Create games to better engage the public in the planning process
- Design tours for residents and planners to experience the City through all their senses
- Bring planning to the people





Keys to Success: Lessons Learned



Willingness to explore and take risks



This work takes time



Match styles of artist and department staff



Strategists are not graphic designers



Include strategists in meetings



Support from department heads is key

“Art is about
building a new
foundation, not
just laying
something on top
of what’s already
there.”

- Prince



**THE CITY OF TREES
DEPENDS ON**

**THE STRENGTH OF
OUR ROOTS**



STATE OF MIND

Michael Rohd, *Director, UM Co-Lab for Civic Imagination*

<https://michaelrohd.com/>

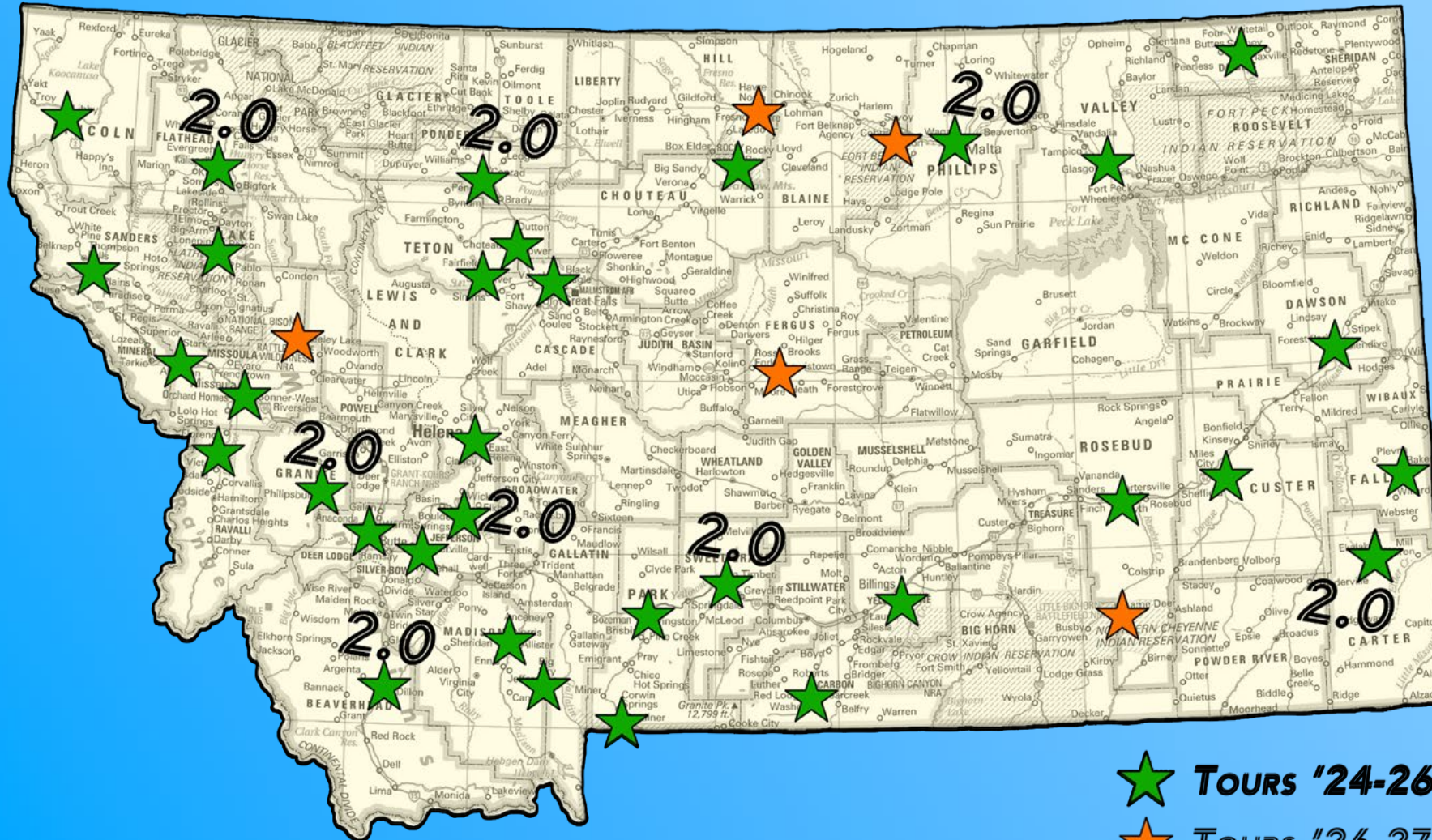
 UNIVERSITY OF
MONTANA
Co-Lab for Civic Imagination

What can help
Montanans tackle the
mental health crisis in
our state?

Making it ok to talk
about mental health in
Montana!

The model: A statewide theatre/public dialogue tour about behavioral health that has conducted 2 day residencies (performance, workshops, meetings) in 35 Montana communities since September 2024...still on the road.

TOUR LOCATIONS



★ TOURS '24-26
★ TOURS '26-27

Some Impacts

- Young People are starting youth alliances and activating as community leaders;
- Care Commitments are being used as testimony at School Boards and local legislatures;
- Local Non-profits and schools are collaborating on new programs;
- Local coalitions are forming or deepening, and moving forward with clearer goals and new opportunities;
- Agencies and organizations are sharing resources, and filling service and prevention gaps;
- Individuals are accessing services they didn't know existed;
- Localities are gaining access to statewide resources for trainings and support



GOALS



With a commitment to center the needs of our state's most vulnerable residents, State of Mind aims to shift culture around behavioral/mental health in Montana by:

OUR SIX GOALS:

- ▶ Making local behavioral health resources more visible;
- ▶ Strengthening local networks of advocates, providers, educators and leaders;
- ▶ Tackling stigmas around seeking mental and behavioral health support;
- ▶ Activating/Centering youth voices in the identification of local needs and visions;
- ▶ Exploring & normalizing care strategies for friends, family, and neighbors;
- ▶ Listening & bringing local perspectives into statewide conversations.

TOUR = Two Day Residency

- ▶ A YOUTH WORKSHOP
- ▶ A TEACHER/HEALTH WORKER WORKSHOP
- ▶ A PERFORMANCE
- ▶ A COMMUNITY COALITION MEETING

13%





SINCE SEPTEMBER 2024

35 COMMUNITIES VISITED

37 SCHOOLS VISITED

1,250 YOUTH ENGAGED

1,500 ADULTS ENGAGED

18 PUBLIC HEALTH DEPTS.

OVER 100 STATEWIDE PARTNERS

\$450,000 RAISED FROM GRANTS