

CONCLUSION

BUILDING THE CONDITIONS FOR CULTURAL INVESTMENT

Advocacy Is About More Than Funding

The experiences gathered in this Field Guide point to a fundamental lesson: successful local arts advocacy is less about a specific ballot measure or funding mechanism and more about building the conditions in which communities see arts and culture as essential to their shared future.

Across Colorado, effective advocacy takes many forms, from public engagement and community education, to dedicated revenue streams, to investments in cultural infrastructure. The strongest efforts share a common foundation. They begin with relationships, listening, and a clear understanding of what matters to residents. They invite people to participate rather than simply attend, build partnerships across sectors, connect cultural investment to broader community priorities, and create mechanisms for sustained public accountability.

The goal is not simply to secure support for the arts. It is to build the public understanding, relationships, and civic capacity that make sustained cultural investment possible.



Build Relationships Before You Need Them

Advocacy should not be understood as a single campaign that begins when a funding decision is imminent. It is an ongoing practice of community building.

Residents who have meaningful opportunities to shape cultural life are more likely to see themselves as stakeholders in it. Partnerships with businesses, educators, local governments, tourism organizations, neighborhood groups, and other community institutions extend the reach and relevance of arts and culture.

Consistent engagement, accessible communications, and inclusive participation help ensure that cultural investment reflects the diversity of the community rather than the priorities of a single sector. Over time, these relationships create the trust and shared understanding that make collective action possible.



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What this means in practice

- * Listen before action. Understand community priorities, concerns, and aspirations.
- * Create meaningful opportunities to participate. Engagement is strongest when people can contribute, shape, create, and lead.
- * Cultivate relationships continuously. Build connections with civic, business, educational, philanthropic, and neighborhood partners before a specific policy opportunity arises.
- * Make participation accessible. Meet people where they are and design engagement around the realities of their lives.



Connect Culture to What Communities Care About

The strongest case for arts investment is rarely about the arts alone.

Communities have successfully connected arts and culture to economic development, downtown vitality, tourism, education, workforce attraction, community identity, health and well-being, public safety, quality of life, and other priorities. Framing arts and culture as civic infrastructure expands the conversation from what cultural organizations need to what communities need—and how cultural investment can help meet those needs.

This broader framing does not diminish the intrinsic value of artistic and cultural activity. It makes visible the many ways that culture contributes to thriving places.

Make the case for culture in the language of community priorities. That means asking:

- * What outcomes matter most to our community?
- * Where do arts and culture already contribute to those outcomes?
- * Where could cultural investment create new opportunities?
- * Who else benefits from that investment—and should therefore have a voice in shaping it?

Pair Vision with Trustworthy Systems

A compelling narrative is necessary, but it is not sufficient on its own to create systemic change. Durable public investment also requires thoughtful governance, transparent decision-making, diverse coalitions, organizational capacity, and funding systems that can evolve as community needs change.

Dedicated revenue can provide stability, but the structures surrounding that revenue determine whether public investment generates trust and lasting value. Likewise, advocacy capacity itself must be cultivated.

Invest in the infrastructure of advocacy

- * **Build leadership.** Train and develop advocates who can communicate across sectors, levels of government, and diverse constituencies.
- * **Strengthen coalitions.** Bring artists, residents, businesses, educators, government, philanthropy, and cultural organizations together around shared outcomes.
- * **Create transparent governance.** Clear decision-making and accountability help sustain public confidence.
- * **Strengthen organizational capacity.** Funding is more effective when organizations have the skills, systems, and resources to use it well.
- * **Allow systems to evolve.** Funding mechanisms, priorities, and governance structures should be able to respond as communities change.



There Is No Single Model

The communities featured in this guide differ in size, geography, history, resources, political environment, and cultural assets. Their strategies work precisely because they have been adapted to local circumstances rather than replicated wholesale.

The question for any community, therefore, is not:

“Which model or mechanism should we copy?”

It is:

“What can we learn from these examples, and how might we adapt those lessons to our own aspirations and conditions?”

The guide is intended as a working resource rather than a prescription. The examples invite communities to consider what is possible, identify approaches that fit their circumstances, and develop strategies of their own.



Start Before the Campaign

For Colorado communities considering their next step, the most important work may begin before any policy proposal, funding campaign, candidate forum, or ballot measure is developed.

Start by:

- * **Listening.** Understand what residents value and what challenges they want their community to address.
- * **Connecting.** Identify the ways arts and culture already contribute to community priorities—and where new opportunities exist.
- * **Participating.** Create meaningful opportunities for residents to experience, shape, and contribute to cultural life.
- * **Partnering.** Bring unlikely allies into the conversation and build relationships across sectors.
- * **Communicating.** Use both data and stories to demonstrate cultural impact and make the case for investment.
- * **Building trust.** Establish governance, accountability, and decision-making processes that demonstrate stewardship of public resources.
- * **Sustaining engagement.** Continue building public ownership after an investment or policy win has been achieved.



A Call to Action: Build the Community You Want to See

The work of local arts advocacy does not end with a successful funding measure, new policy, or public investment. **It begins there.**

Across Colorado, communities are demonstrating how arts and culture can contribute to stronger, more connected, and more resilient places. Realizing that potential requires more than making the case for funding. It requires building relationships, engaging residents, developing partnerships, and creating the systems that sustain cultural investment over time.

Start Where You Are

Every community has a different starting point. Wherever yours begins, ask:

- * What do we want our community to become?
- * What role can arts and culture play in that vision?
- * Who needs to be part of the conversation?
- * What relationships and partnerships do we need to build?

Start by listening to residents and creating meaningful opportunities for them to participate—not simply as audiences, but as contributors, partners, advocates, and leaders. Connect arts and culture to the priorities that matter to your community, using both data and stories to demonstrate their value.

Build for the Long Term

The strongest advocacy efforts are not one-time campaigns. They are **investments in civic capacity**. Build coalitions, strengthen organizational capacity, establish transparent governance, cultivate advocates, and create sustainable funding and ongoing opportunities for public participation.

The communities featured in this Guide demonstrate that there is no single model for success. Each has adapted its approach to its own history, aspirations, assets, and challenges. The opportunity is to learn from those experiences and develop an approach that works for your community.

Take the Next Step

The question is not simply whether arts and culture deserve support.

What kind of community do we want to build, and how can arts and culture help us get there?

Listen to your community. Build the relationships. Find common ground. Invite others in. Make the case. Invest for the long term.

The future of arts and culture in Colorado will be shaped not only by the resources communities secure, but by the collective vision, relationships, and civic commitment they build along the way.

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RESOURCES LIST

The following organizations, tools, and source materials can help Colorado communities deepen their understanding of local arts advocacy, build organizational and civic capacity, and explore approaches to public engagement and investment in arts and culture.

General Advocacy & Community Resources

Colorado Business Committee for the Arts (CBCA)

[CBCA](#)

CBCA advances Colorado's creative economy by connecting business and the arts. Its statewide advocacy work includes community education, research, network building, grassroots mobilization, and policy development. CBCA also has a range of programs to facilitate corporate engagement in the arts and to connect creative entrepreneurs with legal representation and business skills.

Useful resources:

- * [CBCA Advocacy](#)
- * [Colorado Arts Policy Framework](#)
- * [Colorado Arts Action Network](#)
- * [Economic Activity Study of Metro Denver Culture](#)

Colorado Creative Industries (CCI)

[Colorado Creative Industries](#)

Colorado Creative Industries, a division of the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, provides statewide leadership, programs, funding, and resources supporting Colorado's creative sector. Its work connects arts and culture to economic development, community development, and quality of life.

Useful resources:

- * [CCI Programs and Funding](#)
- * [Arts for All 2030 Strategic Plan](#)
- * [Certified Creative Districts](#)
- * [Community Revitalization Tax Credit](#)

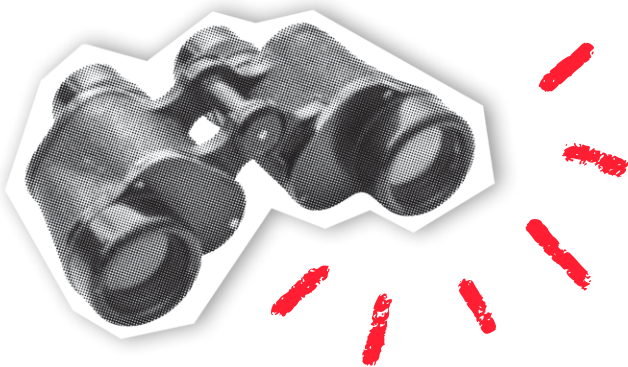
Boettcher Foundation

[Boettcher Foundation](#)

The Boettcher Foundation invests in people, programs, organizations, and community infrastructure across Colorado. Its grantmaking and leadership initiatives provide potential models and resources for communities seeking to strengthen local capacity, leadership, and connections.

Useful resources:

- * [Grantmaking](#)
 - Community Connections Grants
 - Rural Catalyst Grants
- * [Leadership programs](#)



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Americans for the Arts (AFTA)

Americans for the Arts

Americans for the Arts provides national research, advocacy tools, data, and training for arts advocates. Its ArtsU platform includes resources specifically focused on advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels, including guidance on developing an effective ask, unified messaging, and relationships with elected officials.

Useful resources:

- * [Arts Advocacy Research & Communications](#)
- * [Arts & Economic Prosperity research](#)
- * [Arts & Social Impact Explorer](#)

Arts Action Fund

Arts Action Fund

The Arts Action Fund is a national grassroots network focused on mobilizing public support for arts-friendly public policy. Its resources include state arts fact sheets, advocacy information, and tools for communicating the public value of arts and culture.

Useful resources:

- * [State-specific Why the Arts Matter fact sheets](#)
- * [Federal arts action center](#)

Colorado Nonprofit Association

Colorado Nonprofit Association

The Colorado Nonprofit Association (CNA) strengthens Colorado nonprofits through education, connection, and advocacy. CNA champions policies that strengthen Colorado nonprofits and the communities they serve, in addition to providing meaningful trainings, resources, leadership development and connection opportunities throughout the state.

Useful resources:

- * [Advocacy priorities and tools](#)
- * [Programs and trainings](#)
- * [Connecting Colorado conferences](#)



Colorado Municipal League (CML)

Colorado Municipal League

CML provides advocacy, information, training, and resources to Colorado's cities and towns. For arts advocates working with municipal governments, CML can be a useful resource for understanding municipal decision-making, policy processes, local government structures, and emerging issues affecting communities across the state.

Useful resources:

- * [Municipal policy and legislative resources](#)
- * [Municipal training and workshops](#)
- * [State of our Cities and Towns annual survey](#)

Community Resource Center (CRC)

Community Resource Center

Community Resource Center helps Colorado nonprofits and community groups build connections, capacity, and opportunities. Its resources are particularly useful for organizations seeking to strengthen civic engagement, organizational capacity, fundraising, leadership, and community partnerships.

Useful resources:

- * [Civic Engagement resources and training](#)
- * [Colorado Grants Guide](#)
- * [Nonprofit training and capacity-building](#)
- * [Rural Action Network and Rural Philanthropy Days](#)

Bolder Advocacy / Alliance for Justice

Bolder Advocacy

Bolder Advocacy provides legal information, tools, training, and technical assistance to help nonprofits understand and participate effectively in advocacy and policymaking. Its resources are particularly valuable for organizations navigating the distinctions between advocacy, lobbying, voter engagement, and election-related activities.

Useful resources:

- * [Resource Library](#)
- * [Technical assistance and training](#)



Colorado Case Study Sources

The following sources were consulted in developing the case studies and examples featured in the Field Guide. They provide primary documentation, community-level information, advocacy materials, and press coverage that readers can use to explore each example in greater depth.

Durango

LODGERS TAX FOR ARTS & CULTURE

- * [City of Durango – Lodgers Tax Arts & Culture Funding](#)
- * [Durango Creative District – Lodgers Tax for Arts & Culture](#)
- * [Southwest Colorado Community Foundation – Durango Lodgers Tax for Arts & Culture](#)
- * [Durango Herald – Arts Grant Coverage](#)

Manitou Springs

SALES TAX FOR ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE

- * [Manitou Springs Arts, Culture & Heritage Board](#)
- * [Rocky Mountain PBS – Manitou Springs Cultural Tax](#)

Littleton

PERCENT FOR ART

- * [Littleton Arts & Culture Board](#)
- * [Littleton Arts Board / Percent for Public Art Coverage](#)

LODGERS TAX & ARTS/CULTURE GRANTS

- * [City of Littleton – Local Grants & Incentives](#)
- * [Littleton Museum – Arts & Culture Grants](#)
- * [Littleton Arts & Culture Board](#)

Steamboat Springs

GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY CAMPAIGNS & LOCAL INVESTMENT

- * [City of Steamboat Springs – 2025 Budget Letter](#)
- * [Yampa Valley Community Foundation – Community Support](#)
- * [Steamboat Pilot & Today – Local Organization Funding](#)

Boulder

CANDIDATE FORUMS, SURVEYS & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- * [Create Boulder](#)
- * [Boulder Economic Council – Arts & Culture](#)

Greeley

YOUTH ART MONTH & GREELEY ARTS PICNIC

- * [Greeley Creative District – Youth Art Month](#)
- * [Greeley Creative District – Calls for Artists](#)
- * [Greeley Youth Art](#)
- * [Colorado Art Education Association – Youth Art Month](#)
- * [Greeley-Evans School District 6 – Arts Walk](#)
- * [United Way of Weld County – Volunteer Opportunities](#)
- * [Greeley Tribune – Youth Arts Month](#)
- * [NOCO Style – Greeley Arts Picnic](#)

Statewide

Colorado Educational and Cultural Facilities Authority (CECFA)

[Colorado Educational and Cultural Facilities Authority](#)

CECFA provides financing tools for educational and cultural facilities and represents an important resource for communities exploring long-term cultural infrastructure investment.

Additional source:

- * [Colorado Department of Education – CECFA Reference Materials](#)

Additional Research & Data Resources

The organizations above provide a starting point for continued research. Communities may also benefit from national research on the economic, civic, and social contributions of arts and culture, including Americans for the Arts' Arts & Economic Prosperity research and advocacy materials. These resources can help communities combine quantitative evidence with local stories when making the case for cultural investment.

A useful starting point is to combine three kinds of evidence:

- 1** **Local data** — economic, demographic, tourism, education, and quality-of-life indicators.
- 2** **Community stories** — resident experiences, artist perspectives, business impacts, and examples of neighborhood change.
- 3** **Comparable models** — examples from other Colorado communities and national peers that demonstrate what is possible.

Together, these resources can help communities move from making the case for arts and culture to building the relationships, knowledge, and civic capacity needed to act on that case.

